

NORTHERN

INSIGHT

July 2024

Issue 103

**Leading Digital Change:
Expert Tips from Leighton**

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Foreword

FOREWORD

Welcome to the July edition of Northern Insight.

The 103rd issue of the regions most comprehensive Business and Leisure publication is one of our strongest yet and features a plethora of articles, interviews, critical analysis and social photography.

Our cover stars are Leighton who have developed successful software applications for over 32 years.

Look out for our first report on private rail operator Lumo, a North East success story of which we can be rightly proud.

Within some outstanding event coverage we spotlight the Entrepreneurs' Forum 'Fortune Favours the Brave' Conference and Mediaworks Annual Golf Day at Close House.

Our Charity of the Month review showcases the outstanding work of Grace House.

The Built Environment section continues to evolve and grow and is packed with content relevant to this very important sector.

On the leisure front we take a trip to China's Hunan province and, much closer to home, spend 24 hours in Ilkley.

A 228 page epic to help you while away those long Summer nights. We hope you enjoy it!

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

MTG

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Nicholson's get a slice of success for their award-winning pies



Nicholson Butchers, a traditional family butcher with a history dating back more than a century in Whitley Bay, is celebrating a remarkable achievement at this year's Smithfield Awards. The shop proudly took home two Gold Awards for their unique pies - Slow Cooked Beef Stroganoff and Spanish Chicken, along with two Silver Awards for their steaks and pork sausages.

Crafted in-house at their bakery above the shop, Nicholson's award-winning

pies feature homemade pastry and meticulously selected ingredients, with a focus on locally sourced produce whenever possible.

Kathryn Nicholson explained that the rigorous judging process included, a meticulous attention to taste, texture, appearance, and sustainability. Every product nominated went thorough stringent evaluation by a panel of judges, ensuring only the highest standards were met.

"We're thrilled to have received two Gold and two Silver awards from the Q Guild of Butchers," said Kathryn. "These accolades are a testament to the hard work and dedication of our team in creating exceptional products that delight our customers."

Located in Parkview, Whitley Bay, Nicholson Butchers invites customers to experience their award-winning offerings both in-store and online. With free daily delivery to local areas, patrons can enjoy the finest meats crafted with care and expertise.

North East cultural institution receives £1 million boost

A fundraising campaign by the Lit & Phil in Newcastle has been given a £1 million boost by one of the region's most successful businesses.

It is one of the biggest sums ever awarded to a single organisation by The Barbour Foundation, the charity set up in 1988 by Dame Margaret Barbour.

The donation has been welcomed as a major endorsement of the historic independent library and gives a flying start to a capital appeal aimed at securing its future.

Mary Durkin, chair of the Lit & Phil, said after receiving the cheque from company chairman Dame Margaret Barbour DBE: "We are very, very grateful. The Lit &



Phil was supported by local industry and commerce during its early years, notably by locomotive designer Robert Stephenson who in 1855 rescued the building at a time of financial difficulty.

"Dame Margaret and The Barbour Foundation have echoed that support with this fantastically generous donation which goes a long way towards helping us achieve our aims for the Lit & Phil.

"For nearly 200 years it has been at the heart of cultural life on Tyneside, a place of enlightenment valued by people from all walks of life."



Optimism amongst North East Entrepreneurs remains high

Optimism amongst North East entrepreneurs remains high, the latest Entrepreneurs' Forum Pulse Survey has revealed.

Of the 111 business owners who responded to the latest survey (approximately one third of the Forum's overall membership), the majority expressed confidence in their business prospects, with many feeling very optimistic about the year ahead.

The survey - which was independently conducted by Explain Market Research - collected responses from Monday 13th May to Friday 24th May, during a period of political uncertainty following the announcement of the upcoming general election on Wednesday 22nd May.

Notably, none of the respondents felt pessimistic about their business prospects for the next 12 months despite facing challenges like lengthened sales cycles, increased costs and pressures on pricing.

Recruiting and retaining staff is a substantial challenge for North East entrepreneurs with 44% of respondents identifying it as their biggest obstacle to growth. Many attributed this difficulty to the struggle of identifying the 'right' candidates and balancing salary demands with business profitability.

Elaine Stroud, CEO of the Entrepreneurs' Forum, commented: "Despite the challenges of political uncertainty and skills shortages, the latest survey results reveal a strikingly optimistic outlook amongst our region's entrepreneurs.

"Many of our members are planning for a period of growth and expansion which is incredibly exciting to see. With 83% expecting turnover growth and over half introducing new products or services this year, this optimism signals a vibrant future for the North East as a region."



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King Charles Affirms Continued Patronage of The Alnwick Garden Trust

The Alnwick Garden Trust is pleased to announce that King Charles has expressed his intention to continue his patronage of the Northumberland charity. This decision comes as part of a broader review of royal patronages by Buckingham Palace, which has seen the King and other senior British royals streamline their commitments.

Despite reducing the patronages of almost 200 charities and organisations, King Charles has maintained a special connection with The Alnwick Garden, which he officially opened in 2002. His Majesty has visited the garden multiple times, with visits in 2012, 2015, and most recently in 2018.

In total, over 830 organisations have been retained by King Charles and Queen Camilla or redistributed among other royal family members. The Alnwick Garden remains proudly within the King's portfolio.

During his 2018 visit, King Charles shared his admiration for Northumberland and The Alnwick Garden, stating:

"For me coming here to Northumberland, which is such a special county, all I can say is it makes me unbelievably proud just to see what you're all doing and the way in which you help to keep this county so very special.

"This remarkable place and this garden, of which I've been a patron now for quite a long time, I know this whole operation here has made a huge difference to the whole area, so I also wanted to pay my compliments to the Duchess for what she does."

Since opening, The Alnwick Garden has attracted over seven million visitors and contributed £347m towards the local economy and its onsite community programmes.

North East Space Conference highlights future success

More than 200 people from across the globe gathered for the North East Space Conference, which showcased the growth in the sector and highlighted the exciting work already taking place in the region and beyond.

This is the 10th year the conference – organised by Space North East England – has been held in the region with international experts, academics, and those at the forefront of driving the space agenda all taking part.

Topics discussed included the changing opportunities for the sector in the region, as well as a look at what the growth of the space industry means to local universities. The conference – sponsored by Lockheed Martin, North East Technology Park (NETPark), Newcastle University, Northumbria University and Orbex also highlighted the work being done on creating an ecosystem for outer space and outlined the changing business opportunities.

Among those taking part were David



Parker, European Space Agency, European Centre for Space Applications and Telecommunications (ECSAT) and John Bone, chair of North East Space Leadership Group.

John Bone Chair of North East Space Leadership Group said: "The North East Space Conference has clearly shown the significant progress and collaborative efforts within the UK space industry. The North East is playing an essential role in this development.

"The insights and innovations shared highlight our region's contribution to the national space agenda. With the support of our partners and the expertise from academia and industry, we are building a promising future for the space sector here in the North East."



Accountancy firm leads the way in sustainability

North Shields-based accountancy firm Blu Sky has announced it has now officially become a B Corp certified business after proving its dedication to being a force for social and environmental good.

B Corp is a global movement started by nonprofit network B Lab to transform the economy for all people, communities and the planet. Companies that achieve B Corp certification must meet B Lab's high standards for social and environmental impact, showing that it has made a legal commitment to stakeholder governance and demonstrating accountability and transparency.

The certification is the latest in a series

of initiatives the firm has undertaken in a bid to boost its ESG efforts and pledge its commitment to a more sustainable way of doing business.

In 2022, Blu Sky was awarded 'On the road to Net Zero' certification from the Net Zero Accountancy Initiative, after implementing several changes including becoming completely paperless, phasing out single-use plastic, introducing battery recycling, implementing a strict no use of planes for business travel rule and encouraging travel by public transport and EV car sharing.

Jon Dudgeon, Blu Sky Co-founder and CEO, commented: "We're thrilled to be B Corp certified. Our commitment to creating a more sustainable business started with going paperless several years ago. But B Corp takes it to the next level and beyond, helping us to embed ESG principles throughout Blu Sky.

"It's a true team effort, and I'm incredibly proud of everyone for their input into how we can use our business as a force for good. This certification solidifies our dedication to environmental and social good, and we're excited to build on this foundation to create a more equitable and sustainable future."

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Cover Story



“

*...Getting the
right people
involved from
the beginning
is key...*

L-R Back: Claire Cundill, CBO; Steve Morland, CTO; Tom Preval, Delivery Community Lead
L-R Foreground: James Bunting, CEO; Jo Larby, Accessibility Community Lead

Leading Digital Change: Expert Tips from Leighton

“Business Agility is the ability to compete and thrive in the digital age by quickly responding to market change and emerging opportunities with innovative, digitally enabled business solutions.” – Scaled Agile Framework.

That's one of Tom Preval's favourite quotes, our Delivery Community Lead here at Leighton. Tom explains: **“For me, this gets to the heart of what is important from a delivery perspective when thinking about how we can support digital transformations.”**

Supporting successful digital transformations is something we are well versed in at Leighton, having developed successful software applications for over 32 years. As digital transformation becomes more crucial in today's business landscape, we asked Leighton experts their top tips for navigating digital change.

Where to start?

“Set a clear vision and keep it visible,” advises Tom. Define specific, measurable objectives to ensure all stakeholders are aligned. “Don't forget to regularly communicate the vision and progress to the entire organisation to maintain alignment,” he added.

James Bunting, CEO of Leighton, suggests starting with the problem you aim to solve: “It's imperative to understand the problem you are trying to fix. Dig, dig, dig to understand where you are now and where you want to be.” Engaging an external expert can provide valuable insights and a fresh perspective.

Claire Cundill, CBO at Leighton, adds: “Avoid starting with the solution. It's an easy trap to fall into, and we see it often, but as Simon Sinek says, start with your why and remember who your customer is and how you want to help them.”

Leighton's CTO, Steve Morland, suggests starting small: “Look first around your core product or service, identify functions or processes you can improve and modernise these to support overall change.” This approach allows for manageable steps towards broader transformation.

Deliver value quickly

Embracing Agile methodology is central to delivering value quickly. “Iterate, show progress, test and learn” emphasises James. “Ensure all stakeholders see progress and value quickly and regularly to help maintain momentum and support,” he added. Don't wait for a “big bang” release at the end.

