

NORTHERN

# INSIGHT

April 2024

Issue 100



**Souvenir 100th Edition**

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

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# Foreword

## FOREWORD

Welcome to the April edition of Northern Insight.

It is with huge pride that I write this centenary foreword as we reach the significant landmark of our 100th issue.

You can read more about our story so far within the ensuing two page feature but I must reiterate my huge thanks again to everyone concerned for the wonderful support.

We hope you like the design tweaks we have made within this 228 page epic as we continue to strive to bring you the best magazine possible.

This edition is jam packed with all of the traditional Northern Insight ingredients with an engaging blend of subjects from the business, property, media, technology, education, arts and leisure sectors.

*We hope everyone finds something to enjoy and enthuse. Till next month...*

Michael Grahamslaw, Publisher  
michael@northern-insight.co.uk



### Edition Sponsors



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## Leading Link to manage Blyth Carnival for the next three years

**Blyth Town Carnival has announced that its annual carnival will be managed for the next three years by Bedlington based charity, Leading Link.**

With a wealth of experience in event coordination and a track record of consistent growth, Leading Link is well-positioned to develop and expand the carnival to new heights.

Working closely with Blyth Town Council, Leading Link aims to strengthen their collaboration, combining forces, contacts, and expertise to enhance the overall experience of the carnival. The organisation's community links with businesses, schools, community groups, residents' associations, and their growing team of Young Leaders are crucial elements in ensuring the successful delivery and operation of the event.

The proposed theme for this year's carnival is "The Pirates Takeover," featuring school children dressed as mini pirates, a parade with a 30-foot drivable pirate ship, and a lively atmosphere filled with smoke, chanting, and laughter. The introduction of themed zones, such as "food," "creative," "be active," and "challenge," will offer a diverse range of activities, providing something for everyone.

Julie Summers, Events Co-ordinator for Blyth Town Council said: "We were delighted to award the planning of the carnival to Leading Link. They have excellent community credentials and a whole host of contacts that will ensure the success of the event. Despite ongoing works in the Market Square, we are committed to ensuring the continuity of the event. We've looked at potential new locations, including the Quayside and Ridley Park and will decide soon on the venue which will offer the best possible experience for participants and attendees."

## Investment brings new Fire, Emergency & Security Systems training centre to Gateshead

**Due to high demand for fire, emergency and security systems apprenticeships and a need to keep pace with advancing technology in the industry, Access Training has invested a five-figure sum in a brand-new training facility in Gateshead.**

Access Training - based at Gateshead Skills Academy on Team Valley - has leased an additional property five minutes walk from their main site, to increase its capacity to deliver practical and theoretical training on the design and installation of fire, security and emergency systems (FESS).

The centre will help meet high demand in



a sector where there is a shortage of fully qualified engineers.

The new FESS training centre has been kitted-out with the latest systems, including wireless, as well as some of the most widely installed older systems - to give apprentices across the north east a comprehensive range of skills.

The facility, which was officially opened by the Mayor of Gateshead - Councillor Eileen McMaster - will have the capacity to train 100 apprentices a year on the design, commissioning, installation, fault-finding and repairs of security and fire systems.



## Major port project secures prestigious accolade

**A multi-million-pound project to make swathes of land at Port of Sunderland shovel-ready for development has scooped a major award.**

The completion of enabling works at the port's Trinity - Rail, Road & Sea Enterprise Zone was last named 'Medium Project of the Year' at the prestigious Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) North East's annual Robert Stephenson Awards.

Held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Newcastle, the glittering ceremony brought together some of the biggest names in construction and engineering from across the North to celebrate excellence in the built environment.

The Trinity Enterprise Zone Enabling Works project, also known as Hendon Sidings, was a collaboration between Port of Sunderland, Esh Construction and Mott MacDonald, and was commended by the judges for its innovation, efficiency and community impact.

Completed in April last year, the project represented the final phase of a number of substantive works packages to improve port infrastructure and help attract inward investment to the North Sea hub.

Matthew Hunt, Director at Port of Sunderland, said: "We were delighted when our name was read out and we were named as the 'Medium Project of the Year'.

"This recognition is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our team and our partners at Esh Construction and Mott MacDonald over the last few years to deliver this incredible project.

"The Trinity Enterprise Zone Enabling Works project has been a significant endeavour for us, and we are incredibly proud of the positive impact it will have on our community and the local economy."

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## £5m investment readies apprentices at Armstrong Works for future growth

The installation of a new 800 tonne press brake at Armstrong Works marks the first delivery in a series of investments that will ready Pearson Engineering and its subsidiary, Responsive Engineering, for future growth.

Responsive Engineering is a contract manufacturer that supplies to household names in the transport and renewables sectors, as well as to parent company, Pearson Engineering. Pearson Engineering, is a well-known brand across defence, providing lifesaving equipment to global armed forces that defeats explosives and moves earth and obstacles.

The investment is part of a £5m capital investment plan that will see Armstrong

Works equipped with rare manufacturing capability, enabling both Pearson Engineering and Responsive Engineering to take on work of an even greater scale and complexity than it already does.

Currently, both companies are working to deliver equipment and components to all of the UK MoD's major land vehicle programmes, including armour packs for AJAX infantry fighting vehicles and turret structures for the British Army's main battle tank, CHALLENGER 3.

The investment comes as 15 apprentices take their roles at Responsive Engineering and 3 join Pearson Engineering as part of the company's growth plans and commitment to supporting the next generation of engineers into critical industries.

Rachel Mansfield, Managing Director at Responsive Engineering said: "It is vital that we invest not only in the capability of our site to allow us to take on bolder and more ambitious projects across a wide range of industries, but that we pair that capability with the recruitment of people who will see the benefits and opportunity that it will bring to our region for year to come. Our work spans not only incredibly important projects in defence, but the customers we work with help all of us to live better lives; they're leading the way in renewable energy and transport safety."



## New era for North East Crown Works Studios

**The North East will become a major destination for film and high-end TV production, thanks to a trailblazing devolution deal agreed between the Government and the North East, which will equip the region with the tools to enable the creation of one of Europe's largest filmmaking complexes, in Sunderland.**

Crown Works Studios will transform the economy of the North East - spurring a creative industrial revolution in one of the UK's most exciting sectors, and generating £336m a year for the regional economy. It will enhance the UK's offer to the global film and high-end TV industry, and enable the North East to play a far greater role in future growth.

The devolution deal announced in the recent Budget will provide the new NEMCA (to be formed in May) and Sunderland City Council with the tools they need to make Crown Works a reality and level up the region. Sunderland City Council and NEMCA have today confirmed that they intend to invest up to £120m towards the project using the tools provided by the deal.

This represents a significant contribution towards Crown Works Studios that will kick start the creation of one of Europe's largest studio complexes - and is a huge step towards realising the full ambition of 20 soundstages in the heart of Sunderland.

Creating another major film and high-end TV production cluster outside of the South East, Crown Works Studios will be a catalyst for regeneration creating thousands of jobs and skills opportunities at all levels for people living across the North East and beyond.

## Week2Week expands in Newcastle

Week2Week is a family-run business located in Newcastle. Founded 24 years ago, Week2Week has built a reputation as a leading provider of premium serviced accommodation in and around Newcastle city centre and across the UK via its partner networks. Week2Week has strategic expansion plans in Newcastle, inviting property investors to capitalize on rewarding opportunities to maximize returns on their investments.

Week2Week is set to transform the landscape of property investment in Newcastle. Fully accredited and award winning, Week2Week adopts an innovative approach to property management and dedication to customer satisfaction and has established itself as a trusted partner for property owners seeking to optimize their revenue streams.

As the demand for high-quality serviced accommodation continues to rise, particularly in Newcastle and surrounding areas with business and leisure travellers. Week2Week recognizes the immense potential for growth and profitability in this market, particularly in accommodating



extended stays, corporate bookings and relocations. By offering a range of comprehensive services, including property management, marketing, and 24/7 guest relations, the company empowers property investors to achieve maximum ROI with minimal effort.

"Our further expansion in Newcastle represents an exciting opportunity for both property investors and guests seeking premium accommodation options," said Claire Parry, Managing Director of Week2Week. "We have seen tremendous success in recent years, and we are confident that our proven business model will deliver outstanding results for investors in Newcastle."

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## 100 NOT OUT!

As Northern Insight Magazine celebrates its centenary edition, Graham Courtney spoke to Managing Director, Michael Grahamslaw, about the past, present and future of the magazine.

**If it was a Beatles song it would be called “The Long and Winding Road” but after nine rollercoaster years it is the 100th issue of what has become a staple read for the business community of the North East...Northern Insight.**

It's an important landmark but a magazine of this quality and size (frequently nudging 200 pages) doesn't happen overnight. Michael has been involved in the region's media industry for over 30 years, transcending both print and digital eras. A cultivator of long lasting business relationships he brings a wealth of experience to the table.

Michael said “I started my working life in 1990 with Newcastle Chronicle and Journal and loved the ‘cut and thrust’ of the publishing world immediately. I've always enjoyed meeting people and promoting their businesses. The job is both stimulating and rewarding in equal measure with each day providing unique challenges. I often compare compiling a magazine to putting a huge jigsaw puzzle together!”

From an early stage in his career Michael harboured ambitions to launch his own title and in 2015 finally took the plunge.

“As a starting point I approached the huge variety of contacts I had made over the previous 25 years and told them about my plans to launch an independent business and leisure magazine for the region. The reaction was staggering and truly humbling. After 48 days and over 100 face to face meetings we were ready to roll with issue one.”

With an experienced designer required to bring his dream to fruition, it was at this point that Lady Luck appeared as Michael received an email from Lu O'Rourke who he'd worked with way back in the 90s.

As Lu said “I'd had a great career, working as a Senior Designer and later as Studio Manager at some of the region's top agencies, but chose to take some time out to be a full-time mum. Over the years, I'd worked extensively in print and advertising across a range of national and international brands. When I opted to return to work I dropped a speculative email to Michael and the rest is history. We met for a coffee, he told me about his plans and away we went. Being able to put my mark on the magazine from its inception has meant that I could iterate the design over the years.”

So in 2015 Northern Insight was born and it has continued to be published 11 months of every year since.

Michael said “Several businesses and individuals who appeared in issue one are in this 100th edition. The whole ethos of the magazine is to produce a high quality, independent local publication underpinned by value for money and great service. That will never change.”

He continued, “Of course this is very much a team effort. My wife Lisa handles all of our accounting as well as our website, my son Jack and daughter Holly contribute articles regularly for the magazine and I'm really lucky to have a specialist team of writers such as yourself Graham, who help clients to promote their stories. We are also blessed to have a wide variety of columnists, all experts in their fields.”

A huge percentage of the 100 front covers have been shot by the magazine's lead photographer Simon Williams. Simon, who owns Crest Photography, is one of the most respected photographers in the country. He really does bring meaning to...‘a picture paints a thousand words.’

Michael said “The loyalty from our clients has been unbelievable. We even managed to keep publishing Northern Insight throughout the Covid pandemic, something of which I'm really proud. To be honest, we're like one huge family.”

And that family keeps growing. The North East business community is resilient and continues to evolve. As you'll see in any edition of Northern Insight there are always new businesses appearing, businesses that are changing, new products, latest advice on innumerable subjects... you name it and you can guarantee that at some point over the 100 editions of Northern Insight, it will have appeared.

So...what of the future?

“I'd love to think I'll be sitting here in just over nine years talking about our 200th edition. This job is a bit like painting the Forth Bridge, you are never done! There is always something new to report on, from our wonderful region, or a fantastic new business to promote. That's what makes it so enjoyable.

To conclude I'd like to thank everyone who has been involved with Northern Insight. Without the terrific support from local businesses and the drive and diligence of the people who work alongside me, the magazine wouldn't be what you see today.”

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L-R: Lisa Grahamslaw, Michael Grahamslaw, Simon Williams, Graham Courtney and Lu O'Rourke



# My Northern Insight

Long term friends, clients and contributors share their thoughts on working with the magazine as we celebrate our 100th issue.

“

Ever since CMYK Newcastle was established in January 2021 we have featured in Northern Insight, providing a consistent platform to share our progress and journey with readers. Collaborating with Mike and the Northern Insight team has been an effortless experience, and we anticipate many more years of partnership together. Congratulations on the 100th Edition!

**Craig Pratt, Regional Sales Director, CMYK**



“

Huge congratulations to the Northern Insight team on its centenary edition.

It's been a privilege to be part of the magazine's remarkable journey to becoming one of the North East business community's favourite reads. Here's to the next 100!

**Sarah Waddington, Director, Wadds INC**



“

Many congratulations to Mike and all the team at Northern Insight in celebrating its 100th edition which is a well deserved milestone. The magazine represents the region's business, hospitality, property and commercial markets extremely well and Mike is undoubtedly the glossy publication guru for the North East of England.

Enthusiastic, supportive, professional and caring are just some of Mike's many qualities that builds loyalty with his advertisers. Here's to the next 100 Editions!

**Duncan G Young, Chairman, Sanderson Young**



“

I have used Northern Insight since the first edition, it has quickly grown into the premier Business publication in the North East, which is no surprise given it is the work of Michael Grahamslaw the finest magazine publisher in the region. Here's to the next 100 editions.

**Rodger Brasington, Chief Executive Officer, PROSPER**



“

It has been an absolute pleasure to work with Mike and the wider Northern Insight team for many years, who continually deliver an amazing product which champions all that is great within our region – many congratulations on achieving this fantastic milestone.

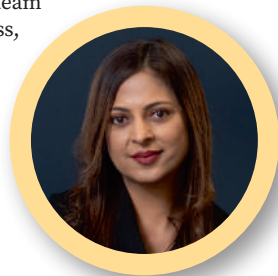
**Stuart Nicholls, Marketing & Communications, Barnard Castle School**



“

We have worked with Mike and the team at Northern Insight, with huge success, for a number of years. Mike really understands our business, our clients, and our goals and really cares about helping us tell our story. We're looking forward to many more years working together!

**Surbhi Vedhara, Partner, Sweeney Miller Law**



“

A huge congratulations to Mike and his team on reaching their 100th edition. It's an absolute privilege to contribute to such a forward thinking magazine. I know Mike's contagious energy and enthusiasm will continue to propel this fantastic magazine forward.

**David Fairlamb, Owner, David Fairlamb Fitness**



“

Having worked with Mike and his team in some capacity for all eighteen years of running Urban Base, Mike has been a wonderful partnership of support and collaboration for marketing opportunities to ensure our business, our clients and our brand benefits from regional promotional opportunities of the highest calibre. Seeing our marketing in Newcastle Airport Business Lounge to the Penthouse Private Lounge at the Hilton Hotel, we have loved working with Mike, Lu and the team. Here's to the next centenary.

**Jan Dale, Director/Owner, Urban Base**







A Hundred, Not Out! - It has been a pleasure to be associated with Northern Insight from its inception a 100 issues ago. Mike, Lisa, Lu and the team have always ensured a quality and vibrant edition with a long shelf-life and recognised as the leading North East Business and Leisure magazine. A publication to be seen in and one which in particular has raised the profile of our Accountancy Practice. A big thank you and roll on the next 100 Issues.

**David Hodgson MBE, Partner, Read Milburn & Company**



Congratulations to Northern Insight on its 100th anniversary. The magazine is a constant source of insightful editorial and is a great barometer as to the strength of the North East economy. During the darkest days of the pandemic, it came into its own, with confident, upbeat content that demonstrated the North East business sector was resilient and would recover.

**Sarah O'Mahoney, Bradley O'Mahoney Public Relations**



I clearly remember Mike coming to see me to tell me all about his new venture. It was a bold move at a time when newspapers and magazines were starting to feel the impact of digital media. So, I am absolutely thrilled that he has reached his 100th edition, especially the announcement of the Built Environment feature, which in my opinion is long overdue given its importance to the regional economy. It has been a pleasure to work so closely with you over the years Mike and to have been able to provide support since your first issue - here's to your future success!

**Philippa Clothier, Managing Director, Clothier Lacey & Co**



It's always been a pleasure to write for Northern Insight. Mike Grahamslaw and his team offer an invaluable contribution to the northeast business community that is unique, stimulates debate, updates business on local and national developments. It also gives a platform for issues local, topical and sometimes controversial, a real airing to those that matter. Northern Insight is genuinely part of the "glue" that cements North East businesses together, and I have always been very proud to contribute towards it. Every congratulations on this 100th edition.

Why is 100 important - see my article in this issue!

**Dr. David Cliff, Owner, Gedanken**



We've been delighted to support Mike since the inception of Northern Insight, and we are proud to see it reach its 100 edition. It has become a monthly cornerstone of the business and lifestyle NE publishing landscape and we look forward to seeing hundreds more editions in the future.

**Peter Cromarty, Managing Director, CCBS Group**



Michael Grahamslaw and Northern Insight Magazine are invaluable partners for my business, Highlights PR.

The magazine showcases my diverse stories and my client's achievements across the North and consistently exceeds my expectations. Michael's editorial insight and dedication to quality content have ensured that our clients receive unparalleled visibility. Working with Northern Insight Magazine and Michael is a pleasure, and I wholeheartedly recommend their services to anyone wanting to raise the profile of their business or organisation.

**Keith Newman, Owner, Highlights PR**



It's a privilege to feature in Northern Insights' 100th edition having contributed monthly from the very beginning. Mike is a delight to work with and as the go to business magazine in the North East for my clients and industry, it provides a rich source of information about what is happening across the region

**Bryony Gibson, Director, Bryony Gibson Consulting**



Howie White have had a long standing relationship with Northern Insight, having been given the opportunity from Mike to grace the cover on a couple of occasions as well as contributing several articles. From a personal perspective, they are a pleasure to work with. From a professional point of view, we have generated new business and increased our network from this relationship. To the next 100...

**David Taylor, Managing Director, Howie White Resourcing**



Forfusion has been collaborating with Northern Insight for a couple of years now; they appear genuinely committed to assisting us in promoting and expanding our business. Being regularly featured in the magazine has provided us with a fantastic opportunity to establish our brand in the North East business community.

**Joanne Thomas, Marketing Manager, Forfusion**







Jessica Williams

## Representation

In March we celebrated B-Corp month across the world.

In the North East we came together with other certified B-Corporations to share our own stories and how becoming certified has impacted our organisations. As a personable, professional impact-led sales and marketing organisation, we measure impact in equal parts to return on investment.

**Embedding ESG into the overall organisation's strategy and doing the same for our clients has seen profound impact across all elements. It ensures that every aspect of environmental, societal, governance is addressed and in addition customers and our people are built into our everyday lives and business.**

The danger has always been that ESG remains a tick box for many with impact rarely measured or reported on. By building this into each and every role within the business and all our activities, we come to live and breathe the philosophy. And we have done the same for many of our clients, bringing ESG to life through appointing charity partners, engaging with local communities, providing enhanced training, tree planting, litter picking, fundraising, volunteering, creating a local supply chain and supporting local businesses.

And when it comes to sales and marketing,

this is represented appropriately across the organisation to ensure the brand reflects the activities and philosophy in house. With many brands facing scrutiny for celebrating events and themes yet not practising what they preach and rightly so. You cannot celebrate IWD and have a gender pay gap, nor plant a few trees to offset CO2 through excessive travel but many do.

We are no longer accepting these shows of volunteering sessions at face value – we have to believe an organisation is taking its responsibilities seriously; and not just when the PR opportunities arise. Aligning your strategy and reality is essential to creating a trusted brand and one your customers will stay with, and prospects will flock to. The way in which your business represents itself online and in person has to match and do so consistently.

Why your customers first chose you and why they stay with you could be a completely

different reason. Why prospects come to you now and why they convert could hinge on the above. So how is your brand and organisation perceived?

It's a remarkably self-reflective question and one we should all ask ourselves, and every stakeholder – frequently. It's uncomfortable (I've done it) and forces you to look at the values on the wall, the version you want to be, versus who you really are. Alignment of what you say and what you do is the most critical part of any structured and successful sales and marketing strategy, with ESG embedded in every aspect.

I liken it to sitting in active wear eating chocolate talking about running a race or watching sport on TV...you have to do it, not just talk about it for the impact to be evident and meaningful.

Operating in a saturated market as many of us do, I'm often asked about USP's (unique selling points) which I long ago dismissed as extinct. However if you do not embed ESG into your overall strategy and brand positioning, that is a USP in a way - and not a good one! Perhaps we should rename it UFP (unique failing point) and create a new acronym – because the world needs more of them...

**Just Williams is an impact-led sales and marketing organisation working with owner managed businesses to raise brand profile, lead generate and embed ESG.**

**Just Williams – Sales and Marketing**  
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#BeInTheRoom





Katie Paparestis



## Aurora Lily, Prosecco on Tap Launch Event

Hello! I'm Katie, also known as the "Prosecco Queen" among my friends. Nothing disappoints quite like flat or warm Prosecco, which is why I've taken matters into my own hands. I've sourced kegged Sparkling Wine directly from Italy, made from the Glera (Prosecco) grape, ensuring every pour is perfectly sparkling, swift and served at the ideal temperature, straight from the tap!

Throughout my career working in traditional male industries, I've been fortunate to have guidance and support from incredible, strong women who have helped shape my journey. Now, I'm dedicated to building a business that not only celebrates women but also gives back to charity and brings women together. My niece, Aurora, is the inspiration behind the name, as she's always full of bubbly energy and I'm determined to make her proud by being a positive role model in her life.

Launching Aurora Lily on International Women's Day was a deliberate choice to honour and recognise women's achievements. I believe in making every day a celebration of women's empowerment, which is why I'm committed to building Aurora Lily as a platform for supporting women.

My recent launch event at As You Like It was a huge success, bringing together my family, friends and inspirational women and leaders from across the North East to network and celebrate International Women's Day, whilst raising money for charity. I'm also excited to introduce our first portable mobile bar in Spring 2024. If you have the perfect opportunity or event in mind, I'd love to hear from you. Let's embark on this journey together, as I truly believe in the power of women supporting women.

So, why not be your own Prosecco Queen with Aurora Lily? Let's empower women through the power of Prosecco, because let's face it, have you ever seen anyone with a glass of Prosecco in their hand who isn't smiling? Cheers to that!

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









# C ASTAL

BY SANDERSON YOUNG



Regional Valuation Manager, Penny Wright & Odie

The North East and its Heritage coastline continues to attract new visitors year on year, who fall in love with its beauty, big skies and people! They want to be part of its history and magic, which offers a unique and high quality lifestyle. These visitors then often become clients, who are in search of a second or permanent home.

We have been exceptionally busy with good levels of enquiries on our coastal and rural homes from all over the country. Demand for second homes and commercial holiday lets remains good, and the sales can be supported by the fantastic rental incomes that have been achieved in recent years. Repeat business and returning guests are a mainstay for the majority of successful holiday homes.

I have lived in Northumberland most of my life, working in estate agency in Northumberland and Newcastle for nearly 25 years, and I still find small 'hidden gems' and locations that I haven't visited. Sanderson Young has the privilege of marketing some of the most stunning and unique homes in the region and

I feel exceptionally fortunate to represent our fantastic clients, who share our pride in the North East. Whether born and bred here, or 'adopted' from elsewhere in the country, this region certainly captures the hearts of its inhabitants.

Pride plays a big part in our work in estate agency; a pride of the area we work and live in, pride in the way we market and photograph our beautiful homes, and pride in the way we handle all our sales to a successful conclusion for our clients.

Much of our business is carried out via repeat and returning clients, where the service we strive to provide is a very personal one. We build up a rapport with our vendors and buyers, which results in their trust and confidence in our advice and guidance.

We will continue to build on our success, with more fantastic and individual homes coming to the market in our region and its stunning coast.

If you're interested in selling your home please get in touch and I'd be delighted to assist. You can contact me on 01665 600170 or email [penny.wright@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:penny.wright@sandersonyoung.co.uk)





SANDERSON  
YOUNG



## *The Old Post Office & Annexe* *Holy Island*

The Old Post Office & Annexe provides a very rare opportunity to acquire one of Holy Island's most prestigious residential buildings. Offered for sale for the first time in nearly 200 years, the property is divided into a three/four bedroom family home and annexe to the side with potential to create a separate two bedroom unit, subject to planning. The entire property also shows potential as a Tea Room or commercial hospitality uses. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: F.



3 3 2 F

**Price Guide:**  
£750,000



**Gillian Greaves**  
**01665 600 170**  
[gillian.greaves@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:gillian.greaves@sandersonyoung.co.uk)







SANDERSON  
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## *Bridge End* *Bridge Street, Warkworth*

Bridge End is a fabulous, detached, family home, undoubtedly the principal residential dwelling within this popular Northumbrian coastal village. The magnificent Grade II listed property, built circa 1690, has been modernised to create a very special home with 8000 sq ft of accommodation over four floors including an annexe and retaining many period features. Bridge End enjoys an extremely private walled garden of 0.6 acres. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: G.



10 4 4

**Price Guide:**  
Offers Over £1.5 Million



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





SANDERSON  
YOUNG



## *The Last Remaining Residence* *Seaham Hall, Seaham*

Imagine being able to escape to your very own holiday home by the sea. The Residences are an exclusive collection of lodges combining hotel living with the freedom of holiday home ownership, within the grounds of glorious Seaham Hall giving you access to award winning spa facilities, two restaurants and beautiful gardens. A furnished holiday home is also a great investment if you're looking to generate tax-free rental income. Tenure: Leasehold. No council tax.

2 1 1

**Price Guide:**  
£695,000



**Julie Summerbell**  
0191 213 0033  
[julie.summerbell@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:julie.summerbell@sandersonyoung.co.uk)







SANDERSON  
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## *Beacon House*

*Beverley Terrace, Cullercoats*

Beacon House provides a unique and very individual Grade II listed home with amazing panoramic sea views, situated at one of the coast's most impressive addresses. The property has been extensively renovated to include a professionally equipped kitchen, superb suspended orangery and lower ground floor spa room with Jacuzzi. The house has a private, landscaped walled garden, with coach house and garage with conversion potential. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: E.



3 3 3

**Price Guide:**  
£1.375 Million



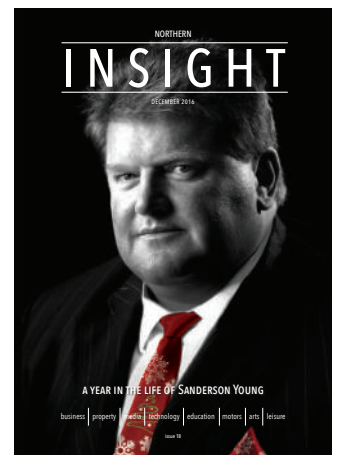
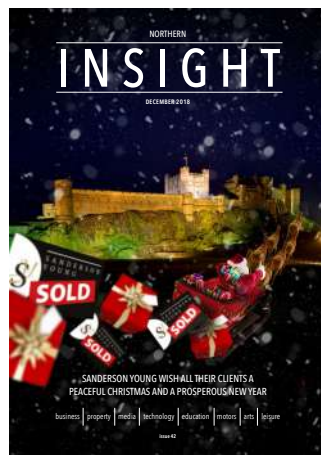
**Harry Young**  
0191 223 3500  
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SANDERSON  
YOUNG

# PROUD TO BE PART OF 100 EDITIONS



Sanderson Young congratulate Northern Insight on reaching a very special milestone, their 100<sup>th</sup> edition! We have been proud to support this informative business magazine from the very beginning and it has proven to be the ideal platform to promote our company, including the coveted December front cover spot which we've been lucky enough to secure for the last 8 years. We look forward to continuing this very successful partnership.



# Success from engagement - how partnership working has always underpinned the North East LEP's work and outcomes

The name of the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) has always told the story of its purpose. From the very beginning, our efforts have centred on cultivating knowledge and fostering connections. Our goal has been to orchestrate a unified response to the region's needs, one that is grounded in solid evidence and collective action, says Helen Golightly, Chief Executive.

**Unlike the regional development agencies before us, LEPs were formed without large teams or pots of funding. The very business model meant that the only way we were ever going to make an impact was by working across the region and through partnerships.**

When we first launched, there was some scepticism and mistrust of LEPs. In fact, in the early days, the North East LEP was criticised for being inward-facing, needing more scrutiny, and spending public money without transparency. Whether justified or not, that perception had to change. If not, failure was inevitable.

The people-focus of the Strategic Economic Plan was fundamental to this step change.

We had to create a living, breathing Strategic Economic Plan and publicise it widely so that every single one of our key stakeholders understood the plan, what we were collectively trying to achieve, and how they could play their part in it. They had to be able to align their own business plans to it. The region needed to own the plan and buy into it.

It needed to be something that people wanted to read, and when they did read it, find it useful rather than the document languishing online and never seeing the light of day. The North East Strategic Economic Plan had to allow stakeholders to see what sector opportunities there were in the North East, where the jobs would be, and enable leaders to monitor whether the supply and demand for skills were right.

It took a while to get the communications right and work out how best to engage with people on this.

We moved from big, weighty documents to concise, focused reporting, with ongoing engagement through briefings, events, newsletters and digital media. When stakeholders across the public, private and third sectors started to tell us they were aligning their strategic plans with the region's plan, we knew we were finally making headway.

## **Making music together**

Our leadership role has been about facilitation. I've always seen the job of the North East LEP as a little like being an orchestra conductor.

Whatever the playbook of the time, our job has been to identify the best musicians and partners, work out how best to unite them and keep them on the same page to deliver a stellar performance.

Our regional orchestra has played some nice tunes. I'd go so far as to say our business growth, skills and green energy successes are symphonies in their own right.

## **The right people at the right time**

One of the North East LEP's strengths has been knowing where to turn when, due to our oversight and understanding of the

region and its key personalities. Our commitment to hearing diverse perspectives has seen us engage across the board, not just at an executive level.

We also brought the right people into the organisation who we could trust to be our ambassadors. Everyone in the LEP, not just the senior team, was recruited because they wanted to help us live our values of making a difference, being better together, thinking bigger, and doing the right thing. They are all the biggest champions of our region.

Our leadership role worked because at no point did we ever say we knew best. We never had a predetermined plan and never paid lip service.

When we needed to bring the region together, for example, during the COVID pandemic, EU Exit and refreshes of the economic plan, our focus was very much on gathering as many views as possible and listening closely. We reached out to experts in individual sectors because they were the ones experiencing challenges first hand and we needed to understand their perspectives closely.

## **The realities of political engagement**

The devolution process itself has required a lot of input. The North East LEP can take some small credit for providing continuity during the occasionally turbulent process leading up to this and avoiding fractures at an economic and transport level.

Working in a political environment and with central government can be challenging. Over the years, we've had to take our time and find ways to bring people on the journey with us.

I'm proud that our team has always been able to forge deep relationships and create safe spaces where people can trust each other and take part in constructive debate. Our relationships with the civil service are seen as best in class and have generally led to better decision-making, funding and outcomes for the North East.

It's been a privilege to work with our colleagues at the local authorities to prepare for the forthcoming transition to the North East Combined Authority, helping to make this as smooth as possible. It's a fitting time to hand over the reins, knowing this commitment to partnership working will remain front and centre going forward.

I am very proud of my time as the Chief Executive and the positive impact we've made, as well as the foundations we've laid for the next iteration of economic development.

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





*Helen Golightly*





*Lucy Winskell*



# Continued aspirations for the North East – how the North East LEP's work will live on in the new world

From its inception, the North East LEP has ensured that the voice of the business community has been integral to decision making. This remains a priority as we begin a new era with the establishment of the new North East Combined Authority, says Chair Lucy Winskell.

**Cast your mind back to the early days of the North East LEP. Tasked with creating the blueprint for improving the regional economy that would become affectionately known as our Strategic Economic Plan (SEP), we were fortunate to have a solid foundation to build upon, as we took the baton from some great people and projects at One North East.**

Twelve years have passed since then and the LEP's people, capabilities and knowledge have continued to grow and develop, and we have seen many of those initial projects (plus many more) come to fruition.

We're about to move into a new era of regional governance, but again, we have so much to build on as our region continues to evolve.

As with any period of change, I have spent some time looking back at the LEP's achievements, and I am proud at how diverse and far reaching they have been.

We have been successful, despite hugely competitive funding rounds, in bidding for the Getting Building Fund and the Local Growth Fund, along with establishing the North East Investment Fund, using both Regional Growth Fund and Growing Places resources to create a long-term legacy fund.

We have helped guide the strategic investment of circa £500m from European Funding to support our economic plan, making sure that this complemented and added value to regional funds.

£270m of Local Growth Funding has enabled delivery of a range of strategic capital projects across the region, creating over 11,100 new jobs, 34km of new and improved cycleways, 14km of new roads and 420,000sqm of new and refurbished commercial floorspace.

In 2020 the North East LEP was awarded £47m from government's Getting Building Fund for local infrastructure projects to support the region's recovery from the Coronavirus pandemic.

Six of the 20 public and private sector-led projects were included in a 'Commercial Property Investment Fund' pilot initiative that has since led to the launch of the regional Commercial Property Investment Fund, replacing the North East Investment Fund. This just shows how the North East LEP has been able to act quickly in times of market need to support organisations, from the smallest size up.

We have been able to support the region's cultural sector, from the Auckland Castle 'Welcome Building' to The Sill, Northumberland National Park's visitor centre on Hadrian's Wall.

In our urban areas we have supported fantastic new community facilities including the Eagles Arena on Scotswood Road, the Beacon of Light in Sunderland and NUCastle in Newcastle city centre, all of which are engaging our young people, building their confidence, aspirations and offering employment support.

Let's not forget the excellent work carried out through the Enterprise Zones, a £155m infrastructure investment programme to date, which, with the Local Growth Fund, has benefited key regional assets such as the International Advanced Manufacturing Park, the District Energy Centre at Newcastle Helix and Northumberland Energy Park - all central to growing sectors of our economy and attracting business investment.

It hasn't all been about funding - the commitment of the board to partnership working has been exemplary. The strength and commitment of the Local Authority Leaders has been commendable. With their talented finance directors and economic regeneration directors, what a team effort it has been.

There has been exceptional value from the representatives from higher and further education and the voluntary sector, all of which are equal voices on that board. The fact that we have attracted national operators from the private sector has demonstrated a real vote of confidence in our leadership. Throughout the years constructive debate and diverse perspectives have enabled us to succeed even in the most challenging times.

Not every opportunity ended up with a win for our region - not being awarded North East England Freeport status in 2021 hit us hard, despite submitting an incredibly strong, innovative and collaborative bid. But even in our disappointment, we learned from this process and used it to help us secure funding for investment zones and a collaborative green super port.

I've been to some very unglamorous places in my time - supporting the creation of routes where future roads 'might' go, and visiting disused pits to discuss heat pumps and mine energy - but all these things are critical for the future, and it has been my pleasure to champion and support them.

Our Business Growth team has had some incredible achievements. Its Scaleup North East programme, initiated because insight showed it would have a disproportionate impact on productivity and job creation, has helped us become one of the regions with the highest scaleup rates, having previously had the lowest.

The Skills team has been equally influential. Thanks to its pioneering work through North East Ambition, the North East LEP is firmly on the map as an international exemplar in career guidance.

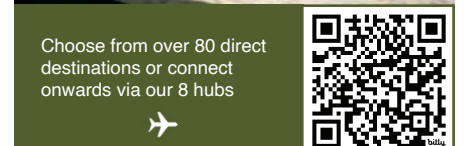
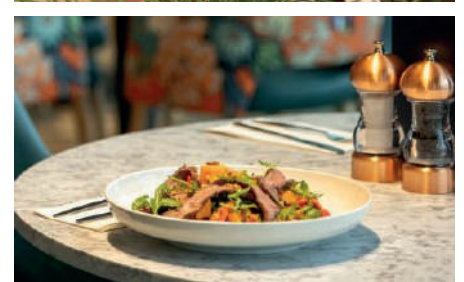
It's a fact that the North East LEP has always been regarded nationally as one of the highest performing LEPs in the country. We have consistently worked within our budgets and achieved a lot with a very lean team, because we have recruited the best. We have had a key role working with other pan-regional bodies such as NP11 and Transport for the North and been an influential voice within the LEP Network.

The LEP Board in the early days will become the Business Board of the new Combined Authority and I have the privilege of continuing as interim chair until the mayor and cabinet have the opportunity to review interim working arrangements.

What has been made abundantly clear is that the views of business will continue to be integral to all decision-making. Critically, throughout the transition to this new authority, I am confident and excited about the future of our region and I am sure, like the LEP did 12 years ago, the new North East Combined Authority will continue to build on solid foundations and seize every possible opportunity for our region to thrive.

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





## What's New at Your Airport?

**We've got lots of exciting projects happening at Your Airport! We're investing over £20m in the passenger experience ahead of the summer season, which includes the redevelopment of the departure lounge and security search area - our brand new passenger experience will ensure your holiday begins as soon as you get to the Airport. Our newest arrival, premium bar and restaurant Aster & Thyme, offers spectacular views of the runway whilst serving the best of local produce...**

Newcastle International Airport, in collaboration with travel food and beverage specialists SSP, has launched a brand-new premium restaurant and bar for passengers to enjoy prior to their flight.

Named Aster & Thyme, it has replaced the Cabin Bar, increasing the outlet's size by 130% and offering passengers a completely new experience with spectacular wall-to-wall views of the airfield.

The new outlet features a botanical themed interior design, complimented by premium marble and brass finishes. Towering floor-to-ceiling windows provide passengers with an impressive uninterrupted view of the airfield, delivering a luxurious atmosphere like no other.

As well as relaxing within the impressive interior, passengers can choose from a range of indulgent dishes from the outlets breakfast, lunch, dinner and drinks menus - all of which celebrate the best of local produce. From North Sea Kippers and Slow Cooked Beef Short Rib to Local Artisan Cheese Boards - there is something to suit all taste buds. Dean Ward, Director of Commercial at Newcastle International Airport, said: "Aster & Thyme embodies

our commitment to provide passengers with a world-class travel experience, and this stylish brasserie will be a haven for travellers to relax and enjoy the best North East produce ahead of their departure - all with fantastic views of the airfield."

“

**...this stylish brasserie will be a haven for travellers to relax and enjoy the best North East produce ahead of their departure...**

Cathy Granby, Business Development Director UK & Ireland at SSP said the new development would do much to enhance the passenger experience at Newcastle Airport. "Aster & Thyme is great place to enjoy a bite to eat or a drink before a flight. We're thrilled to be welcoming Newcastle travellers to our wonderful new bar, and we're certain that travellers to and from this outstanding city will really love this elegant new venue."

This exciting development will create over 20 new jobs and is part of an 18-month, £20m project to refurbish the Airport's departure lounge and security search area - due to be completed ahead of the busy summer season.

Choose from over 80 direct destinations or connect onwards via our 8 hubs





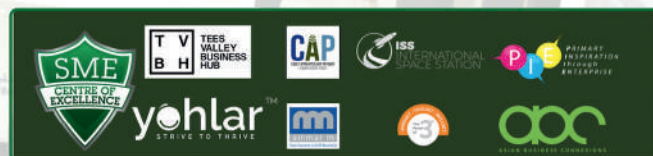
## Special Feature

**Celebrating the 3 biggest growth enablers using the XR3i Model**

# Inclusion Innovation Internationalisation

## From the AmmarM Group of Companies

For the past 20 years the AmmarM group of companies have been encouraging, enabling and empowering organisations to start, survive and thrive globally. This special feature demonstrates the value of these three growth enablers that every organisation should consider.





# Inclusion

## 'By Default'



*"Not-for-profit social enterprise Asian Business Connexions (ABC) is on a mission to help make the North East the most inclusive region in the UK by the end of 2025."* **Inclusion By Default Campaign**

The importance of inclusion in the workplace is increasing and it is now considered a necessary factor for consumers and job hunters.

In fact, 86% of millennial females and 74% of millennial males that are job hunting, consider a company's approach to inclusion, so it's a big part of growing your organisation.

### What are the challenges?

#### Leadership must buy into an inclusive culture.

It can be challenging for organisations to build an inclusive culture because it's difficult to have all your team buy into the idea of building a more inclusive culture. Creating this change starts with the leadership team. Leaders are responsible for adopting change and spreading this throughout the organisation. This is a more common challenge in larger organisations where there is a higher number of employees who need to be informed about the importance of adopting an inclusive culture.

Inclusion – The benefits and challenges of growing your organisation through workplace inclusion.

#### Lack of awareness about the importance of inclusion.

Leading on from the previous point, teams that do not have enough information about the importance of inclusion will not be able to adopt an inclusive culture as it requires everyone to buy into the culture to make it a reality. ABC's Inclusion by Default Campaign aims to inform organisations and individuals about the importance of a more inclusive workplace and through ABC membership you can inform your team about the best practices to make your organisation more inclusive.

#### Organisations are unaware of the best practices for promoting an inclusive workplace.

There are many organisations that are unaware of the best practices to help them develop a more inclusive work environment. ABC supports organisations in developing an inclusive workplace by providing inclusion workshops and resources using the Inclusive Innovation Framework which uses a unique positive approach to inclusion. This leads to a sticky, sustainable and successful change in organisational culture.



#### Inclusive Innovation Framework by Yohlar

The IIF is an action orientated and person centred innovation framework to help develop and deliver an inclusive approach that makes a real difference to every one within your organisation.

The framework includes a series of workshops and exercises that will leave you with a validated action plan to accelerate your JEDI powers and move away from a traditional, and sometimes ineffective approach to inclusion.





## What are the benefits?

### Inclusion can make employees happier.

Creating an inclusive work environment where everyone feels included helps to boost morale amongst your team. The feeling of inclusion provides team members with a sense of belonging and they can understand the impact they have in the organisation. Higher morale has a direct relationship with a higher level of productivity meaning your organisation can operate more efficiently to support growth.



The Armed Forces Covenant is an inclusive commitment that ensures fair treatment and support for current and former members of the armed forces, their families, and veterans.

It aims to eliminate any disadvantages they may face, including in areas like healthcare, education, and employment.

Info:  
[armedforcescovenant.gov.uk](https://armedforcescovenant.gov.uk)

*"Thriving in a highly uncertain competitive environment requires creative thinking in those areas, and the diverse collaborators were better equipped to deliver it." – Harvard Business Review*

Become an ABC Member to enjoy the following opportunities:



Priority invitations to ABC Events such as the popular ABCurry Club.



Show your status as an Inclusion By Default Supporter

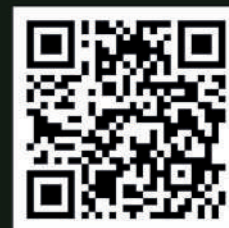


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**abc**  
MEMBER



Plus a lot more,  
all from only  
**£10 per month!**



**abc AWARDS 2024**

THE MOST INCLUSIVE CELEBRATION IN THE NORTH EAST

ABC are looking for Sponsors and Nominations for this year's Annual Awards Dinner.

If you or your organisation are interested in getting involved, contact our team on [inclusion@abconnexions.org](mailto:inclusion@abconnexions.org)

[abconnexions.org](https://abconnexions.org)





“Companies with more than 30% women executives are more likely to outperform those with fewer or none at all.”

– Jen-Ai Chua, Equity Research Asia at Julius Baer

### Attracting the best talent.

An exclusive organisation that ignores certain people in the talent pool are a thing of the past. In today's world, individuals are now paying attention to company policies on inclusion when considering a new job. If you're an organisation that is not promoting an inclusive workplace then you could be forcing away some amazing people with a fantastic skillset that could really make their mark on your organisation. The organisations that are thriving today are the ones that promote and support an inclusive work environment, and it is these organisations that attract some of the brightest and most influential individuals that will shape your organisation for the better.



### Customers respond to an inclusive organisation.

More and more organisations are now implementing inclusion into their marketing strategy (89% of companies actively communicate about their diversity and inclusion efforts) as a way to connect with customers because the consumer is valuing inclusion more and this factor heavily weighs in on the consumers buying decision. Building and promoting your inclusive workforce can help you create a stronger reputation and appeal to more customers which will help you grow your organisation.

Hi, I'm Nipa.  
ABC / AWEsome



AWEsome

ASIAN · WOMEN · ENTERPRISING

*I am looking forward to working with an inspirational cause that helps incorporate inclusion and diversity across the North East.*

*Raised by my father, who was once an immigrant to the UK, I witnessed the prejudice and hostility he faced when attempting to establish his own business. Many in the community suggested that we were unwelcome and accused us of "taking all the jobs".*

*While my parents have sheltered myself and my brother from such prejudices, I am thankful that this is not as prevalent today, however, there is still much work to be done in promoting inclusion and understanding within the UK.* – ABC Inclusion Lead







# 1.7x

Inclusive companies are 1.7 times more likely to be innovation leaders

– Josh Bersin

## Inclusion creates a more innovative workplace.

If you have a workforce built up around people from the same background, with the same culture and the same opinions then your workplace culture and way of thinking will always remain the same. Building a more diverse and inclusive workforce will encourage a broader way of thinking as you start to bring in different ideas from individuals of different backgrounds and cultures which will ultimately help your organisation on its path to greater innovation. Innovation will provide you with the competitive advantage you need to grow your organisation.

ABC membership offers recruitment support and can help your organisation create an inclusive culture and work environment that will have a positive influence on those who work for you and those you do business with. Ultimately, creating an inclusive environment that benefits everyone involved will also help your organisation to grow.

[www.abconnexions.org/membership](http://www.abconnexions.org/membership)



Building effective business education links to support the development of children and young people to strengthen communities.

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

INCLUSION  
IS NOT JUST  
**BLACK  
WHITE**



**#InclusionByDefault**

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



[abconnexions.org/inclusion-by-default](http://abconnexions.org/inclusion-by-default)  
[inclusion@abconnexions.org](mailto:inclusion@abconnexions.org)  
 01661 823234



# A new framework to help develop and deliver a true **inclusive** workplace.

Inclusive Innovation  
Framework



In an ever-evolving world, innovation has consistently proven to be the catalyst for change. Historically, technological advancements have transformed economies, shaped political landscapes, and redefined social paradigms. Yet, one of the most profound impacts of innovation remains largely understated: its role in facilitating inclusion.

Using the Power of 3 Framework - Toolset, Skillset and Mindset - Yohlar has helped transform a number of industries and supported hundreds of organisations to harness the power of innovation.

During the **Inclusion By Default Conference 2024**, Yohlar helped facilitate engaging discovery sessions to over 120 individuals and North East organisations focused on inclusion, direct from our Inclusive Innovation Framework, where participants delved into different aspects of inclusivity.

These sessions provided a platform for attendees to share their experiences, perspectives, and insights, gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities that stand in the way of us collectively creating a more inclusive North East.

With the support of our Inclusive Innovation Framework, we are now steering towards becoming the most inclusive region in the UK by the end of 2025.

This commitment to transformation is a testament to the power of inclusivity as a driving force for positive change

**We invite all organisations to take advantage of our new Inclusive Innovation Framework.**

Speak to the Yohlar team on 01661 823 234 or [hola@yohlar.com](mailto:hola@yohlar.com)

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





# To remain relevant organisations need to continuously improve - **innovate!**



Toolset

Skillset

Mindset

Yohlar's mission is to inspire, empower and progress personal and organisational transformation through innovation. Dedicated to empowering individuals and organisations to overcome challenges with creative solutions that drive meaningful change.

Yohlar Innovation Programmes help organisations to fix things and make them better.

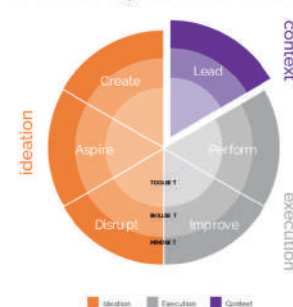
Using unique innovation tools that empower people to solve problems themselves, and embed a mindset that drives personal and organisational transformation.

Yohlar offers access to a comprehensive development resource and a community of innovators and mentors that are transforming the world through innovation.

Tailored and bespoke programmes that inspire and enable change, reinvention and transformation.

Speak to the Yohlar team on 01661 823 234 or [hola@yohlar.com](mailto:hola@yohlar.com)

Yohlar Power of 3™ Innovation Framework



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

"The sessions themselves were my favourite part from the interactions with the Yohlar team to our own team working on our skillsets"

- Jody, Associate Director, AHSN  
Business Model Innovation Course, 2022

**50%**

of meetings are considered unproductive and a waste of time.

Atlassian

**75%**

of cross-functional teams are dysfunctional

Harvard Business Review, 2015

**29%**

of projects are successful.

Chaos Report, The Standish Group, 2013



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LEVEL 6 BMI  
Qualification**





# Building a Global Business Hub:

Situated at the heart of Newcastle International Airport, the International Trade Centre at AirView Park is poised to revolutionise the way regional businesses connect with the global market.

This state-of-the-art trade center offers a launchpad for businesses to grow globally while also providing a soft landing for inward investment.

Equipped with comprehensive support services, including incubator, accelerator, scale-up, and investor readiness programs, the International Trade Centre is a world-class facility that fosters international collaboration.

