

NORTHERN

# INSIGHT

May 2024

Issue 101



## **From Connection to Culture: Bonded's Journey Building an Award-Winning Digital & Media Agency**

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

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## We've Been JAMMING for 20 Years!

JAM Marketing, a dynamic full-service marketing agency based in the North East, proudly celebrates two decades of creativity, innovation, and client success.

Established in 2004 by founder Jackie Marston, the agency has emerged as a powerhouse in the marketing industry, serving clients across the country and abroad.

Jackie Marston founded JAM Marketing after recognising the limitations of her role as a marketing manager at the Newcastle Arena. Fuelled by a passion for creativity and a drive for excellence, she embarked on a journey to redefine marketing standards and exceed client expectations.

Over the past 20 years, JAM Marketing has secured some of the most prestigious clients, earning a reputation for its innovative approach and commitment to going above and beyond for clients. From design and print to digital marketing and event management, the agency offers a comprehensive suite of services designed to elevate brands and drive results.

In 2017, JAM Marketing welcomed Geeta Patel-Ral as a joint owner, marking a significant milestone in the agency's history. Geeta's transition from an esteemed client and co-owner of the award-winning Peace & Loaf restaurant to a valued member of the JAM Marketing team reflects the agency's dedication to fostering strong relationships and embracing new opportunities.

Geeta Patel-Ral said, "The timing was right for me to take a different career path and as Jackie and her team had worked for my business for many years, I was more than aware of their capabilities, so when I was given the opportunity to join, I didn't have to think twice."

Reflecting on the agency's journey, Jackie Marston remarked, "The last 20 years have flown by, and although it was a leap of faith at the time, I have no regrets. Despite facing challenges such as the impact of Covid-19, our commitment to delivering exceptional service has remained unwavering."

Despite being a small team of nine, JAM Marketing prides itself on delivering unparalleled service to its clients. With a focus on client satisfaction and retention, the agency prioritises ongoing training and development for its staff to ensure they remain at the forefront of industry trends and advancements.

Jackie Marston concluded, "We've always operated under the mantra that the answer is yes, now what is the question. This philosophy, coupled with our dedication to staff training and client satisfaction, has enabled us to cultivate long-standing relationships with our clients. Here's to the next 20 years of innovation, growth, and success!"

As JAM Marketing celebrates its 20th anniversary, the agency looks forward to continuing its legacy of excellence and shaping the future of marketing for years to come.

For information on the services that JAM marketing can offer your business, call 0191 917 0819 or email [info@jamprintsmarketing.co.uk](mailto:info@jamprintsmarketing.co.uk).  
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**SUNDAY 16TH JUNE: LANCASHIRE LIGHTNING**

**FRIDAY 21ST JUNE: YORKSHIRE VIKINGS**

**FRIDAY 5TH JULY: WORCESTERSHIRE RAPIDS**

**FRIDAY 12TH JULY: NOTTS OUTLAWS**

**SUNDAY 14TH JULY:  
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE STEELBACKS**

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# Foreword

## FOREWORD

Welcome to the May edition of Northern Insight.

Following the wonderful feedback to our 100th edition we return with another vibrant, content packed issue.

Our cover stars are Digital and Media agency Bonded who have achieved remarkable success in a short space of time.

Within our business pages look out for our new Accountant of the Month feature.

Elsewhere we highlight the wonderful work of The Great North Air Ambulance and also feature exciting social coverage from Durham Crickets Hall of Fame Dinner and The Red Sky Ball.

On our travels, Stuart Forster explores Los Angeles via public transport.

*In summary a great way to kickstart the next chapter in the Northern Insight journey.*

*Thank you to all concerned for the fantastic support. Till next month...*

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



Edition Sponsors



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## The People's Kitchen's founder's legacy sails on



Aberdeen based North Star Shipping has named one of their support vessels, "The Alison Kay." The vessel is dedicated to honouring the legacy of Alison Kay, the founder of The People's Kitchen in Newcastle.

North Star Shipping is dedicated to providing vital support to the offshore industry through a range of services, including rescue operations, patrols, and supply missions. Their commitment extends to the offshore wind sector, where they play a crucial role in transporting personnel and materials to key installations such as the Dogger Bank Wind Farm. The company has recently expanded its fleet to include vessels specifically designed to support the Offshore Wind sector.

One such new vessel is the Grampian Derwent. Her daughter support vessel "Alison Kay" provides additional assistance for the ship's operations.

The naming of the Alison Kay is a great honour for The People's Kitchen as trustee Maggie Pavlou explains:

"Alison Kay started The People's Kitchen more than 30 years ago and her legacy has made a significant impact on the community, providing essential support and care to those in need.

It is fantastic that her name lives on and will be seen by people on the River Tyne when the Grampian Derwent docks. We welcome the association with North Star Shipping and are grateful not only for the naming of the vessel but also the practical help the company is giving us too."

## Sunderland bid launches affiliate scheme to support more businesses

Businesses across Sunderland which are not part of the business improvement district can now get access to a whole range of benefits, thanks to the launch of an affiliate scheme.

At present only levy payers have access to the full range of services and advantages which come from being part of the BID, although businesses across the city which don't fall into that category have still been able to participate in citywide events and initiatives.

With the launch of the new scheme, those who sign up will be able to take part in networking opportunities in unique settings, get volunteering opportunities for staff and can express their opinions on decisions which will help shape the future of the city.

Affiliate members will get invited to a range of events, training sessions and business seminars as well as being able to participate in relevant public relations activities.



## Gas training expands operations to meet growing demand

North Shields based Ignite Gas Training, a leading provider of gas and plumbing training, has implemented a significant expansion of its operations to accommodate the increasing demand for skilled engineers and apprenticeships in the industry.

Founded by Emma Garrick and her husband Brett, Ignite Gas Training has been a trusted name in the training and assessment field for nine years providing high-quality training and assessment services and support to those new to the gas industry as well as to existing engineers.

Acquiring the work space adjoining their existing premises, the newly expanded facilities have effectively doubled their capacity and now include additional classrooms, practical workshop bays, and specialised areas for plumbing, gas, and renewable energy training. The expansion aligns with Ignite Gas Training's commitment to staying at the forefront of industry developments, preparing engineers for the evolving landscape of heating and plumbing systems.

Ignite Gas Training has also recently taken on three new full-time team members, expanding their compliment to 11. The company's dedication to quality training, customer satisfaction, and compliance with industry regulations has earned them recognition and positive reviews from learners and employers alike.

As well as established clients and learners from local authorities and private gas and plumbing engineers, the business is now training more people than ever thanks to a large national contract from domestic appliance repair company Pacifica. Learners are travelling to the North Shields base from all over the UK.



A number of leading companies have already signed up including SSE Energy Solutions, Building Design North, MMC Research and Marketing and Penshaw View Training.

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## Five new tenants for The Quadrus Centre

**A popular business hub has secured five new tenants as businesses continue to flock to South Tyneside.**

The Health Insurance Group, Urban River, Apex Time Critical, ILM Associates and XIX Developments have all opened new offices at The Quadrus Centre over recent months.

The recent lettings take the total number of businesses based at the hub, situated just off the A19 near Boldon Business Park, to 28.

Marketing and web design agency, Urban River, has moved into Studio 206, a 484sq ft office which will house its six members of staff.

Carl Buckley, managing director of Urban

River, said: "We have been based in South Tyneside for 22 years, so when it came to moving, we were intent on remaining in the borough.

"We knew the lease on our previous office was due to expire so we began looking for somewhere new and The Quadrus Centre was just perfect. It's in a great location, has amazing facilities, onsite meeting rooms and plentiful free parking spaces."

Employee benefits specialist The Health Insurance Group has opened a new 592sq ft head office at The Quadrus Centre.

"We've grown significantly over recent years so the ability to move somewhere which afforded us the flexibility and space to grow at a pace that suited us really appealed," said director Adam Brown.

Time Critical logistics partner, Apex Time Critical, which specialises in managing time-sensitive cargo, has moved to a 237sq ft office at the centre.

Carl Thompson, managing director of Apex Time Critical, said: "Having recruited three new members of staff, we found that we'd outgrown our previous office, so we approached the team who manage the centre.

"They were able to source a new, larger unit which met our expectations for the immediate future, while also providing a great insight into how The Quadrus Centre can support our growth going forward."

The Quadrus Centre is one of four business centres owned and managed by South Tyneside Council alongside Jarrow Business Centre, One Trinity Green and South Shields Business Works.



## Award-winning Teesside charity appoints first CEO

**An award-winning Teesside charity that helps those impacted by suicide has appointed its first CEO.**

Former primary school teacher Anne Cullum has joined the Headlight Project having spent almost a decade in senior leadership roles across education.

Launched by Catherine Devereux following the suicide of her husband, Russ, the Stockton-based Headlight Project provides counselling throughout the Tees Valley for those who have lost a loved one through suicide. It is also developing a preventative education and training programme to roll out to local workplaces, colleges and schools.

With extensive experience in supporting children with varying needs, Anne says she's "privileged" to join the Headlight Project.

"I'm delighted to start with the Headlight Project as its first CEO," said Anne, 41.

"My background is in education – I spent 14 years teaching at primary level, and nine of those were as a senior leader – and I strongly believe that early intervention is key when working with children and young adults.

"I know just how important major experiences that occur during childhood can shape growing minds, and how vital cognitive development is in terms of building the resilience that we rely on so much throughout our lives.

"The Headlight Project already does incredible work in some schools and colleges, across the Tees Valley, and I'm keen to lend my skills and experience within education to develop the education and training programmes to reach more schools and colleges and also our local universities.

"I'm really excited to join the Headlight Project as it moves into the next stage of its growth and development, and to help the charity continue its excellent work across our communities."

## New Director for Cavu

**Sahil Nayyar has become a director, having advised on a number of high profile deals, including the sale of Wheelbase to JD Sports plc, and the sale of Simpson and Parsons to Livingbridge backed Jensten.**

Nayyar was recently named Finance Professional of the Year at the Insider's Young Professional Awards.

He said: "My promotion to director follows a strong period for Cavu during which I have advised on a number of landmark transactions. I look forward to continuing to work with our clients to help them realise value whilst delivering high quality advice.

"I am also excited about working with the director group of Cavu to continue to grow and expand our business in and outside the North East."

Shawn Bone, founder and managing



director of Cavu Corporate Finance, added: "Throughout his seven years at Cavu, helping businesses and shareholders to achieve their ambitions, Sahil has demonstrated commitment to, and passion for, client service.

"He's teamed this with an entrepreneurial approach to business that I'm delighted to see rewarded with a promotion to director, where he will continue to be a valuable asset."

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## Cover Story

# From Connection to Culture: Bonded's Journey Building an Award-Winning Digital & Media Agency.

It's been almost three years since Bonded first opened its doors for business; a digital and media agency that promised to prioritise connection in a market saturated by technology and automation. Founded by four leading industry figures, each with more than 15 years of experience driving results for the world's most successful brands, the agency has achieved remarkable success in a short amount of time.

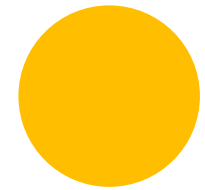
Bonded has since moved into its new Newcastle headquarters to make room for its growing team and opened its second office in Edinburgh as part of the agency's strategic expansion into the Scottish media landscape. Throughout this journey of growth, Bonded has stayed true to its core value of connection. With the belief that only truly connected brands can maximise, the agency prides itself on creating deep connections with its clients, their audiences, and its own team.



### The Birth of Bonded

- 2021

Bonded's founding four come together with a shared vision of prioritising connection in an industry left barren from automation & technology.



### Building Team Bonded

- 2021

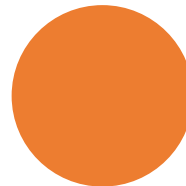
Bonded engaged its first team members who shared the founder's vision & belief in human connection.



### The Early Days

- 2021

With all the usual energy of a startup, long days were rewarded by a succession of new business wins.



### Connecting in the Common Room

- 2021

Bonded holds its first event, 'Connection in a Post-Covid World', with speakers from ITV, Channel 4, Sky & Thinkbox.



### Bonded Bitesize & Future Friday

- 2022

Bonded kickstarts its knowledge sharing blog 'Bonded Bitesize' & job role roundups 'Future Friday'.



### Bonded X N.A.B.S

- 2021

Bonded partners with NABS to bring mental health services to the North East's marketing community.



From partnering with mental health charity, NABS, to bringing together speakers from Meta, Spotify, X, Pinterest and Thinkbox to the North East for its sold-out Future Trends Festival, connection is at the heart of all that Bonded does.

With the agency's continued commitment to investing in senior client-facing consultants and a growing client base from recent business wins, Bonded's growth trajectory is on a steady incline. Having quickly established itself as a major player in the North, the agency has now set its sights on expansion in the South. With more exciting events and a podcast in the works, the future looks bright for Bonded.



### 10'000 Miles Later

- 2022

In support of mental health charity Red January, Bonded challenges Newcastle agencies to step challenge.



### Leaders Who Lunch

- 2022

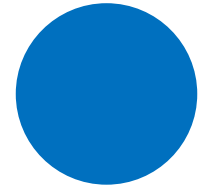
Bonded holds its quarterly thought leadership lunches to unite marketing community.



### Looking Ahead

- 2024

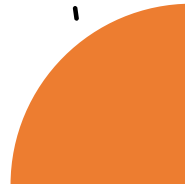
In collaboration with media owners, Bonded produces its first annual trends report, sharing marketing insights.



### Future Avertising Trends Festival

- 2024

Bonded bring speakers from Meta, X, Pinterest, Spotify & Thinkbox to Newcastle for a sold-out event.



### Edinburgh Expansion

- 2023

The agency opens their second office in Edinburgh, bridging connections across the Scottish border.



### Moving on up

- 2023

Bonded move into their new Newcastle headquarters to house their growing team.



### Exciting things to come...

- 2024 & beyond

With more events in the pipeline & a flurry of new business wins, the future looks positive for Bonded.



For more information visit:  
[www.bondedagency.com](http://www.bondedagency.com)



L-R: Emma McDonald with Jessica Williams

## To recruit or to outsource?

As a Sales and Marketing agency, we recruit a broad range of specialisms and like many out there, we have found the market even more challenging of late. It has never been an aspect I've enjoyed and am grateful to have internal support and someone who does. I suppose this comes from a range of experiences over the last nine years in business and recruiting.

The market is moving at a pace with many candidates having been offered and accepted roles in between applying and attending formal interviews. With two live positions for a Customer Relationship Manager and Marketing Manager to fill, we had a c3 week process from role closing to offer and lost a huge proportion of candidates in that time, having already accepted offers elsewhere.

However we also noticed a significant level

of drop offs and no shows at interview stage too. I know from speaking to a number of other organisations recruiting for a variety of roles, they are also wading in these challenging new waters.

We have almost always recruited ourselves and having recently been quoted a 26% recruitment fee, that's likely to remain the same...

I wonder about the impact of time and cost to any business, whether managed internally or outsourced – and believe it must be significant regardless of sector or service. Attrition rates are up, as are sickness rates and failed probationary periods – how has the world changed so much in such a short space of time? Growing a business is hard at the best of times but without the right team, it's nearly impossible.

Thankfully, we have an established base and team and are recruiting for our projected growth, so thankfully we have the resource and capacity to be patient and find the right person who more important than anything else, is a cultural fit to the business.

With a lack of resource internally and a challenging recruitment market and process, it's understandable why other businesses look to outsource. But how long term are these decisions? Are outsourced companies becoming more or less popular?

We have embraced our Associates model more than ever this year and found working with a broad range of freelancers a viable option for any growing business. However now with growth on the horizon we too are looking for internal resource; but every business is different and an outsourced model can work long term. Outsourcing

has significant benefits from a cost, resource, training and overall infrastructure perspective, providing ready-made teams without an overreliance on a single person. Our clients all have three team members assigned ensuring coverage, knowledge and expertise throughout the length of our partnership.

As a certified B-Corporation, it's in our DNA to integrate ESG into our Sales and Marketing strategies, training and well, every aspect of all that we do. People is one of the five pillars of BCorp and one we constantly evolve to ensure that as a small business, we support our people as much as possible. It's also one of the reasons businesses ultimately choose to outsource to us rather than go through the challenging and often painful process of recruiting.

I believe a blend has to exist between hiring and outsourcing and I'd say that's fair given I run an outsourcing business – perhaps as the landscape continues to evolve more will lean towards outsourcing and naturally I'm inclined to hope this is the case. But the issue remains – where have all the good people gone? And it begs the question – what will the world of recruiting look like for small businesses moving forward? Can we compete against the larger providers able to pay at times double the market rate? Time will tell.

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

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## Gosforth



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

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

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# UNPARALLELED NATURAL BEAUTY



One of the wonderful things about my career is that I work in a part of the UK that I myself not only live in, but also truly believe to be one of the most beautiful and unique. It's been nearly a year since I joined Sanderson Young as a Regional Valuer, to drive the business in the Tyne Valley and South Northumberland, and it's a place I know very well indeed. My property career in this area spans almost 10 years and as I look back over the first quarter of 2024, it's with the same optimism and resurgence of positivity I have felt for most of my time in the business.

So what does this come down to? Luck? Certainly not. Northumberland and the Tyne Valley have an unparalleled natural beauty with incredible countryside and a glorious coastline. The homes in this area reflect this, and are very much in demand with excellent schooling, direct transport links and charming market towns and villages adding to the appeal. There is also a wonderful sense of serenity in many parts of this sought after region, whilst also incredibly friendly and supportive local

communities, all combining to offer a desirable lifestyle.

A personal love of mine, and something I feel hugely passionate about, is equestrian property and smallholdings, very much a specialist market place and one that requires a very particular set of requirements. Whether it is a small house with a pony paddock or an equestrian business with all the dream facilities, finding an equestrian property or smallholding is not easy and that's where I can help. Whichever discipline you enjoy, show jumping, dressage, eventing or perhaps you fancy a go at being a farmer, I would like to help you make this happen and I have the experience and knowledge to understand your needs whether you are buying or selling.

Myself and the SY team have excellent knowledge of this remarkable part of the UK and I am well placed to deliver a first class and proactive service to all clients. Please do get in touch if you need any further assistance or advice on 07523 696 041 or email [mandy.denning@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:mandy.denning@sandersonyoung.co.uk)





SANDERSON  
YOUNG



## *Harwood House*

*Harwood, Morpeth*

Sitting in the heart of Harwood Forest in the Northumberland National Park, is this stunning detached home. Harwood House provides a beautiful farmhouse and converted farm buildings with a two bedroom apartment, circa 3.8 acres and spectacular views. Built in the early 1900s, Harwood House and its outbuildings have been renovated to provide a sumptuous family home with fabulous entertaining space offering a business opportunity. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: G.



5 5 4 C

**Price Guide:**  
Offers Over £2 Million



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





SANDERSON  
YOUNG



## *The Old Stables*

*Stelling Hall, Newton*

Occupying a magnificent garden site of circa 6 acres, is this fabulous, stone built family home with stunning views over the Tyne Valley. The Old Stables provides circa 5888 sq ft of accommodation, recently completely renovated to a very high standard. Situated in the sought after village of Newton, nearby to Corbridge and only 20 minutes from Newcastle, the property also offers stables, paddock and a separate cottage, currently a successful holiday let. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: G.



6 3 4 D

**Price Guide:**  
£1.85 Million



**Ashleigh Sundin**  
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SANDERSON  
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## *Wildwood*

*Burgham Park, Burgham, Felton*

In a most idyllic location in the heart of the beautiful Northumberland countryside is Wildwood, a stunning family home in circa half an acre of fabulous gardens, part of the small executive development of Burgham Park. This extremely attractive double fronted property has been constructed to a very high specification by the current owners and offers versatile, flexible living space flooded with natural light. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: G.



5 5 3 D

**Price Guide:**  
Offers Over £995,000



**Mandy Denning**  
0191 223 3500  
[mandy.denning@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:mandy.denning@sandersonyoung.co.uk)





SANDERSON  
YOUNG



## *Holly House* *Ovington*

Holly House provides a magnificent, stone built, detached home in a superb setting in this attractive Tyne Valley village. The house was purchased by the owners in 2009 and has undergone considerable renovations and redesigns, creating the charming property which exists today. Externally, the rear gardens are stunning and there is a detached one bed annexe, ideal for visitors or with income potential via Airbnb. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: G.



4 3 3 E

**Price Guide:**  
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**Durham Cricket Hall of Fame**

Durham Cricket held their second Hall of Fame event last month at Seat Unique Riverside, which once again proved to a huge success as another three former Durham players were inducted into the club's Hall of Fame.

Dale Benkenstein, Phil Mustard and Neil Killeen were the latest inductees following the inaugural six last year, as a packed Riverside enjoyed a night of laughs and entertainment recapping Durham's good old days.











## Apex Group further expands sales team

North East lighting and modular wiring specialists, Apex Group is recruiting to its sales team, as it looks to further capitalise on its growing reputation in London.

Mike Herbage is Apex Group's new regional sales manager, and will operate for both Artech Lighting and Apex Wiring, heading up their London office. Mike brings over 40 years' experience in the electrical industry, working mostly in and around the capital.

A background in the switchgear and lighting industries has equipped Mike with a wealth of experience and knowledge that's perfect for his new role, as he focuses on new projects in London and the South East for the Durham-based manufacturers.

"Artech Lighting and Apex Wiring have spent the last few years disrupting the sectors they operate across and earning a reputation for excellence and delivery. Both companies are constantly challenging the market with new, innovative solutions created by the best design teams in the country," said Mike.

"Having worked in the industry for many years, I'm genuinely excited to introduce my London contacts to Apex and Artech."



## NECCA appoints a new Head Judge

The highly acclaimed North East Contact Centre Awards (NECCA) has appointed a new head judge for 2024.

Sarah Hunt joins the team as head judge and comes with a fabulous pedigree from within the industry having spent over 25 years working within contact centres.

Throughout her career, she has held leadership positions spanning several industries, including retail, banking, insurance, funeral care, and outsourced operations. Her experience is not only rooted in operational roles but also encompasses significant contributions to change management and customer transformation projects.

Her role as Membership Director at the CCMA and Lead Judge for the UK National Contact Centre and the European Contact Centre and Customer Service Awards (ECCCSA) enabled her to draw on years of experience to support contact centre members, suppliers, and sponsors share best practice and help to raise the standards across the industry, and it is this experience that Sarah brings to North East Contact Centre Awards.

Sarah said, "I'm absolutely thrilled to join NECCA this year as head judge. I've had a front-row seat to witness NECCA's significant influence on the North East contact centre community through my work with headline sponsor, Greenbean, compelling me to seize the opportunity to get involved at the earliest chance."



## Sunderland marketeer returns to home ground

A Sunderland marketing expert has taken up a new job at her home ground, with one of the city's leading law firms.

Laura Kerry, 32 has been appointed Marketing and Business Support Executive at Richard Reed Solicitors, bringing with her years of experience gained across a wide range of sectors. And for Laura working in Sunderland means that she's not only working in the city where she is originally from, but is also joining at a time when there is so much positive development taking place.

"I've been working for a number of years for a company in Middlesbrough but when the opportunity came up to come back and work in Sunderland I jumped at the opportunity," she said.

"Richard Reed is such a well respected company and one of the many attractions for me was the fact they are so invested in the local community and giving their support to it.

"It's also a fantastic time to be working in Sunderland when there is so much growth, investment and business opportunities available. "It's an exciting time to be in the city and I'm really looking forward to being part of it."

## Appointment bolsters Mincoffs Solicitors' private client team

A new appointment has strengthened the private client team at a leading North East law firm, as it continues to attract work from across the region and beyond.

Mincoffs Solicitors, which now has more than 100 staff across its Jesmond offices, has welcomed solicitor Alicia Speed to its wills, probate and trusts team.

Alicia will specialise in wills, lasting power of attorney, trusts, probate and Court of Protection work in her new role.



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# CMYK | Business Technology named 'SME of the Year'



**CMYK | Business Technology is delighted to have received the esteemed 'SME of the Year' award at the recent North East Automotive Alliance Annual Awards, which took place at Ramside Hall & Spa.**

**The 'SME of the Year' award, sponsored by North East Institute of Technology (NEIoT), recognised small to medium enterprise businesses most able to demonstrate all-round achievement and progressive best practice within the automotive sector in the last 24 months.**

CMYK have shown strong year-on-year growth, increasing turnover significantly, as well as increasing head count, investing in their people, infrastructure and strengthening their product offering to

further support their growing client base. The awards judging panel, made up of industry leaders commented; "Choosing a winner in this category was extremely challenging due to the quality of entries. CMYK articulated their value proposition very clearly. Their strategy was fluent in their submission and took into consideration the economic situation, the changing habits of customers and their own workforce, whilst pivoting their business for the new world post-covid. A blended environmental approach was noted by the judges. A fully deserving winner and a big congratulations."

CMYK supports many large clients in the engineering, automotive and manufacturing sector across the North East and beyond - rapidly becoming the go-to tech partner for organisations across our region.

Sarah Wharrier, regional sales director of CMYK added; "This award is testament to the outstanding work we do supporting our clients. From service delivery, logistics, administration and account management,

this award wouldn't have been possible without every facet of the business - we should all be extremely proud!"

In the last 12 months, the business has gained two further ISO accreditations (ISO 45001- Health and Safety Management and ISO22301- Business Continuity Management) adding to their existing standards of 9001, 14001 and 27001 and they've proudly become a Living Wage Employer.

The business has also made significant investments in new IT Service Management Platforms, aimed at enhancing and optimising the overall user experience for their clients.

CMYK's growth projections indicate that they will soon be seeking to expand their team even more in the North East region. This expansion is necessary to meet the increasing demand for their services and to accommodate the onboarding of new clients.

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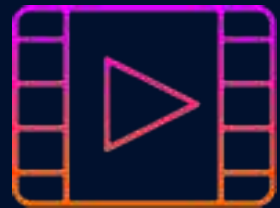
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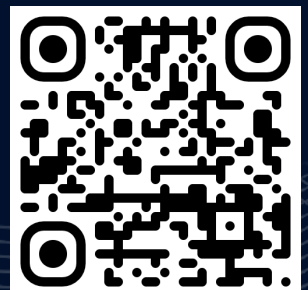


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# The SEBB Group - Connecting you seamlessly - Every call - Every deal

To address the overspending on telecoms among SMEs, Michael Gibbons, Founder and Director at SEBB Group is offering tailored solutions aimed at optimising telecom expenses and enhancing account management. Here, he talks to Northern Insight about their approach.

## Telecom Audit:

Conduct a comprehensive audit of the SME's current telecom expenses, including tariffs, usage patterns, and contractual obligations. Identify areas of overspending, wastage, and inefficiencies in the telecom setup.

## Customised Tariff Plans:

Instead of relying on generic off-the-shelf tariffs, develop customised tariff plans tailored to the specific needs and usage patterns of each SME client.

Analyse historical usage data to determine the most cost-effective tariff structures, including voice, data, and messaging services.

## Account Management:

Provide dedicated account management services to SME clients, offering personalised support and guidance throughout the contract lifecycle.

Proactively monitor usage patterns and expenditure to identify potential areas for optimisation and cost savings.

## Regular Reviews and Optimisation:

Conduct regular reviews of telecom expenses

and usage patterns to ensure that the chosen tariff plans remain aligned with the evolving needs of the business.

Recommend adjustments or changes to tariff plans as necessary to optimise costs and maximise value for the client.

## End-of-Contract Management:

Ensure that businesses clients are not burdened with unnecessary handset costs when contracts end.

Provide guidance on device upgrade options, trade-in programs, or alternative solutions to minimise costs associated with handset replacements.

## Training and Education:

Offer training sessions or educational resources to clients to help them better understand telecom expenses, usage patterns, and cost-saving opportunities.

Empower clients to make informed decisions about their telecom services and effectively manage their expenses.

## Continuous Support and Assistance:

Maintain open lines of communication with clients, offering ongoing support and assistance to address any questions, concerns, or issues related to their telecom services.

Act as a trusted advisor, proactively seeking ways to optimise telecom expenses and improve overall efficiency for the client.

By implementing these strategies, the SEBB Group can help SMEs effectively manage their telecom expenses, reduce overspending, and maximise the value derived from the telecom investments.

"In addition to our corporate clients, we extend our services to charities, recognising the invaluable work they do. Through our established reputation and recognition in the good cause sector, we secure bespoke plans and additional funding to support their vital initiatives. Our commitment to social responsibility was further acknowledged when we were honoured with the Daisy Social Responsibility award within our industry.

"We're excited to announce an exclusive offer for Northern Insight magazine readers from the SEBB Group. We understand the importance of tailored telecom solutions, especially for SMEs. By partnering with us, you gain access to customised telecom packages, a unique offering not found on the high street."

"Don't miss out on this opportunity to streamline your telecom expenses while enjoying top-notch service. Contact us today to take advantage of this exclusive offer and discover the difference working with the SEBB Group can make for your business."

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L-R: Dom Ryan, Carla Redpath, Michael Gibbons

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## RGCF delivers exceptional quarter of transactions

**RG Corporate Finance has experienced an exceptional quarter, having advised on a raft of transactions, while building a strong pipeline for the rest of 2024.**

Between December and February 2024, the national corporate finance boutique based in Newcastle advised clients in sectors including human capital, technology, energy & renewables, industrials and professional services.

Completing in the last quarter, and further emphasising RGCF's cross-border transaction capabilities, was Bluestone Investment Group's acquisitions of New Zealand-based Home Recruitment and its sister business, London-based Australasian Recruitment Company (ARC).

RGCF advised the founders and shareholders of Home and ARC on the sale of the businesses and is highly active in advising on disposals and acquisitions in the human capital, recruitment and training sectors.

In the quarter RGCF advised on another cross-border transaction with Ireland-listed Origin Enterprises PLC acquiring North Yorkshire-based specialist ground protection products supplier, Groundtrax Systems.

Alongside supporting national and international clients, RGCF prides itself on working with companies, shareholders and CEOs in its home region, which in December 2023 included advising the founders of award winning, Northumberland-based holiday letting agency Coquet Cottages on its sale to PE-backed The Travel Chapter.

RGCF is building a notable presence in advising on transactions in the renewable energy sector.

Having advised a number of shareholders in the sale of Banks Renewables, which was the largest transaction to complete in the North East in 2023, RGCF has, this year, supported a North East provider of renewable energy solutions, on the sale of the business to a fast-growing national residential energy services company.

RGCF works closely with its clients, supporting growth strategies with its specialist Strategic Review service through to identifying acquisition targets, PE investors or potential acquirers. Most recently it has been engaged by North East-based IT, cyber and incident response specialist, Trustack Ltd to develop and implement a strategy to engage with potential partners in the North West and Yorkshire.



## Nirvana Europe taking a run at North America

**A specialist North East sports travel and events firm is taking a run at growing its presence in North America with the help of a £500,000 investment from the North East Fund.**

Nirvana Europe organises travel and accommodation for a range of major global sporting organisations and events, including the European and Global Ironman series, British, USA and World Triathlon and the Great Run event series.

The North Tyneside-headquartered firm, which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, already has a growing event management presence in North America.

But after working with regional fund management firm NEL Fund Managers to bring in the investment from the North East Growth Capital Fund Supported by the European Regional Development Fund, Nirvana is now looking to greatly increase its activity across the continent, with a view to up to half of its future growth coming from the US and Canada.

Up to six new North East jobs are expected to be created as the business grows this year, with plans for establishing a permanent North American office currently under consideration.

Steven Foley, relationship development director at CCBS Group in Newcastle, and Barry Gill, director at TIG Group, advised the Nirvana Europe management team through the investment process.

Alongside its overseas growth, Nirvana Europe is also continuing to build its portfolio of events in the UK and is looking at opportunities for breaking into new sports, with swimming and athletics high on its list of priorities.

Other sporting events and activities with which Nirvana Europe is currently involved include parafencing, wheelchair rugby, the Spartan Race series and the Hyrox indoor fitness championships.

Nigel Morris, managing director at Nirvana Europe, says: "The opportunities keep coming for us, both at home and overseas, and it's essential that we manage them carefully to ensure we're growing the business in a sustainable way.

"We're already active in North America, where we've found that there aren't many competitors that can provide the comprehensive services that we deliver at around 150 events every year, and we're confident that we can make big strides there in the medium term.

"We have people on the ground there already, but by setting up a permanent North American office, we'll have the facilities in place to build the business and to train our workforce to deliver events to the high standards that we set.

"There's also plenty of potential for the range of sports with which we're involved to grow, with our long-term presence in the triathlon giving us all the experience we need to deliver swimming and athletics events.

"We'd heard very positive things about NEL, with the hands-on approach that the team took from the off showing how keen they were to make this investment happen."



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# Robson Laidler maintains its 'excellence status' in workplace health and wellbeing



Gemma Graham

**Robson Laidler Accountants, which has offices in Jesmond and Chester-le-Street, has achieved the top level of 'Maintaining Excellence' standard in the Better Health at Work Award programme.**

**As the region's first B Corp certified organisation Robson Laidler runs on the triple bottom line principles of People; Planet; Profit with each having equal importance. The team has several health advocates that help to plan and execute health and wellbeing initiatives throughout the year.**

The Better Health at Work Award is exclusive to the North East of England and promotes workplace health and wellbeing. Robson Laidler was awarded this maintaining

excellence status after following the awards programme for seven years with an impressive lineup of activities including; health checks, cancer awareness sessions, Dementia Friends training and physical activity classes including a walking and running club.

The team has also appointed staff as qualified Mental Health First Aiders, Domestic Violence Champions, and Grief First Aiders and has a Diversity, Equality and Inclusion project team who have facilitated DEI and Neurodiversity training for staff, created rooms as dedicated spaces for prayer and redesigned bereavement guidelines to accommodate religious specific rituals.

Health advocate Gemma Graham said: "As a B Corp we meet the highest standards of verified social and environmental performance, public transparency, and legal accountability to balance profit and purpose and as such employee wellbeing is embedded in everything we do.

"We set, measure and review goals to ensure

we continue our business as a "force for good", living our purpose of "making a positive difference to people's lives."

"We have a calendar of health and wellness campaigns and workshops that run throughout the year to ensure our staff have access to support outside of their day job.

"We received extremely positive feedback on the campaigns we ran during this award-period, which will help us to tailor future activities."

Robson Laidler also offers flexible and agile working as well as communal games areas with a snooker table to encourage team building. Managers have recently gained Level 3 training in Managing Mental Health within the workplace. All staff have access to a Mental Health Continuum and Stay Well at Work Plan to help them manage their own mental health at work and understand when and where to seek support.

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



## Experienced dealmaker, Alex Simpson, returns to RG Corporate Finance as CF Director

**Ryecroft Glenton Corporate Finance (RGCF) has welcomed an experienced dealmaker back to the firm, with Alex Simpson returning to become CF Director.**

Having previously spent six years with the Newcastle-based national corporate finance boutique, Alex subsequently joined Mercia Ventures as an investment professional, helping high growth North East-based SMEs to scale through seed and series A funding rounds, which saw Alex provide investment totalling over £11m to a variety of businesses, including Newcells, ART Health Solutions, Troo and PulmoBioMed.

Having started his career with 'Big Four' firms Deloitte and EY within

their audit teams, Alex made the move into corporate finance when he joined RGCF in 2015.

Advising on the sale and acquisition of businesses valued at between £5m and £75m, Alex also advised on debt and equity refinancing and fundraise project while providing strategic advisory services, working his way up from CF Executive to CF Senior Manager.

Joining Mercia Ventures in 2021 as an Investment Manager Alex delivered a number of significant transactions and investment programmes, including in the medical technology sector, helping Newcastle-based Newcells Biotech secure £2.35m of funding, and Northumbria University spin-out PulmoBioMed raise £1.4m. Alex also sat on a number of boards during his time with Mercia, providing strategic advice and assisting with the growth of portfolio companies.

Alex's expertise enhances RGCF's talented team of corporate finance specialists, which is one of the most active in the North East, as recognised in the most recent Experian rankings, advising clients in the region, across the UK and overseas on all aspects of growth, change and transformation.

The firm has a strong presence in sectors including human capital, technology, energy & renewables, industrials and professional services with an expanding client base in these key markets.

Alex Simpson said: "I am excited to return to RGCF, bringing my broader range of skills and experience to the firm. My time with Mercia Ventures gave me a different perspective of the investment market, which will be of benefit to our clients.

"RGCF's reputation continues to grow, as does the team, which is soon to be two dozen strong, and I've seen its team of excellent people deliver some significant transactions in the time I've been away. I'm looking forward to working with them again on some large and interesting deals."

## Northwood Newcastle planning further growth after North Shields estate agency acquisition

**An ambitious, family-run North East estate agency is planning for further growth after completing the acquisition of a regional rival.**

Northwood Newcastle has acquired North Shields-based Moving Homes, which operates across North Tyneside and South East Northumberland, from founder Tracey Culverhouse for an undisclosed sum.

Owned by brothers-in-law Inde Dhillon and Aman Singh, Northwood Newcastle now has a 25-strong team working across three regional offices and covering an area that runs from Carlisle right across the North East and down as far as York.

Tracey, who set up Moving Homes ten years ago, is staying with the business as manager of Northwood's North Shields operation and will continue to lead the local five-strong team.

Michael Cantwell and Julie Cuthbertson of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors identified Northwood Newcastle as a potential purchaser of Moving Homes and worked with both parties to bring the deal to a successful conclusion.

Daniel Bell, associate solicitor in the corporate team at Mincoffs Solicitors LLP in Newcastle, provided legal advice to Tracey on the deal.

Inde Dhillon and Aman Singh, who are respectively a lawyer and an architect by profession, acquired Northwood Newcastle in 2018 as a result of their shared passion for property.

In 2020, they acquired established residential and lettings agency Bowes Mitchell, also with the assistance of RMT Accountants, and are



looking at making further acquisitions if the right opportunities arise.

Alongside its thriving residential sales operation, Northwood Newcastle currently has around 850 rental properties under management.

Inde Dhillon says: "Our ambition is for Northwood to be the number one sales and lettings agency in the North East and this is the next step towards achieving that goal."



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Develop North has achieved its lending milestone supporting a range of projects including a new warehouse facility currently under construction in Darlington

## North East investment fund Develop North PLC exceeds £70m lending milestone

Develop North PLC (Develop North), managed by Newcastle-upon-Tyne-based wealth management and fund management specialists, Tier One Capital Ltd (Tier One), passed a lending milestone of more than £70million during its most recent financial year.



Ian McElroy, Chief Executive



Brendan O'Grady,  
Fund Manager

**In its annual results for the year ending 30 November 2023, Develop North has reported that, since 2017, it has now loaned £71 million to help fund commercial and residential property schemes in the North of England and Scotland.**

Since inception, Develop North has helped create almost 3,000 jobs and supported 33 developments with a gross development value (GDV) of over £180m.

This landmark figure was achieved in the period following the agreement of four new loans including a £2.2million, 30-month facility to fund the construction of a new warehouse in Darlington, a £1.1million, 18-month facility to refurbish a hotel and wedding venue in North Yorkshire and two residential developments for a combined £2.4m in Aberdeenshire, Scotland.

Develop North is also forecasting an upturn in the property development market in 2024, following tough trading conditions that continued during the past 12 months.

It has navigated this period achieving turnover of £1.72million and profits of £0.261million with fund deployment totalling £19.5million as at 30 November 2023.

Continued confidence in the fund was also demonstrated by the renewal of its rolling credit facility with Shawbrook Bank Ltd, which renewed to May 2025.

John Newlands, chairman of Develop North, said: "Notwithstanding the prospect of a general election, which always impacts the economy, a degree of market confidence and rising property transaction volumes is expected in 2024 as interest rates ease and affordability improves.

"Inflation is falling and, as the Chancellor indicated in the recent Budget, is expected to reach the Bank of England's two percent target quicker than originally forecast, which will also fuel positivity.

"The property markets where we lend, while not immune to wider economic trends, have not suffered the turbulence experienced in other parts of the UK, in particular the South East. As such, the affordability of home prices has been less stretched and there has consequently been only a modest correction in prices in response to the changing interest rate regime.

"Moreover, I believe the lending disciplines that Tier One has in place will continue to provide protection to our loan portfolio; the relationships with developers, the maintenance of prudent loan to value ratios and the knowledge of each site and developments to which we lend.

"Therefore, Develop North will press ahead with identifying and investing in real estate projects of the highest quality, continuing to enhance the fund's portfolio and strengthen

its reputation in the market. This should lead to the creation of shareholder value that is sustainable in the longer term."

Brendan O'Grady, Fund Manager at Tier One, the investment adviser to Develop North, said: "We are very proud to have achieved this significant lending milestone supporting developers across the North of England and Scotland, demonstrating Develop North's role as a viable and effective lender in the property market.

"We are confident that the sustainable approach we have taken to the Develop North fund, the quality and experience of the developer management teams we are working with and the improving economic backdrop will enable us to support a growing number of developments. We are currently at various stages of due diligence across a number of projects in the North East of England, which is a strong indication of the confidence that will continue and grow in 2024."

Develop North PLC is an investment trust listed on the main market of the London Stock Exchange and specialises in providing finance to the residential and commercial property sector.

Tier One Capital Ltd is the investment adviser and fund manager for the London Stock Exchange main market listed Develop North PLC.

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



# RMT Accountants helps Seaham Care Home owners complete retirement sale

Advice from RMT Accountants & Business Advisors has helped the owners of a successful County Durham care home complete its sale to an expanding North East care group.

**Lenore Care has acquired the 34-bedroom Melbury House residential care home in the village of Dawdon near Seaham from owners Robert and Susan Roney for an undisclosed sum.**

Originally a vicarage, the main part of the property dates back more than a century and retains many of its original features, including stained glass windows in the main lounge and a feature central staircase.

Owned by Jack and Grace Jenkinson, Lenore Care now has four North East residential and dementia care homes, and expects to make further regional acquisitions over the next five years.

Melbury House 47-strong staff team are all being retained, with a total of 115 people now employed across all Lenore Care's properties.

Julie Cuthbertson and Michael Cantwell of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors worked with Robert and Susan Roney on the transaction and were introduced to Lenore Care by Michael Wicks, relationship manager at Unity Trust Bank.

Paul Bell, partner in the Newcastle office of Burnetts LLP, provided legal advice to Robert and Susan on the disposal, with Burnetts solicitor Luca Iannotti assisting with the property aspects of the transaction.

Robert and Susan bought Melbury House in 2009, initially upgrading its facilities and adding a conservatory which overlooks the care home's private grounds.



*Grace and Jack Jenkinson of Lenore Care, the new owners of the Melbury House residential care home in Seaham.*

A further 12 bedrooms were added to the original 22 in 2013, as well as a new kitchen, dining room and family room.

Robert Roney says: "Selling Melbury House was part of our retirement plans from when we first bought it, but having run it for so long and knowing our residents and staff so well, it had to go to the right people.

"We felt Jack and Grace were the perfect fit for Melbury House from the very first time they came to view it. They recognised the quality of the property, the commitment of our excellent team and most importantly the happiness of our residents.

"We're really comfortable with putting the future of Melbury House in their hands and hope they enjoy running the business as much as we have.

"RMT and Burnetts were always available to us through the sale process and always had the information and answers we needed to make everything run very smoothly."

Jack Jenkinson adds: "The family feel of Melbury House was a big part of its appeal, and you can see the personal investment that's been made in the property as soon as you walk in.

"The building and facilities are immaculate, the staff are friendly and professional, and it has an excellent local reputation, meaning that it is always fully occupied.

"We're adding a successful business to the Lenore Care portfolio, as well as inheriting a great deal of goodwill, and our focus is on maintaining the impressive standard of care that Robert, Susan and their team have delivered over so many years.

"Our growth plan for Lenore Care is to make further acquisitions in the next five years as and when the right properties come along in the right regional locations."

Julie Cuthbertson, corporate finance manager at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, says: "Being able to introduce Robert and Susan to Jack and Grace, and to then support the completion of a transaction where both the purchaser and vendor are so well matched is especially satisfying.

"The couples' respective ambitions and priorities matched extremely well, and we're very pleased to have helped this deal reach a successful conclusion."

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





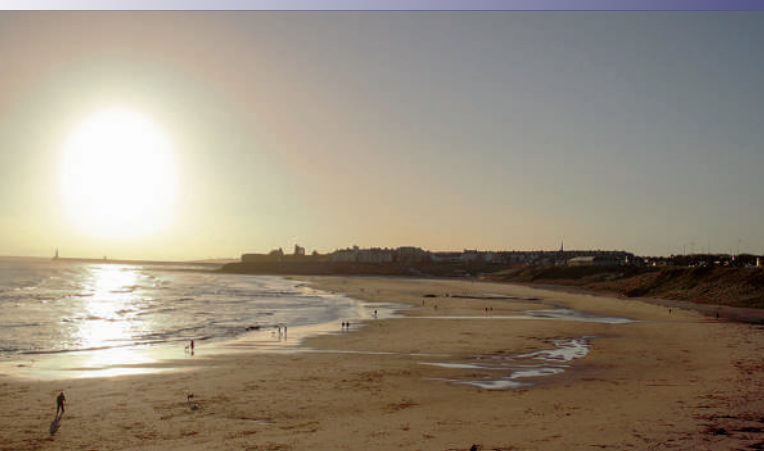
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*Andrew Marsh*



# The internal narrative

Andrew Marsh and Anthony Greco have joined forces to bring Northern Insight readers a 360 view on why narrative is important – what should you be saying and who should you be saying it to? Your internal narrative is your most powerful tool, don't forget it!

**If you're trying to get anything done that involves other people, you need a story. Money, Brands, Religion, Nationality, Laws. They're all stories that we've collectively agreed (or disagreed!) on.**

Anthony, who launched Grectec to help fintech leaders build banking operations that balance cost, customer experience and risk says: "The story you tell is one of the few fundamental assets you have available when starting and building a business. You can hire people with money, but you only get that money by getting either investors or customers to part with their money and buy into your story.

"We're very familiar with the concept that you need a good company story to tell investors. And even more, from marketing, that we you need to tell your customers a great story. Companies will often do these pretty well and they make up two of the four core story types start-up leaders need to be able to tell well for success, whether they're conscious of it or not."

The "Vision Story" for investors and the "How we improve your life" story for customers are put front and centre while "Internal Narrative" is side-lined in our thinking. Deemed less important. An afterthought even.

But when you already have a business and employees, this is your most powerful tool to get people engaged, motivated, pointing all in the same direction with enthusiasm and passion.

**A great internal narrative is easy to communicate, obvious why it's been chosen, and ideally, measurable.**

Andrew Marsh, a regular and well known contributor to Northern Insight, runs many peer groups for leaders in the region, works with organisations on growth and supports leaders to be their best versions of themselves. He says"

"The internal narrative is the most useful tool to get things done in the short term. It ties into the Vision (at Vistage we create a 1-3-5 model to help with this) and is on the scale of 3-9 months. Team goals cascade naturally out of these when done well. Good examples are easy to communicate, obvious why they've been chosen, and ideally, measurable. They point everyone in right same direction, and give clear structure on how to make decisions, usually with only a single word or phrase."

Anthony agrees and says: "This was done really well at Monzo, everyone knew which phase we were in, and could tie their goals and team goals back to the internal narrative at the time:

1. Get a banking licence.
2. Migration (moving from the old pre-paid card stack, to the full bank stack).
3. Unit Economics (achieving positive customer unit economics via either more revenue or lower costs).
4. Table Stakes/Main Account (what does it take to make people use us as their main account).
5. Eat your vegetables (fix all of the operational debt that had built up from hyper-scaling!).

**A bad internal narrative is vague, not measurable, doesn't guide decision making.**

Conversely, a poorly constructed internal narrative can be a significant setback. Vague objectives like "Play to Our Strengths" lack the specificity needed for meaningful action.



They fail to provide measurable outcomes, offer no clear completion criteria, and can even create division among teams by highlighting disparities in strengths and weaknesses rather than fostering a sense of unity and purpose.

