



NORTHERN

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# INSIGHT

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SEPTEMBER 2022

ISSUE 83



**CREST PHOTOGRAPHY - 39 NOT OUT**

business . technology . property . media . education . community . social . arts . leisure . health

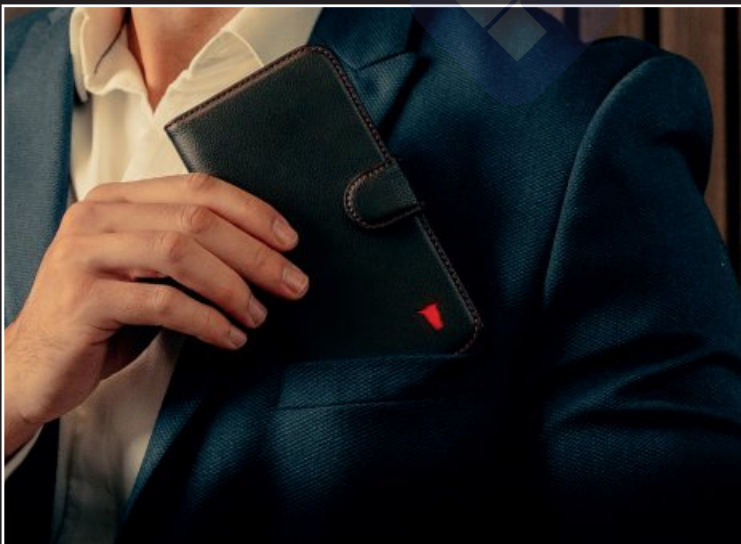
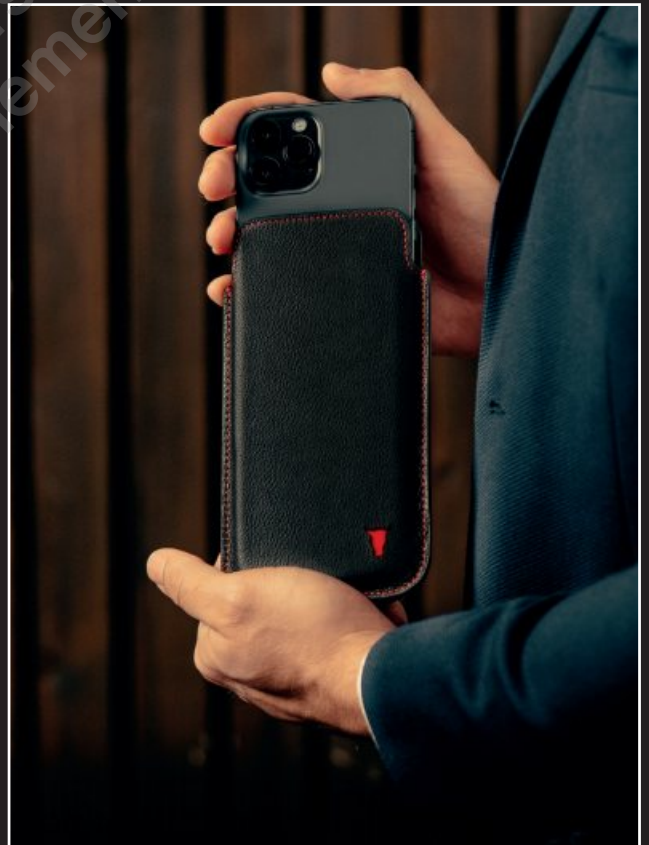
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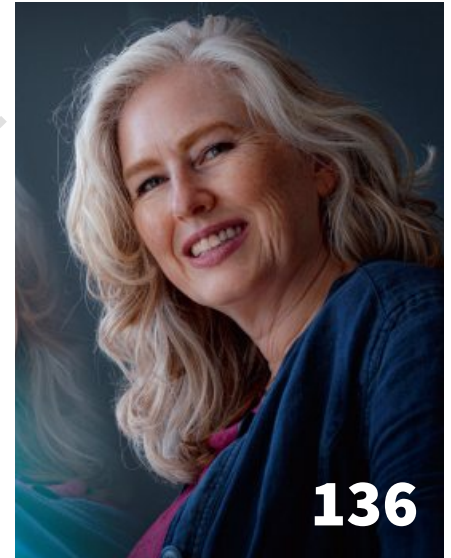
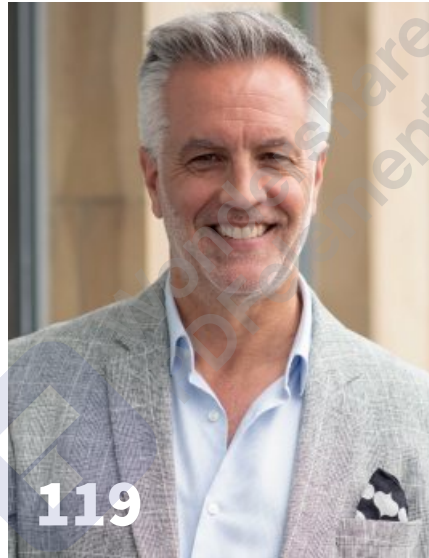
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# FOREWORD

Welcome to the September edition of Northern Insight.

In the seven years since I launched the magazine we have prided ourselves on being your “eye on the region” and this issue is one of our strongest yet in terms of range of content and features.

Our front cover star is our long term friend and contributor Simon Williams, from Crest Photography, who reflects on 39 years in the business.

Amidst a plethora of business profiles we look at the silver anniversary of one of the North East's longest business awards.

Look out also for a great feature on the exciting changes taking place at Dunwoodie Swift, one of Newcastle's longest established architectural practices.

Within a fabulous Arts section we tell the story of the innovative Mortal Fools, a creative learning company co-creating theatre, film and creative projects with young people and artists.

On the travel front we look at being on the trail of the legendary Elvis Presley in Memphis as well as exploring the Italian Riviera.

**Our 83rd edition and one we hope you all enjoy.**

*Thank you to everyone concerned for the continued support. Until next month...*

*M.J. Grahamslaw*

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## Social allies strengthens board with award winning entrepreneur NED appointment

Teesside based Social Allies have announced the appointment of Sophie Milliken as non-executive director. This appointment will support the company's strong growth plans with ambitious goals set over the next 18 months.

Founded by Jess Facchini-Tucker in 2019, Social Allies are a strategic marketing agency working with some of the most known brands in the UK including Morrison Water Services, Dominos and Wilton Engineering. An ambitious growth plan will see Social Allies quadruple their turnover by January 2024.

Sophie Milliken is the current North East entrepreneur of the year and holds a number of roles including CEO at Moja Group and Chair at Smart Works Newcastle. Having scaled and sold her first business, she is well-placed to support Social Allies as they move at pace on their scale up journey.

Jess Facchini-Tucker commented: "I am delighted that we have appointed Sophie to join the Social Allies team as non-exec Director. Sophie brings so much to the table with her background knowledge, personality and overall enthusiasm about the major growth plans Social Allies has set for 2024. I look forward to working closely together she will be a great asset to the board."

Commenting on her appointment, Sophie Milliken said: "When I met Jess, I was seriously impressed with her enthusiasm and ambition. Together, we have put plans in place for her to achieve her ambitions for Social Allies. I'm really looking forward to supporting Jess and the team on their journey and watching them smash their goals."

## New bank launch promises to boost the UK property sector

The property sector across the UK is set for a £3bn boost as specialist bank GB Bank officially launches after receiving its full UK banking licence.

The banking licence allows Middlesbrough-headquartered GB Bank to start driving its ambitious plans forward. It has committed to lend £3bn over five years. The funding will support the creation of over 100,000 jobs, 20,000 new homes and several million square feet of office space.

Savers will also benefit as the bank will offer a range of fixed-term saving products with competitive rates. In addition, savings are protected by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS) up to £85,000, and the funds will be directly linked to the local community developments.



Stephen Lancaster, CEO of GB Bank, said: "We are absolutely delighted to officially launch GB Bank! I'm incredibly proud of the entire team's hard work, which has enabled us to achieve the fantastic milestone of securing our full UK banking licence. Everyone at GB Bank is raring to go and can't wait to see, first-hand, the positive impact GB Bank will make to the communities across the UK."

## Consulting engineers make key appointment to support healthcare sector growth

TGA Consulting Engineers (TGA), an expert provider of consulting engineering services, which is celebrating its 60th anniversary this year, has made a senior appointment to support and grow its healthcare division.

Emma Marshall joins the business as national Healthcare Lead with over 15 years of experience and will be working on projects ranging from refurbishments to new builds for healthcare clients which include the NHS as well as private healthcare providers.

Her appointment comes as part of TGA's planned growth in the sector which has seen a steep rise in contract wins in recent years, largely due to increased funding from the government in response to the stresses brought on by the recent pandemic.



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## Fashion entrepreneur launches 'CLOAN' for sustainable shopping

**A North East fashion entrepreneur has launched an online clothing rental site to encourage a greener and more circular approach to style consumption.**

Rachel Cornick, 39, from Jesmond, Newcastle, has set up CLOAN – a platform combining fashion rental with the power of social media offering consumers the ability to 'loan' influencers' wardrobes from fashion creatives such as Lindsey Holland, Marisa Martins, Jessica Skye and Amira Khan among other contemporary labels, luxury brands and high street names.

Rachel, who is also the founder of social media-based talent agency Varg Talent, has received business support from advisors at Robson Laidler who helped her to secure a large cash injection from the Business Enterprise Fund to generate more exposure for the start up.

CLOAN, which aims to reduce the consumption of fast fashion, also has also secured an exclusive partnership with Go Climate to ensure a consistent commitment to sustainability and will offset its environmental impact.

Rachel said: "I was seeing a shift in the way we consume fashion and at the same time witnessing first-hand the rapid rise of influencer marketing so merging the two felt like the natural next step.

"We believe that fashion should be about experience not ownership and being sustainable shouldn't mean sacrificing style. Our customers can rent items from the personal wardrobes of the creatives and also a curated edit of archival and new season collections.

"Reducing waste is the biggest challenge our industry faces. Loaning won't totally replace owning but it gives the consumer the choice to change some of those habits. It sits as a smart way to rethink our fashion consumption and make more sustainable sense of our wardrobes.

"The advisors at Robson Laidler have been invaluable in helping me navigate through the best tax-efficient way to structure the business, helped me flesh out the business plan and provided forecasts for funding applications."

CLOAN aims to offer a premium rental experience with a direct-to-consumer model with the platform managing all items and quality-controlling every rental, with all loans, stored, cleaned and sent out from its purpose-built facility in Scotland.



## Experience Bank Group Support Digitalab Merger

**Digitalab, a multi-award winning professional photography lab, has successfully merged with Colorworld, thanks to the support from Experience Bank Group.**

Jill Roe, the owner of Digitalab and Mike Brydon, Colorworld's founder met in 2019 travelling from Tilburg in the Netherlands, having been on a Fuji factory visit that all labs in the UK had been invited to. The pair got chatting on their journey home to the North East and realised their companies had different strengths and customer bases, so potentially could work together as one with many benefits. They started to explore the possibility and then Covid hit.

In September 2021, the pair got back in touch and picked up the discussions, deciding to take the leap as a merger seemed the best for both putting them three years ahead in their business growth aims. However, neither had done or been involved in a merger before. It was then that Angelina Bell from Scale Up recommended Experience Bank Group and Andrew Marsh. Jill said:

"Mike loved Digitalab's brand, product range and growth and I liked the fact that Colorworld had bigger premises, more capacity, greater technical capability, and a solid IT and HR infrastructure.

"Andrew has been amazing – he has navigated us through uncharted waters, taking both sides concerns of the merger into considerations. Andrew was instrumental in allaying all of our fears and outlining opportunity. We have four directors now, as Calum Thomson and John Wilkinson are part of the team. Andrew pulled us together as a team, highlighted the challenges and how to overcome them, and made it all possible. He removed the deal breakers and created with us details within our articles of association to protect everyone."

The company has kept the name Digitalab but relocated to the Colorworld premises in North Shields to allow for growth. By bringing together Mike and Jill's core business – Digitalab's wall art, framing and print and Colorworld's printed albums and school photography – the company can now cross sell to each customer base, positioning themselves for growth.

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# SUSTAINABLE SALES

Generating sales consistently and effectively is perhaps one of the biggest issues many organisations and individuals face.

## So how can you create sales sustainably?

Let's start by assessing the meaning of the word sustainable, a word so often used in a variety of contexts. Sustainable sales are about creating long term value, considering the three key elements of people, planet and profit. Sustainable sales can often take longer to achieve as they encompass the nurturing of long-term relationship development, providing solutions and adding value. Establishing yourself as a trusted partner takes time, but the long-term lasting effects are essential. Creating a sustainable sales mentality will drive long term growth in your business, a much more reliable pipeline and a more cyclical sales process with an increased level of inbound leads.

Sustainable sales aren't about quick transactional wins which do not create long term value for either the end user or you the individual / business. They aren't about large or small orders with a minimal margin just to achieve your month end target or annual KPI. They aren't about pricing it so tight to beat the competition and leaving yourself no room to negotiate next time. That said pricing to win is a method we have all used if the long-term value is evident – discounting continuously is not a sustainable nor advisable method and one I would warn against at all costs.

Creating sustainable sales comes down to a few key elements for us at the Just Williams Sales Academy.

1. **Setting Goals and KPIs**
2. **Know Your Customer**
3. **Consistency**
4. **Networks**
5. **Adding Value**

These five key elements when brought together form the foundations for successful sales on a sustainable basis. They each create an essential element in their own right, but together they form a solid platform to create a sustainable sales methodology.

**Setting Goals and KPIs** – This is an obvious one, right? Well, you would be surprised. You may have set company wide objectives and targets, but have you created your own activities and goals? Broken your annual targets down to monthly activities? What do you need to actually do to achieve these? What are your goals, not just KPIs, goals – we have both personal and professional goals mapped out monthly.

**Know your customer** – take a strategic approach ALWAYS! Who buys from you and importantly, why? Ensure you have a comprehensive



Jessica Williams

understanding of who your customers are and engage with them regularly. Are they also your future customers? The reason they once bought from you may not be the reason, they remain loyal to you – find out. Creating sustainable sales is having a loyal customer base – RETENTION is everything!

**Consistency** – Taking a proactive approach in all your customer service and sales based activities with both prospects and customers alike may sound obvious but you'd be surprised how often we fail to complete simple weekly tasks. Schedule and complete the things you least want to do but know will have the biggest impact first. An old manager of mine once called it 'eating the frog' and I've never forgotten it (Thanks Steve!)

**Networks** – Your network is the most essential element in your sales toolkit. Think online, offline, forums, associations, membership organisations, contacts, connections, referral networks your networks network. The more you nurture your network, the more you'll receive and create a ready made sales team of brand ambassadors who talk about you and promote your organisation without even thinking about it.

**Adding Value** – In all of the above, you should at every interaction with everyone you come across, add value. This doesn't have to be in the conventional financial sense but add value to that

business or individual. Think BBMT, our business's philosophy (actually it's Linda's) – Brilliant Basics, Magic Touches. Go above and beyond – make your connection feel special.

There's a quote I use by one of the greats in all our sales training and if you attended our Sales, Service and Success Conference in early September (if you didn't – where were you?! No seriously...?!) you will have received a pack of our favorite quotes in our gift bags...

*People will forget what you said,  
People will forget what you did.  
But People will never forget  
How you made them feel.*

Maya Angelou

Sustainable sales require you the individual to take a long-term view on success, work consistently, add value at every turn and set goals. We have a range of modules, available in bundles, individually or as part of a 12-month training hybrid of inhouse face to face and online to complement and help you achieve sustainable sales growth in your organisation.

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Module	Module Title	Time	
1	Account Management and Retention	30 mins	<b>Bundle 1</b> £195 + VAT
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3	Networking Essentials	30 mins	
4	Essential Sales Tools	30 mins	
5	Creating a Customer Journey	30 mins	<b>Bundle 2</b> £130 + VAT
6	Lead Management	30 mins	
7	Lead Generation	30 mins	<b>Bundle 3</b> £95 + VAT
8	Communication Matters	30 mins	
9	Sales and Marketing – Together Stronger	30 mins	<b>Bundle 4</b> £55 + VAT
10	Sales Team Structure	30 mins	

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## COVER STORY

# CREST PHOTOGRAPHY - 39 NOT OUT

For most of us, taking a photograph is easy. Whip out your mobile phone and fire off dozens of shots. The only snag is that the vast majority, if not all of them, will look like a holiday snap.



Simon Williams

**Which is the big difference between taking a photograph yourself and hiring someone who knows what they're doing...knows what sort of image to get...what sort of kit will work best...will help you tell a story.**

And that's where approaching 40 years of experience makes leading North East based photographer Simon Williams at Crest Photography stand out from the crowd.

We thought we'd catch up with him and find out what it's been like to have a life behind the lens.

**You've been a photographer for 39 years...how did you get started?**

In 1983 after my O' levels, I was offered a job after doing work experience in a studio in Gosforth. I took it rather than the college route I was due to take. Straightaway I was dealing with the Newcastle advertising/design agency scene which was exciting for a young lad.

**What has been the biggest change in the photography business in 39 years?**

The shift from film to digital was a big one. Moving away from those fantastic Hasselblad square format cameras to digital 35mm format meant I had to compose shots differently as well as wrestle with the tech side. I still use dark room techniques to this day when editing images so it's amazing how similar it all is. The speed of digital is fantastic as it enables me to shoot a job and the result will be on the other side of the world within a couple of minutes.

**Is there a particular field of photography you especially enjoy?**

The variation of shoots is huge, from doctors/lawyers/funders/accountants to the royals and rock stars...and not forgetting the planes, trains and excavators! I set up Crest Photography up in 1995 and was very much in the corporate PR world and have pretty much remained in that discipline for over 27 years.

**What's your favourite location?**

They say there's no place like home so I love highlighting any of our North East locations from Berwick's Border Bridge to the Tees Transporter Bridge and obviously the Newcastle Quayside area which I've watched develop over the last 40 years through my camera.

**Is the majority of your work in the North East or do you travel around the UK?**

I cover locations from the top of the Inner Hebrides to the South Coast. It's an amazing way to see our country, the businesses, the towns and the people. The majority of my work is North East based but do "UK Tours" most months.

**We'd guess that as you approach your 40th year in business there have been some ups and downs.**

Starting in the early 80s means I've seen a couple of recessions and a couple of boom times but having a good annual spread of over 100 clients means I've survived the hard times better than most. The last one was the lockdown but I worked with the NHS/Army all the way through and didn't get a week free, for which I was so grateful...and I've not stopped since.

**Are you still learning?**

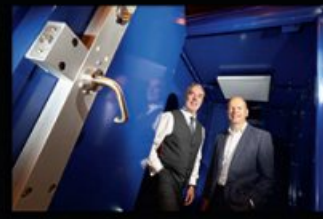
Every day there's something tricky as no location or person is the same, and with well over 20,000 shoots since I set up Crest Photography 27 years ago you can imagine the challenges.

**And you must have met and photographed some interesting folk along the way?**

Some of the experiences have been surreal from being the Queen's host camera...being in Richard Branson's rooftop garden and his office by myself...sitting on a stage with Sting in Bamburgh Castle as he was doing a sound check...having private sittings with Prince Charles...plus photographing several Prime Ministers, including our future ones most recently. I've loved those experiences as well as memorable occasions like working in The Houses of Parliament, or sitting on the touchline at St James Park, or after-show parties with the great and the good. I've been moved to tears by some of the shoots and have been lucky to have a camera to hide behind.

**How do you see the run up to year 40?**

Last week I travelled from Newcastle to Edinburgh to Hull to Wigan to London with eight other shoot locations in-between so that's a pretty good start to year 40. I'm often asked if I'll ever retire but I always reply that maybe semi-retirement one day because I love what I do and every week is an adventure, I know I'm having the time of my life and at 55 there's another 10,000 shoots left in me to do.



“

*...I love what I do and every week is an adventure...*



**Lastly how do you switch off from what seems to be a seven day per week lifestyle job?**

It's non-stop, but you'll hear no complaints from me as my clients are fantastic. In my down time I'll still be snapping away on my phone while walking my dog on Cambois Beach or I'll be up at my retreat on top of the Pennines a million miles from the hustle and bustle of work life.

So there you go. I looks like Simon's 40th year is going to be just as busy as the previous 39.

**Want to get your message across? The best idea is to get in touch with Simon Williams at Crest Photography and he'll quickly sort you out. Call him on 07889 532545 or email [simon@crestphotography.co.uk](mailto:simon@crestphotography.co.uk) You can also see a selection of his work on Facebook, just search for Crest Photography.**



# LEADING BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY PROVIDER CMYK PARTNERS WITH THE REGION'S LARGEST AUTOMOTIVE EXPO AND ENGINEERING & MANUFACTURING EVENT



CMYK will be supporting both the NEAA Automotive Expo and EMCON Engineering & Manufacturing Exhibition in September with their Digital Sign-In Registration Services.



**CMYK work with several of the region's largest Automotive, Manufacturing and Engineering firms to provide agile and hybrid technologies to improve operational and workplace efficiencies. Their core business offerings include all aspects of Managed IT Services, Hardware, Software and associated support, Managed Print & Integrated Scanning Services, Cloud & Mobile Telecoms, Cloud Services, Business Connectivity and Visitor Management Solutions.**

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Craig Pratt, Regional Director at CMYK said: "We are delighted to be supporting and sponsoring two of the largest Automotive, Manufacturing

and Engineering exhibitions in September with our event Sign-in & Registration Services."

Craig added, "CMYK have a great deal of experience and expertise when it comes to supporting the regions Automotive, Engineering and Manufacturing sector. We see exceptional growth potential in these sectors and also its supply chain due to significant inward investment into our region. By partnering with both the North East Automotive Alliance and Engineering & Manufacturing Network it has provided CMYK a platform to showcase our services, and align ourselves with these growing sectors and network amongst leading businesses across our region."

Laura Gage, Marketing & PR Manager at NEAA said: "We are hearing of more and more of our member companies working with CMYK on a range of projects, which is very pleasing to see, and building these valuable connections is really what the automotive cluster is all about.

Laura added, "It's fantastic to have CMYK and the team onboard as an Expo sponsor for

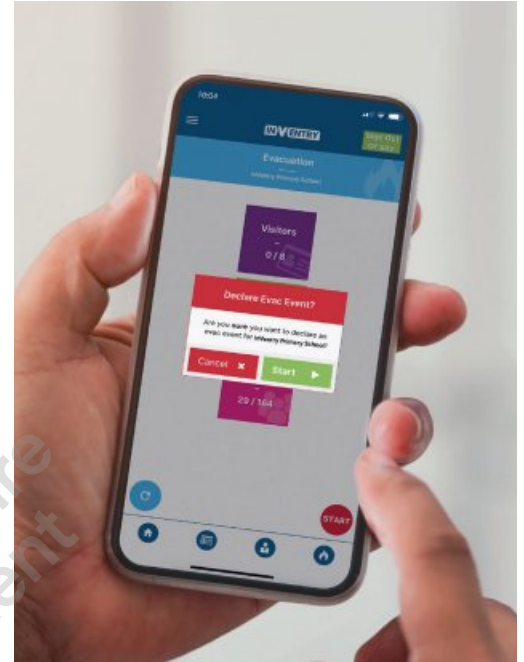
a second year after the great success of the contactless sign-in and registration last year, which was of particular importance as we were transitioning out of lockdown and remote working. Everyone fed back with very positive comments relating to the onsite registration process, so we are pleased to be able to bring this back at the 2022 event."

Kaye Collins of Engineering & Manufacturing stated that "partnering with CMYK was a strategic move for our EMCON show, capitalising on the incredible services and experience of their exhibition team. We know that this will provide a smooth registration process on the day and eliminate much of the time spent on the day's organisation. It's great to have them onboard as a sponsor and a member."

**For more information on how CMYK can support your business, you can reach them by calling 0191 389 7751 or emailing [ask@cmk-digital.co.uk](mailto:ask@cmk-digital.co.uk) [www.cmk-digital.co.uk](http://www.cmk-digital.co.uk)**



# INVENTORY



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InVentry speeds up the signing in process, keeps identity information secure, and leaves businesses feeling confident that their personnel are safe.

**Please contact CMYK to request further information, or book a free online and on-site demonstration.**  
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## Heart-shaped treehouse to help Northumberland tourism business bloom



An award-winning Northumberland sustainable tourism business is introducing a unique romantic getaway with the help of a five-figure investment from the North East Small Loan Fund Supported by The European Regional Development Fund.

Dave and Harvest Harris-Jones set up Laverock Law Cottages and Glamping 11 years ago on a two-acre site at Lowick near Berwick-upon-Tweed after restoring three semi-derelict cottages, which they now offer alongside a handcrafted shepherd's hut made from local timber.

As part of the next stage of the business's development, Dave and Harvest are building a heart-shaped treehouse in a secluded location on the site which will sleep up to four people and which is scheduled to be available before the end of September.

A £25,500 Small Loan Fund investment secured through regional fund management firm NEL Fund Managers is now enabling Dave and Harvest to complete the fit-out of the treehouse's interior, which will include a wood-burning stove, oak flooring, a fully-fitted kitchen and bathroom and locally-sourced artisan crockery.

Laverock Law Cottages and Glamping has won a range of national and regional awards for its commitment to sustainability, including golds in Visit England's Sustainable Tourism Awards, the North East England Tourism Awards and the Northumberland Tourism Awards.



## Tier One Capital invests in the future of its wealth management team with latest appointment

**Tier One Capital, one of the North East's leading independent wealth management and fund management specialists, has grown its team further with the appointment of Bianca Chibanda.**

As Wealth Management Support, Bianca will work closely with Tier One Capital's team of highly experienced financial advisers who deliver independent, personal and bespoke financial advice to the firm's growing client base.

With experience in the wealth management sector, Bianca is the latest addition to Tier One Capital's expanding team. The Newcastle-based business is planning on further growth in coming months aiming to attract more experienced financial advisers and support staff.

Tier One Capital is also committed to providing career development opportunities for its team with Bianca having the opportunity to move into a client advisory role in the future.

Tier One Capital provides its expertise in financial advice, pension planning, savings and investments and insurance and protection to a predominately North East customer base, which includes senior executives, entrepreneurs, business owners, professional partners and high net-worth individuals.

It is also the appointed investment adviser and fund manager for the London Stock Exchange listed Develop North PLC, which provides secured loans to residential and commercial property developments located primarily in the North of England and Scotland.

Paul Blight, Head of Wealth Management at Tier One Capital, said: "Bianca is a great example of the talented people we are attracting to Tier One Capital with the intention of providing a tangible and rewarding career path.

"She is a welcome addition to the team and will play an important role working alongside our financial advisers in their support of our growing client base."



**CCBS Group**  
Business & Funding Solutions

To see a range of our recently transacted deals, visit us at [www.ccbg.co.uk/deals](http://www.ccbg.co.uk/deals)



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Lee Humble with Julie Blackie

## IN THE PINK!

A Newcastle based e-commerce business has undergone an operational and strategic transformation since the pandemic and is now reaping the rewards.

**Pink Boutique is a family-owned womenswear fashion retailer that started from a £90 investment in six dresses and an eBay account 10 years ago. Today Pink Boutique is shipping thousands of packages daily from its 30,000 square foot warehouse in Newburn featuring state of the art distribution techniques and a highly flexible workforce.**

The pandemic was a difficult time for many businesses however Co-founder and Managing Director, Julie Blackie, pivoted the product offering, re-organised the operating structure

and carefully planned stock management allowing the business to navigate through challenging economic conditions.

Mrs Blackie is delighted at the fruits of the labour of her dedicated workforce, commenting: "As a company we have a strong and dedicated management team who were able to react decisively to our changing circumstances. We worked together to reduce our overheads by £2.7m and change product lines to adapt to the new world allowing us to go from strength to strength".

A strategic options review undertaken by Julie Blackie and Azets Corporate Finance Partner, Lee Humble, has allowed the business to enter a new exciting phase of organic and acquisitive growth, with several exciting ventures afoot.

Lee Humble said: "Pink Boutique has navigated a tricky market exceptionally well, exceeding budgets set for the current year, as a number of household brands struggling for an identity and profitability look on. We are delighted to be advising Pink Boutique and are excited to see the business continue to flourish".

He added: "Business owners are often faced

with dilemmas when it comes to strategic direction and can really benefit from speaking to advisors who have seen how other business owners have navigated similar circumstances. Covid-19 and subsequent macro-economic factors have created a perfect storm for a lot of businesses and having an outlet through which management can reflect, debate and conclude on revised objectives and strategies is immensely useful. Having the support from experienced professionals who can challenge management, who are often isolated and facing big decisions, can make all manner of difference."

Despite ongoing economic uncertainty Pink Boutique is trading through 2022 with stability and confidence, with the expanding management team keen to deliver further growth for the North East business.

**Lee Humble has over 17 years of professional services, banking sector and Corporate Finance experience, having spent time in London and the North West. For more information, please call 0191 285 0321 or email [lee.humble@azets.co.uk](mailto:lee.humble@azets.co.uk)**



Richard Humphreys

## URGENT PENSION TAX ISSUES FOR DOCTORS TO ADDRESS

By Richard Humphreys, director at RMT Healthcare, the specialist medical division of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors

If you asked most doctors which of the ancient Greeks they're most familiar with, the answer is likely to be the 'father of medicine' Hippocrates, after whom the oath that they traditionally took before beginning their practice was named.

**But at the moment, it's the words of one of his near-contemporaries, philosopher Heraclitus, that should be ringing in their ears when they're reviewing their retirement plans.**

Heraclitus is credited with inventing the phrase 'change is the only constant in life,' a statement which could characterise the ever-evolving situation with GP pension contributions in recent years.

Over the last decade, the lifetime pension allowance has been reduced by the government from £1.8m to a little over £1m today, while successive Finance Acts have reduced the annual contributions allowance from £255,000 in 2010/11 to £50,000 in 2011/12 and then down to £40,000 in 2014/15.

Since 2016/17, the annual allowance has also been tapered, currently reducing when an individual's threshold (taxed) income is above £200,000 and their adjusted (total including pension growth) income is above £240,000.

For many senior GPs and consultants, all these changes have had a major impact on their

retirement and pension planning.

And now, the current soaring levels of inflation and higher levels of income that have been associated with the provision of Covid-related services are going to have a further significant impact in this area.

Because of the way in which charges for the GP defined benefits pension scheme is calculated, many members of the scheme could be facing pension tax penalties in 2022/23 estimated to be worth anything up to 'half their post-tax income' for pension growth from which they'll never benefit from.

Pleas to the government from the BMA and from the Association of Independent Specialist Medical Accountants (AISMA) to act to mitigate these unique circumstances have fallen on deaf ears.

There is now real concern within the medical profession that these added costs could lead many GPs who are approaching retirement to either stop taking on extra/as much work or to stop practising altogether at a time when

waiting lists have never been longer.

In terms of a solution to this issue, there isn't a single silver bullet and we would strongly recommend that doctors look at their individual situations before taking an informed decision on the best option for them.

Some may choose to stay in the NHS pension scheme and ride out the wave of higher tax bills that will follow this year and next, while others will choose to come out of it, either temporarily or permanently depending on their situations.

It's important to bear in mind, however, that those taking either of the latter routes will lose out on the benefits associated with the scheme as a result, which could potentially be more expensive than the additional charges you're facing.

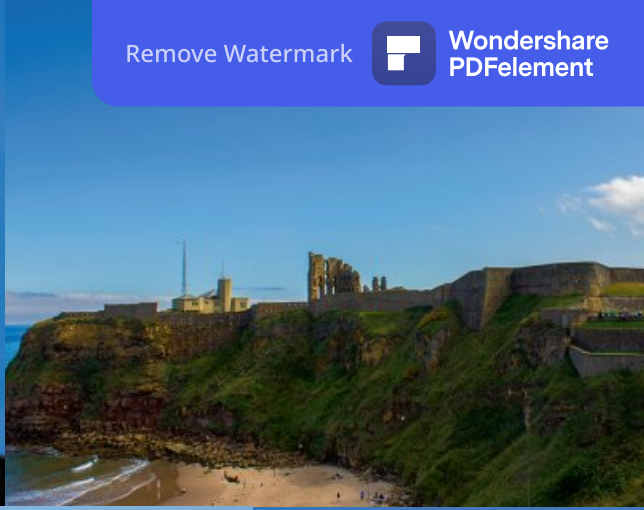
The current situation also provides an imperative to look at any other personal provisions you've made for your retirement, to identify whether increasing your contributions into them might be a sensible move to make at this point.

However you think your individual pension situation looks, the essential thing is to act quickly to get an accurate picture of what you can expect.

Take qualified advice on what the best approach might be for your personal circumstances and then act on it to minimise the impact of what's ahead.

In this situation, sitting tight and hoping for the best is not a sustainable strategy.

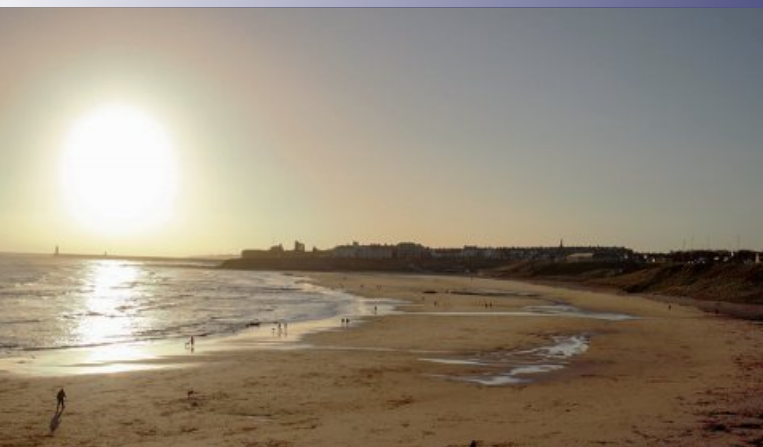
**For further information and advice on GP pensions, and on all aspects of medical and healthcare finance, please contact Richard Humphreys on 0191 256 9500 or visit [www.r-m-t.co.uk](http://www.r-m-t.co.uk)**



# ReadMilburn & COMPANY

*"The Coastal Accountants"*

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tel: 0191 257 0355 mob: 07736 548 228 info@readmilburn.co.uk



## A WELCOME RELIEF

James and Wendy are comfortably off with a large house in a nice area and a cash rich engineering business...

**James ran the business but was beginning to take a back seat as he was entering his late sixties and had employed a good manager in the shape of their son, William.**

They were concerned about Inheritance Tax (IHT). James had started the business forty years ago and built it up from nothing. They were not keen that HMRC would take 40% in tax on their deaths, so they decided to take advice.

The chap from Rutherford Hughes Limited (RHL) sat down with them and asked them about what their fears and concerns were and what they wanted to achieve. The RHL adviser explained more about IHT, the thresholds, reliefs and potential solutions.

James stated, "We would be keen for William to take over the business when I die as he has worked in it with me for some time. Should I give it to him now and hope to last seven years?"

Our man from RHL came back with more questions. "The first question, do you need the income from the business? If 'yes', then you have just cut yourself off from it." He continued, "Do you realise that gifting the business creates a disposal for CGT purposes and therefore a potential tax liability?"

"Further, your business may qualify for Business Relief for IHT."

James replied, "We could draw on our pensions to replace the salary and dividends we receive but I don't like the idea of paying tax at all when William gets the business. You better tell us more about Business Relief."

Our man explained that the business had to be "qualifying" and had to be owned for a period of two years. Under the current rules it would then be 100% exempt from IHT.

Wendy became excited. "So, we can just leave the shares in the business to William and that's it; he gets it IHT free? What about Capital Gains Tax?"

"Let's deal with the easy one first," said our man.



Peter Rutherford

"Capital Gains are wiped out on death so there is no tax to worry about there. However, IHT is still an issue as your company is cash rich. In fact, it is carrying too much cash and therefore, as we speak, has potentially lost its qualifying status for Business Relief."

James and Wendy looked at each other.

Wendy asked, "How can we sort this out?"

"Well, you could pay yourselves a dividend which would suffer income tax and would have the money in your estate for IHT purposes. What might be better is to top up your pensions via a company contribution as this would be immediately outside your estate but that would not reduce the cash sufficiently."

"As a business, it can invest in its own qualifying Business Relief scheme and the money is immediately outside your estates and brings the engineering business back into qualifying status itself."

"Brilliant!" shouts James. "But what if I need the money back in the business?"

"No problem. We can surrender all or part of the investment as needed. It would take a few weeks to get the money back into the business account."

Our chap continued, "Whilst Business Relief investments do try and reduce risks, they are still investments and as such their values can go up or down and you might not get all your money back. That said, it will save you a lot of IHT."

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

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

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

*Tax advice is not regulated by the FCA, and legislation is subject to change. The value of investments can fall as well as rise and capital is at risk.*

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

## Business Distress and Insolvency is no joke.

Directors of distressed businesses must proceed corporate restructuring carefully.

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

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

corporate restructuring, accelerated business sales, and closure options.

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

**Call Greg Whitehead or Linda Farish for a charge free confidential consultation with no obligation.**

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

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



## Northpoint.

Licensed Insolvency Practitioners

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# ACCOUNTANTS LAUNCH FORENSIC ACCOUNTING SERVICE LINE WITH NEW SENIOR APPOINTMENT



Colin Fitzpatrick

A highly experienced accountant who has specialised for many years in forensic accounting and expert witness work has joined Robson Laidler Accountants' fast expanding team as the firm adds a new service line to its offering.

**Colin Fitzpatrick has joined the award-winning firm of accountants and business advisors as a consultant, bringing with him a number of new clients and contacts.**

Robson Laidler managing director Graham Purvis said: "Forensic accounting requires a specific skillset and the arrival of Colin and his clients gives us a welcome boost in this area. His skills will complement the investigations work we already do.

"Colin is a highly experienced forensic accountant who has acted in over 500 commercial or HMRC disputes and as an expert witness in legal cases over more than 30 years.

"His decision to join Robson Laidler provides further evidence of the growing attraction of us as a firm that recognises and rewards talent."

Speaking of his new role at Robson Laidler, Colin said: "The growth of Robson Laidler in recent years has been notable and I am delighted to be joining a firm, which shares my ethos for providing high quality, commercial services that make real tangible impact to the client."

Colin trained with Big 4 firm Price Waterhouse (now PWC) in Newcastle before heading to Grant Thornton where he was business advisory partner and founding member of Northern Disputes Resolution, a grouping formed in Newcastle to promote mediation, mainly to resolve commercial disputes. He has also been the CFO of a Middle East company which listed on the AIM market in London and a Consultant to Baker Tilly.

More recently Colin worked in partnership with Jon Royle for number of years as FitzPatrickRoyle Chartered Accountants, acting for individuals and businesses, including limited companies and partnerships, and undertaking consultancy, forensic accounting and expert witness work in the legal business sector. Colin also has also acted as a non-executive director and close adviser to a number of companies, including advising and acting in sales and acquisitions of businesses.

Robson Laidler's continuing growth was confirmed when in its last financial year, it reported a rise in turnover by 13.5%. It was crowned North East Accountancy Firm of the Year in the 2022 North East Accountancy Awards and staff numbers have also increased to over 100 across its offices in Jesmond and Chester le Street in recent months.

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

# ROUNDTABLE WILL TACKLE SUSTAINABILITY IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

Northumbria University and Anglo Scottish Asset Finance have joined forces to host a sustainability roundtable event for the North East construction sector.

**Taking place on 5 October, it will create a dialogue between major players in the construction supply chain, with Anglo Scottish and Northumbria University's Newcastle Business School, set to facilitate collaboration and provide critical resources to enable green investment in process, project and product within the sector.**



## **Alireza Shokri**

**Research Interest Group lead at Newcastle Business School.**

### **What can attendees expect from the roundtable?**

We will first get to the bottom of what everyone's idea of ethical and green construction and green supply chain is. Gaining an understanding of what is going to be required to meet all stakeholder's expectations is vital for a business to be successful.

We will then look at the opportunities and challenges different providers face depending upon where they are on their journey to becoming more efficient and sustainable and the risks of inaction.

Identifying required resources for environmental sustainability within the construction sector and how Anglo Scottish and Newcastle Business School can collaborate with attendees to help provide resources and investment to become a business that champions sustainability and, ultimately, a market leader will be a key discussion point.

### **Why is collaboration key to ensuring green investment within construction?**

Within construction, most stakeholders, including SMEs, are firefighting and caught up in day-to-day operations, meaning they don't have the time, nor the resource, to address inefficiencies. The sustainability agenda is such a vast and complicated one that many don't know where to start but not addressing the issue is no longer going to be possible, as contractors face scrutiny over how sustainable their supply chains are and call for suppliers to level up.

