

NORTHERN

# INSIGHT

March 2023

Issue 88



Dame Allan's Schools -  
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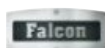
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# Credits

**Managing Director**  
Michael Grahamslaw

**Design**  
Lu O'Rourke

**Accounts Manager**  
Lisa Grahamslaw

**Lead Photography**  
Crest Photography

**Additional Photography**  
The Bigger Picture Agency

**Editorial Contributors**  
Jack Grahamslaw, Holly Grahamslaw,  
Graham Courtney, Barry Speker,  
David Fairlamb, Alex Nelson, Caroline Preston

**Social Media**  
Geeta Ral (JAM Prints & Marketing Limited)



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# Foreword

## Welcome to the March edition of Northern Insight.

Our 88th issue has been a joy to compile and is jam packed with great features, perceptive articles and social photography.

Our cover star is Dame Allans Senior School and Sixth Form who showcase their new Jubilee building which offers outstanding facilities for students to pursue the STEAM subjects of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths.

Employee wellbeing start up Key Wellbeing celebrate their third birthday in our popular Big Interview slot.

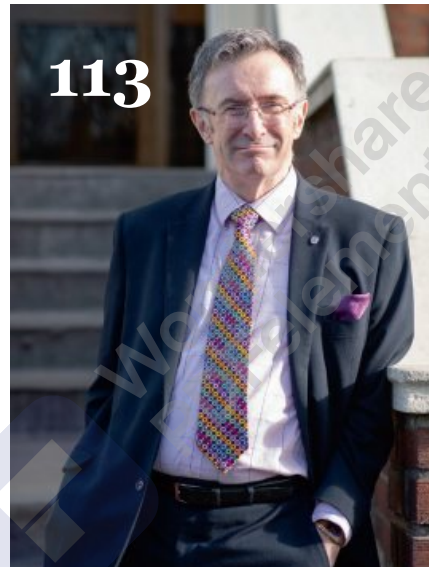
Elsewhere look out for coverage of NE Youths amazing Burns Night Fundraiser.

On our travels we make welcome returns to Rockliffe Hall and Seaham Hall whilst further afield we look at visiting Barbados on a budget.

We hope you enjoy it!

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

*M.J. Grahamslaw*  
Michael Grahamslaw, Publisher  
[mjgrahamslaw@outlook.com](mailto:mjgrahamslaw@outlook.com)



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## Further six-figure investment for independent ice cream manufacturer

North Yorkshire's Brymor Ice Cream has made a further six-figure investment in its production plant, installing a new pasteuriser to further boost its efficiency, which comes just months after investing to double its annual manufacturing capacity to over 1million litres.

The £100,000 self-funded investment sees installation of plant which is up to 50 per cent more efficient than the outgoing model, saving working hours and energy, which is further complemented by the solar panel installation last year. These investments will help Brymor to significantly reduce its carbon footprint as it works towards net zero.

Sales Manager, Heather Wilson said: "Our commitment to continuous innovation and ongoing investment enables us to remain at the forefront of ice cream manufacturing, while also staying true to our heritage.

"This is the latest stage in significant investment across the business, both in production and in the parlour – including the recent addition of a dog exercise area, bringing the cows back for visitors to see, and we have some exciting plans for the coming months."

Brymor achieved a three star accolade in the 2022 Great Taste Awards for its Amarena Black Cherry Whim Wham, and invested £100,000 in a solar panel installation on its roof to reduce its impact on the environment.

Producing potentially up to 1million litres of ice cream each year, Brymor has earned an enviable reputation and in addition to its parlour which welcomes hundreds of thousands of visitors each year, is also stocked in Booths, Waitrose and by many independent retailers, pubs and restaurants.

## Warm generosity helps keep people warm

**Kind hearted freemasons from Alnwick have donated funds to ensure that vulnerable people in the rural Northumberland area can easily get to community warm hubs to alleviate the effects of the cost-of-living crisis.**

Members of Coquetdale Lodge in the town handed over a cheque for £250 to Upper Coquetdale Community Transport to help them provide transport for those in need.

Upper Coquetdale Community Transport (UCCT) is a registered charity based in Upper Coquetdale. They have been providing transport solutions in rural communities for over 10 years and operate a 16-seater minibus equipped to transport the mobility impaired. They also operate one hybrid vehicle. The organisation provides community group, healthcare and public transport solutions and their beneficiaries include all ages from school children to the elderly.

Thomson Bathgate from Coquetdale Lodge explained why the donation was so important. "Everyone is affected by the cost-of-living crisis but for those living in hard-to-reach rural areas, it can be especially difficult for disabled

people and the elderly. UCCT are providing transport to warm hubs and spaces where people can keep warm through the winter months. Transport costs are expensive, and our donation will be used to help provide transport including the administration costs of the service, vehicle running costs for trips, volunteer driver expenses, insurance, and promotional expenses. As a Lodge, we believe in helping others and especially those in our own area who need help due to circumstances beyond their control."



## Two North-East based training and learning providers partner to offer innovative blended learning solutions for safety-critical industries

**Cleveland Fire Brigade Risk Management Services (CFB RMS), a Community Interest Company, and commercial training arm of Cleveland Fire Brigade has announced a strategic partnership with 3t Transform, a learning technologies and software expert specialising in safety-critical industries.**

Both based in the North East of England, with global reach and customer bases, the partnership will see the duo offer an innovative blended learning solution In-person physical training will be elevated through the addition of immersive and digital learning solutions, delivered across a range of risk management services.

Organisations will benefit from a blended learning approach where CFB RMS will employ its decades of experience to deliver best-in-class training and consultancy alongside 3t Transform's learning materials, which are widely used and recognised by many global energy market players.

Enhancing training programs with immersive learning, such as within a digital twin or virtual environment created by 3t Transform, has been proven to increase learning retention rates, increase workforce engagement, as well as helping to improve safety by allowing mistakes to be made with no real-life consequences.

Services offered through the partnership will include managing innovative emergency response and incident command services, supported and enhanced by the inclusion of various cutting-edge digital platforms (virtual reality, E-learning, E-learning with gamification and micro learning).





## Key landmarks put accessibility under the spotlight

Two key landmarks in the North East are leading the way in developing accessibility and user experience at their sought after venues. Bamburgh Castle and Spanish City are in the throes of an Access Audit with award-winning Tailored Leisure Company (TLC), a company on a mission to overcome the barriers and social exclusion faced by disabled people, specifically in terms of access to leisure activities.

The two venues have proactively sought the support of TLC to complete an Access Audit which takes an in depth look at both access to the venue and user experience to support the

venues to identify opportunities for further development, and enhancement of a positive user experience.

TLC recently picked up an influx of award nominations for their ground-breaking work and have established a strong collaborative working approach to drive the development of accessible projects across the region, with partners including SAFCs Foundation of Light, Sunderland City Council and Headway.

Tara Johnson, Director of Tailored Leisure Company who set up the company due to her own experiences of living with cerebral palsy said: "We are delighted to have been commissioned by the two iconic venues to undertake their Access Audit. Both venues are very open to making the venues as accessible as possible to visitors who may have a variety of accessibility needs."

## Mandale Group builds on its Teesside roots with launch of new HQ

Mandale Group has launched its new Stockton-based headquarters to support the firm's rapid expansion.

The modern building is a testament to the company's commitment to growth and innovation in Teesside and provides a modern and efficient workspace for its employees.

Having outgrown their previous office premises close to the A19 on the Stockton North Tees Industrial Estate, the impressive, purpose built HQ at Urry Nook gives Mandale Group 30 per cent more space to allow for the future expansion of the business both in terms of staff requirements and material storage.

Mandale Group, which has been in operation in Teesside for close to 40 years, focuses on both commercial property and residential developments, the latter under the Mandale Homes umbrella.

Maurice Moore, Commercial Director at Mandale Group, said: "The transformation of the new office and warehouse space has not only made working for Mandale so comfortable, but has also allowed staff to socialise together, making for a better environment for the whole team. The wellbeing of all the staff is reflected in the



number of attendees using the excellent facilities provided by Mandale and I'm sure will lead to the retained growth of the company in Teesside and beyond."

Helen Woods, Sales Director, added: "We purchased 44 acres in Urry Nook to develop an industrial business park that will bring new businesses and jobs to the area. It has such great links to the major roads, Teesside airport and with the Freeport status it will be really attractive to companies looking for a base in the North East."

"The Mandale office and warehouse was the first on site, but we are already into phase one of the 23 hybrid industrial units we have planned for the site. These will be ready for occupation in the Summer of 2024."



## Urban Green Newcastle's partnership with Probation Service improving city's parks

A new partnership between Urban Green Newcastle and the Probation Service North East is helping to improve people's experience of visiting some of Newcastle's most popular parks.

The new scheme, which covers Leazes Park, Exhibition Park and Walker Park, sees offenders on Community Payback working with Urban Green Newcastle to carry out general maintenance tasks across the three parks; including removing graffiti, litter picking, and horticulture tasks.

It's hoped the successful partnership will expand to other parks in 2023.

Emma Armstrong-Smith, Ranger Team Leader at Urban Green Newcastle, said: "Caring for and improving Newcastle's 33 parks is a very big job, and as a small charity we rely on support from a wide range of partners."

"Thanks to the brilliant work of probation's Community Payback team, we've been able to make significant improvements to some of the city's biggest parks; reducing the impact of antisocial behavior like littering and graffiti."

"The teams working with us have also been able to carry out horticultural tasks to ensure the parks stay clean and tidy, and that plants and flowers continue to flourish."

Offenders sentenced to complete Community Payback supervised by probation spend a number of days each week working in the parks, carrying out a range of different tasks including cutting back plants and shrubbery, lining paths, edging and clearing gullies, and removing unwanted vegetation.

Laurence Bishop, Unpaid Work Operations Manager, said: "Community Payback is a way for offenders to give back to the local community for the crimes they have committed."

"We're delighted to be working with Urban Green Newcastle because parks and green spaces are such an important part of our communities, and the work the Community Payback team is doing in Newcastle's parks is making a real difference for local people."

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# Business as a force for good

Just Williams has always believed in being a force for good, but since our decision to start the journey to become a B-Corp, we have embedded this philosophy throughout our business and our sister business The Just Williams Sales Academy.

**Just Williams was established in 2015 with a clear purpose – to professionalise the sales industry. Within its first year we supported a number of local charities, regional initiatives and developed our range of local providers within the supply chain.**

By year seven having raised £25,000 for charity and having been involved in multiple people, community and local supply chain initiatives we were looking for something more. We wanted to use the business as an ambassador for change, as a force for good and as a showcase for other small businesses to follow. We wanted to prove that purposeful business isn't a substitute for profit, the two can live in harmony and we can be both responsible and sustainable in all our encounters.

We wanted to learn, improve and inspire all those who we come in contact with and create a sustainable business who puts its stakeholders first. We wanted to create change. We wanted to live and breathe our purpose and prove actions speak louder than words. We wanted to create change in the sales and marketing sectors, and professionalise the industry through setting a standard. We wanted both our businesses to reach the highest independent standards across the board – we wanted to achieve B-Corp status and continue to strive for continuous improvement across all areas.

**Our Purpose** is to help create responsible and sustainable businesses through encouraging a local supply chain, supporting the local community and making a difference in every encounter. We believe in using our business as a force for good.

**Our Vision** is to be the leader of purposeful sales and marketing solutions; facilitating change in Businesses and Communities, for sustainable, transformational growth across the globes

**Our Mission** is to create sustainable business growth and visibility through unique sales and marketing solutions. We empower a collaborative and transformational approach for the betterment of our partners, communities and planet.



Jessica Williams

## Our Values

### Distinctive

Togetherness (work family), authentic, kind (BBMT), grit (resilience), connected and collaborative, open, people, purpose, balanced and flexible, socially responsible, unique, proactive.

### Sustainable

Communities, environment, processes, suppliers/ supply chain, grass roots recruitment (Kickstart, apprentices, work experience), Togetherness, Work Family, scalable processes, foundations to grow.

### Progressive

Ambition, sustainable growth, people, CPD, internal skillset, employee wellbeing, environment (carbon zero), BCorp (constant improvement), team and individual mentality, to make a tangible difference to local communities and charity partners, collaboration, ownership, reflection.

## Our 2021 – 2022 Impact Report Highlights

- Business Principles and Purpose led ethos embedded
- Full Team Training program rolled out with active CPD plans.
- 5% of Net Profits are dedicated to our teams Personal and Professional Development
- We have become a Real Living Wage Employer
- Private Healthcare and Employee Advice Programs launched.
- Signposting and full support service for financial, physical, emotional, professional and personal launched

- Voluntary and Wellness days launched.
- Flexible Working Benefits launched.
- Commitment to become Carbon Neutral by 2030
- Full Recycling Program launched including our own compost bin and plant nursery!
- Support scheme for our building launched to encourage recycling with huge take up
- Switched all our products to non-toxic.
- Organised local litter picks with the Council and other Business Groups
- We have planted over 200 Trees in our local Community.
- 5% of our Net Profits have gone to our two Charity Partners – Red Balloons and The Girls Network
- We have raised an additional £5000 through charity events and activities.
- Over 100 hours of volunteering time
- Mental Health, EDI and Sustainability Training delivered internally and externally.
- Feedback for both our customers and our people implemented.
- Local Supply Chain full review with over 20 local suppliers added and now activated.

**Our ambition for 2022/2023 is even greater – to access and read our full Impact Report, have a look at our [www.justwilliamsLtd.co.uk/what-we-do](http://www.justwilliamsLtd.co.uk/what-we-do)**

**Jessica**  
**Jessica@JustWilliamsLtd.co.uk**  
**Twitter @JessicaJAW1903**  
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# Cover Story

## Dame Allan's STEAM ahead with new building

Dame Allan's Senior School and Sixth Form celebrated its latest investment with a week of events in February. The Jubilee building, an £8 million transformative development, culminated in the official opening of the site on 14 February, as part of 'Dedication Week' for the building.



L-R: The Lord Lieutenant of Tyne & Wear, Lucy Winskill, Principal Will Scott and Chair of Governors, Ian Belsham.

**Boasting new classrooms, a light and airy exhibition space, offices and a 'living wall', the new building is a valuable resource for the pupils at Dame Allan's, offering them outstanding facilities to pursue the STEAM subjects of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths.**

The latest addition to the school, which was established over 300 years ago, was officially opened by the Lord Lieutenant of Tyne & Wear, Lucy Winskill, at a dedication event which saw pupils' artwork displayed along with a range of archive material which the school carefully curates. Guests were able to see the building in use, through a tour of the facilities from sixth formers, hearing first-hand how pupils use and enjoy this space.

During Dedication Week, as well as the official opening, Dame Allan's Schools welcomed entrepreneur Sara Davies, to speak as part of 'The Lectures', the Schools' series of talks from inspirational people from a range of careers. An alumni dinner, a performing arts showcase and art masterclasses with local primary schools also took place across the week.

The building is named in honour of our late Queen as it was completed in 2022, the Jubilee year of Queen Elizabeth II, who visited the school back in 2005 to open our Queen's Building for sixth formers.

The site of the new Jubilee building has previously been a recreation yard for the Girls' School, classrooms and even a caretaker's cottage. Now it is a thriving multi-use space inspiring pupils to pursue their passions.

The Modern Foreign Languages department is going from strength to strength, with a bumper year of pupils taking French, German or Spanish at A Level, and a move into the Jubilee Building.

For pupils wanting to pursue further education and careers in technology and engineering, the purpose-built design and technology workspaces offer the chance to practise those skills, and pupils studying art have the chance to display their work in a purpose-built exhibition space.

As well as senior pupils having daily access to the facilities, Dame Allan's Junior School pupils attend weekly Art and MFL classes in the Jubilee building to help familiarise them with senior school life before moving up once they leave Year 6. Regular masterclasses with local primary schools are also held here so more schools can benefit from the facilities.

Designed by Howarth Litchfield Architects, the environmental elements of the building have been thought through too, with LED lighting throughout, two electric vehicle charging stations at the back of the building, and a living wall. There are also plans to install a beehive onsite in the summer term.

In total, the Jubilee building includes: 16 classrooms, three physics laboratories, art facilities with print room, a multi-functional exhibition space, a design technology workshop together with changing rooms and staff facilities.

Principal Will Scott said: 'The range of facilities available in the Jubilee building will help our pupils to flourish both artistically and academically. The modern exhibition space will allow pupils to showcase their work formally, the science laboratories will house facilities to enhance the pursuit of STEAM careers and the design technology suites will aid the teaching of valuable practical skills needed in a range of careers.'

As for the future, it's looking bright. The recent accolade of Independent Secondary School of the Year in the North East from The Sunday Times Parent Power Guide reflects the academic, artistic and personal achievements of all pupils. The new building will add to the valuable facilities to enable pupils to excel.

**To find out more about Dame Allan's Schools, visit: [dameallans.co.uk](https://dameallans.co.uk)**









## 3 is a magic number!

As employee wellbeing start-up, Key Wellbeing Ltd celebrates its 3rd birthday, Co-Founders, Marie Ranson and Melissa Armstrong reveal:

3 of the biggest lessons they've learnt on their start-up journey

3 things nobody knows about their award-winning business

3 exciting things to expect from the glowing and growing team this year

### What are 3 of the biggest lessons you've learnt on your journey so far?

"For me, I've learnt that your to-do list is never done as a business owner and you've just got to get really good at boundaries and prioritising on what's important. But you are never done, and that's okay! You've just got to learn to make peace with that."

- Marie

"That not everybody is going to be your cheerleader. When we first started attending networking events as Key Wellbeing, I was quite shocked at some of the negative comments we received about us wanting to change the world and really help people's wellbeing."

- Melissa

"That we perhaps should have outsourced earlier. With the pandemic happening so fast, I think we tried to teach ourselves to do as much as possible so that we could get the business out there and help people as quickly as possible."

- Marie

"I agree, thinking back of all the things we taught ourselves - from how to build a website, social media, graphic design, automation, setting up systems. We learnt so quickly, which just shows when you put your mind to something you can do it!"

- Melissa

### What are 3 things nobody knows about Key Wellbeing?

"Although we're a wellbeing company, we're not invincible! I've noticed myself over the last year working really hard and being on the edge of maybe burning out and at times have felt guilty or like a fraud because I'm running a business that's all about wellbeing, but the truth is it doesn't matter what kind of business you run - it's tough and everyone is going to feel it at some point!"

- Marie

"It's not just us - we work with over 50 subcontractors who are all experts in their field, whether that's psychologists, coaches, fitness trainers, the list goes on. While we know a lot, we're happy to admit we don't know everything and in order to bring our clients the best of the best we scour the market to find the best specialists out there to suit that organisation's needs."

- Melissa

"We're not just an online platform. We do have an all-in-one employee wellbeing support and training platform; the Key Wellbeing Hub but we offer so much more alongside that, including everything from a company culture health check, to training and development of staff, and of course - the icing on the cake like in-house workshops, lunch n learn sessions, hybrid-friendly wellbeing events etc."

- Marie

### What are you most excited about for Key Wellbeing's 3rd year of business?

"We're currently working with some amazing partners to develop and deliver some really great, and essential training offerings to organisations which we can't wait to roll out soon (watch this space!)"

There's a lot of workplaces that are in need of upskilling staff and working through the process of change management to adapt to the new way of working that we're all stepping into and we're going to be able to support from that perspective in a much more robust way."

- Marie

"To see our small but mighty team continue to grow and for me to be back on deck after taking some time off on maternity leave. Our pipeline is looking super exciting and I'm so proud of us marking our 3rd year in business and all of the things that we've achieved along the way."

It's safe to say we're not going anywhere, we're just getting started and I can't wait to get bigger, better and help even more employees in the North East and beyond!"

- Melissa

To find out more, visit [www.keywellbeing.co.uk](http://www.keywellbeing.co.uk)

“

*...It's safe to say  
we're not going  
anywhere, we're just  
getting started...*



KeyWords

# The Big Interview...

L-R: Marie Ranson, Co-founder & Commercial Director and Melissa Armstrong, Co-Founder & Creative Director



## RECENT APPOINTMENTS

## New Chair appointed as GB Bank further strengthens its Board

Specialist bank GB Bank has appointed a new Board Chair and recruited two new Board members as it continues to drive forward its ambitious growth plans.

The North East-based bank has appointed SME lending expert Mike Kirsopp as Chair with property and banking industry figures



Andrew Telfer and Ian Henderson joining as Non-Executive Director and Investor Director respectively.



## Marketing professional joins growing group of law firms

Newcastle Law Firm Samuel Phillips Law has appointed Claire Fenwick to the role of Group Marketing Manager to spearhead its growth in the region.

Claire, a member of the Chartered Institute of Marketing (MCIM) brings a wealth of experience to the firm, with a marketing career spanning 25 years.

In her new role, she will lead Samuel Phillips Law's overall marketing strategy and build on the company's position in the market to help

drive strategic growth.

Claire's appointment comes at a period of rapid change at Samuel Phillips Law. Last Summer, the firm was acquired by lawyer Sufe Miah, Founder and Director of Miah Solicitors in Leeds. Miah also acquired Hathaways The Law Firm which has offices in Gateshead and Low Fell. Claire's role will see her leading the strategic marketing for all three firms.

Claire said: "I am looking forward to the challenges my new role will bring and working hard to exceed our goals alongside the fantastically talented teams at all three firms. Although, I will be based at Samuel Phillip's office on Newcastle's Grey Street, I will also be spending a significant amount of time in our offices in Gateshead, Low Fell and Leeds."

## New Comms Officer for Healthwatch

Tell Us North, the organisation tasked with delivering the Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle services has appointed a new Information and Communications Officer.

Cardiff University graduate Purvi Jain moved to Newcastle for the role after studying media and communications, she also has a Master's in international public relations. Previously her journalistic background included roles as a TV anchor and script writer and as a corporate communications officer in India.

"I'm delighted to come to Newcastle to work as it is a very interesting and vibrant city. I've worked in a lot of media roles, but Healthwatch is different as the work I do has the ability to help people to improve the health and social care services in Newcastle and Gateshead. It was a complete leap of faith moving here but I simply listened to what my heart said, set my heart on getting the job and here I am."

Chief Executive Officer of Tell US North, Yvonne Probert added: "We are very lucky to welcome Purvi to our team. She has been involved in media and communication roles since she was young and has a wealth of knowledge in all formats of media including newspapers,



## Kate and Megan start Hay & Kilner Legal Traineeships

Two young graduates have taken their first steps onto the legal career ladder after being chosen by North East law firm Hay & Kilner as its latest trainee solicitors.

Kate Garrett and Megan Bradley have started a two-year training programme which will see them spend four blocks of six months working alongside experienced practitioners in different departments within the Newcastle-headquartered firm, in order to give them a sound general grounding in the law and to help identify any particular strengths and areas of interest.

Kate's first training assignment is within Hay & Kilner's clinical negligence department, while Megan is now part of its corporate team.

Megan studied law at Durham University before taking a Master's degree in Legal Practice at Northumbria University.

Kate took a Law degree at the University of Liverpool, which included a semester spent studying at a Chinese university as well as time spent in industry.

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



television, radio, and the web. She has a keen interest in representing stories and facts to the public in an engaging manner and she is a welcome addition to the team."



David Taylor

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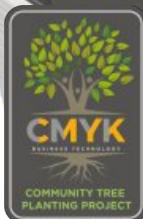
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Closer to the end of your road trip, you might find Potters. This restaurant offers up delectable modern dishes alongside cocktails to die for!

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## The Old Vicarage

*Furze Field Road, Gosforth*

A fabulous, three storey semi detached house, offering a considerable amount of character and charm whilst being tastefully modernised by the current owners. Situated on this prime residential road, the property offers beautiful mature gardens to the front, a courtyard to the rear with a beautiful al fresco dining area, and excellent access to High Street amenities as well as outstanding schooling.  
Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: G.



6 4 3 D

**Price Guide:**  
£1.6 Million



**Ashleigh Sundin**  
0191 223 3500  
ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk



# Property of the month



## ROSEDENE, OFF CHOLLERFORD MEWS, HOLYWELL, WHITLEY BAY



### GUIDE PRICE: OFFERS OVER £1.4 MILLION

Rosedene offers a magnificent opportunity to acquire one of the most outstanding houses within its area. This detached, stone built, luxury home is quietly located within a beautiful cul de sac with grounds of circa 0.35 acres, including a professional state of the art studio detached from the house, and a large double plus garage. Presented to a high standard, Rosedene is entirely newly built in recent years, which is difficult to believe given the quality of the architecture and styling of the house externally, where it replicates a Northumbrian stone built farmhouse. The property has accommodation extending to circa 6300 sq ft with fabulous lighting, underfloor heating, audio systems and CAT5 cabling providing intelligent wiring; the house provides 5 or 7 bedrooms, depending on personal choice of layout, and has stunning interior design.

Tenure: Freehold Council Tax Band: G EPC Rating: C

Contact rare! From Sanderson Young on 0191 223 3500 [ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk) [www.sandersonyoung.co.uk](http://www.sandersonyoung.co.uk)







Penny Wright with Odie

## Meet Penny Wright!

2023 is well underway and what a great start to the year, despite our Sanderson Young Ponteland office closing its doors for the last time in December. With the sadness that comes naturally at the end of a long history in the Coates Institute, also comes new beginnings and opportunities for the Ponteland team, now bringing their expertise in this area to our Sanderson Young Regional office in Gosforth.

We have been exceptionally busy, with my diary full of appointments and seeing some great properties in Darras Hall and the Tyne Valley – which will remain at the heart of our business this year. We have launched a selection of properties for sale, including detached family homes as well as apartments in Ponteland, Wylam and Corbridge, whilst two new bungalows in Darras Hall have attracted a lot of interest with one going under offer within 4 days! Very positively, the number of viewings remains high, especially on our more rural properties around Ponteland.

With over 22 years' experience, I have become known by our clients as being a caring and thoughtful Valuer. Whether it be

a country house in Whalton, a cottage in the Tyne Valley, or a family home in Darras Hall, myself and Sanderson Young are the perfect people to help you take the first step in selling your home.

Born and bred in Northumberland, you will often find me walking on the beach with my dog Odie (who is available to attend appointments at your request)!

If you're looking to sell your home, contact me for a free market appraisal.

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# From Tighthead Prop to Sauvignon Blanc

Rugby Union star opens wine shop in Newcastle.

**All rugby union fans in the region, especially followers of the Newcastle Falcons and Scotland, will know the name of Jon Welsh.**

After spending seven years with the Glasgow Warriors, Jon joined the Falcons in 2015 and racked-up over a hundred performances in a four year spell.

During his time in Newcastle he continued to win Scotland caps, but it was injury, time and bad luck which eventually caught up with Jon.

He ruptured his anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) at the start of the 2019-20 season which meant he had to stop playing for twelve months although he did manage to rejoin the Falcons in January 2021 on a short term contract.



At the end of that season he was ready to resume full time playing and was about to join Gloucester...but then COVID arrived and rugby union, like all sport, came to a halt.

And at this point, Jon decided to call it a day and concentrate on another of his passions.

Wine.

Before he started playing rugby union, Jon was an electrician. He was also very close to being a professional boxer, but it was rugby which finally won him over.

But how on Earth did his passion for wine develop?

"I suspect most people know that after a rugby match there is a tendency for the players to head for the bar," smiles Jon. "It was during my time in Scotland where I discovered how much I enjoyed a glass of wine. I was also fortunate in that I'd made some excellent friends and contacts via rugby, some of whom were involved either in wine or the hospitality industry.

One of them worked for a wine merchant in Scotland called Luvians... they're based in Cupar and St. Andrews...and I was shown that wine wasn't just about drinking it, it was also about the experience.

Since those early days I've become more and more fascinated by wine...the flavours and varieties...and love trying something new from various countries.

Consequently, when I finally retired from playing rugby, I decided to open a wine shop. That was on the 12th November 2021, and I've

loved every minute of it. I even managed to time the opening of the shop with the arrival of the 2021 Beaujolais. I'm still in touch with my friends at Luvians and they continue to point me in the direction of new wines."

Jon is the proud owner of the Jesmond Wine Company situated on Clayton Road. You'll find a huge selection of wines and spirits... some you'll recognise...many you won't have heard of but are well worth trying. In fact, if you keep a close eye on the Jesmond Wine Company social media outlets, you'll see that Jon arranges regular tasting sessions. He frequently has wine and spirits experts attending the shop who can give visitors advice and a chance to try a tippie of something which may tickle their taste buds.

"The response, especially from the local community, has been fabulous," adds Jon. "I have a steady stream of regular visitors coming to the shop. I'm also pleasantly surprised by how far some people are prepared to travel. We love meeting new people and especially enjoy it when they try something different. I'm delighted to say that a lot of folk leave with a single bottle but return shortly afterwards to order a case...they've been converted to something which probably has never been on their radar.

This especially happens when visitors say they don't like red wine or don't like Chardonnay or perhaps struggle with anything that has a sparkle to it. We invariably find that they've tried something...often many years ago...and it has completely clouded their judgement. We ask them what they've tried previously and then point them in another direction. One of our most regular red wine customers is someone who, until a few months ago, said they couldn't drink any sort of red wine. As I said earlier, drinking wine is all about the experience. We aim to make it a positive experience."

Jon's enthusiasm for wine comes across when you meet him. You really should pop into the Jesmond Wine Company and get ready to perhaps buy something different while stocking up on your favourites.

And why not chat about some rugby too.

Jon Welsh and the Jesmond Wine Company...a perfect team.

**The Jesmond Wine Company is open...**

**Tuesday-Thursday 10-6pm**

**Friday-Saturday 10-8pm**

**Sunday 11-4pm**

**Monday closed**

**3a Clayton Road, Jesmond, Newcastle, NE2 4RP**

**0191 240 1269 • instagram: @jesmondwineco**







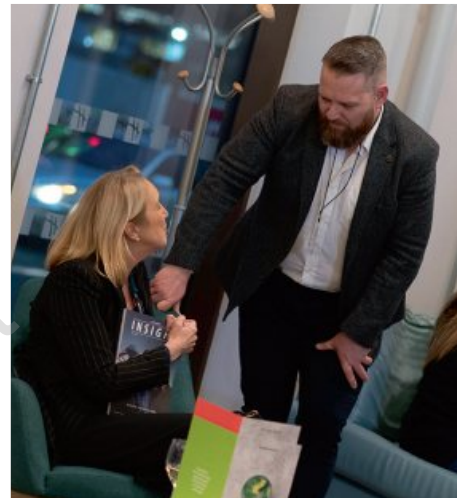




## Launch Party for Holiday Inn Sunderland

The Holiday Inn Sunderland celebrated its recent opening with a launch party for invited guests.

The Hotel, developed and operated by Madison Cairn, boasts a unique and multi faceted offering appealing to both the business and leisure sectors by offering 120 stylish air conditioned bedrooms, a fully equipped gym and chic open lobby for the local community as well as guests.











## Blueocto developing growth plans with North East fund backing

**An award-winning North East web agency is searching for the next phase of its growth story with the help of a five-figure investment from the North East Small Loan Fund Supported by The European Regional Development Fund.**

Blueocto specialises in providing a range of bespoke web services, including website design, responsive web development, web audits and SEO, and has an increasing focus on delivering Shopify and other ecommerce solutions, primarily for SMEs across the North East.

Based at the North East Business & Innovation Centre, Blueocto was founded in 2015 by experienced developer Caroline Hagan, who worked as a sole practitioner for five years

before deciding to grow her business at the beginning of the pandemic on the back of increased client demand.

Having since built a five-strong team over the last three years, Blueocto is now looking to use the £30,000 Small Loan Fund investment, which was obtained through regional fund management firm NEL Fund Managers, to help create new jobs as it builds its client base within and outside the region.

At least two new roles are expected to be created in the coming months as Blueocto enhances its business development and marketing activity and takes on more and bigger projects.

The company was ranked as the leading agency in the North East and 19th overall in the Top 100 UK Shopify Developers list for 2022, an industry table based on client reviews, the quality and quantity of services offered and the range of projects delivered.

## Media Borne to create more creativesector opportunities

**An ambitious North East creative media agency is embarking on the next chapter of its growth story with the help of a six-figure investment from the North East Small Loan Fund Supported by The European Regional Development Fund.**

Media Borne provides high-end video production, photography, animation and creative services to a growing roster of clients ranging from North East SMEs to international blue chip companies and the NHS.

The Newcastle-based full-service creative media agency was set up five years ago by managing director Chris Thompson, who at first ran it as a side venture alongside his civil engineering job before eventually turning it into a full-time career.

Media Borne is now using the six-figure investment, which was obtained through regional fund management firm NEL Fund Managers, to build on their expanding range of creative services with a focus on live-streaming



technology, e-learning and high-end video production.

The agency is also strengthening its presence in the broadcast sector, with a number of creative documentaries already in development, and investing in the new staff required to support its growth.

Four new jobs are expected to be created over the next year as the business grows, as it aims to break through the million-pound turnover barrier by the end of 2024.

Media Borne offers a one-stop-shop for clients looking to bring their creative ideas to life and level up their marketing efforts with access to some of the most experienced media professionals in the region.



## Tier One Capital wealth manager named one of the UK's best financial advisers for third successive year

**Senior Wealth Manager Michael Carrick from Newcastle-upon-Tyne based wealth management and fund management experts, Tier One Capital (Tier One) has been named as one of the UK's top 200 ranked leading financial professionals and financial advisers for the third consecutive year.**

Michael, who has been a financial adviser and wealth management specialist for more than 30 years, appears in the latest VouchedFor 2023 guide to the UK's top rated financial advisers, rounding off a hat-trick of appearances, beginning in 2021. The guide which will be published in March 2023 in conjunction with The Times newspaper, has been compiled using feedback from clients.

Highly qualified with Chartered Insurance Institution qualifications covering investments, pensions, long-term care and trusts Michael commented: "I am hugely honoured to be included in the guide for three years running. We take a lot of pride in making sure the advice we offer always stays relevant and is of the highest quality, as the wealth management and financial landscape continues to change.

"I am very proud that our clients continue to value our advice and trustworthiness year after year. As I always say, it is important to emphasise that I am only one part of a very strong team, with colleagues that are helping each other adapt to the ever-shifting landscape and without whom it would not be possible to provide our customers with the personal, bespoke and independent solutions we are able to present to them.

"Careful financial planning and expert financial advice makes a real difference to people's lives. We continue to ensure that we take time getting to know our clients, their personal objectives, their attitude to risk and their investment return requirements, allowing us to put forward a personal financial plan that's right for them."



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# The importance of efficient payroll processing



Payroll undoubtedly plays such an important role in a business. It can, however, represent a significant financial outlay and it needs to be managed carefully.

## Ensuring compliance

There are complex rules and regulations imposed by HMRC and The Pensions Regulator to ensure compliance. A full understanding of these is critical to ensure no penalties and related employee issues. Also, getting the required tax correct is essential, and ever-evolving tax legislation has increased the complexities of remunerating employees, requiring more specialist knowledge and advice more often.

## Maintaining the growth focus

With businesses across the UK focusing their attention on navigating the challenging economic climate and realigning their growth journey, it's important that senior leadership attention isn't diverted away from this. An

efficient, accurate and compliant payroll function can allow senior staff the time to focus on strategy without worrying about the running of this complex area. This is where an external payroll processor could be a worthwhile consideration.

## Now is the time to assess

Historically, the start of the tax year from 6 April is when businesses typically change their payroll set up. We would therefore suggest that any required payroll function assessments begin now to ensure they're in place in readiness for the tax year commencing. Having the payroll transition complete from 6 April would allow a suitable basis to be embedded for the full year ahead.

## The benefits of outsourcing at a glance

In simple terms, choosing to outsource payroll can lead to the following benefits:

- A reduction in payroll related costs.
- Time saving.
- Compliance peace of mind.
- Elimination of a single point of failure.
- Access to trained and qualified staff.
- Safe and secure storage of data.
- Direct access to related employer solutions.

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***If you require any assistance in relation to your payroll, or would like to discuss outsourcing, please get in touch.***

***Hello@azets.co.uk***

# RMT advice helps Hanover Dairies agree NatWest Finance Restructure Deal to support investment plans



L-R: Dominic Duke of NatWest, Julie Cuthbertson of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors and Hanover Dairies' managing director Tony Baldwin and founder Trevor Hanover.

Advice from RMT Accountants & Business Advisors has helped the North East's leading independent milk delivery service secure a new refinancing agreement with NatWest which will support further investment in its business and services.

**Hanover Dairies delivers a wide range of milk, eggs and non-dairy products to customers across the North East, North West and Southern regions from a network of 12 depots across the country.**

The Blaydon-headquartered firm has promoted its environmentally friendly glass bottle milk sales and wants to further make the consumer aware of the product within its trading areas.

Its long-term environmental focus has seen the company preventing over 18 million plastic bottles potentially ending up in oceans or landfill in the past few years.

Julie Cuthbertson, Michael Cantwell and Anthony Andreasen of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors worked with the Hanover Dairies management team to identify the best available refinancing options and are continuing to work on its development and implementation of its investment plans.

Founded in 1976 by Trevor Hanover with a single milk round, Hanover Dairies now operates more than 200 doorstep rounds across the country, has over 140,000 customers on its books, and employs more than 100 people and supplies to 140 franchisee and independent milkmen.

Alongside domestic sales, Hanover Dairies also works with a number of local authorities on school milk contracts and supplies to over 1,000 businesses.

Managing Director Tony Baldwin says: "We have a passion and drive to maintain and grow the tradition of doorstep deliveries, to continue to provide the very best service possible and to promote the message of a product that can simply and easily help reduce the plastic pollution issue that we now all face.

"We've never stopped making glass bottle deliveries, and it's always made clear environmental sense to do so, but over the last couple of years, we've seen a huge surge in demand from both existing and new customers.

"We're now maximising our efforts towards making everyone aware that glass bottle deliveries are available from us, as part of a wider environmental focus that's been a long-term part of our business strategy.

"Covid also saw us make substantial technology and payment systems investments that are the basis of everything we do and we will continue to do this to ensure we can provide the reliable, efficient service that our customers expect.

"Positive personal relationships are absolutely central to the way we work. From our first meeting, NatWest came across as people you'd want to work with, and our refinancing agreement gives us the flexibility to invest where we think we'll get the best returns, protect jobs and promote employment growth.

"The RMT team's strategy advice has long been central to our management of the business, and their market knowledge and guidance has been invaluable in reaching this new agreement."

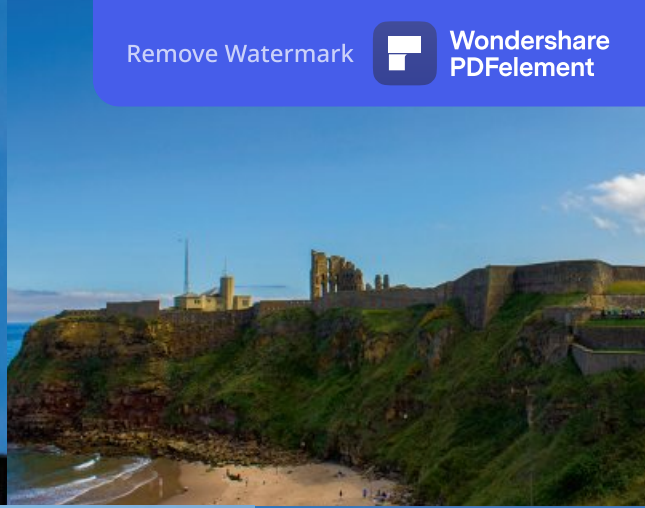
Julie Cuthbertson, corporate finance manager at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, adds: "Hanover Dairies has a proven business model that is succeeding across its distribution network and now has the resources to promote its business model and environmental focus further.

"We identified NatWest as the right flexible funding partner for Hanover to work with on executing their investment plans and we're very pleased to have helped the two parties reach this agreement."

Dominic Duke, senior relationship manager at NatWest, says: "It's been fantastic to work with Trevor, Tony and the Hanover Dairies team to create a flexible refinancing package that will support the business's investment ambitions, as well as its long-term environmental focus. I look forward to continuing our relationship and seeing Hanover Dairies continue with its plans."