With a focus on links to India, Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Netherlands, and the USA, there are real benefits, and potential opportunities that this unique trade center will bring - **and it's ready for new tenants.**

## The International Trade Centre at AirView Park





## Co-Working Spaces and Business Community

In addition to providing support services, the International Trade Centre offers co-working spaces and business community facilities.

These shared spaces promote collaboration, innovation, and knowledge sharing among businesses from different industries and backgrounds.

The vibrant business community fosters valuable connections, partnerships, and access to an extensive network of professionals.

By creating a collaborative ecosystem, the trade center encourages cross-pollination of ideas and provides opportunities for businesses to thrive.



## Incubator, Accelerator, Scale-up, and Investor Readiness Programs

The International Trade Centre at AirView Park provides a wide range of support programs designed to nurture and accelerate the growth of regional businesses.

Through tailored programs such as incubators, businesses can access mentorship, networking opportunities, office spaces, and funding resources.

Accelerator programs help emerging businesses scale quickly, while scale-up programs are tailored for established businesses seeking to expand their market presence.

Investor readiness programs equip businesses with the skills and expertise needed to attract investment and secure funding for expansion.



  
**12,500**  
Businesses

  
**£100M**  
Investment

  
**300+**  
Service Providers





# The Benefits of Internationalisation

To better understand the benefits of internationalisation facilitated by the International Trade Centre here in the North East, let's consider some facts and figures:



# 2.65<sub>M</sub>

**within 60 minute drive**

The North East region of the UK has a population of approximately 2.65 million within a 60-minute drive time, providing a vast customer base for businesses to tap into.

## 2x Russell Group Universities

## 3x Law Schools

The North East boasts the highest university provision per capita, with two Russell Group universities and three law schools. This rich academic environment ensures a steady stream of highly skilled graduates, opening the doors for businesses to access top talent.

### Newcastle - Good For Growth

Newcastle, where the trade center is located, is a fast-growing city ranked highly in the PWC Good Growth for Cities Index. The city's strategic location, excellent infrastructure, and international connectivity make it an ideal base for businesses looking to expand globally.

# 5,000,000

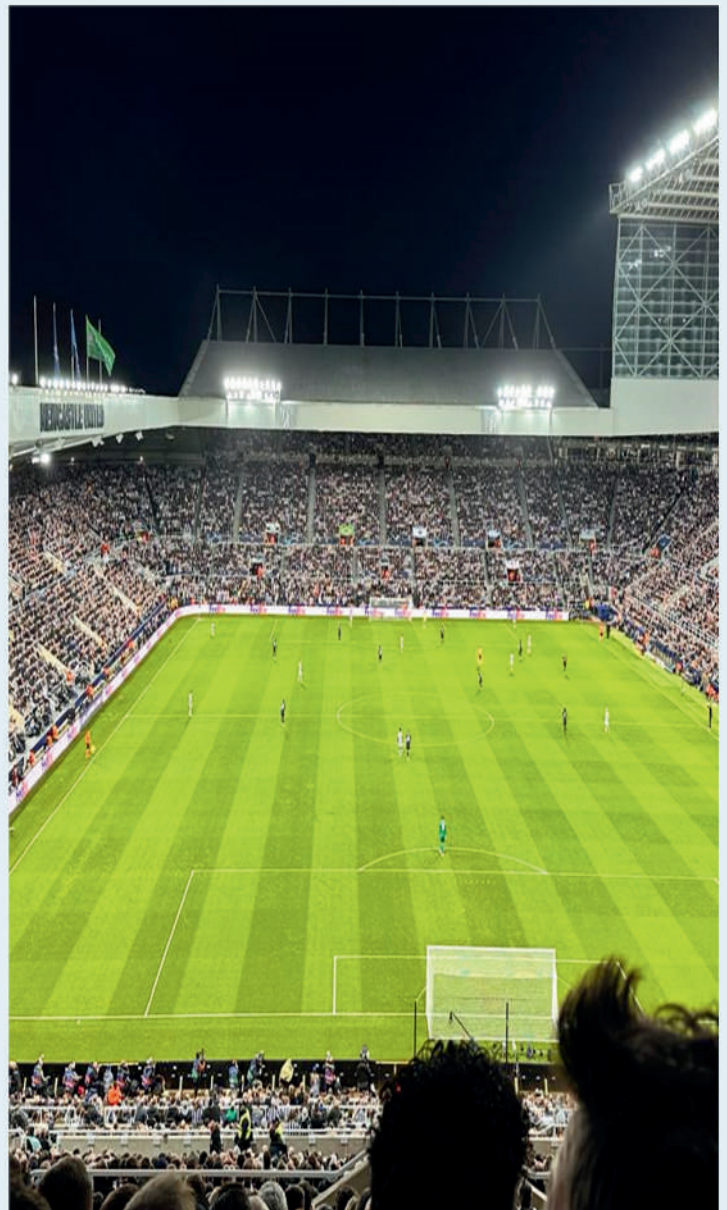
**passengers worldwide**

Newcastle International Airport serves over 5 million passengers annually, offering worldwide connections to destinations across the Middle East, Asia, and Europe. This accessibility opens up endless opportunities for regional businesses to reach new markets and establish international partnerships.

# £13.2<sub>BN</sub>

**worth of exports in 2018**

Businesses in the North East exported £13.2 billion worth of goods in 2018, showcasing the region's strong export capabilities.





# Comprehensive In-Country Support

One of the key advantages of the International Trade Centre is its full wrap around professional in-country support services.

This means that businesses operating out of the trade center receive hands-on assistance and guidance in target countries.

With dedicated teams on the ground, businesses can benefit from localized market insights, regulatory support, cultural guidance, and connections to local partners.

This level of support greatly reduces the barriers to international expansion and enables businesses to navigate complex foreign markets effectively.

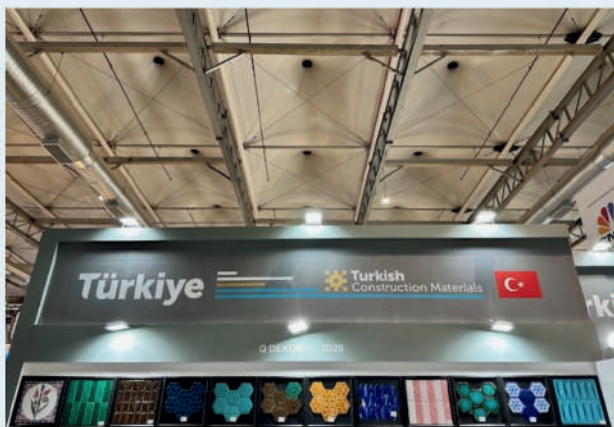
## World-Class Trade Centre with Global Links

The International Trade Centre at AirView Park stands as a pioneering facility, offering a unique hub for international trade.

What sets it apart is the extensive network of government and grassroots level connections it has established in key countries.

With links to India, Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Netherlands, and the USA, businesses operating from this center gain access to global markets that hold significant trade potential.

These connections at both government and grassroots levels provide a seamless entry into new markets, with support from key stakeholders and local entities.



## TURKEY

### Did you know?

By the end of 2023, Turkey was ranked as the UK's 16th largest trading ally. The combined trade in goods and services between both nations amounted for £26.3 billion during that year.

UK exports to Turkey was reported at £10 billion, while imports from Turkey was reported at £16.2 billion by the end of 2023.

Turkey offers substantial opportunities and benefits for UK enterprises, especially within sectors such as technology and manufacturing. Turkey boasts one of the most rapidly expanding economies and has a population of 85 million people.

The economic ties between the UK and Turkey are strong, the trade value between the UK and Turkey has totalled to nearly £26 billion in 2022.

AmmarM group has an office in Istanbul and works in partnership with one of the oldest and most established Chambers of Commerce, ensuring the right support and the right time to help organisations grow global.

## INDIA

### Did you know?

Improved trade relations between the UK and India offer a significant advantage, which includes the decreased trade barriers for goods. Establishing a trade agreement with India would make trade more straightforward and low-cost for UK exporters. This also allows there to be more advantage and value for goods for UK consumers.

By the end of 2023, India stood as the UK's 12th largest trading partner. The combined trade in goods and services between the UK and India reached £38.1 billion. The total UK exports to India was recorded at £14.0 billion, while imports from India to the UK was recorded at £23.2 billion.

India is a vital partner for the UK, trade allows the UK to enhance the relationship between UK and India. India stands out as one of the rapidly evolving economies in the Indo-Pacific region. Projections suggest that the UK exports could surge by £16.7 billion by 2035. By ensuring a mutually beneficial trade agreement, this would grant the UK to have entry to a market that offers both short and long term benefits.

AmmarM has been operating in India for over 15 years with partnerships across all sectors.



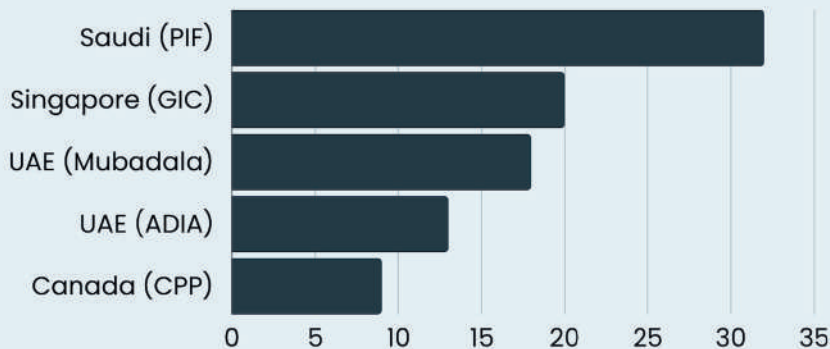
# Howay the Sauds - Saudi Arabia

The positive impact of a successful football club on a city is undeniable. Already, foreign students are showing increased interest in Newcastle and Durham Universities, while the Centre for Economic and Business Research predicts that a league-winning team can contribute 1.1 percent to local economic growth through heightened hospitality spending.

These potential synergies between sports and economic developments have further kindled expectations of a flourishing Newcastle, wider North East and Tees Valley.

## The Expanding Economic Links Between Saudi Arabia and Great Britain

Black Gold - Public Investment Funds,  
Capital Deployed, \$bn, 2023  
Source: Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute



Beyond the PIF and Newcastle United Football Club, economic ties between Saudi Arabia and Britain are strengthening. Total trade figures have surged by 32.8% in the year leading up to June 2023. Saudi firms, independent of PIF, are already active in the North East of England.

Experts at DWF, a law firm with offices in both the North of England and the Middle East, predict exponential growth in Saudi investment within the region in the coming years.

As the Saudi-North East England Trade and Investment Dialogue expands, the North East's journey towards becoming an international launch pad both inward and outward, is poised to create a more prosperous future for both the city and the region and the International Trade Centre at AirView can facilitate that growth.



## CONNECTING SAUDI

with Aman Mirza CBE

"Having spent the last 15 years developing government and grassroots level relationships across the globe, Saudi Arabia offers the most exciting opportunity to us in the North East, given that economy is opening up and the whole country transforming for Vision 2030.

Delighted to have established a number of partnerships to showcase our North East into Saudi and vice-versa through Airview Park."



SAUDI  
BUSINESS  
LINKS



For any enquiries about the International Trade Centre or international trade, contact the team at the SME Centre of Excellence: [team@smecofe.com](mailto:team@smecofe.com) - [www.smecofe.com](http://www.smecofe.com)



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## FW Capital investment has £400 million impact on Northern businesses

Approaching 450 businesses across the North of England have benefitted from investments of £173 million from regional fund manager FW Capital, through NPIF – FW Capital Debt Finance, which is part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund.

The investments have attracted £230 million co-investment from the private sector, totalling an impact of over £400m on the Northern economy. Since the fund was launched in 2017, the funding has led to the creation and safeguarding of almost 5000 jobs. This has helped Northern firms to build skilled teams and create new products and services. 2020/21 proved to be the most active year, with 115 businesses securing £36 million of funding through the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme.

Mike Owen, Chief Executive at FW Capital said: “Access to finance is critical to stimulating business growth, innovation, and job creation, and it’s been rewarding to see how our investments have made a real difference to SMEs across the North. Demand for alternative finance was such that our initial allocation of £102m in 2017 increased to £173m over the course of the fund enabling us to support more businesses and reach higher levels of job creation and growth. We’ve supported a variety of firms across the North and enjoyed working with the team at the British Business Bank to deliver valuable finance to high growth companies.”



Keira Shepperson, Director, British Business Bank said “FW Capital reaching a milestone of delivering £400 million impact to businesses across the North demonstrates our commitment to driving sustainable economic growth. With the upcoming launch of NPIF II, we’re looking forward to continuing this legacy, providing the springboard for businesses across the region to prosper.”



### Artisan doughnut chain grows with NEL Investment backing

An ambitious coffee and doughnut café chain founded by two North East schoolfriends is set to open more stores and create more jobs after attracting a five-figure investment from the North East Small Loan Fund.

Deep North offers high quality artisan doughnuts that are made using the best local, seasonal ingredients and served only on the same day they’re made, as well as specialty coffee made by trained baristas using the best La Marzocco equipment and beans selected by high-end supplier Allpress Espresso UK.

Founded by Phil King and Tom Clark, Deep North opened its first outlet on Front Street in Tynemouth 18 months ago and has also had a regular presence at markets, events and pop-up locations around the region.

After working with regional fund management firm NEL Fund Managers to bring in the investment from the North East Small Loan Fund Supported by The European Regional Development Fund, the

management team is now looking at finding further locations across the region as they work towards scaling up the brand.

Phil King says: “We’d talked for some time about launching a food-based business together, and when we found the space that we took on in Tynemouth, we knew it was perfect for the concept we had in mind.

“Deep North was successful right from the off, with more than 400 doughnuts being sold in Tynemouth on a busy day and additional sales through the markets and other events that we attend.

“We reached the point of opening our second outlet far more quickly than we expected, but it’s been really well received by Newcastle customers and we’re now working on ways to use the space at different times of the day, as well as tapping into the city centre’s corporate market.

“Tom and I have both served our time in the kitchen and on the coffee machine, but we’ve also built a talented team that can deliver the high-quality products that we need, allowing us to spend more time focusing on scaling up the business.

“Our aim is to open more outlets around the region over the next couple of years, to substantially increase our production levels to service these locations and to build the Deep North brand into a recognisable part of the North East’s food sector.”

Jonathan Armitage, investment executive at NEL Fund Managers, adds: “Phil, Tom and the Deep North team have married high quality products to an ambitious business plan, and they’re already well on the way to becoming the North East’s latest food success story.”

Part of the £153m North East Fund and aimed predominantly at smaller SMEs, the £9m North East Small Loan Fund typically offers loans to businesses in Tyne & Wear, Durham and Northumberland.

The overarching £153m North East Fund will provide financial support for more than 600 businesses, creating around 2,500 jobs and delivering a legacy of up to £80m for further investment into the region.

NEL Fund Managers is also responsible for managing the £18m North East Growth Capital Fund, which offers unsecured investments to established businesses looking to realise their growth potential.



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## North East Property Fund invests £50million across the region

The North East Property Fund has reached the investment milestone of £50million, providing funding to help kickstart the development of small-scale property schemes throughout the region.

Managed by FW Capital, the fund was established in 2017 in response to demand for smaller construction and property development financing. It is backed by the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (North East LEP). Since the fund started in 2017 FW Capital has supported the construction of 227 houses across 51 developments, the build out of 7,589 sq ft of commercial space and created and safeguarded 750 jobs.

One North East success story is local property developer Bell Blue who has recently received a £1.435million loan from the North East Property Fund to support an exclusive development of five high specification executive homes in the stunning rural location of Satley, County Durham. The homes boast generously designed space in a location handpicked for its exclusivity and privacy. This is the third Bell Blue scheme the fund has supported, highlighting how it can provide long term support to developers.

Tony Cullen, Fund Manager at FW Capital, said: "The North East Property Fund has played an important role in bringing new housing and small-scale commercial property schemes to the region. It's made a significant impact by unlocking finance for smaller property developers like Bell Blue who are meeting the growing demand in the North East for quality new homes as seen with their latest development in Satley. We're delighted to support their third development. It's a great example of how we're building lasting relationships and supporting local property developers to address the housing shortage in the region. Good quality housing in the right locations is still in demand despite what is being reported nationally. This is perhaps best demonstrated from the fact we have seen sales



across 10 development sites we are currently funding and have received more than £9.5m of repayments since April 2023."

Matt Houghton, Blue Bell Director said: "Our latest development is a stunning location in Satley with spectacular rural views. It's been great to work again with Tony at FW Capital who has shown continued confidence in our business, providing capital to help us to complete the site. This is the third loan we have received from the North East Property Fund and it has had a real impact on the success and growth of our business. We're already attracting prospective homeowners who are interested in the new development, with 4 or the 5 plots still currently available for sale."

Darlington based Bell Blue Ltd focus on small developments of bespoke new build homes consisting of 3 to 10 units. The two previous loans from FW Capital and the North East Property Fund supported two successful housing schemes. The first in 2020 to support the construction of four family homes in Toft Hill, Bishop Auckland, County Durham and in 2022 the build of five new homes on the site of a former equestrian centre in Hargill Road, Howden-le-Wear.



## Host & Stay expands with six figure investment

One of the UK's largest independent holiday home management firms is enjoying fast growth with plans to create new jobs across the North East.

Based in Skelton-in-Cleveland, Host & Stay Group has received a six-figure loan to support its rapid growth. The funding from NPIF – FW Capital Debt Finance, which is managed by FW Capital and is part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund is helping the firm to invest in its structure and staff as part of its expansion strategy. It looks to create 50 new roles in the next 12-18months.

Host & Stay prides itself on making it more affordable for holiday

owners to manage and rent out their properties, while enjoying a greater return on investment. Host & Stay was founded by the Smith family in 2018. Today the business is a leading independent name in the holiday home and serviced accommodation market.

Dale Smith, CEO of Host & Stay, said: "The whole ethos of Host & Stay is to help more holiday homeowners unlock the potential in their properties. This will ultimately lead to increased revenue for our holiday homeowners, and with less hassle due to our end-to-end managed service. We've experienced an impressive growth trajectory having grown from our first property in 2017 to today having over 1000 properties on our books. We're now looking to expand the business further through organic growth and acquisitions and this funding is instrumental in assisting this.

We were introduced to Alex Gent at FW Capital by James Clinghan from TBP who works alongside our accountant James Dale of Anderson Barrowcliff. Alex recognised our growth ambitions and was able to offer an investment proposition that supports our exciting strategic growth plan which will enhance our service offering and boost the local economy with new jobs."

Alex Gent, Senior Investment Executive at FW Capital added: "Host & Stay has enjoyed impressive growth since its inception and is today a multi-million-pound turnover business. I'm thrilled to be part of their growth journey and make a difference to the future success of the company. Their portfolio of holiday homes and apartments extends across the UK from the Yorkshire Dales, to North Yorkshire, the North East, Wales, the South West, Kent and Sussex, and Liverpool."



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# Tier One Capital's Fund Management team for Develop North PLC

Newcastle upon Tyne based Tier One Capital (TOC) is a leading provider of fund and wealth management services.

**The TOC team specialises in managing institutional and high net worth investment funds and are the appointed fund managers to Develop North PLC, an institutional investment company listed on the London Stock Exchange.**

Develop North PLC provides loans to the property sector and is a credible alternative lending source for property developers in the North of England and Scotland.

Since inception, Develop North PLC has created almost 3,000 jobs, provided over £70m of loans and supported 33 developments with a GDV of £183m.

Recent property developments supported by Develop North include:-

£3.8M senior debt facility to deliver a new ultra modern and environmentally friendly advanced crematorium on the outskirts of Glasgow for Horizon Ceremonies, creating 25 new jobs in the construction and operation of the facility.

Funding support for £9M Bede Homes Bill Quay development in Gateshead, facilitating the construction of 30 three and four bedroom family homes.

£3.4M senior debt facility to support the development by Homes by Esh for the construction of 34 family homes at Chilton Moor development, Tyne and Wear.

£1.2M senior debt facility with the Apartment Group to upgrade the Grade II listed building Croft Hotel and create a new wedding venue in North Yorkshire, creating 30 new jobs as part of the upgrade.



**Ian McElroy, Chief Executive**

Ian is one of the founding shareholders of TOC and a board member of Develop North PLC.



**Jess Swindells, Managing Director**

Jess joined TOC in 2017 and is a practising lawyer specialising in Banking and Corporate Finance.



**Brendan O'Grady, Fund Manager**

Brendan is a Chartered Accountant and corporate treasurer and joined TOC in 2017 and leads the Fund Management team.



**Paul Crawley, General Counsel**

Paul provides legal counsel to TOC's board of directors and senior management team.



**Richard McEvoy, Head of Credit Committee**

Richard is an experienced Corporate Banker providing lending process and governance advice to Develop North PLC.



**Andrew Cawkwell, Credit Committee Member**

Andrew is a Restructuring Solicitor and Certified Turnaround professional providing advice to Develop North PLC.





Mike Pott, managing director at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors

## RMT implementing growth strategy with McCowie & Co acquisition

RMT Accountants & Business Advisors is growing its presence in the rural and agricultural sector by completing the acquisition of a longstanding North East specialist in the field.

**Gosforth-based RMT has acquired McCowie & Co for an undisclosed sum in its first acquisition since becoming part of Sumer, the UK's fastest-growing accountancy group, earlier this year.**

Founded in 1970 by George McCowie, who still acts as a consultant to the firm today, McCowie & Co has offices in Hexham and Newcastle, and acts for a wide range of agricultural, farming and contracting businesses across the North East, Scotland and North Yorkshire.

It has an eight-strong team and is also very active within the creative sector, with film, television and media clients located in the North East, North West and London.

McCowie & Co will operate as a subsidiary of RMT, with the same team continuing to service its existing clients, but with the

additional benefit of access to the additional resources and expertise that its new owners can offer.

RMT's management team currently has several further regional acquisition opportunities under consideration.

Peter McCowie, partner at McCowie & Co, says: "We've been operating successfully for more than 50 years and have built a very strong reputation for the firm in specific markets.

"We looked at a number of options for the future of the firm and felt that becoming part of RMT made a great deal of sense for everyone involved.

"It gives our respective clients access to significant new resources and expertise, and we're excited to now be part of a North East business that's got big plans for the future."

Established in 1954, RMT Accountants provides the full range of financial and business advisory services through its accountancy, specialist tax, medical and healthcare, corporate finance and recovery and insolvency teams.

It works with UK companies of all sizes, both within and outside the North East, including a range of international clients.

Top 15 UK accountancy group Sumer is investing in successful accountancy firms throughout the UK to create regional hubs which focus on the SME market and has grown rapidly by completing 12 co-investment transactions over the last year.

Mike Pott, managing director at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, says: "Becoming part of a nationwide organisation like Sumer, with a clear strategy for growth, provides us with new opportunities to bring in additional expertise which will help us achieve our commercial ambitions.

"We've known the McCowie team for many years and have huge respect for their specialist knowledge and impressive, long-term business performance.

"We're very pleased to have completed this first acquisition as part of Sumer and are now looking at a number of other potential acquisitions."

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





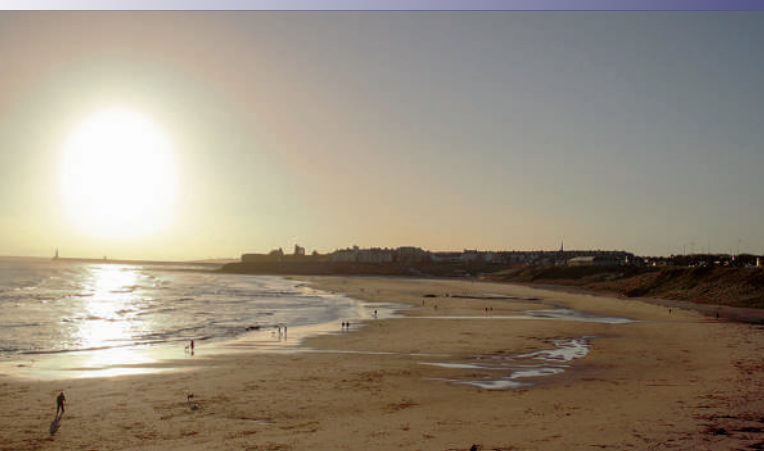
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Andrew Marsh



# How to understand your company's learning needs

Firms face a continuous battle in understanding which training will meet their needs and how the right training will positively affect their retention of talent. It's a minefield of offerings out there, so to help leaders make the right decisions Nevil Tynemouth and Andrew Marsh have joined forces to share their thoughts on the matter.

Nevil has recently launched a free eBook through his business New Results, which supports organisations who need insight to undertaking a strategic approach to planning their own learning needs analysis (LNA). An LNA is a long-term strategic development planning tool needed to achieve your organisation goals. It takes into consideration short, medium and long-term goals directly linking to your long-term strategy.

He said: "Our LNA resource has been developed to help employers understand fully their organisations learning needs. Those needs may be immediate or as part of a longer-term goal, such as succession planning. The resource will assist in the creation of a learning and development plan that aligns with the strategic goals of the organisation. This can be supported by undertaking a training needs analysis that digs deeper into specific individuals' development needs delivered by a training program, considering the people's needs and outcomes required. The key is to create a strategic alignment between your learning and development goals that directly align with organisations long terms goals and aspirations. Our resource, which is free to download, shows you how to do this and much more."

Andrew, who specialises in leadership development, strategy training day facilitation and peer group training amongst other business activities, agrees with Nevil that strategy is key. The pair met as Nevil is a big advocate of peer group learning and had sought out Andrew's groups as part of his own development.

Andrew said: "As well as retaining the right staff, the correct training delivered in a strategic way can improve a company's reputation, escalate growth and increase productivity. Statistics from my Vistage cohorts show that through peer group training, sales, turnover and profit can increase by at least 30%. It is a no brainer that an annual strategic training plan should be part of any board's or leadership team's agenda!"

By investing in a pathway and framework for talented employees on an individual basis they feel valued and if they have the whole tool box to do their job, then their performance will be outstanding. So, by undertaking a strong learning needs analysis you can strategically think about who in the organisation needs training, for what purpose and gain an understanding of what your ultimate goal of the investment is. Nevil continued: "For me there are three main drivers to training and development.

- **Firstly**, to fill the skills and behavioural gap in a team. This is ideal for newer members of the team, a new team, or someone who is having to adopt a new way or working or has been promoted. This usually requires a blend of training as not only are skills needed to be learnt but how to behave and enable the person to liaise confidently with other team members. Development styles that suit this new need include: training, peer groups, 1-2-1 coaching or mentoring, and group facilitation, which will help a team come up with new ways or working using their current skills and experience.



- **Secondly**, to improve retention of staff. By fully engaging people they feel valued sitting in a thriving culture. Since the pandemic there has been an increase in organisations seeing the value of annual conferences, offsite learning and away days. They are track proven to build relationships and connections which goes onto strengthening shared business goals.

- **And thirdly**, succession planning and development. This is a longer-term goal investing in the future of the company linking strategic goals with your current people and their skill sets. The best ways to fill the knowledge gaps is with in depth leadership and management training, peer group and detailed, supportive 1-2-1 coaching that enables an external view on what good looks like."

Andrew runs a host of peer groups across the region focused on small business owners, CEOs, emerging leaders, and an advancing group.

He said: "By working with an organisation such as Vistage and New Results, you are being proactive in managing gaps, and the reputation you build will be a great tool to attract and retain well developed people.

Nevil Tynemouth is founder of New Results, a comprehensive training agency committed to supporting you and your teams on your professional development journey. The teams' expertise spans across:

- Leadership & Management Development
- Personal & Professional Growth Development
- Business Growth, Strategy & Operational Development

**To access the information on learning needs analysis you can visit and download the eBook here: [newresults.co.uk/resources/learning-needs-analysis-lna](https://newresults.co.uk/resources/learning-needs-analysis-lna)**

**To reach out to Andrew Marsh, to learn more about Vistage, Experience Bank Group or how he can transform your business and your team to perform better, please contact [andrew@marshbusinessstransformation.co.uk](mailto:andrew@marshbusinessstransformation.co.uk)**



# Retail Company powered up thanks to Experience Bank Group

An ecommerce retailer that makes buying the tools the easiest part of getting a DIY or professional job done, has powered up its own team, thanks to Experience Bank Group.

**Peter Neal, founder of Experience Bank Group, has helped the owners of Power Tool World bolster their senior leadership team with not one, but two appointments.**

Chris and Suzanne Guy, who set up the business 25 years ago, were initially looking for short term help while they took time out of the business to travel. However, when Andrew Pickersgill and David Quinn joined the team, all four of them found themselves focussed on a long-term goal and were excited about the scalability of the business.

Now in position as Managing Director, Andrew has known Peter through a number of associations, including being part of one of the EB Peer Group Cohorts that focusses on helping existing and aspiring NEDs, Trustees, Board Advisors and Consultants at Board Level. He brings with him a wealth of talent in the construction and building merchant industry. He is focused on both short term and long term wins to grow the company, including extending warehouse facilities, bringing in a new trade account B2B offering and expanding the 40 plus team further.

He said: "Power Tool World is already a huge success and has appeared in Ward Hadaway's Fastest 50 no less than three times. Now is a really exciting time where not only can we expect an uplift in the growth projection, but we can really position ourselves nationally as the next day delivery experts that provide the best service, the advice and the best tools for a longer-term investment."



David Quinn and Andrew Pickersgill

David Quinn was also introduced to the company by Peter and has joined as Finance and Operations Director. A qualified accountant and treasurer, David has worked in a number of sectors including oil and gas, online gambling, retail and manufacturing. He specialises in growth and transition.

He said: "Before we started working together, Andrew and I had never met each other or anyone at Power Tool World. Peter really needs commending for his recommendations, as he recognised what would work for Chris and Suzanne, and has brought together a strong team who understand a shared goal."

Power Tool World stocks the latest professional tools from Dewalt, Makita, Milwaukee and more specialising in saws, drills, angle grinders, nail guns, pressure washers, multi tools, polishers, and

measurement tools. Peter said: "When Chris and Suzanne approached me, I was excited to work with them as the needs were very specific and the people had to be able to flex to maximise the opportunity. David and Andrew are excellent appointments and I look forward to seeing what the future holds for Power Tool World."

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# Interest Rates have been rising. Will that continue in 2024?

As we approach the tax year end Dr Emma Black, CEO & Co-Founder of Cascade Cash Management and President of the North East Committee for the Chartered Institute of Securities and Investment, rounds up what the region's business leaders are likely to see in 2024 for interest rates.

**Emma says: "We've had a tough few years not just here but across the world. The cost of living has risen sharply since 2022. Food and energy prices have rose markedly with supply shocks as a result of the conflict in Ukraine. Moreover, the continued global recovery from the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has exerted further pressure on prices."**

"In the UK, prices of consumer goods and services rose by 9.6% in the year to October 2022 (ONS, 2024), the fastest rise in four decades. While the rise has slowed, inflation remains above target and households continue to face a squeeze.

"As a result of pressure on household budgets, there have been increasing strikes across many sectors and this has led to significant economic disruption. These times have been tough for business leaders and for our region, which continues to fall behind in capital inflows.

"Monetary policy during this time has sought to constrain inflation, and interest rates have risen sharply from 0.10% in December 2021 to 5.25% in August 2023 to dampen consumer spending, slow demand and reduce price growth. This sadly also has exacerbated the impact on households and businesses who have felt increased borrowing costs during this time, particularly for those with variable-rate personal or commercial mortgages.

"Where there are challenges, there are also opportunities and we've certainly seen plenty of those for savers over the same time period. Mindful of increasing costs, it's becoming ever-more important for business leaders to ensure that every pound really does count...and shopping around to do so has never been better!



Dr Emma Black

"Interest rates are strong for those with cash balances and in times of uncertainty, cash buffers tend to remain higher to protect financial resilience. We have been working hard at Cascade to ensure we make savings simple, helping our clients to obtain thousands of pounds of extra interest that otherwise would be left on the table.

"Ensuring you get a fair deal is not always easy. The regulator has raised the spotlight over the last year as providers have failed to pass on rate increases in the same degree to savers as they have to borrowers. The Financial Conduct Authority found in fact that only 28% of the base rate increase was passed on to savers during January 2022 and May 2023 as compared to an average pass-on rate of 80% between 2004 and 2009.

"Our service saves people so much time in trying to find a better home for their cash. We have every single regulated bank and building society in our dataset and at the time of this publication, over 230 providers are in the market offering between them over 6,800 savings products.

"Getting the best selection of those accounts to meet your needs can be hard. Our online platform, AskNeve, generates the best rates

for you based on what access you need to your money and splits it over however many banks you prefer. Many opt for full protection under the Financial Services Compensation Scheme and with over 230 providers, we can certainly deliver peace of mind!

"This year interest rate changes are slowing and there remains debate over whether the base rate will be decreased this year. Most feel a base rate decrease to be increasingly likely as we move towards the end of the year, with a view that rates will normalise between 3.50% and 4.50% towards the end of 2025.

"Whatever happens, it feels like the challenges of 2022/23 are slowing for business leaders. If you've survived the storm, then it's probably time to now start considering how you can maximise your opportunity moving forward – and getting more from your cash reserves would be a good place to start!"

**More information on Cascade can be found by contacting Emma on [Emma.Black@cascade.co.uk](mailto:Emma.Black@cascade.co.uk)**





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## UNW holds International Women's Day event celebrating Females in Finance

UNW's female colleagues recently headed over to The Catalyst in Newcastle's Helix Site for an event celebrating International Women's Day. They were joined by students from local schools, colleges and universities interested in a career in finance.

Organised and arranged by an internal team that included Audit Assistant Manager Beth Sheldon, Employment Tax Specialist Becky Hood and Audit Senior Manager Leanne Leftley, a panel of four inspirational speakers each gave an overview of their different career paths in finance and business.

Nicola Coleman, Audit Partner at UNW, Sara Vening, Director of Finance and People at The Glasshouse ICM, Dr Natalia Blagburn, Portfolio Director at Mercia Asset Management and Charlotte Staerck, Co-founder and CEO of The Handbag Clinic, commented on, amongst other things, the challenges they have faced and what they've learned along the way, continuing the discussion in a live Q+A session and other interactive activities across the morning.

Nicola Coleman said: "Personally, I found the event really uplifting and it was fantastic to see the audience so engaged. At UNW our women are truly valued and really are the best at what they do. We have female friendly policies and working practices and I'm proud to be part of the ever-growing team. I look forward to seeing what the future holds for the next generation of women coming through our brilliant graduate and apprenticeship programmes!"











## Maven launches Female Founder Funding Programme

Maven's new Female Founder Funding Programme aims to offer valuable resources, mentorship, and collaboration opportunities to women entrepreneurs, assisting them in navigating the complexities of business ownership more effectively.

**In the world of finance, diversity remains a challenge, and the underrepresentation of women in private equity is a well-known issue. To address this, we are launching a programme specifically designed to support female founders. Our goal is to promote gender parity and facilitate women entrepreneurs' access to finance.**

Diversity and inclusion play a crucial role in investment and its impact extends to investors, companies, and the overall economy. When we foster diverse teams, we unlock a number of advantages:

**Deeper understanding:** Diverse perspectives lead to a more comprehensive grasp of complex issues. By considering various viewpoints, we gain insights that might otherwise remain hidden.

**Better insights:** A mix of backgrounds and experiences enriches the decision-making process. Diverse teams can identify risks, opportunities, and innovative solutions more effectively.

**Broader competencies:** Different skill sets and expertise enhance the team's capabilities. A diverse group can tackle multifaceted challenges with a wider range of skills.

At Maven, women are integral to our business and culture, playing a prominent role in our organisation's success. The experience and skills brought by women have enriched our business. With mixed gender teams, we've fostered the development of innovative ideas and improved work processes. Encouraging and supporting women entrepreneurs contributes to a more vibrant and inclusive business ecosystem. That's why we've established a programme for female founders, led by our female investment team.

As a signatory to the Investing in Women Code, Maven is committed to supporting the advancement of female entrepreneurship in the UK by improving female entrepreneurs' access to tools, resources and finance from the financial services sector.



“

*Research highlights that there is significant untapped potential within the UK economy, where female entrepreneurs receive substantially less investment compared to their male counterparts. To help drive change, we are launching a programme aimed at supporting women in business and leadership. Our focus is on empowering talented founders at the helm of some of the most innovative and high-growth businesses across the UK. With this new initiative, we eagerly anticipate expanding our network and assisting these entrepreneurs in taking that crucial next step on the funding ladder.*

**Melanie Goward, Partner at Maven**

“

*Female founders and management teams contribute diverse perspectives and experiences, resulting in innovative solutions and groundbreaking products. Diverse teams are more creative and better at problem-solving, as well as generating higher returns and better economic value for stakeholders; research indicates that companies led by gender-diverse leadership teams tend to outperform their less diverse counterparts. In recognising that female founders bring unique skills and perspectives to businesses, we are committed to ensuring that the right tools, resources, and support is accessible.*

**Rebecca MacDermid, Investment Manager at Maven**

Our programme will encompass a series of funding workshops and 1-2-1 support sessions to connect with women entrepreneurs who encounter challenges in accessing growth capital or those who simply want to know more about accessing funding. Our virtual funding clinics will be hosted online, ensuring accessibility for female founders across the UK. The goal is to provide support, advice and feedback to assist them in scaling their companies.

The female founder workshops will provide small groups with an interactive experience featuring engaging and educational presentations from Maven and local advisors. Participants will receive an overview of the funding landscape, tips on investment readiness and insights into growth and scaling opportunities.

Additionally, participants will have the chance to hear from our investment team, who are at the forefront of business innovation and growth. They'll gain insights into the different types of investment available and receive guidance on what to consider when negotiating funding.

***Maven is one of the UK's most active private equity investors helping hundreds of management teams across the UK make their vision a reality and achieve transformational levels of growth. Are you a female founder? Visit [mavencp.com](https://mavencp.com) to find out more about our programme and book your place at our next event.***





# Uncertain times

Covid, Ukraine, Gaza, and the high price of the basics of food and fuel. Public service strikes and disruption to services, hospital waiting lists, illegal immigration, and the inability to find workers willing to work. A slump in stock market values and unusually a collapse in bonds at the same time.

**Local government operations becoming insolvent with a desperate need for additional central funding, but where from? The country has a poor balance of payments whilst enduring one of the highest taxation rates since the sixties.**

Just the right time to have an election and let a new team get their hands on the levers of power with the “exciting” new prospects of renationalising fuel, transport, and utilities. Why then is the rest of Europe moving to the right in their political travel, looking to reduce costs, become more efficient and face up to the slightly uncomfortable times we are going through to ignite growth in the economy?

Possibly because their political cycle has taken them through the big state, left wing centralist governments and they have lost faith in the prospect of it working. Our cycle has taken an opposite trajectory and through a series of bad decisions and appalling management both actual and media interpreted, we have or are about to lose faith in our capitalism as a solution.

Who is going to be right, I don't think it matters. There is so little room for fiscal manoeuvre for whomever wins the forthcoming election, we are likely to have to let this whole set of circumstances play out with a different set of faces, though I feel the outcomes won't be that much different.

With a wider view of global issues, we see the investment markets stabilising and moving forward. We interpret this as pricing in the significant issues in Ukraine, Gaza, climate change etc. and looking forward to the future. We have no way of telling but it does look like the potential end to a downward spiral.

So, in such uncertain times, what do you look for from your financial adviser?

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## Making sure your business is exit ready

The M&A market in 2023 was fuelled by corporates who remained active in pursuing strategic M&A and this appears to be a key theme which is continuing into 2024.

**The drivers of corporate M&A activity are largely twofold:**

1) The UK continues to be an attractive market for overseas acquirers, influenced by many factors including exchange rates, access to new geographies, services, talent and technology. Overseas acquirers are therefore still keen to continue acquiring quality UK businesses.

2) Private equity investors have backed businesses to continue to seek bolt-on acquisitions which enhance scale, expand service offering and are highly synergistic. The strategy is for private equity to position these consolidators for exit.

There has also been a trend of pre-emptive approaches, primarily from buyers seeking to circumvent future sale processes and with the right positioning, they are willing to pay tomorrow's value today.

For shareholders, it is important to start planning your exit at an early stage and there are many different factors to consider, including:

- Considering the exit avenues for your business – it is important to consider your exit avenues and the attributes of the eventual buyer which will help inform on business strategy and positioning the business to a buyer. Considerations



Sahil Nayyar

include: is the buyer operating in the same sector, which type of buyer is most likely to find your business attractive and how does your business fit a strategic gap in the buyer's business.

- Positioning your business for a buyer – this is a crucial point which shareholders should consider at an early stage. To generate maximum value, it is very important to ensure that the business is positioned appropriately including understanding and eventually articulating specific synergies with a buyer. This is a vital stage when considering an exit and will ultimately help strategically position your business in the best possible way to drive a premium multiple and valuation.

- Identifying potential transaction issues – it is important to anticipate potential transaction issues which could arise during a transaction. This will ultimately give you time to rectify any issues which could lead to a smoother sale process. Such issues could be trading related

such as high customer concentration, contractual matters in customer or supplier agreements and solving issues with staff and/or succession.

It is important to consider appointing an adviser early on as exit planning requires careful and due consideration around a number of areas which could be strategically important and give you the best chance to obtain a successful result with maximised returns for shareholders.

Over the last decade, Cavu have advised shareholders across a variety of deal types and engaging early with shareholders ultimately gives the best chance of a successful sale. Our flexible approach means that we work with clients for several years to eventually achieve an optimum exit. We would be delighted to meet to discuss how we could advise you in such instances and how we can help you achieve your goals.

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## EMG Solicitors welcome new COP Director

**Award winning law firm EMG Solicitors who have offices in Durham, Newcastle, Darlington, Penrith and Manchester is delighted to welcome new Court of Protection (COP) Director Rebecca Sparrow.**

Based near Reading, the appointment of a Southern based director extends the firm's national COP offering. Marking their first venture outside of the North and taking the director group to a team of 11.

With over 14 years' COP experience, Rebecca who has held roles at a number of leading national law firms will assume the position of Deputy Trustee and Attorney

for a number of EMG's clients. Her appointment also extends the firm's brand footprint and client offering across the South, South East and London.

Jemma Morland, Director and Co-Founder of EMG Solicitors said: "We are delighted to welcome Rebecca Sparrow to the EMG team. Rebecca not only brings with her a wealth of experience but embodies the true values of the firm, making her a natural fit for our growing team. The appointment also further strengthens our client offering, and expansion to the South as we build a solid presence across the UK."

Rebecca Sparrow, COP Director, EMG Solicitors said: "I've always admired EMG Solicitors as a firm. It's remarkable to see how much they have achieved since the business was founded by Emma Gaudern and Jemma Morland 10 years ago. Their growth and strong reputation in COP are to be admired as well as their values and ethos as a firm. They really resonate with me personally and was one of the reasons that first attracted me to the role.

"It's clear to see that EMG are incredibly passionate about what they do, delivering an outstanding client service and putting their people at the heart of their business. I love their straightforward and transparent approach too, with what they say, being very much what they do!"



## North East law firm is open for business in new space

**A North East law firm is consolidating its position as one of fastest growing in the region by recently opening its new office space.**

Burnetts Solicitors LLP announced late last year its intention to invest £1m in its move from Newcastle's Dean Steet to the seventh floor at 1 Citygate, giving the firm the room it needs as it continues to grow.

And the new office has now opened its doors for the first time, unveiling a state-of-the-art facility which not only provides first class working conditions, but also showcases Burnetts' commitment to being a strong legal presence in the region.

The office has been designed to create a collaborative working environment and includes 60 work stations, a suite of meeting rooms, an eatery and a hub where staff can meet.

Burnetts has also considered the need for hybrid working when deciding on the layout of the new premises and that it also wants to accommodate the needs of visiting clients.

The move comes on the back of a highly successful year for Burnetts, during which time the firm has strengthened its teams across the board, with a number of key appointments in areas including commercial litigation, banking and property.

This brings the total number of people working at Burnetts' Newcastle office to 44.

Burnetts operates across a whole range of sectors including banking, commercial property, corporate, employment and litigation and Head of Newcastle office and Head of Banking, Nicola Nutley believes the move is an important one for the firm.

"We have very ambitious growth plans for Newcastle so it was vital that we had the necessary space to accommodate those plans," said Nicola.

"Citygate is a fantastic location and keeps Burnetts right in the heart of the city, while also giving us the space that we need and giving us a modern, flexible workspace in which our people can thrive."



## Armstrong Watson makes key appointment in North East with new Audit and Assurance Partner

**Armstrong Watson is delighted to announce the appointment of Audit and Assurance Partner Michael Morris in Newcastle.**

With a career spanning more than 25 years, Michael has a wealth of experience. He joins Armstrong Watson after 13 years with Deloitte, where he led the Entrepreneurial Business Team for five years, and 14 years as Audit Partner at UNW.

He joins the accountants, business and financial advisory firm during a period of continued growth in the North East. In the last 12 months alone, Armstrong Watson has acquired Newcastle-based accountancy firm Joseph Miller, moved into the city's state-of-the-art smart office, One Strawberry Lane, and made several senior appointments, including Corporate Finance Partner David Wilson and Tax Director Hayley Deeming.

Michael has worked with a vast range of businesses in the North East and Cumbria, including family and owner-managed businesses, PE-backed businesses, subsidiaries of overseas-owned groups, and entrepreneurial businesses across most sectors. He has considerable experience dealing with not only the needs and requirements of the business, but also the business owners.

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# EMG Solicitors celebrate 10th anniversary and prestigious award win

Imagining a new style of law firm is exactly what lawyers Emma Gaudern and Jemma Morland did way back when in 2014. To not just dream but create a company that would make a positive difference to people's lives – to the lives of its clients, colleagues and their local communities.

**Ten years later, EMG Solicitors has come a long way since the duo first put their heads together. Creating a new way of working with a fresh approach and place of 'joyful employment' as Emma affectionately refers. With the icing on the cake, becoming recent winners of the Private Client Firm of the Year 2024 at The Legal 500 Northern Powerhouse Awards last month.**

## Investing in local communities

With a headcount of 148 colleagues and premises in Durham, Penrith, Newcastle, Darlington and Manchester, the business also has plans for further expansion in the South, after the recent appointment of their eleventh Director, Rebecca Sparrow.

Alongside supporting clients with legal services including Wills, trusts and probate, family, dispute resolution, residential conveyancing, commercial property and their specialism in Court of Protection (COP), the team also devote time to raising much needed funds for their local communities. Every year donating 5% of company profits through the EMG Community Fund, providing charitable grants to organisations and grassroots community groups.

Added to that are the fundraising efforts of the annual WonderLAN charity ball which since it started has raised over £100,000 for Headway, the brain injury association.

## A team that makes a difference to their clients' lives

True to Emma and Jemma's original vision, EMG Solicitors take pride in making a real difference to their clients' lives, whether that's helping them buy their first home or offering advice on planning for their family's future. And with their specialist knowledge of Court of Protection law, they provide the support or 'scaffolding' around clients who don't have capacity to make important financial or welfare decisions for themselves.

As the firm marks its 10th anniversary, it also records a 30% increase in turnover in the last 12 months, as well as a 55% increase in team members and an expanding cabinet of awards for their ongoing leadership and client service.

Emma Gaudern, Managing Director, EMG Solicitors said: "From the start we had a clear vision of creating an environment where our people could really thrive.

It's been an incredible 10 years and personal highlights for me include seeing our COP team and total number of colleagues grow significantly. To think we are now a team of 148 with a national client offering is just incredible! And winning Private Client Firm of the Year at The Legal 500 Northern Powerhouse Awards was a real wow moment! Just amazing! I'm so proud of our teams in our tenth birthday year who go above and beyond every day to deliver an amazing service and to see that being recognised.

The opening of the Manchester office also has a special place in my heart. Being a fellow Mancunian, I always had a dream of opening an office there so making that a reality has been very special. None of this of course would be possible without the talented people we have working here, and our award is for each and every one of them."

Alongside their recent award, EMG Solicitors has marked several milestones including being named as a tier one law firm for its personal tax, trust and probate work in the Legal 500 rankings. With Emma also being ranked a 'Leading individual' in the Legal 500 listing.

Jemma Morland, Director and Co-Founder of EMG Solicitors said: "The last 10 years have brought some wonderful people into our lives; clients, colleagues and professional partners. I'm so proud of our recent award which is real credit to our wonderful team and the great things they are doing every day. We were up against some outstanding firms, so winning means so much."

**Watch the EMG Imagine A Law Firm video here...**



**Find out more about EMG Solicitors at [www.emgsolicitors.com](http://www.emgsolicitors.com)**





Emma Gaudern





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# Raising safety for high rise residents...

In our new column covering topical legal issues, Rebecca Dawson, a Partner in the commercial property team at Burnetts, highlights recent changes in building safety rules set to impact North East owners, tenants and residents alike.

**Further changes to the Building Safety Act 2022 (BSA) in England – designed to raise fire and structural safety standards – came into effect on 16th January.**

The ultimate aim of the new rules is to improve building safety – so here's a brief breakdown of what's involved and who is affected.