Investing in the right tools is also crucial. “Invest in tools and developer experience to get to market quicker,” advises Steve. “Look at what you can automate to start delivering value,” he added. The right tools can significantly enhance efficiency and speed to market.

Leighton's Accessibility Community Lead, Jo Larby, highlights the importance of investing in knowledge to deliver added value. “Invest in knowledge, whether by upskilling yourself and your existing team or using trusted partners as a springboard,” said Jo.

Culture, leadership and empowered teams

“Any digital transformation initiative is a change project,” says James. “Build a culture of change, transformation, and inclusion and ensure the work lands and is used,” he added. Foster an environment where innovation and adaptation are encouraged.

For Tom, strong leadership and empowered teams are vital to moving at pace. “Establish cross-functional teams with the autonomy to make decisions and get work done,” he notes. Equally, these teams need strong leadership. “These teams need to trust that senior leadership is on the same journey, providing necessary direction, resources, and authority,” he added.

Claire added: “Getting the right people involved from the beginning is key. Whether it's tech teams or business stakeholders, your team need to be onboard from the beginning to make it a success and to continue to champion it when bumps inevitably happen.”

Jo highlights the value of leading by example and fostering diverse teams to avoid groupthink and benefit from varied experiences. “Diversity in teams provides opportunities to learn from lived and worked experiences, helping create innovative solutions and ensuring different perspectives are considered,” she notes.

Keep your customer at the core

A customer-centric approach should underpin all digital transformation efforts. “Put your customer or end-user at the heart of what you do,” advises Tom. “Design and implement solutions with customer experience at the forefront.”

Jo emphasises the importance of understanding all potential users and their needs. “Digital transformation should ensure that nobody gets left behind. Understand your users' existing pain points and needs from your service,” she advises. “Ensuring your customer sees you as a trusted partner means considering security, reliability, and availability,” she added.

In today's fast-paced digital landscape, business agility and customer-centric approaches are essential to successful transformations. By setting a clear vision, embracing agile methodologies, and fostering a culture of change, companies can navigate digital transformation effectively and meet their customers' evolving needs.

leighton.com



Martijn Gilbert

Lumo - Making the right connections...

If you've been to Newcastle Central Station over the last few years...since October 2021 to be exact...you can't fail to have seen the blue livery of the brand new electric (built in Newton Aycliffe) Lumo trains.

This is a North East success story of which we can be rightly very proud.

And, unlike the majority of railway lines in this country which have required UK Government support, Lumo hasn't cost us, the British tax payers, a single penny.

We hopped onto the 12.51 Lumo departure from Newcastle and it arrived early into London Kings Cross, scheduled for 15.44. Apart from setting down passengers at Stevenage...handy if you're using Luton or Stansted airports...it's a non-stop service. The seats are roomy, comfortable and there's plenty of luggage space. Quick word of praise for the staff too...they couldn't have been more helpful with some passengers who had probably brought too much baggage! There's an at-seat trolley service and you are regularly updated on arrival times. You even hear from the driver (Dan) if there's a bit of a hold-up.

In other words, it's a cracking way to head south to London and Stevenage, or north to Edinburgh via Morpeth.

So how has Lumo managed to be a success when so many other rail firms have had to be bailed-out by the tax payer?

"In railway parlance, we use what is known as an Open Access policy," says Lumo MD Martijn Gilbert. "We are a private company which pays to use tracks and stations and provides a service to customers by offering different departure times and different connections. We don't poach passengers from other train companies...in fact, it is the opposite because latest figures show that since we launched our Lumo Trains services, the overall number of rail passengers on the East Coast route has increased. It's also been

estimated that Lumo and Hull Trains will add a combined total of around £1.3bn to the economies of both regions. This is via tourism, business accessibility, student traffic, plus giving companies and employees the opportunity to grow.

We offer hugely competitive fares. Passengers, if they book in advance, can travel from Newcastle to London for £29.90. Bearing in mind that it's quick... 2hrs 51 mins... and goes from city centre to city centre, why would you fly or drive?"

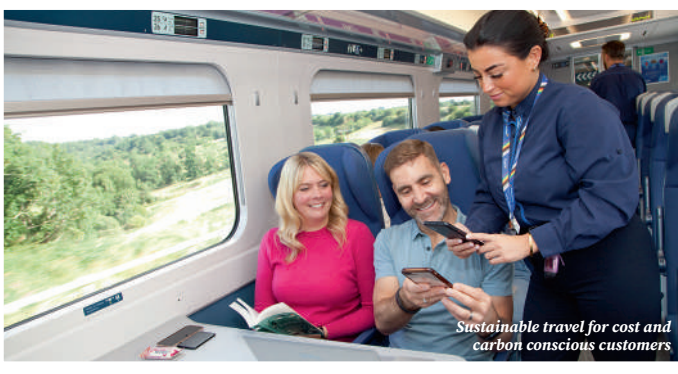
Which is a seriously good point. It's worth mentioning the green credentials of Lumo and their sister company Hull Trains. Last year the two firms saved an estimated 60,000 tonnes of CO2 being pumped into the atmosphere. That's the equivalent of taking 14,000 cars off the road or 684,000 Edinburgh to London flights. Wow.

"Here at Lumo we're proud to be a North East firm, based in Newcastle, helping to grow the region's economy and supporting local businesses via investments and partnerships. We work closely with Newcastle Falcons, The Charlie & Carter Foundation, Newcastle College, Black Storm Brewery and Beamish Museum. We use locally sourced products on our services with, for example, tea from Ringtons and beer from Ouseburn Brewery.

All of our 115 staff are based in Newcastle, most of them come from this region, and it's hugely rewarding to point out that 95% of them came through an apprenticeship scheme called Train'd Up."



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This is a company we should be proud of. It also seems rather apt that another North East- based pioneering train company is proving to be successful and popular as we approach the 200th anniversary of George Stephenson opening the world's first railway line from Stockton to Darlington.

And, because Lumo is a private operator, they can be flexible and react to demand. For example they recently laid on an extra train to London to help fans who were attending the England v Bosnia game at St. James' Park.

Oh, and get ready for news of developments at Lumo. They're looking to extend their service to Glasgow and a new route between London, Manchester and Rochdale. There are also ambitions by Hull Trains for new routes opening in Yorkshire.

Lumo...they're blue...and they're going places.

For more information on what Lumo has to offer and to catch-up on departure times, log onto their website www.lumo.co.uk

There are also details about things to do and places to visit in all of the Lumo destinations.



Business Growth – the sales champion

I have long debated on using the term sales. Sales professionals were after all edited a decade ago to become Business Development Managers, Account Managers or Customer Relationship Managers - removing the very word they were hired to deliver, but why?

So many still recoil at the word itself, almost afraid at the association or what may prevail should they enter into a conversation. Introduce yourself as a sales person and more often than not you'll be met with a shy nod or an immediate excuse to vacate the conversation. Marketing can and often is different... so when people ask me what sales I do, well I say both. But it took me a long time to own the 'sales' badge.

I even did an MBA specialising in sales psychology to give me and those around me the confidence and back up my 20 years' experience with an academic qualification to talk openly about and own the profession of sales. Yet there remains no entry criteria to this business-critical skill. Businesses invest so little in the development of their customer facing people who are often solely reliable for that business growth we all aspire to. I would argue that sales people are the most underinvested resource in your business – in any business yet the ones responsible for the cash is king principle. Crazy right?!

Yet, we still shy away from the word sales never mind those in the profession, although a resurgence seems apparent with those proud of their role and responsibilities to regain the term sales with pride and poise. The lines are becoming more blurred between the role in sales and that in marketing, with many organisations hiring a hybrid role to cover these two specialisms. Which in my mind is like hiring a FD and a HRD – could they be the same person with the same qualities, skill set and acumen – perhaps but highly unlikely.



Jessica Williams

Im often asked by start-ups and smaller organisations, who do I hire first? Sales or marketing?

Marketing has been my long-standing answer given the need for enhanced brand visibility prior to the role of sales coming on board. Its far more challenging to bring new clients on board if those prospects have never heard of your brand and aren't familiar with your business.

Developing your businesses footprint and establishing a brand presence is crucial and can only be developed by marketing without there being an over reliance on one individual from a sales perspective.

But let's get back to the subject at hand – Business Growth.... So, when the one piece of advice so many of us give around cash is king is utterly accurate – cash more than likely pre investment comes from sales and sales come from a joined-up approach with marketing. Just Williams started life as a sales organisation, progressing to sales and marketing having listened and learned from our customer base over the first few years of trading. Speaking to a range of sales and marketing or 'business growth' consultants across the industry, one area we see time and time again is the desire for business growth based on short term wins to support cash flow or immediate growth without longer term strategy.

For most forms of sales and marketing to create the long-term business growth so many of us crave, we have to look at a long-term plan. A strategic and sustainable model utilising multiple platforms to engage with the desired markets and achieve the growth – which in turn supports cash flow which you guessed it – drives business growth.

If you want immediate results but no one has heard of your brand, your conversion cycle is on average 24 months, then hiring and quickly firing a sales and marketing person or team within six months due a lack of ROI is a little, well ridiculous – yet this is the expectation time and time again.

If we want business growth, we need to start placing sales and marketing at the very beginning – invest in it for the long term and yes cash is incredible essential but go back to what drives that cash...

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July • Wednesday 17th • 3-5pm • Fusion Hive



How to identify your target audience and create more

- *Creating your ideal customer profiles*
- *How to find prospects*
- *Tailoring your lead generation to enhance conversion*

August • Wednesday 17th • 9-11am • Fusion Hive



Essential skills toolkit

- *An overview of the essential sales toolkits needed*
- *CRM overview* • *Creating a Sales Process*

September • Wednesday 25th • 9-11am • Fusion Hive



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- *Lifetime Value proposition*
- *Retention and Account Management*
- *Enhancing Customer Referrals and Relationships*

October • Friday 18th • 1-3pm • Fusion Hive

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Mediaworks Annual Golf Day

Over 90 clients and partners recently joined Mediaworks for their annual Golf Day at Close House.