[www.hanoverdairies.co.uk](http://www.hanoverdairies.co.uk)  
[www.r-m-t.co.uk](http://www.r-m-t.co.uk)





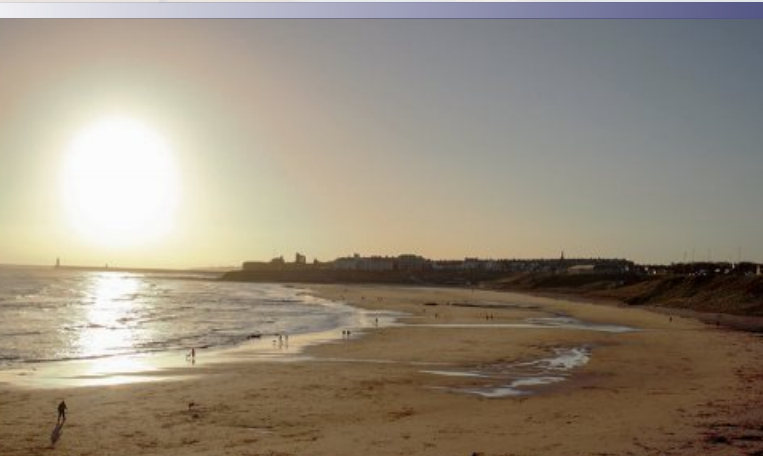
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# Goals and opportunities

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.

Recently he's noticed conversations amongst leaders in the region are increasingly about people, performance and growth, ultimately being factors that add to a company's value. So, what exactly can you do to increase value? Here, Andrew looks at eight important calls to action...

"Whilst admittedly we all know we're in somewhat of a cost-of-living crisis, the leaders in the North East are still hungry for opportunity. Every meeting, event, and many blogs from our region's best, talk about achieving goals, finding ways to grow, retaining the best people and encouraging performance.

"In my opinion, this is what our North East business community is best known for. Resilience. Optimism. Drive. But we would be naive to think that right intentions, with a good dash of hope, are enough.

"Those who are living this talk and are growing, expanding, driving people into senior leadership positions, investing and valuing their people across every level, are following simple, effective strategies. And in doing so, they're increasing the value of their business, not just for sale or exit, but customer loyalty and to attract the best people in their industry. These both secure the future of the company and help attract investment to take the organisation to the next level, if that's the strategy.

"To achieve this, ensuring that a company is a place people want to work is imperative. Happy people, satisfied in their job, treated well and feeling secure perform better. Fact.

"Companies that have this right, often follow eight steps that lead to increasing the value of a business. And just because they are doing these steps doesn't mean they will sell, but it does mean they take themselves seriously as an employer, as a provider, as part of a community. And of course, should they wish to sell, they find themselves in a much better position.

"The eight important positionings, which is what all good Corporate Finance Advisors look at, are:

- **To have zero dependencies**

Dependencies can limit or prevent agility, which can create vulnerability. These dependencies can be found in a business model (for example you only have one supplier), in external service providers (too dependent on one software for example), on employees that are considered a risk to the business if they leave, in financial dependence and on the risk of customers and client's willingness to pay.

Sometime dependencies can't be avoided - if this is the case, ensure they're treated as risks and have plans in place that create resilience, increasing confidence in the company regardless. This can be hard when resources or cash are tight, but it's imperative to have the plan.

- **To have a solid financial performance, with a life cycle**

The seven stages of financial freedom are dependence, solvency, stability, security, independence, freedom and abundance - each is characterised clearly. To reach stability or above is attractive, but the trend/financial story over the time of the business is key, showing year-on-year progress.

- **To be scalable but also know what that looks like**

To be scalable you need to know if you can quickly find/add clients and when you do, can you service them properly? For others to be confident in this, you need to prove your product/service has traction in the market and works, and that you can deliver it easily. It's important to be confident that the cost to deliver is not on the same trajectory as new revenues - there needs to be profit.

- **To have working Capital Forecasts that meet demands**

Working Capital Forecasting is the overall financial requirements of the organisation, measuring the cash position or to exercise control over that position. The Cash Conversion Cycle tool explores the time it takes for a company to complete a full operating cycle. This helps get a handle on burn rate, what is needed to run the business, and the investment areas needed to expand, then clear lines can be drawn on self-financing or investment risk.

- **To have recurring revenue**

All revenue is good, but strength can be built upon return customers, subscriptions, annual renewals, long contracts and similar ways of trading. This reassurance makes a company attractive, robust and easier to demonstrate value through longer projected cash/profit and loss expectations, with guaranteed, concrete incomings.

- **To understand their differentiation on service wrap and intellectual property**

Patents, trademarks and copyrights are valuable assets to a company. It's important to know how they work, as well as understanding what is just part of your service and delivery, which competitors can/are also taking part in. What makes you stand out and why; and is that USP protected?

- **To have a strong customer portfolio**

This one speaks for itself, and also feeds into good recurring revenue. A strong portfolio is made up from a diverse mix of customers, all whom you can easily keep in touch with, market to, upsell/ resell to. They'll be fans of your brand and product /service and be ambassadors who introduce new customers to your portfolio.

- **And to have a team, with an understood succession plan and promotional scale.**

It's important that a team is strong, so that if illness, retirement or sudden loss of a key member occurs, the infrastructure and future of the business is not put at risk. Have a team capable of operating with limited input from you, by investing in their training and development. Peer groups, such as my Vistage Emerging Leaders (which has a new cohort starting soon) are ideal for this.

"These aren't easy things to tackle, so plan, look at how you understand each as a leader, and challenge your team to make them happen too. Score where you are for each of the eight points, out of 10. Then focus on how you can move up 1 or 2 points. And of course, talk to a Corporate Financial Advisor to get early input if the goal of the journey is to sell."

Andrew, who runs a number of peer groups for both Vistage in the North East and The Experience Bank Group, concluded: "This topic, the actions and how they interweave to increase business value, are just some subjects we concentrate on in our peer group meetings. Understanding and bettering knowledge on growth, sales, strategy, performance, people, governance, marketing, DEI and more, is creating holistic leaders, contributing to creating a bright future for the region."

*If you would like to speak to Andrew about helping with your role and organisation then contact him on [Andrew.marsh@vistagechair.co.uk](mailto:Andrew.marsh@vistagechair.co.uk) or visit Andrew's webpage at [myvistage.force.com/sites/s/chairs?username=andrew.marsh&partner=UKEN](http://myvistage.force.com/sites/s/chairs?username=andrew.marsh&partner=UKEN)*





“

*...Happy people,  
satisfied in their  
job, treated  
well and feeling  
secure perform  
better. Fact...*

Andrew Marsh





Peter Neal

# The Experience Bank Group

Peter Neal, founder of The Experience Bank Group, is central to the success of a number of perceptive and learned Non-Executive Directors (NEDs) available to SMEs and charities in the North East, thanks to his peer groups.

**Here, he talks about why it is important to have a knowledgeable and qualified pool of experts for the region's smaller companies from which to build high performing Boards.**

"Before looking at why it's important to look at the quality of NEDs for your board, it's imperative to look at why SMEs may need a board. There are a number of reasons for an owner manager to decide that it is time.

"As a company grows it's important that governance is water tight. A company needs fit for purpose articles, strong guidelines, along with focused strategic thinking. This only comes from experienced leaders, and to be truly strategic, diversity is important. People who think differently to the way business has been done so far.

"A business going for funding and investment will generally require a board. A business gearing up for sale or the exit of the founder will be taken more seriously, adding value to the company when the time comes. Big growth, diversity, acquisition or merging, or geographical expansion including exporting can all need that next step of becoming a more mature and reflective company with a board.

"Our region is currently a hot bed of entrepreneurs, launching companies with huge potential to go far. According to analysis by insolvency and restructuring trade body R3 using data provided by CreditSafe, 12,270 start-ups were established in the region by the end of September 2022. That's a lot of companies needing quality, knowledgeable NED's both now and in the future.

"NEDs and board advisors come in all shapes and sizes. From those with a very specific skill-set, who can bring a voice of experience that will help focus the business, to someone whose skills and knowledge span all disciplines. A good NED has a broad experience in their own fields, such as technology, finance, marketing, law, business growth for example, but they also understand governance, investment, strategy. A great NED knows how to add value to an organisation by staying strategic and not being operational. An outstanding NED brings this and more...the ability to hold the board and the operational executive team accountable, encouraging, driving integrity, focussing on only what is good for the business.

"At The Experience Bank Group, we've recognised this growing need for outstanding NEDs and are assisting with ensuring the demand is met in a number of exciting ways.

"Our philanthropic activity, The Experience Bank, introduces start-ups and SMEs to our pool of 260 strong talented, experienced leaders, who offer their time as board advisors for free. Every entrepreneur knows the decision to take on a NED or board advisor – to let someone into their business – is huge. Finding the right person is not easy and that's where The Experience Bank comes in...

"Within our commercial venture, we offer board evaluation and training - High Performing Boards – ideal for a new board or a board that needs a change in dynamic. Our board evaluation and effectiveness reviews result in improved leadership, greater clarity of responsibilities, improved teamwork, accountability, innovation and diversity of thinking, better decision-making, improved communication, and more efficient board operations.

"We are always keen to remind organisations that boards which truly add value are not just a group of high performing individuals. A great board is a balanced team with complementary skill sets and a culture that allows them to work together to make the most effective decisions for an organisation.

"One of the things we are most excited about is our continuous personal development peer group – designed for aspiring NEDs, Trustees and Board Advisors, the peer groups meet monthly to improve skills, exchange best practice and learn every aspect of good, board level, strategic performance. With two cohorts running already, a third is on the horizon.

"And of course, our strategic board level recruitment services. We focus exclusively on recruiting Board Directors and Senior Management roles. We identify existing and emerging talent, assess, track, and place the right candidates, at the right time, for our clients.

"So, if you are thinking of creating or improving a board, want to know your options, or want to pursue a career as a NED, do get in touch – you never know what could come of it!"

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

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

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

**If you are keen to know more visit [www.theexperiencebank.co.uk](http://www.theexperiencebank.co.uk) or call Peter on 07843 329393.**



# Is your business built on intelligence?

Performance insights and business data gathering is an important part of any organisation, but reports have shown that over a third of data collected is never analysed, meaning leaders could be missing vital information and useful insights that could lead to opportunities.

**Business intelligence (BI) is more than simply the mass gathering of data, but the ability to quickly and easily support multiple business functions such as sales, marketing, finance and operations, in taking on tasks such as quantitative analysis, measuring performance against goals, identifying new opportunities and, crucially, gaining customer insights.**

Using this approach can greatly enhance how data is used to answer key questions and make decisions.

## How can you use BI?

As organisations become ever-more reliant on digital products for support, it has never been more important that decision making is grounded in reliable, robust information – meaning BI solutions are gaining popularity and heralding a new era for businesses.

## Financial management

BI is able to analyse a variety of financial data to develop insight into profit and loss, costs, material use, overheads and much more. During an unstable economy, it is more important than ever to develop accurate budgets, identify cost-reductions and look at the future with profitability forecasts encompassing the whole operation.



Bruce Watson

## Production management

By adopting machine learning, BI can support the teams on the ground by predicting machine failure and alert routine maintenance, preventing issues before they arise allowing operators to plan alternative production, and reduce downtime.

## Supply chain monitoring

Utilising BI tools organisations can predict what materials and products will be needed by customers within set timescales, meaning they can be produced when – and in the quantity – needed to satisfy predicted demand, and over-production, or out-of-stock scenarios, can be avoided.

Within the supply chain, BI can also be used to understand logistics including delivery times, costs and even sustainability issues such as carbon impact. This puts the power with the manufacturer to ensure stock is transported as efficiently, cost-effectively and environmentally friendly as possible.

BI is not just about incremental cost savings

through marginal gains productivity – spinning the wheel faster may make things quicker, but it could be more costly in the long run with a reduction in quality and standards alongside a growing technical ‘debt’. Instead, it offers the opportunity to review entire business operations, question the overall understanding and control over them, and use this to evolve or revolutionise what the business does, how it does it, and the tools it uses to deliver on its plan and achieve its objectives.

**To find out more about BI, business mapping and the other services available from Waterstons, scan the QR code or get in touch at [info@waterstons.com](mailto:info@waterstons.com)**





# State of the State

When it comes to the 'state of the state' the people of the North East have their top three issues that should be tackled by the Government. Ed Roddis, Deloitte's Director of Public Sector Research, talks through the findings of the firm's latest State of the State report, through a North East lens.



Ed Roddis

**Tackling climate change should be a top priority for the Government after addressing the cost-of-living crisis and NHS waiting lists, according to the firm's latest State of the State report. This annual publication on attitudes to government and public services is co-authored by Deloitte and Reform, the independent think tank, and includes a survey by Ipsos UK of 5,813 UK adults aged 16-75.**

When asked which issues should be priorities for the UK over the next few years, most respondents said the focus should be on tackling the immediate cost-of-living crisis (81%) and NHS waiting lists (66%), above anything else.

The public's next biggest priority is climate change, mentioned by 46% of respondents. Improving crime and policing (44%), social care for older and vulnerable people (44%) and the availability of affordable housing (40%) came close behind as key priorities for the UK public.

The State of the State report is always an interesting take on the public's perceptions of the big issues. In the North East, tackling the cost-of-living crisis (86%) and NHS waiting lists (66%) were cited as key priorities for government. The third highest priority is improving the social care provision (50%), followed by crime and policing (46%) and then climate change (44%).

Across the North of England (North East, North West and Yorkshire & Humberside) the importance of priorities were pretty similar - tackling the cost-of-living crisis is the biggest public priority for government (81%), followed by NHS waiting lists (66%). The third highest priority is crime and policing (48%), followed by social care for older people, vulnerable adults and children (46%). Climate change is the North's fifth priority, cited by 42% of the public.

Going back to the national picture, when the UK public were asked about the balance of tax and public spending, just 17% wanted the current balance to remain the same. A third (33%) believe that Britain should aim for lower taxes, even if that means lower public spending, while 29% believe Britain should tax more to increase spending. Younger people aged 16-34 years old are more likely to favour tax cuts (43%) than higher spending (22%), compared to 55-75 year-olds who are more likely to favour higher spending (36%) than cutting taxes (26%). Compared to other regions, the public in the North East are England's most convinced that lower taxes are the right way forward.

When asked about their expectations over the next few years, nearly three-quarters of UK respondents (74%) expect the cost-of-living crisis will get worse, while 58% think NHS waiting lists will worsen. However, more people than not believe that the UK's protection against COVID-19 is improving (27% vs 17%), indicating

a public mood that the UK may be over the worst of the pandemic.

When asked about private sector engagement with public services, people in the North East saw the potential of companies reducing pressure on public services. However, more said they would worry about the private sector's accountability and the risk of companies deciding to stop providing services. The same goes for the potential of the third sector alleviating pressure on public services - people in the North East were worried about accountability and expertise.

The region's level of trust in public services is relatively buoyant. The public has a notably high level of trust in the NHS, followed by the police and then local councils. And when it comes to trust in digital public services, data security is non-negotiable with nearly half the people in the North East saying keeping their data safety was either essential or very important.

The State of the State is an excellent barometer of public perception and once again the people in the North East have not held back with their opinions.

*If you would like to discuss the report in more detail, please email [eroddis@deloitte.co.uk](mailto:eroddis@deloitte.co.uk) [www.deloitte.co.uk/stateofthestate](http://www.deloitte.co.uk/stateofthestate)*



# The M&A outlook for 2023

In 2022, the M&A market was very much a game of two halves. In the first half of the year, deal activity was strong in a continuation of the record 2021 market. However M&A tends to slow during times of macro-economic and geopolitical uncertainty, with some slowing of the market during the second half of 2022.

**In early 2023 the short-term economic outlook may impact M&A activity, although the slowdown in the market is far less pronounced than initially expected, as private equity funds and banks in particular begin to regain their confidence. Traditionally institutions are more cautious in times of economic uncertainty, while Corporates have remained active in pursuing strategic M&A throughout the second half of 2022 and is expected to continue throughout 2023.**

We are expecting a number of 2022 trends to continue in 2023, with implications for shareholders and companies who are considering M&A activity in the coming year.

**1.** Private equity-backed companies will increasingly look to acquisitions as a way of complementing organic growth, as private equity funds will see investment in their current portfolio as a lower-risk means of deploying capital. In 2022, we advised on the sale of Intelligence Fusion to Sigma7, a USA private equity backed acquirer, and expect M&A interest from both domestic and overseas investee companies to remain strong in 2023.

**2.** Private equity will increasingly look at partnering deal types, with a combination of derisking for shareholders and growth capital for continued growth and positioning for a future trade sale. These deal structures allows private equity funds to deploy capital in a lower risk transaction,



with existing management team continuing to drive growth. In 2022, we advised scarlettabbott on securing investment from LDC, and expect these deal types to become the prominent private equity transaction in 2023.

**3.** Private equity will increasingly focus on sectors with high levels of recurring revenue and strong underlying fundamentals, in particular in digital services and Software-as-a-Service business models. In 2022, we advised on a number of transactions in the technology space, including LDC's investment in the £85m Aspire transaction, the growth capital fundraise for Notify, and the Synova-backed Management Buyout of Mallcomm.

The Cavu team are highly experienced and we are able to advise clients on key matters which ultimately drive value. We would be delighted to meet to discuss your plans and aspirations and how M&A can help achieve your goals.

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# UNW's focus on people worth its weight in gold

UNW's continuing commitment to developing its people has once again been recognised with the prestigious Investors in People (IIP) Gold status.

**This is the fourth consecutive occasion the Newcastle-based independent chartered accountancy and business advisory firm has achieved the 'Gold' standard since its initial accreditation more than ten years ago.**

Investors in People is a national organisation that encourages businesses across the UK to invest in their people. To achieve the accreditation, companies must take part in a rigorous assessment process which involves a detailed review by the assessor, an all-employee survey, and focused interviews with a large sample of employees.

UNW, which employs almost 160 people at its Newcastle city centre offices, was first awarded the 'Gold' standard in 2012 and has retained the status following three subsequent reviews, despite the framework evolving and accreditation becoming significantly harder to achieve.

Reflecting UNW's unrelenting commitment to investing in its people to ensure its clients continue to benefit from both technical and service excellence, the reaccreditation comes in the wake of sustained success across all areas of the business.

The firm's independent status together with its quality, size and ethos make it unique within the North East and this attracted a number of senior appointments in 2022, including Chris Wilson who joined UNW as partner and head of corporate finance following 18 years at KPMG, Martin Cross who arrived as audit and assurance partner after almost two decades at PwC, and Nick Broadhead who joined as corporate finance partner from KPMG.

At the other end of the career spectrum, UNW also continued its highly successful graduate and apprenticeship programmes by taking on 20 new trainees in the last year.

Steve Lant, Tax Partner at UNW, said: "An Investors in People accreditation is sought by many businesses and the gold status is awarded to only a small proportion of those organisations, so it is something we can all be very proud of. To have held gold status for over ten years now is testament to our determination to making UNW a great place to work and developing our colleagues. Creating a fulfilling, enjoyable and rewarding working environment is incredibly important to us.

"We have never viewed the Investors in People accreditation as an end in itself. Quite the opposite; we have always sought to invest in our people in a variety of ways and taken the view that if we are doing the right things, the accreditation will follow."

**For further information please contact:**  
**Richard Turnbull Senior Marketing Manager, UNW**  
**0191 243 6000 [richardturnbull@unw.co.uk](mailto:richardturnbull@unw.co.uk)**





## Hay & Kilner welcomes Senior Associate Louisa to the family

**Leading North East law firm Hay & Kilner is expanding its successful family law department with the appointment of solicitor Louisa Bestford.**

Louisa has joined the Newcastle-headquartered practice as a senior associate and deals with all aspects of family law, include pre and post-nuptial agreements, co-habitation agreements, separation and divorce and the welfare of children.

Originally from West Yorkshire, she moved to the North East to complete her legal qualifications and has developed her specialism in family law over the last 15 years at some of the region's best-known firms.

Louisa Bestford says: "Working in family law has a very clear link to the reality that we all experience every day. We help people prepare for their futures, to look after those who are most important to them and, when relationships break down, to reach agreements about the way forward with as little animosity as possible.

"We very much encourage family members to work together wherever possible, especially when children are involved, and the move in law towards no fault divorces and both parties being allowed to use the same solicitor, where there is no ill will, is supporting this approach.

"I could not be happier to move to Hay & Kilner, a large, well-established city firm that has ambitions to keep developing "The family law team is extremely professional and well regarded, as well as being a very friendly one, and I've really enjoyed getting to know my new colleagues across the firm.

## Evelyn Partners acquires Leathers LLP

**Deal will expand the firm's professional services presence in the North of England Evelyn Partners, the leading wealth management and professional services group, is pleased to announce that it has acquired Leathers LLP, a well-established firm of Chartered Accountants and tax specialists with offices in Newcastle and Harrogate.**

Leathers was founded in 1990 by Michael Leather and is focused on advising high net worth individuals, families, business owners and corporates, with strong expertise in personal and business tax planning, succession planning, as well as property and business structuring. It offers a broad array of audit, accountancy, tax compliance and corporate finance services.

Andrew Wilkes, Chief Professional Services Director of Evelyn Partners, said: "We are delighted to have acquired Leathers LLP. Michael Leather has built a highly respected firm with a great client base and one which is



a very complementary fit with Evelyn Partners both in terms of expertise and culture. Strategically this acquisition will further develop our professional services presence in the North of England, supporting our ambition of being able to provide our range of professional services to private clients and businesses right across the UK. I look forward to welcoming Stuart Wright and Ryan Harrison to the partnership group where their expertise and experience will be a great asset to us in developing our professional services offering in the North of England."



## EMG Solicitors celebrate opening of fourth office in Darlington with growing COP team

**Hot on the heels of the opening of their Penrith office only five months ago in September 2022, EMG Solicitors are expanding further with a brand-new division in Darlington. This is supported by a growing Court of Protection (COP) offering, making EMG the largest independent team in the North East with 36 practitioners.**

Specialising in court of protection (both in Health & Welfare and Property &

Accommodation), wills, trusts and probate, family, employment, residential conveyancing and commercial property services, the Darlington branch is a welcome addition to their existing Newcastle, Durham and Penrith offices. Demonstrating the strength of the brand's growing reputation in the legal sector.

Officially opened in January 2023, the Darlington office will be led by Court of Protection Director, Sarah Jackson who also joined the business at the start of this year. Law Society accredited, she brings with her over 13 years' experience in Health & Welfare COP work – a specialism that looks after the best interest decisions of clients in areas including accommodation, care and support. The team of 5 along with Sarah join the existing COP Health & Welfare team to support the businesses North East client base.



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Anna Ramsden

## Managing long-term absence

We recently delivered a seminar aimed at updating employers and HR professionals on upcoming changes in employment law and discussing key themes. Sickness absence management was a key focus of this seminar, as we have seen a number of queries on the subject and a tendency for errors being made.

**Nearly three years after the onset of the first UK lockdown, the Covid-19 pandemic is still impacting on employers in terms of managing those employees and workers who are suffering with the effects of long covid and who are on long term sick leave. Many employers struggle with the process of dealing with staff on long-term sick leave and often do nothing for fear of getting it wrong. Unfortunately, doing nothing is never the answer as it can leave the employee feeling cast aside and can cause resentment amongst the staff who are covering their role.**

The Office for National Statistics published data in January 2023 stating that 2 million people reported symptoms of long covid, symptoms which can affect people both mentally and physically. As a result, long covid could be classed as a disability under section 6 Equality Act 2010, and there have been some employment tribunal decisions in support of this. Accordingly, employers must be cautious of the risk of discrimination claims before

making any hasty decisions on how to deal with employees who are off sick with long covid or other conditions.

On a general level, all employers should have a clear policy on dealing with sickness absence within the Staff Handbook, ideally with separate procedures for short term absence and long-term absence. It should be clear on how an employee must notify and certify their absence, their entitlement to SSP/company sick pay, and what they will be asked to do upon return to work e.g complete a certification form or attend a return to work meeting. Employee absence costs a shocking median £798 per employee per year and so it is essential to plan in advance how you will deal with absence in the interests of the business.

Employers should ensure that they maintain regular contact with employees and provide support where possible. They need to be able to understand the condition an employee has in order to comply with the potential

duty to make reasonable adjustments if the condition amounts to a disability. Obtaining an Occupational Health report is an effective way to gather information on an employee's condition and prognosis for returning to work, however it is not safe to rely wholly on the report. A number of tribunal decisions have gone against the advice of OH reports, as the test for disability is a legal one rather than a medical one. Ultimately, employers should endeavour to gather as much information as possible and seek legal advice on the specific circumstances to determine how best to manage a particular employee's absence.

Unfortunately, despite offering support and adjustments, in some cases it may still not be possible to facilitate an employee's return to work. In such circumstances, employers may consider ill-health retirement, dismissal on the grounds of capability, or engaging in a protected conversation with a view to negotiating a settlement agreement. Any steps taken should be done so with caution, as following the correct procedure is crucial to limiting exposure to Tribunal claims.

Settlement agreements are a really useful tool in allowing the parties to part ways, and when done right they can achieve a suitable outcome for both employer and employee. Contact us if you are experiencing issues with staff sickness absence, or are considering the need for a settlement agreement.

**Anna Ramsden**  
**Hello@clrlaw.co.uk**  
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## Children's Heart Unit Fund chosen as new dedicated charity by Hay & Kilner team

Colleagues at North East law firm Hay & Kilner have chosen one of the region's best-known health charities as their fundraising cause for 2023.

**After raising more than £6,300 for their dedicated charity last year, the Newcastle West End Foodbank, members of the Newcastle-headquartered practice have chosen to support Chuf (Children's Heart Unit Fund), which is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year.**

A range of regular fundraising activities are already underway, while several bigger individual and team challenges are also being planned for later in the year, including sponsored participation in the Great North Run.

Members of the Hay & Kilner team will also be undertaking a number of volunteering days with the charity through the year.

Chuf cares for children and families who receive treatment at the Children's Heart Unit at Newcastle's Freeman Hospital, which is one of only two places in the UK equipped to deal with paediatric heart transplants, as well as

providing support to congenital patients on the adult ward and at six other hospitals across the north of England.

Over 300 children are admitted to the Freeman's Children's Heart Unit for surgery every year, while over 3,000 children return each year for outpatient appointments.

The charity aims to support pioneering services that positively impact heart families, inspire hope and enable its Heart Heroes to reach their full potential, and raises money to fund equipment purchases, facilities, aftercare, salaries and research.

CHUF receives no statutory funding and needs to raise at least £500,000 every year to pay for its core services, with donations from individual and corporate supporters being its primary source of income.

Alicia Clovis-Mothalib corporate & trusts fundraising manager at CHUF, says: "Our aim is to support the provision of holistic care, services and facilities that the NHS is unable to provide or afford, to allow heart children to develop their skills and reach their fullest potential.

"The people and businesses that lend their time, skills and energy to our cause have a direct positive impact on the lives of Heart Heroes and their families right across the region.

"We're delighted to have been chosen by Hay & Kilner as their charity of the year and can't

wait to support their fundraising events and volunteering days.

"We know the team have exciting plans and we'll be cheering them on every step of the way!"

Hay & Kilner is one of North East England's leading independent law firms and provides comprehensive legal advice across every aspect of the law to businesses and individuals from both within and outside the region.

A total of around £25,000 has been raised for the firm's previous dedicated charities, which have included Tiny Lives, The People's Kitchen and If U Care Share.

Bethany Herbertson, solicitor at Hay & Kilner and a member of the firm's CSR committee, adds: "The fundraising we've undertaken in the last few years really brings every part of the Hay & Kilner team together, and we've been able to raise lots of money for some terrific North East causes in recent years.

"CHUF has an immense impact on the lives and well-being of families across our region and beyond, and we're looking forward to finding out more about their work in the coming months."

[www.chuf.org.uk](http://www.chuf.org.uk)  
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# Hay & Kilner

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# A menopause employment champion on the horizon

Jane Sinnamon is a Partner at specialist employment law firm, Collingwood Legal. Jane considers the Government's response to the Women and Equalities Committee Report, 'Menopause and the Workplace' and what it could mean for employers.

The Government has now published its response to the July 2022 report 'Menopause and the Workplace' produced by the Women and Equalities Committee (WEC). Whilst some of the recommendations have been accepted, in full or in part (such as the recommendation to bring forward legislation to make the right to request flexible working a day one right), some of the key recommendations have been rejected (detailed below). Overall, however, the response acknowledges the significance of the topic.

## Menopause Employment Champion

One of the more significant recommendations the Government accepts in principle is the WEC's recommendation of appointing a Menopause Employment Champion. This role will be appointed by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and will consult with DWP Ministers and with the already existing Women's Health Ambassador.

The Government directs that their key role will be to 'give voice to menopausal women, promote their economic contributions and work with employers to keep people experiencing menopause symptoms in work and progressing'. The response does not give a timeframe as to the appointment of the Menopause Employment Champion.

## Rejected Recommendations

Amongst other rejections, the Government rejected the WEC's recommendation to



Jane Sinnamon

produce a model menopause leave policy. The Government was of the view that a model policy is not necessary at the moment given that other organisations such as the CIPD and ACAS have already produced guidance on best practice for employers.

It has also rejected the recommendation to consult on making menopause a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 ("EqA 2010") noting that the protected characteristics of sex, age and disability already provide protection against any discriminatory treatment against employees going through the menopause. Additionally, the Government pointed out that making menopause a protected characteristic 'may inadvertently create new forms of discrimination, for example, discrimination risks towards men suffering from long-term medical conditions'.

The Government has also ruled out the recommendation of implementing legislation introducing age and sex as a dual protected characteristic under the EqA 2010.

## What next for employers?

The Government's response may not be as radical as some were hoping but it is nevertheless a step in the right direction that should act to better support those in the workplace experiencing symptoms of the menopause.

The timeframes for implementing the outcomes of this Government response are yet to be determined, but they will come which, when coupled with an increase in an awareness of this group of employees, should highlight the importance to employers of taking proactive steps to manage this area in the interim by considering internal measures that can be taken to ensure that employees with symptoms of the menopause are supported.

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# Making your will: Don't leave everything to the taxman



**Estate Duty, Capital Transfer Tax and now Inheritance Tax; some form of death tax has existed in the UK since the 19th Century and has since developed into something quite complex.**

**Whilst it's possible for Inheritance Tax to be charged on transfers of assets during a lifetime, it mostly arises on death.**

Inheritance Tax is charged on the value of someone's estate when they die. The value is calculated by adding all assets together and deducting any liabilities. The assets will be anything to which the deceased was beneficially entitled, including their own assets, their share of jointly held assets and assets held in trust.

Exemptions, allowances and/or reliefs are then

applied to give the taxable estate. The tax is levied at 40%, although a lower rate of 36% is available, where 10% of the gross estate is left to charity.

The Inheritance Tax threshold is currently £325,000 for individuals. If your estate, after you've added together assets and deducted liabilities, is over £325,000, there could be an Inheritance Tax bill on your death. Inheritance Tax is charged at 40% on everything over that amount.

Transfers between spouses/civil partners are exempt from Inheritance Tax. You can inherit your spouse's £325,000 allowance provided they've not already used it up (by making gifts to non-exempt beneficiaries or other lifetime gifts). Where spouses leave everything to each other, when the survivor dies, they can leave up to £650,000 without paying Inheritance Tax. The Residence Nil-Rate Band allowance (which is complex, limited to certain circumstances and tightly linked to property ownership) could increase your £325,000 threshold by a further £175,000. You can inherit this

additional allowance from your spouse too. Gifts to charities and some political parties are also exempt from Inheritance Tax.

The exemption for Soldiers who die in the line of duty, contained in the Inheritance Tax Act 1984, can also be used for emergency personnel/front-line workers if they die due to COVID-19.

Considering your tax position is only one aspect of will planning, you'll inevitably have other priorities to consider, which are no less important.

Seeking the right advice early on will help you to achieve what is right for you in the most tax-efficient way. After all, no one wants to leave everything to the taxman!

***Muckle's private client team specialises in supporting individuals, business owners and landowners on private legal matters. For more information, contact Julie Garbutt at [julie.garbutt@muckle-llp.com](mailto:julie.garbutt@muckle-llp.com) or call 0191 211 7896***

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Samantha Pritchard

# Solicitor of the month

## Samantha Pritchard

Solicitor, Muckle LLP

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

As a child, I wanted to be the world's first female pilot until someone pointed out I was decades too late.

Growing up, I never considered being a lawyer. I thought it involved knowing Latin and arguing in a wig in court. But in my early twenties, I was living in rural Japan, and a friend said she thought law might suit me. When I looked into it, I realised she might be right. When I later learned about charity law, something just clicked, and I knew this was where I wanted to specialise.

### Tell us about your current role and what do you most enjoy?

I am a partner in the charities team at Muckle LLP and responsible for leading the firm's offering to the charity sector. I also work across our education and community sports practices.

I most enjoy feeling I'm contributing to our clients' impact on the lives of the people they support. I love getting to know what clients are doing and how I can support the breadth of their legal needs in a way that helps them achieve their mission.

### What is your proudest business achievement?

I was very proud to work with a great team on the transfer of Newcastle's parks and allotments from the Council to a new charity. I got a lot of satisfaction from being able to contribute my expertise to a project that preserved open spaces for local people for decades to come. It also resulted in a nomination for a Financial Times European Innovative Lawyers Award, competing against billion-dollar cross-jurisdictional finance deals, which was pretty mind-blowing.

### How has your industry evolved in the last decade and what changes do you see in the next decade?

At its heart, law is a people profession. We've seen concerted efforts over the last decade to attract talented people from a broader range of backgrounds into the profession. We still have a considerable way to go to make the sector more inclusive and break down barriers that many face in thinking the law isn't for them. At Muckle, we've been offering solicitor apprenticeships since 2016 and other routes to qualification, but there's always more that we can and should be doing.

In the next decade, I believe law firms will focus not just on what they do but how they do it, and I think the next generation will expect this from us. Whether that's through environmentally sustainable business practices, driving value for money through technology and innovation, or taking socially responsible decisions which reflect a firm's values rather than focussing on "bigger is better". I truly feel that at Muckle, we're a step ahead of the curve on this, making it a refreshing place to work.

### What are you currently working on?

I'm working on some key projects at the minute that will deliver fantastic outcomes for clients. One will deliver an increased income stream for our client to spend on their charitable purpose. One will allow our client to take on a new business area to support their beneficiaries better. The other involves our client working collaboratively with a trusted partner to design and deliver a project that will bring new skills to the region.

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

I work with a wonderful team of people who are passionate about the charity and not-for-profit sector. They range from fellow partners and a senior associate to trainees, a paralegal and a solicitor apprentice. The breadth of the team allows us to deliver the cost-effective service our charity clients expect without compromising on the quality of advice. We've exciting plans for the future, and I look forward to working with the team to deliver them!

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

Never be complacent.

### Where do you see yourself in 10 years' time?

The work is never done! So I'd hope to continue growing and developing Muckle's offering to charities and not-for-profits to provide the legal support they want and need across this region and beyond.

### Who would be your four ideal dinner guests, alive or dead?

My husband and our three closest friends. Having time with friends and family is hugely important to me.

### How do you unwind outside of work?

Ambling along the Northeast's amazing coastline, camping with the family, good food with friends and dog walks.

### Favourite Book and Boxset?

My favourite boxset is *Schitt's Creek*. It is even better the second time around.

My favourite book is difficult to pin down, but the *Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver left a lasting impression on me.

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“

*...I most enjoy feeling I'm contributing to our clients' impact on the lives of the people they support...*



# The shock that is no fault divorce

Imagine you are getting the children ready for school and your husband or wife says, "I issued divorce proceedings online last night. You will receive information from the court."

**Your world has just fallen apart. Your husband or wife has actually fallen in love with someone else and there is nothing you can do to stop the proceedings. Welcome to the wonderful world of No Fault Divorce. I call it Not Your Fault Divorce.**

Within a matter of months your husband or wife could be re-married to someone else. Someone who will expect to make financial arrangements with them, who will expect a share of their pension either upon death or retirement.

Unfortunately you have very little time to gather yourself, to get over the bombshell. You need to act much faster than you would like to in order to preserve the financial future of you and your children.

This is no time to try to sort out your divorce yourself. Yes the government have made it much easier to become divorced but nothing has changed relating to a Financial Settlement on Divorce. This is still the most important thing to attend to. It will govern how you are able to live both now and in the future.

Sorting this out directly with your spouse could literally leave you living in poverty in years to come. What if the boiler blows up, will you be able to afford to have it fixed? What if you become very ill in the next decade, have you obtained enough pension from your Settlement so that you have something to fall back on if you can no longer work? Given that most of our divorce clients are over forty this is a very real risk.

## Are you trying to sort out your divorce financial settlement yourself?

If so you might be getting it all wrong when it comes to pensions.

Do you think it's ok just to split a pension on a 50/50 basis, it's never the right thing to do!

Pensions need to be valued properly. One with a value of say £50,000 may pay out £200.00 a month but another much better scheme, also valued at £50,000, may actually pay out £400.00 per month!

Why not use Offsetting instead. By way of example, if Eric is a consultant doctor he may have a pension pot worth £1.5million. Unfortunately, he is now going to be facing extra taxes because of the value of his pension. This is a fairly recent problem following changes to the taxation of pension schemes.

It may be far more beneficial for Eric to give more than half of his pension to his wife if she doesn't have a pension. In return, Eric could take a greater share of other family assets than he might previously have taken. He will be better off tax wise, and his wife will be better off in her later years. If she is in her fifties, she could obtain her new pension in the not too distant future.

## Why do you need a solicitor for your divorce?

No Fault Divorce is new and everyone thought it would be a great idea to go online and start divorce proceedings. However, less people took advice from a solicitor when doing so.

So what? We saved money. Or did you? The divorce itself is the simple bit.

We are now seeing clients in our office who have no Financial Settlement. That's the really important thing, sorting out your finances.

Some examples of where it has gone badly wrong;

*You have come into an inheritance and discover that your ex-spouse is now claiming their share.*



Jacqueline Emmerson

*You have been left with no maintenance to feed you and your children and you can't pay the mortgage.*

*Your ex-spouse re-married one week after your divorce was finalised. You haven't made any claims against their pension. You aren't even aware that their pension is worth hundreds of thousands of pounds.*

## Why we no longer offer legal aid in divorce cases

We feel that it is far better for clients if we can just get on with their case without having to wait a long period of time just to obtain very limited cover under the legal aid scheme. This has become even more important since the introduction of No Fault Divorce.

It used to frustrate us that we could only offer limited advice before having to send the case off to mediation in order to try and reach a settlement. In 95% of cases mediation failed.

Now we are able to advise our clients on an urgent basis, we can cover all aspects of their case including writing a new will, protecting the family home, obtaining maintenance and most importantly of all, arranging for our clients to see their children.

And guess what, we still use mediation. But when it is appropriate, not just to obtain extra legal aid. And it tends to work, keeping clients away from costly court proceedings.

The sting in the tail for legally aided clients is that they eventually have to pay all of their solicitor's costs back to the Legal Aid Agency in any event if they have recovered or preserved assets.

Because we don't deal with so much legal aid form filling each client receives a far better level of service and usually a much faster outcome. We have put in place means and ways to help you pay for your Settlement including an application to the court that your spouse should be responsible for payment of your costs.

***We realise that you may be in shock and therefore we can offer you a Next Steps in Divorce Appointment. If you need help please don't hesitate to contact enquiries@emmersons-solicitors.co.uk or 0191 2846989.***

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## Should I include digital assets in my Will?

If you have ever thought about making a Will, chances are that you have considered what you would like to happen to your home and belongings after your death.

**Something which often gets overlooked, however, is what will happen to your digital assets.**

Digital assets, as you might have guessed, refer to belongings which exist in a digital space, rather than as physical objects such as a house or car.