## What are the new rules?

The new rules cover high-risk buildings, which are those that are at least 18 metres or seven storeys high and contain at least two residential units. This includes both existing and new constructions. It adds additional responsibilities to the owners and management companies of these buildings.

These include carrying out a regular and comprehensive fire safety evaluation of the building's structure, external walls and apartment entrance doors and taking all reasonable steps to anticipate and prevent building safety risks materialising.

Buildings covered by the new regulations must be registered with the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) who must subsequently be kept informed and advised of mandatory occurrence reporting. All existing high risk buildings should now have been registered.

A fully comprehensive safety case report must be prepared containing detailed information crucial to the building and made readily available to residents and to the BSR. The new system requires reporting specific occurrences related to the building's safety, such as cladding failures, fires, or structural concerns.

## Who will be expected to implement these rules?

The responsibility for ensuring the building is fully compliant lies with the 'accountable person', and, crucially, the accountable person cannot delegate their responsibility.

- An accountable person holds the legal estate in any part of the common parts or has repairing obligations in relation to any part of the common parts.

Common parts under s.72 of the BSA include "the structure and exterior of the building... or any part of the building provided for the use, benefit and enjoyment of the residents of more than one residential unit (whether alone or with other persons)."

- If the lease obliges a management company to repair any part of the common parts, they are the accountable person, even if they have no legal title to the common parts.
- Right to manage companies are the accountable person if they have taken over responsibility for any part of the common parts.
- If there is a management lease of the common parts, the tenant of that management lease is the accountable person if the management lease states they have repairing obligations for any part of the common part.

## What are the penalties for failing to comply with the new rules?

The BSR can serve contravention notices on accountable persons if they are not complying with their duties under the BSA. The notice must:

- Set out details of the alleged breach of duty.
- Set out actions required to remedy the breach.

- Urgent notices can be used including a time scale.

Failure to comply with a notice is a criminal offence – up to two years' imprisonment or a fine, with more stringent fines where the failure causes "a significant risk of death or serious injury arising from a building safety risk."

The BSA empowers residents to hold the accountable person responsible through a new complaint process and access to building safety information.

## How do I find out more?

Government support is available in the form of various resources, from informative materials to guidance documents, to help owners comply with the new rules, which will also cover some boarding accommodation such as supported housing and mixed use buildings.

**The Building Safety Act 2022:** [www.gov.uk/guidance/the-building-safety-act](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-building-safety-act)

**Guidance for the new higher-risk regime:** [www.gov.uk/government/collections/guidance-on-the-criteria-for-being-a-higher-risk-building](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/guidance-on-the-criteria-for-being-a-higher-risk-building)

**Building Safety Regulator (BSR):** [www.hse.gov.uk/building-safety/regulator.htm](https://www.hse.gov.uk/building-safety/regulator.htm)

The commercial property team at Burnetts, which has offices at Citygate, Newcastle, Carlisle and Cockerham are also on hand to advise.

[www.burnetts.co.uk](https://www.burnetts.co.uk)



Rebecca Dawson



When others choose to be Goliath, we are David. We fight for our clients all day long. We are agile, flexible and dedicated. No matter your size or ability, all we see is potential, yours and ours. We work smart, dream big and produce excellence. We protect our clients, their assets and each other. We believe in you, in ourselves and in community.



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# Solicitor of the Month...

## Christine McVay

*Jacksons Law Firm.*

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

I am a consultant solicitor with Jacksons Law and I specialise in matrimonial finance. My modus operandi is to achieve the best result possible for my client because the outcome of their financial remedy claim can shape their future - and I want that to be as bright and enjoyable as possible for every client of mine.

### Describe the team you are part of.

I work with Katy Moody and Emma Canham. Katy heads up the department. She is an excellent lawyer, 100% committed and a joy to work with. Emma loves her work; she is a fighter with a big heart. The three of us work closely together, we share information regularly and we all know that we can depend upon each other.

### Did you always envisage a career as a lawyer?

When I was a child, I guess I didn't even know what a lawyer was. I wanted to be a dancer with Pan's People but never quite made that! Eventually I made the right choice of career and since becoming a lawyer, I have given talks to local schools to explain the work that a lawyer is involved in, in the hope of inspiring even one child to be aware of possibilities for them.

### Describe your career path.

Michael Smithson, a local commercial solicitor, trained me to deliver very high-quality work and his mentoring provided the excellent foundation for my career. In 2000, I headed up the family team at McKeags before moving to the Leeds area to specialise completely in financial remedy cases. That led me to Shakespeares in Birmingham, where I represented Euro Millions winners. Returning to my native North East, my journey of creativity continued at Short Richardson & Forth. That experience has served me and my clients very well. I have always been completely dedicated to my work as a family lawyer and all these years on, continue to be so.

### How have you seen your industry evolving?

Divorce has recently been made much easier and much less costly for separating couples which I am very pleased about. A specialist financial remedy court has been created which streamlines such cases and that in operation, I see benefitting all parties.

### What is your proudest achievement?

About 25 years ago, I represented a mother whose child had been abducted by her father and taken to Cairo. We had to attend several hearings in the Royal Courts of Justice before the eventual outcome, which was to see the child once more gathered in her mother's arms. There were many tears of happiness and relief. On that case I had the privilege of working with the superb Henry Setright KC.

From the financial perspective, not necessarily the proudest achievement, I represented a husband who had won £120m on the Euro Millions. After this was announced in the press, his several previous wives, none of whom he had troubled to secure a financial settlement during those divorces, all made an application to the court for a share. They were able to do so, because there is no limitation period attached to a financial remedy claim, unless of course a former spouse falls into the remarriage trap. Fortunately I and Lucy Stone KC, were able to keep at bay the worst excesses and the client was extremely pleased with the outcome - he could then sleep peacefully at night.

In my spare time, as a voluntary board member of Business Beats Cancer Newcastle I attempt to raise funds on behalf of Cancer Research UK. We have all lost too many loved ones to that terrible disease and progress in that field is a must.

### What are your greatest strengths?

My work ethic, my care for my clients and having a good business head.

### Who are your heroes and mentors?

On a personal level, my heroes and mentors were my mother and sisters. They believed in me much more than I believed in myself, but their encouragement, love and support, eventually led me to where I am today - happy and doing a job that I love.

Professionally, I have been privileged to work with some of the best lawyers in our business and I have learnt so much from them over the years. The late, great, Paul Isaacs, Martyn Bennett, Roger Bickerdike and more recently, Emily Ward to name but a few, all such hard workers, lawyers of great skill and detail and have been a pleasure to work with.

### Who would be your ideal dinner guests – living or dead?

Shakespeare, Nelson Mandela, David Attenborough - and I could not be so privileged to spend time with those wonderful people without my own mother being there to enjoy every moment.

### What do you do to unwind?

We are so lucky to have the beautiful Northumberland coastline on our doorstep. I walk in that area most weekends, and in the company of my family, often rounded off with a hearty pub lunch.

### Where would you like to see yourself in 10 years' time?

Spending extra time in more remote, mountainous areas, that I love.

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“

*...my heroes and  
mentors were  
my mother and  
sisters...*

Christine McVay





## How direct is too direct?

There are many common misconceptions about direct marketing and what it involves – and not knowing the facts could lead to serious consequences for your business. Experts in data protection law Muckle LLP explain more...

**Direct marketing is an essential part of any business's marketing toolkit; communicating with your exact target audience is an effective way you can increase relevant leads (and, therefore, sales) for your business. Recent statistics include:**

- Direct mail marketing has a response rate of 5.3% (compared to 0.6% for email marketing) (ZipDo, 2024).
- Over 50% of consumers make a purchase after a marketing text (Attentive Mobile Consumer Report, 2023).

Direct marketing is often associated with cold calls, irritating door drops or spam emails. In reality, direct marketing is a little more nuanced than that – most spam might be direct marketing, but most direct marketing is not spam.

### Direct marketing uses personal data

Google 'direct marketing' and you'll get varying results. The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), the UK data protection regulator, defines direct marketing as "the communication (by whatever means) of advertising or marketing material which is directed to particular individuals".

Most types of marketing involves targeting potential or existing customers to a degree, often grouping customers together via certain variables such as age, gender or hobbies, and sending marketing messages to them accordingly. For example, a paid social media campaign that advertises cookware to people who like baking.

Direct marketing takes this personalisation one step further and uses personal data such as names, email addresses, and even postal addresses to contact specific people. This raises various issues that more "blanket" marketing doesn't, such as whether a person has given consent.

### Direct marketing covers a range of communications

Direct marketing is commonly thought of as using a 'traditional' form of communication, such as email, phone calls, texts and post. However, this isn't always the case.

With the increased use of technology, direct marketing channels extend to social media and digital advertising with different rules applying to the likes of a leaflet posted through your letterbox to an online advert based on your browsing history.

### Direct marketing legislation is complicated

If you've made it this far through the article,

you may have gathered that direct marketing legislation requires considerable thought and there is a wealth of resources that you need to consider to be fully compliant with the law. If your target audience is based in the UK, you need to adhere to the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations (known as PECR), the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR.

### Direct marketing law breaches have consequences

Unfortunately, the penalties for getting direct marketing wrong can be severe, even if you break the law unknowingly. The ICO can and will issue fines for businesses that breach direct marketing law, and these fines can be steep. In the last year, we have seen fines ranging from £55,000 to £170,000. There's also the reputational risk that comes with improper direct marketing; by annoying and even distressing your customers, you will turn them away from your business entirely.

### Direct marketing legal training can help you

Fortunately, there is a way you can cut through the noise. We are shortly launching an online training course on direct marketing law based on the latest ICO guidance (which was updated in December 2022). This will give you all the tools and techniques you need to master your direct marketing legally.

Be the first to hear about when the course goes live by registering your interest by scanning the QR code on the page opposite or visiting our website.

[www.muckle-llp.com](http://www.muckle-llp.com)





# Direct marketing online training

## The tools and techniques you need to master your direct marketing legally

Direct marketing law can be complex, and it's easy to get it wrong.

That's why we've created Direct Marketing On-Demand, an online training course that gives you everything you need to know about direct marketing legislation.

We've analysed the law so you don't have to, using the latest ICO guidance, UK data protection legislation and Privacy and Electronic Communication Regulations (PECR).

**Be the first to register your interest.**



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## An introduction to Mincoffs' Family Team

**Mincoffs' family department is acclaimed for going the extra mile for its clients.**

**There are a number of situations in life when someone can anticipate that they may need to instruct a solicitor, from selling a business to drafting a will.**

Family law cases, however, are a little different as no one enters into a marriage or relationship expecting it to end.

And, while some legal matters can be relatively straightforward to deal with, family cases are often the opposite.

This is where the role of a family solicitor comes in and Mincoffs Solicitors boasts an expert team, led by partner Emily Cannell.

Having joined Mincoffs as a solicitor 10 years ago, Emily quickly climbed the ranks to become an associate just a few years later, before being promoted to partner in 2021.

Now, Emily works closely with associate solicitor Rachel Smith, solicitor Jessica Nicholson and consultant Lyn Rutherford,

with more than 85 years' of combined experience across the team.

Based in Newcastle but taking instructions from clients located all over the UK and overseas, the team has seen more than their fair share of complex and unusual cases over the years.

"No two family matters are ever the same," said Emily, "and we take care to get to know each of our clients individually in order to provide a tailored service for their particular needs."

One of the ways the team achieves this is through a free initial consultation, ensuring that clients can describe their situation and voice any concerns or worries in depth, without having to worry about the clock.

It's not unheard of for the team to go above and beyond for their clients, such as being at the other end of the phone on a weekend or evening if an emergency situation strikes out of hours.

While each member of the team represents cases across the entire spectrum of family law, Emily has extensive experience dealing with matters involving high net worth individuals, which often encompass complex business structures.

This is also when the department benefits from being part of a full service firm, with the ability to draw on experts in estate planning, corporate and employment law – to name just a few – all under one roof when necessary.

Elsewhere in the family department, associate Rachel Smith has particular expertise and a keen interest in private law children matters, especially those with more complex elements such as fact finding and applications to relocate overseas.

In fact, the whole team are never one to stray away from complicated cases, with a recent testimonial given to global legal directory, Legal 500, describing them as "a highly skilled team of individuals, often specialising in the obscure and unusual cases no other family department would touch. This is the true definition of an expert."

The same directory, along with leading legal research company Chambers and Partners, consistently highlights Mincoffs' family team in its annual rankings and has done so for a number of years.

"We've built an incredibly strong team over the last decade and we're continuing to grow, with Jessica joining us last year to assist with an increased workload and take the lead on her own cases," said Emily.

"Due to the nature of our work, we are often instructed by clients during what can be an incredibly distressing time so we pride ourselves on providing not only a high quality service, but delivering it with compassion and sensitivity too."

**For more information, visit [www.mincoffs.co.uk/services/family-law](http://www.mincoffs.co.uk/services/family-law) or contact Mincoffs on 0191 281 6151 or by emailing [enquiries@mincoffs.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@mincoffs.co.uk)**



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# Inheritance disputes on the rise: How to avoid them

As dementia cases increase, house prices rise, and baby boomers with significant accumulated wealth start to pass, statistics reveal a surge in UK inheritance disputes in the past 10 years. Sweeney Miller Law's, Charlotte Cairns explores how to avoid Will disputes in the first place.



Charlotte Cairns

## What are inheritance disputes and contested Wills?

Covered by the umbrella term 'contentious probate', inheritance disputes and contested Wills usually arise after a family member or relative has died and the estate is being administered. If one or more individuals have not been provided for in the Will when they expected to be or feel they have been unfairly provided for, they can make a claim against the estate.

Year-on-year data from the Ministry of Justice paints a stark picture of the state of inheritance disputes and contested Wills in the UK, with an increase of over 34% since 2017 and 140% since 2012/13.

Anyone can contest a Will if they feel they have a valid legal claim, but more often than not, Wills are contested by those who can prove that they have been financially supported by the deceased while they were alive. This includes children, current or former spouses and any other dependents.

The main grounds for contesting a Will relate to:

- Lack of mental capacity.
- Lack of understanding and approval of the Will by the deceased.
- The deceased being under undue influence by someone else.

- Forgery and fraud.
- The Will not being drawn up with the correct legal requirements.

These disputes can result in expensive and drawn-out Court cases, so it is critical to understand what simple steps can be taken to avoid them.

## Avoiding disputes

It is impossible to completely lock down your Will against any disputes, however, whilst each case is unique, here are some steps you can take to help avoid them:

1. Plan early ensuring that you have the requisite mental capacity when creating the Will.
2. Get professional legal help from a specialist Will writing solicitor or lawyer who can pinpoint any potential loopholes or pitfalls.
3. Consider a lump sum provision in your Will for those relatives who may have a potential Inheritance Act claim.
4. Avoid making regular payments to those you wish to leave out of your Will.
5. Write an accompanying letter to add context to your decisions.
6. Keep your family members in the loop.
7. Give charitably during your lifetime.

8. Review your Will every five years or after any significant change in your life, e.g. getting divorced/married or having a child.

When getting a legal expert to write a Will, it is also a good idea for them to advise on and help draft a Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA). An LPA is a formal legal document where you appoint one or more people (attorneys) to make decisions on your behalf if you can no longer do this yourself; for example, you become incapacitated or unwell. LPAs can be just as important as your Will to avoid disputes and expensive Court costs.

## Expert advice

Commenting on the concerning inheritance dispute statistics, Charlotte said: "The number one way to avoid an inheritance dispute after your death is to ensure that the Will is written and regularly reviewed with the help of an experienced specialist. We recognise that each client's circumstances are unique and we help you create a Will that is appropriate for you and your assets, and most importantly, that reflects your wishes."

**Speak to Sweeney Miller's experienced Wills, Trusts and Estates team today by calling 0345 900 5401, emailing [enquiries@sweineymiller.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@sweineymiller.co.uk) or visiting [sweineymiller.co.uk](https://www.sweineymiller.co.uk)**



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# Financial protection

As a Divorce and Will Writing Solicitor for over 30 years, I constantly write about the need to protect yourself financially when you are divorcing.

**I often find clients wish to take a lower settlement than I think they could obtain because they think that things will work out okay in the future or they are being bullied by their spouse or in order to save on legal fees or because they are simply kind people who do not wish to rock the boat.**

Imagine your husband or wife says this is all I can afford to give you now and the court will not give you any more money. It may be that you are part of a business with their family; you will find yourself under enormous pressure from that family to take as little money as possible.

What are you now going to be left with, have you thought about how much it would cost to build up a decent pension, the cost if the roof of your home needs repairing or if the boiler blows up? Could the business which you are being asked to leave be sold for millions in the next few years?

A lot of my clients have come from very good backgrounds and have been used to a certain level of economic stability as children. And yet when I see them 10 to 15 years after a divorce, they are often living in poverty.

Many of these parents will have scrimped and saved to allow their children to go to private schools as they did. They do not wish to admit to anyone that they are short of money, and it would certainly be beyond them to claim state benefits, they would see this as embarrassing.

I also see this amongst the self-employed, they are so used to making their own way in life that it would never occur to them to seek state benefits when the chips are down. They would never admit to their ex that they have run out of money. So they go on borrowing perhaps against property or on credit cards in order to pay the maintenance of their children or even their ex spouse.

If this is you, you are not alone, I see this frequently. Life throws curveballs



at everyone, it is not something to be embarrassed about.

## So how can you improve your financial situation?

**1. Do not accept the first offer that is put on the table by the person from whom you are separating.** Pensions should not be overlooked, you may have a very low pension entitlement compared to your spouse. They may be able to access a good pension at the age of 55 or 60. You can share some of this pension by way of a Pension Sharing Order. This means that part of their pension is ring fenced and is transferred into your name for your use later in life.

**2. If there is disagreement as to whether School fees should be paid, this is worthy of a proper discussion.** Could it be that your child attends private school for only part of their education? Have you thought about asking the school for a bursary or scholarship?

**3. You both need to calculate exactly how much money you will need to live.** This includes everything from mortgage payments to haircuts, car repairs, car tax

and insurance, school uniforms, school trips school lunches pocket money...

## 4. Have you claimed all welfare benefits to which you are entitled?

If you are on a low income, you should apply for child benefit, even if you are self-employed. You should apply for universal credit and council tax benefit.

Your embarrassment about being on these benefits should be weighed against the needs of your children. It can be very stressful for them, and you, to go without because their absent parent is not paying their way.

I see my role as being to support my clients to seek the best deal possible for now, for their future and for their children.

It is for this reason that I have set up our "Next Steps in Divorce" advice sessions. The aim is to give you an overview as to your entitlement and to help you prepare your case.

**If you require any further advice contact me, Jacqueline Emmerson at enquiries@emmersons-solicitors.co.uk**





Hay & Kilner's Family Team. L-R: Kayleigh Bell, Matthew Turner, Fiona Ryans, Kate Garrett, Christian Butler, Louisa Bestford

## Finding the right approach to separation for you

*By Louisa Bestford, senior associate in the family law team at Hay & Kilner.*

**Just as every family is unique, so are the circumstances of its separation.**

**When a marriage ends, we support our clients by adopting an approach to meet their needs. We recognise one size does not fit all and have a wealth of experience within the department to enable us to offer bespoke guidance and advice.**

There have been significant recent changes in divorce law, the primary purpose being to reduce acrimony between couples by eliminating what is often called the 'blame game'.

The separation of a family or couple is naturally one of the most difficult situations they will ever face.

However, 'no fault divorce' has often opened a gateway to more effective negotiations about financial matters and children.

We have specialist expertise within the team to guide you through divorce using various approaches. We currently offer a collaborative approach, the opportunity for both parties to be represented by one solicitor together or, most commonly, separate representation.

The collaborative approach is used where a couple wish to work together constructively to resolve issues arising from their separation while having their own collaboratively trained lawyer present to steer discussions and provide advice when needed.

Everyone agrees at the outset not to involve the court, other than to obtain a final order setting out the terms of the agreement reached, and parties work together, at their pace, to agree matters arising from the breakdown of the relationship.

With the dawn of no-fault divorce, we are seeing an increasing number of divorces and separations where both parties instruct the same solicitor through the new process of 'Resolution Together'.

Hay & Kilner is one of the few North East law firms to currently offer this approach. It is not suitable for every couple, so to determine whether it is, an initial screening is carried out which examines each person's individual viewpoints and priorities and considers whether both are truly willing to work together to achieve an agreement.

If circumstances change, you can always change track to a more traditional approach.

We are delighted to offer bespoke methods of working, but the great majority of cases still follow the traditional route of both parties being represented separately and negotiations being conducted between the parties' respective specialist solicitors.

Many clients want someone on their side as they may be vulnerable during separation and constructive discussions are not an option. Assets can be very complex and difficult to untangle without the necessary expertise.

Often, our clients simply want the matter taken out of their hands, so they can focus on coming to terms with the end of their relationship. In these situations, collaborative

methods are unlikely to be appropriate.

We take the time to fully understand you, your situation and your priorities to ensure we can provide you with practical advice and services in a sensitive way tailored to your personal needs, no matter what they may be and what has led you to divorce.

We match you with the member of our team with the most appropriate skills and experience for your situation and they will work closely with you to guide you carefully right through from your first meeting through to finalising a settlement.

Alongside advising in relation to separating families, we are also asked for assistance with protective planning. Pre-nuptial agreements ('pre-nups') and co-habitation agreements should be considered by couples taking their relationships to the next stage. Both documents record how the couple intend to treat their assets if things don't work out.

Preparation of this type is not always attractive, but however much you hope it won't ever be required, this can make a huge difference in the long term and is often ideal for a collaborative approach.

Our family team can offer specialist advice over a broad range of other areas, including matters arising in relation to children.

We take a holistic approach in every case, fully considering all the issues, and will always recommend managing your family situation in the most appropriate way.

The breakdown of a relationship is never easy, but with the right people on your side, we aim to make it as smooth and manageable as possible.

**For further information on how Hay & Kilner can help you with divorce and separation issues, please contact Louisa at [louisa.bestford@hay-kilner.co.uk](mailto:louisa.bestford@hay-kilner.co.uk) or on 0191 232 8345.**



# Sickness absence: an increasing issue and a difficulty to manage

Sean Garmory is a Solicitor at specialist employment law firm, Collingwood Legal. Sean considers the increase in poor health amongst the UK workforce and what this could mean for employers.

## A concerning picture

A report from the Resolution Foundation has highlighted the increased prevalence of poor health amongst young people. According to the report, one-in-twenty young people (excluding full-time students) were economically inactive in 2023 due to ill health. While these young people are not currently employed, the report points to the prevalence of mental illness amongst the 18-24 demographic with 34% reporting symptoms of common mental health disorders and, more importantly, 44% of young people aged 18-24 with mental health problems are already employed and employers will need to be mindful in respect of managing these employees.

However, it is not just young people experiencing an increase in poor health. A survey from the CIPD and Simplyhealth in 2023 looked into sickness absence trends amongst a cross section of the UK workforce representing 6.5 million employees. According to the report's findings, employees were absent from work for an average of 7.8 days over the course of a year. For context, pre-pandemic sickness absence levels amounted to 5.8 days.

The report highlighted that work-related stress was a key contributor to absence with 76% of respondents reporting absences from work for this reason. It was also noteworthy

from the respondents that long-term sickness absence was mainly caused by mental health issues at 63%.

## What can employers do about this?

Evidently, sickness absence is becoming an increasing issue for employers. On the one hand, employers will want to be supportive of employees who are absent for reasons of sickness and will want to try to assist to get them back to work, but on the other hand, repeated sickness absence can reduce morale within a team of employees and can reduce the productivity of an organisation. Ultimately, there is only so much an employer can do sustainably while running their business.

It is important that an employer has a sickness absence procedure in place to deal with both instances of short-term and intermittent absences as well as long-term absences. It is equally important, however, that employers monitor levels of sickness absence and keep records of the reason

behind a period of absence in order to more effectively manage repeat or persistent absence issues.

However, it is also the case that individual managers need to be equipped to deal with these issues when they arise. The CIPD report concluded that "a lack of line manager skills and confidence is the top challenge in supporting wellbeing". In respect of sickness absence, it is often the case that an employer is judged by what a reasonable employer would do in the situation in question but being that every sickness absence and employee is different, it is unsurprising that sickness absence issues remain a prevalent problem.

**Collingwood Legal is a specialist employment law firm and we provide bespoke training and advice to organisations on all areas of employment law.**

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## Author and Running Coach, empowers others through her journey of overcoming eating disorders

Last year, Alison Beveridge from High Heaton, Newcastle, bravely shared her personal battle with an eating disorder in her debut book. "Me, Myself, and Ed." In the novel, the protagonist's struggle with an eating disorder is personified through the character of "Ed," (Eating Disorder) and the book sheds light on the mental and physical impacts of anorexia. A year on, Alison has turned her life around and now co-leads a thriving women's running group to promote fitness and well-being.

Since the book's release, Alison has received an outpouring of positive feedback, with

readers expressing gratitude for the insight provided and the encouragement to seek help. Alison herself has undergone a remarkable transformation, evident in her increased confidence and numerous achievements over the past year.

"I've qualified as a running coach for 261 Club Newcastle, a women's social running group. Additionally, I've earned a promotion at work, now working for a travel company in the product and operations department, allowing me to explore the world and embrace new experiences," shared Alison.

261 Club Newcastle meets every Friday at 9:30am at Paddy Freeman's Field for warm up exercises and a social run. The group, focused on women's health, offers a supportive and non-competitive environment for women of all abilities. Alison encourages beginners to join, emphasising that the focus is on personal growth and friendship.

## Quinn's Retreat selected as chosen charity for Coast Festival 2024



The organisers of North Shields based Coast Festival 2024 have announced that Darlington based Quinn's Retreat is their chosen charity for the prestigious music event in June.

Tracey Beadle, the founder of Quinn's Retreat formed the charity to provide support to those bereaved by suicide or struggling with their mental health. The organisation offers free week-long stays in static caravans located in Barnard Castle, County Durham, and just outside Appleby in Cumbria. Tracey initiated the charity after the tragic loss of her daughter Quinn to suicide in December 2018 and son Dyllon, 21, just ten months later. The charity aims to provide a safe space for individuals to cope, reflect, and share memories.

John Peacock, the organiser of Coast Festival, expressed why Quinn's Retreat was chosen as the festival's charity. He shared that the connection began during the lockdown when he and his friends, avid supporters of indie music, came across Quinn's Retreat online.

"Our festival aims to provide a platform for Quinn's Retreat, enabling them to raise funds, increase awareness, and connect with a broader audience. We have formed a genuine friendship and we have pledged our commitment to supporting the charity in various ways," said John.

Coast Festival 2024, scheduled for June 21-23, boasts an impressive line-up with headliners such as Professor Green, The Selecter, and Badly Drawn Boy. The festival will feature not only renowned artists but also numerous local and grassroots bands, creating a diverse musical experience for attendees.

Tickets for Coast Festival are available on skiddle.com, priced at £25 per day or £55 for a three-day pass.

## Wild Corporate Day in aid of NE Youth

Wild Deer Events organise running, cycling, swimming and multisport events for all fitness levels, at beautiful and challenging locations across the UK.

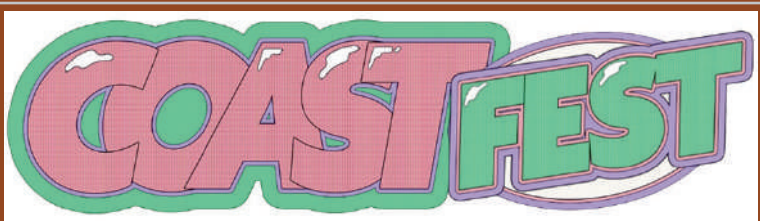
Founded in 2019 by Daniel Flint, their main aim is to establish a series of Trail Running Races in beautiful countryside venues across the North East. The company has expanded rapidly and now offers over 35 Running, Swimming, Multisport & Cycle Sportive Events all across the UK. Wild Deer are delighted to be organising the North East's first Corporate Sports and Golf Day in aid of NE Youth.

Round up your colleagues for a fun filled day with breakfast, lunch, activities and fantastic



networking opportunities. Choose between a Golf Day or our Sports Day and complete either a run/bike/run (duathlon) relay or a team scavenger hunt (walk or run five miles with challenges along the way). There will be prizes for the winning teams and lots more.

For more information visit our website: [www.wilddeerevents.co.uk](http://www.wilddeerevents.co.uk)





# The Children's Foundation launches project to support 'ghost children' back into education

The Children's Foundation is addressing the region's education attendance crisis with a project designed to get 'ghost children' back into education.

**The North East is in the midst of an education attendance crisis, with thousands of pupils, often referred to as 'Ghost Children', suffering from anxiety and other mental health issues which negatively affects their school attendance.**

Our region has the highest rate of absence for state-funded schools in England overall, the highest for both primary and secondary schools and the second highest after the East Midlands for special schools, according to figures from the Department for Education (DfE). Children are experiencing increased levels of stress, isolation and anxiety, making the prospect of returning to the classroom a daunting one, particularly for age groups going through transition periods or exams.

The Children's Foundation exists to improve the health and well-being of children and young people in the North East by making serious stuff fun. 'Roots to Health' is based on the charities allotment in Newcastle, and is specifically designed for 14 – 16 year-olds to tackle the barriers that young people identify in returning to a formal education setting, and allow them to gain a formal qualification.

Through this project young people gain access to individual youth work support and informal therapy, fostering trust, openness, and building confidence in nature. The young people that join the project are not currently engaged in full-time education / training or they are young people facing barriers impacting the likely hood of them



achieving formal qualifications in school. The sessions run every week and develop a young person's ability to mix socially, make friends and learn new practical skills, whilst acquiring an accredited qualification (City & Guilds Level 1 Award in Practical Horticulture).

Sean Soulsby, CEO of The Children's Foundation said, "With recent reports showing that 1 in 5 children are now regularly missing school, projects like Roots to Health are needed more than ever. This is a problem on which the North East needs to collaborate to solve. The Children's Foundation was created to address the needs of children and young people in the region, and this is a growing issue that needs to be taken seriously, but we can't do it alone.

"Every day of school matters and our region has fallen behind others in terms of school attainment and health inequalities. Our children are getting a raw deal and tackling this issue is vital to Levelling Up.

"Children and young people have told us how important it is to have a green space and a therapeutic horticulture offer and tell us that it is vital for good health and wellbeing. One of the young people involved in the project told us that if it hadn't been for Roots to Health then they would have

just been "sitting in his room". That is some of the best feedback we can hear, and that particular young person has visibly grown in confidence over the time they have been with us. If our projects can make a difference for just a handful of the young people who are struggling to thrive in a traditional education setting, then it will be worth it."

A recent study from The Lancet Public Health Journal found that every year spent in school or university improves our life expectancy. The peer-reviewed research looked at the UK and the US, alongside developing countries including China and Brazil, finding that primary, secondary, and tertiary education is the equivalent of a lifetime of eating a healthy diet, lowering the risk of death by 34% compared with those with no formal education.

Sean continued, "Addressing this issue needs a combined, collaborative approach from schools, local authorities, families, and charities like ours, working together to address the unique needs of each young person and combined with an investment in mental health provisions for young people in the region."

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



# Charity of the Month



*Service users at Blyth Star's Woodwork Department in a car they built for a local primary school*

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Somewhere to Live. Somewhere to Work. Someone to Care.

### What does Blyth Star Enterprises do?

Blyth Star Enterprises is a registered charity which provides rehabilitation and recovery services for adults living with complex mental health needs and learning disabilities. Through a comprehensive range of living support services and day services that reflect as closely as possible, real working environments, we help individuals to develop or regain the skills and confidence they need to live fulfilled, independent lives in their local communities.

### Why was the charity founded?

Blyth Star Enterprises was established in 1987 by a group of parents, carers and professionals who came together with a shared vision for a service that would provide a better quality of life for people with mental health needs and learning disabilities.

At the time Blyth Star was founded, opportunities for individuals accessing social care services were limited. The provisions in place didn't support rehabilitation or

recovery, which inevitably lead to many people enduring a continuous cycle of rehospitalisation.

By combining support, training, accommodation and rehabilitation together, Blyth Star developed a unique pathway that would support people from hospital to independent living – it's a model that we've continued to develop over the years in line with the ever-changing needs of our service users and to date has helped thousands of people to take back control of their lives.

### Which area do you cover?

While we might have 'Blyth' in our name, our services cover the whole of Northumberland. In addition to our outreach services, which span as far north as Berwick and as far west as Hexham, we also run two small community enterprises in the region, Stakeford Nurseries in Stakeford and The Woodfuel Centre in West Sleekburn. These Day Services provide simulated working environments for Blyth Star's service users to receive employment training and engage in the local community in a safe and measured way.



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

We've always recognised that our staff are our greatest asset at Blyth Star, but the way they stepped up during the Covid-19 lockdown to support not only our service users, but the wider community too is something that we're particularly proud of.

Over a six month period, we delivered over 3,000 hot meals to residents, we put together food parcels and care packages of hygiene products and pet food, we supported the local authority to try and help those who found themselves homeless to find shelter - staff did anything and everything they could do to support vulnerable people living in our communities at what was an incredibly difficult time.

### What are you currently working on?

We have a number of exciting projects in the pipeline, including the creation of a new, dedicated training centre at our plant nursery at Stakeford.

In 2023, the in-house programme of horticultural training for our service users received external endorsement from the Awarding Organisation, NOCN. To support the delivery of the programme, we've been fundraising to build a classroom-type environment, surrounded by training gardens and raised flower beds to create a fully accessible learning environment for individuals of all ages and abilities to be able to gain their qualifications.

### What does the future hold?

We've seen huge changes in health and social care and the charity sector as a whole over the past 37 years. We've had to remain agile in order to just survive at times, but we've weathered the storms and we've come out the other side stronger than ever. From this position of strength, we're committed to not only improving our provision for our service users, but also establishing ourselves as an employer of choice. We're proud to have recently become a Living Wage Employer, committed to paying our staff in accordance with the cost of living. This is something we feel really passionately about as without our staff, we simply couldn't do what we do.



Service user, Alan, with a giant pumpkin at Stakeford Nurseries



Service users at The Woodfuel Centre

### How do you get involved?

There are lots of ways that people can support Blyth Star, through a donation of their time, money or both, it all makes a difference. If you would like to make a donation, you can do this securely via JustGiving by scanning our QR code below. Alternatively, we're always on the lookout for support workers to join our roster of bank staff.

For more information, visit [www.blythstar.org.uk](http://www.blythstar.org.uk)





## Sporting Wallsend community hub offers free meals and activities over Easter holidays



**Last year Wallsend Boys Club/WBC (renowned for producing professional players including Alan Shearer) opened SPORTING WALLSEND - an all purpose community hub to serve the people of Wallsend and beyond.**

The hub is now offering loads of activities for old and young people. In the last few months they have been successful in attaining holiday activity and food funding commissioned by North Tyneside Council to tackle the holiday hunger issue over the Easter holidays.

They've also been awarded 10K from Sport England to fund sessions for over 50s focusing on improving strength, balance and coordination. The sessions will be running twice weekly for the next year.

AND...they will soon be offering Early Years sessions (starting at the end of April) The focus will be around "Play and Learn" with fun, engaging and educational sessions and monthly themes.

John Percival, General Manager said: "Sporting Wallsend is on a mission to inspire the community to be healthier and happier. We feel like we're just getting started and its really exciting. Its great that we an offer some free holiday club places and meals to those who really need them. We are also proud to offer activities for the older members of our community with the help of the funding from Sport England. We urge organisations out there to get in contact if they want to work with us on or mission."

**Contact John: [johnp.wallsendboysclub@gmail.com](mailto:johnp.wallsendboysclub@gmail.com)**

## International Women's Day raises vital funds for NE Youth



**NE Youth recently celebrated International Women's Day with a supper club at The Wood Oven in Wylam.**

**The venue was full with ladies who were there to support the charity, revel in some sisterhood and dance the night away...whilst eating some amazing pizza!**

The event, which is now in its seventh year was supported by David Gray Solicitors meaning all the money raised on the night would go direct to the projects that NE Youth run that support young women- and Save the Children Gaza appeal.

Fabulous raffle prizes included a lunch at NEST, a huge teddy bear called Germaine, a wonderful hamper from Bernicia Candles and a round of golf for two at world renowned Close House.

Kim McGuinness dropped in for a chat, Anna Foster from BBC Newcastle helped to compare the evening and Channy, the incredible local singer/song writer entertained everyone with some uplifting tunes by inspiring women of course!

The solidarity in the room was palpable, everyone had the most amazing night and lots of money was raised.

**To support NE Youth visit: [www.neyouth.org.uk](http://www.neyouth.org.uk)**







Activated Mindset founders L-R: Jude Daunt and Julie Turnbull

## Activated Mindset: Revolutionising workplace well-being

In the heart of Gosforth, within the historic walls of an old fire station, Julie Turnbull and Jude Daunt have ignited a spark that is reshaping the landscape of corporate well-being. Together, they are the dynamic duo behind Activated Mindset, an innovative online platform designed to tackle anxiety and boost confidence among employees at all levels.

keep individuals performing below their potential. Activated Mindset aims to bridge that gap.

For Julie and Jude, the best part of their job is witnessing the transformation in individuals. Passionate about people, they thrive on adding value not only to a person's work life but also their overall mental health. Jude recalls one client who had imposter syndrome, who constantly believed that she wasn't good enough to do the job. After receiving support, she summonsed up the courage to ask her manager for a pay rise. Not only did she get it, but she also received a well-deserved executive director title.

"Seeing people's lives change for the better is the best part of our jobs," said Jude. "We constantly see the lightbulbs going off in people's heads about how they think, work, and operate. We get feedback from senior management that our interventions have resulted in their staff putting more thought and effort into their work and thereby investing personally in the business."

Julie agreed. "With Activated Mindset Online, our aim is to revolutionise the business landscape by giving companies the tools to empower their people. Our platform isn't just about talking; it's about providing practical solutions that propel individuals forward, fostering a culture of self-worth and confidence.

"As we continue our journey from testing to implementation, we are excited about the positive impact it will bring to businesses and the lives of countless individuals. It's not just a job for us; it's a mission to create workplaces where everyone can thrive."

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

Their paths first crossed in 2019, just before the world plunged into the chaos of COVID-19. Like most people at the time Julie, had issues with anxiety both on a personal level and professionally so she felt the need to seek guidance. That's when she stumbled upon Jude's retreat advertisement. Attending the retreat marked the beginning of a transformative journey. Impressed by Jude's coaching approach, Julie embarked on one-on-one coaching sessions and eventually joined Jude's Unbreakable Mindset Certification Academy

As their connection deepened, a shared vision emerged. Julie's extensive corporate experience (over 22 years in senior leadership roles) blended seamlessly with Jude's coaching expertise. Recognising the gap in well-being support at the entry level within corporate entities, the two entrepreneurs decided to join forces. Initially experimenting with one-on-one sessions and group workshops, they soon realised the need for a more direct solution that focussed on those that need it most

Activated Mindset Online has taken 18 months to develop. It is a revolutionary programme designed to provide accessible and impactful support to employees at the entry level to middle management. The platform utilises a back-end system where users input their thoughts, struggles and feelings, generating a tailored coaching program delivered through bite-sized videos. Currently in the testing stage, Activated Mindset Online is already making waves across various industries. From universities, offices to warehousing, the programme is proving its versatility. The goal is to offer a solution that doesn't break the bank for entry-level staff while delivering substantial and meaningful support.

Julie and Jude believe that the traditional approach to workplace well-being, often centred around counselling services, falls short. While companies invest in policies and strategies to improve culture, the missing link lies in supporting individuals to overcome the mindset barriers that



## Ashington Partnership announced to support Northumberland's growing businesses community

Northumberland based business support programme, The Northumberland Small Business Service, has announced a new partnership with Northumberland Business Service Limited (NBSL) to bring local businesses support for growth opportunities.

**The new partnership offers micro-small sized businesses up to 12 hours of support with a technical specialist, covering a range of topics from Resilience Planning, New Product Development Planning to Digital Marketing. With over 14 subjects, businesses of all sectors and experience are encouraged to take advantage of the support.**

As part of the support from Northumberland Small Business Service, businesses may also be eligible for grant support to help their business grow.

With a record high of nearly 13,000 companies now registered in the county, the support is a welcomed addition to the business support landscape. The 1-2-1 support will see businesses safeguard jobs as well as create 100 jobs across Northumberland.

The Northumberland Small Business Service (NSBS), is delivered by Advance Northumberland delivering on behalf of Northumberland County Council. The project is partly funded by the North of

Tyne Combined Authority Investment Fund and by the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Rural England Prosperity Fund with the North of Tyne Combined Authority as the lead authority.

John King, Head of Operations at NBSL said "We are delighted to be working with the NSBS Team to bring this important support offer to the Northumberland business community. We would encourage local businesses to explore how this technical specialist programme can support them to achieve their growth plans."

NBSL has supported over 14,000 businesses across Northumberland and will be working

closely with NSBS as part of their Growth and Resilience element of the service, which is aimed at micro-small sized Northumberland based businesses who have been trading for over 12 months.

Both Ashington based, NSBS and NBSL are excited to work together to support businesses as part of the NSBS Growth and Resilience strand of support, which is being delivered until March 2026.

As well as the Growth and Resilience support, the service also offers support for farm enterprises looking to diversify and individuals looking to start a business across Northumberland but predominantly in the rural areas.



*L-R: David Jackson, Skills Manager – NBSL, Gillian Fricker, Interim Programme Manager – NSBS & John King, Head of Operations – NBSL*





“

*...We would encourage local businesses to explore how this technical specialist programme can support them to achieve their growth plans...*

The experienced team and its range of experts will work directly with individuals and businesses to help them start, grow, diversify, and sustain their businesses. There is also access to a £2million rural capital Grant Investment Fund which will support eligible businesses in rural areas with clear growth plans to access direct capital investment to expand productive capacity or diversify into new markets or products.

Interim Programme Manager, Gillian Fricker said “I am excited to announce the partnership and continue to support businesses across the County. It is a very exciting time for businesses in Northumberland and we are looking forward

to seeing how the 12 hours of tailored 1-2-1 support can help businesses flourish and grow”.

The North of Tyne Combined Authority is a partnership of three local authorities: Newcastle City Council, North Tyneside Council, and Northumberland County Council and the North of Tyne Elected Mayor.

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is a central pillar of the UK government’s Levelling Up agenda and provides £2.6 billion of funding for local investment by March 2025.

The Fund aims to improve pride in place and increase life chances across the UK investing

in communities and place, supporting local business, and people and skills. For more information, visit [www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus)

***If you have any questions about the event or the new Northumberland Small Business Service, please visit [www.northumberlandsmallbusiness.co.uk](https://www.northumberlandsmallbusiness.co.uk) or contact the team at [business@advancenorthumberland.co.uk](mailto:business@advancenorthumberland.co.uk)***



# My Weekend...



Jane Dennison

## Jane Dennison

*CEO of the Dragonfly Cancer Trust.*

Jane works with families, hospitals, and hospices across the UK supporting young people (aged 0-25) with terminal cancer.

**Each year approximately 530 young people in the UK die from cancer and many more spend too much of their youth in hospital. For these young people and their families each moment matters.**

### **Do you ever have to work weekends?**

Yes, occasionally, I always make sure to be present at events like the Great North Run and our Annual Dragonfly Ball. Working during these weekends is more than just a commitment; it's a heartfelt engagement with our community. The Great North Run, in particular, holds a special place in my heart. Witnessing the collective spirit and diverse motivations of runners fills me with such emotion.

### **Are most weekends the same?**

Each weekend carries its own unique rhythm. There are times when I find it hard to switch off, especially when I read through the many applications from young cancer patients. Their stories resonate deeply with me, reminding me of the blessings in my own life, particularly my children.

### **What do you do at a weekend which you can't fit in through the week?**

Weekends sometimes offer an opportunity for focused work. I occasionally spend time writing funding applications and updating our accounts. With fewer distractions, it's the optimal time to deep dive into these tasks and ensure everything is in order.

### **Morning exercise or a recovery lie-in?**

I cherish the mornings, especially in the spring when I venture out

with our rescue dogs. The fresh air and the sounds of birds singing symbolise new beginnings for me. In the summer I often head to the beach at Boulmer before 7.00 am, apart from the occasional early swimmer it is absolutely deserted and is sheer bliss!

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

Always a night in for me. Home is my sanctuary, where I find solace and contentment. There's always something fulfilling to do, whether it's pursuing one of my hobbies or simply enjoying quiet moments. I have recently started playing the guitar, I make wire sculptures and love interior design!

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

I have a secret passion Newcastle United, though I may not broadcast it widely. I am a keen walker and have had the privilege of walking in the Grand Canyon, Ben Nevis and many Wainwright walks.

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

I'm fortunate to live in an area with an array of fantastic restaurants. Nest, House of Tides, and Faru in Durham are among my favourites; however, I do like the occasional Francesca's pizza. I especially like dining out with my son, who has a remarkable palate and is studying for his Master of Wine exams, it's always a fun and a very enlightening experience.

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

The best part of weekends is undoubtedly spending time with my family. As a recent grandparent, the joy of being with my loved ones is incomparable.

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

You'll usually find me immersed in the simple pleasures of life – listening to music, exploring College Valley, and cherishing moments with my family and dogs. It's the simple things that truly fill my heart with happiness.

**To find out more about the work of the charity –**  
[www.dragonflycancertrust.org](http://www.dragonflycancertrust.org)





L-R: Nicky Walter (former Churchwarden), Andrew Skelton (SOS Group) and Rev James McGowan

## SOS Group community donation for heavenly choir

Team Valley-based SOS Group is blessed to work with a varied range of clients, from start-ups to international household names, and is celebrating one of its longest standing business relationships by donating to support its community work.

**The office technology provider has worked with St James' and St Basil's Church in Fenham, Newcastle, for over 20 years, helping ensure the smooth running of the organisational aspects of the church's work.**

Affectionately known as Js and Bs, the church was built through the generosity of local ship builder Sir James Knott after the First World War in memory of his two sons. It has always provided, not only a space for worship, but somewhere to bring together the local community and has become a popular venue in the North East for grass roots music.

Reverend James McGowan, Vicar of St James' and St Basil's, says: "We're a relatively small client of SOS Group but we don't feel like it! SOS makes us feel very valued, not only providing efficient customer service, but also taking an interest in our life and work

to make sure we have the best possible tools available.

"In addition to our regular Sunday services, our Community Music Programme offers space for over 200 people each week to engage in music through choirs and concerts and this generous donation from SOS Group will be used to support the work of Newcastle Phoenix Choir, which is based at Js and Bs."

Newcastle Phoenix Choir formed in 2021 to take over the work of StreetWise Opera in the North East. StreetWise had a mission to engage with those who had experienced homelessness and other forms of social exclusion and it offers space for friendship and self-confidence to grow using music and song.

Andrew Skelton, a Director at SOS Group, says: "We're very proud of our long-standing

client relationships and, having worked closely with St James' and St Basil's for more than two decades, we know what a positive impact they make in Newcastle.

"It's a great pleasure to make a donation to support their wonderful community work and wish Newcastle Phoenix Choir all the very best for the future."

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.

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 company also has an established reputation in the events sector and has provided digital office equipment services at competitions including the 2024 World Athletics Indoor Championships, 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](http://www.sosgroup-ltd.co.uk)**



# In conversation with...

## Mark Lancaster

*Supply chain operations manager,  
Bergen Logistics UK, sister  
company to Elanders UK, part of  
the Elanders Group.*

### What services does Bergen Logistics UK provide?

We provide a global order fulfilment service for a variety of businesses in various industries from fashion, cosmetics, home goods and medical devices. We offer omnichannel solutions for efficient handling of e-commerce, retail and wholesale businesses. We also have advanced technology and automation to improve efficiency and accuracy, along with a cloud-based WMS to give clients full access to their inventory status.

### Tell us about your role.

I am supply chain and operations manager for the new Bergen Logistics Site in North Shields. Along with my team, I ensure the smooth functioning of the company's supply chain and logistics operations. I am responsible for developing and implementing the site's supply chain strategy by optimizing processes, managing inventory and ensuring timely delivery of goods while working closely with a highly experienced team to offer a best-in-class service to the customer and, at the same time, making it a great place to work.

### What attracted you to the position?

Elanders, is very different to other businesses I have worked for. It really appealed to me as the team I met, prior to joining the business, worked very collaboratively and were very welcoming. The business has allowed me exposure to other parts of the operation and the opportunities to progress are there. Also, being part of a new site with excellent growth potential, has been brilliant.



Mark Lancaster

### What do you hope to achieve?

Things move fast in the supply chain world and people are key to this. I want the site to be best in class and, in order to do that, vital engagement with the team and other stakeholders is a key part of the site's journey. The team operates at an exceptional level and that shows in the feedback from our customers. I aim to maintain that level and build from there.

### What's your proudest business achievement?

I am big on continuous professional development for all members of the team, as they will be the future leaders of the business. It is only right they have the tools to understand the ever-changing landscape of supply chain.

