NORTHERN

INSIGHT

February 2024

Issue 98

HOWIE WHITE THE MAN BEHIND THE NAME

business • technology • property • media • education • community • social • arts • leisure • health northern-insight.co.uk

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Welcome to the February edition of Northern Insight.

After an extended Christmas break it was great to return to the desk on January 3rd. With our 100th issue on the horizon this promises to be another important year for the magazine.

Over the first few weeks of 2024 it has been lovely to get out and about and meet so many of our longstanding clients. Your ongoing support is truly humbling.

We kickstart the year with another vibrant issue packed with all of the traditional Northern Insight ingredients. A joy to put together.

We hope you enjoy it. Till next month...







Anglo Scottish Asset Finance completes management buyout

Durham-based company Anglo Scottish Asset Finance Ltd is excited to announce the completion of a management buyout (MBO) to take back control of the business. The investment is backed by a consortium of UK-based funders, the company's original founding directors, wider management team, existing employees, and contractual agents.

Founded in 2007, Anglo Scottish quickly established its name in the finance brokerage sector. In 2015, the company was acquired by McMillan Shakespeare Group, a publicly listed Australian company seeking an appropriate acquirer for its UK operations following a strategic view to exit the UK and focus on its core capabilities down under.

The MBO will result in an expansion of the business's presence in the UK as Anglo Scottish aims to develop a new funding option for customers while establishing new partnerships, joint ventures and strengthening relationships with current funding partners. It plans to leverage new technologies and expand its capacity to secure new clients and support partner relationships in the industry. The funding raised will support these initiatives as the Anglo Scottish brand continues to develop.

The announcement follows a successful year for the business with Anglo Scottish adding three new divisions – Renewables, Agriculture and Ground Transport – to its existing structure, which already covers Vehicle Finance, Asset Finance, Commercial Finance and more.

Additionally, the company brokered over 12,900 deals in the financial year 2022/23, reaching a substantial milestone with over £519 million of brokered business within the year. During the MBO process, the company offered investment opportunities to all employed staff and agents, allowing all to benefit from the company's success.

North East Solar Company wins National Contractor of the Year Award

Advanced Renewable Power (AR Power) based in Washington was set up by husband-and-wife team Mark and Maria Dunville. In its 12 years in business, the installers of commercial and industrial solar energy systems have grown exponentially in the sectors with contracts now totalling to around £10 million per annum.

The firm were delighted to win 'Contractor of the Year' at the National Solar and Storage Live Awards. The event recognised the most innovative and impactful solar and storage projects and contributors throughout the UK.

AR Power was cited as having exemplary best practice, outstanding customer service and a trail of brilliant, completed projects. Some of the company's recent projects include the installation of 11 solar systems at key buildings owned by Newcastle City Council such as swimming pools and the Theatre Royal. In addition, the new installation at drawer manufacturers BHK (UK) in Peterlee was the firm's largest project to date and ranks amongst one of the largest rooftop installations in the North East with 2344 panels and a staggering 1.3MW Solar PV power output.

Technical Director Mark Dunville said "We are delighted to win this major accolade. It's all about our team and the way we focus on quality workmanship and customer service, which comes down to our people and the culture we've created. We always pay attention to detail and put the same amount of care into every project regardless of its size or scale."



Sunderland gift card gives local economy a boost

Since its launch in 2020 by Sunderland BID the card has created sales of more than £265,000 for companies operating across retail, hospitality and leisure. And 2023 has proven to be the best year yet, with sales of £137,930 – representing a massive 86 per cent increase on the previous year. The card is now accepted across 184 different businesses, with new ones constantly coming on board.

Pre-Christmas the Empire Theatre signed up, as did Keel Tavern, one of the city's newest bars and restaurants.

Ollie Vaulkhard of Vaulkhard Group which owns the venue, believes it was important to be part of the scheme.

"We are new to the business community in Sunderland and welcome the opportunity to meet our peers and extend our hospitality to them," he said.

"There are so many exciting things happening in the city and we hope that people receiving the gift card will come and enjoy what we have to offer at Keel Tavern."

Sharon Appleby, Chief Executive of Sunderland BID, believes the impressive total has been helped by bulk purchases by corporate customers, who have seen it both as a way to reward staff, thank customers and support the local economy at the same time.

"This is a fantastic result for 2023 and it shows that more people are aware of the gift card and are choosing it as a way of gifting," said Sharon.

Cards can be bought online at www.sunderlandgiftcard.com or at sales points at the Bridges, Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens, National Glass Centre, Houghton and Washington libraries. They are also available as digital downloads which can be bought online and then go directly into the wallet of the recipient.

Any businesses interested in signing up for the scheme should contact gftcard@sunderlandbid.co.uk for more information.





IF YOUR BRAND IS WHAT PEOPLE SAY ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS WHEN YOU ARE NOT IN THE ROOM, WHAT WOULD THEY SAY ABOUT YOUR COMPANY? www.bradleyomahoney.co.uk



Business leaders shape plans for city showcase

Expo Sunderland, led by Sunderland City Council in partnership with the University of Sunderland, will explore the future of homes, living and cities with a programme that will be shaped by businesses and people from Sunderland.

'Future Living' is one of three key Expo Sunderland themes and the first stakeholder meeting brought together more than 30 businesspeople and educationalists from organisations including Tombola, South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust and Nissan, to focus on how to showcase the high-quality careers available in the city as well as future opportunities, as Sunderland transforms.

Held at City Hall, groups explored education and employment opportunities that will support residents to access new and emerging careers in areas such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automotive design, animation and graphics, biotechnology, healthcare and science, Esports, and film lighting and production. The insights gained at the meeting will help to shape a line-up of events and activations – forming part of the Expo Sunderland programme – that will showcase future investment and job opportunities to drive the city's success long into the future.

Sarah Gilley, event director for Expo Sunderland, said: "The first of our working group cohorts provided a unique opportunity for employers to contribute to a programme that aims to inspire residents about the careers available to them in their everchanging city.

"We want to create career and skills events within the Expo programme that raises aspirations and enable people to understand how the skills they possess can be transferred, unlocking exciting new opportunities in Sunderland's existing and emerging industries.

Expo Sunderland's headline sponsor is the University of Sunderland.

Joanne Usher, Corporate Engagement Officer, Expo (University of Sunderland), said: "We're thrilled to be playing a pivotal role in Expo Sunderland.

"We're wholeheartedly committed to the future economic, social, environmental, and cultural success of the city. The Expo offers an incredible opportunity to showcase all the things that will make it an even better place to live, work and study for years to come.

"It's fantastic to see work engaging residents, including our staff and students, with the exciting programme of events already underway, connecting the Expo programme to the people who will ultimately drive Sunderland's success in the future."

To find out more about Expo Sunderland, visit www.exposunderland.com

Plant-based firm open 'UK first' site

MYCO Holdings will transform a former food manufacturing plant in Leeming Bar into a vertically farmed production unit. It will be the first site of its kind in the UK.

The North East-based firm hopes the move into the purpose-built 20,000 sq ft site will launch an exciting period of growth, amid an expected boom in sales of plant-based meat substitutes.

"This is a great move for MYCO, and one we all believe will help the business unlock its extraordinary potential," said John Shepherd, co-founder and chairman of MYCO.

"This new site is a food industry first, and the concept of combining both the growing of the raw materials and the manufacturing of the finished product under one roof will pave the way for more sustainable food manufacturing practices in the future."



MYCO's own plant-based protein is made from oyster mushrooms and has already attracted interest from a host of household names across the food industry.

The move follows months of work with Judith Turner of North Yorkshire Council to secure the unit, which given its proximity to the A1, will further aid sustainability by reducing food miles. To cope with the expected influx of demand, the six staff initially based at the new site will need to swell to around 75 over the forthcoming period.



Palintest strengthens manufacturing operations at UK site

Water analysis technology pioneer Palintest has made a major investment in its manufacturing facilities, to meet increasing demand for its products and support its strategic growth ambitions.

The Gateshead, UK-headquartered company, which manufactures equipment for water quality monitoring and disinfection control, has invested in a range of new equipment and strengthened the infrastructure at its Team Valley site.

It is the largest investment by Palintest in its manufacturing operations in a decade.

The investment has included increasing the number of production lines at the site from one to three. The large production line will be dedicated to the production of large batch products, a second line will focus on Palintest's smaller batch products and a smaller production line will be dedicated to sample batches for use in R&D, and products which require more complex manufacturing processes.

Two new tablet manufacturing machines have been installed on the Team Valley site, which have increased its tablet manufacturing capacity by 115%, and improvements have been made to Palintest's PQT laboratory, which will support the company's testing and R&D activities, and aid new product development.

In addition, a £500,000 investment has been made to create a new fully automated liquid product line at the Team Valley site, which has been introduced to streamline the liquid product manufacturing process, and a further £500,000 has been invested into a new air handling unit.

Established in the UK in 1989, but with a history dating back to the 1800s, Palintest has pioneered techniques and technology used in water management, the pool and spa sector, the food and beverage sector and humanitarian aid, as well as in a variety of industrial processes.

Palintest's technologies are manufactured in the UK and are used globally in a variety of applications to protect lives and the environment. Its customers include water companies and municipal authorities, leisure facility operators, NGOs and food processing plants.



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In conversation with...

David Taylor

Managing Director, Howie White Resourcing

Tell us about your background?

I went to Durham School then went onto Northumbria University to study Business Management, I did a couple of summer placements with Howie White Resourcing joining them after I graduated and then took over the running of the business in 2022.

What is your role?

I am the Managing Director of Howie White Resourcing.

What is the main purpose of HWR?

Howie White Resourcing was established, to provide an alternative to database recruitment agencies. We do not have a database of people seeking employment but proactively find candidates for the role through our extensive range of contacts and by networking within relevant markets.

What is your proudest business achievement?

Working my way up through the business starting as a graduate in 2013 to taking over the business in 2022.

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I always wanted to own my own business, was never sure doing what I just knew that is what I wanted to aspire to do when I was older, which makes me proud that I have achieved that ambition, but now it's about bettering myself in the role and making the business the best it can possibly be.

What is your business USP?

People buy from people, every role that we recruit is unique because every business and every appointment is different. We take time and use our experience to really understand what a client wants from someone coming into a role. We seek to understand not only the technical requirements of a role but also the culture and values of a business. When you understand what you're looking for you can find it.

What services do you provide?

We are a search based recruiter, pure and simple. We do not have a database of people seeking employment but proactively find candidates for the role through our extensive range of contacts and by networking within relevant markets. While this sounds simple, making it happen takes a unique skill set. We find that people are incredibly helpful if approached and treated properly and are happy to engage with us to reach relevant candidates.

How do you like to unwind?

Spending family time with my wife, our 3 year old son and 2 dogs. Going to watch NUFC - although this isn't always relaxing! We enjoy getting away on family holidays...and playing golf when the weather allows! Having a good work/life balance can be challenging at times, especially as a business owner, but it's important to me to make sure I maintain one and don't miss any key milestones with our son because I've got my head in a laptop.

Briefly, what does a typical working day comprise for you?

It's the cliche of business owners to say, 'there isn't really a typical day, everyday is different' but it is entirely true. Working with a wide variety of sectors and clients means every role we handle is different. Typically though, my day always starts with taking my 3-year old son to nursery, then it's head down with emails, calls and meetings for the rest of the day. I really cherish that twenty minutes in the car with my son each morning and having a chat with him before work mode kicks in.

What are the plans longer term?

There are no plans for fundamental change, as we are confident that our business model is one which is attractive to our existing and prospective clients. What drives me, is making sure Howie White can be the best it can be and continue to provide a first class service to our clients.

What advice would you give to someone with a business idea?

I'd say, surround yourself with likeminded people and also people that know a lot more than you. Build a network and get out and meet business owners as well as setting yourself goals, you will get knock backs, but persevere.

What is your company's mission?

To raise standards within the recruitment industry and to ensure that we continually add value to the businesses that we work with.

What has been your career highlight?

I wouldn't say I have one career highlight. I am very proud of the business as a whole and the fact that we are celebrating our 25th birthday this year in a competitive market. Coming through COVID where the world changed as a whole in terms of business as usual, was a real challenge, but one that we rose to. Seeing Howie White change and adapt when technology tries to infiltrate the recruitment industry more and more, while still retaining the personal element of the job is always rewarding to see.

Finally, a quick fire round of 'Either/Or'

Dog or cat? Dog - we have a pug and a Cockapoo puppy! **Indian or Chinese?** Indian - Goan Chicken Curry always! **Sunshine or slopes?** Sunshine hands down! Preferably with beer in hand.

Teams or face to face? Face to face, can't beat meeting people in person.

Email or call? Both! Both have their place for different requirements. **Tea or coffee?** Coffee always - milk no sugar if you're asking!

www.howiewhite.co.uk

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Shart it

...surround yourself with likeminded people...

David Taylor

Still going strong...

Just Williams launched in 2015 as a Sales Consultancy business, nine years later we are still going strong and like many, have diversified, evolved, and enhanced our offering. We now provide Sales and Marketing solutions to business looking to grow. In 2021 we launched our second business, The Just Williams Sales Academy to bring to life our desire to professionalise the sector and create an industry standard in Sales.

Recruiting and retaining salespeople is a battle many of us face... that's one of the many reasons we exist and continue to. I believe that Sales is a profession that remains under-invested in and overlooked and so often, failing.

If you are looking to grow this year, you are more than likely looking to hire a full-time Business Development/Sales Professional as a result, at a significant cost and risk to your business. Yet there is another way – one we have developed and been delivering for almost nine years. Sales however, cannot work alone and without support the cost and risks will be high and both parties are often left with a bitter taste. Sales has to be supported by marketing to achieve the best possible results and provide that crucial ROI.

Our Vision is to be the leader of purposeful sales and marketing solutions: facilitating change in businesses and communities, for sustainable growth across the globe.

I founded JW with a different belief, to professionalise the sales industry and provide an alternative solution with less risk, cost and stress while delivering a sustainable and strategic sales solution. Enhanced five years ago with our marketing department, working in partnership with the sales team. Sales and Marketing both carry broad job descriptions and role remits, yet we hire these individuals with unrealistic expectations and then are surprised when they don't deliver. Generic sales roles can comprise of data analysis, strategy development, process development, account



management, lead generation, new business development, pitching, presenting, proposal generation to mention a few. There are a few exceptional individuals out there who can achieve all of these but in my experience of managing salespeople for 20 years, they are like hen's teeth. Yet this is our expectation time and time again as our budgets don't stretch to hire mutliple people within these roles. Similarly in the field of marketing we expect content creation, social media management, SEO, PR, graphic design, award applications, tender writing to name a few. Again, is this really the role of one person?

We hire people to deliver results ultimately – to help achieve the organisations strategy and goals, yet do we really give them the tools, support and structure to achieve this?

Our Why is to help create responsible, sustainable businesses through encouraging

a local supply chain, supporting the local community and making a difference at every encounter. Why – because we believe in using our business as a force for good. We believe in challenging the status quo and providing outsourced sales and marketing in a purposeful, accessible and sustainable way. 2024 is looking even stronger with huge ambitions for both businesses.

The Just Williams Sales Academy launched in 2021 has now trained over 3000 individuals online and face-to-face in customer service and sales and like Just Williams, is a certified B-Corporation business. As the only training business in the NE with this certification, we adopt the highest standards and continue to work with SMEs, Colleges, Universities all with a mindset of delivering exceptional customer service, enhancing their market position, increasing retention, and generating new opportunties. We are looking forward to another bumper year for us, our clients and our stakeholders.

Late last year we launched our latest Impact Report, which saw us;

- Become a certified B-Corporation scoring 100.1
- Raise and Donate over £6000 to local charities
- Reduce our landfill by 25%
- Win the best business community impact award
- Plant over 250 Trees
- Increase our local supply chain by over 50%
- Work with freeelancers, local businesses and fellow organisations passing over 30K of projects
- Support the local B-Corp community by hosting the first B-Social on Teesside.

This year across both businesses we will continue to offer a range of opportunities to all our stakeholders including access to our wellbeing training series, community litter picks, and why not join us for our Just Williams CEO Yorkshire 3 Peaks Challenge in June 2024; if you too like a goal, a fitness challenge whilst raising money for charity. (Contact me asap for more info via Linkedin)

Our Charity Partner for both businesses in 2024 will be Catalyst – a not for profit organisation supporting and working with the VCSE sector to innovate, evolve and thrive. Winning their Business Community Impact award in 2023 and seeing firsthand the impact they have, spurred us on to support them further. Through volunteering, donations in kind and raising funds, we will be working in partnership with Catalyst to drive change in our local community. Find out more: www.catlyststockton.org

As a self-confessed adventurer and lover of a physical and mental challenge, this year will see me complete my first Ultramarathon in February and later on in the year Everest Base Camp. Following five marathons and Mont Blanc in 2023, this year had to be 'next level' and help us achieve our aim of raising £50,000 for charities by our tenth birthday next year. Running has for the last six years been my 'thing', my headspace, my love, and given me the ability to demolish more cheese boards, drink more red wine and devour more pasta than ever before. Finding the thing that keeps me mentally and physically fit I know without a shadow of doubt, has kept me focused, taught me grit and keeps me progressing forward. It also allows me to go on some wild adventures and enables muchneeded headspace in our busy challenging lives, so be able to do this whilst raising funds for our local communities is in itself an achievement and a focus for 2024.

Last year was challenging for so many, and I like others had to dig deep at times. With 2023 over and as ever I am looking at the horizon of a new year with hope, determination and my favourite characteristic of all – grit. I am proud of all we have achieved to date and proud I continue to challenge myself physically and mentally, and being a huge fan of both reflection and continuous learning, I have a few recommendations for you that have been a beacon for me in the last year:

Book recommendations:

The Great Game of Business -Jack Stack, Bo Burlingham

Doughnut Economics – Kate Raworth The Responsible Company – Yvon Chouinard

Podcast recommendation:

Business without bull****/On Purpose/Feel Better Live More

Event Recommendation:

TEDx Newcastle (Nov) and Manchester (March)

We are looking forward to another year of Northern Insight publications and hope you'll join us over the next 12 editions of our thoughts, tips, recommendations, and maybe the odd promotional push too (we are in sales and marketing after all!)

Here's to a healthy, happy and fulfilling 2024 for us all!

Just Williams -

Sales and Marketing www.justwilliamsltd.co.uk Just Williams Sales Academy -Sales and Customer Service Training www.justwilliamssales.academy



BUSINESS INSIGHT



Comment...

The announcement of the 2024 Oscar nominations produced no great surprises but some disappointments. Whilst some may find Barbie is of questionable artistic merit, it was the highest grossing film of 2023 - £1.12billion. It does have nominations for best film and for Ryan Gosling as best supporting actor, but not for the Director Greta Gerwin or the star Margot Robbie.

Gerwin reimagined the story and wrote the script and is the highest grossing female director in history. Watch out for a Me Too demonstration at the 96th Annual Awards in Hollywood on 10th March.





Deserved multiple nominations for Oppenheimer and Maestro, but surely One Life deserves recognition. It tells the amazing story of Sir Nicholas Winton who with others saved 669 children in Prague, mainly Jewish, from the Nazis in 1939. It is surely Anthony Hopkins' finest performance, subtle and understated.

A happy oasis for ever optimistic Newcastle United fans, witnessing a rare derby match at the Stadium of Light on 6th January and a momentous cup win. We were all obliged to travel in a convoy of coaches from St James Park. Having queued from the top of Leazes Park Road we were rewarded by an energy bar, water and a black and white scarf. Don't say the club does not value its supporters.

After our 3-0 win, it was a bitter pill for Sunderland when their credit card machinery failed and they gave away hundreds of free pints of lager to the thirsty celebrating Geordie faithful.

That it should have taken the four day prime time docudrama Mr Bates vs The Post Office to bring to public prominence the greatest miscarriage of justice in British legal history, is a scandal in itself. The call for those responsible to be held to account will continue. Too late for the many who have already died before having their names cleared or receiving compensation.

The return by Paula Vennels, former Chief Executive of the Post Office, of her CBE was symbolic but a move in the right direction. A major hero in the saga is of course the real Mr Bates who seeks no plaudits but only justice for the more than 4000 sub-postmasters and fair compensation for the many who have suffered so much for over 20 years.

When Suella Braverman as Home Secretary warned that our professed multiculturalism was an abject failure, many persist with is as a realistic utopia. Praise must go to Katherine Birbalsingh, Britain's 'strictest head teacher'. Half of the children at her school, Michaela Community School in Wembley, are Muslim. The school is secular and has excellent academic results, 80% of 6th formers gaining admission to Russell Group Universities.

But the school is secular - no prayer rooms, no special treatment, meat-free menus so that all students eat the same lunch and no mobile phones. Cliques based on religion or ethnic background are discouraged.

Now Birbalsingh has had to defend High Court proceedings brought in the name of a girl claiming the right to pray on her blazer prayer mat in the school yard - that the ban fundamentally changed the girl's feeling about being a Muslim in this



country. Blame the lawyers at Matrix Chambers (on legal aid) coming up with the gobbledegook at immense cost.

The risk is that such challenges, far from dealing with alleged but non-existent discrimination, will increase marginalisation, frustrate the successful efforts of the ambitions of a successful educationalist and deprive many children of an excellent education.

Time to celebrate the Chinese New Year 2024 this time it's the Year of the Dragon. The usual celebrations will take place in Stowell Street beside the Imperial Arch on Sunday 11 February at 10.30. Dancing, firecrackers, delicacies. An excellent outing for the whole family - and multicultural!

Kung Hei Fat Choi!

barryspeker@hotmail.com





25 YEARS OF SANDERSON YOUNG



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From Sanderson Young

A RARE! KIND **OF SERVICE**



is the driving force behind Sanderson Young's exclusive Rare! brand. As branch manager, and with her dedication to bringing buyers and sellers together, Ashleigh is committed to matching the region's exceptional properties with clients who are looking for their dream homes.

Focusing on the sale of homes in excess of £850,000 across our beautiful region, Rare! provides a highly personalised and tailored service to meet each client's specific property needs. "Many of our Rare! clients don't want to go out and search for an estate agent who will heavily market their current home via online portals and for sale boards" comments Ashleigh. "They want to work with a trusted and knowledgeable agent who understands their unique needs and respects their wishes of discretion in finding a new home." Low profile sales are a regular part of the Rare! sales team's business. Knowing her clients well and listening to their specific on 0191 2233500 or email ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk

With almost 40 years of estate agency experience, Ashleigh Sundin requirements enables Ashleigh to successfully and perfectly match buyers with their dream homes which are often not currently being promoted on the open market.

It's not just the standard estate agency service that you get with Rare! - Ashleigh and her team are available 7 days a week, as well as outside normal working hours, to better fit in with their clients' needs. Combining vast experience and expertise, great connections within the business community, and an extremely high level of customer service, they excel at developing solid relationships and building trust with their clients, placing great value on face-to-face consultations and accompanying potential buyers to their viewings.

If you are thinking of moving in 2024, Ashleigh and her team at Rare! will do their very best to make it happen! You can contact Ashleigh





South Fields Tranwell Woods, Morpeth

South Fields provides a modern, detached family residence boasting close to 7,000 sq ft of internal living space including a private leisure suite with beautiful swimming pool and sauna. Positioned towards the edge of Tranwell Woods, the property sits in a generous plot of over 0.5 acres and enjoys open views over surrounding greenery. This imposing family home is located in a tranquil area, a short drive from the delightful market town of Morpeth and well placed for the A1 giving access to Newcastle and the Airport. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: H.





Price Guide: £1.75 Million



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



Henshelwood Terrace

This stylish townhouse is located in the very heart of Jesmond and boasts over 4000 sq ft of internal living space combining period charm with superb modern detail. The substantial, double fronted property is thought to have been originally constructed around the turn of the century and is situated within walking distance of some of the region's finest independent and state schools. Externally, this fabulous family home offers a lovely town garden to the front and a private, south facing, walled rear courtyard. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: F.



Price Guide: Offers over £995,000



Harry Young 0191 223 3500 harry.young@sandersonyoung.co.uk















CMYK Christmas Golf Day raises £1465.00 for the Red Sky Foundation

The region's leading business technology provider CMYK warmly welcomed guests to their annual Christmas Golf Day in December, held at the magnificent Close House in support of the Red Sky Foundation.

The day began with a hearty festive breakfast, with an introduction from the Red Sky Team to highlight the amazing work they do for young children across our region. Despite the wet weather leading up to the event, golfers headed out for an enjoyable day of festive golfing fun - whilst raising funds for a great cause. After golf, a delicious Christmas lunch was served to warm everyone up, before concluding the day with an obligatory prize giving presentation. Craig Pratt, regional sales director of CMYK commented; "Massive thanks to our clients, partners and guests who attended our

annual Christmas golf day this year and for helping to raise such a significant amount of money for the Red Sky Foundation, a charity we are extremely proud to be aligned with. We can't thank you all enough for your

continued support throughout 2023, it's been another extremely positive year for CMYK, and we are extremely grateful. Special thanks to our partner and client Close House for hosting us all and congratulations again <u>t</u>o all the prize winners."





































Teesside commercial vehicle bodybuilder builds on foundations

After 15 years of steady growth, CPD Bodies is poised for further success.



When Cathal Doocey acquired a failing engineering firm 15 years ago, he probably didn't expect it to be turned into the success that CPD Bodies has become. As well as acquiring all of the mechanical equipment, he also acquired the workforce...of 1.

Now Cathal's workforce hovers around the 100 mark and the company has just announced its accounts which show a £37m turnover and an overall profit of £6.7m.

"Since the COVID pandemic, we've taken the business forward so that it's now stronger than ever," said CPD Managing Director, Cathal. "We continue to build the firm in all areas. We've extended our range of products, we've opened a new arm to the business and we've acquired new sites, the latest being a £1.7m acquisition. We now have four sites across Teesside totalling 32 acres, nine workshops, and we've spent £150,000 on redeveloping our offices. We have no debt. Consequently, due to the expansion work, our predicted turnover for the next 12 months is likely to be around £50m but it means we now have firm, secure foundations upon which we can take CPD Bodies forward."

CPD Bodies works with some of the biggest van companies in the UK including Enterprise, Northgate, Europcar, SIXT, Dawson Group and Ford Direct.

The core business for CPD Bodies is specialising in custombuilt vehicles which are designed to do a job.

"We've got a major marketing campaign coming up in 2024 as we aim to reach more end-users. The majority of our vehicle builds are for companies, but we're now able to customise vehicles for small business and one-person operators. We can provide racking inside a van or install small compartments and drawers. It means that a single plumber or electrician can contact us and simply ask for the van interior to be designed and constructed in a customised way.

We're also aiming to provide more vehicles to customers who want to go electric. Over the course of this year we've agreed to take 800 vehicles from Ford Direct and around 100 of them will be battery powered. This will be ideal for businesses who don't do a lot of long distance work but mainly need a van which stops and starts on a regular basis, probably something like a delivery van in a built-up area. It will also suit tradespeople who, for example, start and finish each day from home and either head to one or multiple jobs not too far from their base."

Cathal has also formed a new company called VanDemand. If you go onto the excellent website *www.vandemand.com* you can browse through the range of vehicles they have in stock or close to being ready. All of the VanDemand vehicles are brand new...there are no used vans. They can also help you with finance, offering monthly payments for up to seven years with flexible deposits.

You can call VanDemand on 0845 646 5646 or email info@vandemand.com

These are exciting times for Cathal and his team at CPD Bodies.

Do you need a custom-built vehicle which is designed to do a job? The best idea is to go onto their website www.cpdbodies. com where you'll see details of their entire range and how they can help you. You'll also spot their contact details.

CPD...a North East success story that's building for the future.

cpdbodies.com



66

TUP TUP TUP Set Law

...we've acquired new sites, the latest being a £1.7m acquisition... BUSINESS INSIGHT

Kings Park Capital (KPC) backs STACK with investment

KPC is pleased to announce its investment in STACK, the innovative operator of mixed-use leisure venues renowned for their fusion of bars, live entertainment and leisure activities offering memorable experiences alongside a high-quality all-day street food offer, led by local independent vendors.

Founded by Neill Winch in 2017, STACK has rapidly become a cultural and community hub, initially making its mark with the Newcastle site in 2018, which drew more than three million visitors before its closure in 2022.

STACK is poised to launch a new flagship site in Newcastle at Worswick Chambers in 2025, in a revitalisation of the historic Grade II listed building, featuring nine bars and ten street food units.

STACK Seaburn, which opened in 2020 despite the pandemic challenges, already attracts more than 600,000 visitors annually, showcasing the brand's compelling and resilient proposition.

STACK is continuing its expansion with STACK Middlesbrough, scheduled to open in spring 2024. This move marks the beginning of a series of site launches, with STACK Lincoln already in the construction phase and



Mammoth accelerating growth plans with Growth Capital Fund Investment

Health and wellbeing brand, Mammoth, is set to create new jobs and develop the infrastructure needed to drive growth both at home and overseas after securing a six-figure investment from the North East Growth Capital Fund through regional fund management firm NEL Fund Managers.

Headquartered in Newcastle, Mammoth will utilise the investment to help drive sales of its recently revamped product range, including its flagship Comfort collection, and has already secured a 40% increase in retail floor placements for the key winter trading period.

The six-figure investment from the North East Growth Capital Fund Supported by the European Regional Development Fund will also enable Mammoth to recruit new personnel into roles that will be critical for the company's future expansion.

A new Bedding Manager, Global Sales Project Manager and Customer Service Manager are set to join the firm in January and will work under new Managing Director, Mike Hobson, who joined the business in July 2023.

The business will also be investing in new warehousing for its bedding collection, as well as a new European mainland international showroom, plans for which had been delayed by bad debt suffered as the result of supply chain issues and the challenges of Covid-19.

Under the leadership of Mammoth CEO, John Tuton, and MD Mike Hobson, the next period of growth will see the brand continue to innovate and partner with experts in sleep, comfort and performance.



the highly anticipated St James' STACK, a joint venture with Newcastle United that will establish a Fan Zone by the stadium, reflecting the brand's innovative approach to leisure and community engagement.

STACK's expansion strategy is multifaceted, consisting of innovative container parks in Carlisle, Manchester, and Sheffield together with several development projects aimed at repurposing vacant retail spaces, breathing new life into city centres in locations such as Lincoln, Durham, Bishop Auckland, Whitley Bay and Northampton.

This dual approach underscores STACK's commitment to creating both pioneering leisure environments and revitalising urban landscapes. KPC's investment will be used to accelerate STACK's growth and realise the team's vision of delivering these transformative projects.



Durham based housing developer receives six figure funding boost

Durham-based developer Kelmec Ltd has received a six figure funding investment from FW Capital to support the development of four ecofriendly new homes in Murton with a focus on sustainable living.

The investment for the development of Empire Terrace is being backed using investment from the North East Property Fund (NEPF) which is managed by FW Capital on behalf of the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The Fund was established with the aim of supporting the development of small-scale property schemes.

Four plots are being built using state-of-the-art construction techniques, with a strong focus on energy efficiency, ensuring a sustainable and environmentally friendly lifestyle. Each of the homes boast spacious open-plan living and three well-appointed bedrooms. They are situated in a prime location and conveniently located close to all local amenities, ensuring easy access to shops, bus routes, and recreational facilities, adjacent to Woods Terrace and near to the Dalton Park, a premier shopping and leisure destination.

Mark Killen, Director at Kelmec Ltd said: "This is our first housing development scheme and without the backing of Lewis Blakelock and FW Capital we wouldn't have been able to progress the site to where it is today."

Lewis Blakelock, Assistant Investment Executive at FW Capital added: "It's great to see housing being built in the Murton area. The team at Kelmec is using their previous experience to build their first scheme of high quality houses and we're delighted to be supporting this local development. It's a great example of how NEPF can be used to support smaller property schemes that may have struggled to get finance from mainstream lenders."



Mincoffs signs on as Northern football club sponsor



Newcastle's oldest rugby club has scored a sponsor for this season, thanks to support from an award-winning North East law firm.

Mincoffs Solicitors has teamed up with Northern Football Club, as the firm signs on as shirt sponsor for its mini and youth rugby teams.

14 groups train with the club each week, ranging in age from under 6s to under 16s, including the club's girls group, Northern Amazonians.

The sports club is one of many local groups and charities the firm – which recently changed its logo as part of an ongoing rebrand – supports as part of its ongoing ESG work.

Paul Hughes, senior partner and head of corporate at Mincoffs Solicitors, is delighted to back the club.

"Sport is a fantastic outlet for young people and Northern Football Club is a great example of this, so it is our pleasure to sign on as shirt sponsor this season," he said. "A number of our staff have children who play for the youth teams, so it is an organisation we have close ties with and one we are proud to support.

"We wish all of the players at Northern Football Club a fantastic season in their new kits and we look forward to cheering them on."

The rugby club, which was founded in 1875, operates at its home ground of McCracken Park, Gosforth, and boasts a number of players who have gone on to play at an international level, including Jonathan Webb, Brian Keen, David Rees and Colin White.

The club has strong links with Newcastle Falcons and, from u14s upwards, regularly has players go through the development player programme and academy.

Ben Hunter, chair of youth rugby at the club, said: "We are incredibly grateful to Mincoffs for their support of Northern this year.

"Community sport can have such a positive

influence on individuals and communities and we believe rugby is particularly good at this. Having support from Mincoffs is invaluable to allow us to offer players and coaches personal development on and off the pitch.

"These funds also allow us to offer inclusive opportunities for players to go on tour at the end of the season for individuals who may otherwise not be able to. Thank you to all of the team at Mincoffs."

Mincoffs has gone from strength to strength over the last 12 months, with its corporate team being named the North East's most active legal advisor as per the latest Experian Market IQ M&A Review.

Alongside corporate and commercial services, the firm's offering includes real estate, dispute resolution, employment law, licensing and gaming, residential conveyancing, family law and wills, probate and trusts.

For more information visit www.mincoffs.co.uk

Are you making a positive difference?

Businesses are increasingly expected to consider purpose as well as profit, and the future of our planet and its people.

These are referred to as environmental, social and governance (ESG).

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Our business consultants can help you with your ESG Strategy Implementation.

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ACCOUNTANTS



Tech firm getting Seriös about growth goals with North East fund backing

A North East technology consultancy is aiming to treble its workforce by creating 100 new jobs over the next three years after securing a six-figure North East Fund investment.

Seriös Group is a boutique data and test solutions provider which designs, delivers and manages bespoke solutions for large corporate clients and private sector enterprises which provide them with the insights they need to meet specific operational and commercial outcomes.

After working with regional fund management firm NEL Fund Managers to bring in the investment from the North East Growth Capital Fund Supported by the European Regional Development Fund, the Newcastleheadquartered business is now preparing to fully launch its own purpose-built data platform accelerator, Seriös One.

The new platform provides the foundations and capability to turn enterprise and Internet of Things telemetry data into business insights, analytics and solutions that meet specific client requirements.

Around 15 new jobs are expected to be created through 2024, with a further 85 to follow over the ensuing two years as the business grows.

Headquartered at Hoults Yard and with a subsidiary office in Glasgow, Seriös Group was set up at the start of 2020 and operates to a remote working hybrid model, with most of its expert team based around the North East.

It works across all industries, but has built up particular expertise in the commercial property and facilities management sectors through its work with data generated by 'smart' buildings.

Seriös Group already has a strong presence right across the UK, and is now looking to add further major corporations to its impressive client portfolio.

NEL Fund Managers was recommended to the Seriös Group management team by the firm's non-executive chairman, well-known regional entrepreneur Neil Stephenson.



Develop North supports new jobs and a new greener processing facility in Darlington with £2.2m funding

Develop North PLC (Develop North), the investment fund providing loans to property developers in the North of England and Scotland, is supporting the construction of a new warehouse facility in Darlington.

Developed by Jaymac Pallet Services, the new facility is being built on the Faverdale Industrial Estate having secured a circa. £2.2m funding package from Develop North, which is managed by Tier One Capital Ltd (Tier One), the Newcastle-upon-Tyne-based wealth management and fund management specialists.

The development on the 3.7 acre site will feature a pair of connected industrial units, with around 17,000 sq ft of space for storage and manufacturing. It will undertake the storage, repair and supply of pallets for the food, industrial manufacturing and medical industry.

Jaymac Pallets is a family-run business founded in 1997. It has its main facility in Team Valley, serving the Tyne and Wear region.

The site will operate 24 hours a day and will create in the region of 30 jobs once fully operational.

Since it was founded in 2017, Develop North has successfully provided funding to support the construction of 34 residential and commercial projects across the North East of England and Scotland. These projects have received debt funding totalling £73million, which has created an estimated development value of £186 million, contributing significantly to the growth and prosperity of the regions it supports.

Brendan O'Grady, Fund Manager at Tier One, said: "We're delighted to be supporting Jaymac Pallets' North East expansion with a funding package that will create a modern, sustainable facility in a key location in Darlington. We are excited to support another North East development looking to create jobs and promote economic development in the region, both of which are key objectives of Develop North."



RGCF reports another record year and predicts continued positive M&A activity for 2024

RG Corporate Finance has reported another record year of M&A activity, with a positive outlook for 2024.

RGCF continues to be highly active in a number of key industry sectors, including, among others, recruitment & training, industrials & manufacturing, healthcare, technology and professional services, which are generating positive, growth focused M&A activity.

Among the highlights of the past 12 months were the sale of M2 Education to Sweden-based strategic acquirer Humly, Euston Capital's acquisition of Hammond Chemicals and Mitie plc's c.£19.1m acquisition of security and facilities specialist RHI Irving.

In the technology sector, RGCF advised online neurodiversity training and assessment provider Cognassist on raising £4m of development capital from Gresham House Ventures, which is a growth equity investor and Venture Capital Trust (VCT) based in London.

Professional services continues to be an active sector for RGCF, with acquisitive, often PE backed or listed businesses, looking to build market share by making strategic acquisitions.

This was exemplified by North West-based MAPD Group's acquisitions of Ashton-under-Lyne practice Bromleys, and Cumbrian law firm Thomson Hayton Winkley (THW) and its sister business The Rural Law Practice (RLP), which are acquisitions RGCF advised on from a corporate finance, financial & tax due diligence and transactional tax perspective.

Carl Swansbury, partner and head of corporate finance at RGCF, believes that despite the 'financial headwinds' such as higher interest rates, high inflation and political uncertainty, which can result in investor caution, there is still a lot of 'dry powder' in the market.

Carl said: "Our record performance in the past 12 months can be attributed in part to our experience and expertise in advising businesses on transactions in key industry sectors, but there are positive market forces that will defy financial headwinds and political uncertainty and continue to influence M&A activity."

0191 281 1292 Clear advice Creative thinking





RG Corporate Finance OPINION DRIVEN STRATEGIC ADVICE



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Pallets' North East expansion with a funding package that will create a modern, sustainable facility in a key location in Darlington. We are excited to support another North East development looking to create jobs and promote economic development in the region, both of which are key objectives of Develop North.

"The management team has ambitious plans to grow the business, delivering local jobs and encouraging skills development through its apprenticeship schemes, alongside its sustainability activities, which offer its clients waste solutions through its Recover, Repair, Reuse and Recycling services."

Jay Macari, Manging Director of Jaymac Pallet Services, said: "Jaymac Pallet Services appreciate the support offered from the team at Tier One Capital and Develop North enabling our business to grow and, in turn, support the local community.

"The build represents the next step in Jaymac Pallet Services' strategy to become the most sustainable pallet supplier in the North of England. The site has been designed with the environment in mind and moves us closer to our key customer base. The extra space that the site brings also allows us to extend our wider solutions offering, enabling us to store, sort and unpack goods in response to strong customer demand for these services."

www.tieronecapital.co.uk



RMT's advice helps STACK build platform for major growth investment

Advice from RMT Accountants & Business Advisors has helped an ambitious North East leisure firm secure a substantial growth capital package to help underpin the next stage of its expansion.

Innovative mixed-use leisure venue operator STACK has received investment from London private equity house Kings Park Capital to accelerate growth plans and take its popular drinking and dining destinations across the UK.

STACK's multi-faceted expansion strategy consists of placing new container parks in Carlisle, Manchester and Sheffield alongside several development projects aimed at repurposing vacant retail spaces, breathing new life into city centre locations such as Lincoln, Durham, Whitley Bay and Northampton.

Long-term advisors Michael Cantwell and Anthony Andreasen of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors worked with the STACK management team on the structural and tax aspects of the deal. They are now continuing to work together on the firm's long-term development and implementation of its investment plans.

Founded in 2017, STACK has become one of the UK's fastest growing leisure brands.

It drew over three million visitors to its first Newcastle site between 2018 and 2022, and is set to launch a new flagship site in Newcastle city centre at the regenerated Worswick Chambers in 2025, which will feature nine bars and ten street food units.

Elsewhere in the North East, STACK Middlesbrough is scheduled to open in spring this year and construction work on the STACK Bishop Auckland site is set to begin in March.

Neill Winch, founder and CEO of STACK, says: "Teaming up with Kings Park Capital, a specialist investor in the leisure sector, is instrumental for our growth, and their investment will enable our extensive pipeline of new venues to become a reality.

"The RMT team's advice and guidance has been a key part of our success over the years and their support has been central to shaping and completing this crucial investment package."

Michael Cantwell, head of corporate finance at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, says: "Neill and his team have built an extremely recognisable and dynamic leisure brand in a very short period and now have what they need in place to fulfil even more of the business's growth potential.

"It's great for us to be playing a role in the continuing STACK success story and look forward to seeing more projects being realised ...The RMT team's advice and guidance has been a key part of our success over the years and their support has been central to shaping and completing this crucial investment package....

around the country through the coming year and beyond."

Also advising STACK on the investment was Newcastle-headquartered commercial law firm, Square One Law. Having worked with STACK, on its nationwide concept, providing advice on all aspects including real estate, construction, commercial contracts, intellectual property and finance raising, the firm played a key role in supporting Neill and his team in the transaction.

Jamie Tillman, partner at King Park Capital, adds: "We are excited to be partnering with STACK and are committed to supporting Neill and his exceptional team in its ambitious expansion. We believe STACK'S unique leisure hubs will become landmarks in towns and cities throughout the UK."

www.r-m-t.co.uk



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Alice House Golf Day

When the first Alice House Hospice Golf Day to take place at Hartlepool Golf Club gets underway next month, a locally based financial adviser will be proud of what has been achieved.

Harrison Smith, who fronts a Hartlepool office for Corbridge's wealth management company Emerald Associates, has been keen to do more work in the community since establishing a base in his hometown.