This includes cryptocurrency, digital artwork, e-books, loyalty points, digital music collections and photographs, social media, emails and other online accounts, to name just a few.

With a Which? survey finding that 77% of its members have digital assets of sentimental value and 35% have assets of financial value, it's clearly something which needs to be considered when it comes to getting your affairs in order.

If you would like your loved ones to have access to these assets after your death then it's important to make sure this is clearly outlined in your Will, otherwise they will be distributed according to intestacy rules.

You may also wish to consider what happens to your social media accounts, with some platforms giving loved ones the opportunity to memorialise a page after someone has passed.

However, it may be that you would prefer to have these accounts deleted altogether and the same goes for other online accounts or emails, especially if there is any information stored there which you would prefer to keep private.

The process of leaving digital assets in your will is important but can be complicated.

For example, if instructions for how to get into your accounts and what to do with them aren't stipulated, then your loved ones may find that they have to navigate each individual company's policies to try and gain access, which can be both time consuming and difficult.

It is therefore important to discuss your options with a solicitor so that they can talk you through the process in depth.

Not only does this provide some clarity for loved ones carrying out your wishes but also means you have peace of mind that both your physical and digital assets are accounted for.

**For friendly, trusted advice on leaving digital assets or making a Will, contact Lydia McCaslin, Head of Wills, Trusts and Probate at Mincoffs Solicitors, on [probate@mincoffs.co.uk](mailto:probate@mincoffs.co.uk) or visit [www.mincoffs.co.uk/services/wills-probate-trusts](http://www.mincoffs.co.uk/services/wills-probate-trusts)**



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## Five Lamps shining a light on Teeside jobseekers' support needs with Newcastle Building Society backing

**Teeside jobseekers are getting extra support in their search for work thanks to a new project from a local charity that's been backed by a four-figure grant from the Newcastle Building Society Community Fund at the Community Foundation.**

The Five Lamps Organisation is working with a range of community organisations to identify local people who could benefit from extra employment support and then delivering individualised support packages to them which help them prepare to find the jobs they want.

The Stockton-headquartered charity has so far supported people working towards jobs in the

security, cleaning and gaming sectors – and it has made its own commitment to the project by taking on one of the

participants as its new IT apprentice.

Five Lamps has used the £3,000 Newcastle Building Society grant to set up and cover the running costs of the new project, and it is hoping to significantly increase the number of local people on the programme this year.

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

The Five Lamps Organisation delivers an integrated range of social, economic and financial inclusion services within which it seeks to transform lives, raise aspiration, remove barriers and offer choice.



## Charity With Bow Wow Wow Factor Seeks New Canine Volunteers

**A North East charity that helps the elderly, isolated and bereaved by befriending dog lovers in their own homes, hospitals or care homes is looking for a new breed of volunteers to meet the rising demand for its services.**

Wag and Company based in Hexham, Northumberland was formed by volunteer CEO Diane Morton in 2016 and since then, the charity has made some 90,000 friendship dog visits to people who can no longer have a dog of their own because they are in care or are too disabled to look after them.

Dogs must be at least 18 months old, have a good temperament, love cuddling and be under control; they don't have to be obedience champions!

CEO Diane Morton explains why the charity needs more volunteers: "We have huge demand for what we do, now as we've got more than 220 care homes, hospitals, and hospices on our waiting list and around 20 home placements that we need to find lovely Visiting Wag Teams for. We always look to match our home placements first as they are generally people who are more isolated, living on their own and with more complex health issues.

"Anyone that could give a couple of hours a week to share their time and their dog with an elderly neighbour would find it one of the most rewarding things they've ever done."

Anyone wishing to find out more about volunteering, the charity's website is [www.wagandco.co.uk/volunteer](http://www.wagandco.co.uk/volunteer)

## Newcastle man cycles to 'space' for charity's 70th birthday

**A tenacious Newcastle man has taken on the epic challenge of cycling to 'space' to raise money for the Percy Hedley Foundation – to mark its 70th year of supporting disabled people in the North East.**

Long-time-fundraiser for the charity, Jonny Connop, 44, from Forest Hall, is attempting his toughest challenge yet for Percy Hedley.

He is cycling an average of 1000 feet in elevation every day on his bike throughout 2023, until he reaches the equivalent of space – at 364,000 ft – which is also the same as cycling 134 times up the world's tallest building, the Burj Khalifa in Dubai.

Mr Connop, a sports therapist, has previously raised funds for the charity by completing the America Coast to Coast and Scotland North Coast 500 cycle routes.

He first became familiar with the Percy Hedley



Foundation when a friend started working there as a physiotherapist and after visiting some of the Foundation's schools and seeing the great work they do for young people and adults with disabilities, Jonny decided to back them, long term.

Mr Connop's 'Race to Space' fundraising target is £7,070 and donations can be made at [www.justgiving.com/fundraising/jonny-cycles-to-space](http://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/jonny-cycles-to-space)

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# Black & Gold Ball

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## Ponteland Lions are at it again!

Now that Ponteland Lions are back in action with their bookstall providing a valuable service for the community, they are building on their success to do more for people in need.

In October the Lions Club put on a quiz at Ponteland Social Club and with tickets at £12 a ticket and food provided by Gills fish and chips, a total of over £530 was raised for charitable use. The Club has virtually matched this to give £500 each to the Kenton Foodbank and the Westend Foodbank and is now looking at another quiz to be held back at the Social Club in April. In the meantime they are be back selling books outside Waitrose on the last Saturdays of the month.



## Comfrey Project meeting growing community needs with Newcastle Building Society backing

A longstanding North East charity which helps refugees and people seeking asylum gain practical skills in the garden has received a four-figure funding boost from the Newcastle Building Society Community Fund at the Community Foundation.

The Comfrey Project runs a community garden at its Windmill Hills Centre headquarters in Gateshead and allotment sites in Fenham and Walkergate which provide its volunteers with a chance to undertake a range of meaningful work at its weekly sessions, including gardening, cookery and housekeeping.

The charity, which celebrates its 21st anniversary this year, encourages its volunteers to share their own skills and build new connections in the community while also developing their confidence and enhancing their personal well-being.

The Comfrey Project has used the £3,000 Newcastle Building Society grant to help meet the growing costs of delivering its services and ensure it can provide all the equipment and support that its volunteers need.

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



## Win a Wedding Competition

This year marks 20 years since Grace House became a registered charity and they are looking to celebrate the occasion with a range of different events throughout the year.

One event they are running is a 'Win a Wedding' competition. This is where a shortlist of couples will fundraise against each other to win a wedding package that has kindly been donated by local businesses and suppliers.

So far, the package is worth over £8,000 and includes:

- **A fisherman's knot package from Webster's Ropery.**
- **Photography from hair and makeup right until the first dance, from Liam McCormick.**
- **Makeup for a bride and two bridesmaids from Prism Beauty.**
- **Two vouchers for a group of up to 16 adults for two evening games of laser tag from Laser Quest Sunderland – Stag Do.**
- **A 3 tier basic wedding cake from Cakes Amour.**
- **30 minutes per week personal training and one bootcamp per week for six weeks from Wear Fit.**
- **Cupcake Favours from Julie Anne.**
- **A ceremonies package from Paul Blackett celebrant.**
- **An invitations package from Helen Scott.**
- **Cocktail Making class for six people at the Alchemist -Hen Do.**
- **Hair by Avenue Hair and Beauty.**
- **A Bridal Bouquet and Button Holes by Margaret Rose Events.**

Couples can apply to enter the competition by emailing [HF@gracehouse.co.uk](mailto:HF@gracehouse.co.uk) for an application form.

As part of the event, there will also be a wedding fayre held at City Hall in Sunderland on Saturday 15th April. If you would like to exhibit, please email [HF@gracehouse.co.uk](mailto:HF@gracehouse.co.uk)

Community Fundraiser, Harry said 'We are extremely grateful to all of the local businesses and suppliers who have kindly donated their time and services to this competition to help raise funds for Grace House. We hope that the businesses get some good exposure and business from this event. Without the generosity of local businesses, Grace House would not be where it is today celebrating 20 years of being a charity.'

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# Success for Opportunity North East Careers Pilot

A ground-breaking pilot has demonstrated the importance of targeted and personalised Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) in improving post-16 destinations for young people.

**The two-year pilot project, led by the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (North East LEP), was part of the Department for Education's (DfE) Opportunity North East programme and commitment to improve education and boost productivity in the North East.**

Overall, 28 schools were involved – 16 in the North East LEP area. Each school identified up to 30 pupils identified as having an increased risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

Many of the pupils involved were from a disadvantaged background or had special educational needs, both indicators of being at higher risk of becoming NEET at the end of Year 11.

The North East LEP developed and commissioned an intensive and targeted offer of personalised advice and guidance for young people in each ONE Vision school to help them to make the best of their strengths, interests and aspirations, aiming to improve the destinations of these young people at the end of Year 11.



Neil Willis

At the end of the project, the young people involved knew more about how to find a good career; they had a greater focus on their chosen sectors; and they had clear plans on how to achieve their goals.

The project saw a 113% average improvement across the 12 key areas of underpinning careers-based knowledge, while the percentage of students with no “vision” of their future career sector fell from 13% to 6%.

An increase in the number of pupils with a post-16 plan increased from 75% to 98% and some 97% of students are predicted to be in education, employment or training.

In addition, an overwhelming majority of the young people involved in the project reported being happy in their chosen post-16 destination.

Neil Willis, Regional Lead for Education Challenge at the North East LEP, said: “One of our underlying aims was to show that CEIAG needs to be targeted and personalised which is particularly important for pupils that are associated with being at risk of becoming NEET. Pressures on the current system can make this approach challenging in schools.

“For many students, if they don’t get on the right footing at the end of Year 11, it can impact on their progress in future life so ONE Vision enabled us to test an approach to address this.

“We have demonstrated that regular contact with a careers adviser, coupled with accurate data recording and highly-personalised interventions, leads to significant increases in a student’s capacity to make the informed decisions needed to secure a good career pathway.

“As well as improving destinations for young people, this also delivers considerable wider economic and social benefits.”

Nationally, young people who become NEET are likely to experience a range of other negative outcomes, triggering wider economic costs over £77,000 each in direct lifetime costs to public finances and over £144,000 in wider lifetime costs to the economy and wider community.

Every percentage point reduction in NEET pupils across the 15 ONE Vision secondary schools has the potential to save public finances £1.85million and over £3.46million in wider lifetime costs to the economy and community.

The findings of the pilot, which was supported by the Oxford University Careers Service, will be shared with the DfE, local authorities and careers education leaders.

**See the Opportunity North East report on the North East Evidence Hub: [EvidenceHub.NorthEastLEP.co.uk](https://EvidenceHub.NorthEastLEP.co.uk)**





## Brilliant Burn's Night supper raises 27k for NE Youth

NE Youth have celebrating Burns Night for over 30 years- thats a lot of haggis and bag pipes! This year the charity pulled out all the stops and with the help of their headline sponsor, Perspective NE, set about raising as much as possible to ensure that more young people across the region can be supported in 2023.

The night was an incredible success raising £27,000

It started with young drummers of Jack Drum Arts, followed by the highland dancers of the Donna Kimberley School of Highland Dancing. The traditional piping of the haggis & reading of Robbie Burns poems was followed by a ceilidh and dancing till the wee hours with the brilliant band Discography providing the live music.

Ian Wilkinson, CEO at Perspective Financial Group: "It was a great pleasure to be lead sponsor at NE Youth's Burns Night Supper- we hope to be able to make a ongoing contribution to this fabulous charity which faces a continual battle for funding, having seen a reduction in central government funding of 96% over the past 10 years. Its highly likely that there will be further cuts over the short to medium term which is why those of us who can, should do everything possible to support this fabulous charity so it can continue to provide the extremely important services that it does."

The support and generosity of everyone involved means that NE Youth can continue their ongoing work in making a difference to the lives of young people in our brilliant region!

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









# Charity of the month...

*In this edition, we talk to...*

## The Percy Hedley Foundation

A charity which empowers people with disabilities and their families.



### Why was the charity founded?

In the 1950s, it was thought that no more could be done for children with Cerebral Palsy beyond what was already being done and they couldn't access school education, which is hard to believe today. So, Molly and Stephen Darke, along with other parents, made it their mission to help their children realise their full potential and live life to the full.

Because of their passion and commitment, the Percy Hedley Foundation was founded in 1953 as a special school for children with Cerebral Palsy. When the first school opened there were only 12 students, Molly and Stephen Darke's son among them.

### Which area do you cover?

We're a North-East Charity, based in Newcastle and North Tyneside offering our specialist services from two schools, a college, lifelong learning for adults and four residential homes for adults.

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

This year we are celebrating turning 70! The Percy Hedley Ball happens every year, each with a different theme in mind, for example, this year's theme is our Birthday, whilst 2021's theme was the 1920s.

We offer a range of events throughout the year, including the Great North Run in September. During 2023, we've got some exciting activities planned such as an exhibition looking at our history and Paint the Toon Purple in May.

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

During the last 70 years we've delivered over 30 million hours of specialist education, learning, care, therapy, nursing and support. During that time, we've seen empowered people to break down barriers, from starting one of the first special schools in the country, to creating work inclusive work opportunities and being involved in the launch and development of disability support.

Last year, we teamed up with Northumbria Police to launch the UK's first Volunteer Police Cadet scheme for students with disabilities.

Eight of our students at Hedley's College had their ceremony where they were officially sworn in as the first-ever to join Volunteer Police Cadets Scheme for those with special needs.

The partnership has also been nominated at the 2023 British Diversity Awards for Community Project of the Year.

### What are you currently working on?

In celebration of our 70th Birthday, The Percy Hedley Foundation is launching the Percy Pledge.

Every day we empower people to live as independently as possible and reach their full potential. In 2022, we delivered 1.2million hours of special education, lifelong learning, therapy, and care.

As a charity, we rely on fundraising to make sure that the people at Percy Hedley have the best opportunities, to give them the confidence and skills so they can live life to the full.

In 2023, through The Percy Pledge we are looking for 70,000 supporters to donate £7 and continue to support us with the amazing work we deliver every year across the North East.

Donations are used to fund specialist facilities and enhance the resources, equipment and experiences that enable the people we support to flourish during their time with us.

### What does the future hold?

This year, we celebrate 70 years of empowering people. It is estimated that there are 1.5 million people in the UK with learning disabilities so demand for our services continues to grow. Between 2021-2022 we supported 584 people with disabilities and spent 1.2 million hours providing special education, lifelong learning, therapy and care. With help from our supporters, we want to continue to support more people with disabilities and their families, empowering them to be their best selves.

### How do you get involved?

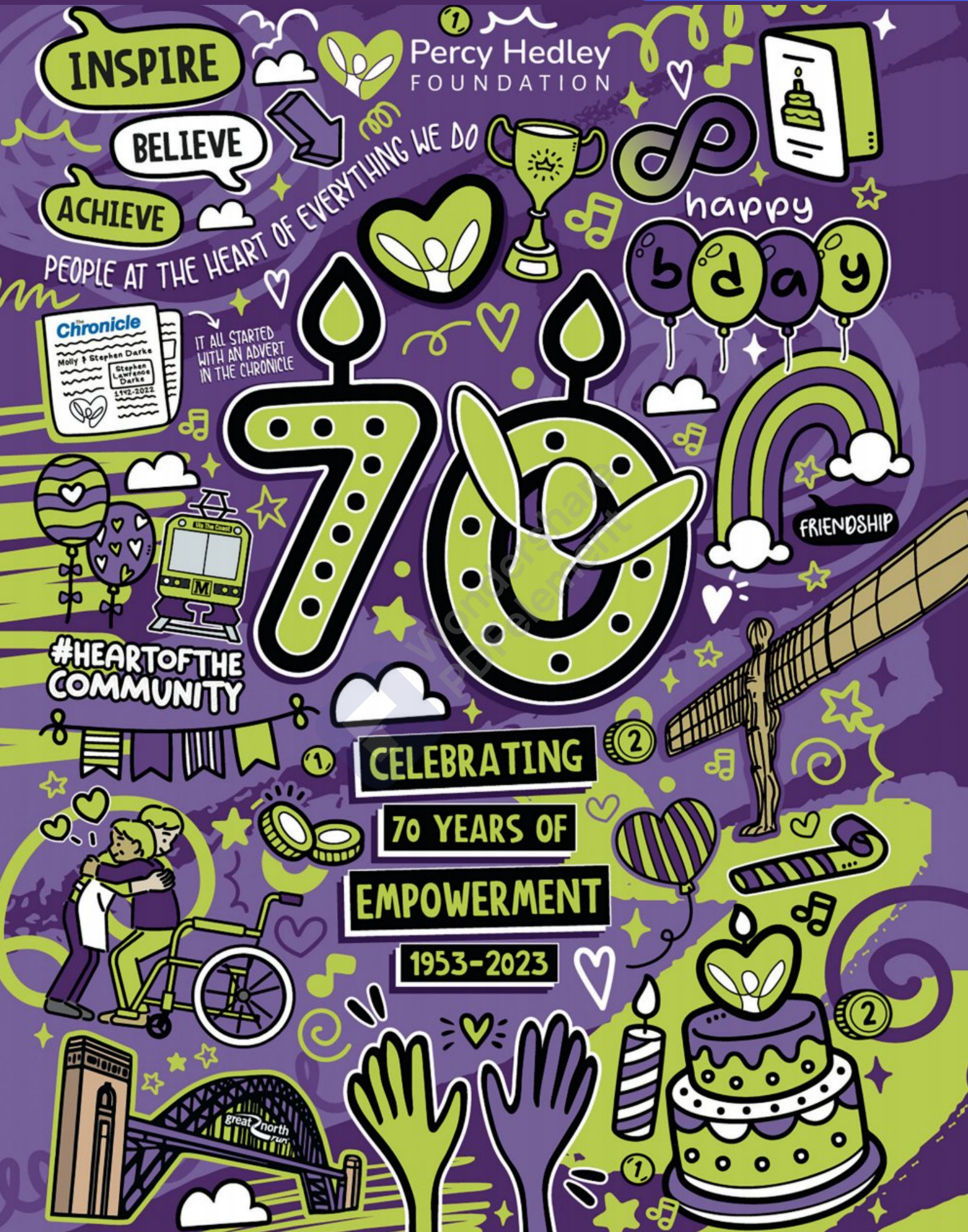
**To donate to the Percy Pledge** [www.percyhedley.org.uk/pledge](http://www.percyhedley.org.uk/pledge)

**To find out more about other ways you can support us**  
[www.percyhedley.org.uk/get-involved](http://www.percyhedley.org.uk/get-involved)

**You can make a real difference to the lives of disabled people here in the North East!**











## Attracting talent in a passive job market

As an employer, it can be frustrating when an open role is not garnering enough interest from potential candidates, and subsequently not being filled as quickly as the business requires. Targeting the passive job market could be the solution.



**The current economic turmoil and the cost of living crisis have made people increasingly cautious about moving job roles. It is estimated that around half of UK employees are currently classed as passive job seekers, meaning they are not actively searching for a new job but would consider a new opportunity if one presented itself.**

There are several ways businesses can combat this trend. A report by the CIPD found the top reasons for employees quitting their jobs in the UK include a lack of career progression opportunities and poor pay. This highlights the importance of offering competitive salaries and benefits, including health insurance, paid leave and flexible working, to attract and retain new staff.

Since the disruption the Covid-19 crisis caused to businesses, there has been an increased focus by individuals on culture and how it aligns with them as candidates. A positive workplace culture can lead to increased job satisfaction, lower turnover rates and higher levels of employee engagement.

This falls hand in hand with ensuring your business has a positive brand identity and

reputation in order to attract new talent. In today's fast-paced world, where technology has made it easier for employees to research potential employers, the power of a company's brand has become more important than ever.

This should be reflected in the company's values, mission statement and day-to-day operations. A company that values its employees, treats them with respect and offers a supportive work environment will naturally attract candidates' who share these values.

Another important aspect of a positive brand is a commitment to transparency and honesty. A company that has a history of innovation, growth and financial stability will naturally attract employees who are looking for steadiness and opportunity for advancement.

Finally, partnerships and collaborations with educational institutions, non-profit organisations, as well as other companies can also help to attract new talent. Consumers, employees and investors increasingly care about a company's social and environmental impact and demand that businesses make a positive contribution to the world. In a highly competitive job market, firms that

can demonstrate their commitment to social and environmental responsibility can gain a significant advantage in attracting and retaining top talent. Studies have shown that job seekers are more likely to choose companies that align with their values, especially when it comes to social and environmental issues.

A company's involvement in social and environmental issues can also enhance its reputation, building trust and loyalty among its stakeholders. This, in turn, can result in increased brand recognition, which can lead to more business opportunities, and can ultimately contribute to the financial success of the firm.

There is no denying that for businesses looking to recruit top talent, the market is tough. They need to address factors, such as company benefits, positive workplace culture and partnerships and collaborations, to attract new talent and maintain a competitive edge in a challenging job market.

***As your in-house recruiter, Talentheads can help your business find the perfect candidate. Find out more at [www.talentheads.co.uk](http://www.talentheads.co.uk) or [hello@talentheads.co.uk](mailto:hello@talentheads.co.uk)***

# Talent firm supports growth with new office space

North East-based recruitment firm Talentheads has started the year with a move to larger premises, following a boost in staff numbers and a 60 per cent growth in turnover.

**Talentheads, which was set up by Sam Spoors in 2020, has moved to a larger office in Morpeth, Northumberland, to house its growing team, having taken on six new members of staff in the past 12 months.**

Lauren Bell and Camille Colligan have been taken on as talent engagement advisors, Alison Jobson, Rose Heppell and Grace Oliver joined as talent partners, and Judith Armatage was hired as a development partner.

Sam said: "We are committed to growth and therefore knew we needed a bigger office space to facilitate that expansion for our teams and our clients."



The Talentheads team in their new office, including founder Sam Spoors (centre)

"We wanted to remain in the North East, as we are so proud of our roots and the location has great links to the A1."

Talentheads offers businesses a different approach to recruitment by absorbing itself into companies as the internal recruitment, talent and resourcing teams and works with business owners on long-term, sustainable strategies to help them take control of the recruitment process.

Sam added: "Our new team members bring a wealth of experience and talent, and I can't wait to see how we all work together to continue the Talentheads journey."

"Last year was so successful for the brand. Aside from the new offices, we also marked our highest monthly revenue, started work with some exciting new clients and made the shortlists for some amazing awards, including

the NE Business Awards for High Growth and Ambition and LiveWire Global Awards for Most Innovative Recruitment Business – UK."

As well as boosting the team, Talentheads has also invested in video technology that allows the team to engage with clients and the talent they are looking to recruit with a real face to support their brand.

The investment in the technology was supported by funding from NBSL, which is part of the European Regional Development Fund.

Sam said: "People buy from people so we have invested in being seen so business owners, hiring managers and candidates can identify, engage and work with people – rather than emails."

**For more information on Talentheads and its range of services, visit [talentheads.co.uk](https://www.talentheads.co.uk)**

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L-R: John Everitt, Kirsty Lawrence, Paul Browning, Shaun Simmons and Sophie Hannah.

## Over 1,000 patients helped thanks to free fuel for life-saving Blood Bikes service

A charity that delivers essential blood and urgent medical supplies, out-of-hours, to North East hospitals has had its plea for help answered by the operators of the Tyne Tunnels, TT2.

**TT2 has made a generous £5,000 donation to Northumbria Blood Bikes to pay for the cost of their fuel for a whole month, after reading the charity's appeal for more donations and volunteer bikers. TT2's gift will fund 1,000 healthcare journeys which will help at least 1,000 local people - potentially saving many lives.**

Outside normal office hours, hospitals rely on couriers or taxis to transfer urgent medical supplies or test samples between hospitals

and other healthcare sites. Northumbria Blood Bike carry out this service free-of-charge, ensuring the NHS's limited resources can be used where it matters most.

Kirsty Lawrence, Trustee of Northumbria Blood Bikes, said: "We are incredibly thankful to the team at the Tyne Tunnels for thinking of our charity and their generous donation towards our fuel costs which will enable our volunteers to support the NHS with over 1,000 jobs free of charge across the month they are sponsoring.

Without the help of donations we wouldn't be able to be there when people need us most. Thank you!"

The service covers Darlington, Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle Upon Tyne City, North Tyneside, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Sunderland.

The charity's funding comes entirely from cash donations, and the service is provided solely by volunteers.

In critical situations, blood or other medical items need to be delivered urgently in order to save a patient's life. Blood bikes, with their distinctive livery and narrow profile, can quickly get through busy traffic to reach their destination. For bulky items, or in extreme weather conditions, cars are used too.

TT2 Customer Operations Manager, Shaun Simmons, said: "With the cost of fuel being so high and this transport service being so important to the people of our region, we are happy to be able to support them."

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



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## Burning bright: The Wood Oven, Wylam

The Wood Oven in Wylam has new owners. Mark Fryer and Andrew Nicholson took over the restaurant in November 2022 and have been busy ever since.

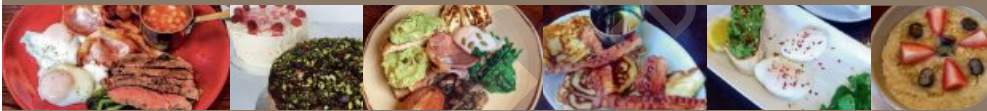
Partners Mark and Andrew had always dreamt about running a small restaurant so when The Wood Oven in Wylam came up they jumped at the chance.

They've got a new logo, branding and a bright neon sign! They're keeping the original menu but with added extras including sharing platters, burrata salads and some fabulous cocktails!

The new owners have some exciting plans for 2023- if your looking for the best wood oven pizza around, head to Wylam!

*The Wood Oven, 01661 852552*

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Nevil Tynemouth

# Can training and development programmes create real cultural change?

This has been a topic of conversation with several of our clients and contacts recently. The short answer is training and development programmes alone can't create that cultural shift. If you and your firm are looking at a cultural change, then training and development will be central to this, but it won't achieve this alone.

**Once you start to look at what role training and development plays in cultural change, it can be pivotal when coupled with these key areas:**

**Where there is a clear link to your wider organisational strategy.** It may sound like an obvious point, but I am not sure if you have experienced training and development that doesn't clearly link to a firm's strategy or goals. It can happen more often than you might expect! Think about aligning all your training and development programmes to your overall strategy and goals. Understanding the skills your teams have at the minute and where the gaps are. Those gaps are your training and development opportunities.

**Understanding what your people need to do to be excellent in their role.** What does this look like and is it documented? Having things like an up-to-date competency framework that evaluate the skills and behaviours needed to deliver against role specific requirements. Using things like a competency framework can help you model excellence and identify growth and development plans at monthly, quarterly, and annual reviews.

**Specific tools and skills to help your team to grow.** Where there is a specific skill or behavioural gap across your firm, taking time to recognise this and build a programme that address this is key. We often train whole firms in things like client journey, we ensure we train those that are furthest removed from clients. This is to help everyone in a firm take a client centric approach. It also helps to create shared goals and language as a firm. These are also supporting pillars in creating that cultural change.

**Challenge and accountability.** Something I find myself saying to more and more firms is "Your values are what you do not what you have written on the wall!". We are often asked to help keep organisations, teams and individuals accountable and to challenge them when they are living their values. I am sure you have experienced a firm that talks about something like "We keep things simple", then sends you a complex document to complete, with no guidance, little help or support and a convoluted service and help team that you can only speak to in an online chatbot. The values there don't match the lived experience.

On the flip side, I did some work with a legal firm recently and I happened to comment to their MD just how friendly every one of their teams across four offices were (I gave a couple of examples and named a couple of people who had been really friendly and helpful). He smiled when getting that feedback and said that was one of the values they had been working on and it was great when a supplier noticed that.

**Having a range of internal development tools and frameworks.** Abraham Maslow's quote fits really nicely here – "If the only tool you have is a hammer, it is tempting to treat everything as a nail". I love that quote because I lived this in a corporate world where one of our managers would (metaphorically) just hit everyone over the head. Repeatedly. Constantly. Then he wondered why people started flinching whenever he walked past! Great firms have a group of well supported people with a huge toolkit to help them and everyone around them achieve individual, team and organisation level goals. These firms use a mix of things like training, facilitation, coaching, management, delegations, workshops, masterclasses, lunch and learn session, bitesize learning, eLearning etc. All of these tools and approaches allow partners, directors, managers and team members to be the best they can in any given situation.

In summary cultural change needs to be supported at every level of a firm in multiple ways. And, while training won't necessarily be the lead component, real change is less likely to happen without a robust training and development plan, linked to your strategy and recognised at the strategic level.

*If you want to discuss your own cultural change programme speak to Nevil: [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)*

# In conversation with...

*From a very early age, I wanted to be an engineer...*

## Ross Hall

*Harlyn Solutions Engineer*

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

From a very early age, I wanted to be an engineer. When I was younger, I was encouraged to build things and take them apart. Whether that was Lego, Meccano or just making things out of bits of wood.

As I progressed through school, I gravitated towards STEM subjects, specifically physics and maths. This led to me exploring different types of engineering careers.

### Tell us about your current role and what do you most enjoy?

My current role at Harlyn Solutions requires me to design, cost, and execute innovative transport solutions for heavy lift projects.

The variety in my role is what I enjoy most. Harlyn works across multiple industries with different types of clients including freight forwarders, equipment owners, manufactures and ports.

My role allows me to work both in the office, completing complex design work, as well as on-site loading vessels and overseeing transport operations.

Having the theoretical and practical parts of my role keeps me on my toes and ultimately, I hope, makes me a better engineer.

### What is your proudest business achievement?

Leaving a comfortable job of ten years mid-pandemic to join a start-up company - and then watching that company grow year-by-year.

### How has your industry evolved in the last decade and what changes do you see in the next decade?

I've only been involved in heavy lifting and marine transport for two years but I now see a



Ross Hall

lot more focus on renewables and the logistics surrounding the construction of offshore wind farms.

Floating wind turbines seem to be the next big thing, allowing wind farms in greater water depths. This brings its own set of challenges in addition to those already present within the industry.

These include – suitable port infrastructure, cable manufacturing capacity, available installation vessels and, of course, suitable training and development of the next generation of engineers and technicians.

### What are you currently working on?

I'm working on multiple projects at the moment. One is a design project where I've overseen the analysis of a steel basket used to store subsea cable.

The other is a lifting and installation project where I've produced the method statement and lift plans for installing a bridge that allows cars to drive onto a ferry.

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

The team at Harlyn are all driven and share the same passion for getting things done correctly.

We're a relatively small team, allowing us to make decisions very quickly and solve problems promptly.

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

Accept every opportunity you're presented with.

### Where do you see yourself in 10 years' time?

Hopefully still in engineering, working on more

complex and challenging projects as part of a much larger team.

And developing younger engineers, passing down experience and encouraging more people into engineering.

### Who would be your four ideal dinner guests, alive or dead?

Firstly, Nikola Tesla who was an engineer who invented many modern technologies and is often forgotten about. When people say "Tesla" now, we automatically think of cars. I would be interested to see how his thought process worked when developing new ideas.

Then, I'd add Andrew Huberman. I listen to his podcast regularly and enjoy his work on neuroscience and how small changes in our daily routines can affect the brain and body.

To that mix, I'm going to add Joe Rogan. We share mutual hobbies, and he has had so many people on his podcast, I'd pick his brains on as many people and topics as I could.

Finally, I wouldn't want my younger self to miss out on all that knowledge so I'd add younger me in there too. Then, I could tell myself to take bigger risks and seek more opportunities.

### How do you unwind outside of work?

Mostly varying forms of exercise. Wrestling, kickboxing and hiking. I also like to listen to podcasts.

### Favourite Book and Boxset?

I don't watch television or read. I prefer to be out and about.

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





# Rising Star



Lily Hogarth

## Lily Hogarth

*Business admin apprentice at NEPO*

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

I have always enjoyed working with people so knew an office-based role would be a good option. I also wanted to embark on an apprenticeship that was general such as business admin rather than be pigeon-holed as I feel there are more opportunities to learn.

### Tell us about your current role

I help with the wider procurement team at NEPO, where I am always learning new procedures and shadow members of the team. I also enjoy listening in on various calls where I take notes. I feel like there are lots of opportunities to progress within the role.

### Why did an apprenticeship appeal?

Unlike my friends, I didn't want to go to university preferring to work. An apprenticeship is the best of both worlds as you are studying and working at the same time. You are also supported rather than being thrown in at the deep end.

### How does your role benefit your learning?

Prior to joining the team at NEPO I didn't know how to use Microsoft office. This was hard to get to grips with at first but now it feels like second nature. I also know more about Excel rather than just the basics.

### Tell us about your team

Initially I was working with the energy team but I am now working with the wider procurement under the supervision of procurement manager, Joanne Leask who is very encouraging.

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

To keep working hard and ask for help if you need it.

### How do you like to unwind outside of work?

On weekends I enjoy seeing my friends. I also have a family dog so lots of dog walks with my sister and I like to travel to Sheffield University where my best friend is studying.

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Louise Kennedy

## On Air: Delving into the Leadership Debate

Sunderland based Oculus HR have been hitting the airwaves with their popular podcast series, Real World HR, hosted by Founder and Managing Director Louise Kennedy. With an array of special guests across each episode the current series has been sharing real life stories behind HR processes - the good, the bad, the ugly, and everything in between.

**The recent episode saw behavioural and people expert Sarah Callender hit the studio and dive into the leadership debate with Louise. Sarah is COO at Duo Global Consulting, where she works with growth focussed businesses to lead and navigate strategic change. A passionate advocate for effective leadership, Sarah runs initiatives to support ambitious leaders to make a positive impact.**

Louise Kennedy, Founder and Managing Director, Oculus HR said: "I have been so fortunate to have so many amazing guests join the podcast and was delighted to be joined by my recent guest Sarah Callender. To grow a successful business, leadership and development are two areas that are absolutely critical, and through the episode we take an

in-depth look at this and how it impacts the business to support sustainable growth.

We touch on some really poignant areas which have an impact on the whole HR process. I set up the podcast with the aim of educating and informing businesses and their leaders on an array of topics that directly impact everyday HR in a clear and concise way, and I've been overwhelmed with the amount of content and insight that guests have brought to the table."

Experts in human behaviour, Sarah and the team at Duo Global Consulting have the ethos that when you understand behaviour the solution to every business challenge becomes clear. They state that 'Your people impact your customers, your culture, and are likely also the biggest cost in your business.'

Their methods have helped businesses attract, engage and develop high performing people, supporting positive business change, whilst strategically developing leadership and management skills needed for business growth.

### Take aways from the episode looked at:

- Why leaders shouldn't be expected to be the complete article, as everyone is constantly learning.
- The importance of emotional intelligence and diversity within and across leadership roles.
- Stereotypes and societal expectations for leaders, along with the pressures they face.
- Taking responsibility for your own development - the power of 'driving your own bus'!

Louise added: "This is the final episode of season one of the Real World HR podcast and what an episode to end on there was so much to take away. I'm looking forward to starting to record the next series this month, but in the meantime all episodes are available on Apple, Spotify and Amazon."

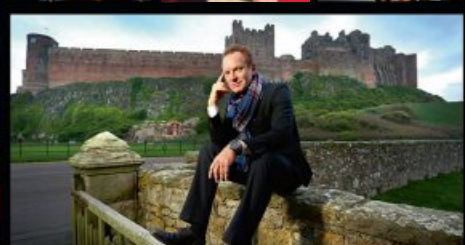
**Sunderland based Oculus HR provide innovative and flexible HR solutions to SMEs regionally and nationally through their dedicated and holistic approach. To find out more about the HR support packages available for businesses contact the team at Oculus HR at [louise@oculus-hr.co.uk](mailto:louise@oculus-hr.co.uk) or visit [www.oculus-hr.co.uk](http://www.oculus-hr.co.uk)**





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# Finding answers to The People Puzzle

Most of you reading this will be involved in business in some shape or form.

**Perhaps you manufacture something or provide a service. You might work for a small, local firm or a multi-national.**

However, there is invariably THE common denominator in every business.

People.

Employers bring in people to work for them, work alongside them and to work with other people to deliver their products.

Employees are brought in to work for people and work with other people for reward and recognition.

All of which is absolutely fine...but there is one proviso.

Are those people the right people for each other?

"We've all been in a situation where it can go horribly wrong where it soon becomes obvious that you've appointed or end up working alongside the wrong person," says Jim Lister, Regional Director and Business Coach for People Puzzles. "You're then faced with the problem of what do about it...how to resolve what can potentially become a very difficult and often disruptive situation. Wouldn't it have been better if the issue hadn't arisen in the first place? That is what we aim to do here at People Puzzles – help get the best culture fit for all parties.

Over the last 12 years, we've worked with more than 1,000 mainly SME businesses across the UK who knew they could be more successful but were being held back by their people puzzles.

We know that when everyone is pulling in the same direction, the result is efficiency, success and ultimately, increased profit. We have a proven process that delivers results and enables our People Directors to start adding value immediately.

And I'm delighted to say that we are increasing our presence here in the North East. We already have a sizeable portfolio of firms we work closely with in this region, but we are now in a situation where we can really push forward and help a lot more firms...small and large... make the most of the right people to benefit employers, employees and customers."

Of course, when it comes to dealing with people, it's always handy to have experience. As well as the 'people' successes, let's be honest we've also made mistakes in business, and as long we learn from those experiences, it can actually turn out to be beneficial and help to make better future decisions.

And experience is what you get from the People Puzzles team.

Take Jim Lister for example.

"Since the age of 27 I've always run my own business and fully understand the push to be successful and be master of your own destiny. I've learnt how important it is to value the people you work with and to make them into a cohesive team. You also need to constantly share your vision with them. And yes, if you have the right people around you and if they fully understand what you're aiming for, there is a very strong chance that your business will be successful.

All you have to do is look at any successful football team, (although as a Hull City fan I know I'm on shaky ground here!) A winning team has people who know their role, where they fit in and who work together. I also know that everyone gets a buzz when you see the results coming through. If you have a leader who can share their dream and enthuse everyone, I see no reason why that business can't flourish."

So, what about People Puzzles extending their reach here in the North East?

"I'm really excited about this," adds Jim. "Our footprint is across the UK, but our next area for growth is across this region. We work in a variety of sectors...traditional manufacturing, engineering, personal and financial services as well as the emerging sectors like internet technology, cyber security and bio technology.

I'm also looking forward to it for a personal reason. My in-laws family is from Newcastle... Byker and Jesmond areas...and 3 generations, my wife, her Mum and my daughter, all went to Newcastle University and loved it. I wouldn't say I'm an adopted Geordie...but I'm getting there!"

And the good news is that Jim will be sharing more information about People Puzzles in future editions of Northern Insight. He'll be outlining precisely what People Puzzles does for its clients and how it can impact North East businesses.

Watch this space.

**If you'd like to find out more about People Puzzles and how they can help you and your business, go onto their website [www.peoplepuzzles.co.uk](http://www.peoplepuzzles.co.uk)**



Jim Lister

The continued  
adventures of...

# Ziggy and Cally!



Hi everyone – Ziggy and Cally here.

Having a great time going around the sites with my little sister – need to give her a nip every now and then to let her know who is the boss but she is shaping up well.

Looks like the weather is improving and our order book is full.

Dad is going to the Cup Final this weekend so I am going to Auntie Sarah's to play with Dexter.

Hope he comes back happy. *Howay the Lads!*

**Percy from Wallsend asks:**

**Q.** Can you suggest any safe woodworm fluid for an attic which has worm holes? We would be concerned for our children's health particularly. We have installed modern Velux windows and need to protect these from any live woodworm. What would you suggest?

**A.** I cannot recommend any woodworm fluids! They are all nerve poisons. Your worm holes are probably many years old. They are actually 'flight holes' of the adult beetles leaving the wood.

There is no justification for using insecticides unless you have definitive evidence that there is a continuing active infestation, and that this cannot be dealt with by normal construction methods, i.e. central heating and ventilation.