**It's not enough to have a great narrative, you need you say it, in person, over and over again. Talking trumps text.**

In the chaotic world of start-ups, a single cohesive narrative can be your compass. It guides, inspires, and gives your team the autonomy to make better decisions. Unlike large corporations, start-ups have the unique advantage of being able to quickly align everyone towards a common goal and a strong, and often repeated internal narrative is the best way to do this.

Andrew and Anthony both advise that this should come from the CEO speaking to the team frequently. It will feel easier to write a company email - but nothing can replace personally engaging everyone. Make your storytelling relatable, use real anecdotes, and apply these techniques at both company and team levels.

Remember, the way you tell your story can significantly impact your team's morale and performance, and at the end of the day make people want to be part of this part of your organisation's journey.

**You can see more at [www.grectec.com](http://www.grectec.com) or by emailing [andrew.marsh@vistagechair.com](mailto:andrew.marsh@vistagechair.com)**



## Meet the Team: James Carrick, Chartered Wealth Manager, Raymond James Monument

In the ever-changing financial services landscape, putting clients first, acting with integrity, valuing independence and thinking long term are paramount.

**At Raymond James Monument, these qualities are embodied in James Carrick, 30, and a driving force behind the business' success to date. With a desire to make a difference, James has played a pivotal role in shaping the office's journey towards its goal of being the Wealth Manager of choice, in and around the North East.**

James' journey into the financial services sector began with a deep-rooted desire to make a meaningful impact in people's lives. Armed with a degree in Economics & Finance from the University of Leeds and a year living in Hong Kong, James embarked on a career path that would lead him to helping establish Raymond James Monument. His early experiences provided him with invaluable insights into the intricacies of wealth management and investment markets, laying the foundation for how he advises a wide range of clients today.

Driven by a spirit of entrepreneurship and a commitment to putting clients first, James has a clear vision in mind - to establish a financial service offering which prides itself on exceptional client service and outcomes. Guided by this ethos, James has been instrumental in helping to shape the office's culture and focus on delivering a truly personal approach to investments and financial planning. In a sector that has seen lots of consolidation in recent years, it feels the personal touch is losing ground, which is something that James and the team at Raymond James Monument have made sure is one of the core foundations on which the office is built.

One of James' greatest strengths lies in



James Carrick

his ability to forge strong and enduring relationships with clients and professional contacts. Recognising that each client is unique, with their own aspirations and financial goals, James and the team, take a truly personalised approach to wealth management, tailoring investment strategies to suit their individual needs. His genuine empathy and dedication have earned him the trust and respect of clients from all walks of life.

Beyond his role as a Chartered Wealth Manager, James is committed to giving back to the community and making a positive difference. Whether through several charitable initiatives, volunteer work or career talks at local universities, James is passionate about helping others and reflects Raymond James Monument's strong commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility. James, who grew up in the region, is also firm believer in connecting local businesses together to promote entrepreneurial activity and growth for the North East and beyond.

Outside of work time, James, if not pursuing his passion for travel, will often be found on a golf course or keeping himself fit through a wide range of sports. Recently, however, wedding planning tends to take up a large proportion of his time with his and Louise's big day falling in May 2024.

**For more information about Raymond James, Monument, and how its expert team could help map your financial future, email [RJUK-Monument@RaymondJames.com](mailto:RJUK-Monument@RaymondJames.com), call 0191 303 4260, or contact us via our website.**

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**[www.Monument.RaymondJames.uk.com](http://www.Monument.RaymondJames.uk.com)**

# Muckle and Cavu Corporate Finance advise on North East digital communications agency deal

**Regional law firm for business, Muckle, and Cavu Corporate Finance have advised a South Tyneside-based digital communications agency on its sale to a global company for an undisclosed sum.**

Beyond Digital Solutions works with leading blue chip brands with national and global presence and has a talented team of a dozen designers, strategists, developers and digital experts.

Combining technical expertise and industry experience, Beyond Digital Solutions works across multiple sectors and industries, including automotive, corporate, digital wayfinding, education, food and hospitality.

Louise Richley, MD of Beyond Digital Solutions, was advised by Associate Solicitor Sara Worsick and Solicitor Josh Campbell from Muckle, along with Sahil Nayyar, Director at Cavu Corporate Finance.

Louise said: "Sara, Josh and Sahil have been instrumental in achieving this deal, providing insight and strategic guidance at each turn. Both Muckle and Cavu were ultra-responsive, diligent and focused, constantly navigating towards the end goal. Their enthusiastic approach was both assuring and relentless. I felt professionally guided and supported throughout."



*L-R: Sahil Nayyar, Director at Cavu Corporate Finance, Sara Worsick, Associate Solicitor at Muckle, Louise Richley, MD of Beyond Digital Solutions and Josh Campbell, Solicitor at Muckle*

Sahil Nayyar, Director at Cavu Corporate Finance, said: "We are delighted to have advised on this significant transaction and to have delivered an excellent result for Louise. Beyond is a leading independent operator in its market segment, and this acquisition marks a new entry into the UK market for the buyer".

Sara, from Muckle, said: "It has been great to work with Louise over the years as her business developed and continued to grow

from strength to strength. This transaction is a real credit to her and the team she has around her. Her positivity and enthusiasm to develop the business shine through, and I wish her and the business the very best in what I am sure will be an exciting future."

**To find out more about Muckle LLP, visit:**  
**[www.muckle-llp.com](http://www.muckle-llp.com)**  
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# Maven managed NPIF II Fund launches in the North East

The British Business Bank has launched its new Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II (NPIF II), a £660m Fund set to cover the entire North of England. NPIF II aims to build on the success of the initial fund, with the purpose of driving sustainable economic growth by supporting innovation and creating local opportunities for new and growing businesses across the North.

**The Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II will increase the supply and diversity of early-stage finance for Northern smaller businesses, providing funds to firms that might otherwise not receive investment and help to break down barriers in access to finance.**

Providing loans from £25,000 to £2m and equity investment

up to £5m, the Fund will continue investing into companies operating within the North West, Yorkshire and the Humber and Tees Valley. It is now expanded to include the whole of the North East enabling businesses across the whole of the North to access the Fund to start up, scale up or continue on their growth journey.





“

The success of the first Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund has proven the instrumental change that access to finance can have for small businesses. From creating hundreds of jobs to developing ground-breaking products, we have seen companies that previously lacked funding options accelerate forward in their growth journeys, which has ultimately benefitted the whole of the Northern economy. This is why it was important to continue the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund into its next phase. With further funding available, and a greater geographical reach in the North East, the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II will engage more stakeholders across the regions, bringing the business community closer together to create more opportunities for entrepreneurs everywhere.

*Louis Taylor,  
Chief Executive of the British Business Bank*

“

We are delighted to be appointed as the equity Fund manager for the North East, working alongside the British Business Bank in bringing a much-welcomed additional source of funding to the region as part of the new £660 million Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II. The region already has a thriving ecosystem for ambitious companies, and the new Fund underscores our commitment to supporting the growth and development of SMEs from Northumberland to Teesside. Accessing finance is often the key barrier for businesses in the pursuit of growth, and through NPIF II, we can address funding gaps and provide capital to innovative businesses, driving sustainable economic growth and job creation across the region.

*Michael Vassallo, Investment Director at Maven*

“

Maven has a long-standing presence in the North East with an experienced team of investment executives serving the business community across the region from offices in Newcastle and Durham. Key members of Maven's NPIF II team include Michael Vassallo, David Nixon, Rebecca Macdermid and Michael Dickens.

Maven has a strong track record in managing other UK regional funds for the British Business Bank, including the recently launched South West Investment Fund, the Investment Fund for Scotland and Midlands Engine Investment Fund II, designed to boost productivity, innovation and jobs across those territories. The new mandates mean Maven manages a diverse range of regional growth funds across the United Kingdom, able to back emerging businesses stretching from Shetland to Cornwall.

“This new Fund will unlock millions in equity and loans for SMEs across the North to realise their full potential and builds upon British Business Bank's vital work ensuring that any small business owner in the UK can scale up and grow. SMEs are the engines of growth for our economy and across government we are improving access to finance, cutting red tape and removing barriers to ensure that they can go further and faster than ever before.

*Kevin Hollinrake MP, Minister of State for Enterprise, Markets, and Small Business*

**As Fund Manager of NPIF II - Maven Equity Finance, Maven can provide investment of up to £5 million to support both earlier and later stage businesses with real growth potential across a range of sectors. If your business, or the business you advise, is looking at equity investment as a solution to fund future growth please visit [mavencp.com](https://mavencp.com)**

## Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II

**£660m**

to support the growth of smaller businesses in the North

Open for applications





“

*...varied experience  
keeps things new  
and exciting...*

Callum Tingle



# Accountant of the Month

## Callum Tingle – putting a Fresh spin on accounting

**Callum is the owner of Fresh Business Solutions, a modern-thinking accountancy business based in Spennymoor, working with over 500 clients across the UK.**

Growing from humble beginnings in a small town in the North East of England, to a portfolio of clients reaching as far as London and the South coast of England, the company provides a range of services to help business owners run their businesses as efficiently as possible. Services include preparation of accounts, bookkeeping, payroll, VAT, tax returns, insurance, accounting software and more.

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

I wanted to be an entrepreneur from a very early age – I found the idea of running a business exciting and wanted to pursue that. I was always interested in the figures side of business, too, so I thought that accountancy would allow me to sink my teeth into all of my interests at once and chase those dreams.

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

My current role across the whole Fresh business group is to bring in new business and focus on growth as well as ensuring that our staff are given the best training and that our clients are given the best service. In addition to owning Fresh Business Solutions, I am the Finance Director for digital marketing agency, Fresh Digital and also for The Axe House. I part-own a local pub, too – this varied experience keeps things new and exciting and I enjoy transferring learnings across the businesses to benefit them all.

### What is your proudest business achievement?

Genuinely, there are many but I have to say that building a 500+ client practice from the ground up without any major financial backing is the main one. My parents loaned me £2,500 to move in to my first office which was an absolute game changer. I couldn't have done what I have without their support and I am so proud of what I have built as a result. I would also say the fact that I have trained two very talented accountants in Lucy Lyons and James Curry, who I have supported through industry training and recently became directors of Fresh Business Solutions.

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

I have watched a very outdated accountancy industry be propelled forward by the introduction of technology and a major focus for me is to continue to be at the forefront of this evolution – it is something we have prided ourselves on from the beginning. I think in the future, the most important thing that needs to happen is that HMRC and other government departments continue to try and modernise their own processes and catch up to where accountancy is as currently, while we need to work with them to meet both our and clients' obligations, this can be very clunky, slow and difficult – which it really doesn't need to be given the technology we quite literally have at our fingertips.

### What are you currently working on?

We are currently working on a couple of private accountancy practice acquisitions, as well as looking at opening a brand new office over in Hartlepool to support our continuing growth



Photos: Xero partner media day.

trajectory. We are also looking at creating a range of seminars/webinars on how businesses can use technology to improve their efficiency, sharing our learnings with others to help support the local economy.

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

In the Fresh Business Solutions team, we have myself, two qualified accountants, a VAT bookkeeper, a payroll specialist and an accounts apprentice, with the intention of growing the team further to support our growing client base. The team is chock full of character – amazing at their jobs but we make accounting accessible and less of a chore!

### What advice would you give to your 18 year old self?

Definitely not to be so hard on myself and to realise that no matter what you do, you can't please everybody.

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

I'd love to be working remotely abroad for most of the year – my partner Ashley is the Managing Director of our digital business and also loves travel – hopefully we can take that side of the business global.

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

It would have to be... Winston Churchill, Stephen Fry, Einstein and Sir David Attenborough. Imagine the conversation?!

### How do you unwind outside of work?

I love playing or watching football and am a huge Middlesbrough and Spennymoor Town fan. Holidays with the family, and food... as much food as possible! But most importantly - #UTB!

### Favourite book and boxset?

The original *Robin Hood* novel and *Friends* – they were on a break!

**01388 417747, [hello@freshbusinesssolutions.co.uk](mailto:hello@freshbusinesssolutions.co.uk)  
[freshbusinesssolutions.co.uk](http://freshbusinesssolutions.co.uk)**



# Navigating the digital Shift: The rise of AI in accountancy



In an era where technology relentlessly advances, artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a light of transformation across industries. The accountancy sector, traditionally viewed as conservative and resistant to change, is now at the forefront of this digital revolution.

As AI technologies weave their way into various aspects of financial reporting and advisory services to clients, they bring about a paradigm shift in how accountants and advisors can approach their work. This article delves into the multifaceted impact of AI on accountancy, exploring the benefits for service delivery and operational efficiencies, while also shedding light on the challenges and ethical considerations that accompany this digital transition.

## AI's Entrance into Accountancy

The infusion of AI into accountancy marks a pivotal change in the industry's landscape. By integrating advanced algorithms, machine learning, and natural language processing, AI technologies are redefining the bounds of data analysis, audit accuracy, and customer engagement. These innovations offer a glimpse into a future where financial assessments and decisions are more precise, timely, and less prone to human error. From robotic process automation taking over repetitive tasks to sophisticated analytical tools providing deeper insights, AI is setting a

new standard for efficiency and effectiveness in accountancy.

## Benefits for Services and Client Delivery

- **Enhanced Accuracy and Speed:** AI's ability to swiftly process vast amounts of financial data with minimal errors translates to quicker decision-making and reporting cycles.
- **Customised Client Experiences:** Through predictive analytics and data-driven personalisation, accountants can now offer advice and solutions that are uniquely tailored to each client's needs and financial goals.
- **Strategic Insights:** AI-powered tools equip accountants with strategic insights, enabling them to transcend traditional roles such as bookkeeping, and reconciliation and contribute more significantly to business strategy and growth planning.

## Improving Efficiencies

**Automation of Routine Tasks:** Automation technology excels in handling tasks that are repetitive and time-intensive, freeing up human resources to focus on areas requiring judgment and strategic thinking.

- **Cost Reduction:** This not only reduces the likelihood of human error but also significantly cuts down on staff costs.
- **Scalability:** The scalability of AI tools means that as a business grows, its financial management and reporting systems can expand accordingly without a linear increase in staffing, thereby supporting sustainable growth.

## Concerns and Considerations

- **Ethical and Privacy Concerns:** The handling of sensitive financial data by AI systems necessitates stringent data protection measures and raises questions about the ethical implications of automated decision-making.



Dan Cooper

- **Job Displacement:** The fear of job displacement looms large, as automation replaces traditional roles. However, this shift also paves the way for new, more analytical and added-value job functions that leverage human insight alongside AI capabilities.
- **Continuous Change and Adaptation:** The rapid pace of technological change demands continuous learning and adaptation from professionals to remain relevant and effective in their roles.

The rise of AI in accountancy is a testament to the industry's capacity for innovation and adaptation. By embracing AI, accountants and advisors can enhance service delivery, achieve unprecedented operational efficiencies, and offer strategic insights that drive business success. However, this journey also requires careful navigation of ethical considerations and a commitment to continuous professional development. As the digital landscape evolves, so too must the accountancy profession, adapting to new tools and technologies while shaping them to serve the greater good of businesses and society at large.

**If you have any questions on AI and how it is changing the accounting landscape, do contact us.**

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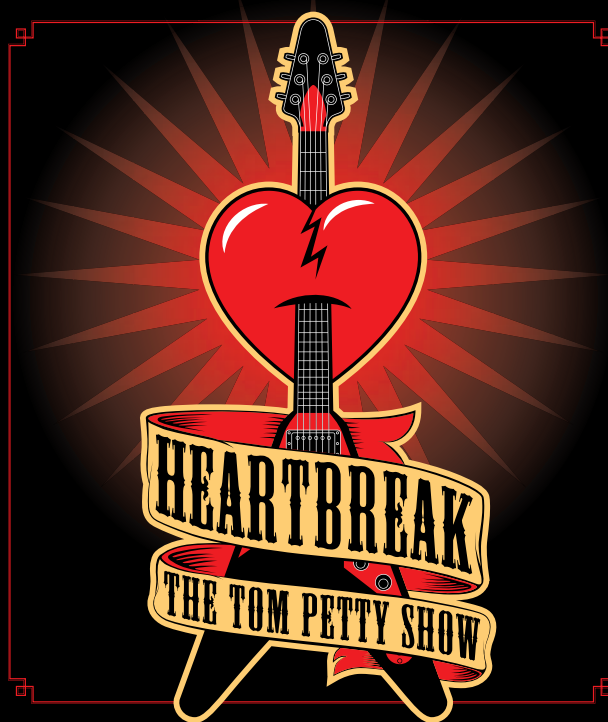
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## North East law firm's move makes room for new appointment

**A top North East law firm, which has just moved into new offices to allow for its expansion, has made its first major appointment at its new premises.**

Newcastle-based Burnetts Solicitors LLP has taken up residence at the state-of-the-art 1 Citygate building, giving it enough room to accommodate its increasing staff numbers and client base.

The firm has now been joined by experienced clinical negligence solicitor, Laura Laffey, who has taken up the role of Legal Director.

Laura – who lives in South Tyneside – has joined Burnetts after a number of years at a firm in Sunderland where she was a director.

Before that she spent 16 years working in Newcastle, first as a paralegal for the clinical negligence team and then joining the team proper when she was qualified.

Her move to Burnetts comes at a time when the solicitor said she wanted “to work with high value cases” in “a modern firm where there is so much opportunity for career progression.”

“I wasn’t really looking to move but then I had a meeting with one of the team at Burnetts and I realised there was the opportunity to do some really good work and be alongside really nice people,” said Laura.

“Burnetts has such a strong team that I knew that this would work really well for me and so when the opportunity came along to work there, I just jumped at it.

“I love my job, I love being able to help clients and I am delighted that I am going to be able to do that at Burnetts.”

## RG reaffirms commitment to professional development with a trio of internal promotions

**Ryecroft Glenton (RG), one of the North East's leading business advisory firms, has demonstrated its commitment to employee personal and professional development with the promotion of three members of its team.**

RG, which is based in Newcastle, provides a range of advisory services including corporate finance, tax, accounts, audit and wealth management, as well as its outsourced | FD service, which provides a complete outsourced finance function solution and board level advisory support for SME businesses.

One of the promotions has been made within RG's audit & assurance service line. Will Spafford, a qualified chartered accountant, joined the firm in 2016 following his studies at Newcastle University in Accounting and Finance. Will has demonstrated significant growth, with this latest promotion seeing him move from Manager to Senior Manager.



Part of the business services team, Charlotte Buckley, also a Newcastle University graduate, has been promoted from Senior to Manager. Joining the firm in April 2020, Charlotte completed her accountancy qualifications in late 2021, when she was noted for academic excellence and won two prizes from the Northern Society of Chartered Accountants.

The third promotion is in the payroll department. Katie Mason joined RG as a payroll trainee and was promoted to Payroll Senior in April 2022. Having further developed her skillset and management abilities, Katie now occupies the role of Payroll Manager.



## Dispute resolution team welcomes four new faces

**With a commitment to building its legal teams to ensure that clients are guaranteed an excellent service and experience, Durham City's leading law firm, Swinburne Maddison LLP (Swinburne Maddison) has welcomed four new faces to its dispute resolution team.**

These appointments bring the total headcount in the fastest growing team in the firm to twenty including 14 lawyers, two partners and four secretaries with two more lawyers on the way.

The recent new recruits comprise three solicitors, Sarah Laird, who qualified in April 2020 and joins from a Newcastle law firm with four years of experience in civil litigation and Kaye Cunningham, who qualified in November 2023. Kaye has been working at a Middlesbrough law firm and brings property litigation experience.

The third new appointment, Liam Musgrave,

recently qualified as a solicitor into the dispute resolution team following a two-year period of training at Swinburne Maddison. He joined the firm in 2021 as a paralegal in the commercial property team, gaining valuable experience on which he will be able to draw when working on property litigation matters.

Finally, Adam McWilliams commenced his training contract with Swinburne Maddison this month, having joined the firm as a paralegal in the residential property team in 2022 before moving into the dispute resolution team. Here, Adam will begin his training, working across all litigation matters.

Adam's appointment as a trainee means Swinburne Maddison will have five trainees well on the way to becoming qualified lawyers.

These four appointments have been made not only as a key part of Swinburne Maddison's strategic growth, but also reflect the continuing demand for the firm's expertise in the field of litigation and dispute resolution.



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# Solicitor of the Month

## Anna Stephenson

*Partner and Head of the Private Client team at Swinburne Maddison LLP.*



### What were your career ambitions growing up?

Throughout my childhood, I always enjoyed learning. I had been interested in becoming a lawyer as I wanted a career which would challenge me and would ultimately be very rewarding.

My parents were incredibly supportive, and they worked hard to make sure I had a good education.

I have always strived to feel technically good at what I do and develop my professional knowledge, once I qualified I undertook further studies with the Society of Trust and Estate Practitioners, which is specific to Private Client law.

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

I am a Partner and Head of the Private Client team at Swinburne Maddison, which involves many tasks. As well as overseeing my department, I run a very busy and varied caseload of Private Client matters which tend to be multi-layered, including advising on estate planning matters comprising business interests, farming assets and sometimes foreign property.

I have taken on several professional Deputy appointments and act as an attorney for some clients. I work with a great team, and it's an exciting time for us in terms of the work we are doing and the growth we are experiencing.

### What is your proudest business achievement?

Most recently I feel an enormous sense of pride when working with members of the team who are progressing with their careers. We have had several trainees in our department over recent years and every one of them has been a pleasure to work with. It is brilliant to see them develop into confident lawyers.

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

Technology has had a huge impact on our industry over the last decade. This has resulted in greater efficiencies, and particularly in our area of work, the ability to reach clients far and wide.

AI will most certainly be used more frequently. The role of the "lawyer" may start to look different but in private client law, we must be ready to serve the evolving needs of the client, keeping up to date with changes in legislation and tax laws.

### What are you currently working on?

I feel like I have something of everything on my desk at the moment. I am currently working with accountants on a high-value trust matter. I relish the opportunity to work with tax advisors as it is always a great learning experience.

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

They are brilliant! What is great about Swinburne Maddison is that we have employees who have been with us for over 50 years, they have played key roles in the training and development of our new team members who have joined us in recent years. The firm has been through a period of growth and our new recruits have hit the ground running and are incredibly bright.

### What advice would you give to your 18-year-old self?

I would suggest seeing a bit more of the world and taking time to travel.

Straight after school, I dived straight into my ambitions of becoming a lawyer on the standard career path; graduating from university, to immediately embarking on my LPC and straight into my training contract. I qualified just after turning 24!

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

Quite possibly, not far away from where I am now!

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

I would have to pick *Vernon Kay* because I think he's funny and of course *Jamie Oliver* to make us a lovely dinner.

*Jasmin Paris*, the first woman to successfully complete the Barkley Marathons. I enjoy running when I can and I'm in awe of her sheer grit and determination, both physically and mentally.

My final guest would be *Michelle Obama* because I think she is very inspirational. If you haven't read her autobiography, it's a great read!

### How do you unwind outside of work?

With difficulty... my favourite thing is to drag my children on mountain walks. The teen years are upon us so it requires a bit more persuasion (and way more snacks) but it is always worth it.

### Favourite book and box set?

I loved the *Woman in the White Kimono* by Ana Johns. I'm not sure I have ever made it through a whole box set. I enjoyed *Peaky Blinders*, but I was too scared to watch the final episode. *The Durrells* is probably more up my street!

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





Anna Stephenson





Matthew Ray

## Alphabet shares are not always as easy as ABC

By Matthew Ray, Associate Solicitor at Swinburne Maddison LLP

**For private companies with only one class of shares (normally designated as ordinary shares), its shareholders are entitled to participate in voting, dividends, and capital distributions in accordance with the proportion in which they hold the issued share capital of the company.**

This standard share structure is not always the most suitable as it offers no flexibility to vary the rights of the shareholders to vote, receive dividends or participate in capital distributions. This flexibility might be desirable in owner-managed businesses where some shareholders are more involved in the management of the business than others or to facilitate tax and succession planning or the introduction of tax-advantaged share option schemes, all of which are becoming increasingly popular in today's market.

For this reason, it is becoming common for companies to implement a more bespoke share structure either on or after incorporation where its share capital is divided into separate classes of shares, each of which have a different name and different rights and restrictions.

This is often referred to as an 'alphabet share structure' and provides flexibility so the rights and restrictions of each shareholder can be tailored to the individual circumstances of the company or to facilitate specialist tax and succession planning.

### **Alphabet share structures: the importance of careful planning and implementation**

Whilst the option of an 'alphabet share structure' is well known, it is often implemented incorrectly and fundamental errors can be discovered many years later when the shareholders wish to dispose of their shares or undertake further tax-driven planning.

Examples of the common mistakes are:

**a)** the directors of the company not having authority under the Companies Act 2006 to

issue and allot new shares of a different class in the capital of the company;

**b)** the failure to disapply or follow certain pre-emptive rights in connection with the allotment and issue of new shares in the capital of the company;

**c)** the rights attaching to the separate class of shares not being clearly documented in a document that is legally binding on the company and its shareholders;

**d)** not clearly distinguishing each class from the others so that the only material difference is the designated name; and

**e)** the failure to comply with statutory requirements under the Companies Act 2006 as to post-completion filings with the Registrar of Companies and updating the statutory registers of the company.

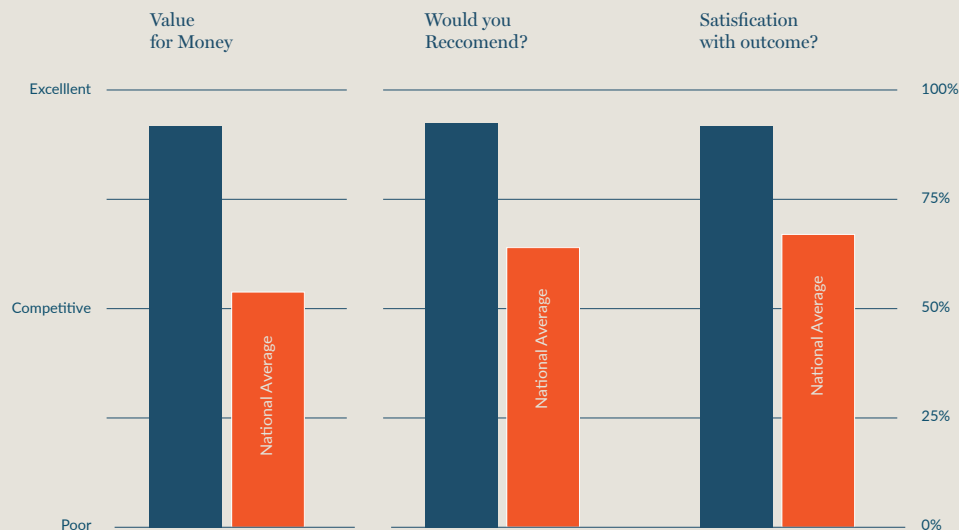
Despite being seen as a relatively straightforward concept, falling foul of these common mistakes can result in unexpected delays, fines, tax charges and legal costs when rectification becomes necessary.

If you are considering implementing an 'alphabet share scheme', it is necessary to take specialist legal and tax advice to ensure that the strict requirements are met, and the company has a clear and certain share structure.

**For further information on the restructuring of share capital or if you require advice on any other corporate related matter, please contact Matthew Ray at [mjr@swinburnemaddison.co.uk](mailto:mjr@swinburnemaddison.co.uk) or by telephone on 0191 384 2441.**



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# Shedding light on schemes which empower farmers to diversify and grow the generation of green energy

Welcome to the regular column from Burnetts Solicitors LLP, in which we are covering a variety of topical issues across all legal sectors. In this month's column, Richard Miller, our Chairman and a partner in our Agribusiness Team discusses the growing impact of solar installations on agricultural land.

**In the last few years, there has been growing interest in using agricultural land for solar installations. There is a significant opportunity to produce large amounts of solar energy on farmland and it can be a good way for farmers to generate income from their land. It can help towards diversifying revenue and increasing farm profitability.**

However, before embarking on a scheme to allow a solar farm to be installed on agricultural land, there are a number of issues which need to be considered. In addition to obtaining legal advice, anyone considering a scheme will also need to take advice from their accountant and a land agent and valuer. One of the other important considerations is obtaining consent from any bank (or other funder) which has a charge over the land and dealing with any issues which need to be addressed as a condition of the lender giving their consent.

The documentation under which the solar farm will be leased to the solar operator needs to be reviewed very carefully and this should be by a lawyer who has expertise in solar schemes. Very often, the documentation seeks to impose restrictions on the remainder of the agricultural land owned by the farmer. The farmer needs to ensure that the remaining farm continues to be viable, both in terms of value as security to a lender and in terms of practicability of accessing the remaining farmland once the area leased to the solar operator becomes off-limits.

Some of the issues which we see regularly involve the solar operator wanting to gain unnecessary or impractical rights of way over the remaining farmland and wanting to impose onerous restrictive covenants which seek to prevent the farmer from operating the remaining farm in certain ways or preventing him from signing up to any other renewables schemes on the remainder of his land.

Another common issue is that solar operators sometimes agree and sign an option to set up a solar installation on land, but do not really



Richard Miller

intend to actively develop it. This effectively ensures that no-one else can develop that land as a solar farm and this protects the value of other solar installations which the solar operator has in the geographical area. Any options which are granted by agricultural landowners should therefore insist that the development is commenced within a set period of time.

One of the main tax considerations revolves around inheritance tax and the loss of Agricultural Property Relief ("APR"). The inheritance tax rules in England mean that (with some exceptions), active farms can be transferred to the next generation, on the death of a farmer, without any inheritance tax being paid. However, if a solar installation is placed on the land, then it moves from being agricultural land to commercial land and the APR is lost, meaning that inheritance tax will potentially become payable. This is obviously something which needs detailed advice before signing up to a solar scheme.

Perhaps the biggest issues surrounds reinstatement of the land when the lease to

the solar operator comes to an end. There could be a significant cost in connection with the removal of the solar panels and installation and reinstatement of the land. Many of the solar operators will set up an SPV (special purpose vehicle) to operate the solar farm and it could have no (or very limited) financial resources. It is therefore important to obtain a bond, insurance policy or a guarantee (from a financially sound entity connected with the operator SPV), which will pay out if the SPV defaults on its obligations to reinstate the land. This ensures that the costs of reinstatement are met in full and that the land can be returned to agricultural use.

There are many good reasons for agricultural landowners to consider leasing part of their land for the development of solar installations, but also many potential pitfalls, so it is vital that expert advice is obtained at the outset of any proposed scheme.

**If you would like to discuss any of these issues, please contact Richard Miller on 01228 552296 or [rm@burnetts.co.uk](mailto:rm@burnetts.co.uk)**

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# Muckle LLP announces five new promotions



**Regional law firm for business, Muckle LLP, continues to reinforce its award-winning team with five promotions, including one partner.**

**With the North East attracting the highest calibre legal talent and firms working to recruit the best, Muckle believes the key to its success is its emphasis on not just attracting but also retaining the most talented lawyers in order to best serve its client base, which includes Tees Valley Combined Authority, Kitwave and Wilton Universal Group.**

Stephanie Brown has been promoted to partner, Carolyn McKay and Claire Naughten have become senior associates, and associate positions go to Gillian Scribbins and Sarah Farish.

Corporate lawyer Stephanie Brown is tipped as a 'Rising Star' by Legal 500 UK and was named Young Lawyer of the Year at the Insider North East Young Professionals Awards 2022. She specialises in advising businesses on sales and acquisitions, private equity transactions, investments, corporate reorganisations, demergers, and general company law matters.

Carolyn McKay and Claire Naughten have

been promoted to senior associates in the firm's award-winning real estate team, while Sarah Farish and Gillian Scribbins have become associates in the firm's renowned banking and dispute resolution teams, respectively.

Carolyn specialises in commercial landlord and tenant work, as well as acting for corporate bodies, charities, housing associations and individuals on a range of real estate matters, including portfolio acquisitions, estate management, disposals and property finance matters.

Claire is highly experienced in property transactional work with a particular focus on the real estate aspects of banking transactions. She is known for her transactional work, including secured lending, both lender and borrower, development finance, freehold disposals and acquisitions and advising landlords, tenants and investors on all aspects of landlord/tenant relationships.

Sarah's main experience is in the insolvency and restructuring sector, in which she has impressively built up a reputation as an insolvency expert in both contentious and non-contentious work. Her work was recognised by Legal 500 UK, with the independent legal directory naming her as a 'Recommended Lawyer' in its 2024 edition.

Gillian worked in journalism, television, and in-house legal before joining the firm and is consistently recognised by clients for her commercial approach to dispute resolution. Gillian has advised some of the firm's biggest

clients on contractual, data protection, shareholder, intellectual property, construction and regulatory disputes.

Jason Wainwright, managing partner at Muckle LLP, said: "As a firm, we have a strong commitment to investing in our people, and it's a pleasure to once again be announcing such a significant list of promotions.

"The promotions reflect the hard work, expertise and enthusiasm these lawyers have shown. Many of them have been with the firm for a number of years, and it's a privilege to watch them craft their careers with Muckle.

"We pride ourselves on nurturing talent from within, so recognising the commitment of homegrown talent with reward and development is very important to us at Muckle.

"I look forward to supporting Stephanie, Carolyn, Claire, Sarah and Gillian as they continue on their individual paths as remarkable lawyers."

Muckle recently became the first law firm in the North East and Cumbria to achieve B Corp accreditation, awarded to businesses that meet high standards of social and environmental performance, transparency, and accountability. The firm was also named Company of the Year and Best Place to Work at the North East Business Awards in 2023.

**For more information about careers at Muckle, visit [www.muckle-llp.com](http://www.muckle-llp.com)**



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*L-R: Lisa Bucknall, Claire Devapal, Corrianne Boston, Hannah Flowers, Hannah Nagel*

## Mincoffs Solicitors announces raft of promotions

Leading North East corporate and commercial law firm, Mincoffs Solicitors has announced five promotions across both its business and private client teams.

**Hannah Flowers and Hannah Nagel have been made associate solicitors in the commercial team, along with Claire Devapal and Lisa Bucknall in the residential conveyancing team, and the dispute resolution team's Corrianne Boston.**

The promotions are the latest in a prolonged period of growth for the firm, which has more than 100 staff across its Jesmond offices and marked its 75th anniversary last year.

Hannah Flowers specialises in intellectual property, while Hannah Nagel has particular expertise in the field of data protection, and both work across a wide range of commercial matters - including commercial contracts, franchising and information technology.

Claire and Lisa advise clients on all aspects of residential conveyancing, including house purchases and sales, transfers of equity and lease extensions of various complexities, while Corrianne has wide reaching experience in a variety of commercial and property litigation matters, acting for both claimant and defendant.

Senior partner Paul Hughes believes the promotions will bolster

both the business and private client offering at the firm.

"We are delighted to see Hannah, Hannah, Claire, Lisa and Corrianne progress in their careers at Mincoffs," he said.

"Their promotions to associate solicitors are thoroughly deserved and a testament to the time and effort they dedicate to delivering successful outcomes for their clients.

"I have full confidence they will excel at their new roles within their respective teams and I wish them every success in this next stage of their careers."

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

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

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

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# Sweeney Miller Law relocates Sunderland office to accommodate growing team and increasing client numbers



L-R: Partners Charlie Lynn, Surbhi Vedhara, Jessica Fenwick, Damien Todd

Leading North East law firm Sweeney Miller Law has cemented its commitment to the region by moving its Sunderland base from the Ashbrooke area of the city to a more spacious and modern office space north of the river.

**Sweeney Miller Law, which provides legal services to businesses and individuals from its offices in Sunderland and Newcastle, has enjoyed a period of significant and sustained growth in both staff and clients from across the North East region and nationwide. This growth has prompted the move across the River Wear to facilitate further expansion.**

The riverside area has recently been a magnet for huge investment into the city. The new premises will be in the midst of the planned regeneration of this area and in particular, the proposed new Crown Works Studios development, which has garnered a lot of attention.

The Right Worshipful the Mayor of the City of Sunderland, Councillor Dorothy Trueman commented:

“

*On behalf of the city, I would like to thank Sweeney Miller Law for choosing to stay*

*in Sunderland as they expand their services and for creating such fantastic job opportunities for our residents. I wish them every success in their future expansion and endeavours.*

The new premises, Sweeney Miller House, has undergone a significant refurbishment to align with the firm's Newcastle office, modern brand and ambitious approach. It boasts a significantly larger footprint than the firm's former Wearside base, at nearly 10,000 sq ft, and features a welcoming reception area, suite of meeting rooms, boardroom and event space, and a spacious staff break-out area with pool and table tennis tables as well as ample parking for staff and clients. The location also provides excellent regional and national transport links to the A1 and A19 and easy access to Sunderland city centre using public transport.

The building has a prestigious past, as it was notably inaugurated by the late Queen Elizabeth II in May 1993, during a visit to Sunderland with the Prince of Wales, when

it was home to the Homeworthy Furniture factory and more recently, was the home of a large claims company.

Sweeney Miller Law Managing Partner Surbhi Vedhara commented on the move: “While our office in Mowbray Villas has served us well for many years, our continued growth of both team and workload has provided us with an exciting reason to look to the next chapter of Sweeney Miller Law and move to premises that can facilitate our ongoing expansion. We've always had a base in Sunderland, and the new facilities will allow us to continue providing excellent service to our clients in the area, the region, and further afield. We are excited about the opportunities that Sweeney Miller House presents for us and very much look forward to what the future holds.”

Sweeney Miller House's additional space will enable the firm to develop its services for individual and business clients in the region across its key practice areas of conveyancing, commercial property, family law, dispute resolution, private client and landlord and tenant. The firm's well-regarded, partner-led commercial and corporate teams also offer a complete solution for any potential business need.

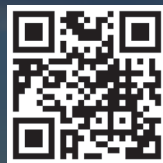
**Keep up to date with Sweeney Miller Law at [sweeneymiller.co.uk](https://sweeneymiller.co.uk) or, for leading private and business legal advice, call 0345 900 5401.**

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## The Business Owner's Divorce

Jacqueline Emmerson has been practising Family Law for over thirty years.

She works with a team of experienced Family Lawyers including Tracey Hammond, also qualified for over thirty years, and Elizabeth Brown, qualified for over twenty years.

**"As I have progressed in my career, I have dealt with more complicated cases. Many of my clients own their own businesses. I like dealing with this type of work. As a business owner, I understand the need for cash in a business, what is really going on behind the profit and loss accounts, what to look for in business and personal bank statements and the different ways in which a business can be valued."**

There can be a vast range of outcomes for the business owner who is divorcing. Their share of the value of a business will have to be taken into account when reaching a settlement.

In some cases businesses have been valued at millions. This can come as a shock to the spouse not involved in the running of the business. Especially when they have been offered a very low Financial Settlement upon divorce. Many businesses have been built up over decades. In the North East for example, IT companies started by founders straight out of university thirty years ago are now seen as world leading.

On the other hand, if a business really is entirely dependant upon one main person for its income it will often be valued using much lower multipliers.

In the case of "Fred" and "Tina," Fred ran his own business. Tina did not work, and she sought a large proportion of the value of the matrimonial home, a large maintenance payment for life and a lump sum equivalent to half of the value of Fred's business. She was determined that the value of Fred's business would be about £400,000.



Jacqueline Emmerson

Having looked at the accounts and turnover of Fred's business, Emmersons family team could see that he would have very little by way of goodwill in his business. It was the classic case of the business was reliant upon Fred to keep it going, he was the main fee earner. So without him at the helm, there would not really be a business to sell. Emmersons thought the business would be worth at most £40,000. Arrangements were made for a specialist accountant to value it; it was actually valued at about £25,000. This was a joint instruction from both Fred and his wife, via solicitors, and therefore Fred's wife had to accept the valuation.

It can be very complicated to unpick the workings of a business. Is one partner going to leave the business, if so how are they to be compensated? Can the business afford to compensate them? The business is the golden goose that provides the income, often for the whole family. If you strangle it then

that income is lost. Again, it's about the long term view, how can two separate parties be provided for in the long term?

A well-run business, with strong branding, strong service culture and repeat clients can be worth a lot of money. If it doesn't rely solely on you to keep it going, then it is worth even more. More and more consolidators are buying smaller businesses, there is a lot of venture capital money available at the moment. Dentists, vets, accountancy practices, IT and opticians have all benefitted recently from selling their businesses as going concerns.

Is your pending divorce the time to sell up and reap the rewards?

**As always, if you want to chat about any of the above then you can contact [jacqueline.emmerson@emmersons-solicitors.co.uk](mailto:jacqueline.emmerson@emmersons-solicitors.co.uk)**



# Newcastle costs law firm, Brough Partners appoint new COP lead to support growth

Newcastle based Costs Law firm, Brough Partners has appointed Ana Matos as Head of Court of Protection to support the businesses recent growth, which saw a 48% increase in turnover in the last 12 months.

Brough Partners specialise in Court of Protection (COP), Legal Aid and Inter Partes costs law work. Bringing with her over eight years of experience in the sector, Ana's responsibilities will include supporting and maximising the COP costs claims of solicitor clients as well as assisting with business development and staff training. A consultant for the last four years, Ana previously held roles at Paragon Costs, A&M Bacon and bSquared Costs.

The appointment supports the businesses ambitious growth plans which in the last year alone experienced a 48% increase in turnover with the company targeted to hit approximately £500k in the next two years. The growth follows a recent rebrand and move to larger office space in Newcastle to accommodate the team's expansion.

Andrew Brough, Managing Director, Brough Partners said; "Since founding the business



L-R: Andrew Brough and Ana Matos

back in 2018, we have noticed an increasing demand for our services from solicitor clients across England & Wales which has been fantastic. We feel this is largely due to our ongoing commitment to providing a friendly and quality service for clients and most importantly securing for them the very best financial results.

The appointment of Ana to Head of Court of Protection will allow us to extend our offering and capabilities further in the legal costs field, specifically within COP to support our growing client base. We are delighted that Ana has joined us and wish her the very best in her new role."

Ana Matos, Head of Court of Protection, Brough Partners added: "It's great to be joining the Brough Partners business at such an exciting time in their growth journey. They are a wonderful team, with many longstanding clients and I'm looking forward

to supporting their COP service offering. My focus will be to ensure that client's costs are maximised fully and to provide them with the essential tools and guidance to increase recoverability. I'm also really looking forward to providing in-house training on costs related matters too."

Andrew added: "We certainly have ambitious plans for the next few years! But that said, we will continue to remain true to our values, around quality, offering a friendly and dedicated service and securing the best outcomes for clients. As we expand the team further, training and development and investing in our people will also be a key priority. I'm really proud of the talented team we have here, without whom, we simply wouldn't be where we are today. We are always on the lookout for costs law talent, so if you feel you have what it takes to be part of our team, please do drop us a line."

 A large advertisement for Brough Partners. The background is a blurred image of several people in business attire sitting around a table, looking at documents. The Brough Partners logo is in the top right corner. The main text is "Expertise you need, results you want." in a large, white, serif font. Below this is the text "Costs Law specialists in Court of Protection, Inter Partes and Legal Aid." in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. At the bottom left, the website "broughpartners.com" and phone number "T: 0191 300 1579" are listed. At the bottom right, there is a QR code.
 

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Helen Milburn and Rebecca Logue, Jacksons Law

# Looking after your family's estate and investments

Solicitors, Helen Milburn and Rebecca Logue explore your options.

**Have you heard of a Family Investment Company (FIC) to manage your estate for future generations? This could be a great alternative, with beneficial tax implications to something like a Discretionary Trust for the right family - so it's always a good idea to explore all the options when it comes to estate and succession planning.**

FICs are becoming an increasingly popular alternative to a Discretionary Trust – and what is right for different families will be as unique as your family structure.

Helen Milburn and Rebecca Logue of Jacksons Law explore the similarities and differences to help you weigh up the pros and cons.

"The main similarity is the purpose behind them," Helen says.

"The generation that hold wealth often want to pass this on to the next generation, but don't necessarily want to give them free reign over it!"

FICs and Trusts are particularly important for high net-worth clients, as part of estate planning. Such clients also have one eye on tax mitigation strategies – and both FICs and Discretionary Trusts can support these.

Helen says: "A Discretionary Trust has always been a popular vehicle for this, enabling you to pass your assets into a trust, to remove them from your own estate into the careful hands of trustees, who manage and control your assets.

"The trust is set up as a long-term mechanism to benefit a class of persons, for example, children and the next generation after them."

Rebecca adds: "The FIC operates on a similar basis, whereby the company is managed by directors who have a similar duty of care, usually to children who have a defined shareholding."

With a FIC, the board of directors are family members and the operation of the FIC and shareholding are tightly controlled through the company structure.

Articles of association and shareholder agreements are carefully drafted to reflect the family's wishes.

Shareholders can be restricted to family members only, to ease concerns of shareholdings being transferred outside the family unit."

Rebecca adds: "There can also be an element of control reserved – should the shareholders stray out of line!"

A Discretionary Trust can offer similar benefits, as there is a set class of beneficiaries under the overarching control of trustees. However, with a Discretionary Trust, the class of beneficiaries could be

much wider.

"The beneficiaries could include young grandchildren and unborn future generations, whereas a FIC generally has to have adult beneficiaries," says Helen.

"It is possible to contain a Discretionary Trust within a FIC to hold shares for minor beneficiaries or future generations, which can be a popular strategy."

So what are the different assets that can be held in Discretionary Trusts or FICs?

Helen says: "There are different suitabilities, depending on the assets being held.

"A FIC is a company and therefore may be best suited to holding investment portfolios, trading companies or a property portfolio.

"If you are thinking of your holiday home by the sea, this may be better placed into a Discretionary Trust."

Tax, the word on everyone's lips, is also a factor when it comes to choosing between a FIC and a discretionary trust.

Helen says: "Whichever way you go, there are tax consequences, but it comes down to specifics when working out the most tax efficient option for your family.

"Each option will have different implications for the inheritance tax, capital gains tax or income tax that may be due – so it all comes down to getting the right advice."

Solicitors, accountants, tax advisers and financial planners can all work together to help you explore your options.

**For more information, contact Helen today on 01642 873050 or email [enquiries@jacksons-law.com](mailto:enquiries@jacksons-law.com)**  
**[www.jacksons-law.com](http://www.jacksons-law.com)**

# Preparing for the new duty to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace

Paul Johnstone is a Partner at specialist employment law firm, Collingwood Legal. Paul considers the new duty to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace and what employers can do to prepare for its implementation.

Legislation has existed for many years to protect employees in the workplace from sexual harassment. This includes personal liability for workers who commit acts of sexual harassment, and vicarious liability for employers for the acts of their employees.

However, these protections have not stopped harassment at work from being an issue, as evidenced in a recent report by Unison of 12,200 NHS workers which found that 10% of respondents reported unwanted incidents at work.

New legislation was passed last year to introduce a new duty on employers to prevent sexual harassment. From October 2024, a worker bringing a sexual harassment claim can also bring a claim that their employer failed to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. If successful, an Employment Tribunal can order compensation be increased by up to 25%.

This new duty may appear similar to the existing “reasonable steps” defence an employer can plead in order to avoid vicarious liability for the discriminatory acts of their employees. This allows an employer to argue it took reasonable steps to prevent the employee from doing the act complained of. However, the “reasonable steps” defence assesses steps an employer takes to prevent sexual harassment with reference to the conduct of the individual accused of harassment, whereas the new duty’s focus is on preventing sexual harassment within the organisation generally.

When employers plead the “reasonable steps” defence, this has usually involved providing evidence of the training received by an individual perpetrator and the policies and procedures provided to them. With the introduction of the new duty, the question will likely be raised as to whether the employer’s training, policies and procedures



Paul Johnstone

are sufficient to deal with sexual harassment in the workplace with reference to the employer’s operations and its size and resources. Moreover, as the new duty is not restricted to the steps taken in respect of an alleged perpetrator, employers should be mindful of the risks of sexual harassment from third parties such as clients and customers.

Employers in all sectors and of all sizes need to prepare for the introduction of the new duty and the steps they need to take to maximise the chances of being protected from enhanced liability under the new duty.