Harrison is looking to deliver financial health sessions in the workplace for employers and head into classrooms to offer the next generation advice - and he was keen to support local charity Alice House Hospice.

Alice House Golf Day will take place at Hartlepool Golf Club on Friday, March 22 and is already on track to be a sell-out – with sponsorship opportunities still available. Harrison Smith, Financial Adviser, Emerald Associates said: "When I first met up with Greg Hildreth from Alice House the golf day was an idea that we spoke about – and it's gone from there. It's the perfect combination really because so many of the club's captains over the years have chosen Alice House as their chosen charity.

"The golf day should be a fantastic occasion and what's exciting is that we have seen already that the support is there for this to come back again and again. That would be amazing. I can't wait for the event to come around and I'm excited at the prospect of seeing golfers head out on to the course and battle it out for the right to win the Alice House Golf Day."

Harrison moved into his own office at Hartlepool's HartlePower Community Interest Company (CIC)'s Greenbank, Stranton, Business Centre last summer. He represents Emerald Associates, who are based in Northumberland.

The 27-year-old, who studied for the Chartered Institute of Insurance Diploma in Regulated Financial Planning, has expert support from an established company boasting 160 years of experience – and the green and white colours of Emerald Associates' branding is prominent. Harrison is keen to pass on that vast expertise to the people in his hometown.

"I love Hartlepool," said Harrison, a graduate of Francis Marion University in South Carolina, USA. "Apart from the four years I had in America, I have always been here. I decided I wanted to be back here because it is home, I didn't see myself anywhere else.

"After returning from playing football at university and some third division standard football in Alabama out there, I got back and was an area manager with a nationwide supermarket chain but didn't want to stay in retail. I didn't feel I was helping people.

"I joined Emerald as a relatively new adviser in January 2021 and I'm now self-employed associated with a practice with huge knowledge of the industry. I have wanted to do more in our Hartlepool community and it has already been great to link with fantastic organisations such as HartlePower and Alice House Hospice."

Harrison believes there is a greater need in the area to help others understand more about their financial situations. He will generally provide a no obligation consultation to hear what an individual or a business would like to achieve in an informal fashion.

Harrison said: "I want to provide financial advice and make it available to everyone - whether that is personal or corporate clients, there is always something you can do.

"A big part of financial planning is giving yourself time, don't think about it five years away from retirement for example. The earlier you do it; the more attainable people's goals are. I want to help."

To contact Harrison check out his adviser hub linktr.ee/harrisonsmithea [linktr.ee]



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One becomes two with more growth planned

A leadership peer group for existing and aspiring NEDs, trustees, board advisors and consultants at board level has swelled in size so much through 2023 that the cohorts have started 2024 in two newly formed groups, with a third on the horizon in the coming months.

Experience Bank Group, formed by Peter Neal in 2015, offers a range of core services including continuous professional development peer groups, leadership level recruitment particularly in the charitable sector and philanthropic support for SME's/ start-ups with purpose.

Peter said: "Having been running the peer group for existing and aspiring NEDs, trustees, board advisors and consultants at board level for three years now, the group has grown to a size where the cohorts will benefit from splitting into two, with quarterly events where they come back together.

"The objective of being in the peer group is to become a better advisor, make better decisions and achieve better results. To do that full rounded conversations are needed where everyone has a voice and the smaller groups will allow and encourage that. When brought back together, real sharing of experience can be done and the group will enjoy some quality speakers together."

The diverse mix of the interactive and challenging groups supports personal development too, as well as learning and development. The sessions will always have some element of health checking personal life with professional commitments.

The monthly meets are currently hosted at Hay and Kilner Law firm in Newcastle and Mayborn Group at Balliol Business Park. Alison Reynolds, a freelance Strategic HR and organisational development consult, is also a NED and trustee. She joined the group to gain new skills in all of her roles and is now thriving:

"I find it easier to take opinion and advice in the peer group setting and also love that I can give my advice, which cements the belief that I am great at what I do. My voice, ideas and experience are valued by the other cohorts and my confidence has been boosted, especially when brought together with the new skills I have learnt."

As well as providing you with the business tools and resources to improve your decision-making abilities, facilitator Andrew Marsh who supports each member of the group with his knowledge, insights and experience also processes real time challenges and issues in the monthly meetings in ways that mirror a board setting. Antonia Brindle, who is a board advisor and trustee, as well as a marketing consultant working at board level, has been a member for over two years now.

She said: "Connecting with other thought provoking and knowledgable individuals brings a solid base of support when needed. The peer group enter into challenging discussions, and the broader perspectives and strategies have helped me address something in one of my roles on a number of occasions. Being part of the group is worth its weight in gold and I am not surprised at its popularity!"

As the programme expands into multiples of groups, this does open up opportunity to join Experience Bank's peer group programme, whereas previously there has been a waiting list.

It is anticipated that the list will grow quickly again throughout 2024, so if you are interested do get in touch with peter@theexperiencebank.co.uk

More information is available at theexperiencebank.co.uk

Sharing the wealth: Insights gained and lessons learned as an SME Portfolio FD



Steven Jones, a Portfolio Finance Director (FD) and one of five FDs at Kingsmere Financial Directors, looks back on his experience in the North East SME sector, and gives his three 'universal truths' which he believes are fundamental to growing a flourishing business and forging a successful career.

The last 10 years working as a Portfolio Finance Director have undeniably been the most professionally rewarding period of my career. I have met some fantastic people, driven by their commitment to the businesses they have created and grown, and have shared in working with them through sometimes difficult and sometimes spectacularly successful times. And these experiences have helped crystallise three universal truths .

1. CASH, CASH, CASH!

A business may be the labour of love of an enthusiast, it may be a long-standing family business employing friends and family, it may even be a charity but the ultimate purpose of all that effort is to produce cash.

Each and every single decision a business owner makes should have, as its first and most

important consideration, 'How will this decision alone affect the bank account?'. There are many and varied decisions to be made when running a business - granting customer discounts, agreeing supplier payment terms, or making capital equipment purchases - all these will have implications for cash.

To bring this all together, and allow the business to understand the implications of impending financial decisions, the most effective exercise is to prepare and critically review a forecast of all cash income and expenditure. In my experience of having prepared many such forecasts the most useful have been weekly forecasts looking three months ahead, but that may not be appropriate for all businesses.

None of this will be a surprise to anyone but it remains a truth that without full focus on cash no business can be truly successful or reach its goals.

2. Do the right thing, all the time, every time

This is one that can be difficult for businesses to uphold in all circumstances but my experience has confirmed to me that the strongest, most successful, happiest businesses are those that abide by this mantra.

At the worst, not following legal obligations could prove fatal, but failure to act with any party in good faith will undermine the reputation of a business, regardless of the quality of the goods or services they may provide. The downsides of reputational loss are considerable; a business may find it difficult to win customers, achieve profitable pricing and payment terms for its outputs, secure economic supply chain prices or favourable supplier payment terms, or attract and retain high quality staff. In addition, and often overlooked, is that working in a successful business with a strong reputation is personally rewarding and much more fun.

3. There is nothing more important than your professional reputation

This is a personal one relevant to individuals and is linked to truth 2 in relation to businesses. A reputation as someone who is trustworthy, whose advice is unbiased and whose recommendations are made wholly for the good of the client rather than for personal gain is a Portfolio FD's strongest asset.

On more than one occasion I have provided a solution to a client which brings my assignment to an early conclusion, with a cost saving to the client. From a personal perspective this approach, while not necessarily delivering me the maximum material gains possible, has provided me with a rewarding career, some good friends, a clear conscience and of course some great fun.

I can only thank all the clients and staff I have worked with, in businesses of all shapes, sizes, business sectors and ownership models over the last 10 years for helping me learn, and sometimes re-learn some very useful truths.

Steve is one of five outsourced, portfolio FDs that make up the Kingsmere Finance Directors team; Kingsmere clients have access to a vast breadth of expertise across a wide range of sectors.

For businesses considering engaging with a portfolio FD, find out more at kfdl.co.uk or email the Kingsmere team at info@kfdl.co.uk

2024 Tech Trends

As we settle into the new year, Waterstons Technical Director, Alex Bookless, shares his insights into the technology trends we can expect to be big in 2024.

Demystifying AI

Al is unavoidable. It's used in supply chains across industries and sectors, and it's only going to increase. Microsoft see AI as the paradigm shift in human computer interaction and they're probably right.

There's still a lot of hype around AI, especially generative AI (tools such as ChatGPT) and the fear of missing out can be quite high, but there's also a lot of to think about around its adoption, risks, and how those benefits are realised in practice. As we're seeing a broader adoption of AI, 2024 will be the year of understanding:

• The actual business problems and opportunities Finding out what it can do for us as businesses is going to be huge and finding more tangible responses to 'We need AI', other than 'What for?' will get easier this year as people become more familiar with its strengths and limitations.

The true cost and ROI

They can be very expensive to run, there's no doubt about that. With more options being developed and widely used, we're going to be in a stronger position to understand the true cost, use and therefore ROI.

The limits of current GenAI

The main AI hype is around Generative AI – it's not always the right solution to the problem, and it can't solve everything, regardless of how much you want it to. They will continue to evolve, but we will start to see other AI solutions gain more traction.

How 'normal' businesses can adopt AI

AI is mainly the domain of big businesses – for example, Microsoft's Copilot is only available for organisations with over 300 users, and that can afford to drop at least £110,000 per year on this alone. Most businesses aren't there, so we'll start to see how more SMEs use AI to support their organisations.

AI built-in by default

Coupled with this, expect to see your business systems start releasing their own AI powered functionality built-in, particularly in SaaS solutions (and if they aren't, you should probably ask them 'why not?').

Sustainability awareness

The cost to our environment is not to be ignored or forgotten. For example, the carbon emissions generated and water consumption that powers these models; the cost isn't only financial.

Our options beyond 'large language models'

options?'. For a specific purpose, a small language model may be far more cost effective to deliver for example.

Find out more about AI and how it can support your business, systems and team, or organise an innovation workshop, by getting in touch with our Innovation team.

Cyber crime will continue to be a huge challenge

An unfortunate reality, cyber security will continue to be something to work on and keep making progress in.

The minimum standard will continue to develop

If you don't have Next-Gen AV or EDR yet, get it. This will become a necessity for all organisations - as important as the tooling is, consider how it is monitored. A 24x7 MDR or SOC service is also important to consider.

Similarly with multi-factor authorisation (MFA); although an important tool to prevent identities being compromised, threat actors are finding

ways to breach even these, so looking at modern authentication options such as FIDO2 and password-less technologies such as fingerprints or facial recognition for device and system security is vital – particularly for your most sensitive systems.

Cloud security will need more focus

As more data is stored in the cloud, threat actors are finding more and more ways to infiltrate and compromise it so securing it is more important than ever – from proactive data classification and protection, to improving monitoring and auditing of user activity to detect any issues.

Zero trust becomes more accessible

Zero trust has been making a lot of noise in the past few years, although it's not a particularly new concept. It is now more easily adoptable by businesses of all sizes as it becomes better understood, and technologies become cheaper to licence and implement.

Find out more about the ongoing cyber threat landscape through our monthly report.

Reducing emissions and improving sustainability

After COP28, the same messages are being shared with the same lack of progress on our journey to NetZero, but we are starting to see changes. In procurement for example, we're seeing more and more tenders look at sustainability and environmental impact with some awarding 20% of marks towards these efforts. But there's still a way to go...

People

Educating teams and continually building understanding around sustainability is vital to embed it within a company culture and individuals' thought processes.

Process

Building sustainability into everyday business processes, strategies and business case decisions will be vital, as well as ensuring it plays a large part in supplier due diligence and procurement.

Technology

It's never been more important to use, and design, solutions that reduce emissions. Organisations have never been under more pressure to find efficiencies and smaller businesses with limited resources will struggle to that accurately track and predict emissions. Technology and systems will play a key part in enabling organisations to generate a true picture of activity and efforts.

To find out more about how your organisation can improve and measure its sustainability metrics, get in touch with Alex at alex.bookless@waterstons.com





Alex Bookless

Look ahead with... Raymond James, Monument

2023 turned out to be a good year for equity markets despite the challenges posed by a mini banking crisis in the US, above target inflation and interest rates at levels not seen since before the Great Financial Crisis.

However, as markets usually do, they looked beyond the present world issues to hopefully better times ahead. The prospect of interest rate cuts in developed economies during 2024 garnered much excitement, as well as the potential impact of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI). So, lets look at the likely key themes for the year ahead.

Al. It is to Al we turn to first. Technology stocks were the star performers during 2023 with the Magnificent Seven – Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, Meta Platforms, Microsoft, Nvidia and Tesla – accounting for about 80% of the eventual rise in the S&P 500 throughout last year, propelling the US benchmark index to an all time high. There is no doubt Al will continue to be a much-watched theme during this year, however, the benefit to share prices could be seen far wider than just the Magnificent Seven (which are trading at fairly lofty valuations), as many companies embrace Al to help them generate additional services and cost benefits. Relx, Experian, Prudential and some of the world's largest healthcare companies are examples of organisations investing further into Al technologies.

Smaller Companies. Whilst some of the largest companies in the world have been the main driver of returns over many years, the opportunity for global smaller companies looks increasingly interesting. Despite smaller companies outperforming their larger counterparts over the past 25 years, the valuation difference between them has widened creating an entry point that looks to offer attractive long term returns for patient investors. Ultimately, valuations do matter, and this part of the market is often under researched, which creates opportunities, with smaller companies being able to react more quickly, grow more rapidly and potentially become tomorrow's winners.

Inflation. There is no doubt that the downward trajectory of inflation is much welcome, with three of the four components of inflation - Energy, Food and Core Goods - being supportive. However, the largest component -Services – is proving more tricky. Services are very much linked with consumer spending (which accounts for 64% and 69% of the UK and US economy, respectively), that in turn is supported by job security, rising real incomes, savings levels, overall wealth and access to debt. However, discretionary spending by consumers is impacted by living expenses, spending on essentials and taxes. Whilst the impact of interest rate rises is yet to be fully felt, due to many borrowers being on fixed rate mortgages, a significant number of UK households will need to re-mortgage this year, which will affect the ability for those consumers to spend at the current rate. Coupled with a likely tick up in the unemployment rate, as companies look to cut costs, this is likely to result in a challenging environment for some. Saying that, some consumers are seeing a boost to their spending ability with higher interest rates on savings. The US consumer looks to be in a better position, but the economy is still likely to see an increase in the unemployment rate.

Recession here and in the US remains a possibility too. This paints a mixed picture for the outlook for consumer spending, which could lead to inflation remaining slightly higher than anticipated by markets.

Interest Rates . The outlook for investment markets will continue to be choppy and very much driven by expectations on interest rate cuts this year, on which the market is pricing in around 125 bps of cuts in the US and 50 bps in the UK by the year end. Whether this will come to fruition will all depend on how sticky inflation proves to be. Both equity markets and longer dated bonds have benefitted over the past few months from the likely peak in interest rates in developed economies. Bond markets could prove more volatile should inflation remain elevated, but even at current levels, Government Bonds offer attractive longer terms returns compared with more recent times. A tailwind for bond markets could be the \$7 trillion invested in global money market funds, some of which is likely to find a new home as interest rates start to fall. Bonds could be a beneficiary.

Elections. 2024 will be a busy year for elections, with voters going to the polls in Russia (March), India (April-May), European Parliament (June), US (November) and the UK later in year too. However, voters shouldn't expect many giveaways on either side of the Atlantic, as the coffers are fairly bare with continued deficits being funded by further bond issuance, but at higher rates. This vicious circle will make it difficult for large scale fiscal stimulus over the years ahead.

During 2024, Investment markets will need to navigate the negative impact on lower company profits as economies slow, but will be influenced by movements in interest rates as central bankers at home and overseas look to engineer a hopeful soft landing and avoid a recession. As always, there will be winners and losers and no doubt the odd surprise that investors will need to deal with.

Some of the information used in this article was sourced from the Charles Stanley Market Outlook 2024.

Risk Warnings: Any opinion or forecast reflects the judgment as at the date of issue and is subject to change without notice. Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future results. This commentary is intended for information purposes only and no action should be taken or refrained from being taken as a consequence without consulting a suitably qualified and regulated person. With investing your capital is at risk.

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...no doubt AI will continue to be a muchwatched theme during this year...

Left to right, back to front Gary Fawcett, Jason Ryan, James Carrick Michael Rankin, Alison Hedley, Rob Brotherton

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North East commercial finance boutique expands team in Tees Valley and Durham

Award-winning North East commercial finance boutique CCBS Group has appointed Rachel Chambers to lead further expansion of its services in Tees Valley and Durham.

With over 15 years' experience in senior positions predominantly in the energy, transport and engineering sectors, Rachel joins the CCBS team in its tenth year supporting North East businesses with innovative financial solutions.

Peter Cromarty, Managing Director at CCBS Group, said of the appointment: "We have always worked with businesses and intermediaries in Tees Valley but we want to make a bigger commitment to the region - working with Rachel to put down firm roots, open an office and expand the level of support we can provide to businesses in the area. Rachel's passion and drive to create opportunities for SMEs and help them to grow sustainably and strategically aligns perfectly with what we're all about here at CCBS, and her experience in advanced manufacturing, green energy and renewables will allow us



to help even more North East SMEs over the coming years."

Rachel was the driving force behind the setup of the Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Advanced Manufacturing (CESAM) in the North East and led work on the Driving the Electric Revolution Industrialisation Centres (DER-IC), working with industry to grow UK Power Electronics, Machines and Drives manufacturing capability, capacity and competitiveness.

She said: "I'm thrilled to be joining the CCBS

team to help drive their operations in the south of the region. There are so many exciting things happening in the Tees Valley and Durham area and we know that we can help businesses to maximise these opportunities and catalyse their future plans by opening doors to funding, advice and contacts. The CCBS team are so friendly and incredibly knowledgeable and well-connected - I can't wait to see what we can achieve together."

www.ccbsg.co.uk
Providing innovative funding solutions



CCBS Group is a commercial finance boutique helping North East businesses achieve their aspirations, take advantage of great opportunities and endure when times are tough.

Whether it's fundraising, business system improvements or outsourced credit control and commercial debt recovery our team has over 100 years' experience to support you and your team with your next move.

Phone: 0191 2111450

Email: info@ccbsg.co.uk

www.ccbsg.co.uk



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- VAT & Tax Loans







@CCBSGroup





Higgs Bookkeeping Services unveils their new rebranding initiative



In a strategic move to redefine its identity and enhance client-focused services, Higgs Bookkeeping Services, led by the experienced North East Accountant Ivan Higgs, has embarked on a total rebrand.

The company now calls itself YourAccountants and along with the new name, comes a brand-new logo and identity for the business.

With over two decades of expertise in accountancy, Ivan has held senior positions in construction and legal services.

Motivated by a passion for technology and a commitment to delivering exceptional service, he initiated the establishment of a specialised Construction Accountant business, aiming to bring substantial value to small and medium-sized enterprises.

Their new business will incorporate construction, however, is open to all other businesses now too.

Ivan's multifaceted approach extends beyond

traditional accounting roles.

In addition to the Construction Accountant venture, he operates another business providing Portfolio Finance Director services to Construction SMEs, available at a competitive day rate.

Ivan commented: "As a North East Accountant, YourAccountants offers comprehensive services to limited companies, with bespoke packages that are a perfect fit for your business.

"The pricing structure for bookkeeping and VAT is tailored to the specific needs of our clients, dependent on the number of transactions and invoices/receipts processed monthly. It's not a one-cap-fits-all approach, we simply quote based on the needs of the individual business." YourAccountants extends its services to various industries. The company prides itself on its expertise in Bookkeeping and HMRC Compliance, with a particular focus on catering to the unique requirements of construction SMEs.

The benefits of choosing YourAccountants for your financial needs include:

- Avoiding direct interactions with HMRC.
- Ensuring compliance deadlines are met without the need for client intervention.
- Transparent cost allocation for payments and receipts, facilitating clearer reporting.
- Operational time savings that can be utilised more effectively.

Conveniently located at The Clervaux Exchange, Clervaux Terrace, Jarrow, NE32 5UP, YourAccountants can be reached at 0191 466 1264.

The firm invites businesses to explore the possibilities of a streamlined and efficient financial partnership tailored to their unique needs.

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www.fwcapital/property info@fwcapital.co.uk 0191 269 6969



North East Commercial Property Investment Fund

FW Capital is part of the DBW Group. FW Capital Ltd is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

FWCapital

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Joanne Whitfield

Stimulating growth across the North East

We're matching ambition with the right level of investment funding.

2023 proved to be a busy year for the North East team at FW Capital, reporting a 19% increase in lending from the previous year. The team, led by Joanne Whitfield has been adapting to the increased demand for lending from local businesses.

"Despite hurdles, the North East economy has displayed resilience, especially in view of the ongoing pressures experienced by businesses. We've seen increased demand for lending.

The current NPIF investment phase has now completed with the British Business Bank launching the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II in March 2024. By the end of February this year, we will have provided over £170million of funding across the North, assisting close to 450 companies, through NPIF – FW Capital Debt Finance.

Alternative funding options are increasingly popular for SMEs who are adapting to and evolving with challenging market conditions. Access to funding is vital to encourage business growth, innovation, and job creation. At FW Capital we are actively forging new relationships to expand our funding offering and drive growth.

Last year we launched the North East Commercial Property Investment Fund with the North East LEP. This provides loans from £1million to £7million for speculative and non-speculative property developments with repayment terms available up to five years. The £35m fund will run for 15 years. We want to address a gap in the market and facilitate the delivery of new commercial property development projects that support employment creation and economic growth in the North East LEP area. The £35m will provide £119m of investment over the lifetime of the fund after repayments are recycled into new schemes. We've supported a variety of deals including the provision of over £1m to support a development of industrial units in Durham.

The region's property market is buoyant and has been bucking the national trend with increased demand for finance to support local developments. Our existing property fund, The North East Property Fund which we established in 2017 hit a key milestone in 2023, surpassing £50million of investment in property schemes with many more enquiries coming through. This fund offers loans from £250,000 to £2 million to smaller construction and property development firms who have struggled to access finance through traditional channels.

As one of the UK's largest regional fund managers, FW Capital is in a great position to help SMEs. We have a strong track record of providing flexible finance to dynamic businesses not just across the North of England, having extended our footprint into the South West of England and across Wales. July 2023 saw our expansion into the South West with a new office in Bristol to deliver finance to SMEs through the British Business Bank's new £200 million South West Investment Fund. Similarly, in December 2023 we became the British Business Bank's partner in delivering the Investment Fund for Wales, supporting businesses across the devolved nation. There we manage the £30m IFW – FW Capital Debt Finance fund, part of the £130m Investment Fund for Wales.

Looking ahead to 2024 we're seeing strong demand for investment and we're actively fundraising and looking for new investors to expand our offering for SMEs. Interest rates have stabilised and inflation is reducing, but there remain challenges, with skills shortages still being a major problem. However, businesses in the North East have demonstrated time and again they can rise to these challenges. It is really important for businesses to stay confident and embrace opportunities to grow so they do not get left behind.

Receiving financial backing from an investor that can take the time to understand their needs and tailor the right investment for them is critical.

Here is where our approach comes to the fore. We add value and provide support to each business we work with. Our focus is on trying to do things differently and spotting gaps where SMEs need help. We can then work with them, making introductions to our network where appropriate to maximise the impact of our funds to help them achieve their ambitions.

Being locally based we take great pride in our role in the rejuvenation of the North East. Local business success is the key to the growth and prosperity of the region which is why we put local businesses at the centre of what we do. We recognise it can be daunting to access finance but our team is here to help. With our strong network of local professionals and passion for business-to-business referrals we can give you the tools to help businesses to reach their full potential."

If you want to find out how we can support your business please contact us. Call 0191 269 6969 or email info@fwcapital.co.uk You'll also find additional details on our website www.fwcapital.co.uk



The demand for technological innovation: Achieving growth in the current economic environment

Maven hosted a technology roundtable, chaired by Senior Investment Manager, David Nixon, and featuring a number of regional tech founders, sector experts and advisors. In the second part of this series, we explore the rising demand for technological innovation, hearing from companies that have successfully navigated this environment over recent years and explore the opportunities for driving growth in the current economic climate.



In the ever-evolving landscape of our economy, the demand for technological innovation has become more than a trend—it's a necessity. As we navigate through a complex economic period, businesses face both challenges and opportunities. The rapid pace of change requires a strategic approach to innovation to ensure sustained growth.

The UK currently has one of the slowest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rates in the G7 and there have been some challenges in recent years due to a number of micro and macro economic factors, yet despite this, the North East remains a growth area for start-up and growth software companies. And at the heart of this growth lies the power of technological innovation.

David Nixon: The recent uncertain economic environment has not only provided challenges, it has also presented great opportunities. We've seen portfolio companies come to terms with increased price sensitivity from clients, overhead volatility, tight labour markets, growing competition as some software markets mature, and longer sales cycles. But still, the digital sector represents an integral part of the UK's economy. New technologies help drive efficiencies and improve productivity, and as such software remains a high growth area.

The UK's digital market was valued at over £50bn in 2023 with digital technologies, cloud computing, AI, and Internet of Things (IoT) increasing as more and more businesses are adopting a tech-led strategy and implementing digital processes. The success of cloud technology and platform business models has contributed significantly to the tech industry's value creation.

Kevin Beales, Founder of MySalesCoach, sales coaching as a service platform: There are some great success stories in the North East but achieving extraordinary levels of growth is a real challenge. In an ideal world, once you understand the market, if you build a solid product, customers will pay for it. Technology businesses need to take time to prove the need for their solution or product before building out their idea. And continuing to improve and innovate your product as you gather data is where you stand out from the competition.

Gilbert Corrales, Founder of Leaf Grow, an end-to-end performance marketing services platform: Building a technology business is unlike many other industries and creating technology to scale sometimes requires a complete change of plan. Often as long as you are very good at what you do, focussing on one problem and building solutions, not features to solve that problem, there is opportunity for growth.





To stay ahead, technology businesses must continuously embrace and leverage the latest technologies and trends, turning challenges into opportunities.

By 2025, more than 50 billion devices will be connected to the Industrial Internet of Things (IIOT) and according to the world economic forum we'll experience more technological progress in the coming decade than we did in the preceding 100 years. Almost half of all existing work activities could be automated as next-level process automation becomes more commonplace.

Pete Daykin, Founder of Wordnerds, an innovative customer feedback analysis tool: From our position as an early-stage business, taking part in accelerator programmes, most businesses find you either need a very technical team to build something deep tech or you need to leverage opensource or you need a lot of capital to hire a good team. Otherwise, it's very difficult to develop real or innovative tech that no one else can. You can spend a year building software before you get to the validation stage to see if anyone is going to buy your solution, or you can use opensource which is arguably faster but worse quality. But once you get to a certain size you can invest in time and resources and people to build something new and different.



Paul Lancaster, Founder of UK Startup Week and PLATFORM, a monthly event for entrepreneurs: I've spent a lot of time with Tech Nation and we were good at empowering companies across industries to build more efficient and effective digital solutions. To thrive in this space, businesses need to focus on innovation, market your products effectively, get funding and build a strong team. Target gaps in the market for innovation, be agile and lean with costs, look to partnerships and collaborations, attract top talent and seek funding to support your initiatives. Overall, the pivot to digital across the wider economy is driving demand in the sector.

It's clear the reciprocal relationship between technological innovation and economic growth is undeniable. Investors play a pivotal role in fuelling innovation and as we stand on the brink of the tech revolution, it's imperative for businesses to embrace innovation as a catalyst for growth. Innovation is not just a buzzword, it's the driving force behind success. To stay ahead, technology businesses must continuously adopt and leverage the latest technologies and trends, turning challenges into opportunities.

Maven is one of the UK's most active private equity investors and is passionate about working with ambitious technology-led businesses to achieve their strategic goals and maximise growth potential. If your business, or the business you advise, is looking at private equity as a solution to fund future growth we would love to hear from you. Speak to one of our investment team by getting in touch at funding@mavencp.com

Three Rivers Health & Safety Consultancy - your trusted partner for seamless safety compliance



Opening its doors in 2020, Three Rivers Health & Safety Consultancy Ltd has emerged as a leading force in safety services throughout the Tyne, Wear, and Tees regions.

Boasting extensive expertise across various sectors, such as construction, demolition, manufacturing, engineering, and facilities management, their consultancy is committed to ensuring the utmost safety standards.

Headed up by Adam Swinney, the company's dedication to excellence is underscored by their prestigious ISO certifications - ISO 9001 for Quality Management and ISO 45001 for Health & Safety Management. These certifications affirm their unwavering commitment to delivering top-notch services while adhering to the highest industry standards. Adam told us: "At the core of our success is a team of consultants with a proven track record, each possessing a wealth of experience in Health and Safety across diverse industries.

Committed to continuous professional development, our consultants actively engage with the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) and the International Institute of Risk and Safety Management (IIRSM). This commitment ensures that our team remains at the forefront of industry knowledge, ready to navigate the ever-evolving landscape of Health and Safety.

"As your local Health & Safety Consultants, we prioritise offering personalised services that cater to your specific needs. We can assist and guide you with the implementation of safety for businesses. Our 24-hour customer support line (0191 250 8899) reflects our dedication to providing assistance whenever you need it."

The company specialises in delivering comprehensive training and consultancy services across the Tyne, Wear, and the Tees regions. Their consultancy's footprint extends across construction, demolition, office environments, and manufacturing sectors, showcasing their versatility in meeting diverse industry requirements and they can deliver the suite of IOSH courses, First Aid Courses, Manual Handling, and Fire Safety etc.

With accreditations including UKAS ISO 9001 Quality Management and UKAS ISO 45001 Health & Safety Management, Three Rivers Health & Safety Consultancy Ltd offers your business peace of mind, assuring you that you are in safe hands.

Adam concluded: "Compliance Without Complication, encapsulates our commitment to making the adherence to safety regulations a seamless and straightforward process for your organisation."

Three Rivers Health & Safety Consultancy Limited - giving your business peace of mind that you're in safe hands!

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New year - New mindset

The North Tyneside Business Forum organised a seminar to address mental health in the workplace to help businesses banish the winter blues. The event, at Tynemouth 61, Guest House and Tea Rooms featured speakers offering insights and strategies for fostering well-being and resilience at work.

Polly Brennan used her passion for outdoor sports and her experience as a mental health coach and occupational therapist to deliver 'Pack Your Mental Fitness Kitbag,' a journey to develop your own Mental Fitness Kitbag. Delegates discovered essential tools to navigate life's challenges and enhance their overall well-being.

From the great outdoors to indoor design, Carole Crowe asked the important question 'Does Your Interior Make Your Heart Sing?' Carole, a qualified interior designer and counsellor, explored the profound impact of a well-designed and energised workspace on creativity, productivity, and overall well-being.

Kelly Oliver-Dougall – Founder of Unisus, shared her entrepreneurial journey, challenges faced, and how she maintained positivity during tough times. Michael James, Chair of North Tyneside Business Forum said: "The event was all about raising awareness of what support is out there for mental well-being in the workplace."

The Forum is FREE to join and is for any business with a trading address in North Tyneside.

www.northtynesidebusinessforum.org.uk





Running for gold

Newcastle-based Mincoffs Solicitors organised a takeover of the popular Town Moor Parkrun recently to surprise consultant Howard Gold on his 80th birthday.

A keen runner, Howard has been involved with the parkrun for many years and now supports the organisation as a volunteer, with his birthday celebration marking the 183rd time he has volunteered for the event.

More than 80 staff, family and friends took to the parkrun in specially-designed 'Running for Gold' t-shirts to show their appreciation for Howard, who joined the firm in 1969 and worked closely with founder Harry Mincoff.

Howard acted as senior partner for many years and established the business' corporate and real estate departments, working on some of the region's most high profile commercial property deals, before stepping down to become a consultant.

"I had no idea that anything was planned and it was a massive surprise to see everyone at the parkrun," said Howard.

"After getting over the initial shock, I really enjoyed the morning and I'm very appreciative to everyone who went to such lengths to acknowledge my great age."

Julie Parr, chief operating officer at Mincoffs, organised the event alongside HR and office manager, Michelle Dodds, after learning about Howard's passion for running.

"Howard didn't want any fuss for his birthday but reaching the significant milestone of 80 years could not go unrecognised by us, considering all he has given to Mincoffs," she said.

"It was a fantastic morning as we all proudly wore our 'Running for Gold' t-shirts and it felt like the right way for all of us at Mincoffs to celebrate and wish Howard Gold a very, very happy birthday."

The event was organised with the support of Town Moor Parkrun, the Heaton Harriers and Urban Café.



Burnetts LLP to expand

Burnetts Solicitors LLP is to move from its current base at Newcastle's Dean Street to 1 Citygate, which will represent a £1m investment in its new premises.

The move – which is scheduled for early 2024 – will see the prestigious legal firm create a stateof-the-art environment on the seventh floor of the building.

And it will help consolidate Burnetts' position as one of the fastest growing law firms in the region, with ambitious plans in place for the future.

The design will follow the same pattern as the company's Carlisle office with more than 60 work stations as well as meeting rooms, a hub where staff can gather and an eatery.

The new look office will be created to ensure a



Law firm expands Tees Valley presence

Square One Law has recruited four specialist employment law experts to join its existing team, all of whom have joined the company's growing Tees Valley office. "collaborative work environment" for both the team and clients and has been designed to take into account people being able to split their time between home and office working.

Nick Gutteridge, Managing Partner, said the move was "to allow for the next period of growth."

"Dean Street has served us very well but we now need a larger space to enable us to create an environment where we can recruit and retain staff who buy into our culture and our values," he said.

"At the same time we believe this will also work extremely well for our clients."

Burnetts operates across a number of sectors, including banking, commercial property, corporate, employment and litigation and along with Newcastle has offices in Carlisle and Cockermouth.

Employment partner Liz Casey will co-ordinate the further development of the firm's Tees Valley presence while continuing to support existing business and client relationships alongside senior associates Lauren Mills and Joanne McHale-Young and paralegal, Debbie Howes.

The four had all previously worked together at law firm Knights, which was formerly Archers Law LLP. Combined, they boast 71 years' experience helping organisations navigate the legal complexities of employment law, from collective redundancies to intricate outsourcing, restructuring and TUPE transactions.

Liz said: "We're delighted to have joined the employment team at Square One Law. The firm has a great reputation across the region and their progressive approach will allow us to continue to deliver exceptional work for our clients, while remaining together as a team.

"As soon as we met the firm's partners, we knew it was the perfect fit. They share our values of integrity and always putting our clients first, and they are incredibly passionate about investing in the Tees Valley, which all four of us are proud to call home. "

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Do you really need a solicitor to handle your divorce?

Jacqueline Emmerson who has over thirty years of experience helping divorce clients thinks so.

"I am a solicitor so of course you would expect me to say yes. In many instances I assist clients to manage their own cases.

"Divorce, is different, the stakes are high if you get it wrong. It's not so much the issuing of the divorce petition itself. I'm more concerned about the Financial Settlement that follows on from divorce. Or the financial agreement a couple may make between themselves when they have not obtained a divorce"

Here Jacqueline provides some examples;

"A client was leaving the Air Force after 22 years of service. He was entitled to his long service bonus and his wife had hung on long enough in order to obtain her share. My client was distraught that his marriage had come to an end. He agreed to give his wife more than half of the settlement and in return she would let him remain living in the matrimonial home. In the meantime his wife went to live with her new partner.

"Some months later he came to see me. His wife had now been to see a solicitor, she wished to obtain a full settlement. She sought the house, as she had taken the children to live with her, two thirds of my client's pension, and maintenance for the children. She had spent the lump sum that he had given her. The poor man was beside himself, as far as he was concerned they had reached a final deal.

"Another client came to see me five years after he and his wife had separated. They had cobbled together a Consent Order, on the face of it it seemed like a fair deal. However, part of the agreement was that he would transfer the matrimonial home to his wife. In return she would transfer their jointly held savings policies to him. He stuck to his side of the bargain but his wife did not.

"The situation was even worse. He had agreed to pay maintenance to his wife for the rest of his life! Yet they were only in their forties when they divorced. During the next five years my client was unemployed for nearly three years. He continued to pay maintenance to his ex-wife and yet she was on a very good salary.

"I advised him to stop the maintenance payments, and made an application to the court to vary the terms of the DIY Consent



Order. I also arranged for the savings polices to be transferred over to my client, thus allowing him to purchase a home for himself instead of renting as he had been doing.

"Financial Settlements upon divorce are not simple. Separating couples will often reach a deal themselves, wishing to keep things amicable or they don't wish to spend money on legal advice. There is a reason we are called Divorce Specialists, years of assisting clients is how we learn where things can go wrong in the future. Thus we can help our clients to plan ahead."

So how can you obtain the best of both worlds? How can you save money and use a solicitor?

They key is preparation. Gather together all of your financial information, look on the HMCTS website for Form E. This contains all of the information that both parties solicitors will require in order to provide you and your spouse with comprehensive advice. It can take a while to obtain all of the information but the more prepared you are the cheaper the process will be.

"My job is to support you through the process.

I am not involved in the emotional side of things. I take a forensic approach, considering financial documents, where can savings be made, how are you each going to afford new accommodation, what should happen to your pensions, your savings, investment properties or any business that you or your spouse run.

"I am here to help you look to the future. Guilt at the breakdown of your marriage is no position from which to negotiate a settlement which will affect the rest of your life.

"Clients advise me that their spouse has said that this is all they will get so just accept what is on offer. They are being bullied into accepting an unsuitable deal, I have seen and heard it all!

"I offer Fixed Fee Next Steps in Divorce advice sessions. You will leave my office armed with advice and a plan of action. That in itself is worth every penny, it can be the difference between you living your later years in poverty or being comfortably off."

If you need any help please don't hesitate to contact me on 0191 2846989 or enquiries@emmersons-solicitors.co.uk







EMG Solicitors celebrated their annual charity WonderLAN Ball

Raising £21,000 for the Look Ahead North event run by Headway – the brain injury association.



























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It was the heat of the moment

Nathan May – O'Brien is a Solicitor at specialist employment law firm, Collingwood Legal. Nathan considers a recent case from the Employment Appeal Tribunal on resignations made in the "heat of the moment."

A resignation from an employee can be difficult for an employer to navigate, particularly if the circumstances behind the resignation are acrimonious. The recent case of *Omar v Epping Forest District Citizens Advice* provides some useful guidance in managing such situations.

Facts

Mr Omar had previous issues with his line manager, Ms Skinner, which culminated in Mr Omar verbally resigning on 19 February. It was Mr Omar's argument that the next day his employer recognised that he wished to continue working with them and they offered him an alternative role. However, by 21 February his employer had explained to Mr Omar that Ms Skinner no longer wished to work with him, and his resignation would stand.

Mr Omar was then asked to confirm his resignation in writing. He confirmed verbally that he would do this but never committed to this in writing and sought to retract his resignation. This was not accepted by his employer who confirmed the termination of Mr Omar's employment with one month's notice.

At the Employment Tribunal, Mr Omar argued he had not resigned in that any purported resignation had been "in the heat of the moment" meaning his words of resignation couldn't be taken at face value. He therefore claimed that he had been unfairly dismissed. The Employment Tribunal rejected Mr Omar's claim and found on the facts of the case that the words he used were unequivocal and were intended to resign. Mr Omar appealed the Employment Tribunal's decision.



What did the Employment Appeal Tribunal ("EAT") decide?

The EAT allowed Mr Omar's appeal on the basis that the Employment Tribunal's reasoning was flawed. Of relevance to employers, the EAT reviewed the legal principles in respect of resignations:

- Once an employee gives notice of termination, this cannot be retracted unless the employer agrees to this.
- Words conveying a resignation, or potentially doing so, need to be construed objectively considering all the circumstances.
- The words are judged from the perspective of a "reasonable bystander" in the position of the individual receiving the words of resignation.
- It must be apparent to the "reasonable bystander" that:
 - O Words were used which constitute an immediate resignation or a resignation on notice. It's not sufficient to express the intention to resign in the future; and
 - The dismissal or resignation needs to be "really intended" meaning that the speaker used words which appeared to genuinely express that intention.

This objective assessment is carried out at the time the words are uttered, which will include

an assessment of employee's mindset. Evidence as to what happened after the resignation is admissible to the extent that it is relevant to the question of whether the resignation was "really intended".

Heat of the moment resignations have no special status in law, and, in this case, the question was whether a reasonable employer could have concluded that Mr Omar really intended to resign.

What should employers note from this case?

The case provides a useful summary of the factors an Employment Tribunal will assess when there is a dispute as to whether a resignation or a dismissal has taken place. In the context of a resignation, the focus will be on what an employee "really intended" when they used words purporting to resign. Depending on the situation, employers may well be best advised to allow an employee a cooling off period before checking that it was genuinely the employee's intention to resign.

Collingwood Legal is a specialist employment law firm and we provide bespoke training and advice to organisations on all areas of employment law. www.collingwoodlegal.com 0191 282 2880

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Law firm expands further with two new appointments

Nationally recognised law firm, Sintons, has expanded further with new appointments to its healthcare real estate and personal and family teams.

Richard Hartis has joined Sintons' real estate team as Partner and brings with him 15 years of expertise in the healthcare sector. Richard specialises in property disposals and acquisitions, having worked with organisations including NHS Trusts, GPs and charities.

And contentious probate expert, Sharon Siu, has joined Sintons' team of personal and family law specialists. Sharon, who practised as a barrister in Hong Kong before qualifying as a solicitor in England and Wales, specialises in contentious probate, which includes challenges to wills and disputes relating to trusts and estates – an area where Sintons has recently been ranked as amongst the best in the country.

Christopher Welch, Sintons managing partner, said: "Both Richard and Sharon bring outstanding knowledge and experience with them and offer the highest levels of legal expertise. We are delighted to welcome them both to Sintons."

The real estate team at Sintons is one of the largest in the North East and includes lawyers with specialist knowledge of the healthcare, agriculture, renewables and leisure sectors.

On joining the team, Richard said: "Sintons is known for setting the standard when it comes to legal excellence and are consistently recognised as being amongst the very best in independent rankings such as the Legal 500. To be joining a team like this, at a time of continued growth for the firm, is a fantastic opportunity."

The firm's personal and family team supports clients with many aspects of personal and family law, from buying and selling residential properties to wills, trusts and probate.