Your new Velux windows are unlikely to be affected by wood-boring insects – the timber in them is kiln-dried and sealed with a water-based varnish.



Please send me your building queries through facebook - @WDLne, website: [wdlnortheast.co.uk](http://wdlnortheast.co.uk) or through my Dad's good pal Michael Grahamslaw at Northern Insight on [mjgrahamslaw@outlook.com](mailto:mjgrahamslaw@outlook.com)

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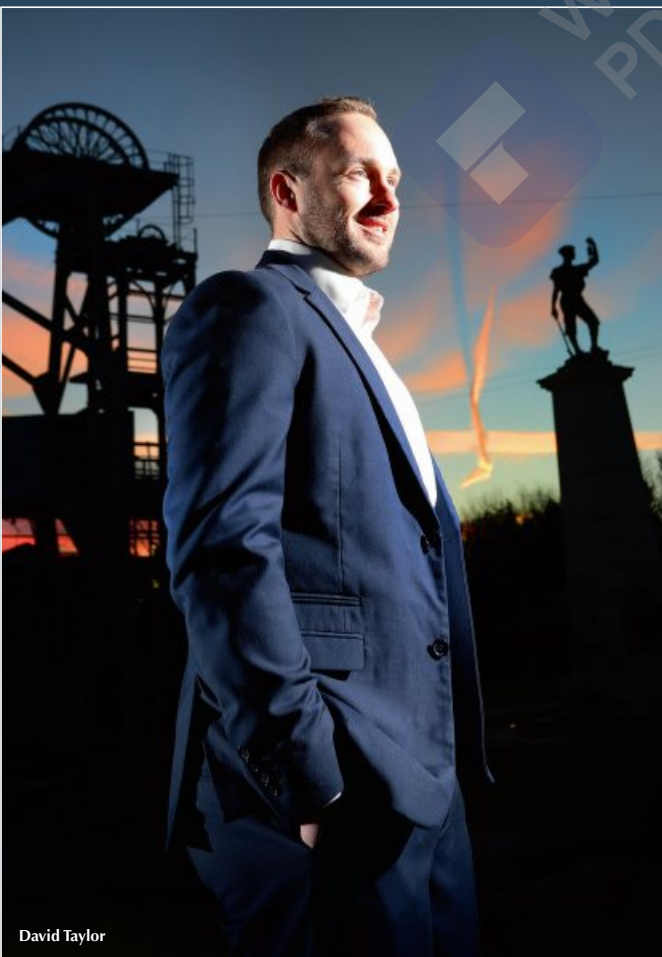
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enabled us to  
further hone  
our approach  
to quality...”

# Quality matters

Dr David Cliff explores issues around the subject of quality, together with a case study of a progressive North East company with quality very much at its heart.

**"The bitterness of poor quality remains long after the sweetness of low price is forgotten" – Samuel Johnson's immortal quote is often easily sidestepped when the spiralling inflation and ever-increasing demands to fund our choices have to be weighed in the balance, but it remains crucial if we are to have a sustainable world.**

Mind-sets need to change. Low price and high quality are not always compatible. They are part of a spectrum that often requires one end to be sacrificed in favour of the other. Even our most advanced engineering technologies and production styles cannot necessarily reconcile this equation. Mercedes-Benz vehicles used to be over-engineered so much so, that vehicles would last decades with solid reliability. That practice added something quintessential about the brand but has been trimmed over the years to the point where, despite good quality, users often complain vehicles have shorter operational lives than in the past.

China has added to this interesting quality/price balancing act over the years, often where past focus on cheapness has left a bitter taste in some supply chains often not assuaged by subsequent improvements.

For the consumer it is very much "caveat emptor" (let the buyer beware). I've seen extraordinarily low quality goods and services provided at a relatively high price supported by slick, aggressive sales techniques that "socialise" the client into a belief that what they are getting is good. After sale, whatever disappointments abound, while some will assert their rights, many will seek to justify their initial purchase through the use of confirmation bias wherein they convince themselves that they made the right choice.

There are some organisations however, where quality dictates everything, rendering those organisations not necessarily the cheapest but probably the best, reflecting Johnson's 'bittersweet' axiom. Gedanken has been pleased to work with one such company, The Luxury Loft Company in Newcastle. The company, provides all forms of domestic and commercial property work but as the name implies, has a particular focus upon works that include loft extensions. Daryll Chana, TLLC's MD, is close to evangelical about quality in his approach. He personally inspects every site, and the staff are very clear about the exacting standards that need to be incorporated into a build. So many of his approaches to quality, are under promoted, tacit 'givens' in his quality process.

For example, the one -year post build inspection and repair visit has many people amazed, by those used to so many building companies vanishing once the invoice is settled. "I personally couldn't bear to see someone make a large investment in their home, put their trust in my company and find they were let down. Quality involves deep thought over the customer experience", says Daryll, this has led to, for example, offsite prefabrication to minimise the disruption to users, often halving the time that most contractors would typically be on site. Quality is a 'whole systems' approach he asserts. "Whether it's about the courtesy shown in the early stages, attention to detail about the clients particular needs, the follow-ups to ensure that our work lasts for years to come, we won't compromise. That may mean we are a little more expensive than some of our competitors, but our experience is people express far greater customer satisfaction than many of our competitors receive". Quality also adds to the bottom line for the company, a focus on 'zero warranty claims', means a very strong completer-finisher ethos. "I would rather somebody spend a few extra hours on site to get the job absolutely right than to have an unhappy customer over a piece of work that has been done with a view to timescales rather than craftsmanship as this inevitably backfires on the brand, the customer and the relationship between them".

This approach to quality is reflected in the company's order book and the constant stream of referrals the company receives, leading to year-on-year progressive growth and strength in the region.

"Working with Gedanken has enabled us to further hone our approach to quality, as well as structuring the organisation for scale up and growth", Daryll adds.

For us here at Gedanken, it's always easier to work with a company that has quality at its heart, an embedded value that knows no compromise, but equally, in common with all values, it needs to be constantly reflected upon if it is to remain contemporary, manage change and meet the constantly evolving needs and aspirations of customers.

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

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# NE1 CAN

By Kerry McCabe, Business Network Manager

**Recruitment and retention are increasingly difficult for businesses and employers across all industry sectors in the North East. Not only are there widespread problems recruiting, businesses are having trouble retaining staff and finding those with the right skills in the first place.**

**This employment landscape provides the backdrop for the activities of one of NE1's most long-standing and successful initiatives, its youth engagement programme, NE1 CAN. Established in its current form in 2016, NE1 CAN provides a free programme of engagement and events delivering careers insight sessions to young people across Newcastle and the North East, the only one of its kind in the region available to all students, regardless of academic abilities. Working with cross-sector businesses, the programme offers real life experiences and insight into different jobs and careers. Since its launch, it has worked with 82 education providers and over 7,500 young people.**

Events are hosted by businesses in their offices, factories and work spaces to give young people valuable and practical insight into the real-life world of work. The great thing about NE1 CAN is that it is a free programme that is accessible and inclusive to all. Sessions are free for those attending, and for the businesses, and the door is open to all, subject to availability. The current schedule is fully booked with a huge demand for places and a waiting list for students keen to take part.

Given the current recruitment and employment challenges, there is no better time for businesses to engage with young people, to help create a pipeline for future employees across all entry levels from school leavers to apprenticeships or graduate roles.

Businesses regularly come to NE1 CAN hoping to promote unfulfilled apprenticeships, or job vacancies. It is a recurring theme, businesses advertise jobs but can't fill them – young people, the potential recruits, can't apply for these jobs, because they don't even know they exist. There is a general lack of understanding and knowledge among young people of the opportunities that exist. It is NE1 CAN's job to change that.

The overarching aim of the programme is to help young people understand what's out there in the world of work, help demystify job titles, as well as showing the wealth of opportunities available here in the North East. The final piece of the jigsaw is to give young people a better understanding of what they need to get there.

Many of the roles highlighted by employers are completely unknown to most young people; they have never heard of account executives, SEOs, conveyancers, paralegals, estimators, dry liners, the list goes on, and this lack of knowledge extends across all industry sectors.

NE1 CAN brings these roles, job titles and businesses to life through in-person events. Young people get the chance to

see the workings of different organisations, speak to people within businesses, and learn about the many and varied roles and opportunities available here in Newcastle and the wider North East.

Teachers and careers advisers attending these events are also exposed to these experiences and business settings, often for the first time, and they too learn something new each time they attend. This means they leave equipped with knowledge and a greater understanding of the employment landscape which, in turn, can be passed onto other students. It is truly inspiring and has a lasting legacy.

Smaller group events have been added to the programme this year giving practical, hands-on experience in specific jobs and industries. Last year a Chef's Life event was held with over 50 young people looking at what being a chef is actually like. This was then followed by a smaller, more targeted workshop at Blackfriars' Cookery school. Eight pupils, who were inspired by the Chef's Life event, took part in a practical afternoon teaching session in the restaurant's kitchen. The experience gained from both events will help these young people decide if it is a career they really want to pursue, and more generally will help with their careers planning, and applications for jobs, apprenticeships or UCAS.

Similar hands-on programmes are planned for other sectors in the future. The team recently worked with Newcastle Building Society at its head office delivering an event for 40 students focusing on apprenticeships. Samuel Phillips law firm is another Newcastle based company working with NE1 CAN. The company prides itself on being people-focused and is very keen to show the inner workings of the legal profession through the eyes of its business, and to encourage young recruits into apprenticeships and graduate opportunities in law.

With 55% of school leavers not going into further education, there can be no doubt that, as a society, we need to do better at engaging with, and getting young people excited about the wealth of employment opportunities available in the region.

**NE1 CAN is working with the Newcastle business community to do its bit. Planning is currently underway for the summer schedule. Any businesses interested in working with NE1 CAN to promote employment opportunities in their sector should contact: [Kerry.mccabe@newcastlene1td.com](mailto:Kerry.mccabe@newcastlene1td.com).**





# How to find the perfect new job

*Bryony Gibson, director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, offers advice on the best way to begin a new job search*

**When employees decide to look for a new challenge, more often than not, it's triggered by the feeling of being let down.**

**Whether it's a lack of support and development, because they've slipped into a rut, or believe they are undervalued, making a conscious choice to kick-start a job search can feel like a big step, but keeping your options open is not something you should be afraid of.**

If you're unhappy and unsure where to begin, here is some advice to make sure you approach the process in the best possible way:

## 1. SET CLEAR GOALS

You need to define your non-negotiables at the outset. Think about what you want from a new job. Listing what you feel is wrong in your current role is often a good way to begin but,

whatever you do, you need to set your goals and write down what you want to achieve. It's the only way you can truly weigh up the offers you receive further down the line.

## 2. UPDATE YOUR CV

Your CV is the first thing potential employers will ask for, so it pays to have it up-to-date. I would also include your LinkedIn profile in that, as often employers will cross-reference the two, as well as review any recommendations you might have to draw a measure of your character. With your CV, the key is to give yourself the flexibility to tailor it to a specific role or application. Taking the time to do this will give you a huge advantage in the initial short-listing stage.

## 3. MAKE TIME TO NETWORK

Whilst I don't necessarily agree, the adage "it's not what you know, but who" cannot be ignored. That means if you're serious about finding a new role, it's time to get out there and network and get a feel for the market. Start by speaking to people you trust, as you never know who is on the cusp of recruiting or knows when a new opportunity is on the horizon.

## 4. FIND THE RIGHT RECRUITMENT CONSULTANT

If you work in a specialist role, you need a specialist recruiter to represent you. An expert in your field will understand the nuances between roles in your industry. They know the market inside and out and the skills you need. Most importantly, they will be trusted by the people hiring. People that you would otherwise not be able to reach out to.

## 5. JOB BOARDS

Even if you are represented by a recruitment consultant, you can remain proactive by signing up to receive targeted alerts and updates from job boards and websites such as Reed, CV Library, and Indeed (others are available).

## 6. PREPARE, PREPARE, PREPARE

Practice makes perfect so, if you suffer from interview nerves, try rehearsing with family and friends to build confidence. When it comes to interviews, the biggest mistake people tend to make is to arrive unprepared so do your research. As a recruiter, there is nothing worse than receiving feedback that someone interviewed fabulously but didn't take the time to find out about the company. It immediately switches prospective employers off, no matter how talented you are.

## 7. KEEP AN OPEN MIND

Try to remain open to possibilities when searching for a new role. This doesn't mean a huge pivot away from what you are doing but, just because you find out about a role or have an interview, it doesn't mean that you have to take the job. Recruitment is a two-way process, and it's the employer's responsibility to convince you to join them too. And if it doesn't turn out well, you can always chalk it off as more interview practice!

**If you are unhappy in your current role, while it may take time to find the dream job, an interview is within reach. You just need to know how to find it.**

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



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# From *The Home of Curry* to your home

If you've ever looked at the chilled cabinets in supermarkets and thought, if only they tasted like restaurant quality, then I'd buy them! Well, Zeera have taken that little problem away, as they release their latest addition to their services.

Shah Choudhury told us: "Zeera Home Kitchen allows you to have restaurant quality food, cooked lovingly by our chefs and ready for you to just re-heat at home at your convenience. The food is of the same high standard as what we serve in our restaurant, you just have to order it by 9pm for the next day and at your allocated time for collection, your chilled food will be ready and waiting for you."

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## Canary Wharf project embraces Apex Core

**A speculative investment that has rapidly become an industry game-changer is celebrating another huge contract success.**

Apex Core is manufacturing 450 prefabricated utility cupboards (PUCs) for a luxury apartment development, which will be one of the highest buildings in London's financial district.

The units, all manufactured in Durham City, are for the "Aspen" scheme in Consort Place, Canary Wharf. The contract was awarded to Apex Core by ARK, part of JRL Group, which is overseeing the high-quality mixed-use project.

Apex Core Sales Director, Paul Hopps, said: "Apex Core units are perfect for apartment builds and urban development, particularly in the cramped confines of most London sites, arriving assembled and ready to 'plug in'."

"When we invested £500,000 in creating the largest specialist PUC manufacturing facility in the UK three years ago, it was barely even a fledgling industry, but with developers recognising the huge time saving benefits they offer, they're revolutionising the industry."

"We are delivering Core units to enormous developments all over the capital, which is really embracing the concept, but the rest of the UK is coming around to them too, so we expect we'll need to expand operations in 2023."

Apex Core designs, develops and manufactures prefabricated utility cupboards – a central hub for a home's heating, ventilation, electrical, communication and metering services.



## Master Mariner gives berth to Shipmove Mooring app

**The problem of ships breaking free from their moorings due to a combination of bad weather and insufficient mooring ropes has been tackled in a new, simple to use mooring app.**

Former Harbour Master and Master Mariner Captain Mike Nicholson from Newcastle runs Shipmove, a marine consultancy offering practical solutions for ships, ports, and people. Shipmove specialises in navigation strategies, marine civil engineering consultancy and maritime risk.

During his career, both at sea and as a Pilot and Harbour Master, Mike witnessed a number of incidents involving vessels breaking free from their moorings and decided to study the safest and most effective ways to moor a ship. He has spent more than 10 years and thousands of hours researching and perfecting the data and calculations in the new app.

A complicated calculation has been simplified to use just five variables: length overall, vessel type, load condition, wind strength and current strength. The app will then tell the ship's officer, how many headlines, breast ropes and springs are required. All at a fraction of the time and cost of traditional mooring programmes, and, being written by a sailor for sailors, it is far easier to use than competing products.

The app is designed for use with large ships over 100m in length and is primarily for ship's officers, terminal operators, and port authority staff. It is easily downloadable on both Apple and Google platforms and costs just £9.99. The complex calculations can be completed in just 60 seconds.

[www.shipmove.uk](http://www.shipmove.uk)

## New station entrance shows its steel

**The steel frame depicting the outline of a stunning new entrance to Sunderland train station has become the latest addition to the city's skyline.**

Delivering a light, bright and airy welcome to Sunderland, the £26 million project is part of a wider £100 million plan to transform the transport hub.

The full entrance shell is expected to be completed by the end of March, once the roof and walling systems have been installed, marking the next major milestone in the redevelopment of the city's main transport hub.

The glazed statement entrance, which will overlook Market Square, features a large glass wrap around design, and will include a new ticket office and reception, public toilets, retail space and cafes, comfortable waiting areas, as well as a new mezzanine level that will have office space reserved for rail industry staff.

In 2019/2020, around 1.5 million Metro trips were made from and to the station, with approximately 427,000 trips made using the national rail network, and numbers are expected to grow as the city centre becomes an economic hub and residents begin to embrace more sustainable modes of transport.



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# Bernicia £10,000 funding for local charity now helping ex-offenders into work



L-R: Dionne Smith, Bernicia employability partner, with Beverley Brooks, founder of The Recruitment Junction, pictured at its Newcastle base.

**North East housing association Bernicia has teamed up with award-winning local charity, The Recruitment Junction, to boost its efforts to get people with convictions into work.**

**The six-month project will allow the Newcastle-based charity to work intensively with an extra 20 former offenders who are hoping to find work and move on with their lives in a productive way, while helping regional employers fill job vacancies.**

The £10,000 project is part of Bernicia's wider £2m employability programme aimed at creating job opportunities for communities where its tenants live.

This investment will contribute towards funding a specialist support worker who will assist 20 men and women from across Northumberland, Tyneside and Wearside to find full-time or part-time employment.

Leading employers who have lent their support to the project include Greene King, Suez, Sunbelt Rentals, Adderstone Group, Mitie and Wagamama.

Beverley Brooks, founder of The Recruitment Junction, said: "I am thrilled to go into our third year with this support from Bernicia enabling us to place more people with prior convictions into paid work.

"We are passionate about seeing people re-discover a sense of purpose through work, becoming role models who drive positive generational impact across their families.

"We look forward to continuing to deliver on skills shortages for employers across the North East, combatting persistent regional unemployment and contributing to a national reduction in re-offending that sees safer communities and fewer victims of crime.

"Since launching at the end of 2020, we have placed over 300 people with convictions into paid work across more than 100 local employers, with over 75% job retention rates and more than 98% of these men and women going on to live crime-free lifestyles. I look ahead with confident expectation to building

upon this in 2023."

Dionne Smith, Bernicia employability partner, said: "We recognise the complexity of the challenges people with convictions are faced with.

"Our investment in The Recruitment Junction programme allows us to break down attitudes and barriers, to recognise, understand and address the full diversity of the prison population, help raise their aspirations and get them access to fulfilling work.

"The wider social value of reaching people with convictions is in the impact of reducing offending in communities, building stronger links with employers to maximise job opportunities so prison leavers can lead a crime-free life and giving people the self-respect of earning a wage and dictating a positive future for them and their families."

Bernicia is working with partners across the North East business and education sectors to build aspiration, increase confidence and provide access to training, skills and job opportunities.

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





Joanna Lewis

## HR teams advised to promote whistleblowing policies more

HR managers and directors are being encouraged to review their whistleblowing processes in light of new research revealing low awareness and trust among employees.

**A new survey highlights that a majority of HR professionals (57%), in both private and public sectors, believe their employees are actively encouraged to speak up about wrongdoing. An additional 36% state that employees are 'aware' they can report wrongdoing.**

**However, a significant proportion of employees are not aware of what to do if they witness or discover wrongdoing in the workplace.**

The findings suggest that there is low investment in the training and promotion of whistleblowing processes and policies.

The whistleblowing survey, conducted by an independent third party, was commissioned by Sunderland-based Safecall – a specialist whistleblowing and compliance services provider.

The majority of respondents – some 83% – have a whistleblowing policy in place... 17% do not. While there is no legal requirement for an organisation to have a whistleblowing policy, under the Corporate Governance Code, if a listed company does not have one in place then senior management must be able to explain why this is the case.

On a positive note, HR managers are overwhelmingly aware of the EU Whistleblowing Directive. A minority – just over 20% – said they were not aware of the Directive and, in turn, the

impact it may have on their business.

This suggests that nearly two years of awareness activity by both public and private sectors has largely worked.

Joanna Lewis, MD at Safecall, said: "Awareness and adoption of whistleblowing processes and policies is high, which is great to see. However, when you look at how these systems work in practice and the level of trust in them, we see some unsettling trends.

"There are organisations that have whistleblowing reporting systems in place but are not actively encouraging reports. A minority of organisations – even if they do have whistleblowing reporting channels in place – see whistleblowing as a tick-box exercise. They don't recognise the benefits to the revenue, morale and profit of their organisation."

The findings show a large number of organisations – some 43.5% – are not bought into or, at worst, are completely unaware of the benefits of actively promoting whistleblowing.

Lewis said: "While progress is being made, more needs to be done to persuade some HR management teams that whistleblowing has multiple lasting benefits to both them and their organisation."

Training and promotion of whistleblowing processes in the workplace appear to be areas where improvements can be made:

- For the majority of respondents, whistleblowing training is not mandatory in their workplace.
- More than 61% of organisations undertake no promotion or offer whistleblowing education to their workforce.

Lewis added: "If there is little or no training on what whistleblowing is about, then employees will most likely revert to their default inclination: Not speaking up. Wrongdoing will go unreported and potentially continue."

For those companies that provide internal whistleblowing services, only 58% of their investigators have been formally trained. This indicates 42% of investigations are conducted by employees that have either learnt through experience, are self-taught, or have no experience at all.

The risks for organisations conducting investigations using employees with no formal whistleblowing investigations training are severe. The greatest element of risk lies in failing to follow legislative and tribunal process, and this is a recurring reason for organisations losing tribunals.

When asked about the sentiment of employees, there were mixed responses from HR professionals. Lewis commented: "The fact that 42.6% of respondents felt employees 'generally feel safe' in reporting concerns of wrongdoing raises questions. It betrays an overall lack of confidence."

She said it is a cause for worry that more than 74% of respondents could not be certain that whistleblowers were confident in reporting wrongdoing. It's not enough for the whistleblower to 'generally feel safe' when considering reporting wrongdoing – their confidence in the process should be absolute.

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



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Ammar Mirza CBE

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Innovation is vital to driving progress and positive change across all industries. It enables us to find new solutions to complex problems and push boundaries to achieve new heights of success and efficiency.

**Through Yohlar, I am proud to have been a part of a project that demonstrated the power of innovation in healthcare. Our proprietary Rapid Design Sprint + Innovation Discovery Session helped the Durham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) transform their Same Day Emergency Care (SDEC) referral process, making it more efficient, safe, and user-friendly for patients.**

Despite limited resources and a diverse group of stakeholders, our team was able to bring together key stakeholders from different services, including GPs, Clinical Leads, Medical Doctors, Managers, Ward Clerks, and Nurses. My team and I facilitated the process using the Power of Three™ methodologies of mindset, toolset and skillset, allowing

stakeholders to map out processes and create desktop walkthroughs to act as tangible tools.

The session was a clear success, resulting in the creation of a new, innovative patient pathway that has the potential to reduce admission time to SDEC by over 60%. This collaboration demonstrated the impact of using a well-designed, fast-paced design sprint to achieve meaningful and tangible improvements in patient care and service delivery, creating a collaborative environment where participants could share ideas and work together to develop a new, innovative patient pathway.

Moreover, this project showed the effectiveness and impact of our field-tested innovation process. Stakeholders are now utilizing Yohlar-based techniques to solve other complex problems, further demonstrating the potential of our process to make a positive impact on healthcare.

I am thrilled to see the impact of our Rapid Design Sprint + Innovation Discovery Session on the Durham CCG project. I have always been a strong advocate for the power and importance of innovation in driving positive change and this project serves as a testament to the potential of our process and I am excited to continue collaborating with healthcare organizations to drive innovation and create positive change.

***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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# Happiest at Home creates the next generation of care

For 54-year-old former North East man, Ray Halton, a diagnosis of MS turned his life upside down.

**Although at first the progression of the disease was slow, over the last eight years Ray has found the every day actions that most people don't even think about, were becoming increasingly more challenging.**

His wife had her own health problems so couldn't help with the physical support Ray needed and accessing the adult social care system seemed the only solution – but Ray's initial attempts were “causing me increasingly more stress.”

“It was such a slow process and it just seemed impossible to get any results,” said Ray, who now lives in Lincoln.

Salvation came in the form of a new home care service based in Newcastle, but which in a short space of time has clients around the country – and is going from strength to strength.

Happiest at Home was set up in the midst of the pandemic, recognising a gap in the market for people who needed good quality care – in all its forms – but didn't want to go into a residential facility.

This was certainly the case for Ray who, after speaking to the company, was linked with his CarePal, an experienced care provider who now supports him five days a week.

At heart of the company's business model is finding their client's a carer who is a good fit and it is only when everyone is happy that the relationship moves on to the next level.

For Ray the arrival of his CarePal, Laura, was a godsend.

“Laura comes in for an hour and a half every morning to help me with the little tasks that are quite challenging now like getting out of bed and getting dressed,” he said.

“In the past I could spend an hour and a half attempting to put my socks on. Now with her support I can do so much more which isn't just good for me but for my wife and son as well.”



Sam Hackett

Laura also has an additional five hour slot twice a week with Ray, helping him enjoy his hobbies and leisure activities – which in turn is giving him a better quality of life.

“Before I was diagnosed I was really independent,” said Ray.

“And sometimes when you've been like that, it's hard to ask for help but I'm so glad I did.

“Having the support I get through Happiest at Home has made a huge, positive different to all of our lives.”

For director Sam Hackett, hearing Ray's comments highlights that the company has absolutely come up with the right formula.

“We wanted to offer a solution which would allow people not only to stay in their homes but also gave them a say in who was helping to look after them,” said Sam.

“It's very important that the CarePal and the client are a good fit, for everyone concerned.

“What we also give is continuity, rather than the client not knowing who is going to turn up to help them on any particular day. They form a really strong relationship and that's good for everyone.”

It's not just the clients who benefit from Happiest at Home however.

Finding the right staff and giving them a decent level of pay – which is amongst the highest levels in the country – is attracting experienced care givers, including qualified nurses, from across the UK.



Ray with Laura

It's a formula that clearly works as from the company's offices at Dobson House, Gosforth they are supplying carers across the whole of the UK and Northern Ireland too.

That in turn has seen Happiest at Home grow at an incredible rate, turning over more than £1m in its first year.

“We launched in November 2021 and have grown much faster than we anticipated,” said Sam.

“We knew what the challenges were that needed to be addressed to create a service that worked for both care staff and for clients and we are delighted at how well it has been received.”

Happiest at Home offers support for everyone from elderly care to those with learning difficulties, needing help with their children or who have physical disabilities.

**The company is looking for new people to join their team as well as expanding its client base. For further information visit [www.wearehappiestathome.co.uk](http://www.wearehappiestathome.co.uk) or email [hello@wearehappiestathome.co.uk](mailto:hello@wearehappiestathome.co.uk)**



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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.

*"We laugh together, we comfort one another. It's absolutely amazing."* A Whitley Bay resident.

This home has been specifically designed to enhance the lives of people living with dementia, with specially-trained staff seeing to our residents' specific needs. The home provides residents with lots of independence, features spacious grounds - including a special reminiscence area - and even has a hair salon, cafe, library and pub!





“

*...The  
Government's  
announcement  
was music  
to my ears.  
Groundwork's  
agenda is finally  
'coming home'...*



# In conversation with...

## Steven Roberts

*Groundwork NE & Cumbria new CEO*

**The Government's new Environmental Action Plan 2023 has set ambitious targets to reverse nature's decline, and a goal for everyone to live within 15 minutes' walk of water, or green space, to improve the mental health and wellbeing of the nation.**

**UK's leading environmental and community charity, Groundwork North East & Cumbria welcomes the plans as it focuses on issues they've been tackling for years.**

To avoid wasting time and money on new initiatives, the charity has called on the Government to accelerate Groundwork's existing environmental programmes.

Steve Roberts, Groundwork North East & Cumbria's new Chief Executive outlines why Groundwork is well placed to lead on these environmental efforts.

"The Government's announcement was music to my ears. Groundwork's agenda is finally 'coming home'.

While the UK now grapples with environmental and nature based challenges, we have been championing the fight for over 30 years.

We have spent the last three decades working to improve public access to nature, championing environmental improvements and bio-diversity and revitalising our estuaries and waterways. All this has been done knowing that mental health and well-being are improved by being outdoors and connecting to nature. Although welcome, the Government is rather late to the party.

Central to our approach has always been to improve places to improve people's quality of life and connection with nature, what the Government is calling their '15 minutes from green space and water goal'. We're already on it, and hope that now the Government has adopted the agenda, it will be backed by funding that will turbo charge our efforts.

This is our bread and butter.

We are as well known for our grass roots, local partnerships as our strategic activities and we will continue working to support communities improve their local areas, and attract funding, which we hope will be more readily available.

Developing nature-based solutions to environmental problems is another important part of our work, and where we have enjoyed notable success of late. This work is also a large part of the Government's new agenda. We adopt a bold, ambitious approach to tackling environmental and ecological problems with a heavy focus on innovation.

We hope that our successes will ensure that our ideas and projects will be adopted and scaled up to help communities and organisations achieve net zero, and support individual businesses in their efforts to cut and offset carbon.

We have always believed in delivering radical solutions and now in my new role as Chief Executive I want to re-ignite this radicalism, encouraging teams across Groundwork to be brave and bold to deliver results in all our activities. With the Government now committed to improving air and water quality we hope the work we have been doing in the North East will be rolled out to other areas of the country.

Take Our Great Geordie Reef as a prime example of our efforts. The island, moored on Newcastle's Quayside, was the world's first high-tide floating eco-system, providing 'green' training and jobs for people who helped to make it. It is also a phenomenal learning tool and test bed for carbon capture, biodiversity and marine eco-systems. We are working on similar innovative environmental projects in Whitby in North Yorkshire. In partnership with the Environment Agency and others, we are testing artificial habitats, including artificial living sea walls, rock pools and fish shelters to improve water quality and bio-diversity in the Esk estuary.

These projects provide a great platform for green training and employment, another of our key priorities for the year ahead. Equipping people with the skills to move into green jobs has been my focus at Groundwork for over 22 years, in my former role as Director of Youth, Employment & Skills. Now as Chief Executive, I am still championing this cause.

To deliver our charitable objectives, we recognise that much of our work needs to be done in partnership. Whether we deliver projects directly, or influence others to deliver activity that advances our goals and ambitions. We hope that the Government's newly stated commitment to environmental improvements will help our cause."

**Anyone interested in working with Groundwork North East & Cumbria and supporting our campaigns can contact us at [GNEC.development@groundwork.org.uk](mailto:GNEC.development@groundwork.org.uk)**

**@StevenRoberts**

**[www.groundwork.org.uk](http://www.groundwork.org.uk)**

**Twitter: @GWKNE**

**Instagram: gwkne**

**Facebook: Groundwork NE & Cumbria**

**LinkedIn: Groundwork North East & Cumbria**



## Lucid supports Darlington Mowden Park's success on and off the field



**Darlington Mowden Park (DMP) is home to both men's and women's professional rugby teams, and has worked closely with Norton-headquartered Lucid Technology Solutions for many years, attributing some of its success as a popular venue to the company's support.**

Keen rugby fans, Lucid have provided managed IT support to the offices at DMP, but have also implemented a robust wifi solution and brand new CCTV throughout the arena – creating a better customer experience not just for rugby goers, but also those attending the many music and business events. The company is also a sponsor of the men's team, including direct sponsorship of four players and as match ball sponsor for DMP's recent game against Moseley in February.

Managing Director at Lucid, Paul Alsop said: "We're proud to work with the team on and off the field at DMP and enjoy a great relationship – not only are we honoured to call them a customer, but we have a box in corporate hospitality that is perfect for hosting clients

and contacts and it's the perfect place to show off what the venue has to offer. The team look after us so well, everyone from our designated waitress to the team who organise everything behind the scenes, and we're visited by players after the match too which is always popular with guests."

Lucid, formerly Yarm Computers, has been in business for over 30 years and has a team of over 20 people. With services including IT support, connectivity, telecoms, CCTV and custom-built software application, Worktraq, Lucid supports businesses across almost every industry including law, videography, HR, warehousing, and finance.

DMP Chairman Mick Birch commented: "Paul and the team at Lucid have been massive supporters of the club for a number of years now and I can't thank them enough for their support. It's fantastic to have them involved in so much that goes on here at the Arena and we hope that will continue for many years to come!"

## Lockheed Martin connects with SME community

**Lockheed Martin, a global technology leader in aerospace, space and security, recently hosted an event to help SMEs unlock the growing opportunities of space in the North East.**

Over 100 attendees from companies across the region joined Lockheed Martin and partners RTC North and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) at the Discovery Museum in Newcastle, where a series of talks were given and exhibits on show from across the space and defence industry.

With over 75% of Lockheed Martin's suppliers in the SME space, the event provided an exciting opportunity for companies to learn about ways of working with larger enterprises and the value of these partnerships in delivering unique capabilities.

The Ministry of Defence engaged with



SMEs from the region on how they can help their businesses grow, with RTC North discussing the future of robust supply chains to demonstrate how SME's can build new opportunities.

Paul Livingston, Chief Executive of Lockheed Martin UK, said, "SMEs play an important role for us in the UK and so we were delighted to host this event and support the development of the North East's already thriving space sector. We are committed to helping the UK become a space nation and contribute to Levelling-Up the economy."



## CityFibre has laid enough full fibre in Newcastle to lap St. James' Park over 1,000 times

**CityFibre has now laid a staggering 415km of full fibre internet beneath the streets of Newcastle as part of its £62m plan to future-proof the city's digital connectivity.**

This landmark achievement from the UK's largest independent full fibre platform means there is enough full fibre connecting the city's homes and businesses to lap the iconic St. James' Park football stadium almost 1,200 times.

Paul Wakefield, CityFibre's Area Manager for Newcastle said: "The fact that we've laid enough full fibre to lap the famous St. James' Park over 1,000 times really illustrates the unprecedented scale and pace of our project. Our much needed rollout will transform Newcastle's digital capabilities - making it one of the best-connected cities in the UK."

"Digital infrastructure has become the cornerstone of everyday life and the people we have connected say they are already reaping the benefits of lightning fast, greener and more reliable broadband. We look forward to boosting the area's connectivity even further as we continue to advance our build project towards the city centre."

Newcastle is one of a growing number of locations in the UK to benefit from CityFibre's nationwide full fibre rollout, which will bring new and improved broadband infrastructure within reach of up to eight million UK homes and eight hundred thousand businesses.

CityFibre's build partner in Newcastle, GCU, is working in various locations across the city with work currently ongoing in the South Heaton, East Denton, Fawdon, Gosforth, Bridgewater and Benwell Grange areas, as well as the area surrounding the Royal Victoria Infirmary and Newcastle University. Work has been completed across large sections of the city, including Gosforth, Kenton, Walkergate, Walker and Arthur's Hill, with more to follow shortly.

As work is completed in each neighbourhood, CityFibre will designate the homes 'ready for service', which means residents can choose to connect to full fibre-enabled broadband services as soon as they go live within their area.



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# Flexible business model brings continued success to IT company

When Jon Place, managing director of IT support specialists Integrity Technology, launched the business back in 2010, he knew he wanted to shake things up within the industry and thirteen years later, his vision continues to pay dividends.



Jon Place

**Providing commercial IT & Microsoft 365 support, repairs, network installations and upgrades, data backups and remote working solutions, the South Tyneside based business has grown considerably in recent years, now employing six members of staff and working throughout the north east and beyond.**

Having worked within the IT industry since 1994 for many leading tech businesses, Jon had ambitions to create an IT support company that cut out the techie jargon, spoke in plain English but perhaps more importantly, didn't lock customers into problematic contracts.

With his experience within the industry, Jon was acutely aware that many IT companies regularly tie customers into long term contracts which can be a huge risk for small and medium sized businesses, particularly if the client then receives sub-standard service. Deciding on an alternative model of offering

rolling monthly agreements with no short or long-term tie-in, the service has certainly been a hit with their vast array of clients, many of whom have worked with Integrity for many years.

Jon is acutely aware that his clients can simply walk away at any point, however, by continually providing a first-class service, he is confident that customers will continue to use Integrity's services and that has certainly been the case.

The business has experienced a raft of great client wins with names including Hard Rock Café, Sweeney Miller Law, Ramage Transport and Findley Roofing and have also invested in a new easy to navigate website.

Commenting on his successful business model, Jon explained, "From day one, ethics and morals have been an integral part of the business, I wanted to offer a no-nonsense transparent approach to our clients and that included the 'no contracts' model.

As a small business owner myself, I know it can be very off-putting to have to sign in to long term contracts, with our service, we take all of the risk and the client doesn't have anything to lose. To put it simply, if our service isn't good enough, our customers can leave. Thankfully, due to the hard work, experience and commitment of the Integrity team, the exact opposite has happened. We're proud to have supported our customers for many years and have found the business model attracts clients initially as they know unless we're providing the service they expect, they can go elsewhere.

Taking that risk back in 2010 when I launched the business has definitely proven to be a good decision and something which I'm sure our current and future clients will continue to enjoy."

**For more information on the services which Integrity Technology Services can offer and to view their website please visit: [www.integritytechnology.co.uk](http://www.integritytechnology.co.uk)**





# Talking Tech and Digital

In the latest of these popular series of features, Michael Gramshaw talks to...

## Caroline Hagan

Director, Blueocto

### Did you always envisage a career in the world of Technology?

From a young age I had an interest in Tech and Computers, no one else was "techy" in my family, it was just there, so I delved into books from the library and began learning how to build computers and eventually dabbling in web design whilst I was in High School.

Later I studied Graphic Design at Newcastle College, and Design, Multimedia and Graphics at University of Sunderland. There wasn't any "Web design" courses back then, so I was completely self-taught! I can't honestly imagine doing anything else, it's such a diverse and creative sector.

### What attracted you to your current role?

I decided to work for myself prior to having my daughter - the tech industry wasn't geared up for part-time Developers or new mothers, so, having had stints of freelancing between employment in my younger days as a Web Developer, I felt I would go whole-hogg and full-time run my own business.

It'll be our agency birthday in March for Blueocto, we will be nine years old.

### What tips would you give to someone looking to work in the industry?

Having the right drive and passion trumps what stack or cutting edge platform you are working in right now. Almost everything can be taught, so having a positive attitude and bringing your unique personality to the team is what I'd be looking for.

If you come into tech thinking you'll be the next biggest influencer or make lots of money, you still have lots to learn! There is so much resource you can learn from, so start reading and absorbing and you'll become a much better, well-rounded contributor to the industry as a whole.

### Tell us the most exciting thing you're currently working on?

We are currently developing a new Portal for Darlington College, which will vastly improve the application and enrolment process, both for the staff and students.

Looking forward to phasing this online in the coming months.

We are also creating a fresh new look for a london-based retailer, which will incorporate their wishlist, improve the user experience and speed up the website vastly compared to their existing online presence.

### Tell us about your team.

We are a small but perfectly formed team - Senior backend developer Daniel, who is the expert in PHP and creating bespoke functionality and getting software to talk to each other. Junior developer Ben is progressing through his Apprenticeship at a high level and has come on leaps and bounds, already contributing considerably to the workload, and myself - I'd consider myself a Senior Frontend Developer, with experience in Design and Digital Marketing, so we compliment each other quite nicely.

“

*...If you come into tech thinking you'll be the next biggest influencer or make lots of money, you still have lots to learn!...*

### What's your fondest memory of a career in the industry?

Most of my fond memories are simply the great teams I've worked with and the banter you have everyday, which makes coming to work so much fun.

In particular, travelling to London to spend 3 days at Google's Academy stands out - it was intensive training on Web Apps and we had to split into teams for a hackathon and we came first, so that was an excited experience.

### What are your remaining career aspirations?

I'd love to continue to grow Blueocto organically, expanding the team so we can offer a more robust service. I do envisage taking a less of a "hands on" approach and I'd love to delve into some other interests such as mentoring in local schools or colleges.

### What piece of technology would you be lost without?

Probably my iPhone, typical Apple fan girl that it syncs with everything. Having my calendar on hand is probably the most useful app I use!