Everyone was welcome as they played in the European Championship themed golf day in the 'Get into Golf' and '18 Hole' competitions.

Client feedback has been outstanding. One commented, "...if Carlsberg did golf days it wouldn't be as good as the Mediaworks golf day".

The event raised almost £3,000 for the Newcastle United Foundation who do an amazing work in our community. Thank you to everyone who took the time to attend and support the event.





CMYK | Business Technology award win helps North East STEM pupils compete in America



Winner of the North East Automotive Alliance (NEAA) SME of the Year award, CMYK | Business Technology, is celebrating the success of both Wardley and Bill Quay Primary schools STEM pupils, in the recent VEX Robotics competition in the USA, having donated £1,000 prize money to each school to help fund the opportunity of a lifetime.

Community-conscious, CMYK, which established its Newcastle operations in January 2021, donated the funds to the schools, having qualified from the national VEX competitions and becoming two out of only four schools in the country to represent the UK in the prestigious World VEX Robotics competition, at the beginning of May.

Held in Dallas, STEM pupils from around the globe gathered to celebrate their accomplishments and compete to be crowned champions.

Both schools were shortlisted and Wardley went on to win the Judges Award for the maths division.

The award is presented to a team the judges determine is deserving of special recognition. Judges consider a number of possible criteria, such as a team displaying exemplary effort and perseverance at the event, or team accomplishments or endeavours during the season that may not fit existing awards.

CMYK now operates nationally across its six regional sites providing a wide range of technologies and services, including all aspects of Managed IT Services and encompassing hardware, software and associated support, Managed Print and Scanning Services, Telecoms, Business Connectivity, Cloud Services and Visitor Management Solutions.

Over the last three years, the company has experienced significant growth and won several contracts in the automotive sector with the help of its active membership of the NEAA. These include Unipres UK, Ford Aerospace and Smart Manufacturing Solutions.

For the fourth year running, CMYK will be a sponsor and deliver digital sign-in registration services at the NEAA's flagship event, the North East Automotive Expo 2024, held in September at the Beacon of Light, Sunderland.

Laura Gage, marketing and PR manager at the North East Automotive Alliance, said: "It is truly something special to watch a company grow its foothold and impact in the region in only a few years. The Alliance gives businesses the opportunity to network, get their name and reputation out there and CMYK is evidence that deeply motivated, ethical and community-conscious businesses can create huge success in a short space of time. It has done this by putting value and time in to creating connections within the wider business community and championing younger generations."

Craig Pratt, regional director, CMYK, said: "It has been another amazing year for the CMYK team, to win SME of the Year at the recent NEAA Awards was huge. For the award to have been associated with the North East

Institute of Technology, being a key member and an organisation that understands the tech industry inside out, was a real indicator we are making an impact and bringing value to the region.

"Our work to assist STEM focussed schools is incredibly important and reflects our belief that we are all better when we work together and give back. CMYK has offered support to both Bill Quay and Wardley Primary Schools and several others in the region, for a couple of years now. This includes collaborating with our partners and launching a new sustainable tech programme with our client and partner, Opencast. A significant number of laptops, screens and MacBooks have been donated to the schools so they can be used for coding and STEM projects. CMYK is committed to facilitating the rehoming of technology within education and we will continue to drive 'tech for good' to ensure as many pupils as possible have access to good tech. This is an ongoing commitment and one we are passionate about.

"Over the past few years, we've got to know the children that competed in Dallas and it's been a huge privilege to help support their journey. It is exciting to see the NEAA is committed to our younger generation, not only through awards donations but having assigned a dedicated space at this year's Expo, so these young individuals can showcase their talents, mingle with businesses, and form strong connections to help make their STEM endeavours sustainable. Most importantly, it will highlight to the pupils the possibilities available for employment within our region and how they can turn their passion for tech and engineering into a career."

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THERE IS NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT



Imagine the property market as a clock face. Twelve o'clock is a rampant buyers' market with lots of property available and buyers playing hardball with offers. Six o'clock is a sellers' market, with prices rising quickly and purchasers panic buying, often going straight in at asking prices to secure properties. These are times in the market when things are most uncomfortable and precarious. These markets generate gazumping or gazundering, practices that often do more harm than good and are strenuously discouraged by experienced estate agents.

Between these market extremes, at three and nine on our clock, is balance. Buyers have more time to make their choices and try reasonable offers. With more property on the market, sellers have more competition and have to price reasonably to attract buyers. More than that, their homes should be in the best possible structural and tastefully decorative condition. Clutter will have to go.

The market this year feels more in balance than it has been for a long time, a rare period when buying and selling property is

relatively calmer, easier and less of a lottery. For those thinking of moving this summer, embrace the opportunity that falling interest rates bring more buyers. Sadly, this time of equilibrium will pass. It is the way of the property market. Our advice is, if you want to move, now is a wonderfully opportune time to do so.

As always, our highly knowledgeable and hugely experienced team are on hand to give the most clear advice on how to successfully market and sell your home. We believe in strong marketing techniques and a proactive approach, and we are confident our team will always go that extra mile to enable your home to have the best exposure it can possibly get.

So perhaps, with this rare moment of calm, you can begin to think about your moving journey, just let us help you make the right one.

Janet Hopkinson

0191 213 0033

janet.hopkinson@sandersonyoung.co.uk



SANDERSON
YOUNG



Millfield

Runnymede Road, Darras Hall

Millfield is a very special property, in a fabulous location set back most attractively from Runnymede Road. This stunning home, remodelled and rebuilt by the current owners, provides extensive, extremely well maintained, versatile accommodation. Millfield occupies a site of circa 1.33 acres with an outstanding private rear garden with fabulous mature trees, patio terrace, alfresco dining areas, and an impressive mature pond, undoubtedly the focal point. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: H.



5 4 3 D

Price Guide:
Offers over £2.5 Million



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



SANDERSON
YOUNG



The Old Sawmill Middleton, Belford

Situated within circa 8.5 acres of grounds is this lovely country steading, offering a fabulous family home and three successful holiday cottages, with excellent access to the Northumberland Heritage Coastline. Also within the grounds is a fishing lake, a newly refurbished stable block with four stables, garage, workshop, poultry shed, outbuildings and an old drying barn with historic planning granted for a three bedroom cottage. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: F.



4 3 3 E

Price Guide:
Offers over £2.25 Million



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





SANDERSON
YOUNG



Shadwell Towers

Western Terrace, East Boldon

Shadwell Towers is an impeccably stylish, detached family home situated in a generous, south facing garden site of circa half an acre. This exceptional residence, constructed in 1901, was purchased by the current owners in 2018 and has since undergone a complete transformation. The result is a modern and refined three storey property offering expansive reception space and beautiful features with much period charm. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: F.



5 4 3 C

Price Guide:
£975,000



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



SANDERSON
YOUNG



Lindisfarne

Gubeon Wood, Tranwell Woods, Morpeth

This fine, detached family home is located in a tranquil, private setting and occupies a mature wooded site of around 3.5 acres. The property, purchased by the owner 34 years ago, provides well presented accommodation extending to circa 3786 sq ft and has been very well cared for with a number of improvements carried out over recent years, including the addition of a beautiful conservatory and orangery/garden room. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: G.



4 5 2 E

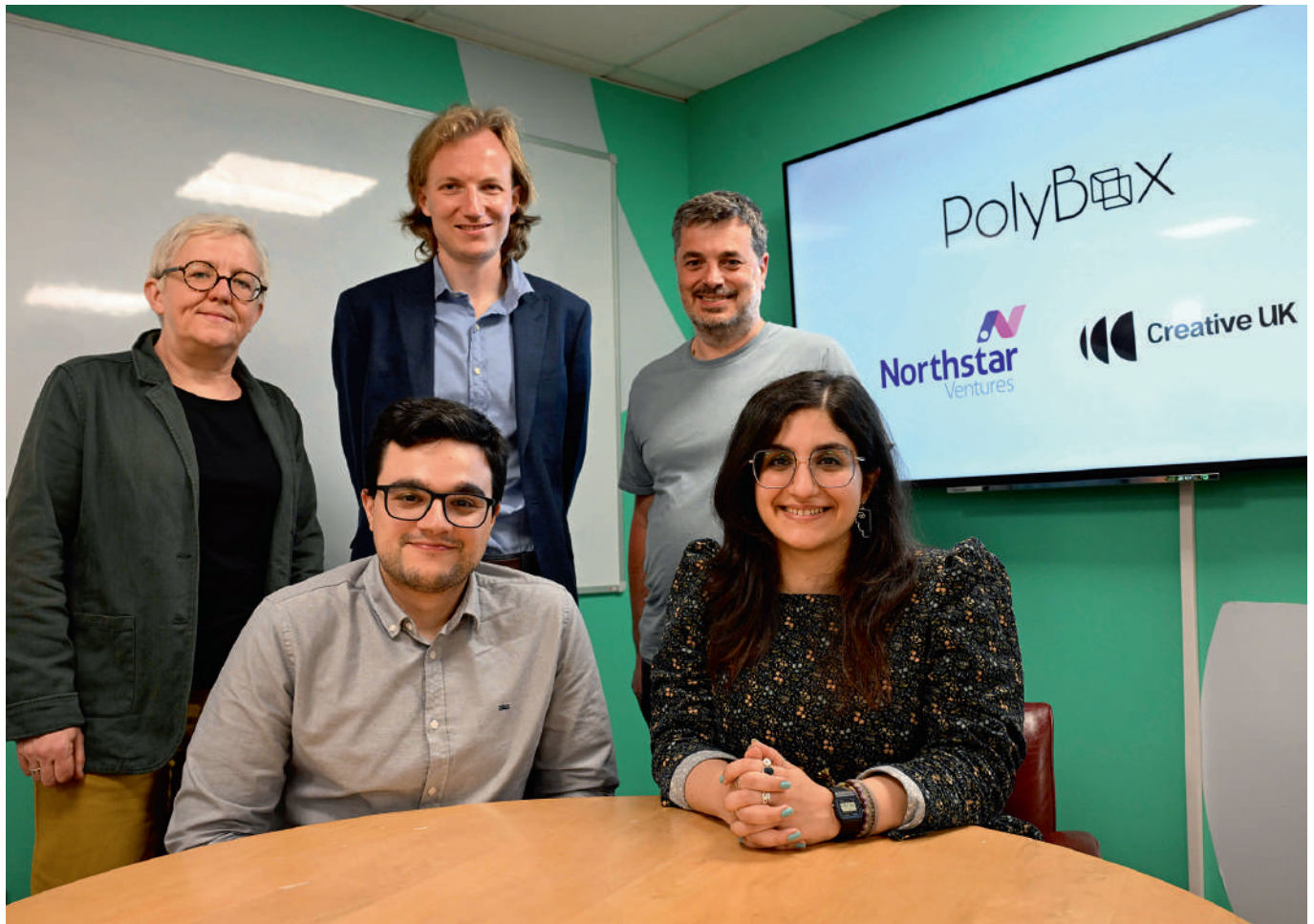
Price Guide:
£1.25 Million



Ashleigh Sundin
0191 223 3500
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Northstar Ventures invested in PolyBox's AI technology



Marketing may just have got even smarter after £500,000 investment into PolyBox's innovative new AI technology.