Now, more than ever, it is essential that contractors and suppliers come together to support one another and find how they can prosper, together. Support outside of the supply chain is invaluable and Newcastle Business School has a wealth of knowledge and experts that have real-time experience in easing pain points for SMEs.



## **Charlotte Enright**

**Sustainability lead and business development manager, Anglo Scottish Asset Finance.**

### **Why is finance an important part of the sustainability discussion?**

When addressing inefficiencies, there will be many changes that are relatively easy and simple, requiring no capital investment. However, many businesses will find that investment is essential in some areas of their operations. This may be because they need to replace inefficient machinery or, for example, they may look to move to an electric vehicle fleet.

Another way that we can support businesses is with installation of renewable energy for example LED, battery storage and solar. In the current climate of rising energy bills this can help mitigate rising energy costs, often making projects cost neutral in the long-term or significantly reducing energy bills. We offer monthly finance payments and once the project is paid for at the end of the term, businesses benefit from lower monthly running costs and reduced carbon emissions.

### **Who is the roundtable event suitable for?**

The event will provide invaluable insights and will be beneficial for all within the region's construction sector, for this is a challenge no business can avoid and it must be addressed together.

There will also be opportunity to develop a sustainability plan, one of action and execution, for any business within the region's construction value chain, if they so wish to engage with the Business School and Anglo Scottish going forward.

**For more information contact [alireza.shokri@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:alireza.shokri@northumbria.ac.uk)**

# ESG – WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

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. He has a career steeped in technology, business change and venture capital backed organisations, as well as working with boards to achieve the best they can.

**Here, Andrew focuses on Environment, Social and Governance (ESG), an important topic for all business leaders and boards to have on their agenda right now.**

“It is worth starting with what ESG is and why it should matter, before leading onto some good examples of what you should be doing and what others are doing.

“As a leader you are duty bound to focus on the financial wellbeing of your company, which is often construed as profits. ESG up until recently was seen as an extra cost. But the result of this thinking is that we ignored the impact on our environment, and our wellbeing.

“Leaders are now seeing that ESG is interlocked with long term profitability. You can have both and that by including it in their business strategy businesses can unlock opportunity, reduce waste and future proof your brand in the eyes of all your stakeholders.

“According to KPMG nearly 70 percent of business leaders acknowledge that ESG is essential or good for business. But what is important to recognise here is that the three elements of Environment, Social and Governance when brought together becomes a strategic approach looking beyond shareholder return, by evaluating and operating your business in a way that takes into consideration the entire ecosystem of your operational sphere.

“You cannot miss this topic in the press and social media e.g. Net Zero targets, UN sustainability goals, rise in ESG certificates in B-Corp and environmental standards like ISO27000. More and more I am seeing investors, customers, consumers, governments and employees demanding to see and understand businesses approaches with many valuations being impacted. This is a trend that is here to stay and we must embrace it.

“Taking each one as an individual approach, environment is how your company’s activities affect the world with its pollution, emissions, energy, use of natural resources water consumption, waste but also investments in clean technologies and net zero strategies. Typically, these are all focused by Government led environmental policies, but it needs to be more than a list of things to do from the Government. It needs real action and demonstration of change at all levels and none more so than the SME. For example, the energy trilemma has never been more at the forefront of business’s minds in a world reeling from covid, the Ukraine war pushing gas prices to record levels, and a cost-of-living crisis – all exacerbated by the now daily impacts of climate change. Energy affordability, security and sustainability is a tricky balance, but behind this is a growing, collective consciousness in the business community about ESG and the bigger picture beyond profit. The reality is a significant majority of businesses cannot operate without energy and you can’t always pass on increasing costs to consumers.

“One company that has been delivering low carbon and renewable energy projects for over a decade, Reheat, works directly with clients who are now accelerating their transition to decarbonised production. The economic situation is of course a key driver, as biomass heat solutions, for example, provide a viable, ready-to-go alternative to oil and gas, with lower prices that aren’t subject to interruptions in global supply chains and the dramatic price-hikes that fossil fuels have experienced recently.

“However, environmental and social responsibility is an increasingly significant factor in client decision making. Some of Reheat’s major clients, such as the National Trust, know their customers – the general public – are highly aware of such a large estate owner’s environmental impact. But as an organisation there is a responsibility to ensure their operations are as low carbon as possible. Reheat has supported the National Trust to decarbonise the heat production across a dozen

sites, installing over 2MW of renewable heat generation capacity, and delivering a wide variety of heat consultancy.

“Another Reheat client, Yearle House in Northumberland, has transitioned to 100% biomass heating and promote on their website the owner’s ambition to align sustainability performance with Northumberland County Council’s carbon neutral by 2030 plan. In addition, many businesses (including Yearle House) seek to be stewards of natural resources, sourcing sustainable and local wood fuel that not only has environmental benefits but also supports local supply chains.

Founder of Reheat, Ben Tansey told me: “From a renewable and low carbon energy perspective, businesses in the North East can start their ESG journey with access to advice and schemes that consider how they can use less energy, increase energy efficiency, explore renewable and low carbon energy options and offset remaining emissions. A useful place to start is measuring your current environmental impact through disciplines such as carbon accounting – for example visiting Smart Carbon ([smartcarboncalculator.com](http://smartcarboncalculator.com)), based in the region. Exploring low carbon and renewable energy sources can put a business on a purpose-led path to making a significant contribution to society beyond profit.”

“The Social element of ESG focuses on how as a business you treat people, namely stakeholders both in the business and in target audiences. We touched on a lot of these topics during my previous Diversity, Engagement and Inclusion articles, such as gender pay gap, reskilling and training, health and safety, human rights and equality.

“And Governance, the ‘G’, which is an arena I personally love and excel in, outlines how a company executes its highest-level functions, including decision making, ethics and adherence to company articles. Ecosystem ESG falls within this, too, making leaders think outside of their immediate concerns and consider an entire perspective of possibilities.

“Commitment to ESG brings a competitive advantage, and allows for increased innovation in solving problems, if you fully embrace it.

“An organisation that has done just that is Accenture, a computer technology services business with offices around the globe, and one right here in the North East. The company shares their ethics, corporate governance and policies transparently on their website allowing the world to hold them accountable. Chair and CEO of Accenture, Julie Sweet, says: “Across the globe, one thing is universally true of the people of Accenture: We care deeply about what we do and the impact we have with our clients and communities. It is personal to all of us.”

“This is a clear example where ESG has been used to shape the culture, and define the character of the company, putting them in a clear pole position for their behaviours. That has instilled into their team, also making it a great place to work for anyone who has values.

“Investors also take ESG commitment seriously so it goes without saying that if you want to grow and want to attract investment, ESG should be high on your agenda right now. Next month I will look more closely at the Social and Governance angles for you.”

***If you need help in homing in as a leader how ESG could benefit your organisation, then please do get in touch with Andrew on [andrew@marshbusinesstransformation.co.uk](mailto:andrew@marshbusinesstransformation.co.uk)***







Andrew Marsh

# FINANCE DURHAM INVESTS £600,000 IN CONDUIT CONSTRUCTION NETWORK



L-R: Kerman Vandriwala, Finance Director for CCN, David Nixon, Senior Investment Manager at Maven, Peter Rippingale, Investment Manager at Business Durham, Councillor James Rowlandson.

Door set manufacturer and distributor relocates to County Durham to substantially scale operations and create 30 new jobs.

**The Finance Durham Fund, managed by Maven Capital Partners (“Maven”), established by Durham County Council and overseen by Business Durham, has supported local business, Conduit Construction Network Ltd (“CCN”), with a £600,000 funding package. The investment has enabled the business to substantially scale-up its operations and relocate to a new 54,500 sq ft facility in Belmont Industrial Estate, creating 30 new jobs in County Durham.**

CCN manufactures high-quality door sets and screens for the commercial, education and healthcare sectors. The business has increasingly focussed on whole door sets due to the preference of its client base, as whilst they are harder to manufacture, they are quicker to install and as such help clients in timely project delivery. Its ISO and fire safety accreditations have allowed them to build a reputation based on two tenants of quality products and timely, reliable delivery.

The Durham move adds significant capacity and brings operational benefits with a plan to increase production and sales significantly. Alongside relocation, the funding package from Finance Durham will be used to fit out the new factory on the Belmont Industrial Estate and purchase new machinery. The investment will also enable the business to expand its already developed product range and increase the speed and efficiency of manufacture resulting in shortened lead times, whilst improving quality and further enhancing product scope. Longer term CCN is also planning to set up an in-house manufacturing Training Centre to develop its existing and future workforce in a live environment.

CCN was founded in 2005 by father and son Laurence and Chris Maguire. Laurence retired last year, and Chris was appointed Managing Director after over 15 years’ experience working in the manufacturing sector. After graduating in Business and Law he joined the family business working as an Operations Manager/Director over the previous 10 years.

David Nixon, Senior Investment Manager at Maven, said: “CCN is an established business with a track record of stable growth and profitability. The business enjoys strong client relationships and a reputation for quality and reliability, which have enabled it to develop a pipeline of exciting opportunities. The relocation to County Durham enables them to deliver much

higher volumes and take advantage of prevalent market conditions to grow the business. We are delighted to support Chris and the team at this time and look forward to working with them to support their expansion plans.”

Kerman Vandriwala, Finance Director of CCN, said: “The relocation of CCN to Durham was a significant step towards achieving our growth aspirations. This was secured with substantial financial and professional support from Finance Durham. Within six months of the move CCN are already benefitting from the cutting-edge manufacturing machinery investment resulting in reduced unit costs at a time of exceptional inflation. We will now be in a position to competitively expand our service, quality and technical support levels to our customers.”

Cllr James Rowlandson, cabinet member for resources, investment and assets at Durham County Council, said: “We are delighted to have invested in CCN through Finance Durham to support their exciting plans, and to be able to welcome this growing company to the county. It’s a great example of how our Finance Durham Fund is helping to create more and better jobs, and contributing towards a strong competitive economy for the future. We encourage more businesses to follow suit and access the funding opportunities we have available through our Business Durham team.”

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



# 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.



Purchasing new machinery



Capital expenditure



Exporting abroad



Investing in new products



Hiring a new team



Filling gaps in working capital



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



# NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT – MACRO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS ON THE M&A MARKETS



The increasing level of inflation continues to impact people and businesses across the UK, and is also driving an increase in the Bank of England interest with the fifth consecutive rate increase in June this year.

**While at Cavu we still see a historically strong M&A market, and expect this to continue for the next 12 to 18 months, there are now early signs that beyond this horizon trade acquirers may tighten their M&A budgets and private equity may become more constrained as a source of capital. This should be an important consideration for companies and shareholders who are considering a transaction as timing may become an increasingly important factor in that decision.**

Any shareholders who are currently considering a transaction would be well advised to ideally

do so in the near-term to avoid the combined increased risk of macro-economic factors and potential constraints in the funding market.

The corporate M&A market is expected to continue being strong in the near term, but with potential softening in the medium term. In particular, overseas acquirers are highly active in the UK market, in part driven by the weak pound. However, in the medium term slowing economic growth in the UK may make UK companies less attractive for overseas acquirers, while domestic acquirers will face an increased cost of lending to fund additional acquisitions.

The hardening macro-economic climate creates an uncertain outlook for the private equity market and companies considering raising money from private equity funds. Aside from the obvious risk that a gloomier economic climate creates a harder environment in which to generate strong organic growth, the risk is also that it generates a more structural change in the private equity market which will be felt in the medium to long term. The private equity industry has since 2013 enjoyed the benefits of low interest rates, with investors such as pension funds and sovereign wealth looking

to private equity funds as an attractive means of generating their own longer-term returns. As interest rates increase (and the growth prospects of private equity-backed companies decrease), these investors may now start to shift their capital allocation towards lower-yield, lower-risk investment such as Government bonds.

There will always be exceptions to this trend, including for instance the recent €1bn fundraise from Synova Capital (including the £250m Chrysalis fund ear-marked for the lower mid-market) and ever-green funds such as LDC who are less exposed to macro-economic climates.

Cavu has a deep knowledge of private equity and M&A markets and can inform on most appropriate sources of capital for a deal, including which funds have recently raised capital and tend to offer the strongest terms. We focus on maximising value for clients whatever we are doing, and our deep understanding of private equity and trade acquirer markets is critical in our ability to repeatedly deliver exceptional outcomes.

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# HIGHLY ACTIVE SUMMER BOLSTERS AN EXCEPTIONAL YEAR TO DATE FOR RGCF

**RG Corporate Finance (RGCF) has continued to have an extremely active 2022 with the firm advising on a series of significant transactions over the summer period.**

In recent months, the North East-based CF advisory boutique has worked closely with shareholders, management teams and investors from businesses in the region and further afield to support them and their business' growth ambitions.

Most recently this included RGCF advising the shareholders of London-based DMJ on the sale of the business to mid-market private equity house, Omni Partners LLP, which will see DMJ operate as a brand within the newly created Fortes Group, to drive further growth both organically and by acquisition.

Also, from outside of the North East, RGCF advised Software as a Service (SaaS) provider Market Dojo on its 50.1% acquisition by French listed Esker, which is a global cloud platform and

leader in AI-driven process automation solutions operating in the finance and customer service markets.

Among the noteworthy transactions led by RGCF on behalf of North East-based companies, was the sale of gift card provider MBL Solutions. RGCF advised the shareholders of the Seaham-based business on its sale to Appreciate Group, which is home to brands such as Love2Shop and Park Christmas Savings.

RGCF also carried out financial and tax due diligence on behalf of strategic communications business Definition Group on its recent acquisitions of brand strategy and experience consultancy Brand Vista and tone of voice specialist Schwa.

In addition, in this period RGCF was appointed to support an acquisition-led growth strategy being delivered by the global market leading decentralised clinical trials specialist Medical Research Network Ltd (MRN) based in Milton Keynes, which is looking to expand its range of services, while developing clinical trial technology to support remote, hybrid and virtual clinical trials.

Carl Swansbury, Partner and Head of Corporate Finance at RGCF, said: "Traditionally the summer is a quieter period for deals, but since the pandemic there has been a marked shift and our pipeline of work is strong throughout the year.

"However, it is not only the volume and complexity of the transactions that stands out during this period, but also the diversity of sectors in which we are advising businesses within. We have built a strong



Carl Swansbury

reputation for our knowledge and expertise of advising on transactions in a broad range of industries, including technology, healthcare, human capital, professional services and manufacturing/engineering, which enables our team to deliver clear, industry relevant on point advice to our clients that adds significant value."

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Michael Stowe

## WEALTH MANAGER APPOINTED AT LOWES FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

A new wealth manager has been appointed at leading North East financial advisory firm, Lowes Financial Management, as the company continues to build a strong team to drive its ambitious growth strategy.

**Michael Stowe, 36, has been appointed to the role at a time of wider restructure and ongoing expansion at Lowes.**

As a multi-award-winning independent financial advice firm, Lowes, which last year celebrated 50 years of servicing clients, recently appointed its first associate director and a head of financial planning, this alongside opening a new office in Teesside to further develop its national and regional profile.

In his role as wealth manager, Michael will be involved in developing his relationships with current and new clients, working from both the Newcastle and Middlesbrough offices.

Michael has been part of the wider Lowes team

for almost 10 years, starting in an administration role and working his way up, learning the business in various roles before becoming a Lowes Consultant. His appointment as wealth manager comes as the firm seeks to cement itself as the best Independent Financial Adviser (IFA) in the North East.

He said: "I am delighted to be taking on this role at Lowes during such an exciting period of growth and progress. During the last several years there has been a lot of change within the financial advisory sector from legislation and regulatory requirements to the opportunities that technology has created.

"Lowes has built its reputation on providing a

personal service to clients; an approach which we plan to continue to build on and enhance. The ongoing growth of the senior leadership team at Lowes is allowing us to improve our levels of service for our clients by introducing efficiencies and removing time-consuming tasks. This means we can offer more time to those who want a more personalised service."

Lowes advises clients across a wide range of financial aspects such as inheritance tax planning, investment management, pensions, tax mitigation, long term care and other general financial planning issues helping clients and their families to secure their financial future. More specifically, Lowes is a recognised national authority in structured retail products.

Last October, Lowes was once again recognised as the UK's Best Investment Advice Firm by financial adviser magazine Money Marketing – winning the award for three out of four years, being runner up in 2019. The Money Marketing Awards are one of the financial services profession's most prestigious awards that recognise and reward the sector's leading advisers and providers.

**For more details about the firm visit [www.Lowes.co.uk](http://www.Lowes.co.uk)**

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# INTERNATIONAL MATERIALS TECHNOLOGY GROUP COMPLETES TRANSITION TO EMPLOYEE OWNERSHIP

Newcastle-based Key-Tech International Group has recently moved to employee ownership after its founder, Dr Patrick Ferguson, transferred his entire shareholding in the parent company, Key-Tech International Limited (Key-Tech), to an Employee Ownership Trust (EOT).

**EOTs were introduced by the UK Government in 2014 to facilitate wider employee ownership with the aim to encourage more shareholders to set up a corporate structure similar to the John Lewis Partnership model.**

Key-Tech's subsidiary NEL Technologies Limited is a leading manufacturer of flexible heater assemblies. It started business in 1984 in Consett, County Durham before relocating to Newcastle upon Tyne. Continued product development and innovation have enabled it to become a supplier to global blue-chip companies with the majority of sales going to export markets.

Key-Tech has a dedicated workforce in the North East and one of the major attractions of the transfer to the EOT is that it preserves the independence of the group and protects employment in the North East.

Dr Patrick Ferguson said: "I knew I couldn't continue to own the group forever, however, I was worried that a trade buyer might at some stage shut down the North East operations and move production out of the area. The EOT became an obvious strategy as the group is now owned by a trust which has been established for the long-term benefit of the employees. This will not only protect employment, but it will also ensure the quality of employment is maintained and improved.

"The EOT route provides me and the team with a legacy and ensures that the interests of the loyal NEL Technologies customers are continued to be met. Importantly, it also gives our valued employees a stake in the future of the business and the chance to become owners supporting the day-to-day company activities."

The transaction was advised on by the corporate finance and tax teams at UNW LLP and the legal team at Womble Bond Dickinson (UK) LLP.

Steve Lant, Tax Partner at UNW, said: "We are delighted to have supported Patrick and Key-Tech in achieving a smooth transition to ownership by an EOT. Patrick has dedicated over 25 years to running the business and the EOT preserves his legacy in addition to giving a great opportunity for the employees and continuity for customers. I look forward to seeing the business progress in the years to come."

Jeremy Smith, Partner at Womble Bond Dickinson, added: "I am delighted to have supported the Key-Tech team through the employee ownership process and wish them a successful future."

Reflecting on the support received from both UNW and Womble Bond Dickinson during the process, Dr Patrick Ferguson added: "There is a lot of noise in relation to EOTs and lots of people who claim to know how they work. It was very reassuring to be expertly guided through the whole process by a team with significant experience of working with employee-owned businesses. They were able to cut through the noise and arrive at practical and detailed arrangements which work for the business and employees."

James de le Vingne, Chief Executive of the Employee Ownership Association (EOA), said: "We congratulate our member Key-Tech on its transition to employee ownership; securing the ethos, values and culture of the business, as well as rooting jobs in the North East. Businesses that give employees a stake and a say build trust and shared responsibility, uniting leaders and employees behind a common purpose, and leaving businesses in a better position to flex and adapt.

"Employee ownership is one of the fastest growing business succession solutions in the UK, where there are now more than 800 employee-owned businesses – with more than 300 of those having transitioned since 2020. Key-Tech joins a network of EOTs in the UK that include Richer Sounds and Go Ape."

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







Back: Staff at NEL Technologies

Front: L-R Owen Conquest, Corporate Finance Executive at UNW, Katy Lamb, Corporate Finance Senior Manager at UNW, Tom Henderson, Operations Director at NEL Technologies, Dr Patrick Ferguson, Founder and Managing Director at NEL Technologies, Jeremy Smith, Partner at Womble Bond Dickinson

# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## MATT NICHOLS

*Head of vehicle sourcing at Anglo Scottish Asset Finance, explains that businesses and individuals can save a lot of time and energy by utilising the vast man power of Anglo Scottish when looking for vehicles.*

### Can you tell us about your role?

I started working at Anglo Scottish five years ago. Prior to my arrival, the business had a respected presence within vehicle sourcing but it wasn't a main focus. Now, we have really built up the department and placed a lot of resource in to making it the force that it is today and my drive is to raise awareness of why vehicle sourcing is such a benefit for businesses and individuals.

### Why might a business or individual look towards Anglo Scottish for vehicle sourcing?

Time is a valuable asset and one that is not to be wasted, after all, there's a reason for the saying, 'time is money'. Businesses simply don't have the resource to spend days looking for a vehicle, or fleet, that delivers exactly what they need.

If you go to a typical dealership, the sale is all important, so they offer you what they have and not necessarily what you need. Anglo Scottish is customer-centric and first asks what a business or individual needs, looks at the finance options available within budget, the desired vehicle, including electric vehicle options and then looks to find it for them.

There is no one size fits all approach that ever gets the best result for the customer and nor should there be.

### Why are traditional dealerships not always the best option?

Anglo Scottish has relationships with almost all of the major manufacturers and can offer vehicles from them all, whereas dealerships usually only offer one manufacturers vehicle.

Dealerships may also direct customer to vehicles that do not fit all of their requirements or sit outside of a comfortable budget. On the other hand, we take a very bespoke approach to

customer service and believe in finding the deal that is best for the individual. This is often hard for dealerships as they tend to be tied to only one finance provider, meaning their access to finance products is more limited.

Something else to consider, is that not all dealerships can offer contract hire or salary sacrifice. At Anglo Scottish, we believe the best option is to have every consideration on the table and from there we go through a process of elimination with our customers until we reach upon the ideal option for them.

### Do customers still get the same warranty as they would at a dealership?

Absolutely. All vehicles come with a manufacturing warranty and we work with a number of companies that we can directly link in with if the customer is seeking an extended warranty. I can arrange this via one of these companies and little or no time is required from the customer to secure the extended warranty. We also speak with each business and individual about any services packages that are optional.

### Is leasing or contract hire better?

Again, like everything, it's totally dependant on the individual and their circumstances. I have had individuals come to me dead set on

leasing because a friend has told them about an amazing deal but when we've sat down and looked at all the options, contact hire is the clear winner for them.

There are so many things to consider including salary sacrifice, which Anglo Scottish can offer to any sized company, whether they have one employee or 500.

### What is the Anglo Scottish ethos?

To do exceptional business and to do it right. We're a company that offers a one-stop-shop for pretty much every finance need, be it printers, furniture for an office, prestige cars, asset finance or vehicle sourcing. As such, customers can be assured we will always find the best deal for them via our vast panel of lenders. Our customer retention rate is proof of that and the fact that a significant percentage of them use our services for multiple areas of funding, signals we are excelling at providing all round exceptional customer service.

At the end of the day, we are all people providing a service to someone else and the best businesses, in my opinion, are the ones that put the customer before any sale, no matter the size.

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Matt Nichols



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## Muckle LLP is the clear choice for newly qualified lawyer

Newcastle-born Gillian Scribbins is celebrating after qualifying as a solicitor with Muckle LLP - the North East's leading independent law firm for businesses.

Gillian studied both French and German at Bristol University, and completed a Masters in Journalism, before joining Muckle LLP's Commercial Team in 2018 as a paralegal after a spell with Northumbria University's in-house legal team. Previously, she had worked for a French financial newspaper and the BBC in its Rights, Legal and Business Affairs team.

She started her 18-month training contract in September 2020 before qualifying into the firm's Dispute Resolution team, which has continued to expand over the last 12 months to meet a growing need for its services.

After starting her training contract, Gillian spent 18 months across different practice areas including Construction and Engineering, Corporate and Banking and Restructuring, before taking her final seat in Dispute Resolution.

Gillian said: "Muckle has been supportive throughout my training and qualification, and I am delighted to continue my career here at the firm. It has been a great firm to train with as we get exposure to and responsibility for a breadth of complex and varied matters.

"Working here, you are accepted and appreciated for what you individually bring, and you know your strengths will be recognised."

At Muckle trainees also enjoy getting involved in the firm's frequent Environmental, Social and Governance activities. The firm was recently recognised at the North East Business Awards 2022 with the Heart of the Community award, and it is this personal investment in the North East community that Gillian believes sets it apart.

Susan Howe, Partner and Head of Dispute Resolution, added: "I am delighted that Gillian will continue to develop her career here at Muckle, and, in particular, in the Disputes team. She has already proven to be a fantastic asset to the team and to our clients, and I know she will continue to do great things."



## Double appointment boosts Hay & Kilner's expert dispute resolution team

North East law firm Hay & Kilner has made a double appointment to its thriving dispute resolution team as it continues to grow its presence in the corporate and commercial sector.

Guy Barr and Adam Chaffer have joined the Newcastle-headquartered firm in senior associate and associate roles respectively.

Guy brings more than two decades' experience with leading North East law firms to his new position, and specialises in business disputes, contentious trusts and probate, and property litigation.

He has worked across a wide range of industry sectors, and has particular experience in insurance and claims against professionals.

Adam has worked in the legal sector for nine years, qualifying as a solicitor in 2018, and specialises in corporate and commercial litigation, including shareholder and partnership disputes.

He holds higher rights of audience (civil) enabling him to undertake advocacy in the High Court and the appellate courts and has experience of both trials and interim applications before the court.

Alongside his practice, Adam is the author of The Law Society Litigation Handbook and writes for both the Company Lawyer Journal and the Construction Law Journal.

## Swinburne Maddison acts in Zen deal

Zen, the highly popular Asian fusion restaurant in Durham City, is under new ownership following the purchase of its entire issued share capital by local entrepreneurs, Zak Newton and Sam Gadd.

Trading under a newly registered company, Zen UK Holdings Limited, the pair instructed Durham City's leading law firm, Swinburne Maddison LLP (Swinburne Maddison) in May to act on their behalf in the purchase of the restaurant business, which has been successfully owned and operated by Sam Gadd's parents, Nigel and Deborah Gadd, for almost 15 years.

Swinburne Maddison worked closely with the Gadd's' retained accountancy and business advisory firm, Azets, to conclude the deal, primarily ensuring that they implemented the agreed terms of the tax clearance provided by Azets and advising the new owners on areas of risk.

Commenting on the transaction, Swinburne Maddison's Alex Wilby, a partner in corporate finance, mergers and acquisitions, said: "We were delighted to be instructed by Zak and Sam as they embark on their ownership of Zen, which is a highly popular restaurant. We also enjoy a good working relationship with Azets and, as always, it has been a pleasure to work with Stephen Harris and the tax advisory team.

"Whilst this was a straightforward matter,



we hope our work simply marks the start of a longer-term relationship with Zak and Sam, which may involve us in other areas of legal practice as the pair build their business empire in the future, which I am confident will be a huge success."



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## SINTONS SUPPORTS DEVELOPMENT OF DERELICT QUARRY INTO NATIONALLY-KNOWN ATTRACTION

A Northumberland quarry which had fallen into disuse is being redeveloped into a nature reserve, in a project spearheaded by the local community.



L-R: Tom Wills and Sam Watts from Sintons;  
Terence Howells, Embleton Parish Council;  
Kevin Redgrave, a member of  
the Quarry Working Group



**Embleton Quarry dates back to 1864 and was a major source of employment for the area for over 100 years, but after whinstone production ended in the 1960s, the site became overgrown and unused.**

Wanting to revive the site, Embleton Parish Council put together a plan of action in 2016 which led to them acquiring parts of the quarry in stages from Northumberland County Council, and now owns the whole quarry and the associated Quarry House.

Led by local people, the site - the first on the coast to be awarded Dark Skies Designation Status - has been subject to extensive works to make it into an attraction for locals and tourists alike, with significant clearance and groundwork being carried out over the past five years.

Through the dedication of the Parish Council and the Embleton community, the site is now easily accessible again after the years of dereliction, and work is ongoing to make it fully accessible to wheelchairs and pushchairs so as to become a family and disability-friendly attraction.

The latest phase in the development of Embleton Quarry Nature Reserve involves the preservation of the Quarry House, once the home of the quarry manager, which it is hoped will be restored in the years ahead.

The huge achievement has seen the project feature on Kate Humble's Coastal Britain, as part of her visit to Northumberland earlier this year.

The acquisition of the site has been supported by specialists at law firm Sintons, which has supported Embleton Parish Council in delivering on its ambitions to revive the quarry to become a site at the heart of its community.

"We have spent a lot of time designing the site to get to our objective of creating a nature reserve," says Terry Howells, chair of Embleton Parish Council.

"The great thing about this project is that nobody has had a bad word to say about it, everyone seems to be with us. It's very much led by the community.

"Back in 2017, we got to work straight away in clearing undesirable gorse and other vegetation, acquiring the rest of the quarry and then opening up more of the site from there.

"We've managed to clear a lot of paths and it's now a site people can visit and enjoy, although work continues. We held a trial evening of stargazing in the darkest part of the quarry, and over 100 people came, so that was very successful - we look forward to hosting more of such events.

"Recently we organised clearing inside the house, which was a big job in itself - over the years the roof had fallen in and

some massive trees had grown inside the house, and we are now working on getting it ready for stabilisation work to take place.

"This has been a huge undertaking and a very exciting project, and we're delighted to have such positivity and positive feedback from the community and from our visitors, too."

The Parish Council has been supported by Tom Wills, head of agriculture and estates at Sintons, alongside real estate solicitor Sam Watts, in the acquisition and development of the site.

"The development of Embleton Quarry Nature Reserve is an absolutely fantastic project, and the fact this has been led by the local community makes it very special," says Sam.

"This has been a real labour of love for the Parish Council, and their volunteer workers whose dedication has been unfaltering.

"Through their efforts, what was once a key site in the local community has regained its proud status through becoming an attraction which is set to bring in tourists from miles around, as well as being a beautiful area for local people to enjoy.

"It has been a genuine privilege to be part of such a community-led initiative, which continues to develop and become even more impressive. Embleton Quarry Nature Reserve is now another great asset in our wonderful North East of England and we are delighted to have supported the plans in becoming a reality."

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

“

***...This has been a real labour of love for the Parish Council, and their volunteer workers whose dedication has been unfaltering...***

# RISING STAR

## TOM CLARKE

*A solicitor in the specialist employment law team at Hay & Kilner in Newcastle.*

### What was your training background?

I grew up in the beautiful village of Kirkby Lonsdale in Cumbria before going back to my father's roots and moving to the North East to study music at Newcastle University.

After deciding that law was where my future lay, I studied for my Graduate Diploma in Law and then my Legal Practice Postgraduate Diploma at Northumbria University.

### What made you want to be a lawyer?

I went to a careers talk by a graduate of my degree course who had gone on to work in the law. I didn't really know what working in a law firm might be like, but it made me think that finding out more would be a good option.

### What made you choose to join Hay & Kilner?

I got a place on Hay & Kilner's summer vacation scheme, through which we give students the chance to learn more about a potential future legal career. I really enjoyed the experience and so applied successfully for a training contract.

Before starting this in 2016, I worked here as a paralegal for a year and found that Hay & Kilner provided a much more friendly, encouraging and supportive environment than any law firm cliché you might imagine.

I was 'hands on' straight away with the employment team during my training, working with the partners on a range of really interesting client projects which helped put the impact of our work into clear perspective.

### What does your typical day involve?

The variety of my work is one of the most appealing parts of it and there's no such thing as a typical day.

I could be working on anything from advising clients on emerging workplace issues through to managing full-blown employment tribunals, with the guiding principle being to help people who've spent years building up their businesses to run them as efficiently and successfully as possible.



Tom Clarke

### How has your role developed since joining the firm?

I'm taking on more responsibility and have a growing number of clients who come to me as their first port of call, with the support from the senior team always available as required.

I'm also working more closely with colleagues across the firm, such as our corporate/commercial and litigation teams, on projects where clients need the wider expertise that's available here.

### What achievement in your career so far are you most proud of?

Being able to support and assist SME owner/managers who have built successful businesses is a very satisfying feeling, as is gaining their and my senior colleagues' trust and respect.

### How do you see your career developing?

I'm getting more involved with different aspects of the practice's wider development, such as the planning of our move to our fantastic new headquarters in The Lumen building in Newcastle's Helix development.

It's an exciting time to be at Hay & Kilner and I want to contribute as much as I can to its future development.

As vice chair of the Newcastle Young Professionals' Forum, I'm also part of a team that organises a range of events and activities which bring people together from across the city's professional services community to help create useful new business relationships (and to have some fun while we're doing so!).

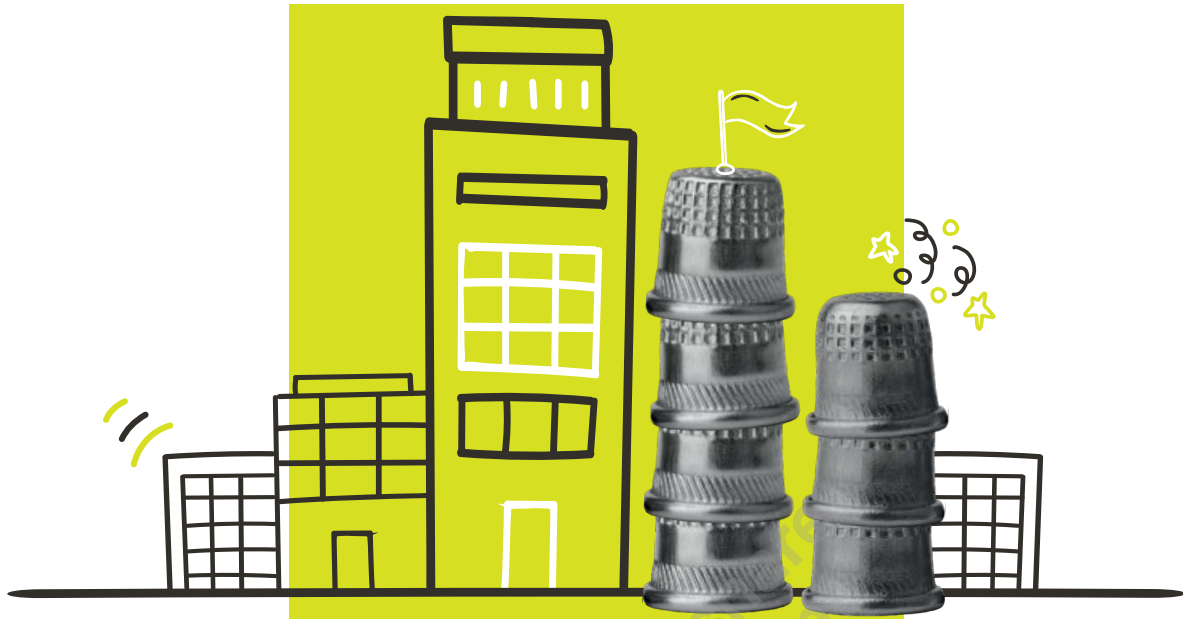
### What advice would you give to anyone looking to follow a career in the law?

Keep an open mind about what you might want to do, especially on the areas of the law in which you might want to work, as it's important to consider a range of options before you make up your mind.

Show who you are, as your personality is central to the relationships you'll develop with both colleagues and clients, and if you're looking to move to/stay in the North East, make sure you can say why you're choosing to make that commitment.

**Get in touch with Tom at**  
[tom.clarke@hay-kilner.co.uk](mailto:tom.clarke@hay-kilner.co.uk) or  
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# THE IMPACT OF RISING INFLATION ON LANDLORDS

The rate of inflation is forecasted to keep rising this year, potentially hitting 15 per cent by the start of 2023.

**With prices rising faster than they have done for 40 years, what does this mean for landlords, asks Dale Smith, founder and director of Grey-Smith Legal.**

The increase in the cost of living is putting a squeeze on people's finances in ways not seen for years. Hastened by the failure of income to keep up, the average wage rose just 4.3 per cent between March and May. When inflation is taken into account, regular pay actually fell by 2.8 per cent compared to 12 months ago.

For the rental property market, this may have extensive repercussions.

## Increasing prices

A GetGround survey found that four in five UK landlords were 'concerned or very concerned' that rising inflation will negatively impact their ability to invest in property. Over 90 per cent of respondents also believed it would mean an increase in maintenance costs, with mortgage finance, energy bills and insurance premiums cited as the main aspects likely to be impacted by inflation.

Despite this, the survey found that rising inflation was unlikely to put the brakes on investment behaviour. In fact, less than three in ten landlords are planning to reduce their property investment activity. The majority of landlords surveyed were planning to remain as they were, while 24 per cent plan to increase their property portfolio, regardless of inflation.

## Supporting tenants

One aspect likely to have the most significant impact on landlords is how inflation will affect their tenants. With the war in Ukraine pushing up food, petrol and diesel prices and high oil and gas prices, meaning energy bills are rising to unprecedented levels, it's no wonder many families are left reeling.



Dale Smith

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has reported a 26 per cent increase in the cost of a pint of milk, while butter has risen by 21 per cent and pasta by 15 per cent. These price increases represent an impossible situation for many, which may impact their ability to keep on top of rent payments.

It's a difficult situation for all involved and will take understanding and patience to get through it. Fortunately, the GetGround survey reports that 70 per cent of landlords feel a responsibility to help their tenants during this cost of living crisis. The most effective actions landlords can take are to temporarily freeze rents, make energy-efficient upgrades to properties and agree longer tenancy durations. Doing so will help to mitigate the rising costs for those living in rented properties.

## Controlling inflation

The Bank of England (BoE) is tasked with controlling the rate of inflation, although it is some way off its two per cent target. The main tool for slowing inflation is to increase interest

rates, which it has now done for the sixth time in a row, reaching 1.75 per cent. While this represents the largest increase in 27 years, it is still historically very low.

For the property market, this could have a significant effect. The value of UK property could fall, and an increase in interest rates could see a reverse in house prices and an impact on affordability levels. None of this sounds particularly positive, but there are ways around it.

Investing in real estate is often seen as a way to protect against rising inflation, and landlords should consider assets that can offer them higher-than-inflation returns to beat its effects. The rental market is still incredibly strong and doesn't look to be slowing down any time soon. This means that rent increases could potentially exceed expense increases.

Over the long term, rental properties should remain a safe bet - it may just mean a few bumpy years for everyone.

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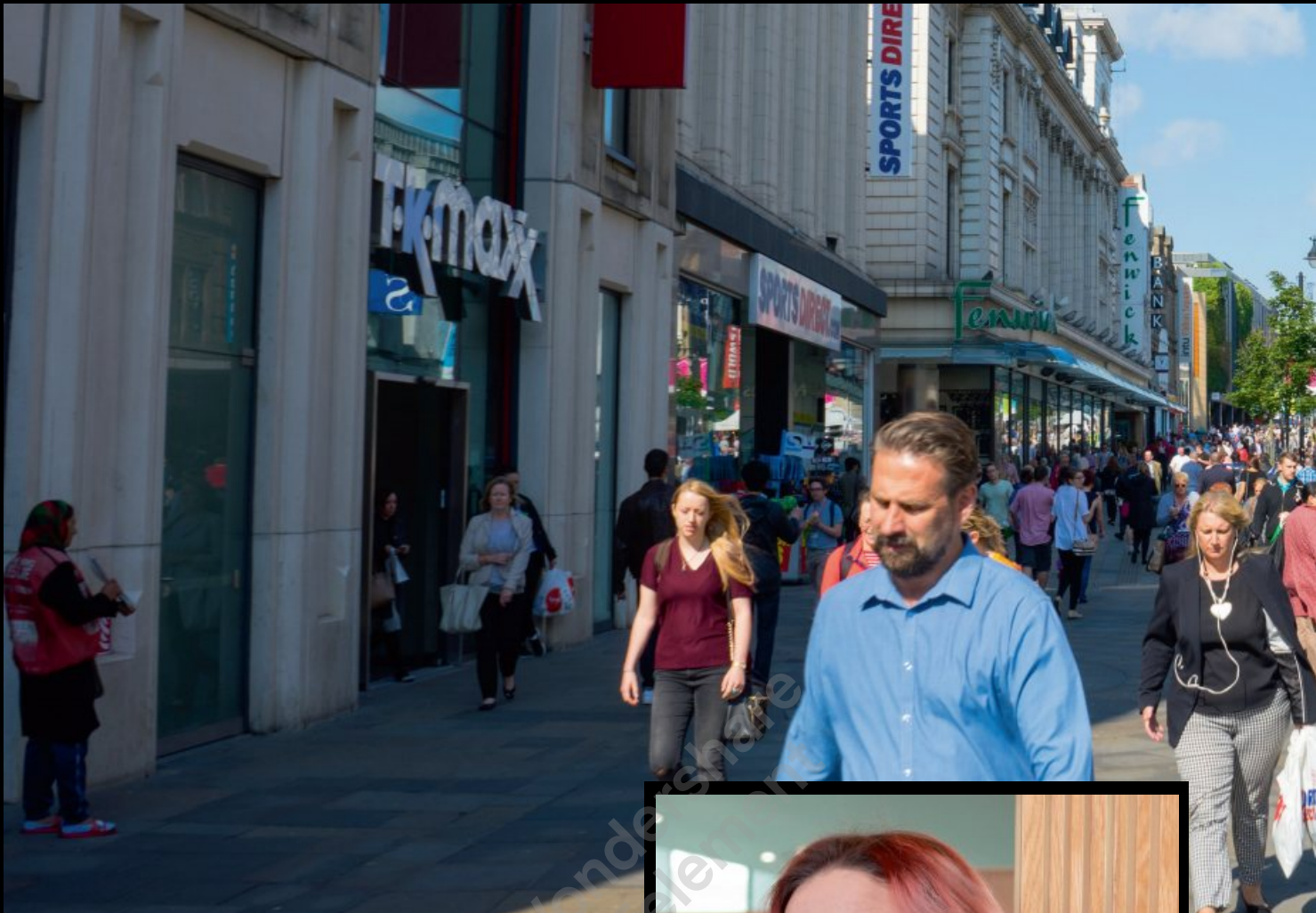


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## PREPARE AND PROTECT: TWO KEY STEPS FOR COMMERCIAL LANDLORDS AS THE UK ECONOMY FALTERS

As economic growth falters under the weight of high inflation and businesses face the combined threat of rising costs and reduced consumer demand, we look at steps commercial landlords can take to protect themselves.