### Who are your heroes and mentors?

Nicole Sullivan was an inspiration to me, as a woman in tech she effectively helped Facebook optimise what they had originally built to make it faster and more manageable - this is a huge part of what we do at Blueocto.

Lots of fellow business owners, who show up everyday and share their craft is a massive inspiration to keep pushing on.

### When not working, how do you like to relax?

When not at work I'm often found looking after my eight year old daughter who loves playing video games, so showing her some classics is a must! We love to venture out, make crafts and travel, too.

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



Caroline Hagan





# The safe and secure way to manage mission-critical IT

And that's official. Let's face it, when it comes to having someone looking after your IT, you want them to not only know what they're doing, but also ensure that they're a safe and secure operator who will protect your privacy.

**You also need to ensure that any information which has been entrusted to you by a third party will be fully protected.**

It all comes down to credibility.

Yes, reputation can also play a large part in this, but it is even better when you know that the company you are contacting for help really does meet the most stringent requirements....that they're a safe firm to be doing business with.

And that is exactly the reason why the local Tyneside-based IT experts Forfusion applied for, and have succeeded in being awarded, ISO 270001 - the world's best-known standard for information security management systems.

"This is something we'd been planning to do for the past couple of years," said Forfusion's COO David Griffin. "We are working increasingly within the public sector and, quite rightly, they want to ensure that their systems are fully up to scratch in terms of security, and that any firm which maintains and repairs those systems is also fully committed to the ultimate in privacy protection.

In typical Forfusion fashion, we set out to achieve this accreditation differently from others. We have implemented the ISO 27001 standards across every single department and touch point within our business, which reflects our meticulous approach to the way we operate.

ISO 27001 shows that we meet, and indeed surpass, those levels of security management. I'm also delighted to say that we're one of the few firms to apply for ISO 27001 and be awarded it first time. It proves that we know what we're doing and that we've always been doing it that way."

In other words, although the reputation of Forfusion has seen the company win some prestigious contracts, they can now officially prove that they meet the highest standards within the IT industry.

"For many years, the ISO accreditations could often be considered as a bit of a tick-box exercise, but it has now become standard practice for many companies to become fully accredited as a matter of course," adds David Griffin, COO, Forfusion. "You may have the most magnificent reputation as a company for producing outstanding service and being utterly dependable and secure, but you need to remember that on some occasions, you will be tendering for work at a company or organisation who've never heard of you. However, if you have ISO 27001 status, they will know that you already adhere to strict working practices and can prove it."

Forfusion continue to go from strength to strength. Based on the Cobalt Business Park on North Tyneside, Forfusion specialises in managing, designing and implementing IT infrastructure for large public and private sector companies. Trusted by Cisco, the Civil Service, and the NHS, their expertise includes IT managed services, security, networking, connectivity, and cloud.

**Interested? You should be.**

**Talk to the Forfusion team today to transform your business.**

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“

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this accreditation  
differently from  
others...***



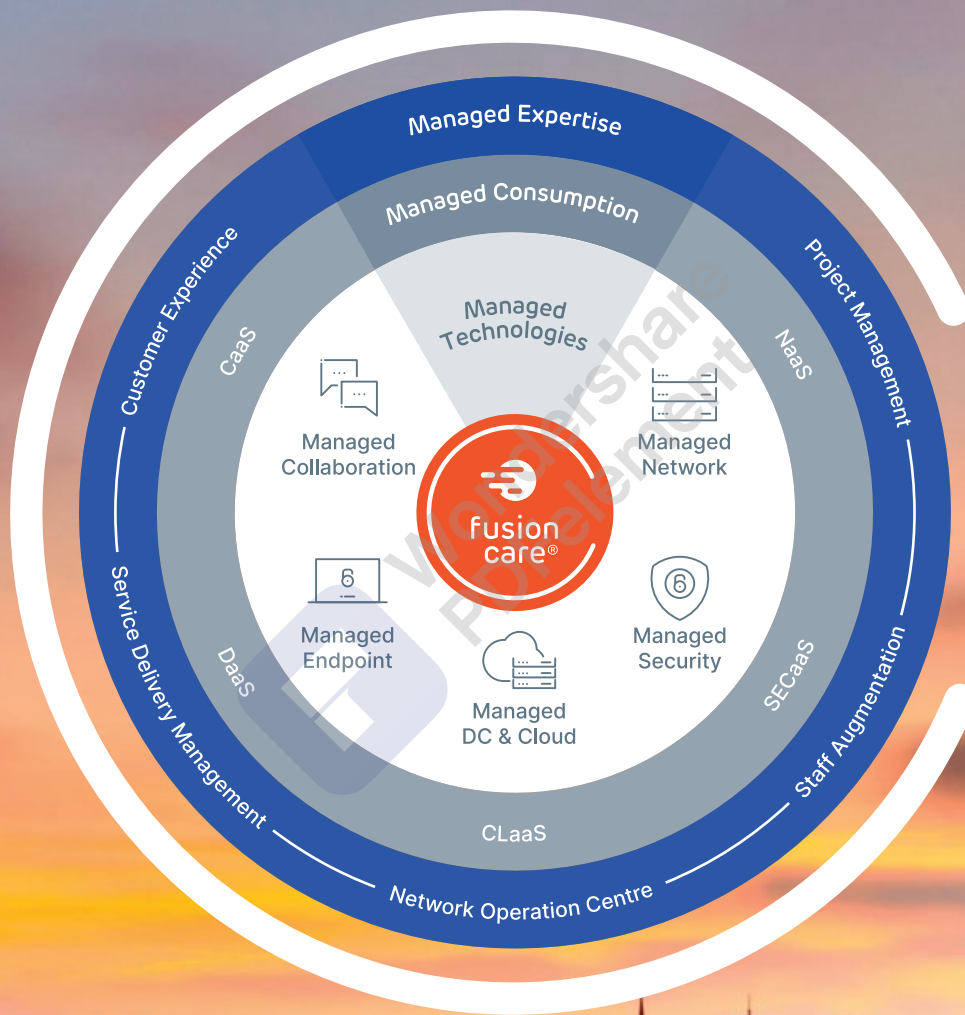
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L-R: Karl Mitchell (Operations Director), Archie (Barketing Director) and James Creese (Technical Director).



# A stITCh in time

Making tweaks to your IT now, could save you a headache in the future, writes Karl Mitchell, Operations Director at Uptime Allies.

**With the recent furore around ChatGPT, it would be easy to get carried away with what technology can do for your business. But the truth is, most small businesses are simply not getting the fundamentals of their IT right. By spending a bit of time on the core aspects of IT and telecommunications, businesses could be saving time, money and headaches by choosing the right technologies and partners for their business.**

We don't have to state the obvious that the past few years have presented challenges. Small businesses have had to adapt and that has meant a huge upswing in IT systems like online video conferencing, software and apps. But with price hikes a very real additional expense, most businesses are probably paying too much, or more importantly, paying the wrong providers for their day-to-day services. It's time to get back to basics.

Here's a handy guide to optimising your IT, to stay safe, secure and agile:

## 1. Know thine enemy

A lot of business owners don't realise that they have purchased services from re-sellers that re-package internet, webhosting and leased lines, usually for the biggest commission. The service element of the agreement is often secondary, meaning if something goes wrong, it's usually a more convoluted process understanding who is responsible for fixing an issue and what the response time might be.

## 2. Take some time to get a handle on what you are paying for

What subscriptions are currently in place (and what is that costing you)? Knowing what you are paying for is the first step to cutting down on budget-busting costs.

When are your contracts due for renewal and who are you paying them to? Knowing where to go when something goes wrong is the biggest challenge we see, second only to long-contract tie ins.

## 3. Are there any additional costs that you simply don't need?

Understanding your usage is paramount to getting the best service. Often companies go for the highest bandwidth or the most comprehensive package, when in reality, that can be surplus to requirements. Finding a provider with direct relationships means you can flex up and down to suit the needs of your business. Do not be fooled by the shiny offers, not all megabits are created equal!

## 4. Cybersecurity - get your house in order

More often than not, cybersecurity becomes an issue only when something goes wrong, usually when the damage is done. If you are responsible for data, marketing, communications or websites, then you need to take cybersecurity seriously.

Speak to your provider about how they can protect you - and then take the time to train your team on what to do in the event of an issue. This will include preventative measures such as forwarding emails, paying money to new accounts or management measures such as who to escalate to when something goes wrong. It might sound like a lot, but it's the single most important thing you can do for your business in the current climate.

## 5. What you measure, you can improve

Monitoring is standard practice amongst good providers and will ensure that your downtime is limited. Monitoring is, very simply, a way of checking connections as quickly as every second to ensure that everything is working as it should. Connectivity can be affected by all sorts of issues - and we all know time is money.

## 6. Understanding changeover

Most businesses stay with their current provider because they feel it will be too resource-intensive to make the switch. The reality is that a good provider can handle most of that for you, even managing finalising contracts so that downtime is minimised and cost savings are optimal. Do not be afraid to ask the question, you may get a better deal just by discussing leaving your current provider.

## 7. Be a commitment-phobe

Beware of the shiny discounts that tie you into long contracts. The last few years have proved that you don't know what's around the corner, so work with a provider that can adapt to changes in your usage and requirements. Agility is after all, a much-needed survival tactic in today - and tomorrow's world.

[www.uptimeallies.uk](http://www.uptimeallies.uk)





# Charity of the month...

## Sarah Heward

*Chief Officer of Operations, Tech Equal*

### Why was the charity founded?

Access to technology and the internet has become increasingly important in today's world, as they both play imperative roles in education, communication, and access to the wider world. However, many children living in Teesside do not have equal access. This disparity is known as the "digital divide" and has significant implications for children's education. The pandemic forced the spotlight on this when schools closed, and children had to learn from home.

The Tees region makes up 36% of UK child poverty, with areas of Middlesbrough falling in the top 4% of this statistic. Tees kids are seriously falling behind, through no fault of their own.

Dean Benson, the brainchild behind Tech Equal, was appalled at the level of digital poverty in Teesside. After donating approximately £20,000 during the pandemic, he decided to pursue a longer-term solution to tackle digital poverty. Over the last year, this idea has become part of a much bigger agenda to increase tech equity for all Tees kids.

### Which area do you cover?

Currently, we are working with 13 Middlesbrough-based schools to upskill their workforce. Our partnership with Spark Tees Valley provides teachers with the skills they need to go back into the classroom confidently and competently using tech equipment. As we grow, we hope to work with the wider areas of Teesside and Tees Valley.

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

Having launched the charity from scratch, we have had so many moments to be proud of from the launch of our first training cohort to making our first donation of devices to Zoë's Place. We recently found our first fundraising partner, with others hopefully joining us shortly.

### Who are your main trustees and patrons?

As well as myself and Dean Benson, our board of trustees is made up of Katrina Morley, CEO

of Tees Valley Education, Helen Woods, from the Mandale Group, Professor Mark Simpson from Teesside University and Matt Welch from Tech Nation. They are extremely passionate about making a positive change for the next generation.

Charlotte Nichols from Harvey & Hugo, Laura Hall from The Truffled Hog and Max Freer from Ook Agency also work alongside me, forming a formidable creative and strategic team to drive our vision forward.

### What are you currently working on?

This is a really exciting time for the charity as we have finally moved into an operational phase with so much happening in the background to be executed in 2023.

The launch of our first campaign, Purple Friday, is around the corner. We are asking Tees Valley businesses and schools to get involved on Friday, March 24th and play their purple part. Wear, make, bake or do something purple, have fun and help raise awareness of tech equity. We want the whole region to get involved and help us #TurnTeessidePurple.

### Why is it important for children to have digital access?

By 2030 it is predicted that 9 out of 10 jobs will require digital skills – a skill set Tees children

are currently leaving education without. In addition, they have very little awareness of what digital, creative and tech businesses are doing right here in the North East and what jobs are available to them as viable careers.

During primary education, the brain is in a crucial stage of cognitive and social development – a time when increasing aspiration and teaching new skills can be most effective. We hope that by capitalising on this stage of neuroplasticity we can increase the aspirations of our next generation and use them as a catalyst for change.

### How do people get involved?

As we set our plans in motion for 2023 there are a handful of ways businesses can be involved by donating time, money, expertise or equipment.

We are looking for 100 Tees Businesses to sponsor 100 Tees children. It costs 31p a day to ensure a child has access to digital equipment in education – that's less than a Costa coffee.

100% of donations go to increasing digital access in education.

*If you would like more information, please contact us at [info@techequal.co.uk](mailto:info@techequal.co.uk) or visit our website.*

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Sarah Heward



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# Machine learning and AI may offer a big boost to your business

By Steve Morland,  
Specialist Tech Lead, Leighton

Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) have been big news in the tech world recently, with huge leaps in natural language processing leading to the development of advanced chatbots like ChatGPT. The likes of Microsoft and Google see huge potential and are working to incorporate the technology into search engines in the hopes of creating a more human interface.



Steve Morland

**Adopting AI used to be more prominent in large corporations with huge research budgets, but today AI and ML have the potential to revolutionise businesses of all sizes as it becomes more accessible. As with all advances in technology, more casual benefits can be felt by anyone.**

From automating repetitive tasks to providing personalised experiences to customers, the benefits of AI and ML are numerous. In this article, we'll explore how these technologies can help your business.

## 1. Increase efficiency

AI and ML can automate a variety of repetitive and time-consuming tasks, freeing up time and resources. If you work in a business that deals with thousands of documents, or perhaps needs to classify documents, this could be hugely labour-intensive. ML algorithms can be used to automate data entry, generate reports, and perform quality control checks. This not only saves time but also reduces the risk of errors and improves the overall efficiency of business operations.

## 2. Improve customer experience

With the help of AI and ML, businesses can provide a more personalised and streamlined experience to customers. Chatbots can be used to answer customer queries, provide support, and even make recommendations based on a customer's browsing history. You could also use AI to detect keywords and trends in correspondence, helping you detect negative feedback and do something about it quickly. This not only improves customer satisfaction but also saves businesses time and resources by reducing the need for human customer support.

## 3. Improved analysis & informed decision-making

ML algorithms can analyse vast amounts of data and provide insights that may not be apparent to humans. This can help businesses make informed decisions that are backed by data. Predictive analytics can help businesses anticipate demand for products and services, optimise pricing, and identify trends that may impact operations. ML algorithms can be used to analyse competitor data, identify market trends, and provide insights into customer behaviour such as detecting sentiment in reviews or

certain keywords and phrases. This can help businesses stay ahead of the curve and make informed decisions.

## 4. Cost savings

Implementing AI and ML can help businesses save costs in various ways. For example, automating tasks reduces the need for manual labour, which can save on staffing costs. Predictive analytics can also help businesses optimise inventory management, reducing the costs associated with overstocking or understocking. Additionally, AI and ML can help businesses identify inefficiencies and areas for improvement, which can lead to cost savings in the long run.

AI and ML can be useful to any business and can return real benefits to you and your customers. Integrating it with your current applications and IT infrastructure may not be as complicated as you think. The pace of innovation in AI and ML shows no signs of slowing down, and it will be fascinating to see what breakthroughs and applications emerge over the next few years.

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Anneka Johnson

## North East remote technology company most innovative supplier

A North East remote technology specialist has won a national award for being the Most Innovative Supplier to the social housing sector.

At a glittering event at Edgbaston Stadium, in front of over 400 people, Plexus Innovation beat off stiff competition to win the title at the Housing Digital Innovation Awards 2023.

The judges said: "Plexus Innovation's GUARDIAN® displayed an innovation that is helping improve service, as well as health and safety and environmental performance. A great example of an SME innovation company making an impact in the sector."

Designed and manufactured by Steve Todd at Plexus Innovation, GUARDIAN®, provides digital business improvements in a host of industries by remotely measuring temperature, pulses, humidity and air quality.

Used to manage water/heating systems, assets and facility environment, GUARDIAN® enables insight-driven decisions, identification of risk against health threats or poor system

performance, reduction in energy use and water waste, protection against damp and mould; and provision of real-time data for compliance management.

Steve, who collected the award alongside colleagues Anneka Johnson and Antonia Brindle, said: "We work hard as a team and with our customers to bring innovative products and solutions to the market under our GUARDIAN® brand. Our users are enjoying being able to use our technology to make decisions based on data which has a positive impact on reducing health risks, improving business processes, and assisting them on the road to Net Zero.

"One of our huge successes is reducing the need for water flushing in properties by up to 75%, saving huge amounts of water and the energy associated. Protecting against damp and mould is a concern for the social housing sector,



Steve Todd

using GUARDIAN® to measure and quantify the problem is naturally a good fit.

“We are delighted to have received the recognition from Housing Digital and the judges, and will display our award proudly in the office for the whole team to enjoy.”

Plexus Innovation has trebled in size in the past two years and recently raised a further £480,000 to help it expand into new markets from the North East Venture Fund (NEVF), supported by the European Regional Development Fund and managed by Mercia; and from the Finance Durham Fund, managed by Maven Capital

Partners, established by Durham County Council and overseen by Business Durham.

Plexus Innovation’s GUARDIAN® technology remotely monitors critical infrastructure, providing real-time data that assists with compliance reporting. The system also provides automated alerts to highlight any potential health risks or failing assets.

GUARDIAN® is being used by social housing clients including believe housing, North Star Housing Group, Sovereign, Loreburn Housing Association, Selwood and Careline Lifestyles. The funding and this award will

enable co-founders Ian Murray and Steve Todd to accelerate product development and boost market penetration further into social housing and other sectors including education, healthcare, manufacturing, leisure and hospitality.

The latest investment followed a £400,000 funding round in 2020. Since then, the company has tripled to employ an eight-strong team and is planning to create two new jobs in the coming months.

**More information is available on**  
**[www.plexus-innovation.com](http://www.plexus-innovation.com)**



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## Buy a luxury home – with a castle attached

Lovers of luxury can now set up home at one of the most prestigious addresses in the North East.

For 10 centuries Lambton Park – just 15 minutes

from Durham City, on the banks of the River Wear - has been the ancestral seat of the Earls of Durham.

And now buyers can snap up their own stately home on the estate, set in 1000 acres of historic Durham woodland, complete with a castle.

The Lambton Park development by Miller Homes comprises properties of varying sizes

with the Oak and the Aspen at the top of the range.

Designed by the architect behind HM The King's Pounbury estate at Dorset, the Oak and Aspen combine historically empathetic design with state-of-the-art features expected by buyers at the upper end of the market.

These include dual aspects to living rooms and bedrooms, along with walk-in wardrobes, studies or reading rooms, substantial utility or laundry rooms, open plan kitchen and dining rooms and spacious bathrooms and en-suites.

Design features include Victorian-style sashed bay windows, bi-fold doors leading to private gardens and spacious hallways and landings with extra wide doors to all rooms.

Owners can also enjoy exclusive access to private areas of Lambton Estate with around 11.5km of footpaths through some of the most unspoilt woodland in Britain and the Grade II listed Lambton Castle – the ancestral seat of the Lambton family - at its heart.



## Knight Frank Newcastle announces two new appointments

Knight Frank has welcomed two new commercial property professionals to its 76-strong Newcastle team, including a senior valuation heavy weight.

Adam Harley has joined Knight Frank as Partner to head-up their valuation department, following the departure of Kevin Scully. He joins at the same time as graduate surveyor, Emily Horriben, who is working in the property asset management team.

## Transformation of Sunderland's Old County Court Well Underway

Newcastle-based Sendrig Construction (Sendrig) is making good progress with its total transformation of the old Grade II listed County Court building on John Street, Sunderland where the contractor is creating a 45-unit luxury student accommodation block.

Sendrig, which plans to develop, build and operate the accommodation, purchased the building in 2018. Its design and delivery team has spent the intervening period consulting with local businesses, residents, the planning department and various heritage bodies during the pre-construction phase to develop the design, gain planning consent and undertake



exhaustive surveys given the building's many heritage assets – some of which, such as elegant cornicing, were discovered when the lowered ceilings were removed.

John Street occupies a central location within the City of Sunderland, close to Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens and sits within and contributes to the Sunnyside Conservation Area.



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# Commercial Property People

*In the first in a new series we talk to leading industry figures in the region in this sector. This month Michael Grahamslaw spoke to...*

## Philip Bowe

Founder of BIV Bowes



### Did you always envisage a career in Commercial Property?

I didn't, but there is a logical route from about 1964! My earliest recollection is of wanting to design motor cars although petrol prices in 1973 made me think it wouldn't be long before we had any motor cars on the road! I first looked at architecture and then moved to property surveying. I left school on a Thursday and started work in Central London the following Monday on the princely wage of £2100 per annum!

### What attracted you to your current role?

Quite simply not being stuck in an office from nine to five and getting out and about and meeting people. Over 40 years on I still get a buzz from forming new relationships and working with new clients.

### How has the job changed over the past 40 years?

It may be controversial to say but I think the pace of modern life has distilled the old "work hard/play hard" mentality. I fondly remember doing some of my best work in the pub on a Friday afternoon. Happy days! However technology has made an enormous difference with the ease of getting property information greatly enhanced. This is of course a double edged sword as the public can access similar information and the adage of "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing" can make professionals' lives harder.

### What advice would you give to someone looking at a career in Commercial Property?

In the early stages get a job which involves looking at lots of different property and don't get too focussed on one aspect of the sector too soon. Get out and meet as many people as you can and find the aspect of the profession you enjoy which will mean you will get better at it.

### What is the most exciting thing you are currently working on?

I am in the early stages with a development for a client who had two very clear ideas for a site. We came up with a third alternative they described as "off the wall" but now look likely to take forward. This is immensely satisfying.

### What are your fondest career memories?

Working with people with founts of knowledge gathered over a time period now going back more than 100 years which they were happy to share. People who start as clients and are now friends and also sharing my experience and knowledge with the younger generations entering the industry.

### What are your remaining career aspirations?

To recruit the right person to work with me and possibly take the business over...but not yet!

### What are your favourite Commercial Property developments?

I really had to think about this one. Not strictly commercial, but I still think the main part of Newcastle Civic Centre is an example of quality 1960s architecture. The new developments on Bath Lane which complement the City Centre developments are examples of 21st Century architecture that will stretch the City Centre in a new direction.

### What is the best place to live in the region and why?

Within the North East we are spoilt for choice. Wherever one is, one can be 20-30 minutes from good shopping, countryside and the coast allied to a terrific rail link to London. A very special area to work and live.

### How do you relax?

I am President of the Ponteland Lions and enjoy their fundraising activities. I also enjoy country walks with my girlfriend and the atmosphere of a good pub, an institution we must fight to keep.

After multiple health scares in 2022 my New Years Resolution is simply to be happy and make other people happy.

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

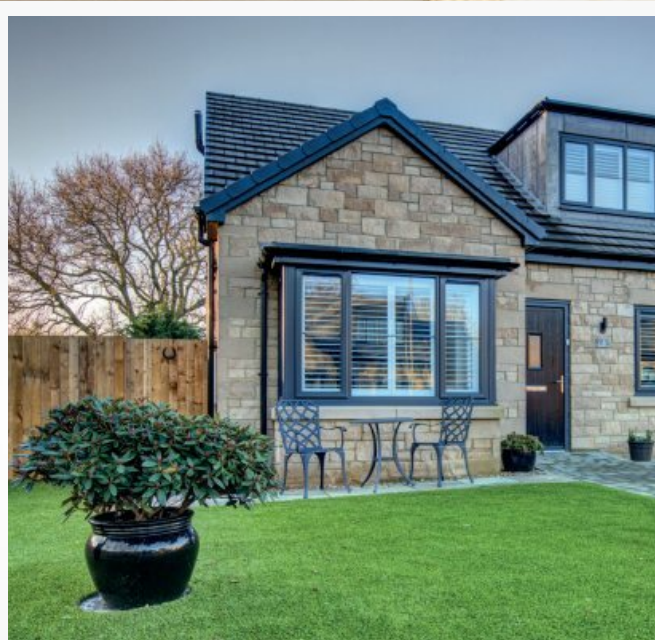
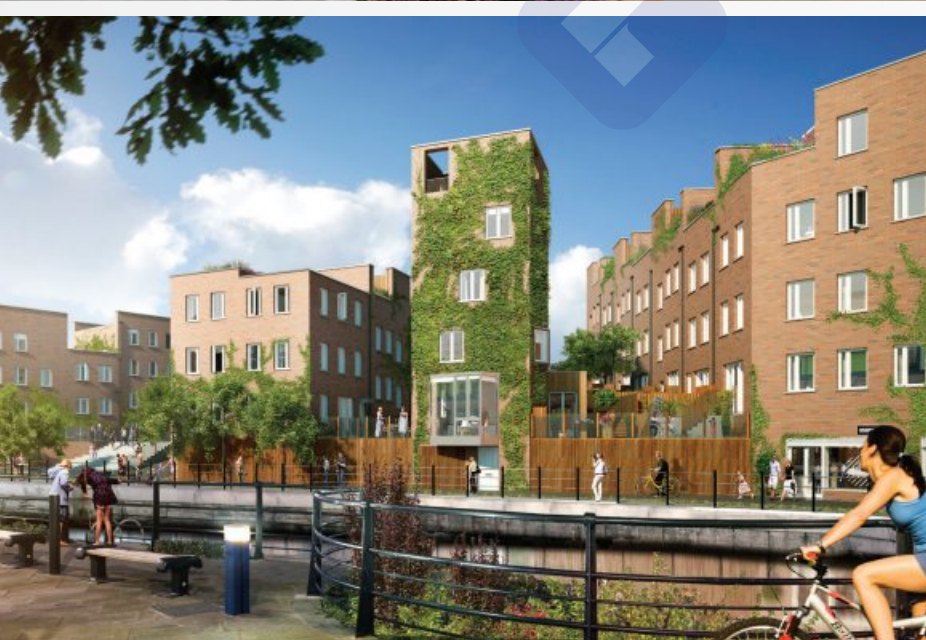




Philip Bowe



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**Believe Housing** in County Durham offering a superb range of Rent to Buy new homes across the region, supporting first time buyers getting onto the housing market in a challenging market.



**Oakapple Group**, in Leafy Jesmond, a bespoke development of luxury apartments to suit a diverse range of buyers of all age groups.

**Banks Homes**, Durham City, something very special is Coming Soon. Watch this space.

**PfP Igloo** at the Ouseburn, the community is growing from strength to strength with the iconic 'Malmö' Coming Soon.



**Melbury Homes** in Lanchester offering a range of self-build plots for exceptional luxury homes.





Jennifer Welch and Kevan Carrick, co-founders of JK Property Consultants

## Portfolio of new instructions

A rent review for a 20,000 sq ft Newcastle city centre office and the remediation and disposal of a 30-acre site at Jarrow for employment use, are just two of a raft of projects JK Property Consultants will undertake during the course of 2023.

**The portfolio of new instructions follows a highly successful 2022 for the Newcastle firm, in which it advised on properties with a total value of £350 million.**

Amongst the highlights was the purchase of 10,500 sq ft Allergate House, Belmont Business Park, Durham, on behalf of ambitious business support services provider, Umi and advising, through Arup, Mayor, Ben Houchen and the Tees Valley Combined Authority, in the formulation of masterplans for delivery by

the newly formed Development Corporations for both Hartlepool and Middlesbrough, by providing regeneration and property market advice as a sub-consultant to Arup.

JK Property Consultants assists investors, developers and occupiers, applying its local market knowledge with a national perspective, whether for development, acquisitions, lease renewals, reviews and resolving issues through dispute resolution.

Kevan Carrick, co-founder of JK Property Consultants, alongside, Jennifer Welch, said: "We are entering 2023 with great enthusiasm and with the boost of new branding and website.

"New instructions for 2023 will need to address the challenge of uncertainty caused by the decline in the economy, rising interest rates, the return on the investment to meet the government's carbon net zero objectives, and how the government plans for levelling up with new Development Corporations for Hartlepool and Middlesbrough and the new Devolution Deal for the remainder of the north east region, will impact on values and delivery."

Instructions for 2023 include advising the owner of a house on the compensation payable for the cessation of a planning consent and a new consent requiring major adaption of a partially constructed house. Acquiring the purchase of a unit of about 5,000 to 20,000 sq ft

for the retail of sporting goods and the training for rifle shooting.

Disposal of three acres of employment land for lease. Acting as an expert witness to determine the price of land for a £75 million housing development. The rent review of a 20,000 sq. ft. city centre office. The remediation and disposal of a 30-acre site for employment use and the renovation and reletting of office space in a very important listed building likely to come to the market around Easter 2023.

Kevan Carrick, is a chartered surveyor with over 50 years' experience in the property sector. He is a mediator, shortlisted the National Mediation Awards as Commercial Mediator of 2020/2021, director at North East Business Innovation Centre, an ambassador for the Open North Foundation and ambassador for North East Initiative on Business Ethics, where has recently retired as co-founder and chair.

Jennifer Welch worked for the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) in the North East and became director for North and Midlands. She then took on a global role with the RICS and spent time operating in Asia and, latterly, as the director for Sub Saharan Africa, promoting business ethics and international standards.

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

# In Conversation With...

## Aidan McCaffery

Director at AMC Surveyors

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

Like most young lads I was going to be a Footballer or a Firefighter. They never happened, but I enjoyed playing football at a good local level playing for Hebburn Town FC, Cleadon FC, and Boldon FC as a centre midfielder – clearly never going to be Bruno – so university and AMC Surveyors was born.

### Tell us about your current role and what do you most enjoy?

As owner of AMC Surveyors I enjoy the variety of work. I can be surveying a £20k flat one day and then on to a £5M mansion, followed by project managing new build schools, which all offer interesting highlights and challenges.

### What is your proudest business achievement?

It was a huge pleasure to support the contract for the provisional of a brand new school at Wynyard Primary School in Cleveland, and getting the children into their new classrooms in time for the academic year. It was an incredibly stressful time knowing the teachers and children were excited about their new classrooms and the build programme was struggling to keep momentum, however knowing the kids (and their parents) were excited to be at a brand new school gave me the support and tenacity to drive the project to success. I am also very proud to be working on an extension at the wonderful Middlesbrough Green Lane Primary Academy – described as a Big School with a Big Heart – and we are sharing their journey in helping them with their building needs. I am also proud for the opportunity to be able to help charities such as Fighting All Cancers Together (FACT) and Newcastle Dog and Cat Shelter with their property needs, as they are both fantastic charities.

### How has your industry evolved in the last decade and what changes do you see in the next decade?

There has been a massive adoption of new innovation such as software and use of drones



in the industry. More technology is to follow... watch this space.

### What are you currently working on?

Supporting new standards in the new homes industry with the NHQB requirements offering buyers the chance to have an independent 'snagging' survey completed days prior to completion. This is a very reassuring action from the government in recognising new home standards are met across the industry.

I am also very excited to soon be opening our new Manchester (North-West) office as well as further growing the current Harrogate (Yorkshire) office.

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

We are a small friendly team of surveyors and admin support. We cover a large area of the north of the England and together we work to meet timelines for our clients across the region on their projects and survey needs.

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

Know your worth and how to value your team and services to enable us to work with the right like-minded professional people. I also strongly believe in that you not only have to work hard, but you also have to work smart, which includes for the adoption of innovative products and ideas.

### Where do you see yourself in 10 years time?

Leading a team throughout the north of England with potential to organically grow to be national across the whole of the UK.

### Who would be your four ideal dinner guests, alive or dead?

Noel Fitzpatrick (Supervet), David Goggins (Navy Seal), Bobby Robson – nothing else to say, other than my hero, and for a jovial dessert Ricky Gervais (the Office dance can follow many beers!)

And the food would be steak medium rare, homemade chips, peppercorn sauce, and of course a Guinness! Have you booked the table Mike?

### How do you unwind outside of work?

I am a frustrated golfer so many hours are spent at my local Heworth Golf Course and any other course I can take the challenge to beat the handicap. I am also an avid English Heritage and National Trust follower and spend weekends with the family enjoying the local attractions we are so very lucky to have in our region.

### Favourite book?

Best books – *Living with a Seal* by Jesse Itzler and *A Life worth Breathing* by Max Strom; I think many hours on the golf course led me to the latter book...will lead you to the loving and peaceful power of the universe and allow you to fully awaken to your highest human consciousness. A hole in one is on the horizon!

**AMC Surveyors – New Homes NHQB Specialists, Project Managers, Everything in Surveying – a happy professional team covering the North East, North West, Yorkshire, and beyond.**

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# Rare to the housing market!

## The Old School

Warkworth, Northumberland. Offers over £950,000



**Situated on the River Coquet, Warkworth, Northumberland comes with fishing rights, your own private stretch of river, private jetty and boat moorings.**

The property has only come to the market once in 36 years.

Exceptionally private, the property features unrivalled views of the river/estuary viewed through panoramic floor to ceiling windows. Within walking distance is the golf course, beach, marina, Warkworth Castle and the village pub. Herons, seals, salmon jumping, swans and deer are seen almost every day, this property is unique.

Four bedrooms with scope for two more, this property was formerly the village school and now has a large floor to ceiling triple glazed glass extension, offering outstanding private views.

The current owners paddle board and salmon fish as well as mooring a small motorboat on their private river that can be sailed up to the marina and local fish shops and restaurants. Viewing highly recommended.

**Listed with Pattinsons Estate Agent in Alnwick, Northumberland. [alnwick@pattinsons.co.uk](mailto:alnwick@pattinsons.co.uk)**







# Coastal properties and style

Here at Willow & Maine we have had the pleasure of transforming the interiors of several coastal homes across the North East.

**The most Southern was a residential project at Redcar and the furthest North was a large residence just North of Bamburgh, we also completed an Airbnb holiday rental at Alnmouth, and a stunning architect designed house in Seaham. Like most of our projects they all had unique styles and requirements.**

## The property-Airbnb Alnmouth

Our first coastal property was an Airbnb in Alnmouth. Our clients are based in North Yorkshire, so they wanted everything managed and delivered by us within a short time frame. They approached us as they had just had their offer accepted, we then had a window of two weeks where the property wasn't booked and two months to arrange everything.

We travelled down to their home to deliver a mood board presentation and then drew up a budget and started getting everything ordered including furniture, bedding, lighting accessories and window dressings. We then worked with the clients to ensure all trades were booked in including electrician, decorators, and joiner to ensure everything could be completed within budget and on time.

## Style

As the clients were going to be using the property, we injected some of their style whilst considering their guests needs. Comfy sofas with cushions and throws, lots of rattan, comfortable beds with quality white bedding, finished off with lighting, artwork and accessories. We also chose wallpaper with a nod to the coast but not too obvious. Other coastal elements through the property included wicker baskets, striped fabrics and pictures. It's been pretty much fully booked since it was finished.

## The Property-New build Seaham

The Seaham property is a beautiful architect designed property, with stunning views over the golf course to the sea at Seaham. The clients had a beautiful home, but they wanted help adding some colour, furniture, window dressings and accessories. As with all our projects we started off with a mood board and once items agreed, the works began.

## Style

In the grand room which is a large kitchen, dining and family room, the walls were plain white, and the client wanted colour. We painted the chimney wall Stiff key blue, and colour matched the other walls to the kitchen cabinets. We also added thick wooden shelves to the alcove to give storage and texture, we also added a long wooden picture ledge. In the lounge the walls were painted Bone white which is very subtle grey, and we used linen style paper on the Chimney breast. We sourced new furniture including a bookcase, console tables, rugs, lighting and accessories. As a reference to the coast, we used a hint of blue and white throughout the different rooms. Beautiful striped linen curtains and blinds we added to the lounge windows. We brought the outside in using large plants in wicker planters and various baskets.

### Some of our favourite stockists;

Rattan side tables and Rugs can be found at [www.Benuta.com](http://www.Benuta.com)

Rattan baskets and planters  
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For lovely coastal prints and cushions check out [www.samphirebay.co.uk](http://www.samphirebay.co.uk)

For lovely linen fabric Zoe Glencross designs lots of prints and colours.  
[www.zoeglencross.co.uk](http://www.zoeglencross.co.uk)

Beautiful French linen homeware  
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**If you have any questions or would like help with a Coastal property or other property, contact us for your complimentary initial consultancy at [www.willowandmaine.co.uk/page/contact](http://www.willowandmaine.co.uk/page/contact)**

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Cushions from Samphire Bay



Seaham House



Seaham House



Baskets from Garden Trading





Neil Turner

## Good Design - looking forward or behind us?

By Neil Turner, Howarth Litchfield

I welcomed the comments made by Michael Gove in November when he penned a forward to a think tank Policy Exchange document, 'School of Place'. He suggested that opposition to new housing could be reduced, if there was a greater focus on design and the 'heart and soul' of places.

**The report criticised both the quality of modern architecture, as well as 'indifferent or insipid planning', going on to ask for a new school of architecture that focused on the recovery of traditional architecture .**

The document, and Mr Gove, have certainly created a debate.

The document covers a few major issues and who could disagree with a comment that puts design as a priority in all buildings in this country and most definitely housing. The country has a wonderful heritage of building styles and inspiring examples of architecture from Roman times through to the 21st century.

Each era has its place and we must balance the need to retain our heritage whilst allowing good architecture to develop to support the needs and requirements of the present time .

Within Britain, we often appear to have a schizophrenic view towards design, especially on new housing. We have enormous pressures to build more housing to accommodate current needs, yet find endless reasons not to achieve targets or face endless delays due to a slow planning system.

The report highlights that a recent poll stated 84% of people preferred a traditional style in contrast to just 16% preferring a modern style. Of course, it depends on what questions were asked to obtain these results as interest in modern design has never been stronger with TV shows, magazines and demand for self-build housing. More and more people want to build a house, fit for the modern way of living.

So how do we square this circle of design scrutiny? I am not going to say we should all be building mock Georgian housing, nor that every new house should be shiny metal and

plate glass walls. The challenge is to make all designers – of whatever style allegiance – and developers, create housing that is fit for its place, using materials that are appropriate to the area and so have character.

The key is 'character', often a better word than design. A new house in an estate should have character and that includes its wider setting, landscape and road layouts . Mr Gove is correct in asking questions about how we can improve this.

I don't think we can blame planning departments, architects or developers for the absence of this quality. I think that it is a larger society question about how to encourage everyone to build with an eye to good design, quality or character – or whatever term you want to give it.

If we want the quality and character of our built environment to improve, then we need to pay for it and there lies the pressure. We need a proactive national planning system that rewards innovation, improves environmental standards, and champions character and design. How we do that and meet current needs is not an easy task. At least debating it is a good start.

**Neil Turner, director, Howarth Litchfield can be contacted on 0191 3849470 or email [n.turner@hlpuk.com](mailto:n.turner@hlpuk.com) [www.howarthlitchfield.com](http://www.howarthlitchfield.com)**



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# It's not all doom and gloom for the Commercial Property Industry



Currently, the National and Regional news seems to be dominated with stories of economic doom and gloom: inflationary pressures, rising interest rates, looming recession, spiralling energy prices and the cost of living crisis.

**All these factors will undoubtedly play their part in restricting and suppressing growth prospects in the commercial property market. Activity has certainly slowed in the last 6-9 months, but surprisingly, requirements across all sectors are still relatively buoyant and commercial properties are still being let or sold for either occupation or for investment, which in certain sectors is still highly competitive.**

A very recent survey by Ipsos for the British Property Federation conducted between 15 December 2022 and 10 January 2023, has reported that the industry remains positive for the long term. The results are based on a

response from 105 British property leaders spanning owners, developers, funders, agents and advisers. It reports that 78% were confident about the UK's economic prospects in the next five years.

Looking at the North-East region and into North Yorkshire, there are certain sectors which are still in decline, such as high street retail in some centres, but in other sectors, particularly prime City centre offices and industrial, demand remains high. Flexible working will inevitably affect demand, particularly in the office sector, but the decline in demand has not been as significant as anticipated. This new way of working is forcing many office occupiers to review their position and this often leads to new premises, and not necessarily smaller space.