Sharon commented: "Sintons really spans the breadth of personal and family law, alongside its services for businesses. I'm looking forward to being part of a team which can often measure the length of its relationships with its clients in decades rather than years and which has earned a reputation for providing the highest standard of legal advice for generations of people in the North East."

Sintons, whose head office is based in Newcastle upon Tyne, was recently named as among the best law firms in the UK, with its healthcare, real estate and personal and family teams amongst those named in this year's Legal 500. It has also been recognised as a leader in its field by the Chambers UK Legal Guide 2024.

Find out more at www.sintons.co.uk

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Navigating data protection law changes

On 18 July 2022, the Data Protection and Digital Information Bill (the Bill) was introduced to Parliament and is progressing through Parliament.

Rhiannon Hastings, data protection paralegal at leading commercial law firm Muckle LLP, answers some questions about how these changes might affect you.

When will the Bill be made law?

This is anticipated to become law in mid-2024.

This means your organisation must address the changes the Bill will make to UK GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations in readiness and ensure your data protection framework and practices meet these requirements.

Are we still required to have a Data Protection Officer (DPO)?

Currently, DPOs are only mandatory for public authorities or organisations that carry out a high volume of 'high risk' processing. DPOs must work with the senior management team in the capacity of an independent advisor, be an expert in data protection and have adequate resources.

The new Bill will effectively substitute the role of a DPO for a Senior Responsible Individual (SRI).

If your organisation is required to appoint a DPO under the current legislation, you must appoint an SRI once the Bill is implemented. However, the SRI must be an actual member of senior management.

Are we still required to continue managing a record of processing activities (ROPA)?

A ROPA is a record of your processing activity. The UK GDPR requires organisations to have a ROPA if it has over 250 employees and/ or it processes special category data. However, the Bill no longer requires organisations to document processing activities in a ROPA and will instead require organisations to implement a 'privacy management programme'.

To ensure organisations comply with this new change, we recommend that a similar exercise to that required for compilation of a ROPA is undertaken to create the privacy management programme (and that a data map will remain extremely helpful to understand how the personal data is being used, where it is being stored and who else has access to it, etc.

Do we still need to obtain explicit consent for using cookies?

The current legislation requires organisations to obtain consent from data subjects before placing cookies on their device. However, this doesn't apply to "strictly necessary" cookies.

The Bill will provide organisations with more freedom by allowing them to collect personal data using cookies for non-intrusive purposes without consent being required. An example is measuring visitors to your website via Google Analytics. However, targeting cookies (i.e. cookies used for advertising purposes) will still require consent from data subjects in order to comply with other relevant legislation. This change will only apply to data subjects based in the UK. Therefore, organisations must observe other countries' legislation concerning the use of cookies if their website is likely to be accessed by data subjects based outside the UK.

In addition to supporting organisations, the Bill will reduce the number of cookie pop-ups received by individuals, hopefully reducing the associated irritation factor!

How does the Bill change the current approach to managing and responding to subject access requests (SARs)?

A SAR is a request for an individual's personal data from an organisation. Currently, organisations can either charge a reasonable fee to comply with a SAR or refuse to respond to it entirely if it is "manifestly unfounded or excessive".

However, the Bill is replacing the wording "manifestly unfounded" with "vexatious" meaning organisations can charge a reasonable fee, or refuse to respond to a SAR, when it considers the SAR as vexatious or excessive.

To help your organisation decide this, the Bill will require the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO – the UK regulator) to produce a code of practice explaining how the terms "vexatious" or "excessive" should be applied.

Next steps

This article only covers a small number of changes introduced by the Bill. To ensure you're up to date with the latest data protection legislation, sign up to one of our events via <u>www.muckle-llp.com/events</u>

If you need help with compliance in the run-up to the Bill becoming law or for more information on other data protection matters, please contact Rhiannon using: rhiannon.hastings@muckle-llp.com

Rhiannon Hastings

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Paul Hughes, senior partner and head of corporate

75 years of Mincoffs Solicitors

Mincoffs Solicitors reflects on a successful 2023, which marked 75 years since its inception.

Founded by renowned solicitor Harry Mincoff, Mincoffs Solicitors has gone from strength to strength over the years, growing into an awardwinning business with a team of more than 100 at its Jesmond offices.

Originally specialising in criminal law when it was founded in 1948, the firm acted in a variety of landmark rulings including the first tug-of-love custody case and the infamous murder of Angus Sibbett – which inspired the cult classic film, *Get Carter*, and the song *5:15am* by Mark Knopfler.

Mincoffs later expanded its practice areas to licensing and commercial property work as it welcomed partners Austen Science and Howard Gold in 1958 and 1969 – with the business adopting the name, Mincoff, Science and Gold.

With strong historical links to the success of the region, Mincoffs provided legal advice to The Magpie Group during its rejuvenation of Newcastle United in the early 1990s and also played a key role in the city becoming the party capital it is today, using its specialist knowledge to create groundbreaking solutions for the firm's hospitality and leisure clients as they navigated complex licensing and gaming laws.

Mincoffs' corporate department also acted in the first AIM flotation in the North East and its expertise in capital markets work deepened over the subsequent years as it helped many of its other clients in their own journeys to the public markets.

The team continues to advise a number of listed companies, both in relation to their market obligations and generally.

In the same year the firm celebrated its 75th anniversary, its position in the marketplace was showcased by its ranking as the region's number one firm for deal volume, as per the latest Experian Market IQ M&A Review.

The business has also continued a period of prolonged growth and expansion, welcoming more than 20 appointments last year and achieving an 18 percent fee increase across its nine departments. Paul Hughes, senior partner and head of corporate, is confident the business' growth trajectory will only continue in the future.

"Mincoffs Solicitors has a rich and varied history and we are proud to have played a key part in the North East's development over the decades as we have grown into the firm we are today," he said.

"All these years on from when Harry founded the firm, it is brilliant to be in such a strong position in not only the regional market, but also nationally as we continue to receive instructions from across the UK and further afield."

"Ultimately, our success is a testament to the hard work of our entire team, who go above and beyond to deliver service excellence for our clients across the board."

Mincoffs Solicitors has provided expert legal services and advice across the North East and beyond for more than 75 years.

Alongside corporate and commercial services, the firm's offering includes employment, dispute resolution, licensing, real estate, residential conveyancing, family and wills, trusts and probate services, with significant experience in manufacturing, technology, healthcare, leisure and hospitality, and media and entertainment.

For more information visit www.mincoffs.co.uk

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...it is brilliant to be in such a strong position in not only the regional market, but also nationally...

New year, new divorce proceedings: Financial settlement considerations for separating couples

Partner and Head of Family Law at Sweeney Miller Law, Rebecca Cresswell, discusses the importance of understanding financial agreements and what splitting couples should consider at the start of divorce proceedings.

It is well known that January is often a busy month for divorces. If your New Year has unfortunately started this way, then as a splitting couple have you stepped back to consider the financial practicalities?

Many people do not realise that a divorce does not resolve your financial matters and there is no time limit on when your spouse or former spouse can make a claim against you for your assets.

To reach an agreement or a clean break with your spouse – or former spouse - it is always advisable to have the agreed terms drafted into a consent order approved by the Court to make it legally binding. Unless you have an approved Court order, your informal agreement can later be overruled by a Judge if your former spouse makes a claim against you, creating uncertainty for the future.

Financial considerations on divorce

The Court will take all the marital assets into account and ensure both partners' needs are



met; if they are, then the sharing principles will apply. If there are insufficient matrimonial assets to meet the partner's needs, the Court can consider non-marital assets such as inheritance and assets generated before the marriage and can share the assets equally. It is important that you consider taking legal advice on your individual circumstances - each case is unique and dependent on the assets you hold.

Pre-nuptial agreements and protecting wealth

Circumstances may differ if you entered into a pre-nuptial agreement before you married, as the agreement would have established the intentions on the division of finances in the event of divorce. Although nuptial agreements are not legally binding in England and Wales, if drafted correctly by solicitors they have a substantial impact on a Judge's decision.

Rebecca comments: "More couples are protecting their wealth before entering into a marriage and drafting pre-nuptial agreements to formalise their arrangement. At Sweeney Miller Law, we have seen an increase in couples seeking advice as they are marrying later in life or embarking on a second marriage."

Many individuals already have assets they wish to protect or a business that needs to be considered. Depending on if they are a sole trader, partner in a partnership with others, or a shareholder in a limited company, they need to consider how the business could be affected if they were to divorce. It is equally important to consider whether, under the articles of association, shareholders should be required to enter into a pre-nuptial agreement before they marry to protect the business, as a Judge would consider whether the business is matrimonial property.

Unmarried couples

If you are separated from your partner but were not married, the rules are different as you can only rely on property ownership, financial contributions, and the presence of dependent children, unlike marriages where the Court looks at all the circumstances of the case and where the primary consideration must be the welfare of any children.

Expert advice from Sweeney Miller Law

At Sweeney Miller Law, we work collaboratively within our family and corporate teams to help you navigate all aspects of your separation and protect your business and future wealth. To start the process and arrange an appointment, contact Rebecca Cresswell at rebecca@sweeneymiller.co.uk, call 0345 900 5401 or visit sweeneymiller.co.uk

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Hay & Kilner launches new commercial mediation service

North East law firm Hay & Kilner has set up a dedicated commercial mediation service to support regional businesses resolve commercial disputes as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Headed by associate and qualified mediator Adam Chaffer, the new service is designed for companies, business partners and shareholders in all sectors that seeking to resolve their conflicts to do so pragmatically without incurring time and expense of progressing matters to trial.

Adam Chaffer is registered with both the Society of Mediators and as an associate member of the Civil Mediation Council, and has successfully completed industry accreditations through the Society of Mediators which involve both written and practical examination. A skilled commercial litigator and the author of the Law Society's Litigation Handbook, Adam has extensive experience of both resolving disputes out of court and of working at board level in both public and private sector organisations, allowing him to understand the benefit of resolving disputes of court both from a practical but also commercial rationale.

Alongside his legal practice, he currently serves as a director of and company secretary Visit Northumberland Limited, the destination management organisation for the county, and is the Northumberland National Park Authority's Independent Person for Standards.

The latest official industry figures show that around 17,000 commercial mediations were carried out in the UK during 2022, with the yearly total now back above where it stood before the pandemic and continuing to rise.

Adam Chaffer says: "Disputes will naturally arise in many commercial situations, and can cause commercial relationships and wider projects to be delayed, costs to rapidly increase, jobs to be lost and even companies to fail if timely solutions aren't found.

"Mediation provides a forum for parties to come to a resolution commercially and practically.

"Business disagreements may sometime seem unresolvable, but with the right commitment from all parties, successful outcomes can often be secured far more quickly and efficiently than might otherwise have been possible through traditional adversarial proceedings."

For fiurther information on Hay & Kilner's commercial mediation service, please contact Adam Chaffer via adam.chaffer@hay-kilner.co.uk or call 0191 232 8345.

It's an uphill struggle in 2024 for The Three Tumours Charity

The Three Tumours Fundraising Initiative 2024 aims to alleviate the financial burden of supporting a new PHD student at the RVI, necessitating £250,000 annually, but it needs your help.

The primary focus for 2024 is to generate funds for a new PHD student at the RVI as part of The Three Tumours Charity's commitment to combat brain tumours. This charity is dedicated to a comprehensive mission, encompassing 'Raising Funds To Find A Cure,' 'Signposting Resources For Sufferers Of Brain Tumours And Their Families,' 'Increasing Awareness To Aid Early Diagnosis,' and 'Improving The Quality Of Care For Brain Tumour Sufferers And Their Families.'

Alarming statistics reveal the silent yet devastating impact of brain tumours in the UK. These tumours claim more lives among individuals under 40 than any other cancer, constituting 2.6% of all cancer-related fatalities. Notably, they surpass leukaemia in children, prostate cancer in men under 45, and breast cancer in women under 35.

The significance of The Three Tumours charity's work cannot be overstated. Through fundraising activities, the organisation channels funds into crucial research, support services, and awareness campaigns, marking a tangible effort to reshape the narrative surrounding brain tumours.

This initiative exemplifies the transformative power of collective action



THE THREE TUMOURS Awareness of brain cancer

with a shared purpose, creating a ripple effect of change. The funds raised will offer vital support, signifying an unwavering commitment to eradicating brain tumours and enhancing the lives of those affected.

Chairperson Claire Downs emphasises, "As we embark on 2024, let us not forget the countless individuals battling brain tumours and the families supporting them. Together, we can make a difference. Collectively, we can foster hope. As a group, we can strive for a future where precious lives are no longer claimed by brain tumours, and survival statistics become more promising."

For assistance and support with The Three Tumours, please contact Claire Downs at 07930 326 905.



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BUSINESS INSIGHT

Worried about Inheritance Tax?



If you feel guilty about SKIing, (spending your kids' inheritance) 'Gifting' could be the solution!

Swinburne Maddison's Amy Pyman, associate solicitor in the private client team, offers six tips for successful gifting.

Gifting through your lifetime can be a great tool to manage your Inheritance Tax (IHT) liability but it does come with complexities.

1. What are the IHT rules?

Each individual has an IHT-free threshold of £325,000.00 (known as the Nil Rate Band). Assets over this amount (that cannot benefit from any other kinds of relief) will be taxed at 40%.

If you are married and/or have children who will inherit your main home, you may benefit from some additional allowances of up to £1million - if your estate is valued at over £2million, you start to lose some of these reliefs.

2. The seven year rule

Not everyone fully understands 'the seven-year rule'. In short, if

 You live for seven years after making a gift, and have never made any other gifts, IHT will not be payable on that sum.

- You make any gifts in the seven years prior to your death, the NRB will be reduced by the value of the gifts. These gifts are known as "Potentially Exempt Transfers".
- You make gifts over the NRB in the seven years before your death, IHT on that gift may need to be paid on your death.
- You make a gift but continue to benefit from it - if you gift your home to your children yet continue to live there for example - it will still be taxable on your death.

3. Why should you think about gifting?

If you have assets over the IHT free amounts, the most effective way to manage your IHT liability is to reduce the value of your estate.

There is no limit to how much you can gift as long as you know the tax implications. Some really easy ways to gift, without the headache of the seven-year rule are:-

- You can make gifts of up to £3,000 per year, IHT free.
- You can make small gifts of £250 per year to as many individuals as you like.
- Gifts to charities pass completely IHT free.
- Gifts out of excess income can stop your Estate from growing any further.

4. What if I don't live for seven years?

There can still be a significant saving to your estate. If you live for three years after gifting, the IHT on that gift will be reduced. The reduction becoming greater as more time passes.

5. What if my beneficiary gets divorced?

If you don't wish to gift money outright to beneficiaries in case they get divorced, become bankrupt or encounter any other unforeseeable event, you could consider transferring assets into Trust and becoming a Trustee so you can control when the money is paid to your beneficiaries.

6. Do your Executors have all your information?

Even if no IHT is payable as a result of careful gifting, it is important that your Executors have all the information they need to allow them to correctly report to HMRC. The most important thing is that you keep a record of your gifting and ideally, also keep a record of your usual income and outgoings so that they can make the most of any additional reliefs.

Other things to consider:

- Capital Gains Tax might be relevant.
- There are other ways to manage IHT ensure you have considered all options.
- Ensure you have a valid Will, which is kept up to date or Executors could face an avoidable IHT headache!

Beyond anything else, the most IHT effective thing you can do is to enjoy your money - go SKling and take the kids too - if you must!

For advice, please contact Amy Pyman by email at ajp@swinburnemaddison.co.uk or call 0191 338 6515. www.swinburnemaddison.co.uk

A welcome from Burnetts

It's a new year – and a new start, a time filled with both possibility and challenges.

Here at Burnetts we're getting ready for an exciting time, moving from our long-standing base at Dean Street, Newcastle to a brand new office at Citigate.

As we continue to expand we need to be able to cope with the demands of a fast-growing business and this move highlights our continued commitment to the region, with a £1m investment.

Over the next six months various experts from our team will be sharing what we hope will be sound advice on a number of topics which we believe will be relevant and useful to both businesses and individuals.

We're proud of our skilled lawyers and the vast range of expertise they cover, so we'll be sharing some of their sound advice through this column each month.

At Burnetts we have teams covering every aspect of business and day to day life, including our expanding banking, corporate and commercial property teams – you can see just how far reaching our services are at our website, *www.burnetts.co.uk.* And we will be drawing from these experts every month, to showcase a relevant issue or idea and providing some sound legal advice.

Of course we're happy to address any particular subject as well, so please feel free to get in touch if there's something you feel we should cover.

We have a lot going on at Burnetts which isn't just about the day to day work for our clients.

Our employment team are always very active and well aware of the thin line many employers walk when they have staff, we have joined forces with a leading HR company and are hosting a free seminar in early February.

Taking inspiration from TV show, *I'm A Celebrity* (don't worry nobody will be made to eat insects!) the event will take a fun approach to a very serious subject.

It's just a way of doing things differently, but at the same time providing a vital service and if anyone is interested in attending, please get in touch.

Now that the introductions are out of the way, we look forward to being a regular here at Northern Insight and providing some sound, useful information and advice.

www.burnetts.co.uk

Nicola Nutley Partner, Head of Banking at Burnetts Solicitors LLP and Head of Burnetts, Newcastle



Healthwatch set sail for community engagement

Healthwatch Newcastle and Healthwatch Gateshead have dropped anchor at their new headquarters in Milburn House, Dean Street, Newcastle. The relocation to this fascinating period building, inspired by a ship's design in its layout, pays homage to its original ship-owner proprietors.

As the team settles into their maritime-themed surroundings, they have set course to charter a different approach to their community engagement offer. In the coming months, the team plans to step out of their new offices and make waves by connecting directly with the people who utilise health and social care services in Newcastle and Gateshead.

This outreach initiative follows their recent annual joint meeting, during which Healthwatch Newcastle and Healthwatch Gateshead identified key priorities, including a focus on Mental Health, Social Care, and underserved groups such as refugees and asylum seekers. The team aims to address these priorities by being based in various community location across the city and the borough. This will enable the team to actively engage with people in their communities at specific localities, ensuring their voices and needs are heard.

Yvonne Probert, CEO of Tell Us North (CIC) which provides Healthwatch Newcastle and Healthwatch Gateshead to deliver community engagement, research, evaluation, and assessment services within the fields of health, wellbeing, and social care said:

"It may sound strange to hear that we have just moved our team into this wonderful building full of character and charm based on the region's maritime history and we're literally 'shipping' them out into the community.

"Our role is to ensure social care and health commissioners and providers listen to the views of their local communities so that we can seek continuous improvements to their services. The best way to do that is by integrating ourselves deeper into the fabric of the community and becoming a part of everyday life for the people we serve."





North Shields funeral business welcomes seventh generation as new Director

An established North Shields family funeral business that has served its local community for more than two centuries has appointed a family member as a Director.

The appointment of Ben Broadhead to Director ensures an ongoing family connection and as a seventh-generation family member, he has pledged to lead the company into the future while upholding the values and traditions that have made

North East businesses help raise £75k for disabled children

The Percy Hedley Foundation's infamous Mistletoe Ball was held for the fifteenth time in the charity's 70th anniversary year and raised an impressive £75,000 – bringing the total raised by the events to over £1million.

Held at the Hilton Newcastle Gateshead hotel, 286 guests enjoyed a drinks reception, dance performance, three-course meal, tombola, raffle, auctions and dancing. Special guests included ex-Percy Hedley pupil, three-timeparalympic-gold-medal-winner, Stephen Miller MBE and Dame Irene Hays of Hays Travel.

The £75,000 raised will fund new equipment, specialist facilities, educational programmes and employment schemes for the <u>Foundation</u>'s 650 children and young people. E Turnbull & Son a trusted name in the community.

Ben's mother, Jane Broadhead, daughter of Ben's grandfather Jimmy Turnbull and currently managing director, will continue to provide guidance and support while gradually passing the reins to her son.

Community engagement is important to Ben and his team. Turnbulls has a history of supporting local initiatives and organisations. To mark the occasion of Ben's appointment, Turnbulls have agreed to sponsor French and Spanish lessons for the YMCA North Tyneside nursery classes in North Shields ensuring no child is deprived of this invaluable chance to learn and grow.

"It's wonderful to be able to fund these classes so that the children can gain valuable language skills at such an early age. We are a global community now more than ever and having the ability to communicate in more than one language is an essential skill to have. We're delighted to help with this and many other local good causes such as the YMCA hot meal initiative, North Shields junior football teams and the Tynemouth Golf Club juniors," said Ben.

Louise Horsefield, head of fundraising at The Percy Hedley Foundation, said: "We've been blown away by the support shown for the ball by the North East business community.

"This event is such an important night for us, not only to celebrate the amazing work we do every day but to raise vital funds to support our pupils, students and residents to have equal opportunities that enable them to live their best lives. Thank you so much to everyone who so generously supported the event."

The main sponsors were care industry recruiters, Medsolve, facilities managers, Anchor Group Services, regeneration specialists, Hellens Group, transport provider, Hobans, independent supported living specialist, Lenore, audio visual specialist and production company, Purple Productions and temporary healthcare recruitment provider, Standby Healthcare. The 2024 Mistletoe Ball will be held on Saturday 23 November.



Ashington Sea Cadets offers young people aged 10-18 a different kind of adventure, equipping them with skills that will launch them for life. Make friends, learn valuable skills, and have fun while doing it! Get in touch today to find out more...

t: 07948 216 491 / 07722 209 132 e: enquiries.ashingtonseacadets@gmail.com

Charity of the Month

Curious Arts

Curious Arts is a North Eastbased Arts and Youth charity championing and developing LGBTQIA+ arts, artists, and communities across the region and beyond.

Working in partnership with cultural and community organisations, Curious Arts develop and deliver community-focused arts projects and events through the year. Increasing visibility and understanding of LGBTQIA+ experiences and communities.

Why was the charity founded?

Curious Arts was founded by CEO & Executive Producer Phil Douglas in 2017, following the successful launch of LGBTQIA+ arts festival Curious Festival back in 2016.

Becoming a charity in early 2022, Curious Arts was founded to champion LGBTQIA+ arts and artists, increase LGBTQIA+ representation in the region's cultural offer and create meaningful opportunities for LGBTQIA+ artists, communities and allies to engage in LGBTQIA+ culture.

Which areas do you cover?

Curious Arts is based both in Hartlepool and Newcastle but our annual programme of projects and events spans the whole of the North East, from the Tees Valley up to Northumberland. Our work often sees us popup around the country, with events as far and wide as Manchester, Liverpool, York, Oxford and Canary Wharf, London.





What type of events do you have?

We deliver a wide variety of projects and events and truly offer something for everyone, from family-friendly Mini Prides, Curious Takeovers and outdoor performances to comedy nights, performance cabarets and local Prides.

We also currently have five regular youth projects taking place in Middlesbrough, Stockton-on-Tees, Newcastle and Gateshead - learning a variety of new skills from music production to forestry! Alongside this we support LGBTQIA+ artists to develop their practice and produce new works, deliver LGBTQIA+ awareness training to the public and cultural sector and tour original performances.

What is your mission?

Curious Arts' values are creativity, inclusivity, and visibility and our mission is to champion and develop LGBTQIA+ arts and culture in the region, increasing opportunities for the LGBTQIA+ community as artists, audiences, and participants. Through advocacy and consultancy with partner organisations, we are developing projects, touring productions, and bespoke initiatives to celebrate and increase the visibility of the North East's LGBTQIA+ culture.

What have been your proudest moments so far?

Working so closely with LGBTQIA+ communities and partners across the region, there have been many proud moments in our journey so far. Having the opportunity to make exciting, accessible projects and events happen in our home region and seeing firsthand their impact on the communities who engage, who have felt unrepresented beforehand, is always a motivating driver for our work.

We were very proud to achieve charity status in early 2022, after a challenging period navigating the pandemic. Gaining recognition for our work and actively living our values.



What are you currently working on?

All of the projects we've touched on already, but we're particularly excited to be working with our partners and community members across the Tees Valley this year, to develop Pride events which are informed by the communities they celebrate and serve, in Middlesbrough, Stockton-on-Tees, Darlington, Hartlepool and Redcar & Cleveland.

We're also actively continuing to develop our LGBTQIA+ awareness training, to support businesses and organisations in the public and private sectors to increase their team's confidence in engaging authentically and respectfully with members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

How do people get involved?

Anyone who would like to attend an event, volunteer or take part in a project can find upcoming dates and contact information on our website. We welcome conversations with people who would like support or spread the word about our work.

Organisations that would like to invest in their LGBTQIA+ Awareness through our training sessions can start the process by emailing hello@curiousarts.org.uk or complete an enquiry form over on our website. www.curiousarts.org.uk

Unveiling the future of productivity: Introducing a brand-new office space

We are thrilled to present a game-changer in office design – a brand new office space that represents the future of Central. Creating an environment that fosters creativity, collaboration and efficiency. Welcome to Portland House!

Working in partnership with designers Ultimate Commercial Interiors, the new office space represents a new vision for our brand.

Gone are the cramped offices and boring workstations – this cutting-edge office space is the embodiment of a forward-thinking approach, where productivity is nurtured, and work-life balance is at the forefront. With its innovative layout, modern amenities, and thoughtful incorporation of technology, it sets a new standard for the company.

One of the most striking features of this new





office space is its openness and emphasis on collaboration. Outfitted with spacious common areas, flexible workstations, and inviting breakout spaces, the layout encourages employees to interact, brainstorm, and seek each other's expertise throughout the workday. These open spaces are complemented by cozy nooks and meeting pods, providing privacy and concentration when necessary, striking a perfect balance between collaboration and focused work.

Advanced technology is cleverly woven into the fabric of this office space. Smart devices, automated systems, and integrated sensors enable a more streamlined and efficient workflow. From touch-free access controls to state-of-the-art meeting room systems, every detail has been meticulously designed to ease day-to-day operations and fuel a seamless digital experience.

To ensure sustainability, the designers have focused attention on environmental responsibility. Utilizing green building techniques, such as carbon neutral flooring,



energy-efficient lighting, and recycling facilities, this workspace aims to minimize its ecological footprint. Additionally, initiatives like electric vehicle charging stations contribute to a greener commute and further align with the eco-conscious vision of the company. With facilities such as bike stations, hotel-quality showers and drying rooms, and access to on-site laundry and dry cleaning, yoga studios and work place catering, Portland House is certainly one of Newcastle's most prestigious office buildings.

Financial Director, William Palmer said "Investing in a modern office space like this is not just a matter of aesthetics. We are embracing the principles of collaboration, well-being, technology integration, and sustainability. We have changed!"

So, welcome to the future of Central – a workplace where collaboration, innovation, and well-being converge in a space designed to unlock the full potential of every employee.

www.centralemployment.co.uk





Sporting Wallsend: new community hub open for business

Sporting Wallsend is a community hub that opened at the end of last year with the intentions to inspire the local community and beyond to lead healthier, and therefore, happier lives through a variety of activities and well-being clubs hosted in a safe environment that welcomes all. By providing members with equal opportunities and a network of first class support and facilities, their vision is to empower all to embrace a happy, active future and balanced lifestyle.

The Hub is designed as a venue for activities that promote and encourage healthy lifestyles so whether thats yoga, karate, boxing or table tennis ...the space is perfect for all. The sparkling new building is also ideal for conferences, workshops and parties and has very competitive rates. During February the hub will be flinging its doors open to showcase the space- theres going to be lots going on so keep an eye on their socials.

If you would like to learn more or book the hub for sporting clubs, community events or conferences please contact: John Percival: johnp.wallsendboysclub@gmail.com or call: 0191 2639490

Leading the way to a healthier & happier community

All are welcome to take part in a variety of activities and well-being clubs hosted at Sporting Wallsend in the Peter Olsen Community Hub.



In association with Wallsend Boys & Girls Club

Get in touch to find out more

义 0191 2639490 🗟 johnp.wallsendboysclub@gmail.com



Tyne Tunnels – 2023 in Review: quicker journeys, record levels of users and community impact

The operator of the Tyne Tunnels, TT2, is reporting quicker journey times, record levels of vehicles travelling through the tunnels and a bumper year of support for its local communities during 2023.

The river crossing was used by over 19 million vehicles over the past year* - compared to just over 17 million the previous year - which is an 11.7% uplift.

New data shows journey times have improved since the switch to open road tolling in 2021, with the average journey time in October 2023 being 35 seconds faster southbound, and 46 seconds faster northbound.

Over the last 12 months, the tunnels operator contributed to various community projects, charities and local groups, including a transport scheme for Tiny Lives which helps families of premature babies get to and from hospital, and a sustainable village and sensory Tyne Tunnel for The Percy Hedley Foundation's schools. TT2's investment in community projects amounted to over £110,000 in 2023.

The percentage of people not paying their toll has reduced from 5.39% in the first month of open road tolling to 2.84% in November last year - falling further to 2.20% in November this year.

It has been just over two years since the tunnels modernised by allowing users to drive straight through without stopping - on 8 November 2021 - and the switch has made journeys faster and smoother.

The TT2 on-site operations team now manages

to clear a broken-down vehicle in just seven minutes and 15 seconds, on average.

The number of people and businesses prepaying for their journeys has risen – with almost 83,000 new TT2 Pre-Paid accounts opened in the last year. In November 2023, 82.94% of payments were made via Pre-Paid accounts. This comes following improvements to the user-experience through changes to the TT2 website, upgrades to the payment system including introducing Apple and Google Pay, and the launch of the Tyne Tunnels' customer focus group.

CEO at TT2, Adrian Wallace, said: "We're really pleased to see that more people than ever are choosing the tunnels to cross the river and that journey times have reduced since we switched to open-road-tolling.

"The Tyne Tunnels were brought to the region to support regional growth by offering a safe, reliable, and efficient, alternative way to cross the Tyne. We help over 62,000 vehicles cross the river every day and we are proud to be supporting greater social mobility and regional success, as well as helping our local communities and the environment through extensive CSR initiatives and funding."

*Figures cited cover the 12 months from November 2022 to November 2023.

More detail about the Tyne Tunnels and payment methods: www.tt2.co.uk



23-25 Clayton Road Jesmond Newcastle upon Tyne 0191 212 1123









LETS FIGHT FOOD POVERTY TOGETHER. FEEDINGFAMILIES.ORG.UK



ARE YOU SEEKING A CHARITY TO SUPPORT THIS YEAR?

We are a small and very transparent charity based here in the NE.



The Charlie & Carter Foundation (CCF) provides financial support to parents of seriously ill children with life limiting conditions.

Founded by the parents of 'the boys', Chris and Sarah Cookson work tirelessly alongside a committed team to support families in their time of need.

We would love you to help such families by getting involved in our:-

Corporate Fundraisers Physical Challenges Annual Ball

Contact Laura Jane Forbes T: 0191 466 1428 E: Laura@ccfemail.co.uk

Registered Charity No: 1166538

thecharlieandcarterfoundation.co.uk

Inclusion North East Conference 2024



ABConnexions CIC is a not-for-profit social enterprise that aims to connect, support and promote ethnic and wider communities in the North East.

Through our Inclusion By Default (IBD) Campaign we want to help make the North East the most inclusive region in the UK by the end of 2025.

To do this we have developed and delivered several inclusion initiatives and our first IBD Conference in January. We want to develop and empower a community of champions who can work together to co-create an inclusive roadmap for the region, exploring how we can become more inclusive as a community, as organisations and personally as individuals.







Our new Inclusive Innovation Framework being utilised at the IBD Conference 2024

Using the Inclusive Innovation Framework (IIF) developed in partnership with Yohlar, the campaign will connect, support and promote all communities and initiatives that are working on inclusion, alongside tackling major issues that exist throughout the UK.

In doing so we will raise the profile of existing organisations and initiatives that are already making a difference,

sharing good practices and lived experiences, starting by inviting everyone to answer:

"What does inclusion mean to you and your organisation?"



It's time to be comfortable with uncomfortable conversations and get involved...

We successfully hosted our first IBD Conference recently with over 100 North East stakeholders for inclusion.

We had many uncomfortable conversations in a safe collective space to begin a roadmap for the North East and we imply you and your organisation to get involved too.



#InclusionByDefault

Want to support our campaign or know more about our IIF framework?



abconnexions.org/inclusion-by-default inclusion@abconnexions.org 01661 823234



Inclusion Revolution: Crafting the North East into the UK's Inclusivity Capital by 2025!

Imagine a future where the North East isn't just known for its stotties and Angel of the North, but as the beacon of inclusivity in the UK. On January 25th, I had the absolute privilege of hosting a conference that wasn't just a gathering – it was the start of a revolution.

Picture this: over 120 movers and shakers from every sector imaginable, brainstorming together to transform the North East including Tees Valley, into the most inclusive region in the UK by 2025. Talk about ambitious goals!

Growing up in the North East, I've had my fair share of ups and downs. Sure, I've faced the rough end of discrimination and prejudice, but let me tell you those experiences didn't dampen my spirits. Instead, they sparked a fire in me to make a difference. And what better way to do that than championing inclusivity?

At the conference, we heard from a smorgasbord of speakers. **They weren't just talking heads; they were torchbearers illuminating why** **inclusion matters**. From the undeniable value of social justice and equality to the magic that diverse perspectives and innovation can conjure up – we covered it all. And let's not forget the economic benefits and the overall improvement in quality of life. Inclusion isn't just a nice-tohave; it's a must-have!

I've always believed that our region is a hidden gem, brimming with potential. And this conference proved it. There's a hunger for change, a desire to reduce discrimination and comply with legal and ethical standards, and, most importantly, a drive for personal development. We're not just talking about ticking boxes here; we're talking about genuine, ground-up transformation. This journey towards inclusivity is not just a solo trip; it's a group tour. We want everyone to hop on the bus. Whether you're a business bigwig, a community champion, or just someone who loves the North East, your voice matters. We're crafting a narrative where every voice is heard, and every story is valued.

As I reflect on the conference and the incredible energy in the room, I can't help but feel optimistic. We're on the cusp of something big, something transformative. **The North East is all set to not just join the conversation on inclusion but to lead it**.

So, here's the call to action – let's make the North East a shining example of what true inclusivity looks like. Join the movement, share your ideas, and be a part of this exciting journey. Whether you're contributing from a boardroom or your living room, every bit counts.

Inclusion should be by default not by design! Together, we're not just dreaming of a more inclusive North East; we're building it. And remember, in the words of a true Northerner - "Shy bairns get nowt." So, let's not be shy about making our region the best it can be. Who's with me?

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.
Plastic Mouldings Northern: Taking your project from design to production



Innovative. Reliable. Revolutionary.

As one the UK's leading Vacuum Forming specialists, Plastic Mouldings Northern Ltd have over 150 years of combined experience in the supply of high quality and often very intricate moulded parts to an array of industries.

The ethos here at our Bishop Auckland based site is to supply top quality vacuum formed products at realistic and sustainable prices, with excellent customer service as standard. Working across a range of sectors from automotive and aerospace to the food industry, the experienced team have worked on projects with The London Underground, McLaren, Bentley, Rolls Royce, Jaguar, JCB, and BAE Systems.

The Vacuum Forming process itself involves manipulating rigid sheets of plastic into bespoke 3D moulded parts using a specific aluminium tool. Plastic Mouldings Northern's continuous investment in machinery and tooling has been a real game changer at the site, enhancing capabilities for the most bespoke and intricate projects.

Freddy Bourdais, Co-Founder and Sales Director, Plastic Mouldings Northern Ltd said: "We are always innovating and staying ahead of the game in the industry, and our recent investment in two new Biesse 5 Axis CNC machines brings a host of further solutions to our capabilities. The 5 Axis CNC machine is a ground-breaking piece of kit with its large trimming size capacity of 4mx2m makes us quite unique within the industry.

We can vacuum form up to 3500 x 1500 mm in up to 15mm material thickness in a vast range of plastics, with a huge focus on recycled and recyclable plastics which perfectly aligns with our ethos as a returnable packaging specialist."

Our 5 axis CNC machines use computeraided design (CAD) and computer-aided manufacturing (CAM) to allow trimming of moulded parts to tight tolerance.

Recent investments take the total machinery on-site to seven Vacuum Forming and three 5 Axis CNC machines whist the site itself now spans three acres with 65,000 square feet of indoor storage - impressive machinery matched with the team's unparalleled knowledge and experience makes PMN the go-to partner for vacuum forming.

Customised Solutions

Vacuum forming is a key solution to a host of industry projects and PMN's expertise in the field is internationally renowned – from design to production the team is on hand to ensure that projects run smoothly.

The production capacity at PMN is extensive, with projects varying from Theme Park parts and Vertical Farming Hydroponic Grow Trays, to Automated Robot covers and Roof Sign contracts hitting Australia. Production spans an array of industries too, with projects extending from the automotive industry with battery covers and vacuum formed interiors, to the medical industry providing training aids and customisable high quality storage solutions.

To find out more about how Plastic Mouldings Northern can support with vacuum forming, vacuum formed packaging, vacuum formed finished parts and contract moulding, contact our team via sales@pmn-ltd.co.uk or visit www.pmn-ltd.co.uk for further information.

Business Durham their business is your business

Durham County Council's business support service wants to help your business flourish. And leading from the front is **Managing Director of Business**

Durham, Sarah Slaven.

"We're here to make sure that County Durham is a great place in which to do business, to build a strong local economy and provide jobs for local residents," said Sarah. "We provide support for businesses at all stages from helping start-ups, supporting current businesses to grow, attracting inward investment, to help create jobs and nourish a vibrant economy."

Looking forward Business Durham manages a portfolio of commercial and industrial property on behalf of Durham County Council. One particularly successful project is the North East Technology Park (NETPark) on the outskirts of Sedgefield.

NETPark is a classic example of what Business Durham is all about. Durham County Council had a bold vision how to create higher value jobs long term. The region had previously relied on traditional industries, so something had to change. NETPark has done so well that we are now embarking on a £62m further phase of development which will see it double in size. Bigger units are being built for firms that are expanding and this will then release space in the smaller units for new businesses to move into. We are attracting a lot of interest from firms outside the region who can create some exciting opportunities in new industries such as space and satellite technology".

As well as funding and cash flow challenges, attracting skilled staff is another obstacle many businesses are facing currently, so one



of Business Durham's roles is to help promote County Durham and the North East is.

"We have a good standard of living, it's cheaper than other regions and we have a lot of quality jobs. Throw in our stunning countryside and beaches, great communication links, sensible housing prices and a really good work ethic, and you'd wonder why a firm wouldn't want to come here.

"To help businesses to grow and improve productivity we've set up the Durham Business Growth programme. With a total budget of £8.16 million from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the programme combines the expertise of Business Durham, RTC North and UMi to provide a simplified and accessible platform for businesses seeking tailored support.

"Instead of having a multitude of small support packages, Durham Business Growth provides firms and individuals with everything they need to access support. It's a bit like a menu whereby businesses can select their preferences.

"Whether they require assistance for growing

their business, support to enter new markets. develop innovative products, secure funding, or invest in buildings and equipment, the options are adaptable.

"The first step is that one of our Business Engagement Officers will look at the company to ascertain what they need and what is available. We want to make it as simple as possible.

"With this new funding we can now help businesses of all sizes and all sectors so, for example, we can now help the tourism and hospitality sector."

Interested?

Funding is available until March 2025 so the best idea is to have a conversation with the Durham Business Growth engagement officers. Email enquiries@ durhambusinessgrowth.co.uk or call 0191 7161006. You'll also find further details by visiting their website...

www.durhambusinessgrowth.co.uk

Silk Route Spirits

We have chosen the name Silk Route Spirits for our distillery because we have drawn upon the exotic spices and flavours, many of which were first introduced to Europe along the silk route to inspire our gins and other spirits. Liquorice and cassia bark from China, green peppercorns from India and coriander seeds are all used to infuse our gins. Similarly, fresh vanilla from Madagascar, ginger from the east and a range of other spices go to make our spiced and caramel rums.

So, let me take you on Journey, "A Journey of Taste" starting in the year 130 BC. A journey that will transport you across the millennia and share with you a story that is much more than just a journey through time, it is a journey that will cross continents, explore great empires that have come and gone and will tell the history of ancient peoples who have lived and traded along the Silk Route. Empires such as the great dynasty of Han, the Parthians of modern-day Iran, the Macedonians of Alexander the Great, the Mongols of Genghis Khan and the vast swathes of the empire of Tamerlane who conquered Central Asia.

The journey will explore the contributions to East, West trade, to flavours and spices of peoples such as the Han empire, the now almost gone Sogdians who were central to



trade as well as Zoroastrians and Persians. The journey will also explore the role of Venetian traders such as Marco Polo and the Ottoman Seljuk Turks who were instrumental in bringing the strategic importance of the silk route to an end.

The story begins with the Han Dynasty and the imperial court, then ruled by Emperor Wu of Han who opened trade in 130 BC, and it was to

last until 1453 CE, when the Ottoman Empire finally conquered the city of Constantinople and closed off trade with Western Europe.

Our next blog will explore the discovery of silk and the role this played in opening the markets of the west to the flavours of the East!

www.silkroutespirits.co.uk



Down the road

Where there is a will there really is a way (or ask for not whom the bell tolls, ask if the campanologist has his or her affairs in order)! Dr David Cliff explores the days we dread.

> They say the only certainty in life is death and taxes. Given the current economic crisis, one could be forgiven for the preponderance of attention day to day is on the latter, but the former is a critical consideration in our lives.

> Procrastination is a natural trait used when we wish to defer, avoid, or otherwise accommodate fear. It is an understandable defence mechanism to the grisly prospect of our demise. Our common usage belies this. We use terms like 'always' and 'forever', as if our finite human experience encapsulates all time.

> We fear our end, and our failure to engage with the subject can add to the existential despair some experience, questing meaning, purpose and validation in life with the attendant fear that life can be somehow "wasted". Post industrially, this ultimately, translates into legacy and the extension of our wishes posthumously.

Yes, its complex, deeply philosophical and emotional. In a 'brass-tacks sense', a society that looks at possession, wealth and indeed tax liabilities that fall out of our demise can only be addressed by good estate planning and our wishes embodied in a will.

Things become more complex with increasing longevity. In 1873 the average age of death was around forty. Now, most can look to achieving seventies/ eighties, with record numbers becoming centenarian. Longer lifespans create greater potential for experiencing significant periods of incapacity, wherein people need effective powers of attorney, for health and financial matters.

These cannot be 'kicked down the road' - there are avoidable risks in so doing. The relational, financial, material, business and legal elements of our lives are often massively compromised if not thought through when we are no longer present or incapacitated.