Laura Keegan

**The commercial property sector is a massive contributor to the UK economy. Statistics from the Statistical Research Department say the UK's commercial property market is one of the largest in Europe, closely linked to overall economic success.**

The UK economy is facing arguably, its toughest test yet. While we've previously ridden out periods of rising inflation, never has it been driven by such diverse factors.

### Insolvencies are on the rise

Several business sectors are already affected; accommodation and food services account for 11% of the total monthly insolvencies in

England and Wales in June 2022. The sector only accounts for 5% of all companies registered in England and Wales.

Retail is also starting to see an upward trend in insolvencies. Online retail is largely expected to weather the difficulties; traditional, shop-based retail is likely to be at the sharp end of the consumer spending squeeze.

Economists agree that corporate insolvencies will increase substantially over the next twelve to eighteen months, a particular risk to commercial landlords.

Landlords need to be aware of the movement in the insolvency market to prepare and protect themselves against economic changes.



### CVA or Restructuring Plan?

Company Voluntary Arrangements (CVA) have traditionally been disliked by landlords who often feel that they have unfavourable terms forced upon them.

However, given that the landlord usually has a high-value claim and CVA proposals are voted on and approved by the creditors ranked by value, the landlord's interests are generally protected. If you can't get landlord approval, often, a CVA will not pass.

A new restructuring plan, introduced in the Corporate Insolvency and Governance Bill 2020, differs markedly from a standard CVA. It allows the court to bind creditors to a restructuring plan, even if less than 75% of creditors agree.

If the plan is considered to pass the required tests, the Court can push the plan through by exercising its power of "cram-down" against the rejecting class. This means that minority creditors may not be able to block viable restructuring plans if the court believes that the plan would not leave them worse off than the relevant alternative.

### Restructuring plans for SMEs

Originally not thought to have a significant impact on the industry due to the additional costs, a recent High Court decision to sanction a Part 26A Restructuring Plan for an SME has opened this up as an option for smaller distressed companies.

Reading through the creditor classifications and proposals for the plan in the judgment reads very much like a standard CVA proposal.

Significantly more detailed, the plan provided for the company to make monthly contributions into two designated pots: one for HMRC and one for non-essential creditors.

Essential creditors and employees were excluded from the plan and paid in full to continue trading.

The connected company would receive nothing, and the existing

shareholders would have seen their shares substantially diluted.

A settlement figure was agreed with the secured creditor (which saw them taking a substantial hit) and was proposed to be paid by part lump sum on approval and the balance over time.

HMRC rejected the plan as it saw them lose their preferential creditor status, which they would otherwise retain if the company went into a formal insolvency procedure, even though the plan saw them receiving more money than an insolvency would.

The Court exercised its power to "cram-down" HMRC and approved the plan.

It is unclear whether this case will see a rise in Part 26A Restructuring Plans for SMEs, but it is important to watch out for developments in this area.

### Implications for landlords

It's possible to protect your interests as a commercial landlord by considering the risks inherent in your portfolio based on the type of businesses your tenants operate.

Acting before an insolvency situation is even more important; if there are rent arrears, start discussions and see if something mutually beneficial can be done for both parties.

Landlords should not disregard the opportunities available in the distressed markets.

There is no doubt that the market faces challenging times, but if steps are taken to assess the risks to your business, steps can then be taken to protect against those risks as far as possible.

**For support and advice on any of the issues covered in this article, contact Laura Keegan, Senior Associate at Muckle LLP on 0191 211 7970 or email [laura.keegan@muckle-llp.com](mailto:laura.keegan@muckle-llp.com)**

# SOLICITOR OF THE MONTH

## CHARLIE LYNN

*Sweeney Miller Law*

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

I am a litigation solicitor dealing with both general and commercial litigation, providing advice to individuals and businesses across a wide range of issues including contract disputes, debt recovery and commercial property disputes.

I also deal with landlord and tenant disputes such as possession proceedings and rent arrears recovery involving both residential and commercial property. My work involves a wide range of residential and commercial landlord and tenant matters, including drafting tenancy agreements and contracts, eviction notices, as well as providing advice on deposits, rent reviews, lease renewals and dilapidations claims.

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

After passing my A Levels I studied Law at Durham University. Following graduation, I obtained my Legal Practice Course and Masters qualifications at Northumbria University.

I initially joined Sweeney Miller Law on work experience whilst studying my degree. I then secured a role as a paralegal and my hard work was rewarded when I was offered a training contract at the firm leading to qualification as a solicitor in July 2021.

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

As a junior lawyer, I was initially a little anxious representing clients at Court, however as with the other skills that I have developed within my professional career, I quickly adapted and managed to build upon my experiences to overcome those challenges and achieve positive outcomes for clients.

I also qualified during the Covid pandemic which presented its own difficulties in terms of day to day training and client contact. However, with the excellent and enthusiastic support of my senior colleagues and team, I quickly adapted, leading to me becoming a qualified solicitor.

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

That is a tricky one as there have been a lot of people who have helped me greatly throughout my career. Sweeney Miller Partner Damien Todd



Charlie Lynn

is someone that I very much respect. Like me, he started working at the firm on work experience, then became a paralegal, qualified as a solicitor and ultimately became an Equity Partner at the firm which is inspiring for someone like me still at the very early stage of my legal career.

Managing Partner at the firm, Surbhi Vedhara has also been invaluable to my progression, I worked closely with her during my training. She is focused on developing people within the firm and has helped to create a sense of a close-knit Sweeney Miller 'family' and an environment where there are no limits to what can be achieved.

### What is your biggest weakness?

I would say switching off from work and obtaining a work/life balance is always tough, but it is something I am continually working on. Given many of the regular and repeat business owner clients we work with, in some respects the office never closes and we have to be available to them as readily as possible. Getting the best results for our clients is very rewarding and makes it all worthwhile.

### What are your remaining career aspirations?

Whilst I am still relatively newly qualified, I am lucky enough to have a small team of my own which continues to grow. My aim is to continue to develop the litigation department at the firm, both supporting the other teams ensuring clients have access to all the legal help they need, as well as building our own portfolio of dispute resolution clients. As part

of that process, I aspire to continue being a driven, approachable, and technically advanced litigation lawyer.

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

Obviously Covid has impacted our profession and I think this has encouraged and accelerated the use of technology, such as video and telephone Court hearings and generally how we approach interacting with both clients and colleagues.

The provision of the Damages Claims Portal is another example of technology coming into play with regards to Court proceedings and I only expect technological advances to increase.

Another significant development and something that will hopefully continue to grow, is Newcastle having its own Business and Property Court which means that local businesses of all sizes and types from start-ups to large blue chips, can have their disputes cost effectively dealt with in the North East.

### How do you like to unwind?

I enjoy playing football and watch pretty much any football that is on the TV. I also enjoy socialising with family and friends.

I am also a music fan and was fortunate enough to go to this year's Glastonbury festival.

**To find out more about Charlie and his team, visit [www.sweeneymiller.co.uk](http://www.sweeneymiller.co.uk) email [charlie@sweeneymiller.co.uk](mailto:charlie@sweeneymiller.co.uk) or call 0345 900 5401.**

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# PROBLEMS FOR EMPLOYERS WHEN OFFICE BANTER CROSSES THE LINE

By Tom Clarke, Solicitor in the specialist Employment Law Team at Hay & Kilner in Newcastle.

“It’s just a bit of banter, mate – calm down!”

**There’s no doubt that humour can be greatly beneficial to a workplace environment, helping to improve staff morale and cohesion, and to carry people through situations which might be challenging, busy or stressful.**

It’s likely, however, that many of us will have been in workplace situations where things have gone a bit too far, whether intentionally or otherwise, and this can be where ‘humour’ that crosses the line can cause real problems for employers.

The number of Employment Tribunal cases citing “workplace banter” has reached a record high, with a reported 45% increase in references last year compared to the year before.

A swift perusal of your social media feeds should easily reveal jokes or comments that go too far, could be interpreted in the wrong way or are simply rude, offensive and unpleasant.

But in a workplace situation, this can lead to difficult and time-consuming staff grievances, or even Employment Tribunal claims that can cost employers significant amounts of time, money and resources to address.

Recent case law has made clear that, where workplace ‘banter’ oversteps the mark, it can amount to unlawful discrimination.

This is typically defined as harassment in cases where comments refer to the ‘protected characteristics’ under the Equality Act 2010, which are race/ethnic origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion/belief, pregnancy, gender re-assignment, disability and marriage/civil partnership.

Determining what actually is reasonable or appropriate behaviour is something of a ‘grey area’.

A complainant’s reaction to what is termed ‘unwanted conduct’ (such as ‘banter’) has to be reasonable and context is therefore very important.

For example, a widely reported discrimination claim failed despite the fact the claimant had been called a “fat, ginger pikey” because it was found that the office culture normalised banter and the claimant himself had been involved in similar behaviour, so couldn’t establish that it was unwanted.

It is, however, possible for an individual who is not the intended recipient of a comment or joke to be offended by it – and if that response is objectively reasonable, they too could pursue a claim.

In the scenario above, this might be someone who had overheard the comment, but hadn’t themselves been involved in similar conduct.

It shouldn’t be assumed that all employees are okay with such banter and there is no requirement for employees to have explicitly asked for the conduct to stop.

The significant increase in home working can also be problematic in this respect.

With many colleagues now communicating through direct messaging platforms or ‘slack’ channels, tone and delivery can sometimes be misinterpreted.

In some cases, individuals can feel more confident than they would in person and the written evidence of what they said is of course there for all to see.

So what can employers do?

Every employer has a duty of care to safeguard staff welfare and ensure the working environment doesn’t become toxic because of a

misunderstanding of the line between ‘banter’ and harassment.

This is important not only in avoiding grievances and tribunal claims, but also to fostering a positive and diverse environment that allows businesses to flourish and be productive.

In many cases, this starts with training. We often work with clients on delivering equal opportunities training which raises awareness around specific issues and ensures that everyone understands what is and isn’t acceptable at work.

Alongside this, robust policies and procedures can, in certain circumstances, also help protect employers if there is a Tribunal claim. Employers must also ensure that any complaints are dealt with appropriately and that managers are trained to know when to intervene by proactively preventing issues arising and effectively dealing with them if they do.

Hay & Kilner’s specialist employment law team is hosting a free seminar on equality and diversity in the workplace on Wednesday 28 September at The Catalyst in Newcastle which will examine how equality and diversity issues may arise in the workplace and look at ways employers can support employees and minimise the risk of discrimination claims.

**To reserve a place at the event, or for advice on any aspect of employment law, please contact Tom at [tom.clarke@hay-kilner.co.uk](mailto:tom.clarke@hay-kilner.co.uk) or on 0191 227 6728, or visit [www.hay-kilner.co.uk](http://www.hay-kilner.co.uk)**



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 <p><b>Northern Law Awards 2022</b> Main Partner: TRINITY CHAMBERS</p>	<p><b>WINNER!</b> Team of the Year Employment <b>Collingwood Legal</b></p>
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# SILVER ANNIVERSARY AWARDS RECOGNISE THE GOLD STARS IN BUSINESSES

One of the North East's longest running annual business awards celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, a testimony to the dedication, entrepreneurship, and longevity of businesses in North Tyneside.

The North Tyneside Business Forum have recognised this in two new categories which will be showcased at the awards on 17th November at the Village Hotel, Cobalt Park with sponsorship from Capita, Equans, Tedco, and Action on Climate Change North Tyneside.

Applications are now open and North Tyneside businesses can enter any of the five categories, with all category winners automatically entered for the overall North Tyneside Business of the Year Award. Category winners receive a certificate, prize, and trophy as well as substantial recognition and publicity.

The categories are:



- **New Business Award** – A business which has started since March 2021 and has shown potential growth.
- **Resilience Award** - A business which has shown resilience and growth throughout challenging economic times.
- **Action on Climate Change Award** - A business which demonstrates efforts to protect and enhance the environment.
- **Innovation Award** - A business which has identified new and innovative ways of working, and/or created something that is unique to the market place.
- **Heart of the Business Award** – nominated by the business for a member of staff which keeps the business going and has overcome their own personal challenges.

In addition to the five categories, the public will nominate and vote for the Heart of the Community Award which recognises the way that businesses support their local community. Chair of North Tyneside Business Forum, Karen Goldfinch said: "This will be a very special event as we are celebrating the awards being 25 years old and the 12th birthday of the Forum. We have a lot to be proud of and even more to shout about. Our businesses carry out their work with passion and enthusiasm and I'd urge any North Tyneside business to enter the awards and let everyone know their story and share the good news about what they do."

*Applications can be made at [www.northtynesidebusinessawards.co.uk](http://www.northtynesidebusinessawards.co.uk). Closing date is 23rd September 2022.*



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## Luis scales the heights of fundraising

**An intrepid Middlesbrough businessman has successfully completed a self-funded gruelling mountain odyssey, raising £15,000 for local charity, the Teesside Family Foundation.**

Luis McCarthy, managing director of JMAC Group, took part in The Big Mountain Challenge, reaching the summits of Mera Peak (21,247 ft) and Island Peak (20,210 ft), both of which stand opposite the majestic Mount Everest.

With temperatures plunging to minus 40 degrees, and suffering from acute altitude sickness and blinding headaches, brave Luis had to push himself out of his comfort zone to complete his mammoth challenge.

"I've always believed in pushing the limits of my own abilities," he said. "As a person who is blessed with good health and a supportive family, two weeks of discomfort was more than worth it to raise money to help those in need."

Luis, who enjoys keeping fit but had no prior experience of mountain climbing, chose the Teesside Family Foundation as beneficiary of his JustGiving page, setting £15,000 as his fundraising goal.

"Teesside is my home and within it are some amazing businesses and some amazing people, but many who are not so fortunate," he said.

"The Teesside Family Foundation has no employees, just a group of amazing volunteers with the sole intention of helping local people in need and making life a little easier for those who are terminally ill, have disabilities or who are in crisis. It was a pleasure to do my part to support this amazing charity."

When his fundraising tally stood at £7,500, Luis saw a social media video post about local girl Dee Conroy who had suffered a series of major



seizures, leaving her needing full time care, unable to communicate verbally and now wheelchair dependent.

"Luis called me at close to midnight one night, really moved and desperate to help Dee," said Teesside Family Foundation co-founder, Tony Wedlake.

"Dee's mum Toni was using an old Ford Zafira to drive her daughter around, but the poor girl was black and blue from being lifted in and out, so she was spending more and more time isolated at home. Just two years before, she had been about to start university, so her life was pretty miserable. Luis donated £6,000 from the donations he raised to buy Toni a wheelchair assisted vehicle which has given Dee a new lease of life."



## Sambuca hosts first annual chari-tee Golf tournament

**Italian restaurant Sambuca in Blyth will play host to the first of its plans for an annual charity Golf tournament next month, raising funds this year for a North East cancer charity.**

The event will tee-off on Friday 16th September at 11am at Blyth Golf Club and will see 40 golfers, business people and local dignitaries gather for an 18-hole competition, followed by a complimentary three course meal at Sambuca. They will be joined on the evening by hole and event sponsors

and suppliers, entertainment by singer Paul Skerritt and magician Martin Duffy, and special guests including Bertie Forster, hosting a raffle and an auction in aid of Maggie's cancer care centre, based at the Freeman Hospital.

Sambuca chief exec Andrew Beale said: "The charity golf day will be a calendar highlight each year not only for the players and sponsors, but also for the chosen charities across the North East.

"The support and prize donations received already has been incredible and we look forward to a great day on the course for a remarkable cause."

The event is aiming to exceed its personal target of raising over £6000 for the cancer charity and has already secured generous donations of gifts and prizes for raffle and auction from some of the North East's largest distributors and supply chain partners as well as from a host of independent retailers.

Coca Cola Ltd will be providing refreshments throughout the course at nominated holes for the players, along with Bookers cash and carry and other local suppliers.

Centre head of Maggie's Newcastle, Karen Verrill said: "We are so grateful to Andrew and all at Sambuca Blyth for choosing Maggie's for their first annual charity golf tournament and auction.

"Our centre is a haven for people. Even if it's just a place to pop in while they wait for an appointment. Sometimes they walk in not knowing they need support. They walk into the centre - a beautiful non-clinical environment, and suddenly they realise they need help.

"We hugely appreciate everyone who has pledged their support so far and the funds raised through the sponsorship, raffle and auction will go such a long way in helping us improve our facility further for our frontline team and trained cancer nurses to help patients and their families who are living with cancer every day.

"Our door is always open to anyone affected by cancer, and our kettle is always on!"

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# NORTH EAST CHARITY BRINGS THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY TOGETHER



Harry Forster & Laura Forbes

Sunderland based children's charity, Grace House, are inviting the North East business community to come together and showcase their businesses, while raising funds for the children and families they support at their inaugural Expo for Good.

**The charity, who have been based in Sunderland for nearly 20 years provide much-needed support to families throughout the region, enriching the lives of disabled children, young people and their families.**

While businesses have found the last two years challenging, the charity sector have certainly been hit hard due to many fundraising activities being cancelled due to the pandemic. The sector has found new and innovate ways to raise

awareness of vital work they carry out with the Expo for Good being a unique way to not only raise funds but also to collaborate with the local business community.

Held at The Rainton Arena in Houghton le Spring, the event is poised to bring together over 50 exhibiting businesses and a fantastic line up of guest speakers with all funds from the event being given directly to the charity. The event promises to be a fantastic day with the opportunity for exhibitors and delegates to raise their business profile, network and hear from influential business owners from the North East area.

Supporters will also have the opportunity to promote their business in the Expo for Good magazine which will be distributed to every exhibitor and delegate on the day.

Corporate Fundraiser, Laura Forbes, who initially came up with the innovative concept, commented, "We're all aware that businesses and charities have experienced a tough couple of years, however I know that the North East region is so generous and still love to help in their local community. With the launch last year of our networking group, Network for Good,

the expo seemed like a great extension to this. Speaking to many people within my network and working within the charity sector for many years, the North East is an extremely generous area and they love to support a local cause. While this has been made more difficult recently, giving businesses a chance to showcase their products or services while helping out a local charity at the same time seemed to be the perfect solution.

For every exhibitor stand that is booked at the expo, this investment will pay for six weeks of youth group or music therapy sessions, these bring together children to improve their social skills and provide valuable life lessons while also allowing children to communicate and engage with their family.

We will be releasing more information and speakers leading up to the event and are looking forward to a brilliant day celebrating local business combining with the charity sector."

**For more information on the Expo for Good or you would like to discuss how to support Grace House, please contact Laura Forbes on 0191 435 2085 or email [LF@gracehouse.co.uk](mailto:LF@gracehouse.co.uk)**



## Army Cadet Force marches on thanks to Northumberland Freemasons

**Army Cadets and supporting Cadet Force Adult Volunteers (CFAV), from across the county, have been given the opportunity to participate in the 2022 Nijmegen Marches thanks to a generous donation by Northumberland Freemasons.**

The £6000 grant has allowed 40 cadets, with supporting CFAV's, to participate in Exercise Blister Shuffle 2022, which formed part of the Nijmegen Summer Festival which attracted some 48000 participants from all over the world.

In their 104th year the Marches, one of the largest events in the world, consist of four days marching a distance of 25 miles each day, in a circuitous

route, commencing and finishing in Nijmegen City Centre. The total cost of taking the 40 Cadets to Nijmegen amounted to £25,000. Substantial fund raising activities had been undertaken by the Cadets, however, there had still been a shortfall of £6,000, which we are grateful to the Northumberland Freemasons for making up."

Freemason, Stuart Cairns, Secretary to the Trustees of the Richard Henry Holmes Masonic Benevolent Fund said "The Trustees saw this as a wonderful opportunity for members of the Northumbria Army Cadet Force to enjoy a memorable and life learning experience and readily agreed to a grant award of £6,000 to cover the funding shortfall."

The Benevolent Fund donates around £160,000 annually to local charities and good causes, including food banks, to boost worthwhile and deserving projects throughout Northumberland, Newcastle and North Tyneside.



## PM hails Sunderland couple "The very best of Britain"

**A Sunderland couple, honoured by the Prime Minister for their charity work, were guests of honour at a recent Downing Street garden party.**

Sergio and Emma Petrucci, whose Red Sky Foundation supports cardiac-related causes across the North East, helping babies, children and adults living with heart conditions, were last year recognised with a Point of Light award.

The awards are granted by the Prime Minister to 'outstanding individuals - people who are making a change in their community across the UK and the Commonwealth.'

Sergio and Emma joined other award winners at a garden party in the grounds of Number 10, where PM Boris Johnson said they were "the very best of Britain."

Sergio and Emma, the 1626th and 1627th

Point of Light award winners, were inspired to set up the Red Sky Foundation after their daughter's life was saved by doctors in 2015.

Luna, now eight, underwent open heart surgery at Newcastle's Freeman Hospital, just days before her second birthday, after cardiologists described her tiny heart as a 'ticking time bomb' having identified two complex heart conditions.

To thank all those who cared for her, the couple began fundraising for the Children's Heart Unit, holding their first Red Sky Ball a year later.

Subsequent Red Sky Balls and other fundraising events have raised close to £400,000, helping to fund two state-of-the-art echo machines for Sunderland Royal Hospital and James Cook Hospital along with a specialist organ transplant machine which keeps a donor heart healthy for longer giving surgeons more time to perform a transplant.

Their Foundation has also funded countless defibrillators across the North East and helped to secure a specialist Fontan nursing post in the region, the first of its kind in the UK.



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Sam Spoons

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**Certainly, that may work to some degree. Those candidates who are scouring job boards daily or looking specifically at opportunities on your website could cast their job seeking eyes over your advert and press the Apply Now button – and could be perfectly suited to both the role and your company values.**

However, is anything really that easy?

As the pandemic has changed the mindset of many individuals, people have now decided they want more meaningful, engaging, and personal interactions – with absolutely anything.

So, some options when sourcing your perfect candidate –

- **If you do choose to advertise in the above way** – make your advert sing to the right individuals. Research tone, language, and the correct advertising platform for the person you are seeking. Share your company values, the mission and vision of your business and show some images of your people. Allow the potential

new team member to visualise your proposition.

- **Advertise and reach out.** Use your network, ask for referrals, establish (or maximise) Refer a Friend schemes, share with your connections and ask them to share with theirs. Push it out far and wide and maximise spreading that advert with friends, family, neighbours, colleagues, ex-colleagues, and lots of friends of friends.

- **Advertise, reach out to your network, and proactively target new talent.** This is the future (and our current) stance. Identify individuals who may not be looking on job boards and may not yet know that they are looking for a new role. Identify those who need to know about your opportunity due to the progression, location, training, and/or exposure that your role offers. Use the search functionality in social media groups such as LinkedIn and Facebook to target and communicate with many 'strangers' who may not have come across your advert - but may have the perfect background, values and mindset.

Remember that as the struggle for talent continues and your talent pool needs to be larger than before (with many businesses reporting rejected offers or candidates going 'cold') a proactive sourcing method is required. To top that last comment off – it doesn't need to be expensive. It will take time and capacity however, the more people you speak to the bigger your Employer brand coverage and the more those 'watching out' for opportunities with you will increase.

*Here at Talentheads we partner as the internal recruitment team for growing businesses so get in touch to find out more about how we can support you to reach out to both active and passive talent while spreading and increasing your Employer presence - 0191 300 8688 or [hello@talentheads.co.uk](mailto:hello@talentheads.co.uk)*





## BUDGET TAXIS... THE DRIVING FORCE OF THE NORTH-EAST

It's been a jam-packed year so far for Budget after being met with an array of unexpected challenges following the pandemic. However, with hard work and some good old Geordie positivity they have come back stronger than ever.

**As well as getting business back to normality, Budget have helped the region in plenty of ways; from alleviating employment pressures to partnering up with Women's Street Watch - doing their bit to benefit the people of the North-East is a priority for Budget Taxis.**

Since making a pledge to help those struggling to find work last year, Budget has gained over 150 new taxi drivers from all walks of life. By covering the cost of training new drivers, Budget was able to take on people with no previous taxi experience.

Simon Goodfellow, previously a factory worker joined the Budget team and had all the usual expenditures covered by the firm. This encouraged Simon to make the full-time switch to taxi driving and he hasn't looked back, telling us "It's definitely changed my life, being your own boss - you can't beat it".

In April, following the devastating murders of Sarah Everard and Sabina Nessa, Women's Street Watch Newcastle began patrolling Newcastle streets to try to protect women. Budget raised their interest in helping whatever way they could and set a credit limit of free taxis every month to use for women travelling home alone at night. This was just one of many initiatives that Budget plans to use in assisting them.



During the planned rail strikes in June, many passengers were stranded as they tried to get around the region. Known for always helping in a crisis - drivers at Budget put in the extra hours to help their loyal customers. Transporting over 1000 passengers - many as far as Edinburgh, Budget worked through the endless bookings to make sure people got to where they needed to be. A member of the Budget customer care team said "We're extremely grateful to our staff at Budget, they are always the first to volunteer to help in a crisis and this is no exception."

**For reliability and a company that has its community's best interest at heart, choose Budget Taxis. [www.budget-taxis-newcastle.co.uk](http://www.budget-taxis-newcastle.co.uk)**

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# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## KEITH LAMB

*Social value and supplier coordinator at the North East Procurement Organisation (NEPO).*

### Tell us about your role at NEPO.

I provide advice and support to NEPO's procurement teams as well as to our member authorities on our policy and approach to social value. I also manage and support the delivery of the NEPO Business Club programme. This provides free training to North East suppliers on understanding and preparing how to identify, access and submit to public sector tender opportunities. As part of my role I also develop stakeholder relationships to support the development and promotion of our social value work.

### What services does the organisation provide?

NEPO achieves benefits across the public sector through collaborative procurement across major strategic areas of high value spending. These include construction, energy, facilities management, fleet, food, ICT and professional services. They are delivered on behalf of our member authorities consisting of the 12 North East local authorities. Our frameworks are also available for use by the wider public sector including, but not limited to, government departments and their agencies, non-departmental public bodies, NHS bodies, emergency services and educational establishments.

### What's your proudest business achievement?

Prior to my current role, I was the procurement specialist managing a portfolio of fleet contracts. As this market is based on a well-established international supply chain, NEPO has had to partner up with external bodies in order get the buying power and leverage needed to get value. When I took up the fleet lead, a new partnership had been agreed with an external private sector buying body known as The Procurement Partnership Ltd (TPPL). I managed the TPPL relationship to ensure the contracts met our fleet requirements and delivered for our Member Authorities. This was successfully achieved with spend and revenue returns significantly growing from 2018 to 2021 demonstrating use and effectiveness. This was reflected in an expansion of the agreement to include a contract for another spend category and the renewal of the partnership agreement in early 2020 for a further five years.



Keith Lamb

### What challenges have you encountered?

The Covid-19 pandemic presented a whole new level of challenge. However, individually and collectively, the NEPO team adapted quickly to virtual working and forming teams online. We did this very successfully and adapted to another way of working whilst ensuring we continued to deliver effectively for the region. Personally, my most recent challenge was switching to a new career in procurement following redundancy from a 26-year career in the civil service. Not only the move from the huge civil service system to a small service orientated organisation like NEPO but also having to go 'back to school'! I'm working towards getting my full Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS) qualification which has meant me sitting exams again more than 30 years after I last sat one.

### How has the industry changed since you began your career?

While I have only been in procurement for six years, I've seen changes already and there's more to come. Relevant to my role is the growth and prominence of social value as part of the public sector tender process and the increasing use of this as a lever to deliver on wider government and regional priorities around the economy and climate change. The combined impacts of Brexit, Covid recovery and the Ukraine conflict, creating unprecedented turbulence and pressure in supply chains. This has created challenges to procurement professionals around supply security and cost pressures and more frequent demands for price increases. At the same time,

Brexit means the UK public sector procurement regulations and processes have been subjected to a major government programme of consultation and proposals for reform. These reforms will inevitably bring significant changes to the way we operate but NEPO is up for the challenge!

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

The term hero should be used sparingly and only in circumstances where lives are truly saved or safeguarded, such as the frontline health workers, who operated throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. This may seem like a cop out but can a sportsperson or other celebrity really be a hero just for doing their job? In business I prefer to think of people I admire or who inspire me. These are individuals who act with integrity and professionalism and those with a clarity of purpose or message which they communicate in a simple and effective way. One example is Martin Lewis of 'Money Saving Expert' fame.

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

Sometimes called the serenity prayer, I came across it as part an organisational quality improvement programme which stuck with me. It has various forms but for me it boils down to 'Give me the strength to do or change the things I can, accept the things I can't and the wisdom to know the difference'. Put simply, make things better where you can and don't waste time worrying about the things that are outside your control.

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

"To eat well in England, you should have breakfast three times a day." Somerset Maugham



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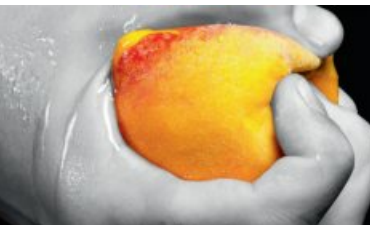
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# RAISING SKILLS LEVELS IN THE NORTH EAST WHILE NAVIGATING NATIONAL CHANGE



Michelle Rainbow

How will the government review of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) affect the work going on to improve skills in the North East? Michelle Rainbow, Skills Director at the North East LEP, gives an update.

**In February of this year, the government published its Levelling Up white paper which not only set out proposals to spread opportunity more equally throughout the UK, but also reviewed and clarified the role that LEPs will play going forward.**

This review recognised the valuable role LEPs play in supporting local economic growth and it confirmed that one of our core aims as a LEP will still be to ensure North East residents of all ages have the opportunity to develop skills that match the opportunities in the labour market.

The North East LEP and its skills programme is very much aligned with the government's vision and confirmation of this has been useful and positive.

As a result, many things about the way we work

will stay the same following the review. We will still be facilitating partnerships between business and education. We will still be working to make sure that each and every young person in our region can access the world of work when they leave education. And we will still be working with businesses to help them become more successful by upskilling their teams and creating links with the next generation.

In terms of change, there is more for us to do in terms of supporting individual businesses and sectors in our region to overcome their particular challenges. We'll be working closely with our business growth colleagues who are speaking to companies day in and day out, to find out what the issues are which are preventing them from growing and scaling and to provide a solution or support where we can, such as guiding people through the options for recruiting apprentices, or helping businesses to get involved with shaping the region's new technical education offer.

We'll also be looking at challenges businesses face in a range of sectors, like social care, which are big employers in our region but which fall outside the six sectors which have been identified in the North East Strategic Economic Plan as key areas of growth and opportunity (these are advanced manufacturing, digital, energy and health and life sciences). After all,

having an appropriately-skilled and qualified population is good for businesses in every industry.

So while we will be aligning everything we do with government priorities, the needs of people, education providers and businesses in our particular geography will always be our focus.

And while change can be difficult to navigate – and we've definitely been through a lot of change recently – taking a long term view can help. This applies to us at the North East LEP and it applies to businesses too. If you see skills as something which can help you secure the future of your business in the long term, and you can spend some time now on training, apprenticeships and T-Level placements, you'll be in a better position to navigate change in the future. And we can help you do that.

Skills was a priority for us before the government review and it's still a priority now. We want all businesses in the North East to be able to get the skills support they need, so if there's a challenge you are facing then please do let us know.

**Visit [NorthEastLep.co.uk](https://NorthEastLep.co.uk) to find out about the North East LEP's skills programmes, and visit [NorthEastGrowthHub.co.uk](https://NorthEastGrowthHub.co.uk) to access business support.**

# NEW DATA SHOWS ENHANCED TYNE TUNNEL PERFORMANCE



A half-year review of all the statistics collected since the toll booths were removed in November 2021, shows a positive overall picture of the tunnels' performance and that drivers have adapted well to using a cashless system.

**Under the new system, cameras automatically register journeys and payment needs to be made before midnight the following day.**

Since open-road-tolling was launched, the tunnels have seen more than 10.6 million journeys made and during the first month – November 2021 – 94.6% of drivers paid their toll on time. In June, that figure has risen to a healthy 96.52%.

TT2, which operates the tunnels on behalf of the North East Combined Authority, says it is on track to achieve a compliance rate of 97% by the first anniversary of the new system being launched.

Philip Smith, CEO of TT2, said: "We have delivered faster, smoother journeys, less congestion, reduced emissions and better local air quality and they were the main reasons behind the decision to launch open-road-tolling."

Northbound journeys are now 33 seconds faster and southbound trips, 29 seconds quicker – on average across a day.\* June 2022.

CO<sub>2</sub> emissions have been reduced by 90% since open-road-tolling went live. In June, the CO<sub>2</sub> saving equated to 2,640 return passenger flights from Newcastle to New York.

The percentage of customers pre-paying for their journey has risen from 72% in November to almost 78% in June.

TT2's Philip Smith explained: "We were fortunate to follow in the footsteps of open-

road-tolling launches at the Dartford Tunnel and the Mersey Crossing, and we have benefitted significantly from many of the lessons they learned.

"Of course, there have been some bumps in the road because changing a tolling system that has been in operation for decades and one that handles 18 million journeys every year is a challenge. But we continue to listen to our customers and learn how we can do better.

"The fact that we now have almost 97% of drivers paying their toll without issue, is testament to the hard work of our team at TT2 and the strong partnership we have with our client, NECA.

"We anticipated an initial spike in UTCNs as people got used to a new system and way of paying. We are pleased to see the level of non-compliance steadily falling as people get used to the new system."

[www.tt2.co.uk](http://www.tt2.co.uk)



Grace Stevenson and Nick Williams

## PHAROS OFFSHORE CREATES LEGACY WITH LIVING ARCHIVE

Pharos Offshore Group has invested in a new contract with Living Archive that will position the leading partner of choice for specialist equipment, manpower and engineering in the subsea pipeline and cable installation industry as a strong brand in the future.

**The first commercial company to use recently launched Living Archive, Pharos will be using the online platform to tell its own story from 2003 where it all started, to today. The digital exercise will create a legacy which will explain**

**exactly what the company does and what they stand for.**

Living Archive is the perfect platform to humanise a company, to store all media in one place and to curate and exhibit projects, work, partnerships and successes, demonstrating your impact. As the user, the company can decide what is public, private and what is channelled to chosen audiences.

Phil Walker, CEO of Pharos Offshore brought in Living Archive, as it is an exciting time of growth and development for the company who have subsea equipment and people working 24/7 around the globe. He said:

“We are in the process of a growth strategy and part of that is to strengthen the brand through use of what we have done and what we do. The Pharos Living Archive will tell the story from being a one-man start-up, to the large company that employs over 70 people in Blyth.

“Living Archive is an exciting way for us to create an understanding between the stakeholders, staff and customers. We can uphold our key messages and the values that underpin our company, in a way that is rarely put out there. It will display our resilience, optimism, and is a strong way to tell our story of authenticity, culture and history.”

Phil was also keen to have the founder of Living Archive working alongside Pharos on the creation of their Living Archive, referring to Nick Williams as passionate about preserving and

communicating the value of an organisation. Nick, whose vision is to assist in delivering better outcomes via his platform, is bringing Pharos Offshores Living Archive to life, allowing a wide number of people to contribute, monitoring what is curated and what is stored.

Nick said: “I am delighted to be working with the Pharos Offshore team creating a strong and lasting meaning to everything that they have been doing. It is a cost-effective solution to create a permanent company archive, creating a legacy that can be added to day after day, year after year.

“They can share the full extent of their work to who needs to see it, collaborate with partners, participants, or even the local community. The platform allows for innovation and co-creation, strategically engaging where it will do the most, by organising and retrieving all forms of digital media.”

From photos, to video's, logs, drawings, sound, documents and much more, Pharos is using Living Archive in a truly visionary way, bring a focused structure on telling the company's story.

***If you are a commercial company, a charity or a community cultural organisation and want to create your own living legacy, then get in touch by visiting [www.livingarchive.net](http://www.livingarchive.net)***



# Lord Taverners Annual Raceday

Friday 23rd September

Privately hosted in the Gosforth Park suite  
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Gates open at 3.15pm

First race is 5.15pm • Last race is 8.15pm

Food served in the format of a Grand Buffet

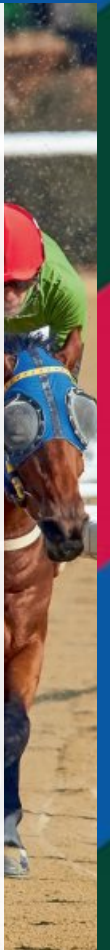
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David Taylor

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## SSCL HELPS ACHIEVE BUSINESS PROCESS SERVICES SUPPLIERS GLOBAL RANKING

Shared Services Connected Limited (SSCL), a leader in critical business support services for the largest Government departments, Defence, Police and CITB across the UK has played a key role in its parent company's ranking in TechMarketView's 2022 UK Supplier Ranking for Business Process Services Suppliers.

**With a base employing 330 people at Quorum Business Park, Newcastle, teams are delivering digital and innovative services in HR case management, employee services and contact centre services - enhancing the customer experience, enabling smarter public services.**

Its parent company, Sopra Steria, is a European Tech leader recognised for its consulting, digital services and software development. The company has been ranked third in TechMarketView's 2022 UK Supplier Ranking for BPS.

It's the second year running Sopra Steria has been ranked, underpinned by strong

performances by SSCL and NHS Shared Business Services – its two UK joint ventures, showing organic growth. These rankings are part of a series of reports assessing market and supplier performance which includes BPS Operations Market Trends & Forecasts and Supplier Snapshot.

This achievement demonstrates first-hand the 'Customer First' approach SSCL has embedded into its business objectives, ensuring it strives to anticipate customer requirements and show willingness to go above and beyond delivering the service or product clients require.

David Morris, SSCL CEO, said: "2022 saw some strong results for SSCL as we continued to deliver

*high volume assessments and recruitment for clients, all while managing payroll for over 500,000 UK civil servants and fulfilling major contact centre contracts. Our role in BPS focusses on the strength of our people, our innovative technology and our future ambition to continue to transform business processing for all our clients in Government, Police and Defence.*

*"We have secured listings as a super large organisation in Great Place to Work in the UK - another accolade we're incredibly proud of. All this combined is proof that our work to help support customers achieve better business outcomes is producing excellent results."*

It's not just our unique offerings and business expertise which help to showcase our successes, but also the commitment we have to our employees. Ensuring a consistently great work experience for our employees is as important to us as the service we deliver.