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

I believe that ending your day with a small win, regardless how small, is still a win, whether that be hitting a challenging KPI, some positive feedback from a customer or a good result. It's all about the bigger picture and we sometimes forget it takes steps to get there, nothing happens without the solid foundations you put in place. I also have to say that a positive attitude is a good rule to live by.

### How do you like to unwind?

I have a young family, so unwinding is spending time with them, which is often either chasing my toddler around the house or trips to the park on a weekend.

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





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# Navigating organisational change

with Scott Smith, People Spark Solutions

**Scott, you grew up in the North East, studying at Northumbria University and working in large organisations before launching People Spark Solutions in 2020. Tell us about your journey so far.**

My career starting in banking. Following the financial crisis, there was a need for rapid and sustainable change. I have been through many transformation programmes, some great in terms of their sustainability and positive impact.

**Now, you work with clients in businesses of all sizes in the North East and across the UK – what kind of change issues are they dealing with?**

Change is an inevitable part of organisational growth and evolution – whether it's adapting to market shifts, implementing new technologies, or restructuring teams. Change can be both invigorating and challenging as many of you will know – so it's important that you feel empowered to support your team – and that you have the right support.

**What is your approach to supporting clients through organisational change?**

We support organisations going through change with coaching and mentoring, leadership and group or team development, and assess key drivers and strengths and weaknesses using psychometric assessments. These assessments provide valuable insights into personality, communication, conflict, and team dynamics – all of which can be assets or detractors in a transition period. For example, if a senior leader was struggling to generate buy-in for change, we can work with the team to identify the enablers and blockers.

**Why is coaching and mentoring essential during periods of change?**

It's been proven that organisations that prioritise coaching and mentoring during periods of change experience higher employee engagement and smoother transitions – paving the way for an effective transition – no matter what the circumstances. Prioritising individual wellbeing whilst balancing organisational goals and resilience is the key to this – and that's where coaching or mentoring can really help.

**Why do 1:1 sessions make a difference?**

One-on-one meetings play a pivotal role in maintaining employee morale and productivity during periods of uncertainty. It's essential that leaders make space and time for open communication, feedback, and support to give employees a sense of stability and empowerment – and reduce stress – but it's also useful for the leader as you can reinforce key messages, provide signposting and extra support.

**What is the difference between coaching and mentoring, and which is more beneficial for change management?**

Coaching is like having a skilled teammate who helps you set goals, learn new skills, and overcome challenges. Mentoring is like having a wise friend or advisor who shares their experiences and advice with you over time. In times of change at work, both coaching and mentoring are super important. Coaching can help you adapt quickly to new situations and build confidence, while mentoring can offer insights and support.

**If you think you or your team could benefit from coaching or mentoring support to help you through a period of change, get in touch with [scott@peoplesparksolutions.co.uk](mailto:scott@peoplesparksolutions.co.uk) for a no-obligation chat. [www.peoplesparksolutions.co.uk](http://www.peoplesparksolutions.co.uk)**



Scott Smith



# Ensuring safety: Three Rivers Health & Safety Consultancy Ltd leads the way



Ensuring the safety and well-being of employees is paramount in business operations. Three Rivers Health & Safety Consultancy Ltd emerges as a beacon of assurance, offering comprehensive site inspections across the UK.

Focusing on sectors like construction, manufacturing, and engineering, the consultancy stands as a guardian of health and safety, safeguarding workplaces and fostering a culture of compliance.



**At the heart of their service lies a dedication to meticulous inspection protocols and each site inspection commences with a rigorous examination of statutory documentation, followed by a thorough review of past incidents or accidents. This groundwork sets the stage for a physical walkthrough alongside site managers and supervisors, ensuring compliance and a deep understanding of safety protocols among the workforces.**

One of the hallmarks of Three Rivers Health & Safety Consultancy Ltd is its proactive approach. Should any concerns arise during inspections, immediate advice is offered to rectify issues swiftly and effectively. Their team, known for its approachability and friendliness, acts as a partner in navigating the labyrinth of

health and safety legislation, ensuring businesses remain on the right side of the law. The company prides itself in being the health and safety arm of the businesses it works alongside.

Post-inspection, clients receive a comprehensive electronic report via the consultancy's advanced inspection software, GoAudits. This report includes detailed summaries and tailored subsections relevant to specific industries, supplemented with photographs and consultant comments. Furthermore, actionable items are provided with closure dates and automated reminders, streamlining the compliance process.

With offices strategically located at Lighthouse View in Seaham and EH20

Business Centre in Loanhead, Three Rivers Health & Safety Consultancy Ltd stands ready to serve businesses nationwide. Their commitment to excellence and expertise makes them the go-to choice for companies seeking to fortify their health and safety measures.

In a world where safety is non-negotiable, Three Rivers Health & Safety Consultancy Ltd emerges as a beacon of reliability. They ensure that businesses thrive within a secure and compliant environment. Contact them today to embark on a journey towards enhanced safety and peace of mind.

**For enquiries, call 0191 250 8899 or email [info@threeivershealthandsafety.co.uk](mailto:info@threeivershealthandsafety.co.uk)**



# In conversation with...

## Jenny Hearl

CEO, Eothen Homes

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

My older siblings all worked abroad when I was growing up, they were my inspiration to travel. My mother was a senior Sister in A&E and she encouraged me to become a nurse which would provide opportunities to travel and work abroad.

### Tell us about your current role.

I have worked for Eothen Homes for more than 30 years and have been the Chief Executive for 28 years. I manage the day to day operations of the charity and plan future strategy. Eothen is a small, successful charity, and our staff make us what we are. Although many Chief Executives are purely-office based I love nothing more than getting out to our three wonderful homes in Gosforth, Whitley Bay and Wallsend, seeing our incredible team at work, and of course catching up with our residents.

### What is your proudest business achievement?

In 2016, we opened a new £6.2 million care home which provides a unique environment and model of care for those living with dementia. This was a huge project for our small charity but it has been so successful. For me this was a great achievement and I am also very proud that the charity continues to go from strength to strength, so much so that we are one of the top 20 small UK care home providers, according to carehome.co.uk, based on all of the outstanding reviews given by our residents' families.

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

It has become more regulated and we continue to feel the effects from the Covid pandemic. People coming into care homes are older and frailer, and recruitment continues to be a challenge.

### What are you currently working on?

We are actively looking for a new development opportunity in the North East and are currently implementing an electronic care home system to ensure we are up to date with the latest technology.

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

I have a fantastic senior team at our Head Office in Cramlington, who are as passionate



Jenny Hearl

about elderly care as I am. We employ 165 staff who make up our Eothen family, they all work extremely hard and are an integral part of our success. We have been a Real Living Wage employer since 2018 and now exceed these rates for our care staff.

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

Understanding that not everyone has the same standards as you and to focus on what you are good at.

### What has been your biggest challenge?

Learning to balance the needs of stakeholders and being responsible for caring for people's parents or loved ones, especially those living with dementia. We regularly receive exceptional reviews and positive feedback which makes it all worthwhile, knowing we have made a difference.

### Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

My Mum is a huge inspiration, she was one of the first nurses in the NHS in 1949, and is still active at 93, swimming every week!

The founder of Eothen, Audrey Miller and

our previous Chairman of Trustees, Dr Andrew Shepherd, who recently retired after 34 years of faithful voluntary service to Eothen. Donating one of your most important assets – time – is an incredible, selfless thing to do.

### What does the future hold?

We are developing a culture of excellence and research and are involved with several projects, with the aim of improving experiences in care.

The future is exciting for Eothen and will hopefully involve a new care home development with outstanding provision of elderly care and great employment opportunities for the area.

### How do you unwind outside of work?

Travelling, walking and meeting up with family and friends.

### Favourite Book and Boxset?

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen is a favourite, also LJ Ross, who recently visited one of our home's book clubs.

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





# Eothen Care Homes



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“

*...the number 100  
is woven into  
various traditions  
and rituals...*



# 100 and counting!

In addition to the profound significance of the number 100 in various contexts, its symbolism resonates strongly in cultural and intellectual spheres. As Northern Insight achieves its 100th edition, Dr David Cliff examines the significance of 100 in our culture and psyche.

**The number 100 holds profound personal and business significance across the globe, reflecting themes of completion, abundance, and achievement.**

Companies that reach their 100th year in the UK become celebrated brands associated with their ability to adapt to changing market conditions, innovate, and maintain a strong, increasingly heritage-based presence. It signifies more than just survival, but a capacity to thrive in the headwinds of economic challenges and technological advancements.

Moreover, in the UK's rich cultural tapestry, the number 100 is woven into various traditions and rituals. Centuries passing, such as the 19th and 20th, carry significant connotative meanings in historical, industrial and cultural contexts. These milestones mark pivotal shifts in society, technology, and culture, shaping collective memory and identity.

Beyond historical and cultural contexts, the number 100 holds significance in personal milestones and achievements. Whether it's celebrating a centenarian's birthday, or acknowledging an athlete's 100th game, reaching this milestone is a cause for celebration and reflection.

In the realm of literature and academia, the number 100 is often associated with excellence and perfection. A perfect score of 100 on an exam or assignment signifies mastery and proficiency in a particular subject or discipline. Similarly, a 100th edition of a publication, reflects longevity of authorship, publication value, cultural contribution and not putting too finer a point on it, relevance to people.

Something I frequently talk to clients about is the significance of their efforts and their worries whilst remaining in the "here and now". We often lose focus on this whilst striving to create some future yet to be realised. Certainly, time reframes our experiences and our achievements. The reality is, for good or for ill, in 100 years no one will remember you and these days in 100 days most people will have forgotten who you are and what you did previously. This can be a recipe for despair

or relief depending on your mindset. Personally, I find it quite relieving to think numbers often make us paradoxically important, and yet not so. Why, who would have thought Liz Truss has 'phoenixed' her career into a TV personality and world influencer within a matter of months!

It's interesting that 100 features more in our language than ever before. Words like "absolutely", "completely", or "maximum" have often been substituted by the use of "100%", used colloquially, for emphasis, particularly by younger people. Whilst, in reality, 85% is probably the optimum capacity for most people and systems to function within, 100% always remains the goal. The "extra mile" is now expressed as a percentage above 100 in our everyday language.

As Northern Insight achieves its 100th edition, it serves as a testament to its editorial team's dedication to providing valuable perspectives, analysis, and commentary on issues shaping our society, culture and business. It is a milestone worth celebrating, not only for the publication in itself but also for the readers, contributors, and supporters who have been part of its journey. For my own part, I've been very grateful to the Northern Insight team who has always appreciated the critical realism and tinge of controversy I bring to my input. At Gedanken (the German word for thoughts) our key credo is to serve the business community and the northern economy, above promoting Gedanken itself. We seek to foster debate, provoke thought and offer a new perspective wherever possible. It's what we do, day in and day out at Gedanken and there will be no change in issue 101!

With every congratulation to Mike and the staff of Northern Insight, this achievement is akin to a sporting term, very clearly 100 and not out! And, unlike the airships of the last century, the R100 and the R101 (now I'm being geeky), continues, to fly high!

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





## New beginnings at Talentheads as growth continues with second office

Talent acquisition and development firm Talentheads was launched from a kitchen table in Morpeth during the pandemic. Now the award-winning company's founder, Sam Spoors, discusses expanding into County Durham – and how that's good news for businesses south of the Tyne.

**Spring is here – and that means new beginnings. And at Talentheads, we have a new beginning of our own – a second office in County Durham.**

When I launched this company from my kitchen table at the height of the pandemic, my five-year goal was to eventually expand south of the river.

I knew there was a market, and I've always believed that Talentheads' unique approach to recruitment and talent development would work anywhere.

Nobody recruits and develops talent like we do.

Unlike firms who adopt a transactional approach to recruitment, we look beyond CVs and seat-filling.

Our team embed themselves within your business, learning your ethos whilst sourcing staff who share your values.

That means lower staff turnover and recruits who want to grow with your business.



Sam Spoors



And we don't stop once your new hires sign on the dotted line. We attract, build and develop talent, through our Talent Success Cycle, building your team through learning, development and/or coaching whilst implementing strategies to enable your team to support your growth.

Our innovative approach has disrupted the industry, resulted in year-on-year growth and – most importantly – our clients love it.

That's allowed us to grow faster than we'd ever hoped – and we couldn't be more excited with our new space.

And it was time for it.

Our ever-expanding client base meant we were increasingly in the area and we wanted to be closer to our strong network of ambassadors and the Durham business community.

So, we opted for Pity Me. Why? Because it felt like home.

Morpeth was where I launched Talentheads and that's where we are still headquartered, but Pity Me mirrors it in many ways – whilst widening our talentpool even further.

It also means we've done some recruitment ourselves.

Lead Talent Partner Gareth Jones will head up the Durham office with a focus on growing our client base.

We hope the location will also unlock new business opportunities further south.

The sky's the limit for Talentheads, as we passionately believe our pioneering approach to recruitment and talent development can become the sector's gold standard.

Our expert team has 150 years of combined industry experience. They know recruitment, learning and development and talent success – and how to do it well.

Our unique Talent Success Cycle is at the core of our business, and consists of four key parts: Talent strategy, recruitment, learning and development, and coaching.



Our Talent Success Cycle encompasses every stage within recruitment and learning and development, which we know works best when we sit side-by-side with clients, taking a more hands-on approach as well as a seat at the leadership table.

Our approach is tailored, research-based and values-focused.

Our values are our foundation and act as a launchpad for the growth which has made this second office necessary.

We believe in community; local jobs for local people, and to help create a thriving, connected society.

Our bravery is demonstrated by our trailblazing approach to recruitment, which is disrupting what had become a lethargic industry, giving the sector a shot in the arm which we hope can – long-term – improve the stereotypes around recruitment and talent development.

We also believe in creating a legacy, be it by playing our part to ensure a more sustainable future or by re-shaping recruitment.

And we genuinely care. That's why last year we launched our 'More than a Number' campaign aimed at ending the numbers-based approach to recruitment that's sadly become normalised over the years.

So, whilst other businesses may have lost sight of what matters, community and people are at the heart of our business.

At Talentheads, we know that matching people up with the right – or wrong job – shapes lives immeasurably.

It's the Talentheads way – our unique approach allows businesses to dial up and dial down any of our services. We are experts in helping growing businesses navigate their way to talent success.

We do everything to ensure to ensure both parties find the perfect match for the long term.

And we know we've found our perfect match with our new Durham base, which should open around Easter.

It is a major milestone. Having started at that kitchen table during lockdown, Talentheads has grown from a team of four into an award-winning, multi-site business with an international client base.

So please pop-into our new office and say hello – as when it comes to your talent success, maybe a new beginning is what's needed for your business to grow too.

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



# How to ace your job interview

Bryony Gibson, director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, offers insight into the best practices to adopt when preparing for a job interview.

**In the ever-evolving world of recruitment, the landscape for job interviews has shifted dramatically. Gone are the days of recruitment being solely through in-person meetings. Now, most interview processes begin behind a computer screen, adding a new layer of complexity.**

Whether you're an experienced practitioner or re-entering the job market after a long hiatus, navigating the change requires a focused approach where you get out what you put in.

## No detail is too small

Preparation has always been key, but even more so in the digital age. Take the time to plan every aspect of your interview. From testing software and knowing when and where you need to be to investigating potential road closures and parking options. Establish who you'll be meeting and what's expected of you ahead of time, leaving no room for last-minute uncertainty to hamper your first impression and performance.

## Appearance matters

Your appearance speaks volumes so make sure you dress in an outfit that both exudes confidence and is also appropriate to the setting. Whether it's formal attire or more relaxed, choose wisely to make a strong first impression.

## Know what you want

Beyond landing the job, it is important to define what you hope to achieve from your interview. I am not talking about salary and benefits here, moreover, it's about filling in the gaps in your knowledge of the business. Prepare insightful questions. It not only demonstrates a genuine interest in the company and role but will help you decide if it's the right place for you.



Bryony Gibson

## Fail to prepare, prepare to fail

Take advantage of the online resources at your disposal, such as the company website careers page and social media channels. There is no longer an excuse for not understanding an organisation's culture, values, and goals before you attend an interview. And once you do, it will be a lot easier to demonstrate how you are the ideal candidate for their team.

## Learn from others

If you have the support of a recruitment consultant, use their expertise to your advantage. Ask for a pre-interview discussion. Lean on their experience so you can gain valuable insights and tips to enhance your preparation and improve your performance on the day.

## Make friends and influence

Remember that likability and trust play a significant role in the outcome of an interview. Focus on building rapport with your interviewers on a personal level to make a positive impression. Take the time to research the people you'll be meeting. Familiarise yourself with their backgrounds and roles so you can establish an early connection. Setting a positive tone from the start helps the conversation flow, as well as showcases your interpersonal skills.

## Master the art of telling your story

There is nothing worse than interviewing

someone who is not fluent in the professional journey within their CV. Learn it inside and out. Craft compelling stories to highlight your achievements and experiences. Use the chance to talk about your journey as a platform to introduce your character and emphasise your biggest strengths and capabilities.

## Face into challenge

Take time to anticipate and prepare for people who challenge your career and choices. By responding honestly and confidently to difficult and direct questions, you demonstrate self-awareness, inner belief, and a positive and mature approach; all traits people want to see in their employees.

## Plan your star competencies

Practice answering competency-based questions using the STAR method - situation, task, action, result. Pre-plan four or five examples that illustrate the key skills they are looking for and will prove you can thrive in the role.

In conclusion, succeeding in a job interview requires more than just technical expertise. It demands preparation, planning, effective communication, and a proactive approach. By applying these tips, you will help to position yourself as a prime candidate and almost certainly increase your chances of being offered that new job opportunity you are chasing.

For public practice advice and expertise, get in touch:  
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# BNI Northumbria's support for The Three Tumours at Annual Awards Dinner

At its annual awards dinner, BNI Northumbria demonstrated unwavering support for The Three Tumours charity, raising an impressive £800 that was generously donated to the cause. Alexandra Brown, a trustee of The Three Tumours, expressed profound gratitude for BNI Northumbria's support, emphasising how it enables the charity to continue its mission of raising awareness about brain cancer and providing essential information, treatment support, and post-treatment care to individuals and families grappling with brain tumours.

BNI, a global networking organisation known as Business Network International, strives to connect businesses and cultivate mutually beneficial relationships. The BNI Northumbria chapter is recognised for its commitment to making a positive impact within its local community.

Established by individuals from the North East who have confronted their own battles with brain tumours, The Three Tumours charity is a platform for delivering crucial information on brain tumours, treatment options, and support for those impacted by the disease. Their focus extends beyond raising awareness to assist individuals in managing the aftereffects of brain tumour surgery, fostering a supportive community



through social activities and shared experiences on their website.

With the aid of BNI Northumbria's support, The Three Tumours can broaden its reach and assist more individuals affected by brain tumours, channelling the funds raised towards events, research initiatives, and resources for those in need. This collaboration exemplifies the impactful synergy between businesses and charitable organisations, highlighting how, together,

they can significantly improve the lives of individuals confronting the challenges of brain cancer.

**To discover more about The Three Tumours and their initiatives, visit their website at <https://thethreetumours.co.uk>. By joining hands, we can bolster their mission, raise awareness about brain cancer, and provide vital support to those navigating the complexities of the disease.**

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# Hollywood of the North – but no Oscar for the Chancellor

Now that we've had time to absorb the Chancellor's Spring Budget and have delved into the details, we can wholeheartedly welcome and celebrate the investment announced for the North East and the pledges made by the Chancellor for the region.

**We all stand to benefit from the "Trailblazer" devolution deal for the North East Mayoral Combined Authority together with the potential funding of £100 million which will be key to unlocking other multi-million-pound funding streams. Shifting the power to the region will also ensure that in future we receive more funding and flexibility to make important decisions that benefit the people of the region. We can take the reins, bringing control back to the North East.**

The money that is coming our way has already been earmarked for some transformational projects that the region has been working on, including the Crown Film Studios in Sunderland. After a high-profile and concerted campaign, money has been granted to transform Sunderland into a global hub for big-budget film and TV production centred around Crown Works Studios. This is phenomenal news for the city of Sunderland and the wider region, the 'Hollywood of the North' will be born, generating jobs and opportunities the like of which haven't been seen before.

Another Budget bonus for Newcastle was £10 million towards a Health Innovation Zone, part of Newcastle University's pioneering plans to regenerate the former Newcastle General Hospital site into a Health Innovation Neighbourhood. Plans include housing, green spaces, healthcare and educational facilities alongside research and innovation projects.

The Zone will be the first of its kind in the UK, designed to tackle major health and social challenges and to develop solutions that will benefit people not just in the North East but globally. The first phase of the site's redevelopment can now get underway thanks to the funding.

A £58 million maintenance budget was also brought forward in the Budget to carry out essential work on the Metro system and a new 'investment zone' was announced for the North East which is hoped will bring in £3 billion of investment and create more than 4,000 jobs over the next 10 years.

Aside from funding announcements, however the budget overall was lacklustre.

The money that is coming our way supports pioneering projects and initiatives that have been devised and worked up here in the North East. The region's efforts are being recognised, supported and rewarded with funding that will enable these projects to progress and provide a focus for the future. This is self-generated economic recovery. The Chancellor's budget meanwhile did little to turn the dial on the economy. Instead, as was feared, it was more focused on the election, granting concessions for voters rather than businesses. There were few major initiatives to turbo-charge economic growth. The widely-trailed 2p reduction on National Insurance contributions was for employees, with no relief for employers. It is of course fantastic that staff will get extra money in their pockets but the budget went no way to addressing the structural issues facing the economy and leaves us with the greatest tax burden since the 1940s.

Our wish list of VAT cuts, extended business rate reductions for hospitality and tax-free shopping to boost retail were not on the agenda. Although they too would have to be paid for, they would have injected new life into a flatlining economy.

We welcome the funding for the combined authority and the investment in the region, it is all hugely positive but we still lag behind our counterparts in terms of infrastructure investment and we still have ground to make up.

All eyes will now be on party election manifestos to see which side is going to seize the economic bull by the horns.

Grown-up discussions are needed now regarding future investment in Newcastle, the region, and nationally to create a more stable and prosperous country.

Everyone is feeling poorer and the antidote for poverty is prosperity so whichever government is in charge after the general election will need to focus on sustainably growing the economy in the next five years.

[www.newcastle1ltd.com](http://www.newcastle1ltd.com)





Stephen Patterson, NE1 LTD, CEO



# Taking your Senior Team from Striving to Thriving

There's no getting away from it, teams are under tremendous pressure in organisations, especially senior leadership teams.

## So many factors are coming together to add increased challenge:

- There is a need to do more, of a higher quality, with less resource, at pace.
- Many are running the business whilst transforming the business.
- They are managing conflicting priorities within teams and from stakeholders.
- People are members of multiple teams, requiring different ways of working in each.
- Teams may be virtual, hybrid, or have diversity and multi cultural challenges, with little time to build relationships and influence effectively.

Add to this the need to grow the business in challenging environments, be adaptive and agile in the changing landscape of digital transformation, all whilst keeping workforces engaged and aligned when there is potentially changes within the team too!

How then do you make sure teams, and especially your senior teams are thriving in this environment?

Stepping back, taking time out as a team



Annabel Graham

to reflect on how you are set up, how you function and how you deliver can be a crucial step to create momentum. This enables you to review the five core areas of team focus which we address in Team Coaching.

## 1. Are you a team?

This may seem obvious, but are you working as a team or a group of individuals? Determine whether the team operates as an interdependent team where you are reliant on each playing their part, an extra dependent team where you are delivering similar roles in different territories, or a project team with a clear start and finish. Doing this will enable you to address step 2.

## 2. Team Functioning

How is your team operating both together and apart?

- Are you all clear and in agreement on your team vision and purpose? Does this fit with the mandate you have been given by your stakeholders?
- Have you clarity on your strategy, synergies and overlaps, and your key priorities as a team?
- Have you agreed how you function? i.e. when you meet, about what, for how long. How you commit to decisions, what accountability means, how you manage conflict, and how you hold each other to account and give feedback to each other.

## 3. Team Relationships

Team dynamics - how well your team is getting along, and trusting each other is at the heart of every team. We think we spend plenty of time together because we're always in meetings, but are we having the right conversations? Do we know our team members personally and really feel safe admitting our concerns to them?

Has the team agreed expectations of each other, how it will work together, collaborate, give feedback and meet to ensure relationships are effective. What is your leadership stance and team values, your team behaviours and how you will role model these to others?

## 4. Stakeholder Expectations and Relationships

No team operates independently, it is part of an ecosystem, and it needs regular feedback from all parts of that ecosystem to ensure it is operating in the best way for the system to thrive.

When was the last time your team sought feedback from it's stakeholders? What feedback would they be giving you if they were asked? How well does the team influence those stakeholder relationships? Are there clear lines of ownership for all stakeholders, with a communication plan?

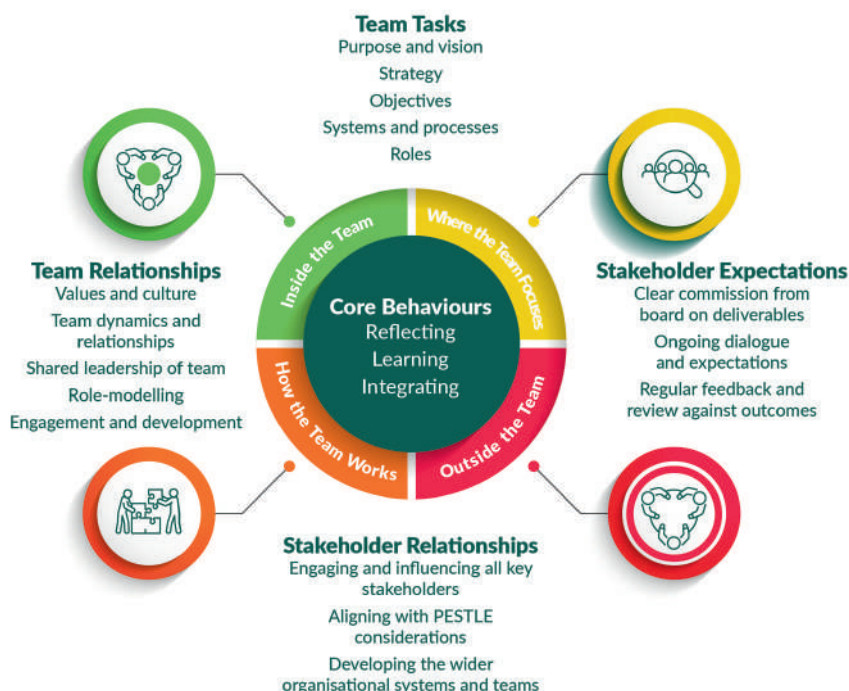
## 5. Learning as a Team

Finally are you learning as a team? Are you taking time to reflect, recognise your triumphs, admit your mistakes and adjust your stance regularly, as only in stepping back do teams really move forward.

I've worked with over 40 teams in 10 years, and these aspects are all areas which I address at some point in team coaching sessions, which are co created by and with the team.

By doing this, teams build better relationships with each other, face into the challenging conversations they have been avoiding, gain more traction with their goals, create a clarity and energy which often wasn't there before, and ultimately deliver more effectively for those they serve.

**If you'd value a thinking space for you or your team, contact Annabel via LinkedIn, [annabel@successfultraining.co.uk](mailto:annabel@successfultraining.co.uk), or visit [www.successfultraining.co.uk](http://www.successfultraining.co.uk)**





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Kathryn Rodgers

## A paradigm shift: Unleashing the potential of HR with FACEforward by face2faceHR

Aligning HR Practices  
with business goals for  
unprecedented success.

**In today's fast-paced and ever-evolving business landscape, Human Resources, or HR, is no longer confined to administrative tasks and compliance. It has emerged as a powerhouse that directly influences the success and growth of organisations.**

Recognising the critical need for synergy between HR practices and business objectives, face2faceHR has introduced a game-changing concept called FACEforward. This revolutionary approach redefines how businesses perceive and implement HR strategies, creating a powerful alliance between HR and overall business goals.

The objectives of FACEforward by face2faceHR are as expansive as the impact they aim to create within organisations.

FACEforward starts by delving deep into an organisation's existing HR practices,

uncovering hidden strengths and areas for improvement. Through meticulous assessments, face2faceHR experts gain profound insights into the current HR landscape, pinpointing opportunities for optimisation. This objective ensures that HR practices are perfectly aligned with the unique needs and goals of the business, setting the stage for transformative change.

With alignment as the cornerstone, FACEforward sends HR strategies to new heights by synchronising them with the organisation's objectives. face2faceHR collaborates closely with businesses, developing customised HR strategies that directly contribute to achieving specific business goals. This synergy ensures that HR becomes a catalyst for growth, fuelling the organisation's overall success.

But FACEforward understands that true success lies in the hands of employees. Recognising the pivotal role played by engaged and productive employees, face2faceHR focuses on fostering a vibrant work culture. By implementing strategies such as effective communication channels, performance management systems, and recognition programs, businesses can ignite the passion and drive of their workforce. By unlocking employee satisfaction, motivation, and engagement, organisations unlock the true potential of their people, propelling productivity, and sustainable growth.

At the heart of FACEforward lies the delivery of a tailored People Plan—a comprehensive roadmap that encompasses actionable steps, deadlines, and measurable goals. This People Plan serves as a guiding light, ensuring the seamless execution of HR initiatives

aligned with business objectives. With a clear framework in place, organisations can confidently navigate the complexities of HR, equipped with a blueprint for success.

The FACEforward approach is distinguished by its meticulous process. Beginning with a comprehensive analysis of an organisation's HR practices, face2faceHR experts generate invaluable insights. These insights form the foundation of a detailed report that presents recommendations to senior staff. But it doesn't end there. face2faceHR goes beyond the report, engaging in collaborative consultations with key stakeholders.

This ensures that the resulting bespoke People Plan is finely tuned to the unique needs and aspirations of the organisation.

By introducing FACEforward, face2faceHR empowers businesses in the North East to unlock their full potential by aligning HR practices with their overall business goals. This transformative approach revolutionises the HR landscape, elevating it to a strategic partner that drives organisational success.

FACEforward empowers businesses to navigate the complexities of HR with confidence, ensuring their workforce is fully engaged, motivated, and performing at their best. Step into the future of HR and unleash the full potential of your organisation with FACEforward by face2faceHR.

**To learn more about this innovative approach and how it can revolutionise your business, visit the face2faceHR website at [face2facehr.com](https://face2facehr.com). Embrace the power of HR and embark on a journey towards unparalleled success with FACEforward by face2faceHR.**



# Daughter returns to charity she grew up in



*A young Hannah helping at Silverline Memories*

The daughter of a regional charity CEO has returned to the charity her mother established whilst she was growing up, to build her career and support the organisation through its next period of growth.

**Hannah Turney grew up helping at Silverline Memories from the age of 11 and now 21, she has joined her mother Sandra Coulter in the bid to help even more people with dementia and their families.**

Appointed as Executive Assistant to the Board and CEO, Hannah's return is at a critical time for the organisation as it is celebrating its 10th anniversary with a Hollywood themed fundraising ball on 11th May.

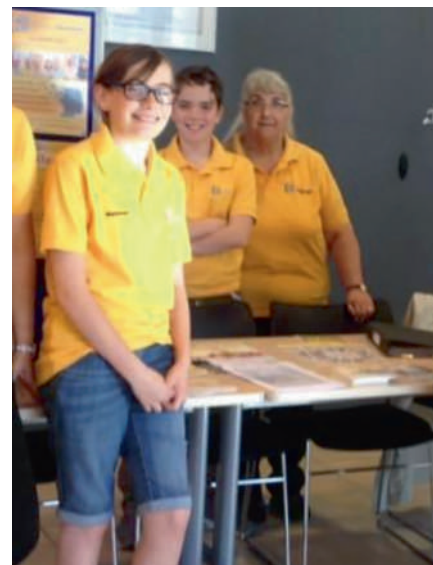
Hannah said: "I remember Mum saying she was starting a charity to help people and there was five people in the church hall. I used to come along to help and did jobs such as stuff envelopes and put chairs away after meetings. It is an exciting time to officially be part of Silverline Memories and the ball is going to be an amazing way to celebrate what has been achieved, as well as fundraise.

"I am so proud of everything that has been

achieved from what was originally a family passion. I am currently looking for sponsors for the ball, for prizes to be donated and encouraging people to buy tickets."

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 ever growing team of employees and volunteers work hard to provide opportunities to keep people with dementia and their families active and engaged, connecting with each other to enjoy positive mental health and wellbeing.

Sandra said: "Hannah has always been dedicated to Silverline Memories, even



taking her food hygiene course at the age of 16 so she could be more involved. As the charity has grown, so has the workload and it became apparent, especially with the impending ball, that an extra layer of support was needed for me and the board members. Hannah's understanding of the charity, and her passion for the cause made her the perfect choice!"

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.

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.

***Tickets can be bought at and more information on the charity is available on [silverlinememories.com](https://silverlinememories.com)***





# Celebrating northern heritage and a rich skills legacy



Back in February, The Glasshouse International Centre for Music played host to a momentous occasion: the 175th-anniversary celebration of educational charity NCFE.

**The event brought together colleagues, guest speakers, partners, and friends for a day of reflection, celebration, and conversation about NCFE's long history, enduring impact in the region and beyond, and vision for the future.**

The festivities kicked off with an inspiring dance performance by learners from Gateshead College, setting the tone for a day filled with stories, insights, and a shared passion for education.

John McCabe, Chief Executive Officer of the North East Chamber of Commerce, took the stage as the first keynote speaker, highlighting the crucial role the skills sector plays in driving economic growth across the region. He emphasised the importance of equipping individuals with the necessary skills to thrive in an ever-evolving job market, a sentiment echoed throughout the day.

Following John was Tim Campbell MBE, entrepreneur and star of the popular TV show *The Apprentice*. A vocal advocate for technical education, Mr Campbell spoke passionately about the empowering potential of education and the importance of providing all learners with choice and opportunity. His words resonated strongly – particularly during National Apprenticeship Week.



Dr Sam Parrett CBE, CEO of London South East Colleges, then took to the stage, shifting the focus towards the vital role of further education in fostering social action within communities. She described colleges as "anchor institutions", highlighting their capacity to serve as stabilising and supportive forces in their local areas.

Multicultural Apprenticeships Ambassador Kasim Choudhry followed, sharing his perspective on the transformative power of apprenticeships. He underscored the positive impact they have had on individuals from diverse backgrounds, emphasising their ability to create opportunities and ensure inclusivity in the workforce.

## Inspiring stories

Perhaps the most impactful session of the day, however, was hearing from NCFE learners past and present. From young apprentices and T Level students at the very start of their career journey, to adult learners returning to their studies and changing career pathways; we heard from six individuals who inspired the audience, across sectors ranging from travel and tourism to mental health counselling.

Each learner shared their story, aspirations and talents, with one pupil – music technology student, 14-year-old Freddie Vokes – even playing the piano for guests in the foyer of The Glasshouse before the event got underway. Their inspiring stories offered a glimpse into the transformative power of NCFE qualifications and the impact they have on shaping careers and lives.

The afternoon session also featured a spirited panel discussion moderated by Brenda McLeish, CEO of Learning Curve. Brenda led past and present NCFE CEOs, Managing Directors, and Trustees in a conversation that delved into the organisation's rich history and enduring values, before asking about hopes for the next 175 years.

## Looking to the future

As NCFE reflects on its 175-year legacy, the organisation also looks to the future. The event served as a platform for NCFE to reaffirm its commitment to innovation and agility in an ever-changing landscape.

By focusing on developing future-proof products and services, NCFE aims to continue supporting learners and employers in the North East and beyond for the next 175 years.

The event at The Glasshouse was a resounding success, solidifying NCFE's position as a leading force in technical education across the UK. As the organisation embarks on its next chapter, it does so with a renewed sense of purpose, a commitment to its regional roots, and a dedication to shaping smarter learning for generations to come.

**To discover more about NCFE's 175-year history and its impact on learners and society, visit [www.ncfe.org.uk/about-ncfe/175-years](http://www.ncfe.org.uk/about-ncfe/175-years)**



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Helen Butler

## It's all about the data

In working with businesses across various sectors, one common thread that I believe separates the thriving ones from those just scraping by is their relationship with data. Data in a business context encompasses everything from the numbers that highlight sales trends to the feedback that tells us what our customers think and feel. It's the detailed record of your business's operations, your customers' behaviours, and the broader market dynamics.

**From my experience, the business owners that lean into their data are the ones that truly see sustainable growth. It means they're not just reacting to what comes up; they're anticipating changes, understanding deep customer needs, and refining their operations to be as efficient as possible.**

Why does this matter? Because data provides clarity and insight in a way that gut feelings and guesswork can't.

I find that there is often a hesitancy to dive deep into the numbers, partly from a concern about what might be uncovered. Whether it's underperforming products, inefficiencies in operations, or unexpected customer behaviour patterns, the fear of facing these realities is real. But a piece of advice I always share is that it's better to know what's happening in your business, for better or worse, than to be in the dark. Knowledge is power, after all. Once you're aware of an issue, you can start taking steps

to address it. Ignoring data doesn't make these challenges disappear; it just delays your opportunity to fix them and move forward.

### **Here are three ways you can start effectively using data in your business:**

**1. Keep it Simple:** Start with a few key indicators that matter most to your business. It could be tracking how many new customers you're attracting, understanding which products are bestsellers, or identifying operational bottlenecks.

**2. Use Data as a Tool for Conversation:** Bring your team together to discuss what the data is showing. For me, it's all about the story that the data tells you. Is there a consistent issue that customers are pointing out? Are there unexpected successes in certain areas of the business? These insights can guide meaningful changes and innovations.

### **3. Adopt a Mindset of Continuous Improvement:**

The most impactful use of data comes from the willingness to continuously learn and adapt. Encourage your team to ask new questions, and to be open to changing course based on what the data reveals.

Consider data as your business's feedback loop. It tells you what's resonating with your customers and where there's room for improvement. And just like any form of feedback, it's invaluable. It helps you tailor your offerings, refine your operations, and ultimately, serve your customers better.

Of course, the aim is not to collect data for data's sake! Everything you do in your business should have a clear purpose and in the case of data use it as a lens through which you can view and improve every aspect of your business.

Businesses that embrace data, even when it reveals uncomfortable truths, are the ones that adapt and thrive. They use it as a tool to make informed decisions, not just once but as an ongoing practice. This proactive approach helps them stay ahead of the curve, ready to adapt when necessary and seize opportunities as they arise.

The takeaway? Embracing data doesn't have to be overwhelming. It's about starting small, staying curious, and using the insights you gain to move your business forward. Whatever the size of your business, the right approach can make a huge difference on the path to success.

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



## Framing Unlimited secures deal with local artist to frame artwork featuring Ed Sheeran



Framing Unlimited, a picture framing business in Chester-le-Street's Drum Industrial Estate, has proudly announced a significant collaboration with County Durham artist Mr Sly who is known for his mixed media collages and contemporary interpretation of 20th Century pop culture. The business, run by new owner, Blayne Palmer, has framed several of the artist's work including a piece featuring musician Ed Sheeran which is destined for the pop star's personal collection.

Blayne took over the established business 18 months ago after leaving university with a degree in business management and a series of jobs including marketing, hospitality, and selling cars. When the previous owner wanted to sell the business, Blayne seized the opportunity, and after a brief but intensive training period, took over the reins of Framing Unlimited.

The business has successfully framed a diverse range of artworks, including large-format pieces such as a six-foot artwork by Mick Graham, who specialises in military imagery - most notably armoured vehicles and tanks and photography by several local photographers. In addition, Blayne has framed wedding dresses, signed football shirts and even a rug made from camel hair.

"I'm delighted the way that the business has grown in such a short period of time and I'm very proud that one of my framing commissions is ending up in a super star's home. I enjoy working with Mr Sly who has collectors all over the world and clients including Chelsea Football Club, L'Oréal and Red Ken."

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

## Blyth Town Council generously donates £5000 to food bank



In a unanimous decision, Blyth Town Council has demonstrated its commitment to supporting the local community by donating £5000 to the Blyth Food Bank. This financial aid will contribute to the ongoing efforts of the food bank in providing essential resources to those in need.

Mayor Warren Taylor, a passionate advocate for the cause, not only oversees the donation as part of the council but also actively volunteers at the Blyth Food Bank. Mayor Taylor highlighted the importance of community support in addressing the needs of those facing food insecurity.

"We all felt as councillors that the food bank was something we should be supporting on a regular basis," he said. "It was a unanimous decision amongst all councillors, spanning across different parties, to provide £5000. This support will continue on a six-monthly basis until further notice."

The Blyth Food Bank, situated on Seaforth Street in Blyth, operates both a warehouse, where volunteers assemble food parcels, and a distribution centre. Food donations come from various sources, including local supermarkets, individual donations, community groups, and local businesses.

"People who do get a food parcel have to be referred, so there is a method in getting these packages," Mayor Taylor explained. "Referrals can be made by Northumberland Communities Together, Citizens Advice, schools, Blyth Job Centre, and other relevant agencies. Further information can be found on the Blyth Foodbank Facebook page."

Mayor Taylor expressed his thanks for the overwhelming support from the Town Council and urged the community to join hands in this worthy cause. "It's a very worthwhile cause, and I'm pleased that all councillors voted to support it," Mayor Taylor said. "It's a real shame that we need to provide this service but without it many people would go hungry and that is just not acceptable."





## Next generation leaders

*By Wayne Farrell, Director, Lynas Engineers*

**The construction industry faces a looming leadership gap. As experienced leaders approach retirement, a skilled and prepared next generation is needed to navigate the complexities of modern construction projects. This requires a proactive approach to cultivate future leaders who can not only manage projects efficiently but also embrace innovation and sustainability.**

**As a relatively young director and business owner within the construction industry, it's easy for me to remember what it was like to be a technician starting out. The pathways for progression were not always easy to navigate or relate to; being in an incredibly technical environment I never really saw myself as a potential leader when I couldn't even understand half of the three letter acronyms people would often use!**

These kinds of memories tend to invoke feelings of wanting to 'look after' younger members of our staff more closely. To ensure they fully understand what it is that is being explained to them not only gives them a better chance of doing the task well, but also builds their confidence by knowing why they are carrying out the task in the first place. These small interactions have such incredible impact not only in the immediate space, but for their future and progression also.

This is just one small example of what we're

trying to do with the development of staff at Lynas Engineers; instilling knowledge and experience, creating exposure, giving them the feeling of ownership and responsibility; eventually leading to confidence and true pride in their work. With consistent guidance and mentoring, we now have members of the team that are running several of their own schemes at once, who are delegating with authority, and who are, more importantly, applying that original ethos of looking after the younger staff who are now working directly from them.

This is a very organic method of cultivating leadership, and we have real-life examples of those within the company who have shot through the ranks from senior technician to senior engineer within just 5 years. We want to help foster a culture of mentorship and development that works for all members of staff, which will ultimately benefit the overall business and allow more growth for the creation of real jobs. We have an avid belief in the creation of 'real' new

jobs, and what I mean by this is - we don't just look to transfer local skills from one design consultancy to another, but with currently 38% of our 13-engineering staff on degree apprenticeship courses we seek to provide new job creation for the region as a whole. This obviously then opens up opportunities for more people to step onto the construction ladder to help balance the gulf of the retirees stepping off on the other side; and develops our existing team into the future leaders our industry so desperately needs.

It isn't always easy to grow a company this way. It would have been significantly easier and quicker to simply buy-in all the skills we needed as we needed them. But instead, we have spent, and continue to spend, a huge amount of time and effort with our team to ensure that they grasp the intricacies of design, of delivery, of client and consultee liaison, on standards and guidance, and so on, so that they can look at project cycle holistically from an early onset in their career and grasp the importance of what they do on a daily basis. They are important, and what they do – and how they do it – is crucial too.

At Lynas Engineers, we are proud to be a young, vibrant, and ambitious company, which is synonymous with our passion and appetite to excel. And in order to do that we, and the overall industry, need to continue to inspire ambition, confidence, and success into the next generation of young engineers to ensure Construction continues to have a buoyant succession plan for those that will carry the baton on and lead us through the coming evolutions of the industry.

**[lynasengineers.com](https://lynasengineers.com)**



# Are you a washer?

Whether it's greenwashing, or kindwashing. If you are saying one thing but doing another, it's a lie.

**Are you a liar?**

**Are you actually adding to the problem?**

**Are you part of the problem?**

**Equity-washing!**

Last week was International Woman's Day; I am yet to find an event I can go to that is representative and inclusive of female inequality. They all sit in a place of privilege, eating cupcakes and cheering Happy IWD whilst real life-limiting inequality isn't part of the discussion. No one is talking about abortion being illegal in more countries than it is legal, with many women and girls dying as a consequence. Your organisation may have an office in one of these countries, they may do business in one of these countries? A colleague may be affected by this discriminatory law? If your organisation does and celebrated IWD, declaring the number of privileged females sitting in power positions, but has done absolutely nothing to improve life-limiting and life-damaging equality, that is equity-washing. Awareness days and protest days aren't something to jump on for content marketing, or a tick box in your CSR, or ESG.

Social justice campaigns are there to protect the people affected by atrocities of their inequality.

If you are using them you are adding to the problem, you are making it worse and you are the problem.

Inequality gaps are widening!

Cupcakes don't improve the real world problems of inequality.

Whether it's Pride Month, Black History Month, International Day of Persons with Disability, World Mental Health Day, Cancer Awareness Week etc. If you are not taking action to improve the situations you are 'celebrating' then stop!

Action matters.

So many organisations talk about Cancer Awareness but have toxic work environments and cultures that increase the risk of cancer and then the sick leave policy discriminates employees with cancer.



Then there's those that say they support children affected by food poverty whilst not paying the real living wage!

Be honest. Don't use and abuse. Don't make the problem worse.

The focus should not be on the celebration of a day, or week, or month.

It should be about what you can do, everyday, to make a difference.

What are the values of your organisation?

What social justice and inequality issues are you or can you actively support, make an impact in, and are passionate about creating a real change.

Tell us about that, every day.

No business or individual can do everything. But we can all do something, and do that something justice.

If you are actively involved with children's

mental health, share that, every day, share what you are doing and the impact it is making.

That we will respect.

Eating cupcakes and celebrating a different cause every day, is not respectful.

It's unkind.

Lead with your values, lead with your action, lead with your impact. And don't forget to be inclusive and representative; seeing is believing.

As we move into this new financial year, think about your business, and what it realistically has the power to change and work at creating that change, then you can celebrate, celebrate the difference you have truly made with the people you have supported.

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## Automotive businesses help to deliver Primary Engineer Vehicle Programme in the North East

**A generation of potential young engineers is set to be unearthed, as award-winning Port of Tyne and Adient Seating, donate £3,000 to Primary Engineer to support local North East schools.**

The companies were winners at the North East Automotive Alliance (NEAA) annual awards 2023 and chose to donate their prize money to bring the Primary Engineer Vehicle Programme to schools, teachers, pupils and engineers in the North East during the 2023/2024 academic year.

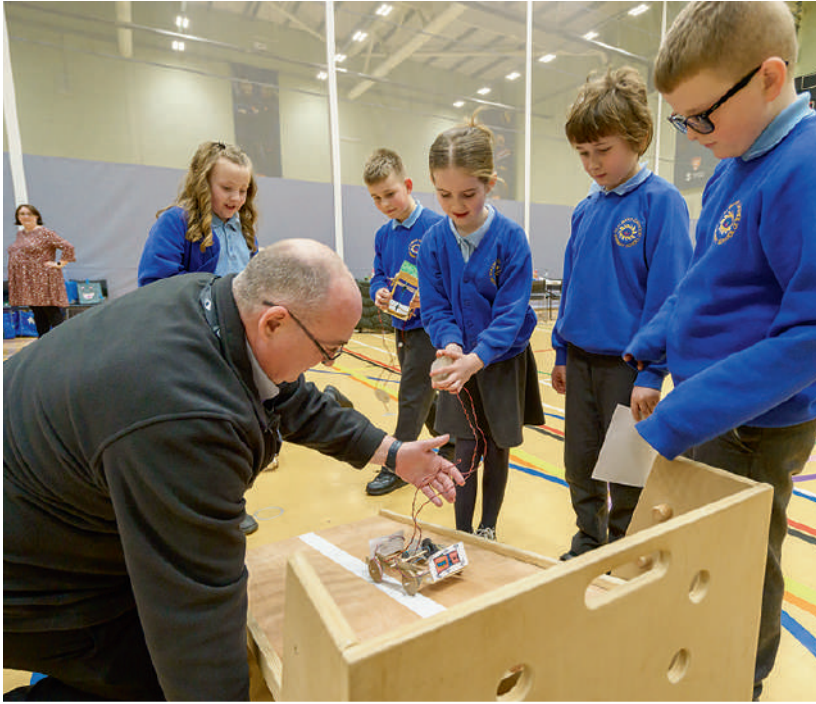
This programme aims to establish meaningful links between engineering and schools, the foundation of which is based on training teachers and partnering them with engineering professionals.