One practical method for an employer to demonstrate a proactive approach may be to introduce a form of sexual harassment “risk assessment” of operational practices (akin to a health and safety style risk assessment). This could be achieved by identifying areas of potential risk such as:

1. having to deal with individuals where there is an imbalance of power (e.g. managerial relationships where some core personnel have control over a person’s career progression);
2. raising awareness of scenarios where individuals may work in an intimate work location or at a time of day or night where

there are not many people around;

3. where some employees may be exposed to social or business-related events where alcohol could be freely available.

The above list gives a few examples of issues which may be relevant for a particular employer to consider when assessing the risk of employees being exposed to sexual harassment. The kinds of situations where sexual harassment might occur could differ widely depending on the nature of an employer’s operation and each organisation will need to consider the specific areas of risk applicable to them.

*Collingwood Legal is a specialist employment law firm with extensive experience of dealing with harassment and diversity issues. We can provide bespoke training and advice to organisations in preparing for the implementation of this new piece of legislation, including a review of an employer’s policies and procedures.*

**If you require this specialist advice, please contact 0191 282 2880 or visit [www.collingwoodlegal.com](http://www.collingwoodlegal.com)**





Anna Ramsden

## Navigating workplace banter- an employment law perspective

Banter, jokes and pranks between colleagues are a daily occurrence in the majority of workplaces, but how do we establish when a line has been crossed?

**Humour is important and many people rely on it to get through the challenges of their working day. Banter can also foster positive relationships between colleagues, but it is important to be respectful and for clear boundaries to be set. From an employment law perspective, issues can arise when workplace jokes relate to a protected characteristic, as defined in the Equality Act 2010.**

There have been an increased number of claims in the employment tribunal related to banter in the last few years, many of which have been determined to be bullying or harassment in relation to discriminatory jokes on the grounds of race, gender, nationality or sexual identity. This should cause concern for employers, as they are likely to be held vicariously liable for the actions of their employees. Additionally, employers should be aware of the upcoming changes to the Equality Act 2010 due to come into effect in Autumn this year (2024) which will impose a new legal duty to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of employees during their employment.

However, the more recent case of *Richardson v West Midlands Trains Ltd* sheds some light on the perception of the employment tribunal on workplace jokes. The case involved a Claimant who left shed exoskeletons of a tarantula and snake in a colleague's pigeonhole on separate occasions after said colleague had expressed a dislike towards insects. After the second incident involving the snakeskin, the colleague was distressed enough to report the pranks to her line manager, particularly as the Claimant had been asked to stop by the colleague after the tarantula incident. The Claimant was subsequently dismissed for gross misconduct.

The tribunal found that these were "harmless, childish pranks" and the Claimant was reinstated in his role and awarded £40,000 for his unfair and unlawful dismissal. Whilst this is somewhat of a win for workplace banter, the tribunal in this case were clear that the Claimant's actions were inappropriate and unacceptable due to the distress caused to the colleague and therefore would have amounted to misconduct. The key point is that the

careless pranks did not amount to gross misconduct warranting dismissal.

In determining how to deal with a workplace prank gone wrong, an employer should consider the context and how serious the pranked-employee found the prank, particularly where they have already called for any pranks or jokes to be stopped. Conversely, they should also consider the employee's motivations for the prank and any admission of guilt or apology after the events. Some pranks could be serious enough to amount to gross misconduct but it is important to be able to link this to company policies and consider all the circumstances before being quick to make any decision.

With April Fools' Day just last month, we expect there to have been a number of pranks and jokes between colleagues. As an employer, are you equipped to deal with any fallout from this? Is your disciplinary policy up to date and fit for use in these situations? Have your employees been informed about where the boundaries lie? Do they understand the organisation's equal opportunities policy? If your answer to any of these questions are no, please get in touch with us today, we're here to help with any of your employment law or HR needs.

By implementing clear policies, providing training and promoting a culture of respect and inclusion, employers can create a workplace where everyone feels valued and respected, all while having a laugh with their colleagues.

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## Fundraiser embarks on world record attempt for longest triathlon

**Ian Lambert from Wallsend, Newcastle, is gearing up for an extraordinary challenge: to break the world record for the longest triathlon ever attempted. His mission isn't just about personal achievement; it's also a profound effort to support the Dragonfly Cancer Trust, a cause close to his heart.**

The Dragonfly Cancer Trust based in Newcastle is dedicated to supporting young people aged 0-25 who are battling terminal cancer, aiding families, hospitals, and hospices across the UK. Through financial assistance and emotional support, the trust aims to alleviate the stress and burden faced by families dealing with terminal cancer diagnoses.

"The Dragonfly Trust is a cause I deeply support," Ian explains. "I'm a trustee with the charity and I've seen at first hand the good work they do to help families create positive memories despite the uncertain future. This is my longest and toughest challenge yet, and probably ever but it's all for a worthy cause, and I'm determined to push my limits for the Dragonfly Cancer Trust."

The triathlon consists of approximately 1,155 miles of running, 4,610 miles of cycling, and over 175 miles of swimming. He started on his journey on February 1st, with the running segment now underway. He averages between 16 and 26 miles per day, pushing himself relentlessly towards his goal.

In addition to his physical exertion, he aims to raise £15,000 for the Dragonfly Cancer Trust and to raise awareness of the good work that the charity does.

## Miller Homes to donate a further £10K to North East charities

**North East charities can once again bid for a share of £10,000, courtesy of one of the region's leading housebuilders.**

Miller Homes introduced its regional Community Fund in 2022 to help grassroots projects linked to education, wellbeing, the environment and sport across the North East.

And now the first of two rounds of 2024 funding is underway, with the company urging groups, organisations and good causes to apply.

Last year, awards were issued to a number of beneficiaries including Silver Tree Primary School at Usher Moor, which applied to the Miller Homes Community Fund for support to develop a much-needed library.

Money also went to Seaton Sluice Football Club to help pay to take young players to a tournament in Blackpool, and to North Shields-based Mindstars NE to buy craft materials to help young people suffering with mental health issues.

Cramlington's Mayfields Community Centre received £1000 to support its community meal service and St John's Methodist Church, Whitley Bay was awarded money to pay for its Friday Cuppa Warm Welcome sessions for anyone feeling lonely or isolated.



Argus Community CIC at Peterlee was granted £1000 to help fund the plan to provide free accredited training for long term unemployed people and the 1st Newfield Scout Group, at Chester-le-Street, received a grant to enable them to buy two event shelters.

Regional operations director, Ryan Lincoln said the Community Fund "demonstrates in the most practical and helpful way possible just how much value we place in communities."

"Our developments are about far more than bricks and mortar," he said. "They are about people, communities and quality of living. So if we can support groups, organisations and charities then we are happy to do so."



## Historic moment as HMS Blyth's Bell handed over to Blyth Town Council

**A significant moment in maritime history was commemorated as the ship's bell and other historic artefacts from HMS Blyth were officially handed over to Blyth Town Council by the Royal Navy.**

HMS Blyth was a regular visitor to its adopted town but in 2023 the vessel was sold to Romania, one of the UK's NATO allies. As is the tradition, the ship's bell, battle honours board and name plate were handed over to Blyth Town Council for safe keeping

until the next HMS Blyth enters service in the future.

To mark this occasion, a celebration was held at Blyth Bede Academy, featuring the Royal Marines Corps of Drums, static displays by various units of the Royal Navy, Maritime Reserves, and military charities. An inspiring speech was delivered by Commodore Tom Knowles VR ADC Royal Navy, the Naval Regional Commander for the North of England and Isle of Man. The Lord Lieutenant of Northumberland was represented by Deputy Lieutenant Andy Collier and the event was further graced by the presence of esteemed local dignitaries. Amongst the 240 guests were members of the local community and voluntary groups representing the people of Blyth.

Mayor Warren Taylor said: "This was an event to be proud of, but it was also tinged with sadness as our adopted ship has been decommissioned. We are a proud naval town having had a major submarine base in South Harbour during World War Two and our relationship with the Royal Navy is very strong."



Providing financial support to parents of seriously ill children with life limiting conditions, that require 24 hour nursing care or specialist nursing facilities



[www.thecharlieandcarterfoundation.co.uk](http://www.thecharlieandcarterfoundation.co.uk) Registered Charity No: 1166538 [laura@ccfemail.co.uk](mailto:laura@ccfemail.co.uk)





## What at night for DAY!

Durham Area Youth was established as a CIO in September 2017. They provide youth provision to young people aged between 6-18 years old in the villages of West Rainton, Pittington, Sherburn Village, Sherburn Hill, Great Lumley and Bournmoor.

### Their core aims are to:

- Provide a young people led service, adapting and changing to their interests.
- Provide a fun, engaging & safe environment for young people to develop confidence, resilience and social skills.
- Offer a range of activities and support allowing young people to develop skills and progress in life.
- Promote community participation.

On 21st March they held their second DAY Youth Awards, created by the young people. The award evening main aim was to recognise and



celebrate the fantastic achievements of young people, volunteers and staff across Durham Area Youth.

With awards for young champion, personal achievement, volunteers, partnerships and social action the night was filled with amazing stories and lots of emotion.

Emily Burns, CEO, Durham Area Youth commented: "Our awards are great for our young people as it gives them something to look forward to. Durham Area Youth couldn't exist without all the partners we work with, they are really vital to help to drive us forward, its great to give them recognition too. Durham Area Youth is growing year on year, there is a real need for the services we are providing. Through collaboration we hope to support more young people across the next year and beyond. A huge thank you to all our sponsors and everyone who helped to make the awards such an incredible night."

**To find out more about Durham Area Youth visit:**  
**[www.durhamareayouth.org.uk](http://www.durhamareayouth.org.uk)**





## Mental health charity helps primary school

A Northumberland charity which supports individuals living with complex mental health needs and learning disabilities has stepped up to support a local primary school with the creation of some new outdoor play equipment.

Blyth Star Enterprises, which provides living support and day services that reflect real working environments, has been working with Shanklea Primary School

in Cramlington to design and build some exciting new play structures, exclusively from sustainably sourced materials, after the school's previous outdoor play equipment had to be removed on health and safety grounds. Working closely with staff and pupils to come up with creative concepts for structures that would encourage imaginative, cooperative play and help develop the children's fine and gross motor skills, service users and support staff from Blyth Star's woodwork department day service set to work to bring their ideas to life.



To date, the charity has built and installed a number of reading tipis and mud kitchens, a water play balance beam, a role play shop and a full-size car, complete with personalised registration plate.



## The Alnwick Garden welcomes grant from The National Lottery

The Alnwick Garden in Northumberland has received £350,000 from The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest community funder in the UK, so that it can remain steadfast in its dedication to enriching the local community.

The Alnwick Garden, an established charity organisation, will use the funding over five years to develop a new programme to improve well-being and employment opportunities, entitled 'Growing Together Northumberland'. The initiative will work with people over the age of 16 who are not economically active, nor in education, employment, or training to develop their skills and support their progression.

Duncan Nicholson, Head of Funding for the North East & Cumbria at The National Lottery Community Fund said: "We are delighted to support The Alnwick Garden with its Growing Together Northumberland project, which will help participants to build skills, gain volunteering experience and move closer to employment.

"This funding, made possible thanks to National Lottery players, allows us to respond to the needs of local communities. Our funding strengthens society and improves lives across the UK, and we will continue to invest in communities where funding can help projects to have a real impact."

This helping hand from The National Lottery Community Fund will ensure The Alnwick Garden can remain a garden for all, which already hosts a range of educational and social programmes, but also extend its reach to the local communities. Its existing offering includes employability programmes, initiatives for over-55s to reduce social isolation, horticulture programmes for young people with additional needs, and a range of schemes for young people, focussing on the importance of healthy lifestyles and education around drugs and alcohol.



## River Trust celebrates 20 years of protecting the Tyne and wants to hear from you

As Tyne Rivers Trust celebrates its 20th anniversary, the team at the Trust are asking people, businesses and communities in the North East, what does the River Tyne mean to them.

Tyne Rivers Trust, a unique charity specialising in restoring, improving and protecting the rivers, lakes, ponds and streams of the Tyne catchment, was established in the same year that X Factor first came onto our screens, Facebook was launched and a first class stamp cost just 28p.

Dr Ceri Gibson, chief executive of Tyne Rivers Trust said, "The Trust was set up in 2004 to mitigate the construction of the second Tyne tunnel owing to concerns about the impact of disturbing contaminated sediment on migratory fish. However, it was quickly recognised that there was much more that could be done to protect our rivers and ensure they thrive for future generations.

"We know that it's not just us who care about the Tyne. The river has shaped the region's character for centuries and is iconic for many people. It is used for activities like boat trips, fishing and riverside walks while continuing to be important for businesses and industries. So we'd love people to share their memories, stories and images with us so that we can capture what the Tyne means to you."

To find out more about the work of Tyne Rivers Trust, visit [www.tyneriverstrust.org](http://www.tyneriverstrust.org)



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# Dragonfly Cancer Trust

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## Charity of the Month...

### The Great North Air Ambulance Service, your region's essential life-saving charity

The Great North Air Ambulance Services' (GNAAS) roots go back to 1991, when the GNAAS Appeal was launched with the aim of providing the North East of England's first helicopter air ambulance. It took four years to raise enough money to bring this dream to fruition. This was funded partially by public donations and partially by the NHS Trust, but spiraling maintenance costs and the relatively low level of public donations were major causes for concern. The CEO at the time realised that if the charity was to be successful, it would not be under the control and strict guidance of the Ambulance Service. In May 2002, the charity was registered with the Charity Commission.

#### Why was the charity formed?

To save lives in emergency situations with our expert-level pre-hospital care. We aim to be there in the critical moments that matter, to keep families and communities together by saving lives. Since our creation as a charity, we have responded more than 27,000 times across our region.

#### Which area do you cover?

We cover over 8,000 sq miles including the North East, North Yorkshire, Cumbria and the Isle of Man. We often support neighbouring Air Ambulance charities in Scotland and the North West of England. Our region covers busy cities, residential areas and miles of national parks including the fells of the Lake District.







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

We have many fundraising events throughout the year covering social, sport and challenge events. We host annual balls across our region that celebrate the charity, patients and supporters in an entertaining night that helps to raise vital funds. We have a huge participation in the Great North Run (the world's biggest half-marathon event), which last year raised more than £188,000 for our cause. Other events include corporate golf days, coffee mornings, and plenty of walking and cycling challenges to choose from.

Explore our region in different ways and see our latest events here: [gna.as/events](https://gna.as/events)

### Who are your trustees and patrons?

Our trustees come from a range of backgrounds, all bringing different business experience to their role which helps them when directing the affairs of the charity.

Our patrons are anyone who is in need. Whether that is someone who lives in the area, is just visiting for a holiday or simply passing through. Our aim is to keep families and communities together by saving lives.

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

In the last 22 years there are many moments that we are proud of, here are just a few of them:

- In 2015 we became one of the first air ambulances in the UK to carry blood products on our aircraft. (Our 'blood on board' project means that we can deliver transfusions and administer blood products outside of a hospital setting. In 2022 we celebrated delivering blood to our 500th patient!

- In 2017 we were the first to record a pre-hospital thoracotomy in the world (when the chest is opened and an incision is made into the sac that surrounds the heart to relieve pressure. This footage is now a vital training aid for our team along with other pre-hospital clinicians.)
- In 2023 we teamed up with Manx Care to offer our services to the residents and visitors to the Isle of Man. (We are the only critical care air ambulance responding to the Isle of Man every day. We provide critical care interventions and transfer seriously injured or unwell patients by helicopter from the Isle of Man directly to the UK for emergency medical treatment. This was a really important milestone for us last year.)

All of the moments we are most proud of have been improving our service or ensuring we can reach even more people with our care.

### What are you currently working on?

Operating as a round-the-clock service has been a long-term goal for our charity. Although we have made great strides in achieving this, we are currently working on becoming 24/7 in the North East and are operating four nights a week in Cumbria. This expansion alone has meant that we were able to attend an extra 745 incidents last year. We want to be 24/7 across the whole region so that we can be there for those that need us, no matter what the time of day. Unfortunately, this will need continual funding and so the only way we will be able to operate this vital service is with the help and support of the general public.

### What does the future hold?

We are always searching for ways to expand our service so that we can be there for even more people in the critical moments that matter. Our equipment and assets always need upgrading and replacing. We are constantly testing out trials in medical innovations that can improve the pre-hospital care for our patients.

### How do you get involved?

We would not be the charity we are today without the support from the general public; fundraising for us, attending our events and volunteering with us.

Our main focus currently is to make our service 24/7 so we can be there for anyone, anytime, anywhere.

**To help with this appeal head to [gna.as/helpus247](https://gna.as/helpus247) or to get involved with volunteering, events or just to find out more visit to [www.gnaas.com](https://www.gnaas.com) or follow us on social media at /GNAirAmbulance**







## Volunteer lands full time role making memories

**A volunteer at a charity that supports people with dementia and their families has joined the team as a full time member of staff.**

**20 year old Shannon Dees started volunteering last year supporting the centre manager at Silverline Memories, Jo Batty-Wilkins. When the position for office administrator came free she jumped at the chance and is now involved in huge variety of work for the charity.**

As well as overseeing the telephone and

reception duties, Shannon also oversees finance including bookkeeping, invoicing and payroll. She also manages organising staff training and office administration, as well helping out with the EBay shop. CEO and charity funder Sandra Coulter said:

“Shannon has been a god send, quickly settling into the role and keeping the ship going in a straight line. The need for our services grows weekly as more and more people are diagnosed with dementia, so it is important we grow the team and bring in people that have a passion for what we do and that clients take to. I have no worries on that front with Shannon as not only does she do a good job, but everyone wants to dance with her at our events.”

Shannon has joined as the charity is celebrating its first successful decade supporting people in the North East, and the team are currently organising a commemorative Hollywood themed ball on Saturday May 11th, at the Grand Hotel, Gosforth Park.

Set up 10 years ago the charity, which is based in Kenton, was founded because of a passionate belief that life should not end with a diagnosis of dementia. The team work hard to provide opportunities to keep people active and engaged, connecting with each other to enjoy positive mental

health and wellbeing. 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. Shannon, who has a foundation degree in health and social work, said:

“It is quite simply the best job ever. Having previously worked in hospitality I am used to dealing with the public, but the service users here are all so lovely that every day is a pleasure. The job does keep me on my toes though, which is good as I get a lot of satisfaction from it and I never go home sad at the end of a working day!”

Although the charity is funded by grants from 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 Hollywood themed ball, provide a prize for the raffle or to any restaurants/food outlets who will donate a voucher to the grub grab raffle being held on the night.

***Tickets can be bought at and more information on the charity is available on [silverlinememories.com](http://silverlinememories.com)***

# Five Foundations of Health – Tips from Gosforth Family Chiropractic

**Proper nervous system movement and function form the cornerstone of Foundation #2, one of the five crucial pillars of health. The significance of this foundation cannot be overstated, as it directly impacts our overall well-being. When we neglect the importance of maintaining the mobility of our spinal column, we subject ourselves to a cascade of issues stemming from micro-trauma.**

Micro-trauma, the accumulation of small injuries over time due to prolonged static positions, is a silent assailant of our health. Whether it manifests as occasional discomfort or debilitating pain, its effects can be profound. The solution lies in embracing frequent movement. Our spine, comprising of 24 vertebrae with interposed discs, is designed for mobility. When deprived of regular movement, these discs become vulnerable to stagnation, leading to a toxic environment within the spine. Consider your posture as you read this. Are you hunched over, slouched, or feeling discomfort? These are red flags indicating the need for immediate action. We must break free from the modern-day norm of sedentarism, characterized by hours of sitting at desks or during commutes. Neglecting movement in favour of convenience perpetuates the cycle of micro-trauma, jeopardising our health in the long run.

Fortunately, incorporating simple exercises into our daily routines can counteract the adverse

effects of prolonged sitting. These exercises aim to reintroduce mobility to our spines gradually. Remember, less is more, and it's crucial to listen to your body's signals. Here are four exercises to kickstart your journey towards a healthier spine:

**Glute Bridge:** Lie on your back with knees bent, lift your hips while squeezing your buttocks. Hold for 10-15 seconds, repeating three times.

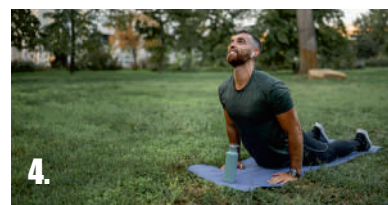
**Knee to Chest:** Bring one knee towards your chest, hold for 10-15 seconds, alternating sides, and repeating three times.

**Double Knee to Chest:** Bring both knees towards your chest, hold for 10-15 seconds, repeating three times.

**Cobra Pose:** Lie face down, hands under shoulders, gently lift head and chest off the floor while pressing down through the tops of your feet. Hold for 30 seconds, repeating three times.

By prioritising movement and incorporating these exercises into our daily routines, we can safeguard our spines from the perils of sedentary lifestyles, paving the way for a healthier, more vibrant future.

**For further information contact Gosforth Family Chiropractic,  
[www.gosforthfamilychiropractic.com](http://www.gosforthfamilychiropractic.com),  
07359 188 567**



## Breakfast at Tiffany's Themed Event

Step into the world of glamour and generosity with our upcoming 'Breakfast at Tiffany's' themed afternoon tea, dedicated to supporting The Three Tumours Charity. Join us on Friday, 24th May, from 3-5pm at the Assembly Rooms in Newcastle for an unforgettable experience.

Prepare to be enchanted as you indulge in an afternoon of sophistication, delectable treats, and heartfelt moments, all while raising awareness and funds for The Three Tumours. Inspired by the iconic movie, 'Breakfast at Tiffany's', our menu boasts exquisite teas, pastries, and finger sandwiches fit for Holly Golightly herself.

Dress to impress in your finest attire, channelling the timeless elegance of Audrey Hepburn, as we transform the venue into a haven of charm and grace.

Be sure to participate in our charity raffle for a chance to win fabulous prizes generously donated by local businesses and supporters. Every contribution aids us in our mission to make a difference in the lives of those affected by tumours.

With a minimum of £5 from each ticket sale directly benefiting The Three Tumours, your attendance supports vital research, patient care, and awareness initiatives surrounding this critical health issue.



Mark your calendars and extend the invitation to friends and family. Together, let's stand united against tumours and create a lasting impact.

Join us in spreading hope, love, and generosity as we come together for a cause that truly matters.

**For further details and to RSVP, visit our event page on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/events/934575104702878?ref=newsfeed](https://www.facebook.com/events/934575104702878?ref=newsfeed)**





**Red Sky Ball 2024**

Recently held at the Beacon of Light, illuminated the North East community with glamour and generosity.

With a record attendance of 1000 guests, the evening showcased sensational performances, heartfelt speeches, and plenty of fundraising activities. Together, attendees raised an astounding £200,000, demonstrating the power of unity in supporting Red Sky Foundation's life-saving initiatives. Beyond the numbers, the event symbolised compassion, resilience, and the belief in creating positive change. The legacy of the Red Sky Ball 2024 continues to inspire hope and generosity within the community.











## A Beacon of Hope

In the heart of the North East community, beneath the shimmering disco ball, the Red Sky Ball 2024 unfolded as a radiant spectacle, weaving together glamour, generosity, and boundless possibilities.

**As attendees stepped into the Beacon of Light, on Friday 22nd March 2024, they each left their own mark on what was a truly spectacular evening and made such a positive difference to the lives of those in need. Roughly 1000 guests attended Red Sky Foundation's annual ball, which is an all-time high for this event.**

As the festivities commenced, the Red Sky Ball unfolded as a charming tapestry of entertainment, fundraising, a delicious three-course meal served by Ramside Event Catering and the opportunity to take a look back on all of the special moments from the past year. Charlie Richmond, the host of the evening, announced sensational performances which dazzled the audience, including Hunni, who previously won The Voice UK in 2023, a.k.a. Jen & Liv, Ben Forster straight from the West End, Emily Haig Soprano and the amazing Ace Performers dancers.

Red Sky's guests then also heard from Terry Archibold and his lovely daughter Beatrix,

who received her long-awaited heart transplant last year after living on Ward 23 at the Freeman Hospital, in Newcastle. Attendees were able to listen to Doctor Nassar, who is a surgeon on Ward 23, discuss how vital each penny raised is and the difference that it can make. Red Sky Foundation have pledged to purchase a brand new Xvivo machine for the NHS, specifically for the Freeman Hospital, which gives doctors and nurses hours longer to transport a heart from one patient to the next, by preserving the fundamental organ.

But amidst the glitz and glamour, the true essence of the Red Sky Ball shone through - the spirit of generosity and kindness. Throughout the evening, attendees came together to support Red Sky Foundation's life-saving initiatives through various fundraising activities. The envelope raffle, live auction, defibrillator pledges, and silent auction became avenues for guests to contribute to their cause, raising vital funds to empower individuals and families facing the unthinkable.

One of the most memorable moments of the night came when the total amount raised was revealed—an awe-inspiring £183,000. However, the generosity of a single guest propelled the fundraising total to an astounding £200,000, demonstrating the extraordinary impact that can be achieved when individuals unite together.

Sergio Petrucci, Founder & CEO of Red Sky Foundation said, "Wow that was a record breaker on so many levels, in fact it was the best ever Red Sky Ball since this story began! We couldn't have wished for it to stick the plan anymore than it did, from the world class performances, the incredible

food and most importantly, the most special people in the room joining us for the event at the Beacon of Light. On behalf of everyone involved in Red Sky Foundation, our trustees, our heart families, the doctors and nurses and all of the Red Sky Heart Heroes we are able to support, I would like to personally extend a huge THANK YOU to each and every one of you for making Red Sky Ball a smashing success! Your presence, generosity, and unwavering support truly made the evening one to remember."

Beyond the numbers, the Red Sky Ball was a testament to the power of community and the ripple effect of kindness. It was a celebration of compassion, resilience, and the unwavering belief that together, we can create positive change in the communities and ultimately, the world.

Amidst the laughter and joy, there were moments of reflection and gratitude—reminders of the profound impact of Red Sky Foundation's work. Attendees were reminded that their support was not merely a donation but a lifeline for those in need, providing hope, resources, and compassion.

As the night drew to a close, guests departed with hearts full of warmth, memories, and a buzz to join the Red Sky team at next year's event. The Red Sky Ball 2024 had not only been an evening of glamour and partying but a testament to the collective power of compassion and generosity.

In the aftermath of the event, the legacy of the Red Sky Ball 2024 lives on—a beacon of hope and inspiration for the North East community and beyond.

[redskyfoundation.com](https://www.redskyfoundation.com)

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



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# Is your business killing people through it's plastic use?

Innovation creates groundbreaking solutions to resolve the world's greatest problems.

**Plastics. Ironically, once deemed a solution to protect the worlds precious elements such as wood and prevent elephants being slaughtered for ivory. Plastic appeared to be a great innovation that would protect nature, Earth.**

Some early plastics were made from plant-based materials, but ultimately oil-based plastics met the demand of both need and cost.

Plastics have transformed society and became an essential commodity. It was a cheap solution for many problems we faced but it was also essential in protecting life, such as the development of medical equipment.

A groundbreaking invention to protect nature in 1863 which transformed society today is now one of our biggest threats.

We all know plastics are damaging the oceans, land and wildlife but did you know, plastic is responsible for up to one million human deaths a year.

The world's poorest countries are experiencing loss of life as a direct result of plastic pollution due to our poor mismanagement of waste and plastic use.

But it doesn't end there. The impact of plastic related deaths are on the rise.

We all know about plastics ending up in fish guts from plastic pollution in our oceans but in 2022, plastics were found in human lungs and blood.

And since, links between plastic and several health conditions has been found:

- Alters hormone activity
- Disrupts growth
- Impacts cognitive function
- Infertility
- Increases obesity
- Asthma
- Diabetes
- Thyroid Problems
- Cancers
- Lung Disease
- Stroke
- Heart Disease

Earth Day 2024 focused on plastic, and whilst we are aware of the impact on the earth and our changing environment, we are less aware on the direct impact on our bodies.

Every time you sip a drink from a plastic bottle, you are digesting plastic.

Take a look around you, in your place of work, and your home. How much plastic is in your life? How much plastic are you

unknowingly consuming everyday, how much are you digesting?

Plastic reduction is as much about protecting people as it is the planet. And whilst the race is on for the innovation to replace this harmful product, we have a responsibility to reduce our use, and how we manage the consumption and waste of the plastic we do use.

And recycling isn't the answer!

Some of the little things we can do to ensure our place of work protects us:

- **Clean regularly** using plastic free products. Dust is made up of a high level of plastic particles, cleaning every day increases the clean air in your office.
- **Ban single use plastics.** There are so many planet-friendly alternatives and other ways of working, single use plastics are not needed in the office.
- **Repair and reuse** office furniture and products, and buy plastic free alternatives if new items are needed.
- **Accessible well stocked kitchen** to enable staff to make healthy, nutritious food and drinks.
- **Effective waste management**, ultimately work on reducing waste levels.
- **Flexible working** enables staff to reduce travel, and also work in environments that promote clean air.
- **Cycling schemes** are a great way to support employees health and their impact on the environment.

Protecting the planet is ultimately about protecting human life and working towards eradicating plastic from our lives is crucial.

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





## The Versatility of Mezzanine Floor

Mezzanine floors ingeniously insert an intermediate level floor into tall structures, optimising space for storage, offices, and manufacturing.

This versatile solution for efficient vertical expansion is embraced by businesses across diverse environments, offering a myriad of benefits.

**Mezzanine Floors UK offer a strategic solution, enhancing space utilisation with increased floor area. They promote efficient organisation without incurring relocation expenses, providing a cost-effective and streamlined expansion solution.**

One of the primary advantages of mezzanine floors lies in their ability to utilise unused space effectively. By installing a mezzanine floor, businesses can increase their floor space within their existing premises, eliminating the need for costly moves to new locations. This not only saves on relocation expenses but also ensures continuity in operations without disruption.

In addition to this, mezzanine floors create ample storage space, allowing businesses to optimise their workspace for day-to-day operations. By relocating storage facilities to the mezzanine level, companies can free up valuable floor space for essential activities, enhancing productivity and workflow efficiency.

Additionally, mezzanine floors offer a practical solution for expanding office space

without compromising on the primary work area. With the installation of a mezzanine floor, businesses can seamlessly integrate additional office space, facilitating smoother operations and accommodating growing workforce requirements.

In terms of production, mezzanine floors play a crucial role in improving manufacturing processes and workflow. By relocating production facilities to the elevated mezzanine level, companies can optimise their production space, leading to enhanced efficiency and output.

Furthermore, mezzanine floors contribute to energy savings by helping to retain heat within the workspace. As heat naturally rises, the elevated structure of a mezzanine floor ensures that warmth is distributed efficiently, creating a more comfortable and energy-efficient environment for employees.

In addition to operational benefits, mezzanine floors offer significant cost savings compared to relocation. With no additional rent or expenses associated with changing business details such as addresses, mezzanine installation provides a cost-effective solution for expanding businesses. It allows the accessibility of the newly created space is almost immediate, typically within one month of placing the order, minimising downtime, and ensuring continuity in operations.

In conclusion, mezzanine floors serve as a versatile and efficient solution for businesses

seeking to maximise space utilisation and expand vertically. With a range of benefits including increased floor area, enhanced organisation, and cost savings, mezzanine floors continue to be a popular choice across various industries, facilitating growth and productivity in today's competitive business landscape.

**Don't just take our word for it...**

“

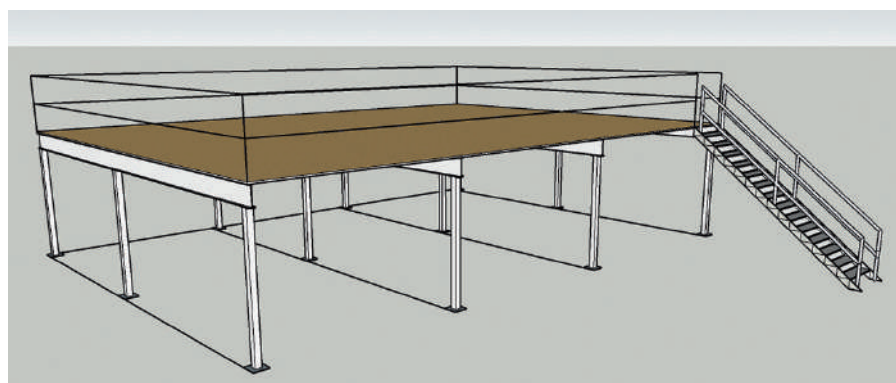
*I wanted a mezzanine to increase my storage space. They helped me design the floor and three weeks after I ordered they came to install. The installation was quick with minimum disruption to my business, and I did not even need to clear all the area. Would definitely use them again.*

“

*I sent them a sketch of what I wanted. They designed the mezzanine and followed with a call to make sure everything was right. Once I ordered they kept me in the loop regarding progress and installed on the agreed dates.*

*Very professional.*

**Mezzanine Floors UK  
Unit 1, Franklin Park, Patterson St,  
Blaydon-on-Tyne, NE21 5TL.  
07726 372005**





## North East Based Metal Fabrication firm acquired in £1.8m deal



Jarrow based metal fabrication firm AAP has been acquired by DINH Ltd in a £1.8m deal.

AAP was established in 2009 and provides bespoke metal fabrication services with particular expertise in the Subsea, Offshore and renewables sectors. The acquisition will see the current AAP directors retire with immediate effect.

The DINH purchasers are Gordon Watt and Jeremy McLeod-MacKenzie, who are both qualified accountants and experienced business owners. They already jointly own three other UK businesses involved in engineering and metal fabrication.

The strategic fit of acquiring AAP is strong due to the buyers' existing business, Washington Waterjet Ltd (WWJ), being located in the same area.

The intention is for AAP's general manager to take over the day-to-day operations with support from Terry Hall who is MD of WWJ and will also become the Managing Director of AAP. Jeremy McLeod-MacKenzie will provide FD and strategic support to both businesses.

Commenting on the acquisition, Jeremy McLeod-MacKenzie said "AAP has developed a strong reputation for supporting local clients with innovative solutions in a timely manner. This has resulted in the development of a loyal customer base that considers AAP a critical supplier. There is still huge potential to extend AAP's geographical reach and continue its development and growth, with focus to date having been on their local marketplace."

Two new jobs are anticipated to be created based on the increasing revenue in the business. These are expected within the next 12 months.



## New appointment at growing engineering firm

Growing Northern architectural and engineering firm Building Design Northern (BDN) has added to its number with its latest new appointment.

The Sunderland headquartered business has appointed Alex Johnson as a structural engineer, adding to its expanding team based in the Old Simpson Street School on the edge of the city centre.

Alex is a qualified civil and structural engineer, with six years' time-served with a regional engineering consultancy.

He joins the ambitious multi-disciplinary firm, which has offices in Sunderland and Ulverston, and will work on a number of high-profile for BDN's roster of clients which includes British Steel and B&Q.

Alex said: "I'm really pleased to be part of BDN, a firm that has really ambitious plans and is working on some fantastic projects for an impressive client list."

## Parker Bioscience Filtration looks to the future with new apprentice intake



Parker Bioscience Filtration has welcomed six new apprentices to its Birtley, UK site, as part of its long-term commitment to workforce development.

The apprentices are being trained in a number of Parker's business areas, including procurement, HR, finance, manufacturing and marketing, and the apprenticeships are being delivered in conjunction with several training providers. Parker

Bioscience Filtration is part of Parker Hannifin, the global leader in motion and control technologies. Its long-running apprenticeship scheme has been developed to help apprentices to 'earn, learn and qualify' whilst preparing them with the foundations of a rewarding career in their chosen fields.

Dana Donnell is undertaking a Level 3 Procurement and Supply Assistant Apprenticeship at Parker Bioscience Filtration through training provider The Apprentice Team, Layla King-Lough is undertaking a Level 3 HR Support Apprenticeship – delivered by Sunderland College – with the Parker team, and Lola Haran is working towards a Level 3 Assistant Accountant Apprenticeship at

Parker Bioscience Filtration with training provider Kaplan. Apprentices Max Turner and Adam Schrouder have both joined Parker Bioscience Filtration's manufacturing team – they are studying for Level 2 Lean Manufacturing Operative Apprenticeships with Zenith Training.

In addition, Luke Dumigham is working with Parker's marketing team while he undertakes a Level 3 Content Creator Apprenticeship with Zenith Training.

Laurent Pouchard, general manager at Parker Bioscience Filtration's Birtley site, said: "We are delighted to welcome Dana, Layla, Lola, Max, Adam and Luke to Parker and we look forward to seeing them progress with their apprenticeships at our Birtley facility."



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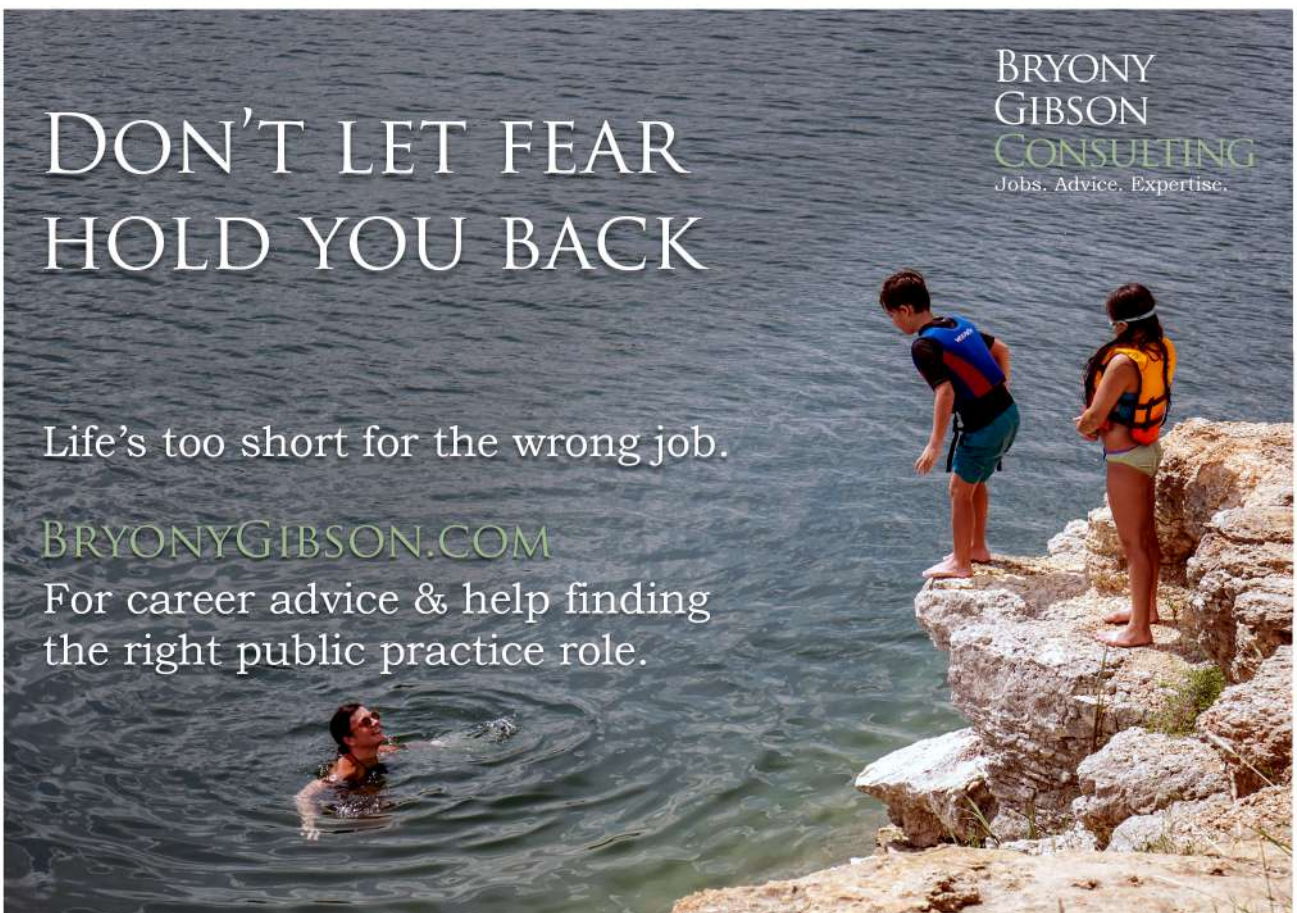
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# Calibrate is measuring up nicely

Award winning heat pump installers – save money and eco-friendly.

**Calibrate Energy Engineering have been installing commercial heat pumps for two decades. They're also racking-up awards... Gold Innovation Award at the Royal Highland Show Awards; Best Rural Innovation in the Rural Business Awards; Green Initiative of the Year in the Best of Northumberland Awards and Installer of the Year & Non-Domestic Ground Source Project in the ACR & Heat Pump Awards.**

In other words, the experts are giving Calibrate a massive thumbs up. It's probably a pretty good guess to say that most, if not all, of you who run a business will have seen an increase in your energy costs. Even if you are a single person working from home, your heating bills will almost certainly have risen over the past couple of years.

That's why everyone is looking at ways to reduce costs.

And yes, more and more of us are looking to our conscience and doing as much as we can to go green and help the climate.

It's also why heat pumps are a win-win because, once you've got the system up and running, it will save you money and be incredibly eco-friendly.

"Most businesses will use a gas boiler to heat their premises and hot water but, in comparison, a heat pump will be around 300 per cent more efficient than the boiler, and a ground source will be between 400 and 500 per cent more efficient," said Calibrate's Business Development Lead, Nick Mather. "They use the thermal energy in the ground, air or water and can provide heating during winter and chilling in the summer. Ground or air source heat pumps are great for manufacturing, agriculture, horticulture, food and drink businesses, hotels, leisure centres, schools and universities. In fact, we supply businesses of all shapes and sizes to help them reduce costs and hit their environmental targets."

Calibrate offer a service called Calibrate Analytics. In a nutshell, it's a case of them monitoring precisely what level of energy you use. The Calibrate Analytics assessment and control tool plugs directly into your existing system and determines how you can reduce your electricity and energy costs whilst also reducing your carbon footprint. Every aspect of your business is studied...gas glow, electricity usage, humidity and temperature...everything that makes up an energy profile. It then models the difference installing one of their renewable technologies will make to performance and outputs to support the client in making the transition.

"We supply intelligent, hands off, commercial heating, chilling and electricity generating solutions to high energy-use industries. We want potential clients to rethink and reshape how their energy is more economically utilised and consumed. We do this by reducing their operational expenditure, dramatically reducing their energy costs. It will also create a positive impact on their carbon profile."

The company, now owned by RSK Environment Ltd, is based in North Northumberland near Bamburgh but works across the UK. It's interesting to look at the various case studies which Calibrate includes on its website... [www.calibrateenergy.co.uk](http://www.calibrateenergy.co.uk) ...because your type of business may feature.

For example, the owner of a poultry farm, who drafted Calibrate in to help get an old and unmaintained heat pump system back to optimal performance, commented: "These improvements have had a massive impact on my bottom line by slashing my electricity input from the grid to offset much of the cost increases

meaning a swift return on investment of my outlay for the re-works. In addition, I am using much fewer kWh to run the heat pump, so this has significantly reduced my CO2 output from grid electricity, making the farm greener."

The owner of a large grain production and logistics business commented: "When we made the decision to invest in heat pump technology, we looked at various companies who offered this service, we narrowed these companies down to Calibrate due to their professional approach and because they were able to carry out the full bespoke design, installation and also support the system with a comprehensive long term maintenance agreement. We were not disappointed with Calibrate and have completed 3 large projects and would highly recommend them."

With the right controls and monitoring systems in place, such as Calibrate Analytics, renewable technologies can also provide a swift return on investment. If you install an air or ground source heat pump, you will get to the point where you are into pocket as the initial outlay has been offset by savings from the switch to this alternative option. Energy savings then deliver a positive impact on bottom line performance, whilst reducing the carbon footprint of the business.

"To get the most out of our solutions, we also work closely with our clients to help them understand how to be more energy efficient. Education can go a long way to cutting costs without any financial outlay. We can even extract heat from your current boiler's flue or generator's exhaust outlet to benefit other functions."

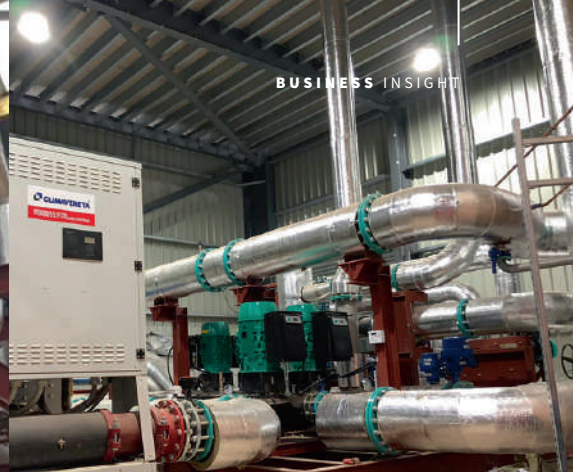
The best idea is to contact Nick and his team at Calibrate. They'll then take you through exactly what's available and what the costs and gains will be.

**Email [nick.mather@calibrateltd.co.uk](mailto:nick.mather@calibrateltd.co.uk) or call into their offices at Calibrate Energy Engineering, Mousen Lane, Bamburgh, NE70 7HN. 07521 146357.**



Nick Mather









## To Infinity & Beyond

ISR Laser recently teamed up with Gosforth Against Graffiti to preserve the heritage of structures in Grandstand Road, working together to combat vandalism.

**Newcastle's heritage is a testament to its identity and is a source of inspiration for its residents, which is why ISR Laser is determined to protect the architecture and connect the community through the preservation of shared public spaces.**

ISR Laser cleaning are revolutionising the field of surface cleaning, with the focus of offering chemical-free, contactless, and precise cleaning solutions. After recognising the need for better cleaning solutions, Terry South is committed to providing excellence while prioritising environmental sustainability.

The benefits of using these lasers when cleaning is astounding as they ensure zero damage, zero contact and zero contaminants left behind, meaning that this specific cleaning process is safe for both the environment and the public. This cutting-edge technology delivers exceptional results and clears the way for a cleaner future.

By cleaning areas in Newcastle such as the Town Moor, ISR Laser are showing that they are actively involved in enhancing the cleanliness and beauty of these public spaces.

This event garnered over 1000 views across social media platforms. With this continued support and participation, ISR Laser are well on their way to reaching their goal and making a substantial difference in enhancing the cleanliness and beauty of our public spaces in a sustainable environmentally friendly manor.

ISR Laser are anticipating their new factory opening in Dunston, near the MetroCentre in Gateshead, marking an exciting milestone for the company. The expansion to a larger facility not only provides them with increased workspace but also opens possibilities for incorporating additional equipment. They were also proud to be part

of the BBC's DIY SOS project recently carried out in Wallsend, which saw The True Colours Theatre be presented with their forever home.

The new factory will offer ISR Laser the opportunity to enhance their operational capacity and efficiency. It not only provides them with expanded workspaces but also opens doors to potential advancements in equipment, further solidifying their position as a leading provider of laser cleaning solutions.

**To get in contact, visit [isrlaser.com/about/](https://isrlaser.com/about/) or alternatively call 07774 622 807 for more information.**





# North East battery manufacturer reveals five year growth strategy



**North East manufacturer Alexander Battery Technologies (ABT) plans to recruit and heavily invest in its UK and overseas sites as it embarks on an ambitious growth strategy.**

**The Peterlee based company, which designs and manufactures customised rechargeable battery packs for a range of industries, has enjoyed strong growth in the last 12 months with turnover rising to £18m for 2023.**

Since embarking on a five-year growth plan, ABT has seen revenues rise by around 30 per cent during the last year. Now, in its 40th anniversary year, the company has higher ambitions to achieve a £100m annual sales target within the next four years.