Tech MarketView previously stated: "*the company's caring culture shines through in its Tech for Good programme and has been evidenced by the new initiatives set up in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, many of which are now being embedded as 'business-as-usual' activities.*"

**Find out more about the work SSCL delivers for clients and working for us at [SSCL.com](https://www.sscl.com)**



# Howe Consultancy

## TOP TEN TIPS FOR CREATIVE THINKING



**CLOSE YOUR EYES...**helps to think more abstractly



**STRETCH...**extend your thinking past the obvious



**BE RIDICULOUS...**today's ridiculous is tomorrow's innovation



**MIND MAPS...**make lateral notes



**CONTEXT...**what works in one place can work in another



**SLEEP ON IT...**your subconscious mind often works out solutions



**TWO HEADS...**other people's ideas will accelerate your own creative thinking



**RETURN...**put your ideas to one side and pick them up later on



**EXERCISE...**do your creative thinking on the move



**CHOCOLATE...**have a treat when you've come up with new ideas

## THINKING CREATIVELY IN HR

**One of the sayings I hear myself repeating over and over again to clients is to take your time dealing with HR issues and not to rush to actions and conclusions. Don't listen to gossip and collect the relevant facts. There are always two sides to every story and as HR leaders we must lead by example.**

HR is about managing risk and producing "win, win" solutions. It is not always about following the rule book to the exact letter. We add value to a business because we think differently to the business owner. We offer ways to effectively deal with the real issue as sometimes this can be camouflaged by other noise in the workplace.

Good management is about good judgement and often we don't learn this until we've made a few mistakes along the way. Strong businesses have good people working for them and how they think, and approach problems is paramount to success.

Here's our top ten tips for thinking creatively and then applying these tips to dealing with HR issues.

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Nevil Tynemouth

## WHEN IT COMES TO WORKING WITH YOUR CLIENTS, WHAT ARE YOU GREAT AT?

What are your strengths when you are meeting and speaking to your clients?

**These are two of the questions that I ask when interviewing people to help shape content for training and development programmes. Many people struggle to answer these clearly, even when I ask them to be “honest and not modest”. Some even struggle to identify one thing they do well!**

If I asked you the same question, could you answer this clearly and definitively?

It's a tough one and one that is worth exploring. You might get asked this type of question directly by clients, you might get asked by those in your network who want to refer clients to you. Most importantly you need to be able to answer this question to yourself honestly. So, what stops you?

It appears that your inner critic can have a strong and clear voice. Highlighting your deficits, your gaps in knowledge or the mistakes you have previously made. Your inner champions voice by comparison is either very quiet or appears to be on a permanent holiday.

Tackling this quiet voice can help you grow and really develop what you do and how well you work with your clients (along with colleagues, suppliers, friends and family).

Where can you start? Ask yourself this question – in that last client meeting or on that last client call, what did I do well? It may take a little time to identify some of the big and small things you have done, so be patient. When you do, make a note of them and review and reread these notes. When you have a single point or a few notes, ask yourself, how do I keep doing this? It is very easy to miss these things and you run the risk of not doing these things on a regular basis. So many people can benefit from doing the basic and doing them extraordinarily well.

This simple process can help you grow and find your real strengths. It can give a bigger voice to your inner champion and give you a more balanced view of your current skills and abilities.

What do you do if you can't find answers yourself?

Ask your clients. Simply interview those clients who are onboard and working with you and ask them what you do really well for them. The answers they give might well surprise you. I did this with a range of our clients, and it really surprised me. One of the common themes they told me was when we trained their teams, they loved the fact we used very little or no PowerPoint. Instead, we actively encouraged

discussions, exploring topics, ideas, and new ways of working. I assumed (my mistake) that this would be normal in the training and development world, and it turns out its not. I now use this knowledge to position what we do with new clients. I wonder what your clients would tell you that will help you grow and create a consistently improving service to each of your clients.

I like to reflect and look for these learning opportunities after each meeting, each day and each week. Noticing these positive things can help me grow by asking that “How do I repeat this?” question. Now naturally I don't just look for the positives, and I am sure you would expect me to flip this question over. Asking yourself something like “What could I improve when I work with clients?” can also be extremely insightful. It will help your development and highlight ways you can positively improve your client engagement and interaction.

If you have identified these things you do well and the things you could improve, that's a really positive position to be in. You are already ahead of most people in developing and growing. If you haven't yet identified these areas, it's time to sit down with a cup of tea and ask yourself, ensuring you are being honest and not modest, simply focussing first on what you do well. It's a great part of self reflection and growth.

**To contact to discuss coaching or becoming a coach, 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)**

# WHAT IS A PERSONAL BRAND AND WHY SHOULD YOU CARE ABOUT HAVING ONE?

**People often think personal branding is simply what you post on your social media. It is so much more. I discovered the power of personal branding when scaling my first business and started actively seeking opportunities to get known in my industry.**

I was a guest on podcasts, authored a book, became a columnist for an industry magazine, did a TEDx talk, appeared on radio and TV, and won multiple awards. I had always done voluntary work but I aligned my charity interests more clearly with my work and my own values. These activities all created great content for social media which helped grow my personal brand further online.

Two significant things happened because of my efforts to raise my profile. Firstly, when I turned up to sales meetings, my prospective clients were already warmed up. They would comment that they had seen my article or congratulate me on a recent award win. It made the conversation easier, and it felt like they had already decided to buy before I even started my pitch.

This significantly increased sales.

Secondly, the more work I did on my profile, the more opportunities came my way. Following my TEDx talk, I was invited onto podcasts, approached to be an ambassador for a charitable organisation and secured several speaking engagements.

Standing out in your industry can feel like it will take a lot of time and effort. It will. But it will be completely worth it.

My biggest tip to build a strong personal brand is focus on a collection of different things which will amplify your voice.

Over the next few months, I will use my column to share advice and tips on the substance behind your personal brand, looking at topics such as awards, networking, authority, speaking engagements, media and press and online presence. If you want to assess your current personal brand, try out this free quiz - [thisismoja.com/profile-quiz](https://thisismoja.com/profile-quiz)

**Sophie Milliken, CEO at Moja Group**  
[sophiemilliken@thisismoja.com](mailto:sophiemilliken@thisismoja.com)  
[www.thisismoja.com](http://www.thisismoja.com)



Sophie Milliken

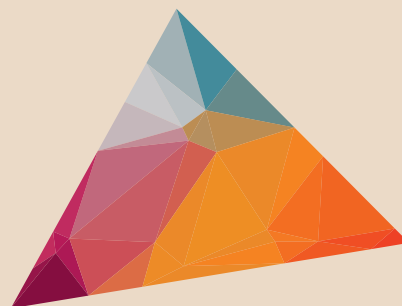
## YOU'RE IN THE BUSINESS OF PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Business development is simply helping, serving and supporting people.

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# FLAGSHIP EXPO RETURNS TO THE BEACON OF LIGHT WITH NISSAN AS KEYNOTE

The North East Automotive Alliance's (NEAA) flagship Expo is to be held at the Beacon of Light, Sunderland for its seventh year.

**The Expo, an industry highlight for companies operating within the region's automotive supply chain, will take place on Thursday 29 September. The one-day exhibition is free-of-charge to NEAA members and manufacturing delegates and is supported by a high calibre of sponsors.**

The 2021 event attracted over 670 delegates, 124 exhibitors, 14 sponsors and helped instigate over 110 meet-the-buyer appointments with ten of the region's largest automotive companies. These included, Nissan, Komatsu and their tier one suppliers, all of which helped to facilitate vital business connections for the automotive supply chain.

This year the keynote speaker is Alan Johnson, vice president manufacturing at Nissan Motor Manufacturing UK (NMUK). Alan, who has over 30 years' experience at Nissan, is responsible for all manufacturing aspects of the plant, and, as well as discussing digitalisation, skills and localisation, he will talk about Nissan's drive towards net zero with its EV36Zero £1bn Electric Vehicle Hub.

Sunderland City Council is confirmed as main sponsor for a seventh year and Invest South Tyneside, Advance Northumberland, TR Fastenings, ThinkPrime, CMYK, Horizon Works, Masfix, Ekobox and Reliance High-Tech continue to show their support with repeat sponsorship. New sponsor Nokia has come onboard as partner sponsor, whilst Manosun will sponsor the Technology Showcase and Smart Manufacturing Solutions and SMS Tech will sponsor the 'new for 2022' Drinks and Networking Reception.

Teesside University will also take to the stage at the Expo to talk about sustainability in the automotive sector. Dr. Mansoor Soomro, senior lecturer in sustainability and international business at the Teesside University International Business School (TUIBS) will present a seminar focussed on 'How to transform the automotive industry into a sustainable industry?'

Cllr Graeme Miller, leader of Sunderland City Council, said: "The North East has a revered reputation of being a centre of excellence for the automotive industry and the Expo provides a perfect platform to showcase all of the innovative businesses that are proud to call the region home.

"From Nissan to established component manufacturers such as Unipres, Faltec, Snop and Vantec to name a few - and fast-growing industry disrupters including Envision AESC, Hyperdrive and most recently Saietta - the region's success has helped create tens of thousands of jobs and become one of its largest contributors to GDP over the past 40 years.

We're looking forward to celebrating this success at the Expo alongside our industry partners."

Exhibition stands are already over 90% sold, so companies wishing to use the Expo as a platform to showcase products and services to the sector are urged to act fast to secure one of the remaining spaces.

The NEAA will also host an SME Zone which offers vital support to firms looking to expand their presence in the automotive sector. The ERDF funded programme will provide fully funded exhibition space to eligible companies in the North East Local Enterprise Partnership area. One company that benefitted from this funded presence at the Expo in 2021 was Cobots Online, which automates manufacturing processes.

Paul Butler, chief executive, NEAA, said: "The Expo events are an industry highlight, with many attendees coming away with new contacts and business leads, as was the case for Cobots Online and software development company, Fuzzy Logic Studio, which, following its success at the 2021 Expo, is now a member of the North East Automotive Alliance.

"Following the recent announcement by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, that the North East is at the centre of Britain's first 'electric decade,' having received £4.1 billion of the £10.8 billion invested throughout the last decade in to electric vehicle and battery production, it is evident that the heartbeat of UK automation is right here, in this region.

"Opportunity is vast and collaboration is the key to success for firms in the sector looking to make their mark and grow at an exponential rate."

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

“

*...The North East has a revered reputation of being a centre of excellence for the automotive industry...*



*Dr David Cliff*

# GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE

Automate, is a key cry issued by those scaling their businesses. But let's not lose sight of the fact the absence of the "ghost in the machine" may come to haunt your organisation, as Dr David Cliff reflects:

**As we live in a technological world, many decisions that intimately affect our lives are down to automated processes. Daily, they decide our consumer preferences, traffic flow and call handling. Increasingly, algorithms come into the most intimate parts of our lives, including our health. A Coroner's recent judgement over a 90-year-old left waiting for an ambulance so long she died, was down to the over application of algorithm technology and devoid of human judgement at the time.**

Automation can create great ways of getting things done quickly and without the emotional 'contamination' of human operators. These systems are however, without feelings, impartial and simply search for sameness and difference criteria. Despite the growth of AI they lack the "ghost in the machine" that is involved in human judgement. Bureaucracy loves algorithms, the sociologist Max Weber ultimately regarded bureaucracy as something that would result in fairness of distribution to all and so algorithms could be argued to move towards this. However, 'fairness' is a subjective value not satisfied by simple 'sameness'. Consequently, automated systems are far from perfect and easily duped. Consider how the family of the 90-year-old mentioned above may feel, especially when some of those priority calls at relevant the time were misusing NHS services, and where human need was also balanced against organizational risk in the establishment of who to service first.

Equally, our consumer habits are regularly reduced to automated processes. Notice how hard it is to contact a human being when you're dealing with any form of customer services whether it's banks, online shopping or just about anything else! Somehow our transactional needs are dealt with by a process system that allows us to complete transactions. However, when complications occur, speaking to a real human being is often the way to restore faith. The problem is when you speak to the many human beings in these systems, the very automation they use operationally increasingly prevents them from offering the one thing that is needed to complete the customer experience – discretion.

Discretion may be an old idiosyncratic thing, but it produces a mutuality between humans that affirms the recipient as an individual. It can nuance customer experiences so that people feel they are seen as being unique in their own right. This is important to people in their buying experience, but when the transactions involved go beyond that of simple consumerism into health care and the like, it creates confidence and hope.

Discretion injects something valuable into a system – 'necessary diversity' - a systems concept that is hardly ever spoken of these days. It prevents the creation of 'wooden' responses- those where the transaction is a technical success, but the person is left feeling dehumanized but must just get on with it usually, because the system is too complex to change and/or the opportunity cost of complaint or going to rivals is just too great. Look at banks for example, they have to pay you to switch and do the leg work for you to encourage you to change to them.

When something goes wrong in the human front, people "learn the lesson", but humans running organisations with automated processes on key customer facing areas are not necessarily learning, they are simply tweaking code within the same system. It does not produce the real seeds of change.

Most automated systems are fine when processing very simple transactions, buying online et cetera, but when trying to deal with the uniqueness of human need, we must remember they only partially satisfy the customer.

We lose sight of people as individuals at our peril. They can tolerate impersonal, "distributive" types of service for a long time some forever, but for most a time of reassertion occurs wherein their individuality must be accurately both listened to and responded to. Otherwise, you can get cataclysmic switching which can result in an organisation hemorrhaging customers, whether that's Sainsbury's customers switching to ALDI or NHS customers switching to private healthcare or swing voters in politics where AI based polling forecasting systems fail to understand the "Volk Geist" of the people! Systems, like ideologies, are often great servants and poor masters...

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

“

*...We lose sight of people as individuals at our peril...*

# MENTAL HEALTH CHARITY AND NHS TO PILOT ENGLAND'S FIRST DISTRESS INTERVENTION PROGRAMME IN THE NORTH EAST



*Mental Health Concern's Head of Crisis and Housing Services, Julia Perry, and Consultant Applied Psychologist with Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust, Rachel Smith.*

**A local mental health charity, Mental Health Concern (MHC), in partnership with Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV), is leading the pilot of England's first Distress Brief Intervention (DBI) service in the North East.**

MHC, which already provides mental health and wellbeing support to communities in Tyneside, Northumberland, and Teesside, will work with TEWV to provide mental health support to any individual in distress, but who does not require further emergency assistance.

The DBI approach has two levels. Level one involves training for front line staff (NHS111, A&E, Police, Primary Care, and North East Ambulance Service) to provide a compassionate response to people in distress, identifying those who would benefit from referral to the level two service.

MHC will lead on DBI level two. Specially trained staff will contact the person within 24 hours of the referral, providing compassionate, community-based problem-solving support, wellness and distress management planning, supported connections, and signposting for up

to 14 days – helping to reduce their immediate distress, and supporting people to better manage their mental health over time.

Following the successful roll out of DBI in Scotland, this service will be the first of its kind in England. Results show that 90% of people referred to the service agreed that DBI had given them the tools and skills to manage their distress and one in nine revealed that they may have attempted suicide or continued with their suicidal thoughts if not offered the service.

The charity will provide DBI alongside its Together in a Crisis service, which provides support to those in mental health crisis across the North East including working with TEWV in Teesside. Two new roles will be created to deliver the DBI service and provide support across Derwentside.

Rachel Smith, Consultant Applied Psychologist with Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust, said: “We are thrilled to be working in partnership with Mental Health Concern to pilot the first DBI service outside of Scotland. This exciting new development is part of our work to make mental health support available to more people in their communities when they need it. We are confident it will make a real difference to the people of Derwentside.”

Adam Crampsie, Chief Executive Officer for Mental Health Concern, said: “I am delighted to see the invaluable DBI service being rolled out in England, and I am incredibly proud that Mental Health Concern will be advancing its working partnership with TEWV and our NHS and VSCE colleagues on this pilot scheme in Derwentside.

“We've seen the impact that the service has had in Scotland in helping people in distress to cope and manage their issues better. We believe that the DBI Service will be as effective in the North East and provide prompt and specialist support for those who need it.”

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





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North East  
Local Enterprise Partnership

TYNEXE  
COMMERCIAL

NORTHERN 2018  
POWERHOUSE UK Government



L-R: Danielle Barry – Compliant,  
Graham Hawkins – BDS Fire, Garry Wells – BDS Fire.

## GAME, SET AND MATCH FOR NORTH EAST ISO CONSULTANCY

Sunderland based ISO consultancy, Compliant, are celebrating as they secure another national client.

**Fire detection and alarm experts, BDS Fire, who are based in Surrey, were keen to grow their business and sought out the advice and expertise of Compliant to assist with gaining the ISO 14001 (environmental) and ISO 45001 (occupational health and safety) standards.**

The company, who have provided maintenance support for fire alarm systems at the All England Lawn Tennis & Croquet Club (known to us as Wimbledon) since 2018, have a wealth of experience in fire advice, risk assessments and compliance. Looking to invest in their

business and reinforce their position as leading fire safety experts, they embarked on gaining the UKAS accredited ISO certifications, helped by Compliant who are also providing ongoing maintenance and surveillance support.

Compliant, who are owned by BSI trained lead auditor, Mark Henderson, have experienced substantial growth during the past two years. With many businesses either looking to grow, tender for public sector opportunities or streamline their processes, their ISO consultancy services have never been as valuable.

When Mark Henderson and Danielle Barry, Compliant's Marketing & Internal Audit Manager, were invited to meet with BDS Fire on-site at Wimbledon, they of course jumped at the chance.

The tour was led by BDS Fire, Compliance Manager, Graham Hawkins, who explained, "we manage over 15,000 devices here onsite and are moving to a 24 panel network; it's constantly expanding. At the minute the site covers 56 acres, with 900 Fire alarm call points and court 1 alone has a 12,500 seating capacity.

Having ISO 14001 and 45001 in place ensures that we are complying with health and safety regulations and considering the environment in all of our activities. Compliant have been a great support and we look forward to a successful ongoing relationship."

Compliant director, Mark Henderson commented "This has been another great site

visit for the Compliant team. We take pride in meeting the staff from the companies that we support and getting to see where and how our management systems are being implemented.

The team at BDS have been extremely thorough and we were able to see for ourselves at this impressive site that the environment and health and safety are being considered at every stage of their processes.

We are excited to visit more of BDS Fire's clients and see how the certifications that we facilitated are being embedded across a range of different locations."

Digital Marketing and Internal Audit Manager, Danielle Barry added "It's great to be out and about again after the restrictions and it was fantastic to visit another client on such a prestigious site. Seeing how our management systems are ensuring that the highest standards are met at such a prominent location has been extremely rewarding.

Not to mention it's always exciting to meet the teams that are implementing our framework in real life situations. These site visits give us a greater understanding of the requirements of the documents that we are developing and how we can make future improvements. Thank you to Graham, BDS Fire and the staff at Wimbledon."

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

# EQUAL PAY: ARE YOU AN EXPENSIVE LAW SUIT WAITING TO HAPPEN?

By Heidi Turner, Director of Cheviot HR Ltd, HR Consultancy

## What is Equal Pay?

Equal Pay legislation has been in place since the 1970's and was triggered by strike action by women machinists at the Ford Motor Company campaigning to be paid the same as their male colleagues.

### In fact, the film "Made in Dagenham" documents the famous campaign.

Since then, Council workers have filed equal pay claims and equal value claims, which cost Councils nationwide billions of pounds in settlement, prior to the introduction of the Single Status Agreement in 1997. This was a commitment to ensuring equal pay for work of equal value, by implementing a nationwide job evaluation scheme to address historic pay inequalities.

### A big threat to all businesses today

Fast forward to today, many businesses are quaking in the wake of the recent Asda equal pay case, which the employment tribunal upheld. This has had a ripple effect on the rest of the retail industry, particularly those defending their own equal pay claims - such as Sainsbury's, Tesco, Morrisons, Co-op and Next. Ultimately, if all of the retailers lose their equal pay claims, it is estimated they could face £8bn in compensation payments to employees.

The thing is, on the face of it, two jobs which seem very different, may have very similar demands, responsibilities and environments and therefore should be paid the same or similarly. That one employee who can demonstrate comparative worth (as with the Asda case) could cause a ripple effect across the whole organisation, leaving you with a very hefty backdated bill.

The inconvenient truth is that any business, regardless of industry, shape and size could be vulnerable to an equal pay or equal value claim unless they can demonstrate that they have introduced a systematic and analytical way of determining a job's worth and relative pay.

### So how do organisations typically determine the right pay?

A very significant number just determine a salary that 'feels right'. They may have a system in place for undertaking pay reviews associated with performance (or to award long service) but many organisations out there still just seem to 'go with the flow' or, do a bit of research on what salary their competitors are offering and establish theirs accordingly depending on whether they choose to lag or lead.

### Hope they don't find out...

This may work OK for a while, but as the company grows, salaries aren't consistent and it becomes an almighty mess. They just hope that employees don't find out what others are being paid, or they hope they don't challenge



this. They probably have had informal or formal grievances about pay, and either told them to stop grumbling and hoped they would go away or they paid them more money. Either way, unsatisfactory.

### So how should it be done?

Implement an analytical job evaluation scheme. Job evaluation is a tool to ensure that you are paying fairly and equally in relation to comparative worth within your organisation.

There are a few job evaluation schemes out there, but few have the flexibility of being adapted to businesses with specific attributes and skills which can be weighted in response to client preferences. After decades of experience of using other job evaluation schemes, we developed "The Cheviot Scheme" which like others, attributes a score for each facet of each job, but recognises the individuality of each business.

### What is involved in implementing a job evaluation scheme?

Firstly, we will need a list of all jobs from you across your business to determine how many jobs need to be evaluated. Each unique job should be evaluated. We then issue job evaluation questionnaires to all representatives of each job for completion. Once we receive the completed questionnaire, we analyse the job with reference to factor scores defined by our scheme.

We then attribute a total number of points to each job and place in rank order, to then assimilate onto a pay and grading structure which is determined following a pay modelling exercise with the client.

The client is left with the assurance of protection against any future equal pay claims and associated hefty pay out, and a fair and transparent pay and grading structure.

**If you would like to find out more about implementing job evaluation in your business, or to discuss concerns you may have about equal pay, please contact Heidi at [heidi@cheviothr.co.uk](mailto:heidi@cheviothr.co.uk)**

**The Cheviot Job Evaluation Scheme - Cheviot HR Ltd**



# RETAINING STAFF IN THE EVER-CHANGING HR LANDSCAPE

The HR industry has faced massive upheaval since the pandemic with employers seeing the need for pro-active and highly responsive strategies to support business growth and development. Recent trends show that HR teams are facing a new challenge with many employers undergoing significant staffing challenges.

**Retention. Reputation. Attraction. It's a candidates' market out there at present and when thinking about recruitment, retention needs to take centre stage, to not only retain existing staff but to attract new talent into the business.**

Louise Kennedy, Managing Director, Oculus HR said: "Over the years we have seen the HR landscape change frequently, businesses with robust HR systems and processes in place have seen the benefit of this investment in recent years. It is vital to embed impactful HR policies and procedures from day one, and investment in succession planning is key.

This succession planning is an essential tool to retain and in turn attract top talent into the business, getting the culture right is also vital, thereby marketing the business to employees as an attractive employer."

One size does not fit all when it comes to HR policies and employers need to take the time to invest in these. From wellbeing policies to supporting different working models such as the growth of hybrid working, employers need to be aware of current trends and expectations from both prospective and existing employees.

HR support needs to be transparent and consistent; processes need to support employees throughout their journey, from offer of employment through to the succession planning. These processes will help build the reputation of the business as a forward thinking and dynamic employer committed to employee support, growth and development. Some key areas to get right include:

## **Wellbeing and Mental Health**

It is increasingly important to support employees' mental health in the workplace and as such a wellbeing policy will be top of the agenda for many.

## **Bullying and harassment**

A topic that is on the rise, especially with the increase in hybrid working, having this policy in place assures employees that you care about their safety.

## **Working practices**

The world of work has changed, and with the rise in the cost of living some employees are prioritising employment with flexible working options. In addition, existing employees need be clear on the opportunities around applying for flexible working models.

Positive HR processes should underpin the recruitment strategy, if the processes are right, it will reflect well on company values. Existing employees will in turn become advocates and champion the business.

Louise added: "A point to note is that Exit interviews are incredibly important, especially when it comes to gaining a deeper understanding of employee concerns, morale in the workplace, management processes, day to day operations and more. Conducting exit interviews provide the perfect opportunity to identify ways that you can optimise employee retention and maximise engagement opportunities. Ultimately, you will be able to get an overview of employee experience of working within your business."

***Sunderland based Oculus HR provide innovative and flexible HR solutions to SMEs regionally and nationally through their dedicated and holistic approach. To find out more about the support packages available for businesses 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)***

“

***...One size does not fit all when it comes to HR...***



Louise Kennedy



Bryony Gibson

## BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU ASK

*Bryony Gibson, Director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, offers advice on the questions you should never ask in a job interview.*

When helping somebody to find a new job, I offer market and salary advice and support them with everything from their CV content to their interview technique, and contract negotiations.

**Throughout the process, many factors can affect the success of a job search, but it is during the interview that both parties genuinely discover if the chemistry is right.**

The best interviews are always a two-way affair where both sides are not only selling themselves but also deciding whether they think there is a future together.

From an applicant's point of view, in my experience, it is the people who are prepared, have done the research, and are keen to make a good impression that come out on top so, even if you're not yet passionate about the business in question, you need to show you are.

Assuming all goes well, at the end of your interview you will be asked whether you have any questions for the interviewer. Never decline. By opting not to ask a question, the final impression you leave will be that you either weren't engaged in the conversation or you haven't done your homework and aren't interested in the business.

It pays to think of questions beforehand, however, be careful what you say, as there are some questions you cannot afford to ask, including:

### **Something Google could answer**

A common mistake people make when trying to show a curious mind is asking more about what the company does, who the competition is, or what clients the firm works with. Any questions you could have conceivably discovered the answer to already need to be avoided. Before an interview, it is your job to learn as much as possible about the company and the last thing you want to do is to come across as being unprepared.

### **Anything salary or benefits related**

The terms of employment are yet to be discussed so, while you may think questions like "What would my starting salary be?", "How often would I get paid?", "When is the next performance review?", "Would I get healthcare benefits?" show the employer that you are keen, the reality is that they only serve to make you look focused on the wrong things.

### **Questions starting with the word "Why"**

People are predisposed to take a defensive position when faced with a question beginning

with "Why". Instead, try to rephrase your queries to be less confrontational i.e., rather than "Why did the company do...", try "What is your opinion on...".

### **What happened to the person before me?**

Knowing what happened to the previous person in a job is important but, as tempting as it may be, this is information your recruitment consultant should be able to supply and not something you need to ask. Hopefully, it will be offered during the interview but, if not, it is best to steer clear of the topic and pick it up with your consultant, as you don't want to give the impression that you have concerns about the opportunity.

### **Do you monitor internet usage, work emails, or social media?**

While a valid concern, this is something best left unsaid. Often, it gives the impression you have something to hide and, on a similar note, in the lead-up to an interview, it is also wise to review your social media accounts to make sure there is nothing critical of your current employer or any posts that could be conceived negatively when viewed out of context.

While most recruiters agree that "Thank you, but I don't have any questions" is the worst possible response when the tables of an interview are turned, your goal is to build on the rapport you have created and ask a few smart and thoughtful questions that not only show you have been paying attention during the conversation, but that you have done your homework.

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



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# Bryony Gibson Consulting Job Opportunities

## ACCOUNTS SENIOR - AGRICULTURE

*Newcastle/Northumberland, £35- 40,000pa plus benefits*

Family values and a consultative approach to clients is very much the style of this fast-growing practice as they look to appoint an Accounts Senior to manage an agriculture client portfolio. A rare opportunity to work in this specialist sector presents an interesting role for an experienced Accounts Senior (ACA/ACCA or QBE).

You will be supporting the Partners with first point of contact with clients, along with preparation of year end statutory accounts and the oversight of bookkeeping.

Whilst existing agriculture experience would be advantageous, an ability to communicate well and forge long-lasting client relationships along with technical expertise is required. Full & part-time hours available, with hybrid working. **Quote Ref: 2053**

## TAX MANAGER

*Newcastle, £47- 62,000pa plus benefits*

Working for a leading accountancy firm with offices worldwide, the Tax Manager will be responsible for the compliance review of a team who provide UK tax compliance services to Partnerships across the UK and overseas. Managing these relationships with clients requires experience and we are looking for an individual competent in the review process of partnership tax computations alongside experience with client portfolio management.

The diversity of the portfolio and client base provides an excellent platform to further develop your technical and client relationship skills whilst delivering high quality compliance and ad hoc consultancy within a well respected team.

The business is growing and presents attractive future progression for the career driven individual, who holds a minimum of four years compliance experience, supervisory skills and preferably ATT/CTA qualified. **Quote Ref: 2059**

## ACCOUNTS SUPERVISOR

*Durham, £30- 40,000pa DOE*

Playing a supporting role to the Manager this offers great exposure to those wishing to transition to a Managerial position. You will be responsible for the day to day delivery of year end statutory accounting for limited, partnership and sole trader clients. You will be actively involved in the preparation of complex accounts whilst reviewing those for junior members in the team and ensuring all aspects of bookkeeping are accurate and completed on time.

For those with audit experience you will be leading on a small number of audits across the firm supervising the planning and testing stages and reports.

The position offers plenty of client contact on a day to day basis as well as a hands on role and the opportunity to share your knowledge with the trainees in the department. ACA/ACCA or qualified by experience considered. The firm have created a friendly culture that has benefited from people being in the office each day and would look for the successful individual to be office based, although flexibility is provided with start and finish times to suit. **Quote Ref: 2064**

## SENIOR INSOLVENCY ADMINISTRATOR

*Durham, £30,000pa, plus benefits*

A large accountancy firm with national and local clients in a response to growing work are seeking an Insolvency specialist.

As a qualified Accountant or Insolvency Practitioner (ACA/ACCA/CPI) you will be responsible for managing case delivery which will include the pre-appointment, case progression and closure.

We are looking for a confident individual with strong communication and verbal skills who is comfortable in regular conversation with directors, bankrupts and debtors as you investigate. You will also attend meetings with shareholders, creditors and liaise with solicitors on specific legal issues arising on cases.

With guidance from the Partners you will further advance your technical skills and insolvency career. The firm have a great working atmosphere making it an attractive move for an Insolvency specialist. An array of attractive flexible benefits are provided by this firm. **Quote Ref: 2048**

For further information please visit [www.bryonygibson.com/vacancies](http://www.bryonygibson.com/vacancies) or for a confidential discussion, please contact Bryony Gibson, Bryony Gibson Consulting, on 0191 3759983.

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



Josh Gill

## SMART METERS FOR A SMARTER FUTURE

By Josh Gill, CEO & Founder of Everflow

When discussing utilities, water is often either forgotten about or granted a mention towards the tail-end of a conversation.

**With a drought declared across eight areas of England and heatwaves dominating the news, water has been moved to the forefront of the conversation.**

So much so, that the Chairman of the National Infrastructure Commission has urged the deployment of advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) within the water utility industry to allow people to take control of our water consumption whilst increasing efficiency and delivering sufficient demand reduction to enhance drought resilience.

### What does AMI mean for the industry?

AMI's are undoubtedly representative of a pivotal change in the industry. In May, a report published by Frontier Economics and Artesia, revealed that AMI can deliver up to £2.2bn net benefit across England and Wales which is six times that of alternative, 'drive-by' solutions.

Smart metering eliminates the manual process of sharing readings with suppliers and allows for much closer monitoring of consumption.

### Why is it beneficial to have accurate data?

The ability to access accurate data is key in tackling inefficient water usage. It is not possible to manage and reduce consumption for something if you don't have the correct measurements in the first place.

Smart meters remove any guess work or inaccuracies, in turn allowing people and businesses alike to quickly track energy usage, at the same time as holding themselves accountable. They currently make up 31% of meters in the UK and that figure is expected to increase.

If we were to see a national rollout of smart water meters, it would be possible to measure the benefits of water efficiency interventions to inform the industry on what approach is best. In the absence of reliable data, it is difficult to national benchmark progress or devise effective strategies.

### Why else are smart meters beneficial?

Not only can you see how much energy is used, but you can see where it is used. Smart metering allows you to see how much energy is being used by a particular appliance, allowing people and businesses alike to see which appliances are the most energy efficient. Better energy habits will in most cases mean cheaper energy bills in the long run and in turn is likely to cut down CO2 emissions, helping many businesses meet their net zero targets.

To encourage more people to switch to smart

meters, many energy suppliers are offering exclusive discounts and cheaper tariffs with smart meters. As people don't need to take a final reading, switching suppliers will be easier.

### The future of AMI?

In spite of the undeniable potential that AMI holds for the water industry, there are a number of critical barriers impeding its widespread deployment; the most significant being funding. Unfortunately, the current price caps are not sufficient for organisations such as Everflow to provide smart meters to customers alone. While the Chairman of NIC advocated for an increase in customer bills to cover AMI, in the current climate a further increase in utility bills is not a beneficial option for many. Despite the clear benefits that AMI will bring, many wholesalers are not incentivised to enter this market and drive down costs.

Whilst disappointing, it is becoming increasingly clear that, much like the energy market, there is a need for greater Government investment to ensure the costs of AMI do not unduly fall on any one stakeholder alone.

Ultimately, water companies and the water sector face huge challenges over the coming decades if Water UK's 2050 vision and the Government's environmental targets are to be achieved. With a comprehensive national strategy and funding as well as regulatory support, AMI represents a tangible way for the UK to meet these targets.

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



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Ammar Mirza CBE

## THE MINDSET OF SUCCESS

I have often wondered why do some organisations achieve rapid growth and success whilst others do not?

**Is it their location? their technology? their business model? their skills? their technology? The answer is none of these factors DRIVE success!**

**What does DRIVE success is MINDSET!**

It's 'the way' that successful people think about themselves, their business and the world that makes the difference. Such difference in thinking can be subtle in nature but transformational in effect.

So, with mindset being the central driver of success, embedding the right mindset must be the primary focus of learning and development programmes – right?

**Wrong! The stark reality is that a focus on mindset is often non-existent, with the focus instead being placed on providing people with a knowledge and understanding of what are often outdated models and theories.**

Recognising that such outdated approaches do

not adequately release the potential of people I created Yohlar based on over 20 years of practical research!

**Based on the belief the everyone can deliver value, Yohlar is a unique, worlds' first and revolutionary approach to learning and development.** It's based on rigorous research into what drives the world's most successful organisations and delivers a suite of qualifications that embed the Yohlar Mindset. In addition, Yohlar provides participants with the contemporary toolset and skillset needed to launch new ventures and deliver business model innovation.

The Yohlar Mindset of success consists of four interrelated dimensions.

- 1. People with the Yohlar mindset BELIEVE that:** that they can develop and execute scalable business models, they believe that they can rewrite the rules, they believe that opportunities are in abundance and they believe that problems are opportunities in disguise.
- 2. People with the Yohlar Mindset THINK:** 'what if', they think 'just do it', they think that if it isn't broke then break it, they think that failures are opportunities to learn, they think that stretching goals and visions are exciting, they think that they can always be better and they think that they can be better than the competition.
- 3. The BEHAVIOURS exhibited by people with the Yohlar Mindset are:** Proactive, energised and positive, continuously seeking out new problems to solve, ruthless in holding

themselves and others to account, highly disciplined, focused on the vital few things that will deliver the most value and proactive in communicating and reinforcing success.

**4. The VALUES held by people with the Yohlar Mindset are:** that they and their businesses are here to deliver sustained and increased value to their customers, they value people and their potential, they value the role that technology plays, they value the role enterprise can play in making the world a better place and they place huge value on recognising and rewarding high performance.

Central to Yohlar is a community of people who are all tuned into the Yohlar Mindset. A community committed to supporting one another's journey and success. Being surrounded by people with the Yohlar mindset is infectious, injecting positivity, building self-belief, and raising energy levels through the roof – as a community we can achieve anything that we apply our mindset to!

**If you want to succeed, if you want to unlock your true potential, if you want to be surrounded by a group of people with a shared mindset and a commitment to make you the best that you can possibly be then Yohlar is for you?**

*To find out more please visit [www.yohlar.com](http://www.yohlar.com)*

*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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## North East business Mesma named finalist in National Entrepreneur Awards

A Tyne and Wear technology specialist has been named as the only finalist from the region in a national award category that recognises the country's top small business founders who create alternative routes to employment.

Mesma has been shortlisted from over thousands of entrants from across the country for the 'John Caudwell Blaze Your Own Trail Award' in the Great British Entrepreneur Awards 2022.

The awards, produced in partnership with Starling Bank, acknowledge and champion the hard work and uplifting stories of business owners across the UK, with an emphasis on their journey and resilience over financial achievements.

Mesma is seen as an outstanding example of an enterprising small business offering apprenticeships, vocational training, and diversity and inclusion initiatives that help to improve young people's access to work. The winner will be announced at the Grand Final, held at the Grosvenor Hotel in London on 21st November.

The move comes as the firm brings in Evan Simons as a business development representative apprentice and Liam Imray as a software developer apprentice, whose apprenticeship training is being provided by Sunderland College and Baltic Training respectively.

Mesma is used by a range of organisations including regulatory and accreditation bodies to simplify complex quality assurance processes. This ensures management information is used to target resources in the areas that have the most impact on the quality of the end user experience.

The company, which currently employs eight people, continues to pursue UK and international growth plans that will see its annual turnover increase to £600,000 in the next 12 months. Current customers include Skills Development Scotland and the Department for Education.



## Something in the water at consultancy firm

A North East technology and business consultancy has started the year strong with a staff increase of over 30 per cent.

Waterstons Ltd has recruited over 65 team members across all departments since the start of the year.

The recruitment drive, which covers all levels from graduates and apprentices to senior leaders, is part of the firm's strategic vision for the next three years which focuses on clients and people, not numbers.

Michael Stirrup, who became the company's CEO in June 2021, explains: "We are, and always have been a people-first business, with each appointment designed to benefit our clients and drive us towards our 2025 objectives which include reaching new sectors, increasing diversity, and offering greater opportunity for learning and development.

"But over and above anything are the opportunities we want to give our people – from flexible working and unlimited holidays to international travel and relocation. We're proud to empower them to explore new initiatives and drive innovation with our clients to help improve their businesses."

Launched over 28 years ago, the company has expanded its capabilities to incorporate cyber security, digital productivity, and data and analytics, with its 278 employees working flexibly across four offices in Durham, Glasgow, London and Sydney.

Michael continued: "By 2025 we want to add more global locations, invest heavily in research and development, and double our turnover. The people who join us are key to realising these goals and with the expertise and passion of each and every one, we are confident that they will not only be met but exceeded."



## Global electric vehicle company creates 25 tech jobs in Newcastle

Dynamo North East is excited to share that NASDAQ-listed, electric vehicle company Ideanomics is recruiting skilled tech jobs in the United Kingdom, centred in North East England. The company's technology division, Ideanomics Digital, is headquartered in Newcastle and has launched a recruitment drive to unearth the region's best and brightest digital technology talent.

David Dunn, CEO of Dynamo and Sunderland Software City, commented: "The North East is well equipped to support growing technology companies flourish in the region. We're delighted to be working with Ideanomics, and we look forward to seeing their work unfold in bettering the EV industry across the globe."

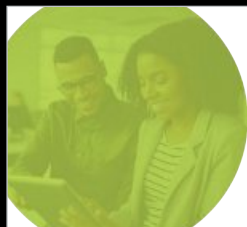
Ideanomics Digital plans to fill twenty-five specialist roles over the next nine months with the potential for more to follow. Job opportunities include software developers at all levels, testers, business analysts, IT managers and IT technicians. Positions are open for applications now.

As well as having the opportunity to work on new technologies that will support the adoption and rollout of electric vehicles, successful candidates will also become Google certified cloud architects at no personal expense.

Elected Metro Mayor for the North of Tyne, Jamie Driscoll, said: "New jobs. Well-paid jobs. Jobs that are helping to ensure we have the skills to tackle the climate crisis.

"This is a big win for the region and it's testament to the talent we have here. Hats off to Ideanomics for recognising that. Best of luck to their new recruits!"

Ideanomics Digital is focused on accelerating IT and technology innovation that enables Ideanomics to deliver on its mission of accelerating the global uptake of electric vehicles.

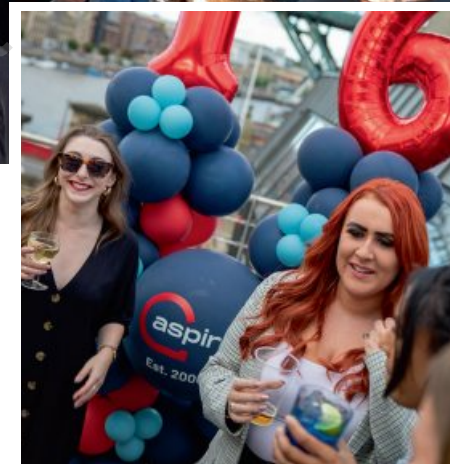


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## ASPIRE CELEBRATES 16 YEARS OF DELIVERING TECHNOLOGY LIKE NO OTHER!

Aspire Technology Solutions held an employee party on the rooftop of their impressive office to celebrate 16 years of business.