Northstar Ventures has invested £300,000 in Polybox to support the development of its innovative AI marketing technology and to expand its team.

PolyBox is an ambitious young company founded by two Newcastle University graduates, Rojin Yarahmadi and Nikolaos Benopoulos, operating in the fast-paced world of automated data analysis, reporting and AI. The total funding round of £500,000 was led by the North East Innovation Fund supported by the European Regional Development Fund and managed by Northstar Ventures, alongside Creative UK's North of Tyne Culture and Creative Investment Programme and angel investors.

PolyBox's data analysis and reporting tool enables marketing agencies to view data from multiple sources like Google and Meta in a real time dashboard and auto-generate PowerPoint style reports for end customers. This can not only provide on the spot insight into the return on investment of campaigns over multiple channels, but it also has the

advantage of making significant savings for marketing agencies, in an era here managing costs and embracing technology are ever more critical to their success.

The funding will not only support the development of this innovative technology but will allow PolyBox to invest in an AI analysis chat tool. This device will allow the integration of third-party open-source data into the model, enabling more in-depth analysis of effects on performance. PolyBox has collaborated with the National Innovation Centre for Data based in Newcastle on its technology development to date and will continue this collaboration in the next phase of development.

Rojin Yarahmadi, CEO and Founder of PolyBox, said "We are thrilled that the potential of PolyBox has been recognised by our investors at Northstar Ventures, Creative UK and angel investors. The £500,000 investment we've acquired will be transformational for us as we undertake research and testing, growing the team and ultimately develop the product further with enhanced integrations and more. Nikolaos and I firmly believe that automation and AI will bring about huge change in the way marketing agencies provide insights to their clients, and we're excited to be taking this offering to the next level thanks to our investment."

Tom O'Neill, Investment Manager at Northstar Ventures, said: "We are excited

to invest in PolyBox alongside Creative UK, North East Combined Authority and angel investors. Rojin and Nikolaos have developed an innovative and compelling product catering to marketing agencies and will be using their expertise in AI to develop the product further over the next 12 months. We look forward to seeing the business continue to grow and working with the management team on the next phase of PolyBox's development."

Sasha Collington, Investment Manager at Creative UK, said: "We were impressed by founders, Rojin and Nikolaos, and their innovative solution to enable marketing agencies to demonstrate to their clients the effectiveness of their campaigns using a data-led approach. We are delighted to invest in Polybox through the North of Tyne Culture and Creative Investment Programme funded by the North East Combined Authority (previously the North of Tyne Combined Authority)."

Carol Bell, Regional Associate Director, North, Creative UK, said: "It has been fabulous to be co-investors with Northstar alongside Angel investors to support more early-stage companies in the region, and we look forward to seeing how Polybox grows and provides vital support to our sector."

www.northstarventures.co.uk



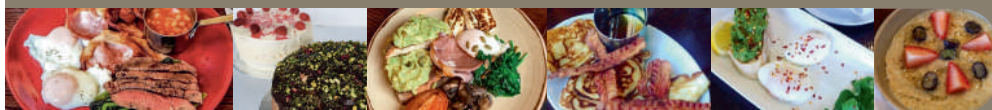
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L-R: George Dennis (Jaymac), Brendan O'Grady (Tier One Capital), Wes Thompson (Jaymac), Jay Macari (Jaymac) on the site in Faverdale, Darlington

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.

In its annual results for the year ending 30 November 2023, the London Stock Exchange listed property investment fund, reported that since 2017, it has now loaned over £74 million to help fund commercial and residential property schemes in the North of England and Scotland.

Since inception, Develop North has now helped create over 3,000 jobs and supported 36 developments with a gross development value (GDV) of over £195m.

This landmark figure was achieved 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.

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 announcement of

the 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



Brendan O'Grady,
TOC Fund Manager



John Newlands,
Chairman of Develop North

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."

**Contact: info@tieronecapital.co.uk
Telephone : 0191 222 0099
www.tieronecapital.co.uk
www.developnorth.co.uk**



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RMT Accountants & Business Advisors looking to the future as it celebrates its 70th Anniversary



In 1954, Robert Miller and Stanley Tate took the decision to open an accountancy practice on Newcastle's iconic Quayside.

Seventy years on, that practice - RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, as it is now known - is still going from strength to strength, with a team of more than 120 working from its Gosforth headquarters.

RMT has grown to become one of the North East's highest-regarded professional services firms, providing the full range of financial and business advisory services through its specialist teams. It works with companies of all sizes within and outside the North East, as well as internationally.

Its medical and healthcare division is the largest, dedicated specialist team in the UK outside London and acts for well over 1,000 medical professionals, with client and staff numbers increasing substantially year on year.

RMT is also one of the first independent accountancy firms to set up its own IT/technology business, RMT Technology, which helps clients across the UK to identify and implement hardware and software solutions which meet their specific business needs.

Mike Pott, managing director at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, says: "The North East has changed out of all recognition over the last 70 years and we're immensely proud that RMT has been an integral part of its professional services community throughout.

"The business is constantly developing and evolving, but the decision we took 20 years ago to build our own offices at Gosforth Park was a key milestone in RMT's history, giving a tangible boost to our operations and laying the foundations for everything we've become today.

"We continue to adapt and enhance our offering in line with market needs while always maintaining our focus on delivering the highest standards of service and detailed insight that clients rightly demand.

"We believe that no other regional practice offers the breadth of services that we have available while also providing the level of personal involvement and collaboration that so often makes the difference to meeting clients' commercial and personal goals."

Developing the culture within RMT is of primary importance to Mike and the wider team.

He continues: "The expert team we've built and the working culture we've created are at the core of RMT's long-term success.

"We want RMT to be somewhere colleagues feel valued, where they enjoy coming to work and are treated as individuals. We have many longstanding senior team members and believe this to be a real testament to our culture and values.

"Our team know they have the support of

their colleagues, from both a professional and a personal standpoint, and that they will get the opportunity to do interesting, valuable client work with us."

Last year, RMT actioned the latest stage in its development, becoming part of Sumer, the UK's fastest-growing accountancy group, through an investment arrangement that has made growth by acquisition a key part of its commercial strategy.

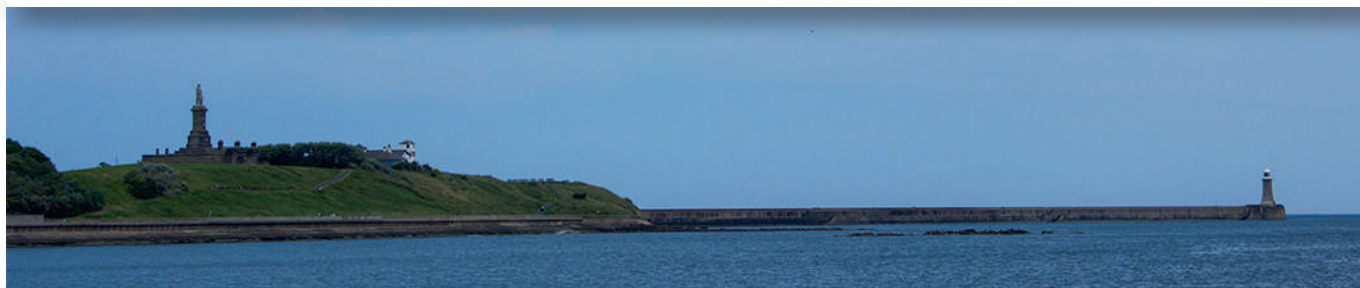
The firm recently completed the acquisition of rural and agricultural specialists McCowie & Co, and has further regional acquisitions currently under consideration.

Mike concludes: "Becoming part of a nationwide organisation like Sumer, with a clear strategy for growth, is providing us with opportunities to bring in additional expertise to enhance the services we offer to our clients.

"With the Big Four firms becoming ever more remote and smaller practices experiencing the pressure of an ever-increasing regulatory burden, the opportunities for firms like RMT have never been greater.

"Our team and our client base continue to grow significantly, and we see no limit to future expansion."

For further information on the range of services provided by RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, please visit www.r-m-t.co.uk or call 0191 256 9500.



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Filling a gap

As one of the region's most supportive leaders, Andrew Marsh has recently spotted a hole in the information available to the North East's business community. Here, he explains the steps he has taken to shed light on the region's funding landscape and why.

"I have a number of roles, in each one working closely with decision makers and leaders who all have the same goal of growth and creating opportunity."

"As chair of Vistage North East and Northumberland, as a NED on a number of boards and as mentor and facilitator of the Experience Bank Group peer groups for existing and aspiring NEDs, Trustees, Board Advisors and Consultants operating at Board Level, conversation often hinges around funding and financing.

"We are a region focused on growth, opportunity, great ideas and leaders driven by doing better, doing good and working at pace. But this all costs money. And many businesses need to raise that capital to achieve their potential.

"Of course, there are banks for loans and personal monies that can be invested, but there is also a plethora of help out there in the form of a range of grants, funds and investments that can enable a company to reach its goals. This, however, can be a minefield and it got me to thinking that there isn't a one stop place where all of the financial support opportunities are shared. And how great would it be if there was one, that would help in the decision-making process of the best suited option for each business need?

"Always wanting to be a provider of solutions, I have joined forces with some great minds from the region and have created a document we think is pretty unique.