The programme concludes with a celebration event that sees some of the pupils put their engineering skills to the test against other participating schools.

The North East celebration event was held at Sunderland University CitySpace Building at the end of February, bringing together teams from the participating schools to compete, with the NEAA helping as a judge.











## Want to grow and future proof your business?

*Start by investing in your people's professional development – it's the best investment you'll make!*

**Could cultivating better workplace cultures that enable workers and volunteers to feel more consciously capable and resilient through an investment in skills development, hold the key to your future organisational success? Award winning training providers Mortal Fools think so!**

**CONNECT is Mortal Fools' high impact training and professional development programme delivered in person or online, for organisations, teams and individuals.**

They've been delivering CONNECT training to the likes of SeedLegals, Newcastle University, National Trust, Wakefield Council, Virgin Money, Ryder Architecture, Muckle LLP, INTO Global, Sunderland Culture, Arts Council Ireland and many more clients.

The CONNECT programme offers dynamic and effective approaches to developing leadership practice, engaging and impactful communication, presentation, and persuasion skills,

managing difficult conversations, embedding growth mindset, overcoming imposter syndrome, investing into team dynamics, digital presence and emotional resilience & well-being.

"Our experience with Mortal Fools was amazing! They deliver leadership training with a difference; it's fun, impactful and delivers meaningful learning experiences in a very memorable way. We've never laughed and learnt so much at the same time." - Nicola Leyden Director of HR – Muckle LLP

The demand for CONNECT training has never been higher – the shifting business landscape over the last few years, for many organisations has revealed skills gaps, fixed mindset culture, low levels of staff wellbeing, inability to innovate and a general apathy and pandemic burn out.

First, we had, The Great Resignation and "Silent Quitting"; then emerged the epidemic of Burn Out from years of toxic "Hustle Culture" and "The Great Exhaustion" – thanks to the historic normalisation of unrealistic workloads coupled with the expectation of high performance on skeleton resources. Now, Gen Z & Gen Alpha are entering the workforce, looking for organisations to work in that align with their values, provide enrichment, and work life balance.

We are seeing this play out in real time across our workplaces – whilst this is challenging, for many businesses it has also been a catalyst for new people centric thinking; unlocking a better understanding of what people need to do their job well, the type of employer they want to be, and balancing business needs and people needs.

Mortal Fools are seeing more and more organisations go through this thinking and many are ending up at an inescapable conclusion: investing in their people through training and professional development, is investing in high performance, sustainability, and organisational future proofing.



This has led many leaders and organisations to seek out CONNECT training, as an investment in skills development and team dynamics, enabling growth mindset thinking, conscious organisational culture shifts, higher levels of motivation, increased tolerance to change and resilience, enhanced personal confidence and capability and improved staff well-being.

“

*Continuous investment in people benefits not only the individuals – through their skills development, confidence, and motivation – but the business itself, increasing staff retention and productivity, which benefits us all. We're proud to work with other businesses to support them in that journey.*

*Kiz Crosbie, CEO Mortal Fools*

The CONNECT programme was designed in response to the contemporary business and professional landscape and is grounded in real world practical applicability. It's not a passive or instructive “how to”, it's an active exploration of possibility and self-discovery through a unique combination sharing theory and research from the social sciences with creative sector practice intertwined through-out.

Mortal Fools are hosting a digital showcase of the CONNECT training programme on 1st May, 10am for folks with training needs in their organisation or those interested in employee/volunteer wellbeing & skills development and organisational culture shifts & leadership.

At the showcase, Mortal Fools CEO Kiz Crosbie will digitally walk attendees through the CONNECT programme offer, showcase its practical application in the ever-changing business landscape and share client case studies and programme developments.



Across the hour Mortal Fools will showcase CONNECT as an impactful, meaningful way to invest in:

Workforce wellbeing, professional skills development, confidence, resilience, and ability to perform.

Team dynamics and developing healthy interpersonal relationships.

A people-centric learning culture that cultivates its workforce.

Organisational future proofing with authentic people power, that can handle change and embraces new ways of thinking.

Corporate social responsibility - CONNECT income subsidises Mortal Fools work as an award-winning children's charity with vulnerable children and young people.

**To sign up to the showcase email**

***Rachel.Horton@mortalfools.org.uk***

**To find out more about CONNECT visit:**

***www.mortalfools.org.uk/connect***

**To find out more about Mortal Fools work**

***as children's charity visit: www.mortalfools.org.uk***





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From left: Advanced Vehicle Leasing's Clarke Beagrie and Stuart Beagrie

## We've got the power

AVL unveils electric car 'salary sacrifice' scheme.

**"The priority is always the customer – that's not just rhetoric, it's our ethos."**

So says Stuart Beagrie, founder and MD of Middlesbrough-based Advanced Vehicle Leasing – a firm that, since 1997, has been dedicated to getting the best vehicle leasing deals for private customers and businesses alike.

And with its new salary sacrifice scheme on electric cars, it's plugging into the so-far untapped potential of the vehicles of the future.

For 27 years, family-run AVL – Advanced Vehicle Leasing – has built an enviable reputation for hassle-free business and personal leasing arrangements on all types of cars and vans.

With Stuart and son Clarke in the driving seat, AVL – centrally based on Middlesbrough's Riverside Park since 2015 – has 25 full-time staff who go the extra mile to ensure the hundreds of vehicles leased each month are the perfect fit for the customer.

Stuart said: "Whether it's one car or 100, everyone gets the same attention because that's the core of our business. It sounds old-fashioned but it's a basic thing – look after your customers."

"We had a strapline 'nice people to do business with' but we have to be. We don't make anything in here, so we need to look after people."

And with their latest initiative, they're not just helping the customer – they're helping the planet too.

AVL has launched a salary sacrifice scheme where businesses lease electric vehicles and the employee pays for theirs by 'sacrificing' a proportion of their wage.

And, says Clarke, it could prove a gamechanger.

He explained: "The employee sacrifices an element of their wages towards the cost of having the vehicle each month. It comes out of their gross monthly wage, but they are saving the National Insurance and the element of PAYE tax on that. The employer is also saving their National Insurance contribution."

"In effect, the employee gets a fully serviced and maintained, all-electric car for a much smaller percentage of what they would be paying by doing it all themselves."

"It must be an electric vehicle, though, because the 'benefit in kind' tax on electric cars is next to nothing in relation to diesel and petrol – that's the big win."

Stuart adds: "It's a win for everybody – the employee, the employer, the environment, us – and there genuinely isn't a catch."

"From an employer's point of view, they're going down the right route regarding carbon emissions and for an employee, we feel it's the right thing to do and will be cheaper for them to run because it's cheaper to charge your car up than fill it with petrol or diesel."

Launched in mid-January, Clarke said the salary sacrifice scheme has several advantages for the businesses using it.

He explained: "One big win for the employer is that it will help staff retention – you're giving your staff access to something they wouldn't get access to elsewhere and it could save them hundreds of pounds a month. A lot of companies have green targets, which of course this can help meet."

Each customer will use a secure portal on the AVL website to access the scheme.

Clarke said: "Businesses will create a 'log in' and can then offer the staff they wish to access it. Then we will work with them, to find the correct vehicles and manage all the paperwork for them."

"One reservation people have had was regarding staff members leaving – they don't want to feel lumbered with the car. Most companies in the marketplace want three to six months' minimum notice but we've structured it so that any time after the first year, regardless of circumstances, if a member of staff leaves, we will take the car off their hands at a month's notice."

And whether it's leasing electric, petrol or diesel vehicles, Stuart says customer service will remain at the heart of the AVL operation.

He said: "We literally do everything – from the credit, to getting the right cars, the right colour, the right models, then getting them delivered on a trailer. It's all part of what we do."

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Salary Sacrifice is a scheme that allows an employee to give up a portion of their gross salary for a fully funded, maintained & insured vehicle.

This reduces personal income tax and National Insurance contributions for the employee because of the much lower Benefit in Kind (BIK) tax electric vehicles attract.

## Employer Benefits



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## Front of the class!

Two learners have gone from sitting in class to teaching at the front after excelling at a Hartlepool construction and civil engineering plant training centre and Hartlepool College of Further Education.

**Amy Richards and Luke Willgress are two of the more than 600 people who have gone into work from unemployment through Seymour Skills Academy's Gateway to Construction course.**

The pair have quickly progressed into trainer roles on the programme following industry experience and completion of their teaching qualifications. They now are part of an award winning team, delivering the very course they started on which is brought in partnership with Hartlepool College, at the 11-acre real-life construction site on Brenda Road.

Amy, 31, is now a Plant Instructor having followed up the six-week course for industry recognised qualifications and being offered an initial job as a training support operative, providing her with practical experience which has led to promotion following completion of her NPORS Instructional Techniques accreditation.

She said: "I have always had an agricultural background and was unemployed for a while, and then my nana said 'why don't you give this a go?' So I joined the programme in 2021.

"I didn't really have a career in mind and now I'm here it's been massively important for me, life-changing. This has brought on my confidence so much because I was so shy at speaking to people.

"This has brought the best out of me. I would love to get more women into construction because it is still a male dominated industry. You might still hear people say you shouldn't be doing that – but I always say 'why?'

Luke is now a Streetworks Instructor having progressed from being a learner to a trainer at Seymour Skills Academy after a brief spell working on multiple sites for Seymour Civil Engineering's main business gaining strong practical site experience and laterally achieving a Level 3 Award in Assessing Vocationally Related Achievement.

The 25-year-old said: "I can't believe what Seymour Skills Academy has done for me. I used to be someone who wouldn't leave the house when I was at school. I just didn't suit the classroom environment and now I'm enjoying it!



Picture: Seymour Skills Academy.

"I wasn't getting much work as a groundworker during Covid. Then someone I know told me about this course so I could gain qualifications to open up the opportunity for more work. I took a leap of faith to come on the Gateway to Construction course and haven't looked back.

"After six weeks' training I got a job supporting the Trainer. I was preparing areas, looking after the plant, helping to make cups of tea. I've then gained further experience working on a range of sites across a number of industries and I've continued to work upwards. I'm now a trainer and I have proven to myself that I can do it after doubting myself.

"I get up and deliver to six to eight people each time and I get good feedback from experienced people. It has helped me become a better person.

"I am looking to keep moving forward in my career, looking for the next challenge."

The personal development of Amy and Luke has hugely impressed the Skills Academy team. Through their career progression, they have supported them throughout - from gaining their initial qualifications through to mentoring and shadowing experiences which has helped them develop their presenting and teaching skills, complimenting their occupational knowledge to empower them to become great teachers.

Donna King, Seymour Skills Academy manager, said: "I couldn't be prouder. To see

them come through the journey they have both had has been so inspiring for others. "They both play an integral role here and to see them delivering training makes me feel like a proud parent."

The Gateway to Construction was set up to help those out of work through a programme of industry recognised qualifications, delivered in partnership with Hartlepool College, and move them into employment within construction. The programme itself has seen 76 per cent of learners secure a job in the industry.

Gary Riches, Hartlepool College's vice principal, said: "This is exactly what the civil engineering training academy is all about. It's designed to help learners progress, whether that's directly into skilled practical employment or teaching and passing on their knowledge to the next generation. "We are dedicated to meeting the needs of our employer-partners within the construction and civil engineering sector and this close partnership we have with Seymour Civil Engineering is evidence of that.

"I'm proud to say that this training facility in Hartlepool is doing its bit to close a very big skills gap in the construction sector, and to have a sector specialist employer working with us is the reason so many people are gaining the right knowledge and skills to see them transition into paid employment."

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## Lovell delivers a significant increase of affordable homes across the North East

**Lovell has shown resilience against a softer housing market in the North East through its partnership housing model. Over the last year, 123 homes were delivered across the region with 100% being affordable, despite a challenging economic climate.**

In the North East, it is anticipated that Lovell will exchange on two major schemes of around 300 homes, with a value of £75 million. The leading provider of homes in partnership also has a visible pipeline of around 2,500 mixed-tenure homes for all.

While there was a slowdown in the sale of private homes on mixed-tenure sites, due to the cost-of-living crisis and rising mortgage rates, revenue across Lovell Partnerships is up by 20% in the year to £838m, with an operating profit of £30.5m alongside a return on capital employed of 12%.

The secured order book at the year-end was £2.034bn, representing a 3% improvement on last year's position and a clear reflection of the successful strategic growth and partnership model. These results have bolstered the overall results of parent company, Morgan Sindall Group plc, whose full year results were published to the London Stock Exchange this morning.

The Group delivered a strong performance in 2023 against a difficult market backdrop. The results were another record for the Group and reflected the strength and breadth of the Group's operations and the talent and commitment of its people.

Group revenue increased by 14% to over £4.1bn, while adjusted operating profit before tax was up 6% to £144.6m. The Group's balance sheet remains strong with net cash of £461m, and its high-quality secured order book of £8.9bn, up 5% on the prior year leaves the Group well-positioned for the future and on track to deliver a result for 2024 in line with its current expectations.

## GMI Construction Group checks in for latest Dakota Hotel project

**GMI Construction Group has been appointed principal contractor to deliver the North East's first Dakota Hotel.**

The luxury 118 room boutique hotel will transform the vacant St Anne's Wharf at 112 Quayside, which fronts onto the River Tyne, and is scheduled for completion in Spring 2025.

The development will generate 150 new jobs and provide an additional 65,000 visitor nights per year, creating an estimated £1.5m boost to the local economy.

The contract win sees GMI Construction Group continue its strong relationship with the lifestyle luxury brand - having previously completed three Dakota Hotels in Manchester, Leeds, and Glasgow. The UK hotel chain, which also has hotels in Edinburgh and Motherwell, regularly welcomes celebrity guests.

The contemporary hotel will retain much



of the building's current features and details, complementing its architectural heritage, while a new-look entrance lobby, reception and signature ground floor Bar & Grill.

An existing courtyard at the front of the Quayside property will be reconfigured to provide a vehicle drop off area, while the first floor will feature bedroom terraces. In addition, PV panels and Air Source Heat Pumps will be installed to provide renewable energy.

The building previously held a number of tenants, including law firm Womble Bond Dickinson. It had been based on the Quayside since 1998 until relocating its 400 staff into the Spark building at Newcastle Helix.

## Own new rate reducer mortgage strikes the right chord with Miller Homes customers

**Miller Homes has launched a new partnership with Own New that could mean lower mortgage rates for people looking to buy a new build home in the North East.**

Own New Rate Reducer is a brand-new product that could enable customers to reduce the interest rate on their mortgage for a new Miller home for their initial mortgage term, while still owning 100% of their property.

Anne Marie Britton, Group Sales and Marketing Director for Miller Homes, said: "We are delighted with the initial response to our partnership with Own New and the interest it has generated amongst potential house buyers. Given the number of enquiries we have received since launching, this is clearly a product that resonates with individuals and families that are considering their options for buying a new home.

"I look forward to developing our partnership with Own New over the coming months, and I hope first time buyers and existing homeowners who are thinking of making a move, will take



the time to find out more about the many advantages Own New offers."

Eliot Darcy, founder of Own New, said: "It's great to see Own New Rate Reducer resonating so well with customers. Alongside the national lenders and housebuilders like Miller Homes who have signed up to the scheme, we believe that Own New Rate Reducer will be a significant boost to many people's home-buying dreams.

"People can benefit from Rate Reducer whether they have a small or large deposit. For some people who already have equity in their home, it could herald the return of the sub-one per cent mortgage deal. By working together, we are increasing mortgage lending opportunities and bringing the possibility of owning a new-build home to wider range of buyers."

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Wayne Halton

## Property market on the rise but not everyone is building

The housing market appears to be in rude health, with enquiries and sales on the up across the North East. Regional, private developers can't build fast enough – and yet not everyone is rushing to market. Wayne Halton, PR specialist in the built environment space, reviews the landscape.

**There's little doubt the residential property market is bouncing back to good health. A momentum is building, and agents have reason to be more cheerful than this time last year.**

Property enquiries are rising along with house prices. Inflation is set to steadily fall which is further good news for anyone buying or re-mortgaging

The gloom of 2023 is lifting although some commentators are saying the market remains fragile. Affordability and realistic prices remain key issues in the market.

Michael Mortimer, MD of punchy, expanding Newcastle estate agency Hive Estates, said; "Activity is reaching pre-pandemic levels. We are getting multiple viewings and offers for a home. There isn't a mad rush but it's still busy and that's what we want to see for everyone in the market."

"The growth and activity we are seeing is led by upsizers, that's those people moving up the property ladder. We're also seeing high levels of first-time buyers trying to get on the ladder and escape the renting trap."

The average UK house price is now just £1,800 off the peak recorded in June 2022 after it increased by 0.4% in February,

marking the fifth monthly rise in a row, according to Halifax.

Zoopla is also reporting an uptick in the number of buyers and sellers. The property website is predicting a 10% rise in total house sales (1.1m) in 2024 compared to 1m last year

And yet the country is not building enough new houses or the type of homes many people and communities want. The demand is there but the supply isn't. There were fewer than 250,000 homes built last year across Great Britain, falling well below the 300,000-homes target for England alone.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) recently published the results of a year-long study into the UK housebuilding market which blamed a combination of the planning system and the limits of speculative private development for the persistent under-delivery of new homes.

Talk to any mid-tier, private developer and they all frown or, in worst case scenarios, start ranting and frothing at the mouth when you mention planning and the interminable delays they face.

The CMA has called on Government to do more to support the SME housebuilding sector, which has seen numbers fall

significantly since the 1980s, as well as go further and faster on planning reform.

The report found two-fifths of homes built between 2021 and 2022 were delivered by the largest, national housebuilders while more than 50,000 homes were delivered by thousands of smaller, regional builders.

Jan Dale, director and founder of regional estate agent and new homes specialist UrbanBASE, is optimistic about the opportunities for SMEs, and developers building 50 or less homes a year with funding readily available. She said:

"Residential development land in the right location is at an all-time high and land value in areas such as Durham, Gosforth, and Northumberland are all seeing robust growth due to buyer-demand."

"The right location. The right style of home. The right price. Remains the future of success in new housing schemes. As such new housing schemes by Pimlico Homes and Banks Homes, both in Durham City, have all sold off-plan and at new price points."

She adds: "The North East does need a degree of new social housing, but there is also an absolute shortfall of larger, luxury, housing stock in our cities to attract and retain senior personnel and the best professionals to our region."

While there's opportunities for the smaller developers, the volume builders are cutting back. Taylor Wimpey recently revealed it expects to see a further drop in completed property sales this year, with profit margins continuing to be squeezed by soft house pricing and higher costs. During 2023, total UK house completions fell to 10,438 from 13,773. Taylor Wimpey expects the number of UK completions this year to be fewer than 10,000. Persimmon is following suit and is also planning to build fewer homes this year.

**More details:** [www.mhwpr.co.uk](http://www.mhwpr.co.uk)





*Jessica Fenwick*



# The Built Environment

*In this new series of interviews with leading figures working within this crucial sector Michael Grahamslaw spoke to...*

## Jessica Fenwick

*Partner, Commercial Property, Sweeney Miller Law*

### **Did you always envisage a career working in and around The Built Environment?**

The Built Environment was always in the background of my interests growing up, but it really came to the forefront as I entered the legal profession. I love being part of something that literally changes the world around you (as cheesy as that might sound!). I can walk round towns and cities, and, unlike other specialist legal areas, I can physically point to something that I have been involved with.

### **Tell us about your current role.**

I am the partner overseeing the Commercial, Commercial Property and Corporate department at Sweeney Miller; I split my time between our Newcastle and Sunderland offices. My day-to-day role involves co-ordinating and supervising the teams and training the junior team members; something we pride ourselves on as a firm.

### **Tell us about your team.**

The Commercial team has expanded greatly since I first started at Sweeney Miller back in 2013; we have now reached 11 members and counting. I work closely with my fellow partner Surbhi Vedhara, and we recently appointed Matthew Smith, an experienced Senior Associate Solicitor, to the team. Shama Ohri is also a Senior Associate working remotely from Oman having previously held other positions in Newcastle. Solicitor Ramsha Nayab, who joined us last year, has been a great addition. We have two trainee solicitors, Shahar Sadat who is due to qualify after joining the firm as a Paralegal, and Chloe Cooke who has made a strong start to her training contract. We are all supported by four Paralegals, James McNaughton, Rebecca Douglass, Mona Aslam and Amardip Sadhra and a centralised admin team. We have a wealth of experience, and the team prides itself on offering tailored specialist advice to our clients from those first venturing into property right through to experienced investors and developers.

### **What are you currently working on?**

We have a number of exciting projects at the moment, both regionally and nationally. I've been working on multiple projects which form part of the regeneration in Sunderland City centre, and it is lovely to see some of these approach build completion.

### **What is your proudest career achievement?**

I am really proud of the team we have built and the careers we have started and progressed, but undoubtedly my proudest moment was making partner at Sweeney Miller having worked my way up from a paralegal role. Law remains a difficult space to enter but it's exciting to see so many women like me now in partner positions and senior leadership roles.

### **What is your own favourite building?**

Whilst I can appreciate the aesthetic of many modern buildings my heart always lies with old buildings. Chatsworth House is just beautiful (I wish I could live there!) but I also love the ruin that is Lowther Castle in Cumbria (my ultimate renovation project).

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

The legal sector is always dragged kicking and screaming into technological innovations but, for me, technology can't be ignored and if you don't create, embrace, and tailor it for your own needs, you're missing a trick. Document drafting automation is there, but it still has a long way to go before it becomes a truly useful tool. Who knows where AI will take us, but I see it as an opportunity rather than a threat.

### **What does the future hold?**

After relocating our Newcastle office just over two years ago, we have just moved our Sunderland office to a bigger, purpose-built office space to make room for our next wave of expansion. We're building on our continued success which has seen us expand greatly over the last few years whilst retaining our strong reputation for both individuals and businesses alike.

### **Who would be your four ideal dinner guests?**

Michelle Obama, as I really respect how she has used her position for good. Sara Davies as she is so successful yet always comes across as being so relatable and motivating. Clive Myrie as he was a speaker at a conference I attended, and he had a great back catalogue of witty stories. Tim Peake as space travel fascinates me (although not something I have any great desire to do myself!) I don't think conversation would run out with these guests.

### **How do you like to unwind?**

If you had asked me this question a couple of years ago, I would probably have given a different answer but since moving to a house with a bigger garden instead of seeing gardening as a chore I've started to find it really relaxing and it as something we do as a whole family. Family is really important to me and whatever I'm doing if it's with family it helps me unwind. I'm also now a year into renovating our third family home in five years which weirdly acts as downtime for me!

### **Favourite Boxset?**

Honestly, I like pretty trashy boxsets – the kind of stuff you don't have to think about after a long day! Some I definitely wouldn't confess too but I recently finished *The Affair* which I enjoyed. I love watching home renovation shows especially renovations of historic buildings.

### **Favourite Book?**

I was a big reader when I was younger before kids and a demanding job but not so much now. There are only two books I have read more than once and would read again, and they are *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee.

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



# Luxury living at landmark £2.25m Symeon Manor

Durham City's most luxurious new home is coming onto the market as the creation of the North East's most exclusive residential development continues.



*The £2.25m Symeon Manor at the Mount Oswald estate in Durham City*

Symeon Manor is a unique detached six-bedroom, six-bathroom property that sits independently within the landscaped grounds and woodlands at the centre of the historic Mount Oswald estate, just to the south of Durham City.

The £2.25m landmark property comes with a substantial private landscaped garden, a spacious three car garage, an open plan kitchen and dining area, a study and a home cinema space.

The substantial living room features French doors on two sides, allowing light to flood into the room, while there is also a utility room and cloakroom off the generous entrance hallway.

Five of the six bedrooms offer contemporary en suite bathrooms, while the master bedroom has a walk-in dressing room and a large south-facing terrace.



*An aerial image of the Symeon Court development at the Mount Oswald estate in Durham City, with Symeon Manor on the right*





*An artist's impression of the Symeon Manor kitchen*

Symeon Manor features underfloor heating throughout the ground floor, as well as a beautifully designed kitchen which includes Silestone worktops, high quality appliances and oak finished doors. The kitchen will be finished to the buyer's specifications.

The property also includes a range of environmental design features including an energy efficient air source heat pump, solar panels, LED bathroom lighting and an electric vehicle charging point.

Symeon Manor is currently being built by Banks Homes and is part of the firm's wider Symeon Court development at the Mount Oswald estate, which also includes four four-bedroom and four five-bedroom homes that are located nearby.

Durham City property firm Urban BASE is acting as sales agent for Symeon Manor and Symeon Court, where the first of the new properties are expected to be ready for occupation later this year.

The Mount Oswald estate was built at the turn of the 19th century and features a Grade Two-listed Manor House that is set to reopen later this year after a substantial refurbishment as The Story, County Durham's exciting new local history centre and cultural venue.

Aisling Ramshaw, head of sales and marketing at Banks Homes, says: "Symeon Manor is a one-of-a-kind property in a magnificent location and represents the absolute pinnacle of luxury living.

"It has been designed to provide an exquisite combination of style, design, and functionality, and includes all the features you need to live, work and play in complete comfort.

"Mount Oswald is a dream location for families, commuters and countryside lovers alike, and as well as offering excellent transport links, it sits just a short walk away from one of the UK's most beautiful and best-loved cities."

**For further information on Symeon Manor, please visit [www.bankshomes.co.uk/symeon-manor](http://www.bankshomes.co.uk/symeon-manor)**

**To register your interest in Symeon Manor and Symeon Court, please contact Jan Dale at Urban BASE on 0845 643 1186 or via [info@urban-base.com](mailto:info@urban-base.com)**



*An artist's impression of the luxurious lounge at Symeon Manor*



# 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.







**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

served 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  
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## Own New

Owning a new build home here in the North East could now be easier and more affordable – thanks to a newly launched mortgage product...

**When it comes to a dream home, new builds are increasingly at the top of most house buyers' lists.**

Given their energy efficiency, choice of house styles and build quality, that is probably not surprising – but now there is an even bigger and better reason to buy new.

Miller Homes North East – one of the region's leading housebuilders – has launched a new partnership specially designed to lower mortgage rates for those looking to buy a new build home in the region.

Own New Rate Reducer is a brand-new product that could enable customers to reduce the interest rate on their mortgage for a new Miller home for their initial mortgage term, while still owning 100 per cent of their property.

Launched with national lenders Virgin Money and Halifax it is available on selected plots at all 10 Miller Homes North East sites now and is open to anyone interested in buying a new build home, provided they have a 10 per cent deposit.

People can benefit from Rate Reducer whether they have a small or large deposit and, for those who already have equity in their present home, it could herald the return of the sub-one per cent mortgage deal.

And, in addition to lower monthly mortgage

payments, new build buyers will also benefit from lower energy bills.

According to recent research from the Home Builders Federation, new builds are powered by 55% less energy than older properties, saving customers up to £2,200 on their annual energy costs.

By partnering with Own New Miller Homes aims to increase mortgage lending opportunities and bring the possibility of owning a new-build home to wider range of buyers."

And since announcing the scheme last month (March) Miller has seen a surge of interest.

Anne Marie Britton, Group Sales and Marketing Director for Miller Homes, said: "We are delighted with the initial response to our partnership with Own New and the interest it has generated amongst potential house buyers.

"Given the number of enquiries we have received since launching, this is clearly a

product that resonates with individuals and families that are considering their options for buying a new home.

"I look forward to developing our partnership with Own New over the coming months, and I hope first time buyers and existing homeowners who are thinking of making a move, will take the time to find out more about the many advantages Own New offers."

Visit [www.millerhomes.co.uk/](http://www.millerhomes.co.uk/) now to find out more about Own New and additional offers from Miller Homes that could help you purchase a property in the North East now.

Miller Homes would encourage people looking to buy a new home to seek regulated advice from an independent mortgage broker on the options available for them.

**For more information about Miller Homes properties across the North East visit [www.millerhomes.co.uk/locations/north-east-of-england](http://www.millerhomes.co.uk/locations/north-east-of-england)**







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# What does the Spring Budget 2024 mean for the housing market in the North of England?



**The UK's residential property market has seen significant shifts in recent years, particularly in the realm of short-term lets and second home ownership. The March 2024 budget introduced several crucial changes aimed at addressing issues surrounding these practices.**

**William Thornton and Fiona Roe take a look at the changes investors, landlords and second homeowners could be facing.**

## Short-Term Lets Regulation

*Fiona Roe, Branch Manager with youngsRPS, examines proposed changes to short-term lets:*

“Short-term lets, more commonly referred to as holiday lets, facilitated by platforms like Sykes, Airbnb and Vrbo, have become increasingly popular in recent years, with the number of holiday lets in England rising by 40% between 2018 and 2021. Pandemic enforced travel bans and the cost-of-living crisis haven't damped the public's desire for holidays, but it has meant that many have had to reevaluate their finances and chose staycations over holidays overseas. Sykes reported a 50% increase in bookings since

2019 in their 2023 Holiday Letting Outlook Report, and North York Moors National Park reported 8.7 million tourism visits to the park in 2022.

While these rentals offer flexibility and additional income for property owners, and increased income to the locality of the property, they have raised concerns about housing availability, community disruption, and regulatory oversight.

Mr Hunt's budget proposed the elimination of tax relief that currently sees homeowners favour income generated from holiday bookings than long term rentals. With changes seeking to create a more balanced playing field for both traditional long-term rental providers and short-term let operators while addressing community concerns about the impact of transient visitors on neighbourhoods.”

## Multiple Dwellings Relief

*William Thornton, Head of Residential Agency on the abolishment of Multiple Dwellings Relief:*

“The multiple dwellings relief (MDR) scheme, a stamp duty relief for people who purchase more than one dwelling in a single transaction, was intended to support investment in the private rental sector. Mr Hunt suggested in his budget that this scheme hasn't been used in the purpose for which it was designed, with the system being abused to profit from the use of multiple dwellings on a short term let basis rather than investing in long term rentals.

The Office of National Statistics reported back in 2023 that around 70,000 second addresses were used as holiday homes in England and Wales, with more than 3,500 of these located in Northumberland. The popularity of second homes, particularly in tourist destinations and scenic rural areas like the North East coast and the Tyne Valley, has undoubtedly contributed to housing affordability challenges for some areas of the UK but the news of the proposed abolishment of MDR on 1st June 2024 was not greatly received by those investors looking at purchasing multiple properties, be it for long or short-term rental properties.

Better news was in the offing for those with existing property portfolios, with a decrease in capital gains tax rates. The Chancellor will implement a reduction in the higher rate of capital gains tax, lowering it from 28% to 24%, with the aim of stimulating increased property transactions.”

In conclusion, property investors should not be disheartened too much by the Chancellors budget. Investment involves prioritizing the market's long-term fundamentals and making decisions grounded in thorough analysis. Potential income and capital growth from property has historically outperformed other forms of investment and continues to do so. It's crucial for property investors to maintain a broader perspective.

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## Designing in 2024 – What are the challenges?

*By Neil Turner, Director,  
Howarth Litchfield*

**A common question of many clients is the cost and value to them of building projects. As architects we can fixate on the design qualities and aesthetics of any building project, when in reality, the functionality, the costs, the programme, and the buildability can be equally or even more important to the client team.**

**Of course, all buildings should be attractive, inviting and improve our environment. Architects care deeply about design and all of them want to win awards. Don't believe those architects that deny it – they are all vain, as it part of the training!**

The question of quality or value is a subjective point. A successful project is much more than the simple aesthetics or the choice of materials. I have been into Newcastle University for student reviews this last week, listening to and enjoying the students describe their schemes with raw enthusiasm on everything from purity of a design idea through to new thoughts on sustainability. They must understand that a scheme needs to

achieve success on a huge variety of elements for a project to work.

The challenge in architectural practice is to balance many more issues with the practical problem solving of making a building possible, affordable, buildable, and safe - yet still make a building into a worthy piece of architecture.

Over the last few years, the challenges have grown and in the last year we have seen the introduction of new legislation, including the Building Safety Act. This will require designers, clients and contractors to look at how they design, build and record design decisions.

The consequences of the dreadful Grenfell tower disaster and the problems that were discovered between suppliers, contractors and designers must not be allowed to be repeated. A 'golden thread' of recording information is now required. Most architects and contractors were already doing this recording, but it now needs to be enforced. The responsibility on the client side is now much more serious and simply cannot be ignored, which is to be applauded.

New biodiversity legislation is in force, asking for a ten percent gain over the original using a complex measuring tool from the Government.

The reality is that it is impossible for a site

to achieve this target, so developers, house builders and business will have to look at buying credits off site - or develop adjacent land. Ecologists are telling me they do not know how the rules will work. Time will tell us if this helps our environment, but I suspect that this legislation will slow down building projects, add huge costs (and delays) and be anti-development.

Of course, I want development to be sensitive to our environment, but for the economy to grow in this region we don't need obstacles or cost added.

Throughout my career I have seen changes in building regulations, planning, safety laws along with new developments in building technologies, materials, and enhanced awareness of energy use (both in the construction and the running of a building).

All these add to the challenges of a designer but do not prevent a good architect from delivering great buildings. So, whatever the challenges of a brief set by the client team, rejoice at the opportunity and give it your best – its all part of the excitement of being an architect.

**Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield can be contacted on 0191 3849470 or email [n.turner@hlpuk.com](mailto:n.turner@hlpuk.com) [www.howarthlitchfield.com](http://www.howarthlitchfield.com)**





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## All change?

By the time you read this article, it is likely an election will have been called and if not in May, certainly sometime this year there will be one, and almost as certainly we will have a Labour government after that election.

**So, what does that mean for property?**

**I see positives and negatives with the change in the government. Whatever colour the government is, and whatever colour our personal politics are, it is clear that serious work is required in the property field to address serious problems.**

Looking at housing (which affects us all), there are three elements which need major policy change.

Firstly, there is a distinct lack of rented housing, both private and social, at a time when the trend of home ownership is falling (from a peak of 70.6% in 1980 to 64.3% in 2023), and the squeeze on supply is pushing rents up and having catastrophic effects for many people in this group. Recent legislation seems to have punished both landlords and tenants.

House price inflation has in the 21st century reached epic proportions. In the year 2000, the average house price in England was £75,219. In December 2023, the average house price had risen to £284,691. However, average weekly pay over that period has increased from £293 to £626, so in 2000, a worker needed 256 weeks pay to buy a house, and in December 2023, the same average worker needs 455 weeks to pay for his home.

As for Council Tax banding, not a bad idea in itself, but now 33 years out of date. Values are assessed as at 1991 and clearly

whereas there has been a general price rise (as above), some areas have improved dramatically, some have dropped (and not just risen more slowly, actually dropped), 'and in general it's a bit of a "mess"'. There is the other issue in that Council Tax bands are the same across the country, Westminster, unsurprisingly, has a very high proportion of Band H houses. A Band H occupier in Westminster pays £1,824.10 and the few Band A occupiers pay £604.04. Compare this to Newcastle city where the Band H levy is £4,224.68 and band A is £1,408.23. Clearly there is something wrong here!

Within the commercial property field, the Shadow Secretary of State for Business and Trade Jonathan Reynolds has spoken about "making rates much more market responsive so they react to real word conditions... not spreadsheets in Whitehall". A slight shift towards responsiveness has already been taken by the current Conservative government by scrapping a downwards transition in commercial rates. Labour

also propose more regular revaluations in business rates. Whereas this will be seen by many as being good, for those of us who practice in rating, we realise it is going to be difficult to deal with as the Valuation Office is already overwhelmed with appeals and challenges based on a six year time lapse between the last two revaluations.

Of course, there are continued mutterings from all parties about replacing business rates. But these discussions have been going on for at least the 43 years plus that I have been in practice - I don't see anything happening "tomorrow".

The opposition have now had 13 years in opposition to prepare sensible policies that benefit everyone. All we can hope is that they've invested this time wisely to produce thought out and considered policies rather than some of the "knee jerk" reactions we have been used to!

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Phil Bowe





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## Tim Barrett takes on role of chair

Campaigning and lobbying body, Construction Alliance North East (CAN), has confirmed Tim Barrett, as its new chair. A member of the Federation of Master Builders and former trustee of The Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB), Tim takes on the role from Ken Parkin, who has been chair since 2020.

**CAN represents regional SME contractors and comprises of Northern Counties Builders Federation, Civil Engineering Contractors Association, Federation of Master Builders and the National Federation of Builders. It calls upon a network of 500 North East businesses, with its primary role being to lobby both the government and local authorities for fairer procurement practices.**

CAN's mission is defined around three pillars: a 'levelling up' in procurement processes to allow regional companies to deliver more local projects, harmonisation of payment terms up and down the supply chain, so they are fair and equitable and ensuring a sustainable North East industry by continuing to develop a directly employed workforce.

Members work collaboratively with each other and external organisations for the sole benefit of the North East region's contractors.

Tim, left school at 16, to work as a site operative, going on to achieve an HND in Construction Management and becoming a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Building. Many career highlights include being a local chair for the North East and the chair of the UK & Ireland time zone for the Chartered Institute of Building, which represents 48,000 construction management professionals, globally. In 2016, he became a trustee of the Institute, completing his tenure 2023, holding such roles as chair of the policy and remuneration boards during this period.



Tim Barrett FCIOB

Tim, said: "I am very much aware I am taking on the role of chair of Construction Alliance North East during a year that will see fundamental structural change regionally, with the creation of the enlarged, all-in, North East Combined Authority with increased, devolved, powers and nationally, with a general election looming and the prospect of a change of Government. We will monitor, very closely, developments, as they take place and will pursue a range of initiatives, including meaningful dialogue with the region's current MPs and those candidates for regional Mayor and in the General Election. Our primary objective being to ensure all national and regional stakeholders recognise the North East's construction sector is both a huge asset and critically important to the region and its ambition for future growth.

"I would very much like to take this opportunity to thank Ken Parkin for his astute leadership of CAN. During his term as chair, he has ensured we punch well above our weight, are listened to in the corridors of power and that we have achieved a range of highly successful outcomes when it comes to the three areas where we look to achieve maximum impact.

"In 2024, our focus will be on high impact events, one of which is a proposed summit with key strategic figures within local authorities, via our partners at North East Procurement Organisation (NEPO), to identify and tackle the barriers in public sector procurement for regional contractors. We are also working with the Northern Housing Consortium, Durham County Council and Newcastle City Council on other high-profile events."

Ken Parkin, said: "It has been a huge pleasure to serve as chair of CAN and to wave the flag for the region's excellent contractors. Their voice needs to be heard at the highest level and in the right places, both inside and outside the industry, as it is often only large contractors and consultants who have the clout to make a difference and influence policy. To a great extent, we have done this, however, there is still work to do and I am delighted that Tim is taking over as, with his depth of experience with regional contractors and knowledge of the industry, he is extremely well placed to carry on leading the fight."

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



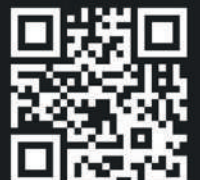
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# In conversation with...

## Tim Barrett FCIOB

*Chair of Construction Alliance North East (CAN)*

### Can you tell us about CAN and your role as chair?

CAN is a lobbying body. Playing a strategic role in supporting regional North East contractors, we represent over 500 member companies through their membership of Northern Counties Builders Federation, National Federation of Builders, Federation of Master Builders & Civil Engineering Contractors Association. These companies play a major role in the local economy with a combined turnover of over £3billion and employ more than 100,000 people in the region.

The role of the chair is to get in front of decision makers and discuss how we can get our membership involved in the wider strategy at local government and client level and help them make policy and decisions that will have a positive impact on the local construction industry. The great benefit to keeping things regional is we see a positive impact in social value. This year, with a general election coming, it's more important than ever to ensure we have a say in how the industry will look going forward.

### What are the biggest challenges and opportunities facing the construction sector?

We all discuss the shortage of a skilled workforce. However, this creates opportunity for innovation and technology to step in and create new processes including things like offsite building and new materials. We also have opportunities to encourage a new, exciting younger generation, to choose a career in construction.

### How does CAN support and promote the region's SME contractors?

We really want to promote to all our regional construction clients the benefits of regional contractors. These can be in the sectors of local authority, healthcare, education, housing and general construction. We want them to think how they procure their projects, how they manage them and how they appoint the contractor and the reasons behind that.



Tim Barrett FCIOB

The construction industry, for many years, has been a race to the bottom on costs. We need to help educate clients on cost verses quality. Our regional contractors produce some fantastic quality and should expect to be recognised for that and given opportunities on regional contracts.

### What can be done to bridge the skills gap in the construction sector?

This is probably the biggest critical risk to the industry in the next decade. We are looking at having discussions with clients to see how our membership can help. We need to review, very quickly, the inadequate apprenticeship scheme and make it exciting for younger people. Often, trade roles become stepping stones to construction management roles, so coming into the industry at any level is an opportunity to a lifelong, well-paid, career.

We must also look at retraining and getting people back into employment and we have the opportunity to look at training programmes with local government to see how we can help them achieve this.

### What does CAN want to achieve?

At CAN we have three main areas of focus. *Intelligent procurement.* Simplifying the

process, so regional contractors have access to regional projects, including local authority and government projects.

*Fair payment.* This is a complex area for contractors. It is to ensure they get paid what they are owed for the works completed and in a reasonable amount of time. In the last year, three large regional contractors have ceased trading with this being one of the major causes. This then trickles down the supply chain, damaging smaller companies, also.

*Skills and training.* This is critical to our industry. With an aging workforce, we are looking nationally at a deficit of well over 300,000 people by the end of the decade and we need to encourage new blood into our industry. Some of the traditional roles we have today, will greatly evolve over the next decade to something new and exciting.

If, by the end of the decade, we had helped our regional contractors procure local projects at a fair price with good payment terms and we have helped fill the skills gap through collaboration with clients, we would have achieved much more than we thought possible.

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



## Community Partnership Grants

A £1.35m fund has been set up to support community projects in the north and west of Newcastle, including Kenton. It is funded by Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund with the North of Tyne Combined Authority. Newcastle City Council is running the programme.

The programme aims to support projects that bring communities together to build relationships, create more vibrant opportunities for residents and tackle local issues. Projects can include volunteering and activities.

So far 22 projects have been given the go-ahead. Kenton Park Community Association has successfully applied to the Community Partnership and been awarded £59K capital funding and £73K in revenue funding. The money will pay for resurfacing of the hall floor, refurbishment of the soft play area, new heating, hot water and new air conditioning and sensory equipment at Kenton Park Sports Centre.

The rest of the money is to be used to fund community development work across Montagu Estate, Kenton Bar and North Kenton.



## Kenton Park Sports Centre

**Kenton Park Community Association charity manages the Sports Centre and nearby Shandon Way Centre, providing a range of affordable leisure activities and sports facilities for all ages.**

The Sports Centre, managed by Bobby Richardson, has rooms to hire from small meeting rooms to a large sports hall and offers space for children's birthday parties. They provide special events throughout the year such as trips, Halloween, Community funday and Christmas parties.

**For more info visit [www.kentonparksportscentre.co.uk](http://www.kentonparksportscentre.co.uk) or call 447 9200 or 07592 363 131.**

The continued adventures of...



# Ziggy and Cally!

Hi everyone,

Early morning walks and later evening walks as we head into Spring. Well my tail is still frozen as Cally and I jostle for the position next to the fire. Been so much rain I could do with some doggy wellies. But I shouldn't complain, this is my 14th year and I still get around. See ya next month!

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

**A.** I cannot recommend any woodworm fluids. They are all nerve poisons. Your worm holes are probably many years old. They are actually 'flight holes' of the adult beetles leaving the wood. There is no justification for using insecticides unless you have definitive evidence that there is a continuing active infestation, and that this cannot be dealt with by normal construction methods, i.e. central heating and ventilation. Your new Velux windows are unlikely to be affected by wood-boring insects – the timber in them is kiln-dried and sealed with a water-based varnish.



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



## Circadian lighting specialist expands into new office at The Catalyst

**A tech company that aims to improve independent living through circadian light technology has moved into a new office in The Catalyst at Newcastle Helix.**

Circadacare, which develops lighting systems that support the circadian rhythm – the natural 24-hour internal body clock that regulates your sleep-wake cycle – has moved into a larger office in The Catalyst to accommodate its growing team ahead of the launch of its AI-monitored light bulb, Heleos.

The lighting technology specialist first moved to The Catalyst in 2022 and was based in the National Innovation Centre for Ageing's Hub alongside other businesses looking to harness opportunities and create solutions in the healthy ageing sector.

Tallie Bush, product director at Circadacare, said: "There's a great deal happening in the North East with healthy ageing and longevity, and we wanted to be part of that.

"The Catalyst has the National Innovation Centre for Ageing (NICA) embedded

and we really wanted to be incubated with them to exchange information and collaborate. It's been extremely valuable.

"And the National Innovation Centre for Data (NICD) is based here too. Knowing you're working alongside NICA and NICD when you're making an Internet of Things (IoT) healthcare product is a perfect match."

The company has been designing circadian lighting solutions for managed care environments and dementia care facilities since 2020.



## Tustain Motors praise connectivity boost delivered by Commsworld and Alncom

**Commsworld and Alncom have together transformed connectivity for businesses across rural Northumberland.**

An example of their partnership's achievement is retail motor group Tustain Motors, headquartered in Alnwick and with dealerships across rural areas of England and Scotland, including Hawick in the Scottish Borders and Haddington in East Lothian.

Since launching in 2010, Managing Director Brian Baxter and Finance Director David Storey have built the business into a Northumberland success story.

But David Storey said that the digital revolution has changed the way the industry operates, especially with customers. Thanks to Commsworld and Alncom, the vastly improved ultra-fast connectivity that reaches rural locations has allowed Tustain Motors to keep pace with what is a highly competitive industry. He said: "Previously, and in particular over the last few years, internet connectivity hasn't been great. As the industry continues to change, it's vitally important

we have good connectivity, as people do most of their searching for vehicles online. It had been difficult with poor connections.

"But now the improvements we've had with connectivity have been a great help to us. That's because, with the help of Commsworld and Alncom, we now have fibre in all our sites which has improved the connectivity we have and has boosted our business.

Gary Ross, Commsworld North East Account Manager, said: "We are delighted that Tustain Motors has benefitted from the greatly improved connectivity that we have brought to Northumberland's rural areas with Alncom. The partnership's goal was always to connect businesses, organisations and communities, no matter how remote, to high capacity, resilient and future-proofed fibre connectivity. This new connectivity is fulfilling our joint vision to bridge the digital divide between rural and city so businesses, community organisations, residents groups and schools enjoy all the social inclusive benefits that better broadband connections bring."



## Digital development agency announces ambitious plans

**Enigma Interactive, one of the UK's leading digital development agencies, has announced ambitious growth plans following a record year for the business.**

The agency, based on Newcastle Quayside, saw significant growth of 25% in 2022/23, taking sales to £3.5million, thanks to the launch of new service lines including content design and increased demand for specialist digital services.

Enigma Interactive works with clients to develop highly effective digital strategies and run digital transformation programmes alongside building websites, content management systems, interactive platforms, and apps. To support continued strong demand and the team's growth ambitions, Enigma Interactive is now looking to increase capacity to support its core client services, including strategic consultancy, managing large-scale digital programmes, high-end web design & build, eCommerce, eServices and bespoke digital application development.

Steve Grainger, managing director of Enigma Interactive said, "This is a really exciting time to work in the digital sector. Our purpose is simple – to help our clients reap the benefits of an effective digital presence and we're seeing a renewed sense of ambition from clients to harness the power of digital, to help them grow, be more efficient, and gain a competitive advantage. There has been a realisation from businesses that having an 'okay' digital presence is no longer good enough, and for it to be effective and deliver the true business value it needs to be purpose-designed and address the very specific needs of their organisation and its audiences. Success is in the detail, and this is something our services are tuned to. This provides us with a good opportunity to bring in new talent to add to our existing team so that we can increase capacity and help even more clients realise their ambitions.

We have ambitious plans for the agency and we are looking for strategically minded, self-starters who are interested and excited about our business, our sector, and our clients. With some incredible projects in the pipeline, we are also looking forward to welcoming some fresh talent into our team, who we know will bring their vision and expertise to Enigma."

# Tech. Talent. Together.







Steve Morland

# The evolution of customer experience: leveraging tech for a competitive advantage

*By Steve Morland, Chief Technology Officer, Leighton*

Customer expectations are constantly evolving, driven by advancements in technology and changing market dynamics. The pandemic also had a significant impact, fundamentally altering customer expectations and accelerating the pace of digital transformation.

businesses. E-commerce platforms, mobile apps, and optimised websites have become essential tools for businesses looking to meet customers where they are – online. By leveraging these digital channels effectively, businesses can provide seamless shopping experiences, convenient appointment scheduling, and responsive customer support, ensuring continuity of service and maintaining engagement with customers in the digital space.

## Keeping it contactless

Health and safety concerns led to heightened demand for contactless experiences, prompting businesses to innovate and adapt, but in a post-pandemic world contactless is here to stay. Contactless payment systems, digital menus, and online ordering platforms have become integral to providing safe and convenient transactions for customers, whilst pick-up and delivery services, allow customers to receive their orders without physical contact. By embracing these contactless solutions, businesses can instil confidence in their customers, prioritise their safety, and maintain operational efficiency in a rapidly changing environment.