With 50 per cent of sales in the US and around 47 per cent in Europe, the company wants to grow exports while also significantly boosting sales across the EU and the UK. Later this year the company is targeting to announce details of a new manufacturing operation in Europe.

During 2023, the company secured several big contracts and broke into new markets, most notably the growing e-Mobility sector; and secured a project for a battery pack for an on-highway eMotorbike. Elsewhere, ABT won a project in the military sector for

an unmanned support vehicle that works alongside military personnel, carrying heavy equipment and support gear. This demanding project requires a large battery pack of around 70kg with a voltage of circa 120V.

The international company, which operates in key sectors including robotics, telecommunications and e-mobility, currently employs more than 110 people and expects this to grow significantly in the next few years.

Most of the staff are based at the advanced high-voltage battery testing and validation laboratory at its Battery Technology Centre, as well as its state-of-the-art logistics facility at Peterlee. However, ABT is also steadily building its sales and service operation, opening a new location in Frankfurt last summer.

The German office enables the company to offer technical consultancy tailored to the needs of regional customers. This office puts ABT in a strong position to satisfy fast-growing demand in Europe for lithium batteries in the e-mobility, robotics, medical, and wearable/portable devices markets.

Alex Stapleton, chief commercial officer at ABT, said: "The business invested heavily during 2023, to set us up for growth in the coming years. We concluded the complete design and build of our Battery Technology Centre, providing 12 dedicated laboratories for new battery development projects.

"These support the business with significant bandwidth for up to 12 different projects in parallel, and are capable of supporting designs up to 800v and over 100kWh. The

Battery Technology Centre also added much needed office space, as well as extra production floorspace to further future-proof the flexibility of our UK site."

Additional equipment will go into this building in 2024, including a bespoke test-rig for battery testing, which can be adapted for a wide range of projects and applications, such as high voltage requirements.

In the middle of 2023, ABT invested in IPG Photonic's very latest battery laser welding machinery, the EV Flex. This new laser welder is currently being installed within the Peterlee factory, which once in full production will represent an investment of more than £500,000. The EV Flex provides the technical platform to deliver large packs to meet the standards required for automotive on-highway vehicles and similar high voltage applications.

A new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) platform, representing a further investment of around £500,000, has only recently gone live. Alex Stapleton added: "This critical system upgrade will enable the business to digitalise and automate all the world-class controls in manufacturing, enhancing the level of available detail to meet automotive standards where needed."

During 2024, the company is investing in additional certifications for the business, such as ISO27001 (Cyber Security), ISO45001 (Health & Safety), ISO/TS 16949 (Automotive) and ISO14001 (Environmental).

**For more information about Alexander Battery Technologies, visit: [www.alexandertechnologies.com](http://www.alexandertechnologies.com)**



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## Three Rivers Health & Safety Consultancy launches online e-learning platform



Three Rivers Health & Safety have recently announced the latest addition to their services: the launch of our online E-Learning platform. This decision stems from valuable feedback received from our existing clients and enquiries from businesses and the public.

CEO Adam Swinney said: "Our investment in this online platform allows us to provide a diverse array of training courses, including those frequently requested by our clientele. These courses cover crucial topics such as Asbestos Awareness, Fire Safety, CDM Awareness, Environmental Awareness, Risk Assessments, Lock Out – Tag Out (LOTO), Working at Heights, Confined Spaces, and Workplace Health & Safety.

"While we acknowledge the suitability of online delivery for certain awareness courses, we emphasise the importance of practical, face-to-face training for specific subjects. Courses like manual handling and first aid demand hands-on experience that cannot be replicated through virtual platforms. Indeed, tapping the spacebar and taking sips from your coffee cup won't adequately prepare you for delivering chest compressions and rescue breaths in a real-life emergency scenario!"

You can join Three Rivers Health & Safety by embracing the convenience and accessibility of online learning while recognising the value of hands-on training where it truly matters.

**For more information and to access their E-Learning platform, visit: [threerivershealthandsafety.co.uk](http://threerivershealthandsafety.co.uk)**

## Three Rivers Health & Safety Consultancy Ltd

2 Lighthouse View, Spectrum Business Park, Seaham, County Durham, SR7 7PR

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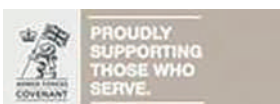
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*...We have become  
the eyes and ears  
on the streets of  
Newcastle...*

Mark Sumner

# NE1 celebrates second anniversary of its Crime Reduction efforts and unveils big plans for the future

NE1's Newcastle Business Crime Reduction Partnership celebrates its second anniversary in April. Launched to support businesses and to tackle anti-social behaviour and low-level crime in Newcastle, the partnership is enjoying phenomenal success with a rapidly growing membership, numerous successful prosecutions and the prevention of countless crimes.

**Mark Sumner, Operations Manager at NE1 Ltd, who spearheaded the launch of the Partnership and oversees its activities, reviews the last two years and reveals exciting plans for the future.**

We first launched the Business Crime Reduction Partnership after an alarming survey showed that 90% of Newcastle businesses said they wouldn't report minor shoplifting incidents and anti-social behaviour to the police. Many thought it took up too much time and they weren't confident any action would be taken. The retail sector in particular said they felt vulnerable, with shops an easy target for shoplifters and nowhere to turn to for help.

NE1's job is to support the city's business community, so we knew we had to act. Our solution was to provide an easy and effective way to report crime and disorder and to encourage the police, the council and businesses to work together. We knew that by collaborating we could make Newcastle an even safer and more welcoming place for businesses, staff, visitors and the people of the city.

We have had two successful years and are delighted with the results achieved so far. Membership is growing and businesses are increasingly active within the Partnership.

We have become the eyes and ears on the streets of Newcastle, working together to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour, operating in much the same way as a neighbourhood watch scheme. Members are given access to an online forum to record incidents, share information and raise the alarm to help prevent crime in the city centre. As well as reporting into the system, members are alerted when known offenders are operating so they can be vigilant and help prevent incidents from happening.

Recruitment of new members was recently boosted by the appointment of a dedicated Business Crime Officer who joined NE1 at the end of 2023. Terry Brooks works alongside NE1's team of Street Rangers, the police and partners to support businesses. A key part of Terry's role is to promote the Partnership and encourage sign-ups. From 150 members in December 2023, we now have 227.

Through face-to-face meetings, Terry has been able to explain the benefits of the partnership and has enlisted new members including national operators like Greggs and Tesco as well as numerous independents and an increasing number of professional services companies and hospitality venues.

Last year, 1,040 incidents were reported. So far this year 475 have already been logged.

In addition to Terry's appointment, NE1 has funded the recruitment of a new

CCTV operative. This dedicated new 'eyes in the sky' role monitors the city's CCTV cameras acting as a deterrent and raising the alarm, preventing crimes from being committed. The role is already delivering exceptional results.

By monitoring what is happening in the city in real time, the right resources can be deployed in a cost-efficient and timely way. If a known offender is spotted on CCTV businesses are alerted via radio so they can take the necessary actions to protect their business.

The CCTV monitoring has also given the Partnership crucial data to help draw up a heat map of at-risk hot spots and peak times for crimes. Using this knowledge, the Partnership works with the police to deploy resources when and where they are needed.

Following the ongoing success of the Partnership, we are now entering a new phase of collaboration between NE1, Newcastle City Council and Northumbria Police with the launch of a new multi-agency working group.

A team of dedicated police officers, and community support officers will be assigned to the group to work alongside NE1 and its Street Rangers, together with the Council's community safety team, pooling resources to make Newcastle a safer and better city. Operating out of a shared city centre office, the new working group will identify and address issues affecting the city centre. Daily briefings will be held to understand the priorities and plan how to tackle on-street issues like crime, anti-social and nuisance behaviour, begging, and other disorder problems.

This new initiative will be launched in mid-April and we are looking forward to this new era of joint working and closer collaboration.

The Business Crime Reduction Partnership will play a crucial role in this new working group, providing data to shape its efforts.

People will soon see the difference this new working group will make with more visible street patrols, and a whole team dedicated and solely responsible for city centre issues.

We at NE1 have played a huge part in bringing this team together. We are confident that our efforts will continue improving the city landscape, reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, and making the city a more appealing, engaging and safe space.

[www.newcastlene1ltd.com](http://www.newcastlene1ltd.com)



# A guide to pre-employment checks

Bryony Gibson, director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, talks about the pre-employment checks that ensure someone is suitable for a new role.

**Perhaps not the most dynamic topic at first glance but pre-employment checks are a critical part of your talent attraction strategy.**

The final layer of protection for a candidate's suitability, navigating the regulations can feel like running blindfolded through a maze, which is why I am going to try and demystify them and transform the final stage of your recruitment process into a seamless and well-planned affair.

## The Role of Pre-Employment Checks

Imagine someone applying to join your team with the ideal experience and a glowing CV. They appear perfect for the role yet, under the surface hides a history that brings risk to your company's future integrity.

This is where pre-employment checks shine. Giving you a comprehensive overview of a candidate's background, credentials, and character, they help you to verify their employment history all the way through to criminal record checks.

By using the right checks you can mitigate risks, uphold legal compliance, and foster a safe, productive work environment for your current team because you know your recruits will contribute positively to your working culture.

## Your Legal Obligations

Complying with legal requirements is essential in any area of business, including recruitment and employment. Failing to undertake the appropriate checks can not only tarnish your long-term reputation but could also result in severe legal consequences.

Whether it is right-to-work assessments, medical reviews, employment references, online social media or criminal record checks, each piece of due diligence is designed to protect both employers and employees and ensure fairness, transparency, and compliance at every step.



Bryony Gibson

## Types of Pre-Employment Checks

Pre-employment screening is not a one-size-fits-all affair. It will differ between organisations and the nature of the role so you should be tailoring the checks undertaken to fit your needs. From examining identification documents to delving into online profiles, each plays a distinct role in the vetting process, helping you to build a more informed picture of the person you are looking to recruit.

Whether it's verifying right-to-work status to prevent illegal working, or conducting CRB checks to safeguard vulnerable people, each stage helps you to reduce the potential risk of recruiting unsuitable people to your firm.

## Conducting Pre-employment Checks

Most commonly carried out after a job offer has been made, there are several steps to ensure you are compliant, beginning with a request for the applicant's consent. If they refuse, you are not legally allowed to conduct any searches or checks and must decide on the best route forward without the benefit of this information.

Assuming the candidate does approve, you need to gather and verify the relevant documentation to start the screening process. Typically, this includes photo identification, passport, work permit, educational or existing DBS certificates, and criminal record disclosures.

While a manual process can be relatively time-consuming, some tools and technologies can help. Checks can even be carried out on government websites where you can view someone's right to work or see a copy of their driving license.

Maintaining detailed records of completed checks is essential for compliance with laws governing data protection, equal opportunities, employment, and privacy. Not only does this safeguard you and your business in the case of disputes, but it also helps to standardise your approach and ensure fairness throughout the process.

## Final Thought

Pre-employment checks are not just about ticking boxes; they are about embracing a mindset of excellence and long-term recruitment success.

Once the processes are in place, candidate screening will quickly become second nature but please remember the golden rule of clarifying that any job offer is conditional on the results of your pre-employment checks.

Legally, your employees' contract begins when they accept your job offer so if you decide to withdraw it at a later stage, without reasonable grounds, it could be seen as a breach. By reserving the right to withdraw your offer, if your checks reveal any issues or concerns, you will protect yourself and the business.

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



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A rare opportunity to join a thriving accountancy firm at Partner level with the chance to make your mark on a fast-growing audit team.

We are seeking an audit professional with a strong presence in the Newcastle market who has the ambition to lead an audit function.

Ensuring excellence is delivered to clients, driving strategic targets and growing the team through recruitment and professional development, you will represent the firm at networking events, bringing in new business and identifying services that will add value to your clients.

Championing the firm's values within the team and those around you, this is a fantastic opportunity for an RI (or on track) who has experience from either the Big 4, a national or mid-tier Independent firm. **Quote Ref: 2260**

## AUDIT SENIOR MANAGER

Newcastle, £Competitive

With audit as their largest service, this firm provides support across the UK to a diverse portfolio of large listed PLCs and OMBs.

The appointment of a Senior Audit Manager is an important addition to their team and will oversee the effective management of a substantial portfolio of clients.

With proven client handling, staff management, and a track record of producing high-quality audits you must be a great ambassador for the firm. Actively involved in developing future business, you will write proposals, present to prospective clients and work with existing relationships.

With the opportunity for quick progression to Director, this role suits the career ambitious and has a flexible working policy that means you can work effectively from home and the office. **Quote Ref: 2256**

## AUDIT DIRECTOR

Newcastle, £Competitive

With a clear route to Partnership and RI qualification supported, this is a golden opportunity for anyone who dreams of leading an audit team and being instrumental in the Partner Group's strategic decision-making.

Already possessing a local market presence, you will lead on existing audit work as well as develop future opportunities.

As a large firm with a strong reputation, you will be provided with a robust support structure designed to help you deliver growth across the region. For anyone with Big 4 exposure, this opportunity offers you the chance to make something your own and lead a team in collaboration with the Partners.

We are keen to find someone who has proven experience and is driven to reach Partner level. **Quote Ref: 2219**

## AUDIT MANAGER

Newcastle, £Competitive

This is your chance to join a highly professional and well-regarded north east accountancy practice.

Managing their audits from planning to completion, you will oversee a team with support from the Audit Director and Partner.

As a qualified Accountant (ACA/CA/ACCA) with current FRS102 technical knowledge, we are looking for someone who is working at Supervisor or Manager level in the corporate field and keen to further their expertise.

If you enjoy working with a varied portfolio of clients from manufacturing to IT and professional services, with minimal local travel, hybrid working and great flexibility, this is an excellent role to elevate your career to the next level. **Quote Ref: 2254**

To express an interest in any of the above vacancies, or for a confidential discussion about your career, please contact Bryony Gibson, Bryony Gibson Consulting, on 0191 3759983. Discover more vacancies at [bryonygibson.com](http://bryonygibson.com)

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# Making things better than before...

Dr David Cliff explores the value of mediation in business, looking not just at the bottom line, but to the long-term relationships that add to the culture of an organisation.

**Mediations are a bit like buses. It is as if there's a conscious collective that foments over time and the cumulative woes of different organisations visit the Gedanken office all at the same time. It can be weeks before we are approached to discuss a mediation and then three or four matters come in on the same day!**

At Gedanken, our non-legal approaches to mediation are often welcomed by companies as they focus on the fundamental issue behind disputes in organisations. Namely, the relational space that exists between people, including, how they interact and how they add value or add risk to a company's activities. The relational environment in the workspace determines the culture of an organisation. The two are reciprocal.

Mediations often come about as a result of simple human factors. Excessive stress, unrealistic expectations, failure to calibrate one's expectations against those of one's colleagues, and yes, that old chestnut, poor and/or insensitive leadership that is focused on expediencies rather than the fact that organisations are human systems.

At Gedanken we have a simple approach to mediation. It's not about the righteousness of one party's position over another, it is about the fact that there is no one reality. This is something academics refer to as "ontology". We in fact construct our sense of reality from the multiple values, ideological positions, learning experiences and value driven perspectives we as individuals have acquired through life. We therefore can each experience a reality very differently and from that many differences of view can occur. Normally these differences form part of the diversity and interest of life, and indeed can productively add to the culture of an organisation. When unaddressed and their maintenance neglected however, these differences can easily lead into disputes that result in people becoming less than their "highest selves" in terms of performance, collegiate relationships, and awareness of others. Frankly sometimes it can look more like "pistols at dawn"!

The financial case for mediation is well documented. A plethora of studies indicate the potential for resolution via mediation processes being as good as fifty to seventy percent of cases.

Similarly, cost savings typically range from fifty to eighty percent of formal legal processes. Less well quantified but at least as important, are the significant savings created in terms of time and workplace disruption. Unaddressed conflicts can also have the potential to create a systemic impact across an entire workforce, impacting upon morale, staff retention and productivity. This is particularly true in mediations that involve members of organisations who have particularly fine honed, difficult to replace skills, or their knowledge and aptitudes are particularly rare.

Any good mediation looks less to the likely political and organisational outcomes of a dispute, although these often cannot be ignored. Primarily however, it needs to focus on the fact that most disputes involve important business relationships that have gone off track and can be reworked to continue to be productive, honouring all of the parties concerned, if indeed ultimately, differences have to be respected far more attentively than hitherto.

It is a necessarily disciplined and "boundaried" process that focuses primarily on the safety of the individuals and the preparedness to find ways forward. It needs the preparedness and commitment of the parties to work towards a solution that is satisfactory for all.

Non-legal mediation differs from legal mediation in that it does not keep at the forefront of its mind the potential legal outcomes that are incentivising the parties to reach settlement. It ideally should occur before lawyers become involved. It instead looks to a far more intrinsic relational outcome that will be more satisfying for the parties in the long-term.

**Anyone wanting to discuss a specific mediation issue or the value of mediation to their company, need only give us a ring or drop an email to [actnow@gedanken.co.uk](mailto:actnow@gedanken.co.uk) and we'll be happy to explore these and offer some initial guidance.**

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





“

*...Mediations  
are a bit  
like buses...*

Dr David Cliff





## Central Employment announces strategy to mitigate impact of National Living Wage increase for local businesses

Central Employment, a leading industrial labour supplier with over four decades of experience, aims to address the significant rise in the National Living Wage which took effect on April 1st 2024. The recent increase, which marks the largest in over a decade, sees the NLW surge by 9.8% from £10.42 to £11.44 per hour. This substantial hike of £1.02 represents a landmark moment in wage regulation in the UK.

**In addition to this wage hike, the statutory costs to employers are also projected to increase by £0.32, encompassing annual holiday pay, employers' National Insurance contributions, pension auto-enrollment costs, and the apprenticeship levy (applicable to businesses with a pay bill exceeding £3 million).**

The North-East recruiters are devoted to adhering to the Government GLAA charge rate guidelines, with the current guidance suggesting an increase to £1.29 per hour from the existing rate of £1.15. This adjustment, underscores Central's commitment to align with statutory requirements while also remaining sensitive to prevailing market dynamics.

Reacting to these unavoidable cost escalations, Central has diligently reviewed its operational framework to adapt to the changing landscape of the industry and taken proactive steps to reduce its service costs below the suggested threshold to minimise the impact on its clients.

Financial Director, William Palmer, emphasised the company's proactive approach in tackling the impact of the

NLW on both existing and future clients. He stated, "We are acutely aware of the challenges posed by the escalating wage rates and recognise the importance of striking a balance between regulatory compliance and operational efficiency. By streamlining our service costs and offering competitive rates, we aim to support our partners during this transitional period."

Furthermore, Operations Director, Mark Trett, highlighted Central's holistic candidate selection process that ensures compliance with essential criteria such as right to work verification, educational qualifications, work references, background checks, and relevant experience. The recruitment firm also provide pre-employment inductions and training, including Lean and IOSH certifications, to equip candidates with the necessary skills and knowledge for their roles. Mark stated, "We are dedicated to upholding compliance standards and providing top-tier services to our clients. By investing in training and attracting skilled professionals, we aim to deliver robust solutions and meet the demands of a competitive market."

To facilitate cost-saving opportunities

for businesses, Central has introduced discounted rates for both current and new clients. Amidst the evolving regulatory landscape, they are committed to surpassing client expectations by offering inflation-beating reductions and matching or beating existing agency rates on supply services.

The increase in the minimum wage not only marks a crucial moment in advancing economic and social equality but also calls for businesses to recalibrate their strategies to thrive in a dynamic market. By focusing on cost-efficiency, employee engagement, and market positioning, Central is poised to navigate the changing landscape with resilience and adaptability. Central remains committed to creating a positive impact on its workforce and business operations. Embracing these changes with foresight and competence, the company sets out to reinforce its position as market leaders while driving value for its clients and employees.

**Contact Central's Operations Director, Mark Trett, today to explore customised strategies that align with your business needs and leverage their expertise in industrial and manufacturing labour supply.**

**mark.trett@centralemployment.co.uk  
0191 232 4816**



Scan me!

# 'How Talentheads helped me solve my talent puzzle'

## - Sam Spoors sits down with Lyndsey Pitt of Looper Insights



Sam Spoors (middle), Laura Barker (Talentheads) and Lyndsey Pitt of Looper Insights

Sam Spoors founded Talentheads from her kitchen table, and in just over four years, has grown it into an award-winning business that has just opened a second office in County Durham. She sat down with Lyndsey Pitt, HR manager for Looper Insights, to discuss the benefits Talentheads brought to the business.

**Sam:** Great to catch up, Lyndsey. Can you tell me how you first encountered Talentheads?

**Lyndsey:** "It was when I was looking for a new role prior to joining Looper Insights.

"I spoke with you and remember being incredibly impressed that you didn't actually work for the company that was hiring. I had a great feeling about how committed you were to both the business and helping clients"

**Sam:** Why did you decide to choose Talentheads to support Looper Insights with the company's learning and development?

**Lyndsey:** "It all came down to value for money. We were looking to secure some leadership training for our managers, and like any business, we had a budget for it.

"I had sourced an online course that looked okay but was run on a 'per head' cost. As we are currently partnering with Talentheads on our recruitment, we discussed what you could offer, and it knocked the other course out of the water.

"For the same price, we benefited from a fully bespoke, in-person course that lasted for half-a-day and was designed specifically for us.

"This was great as I was able to fully brief the team on the most important learning outcomes and critical areas of content. As a fully remote and international business, our leaders face a unique set of challenges and we were able to ensure the course was created around this, which was a lovely bonus."

**Sam:** And how have you continued to work with Talentheads?

**Lyndsey:** "Talentheads' flexibility and full talent cycle is a dream model for businesses who are scaling. Whilst you've also created a strong recruitment process for Looper Insights, when those needs naturally dip, we can dial-up the team to access learning and development support.

"You supported us with the design of our brand-new induction programme, as well as delivering our Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging training, and we love the fact that the coaching approach is integrated into everything you deliver as part of your Talent Cycle."

**Sam:** What impact has the Talentheads team had on your job day-to-day?

**Lyndsey:** "I'm a stand-alone HR manager and given that I work part-time, there are just not enough hours in my working week.

"Talentheads are an absolute godsend in terms of supporting me in my role.

"I love having a large team on-hand that are not only wonderful, supportive people to work alongside, but whose services I can just dial-up or dial-down depending on the needs of our business.

"That flexibility is brilliant, and so are the results Looper Insights have had with you and your team."

It was a pleasure chatting to Lyndsey and discovering first-hand how Talentheads has benefited both herself and Looper Insights.

And she's not alone; Since 2020, we've supported almost 60 companies and upskilled nearly 750 managers through our learning and development services – whilst our agency fee-free approach has so far saved businesses over £1.3m.

And of course, we've helped place 450 local people into local jobs.

The Talentheads difference is that we recruit to retain, which means you're not wasting precious time and money having to repeatedly re-hire. Plus, our coaching and learning and development service means we can upskill your team, fuelling your business growth and retention.

**Get in touch and see how Talentheads can solve your people puzzle:**  
[www.talentheads.co.uk](http://www.talentheads.co.uk)



# Is your business ready for the changes?

Adjustment to Working Hours Records - Streamlining compliance and Enhancing Flexibility.

**In a move aimed at modernising labour practices and ensuring greater efficiency, adjustments to working hours record-keeping requirements are set to come into effect, relieving employers of the obligation to meticulously track daily working hours for each employee. This change acknowledges the practical challenges faced by employers and aligns regulations with contemporary workplace realities. While some employers have already adopted this practice, the amendment now formalises it across the board.**

However, it's essential to clarify that this modification doesn't imply a relaxation of accountability. Employers will still be mandated to maintain adequate records demonstrating adherence to the Working Time Regulations 1998, thus upholding standards of fair labour practices and safeguarding employee rights.

Furthermore, significant alterations to holiday entitlement calculations are on the horizon, particularly benefiting irregular and part-year workers. The prevailing system, which grants a fixed holiday allowance irrespective of actual working duration, is poised for transformation. Henceforth, holiday entitlement will be computed using an accrual method, pegged at a statutory minimum of 12.07% of hours worked. This adjustment ensures equitable treatment, addressing the disparity between full-time and part-year employees.

Moreover, the reintroduction of rolled-up holiday pay signifies a departure from previous restrictions. Employers will now have the prerogative to include holiday pay within regular pay periods, enhancing financial predictability for workers with irregular schedules or seasonal employment.

In another significant development, the National Living Wage eligibility age will be lowered to 21, expanding wage protections

to a broader segment of the workforce. Concurrently, incremental increases in wage rates underscore a commitment to equitable remuneration practices.

Recognising the caregiving responsibilities of employees, provisions for carer's leave are set to be enacted, granting unpaid leave for individuals supporting dependents with long-term care needs. This measure acknowledges the importance of work-life balance and accommodates the diverse needs of the workforce.

So, reforms regarding the distribution of tips and gratuities aim to ensure transparency and fairness, prohibiting employers from making deductions and mandating equitable distribution among workers.

Simplification of TUPE consultation requirements for small businesses and transfers involving fewer than 10 employees seeks to streamline administrative processes, fostering efficiency while maintaining employee engagement and consultation standards.

Additionally, amendments to statutory flexible working request rules empower employees with greater flexibility and expedited processing of requests, reflecting evolving attitudes towards work arrangements.

The right to request more predictable terms and conditions of work addresses the uncertainties faced by workers in non-standard employment arrangements, fostering stability and security in employment relationships.

Furthermore, the duty to prevent sexual harassment underscores the commitment

to fostering safe and inclusive work environments, with employers mandated to proactively address and mitigate instances of harassment.

A draft statutory code of practice on fire and rehire seeks to establish clear guidelines for managing changes to employment terms, emphasising dialogue and consensus-building as preferred approaches.

Enhanced protections against redundancy for employees on pregnancy and family leave aim to safeguard their employment rights during critical life stages.

Limiting the duration of non-compete clauses to three months aims to strike a balance between protecting legitimate business interests and ensuring employees' freedom to pursue alternative opportunities.

Finally, the introduction of neonatal care leave and pay recognises the unique needs of parents with babies requiring specialised care, providing essential support during challenging times.

In conclusion, the impending changes reflect a concerted effort to modernise labour regulations, foster inclusivity, and uphold employee rights. Employers are encouraged to familiarise themselves with these amendments and seek appropriate guidance to ensure smooth implementation and compliance.

**For assistance navigating these changes, organisations can reach out for tailored advice and support from Kathryn Rodgers from [www.face2facehr.com](http://www.face2facehr.com) 07946 330 025.**



Kathryn Rodgers



Babies being cared for in hospital  
(credit: Tiny Lives)

## Lifeline given to parents with poorly babies in hospital

The parents of very sick newborn babies and babies with heart problems in the North of England have been offered a lifeline to help them get through difficult times when their children are in hospital.

**The operator of the Tyne Tunnels, TT2, has announced it is supporting the Tiny Lives Trust and Red Sky Foundation for a second year running with a £18,000 donation to pay for the transport of hundreds of families to and from hospital, to visit their poorly babies, for a whole year.**

TT2 is gifting the Tiny Lives scheme £15,000, following the success of the firm's £10,000 donation last year which supported 362 families who had babies in neo-natal care.

Red Sky Foundation's transport scheme which supports families of children undergoing heart surgery, has received £3,000 from TT2. TT2 gave Red Sky a £2,000 donation in 2023 which provided fuel costs for a number of families.

The two charities' transport schemes enable parents to spend invaluable time with their sick children by removing the financial burden of transport. Since the cost-of-living crisis, the charities have seen a significant increase in the need for their vital transport support scheme.

The money from TT2 will buy hospital parking permits for parents with a car and pay for public transport travel passes for those that don't, and for those in the greatest hardship, help with fuel costs.

Joe, whose son Alexander was on the unit at the RVI hospital in Newcastle, is a parent who has benefitted from Tiny Lives' transport programme. They said: "Tiny Lives gave us a parking permit, which was a massive weight off our shoulders. I'm not sure we could have afforded to be there every day with the car, without that support. It was massively appreciated."

It is estimated that neonatal families in England are forced to lose on average, £405 a week when their baby is in hospital, which includes travel, parking, food and drink, childcare for siblings and loss of earnings. For many families, these unexpected expenses cannot be absorbed and without financial assistance, visiting their baby as much as they want to, would not be possible.

Rachel Hardwick, Funding & Partnerships Officer at Tiny Lives, said: "We cannot thank TT2 enough for its support. Donations like this one help us provide a valuable safety net for parents entering a world completely out of their control by supplying items, funds, staff specialists and support networks to help make their neonatal journeys a little easier."

TT2's chief operating officer, Shaun Simmons, said: "One of the key purposes of our community fund is to provide safe and efficient transport connections by working with causes that provide, or support vital transport in the region. We also encourage and promote safe travel through partnerships with charities and organisations.

"Having a premature or poorly newborn baby can be one of the most difficult and life-changing challenges a family can experience, so when we heard we could play a part in supporting parents in this terrible position, we were delighted to do so."

TT2 works closely with many north east charities that support for vital transport. The firm has previously fuelled the fleet of Daft as a Brush charity for a month to help get cancer patients to and from treatment appointments for free and the Northumbria Blood Bikes, as well as a partnership with St John Ambulance to fund a new community support vehicle and 30 community support bikes and a campaign for safety and first aid.

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



# Welcome to Condliffe Cleaning Services – A clean above the rest!

As the proud owner of Condliffe Cleaning Services, I am delighted to share a glimpse into our ethos and the range of professional cleaning solutions we offer.

Operating as a family-run business nestled in the heart of the North East, we extend our services to clients across a vast expanse, from Teesside through to the Borders of Scotland.

**My name is Barbara Condliffe, and we first opened our doors to Condliffe Cleaning Services in 1995 and have grown from a small, family-run business to 70 staff members. Although we are still a family-run business and our values are the same as they ever were, we now offer our clients a full-service, one-stop-shop commercial cleaning solution.**

At Condliffe Cleaning Services, we take immense pride in our commitment to delivering a service that not only meets but exceeds the expectations of our clients. The longevity of both our clientele and our dedicated staff stands as a testament to the values we uphold and the quality of service we provide.

Our portfolio encompasses a comprehensive array of professional contract cleaning services, meticulously tailored to suit the diverse needs of businesses spanning various industries.

Whether it be office buildings, retail establishments, restaurants, rural cleaning, or medical facilities, our expertise ensures exceptional outcomes with every cleaning task undertaken.

Daily cleaning forms the cornerstone of our services, recognising that the requirements for cleanliness can differ vastly depending



Barbara Condliffe

on the nature of the space being cleaned. From routine maintenance to specialised cleaning protocols, we ensure that every aspect is meticulously addressed, leaving no room for compromise.

Rural areas present a unique set of challenges, and our rural cleaning services are meticulously designed to cater to the distinct needs of countryside properties. By blending seamlessly with the natural surroundings, we strive to maintain a clean and well-maintained environment that harmonises with its rural backdrop.

End of tenancy cleans demand precision and thoroughness to ensure that rental properties are returned to pristine condition. Our tailored end of tenancy cleaning services cater to the needs of both tenants and landlords, facilitating a seamless transition for the next occupant.

Crystal-clear windows can transform the ambiance of any space, and our professional window cleaning services are dedicated to providing a flawless finish. By prioritising attention to detail and utilising industry-leading techniques, we guarantee a clear view and a brighter, more inviting atmosphere for your home or business.

Don't just take our word for it - our satisfied clients speak volumes about the quality of service we provide. From testimonials lauding our dedication to delivering immaculate cleaning experiences to commendations highlighting our professionalism and attention to detail, the feedback we receive fuels our commitment to excellence. Our testimonials are available on our website; [www.condliffecleaning.co.uk](http://www.condliffecleaning.co.uk). For those seeking further information on our services, we invite you to reach out to us via phone or email. Our dedicated team stands ready to address any queries or concerns you may have, ensuring that your cleaning needs are met with the highest degree of professionalism and efficiency.

**At Condliffe Cleaning Services, We Don't Just Clean - We Redefine Cleanliness, One Immaculate Space at a Time.**

**For a free, no obligation quote on your businesses' cleaning services, contact us on 0191 406 6106 / 01434 400 450 [www.condliffecleaning.co.uk](http://www.condliffecleaning.co.uk) [info@condliffecleaning.co.uk](mailto:info@condliffecleaning.co.uk) 6 Kingsway North, Team Valley Trading Estate, Gateshead, NE11 0JH**



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Ammar Mirza CBE

## Taking a LEP of faith into Devolution - An end of an era

Thursday 21st March 2024 was the final board meeting of the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (NELEP). Coincidentally a decade of impact driven engagement for me personally, volunteering with numerous others, to help make our region a better place.

**I remember the launch of the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) – I still have a draft copy - and how attracted I was to getting involved, as I believed back then the NELEP would make a difference.**

The first-of-its-kind body public and private partnership, representing the region, that would enable the delivery of a Strategic Economic Plan delivering more and better jobs. For all.

Having experienced and demonstrated the power of collaboration, working through various local strategic partnerships since 2003, and representing the private sector across Tyne and Wear, I knew what could be achieved when there is a joint ambition.

Applying, unsuccessfully, to become a volunteer board member on more than one occasion. Go figure! Despite the sting of rejection, I remained committed to supporting the partnership approach and even more determined to be involved.

Engaging with the enigmatic Paul Woolston, the original Chair, through various associated initiatives in 2014, I eventually joined the Business Support Board co-chaired by Paul Varley and Gillian Southern.

That is when I began to truly appreciate the true value of the LEP and ambition of the SEP, especially as an a-political, unbiased and independent body that has always had the regions' best intentions at its core.

Since then, with the unwavering personal and professional support from Andrew Hodgson OBE who appointed me as a Main Board member, I have had the privilege of Chairing the Business Advisory Board. Working with an amazing array of partners from across the public and private sector and an operational team led by an extremely capable Colin Bell. As the SME representative for our region on the Main board it has been an honour representing the economic heart and life-line of our regional economy.

Some of the highlights:

**Launching and re-launching the Growth Hub. Learning version 1.0 and 2.0 with 3.0 becoming a national exemplar**

*Working on the regional skills strategy with Bob Paton CBE and supporting the establishment of the first University Technical College in Newcastle. The skills team rolling out the Gatsby Benchmarks and once again leading the skills development revolution.*

*Connecting with various regional, national and international stakeholders and introducing them to the LEP. Going on to developing long term relationships helping deliver the SEP, including Microsoft, Bdaily, Ward Hadaway, Deloitte's, Aon, Police Cyber Task Force, Entrepreneurs Forum, Newcastle College to name but a few.*

*Championing a number of initiatives and programmes including the MIT Regional Entrepreneur Accelerator Programme, Scale-up North East, High Potential Start-up, Access to Finance, Inclusion and International Trade.*

*Being the Private Sector Representative on the European Fund that delivered £1bn worth of funding support investing in developing all of our sector strengths from technology to offshore, automotive to advance manufacturing.*

*Seeing thousands of new and better jobs being created and the North East positioned as the most proud, passionate and positive region in the UK.*

So, as I reflect on the monumental opportunity that the Mayoral Election brings. I hope that the work of the LEP, led by Helen Golightly and expertly chaired by Lucy Winskell OBE, together with all of the effort of partners and partnership working is recognised, and not dismantled to reinvent the wheel. I am very much taking a leap of faith into the future and hope that we can adopt and adapt the power of three – to better communicate, collaborate and celebrate our wonderful region.

**Ammar Mirza CBE is Chair & Founder of Asian Business Connexions, Chair of the NELEP Business Growth Board, Honorary Colonel of 101 Regiment RA and holds various positions across the public and private sectors.**



# JUNA SATHIAN PUBLIC SECTOR AWARD 2023

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ORIGIN COUNCILLOR AND LEADS INITIATIVES FOR CLIMATE  
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# How tips should be allocated is changing – are you ready?

*Employment (Allocation of Tips) Act 2023. Coming into force 1st July 2024.*

At the HR Dept, we take pride in helping companies prevent people problems. One of the ways we do this is by ensuring business owners keep up to date with employment law changes, and one of the newest pieces of employment law comes into force on the 1st July this year and will impact heavily on the hospitality and service industries. It is the Allocation of Tips Bill. So, what is this new law?

## Introduction

The purpose of the Employment (Allocation of Tips) Act 2023 (referred to as “the Tipping Act”) is to ensure the fair and transparent allocation of all tips, gratuities, and service charges. For brevity, “tips, gratuities and service charges” are referred to simply as “tips” throughout this document. The desired outcome of the Tipping Act is to improve fairness for workers by ensuring that the tips consumers leave in recognition of good service and hard work are going to the workers as intended. The Act aims to increase fairness in tipping practices and create a level playing field for employers who already allocate all tips to workers by ensuring that all employers follow the same rules.

## The Code of Practice (Still in development)

The Tipping Act was granted Royal Assent on 2 May 2023. It amends the Employment



Diane Mactavish

Rights Act 1996 (“the 1996 Act”) and a Code of Practice will be introduced, so that employers will be required to:

- Pass on all tips and service charges to workers without deductions, except in very limited scenarios, such as deduction of income tax.
- Ensure that tips are distributed in a fair and transparent manner when the employer takes control, or exerts significant influence, over their distribution.
- Have regard to the code of practice on fairness and transparency of tip distribution when they are distributing or influencing the distribution of tips.
- Maintain a written policy on how tips are dealt with at their place of business, and ensure this policy is made available to all their workers.
- Maintain a record of all tips paid at their place of business and their allocation and distribution between each worker, to which workers have the right to request access.

The Code of Practice will apply to all workers but not anyone self-employed.

## So as employers what do you need to do?

- **Firstly**, be aware of the changes and when they come into force.
- **Secondly**, be prepared. You need to review any existing policies in line with the ACAS code of practice and bring them update or introduce a policy if you don't currently have one.
- **Thirdly** – ensure all your staff are aware of the policy and how it works in practice.

At the HR Dept, we help support SME's in the North East with advice and practical solutions to HR problems, with everything from one off pieces of work such as contracts or handbooks, to an advice line and on-site support for all your HR needs and we are here to help you if need it. We are local so can be on site when you need us and we are not a call centre we really get to understand your business and its challenges.

***If you need any help with this new legislation or you would like to have your existing policy reviewed considering these changes then please get in touch.***

***Diane Mactavish, HR Dept Newcastle North and North Tyneside. Call 0191 2838732 or email: [diane.mactavish@hrdept.co.uk](mailto:diane.mactavish@hrdept.co.uk)***



# Why everything we know about depression is wrong...

Whoa, that was a deep title for my first article. So, let me first introduce myself. I am Jude Daunt, creator of the Unbreakable Mindset Methodology® host of the Unbreakable Mindset Podcast and co-founder of Activated Mindset Online.

**Having helped clients all over the world, from CEOs to celebrities, teachers to freelancers, my mission has always been to support people out of a negative headspace and help them live a life free of mental constraints.**

Like most people with anxiety and depression, I just presumed I would always struggle; it was all I knew. Being on antidepressants from the age of 15 wasn't a big deal in my family. Depression and anxiety were commonplace; all of us believed it was a medical condition we would have to live with.

Tons of therapy ensued, and nothing changed. The breaking point came when my anxiety manifested as an eating disorder, and I was a real hot mess. Stay tuned; I promise this article gets lighter.

After trying every therapy that was available back then, someone recommended a coach that changed my life forever.

So, let me tell you what I discovered on my journey and working with countless case studies over the years.

Anxiety is caused by anxious thoughts. Okay, so that's not that ground-breaking, but if they are allowed to ruminate and left unchecked, they will become unmanageable, and you end up feeling like you can't cope, leading to depression.

What I found with most treatments out there is they try to treat the symptoms of anxiety and not the cause. If you're not treating the cause, then anxiety will always come back,



Jude Daunt

keeping you stuck in that dreaded negative cycle.

So, let me share with you the four common causes of anxiety:

**Childhood Blueprint:** More importantly, your limiting beliefs, beliefs we all formed in childhood from around the age of 7. Beliefs we have about ourselves and the world around us. My beliefs were that of, "life is tough, that's just the way it is," "I'm the thick one in the family," and "if something good happens, something bad follows."

**Anxiety Triggers:** There are some really common ones that keep people stuck: procrastination, worrying about what other people think, feeling overwhelmed, and disorganisation.

**Habits and Actions:** We will either empower ourselves on a weekly basis or

disempower, and at the heart of this is how we show up in all areas of our lives.

**Lack of Self-Worth:** How we feel about ourselves is a huge trigger, and what we allow in and accept is determined by what we think of ourselves.

When you work on reprogramming these four key areas and have the tools to implement this, it becomes ingrained in your subconscious. It is 100% possible to break free from negative mental health when you address the cause rather than just the symptoms.

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# Building Connection in our workplaces: Be Intentional

It's four years now since we were all at home, in the depths of the pandemic's first lockdown, when 7 million of the UK working population who had never worked remotely, were rapidly figuring out how to make virtual working a reality.

Since then, research globally and in the UK is demonstrating that virtual and hybrid work is becoming the norm across many businesses, and it's about time!. We've had 100 years of the office structure, but technology has moved on rapidly, and it's time to shift with the times. According to TravelPerk...

- Just 30% of UK companies are working fully on-site today, as opposed to 57% before the pandemic.
- Over 40% of survey respondents claim that their companies have shifted to a hybrid model since the global pandemic.
- Fully-remote work has doubled in popularity, jumping from 4% in a pre-pandemic world to 8% now.

In changing our physical environments though, I wonder if we have also changed our working practices to fit the new world? My experience from my client conversations is not necessarily. Back to back meetings have become the norm, all day, most days with little time is carved out for deep work. Also small talk, that important relationship building chit chat that the office provided, in many cases has disappeared.

At the same time, we know that being connected to our colleagues, building trust based relationships, engaging meaningfully as teams has huge benefits to our well-being, our ability to connect emotionally, influence effectively and develop the psychological safety so vital within our workplaces.

## How then can we build connection?

### Agree Expectations

These conversations can happen in any direction: upwards, sideways, down to the team or out to suppliers, customers and stakeholders. Discuss with each party: what are your expectations of each other? How

do you prefer to communicate? How often should this be? What level of detail do you like? How do you like feedback?

### Create the Forums

Creating forums at a team level is particularly key, not just a one to one basis. We assume often as leaders if we are speaking with every team member that's enough, but our role is to develop the team as well as the individual so meetings both in person and virtually are vital for connection

*Discuss with each party:* how is it best for us to meet and connect, about what, when and for how long? Agree this with individuals, your team, your key stakeholders and customers – all will be on a different frequency, and potentially about different things.

### Make time for Connecting

This is vital both remotely and in person. Too often I see meetings, even 30 minute ones, leave no time for connection. Everyone gets down to business straightaway, talking about facts and information, instead of remembering we are engaging with humans, and they like to connect.

So create space for small talk, connect first as individuals, then get down to business. This will help develop rapport, find common ground, and ultimately enable better outcomes, due to greater levels of trust.

### Develop your Emotional Intelligence

95% of our behaviour is driven by our emotions, so making sure we check in with our own, and recognise them in others really

helps our connection. Paying attention to how we're showing up, how stress and pressure influence our behaviours and responses should be a constant for us. Developing our own awareness enables us to manage our emotions more effectively, and recognise them in others. This enables us to adapt more effectively and even influence the other parties.

### Value the Strength of your Relationships

Frequently we underestimate the importance of Strength of Relationship as a factor in how successfully we can influence others. We forget that only talking about facts and information doesn't create a bond or trust, and if this isn't there, then we'll find it a struggle to influence others. If you have a difficult stakeholders, just think - do you know their family background, what they value, how they spend their spare time? If not – you need to connect more, as just being able to talk a little about common interests will help you see a shift in how well you work together.

Remember doing business is human, so being intentional around connecting more on that human level can only be a good thing.

**Annabel is an Executive and Team Coach, Leadership Facilitator and Coach Supervisor. 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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# INSIGHT

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## No bridge too far for footbridge developer

**The latest milestone in the construction of the new River Wear footbridge has proven a world-first for the civil engineering community.**

Civil engineering specialist, VolkerStevin, has designed and delivered a first-of-its-kind piling solution for the high-level New Wear Footbridge in Sunderland.

A series of piles are required for the bridge foundations. This involves drilling a large void down to rock level and replacing the earth removed with reinforced concrete.

However, due to the location of the bridge's north pier beside the River Wear,

and river working restrictions, the team were unable to create the required access for a traditional piling rig, leading to an entirely new solution being developed.

Working in collaboration with its sister business, VolkerGround Engineering, the team created a bespoke cantilever piling solution, overcoming the access, design, and environmental challenges. This approach not only allowed a crucial part of the project to be finished, but also serves as a benchmark for future projects.

Mark Denham, project director, said: "At VolkerStevin we're no strangers to overcoming complex challenges and the innovative cantilevered piling frame was a crucial part required for the success of this project. The development of this solution was made possible through a collaborative approach involving our in-house temporary works team and piling specialists, key supply chain partners and our client.

The absence of similar existing solutions prompted extensive research across different sectors. We rigorously evaluated potential solutions based on health and safety, environmental impact, and buildability, leading to the development of this preferred solution from concept to detailed design."



## Developer gets to work on former Job Centre transformation

**An award-winning estate agent and property developer is getting to work on the redevelopment of the former Job Centre in Sunderland city centre.**

Ashbrookes has this month [4 Mar] opened its first branch in the city on the bottom floor of the building as part of phase one of the development.

Phase two, which is dependent upon planning permission from Sunderland City Council, will see the building extended by a further two floors.

Bringing it in-line with the two adjoining units, the expansion would see the three floors above the branch house 78 luxury student apartments.

Ashbrookes has also said that it will transform the exterior façade by recladding it to look 'fresh and more modern'.

Arif Mushtaq, managing director of Ashbrookes, said: "We are delighted to be opening our first estate agency branch in the city. This is Ashbrookes's 4th branch with the other branches established in Middlesbrough, Acklam and Yarm.

"As an agency, Ashbrookes is a residential sales and lettings estate agency which also specialises in property management and property development. Ashbrookes is currently renovating or building 3 additional projects in Middlesbrough focused on student accommodation with in excess of 200 studios in the pipeline for 2024/2025.

"The new Sunderland agency has already created five jobs with more hopefully in the pipeline as we continue to increase our presence in the city.

"Once development is underway, it will generate a further 70 construction jobs."



location, other natural materials, such as wood and seagrass have also been incorporated, while many of the accessories on display, such as bowls and vases, are also made of glass.

Seaham Garden Village will create an entirely new community surrounded by thriving wildlife havens, with almost 50 per cent of the site given over to open spaces and landscaped areas.

And, along with the 375 new build homes Miller North East will build in total, the development will include a primary school, an innovation centre and a community hub.

## Sea Glass at Seaham

**Glittering jewels of the sea are the inspiration behind the show home at the North East's most eagerly awaited new housing development.**

The new £250m Seaham Garden Village is set to bring open space, sustainable living and well-designed, energy efficient houses to Durham's heritage coastline.

And Miller Homes North East's show home opened recently with an interior design scheme which reflects the area's glassmaking history.

In the mid-19th century, when Seaham boasted the largest glass bottle works in Britain, surplus glass would be routinely deposited in the North Sea.

Now, more than a century later, pieces of glass, smoothed and shaped by the sand and sea, wash up on Seaham beach attracting glass 'pickers' from across the region and beyond.

And Seaham's sea glass has inspired everything from the colour scheme of the show home to its wall coverings, some of which contain glass beads, gently refracting light and casting rooms in a soft shimmery glow.

To reflect the development's coastal

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*Sarah Robson with Simon Walker,  
Staindrop site*

## Homes By Carlton to launch new housing site in Staindrop

Regional housebuilder Homes by Carlton has acquired land for a new 48-unit housing development in Staindrop, County Durham.

**The scheme, which will be known as Woodberry Park, will comprise a mix of three, four and five-bedroom detached and semi-detached homes designed to appeal to families of all sizes.**

Construction is due to start on-site later this year.