"The document explains the differing lengths of funding and what alternatives fall with in that category. The document has live links to leading suppliers of each fund or loan, along with explaining the funding by brackets. It offers up some alternatives, such as crowdfunding, social venture, green funding and farming support. And it deep dives into local authority grants, all with live links to take readers to the right online resource.

"Most importantly, we have shared the top 12 things crucial things to consider when raising funds for your business and the details of some leading advisors in the region who are always willing to help with deeper investigation into your options.

"Complete with a glossary of terms so avoid any confusion, the funding landscape document is available by getting in touch with me direct. I'd also welcome feedback and if anyone becomes aware of monies that can be accessed by businesses, then do get in touch with the details so we can add it in. This is very much a live, working document that we want to keep pace with the landscape!"

Andrew's previous experience spans both public and private sectors, with 20 plus years' experience as a Managing Director for companies in everything from engineering & manufacturing, to technology services.

Having led multi-million-pound P&Ls, he is a renowned specialist in business transformation with an impressive track record of repeatedly creating sustainable growth. He is influential in keeping positivity in the leadership ranks of the North East and is involved in a number of local ventures, keen to see the regional economy thrive. He has helped many companies / organisations in tackling considerations for growth and appropriate funding options for that development phase.

You can contact him on
andrew@marshbusinesstransformation.co.uk
07557 976410
Linked In: AndrewMarsh58

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Funding Landscape
document
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Marsh Business Transformation
North East
**Funding
Landscape**
 Round Up 2024



Andrew Marsh

Tiny Dragon set to grow thanks to The Experience Bank™

A Newcastle based innovative production company is set to build on its recent B2B success thanks to collaboration with a philanthropic offering based in the region.

Tiny Dragon Productions, which launched in 2021, bring together creative storytelling and digital entertainment to development immersive events in a variety of locations. Having recently won work with Stack and a large shipping company that has a arts subsidiary in China, the company turned to The Experience Bank™ for help.

Experience Bank Group is a commercial venture specialising in peer groups and board/high-level recruitment for charities and SMEs with purpose. Its philanthropic offering, The Experience Bank™, offers qualifying start up and small companies primed for growth access to a bank of hundreds of leaders from the region who offer up time and experience pro-bono.

Mark Calvert, co-founder of Tiny Dragon Productions, heard about Peter Neal, the founder of Experience Bank Group through another organisation who had benefitted from the offering, Living Archive. On approaching Peter, Mark said: "Peter was very straight with us and talked through the protocol of how to qualify and present ourselves to The Experience Bank™, which



Peter Neal

was great as we knew where we stood. The process was seamless and we are delighted now to be working with two board advisors, Barry Revels and Richard Lee. The pair bring complimentary experience and knowledge, with Barry's background in tech kit proving extremely useful already. We are confident that Richard's detail led approach and Barry's industry acumen will prove invaluable in our growth and we are all very excited. Thank you to Peter and to Barry and Richard for believing in us!"

The new Stack contract, a modular design inside a container at the Sunderland site, is to create an immersive experience for families. The exciting challenge has opened up the team to working with more food and beverage outlets, increasing footfall. Peter said: "Hearing about the exciting future of Tiny Dragon Productions showed me how

they fit into what The Experience Bank™ was set up to do. I am delighted that both Barry and Richard will be support them in what I imagine will be a very bright future!"

When asked for the reasons that the board advisor duo have chosen to give their time to Tiny Dragon Productions they said: Barry Revels: "From the start I found the enthusiasm from the team very infectious. They bring a combination of original artistic content and technology to a market which is growing year on year. This is going to be fun and exciting."

Richard Lee: "Being part of The Experience Bank™ brings so many opportunities to be part of the future of the region. Tiny Dragon is one such opportunity and I am delighted to be working with them to take the company to its next level."

Mark's partners at Tiny Dragon Productions are Matt Runham and Pippa Fox, and between them they have many years' experience in theatre direction and production, and business acumen having sat on a number of boards in the sector.

You can find more about the organisation using @tinydragonprod1 on all socials or at www.tinydragonproductions-uk.com. You can find out more about The Experience Bank™ on theexperiencebank.co.uk/the-experience-bank



Introducing Michael Rankin at Raymond James Monument

Michael, a highly experienced investment professional with a career spanning nearly 24 years, joined the Raymond James Monument team in his hometown of Newcastle, in early November.

With a deep passion for client-focused financial management, Michael is thrilled to be back offering tailored investment solutions to individuals and families in the region.

Michael's journey in the financial world began following his time at Northumbria University in the late 1990s, when he joined Barclays telephone banking service in Sunderland. This led to a six-month role at Barclays Stockbrokers in Glasgow, which is where Michael discovered his love for investment management.

After returning to the North East, he secured a job as a trainee investment manager in Teesside, before quickly working his way up the ranks to the position of Divisional Director.

In 2014, following the Teesside office closure, Michael moved back to Newcastle, where he continued to build his client base and helped manage investments for individuals across the UK. Over the next decade, his expertise and commitment to a personalised service led to the growth of his client portfolio to an impressive £80 million.

Despite this success, Michael felt a growing desire to return to his roots of providing a more tailored investment experience to his clients. He sought an opportunity where he could truly focus on understanding individual needs and crafting bespoke investment strategies that aligned with each client's unique goals and aspirations.



Michael Rankin

This desire led him to Raymond James Monument - a firm that shared his commitment to client centric wealth management. Here, Michael found an opportunity where he could leverage his extensive experience and passion for investment management, to make a real difference in the lives of his clients.

"I have seen many changes over the past 20 years, including a move away from helping those clients who have a more modest amount available to invest."

With many of Michael's previous clients in Teesside, he was very keen to be able to offer a continuity of service, which was becoming increasingly difficult. He was also very keen to get back to managing money, which was

always a big part of the job and an area he both enjoyed and excelled.

"What we do at Raymond James Monument is to ensure our clients' needs and objectives are always our number one priority and I'm hugely excited at being able to get back to offering a truly tailored investment service."

As well as having more time to concentrate on helping his clients, Michael is also eager to continue his love of travel, with many more countries still left on his bucket list.

"I have always loved the Far East, especially the food. However, having not had the opportunity to visit Japan, this is something I would like to rectify as soon as possible."

www.Monument.RaymondJames.uk.com



Exit Strategy – When is the right time to sell a business?

Deciding on when to sell your business is a complex process and likely to be one of the most difficult decisions you will have to make.

Ultimately, the right time will be when a valuation can be achieved that is acceptable for all stakeholders and ensures a strong future for the business. The decision is influenced by a wide variety of factors and David Nixon, Senior Investment Manager at Maven, outlines five of the key considerations.

1. Personal Readiness – Are you ready to sell? This is a very personal question, that only you can answer, but most entrepreneurs will ask: Have I reached financial independence or will selling help me reach this goal? Have I achieved personal career goals? Are there other activities or ventures I want to pursue that selling will facilitate? Other common personal factors to consider include your health, retirement planning or family plans.

2. Stakeholder Readiness – If you have a business partner, or you have taken on

investment, then the needs of your fellow owners and investors are paramount in the decision-making process. Deal structures such as MBOs can facilitate exits for single shareholders, but in those cases typically requires complex planning and structuring, with input from all stakeholders. More typically all stakeholders will exit at the same time, so it is critical to have strategic alignment from the outset among stakeholders about exit horizons and expectations/goals around exit valuations.

3. Business Foundations – It is crucial that your business can demonstrate strong foundations and stand up to scrutiny. Selling a business means opening its doors for critical analysis by potential acquirers and their advisors. Strong foundations not only help improve valuation, but also reduce execution risk, which is the risk of an acquirer pulling out or reducing price during diligence. Key points to consider include the strength of the senior & secondary management team, robust governance & financial controls, diversification of clients & revenue streams, patents or protected IP on products/services, alongside good records in H&S and staff retention.

4. Business Performance – Financial performance is a very important factor as it not only directly impacts the enterprise value of your business, but also influences a buyer's perception of the robustness of the business. It goes without saying that companies that are enjoying strong growth, alongside stable or growing margins, will often attract valuations above market averages, but they also can generate more preferential deal terms due to the perceived lower risk the company presents to an acquirer.

5. Market Conditions – Market conditions can have a significant impact on the enterprise value of your business. High growth markets will often drive increased demand from both strategic and financial acquirers. This increases the likelihood of an off-market approach that will often yield better deal terms and valuations than via a formal marketing process through advisers. The growth potential of a market is also very important, as well-placed companies in dynamic markets are usually the ones that attract the highest valuations. The timing of a sale is also critical, as waiting too long could result in a downturn in the economic cycle that could reduce valuation.

Whether you want to pursue new opportunities, are succession planning, or simply want to step away and enjoy the fruits of your labour, the right partner and timely process can help you explore all options and de-risk your personal financial position. Planning and executing a successful fundraise for exit often requires persistence, resilience, and the ability to effectively communicate the company's value proposition, and by focusing on the factors discussed, entrepreneurs can optimise the value in their business.

Maven is an experienced Private Equity investor and we can help owners release equity in their business, whether you want to pursue new opportunities, are succession planning, or simply want to step away and enjoy the fruits of your labour, we can help you explore your options. If you would like to discuss whether PE is right for your business, or for the business you advise, then please get in touch with one of our investment team at funding@mavencp.com

INVESTED

PODCAST



The Invested Podcast interviews CEOs and founders at the helm of some of the UK's fastest growing businesses, including those backed by the Maven VCTs.

Laura Boyd, Television and Entertainment Reporter, chats to them about the successes and the inevitable struggles they have faced when growing their business.



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Unlocking Business Potential: Why should you be preparing management accounts?

In today's competitive business landscape, the key to sustained growth and success lies in making informed and strategic decisions. This is where monthly management accounts become invaluable tools for businesses.

By regularly compiling and analysing financial and operational data, businesses can navigate complexities, identify opportunities, and mitigate risks effectively.

1. Enhanced Decision-Making

One of the primary benefits of monthly management accounts is the ability to make informed decisions. These reports provide a detailed overview of financial health, including income, expenses, cash flow, and profitability. By analysing this data monthly, business leaders can identify trends, monitor progress against budgets, and make timely adjustments. This continuous feedback loop enables businesses to respond quickly and proactively rather than reactively, thus fostering a culture of agility and strategic foresight.