Relax, I am not about to introduce the Grim Reaper, the increase of secularism, erosion of faith systems, or Samoan funerary rituals here. Aww, you say.

Let me instead introduce a wonderful force of nature that Gedanken has been pleased, nay blown away, to work with, Leah Hamilton, MD of Hamilton Legacy. Her Durham based practice covers the North East and beyond and 'gets' all the legals, procedurals and processes to effectively manage people's affairs when fate is unkind, or just inevitable. Leah and her staff undertake this with such heart, passion and a level of person centredness I have rarely seen in many law practices, or indeed in the online world. Leah explains, "We take the time to understand people's wishes and needs, which often change as their circumstances do and walk with them every step of the way". Leah and her team recognise the often very difficult choices people have to make when planning for difficult times. "Nobody wants to think about a time when they are incapable, or no longer here, but this is reality. Where we can become empowered in these processes, is by safe, thoughtful, effective planning that give us a real say at those times in which we can't speak for ourselves. Our clients retain their control, their dignity and much of the meaning, value and purpose they have built throughout their lives".

Moving back to those taxes, these are often an accompanying factor with one's death. "Paying tax twice over is not a great prospect in what is a high tax society anyway", Leah reflects, "careful planning legitimately mitigates tax burdens and protects your estate to best benefit those closest to you".

Whether its your business succession, family arrangements, or own personal desires, Hamilton Legacy offers a chance to plan and retain control of life and business matters. Leah's service offers peace of mind for clients, their families and often staff. "Wishes are clarified, so others don't have to 'best guess' what a person wants at a crucial time", she adds.

Leah commissioned Gedanken to look at how she and her team could extend her business activity further across the northeast as well as develop her own ultimate plans for addressing her work/life balance with appropriate scaling. "Gedanken has helped us to more strongly communicate the value of our offering with clients and openly celebrate the solid values of competence, quality practice and sensitive, compassionate service that is central to both the company's values and those held personally".

For realists and pragmatists who don't do procrastination, especially, when they have worked so hard, Leah is someone who truly changes fear to fascination, uncertainty to clarity and hard-won achievements into meaningful legacy!

www.gedanken.co.uk www.hamiltonlegacy.co.uk



...Things become more complex with increasing longevity...

Leah Hamilton with Dr David Cliff

BUSINESS INSIGHT

Taking recruitment beyond the initial hire

Laura Barker, Head of Talent Development at recruitment firm Talentheads, explains why developing your talent helps your business reach its full potential and why investment into recruiting doesn't just end at the initial hire!

For many involved in recruitment, the belief is once you have hired your candidate it ends there (most recruitment businesses end there too). We think that's nonsense.

At Talentheads, getting those key hires through your door is only the start of what we provide – and what a good recruitment firm should do.

Because it isn't just about filling a vacancy.

Yes, you want these roles filled. But you want to ensure these team members not only fit with your business, but they will flourish and develop with you for the long term, growing with you and your business.

And that's where Talentheads dramatically differs.

We strongly believe in the idea that the greatest results come from investing in the Talent Success Cycle.

Basically, this is a full cycle approach – and having carefully matched up 500 individuals with new positions since 2021, we know that it works.

It starts with our unique approach to your growth; Talentheads' USP is that we embed ourselves within your business to learn and understand your firm's culture so that by the end, we know your business inside out.

That enables us to select people who match your business' values and ethos. In theory (and as we've discovered, in practice) this leads to attracting your ideal candidates, hiring the right talent for your business, those who want to be part of your business and stay for the long-term, who focus on the success of your business.

But that final part is pivotal to the Talent Success Cycle, your employees develop within your business. As your talent moves through your



organisation, becoming the leaders and hiring managers of the future, new talent enters and the cycle begins again.

Our unique model means we use our expertise and experience to elevate your learning and development strategy. Leading and supporting on development and training, growing and coaching your staff and freeing you up to grow your business.

It is a streamlined approach, focussing on the success and development of your people with flexibility around the needs of your business, saving you time, money and energy as you have the internal team already in your business providing the full talent cycle.

With everything in-house, you have no need to look for further provision.

We can do it because of our model - we are already in your business so who better to help grow your staff?

We know your business' strategy. We know where the skill gaps are. And we know where future roles may arise.

By developing your team and possessing a unique insight into your business, our joined-up approach helps to futureproof your firm, helping all of your team reach their full potential.

Through your talent developing and moving up and through your business, we are here to continue to build your team.

If a vacancy arises then the cycle begins and we are here to attract your next employee, we have your succession plans in place with either an internally developed team member or from your external talent bank.

That can be enormous for your business,

especially as many of the growing number of firms utilising Talentheads are also fast-growing themselves.

With your plans in place, and your strategy, recruitment, training and coaching taken care of, then there are no issues if a vacancy arises. There are no extra costs or unsettled team!

Removing the issues of re-recruiting and training a replacement leaving your business vulnerable and unable to work at capacity -Talentheads are here, building your successful team with no impact on your business.

Embracing the whole Talent Success Cycle model, those concerns can be firmly banished.

Not only does it create that much-needed depth in house but ultimately, Talentheads' model is about recruitment and development, so once you've got your new hires through the door, our job is to ensure they reach their full potential and grow, along with you and your business.

The beauty of the Talent Success Cycle is its flexibility around the needs of your business. If your recruitment needs to increase, you dial up that area, if the need is lower you can then dial up in another area...strategy, training and/ or coaching! It provides the flexibility to fit with your business growth!

We already know they fit your ethos – but we pride ourselves in coaching and guiding them so that they see a clear career path within your firm.

We make them feel engaged. We make them feel invested in. And we make the process easier – for everyone.

To find out more about Talentheads and the Talent Success Cycle, visit talentheads.co.uk



North East ISO consultants support marine software business to gain ISO 14001

Sunderland based ISO consultants, Compliant, are delighted to have supported fellow North East business, Sir Joseph Isherwood, to gain ISO 14001, the internationally recognised environmental standard.

The North Tyneside based marine software organisation, which has traded since 1907, works with businesses across the globe, providing a range of systems for maintenance management, document control, data communication and integrated logistic support.

With environmental sustainability at the heart of the business, the company approached Compliant to support them in gaining the standard as they looked to demonstrate their commitment to reducing their carbon footprint and achieving their long-term environmental goals. Compliant, who support businesses across all sectors within the UK, Ireland and the USA to gain ISO certification, were delighted to work with such a forward-thinking and established north east business. Director, Mark Henderson, commented, 'Many businesses are now thinking seriously about the impact they are having on climate change and the environment. Commercially, many bids, tenders and government frameworks now insist that suppliers are committed to good environmental practices therefore in order to secure new markets and grow, businesses have to be aware of their impact and demonstrate their certifications. It's always great to work with a fellow north east business, however, we were delighted to support such an established company with such a rich heritage in our region. Since gaining the standard, the team have embraced the framework and are embedding the culture within their workforce which is great for us to be a part of?

Paul Dixon, Technical Manager at Sir Joseph Isherwood, commented, 'Environmental sustainability and the impact on climate change is something that is at the heart of our business. When we started to research the ISO 14001 standard, we decided to approach this with a two-pronged attack, this was to improve our sustainability while reducing our carbon footprint and from a commercial perspective, we knew that we needed the standard to open further opportunities within our industry.

As we support clients across the globe, having the internationally recognised standard will prove our credibility, transverse across all of our operations and demonstrate our commitment to the environment, we look forward to maintaining this with the support of Compliant in the future.'

For more information on Compliant's services or for a no-obligation proposal, visit their website at www.compliantfm.com

Are you afraid to change your job?

Bryony Gibson, director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, talks about the importance of being honest with yourself and knowing when it is time to embrace positive change in your career.

Do you fear change? I sometimes do. I think we all do, to some extent, because it usually means that the outcome is unknown.

In truth, our brains are hard-wired to search for comfort in understanding. When we don't know what is going to happen, we begin to make up scenarios, and that leads to worry.

One of the many things recruitment has taught me is that people also find it hard to move on when something familiar comes to an end. Fear of failure comes into play. If we don't know how something will turn out, we'd rather not try because it could be risky or end badly.

When it comes to your career, usually, it boils down to one of three things: the people, the role, or the environment. The good news is that these areas should all be able to be improved by talking openly with your employer.

Having said that, I suggest that you do not leave things too late. Don't wait until things are dire before acting. By putting yourself in a position where you want out of a job as quickly as possible, you open the door to making decisions that lack the insight and information you need to make the best choice.

Then, when it doesn't go well, there is a strong chance you will reinforce the idea that change is not good, rather than recognising it was needed earlier so your decision can be reached in a calm, knowledge-led, and balanced way.

I see this happen a lot. Where people know, deep down, that they want to move but keep telling themselves they are being too fussy, too



demanding, or will just stick it out for another six months and wait for that pay rise, bonus, or promotion.

Whatever the reason, we all know that more often than not, if you do not make the change, then nothing will change at all. So how do you know when it is time to find a new job? There are a lot of things that can trigger the search.

It could be more bad days than good. Uncontrollable or overwhelming stress levels. A lack of energy and motivation. Persistent frustration and issues you can't seem to shake. Being unhappy in, and subsequently out of, work. These are all signs that it is time to reassess your situation and start being honest with yourself.

Right now, a lack of career opportunities and salary progression is prevalent. With promises being broken or put on hold, and work-life balance suffering as a result.

While no job is completely perfect, it's important to keep your bigger picture at the forefront of decision-making. Consider the experience you're gaining, the networks you're exposed to, and the kudos you get from working where you do. This will help you understand what to do next.

What you need to remember is that you are not alone. We all experience a degree of apprehension when it comes to change. That's why comfort zones exist.

Changing your job is a big decision but being uncomfortable with uncertainty is not a good enough excuse to avoid it. If you think it might be time for you to move on, my advice is to explore it. Reach out and explore what is out there. Do some research. Speak to someone you trust. The more you know, the less scary it will become.

Of course, the grass is not always greener, but your time is very precious and, if you're not happy, you need to make a change of some kind. Whatever you decide to do, be confident and don't be put off by fear because the rewards when you find a job you love will be lifechanging.

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

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An Eventful 2023 for NEHA

2023 was another successful year for the North East Hotelier Association (NEHA) - in partnership with over 50 of the regions hotels.

Proudly boasting 3,400 people employed in their industry, NEHA aimed to increase the number of talented professionals with the launch of their Hospitality Mentor Programme, partnering with the University of Sunderland to provide valuable practical skills and insight for students who are looking to pursue a career in the sector. They hoped and achieved that in doing this, support for the recovering industry would be strengthened post-Covid 19 and inspire young talent to pursue a role with them.

NEHA showed their support for Newcastle's business community as the sales teams joined Get Into Newcastle's spring clean, collecting rubbish from the Quayside and working together to keep the beautiful city at its best for their guests, as well as showing a reflection of the high esteem they hold for the city. Among those who accompanied them was the Maldron Hotel Newcastle, Delta by Marriott Newcastle, Staybridge Suites and DoubleTree by Hilton.

On the 26th of October 2023, over 400 attendees from hotels across the region gathered in anticipation at the Fed Brewery Gateshead to celebrate the annual NEHA Excellence Awards.

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The glittering event showcased the outstanding hospitality of its members, as well as raising a fantastic £1546 for Hospitality Action and provided their well-deserving employees with their gratitude as they were served a delicious three course meal with fantastic entrainment – a good time was had by all.

Overall, 2023 was a promising year for the association, continuing to be a positive voice

for the industry, their unwavering dedication to the further improvement and success of the hospitality industry is an inspiration to their partners, bringing together the leading hotels of the North East to ensure the bright future of North East hospitality.

For more information on NEHA and its benefits go to www.nehotels.co.uk



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Transforming talent acquisition for UK businesses: A North East success story

If you have engaged with a recruitment agency partner in recent years, there is a strong possibility that you will have encountered either NRG (Northern Recruitment Group) or Recruitment Process Outsourcing (RPO) business Greenbean. Leanne Chambers was recently appointed as Managing Director of both businesses in a move to enhance their full-service recruitment solutions across the UK.

> Headquartered in Newcastle upon Tyne, these two distinguished recruitment firms collectively bring over 40 years of industry expertise to the table. Their proficiency extends over a broad range of sectors such as Corporate Services, Tech & Digital, and Engineering, Manufacturing, & Technical (EMT). NRG also boasts a skilled Executive Search and Selection team, adept at filling senior, executive, and non-executive roles; whilst Greenbean has the insight, scalability, and capability of a Recruitment Process Outsourcing (RPO) business to manage high-volume and project-based recruitment solutions.

The combined insight and expertise of both businesses distinguish themselves in the marketplace by offering a fullservice solution for talent acquisition, and the recruitment partner of choice.

Leanne has been with NRG for almost 20 years, the last six of which as the driving force behind Greenbean. During this time, she has led the team to successfully deliver large-scale and project recruitment solutions to clients across the UK, working in partnership with brands such as NewDay, Worldpay, Santander, Tesco Bank, Ocado, and the startup of the UK's 1st digital-only bank Atom Bank.

It is an exciting period of transformation for the two companies, and Leanne is the perfect person for the job. Her history speaks for itself, and we learn more about the woman at the helm.

"After finishing my degree in Tourism at Sheffield Hallam University I joined the Hilton Group in London working in the Conference, Event and Corporate Sales departments," said Leanne. "After 5 years I then joined the recruitment agency that was helping me find my next role.

But, as someone who was born and bred in the North East, I wanted to return home. That was July 2005 when I joined NRG in Newcastle as a Senior Consultant. I have been with the firm ever since.

In 2017 I led the team to set up Greenbean, our dedicated RPO division. As well as managing large temporary and permanent volume recruitment projects for many of the UK's largest household names, we also function as an in-house recruitment agency for businesses without an internal talent acquisition team or those seeking to outsource certain parts of their recruitment process or projects outside of their business-asusual recruitment. Our bespoke models can bolster internal resources during times of peak demand to flex and scale with the ever-changing needs of the business." One of the significant changes Leanne has implemented since assuming leadership of both businesses is the introduction of certain aspects of the RPO offering to NRG clients. She recognised that select elements of the RPO solution such as recruitment process diagnostic & design, recruitment marketing, interview and assessment centre design and facilitation, and vetting and pre-employment screening, could add huge value to businesses as standalone services.

This transformation into talent advisory services offers a versatile solution that provides an alternative to a full RPO solution. This modular solution is proving highly popular among businesses of all sizes, from SMEs to blue-chip corporations, global enterprises, and public and third-sector organisations, marking a significant evolution in their service offerings.

"Collectively NRG and Greenbean stand unique in the marketplace in being able to offer businesses, wherever they are in the UK, a comprehensive suite of solutions and services that support them throughout each stage of their journey, from start-ups and periods of growth to those navigating relocation, change and transformation."

Leanne goes on to say: "I am extremely proud to assume leadership of two well-respected brands within the recruitment industry. This creates a unique opportunity for us to make a real difference in supporting how businesses transform their approach to talent acquisition."

Their offices are based at Quorum Business Park, NE12 8BU. NRG and Greenbean, your Recruitment Partner of Choice.

Interested to know more about NRG and Greenbean's combined services please visit:

NRG www.nrgplc.com call 0191 232 1222 email contactus@nrgplc.com

Greenbean www.greenbeanrpo.com call 03330 160 330 email enquiries@greenbeanrpo.com

Leanne Chambers

The new leadership agenda

In the ever-evolving landscape we're working in, the environment around us is undergoing a profound shift. This transformation affects how we work, engage with colleagues, and adapt to technological advancements.

The traditional norms and comfort zones we once relied upon have become outdated, triggered by the Pandemic. Just look back five or 10 years, and consider how you worked then. How very different is it now? I know it's transformed for me.

This change, catalysed by the rapid acceleration of AI over the last 15 months, prompts us to critically assess how we operate as leaders within our organisations. If we are still working as we did 5 years ago – then we've missed something! The rise of virtual and hybrid work setups, accelerated by the pandemic, has changed the way we should engage with colleagues and conduct business. Consequently, our approach to relationships and work dynamics needs an overhaul.

Al's impact on daily tasks to the digitization of work processes is forcing us to adapt, no matter how much we wish to hide, and staying abreast of technological advancements is imperative to avoid falling behind in an ever-changing world.

Combine that with the multi-generational workforces we now have, we see the varied societal influences which have shaped different generations' values and approaches to work coming through. Treating everyone with a one-size-fits-all approach is no longer working, and instead, we need to be mindful of individual needs and adapt our engagement styles to suit.

The reality is we're in a decade of change and by 2030-35 how we will be working, living and experiencing the world will be very different. I don't have a crystal ball but I can look back with some ease and certainty and say this is pretty much predicted.

If you look at the societal patterns seen in the last three centuries in the '20s, you will see the same patterns we are witnessing now: a pandemic, global migration due to war and famine, changing role of women in society, racial and class tensions, financial insecurity and poverty gaps, and rapid technological advancement which changed society forever. The '20s are the decade of change in every century – why would it be different this time?

We are in the 4th Industrial Age.



Amidst this transformative landscape, leadership skills play a pivotal role. If we look at the thought leadership coming from the Future Agenda, RSA, McKinsey, PWC, Deloitte, Citrix and futurist thought leaders, we see some common patterns

21st Century Leadership Model

emerging.

As leaders, I suggest we have 6 ways we will need to be, making sure we continue to develop as the years progress.

1. Connected: We must exhibit emotional intelligence, active listening, and compassion to engage meaningfully and with our teams, particularly as work-life boundaries blur. They are a whole person.

2. Intentional: We need to be intentional about how we're connecting with the people in our teams, our colleagues and our stakeholders. We need check in often, give clarity of purpose, of goals and approach, and be hyper aware of our actions and impact.

3. Foresighted: We will need to be forwardthinking, constantly horizon scanning and building our awareness of what is to come. This will impact our strategies, requiring organisation **4. Empowering:** We should be leading the way in collaboration and trust-building, nurturing a distributed leadership style, which empowers teams to act independently within a psychologically safe environment. No more hero leader.

5. Become Change Agents: As leaders we must foster an environment where adaptation to change is not only encouraged but embraced, even in ambiguous or complex situations. This means going first.

6. Become Learn-It-Alls: Adopting a growth mindset, and cultivating continuous learning, creativity, and openness to new ideas, will be crucial to ensure readiness for this evolving landscape.

As leaders, embracing these skills and adapting them to our individual needs is vital. Whether developing connections, empowering teams, or embracing change, recognizing our own personal growth areas is pivotal for navigating the coming years.

What change will be required in your leadership stance in 2024, to start you on this journey? And who will support you along the way?

If your development support needs would benefit from one to one, team or group coaching, I can help with that. Contact Annabel via LinkedIn, annabel@successfultraining.co.uk, or visit www.successfultraining.co.uk



A ball to remember for 10th anniversary

A charity that brings joy into the lives of people living with dementia is celebrating its first successful decade supporting people in the North East, by holding a commemorative ball.

Silverline Memories, the creation of Founding-CEO Sandra Coulter, is hosting the Hollywood themed ball on Saturday May 11th, at the Grand Hotel, Gosforth Park.

Set up 10 years ago the charity, which is based in Kenton, was founded because of a passionate belief that life should not end with a diagnosis of dementia. The team work hard to provide opportunities to keep people active and engaged, connecting with each other to enjoy positive mental health and wellbeing. Sandra said: "We are so excited to launch the ticket sales for our celebratory ball, which mark the achievements of not only our team and volunteers but also our service users and their families, many of whom have been with us for much of the journey.

"To make the ball a huge success we are reaching out to anyone who can support with sponsorship, donations for our raffles and fundraisers and of course, to come along and celebrate by buying tickets. The nights entertainment is being provided by Marty Craggs of Lindisfarne fame, so it is guaranteed to be a great event!"

The charity currently supports 280 people across 158 households, and with its 2024 fundraising drive and its new wellbeing centre recently opened at Kenton Shopping Centre, the team hope to be able to support many more families who are affected by the condition.

Sandra said: "We started off by looking after around 100 people a year but as understanding of the condition and its diagnosis has Tickets can be bought at and more information on the charity is available on silverlinememories.com

increased so has the need for independent support for the person and for those who love and care for the person. Our specialist support includes café groups, tea dances, choirs, weekly meet up socials, advocacy and much, much more. Many of our service users claim to have met their very best friends here, and with the sensory space we are currently developing, there will also be time for quiet reflection and decompression from the emotions that accompany dementia."

This all, of course, costs money and although the charity is funded by grants from both national and local trusts and organisations, the generosity of supporters and corporate donations are key. With that in mind, Silverline Memories are reaching out to anyone who would like to sponsor the event, provide a prize or any restaurants/food outlets who will donate a voucher to their grub grab raffle.

If you'd like to have a chat about supporting the event then please email Sandra Coulter on sandra@silverlinememories.com

Castle delivers Landmark industrial facility

South Tyneside-based, Castle, has completed works at the former TRW Automotive Systems site at Washington.

Appointed as principal contractor by the abrdn Property Income Trust, Castle has refurbished the 150,000 sq. ft facility, which will be a distribution centre for the UK's biggest, dedicated parcel delivery specialist.

Headquartered in Hebburn, with a headcount of over 100 staff and offices in Glasgow and Edinburgh, Castle, which last year recorded £30 million turnover, is one of the UK's leading providers of building services, offering a wide range of high-quality engineering and contracting services covering all aspects of building, mechanical, public health, renewable and electrical engineering.



Andrew Dawson, managing director at Castle, said: "It was a great honour to be awarded the contract to refurbish such a well-known and significant facility. We take great pride in playing our role in supporting local investment and regeneration."



The scheme of works consisted of utility disconnections, demolition and strip out, earthworks, retaining structures, drainage, including attenuation, RC yard construction, parking areas and roadways, a vehicle refuelling area, van washing areas, re-surfacing, fencing, hard and soft landscaping, roofing works, cladding works, new doors and dock levellers, replacement of mechanical and electrical services throughout the facility, roof mounted photovoltaic panels, replacement joinery and finishes, cleaning, statutory compliance testing and assessments.

Castle has successfully introduced renewables into a 30-year-old building through the introduction of a roof mounted Photovoltaic sealed panel 1168kWp system which will generate 942,930kWh per year, which is the equivalent of supplying 235 homes and is estimated to provide 241,390kgs of CO2 carbon offset for year one. These works have allowed Castle to upgrade the facility from a Grade C rating to a new energy rating of 10A/EPC A.

www.castlebs.co.uk

Eothen Care Homes



Eothen Care Homes enhances the lives of older people by providing experienced and specialist care at our three North East care homes

Whitley Bay

Gosforth

Wallsend





Our purpose-built Whitley Bay and Gosforth homes provide our happy residents with spacious, en-suite rooms, as well as gorgeous, landscaped gardens and a range of events and activities. Our kind and caring staff are there to help residents live fuller, more rewarding lives. Both homes are close to local transport links and shops.

"We laugh together, we comfort one another. It's absolutely amazing." A Whitley Bay resident. Our Wallsend home has been specifically designed to enhance the lives of people living with dementia, with speciallytrained staff seeing to our residents' specific needs. The home provides residents with lots of independence, features spacious grounds - including a special reminisence area - and even has a hair salon, cafe, library and pub!

A major player in UK environmental industry



Substantial investment has paved the way for targeted and sustainable growth at Peterleebased, Asbestos Audit.

The company is committed to achieving a £7 million turnover by 2025, through a strategic focus on key sectors, active participation in national frameworks and a strong emphasis on sustainable development.

Asbestos Audit, with operations spanning 13 locations across the UK, has notably expanded its workforce from 19 to 60 staff in 2023 and ongoing hiring initiatives are underway to support the expansion of its specialist environmental, demolition and training services.

The company has relocated its headquarters from Sunderland to Peterlee alongside an operational base in County Durham for its growing asbestos removal and demolition departments and its asbestos consultancy has expanded its offering with a new in-house asbestos laboratory and air monitoring division.

Over the past year, the company has witnessed a huge surge in project engagement, scaling up from 5,000 to 25,000 projects. Furthermore, the company has achieved recognition on a national scale by securing significant frameworks with clients such as SITEC, City Fibre, Landmarc MOD, Esh Group and SCCI Alphatrack.

Specialist services provided by the company Include asbestos surveys, asbestos sampling, asbestos removal, contaminated ground testing and remediation, demolition and project management.

Ben Pickard, managing director at Asbestos Audit, said: "Over the past 12 months our growth has been remarkable and this momentum is set to continue. Beyond the structural enhancements we've implemented, we've also welcomed new, highly skilled talent to our team, particularly, in crucial leadership and management roles. This strategic move is aimed at upholding our exceptional track record in delivering quality and maintaining high standards of health and safety.

"Our vision is to provide the market with an unparalleled, one-stop-shop, enabling us to respond swiftly and with exceptional agility to our clients' needs, setting a benchmark for the quickest turnaround in the industry. Thanks to our incredibly loyal customer base, we are confident that, with their continuous support, we will successfully realise our goal of establishing a dynamic business founded on organic and sustainable growth.

"The company has identified key sectors for expansion including telecommunications, defence, public sector/NHS and national developers.

"This strategic approach is not just about growth; it's about a sustainable, meaningful, expansion that aligns with our core values and strengths. As we move forward, we remain committed to delivering excellence, fostering partnerships and making a positive impact in every sector we touch."

www.asbestosaudit.co



North East organisations pledge support to homeless veterans' charity



A host of organisations from across the North East have pledged their support to veterans' charity Launchpad.

The charity, which provides accommodation and targeted support to UK Armed Forces' veterans experiencing homelessness and unemployment, has welcomed support from a number of North East organisations.

As part of their 25th anniversary, Clothier Lacey & Co - one of the region's best-known marketing and PR consultancies is supporting the charity, offering their expert marketing and PR skills as well as an extensive network of contacts to work with the charity, which has two houses in the North East – Avondale House in Byker, Newcastle upon Tyne and Hollyacre House in Sacriston, County Durham.

Painting and decorating contractor, Bell Group, has transformed the communal lounge and kitchen area at Avondale House. As part of its social value commitments, staff from the firm delivered a two-day upskilling and

volunteering course where residents were taught the basics of painting techniques to improve their skills and knowledge. The paint and materials were provided by Dulux.

Residents from both houses received a Christmas boost thanks to Ryder Architecture and Hydrock. Launchpad was one of three charities to benefit from last year's Oktoberfest. The money Launchpad received was reinvested to hand out essential gifts to the veterans who were also treated to a buffet, full dinner and activities.

The charity has welcomed a grant from the Newcastle Building Society Community Fund to purchase a greenhouse and essential gardening tools and equipment at Hollyacre House. This will make a huge difference to the residents, encouraging them to engage in outdoor activities to stimulate their mental health and wellbeing.

For more information and to find out how you could support the charity, please visit www.veteranslaunchpad.org.uk or contact Craig Downs, North East Business Development Manager craig.downs@veteranslaunchpad.org.uk

Follow us on LinkedIn @ Launchpad Veterans

AF&V Launchpad Limited Registration Charity No. 1153185





What will 2024 bring for property?

The next 12 months will be challenging for property owners and occupiers. Kevan Carrick, co-founder of JK Property Consultants offers his perspective on the year ahead.

It's always good to start with the positive news. The signs are there that there are sunlit areas of the property sector, particularly in industrial and manufacturing. New demand from inward investors and foreign direct investment, with the growth of new and innovative sectors, such as energy, automotive and life sciences, has benefitted the region enormously in the last 12 months and his will continue to help to grow the economy, driving development and investment.

Now for the nitty gritty.

Commercial property occupiers will continue to incur higher energy costs. They will be under pressure to achieve zero net carbon in the foreseeable future in both the property occupation and operational processes. This will mean higher revenue costs and greater pressure on profitability and it will be particularly acute for smaller businesses. The lower demand for property will see little increase in rents and an increase in the incentives available to attract occupiers taking leases and encouragement to agree longer leases.

There is a plethora of information available to improve sustainability and reduce energy costs but the challenge is how to access this and determine the payback for the investment to meet obligations and achieve value for money. The pressures will require good relationships with landlords to consider how to improve the insulation of the fabric of existing buildings and where those improvements increase the value of the landlords' investment in both revenue and



capital terms. There is a mechanism under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 to help resolve matters.

Property investors are experiencing a dynamic shift in demand from and the needs of occupiers. More occupiers are under cash flow stress, are seeking shorter term leases and are resisting the pressures on rising costs, where they can. Rental growth is expected to be flat over the next year. This increases the risk to the landlord in the continuity of income and returns on investment are not likely to improve in the next 12 months.

Residential property has seen a lowering of demand over the last few months, and this is likely to continue over the next year and lower interest rates will help existing owners and house resales, with a forecast rise in prices. First-time buyers will continue to struggle to enter the market. There remains a challenge for rental properties with rents increasing because of the shortage of houses and flats. This is also adversely impacting on the condition and quality of accommodation.

The value of property and the unstable market suffered over the last few years, will continue until there is an increase in the supply of houses for sale and to let, this includes social and affordable homes. Successive governments that have failed to deliver the minimum 300,000 per annum have exacerbated the problem and will continue to do so until there is a greater supply delivered. This problem will continue to slow the growth of the regional economy.

Such improvement in the delivery of more houses requires a paradigm shift in the housing sector on delivery mechanisms, particularly in the supply of land, greater contributions for social and infrastructure needs and construction of houses at a time when there is a demand to build houses to higher standards for quality with insulation and achieving carbon net zero.

jkpropertyconsultants.com



Is the annual appraisal dead? Implementing continuous performance management for 2024

Think back to the last time you ran appraisals with your team. Did you enjoy trying to remember what happened months ago, then filling in lengthy forms with the details? No? Your team likely didn't either.

So, how do you move away from box ticking to useful, valuable discussions about your team's performance and development plans?

Moving to a continuous performance management process involves replacing annual appraisals with more frequent, more informal conversations between you and your employees. Because you're talking more frequently, more relevant objectives can be set, feedback can be more immediate, problems can be picked up sooner, and the whole performance management process is more agile and more responsive to business and role changes. Sounds great, right? There are a few things to consider before deciding whether it's the right approach for your business:

Will it actually happen?

Do you have sufficient resource to ensure that more frequent conversations are going to happen reliably and consistently? What does 'frequent' reasonably look like in your business? If that's once a quarter or less, retaining an annual process might be a better way of ensuring that people get a proper full discussion about their performance away from their dayto-day job.

Inconsistency of approach

How comfortable are your supervisors, team leaders and managers with the people aspects of their role? Before implementing continuous performance management, think about any training needs they may have to ensure its delivered consistently – otherwise you may find that while some teams get frequent supportive conversations, for others, busy-ness means that all of a sudden six months have gone by since the last one.

Need for evidence

Having an annual appraisal can provide useful evidence if there is a need to take steps to address performance through a formal process. If you're thinking about removing it, make sure you've agreed how concerns will be raised, support offered, and records kept so that you don't run into problems if you do need to work through a disciplinary or capability issue.

Why not start 2024 by reviewing how performance management works in your business? Consider what you want to achieve out of the process and identify whether these goals are being met. If you're keen to try continuous performance management but not sure how, feel free to get in touch for a free, no obligation chat.

Kathryn Rodgers, face2faceHR 07946 330 025



Bernetts Solicitors LLP boosts its commercial litigation team

A top ranked commercial litigation team has strengthened its services to clients by appointing a new Partner to its Newcastle office.

Property litigation solicitor, Sue Roberts, has joined Burnetts Solicitors LLP, having previously worked for 18 years at another top North East firm.

And now she is adding her expertise to the already highly experienced team at the Tyneside solicitors, as part of the Burnetts' plan to consolidate its position as one of the top commercial litigation departments in the north.

Keighley takes new Operations Director role at Redgate Lodge Motor Group

Leading North East Motor Group Redgate Lodge has expanded its senior team with the appointment of Paul Keighley to a new position of Operations Director.

Paul brings over four decades' industry experience to Redgate, and has held senior roles with leading dealer groups and brands including Audi Colebrook & Burgess, Porsche & Bentley JCT 600 and the former Newcastle-

Newcastle Building Society appoint new manager to head up Sunderland branch

Donna Brown has been appointed as the new manager of Newcastle Building Society's Sunderland branch, strengthening its commitment to the city.

Despite a national trend of bank branch closures which has seen several banks leave high streets across the North East, Newcastle Building Society remains committed to its branch network, investing heavily in the provision of face-to-face services across the region.

South Shields-based Donna has returned to the Society's Sunderland branch on Waterloo Place, where she began in 2020 as a customer advisor. After five months as South Shields assistant branch manager, Donna will now lead the team which has been providing face-to-face access to financial services since 2000.



Sue has more than 20 years' experience in the field of property litigation and is delighted to be bringing her skills – and her reputation – to Burnetts.

based Benfield Motor Group.

He is also one of just a handful of people in the regional motor retail industry to be awarded a prestigious Gold Pin by Volkswagen in recognition of the exceptional contribution he made to the business.

Paul Keighley said: "The minute I met Scott and the management team at Redgate, it was clear there was an exciting opportunity for me to join a family-run business with a good track record in the motor industry that also has ambitious growth plans for the future."

Redgate Lodge Motor Group is a multi-award winning used-car dealer group which has its main dealership at Shiremoor in North Shields.



Property specialist Amandeep laying new foundations at Hay & Kilner

A specialist property litigation solicitor is building his career opportunities with a move to North East law firm Hay & Kilner.

Amandeep Dhillon has joined the Newcastleheadquartered practice as a senior associate and has extensive experience of advising public and private sector clients on a range of property law issues, including landlord and tenant disputes, portfolio management and development disputes.

Aman, who is from South Shields, studied at Sunderland and Northumbria Universities before qualifying as a solicitor at a boutique North East firm.

He moved away to work for law firms in Manchester and Milton Keynes/London, further developing his expertise in property litigation, before making a long-planned return to the region three years ago.

Amandeep Dhillon says: "Returning to my home region was always in my mind when I moved away – with everything it has to offer, from both a business and a lifestyle point of view, there's really nowhere better.





"No more square pegs in rou<u>nd holes"</u>

We operate in an environment where two things have to happen...the candidate has to be right for the job and the job has to be right for the candidate! *Contact us today: info@howiewhite.co.uk* EST. HW 1999 Howie White RESOURCING

Redgate Lodge Motor Group swings into action to raise over £12,000 to support grassroots sport in the North East



Redgate Lodge Motor Group, a leading car dealership in Newcastle Upon Tyne, has hosted a successful golf day in aid of Sport Newcastle, a charity that supports the development of sport and young talent in the region.

The event, which took place at City of Newcastle Golf Club in Gosforth attracted 164 golfers and raised £12,088 for the charity.

The money raised will go directly to sports people and clubs in the North East. Sport Newcastle is a registered charity supporting grassroots sport and has provided more than £2.5 million in financial grants spanning a quarter of a century to young talent, sports clubs and events.

Paul Keighley, Operations Director, Redgate Lodge Motor Group, said: "We are delighted to have hosted such a fantastic golf day for Sport Newcastle, which is a charity that is very close to our hearts.

"We are passionate about giving back to our community and helping young people achieve their sporting dreams. We would like to thank all the golfers, businesses, sponsors, and all the volunteers who made this event possible and contributed to its success."

Sport Newcastle is a voluntary organisation that was established in 1968 to promote and develop sport in Newcastle and the surrounding areas. The charity supports over 40 different sports and provides grants, awards, and scholarships to talented athletes, coaches, and clubs.

The charity also recognises and celebrates the achievements of local sporting heroes through its annual dinner and hall of fame. Patrons of the charity include Alan Shearer CBE, Sir John Hall and Jonathan Edwards CBE.

Former Olympic, World, Commonwealth and European triple jump champion, and Sport Newcastle Patron, Jonathan Edwards CBE took part in the event playing for the Redgate Lodge team and said, "Support from North East businesses is an essential part of our commitment to providing sporting opportunities for all. As a former aspiring young sport person, I know first-hand how a small amount of money can make a huge difference to help realise your sporting dreams and believe in yourself.

"When I was a student at Durham University, I

was awarded a £250 grant by Sport Newcastle to buy my first pair of spikes, which really inspired me to believe I could go on to achieve great things in athletics."

Mike Booth, Vice Chair at Sport Newcastle, said: "We are very grateful to Redgate Lodge Motor Group for organising this wonderful golf day and raising such a generous amount for our charity. The funds will make a huge difference to our work and enable us to support more grassroots sport in the North East. We are also very thankful to City of Newcastle Golf Club for hosting the event and providing a superb venue and service."

The golf day was attended by a wide range of businesses from the motor trade and local businesses including, BCA, Manheim Auctions along with Euro Car parts, Bosch UK, several leading finance and vehicle funding partners plus many regular and new faces who travelled from as far as Glasgow, Yorkshire and the Midlands.

The winners of the golf day were Auto Protect warranties with Lee Myers as their captain. The winner of the nearest the pin competition was Adam Findlay from Davison's Solutions and the longest drive winner was Scott Palmer from Lookers Nissan.

www.redgatelodge.co.uk

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Time is running out – The big digital switch off

For more than a century, the UK has relied on the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) to manage phone calls. The PSTN, encompassing a complex network of telephone lines, satellite links, and switching centres, has been the backbone connecting callers when dialling specific phone numbers.

Dom Ryan from The Sustainable and Ethical Buying Bureau (SEBB) explains that they are a group of like-minded organisations that offers a range of services across communication and connectivity.

"By working together through group purchasing and shared resources we can offer a strong proposition to our customers, and they can

enjoy the lower prices than if they were priced individually.

"One of the main fears and reasons to speak to us is that any service that gets a fault after 2025, it will not be fixed and if the organisation is still in a contract, they may be forced to pay of the rest of the contract AND take out a new working service so it's essential to speak to us now to

prepare for that eventuality."

However, the emergence of internet calls, video conferencing, and online collaboration tools has outpaced the capabilities of the PSTN, making its maintenance increasingly challenging. As a response, the UK is set to phase out the PSTN by the end of 2025, ushering in a new era of telecommunications dominated by digital services, particularly Internet Protocol (IP) and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone systems.

Dom explains why it is imperative that businesses act now: "Acting promptly is crucial. We are currently assisting businesses and charitable organisations in transitioning to modern IP phone systems, leveraging fibre instead of the outdated copper wires used by the PSTN. The shift to IP calling not only consolidates phone service and internet access under one roof, reducing overall costs, but also brings additional benefits such as high-quality video conferencing and enhanced accessibility.

"Businesses that delay the transition may face

BUSINESS INSIGHT

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sebb

...working together through group purchasing and shared resources we can offer a strong proposition to our customers...

more than just communication challenges. Alarm systems and emergency contact points, often reliant on PSTN, may become inoperable if not upgraded before 2025. Communication providers are aware of the widespread use of PSTN lines, but the responsibility for updating or replacing hardware lies with the customers."

sebb

sebb

Group

Preparing for the switch involves evaluating existing services, identifying needs, and creating an action plan. Small businesses may need new handsets and IT personnel familiarising themselves with phone service dashboards, while larger enterprises may require retiring outdated equipment and planning for new opportunities offered by IP technology.

To support businesses in this transition, SEBB's Professional Services offer comprehensive planning and implementation, from the discovery phase to final on-site testing.

As part of their commitment to aiding businesses, they provide a free Telecoms and IT Services Health Check. This review includes a thorough audit of phones, mobiles, and connectivity, proposing tailored solutions for current and future needs.

The health check encompasses an analysis of current services, cost comparisons, quality and speed evaluations, hardware assessments, and maintenance agreement reviews.

The findings report provides a suitability report of current services, identifies potential cost savings, and offers recommendations for service changes to future-proof the organisation. An action plan outlines the implementation of recommendations along with timescales.

For a no obligations health check, simply scan the QR code:



Dom concluded: "Taking these steps now ensures a smooth transition and avoids a stressful and costly transformation closer to the 2025 deadline."

Under the SEBB Group is SwitchAid, Project Business Solutions and Cheap Charity Phone Deals. SwitchAid is a non-profit organisation that specialises in providing mobile, telecoms, and connectivity consultancy services tailored for charities and non-profit entities. 0191 303 9404. Project Business Solutions is an ethical business-to-business telecoms and technology consultancy committed to delivering customised solutions. Their goal is to ensure that their clients operate in the most effective manner possible, all whilst maintaining costeffectiveness. 0191 511 1153.

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...It's important that I practise what I preach...

Helen Butler

In Conversation With...

Northern Insight talks to new columnist...

Helen Butler

Founder of Simplified Operations

What were your career ambitions growing up?

Truthfully, when I was younger, I didn't have a clear career ambition. Career guidance in schools wasn't great and I didn't have any real concept of what opportunities there were; especially in a business environment! I decided against university as I couldn't think of a subject that interested me enough and instead took a couple of years to try out a few different jobs, finally coming back to my love of numbers, and headed down the finance route. I vaguely remember a notion I had that I wanted to earn a salary that matched my age each year. A bit unconventional, but it was my way of measuring success and personal growth, no matter the job I ended up in!

In your view, what are some of the common operational challenges that small business owners are experiencing?

One of the most common challenges I've observed is the lack of clarity and structure in small businesses. Many owners are passionate about their ideas, build a solid customer base and create a team to support, but often overlook the need for a clear operational framework so it can all work well together. This lack of structure can lead to inefficiencies, miscommunication, increased costs, and ultimately, hinder growth. I think there's a general nervousness around the words structure and process - I think some owners see them as misaligned with the entrepreneurial spirit - but the truth is that having the structures and frameworks in place can create the foundations to enable so much more to be achieved.

What are the plans for 2024?

I'm excited for this year. December and January have been our busiest months to date and we're currently expanding the team so that we have more delivery support to service new clients, and back-office management support to keep the operations running smoothly. It's important that I practise what I preach so creating the right team early on is key! Supporting more clients to generate more profits is the aim for 2024.

What has been your biggest challenge so far in business?

Without question, the feeling of isolation that can show up when building a business. Friends and family are supportive, but there's a gap in shared experiences and therefore it can be difficult for them to truly understand the pressures you face, and in some cases the decisions you're making. Finding those like-minded individuals who can be your sounding board is crucial.

How do you maintain a healthy work-life balance, and what are your favourite activities to unwind?