The Woodberry Park announcement follows two recent land deal successes for Homes by Carlton – the acquisition of a further 148 units at their Middleton Waters site in Middleton St George, and a new 29-unit scheme at Beauford Park, Witton Gilbert.

The scheme is in partnership with Karbon Homes's Next Level Developments, who will be providing the full funding package for the development.

Simon Walker, Managing Director of award-winning Homes by Carlton, said: "We're delighted that Next Level Developments have provided a Joint Venture funding facility which will allow Homes by Carlton to deliver what is set to be a beautiful development of three to five-bedroom homes in popular Staindrop.

"I believe this funding structure is an excellent example of an innovative approach to enabling regional housebuilders such as Homes by Carlton to deliver high quality homes throughout the region, providing prospective home buyers with more choice."

Sarah Robson, Director of Development at Karbon Homes, said: "Through Next Level Developments, Karbon Homes's Joint Venture funding arm, we are committed to supporting regional housebuilders in the development of much-needed new homes. The returns from this then support Karbon Homes's continued investment in our affordable homes programme."

Woodberry Park represents a £10 million investment and forms part of a £60 million commitment from Homes by Carlton to deliver high quality homes throughout the North East, creating hundreds of jobs over the coming years.

**More details on current and future sites can be found by visiting – [www.homesbycarlton.com](http://www.homesbycarlton.com)**



# The Built Environment

*In this new series of interviews with leading figures working within this crucial sector Northern Insight spoke to...*

## Ben Pickard

*Managing Director, Asbestos Audit*

### **Tell us about your current role.**

I currently oversee and manage Asbestos Audit Ltd. We are primarily an environmental consultancy specialising in asbestos with surveying, removal, earth work and demolition departments. My working day is a mixture of meetings, overseeing the teams and the odd day on site to keep my surveying skills fresh.

### **Tell us about your team.**

We employ a team of over 45. Our headquarters is in the North East with regional smaller teams in Scotland, Midlands and the South coast.

### **Did you always envisage a career working in and around The Built Environment?**

Initially, I was in the Army which had always been my dream. Unfortunately, I was injured in an accident and had to alter my plans, significantly. I trained in civil engineering while working at various surveying and construction related companies. Then, my better half, Alice, pushed me towards bettering myself and I undertook a Building Surveyors Honours Degree.

Then, like most in the asbestos industry, I fell into a junior asbestos surveyors' role at what was White Young and Green and I've been doing it now for 23 years. I learnt a lot from a good team of people and this has helped me to create the company I have now. I don't think anyone goes out wanting to work in asbestos everyone just seems to fall into it.

### **What are you currently working on?**

We have always had a background in the asbestos part of Brownfield Site regeneration but we are looking to further our strategic goals by entering into new partnerships with Ergo Environmental, a likeminded company with a background in geotechnical and contamination work. This will allow us to grow the company to over 60 staff and increase our turnover and client base. Coupled with our new laboratory and accreditations, we are in a strong position to grow whatever the economic climate throws at us.

### **What is your proudest career achievement?**

I think the proudest achievement to date is just knowing that I can leave the team we have built to crack on, if I'm away on holiday and simply not have to worry. Having support around you is critically important to company and personal career success.

### **What is your own favourite building?**

We recently undertook surveys on the Tyne Bridge for Esh Group. Although it is looking a little battered and bruised by the English weather and a multitude of users, the building is iconic of the North East and will continue to be for centuries to come.

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

The day-to-day asbestos management and surveying work will continue for some time to come. I was told when I entered the industry that there wouldn't be any asbestos left within 15 years. As it turned out the problem was very much underestimated. There is now a push into asbestos in soils and brownfield site work which we are embracing.

### **What does the future hold for your business?**

We look to grow year-on-year and increase both our skills base and client offering. Ideally, I would like to grow the company to the point at which I can hand it over to the management team to run and take more of a back seat, allowing me to work on new ventures and capital streams.

### **Who would be your four ideal dinner guests?**

Winston Churchill would be a good dinner guest. I don't agree with his politics but anyone who can stir up a nation at a time of need and produce memorable speeches like he did, is certainly worth talking too. Richard Branson would be interesting. I find his story very interesting, and he is proof that you can achieve anything you want through success and failure. Elon Musk would be very fun to talk to but I'm still not sure if he's overall good or bad (a bit like Batman). I would also invite Alan Hinkes, the British mountaineer. I saw him speak some years ago about conquering K2 and the challenges and personal strife he went through to get there.

### **How do you like to unwind?**

I enjoy the gym and working out when I have time alongside short breaks and trips away. I tend to work six days a week most of the time which doesn't leave a lot of time for much else.

### **Favourite Boxset?**

I have just finished watching *Fall Out* which was great and just like the video game. The whole thing was very well done.

### **Favourite Book?**

*The Hobbit* or anything by Terry Pratchett

[www.asbestosaudit.co](http://www.asbestosaudit.co)



“

*...Having support  
around you  
is critically  
important...*

Ben Pickard





## Awards Shortlist

**Morpeth Sport and Leisure Centre has been shortlisted for two construction industry awards, continuing its success since opening in April 2023.**

Serving as an example of how well-designed facilities can strengthen social cohesion and inclusion in an aesthetically pleasing hub, the £21m centre has been shortlisted in the Public Sector Project and Community Benefit Project categories of this year's RICS North East Awards.

The project was designed by leading firm GT3 Architects and was commissioned and funded by Northumberland County Council and Advance Northumberland. The centre has become a cornerstone of the community in the town since opening and features state of the art sporting facilities, as well as a community services hub, which includes a double-height community library and customer service centre.



## Knight Frank Newcastle announces new office head

**Global property consultancy, Knight Frank, has announced the appointment of a new head of office in Newcastle, who will take the reins from the current leader of the 76-strong team - Peter Bowden.**

Partner Ian Tew, who began his commercial property career at DTZ, has 28 years' experience as a Chartered building surveyor, with 24 of those spent at Knight Frank where he has established a successful building consultancy service which works across the UK.

Peter Bowden has led the Newcastle office for almost 12 years and will continue with his role in Knight Frank's property and asset management team, before retiring later in the year.

Mr Bowden said: "As we start the new financial year, it is right that I hand over the head of office role, whilst I continue with the day job, so that business planning for the next year is carried-out by those taking things forward."

"I'm absolutely delighted to say that Ian will pick up the reins and I know all of the team will give him their full support because that is the way in this office. No politics, no factions, just good, skilful people doing a fantastic job across the board."



## New homes planned for Bowesfield Park

**Plans for a major new residential scheme at a unique mixed-use site on Teesside are set to move forward after a deal was signed between a leading housebuilder and a regional developer.**

Keepmoat Homes is looking to build up to 257 new homes on a previously developed 6.8 hectare site at Bowesfield Park, which sits on the banks of the River Tees in Stockton and which was created by North East employer Banks Property.

The development would be located near Cygnet Drive and Kingfisher Way, on a site that is allocated for residential development in the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Local Plan, and would include a mix of property types, including 79 affordable homes.

A number of environmental improvements would also be delivered as part of the project, including the creation of new footpaths and the planting of new hedgerows, shrubs and trees.

A planning application for the proposed development has been submitted by Keepmoat to Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and is expected to come before the Council's planning committee later this year.

Bowesfield Park is a 35-hectare former brownfield site which was remediated by the Banks Group to deliver a fully integrated, mixed-use scheme to have substantial wildlife habitats and recreational areas sitting alongside commercial and residential spaces.

It includes a 15-hectare wildlife conservation area, as well as 250 existing homes and commercial occupants including Handelsbanken, Lexus Teesside, Audi, Stoneacre Teesside, nursery chain Kids 1st and digital marketing agency Colewood.



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# Show apartment opens to great acclaim in Hexham



**The eagerly anticipated opening of the show apartment at The Wool House on Gilesgate has been met with great acclaim by those who had already reserved a property and were given priority viewings by the selling agent, Youngs RPS, just before Easter.**

**Eight viewings took place with many more already scheduled following on from three reservations made earlier in the Easter week.**

Progress at the development has suffered from some delays due to the unprecedented demand for insulating materials following the Grenfell Tower fire, which led to supply problems.

As a result, development director, Bob Skelly, believes there is likely to be some pent-up demand from local people who have watched the development of The Wool House with interest.

Now, delighted with the finished product, he is pleased that those who have been able to

visit the show apartment feel it has been well worth the wait.

He said: "We have been working flat out to get the apartment ready for Easter which is what we promised.

"Our interior design consultancy, Dakota, captured the essence of The Wool House branding from the outset with their fabulous interior designs based on the heritage of the building as a former wool warehouse and their interiors feature natural shades and textures.

"The overall impression, as well as the high-quality fixtures and finishes have gone down very well with everyone we have shown around, which is great feedback and makes some of the challenges we have faced in reaching this stage, all worthwhile."

William Thornton, head of residential agency at YoungsRPS, conducted the viewings and described some of the reactions he overheard: "It was very positive with everyone mentioning the standard of finish and the size of the rooms.

"Because it is still a live construction site, we are undertaking accompanied viewings to a strict timetable and offering slots on either Thursday or Friday afternoons between 3-5pm. Personal protective equipment will be provided by The Wool House at the point of entry to ensure the utmost safety for all visitors to the site, so if you wish to view the show apartment, please contact our Hexham office to arrange it."

The luxury development, which features 45 one and two-bedroom apartments, duplexes and penthouse apartments over six floors with on-site parking, provides a superb choice for buyers looking to downsize or for those who spend time travelling or living abroad for some of the year and are looking for a 'lock up and go' home which is easy to run and offers a high degree of security.

Central to the design of each apartment are well-planned German-manufactured kitchens by Beckerman and stylish Porcelanosa bathrooms and tiling.

There are now 11 apartments reserved. Prices start at £175k for a one-bed apartment and at £265k for a two-bed apartment.

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





# Surge in membership as national and regional firms recognise the need for innovation in the construction sector



*Catriona Lingwood, chief executive, Chelsea Corbett, sector administrator and Leanne Conaway, events manager, Constructing Excellence North East.*

**Constructing Excellence North East, (CENE) has confirmed a surge in membership since the start of the year.**

**The construction sector body, has welcomed 13 companies into membership varying in size from influential national operations to successful home grown, North East, firms.**

The new members are Arcas Building Solutions, Brighter Compliance, CAD21, Gridmark Survey, Lynas Engineers, Morgan Sindall, Mott MacDonalds Bentley, PJJ Consultancy, Rob Langley Mediation, Solomons Europe, Thomasons, Tarmac and Vinci.

Catriona Lingwood, chief executive of Constructing Excellence North East, said: "We are a dynamic industry body, tackling some very challenging issues for the construction sector, ranging from

strategies to manage the move to net zero carbon through to securing a more diverse and inclusive workforce, so as to secure the long-term future of our industry.

"It is for this reason that we are continually building our membership base, although the sudden surge that has taken place since the beginning of 2024 has been exceptional. These new members and those that have been with us many years, recognise there is much more to be gained by coming together, sharing best practice and learning from one another.

"Moreover, through our industry theme groups - which look at innovation, people, climate and value - and our awards, conferences and seminars we are opening up conversations on key issues facing the construction sector in the region and, critically, unearthing innovative solutions that members tell us are having real impact on their businesses."

In March, CENE held its annual conference which focused on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. The 'All In' Conference included wide representation including 'women in', LGBT+ and disability groups. Speakers

included Victoria Short, Randstad UK&I; Michael Nicholas MBE, Northumbrian Water Group; Paula McMahon, Sir Robert McAlpine; Laura Forsyth, Celebrate Difference and Sarah Hey, Hydrock.

On the near horizon are the Generation 4 Change (G4C) North East Awards which take place on April 26 at the Hilton Newcastle Gateshead. The CENE Awards take place on June 14 at the Grand Hotel Gosforth Park and the Constructing Excellence National Awards takes place on November 15 at the London Marriott, Grosvenor Square.

Catriona, added: "We welcome all new members and encourage them to play a full role within the Constructing Excellence movement. We are very confident the construction sector has a tremendous future. We employ tens of thousands of people in the North East and we will be absolutely critical in the delivery of future infrastructure that will allow the region, as a whole, to grow and flourish."

**[cene.org.uk](http://cene.org.uk)**



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Kevan Carrick

# Mediation unlocks property and commercial disputes

Disputes are familiar features of the UK commercial and property sector.

**For this reason, mediators are often brought in to resolve complex issues.**

I have mediated a vast number of disputes and the role requires negotiating skills and the art of getting to 'yes'. Many disputes are settled by mediation when the parties understand the potential costs and time of going to court are just too big to risk, compared to the amount in dispute. Mediation is a structured negotiation with the specialist facilitating agreement, or agreements, if more than two parties.

If you need a mediator, the starting point is to ensure they are registered via the Civil Mediation Council, or Northern Dispute Resolutions.

This will provide you with peace of mind that your mediator abides by a code of conduct, has been trained to acceptable industry

standards, has suitable insurance, carries out continuous training and development and offers access to a complaints process, if needed.

Mediators help those in dispute communicate about the issues of concern to them and help participants find solutions that are acceptable to everybody involved.

It is a confidential process that gives parties control over the outcome. Mediators help the parties to understand the issues and the options that are available to parties, but they do so from a neutral position with no interest in the outcome of the dispute and cannot impose a solution.

In civil commercial mediation, offers can be made without influencing what happens if the dispute is eventually resolved in court (known as offers made 'without prejudice') which can enable participants explore and to try to reach a settlement without compromising their position.

**Is There a Right Time to Mediate?**

In any field of mediation, it is difficult to think of a wrong time to mediate. In civil commercial mediation it is often a matter of balancing risk against cost. The earlier in the dispute it is decided to mediate, the lower exposure to litigation costs. The possibility of important information becoming available through disclosure and the agreement of facts, might dictate the timing of the mediation. At the other extreme, full disclosure, witness statements and expert reports, are notoriously expensive, and this needs to be weighed against the level

of reduced risk that accompanies more information being available.

Common wisdom is the best time to mediate is before disclosure and witness statements but after each party, particularly their surveyors and/or lawyers, fully understand each other's position in the dispute.

In workplace and community mediation, it is the sooner the better. Left to fester, a conflict in the workplace or community will often escalate, causing more damage, not just for the parties but to those around them. This can apply also to commercial disputes where ongoing relationships are important. Once a mediator gets involved and gives everyone an opportunity to express their views in a safe and confidential environment, parties can start to get a better understanding of the cost and consequences of the dispute and make a more informed choice.

*Kevan Carrick, co-founder of JK Property Consultants, is a chartered surveyor, with over 50 years of experience in the property market as an entrepreneur, and nearly 30 years as a mediator and mentor. He is a registered mediator with the Civil Mediation Council and was shortlisted for the Commercial Mediator of the Year in 2021 and 2022 by the National Mediator Awards. He co-founded Northern Dispute Resolutions Limited, where he applies his skills to resolve disputes, encourages the use of mediation and trains post-graduate law students.*

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## Our High Streets

The emperor Napoleon described the English as a nation of shopkeepers. The question is are we still one or has the growth of e-commerce changed us?

The high street has been grappling with an increasing number of shop vacancies for some time now, a trend exacerbated by shifting consumer habits and economic challenges.

**The Covid lockdowns led to a huge increase in internet shopping. Figures show that in the February preceding the first lockdown, 19.1% of transactions were online. As a direct result of non-essential stores closing their doors, that increased to 37.8% by January 2021. The latest figures for February 2024\* however show that online shopping fell back to 26.6% of all transactions. A decline of almost a third, a promising sign of things to come perhaps?**

Reports claim the vacancy rate for high street shops has now reached a concerning level, reflecting the struggles faced by

traditional bricks-and-mortar retailers amidst competition from online platforms and changing retail landscapes. Efforts to revitalise these areas and adapt to evolving consumer preferences are underway, but the issue of high street vacancies remains a prominent concern for communities and policymakers alike.

The sharp increase in internet shopping led to high street shops closing in large numbers, as can be seen throughout the country. The mainstream press were quick to report that the North East had the highest rate of empty shops in the UK at the end of last year, but little mention of the region seeing the biggest increase in store openings, according to British Retail Consortium figures. The slowdown in the economy has undoubtedly also influenced how we shop but, the tide seems to have turned. youngsrps' commercial team, and many other agents across the region, are now experiencing a steady demand for small shops, a trend not dissimilar to that after the financial crash of 2008.

So where is the happy medium? Most of the shopping centres where we are involved, such as Whitley Lodge which is home to a mix of retail, food and leisure units in Whitley Bay, Coastway Shopping Centre in Wallsend and Kenton Retail buck this trend with very high occupancy levels and continuous demand ensuring any vacant units are quickly re-let.

Government backed schemes such as the Future High Street Fund of £1 billion, are being put to use redeveloping declining town centres and increasing mixed use spaces.

Hexham, Ashington, Blyth and Cramlington are all in the depths of development now.

Several of the major chains are also expanding and diversifying their high street presence. Dominos have proposed to open 70 new stores in 2024, and a total of 2000 stores by 2033 across the UK and Ireland. North East based Greggs plan for up to 160 new stores across the country, with more convenient access to its stores and a varying portfolio of store locations, including their 'Tasty by Greggs' concept in collaboration with Primark. Newcastle's Northumberland Street store currently boasts a 114 seat café, not forgetting the world's largest Greggs, which opened in Birmingham's Primark store in March 2023. Asda, with its firm growth strategy in convenience, began converting the 470 convenience stores and forecourts bought from the Co-op and EG Group under the Asda Express banner in January with completion expected by the end of Spring 2024.

Peacocks, Trespass and Bon Marche are also expanding their high street presence whilst Next and M&S are re-locating to larger stores. Wilko, now owned by The Range, has opened three new concept stores with 50 more to follow.

The challenge of vacancy is nothing new and the Covid pandemic may well have challenged the high street further but there are encouraging signs that we are gradually returning to Napoleon's view that we are a nation of shopkeepers.

\*Figures taken from Office for National Statistics.

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

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# Karpet Mills: Tailored flooring solutions for your workspace and your home



Karpet Mills, the North East's leading carpet and flooring retailer, have had a promising start to 2024 across all sectors; but have seen substantial growth from their commercial flooring offerings.

**Clients in recent projects include Nixon Hire, Bradley Hall, Gateshead Council, North East Autism Society, Matfen Hall, Durham Cathedral to name just a few, covering a wide range of commercial flooring schemes across all sectors, including office space, hospitality and education.**

With several commercial developments already completed this year, including 5,500 sqft of carpet tiles at Cobalt Business Park, luxury Hugh Mackay wool twist carpet fitted throughout Lumley Castle Hotel and specialist safety flooring installed at iPac Packaging Solutions in Tanfield, it has helped reinforce that the 6th generation family run business is more than just a residential flooring specialist.

Whether moving to a new premises, planning a full office refresh, or just a small meeting room replacement, Karpet Mills have flooring options to suit all projects. "Commercial flooring can be a complex sector and we have learned it is as important for our clients to get help with specifying the right products, not just hitting the right budget. Having sold flooring for over 140 years we have built up a bank of priceless experience to be able to help our commercial customers to navigate the process of their project." Says Karpet Mills director Joel Dickinson.

Joel goes on to add "A lot of our clients are moving premises and we can help with both sides of the process – we can help them to return the property they are vacating back to its original condition at the lowest possible cost which is normally a requirement as part of the dilapidations works within a commercial lease. Then naturally, we can help to design and undertake the fitout and refurbishment of the facility they are taking occupation of."



With a dedicated team to handle the commercial projects from inception to fitting, Karpet Mills offer everything from carpet tiles to safety flooring, bespoke contract carpets to LVT, subfloor preparations to specialist staircase products. And just as with their residential carpet and flooring projects, Karpet Mills expert team of flooring advisors can provide a free planning and design service that includes measuring, floor inspections, laying patterns and much more.

Established since 1878, the Karpet Mills Group now boasts 8 showrooms across the North East, including their premier division, Designer Flooring. All branches are open seven days a week.

**To find out more about commercial flooring, or to speak to someone today about your flooring project, contact Karpet Mills today.**

**Declan Clark, Marketing & Commercial Flooring Manager, Declan.clark@karpetmills.co.uk • 07399584687**



# More neighbourhood wardens for Kenton

**The street wardens are the eyes and ears of the neighbourhood and give local residents peace of mind.**

New street wardens have started work across Kenton in response to residents' concerns over anti-social behaviour. The latest recruit is Andy Turnbull, a former police officer. Patrolling neighbourhoods on a day to day basis, the street wardens work closely with the local police force, the EPiC team and local people to deter anti-social behaviour and low level crime.

Councillor Stephen Lambert, Chair of the Kenton Ward committee, said: "The street wardens are the eyes and ears of the neighbourhood and give local residents peace of mind."

Kenton's wardens aim to make a difference in the Montagu, Kenton Bar and North Kenton communities, to improve quality of life whilst building community confidence by reducing crime and the fear of crime and deterring ASB.

The wardens have the power to issue fixed penalty notices for offences relating to littering, dog fouling and fly-tipping.

Lambert said: "Our wardens are highly visible. They patrol estates, acting as a deterrent to bad behaviour, vandalism and graffiti. Their presence in the last six weeks has made it easier to deal with problems, as well as calming the fear of crime among older residents and families."

"Community safety is the number one issue for people across Kenton."



## The continued adventures of...



# Ziggy and Cally!

Hi everyone,

Rain, rain, and more rain – just as well we have been working inside but outside stuff has been slow. Anyway, I will be 14 soon (that's 98 in people years – letter from Charles maybe soon?) so today I am going for a shampoo and set so I look my best. May help me dry off quicker too having less fur! Pictures to follow next month!

*Q: Hi Ziggy. I am tearing my hair out over my new build home and wondered if I could get some advice.*

It's fully abutted by a terraced house on one side and partially abutted by a flat over a garage the other. So on the flat side part of the wall is open to the elements. Internally, those parts of the house are cold and prone to mould. The housebuilder is claiming it has done job to specification; yet why is a new house suffering from this affliction if that's the case? Construction is render, block, filled cavity, block, plasterboard. Many other things about the house and garden leads me to assume it's been bodged but with the builder refusing to budge, where can one go for redress? (If it's at all possible?)

**A:** When you buy a new build house from a developer you have no consumer rights. New

homes are not covered by the Sale of Goods Act. You have more rights if you buy anything from the supermarket than if you buy a new home. That's why I have always advised readers not to buy new homes.

However, the builder may have a policy which will act as a warranty for defects. But be aware that many policies, have exceptions for damp, condensation or shrinkage.

Your builder would have also completed an energy assessment. You could contact and independent party to re-evaluate this if your home feels much colder during those winter months.

### Who else can I turn too?

If the builder can no longer help with your complaint, the next step would be an independent dispute resolution service. You will need to provide all the evidence you have and have three months from your last communication with the builder to submit a dispute. The best info I could find is here: [consumercodeforhomebuilders.com](http://consumercodeforhomebuilders.com)

### What does the home warranty cover me for?

This depends on the policy taken out by the builder but you will be given a help guide from the builder, conveyancing solicitor or warranty provider. You should read this carefully.



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)



# Brian built a career around construction

Now he's retiring into the boardroom...and onto the golf course.

**One of the most respected names in the North East building and property maintenance industry has decided to retire from the day to running of his company and begin a less hands-on role by becoming chairman.**

WDL is a family-run business which has provided the region with a comprehensive building and property maintenance service for over 40 years. They specialise in conversions, extensions, alterations and repairs. Their experienced team plus reputable sub-contractors provide domestic and commercial clients with a full service ranging from bespoke design and construction, to regular maintenance and aftercare.

Their domestic building services range from bathroom and kitchen fitting, loft and garage conversions, orangeries, plumbing, and central heating installation and repair.

WDL are also experienced in commercial property work including refurbishments, renovation, shop and office re-fits, as well as regular maintenance. They are also happy to work in partnership with company site or facility managers.

In other words, when it comes to construction and property maintenance, WDL can provide a bespoke service.

And leading WDL from the front for the past 46 years has been Brian Dickinson.

"I completed a degree in building management at what is now Northumbria University, and started off organising shop fitting around the UK," said Brian. "I eventually decided to build a local team who would be able to undertake the full range of property maintenance.

I'm proud of our reputation for developing apprentices to join the building trade. The country is desperately short of properly trained plumbers, joiners and bricklayers. We are members of the Construction Industry Training Board and constantly push for companies to take on more apprentices. One of our apprentices, Harriet Hawdon, will be fully qualified in May. We're playing an important role in the city in getting more young women to take up an apprenticeship in construction whilst helping to overcome gender stereotyping in a traditionally male dominated industry."

So, what of the future for Brian?

"I've got my son, Alexander, breathing



Brian Dickinson

down my neck. He's studying for a degree in quantity surveying. We also offer a property consultation service where we help with advice for anyone looking to buy some residential or commercial property so I'll probably lend a hand with that...may as well put 46 years of building experience to some use. For most of the time however, I'll mix a bit of business with a lot of pleasure, continuing as company chairman but desperately trying to improve my golfing handicap which is best described as being a lot."

Enjoy retirement Brian. You can even tempt our Managing Director Mike Grahamslaw for the odd round of golf.

You'll beat him!

**For more information on WDL, go onto their website [www.wdlnortheast.co.uk](http://www.wdlnortheast.co.uk) or call 0191 340 9925/0191 340 2208...email [info@wdlnortheast.co.uk](mailto:info@wdlnortheast.co.uk) or pop into their offices at 64 Southwood Gardens in Newcastle.**



Brian Dickinson

## Nothing changes!

Brian Dickinson, Chairman of WDL Builders, reflects on 46 years within the construction industry.

**It is now 46 years since i began my career in the construction industry and since I am retiring soon I wanted to mention two things that have hardly changed in all that time.**

The first thing is what is now commonly known as 'cowboy builders'.

Only this morning I was asked to go and look at a job carried out badly by someone who quite clearly did not know what they were doing - the client was taking them to the small claims court - good luck with that.

A national newspaper carried an article last week about someone who had employed a 'builder' who had charged them thousands of pounds and left them with a hole in the roof. They had then paid someone else to put that right and they had done the same thing. They had thought that as they were

a member of Checkatrade they would be covered - but that is not how it works - they only cover up to £1000 in damages - and had only paid out after pressure from the newspaper.

However this was not an original story - you could have read a similar article 40 years ago - and i was looking at 'disaster' jobs 40 years ago.

We now have programmes like Cowboy Builders and Rogue Traders naming and shaming these people but still it goes on.

The Federation of Master Builders and other trade organisations have campaigned for many years to get some sort of legislation brought in to try and contain the problem but to no avail.

Most governments be they Labour or Conservative make noises about changing

the law to deal with the problem but to date nothing has been done.

We still have a situation where anyone who has never held a hammer can buy a van and call themselves a builder.

There is no register and no check on their credentials and is very easy for them to become members of one of these so called vetting organisations who will run for cover when problems arise.

It would be quite simple for the government to make it impossible to trade as a builder without being given a government accreditation to prove that they are competent to work in the industry Obviously this would not be perfect as everything is open to abuse but it would go a long way to removing the reputation the industry has got

My second criticism is apprenticeships.

I took on my first apprentice in 1981 and shall be taking on the latest in September.

Quite a few over the years in various trades - some good - some not so good and some very good - but they were all given a chance

We are a small company but i like to feel that we have contributed

However the one thing which has remained static within construction over the last 40 years is lack of skills

There has just not been enough government support for full apprenticeships

We have had systems such as the Youth Opportunities Scheme in the 80's through to various works skills training courses in the 90's and works placements in more recent times.

The one thing though that they do not give to the individual is a full time job.

That is what is wrong with the system - a person needs to feel wanted and part of where they are working - not something that can be cast aside on a whim - they need to gain some pride.

We need more investment in apprenticeships within this industry.

This country is the most uninsulated in Europe and hopefully with a change of government we will see the re-instatement of the Green Grants.

We already know that should there be a large roll out of grants to insulate houses we will need more trained operatives.

I have campaigned with the Construction Industry Training Board and the Government to try to get a qualification solely to carry out the works associated with the insulation industry.

To date I have had no response. but i shall keep on trying.

However remember both of my topics go hand in hand - less skilled more unskilled carrying out the work.

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





## Sea glass at Seaham

Glittering jewels of the sea are the inspiration behind the show home at the North East's most eagerly awaited new housing development.

**One of the most naturally beautiful stretches of the North East coastline, the shore at Seaham is also, quite literally, scattered with sparkling treasure.**

Treasure which will be on the doorstep of the new £250m Seaham Garden Village, which is set to bring open space, sustainable living and well-designed, energy efficient houses to Durham's heritage coastline.

In the mid-19th century, when Seaham boasted the largest glass bottle works in Britain, surplus glass would be routinely deposited in the North Sea.

And, when Miller Homes North East's show home opens later this month (April), its interior design scheme will reflect the area's glassmaking history and the sparkling links with that past that can be found on the seashore.

For, more than a century later, pieces of glass, smoothed and shaped by the sand and sea, wash up on Seaham beach attracting glass 'pickers' from across the region and beyond.

And Seaham's sea glass has inspired everything from the colour scheme of the show home to its wall coverings, some of which contain glass beads, gently refracting



Caragh with samples of some of the materials used in the show home

light and casting rooms in a soft shimmery glow.

"The most common glass to be found on Seaham beach is coloured green and clear, however you will also find teal, aqua or milk glass, which has pastel tones of yellow, blue and green," said Caragh Penney, of Jasmine and Lilah Design, which created the show home's interior.

"The design has both direct and indirect references to sea glass," she said, with a soft flow of colour from room to room - each in a different shade of sea glass - giving a nod to Seaham's history."

To reflect the development's coastal location, other natural materials, such as wood and seagrass have also been incorporated, while many of the accessories on display, such as bowls and vases, are also made of glass.

"By embracing the beauty and functionality of glass, we can help create a more sustainable future for generations to enjoy," said Caragh, who has also filled the space with houseplants, reflecting the site's garden village status.

Seaham Garden Village will create an entirely new community surrounded by thriving wildlife havens, with almost 50 per cent of the site given over to open spaces and landscaped areas.

And, along with the 375 new build homes Miller Homes North East will build in total, the development will include a primary school, an innovation centre and a community hub.

Less than half an hour drive from both Newcastle and Durham and sited on the East Coast train line, Seaham is well placed for those looking for semi-rural living.

"It really is a beautiful area," said Lauren Angus, sales director at Miller Homes North East "and, because glass - and now sea glass - is such a feature of the area, it was the perfect inspiration for our show home."

**For more information about Miller Homes properties at Seaham Garden Village or at various other sites across the North East visit [www.millerhomes.co.uk/new-homes/north-east/seaham-garden-village-ph1.aspx](http://www.millerhomes.co.uk/new-homes/north-east/seaham-garden-village-ph1.aspx)**

Picture credit: Nikita McConnell



# Banks Homes starts work at new Cathedral Meadows development in West Rainton



Work is underway on the creation of a new, high quality residential development at West Rainton.

**Regional housebuilder Banks Homes is building 150 new homes at Station Road, which it has chosen as the location for its first large-scale residential development.**

The County Durham-headquartered firm is acting as principal contractor on the Cathedral Meadows project and will be building 120 detached, three-to-five bedroomed family homes at the site, along with 30 affordable homes.

A one-off bespoke range of modern house designs has been created for Cathedral Meadows, with Banks already receiving enquiries for people who are keen to own a new home there.

The high specification homes are designed to be full of natural light, and will include Hive heating system, turfed rear gardens,

Porcelanosa bathrooms and tiles, and Omega kitchens that will be finished to buyers' choice of colours and style.

Cathedral Meadows will also include a new play area, new landscaped areas and new areas of public open space, while as part of the project, long-awaited improvements have already been made by Durham County Council to the West Rainton and Pitlington Lane junctions of the A690.

The development will be officially launched in the summer, with the first occupants scheduled to be in their new homes by early next year.

Up to 40 jobs will be supported on site during the development of the Cathedral Meadows site, with Teesside-based Wearmouth Construction being chosen to deliver the required infrastructure, landscaping and drainage work and a range of further regional sub-contractors set to be appointed in the coming months.

Work on Banks Homes' first project, Symeon Court, an executive development of nine luxury homes in the centre of the prestigious Mount Oswald site in Durham City, is already well advanced.

Russ Hall, managing director at Banks Homes, says: "Interest is already growing in everything that Cathedral Meadows will offer, with enquires about buying a new home there already coming in regularly, and we're confident that demand will continue to rise as we move through the development process.

"Acting as principal contractor gives us full control over how Cathedral Meadows will be created and over the high standards to which work will be carried out by all our trusted sub-contractor partners.

"Banks Homes is building a strong pipeline of projects across the North East and Yorkshire which will contribute directly to meeting the pressing need to improve and increase the housing supply in these areas, and we'll be bringing a range of exciting projects forward this year that will fully establish the style and quality of new homes that we'll be delivering."

**For further information on Banks Homes' Cathedral Meadows and Symeon Court developments, please visit [www.banksgroup.co.uk/banks-homes](http://www.banksgroup.co.uk/banks-homes)**







L-R: Marc Hardy, Jez Ramsay and Michael Simmons.

## Space VR blasts off!

Northern Insight talks to Jez Ramsay, Director at Space VR.

### Did you always envisage a career within the Built Environment?

I was always the kid in the class that could draw, and thought even at an early age that I'd have a career in some field of visualisation, it was the only thing I ever enjoyed at school and was good at. I was first aware of architectural illustration in my early teens as I lived next to an architectural practice and could see illustrations on the walls through the windows. Back then it was mainly watercolour or Gouache and there was something about the precision of the drawing mixed with the freehand style of the colours.

### Tell us about your current role.

I run a Virtual and Augmented reality company primarily servicing architectural sectors called Space VR. We produce digital material of exterior/interior spaces, commercial products, virtual reality presentations and researching emerging technology such as photogrammetry and augmented reality. That all sounds very complicated but basically, we create computer models of architecture you can view through a headset or on your computer.

### What is your (Space VR) proudest business achievement?

I suppose a proudest business achievement wasn't a single moment, but it was more realising you have the experience to see through every aspect of a project, from meeting the client, discussing the services you can offer, delivering the material and seeing the client very happy with what you've provided, still gives me a kick!

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

Ten years ago, 90% of everything that appeared in a 3D image would've been created by the illustrator. Now, because of the massive available market in pre-made 3D assets, an extremely impressive image can be created in a fraction of the time that has mostly been constructed from purchased models. Now that's not necessarily a bad thing, depending on how you look at it, but in my opinion, it's reduced the skill set required to do what I consider is a skilled job. But there are still many high-level CG companies out there performing perfectly well, offering a high standard of service specific to client requirements so maybe there's room for everyone.

Also, we can't avoid talking about A.I. Our material is always custom produced as the interiors are specifically designed so we can't use it to generate an image as the technology isn't there yet but A.I. is clearly going to be part of an architectural illustrative future that could lead to a different kind of service provided to clients. This is one of the reasons that Space V.R. offers a much more encompassing service, creating many other aspects of digital material other than simply illustrations.

#### **What are you currently working on?**

Augmented Reality is something we're most interested in currently. We can offer clients the service of seeing their 3D asset superimposed into a real-world space. So, for example, we can design a bar servery and let you see, and walk around it wearing one of our headsets, in position in your existing physical area as long as there's space to move around.

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

There're two main teams, the interior design service from our sister company Space I.D. & the small permanent team at Space V.R. along with its consultants if needed. The Space I.D. guys design the venues then it seamlessly moves over to Space V.R. for the digital material as we're all in the same building. This is a tremendous advantage and makes for a much smoother workflow from the initial spatial design to illustration for our clients.

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

A much-admired copywriter once told me, and I'm paraphrasing, to consider that everything you send out from your company, every email, every phone call, your website, down to your email signature. It all has a cumulative effect in representing your valuable company persona. And think before sending that email!



#### **What has been your biggest challenge?**

The biggest challenge has been to change the perception of what we do in the eyes of our clients. The very image of a headset can conjure thoughts of inaccessibility and out of reach technology so we're trying to demystify virtual environments. Along with full interactive presentations, V.R and A.R. can also be used as a tool to understand an initial concept which can be produced very quickly at low cost. For example, if you have a new hospitality venue and want an appreciation of any structural changes we can quickly create a plain Virtual Reality application and let you view it through the headset so you get a fully immersive view of the scale and proportions.

#### **What does the future hold over the next five years?**

Our initial goal when setting up Space V.R. was always to offer a wider service than simply computer illustrations. With the rapid developments in mixed reality, we're really keen to be the company that's at the forefront of introducing new technologies, whilst making them much more user friendly and accessible.

**Call Space V.R. & ask for Jez 0191 816 3391 or email: [talktous@spacevr.co.uk](mailto:talktous@spacevr.co.uk) [www.spacevr.co.uk](http://www.spacevr.co.uk)**





Neil Turner

## PV panels – when to invest in solar

By Neil Turner, Director,  
Howarth Litchfield.

I have written a great deal on green energy solutions and how to improve our current building stock. One of the most obvious ways of generating electricity in domestic and commercial properties is to install photovoltaic or (PV) panels.

**It is estimated that there are 1.3 million solar installations and 1100 solar farms in the UK, which contribute towards approximately 5% of the overall energy demands of the country.**

A few years ago, when first introduced, they were expensive and accompanied by healthy feed in tariffs (FIT) which were government grants to help fund their installation – these have now disappeared. But is now a good time to install them?

I have installed them at home and completed a large installation at our office. Both are ideal locations with low pitched south facing roofs. However, panels or solar thermal panels are not the most aesthetic items and can, if not considered properly, spoil the design of a building or more precisely the roof. There are now alternatives appearing which look much better including PV matts fixed directly to metal roofs. There are also some which can be integrated into a metal roof, so they are virtually invisible. Slate roofs can also have individual slates with cells built into them, replicating the pattern of a traditional roof.

The challenge is harder on historic or listed buildings and clearly fixing normal panels in sensitive highly visible locations is problematic. So, we need to find ways to hide them or disguise their use on our heritage building stock. We are already seeing more churches, colleges and historic buildings looking to incorporate them, but we do need to see the costs of the integrated systems becoming more competitive.

The panels can also be fitted on the ground or on directional sun systems that track the sun. For large estates it can be more efficient and less problematic to have a 'farm' of ground mounted panels. This is not so easy in cities or urban settings.

We have been involved with a large solar farm as local authorities look to self-generate energy to help them reduce their carbon use and footprints.

One of the challenges of PV farms is deciding what type of land to use. There has been recent publicity on large proposals wanting to use good quality arable farmland. This brings in wider issues of not wasting farmland and the effects on food production for the country. Although farmers will look to diversify and generate income and energy for themselves and for sale, ideally brownfield sites would be best for land-based PV farm production or low-grade quality land.

The cost of panels has dropped over the last few years - to the point where the market is being flooded with cheap imports. So, it is a good time to invest and do your bit for energy generation. Excess energy can be sold back to the grid on domestic and commercial properties, although the rates are not great. Far wiser to use the energy yourself, rather than buying (much more economic) or store it in batteries for a rainy day!

**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)**





# Wingrove Motor Company bringing iconic brands Alfa Romeo and Jeep back to the North East

**The North East's largest family-owned & operated car dealership company is expanding its brand portfolio by bringing two iconic automotive brands back to the region.**

Wingrove Motor Company has secured exclusive contracts with Alfa Romeo and Jeep as part of the company's ongoing expansion plans.

Wingrove, which will celebrate its centenary next year, is also adding servicing contracts for Fiat, Abarth and Fiat Professional to its dealerships, with the new names set to take their places alongside Citroën, Peugeot and DS at the firm's Newcastle West Road and Silverlink dealerships from next month.

Around half a dozen new jobs will initially be created through the new contracts, with the arrival of the new brands expected to help the business increase its turnover by at least 25 per cent over the next year, to around £60m.

The existing and new brands are all part of the stable of brands owned by leading global automaker Stellantis.

Josh Parker, managing director at Wingrove Motor Company, who is the fifth generation of his family to manage the business, says: "The reintroduction of the iconic Alfa Romeo and Jeep brands to the region isn't just an expression of confidence in Wingrove, but also in the North East as a whole.

"We're strengthening our long-term relationship with Stellantis and its brands after their senior team saw at first hand how we deliver the high-quality customer experience that is the basis of our long-term commercial success.

"We've been in discussions over several months about how best to shape the next phase of Wingrove's evolution, and we're hugely excited to be adding such outstanding names to the range of vehicles we sell and service."

Wingrove currently employs around 90 people across its Silverlink,



L-R: Wingrove Motor Company managing director Josh Parker with group commercial director David Guy

Newcastle West Road and Cramlington dealerships and service centres, and expects that figure to pass three figures before the end of the year.

Alfa Romeo will be located alongside Wingrove's range of new DS cars at the Newcastle West Road dealership, which will also offer servicing for the Fiat & Abarth brands, while Jeep will join Wingrove's award-winning Citroën and Peugeot brands along with servicing for Fiat Professional at the Silverlink site.

Josh Parker continues: "Introducing Alfa Romeo and Jeep will have a significant impact on our commercial performance, with the new North East jobs that we're creating now likely to be followed by more as we get everything fully bedded in.

"Wingrove Motor Company has been a constant part of the North East automotive scene for almost one hundred years and we couldn't ask for a better way to be leading up to our centenary."

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



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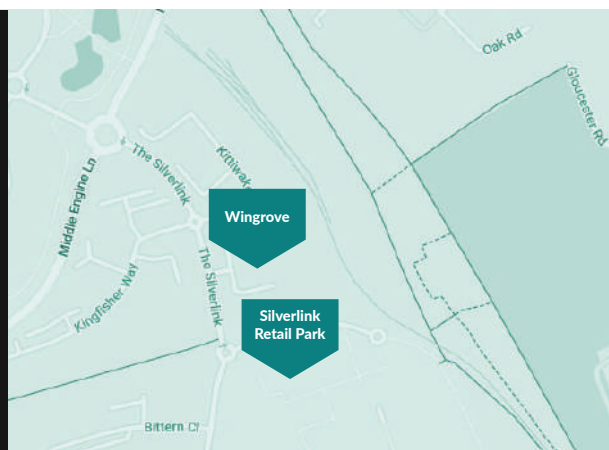
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## £1m 5G contract awarded to Port of Tyne

The Port of Tyne, one of the UK's leading deep-sea ports, is proud to announce that it has been awarded a £1.159million contract with South Tyneside Council to launch 5G-enabled 'smart port' operations.

This announcement cements the Port's transformative plans to evolve into a 5G-enabled port, ushering in a new era of connectivity and innovation in the maritime industry.

This ground-breaking investment in a port-wide private 5G network positions the Port of Tyne as a pioneer in the UK, primed to grow and positively impact local communities.

The funding forms part of The Department for Science Innovation and Technology (DSIT) '5G Innovation Regions (5GIR)' £37M grant, of which the seven North East local authorities (LA7) successfully bid to receive over £3.7million to support this and three other 5G and advanced wireless connectivity projects across the North East. These activities support 5G and advanced wireless connectivity as key components of the regional digital strategy to build on the key strengths of the region.

The four projects are:

- 5G-enabled port operations
- Connected Intelligent Transport Systems.
- 5G-Enabled event production and 360° live broadcasting.
- Advanced wireless sensor technology on farms.

The North East's inaugural 5GIR project aims to drive innovation and unlock opportunities for economic growth through making use of world-class digital infrastructure.

The 5G Port of Tyne project will demonstrate how better digital connectivity can help to drive growth. It will involve 5G cameras and IoT sensors to inspect the port estate, boosting efficiency and reducing fuel usage.

Setting a precedent across the industry, this will enable ports across the country to drive forward plans to become all-electric and reduce environmental impact, whilst enhancing competitiveness and improving safety.



## North East agency grows with returning female tech talent

**A North East brand, marketing and digital transformation agency has grown its team with the addition of a returning developer.**

Newcastle agency Vida Creative has welcomed Gemma Robinson back to the team, who returns to the agency as a Senior Developer.

North East native Gemma initially graduated from Birmingham City University in 2017, is a skilled developer specialising in frontend and WordPress. After leaving university, Gemma held various roles at creative and marketing agencies in the Midlands.

Moving back to the region during the pandemic, Gemma joined Vida Creative as a developer in 2021 until 2023, working on a vast array of projects for purpose-led clients, including tech businesses and not-for-profit organisations.

Gemma has returned to Vida Creative this Spring as a Senior Developer to support the agency's continued growth across a wide range of sectors.

Gemma explained: "I thrive in a fast paced environment, and I love doing great work with great people, which is the main reason I returned to Vida. I missed the nature of the work I was doing, particularly supporting the local community. I also really missed the team - we're a close bunch and I really value their support, in work and life."

For Gemma, Vida Creative also represents a place where she can build on her tech skills: "In my seven-year career, I've only worked with one other female developer. So it's great to be in a role where I can grow and be supported based solely on my abilities as a developer."

Vida Creative co-founder Ellen Hedley commented: "It is fantastic to welcome Gemma back to Vida as a senior developer. Her wealth of experience and her enthusiasm for the work we do here is exactly what makes her such a great member of the team."

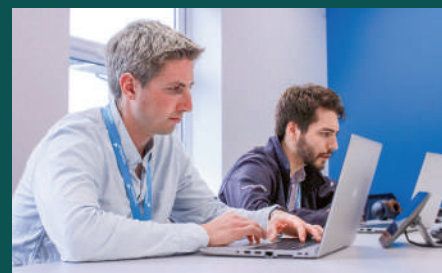
## razorblue's strategic promotions fuel growth and staff development

**razorblue, a leading IT partner, has embarked on a transformative journey to bolster its strategic growth with a series of significant promotions.**

These strategic moves are aimed at fostering staff development, streamlining operations, and elevating the client experience to new heights. In the past 12 months, razorblue has made 26 promotions, demonstrating the firm's dedication to nurturing talent and its commitment to fostering internal growth and expertise.

Moreover, to meet increasing demands razorblue has expanded its customer service team and appointed a Head of Customer Service, proving their dedication to elevating and maintaining exceptional service standards, a goal shared closely with Commercial Director, Mark Wilkinson.

In alignment with its growth trajectory, razorblue has also created new employment opportunities, with plans for further expansion in the pipeline. This expansion reflects razorblue's commitment to not only supporting its internal talent but also contributing to broader economic growth.



Joanne Finkledey, People Director at razorblue, says: "Our success as a managed IT provider hinges on our unwavering commitment to our people. By treating them fairly, supporting them, and valuing their input, we empower them to deliver exceptional service to our clients. Listening to their feedback, embracing change, and fostering a culture of recognition are fundamental to our ongoing growth and success."

"Training and development is such an important asset to help support our people, we want them to thrive and develop, we value their input and have numerous outlets for staff to give this."

"At razorblue, our employees are the heart of the business and so important to operations, driving us forward each day towards our collective goals."

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# Talking Tech and Digital

*In the latest of this popular series we talk to...*

## Kieran Turnbull

Founder, Zenith Systems

### Did you always envisage a career in the world of Technology?

From becoming a teenager, I saved up cash from every birthday and Christmas card so I could build my own computer. From then onwards I was hooked on tech, I loved getting my hands dirty and learning to make things work properly, this also meant I became the family "IT support guy".

I'd always had one eye on the industry professionally but I actually started out working in kitchens until my mid-20s. I was never great in an academic setting but eventually, I got my foot in the door with a tech support role, once I was there fixing real problems for people I knew I'd ended up in the right place.

### What tips would you give to someone looking to work in the industry?

Be hungry to learn. The tech world changes so fast it really is difficult to keep up. What I do now looks nothing like the career plan I had 10 years ago. That part of tech has been completely transformed in the past decade by a small group of companies, so, no need for as many wizards in that particular field these days.

Learn to learn. Once you know how you best pick up something new, the quicker you can jump onto that new project or technology and get going, I spent a lot of weekends in my early career with servers set up under the stairs.

### Tell us about the most exciting project you're currently working on.

I like to make tech work for me, the current fun is actually an internal project. Getting all my time-tracking, billing and project management tools to talk to each other and my accounting software has meant more time to spend working with my customers instead of toiling away with admin work.