**Aspire first opened its doors back in 2006 as a two-person company. With a current workforce of more than 230, it has since become one of the fastest growing IT managed service and cyber security providers in the UK.**

It's increasingly difficult to remember, but 2006 was a time when the iPhone was yet to be invented — so too were the host of time-saving productivity apps we've all come to know and love. It was the year that Facebook extended its platform to the world, Twitter was launched

and the dominant web browser was Internet Explorer.

Back in 2006, the average UK broadband speed was 3.8Mbit/s (3.8 megabits per second). A far cry from the dedicated 100Gbp/s (100 gigabits per second) that Aspire now offers its customers.

Fast forward to today and Aspire have offices in Gateshead, London and Stockton-on-Tees. The business has scaled rapidly with revenue rising to £30m during the last 12 months, growing more than 48% over the past three years.

The company, who were crowned North East business of the year 2020, has a portfolio of clients located across the UK, Ireland, Continental Europe, and Australia, including the likes of Barbour, Lookers and Sunderland AFC to NHS and local authorities.

Having secured a minority investment from private equity firm LDC — in a transaction which values Aspire at £85m — the business looks set for further growth.

Aspire's company vision is to 'deliver technology like no other' and ensure businesses have access to innovative IT solutions that enable them to grow more quickly is the cornerstone of their promise. In addition to their suite of IT services and support, the company has recently 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 is equipped with next

generation cyber security intelligence, proactive monitoring, and advanced threat detection to keep customers protected.

To celebrate their milestone anniversary, Aspire enjoyed a party on their roof terrace complete with pizza (courtesy of Lucca Pizza Company), drinks (from Albert & Charlies Mobile Bar) and music from North East DJ playing throwback tunes from the early 2000's.

CEO, Chris Fraser said: "It's been an incredible journey watching Aspire go from strength to strength since we founded it 16 years ago. A huge thanks is owed to everyone who has helped us on our journey. Our success wouldn't have been possible without a great group of colleagues, customers and partners, many of whom have grown with us along the way. One thing that hasn't changed for us over the years is our passion for providing innovative solutions to help our customers grow. This continues to be at the heart of everything our teams do today. I'm really excited about the next 16 years as we continue to deliver our ambitious plans!"

*Find out more at [aspirets.com](https://aspirets.com)*



# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## MICHAEL STIRRUP

CEO of Waterstons Ltd

Since joining technology and business consultancy Waterstons in 2006, Michael Stirrup has held the roles of business consultant and finance director before being named CEO in June of 2021.

**After a year at the helm, we wanted to get to know more about him, his career journey and his future plans for the business.**

**What did you want to be when you were younger?**

I dreamed of being either a singer or a footballer; unfortunately neither ambition has been achieved, but I still have hope!

**Tell us about your current role.**

My main responsibility is creating and communicating a strategy that'll help us achieve our global ambitions, but the best bit is the amount of talented people I get to spend time with and learn from; be that our employees or our clients.

**What is your proudest business achievement?**

Being named CEO has been the pinnacle of my Waterstons career, but other highlights include leading our Durham office design and move project which hugely improved our ways of working, as well as playing a part in the opening of our office in Sydney, Australia.

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

The IT industry is forever changing and never standing still, which is part of the fun.

In my opinion, the biggest change has been the realisation from many companies that having a digital strategy is hugely important in adding value if deployed in the right way – a drum we've been beating for over 28 years.

The increasing threat of cyberattacks is also something that has grown in importance over the last few years; companies need to understand the risks they face and ensure they have the right levels of protection in place.

**What are you currently working on?**

We're assessing our ongoing strategy to ensure we're using our team's expertise to listen to, understand and continually respond to our clients' needs.

This expertise is a key part of our business progression, so we're always looking at opportunities to offer new services in new sectors and even new countries. For me this has included a trip out to Sydney to visit our Australian colleagues who are a key part of our global growth plans.

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

We have a hugely talented bunch at Waterstons; there are people more than half my age who are much more intelligent than I will ever be and it's great being challenged from all angles!

We have so many technical experts who know their stuff inside and out but just as importantly they know how to apply that knowledge to help our clients succeed.

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

"You don't need to know everything; you just need to find somebody who knows the stuff you don't."

I heard that at an event years ago and it's stayed with me. Part of being a good leader is celebrating that others know more than you; you should always try to employ people who are smarter than you as they're a benefit, not a threat.

**What has been your biggest career challenge?**

Being CEO is very different from my previous roles; suddenly you feel very lonely and feel a greater sense of pressure, but having a fantastic team around you helps hugely.

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

Many years ago there was a lady I worked with called Marie-Pierre; sadly, she's no longer with us but she taught me to always have fun at work. She always worked hard, but never took things too seriously and truly lived her teaching!

Outside of work my hero is probably David Ginola; I had the pleasure of seeing him play for Tottenham on numerous occasions and he is the most gifted footballer I've ever seen in the flesh.

I've picked two French people – my time living in France when I was younger has obviously influenced me more than I realised!

**What would you say to the next generation of North East business leaders?**

Have fun, take risks and be brave.

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

My kids take up a lot of my time so there's not much time to unwind! When they're not jumping all over me, I turn to my indie vinyl collection or knock out a few songs on my acoustic guitar.

**First and last gig you went to?**

My first gig was *Chesney Hawkes* – classic and I won't hear otherwise. My most recent gig was *Bernard Butler and Jessie Buckley* which was amazing.

My favourite gig however was when I saw *The Charlatans* in this tiny venue in Paris back in 1999. The music was fantastic, and my friend and I ended up on a drinking session with the band after the gig! One of my more surreal music memories, but certainly one of the best.

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





“

*...Have fun,  
take risks and  
be brave...*

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**Swing Into Action**

On 20th July, cloud solutions and managed services provider, Synergi, and their Microsoft Dynamics sub practice, Unifi, excitedly welcomed their customers to a day of golf at Close House.

Customers were offered the opportunity to play and network as well as learn about the latest in digital security, including Managed Threat Response (MTR), passwordless authentication, and Microsoft Teams Telephony. Helping business swing into action in more ways than one!

This event was sponsored by leading security experts, Sophos.







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# TALKING TECH AND DIGITAL

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

## STEVEN FORREST

CEO of Forfusion

### Did you always envisage a career in the world of technology?

Definitely not; I failed computer studies at GCSE level, which wasn't exactly the best start to my technology journey. My first real job involved designing single-story dwellings and blast walls in the British Army, which met with my interest in both mathematics and physics. It's a bit tenuous, but I guess to an extent this created a logical path into working with technology, as it wasn't long before linking computers via networks and communicating securely over wires piqued my interest. I couldn't imagine not being involved with technology these days.

### What attracted you to your current role?

It gives me immense pride to lead and be part of a cohesive team. We're currently building something very special here at Forfusion. For years we've been taking on industry giants by doing things differently, and we're now seeing some encouraging results. Being operationally and financially stable has also opened doors for our in-house apprenticeship schemes, STEM initiatives, and other socially responsible activities to support local communities. It's not all about making profit, it's as much about giving back to society, and in particular our wonderful northeast region. My role today is more involved and diverse than I ever dreamt it could be. I love it.

### How important was technology during the Coronavirus pandemic?

Technology has played a critical part for many businesses. It has helped some businesses soar to great heights, but unfortunately, it has also led to the demise of others. The advent of cloud computing and acceleration towards adopting remote working solutions has turned services previously considered niche into commodities. To an extent paving the way for industry giants to take more market share, and very aggressively too, in some cases crushing or subsuming smaller competitors along the way. However, on the flip side, it has encouraged organisations like Forfusion to be more creative, fuelling the creation of niche value-added market disrupting services.

### What tips would you give someone looking to work in the industry?

Everyone should consider where the market is headed, and how aggressively a blend of cloud, security and 'X-as-a-Service' type offerings will take hold—as with many industries, providing products and services that are subscription-based and consumed monthly is fast becoming the norm. Businesses must cater for the shift from a traditional ownership model to a mechanic focused primarily on lease, annuity, or non-ownership basis. I'm pleased to say that Forfusion can provide all its products and services via this model due to recently maturing its offering in-line with demand to give clients a choice.

### Tell us the most exciting thing you're currently working on?

We have an incredible managed services portfolio delivered by a very experienced team across geographically dispersed Network Operations Centre's (NOCs). The team is only a few weeks away from launching an incredibly comprehensive service offering spanning every technology pillar. Our developers have been immersed in creating innovative services that leverage Software Defined Networking (SDN), Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), and deeper integration with market-leading vendor Application Programmable Interfaces (APIs). Efforts have manifested in Forfusion seeking and obtaining a competitive advantage through significant differentiators, which we call Unique Selling Points (USPs).

### What's your fondest memory of a career in the industry?

I have many fond memories, but I think my favourite memory has to be our first taste of displacing a global incumbent supplier for a multi-million pound managed services contract. It was evident that an organisation like Forfusion, with fewer than 100 employees, could use creativity and guile to find ways to help our clients mitigate risk and innovate in parallel. We have chosen to operate in the mid-market and enterprise space, where the risk is relatively high, but so is the reward. We have the capability of the large more cumbersome integrators but retain the ability to be agile, flexible, and put our customers first genuinely.

### When not working, how do you like to relax?

My time away from work is divided into three main areas. My priority is my three-year-old daughter, so I like to spend quality time with her, whether taking her swimming or putting up with her ever-increasing cheekiness in the local park. I also like to keep fit, so whilst it doesn't exactly constitute relaxation, a lot of my time is spent on triathlon training, which I enjoy. Apparently, I am going through a midlife crisis! Rumour has it that I also like the odd glass of French wine, preferably whilst holidaying in France and eating the local delicacies.

“

...We're  
currently  
building  
something very  
special...





## GET BY WITH A LITTLE ADVICE FROM OUR CONSULTANTS

“If a man begins with certainties he shall end in doubts; but if he begins with doubts, he shall end in certainties.”

**16th century philosopher Francis Bacon hit the nail on the head; ask questions. After all, when it comes to business, nothing is more important.**

As a business consultancy, our clients most commonly need us when something needs to change. For example, a CRM system is no longer efficient, data is being collected but not used, cyber resilience has slipped and needs bringing up to date. We really sink our teeth into projects, living and breathing it daily until it is completed and successful.

But questions aren't just for projects, that's why having a trusted, third-party business advisory team to turn to could make all the difference to your future success.

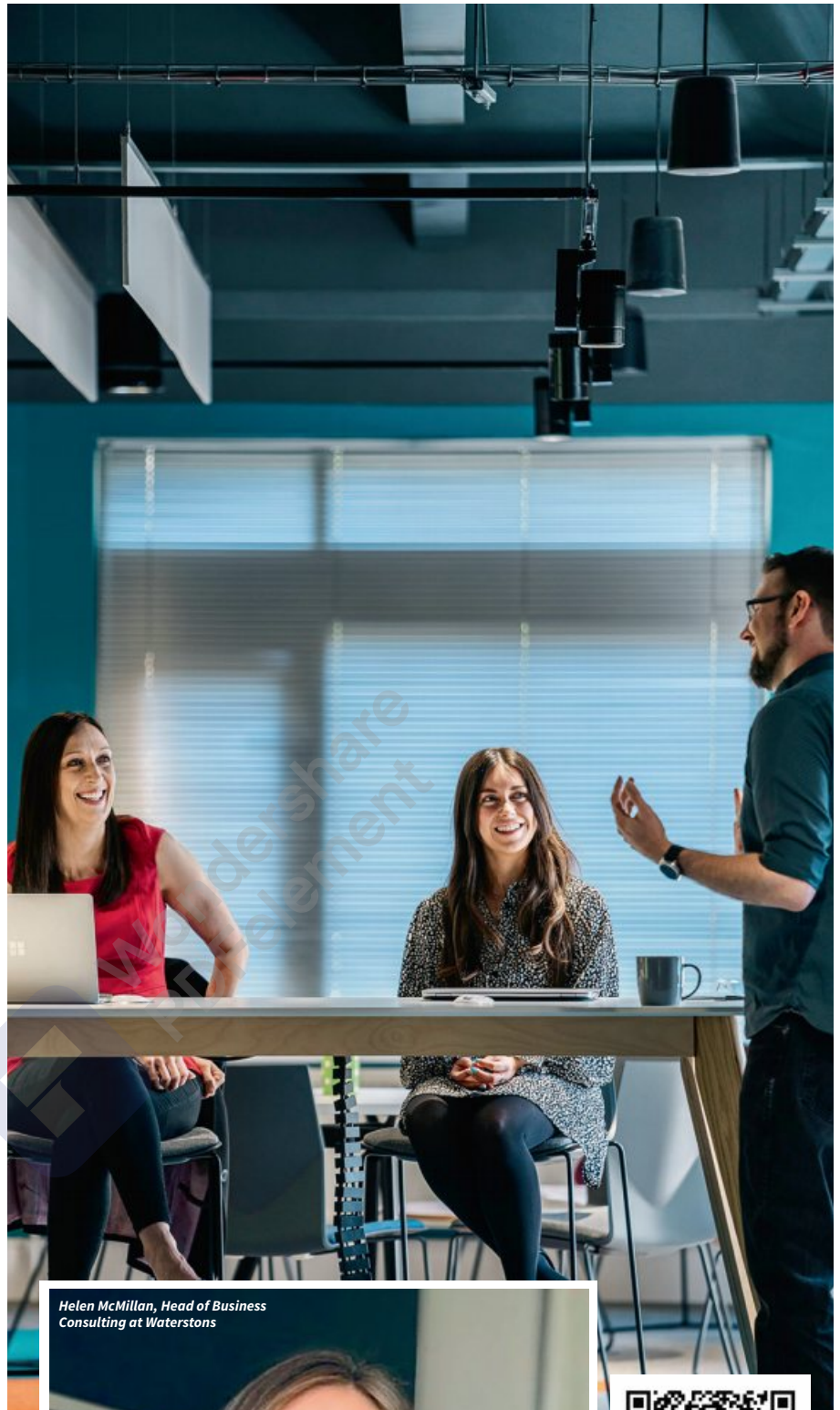
Head of Business Consulting, Helen McMillan explains: “Our clients are working on multiple projects at any time, with many people often involved in more than one, which can be overwhelming and time consuming.

***“With so many activities on the go, it helps to have a sounding board. That’s where we come in.*”**

“As trusted advisors with relationships built over many years, we are able to use our expertise to look at any situation objectively, provide assurance and help to keep the team on track.

“It doesn't have to be a specific project, service or activity, or in fact how long it takes; we act as an extension of your team, and a safe pair of hands and eyes, to help you grow and make better decisions when it's business as usual.”

**To find out more about how Waterstons can help advise your business, scan the QR code.**



Helen McMillan, Head of Business Consulting at Waterstons



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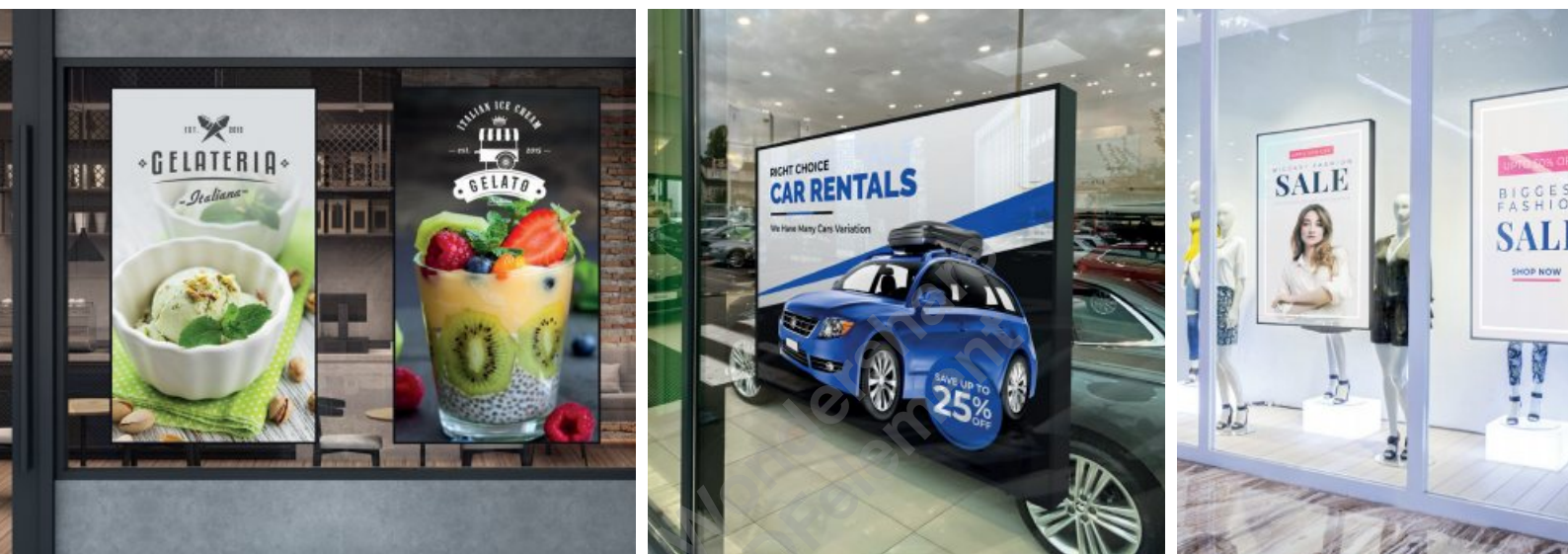
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The contrast at the moment seems to be more stark than ever, although with over 40 years in the property profession, I have seen areas gentrify and deteriorate, sometimes at quite alarming rates.

We are regularly told that “the High Street” is dead and people believe that the move to online trading is not just inevitable, but it is happening rapidly. It is fair to say that some High Streets have not recovered from the pandemic – but I would venture to say that most of these were teetering beforehand, and possibly before online trade took a foothold. For many who died “from covid”, there were additional complications in place beforehand and covid was more of contributory factor than the major cause of death for these unfortunate souls.

I think the same is true of many retail locations. In the northeast I call as my witnesses Shields Road in Byker, Gateshead High Street and Newgate Street in Bishop Auckland. All of these had been affected by different factors that were around long before covid and long before online trade (which may not be quite the spike you think).

Certainly Newgate Street in Bishop Auckland was effected badly by the opening of Tindale Retail Park, Shields Road Byker has lost out to the resurgence of Chillingham Road (as well as the Newcastle Retail Park on Fossway) and Gateshead High Street suffered firstly when Eldon Square in Newcastle was built and became very accessible from Gateshead with the new metro line (as it was in 1980), and then further hit by the development of the Metro Centre later in the 1980’s.

But is it just retail that is affected by location? I read in the middle of August that the Glassworks student accommodation Coquet Street Shieldfield, comprising 270 beds, has collapsed into administration.

The Evening Chronicle news article describes the block as being in Ouseburn and this is a little bit of a misnomer, because rather like Christopher Robin’s stair, “it isn’t really anywhere, its somewhere else instead” - but I think Shieldfield would be a more accurate description. It has become such a well known phrase that it became the title of a tv

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*Phil Bowe*

programme – “Location, Location, Location” and this certainly seems to be the case here. What was missing around Glassworks? Why are students still keen to live in Jesmond (to the irritation of full-time owner-occupiers)? Because there is more there.

Jesmond does offer good shopping facilities with Tesco, Waitrose and Sainsburys all represented, 2 Metro Stations giving fast access into Newcastle for parties or to other student houses and of course the plethora of pubs and other drinking venues on Osborne Road. Coquet Street wasn’t and still isn’t so well served.

BIV Bowes has been recently engaged to consider the redevelopment of two sites of which are within a mile of the City Centre, and the original brief was to consider offices. We have advised that offices in these particular locations (I can’t say any more due to confidentiality at present)

would not necessarily be viable.

In one of the locations it is close to where over 50,000 square feet of office space remains largely unlet despite being built to a very high standard and offering onsite parking. I feel there are better alternatives and have put these to our client for their consideration – time will tell if our advice is accepted and followed up on.

The whole point of this is that offices work, retail works, residential works – but each in its right place. The right building in the right place, at the right price, built at the right time to meet market demand.

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## Specialist property firm sets sights on Hexham as part of expansion

**Leading property consultancy George F. White is primed to support Hexham's thriving property industry with the launch of a new office in the market town.**

Located at Wentworth House, Wentworth Park, the new Hexham base comes following a period of substantial growth for the firm and will help to meet the growing demand it is seeing in the area.

Already with a large client portfolio spanning this part of Northumberland, George F. White's new presence in Hexham will allow it to build upon the wide range of businesses it provides specialist advice to as part of its ongoing expansion.

A team of experts across the rural, planning and development and commercial sectors are already in place at Wentworth House, including Partners Tim Michie, Elliot Taylor, Craig Ross and Gary Robinson – all who have extensive experience in the region. The firm is looking to further expand the team in the coming months to support the growth of its client base.

George F. White is also launching its existing residential property service in Hexham due to the high demand for homes in the area.

Managing Director, Sally Hart, commented on the expansion: "We're in an exciting period of growth and I'm delighted to see this new location open as we have an increasing client base in Hexham and the surrounding Tyne Valley, Cumbria and Western Scotland, particularly across our rural, planning and development and commercial sectors. It also puts us in the best position to take advantage of new opportunities, alongside our expansion into the residential property sector."



## Work begins on new Vaux homes

**One of the country's most ambitious residential developments is under construction, with ground broken on Riverside Sunderland's first housing scheme.**

Sunderland City Council's Vaux housing development – the first of 1,000 homes that will eventually stand across the Riverside Sunderland site – is underway, with North East based Tolent building 132 ultra-modern homes.

Vaux is the first of four new residential communities being delivered by the council at Riverside Sunderland, that will eventually provide city centre housing for up to 2,500 residents. Tolent will build the stunning houses – comprising apartments, townhouses, and maisonettes - using modern methods of construction, renewable energy systems and smart technology to reduce the carbon footprint of the development, producing high quality, energy efficient properties in the heart of the city.

Councillor Graeme Miller, leader of Sunderland City Council, said: "It's brilliant to see work get started on these new homes, which will help us to build a larger residential community in the city centre, in turn, driving more footfall and spend in the area by day and night.

"These homes will be truly trailblazing too – made sustainably and able to support people to reduce their carbon footprint and energy costs. It's a real statement development in lots of ways and one we're proud to be leading."

## £2.5m investment sees ex-HMRC Sunderland building transformed

**A large Sunderland office building that was home to HMRC for a quarter-of-a-century has been sold and undergone a radical refurbishment to transform it into modern, hybrid offices.**

North West based commercial property investors, Kingscrown Group, snapped up the 36,000 sq. ft. Waterside House from previous owners Topland Group and has invested significantly to remodel and refit the building, which is now ready to occupy.

Knight Frank and Connect Property have been appointed as joint agents for the building which has views of the River Wear and is based on

Sunderland Enterprise Park.

Neighbouring office occupiers include Berghaus, TSB, Sunderland NHS and Sunderland City Council, Avant Homes and Taylor Wimpey.

The new interior has been designed for an evolved, post-pandemic business world and includes office suites, meeting rooms and break-out spaces and kitchen areas to suit a variety of different sized businesses.

Director of Kingscrown Group, Daniel Pollock said: "We acquired this property because we could see it had enormous potential. It was built specifically for HMRC which occupied it until



2017 and the whole building has always been open-plan. We've broken it up to create space that aligns with current market demand and we are already in talks with a number of occupiers."



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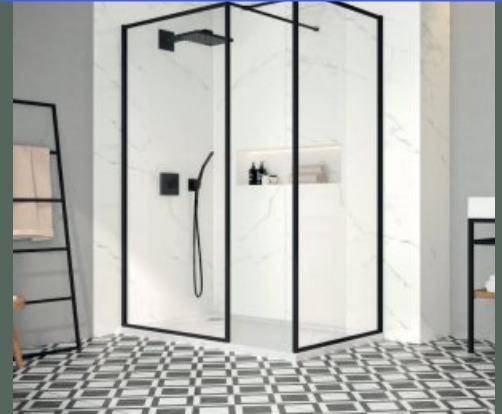
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Tenure: Freehold Council Tax Band: F

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In 2021, the exclusive rare! division of Sanderson Young broke a new record, achieving 100 sales, at an average of around £1.25 Million, throughout the year.



The success of the branch has continued into 2022, where already this year 64 sales have been achieved by the end of July, with a number of those properties being sold "off market", away from the glare of publicity. The success of this specialist division is overseen by Chairman, Duncan Young, and is supported very well by his Branch Manager, Ashleigh Sundin, who has extensive knowledge throughout the region. "Our recent success has led to the recruitment of two new members for our team in the rare! office, Mary Walker and Emma Lane, who both joined us from an established residential agency in Jesmond, and from Mary's point of view she returns to work with her colleagues who she began estate agency with over 30 years ago."

The experience of knowledge throughout the rare! office is complimented by Duncan's son, Harry Young, who has been in the company for some years now and is very keen to fill his shoes with enthusiasm, vigour, and confidence.

The depth of knowledge throughout this specialist office is enhanced by the support of excellent Sales Coordinators and a very good Administration team. Sanderson Young rare! deal with the sale of houses in excess of £850,000 within Newcastle and over £1 Million on a regional basis, where they have a number of proven sales techniques and marketing skills to ensure that the very top end of the housing market is very well supported by a first class agency.

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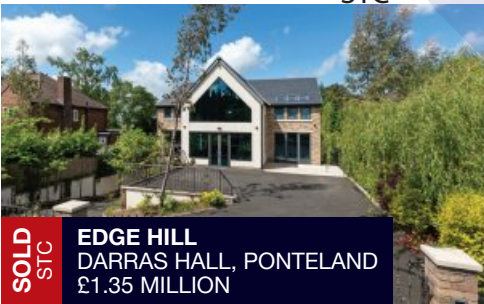
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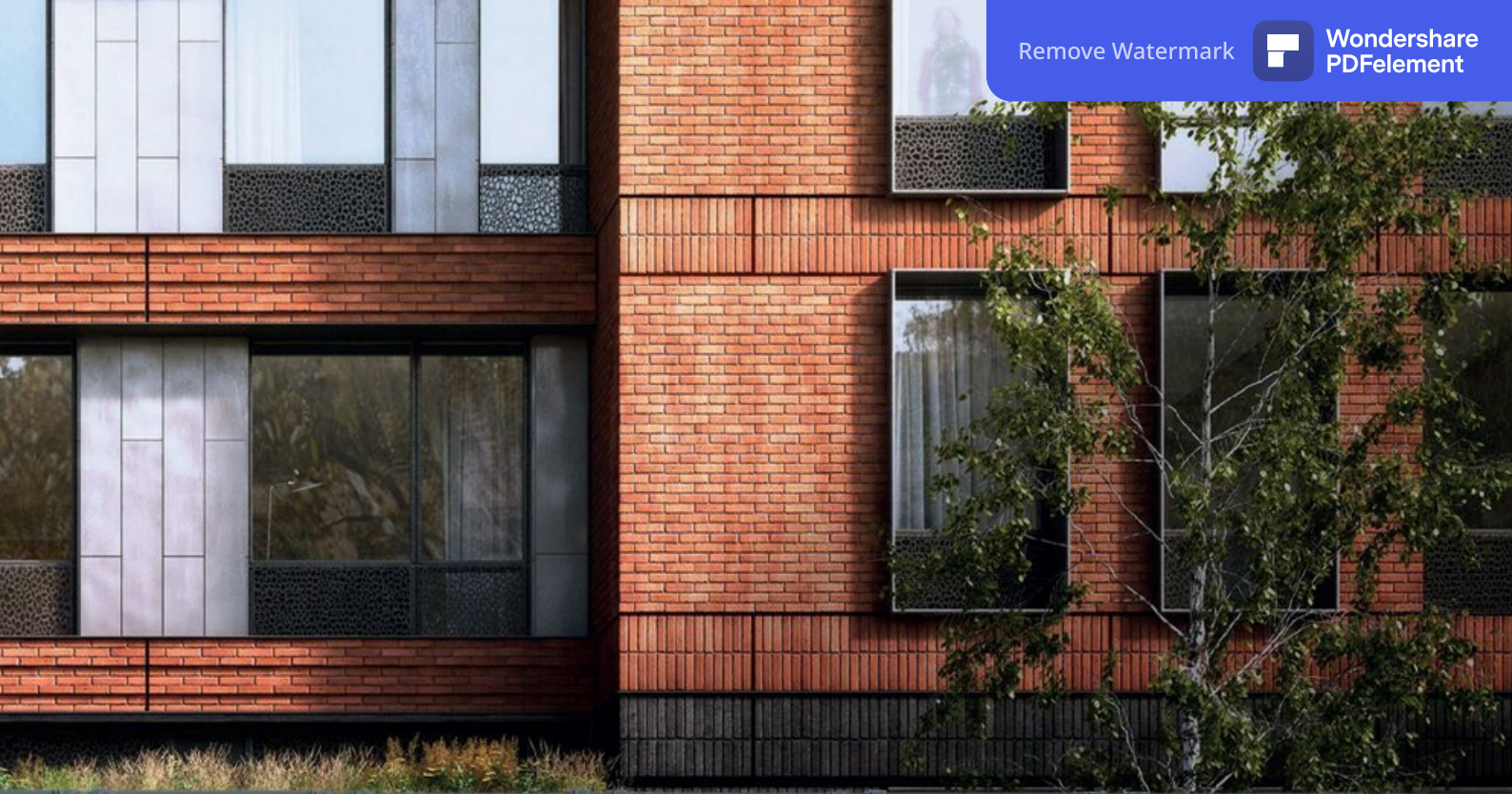
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# EAGERLY ANTICIPATED HEXHAM DEVELOPMENT LAUNCHED BY youngsRPS



With the multi-level nature of the site and the need to undertake careful civil engineering works, together with the outbreak of Covid and more recently hold ups in the supply of building materials, the formal launch of The Wool House was unavoidably delayed until May.

**And with the developers of the apartments, which is under construction on the former swimming pool site in Gilesgate in Hexham and marketed by youngsRPS, recently agreeing prices on a selection of apartments within the luxury development, interest has soared.**

Kim Harrison of youngsRPS commented: "It is extremely difficult right now for developers and indeed anyone involved in construction, to know from one week to the next how much materials are going to cost and even if they are going to be available – especially those that are imported.

The Wool House offers a choice of forty-five one and two-bed apartments, duplexes and penthouse apartments on six floors and with views across the Tyne Valley or the town towards Hexham Abbey, it looks set to be an extremely popular scheme.

Quite simply, there is no other development like it in Northumberland, let alone Hexham, because it combines a superb location in the heart of a bustling market town and offers a high specification of build and finish with a wide choice of accommodation. It also has the added benefits of on-site parking and private gardens.

We are really excited to be involved in such a fabulous scheme, which will make a major contribution to the choice of housing on offer in and around the town."

Director of The Wool House, Bob Skelly, added: "We wanted to bring some peace of mind to interested parties and as there has been such strong interest in the apartments, we felt it was a good idea to fix costs on some for those who wish to reserve early which they can do with a reservation fee of £1,000.

***"This means that for anyone who reserves now, we will guarantee pricing until the Autumn."***

The Wool House show apartment should be open by end of the year, the costs of the individual apartment types should be agreed by September/October and the overall development will be complete at around Easter 2023.

**For further information, please contact youngsRPS Hexham  
Tel: 01434 608980 or email [hexham@youngsrps.com](mailto:hexham@youngsrps.com)**



# The WOOL HOUSE

## Prices Now Released For Hexham's Luxury Apartment Scheme

The Wool House, Gilesgate, Hexham NE46 3BT



This is a unique apartment development, finished off with a high standard of fixtures and fittings and designed across six floors with parking beneath.

- Comprising 45 luxury one and two-bedroom, duplex and penthouse apartments
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## GEORGE F WHITE: BUILDING ON MOMENTUM

A record-breaking turnover, a significant business merger, and two new offices; it has been a truly exciting year for George F. White, but the best is yet to come...

### Record Breaking Turnover

2022 is a year to remember for George F. White as the firm announced a record-breaking rise of 12 per cent on the previous year's turnover. Most notably, the milestone turnover is the highest in the company's 43-year history.

Continued growth is top of the agenda for Managing Director Sally Hart, who is aiming to almost double this year's growth by the end of their next financial year.

Sally said: "The property industry has evolved at a rapid pace over the last couple of years and we've taken advantage of the opportunities to grow our portfolio. Building on this momentum is essential to our growth strategy, supporting more businesses and creating local jobs."

"Such considerable growth isn't possible without a strong team with shared values which I'm proud to say we have, and our success belongs to each individual playing their key part. We have ambitions to grow the team by 15% in the next 12 months, with some exciting roles now open across our services at varying levels."

### Business Merger

In May, George F. White welcomed Johnson Tucker LLP into its consultancy practice to further strengthen its commercial property footprint in the region and beyond.

Richard Garland, Partner said: "We are delighted to welcome Johnson Tucker into the George F. White family. The team prides itself on attention to detail and driving the right deal through holistic advice. We offer a specialist service comparable to large national firms, whilst maintaining the flexibility of a regional client-focused business. The merger with Johnson



George F. White's Richard Garland,  
Sally Hart and Robyn Peat

Tucker builds upon our expertise and expands our range of specialist services, allowing us to apply both to larger projects than ever before."

### Office Expansion

As well as opening a new office on Dean Street in Newcastle earlier in the year, George F. White most recently launched an office in the market town of Hexham, allowing the firm to support their large client portfolio in the Tyne Valley and introduce its existing residential service due to demand in the area.

A team of experts across the rural, residential, commercial, planning and development sectors are already in place, including Partners Tim Michie, Elliot Taylor, Craig Ross and Gary Robinson – all who have extensive experience in

the region. The firm is looking to further expand the team in the coming months to support the growth of its client base.

Commenting on the Hexham branch, Sally Hart said: "I'm delighted to see this new location open as we have an increasing client base in Hexham and the surrounding Tyne Valley, Cumbria and Western Scotland, particularly across our rural, planning and development and commercial sectors. It also puts us in the best position to take advantage of new opportunities, alongside our expansion into the residential property sector."

**For more information and updates on George F. White, please visit their website [www.georgefwhite.co.uk](http://www.georgefwhite.co.uk)**

# DASTARDLY DEEDS DONE IN THE DARK



Damiano Rea

I confess to a fascination with the history of Heaton and the areas journey from small, outlying farms to the current vibrant urban landscape. During the centuries, Heaton must have endured crimes that would horrify today's hipster café society.

**From the 13th to the 17th century, the Border Reivers would have made life challenging as Heaton was well outside the city walls. The 19th century would have seen footpads, cut-purses and mountebanks lurking in the hedgerows.**

And now comes a wave of crime that has landlords, managing agents and tenants gnashing their teeth in rage. Binjacking. Yes, the theft of wheelie bins has become a major issue here in Heaton and, no doubt, elsewhere in the North East.

Originally bins were provided free by the council. A simple solution to keeping our streets free of rubbish and ensuring its efficient disposal. All well and good, until your bin is stolen. Then the Council require a payment of £25.00 to replace each one. Quite why anybody would want to steal a bin is beyond me, but it happens. And it causes a chain reaction.

Let us say the tenant of number 6 puts out their bin like a responsible citizen. And comes home to find it missing. They need a bin and the simple solution is to walk up the street and purloin the bin from number 26. Now number 26 is without a bin and the simple solution is... I am sure you can see where this is going. It is quite amusing to imagine masked binjackers criss-crossing the back lanes of Heaton at dead of night dragging squeaking wheely bins in their wake.

But as with any crime, the result can be less than amusing for the victims. Let us say a tenancy has ended. The outgoing tenants have put their bins out which have been emptied then vanished. The incoming tenant expects bins to be provided. The landlord has supplied bins and is unwilling to shell out £50.00 for new ones.

The Council really do not care who pays them for the new bin and are now using their new

property licensing powers to come down hard on the landlord rather than trying to mediate. A tenant of ours rang the Council recently to report that she had no bin. A Council Licensing Inspector duly arrived. She walked straight into the back yard. "You have no bins" was her august judgement. Clear to see why these guys earn the big bucks?

The end result of this ludicrous situation is serious. Rubbish accumulates and can pile up in yards and back lanes. Glad tidings for rats, which are becoming an increasingly common problem. The answer is pretty simple. The Council should replace stolen bins. Overall the numbers are small but the knock-on effect of binjacking is serious. In 1927 the composer Ray Henderson sang "The best things in life are free". I am sure he did not envisage free bins when he wrote it, but streets free from rubbish must rank, if not the best, certainly as a pretty good thing in life.

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*Heaton Property is an award winning full-service estate agency from the North East set up in 2005. In September 2021 the company won gold in the 2021/2022 Best Estate Agent Guide.*



Neil Turner

## GREEN BELT – WHAT IS ALL THE FUSS ABOUT?

By Neil Turner, Howarth Litchfield

There isn't a day goes by without an article on house prices, second homeowners, new housing and the green belt. Each of these subjects is hugely complex and arouses emotions of jealousy, anger and frustration.

**Add in the current financial issues of higher inflation and increasing interest rates and it's enough to make an architect like myself wonder how all the matters are going to pan out.**

I am fascinated by the status of the green belt - currently a key subject for the two Conservative candidates who are vying to become Prime Minister. Both are offering different approaches. Rishi Sunak is advocating a moratorium on greenfield development land whilst Liz Truss is calling for the abandonment of strategic housing targets. So, who is right?

I think we need to understand what the green belt is, and why it was set up and how it needs to evolve to suit the century we live in.

Green areas have been appreciated since the Victorians built parks for workers to enjoy. The advent of trains allowed people to easily



Image courtesy of Sky Image



travel outside the towns. The term green belt was invented in the 1920s and seen as a buffer zone between the commercial zones of towns and their residential areas. In the 1930s, local authorities bought land around London and created a 'green belt'. It was only post war when we had the 1947 Planning act, which allowed the green belts as we know to be created in the planning circular of 1955. That's the history lesson over!

The dilemma this created was that green belt land is not meant to be a land bank, nor is it land reserved exclusively for a rich elite to allow them to live in large estates in the country. The intention was to resist random development and the pressure on uncontrolled development. The pressure to build in the green belt has always been there.

Green belt doesn't just mean a beautiful green valley - indeed much of the land designated as green belt is quite dull, ordinary land. Its status comes from its geographical position and relationship to urban areas.

So how do we protect green belt and allow people to own and live in a house, in a country that is growing?

Certainly, there is a compelling argument for the openness and health benefits when visiting the countryside, not forgetting the ecological and environmental considerations and the benefits of trees and landscape - in our desire to reduce carbon use.

Should we restrict new build to brown field

sites only, thereby regenerating our towns and suburbs? I do think we should actively assist this position, but we can't simply rule out all development in green belt. I have dealt with a couple of applications recently (in the countryside) and the current rules are contradictory, complex and frequently expensive for clients.

We need to re-evaluate green belt and its purpose. These pressures vary around the country. In the North East we don't have the same house pressures as the South East, but we still have specific housing requirements and challenges. I often listen to some of my younger staff as they look to buy their first houses.

Development should be permitted in the green belt. To get the right balance I would place a higher bar on development standards, in terms of the standard of architectural design and for specific purposes. I don't want to see generic houses across the fields, but beautiful well considered housing estates can (and should) fit in. Innovation and experimental houses as one-off developments can help mass housing improve along with specific businesses that need to be in the country to grow and serve its communities.

Life is never black and white and nor should it be in the green belt.

**Neil Turner can be contacted on 0191 3849470 or email [nturner@hlpuk.com](mailto:nturner@hlpuk.com) [www.howarthlitchfield.com](http://www.howarthlitchfield.com)**



The Ropes, Modobloc development (Artist impression)

## DEVELOPMENT OVERLOOKING OUSEBURN AND RIVER TYNE IS UNDERWAY

Construction has started on a residential development overlooking the Ouseburn Valley and River Tyne, Newcastle.

**The Ropes is an exclusive development comprising seven design-led, four-storey townhouses in the heart of a growing urban community. Each house features three bedrooms along with a studio that can be utilised as a fourth bedroom.**

Regional developer Modobloc has appointed Tyneside Developments as the main contractor onsite. The terraced townhouses on St Lawrence Road have been designed by a professional team from award-winning architects Edwards Architecture along with engineering specialist JC Consulting.

The project represents the growing relationship between Robbie Kalbraier of Tyneside Developments and George Jenkins at Modobloc. This is the first significant project together, with more planned in the future.

The unique, contemporary homes have been designed with an emphasis on light, space and the striking views along the River Tyne. Properties each feature two balconies.

As well as the use of modern materials, the properties are being built using modern methods of construction that include the use

of Structural Insulated Panels (SIPs), a more sustainable approach to construction.