There are always swings in terms of where time is spent and I'm okay with that. So it's less about balance but more about a core set of nonnegotiables to keep things working. For me, that includes making time for exercise and getting adequate sleep. I've noticed that if I work after 9pm I'm unable to switch off for quite a few hours and can be awake into the early hours which isn't helpful! To unwind, I prefer activities that get me moving and out of the work mindset – a run, a bike ride, a training session, anything that helps me reset. If I want to really unwind, I do like to like to indulge in a spa day at Seaham Hall. Bliss!

www.simplifiedoperations.co.uk

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Forward-thinking cleaning from ISR Laser

Is your business looking for a professional laser cleaning company, which is chemical-free, contactless, and precise? Introducing Terry South from ISR Laser, whose company is using sustainable technology to tackle the jobs we all hate doing, and in record time.

What can lasers clean? Any hard surface such as stainless steel, mild steel, alloys, brass, hardwoods, plastics, and natural stone. Contamination could be rusting, oxidisation, graffiti, aged surface, paint, or weld. Laser also works for sit investigation in the recovery of material data such as part numbers to cleaning of threads to allow easy disassembly.

Embarking on the journey to revolutionise cleaning, having accumulated extensive experience in industrial quality departments, worldwide, owner Terry South witnessed the drawbacks of poor-quality cleaning—resulting in slowdowns, stoppages, safety hazards and an environmental disaster accepted as "The Norm" within industry as laser technology is not widely

used in UK or taught.

Terry witnessed the change in Europe towards laser cleaning during the covid period which allow greater control of delivery as Europeans used lockdown wisely to align with sustainability in reducing their carbon footprint moving away from Shot blasting and chemical cleaning in addition to reducing their power usage.

Recognising the need for a superior sustainable solution, he understood that achieving operational excellence required a long-term solution avoiding compromises. Traditional methods involving subcontractors, chemicals, solvents, and time constraints were not conducive to the level of cleanliness essential for safety standards and the growing need for supply chain, stage three, decarbonisation.

The conventional options of chemicals, pressure washing, and sandblasting were deemed inefficient and not sustainable with an industrial change required to allow long term operation in manufacture of some products. In addition, present methods often sacrificed tolerances and substrate necessary for remanufacture and future use, so with introduction of laser cleaning comes the chance to reduce costs as no parent materials are removed, or heat transferred in the cleaning, so tolerances retained.

Suppliers prioritised delivery deadlines and payments over the total quality and lifespan of equipment. Upon returning to the UK, Terry South



INSTANT SURFACE RECOVERY

was determined to assist businesses in maintaining environmental goals without compromising the crucial aspect of achieving a high standard of cleanliness and extended life cycle potential in possible remanufacture.

SER CLEANING

Connecting with his network of industrial clients, scientific colleagues, and professional contacts, he knew from working in Europe that Pulse Laser Cleaning was the solution. Utilising a highly portable laser and fume extractor, the ISR Laser team ensures your substrate is recovered as far as practical to original standard, with

- Zero damage Zero contact.
- Zero contaminants left behind Minimized downtime.
- Maximised performance retention Cost minimisation.

Get the laser on site – and increase your sustainability in commercial, industrial, and domestic cleaning to review your present method against what the future holds.

As early adopters of their highly portable and effective laser cleaning devices, ISR have access to the latest training, products, and applications and will next year show in both Newcastle and Manchester Expo 2024.

Laser cleaning ensures:

- Zero residue creates zero waste, only removing the contamination.
- No noise No need for messy cleanup.

 No downtime required as you can potentially clean an operating machine while in use.

After

 Free from corrosive chemicals or damaging friction resulting in a pristine substrate, allowing you to resume work seamlessly with minimal disruption.

Conveniently located in the Northeast of England, but servicing the whole of the UK, the company work with businesses from the Angel of the North to Canary Wharf and can assist in cleaning without harming your substrate, lungs, or the environment and at the same time increasing your sustainability.

Terry explains: "At ISR, our vision is simple; to provide an energy-efficient, sustainable and environmentally friendly service for cleaning oxidation and contamination without resorting to CO2, blasting, or chemicals. Our laser-based approach minimises energy usage through the ablation rate of materials, representing a positive environmental leap forward in cleaning for the future.

Stay on the sustainable-edge of cleanliness with ISR Laser. 07774 622807 • Email: info@isrlaser.com www.isrlaser.com • Facebook: isrlaser Terry South



Fusion Spaces – driving wellness through technology moves to the North East

Fusion Spaces, a unique wellness and technology business, has recently moved to the North East of England. The Fusion Spaces directors, husband-and-wife team of Michael and Jayne Cox, fused their combined passions of AV specialist to F1 and sound production industries with trauma informed coaching and consultancy.

Together they are driving the development and delivery of innovative technological solutions that help to reduce human stress and anxiety.

With the business formed after a number of turbulent years that impacted their health, the recent move to the North Sea coast marks the culmination of a long-term plan to live and work 'free range', connected to the coast and nature in the recently renamed Northumberland 'National Landscape.'

This 'free range' way of life not only supports their personal wellness goals, but the future aims of the business to reduce human stress and anxiety by utilising technology for good. Fusion Spaces is now working with local businesses in the North East, with plans to move further north into Scotland to help deliver their unique brand of wellness.

A recent collaboration with immersive experience specialists, Pixel Artworks, brought Room to Breathe to life at Outernet, London's most visited immersive experience attraction in 2023. Receiving exceptional pick up from the media and reach on social media, Room to Breathe brought tranquillity and calm to anxious commuters using original music by Matthew Wilcock to guide the breath using an ethereal pulsing sun visualisation that supported a calming box breathing practice.

Room to Breathe is now available on license and can be used as an immersive wellness experience, and in various formats by businesses in break-out areas and meeting rooms or within healthcare settings and public spaces.

If you'd like to know more about Room to Breathe, immersive wellness experiences or how Fusion Spaces could support you, please contact Michael or Jayne michael@ fusion-spaces.com, jayne@fusion-spaces.com.



technext.co.uk #getinvolved

Business leaders welcome return of Tech Festival for '24

TechNExt, the North East's premier technology festival, is set to make its much-anticipated return in 2024. Following the success of the inaugural event in 2023, the event has been welcomed back by businesses in the region. TechNExt 2024 was officially launched at a special event last week, at the Opencast offices in Newcastle Upon Tyne.

TechNExt 2023 took place earlier this year, spanning 5 days in June. It drew over 3,000 attendees and featured a lineup of 52 community-led fringe events alongside its flagship events. The festival not only highlighted the burgeoning tech scene in the North East but also showcased the importance of collaboration to the region's sector.

TechNExt 2024 promises to build on the previous festival's momentum, with

Fledgling Newcastle software company lands contract with global giant

Reclaro, a burgeoning Software as a Service (SaaS) business based in Newcastle, has announced a major contract with London and Manchester based IRIS Software Group, a global business with a workforce of around 3,500 employees.

Reclaro specialises in providing simple strategy execution software, designed to help companies seamlessly connect their strategic goals with day-to-day operations. As an innovative start-up with a micro team of five employees, Reclaro is based within a thriving co-working space in the heart of Newcastle.

Founding CEO, Pete explained that IRIS Software Group has grown exponentially in the last 12 months which has prompted a more strategic approach to business productivity and effectiveness.

"Our cloud-based software solution helps ambitious growing businesses execute their strategy quickly and effectively with interactive performance monitoring. IRIS Software Group is a leading global



four flagship events - the mainstage conference, industry dinner, Tech Talent Live and the festival party - set to return alongside a new programme of fringe events.

New for 2024 is a schools' challenge. This will see the festival partner with regional schools to inspire students about technology and showcase the fantastic opportunities technology offers them. TechNExt 2024 will also have a renewed focus on the Good Festival Ambition, which promotes sustainable, diverse and inclusive event practices.

David Dunn, CEO of Sunderland Software City, said: "TechNExt 2023 set a new benchmark for tech events in our region. It has been instrumental in showcasing the North East as a hub of technology innovation and talent.

"The overwhelming response to last year's TechNExt just shows what a vibrant tech community we have in the North East. Its return in 2024 is a testament to our thriving business ecosystem."



player in the Human Capital Management, Accountancy and Education software and services, and we're delighted they've chosen Reclaro to supply strategy execution software for them,." said Pete. "The business had the choice of using several alternative firms and I'm incredibly proud they have chosen us, a tech start-up in Newcastle."

The signing of this recent customer with IRIS Software Group not only signifies a huge milestone for Reclaro but also demonstrates the industry recognition of the value and uniqueness of their product. As they continue to scale their operations, this important collaboration marks a strategic move towards broader market penetration.

A year in the life...

Dan Kitchen

Managing Director at razorblue

What did you set out to achieve this year?

2023 was a year of bettering ourselves, our primary focus was on continuous improvement and fortifying our foundations. We were on a mission to elevate our standards, refine our systems and processes and make strategic investments in our most valuable asset- our people in order to continue on our growth trajectory.

Has everything gone according to plan?

Almost, the economy has not been as buoyant as expected and its essential to acknowledge the external challenges we faced. The economic landscape presented some unexpected hurdles, and like many other business leaders, we navigated through various headwinds. Our adaptive nature has allowed us to stay resilient and nearly on course with our ambitious plans.

What are you most proud of this year?

Without a doubt, one of the highlights of our year was winning three Business of the Year awards. To be recognised by three independent panels of judges as the best business in our region is truly phenomenal. It's a testament to the collective dedication and hard work of our entire team and reinforces our commitment to excellence in every facet of our operations.

What's the best piece of business advice you've received this year?

Received and given – control the controllables.

Tell us about your team?

Our team is amazing – a diverse and dynamic group of hardworking individuals who collectively form the backbone of our success.

The past year witnessed significant expansion, with a particular highlight being the growth of our finance team to accommodate the scale we've achieved. From our 24-hour service desk to the dedicated teams in development, sales, marketing, account management, and HR, each department plays a crucial role in our success. Bringing almost everyone from our various offices to Newcastle in December for a yearend celebration was a testament to the unity and hard work that defines our team spirit.

Describe 2023 in 3 words...

Tough, challenging, rewarding.

What are your aims for 2024?

2024 is a year where we're going to see the fruits of our hard labour in 2023 with a business that is much more efficient and agile.

razorblue.com

Dan Kitchen



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...recovering from cancer in 2013 really did change my perspective on life...

Talking Tech and Digital

In the latest of this popular series of features Michael Grahamslaw talks to...

Michael Cox

Director, Fusion Spaces

Did you always envisage a career in the world of Technology?

For as long as I can remember I was fascinated by the music industry and the technology used for music production. I wanted to somehow be part of that scene and I have a memorable moment, at age eight or nine, I saw the Mike Oldfield album sleeve for Tubular Bells and heard the incredible sound he had created.

These experiences, and an enquiring mind meant I spent hours learning about things like multi-track recording, and to this day, I am not sure how I did this in the era before the world wide web!

What tips would you give to someone looking to work in the industry?

This is a formula for anyone who has ambition. Be persistent and surround yourself with people who support and believe in you.

If you feel a passion for something, it's not so much hard work, as being prepared to dedicate time and effort to reaching your goal. And if a conventional route via education, for example, doesn't work out for you, or you feel this isn't how you learn best, look for other avenues and people who are willing to help you get to where you want to be.

Tell us about the most exciting project you are currently working on?

My work within the F1 industry spans 18 years and always excites me, it's another childhood dream for me and I appreciate how fortunate I am do be able to work with F1 teams.

From a wellness technology perspective, I am excited at where we can take immersive wellness experiences, like Room to Breathe in the future and how I can work with my wife and co-founder, Jayne, to innovate technology and improve lives through our ideas and collaborations.

Tell us about your team?

My technical team is a group of highly skilled individuals that work to the same standards that I set for myself. I have known most of them for many years and they can be trusted to maintain a level of confidentiality that is required for so many of our projects.

It really is true that people are at the heart of what we do at Fusion Spaces, and this means that each member of our team is out their representing our business and us.

What are your long-term plans for the business?

Fusion Spaces was founded on the premise that it would provide security and purpose for us and eventually give back to those in need and genuinely improve lives, using our knowledge and the ever-changing technology that we have available to us.

We are making a name for ourselves and with the move to Northumberland we hope to realise these objectives and form partnerships that help us make a difference.

We have set our sights on innovating the healthcare sector and helping to reduce anticipatory anxiety, triggered by the need to wait for appointments or treatments, watch this space!

What's your favourite piece of technology?

Technology is constantly changing and it's obviously a significant part of my life and the business. So, I've considered this question more personally and the turntable is an obvious choice, but, and perhaps rather



controversially, my favourite piece of technology is the Apple iPhone. The iPhone was a game changer and it affected how we communicate, changing our lives forever and the rest really is history.

Do you have any heroes or mentors?

David Bowie, and numerous bands, musicians, producers, actors, directors, in fact anyone who is innovative, willing to take risks and not just follow the masses.

It blew my mind discovering that the famous crooner, Bing Crosby, funded the development of magnetic tape and revolutionised sound recording. Where would we be without this?

When not working how do you like to relax?

Well, it's not a rock star lifestyle, and recovering from cancer in 2013 really did change my perspective on life. Perhaps like many of the people that have influenced me, particularly in the music business, once the excesses have finished, it's about really living with gratitude and enjoying the simpler things in life.

For me this is connecting to nature and now we live near to the Northumberland coast, awe and wonder is literally on our doorstep. I also enjoy reading, mostly non-fiction, vegetarian cooking, listening to an eclectic mix of music, watching films and researching.

I have a daily walk with Jayne and our dogs, where we find we relax and sometimes have the best business ideas or solve a problem.

What's your fondest career memory?

Captured perfectly by Keanu Reeves in the recent docu-series 'The Impossible Formula 1 Story'. Being a part of history making and experiencing first hand an unforgettable sense of 'can-do' team spirit and loyalty, is right up there for me. But I'm choosing what happened before this as my fondest career memory as it was my first opportunity to work within the F1 industry for Honda Racing F1 Team.

What's the best piece of business advice you've received?

Play to your strengths, thanks Richard!

www.fusion-spaces.com

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Aspire expands footprint with acquisition of Cloud Cover IT

Aspire Technology Solutions, one of the UK's leading Cyber Security and Modern Workplace Managed Service Providers, has announced the acquisition of Cloud Cover IT, a dynamic Managed Service Provider based in Glasgow.



aspire

As part of this investment, Cloud Cover IT will become a part of the Aspire group and its software development and business applications division will be rebranded as "Flyte." The company will be well-positioned to make ongoing investments and extending its business applications offerings to better serve its growing customer base.

Cloud Cover IT has been delivering IT support and digital transformation solutions for over 11 years. It prides itself on providing an excellent service to its customers. As part of the Aspire group, it now has access to the full range of Aspire products, solutions and expertise to offer even greater benefits to its customers.

Chris Fraser, Aspire CEO and founder said: "Our acquisition of Cloud Cover IT marks a new and exciting chapter for both companies. This move will strengthen our presence in Scotland, positioning us in a thriving market. The Cloud Cover team will become an integral part of the Aspire group, and together, we believe we can grow significantly in this key strategic market. I'm excited to see the opportunities accelerate as we offer customers, present and future, the innovative solutions that they need in a changing world. Exciting times lie ahead."

Lance Gauld, Founder and MD at Cloud Cover IT, commented on the synergy between the two companies, saying: "Multiple factors drew us to Aspire; they are an outstanding company. The alignment between our organisations and how we complement each other is evident. We share similar values in our approach towards our people, customers, and objectives. This partnership is not merely a merger with a large IT company; it is a collaboration with a leading UK technology provider that understands us. As part of the Aspire group, we can grow our footprint further and broaden our offerings with access to more expertise, resources and an extensive portfolio of solutions to help our customers drive their businesses forward."

With a 17-year legacy in the technology sector, Aspire has experienced significant growth, serving over 1,700 customers and nurturing a dedicated team of around 250 experts. With a notable footprint across the UK, including offices in Gateshead, London, Leeds, and Teesside, Aspire has earned a reputation for delivering leading solutions across cyber security, cloud, managed services, connectivity, and unified communications.

Aspire is backed by private equity firm LDC. The recent appointment of Tom Howard as Chief Financial Officer is set to play a pivotal role in shaping the company's financial strategy, facilitating its organic growth and expansion through acquisitions.

www.aspirets.com


TECHNOLOGY INSIGHT



Integrating tech into your Learning & Development (L&D) strategy By Richard Coates

How companies integrate tech and how successful they are at doing it can depend on many factors, not least how much of a role technology already plays in the organisation and, importantly, how employees view tech adoption and change. This is no different for L&D.

In an environment where company culture includes embracing change and fostering a workplace that welcomes new ways of working with technology, then this is a more conducive situation.

That said, we have worked with traditional organisations that have (usually due to some external catalyst like the threat of emerging competition, for example) been exceptionally keen to move forward and fast-track their operations through both the implementation of new tech for operational purposes and by using tech as part of a delivery suite for training.

In both situations, the challenges can often be the same, though they may vary in degree. Common challenges and requirements include:

Resistance to change — usually stemming from a fear of the unknown and perhaps concerns concerning the individual's ability to use the new technology.

Real and perceived costs of switching — moving to a new system is generally more costly in the initial implementation period, though costsaving thereafter as employees get to grips with it and the new tech efficiencies take hold. The uncertainty and perceived risk of switching can result in perceived costs that may not be entirely accurate.

Sufficient implementation planning - so often

are timescales underestimated. New tech and new processes need time. There inevitably will be some teething problems and inefficiencies until fully embedded. All stakeholders need to be considered and consulted.

Make time for training — no matter how intuitive the new tech and system is, employees need to be fully supported and provided with the right tools and training to help them learn to work in a new way. This may involve professional consultation, to begin with, moving to a selfinitiated learning process whereby employees can learn via peers and online resources made available.

Ensure a good user experience — if the software is a good fit for the organisation and employees, is well designed and boasts new-age technology and content that is more engaging and immersive, chances are that your employees are going to get more out of it and will want to use it.

Integrating the tech with incumbent systems - It is vital that the new tech integrates well with existing software and processes. It needs to become part of the suite, not a bolt-on that sits separate to all systems to be both efficient and effective.

Start small, learn, then scale - Introduce the new tech as a pilot to begin with, drawing leanings

from user experience and software analytics before rolling out — and do so systematically rather than in a blanket fashion.

Let your employees be your ambassadors - if all of the above points have been addressed, then there is a better chance the pilot will run well. Select a 'trial team' made up of individuals that help to positively promote the system internally.

Sell your successes up the chain — management at all levels need to be kept informed on progress. Regular reporting, progress tracking, and sharing insights along the way will help promote buy-in, as well as showing employee and business benefits.

Finally, as an L&D tool, the learning progress of an individual, team, function, and organisation needs to be demonstrable and communicated. And where training transcends to skill acquisition and knowledge retention — resulting in improvements in internal capabilities, productivity, and performance — then this too needs to be communicated in terms of what this means for the business.

Of course, the importance of choosing the right L&D software cannot be overstated. Simply put; good tech can make an organisation improve competitiveness in the market over time. Poor tech can slow an organisation down.

If a new-age L&D system is adopted, one of the key benefits it delivers is the ability to provide real-time feedback and reporting, automating previous manual processes and providing a world of insight to a company. The spin-off benefits of this type of market intelligence are both significant value-adds.

Lumanorth is part of the BentoBot team, which has extensive experience across both technology and L&D. Together we have created a new-age learning technology platform that combines the very best in tech and L&D practice to deliver a powerful resource that benefits the individual learner, the team and the organisation.

If you would like to know how BentoBot can benefit your organisation, visit www.bentobot.com

TECHNOLOGY INSIGHT



Meridian Business Support recuits SOS Group

Office technology provider, SOS Group, has signed a new five year contract with one of the UK's largest and most established recruitment companies, Meridian Business Support.

Meridian Business Support specialises in the recruitment of temporary, permanent and contract hiring, on average providing over 4,000 temporary staff per week and placing over 1,200 permanent candidates a year.

Based in Manchester and with almost 35 years of success and awards under their belts, Meridian helps companies across the country fill roles within their business and supports candidates in employment searches across multiple sectors, including healthcare, industrial, built environment and office and professional.

The new business relationship will rationalise the company's branch and satellite office technology needs nationally and, in addition to delivering a secure and reliable network of 35 multifunctional office devices, the managed print services will bring estimated savings of around £20,000 each year.

Amanda Harrison, procurement and property manager at Meridian Business Support, says: "The team at SOS Group offer a true partnership approach, which is exactly what Meridian was looking for in a technology provider.

"Their management of the process, including handover from the previous supplier, was easy and stress-free and I look forward to continuing to work with them."

SOS Group was established in 2002 by three company directors, who are still the principal stakeholders and client account managers.

Facilitating all business requirements, including communications and IT, SOS Group specialises in providing copy, print, scan solutions and has a centralised office in Gateshead and six regional hubs servicing accounts nationally.

The award-winning company has a proven track record in creating a smooth transition from previous office technology suppliers, something SOS Group Director, Andrew Skelton, knows is vital to any business.

Andrew says: "We bring all our experience to

the table to ensure a smooth handover for our clients. In the case of Meridian, this included delivering all the previously used devices to their third party supplier and ensuring a transition with no financial penalties incurred because of the change in contract.

"We know our clients want more than cost savings, they need reliability and peace of mind. That only comes through quality service and the assurance of personal support from account managers and engineers, something that really sets SOS Group apart from our competitors.

"Meridian provides exceptional recruitment support for their clients and we're looking forward to matching that standard with our business technology support for them."

Established in 2002, SOS Group supplies and maintains leading brand digital office equipment and offers a full range of office management services, including unified communications, IT support, document management, cost consultation and managed print services for startups to multi nationals.

The company also has an established reputation in the events sector and has provided digital office equipment services at competitions including the IAAF World Athletics Championships, the Special Olympics GB National Games, British Swimming Summer Championships and World Para Athletics Championships.

For more information, please visit www.sosgroup-ltd.co.uk



Beaver Broadband – Beavering away to find the best telecoms solutions for you

The other day in the Northern Insight office, we were having a laugh at a cartoon. A bloke was stood in his office looking at a computer screen. 'Computer cannot find printer.' He was shouting at the screen and pointing to a printer which was next to the computer. He said... "There it is."



Yep...been there. We're so used to turning on a PC or Mac or using our mobile stuff that when things go wrong a feeling of panic quickly descends.

And why does your WiFi or broadband go down at the exact moment when you're needing to do something important? You then have to resort to two solutions. Turn off everything and start again or contact your telecoms provider.

Good luck.

Thankfully, there is an alternative.

How about getting in touch with a local company who you can actually talk to. They will then either resolve the situation remotely of send out an engineer.

And it doesn't matter whether you are a single person in a one bedroom flat or the MD of a large company...your problem will be sorted quickly.

Phew.

That's the beauty of Beaver Broadband and Beaver Networks.

Kit, the beaver, is a talented chap...and so are his owners, Gemma Levers and her business partner Richard Frederickson. They're always beavering away to sort any telecoms problems, ensuring that customers get the best possible service at the best possible price.

"We are essentially Business Communications and Infrastructure Technology specialists with a mission to deliver reliable infrastructure, connectivity and security systems that add real value to any business," said Gemma. "We deal with the full infrastructure for a variety of both small and large organisations throughout the UK, including a large majority of the pubs and clubs in Newcastle and the surrounding area. We also deal with many hotel chains throughout the UK.

Our work initially has taken us from Aberdeen to Brighton but has now taken us on international business including visits to Orlando, Rome and Barcelona working as network support specialist for large scale conferences and exhibitions."

Beaver Broadband was previously part of a group which also included Edricorp, but when the Covid pandemic hit, Gemma and Richard decided to streamline their operation and concentrate on the two Beaver companies. In effect, nothing changed for Edricorp customers...just the name of the business they were now dealing with.

"Because most of our clients were centred in and around the hospitality business, needless to say that Covid caused us some major headaches and scuppered a lot of plans as many of them were forced to stop trading. However, on the plus side it allowed us to take stock of our business and concentrate on our core specialisms. Businesses, small and large, have better things to worry about than changing telecoms suppliers, comparing prices or waiting for engineers who don't show up. We do everything we can to make the process super simple and unobtrusive for our clients, so that they can get on with their day and focus on what's most important to them."

Apart from great service and great prices, here's something which you don't get from other telecoms providers...the personal touch. You won't just be another number...you will receive regular contact from Beaver Broadband to keep you fully informed as to what the current and future telecoms trends are. There may be a new bit of kit which would be perfect for you. Perhaps a new fibre network is now available for your area...oh and how is your internet security? Is it up to date and is it effective?

You can also choose from a selection of contracts. You can go long or short term...you can choose from the sort of internet connection which is most suitable for your needs. Beaver Broadband will find out about your company and, thanks to their experience, will point you in the right direction both in terms of price and suitability. There's no point in paying a vast amount of cash for something which you don't need.

The bottom line is all of this is that Gemma and the team at Beaver Broadband don't expect you to be an expert in telecoms. How are you expected to know what the telecoms market is offering...how will you know about future trends and what the network providers are planning to do?

"We talk to our customers...we explain to them what is available and what is relevant to their needs...we ask questions and find solutions. Nothing is off the shelf...everything is tailored to the company or the individual."

So, there you go.

Rather then standing there shouting at your computer, speak to Beaver Broadband and they'll make sure things don't go wrong in the first place. If something unforeseen occurs, then don't panic because Kit the beaver, will beaver away to get things sorted. From installing fibre optic cables to constructing custom designed server rooms, Beaver Broadband will provide infrastructure that truly works for you and there will always be someone on-hand to ensure that your business communications are fast, streamlined, and above all, reliable.

Go onto www.beaverbroadband.com you'll be able to find out more details of what Beaver Broadband can do for you. You can also call them on 0191 466 1610. Leading digital development agency launches new service to put people back at the heart of online experiences

Enigma Interactive, one of the UK's leading digital development agencies, has launched a dedicated content design service to support their clients to enhance their online experiences, invest in platform accessibility, and elevate their online performance in 2024.

Based on Newcastle Quayside, Enigma Interactive is a 40-strong team of digital innovators, creative developers, and digital strategists. The agency is consistently rated one of the best digital agencies in the UK and high-profile clients including Superdrug, National Power Grid, and the NHS have already embraced the new content design service to evolve how their clients' digital presences are serving their target audiences.

Steve Grainger, managing director of Enigma Interactive said, "Post-pandemic we have seen a significant increase in the need for digital solutions that guide users to find information or manage their services online quickly and easily, and whenever it is convenient for them. The addition of Enigma's content design offering allows us to work with our new and existing clients to ensure that user needs are at the heart of all online interactions.

"More than ever, consumers are looking for



consistent and considered online experiences, which are purposefully designed to fit with how and where they are using the platform in question. Content design goes beyond just creating compelling visuals, it's about helping the end user achieve their goals as easily and enjoyably as possible. That goal depends on how they are engaging with our client, but it could be anything from purchasing a product to finding and connecting with your team, or accessing information like test results. Well-designed content guides users toward successful outcomes.

"As part of this service, we start with a personcentric approach to establish the user's needs, preferences, and potential pain points to create content that resonates, informs, and guides them through their experience using their website or application. Empathy and understanding of human needs are crucial parts of building something informative, useful, and impactful. Ultimately we are here to bridge the gap between the tech and the human that is going to use it by putting ourselves in their shoes and understanding the bigger picture."

Enigma Interactive has partnered with Superdrug, a leader in the health retail space to enhance its online services, including developing and designing an online pharmacy website that integrates with the NHS prescription service.

Speaking about the project with Superdrug, Steve continued, "The aim was to make it as easy as possible for users of the Superdrug pharmacy website to complete their intended tasks, taking into account the varying digital confidence of users and possible health or accessibility issues which may be at play. Whether it was finding out information about the online pharmacy service, ordering prescriptions, or managing their accounts, the enhancements were delivered to create a seamless, inclusive, and user-friendly experience for Superdrug customers."

Alongside partnering with Superdrug, the Enigma Interactive content design team is delivering a digital transformation programme for National Grid Electricity Distribution. This programme of work focuses on the design and development of intuitive self-serve applications to make it easier than ever for customers to connect to its energy network. The programme of work focuses on the design and development of self-application platforms and supports users in the adoption of new processes.

Enigma Interactive is headquartered in Newcastle, with a second presence in London, and works with clients from all over the UK to develop highly effective digital strategies and run digital transformation programmes as well as build high performance websites, content management systems, interactive platforms, and apps.

For more information on Enigma Interactive and how content design could benefit your organisation in 2024 visit enigma-interactive. co.uk/work/content-design-services

AI to Gen Z: Five trends that will shape workplace culture in 2024



As people become more comfortable leaving roles that do not address their needs, well-being, culture, and inclusivity are no longer simply tick boxes that look good in an annual report.

Ivan Hollingsworth, founder and director of Centric Consultants shares the emerging trends that businesses must take note of if they want to create environments for people to thrive in 2024 and stay ahead of the pack.

1. Tech-driven human connection

The advancements and widespread adoption of generative AI will mean a decrease in busy work and a drop in mundane, repetitive tasks for some teams. While this is a positive opportunity to focus on creativity, innovation, and being truly human, leaders must be aware that it will leave some colleagues questioning their purpose. In 2024 leaders should embrace advancements in technology and AI as a chance to free up space in their team for real human connection, creativity, and big conversations and pivot their role into being a 'culture curator', rather than micromanaging every step of the process.

2. Getting comfortable with being uncomfortable

Most organisations will say that they are committed to increasing diversity and inclusion in their organisations, and now that this has been on the table for a few years we are starting to see an increase in more diverse voices around the table, and that is when the hard work starts. This year leaders need to embrace what an equitable environment looks like within their team and get comfortable with the fact that some of the conversations you have to have to get there might be a little, well, uncomfortable. If as a leader you are asking people to be 'authentic' at work, but then shutting down conversations or opportunities when they express opinions or needs that are new or different, then you are not asking people to be authentic, you are asking them to be like you, which defeats the point entirely.

3. Challenges outside of work will continue

As we head into another turbulent year, outside of work there will continue to be challenges that your teams will have to navigate, this could be anything from the cost of living crisis to family break-ups, caring responsibilities, or childcare issues. Asking your team to be 'resilient' in the face of these challenges doesn't help anyone and leaders should focus on creating supportive, understanding environments that help people bounce back as quickly as possible when life throws them a curveball.

4. Culture driving business evolution

As Satya Nadella, managing director of Microsoft put it, "The C in CEO now stands for culture. The CEO is the curator of an organization's culture and anything is possible for a company when its culture is about listening, learning, and harnessing individual passions and talents to the company's mission.

5. The generational power balance is shifting

The next generation of leaders, Gen Z isn't just starting to enter the workforce, some are already managing teams or are in a skilled position. This new generation has different expectations when it comes to communication, workplace culture, and hierarchical team dynamics. Organisations can't put their head in the sand any longer if they want to futureproof their business and nurture the leaders of the future, they need to act now to create environments that stimulate connection, provide an opportunity for meaningful feedback and encourage open communication.

Centric Consultants is based in the North East of England and delivers workshops and bespoke training across the UK.

To find out more and to speak to the team directly about the problems you are trying to solve email ivan@centric-consultants.com



School library enters new chapter thanks to Miller Homes North East

Youngsters at a County Durham primary school are falling in love with reading, thanks to the support of a leading housing developer.

Silver Tree Primary School at Usher Moor applied to the Miller Homes Community Fund for some support so they could develop a much-needed library.

And now the library is open for pupils, with the addition of a comfy sofa for youngsters to enjoy the books, courtesy of the Miller Homes donation.

Miller Homes – which is delivering new homes across Durham, Tyne and Wear and Northumberland - introduced its regional Community Fund in 2022 to help grassroots projects linked to education, wellbeing, the environment and sport across the North East.

And twice a year good causes can apply for a share of £10,000 to help them with a specific project or need.

Headteacher Helen Grainger launched the library project in September, with plans to turn an empty classroom in a reading resource.

"We did a survey and found that not many children were members of a library or had even been in a bookshop," she said.

"So we decided that we needed to create our own and really open the experience of reading all of our children.

"There is no library in the village so we knew how important this would be for everyone.

"We desperately needed somewhere for the children to be able to sit but we simply didn't have any funds so we were absolutely delighted to have received the donation from the Miller Homes Community Fund."

The money has been spent on buying a sofa and bean bags for the library, which was officially opened on the last day of the 2023 school year by former teacher, Judith Kidd, who has had the library named after her.

New image gives buyers a glimpse of the future of Smith's Dock

Places for People - the UK's leading social enterprise - has unveiled a brand-new image of North Shield's newest waterside neighbourhood at Smith's Dock.

Having submitted a planning application for the next phase of works, Places for People has shared the image showing some of the 409 new homes in situ by the riverside. If approved, the proposals will include a range of two-, three-, and four-bedroom houses and one- and twobedroom apartments – many of them affordable.

The proposals will also see two of Smith's Dock inlets brought back into use as spaces for the public, as well as green space and playing areas, new tree plantings, and green-lined streets meandering through the site. Speaking of them, Nilam Buchanan, Regional Managing Director of Places



Luxury hotel to open this summer

A modern five-story building will adjoin a beautiful Georgian former schoolhouse in Alnwick to create Northumberland's newest luxury getaway in summer 2024.

Bailiffgate Hotel is located in the historic former premises of Duchess High School, overlooking the Barbican entrance to Alnwick Castle. With 48 bedrooms, suites, and apartments, as well as a stylish bar, restaurant, and private dining room, the hotel will offer a variety of accommodation options.

In 1888 the house was taken over by the Duchess's School, a school founded by Duchess Julia in 1808. It was a private school until 1903 when it was recognised by Northumberland County Council as a County Secondary School. The school continued to expand and Bailiffgate House remained part of the school until 2016.

This hotel represents a significant investment by Northumberland Estates in Alnwick's tourist economy, which, alongside existing shops and attractions, will entice a new generation of tourists to Northumberland and have a positive impact on the town. In addition, the hotel hopes to appeal to locals with an amazing new bar and restaurant.

Bernard Bloodworth, a former pupil at the school, has been appointed General Manager. Bernard said: "Bailiffgate House holds a lot of memories for the people of Alnwick, and we want to make sure that everything from the décor and architecture to the menus and service exceeds expectations.

"As we approach opening, we will be recruiting for staff and running some special offers for former pupils who we hope will be intrigued to see what their former classrooms have become."



for People said: "We are delighted to share more of our vision for the future of Smith's Dock.

"Our vision is to create a real community, with a variety of contemporary homes for different customers, all of them centred around a hub where all the things you need, and love, can be found right on your doorstep."



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Some models of cooker are available from stock or with short delivery times other manufacturers have long wait times so all dependent on choice. So if your project is well into 2023 then now is the time to make a visit to the showroom.

Special offers and promotions are always available so find more information via website **www.wdix.co.uk** or visit their showroom today.





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A charming Grade II Listed conversion with a detached stone cottage nestled in Northumberland

Set within a cluster of similarly converted outbuildings at the rural farmstead of Ulgham Grange, No. 4 offers a detached stone-built characterful property and a unique living environment.

TA TA TA





HOUSE FOR SA



This is an enchanting family home with period features including vaulted ceilings, exposed beams, feature stained glass windows and stonework.

Four bedrooms, three bathrooms, a games room and spacious living room together with a large dining area make this the ideal property for those that need space, tranquilly and easy access to Tyneside and beyond. There is parking for multiple vehicles and extensive gardens.

There is the potential for supplemental accommodation in the charming detached two-storey stone outbuilding, which offers a compelling project for development as well as adding value to the entire property. Already

serviced with utilities, it would perfectly lend itself to multiple potential uses such as a holiday let cottage, a multi-generational living annex, a garden office, a garden kitchen with bar and games room, an art studio and such like.

To find out more information about No. 4 Ulgham Grange Farm, Ulgham NE61 3AU contact Strutt and Parker Morpeth

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youngsRPS commercial team achieves continued success in recent sales and lettings



In the dynamic world of commercial real estate, the adaptation of a property for alternative uses can unlock greater value.

2023 was widely expected to be a tough year for commercial property with media reports headlining the impact of rising interest rates, soaring inflation, changing work dynamics, and global uncertainties casting a shadow over the commercial property market, just as post covid vulnerability was starting to show signs of improvement.

"The commercial property market needs to reflect on these market conditions and be open to change and offer flexible solutions in the market" says Paul Fairlamb, Associate Director and Commercial Chartered Surveyor with youngsRPS.

In dealing with property portfolios we must always be open minded to different uses for property and finding the right time to sell a property and reinvest and the right time to hold on to an asset.

Some notable achievements during the year included acting jointly for the owners of the former Womble Bond Dickinson office. This was a large office building in an iconic position on Newcastle Quayside. The focal point for larger office occupiers has now shifted to other parts of the city but after a short marketing period a sale of the property was completed for a hotel use and Dakota Hotels have now secured planning consent for conversion of the property into a 115 bedroom boutique style hotel.

Other similar transactions involving a change of use have included a former vehicle repair garage in North Yorkshire which was let on behalf of the owner to Coop Funeralcare who are converting the property to a chapel of rest. A large former restaurant in Consett where we agreed a letting to a national operator who is to convert it to retail use and in Carlisle, we completed the sale of a town centre retail property for use as a gaming centre.

Paul continues "It is not particularly the case that demand for offices and shops is poor in all locations. We are still letting and selling space across all sectors. However it is more important than ever to be open to different uses for property and marketing property effectively to reach a wide audience of potential occupiers. In some cases various consents may be required for alternative uses but this process can be worthwhile in order to breathe new life into property".

YoungsRPS remains a trusted partner for those seeking to navigate the complexities of the commercial property market, and these recent successes strengthen their reputation in the market.

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Election wish list for the construction industry

By Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield

Another year beckons and the promise of a general election (at some time) during the year. I thought it would be interesting to think of what manifesto – in a non-political manner – would aid the construction and architecture industry.

I never envy those in power as there are always several sides to an argument and different perspectives on polices, ideas and ideologies. So here are my thoughts on how we can stimulate growth.

• Remove VAT on listed building projects. - we need to help the majority of owners or custodians of our building heritage. There are 500,000 listed buildings in the UK. This move would encourage people to buy or develop older buildings, rather than being put off. Developing our existing building stock is also sustainable and uses less embodied energy than constructing new buildings.

Incentives for the introduction of green technologies – Recent Building regulations and planning officers now look for sustainable improvement on energy use and energy generation. However, we should go further with incentives and tax breaks. Developing new buildings is not cheap, so let's help with financial incentives that encourage everyone to be green, which will benefit them in the pocket – from domestic tax breaks on PV, heat pumps and insulation through to company tax breaks on energy generation and use would help focus our minds on moving to a greener economy.

• Make the planning process simpler and more affordable – reduce the amount of specialist reports required to accompany applications which only add to the time and cost for clients. This will encourage more development by reducing the financial burden at an early stage (and the risk) to clients, developers and contractors. The cost of applications can be excessive and act as a disincentive: there has to be a middle ground that is appropriate.

• Stress the importance of good design for planning applications – good architecture should be at the centre of planning and not an afterthought. I would like to see more design review panels assessing proposals so that independent panels can advise local authorities on the merits or otherwise of a scheme.

• Review the definitions of green belt and brown belt and be brave in allowing sensible, well considered development. That could be new housing or commercial/industrial in areas where it is needed. In the North East we have some beautiful countryside but that doesn't stop the need or desire for new business to set up in certain locations. Clearly, we should look to re-use former industrial land first, but in a large diverse region, we need to see development opportunities in the market towns as well as the main cities.

• Landscaping – just like the architecture, the areas around a development should be green and healthy, to make us all feel better and enjoy the placing of buildings in their development settings. New biodiversity rules have been introduced for 2024 and we don't know the impact of these rules yet, other than more cost on development. I can see the rules being changed again before an election, when the true costs become apparent.

• Funding for NHS and local authorities – I would like to see improved and more focused development budgets in the regions to allow for more development of doctors' surgeries, schools and services, specific to the North East. Each part of the country has its challenges and I should like to see more collaborative working between various local authorities (in this region) as they imaginatively put together development ideas, strategies and plans that need investment. Give our local authorities the chance to improve our services with the right direct funding.

I am sure the list could go on and on. Designing buildings in 2024 will still be fascinating as we work to the latest guidelines and impact of legislation (most recently the Building Safety Act of 2023) and look forward to helping our clients with the appropriate solutions and ideas.

Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield can be contacted on 0191 3849470 or email n.turner@hlpuk.com www.howarthlitchfield.com

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Plans modified for luxury apart-hotel in Newcastle's Ouseburn Valley



North East Developer Modo Bloc has modified its plans to develop a stylish apart-hotel on a site in the Ouseburn, Newcastle.

The rapidly growing Newcastle-based company has re-submitted plans to the city council to build 15 apartments – rather than 28 - within a single, reduced four-storey height structure on Foundry Lane. The proposal to develop a vacant brownfield site builds upon previous planning consent for a mixed-use development by the same design team.

Modo Bloc has taken on board some of the initial concerns raised by planners and reduced the size of the scheme to maintain and enhance the local bio-diversity. A third of the site will now be untouched by the development to maintain the ecology.

The £5 million project will comprise a mixture of one and two bed apartments. It is proposed the ground floor will now only provide space for one retail and commercial unit. There will be six parking spaces and eight spaces for cycles.

Located within the Ouseburn Conservation Area,

Miller Partnership Architects have given great care and attention to the heritage and character of the site when designing the structure.

Co-director Steve Miller, who worked on the original Ouseburn Central Masterplan with Newcastle City Council, explained that careful consideration has been given to an architectural approach which adopts the characteristics of surrounding industrial buildings and prominent structures.

Steve said: "The built elements of this proposal are in keeping with the scale of the area. With a limited frontage along Foundry Lane and a desire to give each individual apartment a river / street frontage the overall building is subdivided into units, each with principle living accommodation open to the view."

Throughout the pre-planning process, Modo Bloc liaised closely with local residents and occupiers to consult on any worries or concerns.

George Jenkins, MD of Modo Bloc, said: "We fully recognise the unique character of the Ouseburn. We have consulted with local stakeholders and our architects have paid particular attention to the local environment. Attention has also been paid to the existing acoustic landscape, recognising the live music that gives the Ouseburn Valley its distinctive character."

"Our modified proposed development will be designed and built to the same high standard

of building construction and interior design as other apart-hotels we have already delivered and are currently delivering elsewhere around Newcastle.

"A new investment like this should also encourage greater tourism for the area, helping create and support employment, while also stimulating local businesses with marketing efforts."

The project will be styled and developed much like an earlier scheme that Modo Bloc brought to the market in 2021 - Chelmsford Lofts, a stylish 8-flat aparthotel in Sandyford, Newcastle. Managed by Your Lofts, the concept is proving popular with people booking weekend 'staycations' and longer corporate stays. Modo Bloc is currently redeveloping a former care home, at Springfield Park, Forest Hall into 12 self-serviced luxury apartments.