From a YoungsRPS perspective, operating out of our Newcastle upon Tyne City centre office across the North-East region, we have, over the last year or so, increased the volume of agency instructions in the retail, office and industrial sectors and can report a relatively strong uptake with sales and lettings being achieved, so long as a realistic pricing regime is implemented. Well-let commercial investment properties with strong tenants are in short supply and there remains a large pool of investors keen to put their money in commercial property where they still see prospects for a relatively high return and for rental and capital growth.



Michael Blake

In addition, YoungsRPS have increased their managed property portfolio, including a new retail development in South-East Northumberland programmed to open for trade spring 2023, and which has been virtually pre-let off plan.

There is still probably a bumpy road ahead for a while, but prospects in the medium to long term appear far more favourable for the commercial property industry than some commentators would have us think.

**Michael Blake is a Director of YoungsRPS, operating across the North-East region and North Yorkshire out of the company's Newcastle upon Tyne office.**

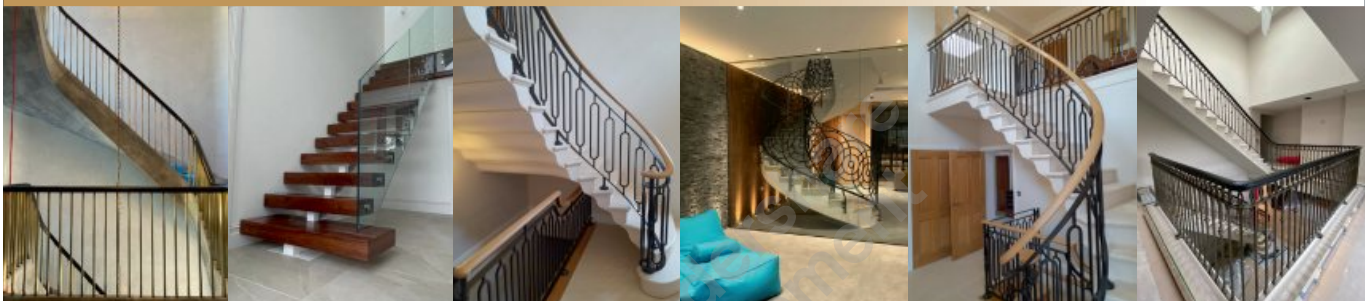
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"We've worked with Neil for almost 10 years, his craftsmanship and product knowledge are terrific. The 'flow' of the balustrade is really important to creating a smooth timber handrail so we're always happy to see if it's Neil that has made the balustrade."

*Kenny Macfarlane - Managing Director - Handrail Creations*

"We have only worked with Neil Hood Bespoke for a year, but already we can see that the quality of their services is first class. Our company design and manufacture bespoke furniture and Neil's team assist in the fabrication of components required. Their work is excellent."

*Joshua Boynton - Thomas May Bespoke*

"It is a fact that when considering a bespoke design for a curved double height set of balustrades, we searched high and low scouring the UK for a company that could undertake the project. We were advised along the way that what we were requesting was difficult as curved staircases are a dying trade.

The stairs were finally sourced and built by a Hungarian company that had a secondary base in Shropshire. Although a work of art in themselves they did not match the drawings provided neither were they true to the handrail or even the set above them. Although to the eye they appear aesthetically pleasing the problem this left the fabrication companies was huge. Consequently, we discussed the project with around 20+ fabrication companies almost all of which stipulated that the job would be either financially unviable or impossible to undertake.

In the finish it was only two companies that were in the running and the only company that came forward with confidence was Neil Hood Bespoke, undertaking the works to a professional level on time and to budget."

*Dan Bovill - Technical Director - Solartherm UK - Part of Silvercrest Energy Limited*





# Planning consent obtained on key 24 acre industrial development site



CGI images supplied by The Harris Partnership

Privately-owned Co Durham-based property development company, Premcor Estates (Premcor) has obtained planning consent for three industrial/distribution units, with a combined floor area of 402,000 sq ft of office and industrial space at its 24-acre 'Fabric Darlington' (Fabric) site.

**Immediately adjacent to the Amazon fulfilment and distribution centre, Fabric occupies a highly visible position on Tornado Way, Darlington, within this established and fast-growing industrial and logistics location.**

Strategically situated a short distance from the A66 and fronting a main arterial route between Darlington and Middlesbrough, Fabric provides fast access to J57, 58 and 59 of the A1(M).

Acquired speculatively by Premcor some 18 months ago, the developer has spent the intervening period developing and submitting a detailed planning application for industrial and warehouse usage.

Units vary in size from 84,000 to 213,000 sq ft, can accommodate any design and build requirement and have detailed consent for Class B2 and B8 use (industrial storage and distribution) with ancillary offices.

Premcor director, Simon Hawkins, said: "Our successful planning application takes this speculative development into a different league in terms of deliverability and we are expecting a great deal of interest from various quarters, particularly businesses involved in manufacturing, warehousing and distribution.

"Darlington is one of the North East's longest established industrial centres and has a world-class reputation for engineering, while Fabric offers proximity to local manufacturing

occupiers like British Steel and Cummins Engines as well as other nearby logistics operators such as Aldi, Argos, DHL and Fedex. It's a perfect combination. As a result, we see the site as having both national potential and as a genuine gateway to the North East."

The range of accommodation available, for sale or to let, offers design and build opportunities with a Grade A specification including a target EPC rating of 'A' and a minimum BREEAM rating of Excellent, while rooftops will be solar PV ready.

Fabric is being marketed by Richard Scott, industrial and logistics director at Savills Newcastle. He added: "There are hardly any sites like this left across the region and Premcor was able to quickly seize the opportunity

when it became available. We were talking to several interested occupiers before we obtained planning consent so we can now push forward in earnest to bring some of these discussions to a positive conclusion. It is certainly an exciting development opportunity to bring to market."

Jonathan Dulston, Leader of the Council said: "I am delighted that the planning committee at Darlington Borough Council has given its consent for this scheme, which is sure to attract a great deal of interest. It is a huge vote of confidence in the region when major and global brands decide to locate here. Not only do they create jobs, but their presence attracts other businesses in their supply chains, so it is all good news for local people and the economy."

Construction is scheduled to begin at the end of quarter two. The Harris Partnership (Wakefield office) is project manager and architect for the scheme.

**For more information contact:**  
**Simon Hawkins, Director**  
**t: 07979 703 272**  
**e: [simonhawkins@premcor.com](mailto:simonhawkins@premcor.com)**  
**[www.premcor.com](http://www.premcor.com)**







L-R: Clare Rees and Glen Martin in the Matthew Charlton kitchen showroom

## Developer 'buys local' for luxury apartment fit out

Matthew Charlton scoops major kitchen order for The Wool House.

**The developer behind Hexham's 45 luxury apartment development, The Wool House, has announced the appointment of Hexham's long established builders' merchant, Matthew Charlton, to supply all the kitchens and appliances for the scheme.**

Manufactured by German company, Beckermann, with its established reputation for quality, craftsmanship and style, the range of kitchens, available through Matthew Charlton, is proving highly popular because of its wide variety of designs and colours.

The Wool House development director, Bob Skelly, has been working closely with the kitchen showroom manager at Matthew Charlton to come up with some highly individual kitchen layouts to suit the various styles of The Wool House apartments, which include one and two-bedroom, duplex and penthouse apartment options.

Commenting on his decision to buy local, Mr Skelly said: "As a local business ourselves, it is

always good to reinvest into the local economy if possible and an order of this size and scale is greatly appreciated by Matthew Charlton, who employ a sizeable workforce.

"Just as importantly, Beckermann Kitchens, which are manufactured in Germany, are of excellent quality and durability with some superb styles and colours, so they were an obvious choice. We have not yet made a decision on the manufacturer for our built-in appliances which will include a dishwasher, fridge-freezer, electric hob, electric oven and extractor unit.

"In working with a local company we will have access to a showroom manager in Hexham, not a faceless organisation somewhere else in the country, and given the supply problems that have affected the entire construction industry over the last couple of years, buying local should help to alleviate any supply issues in the future, should they arise. We are looking forward to progressing to the fit-out stage within the next few weeks."

Clare Rees, kitchen showroom manager and

Helen Makepeace, kitchen consultant, will co-ordinate all orders. Clare said: "I am very excited to be working on this prestigious project, which is at the heart of Hexham and a key development for the town.

"We have our own designer from Beckermann, Glen Martin, who will assist the installation by coming on site to advise the kitchen fitters and will be available when customers come to the show apartment so that kitchens can be tailored to customers' exact requirements. There will also be the option for upgrades too."

As work at the development progresses on programme, a decision has also been made about the bathrooms and sanitary ware which will come from Porcelanosa, another high-quality manufacturer, fulfilling the early design aspirations for these luxury apartments as visualised by award-winning interior design specialists, Dakota.

**[www.thewoolhouse.co.uk](http://www.thewoolhouse.co.uk)  
All enquiries please call Kim Harrison,  
YoungsRPS 01434 608 980**





# Commercial redevelopment scheme for Southwick, Sunderland



**North East developer Modobloc has revealed plans for a £2.1m commercial property development, set to bring much-needed jobs to Southwick, Sunderland.**

**The Newcastle-based developer has submitted plans to Sunderland City Council to redevelop a brownfield site adjacent to Kings Road and Sunderland Road.**

Modobloc hopes to build two units – a 4,000 sq ft unit for Tesco and a 1,200 sq ft unit for Cooplands. The development is expected to create up to 20-30 jobs once fully completed and let.

George Jenkins, MD of Modobloc, explained: “This is a small but exciting commercial development that has attracted two high quality retail tenants. It’s a perfect roadside location where demand will be high.”

Modobloc director Ollie Stapleton added: “We are pleased to have an opportunity to breathe life and energy back into the location, helping to regenerate this part of Southwick.”

Modobloc is already looking at other commercial development sites around the region and is currently seeking planning permission from South Tyneside Council for a £3m development project off Claypath Lane and the A194, in South Shields. Modobloc hopes to build three units as well as a Starbucks Drive Thru store.

The ambitious developer recently established Modobloc Construction to help accelerate some of its new residential and commercial developments.

Last year Modobloc secured planning permission from Stockton Borough Council to build 22 light industrial units on a brownfield site on Cowpen Lane Industrial Estate, Billingham. Construction of the 30,000 sq ft of new industrial space is well underway. This £4 million project was the first of several planned projects in the commercial property development arena.

Elsewhere, the developer is busy with several high-quality, design-led residential developments, including in Stannington, Northumberland and The Ropes, Ouseburn, Newcastle.

The Newcastle-based developer has formed a partnership with Christian homelessness charity Oasis Community Housing to donate £2,000 towards

housing and supporting a homeless person for every new house or two flats it sells this year.

Modobloc has already sold two properties ‘off plan’ at its luxury, seven design-led, four-storey townhouses development, The Ropes, at St Lawrence Road, overlooking the Ouseburn Valley and River Tyne, in Newcastle. A first donation has already been paid to the charity.

George Jenkins, of Modobloc, explained: “We have a busy, exciting year ahead with new home developments across the city – especially in and around Ouseburn. These projects will set a new standard in residential development and drive regeneration in a key area of the city.

“As part of our wider plans to be a catalyst for regeneration we felt it was important to do something with people struggling in the communities in which we invest. It’s important to look to the people as well as living places when trying to build better communities and attractive destinations.”

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 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 Newcastle estate agent Hive Estates – who are already taking registrations of interest.

**More details about Modobloc: [www.modobloc.co.uk](http://www.modobloc.co.uk)**





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## NE1 CAN event hosted by Mediaworks

**Mediaworks, one of the UK's largest independent digital marketing agencies, teamed up with Newcastle NE1 this month to deliver a programme of engagement for local schools across the region.**

In honour of National Apprenticeship Week, the agency welcomed over 40 year-ten students from four schools – Jarrow School, Duke's Sixth Form, Sacred Heart and Parkview Learning – to provide real-life careers advice, insight, and inspiration whilst raising aspiration and ambition for future marketeers.

Mediaworks employees from various service lines across the business, including SEO, strategic planning, and development, stepped in to host Q&A chats discussing their educational backgrounds and career journeys.

The NE1 CAN events enable employers to have constructive conversations with employees of the future, providing the opportunity to break down barriers, discuss employability skills, and

take learning out of the classroom into the real world of work.

Jayne Walsh, head of people experience at Mediaworks, said: "The interaction and feedback we received from the students was second-to-none. It was great to welcome them into the Mediaworks office to experience a 'day in the life' at the agency and give insight into our culture, our people, and their career paths."

During the event, the agency set students a creative challenge for a real-life client, Oceans, to think outside of the box for an exciting ad campaign. The winning idea was judged by a panel of Mediaworks and frontrunners received a prize of Mediaworks goodies.

Mediaworks delivers a range of services across SEO, PPC, web design, brand, content, and digital PR. The rapidly growing agency currently has offices in Newcastle, Leeds, Edinburgh, Manchester, Dublin, and London. Those interested in the 2023 apprenticeship programme at Mediaworks can find out more here: [www.mediaworks.co.uk](http://www.mediaworks.co.uk)



## A Peachy partnership for DMP Sharks

**The North-East's only Allianz Premier 15s rugby team, DMP Sharks, has secured a sponsorship contract with local marketing agency Peachy Digital.**

With a self-confessed 'women's rugby geek' amongst its staff, Peachy Digital will assist the Sharks with external communications including public relations and social media.

Lizzie Turner, managing director of Peachy Digital said: "We're delighted to be able to offer our support to DMP Sharks. We're big rugby fans, and recognise the unique challenges faced by women in the game - particularly here in the North East."

DMP Sharks' future in the Allianz Premier 15s league was in jeopardy weeks before the start of the 22/23 season, when the players and administration were forced to turn to crowdfunding as the only option to raise sufficient funds to satisfy the entry conditions. A substantial financial commitment has since been secured from Vodafone, who are now principal sponsors of the girls' and women's section at Darlington Mowden Park.

Yet, despite this sponsorship deal from Vodafone, DMP Sharks have been unable to tender for inclusion in the 23/24 Premier 15s league, as the vast increase in the level of investment required to compete was deemed unsustainable, particularly for a community rugby club.

Tom Bulmer, marketing and sponsorship manager at Darlington Mowden Park said: "We're delighted to have Peachy Digital on board this season and we're hugely grateful for their support. Their knowledge and expertise will help us raise the profile of the Sharks, and women's rugby in the North East both regionally and nationally, and we look forward to welcoming them to the wider Sharks team."

## Marriott Communications shortlisted for two FSB awards

**Sunderland-based digital communications agency, Marriott Communications, has announced shortlist success in the upcoming Federation of Small Businesses Business Awards 2023.**

After a stellar year of growth and digital achievements, Marriott Communications have been nominated for "Start-Up Business of the Year" with CEO, Samuel Marriott-Dowding also shortlisted for "Young Entrepreneur of the Year." These shortlists are the latest commendations for the agency following other North East shortlists and wins, including for Marketer of the Year at the Prolific North Awards and the win of Agency of the Year at the Northern Enterprise Awards.



Marriott Communications' CEO, Samuel Marriott-Dowding, said: "Marriott Communications has grown so much over the last two years, and I am truly grateful that our work is being both commended and recognised within the North East region - a place that our agency now calls home. I would like to share a massive thank you to the FSB for such exciting nominations, and also to our clients and partners whom we are so privileged to work with."



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Brand Audit



Brand Value Proposition



Brand Storytelling



## Activate



Growth Strategy



Digital Strategy

Marketing and  
Communications Strategy

## Amplify



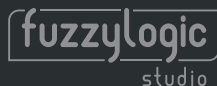
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# Marketing and Media Matters

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

## Sarah Walker & Sarah Dale

*Directors of PR, media and communications business, SASS media Ltd.*

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

**Sarah D:** As a child, I scribbled away creating my own stories, but I didn't decide to become a journalist until I was in my final year of my English degree. I entered a competition in Cosmopolitan to win a scholarship, having written a feature on a colleague who had fled Iraq with her family. I got down to the last six in London and, although I didn't secure the scholarship, it gave me a taste of being able to tell someone's story and I was hooked.

**Sarah W:** As a child, I loved writing and had several different typewriters and word processors - but I always wanted to be a vet. However, my very average GCSE science grades - and the fact I'd become known for reading the school's daily news bulletin - set me on the path to becoming a journalist.

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

**Sarah D:** I did my NCTJ training in Newcastle and joined The Gazette on my 23rd birthday, working in news, features, business and politics and spending several years as lifestyle editor. I left to work in a primary school and became an emotional wellbeing practitioner, but the writing bug never left me. Last year, we set up SASS media Ltd.

**Sarah W:** I graduated in Journalism from Napier University, Edinburgh in 2004 and began working for a press agency in Edinburgh. I briefly went freelance, before landing a role as business reporter at The Gazette on Teesside in 2006, where I met Sarah D. I moved to general news before specialising in health. I moved into PR in the NHS in 2015, before setting up my own business in 2020.

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

**Sarah D:** We are both big believers in a work/life balance and ensuring you look after both your physical and mental health, but when you're juggling a very busy business with lots of different clients and family life, it can be hard to ensure you do take a breather.

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

**Sarah D:** When I was a trainee reporter, it was Kate Adie, and I was lucky enough to meet her at the Tom Corder Awards. Now, I love to see Steph McGovern championing the Boro as a broadcast journalist. Having strong female role models in the media is vital to future generations.

**Sarah W:** I really like Kay Burley from Sky News. I think she's great at her job. I really appreciate her no-nonsense style and interviews.

### What is your greatest strength?

**Sarah W:** Our biggest strength is our caring and empathic natures. I think this has opened a lot of doors for us.

### What is your biggest weakness?

**Sarah D:** I always have too many tabs open and it is hard to calm my busy mind.

**Sarah W:** My laugh! It's loud, raucous and has gotten me into a fair bit of trouble in the different offices I've worked in over the years.

### What has been your proudest achievement?

**Sarah D:** In my career, my proudest achievement is seeing SASS grow from an idea last May to a full-time business with a variety of clients.

**Sarah W:** My proudest achievement career-wise is still probably graduation. It was the culmination of many years' hard work studying and doing various part-time jobs.

### What are your future career aspirations?

**Sarah D:** We love what we do. We have so many ideas and so many projects in the pipeline, we will continue to work on our growth and our clients' growth.

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

**Sarah W:** It will become increasingly important for people in business to position themselves as experts in their industry and create their own engaging content - and we can help with that.

### How do you like to unwind?

**Sarah D:** I love to go for long walks with my family or friends but I also love being curled up on the sofa with my husband, son, a good book or Netflix and a cup of tea.

**Sarah W:** Being with my kids and husband, walking along Redcar or Saltburn beach, playing games or doing arts and crafts. I also value time spent with good friends.

**www.sassmedialtd.co.uk**

**Email: sarah.walker@sassmedialtd.co.uk  
and sarah.dale@sassmedialtd.co.uk**

**Tel: 07896 894538/07814 976582**



L-R: Sarah Dale and Sarah Walker





L-R: Sarah Dale and Sarah Walker





# ...Spring brings reasons to celebrate...

*The nights are getting shorter and the days longer – a good enough reason to celebrate!*  
**Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us what their business is celebrating.**



I'm Simon and I write under the pen name of S Rob. I specialise in writing books about the occult. My company is Werevamp Media Ltd and I am celebrating the publication of my 666th book. I believe that I am the most prolific occult author in history which means that it's probably the only 666th occult book ever written. The number 666 is a very important one in occultism and is said to represent The Devil although many believe it was either a mistaken attempt to represent Caesar: the leader of the Roman empire: or a good attempt to represent a Jewish rival to Jesus. I will probably celebrate it in a low-key way, but it will be celebrated as I feel it should.

**Simon Robson (S Rob) Author Werevamp Media**  
 Find us on Amazon.



This year dwmedia is celebrating collaboration, working with more industry professionals to create some amazing content.

**Daniel Wilkinson DW Media**  
[www.thedwmedia.co.uk](http://www.thedwmedia.co.uk)



My parent company, UW, has won Growth Company of the Year at the Shares Magazine Awards. We're helping record numbers of people to save and make money by making people's bills cheaper. If you'd like to know how to get involved, get in touch.

**James Palmer, Utility Warehouse 07960 121068**



I'm looking forward to making new opportunities for my clients and myself. I don't like to stand still too long and often you know when the time is right to reevaluate your business. As it says on my wall, "time flies but you are the pilot!"

**Karen Goldfinch, Chair, North Tyneside Business Forum and owner Karen Goldfinch – Your Business Pilot**  
[www.northtynesidebusinessforum.org.uk](http://www.northtynesidebusinessforum.org.uk)  
[www.facebook.com/yourbusinesspilot](https://www.facebook.com/yourbusinesspilot)

After a fantastic eight years at St Peter's Marina in Newcastle, I've moved Highlights, my floating office to Royal Quays Marina in North Shields. The move was needed to meet demand from my clients in the North and South Tyneside area and I'm looking forward to welcoming more people on board for a cup of coffee and a chat. Come onboard and help me celebrate!

**Keith Newman**  
[www.highlightspr.co.uk](http://www.highlightspr.co.uk)  
 07814 397951



Off The Grid has recently celebrated its fifth-year anniversary. It's been a great journey that has taken us to some amazing locations around the country, working with some truly inspirational young people and adults. We have some very exciting plans in place for new activities and programmes around the region for 2023 and beyond! If you want to be part of the next five years and experience for yourself or groups, you work with what Off The Grid is really all about just get in touch with us!

**Paul Kirkpatrick**  
[www.offthegrid-adventures.co.uk](http://www.offthegrid-adventures.co.uk)



This year I am celebrating my learners – I teach French to everyone from 14 to 90 and beyond. I have more than 75 learners who are learning French from all levels from beginners to intermediate and advanced. We get together once or twice a week, and we celebrate our love of the French language.

*If you'd like to join one of my classes just get in touch [barbara@linguaforme.co.uk](mailto:barbara@linguaforme.co.uk) [www.linguaforme.co.uk](http://www.linguaforme.co.uk)*



This year, my British gift business Powder Butterfly has so much to celebrate. I'm releasing new location collections featuring handmade British gifts that capture the best of British sights and locations. I'm also working with some established suppliers to offer even more variety for my customers. Additionally, mural commissions through both private and corporate clients have increased substantially this year; being able to travel around the country creating pieces inspired by different British sites adds extra value to my work portfolio. Last but not least, I'm thrilled that some large organisations have started conversations with me to create exclusive collections of British-themed products – something which I am immensely proud of!

**Corinne Lewis-Ward**  
[www.powderbutterfly.com](http://www.powderbutterfly.com)



We've so much to celebrate at the moment as the charity has never been so busy. We are really buzzing as we continue to get the best feedback from parents and their families and continue to see that number grow. We are looking forward to bringing in a number of new initiatives soon but more about that later.

**Lyn Horton, CEO Leading Link**  
[www.leadinglink.co.uk](http://www.leadinglink.co.uk)

*Last month our RADAR members appeared on BBC TV, BBC Radio, Local TV and many magazines and newspapers. To find out more about the benefits of becoming a RADAR member, contact [keith@highlightspr.co.uk](mailto:keith@highlightspr.co.uk) or call Keith on 07814 397951.*

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**Contact Keith Newman for more details.**

**Visit him on his floating office**

**[keith@highlightspr.co.uk](mailto:keith@highlightspr.co.uk)**

**07814 397951**

**[www.highlightspr.co.uk](http://www.highlightspr.co.uk)**







Veronica Swindale

## An award-winning story..!

It was fabulous to present Rachael Roberts with the Award for Marketing Director of the Year at the 2022 North East Marketing Awards in December. It was great catching up after the event and exploring the benefits of winning awards.

### What does winning the award mean to you?

It means a great deal to me. Marketing has been a fantastic career choice that has allowed me to work with amazing brands, teams and individuals and has provided me with many exciting opportunities and experiences. It has also required a lot of hard work and flexibility!

Like many, I have experienced imposter syndrome at some points in my career - either when the role wasn't suitable for me or when my children were younger (juggling home life and deadlines can be challenging in any profession)!

This journey and the belief in the commercial value I can bring to a business through marketing enabled me to confidently demonstrate my research-driven approach in my interview for Marketing Director of the year.

### What are the key characteristics of being an effective Marketing Director?

Being able to see the whole picture. Using market research to create data-driven campaigns, customer insights to clearly define your segmentation, targeting, and positioning, and having clear reporting metrics in place to evaluate return on investment.

Another fundamental characteristic is prioritising building relationships and seeking opportunities where you can. A simple conversation with someone new could turn into a brilliant collaborative opportunity and a new route to market.

My team has heard this and has grown to live by it, but my motto is 'progress over process'. Marketing is an ever-changing discipline, and although it is fundamental to have plans and strategies in place, you need to be empathetic to fast-paced markets (such as the one I work within), which requires us to be agile to capitalise on changes, new ideas and ventures. Therefore, testing is another critical characteristic.

In an unpredictable market where it's hard to spot trends, the only way to know if something works is to run with it. If it works and you get loads of leads, great. If it doesn't, it's been a learning curve -which is also great.

### As the business grows, how will you go about building your team?

The marketing team started with just me in September 2020, and over the last couple of years, we have grown to a team of five. We are all part-time, but our dedication, enthusiasm, and effort are still strong. We have an open and trusting culture where all ideas are welcomed, so I want to nurture and coach my team further over the next few years.

We are currently working with Newcastle University Internships. We have been lucky to have secured two talented interns over the last year who have shown fantastic potential and are an asset to the North East marketing industry. We hope to continue with our partnership moving forward.

**What essential skills will the business need to bring in to help you grow?**

We are in a digital landscape, selling a digital product to schools, and our website is our shop front. As the business grows, I plan to invest in digital and SEO to maximise our online marketing efforts.

Our market is unique as we don't necessarily have direct competitors. We sell an online reading programme to schools, and yes, there are other reading programmes available that we are competing against, but in essence, we are all competing for a school's budget.

**Do you have a message for anyone thinking of entering the NEMA awards next year?**

My colleague entered me for this award, and I didn't think anything would come of it. But, after seeing all the hard work, effort, and success laid down from the last year on a submission form, I'm glad that she did, as a testimony to the achievements of our whole team. Yes, I've won this award, and it's an honour to be recognised, but it wouldn't have been possible without the support of my colleagues.

If anyone is considering entering the North East Marketing Awards, please do so. Winning the award has reinforced why I love marketing and the power we have to make a difference.

***As a corporate sponsor of the Awards, nesma is always delighted to be part of the judging panel to see first-hand the exceptional talent we hold in the North East.***

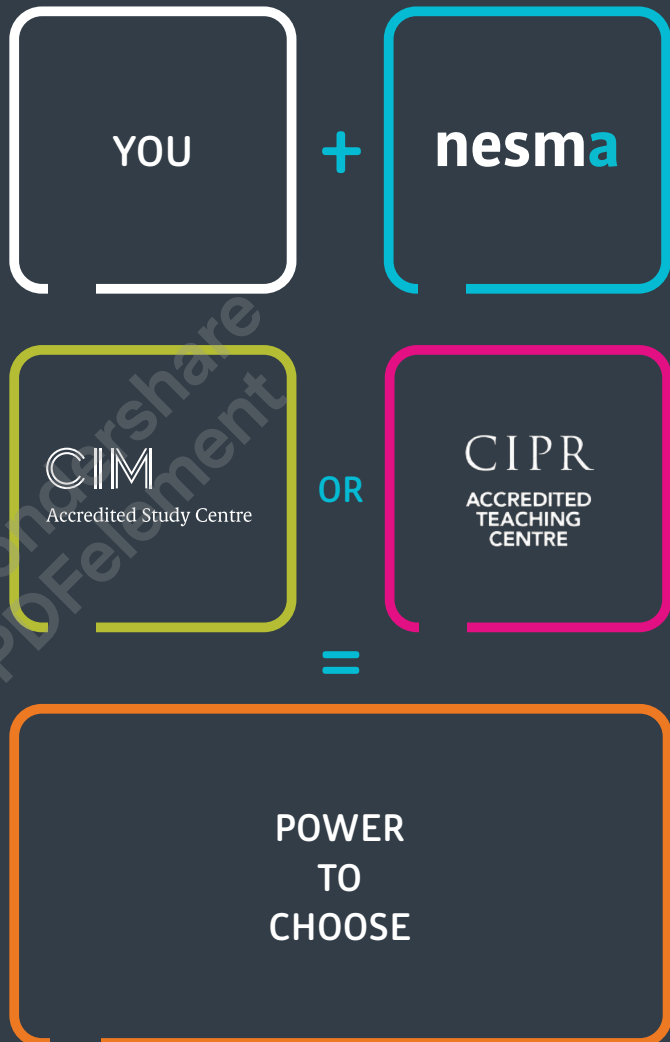


Rachael Roberts

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# Make your marketing work harder







## Main event for Esport gamers

**Esports has become one of the world's fastest growing industries with millions being invested in competitive gaming.**

As a result, more and more colleges across the UK are now offering BTEC courses in this subject area – with the University of Sunderland responding to an increased demand in the gaming industry and the lucrative domain of managing these events,

to launch an Esports Event Management Bsc(Hons) degree.

Drawing on the experience and expertise of the University's well-established events management and computer-based degrees, the three-year programme launch is timely, as the North East is becoming an esports trailblazer with the national esports body, the British Esports Federation, set to open a performance and education campus in Sunderland. The campus will provide access to training, equipment and investment, as well as a base for the Great Britain Esports team.

Dr James Scott, Head of School (Law and Tourism), said: "There is certainly a significant growth for the skills involved in running esports events, which has become one of the fastest growing industries in the world.

"Esports events are packing out thousand-seater stadiums regularly, which requires a huge amount of event planning. This is where our new degree course comes in. Students will explore the world of competitive gaming and learn what makes a successful esports event. They'll delve into the production and management of esports events and develop an understanding of the technologies associated with organising these events."

## Esh Group launches new careers programme

**A brand-new school programme which aims to show young people how the curriculum directly links to careers within the construction industry has been launched by North of England contractor, Esh Group.**

'Construction in the Curriculum' delivers a timetabled subject through a construction and built environment lens in a bid to inform students about careers in the industry and how their education applies to real life job roles.

The first workshop will see Esh staff take over a Maths lesson with students experiencing 'a day in the life of a Quantity Surveyor' to highlight the importance of maths skills in the surveying role. Students will apply the curriculum that they have previously learnt to a real-life scenario by calculating volume, length, square area and quantities from bespoke project drawings, as well as percentages and profit margins.

The programme is now being rolled out to secondary schools nearby its construction sites across the North East, Tees Valley,



Yorkshire and the Humber, with more than 130 students engaged so far.

Darush Dodds, Director of Corporate Affairs at Esh Group, said: "The launch of this new careers programme builds on our 11 years of experience delivering workshops within schools as we work hard to change outdated perceptions of the construction sector and encourage more young people to consider a career in the industry.

"Programmes which bring together business and education are integral in helping students make informed decisions about their future. With Construction in the Curriculum, we want to introduce students to relatable role models as well as help them understand how their day-to-day education can directly link to construction and the built environment careers."



## Production designer Grant Montgomery gives fascinating industry insight to film students in Darlington

**Acclaimed production designer Grant Montgomery came to Darlington to speak to students at the region's leading centre for A Level film studies about his work on BAFTA-nominated flick The Wonder, and gangster family epic Peaky Blinders.**

With more than 30 years' experience in the industry, Grant gave a fascinating insight into his work on movie sets and television series to Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College (QE) students hoping to carve out a career in film and media.

Grant, a designer and art director responsible for the visual concept and design styles on many major productions, spoke about his close working relationship with critically acclaimed Chilean director Sebastián Lelio on his recent project, The Wonder (2022).

The Netflix movie, starring Florence Pugh, is set shortly after the Great Famine in rural Ireland and tells the story of an English nurse tasked with observing a fasting girl, who appears to survive without eating food.

Speaking to QE students about his role, Grant explained: "Production designers help tell the narrative through a three-dimensional world. I love creating these worlds - it's a form of storytelling. Really good design is often invisible but tells a story. You're creating an arena for the performers.

Over the last nine years, Grant has been nominated for three BAFTA awards for Best Production Design (Peaky Blinders and Gunpowder) and in 2011, he received the RTS Award for Best Production Design for his work on The Crimson Petal and the White. His credits also include Birdsong, Death Comes to Pemberley and The Secret Garden.

His message to students was clear: "You've got to have passion; you have to passionately study, understand and love film to help you get through the ups and downs of a career in the industry. It's passion that keeps you going in whatever role you choose."



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# High praise for Newcastle High School for Girls following rigorous independent review

Newcastle High School for Girls (NHSG) has been given a resounding seal of approval from the Good Schools Guide following a rigorous review conducted by the independent guide which supports parents in choosing the best education for their children.

## THE GOOD SCHOOLS GUIDE

**The all-girls school that prides itself on unleashing the potential of girls to learn without limits received high praise all round, with its Senior School summarised by the Good Schools Guide (GSG) as offering ‘High quality teaching and learning, a broad modern curriculum and every kind of opportunity and challenge. Superb facilities, strong pastoral care and a very obvious commitment to inclusivity tailored to girls’ needs and interests. It’s a pretty compelling package’.**

The review also highlighted NHSG’s ‘unique ethos of ambition and attainment in both academics and co-curricular in order to empower girls to be trailblazers and world-shapers’.

NHSG Head, Michael Tippet, said: “It’s extremely pleasing to receive this external validation for NHSG. It encapsulates our school’s aims as well as the real-life experience for all our pupils, whether they are in Nursery or Sixth Form. At NHSG we not only educate our pupils, we empower them. We support, nurture and challenge every girl to be herself, to achieve her potential and to approach life with real enjoyment and enthusiasm.”

NHSG’s Junior School, which accepts pupils from age 3 – 11, also enjoyed an excellent GSG review summarising it as having ‘Great facilities in a lovely leafy environment, impressive co-curricular options that keep everyone busy and challenged, all wrapped up in a rock solid ethos about enabling





“

*...A broad modern curriculum and every kind of opportunity and challenge...*

*Senior School*



girls to become confident young women in a modern world. Strong curriculum and highly qualified specialist staff ensure exceptional preparation for senior school.

Known for being fearfully frank, the GSG reviews of NHSG were written following a rigorous process and visit made by one of the GSG's expert consultants which included an extensive tour of the school during the working day. In addition, Michael Tippet and Amanda Hardie (Head of NHSG Junior School) were interviewed as well as other staff, pupils and parents, in order for the GSG to create a well-informed, impartial and candid evaluation of the School.

The resulting reviews of NHSG are testament to the leadership of Mr Tippet, who was appointed as Head in 2018, and Amanda Hardie who took up the role of Head of Junior School in 2020. Since then, NHSG has seen a significant uplift in its examination results, winning it the coveted Sunday Times NE Independent Secondary School 2020 award.

Alongside excellent teaching and learning, NHSG takes pastoral care, personal development and its co-curricular programme equally seriously. It benefits too from being one of the 25 schools of the Girls' Day School Trust with its exceptional 'Girls First' ethos.

The importance of equipping girls with the broader life skills and values that combine to make happy, healthy and fulfilling lives is a binding principle that runs throughout the School and the GDST and impacts long into later life.

NHSG alumna, television GP Dr Ellie Cannon, who has been named GDST Alumna of the Year said of her time at NHSG: "At school it was never just about the grades. It was a profound learning experience and one that I cherish to this day."

Access NHSG's full Good Schools Guide reviews:

*Scan for the NHSG Senior School review*



*Scan for the NHSG Junior School review*



**For further information about NHSG, contact the Admissions Team directly:**  
**E: [admissions@ncl.gdst.net](mailto:admissions@ncl.gdst.net)**  
**T: 0191 201 6511**





“

*...remember that no  
one person has all  
the good ideas...*



# From the Headteacher's study...

## Brendan Tapping

CEO of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

I wanted employment that I would enjoy going to each day, that made me want to get out of bed on a morning. I wanted a varied working day. Working in schools with children, staff, parents and the wider community, I have really enjoyed being part of education as a teacher, middle leader and senior leader. Growing up, I would not have imagined I'd be a CEO of a multi-academy trust (MAT). I enjoyed being in the classroom, but I knew that if I really wanted to influence the processes, it would be in a leadership role.

### Tell us about your current role and what do you most enjoy?

I am the CEO of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, one of four Catholic multi-academy trusts in the Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. We have 30 schools in the Trust – 25 primaries and five secondaries. Our mission is to help develop better schools, better communities and better futures in Christ. We want every child to be the best version of themselves. In terms of my role, I work with headteachers and our department heads to achieve our mission through co-creation, collaboration and cohesion. If we become too uniform, we stifle creativity.

### What is your proudest business achievement?

Leading the Trust through exceptional rapid growth. We have managed to grow rapidly despite the disruption of Covid. We had to come together even more as a family during Covid and we did a lot of that via a screen not face-to-face. We had to make sure that our children got the best education they could despite the pandemic and are still working hard to fill in any knowledge gaps.

### How has your industry evolved in the last decade and what changes do you see in the next decade?

The landscape in education is changing constantly, and what has changed significantly recently is the way education is structured. Ten years ago, there were community schools and voluntary-aided (VA) schools. Now we have community schools, VA schools, stand-alone academies and MATs. There has been a lot of change around curriculum expectations, for example, EBacc [English language and literature, maths, sciences, geography or history, a language] and changes to the Ofsted Framework. We have had numerous changes in government and a lot of different secretaries of state for education in the last ten years. Each has their own areas of priority. It's up to MAT leaders in education to respond effectively to those changes, while focusing on providing the best education we can to ensure pupils grow up to be well-rounded adults and contribute positively to society.

### What are you currently working on?

We are working on closing Covid gaps of knowledge in our children. We are also focusing on agile strategic planning and developing our organisational culture as a relatively new and rapidly growing organisation.

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

Fantastic people. Despite daily challenges, I thoroughly enjoy coming to work. I work with a group of highly skilled people that are very patient and focused on giving children the very best chances that they can. I am humbled by the level of commitment and hard work I see every day.



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

Concentrate on a very small number of priorities at a time. There's real challenge in that. The other thing is remember that no one person has all the good ideas.

### Where do you see yourself in 10 years' time?

I will be nearly 70 in ten years' time so hopefully, I'll be outdoors walking my dog, an 18-month-old yellow Labrador called Merlin, and spending more time with my wife Sarah. We love to walk along the North York Moors.

### Who would be your four ideal dinner guests, alive or dead?

Socrates, Sir Alex Ferguson, Emmeline Pankhurst and Inger Andersen (executive director of UN Environment Programme).

### How do you unwind outside of work?

Having a workload charter for the Trust, looking at workload and wellbeing, is vital. We have 110 mental health first aiders across the Trust, including me. I think it is very important that I walk the walk and talk the talk.

In terms of relaxing, I enjoy spending time with Sarah, walking, and I'm a season ticket holder for Sunderland. I enjoy cooking - my wife says I make a mean omelette! I like to cook and would have a go at anything if there's a recipe and fresh ingredients. My philosophy is 'It's only a meal'.

### Favourite book and boxset?

My favourite book is *The Fields of Death* by Simon Scarrow, but any decent historical fiction. My favourite boxset is *The Sopranos*.

[bccet.org.uk](http://bccet.org.uk)





# Wellbeing, the empathetic pillar of successful education

By Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster at Newcastle Royal Grammar School

Much has been written recently about the impact that Covid-19 and the consequent lockdowns has had on wellbeing and, as a community, the RGS has had our fair share of challenges. Indeed, our students have faced similar pressures and anxieties to so many young people across the country.

**The pastoral work to support students is time consuming, emotionally challenging and does not receive the public accolades of exam results or co-curricular achievements. It is often taken for granted as something any school should do but it involves huge amounts of selfless effort behind the scenes by many dedicated people who are so often genuinely unsung heroes.**

Earlier this year, we were therefore very proud to have secured the Wellbeing Award for Schools, established by the National Children's Bureau. As it happens, this award is actually something we had been working towards since before Covid-19 struck as we knew that we wanted to learn from best practice about looking after the wellbeing not only of pupils but also of staff and parents and even the wider community. We already had a strong wellbeing culture at RGS and we wanted to be able to celebrate that, whilst also identifying what more we could do to keep it evolving positively. It has been hugely

reassuring to receive external validation of all the good things that we are doing and winning such a coveted accreditation for this aspect of RGS is a wonderful endorsement of the exceptional work of so many.