### Tell us about your team.

I currently work with a network of partners to ensure a full service while maintaining a single style 'IT Manager' contact for each customer. As I look to increase my service offering, I'm hoping to further grow the team later this year, so, exciting things to come.

### What are your long term plans for the business?

To grow the team and offer more capabilities in-house while maintaining that personal relationship with each customer, I'm passionate about making my customers' technology support their business goals.

One of the big things on the horizon will be ISO 27001 certification, so that we can continue to build trust with our customers.

With having a big focus on supporting local and small businesses, eventually I'd like to achieve B-Corp status to ensure that customers, staff and everything around us benefits from what we do.

### What's your favourite piece of technology?

I like robust security wrapped around the tech and business processes, this earns me the name of 'Captain Risk-Assessment' from my partner!

The zero-trust security model is a much welcome change in the industry, given the increase of work from home/anywhere. Ensuring that the security checks are done regardless of where you are in the world means less risk exposure rather than relying on the traditional "big fence" style of cyber security.

### Do you have any heroes or mentors?

I have had some fantastic mentors over the course of my career. I've had a working relationship with my current mentor for about four years and I hope to keep it up as it has been amazing for my professional development. I've also done a fair bit of mentoring myself with graduates, it's interesting to work with the next generation of techies and support their growth.

### When not working how do you like to relax?

My partner and I both mainly work from home so after work we tend to go for a walk for an hour to "commute" and decompress. This way we're not bringing anything from the home office into the rest of the house to ensure we keep a sensible work/life balance.

### What's your fondest career memory?

Watching my team and mentees progress their careers, getting promotions and seeing all their hard work paying off.

### What's the best piece of business advice you've received?

*There's no such thing as a self-made person.*

I agree with this whole-heartedly. I am the product of many people who have influenced and taught me over the years. From mentors to peer networks, even though you can sometimes feel isolated, there's always someone you can bounce ideas off.

[www.zenith.systems](http://www.zenith.systems)





“

*...There's no  
such thing as a  
self-made person...*

Kieran Turnbull



# Flexible working? We've done it for 30 years

By William Foulds

Picture this: It's 10:30am on Tuesday and I'm sitting in a café with my laptop finishing an important email before I head off to get my haircut, then I'll head back home to finish the day of work.

**In the post-covid, remote-working world, this sounds pretty ordinary – or does it? What was hailed the 'new normal' after the restrictions and lockdowns of the pandemic is becoming less common, with employers encouraging teams back into offices, and taking time out of the work day to tick off life admin tasks frowned upon.**

With the new flexible working act recently coming in to force in the UK, flexible working and an employee's right to request it is at the forefront of legislation. For us, flexible and remote working are far from new – they are simply normal, because we've done it for 30 years.

We're not doing anything particularly groundbreaking; we purely trust our people, allowing them to work flexibly, have no set hours of work and no annual leave limits, and in return they will trust us to equip them with the skills to succeed.

"But how does that work?" is a question we get a lot, and it's simple: the relationships we've forged with our clients and each other.

At the core of our organisation is people and their ability to do amazing things for our clients – which they demonstrate in delivery time and time again. We don't focus on the attendance, rather the output of our people, their happiness and subsequently the happiness of our clients.

Instead of mandating office attendance, we use technology to work together both nationally and internationally – and being global means that we can manage our days around when we're needed most, not to mention when we're most productive.

While face-to-face is valuable, it's not always possible logistically, but when we do come into the office it's because we want to. And there's rarely a quiet day in any of them.

The core values of honesty, trust and people-first are demonstrated from day one, backed up by our suite of benefits,

meaning the people who choose to join us, also choose to stay with us – clients and employees alike.

"We knew from the outset that we would trust each other, everyone in the business and our customers until we were (very occasionally) proved wrong. We have held to that principle for the past 30 years. We should always be genuinely grateful to the people who choose to work with us."

Sally Waterston, Co-founder and co-chair.

We're proud to create a space for people to thrive without being bogged down in processes, rules and limitations. We've always been flexible, open and honest and we always will be.

**To find out more about how we've made flexible working a fundamental part of our business, get in touch with William at [William.foulds@waterstons.com](mailto:William.foulds@waterstons.com)**



William Foulds



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# Navigating proof of concepts and minimal viable products: insights from Leighton's on:tech event



Featuring: Steve Morland (CTO at Leighton), Manila McLean (CIO at Newcastle Building Society), Peter Wilson (Vault Engineer at HashiCorp), Naomi Allen-Seales, (Investment Manager at Northstar Ventures) and Mark Saunders (Technical Lead at Greggs).

Leighton's most recent on:tech event explored the intricacies of navigating proof of concepts (POCs) and minimum viable products (MVPs). The panel discussion, moderated by Steve Morland, CTO at Leighton, shed light on the challenges, strategies, and insights crucial for successful product development.

## POCs versus MVPs: what's the difference?

In our experience at Leighton, the terms POC and MVP are used interchangeably depending on the stakeholders and the situation. As Steve explained: "Sometimes a POC will actually be an MVP, and an MVP will end up in production very quickly." The difference, Mark explained, is the scope of activity: "A POC tends to have a smaller scope and aims to see if new technology, a new piece of hardware or a new approach to something is worth it."





Essentially is the juice worth the squeeze? An MVP is more about getting something ready for full production and getting something in the hands of the user.”

But as Manila explained, a POC or MVP doesn't just have to be about technology: “It can be a service, an operating model or a piece of technology.”

### Beyond POCs and MVPs

When it comes to developing POCs or MVPs, Manila explained there's a difference between ‘project’ and ‘product’ mentality which can be heavily influenced by the culture of the business you're in and can impact the success of the product. She said: “I think there needs to be a mindset shift – a lot of business stakeholders are cautious about launching with MVPs. They need to trust the concept of launching MVPs with a plan for continuous improvement behind them. It can often feel like you're like right, that's done, let's move on to the next big project, but you need to have support and investment for continuous evolution, or your MVP is going to fail.”

Peter added that it's important to think about the level of support you're going to put into the product: “How are you going to support the product? How are you going to market it? Is the MVP enough to sell to a user group? It's all well and good getting an engineering team to build a POC, but beyond that, you need to make sure your product team, support team and marketing team are all behind it too if you want to take it from POC to MVP.”

### Investment perspective: it's all about proof of value

When developing a product, although it can be easy to get caught between proof of concepts or minimal viable products, Naomi suggested that perhaps businesses, especially start-ups or scale-ups, should be thinking about proof of value. She explained: “If you're looking for investment, the most important thing to investors is that you have a strong potential user base for your product. We're probably more likely to invest at that typical ‘MVP’ stage, but really, we're looking at your potential customer base and revenue streams to understand how much value the product is going to provide and how it is going to be paid for as well as your product roadmap and scalability to determine if we'll get a return on investment.”



### Balancing innovation with technical debt

When it comes to balancing innovation with technical debt, our panellists explored the trade-offs involved in making compromises during product development to ensure scalability, security and maintainability whilst navigating the complexities of technical debt.

As Naomi explains: “Some of the issues you might see at that early stage of innovation is over-engineering and not listening to the feedback. The point of the MVP is to get something out quickly at the lowest possible cost and to ensure it is viable and scalable.”

Mark added: “You're going to have to make some compromises. You're going to have to cut corners. The POC gives you the opportunity to find out what you can and can't compromise on technically, but don't compromise on the things that can ensure scalability.”

To end, Naomi added: “Balance the resource needed with the pay off at the end. If it looks like it won't have return, leave it alone” or in Manila's words: “Fail fast and move on.”

Navigating POCs and MVPs requires a balance of innovation, strategic planning, and continuous iteration. As our panellists demonstrated at on:tech, by understanding the nuances between POCs and MVPs, embracing a product mindset, aligning investment strategies with proof of value, and carefully managing technical debt, businesses can pave the way for successful product development.



# SOS Group partner with Epson to offer heat-free printing technology



L-R: George Young, John Behan and Andrew Skelton (Directors at SOS Group) with Paul Harland (Account Manager at Epson UK)

Gateshead-based office technology company, SOS Group, is entering into a partnership with Epson for the first time to further increase the choice it can offer its document management clients.

**The new partnership sees the addition of Epson's heat-free business inkjet technology to the SOS Group solutions portfolio, something that will be particularly popular for clients seeking to reduce their energy usage and consumables.**

Established in 2002, SOS Group facilitates all business and event requirements, including communications and IT, and specialises in providing copy, print, scan solutions for clients from local start-ups to multi nationals.

Awarded both ISO 9001 and ISO 27001, it has a centralised office on the Team Valley and 18 staff, including specialist engineers servicing accounts nationally from six regional hubs in London, Scotland, the North West, Midlands, South Yorkshire, South West and North East.

George Young, a Director at SOS Group, says: "We work closely with our clients to offer them the very best copy, print, scan solution for every situation, and that means working with all the top brands.

"Unusually for this industry, we don't subcontract engineers, and this ensures both quality of service and a genuine understanding of our customers' individual business needs.

"Our team are now fully Epson trained and accredited and looking forward to bringing this unique technology to our clients, giving them the opportunity to achieve significant environmental, productivity and financial benefits by replacing their laser printers with heat-free business inkjet printers."

Epson's heat-free inkjet printers offer significant cost-saving and environmental

benefits by consuming dramatically less energy than equivalent laser printers, using fewer consumables, producing lower CO2 emissions and requiring less intervention from engineers.

Paul Harland, Account Manager at Epson UK, added: "Epson favours quality over quantity in its reseller network, and the SOS Group's name and track record speaks for itself within the managed print industry.

"What's equally important to us is that Epson partners share our commitment to addressing the increasing demand from businesses to reduce energy consumption, waste, and intervention through their print solutions, and SOS have proven keen environmental advocates in this area. We look forward to what the future holds with this partnership."

**For more information, please visit:**  
**[www.sosgroup-ltd.co.uk/epson](http://www.sosgroup-ltd.co.uk/epson)**

# Eclipse Wholesale Prepares for 20-Year Milestone

Eclipse Wholesale, a telecommunications wholesaler based in Gateshead, is gearing up to celebrate a significant milestone as they reach their 20th year in business this September. The anniversary reflects the company's resilience and determination that has allowed them to consistently grow over the past two decades.

**Established in 2004 by Managing Director, James Drake, Eclipse was founded with a clear mission: to liberate underperforming resellers from counter-productive suppliers and elevate their service. Eclipse took on this challenge and over the years has evolved, adapted and overcome many obstacles.**

Their dedication to serving the channel led Eclipse to shift their strategy to a channel-first approach, meaning only catering to resellers and dealers within the channel.

At the forefront of this strategy is their fully equipped partner programme, designed to onboard channel partners on flexible models and enhance their portfolios with Eclipse's key five services. This strategic shift has generated incredible success, positioning Eclipse Wholesale as a key player within the channel and allowing them to grow their base significantly year on year. Building on this, the company's latest vision is to become the leading wholesaler for small to medium-sized channel partners across the UK.

What has set Eclipse apart over the last 20 years is not just their products and services but their commitment to providing unmatched support to their partners every step of the way. From their experienced



James Drake

customer service and sales teams to their comprehensive marketing resources and billing processes, Eclipse ensures that their partners have all the tools they need to thrive within the channel. The addition of their Eclipse Self-Service portal, which was introduced in 2019, has significantly enhanced the partner experience by streamlining processes and allowing partners the freedom to place, track and run diagnostics on their orders from any location and device at any time. The portal has proved to be successful with over 90% of their resellers now active on it. Earlier this year, the team launched the Eclipse Wholesale Marketing Hub, which gives their partners access to a full suite of marketing resources to help boost their campaigns.

In 2023, Eclipse took on a new challenge with their expansion to Scotland, where they were presented with an opportunity to launch CityFibre Business FTTP to resellers across the region. The launch, held in Edinburgh, was a great success with over 70% of the guests onboarding as partners. This marked the beginning of a promising new chapter for Eclipse Wholesale allowing them to not only create meaningful partnerships and

grow their Scottish footprint but to also introduce a Channel Partner Sales Manager for Scotland to the team.

James Drake says "I'm delighted that during 2024 we have a year of planned events to celebrate and reflect upon Eclipse Wholesale's 20th Work Anniversary, culminating at the end of the year with an evening spent with friends, family, customers and suppliers. The last 20 years have simply flown by as there has always been the next project or milestone to achieve. As the company has grown, so have our ambitions and focusing on these is what continues to drive us forward."

As Eclipse looks forward to celebrating their two decades in business, they continue to strive as a leading player in the channel providing the best services possible with high-quality processes in place. Their milestone celebration promises to be a joyous occasion, scheduled to take place at a Newcastle venue in September. The event will serve as the perfect opportunity to acknowledge the contributions of past and present staff, partners, suppliers and close friends who have played a key role in Eclipse's incredible journey.

all the **Channel** needs



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Eclipse Wholesale





# The white board and flip chart – it's time to let them go!

The 21st Century is here so you need to sort out your audio-visual kit.

**And there is no better way than with Universal AV, they are an award-winning audio-visual integration specialist who have been helping businesses with communication solutions for over 30 years...businesses like Newcastle Utd FC, Durham and Newcastle Universities as well as hundreds of other clients around the UK.**

They also work with small and medium size firms as well as with single people who are working from home and just need to make sure that they have the right sort of kit that, crucially, works.

"We live in a world of Teams, Zoom, Skype and Google Meet, so it's important that businesses have the ability to communicate effectively," said Mark Atkinson, Sales Manager for Universal AV. "Covid 19 forced companies and individuals to work in a completely different manner. Face to face meetings were not possible; travelling to visit a company was not allowed; if people wanted to speak to clients... new and old...it had to be either via video link or telephone.

Consequently, it saw a surge of interest in audio-visual equipment. Unfortunately, it also saw a surge in people buying the wrong sort of kit which turned out to be unsuitable or simply refused to work on what was their computer equipment at the time.

And of course, the world of technology is moving quickly. For example, the work we have just completed for Newcastle Utd allows the players to listen to their own music in different areas of the gym. In the Café area we have installed some digital signage to enable swift information sharing with staff and players. That would not have been possible until very recently because technology was not available."

Hybrid working is something most firms did not consider before Covid 19. Now, for many, it is the norm. A lot of firms reading this article will have a mix of people working permanently from home or mixing home working with days in the office.

And of course, hybrid working means that you can operate from anywhere. But that brings us back to the familiar problem of having the right sort of kit and ensuring that it works.

Which is precisely where Universal AV come in.

"Companies frequently have staff and clients scattered around the country; some can be working

from home; others can be working in branch offices. How do we communicate and collaborate effectively, working together as though we were all sat together around a boardroom table? Simple. We use technology to speed-up the decision-making process by getting everyone together in a virtual office space.

The nightmare scenario is the thought of discussing a potential multi-million-pound deal with a group of clients who are sitting around a smart boardroom table while you are struggling with a small webcam on top of a creaking PC in a scruffy office...or even your kitchen.

We can sort that. For example, we can now organise that if there is a room full of people using a single camera, we can use technology to allow, in effect, the camera to zoom in on the person who is talking. We can block out external noise like an air con system or office hubbub. We can give you a false background.

Audio-visual equipment can also help contribute to a company's sustainability record for the simple reason that when an online meeting can be so good and so effective, why travel long distances for a face-to-face chat? The new AV meeting technology really does feel as though you are there...in the room...in person."

The bottom line in all of this is that, although you may feel that popping to your local computer store will enable you to get adequate AV equipment, you could be wasting your money. A chat with Universal AV on the other hand, will mean that you get exactly the right equipment that does the job you are looking for. It is a tailored solution for you, your business, your requirements, your surroundings, and your budget.

And it will work.

**Universal AV...helping you do future business... clearly.**

**The best idea is to speak to Mark and the Universal AV team. Go onto [www.uniav.com](http://www.uniav.com) to find out what Universal AV can do for you. You will also find all their contact details.**





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*...Covid 19 forced companies and individuals to work in a completely different manner...*

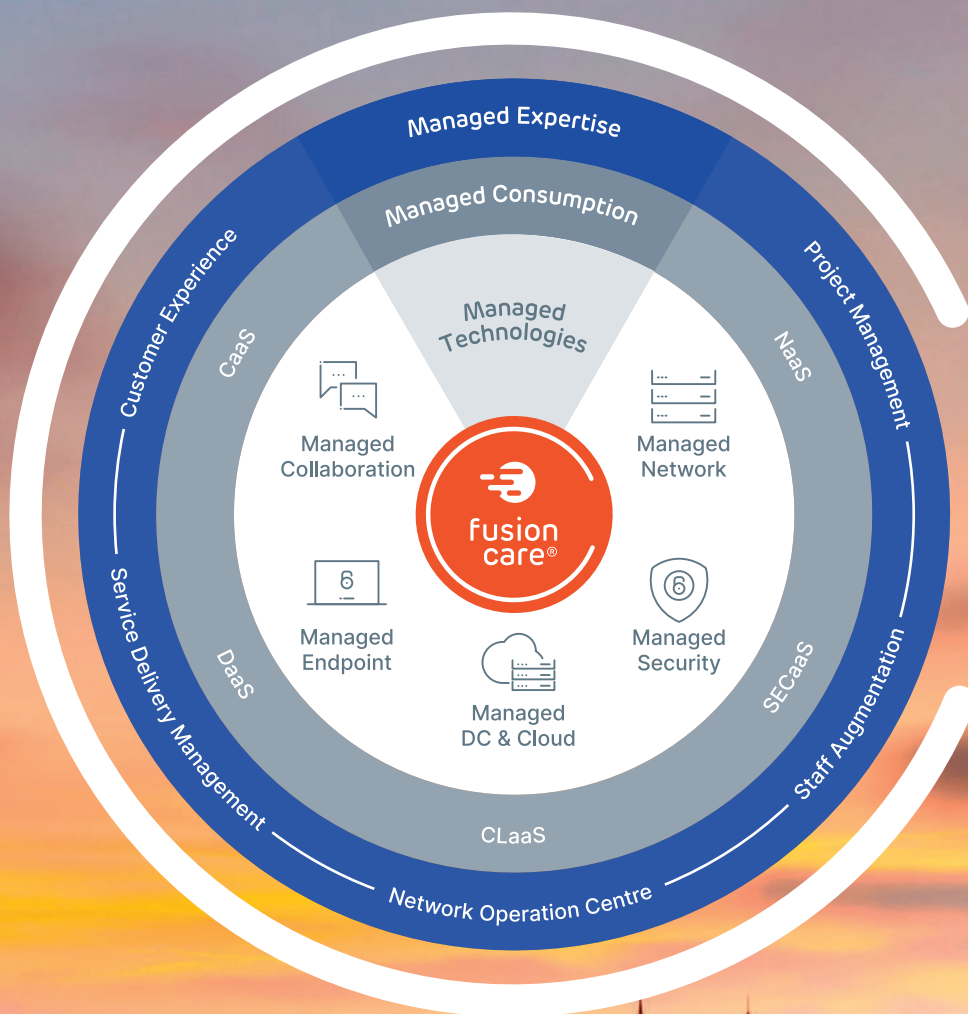
Mark Atkinson





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## Do DEI initiatives work? The evidence says they do

Camila Williams-Johnson, General Manager at EW Group, a diversity and inclusion consultancy and part of Hebburn-based, eQuality Solutions Group, reflects on the criticisms of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programmes in the workplace and sets out a compelling case for why it does work when implemented properly.

**The DEI sector has been placed under scrutiny of late. The Government sponsored, independent Inclusion at Work Panel, which reported findings in March, spoke to more than 100 people in 55 organisations and reviewed the latest research into how employers make decisions about DEI policies and practices in the UK.**

The report, amongst other things, found that many employers want 'to do the right thing', but are at times, introducing measures without the support of evidence. The report has set out a framework to apply to DEI policies and procedures that includes the gathering of evidence and reviewing of interventions regularly.

Science shows us that the foundation for improving diversity, equity and inclusion is rooted in tackling unconscious bias. Not only does overcoming biases allow businesses to attract the talent available to them, it also helps create a more inclusive culture where employees are able to thrive, leading to greater organisational success.

A research report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2018 evaluated 18 academic investigations that focused on the efficacy of unconscious bias training. They found that, overall, training interventions:

- Increased participants' awareness of unconscious bias.
- Reduced the strength of unconscious bias (though it did not completely neutralise it).
- Weakly reduced the strength of explicit bias

(although the precise measurement of explicit bias was found to be lacking in all studies).

- May or may not change behaviours (this is due to there being insufficient research available and existing research utilising low-validity research evaluation methods).

The research concluded that the most effective means of raising awareness and reducing bias were using the Implicit Association Test (IAT) coupled with a debrief, educating staff on unconscious bias theory, long-term training programmes, and interactive workshops.

At the EW Group we believe in data and evidence for effective DEI programmes so much, that we developed the Diversity Development Standard (DDS); a recognised standard of DEI accreditation for workplaces. Following an in-depth audit that assesses five key areas of DEI in the workplace, an organisation is presented a report detailing the findings of the audit and setting out an action plan with recommended steps, prioritisation, and timescales. The report findings and recommendations are independently reviewed and validated by another DEI specialist before being awarded the appropriate level of accreditation.

To give another example of a more bespoke client project at EW Group, we performed an analysis of a business' recruitment and selection processes that had recently been taken to an employment tribunal. We forensically analysed the company's practices, interviewed, and worked alongside a substantial number of staff and used this insight to craft recommendations that the company implemented. One of these proposals was unconscious bias training for staff involved in the recruitment process. The effects were then measured over several years, during which data revealed that diverse staff representation had increased dramatically at all levels of the business. Our process was simply to provide practical steps, grounded in data, that staff could take action with. Evidence was the grounding of every recommendation and action taken.

In life, our biases are inevitable, but if we want a more equitable society, we do have a responsibility to do something about mitigating them. By recognising biases, we can be proactive in shifting them and therefore in making positive changes for the workplace.



Camila Williams-Johnson

# North East mobile software specialist secures first major US contract

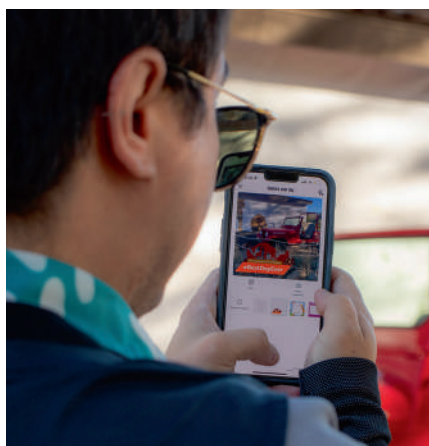


North East based global attraction experience software specialists n-gage.io has secured its first major US contract with the Living Desert Zoo and Gardens in California, which has launched a new mobile app aimed at enhancing their visitor experience.

**The top US visitor attraction, that welcomes over 600,000 visitors annually, has just unveiled a new experience platform to improve communication, navigation, conservation education and accessibility at the 1200-acre site.**

The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens, which is dedicated to the preservation of world deserts and wildlife is ranked one of California's best-loved wildlife attractions and ranked as one of the 26 best zoos in the US by the US News & World Report. The attraction is renowned not just for its 150+ animal species but also its 52 gardens that contain over 1,200 plant species, making it a day out to remember for both animal and plant lovers alike.

Given The Living Desert's reputation for conservation education, working with over 70 partners worldwide, it comes as no surprise to find the Zoo innovating with technology to drive conservation education messaging whilst also introducing a host of interactive features in its new mobile app to enhance the visitor experience.



Keeping pace with an audience's ever-evolving technology expectations led The Living Desert to turn to the UK based attraction experience experts at n-gage.io for a solution.

Led by entrepreneur Bryan Hoare and incubated in County Durham by 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.

"We're delighted to secure our first US contract with The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens who chose our powerful attraction management software and highly customisable mobile app following a rigorous selection process" said Bryan Hoare, CEO of n-gage.io.

"The Zoo and Gardens are renowned for their work around the world, contributing to wildlife conservation for over half a century. We're proud to build on this legacy and provide their visitors with a digital mobile pocket guide that enhances their visit and experiences, and we're actively looking to

help more zoos, wildlife parks and other attractions across the US to transform their approach to digital engagement."

The n-gage.io solution pairs the SaaS platform's highly customisable mobile app with its powerful attraction management software to deliver The Living Desert both the tools and data insights it needs to enhance the visitor experience and communicate with them in real-time.

The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens now uses the app as a focal point for visitors, to provide more rich content and media on their habitats and surroundings. Visitors are also feeling the impact of improved navigation, finding their way around habitats, gardens, and other points of interest using n-gage.io's innovative wayfinding solution, which is optimised for both on and offline use.

"We're excited to launch this new app and offer our visitors an enhanced experience," said Allison Krupp, Vice President of Marketing & Communications at The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens. "We're always looking for new ways to innovate and enhance our visitor experience. In n-gage.io we found a UK team of dedicated and innovative professionals who have developed a software platform and highly customisable mobile visitor app packed with features that we believe is a game changer for our industry."

"The app is now playing a major role in helping us to achieve our goal of continuing to inspire current and future generations around the importance of conservation. Additionally, we appreciate the multi-lingual features for our global tourism visitors."

**More details: [www.n-gage.io](http://www.n-gage.io)**





## O launches fractional CMO service to help companies grow

O agency, the North East Marketing Agency of the Year for the last three years, has launched a new consultancy service for ambitious companies that don't yet have a senior marketing head at board level.

Led by Founder Kari Owers and Managing Director Kirsty Ostell, its 'Fractional CMO' (Chief Marketing Officer) team brings decades of experience handling marketing communications for some of the region's most successful companies.

"Our Fractional CMO consultancy service empowers businesses of all sizes to reach their marketing and sales potential and change the game when it comes to getting big results without the big in-house team," says Kirsty Ostell. "Put simply, we can be your strategic marketing lead at board level, allowing you access to some of the best heads in the industry without the overhead of a senior hire until you're ready."

She added: "From start-up to scale-up and businesses looking to exit, we help to bridge the gap between the marketing and sales functions, the board and other stakeholders, such as investors or your internal team."

"A CMO's job is to advise at a commercial level on how to use effective marketing to realise your ambitions. We advise at the points we are most needed and help shape a robust strategy that will remove any guesswork from the company's growth plans."

"This service launches alongside our new Effectiveness™ model which has been designed to help marketing teams quickly showcase results in line with business objectives and without getting blindsided by huge marketing performance metrics that aren't actually moving the needle for the business."

## North East favourite Dicksons appoints Gardiner Richardson to support business expansion



The family-run, South Shields based retailer, has appointed brand communications agency, Gardiner Richardson to refresh the heritage brand to reflect the businesses' ambitious growth plans.

From the famous saveloy dip to regional favourite pease pudding, Dicksons has been keeping the region fed for the last 70 years with food to enjoy on the go and at home. Employing 320 people and with stores from Northumberland to County Durham, the company manufactures a wide range of food in its South Shields factory, including 1.5 million pots of pease pudding a year.

The brand refresh comes as the retailer is investing into new products, store refurbishments and new concessions in supermarkets around the North East. The

work will include a refreshed logo, colour palette and brand styling and fans of Dicksons will find the new look across stores and products in the coming months.

Mike Dickson, Retail Growth & Development Director at Dicksons, commented on the appointment, "As we've continued to invest in our 31 stores and product offering, we knew our brand needed the same level of focus to maintain our appeal and engagement with customers."

"Newcastle based Gardiner Richardson are the right partner for us, bringing experience of delivering brand, communications and design projects for well-loved North East brands such as Ringtons, Northumbrian Water Group, Grainger Market &

## Acclaim for Bonded event

Newcastle based digital and media agency Bonded recently held its Future Advertising Trends Festival at The Catalyst. Featuring industry leaders from Meta, X, Spotify, Pinterest, and Thinkbox the event was the first of its kind in the City.

Steven Underwood, Bonded's Managing Director, expressed enthusiasm for connecting North East businesses with prominent media platforms, highlighting the event's success in facilitating meaningful connections and knowledge sharing.

Presentations at the event covered diverse topics, including Pinterest's focus on personalisation and brand visibility, Spotify's future-oriented approach to audio advertising, X's evolution from Twitter and emphasis on brand safety, Thinkbox's research on context in ad recall, and Meta's



use of AI to enhance businesses.

The Future Advertising Trends Festival in Newcastle received acclaim for its insightful content and has sparked interest in similar events in other regions, reflecting the growing demand for knowledge sharing and networking opportunities in the media industry.



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## Sustainability. It's much more than just a buzzword.

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We're already doing this for FuturePlus, as they empower businesses of any shape or size to work

towards their ESG goals. We're communicating Silverstone racetrack's major gearshift to carbon neutral. And we're helping build the profile of global electric motorcycle racing series E-Xplorer, where men and women ride together in total gender parity. In this ever more interconnected and eco-conscious world it's helping them make their mark without leaving a trace.

So whether you're just starting out on your journey to become a sustainable brand or you're already making an impact on communities far and wide, why not see how we can help?

[phil.coverdale@cravens.co.uk](mailto:phil.coverdale@cravens.co.uk)







*Helen Craddock*

# Marketing and Media Matters

*This month Northern Insight talks to...*

## Helen Craddock

*Owner, The Preneur Network*

### Did you always envisage a career in the Media Industry?

I had a brilliant English Literature teacher who had a passion for media and that sparked an intrigue at 16 but at that age, I remember being overwhelmed with options.

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

I was accepted to study English and Journalism at university, but I made a last-minute detour after winning a scholarship to pursue my other love of performing arts and professional theatre. I spent three years studying at Covent Garden, then seven years producing, choreographing, and promoting shows and events internationally. When I returned to the UK, I went back to study at London Business School and transitioned my skills into my first marketing and communications role with The National Trust. From there I worked with RICS and found a love for the built environment, and then spent over six years as Communications Director at Ryder Architecture before taking a leap of faith to setup Preneur Network last year.

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

I love nurturing people, and collaborating on ideas so initially, being a business owner with no employees was lonely. I've now built up a wonderful network of freelancers I collaborate with and brilliant clients. As with so many big changes in life, there have been the people who have gone above and beyond to cheerlead, support, and mentor me and I'm aware of their profound impact on my first year in business.

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

Steven Bartlett. I've been lucky enough to meet him in person. He's very self-aware and constantly pushing his own boundaries and diversifying.

### Which fictional media character can you most relate to?

Elle Woods, Legally Blonde. "You must always have faith in yourself" regardless of what others think. I'm cheerful, enthusiastic, emotional and yes, I love pink. But I'm also obsessed with self-development and education, determined, and very ambitious.

### What is your greatest strength?

Being a great listener and spotting the opportunity gaps others sometimes don't see.

### What is your biggest weakness?

Worrying too much about what other people think of me – it's something that can hugely hold you back from achieving your dreams if you don't check yourself. A few years back, there's no way I would have agreed to do this interview for that same reason!

### What has been your proudest achievement?

Leaving a dream job, team, and promising employment career to establish my own comms and marketing business. I'll never look back with that regret now about having the 'what if' hanging over me. Being in complete control of my business direction, achievements, and culture, and knowing my two young children see me doing that, genuinely inspires me out of bed every day.

### What are your future career aspirations?

I hope I continue to always seize the business opportunities as they come my way with an open mind on how far new adventures, partnerships, and ideas can grow.

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

AI is advancing rapidly with incredible developments. However, it's crucial to balance this with maintaining personalised and emotional human experiences for brands.

### How do you like to unwind?

I have some precious 'mind spa' time on a Sunday, listening to my Headway app while running in Northumberland. Then a glass of fizz and some nice food to counterbalance!

*preneur.network*





## Empower your communication skills

Continuous learning isn't just beneficial - it's essential for success.



Veronica Swindale

**The latest set of Chartered Institute of Public Relations results are in, and nesma is delighted that together, our students and tutors achieved an impressive 93.75% pass rate.**

Veronica Swindale, nesma MD, therefore asked specialist nesma tutor Anne-Marie Lacey and some nesma alumni why staying up to date with training is crucial for anyone in PR, communications, or even business managers, among other things.

### Why do you love doing what you do?

PR and professional communications are exciting industries. No two days are the same, and it's a great feeling to have such an impact on so many careers.



I moved from an HR generalist background to engagement and, more recently, to specialising in internal communications. I decided on this CIPR qualification as I wanted to understand internal communications, reinforce my knowledge, and build a network of internal communication professionals.

*Rebecca Eastham*

*CIPR Specialist Certificate - Internal Communications  
Employee Communications Manager at David Lloyd Clubs*



I decided that having a professional qualification in Digital Communications would combine the knowledge and skills I have learned over the years. Despite my extensive experience, I have learned new skills, and I know that this qualification will help me move on to the next step in my career.

*Vicky Moore*

*CIPR Specialist Diploma - Digital Communications  
Communications Officer at the Regulator of Social Housing*

### Why do you think professional qualifications are essential?

You always need to call upon different skills within your practitioner toolkit. A CIPR qualification is a badge of professionalism and sets you above the rest in a competitive work environment. A professional qualification in PR equips you with the latest knowledge and understanding, underpinned by theories, models, and frameworks, to help you be the best you can be.

### What do learner sessions look like for CIPR qualifications?

In addition to learning historical contexts and contemporary constructs of PR, you'll



Anne-Marie Lacey

learn about the latest trends you need to know to stay ahead of your game. It's about pairing theory and practice with real-life examples and lived experience to help build your confidence to deliver with conviction in your place of work. All sessions are taught live by a real-life tutor with years of experience in PR and communications, so there are plenty of discussions and debates!

#### **What do you think makes nesma stand out as a study centre?**

It's about collaboration, too – we don't just talk at our learners for a few hours each week! One of the benefits of learning with nesma is the value you get from your classmates, too. Every session is interactive, with plenty of time for critical thinking and self-reflection, conversation, sharing ideas, and working together.

“

I decided to enrol in the CIPR Specialist Diploma - Digital Communications qualification because it offers an opportunity to learn new skills in a rapidly evolving communications world.

*Ed Hodge*

*CIPR Specialist Diploma - Digital Communications  
Editorial Manager at The R&A*

#### **What feedback do you get from students?**

Students tell us repeatedly that one of the most significant benefits of studying with us is the peer-to-peer relationships they form. They say they benefit from other people's experiences, shared examples and advice, and the development of their professional network in the UK and worldwide.

“

This qualification made me feel like I'm progressing in my career while learning new skills. I was in a bit of a rut with my job, and now I am on my way to a promotion and am feeling very positive!

*Georgie McManus*

*CIPR Professional PR Certificate  
Communications Officer at the Carers Trust*

#### **Why do you think the special CIPR qualifications are now very popular?**

In today's competitive job market, standing out from the crowd is vital – and CIPR qualifications can help you do just that! Communication roles now vary considerably and depending on the size of the organisation and your responsibilities, taking a deep dive into a subject or refreshing your skills in specific areas like Internal or Digital Communications may be necessary. With CIPR qualifications, you're not just learning theory – you're gaining practical, real-world skills directly applicable to your day-to-day work. From Crisis Communications to Stakeholder Engagement, the CIPR specialist qualifications cover various topics designed to equip individuals with the tools they need to excel as a generalist or a specialist. Continuous professional development will undoubtedly position you as a trusted expert and will always be an asset to your organisation or clients.

Studying CIPR qualifications will keep you informed, enhance your skills, and encourage professional growth.

**If you are interested in studying with nesma or would like to talk to us about how we can help you review your team's skillset, please get in touch at +44(0) 7734 222 254 or [hello@nesma.co.uk](mailto:hello@nesma.co.uk).**

# nesma

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Stephen Waddington

## The reality of AI adoption: Shifting from experimentation to implementation

Wadds Inc. works with ambitious creative and professional services agencies and communications teams 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. Here founder Stephen Waddington looks into AI adoption.**

We've called peak hype for generative artificial intelligence (AI) in professional domains such as marketing and public relations.

Everybody is talking about it, but there is limited evidence of anyone achieving anything like the 40% or more productivity gains promised by AI vendors.

This new class of technology is described as both eliminating professional work and capable of demonstrating emotion and

intellectual reasoning. So far, the reality could not be more different.

The term AI itself doesn't help. It's artificial, and it isn't very intelligent.

AI is based on training an algorithm to manipulate a data set called a large language model (LLM). It predicts words or phrases based on this data set.

AI has been ascribed a superhuman quality because it responds to natural language and can manipulate large amounts of data in real-time. Thanks to technology vendors such as Anthropic, Google, and OpenAI, AI is accessible to anyone with a web browser and internet connection at no cost or low cost.

It excels at pattern recognition but lacks comprehension of underlying concepts and

cultural awareness. It supports reductive applications better than generative applications. Use cases in a professional domain include administration, content generation, research, relationship management and evaluation.

AI creates a series of societal and organisational risk issues, including copyright, data management, ethics and hallucination. Governance and training must be addressed before AI tools can be used commercially.

For all these reasons, organisations have yet to use AI systematically in a professional domain. Adoption is best characterised as experimental, although a turning point may be in sight.

A survey by Andreessen Horowitz, published in March, investigated the adoption of AI in large companies. It reported that organisations were moving from experimentation to rollout, including a broad application of generative AI and in-house apps.

There are generally four approaches to the adoption of AI.

### 1. Limit the use of AI

This is a common approach in higher education and markets such as finance and healthcare, where the risk issues are deemed too great. A challenge is that individuals within an organisation may ignore governance and use it on devices outside the corporate firewall.

### 2. Workflow adaption

Professional workflow is deconstructed, and third-party AI tools are applied to augment tasks. Examples include transcription (Otter), image manipulation (Canva), research (Consensus) and reporting (Fireflies).

### 3. Democratise LLMs

LLMs are distributed to everyone within an organisation. The appeal of providing everyone in a team with access to an LLM is that it democratises access and allows users to find use cases within their own workflow. Microsoft is actively supporting this strategy with its customers with the launch of a tool called Copilot as part of the Microsoft 365 suite.

### 4. Custom LLMs

Organisations build their own in-house AI tool, typically by licensing an LLM API such as ChatGPT or using an open-source model to guarantee data management and security. An organisation's IT team typically leads this activity.

AI technology holds substantial promise, but its practical application is a work in progress.

Mainstream adoption will require robust governance frameworks and training. Organisations must adopt a balanced approach, recognising both AI's capabilities and limitations, to integrate this technology effectively into their operations.

***If you run a creative or professional services agency and are looking for an experienced non-executive director to help build resilience and plan for growth, please visit [www.wadds.co.uk](http://www.wadds.co.uk)***

# Global manufacturer appoints North East PR consultancy to support its marketing efforts



Wayne Halton

**Leading North East business-to-business communications consultancy, MHW PR, has been appointed to manage national and international media relations for global manufacturer Alexander Battery Technologies (ABT).**

**The County Durham based company, which designs and manufactures customised rechargeable battery packs for a range of industries, has appointed MHW as its PR partner for the next 12 months.**

The international company, with a growing operation in Germany, is on an ambitious growth strategy which has seen it build and develop its sales and marketing team in the UK and Europe.

Since embarking on a five-year growth plan, ABT has seen revenues rise by around 30 per cent during the last year, with turnover rising to £18m in 2023. Now, in its 40th anniversary year, the company has higher ambitions to achieve a £100m annual sales target within the next four years.

ABT operates in key sectors including robotics, telecommunications and e-mobility, and currently employs more

than 110 people at its Peterlee and Frankfurt operations, which it expects to grow significantly in the next few years.

Newcastle-based MHW will be advising on messaging along with national, specialist media relations to promote the capabilities and successful projects of this growing company.

Sian Ferry, marketing manager at ABT, said: “MHW were chosen as our preferred PR partner based on their proven record of working with international manufacturers, supporting their marketing efforts.”

Wayne Halton, founder and director of MHW, said: “We are delighted to be securing ambitious, international businesses like ABT. It’s a particularly exciting time to be coming on board to support the marketing team as they push for growth. The company has invested heavily in its County Durham site

and there are plans to expand capabilities and manufacturing.

“As a leading B2B PR consultancy in the North East, MHW has strong credentials across the manufacturing sector. We know and understand the specialist trade media which still plays a vital role in reaching and influencing key audiences. Elsewhere, we will be supporting planned trade exhibitions in the UK and overseas.”

MHW, established more than 23 years ago, currently works with a range of manufacturing clients including Gateshead-based Express Engineering, Peterlee-based Seaward Electronic, and off-site construction company Remagin, with operations in Newton Aycliffe and Leeds.

The consultancy also has strong expertise and credentials in the construction and built environment sector working for national planning and development consultancy Lichfields; London based QS and cost consultancy firm Stature Piercehill; County Durham housebuilder Homes by Carlton; and regional housing and commercial developer Modo Bloc.

**More information about the MHW PR at [www.mhwpr.co.uk](http://www.mhwpr.co.uk)**





# STEP INTO THE CURIOUS WORLD OF ALNWICK

Northumberland

Visit Northumberland targeted tourism campaign.





Helping brands be less ordinary.







Keith Newman



## A decade floats by for Highlights PR

In the bustling world of public relations, standing out is key. For Keith Newman, founder of Highlights PR, setting sail on a different course has been his secret to success. Nestled within the tranquil waters of Royal Quays Marina in North Shields sits his unconventional office, a 24-foot-long motorboat.

Keith's floating sanctuary has become synonymous with innovation, hospitality, and creativity. "When people step aboard, they're not just entering an office; they're embarking on a PR journey," Keith remarks with a smile.

Highlights PR celebrates its 15th year, and for the past decade, Keith has utilised his floating office as a strategic asset. Beyond its picturesque setting, the boat offers a myriad of advantages. "It's a breath of fresh air, both literally and figuratively," Keith said. "The gentle lapping of the river Tyne creates a serene backdrop conducive to good writing and ideas generation."

But it's not just about the ambiance; Keith leverages his floating office as a unique PR tool. "Bringing clients on board isn't just a meeting—it's an experience," he explains. "Many of my clients come down to the marina and are amazed at how calming being on a boat can be. It's a great place to talk and think and many of my biggest stories have started life there."

Keith also enjoys taking clients out along the river where he showcases historical landmarks and the river's industrial heritage, offering clients a glimpse into the region's rich tapestry. "It's about forging connections beyond the boardroom, fostering a deeper understanding of our surroundings," he adds.

Crafted by boatbuilders Viking Mouldings in a factory nestled in Herefordshire, the boat symbolises craftsmanship and attention to detail. It is fitted out with the latest safety features including lifejackets, throwing lines and firefighting equipment as well as modern GPS navigation aids and radios.

Over the years, Keith has welcomed more than 300 visitors aboard, each immortalised in a photo in a series of coffee table books—a cherished memento of their time spent on the water. "It's about creating lasting memories," Keith says, flipping through the pages adorned with smiling faces. "Many of the faces have become not only clients but friends too and it's great to welcome everyone onboard."

Highlights PR caters to a diverse clientele, ranging from large utilities to small entrepreneurs, charities, entertainers, and music festivals. Some of his clients have been with him for much of the length of his



time in business including The People's Kitchen, Northern Gas Networks, Sunday for Sammy, Blyth Live Music Festival and Healthwatch Newcastle.

"Every client is unique, and so are their stories," Keith said. "It's about amplifying their voices and leaving a lasting impact. I want to help everyone tell their story even if they think they don't have one. People love hearing about other people and my aim is to help them to be heard."

"In an industry defined by change, staying anchored to my values is what sets Highlights PR apart," he said. "I enjoy being at the helm of the business and the boat is a key part of my life and long may it continue."

**Contact Keith@highlightspr.co.uk**  
**07814 397951**  
**www.highlightspr.co.uk**



# ...If I were you I'd...

**Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us what the best business advice was they have received.**



The best business advice Riaan and I have had recently, is to convey the emotion of what you are doing to your clients and potential clients. Connect with people at a deep level with honesty so they feel how you can help them.

**Dr Ceri Sutherland, Idos Healthcare and Well Being,**  
[www.idoshealth.co.uk](http://www.idoshealth.co.uk)

It's very selfish to keep all my knowledge to myself, so by sharing it, I'm making a positive impact on my audience and helping them to solve the challenges they are facing. To quote Zig Ziglar, "You can have everything in life you want if you just help other people get what they want."

**Mark Orr, DW Media, [www.thedwmedia.co.uk](http://www.thedwmedia.co.uk)**



"Always take a step back and look at the bigger picture", the best advice I was ever given when I first started my management career many years ago! Still as relevant today as it was in the mid 90s as its very easy to get caught up with the small details, focus too much on delivering a precise set of outcomes or tackling the main issues of the day.

In the voluntary sector it is easy to just get on with what you're doing and not stop to look at the bigger picture to check if what you're doing is needed and still relevant! Off The Grid is very good at listening to what our clients tell us. All of our programmes are developed with the clients and adapted for the youngest eight-year-old and oldest 94 year old currently on our programmes. This approach keeps our customers happy, keeps us a step ahead of the competition and delivers real value for money for our funders!

**If you're interested in working with us, just get in touch for a chat and a coffee! Paul Kirkpatrick, [www.offthegrid-adventures.co.uk](http://www.offthegrid-adventures.co.uk)**

"Ask, Ask, Ask" was a phrase I was told once by a wise old businesswoman a good number of years ago. Now, when I say a wise old businesswoman – she was doing a cracking trade from her caravan, with red lace curtains, a parrot on a perch, incense burning in the corner, next to a rabbit's foot and a crystal ball that looked more cloudy than a wet weekend in Blackpool and it cost me 40 quid! – however the advice she gave stuck with me, as did the smell to be fair"

**...and a big thanks to Leading Link Volunteer Helen Wilson who had the misfortune to pop in when we were taking the picture. She didn't see that coming...Chris Johnson, Leading Link**





The best bit of advice I was ever given was by my late dad when he said, "Keep your nose clean and you will work for life." I think I have adopted that philosophy all the way through my working life – being honest, transparent and do the best I can for my clients.

Keith Newman, [www.highlightspr.co.uk](http://www.highlightspr.co.uk)



A piece of advice that has stayed with me is - "Your brand is what people say about you when you are not in the room." This is an important point. When building a brand, we often think that everyone feels the same way about it as we do. But we see it from all angles, most people see your business from their perspective, and each interaction with your business forms an impression of your brand values. If you take this advice on board then it means that you will get loyal repeat customers because you are doing a great job, and they will be singing your praises when you aren't in the room. If you don't then you will find it harder to build a loyal community of customers or clients and this could mean that you won't stand the test of time.

Corinne Lewis Ward, [www.powderbutterfly.com](http://www.powderbutterfly.com)

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

## Are you on the media's RADAR?

You can be... for less than the price of a couple of coffees a week!

**Become a member of Highlights PR's RADAR programme.**

**Benefit from more than 15 years in the PR industry.**

**Get your name out to local and national press, TV, radio, magazines and more.**



**Special bonus for RADAR clients:**

- Interview on Radio Northumberland
- Crisis PR management advice
- Feature in Highlights PR's newsletter
- Exclusive offers on PR, media training and more
- LED advert beamed from the floating office

Contact Keith Newman for more details.

Visit him on his floating office

[keith@highlightspr.co.uk](mailto:keith@highlightspr.co.uk)

07814 397951

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







L-R: Sarah Dale and Sarah Walker

## Extend your marketing team with a little bit of SASS!

Sarah and Sarah explain how you can increase your marketing power in a cost-effective way.

**At SASS media Ltd, we work with businesses of all sizes, from sole traders to large education Trusts, NHS organisations and charities.**

Our ethos is that all businesses and organisations should have a chance to tell their unique stories and ultimately, sell their products and services through positive PR, show how they are leaders in their field, or highlight the positive difference they are making.

That's why we offer a free consultation, during which we advise how we can help to promote your business or organisation, while also giving you a steer on what other marketing support you may want to consider.

This may include where to get help and support to ensure your social media is on point and putting you in touch with excellent graphic designers and marketing strategists,

who can help you create or develop your brand.

In terms of what we do, as our name suggests, we are media specialists first and foremost.

Both Sarahs started their careers as journalists and met while working on the business and features desk at The Gazette on Teesside.