2. Improved Financial Control

Regularly prepared management accounts offer a granular view of a company's financial status. They highlight variances between actual performance and budgeted expectations, allowing businesses to control costs and optimise spending. This level of financial scrutiny helps in pinpointing inefficiencies, such as unnecessary expenditures or underperforming assets, and taking corrective actions swiftly. As a result, businesses can maintain tighter financial control, ensuring that resources are allocated optimally to support growth initiatives.

3. Strategic Planning and Forecasting

Monthly reporting serves as a foundation for robust strategic planning and forecasting. By leveraging historical data and trend analysis, businesses can develop more accurate forecasts and set realistic goals. This forward-looking approach enables companies to

anticipate market changes, plan for various scenarios, and allocate resources more effectively. Tools like Fathom excel in this domain, offering sophisticated forecasting and scenario planning features that transform raw data into actionable insights.

4. Enhanced Stakeholder Communication

Transparent and regular reporting enhances communication with stakeholders, including investors, lenders, and board members. Monthly management accounts provide stakeholders with a clear picture of the company's performance and future prospects. This transparency builds trust and credibility, essential for securing investments or loans. Moreover, detailed reporting can help in articulating the company's strategy, growth plans, and risk management approaches, thereby aligning stakeholder expectations with business objectives.

5. Operational Efficiency and Performance Management

Management accounts are not just about financial metrics; they encompass a wide range of operational data, including key performance indicators (KPIs) related to sales, marketing, production, and customer service. By monitoring these KPIs monthly, businesses can identify bottlenecks, streamline processes, and improve overall efficiency. For instance, tracking customer acquisition costs and lifetime value can help refine marketing strategies, while analysing production data can lead to more efficient inventory management.

How to implement efficient and robust Management Accounts

To reap the benefits of monthly management accounts and performance reports, businesses need to adopt effective tools and processes. One tool that has revolutionised financial management and reporting is Fathom.

Fathom is a powerful financial analysis and

management reporting tool that integrates seamlessly with various accounting software products. It offers a suite of features designed to transform raw financial data into meaningful insights. With Fathom, businesses can create customised, visually appealing reports that highlight key financial metrics and trends. The tool also provides interactive dashboards, making it easy to monitor performance at a glance. Additionally, Fathom supports in-depth financial analysis, including profitability, growth, and cash flow analysis. Its benchmarking feature allows businesses to compare their performance against industry standards or internal targets, providing a clear view of where improvements are needed.

Steps to Prepare and Maintain Monthly Reports:

- 1. Data Collection:** Use Xero to record all financial transactions, ensuring that data is accurate and comprehensive.
- 2. Data Integration:** Sync Xero with Fathom to consolidate financial data and generate reports.
- 3. Report Customisation:** Customise reports in Fathom to focus on relevant KPIs and business metrics.
- 4. Analysis and Review:** Regularly review the reports, analyse trends, and discuss findings in management meetings.
- 5. Actionable Insights:** Develop action plans based on insights derived from the reports to drive strategic initiatives.

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Robson Laidler Accountants listed in The Sunday Times Best Places to Work



Robson Laidler Accountants has been named as one of the Best Places to Work in the UK for 2024 by The Sunday Times.

With a team of 94 staff across its two offices in Jesmond and Chester le Street, the accountancy and business advisory firm made the list and is thrilled that its efforts to improve workplace happiness have been recognised.

Amy Park, director of people and culture at Robson Laidler said: "We are completely overwhelmed to have been named in the Sunday Times Best Places to Work Awards and to be nationally recognised as an employer with the highest employee engagement and wellbeing levels alongside big names such as Octopus Energy and Easyjet Holidays.

"What makes this accolade even more special is the fact it comes directly from our people. There's no judging panel or swish submission to decide who makes the Best Places to Work list; it is based on honest feedback from our staff. I'm incredibly proud to work with amazing people across our business, who always show such passion and commitment to their work and clients and to supporting each other.

"We believe that a company's strength lies in its people, and that happy and engaged staff are the cornerstone of a successful business. We take pride in our diverse team



Graham Purvis, MD



Amy Park, Director of People and Culture

and inclusive environment. Based on the insights gained from this year's feedback, we are committed to enhancing Robson Laidler, ensuring it continues to be an even more exceptional place to work in the years to come."

Independent accountancy firm, Robson Laidler became the first organisation in the North East to become B Corp certified in 2021 and a Real Living Wage employer

in 2022. Its numerous inclusive workplace culture initiatives include; a calendar of health and wellness campaigns including managing mental health in the workplace and neurodiversity, enhanced life journey policies, work-life balance, flexible and agile working, cycle to work scheme, volunteer days and birthdays off.

Managing Director Graham Purvis said: "We run the business on the triple bottom line principles of People; Planet; Profit. 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. I couldn't be prouder of this achievement as it embodies everything we are striving for – to be an employer of choice."

The Sunday Times, powered by WorkL, Best Places to Work is a nationwide workplace survey that honours and celebrates Britain's top employers - which number over 500 organisations across different industries and sizes - and acknowledges the best workplaces for women, LGBTQIA+ community, disabled employees, ethnic minorities, younger and older workers, and wellbeing.

David Lloyd Clubs, CGI IT UK and Octopus Energy were among the Top Ten best employers in the Very Big organisation category, while Easyjet Holidays and Dishoom were ranked as some of the Top Ten best employers in the Big organisation category. YuLife insurance provider and Iconic Smiles dental group were celebrated in the Medium and Small organisation categories, respectively.

www.robson-laidler.co.uk

Cavu advise Datum360 on exit to strategic acquirer Autodesk

BGF has announced the successful exit of Datum360, a Connected Data platform that allows large asset owners to seamlessly access engineering information and asset data.

The Teesside-based business has been acquired by Autodesk, Inc. (NASDAQ: ADSK). Headquartered in San Francisco, Autodesk is a global leader in design and make software for the architecture, engineering, construction, operations, manufacturing, and media and entertainment industries.

Datum360 was founded in 2009 and now has a global footprint. The business has an impressive customer base across a range of sectors, such as power generation, utilities, food production, and infrastructure. By connecting customers with their data, Datum360 helps to enhance their decision-making and enhance efficiencies across their organisations.

BGF started backing Datum360 in November 2020 and, since then, the business has multiplied revenue. The investment has delivered a 5.9x money multiple (MM) return and an IRR of more than 60% for BGF.

"On meeting BGF, it was clear that they had a differentiated offering and were well versed in helping SaaS businesses scale. They've been the ideal partner to help us expand our market share, continue to innovate, and grow the business

over our partnership. We're looking forward to the next chapter and an exciting future with Autodesk, which will create significant opportunities for our team and clients." Steve Wilson, CEO of Datum360

Chris Boyes, who led the investment for BGF, commented: "It's been a pleasure to work alongside an excellent team, led by Steve Wilson, David Mitchell and James Michael, and supported by non-exec chair Ross Smith. The sale of Datum360 to Autodesk is a fitting culmination of the progress made during our partnership."

"Datum360 is another illustration of the value created by BGF's investment model, with our patient, minority-only capital, allowing us to form long-term partnerships with forward-thinking companies. Our approach enables us to confidently invest through the cycle, until we reach the right exit opportunity for everyone involved. We are delighted to have worked with them, and wish Steve, David, James and the wider Datum360 team the best for the future."

Advising BGF and Datum360 shareholders on the exit process were Cavu Corporate Finance (Thomas Brunsnes and Shawn Bone) and Weightmans (Duncan Reid, Kirsty Adamson and Rosie Roof).

Thomas Brunsnes, Director of Cavu Corporate Finance, said: "It has been a pleasure working with BGF and the Datum360 team on delivering this transformative transaction for the business. Steve, David and James have, alongside BGF, been able to expand its



Thomas Brunsnes

international footprint into the USA and Asia-Pacific markets, delivering critical software to some of the world's largest companies. We have worked with Datum360 and BGF for a prolonged period to secure a successful exit for the Shareholders, and are delighted to have advised on this highly strategic transaction with Autodesk."

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UNW opportunity too good to resist for repatriating audit partner

In the wake of sustained growth and new client wins, Newcastle-based independent chartered accountancy and business advisory firm UNW has announced the appointment of Ian Kelsall as Partner and Head of Audit & Assurance, notably strengthening its senior team and offering to clients.



Ian Kelsall, Partner and Head of Audit & Assurance at UNW, with some of UNW's Audit & Assurance Team

The announcement follows the arrival of Nicola Coleman as Audit & Assurance Partner at the end of 2023 and comes off the back of a period of demand-led growth that has seen the firm, which counts some of the region's largest and fastest growing businesses amongst its client base, invest considerably in its senior team.

Ian, a native of the North East, moves to UNW from Deloitte where he was a Partner and Head of Audit in the Belfast office. With more than two decades of experience, Ian has provided corporate audit services to FTSE 250 and AIM listed entities, privately owned businesses and large

subsidiaries of overseas multinationals, across a wide range of industry sectors including energy, utilities, transport, manufacturing, retail and pharmaceuticals.

He trained and qualified with a North East independent firm and then worked in senior management roles at both EY and Deloitte locally before transferring to Belfast.

Andrew Wilson, Managing Partner at UNW, said: "We have known Ian for some time now and believe he will be a perfect fit for our firm. He has a wealth of experience looking after the type of clients that populate our portfolio and is really keen to get back to the region and focus on local businesses. He's a team player and enthusiastic about supporting the development of the fantastic people we have throughout the firm."

Ian commented: "A return to Newcastle has always been an attractive option for me, but the only opportunity in the local market that I could really get excited about was at UNW. The calibre of its team and client base, along with its culture and ambition, and the entrepreneurial approach of an independent firm, ticked all the boxes for me. UNW's determination to continually invest in its people and drive opportunities both internally and externally across the region really sets them apart from others."

www.unw.co.uk

“

*...A return to
Newcastle has
always been an
attractive option
for me...*



Fortune Favours the Brave

One of the largest events in the Entrepreneurs' Forum's calendar, this year's Fortune Favours the Brave conference welcomed over 200 North East entrepreneurs and business leaders for a day which celebrated resilience and daring entrepreneurship.