As customer expectations continue to evolve, businesses must embrace innovative technologies to stay competitive and drive growth. From AI and event-driven architecture to digital channels and contactless experiences, companies should embrace technology to enhance the customer experience, drive engagement, and build lasting relationships with their customers. By prioritising innovation and investing in the right technologies, businesses can gain a competitive advantage.

As many businesses have been forced to adapt to evolving circumstances, it has highlighted the need for innovative technologies and digital solutions to meet the changing needs and preferences of customers. From artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to event-driven architecture, modern businesses have a wealth of tools at their disposal to drive growth and gain a competitive advantage.

## The impact of AI

There's no escaping AI at the moment, but it's far from just a buzzword. When utilised effectively, AI and machine learning can revolutionise the way businesses interact with customers. By leveraging AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants, companies can provide round-the-clock support, answer customer queries in real-time, and personalise interactions based on individual preferences. These intelligent systems not only improve efficiency and responsiveness but also enhance the overall customer experience, leading to increased satisfaction and loyalty.

## Event-driven architecture for real-time responsiveness

Event-driven architecture enables businesses to respond to customer needs and market trends in real-time. By capturing and analysing data from various touchpoints, companies can identify opportunities for engagement and deliver timely, personalised messages and offers. Whether it's sending targeted promotions based on browsing history or triggering notifications for abandoned carts, event-driven architecture enables businesses to deliver seamless and relevant experiences that resonate with customers.

## Embracing digital channels

The shift towards digital channels has become increasingly pronounced, especially in the wake of the pandemic. With restrictions on physical interactions and the closure of many brick-and-mortar businesses, customers have turned to online platforms for their shopping needs, appointments, and communication with

[leighton.com](https://leighton.com)



# Talking Tech and Digital

*Over the past two years this platform has proven to be one of our most popular features. This month we were delighted to talk to...*

## David Parkinson

*CEO, Brave & Heart*

### Did you always envisage a career in the world of Tech?

Not really – I was very into my computers as a young boy – C64, Amiga 1200 etc – even doing some lightweight programming myself and developing a doctors question flow to solve a patient issue – a basic “goto” chatbot if you like, but then I joined the British Army at 16 and after that started working on the production line at Nissan in 1991 for the (then) new Micra. All the while I was still tinkering with IBM 386’s and “playing” with computers. Then Nissan part paid me to take a HNC in Business Computing and then fully sponsored me towards an IT degree, which I got from Sunderland University in my early 30’s. The rest, that’s another story!

### What tips would you give to someone looking to work in the industry?

Never ever stop learning. I am always training and retraining myself and I have made that a core value at Brave & Heart – we have a strong training ethos and currently all the team are doing training of some sort.

### Tell us about the most exciting project you’re currently working on.

Well, we recently completed a very complex Power Platform project that combines a government reporting system with a full company project management system, and now we are stretching SharePoint to its limits developing a document management platform, but our most exciting project is building the team, helping them, supporting them and expanding their capability and collaboration potential.

### Tell us about your team.

From just two of us to now a dozen we are a multi-disciplined team that cover a lot of bases. As we combine technology with people and strategy we cover PR, marketing and HR, not just IT. As such the team are always working on something new and building their confidence. We are a low hierarchy matrix style organisation and work in “pods”. This means one person can be working on three or four different projects at once, all in different disciplines. Each team member is carefully picked to fit our values and the ethos and enthusiasm they bring impresses me every day.

### What are your long-term plans for the business?

We are not looking to grow for the sake of it. The intention was never to create a large company, it was to create one that did the right thing for clients. Key strategies for 2024 and beyond is to become a more ethical and environmental company, which has us working hard now to attain B-Corp certification. Technology wise we are expanding our in-house Power Platform capability and in the next year will be doing more employee value propositions for clients. Ultimately, we are led by our clients and are always agile enough to build or bring in different skills when needed.

### What’s your favourite piece of technology?

Apart from my robotic lawn mower, I’m an aging gamer, so love all things games. I would have to say my handheld Steam Gaming Console is a favourite and also allows me to replay Half Life. We also have an “Owl” camera we use to connect all the team when at a clients site as we are all remote and work in different locations - it never ceases to amaze everyone in the room.

### Do you have any heroes or mentors?

I don’t like to class people as either. There are a lot of people I have learnt from in my career, and I have picked and chose the different lessons I have had from each of them as and when I thought it would prove useful. There are many people I admire, through all their flaws, from technologists Steve Jobs and Jony Ive to story tellers like Chris Nolan and Ridley Scott. I never forget that everything we do has to serve a purpose and tell a story, and I make sure the team are always aware of this.

### When not working how do you like to relax?

Last year I did three triathlons, which I need to get fighting fit for again, and this year I decided to rebuild a classic 1963 Land Rover, putting my Army mechanics training back in use. I run, I try to do bad Yoga and spend as much time with my family as I can. Ultimately, we only get one shot at this. Make it fun.

### What’s your fondest career memory?

In 2014 I was put in charge of the global launch of the Nissan Qashqai which I helped to ideate, oversee and ultimately develop one of Nissans most successful launches of the time on a film sound stage in London. It was ultimately the catalyst for me to leave and start my own company. I mean, if you have started on the production line and eventually get to run a global car launch, what else is there left for you to do?

### What’s the best piece of business advice you’ve received?

You don’t have time, you make time. One of my first managers drilled that into me and I have never forgot it. In many situations you must stand back and reassess what is happening, look at the bigger picture and what you are trying to achieve. Then you work out how to make the time needed for it to happen.

**Find out more about Brave & Heart at [www.braveandheart.com](http://www.braveandheart.com) and connect with David on LinkedIn at [www.linkedin.com/in/daveparkinsonuk](https://www.linkedin.com/in/daveparkinsonuk)**



“

*...you don't  
have time, you  
make time...*





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The year the Channel Tunnel opened, the UK's National Lottery was launched, and Forrest Gump hit the big screen.







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Technology has come a long way since 1994, as have the ways people work and businesses operate, but since 1994 we've stayed true to our values of honesty, empowerment and putting people first. Key to that has been our truly flexible working policy – something many organisations only adopted after covid.

While new technologies will continually emerge, devices become more sophisticated, and AI develop as part of every day life, we will continue to do exactly what we set out to: solve business problems with efficient solutions and excellent people.

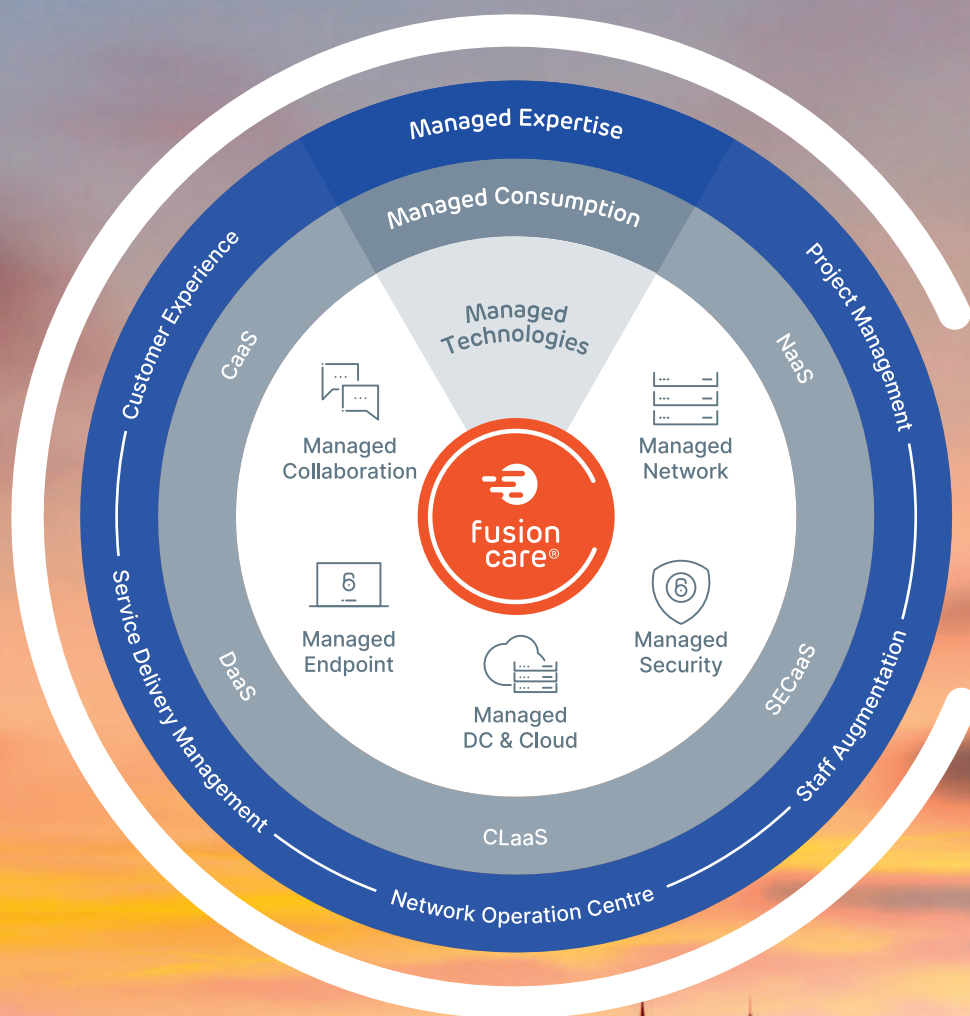
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L-R: Dean Dixon, Callum McDougall, Mike Tennant and Paul Sykes

## AI is here...and so is a massive security risk

The Unite Group is ready to keep you and your business secure.

**It's almost 15 years since directors Paul Sykes, Callum McDougall, Dean Dixon and Mike Tennant set up The Unite Group.**

A lot has changed for the company since then...but the world of computers, the internet, telecoms and...in particular...the threat of cyber attacks, is unrecognisable. Think of what you were doing 15 years ago and how you were using technology for either your own personal use or how your company was using it. Online banking, shopping, emails, social media, personal data, accounts...they're now something we take for granted. We easily do all of this from home, work or on the move via a mobile phone or tablet.

But have you been keeping pace with the sort of security you need to prevent theft, ransom or a malicious attack?

This is why you need to have a chat with the guys at The Unite Group. They can help you with your security, but they can also take care of any IT and telecoms issues. They can even help you with your digital marketing from the team at Social Plus who make up the group.

"Having various divisions within the company to look after Cyber Security and IT, Telecoms and Digital Marketing means that we can look after everything under one roof because all three invariably work hand in hand," said director Paul Sykes. "We also try to make accessing these as simple as possible for clients because we operate a straightforward pricing policy on our services so that customers can understand costs. It means clients can budget over a set period and know precisely what they're paying for and how much."

If you needed any sort of stamp of credibility about The Unite Group, they're in the top 100 SME businesses worldwide for providing Microsoft security products and as such were invited to a three day security conference called the Microsoft Security Scholarship with senior directors from Microsoft in attendance.

They will also be attending the Cyber Security Exhibition in Birmingham next month. Their stand is on the IASME pod. IASME is the UK Government's Cyber Security body that oversees Cyber Essentials as well as certifications and the various processes needed to meet the right criteria to show that you and/or your firm is secure.

"The Unite Group are Cyber Essentials assessors. This means that we can guide a business on how to secure their IT against cyber attack. In a lot of cases...including Government contracts...companies will need to have Cyber Essentials certification if they want to tender for business. If you can show that you have Cyber Essentials certification, it gives clients reassurance about your levels of security. We also offer training on Cyber Security as well as on how to get the most from the raft of Microsoft products, especially Microsoft 365. When

it comes to IT support it's often more about educating people regarding the dos and don'ts, eradicating mistakes and setting policies is one of the best steps to help with your security."

And of course, there never seems to be a day when we don't hear about how AI can help you or your company. Like a lot of the internet, AI is an incredible tool when used correctly, but it can also bring risks that need to be managed. You need to take precautions and plan accordingly to secure company data and The Unite Group are here to assist you with this.

As well as ensuring that your IT, telecoms and security are up to scratch, they can also help you with your digital marketing. The team in the company's Social Plus arm offer website design and maintenance, social media management, SEO and PPC campaigns to drive revenue through your website. With two Certified Digital Marketing Specialist heading up PPC why not see how they can help grow your business.

So why don't you contact Paul and the team at The Unite Group to discuss what sort of security you have and, importantly, what you should have.

And if you're looking to grow your business why not go along to one of their network events which are run locally through Network+. The events are free and great for local businesses to get together to network and share ideas.

**To contact The Unite Group and see what they're up to, as well as finding out the latest security, IT and telecoms news, go onto their website... [www.theunitegroup.co.uk](http://www.theunitegroup.co.uk) or call 0191 466 1050**



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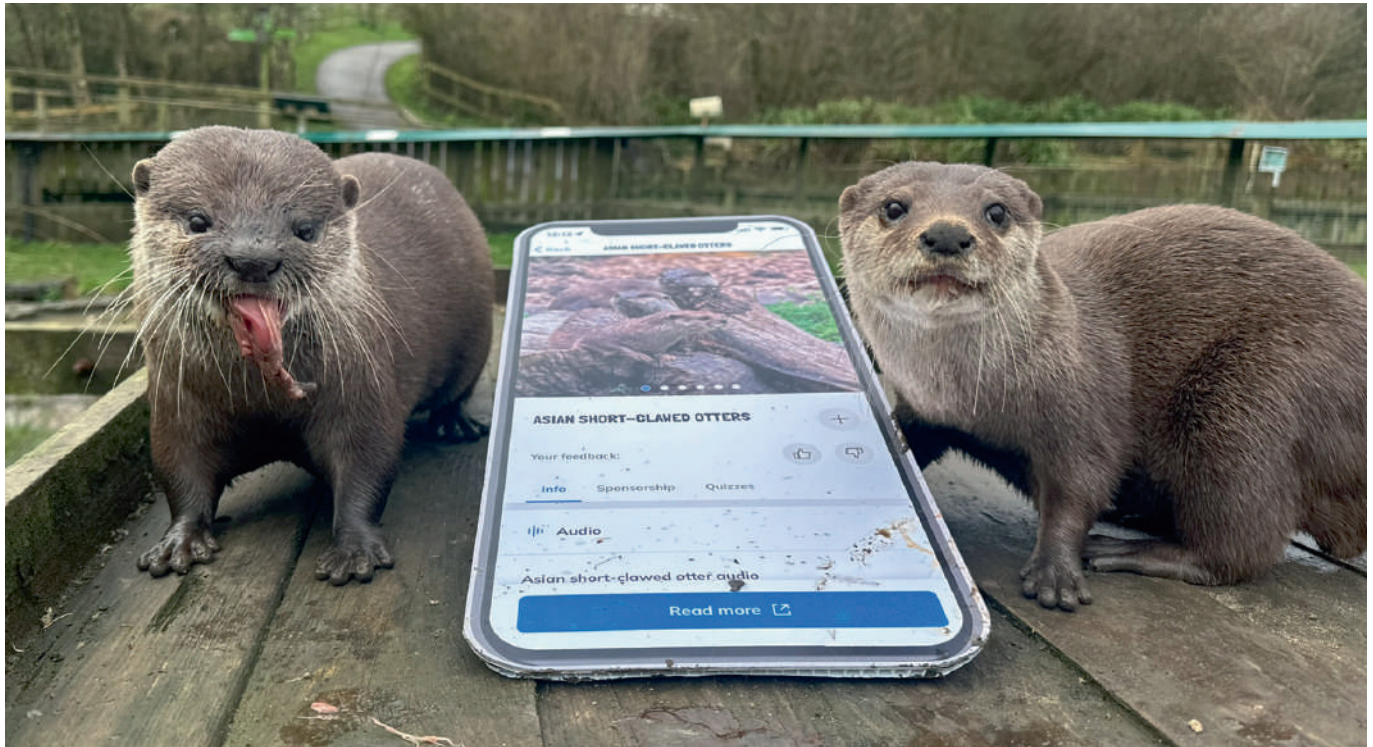


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# Appy times for visitors to Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust



North East global attraction experience software specialist n-gage.io has secured a contract with the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT), who have launched a new mobile app at their Washington, Tyne & Wear site, aimed at enhancing their visitor experience.

**The Trust is responsible for creating and maintaining thousands of hectares of wetland habitat at their nature reserves across the UK to support and protect endangered species.**

WWT sites welcome over one million visitors annually, and the Washington site has just unveiled a new experience platform to improve communication, navigation, wetlands conservation education and accessibility at their 105-acre site.

WWT is the UK's leading wetland conservation charity operating 10 wetland sites across Scotland, England, and Wales. The charity is renowned not just for promoting wetland conservation but also highlighting the vast array of wildlife that can be found across our native wetland areas.

Given the Trust's reputation for promoting conservation education, the team at the WWT Washington turned to the attraction experience specialists at n-gage.io to explore how mobile technology could play a wider

part in its communication strategy whilst also introducing a host of interactive features in a new mobile app to enhance the wetlands visitor experience.

Led by entrepreneur Bryan Hoare and incubated in the North East by County Durham based GCV Labs – n-gage.io aims to transform audience experiences through a highly customisable, data insight driven SaaS platform with an integrated mobile-web application.

The n-gage.io solution pairs the SaaS platform's highly customisable mobile app with its powerful attraction management software to deliver WWT Washington both the tools and data insights it needs to enhance the visitor experience and deepen engagement with them in real-time.

The plan is to use the app as a focal point for visitors, to provide even more rich content and media on their animal collections and wild reserve, whilst understanding more about activity across their site. Visitors will benefit from the impact of improved

navigation, finding their way around the reserve and other points of interest using n-gage.io's innovative wayfinding solution.

The WWT Washington team also plan to use the app to keep wetland visitors up to date with details of their latest campaigns, conservation activity and event programmes. Meanwhile, visitor services teams make use of valuable data insights to refine marketing campaigns and drive the conservation agenda through targeted and personalised in-app messaging.

"We're really excited to have launched our new WWT Washington interactive app which offers visitors and the wider community a peek into our wetlands before a visit, and an enhanced experience while here," said Deborah Nolan, Marketing and Communications Manager at WWT Washington Wetland Centre.

"We've been so impressed with n-gage.io who have supported us in getting the app set up and ready to launch. Their technical expertise has been invaluable and, as a local organisation, we've benefitted from their knowledge and experience first-hand."

"We're delighted to be supporting WWT's mission to promote and protect our wetland areas and it's particularly rewarding for us to be working with the team at our local Wetlands Trust Reserve in the Northeast" said Bryan Hoare CEO of n-gage.io. "The WWT are renowned for their work and we're proud to be playing a small part in helping to highlight this using our technology, whilst giving the team the capability to capture valuable visitor insights to help improve operations and drive engagement."

**More details: [www.n-gage.io](http://www.n-gage.io)**







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# Life reaches for the stars with ongoing commitment to accessibility

The Spring season of events is upon us with visitors snapping up tickets to sell-out experiences. However, for 22% of the population that are disabled, the demand to be first in the queue for sought-after tickets is the least of their concerns, due to a lack of accessibility in venues.

**Life Science Centre, in Newcastle upon Tyne, which has been offering hands-on science inspired experiences for families since 2000, has recently been named top in the league of visitor attractions in England, ahead of destinations including the National Portrait Gallery, London Transport Museum and Bletchley Park. The venue recently sought the support of Tailored Leisure Company to ensure their accessible offer is ever evolving as part of their on-going commitment to put accessibility at the forefront of their operations.**

Tailored Leisure Company (TLC) with founder Tara Mackings at the helm are renowned in the North East region for their ethos and vision to overcome the barriers and social exclusion faced by disabled people, specifically in terms of access to fitness and leisure activities.

Tara, who was recently awarded a British Empire Medal for services to her community has been a key driving force in developing accessible projects in the local community since its inception and has the experience first-hand of disappointing trips and even cancelled plans entirely due to poor accessibility at venues across the UK when bringing up her young children.

In their bid to prioritise accessibility and to support venues with what is vital for any venue looking to be entirely inclusive Tailored Leisure Company have launched The Access Audit.



Life joins key venues across the region who have proactively sought the support of TLC to complete an Access Audit including Bamburgh Castle, Spanish City and Haystacks. The Access Audit takes an in depth look at both access to the venue and user experience to support the venues to identify opportunities for further development, and enhancement of a positive user experience. The Access Audit offers advice to businesses and employment settings on how to be more inclusive in many cases with quick wins for a range of disabilities bringing community groups together.

Tara Johnson, Director of Tailored Leisure Company who set up the company due to her own experiences of living with cerebral palsy said: "We were delighted to have been commissioned by Life to undertake their Access Audit. The team at Life has earned an international reputation for its innovative approach to accessibility and inclusion. They are committed to ongoing improvement and change.

Unfortunately, we are in a situation in 2024, where a high volume of venues are not proactive like Life, with many venues pledging they are fully accessible, when in fact they still don't understand how to be accessible for disabled people.

It's vital that venues understand what accessibility means, it doesn't just impact the disabled visitor it has a knock-on effect of their families too, a situation I experienced too many times when my children were younger. It's heart-breaking as a parent to tell your children you have to leave or can't participate, due to a lack of access."

Life Chief Executive Linda Conlon said: "Life has been committed to creating a science centre for all to enjoy and in the past few years, we have increased our efforts enormously. As well as physical adaptations, we've introduced new events and activities for people with particular needs and we've seen a real culture shift in the organisation. "Of course, our work is never done and we have more exciting plans as we head towards our 25th birthday. We remain committed to providing the best experience possible for all our visitors, including those with specific needs."

The award-winning formula over the years at TLC has seen the team pick up an influx of award nominations and wins for their ground-breaking work and they have established a strong collaborative working approach to drive the development of accessible projects across the region.

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



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## Gardiner Richardson to refresh heritage brand Dicksons

From the famous saveloy dip to North East favourite Pease pudding, Dicksons has been keeping customers well fed for the last 70 years with food to enjoy on the go and at home.

The family-run retailer is investing into the Dicksons brand, as well as its stores and product ranges to engage its existing and new audiences.

The investment includes appointing brand communications agency, Gardiner Richardson to refresh the heritage brand's logo and colour palette to reflect the businesses' ambitious growth plans. The retail design specialists, Lumsden Design, are also working on the project, bringing to life the brand refresh across concessions in major supermarkets, as well as in stores.

Mike Dickson, Retail Growth & Development Director at Dicksons, commented on the investment "As we've continued to invest in our stores and product offering, we knew our brand needed the same level of focus to maintain our appeal and engagement with customers.

"Gardiner Richardson and Lumsden are the



perfect partners for us, bringing experience of working with big retail and consumer brands which build engagement and loyalty with consumers."

Matt Forster, Associate Director at Gardiner Richardson, added, "We're honoured that the Dickson family has put their trust in us to take great care of their brand's rich heritage while capturing the businesses' exciting future direction. We've been feeding our creativity with regular trips to Dicksons to sample the menu – all in the name of work obviously!"



## Horizon Works continues to bolster its digital offering with key appointment

**Horizon Works, a B2B marketing company based in the North East of England, has appointed Michael Maddison as Senior Digital Designer.**

An award-winning digital designer, Michael has more than 20 years' experience in the design industry. This includes working at FTSE 100 companies, including Sage, and multinational brands in the public, private and charity sectors.

Michael will lead Horizon Works' multimedia offering, leveraging animation, websites, video and moving images to break down language barriers, translate technical information into high impact content, drive engagement with target audiences, support training programmes and much more.

Horizon Works, which was founded in 2010, is headquartered at Northumberland Business Park near Cramlington. The company works with ambitious and fast-growing innovation and technology-led manufacturing and engineering businesses that are creating solutions of worldwide importance. It offers a wide range of integrated marketing services including strategy, PR, design, digital and animation, and supports regional, national and global organisations.



## Blyth Media Day empowers young creatives in film production

**Blyth Town Council has held its first-ever Media Day with children up to the age of 17 engaging in a day treading the boards learning about acting and off camera activities.**

The event was organised in collaboration with Act 2 Cam, a performing arts school, where young people explore the world through drama, art, and filmmaking. The initiative aimed to provide young talents with an immersive experience in filmmaking,

allowing them to create a short film by the end of the day.

While some of the young participants had prior drama experience, the day catered to both aspiring actors and those interested in the behind-the-scenes aspects of film production. Attendees not only had the chance to perform in front of the camera but also learned about the intricacies of filmmaking, from conceptualising storylines to operating cameras.

Organised as a free half-term activity, the Blyth Media Day offered a productive and enjoyable experience for the 48 children who attended. The event, hosted at the Phoenix Theatre in Blyth, provided a warm and creative environment for the children to explore their storytelling abilities.

Act 2 Cam was founded by ex-teacher and actor Stephen Woods from Whitley Bay.

Julie Summers from Blyth Town Council said: "The Blyth Media Day was not just about acting; it was about nurturing diverse talents. From clapperboard operators to camera and boom operators, there were roles to suit everyone. Even those not comfortable in front of the camera had fun directing, producing, and organising. I'm hoping that it has inspired a new generation of budding actors and behind the scenes professionals."



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## On the Air with Highlights PR

Highlights PR have relaunched their popular media training courses. The short training package is designed to help small businesses gain the confidence they need to come across professionally to the watching and listening audience.

Keith Newman from Highlights PR has designed the course specifically for small businesses and charities. The half-day session includes information on understanding the programmes audience and how to tailor your messaging accordingly. It also looks at presentation skills, body language and how to "bridge" questions that are awkward or difficult to answer.

Each session takes place in the studio at Radio Northumberland in Bedlington which adds to the realism of the media environment. The interviews will be used in a future radio show giving the participant airtime and media exposure. The sessions are fun and take a step-by-step approach so that



no one feels pressurised or intimidated. Places are limited to just three per session.

Courses can be booked by emailing [keith@highlightspr.co.uk](mailto:keith@highlightspr.co.uk)

## Music Documentary Premieres at Tyneside Cinema

Lamin Gibba, the founder of Jerry J Clothing, has come a long way from his humble beginnings in Gambia. Arriving in the UK with nothing apart from ambition and a will to succeed, Lamin settled in Newcastle. With the support of the Prince's Trust, he established himself in the fashion industry with his Jerry J street clothing brand and has now expanded his creative endeavours into filmmaking.

"Bridge the Gap" is a music documentary that delves into the music scene of North East England. It examines how the talent in the region doesn't match the success rate compared to other places like London, Manchester, and Birmingham and asks how the gap can be bridged. Through intimate interviews, captivating performances, and behind-the-scenes glimpses, the film



explores the stories of talented local musicians in the North East.

Lamin recently premiered his documentary film at Tyneside Cinema in Newcastle, shedding light on the challenges musicians face outside London and exploring the rich talent pool in the North East. The documentary emphasises the need for the music industry to recognise and nurture talent beyond the confines of the capital. The film features interviews with north east and national music professionals, including iconic artists and rising stars, providing insights into the unique challenges faced by musicians in the North East.

## UK training provider appoints Gardiner Richardson to support ambitions to grow apprenticeship numbers

**Damar Training has appointed brand communications agency Gardiner Richardson to support business growth and provide even more apprenticeships across the UK.**

Damar training has created 1000s of jobs through apprenticeships over the last 44 years. The organisation has been a trailblazer in providing alternative and accessible routes into professions within sectors such as business support, legal and financial.

Gardiner Richardson will be working with Damar to develop and deliver a communications strategy, including defining audience personas and messaging.

Jonathan Bourne, MD & Co-owner at Damar Training commented: "For over 40 years of delivering apprenticeships, we've been helping to challenge common misconceptions about the roles and industries that apprentices can benefit. Apprenticeships can be a valuable part of almost all teams and sectors, not just practical or hands-on roles.

"Our partnership with Gardiner Richardson and our new communications strategy will put us in a strong position to further help the business community realise the value of apprenticeships, as well as create even more new jobs and training opportunities."

Jen Hallam, Business Development Director at Gardiner Richardson, added, "The driving force behind our business is our values and we love working with like-minded clients who are benefiting our



society. For Damar Training, we'll deliver a strategic communications campaign which will help the team realise more apprenticeships, ultimately supporting more businesses with access to a wider pool of talent and training."

Damar Training joins the Gardiner Richardson client roster which includes Ringtons, Northumbrian Water, Egger, Northumbria University, RIBA, Osbit, Rayovac, as well as councils, local authorities and public health bodies across the North East and UK.

For more information on Damar Training visit: [damartraining.com](http://damartraining.com)

For more information on Gardiner Richardson visit: [www.gardiner-richardson.com](http://www.gardiner-richardson.com)

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## Kevin McEwan: Navigating the Media World

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.

**Bonded's Co-Founder and Media Director, Kevin McEwan, reveals his motive for setting up a new type of media agency, and what the increasing fragmentation of the media industry means for brands and audiences.**



**"We mustn't overlook the traditional channels that continue to do the job they always have."**

Kevin McEwan

### ***What made you want to start Bonded Agency?***

The founders (Steve Underwood, Kevin Sung and myself) decided to start Bonded to fill a gap that we saw in the industry – for an agency that prioritised real human connections over technological automation. We all had experience in large media agencies, and our individual skill sets complemented each other. Having autonomy over our work enabled us to really focus on delivering great work for our clients.

Launching the agency, especially during a challenging time economically, was a big risk – but it turned out to be a great decision. We've since built a strong client base, and I couldn't ask for a better team, who are not only all highly capable and driven, but great fun to work with. I'm really proud of the supportive culture that we've developed here at Bonded.

### ***As a Media Director, what do you wish more people knew about the industry?***

The complexities of media planning, and the rigour that goes into it, often go unnoticed. In today's fragmented media landscape, consumers have so much choice over the media that they consume, so choosing the right

channels is crucial. Our audience-first approach to media buying requires an extensive amount of planning, data, and insight. Our role is to skillfully navigate clients through this landscape, developing media plans that help them connect with their audiences most effectively.

### ***Are there any upcoming developments in the media world that you are excited by?***

The increasing fragmentation of the market continues to excite me. Technological advancements, particularly in AI, have reshaped how people consume media in the past decade, and this shows no sign of slowing down. This prospect is both thrilling and a tad intimidating! Our 2024 Future Trends Report breaks down the upcoming trends to expect in the industry – so give this a read if you haven't already.

Despite this, the recent conversation surrounding the 'Mr Bates vs The Post Office' TV drama has exemplified the enduring power of traditional channels. TV still has the power to drive cultural change through impactful storytelling – so we mustn't overlook the traditional channels that continue to do the job they always have.

### ***And finally, what does 'Connection' mean to you?***

Connection, to me, is all about people and the bonds that we form with them - whether that's within the Bonded team, with our clients, media owners or partners. Within the context of what we do at Bonded, it's about weaving connections that resonate; connecting our clients to their audiences through precisely tailored communication channels.



For more information visit:  
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CONNECTING WITH



# Marketing and Media Matters

*In the latest of these popular series of features we spoke to...*

## Antonio Bachini & Claire Knight

*Co-Founders of The Traveller and the Bear*

### Did you always envisage a career in the Marketing Industry?

**Ant:** No. I studied Interior Design and thought that's the path I'd take – until I didn't. I got a job in a graphics studio straight from college and then fell into advertising from there.

**Claire:** Not really. I did a business degree at uni and loved all the marketing stuff – got a job as an Account Executive in my first ad agency and have been in the industry ever since.

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

**Ant:** After the graphics studio I went to London, worked in some agencies there – moved to Leeds and did the same, then freelanced all over the country before settling back in Newcastle.

**Claire:** I studied in Edinburgh and stayed up there for a few years working in a few different ad agencies. I moved back down to the North East and worked for a couple down here too. I met Ant at my last agency, and we worked together for about 10 years. In 2020 we took the leap and set up The Traveller and the Bear.

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

**Ant:** The challenge of being faced with people who just want to take the easy route all of the time. The easy route rarely leads to the right creative outcome – we constantly challenge people to think about things differently.

**Claire:** Internal politics within agencies. You can spend far too much time on internal stuff that doesn't matter. That's one thing we refuse to entertain. We get on and we get the job done – it should be all about the work.

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

Anyone who has conviction in their own beliefs. People with opinions, who aren't afraid to call things out within our industry. There are a lot of flaws in this industry. We respect people who aren't afraid to voice an opinion about them to make our industry a better place. We try and do that. We respect people who champion other's work, not seeing anyone as real competitors. We also massively respect each other – our partnership is like no other.

### Which fictional media character can you most relate to?

**Ant:** Mr. Topsy-Turvy. Everything about Mr. Topsy-Turvy is upside down, or inside out, or back to front. He's a funny sort of fellow. I like his oddness.

**Claire:** It has to be Carrie Bradshaw. Her love affair with shoes, her curly hair, her ability to pull off a tulle skirt for any occasion – maybe that's where the direct comparisons end, maybe not. Her career, fierce loyalty to her friends and her imperfections make her irresistibly relatable.

### What is your greatest strength?

**Ant:** The ability to see better ways of doing things.

**Claire:** I am a creative thinker but I am no creative. I think my greatest strength is being able to champion our ideas 100% but also bring organisation to the party.

### What is your biggest weakness?

**Ant:** Spelling...I can't spell for sh!t – apparently it's important? Good job I get to focus on mega ideas and have a team who are all over the detail.

**Claire:** Jam-packing my life with stuff because life is too short. But leaving little time to recharge. I must get better at that (it's on my spreadsheet).

### What has been your proudest achievement?

**Ant:** Setting up this agency. It allows us to give people the freedom to do the best work of their lives – no restrictions, no egos, just mega ideas.

**Claire:** The same. This place. Having the confidence in ourselves to want something better, grab it and make it happen. That combined with advocating endlessly for my non-verbal autistic 6-year-old daughter, Wren. She is the driving force behind everything I do, and I am forever proud of us both.

### What are your future career aspirations?

To continue to build a successful agency – creating a legacy where people truly believe that their ideas are valued and important. Success would be that the agency continues well beyond the pair of us and that the core belief of why we set up in the first place is carried on by others – to produce stuff that matters.

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

It feels like our industry is actually regressing more and more – there's far more emphasis on production of assets than creative ideas than ever before. Volume of content has become more important than the core idea. I think there will be a division in how we term 'creative agencies' with more higher-level agencies focussing on ideas, then agencies who are simply content producers, churning volume. It's our job to make sure that the big ideas continue to drive the work.

### How do you like to unwind?

**Ant:** Family. Guitar. Bike. Italy. In that order.

**Claire:** Family. Friends. Dog walking. Sunshine. In that order.

*thetravellerandthebear.com*





the  
Traveller  
& the  
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Antonio Bachini & Claire Knight





## Making an impression that lasts

In the digital age, your professional image is often the first impression you make. Whether it's for LinkedIn, your company website, or social media profiles, a business headshot is a powerful tool. Here's a short guide to ensure your business headshot reflects the polished image you want to convey.

### 1. What to wear?

Hawaiian shirts might be a hit on the beach, but they have no place in a business headshot, unless you are a comedian. Keep it simple with plain tops that exude professionalism. Consider where you'll use the image - LinkedIn, your website, social media, or press releases. Tailor your outfit to your audience and the impression you want to leave. Remember, an inappropriate photo could turn potential clients away.

### 2. Background

Just be aware of what is in the background. I am an advocate of environmental shots, so if you work in a nice office, then there is nothing wrong with having that in the background, so long as it is not distracting. Avoid the Prisoner Mug Shot look by steering clear of walls. That said, if you work from

home, viewers may be more interested in your decor.

### 3. Lighting

Lighting is key to a successful headshot. Stand indoors near a large, preferably north-facing window. This provides constant indirect light throughout the day, preventing harsh shadows. The great artists such as Rembrandt always had north facing studios. Turn off interior lights, as mixed lighting can create unpleasant tones. Avoid the unflattering effects of overhead lighting. Remember, a well-lit photo can make all the difference.

### 4. Lens/settings

When using a phone, opt for the highest resolution available to allow for cropping later. Understand your phone's Pro and

Portrait settings for optimal results. Disable beauty mode, as artificial textures are a no-go. Maintain a proper distance from the camera to avoid distortion. If you're using a professional camera, consider a 105mm focal length and a distance of approximately four meters for a top-notch headshot.

### 5. Smile and Posture

Strike a balance with your smile; aim for an eight out of 10 on the scale. One being unsmiling and 10 being really cheesy. Most men benefit from a square-on pose without a head tilt, but exceptions exist and best to try out different options. If you wear glasses, be mindful of reflections, usually a slight turn or head down will do the trick. When taking photos, try various poses with your body angled differently to discover what suits you best. For the ultimate result, consider hiring a professional photographer, but hey, we might be a little biased.

Remember, your business headshot is an investment in your professional identity. With these tips, you'll be well on your way to a picture-perfect portrayal of the competent and approachable individual you are.

**Scarlet Butterfly Media offer both Photography and Videography services, we are based in the North East but often complete projects all over the UK.**

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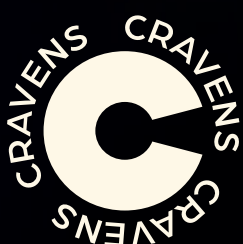
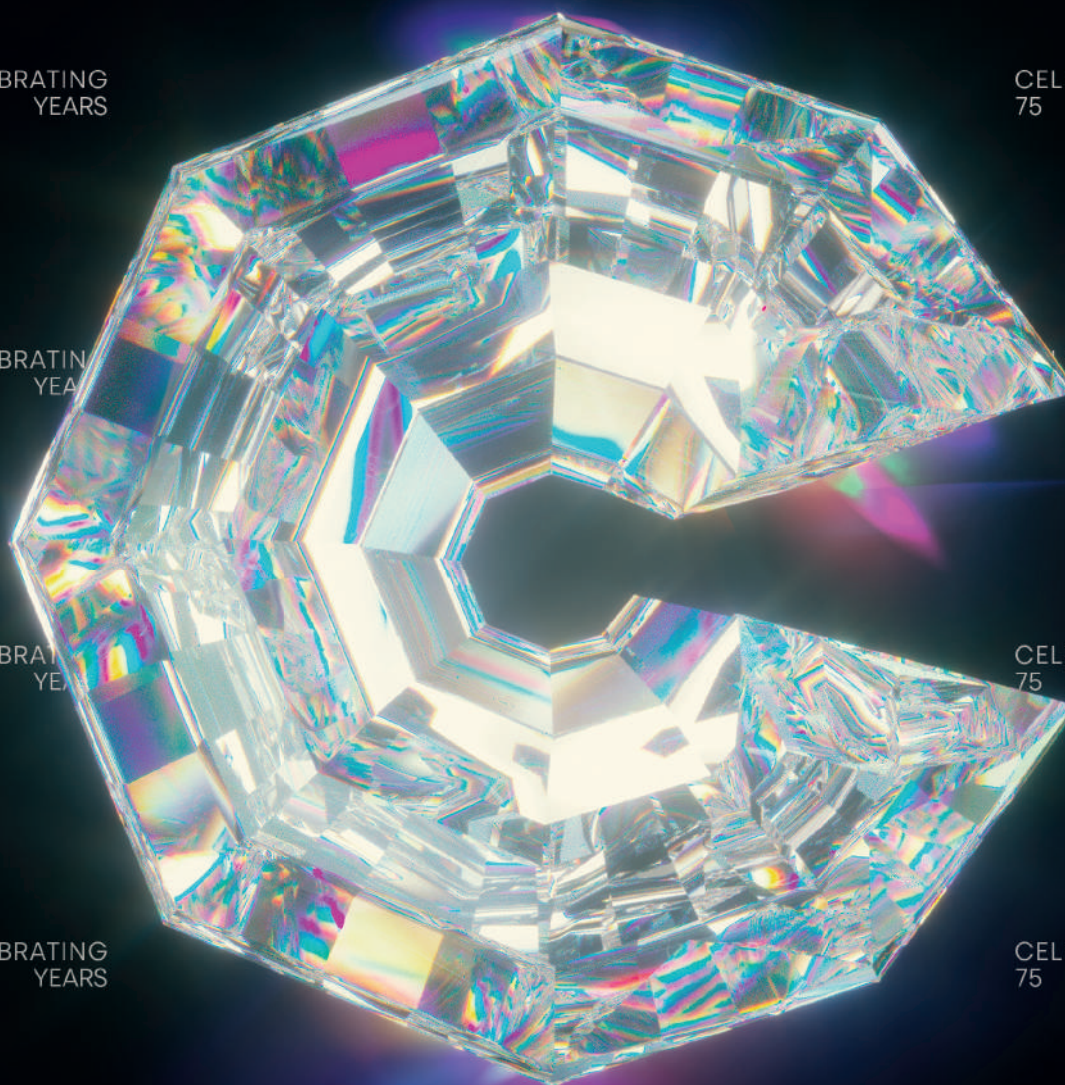
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Chantelle Doughty



Veronica Swindale

## Sharpening Strategic Leadership Skills

Beyond just executing campaigns and analysing metrics, marketers are increasingly expected to demonstrate strategic leadership skills.

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The CIM Marketing Leadership Programme is a postgraduate-level qualification focused on giving Marketers the opportunity to sharpen their strategic Leadership skills. Veronica caught up with Chantelle Doughty, Head of Policy & Campaigns at Thirteen, who has just graduated with distinction for this top-level CIM qualification in Marketing Leadership, to ask her about her career journey to date and why she took the step to study this particular qualification.

### **Did you always envisage a career in marketing?**

I studied Business Management at University, but early on, I realised how much

more I enjoyed the marketing modules, so I elected to take as many as I could and focused on finding a marketing role for my 'Year in Industry,' which I spent working on websites at IBM in Basingstoke.

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

It's been quite the ride from high-end luxury retail to social care and social housing! I started off in FMCG before quickly moving into direct-to-customer retail marketing, spending three wonderful years at Fenwick in Newcastle. I then moved to Dubai, where I worked for Harvey Nichols, before moving to head up the marketing team for Bloomingdales – both franchises in the Middle East. I absolutely loved retail and have a penchant for department stores. When I returned to the UK for personal reasons, I joined my in-law's social care business, taking on a business development and operations role before moving back to core marketing and communications at Thirteen Group, where I have been for the last four-plus years.



**What do you enjoy most about working in marketing?**

The variety mainly...you get to work with all areas of the business, using creative ideas to drive strategy. Marketing covers so many disciplines and skills, and you can wear a different hat every day. You can start off the morning analysing data, trends and budgets, and by the afternoon, be shooting a campaign with customers or briefing in creative work; it never gets boring!

**What have been the biggest challenges you have faced in building your career?**

Moving away from family and friends for the right opportunities has been difficult when I haven't found the right role locally and, more recently, balancing starting a family with still wanting to progress professionally. I have had to make personal decisions that have slowed down my career progression. It can be challenging, and I've had lots of conversations with colleagues about 'can we have it all?'

**What was the trigger to start the CIM Marketing Leadership Programme?**

I've completed quite a few of the CIM shorter courses over the years and have always benefited from them. I wanted to gain a professional qualification at a more senior level and work towards Chartered status. I applied for support through Thirteen's personal development fund and was lucky enough to be granted funding and flexible working for study. The timing wasn't great; I got approval when I was pregnant, so I started studying whilst on maternity leave, completing the Level 7 programme whilst returning to work and adjusting to being a first-time Mommy! You can't pass these opportunities by, and I'm so grateful. nesma (who I studied with) are fantastic and were incredibly supportive and flexible.

**What do you do differently now?**

I have a much deeper understanding of the wider challenges and disruption businesses face. The programme is focused on making real-life data-driven strategic recommendations. I feel more confident in assessing the environment, developing strategies and seeking opportunities in times of change, particularly in the volatile social housing market, which faces extreme external pressures and scrutiny.

**What are your future career aspirations?**

Marketing as a discipline is continually evolving with new channels and skills required to reach new audiences. I'd like to keep my skills up-to-date and relevant and develop into more strategic leadership roles.

**How do you unwind outside of work?**

Mainly spending time with my wonderful two-year-old little girl (although I couldn't describe managing a toddler as unwinding!) alongside family and close friends. I love food, so cooking and eating out, and I'm trying to factor in some head space with yoga and a little running. I love spending time in the countryside and am lucky to have North Yorkshire on my doorstep.

**And finally, are there any business accounts/podcasts you would recommend?**

I read Mums in Marketing online for both advice and comedy value! It's a great community of like-minded Mums supporting each other on all things marketing and life in general.

This qualification takes approximately 18 months to complete and focuses on applying strategic thinking to facilitate and implement change at board level. After completing this postgraduate marketing qualification, you can utilise the designated letter 'DipM' after your name. The course can also be used to work towards a Master's or MBA qualification.

**Want to find out more? Contact Veronica Swindale at [hello@nesma.co.uk](mailto:hello@nesma.co.uk)**

# nesma

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# ...Artificial Intelligence is making the news...

*Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us how they use AI.*



AI is a fascinating area of development that we have been exploring recently. As technology advances we hope to utilise AI to streamline our current very time consuming booking systems and communicate better with the adult and young people who enrol on our programmes each year. Developing a strong social media strategy is another key area we hope AI can assist with particularly using seasonal ad campaigns and show casing our good work which is key to future growth!

If we could have just one task, though, it would definitely be to utilise AI in developing our fund raising capabilities as this for any small charity is the most time consuming aspect with over 50% of our time involved with bid work or funding returns!!

If you're interested in working with us as a partner agency or utilising our services just get in touch with us on [info@off-the-grid-cic.uk](mailto:info@off-the-grid-cic.uk) for a chat!

**Paul Kirkpatrick, Off the Grid**



AI will play a big role in healthcare in the future as it enables a greater degree of personalised medical intervention. At Idos we do not use AI yet but we are hoping to meet a data modelling expert in the near future and are excited to see if AI could be used to help our clients.

**Dr Ceri Sutherland, Idos Healthcare and Well Being, [www.idoshealth.co.uk](http://www.idoshealth.co.uk)**



If I could have AI do one thing in my business, it would be to work out a way for me to do all of the creative projects that I would like to complete instead of all of the boring but necessary jobs. I have made it my mission to keep creating new collections every year and the only thing that gets in the way of this is the challenge of getting all the admin jobs done. Being neurodiverse also means I struggle to prioritise jobs I don't enjoy so that can be a huge challenge.

**Corinne Lewis Ward**  
[www.powderbutterfly.com](http://www.powderbutterfly.com)



AI has not just changed my business it has changed the world. On the 30th of November 2022 the first available AI program capable of writing a book was released. This is capable of being used to write a book and now programs are available that can write a PhD thesis. This means that my business is in a time of perhaps the greatest challenge in history for writing; a time when the superiority of the human mind is threatened. This means that as I write books using a computer only for research and as a fancy typewriter some others use a computer to generate books. These generated books can be produced in a fraction of the time than it would take to write one. Maybe the future for me will be working out how AI can be used to increase IQ and make the human race more superior. But one difference has also been that as well as writing as S Rob, I have reinvented myself as Simon Rob. Ironically this is because of a problem AI generated books will come across: if they have not already: that it's difficult to search more than a certain number of books using the same name and so I write as Simon Rob so my books are easier to search for. For now, who can say what happens next?

**S Rob also writing as Simon Rob**



AI is something we are already seeing within our industry, through automated print processes, or AI Design work. Meaning it is something that we can't completely ignore as we need to be open to the progress and development it brings. The print industry has developed and changed so much in the 30 years that we have been operating, so it is exciting to consider how much change we may see in even just the next five years!

**Rebecca Thompson, [sales@pmpnameplates.co.uk](mailto:sales@pmpnameplates.co.uk)**



We use AI for audio processing, especially when we get audio sent to us that is not recorded professionally. It saves us a lot of time, making sure our clients can be heard and we can focus on other aspects of the project. However, everything else in our business is managed and created by humans! We think that having the personal touch is a very important part of running a business and having that client interaction is something we could never lose.

Daniel Wilkinson, DW Media,  
[www.thedwmedia.co.uk](http://www.thedwmedia.co.uk)



My life and work are all about the moments of quiet human care. The great and the small acts of self-care, self-discipline, and self-awareness. All our innovations need to be managed wisely and with enough courage to make the most of what they can offer. Within that hope, we need to be cautious about the unexpected outcomes and potential problems.

Like most people, I am a little nervous about it and excited. In the meantime, I still love seeing my clients and feeling a warmth that a good book can give!

My only thoughts would be as I say to clients, "Well done! Good luck! Go gently!"

Dr Rebecca Williams Dinsdale,  
[www.drrebecca.org.uk](http://www.drrebecca.org.uk)



Here at Leading Link, we believe in the personal touch, genuine engagement and communication with all of our staff, colleagues and our amazing young people. In a fast-moving world, AI can do wonders and be really beneficial, but at the moment, other than it assisting with very menial tasks, we prefer an "LL" to an "AI" any day of the week!