George Jenkins, MD of Modobloc, explained: "The Ropes will set a new standard in residential property in an area undergoing intense regeneration. It will pave the way for future design-led developments as the Ouseburn becomes one of Newcastle's most desirable places to live."

Over the last two to three years, Modobloc has pipelined over £60m worth of developments. More recently the company has grown its workload through larger residential conversions along with building new homes and commercial developments.

George said: "We have ambitious plans to build more design-led homes and develop more land for both residential and commercial use with exceptional craftsmanship at the forefront. We're always looking at interesting investment and development options in North East communities and beyond."

Construction of The Ropes, a £4m development, is due to be completed by the summer of 2023.

It is expected The Ropes will be sold off-plan



George Jenkins

to homeowners and investors looking to buy a uniquely designed home in an attractive, historic location on the banks of the Tyne.

The properties are coming to market via Michael Mortimer at Newcastle estate agent Hive Estates – who is already taking registrations of interest.

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



## SWIFTLY MOVING ON

Peter Swift, Director at DunwoodieSwift Architects, tells us about the exciting changes taking place at one of Newcastle's long-established practices.

**Having been a Director at Dewjoc Architects in Newcastle for 10 years or so I decided to set up my own architectural Practice, SWIFT Architects, in 2011. I chose to do this with some highly talented people I had worked with for many years on numerous developments, both locally and nationally. These include St James' Gate & the Newgate Centre in Newcastle; Metro Riverside Park, M&S Lifestore and the Baltic Jury's Inn in Gateshead; Wynyard Business Park on Teesside & Belmont Business Park in Durham and Heathrow Express Rail Link and a number of large retail projects around the country.**

In 2018 SWIFT Architects merged with Dunwoodie Architects, a well-respected specialist healthcare business of some 30 years standing to create a combined business with strength and experience in specialist acute, primary and mental healthcare as well as vast experience in commercial, retail, leisure, transport and residential sectors. At that time it was decided to retain the Dunwoodie name as it was so well known, particularly in healthcare circles and had successfully stood the test of time. However, as the client base & sector spread has developed significantly and is now much broader than when the businesses merged we believe it is now the right time to update the company name and branding to reflect the changes that have taken place over the past four and a half years.

As a result, going forward, the company name will change to DunwoodieSwift Architects. We have consciously linked the two names as part of the re-brand as the businesses have been functioning successfully as a single entity for over four years and the profile of the combined Practice is very different to what it was when they came together. We believe it is very important to demonstrate that significant change has taken place within the business and we feel that can be most tangibly demonstrated by organically evolving the company name. Whilst still having a very strong healthcare background and portfolio, the business has developed dramatically over the last few years.

I have repeated many times that I have been involved in some big projects during my career but none have generated more comment or interest than the STACK Newcastle project. Whilst being a relatively small project it has brought a lot of pleasure to a lot of people over the four years it has been open, despite being closed for long periods during the pandemic.

I took the £100m Newgate Shopping centre project to planning twice, once whilst at Dewjoc & subsequently with the current occupier mix whilst running SWIFT Architects. One thing I can safely say is that not many people ask me about the Newgate Centre project with its 600 plus student beds and Maldron Hotel but STACK constantly generates comment and conversation, the vast majority of it being very positive. It would be very easy to say it's just a load of shipping containers thrown together but I think it has been demonstrated over the last four years that it's sum is a lot greater than it's parts and it has brought a lot of pleasure to a lot of people in that time. It's unfortunate that it has now come to the end of its life but that was always the intention for this 'meanwhile' use. However, as many of you will have seen, we are now working with the future tenant on a new leisure scheme as part of the wider Pilgrim Street redevelopment not far from the previous STACK site.

Much of the learning we gained on the Newcastle STACK project was put to good use at STACK Seaburn in Sunderland which, in my opinion, is a step up from the Newcastle scheme, perched as it is overlooking the beautiful North East coastline. I wasn't particularly familiar with the Sunderland seafront but I can genuinely say that it has been a very pleasant discovery. Hopefully it can prove to be another significant milestone in the continuing development of DunwoodieSwift Architects who have a bright future ahead, with a number of very exciting projects all around the country. Watch this space, you will be hearing a lot more about us as our evolution picks up pace!

**To find out more go to [www.dunwoodieswift.co.uk](http://www.dunwoodieswift.co.uk)**

“

***...STACK constantly generates comment & conversation...***



*Peter Swift*

# WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN COMMERCIAL CONVERSION OPPORTUNITIES

If you're ready to take the next step and undertake some bigger projects, commercial conversions may be your next focus. However, whilst it may give you a heady rush of excitement to start a bigger project, your due diligence is even more necessary and can be a little different from the research you would do for smaller residential projects.

## Questions To Ask Yourself

Just like when looking at smaller residential projects, getting the basic information allows you to look at whether the project is viable and whether it's a right fit for you. Additionally, like smaller projects, knowing the area, what the demand is, and your exit strategy all must be considered and should be some of the first questions you ask yourself. If you know, for example, that flats are in high demand in that area, then your exit strategy may be to convert the commercial project into various flats and either sell them or rent them. From there, a more in-depth look into the project can happen. However, if flats or apartments are not in high demand in that area, what's your strategy? What are you converting the commercial property into? Would a House of Multiple Occupancy (HMO) work well in that area? Maybe serviced accommodation? Or is it a viable option to refurbish the property into rental space for offices, or a local shop etc.?

Making sure to ask yourself what the demand is in that area is a good way to work out whether the project is viable.

## What Surveys Do I Need?

Surveys and other crucial pieces of information can make or break a project, so it's important to know which ones to get, why and when. With help from our sister company, Ashdan Consulting, we are fortunate to know the different surveys needed when looking at bigger projects.

It should be said that all surveys should be carried out before any purchase process has begun, and by the professionals!

Firstly, a Condition Survey should be conducted by an RICS Building Surveyor. This survey is carried out to understand the condition of the existing elements of the building, for example the roof/windows/doors etc.

If the Condition Survey has highlighted problems with the structure of the building, this leads to a Structural Engineer being



commissioned for a Structural Survey. The information that comes to light via this survey could very well mark the end of the project before it's even started!

Further to the above surveys, a Measured Digital Survey should be carried out, preferably done by an RICS Land Surveyor. This survey is essential to inform the architect of the dimensions of the critical areas of the existing building, which they will then use to develop their designs.

Included within the necessary surveys is an asbestos survey. These are standard inspection surveys which are typically non-intrusive but may include sampling of suspicious materials. But, all asbestos surveys should be carried out by a registered asbestos survey company!

A final survey to be conducted is the survey of the existing services installations. These surveys determine whether the mechanical, electrical, and plumbing installations are adequate in their capacity and condition to accept any new installations proposed.

As you can see, looking into potential commercial conversion projects takes on a whole new level of due diligence and extra questions to answer. And as always, any project you as a developer seek to undertake should be thoroughly investigated and researched, and with commercial conversion projects, this can take extra time and effort!

**The key is to get the right team of professionals around you who know what they are doing!**  
[www.ashdan-estates.com](http://www.ashdan-estates.com)





# Eothen Care Homes

*Compassion, comfort and companionship*



**Eothen Care Homes enhances the lives of older people by providing experienced and specialist care at our three North East care homes**

**Whitley Bay**

**Gosforth**

**Wallsend**



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.

Our Wallsend 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.

@EothenHomes

www.eothenhomes.org.uk

0191 281 9100



Neil Hart

## BRADLEY HALL NAMED MOST ACTIVE AGENT ACROSS THREE NORTH EAST COUNTIES

Leading property firm Bradley Hall has once again been named among the North East's most active property agencies.

**The full-service property consultancy, which has seven branches stretching from Alnwick to Tees Valley, topped the EGI North East lettings and occupational sales ranking during the second quarter of 2022.**

EGI's On-Demand Rankings are calculated by the total amount of floorspace transacted, or total value for investment sales by property agencies across the UK.

Bradley Hall topped the rankings for all three North East counties included in the report – County Durham, Northumberland and Tyne & Wear – having closed 47 deals across the region from April to June.

This included high profile deals such as the sale of Claremont House for £2.35million, 16 affordable homes sold to Thirteen Group for £2.23million and the letting of a 96,7367sq ft industrial unit at Merrington Lane Industrial Estate in Spennymoor.

Neil Hart, Group Managing Director at Bradley Hall, said: "This is a great achievement for everyone associated with Bradley Hall.

"As an independent company which has been rooted in the North East for 34 years, we are proud to be in a position where we are continuing to compete with some of the biggest names in the industry and this is testament to the fantastic collective effort and the incredible knowledge of our teams right across the region."

The listing tops off what has already been a stellar year for the company, following the

opening of its new Leeds head office and having seen the value of its sales, lettings and acquisitions exceed £160,000,000 in the year to May 2022.

Hart added: "The past few years have been a real challenge for the industry, so to be in a position where we are continuing to break records and expand into new areas is absolutely fantastic.

"Not only has this enabled our expansion into Yorkshire but it has also allowed us to create jobs across the business in almost every department, from surveying to planning and design and mortgages, and we're excited to see what the future holds.

"While there will undoubtedly be challenges along the way, there is a real buzz around the North East at the moment and we're confident that, as we look to the future, the region will continue to be seen as a desirable place for businesses to invest and grow."

**For more information on Bradley Hall, visit: [www.bradleyhall.co.uk](http://www.bradleyhall.co.uk)**

The continued adventures of...

# Ziggy!



**Hi everyone!**

**I shall soon be going on my holidays to the coast to live with Aunty Lisa and Uncle Rob as Cally is what they call 'in season'. Not sure what that means.**

**It will be nice though to play with my cousins Kinny and Maisie. Anyway, got to go and pack my things. See you.**

**James from Gosforth asks:**

**Q.** Every year gusts of wind dislodge one or two of my roof slates. The roof is in its original 1920s condition with no underfelt. There are adverts in the papers for a 'foam spray solution' for old roofs. These are guaranteed for twenty or so years. Is this the easiest way forward, or should we look to get the whole roof redone?

**A.** The fact that slates are slipping every year probably indicates that the nails which hold them to the timber battens are rusted through. Roofers refer to this as nail fatigue or nail sickness, and it is

definitely time to have the roof stripped off and re-covered.

Having foam sprayed on to the undersides of the slates may sound like a wonderful high-tech solution but it is actually a bad idea. It is at odds with the recommendations of the Building Regulations, which require a clear 50mm ventilated gap between insulation and roof covering. The foam sets hard and removes the two vital attributes that allow a traditional roof to last and perform so well for so long – the ability to breathe and the ability to move.

The foam completely encloses the timber battens and the top surfaces of the rafters, which might cause them to rot. It also sticks tight to the slates and makes it almost impossible for them to ever be re-used. You will also probably find that the cost of the spray-on foam solution will be three or four times that of having the roof re-covered in the traditional way.

Try to find a roofer who will remove the existing slates carefully, and re-use as many as possible. Also make sure that the roofer uses a breathable sarking felt, and allows it to sag between the rafters. The ridge tiles and any hip tiles should be rebedded using lime-and-sand mortar to match the original; do not allow the roofer to use sand-and-cement.



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

## Interest Rate Myth-Busting:



SANDERSON  
YOUNG

The average UK house price currently sits at approx £280,000 and if a buyer had a 10% deposit (£28,000) this would leave them requiring a mortgage of £252,000.



This means that over 25 years at an interest rate of 2.8% your monthly mortgage payment would hypothetically be £1,169.



If we were to increase the rate to 3.3% (0.5% increase) the monthly repayment would be £1,235 and we appreciate this will have an impact.



However, this is only an increase of £2.17 per day. This is currently cheaper than the price of a fancy coffee.



Talk to our team of experts today for more sound financial advice on how the market is currently performing.

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



## New radio media training courses aired

Whether you are giving a pre-recorded telephone interview for two minutes or appearing in a live TV studio for an hour, it is essential to properly prepare for your media appearance by thinking carefully about the key messages you want to convey.

Now, a PR company has produced a short training package to help small businesses gain the confidence they need to come across professionally to the watching and listening audience.

Keith Newman from Highlights PR has designed the course specifically for small businesses and charities. The half-day session includes information on understanding the programmes audience and how to tailor your messaging accordingly. It also looks at presentation skills, body language and how to “bridge” questions that are awkward or difficult to answer.

Uniquely, the sessions take place in the Bedlington studios of community radio station Radio Northumberland giving attendees the opportunity to be interviewed in a real media environment.

“Having the microphones, headphones and mixing desk in the sessions is a great way for people to learn in a safe environment. It’s all about learning easy, practical tips that will make an interview less daunting or pressurised. It really is a fun course and there’s lots to learn.”

**Course can be booked by emailing [keith@highlightspr.co.uk](mailto:keith@highlightspr.co.uk)**



## Leading digital agency appoints new group SEO director

One of the UK and Ireland’s largest independent digital marketing agencies, Mediaworks, has appointed Alistair Hague as its group SEO director.

Alistair joins the award-winning agency with over 15 years’ experience leading senior marketing, global search engine optimisation programmes and large-scale web projects.

Alistair said: “Mediaworks is extremely well known for delivering commercially-driven digital campaigns in the healthcare and finance markets, to name but two. Their rapidly growing client base matches my ambition to continue to work with leading global brands and ambitious challengers looking to disrupt their respective industries. I’m thrilled to be onboard.

“There’s already and incredibly talented SEO team in place and I’m looking forward to tapping into Mediaworks’ advanced in-house proprietary tools and market leading systems.”

Brett Jacobson, CEO and founder of Mediaworks, added: “Alistair’s skillsets and enterprise level experience in digital transformation projects and SEO is exactly what we’ve been looking for. His experience will play a significant role in shaping our clients SEO projects both nationally and internationally. His global experience means he’s a perfect fit for our team.

“He’s already making a hugely positive impact on the way we are delivering our clients’ SEO campaigns. I’m really excited to welcome him to Mediaworks as part of the senior leadership team and seeing the impact he’ll have on our delivery capabilities in SEO.”



## New automotive account director for print and marketing firm

A Teesside-based print and marketing company has appointed a dedicated account director to support its growth.

AlphaGraphics North East (AGNE), which is based in Stockton, has taken on Michelle Keeton as part of its plans to develop its automotive marketing services.

Michelle has an extensive 30-year career in print, packaging and marketing across varied industries, including automotive, food and beverages. At AGNE, she will be responsible for managing the account of one of the firm’s big name automotive clients.

Michelle said: “I’ll be managing one of the biggest accounts here at AGNE and will be responsible for the day-to-day running across the whole account – working with marketing teams nationwide to provide an excellent service.

“I’ll be advising on their print and marketing materials in dealerships, including POS, display and signage, as well as helping develop their event campaigns.

“My job is to offer the highest level of customer service to our clients and provide them with a dedicated point of contact with access to support and advice for all their print and marketing needs.”

AGNE recently announced its plans for further growth, having expanded its premises and taken on more clients, enabling it to recruit new roles.

Director Sean Costigan said: “We are excited to have Michelle on board in this period of growth. Her role will allow us to expand the team further to better manage some of our contracts.

“It also gives us scope to develop our services in the automotive industry going forward.”



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Rule No.2



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**WITH**

AND THE WHY?

**PURPOSE**



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# MARKETING AND MEDIA MATTERS

In the latest of our series of 'Marketing and Media Matters' features Northern Insight talks to leading figures in the region's media industry.

This month we meet...

## ELLEN HEDLEY

Co-founder, Vida Creative

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

If being an actress counts then yes...I was the shyest child ever though so I'm not sure how that would have panned out!

I've always enjoyed being creative and took creative subjects at GCSE and A-Level. So, when I started looking at careers, agency life always appealed as I thought that it would allow me to use my creativity every day.

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

I studied film at university then went to work in a PR agency, before moving to a job in the marketing team at a university. I stayed in higher education marketing for a while, working at two different universities in the process. I worked with agencies to commission various projects and was always jealous of the things they got to do.

Long story short, I set up Vida with my partner so that we could have creative autonomy, and to do good work with good people. Vida is now five years old, with a team of nine that work alongside tech, events and corporate companies on branding, design, marketing, website and web application development.

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

Covid was a big one, like it was for most people. As a digital agency it didn't take us much to move and adapt to working from home, but it was more the uncertainty of what was happening. It was hard to keep up with everything, so we had to work hard to keep our team updated and reassured.

We were very lucky though, in that once it was clear what the situation was with covid, our tech sector work increased. It meant we could grow the business in the way that we had initially wanted to. Along with keeping the team busy and focused on what we do best, whilst everything else happening in the world was so out of the ordinary.

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

When I was very early on in my career I went to a social media conference where Steven Bartlett was talking. He's a year younger than me, and he was talking about how he'd founded and grown Social Chain to a huge business. At the time I didn't think I'd one day have my own business, but I did find it pretty inspirational! Ever since then I've kept an eye on what he's up to. Now being a young founder myself, knowing all of the challenges you have as a business owner, makes me respect what he has already accomplished massively.

### How have you adapted your business during the coronavirus crisis and supported clients?

We put a much greater focus on keeping our team as happy and safe as we could. We had more internal video call meetings just to have chats and check ins with each other. Apart from that, we supported our clients to adapt their marketing and brand strategies to be more appropriate for the world we now live in. We also

supported some of our tech clients to pivot their products with UI designs and development work. Many business' strategies will have changed a lot more than usual these past few years! And we've been supporting our clients to stay authentic and relevant during changing times.

### What is your greatest strength?

I'm good at talking to people. Probably because I don't like awkward silences! In all seriousness though, part of my role at Vida is the business development side. So, meeting and speaking to new people is something I've had to get comfortable with more and more over the years.

### What is your biggest weakness?

On the flipside, I can talk too much. I get passionate about things and want to talk about them! During things like discovery workshops it's so important to ask, not answer, the questions we're discussing with clients, and I must admit I find it tricky to stay quiet sometimes during the pauses and thinking time.

### What has been your proudest achievement?

Growing Vida to nine people from absolutely nothing. Creating a company with a great culture and brilliant people. Oh, and doing the Great North Run is up there too!

### What are your remaining career aspirations?

To continue to make Vida a great place to work for our team. And a great agency to work with for our clients. We want to grow a little more, but our aim isn't to become a huge agency. Our main focus is to stay curious, and keep learning so that we can stay current and continue getting better at what we do. Ultimately, so we can deliver the highest quality services, products, and results to our clients for years to come!

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

AI is already prominent, but I see people utilising it a lot more in the next decade. Human connection is so important in everything we do though, so I don't think that will be going anywhere fast. We've already seen web applications becoming more popular too, and I think this will continue. Our team have built a few web apps to date, and we want to continue to grow that side of the business, delivering more bespoke solutions to our clients in the process.

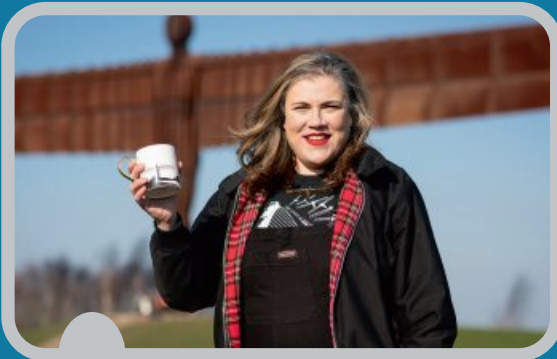
[vidacreative.co.uk](http://vidacreative.co.uk)

“

*...stay curious, and  
keep learning...*

# ...CUTTING THE COSTS...

*Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us what they are doing for their customers and their businesses to help counteract the constant cost of living rises.*



Due to the rising cost of living, all new collections and product ranges include low-cost, entry-level products so that my customers can continue to enjoy Powder Butterfly products. I am also looking at developing more charitable partnerships to make sure that my customers have a positive impact upon their local community, as well as supporting a small business. I always make sure my customers know that for every £1 they spend with any local business, 63p goes back into the local economy. Even if they only spent £1 with local businesses, they are helping this country's economic recovery.

**Corinne Lewis Ward**, [www.powderbutterfly.co.uk](http://www.powderbutterfly.co.uk)



The day camps at Leading Link are thriving this summer with 90 places in both Blyth and Bedlington.

The day starts at 9.30am with breakfast and then right into their first of three activities during the day which is a cocktail of arts and crafts, outdoor pursuits, and fun games. There is even drumming, cycling and dance included together with a couple of trips out.

Bedlington restaurant, La Torre has been delivering great food for the children and the young leaders every day and this all adds to great days!

Feedback from parents has been very well received as six weeks can be a very long time to keep the children occupied and it all adds up causing some real financial pressure on families especially in this current climate. Other parents are able to go to work knowing their child is safe, busy, fed, and happy.

The camps are fully funded by the Northumberland Holiday Activity Partnership made up of DfE's HAF and National Lottery via North East Child Poverty Trust.

Once the summer is over, Leading Link will be straight on to Christmas as we know that the economic situation is set to decline further. However, the best thing is still the smiles both from our amazing young leaders, staff and the children taking part!

**Lyn Horton**, [www.leadinglink.co.uk](http://www.leadinglink.co.uk)



I'm a writer and occult consultant with the distinction of having written more books on the occult than anyone else in the English language with a current total of more than 600. Times are tough for everyone but myself and my organisation have chosen to make things better by reaching out and helping others. I have a new employee. The employee is a 60-year-old Brazilian. Brazil is an unforgiving country and this man with an amazing life and his wonderful young wife found that they didn't have enough money to look after themselves properly. They were having a bowl of water in the middle of the table at meal times in place of food so they would not feel hungry. In short, they were on the short path to starvation: it is difficult to survive on water alone. So, I employed him to post links of my books and so promoting my books and giving him more than enough money to buy food and both of their lives were transformed.

**S Rob**, author, [www.srob.co.uk](http://www.srob.co.uk)



Off The Grid Adventures spends a significant amount of its time working with those less fortunate through our mentoring and support programme. This essential service which is funded through "Children in Need" has been inundated with requests for support and we have worked with over 150 young people and adults on a variety of issues over the last 12 months. The situation is definitely becoming more challenging, and we are getting more creative in how we work due to the rising cost of living. We are always on the lookout for volunteers and if anyone is interested in helping us to support the more vulnerable in the community, drop us an email to arrange an informal chat about what we do!

**Paul Kirkpatrick**,  
[paul@off-the-grid-cic.uk](mailto:paul@off-the-grid-cic.uk)





I know how hard things are for everyone, so I've developed a concept for the KUDOS Advertising Platform - the world's first Social Benefit Network.

It's coming soon and it will radically redistribute the advertising spend (some £24 Billion in 2021) of UK companies to those that need it most: UK people, their families, and charities! Basically, you see an ad and shop. You leave a review and get rewarded.

Keep your eyes peeled for how to register soon!

*Matt Allen, Founder and Director KUDOS, matt@kudosuk.co.uk*



Although we can't directly influence the rising cost of living or provide an answer to the crisis, we can offer support and guidance. For example, through our media contacts our members have highlighted their concerns on national TV news, radio, and news print. We are also seeing an increase in members of the Forum posting their experiences and requests for help on our social media channels.

*Karen Goldfinch, Chair, www.northtynesidebusinessforum.org.uk*

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

## Are you on the media's RADAR?

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- Interview on Radio Northumberland
- Crisis PR management advice
- Feature in Highlights PR's newsletter
- Exclusive offers on PR, media training and more
- LED advert beamed from the floating office



Contact Keith Newman for more details.

Visit him on his floating office

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Veronica Swindale

## WHY WE SHOULD BE INVESTING IN OUR EMPLOYEES' TRAINING

The concept of buying people in with the skills and qualifications you need and keeping them forever has long gone.

---

**The Great Resignation is with us – It's an open market. Talented people are reviewing what they want out of life and their career. They are**

**often looking to pursue other paths, perhaps in different locations than where they were two years ago.**

However, talented individuals are in demand more than ever.

As employers, we invest in human capital, which encompasses a person's knowledge, skills, attributes, experience, and health. We should acknowledge the strengths that people bring to our roles and be prepared to support them through their personal and professional development.

Someone I know started a new role recently, and, in her induction, there was no acknowledgement that she had already had ten years of work experience! Therefore, she was treated as a 'newbie' to work and the organisation. Both communication and internal marketing are key here.

A recent McKinsey<sup>(1)</sup> report shows that employees change roles every 2-4 years, with 80% moving to new companies. Movement across or outside the organisation builds our human capital, so in the fields of marketing and communications, we need to break the mould

of 'my employer is going to pay for this, but I need to pay them back if I move within two years'. We hear this often hear at nesma. Our response is usually 'don't worry because your next job will give you better pay, and you will be able to pay those course fees back easily.' Is this kind of approach outdated now? Ask for a contribution to membership fees or assessment fees but don't try to trap them with a financial threat or, worse, put them off studying because of the financial burden.

Paying for a qualification does not guarantee employee loyalty. Paying for a qualification (and employers pay for at least 80% of our students) means that you recognise that the skills and behaviours acquired will enhance your organisation's well-being and your employee's motivation and confidence.

We love seeing our students succeed in their professional exams and then learn that they have been promoted, which shows that the organisation is thinking about the bigger picture.

The latest trend we have seen emerging is employers putting whole teams through their professional exams. Creating a motivated, collaborative, and educated workforce upskilled to a professional level that the organisation needs with the employers seeing an immediate impact on the business.

The McKinsey report further asserts that we should take a longer-term view in investing and developing our current workforce. Invest today, and we will all reap future benefits. The person you develop today, even though they may leave you in the short term, may come back again in the future because of the support and platform you provided for them to progress when they started. In this way, you contribute to what society needs – increasingly qualified and mobile talent – to help our organisations and economy survive and grow in increasingly dynamic times.

Further research undertaken by nesma locally found that employers relied heavily on robust personal development plans to help new starters become embedded within the workforce and be productive from the outset.

Skills and experience are essential, along with understanding required behaviours, and it is difficult for new starters to learn these if they are not alongside colleagues in the workplace. New starters should be encouraged to be alongside colleagues as much as possible in the early stages to ensure that an appropriate work ethic can be developed for timekeeping, productivity, and communication. Supported by a personal development plan, they can get off to a stronger start.

A recent initiative in Cumbria has shown that offering work experience to people looking for a career resulted in over 40% of those provided a placement staying on in employment. Imagine if we could replicate that across our regions. Roles are now appearing that our teachers and lecturers have not heard of yet. Fast-tracking for the future? Now, there's a thought!

**Take a look at [www.nesma.co.uk](http://www.nesma.co.uk) for marketing, digital marketing and communications qualifications and workshops for you and your employees.**

(1) July 15, 2022 | Podcast | McKinsey Daily Read  
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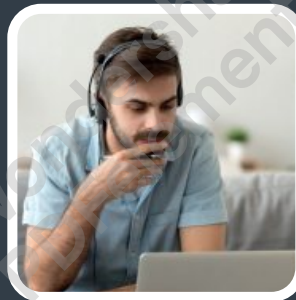
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# DELIVERING GROWTH THROUGH DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Revenue growth specialist Revolution successfully transforms clients' businesses by helping them incorporate new technology into their growth strategy.

**The award-winning revenue growth agency, Revolution, has seen an increasing demand for its technical services over the last 12 months after leading several public and private sector clients through successful digital transformation projects.**

Revolution, headquartered in Gateshead with a second office in Manchester, is a full-stack growth agency that takes a multi-faceted approach to your business growth. The team of developers, designers, and demand generators will transform your business by addressing four key components: business model, key processes, admin overhead, and market share growth.

Through innovative digital transformation projects and targeted demand generation strategies, Revolution has generated an average 137% increase in revenue for its clients in 2022 (Jan - Jun). Revolution's clients who invest an average of £9,000 per month across digital transformation and demand generation projects are set to see an average annual return of more than £250,000 in real terms, proving that brands who implement a robust growth strategy are making a worthwhile investment.

Consumers' interaction with brands has changed over recent years, and technology is developing more rapidly than ever. Last month, YouTube announced a partnership with Shopify. The collaboration between the two tech giants will allow creators to display products from their Shopify stores throughout their channels, below videos, during live streams, and at the end of videos - a sign of evolving times.

Search Strategist, Alexandra Grecoe has been a member of the demand generation team at Revolution for eight months. Alexandra said, "SEO plays a massive part in our digital transformation projects; it's an excellent opportunity to enhance a website's code, content, and authority to boost brand visibility in search engines. When migrations from platform to platform are done correctly, it leads to massive growth potential. Leveraging search data will go a long way toward satisfying both your users and search engines.

"Technical SEO alone will not propel you to the top of Google or Bing. However, a technically unsound website will most likely have limited visibility on search engines, preventing brands from reaching their growth KPIs. Our data-driven technical strategies are rooted in driving organic search performance with a commercially balanced approach."

In this digital era, understanding the essential elements you need to target when developing your strategy is critical. There are many different strategies brands can adopt for growth, and choosing which type is most worthy of your investment will depend on your company's goals. Having a clear idea of what you want your business to achieve is the first step in identifying which services would benefit you the most.

Over the last two decades, Revolution has helped many high-performing, ambitious businesses grow, and the agency is on track to achieve its own growth target of 40% year-on-year



Adam Catlow

in 2022. The Demand Generation and Digital Transformation teams will transform your digital presence through strategy and design by reinventing the digital ecosystem surrounding your business. Revolution's technical services include UX and UI, web development, API integrations, Technical SEO and custom software development.

Harnessing the power of digital has numerous benefits for businesses across all industries. The main advantage is that it will significantly increase revenue. Other benefits include cost savings, expansion into new markets, enhancing your brand's online persona and streamlining the user experience journey for your customers. If you are looking to stay ahead of the curve and grow your business revenue, including digital marketing in your strategy and deploying is essential.

Chief Technical Officer (CTO) Adam Catlow, who joined Revolution in 2021 and leads the digital transformation team, knows the value of incorporating tech into your growth strategy. Adam explains, "As economic uncertainty looms and a recession seems more and more likely, the number of worries (and potential unknowns) for businesses and organisations increase. Digital Transformation Strategies allow us to build resilience in facing these challenges and fine-tune delivery. Taking steps to lower the costs of sales support, administration tasks and customer experience, whilst increasing efficiency across operations and fulfilment are areas all businesses should be looking to address. Using technology as an enabler to facilitate these transformations will inherently reduce costs and provide a solid platform for the business to focus on its external growth strategy".

Whether looking for a fully integrated eCommerce solution, wanting to integrate your marketing automation system with your website, or developing a UX/UI strategy, Revolution builds bespoke packages based on your business, industry, strategic goals, and budget.

***If you're interested in discovering how Revolution can help your company through its digital transformation, or want to know more about the services available, get in touch with one of their specialists today at [start@revolutiongrowth.co.uk](mailto:start@revolutiongrowth.co.uk)***



## A UNIQUE INTERVIEW...



### STEVEN PARKER

Managing Director at Causal Effect

#### How did you get into digital marketing?

I always liked the idea of working 'in the media'. My first role in the media was with ncjMedia, or as they are better known, *The Chronicle* and *Journal* in Newcastle. I worked across various teams there and that really whet my appetite for digital marketing. I was amazed that you could figure out directly the return on investment through analytics and from then I was hooked.

I moved to a firm called Mediaworks which at the time was a small but scaling business with big ambitions and I really learned a great deal specifically about SEO. Then I moved into wider digital marketing aspects of paid Google Ads and social media before going on to start, and recently exit, my own digital marketing business, Digital Allies.

#### Who or what inspires you?

It may be cliché but definitely my wife and two children. I love to spend time with them and they teach me things about the nuances of digital for their so called Generation Alpha. I never grew up with digital as a child (I know, I'm getting on!) so helping them navigate the incredibly tricky minefield of 'always on comms and devices' keeps me on my toes.

#### What advice would you give to anyone interested in getting into digital marketing?

The best thing to do in my opinion is to get stuck in and gain some experience. Then specialise. There are many great qualifications available, such as the Chartered Institute of Marketing courses, and they are a vital part of career development, however I would juxtapose these qualifications with some hands-on real-world experience. It really helps a CV stand out when sifting through many that get sent.

There is a significant shortage of skilled specialists across the more technical aspects of digital and development, as well as data specialisms so I would suggest focusing on these for longer term career prospects and earning potential.

#### What is your favourite part of your job?

The thing I love most about what I do is the variety of clients and people I get to work with. From businesses that manufacture rolls of tape, to start up businesses delivering innovative new ways of doing things, to the more established businesses. I find helping them and more importantly, teaching them how to do digital well is probably the most rewarding element for me.

Everything I know is on the internet. There is nothing you can't find out. The key is in being able to decipher what's important and apply it in a pragmatic way and in doing so generating positive impact is a real kick for me!



#### What has been your most memorable moment to date relating to your business journey?

The most memorable moment has to be meeting Deborah Meaden and Theo Paphitis. At the time I worked with a client called Value My Stuff who gained investment on Dragons' Den. They had gone through a major business refocus and I met them as part of the business relaunch, which as a Dragons' Den fanboy was a brilliant moment!

#### What are your favourite magazines?

As much as I am a digital marketing advocate, you can't beat the touch, feel, and smell of a freshly printed magazine.

I like to read the local specialist publishers such as Northern Insight!

On a more national level, I tend to read car magazines such as *What Car?* and the *Radio Times* every Christmas.

#### What does the future hold for Steven Parker?

That's a question I've been pondering for a while. I love what I'm doing right now which is to help organisations at every level with their digital marketing plans.

Add in some mentoring for the Entrepreneurs' Forum, associate work for IA Growth, non-exec work with Seller Presto, lecturing for the Chartered Institute of Marketing through NESMA, along with my work over at the Beacon of Light it's a pretty packed and varied mix of work that I'm really enjoying.

I'll carry on with that for now and who knows what will happen, but I do have an itch to grow a business again!

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



“

*...you can't beat the touch,  
feel, and smell of a freshly  
printed magazine...*

Steven Parker



Sue Storey

## B2B OR NOT 2B?

Why does B2B marketing have such a bad rep? And, often, such bad results? Sue Storey, Creative Copy Lead at integrated communications agency Different Narrative and veteran of campaigns for the British Chambers of Commerce, Forfusion, Port of Tyne, Sage, and University of Sunderland among many others, believes that the issue lies in the concept of B2B itself.

### The launch of a Creative B2B category for this year's Cannes Lions advertising awards sparked much discussion in the marketing sector, amongst agencies and in-house teams alike.

Of the 14 B2B Lions awarded – out of 415 entries – not a single one went to a specialist B2B marketing agency.

Was this, as has been debated, because B2B marketers traditionally focus on straight-talking sales activation aimed at the bottom of the purchase-journey funnel, rather than on the creative engagement tactics and big ideas more often associated with brand-building campaigns?

Or does the issue run deeper than that?

Could it be because the entire concept of B2B is one giant red herring?

Because, when we look past the categorising and pigeonholing, no marketing task, ever, is about business connecting to business. Or, indeed, about business connecting to consumer.

### Businesses don't connect. People do.

Businesses aren't sentient, emotive beings. People are. And every business is made up of people. Curious, diverse, perfectly imperfect, human beings.

Every business decision is a human decision. It's that simple, and that complex. Made on behalf of a business, yes, but subject to all of the

rational/emotional psychological pin-balling that influences any other human decision.

When we consume so-called B2B marketing material, we don't do so in a vacuum with 'Business' or even 'Professional' printed on the label. We consume it in the vibrant, multi-faceted, full-on big wide world we woke up in that morning and will navigate like an emotionally loaded pick-and-mix until we go to sleep that night. We don't only compare it with other B2B marketing material, we compare it with all the other eye-catching, intriguing, funny or shocking candidates for our attention at that time. No wonder much of it fails to cut through.

### B2B marketing that works, works because it isn't B2B marketing

It's P2P marketing. From people to people.

That means it focuses not only on achieving positive outcomes for target businesses, but on how the people behind those businesses feel. What frustrates them? What throws a whopping great spanner into their to-do lists, or what might give them a lift on a mundane Monday?

P2P communication is personal. It recognises that every business decision-maker is unique and human. And it also appreciates that the business context can add an extra layer of accountability and stress to the decision-making process. The seemingly straightforward task of delivering what the business needs actually involves meeting the needs of everyone involved in the decision-making chain. That means taking time to get to know those people, through discussion, data, or both. Learning what barriers they face. What their goals are, and how they measure success.

For example, studying the pain-points of CTOs and their teams for networking infrastructure partner Forfusion led to an empathy around the importance of good connections. And hearing that many start-up business founders feel they have no understanding ear to share their worries with led to the 'Business Togetherness' campaign for British Chambers of Commerce.

P2P communication doesn't broadcast bland commands. It understands. Banter and entertains. Empathises. Poses questions. Makes us think.

That's why we think beyond B2B, to P2P.

*If you have a business objective to smash, and you'd like to discuss it P2P, say hello@differentnarrative.com*



22<sup>OR</sup>

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L-R: Andrew Young and Harvey Trent, Founders and Directors of The Pulse Rooms.

# UNLOCKING GROWTH WITH YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION

By Andrew Young - Founder and Director of The Pulse Rooms

At The Pulse Rooms, identifying and amplifying a client’s Value Proposition is at the core of how we help them achieve sustainable growth.

**Every business has a Value Proposition to share, and it is arguably the most critical element of your overall marketing messaging. If your proposition doesn’t clearly communicate how you meet customer needs and demands, you risk missing out on potential business and losing market share to your competitors.**

Research by The Guardian found that businesses which focused heavily on refining and sharing their Value Proposition over ten years grew by 76%, even when their promotional efforts weren’t on point.

Here are three things to consider when working on this statement for your business.

### Make Your Customer The Hero

The strongest Value Proposition statements speak directly to a customer’s pain. It should make them the hero in the story, not you. Businesses often get caught up in the ‘we problem’, where they spend more time talking about what they do and less time talking about how they solve their customers’ needs.

Spend time understanding exactly what your ideal customer looks like and find out the problems they face. Sometimes the real issues they experience aren’t easily visible at first, so it’s essential to look beyond the obvious. Talking to your existing customers is a great way to understand why they chose your business over a competitor. You can even use their exact words in your final Value Proposition.

### Identify What You Do Best and Focus On It

When your offering consists of many different products and services, it’s easy to fall into the

trap of losing clarity in your messaging. Your Value Proposition should identify the one thing you do best, which also presents the most significant value to your customer. This is the message you need to repeat over and over again across your marketing channels. By focusing, you’re more likely to win potential business from your competitors as customers will know how and why you are different.

### Test, Test, and Test Again

Testing your Value Proposition is key to ensuring long-term success and helps you see if it resonates with your customers. You might apply your statement to a landing page and analyse if it leads to conversions. Alternatively, you can pitch it directly to your customers in conversation and listen to their questions in return. This ensures you don’t end up with a Value Proposition which doesn’t meet customer needs and demands. We use a simple analogy to explain this. Are you offering a red ball, when your customers really want a green ball?

*For further tips and advice on building a Value Proposition for your business, visit [www.thepulserooms.com](http://www.thepulserooms.com). Alternatively, get in touch by emailing [hello@thepulserooms.com](mailto:hello@thepulserooms.com)*



## HOW CAN VIDEO BUILD BETTER CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS?

This month we caught up with the Turps Film team to discuss how video can support an organisations customer service initiative.

**Turps Film told us, customer acquisition is no longer king – customer retention is. Research shows that the average business will lose approximately 20% of its customers because they fail to maintain customer relationships. Video content, if used correctly can be key in connecting with your audience.**

**Video is here to save the day!**

More businesses now use video as a tool to reach customers as it's easy to digest, entertaining and engaging. 97% of marketers say that video helps

customers to understand products. Videos make an excellent medium for giving customers an easy, educational look at a product or service.

### Video can strengthen your customer messaging

Quite often, customer service managers are tasked with the difficult challenge of launching a new product. Most of the time these products can be tricky to set up for the customers, but once they are set up, the benefits pay off.

Many of our clients have to spend time addressing product or service queries regardless of what industry they're in.

This takes time that could be better spent elsewhere! The solution... produce an 'explainer video' addressing the most frequent enquiries. This could be how to use a product or service, common mistakes, or how to achieve the best results.

This type of video is a quick and effective way to prevent disengagement and removes the potential risk of an unhappy customer.

### Welcome with video

So, you've recruited a new member of staff – well done! Instead of writing out an email to welcome your newest teammate, why not create an impromptu video message? These can be very casual and don't require a huge amount of production value whilst summarising your company's culture, customer base, and goals.

### Impress your customers with video today

There is no right or wrong way to get started using video to build your customer relationships. Here at Turps Film, we work with an array of clients to strengthen their customer relations every day.

By embracing video, our clients build better relationships, their customers stick around for longer, customer satisfaction improves, and referrals are plentiful.