Hosted by Alfie Joey, the event included captivating speeches from Rosie Brown (COOK), Mark Scott (Bella & Duke), Irene Graham OBE (ScaleUp Institute), Ammar Mirza CBE (Asian Business Connexions), Julia Hoggett (London Stock Exchange), Gill Hunter (Square One Law), Shah Yaseen Ali (Newcastle University Students' Union), rock musician Mark Deeks and disabled adventurer Darren Edwards.







“

*...The timing
of opening our
Newcastle office
couldn't be
better...*

Paul Shields

Accountant of the month...

Paul Shields

Partner at Johnston Carmichael

Paul has over 25 years' experience working in accountancy practices in the North East and supporting regional businesses to thrive.

Founded in Scotland almost 90 years ago, Johnston Carmichael is one of the UK's leading independent firms of chartered accountants and business advisers. The firm expanded into the North East in 2023, with an exciting new office in Newcastle City Centre, supporting job creation and opportunities for the region's businesses.

What were your career ambitions growing up?

Not accountancy, funnily enough. Like most boys in the North East, I grew up playing sports, mainly football and cricket. I was always better at cricket, so my ambition was to become a professional cricketer. That didn't quite work out but I'm lucky enough to still play and coach and my son loves it, so I still get to spend plenty of time at the cricket club.

Tell us about your experience in the North East?

I started my accountancy career more than 26 years ago, working at different regional practices and gaining experience working with some incredible businesses. Over the years I have met so many ambitious business leaders in the region and have a real understanding of the unique opportunities and challenges faced by North East businesses. I work across sectors but have a passion and specialism for the Engineering & Manufacturing sector. I love to work with regional businesses who are innovating and exporting to put the region on the map.

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

I joined Johnston Carmichael as Partner to head up our Newcastle office. I've been fortunate to work with some great clients and brilliant colleagues, so the most enjoyable part of my role is helping both to achieve their ambitions. The North East business community is extremely tight-knit, and there has been a real willingness to get to know Johnston Carmichael, which has been so rewarding.

Why is Johnston Carmichael an exciting addition to the North East market?

Johnston Carmichael may be new to the region, but we are an established firm with nearly 90 years of experience. I think the timing of opening our Newcastle office couldn't be better. Businesses are really open to getting to know us and to understand more about our sector expertise and what we bring as an independent firm. We have the flexibility to quickly adapt to the unique needs of local businesses, backed by the support and strength of a larger organisation and it's well received.

What is your proudest business achievement?

I love helping to develop people and create new opportunities. I've been heavily involved in recruiting graduates and school leavers and supporting them throughout their professional exams. Seeing their relief and joy when they qualify and progress in their careers is extremely rewarding. I enjoy being able to play a role in shaping their professional journeys and contributing to their success.

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

The industry has seen huge changes, largely due to the impact of COVID-19. The shift to cloud-based accounting solutions has allowed for a more mobile and agile approach. This flexibility allows team members to work in ways that best suit them, without the constraints of a traditional office environment. However, this shift has also brought new challenges, particularly with training. There have also been substantial increases in regulation, making it difficult to be a generalist within the industry. I think the next decade will bring further tech advancements, greater automation, and integration of AI, which will likely shift the focus of accountancy processes towards a more advisory role.

What's next for the North East office?

Since selecting Newcastle as the location for our first North East office last year and hosting a fantastic launch event a few months ago in March, we've gone from strength to strength with a team of 12 and some great client wins. Our focus is to continue to bring in the best talent across all our service lines. We are also moving to a larger office space, which will enable us to expand to around 25 team members in the heart of Newcastle. The long-term plan for the office is to employ over 100 people and collaborate with even more brilliant clients!

Tell us about the team you work with.

I work alongside an excellent team right across the UK. With a headcount nearing 1,000, we benefit from a wealth of expertise and support as we continue establishing our presence in the North East. We have a team of specialists across a range of disciplines to support businesses here in the region. We also have a really strong VAT offering. I work closely with Alex Nicholson, who's also in the Newcastle office, and who leads the VAT service line for the firm.

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

Some of the best advice I've heard is, "You only regret the things you don't do." Don't let worries or the opinions of others hold you back; you're not supposed to have all the answers. Embrace opportunities, try new things, and learn from every experience, as these will shape your future and help you grow both personally and professionally.

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

I think I would choose Shane Warne, Roy Keane, Tiger Woods, and Will Ferrell. In reality I'd probably settle for a dinner with my wife, Lucy, and our children, Isabella, Eva, and William.

How do you unwind outside of work?

Spending quality time with my family, enjoying a relaxing evening at home with a takeaway. I can often be found playing (badly, these days), coaching and watching cricket at Whitburn Cricket Club.

www.jcca.co.uk



Mincoffs retains position as region's number one deal adviser

A fast-growing North East law firm has had a strong start to Q1, with the news that it has once again secured the top spot in a prestigious ranking table.

Mincoffs Solicitors, based in Newcastle, has been named the region's number one deal adviser for Q1 by the Experian Market IQ M&A Report.

The firm completed 12 qualifying transactions in the North East over the time period – putting it five deals ahead of the next legal adviser on the table – with a total of 30 transactions across the year to date and a deal value in excess of £300m.

This continues a pattern of success for the firm, which was also ranked as the top legal adviser across the entirety of 2023 in Experian's end of year report.

Senior partner and head of corporate, Paul Hughes, is delighted with the result.

"Being ranked the number one legal adviser throughout 2023 was a great achievement and to continue the trend into the first quarter of 2024 is something we are really proud of," he said.

"The team work tirelessly for our clients to ensure we produce the best possible outcomes, and it is fantastic to see this hard work recognised in the Experian rankings.

"This is a great position to start the year in and one we hope to continue into the rest of the year."



Muckle supports University of Sunderland in achieving major project milestone in London

Nationally renowned education provider The University of Sunderland is one step closer to opening its new London campus after signing the lease on its new home.

Following over a decade of continuous growth, the University of Sunderland in London is expanding its premises near Canary Wharf, one of the capital's key commercial districts.

The £8m investment sees the University take up circa 95,000 sqft of space in two adjoining buildings, increasing its current floor site by 65% and solidifying its footprint in the capital.

The new campus, which is located at 4 and 5 Harbour Exchange (HX), will be completed later this year.

The two leases were negotiated by the real estate team at leading commercial law firm Muckle LLP.



Prima Cheese expands into London with support from Sintons law firm

North East-based Prima Cheese, one of the largest exporters of dairy products in the

country, has expanded into London with the support of Sintons' real estate team, in order to further exploit opportunities for international trade.

Prima, which operates from its headquarters in Seaham, County Durham, exports its products to more than 50 countries

worldwide and specialises in the supply of processed cheese.

The family-owned and founded business has now acquired new premises in north London, as part of its ambitious plans for further growth in 2024, acquiring the property through its property portfolio company, Prima Projects.

Prima South is a unique retail and office space located on the vibrant and artistic Holloway Road in Islington. The property, known as The Billiard Factory, is occupied by multiple creative businesses and is directly adjacent to the National Youth Theatre, which makes this an ideal and strategic acquisition for Prima to establish their southern base of operation.

Sintons, long-standing advisors to Prima, dealt with the transaction, with Alok Loomba, partner, supported by Chris Jackson, senior associate, leading on the transaction with the support of a wider team.



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Elena Manukyan

Solicitor of the Month

Northern Insight talks to...

Elena Manukyan

Owner, Swan Solicitors

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I didn't have the easiest upbringing, I was born in Moscow, and we moved to England (London), in 1995 when I was six years old. I couldn't speak English and we had no friends or family here. The first few years of school were tough, I worked hard at school, and quickly learnt English. Growing up I had an interest in business, and it wasn't until I went to university that I realised I had an interest in law, and changed from studying for a Business Management degree, to a law degree. From then on, I knew I wanted to qualify as a Solicitor, and that became an ambition of mine. Qualifying as a Solicitor isn't easy, it's very competitive, and can take many years. It is worth it though.

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

I recently set up my own law firm, so I guess the early passion I had for business never went away, and I managed to combine my passion for business and law in the opening of my own law firm. I specialise in personal injury law and that's what my law firm, Swan Solicitors, helps people with. The part of the job I enjoy the most is training new team members, who will hopefully go on to make great Solicitors one day. I'm fortunate to have had great bosses throughout my career, who I credit with any success I have had, and I hope to be a good leader myself to those that work for me. Getting great results for clients and winning cases always feels good too. In personal injury it very much feels like David vs Goliath, and we're on the side of David going after large insurance companies or organisations, so winning always feels great.

What is your proudest business achievement?

Hiring my first team member will always be a proud achievement. There's only so much you can do on your own in a business. Making your first hire can be daunting, but when you find a great candidate, you'll soon realise that you can achieve so much more together.

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

Personal injury has had a battering in terms of reforms. Peoples right to have legal representation continues to be impacted through reforms, which reduce, or in some cases, completely removes their right to recover their legal costs, meaning Solicitors don't get paid to represent injured Claimants. This is something we've come to expert as Solicitors so we just adapt as best we can.

What are you currently working on?

Currently my biggest focus is building the law firm. At the moment, it's more of a cygnet than a swan, I hope it grows into something beautiful, and that's where a lot of my focus is.

Tell us about the team you work with.

We are only a small team of four at the moment, hopefully we'll grow, but the aim isn't to grow quickly or to huge numbers, the aim is to grow in a way which is sustainable and makes commercial sense.

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

Probably the same advice I'd give myself now; to enjoy the journey and not focus too much on the destination. I think it's important to set goals, because then you have something to work towards, but enjoying the actual journey is so important. We only really have this moment, and if we can't enjoy that, we won't enjoy when we reach the destination. I'd also say 'live life on life's terms', you can't control most things, focus on those that you can, that's where your energy will be best spent.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years time?

Still working in the legal industry and running Swan Solicitors. I also have an interest in legal marketing, and all things social media, so I may spend time working on those interests too.

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

I'd invite my mum, husband and maybe somebody funny to keep us entertained, I love Micky Flanagan – obviously I'd invite myself.

How do you unwind outside of work?