Chris Johnson, Leading Link,  
[www.leadinglink.co.uk](http://www.leadinglink.co.uk)

Last month our RADAR members appeared on BBC TV, BBC Radio, Local TV and many magazines and newspapers. To find out more about the benefits of becoming a RADAR member, contact [keith@highlightspr.co.uk](mailto:keith@highlightspr.co.uk) or call Keith on 07814 397951

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Contact Keith Newman for more details.

Visit him on his floating office

[keith@highlightspr.co.uk](mailto:keith@highlightspr.co.uk)

07814 397951

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“

*...We need to  
end child poverty.  
It's that simple...*



## Kim McGuinness: The North East's next Mayor?

Wadds Inc. works with ambitious businesses dedicated to achieving growth with social impact. Its focus is on helping management teams build a future proof, differentiated market position that exploits emerging opportunities, manages risk, embraces innovation and navigates economic volatility.

**As the North East mayoral election draws closer, director Sarah Waddington CBE has been checking out who is standing. Here she interviews her preferred candidate Kim McGuinness about her plans to make the North East the home of real opportunity.**

### **What motivated you to stand for the position of mayor?**

I love this region and I want it to succeed for everyone. I know some people will see that and think it's a bit cringe, but I'm not ashamed to say I'm standing because I want to champion this great region and end the days in which the rest of the country thinks the North begins in Manchester and ends in Leeds. Yes, we face some big challenges, but we have huge potential.

### **What are the key points of difference between you and the incumbent?**

So, this is an entirely new position created at the start of the North East devolution journey. If you live in Consett or Sunderland, devolution has meant nothing and done nothing for you so far. My job is to ensure everyone, not just big business, feels the benefit of devolution to the North East.

### **What are your priorities among the current inequalities facing the North East?**

We need to end child poverty. It's that simple. I want the North East to be the home of real opportunity and that means ensuring where you come from does not hold you back. I've made clear that as mayor I will judge every request for investment with the starting question 'what does this do to end child poverty'. After that it's about creating the infrastructure of opportunity. That means rebuilding a Sure Start network, introducing a mayor's childcare grant and creating jobs in the foundational economy, those local jobs and services that actually keep a household going.

### **The North East has a number of major place-based strengths. How will you harness these?**

Our regional pride is a huge asset and I will ensure we finally make our creative sector, from music to the arts, a key feature of our economic success. We are already making

huge strides in green energy. But alongside that will be investment in jobs and investment in transport. I'll set up a Mayoral Development Corporation to co-ordinate investment on our ports and rivers. And I'll ensure we are upgrading and expanding the Metro and reopening the Leamside Line in County Durham.

### **What's the number one outcome you will drive for if elected?**

The number one outcome my office will measure will be the reduction in child poverty. But I think the wider outcome for our North East will be the sense that we have built on our regional pride and are leading the way in taking powers out of London. I think many of us in the North East have watched the media treat Andy Burnham like he represents all of us and thought, 'hang on, there's more to the North than Manchester'. We need a strong voice winning investment in our region, fighting for our North East, and that's my mission.

I'd be grateful for your vote on 2nd May. If you'd like to know more about what I stand for or to get involved with my campaign, please visit [www.kimmcguinness.org](http://www.kimmcguinness.org)

*To find out more about Wadds Inc., visit [www.wadds.co.uk](http://www.wadds.co.uk).*

Sarah Waddington





A unique interview...

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magazines

## Paul Harbord

*Steadfast Security*

### How did you end up building a career in security?

You could say 'Security' is in my blood. From my family's military and professional histories to my current role and future ambitions too – I've always been around situations of making safe and secure, so it has been a genuinely natural progression for me to get to where I am today.

It started when I was only 10 years old. My Dad would take me out on site patrols, occasionally, we'd come across unauthorised people on site, generally youths breaking into schools. My Dad would jump out of our vehicle and lock me in while he took chase. You could say, security has been instilled into me from a young age.

From then at 16, I went and followed in my Dad's footsteps and joined The Light Dragoons which amalgamated from his regiment the 15th/19th. I was probably thrown into the deep end when I joined as I was flown out to Iraq after my 18th birthday on Op Telic 6. Security in hostile environments was imperative, you couldn't switch off otherwise you and your comrade's lives would be in danger. I completed two tours of Afghanistan before leaving to pursue a career in the family business, The Steadfast Security Group.

At Steadfast I spent time as a frontline operator, guarding customer sites as a Security Guard and conducting Mobile Patrols. From there, I moved into the Control Room to manage the roster and Security Operators. Following this, I was promoted to Operations Manager and then Security Director, with responsibility to oversee the organisation's security department and maintain policies to assure the safety of property, assets, and people.

*Paul and Michael*

I'm incredibly proud to have now taken up the role of Managing Director of The Steadfast Security Group, which I'm very proud to be doing, alongside the support of my Dad, and Founder, Michael, and business partner Dave Watson.

### Who or what inspires you?

In short, my Dad. If you go back to where the Steadfast Security Group story started, at the very beginning it was my Dad, Michael who responded to a need, and turned it into the organisation we have today. Employing nearly 150 people, and keeping countless sites, teams and families safe – his ambition is a real driving factor for me and continuing his dedication in my own way, through the Group.

Before the original foundation of the Group, my Dad worked to protect the premises of a friend of an old Army comrade, following a failure from a previous supplier and the customer was out of ideas following a string of criminal incidents and activities on his site. Fresh out the Army, My Dad stepped up and within the first 12 hours of his shift, he had successfully deterred two intruders and apprehended a third that was ultimately arrested. The client couldn't believe what my Dad had achieved in 12 hours, what a fully functional security company couldn't do in 3 months! The client branded my Dad the 'Standfast Soldier' and awarded him a contract to protect his 3 other sites. From there, Standfast Security was born which later amalgamated into The Steadfast Security Group.

In 1997, with help from his brothers he formed Steadfast Security Systems, which are now a nationwide operator providing security systems, fire and electrical installations and servicing. From there, in 2006, he went into business with Dave Watson to form Steadfast Secure Storage, which provides Secure Storage and Haulage to businesses across the North East. The 3 businesses now form The Steadfast Security Group as it stands today and are still employing trusted and reliable veterans to this day.

Going from leaving the Army to building a multimillion-pound organisation is an inspirational as it gets for me!

### What advice would you give to anyone interested in getting into the security business?

The Security industry is notoriously challenging, in many different ways. Sadly, it doesn't have the greatest reputation to some, but this is not a true reflection of the professionals working within it. If anyone is interested in getting into the security business, my advice is to be thorough and do your research. Not every organisation is as professional as we are, and sadly it's those that reflect badly on others doing the work well.

From a business perspective, I say always trust and follow your gut instinct. If a new contract or deal seems too good to be true, it probably is. Do your due diligence on new business and always, ALWAYS request references for new staff coming into your business.





Paul Harbord

#### **What is your favourite part of your job?**

My favourite and probably most rewarding part of the job is seeing our team succeed. If we secure a contract or capture a break-in or unauthorised person on site; or even receive good feedback from a client, I'll praise the whole team – we succeed together. We are a very close team, but being able to high five people, or generally celebrate and praise the team following a new success is incredible.

Ultimately when that happens, we know someone is safe or a site is secure – and that is what we are all about, providing peace of mind.

#### **What has been your most memorable business moment thus far?**

I would say, reaching the position of Managing Director has been my most memorable moment to date. I've always envisaged managing The Steadfast Security Group from a young age and to finally do that is an incredible achievement. Doing so alongside my Dad and Dave is even more rewarding too, being supported by the people who started it all and my mentors.

#### **What are your favourite magazines?**

Professional Security Magazine, Entrepreneur and CEO and Unique Magazines content (of course!).

#### **What's the future hold for Paul Harbord and Steadfast Security?**

As the new MD and with a legacy to continue, I certainly don't have any intention to sit on my laurels! I've set some big company goals this year and I intend on achieving and completing each one. My teams are fully aware of what needs to be done, not only do I speak about them weekly, but they are also typed up in large font, printed out on A3, laminated, and nailed to wall above each workstation – I'm a big believer in being open and communicating clearly – so whatever form it takes, I know our teams all know what we are trying to achieve and we are all working together to get there.

If you want to know what they are, feel free to follow our social media pages (Facebook and LinkedIn) and website to see what developments unfold.

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Sarah Dale and Sarah Walker

## Promote your event with a touch of SASS

PR firm SASS media Ltd loves nothing more than shouting out about clients' successes and promoting their events with their trademark warmth and touch of SASS. Here Sarah & Sarah from SASS share a couple of 'save the dates' for the North East calendar.

**You can't beat the anticipation of a great event, marking it in your calendar and ensuring the date is kept free. Whether it's a glamorous gathering or an outdoors festival, a glittering awards ceremony or a charity walk.**

SASS media Ltd is run by journalists and PR professionals Sarah Walker and Sarah Dale. Based in Teesside, they have secured media coverage in print, online, on the radio and TV for clients across the UK in a variety of different sectors including education, health and wellbeing, charity and infrastructure, as well as writing for several B2B magazines and promoting events.

Sarah & Sarah have teamed up with the UK Top Influencer Awards and Saltburn Food Festival to support their public relations this spring/summer.

Both events are run by trailblazers in their fields. Saltburn Food Festival was started by businesswoman and foodie expert, Lorna Jackson, who also runs the popular monthly Saltburn Farmers' Market and Real Meals café and deli. The UK Top Influencer Awards is the brainchild of model, businessman and DJ, Chris Henderson, who spotted a gap in the market for a national awards ceremony celebrating influencers right here in the north-east.

On April 20, the inaugural UK Top Influencer Awards will be held at Northumbria University's Students Union, Event Northumbria, in Newcastle. Hosted by Love

Island and TOWIE star, Georgia Harrison, the event will be a gathering of who's who in the influencer industry. The range of categories include Top Nano-Influencer, recognising influencers with fewer than 10,000 followers, Top Micro Influencer, for those with 10,000 to 100,000 followers, and Top Macro Influencer, who have between 100,000 and one million followers. Other categories include Top Celebrity Influencer, Top Social Justice Influencer and Top Technology Influencer. The awards attracted hundreds of entries and the finalists have been whittled down to 200 across 20 categories.

The hugely popular Saltburn Food Festival, which draws in crowds of around 20,000 people, returns on Sunday, July 28. From sweet treats to savoury delights and special chef demos, Saltburn Food Festival is definitely a day out not to miss. The event is open to everyone – including your four-legged friends who can take some quiet time out in a special dog crèche – and easily accessible via train. Bring a hungry tummy and lots of shopping bags to be sure of a great day out.

The UK Top Influencer Awards and Saltburn Food Festival are not the only exciting events SASS media Ltd have teamed up with.

Last year, the media professionals worked with Taste of Africa North East, a charity which was established 21 years ago to celebrate, promote and support Black people in the north-east, to support their calendar of events from July to October. The events,



Sarah Walker and Sarah Dale with Lorna Jackson

which were covered by the media in print, on TV, radio and online, included the Black History Youth Awards, Miss Black History North East, the Taste of Africa Showcase, the Taste of Africa Carnival & Parade and a special Windrush exhibition.

Their PR support for charities has continued into 2024 with the promotion of #walkintothelight, highlighting the issue of suicide in young people in the North East. Alisdair Beveridge, owner of The Build Directory, who has already completed several charity walks for The Teesside Charity and The Headlight Project, gathered the support of local colleges across the region to hold two walks in Teesside and Newcastle on March 13.

To make it easier to spot Sarah & Sarah at events across the region, look out for their SASS pink hoodies and say hello.

**If you would like to find out more about sponsorship opportunities for the UK Top Influencer Awards, email: [hello@uktopinfluencer.com](mailto:hello@uktopinfluencer.com)**

**If you would like to find out more about sponsorship opportunities at Saltburn Food Festival, email: [lorna@foodfirstsaltburn.co.uk](mailto:lorna@foodfirstsaltburn.co.uk)**

**To find out more about how SASS media can support your PR and events promotion requirements, email: [sarah.dale@sassmedialtd.co.uk](mailto:sarah.dale@sassmedialtd.co.uk) or visit [www.sassmedialtd.co.uk](http://www.sassmedialtd.co.uk)**



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# The Culture Review – The rise of accidental managers

with Ivan Hollingsworth, Founder of Centric Consultants



Recently there has been a lot of discussion in the media on the rise of ‘accidental managers’ - people with training in a specialist skill who are thrust into a people management role without adequate training or support. It’s an issue that is putting significant strain on teams in almost every sector.

## So how do we address the problem?

When you are thinking of promoting or hiring a manager, the first question would be to ask does this team need a manager or a leader? Someone parachuting in to watch and check what each person is doing is never ok and will ultimately negatively impact everything that you are trying to achieve by building a thriving culture. Connection, trust and psychological safety are almost always damaged in this scenario, spreading toxicity through your workforce and damaging productivity, morale and your ability to retain the best talent. Like any role, managers need appropriate training and the role should come with a tight remit about listening, coaching, and collaborating; this will put people at ease.

The difference between management and leadership is one of the biggest challenges

facing organisations as they try to grow and evolve. According to the CMI Good Management Report 2023, 52% of managers do not hold any management and leadership qualifications and employees who rate their manager as ineffective are significantly more likely to be planning to leave their organisation in the next 12 months than those who say their line manager is effective (50% vs 21%).

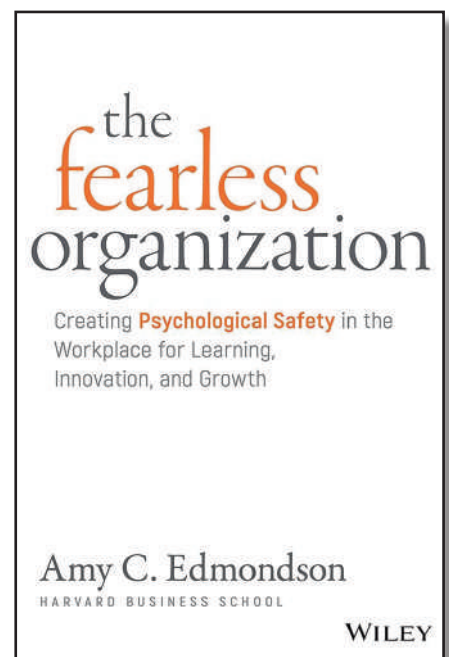
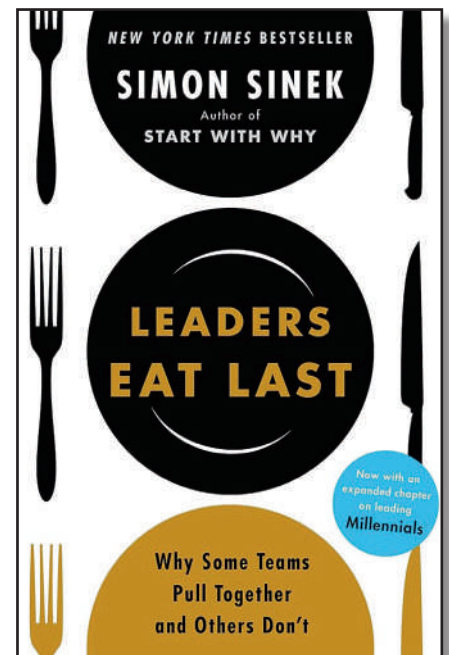
Leaders that show humility, admit that they don't have all the answers and are genuinely curious ideas and opinions will generate an environment where people want to input and innovate - and that doesn't come naturally to everyone. Invest in training that takes a critical look at the values of an inclusive leader and how by adopting them you can empower yourself and others to reach shared goals and make high-quality decisions and support your team to understand what psychological safety looks like.

## The Fearless Organization – Amy Edmondson

In this must-read book, Amy Edmondson offers practical guidance for teams and organizations who are serious about success in the modern economy. With so much riding on innovation, creativity, and spark, it is essential to attract and retain quality talent—but what good does this talent do if no one is able to speak their mind?

## Leaders Eat Last – Simon Sinek

In *Leaders Eat Last*, Simon Sinek, internationally best-selling author of *Start With Why*, investigates these great leaders from Marine Corps Officers, who don't just



sacrifice their place at the table but often their own comfort and even their lives for those in their care, to the heads of big business and government - each putting aside their own interests to protect their teams.

Ivan is the only accredited 'Licensed Psychological Safety Practitioner' in the North East who can carry out the Fearless Organization Scan, which is widely regarded as the gold standard to measure psychological safety.

**For more insights on what company culture truly means, and to find out more about booking a Fearless Organization Scan for your business follow Centric Consultants on LinkedIn or email Ivan directly at [ivan@centric-consultants.com](mailto:ivan@centric-consultants.com)**



# nesma

No matter how good  
we are at our jobs,  
lifelong learning  
is a must for all of us!



Since graduating with the CIM qualification in Marketing Leadership I have a much deeper understanding of the broader challenges and disruptions businesses face. The programme focuses on making real-life, data-driven strategic recommendations, and I now feel more confident in assessing the environment, developing strategies and seeking opportunities in times of change.

**Chantelle Doughty**

Head of Policy & Campaigns  
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Samuel Marriott-Dowding

## Transforming businesses; online, offline, and beyond

With the first quarter of this year nearly coming to an end, there is no better time than the present to share some exciting news about the launch of Marriott Communications' sister agency - MD Digital.

**Created in partnership with Wesley Dowding, MD Digital is a change management, business consultancy, and modern workplace training provider; transforming businesses; online, offline, and beyond.**

This is an exciting evolution for Marriott Communications, as with the development of our new agency we are now able to

take a holistic approach to business support through the provision of services such as marketing and branding, to staff training (including Microsoft 365, Artificial Intelligence and Google Workspace), project management, and growth management.

It should come as no surprise that the importance of 'being digital' or 'digitally present' for businesses big and small has grown over the last few years, especially when considering the advancement of new technologies such as artificial intelligence. This has meant that businesses must adapt quickly to these changing landscapes, a feat not always easy, if at all possible, when a business' interests means focus is often placed on growing sales and protecting profits in such economically challenging times.

MD Digital, in essence, will strive to fill these gaps or lack of digital flexibility, by providing real-time digital solutions tailored to a specific business and its digital needs.

Speaking with my Co-Founder, Wesley Dowding, he said: "Launching MD Digital was a natural step for me.

I have over 20 years of experience in marketing communications, SaaS, and productivity solutions, as well as the entrepreneurial experience of starting and building a multi-million pound business - so the challenges businesses and business owners are experiencing in the current climate are clear to see.

Businesses are experiencing an intricate series of challenges; from inflation, to staff retention issues, to failure to flexibly adapt to digital changes. A critical component of why this agency was launched was to enable businesses to adapt, overcome, and transform - without breaking the bank, and without being bogged down with complex digital jargon.

MD Digital specialises in enabling organisations, big and small, to make the most of their technology investments via a combination of training, change management, and project management. Whilst working alongside Marriott Communications, we aim for these two agencies to give our clients the opportunity to use our wrap-around business support services that analyses and improves nearly every function of a business.

It has been a pleasure to see the warm reception we have received so far for the launch of MD Digital, made even more special being that we have launched the agency in Sunderland, where not only has Marriott Communications seen so much success, but also as a city that is slowly becoming a creative and technological powerhouse located in the heart of the North East."

**Find out more information about our specialist services by contacting our team at [info@mddigital.org](mailto:info@mddigital.org)**





KATE BUCKINGHAM  
PHOTOGRAPHY

## A BENCHMARK OF CREATIVITY

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*"If my style of photography grabs your attention and you'd like to discuss how we can work together, give me a call or drop me a message. I would love to be part of your journey!"*

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Paul Fraser

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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Nicola Halse

## Marketing consultancy celebrates 4th anniversary with two new services

Washington based Riverside Marketing Solutions, who are celebrating their 4th anniversary this month, have added two new services to their portfolio as they continue to increase their client base.

Owner, Nicola Halse, originally launched the business in 2020 offering flexible marketing, sales and business development support to sole traders and SME's and has experienced an increase in demand for her services during the last 12 months.

The flexible business model, which allows companies to take advantage of the services on a 'no commitment' basis is ideal for those wishing to either take their first steps into marketing or for those who want to increase their exposure but who don't want to employ a full-time marketing manager. Following an increase in demand, Nicola, who has over 30 years experience within the industry, has now decided to add two new services to her portfolio, LinkedIn 1-2-1 and Marketing 1-2-1 sessions.

Commenting on the newly introduced sessions, Nicola said, "Since launching the business four years ago, not only has there been huge leaps forward in technology and the way businesses use marketing tools but the way that businesses work has also changed.

There is a lot more flexibility in the services that companies offer, businesses have to be extremely proactive and competitive in the way they market and sell their products and services, however, with the current economic climate, many businesses are reluctant to invest in a permanent marketing or business development person.

I've recently found myself being asked for advice by businesses who aren't sure what

marketing could look like for them and not sure where to start, but again, they don't want to commit to a long-term contract, so for a one-off fee, I decided to introduce my two new services, 1-2-1 sessions on increasing your LinkedIn personal brand or a mini marketing strategy.

The sessions will ensure that employees and businesses are making the most of their personal brand or the mini marketing strategy will look at their social media platforms, buyer personas, tone of voice and how to improve exposure to their target markets.

When I launched the business in the first week of a national lockdown, I could never have dreamt that four years later, I would have supported so many north east companies and experienced such success. With that, have come amazing opportunities including becoming an Enterprise Advisor at Durham Sixth Form Centre, speaking with students at Durham University, taking part in marketing workshops with budding entrepreneurs and twice being shortlisted for a StartUp Award.

I'm looking forward to continuing to support businesses and young people across the north east and can't wait to see what the future holds, here's to the next four years!"

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



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## Primary school in Jarrow celebrates 110th anniversary

**Schoolchildren enjoyed a fascinating look back through history to celebrate their primary school's special anniversary.**

St Bede's Catholic Primary School in Jarrow held an exhibition displaying old photographs, newspaper cuttings and even logbooks from 1914 unearthed as part of the primary's 110th anniversary. The site originally housed a hospital and once a school, it was divided into separate infants and junior schools.

St Bede's, which is part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, was the first Catholic school in Jarrow, a source of pride for acting headteacher Mark Hurst.

"That means the majority of people who live in Jarrow know the school and either attended themselves or know someone who was a pupil here," said Mr Hurst.

"We have a great sense of heritage and community here. We are all connected and have strong links with the families in the community.

"It was fascinating looking at the old logbooks, which are like diaries, and photos and the children and staff loved looking back through the school's history."



## Excited litter-pickers will clean up thanks to grant

**Serving the local community is important to a primary school in Peterlee – and now they can hold regular litter picks thanks to a £500 grant.**

Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Primary School, which is part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, successfully applied for a Believe Housing community grant to buy litter-picking equipment for the school.

The project has the two-fold benefits of supporting the health and wellbeing of the school's pupils and helping to keep the local community litter-free.

Science lead and Year 2 teacher Susan Jones and teaching assistant Marguerite Elrick will lead the OLOTR Litter Pickers group, which will organise a litter pick every half-term within walking distance of the school.

The funding will purchase litter-picking equipment for 10 children. Last July, the school was also granted a £500 Muddy Faces award from Washington Wetlands Trust, which they will use to buy additional litter-picking equipment.

"This project will educate the younger generation and their families about the importance of picking up litter and the impact of litter on the local and wider environment," said Mrs Jones.

"Peterlee has a lot of shops, schools and people walking and driving through, so keeping Peterlee tidy is important. We will work closely with Peterlee White Watch who have stressed their interest in supporting us with community projects that care for the local environment.

"We already go to Crimdon Beach to carry out beach cleans twice a year, but the children are keen to do the same on their doorstep. We will develop community links by involving parents, grandparents and carers in this project and run an after-school club using this equipment purchased to tidy the school grounds.



## Hitachi digs deep for South Tyneside schools

**Playtime just got a lot more interesting for primary school pupils across South Tyneside, following a donation of ride-on toy diggers from a global equipment supplier giant.**

Hitachi Construction Machinery UK, based in Hebburn, is donating 21 "ride-on toy mini diggers" to local schools, to get youngsters excited about the construction industry and deliver on the company's commitment to the South Tyneside Pledge.

Organisations which back the Pledge, commit to taking small steps to boost local economic activity, reduce health inequality, reduce carbon emissions, and enhance civic pride.

Hitachi Construction Machinery UK Ltd (HCMUK) are a wholly owned subsidiary of Hitachi Construction Machinery Europe responsible for the supply of excavators, wheel loaders, parts and servicing to the UK and Irish construction industry. The firm signed up to the Pledge last year – and as part of its commitment is organising the donation of the 21

ride-on diggers and has also welcomed a visit to the plant of students at St Joseph's Secondary School.

Chief Executive Officer, David Roberts said: "We are delighted to donate these Hitachi ride-on diggers to Primary Schools within our community. Not only does it highlight our commitment to the South Tyneside Pledge, more importantly it will bring great joy to so many children now and in the future.

"We take great pride in supporting the community that's so vital to our business, and we hope this donation will inspire the next generation to get involved in the world of construction machinery."

**Newcastle Preparatory School**  
NPS



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

Newcastle Preparatory School, 6 Eslington Road, Jesmond NE2 4RH



# A day in the life of...

## Gemma Strong

*Head Teacher, Newcastle Prep School*

### What's your morning routine like, and how does it set the tone for the rest of your day?

My mornings follow a fairly regular routine. I usually arrive at NPS around 7.30am to ensure that preparations are in order for the day ahead. This time is initially spent saying good morning to our school guinea pigs and ensuring they have breakfast, before enjoying my own in the staff room. This social part of the day is very important to me in connecting with colleagues. It is then time to welcome our children into the building – the highlight of my day!

### Can you describe a typical workday, including your responsibilities and tasks?

I think the first point to make is that in preparatory school life, there is never a 'typical' day, regardless of your role. My responsibilities and tasks can be wide-ranging and flexibility is definitely key.

On any given day, I could be taking an assembly, meeting with a parent, assessing financial information, planning new projects, networking with other professionals, meeting with staff members, taking a prospective family on a school tour, teaching, celebrating children's successes, responding to safeguarding concerns, supervising a trip or communicating with our governing board. It is also safe to say that I am quite a 'hands-on' head teacher and appreciate spending time with the children most of all. Personally, I enjoy that no two days are the same; it is the nature of working with people, and specifically, children!

### What role does technology play in your daily life, both personally and professionally?

Professionally, I spend a lot of time using technology and understanding the role it plays in young people's lives. As a school, we are very lucky to have invested in excellent robotics and coding equipment which I take a keen interest in.

In my personal life, I actively try to spend less time around technology. Most



Gemma Strong

of my hobbies involve a practical and creative element, perhaps to counter the considerable time spent with a screen within my working week. I enjoy gardening, baking and quilting in my spare time, all of which involve physical input but garner beautiful results.

### How do you prioritize self-care and maintain a healthy work-life balance amidst a busy schedule?

In whatever I am doing, I like to be wholly focussed and give my full attention. When I am in school, it is where my mind and passion are. Equally, once I leave the building, I endeavour to leave school-related thoughts behind and dedicate my efforts to home life. Yes, this is sometimes easier said than done but I enjoy both of these aspects in my life so, while trying to strike a balance, I don't see them as opposing or conflicting. Each are hugely important parts of who I am.

I do like to 'switch off', especially at weekends and during school holidays. This is my time to recharge and ensure that I am giving my best to everyone in my life. This could be doing a wholesome hobby or taking a rare few hours to do absolutely nothing.

People are also central to self-care in my world. The support I receive in all aspects of my life from family, friends and colleagues means so much.

### What are some challenges you typically face during the day, and how do you overcome them?

My role certainly comes with challenges, whether that is a difficult conversation or a never-ending to do list. The ways in which these are overcome can be quite varied. When managing challenging dialogue, key to my approach is being professional, fair and kind. If I am becoming overwhelmed by tasks or stretched in many different directions, this is where a combination of colleague support and prioritisation allow everything to become more achievable.

It is always helpful to take a walk around school and just see the delight and care-free way children go about their day at NPS. It often realigns priorities in my mind.

### Can you share a memorable moment or highlight from a recent day in your life that stands out to you?

Working with children aged 3-11, there aren't many dull moments and I am forever proud of what our children achieve. A particular highlight springs to mind when our Year 6 children had a treat day recently to celebrate their success in 11+ exams. Joining in with their bouncy castle fun was so incredibly freeing, but not quite what they expected to see their head teacher doing!

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





## 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](mailto:admissions@barneyschool.org.uk)**



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in all areas  
*Independent Schools  
Inspectorate, 2023*



BARNARD CASTLE SCHOOL

PREP | SENIOR | SIXTH FORM

# Whole School Open Morning

Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2024



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## Barnard Castle School Whole School Gala Concert 2024

Barnard Castle School, or 'Barney' as the school is affectionately known, literally took over Gateshead on 13th March 2024 as the entire school body of more than 700 pupils, including the youngest from its Preparatory School all the way to Sixth Formers, journeyed to the stunning and picturesque The Glasshouse International Centre for Music for its second Whole School Gala Concert in as many years.

Barney returned to The Glasshouse, following its inaugural concert in 2022, which was also a massive success. Performing a range of hit songs that utilised the School's talented orchestras and ensembles, including 'Africa' by Toto where the entire hall turned into a rainforest and The Avengers theme song, the evening concluded with a spectacular rendition of (Is This the Way to) Amarillo involving the entire student body that also included a hilarious video featuring Headmaster Tony Jackson and staff.

Commenting on the successful evening, Director of Music Richard Dawson said: "I have always maintained that our first Whole School Concert in 2022 was the highlight of my teaching career, so to be able to return two years later, taking every single pupil perform to a packed house was humbling, inspiring and just brilliant.

"Working with the pupils in preparation has been just the most wonderful thing, and they performed superbly. Their dedication, infectious positivity and sheer musicality came across in spades, and I am proud of each and every one of them, from the smallest trio performing a Y13 pupil's composition written specifically for the event to the largest massed items where 700 pupils sang from every corner of the hall and everything in between.

"Opportunities like this wouldn't be possible without all of my amazing colleagues, who have supported the concert every step of the way, and a brilliant Senior Management team who have made it clear how much music and the arts are supported here at Barney from my very first day."

Headmaster Tony Jackson added: "I am so very humbled and proud of the way the whole school and Barney community comes together on occasions such as this.

"Under the leadership and stewardship of our Director of Music, Mr Dawson and his team, as well as the creative juices of our Director of Drama, Mr Edwards, we pride ourselves on driving high standards in the creative arts at Barney, whilst ensuring that there is a sense of inclusion and everyone also feels they can have a go. This is demonstrated regularly over the course of the academic year, with high quality concerts and productions counter balanced by light hearted but inclusive events such as House Singing and House Drama competitions, in both Prep and Senior Schools, as well as weekly Congregational singing practices, which we still believe plays a very important part of our education."









# All Different, All Equal: Kenton School's exceptional SEND Support

Kenton School, a secondary and sixth form school within Northern Leaders Trust, upholds an inclusive ethos encapsulated by its motto of 'All Different, All Equal'. Providing exceptional Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) support, the department is committed to ensuring that every student receives the highest quality education possible.



With 13% of Kenton School's population identified as SEND students, personalised support is provided. This includes Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) - a specialised support strategy for those with significant and long-term special educational needs.

The SEND Department provides their support through four broad areas of need:

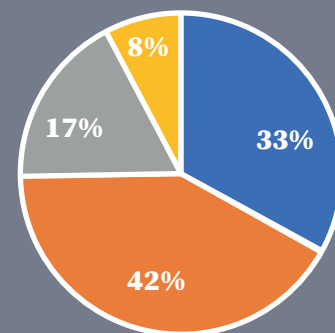
- **Communication and Interaction** – includes students on the ASD spectrum – commonly Asperger's syndrome and autism - who are likely to have difficulties with social interaction.
- **Cognition and Learning Social** – includes students with dyslexia, dyscalculia and/or dyspraxia.
- **Social, Emotional or Mental Health** – includes students who have mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, PTSD etc.
- **Sensory/Physical** – includes students with sensory issues and/or physical disabilities.

As shown in Figure 1, the majority of SEND students require support for cognition and learning. For instance, Lily, a Year 10 student with dyslexia, initially found it difficult to read from the board, due to the PowerPoint background colour. Additionally, handouts provided in lessons had small, close-together text, which Lily found hard to read. Tailored strategies were implemented through her EHCP, including the provision of pink backgrounds on PowerPoint presentations, larger font sizes and increased spacing between text on handouts. Lily praised the strategies, saying that 'I became more confident in lessons, because I could easily read presentations and handouts.'

Students requiring support with communication and interaction often face challenges with language, communication and imagination, which can affect their interpersonal relationships.

## Four Broad Areas of Need

Figure 1.



- **Communication and Interaction**
- **Cognition and Learning**
- **Social, Emotional or Mental Health**
- **Sensory/Physical**



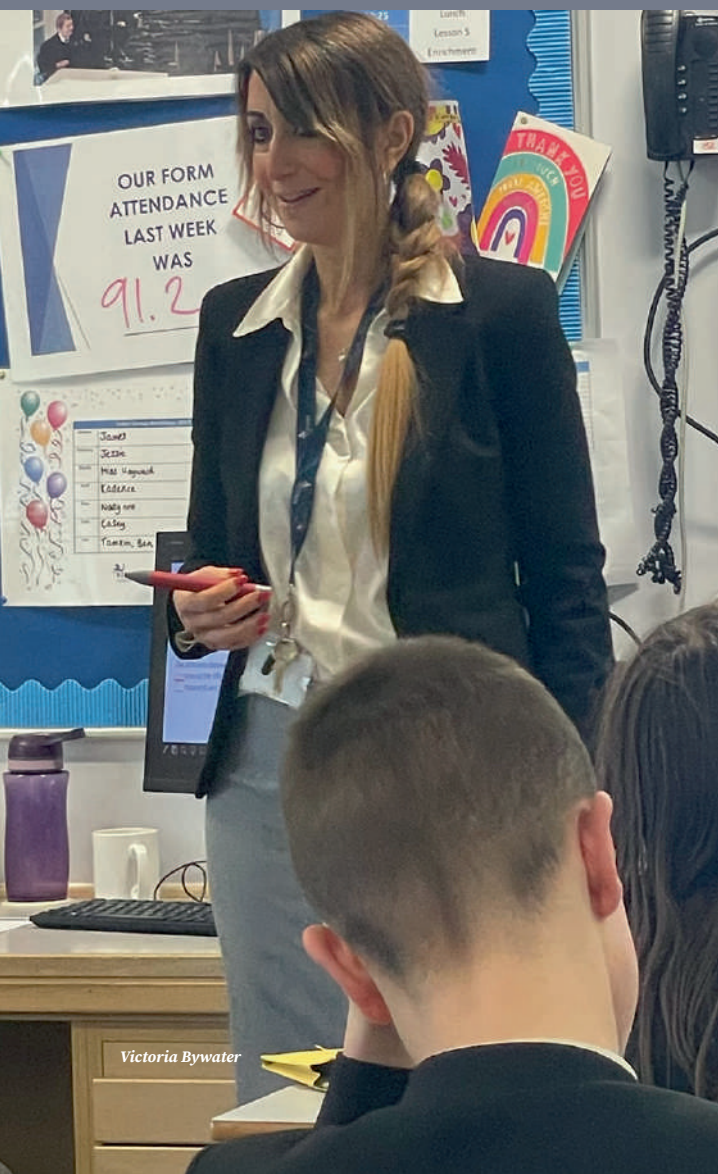


Kenton School's SEND department specialises in effectively integrating students into mainstream education. This was highlighted by Ofsted in the school's recent report, which states: 'Staff are adept at meeting the needs of pupils with SEND. Leaders provide valuable information about what works for individual pupils, and what does not. Teachers use this to help pupils with SEND to achieve well. Pupils who attend the specially resourced provisions benefit from the support that they receive.' (Ofsted Report, 2022.)

Additionally, the unwavering commitment of the SEND department staff has been recognised nationally through the Pearson National Teaching Awards in 2021, when manager of the school's Communication Disorder Additionally Resourced Centre, Rachel Elliott-Downing, won the silver award for Excellence in Special Needs Education.

Rachel led Kenton School's involvement with the Young Enterprise Development Programme, which has broadened the horizons of many Kenton students by exposing them to situations that develop their social skills, teamwork and self-confidence. Kenton School has received regional acclaim for this programme and prepares SEND students for life in and after school, having been named 'best stall', 'best company' and 'best financial model' in recent years.

Kenton School is the largest school in Newcastle, which can pose a challenge for students that require social, emotional or mental health support. EHCP plans are tailored to accommodate a students' challenges – for example, Year 11 student Chloe's EHCP informs the teachers of where to sit her in lessons, asks teachers not to 'cold call' her during lessons and enrolled her in intervention sessions called Talkabout, which has equipped her with the skills to interact with her peers and communicate her needs



Victoria Bywater



Similarly, ML, a Year 8 student with a hearing impairment has an EHCP with strategies such as requests for teachers to look at him when they talk and sit him where he can hear them. Additionally, the SEND support team keeps spare batteries for when his hearing aid runs out of charge.

Victoria Bywater, the school's Head of Learning Support and SEN co-ordinator, is "particularly proud of the dedicated staff in our department, and the collective synergy of their individual skills that contribute to supporting our most vulnerable pupils. Our team is a close-knit, cohesive unit and each member brings a unique set of skills which collectively enhance the support we offer.

From specialised knowledge in speech and language therapy to expertise in communication and interaction, our staff members collaborate seamlessly to address the diverse needs of our students."

Kenton School's high-quality SEND support ensures that every student's needs are met. With dedicated staff and tailored strategies, students can flourish academically and socially, preparing them for life beyond school.



# Co-education positivity

*By Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster of Newcastle Royal Grammar School.*

As I write this, we have been celebrating International Women's Day at the Royal Grammar School and reflecting on the very positive contribution of girls in the RGS community. As part of ensuring there is more representation of women around what was once an all-boys school, we relatively recently hung a portrait of our first female Chair of Governors in the main hall beside one of our more famous alumni, Admiral Lord Collingwood.

**To celebrate more than twenty years of co-education at the RGS, the alumni association have also commissioned a new stained glass window for the library. It was unveiled this week and a number of the first ever girls that came to the RGS returned for the event. One of them also spoke to the whole school in assembly about the strength that her experience at the RGS gave her for an extraordinarily successful subsequent business career.**

Some of the achievements of our more recent alumnae are already noteworthy too. A pair of twins who left last year have a developing career as singer-songwriters, recently coming second out of more than twenty thousand entries in a songwriting competition in Tennessee. Meanwhile, we had three Old Novos taking part in the Oxford and Cambridge Varsity hockey match last week, the Oxford Captain on one side and two representing Cambridge. We can see the same ambition for success evident in our students still at the school; for example, the girls showing leadership in challenging

weather during their Duke of Edinburgh expeditions or captaining a Vex Robotics team going to the National Finals.

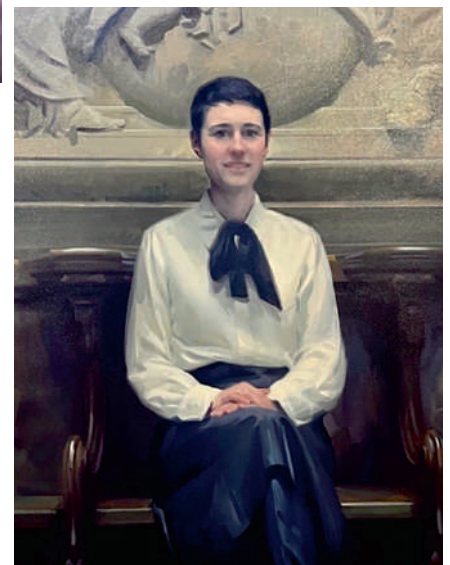
The best boss I ever worked for was a woman, so at a time when concerns about misogyny in young men are very much at the forefront of our minds, our boys need to grow up alongside girls, learning to work with and respect the contribution that girls make. The reverse is also true as girls will find themselves stepping into a workplace alongside their male counterparts and they need to understand and be confident in their own abilities to succeed in whatever career they choose. We should celebrate the power of diversity that co-education brings to our community and the variety of ideas and backgrounds that is our strength.

As someone who went to a single sex school myself (as did my wife), there is no doubt in my mind about the value of co-education to both boys and girls today. It is fundamental for preparing young people for life in the modern world and it is perhaps for that reason that I have only ever worked in co-educational schools. While boys and girls can bring different perspectives, I have enjoyed challenging lazy stereotypes. Educating boys and girls alongside each other is fundamental to the character and success of the RGS today and has led our

culture to evolve in a very positive way, fully in keeping with the sense of belonging and belief in each other that are core pillars of our ethos. Amongst independent schools in the Newcastle area we are the only truly co-educational Senior School and we firmly believe that co-education should be embraced and celebrated by all.

In the interests of balance, I should note at this point that, when it comes round, we will also be marking International Men's Day too.

[www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk](http://www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk)







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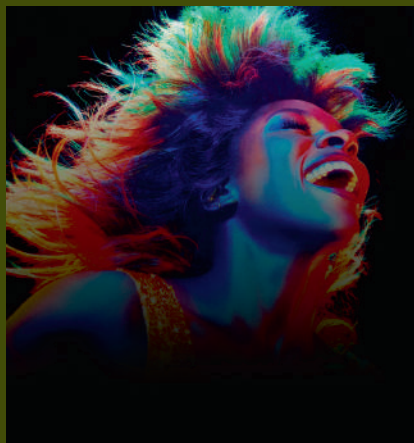
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## Tina Turner musical coming to Sunderland Empire

The producers of the hit West End production, **TINA – THE TINA TURNER MUSICAL** are delighted to announce the first ever UK and Ireland tour, coming to Sunderland Empire from Wednesday 26 March to Saturday 5 April 2025.

The musical continues to run in the West End at the Aldwych Theatre, where it has played for over five years following its world premiere, receiving critical acclaim, and breaking all Box Office records at the venue. It is currently booking until 31 May 2025, making it the longest running show to ever run at the Aldwych. The production is also a global success, with eight productions having opened worldwide since 2018, including on Broadway and across North America, Germany, Spain, Netherlands and Australia. The show is currently on tour in both North America and Australia.

Producer Tali Pelman said, “Tina Turner played to packed out arenas across the UK and Ireland throughout her extensive career. We’re thrilled to now be able to bring her extraordinary story to stages across the UK and Ireland for the first time with **TINA – THE TINA TURNER MUSICAL**, celebrating the life and times of a truly inspirational woman whose story continues to move and elate audiences around the world every night.”

The musical is the story of legendary artist Tina Turner, the twelve-time Grammy Award winning Queen of Rock ‘n’ Roll. Set to the pulse-pounding soundtrack of her iconic hits, including *The Best*, *What’s Love Got To Do With It?*, *Private Dancer* and *River Deep, Mountain High*, the musical is an inspiring true story of a woman who dared to dream fiercely, shatter barriers and defy the bounds of age, gender, and race to conquer the world against all odds.



## Star cast announced for brand new British musical

Celebrating the chart-topping pop tunes of the past four decades, **NOW That’s What I Call A Musical** will feature award winning actress Nina Wadia starring as Gemma, alongside 80’s icon Sonia, playing herself, when the production visits Newcastle Theatre Royal (Tue 8 – Sat 12 Oct 2024).

The brand-new British musical written by award-winning comedian Pippa Evans and directed and choreographed by Craig Revel Horwood, is to visit Newcastle Theatre Royal as part of its first ever UK tour.

Nina Wadia, known for her role as Zainab Masood in BBC One’s *Eastenders* said “I grew up listening to the *NOW* tapes so for me, being a part of this musical is like going home. When I read the script, I immediately fell in love with the characters and Pippa’s story. I can’t wait to get started on my first ever musical.”

“Everybody has memories of where they were when each song was out and what they were doing. We are going to take people back on a nostalgic road of all their favourite songs.” Pop-star Sonia, who’s catchy debut single *You’ll Never Stop Me Loving You* shot to number one in the UK and sold a staggering 350,000 copies, adds.

Relive the playlist of your life through the iconic compilations brand *NOW That’s What I Call Music*, which has sold an estimated 200 million copies worldwide, and get ready for a fun-filled evening bursting with hits from Whitney Houston, Wham!, Blondie, Tears For Fears, Spandau Ballet and so many more.

Tickets can be purchased at [www.theatreroyal.co.uk](http://www.theatreroyal.co.uk) or from the Theatre Royal Box Office on 0191 232 7010.



## 20th anniversary show at the Tyne Theatre

The Red Hot Chilli Pipers have embarked on a world tour to celebrate their 20th anniversary and arrive at the Tyne Theatre and Opera House on Friday May 24th.

There has never been anything quite like The Red Hot Chilli Pipers, from their beginnings in 2002 and a cameo appearance at T in the Park in 2004 with the Darkness to opening the main stage in their own right in 2014. The past twenty years have seen the Red Hot Chilli Pipers become the most famous bagpipe band on the planet...ever! Bagpipes with attitude, drums with a Scottish accent and a show that leaves people with warm hearts and smiles on their faces.

The bands achievements have reached incredible heights with their groundbreaking fusion of traditional Scottish music and rock/pop Anthems which they proudly call “Bagrock”. The Red Hot Chilli Pipers are a genuinely unique experience.

The Chillis have never been more in demand for their infectious style of feel-good music which appeals right across the age range to people all over the world. They have collected together an impressive group of musicians, dancers and singers from Scotland and further afield, many holding World Championship titles and all exceptional performers with impressive credentials and qualifications.

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# In conversation with...

## Paula Mitchell

*Sales and Development Manager,  
Sunderland Empire Theatre.*

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

I've always loved theatre but never appreciated the diverse roles available in the sector, my passion for the performing arts and live entertainment inspired me to pursue a career in this area. I originally had a voluntary position at a local theatre, then moved on to a casual box office assistant and worked up from there.

### Tell us about your current role.

My current role is to collaborate with local businesses to help them make our audience members their clients or customers through exciting sponsorship opportunities. I look after our 1907 Corporate Club, which offers great brand awareness as well as ticket allocations for the year to be used as a unique way of entertaining clients or for treating staff with the best that live theatre has to offer.

### What is your proudest business achievement?

My proudest achievement has occurred recently with the run of Disney's Aladdin, it's always a very busy time when a show of this size visits the theatre but working with a Company that I've admired for many years was a real highlight.

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

Covid dramatically changed the landscape of the sector, and it took a while for producers to regain the confidence to take shows out on the road again which led to a sketchy time with rescheduled shows filling the programme. Fortunately, our audience soon came back in their masses to appreciate the breathtaking experience of live theatre once again which in turn gave producers the assurance to tour shows out of London for us all to enjoy!

### What are you currently working on?

Although we're not even at Summer yet, it's never too early to start thinking about Christmas so I am looking to find a sponsor for this year's Panto. This partnership is



Paula Mitchell

one of our biggest offers as a lucky business can have their logo on panto artwork for all future print and digital ads, show tickets for staff or chosen charities but also script mentions or product placements in the production.

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

I work within the Marketing Team, and I'm constantly blown away with their amazing ideas to market the shows and reach new audiences on socials. We work well together to come up with exciting collaborations to sell the shows while also putting local businesses in the spotlight. It's a joy to come into work every day with this glorious team.

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

I was once handed a post card at a business event: 'People will forget what you said, People will forget what you did, But people will never forget how you made them feel.' I think it shows the importance of building relationships and truly being yourself to build trust and make people feel comfortable.

### What has been your biggest challenge?

My biggest challenge was leaving a company that I had been at for 11 years. You can easily get comfortable within a role and stick with what you know, but it was a gamble that has

paid off and it's allowed me to grow within my career in theatre.

### Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

My hero in business is Sara Davies, not only has she built a fantastic business from a young age, but she shows that you can be a successful entrepreneur while remaining approachable and kind.

Outside of business my hero is my twin sister, Kathryn. I wouldn't be who I am today without her cheering me on in all that I do.

### What does the future hold?

We have some outstanding shows heading our way, most notably Hamilton for 2025! I hope to engage with more businesses and welcome them to our magnificent theatre for these spectacular shows with truly bespoke experiences.

### How do you unwind outside of work?

Ironically, by going to the theatre...so I am in the perfect job!

### Favourite Boxset?

My favourite boxset is Friends; it has been my go-to series for many years and always puts a smile on my face.

[www.atgtickets.com/sunderland](http://www.atgtickets.com/sunderland)





## The Artist's Year

By Mary Ann Rogers

After the longest, wettest winter in living memory, we are finally leaping into spring here at Mary Ann Rogers Gallery.

**The hills and fields are still sodden, but daffodils now line the road up to the gallery, a sea of yellow nodding heads to welcome visitors.**

Inspired by the regular sightings of hares looking to pair up and breed, new hare paintings are well underway. Curlew, lapwings and oystercatchers can be seen and heard every day now around Leam Cottage just as lambs begin to appear.

New opportunities to exhibit in 2024 include the Portsoy Gallery in Aberdeenshire, we are looking forward to a trip up there, plus a new gallery in Oxfordshire which could work out well!

The nature camera has been set up by the river, and we've been very lucky to watch a fox come by quite often, although the otters are still evading us! I would love to be joined in the pool by an otter while I swim - it almost happened once last year, and they are such curious creatures that I fully expect one to pop up one day!