At the RGS we believe that wellbeing is of central importance to both learning and attainment, and we have a whole school approach where emotional wellbeing and mental health is everyone's business. The Award recognises the amazing array of our existing activities that are aimed at placing emotional wellbeing and positive mental health at the very heart of our school culture.

Each year we take in a whole new cohort of pupils from a wide range of backgrounds and prior experiences, introducing and promoting our positive culture through our carefully crafted transition programmes. Maintaining our standards of behaviour requires conscious and persistent reinforcement from trained staff, consistent leadership example of senior pupils

and the constant adherence to expectations of all. It is built upon hundreds of tiny acts that happen every day in school and which help to create the wellbeing culture that is ever evolving within our community – we are proud of the fact that so many people prioritise their own and others' wellbeing as a matter of course and this is a key component of enabling our students and staff to thrive and to be the best version of themselves.

This has not happened by chance, however. A lot of conscious thought has gone in behind the scenes in developing our wellbeing strategy. Wellbeing is now an integral part of our development plans in school and is embedded in all aspects of school life, from coordination of assembly messages through departmental meetings, structural improvements in school and even little things like our dining hall layout.

So, what's next? We are certainly not complacent and are only too aware that there will always be things we can continue to improve. We have therefore put together a dynamic wellbeing plan that encompasses students, staff, parents and the wider community which you can see on the newly designed wellbeing page on our school website.

Indeed, we are ambitious and open to new ideas which is evident in our future plans. In order to mark the award, we asked the whole school to make two wellbeing pledges: one to themselves and one to the rest of the community, because each individual has a responsibility both to look after their own wellbeing and to support the wellbeing of those around them. Perhaps readers of this blog might consider making their own pledges.

[www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk](http://www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk)





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## The right to be...

When Durham High School was founded in the City of Durham in 1884, one of its objectives was to provide an education for the future wives of the Church of England clergy in the North East of England. Fast forward to 2023 and the school, although wedded to its Anglican foundation and ethos, has, unsurprisingly, ceased to have this aim as one of its fundamental educational objectives.

**Although we would be delighted if any of our students decided to marry into the clergy, we would be equally thrilled if an ex-girl decided to become an Anglican priest herself, or even a Bishop, considering that Durham has one of the finest theological colleges in the UK in Cranmer Hall.**

However, in my recent chats with my Year 6, it doesn't look like we have any budding vicars in this year group. Top of the list is veterinary surgeon, and other prospective professions include GP, dentist, engineer, Formula One driver and professional netballer. Good luck to all- many of them will probably hold down a number of 'portfolio' jobs in their working lives, with jobs that probably have not been invented yet.

The sheer vivacity and optimism of the glorious Year 6 girls, so full of prospects and with no concept of a glass ceiling, made my heart sing with joy and I truly hope that their pathway in life will not be stifled or curtailed because of their gender. However, for this to be true,



Simone Niblock

it is, unfortunately, the case that, in the third decade of the 21st century, we still have some way to go. This was brought into focus during our Independent Schools' Inspection last term- Excellent (the highest accolade) in all categories, by the way- where we were requested to show our resources on the issue of misogyny and how it fits into our PSHCCE programme. Moreover, senior schools throughout the country have been asked to provide teaching resources in PSHCCE to broach the subject of Andrew Tate and his multitude of social media broadcasts. I am sure that I don't need to go into detail here about some of his more despicable outpourings; needless to say, they are very disturbing and upsetting topics to be discussing with teenage girls. However, it is essential that they are made aware of the misogyny that underpins them, lest these views become normalised in any way.

Interestingly on the topic of misogyny, I found myself agreeing with Madonna's calling out of the patriarchy when discussing the media backlash against her suspiciously smooth face and bloated lips at the Grammys. Like many people, I was shocked to see that she now has fewer lines than when she first burst on

the scenes forty years ago, self-consciously controversial, and gloriously 'thrift-shop' chic. However, after reading her perspicacious Tweets in response to the faux outrage, I felt ashamed that I had become part of that 'Group Think' and I acknowledged that I had unconsciously internalised the misogyny that she was railing against. It is a truth, albeit not universally acknowledged, that when a famous woman changes her appearance drastically, her looks are microscopically examined, and vilification often ensues. On the other hand, male celebrities such as Tom Cruise- who unless he really does have a portrait in the attic has most definitely had a huge amount of cosmetic surgery over the years- are praised for 'keeping their youthful looks'. I still prefer Madonna in her 'Papa Don't Preach' glory days, but I aver that she should have the right to look how she wants, and who I am to judge?

**Every day is an Open Day at Durham High School. Call 0191 384 3226 or email [enquiries@dhsfg.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@dhsfg.org.uk) to find out more or arrange a visit.**



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# My apprenticeship journey at NCFE

To mark National Careers Week, John Joe Tams, Accreditation Apprentice at the North East based educational charity NCFE, reflects on his experiences as an apprentice at one of the UK's leading organisations in technical and vocational learning.

**I'm incredibly proud to be an apprentice. It's a pathway that's too often looked down upon as a second class option, but it's provided me with so many opportunities that I simply wouldn't have had at university.**

My apprenticeship at NCFE has opened the door to so many opportunities, pushed me out of my comfort zone, and helped me develop within the working environment, but it wasn't a straight forward journey to this point.

I stayed on at school to complete Sixth Form and left with predicted grades as we went into the first lockdown. I knew I wanted to work and earn my own money, but also wanted to continue with my education, which is why I decided an apprenticeship was the best route.

When it comes to careers advice, in schools there's definitely a bias towards universities. For me, apprenticeships were only talked about at a very high level, as I think the teachers themselves aren't familiar about what one actually involves.

It was extremely hard to find an apprenticeship as businesses were furloughing workers or letting people go as a result of cost savings. I was successful at some interviews, but not offered a job, as organisations realised that they couldn't employ any more staff. Fortunately, I found NCFE.

## National Apprenticeship Week

February marked National Apprenticeship Week – a celebration of this training pathway and those who make it a fantastic option for people of all ages. For me, it was incredibly busy and filled with opportunities and new experiences – exactly what a good apprenticeship should deliver.

On the Wednesday, I attended an event hosted by the Association of Apprentices at Guildhall in London. It was my first time travelling long distance for work and a really exciting experience – as well as being great for my personal development.

Accompanied by Philip Le Feuvre, NCFE's Chief Strategy Officer, we spent the day networking and speaking to a host of other apprentices and executives. It was a fantastic chance to compare experiences and discover how people from different parts of the country work.

It was also a great opportunity to spend time with a member of NCFE's executive team and share what we were both working on, as well as how I'm finding certain aspects of my apprenticeship.

## Interviewing an MP

On Thursday, I co-hosted an FE News live show that saw apprentices taking the lead – both in front of and behind the camera. The focus was all about looking forwards and how we

can improve things for both employers and the apprentices of the future.

As part of the show, I interviewed Toby Perkins MP, Labour's Shadow Minister for Skills and Further Education. We discussed a range of themes, including changing perceptions of apprenticeships, the cost of living crisis, and how we can improve careers advice in schools.

During the show I interviewed two current apprentices – Sofia Bunce, Marketing Apprentice and Digital Content Executive at Home Group, and Umayr Tanveer, multi-award winning software engineer at BT - about their experiences and advice for anyone considering an apprenticeship.

I also spoke to David Hughes, CEO at the Association of Colleges, and Sue Pittock, CEO of Remit Training, about what they'd like to see in the future. The opportunity was amazing. It's great to expand my profile as an apprenticeships advocate, as well as gain a lot of confidence in the process.

## CEO shadowing

The week ended with a recorded conversation with NCFE's Chief Executive, David Gallagher, as we caught up with each other one year after we completed work shadowing and reverse mentoring. It was a fantastic chance to discuss how the opportunity benefitted us both.

This conversation last year really raised my personal profile and put me on the path to where I am today. That's what a good apprenticeship must do – provide the tools and experience to help people grow in their careers.

I'm lucky that I found NCFE, but so many others aren't as fortunate or don't even realise apprenticeships are an option in the first place. Even if they do find something they love, there's now the risk of them having to drop out because of financial pressures.

Hopefully my experiences show that apprenticeships are a fantastic pathway. Although mine is nearly at an end, I'll always be a passionate advocate for them and all they can provide.

**Discover more about careers at NCFE by visiting [www.ncfe.org.uk/careers](http://www.ncfe.org.uk/careers)**





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“

*...My  
apprenticeship  
at NCFE has  
opened the door  
to so many  
opportunities...*

John Joe Tams



# Newcastle School for Boys pupils support the local community through their dedication to service

Pupils at Newcastle School for Boys have committed themselves to supporting their local community on a weekly basis through the School's Voluntary Service Club.

**The club, which was introduced this academic year and currently runs at the junior end of the school, has seen great popularity amongst the pupils aged between seven and 11. The club was launched initially with the boys collaborating to think of different ways they could serve their community and then agree upon which acts of service they would initiate first.**

The pupils from the Gosforth-based, boys-only, independent school have carried out activities both in their immediate area as well as impacting on wider areas of the region. A particularly popular activity has been litter-picking, with many of the boys purchasing their own little picker, to make collections both in the streets local to the School, Gosforth Park, and they also lead their fellow pupils in Years 3 to 6 on a mass beach-clean on Tynemouth Longsands and Tynemouth Park. With just their first litter pick in Gosforth Park alone, the boys collected over 4kgs of rubbish.

It's not just environmental issues the pupils wish to tackle, they have also aimed to spread happiness throughout the community with the messages of hope and positivity. The boys painted small rocks with kind thoughts and quotes before distributing them around the local area for others to find in the hope that they would spark joy in their day. Most recently, the boys took to baking biscuits which were delivered to the nurses on the Paediatric Intensive Care Unit at the Great North Childrens' Hospital to help them through a long night shift and to show their appreciation for the vital work they do.

The litter pick wasn't the only time the club members brought their work to the wider pupil-body at the School, they also led on a donation drive for Feeding Families' food bank as part of their Harvest Festival celebrations. Members of the Voluntary Service Club were then invited to the Feeding Families packing centre in Blaydon to help with the construction of food boxes and to learn more about the work delivered by the charity.

Junior School Assistant Head (Character Development) James Clark said of the club 'We're incredibly proud of how keen the pupils have been to become involved in Voluntary Service club and of how successful it has been.







At Newcastle School for Boys we place a great emphasis on character development within our pupils and the roles they play within the wider community. This is largely underpinned by our Character Compass which focusses on developing community, integrity, resilience, courage, leadership and empathy in our boys. Arguably, the club allows for the opportunity to develop all of these character traits but particularly their community spirit and understanding of what it means to be a positive member of that community.'

The club look forward to more fantastic opportunities over the remainder of this academic year including further charity drives and developing an ongoing relationship with local care homes providing both physical support and friendship to residents.

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







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## Joe McElderry returns to Newcastle Theatre Royal panto

North East singer-songwriter Joe McElderry is set to make a triumphant return to Newcastle Theatre Royal this year as Jiminy Cricket in a brand-new pantomime, *Pinocchio* (Tue 28 Nov '23 – Sun 14 Jan '24), following a magical season as *The Fairy Godfather* in *Cinderella*.

Having proved a firm favourite with audiences since joining the cast in 2021 for *Snow White* and the Seven Dwarfs, Newcastle's own Joe will team up with the previously announced comedy superstar Danny Adams as Pinocchio, returning favourites Clive Webb as toymaker Geppetto and Chris Hayward, turning once again to the side of good, as Dame Rita.

Since winning *The X Factor* in 2009, Joe McElderry has solidified his reputation as one of the country's finest singer-songwriters, which has seen him enjoy an extensive and successful career spanning music, television and musical theatre.

*Pinocchio*, a brand-new pantomime, created especially for Newcastle Theatre Royal will be produced by Michael Harrison for the world's biggest pantomime producer, Crossroads Pantomimes.

On the latest casting, Michael Harrison said: "I know how much audiences have enjoyed Joe's brilliant vocals and the hilarious comedy moments between him and Danny, so I'm absolutely delighted that he'll once again be joining Danny, Clive and Chris this Christmas in our new production of *Pinocchio*."



## Tell them Saul sent you

Emmy-winning writer and Golden Globe-nominated actor, comedian, and director Bob Odenkirk will take the stage at Newcastle's Tyne Theatre and Opera House as he recounts the twists and turns of his comedy career live on stage.

Celebrating the paperback publication of his Sunday Times bestselling book *Comedy, Comedy, Drama*, Bob will share the highs and lows of showbiz: from his work on infamous cult comedy *Mr. Show*, as a performer and writer on legendary series such as *The Larry Sanders Show* and *Saturday Night Live*, to becoming everyone's favourite lawyer Saul Goodman in global hit TV series' *Breaking Bad* and *Better Call Saul*; plus what it's like to work with Steven Spielberg and Greta Gerwig, and re-reinvent himself as an action film ass-kicker at fifty in *Nobody*.

Bob Odenkirk's career is inexplicable. And yet he will try like hell to explicate it for you...

Featuring humorous tangents, wild characters, and Bob's trademark unflinching drive and humour, don't miss the opportunity to spend an entertaining evening with the beloved star and comic maverick.

Theatre Director Jo Johnson commented: "We are delighted that Bob will join our programme of in-conversation events in 2023, which gets bigger year-by-year! It will be a great chance for audiences to learn more about Bob's life within such a unique industry and get a special insight into some of his most loved roles."

## Lesley Garrett raises money for Washington Mind

World famous soprano Lesley Garrett CBE, who is currently playing Mrs Pearce in the UK tour of Lerner and Loewe's *My Fair Lady*, recently treated matinee theatre-goers at Sunderland Empire to a free intimate performance raising money for the theatre's nominated local charity Washington Mind.

Thanks to Lesley's performance and to the generosity of patrons, the theatre raised upwards of £300 which will help to fund the charities' ever vital services and groups and promote and improve the mental health and wellbeing of the people of Wearside and beyond.



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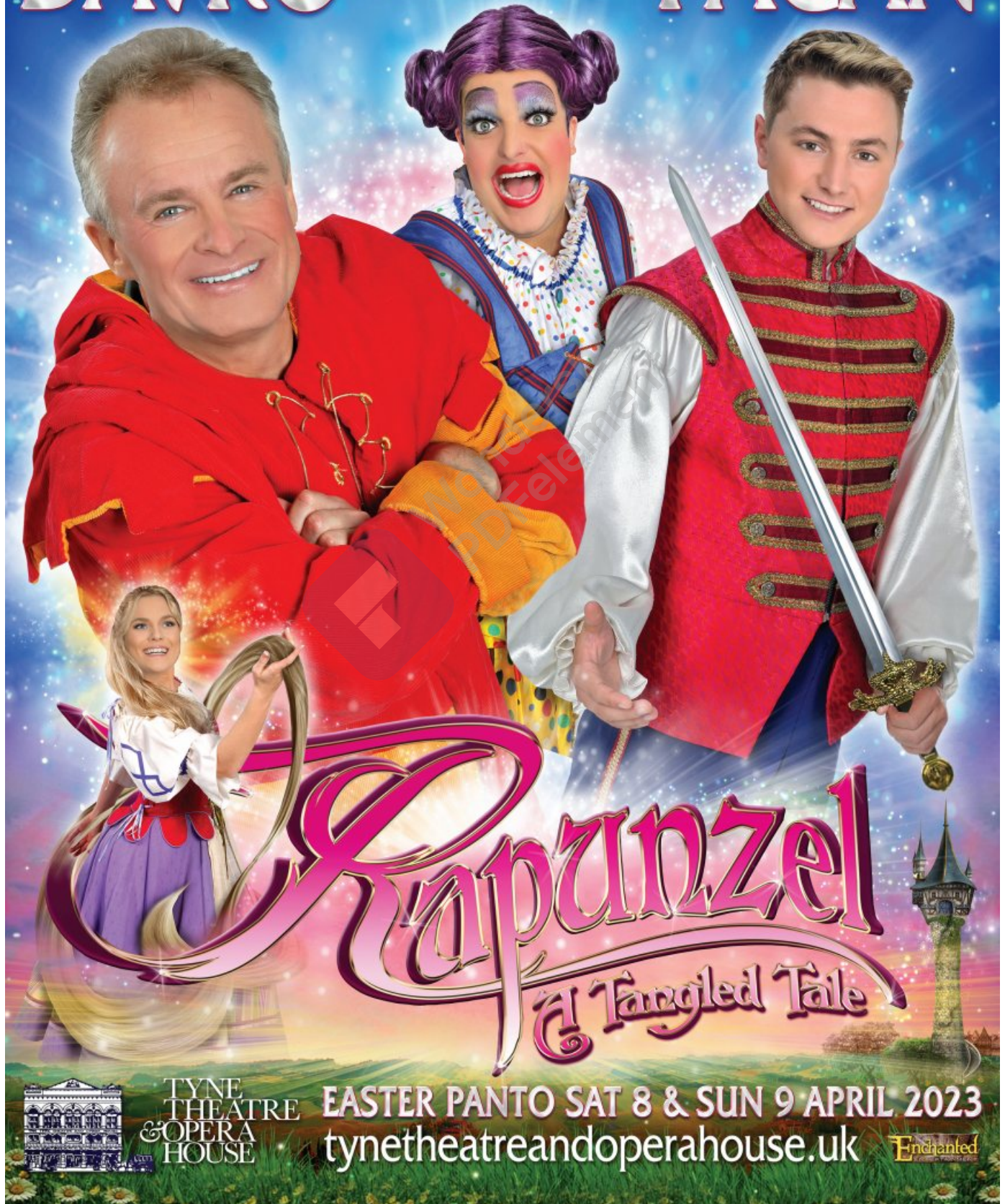
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# Culture Club

## Laura Gillespie

Laura runs a successful recruitment agency in Sunderland. She works with a wide and diverse range of businesses across the healthcare, marketing, IT, commercial and manufacturing sectors filling permanent positions for her clients both in the North East and Nationwide.



Laura Gillespie

### Who is your favourite author and why?

My favourite is a lady called Victoria Hislop, in particular a book called *The Island*; a historical novel based on a true story about Spinalonga where the Greek authorities created a leper colony. A fascinating book, and one I read every summer. I also like Jeffrey Archer. You never quite know what you're going to get with him and he's very articulate and I can easily get lost in his books.

### What would be your three Desert Island Discs?

If I can dream by Elvis Presley, The Osmond's, were my group when I was a kid (in particular Donny Osmond) so Crazy Horses, and finally Meatloaf's *Bat out of Hell*.

### Who is your favourite film star and why?

I love Tom Hanks as every character he plays is fantastic. I've just seen him recently as Colonel Parker in *Elvis* and he made me hate Colonel Parker, he was so believable. Maggie Smith is amazing in *Downton Abbey*. She plays such a good part, I love her sarcasm and wit. She is a great example of how you can still get work in such a tough industry in your later years.

### What are your top three films?

*Grease*, I know every word and every song. Another musical, a bit older but still a classic,

*Carousel* and finally *Doctor Zhivago*. This is a very different movie; my husband hates it and when it's on at Christmas I make him watch it with me.

### Which poem left a lasting impression on you?

I love *Daffodils* as a flower and remember the poem by Wordsworth being taught at school by a particularly eccentric English teacher.

### What box sets have you enjoyed?

I absolutely love *Sons of Anarchy* with Charlie Hunnam the Newcastle lad playing an absolutely fantastic lead. I've seen that series seven times. My husband is a biker and he said that the first episode is like *EastEnders* on bikes. My next favourite is *Pride and Prejudice* with Colin Firth and Alison Steadman. I do wish I'd had the DVD when I was studying the book at school. I also enjoyed *Peaky Blinders*, *Game of Thrones* and *Die Hard*.

### Who is your favourite artist or performer?

I will always stay true to Donny Osmond, and from a musical point of view Elvis Presley as there is no one like him and never will be.

### What is your favourite venue?

Definitely Newcastle City Hall. I've seen everyone from Meatloaf to The Osmond's and The Everly Brothers to Dire Straits. I love music so if there's an opportunity to go to the City Hall, I'll take it.

### Which musical instrument do you particularly enjoy?

I like to listen to the piano, but my husband plays guitar and banjo, which I enjoy. He once bought me a flute but it's still in the box. I prefer to listen rather than play.

### From the world of Arts and Culture who would be your ideal dinner party guests?

I would invite Donny Osmond, David Jason, Maggie Smith, Elvis Presley, and Tom Hanks too.

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# MORTAL FOOLS

“

*...If only more  
organisations  
invested in  
young people  
in the region...*



# The potential of a good collaboration

Like many folks, theatre, drama and creative learning company Mortal Fools are getting out and about – networking and making connections.

**We attended the recent Womble Bond Dickinson's North East digital sector event hosted in partnership with UKTN and Invest Newcastle. Now you may wonder, why was a theatre company attending a business tech event!? Well, the answer, was summed up beautifully by Dawn Dunn, at Invest Newcastle during the first panel, as she urged businesses to "look outside your boundaries" and championed collaboration over competition. And that's very Mortal Fools.**

Since our award winning partnership with Vida Creative in which we created Melva, our fun and accessible creative digital intervention, supporting children's mental health, emotional development and wellbeing, we learnt the powerful potential of a good collaboration. Together we created a digital product that is disrupting wellbeing education and being used by 25 primary schools (with more to come!). This partnership of two very different organisations, was underpinned by the core purpose of improving the lives of children in response to the mental health crisis accelerated by the pandemic.

The success of that partnership encouraged us to be bolder seek collaborative opportunities in sectors and spaces in which you may not expect to find a theatre company. Consequently, we are open to connecting with any business that is as passionate about North East young people as we are and this openness has indeed led to opportunities outside of our "boundaries", each crucial to our success and growth as a company over the last few years.

At Mortal Fools we specialise in co-creating dynamic, socially relevant, high-quality performance-based creative projects with children and young people. The world is an increasingly scary place, and our work enables young people to feel empowered in their decisions, be brave, explore their skills and preferences in safe spaces, experiment and learn to fail (a key component of creativity and resilience). As a theatre company, we mostly use drama and theatre-based approaches – inter-personal and underpinned by social sciences by nature to enable an improved understanding of relationships and effective communication, changes in outlook, confidence and accomplishment, increased leadership, and employability skills, enhanced personal resilience and capabilities and young people actively scaffolding towards a healthy and fruitful future. To put it boldly, our work can be transformational.

With this knowledge and our engagement with young people, as we sat listening to the digital sector event panels discuss the "war on talent" and the regional skills gaps, all we could think about was collaboration – if only more businesses connected with organisations, like us, working with young people in the region, actively cultivating the future workforce. If only more organisations invested in young people in the region. We can help businesses do that; by connecting with and investing in our work, organisations are contributing to the development of homegrown talent. The skills gap problem requires a cross sector collaborative solution.



In this spirit of openness, we'd like to extend an invitation to leaders, and organisations, to join us to work collaboratively with courage and care, to make the region a better place to grow up with clearer career pathways of opportunity. Investing in Mortal Fools is an investment in the beginning of that work and enhanced employability beyond the education system alongside a meaningful, impactful and tangible way to demonstrate ESG/ CSR work to local communities.

So why not join the likes of Muckle LLP, Ryder Architecture, Kavlifondet, CyberNorth and Crystallised and connect with us - together, we can achieve more through cross sector collaboration.

**Find out more about Mortal Fools via:**  
**[www.mortalfools.org.uk](http://www.mortalfools.org.uk) and/or email**  
**[Rachel.Horton@mortalfools.org.uk](mailto:Rachel.Horton@mortalfools.org.uk)**





## £2 maximum fare on buses until the end of March 2023

This column usually concentrates on rail services, since it is sponsored by [nationalrail.com](http://nationalrail.com), a rail retailer. But occasionally something happens so big, and so unknown to many members of the public, that it is worth shouting from the rooftops!

**Bus fares have been slashed throughout England and the maximum single fare has reduced to only £2, every day of the week, any time of the day, for any age of person who would normally pay adult fare. It's part of the government's help with the cost of living. It has been in place since the start of January with all major operators taking part and many of the small independents too.**

It was launched with a fanfare at New Year, and regular bus users are using it every day to go to work, shops, and on days out. Those people who have opined for years that if bus fares were cheaper, more people would use the bus, have been proved sadly wrong. Anecdotally (and the figures will no doubt follow) there has been no appreciable increase in ridership through this promotion. It goes on for three whole months, and provides some substantial savings on journeys more than a couple of miles.

Long routes such as Go North East's X10 between Newcastle and Middlesbrough have seen fares cut to £2 when the single fare by train is £12.30 off-peak, more at peak times. Other long-distance routes participating include the now all-Stagecoach Newcastle to Carlisle service 685, which route takes you through Hexham from where there is a network of £2 a shot routes to places like Bellingham and Allenheads via Allendale Town. I was up there late last year and was the only one on the bus thinking "why aren't there more people wanting to experience this wonderful ride?"

How often do you jump in the car to give someone a lift somewhere and return home having used up your time when the other person could just have gone on the bus? I am taking my wife's car in for service tomorrow, and I will drop it off in Sunderland, and get bus 8 back home, returning later by bus to collect it and drive home. I don't really need a courtesy car. If you get engrossed in a book, or texting a friend, or researching the internet using the free wi-fi, it's amazing how quick the journey can go. Sure, it's often slower than taking the car, but you can use the time constructively, there's no hunting for car parking spaces, and you don't need to get back on the bus where you left it, whereas you have to return to a parked car.

So don't be one of those "I've never been on a bus for years" people, as if it was something to be proud of. Reduce your carbon emissions, even occasionally, and give the humble bus a try. If you want advice on what runs round your way, just drop me an email. One really stark fact that comes out of the £2 promotion is what good value the regional day tickets can be. If I go to Durham from home, I need to change in Chester-le-Street or Craghead so it's £4 there and £4 back until the end of March, total £8. But there's a County Durham zonal ticket for £6.40 for all Go North East services in the County, yes, as far as West Auckland which I use when visiting the station in Bishop Auckland. And for the whole region from Whitby up to Berwick and Carlisle, investigate the Explorer ticket, currently £10.90, including all the buses pictured, plus Tyne and Wear Metro, rail services Blaydon to Sunderland, and even the Shields Ferry. That's the Daddy! It makes £2 a trip positively expensive.

[Alex@nationalrail.com](mailto:Alex@nationalrail.com)

For a copy of the UK rail map, extract below, visit [www.railmap.org.uk](http://www.railmap.org.uk)

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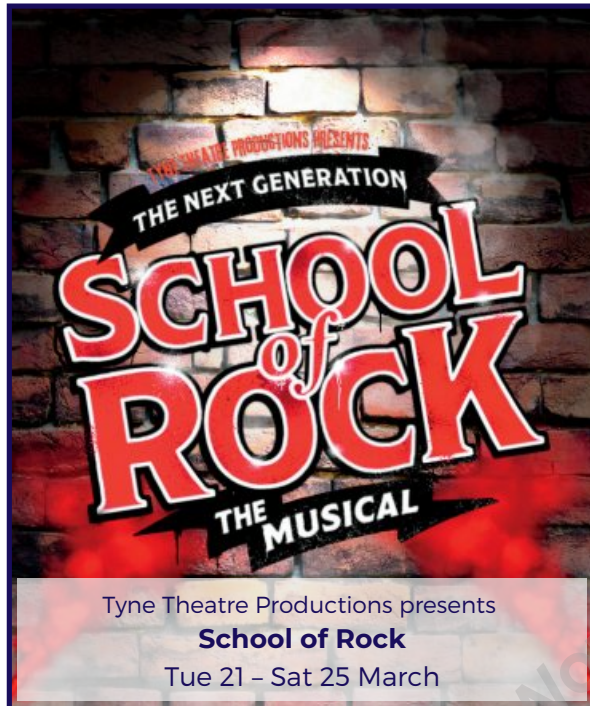
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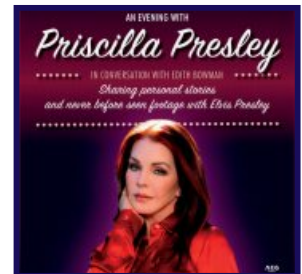
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# Barbados - on a budget?

By Caroline Preston

Two words, Barbados and Budget. Definitely not words you'd expect to find together, not here at least. After all, this Caribbean island paradise plays home, at least some of the time, to influential and affluent individuals from across the globe.



Its super-rich fans include Simon Cowell, Mariah Carey, Prince Harry and Gwyneth Paltrow, regular holidaymakers here. Others, like Wayne and Colleen Rooney, own luxury homes. But Barbados isn't just for the super-rich, budget-friendly holidays are possible.

Located in the Lesser Antilles of the West Indies, Barbados is the most easterly of the Caribbean Islands. A British Colony for 300 years, the British influence here is strong. Barbados gained independence in 1966, but Queen Elizabeth II remained as Queen of Barbados until 2021.

Prior to its days under British rule, Barbados was also claimed by Europeans, notably the Spanish and Portuguese. These influences mixed with the island's African and Indigenous roots mean one big thing – flavour.

While British food influence still features heavily on menus, the stand-out cuisine here is Bajan or Creole – a mixture of African, Portuguese, Indian, Irish, Creole, Indigenous and British cuisine, it's also big on seafood. Local flying fish, swordfish, kingfish, yellow-fin tuna, red snapper, shark and more can be sampled at the lively Friday night fish-fry at Ostin's Fish Market. Fresh off the grill, it's the best.







The recommended areas to stay in Barbados are along the south and west coasts. The north and east of the island are excluded for now, beautiful but more rugged, rustic and less popular than their rivals.

Big choices in accommodation are available in both areas, many not costing a fortune. The famed Sandy Lane resort, however, may be an exception. This west coast celebrity bolthole is £900 minimum per night and is a favourite hideout for the X-factor boss Mr Cowell, but Simon in shorts? It's a no from me.

The south coast is the lively one, home to St Lawrence's Gap and the fabulous white sands of Dover Beach. This place offers plenty of nightlife and some budget eats. TripAdvisor lists its best-rated budget hotel in this area as Time Out at the Gap, just steps from the beach and from £79 per night, it's well priced.

The south coast is also home to many often championship golf courses. A day's golfing can cost as little as £70 per person including cart hire.

The west coast is a bit more chilled and spread out but offers affordable digs all the same. Days here can be spent on beaches, bathing in turquoise waters or head over to Holetown. This small city is steps away from the free-to-enter Folkestone Marine Park, great for picnics or snorkelling the reef.

For reasonably priced rooms try the All-Seasons Resort at Sunset Crest, St James. They offer comfort and a great pool area from just £96 per night, room only. For great value daytime eats check out Papa Earls street food van, around lunchtime he's often found opposite the Sandpiper Hotel, offering local food and generous portions for less.

It's in the evening when Holetown wakes up, head over to the imaginatively named First and Second Streets where there's an abundance of bars, eats and even nightclubs.

It may surprise you to know that all beaches in Barbados are public, which means a slice of Sandy Lane is indeed possible, you just access the beach at one of the public access points and walk along. Sadly you can't use the resorts' sunbeds, so take your towel and go for a dip.

A great budget-boosting day can be spent 'beach-hopping' by local bus. We called them the 'reggae-reggae' busses, brightly coloured, they pump out the Caribbean beats and take you as far as you need for around £1.50 per journey. Get your map out and set your agenda for adventure.

We did this and experienced near-empty beaches. We swam, snorkelled, sunbathed and chatted with locals, drinking from the coconuts they'd just harvested. Although the transportation is not for the faint-hearted, it's a day much more memorable than an overpriced afternoon tea, just don't be shy, you'll need to 'holler' when you want to get off!

The weather here is hot and you'll need refreshments regularly. One alcoholic variety is the local tipple, rum. Barbados is considered its birthplace and the Mount Gay distillery was founded here in 1703. It still operates today and is believed to produce the oldest rum in the world. In abundance and great value for money, rum punch is an island favourite, order it at a bar or rum shack or head to popular Surfside Beach Bar near Sunset Crest. Its happy hour offers a litre of this tasty rocket fuel for just \$20 US, be warned, it's got a kick.

Travelling on a budget can be tricky and requires a bit of prep, a top tip is research before you go. Data is expensive and Wi-Fi not always available so plan your days and nights around your budget and build in a couple of treats. The island paradise of Barbados awaits your arrival.

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

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## Beer and Cider Festival Pumps Up Audience from USA

The 45th Newcastle Beer and Cider Festival takes place from 29th of March till the 1st of April at the Northumbria Students Union Building in Newcastle with beer and cider lovers able to sample some of the UK's finest craft beers and ciders.

Some of the beers have been brewed exclusively for the festival and others will be premiered there before going on general sale. Breweries including Camper Van Brewery from Edinburgh, Top Rope Brewing from Liverpool and Tiny Rebel Brewery from Newport Wales have already pledged to attend. For the first time this year, there will also be a spirits bar with rum whisky and gin to ensure that everyone's tastes are met.

There will be bands playing throughout the festival including Blistered Molly, a female fronted classic rock band covering songs by artists such as AC/DC, and Guns and Roses.

St Oswald's Hospice, Women's Detection of Cancer and the Great Air Ambulance have been chosen as the festival's charities. On the Thursday, participants are encouraged to wear a hat, the more unusual the better and if anyone doesn't have one, they can buy one from the St Oswald's stall.

"Every year we get better and better both in terms of the breweries taking part and visitor numbers. Already we know that a real ale lover from Texas has booked his holiday around the festival, and it's amazing that someone has decided to travel across the Atlantic to join us for the festival. I'll be buying him a pint or two to say thank you," said organiser Anthony McMullen.

[www.nclbeerfest.uk](http://www.nclbeerfest.uk)

## The return of Rod!

Rod Stewart will return to Seat Unique Riverside in 2023 for his Global Hits Tour.

One of the best-selling artists of all time, Rod Stewart will return to Seat Unique Riverside in 2023 having announced his Global Hits Tour next summer.

Stewart will light up Chester le Street on Friday 30th June in what is expected to be another blockbuster night of entertainment. Following his celebrated run of dates in the UK in 2022, Sir Rod Stewart continues his reign as one of the world's finest live performers with the announcement of a run of special summer UK shows.

Rod's 2023 shows are set to be filled with show-stopping classics and fan favourites from across his impressive career.

"My favorite memories have been summer nights with a beer or two alongside the best fans in the world," Rod said of the run of dates. "I'm impatiently awaiting this summer playing at a variety of special venues - football, cricket and rugby stadiums, estates and castles! We'll all be dancing under the stars."



## Tynemouth guest house in the running for top tourism award

Tynemouth 61 Guest House and Tea Room is celebrating after being named as a finalist in this year's North East of England Tourism Awards, in the B&B and Guest House of the Year category.

The awards organised by NewcastleGateshead Initiative (NGI) in partnership with Visit England Awards for Excellence, recognise the best of the best in the Region's tourism industry, with more than 160 businesses entering the awards this year.

The 18th century guest house and tea room on Tynemouth's Front Street, right in the heart of the village, was taken over by Stephen Minns and his husband, Neil McWhirter, in September 2017 and the couple have worked to transform it into a boutique-style hotel offering beautiful, high standard, en-suite accommodation with a friendly and welcoming service.

After two-rounds of judging by industry experts, No 61, is one of three finalists shortlisted for the award, and this year they are hoping to take the crown and go on to represent the Region at the Visit England Awards for Excellence which promote the best of the region on a national stage.

No strangers to the spotlight, the guest house and Stephen featured on Channel 4s 'Four in a Bed' in 2018, clinching second spot, and gaining an army of new fans, who have travelled from as far away as Florida after seeing it on the programme.

"We are delighted that No 61 has been shortlisted as one of three finalists, and that we are the only one from Newcastle and Tyneside to make the list," said Stephen.

"We have worked extremely hard to create a luxurious and comfortable experience for our guests, but with the personal touch that our guests love, and that sees them coming back time and time again

"We are really looking forward to the ceremony on 23rd March at Newcastle Civic Centre, and wish all the other great businesses taking part in the awards the best of luck."



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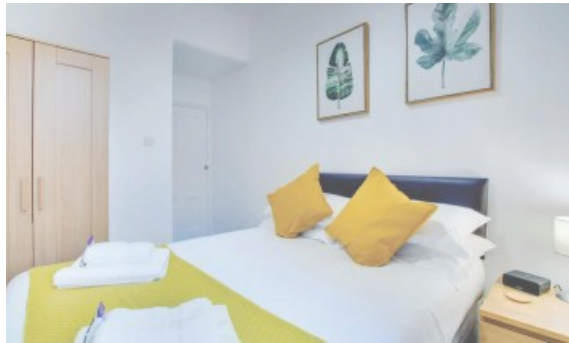


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# maldron

HOTEL  
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# In conversation with...

## Jemma Cross

Director of Sales and Marketing, Maldron Hotel Newcastle

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

From a young age I wanted to do something with science, Briefly a vet, then a dentist...And then I did a degree in Forensic science during which I started bar work to fund it and instantly fell in love with hospitality. Childhood me would never have seen me where I am now! But I can't ever see myself working in another industry. There aren't many places where you get the chance to make someone's day every day.

### Tell us about your current role and what you most enjoy?

I'm currently Director of Sales and Marketing at the Maldron Hotel Newcastle. I've been here since pre-opening in 2018 and I absolutely love it. I'm so passionate about Newcastle as my hometown and couldn't think of anything better than introducing a new 4\* property to it. I think my favourite thing is the variety of the role. I always tell people hotels are so great because no day is ever the same. I can be visiting clients, prospecting new business, attending trade shows, designing marketing campaigns, and even the odd shift as Santa's elf at Christmas. Add that to the fabulous team that we have here on site and it's a thoroughly enjoyable role.

### What is your proudest business achievement?

I would say probably coming out of Covid strongly, we only opened December 2018 as a new brand to the city and in fact the country. We were the first Maldron Hotel in mainland UK, so the first year was a lot of work getting the brand out there, getting people in to visit and building relationships. To have that come to a stop after year one was extremely challenging. But I'm not one to shy from a challenge and kept in touch with most of our bookers over lockdown, looked at new business streams and as a result had a really fantastic corporate year in 2022.

### How has your industry evolved in the last decade and what changes do you see in the next decade?

Hospitality is ever evolving, it's part of the reason I love it. There's a fine balance between the core heart of the industry – delivering personalised service, and keeping up with the expectations of the consumer. The world is getting so much more digital, and you have to find a way to embrace the changes whilst not losing the personal touch. If we look at all the advances in just the check in element of hotels – Self service kiosks, checking in online, key cards on your phone, it's fascinating I can only see that side of it evolving further to be honest. Our hotel is currently trialling the uk's first Bulter Bot, a room service robot. Now in other countries this is standard so I can see them moving into the UK. We are very clear though as both a hotel and a wider company that these technological advances will never replace people. They are simply there to enhance both the staff and guests experience. It's all super convenient doing everything from your phone but I don't think you can beat a little personal interaction.

### What are you currently working on?

We're really focussed this year on growing our food and drink market. Our Grain & Grill restaurant is amazing, loads of space, big screen for sport and the outdoor courtyard (for our very well know Newcastle summers hehe). We've just launched the new menu which is amazing and have some new packages coming out for Baby showers and Birthday parties. We've got some great events coming up for Mother's Day and Easter Sunday too. It's really the side of the business that the local market can really benefit from. The don't necessarily need a hotel room but they can still enjoy some Maldron Hospitality so we're focused on getting that knowledge out there.

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

They are the best in the world, no question! It's the biggest support framework, we are all cheerleaders for each other. Yes, we are separate departments but we operate as one Team. Breakfast is busy? Down come the office team to help. Housekeeping need a hand, Restaurant staff are up there in a flash. Props to our GM Anna who has created this culture from the very beginning. I think the fact that we still have a lot of the original staff here is testament to the working environment.