The Ouseburn proposal will be the third aparthotel to be run by Your Lofts.

George said: "We have ambitious plans to build more design-led homes and develop more land for both residential and commercial use with exceptional craftsmanship at the forefront. We're always looking at interesting investment and development options in North East communities and beyond."

More details: www.modobloc.co.uk



Hi everyone,

Happy New Year! I hope you all had a great time. Cally and I had Christmas tripe cake which was yummy. Cousin Dexter came to stay for a week and we had a great time. We both have our winter coats on as it is really cold. Upwards and onwards – see you next month.

Q. Every year gusts of wind dislodge one or two of my roof slates. The roof is in its original 1920s condition with no under-felt. There are adverts in the papers for a 'foam spray solution' for old roofs. These are guaranteed for twenty or so years. Is this the easiest way forward, or should we look to get the whole roof redone?

A. The fact that slates are slipping every year probably indicates that the nails which hold them to the timber battens are rusted through. Roofers refer to this as nail fatigue or nail sickness, and it is definitely time to have the roof stripped off and re-covered. Having foam sprayed on to the undersides of the slates may sound like a wonderful high-tech solution but it is actually a bad idea. It is at odds with the recommendations of the Building Regulations, which require a clear 50mm ventilated gap between insulation and roof covering. The foam sets hard and removes the two vital attributes that allow a traditional roof to last and perform so well for so long – the ability to breathe and the ability to move. The foam completely encloses the timber battens and the top surfaces of the rafters, which might cause them to rot. It also sticks tight to the slates and makes it almost impossible for them

to ever be re-used. You will also probably find that the cost of the spray-on foam solution will be three or four times that of having the roof re-covered in the traditional way.

Try to find a roofer who will remove the existing slates carefully, and re-use as many as possible. Also make sure that the roofer uses a breathable sarking felt, and allows it to sag between the rafters. The ridge tiles and any hip tiles should be rebedded using lime-and-sand mortar to match the original; do not allow the roofer to use sand-andcement.



Please send me your building queries through facebook -@WDLne, website: wdlnortheast.co.uk or through my Dad's good pal Michael Grahamslaw at Northern Insight on michael@northern-insight.co.uk

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Philip M Bowe

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2024 - what does the crystal ball reveal?

It's about now that everyone looks at the previous 12 months of their lives and ponders about the next 12. New Year's Resolutions will have been made and probably broken already. But how different will this year be, and how will it affect individuals?

Obviously I'm talking mainly from a commercial property perspective, though we must be aware of the interaction between consumer behaviour and attitudes, house prices and commercial property values.

The perceived wisdom is that as a nation, we are near the end of the recessionary times that have affected us so much in recent years. Oxford Economics reckon that London will come out of the recession first and will see the strongest recovery across the regions between 2024 and 2025. And the North East will come out worst. Not so good, and I'm also fairly sure that those living on the poverty line anywhere in the country - and many for the first time - may feel that any economic recovery is going to pass them by. Are we polarising as a nation?

Looking at the main market sectors I think this is my crystal ball.

Residential

House prices in the owner occupied market will at best remain flat, with some prices falling. I have seen some brave developments of luxury homes in what might be considered less desirable locations, and I think that they will be hit.

In the rental market, it's becoming hell for everyone. Landlords are being squeezed by the market - higher interest rates, lower LTVs and more stringent stress testing; and by government with stricter energy efficiency requirements and licensing. This is driving many landlords out of the market which in turn pushes rents up and affects tenants. Frankly I think a lot of current policy in this sector is creating a "lose-lose" situation.

Retail

This is a sector very much driven by public behaviour. Like others (I call Graham Soult as my chief witness), I believe in the "High Street." True, it's changing, but hasn't it always? I'm old enough to remember when there was a really large supermarket opened by Safeway near my parents' London house. It is around 1900 square metres. The small Tesco in Jesmond is 558 square metres and Waitrose is 1172 sq.m. But Lidl in Walker is 1934 sq.m. – I would contend that we consider these now to be small to average size. It was 1961 that Boots introduced the first self service pharmacy for non prescription drugs. But this is now seen as the norm. In the last few years, particularly since the covid scare, we have seen more shopping done online - though once that issue was "put to bed" there has been a return to physical shopping. We need physical stores to touch and feel merchandise (and they also create jobs, particularly without those dreadful self service checkouts). Use it or lose it.

Offices

So the North East is going to be the last region to come out of the recession? Look at what's happening across our region. It's not just Newcastle with Pilgrims Quarter and other developments, Sunderland has Riverside Sunderland, with ambitions for 93,000 square metres of offices, and Durham has Milburngate, offering a

total of 41,800 square metres of space including in the first phase 5,000 square metres of offices in one building. The value of working physically together has been realised and this frequently outweighs the alternative benefits of home working.

Industrial

I think it's fair to say that our region was world leader in heavy engineering and business at one time. We had the coal supplies, we had significant ship building on both the Tyne and the Wear, and of course the railway industries. But maybe we clung onto our heritage longer than we should have. It left us a bit short, particularly with more manual labour supplies than the demand. But the situation is changing, it's just a different type of manual labour. As well as the mega units of Amazon in Washington and Spennymoor I know from experience that trying to acquire good quality factory/warehouse buildings of around 500-1,000 square metres is a thankless task (though matters were resolved in the end). It's good news if we react the right way.

Leisure

For a number of years now, Newcastle has been seen as a party city. Ouseburn is apparently one of the coolest places to live in the UK now (I never thought I'd live near somewhere "cool" but there you go). There are still serious numbers of pubs closing, and at least one large pub operator is struggling with debts of £2.5 billion - it takes a lot of pints to pay the interest on that! However, other smaller operators, from 'local boozers' to 'destination houses' are making a success of it. I think it would be fair to say that the middle is seeing the squeeze more than the poles of the market. The UK hotel market also seems to be booming - perhaps the combined effects of leaving the EU, meaning we need visas to travel abroad combined with the changes in habits that "the pandemic" have, more by accident than by design, given staycations a whole new popularity. I do think though that the hotel market (excluding London) seems to be very much falling into three categories – Lodge style accommodation, Boutique hotels (of all sizes), and top end hotels with facilities. Of course some transcend by offering a Lodge-level rates with facilities at extra cost, but the days of 'boarding houses' seem to have gone.

In 12 months' time we can see if my crystal ball is clear or cracked...

www.bivbowes.co.uk



How does your garden grow?

Picture the county of Durham and chances are its historic city, with its towering cathedral, or the rolling countryside to the west, will spring immediately to mind. But, instead, head east, where a whole new community is taking shape...

The harbour town of Seaham is having quite a moment. A quiet place with a legacy of mining and glass making, it can generally be said to have kept itself to itself - not on the tourist trail, its finer qualities long went unnoticed.

But that is changing, thanks largely to a newfound awareness and appreciation of its stunning coastline.

One of the most beautiful in the North East, along which the early 19th century romantic poet, Lord Byron, would walk from his marital home, Seaham Hall, it is also home to Tommy.

This unbelievably poignant statue of a First World War soldier by artist Ray Lonsdale, is displayed close to Seaham war memorial, on Terrace Green by the seafront.

Then there is the wildlife which has made its home on the cliffs and crags, not to mention fresh air and space in abundance. Less than a half an hour drive from both Newcastle and Durham and sited on the East Coast train line, Seaham is well-placed for those looking for semi-rural living – and so it is not surprising it is the chosen location for a new, £250m garden village.

The development will create an entirely new community with well-designed, energy efficient houses surrounded by thriving wildlife havens - and almost 50 per cent of the site will be given over to open spaces and landscaped areas.

And Miller Homes North East, which is creating 72 three, four and five bed houses in its first phase of development, has already sold a third of those due to be built this year.

Although the concept of garden villages – well designed, healthy places with affordable homes - stretches back at least 200 years, the Seaham development is giving it a 21st century context.

And, along with the 375 new build homes Miller North East will build in total, the development will include a primary school, an innovation centre and a community hub.

Comprising a variety of house styles, the first

Miller Homes properties are currently due for completion in late spring.

Selling is well underway from the company's Trinity Green development at Pelton, County Durham prior to its show home opening at Seaham Garden Village later in the year.

"Buyers are clearly attracted by the location, the facilities and the space for families to grow and thrive," said Lauren Angus, sales director, at Miller Homes North East.

"Garden Villages are unique, innovative and are ultimately, all about creating great places to live," she said.

"Beautifully and imaginatively designed homes and additional community facilities will be at the forefront, but all sitting within a range of open space and landscaping."

For more information about Miller Homes properties at Seaham Garden Village or at various other sites across the North East visit www.millerhomes.co.uk/locations/northeast-of-england



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Making Northumberland an even better place to live and work



Advance Northumberland is the regeneration, physical delivery and business support vehicle delivering regeneration throughout Northumberland on behalf of Northumberland County Council.

Its unique, joined-up approach combines the ability to build homes with support for inward investment and business growth, and the ability to deliver regeneration and investment projects.

Here's a snapshot of what it accomplished in 2023... and what's in store for the future.

A greener future

Centred around the Blyth Estuary, Energy Central is the premier UK deep water base for businesses working across renewable energy, offshore wind, subsea engineering, decommissioning and energy storage.

It's a partnership between Advance Northumberland, Port of Blyth, Northumberland County Council and the Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) Catapult, and has brought green jobs and investment to Northumberland.

Indeed, Advance Northumberland played a key role in attracting global subsea cable supplier and servicer JDR Cable Systems, to the Northumberland Energy Park site at Cambois – which is part of the Energy Central cluster. Work progressed through 2023 on the £130 million factory, which is due to become operational this year and will be situated next to a widened dock – part of the site's infrastructure improvements.

With greater investment in the green economy, comes an increased demand for skills. And a new facility at Energy Central, The Energy Central Learning Hub, will help to meet that demand.

This £13.6 million facility, which is set to open in 2024, will deliver STEM education and vocational and work-based learning. It is being delivered

as part of the £90 million Energising Blyth Programme funded by the UK Government, Northumberland County Council, and the North of Tyne Combined Authority (NCTA).

Small business support

Advance Northumberland recently launched a new programme – the Northumberland Small Business Service (NSBS) – to help businesses unlock the barriers to growth.

NSBS is one of the first UK Shared Prosperity Fund-supported initiatives to be rolled out and is one of the first projects to emerge from Northumberland County Council's Rural Stewardship and Investment Strategy. It is backed by funding from the NCTA and the Rural England Prosperity Fund.

Specialist enterprise and start-up support is available through the programme and eligible companies in rural areas can apply for a grant of between £10,000 to £300,000. The NSBS also includes a Farming Advisory Service, which is assisting farming businesses.

Boosting housing provision and building communities

Ascent Homes, Advance Northumberland's housebuilding arm, has been active right across the county.

In 2023, the final properties within phases one and two at Ascent Homes' Wayside Point development, comprising 196 homes, were completed. The third phase of 34 homes was launched last month and there'll be a further 116 homes across phase four.

East Ord Vale near Berwick-upon-Tweed and Hareshaw Fall in Bellingham will be coming soon too. They will be joining sites such as Commissioners Quay in Blyth, Willow Farm site in Choppington, Kingsmead in Wooler and Allerburn Manor in Alnwick in the Ascent Homes portfolio.

Ascent Homes has also been working with housing association Bernicia to provide affordable housing.

Transforming towns

Want to know how Advance Northumberland is





rejuvenating town centres? Just look at Blyth, where it is project managing the creation of a new Culture Hub. Funded by the Energising Blyth Programme, this will be part of a revitalised market place.

In Ashington, Advance Northumberland is leading on the transformation of Portland Park: a cinema and restaurant are planned for the site.

Advance Northumberland also project managed the build of Berwick Leisure Centre, which opened in 2023, and Morpeth Sports and Leisure Centre, which also opened last year and was ranked number one in the country by Sport England's Quest quality assessment.

In addition, in 2023 Advance Northumberland took over the Town Centre Retail Project in Bedlington from Tolent, following the company's demise, and recommenced work on the regeneration of the Market Place. The project has received £2 million from the Government's Getting Building Fund, which is managed in the region by the North East Local Enterprise Partnership.

Looking ahead to 2024

Major infrastructure projects, community developments and private sector investments will come to fruition in 2024, which will have a transformational impact on the people of Northumberland.

And throughout this year, Advance Northumberland will be maximising on Northumberland's opportunities through delivering economic growth and reducing inequalities.

Find out more at

www.advancenorthumberland.co.uk

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B2B PR specialists mark continued growth with new senior hire

Award-winning PR and content agency McBryde & Co has appointed a new Account Director, cementing the Newcastle-based agency's stellar growth since launching in 2019.

Kate Gresswell's appointment comes as the agency celebrates being named the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) Small PR Consultancy of the Year for the second year running, and winner of Best Environmental Campaign for its ongoing work with national biodiversity specialists Environment Bank.

Announcing Kate's appointment, founder and director Rachel McBryde, said: "We are very pleased to have Kate join the team at McBryde. Her extensive background in B2B marketing, depth of knowledge, enthusiasm and track record in delivering impactful strategies for clients make her the perfect fit for our team and our dedication to excellence.

"As well as continuing to grow our client base in the professional service and public sectors, we are seeing increasing demand for our specialist expertise in both sustainable communications and within the clean energy sector. Kate's appointment supports our longer-term business ambitions and we're delighted to have her onboard."

Kate brings years of strategic communications and leadership experience, having held roles in large integrated agencies in Newcastle and London. Her past clients include the North East Ambulance Service, Teesside University, Newcastle University, NewcastleGateshead Initiative, Protium Green Solutions, Northumberland County Council and Harrogate Spring Water.

Commenting on her appointment, Kate said: "I'm thrilled to be joining the McBryde & Co team, having admired the work that Rachel McBryde and the team have been delivering for years.

"Being part of Small PR Consultancy of the Year is the cherry on the cake, and is a testament to how McBryde & Co is breaking the mould in the world of PR and content."

Echo Events complete 2023 event season with glamorous North East Marketing Awards

The North East Marketing Awards, celebrating the extraordinary creativity and achievements of those working in marketing in the region, proved another great success for Echo Events at St James' Park, Newcastle upon Tyne on 30th November.

The event, which is hugely grateful to have had main partners Nigel Wright Recruitment for all of its five years, attracted over 430 guests from the marketing world for the 2023 ceremony.

Stars of the evening included a stunning special performance from Jen and Liv who joined the welcome reception fresh from The Voice, as well as the biggest award-winner of the night, Ben Quigley of Different Narrative, who was presented with the Outstanding Achievement Award having recently been described as a titan of the North East regional marketing scene.

This year's more than apt Charity Partner

The right Route

North East-based media agency, Route, has appointed one of the UK's highest profile FMCG marketers to the board as Non-Executive Director.

Gareth Turner, former head of marketing for Weetabix, has over 23 years of experience in national and global roles, marketing some of the country's biggest household brands, including John Smiths, Bulmers and Lurpak.

His appointment by Route founders and directors Darren Davidson and Ben Dascombe comes as the agency enters a new phase of growth and strategic acceleration.

As part of his role, Gareth will use his decades of expertise and industry gravitas to hone Route's ambitious plans, setting the agency up for another year of stellar growth.

Having established his strategic marketing consultancy, Big Black Door, in 2022, Gareth was approached by Darren and invited to join the board, to provide an additional experienced perspective for the business strategy, identify market opportunities and advise on best practice for 'big brand' agencyclient relationships.

Darren said: "I have known Gareth for over 23 years and kept abreast of how his career and vision for brand success has developed over this time. His renowned experience and ability to stay ahead of the curve makes him a vital



was the wonderful Feeding Families, who offer support, hope and security to those experiencing food poverty in the North East, and we are delighted to announce that the marketing community raised nearly £2,000 for them on the night.

Sarah McPhie of Feeding Families thanked the North East Marketing Awards saying, "The timing of this donation couldn't have been more perfect with the run up into our festive projects and will go towards purchasing food to go into the 10,000 food boxes that have been requested this year."

The Marketing Awards mark the end of event season for Echo Events and Association Management, who proudly own and organise this event, as well as North East Accountancy Awards and Northern Law Awards.



contributor to our business.

"Collectively, we have always admired and recognised the value in Gareth's bold, creative and organic marketing ideas, which have driven many high-profile creative campaigns of the last twenty years. His energy and enthusiasm are truly infectious and clearly the secret to his success.

"Gareth will challenge our thinking, particularly on issues of communication and market positioning, and accelerate our expansion and development as a business. We are extremely excited to have one of the best marketers in the industry on our team, confirming that 2024 is going to be another incredible year for us as an agency."

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Newcastle marketing firm secures prestigious role with European public health body

Guerilla Communications Ltd, an award-winning agency based in Newcastle, is pleased to announce its appointment to strategic communications partner for the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & Healthcare (EDQM).

EDQM protects public health through the development, implementation and monitoring of quality standards for medicines and their safe use. It is one of the main administrative entities of the Council of Europe and its standards are recognised as scientific benchmarks world-wide.

Guerilla's prestigious collaboration with EDQM will support the organisation's strategic objectives, particularly when it comes to developing its brand and increasing the impact of its communication.

Evangelos Tasopoulos, head of the communications and events division at EDQM, explains: "When it comes to communications, the EDQM is committed to transforming complex pharmaceutical, scientific and regulatory concepts into engaging content that resonates with its diverse audiences and stakeholder needs. It is crucial for us to effectively communicate our pivotal work in public health protection in Europe and worldwide.

"We are excited to embark on this journey with Guerilla. Their proven expertise in healthcare communications and crafting resonant messaging aligns perfectly with our mission to share the essence of our work to protect public health worldwide.'

Renowned for its pioneering approach to branding and marketing, from its base in Newcastle upon Tyne, Guerilla will play a crucial role in implementing and monitoring EDQM's communication strategy, providing a creative, responsive, and comprehensive communications resource.

"We are incredibly excited about this partnership," said James Allen, managing director of Guerilla. "EDQM's dedication to the quality of medicines and healthcare resonates with our ethos of creating meaningful and impactful communications. Together, we look forward to crafting strategies that amplify EDQM's mission."

Newcastle digital agency Readysalted aims to treble its growth

A Newcastle-based digital agency has announced ambitious plans to treble its growth and open a London office, after expanding its client base in the UK and Europe and recruiting three new employees.

Specialising in UX (user experience) design, and digital transformation development, Readysalted, who recently celebrated their 20th anniversary, have plans to hit half a million pounds turnover by 2025 and treble the size of the business by 2028.

2023 also saw the team achieve their largest annual turnover to date with a 30% increase in revenue from the previous year. The business works with clients including Newcastle, Durham and Cambridge universities, as well as businesses in the medical science and manufacturing sectors.

Currently working with clients in the North East, London and across Europe, the Readysalted team also have ambitious plans to open a London office this year.

Simon Honeywood, Founder and Managing



Director of Readysalted said: "The last 12 months have been fantastic for the business as we continue to support our many clients across the globe. I still have to pinch myself about how far we have come in 20 years from when I started out as a freelancer in the industry. This really is credit to the fantastic team we have at Readysalted, their expertise and commitment to delivering outstanding client care.

"We really take the time to understand the businesses we work with, what their customers need when they visit a website, and how they behave online. We also work with clients on digital transformation, which is something that can save people hours and hours of time and completely change the way they work - it really is transformative!

And as the business celebrates over 20 years in the sector, they are setting ambitious plans for growth, with a new London base and the appointment of further members to the team.



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Rephrase owner Paul Fraser has spent more than 20 years working in the media for a variety of titles regionally and nationally, including a long stint at The Northern Echo

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Social Allies unveils exciting rebrand

Jess Tucker, Director of Teesside's leading digital agency, Social Allies, proudly spearheaded a recent brand refresh effort which signals a significant transformation in the company's core values, mission, and overall identity.

The Social Allies Refresh party, hosted at the vibrant Playbrew in Middlesbrough, served as a joyous occasion for the company to introduce its reimagined vision to clients and friends alike. The event was a kaleidoscope of experiences, featuring delectable cuisine from the renowned Wicker, a cutting-edge 360° vision camera from Glam Cam, DJ Dunny's infectious beats, and a stunning champagne living wall which captivated attendees.

The event boasted an impressive turnout and was graced by a speech from Managing Director, Steven Pearson, of Wilton Engineering, who extended heartfelt congratulations to Social Allies for their inspiring new direction.

In a landscape where a multitude of digital agencies are sprouting up in Teesside, Social Allies stands apart. Known for its down-toearth, distinctive, bright, and fun approach, the close-knit team of four brings a wealth of expertise and experience, positioning them to deliver exceptional digital solutions that cater to the ever-evolving needs of clients.

One pivotal aspect of Social Allies' rebranding journey is their commitment to addressing the issue of cyberbullying in schools. In recognition of the importance of safeguarding and educating young people in today's digital world, the agency is actively working on implementing programs and initiatives aimed at empowering children to combat cyberbullying. This initiative underscores the company's unwavering dedication to making a positive impact on the community and creating a safer online environment for the younger generation.

Social Allies is brimming with excitement about this new chapter and eagerly anticipates continuing to provide innovative digital solutions while simultaneously making a meaningful contribution to societal issues. The rebranding represents a significant step forward in the agency's evolution, underpinned by a steadfast commitment to excellence and social responsibility.

For more information about Social Allies, please visit www.socialallies.com or contact jess@socialallies.com













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Marketing and Media Matters

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

Aimee Philipson

Owner, The Write One

Did you always envisage a career in the Media Industry?

Yes! I wanted to be a journalist for many years but after lots of work experience placements in my twenties – including at Woman's Weekly which I absolutely loved! – I was more drawn to communications and PR, and then using my writing and sales skills for bid writing later in my career.

What has been your career path so far?

When I was at University, I accidentally ended up on the School of English's mailing list (I did Spanish and History!) and I received an email about a volunteer placement within a local hospice's communications team. I applied and loved the placement, I snapped their hands off when they offered me a job after graduation. I cut my teeth in all things comms during my time there, had fantastic mentors and continued studying. In 2015 I joined Narrative – a North East integrated marketing agency - to specialise in digital marketing and worked with clients in lots of industries - becoming an outsourced CMO for some - and joined the management team, leading on new business and partnerships. In the last few years, I brought my commercial and not-for-profit experience and writing skills together to go freelance as a bid consultant and work with ambitious organisations and SMEs on projects with big social impact.

Which fictional character can you most relate to?

I think Hermione Grainger from the Harry Potter books, because I've always loved learning, and organising things and people. She's super bossy, has big hair and doesn't suffer fools gladly! But she has some redeeming features too (I hope!).

What is your greatest strength?

A client once told me that my greatest strength was that I listen to what clients think they want, then deliver what they actually want. I loved that! I'm not sure all clients would though!

What is your biggest weakness?

My biggest weakness is speed. I work super efficiently but sometimes forget to enjoy the work or take a break. I've been using the Motion AI tool to organise my work and calendars and it also reminds me to have lunch!

What has been your proudest achievement?

One of my proudest career achievements was gaining my MIPA status from the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising in 2021 - but this year I've had lots of 'joint' proudest moments with clients, via funding successes including launching a Youth Club in Tower Hamlets for aspiring journalists and YouTubers, supporting SMEs to access contracts and funding they didn't think they had a chance to, and kickstarting some amazing digital projects in AI and VR with Innovate UK funding. In my personal life, one of my proudest achievements will always be running the Great North Run in 2012 because I hate running, it was my birthday and it rained constantly for the (honestly) four hours it took me to get to South Shields. Never again.

What are your future career aspirations?

I absolutely love what I do, helping raise money for important causes and supporting SMEs to reach their potential and grow, so I will definitely be sticking with this for a while. But there are so many things I want to do from writing a biography, working in a botanical garden, and going back to university to living on a farm, running a bookshop slash cocktail bar and scaling a tech business – so who knows where I'll be in five years' time!

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

The evolution and widespread use of generative AI such as ChatGPT will change bid writing forever. There are already myriad courses and forums about its use in public procurement and grant applications, and yes it's a useful tool in a writer's toolbox, but having sat on tender evaluation panels recently, it is very clear which responses have been written by AI! So, I feel there will always be a need for expert and tailored writing and research - and scoring criteria will evolve over time too – but it will definitely have an impact.

How do you like to unwind?

Last year I had two of my most relaxing 'switch off' holidays ever – one was walking the 100-mile route of the West Highland Way, and the other was a campervan trip to the Outer Hebrides. So I'm hoping for many more hikes and campervan adventures this year as well as trips to the cinema which is always my perfect way to unwind – no phone signal and a big bag of Revels!

hello@thewriteone.co



Josie Middleton: The Power of Digital PR

Bonded is the digital and media agency that prioritises connection. Join us as we connect with a different member of the team each month to get their take on all things digital media.

Josie Middleton, Bonded's newly appointed Digital PR & Content Director, shares her insights into the power of traditional and digital PR, recounts the weirdest coverage she's secured for clients, and offers a glimpse into what to expect in 2024.



Josie, what does digital PR mean to you?

Digital PR is part of the SEO mix. Using tactics similar to that of traditional PR (which is hundreds of years old) but with a slightly different aim. Digital PR aims to help a website rank higher organically in search engines. This has evolved to encompass areas such as brand awareness, brand sentiment, engaging with customers, and other channels such as social media.

To me, digital PR is all about creativity and measurement, which is why I love it so much. It's phenomenal to see an idea you've had appearing in different publications and then to see how this work positively impacts the visibility of a website.

Are there any common misconceptions people have about digital PR?

People are surprised when they discover the amount of technical and analytical skills involved in PR. Daily, you'll find digital PR professionals with their heads in various tools, datasets, and spreadsheets, which inform our creative client work. We also have to keep a close eye on how Google is evolving its algorithm and how this can impact our clients and tactics and be prepared to change direction and restrategise at the drop of a hat.

Are there any developments coming to the realm of digital PR in 2024?

I'm super excited about AI, though I don't think this will replace the role of digital PR any time soon. While AI will continue to help supercharge digital PR campaigns with more visuals and data, digital PR takes a considerable amount of emotional intelligence, creativity, and soft skills, which technology can not replace.

What brought you to Bonded, and what does 'connection' mean to you?

I was drawn to Bonded by the team's experience and deep specialisms. It's rare to find such a passionate, empathetic, and creative bunch of people with a unified goal of delivering first-class service.

For me, connection means going beyond the surface. I love to know what makes people tick, whether that's potential buyers, clients, or colleagues.

And finally, what's the weirdest coverage you've managed to generate for a client?

After receiving a request from the New York Times asking for funny job interview stories, we shared a story from my boss, who had once attended an interview with a nightclub stamp still on his hand. Not only was the story picked up by the New York Times, but it was also shared by heaps of other publications too! I've also worked with a former FBI agent and a well-known Dame, which was pretty cool!





Chicago Calling!

2024 has got off to a flying start for House of Hype & Co with news just landing that Founder and Managing Director Claire Pickersgill, has secured a place as part of the Department of Business & Trade Women's International Network on a Trade Mission to Indianapolis and Chicago.

The trip will see House of Hype & Co. participate in a full itinerary of B2B matchmaking meetings, company site visits, networking receptions and the opportunity to celebrate International Women's Day at the Consulate General in Chicago.

Claire said: "This really is a pinch me moment and I'm so excited to represent the UK as part of the Trade Mission, not only is it a great opportunity for myself and the business but I'll also have my client's objectives on my mind too for the visit, alongside promoting Sunderland and the North East."

PR agency, House of Hype & Co. work with clients to get audiences talking positively about their business through a range of channels and concepts to enhance their reputation, growth and increase business opportunities.

The key ethos at House of Hype & Co. is that they are connectors and collaborators, and work with businesses to ensure their communications campaign have maximum impact by leveraging their black book of contacts, whilst getting behind trending talking points.

From national to international coverage, to gaining new contracts, funding success, collaborations to winning awards, the agency has a track record of making an impact and supporting businesses to rise, shine and elevate their offer.

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...What we love about our Business...

It's February - the month of love and Valentine's Day of course. Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us what they love about their business.



Off The Grid Adventures is a leading activity provider across the North East region working with vulnerable adults and young people. Managing this service it is an incredibly rewarding job. I am very fortunate to regularly see people overcome adversity and go on to succeed in life! A great example of this was over the Xmas period we ran some family events. Some of the parents had been young people on our programmes many years ago. It was great to hear them share fond memories they had of adventures they had had with us over the years and how it helped shape their lives! While it's essential to address the challenges faced by our client group it's equally important to acknowledge and celebrate the successes along the way. Looking ahead to 2024 its going to be a massive year for us, Whether your interested in volunteering, deliver a service or collaborating with us we invite you to reach out and join us in making a difference. Together we can continue to empower vulnerable adults and young people enabling them to thrive and succeed. Get in touch for a chat!

Paul Kirkpatrick, paul@off-the-grid-cic.uk

I love to feel that at Idos we are helping people take control of all aspects of their mind and body and feel confident about themselves. It feels like such an accomplishment after over 30 years of working in the NHS, which I think is great, but does not provide this style of wellness centred care. Hopefully people get home after being at idos and feel like they can face another day with an illness because they know we are here, they are welcome at Idos and will get what they need- even if it is not a miracle cure!

> Dr Ceri Sutherland Idos Health and Wellbeing www.idoshealth.co.uk

With the boatload of Valentines Cards, Flowers and more importantly Chocolates that head my way at this time of year – what better way of capturing all of this, but on a Spreadsheet! However, reality soon hits, as I buy my own Ferrero Rocher (other such versions are available!), kid myself that I will make them last at least a week and think about how far I will need to jog, to burn off those extra calories! Those that know me, will know that the word "jog" fits into my lifestyle about as much as the word "salad" does - but it's good to have a dream! Again, if jogging and eating salad were to be part of my life, I would account for it all on a Spreadsheet. Working at Leading Link in an agile, ever moving environment, where no two days are never the same, I use spreadsheets a lot and need a certain level of planning, consistency and spreadsheet(ing) and that's what I love about my job



Chris Johnson, www.leadinglink.co.uk





I am writing this on my phone and this illforgotten memory of mine helps illustrate one thing I like about my job of writing books and that is I get to choose when I write:although not normally on my phone. Writing is a delight and a hard slog all at once and I dare say few will ever understand just how difficult producing a single book can be never mind the 50+ I write every year. Yes it's hard to an insane degree and even drives me out of good health into a period where I must slow down and eat better and exercise more. But it would be difficult to be without it.

Simon Robson (S Rob), wwwsrob.co.uk

MEDIA INSIGHT

One thing I love about my job is meeting new people and exploring new opportunities with my clients. To be able to help others get their message and story out is fulfilling and makes it all worthwhile.

Dan Wilkinson, www.thedwmedia.co.uk



What i love about my job is meeting people and seeing behind the scenes at their place of work. I'm very lucky to have access to places other people don't see such as factories, interesting office spaces and entertainment venues. For example working with Sunday for Sammy, I had full back stage access at Newcastel Arena to see the work that goes on behind the scenes. If you'd like me to visit you, or you my floating office, drop me a line.

HIGHLIGHTS

Keith Newman Highlights PR



I love my job as a designer and artist. I get to use my creative skills to create posh souvenirs that my customers absolutely love. Knowing that they have had a great experience when they have bought my products online or at a market is wonderful. And when they take the time to give me a review on trustpilot it really makes my day.

Corinne Lewis-Ward, www.powderbutterfly.com



I love seeing my clients make progress. I love enabling them to find their hope again. I love working with them to see their own worth. I love helping them to overcome their challenges. I love learning from their courage, joy and diligence. I love that together we can make life brighter.

> Dr Rebecca Williams Dinsdale www.drrebecca.org.uk



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Contact Keith Newman for more details. Visit him on his floating office keith@highlightspr.co.uk 07814 397951 www.highlightspr.co.uk

Veronica Swindale

MD of nesma

Based in Newcastle, Veronica has grown nesma into an international marketing and communications training business with a community of 16 tutors (including globally recognised authors) working with learners from 27 countries across three continents and an alumni of 1000's.

> As an ambassador for formally recognised vocational qualifications, the business helps learners achieve their ambitions and client marketing teams to develop and retain their talent. To achieve this, Veronica has forged valuable partnerships with major institutions, including the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM), the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and other complementary organisations and is working to develop an even more comprehensive range of learning solutions to support professionals at every stage of their marketing or communications career.

We discovered more about how Veronica forged her passion for developing marketing skills.

How long have you been work working in marketing?

I first started working in marketing for the A & P Appledore Group way back in the last century! Amongst other things, my roles included market research on behalf of shipbuilding and ship repair companies worldwide, and I cut my marketing teeth as a Project Consultant. The company supported me in pursuing my Post-Graduate Diploma in Management Studies and CIM Post-Graduate Diploma in Marketing at Northumbria University. I subsequently qualified as one of the first CIM Chartered Marketers in the country and have just celebrated 25 years with fellow Chartered Marketers at the CIM Head office in Berkshire.

Why do you think you have been successful?

I have focused on continuously growing our catchment, and nesma now has students in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Learners are drawn to our expertise, high results, culture and values. My approach has always been that every student has unique needs and that we tailor our approach and course recommendations to meet those needs along their career journey. Many students continue to study with us for their second, third, fourth and even fifth qualifications as they climb their career ladder, and it's great to see them progress along the way.

How do you keep your business relevant?

Many of our students are funded by their employers as part of their training or CPD programmes, and that is as significant now as it was when I was sponsored when I first started. It's great to see so many employers rewarding and supporting talent. nesma has created an environment of flexible learning so that all our students learn within a supportive community and interesting peer groups. High-quality internal and external customer care is paramount. We have created a style of teaching known as 'the nesma way', which is highly collaborative and supportive. Our workbased assignments provide immediate benefit to the learner and their employers. We are constantly refreshing and updating our development options. We have recently evolved our digital marketing and sustainability modules and added P R Smith's SOSTAC[®] Marketing Planning qualifications as one- and two-day masterclasses. It's important to me that even fully qualified practitioners can always find something new to enhance their CVs and knowledge base, as one of the best things about life is that we never have to stop learning and keeping nesma relevant certainly keeps me on my toes, too!

What does the future hold?

We are building the business through additional course development and growing the nesma teaching and delivery teams. Most of our business is built on word of mouth. The team is working hard on developing our presence in new territories through partnerships and collaborations. In the meantime, I would love to catch up with as many friends and associates in the North East as possible to discuss your training and development plans and how we might work together to build our relationships.

Veronica.Swindale@nesma.co.uk Tel: 07590 018205


Veronica Swindale





NorthStandard's marketing team in the spotlight

nesma was the Corporate Sponsor and Category Sponsor for The Marketing Director of the Year and Best Example of CSR at the North East Marketing Awards. It's an event we look forward to each year as it celebrates individuals and teams who are changing the landscape of marketing in the North East through creativity, innovation and passion. Rob McInally won Marketing Director of the Year, and his team at NorthStandard also won Brand Creation of the Year (in-house). Veronica caught up with Rob after the event to learn more about the person and the business.

Who put you in for the award?

It was Sally Teasdale, NorthStandard's Brand and PR Manager, with the assistance of our local PR agency, Karol Marketing.

How did you find the judging process?

The judging process was very thorough and quite challenging but in a positive and supportive way. It was also an excellent opportunity to explain more about NorthStandard, profile our 160+ year history in the North East, and demonstrate our ongoing connections to the region.

I love to get into the minds of great people like yourself. What are your guiding principles for work and life?

My guiding principles have been a combination of pursuing marketing excellence, keeping my eyes on the horizon and valuing the perspectives, support and input from friends and colleagues.

I know you are right behind your team from a leadership perspective. How do you create a learning and development culture to nurture your talent?

A thriving learning and development culture within any marketing team is the bedrock for future success internally and externally. The marketing team culture we are building at NorthStandard is a dynamic blend of collaboration, innovation, and inclusivity that fosters and encourages



employee well-being, a healthy work-life balance, and continuous professional and personal development and training—supported by effective and open communication, another cornerstone of a positive culture. An open and transparent environment fosters trust and collaboration, and our regular team meetings and feedback mechanisms help ensure everyone's voice is heard and ideas are welcomed. Investing in the team's happiness and growth will pay dividends through the incisive marketing strategies and campaigns they can create for the business.

Recently, a friend took on a marketing director role and wasn't sure whether they were up to the job. What advice would you share with others looking to take on a role like yours?

Firstly, being a marketing director is a continuous learning journey. So, learn to embrace challenges, stay adaptable, and strive for improvement. More specifically, I suggest building strong relationships and networks, keeping updated on developing industry trends and fostering a sense of creativity and innovation in all that you do.

You have navigated a fantastic merger, making NorthStandard no. 2 in the maritime insurance industry. What do you expect 2024 to look like in terms of marketing?

The integration following North P&I's merger with one of its largest competitors, 'Standard Club', to form NorthStandard in February 2023 is still underway as we work to seamlessly bring together two such successful organisations into a single, larger business that has been shaped to support a strong in-house expertise base across the world.

In terms of marketing, we're continuing to bring our global offices together. We are in the early stages of planning a complete refurbishment of our Newcastle headquarters, based on the Quayside. This investment will reaffirm our commitment to the North East and to our people. 2024 will also see the expansion of our extended product portfolio worldwide, the launch of new digital services, including our new website and the continued development of the NorthStandard brand across our key global markets.



The North East Marketing Awards is an annual event, and as well as sponsorship, Veronica volunteers her time to be on various judging panels. She is constantly inspired by how much she learns from the experience and always feels motivated by the innovations, solutions and ideas that are presented throughout the process. In addition, she thoroughly enjoys the chance to engage in discussions and debates with other industry experts.

There are lots of reasons why winning awards is good for business. As with all awards, these awards recognise the hard work and achievements of individuals and teams. A win or nomination can have a substantial morale-boosting impact that drives them to even more remarkable successes, so we will watch the team at NorthStandard very closely and follow their achievements in 2024.

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A unique interview... UNIQUE magazines

Robert Permain

Freelance Video Producer & Videographer, Robert Permain Video Production

How did you end up building a career in videography?

While studying for a degree in graphic design, I had the opportunity to work on photography and animation. This ignited my desire to pursue film and video production, so after graduating, I took up a role in storyboard production for a TV commercial production company. Working there, I learned many of the skills in filming and editing, along with gaining knowledge and experience in the many aspects of film and video production. Then whenever an opportunity came up to work on new projects I took them. From commercial and corporate production through to TV news and sport, I continuingly learned and developed my skills in filming, editing and overall production.

Who or what inspires you?

I'm inspired by people who aren't afraid to take risks – to push boundaries and find new ways to achieve their vision.

What advice would you give to anyone interested in getting into videography?

Videography can be a very rewarding profession. From creating engaging content on social media to corporate videos and commercials, etc. it's a fantastic way to express your creativity and communicate effectively. Today the opportunities for videographers are tremendous. Many companies and agencies look for videographers to help grow their businesses and communicate with their audiences. Experience is invaluable, but if you can develop the necessary skills and demonstrate brilliant creativity, organisational ability and a strong work ethic, then you have a great chance to work in this industry. Technically, you will benefit from having hands-on experience with video and audio equipment and software. Phones are great, but ideally you should consider other kit such as mirrorless cameras, etc. Other higher end cameras are available, but generally at a high price point. Edit software is usually through subscription, but other free, or one of purchase options are also available. You will also need a computer that can handle the software capabilities.

What is your favourite part of your job?

Meeting people, working with actors, travelling and learning new things. There are so many parts of my job

that I enjoy, but the key thing for me is to help develop a concept and see it through to completion, telling a story in the final video. This is crucial to the success of a project.

What has been your most memorable business moment thus far?

There have been so many memorable business moments, but, probably, the time when I worked on a video project that took me around Europe, USA and China. I had researched and written scripts, casted actors and then had the opportunity to direct crews in California, Florida, Shanghai and Hong Kong. Working with the clients, crews and actors was an unforgettable experience. Everything clicked into place and even though I needed to direct through translators in China, the results were very satisfying. With each of the jobs taking up to 4 weeks of filming in lots of locations, they were hard work but incredibly enjoyable.

What are your favourite magazines?

Pro Moviemaker and *Televisual* are both fantastic magazines. *Pro Moviemaker* gives great in depth reviews on camera kit and interviews with filmmakers across the industry. This, along with some tips on techniques, etc makes this a great read for anyone interested in videography. *Televisual* gives unmatched insight into the video and broadcast industry and is well worth a read. Apart from those magazines, as I'm also an artist, so I often read *The Artist* magazine, which is a good source of inspiration for anyone wanting to develop this side of their creativity.

What's the future hold for Rob Permain?

Working now as a freelance videographer, I hope to reach out to more prospective clients and work on projects that excite me, while also working closely with existing clients to see where I can help in developing their businesses through video. Along with this, I am also writing scripts that I hope to develop and find funding for production.

uniquemagazines.co.uk



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You may be wondering why your business or organisation needs a 'storyteller'.

At SASS media Ltd, we believe all businesses and organisations have an exciting story to tell.

This could just as easily be about the reason you set up your business or organisation and why it exists, as much as any specific successes or achievements you have had recently.

A great example of this is charities, which are often founded when somebody has experienced a difficult problem and has formed an organisation to support other people going through a similar experience, or become passionate about raising awareness of a particular cause.

In the past year, we have worked with Autism Parents Together and A Taste of Africa to secure radio, TV and press coverage about their organisations, which started with their 'why?' story.

We have also produced a regular newsletter for Our Hospitals Charity, the fundraising arm of South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. Working with the NHS is also another specialist area for us.

In the past year, we have produced several stories encouraging patients to use the correct services for their healthcare needs and explaining their many options.

This public information story helped take pressure off crucial NHS services, as well as benefitting patients, by ensuring they sought the right treatment in the right place at the right time.

We were also delighted to promote a new lung screening service through an interesting patient story, which was featured on the BBC.

This service is enabling patients to be diagnosed with lung cancer at an early stage, so that they can undergo curative treatment before they are even experiencing any symptoms.

Working with the BBC and willing patients, we were able to send out a clear message to people that they should take up any offer of screening they receive.

Because of our background in journalism, we are also able to write interesting and compelling features for business-to-business publications.

These features get the organisations we are writing about noticed for all the right reasons.

Another area of specialism for us is also education and we have supported Bishop

Chadwick Catholic Education Trust with a number of press releases since September 2022, celebrating good and Outstanding Ofsted results - and other great things going on in their schools.