**Let Turps Film know if you need support with your video requirements today, we'd love to help! Shoot us a message at [info@turpsfilm.co.uk](mailto:info@turpsfilm.co.uk) and let's get started! [turpsfilm.co.uk](http://turpsfilm.co.uk)**

## ECHO'S SUMMER OF GROWTH

**Echo Events and Association Management, who support and manage the day to day needs of thousands of association members and event attendees all over the UK and internationally, has had a productive summer as it expands to accommodate a growing team and provide additional resource for clients.**

They have moved to the newly renovated Bakers Yard in Gosforth, which provides a contemporary, spacious environment for the team to thrive in.

Claire Westgate, Director at Echo explains, "Now that all the team are back together in the office, we felt it was important to create a working environment which allowed not only for growth and space, but also creativity and a positive mindset. The office space at Bakers Yard provides all that and more."

Along with the new office they are delighted to welcome two new members to the team. Jenny Lowrey joins Echo as Sponsorship Manager having spent the last seven years in a variety of sales roles across hospitality, events and corporate sectors. Jenny will be working across



Echo's event portfolio selling exhibition and sponsorship opportunities. If you're looking to align your brand with business professionals both in the North East and across the UK, contact [jenny@echoevents.org](mailto:jenny@echoevents.org) for more information.

Natasha Tompkins begins in the new Marketing Co-Ordinator role bringing over 20 years of multi-channel marketing experience in a wide variety of sectors to provide dedicated marketing support to the associations that Echo represents. They'll also be welcoming a new edition to their finance team later this year;

watch this space for further announcements.

With a busy event calendar ahead of them, the move is well timed and comes in line with the announcement that the North East Marketing Awards which is owned and produced by Echo is taking place this December, ensuring they'll be finishing 2022 with a bang!

Nominations are open, so find out more at: [northeastmarketingawards.co.uk](http://northeastmarketingawards.co.uk)

**For more information on Echo Events and Association Management and the services it offers, visit: [echoevents.org](http://echoevents.org)**

PEOPLE ARE TAKING THE PIS  
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NOTHING. LESS THAN NOTHIN  
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**BANKSY.**

Your brand needs to work harder and be more useful. It's the only way to keep people interested.

S OUT OF YOU EVERYDAY.  
TAKE A CHEAP SHOT AT  
HEY LEER AT YOU FROM  
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&, YOU ESPECIALLY DON'T  
EY OWE YOU. THEY HAVE  
PUT THEMSELVES IN FRONT  
KED FOR YOUR PERMISSION.

## UNIVERSITY CHALLENGES

By Kieran McLaughlin,  
Headteacher, Durham School

By the time you read this article, the long rambling saga of who will lead the country as Prime Minister will finally have been resolved. As I write, the frontrunner is Liz Truss who presents herself as the change candidate, despite being part of the government for the past few years.

**The polls, or at least the polling of the Conservative party members who are eligible to vote in this process, indicate that she has a significant lead over Rishi Sunak, although as ever polls come with many flaws and caveats.**

Much has been said by both candidates in their pitches to this selectorate, and it may be that both candidates will wish to forget some of the promises they have made. However, one particular comment regarding education captured the interest of the media, at least until the next announcement was delivered. Liz Truss stated that she would look to introduce a policy whereby all pupils who scored straight A\* grades in their A Levels would automatically be invited to interview by Oxford or Cambridge. This would, in her view, level up the socioeconomic background of those who would be eligible to attend either of these universities.

Aside from the practical and legal problems associated with this policy (government has no power to intervene in individual selection policies for universities, for example, and most places are awarded at Oxbridge on the basis of predicted grades rather than achieved grades), it is an interesting issue to make part of her leadership campaign. No such commitment is made, for example, about the remaining members of the so-called G5 universities



Kieran McLaughlin

(Imperial College, UCL and LSE) or indeed about the wider Russell Group universities, the top 20 or so research-focussed universities in the UK.

What is it about those two universities that merited special attention? Partly it is because the selection procedure for Oxbridge is different from other universities; they are the only two universities in the country that routinely interview for every course, and the collegiate nature of the University makes the application procedure more complicated. No doubt it is also because Oxbridge comes under extra pressure to ensure the offers are made to applicants from as wider background as possible. To their credit, they have put a lot of work into widening participation over the past few years and many colleges of those institutions have a proportionate share of applicants from state schools across the country.

However, focus on these two institutes is not the way to address educational inequality across the country. Between them, they admit less than 5000 undergraduates every year how many of those are from overseas. This is a tiny fraction of

the population, and whilst no doubt the policy is well-intentioned, it is highly likely to be the transformational move that is both desired and needed. If anything, the reverse the opposite of this policy is needed.

Rather than focusing on a very small minority and the most selective and competitive institutions, the government should focus on the wider post school picture. Degree apprenticeships, for example, still suffer from a lack of parity of esteem with university life degrees. However, there is growing evidence that those who leave school and take at one of those courses can get a much richer experience in preparation for the world of work. The government will be better placed on those as a means of social ability rather than playing to the galleries with eye-catching but ultimately impact-free announcements.

**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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Durham  
School

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Co-ed, ages 3 to 18  
[www.dcsf.org.uk](http://www.dcsf.org.uk)

# TWO YEARS OF T LEVELS: ON THE FRONTLINE OF THE TRAILBLAZING TECHNICAL QUALIFICATION

Last month, the first ever full cohort of students completed the new government-backed T Level qualification.

**Around 1,300 students embarked on the first three T Levels in 2020, with more than 5,000 then signing up in 2021. From September, a total of 17 subjects will be on offer at over 175 colleges and schools across England.**

Despite this being set to increase to 400 by September 2023, and more big-name employers than ever supporting the route, more still needs to be done to raise awareness of this technical equivalent to A Levels.

To better understand the benefits T Levels can offer, we sat down with two pioneers who have been closest to them since their conception.

Ellie Hearn completed her Education and Childcare T Level in August and is now studying Primary Education at Brighton University.

Zac Aldridge is the Director of Qualifications and Assessment at the North East based educational charity and leader in vocational and technical learning NCFE, who was chosen by government to spearhead the development of the qualification.

## What are the benefits of choosing a T Level instead of another option or work?

**Ellie:** "I loved how I could get experience in the industry before settling into a job or apprenticeship in the teaching sector, whilst also learning key knowledge and information to help me explore teaching in a lot of detail.

"I've wanted to go into teaching since I was very young, however an apprenticeship wasn't going to give me the skills I needed to become a primary school teacher. The T Level is also a good mix of both academic and hands-on learning."

**Zac:** "I think the main benefits must be the employer involvement and industry placement. From the outset, the qualifications are created with current and future skills needs in mind and they're genuinely developed by the employers they're designed to serve."

## What are the skills that students will develop?

**Ellie:** "I've become more confident. Coming from a different high school, I was put into a T Level class not knowing anyone but have come out with a group of 12 good friends! During the employer set project, I developed research tools that will help me at university and throughout my placement.

"I also developed my communication skills through talking to children, parents, and professionals. Placement has also allowed me to develop professional relationships with the teachers which has helped me develop my skills massively!"

**Zac:** "The Level 3 Technical Qualification in Education and Childcare provides students with all of the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to progress into skilled employment or higher-level study in the education and childcare sector.

"From feedback, we've also heard that students are able to really develop their essential, transferable skills such as communication, problem solving, teamwork and resilience. This helps to set them up for whatever their next steps are in life."

## What are the highlights of your T Level experience?

**Ellie:** "I loved my T Level. A 'wow' moment for me during placement was when an autistic child who is mute said a few words to me during a lesson. It was such a rewarding moment which is just the start of a rewarding career."

**Zac:** "It's definitely been a highlight hearing directly from T Level students like Ellie about their experiences. Other huge milestones for us have included being selected as the Awarding Organisation (AO) for what is now nine of the T Levels, with the most recent additions being Hairdressing, Barbering and Beauty Therapy, Media, Broadcast and Production, and Craft and Design. This makes us the largest AO for T Levels in the country."



Ellie Hearn



Zac Aldridge

## What are the next steps on your journey?

**Ellie:** "My dream job is to become a primary school teacher around the Year 2 age, although the role of a Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities Coordinator is something I've thought about too. It's such an interesting and rewarding role!"

**Zac:** "NCFE has just been awarded three new T Levels which will be available for first delivery from September 2023, so we're focusing a lot of our efforts on the development of these fantastic new qualifications.

"We're also working closely with our current providers to support them in their delivery of T Levels, ensuring all students have an experience like Ellie's. Finally, there's still a lot of work to be done in increasing awareness of T Levels so that they are truly seen by all as a quality option for post-16 school leavers."

## And finally, what would be your advice to someone considering T Levels?

**Ellie:** "I'd definitely recommend a T Level to anyone who's interested in studying one - in fact, I already have! There are so many career paths you can enter through it, and it really gets you prepared for future jobs."

**Zac:** "Take a look at the T Levels available and the different occupational specialisms within them. Talk to your provider, read up on the prospects and find out if it's the right fit for you. The important thing for us is offering choice and ensuring young people are equipped with the knowledge and understanding to make the right decision for them."

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*Simone Niblock*

## FOOTBALL HAS COME HOME!

A great deal has been written about the Lionesses' historic Euro 2022 win over the summer, including whether or not they should, indeed, be called the Lionesses- but am not going to add my two pennyworths to the issue of nomenclature.



**The victory is even more pleasing given the chequered history of women's football in England. Considering that the FA banned women from playing on any of its grounds for fifty years 1921 until 1971, the Euro victory showed that women's football in England has come on in leaps and bounds, showcasing a fabulous back heel goal that Lionel Messi could envy.**

The story of women's football began to fascinate me when I heard about its earliest incarnations, with the wonderfully named Dick, Kerr Ladies' being the most prominent team of the early 1920s. They took part in a match against a female team from Paris at Deepdale, which became the Preston North End ground, in what was believed to be the first international match against women's teams. After trouncing the French by 2-0, the women became internationally renowned and toured France, garnering a great deal of press attention across Europe.

This tour also made stars of their best players, Lily Parr and Alice Wood, and the team amassed a massive fan base in England, culminating in a match against St Helen's at Goodison Park, home to Everton FC, where over 53,000 saw them play. However, depressingly, this popularity was not without misogynistic naysaying at the time, especially amongst the stalwarts of the mighty Football Association. Therefore, on 5 December 1921, the FA stripped women's clubs of their official rights to be members of their association, stating that:

"Complaints having been made as to football being played by women, Council felt impelled to express the strong opinion that the game of football is quite unsuitable for females and should not be encouraged."

Consequently, as the teams had nowhere official to play for quite some time, women's football went under the radar, although it did not die completely. Under much pressure from UEFA, the FA rescinded the ban in 1971 but it was not until 1993 that the FA started offering financial support. Eventually, in 2017-8 the Women's Super League, which was formed in 2012, became the first fully professional football league for women in Europe.

Fast forward to July 2022 and the indomitable young women who finally brought football home to England- after 56 years of hurt- are now set to be international

superstars and to create a legacy that will, no doubt, change the face of women's football in this country from now on. Moreover, our proud Lionesses, some of whom were on £20,000 a year before Euro 2022, will now see some proper financial remuneration at last. Their former pay is in ridiculously stark contrast to the ultra-pampered princes of the Premier League, some of whom won't get up in the morning for less than £250,000 a week. Moreover, there has been a general recognition of their silky skills, dribbling talents and their emotionally- intelligent approach to playing together on the pitch without diving, flouncing or spitting at the officials. Even football diehards have admitted that the atmosphere at Wembley was convivial, friendly and family-friendly, in contrast to the appalling behaviour exhibited by England fans at the men's Euro finals last year.

All of this bodes very well for football per se; sisters are doing it for themselves and showing how the game can be played without violence or outrageously anti-social behaviours. Roll on the World Cup in New Zealand and Australia next year!

**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.**

“

*...the game of football is quite unsuitable for females and should not be encouraged...*



## EMPOWERING GENDER PARITY IN SPORT AT RGS

By Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster, Newcastle Royal Grammar School

The success of the English Lionesses in the women's European football championships has inspired many young girls to believe they too could play on an international stage one day, though there is still the need for more diversity to be represented on the team.

**During the tournament, BBC commentators Ian Wright and Alex Scott sent a bold message about the importance of girls having the opportunity to play football in schools as key to the future success of the game. After the final, the research organisation Teacher Tapp conducted a survey of over 8,000 teachers of whom less than half said their school has**

**a girls' football team and less than a quarter said they saw girls regularly playing football in break times. In contrast, 74% said their school had a boys' football team with over 80% saying they saw boys playing football most days.**

While it is right to challenge this disparity, some of the cause arises from differences in schools' sports programmes with girls more likely to be offered hockey and netball while boys are more likely to be given the option of rugby and football. Co-educational schools are increasingly expected to provide a wider range of options and equivalent opportunities for all their students. This does however, present challenges in terms of staffing, use of facilities and even finding meaningful opposition for fixtures. As well as having girls playing alongside boys in every level of RGS cricket teams, we have also started to introduce separate girls' teams for cricket. Unlike rounders previously offered to girls, there is a pathway beyond school in cricket which facilitates more competition. That said, while more of our sports staff have been developing their cricket coaching skills, finding additional cricket pitches is not straightforward. This challenge is felt acutely at club level and many schools in the maintained sector have had playing fields sold off.

The core purpose of a school's sports programme should be to provide a breadth of activities to allow people to find what they truly enjoy and can, in turn, provide the base of a participation pyramid that leads to high performance. By way of example, at the RGS last year we had girls' teams reaching (and in some cases winning) national finals in each of netball, hockey, swimming, cross country, riding,

gymnastics, tennis and athletics. In a typical independent school, there is a gradual decline from near 100% of Years 7 to 9 representing their school in matches to around 50% in the Sixth Form as the option to take other forms of exercise starts to be offered, with the pattern continuing at university and beyond. Viewed through that lens, a school's physical education should strive to ensure individuals develop a lifelong, positive relationship with any form of sport or exercise to support their physical and mental health.

I have no doubt the Lionesses' success is likely to increase demand for girls' football in schools. However, I recently supervised a student's Extended Project Qualification which investigated the future of women's football. His conclusion was the development relies on investment, from grassroots clubs to professional, rather than the provision in schools. Looking closely, influential factors are likely to be spectator numbers, revenue and media exposure. To give context, only 3% of sports coverage in British newspapers last year related to women's sport and it was only this year that Newcastle United's women's team played their first league match ever at St James Park with tickets costing just £3. Since 2007, tennis has already shown what is possible, with prize money at the largest tournaments being equal for men and women.

I sincerely hope the Lionesses' hard-fought achievement, despite the investment disparity, creates positive societal change and many more girls find a form of exercise they enjoy and will aspire to represent their country.

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## CHOOSING A SCHOOL THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOUR CHILD

By Tony Jackson, Headmaster at Barnard Castle School

Choosing a school for your child is one of the most challenging and important decisions you will have to make, and we do not underestimate the magnitude of such a judgement.

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It is important your child flourishes whilst at school, which are the most important and formative years of their lives. At Barney, our students exceed their academic potential as a result of inspiring teaching, delivered in an easy, open and respectful environment at the heart of which are the caring relationships that exist between the teachers and students.

The achievements of Barney in recent times are as a direct consequence of the teachers and wider ancillary staff who spend every day inspiring, supporting and guiding our young people. Barney has always possessed a wonderful environment, with happy children and staff at its heart.

Whilst we are extremely proud of what our students achieve academically, we also recognise the vital importance of preparing the next generation for an ever-changing and increasingly competitive and global marketplace.

We expect our pupils to work as hard as they can, and do as well as they can. However, we tell them that academic success will only open a



Tony Jackson

door; it is what they do when they walk through that door that counts.

As such, we pride ourselves on our co-curricular activities because it is in these environments that most life lessons are learned. We want our young people to problem-solve, work in a team, demonstrate leadership and have emotional intelligence.

Beyond the traditional spheres of music, drama and sport, we currently offer more than 100 activities to our students, which includes a bespoke 'Mind, Body and Soul' programme for Year 7 and 8s.

We want Barnardians to be the types of people who light up a room when they enter it. This requires confidence, resilience and compassion, all built up over a period of time, and in a variety of ways, both within and beyond the classroom. No leader can achieve anything major without the influence of the staff who make it happen. This is especially the case in our school.

We tell our parents that our collective role, as parents and teachers, is to arm our children with the tools with which to clear the path ahead of them, not to clear the path for them. This means we have to allow them to fail at times, in a supportive environment. If we do that together, we are doing our best to prepare our young people for the challenges ahead.

Situated on the outskirts of Barnard Castle, we run an extensive transport service from across the North East to Barney. We also provide full or flexible boarding options in our friendly, welcoming boarding houses.

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## MY WEEKEND



Jonathan Wallis

## JONATHAN WALLIS

Chartered Surveyor based in Barnard Castle.

His key skills are in expert valuations and in providing fair and reasoned reports and opinion. Jonathan makes a positive difference for clients by delivering them a result greater than they expect, whilst fully understanding the needs and objectives for their property or assets.

**Jonathan not only has his office in Barnard Castle, but he is also very much a part of the farming community. He regularly organises fund raising events around the town and as a keen collector of classic vehicles, he also**

**organises car shows. He is also the organiser of the popular Christmas at the Cathedral show in Newcastle which raises funds for the Sir Bobby Robson Foundation. Here he tells us about his weekends...**

### Do you ever have to work weekends?

My general rule is to not work at a weekend as I think it's good to give the brain a break. However, with being a one-man firm, I need to make hay when the sun shines so if there is work to be done then you will find me working on a weekend.

### Are most weekends the same?

Every weekend is different. It depends on whether I am away or at home. Even weekends at home are never the same as I could be out with my classic cars, working in my shed where I keep my cars, cutting firewood, out with friends and family or cooking.

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

Yes, I am one of those people who struggles to switch off. I am always thinking of work and what I need to do and how best I can do it.

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

Read a newspaper.

### Morning exercise or a recovery lie in?

Always the same. A morning walk with the dog.

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

Either. It depends how tired I am at the weekend.

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

I have never been a sporty person. It seemed to escape me!

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

Anywhere that cooks great steaks or beef.

### How important is the weekend to you?

Very important. I always look forward to the weekend. It's a chance to reflect on the previous week and look forward to the next week.

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

Waking up on a Saturday morning and looking forward to some me time.

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

In my shed! Time seems to vanish when I'm in there.

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# BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GTC SPEED

**Wind in the hair motoring never got so good.**

Bentley has a long and proud history in motor racing. The Bentley Boys, Le Mans, Brooklands, the Bentley Blower, Indianapolis.

They also have a wonderful history for wind in the hair, flies in the teeth, open-top motoring.



**And if there's one thing that really gets us excited it's a powerful convertible.**

**Like the Bentley Continental GTC Speed for example.**

**The last time we featured the GT Speed in this magazine was after we'd had a breathtaking day at Silverstone racing circuit. Bentley had hired the full Formula One track for the day so that a handful of us lucky hacks could find out what a GT Speed can really do.**

Power in both the coupé and convertible comes from a 12 cylinder 5950cc engine which produces a whopping 650 bhp. It hurls you to the horizon in a 0-60 sprint time of 3.5 seconds and on to a top speed of 208mph. 100mph comes up in under seven seconds. Four wheel drive and four wheel steering come as standard. There are clever gadgets scattered around the transmission which allow you to power out of corners. Another ensures that the car stays stable by eliminating any roll. In other words, you can throw this Bentley around and it stays glued to the road and maintains a flat stance.

Bearing in mind this car weighs approaching 2.5 tonnes, the straight-line performance and cornering abilities are staggering.

If you can afford a Bentley Continental GT Speed Convertible, you're probably not too fussed about miles to the gallon but, for the record, go easily and you'll manage around 20mpg.

This is the most powerful convertible that Bentley has ever built, but it is incredibly simple to drive it quickly and safely. It sounds fantastic too. In fact, if you go to the four driving modes and select the Enhanced Sports tab, the car will adjust the suspension, engine and transmission settings, and it opens the taps in the exhaust to allow more of the delicious sound to escape.

There's also a launch control. Floor the throttle and brake pedals at the same time...release the brake...and you'll zoom away. Okay, it might seem a bit undignified in a convertible which is designed for long-distance cruising, but it ain't half good fun.

Granted, for most of the time you'll leave the setting in Comfort mode which means you'll waft along in...well...comfort.

Oh and if it drops a shower, just slow to 30mph and you'll be able to operate the convertible roof...no need to stop. Flick a switch on the centre console and the roof raises (or lowers) in 19 seconds.

With the roof down, needless to say that the experience is wonderful. As Bentley say in their promotional guff...“You might be driving but you'll feel like you're flying.” Yep...we agree with that.

The interior, as you would expect, is still the pinnacle of British craftsmanship. Wonderful styling, outstanding build quality and the ultimate in terms of materials used...but that's what you get in every Bentley. There's also a nod to the fact that this is a drop-top car. The seats are ventilated to keep you cool on a warm day. If the weather turns a bit chilly, you can make use of the heated steering wheel, heated armrests and neck warmers which blow warm air from vents in the base of the headrests.

It's also worth mentioning that this is a 4-seater Bentley. A lot of convertibles are two-seaters only but, as long as you've not got a couple of prop forwards wanting to sit in the back, the rear seats are fine, especially for kids.

And don't for a minute think when you have the roof up that this Bentley will be a tad noisy. Wrong. In fact, Bentley say the interior of this Continental GTC Speed is quiet than the tin-top coupé of the previous Continental generation.

From the outside the GTC Speed looks very similar to other Bentley Continental models. Apart from the badging, unique alloy wheels, dark glass for the head and rear lights, subtle changes to the body styling and a dark tinted radiator grille you'd struggle to spot the difference. So why bother going for the GTC Speed when other Continentals look just as gorgeous?

Simple. The Speed version takes this Bentley Continental from being a brilliant car to an utterly fantastic car. It is still the most fabulous long distance tourer available anywhere, but it now offers the chance to have some extra fun when the conditions allow. The GTC Speed encourages you to push on a little when you arrive at some twisty stuff rather than just being content to sit back and enjoy the ride as a high speed cruiser. Bentley call it 'adrenaline, accelerated.'

Cost? Tricky because Bentley don't actually mention anything so crude as prices. However, if you fancy a GTC Speed, you'll be looking in the region of £230,000.

This is arguably the best convertible in the world.

It's hard to think of a better way to head down to the Côte d'Azur for a spot of boulevard cruising along the French Riviera.

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





## Summer School a roaring success

**Sunderland Empire is thrilled to announce that its brand-new week-long theatre Summer School launched for local children for the first time this August proving a roaring success.**

The Creative Learning led theatre school was found to be hugely popular with its 40 places filled to capacity, with a number of sponsored places provided for families with financial circumstances which may have been a barrier to participation. All abilities were welcomed with no experience necessary, simply a passion for theatre.

This extra-curricular summer school was created in response to the local youth appetite for performance-based art, as observed across the theatre's term time educational initiatives with local schools and existing youth groups, including the Sunderland Empire Academy and Curious Connections.

The opportunity aimed at children from the ages of 8 – 18 encouraged local youngsters to immerse themselves in all things theatrical in the heart of the North East's premiere West End venue, whilst giving them the chance to make likeminded friends and introducing them to exciting career opportunities they may not have otherwise encountered.



## Northumberland Theatre Company back on scene with "Scottish Play"

**Amble based Northumberland Theatre Company's new production is a female led production of Macbeth.**

The show starts on 1st September with William Shakespeare's tragedy Macbeth. NTC have received Arts Council funding and the show will tour more than 15 venues from the Scottish Borders to Yorkshire with the majority being in rural Northumberland.

Adapted by writer and director Chris Connaughton and produced by NTC Artistic Director Louis Roberts, this will be a streamlined and very physical version of the original piece and performed in NTC's unique, fast paced and extremely physical style. The show will feature original music and will largely be told from the perspective of the witches. Exploring ideas of manipulation through the media and other external forces, the show will include all the grim, gory, and grisly elements that everyone loves and expects from the tale of Macbeth.

Artistic Director Louis Roberts is looking forward to getting the Dovecote Centre open again and touring with the production.

"Uniquely, this version is predominantly female led. We have the wonderful Alice Byrne as Director with Assistant Director: Eilidh Talman, Movement Director: Katie Tranter, costumes by Amy Jones and music by Lucy Desbrow. Then of course we have the very talented cast of Claire Morley, Gillian Hambleton, and Melanie Dagg."

## Temperatures Rise with Red Hot Music at Gallagher Park Live Festival

**A sizzling Saturday saw more than 6500 people enjoy the sun and music at Bedlington's Gallagher Park Live Festival with great headline performances from Dodgy and S Club All Stars. Also taking part were the West Coast Band, Jay R, The**

**Sleeze Sisters, Kewen and the Crosswalks, The Panthers and The Straits UK.**

The free festival was funded by East Bedlington Parish Council with contributions from Choppington Parish Council, West Bedlington Town Council, Morgan Sindall and private donations.

Events Chairperson, Councillor Dawn Crosby, said: "There was a fabulous line up that had something for everyone young or old. Everyone enjoyed the sun and music and it was a real family day out right on our own doorsteps."



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## THESE MORTAL FOOLS

Against the backdrop of a pandemic and upsetting world events, charity Mortal Fools, has been working hard to make a positive difference to communities and the young people and families they work with. Mortal Fools are a creative learning company based in Northumberland, working regionally and Nationally, co-creating theatre, film and creative projects with young people and artists.

**They work closely with young people who are struggling in some way – struggling with their mental health, at school or home, with their identity, with what’s going on in their life, with confidence or to make sense of the world around them. Mortal Fools’ work is an early intervention that provides a safe space and scaffolds towards good mental health.**

2022 represents the 10th birthday of the organisation; an organisation that started as a youth theatre group in a church hall, has evolved into a multi-award winning, growing organisation with an increasing project portfolio working meaningfully with 1000s of young people each year. While they have grown considerably in size, scope and reach since inception, they remain committed to working with young people as artists, prioritising those in under-served locations and circumstances and providing creative opportunities to collaborate with professional artists to make theatre and film which is relevant to their lives and of such quality that it delights, entertains, and challenges audiences.

The pandemic was a shake-up for Mortal Fools and a period of purposeful growth in response to the urgent needs of

North East young people. Within the uncertainty, they found creativity, collaboration, co-creation opportunities, new ways of working and exciting new community serving and income generating streams. During a period where a lot of “normal” business activity felt impossible, seeds of possibility emerged and were a trigger for great innovation. There is nothing quite like a global crisis to break an organisation out of their decision-making routines, structures and ways of doing things.

An anchoring purpose of all Mortal Fools work is to support people to have better quality inter-personal relationships and to be the best authentic version of themselves. Mortal Fools encourages folks to come out of their comfort zone, authentically show up, try new things, experiment and be human. They’ve taken this mission, alongside the learning from delivering training underpinned by social sciences, to large corporate companies, public bodies, SMEs and freelancers across the last decade, to develop CONNECT; a programme of training and professional development for organisations, teams, and individuals – a strand of work that directly funds their work with young people.

The CONNECT programme offers dynamic and effective approaches to developing leadership practice, engaging and impactful communication, presentation and persuasion skills, managing difficult conversations, embedding growth mindset, overcoming imposter syndrome, investing into team dynamics, digital presence online and emotional resilience & well-being.

Like Mortal Fools, the pandemic pushed some organisations to do things differently, experiment and grow in unexpected, exciting ways; looking at their business with fresh eyes and a want to do better. This led many folks to seek out CONNECT training, as an investment in their people, to grow with their organisation, as it adapts, changes, evolves, innovates whilst enabling staff well-being and competitive advantage.

This flexible training and professional development programme was designed in response to the contemporary business landscape and is grounded in real world practical applicability. It's not a passive "how to", it's an active exploration of possibility and self-discovery through a unique combination connecting theory and research from the social

sciences with creative sector practice intertwined through-out.

By booking CONNECT training, clients receive high-quality, specialised training from an experienced and knowledgeable team AND support 1000s of young people in the region, including many who are highly vulnerable and isolated, as the income from CONNECT goes directly back into young people.

As part of their 10th birthday year, Mortal Fools are looking to connect with businesses, organisations and leaders who are passionate about supporting young people and/or who are interested in investing into professional and personal development for their people. Join the likes of Ryder Architecture, Muckle LLP, National Trust, Newcastle University, Northern Stage as an important part of the Mortal Fools community and support young people in the region, through booking CONNECT training, becoming a patron, sponsorship, gifting a Melva package to a local primary school or by donating. This support will enable the next 10 years of Mortal Fools – full of new partnerships and increase support for young people.



“

*...they remain  
committed to working  
with young people  
as artists...*



To connect with Mortal Fools email: [Rachel.Horton@mortalfools.org.uk](mailto:Rachel.Horton@mortalfools.org.uk)

Download the CONNECT training brochure via: [www.mortalfools.org.uk/connect](http://www.mortalfools.org.uk/connect)

Find out more about the award winning digital mental health intervention, Melva via: [www.melva.org.uk](http://www.melva.org.uk)

Find out more about their work via: [www.mortalfools.org.uk](http://www.mortalfools.org.uk) and across social media via @mortalfoolsuk

# ON THE TRAIL OF ELVIS PRESLEY IN MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

By Stuart Forster

The 2022 film *Elvis* stars Austin Butler as Elvis Presley. The Baz Luhrmann-directed biopic is told from the skewed perspective of Elvis' manager, Colonel Tom Parker, played by Tom Hanks. In common with the rock and roll star whose life story it portrays, the film is proving a major global success, boosting interest in Elvis' music and his connections with the Tennessee city of Memphis.

**The man known as the King of Rock and Roll lived the majority of his life in Memphis. He was born in 1935 in Tupelo, Mississippi – less than two hours' drive away. In 1948 the Presley family moved across the state border to settle in Memphis.**

From October 1949 until January 1953 the family resided in a two-bedroom apartment at Lauderdale Courts. Maintained in the style of a 1950s dwelling, it offers fans a unique opportunity to overnight in a property formerly lived in by Elvis. (Book a stay by calling +1 901 5238662.)

Many more visitors head to Graceland, on Memphis' southern fringe, about a mile from the city's airport. Elvis purchased the mansion in the spring of 1957, following US chart successes during the previous year with songs including Heartbreak Hotel and Hound Dog.

Visitors arrive at the kitschy yet engaging Graceland entertainment complex on the other



side of the street. Jumpsuits, cars (including Elvis' famous pink Cadillac), posters from his 31 films and walls of gold disks count among the vast array of memorabilia displayed.

Interactive displays make it possible for fans to email snaps of themselves being serenaded by 'the King'. Anyone wishing to channel their inner Elvis can buy a caped jumpsuit from one of Graceland's well-stocked gift stores.

Minibuses drop visitors by the colonnaded façade of the former Presley family home and iPads provide insights into how Graceland's rooms were used. Downstairs, there's the television room where Elvis relaxed watching American football on three screens. Next door is a subtly illuminated games room with patterned fabric on its walls and ceiling. The thick green carpet of Elvis' Hawaiian-themed den – known today as 'the Jungle Room' – was ideal for softening sound, so served as a studio for recordings in 1976.

Touring the National Historic Landmark is a way of understanding more about Elvis' personality away from the stages on which he wowed audiences. Its annex conveys Elvis' lifelong interest in law enforcement. The Meditation Garden allows visitors to pay respects at the gravesides of the man who was, arguably, the greatest icon of 20th-century pop culture and other members of the Presley family.

Locations across Memphis provide insights into Elvis' early life. A memorial plaque stands outside of the red brickwork of Humes High School, from where he graduated in 1953.

In November 1955 he signed his first recording contract with RCA in the lobby of the grand

Peabody Hotel. Yet it was for the exit and entry of the ducks that sit in the fountain between 11am and 5pm each day, rather than the King of Rock and Roll, that the hotel's Duckmaster rolled out the red carpet.

Elvis would pop into The Arcade, a diner-style restaurant, for fried peanut butter and banana sandwiches. A plaque and Blue Hawaii album cover denote his favourite table. The Arcade is by a crossroad in the vibrant South Main Arts District and opens daily from 7am to 3pm, making it ideal for fuelling up ahead of sightseeing. It is a short walk from both the Blues Hall of Fame Museum and the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, where Dr Martin Luther King Jr was infamously gunned down.

Along with the blues, gospel and country were major influences on Elvis and, more broadly, rock and roll music. The Memphis Rock 'n' Soul Museum, whose collection was put together by the Smithsonian Institution, conveys how musical styles crossed the colour barrier to converge in the city and went on to influence the world. Star performers are honoured in the Memphis Music Hall of Fame at the former premises of Lansky's clothing store, where Elvis and other turns acquired their outfits.

For true fans, perhaps nothing beats cradling the Shure 55 microphone into which Elvis nervously sang during his early sessions at Sun Studio. Tours of the building on Union Avenue end in the recording studio where many other renowned musicians have laid down tracks. In Memphis, the spirit of Elvis and the music he loved live on.



## TRAVEL INFORMATION...

The Memphis Travel ([memphistravel.com](http://memphistravel.com)) website has information about things to do in the city.

Take care of business before visiting Graceland ([graceland.com](http://graceland.com)) by purchasing tickets online. The 450-room Guest House at Graceland ([guesthousegraceland.com](http://guesthousegraceland.com)) is inspired by the mansion overlooking Elvis Presley Boulevard.

The 227-room Hyatt Centric Beale Street Memphis ([hyatt.com](http://hyatt.com)) is a modern hotel with a rooftop bar near Elvis Presley Plaza.

## GETTING THERE...

Virgin Atlantic ([virginatlantic.com](http://virginatlantic.com)) offers flights from Newcastle to Memphis in conjunction with its partners. Alternatively, travel by train to London with Lumo ([lumo.co.uk](http://lumo.co.uk)) or LNER ([lner.co.uk](http://lner.co.uk)) and fly from Heathrow, via Atlanta, with Delta ([delta.com](http://delta.com)).

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## Spirit of Helping Others Leads to Trail of Admirers for Premium Business

**A Blyth couple who successfully owned and managed a restaurant, a fish and chip shop and cafes are celebrating the success of their current business by encouraging others to shop local and support the hospitality sector.**

Martin and Julie Summers run Clarence Spirits selling gin and other spirits under the brand of St Mary's Premium Spirits, named after the iconic lighthouse.

They supply gin, vodka, and rum to around 300 venues across the region and beyond and work with businesses to provide tasting experiences as well as using their knowledge to help others promote their brands.

Their latest idea is a treasure trail involving 43 customers of St Mary's Premium Spirits located between North Shields and Seaton Delaval via Tynemouth, Whitley Bay, and Blyth. At each venue, customers present their map when they buy one of their products and the staff stamp it to confirm that they have visited the pub or venue.

"We are literally putting the products of St Mary's Premium Spirits on the map but more importantly, we are encouraging people to visit pubs, cafes etc in the region that they possibly have never been to before. The hospitality trade has suffered more than most in recent years with COVID and now with the rising cost of living crisis so anything we can do to encourage people to go out and use these venues can only be good news for the industry."

Details of the trail can be found at [www.facebook.com/stmaryspremiumspirits](http://www.facebook.com/stmaryspremiumspirits)



## Sugar and Spice and all Things Nice at Royal Quays

**The latest new retail businesses to move into the North Shields based Royal Quays Independent and Outlet Centre have added a touch of sugar and spice and all things nice to the rapidly growing shopping and entertainment visitor destination.**

Namaste – A Taste of India and Sweet Memories are the newest businesses to relocate to the outlet after leaving their previous premises in Whitley Bay and Stockton respectively.

Outlet Centre Manager Matt Dawson welcomes both businesses and explains that having smaller, local businesses is changing the way that the public view the centre in a very positive light:

"We've actively encouraged smaller independent businesses to join the Royal Quays family and since we started this policy, we've went from having 17 empty units 18 months ago to having only four now. The whole feel of the outlet has changed, and the public seem to like the blend of big stores and small local traders It's a real family destination rather than just somewhere to shop. You can come here to eat, drink, play games in our Retro Arcade and you can even take part in dance classes. All of these things give the centre a character that it's never had before and I'm glad to say that we have a very unique place to visit."

## Toptracer teeing off at Ramside Hall Hotel, Golf and Spa

**A leading North East golf course has introduced internationally renowned technology to its driving range to help players improve their game – and attract new blood.**

Ramside Hall Hotel, Golf and Spa near Durham has just installed Toptracer, a trailblazing system which allows golfers to track the flight of their ball.

And not only can they use the system to hone their skills, but it also gives them virtual access to some of the world's top golf courses.

Installed in the individual bays of the club's driving range, Toptracer can be programmed to a variety of settings.

These include a warm-up programme, which eases golfers into their game, tracing their ball and the statistics for each shot, to a driving challenge, encouraging them to hit their best tee shots.

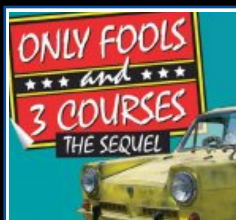
The Approach Challenge is designed to help fine tune iron play in a game of nine approach shots on a choice of three legendary courses, while Closest to Pin is a classic game featuring some of the most scenic par 3 holes in golf.

Players can also try out My Practice to work on their game selecting clubs of their choice, or compete to hit the ball the furthest on Long Drive, while Toptracer 30 will provide insights into the strengths and weaknesses of their game.

And, for young golfers or those just starting out in the sport, Go Fish is a fun game using golf shots to catch each of 24 different sea creatures.

All data can be stored on a personal app, including flight, distance and direction and Helen Roseberry, director of golf at Ramside, believes the system is a massive boost for their players.

"Everyone is very excited about it," she said. "It's an incredible piece of technology and we are glad to be offering it to our members and guests."



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## THE FED SHOWCASES ITS FACILITIES

One of the North East's leading event spaces is throwing open its doors to showcase the results of a major refurbishment.

**The Fed, the former Lancastrian Suite at Dunston, Gateshead, was bought earlier this year by Ramside Estates, which has invested a massive £250,000 in giving it a new look.**

And now the venue is holding a showcase event for event organisers or anyone planning a ceremony or celebration to see what it has to offer.

The Fed is already a popular spot for charity balls, award ceremonies, sporting dinners and party nights but the aim is now to invite people who haven't seen the transformation to see its facilities.

The event – on 15 September – will give visitors the opportunity to meet the team, try out some of the food offerings and see the upgraded

facilities which include a new state-of-the-art sound and light system, video walls and a complete refurbishment.

The Fed is one of the largest stand alone venues in the region, able to accommodate up to 1000 people for a standing event and 650 for a sit down dinner and dance.

John Adamson, owner of Ramside Estates which also includes Ramside Hall Hotel, Golf and Spa, Hardwick Hall, Bowburn Hall, Sedgefield's The Impeccable Pig and Colonel Porter's on Newcastle Quayside, believes people will be stunned.

"This is a great opportunity for anyone who hasn't been to The Fed before or who hasn't been for some time to see the impressive changes that have been made," he said.

***"It's a really versatile venue with the added bonus of the sheer numbers it can accommodate and we are looking forward to showcasing it at the event in September."***

***The evening is by invitation only but anyone who would like to attend can email [cheryl.flowers@wonderbar-newcastle.co.uk](mailto:cheryl.flowers@wonderbar-newcastle.co.uk) to find out more or to be added to the guestlist contact [Rachel@the-fed.co.uk](mailto:Rachel@the-fed.co.uk)***

***For further information visit [www.the-fed.co.uk](http://www.the-fed.co.uk)***





**THE FED**, formally The Lancastrian Suite has relaunched creating an exciting new event space with capacity for up to 1000 guests.

**THE FED IS A VERSATILE VENUE AND HAS A LOT TO OFFER INCLUDING**

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  - AV technician\*
- Creative menus designed by award winning chefs, including street food options
  - Purpose built stage perfect for live entertainment and guest speakers
  - Free on-site parking

**THE FED** can host sporting events, charity dinners, award ceremonies, weddings and conferences alongside a wide range of entertainment from celebrity acts, live bands, tribute acts, stand-up comedy and Christmas party nights.