There, we wrote a lot about businesses and industry within our area – so we're highly skilled when it comes to shouting about the good work organisations in our local area are doing.

Now, we have progressed to using our skills to get organisations noticed through regional and national print and broadcast media.

We also help organisations who have found themselves the centre of media scrutiny to put their best foot forward when it comes to handling journalists' enquiries concerning stories which could have a negative impact.

When we start working with an organisation, we look at it holistically, to determine what your business or organisation needs in terms of public relations and marketing, from promoting good news stories, to preparing for negative publicity, if this could become an issue.

We identify who your key audiences are and how we can target them with the messages you require them to see and hear.

At SASS media Ltd, we work with businesses and organisations in the public sector, the private sector and the third sector.

As spring has sprung, we're delighted to have started new contracts with A Taste of Africa North East and Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, extending the successful

work we have already done with these organisations.

We're also proud to be promoting the Saltburn Food Festival, which takes place on Sunday July 28th – a definite date for your diaries!

We have already secured coverage for Saltburn Food Festival in Teesside Live and The Gazette, the Northern Echo and the Darlington and Stockton Times and have radio interviews with co-founder Lorna Jackson pending.

In terms of the coverage we achieved for Taste of Africa North East last year, over a period of four months, we achieved 17 pieces of online coverage that attracted more than half a million views – a great return on investment for the charity, which also benefited from our 10% charity discount.

However, it's not all about the publicity you receive through the media.

It's also about keeping your own media channels up to date.

With that in mind, we can help with regular blog posts for your website, or case studies about the work you have done for other customers, which can help bring your website and business to life – a must when it comes to the potential for attracting new clients.

This can then be linked to your social media, enabling you to drive traffic to the exceptional content on your website.

***If you'd like to talk to us about marketing and PR for your organisation, get in touch.***

***Call Sarah Walker on 07896 894538 or email [sarah.walker@sassmedialtd.co.uk](mailto:sarah.walker@sassmedialtd.co.uk)***



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)**



# The Culture Review

## More energy, less stress and fewer sick days? Building trust is the answer

*With Ivan Hollingsworth,  
Founder of Centric Consultants*

Trust is the bedrock of how we interact with others - whether that is at work or in our personal lives.

Building trust in a team translates into an increase in productivity, more energy, less stress fewer sick days, and lower rates of burnout - all crucial elements when it comes to forming a healthy, efficient, and stable team. Knowing that you can trust those around you - and that they can trust you in return allows you to be free enough to try new things, innovate, and create new ways of approaching problems - all of which pushes your team forward in the same direction.

In hierarchical cultures (where 'command and control' is the norm), leaders simply expect trust as a byproduct of the position that they are in, and those further down the chain of command are expected to work night and day to build up enough capital that those at the top trust them in return. This transactional form of leadership just doesn't work in a modern workplace, we need to flip the narrative and look at a transformational approach which sees leaders starting from a point of trust in the people in their team and working hard to gain it in return.

Our emotions and behaviors change when we build trust with the people around us, it affects our brain chemistry, and it is up to leaders to adopt strategies to build cultures that allow people to develop this if we want our business to be resilient to future storms and attract the best talent in the industry. So, how do you start to build a culture of trust within your team or organisation?

1. Be present
2. Show empathy
3. Empower your team
4. Communicate
5. Address stress



Ivan Hollingsworth

### Trust Factor – Paul Zak

In Trust Factor, neuroscientist Paul Zak shows that innate brain functions hold the answers we've been looking for. Put simply, the key to providing an engaging, encouraging, positive culture that keeps your employees energized is trust. When someone shows you trust, a feel-good jolt of oxytocin surges through your brain and triggers you to reciprocate. This book also incorporates science-based insights for building high-trust organizations with successful examples from The Container Store, Zappos, and Herman Miller.

### The Thin Book of Trust – 2nd Edition

It's been over 12 years since The Thin Book of Trust was first published. In this 2nd edition, you will find more clarifications, ideas to practice, and other additions including a new chapter on how to build trust on a team. The updated Thin Book of Trust offers a framework that supports trust building as a workplace competency based on the idea that building trust is a competency, a set of skills that can be learned, improved and practiced. A brilliant read for leader who want to embrace the leader as coach philosophy in 2024.

Ivan Hollingsworth is the founder and director of Centric Consultants - a business founded in a bid to tackle 'culture-washing' and support business leaders to build strong, sustainable, high-performing teams based on trust and psychological safety. Do you ever feel too busy to read everything out there and find it difficult to choose where to start? Each month he will share his best business reads on key topics that can help business leaders address key challenges in the coming years, including reducing staff burnout, attracting and retaining people, and increasing team performance.

**For more insights on what company culture truly means, and how to implement change across your business follow Centric Consultants on LinkedIn or email Ivan directly at [ivan@centric-consultants.com](mailto:ivan@centric-consultants.com)**



The Petite Agency team at their HQ in Stockton on Tees

## LinkedIn and the 1% Club

Imagine if your brand could have a face-to-face conversation with potential clients. What stories would it share? What insights would it give? And, what questions would it ask?

**Your company's LinkedIn page is precisely where these digital narratives unfold. It's not merely a profile; it's your brand's digital persona, a 24/7 window into who your brand is, what it stands for and what value it holds.**

With over 1 billion members, 67 million company pages, unparalleled professional networking opportunities and the ability to establish thought leadership, it's the premier platform for B2B.

Until a couple of years ago, LinkedIn often carried the stigma of being the equivalent to a stuffy networking event for employees in the digital space. However, as the demands of digital marketing have intensified for entrepreneurs and gaining traction on video-centric platforms like Instagram and TikTok has become increasingly challenging, LinkedIn has risen to the occasion. It has

evolved by introducing a range of innovative tools, creating a dynamic environment that appeals to users. In doing so, it has emerged in a new light for entrepreneurs, shedding its former image and positioning itself as a prime platform for generating business.

But what is the 1% club on LinkedIn, we hear you ask? Out of the platform's vast user base, only 1% share consistent content. This statistic presents an exciting opportunity for you to connect with your target audience through quality content. Posting valuable insights, expertise, and thought leadership content on LinkedIn is crucial. It not only establishes your credibility but also builds relationships, increases visibility, and drives traffic to your profile, website, or other platforms.

LinkedIn's algorithm prioritises quality content, amplifying its reach and impact within your industry and beyond. By consistently sharing relevant and insightful content, you position yourself as a knowledgeable professional, creating engagement and encouraging conversations with your connections and followers. Moreover, quality content serves as a catalyst for maintaining top-of-mind awareness among your professional network, ensuring that you remain a trusted resource in your field.

Now, our golden rule for quality content? Focus on value first and selling second.

With research indicating the ease and profitability of marketing efforts on LinkedIn, it's tempting to dive straight into sales pitches. However, we advise against this approach and recommend a 3-2-1

strategy: three value posts, two humanised posts, and one sales post. Showing your expertise, allowing your audience to get to know and trust you, and then asking people to buy [in this way] works really well.

By prioritising value-driven content over direct selling, you not only showcase your expertise but also cultivate trust and credibility among your audience. This strategic approach sets the stage for meaningful engagement and long-term success on LinkedIn. So, before hitting the "sell" button, focus on delivering value that resonates with your audience's needs and interests.

In conclusion, your LinkedIn page is more than just a profile; it's a platform for your brand's narrative to unfold. The 1% club serves as a reminder of the opportunities for your brand if you consistently post quality content. It could very well be the difference between a prospective client saying, "I've seen your work on LinkedIn," versus "I've never heard of you." We certainly know which one we'd prefer.

**Fancy finding out more about Social Media for your business? Follow us on LinkedIn**





A unique interview...

**UNIQUE**  
magazines

## The art of being seen: Transformative gifts for every team member

Providing your staff with a personal gift shows them they are more than just the role they perform at work but are an essential and interesting part of your business, with a unique perspective to offer on life.

We pride ourselves in offering gift vouchers, to allow your valuable team members to choose their own subscription or single issues, based on their interests, easily and accessibly via our website.

### Beyond the office: Valuing connections and well-being in the workplace

Humans are wired for connection, and ultimately, all we ever want is to be seen, heard, and understood as we move through life and engage in relationships of all natures. In our lives, we will likely have a number of connections, which serve different purposes.

In a study from Our World in Data, it is suggested we spend most of our days working and sleeping. Together, paid work,

housework, leisure, eating, and sleeping take up 80–90% of all the 1440 minutes in a day. This highlights the importance of a positive work environment, in which our human desires and needs are met. When your staff feel valued at work, they will feel more motivated and encouraged to perform to the best of their abilities, growing their confidence and initiative in tasks, which will result in more positive feedback from clients, therefore encouraging growth.

Outside of work your team members will have hobbies and interests, which build their passion and fire. The way they spend their free time truly reveals who each staff member is at their core, and that is why providing them with a magazine that supports this will show your staff that you care about them in and out of work.







and care about the things that interest you. I also want you to keep reigniting that fire inside and allow you to keep growing this hunger for knowledge.' It is the gift that keeps on giving, especially with our offers of subscribing to magazines for up to a year, so the gift is continuous and impactful.

We aim to encourage others to dive into the things that excite them, whether that be classic cars and home baking or a love for music. Our magazines can be a portal for discovering your true love for life, outside of work, and carrying this joy and love into your day-to-day life. This could be for a Christmas gift to celebrate the year, staff birthdays to show you care, anniversaries for the dedicated time they have spent with you, or even as an incentive for promotions.

A study from Tremendous shows 75% of employees experience a boost in job satisfaction for three or more months after receiving the right gift, specifically at holidays such as Christmas or Easter. It truly does show that they are appreciated.

#### You can trust us

We have been personally trusted and chosen by businesses like Prenax, Hope & Glory, Nike and Inditex as well as many schools and libraries, to provide magazines to their offices and for their clients. Gifting your staff with something out of the ordinary shows them the effort you are willing to go to in order to show them they are valued.

Show your staff you care, with their very own gift voucher.

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

#### From Vision to Vanguard: The journey of Unique Magazines and our commitment to our team

Our managing director, John, started our business in 2002 with a vision to provide people of all ages with easy access to a vast range of printed magazines that are informative, engaging, and educational. Through his passion for this, mixed with a vision for exceptional customer experience, Unique Magazines was born.

Through John's 30 years of experience in the industry, he deeply understands the importance of taking care of his staff; without them, his ambitious goals would be difficult to achieve. He sees the difference it makes when the staff have a passion for keeping his visions alive and this starts with the way they are treated.

At Unique Magazines, we have been the home of magazine subscriptions for over two decades, with over 2,000 magazines available through our online store. The genres of these magazines vary, offering anything from Fashion, Photography, and Art to Travel, Home, and Crafts, and that is truly just scratching the surface of our treasure chest of gems.

#### Gifts that ignite passion: Transforming appreciation through magazine subscriptions

We believe the gift of giving a magazine subscription is like no other. It is an explorative and creative way of saying, 'I truly see



The Unique team



## Famed historian Lucy Worsley delights Dame Allan's audience with gripping talk on Britain's murder obsession

Television historian Lucy Worsley OBE captivated an audience of Newcastle school pupils, delving into the nation's peculiar fascination with crime as part of a powerful lecture series.

The renowned author and Chief Curator at Historic Royal Palaces explored society's curious obsession with murder over the last 200 years before giving an insight into her life work and passions during her visit to Dame Allan's Schools.

Addressing a packed audience of 250 students and parents as part of the Schools' acclaimed lecture series, Lucy's talk, 'A Very British Murder', examined notorious crimes, such as the Ratcliffe Highway Murders, and illustrated how heinous acts became a form of national entertainment through literature, plays, puppet shows and poetry.

She admitted: "I do like reading about crime and I've always been an avid consumer of

detective fiction... and I find the history of detective fiction fascinating, because it's also the history of society. It's the history of justice, it's the history of gender, it's the history of literacy, and it's the history of literature."

Lucy has brought history to life for audiences around the world. Her distinctive blend of scholarly research and narrative style, which has made her a beloved figure in the field of historical education and entertainment, was evident during her gripping talk.

Will Scott, Principal at Fenham-based Dame Allan's Schools, enthused: "Lucy's lecture not only enriched our students' understanding of history but ignited their curiosity and inspired them to explore the complexities of human nature."

"With her passion for the past and gift for storytelling, she was the ideal speaker at Dame Allan's, making history accessible, entertaining and relevant to a contemporary audience."



## YouTube star 'jump starts' children's fitness at Jarrow school

Children were jumping with joy when a YouTube star visited their school.

Jump Start Jonny aka Jonny Stewart is a fitness instructor on a mission to get children fit and his fun workouts and chill-out videos are loved by more than 250,000 Jumpsters in schools and homes across the globe. He loves exercise, particularly because it helps him burn his excess energy and control his Tourette's.

Jump Start Jonny led the Jarrow school, which is part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, in three high-energy workouts in the hall with all the pupils. He also had a tour of the classrooms to meet the children, sign autographs and pose for photos.

The energetic fitness star has definitely made a lasting impression on the children with many saying they want to be just like JSJ when they grow up. Headteacher Paul Craig said: "I have to say that it was one of the best days we have ever had at St Joseph's."

"The atmosphere throughout the morning was amazing. Even the shyest children were bouncing around, and staff were up on stage competing for the best dancer award."



## School hosts special afternoon tea for mums, grans and aunts

The special women in the lives of the pupils of St Gregory's Catholic Primary School in South Shields were celebrated at a heartwarming event.

The primary school, which is part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, held two Mother's Day afternoon tea events for the children's mums, grandmothers, aunts and carers to attend.

More than 150 people booked to attend the afternoon tea leading to the school holding two events rather than one to accommodate everybody. The school's head girl and head boy opened the community gatherings with a special Mother's Day prayer and a montage of photographs of the women who attended were shown, making the event extra special. The class captains served teas and coffees to their special guests with tasty afternoon tea treats provided by the cook and Chadwick's kitchen. They also played a game of bingo with Mother's Day hampers as prizes.

Acting headteacher Emma Shaughnessy said: "The Mother's Day Afternoon Tea event was a lovely occasion that brought our whole school community together. The community spirit was palpable in the room."

"I would like to thank all of the staff who worked so hard to make it a memorable experience and a special thanks to the BCCET catering team for their support too."



# Who run the world?

## Inspiring the next generation of female leaders



Education charity and awarding body NCFE has a wealth of female talent in leadership roles. We spoke with six female leaders (*Katie Hume, Head of People Services, Isha Sachdeva, Head of Research and Insight, Julie Hyde, Director of External and Regulatory Affairs, Allison Jones, Head of PMO, Helen Ketteringham, Chief People Officer and Kelly Miller, Head of Audit, Risk and Assurance*) from across the organisation to hear their unique advice and experiences.

### What does it mean to you to be a female leader?

**Katie:** “Being a female leader means being a role model to the young people around you. Role modelling not only that females can be successful leaders, but also role modelling what that leadership can look like – it can be diverse in terms of gender, but also in terms of leadership style and approach.”

**Julie:** “It means demonstrating competence, resilience, and the ability to inspire and guide others towards common goals. Female leaders often contribute diverse perspectives to decision-making processes and can serve as role models for breaking down gender barriers.”

**Isha:** “The challenges a female encounters through her leadership journey are unique to her gender. It could be about navigating through a bias in the workplace, breaking stereotypes, or even answering societal questions about whether it's ‘time to take a break and start a family’. My leadership

journey has been no different - but what I have found is strength and empowerment from the women which surround me.”

### Are there any female role models or mentors who've inspired you during your career journey?

**Helen:** “I've been inspired by women all of my life. I'm grateful to my parents and grandparents for a solid foundation of morals and values. My sisters and I have grown up close, embracing life's possibilities, and coming back together to support one another. I'm also full of adoration for my two young daughters who share three mantras for what they call the wonky moments in life, which are: try your best, don't give up, and ask for help.”

**Kelly:** “One of our trustees has been an amazing mentor for me. She's inspired me to be better, braver, and to also become a Governor in a local college. There are also male role models who have really supported me. I felt safe and comfortable enough to

talk to my male boss about early menopause, making him aware of the challenges that I might face.”

**Julie:** “I've had some significant role models in my life from a family perspective. Both my grandmothers were independent, resilient women and my mother who balanced a successful career and family, having moved away from her extended family with my father and a very young family of their own.”

### What top tips would you offer young women who are taking their first steps onto the career ladder?

**Helen:** “Number one, use your intuition. Tune into your energy and lead the pace as you navigate the highs, the lows, the twists and turns of both work and life. Two is around self-awareness; know your strengths and your areas of difference and label them as your superpowers. Thirdly, believe in yourself. Back yourself and give self-doubt a volume button that only you can control.”

**Isha:** “Don't underestimate the power of guidance. Seek out mentors at an early stage and tap into their wealth and knowledge. It's going to be incredibly useful throughout the journey to have a mentor, to have people who you can look to for support during the toughest times.”

**Allison:** “Three things I would say are: believe in yourself, build your network, and be bold and brave.”

**Learn more about life at NCFE and the career opportunities by visiting [www.ncfe.org.uk/careers](http://www.ncfe.org.uk/careers)**



# NOMINATE TODAY

Do you know  
a young person  
who makes  
their community  
a better place?

Nominations are open  
to young people who  
attend **ANY** primary or  
secondary school/college  
in **Newcastle**.



#CommunityChampions



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W: [northernleaderstrust.org/community-champions](https://northernleaderstrust.org/community-champions)

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**NORTHERN  
LEADERS TRUST**

# Northern Leaders Trust Presents: Community Champion Awards 2024 – Celebrating Newcastle’s Young Heroes!

Inspired by the rich sense of community spirit in Newcastle, multi-academy trust Northern Leaders Trust is gearing up to host its second annual Community Champion Awards, which aims to shine a spotlight on young individuals who have demonstrated exceptional dedication, leadership and compassion in serving the Newcastle community.



**The 2024 Community Champion Awards has received generous backing from local companies and organisations such as Greggs, Newcastle Eagles, Veterans Launchpad, Vertu Motors, Muckle LLP, Schools North East, building and property maintenance company WDL, the Association of Education Advisers and other prominent local companies.**

The Evening Chronicle has partnered with the Community Champion Awards' team to ensure optimum coverage for the event. A spokesperson from The Chronicle said: "It is with great pride and honour that we support the Community Champion Awards 2024. This evening of celebration recognises the extraordinary contributions that Newcastle's young people make to the community, inspiring us all to give back."

Lee Kirtley, CEO of Northern Leaders Trust, initiated the awards to showcase the remarkable achievements of Newcastle's youth. He emphasised: "As a society, we're often all too quick to focus on the negative actions of young individuals in our communities. As a result of this, many outstanding accomplishments remain overlooked. I established the Community Champion Awards to shine a light on the exceptional contributions that young people are making to the Newcastle Community, with the hope of inspiring others to do the same."

Following the tremendous success of last year's inaugural awards, the Community Champion Awards ceremony will take place on Friday 28th of June at Kenton School with very special guests, entertainment and refreshments.

Last year celebrated the achievements of several exceptional young people. Paul White, a Cadet and trained first aider, helped save the life of an unconscious man by administering CPR and staying with him until an ambulance crew attended the scene.

Olivia Cameron won the Young Carer award for showing exceptional dedication and commitment as a carer for a family member whilst she completed her GCSEs and A-Levels.

The Special Recognition Award winner, Bailey Shore, helped to save the life of a man that suffered a heart attack on the bus. Bailey alerted the bus driver and assisted a doctor in giving the man CPR after learning first aid at school.

Charlotte Bradley, a pageant queen who represents Newcastle upon Tyne, raised over £7,000 for local charities that are close to her heart such as Amber's Law, A-Sisterhood and The Sick Children's Trust.

Chris Zarraga, Director at Schools North East – the only school-led regional network in the UK - highlights the importance of the awards: "This awards ceremony is a fantastic idea and we look forward to acknowledging all the bright young sparks who have made fantastic contributions to our region."

This year, there are eight award categories, which aim to celebrate a variety of community achievements:

- Community Hero Award (sponsored by Newcastle Eagles)
- Young Fundraiser of the Year Award (sponsored by Muckle LLP)
- Young Volunteer of the Year
- Eco Ambassador Award (sponsored by Summers Dodge International)
- Act of Kindness Award (sponsored by Greggs)
- Young Carer Award (sponsored by WDL)
- Courage Award (sponsored by the Association of Education Advisers)
- Special Recognition Award (sponsored by Vertu Motors)

Thanks to the generous support from sponsors, award winners can anticipate receiving £150 in retail gift vouchers on the night, along with an additional £50 in book tokens from Northern Leaders Trust.

Northern Insight's Managing Director, Michael Grahamslaw, will be presenting an award on the night. Nominations for the awards are currently open! They close at the end of May - so don't miss out on the opportunity to make a remarkable young person you know a Community Champion.

Anyone can make nominations, providing the nominee is under 18 years of age and attends a primary, secondary school or college in Newcastle – whether that is a local authority-maintained school, an independent school, a faith school, an academy or a school for children with special needs.

Enthusiastic about the upcoming celebration of young people's accomplishments, Lee Kirtley, adds: "I am deeply moved by the remarkable contributions of Newcastle's young people. Here at Northern Leaders Trust, we felt compelled to create a platform that acknowledges the kindness and generosity in our community, and we're proud that the Community Champion Awards can play a key role for a second year."

Nominate a remarkable young person you know today! Scan the QR code to access the nomination form or visit [northernleaderstrust.org/community-champions](https://northernleaderstrust.org/community-champions) and share their inspiring story.

**[northernleaderstrust.org](https://northernleaderstrust.org)**



# Pens Down: are we seeing the end of the handwritten exam?

By Mr Will Scott, Principal at Dame Allan's Schools, Newcastle.

The summer term is fast approaching and this means public exams for our hardworking Year 11 and Year 13 pupils.

**The prospect of GCSEs and A Levels is understandably daunting. Cast your mind back to your exams - I'm sure many recall an aching hand from handwriting essay answers in a history paper, or reeling off a quote-filled response to an English literature question. I wonder: was that the last time you wrote anything substantial in longhand?**

There has been a bubbling debate within education around the merits of handwriting versus typing on a computer, especially with regards to important examinations. Certain school exam boards, such as Edexcel, will be allowing pupils to type their GCSE English exams from 2025\*. AQA has also announced that GCSE Italian and Polish will be assessed digitally in 2026, with plans to expand the list of subjects thereafter. \*\*

The question is, does this matter? Are we losing something if the art and skill of handwriting fall into disuse?

Traditionally, writing by hand is much valued, so it is taught rigorously from an early age. It helps us learn about letters, how they look and sound, and their shape, all of which link together to promote literacy, communication, and fine motor skills in our youngest learners. We all, in some capacity, have to write by hand in our daily lives and it seems unlikely we'll give that up entirely in the near future.

Quite a lot of research over many years also shows that we are more likely to learn and remember when we write - it is, after all, a more personal and immersive experience, making a piece of paper 'our own' through the skills of our hands, errors and all!



Will Scott

However, it could also be argued that opening up public examinations - and other assessments - to digital media offers the opportunity for the use of skills that are more practical and applicable to the work of the future. Being able to type speedily and format well-presented documents to promote clear and timely communication, is something that we all do day-to-day in the modern workplace. It is unlikely that your boss or shareholders would ask for your latest report to be handwritten, after all...

In addition, pupils are used to working with technology in their learning, so having access to a computer during exams is likely to make them feel at ease and help them perform to the best of their ability. The use of a computer to type during exams can also make them more accessible to children with different learning needs. In fact, typing on a computer is a common allowance for children with dyslexia and for pupils who may, for other reasons, be unable to write. If typing is right for them, it may be right for everyone.

At Dame Allan's, every pupil has a Chromebook, through which they can research, access assignments, complete their work, and receive feedback. Does it not stand to reason that this familiar environment should be extended to their most important assignments?

Despite being of the pen and paper generation, I'll admit that I can see the merits of moving to a digital exam system. However, I hope that handwriting does not become a lost art. There is still something special about receiving a handwritten thank you note or birthday card, that simply cannot be captured in size 12 Times New Roman.

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

Sources : \*[www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/01/04/gcse-english-exams-handwritten-computers-pearson-edexcel/](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/01/04/gcse-english-exams-handwritten-computers-pearson-edexcel/)

\*\*[www.theguardian.com/education/2023/oct/17/pens-away-laptops-open-pupils-told-to-type-not-write-gcse-exam-answers](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/oct/17/pens-away-laptops-open-pupils-told-to-type-not-write-gcse-exam-answers)



# Trust's pride as two school teams reach the finals in football competitions



Two secondary schools, which are part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, are thrilled to have reached the finals of two English Schools' Football Association (ESFA) competitions.

**The Year 7 girls' football team at St Joseph's Catholic Academy in Hebburn and the under-16 girls' team at St Bede's Catholic School and Byron Sixth Form in Peterlee are both celebrating the fact that they beat the competition to reach the final in their competitions.**

St Joseph's beat South Wolds Academy from South Nottingham in the semi-final 3-0 and will now play Surbiton High School from Kingston on 21st May in the final of the ESFA Girls Under 12 National PlayStation 9-a-side Schools Cup.

More than 230 teams entered the

competition. St Joseph's team included players Aliyah Ahmed, Layla Bailey, Zofia Bean, Amelia Brown, Grace Cooke, Lilly Day, Cerys Dickinson, Evie Harkness, Holly Nicklin, Freya Pritchard, Millie Smith, Autumn Stoker, Maddie Thomas, Lucy Vickers and Lily Wilson.

Millie Smith, who plays left-wing position, said: "I am proud that we got all the way here, it's a big achievement! I am nervous for the final but I believe we can win."

St Joseph's Acting Headteacher Suzanne Lewis-Dale said: "We are delighted with the team's achievement. Our school is fortunate enough to have its own football academy in partnership with a local provider Improtech.

"This success demonstrates the immense talent we have within school. We wish them every success in the final."

The under-16 girls' football team at St Bede's beat Haslingden High School from Rossendale, Blackburn 3-1 in the ESFA Girls U16 Arnold Clark Schools' Cup semi-final.

They will play Fulbrook School from Woking in the final on 7th May at The Bet365 Stadium, the home of Championship club, Stoke City FC.

Year 11 pupil Victoria Chester said: "We can't wait to play in the final! We've played well as a team and worked really hard and we have got our reward. We are all very excited."

They have scored an impressive 34 goals in seven games, whilst only conceding six.

Daisy May Clarke is currently the team's leading goal scorer with nine goals, closely followed by Ellen Marie Atkinson, Eva Mysleyko and Teigan Wilson, who all have eight each.

Headteacher Frances Cessford said: "We are over the moon that the team has reached the final. Our school is fortunate enough to have its own football academy in partnership with a local provider, Improtech. Reaching the final shows what great talent and team spirit our players have. We will all be rooting for them in the final."

The squad comprises Eve Antliff, Ellen Marie Atkinson, Olivia Barkess, Sami Boardman, Victoria Chester, Daisy May Clarke, Neve Clarke, Elise Embleton, Amy Howarth, Millie Hudson, Eva Mysleyko, Molly Smart, Eve Webster and Teigan Wilson.

[bccet.org.uk](http://bccet.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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Inspectorate, 2023



BARNARD CASTLE SCHOOL

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# Whole School Open Morning

Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2024



**Scan** for further details about our 'Excellent' School and to book your place  
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# Newcastle High School for Girls looks to the future with the appointment of Head

Amanda Hardie was appointed as Head of Newcastle High School for Girls (NHSG) in January of this year. She is charged with leading the all through three to 18 school's continued development on behalf of its all-girl pupil community.

**We chat to Amanda about her plans, what makes Newcastle High so special and how girls and women are forging successful careers that are changing the face of society.**

**Three months into your new role, how are you feeling about what lies ahead for you and for NHSG?**

It's an incredibly exciting time. I have inherited a school that is already in a very strong position, with excellent A Level results and a firm place in top school rankings. To now be able to build upon those solid foundations is an absolute honour.

Newcastle High is a truly wonderful community where every girl is celebrated for who she is and empowered to be the best version of herself. A huge part of my role therefore is listening to what's important to the girls, keeping abreast of educational and technological advances that can create increased opportunities for them, and for NHSG broadly, and continually driving innovation in all that we do.

**You have held the roles of Head of Junior School, Senior School Deputy Head of Academic and most recently Acting Head. How has this experience influenced you so far?**

Having in-depth experience of both the Junior and Senior School environment has been invaluable as it allows me to know every girl across school as an individual and to create a more consistent pathway through education for our pupils. Planning the curriculum as part of an all-through educational journey means that every stage builds effectively and seamlessly on the one that went before it.

**Why is an all-girl education so important?**

Research shows that there are many benefits to an all-girl education, not least an improved sense of confidence that makes a huge difference. The Girls' Day School Trust, the family of schools to which Newcastle High belongs, is at the forefront of educational research on this topic, and recent figures show that GDST girls feel more positive about the future, are more comfortable taking risks, and are less likely to avoid certain subjects because of their gender when compared to girls who attend mixed schools. This is why NHSG alumnae are so successful in forging dynamic careers; they are trailblazers in sectors which have been traditionally male dominated.

**The School has recently had an Inspection. What was the outcome?**

The Inspection meant we could demonstrate, and receive endorsement for, all the great work that happens on a daily basis. I was thrilled when the inspectors reported that our teachers are delivering great lessons and that our pupils are inspired to challenge themselves to aim high. It was an affirmation that we are delivering on our vision to empower girls to be the leaders, trailblazers and world shapers of the future.

**How do you encourage interest in STEM subjects at NHSG?**

The first factor to consider is that there is zero room for discouragement. Girls can sometimes feel like imposters in mixed environments where boys might dominate certain subjects and take up more space in the classroom. From the moment girls walk through the doors of NHSG, right from their first steps in nursery, they are encouraged to learn without limits.

We have invested heavily in our core academic offer, with the introduction of Design and Tech into the curriculum. Collaborations with Sunderland and Newcastle Universities have also opened opportunities, as well as industry partnerships including with Nissan and Sage.

**What other opportunities are available for girls at NHSG beyond STEM?**

Whether a girl's passion is for STEM, Languages, Art, Humanities, Literature – the list could go on! – our broad and exciting curriculum provides endless opportunities for girls to challenge themselves, to learn and to grow.

Our school is alive with artists who show incredible creativity and drive, linguists who are inspired by native speakers and provided with opportunities to develop mastery of their chosen languages, actors who hone their craft with expert guidance and who produce the most phenomenal performances and historians who are perceptive in their analysis of the past and who show curiosity and insight. Whatever a girl's passion and interest, we'll take her learning beyond the norm.

**Where do you see the school in five years' time?**

NHSG will be a thriving independent school, and the school of choice for girls in the region, where academic success is a given, where there is exceptional pastoral care, where girls have high aspirations and are inspired by strong female role models and know that nothing is off limits for them in terms of their future career choices.

NHSG will be continually evolving our academic offer, award-winning facilities and impactful external partnerships to deliver a future-facing education for every girl.

**Applications to join the school are open for September 2024 and NHSG's next Open Week is 3rd – 7th June.**

**For more information please visit [www.newcastlehigh.gdst.net](http://www.newcastlehigh.gdst.net)**





*Amanda Hardie*





## Embracing and empowering neurodivergent students

*By Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster of Newcastle Royal Grammar School.*

**As a result of having several members of my own family who are high performing dyslexics, I have been very conscious of the importance of supporting neurodiversity at an academically selective school like the RGS.**

**In the past, such children might get through school by developing strategies that allowed them to mask what they found difficult. Where previously there might have been stigma associated with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) increasingly employers and society as a whole are recognising the value of diverse thinking. These days there is far more in the way of screening to ensure that any needs are identified early and appropriate support is put in place so that those with SEND needs do not just “get by” but instead can really thrive and show what they are fully capable of.**

To that end, a couple of years ago, we

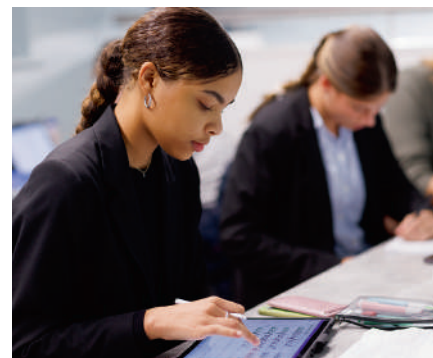
restructured the RGS Learning Support provision, with the appointment of a full time Coordinator (SENDSCO) and this year added an Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) specialist support teacher too. The breadth of challenges that neurodiversity entails, mean that a wide range of reasonable adjustments, both in and out of the classroom, can be made to improve students' experience and learning outcomes. Where in the past, someone might just have qualified for extra time and possibly a scribe or reader in exams, now there is much more focus on ensuring high quality teaching up front, by all classroom teachers. This entails explicit instruction, cognitive and metacognitive strategies, scaffolding, flexible grouping and the use of technology. In many ways this is all pedagogical good practice with beneficial impact for all children, but it can be particularly helpful for those needing SEND support.

The last of these “five a day” elements of high quality teaching is the use of technology and there are many new applications that can have particular benefit for supporting neurodiversity. This is perhaps made easier through the fact that all students at the RGS Senior School benefit from the use of their own Microsoft Surface Pro device. Some students find touch typing far easier than writing, while others prefer dictating through speech recognition software or even using text to voice software to be able to listen, rather than just read text. In parallel, there are significant organisational benefits from using apps such as OneNote to keep everything in one place with a structured filing system that can be accessed both from school and from home, and cannot get lost between the two.

As well as ensuring that neurodiversity is properly supported at the RGS, we also aim

to celebrate different ways of thinking and seeing the world. To that end, each term we organise an extended Senior School assembly usually on a topic related to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and, at the end of last term this took place during 'Neurodiversity Celebration Week'. Our guest speaker, Alex Partridge, was someone who has certainly found strength through his diagnosis of ADHD, though this has not been without its challenges, trips and stumbles along the way. As a founder of LADBible, many of our young people will have been entertained by some of Alex's social media content but, until he spoke, they were not aware of how LADBible became the global success that it is today with a little help of neurodivergence. What was particularly telling was how many of our young people, whether identified as having SEND needs or not, could relate to elements of his story and we ran out of time for him to answer the large number of their questions - always the sign of a successful speaker! This level of engagement provided clear evidence that neurodiversity is very much an accepted and celebrated part of everyday life at the RGS.

[www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk](http://www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk)







## Sunny Day Booked for Gallagher Park Live 24

Now in its seventh year, one of the region's biggest free music festivals Gallagher Park Live is set to entertain the Bedlington crowd with an eclectic mix of tribute bands.

The headline act is yet to be announced but already confirmed are Americana from

the West Coast Band, soul and funk from Discography, nostalgia from 80's Club and the UK's biggest show group, Splash. More acts will be confirmed soon. The event will be compered by Ant Rutherford and will also include craft and community stalls, a fun fair, a youth zone children's activities area, street theatre and food concessions.

Previously, The Gallagher Park Live Festival has become a staple event in recent years, drawing thousands of attendees and featuring acclaimed artists such as Dodgy, Matt Cardle, The Commitments, and Johnny Hates Jazz. Once again, this year, the festival aims to shine the spotlight on exceptional local and regional talent, ensuring that live music remains vibrant in the North East.

The main event is made possible once again through the generous funding provided by East Bedlington Parish Council, along with contributions from Choppington Parish Council towards children's activities on the day. The Parish Council are also encouraging local businesses to get involved by sponsoring various elements of the day. Further details from [clerk@eastbedlingtonpc.org.uk](mailto:clerk@eastbedlingtonpc.org.uk)



## West End star joins cast of Here You Come Again

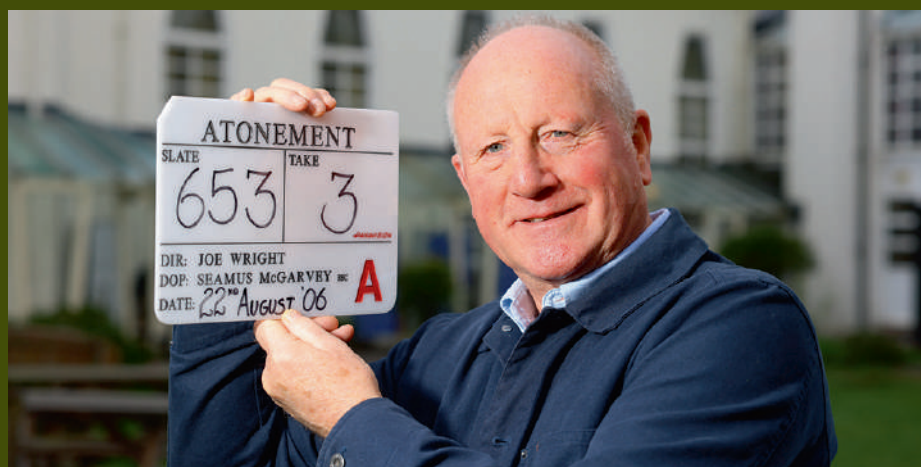
West End star Steven Webb will star as Kevin, a 40-year-old, has-been-who-never-was comedian in *Here You Come Again*, a rollicking and joyful new musical, fully authorised by Dolly Parton herself, when it visits Newcastle Theatre Royal from Tuesday 18th to Saturday 22nd Jun 2024.

Steven Webb began his career 30 years ago as the titular character in Sam Mendes' production of *Oliver!* Since then, he has appeared in a wide range of film, television and theatre. Steven played Elder McKinley in the West End run of *The Book of Mormon*, and his other theatre credits include *The History Boys*; *I Want My Hat Back*; *On the Shore of the Wide World* and *As Is*. He also has many television credits, having previously played roles in the much beloved BBC series *Miranda* and E4's *The Inbetweeners*.

Kevin has just separated from his long-time boyfriend, Jeremy, an investment banker, and is in quarantine in the attic bedroom of his childhood home in Yorkshire. Surrounded by precious belongings from his youth, he is reunited with a much-loved old record player and his cherished Dolly albums.

"I'm beyond excited to be bringing Kevin to life here in the UK. I grew up listening to Dolly and other country music as my dad was a big fan. Twenty years ago, I was in a similar state to Kevin. I was down, a relationship had come clattering to a halt and I felt aimless." Steven Webb says.

"Then Dolly Parton played one night at the Hammersmith Apollo in London. So, I grabbed a ticket and took myself down there. Just like Kevin, I was inspired, galvanised and uplifted by Dolly and her message of love and perseverance. It was practically life changing. And that's why she means so much to so many people."



## Cameraman behind Bond and Harry Potter movies returns to North East roots to inspire budding moviemakers

The cameraman behind one of the greatest historical scenes in 21st century cinema returned to his North East hometown to inspire the next generation of filmmakers.

Award-winning camera operator Peter Robertson, renowned for capturing the famous five-minute-long, single-take Dunkirk scene on Redcar beach for the 2007 film *Atonement*, revisited his former Newcastle school, Dame Allan's, to share insights from

his work on some of the most iconic movies.

With over 38 years' experience in feature film and drama production, including notable contributions to iconic franchises like Harry Potter and James Bond, Peter is well-placed to impart invaluable knowledge and experience from the industry.

Will Scott, Principal at Dame Allan's Schools, said: "As an accomplished camera operator with a remarkable career spanning decades, Peter's visit provided invaluable insights into the film industry."

"We are immensely proud to have nurtured such talent within our school community, and very grateful that Peter took time to return to school and inspire our current cohort of pupils."

# Blagdon Gallery

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# Meet the Artist...

*For this issue it was great to catch up with voice actor*

## Kieran Flitton

*to find how his story has progressed since February 2021.*

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

When I was a bairn, I wanted more than anything to be a sword-swinging knight, or a trap-dodging archaeologist. Big adventurous aspirations that reality couldn't exactly accommodate; not without curbing my expectations significantly. Then, in secondary school, a mate of mine convinced me to pick up Drama with him for a laugh. I never expected to find that all those crazy things I wanted to be as a child existed in there, on the stage, and I could be them. All it took was imagination. Letting go. Expressing. I was hooked on acting immediately. The voice acting followed soon after.

### Tell us about your current role.

This Season I voice the lead protagonist Zagan in the animated series *An Archdemon's Dilemma: How to Love Your Elf Bride*. It's a beautifully charming show focusing on the romance between a sorcerer (my character) and an enslaved elf as they grow together to overcome the traumas of their respective pasts. It's so much fun and requires a wild spectrum of acting, from cool aloofness to off-the-wall melodrama. We actually just wrapped on an amazing show that spanned across the Winter - *Bucchigiri?!?* - in which I got to play a neon-punk martial artist gang leader.

### What is your proudest career achievement so far?

Making the move from the UK to the USA, where I'm currently based! It took a lifetime of dreaming, year's worth of work, and a lot of resources. I had opportunities lined up that made the move possible, but the explosion of roles I've received since arriving has been more validating than I could have ever dared hope.

### What are your biggest challenges?

Building a new life in a different culture has been a big one. The US has been good to me, but it's a different world that has required a fresh start. New identification, new taxes, new everything! Fortunately, the work has been abundant. Time? Less so.

### What are you currently working on?

I have a few amazing shows that are in the recording phase right now but can't yet



announce. I'm incredibly excited to be able to talk about them soon, as they're some pretty thrilling properties. Absolutely blessed by the confidence of some amazing directors out here. Things keep levelling up so fast!

### What are the most enjoyable aspects of your role?

How fresh everything stays! There're always new roles coming in from new shows and new video games and everything is so uniquely different. One month you're portraying a grim, troubled soldier, and the next you're voicing for an eccentric comic relief robot. And the people I work with? It's an endless procession of the most charismatic and interesting people from all walks of life.

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

Don't network. It's not about aggressively selling yourself. It's about being the kind

of person people enjoy working with. Be confident and comfortable with who you are, and don't force things. They'll happen.

### Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

Any and everyone who can ford fame and success and stay down to earth.

### How do you unwind outside of work?

I'm still working on that part! But good friends help ground you in good experience. Take you out of the fast lane for a bit.

### Favourite Book and Boxset?

*Wizard's First Rule* by Terry Goodkind and a toss up between *Band of Brothers* and HBO's *Rome* - because what man isn't obsessed with World War II and the Roman Empire?

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



# North East charities announce training programme to create 'Proud Allies' in the culture and hospitality sectors



Two North East-based charities committed to championing and developing LGBTQIA+ arts, artists, and communities, has re-launched 'Proud Allies', a new training programme to further increase allyship and inclusion for the LGBTQIA+ community in cultural venues, the hospitality sector and in work places across the UK and internationally.

**The 'Proud Allies' training programme, a collaboration between Curious Arts and Northern Pride, uses data and insights combined with an interactive, creative approach to learning. The team has already delivered courses to over 2500 people across the UK and the globe, and the charities hope that the launch of this updated programme will drive noticeable change when it comes to creating warm and welcoming spaces for LGBTQIA+ people.**

Phil Douglas, chief executive of Curious Arts said, "This training is instrumental for venues and organisations looking to empower and educate their teams when it comes to what it means to be an LGBTQIA+ ally. We have delivered our training sessions to high-profile businesses across the region, the wider UK and overseas including Twitch (Amazon), Sky, Museums Galleries Scotland, Crafts Council, New College Durham, Tees Valley Museums, National Youth Choirs of Great Britain, Engage London and Newcastle United FC and we have already started to recruit new members of the training team to fulfil the growing demand."

The training is shaped and presented by a representative team of professionals from

the LGBTQIA+ community who have varied lived experiences, and has been designed to build confidence in creating safe, inclusive, and welcoming environments for LGBTQIA+ people.

Proud Allies is an accessible, informative, and interactive learning experience designed to increase awareness and understanding of intersectional communities, culture, and is a practical way for organisations to invest in their employees and demonstrate their commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion.

The relaunch of the training comes at a challenging time for LGBTQIA+ communities as we witness a rise in anti lgbt sentiment, eroding of rights and increased hate crimes. The training shares the social and political picture of life for LGBTQIA+ people, along with key learning and tools to support teams to be active in their allyship, covering a range of topics, from opening up the basics when it comes to acronyms and inclusive language, exploring how gender identity and expression can empower everyone, whilst also looking to historical milestones and how legislation and activism can impact the creation of safer, more welcoming spaces.

Joanne Mulvihill-Allen, Academic Development Officer at Open College of the Arts (OCA) added, "At the Open College of the Arts we aim to provide a learning and teaching environment in which all members of our community feel safe and respected. The training introduced our learners and staff to the importance of providing positive and inclusive spaces for LGBTQIA+ communities. It was a fantastic opportunity, delivered in a friendly and professional manner which has had an ongoing impact in raising awareness, and increasing confidence around the use of inclusive language, helping us to be more proactive, accessible, and informed."

Kim McGuinness, Northumbria Police, and Crime Commissioner added "The training has been transformational for our organisation, and the team is still talking about it today."

Whilst suitable for all organisations who are committed to championing LGBTQIA+ inclusion, there are added benefits for those working in public-facing roles, front of the house, customer service, marketing, HR, management teams, and board members or trustees. Sessions can be delivered in-person or online, for a small team or an entire company.

**Proud Allies training is available from £1100 +VAT for a course for 16 people, with discounts for block bookings and for qualifying organisations. For more information visit [www.northern-pride.com/training](http://www.northern-pride.com/training) or email [training@npide.org.uk](mailto:training@npide.org.uk)**





Mary Ann Rogers

## The Artist's Year

By Mary Ann Rogers

Among the questions I regularly get asked is 'which is your favourite painting?' This is an easy answer as it is almost always the one I am currently working on.

**The paintings usually are a response to the changing seasons, from the first snowdrops of spring, the sighting of hares in March and April, through lambing time and on until the pinnacle, which for me is the explosion of colour and light in the autumn, followed by the low winter light and bare, windblown trees.**

As I write, I have just completed two hare paintings, and a third one is at an exciting point on my drawing board. This leads me directly into another frequently asked question, which is about so-called painter's block, or 'do I ever find myself stuck?'. I have never really experienced this, and I have a few tactics to ensure that whenever I return to my painting area, it is with enthusiasm and excitement.

One tip, which I share with budding artists, is to always leave a painting at a point which will be fun to come







back to, rather than a blank sheet of paper. Stepping away from a painting when the next step is clear and won't be too challenging is the key. If one steps away at a tricky point, it will be a daunting proposition to return to it.

Another secret I am willing to share is to work on more than one painting at a time. This particularly applies to watercolour, where the drying process is extremely important. Rather than sit twiddling my thumbs, waiting for a painting to dry before moving onto the next step, it makes sense to continue the theme, develop the idea and use the colour palette which is already mixed.

Watercolour is a quite magical medium, and some of the most beautiful parts of a painting are where the paint, water and pigment have found their own way, creating quite unexpected alchemy.

Here in the gallery, visitors are coming out of hibernation and enjoying getting out and about. We are situated right on the edge of Northumberland National Park, with its spectacular countryside, just four miles from Bellingham, the historic market town, set on the bank of the North Tyne. The walk up Hareshaw Linn, from Bellingham, is famous for its waterfalls, culminating in one breathtaking waterfall where I plan to take a dip later this year.

The trend for shipping paintings overseas continues, with one off to a fashion designer in Denmark and another to California just this week. A visit from a well known writer/producer with her lovely daughter from the US this month, as part of a bespoke tour of the UK, was very exciting. It was an honour to be part of her visit to the UK, and to have one of my paintings hanging on her wall.

As the lakes and rivers warm up, plans for some swim/hike trips are underway. It would be hard to beat the incredible 'end-to-end' swim of Westwater two summers ago, or the 'Tadpole Graham' swims across Crummock Water then Buttermere last year, but training is well underway, and we are enjoying studying maps and reading up on new routes.

**Mary Ann Rogers Gallery • West Woodburn, Hexham NE48 2SE.**

**Open: Tues, Thurs, Fri 10-4 also Sun 2-5**

**• [www.marogers.com](http://www.marogers.com) • 07967550772**





# One Happy Member

Affectionately referred to as the 'West End of the North East' Sunderland Empire has been a beacon entertainment throughout its 117 year history.

In more recent years membership of the popular 1907 Corporate Club has grown rapidly.