We are looking forward to welcoming visitors over the Easter holidays, which sees an influx of visitors to our area who enjoy the beautiful walks and views in the Rede Valley.

**Mary Ann Rogers Gallery • West Woodburn, Hexham NE48 2SE.**

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## Local salon secures Top Award recognition

**Kathleen Thompson, owner of Mono Hair Design, based in Boldon, Tyne and Wear, is excited to announce that her salon has been recognised amongst the winners of the Fresha Awards 2023.**

The Fresha Awards honour the top beauty and wellness businesses in the UK. Over 100,000 businesses were assessed across several criteria throughout 2023, including the volume of client reviews gathered, average star rating received, and total number of online bookings confirmed.

Mono Hair Design excelled in all areas, securing its place in the exclusive 'Best in Class' tier amongst Fresha's network of partners.

For over 35 years, Mono Hair Design,

has offered a range of customised beauty, hair, and spa treatments and professional advice, dedicated to providing the highest quality of service for their clients who, although based in Boldon, come from all over the region to see their favourite stylist/beautician from their long serving staff.

Kath Thompson said: "This award is a true testament to our team's dedication to our clients. It will help as we look to continue setting the standard in 2024 and beyond."

Fresha's Awards recognises businesses that demonstrate excellence in the beauty industry, acting as a seal of approval for potential clients. Mono Hair Design is proud to be recognised among the top operators, looking forward to welcoming both new and returning clients as they continue to uphold their exceptional standards in the field.

## From R Place To Sangeeta's New Place

**Emily Cromarty and Rachel Holmes, co-owners of the artisan R Place Cafe in North Shields, have joined forces with Sangeeta Chopra, owner of Namaste Taste of India Cafe in the Newcastle Quays Outlet Centre. The collaboration aims to bring a delightful array of handmade cakes and treats to the heart of the revamped Outlet Centre.**

The trio's partnership blossomed after a chance meeting at a coffee morning hosted by the North Tyneside Business Forum. The meeting brought together new members of the Forum to learn about the benefits of the organisation. Sangeeta who is Vice Chair of the North Tyneside Business Forum explained that she had moved premises in the Outlet Centre and that she was looking to expand her menu to sell home-made, sweet treats for her new café.



Sangeeta's move to bigger premises was because of the need to gain additional space to concentrate her business solely on her Indian food due to its popularity amongst shoppers and visiting crew from cruise liners to the region.

"It's amazing how busy I can be when the cruise ships are in. It seems that the crews talk to each other, and I have queues of people waiting for authentic Asian food. I also cater for western palates too hence the supply of the beautiful cakes from R Place," said Sangeeta.



## Million pound start to the year for NE1's Newcastle Restaurant Week

**NE1's hugely popular Newcastle Restaurant Week in January kickstarted the year in style, delivering a £1 million+ boost to over 100 restaurants in the city to make it the most profitable Restaurant Week on record.**

The twice-yearly event offers discounted meals at some of the city's finest restaurants, with this year's deals priced at £15, £20 and £25 per person. A mainstay of Newcastle's events calendar, NE1's Restaurant Week has helped transform two of the quietest weeks of the year into two of the busiest and most profitable. It is not just restaurants that benefit from the initiative, public transport, taxi companies and other hospitality and leisure venues also report an increase in trade during Newcastle Restaurant Weeks in both January and August each year.

NE1's Newcastle Restaurant Week launched in 2011, with 13 of the city's top restaurants taking part. It has continued to grow, with over 100 restaurants now participating. Inspired by a similar scheme in New York, Newcastle's event was the first of its kind in the UK, and its success has influenced many other UK cities to try to replicate the winning formula.

Ben Whitfield, Director of Communications at NE1 Ltd said: "It is fantastic that January's Newcastle Restaurant Week has once again broken the £1 million mark, making it our biggest on record. As one of the most anticipated culinary events in the city, we continue to work hard to ensure both diners and venues have a fantastic week which showcases the industry and the city at its best."

"As well as enjoying discounted meals, people know that NE1's Restaurant Week creates a real buzz in the city which adds to the enjoyment. We are already looking forward to August's event which will play a key part in our Summer in the City events calendar."



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## Matfen Hall recognised in The Times and Sunday Times 100 Best Places to stay in the UK For 2024

**Luxury hotel and country home Matfen Hall has featured prominently in the 100 Best Places to Stay in the UK for 2024, according to a newly-published guide by The Times and The Sunday Times.**

The publisher's experts visited hundreds of properties across the UK to compile the prestigious guide, looking out for "interesting openings and news of established hotels reinventing themselves."

Matfen Hall, which is situated in the heart of Northumberland, was ranked 13th of the 100 UK properties.

The guide referenced that it "included a Game of Thrones-style Great Hall with a staircase built for sword fights." The historic Great Hall has recently undergone a meticulous restoration, returning it to its former glory and breathing new life into its storied walls.

This transformation has been part of a multi-million pound investment programme following Walwick Estate Group's takeover of Matfen Hall in 2020, having acquired the property from the Blackett family.

The expansive Grade II-listed building has undergone an impressive, thoughtful and stylish transformation and makeover, resulting in an enchanting blend of history, luxury, and modernity.

In addition to the tasteful renovation of the Great Hall; a stunning new airy bar with mezzanine has been created as part of the extensive refurbishment, as well as upgrades to The Cloisters Restaurant and Bar and state-of-the-art kitchen.



## Hotel unveils 2025 Wedding in a Box deal

**A popular North East hotel has unveiled its own gift for bridal couples hoping to tie the knot in 2025 – a Wedding in a Box.**

The new wedding offer from the Holiday Inn Washington, at Emerson Road, gives couples the chance to hold their special day at its Beamish Suite. And, not only does the specially created package include all the key elements – from room hire, decorations and catering to evening entertainment – but the price is fixed at just £2025.

Couples will be able to invite up to 40 day and 80 evening guests, who will enjoy a three-course wedding breakfast, evening buffet and sparkling wine with which to toast them. Tables will be dressed with white linen and napkins, table mirrors, tealights and sparkling confetti with white chair covers also included in the deal. The hotel will roll out the red carpet for the couple's arrival and provide a table plan, place cards and the services of a master of ceremonies.

In the evening guests can dance the night away courtesy of the hotel's resident DJ before the happy couple round off their day with an overnight stay at the hotel, with breakfast the following morning.

Couples wishing to personalise their celebrations can also choose from a menu of added extras from additional day or evening guests to balloons, organza chair sashes, arrival canapés and even a fully stocked sweetie table.

The Wedding in a Box 2025 offer is available for new bookings for next year only and Paul Mandeir, general manager at the hotel, said that dates are going quickly. "The Wedding in a Box really is a complete package and for what we believe to be the best price in the region," he said.

## County Durham Grand Marquee perfect place for WOW factor events

**A County Durham hotel renowned for its large scale events, celebrations, teambuilding days and ceremonies has released a number of autumn dates for anyone looking to create an occasion with the wow factor.**

Hardwick Hall Hotel at Sedgfield, County Durham is set in spectacular parkland along with having a number of versatile function rooms, which make it popular among event organisers from across the UK.

And now there is a further option for anyone wanting to hold anything from a conference, dinner, exhibition, family fun day or even an Asian wedding, with a number of dates available at the hotel's Grand Marquee.

The marquee – which can take up to 1500 people seated on round tables – is erected each autumn and hosts the hotel's sellout Oyster Festival as well as a number of charity events.



This year there are some new dates available for anyone wanting to host a large event in picturesque surroundings at a venue easily reached by road, rail and air.

The Grand Marquee has bookings available from Sunday 29 September through to Thursday 3 October.

It comes with a private bar, cloakroom, toilets and its own garden area, with the venue also having a large amount of free parking available.

The hotel is part of Ramside Estates which also has its own catering arm, so providing a range of food options for anyone booking the marquee is also on offer.

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# Meet the GM

*In the return of this popular series of features we talk to...*

## Jeff Hodgson

*General Manager at Lumley Castle Hotel.*

### **Describe your career path so far.**

My first job in the hotel sector was a porter and I have worked my way through the ranks to general manager. Throughout my career, I initially took up an apprenticeship in joinery. My brother worked in the hotel industry though, and he opened my eyes to all the possibilities. I found the industry really interesting and exciting, and I moved down south to join Queens Moat House Hotels, a long time ago!!

### **What do you hope to bring to your new role?**

I like to think that I've improved every hotel I've worked at in some way and hopefully Lumley Castle Hotel will be no different. For me, it's all about the team and the customers. Having a motivated team makes such a difference to the guest experience. The team already have a strong bond and my plan is to ensure that everyone is well-trained, confident and happy within their roles.

### **Tell us about your team?**

I'm really proud of my team. We have 150 team members, 70 of them full-time, but this increases during the summer months to accommodate the increase in bookings. We're a very tight-knit group and everyone works really hard to make sure Lumley Castle Hotel remains one of the best hotels in the North East. There is a lot to keep on top of, but the team do it with a smile on their face.

### **What is the history and unique features of Lumley Castle?**

Lumley Castle was constructed in the late 14th century by Sir Ralph Lumley, featuring a typical medieval architectural style with a stone keep and defensive walls. The castle remained under the Lumley family, a prominent and influential family in Northern England, for several generations. Ownership changed hands multiple times over the centuries, even momentarily owned by the Bishop of Durham. The castle underwent significant renovations in the 19th century, preserving its historic character while refurbishing interiors in the Victorian style. In the 20th century, it was converted into a hotel and event venue. The castle is known for its ghost stories, including one that it's haunted by the ghost of Lily Lumley. Today, Lumley Castle is a popular destination that combines history and modern hospitality, attracting visitors worldwide.

### **What are you currently working on?**

At Lumley Castle Hotel, our primary concern is our guests and the experience they have when they choose to stay with us, whether for overnight stays, dining in our restaurant, or attending special events like our Elizabethan Banquets and Murder Mystery Dinners. In January, we have initiated significant maintenance and minor refurbishments in specific areas to enhance our overall ambiance and improve guest experiences. These improvements include electrical work,

transforming rooms into suites, installing new carpets within the main castle and state rooms, among other enhancements still ongoing.

### **How does the hotel engage with the local community and support local businesses?**

The castle is a hub for community events such as local celebrations and special events, providing a venue for residents to socialize. It also supports the local economy by sourcing goods and services from local businesses for its events and catering. The castle promotes environmental sustainability through initiatives like energy efficiency and waste reduction. We also support local charities and community organizations through donations and providing space for fundraising events. The castle is not just a tourist attraction, but a vital part of the local community contributing to its social, cultural, and economic life.

### **What recommendations would you give for making the most from a stay at the Hotel?**

The Hotel offers guests a unique experience, combining the history and elegance of a medieval castle with top class accommodation and dining. The hotel features exquisite castle state rooms and suites, some with four poster beds, roll top baths, Narnia style wardrobes and sophisticated lounge areas, offering views of parkland or woodland. Guests can dine in the award-winning restaurant or attend the Elizabethan Banquets, an immersive experience featuring entertainment from individuals in traditional costume, fine dining, and an atmosphere reminiscent of the medieval period.

### **What is your biggest challenge currently?**

Keeping the charm and rich history of Lumley Castle intact, while also keeping up with the latest hospitality standards and meeting guest expectations can be quite a juggling act. But finding that perfect harmony between preserving the past and embracing the future is key to the castle's lasting success. The hospitality world is a bustling marketplace, with countless hotels, inns, and guesthouses all hoping to be the top choice for visitors. But Lumley Castle has a unique advantage - its distinct character and continuous commitment to innovation helps it stand out from the crowd, attract guests, and hold its position in the market.

### **How do you like to unwind?**

My job is pretty full on, so I like to unwind by spending time with my family. I think having a work-life balance is really important, so I try to spend as much quality time with them as possible.

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



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bottled at 40% abv for that warm soothing feel of a quality spirit. The caramel is made with unrefined Kosher Salt that gives a fantastic, salted toffee flavour to the rum and makes it a perfect combination simply with ice, a quality ginger ale or even in a hot coffee.

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...this medieval architectural gem, complete with a stone keep and defensive walls, has witnessed many owners yet has always remained close to the Lumley family, a well-known family from Northern England. In the 19th century, the castle underwent a fabulous makeover, with interiors being spruced up in the grand Victorian style, all the while preserving its historical charm. By the 20th century, the castle had morphed into a hotel and event venue. The castle is rather famous for its ghostly tales, especially the haunting of Lily Lumley, which brings curious visitors from all over the world. As a hotel, it offers an enchanting blend of history and luxury. It boasts magnificent state rooms and suites, with some even featuring four-poster beds, roll-top baths, Narnia-style wardrobes, and elegant lounges overlooking serene parkland or woodland.

What's more, guests can indulge in exquisite dining at the award-winning restaurant or immerse themselves in the Elizabethan Banquets, a fun medieval-themed dining experience where entertainers in traditional costumes add to the merriment.



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## You'll love it at Lui's

*By Michael Grahamslaw*

Mother's Day weekend heralded a welcome return to Lui's restaurant on Newcastle's Quayside. The restaurant – formerly Sabatini – has had a modern facelift and is still serving up some of the best Italian food in the city.

**On a bustling Saturday evening, the dining area packed a buoyant atmosphere with an upbeat playlist bringing the good times.**

Now heading into the warmer weather, there's ample outdoor seating too where diners can enjoy al fresco dining or simply sit and sip an Aperol spritz while catching some rays.

Lui's is a family-run venture which means a warm welcome is assured with Mark and his team always on hand.

We kicked off proceedings with an excellent bottle of Pinot Grigio for my son Jack and I and a bottle of Pinot Grigio blush between my wife Lisa and daughter, Holly.

The menu has returned to a pizza/pasta offering with a selection of Lui's signature dishes – old favourites featuring many modern inflections – in addition to from-the-grill specialities.

The meal got off to a promising start with the old classic gamberoni all'aglio – succulent prawns sauteed in a garlic butter.







Next up was the mussels bianco, an Italian classic that showcased the chef's expertise in handling seafood. The mussels were perfectly cooked in a fragrant white wine and garlic broth, which added a touch of sophistication to the dish. The broth was delicious and really lent itself a good dunking of some Italian sourdough.

The girls meanwhile enjoyed a grand sharing plank of Antipasto Sardo - filled with an assortment of Sardinian delicacies, including cured meats, olives, cheeses, and grilled vegetables.

It was a perfect dish for sharing with each element carefully chosen to capture the flavours of Sardinia. The combination of salty cured meats, tangy cheese and smoky grilled vegetables was a winning mix and transported us to the island's sun-kissed shores.

For mains, Jack enjoyed the salmon calabrese, a stunning dish with a spicy calabrese sauce adding a delightful kick without overpowering the natural flavour of the fish.



For pasta lovers, the traditional penne romana was a real must-try and lapped up by the girls. The penne pasta was cooked al dente and tossed in a rich tomato and cream-based sauce with white wine, garlic and mushrooms.

The combination of savoury flavours with the sharpness of the wine created a burst of flavours which made the dish an instant classic.

Last but not least, my pizza calzone was another revelation. The golden-brown crust was filled with mozzarella, ricotta, pepperoni, mushrooms, and tomato sauce. Each bite was a medley of flavours and textures, and the pizza was cooked to perfection, with a crispy crust and gooey melted cheese.

Totally replete, we swerved desserts in favour of some bracing espressos and a round of obligatory limoncellos.

We certainly had something to drink to. The Lui's site has a longstanding association with good quality Italian food, and based on this visit, the local Tyneside icon remains in very good hands.

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



# Places to go...Barrow in Furness

Northern Railway had a special offer in February, if you collected two tokens from a range of local newspapers. If you then downloaded a form from their website and attached the newspaper tokens, you could have a Northern one day dayrover for £10 or a two day (Saturday and Sunday dayrover) for £17.



**So, where to go? South is difficult because there is no Northern service between Darlington and York. I decided to go west, through the Lake District, to the end of what is termed the longest cul-de-sac in England and visit Barrow in Furness, and beyond that, the wild landscape of Walney Island.**

I set off on Saturday morning and discovered that the Cumbrian coast line was closed between Carlisle and Workington owing to a bridge which needed emergency repairs. Accordingly my supposedly Northern only day Rover was valid on the faster and more direct Avanti route via Lancaster. There, I picked up the Northern service via Ulverston to Barrow, arriving on time at 1504. My principle objective was to visit the Dock Museum run by the local council. However since this closed at 1600 I thought it better to check into my hotel, the well-appointed Duke of Edinburgh Hotel and leave the museum for tomorrow. I don't know of any other DofE hotels in the UK, but this one is trying to upgrade from 3\* to 4\* and is also close to the railway station.

Barrow was a small village of 153 people in 1841 but grew rapidly as a result of the ambitions of the Furness Railway and its enigmatic General Manager Sir James Ramsden who arrived in Barrow at the age of 24. For thirty years, during which time the population grew to 18,911, the affairs of the town were effectively directed from his office.

Parts of Barrow are run down, but there are towering examples of Victorian architecture too, not least the Town Hall, pictured. There are plenty of fine brick buildings and the town is largely laid out in the American gridiron plan, with a few necessary nods to geography. Towering above are six adjacent covered shipbuilding hangars in which submarines are still built by BAE Systems, formerly Vickers Armstrong. I found out that Barrow's growth to 70,000 people was so explosive that in the late nineteenth century four identical churches were consecrated on the same day, dedicated to SS. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Only St Mark's remains, and very welcoming the congregation were too.

The Dock Museum has some amazing model ships, many built in Barrow, and tells the story of shipbuilding which replaced steel making in the 1890s. The whole range of history, archaeology, industrial development etc is told with plenty of activities for children. Free admission, with helpful staff and a nice cafe, it is Barrow's top attraction. A bus ride on Stagecoach bus 1 got me out to Walney Island and a bracing and, yes, damp walk along the coast from Biggar Bank to West Shore, devoid of any welcoming hostelries and only a bare shelter to wait for the bus 2 back.

Return was by Avanti West Coast again to Carlisle and East to Newcastle. I made a point of finding the subway (with lifts) between the tracks, at Carlisle station. Since buses home are sparse on Sunday night I took a taxi from Gateshead to Pelton, which cost more than the whole return trip from Newcastle to Barrow. Another one off the bucket list!

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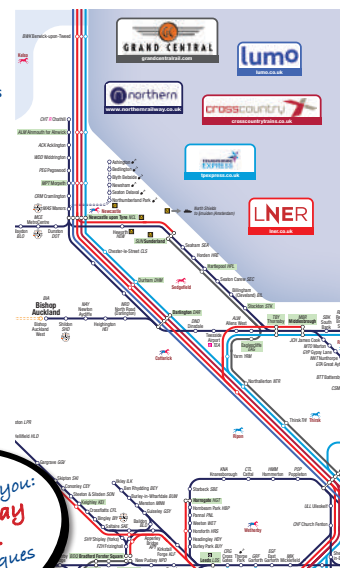
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**maldron** HOTEL  
NEWCASTLE



# Offshore is back onshore!

The Inn Collection Group are celebrating their arrival in the Lancashire coastal resort of Lytham St Annes this March, as Offshore opens as the company's latest seaside spectacular.



**Ideally placed on the Lytham St Annes seafront, Offshore is the group's largest property by number of bedrooms, with the stunning redevelopment of the old Lindum and Carlton hotels, creating an incredible 99-bedroom site.**

Looking over St Annes Pier with the Ribble Estuary beyond and two miles south of Blackpool, the original Lindum Hotel was the group's first site purchased in Lancashire and was bought from operator HY Hotels in November 2020.

A prominent feature of the South Promenade, The Lindum Hotel was previously operated by the Rowley family for more than 50 years.

Extensive remodelling and refurbishment has given a new lease of life to a building that dates back to the Victorian era with the venue unrecognisable from its previous configurations.

Adapting to the pubs with rooms style of hospitality synonymous with The Inn Collection Group, the ground floor spaces have transformed into a warm, welcoming, family-friendly pub.

Boasting 250 covers inside, a large outdoor seating terrace complements this capacity and maximises the venue's shoreline location.







Enabling Offshore to meet the demand of a pub-style food menu, a fully reworked kitchen has also been delivered, with state-of-the-art equipment installed, including a frying range allowing it to serve chip shop favourites with the traditional taste

The revamp has also seen the full refurbishment of all bedrooms, along with additional inventory created by the construction of a ground floor extension.

Speaking as the pub opened its doors for the first time, The Inn Collection Group's head of projects Michael Coulthard said: "It's fantastic to have Offshore back and reopening. It has been an extensive project to bring the site back to life. It has taken time to complete, but we are delighted with the results and look forward to having it serving the towns of Lytham and St Annes.

"The transformation from hotel to pub has seen a lot of work carried out in changing the downstairs spaces and kitchen areas, but there has been some reconfiguration of the rooms side too, with additional ones created and a new lift installation in the old Lindum side of the building.

"The whole thing has been pretty much rebuilt with the exception of some of the structure and that has brought areas that had become almost redundant back into use for things like staff rooms and food preparation.



"That's an exciting part of the job and I'm looking forward to seeing Offshore enjoy a new lease of life."

Just two miles from the bright lights of Blackpool, Lytham and St Annes are nestled along a picturesque stretch of coastline lined with well-tended lawns, a boating lake and pretty parks.

With an expansive sandy beach, Victorian pier, historic windmill, a 'royal' golf course and stylish independent shops, the dual seaside towns serve to remind us why the British seaside is so beloved.

Offshore is within easy access to the key attractions of the two towns, including the golden sands of St Anne's beach, the peaceful tranquillity of Ashton Gardens and the Georgian grandeur of Lytham Hall.

It is also well placed to serve as a base for visiting nearby Blackpool and attractions including the world-famous Pleasure Beach, Tower and new for 2024, Showtime, a brand new attraction celebrating the town's reputation as a capital for entertainment.

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





# Why two key businesses have renewed their lease at Morpeth's popular Sanderson Arcade

Two key businesses have just renewed their lease at Sanderson Arcade – and here you can find out more about what they do and why they love Morpeth's premier shopping centre!



Interview with **Linda Lowther**,  
founder of Advice4Business North East

## How did the business get started?

I used to work as a finance director for a number of companies including major retailers and IT companies and I was spending a lot of time on the road. I thought to myself 'Do I want to be doing 50,000 miles a year in the car at 50-years-old?' And the answer was no, so I decided to go my own way, with 30+ years of Senior Management experience and a business degree from Newcastle University set up Advice4Business North East in 2003.

## What does the business do?

We are a team of specialists/experts who provide advice and support to businesses in a range of areas including financial planning, growth strategies and team building through one-to-one mentorships, workshops and seminars.

## What is the best thing about your job?

Helping other businesses to realise their dreams, grow and fulfil their potential. A lot of companies want to expand and create new jobs but don't always know how to – that is where we can come in and help. A lot of companies in Morpeth have been with us for even or eight years so we are a trusted source of help.

## What do you like about Sanderson Arcade?

I love the cosmopolitan feel of Morpeth as a whole and Sanderson Arcade is a big part of that. In-fact I like it so much I moved here from Alnwick and I don't think I will ever move again, I'm here for life. I very often meet clients in the cafes and restaurants we have here including Barluga, Martino Lounge and Central Bean Coffee House, and they always say how much they love it. I also like hunting for a bargain in the clothing shops including Mint Velvet and Phase Eight.

## Tell us a fun fact about you or your business.

People visiting the centre will probably recognise my two Cockapoo dogs Indi and Bailey, who I often have in the office. In-fact they're both by my feet now as I'm talking!

For more information visit [www.advice4businessne.com](http://www.advice4businessne.com)



Interview with **Sarah Gilmour**,  
founder of SG Aesthetics

## How did the business get started?

I have been a registered general nurse for nearly 30 years and used to work at the Royal Victoria Infirmary in Newcastle before working for the Harley Medical Group and SKiN on Grey Street. I have always had an interest in cosmetic surgery and this led to me opening SG Aesthetics at Sanderson Arcade seven years ago.

## What does the business do?

We specialise in non-surgical aesthetic practice and can offer patients a wide range of treatments including wrinkle-relaxing injections, dermal fillers, fat dissolving, facial sculpting, and much more. Each patient undergoes a free consultation before their treatment that includes a medical and psychosocial assessment to fully assess the patient's appropriateness for treatments.

## What is the most popular treatment?

I would say wrinkle-relaxing injections which reduce the appearance of those problem lines caused by muscle movement. It is temporary but can last up to about six months.

## What is the most important thing patients need to know about aesthetic treatments?

Always make sure you see a registered professional such as a nurse, doctor, or dentist that has all of the relevant registration and insurance certifications in place and displayed on site. It is also important that you see the practitioner in a clinical setting that you can return to if you need to discuss anything further, and not someone who could be there one day and gone the next.

## What is the best thing about your job?

I have a lot of loyal patients who are all very dear to me. I love seeing how the treatments can help them to feel better about themselves and improve their self-esteem.

## What do you like about Sanderson Arcade?

I love how seasonal the centre feels, so for example when it's Easter the Easter Bunny will be out, and all the festive decorations are up over Christmas. There is always a real buzz about the place. In addition, not everyone feels comfortable about other people knowing they have had a cosmetic treatment. The position of the clinic is discreetly located with car parking extremely accessible.

For more information visit [sgaesthetics.co.uk](http://sgaesthetics.co.uk)

## Office enquiries

Any interested parties looking to take office space at Sanderson Arcade can contact Olly Jansen at Dransfield Properties Ltd at [olly.jansen@dransfield.co.uk](mailto:olly.jansen@dransfield.co.uk)

## Come visit us

The shopping centre is open 7 days per week with onsite parking at Stanley Terrace, 3 hours FREE with parking disc (Monday – Saturday) and all-day Sunday.

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





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Staithes House

## A home away from home

By Michael Grahamslaw

If you're a business professional working away, a serviced apartment may provide a worthy alternative to a hotel.

**The experience provides state-of-the-art amenities with the spaciousness and comfort of home.**

One business providing such a service is the family-run Week2Week apartments which boasts a portfolio of hand-picked apartments in and around Newcastle for all your business staycation needs.

I had the pleasure of visiting one such apartment for Northern Insight readers.

The Week2Week collection spans a host

of prime locations across Newcastle City Centre, the Quayside, Gosforth, Jesmond, Tynemouth, Sunderland and South Shields.

We stayed in Staithes House on Gateshead Quays which is available for a range of stays from days to months at a time.

A five minute drive from the centre of Newcastle, it's conveniently located with easy access to the Metrocentre, A1 and Newcastle Airport.

On an early spring afternoon, I pitched up with my wife Lisa and daughter, Holly. We were immediately impressed by the quality of the accommodation, modern in style and replete with open-plan kitchen, large living area, four bedrooms and dining space.

The house was well-equipped too. From flat screen TV's and smart speaker to dishwasher and all self-catering amenities.

With patio doors leading out onto a riverside sun terrace, it really struck us as a sumptuous home-from-home perfect for families or those seeking extra space.

Of course, with hospitality, it's all about the little details.

We were impressed to find a range of complimentary groceries in addition to

luxury chocolates, fresh milk and a bottle of wine which we would put a dent in later.

Enveloped in Staithes House's cosy embrace, we enjoyed a relaxing 'reset' afternoon reclining in front the TV and weekend newspapers. Holly meanwhile took full advantage of the Quayside's running routes with a breezy 5K along the banks of the Tyne.

After a quick blast in the apartment's rain shower, we changed for dinner and taxied into Newcastle. While Staithes House has everything you need for a home-cooked meal, there's also many top restaurants within touching distance should eating-out take your fancy.

After a slap-up Mother's Day (eve) meal in fine spirits, we shared a toast to our second home. Staithes House is a class act.

Discerning business travellers seeking comfort and luxury need not worry with this stylish space.

A serviced apartment provider delivering on all fronts – on any given week.

**For more information, visit [week2week.co.uk/locations/gateshead-quays](https://www.week2week.co.uk/locations/gateshead-quays) 0191 281 3129**







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We provide a flexible and fuss-free personal check-in service ensuring that they keys are handed to you safely on your arrival. Our friendly team all have expert local knowledge and can help with any queries you have during your stay.

### WELL-BEING

Staying in a Week2Week apartment provides you with the perfect space to both work and relax, ensuring you are well rested for the day ahead! Whether you are staying alone or with friends and family, you can enjoy many home from home comforts, including kitchen and washing facilities and a relaxation area. Some properties also have outdoor space too.

### HOUSEKEEPING

We are happy to arrange cleaning and supply fresh linen and towels. We cater for team changes too.



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# Exploring the Medina of Marrakech

By Laura Fleming

Marrakech is a vibrant Moroccan city situated to the west of the great Atlas Mountains. Famous for its old quarter, the Medina, I knew I had to focus my time exploring the gorgeous architecture and bustling markets within the Medina walls.



*Le Jardin Secret*

After leaving the comfort of my friends in Agadir, I was anxious and eager to start heading Northwards through the Atlas Mountains to enjoy a couple of days in Marrakech. The four-hour bus ride was filled with inquisitive conversation and a brief Arabic lesson with my friendly Moroccan neighbour, himself on his way home to Casablanca. The sun had been set for many hours by the time I arrived at my hostel in the centre of Marrakech's Medina, so luckily for me the kind host, Mustafa, made some delicious Moroccan mint tea and promised that he would take me around the famous markets the following morning.

Waking up to the beautiful, sun lit hostel and a humongous breakfast of local delicacies, it was not long before we were out weaving the intricate streets of the UNESCO world heritage site, Marrakech's Medina. The loud intensity of the tightly packed streets and the vibrant colours of the different buildings, paired with the smells of a range of delicious cuisines being cooked up nearby was all an absolute treat for the senses.

After walking a while, we stepped out into the famous Jamaa el Fna market square to see a plethora of market stalls, including one with the widest variety of olives I had ever seen. The music from the snake charmers' flutes echoed around the square as I quickly lost my bearings on where we had made our entrance, so I was grateful for Mustafa's insight.

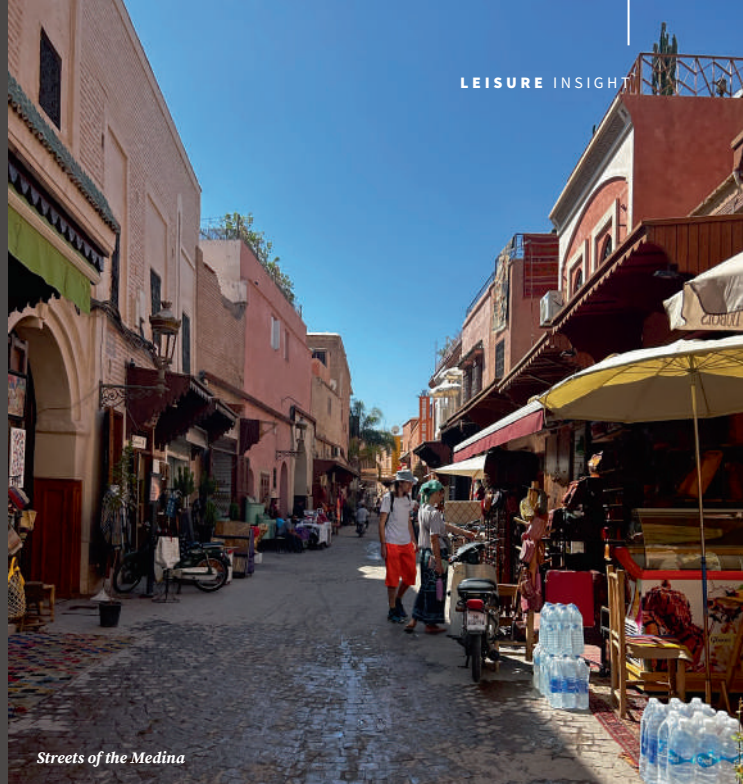
*Laura at the Photography Museum*



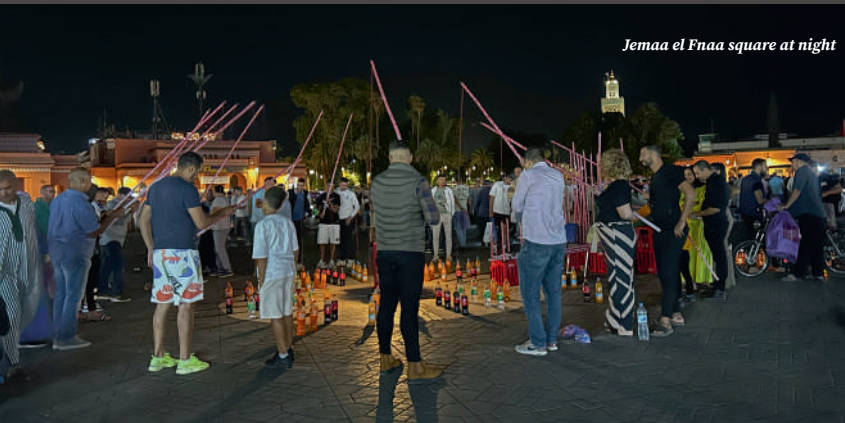


Continuing our walk by delving into the traditional market streets, the Souks, I was mesmerised by the skills and creativity at some of the stalls. One man who caught my attention was fashioning chess pieces by operating a complicated looking tool with his feet, and after watching this spectacular show I had to seriously deliberate whether I could fit a hand-crafted chess set into my backpack. After the impulsive side of me won that battle, we found ourselves outside the unsuspecting Ben Youseff Madrasa. Named after the Ben Youseff Mosque, the oldest Mosque in Marrakech, this historic building possessed some of the most immense décor I had ever seen. The impressive Madrasa was founded in the 14th century and was a college for theology students up until 1960. I was able to explore the tiny meditation and prayer rooms that surround the central courtyard and left with a sense of complete wonder.

After a quick food break in a side street by Jamaa el Fna, I was keen to visit a recommendation from a friend, the Maison de la Photographie de Marrakech. The beautiful museum housed incredible photographs dating back to the early 19th century, which gave me an insight into how the ancient city ran throughout the centuries. As well as a wide range of photographs, the museum exhibited a film about the Berber people, an ancient indigenous group pre-dating the Arabs in North Africa. The film followed a Berber family in the Atlas Mountains, and we were able to watch them make incredibly beautiful jewellery and rugs from the natural materials around them.



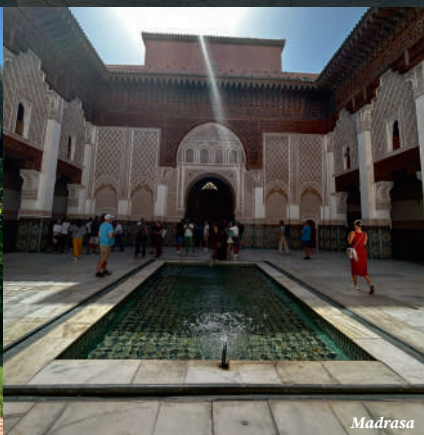
Streets of the Medina



Jemaa el Fnaa square at night



Le Jardin Secret



Madrasa

The next day, I was keen to take a break from the busy streets of the Medina and spend some time in Le Jardin Secret. A serene oasis in the form of two Riads, the place offered a gorgeous display of tropical plants from around the world surrounding intricate water fountains. A Riad is a traditional Moroccan house surrounding a central courtyard, which would typically have a fountain in the middle.

The courtyards of Le Jardin Secret offered a cool, green reclus by comparison of the busy streets beyond the walls of the Riad, which I enjoyed immensely whilst sipping on more mint tea. I was fascinated by the symbolism of water in the gardens, as water is considered to be not only a sign of wealth, but also holds spiritual properties to Muslim civilization. Literature throughout the gardens showcased the hydraulics history of the 'Khettara', a ground drainage tunnel developed in the late eleventh century to supply water to mosques and other significant buildings, Le Jardin Secret included. Refreshed by this calming sanctuary, I stepped out of the Riad and back into the lively streets of the Medina, not knowing what wonders I would find next.

Marrakech has so much to discover, I would strongly recommend visiting to soak up the rich culture of the incredible Medina.

Chess pieces being carved in the souks



## Travel information

*You can find direct flights to Marrakech from major UK airports such as London Gatwick and Manchester on Jet 2. (Jet2.com)*

*Go to [visitmarrakech.com](http://visitmarrakech.com) to learn about the many experiences you can have in and around Marrakech.*

*There are many accommodation options available, I stayed in Riad Dia hostel ([riad-dia.hotelsmarrakech.net](http://riad-dia.hotelsmarrakech.net)), however hotel Riad Atay offers more luxury, and is still located in the Medina. ([www.riad-atay.com](http://www.riad-atay.com))*

*As Morocco is a predominantly Muslim country, it is advisable to dress modestly as a sign of respect. Notably covering your shoulders and knees.*

*For travel within Morocco, SupraTours runs an efficient service, and tickets can be purchased at [marrakechtickets.co.uk](http://marrakechtickets.co.uk), or in person at major bus stations.*





David Fairlamb

## Shaping your body and mind

Firstly I would like to congratulate Mike and his team on reaching 100 Editions!

**Exercise is not just about shaping your body it's also about nurturing your mind. The huge connection between physical activity and mental health has been extensively researched and validated, the benefits of exercise extend way beyond just physical fitness. In fact, the positive impact on mental health is so significant that bringing exercise into your daily routine becomes not just a suggestion, but a real necessity for your overall health and wellbeing.**

One of the most immediate effects of exercise on mental health is its ability to alleviate stress and anxiety. The endorphins act as natural painkillers and mood elevators, effectively reducing stress levels and promoting a sense of well-being. Moreover, exercise serves as a distraction, shifting your focus away from worries and negative thoughts, allowing you to gain perspective and clarity.

Regular exercise is also a strong antidote to depression. Studies have shown that those who maintain an active lifestyle are less likely to experience symptoms of depression compared to those with a sedentary lifestyle..

Regular exercise has also been linked to improved memory, sharper focus, and faster processing speed. It also reduces the risk

of cognitive decline and neurodegenerative diseases, preserving brain health well into old age.

Exercise also fosters self-awareness and body appreciation, helping you develop a positive self image and greater self confidence, also the social aspect of exercise, such as group classes or team sports, provides opportunities for social interaction and support promoting better self-esteem.

Despite the overwhelming evidence supporting the mental health benefits of exercise, many people still fail to recognise how important it is. One reason for this oversight may be the thought process that exercise is solely for physical fitness or weight loss. Our often hyper focus on outward appearances often overshadows the huge impact of exercise on mental health. Our busy lifestyles and other priorities, I feel, deter many from prioritising exercise viewing it as an extra, rather than a necessity.

Of course some may struggle with

motivation or lack the knowledge to incorporate exercise into their daily routine effectively. The perceived barriers, such as time constraints or financial limitations, can push some away from engaging in regular physical exercise. Additionally, mental health conditions such as depression or anxiety can leave many with little energy and motivation, making it challenging to initiate or sustain an exercise regimen.

Overcoming these barriers is essential, as the benefits of exercise for mental health are too significant to ignore. It may take a big mindset shift to establish new habits but by incorporating simple activities like walking or stretching into your daily routine but gradually increasing intensity and duration as you build momentum can be life changing. Seek support from friends, family, or professionals if needed, and explore different forms of exercise to find what brings you that joy and fulfilment.

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



### David's summing up...

*Prioritising your mental health is not selfish, it's an investment in your overall well-being, quality and longevity of life.*



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David Fairlamb

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# Sarah's putting her foot down - again



Sarah Hall

**Sarah Hall comes from a family of motor racing fanatics...and she's looking forward to another successful season on some of the UK's top circuits.**

**Last year was Sarah's first full season of racing and, out of a field of 24, she came 12th which is a terrific achievement.**

But she'd like to do even better in 2024. We caught up with Sarah before she headed off to her first racing weekend of the season.

"I compete in a series called Focus Cup," said Sarah. "All of the drivers are in lightly modified 180bhp Ford Focus cars, and the key feature is that the cars are identical so it's a case of drivers pitting their skills against other drivers."

It's hugely exhilarating to race of some of the UK's top circuits like Silverstone, Brands Hatch, Donington, Oulton Park, Snetterton and, here in the region, at Croft which is my favourite circuit because it's close to where I live and is the place where I've spent many happy hours since I was a child."

Her father, Ken, is a well known face amongst the North East motorsport fraternity...he was an accomplished rally driver...so it's no surprise that Sarah has followed in his tyre tracks.

And because of her success she's keen to promote motorsport to other women in the region.

"As I grew up and got more involved in helping my father and then becoming a racing driver in my own right, I was conscious in the early days of how rare it was to see any other females either working as pit crews or as drivers. Thankfully that is changing and I'd encourage anyone, especially women, no matter how old they are, to get involved. Last season there were three women competing in our championship and we have a female mechanic and we are all treated as equals and really have a great time in such a friendly paddock. It'd be wonderful for others to get involved because this level of motorsport is more accessible than people may think."

The Focus Cup is a brilliant place to start because it's an arrive and drive competition. You don't need to make a large investment and commitment of building a car and transporting it – they take care of everything! The car, fuel, tyres, mechanics, maintenance and moving the car from circuit to circuit, are all taken care of by the team.

You simply turn up with your racing suit and helmet and enjoy it. And there is an abundance of peers about to give you advice on safety gear and gaining a racing licence. You have so much support as a rookie, you are given the same respect as the experienced racers.

You can try one race or you can enter for the entire season. Depending on which circuit you opt for, a single race could cost from £1750 or you can go for the whole 7-round series for £21,000. That's a whole season with seven test days, seven qualifiers and fourteen races. Testing takes place on a Friday

followed by qualifying on Saturday and then two races throughout the day."

Oh and well done to Sarah for thinking about the environment. One of her sponsors for this season is Carbon Positive Motorsport. They offset Sarah's entire racing carbon footprint for the season. It's a step in the right direction for keeping motorsport sustainable and paving the way for future generations to enjoy a sport that so many are passionate about.

Driving is plainly something that is in Sarah's blood. Not only does she enjoy motor racing, she also runs the Teesside Driving Academy. She can teach everything from basic driving lessons, to advanced driving and performance racing standard. She also focusses on teaching drivers how to be safer on the road.

"I'd encourage anyone to give motor racing a try. It's huge fun, makes you into a better driver overall, and it's not only a case of you competing against other drivers, you're competing against yourself...trying to set a quicker time...trying to get a better placing than in your previous race."

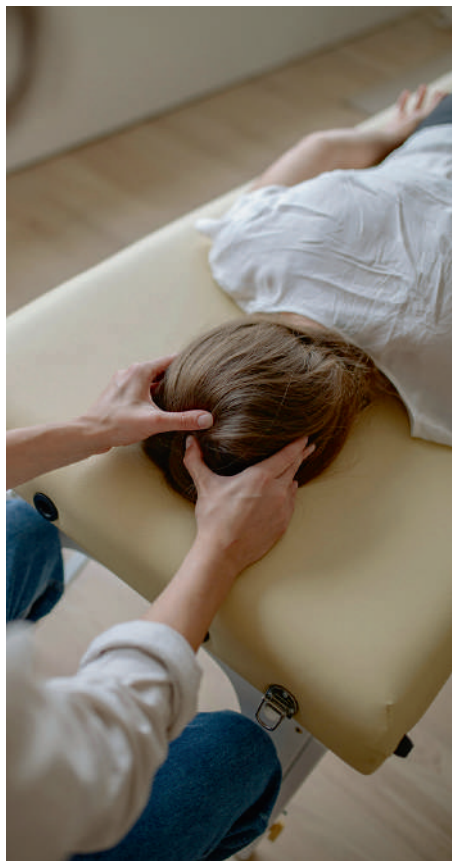
Sarah's a great example to other women and girls who perhaps felt that motorsport wouldn't be the sort of place you'd be accepted.

**Go on...give it a go...careful though...you might find Sarah Hall looming in your rear-view mirror.**

**Want to contact Sarah? Check out her Instagram, Facebook and TikTok pages @sarahhallmotorsport**



# Gosforth family chiropractic's top five benefits of chiropractic adjustment



**Chiropractic practices are becoming increasingly popular, and the benefits just keep on coming!**

Doctor Jacob Palmer from Gosforth Chiropractic talks to us about his top five benefits of chiropractic adjustment, the first being the provision of powerful pain relief, the most common benefit.

Studies have shown that manipulating the spine proved to be more effective in relieving neck pain than medication. Chiropractic care offers pain relief in an abundance of ways which is why regular appointments are recommended.

The second benefit is that it helps to reduce allergies and asthma. The reports studying this have testified and confirmed that chiropractic care helps to improve symptoms of asthma and reduces the need for medication, increasing the quality of life in the long run. Gosforth Family Chiropractic use a wide range of treatment methods for proper, inclusive health management.

Palmer's third benefit is that it could be of great help after a work or car accident. Chiropractic adjustment is not only helpful for pain relief, but for reducing inflammation. For injuries such as whiplash or stiffness, relieving yourself of inflammation and pain is essential. Consultations are vital for gaining

knowledge of the patient and their incident and creating a pain management plan with the experienced staff at Gosforth Family Chiropractic.

Benefit number four is that it helps women during pregnancy. Throughout pregnancy, the body goes through significant changes, and this impacts the nervous system as well as putting a lot of pressure on the spine. By having regular chiropractic care during the pregnancy, it could help ensure a safer, easier delivery as well as a healthy child.

The fifth benefit is digestion improvement. Palmer discussed that the stomach and its functions are being controlled by the nerves running through the spine, explaining why it's important to have proper alignment of the vertebrae. Improper alignment leads to problems such as gas, acid reflux and heartburn. Consistent chiropractic sessions are an easy fix to avoid these problems while simultaneously offering great health benefits.

Palmer concluded: "Taking the time out to have chiropractic care is worth investing into because of the tremendous benefits it offers."

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



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Barry Speker

## The Last Word

That the media should have devoted so much time and attention to the Princess of Wales's Mothers Day photograph was disappointing although not surprising. The Princess had announced she would be out of circulation for three months to recuperate from abdominal surgery - surely a difficult time for the family, including Grandpa being treated with cancer.

Having issued a picture with the three children, no doubt she hoped this would be a reassuring image in her absence. Despite her acknowledged skill as an enthusiastic amateur photographer, her now admitted 'editing' of the photo exposed the image to scrupulous analysis and a plethora of conspiracy theories as well as a humiliating admission of inept photoshopping. Perhaps time to leave public photography to the professionals.

The other royals are getting on with their work, including Queen Camilla at the Women of the World reception at Buckingham Palace to celebrate International Women's Day. The sponsor, Mattel, produced Barbie dolls in the image of Mel B, Dame Helen Mirren and of Queen Camilla, who said the doll had taken 50 years off her life! Not sure it will be a big seller. Some five months after October 7, when

Hamas terrorists broke through the Gaza border to enact murder, rape, massacre and abduction, the United Nations has finally verified the terrorist group's widespread sexual violence against women.

The UN investigators discovered 'clear and convincing' evidence of 'rape sexualised torture, cruel, inhuman and degradation treatment' against hostages.

This included videos filmed by Hamas themselves and multiple witness accounts of the atrocities. Despite this it took until late November for UN Women, the United Nations' women's rights agency to address the issue. A surreal form of denial was permitted to flourish along with Hamas' continued denial.

All this is consistent with the UN's demonstration of extreme contempt for Israeli human rights and of many, particularly on the left, who have been conspicuously silent on the subject of Hamas's enthusiasm for rape and other brutality.

During the Chancellor's speech he described multi-million pounds of spending here and massive public savings there - tax and growth. What was not set out or even mentioned was the number of people estimated to be living in the UK - the actual population, surely relevant in any calculation.

The official statistics suggest that there has been an increase from 61.3million on the eve of the financial crisis to something above 68million, a rise of 10% in 16 years.

In this period there has been a banking meltdown, departure from the EU and the economic catastrophe of Covid. Yet people are still surging into the UK. It seems the population is growing much faster than other large European economies.

The projections of the Office of Budget Responsibility are based on the actual premise that they do not know how many people there are in the country.

We may have to prepare for an increase of two million per decade. In the very long term this rate of immigration may prove to be a positive, to supplement the workforce - provided that there is not a rush to go to Rwanda.

The recent Sunday Times survey on the best places to live in the UK produced some surprises. North Berwick east of Edinburgh came out on top, the first time the accolade has gone to Scotland. All credit to the proud capital of our outstanding golfing region.



Not so clear that Leeds should be voted the best place to live in the North and North East.

We can celebrate that two North East areas were short-listed among the best places to live in the country, namely Whitley Bay and Heaton. Whitley Bay was described as 'a desirable enclave for water-loving families' and commended for its schools and transport links, with special mention of Park View as 'one of the most likeable shopping streets in the land'.

As for Heaton the judges said it has 'just the right amount of grit and glamour' and was praised for its 'mix of Bohemian café culture and mix of independent foodie jewels'.

A useful reminder of what we have on our own doorstep.

*And finally my congratulations to Mike Grahamslaw on this being the 100th issue of Northern Insight. I have been with him from the start and before. It is to his immense credit that the magazine is an outstanding quality asset to the North East. Long may it flourish.*

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