With our help, the Trust has been covered by Look North, BBC Radio 4 and a number of regional publications.

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Finding heart in PR

By Samuel Marriott-Dowding, Marriott Communications

As a PR agency, Marriott Communications is often given the opportunity to support the third sector, so when Aura Fine Art Newcastle approached us to support their 'King of Hearts' charity fundraiser in aid of Rainbow Migration, Crisis, and Freedom From Torture - how could we possibly say no?

The fundraiser, taking place on Saturday 10th February at their gallery in the iconic Newcastle landmark, Fenwicks, will showcase the remarkable work of the exceptionally inspirational and talented King. King's creations will be displayed alongside a carefully curated collection of love-themed pieces from Aura's portfolio of accomplished national and international artists.

King, a LGBTQIA+ refugee fled her homeland to avoid persecution and has since been living in the UK where she has been supported by Rainbow Migration, Crisis, and Freedom From Torture. After meeting with King for the first time at our planning meeting, I was heartbroken for all she has had to endure in her life, but I was also in awe of her resilience, bravery, and the passion for life and love that radiates from her.

After meeting with King she kindly sent me over a quote for media use, and it is an extract that exemplifies her bravery and why this fundraising event is so important.

King said: "Having suffered greatly from persecution and violent acts which resulted in severe mental trauma. I had begun to give up on life until I was rescued by these three unbelievable Charities, who for the first time that I could remember really reached out to me and helped me on the difficult road to rebuild my life. For the first time I have begun to express



myself through my paintings and my poem which I hope will raise some funds for these very deserving Charities."

Marriott Communications is no stranger to supporting third sector organisations or social causes.

We have been fortunate enough to work with dozens of incredible charities across the UK, donating over 700 pro bono hours of support. It is not uncommon to at times feel disconnected from the cause, especially when so much of our work takes place digitally, but meeting with King in person, hearing her story, and of the vital work of the three charities really reaffirmed for me the importance of leading with compassion, empathy, and heart.

The 'King of Hearts' charity fundraiser takes place on Saturday 10th February, 4-7 PM at Aura Fine Art Newcastle. RSVPS to the event can be made to newcastle@aurafineart.co.uk or on 0191 511 1856.



communications

The Fiercely Creative Marketers

66

health Kin

...It's important that we give something back...

Kieron Goldsborough CEO

We know what we're doing... and we can prove it

When Kevin Keegan was manager of Newcastle Utd, he once commented... "It's not what it said on the tin." He was paraphrasing a TV commercial which was aired at the time, and was in response to something being rather different from what he'd been told.

Perhaps you've been promised something which didn't turn out to be what you expected.

Take marketing for example. You may have been told by an agency that they will increase your sales, raise your exposure, boost profits and reduce expenses etc. It all sounds good, but will you really see some results? Will it be a case of 'It does what it says on the tin?'

Or not.

This is where the Newcastle-based marketing agency Different Narrative stands out from other agencies.

They can prove it.

"Here at Different Narrative we have an effectiveness culture," said CEO Kieron Goldsborough. "We are one of a select group of companies across the UK...fewer than 50...who have full IPA accreditation. The Institute of Practitioners and Advertising have strict criteria which we have to meet, the most important of which is ensuring that the work we do for clients really is effective... that we get results, not vanity. We add value to our clients and ultimately improve their performance and profitability." Different Narrative have developed their own in-house software which allows them to track how effective they are being for clients. They can show clients how various marketing plans are working and what sort of results they are currently achieving. It also allow clients to predict future trends and performance... something which is key for any business.

"We give our clients regular updates to show how effective our work is. When they can make accurate future projections and see what the potential results will be, they can then plan accordingly. This has become increasingly important for firms because budgets are tight and they need to know that any future spending will be justified. We show them how they really will get value for money from the work we do on their behalf."

Something else of which Different Narrative can be rightly proud, is their record when it comes to helping the people who work for the business and also helping others in the community.

"It's important that we give something back," adds Kieron. "At the recent North East Marketing Awards, we were given the award for the best example of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility). We have an in-house policy called Change Maker. A small committee made up from members of the Different Narrative team organise events to either raise awareness or help charitable causes, or perhaps devise long-term ventures. We work closely with schools and universities; we offer a two week placement so that students can see what a marketing agency does. We do litter picking, we collect on behalf of the Newcastle West End Food Bank, and we even take part in friendly rivalry with other marketing agencies in the area to promote mental wellbeing."



It doesn't end there.

Different Narrative have now been awarded CPD Gold standard on two occasions by the IPA. Their continuous professional development sees everyone within the company undergo a minimum of 24 hours training (most easily exceed it though) because, let's face it, we're never too earn to learn in what is an ever-changing marketing world.

Different Narrative is a company worth keeping an eye on. They plainly do things the right way and the help and success they can provide your company with is something they can prove. Does your current marketing agency do that?

It also explains why Different Narrative can not only work with dozens of small firms, but also help nationally recognised companies such as Carpetright, Winsor and Newton, Bovis Homes, Hays, NHS and local brands NTCA, Eldon Square and Sunderland Council.

If you'd like to find out what Different Narrative can do for your company you can find out further information via their website...www.differentnarrative.com...call 0191 261 0111 or visit them at their offices on Ravensworth Terrace in Newcastle. You can also email hello@differentnarrative.com

Is your board helping or hindering growth?

Wadds Inc. supports creative agencies with company direction and differentiated propositions. Here Sarah Waddington CBE looks at how a wrongly structured board or no board at all, can be a real barrier to growth.

SMEs pushing for growth sometimes scale without the proper processes in place, which can result in dysfunction across the organisation. A board is often established without the appropriate structure and make-up. This is where formal training and the input of a non-executive director can be hugely valuable.

When board decision-making revolves around operations and immediate concerns rather than purpose, values and strategy, the focus is skewed, and talent isn't used effectively. It's a trap that creative consultancies can easily fall into. But it is also one that can be easily fixed by introducing more robust governance.

Board vs management

Ultimately, the board's role is to consider long-term sustainability through value creation and resource utilisation, and to ensure regulatory and legal compliance.

The chair and non-executive director provide external focus, with the internal perspective provided by the managing director (or CEO), finance director and any executive directors reporting to the MD.

Implementing policies, strategies and business plans should be delegated to management, with board monitoring progress.

Get the balance right

The makeup of the board is more important than you think. Get the balance wrong and it can be dominated by one personality or group think. Conflict-averse 'yes men' (or less often women) or a lack of debate can see the wrong decisions agreed.

Lasting damage can be caused by:

- Poor decision-making due to inadequate information.
- Infrequent reviews of finance arrangements.
- Weak or no evaluation of board members and decisions taken.

- A lack of focus on succession, R&D and business development.
- Not listening to any standing committees where these are in place.

If you're on a board, it's your ethical and legal responsibility to avoid these issues and whistleblow where any serious governance breaches are suspected.

Helen Kenny, Chief Operating Officer at Manifest Group, said: "Introducing non-executive directors to our regional and global leadership boards has been <u>utterly transf</u>ormative.

"Having that outside perspective ensures we stay zoomed out and focused on the bigger picture and that we prioritise our strategic imperatives, rather than getting caught up in operational niggles or the challenges of the day.

"With the majority of our global leadership team being in their first leadership role, the consultation from Sarah at Wadds Inc. has helped harness their talent, drive and passion and foster a productive leadership team which can make strategic and actionable decisions that we're collectively accountable for.

If any of this resonates and you'd like professional advisory support to help structure your business and achieve your growth plans, please email

sarah.waddington@wadds.co.uk or stephen.waddington@wadds.co.uk, and we'll be happy to help.



Is your Corporate Social Responsibility part of your marketing strategy?

A recent sponsor offered their services with the condition that they did not want publicity.

The reason the organisation gave highlighted the true purpose of Corporate Social Responsibility.

I quote, 'we have a responsibility to support society, we can so we do, if we courted publicity to do so then we are not being responsible. We are taking, not giving.'

Considering I have worked with many highprofile individuals who 'do good' but only to boost their personal agenda and lifestyle (One of the frustrations that created Kind Currency).

Our sponsors values exemplified exactly how all businesses should treat their social responsibility.

Corporate Social Responsibility, how is your organisation responsible? Are you giving or using the responsibility to take?

It is usual practice to be given the details of the marketing team or informed it is dependent of the marketing budget when discussing corporate social responsibility, especially at a grassroots level.

But corporate social responsibility is not a marketing opportunity.

It is very much about the responsibility an organisation has.

Without agenda, targets, or gains.

It has everything to do with the values within your company and how they impact the world, internally and externally.

The responsibility begins with the systems and culture an organisation employs to deliver their products and services.

And from there how the organisation goes on to support and positively influence society, the



environment, and the economy.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is working to make the world a better place.

That is the only target, the gains are all embedded within the impact.

Currently, most businesses task the marketing team with their CSR. This is a negative.

It is not CSR at all. Marketing as a department has a ROI measured strategy.

Placing CSR within marketing makes it all about what the organisation can gain. The expectation that there is to be a return.

It feeds the problem rather than being part of the solution.

CSR is not something an organisation must do; it is part of the culture.

Corporate Social Responsibility is paying your employees a fair wage, providing a supportive and nurturing environment. It is using environmental and economical sustainable methods to deliver your products and services. It is supporting the communities you serve and the problems in society that your organisation can help to resolve. These are not tasks with a target, these are a way of life for an organisation.

You can take simple steps to ensure your organisation is not abusing its privilege for corporate gains:

Look at where your CSR sits within your organisation and what expectations have been set as targets. Remove the expectations and lead with empathy.

Gain open and honest feedback on your organisations culture and act on the findings. Do you have employees living in poverty? And if so, how can you best support them?

Has your organisation set realistic sustainable goals? Are they achievable? The small changes really do make a significant difference, think long-term with short-term actionable steps.

Support the issues in society that align with your values and that your organisation could pay forward to help the solution. Do it because you can.

Most importantly, it is just a policy or is it real action?

www.kindcurrency.co.uk

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If you're interested in learning more about what we can offer, please don't hesitate to contact us or visit us at The Grainger Suite, Dobson House, Regent Centre, Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE3 3PF.

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EDUCATION NEWS



Schoolgirl is 'over the moon' with her winning reading bench design

A Seaham schoolgirl was thrilled to win a competition to design a reading bench for her primary school.

Millie Devlin-Munroe's design was the overall chosen entry at St Mary Magdalen's Catholic Primary School, which is part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust (BCCET), for the annual Ambic STEM Challenge competition.

Bespoke furniture manufacturers, Ambic, based in the North East, launched a competition in 2022 for schools to design their own piece of educational furniture. The winners have their designs turned into a real piece of furniture at no cost to the schools.

Millie, who is now a Year 7 pupil at Peterlee's St Bede's Catholic School & Byron Sixth Form College, also part of BCCET, said: "I really enjoyed the process from my first design to visiting the factory and making decisions in the design options.

"The best part was going back to St Mary Magdalen's and seeing my completed bench! I hope it inspires future children at St Mary Magdalen's to read and know anything is possible."

The new reading bench will form part of the school's new reading area.

Headteacher Andrea Goodwin said: "When we found out she won, we were thrilled for Millie. She was absolutely over the moon; it was a lovely boost for her."

Fledgling footie stars will kick off spring term in new strip

A football team in Blackhall has a new footie strip thanks to a new sponsorship deal.

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, which is part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, has been gifted the new football strip from the Royal British Legion and Securi Serve.

Headteacher Lisa Ashton explained: "One of our parents, Martin Close, who is a member of the Royal British Legion Easington District, secured the sponsorship to provide our children with a new football strip.

"The new kit will make a huge difference to the children of St Joseph's for many years to come. The children and staff were thrilled and very grateful to our amazing community for the donation of the new kit.'

Year 6 pupil Lucy Close, 10, a member of the football team, said: "I think it is really nice they were donated to our lovely school. We are really grateful and they look really good."



Pupils' wellbeing at "centre" of North East education trust

Children and young people who "feel that their voices are heard and can make a difference have a greater sense of community and self-esteem", according to Place2Be.

The children and young people's mental health charity launched Children's Mental Health Awareness Week in 2015 and the theme of this year's awareness week, held in February, is 'My Voice Matters'. This concept is central to a North East multi-academy trust's health and wellbeing strategy.

Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, which has 25 primary schools and five secondary schools in South Tyneside, East Durham and Sunderland, is "committed to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of students, staff and the wider school community".

Louise Swailes, mental health coordinator at BCCET, said: "The theme of this year's Children's Mental Health Week is 'My Voice Matters' and the child is most definitely at the centre of our mental health offer at BCCET. Pupil voice is key to developing our support package and we now have teams of mental health champions in our schools who are involved in decision making and the co-creation of policy. There will be many activities happening across the Trust during Children's Mental Health Week to shine a light on mental health and wellbeing, but it is at the centre of what we do every week of the year."



Graham Mercer and Martin Close from the Easington District of the Royal British Legion, and Matt Williams, from SecuriServe, visited the school to present the children with the new kit.

"Everyone at St Joseph's would like to express our sincere thanks and gratitude for the fabulous football kit for our children," added Mrs Ashton.

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Empowering girls to be trailblazers at NHSG: why an all girl education matters

By Amanda Hardie, Head, Newcastle High School for Girls

Recently we were delighted to host a talk for parents by Director of Innovation and Learning at the Girls' Day School Trust, Dr Kevin Stannard, to present the findings from the GDST Futures Report.

During Dr Stannard's talk we were reminded that the GDST was established in 1872 by four radical women who were fighting for the right of girls to have an education. Not only did they set up a group of girls' schools, including ours, but in doing so, they transformed the educational landscape for girls in an era when it was virtually unheard of for any girls to have a formal education after the age of 11, let alone go to university.

Fast forward 150 years, the simple and sad fact is that gender inequality still exists in the UK in all



walks of life - in society, careers, leadership and pay.

At NHSG, and in all GDST Schools, we remain as focused on bringing about equal opportunities for girls as our founders were in the 1870s, and what's more, there is clear evidence of the significant impact an education at a GDST school is having on girls and young women today.

The astonishing findings from the GDST's Futures Report evidences pervasive inequality still exists.

Focusing on just one aspect of the overall report, which surveyed 1358 nationally representative children from across the country, the survey found significant gender differences in confidence. In fact, boys scored much more highly than girls in every single statement made about how they feel about the future. For example, feeling optimistic about getting their desired job, or generally being positive about the future.

The vast majority of girls in this survey attended coeducational schools, and the findings reflect



the wider societal landscape and the gender gap we know exists.

What was fascinating, however, is that when NHSG pupils and their peers from GDST schools from across the country, including from the two academies within the GDST family, were asked the same questions, the survey showed GDST girls to be...

- more confident, more self-assured, more politically aware, more empowered, better able to pursue their ambitions, and feel unhindered by their gender. more comfortable taking risks.
- more willing to embrace flexible careers.

when compared to girls at other schools. Indeed, GDST girls' scores were much more closely aligned to the boys, and in some cases scores were better than the boys.

While I am saddened by the findings of pupils from non-GDST schools, I am heartened by the clear evidence that we at NHSG and GDST are making a difference to the lives of so many girls and women as a result of the education we offer.

NHSG is an all-girl school by design. Everything we do is focused on ensuring our girls have every opportunity for future success by building their confidence, encouraging them to take risks, providing them with the space to develop and learn, preventing them from being drowned out in the classroom, and ensuring they know that nothing is off limits in terms of their future career choices.

This is how we deliver on our vision to empower girls to be the next generation of leaders and trailblazers and to understand they have an equal and important role in shaping our world for a better future.

newcastlehigh.gdst.net



Barney celebrates 'Excellent' success

A unique education system that prepares today's children for the world of the 2060s and '70s has won the highest praise from official inspectors.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate awarded Barnard Castle School the top rating of 'excellent' for both 'Academic Achievement and 'Personal Development'.

The achievement follows the introduction of 'A Barney Education', an innovative approach to developing a dynamic curriculum for its 730 pupils, aged four to 18.

'Barney', as the School is affectionately known, provides an inspirational, compassionate and unpretentious environment in which young people develop character, becoming confident, resilient, intellectually curious, tolerant and driven, with an undercurrent of humility, leaving them ideally placed to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

A six-strong team of inspectors spent three days at the Senior and Prep schools, exploring every facet of learning.

They scrutinised compliance in key areas including the quality of education, the spiritual,

moral, social and cultural development of children, welfare, health and safety, the suitability of staff, the premises and the standards of leadership and management.

Inspectors examined the curriculum, observed 80 lessons and sampled work, from Reception class to Sixth Form. They analysed parent, pupil and staff surveys, spoke with pupils, staff and governors, experienced countless extra-curricular activities, House meetings and Chapel and also visited boarding houses and the Academic Support department. In each area the school was awarded 'excellent'.

Headmaster Tony Jackson said: "This was a rigorous and comprehensive inspection and we are unbelievably proud of the outcome, which is validation of everything we endeavour to do.

"Our children are preparing for a rapidly changing world and are having to contend with adversity on a local and global level. Throw into this mix the volatile and ubiquitous nature of social media and technology and it is clear that we need to evolve constantly to meet their learning needs as we prepare them for work in the 2060s and 2070s."

Inspectors highlighted the excellent quality of academic learning and pupil achievement, praising children's communications skills, their engagement with learning, their self-confidence and understanding of how to improve their performances further.

They also noted pupils' progress and skills across the curriculum including reading, writing and numeracy. They commented on how children expressed themselves with increasing sophistication and their expertise in public speaking, their ability to apply their knowledge and think logically.

Inspectors picked up on the School's sense of spirituality and community, the inspiring surroundings, pupils' morals and positive



attitude towards each other, their excellent, courteous and well-mannered behaviour, their awareness of social issues and diversity, their contribution as global citizens, including charity work, the high degree of student input into school life and their understanding of how to stay safe, both physically and mentally.

The "comprehensive and experienced" pastoral care team was singled out for praise, being described as a "huge strength of the school, embodying the values and ethos they wish to promote".

The report also stated: "The excellent personal development of all pupils is a direct result of the values and ethos of the school. This is driven by the senior leadership team through the innovative use of assembly and tutorial time, endorsed by the governing body, thus fulfilling the aim to develop young adults with character."

Mr Jackson added: "It is a pleasure to work alongside so many talented professionals and be part of such a special, unique community, and we are excited about what the future holds for our School."

To learn more about a Barney Education and its 'Excellent' provision, the school is hosting a Whole School Open Morning (Saturday 2nd March 2024) and a Sixth Form Information Evening (Tuesday 27th February 2024).

You can book your place by contacting a member of the school's welcoming Admissions Team on 01833 696030 or by emailing admissions@barneyschool.org.uk





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Northern Leaders Trust champions students' wellbeing to lay groundwork for their future success... Through a commitment to nurturing the mental health of its students, multi-academy trust, Northern Leaders Trust (NLT), places student wellbeing at its heart, ensuring that every member of staff is dedicated to creating a safe and supportive environment for its students.

"We pride ourselves on putting students at the centre of everything we do," says Matthew Allan, year leader at Kenton School and a key figure in the Trust's wellbeing initiatives. "Our goal is to provide a solid foundation where students feel safe, supported and equipped to navigate the challenges they face."

Recognising the increasing complexity of teenagers' mental health, which is influenced by factors like the enduring impacts of the pandemic, social media and technological advancements, NLT acknowledges the struggles that students may encounter.

Additionally, while the number of children in a mental health crisis is at an all-time high, so are external support wait times. To address this, NLT continues to invest significantly in mental health and wellbeing provision to meet students' needs before reaching out to external agencies.

THE AS

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Matthew Allen, year leader at Kenton School and a group of Y10 students taking part in a student voice session relating to Mental Health.

The Trust has partnered with two counselling agencies, Place2Be and Kalmer Counselling, to provide support to students who require it. Both agencies offer 1:1 referral-based support, as well as a drop-in service.

Kalmer Counselling's two counsellors, based in school daily, are available for referrals from year leaders and school staff, while drop-in counsellors offer immediate support for students who are feeling dysregulated, anxious or struggling with the demands of the school day. Kalmer Counselling works with approximately 20 students weekly through referrals and around another 20 through the drop-in service.

Place2Be allocates several 1:1 sessions to referred students and offers 'Place2Talk' support, which enables students to self-refer.

Anne-Marie Bennett, mental health practitioner at Place2Be, speaks highly of the scheme. She said: "I thoroughly enjoy my job at Kenton and feel very honoured to be part of the students' improvement journey through exploring their own mental health needs."

All students across the Trust can receive support, including those in the Sixth Form. Currently, most counselling referrals relate to anxiety, self-harm, trauma, attachment, depression and bereavement.

NLT's support also extends to its work with Action for Children via its community project, 'Youth Action Kenton', and Children North East (CNE), who run Ways2Wellbeing sessions in school throughout the academic year.

Ways2Wellbeing is a session for parents and carers to come into school to learn about the teenage brain, anxiety, school avoidance, friendship issues and more.

Matthew continues: "The Trust is always open to developing further partnerships with mental health and wellbeing agencies. Encouraging feedback is a priority of the Trust. We value student voice and a big part of putting students first sees us allowing them to shape what we do and offer to our cohort."

A recent student voice activity involved those accessing Kalmer Counselling, with 100% of sampled students 'strongly agreeing' or 'agreeing' that they felt listened to and supported by their counsellor. Students were able to leave additional comments, some of which included 'I love knowing that I have an upcoming counselling session, it is supporting me through school' and 'counselling has helped me to open up about my feelings and emotions to others'.

Michelle Rasoul, counsellor at Kalmer Counselling, acknowledges that not only does the scheme positively impact students' mental health, but also their academic development, reporting that there have been at least five students who have shown an interest in working in Mental Health Support Services. One

student in Sixth Form has applied to study Social Work at Northumbria University, two have asked about being a counsellor and two would like to be mental health nurses. Place2Be Children's Mental Health Week takes place this

month, with the theme 'My Voice Matters.' All year groups will undertake activities and attend an assembly on the theme.

Matthew Allan concluded: "It is an exciting time within the Trust as we continue to develop our wellbeing provision. We are striving to ensure all our students feel supported while continuing to foster a climate of high expectations."

At a time where conversations around mental health are prevalent, NLT is committed to shaping an educational environment where students not only succeed academically, but also thrive emotionally.

As the Trust continues to develop its wellbeing provision, it remains devoted to ensuring that every student feels supported, laying the groundwork for a brighter and healthier future.

northernleaderstrust.org





Can adults learn new skills? Yes, and here's why you should

As we start to break some of our New Year's resolutions, it can be tempting to fall back into old habits. We sat down with Andy Barton, Product Manager at the awarding organisation NCFE, to discover why we don't need to wait another 12 months to embark on a new learning journey.

Can adults learn new skills?

Absolutely – you're never too old (or young!) to learn a new skill. As recently outlined by The Education Hub, continued learning can help improve how the brain processes information and our memory. It can also bring increased satisfaction and purpose to our lives, giving us a stronger sense of self and what we stand for.

It's not just about our own personal wellbeing though, it also has some great benefits when it comes to professional development. The Education Hub outlines how learning leads to increased resilience in the world of work, giving us more choices about the jobs open to us, and increasing our employability significantly.

What new skills can I learn?

The world's your oyster! There are so many skills you can learn this year. For those looking to learn vital, relevant and transferable skills for both work and life, essential digital skills could be a fantastic option – especially with recent research revealing that 92% of businesses consider basic levels of digital skills as important for employees.

Beyond this, there are so many other options depending on your interests, strengths, and career plans. If you're thinking more longterm and are looking to retrain and move into a completely new sector, perhaps explore the qualifications available in growing sector areas such as health and social care, health and beauty, business admin, engineering, or early years and childcare. There's a range of qualifications at different levels in each of these areas which can help you to gain the skills you need.

If you're not looking to completely retrain but are considering how to upskill and boost your confidence to make yourself more employable, you may wish to enhance your 'essential skills'. These are the skills that help us to navigate and progress through our personal and professional lives – such as resilience, communication, speaking, listening, presenting, and understanding.

Where and how can I learn new skills?

The good news is that there's never been more control, choice or flexibility when it comes to the 'when', 'where', and the 'what' of your study.

For some courses, you may have to wait until the start of the new academic year, but others will allow you to begin your study much sooner than this. The overall length of your learning can also vary, depending on whether you're looking to pick up a single skill via short courses and bitesize learning or looking to develop more depth of knowledge and skills through a longer programme of study.

Further to this, whilst some may prefer to learn in person, entire qualifications with accompanying resources can also be accessed completely online – which, for many individuals, may suit your circumstances better.

Plus, as the cost-of-living crisis continues, the flexibility that online learning offers may also allow you to fit your studies around part-time work and other responsibilities, as well as avoiding the additional cost of traveling to a traditional place of study such as a college. For many qualifications, you can even now sit your assessments in the comfort of your own home!

Is there help available for upskilling?

There is a lot of support available to help you invest in your learning this year, including hundreds of funded adult education qualifications and standalone units.

For example, the Adult Education Budget (AEB) funds the delivery of education and training for learners aged 19+, providing opportunities across regions and communities and helping adult learners to progress into work or sign up for an apprenticeship.

Sector-based work academy programmes (SWAPs) provide another opportunity to help jobseekers to learn new skills whilst gaining experience working in a particular industry – for example in care, construction, or warehouse work.

Finally, Advanced Learner Loans can be applied for to help with the costs of a course delivered at a college or independent training provider in England for individuals aged 19 and over.

If you're thinking of investing in yourself and your knowledge by learning a new skill, find out how you can take the first step by visiting www.ncfe.org.uk/learning-for-work



Artificial Intelligence centaurs versus cyborgs

By Mr Will Scott, Principal at Dame Allan's Schools, Newcastle

As we enter 2024, we continue to live in interesting times. A wildly swinging set of public debates rage on about the impact of artificial intelligence, on everything from driving, to jobs, to the future of humankind. Futurologists may predict the myriad ways in which AI will improve our lives, or wreck them, but the majority - who, perhaps quite sensibly, don't closely follow sensational AI stories - note how useless their smart speaker is.

It seems that the impact of AI will be felt "gradually and then suddenly" to quote Ernest Hemingway, as more of us come into contact with people using it in their work and firms invest in AI-enabled systems. Some even foresee 'the end of work' as intelligent robots replace people across swathes of industry, necessitating a whole new structure for taxation and a 'universal basic income' paid by the state to all.

So, how will this play out? As a teacher, I'm particularly interested in the potential impact of Al in the education of children, the role of the teacher and the future of schools. It's even more important when we consider that the North East has one of the highest rates of Al usage amongst pupils in the UK. Over a third (39 per cent) of pupils in the region are using it 'all the time' to help with schoolwork, which is 10 per cent higher than the UK average."*

However, it is perhaps worth considering the nature and purpose of work for a moment.

Humans need periods of struggle, difficulty, disappointment, success and growth. Cycles of confronting meaningful challenge, experiencing failure and finding ways to prevail, are at the centre of the human experience and are necessary for our wellbeing: we all need purpose. I see this valuable cycle often within pupils from across Dame Allan's Schools, as they rise to new challenges, learning and developing resilience and confidence as they go.

Compare a lion in the wild with a zoo animal. If we didn't have work, where else would we find our challenges and how would we estimate their



value? Would we spend our lives doing extreme sports, writing self-published novels and making Guinness Record attempts?

I don't only believe that work is necessary for meaning in our lives. It is also possible to foresee humans continuing to be necessary for work, despite the development of AI. A recent Harvard Business School study noted that the more multifaced the role, the less it is at risk of complete automation. The authors coined the terms 'cyborg' and 'centaur' to describe those who were able best to benefit from AI in improving their productivity, the former being those who intertwined AI with their human input and the latter being able to divide up their work to hand off the more AI-suited parts while focusing on their areas of expertise.

And this, I think, gives us a clue about the future of schools and learning. Teachers have a multifaceted role, from caring for children to inspiring them, working with them creatively to help them learn and develop. It is a hugely social role and the benefit to children is not, as we know, just a narrowly academic one.

But will our work change? Absolutely, and Al will provide an increasingly large toolkit for us to work more effectively, making the best use of our valuable time. For example, AI can streamline administrative tasks, such as lesson planning and report writing, allowing teachers more time for the human, pastoral aspects of their roles. At Dame Allan's, we are excited to embrace this change and have recently appointed an AI Lead to chart the way ahead.

Over the years to come, teachers will possibly become both 'cyborgs' and 'centaurs', even as we grow the next generation of adaptable and multi-skilled citizens to face the challenges and opportunities of the future.

To find out more about Dame Allan's Schools, from Nursery to Sixth Form, please visit dameallans.co.uk

*www.fenews.co.uk/education/over-a-third-of-northeasternpupils-use-ai-all-the-time-for-schoolwork



Navigating the maze of subject choices

By Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster of Newcastle Royal Grammar School.

Many would argue there is too much choice in the modern world, often making substantial life decisions, even everyday choices, incredibly difficult. Selecting which subjects to study is no exception and increasingly challenging with the evergrowing career opportunities for Generation Z.

At the Royal Grammar School Newcastle, we are fortunate to be able to offer a wide range of subjects and consciously provide various forms of support to help each individual student's decision process.

At GCSE, we consider a thorough grounding in English (both language and literature), Maths, and Science, plus a good knowledge of at least one Modern Language, to be an essential part of the education we offer. These compulsory subjects ensure students continue to develop the core skills they will be expected to have at university and in the world of work.

All additional subjects are academic in their content and suitable to support further study at A-Level or beyond. RGS provides multiple levels of guidance during the arduous task of selecting which to specialise in. Students receive bespoke careers advice and specific department curriculum insight. We also encourage conversations with anyone relevant to the area of study, including speaking to students in the years above, while remembering everybody will have their own unique experience. Meanwhile, various staff members provide pastoral support during this (at times) stressful period and parents are kept abreast with information to help them assist their child's research and reasoning. However, the final decision has to be the child's - some years ago, I recall speaking to a boy who had just failed a History exam and he admitted that he had only taken the subject at the insistence of his parents! Similarly, it is usually best not to choose subjects just because of a particular teacher or because friends may be taking them.

Probably the best advice for your child is to pursue subjects they enjoy. That will make it much easier to put in the effort to do well. Strong exam results are used by universities and employers as helpful predictors for measuring an applicant's potential, so it is important students choose things they are likely to be good at. Most pupils will have more obvious strengths, so pursuing their personal aptitude can be an instinctive indicator. However, there are other factors to bear in mind. Working backwards from a particular career path or



university degree can sometimes be a useful exercise to explore which subjects link to certain industries and skills needed. That said, entirely reasonably, many young people do not know what they want to do with their life and most will change jobs several times in their career. Unless a student has a definitive future mapped out, it can be wise to keep options open and consider the balance between subject choices, whether they contrast or complement each other. Ahead of Sixth Form, students are led through various activities to identify possible future intentions and are invited to a series of talks which may spark new perspectives.

A good thing to keep in mind throughout is not to worry about knowing what exactly lies ahead, rather trying to invest one's energy into keeping an open mindset and being willing to take opportunities as they come along. One final thing to note, if your child realises they have made the wrong choice: it is OK for them to change their mind, as I did when I recognised that Maths A-Level was not for me and switched to English after the first six weeks. I had to work hard to catch up but, in my case, it was definitely the right thing to do.

www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk



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A beacon of social change

DCSF is positively impacting the lives of thousands of young people through partnership work and bursaries, review finds.

A school's unwavering commitment to inclusivity and diversity is exemplified by its 'transformational' bursary programme and collaborative partnerships, according to a new report.

A Social Impact Review, commissioned by Durham Cathedral Schools Foundation (DCSF), highlights the many positive ways that the Foundation has contributed to the lives of thousands of young people, not only in the historic city of Durham but across the wider North East and beyond.

DCSF was established in 2021 when Chorister School and Durham School merged to form a seamless 3-18 education for girls and boys. Bursaries have formed part of its DNA since the first King's Scholarships in 1541 and today, one in seven pupils at DCSF attend on means-tested support. The Foundation has transformed the lives of 420 families through bursaries, breaking down socio-economic barriers and providing a diverse mix of students the opportunity to flourish academically and personally.

Andrew Beales, DCSF Development Director, said bursaries are 'truly transformational'. He added: "Our bursary programmes are diversifying our pupil body, enriching the school community and creating a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape."

DCSF bursaries are linked to scholarships that encompass a wide range of talents and skills, from academic scholars to gifted artists, musicians, athletes and performers. While primarily offered to young people in the North East, the boarding facilities at Durham School allow the Foundation to extend its reach beyond regional boundaries.

Each year, DCSF awards Burkitt Scholarships with support of up to 100% fee remission – to around 12 pupils entering the Sixth Form. The Burkitt award is designed for teenagers with high aspirations but whose abilities to achieve these has been adversely affected.

Beyond financial support, the Social Impact Review highlights the effective academic, sporting and creative partnerships that have been developed and nurtured by DCSF.

The Foundation is proven to foster academic excellence through its collaborative efforts with partner schools in the state system. In the last academic year, 15 partnership projects have taken place in areas including STEM, and foreign modern languages, and more than 250 pupils between the ages of 9 and 17 outside the Foundation accessed workshops led by DCSF staff.

Outside the classroom, the report finds that the Foundation is levelling the playing field in sport by sharing its facilities with the wider community. More than 500 young people attend Learn to Swim sessions in the school swimming pool each week and the Foundation hosts a wide range of community sport throughout the year, including hockey, rugby, cricket and netball.

DCSF also works with outreach partners to foster creativity in music and performing arts. Each week, the Foundation hosts more than 100 local musicians and singers for rehearsals and concerts, while over 40 young people attend drama and performance classes using the school's facilities.

Kieran McLaughlin, Principal at DCSF, said the ripple effects of partnership work and bursary support extend far beyond the school gates. "The Foundation has emerged as a beacon of social change," he said. "By breaking down barriers and fostering a diverse and inclusive environment where every child, regardless of background, has the chance to thrive, the Foundation is helping to build a more vibrant and equitable society."

www.dcsf.org.uk



Jorja's Story

A teenager who felt compelled to become a barrister after witnessing an assault on her mother is one step closer to her dream after an academic scholarship transformed her life.

A collaborative partnership between Sunderland's Castle View Enterprise Academy and Durham Cathedral Schools Foundation (DCSF) saw Jorja Ross, from Castle Town, awarded a Sixth Form place at Durham School through its Burkitt

Scholarship programme. Now in Year 13 and preparing to sit four A Levels, Jorja landed an interview at the University of Cambridge's Faculty of Law and has secured a conditional offer to read Law at Durham University.

She said: "I'm ecstatic; I never believed I'd be in this position and none of this would have been possible without the support and the opportunities I've been given.

"While at Durham School I've developed so many new skills and I've gained the confidence to pursue my dreams."

Her mother, Barbara Marshall, said Jorja's life had been transformed: "The attack, and the impact it had on our family, has driven Jorja to make a difference and grasp opportunities."

Each year, Castle View puts some of its most gifted teenagers forward for the Burkitt Scholarship. Vice Principal, Anita Payne, said: "This partnership allows us to raise the aspirations of our students and open the door to new opportunities. It makes us feel incredibly proud when our students thrive at Durham School and go on to secure places at Oxford, Cambridge or other Russell Group universities."



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To find out more and/ or to set up a discovery call to discuss our CONNECT training email: Rachel.Horton@ mortalfools.org.uk



Dr. Rebecca gives hope every day in a difficult world

A new book which can help with positive thoughts has been issued by County Durham author and inspirational coach Dr. Rebecca Williams Dinsdale. Her much-anticipated fifth book, "Your Lifejoy Year 2 ~ Hopeful Thoughts for Each Day." continues her mission to spread positivity, resilience, and joy through insightful daily readings.

Dr. Rebecca, known for her previous books such as "Lifejoy: Your Manual for Resilient Living" and "Lifejoy Journal: An Adventure to Hope, Harmony, and Happiness" draws from her personal experiences and observations of life's challenges and triumphs.

Dr Rebecca's, latest book reflects her dedication to providing readers with a source of inspiration and strength for navigating life's journey no matter what difficulties may exist or be ahead. Her themes, curated month by month, cover aspects like truth, trust, contentment, care, courage, and wonder, offering a diverse range of insights. They offer a powerhouse of help and a piece of calm in a world of chaos.

"Experiencing any challenge in life can be used to imparts resilience, cultivates inner strength, and foster gratitude for the good aspects of life we possess. Regardless of the specific challenges we face, there are countless individuals enduring greater hardships who would willingly exchange places with us. It's a matter of perspective and how you approach life, and my books are valuable resources that guide you in discovering coping strategies to navigate through challenging days," said Dr Rebecca.

"Your Lifejoy Year 2 ~ Hopeful Thoughts for Each Day" is available from Dr. Rebecca's official website www.drrebecca.org.uk where exclusive treats await buyers.



Sought-after North East artist showcases favourite artworks at The Exchange 1856

The Full Monty makes its way to Newcastle Theatre Royal

Based on the 1997 smash-hit film, still very much of our time, The Full Monty visits Newcastle Theatre Royal Tue 27 Feb – Sat 2 Mar 2024 promising laughter, heart and unforgettable moments.

The loss of Sheffield's traditional steel industry and the subsequent unemployment leaves Gaz and his mates down on their luck and feeling like they have been thrown on the scrap heap, but they are determined to fight back... perhaps by baring a little more than they ever thought they would!

The UK tour of Simon Beaufoy's The Full Monty, directed by Michael Gyngell and choreographed by Ian West, stars Danny Hatchard (EastEnders; Not Going Out) as Gaz and Jake Quickenden (X Factor; Hollyoaks) as Guy, alongside Bill Ward (Coronation Street; Emmerdale) as Gerald, Neil Hurst (All Creatures Great and Small; Casualty) as Dave, Ben Onwukwe (Marcella; Coronation Street) as Horse and Nicholas Prasad (RSC: The Comedy of Errors) as Lomper.

Further cast include Oliver Joseph Brooke, Katy Dean, Laura Matthews, Danny Mellor, Adam

Leading North East artist, Mark Taylor is showcasing some of his most-loved paintings at The Exchange 1856 in North Shields as he takes up the artist-in-residence position.

12 of Mark's stunning artworks are currently on display in the foyer of the newly refurbished Exchange 1856 and in its Thomas Brown room. These include a huge portrait of a weary Austrian sailor, who was clearly happier at sea than on land, and a scene from the white fish market in North Shields in its heyday in the 1800s.

Mark is famous locally for his beautiful oil paintings of the North Tyneside coastline, as well as moving portraits of real fishermen, and he boasts many celebrity fans including Sam Fender, Sting, Duran Duran's Andy Taylor and acclaimed screenwriter Ian la Frenais.

Aside from being an artist, Mark is a skilled Lifeboat Coxswain for Tynemouth RNLI and his deep love of the sea clearly shines out in all his work.

Mark said: "My father was a famous North East artist and I followed in his footsteps when I became a full-time professional artist in 2011. I paint what I want to, which tends to be scenes of where I live and the sea, as I love both – people tell me my passion for my subjects jumps out and it's what makes my work special."

Anyone wanting to see Mark Taylor's paintings at The Exchange 1856, can visit the venue during opening hours – 10am until late.



Porter Smith, Suzanne Procter, Alice Schofield, and Leyon Stolz-Hunter. The young actors playing the role of Nathan on tour will be Cass Dempsey, Theo Hills, Rowan Poulton and Jack Wisniewski.

This fast and funny play, still very much of our time, showcases friendship, resilience and the power of self-discovery. A poignant tale with hilarious mishaps, and a soundtrack including 80s and 90s classics, The Full Monty was a firm audience favourite when it last visited Newcastle in 2019 and promises once again to be a rollercoaster ride of ups and downs, laughs and heartbreak!

The Full Monty plays Newcastle Theatre Royal Tue 27 Feb – Sat 2 Mar 2024. Tickets can be purchased at www.theatreroyal.co.uk or from the Theatre Royal Box Office on 0191 232 7010.



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Culture Club

Ben Broadhead

E. Turnbull & Son.

Ben Broadhead is a Director and a seventh-generation family member of North Shields funeral directors E Turnbull & Son. Founded in 1790 by John Turnbull as a cabinet making business on North Shields Fish Quay, E Turnbull & Son Funeral Directors has since evolved into a well-respected funeral care provider.

Here Ben tells us about his taste in music, art and culture.

Who is your favourite author and why?

Dr. Bob Rotella. He is a sports psychologist who has authored numerous books on psychology, with a specific focus on the psychology of golf. I find it fascinating to delve into the mental aspects of the game and many of the insights can be applied to everyday life as well.

"Get good at staying in the present moment and give every shot the same equal level of importance. You stay in the present moment."

What would be your three Desert Island Discs?

Dire Straits – *Money for Nothing* Dr Dre - *Still Dre* Armand Van Helden - *You Don't Know Me*

Who is your favourite film star and why?

Tom Hanks, one of the best!

What are your top three films? Tell me about them...

Captain Phillips – incredibly compelling and plenty of edge of the seat tension all the way through.

Wolf of Wall Street - a powerhouse performance



from Dicaprio and Scorsese's brilliantly energetic direction make it a fantastic watch. Tremendously entertaining if you're in the right mood.

The Hurt Locker - powerful, alluring, and eyeopening. A real deep dive into the personal cost of being good at a really tough job.

Which poem left a lasting impression on you?

In my line of work, I hear many beautiful poems. One of my favourites is "A Long Cup of Tea" by Michael Ashby. A poem with a typically British outlook, he is very matter of fact about death, just so long as the kettle's on where he is heading. He manages to humanise death, most memorably through the opening words "Death is too negative for me so I'll be popping off for a long cup of tea."

What box sets have you enjoyed?

Happy Valley, Kin and Succession.

Who is your favourite artist or performer?

Kevin Bridges – hilarious and many of his stories

I can relate to with being the same age. His ability to work the hecklers and get the best out of the situation is genius.

What is your favourite venue?

It has to be St James' Park. Some fantastic moments of late but the atmosphere when we played against PSG was electric and something I will never forget. A special evening to be a part of with my Dad and Brother.

Which musical instrument do you particularly enjoy?

Saxophone especially when accompanied by some classic house music.

From the world of Arts and Culture who would be your ideal dinner party guests?

Amanda Staveley, Louis Theroux, Peter Kay and Leonardo DiCaprio.

Contact E Turnbull & Son on 0191 257 1201 or email info@eturnbull.co.uk













The Artist's Year

By Mary Ann Rogers

After a marathon pre-christmas run, only ending with the final gallery visitor at 6.30pm on Christmas eve, the 25th of December is the first proper day off for months!