Northern Insight spoke to Louise Bradford, managing director at Creo Comms about the benefits her company enjoys and the importance of the theatre to the local economy.

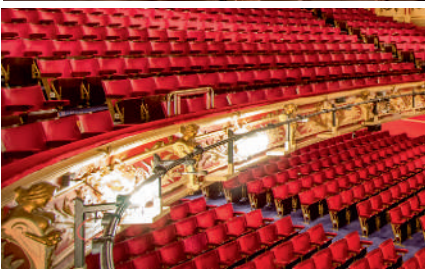


Louise Bradford

## What attracted you to becoming a member of the 1907 corporate club?

The Empire is just a short walk from our Sunderland office so the corporate club provides the opportunity for us to entertain clients in an amazing venue that is right on our doorstep.

The tickets are also a great opportunity for members of the Creo team to enjoy a brilliant night out, while at the same time supporting our local economy.



## What benefits do you receive with membership?

The Empire is a breath-taking venue that attracts world-class shows all year round, so one of the big benefits is that we know there's the opportunity to host clients at somewhere that is high-quality and a little bit different.

From a staff point of view, it gives us the chance to treat the team to something special, with fantastic seats at shows that they otherwise might not get chance to see.

## Has membership been well received by your staff and clients?

It's proved hugely popular. The hardest part was narrowing down what we wanted to use our allocation for! One of the great things about Sunderland Empire is the variety of shows in its programme. This means it's easy to find something for everyone and you can cater to a range of interests.



## What have been your show highlights so far?

I'd have to say Disney's Aladdin has been the highlight. Those who attended had a magical time and it was an absolutely spectacular show. On top of that, the hospitality was great, with a variety of complimentary drinks before and during the show and the chance to grab a programme to read after the show.

## What are you looking forward to in the remainder of the year?

I'm particularly looking forward to Pretty Woman in June! But, in general we're looking forward to taking part in more of the events being put on as part of the corporate club and also continuing to provide the opportunity for staff, clients and partners to attend world-class shows in our brilliant home-city.

## Have you engaged with the Empire's creative learning department?

Sunderland Empire's creative learning team do amazing work, using the power of theatre for social good and allowing all members of the public the opportunity to experience the benefits it can offer. It's great that the Trust continues to support this initiative and opens the door for so many local people.

## Describe how important the Sunderland Empire is to the local business community?

The theatre is hugely important to the local economy. It attracts over 300,000 visitors every year, it brings in people who then go on to spend money in local shops, bars and restaurants, and may well return to visit another event or attraction in the city. The accumulative effect of that is massive, it helps sustain and create jobs in the city.

[creocomms.co.uk](http://creocomms.co.uk)  
[atgtix.co/sunderlandcorporate](http://atgtix.co/sunderlandcorporate)





John Donoghue

## A Bonsai Tree called Geoff

Tales from a bobby on the beat.

**With a bit of luck, most of you reading this will only have had any sort of official contact with a police officer when you needed some help or were being told that a road was closed off.**

However, we're all aware of how difficult the role of the Constabulary can be. Thankfully, there are lighter moments...and you can read about some hilarious examples from the books written by John Donoghue.

That's PC John Donoghue to you and me, whose introduction in the blurb on the back of his latest book gives us an indication of things to come:

Am I the best cop on the streets?...No.

But do I put in 100% effort to every incident I attend?...Also No.

What I do is write about the funny, unusual, or bizarre incidents I go to.

The book, *A Bonsai Tree Called Geoff*, has the sub-title 'Police Stories I Probably Shouldn't Share'...and we begin to see why as we are regaled with tales of him arresting a bride at her wedding, an Aztec-style sacrifice, a

naked dog thief, an accidental kidnapping, subversion in the ranks, disappointing a nun...and more.

If you think that policing is much the same as you see on the telly...forget it. But if you want a glimpse behind the scenes to see what policing is REALLY like, this is for you.

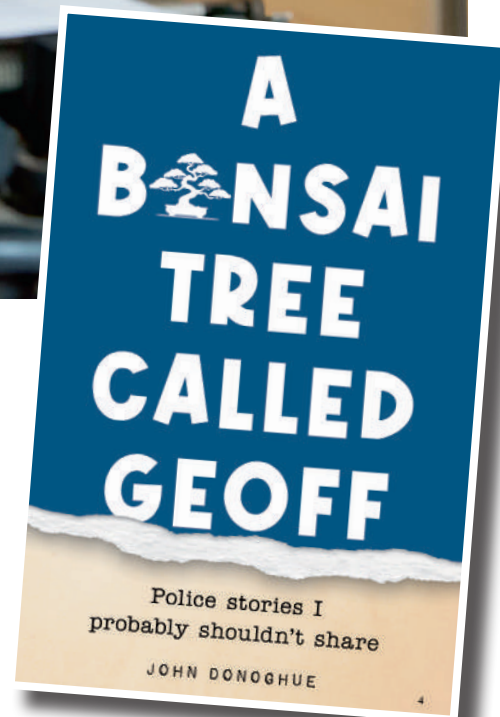
John has spent over 40 years serving Queen, King and Country, in both the Royal Navy and British Army before joining Durham Constabulary. He retired recently on April 1st which, bearing in mind that his books are filled with humour and irony, seems appropriate.

"I thought I'd seen everything when I was in the military," he tells us. "But when I joined the police, I realised it was a whole new world I'd stumbled upon..."

He paints such wonderfully vivid pictures with his writing that you feel that you're actually on patrol with him.

"For most people, life is a mixture of amazing, breathtaking, brilliant, horrifying, dangerous, frightening and rewarding experiences," says John. "But in the police, you can experience all of those in just one day."

"I've been to murders, countless deaths and horrendous incidents," he tells us, "but the flipside to the job is the strange calls we go to. One woman was moaning that bees from a neighbour were stealing pollen from her flowers, whilst another complained about a woman in the park who hid a cat under



her jumper and was pretending she was pregnant with a very angry baby...none of them actual crimes at all!"

My worst task though followed an arrest of a prolific shoplifter. On Christmas Eve I was sent to his house to retrieve the stolen goods, but they were now under the Christmas tree...fully wrapped. I had to unwrap all of the presents in front of the sobbing children to discover which were genuine and which were stolen. And then go back to take the lights off the Christmas tree!"

Reading about crime really shouldn't be so much fun...get ready for plenty of laugh-out-loud moments!

**All of John's books are available from Amazon, with *A Bonsai Tree Called Geoff* released on 1st May.**





## SIX Rooftop awarded two AA Rosettes

Following on from its recent awards successes, SIX Rooftop by Pneuma Hospitality Group, has been awarded two red rosettes by the AA for culinary excellence.

AA Red Rosette awards are only presented to restaurants that are achieving standards that stand out in their local area. These are restaurants that are serving food prepared with care, understanding and skill, using good quality ingredients, enabling diners to make informed decisions about where to eat.

It's plain to see that the simple seasonal food philosophy of both Pneuma Hospitality's Food Director Greg Lambert and Six Rooftop's head chef, Alex Walker, has paid dividends at the Gateshead restaurant. When it comes to his food, Alex is determined to serve fresh local produce, deliver the highest quality possible, and to keep his dishes innovative and exciting.

Six Rooftop's Head Chef Alex Walker and Pneuma's Food Director Greg Lambert remarked: "We're both hugely delighted for the whole team at Six Rooftop. This is a very proud moment for us all and what is the start of a long and rewarding journey for the whole team. We know that we need to continue to push to progress to where we want to be in the future."



## It's back – Save the date for The Hoppings 24

The Hoppings will take up residence on the Town Moor, Newcastle – for the 142nd time – for ten days from Friday 21 to Sunday 30 June. And organisers have promised more than 400 rides and attractions as well as a packed programme of live music and kids' club shows – including the first appearance of the only XXL white knuckle ride in the UK.

The ride – the ultimate experience for thrill seekers – has a G force pendulum and swings up to a height of 47m.

Classic favourites such as Magic Mouse Rollercoaster, the Ghost Train, Dodgems and Fun House will take up residence alongside white-knuckle experiences such as Tagada, Extreme, and Star Flyer. Other top experiences include Reverse Bungee, for those with the ability to stand being catapulted 150 feet up in the air and encounter 4.8 G force, and the chilling Ice Jet which is a turbo charged version of a Waltzer.

A dedicated Kids' Club will keep younger visitors fully entertained with magic shows and appearances from some of their favourite characters.



## Tango launch delicious Sunday Burger

Often cited as the top two favourite meals in the UK are the Sunday roast & proper burgers. Imagine bringing the two together to make the ultimate, mouth watering meal!

You no longer need to imagine as Tango in Durham have created: The Sunday Burger.

It consists of a beef and pork stuffing patty sandwiched within a Yorkshire Pudding bun, accompanied by cheesy potato spread, parsnip strings and Tango's locally famous 'proper thick' gravy. Served with garlic and herb tossed fries. Only available Sunday from 11:30am until 9:30pm.

The word is out in Durham & it's already an Instagram hit! People are travelling to try out this new creation!

Get down to Tango on Saddler Street, Durham to try out The Sunday Burger (Sundays ONLY) Limited availability so the team are advising customers to get in early to avoid disappointment.

Insta: @tangodurham

## Sunderland Restaurant Week turns into an economic feast

The opportunity to dine out at a bargain price has proved too tempting to resist, leading to another highly successful Sunderland Restaurant Week.

The week-long event ended on Sunday 24th March with more than 21,500 diners taking advantage of the special deals at dozens of restaurants, cafes and bars around the city. And according to organisers, Sunderland BID, that has led to a tasty estimated economic impact of £646,440.

The three most popular venues were: Rumour Has It at Green Terrace, House of Zen at Seaburn and Asiana, based at the Echo 24 building. Ian Wong, owner of Asiana which has just undergone a major refurbishment prior to Sunderland Restaurant Week, said it had once again been a huge success.

"This can be traditionally a quiet time of year – after Mother's Day and in the run-up to Easter – so restaurant week is a real boost," he said. "It was another really successful event and we were delighted to welcome so many diners into Asiana, many of whom were getting



their first opportunity to see its new look."

Sharon Appleby, Chief Executive of Sunderland BID, said that restaurant week continued to make a huge impact.

"We have so many great places to eat and so many new restaurants and bars opening that it's fantastic to be able to give people from the city and beyond the opportunity to try them," she said.



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## Danu Studios nomination spotlights excellence in skincare

Danu Studios are proud to announce they have been shortlisted as finalists for two of the most prestigious industry awards in the UK, demonstrating their continued excellence and growing reputation in the beauty sector.

**Led by owner Lucy Adair, who brings over 25 years of experience and a deep passion for beauty, and studio manager Kerri Stephenson, with an impressive 20-year history of managing leading businesses, they form a powerhouse team.**

Danu Studios is a boutique skincare clinic located in Hoult's Yard, Newcastle. Danu prides itself on providing bespoke, tailored facials and skincare regimes for clients. Under the leadership of Lucy and Kerri, Danu Studios has gone from strength to strength. Through their commitment to hiring fully qualified staff, investing in

the latest equipment, and prioritising an exceptional client experience, they have established themselves as one of the top salons in the area. It is this dedication to constant improvement that has seen them reach the lofty heights of being nominated for multiple award categories.

Danu Studios is a finalist for 'Skin Specialist of the Year 2024' from the British Hair and Beauty Awards. Having previously won this prestigious title in 2023, it is clear their skin treatments are among the best available. Clients consistently see real results from customised programs designed

by the talented therapists. Kerri's expert management has no doubt supported this continued success.

They have also been shortlisted as a finalist for 'Best Team of the Year' by The Official UK Hair and Beauty Awards. This nomination recognizes the unparalleled efforts of Danu Studios' entire staff to deliver a world-class client experience. Under Kerri's thoughtful leadership and with Lucy's enduring passion, the whole team functions seamlessly.

On top of these nominations, Danu Studios awaits the results for 'Salon of the Year'. Having won awards previously, the category highlights the overall excellence achieved at their salon.

These finalist placements serve as a testament to Lucy, Kerri and their team's ongoing dedication, innovation, and unwavering pursuit of quality. There is no doubt that with their proven track record, Danu Studios will continue gracing award shortlists and bringing home awards for many years to come.

**Visit their website at [danustudios.uk](https://danustudios.uk) or alternatively contact [info@danustudios.uk](mailto:info@danustudios.uk) for information about booking and prices.**



“

*...We aim to ensure  
that every visit  
to our restaurant  
is an enjoyable  
experience...*

Monie Hussain



# Fine dining finds favour with award judges

A Wearside restaurant has proved to be a prince amongst men when it comes to fine dining, Indian style...

**Authentic dishes, stylish surroundings and superb service are just some of the ingredients that helped secure Sunderland restaurant Yuvraaj its latest award.**

The family run business – in an elegant detached, Victorian villa on Douro Terrace, Ashbrooke – is no stranger to accolades, having been voted Sunderland Curry house of the Year three times.

And now it has received national recognition, having seen off competition from across the UK to be named Fine Dining Restaurant of the Year at the Nation's Curry Awards.

Yuvraaj, at Douro Terrace, took first place at the prestigious event held in Manchester, impressing judges with its extensive menu, which artfully marries classic, Indian cuisine with contemporary flourishes.

Its carefully curated menu includes meat and vegetarian dishes along with an unusually large seafood section with delicacies such as crab piri puri – shredded crab meat and spring onion suffused with spices – and Golda chingree baza, in which king prawns are marinated in spices and citrus before being wrapped in spinach, lightly battered and deep fried.

The menu also offers a range of Bengali specials and signature dishes, including Lucknow Gusth – lean pieces of lamb cooked in a tomato and tamarind sauce – and Hariali; a green curry of chicken with garlic, chilli, ginger, apples, cream and spinach.

And for those who prefer to stick to their tried and tested favourites when enjoying a night out at an Indian restaurant, there are tikka dishes along with a variety of curries in a wide range of strengths – from creamy mehthi, kurma and Malayan to spicy Singapore, Madras and vindaloo – along with popular sides, rice dishes and naan breads.



The extensive menu – which also includes duck, fish, balti and tandoori dishes – has made the restaurant a popular choice since it opened – due in no small part to the excellence of its team of chefs which boasts a combined 80 years' experience.

Key to the family-run restaurant's success is a commitment to using only the freshest ingredients – locally sourced where possible – and presenting dishes with a flair and creativity.

Yuvraaj means Indian prince and owner, Monie Hussain, said the name perfectly reflects the restaurant's ethos that the food it serves must be fit for royalty – because that is how he views their customers.

"We aim to ensure that every visit to our restaurant is an enjoyable experience," he said, "and we take every care to ensure that our food, service and environment are perfect.

"Although our dishes are traditional Indian recipes for the main part, we love to experiment with ingredients and take influences from Bangladesh to create contemporary western fusion dishes that tantalise and excite the tastebuds and are pleasing to the eye."

Customer feedback is also highly important to Monie and the rest of the Yuvraaj family – each of whom is delighted to have won this latest and most nationally prestigious award.

"We couldn't believe it when they said we had won," said Monie.

"It not only reflects on the restaurant but on Sunderland as a whole and that we really have some amazing places to eat in the city."

**For further information visit  
[www.yuvraajrestaurant.co.uk](http://www.yuvraajrestaurant.co.uk)**







## Awards success for The Inn Collection Group

The Inn Collection Group are celebrating after a trio of its inns have been named the best pubs in their counties by the respected on-trade title Pub & Bar Magazine, as part of the 2024 annual awards programme.

**The Bull's Head Inn, The Harrogate Inn and The Swan Grasmere have been named as the best pubs in Gwynedd, North Yorkshire and Cumbria respectively after being entered into the judging process by the Newcastle-based Pubco.**

Entering its sixth year, The National Pub & Bar Awards celebrates the very best venues, people and service standards across the modern on-trade.

Receiving a record number of entries for 2024, the internal judging panel of the magazine have considered everything from perfect service and product range to aesthetic design and entertainment schedules.

Awarding Pub of the Year titles in each county of the UK, the winners will now go on to the National Pub & Bar Awards in London this June, where 15 regional winners and an overall champion will be revealed at a glamorous, cinematic-style awards ceremony.

Bought by the group in November 2022,

Beaumaris' The Bull's Head Inn dates to the 15th century and retains all the character it has acquired over the last 550 years.

From its listed bar decorated with an array of memorabilia including antique weaponry and reputedly the town's original ducking stool to a newly renovated lounge, The Bull boasts plenty of comfy spots all get cosy by open log fires.

Popular with both locals and visitors, the bar has earned a widespread reputation for excellent hand-drawn real ale and for regular live music.

General manager Paul Garth said: "The Bull is a well-established part of Beaumaris and we're delighted to be named the best pub in Gwynedd.

"We are proud to be a pub that is as much for its locals as for visitors and we have our regulars like the Bass Boys who are here with us every week.

"It's great news for The Inn Collection Group and we're enjoying being part of such a good company. We have already seen investment with our new lounge and six new guest rooms and we're looking forward to going from strength to strength."

Opening after a multi-million-pound renovation in July 2023, The Harrogate Inn and more specifically Barking George has quickly established itself as a destination venue in the North Yorkshire spa town.

With opulent, Instagram-able surroundings, there is a sense of grandeur far removed from Barking George's previous incarnation whilst its new outdoor terrace is the perfect spot from which to look out onto the hustle and bustle of Crescent Gardens.

With a well-stocked bar serving a wide range of drinks including an extensive cocktail menu, Barking George's Friday Night live music offering proves a particularly popular starting point for revellers.

General manager Henry White said: "We're

naturally delighted to have picked up the award for North Yorkshire. To be named best in a county where there is some serious competition is humbling.

"Since opening in July, it has been great to see the bar establish itself and the team settle into providing a welcoming place for people to come and we're looking forward to our first full summer this year."

The Swan, Grasmere completes the trinity of winners for The Inn Collection Group and has enjoyed an impressive 12 months after reopening following refurbishment back in April 2023.

Proving as popular for food and drinks as a place to stay since reverting to a traditional coaching inn-style venue, The Swan served more than 41,000 meals in the last 12 months and a staggering 14,000 pints of Madri.

It has also been striving to make a difference in its local community, donating £4000 to good causes in the Lakeland village.

General manager Nellie Buxton-Brown said: "It has been quite a week for The Swan, celebrating our first year back and now finding out that we've been named the best pub in Cumbria.

"It is quite an accolade to be recognised by Pub & Bar Magazine and we will be proudly wearing our winner's badge and working hard to keep the standards that have seen us get that award."

Tristan O'Hana, editor of Pub and Bar magazine: "These pubs represent all that is great about the modern on-trade. You can only imagine the fantastic variety of operations we have discovered through the judging process – it's been an absolute pleasure to investigate just how all of these incredible operators run their businesses... What's great about the Awards is that all the attendees of the Grand Final are already winners – they're the best in their county."

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



# Places to go...Sheffield

There's a new musical in London's West End called "Standing at the Sky's Edge" playing to packed houses. The songs and music were composed by Richard Hawley, Sheffield's well-known singer-songwriter (remember "Tonight the Streets are Ours"?), and is set in the Park Hill municipal housing project towering over the railway station.



**Surprisingly you can't see the flats from the station platforms – the hill is in the way – but it's a massive development with 995 flats and maisonettes originally built 1957-61 and, after a period of decay, it is being redeveloped by Urban Splash.**

I have passed through Sheffield many times but had never visited its Cathedral, its independent shopping sector on Division Street, and loads of really interesting Victorian buildings, including a ruined castellated Salvation Army Citadel which must surely be a candidate for redevelopment. No shortage of coffee shops and arts venues, and plenty of vintage shops, and six free museums. Sheffield Supertram was run for many years by Stagecoach, but has recently been transferred to public ownership with an introductory fares reduction.

My main objective was the Kelham Island Museum which is on the north side of the City, accessed from the Shalesmoor tram stop. The tram runs alongside the east side of the railway station and is easy to use with conductors selling tickets on the tram, avoiding the need to navigate unfamiliar ticketing machines. I bought an all day ticket for £4.90 to have a ride through the City when I had enough walking. Trams are frequent and comfortable and have often priority over other traffic even though the routes are hardly in a straight line. A police incident prevented me from using the tram-train along the railway tracks to Rotherham,

Set in the Don Valley, which was badly flooded in, the Kelham Island Museum is free to enter, and has information about the products of the city from ancient times through the Industrial Revolution and to the present, where the finest tools and particularly cutlery are produced. There's Britain's biggest stationary steam engine, with four giant cylinders and a giant flywheel, and exhibitions on the various types of steel-making, and I particularly appreciated the giant versions of tools and trowels made for promoting various brands at trade shows.

The photograph shows, from above, part of the archive store which is not open to the public, and the little car in the picture was moved there during my visit. Also on display is the natty blue Richardson car from the 1920s, Sheffield's answer to the Model T. I explored the Neepsend on foot before returning to town for a late lunch at the Turtle Bay restaurant with its heady mix of coconut, pineapple and jerk chicken.

After Evening Prayer at the Cathedral, I walked up to Park Hill flats, part refurbished and some still abandoned. There is a whole block for student accommodation, and I found the local pub, The Pearl, which is the first brutalist pub I have been in: uneven concrete floors, plain unadorned grey walls, though with comfortable seating and the gall to charge me £6.50 for a pint of Neck Oil. I'm used to that in London, but it was a bit of a shock in Sheffield.

I made sure I was back down the hill at Sheffield's Midland Station for

the 2029 direct to Durham, and had already booked in advance with a "Seatfrog" upgrade to first class costing me £12 (including the £3 platform fee, whatever that is). First class was virtually empty hence the cheap upgrades, and there was only one other passenger aboard when we arrived in Durham on time at 2200.

[alexnelson@nationalrail.com](mailto:alexnelson@nationalrail.com), [www.nationalrail.com](http://www.nationalrail.com)

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## Silk Route Spirits - The Pursuit of Excellence

Why London Dry Gin? We are often asked why we call our gin 'London Dry Gin' when it is made in Newcastle?

Well, the answer is that 'London Dry Gin' is a process and not a place and refers to the highest quality standard when making traditional gin.

**When applied to gin, you need to understand the history of gin making as this standard mark can be compared to the 'Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée' of French wines or the 'Reinheitsgebot' Purity Laws applied to the making of the highest quality German beer.**

To explain the history, gin began its life as a medicinal liquor in the 11th century when it was made by monks across Europe and particularly Southern Italy and Flanders. Gin became popular in England after the introduction of Jenniver, a medicinal drink imported from Holland and Belgium. Its popularity grew in England after 1688 with the 'Glorious Revolution' led by William of Orange and the restrictions placed on the import of French brandy by the Crown.

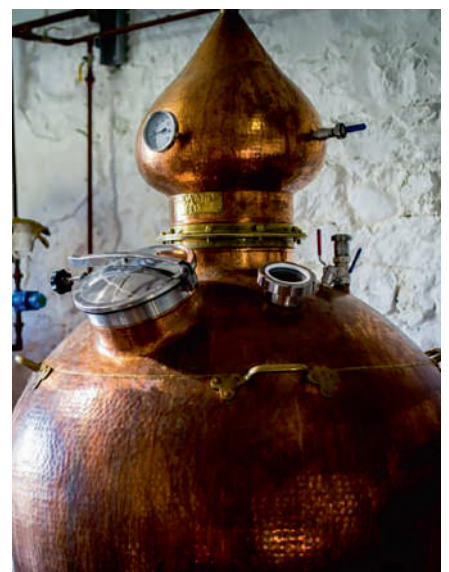
During the 18th Century gin became particularly popular when the government allowed unlicensed gin production and again imposed heavy duty on imported spirits. As a result, between 1695 and 1735 thousands of gin shops grew up across England in what was known as the 'Gin Craze'. The quality and flavour of the gin produced was often very poor and was masked by the addition of sugar or other flavourings and was often hazardous to health. As a result, gin was portrayed as the scourge of the working class and was famously portrayed by Holbein in his etching of 'Gin Lane'.



The invention of the 'Column Still' in 1826 enabled the distillation of pure natural spirits and the creation of 'London Dry Gin' which is a process that ensures the highest quality distilled spirit.

To meet the standards of a 'London Dry Gin' we start with the purest alcohol with an initial strength of at least 96% ABV, ensure a predominant flavour from natural juniper berries, guarantee that no artificial ingredients are included in our gin, and we add nothing after distillation other than the purist spring water to achieve the required alcohol strength.

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# Meet the GM...

Northern Insight talks to...

## Andrew Shiel-Redfern

*General Manager, Hotel du Vin, Newcastle.*

### Describe your career path so far.

I got a job working in a hotel when I was 18 and loved the varied role of the work. Every week was different and I loved giving service to guests. This led me to pursue a degree in International Hospitality Management at the University of Central Lancashire which included a year placement in Hong Kong. When I graduated I went to Bahrain in the Middle East to work. Sadly when we went to war with Iraq I came home and pursued a career in the UK including 11 years with Pitcher and Piano and opening the Botanist in Newcastle. Hotel du Vin is my first Hotel management role where I have been here for nearly five years now.

### What do you most enjoy about your current role?

I enjoy leading a team and looking after staff and guests. You can really be a supportive person and make someone's day through a passion for hospitality and peoples wellbeing. Every day is different and that provides some challenges but for the most part keeps the role really exciting.

### Tell us about your team.

We are a small hotel and don't outsource any roles. We share a couple of roles with Malmaison but otherwise the team is a very solid and reliable group of people. We have won best staff retention for Malmaison and Hotel du Vin (36 hotels) for the past two years. I am very proud of the hotel but more so the team.

### What are the unique features of Hotel du Vin?

We have 42 bedrooms and a beautiful Bistro with an AA Rosette. I think we stand out as providing excellent service in a beautiful hotel setting. We are the number one hotel on Tripadvisor for Newcastle so the feedback means everything to me. We have some beautiful rooms and have a room called Mouton Rothschild which has stunning views down the river. It's a beautiful use of an old building.

### What are you currently working on?

We have just launched a new menu on the



Andrew Shiel-Redfern

17th April so a lot of work has gone into that and we are seeing the rewards of some beautifully crafted homemade food.

### How does the hotel engage with the local community and support local businesses?

We work closely with the Ouseburn trust and also the NU Foundation. I think having great local relationships is very important with the community. I know we are a big company but the people who make the hotel tick are all local people. It's important for myself but also the team and guests to see we support local where we can.

### What recommendations would you give for making the most from a stay at the Hotel?

I think aim to just stay in the hotel and explore the local area. There are some fantastic restaurants and places right on our doorstep whether it be the Ouseburn or the Quayside. A stay at the hotel doesn't have to mean Newcastle it can be much more intimate than that. You also don't need to leave the building. We have a beautiful terrace, wonderful cocktails and a fantastic Bistro. You can really come and totally relax for 24 hours without leaving the hotel.

### What is your biggest challenge currently?

The biggest challenge is probably the same for everyone. Our pockets are being squeezed and the cost of living is affecting us all. It's important we look after our teams who in turn will look after the guests. It's important we continue to be the best we can be at the hotel making memorable experiences.

### What is the best advice you could give to anyone looking to work in the hotel industry?

Reach out to me if you have any questions. It's a wonderful industry and you can go from washing dishes at 16 to being a General Manager through hard work and belief. I will always try and support those interested in a career in hospitality. It's taken me all over the world and I am very grateful.

### How do you like to unwind?

My five year old keeps me busy and I love being a family with my lovely wife, Holly. I also love running. Getting lost on big runs really resets me and brings me a lot of enjoyment as does a nice glass of wine!

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



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Dancing fountain

## Exploring Los Angeles on public transport

Barriers block access along South Grand Avenue. A uniformed security guard, who I initially mistake for a cop, explains that a commercial is being filmed on the street. It's a common occurrence around he adds before wishing me a great stay in Los Angeles.

**I'm exploring the city's Downtown district. The seven-hour time difference between Newcastle and LA was a factor in me waking early on my first morning in the USA. Seizing the day, I started out from my room at the citizenM hotel long before fellow guests headed to the lobby for breakfast.**

California is renowned for its golden sunshine but today clouds brood low over the City of Angels. Consequently, the spectacular metallic façade of the Walt Disney Concert Hall has something of a coppery tone. Designed by Frank Gehry, the iconic building is famed for its acoustics and is one of the cluster of performing arts institutions forming The Music Center.



Walt Disney Concert Hall in LA



Arch in Los Angeles' Union Station

Drizzle prompts me to head inside The Broad, a free-to-visit contemporary art museum whose extensive collection includes Jeff Koons' engaging *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* sculpture plus provocative works by Barbara Kruger and Andy Warhol. I'm inspired to cross the road to view yet more artworks at one of the Museum of Contemporary Art's venues in Los Angeles – the institution's MOCA acronym reminds me to take a coffee break.

From the steps of Gloria Molina Grand Park I gaze towards LA's City Hall. The towering Art Deco building dates from 1928. During working hours on weekdays, the free-to-visit observation deck on the 27th floor of the world's tallest base-isolated structure – a building technique designed to provide stability during earthquakes – is highly recommended by Angelenos for views over their city.

At Civic Center Station I buy a TAP card to use LA's public transport system. Costing \$1.75 (£1.40) a ride, the network offers a value-for-money alternative to getting around by taxi. I disembark just one Metro stop along the line at Union Station, whose mishmash of architectural styles has been dubbed 'Mission Moderne'. Divided by grand arches, the high-ceilinged waiting room and ticket hall impress me with their calm elegance as I recall scenes from the movies *Blade Runner* and *Catch Me If You Can*, for which it served as sets.

El Pueblo, across the street from Union Station, is the oldest part of LA. In 1781, 44 settlers established the farming community that has evolved into one of the USA's largest and most populous cities. They trekked well over 1,000 miles along a historic route today known as the Old Spanish Trail.

I've walked just a tiny fraction of that but



Fresh Sushi



Frank Sinatra star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame

welcome resting my weary legs during the 35-minute journey west to Hollywood on the number four bus. Following the Hollywood Walk of Fame, I view the stars bearing names of famous entertainers embedded into the pavement. On a distant hillside, the Hollywood sign is familiar – despite me laying eyes on it for the first time.

A further bus ride drops me by the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures, whose insightful *The Art of Moviemaking: The Godfather* exhibition runs until 5 January 2025. The film was nominated for 11 Academy Awards in 1973 and won three. I get my hands on one of the golden statuettes by booking the *Oscars Experience*, which costs \$15 on top of the \$25 museum entry fee, and receive a short video of myself lifting the award with a soundtrack of cheering and applause.

Reality is reintroduced by taking a bus, rather than a luxury limousine, towards Little Tokyo for takeout sushi before bed. Tomorrow more Hollywood magic awaits during a Warner Bros. Studio Tour.



Outside Union Station in LA

### TRAVEL INFORMATION

The [discoverlosangeles.com](https://discoverlosangeles.com) website has information about things to do, food and drink as well as accommodation in Los Angeles.

British Airways ([britishairways.com](https://britishairways.com)) flies from Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) from London Heathrow. KLM ([klm.co.uk](https://klm.co.uk)) offers direct flights to LAX from its Amsterdam Schiphol hub.





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parsnip strings, proper thick gravy, and it's even topped  
with a Yorkshire pudding, served with garlic & herb  
tossed proper fries. **Happy Sundays ;)**

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## Time to try Tayu

*Jackie Marston visited the newly-opened Tayu, on 168 Kells Road in Gateshead.*

A new Thai-inspired restaurant housed within the former premises of Porky's on the High Street. Stepping inside, you're greeted with a beautiful, bright decor that instantly sets a welcoming tone. The staff exude friendliness, adding to the inviting atmosphere.

**One of the standout moments of my visit was the captivating Welcome Lion Dance, a delightful touch that immediately immersed me in the restaurant's ambiance. To complement the lively performance, I opted for a Spicy Margarita which, true to its name, packed a punch and left me thoroughly impressed and a little short of breath, if I'm honest!**

Moving on to the culinary delights, the dim sum offered an authentic taste experience, while the spicy salt and chilli prawns were a juicy revelation, bursting with flavour. Our server, Nathan, proved to be an invaluable guide through the menu, showcasing his knowledge and passion for the cuisine.

The mains did not disappoint either. The Cantonese beef was tender and bursting with flavour, a testament to the chef's skill. Equally impressive was the crispy pork belly, which boasted a perfect balance of textures; soft on the inside with crackling that delivered a satisfying crunch with every bite.

Despite the high quality of the dishes, the bill presented excellent value for money. For two drinks, a side order of edamame beans and two courses each, the total came to a reasonable £70, a testament to Tayu's commitment to providing not only exceptional dining experiences but also value for their patrons' money.

In conclusion, Tayu in Low Fell is a gem of a restaurant, offering a delightful fusion of Thai-inspired cuisine in a welcoming setting. It's a far cry from the Porky's restaurant it once was, but a definite improvement.

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







## Changing Minds with Pick up a Penny second Annual Ball

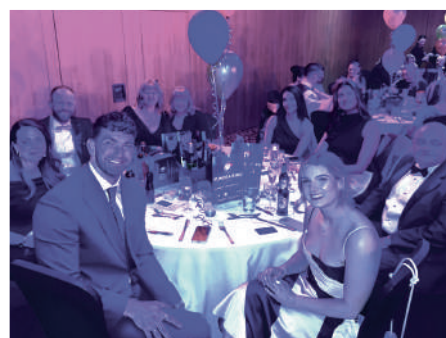
Changing Minds with Pick Up a Penny, a North East Community Interest Company dedicated to providing individualised mental and physiological health and therapeutic services recently held their second Annual Fundraising Black Tie Ball at the Grand Hotel, Gosforth Park, Newcastle.

Leading the charge is psychotherapist Sara Young, along with her dedicated team, who specialise in pioneering therapies aimed at supporting mental and physiological health. Sara, whose passion lies in supporting individuals of all ages, particularly children and young people, founded Changing Minds with Pick Up a Penny in Forest Hall, North Tyneside, to provide comprehensive support for long-term recovery.

Main sponsor of the ball is GAP Group NE, with supporting businesses; Blueline Taxis, The Grand Hotel, Gosforth, Pride Radio, and JAM Marketing Limited.

Sara's vision extends to establishing a network of mental and physiological health centres offering innovative and timely therapies, with plans underway for the first centre in the North East.

**For those interested in supporting this noble cause, contact Sara - [info@changingmindswithpickupapenny.co.uk](mailto:info@changingmindswithpickupapenny.co.uk)**







## HOBBS: The Workwear Edit

Home of timeless British style, Hobbs is the perfect place to begin to curate a classic, contemporary workwear wardrobe. And when better than Spring to start building your forever wardrobe with our season-spanning staples?

**Versatility is the keyword - we need our clothes to work harder than ever before to provide multi-tasking garments that offer quality, sustainability, value for money and multiple styling options.**

### Classic Suiting

Begin with trans-seasonal core pieces such as our machine-washable, mix-and-match ranges including classic jackets, shift dresses, pencil skirts and tapered or wide-leg trousers, to build a versatile capsule wardrobe - Charley in black, with Mel, Mia, and Stevie designs in very wearable navy. Pair for work with simple clean lines such as our perennially bestselling Aimee jersey tops which work brilliantly with tailoring and come a range of neutral plains and punchy prints for a colour pop. For a luxe look add a soft blouse - the elegant lines of Caitlyn in ivory with covered buttons detail, Magnolia

in this season's gentle pink, or a feistier pop with Darcey's bright geometric print. Hobbs has exclusive in-house designed prints such as our Joelle satin chain-print in cream and camel for elegant quiet luxury. You can never beat a crisp white cotton shirt so try classic Victoria or the sleeveless Vic shirt for fitted perfection.

### The Complete Outfit

To complete your tailored workwear, look just add a classic Amelia court shoe or be more fashion forward with super-stylish Maddison slingback in nude. Mary-Jane styles are having a major fashion moment and work beautifully as either Miranda with a chunky block heel or Chrissy's ballerina-style flat. Hang a functional but elegant work bag such as the capacious Hurlingham tote over your arm, drape a season-perfect trench over your shoulders and you are office (and Instagram) ready!

### Work-to-Weekend Versatility

Add a pop of colour to the working week with fashion-forward, co-ordinated brights as the perfect choice for Spring/Summer 2024. Suki in green, Felicity in pink or Nola in bramble purple will take you from desk-to-dinner to a hot date or a wedding with just a change of shoes. To change up your workwear for a less formal work-to-weekend look, think footwear, it really does make all the difference. Swap a court shoe for a chunky Nadine loafer or a pristine white Coralie trainer.

### Style with Mileage

Increasingly workwear is taking on softer options, shirtwaister dresses are your perfect choice for femininity without fuss. Our navy Tania shirtdress needs no more than a pair

of shoes to be office-ready but will take you effortlessly straight to cocktails after work. Take Tallulah in classic ivory and blue polka dots. Add a navy jacket for a workday, add white trainers for a shopping day or lunch with the girls or dial her up with Alice T-bar midnight satin heels and a fascinator for a wedding or the Races. She's machine-washable so go for it!

As we move into warmer weather, tailoring is taking a relaxed, tonal linen focus in soft colours, pink, blue, grey and ivory, fresh for the new season Mirabel, Adina, Roberta, and Lauren co-ords are tailored to perfection to take you to work, weddings or weekends away with just a simple ivory Nina top a perfect Alycia white tee.

Whatever your work wardrobe needs, whether formal or more relaxed, Hobbs has carefully curated a collection of style signatures, including petite sizing's, that are detail-oriented, polished, with multi-functional utility. Timeless, transitional, contemporary and chic, these are pieces you will love forever.

For style advice you can trust, book a complimentary one to one personal styling appointment at Hobbs. Whether you're seeking workwear solutions, occasion outfit inspiration or updating your wardrobe, Hobbs are here to help. To book an instore personal styling appointment head to [www.hobbs.com/personal-styling](http://www.hobbs.com/personal-styling)

Hobbs has been situated in Morpeth Sanderson Arcade since 2012 and the Hobbs Morpeth team excels in what they do and provide shoppers with the highest quality customer service and expertise in styling, trends, and clothing.

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







The PFC Trust chairman Shaun Hope with Seaton Carew Golf Club Captain Phil Cain.

Pic credit: Michael Cartwright/SCGC

## Support the Rare Dementia Fund

A new fund created to help people suffering from a rare dementia has been set up in memory of a much-loved Hartlepool mother.

**Seaton Carew Golf Club's Captain for 2024, Phil Cain, has confirmed that this year he will raise money to support the Rare Dementia Fund, set up by The PFC Trust.**

The Fund has been ring fenced to help support individuals and their families affected by the disease and was created following Lesley Connor's passing earlier this year.

Lesley, whose husband Tommy is a member at the golf club, received a diagnosis of the inherited or young onset dementia, and that brought with it unique and complex challenges.

The PFC Trust has made a seed donation of £5,000 to the Fund and Phil will hold a series of events to boost it.

He said: "It is one of the proudest moments of my life to be made Captain in the club's 150th anniversary year.. I want to do the best I can to represent the golf club and choosing a charity was a key part of that.

"I wanted it to be a local rather than national charity, a cause close to my heart and I want

to make sure everyone has fun raising funds at the golf club.

"I'm sure dementia has touched many of you. Sadly, I witnessed first-hand how one of my friends and her loving family bravely battled this awful disease.

"In her honour and having discussed this with her family it was decided to approach The PFC Trust to see if they could help set up a Hartlepool dementia charity under their umbrella organisation.

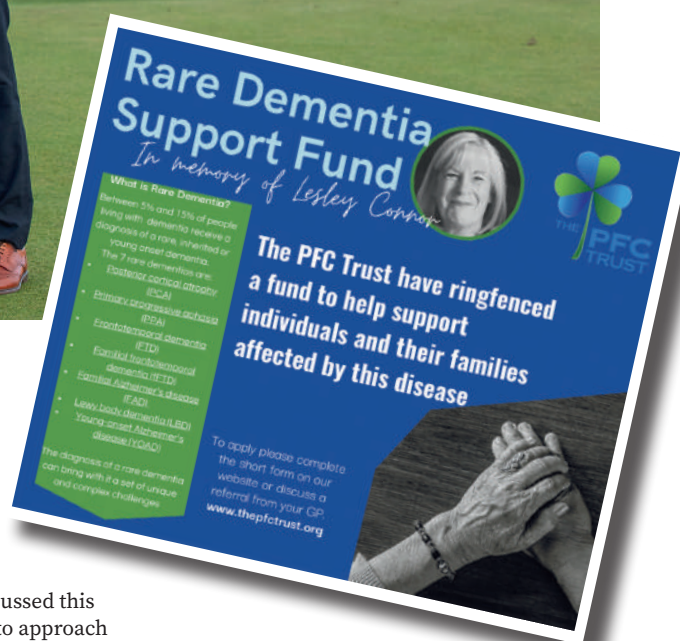
"Not only did they agree but, true to form, this fantastic charitable organisation kindly set up the fund with a seed £5,000 donation and that has provided a fantastic start."

Phil and Seaton Carew GC are organising a Captain's Dinner, Captain's Day, a paddling pool chipping competition, a putting competition and, potentially, a football tournament for the driving range. Other fun ideas and social events are being discussed.

To get the fundraising off to a strong start Phil has introduced a Captain's challenge match. He invites members to take on him and vice-captain Hugh Hamilton using the Captain's 10.30am tee time on a competition Saturday for a minimum donation of £20 each.

The Rare Dementia Fund is open to applications, although decisions will only be made quarterly by a dedicated panel including a dementia specialist.

The PFC Trust's chairman Shaun Hope, Lesley's son-in-law, said: "We are so grateful to Seaton Carew GC and Captain Phil Cain for choosing this new dedicated Fund as



their charity of choice in what is the most special year in the club's history.

"This Fund means a lot to me and my family. We have recently lost someone dear to us as she battled with an awful rare dementia disease.

"During those tough times we realised support for families going through these challenging times is often overlooked. Very few people are aware of the impact because the conditions are so rare.

"We are proud to play a very small part as The PFC Trust in generating support and funds that will go on to help people who have suffered just like me and my family have.

"This is one of many special things that we will be doing with Seaton Carew GC, two organisations that want to support Hartlepool and its community. We are so grateful."

**To apply to the Fund please complete the short form on the PFC Trust website or discuss a referral from your GP. [www.thepfctrust.org](http://www.thepfctrust.org)**





David Fairlamb

## A declining middle aged body

As we hit middle age our physical strength starts to diminish, in fact most people lose 1% of their muscle mass every 12 weeks, past the age of 50.

**One of the main reasons for the decline is our bodies become less efficient at turning protein into muscle and by the time we hit 80, up to half of us may suffer serious effects from this condition.**

The good news is studies show small diet changes along with regular exercise can keep this muscle loss at bay.

This sounds easy, and in reality it is but it takes discipline as new habits need to be formed and stuck too. Many British eating habits actually accelerate muscle loss. A three year study at Newcastle University analysing 750 people's eating habits in North East England found those that consumed high levels of fatty, starchy foods were most at risk because these foods do not provide the fuel needed to build muscle in midlife and beyond. This is compounded by the fact many people have less muscle to lose when they hit forty due to their unhealthy lifestyles over the previous decades. We are also doing more technology related work rather than manufacturing or other physically related jobs.

Playing at healthy eating for a few weeks a year will not work, you need to make a

conscious effort to form healthier food choices and implement an exercise regime that you can stick to long term.

### Eating to promote muscle mass

Latest research shows that two thirds of our bodies Vitamin C is found in skeletal muscle and is a strong antioxidant therefore helps clear toxins which increase as we age. Vitamin C is available in vegetables and fruit, making sure these levels are topped up each day linked in with your healthy diet.

Following a Mediterranean diet showed the most positive results in holding onto your muscle mass.

The diet includes a moderate amount of fish, poultry and dairy adding plenty of vegetables, fruit, olive oil with little red meat and added sugar. The lack of refined sugar had a significant impact on lowering inflammation in the body.

### Exercise

Research shows we do not have to exercise hard, it's the regularity that's important. Low impact daily exercise such as gardening or walking briskly would work well. Anything more, involving resistance work and raising the heart rate would be a bonus.

## David's summing up...

*The health and fitness industry is worth billions, but once again we come back to the same basic principle which we learnt from our ancestors. Eat what we are designed to eat, in other words, fresh natural foods and drink plenty of water, stay away from refined sugar and exercise regularly with resistance.*

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





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Barry Speker OBE

## The Last Word

By Barry Speker OBE

Having been privileged to hold a wide variety of posts and positions this involved being addressed *inter alia* as Mr Chairman, Mr President, Mr Captain, Judge and more recently 'Chair'. That latter title pays allegiance to the remorseless wave of wokery embracing all aspects of modern life. Even the MCC succumbed by changing the laws of cricket to replace the batsman with the batter.

**The designation 'Chairman' has indicated the stalwart pinnacle in public life and private institutions, whether it be companies, football clubs, political parties, boardrooms or the Garrick Club. By tradition the Chairman was in charge. Many resist the inclusive renaming the office holder with the name of the furniture on which the incumbent sits. How should we address a female holder of the office - as Chairman, Chairwoman, Madam Chairman, Chairperson? The solution has been to use the title 'Chair'. Even if the office holder is a man, better to emasculate and make him into a chair.**

As recently as five years ago, 98 of the FTSE 100 companies referred to their leaders as 'Chairman' but today a mere 32. Instead the

majority of Britain's captains of industry -62 in fact - now prefer 'Chair'. The others will soon follow to avoid charges of misogyny and attempting to retain the (old) boys club. So 'Chair' it must be as a sign of our civilised society.

The home victory by Newcastle United against Tottenham Hotspur was not only momentous for the performance and 4-0 score line. It was marked by the excellent initiative of the club and shirt sponsors Sela to produce haptic shirts incorporating technology which produces real time touch sensations for fans and mascots with hearing loss.

This is the first time such technology has been used and it enabled deaf wearers of the shirts to experience the noise and chanting in St James' Park.

I was sitting near the large group of adults and children wearing the black and white shirts emblazoned with RNID and could see their joy and excitement. This was enhanced during the goal celebration when BDB (for the uninitiated that is Big Dan Burn) greeted those in the enclosure with cross armed signing, demonstrating 'congratulations'.

It was disappointing that none of this was mentioned or shown on BBC's Match of the Day, as it was such an excellent example of inclusion and diversity.

The High Court judgment in favour of the Michaela Community School in Wembley was a major triumph for its founder and 'headmistress' (can we still say that?) Katharine Birbalsingh, regarded as Britain's strictest head teacher in the best state school in the country. It has strict discipline, emphasis on traditional values, tolerance and an unashamedly secular ethos.

The case was brought by an unnamed Muslim student claiming that the school's ban on prayers during school hours was unlawful discrimination against Muslim pupils. In an admirably clear ruling, the court upheld the right of the non-religious school to enforce its robustly secular policy. The prayer ban was 'a proportionate measure'. This was hailed as a victory for all schools.

Michaela had been challenged when in defiance of the school's norms, 30 Muslim pupils took to praying in the school yard using their blazers as mats. When the school enforced its rules there was a campaign of intimidation, which included a brick being thrown through the window of a staff member and then a bomb threat.

It is galling that the case against the school was funded with an estimated cost to the taxpayer of £150,000 in legal aid - with the school having to meet an even larger bill.

That Spring has arrived after the wettest March on record, should have been confirmed by the Robbie Howard Golf Trip to North Berwick. As recently mentioned, the Sunday Times Best Places to Live report adjudged North Berwick to be the best place to live in Britain.

We arrived to find The Glen East Links course closed due to flooding. Next day we managed a round at gale blown Gullane and a final round at a sodden Bamburgh Castle on the way home.



As always the main treat was the excellent hospitality at The Open Arms Hotel in Dirleton, an immense consolation for the appalling weather.

But then there is even serious flooding in Dubai. Look out for further preposterous judgments from the European Court of Human Rights holding governments to account for not doing enough to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It is said that its latest decision against the government of Switzerland is overtly political and will 'open the floodgates' - but only in terms of litigation, fortunately. Time for us to leave the ECHR?

***barryspeker@hotmail.com***







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