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

Never give up on a bad day. I think I'll carry that with me forever, personal life as well. I do love what I do, but that's not to say I never have a bad day. Sales can be relentless at times. Even as a positive person it's hard to take rejections, that's a learned skill. Realising that there will always be the odd bad day, that doesn't mean tomorrow will be the same, has served me well over the years. We can all rationalise and plan better with a clearer head.

### Where do you see yourself in 10 years time?

Still thinking I'm 21! Ha ha. In a business sense I think I'd like to be doing something involving coaching or training, whether that be managing a multi-site sales team or having my own business offering sales training to companies. I've been in this industry 20 years, and the knowledge I've picked up is vast. to companies. At the very beginning of my sales career, I attended a training session on recruitment and the trainer said "what's the point in gaining all of this experience, if you don't get to pass it on to people". I'll still be here though, my heart is in the North East so as much as I travel, I'll always come home.

### Who would be your four ideal dinner guests, alive or dead?

I'd have my maternal Grandad, Victor. He died before I was born but hearing my mum talk about him, I think we would have been the best of friends. I'd have the Obamas; I feel like as a pair they'd bring great atmosphere and wouldn't get annoyed with what I'm sure would be incessant questions. And Elton John, mostly because in my mind he's created the ultimate marketing campaign in creating the persona that's made him a global superstar, but also a little bit so we can have a good old sing sound round the piano after dinner.

### How do you unwind outside of work?

Well I have four children so not much unwinding going on at home! We do like to get out exploring as a family. I think a couple of hours at South Shields beach is good for the soul. My husband is from Saltburn so we get the bonus of visiting that amazing beachfront too. For myself I do like to run, although I am a bit of a lapsed runner at the moment. I find it to be excellent headspace. Headphones in, a bit of 80's pop or 90's dance and I'm fully refreshed when I get back.

### Favourite Book and Boxset?

*All my friends are Superheroes* by Andrew Kaufman. My husband bought it for me 16 years ago and I read it at least twice a year every year. It's a gorgeous quirky love story that's not really a love story and is all about knowing your personal superpower. Box set wise, I would have to say *Parks and Recreation*. I can watch it time and time again and still laugh and still cry. I strongly believe if everyone was a bit more Ron Swanson, the world would be a better place!

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



# WL Distillery: Just the spirit this spring!



Scott Wilson-Laing

From picking up international awards to hitting top glossy magazines to being featured at London's world-famous Science Museum, County Durham based WL Distillery are continuing to make a splash on the gin market with their vibrant creations.

**Innovation is at the heart of the distillery and the team behind the award-winning 1st Edition Gin now have an ever-growing popular range of flavours under their portfolio. Wilson's Gin Club 'Watermelon and Liquorice' is a particularly popular edition which hit the market last summer with its infusion of flavours which raised heads in the industry and also arose interest in the USA market.**

The premium pour of 'Watermelon and Liquorice' embodies a refreshing gin, crafted using juniper with the cool refreshing flavours of watermelon and mint balanced with the crisp taste of lime and expertly finished with a twist of liquorice. A delicious blend and a sumptuous flavour of Spring/Summer in a glass and just the tonic for gin enthusiasts.

Scott Wilson-Laing, Founder at WL Distillery said: "We have been on an incredible journey over the last couple of years and receiving leading industry awards in such a short period of time really helped cement the brand as a strong player in the market.

The release of Wilson's Gin Club 'Watermelon and Liquorice' caused quite a stir in the industry with the mix of flavours. It's also been very popular on the event scene with requests for miniatures at events and award ceremonies, and we anticipate further demand for this flavour as we hit the Spring/Summer season."

It's been a busy couple of years for the award-winning distillery, picking up a number of prestigious industry awards including gold at The Gin Masters, making Vogues 'Hot List', GQ's



'Cocktail Club' and listed in the London Spirits Top 100 spirits.

With an explosion of flavours, their inspiration comes from their Northern roots, ensuring a fresh and classic authentic gin experience for customers. Ingredients have always taken centre stage at WL Distillery and each bottle is infused with nature using handpicked and measured botanicals to ensure the freshest, most authentic taste.


The team recently unveiled plans to ramp up expansion with further investment and site acquisition at their County Durham based site. The new plans will assist in expanding their product portfolio and developing their export growth strategy to support further accelerated growth.

**Follow for the latest updates at**  
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# Rockliffe Hall...resplendent luxury and some old-world charm

By Michael Grahamslaw

With the March magazine deadline upon me it was great to escape the pressures of finalising a chunky edition and make a long overdue return to Rockliffe Hall.



**I'd stayed at this wonderful venue on two previous occasions many moons ago and played the championship golf course a number of times in the intervening period but this was my first visit in 'Northern Insight' days.**

Lisa and I set off on a crisp Sunday afternoon, journeyed down the A1, and reached this oasis of luxury in less than an hour.

We were greeted by the warmest of welcomes from receptionist Thea and told that we'd been allocated a room in the Old Hall which has been sympathetically restored. It's a lovely building with original features which provide a happy mix of timeless, classical style with a modern twist. It's absolutely stunning.

As is befitting of a five star hotel, our Old Hall suite (they're all different by the way) was a joy to behold. Huge comfortable bed with Egyptian cotton bedding, massive smart TV, lounge and seating area, great bathroom and mini fridge. The views across the gardens and surrounding woodlands are lovely.

We quickly changed into swimming costumes and bathrobes and made the short walk to the luxury spa.

Due to a frozen shoulder injury which took a long time to heal, this old publisher hadn't done any swimming for two years so it was a joy to get into the huge pool and try the gentlest of breaststrokes. Lisa, a committed non swimmer, made full use of the poolside loungers. She pretended to be reading the newspapers...I suspect she was making sure I didn't sink!

Paddle complete we adjourned to the accompanying sauna and jacuzzi and then made our way for a rather exclusive Spa Garden experience. This is in a separate building adjacent to the main spa and comes complete with another huge communal spa, heated loungers and relaxation area. The jewel in the crown however is the heated outdoor infinity pool with breathtaking views over the golf course and surrounding countryside. Absolute bliss.

Feeling ultra-chilled we returned to base camp and changed to enjoy a pre-dinner 'loosener' in the well-stocked bar before dining in The Orangery which is a truly sumptuous restaurant.

As is befitting of the venue, the food and service was exemplary and the menus, which have been devised by new Head Chef, Paul Nicholson, are varied and hugely imaginative. Their a la carte and tasting menus feature carefully crafted dishes using as much local produce as possible...including from the Rockliffe Hall gardens.

Due to the simple fact that Paul Nicholson constantly changes the menu, largely to reflect the seasons, the dishes we went for may not always be available.

We went for the tasting menu.

For starters I chose the Risotto which came with celeriac, tarragon and Hen of the Woods which is a type of mushroom. Lisa went for the Confit Salmon which contained truffle, leek and whey.

When the waiter puts the plate in front of you, you stare down at a work of art. It's a shame to break into it.

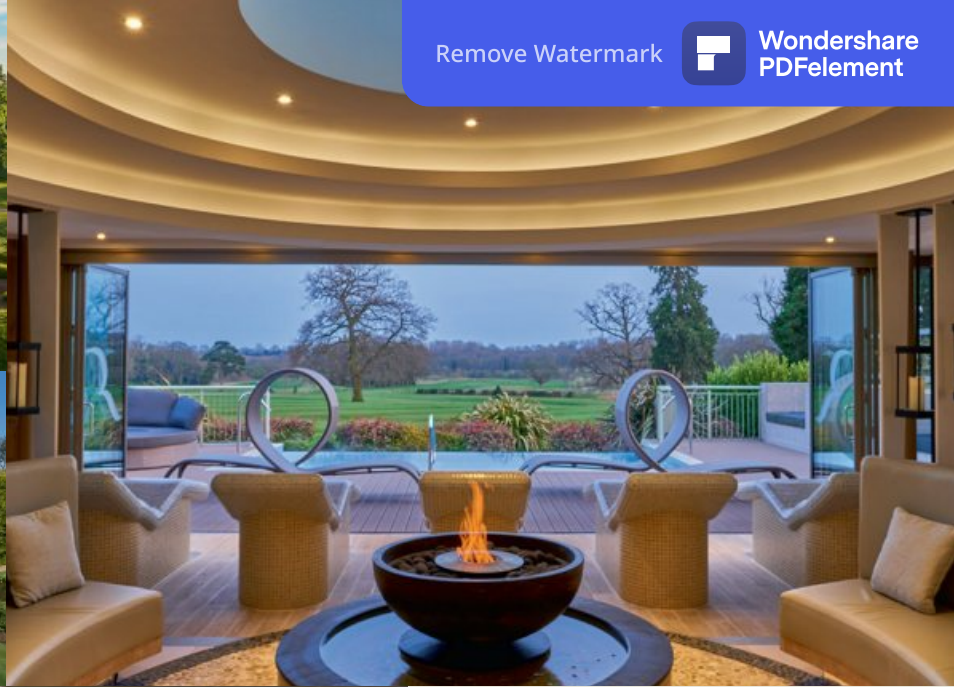
Onto the main course. Have you ever been to a restaurant and spotted someone nearby eating their meal, or seen a waiter walk past with a plate for a fellow diner, and thought...ah ha...that looks really nice? And then you go for it as well.

That's what Lisa and I did. We both went for the Short Rib of Beef. It came with brassicas, malt and smoked bone marrow.

And to finish off, I chose one of my all-time favourites...Granny Smith Apple Pie. Delightful, with a tangy yet smooth yoghurt texture.





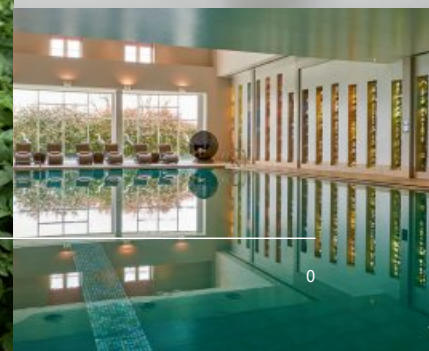


As for Lisa, well anything with chocolate invariably gets the thumbs-up. The 64% Valrhona Manjari contained hazelnut, banana and passion fruit. It hit the spot.

Oh, and the wine menu is vast. They have over 400 available. We took advice on what would go best with the dishes we'd chosen and plumped for the Little Beauty, Black Edition, New Zealand Marlborough. As sauvignon blancs go, it was one of the best we've ever tried...lightly oaked with a seriously tropical zing. Lovely.

After a wonderful night's sleep and a relaxing breakfast of smoked salmon and scrambled eggs for me and full English for Lisa, we made the short trip back up the A1 ready to tackle the deadline ahead in a positive frame of mind and fully relaxed. Couldn't recommend more highly. We'll be back.

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







# New ground for exploring on Walk Inn Breaks from The Inn Collection Group

The Eryri national park, the Lancastrian coast and the fells and trails around Grasmere are amongst the new areas to discover as part of a Walk Inn Break in 2023, as the popular package returns to properties of The Inn Collection Group.

**Offering guests a two-night bed and breakfast stay across ICG's estate of comfortable Inns, with a host of additional extras including dinner on the first evening and complimentary walking packs so guests can lace up their boots and make the most of their stay. Previously endorsed by Julia Bradbury and Cumbria's celebrity Springer Spaniels Max, Paddy and Harry Walk Inn Breaks are ideally suited to enjoying the Great British outdoors.**

The package celebrates the nation's love for walking – and its fondness for the pub – and combines the best of an idyllic inn stay with self-guided walking routes in some of the UK's best-loved walking destinations.

A popular getaway over the last two summers, the addition of The Bull's Head Inn at Beaumaris, the Midland Hotel in Morecambe and the Wordsworth

Hotel in Grasmere means there is new ground to be broken by those stepping out onto the trails this year.

Both coastal and mountain walks are within easy access of The Inn Collection Group's Welsh property, with the dramatic Eryri mountain range, rugged Cambrian coast and Beaumaris Castle world heritage site all easily accessible from The Bull's Head Inn.

From the art deco marvel that is the Midland Hotel walks that take in Morecambe Bay and the Arnside and Silverdale AONB are on offer, while the Wordsworth Hotel offers the chance to follow in the footsteps of the world-famous romantic poet.

With a host of sites also reopening following refurbishment this year including The Swan at

Grasmere, The Waterhead Inn and The Wateredge Inn at Ambleside and The Stables in Whitby, there is a wider choice of locations than ever before.

Running until 31 October 2023, Walk Inn Breaks also include dinner on the first night of the stay and a walking pack of 20 walks accessible from the Inn.

With the reassurance of free cancellations and nothing to pay until you arrive The Inn Collection Group are hopefully of welcoming even more guests to enjoy a Walk Inn Break.

Kate Bentley, rooms director for The Inn Collection Group said: "We're delighted to relaunch Walk Inn Breaks for 2023. It has proved to be an incredibly popular package over the last two years and with new sites and walks to enjoy, we expect that to continue."

"Walk Inn Breaks encourage people of all walking abilities to discover new places and scenery that is literally on the doorstep of our inns and with such a diverse collection of pubs handpicked for their stunning locations there is a break suitable for everyone."

Available exclusively through direct bookings through The Inn Collection Group, Walk Inn Breaks are available from April 1st, 2023, up to and including October 31st, 2023.

**For more information or to start booking your Walk Inn Break visit [www.inncollectiongroup.com/special-offer/walk-inn-breaks](http://www.inncollectiongroup.com/special-offer/walk-inn-breaks)**





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## Seaham Hall - a coastal gem shines brightly

By Michael Grahamslaw

Our visit to Seaham Hall couldn't have come at a better time. I had just concluded the biggest magazine of my career and to say I was exhausted and in need of a break would be an understatement.

**I've been working with Seaham Hall on and off for over 20 years and it was great to return on what was a bitterly cold early December day.**

The hotel and spa complex were acquired by the new owners just over ten years ago and they've brought back to life one of the region's leading hotels. The continuing refurbishment has been a massive success. The whole place is stunning. Grand, elegant and dignified, but with a 21st century vibe.

Every bedroom has been completely refurbished to create 21 totally individually-styled suites. You can choose from junior and executive suites; three garden suites, which include a private, secluded garden area with a modern hot tub or wood-fired hot tub. If you want to seriously go for it, there's a penthouse and, finally, the sumptuous luxury, split-level Ada Lovelace Suite.

After a cheery welcome we were shown to our stunning executive suite, replete with king-size bed and a great view over the surrounding grounds and gardens. There's a handwritten welcome note in your room. There's also a note to tell you that the porter can bring your car around to the front door and help you with any luggage. There's even a note to tell you about the weather for the following day.

Rather than a folder which contains all of the information about the hotel, there's a small tablet computer. You no longer need to leaf through reams of paper, which become increasingly tatty, to find out the Wi-Fi code.

The toiletries are specially produced for Seaham Hall. You get a choice of feather or synthetic bedding - do you want to go with a water pillow, firm cluster pillow, memory foam pillow or a

goose feather pillow? Choices, choices...

Seaham Hall boasts the multi-award-winning Serenity Spa facility. A huge range of Spa Days are available. Naturally, a couple of hours in the spa left us feeling supercharged and ready for the night ahead. The selection of spa treatments is mind boggling; seaweed bath, mud treatment, reflexology, aromatherapy facial, numerous massages, body scrub, seaweed body wrap, manicure, pedicure, etc. Go onto [www.seaham-hall.co.uk/spa-pampering/treatments-therapies](http://www.seaham-hall.co.uk/spa-pampering/treatments-therapies) and you'll find something that will help soothe away any tension. There's even a Zen Garden, with outdoor pool and hydrotherapy jets, and several outdoor hot tubs on a balcony overlooking the grounds.

After a quick change we made our way down to the comfortable bar and whiled away an hour over a gin and tonic for me and a cocktail for Lisa.

We were then shown into The Dining Room, which certainly did not disappoint. There used to be a dark serving area in the corner and various chairs and tables scattered around the high-ceilinged room. Now? Well, it is a magnificent restaurant with sweeping views over the North Sea and features gold plated chandeliers, cosy booths and deep chairs.

Seasonal menus curated expertly by the Executive Chef, Damian Broom, draw inspiration from the region, with all ingredients hand-picked from local suppliers.

The tasting menu wouldn't be my normal choice but actually made for a very enjoyable evening. It was great to sample things I wouldn't try ordinarily.

Although it will vary on a regular basis, you should always get a selection of two starters, two mains and two sweets. On our particular night the first and second courses were more or less split between meat and fish...so...in the interests of culinary science, we actually tried everything.

I started with a lovely piece of Smoked Craster Haddock which came with a sauce of mustard and leeks accompanied by a slice of Norfolk Poacher cheese. I then followed that with a juicy cut of meat...Canon of Highlands Venison. It came with salsify, trompette mushrooms, elderberry and bitter chocolate. This was a real highlight of my meal and goes to show the skill of the chef because when reading those ingredients in isolation, you wonder how on earth they can work as a meal...but they did. Outstanding.

Lisa went for the Maitake grilled mushrooms glazed with beer chestnut purée accompanied by Broth of Burnt Bread. She wanted something lighter than the venison for her main course so plumped for the Gigha Halibut which came with celeriac, shitake and a sauce of Crème Cru and fermented mushrooms. She loved it.

When it came to our final course we decided to take a breather and go for the optional cheese course. We're glad that we did because there was an excellent selection.

And then to finish we both went for the Savarin Cake, which was topped with golden raisins and confit orange.

I have to say that the staff throughout the hotel could not have been more attentive. Five-star hotels can be rather over the top when it comes to service. Thankfully, Seaham Hall gets it spot on. From being welcomed at the front door, to being checked-in, to being shown to your bedroom, it's all very friendly and efficient. Whoever does the staff training should be proud of themselves.

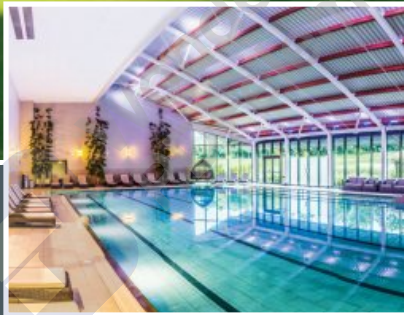
Little things mean a lot.

As for breakfast the next morning, it was Full English all the way for both of us. Calorie counting could wait until 2023. It was the perfect way to start the Christmas holidays. I'm now off to the gym.

[www.seaham-hall.co.uk](http://www.seaham-hall.co.uk)



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## Through the Orangegrass

Review by ChefYesChef Ian McAndrew

At first sight the location of the Orangegrass (great name by the way) could be slightly off putting, housed as it seems to be, in a warehouse type building off/behind the town centre in South Shields, but don't let the façade deceive you. Once you're in it is a large multi-tiered smart environment complete with Gold Buddha's as you'd expect.

The greeting is warm and friendly and on the Monday night we visited it was surprisingly busy which is always a good sign. Admittedly there was a large party of over 20 people in celebrating a birthday but that in no way put us off, it just gave the whole place a good ambience, in no way overpowering.

The menu is full of many of the usual favourite Thai dishes but also contains one or two less usual ones too and with plenty of choice for both vegetarians and vegans alike. As we had been recommended to try the place by a friend we decided, as it was our first time here, to go for one of the many set menus thereby having the choice made for us! It is after all a very large menu making it a huge task to choose from, the set meal was the far easier option.

These menus range from around £11.50pp for a set meal for 1 through to £46.50pp for a Set Meal for 4. We opted for the Set Meal for two priced at £26.55. from the prawn Crackers to start through the Mixed Starters with the most amazing carrot salad, it was truly delicious, through the Khao Pod Gai (Chicken and Sweet Corn Soup). Gai Pud Med Ma-Maung (Stir Fried Chicken and Cashew Nuts) and the Kae Pud Prik Tai Dum (Stir Fried Lamb with Black Pepper Sauce) we thoroughly enjoyed it all.

The prices throughout are incredibly reasonable especially in the current climate and couple this with the great friendly service it is a restaurant I am sure we will return to time and time again. Indeed we have a vegan friend who we are certain is going to love the place.

**Orangegrass Thai Restaurant**  
3 Mount Terrace, South Shields NE33 1PN  
[www.orangegrassthai.co.uk](http://www.orangegrassthai.co.uk)

## Introducing...



Michelin-Star Chef

**Ian McAndrew**

*ChefYesChef!*

With three successful books under his belt and over 50 years' experience in the hospitality industries, when retirement beckoned, Ian McAndrew thought his time had come to pop his feet up and chill.

**Little did he realise that boredom would take hold and he'd pull himself out of retirement to do what he does best, go back into the industry he loves, hospitality!**

Ian has worked in 5-star hotels such as with Anton Mosimann at the Dorchester, Carlton Tower and Intercontinental Hotels, his wife Jane at the Vier Jahreszeiten in Hamburg, Capital, and Waldorf Hotels in London, plus many more, too many to mention, between them over 100 years' experience.

Having gained a Michelin Star during his time as Head Chef at Eastwell Manor in Kent, Ian and his wife decided it was time to work for themselves and opened their first restaurant venture in Canterbury, where they were proud owners of a Michelin Star for eight years, Ian being the youngest Englishman to gain the coveted award!

As well as reviewing restaurants for newspapers, magazines and on-line publications, Ian's agency, Chef Yes Chef offers consultancy advice on a day rate for businesses and individuals within the hospitality industries.

Ian told us: "Never has there been more demand for consultancy services in the hospitality industries, following on from the Covid-19 Pandemic. It's tougher that ever to make it work in this industry at the moment, which is why I have stepped out of retirement to help."

**For help or advice in the hospitality industries from renowned professional Ian McAndrew, call 07973 488 670 [www.chefyeschef.co.uk](http://www.chefyeschef.co.uk)**



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# Kind Business Unhidden creates history by putting people at the heart of fashion

London Fashion Week; the height of privileged fashion, an industry renowned for waste, environmental damage, overconsumption, rising debt, unattainable bodies and influencing mental health illness; gets an injection of kindness with the introduction of emerging and innovative fashion house and one of our Kind Businesses, Unhidden. And I was there to witness this iconic moment in history.

**Kind Currency was created to place need as a priority. We support those we depend on in society that are living in deprivation by supporting ethical businesses, social enterprises, charities and community causes.**

Unhidden was one of the first businesses in our community, when I met Founder and Designer Victoria Jenkins, we had both been announced as the 100 Inspiring Female Entrepreneurs 2022, we shared our vision, our values, our chronic illnesses and invisible disabilities and our challenges as founders trying to deliver change that meet a significant need. Kind Currency was delighted to welcome Unhidden into our community.



Michelle Jones of Kind Currency  
and Kathryn Paylor-Bent of  
Seated Sewing



Victoria Jenkins, Founder and Designer of Unhidden

Unhidden; universal fashion for every BODY, an adaptive fashion brand that everyone can wear. Clothing that is stylish yet comfortable and supports the needs of disabled people. With an eye always on sustainability and not conforming to the catwalk by using non-professional models, people with various differences and needs, Unhidden is a kind business, that all of us can shop kind with.

On Friday 17th February, I headed to London Fashion Week to support and celebrate, not only Victoria and Unhidden, sponsored by Kurt Geiger and the Bicester Collection, but also to champion the disabled community I am delighted to call friends.

I smiled with pride as I watched friends shine on the fashion stage, their beauty demonstrating the power of ethical fashion. I was excited to watch Kate Stanforth, dancer and disabled activist from Northumberland, gracefully descend down the runway.

It was a joy to celebrate another kind business member, fellow Northerner and dear friend, Kathryn Paylor-Bent of Seated Sewing based in County Durham, an adaptive fashion designer herself, Kat was supporting Victoria and the Unhidden mission with her professional services throughout the London Fashion Week project. Kat has multiple conditions with regular hospital admittance, and in her own words, her wheels are her legs, placing her as the expert for adaptive fashion. Kat worked extremely hard

during the process, managing her health and disability needs to meet the demand, hundreds of miles from home and her usual care team; Kat is a true demonstration of the talent, skill, ability and power of disabled individuals and this awesome community.

I travelled to London armed with our kind gifts, to support the show, to help reduce waste, support change and thank those involved and most importantly, pay kindness forward. We were delighted to work with independent creatives and producers on the creation of our kind bags and look forward to sharing these at all of our kind experiences to come. We love to reward our kind members; it is what we are here to do.

London Fashion Week, an event that has always clashed with my personal ethos, an event I never thought I would attend due to the damage it creates, but, the tide is changing, and business must change, it needs to pivot and adapt to focus on need.

Huge congratulations to everyone involved in this incredible and historic moment, it was a privilege to share in the experience, let's hope a ripple has been created in the fashion industry and we witness real change to protect people and planet.

[michelle@kindcurrency.co.uk](mailto:michelle@kindcurrency.co.uk)  
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## Pure Bliss: The Non-Surgical Treatments Making Waves

The technological advancements in non-surgical skin rejuvenation have been hitting the headlines in recent months with celebrities and influencers alike flaunting the amazing results. For those looking for the non-invasive lift and in essence a gym workout for the face there are some highly innovative treatments now available on the beauty scene.

**Setting the standards in skincare are Pure Bliss, an award-winning Sunderland based salon who are celebrating their 21st year in business. Alongside numerous industry awards, and recent site expansion the team have also expanded their treatment portfolio to include the latest medical grade treatment technology, Dermaforce.**

A powerful new force in non-surgical skin rejuvenation, Dermaforce is an advanced cutting-edge device combining microneedling and radio frequency technology to effectively treat a large number of facial and body concerns, with amazing results.

The successful salon in Fulwell, which has recently expanded to an additional site in Hebburn is headed up by founder Lisa Seferi. Lisa's extensive career has been embodied in the world of luxury from working on luxury cruise liners to 5-star hotels, including The Savoy Group where she worked for The Berkeley Hotel.

Lisa Seferi, Spa Director at Pure Bliss said: "Our portfolio of brands at Pure Bliss is exceptional, we have a great reputation across the industry and our ethos is to continue to bring these key brands to the region for the most innovative and indulgent treatments. The reception to Dermaforce in particular has been amazing, it caught my attention when I saw the phenomenal results achieved by Judy Murray after having the treatment.

It really is a powerful new force in non-surgical skin rejuvenation and the treatment is so versatile and can be used to target a number of concerns, through the advanced device combining microneedling and radio frequency."

Microneedling and radio frequency are the latest solution for the ultimate 'non-surgical face lift' and continue to be in extremely high demand. It is a minimally invasive treatment that reduces fine lines, wrinkles, and lifts skin, whilst promoting collagen and elastin production.

Dermaforce is just one of the many innovative non-surgical treatments available at the salon, with 2022 seeing the introduction of French brand Guinot and their luxurious Hydradermie facials, alongside the news that the team picked up Guinot Crown Salon in January 2023.

With a host of treatment options which are adapted to individual skin type and concerns, this unique innovation enables fast and deep penetration using double ionisation technology combined with active ingredients, for exceptional results.

The enhanced treatment portfolio coincides with expansion and the recent set-up of an additional salon in Hebburn, in collaboration with Halo Hair. Pure Bliss @ Halo officially launched last month with flurry of guests in attendance including the Deputy Mayor and Mayoress, Cllr Richard Porthouse and Cllr Margaret Peacock and one of Lisa's long-standing clients, Phyllis, who was delighted to open the salon as Guest of Honour.

Lisa added: "The opening of Pure Bliss @ Halo really cemented our 21st anniversary year, alongside our fantastic new portfolio of treatments and brand collaborations. The facilities in Hebburn are amazing and we are so excited to have launched this venture with Halo Hair, it really is an exciting start to 2023."

**Exclusive offer for Northern Insight readers:**

**50% off Dermaforce**

**Quote 'Northern Insight'  
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[www.pureblissspa.co.uk](http://www.pureblissspa.co.uk)







# Spring is in the air at Jesmond Dene House

## Mother's Day Sunday Lunch in Fern

SUNDAY 19TH MARCH

Leave the washing up to us and treat mum to a sumptuous, traditional, three course Sunday Roast in Fern Dining Room & Bar. Take a stroll in Jesmond Dene after and feel a million miles away, surrounded by the sounds of the tranquil waterfall.

Served between 12 noon - 3.30pm

£55 per adult • £19.50 per child



## Mother's Day Afternoon Tea in the Great Hall

SUNDAY 19TH MARCH • 1PM

This Mother's Day, treat that special lady in your life to a decadent afternoon tea in our Great Hall, with live music and a glass of fizz.

£46 per adult • £20 per child

*Pre booking, and pre payment required.*

*Please contact Events on 0191 212 6060 or email your interest to [events@jesmonddenehouse.co.uk](mailto:events@jesmonddenehouse.co.uk).*

## Takeout Afternoon Tea

AVAILABLE EVERY WEDNESDAY - SUNDAY • 1PM-4PM (collection slots)

Elegantly presented in an ornate box tied with a ribbon, our Takeout Afternoon Tea is no less special and made with just as much care.

It makes the perfect treat for loved ones and transports the ceremony of Afternoon Tea at Jesmond Dene House into your home.

From our House to Yours.

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# The benefits of regular exercise...

The benefits of exercise are massive in so many areas and go way beyond big muscles and an improved cardio system. For those who take part in any workout you will know the post workout endorphins have a huge impact on your mental health immediately. But working out does more than a short term feel good fix it can help you beat stress in the long term too.

**Latest stats show that over 80% of adults have felt so stressed at some point over the last year, they felt overwhelmed.**

## How can exercise combat stress?

Regular exercise is associated with levels of reduced tension, elevated mood, better sleep, and improved self-esteem which all impact how you perceive and manage stress.

Exercise stimulates serotonin, dopamine and oxytocin, all of which will have positive effects on the brain and make you feel happy and act as natural painkillers.

We should all make time for regular exercise to reduce stress, as well as use it as an instant happiness booster. While one off sessions have been linked with a reduction in stress, it's regular exercise that has shown to be the most beneficial at reducing stress levels.

Regular exercise helps lower adrenaline and cortisol, which are released from our adrenal glands. These have a negative effect on the body as well as mind, including physical effects such as increasing the risk of high blood pressure or diabetes.

We also need to think about the social and psychological reasons why exercise is good for stress reduction. It is a way to be outdoors and around other people with similar interests and its this interaction that gives you a sense of community, positivity and self worth.

The good news is that any exercise for any length of time can help reduce stress, therefore pick something you enjoy and add it to your weekly lifestyle.

It is much more important to do something you enjoy, rather than just doing something that's been prescribed for you. If you don't enjoy what you're doing, it is probably going to increase your stress levels rather than reduce them.

## Making time for exercise

If you feel you are under a huge amount of pressure and are already finding it hard to cope, slotting in time for training might feel too much to take on. But, along with managing stress, it's about managing time. We can all find 15 to 30 minutes a few times a week to exercise, especially when you know how important it is for your wellbeing. Once exercise has become a habit, it will be easier to stick to your training, even during times of high stress.

## David's summing up...

*It's important we all find 15 to 30 minutes a few times a week for exercise to help reduce tension, elevate your mood, sleep better, improve your self-esteem and help alleviate stress.*



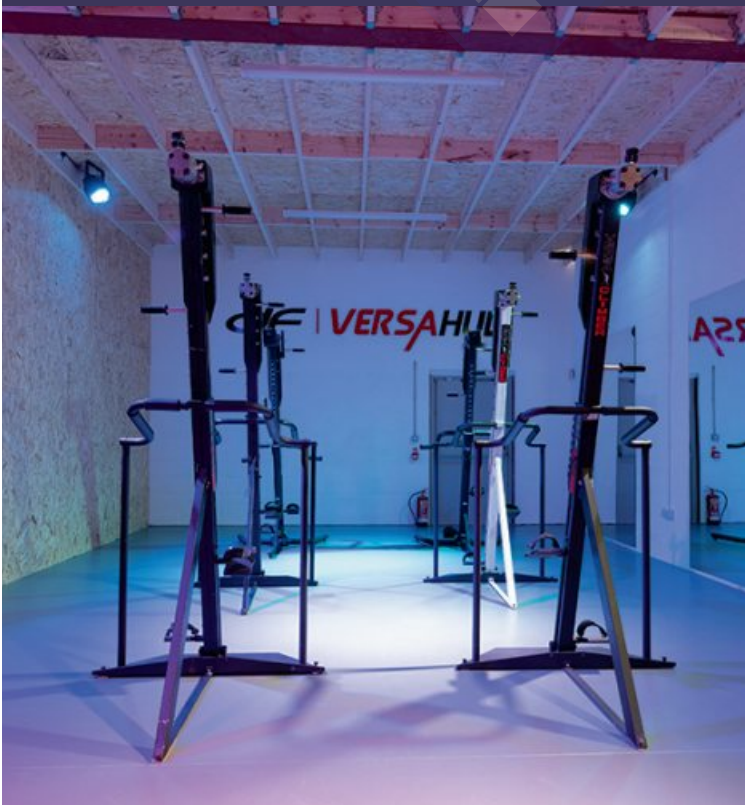
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Barry Speker

## The Last Word

In a new book, 'Time to Think', it is claimed that the Tavistock Clinic ignored evidence that 97.5% of children seeking sex changes had autism, depression or other emotional issues.

**With little consideration, many children were set by the clinic on an irreversible route to transition through puberty blockers, hormone treatment and surgery.**

The author of the book Hannah Barnes, a former Newsnight reporter, found that none of the large publishing houses would publish it because junior staff complained the book was transphobic. Eventually Swift Press published the influential book about the Tavistock (which was forced to close last year by the NHS following a High Court challenging its practice on under 16s). A victory for free speech.

J.K. Rowling has been targeted by trans-activists who accuse her of being trans-phobic by virtue of her holding the recognised view that gender is determined by sex at birth. It is appalling that actors in her Harry Potter films have turned on her to demonstrate their woke credentials. As she said recently 'Deeply amused by those telling me I've lost their admiration due to the disrespect I show violent, duplicitous rapists' - referring to those who Nicola Sturgeon wanted to put in women's prisons. Note that Hogwarts is co-ed!

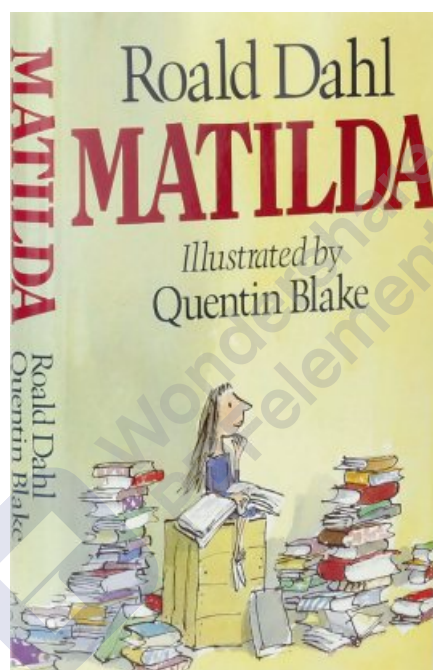
What would Ronald Dahl have said about the recent 'woke' rewrite of his classic works? He, like Rowling, encouraged millions of children to take up reading. Following a review by the Roald Dahl Company and publishers Puffin the books are being rewritten so that they can be 'enjoyed by all children'.

The word 'fat' has been removed from every book. Augustus Gloop is now described as 'enormous'. The Oompa Loompas are now gender neutral and no longer tiny. The words 'black' and 'white' have been removed; and Matilda now reads Jane Austen and not Rudyard Kipling. The edits include removal of references to gender, mental health, weight, race and violence. Perhaps in Dahl's case rewriting is justified bearing in mind the evidence that he was a racist, misogynist antisemitic bully.

However, it is unfortunate if we stop reading children's books because of the character or views of the authors.

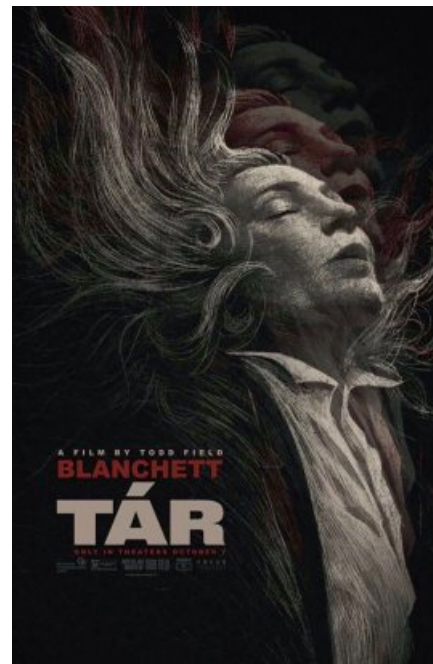
Is this behind the withdrawal of Enid Blyton's books? In fact she was ahead of her time.

Georgina Kirin in the Famous Five stories was a tomboy and insisted on being called George. She said 'I hate being a girl. I like doing things that boys do'. It's just as well the Tavistock Clinic was not around then.



Perhaps time to buy up unadulterated first editions of Dahl classics before the wokeists succeed in getting legislation to make it a crime to be in unlawful possession of a Glass Lift or a Chocolate Factory.

The sudden departure of Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon caught many by surprise. It comes as a late Christmas present for Labour who look to regain seats in Scotland and for the Government in whose side Sturgeon has been a constant thorn. Whilst a successful leader as a communicator, she failed in her primary aim of securing a further referendum. Was this her



reason to go or her disastrous set of reforms to transgender legislation which divided her party and split the electorate?

Her legacy is also of NHS in crisis in Scotland, falling life expectancy and increasing drug deaths and its education system, once the envy of Britain, declining precipitously. The green Agenda sits uneasily with Scotland's reliance on so many jobs in oil and gas.

At least there are still more than 22 million casks of liquid gold rare scotch whisky maturing in warehouses across the Scottish countryside.

It may be put down as typical Newcastle United. Is the new golden age a mirage or a reality? The celebratory game against Liverpool one week before the much awaited Carabao Cup Final at Wembley, a 2-0 defeat, left many fans stunned-but surely not surprised in the case of those of us with long memories.

Will I be able to repeat the pictured scenes from 1969 at St James' Park? The Geordies are ever optimistic. But the unbelievable sending off of our season's frequent saviour goalkeeper Nick Pope and his consequent ineligibility to play in the final was the real blow. A case of Papal fallibility?

I greatly recommend the film Tár starring Cate Blanchett. She has already won a Golden Globe and a BAFTA, her performance here is deserving of an Oscar even if the film, rather long, is in the rarified atmosphere of the enormous egos in the world of female (is that word allowed?) classical music conductors.

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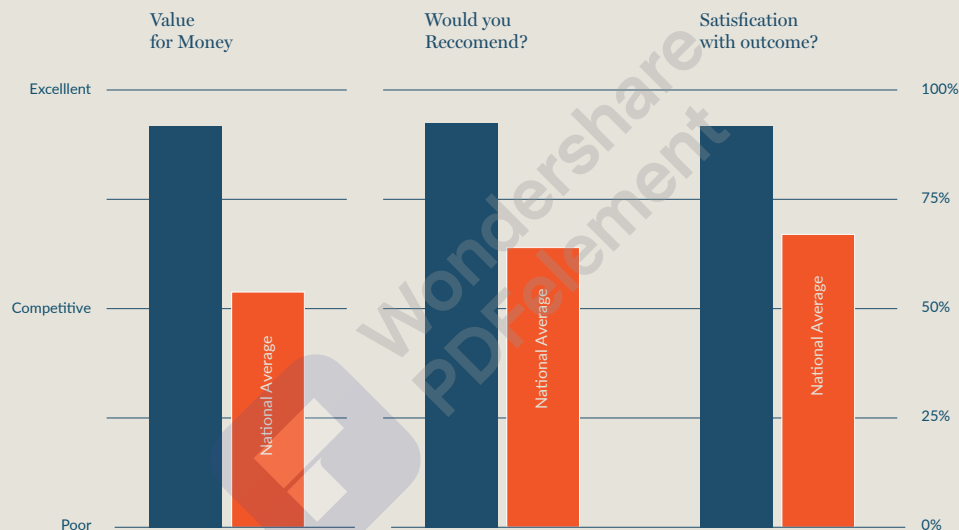
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