Since covid, the new tradition is to meet friends for a bracing river swim, followed by coffee and croissants by the fire and gift opening. With family doing their own thing this year, Fifey and I went for a walk with a picnic on a new local route. The weather was foul, and with nowhere dry to sit, we ended up having the picnic back at home in front of the fire!

Seven years ago, a riding accident resulted in a badly smashed ankle, a metal plate, a lengthy recovery, and a more cautious attitude to dangerous sports. The memories and pain have faded, so this was the year to see if I could squeeze my feet back into ski boots and head to the slopes! The offer of a place to stay in the French Alps was too good to turn down, and now I'm hooked again and itching to get back after a fabulous week with great snow.

Some Baltic weather lately has made river swims startlingly chilly and short! Ice formed at the edges, then grew during each cold night to almost create a sheet right across. Once the thaw came, watching the ice melt, break away then clatter down river over the rapids was thrilling.

Returning to the drawing board to complete the handful of paintings which were abandoned at the end of November is a strange thing. Two paintings of swaledale sheep grazing on the wintry hillside are near completion, meanwhile, snowdrops begin to appear in sheltered spots, and I watched a stoat in ermine (white winter fur) scampering around, hunting, just outside the studio yesterday- an amazing sight.

Mary Ann Rogers Gallery • West Woodburn, Hexham NE48 2SE. Open: Tues, Thurs, Fri 10-4 also Sun 2-5 www.marogers.com • 07967550772

LEISURE NEWS



Bubble tea café opens new Sunderland venue

The owners of a popular bubble tea café have opened a new, larger store in Sunderland city centre, three years after launching the business.

Lucky Cat Boba opened the doors of its new café at 241 High Street West recently occupying the former Barista site.

Set up by engineer turned entrepreneur Sam Johnston during the Covid-19 pandemic, the café serves up an array of vegetarian-friendly bubble teas, ice creams and light bites and has built a loyal following for its products over the past three years.

Sam said: "It was my daughter [Millie] who got me into bubble tea as she used to travel to Newcastle for it when she was young.

"She kept saying that we really needed one in town, so we began to look into it. We did a bit of research and thought, we could do this.

"I had worked at Nissan for 32 years and loved my job, but having travelled to Japan for work on numerous occasions, I had seen how popular it was, so we thought, why not?"

Despite setting up during the pandemic and dealing with the challenges of multiple lockdowns, Lucky Cat Boba's ability to fill a gap in the market helped carve out a real niche for the business. So much so, that a second venue in Middlesbrough town centre shortly followed, as well as the

launch of new products and Lucky Cat Boba-branded merchandise.

"It was supposed to be a side business at first, but once it started to take off, it became a real family affair and we all got into it," she added.

"Fast-forward three years and we now employ over 15 people across our two sites and the new, larger café in Sunderland



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The Eagle Bar Newcastle raises over £2,000 for Blue Sky Trust during their HIV awareness & fundraising campaign

Newcastle-based LGBTQIA+ venue, The Eagle Bar Newcastle, raised £2,023.22 for local charity, Blue Sky Trust, who support and connect people in the North East and Cumbria at every step of their HIV journey. The Eagle Bar Newcastle hosted a Fundraising Event at their venue on the 1st of December 2023 in support of World AIDS Dav.

The event featured a number of nationally recognised drag performers and DJ's, as well as the opportunity for the local community to come together in the spirit of unity and support a local charity doing such vital work. The World AIDS Day Fundraising Event was followed by a digital HIV Awareness Campaign to open an honest and transparent conversation surrounding the prevention of HIV, and the local support and resources available locally to support men and women who experience a positive diagnosis.



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LEISURE NEWS



Alnwick's Poison Garden Gin could be just the Tonic for Valentine's Day

The Alnwick Garden's deadliest garden in the world housing over 100 toxic and mind-altering botanicals, has made its way into the world of spirits and could be the perfect tonic for an alternative gift for a Valentine.

The Poison Garden has launched its firstever Poison Garden Gin, distilled using fruits from its medieval Medlar tree.

The fruits, harvested in December, historically made them one of the very few sources of sugar that would have been available in medieval winters, and they only become edible when they are 'rotten', or overly ripe.

A taste of the caribbean arrives at STACK Seaburn

Lev's has been operating in Newcastle for the past four years and has become a huge hit, thanks to its authentic take on the food of Jamaica.

And now the team behind the takeaway has spread its wings – with the opening of a new outlet at STACK Seaburn.

Theo Bondswell, director of the company, said: "After four years of running the business in Newcastle, we're excited to expand into the wider North East and bring the real flavour of the Caribbean to Sunderland."

The menu at STACK Seaburn differs slightly from the Newcastle offering, although it still features many of the Caribbean's most celebrated dishes such as jerk chicken and curried goat.

"We are also going to introduce a street food element with dishes like loaded fries, jerk When the Medlar fruit is first picked, they are greenish-brown and resemble small brown rosehip when ripe, or alien-looking persimmons, and are rich in natural antioxidants.

Strategic head of catering, retail and hospitality, Victoria Watson, said: "The Medlar fruit has a complex flavour, combining a tart apple-like freshness with an undertone of butter and hints of cinnamon and vanilla. This unique mix of flavours makes it an ideal ingredient for craft spirits such as gin, breathing fresh life into an ancient fruit that has been fading into obscurity.

"The Alnwick Garden is a testament to plant history and its continuous mission of inspiring and educating about plants' power to afflict, heal, and nurture. It is exciting to not only demonstrate how something as toxic as a 'poisonous plant' has had an impactful role to play in shaping human history – be it in warfare, medicine, but even with the humble gin and tonic."

The Poison Garden sits within the 12 acres of The Alnwick Garden and houses many plants known for their potent poisonous properties.

Produced by the award-winning distillery, Durham Distillers, the unique gin is a sensory journey of unusual flavour, and is available to buy from The Alnwick Garden gift shop, and available to order when dining at The Treehouse restaurant.



fries and mac cheese and fries," said Theo. Gemma Dishman, Project Development Director for STACK, added that Lev's is a welcome addition to STACK Seaburn.

"This is the first time we've offered Caribbean food and it will be a great opportunity for everyone to try something different and delicious," said Gemma.

"We are very pleased to be the first choice for Lev's as it expands its brand."



Steakhouse chain to serve up first Sunderland venue

The restaurant chain behind the award-winning RIO Brazilian Steakhouse is to open its first Sunderland venue this year.

Opening in early 2024, the steakhouse will take over the former Halo bar and restaurant on Low Row in Sunderland city centre.

Work is now underway on the £450,000 fit-out of the restaurant, which is expected to create over 45 new jobs once it opens its doors in May.

The business first outlined its plans to open a restaurant in the city last year and Rodrigo Grassi, co-founder and co-director, said it is excited to finally be opening up in the city.

He said: "We are looking forward to taking the new site in Sunderland, having been searching for a suitable place for a while.

"We will soon be starting the recruitment process we look to recruit vital team members.

"We work hard to train and look after our staff, maintaining the high standards of customer service the RIO brand is renowned for.

"We have found the RIO opening model to work well with our team, they are well oiled at new openings which maintains high levels of customer satisfaction and service.

"The proof is in the awards and positions on TripAdvisor - almost every venue we have launched has secured the top spot in just four weeks - it's an amazing achievement by all the team."



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The Selecter sets the tone for Coast Fest 2024

Coast Fest 2024 Announces The Selecter as the headliner for the Saturday of the North Shields weekend long festival (June 21 to 23rd)

Led by Pauline Black,OBE, The Selecter is set to bring an electrifying performance to the festival stage, captivating audiences with their unique blend of ska, punk, and new wave influences.

As a pioneering force in the music industry, The Selecter has left an indelible mark with their innovative approach and timeless hits. The Selecter were a leading player of 2 Tone music, the late 1970s and early 1980s genre that mixed ska with the energy of punk rock. The band's debut album, Too Much Pressure mixed ska, reggae and punk rock and their singles On My Radio, Missing Words, and Too Much Pressure achieved good chart success.

The Selecter adds to the weekend line up which sees Badly Drawn Boy headlining on the Sunday alongside local talent Hector Gannet.

Building on last year's debut festival, organiser John Milton Peacock said: "The Selecter are an amazing band, vibrant and full of energy and their music will appeal to everyone. The 2 Tone bands have a well-deserved reputation for entertaining and Pauline Black is no exception. It's a huge addition to our line-up which is getting better all the time.

In 2024, Coast Fest will embrace a fully family-friendly approach, welcoming parents and guardians to bring children on-site to enjoy music, activities, and special guest performers. The festival will also reintroduce its wheelchair viewing platform, enabling individuals with mobility issues to savour the festival atmosphere and all it has to offer.

Tickets are available from www.skiddle.com/festivals/coast-fest



Lindisfarne story band run for Blyth Live Festival

Blyth Town Council is thrilled to announce that The Lindisfarne Story Band, featuring the original Lindisfarne drummer Ray Laidlaw and vocalist, guitarist Billy Mitchell, will be headlining the much-anticipated Blyth Live Music Festival this year.

Known for their soulful performances and timeless hits, Lindisfarne were originally formed in 1968 and have since become part of North East folklore with Britain's biggest selling album of 1972 – Fog on the Tyne and the legendary Newcastle City Hall Christmas Concerts.

The Lindisfarne Story Band promises to bring these captivating musical experiences to the heart of Blyth. With Billy Mitchell leading the ensemble, attendees can expect an unforgettable journey through the iconic sounds that defined an era. Hits such as Run for Home, Lady Eleanor, Meet me on the Corner and the classic Fog on the Tyne will fill the Mermaid car park area bringing back memories to those who were part of the bands journey in the 1970's and 80's.

Mayor Warren Taylor expressed his excitement about the festival and the choice of headliners, stating, "We are absolutely delighted to have The Lindisfarne Story Band headlining the Blyth Live Music Festival this year. Their music has a special place in the hearts of many, and having Ray Laidlaw, the original Lindisfarne drummer and vocalist guitarist Billy Mitchell on stage adds an extra layer of authenticity to the experience."

He continued, "The Blyth Live Music Festival has always been a celebration of our community's love for music and the arts. This year, with The Lindisfarne Story Band at the forefront, we anticipate an event that will resonate with both long-time fans and new audiences alike. It's a fantastic opportunity for our town to come together, enjoy great music, sing their hearts out and create lasting memories. We're all proud to be from the North East and I'm sure everyone will join in with "Fog on the Tyne". It'll be an excellent event."

The Blyth Live Music Festival is set to take place on Saturday 15th June at Blyth's Mermaid Car Park. There will also be community and craft stalls, food concessions, street theatre and a fun fair. More acts will be announced soon.
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Step back in time: The Old Coach House in Ripon offers charming elegance and historic ambience By Michael Grahamslaw

Sector Sector

One of the more interesting things to drop into my mailbox recently was the opportunity to visit the Old Coach House.

Situated a short drive away from the picturesque city of Ripon this is one of North Yorkshire's best kept secrets.

It is run by my old friend and veteran hotelier Neil Slade and is an absolute accommodation jewel.

The 18th century coach house stands in the grounds of North Stainley Hall, overlooking the lake. Immaculately presented this luxury B&B guest house offers a sophisticated and stylish ambience and all the modern comforts and facilities discerning guests expect today.

The Coach House boasts eight ensuite bedrooms with an innovative mix of colour, pattern and texture and is furnished to a superb standard.

Every bedroom overlooks the beautiful courtyard gardens whilst some enjoy the glimpses of the neighbouring North Stainley Hall.



Features include king size beds, fluffy towels, robes and slippers, 42 inch smart TV's with freeview channels as well as complimentary wi-fi, beverage tray and fruit bowl.

A huge variety of locally sourced breakfast options are available to suit all dietary requirements and tastes and provide the perfect way to kickstart your day.

Sister venue The Staveley Arms is located across the road and is a winner also. This is a family and dog friendly pub, open seven days a week serving locally brewed ales and traditional pub food. During our stay we enjoyed the most sumptuous Sunday Lunch here and whiled away the afternoon.

The Old Coach House has recently been recognised for its excellence by scooping the 'Best B&B in Yorkshire' title at the recent Yorkshire Post Tourism Awards for 2023.

Judges said "The Old Coach House has exceptional customer reviews demonstrating a consistent commitment to delivering outstanding service to its guests repeatedly."

We couldn't agree more. Highly recommended.

www.oldcoachhouse.info

Martin der

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Why Sanderson Arcade will be the place to be in 2024!

We are now well into 2024 and exciting changes are afoot at Sanderson Arcade.

There are several exciting events and developments taking place at Morpeth's popular shopping destination Sanderson Arcade making it the hottest spot in the Northeast this year!

High footfall at our centre

The centre witnessed a remarkable year during 2023 - surpassing pre-pandemic footfall rates and welcoming a host of new businesses to the centre.

Throughout 2023, the shopping centre attracted an impressive number of visitors, marking an increase of 3.5% compared to 2022 - despite tough trading condition on the high street and economic uncertainty.

The centre's unique combination of national and boutique independent retailers, alongside a diverse range of beauty and health services, has established Sanderson Arcade as both a key local service provider and a popular regional visitor destination.

Managing Director James Shepherd said, "The centre's success over the last 12 months is definitely attributable to our varied retail mix and the enhancement of our food and beverage offer. Notable openings like Martino Lounge alongside our independent gastro pub Barluga have transformed Sanderson Arcade into a hub for shopping and socialising."

2024 is set to be even more exciting for the market town shopping arcade, with some exciting new brands joining the shopping line up.

Welcoming new businesses

We love it when new businesses join the Sanderson Arcade family.

With growing interest from national retailers, plans are underway in 2024 to expand the Arcade's retail offer – bringing new brands to the centre with announcements being made soon.

One major brand that will join us in 2024 is The White Company – which sells a range of luxury home, clothing and fragrance goods, plus beauty and spa items and gifts for babies and children.

Popular products that have earned top reviews that customers can look forward to indulging in include candles that can add a fresh fragrance and ambience to your home, chandelier ceiling lights to add a touch of class to your interior, and a range of other top items such as throws, rugs and cushions, plus clothing such as jumpers, coats and jackets.

The store will be opening in Sanderson Arcade early this Summer.

2024 marks our anniversary

We are celebrating our 15th year anniversary in November 2024 – so please keep an eye out on our website for how we are planning to celebrate this big occasion.

Plenty of other big plans for this year

We want to put a real focus on working with the community, our valued customers, visitors, and stakeholders this year.

We are looking at reintroducing our Heart of Morpeth Business awards, which will provide



us with a fantastic opportunity to praise and celebrate local business owners.

Open seven days a week

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Ullswater reopening makes Lakes a perfect 10 for The Inn Collection Group



Nestled in the shadow of Helvellyn on the southern shore of Ullswater, a historic Lakeland property is about to emerge from a year-long slumber and begin welcoming and delighting both visitors and locals once more.

For the past 12 months, The Glenridding Hotel has been undergoing a multi-million-pound rejuvenation by owners The Inn Collection Group and is about to throw open its doors with an exciting new look.

With parts of the property over 150 years old, the venerable property is well-established in the fabric of this tranquil community.

It was the base for British record breaker Donald Campbell during his successful attempt to raise the World Water Speed record in July 1955 but is now more accustomed to a slower pace of life.

Acquired by The Inn Collection Group in 2022, the redevelopment has been carefully designed to sensitively upgrade and improve the hotel and provide the historic building with a sustainable long-term future.

As part of the refurbishment, a new canopied entrance has been constructed, alongside comprehensive refurbishment to the external facades, including sympathetic window and roof replacements and new signage to improve the overall appearance and experience for guests.

Alterations have been made to the existing bedrooms and the removal of a redundant spa

area has created additional bed spaces, taking the total number of rooms from the current 36 to 57.

Upon reopening, The Ullswater Inn will take the total number of properties owned and operated by The Inn Collection Group in the Lake District to 10, all with their unique character and charm, but retaining the classic pub with rooms free.

Furthest north, The Pheasant Inn at Bassenthwaite is a 17th-century coaching inn that provides the perfect base for exploring the northern Lake District, as well as offering fantastic food and drink, and quirky accommodation.

It features a grade II listed bar as one of its main points of character, which was carefully protected as part of the renovations that brought a new lease of life to the site while maintaining its heritage.

Heading further into the national park, The Swan on the outskirts of Grasmere returned to trading in April 2023 after a 14-month programme of works that transformed the old Macdonald hotel back into a more traditional inn.

Mentioned by William Wordsworth in his poem "The Waggoner" and built in the 1650s, The Swan is one of the Lake District's oldest inns and is tucked beneath the dramatic fells surrounding timeless Grasmere village.

Down the road and in the heart of the village is The Wordsworth Hotel is a former shooting lodge set in its own gardens, offering the ideal retreat to soak up the atmosphere that inspired two centuries' worth of romantic poets and painters.

Welcoming guests to rest and be thankful for more than 150 years, the Wordsworth's special atmosphere and ambience combine with 38 bedrooms and suites to create a relaxing stay.

Continuing south, the town of Ambleside is home to four of the groups inns, each with their own individual characters.

Sitting at the top of the town, The Ambleside Inn

has a 300-year history of welcoming visitors, with 30 rooms available whilst just down the winding main street, The Temperance Inn is just the place to settle back with a glass to hand.

For those for whom there's something special about waterside settings, The Wateredge Inn and The Waterhead Inn hit the spot, perched as they are right on the shore of England's most famous lake.

With outdoor spaces making the most of the view and Waterhead Pier handily opposite the two inns are well-placed, whether stopping off for a relaxing drink, enjoying a spot of good, home-cooked food with superb views to match or winding down with a pub stay away.

Topping many a list of the best-loved destinations in the Lake District, Bowness-on-Windermere is home to The Angel Inn and Oakbank House, an easy amble from the shores of Bowness Bay.

This classic inn has sweeping views above the jolly bustle of the village below with a large pub garden to take a seat and enjoy the sights over the lake and Claife Heights to the Langdale Pikes beyond.

The final offering by the group is the first that it purchased, The Coniston Inn which was acquired back in 2018.

Located on the shores of Coniston Water with sensational lake and fell views, this classic Lakeland slate building underwent a full restoration following its acquisition, which included the addition of an extension that significantly boosted its bedroom capacity.

With this wealth of stunning locations, The Inn Collection Group makes for the perfect base from which to eat, drink, sleep and explore in the Lake District.

inncollectiongroup.com



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LEISURE INSIGHT

Rooms with a view By Michael Grahamslaw



Few hotels occupy as enviable a location as the Tynemouth Castle Inn.

The 72-bedroom hotel sits on a stunning sweep of dramatic Northern coastline between the burgeoning town centres of Tynemouth and Whitley Bay.

Despite its prime seafront spot, the hotel had long since fallen into a state of disrepair with my own fond memories of friends' weddings, concerts and amateur boxing nights fading in the rearview mirror.

Well, never has the term 'sleeping giant' been more appropriate!

Following a multi-million pound transformation by the Inn Collection Group, this 1930s icon is now enjoying a new lease of life.

The hotel has been comprehensively transformed and opened at a glitzy launch event in November.

Resplendent with wood-panelled pub, sun terrace and sumptuous guest rooms (57 of which offer a sea view), the hotel offers guests the perfect place to eat, drink and sleep, capturing the romance of a seaside escape with decidedly modern aplomb.

With some highly-prized pre-Christmas holiday, my wife Lisa and I booked in for all this new beachside bolthole had to offer.

Upon arrival, first impressions were good. The venue is totally unrecognisable from what went before and after a warm welcome, we checked into our serene seafront room complete with its own balcony which would be perfect in summer.

In sadly much colder temperatures, we repaired to the cosy confines of the bar instead which doubles as a dining rooms.

Smartly refurbished and warmly lit, the pub

has a cosy, inviting feel with patrons basking in the afterglow of their coastal pursuits. Its menu champions home-cooked pub fayre with some culinary touches and regional specialities.

Food is served daily from 7.30am-9pm and also offers a stunning cooked breakfast to guests as we would later discover.

Also onsite there is also a fish and chip outlet 'Oswins' and ice cream parlour 'Cones' which are sure to prove hugely popular attractions, particularly in the summer months.

Back in the pub, there is an extensive menu with literally something for everyone's taste and budget – all handmade and freshly cooked to order.

We dined early evening and there was already a lovely mix of residents and local clientele. It would appear the Tynemouth Castle Inn is already winning over coastal hearts and minds. It was easy to see why.

We dined regally on Korean fried chicken wings and a winter-warming Soup of the Day to start followed up by traditional fish and chips and scampi and chips. Both were warm, nourishing treats, stylishly presented and singing with flavour.

We even found room to share warm triple chocolate brownie. It was nearly Christmas after all.

Whether you're plotting a seaside escape a la yesteryear or seeking a business stay with a different, the Tynemouth Castle Inn delivers in all areas and it's great to have this top quality hotel back in business.

The venue also lends itself naturally to private dining and corporate entertaining.

A sage choice for all seasons.

For more information, visit www.inncollectiongroup.com/tynemouthcastle-inn.













Knipe takes the reins of Blackrose Pubs Brand

The North East based pub-management brand has been purchased by former MD, Daren Knipe.

In a strategic move to preserve the successful Blackrose brand, former Blackrose Management Ltd Managing Director, Daren Knipe, has successfully acquired the company name and goodwill following its recent insolvency by its former owners.

This acquisition marks a significant turning point for Blackrose, allowing it to trade independently and charting a new course beyond its former structure.

The decision to acquire the Blackrose name and goodwill is a testament to Daren's commitment to the brand's legacy and his vision for its growing future. Knipe, with his extensive industry experience will continue to bring a wealth of knowledge and a fresh perspective that is poised to reinvigorate the Blackrose name and position it for sustained success.

"I am thrilled to announce the acquisition of the Blackrose name and the opportunity to lead the previously successful brand into a new era," said Daren.

"Under the new structure, Blackrose will operate as an independent entity, having already successfully secured the continuation of previous management contracts, we are now also thrilled to be able to take on new clients within the private investment sector and hospitality industry.



"This move ensures that we can adopt a more agile approach whilst placing greater emphasis on our clients and their investments. We will also continue to develop our pledge towards complete transparency and honest relationships with our new and existing partners alike."

The acquisition also comes with a commitment to invest in new and exciting roles and support for his new workforce. Daren has emphasised the importance of the team, stating, "Our amazing people are the backbone of Blackrose, and we are committed to developing an already positive and collaborative work environment as we move forward in our new venture."

Customers and stakeholders can expect a seamless transition into the new structure, with

the business launching its new web pages to invite inquiries from prospective clients in the coming days via blackrosepubs.com/solutions.

The change in ownership is anticipated to bring about exciting developments in product innovation, customer engagement, and overall business operations.

Blackrose will maintain a focus on delivering high-quality services that had garnered a loyal customer base. The company will also be exploring valuable avenues for growth and expansion, guided by a strategic vision that aligns with the evolving needs of the industry marketplace.

www.blackrosepubs.com

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A hotel for all seasons

Stunning parkland, a picturesque lake, mouthwatering food and country house charm – just some of the many reasons why Hardwick Hall Hotel remains one of the North East's best loved destinations.

> There's an old saying that you can't be all things to all people, but in the case of Hardwick Hall Hotel, it proves that you absolutely can.

> The elegant country house hotel, near Sedgefield, is surrounded not only by acres of parkland but also happens to have a lake on the doorstep.

Not surprisingly it's the perfect setting for celebrations, weddings and events but it's equally as popular as a business destination.

A suite of rooms means it is a popular choice for conferences where it can accommodate from a handful to hundreds of attendees – and that's without taking into account its seasonal marquees which hosts up to 1500 guests at some of the region's most prestigious charity events.

That includes the Lobster Charity Ball – this year taking place on 17 May – and the return of the annual Oyster Festival on 27 September.



And of course with great road and rail links and plenty of car parking, it makes the hotel a very attractive option for anyone wanting to organise an event with the wow factor without having to negotiate busy city centres.

Of course it's not all about large scale events – although this is a good time to mention the popular Hardwick Festival which takes place each August and this year celebrates a decade of bringing the biggest names in music to the region.

Hardwick is also the perfect place for anyone just wanting a night away from it all, or somewhere to use as a base to explore what County Durham has to offer.

The start of the year blues is something that so many people suffer from, so a quick break is the perfect antidote to chase away the post festive season miseries.

One of the current best offers at the hotel is the Sparkling Sunday Lunch and Stay, where your stay begins at Sunday lunchtime with a delicious traditional three course meal, followed by an overnight stay in a deluxe or premier room.



To make it even more of an occasion the hotel will give you a bottle of Prosecco on arrival – plus a hearty full English before you check out the following day.

Food is very much part of the Hardwick Hall experience -whether it's a vintage afternoon tea served in the comfort of the lounge or a gourmet getaway which includes an overnight stay, Prosecco and £50 per couple to spend in the acclaimed Rib Room restaurant.

Like its sister hotel, Ramside Hall, the emphasis at Hardwick is being able to have a solution to any inquiry regardless if its business, pleasure or leisure.

And it's only going to get better. Plans are underway for an

additional wing of bedrooms and a spa, which will help enhance Hardwick's reputation still further as a destination in its own right.

If that's not cause to celebrate then this definitely is – a night for up to six people in the hotel's Celebration three bedroomed Celebration Suite complete with private terrace and hot tub, two bottles of Prosecco on arrival, platters of street food and breakfast the next day for everyone.

Prices start from an incredible £550 a night – the perfect way to experience everything this amazing property has to offer.

For further information visit www.hardwickhallhotel.co.uk





The Italian Job

By Michael Grahamslaw

After a hugely enjoyable "boys lunch" during Christmas 2022, I had vowed to return one day to the lovely Rosa 12 in the heart of Low Fell.

Despite recently battling a virulent strain of man flu I had recovered sufficiently for my Lisa and I to finally make the short trip from Northern Insight HQ and we certainly weren't disappointed.

This is one of the region's longest established Italian restaurants which aims to bring back the buzz of the old Italia whilst providing something new and exciting to capture the imagination of the good folk of Low Fell and beyond.

Greeted by the warmest of welcomes from restaurant manager Alex we were shown to a lovely spacious table upstairs where we found a lively throng of diners whiling away the last hours of the weekend. The décor is a neat fusion of the old and the new as they've created a lovely open plan dining area complete with leather bound chairs and mocha horizontal shutters. Splashes of block red and white emulsion combine with spot lighting to create a modern interior whilst the monochrome wall imagery and waxed Chianti bottles provide a quaint throwback to Little Italy.

If the surroundings were impressive then the Sunday menu was no less so. Over a lovely chilled glass of Pinot Grigio we nibbled on some warmed bread and green olives and planned the afternoon ahead.

Lisa kicked off with the classic prawn cocktail, served in a martini glass brimming with plump prawns, fresh lettuce, tomato and cucumber in a gloopy marie rose sauce.

Working on the old adage of "you have to feed a cold" I selected that old comforter potato skins with garlic mayonnaise. A lovely tasty and indulgent treat.

Following on Lisa chose the delightful Sunday lunch with the star of the show the perfectly roasted chicken, a golden masterpiece of crispy skin and succulent meat.

She declared the roast potatoes a revelation – crispy on the outside and fluffy on the inside, they were a heavenly pairing with the flavourful chicken whilst the seasonal vegetables, a colourful medley of carrots, peas, and green

beans, added a freshness that balanced the richness of the main dish.

Meanwhile this carbohydrate junkie tucked into Pizza tandoori packed with jalapenos, peppers and red onions. An interesting twist to the usual classic Italian fayre which ticked all of the boxes.

Totally replete it would be coffees over desserts.

Despite looking rather diminutive from the outside, Rosa 12 is actually anything but and boasts three levels of floor space, each possessing their own unique charms. Fortunately, after a most agreeable meal we got the chance to have a quick explore and discovered that the ground floor is actually a popular spot for coffee and cake whilst the basement is a fully renovated cocktail bar tailormade for live music and private functions.

Defined by low ceilings and lower lighting the "Lugano Cellar Bar" offers a trendy, rustic ambience. With all this to offer then Rosa 12 struck me as a surprisingly multi-faceted venue with enormous character.

Through the week there are also funky happy hour offers, steak night deals and a sumptuous à la carte menu.

Rosa 12 is an absolute winner. I'd meet you anytime you want, at this Italian restaurant.

For more information visit rosa12.com





The man they call G!

In the dimly lit entertainment hall of the Marella Cruise, a mysterious figure took the stage, captivating the audience with his quick wit and uncanny impressions. The man in question, known only as "G," proved to be much more than the initial enigma suggested.

With a resemblance to Russell Brand but without the infamous notoriety, G presented himself as an hilarious unique comedy vocalist and impressionist, promising ideal entertainment for the latenight revellers on the ship.

As Jackie Marston discovered during the cruise, G lived up to the hype and more.

At first glance, G appeared to be comedy gold, effortlessly delivering one-liners and a sarcastic sense of humour that had the audience eating out of his hands. The late-night show, leaving nothing to the imagination, showcased

G's fearless and unrestrained comedic style.

It was evident that he had honed his craft through years of experience.

A delve into G's past revealed an impressive journey that began in 1997 with a backstage role for John Spillers' panto Cinderella. From there, he navigated through various roles, from Butlins Redcoat to lead vocalist for the Hi NRG Showteam. G's career took a turn as a member of the comedy impressionist trio, The Brother Lees, before he embarked on his solo journey in 2006.

G's career highlights speak volumes about his versatility and talent. From playing all roles in professional pantomimes to headlining at the iconic London Palladium, he has left an indelible mark on the entertainment industry.

His experience includes being the host of a rock festival, lead singer of an original rock band, and even receiving four "yeses" on Britain's Got Talent.

Supporting acts for renowned figures like Mike Reid, Little & Large, and Slade, G has consistently proven his mettle in the world of entertainment. Notably, he spent two years as the headline act at Cromer Pier summer show and headlined the Clacton West Cliff Theatre Summer show.

For those lucky enough to witness G's performance, it's clear that behind the mysterious name lies a seasoned entertainer, a master of his craft, and a name that deserves to be remembered in the records of comedy and entertainment history.

If you want to follow The Man The Call G, then look him up on Facebook and if he's ever anywhere you are and you want entertaining, he's your guy!



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A sparkling stay at Hotel du Vin

By Michael Grahamslaw

After an incredibly busy year it was great to kick off a lengthy Christmas break with a visit to the Hotel Du Vin in Newcastle.

This has been a firm favourite in recent years after enjoying our 30th anniversary meal there in 2022 and leaving so impressed, we booked in for the full overnight stay experience.

This 'hat trick' of visits certainly didn't disappoint.

The hotel lies atop the Ouseburn, an impressively refurbished Edwardian building which was originally home to the Tyne Tees Steam Ship company, combining the boutique feel of a smaller hotel with the amenities of one much larger.

From the exterior, the hotel boasts breath-taking, panoramic views of Newcastle's Quayside while inside is a neat fusion of its maritime heritage and wine-themed bric-a-brac.

Hotel du Vin translates literally as "Hotel of Wine" (or so my French teacher daughter tells me) which provides a classy theme to a hotel chain with real character.

Hotel du Vin doesn't have the big soulless hotel feel many places do. This is full of charm and character, a building keeping in with its history and tradition. It's personal and warm from check-in to checkout.

We stayed in the sumptuous Villa Marie suite, with large window offering views out over the courtyard and towards the Tyne. The large bathroom, with sunken bath and rain shower, was put to good use after a morning run. All the facilities you need are at hand, with Nespresso coffee machine and flat screen TVs.



Following drinks – a healthy menu of champagne cocktails are available in the leather-bound bar area – we dined regally in Bistro du Vin, the hotel's in-house eatery offering a mix of classic French and international dishes and a wine-led experience.

Winter was really kicking in on a bitingly cold Newcastle night. Thorough, solid warming food was the order of the day from the a la carte menu. After nibbling on olives and fat hunks of sourdough, I kicked off with tiger prawns with Chilli, garlic and pastis butter whilst Lisa chose the Severn & Wye smoked salmon with treacle soda bread and fromage blanc.

Following on, fillet au poivre arrived, 21 day aged, bathing in peppercorn sauce – my all time favourite. Accompanied by pommes frites, this was melt-in-the-mouth fayre befitting of the most tender of cuts.

Across the table, Lisa chose chicken chasseure with spatzle noodles, braised normandy chicken, mushrooms, tomato and baby onions with traditional fried pasta which she proclaimed hearty and delicious.

Lisa enjoyed a crisp glass of white to accompany whilst I complemented my steak with a warming glass of Malbec – each cherry-picked by our super-knowledgeable sommelier.

As is so often the case after such a fine meal, desserts were tempting, so we rounded off in style with an apple tarte tatin in addition to a selection of French artisan cheeses.

We then adjourned to the comfortable lounge for coffee and liquers so pleased that the Hotel Du Vin hasretained its previous benchmark of excellence.

We have already discussed returning soon to sample the Taste du Vin menu where each course is expertly paired by their group sommelier with a glass of wine to complement each dish. Watch this space.

Admittedly, this wasn't our first stay at Hotel du Vin, but this visit was a particularly good vintage.

For more information, visit www.hotelduvin.com

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Burger Drop goes national: Launches national franchising with veteran franchise Director on board



Burger Drop, the beloved Newcastle-born food brand renowned for its affordable luxury burgers, is set to make a significant leap with the announcement of its national franchising initiative. This expansion, a testament to the brand's success in Newcastle, marks a strategic move toward dominating the premium burger space on a national scale.

A key figure behind this ambitious expansion is Paul Davies, a seasoned franchise director with a remarkable 30-year career in franchising, having contributed to the success stories of industry giants like KFC, Ben & Jerry's and more recently Heavenly Desserts. His wealth of experience positions Burger Drop for a seamless and successful transition into the national franchising arena. Directors Amer and Hasan, the visionaries behind Burger Drop, have set their sights on multiple store openings in 2024, with three locations already in the pipeline. The directors' long-term vision is nothing short of audacious: to establish Burger Drop as the go-to destination for premium burgers with a target of at least 150 stores nationwide within the next five to 10 years.

The franchising venture, launched in early January, has seen an overwhelming response, with Burger Drop receiving several inquiries daily. Hasan is confident that potential franchisees will relish the opportunity, stating, "We've worked tirelessly to create an amazing franchise offering with an incredible support team. Coupled with some of the most sophisticated training, auditing, and reporting tools in the industry, franchisees will have the opportunity to run a modern and highly profitable restaurant and delivery business."

Burger Drop's commitment to providing an exceptional experience extends beyond its burgers. The brand promises not only a delectable menu but also comprehensive support and cutting-edge tools for its franchisees, making it an enticing prospect in the world of franchising.

For franchise enquiries, please visit: www.burgerdrop.co.uk/franchise www.burgerdrop.co.uk









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A cleaner lifestyle?

Eating clean is a lifestyle choice, there isn't a start and end time. It's a conscious decision to stay committed to consuming whole, unprocessed foods that nourish our bodies and provide optimal nutrition.

It is not about following a strict diet or depriving yourself of certain food groups; instead, it emphasises balance and moderation. It encourages mindful eating by listening to your body's hunger cues and being aware of the quality of food you are consuming.

Clean eating goes beyond just what we put on our plates; it also encompasses how we prepare our meals. Cooking at home allows us to have control over the ingredients used while reducing reliance on processed convenience foods.

Here are just some of the benefits:

Improved energy levels

When you consume whole foods that are rich in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, you provide your body with the fuel it needs to stay energized throughout the day.

Enhanced digestion

Clean eating focuses on consuming unprocessed and foods high in fibre like fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. These foods promote healthy digestion by aiding regular bowel movements and reducing bloating.



Weight management

A clean eating approach emphasises natural and nutrient-dense foods while limiting processed foods high in unhealthy fats and added sugars. This can support weight loss or maintenance goals by reducing your calorie intake.

Strengthened immune system

Clean eating provides essential vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that support a robust immune system. By nourishing your body with these nutrients, you can better defend against infections and diseases.

Beyond the physical benefits

The commitment to eating clean often leads to improved mental clarity and emotional wellbeing. The connection between diet and mental health is well established. By fuelling the body with wholesome foods, you will benefit from a heightened focus, reduced stress, and enhanced mood.

Hold your will power and do not lose spirit if you have the occasional lapse, you should expect that, there may be times where it's more challenging such as holidays or eating out.

Meal planning will help to keep you on track and reading food labels should become a habit as you seek to understand what sugars and fats you are unknowingly consuming. Involving other family members in food preparation will also help them learn about clean eating and how to make better food choices in 2024.

www.davidfairlambfitness.co.uk

David's summing up...

View clean eating as a long term lifestyle choice rather than just something for the new year. Combining it with regular exercise and staying hydrated will boost your health and wellbeing throughout 2024.

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Places to go...Under the Tyne!





February is not the best month for a day trip. The weather is often poor, at best unpredictable. But why not use it for a walk on a footpath guaranteed to be free from snow and ice year round? Take a walk under the Tyne!

I'm not talking about the vehicle tunnels between Jarrow and Howdon, opened in 1967 and 2011 respectively. These were predated by the original pedestrian and the first purpose built cyclist tunnel, which opened in 1951 as part of the Festival of Britain celebrations, Built at the cost of £833,000, the twin bores are 270 metres in length and lie 12 metres below the the river bed. At the time of construction, the wooden escalators were the longest in the world and the highest rise in the UK.

All four escalators, up and down north, and up and down south, had 306 steps. One of each are being replaced with inclined lifts, yet to be brought into use, and there are also lifts available slightly closer to the river from separate shafts, saving you a long walk up or down the non-operational escalators. Cycles can be used in the lifts and escalators. The whole ensemble of buildings, shafts and tunnels are now Grade II listed.

Both ends are walkable to the Metro stations at Howdon and Jarrow, enabling you to cross in the other direction on the Shields Ferry which runs every day (but not every evening) between South Shields and North Shields. Spirit of the Tyne, built in the Netherlands, is the normal vessel from 2007, backed up by the last vessel to be built at Swan Hunter on the Tyne, the Pride of the Tyne, built in 1993. Both of them take around seven minutes to make the crossing. The ferry has been going since 1377, and now runs half-hourly.

A trip on the Metro from Jarrow to South Shields and between North Shields and Howdon completes a round-trip, which can be added to easily with a trip downstream to Tynemouth, up to Wallsend for the fort at Segedunum (check opening hours for winter visits), or on the south side to Arbeia Roman Fort (opening hours ditto) or the Barbour outlet shop at Bede Industrial Estate. On the north side, try the outlet at Royal Quays, walkable from Meadowell Metro station. Touring the Metro, you can visit some of the original LNER's 1930s art deco stations. The best examples are Longbenton (pictured) and West Monkseaton You might even spot some of the new Metrocars, the Stadler class 555 trains built in Switzerland which are coming into service in 2024. There's plenty of things to do in winter, you just have to decide what you want to do.

And how you do it. This column usually concentrates on railways. But when there are good deals on buses, it's worth knowing about them. For years the best multi-modal transport ticket was the Explorer, now £12.70. Coming in at £6.80 is the new Transport North East "Day Saver" which covers travel all day across Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, and County Durham on any bus, the Metro, Shields Ferry, and the Northern Rail services between Blaydon and Sunderland. (21 and under is only £3.) Unless you need to access Tees Valley and North Yorkshire, and a bit of Cumbria, the Explorer has been well eclipsed. Local Day Rovers are available in Tyne and Wear for £6, Northumberland £5 and County Durham for a stonking £4 for travel from Seaham to the top of Weardale. Maybe time to put your boots on for a February day out!

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Alex Nelson (Ticket Guru)

For help with bookings, email alex@nationalrail.com

Places to go...Llanrwst and the Conwy Valley







I arranged a two-night visit to North Wales from 29 November to 1 December so my wife could claim I was away for two months. Staying in the small town of Llanrwst (pronounced Thlan-roost) at the Eagles Hotel, I took to opportunity to visit Llandudno, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Betws y Coed and the village of Dolgarrog.

This has a very impressive Hilton Garden Hotel, but rather a long walk (30min) along unlit footpaths to the railway station of the same name. After dark when I was going back to my hotel, I was not prepared to trust the torch on my phone not to conk out along the route, so I took the unusual step of hitchhiking back to Llanrwst, and was picked up luckily by the third vehicle which came along, since local people are well aware of the deficiencies of public transport in the area, and the complete dearth of taxis. On the way there, everything was going swimmingly until a broken rail caused my train to be terminated at Huddersfield. I had been looking forward to a break at the fine Victorian resort of Llandudno and a walk on Wales' longest pier, since there was a 1h 43m connection at Llandudno Junction. I boarded another train towards Liverpool which was due to call at Newton le Willows, and the conductor on the train advised that the Llandudno service was just behind us. Sure enough, two minutes after leaving the train, along came the one I wanted and I had my time in Llandudno after all. From then on I was in the hands of Transport for Wales on its Conwy Valley line south into Snowdonia, and the roughly hourly bus service no.19 of Llew Jones. Combining the rail timetable with the 19 bus enabled me, without too much difficulty, to plan a walk in the Welsh hills between Roman Bridge station and Dolwyddelan to visit the Castle there. Highlight was probably the visit on the 19 to Zip World, an adventure centre, where I took a ride on the toboggan on wheels called Fforest Coaster. There are huge queues for this in the summer and I arrived just after 1100 for my timed 1130 ride. By 1150 with no queues I had done the descent on this innovative roller coaster three times, had a camera fitted to the toboggan and bought the video which entitled me to a fourth ride free before I walked into Betws y Coed.

Whilst waiting for the train south, I was phoned by the Llechwedd Slate Caverns to say their underground railway was out of order so could I attend tomorrow? No, unfortunately, so I went to visit Dolgarrog where there is a memorial park dedicated to the dam disaster.

On 2 November 1925 the failure of two dams caused a flood that swamped the village of Dolgarrog, killing 16 people. The disaster was started by the failure of the Eigiau Dam, a gravity dam owned by the Aluminium Corporation. The water released from the reservoir flooded downstream, and overtopped the Coedty Dam, an embankment dam. This dam also subsequently failed, releasing the huge volume of water that flooded Dolgarrog. Many more villagers could have been killed had they not been in the local theatre watching a film that night.

The fare from the North East, with a railcard, was only £20.95 each way. Out-of season hotel rates are low, and there's plenty of cosy hospitality businesses to enjoy in the hours of darkness. Take your walking boots, and enjoy the winter weather. Last train back home is after 1800 from Llanrwst.

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