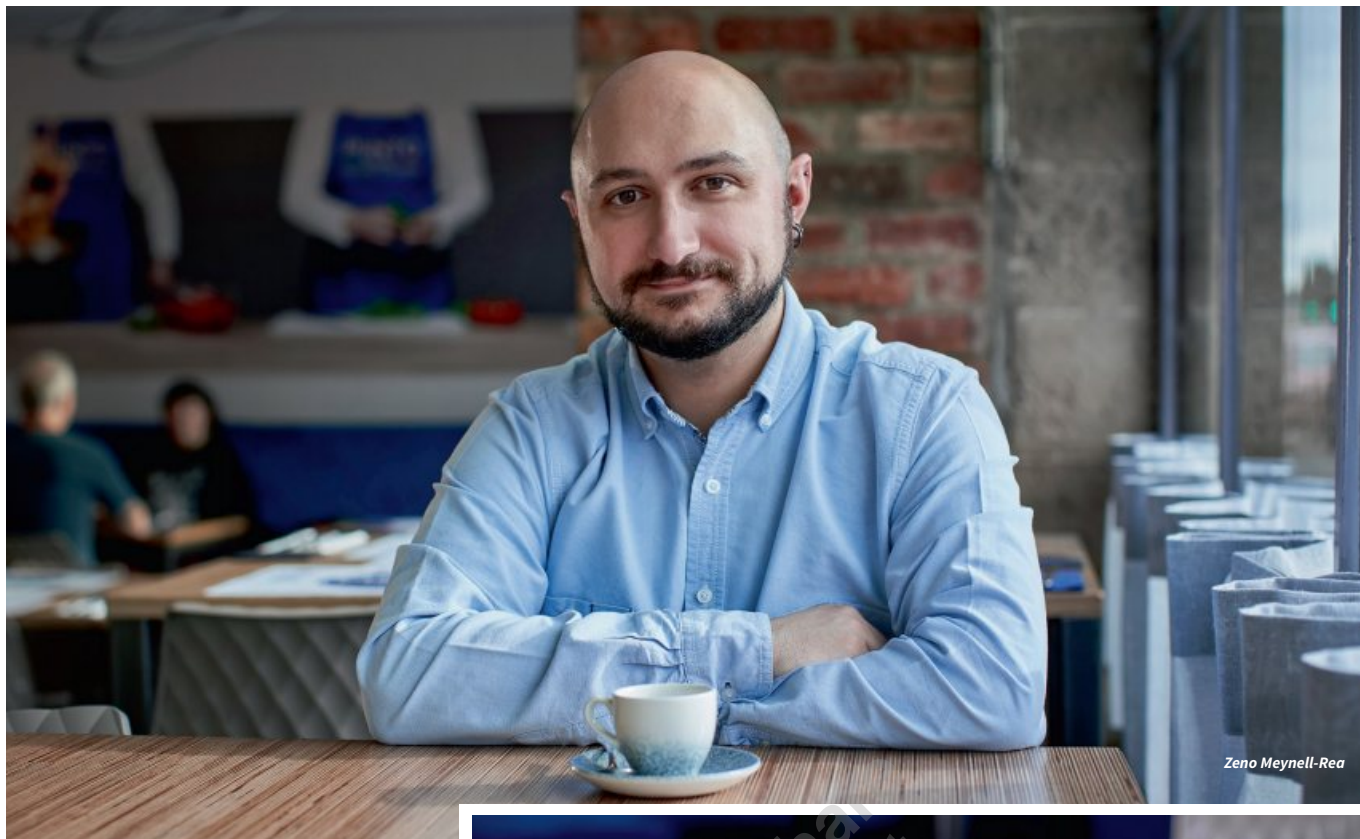
Our friendly and experienced team are here to help and look forward to welcoming you to **THE FED**.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT US ON 0191 4605353  
OR EMAIL [INFO@THE-FED.CO.UK](mailto:info@the-fed.co.uk)**

**THE FED, LANCASTER ROAD, DUNSTON, GATESHEAD, NE11 9JR**

\*Additional charges may apply





Zeno Meynell-Rea

## NOT ALL PIZZA IS CREATED EQUAL!

Zeno Meynell-Rea, Operations Director, Punto Italian Kitchen, Heaton.

“Pizza is just pizza though.” I hear you say! A circle of dough with some tomato and cheese on top and it’s cooked in an oven and you eat it, right? Not quite!

**To Italians pizza is serious business, and just like the numerous varieties of bread buns (or baps, barmes, stotties, rolls etc.) there are in fact seven types of pizza commonly found. The most famous of which is Pizza Napoletana.**

Created in Napoli, as the name suggests, Pizza Napoletana is the only type of pizza to have Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG) status. As such it must be made to a strict set of rules laid out by the Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana (AVPN). First, the dough must be made from ‘Doppio Zero’ Flour, Water, Yeast & Salt. No other ingredients are permitted in the dough.

It must be stretched by hand. Then it has to be cooked in a wood fired oven for no longer than 90 seconds at a temperature of 485°C. Toppings may vary but for a Pizza Margherita DOP it must



be made with San Marzano tomatoes, Buffalo Mozzarella or Fior di Latta from Campagna and finished with a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil.

The finished result is a very soft pizza with a fluffy rim or ‘coricione’. In the UK many people find Pizza Napoletana a little too soggy as it tends to flop in the middle. This is where our next type of Pizza comes in; Pizza Romana or Pizza Tonda Romana.

Unlike Pizza Romana, there are no strict rules here which is why we prefer to use style at Punto Italian Kitchen. We will use doppio zero flour, water, natural yeast and salt but we also add a little olive oil to the mix. Pizza Romana tends to be far more crispy and less ‘soggy’ than the Napoletana variety.

The lack of and defined rules means you can get really creative with styles, toppings, dough mixes and proving times. After all, while traditions are important, we are here to be a modern Italian kitchen.

Another favourite from the capital city is Pizza al Taglio, literally meaning ‘by the cut’. You will find these all over Rome as a typical ‘street food’. Baked in large rectangular trays it is cut into

long strips which are folded over and wrapped to eat straight away. Pizza al Taglio is something of an obsession of mine when I return to Italy as it brings back childhood memories of visiting the local pizzeria bar and seeing all of the different styles lined up along the counter.

One of the more interesting types from Naples is Pizza Fritta, fried pizza. While fried dough existed to some extent before the Second World War it was normally in the form of Crespelle. Pizze Fritte on the other hand really emerged after the war when ingredients were scarce, wood was expensive and ovens had been destroyed.

Filled with various ingredients from anchovies and broccoli or less favourable parts of vegetables they made a really cheap and easy meal during hard times. Now of course you can get far more refined varieties.

***You may have noticed that I have only mentioned four types of pizza. To find out about the other three and to see the expanded version of this article, you’ll just have to visit our blog at [www.puntoitalian.co.uk](http://www.puntoitalian.co.uk)***



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## A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

With a brand new production for 2022, The Sensational 60s Experience arrives at the Playhouse Whitley Bay on October 20th and promises to be a night to remember.

**The production marks Mike Penders farewell tour. Mike was the original voice of The Searchers who were only rivalled in Liverpool by The Beatles and Gerry and the Pacemakers. The band notched up 6 UK top ten hits including Needles and Pins and Dont Throw Your Love Away.**

Other highlights include Dozy, Beaky, Mick and Tich and who in 1966 were in the charts for 50 weeks out of 52. Hits include Bend It and Zabadak.

The Fortunes also appear having first came to prominence in 1964 with their hit Caroline which was used as the signature tune for the influential Radio Station of the same name.

This is a great opportunity to step back in time to when pop music was at its very best.

For ticket information call the box office on (0844) 248155 or visit the website [www.playhousewhitleybay.co.uk](http://www.playhousewhitleybay.co.uk)

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## CHANGE OF SEASON AT STACK SEABURN

The hottest summer on record may be behind us, but with a change in season comes a new wave of exciting entertainment - kid's events, live sport, and live entertainment at STACK Seaburn – the innovative shipping container hub situated on Seaburn's coastline.



**The much-loved venue welcomed over 150,000 visitors through its doors during the 6-week school holidays, and it would seem that STACK is hoping to keep this momentum up – announcing a stellar schedule that stretches from September to December, just in time for the festive period.**

To tickle your fancy, and help you get those all-important dates in your diary – we've rounded up the cream of the crop, so you know 'What's On' across the months:

Starting in September, STACK visitors will be given the chance to have their taste buds tantalised with the return of Sunderland's Restaurant Week. Running Saturday 17 to Sunday 25 September, diners can sample their way through the venue's eclectic range of street food for less, with many of the operators offering a special deal across the 10 days.

Bellies full, we turn to look at STACK Seaburn's event and entertainment offer: from acoustic acts, to full scale band performances – the social hub caters for all music tastes and ages. New to their line-up, The mOObs band will debut STACK's stage on Sunday 11 September, to bring you the best in northern indie, rock and classic pop covers.

Usual weekly activities including STACK's Tuesday Trivia Quiz and Thursday's Rocks Off Juke Box show will also be accompanied by the site's increasingly popular monthly events: Kroud Karaoke and So 80's evening, to create a well-rounded month of activity.

October brings Halloween fun and ghoulish activities for the kids to get involved in – with popular character meet and greets taking up the majority of daytime activity during the half term school holidays.

But the event that has everyone talking, must be the return of Rob Lamberti – the UK's #1 George Michael Tribute. On Thursday 13 October, be prepared to have your mind blown as Rob takes centre stage and embodies the 'Careless Whisper' singer effortlessly with his accompanying band – some of whom are George Michael's personal musicians.

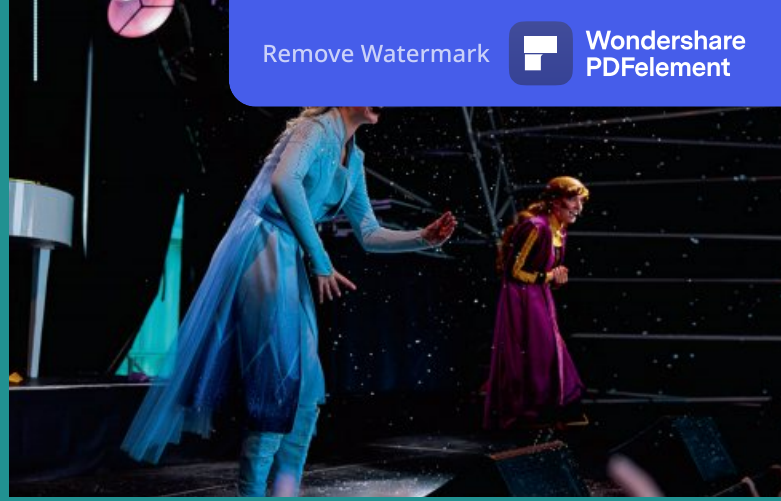


**To witness Rob's incredible vocals and mesmerising portrayal celebrating the one and only George Michael tickets can be purchased at £18pp + booking fee online from STACK's website. This is a ticketed event for over 18's only.**

Of course, STACK wouldn't be the versatile venue we've all come to know it for without a spot of sport. Football fans can come along and enjoy watching Sunderland AFC take on their EFL Championship rivals, live on the main plaza big screen.

Leading into the remaining two months of the year, STACK is proud to announce that it will be a lively hub for all World Cup 2022 matches – after the success of broadcasting the last Euros competition and SAFC League One Win live on its big screen.





And it's never too early to talk about Christmas, is it? The venue has announced that Christmas Party Nights and bench bookings will go live to reserve during the month of September – meaning you can get ahead of the game and book that all important office night out, or a catch up with mates. Party night bookings will include reserved seating, food & drinks tokens and live music and entertainment. More information on Christmas events will be announced on the STACK website over the coming weeks and to stay in the know you can sign up to their e-newsletter by visiting their website.

Mix the fever of the World Cup with their infamous Christmas Party Nights, and you're bound to find that most of your weekends can be filled up with festive plans at STACK.

So, as we say goodbye to summer, fear not – things are certainly heating up at STACK Seaburn.

**For more information and full entertainment schedule, please see [www.stackseaburn.com](http://www.stackseaburn.com)**

**STACK**  
SEABURN

**ROB LAMBERTI**  
**A CELEBRATION OF**  
**THE SONGS & MUSIC**  
**OF GEORGE MICHAEL**

**THURSDAY 13 OCTOBER 2022**

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**TICKETS: [WWW.STACKSEABURN.COM](http://WWW.STACKSEABURN.COM)**





L-R: MFC head of partnerships Liam McGuinness and CEO of Host & Stay Dale Smith.

## KEEPING IT IN THE COMMUNITY

It takes collaboration across a community to develop better skills for better lives, believes Dale Smith, CEO of holiday home management firm Host & Stay.

**By joining forces with local organisations, Dale hopes to get to the heart of the areas Host & Stay operates in - and that outreach is beginning through a love of the beautiful game.**

### Kicking off a new partnership

Football is a unique sport. Its heavy focus on the fans often means it's the heart of a community and, in many cases, it's the longest relationship people have had.

Middlesbrough and Sheffield Wednesday are popular clubs, drawing around 50,000 supporters to their matches each week between them, and both are well-established, having been founded over a hundred years ago.

This long-established history and fan relationship is one of many reasons why we're delighted to have been named as partners to these two great clubs for the current football season, signing deals that will bring key opportunities for Host & Stay, our employees and the wider community through engagement,

club association, tickets and player activations.

By joining forces, our aim is to not only increase customer awareness, but also give back to the areas in which we operate. We're hoping that these partnerships will enable us to get closer to communities through charitable donations, giving our time to volunteer, providing new jobs for local people and developing careers as we grow.

We have also pledged to support both clubs' charity foundations, the MFC Foundation and the Sheffield Wednesday Foundation, by giving away our allocated matchday tickets to disadvantaged children and families who would otherwise not have the opportunity to watch a football match.

The residents of these underprivileged areas may not be able to attend the matches as often as they'd like, but that doesn't mean the love of the game isn't there. As a lifelong Middlesbrough fan myself, I know the joy going to a match brings, so to be able to provide that for others means a lot.

But how do these partnerships tie into the wider business strategy and development of Host & Stay? Well, it all comes down to our purpose.

### Fulfilling our purpose

While profit is undoubtedly important - after all, without it, we cannot create jobs - the ultimate aim of Host & Stay, and The SDDE Smith Group as a whole, is to have a positive impact on everything we do.

Businesses form the backbone of any community because they bring people together, and we want to do all we can to build the character of the local area and help regional economies thrive.

### Local identity

There's a sense of pride in being part of a

community, and for us, we are beyond proud to represent Teesside and the North as a whole. By bringing our products and services to the area, we are hoping to influence it for the betterment of its residents, making daily needs more accessible and increasing local revenue.

With these football partnerships, we can help to form the identity of the local community and represent the important history of both Middlesbrough and Sheffield, both of which are crucial to the towns they serve. The clubs have helped to shape the character of the area, and our wish is to further encourage this, not only by connecting with individuals, but also by directly influencing tourism and creating a thriving community with our holiday homes.

### Local jobs for local people

One of our key drivers is the ability to create jobs for the local community. Not only will this bring more money into the area, but it will also encourage more people to stay. This has a compounding effect, allowing people to work closer to home and improving the general quality of life for residents.

For us, the answer to the question of whether, as a business, we can do this is undoubtedly yes. We are fortunate to be in a position to make a difference to the people and the places we operate, and community-centred partnerships, such as the ones with Middlesbrough and Sheffield Wednesday, get us one step closer. The key for us is to come up with new ideas on how we can create positive changes in our communities.

We're on a mission to push boundaries, to create better places to live, to work, and to stay, and we look forward to seeing 'Boro supporters and The Owls at their matches soon.

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



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## SCHOOL HOLIDAY FUN, OH THE FUN!

Contrary to popular opinion, I believe in the need for children to have an extensive break when the days are long, and the weather provides opportunity to be outside. Their minds and bodies absolutely need it.

**But, for working parents, it is the most challenging period. The pressure to achieve the elusive work life balance creates significant stress. It puts strain on relationships, parents get frustrated with each other, for some single parents it is all on them. Grandparents get annoyed that their retirement is a return to parenthood with less energy and patience. You only see friends to juggle kids. Relationships are tested. Finances are stretched. And then there's the horrific guilt, the fear that we screw up and our children are the unfortunate consequence of doing so.**

Born in the 70's, an 80's child, I grew up on a street full of families. We'd be straight out of bed and onto the street the minute the sun peaked through our curtains, and we stayed out until the stars sparkled. The doors were open all day, a parent there if needed. For many of my peers today, we feel lucky to have lived such an experience, but this unfortunately fuels the guilt we all feel as parents.

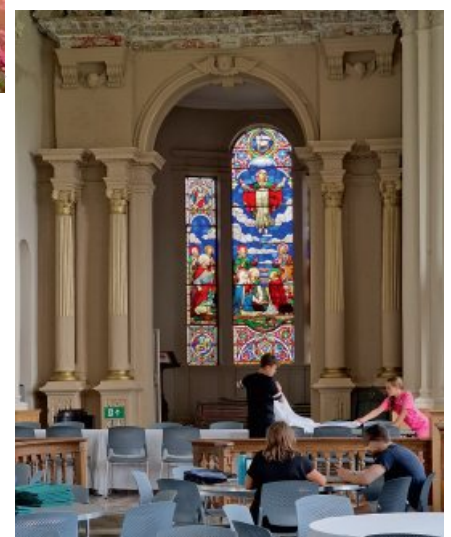
The owner of a wedding planning business, the Summer is my busiest period. Throw in being a Founder of a start-up business and other 'working' commitments, I don't help myself by thinking I'm a 'stay at home Mam!' The reality is, I'm not. I'm travelling with work, so is the Husband and we have no support to lighten the



load. Planning, months in advance, is the only way I've found we can navigate the summer holidays.

Every situation is different so there's no magical formula. As I write, my house is full of kids, only two are mine! They have decided to bake so I'm surround by absolute chaos. I'm writing, trying to talk to you, in between the noise of kids talking over the top of one another and at me! Once the sugar hits, the walls won't contain them, we'll need to hit the park, they'll play and fight and whinge, and I'll find a bench and sit with my laptop to work. Embracing the chaos.

And whilst I take work into their space, I also bring them into my workspace. My children are experienced wedding stylists and on an entrepreneurial journey. As they've grown, they've become more involved. They experience fulfilling a task and being rewarded 'getting paid.' My eldest joined me for his school work experience recently, we travelled and worked together on a celebrity wedding. He



was absolutely amazing and has continued as a valuable member of the team throughout the Summer. I feel immensely proud to work alongside him.

We are all grateful for Summer Clubs but not all day, everyday. So, they'll join me for meetings. When they were younger, I'd go armed with activities and food, now, they absorb the meeting, they provide me with feedback, they are curious and ask questions, all of which helps me and Kind Currency. Being a parent it's a huge part of me as an entrepreneur.

There is no miracle solution.

As you read this, structure will have returned, we'll look back and realise we didn't do too bad! Our frustrations will have melted away, the tiredness, the meltdowns, the mistakes, all forgotten, and the guilt quietened. Most importantly, when our children are asked if they enjoyed the holidays, they'll smile with joy. Be kind to yourself and smile too!



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



## COUNTDOWN TO CHRISTMAS

It's been quite a summer, but cooler evenings, groaning bramble bushes and falling leaves mean autumn's fast approaching. So, where better to celebrate the countdown to Christmas than at two of the region's top pubs...

If you're walking through Ponteland or Felton and the still night air echoes to the sound of Champagne corks popping, it will come as no surprise.

Because each of those villages has a pub at its heart and each of those pubs has reason to celebrate.

In March, The Blackbird, at Ponteland was named Pub of the Year at the North East England Tourism Awards. Then, just weeks later, its sister site, The Northumberland Arms at Felton, near Alnwick, won a 2022 Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice Awards for the second year in a row – putting the pub with rooms in the top 10 per cent of hotels worldwide.

Both properties are part of the Northumberland Pub Company and were singled out for their attention to detail, their food offering and their general high standards in everything from service to cleanliness.

But let's come back to the food, because this is the time of year when thoughts – and dreams – turn to rich stews, succulent roasts, hearty soups and extravagant puddings...all of which taste better when cooked and served by someone else.

Each venue offers a changing seasonal menu, featuring locally sourced ingredients wherever possible, with chefs who combine the comforting appeal of traditional dishes with a little contemporary, culinary fairy dust.

Recent reviews include comments such as “five-star service and food” “superb” and “great evening out” – so it is no wonder both are already starting to look towards their festive offering.

The final touches are currently being put together but there's no doubt that they will be upholding the standards that both venues are known for – which means seasonal food at its finest, cooked to perfection.

Guests at The Blackbird - originally a castle built by warriors in the 14th century – can opt to dine within the comfort of its thick stone walls, in front of a roaring fire, or outside, in a tipi, warmed with heaters and strung with twinkling lights.

While The Northumberland Arms - a former coaching inn built in the 1820s - offers contemporary, country chic, overlooking the River Coquet as it meanders through this prettiest of villages. And, with six charming bedrooms, there is absolutely no need to even think about returning home at the end of the evening.

**For more information about the Blackbird, or to book, visit [www.theblackbirdponteland.co.uk](http://www.theblackbirdponteland.co.uk). Bookings for The Northumberland Arms can be made at [www.northumberlandarms-felton.co.uk](http://www.northumberlandarms-felton.co.uk)**



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- MANICURE
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90 minutes - 1-5 children

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# OUT AND ABOUT - LUDLOW



Ludlow in the Welsh Marches is ideal for a short break by train, travelling from the north-east via Manchester and Shrewsbury. If you choose to stay close to a station anywhere in England, Wales or Scotland, you can have a low carbon holiday with plenty of opportunity to visit interesting places with little effect on the environment.

We found a pleasant place to eat at *Changs Thai Bar and Restaurant* where the service was very fast and the Asian food delicious. There are no high-rise buildings in Ludlow, so the tower of St. Laurence's church stands proud. One of only 18 churches given 5\* rating in Simon Jenkins' "England's Thousand Greatest Churches" and the views from the top are magnificent. To the west is the mostly ruined Ludlow Castle, owned by the Anglo-Welsh Powis Estates, and to the north east you can watch the trains running through Ludlow Station, and make a mental note to visit that restored Victorian railway shed close to the station which is the home of the Ludlow Brewing Company, before rejoining your train. Don't attempt Ludlow in a day - it's too far - but as part of a few days away, based, say, in Shrewsbury, it's a town well worth a visit.

**I was in the area of Church Stretton in southern Shropshire during July and visited Welshpool (for Powis Castle), and Shrewsbury, staying for a few nights. Rail strikes notwithstanding, which constrained our activity on 27th July, my wife and I particularly enjoyed our visit to the town of Ludlow, which lies on the Welsh Marches Line.**

[alexnelson@dunelm.org.uk](mailto:alexnelson@dunelm.org.uk) [www.nationalrail.com](http://www.nationalrail.com)

With an off-peak day return, you can break your journey as often as you like in both directions, which enabled us to stop off at Craven Arms (where the Heart of Wales veers off to the southwest towards Swansea, calling at 28 mostly tiny stations on the way), to visit Stokesay Castle. An off-peak return from Shrewsbury to Ludlow, without discounts, is £14.30.

Cross the car park at Craven Arms - noting the times of trains onward later in the day - and turn right to walk south along the A49 road out of the village to find English Heritage's wonderful Stokesay Castle, which was built by Lawrence of Ludlow from 1285 onwards, and he had the King's permission to crenellate (fortify) his manor house in 1291. He traded in wool and became a very rich man and the collection of buildings testify to his wealth. There's a good tea room at Stokesay to sample after climbing up the towers of Stokesay Castle, before walking back into Craven Arms for the onward train to Ludlow. There is an alternative to walking back to Craven Arms station: the Minsterley Motors service 435 from Shrewsbury runs hourly, from Stokesay about on the hour, and takes just ten minutes into Ludlow.

My home village in Co. Durham has three listed buildings. Ludlow has over 500, including the famous Feathers Inn, pictured, which must be one of the most published buildings in England. There are black and white half-timbered structures wherever you look, interspersed with later Georgian and Victorian buildings. There is a range, a cornucopia even, of independent shops around the town, for example a well-stocked cheese shop called The Mousetrap where we tried several of the cheeses on offer, and the lady looked after our choices so we did not need to carry them around whilst they stayed refrigerated on a hot day. There is a hedgehog rescue centre called Pricklebums, opposite the clock shop on Quality Square, visitors by appointment only. It must be one of the few Hedgehog Hospitals.

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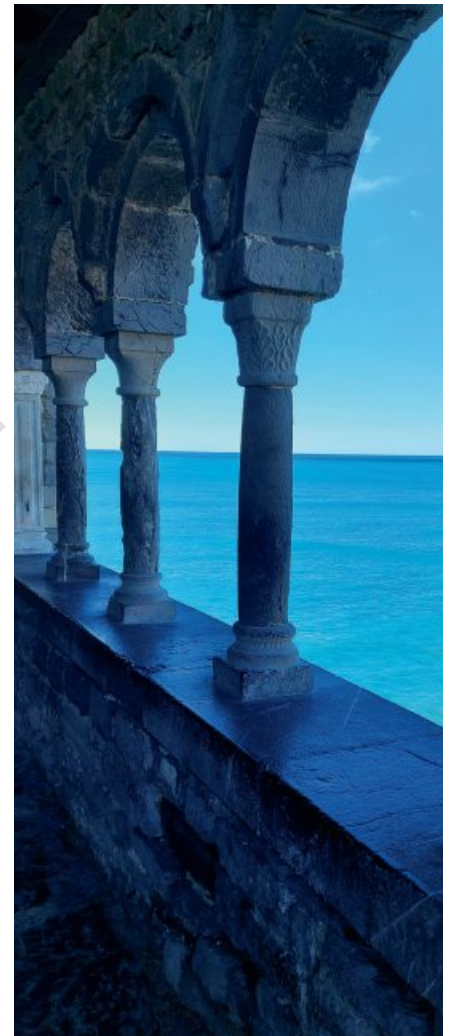
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## LA SPEZIA – GATEWAY TO LA CINQUE TERRE AND BEYOND

By Caroline Preston

The Italian Riviera is synonymous with the Liguria region of Italy, a crescent-shaped strip of Mediterranean coastline between the south of France and Tuscany.

**This region has something for everyone... beautiful hillside villages, glamour and glitz equivalent to Monte Carlo, exquisite countryside and of course, Florence and Pisa, the cities of art, architecture and food.**

Clearly, this region attracts millions of tourists. Some 65 million visit Italy each year, many heading here, and who can blame them...I love a show stopper, but I'm also a big fan of authenticity aka the 'real thing' and this trip I may have just found the gin to my tonic...La Spezia.

La Spezia sits right on the border between Liguria and Tuscany, it's Liguria's second largest city and is home to the country's largest naval base. Its combination of historical buildings,

beautiful scenery and tree-lined waterfront, the Passeggiata Costantino Morin, makes for idyllic wandering.

Surprisingly though, this is a city that is often overlooked despite having exceptional transport links and its own Riviera town, Porto Venere, a mere 20 minutes away.

Porto Venere is as pretty as its famed Riviera rivals and it's historically interesting. Its rocky shoreline is home to Grotta di Lord Byron (Byron's Grotto) named appropriately after the English Poet who lived in Porto Venere. Byron often swam in this rocky cove and said he drew inspiration from it. Porto's beautiful harbour is surrounded by colourful houses and the town's crooked alleyways climb upwards to the precariously positioned gothic Church of San Pietro.

So why stay in La Spezia or Porto Venere? Four reasons, better value accommodation, great transport, authenticity and la Cinque Terre, the five picturesque old fishing villages are said to be among the most photogenic places in Italy, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

So picturesque are these villages, everyone wants to be there, much like summer in Cornwall. Your visions of a scenic Italian road trip may be one thing, the reality may be another, roads can be very congested. La Spezia, however, has the answer, in its rail links, its central station, La Spezia Centrale, is on the main railway line linking Genova, Cinque Terre, La Spezia, Pisa and Rome.

These frequent services mean you can enjoy

a better value, more authentic experience by staying outside of the main tourist hubs. The benefits of this are a plenty, connections with local people, their cultures and of course 'real' food...Liguria is a food Mecca, the home of Minestrone, Focaccia, Pesto Genovese and Linguini pasta, need I say more?

So, the next time you're planning a getaway, could you consider what hidden gems may be waiting to welcome you just a little further out? Like La Spezia it could be your gateway to new adventures.

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

### Travel notes:

*Caroline travelled to La Spezia and Porto Venere with MSC Cruises in February 2022. For information on train services please visit [www.cinqueterre.eu.com/en/cinque-terre-timetable](http://www.cinqueterre.eu.com/en/cinque-terre-timetable).*



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# WHY THE FINISHING TOUCHES MATTER IN YOUR HOSPITALITY VENUE



The hospitality and leisure industry is experiencing a revival following a tumultuous few years. But once you've enticed customers in, how do you get them to stick around and spend more cash?

**Upgrading your interiors and prioritising those small finishing touches can make all the difference, says Bethany Walker, head of design at Styled Interior Design.**

There is a lot of competition in the hospitality and leisure industry, so it's essential to find ways to stand out from the crowd.

Interior design is a huge part of the customer experience, and a carefully designed space can mean the difference between having a quick meal and leaving or sticking around for dessert and extra drinks. But often it's the small, finishing touches, the ones that bring a look together, that create the most excitement.

#### Tying a space together

Accessories are the name of the game here. Think colour-coordinated napkins, candles, flowers and vases. These elements of layered design really emphasise and complement a wider theme, whilst creating a striking, effortless backdrop to your customers' food photoshoot. If your restaurant is cosy, think plush cushions, musk-scented candles and dainty glass vases with injections of green foliage. For fun and colourful themes, think coloured shaped vases,

floral scents and cascades of brightly coloured flowers to ensure your restaurant's personality shines through.

But you don't need to stop there. Your finishing touches could extend to the doorknobs on the bathroom doors, water decanters on the table or quirky salt and pepper shakers. And the glasses, crockery and cutlery you choose are just as important too. Just make sure the space doesn't end up feeling too cluttered.

So, once you've chosen your finishing touches, how do you guarantee they get you customers?

#### Get on social media

If you've spent time and effort crafting a beautiful space for people to enjoy, shout about it on social media!

According to research by Zizzi, 18 – 35-year-olds spend five whole days a year browsing food and restaurants on social media, and 30 per cent would avoid a restaurant if their Instagram presence was weak. Many social media users decide on the food they are going to order before they've even set foot in the door – relying on beautiful images to help them out.

If that's not enough to get you reaching for

your phone, perhaps this will – 69 per cent of millennial diners take a photo of their food before eating it. Now you see why it pays to invest in your finishing touches.

Social media is one of the best ways to market your hospitality venue, if not the best way. It's free, easy to set up and has a captive audience. In fact, 4.62 billion people now use social media on a regular basis – that's over half of the world's population.

Not only that but there are hundreds of food and restaurant influencers with large, trusting audiences who can do your marketing for you. Many restaurateurs actively create spaces that will match the 'Instagram aesthetic'. Yes, those little squares are more important than ever for the hospitality industry.

Investing in the finishing touches can make a big difference to how you appear on social media. A quick google search of 'Instagram restaurants' gives thousands of results including profiles of the best restaurants on the platform, and blogs on the most 'Instagrammable' and 'prettiest' restaurants.

You may be wondering if this still applies to you if you don't have a large millennial or Gen Z customer base, but just remember that millennials are now the biggest adult cohort worldwide, accounting for 23 per cent of the population. If you're not targeting millennials with your interior design, maybe you should be.

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# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## MARC MILLAR

From North Wealth Management, and Senior Partner Practice of St. James's Place Wealth Management, Marc talks to Highlights PR's Keith Newman about his passion for golf and a new networking group he has formed for those who enjoy the sport.



### **Marc, you've been involved in sport all of your life but how did you get into golf?**

Being from Scotland, I was never really far away from a golf course. I first picked up a club when I was just seven or eight and my school holidays would be spent in the municipal course near to my home. My parents were huge on golf going to watch Opens and local events, so it was pretty much through them that I found myself interested in the sport.

As a professional footballer I spent a lot of spare time playing golf and when I retired from football, I had a couple of jobs involving golf. I love the sport and more importantly the connection you get with other golfers.

### **I suppose being from Scotland, the home of golf, you must have grown up seeing the big competitions in your neck of the woods. Did you ever see any of the famous people involved or did you simply enjoy watching them on TV?**

I loved watching golf on TV, but I was lucky enough to be at St Andrews in 1984 when Seve Ballesteros won the Open and I watched his famous little celebration which was great to see.

### **In your job as an expert in wealth management, do you still get time to play a lot of golf?**

I try to play as often as possible as it helps me to relax and it's also a great way to meet new people as well as meet up with old friends.

### **Tell me about Golf in the City.**

It's a networking group we've formed for people who love playing golf. It started between a couple of friends, and we just thought that there was a lot of golf charity or corporate days and that it would be a good idea to maybe start growing our own golf networking group. It started with my good friend James Ealey and now we are regularly networking with over 50 people.

### **What sort of people take part?**

Everyone is the short answer. It's self-employed individuals, engineering businesses, teachers, hospitality, financials, construction etc there's just a real broad variation of businesses involved and there's definitely a lot of positive contacts being made for everyone involved.

### **What about the different levels of expertise, do you do you put people together who have the same ability or just mix and match?**

There is definitely no better way to get to know someone than spending four or five hours with them over 18 holes. If someone needs an introduction to others, I'll facilitate that, but it's not necessarily based on their levels of golfing skill or handicap. We've got some high handicappers and I'm pleased to see two or three lady golfers getting involved. It's more a case of having an enjoyable Friday game of golf but with people that you can maybe have a connexion with or look to have mutual benefits.

We meet in the morning for a breakfast roll and coffee with a brief introduction and just go over some of the rules and plans for the day, discuss who's playing with who and then enjoy 18 holes.

### **As it's a networking event, does business change hands?**

There's definitely business exchanged amongst the networking group, but it's done in a very casual way based on building relationships and with the shared interest of golf.

### **You also have a charitable aspect too?**

Yes, there are enough people in the group for us to plan our own charity day next year. The vast majority of our members will be involved and it's just a case of giving something back to a local charity that means a lot to our members.

### **How can business people who enjoy golf find out more?**

They can contact me at [Marc.Millar@sjpp.co.uk](mailto:Marc.Millar@sjpp.co.uk) or visit Golf in the City on LinkedIn. There are no restrictions as to what businesses are involved, the only thing that we ask is that it's not used as a sales environment where people are pitching for business. It's a great networking group with no membership cost and it's growing positively giving members good leads and connections.

**Marc Millar is on 07842 628731**  
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David Fairlamb

# KNOWING IT IS ONE THING, DOING IT IS ANOTHER

We all know that regular exercise and keeping active plays a huge part in our general health and wellbeing. Knowing it is one thing but consistently doing it, is where many of us fall down.

## **Finding the motivation, sustaining that focus and keeping a routine is often harder than doing the exercise itself.**

As you can imagine over 25 years as a trainer I have pretty much heard every excuse going and there have been some interesting ones, but in the end it comes down to you and how much you want to make those changes. I believe if you want it badly enough you will just do it.

Here are 10 go to tips to help you hold your focus and motivation:

### **Memory**

Remember how good it feels when you have exercised and that endorphin rush which gives you a real positive drive and feel good factor.

### **Positive People**

Try to surround yourself with positive people that give off good vibes and make you feel good at the same time. You know who those people are, this will keep your mood and energy up therefore you are more likely to feel like exercising.

### **Get Up and Go**

Training during the day or in the evening you are more likely to find an excuse to miss your training or find other things that seem more important at the time. Try your workout as soon as you get up, then it is done for the day and gives you a real sense of achievement plus puts you in a positive frame of mind from the minute you walk into work.

### **Podcast**

Change your mindset and boost your mood and energy by listening to an uplifting podcast that inspires you. It may be a motivational story, life event or something funny, whatever works to help to re-ignite you.

### **Training for what?**

Train for a purpose, 80 per cent of people who start a regime without any sort of focus or goal fail. Keeping your mind set on something is massively important and short term goals are key eg dropping 4lbs of fat, training for a 5k run, aiming to be able to do 100 squats a day, raising money through exercise. Whatever it takes, find something to hold your focus.

### **Train in a Group**

It has been proven training within a group makes you work harder, provides quicker results and is more sustainable. It not only improves your mood through exercise but also through the camaraderie and social aspect of the group.



### **Variety**

Most of you will have your go to exercise workout which is great but if you do not try anything else you will never know the positive impact it may have. Our VersaClimber classes are totally unique with nothing like it anywhere else. The combination of the non weight bearing climbing motion, music, lights all in its own hub is something that needs to be experienced.

### **Working with a Professional**

Having that accountability and constant variation by working with a professional works. It also means you do not have to think about how and what you need to be doing. Also by booking an appointment you are far more likely to stick to it.

### **Teach Yourself**

Teach yourself to be positive, some days are much tougher than others but we all need to continue to look at the positives and do as much as we can to push through those tough days. Holding onto your strong routines and learning that giving in, is not an option.

### **The Key to Feeling Good Promoting Motivation**

Eating the right kind of food is absolutely key to feeling good every day, do not underestimate this comment. Eating fresh natural foods, in other words what our bodies are designed to eat is your ultimate motivational tool to hold your focus and motivation throughout life.

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

## DAVID'S SUMMING UP

*In the end focus and motivation comes down to you and how much you want to make changes. I believe if you want it badly enough you will just do it.*

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## THE LAST WORD



Barry Speker

**The cost of living crisis, rampant inflation, rail strikes, drought, floods, sewage in the rivers and on the beaches, fuel prices and the energy crisis were just a few of the reasons given as arguments to curtail the prolonged process of electing the Tory leader and next PM; to get the Government to declare its policies and solutions. However election rules is rules!**

Writing this column makes me cautious in making predictions which by publication day prove to be erroneous and embarrassing. Whatever! It seems more than likely that Liz Truss will make it to Number 10, unless there is an amazing late rush for Rishi or Boris makes some further U-turn to undermine the system and rebound back from Greece to grasp the zip-wire of power.

As PM who will Liz Truss emulate? Her role model and long admired Margaret Thatcher? Her predecessor Boris to whose policies and approach she displayed immense loyalty? or perhaps it might be Finland's Prime Minister, Sanna Marin. The Finnish leader's publicised partying, at rock festivals and nightclubs, makes the events at Downing Street look tame in the extreme, (leaving aside the Covid rule issue). Ms Marin was slated for seeming 'unstatesmanlike' (should that be 'unstatespersonlike') purely for



behaving like normal people do. She was even persuaded to take a drug test!

It appears that despite the error of allowing parties to be filmed, her popularity is enhanced particularly with younger voters and her perceived ability to be a good Prime Minister is thought not to be undermined. Truss for Glastonbury?

The return of Kynren, Bishop Auckland's historical pageant, is greatly welcomed. I first saw the event four years ago and it is even more impressive, enjoyable and enhanced. The capacity audience was engrossed. From Boudicca (Boadicea), through the Vikings, Romans, Middle Ages, Civil War, Elizabethan Age, Industrial Revolution, two World wars and very much more. There is even space for Windrush and the 1966 World Cup Winners.

The dates for 2023 are available now and I cannot commend it too highly. No doubt the Lionesses will make an appearance.

There has been widespread criticism of the BBC decision to scrap the Saturday reading of the classified football results. Albeit this started in an age when all matches were played at 3 o'clock on Saturday afternoon. By 5pm supporters would be back in their cars listening to the reassuring tune of Hubert Bath's 'Out of the Blue' heralding 'Sports Report' and the reading of all the football match results.

Suddenly and without warning it was gone. Eventually the BBC explained that it 'no longer has time in its radio schedules' and in any event the results are available on television and online. To read the English and Scottish results takes about five minutes. I agree with the description of this cancellation as an act of cultural vandalism. We need to hear 'East Fife 4, Forfar 5'. I hope the BBC will listen to its audience and reinstate.

This is alongside a new BBC policy to impose quotas for featured classical music, suggesting that concentration on great composers such as Bach, Beethoven, Mozart and Wagner is unacceptably 'male, pale and stale'. and that other composers because of gender or skin colour have not been given their fair share of attention. The BBC Proms is already sidelining some excellent composers who have the misfortune to be male, pale and middle aged.

After 1000 years in which western classical music has been much dominated by white composers



and performers, there is ample evidence of a significant pendulum swing.

Many black and Asian composers and performers are widely featured in all concert halls. There is certainly no sex bar. Inclusiveness is universally welcomed. Audiences have ears. Talent is recognised on the basis of merit and appreciation. However there is no call for artificial quotas to be imposed by the self-possessed and opinionated BBC oligarchy.

As a consequence of low rainfall, this year's crop of fruit and vegetables will include an unusually high proportion of mis-shapen ugly or 'wonky' specimens. The National Farmers Union warns that the drought conditions will particularly affect carrots, onions, potatoes and apples and they are urging supermarkets not to shy away from them.

This recalls, for those with long memories, the features of suggestive saucy spuds on Esther Rantzen's That's Life.

Harvests may already be smaller and the cost of living crisis means cheap foodstuffs are essential. Certain supermarkets should relax their obsession with aesthetically perfect items. The oddly shaped offer will be just as nutritious with the same calorie content, and bring a smile to the shoppers.

Look out for new range of odd shapes and sizes of fruit and vegetables. Just like the old broken biscuit shop!

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