Good question – I work a lot, often six days a week, but on a Sunday, I volunteer at an animal shelter looking after the cats. I also like to eat out and get to a local Park Run on a Saturday morning to work off the calories.

Favourite book and boxset?

I read a new book every month, so this is a hard question, but I like anything motivational, so anything by David Goggins or Steven Bartlett. I also read a lot of business and marketing books.

www.swansolicitors.co.uk

UK General Election 2024: What changes to employment law could we expect?

By Phoebe Gogarty, Associate Solicitor at Swinburne Maddison LLP

There are many promises of change ahead of the General Election on the 4th of July 2024, which differ greatly between the three main parties. From bringing back National Service to redefining Employment Status, we break down the key proposals that employers need to know.

Will there be any change to pay, tax, and NI contributions?

The Conservatives have pledged to reduce employee NI contributions to 6% and maintain the National Living Wage (NLW) at two-thirds of median hourly earnings by October 2024. Similarly, Labour proposes to link the NLW to the cost of living, while the Liberal Democrats plan to conduct an independent review to establish a 'genuine' living wage.

Additionally, Labour aims to implement a total ban on unpaid internships not connected to an educational or training course.

Will employees gain additional employment rights?

Labour has proposed significant changes to the right not to be unfairly dismissed after two years of qualifying service. Under Labour's new proposal, this right would become a day one entitlement, removing any service-related eligibility for the first time. They also plan to update the code of practice on 'fire and rehire' to strengthen employee protections, meaning employers would need more than a substantial reason to change existing terms of employment. Further details of this proposed threshold are awaited.

Labour also intends to introduce new rights for greater predictability in working patterns by banning 'exploitative' zero-hours contracts and creating a right to an average-hours contract for hours regularly worked, based on a 12-week reference period, though no minimum number of hours has been specified.

The Liberal Democrats propose that zero-hours contract workers receive a 20% increase on their minimum wage during 'normal demand' periods to compensate for times when no hours are available. For agency workers, they would introduce a right to request fixed-hours after 12-months of service, which employers could not unreasonably refuse. Additionally, they propose a new right for disabled employees to work from home unless significant business reasons prevent it, with a higher threshold for employer refusal than for statutory flexible working requests.

Will there be changes to sickness absence or family-friendly leave?

The current Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) waiting period is three days, making the fourth day of sickness absence the first eligible day for payment of SSP. Labour proposes to scrap this waiting period and the current Lower Earnings Limit to ensure eligibility for pay is available from day one for all employees.

The Liberal Democrats propose more extensive changes, including implementing Labour's above suggestions and increasing the SSP rate to match the National Minimum Wage.

The recently increased protections against redundancy for those returning from maternity leave around the right to suitable alternative employment is to be further strengthened by Labour's plan to ban dismissals for a six-month period after their return.

Currently, there is no statutory right to bereavement leave, leaving this to the discretion of employers. Labour intends to introduce a right to take compassionate leave but has not specified the fixed period or whether it must be paid.

The Liberal Democrat propose significant changes in this area, including a new day-one right to parental leave, removing the current one-year service eligibility requirement. In addition, they also propose new statutory rates for maternity pay and shared parental pay at 90% of earnings (subject to a cap) and an additional month of paternity leave with the same increased statutory rate of pay.

Will there be any amendments to equality and discrimination protections?

The Conservatives propose to clarify the existing protected characteristic of 'sex' under the Equality Act 2010 to read 'biological sex'. This change would limit reliance on this characteristic by trans people to their assigned sex at birth, regardless of whether they hold a Gender Recognition Certificate.

A new duty on employers to take reasonable steps to protect employees from sexual harassment is set to come into force in October 2024. Labour proposes raising this threshold to 'all reasonable steps' and treating harassment as whistleblowing. This would allow employees to seek interim relief for their salary if their dismissal is linked to the harassment.

Following the outcome of 4 July's vote, employers must be alert to the imminent announcements as to which proposals will be actioned and how they will affect their workforce. If you have any questions or concerns about the implications of the proposed changes for your business, please do not hesitate to contact the Swinburne Maddison employment law team for advice. You can also visit our website at swinburnemaddison.co.uk for more information and updates on the latest employment law developments.

www.swinburnemaddison.co.uk



Phoebe Gogarty

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Want to know more? Contact Phoebe Gogarty, Associate Solicitor in our employment team at pgg@swinburnemaddison.co.uk for more information for a no-obligation quote. Alternatively, visit our website swinburnemaddison.co.uk/smartHR or call us on 0191 384 2441.





L-R: Simon Robinson and Sam Marlow pictured in front of Miller Homes first phase of residential development at Lambton Park

Professional partnership brings forward further exciting development opportunities at Lambton Park

The professional partnership between Durham City's leading law firm, Swinburne Maddison LLP (Swinburne Maddison) and Theakston Estate Company Limited (Theakston) is gearing up a pace as two new development sites are soon to be released to the market at Lambton Park, near Chester-le-Street.

The land was originally made available for development when Theakston took up the first option agreement for a 111- hectare site as the 'promoter' of the Lambton Park site with the aim of facilitating the transformation of this unique location.

Miller Homes was the residential development partner to be awarded the first site, which saw 106 luxury homes built in the Victorian style and is now nearing completion.

Bellway plc was the next developer to secure a site in February 2023, which is being marketed under the name of Hedworths Green and includes a mix of stunning two-bedroom apartments, three, four and five-bedroom homes in the Georgian style.

The third development site, Lionfields, was awarded to Robertson Homes at the end of 2023. This will see the construction of 57 four, five and six-bedroom prestige homes in the Arts and Crafts style.

Now, two more sites are due to be released, once planning approval is determined – a site for 30 self-build plots on a site adjacent to the Lionfields development and a mixed use scheme, Bowes Gate, which features 35,000 sq ft of commercial space and will act as the beating heart of the development or 'community hub'.

Working alongside the Trustees of Lambton Estate, commercial property partner at Swinburne Maddison, Simon Robinson, has played a major role in the site's success as a highly sought-after development location.

He has worked in an advisory and legal role alongside Theakston for twenty-five years and at Lambton Estate for over ten years, providing the full range of legal work associated with plot sales, negotiation of contracts, ancillary documentation and advice on infrastructure agreements.

Commenting on the release of these latest sites, Simon said: "Each new site takes around nine months of legal work to reach contract completion. I am also working closely with the Trustees of Lambton Estate's solicitors, Withers Worldwide LLP in London, and GSC Grays, the managing agent acting on behalf of Lambton Estate.

Director of Theakston, Sam Marlow, added: "At all stages of the project Simon has provided commercially clear advice and a robust contractual framework within which the development is being delivered. His work on the negotiation of the infrastructure agreements ensures the infrastructure investment we make is adopted by the statutory authority as expeditiously as possible."

"It continues to be a busy and exciting time at Lambton Park and we are delighted to see the site really beginning to take shape now. Once we get planning consent for our current submissions, we will begin work on the next development opportunities."

Extending to some 600 hectares, Lambton Estate is situated near Bournmoor, Chester-le-Street. It has been the ancestral seat of the Earl of Durham for ten centuries.

The development schemes underway will fund conservation works across Lambton Estate which include the restoration of Lambton Castle and its stables as well as the Lamb Bridge.

For more information contact Sam Marlow on 0788 788 7791 or email sam.marlow@theakstonland.com



Around 13km of previously private parkland pathways have been opened up for the benefit of members of the public, businesses and house buyers.



“

*...an agreement
can save you
from stress
further down
the line...*

Protecting your assets: the case for pre-marital agreements

Pre-marital agreements might once have been the preserve of the rich and famous but, today, they're used by people from all walks of life. So, who should consider getting one and what are the benefits? Louise Masters, partner at Newcastle-based law firm Sintons, and a specialist in family law, explains more.

Traditionally, pre-marital agreements were something used by the wealthiest in society but in fact, I now recommend them to many of my clients.

Basically, if one person is bringing more wealth with them into a marriage than their partner – which can include property, cash or a business – they should consider a pre-marital agreement.

What does the law say about dividing assets on divorce?

When a married couple separates, there are two types of assets taken into account: matrimonial assets, which have been accumulated together for joint use, and non-matrimonial assets such as an inheritance by one person from a family member.

Matrimonial assets are jointly owned and divided between the two parties when they separate. There is nothing inherently unfair about one party seeking to preserve their non-matrimonial assets but there are some circumstances whereby these can be taken into account.

You might think a property you bought before marriage would be a non-matrimonial asset but in fact, if both people live together in the property, and it is regarded as the family home and therefore special to both, then the nature of this asset changes and will generally be shared equally upon divorce.

And cases where one or both parties run a business aren't always clear-cut. We speak to lots of clients where a family business has been built up over generations. Even though a business can have existed for many, many years before the marriage, it could still be seen as partially a matrimonial asset, depending on the circumstances.

In addition, the needs of the parties trumps all else so that if there are insufficient matrimonial assets to meet both parties' needs, then the Court can look to the non-matrimonial assets to bridge that gap.

A safeguard against expense and heartache

Examples like these can catch people by surprise and cause issues that are tricky and expensive to unravel.

That's why it's best to get advice early on – at least six months before getting married – as an agreement can save you from stress further down the line.

Of course, no one goes into marriage thinking they'll end up separating. But aside from saving you

money and heartache if divorce does happen, a pre-marital agreement can also improve communication between partners and increase transparency within a relationship. It gives you certainty about the future and couples who do separate can remain on better terms if they're able to avoid an acrimonious divorce. We also encourage parties to engage in the process of preparing a pre-marital agreement in a collaborative way, with meetings together to discuss matters and negotiate openly.

I would also point out that parties can consider a post-marital agreement, if say, one party receives a gift or inheritance during the marriage.

Legal agreements for cohabiting couples

The UK census shows more couples are choosing to live together without getting married or entering a civil partnership: the proportion increased from 20.6% in 2011 to 24.3% in 2021.

Even if you have no plans to get married, there are still ways you can protect your assets. I often advise couples to consider a cohabitation agreement which, like a pre-marital agreement, is a legal agreement setting out who's entitled to what in the case of separation.

I see a lot of cases where couples disagree about entitlement to the property where they had been living. A cohabitation agreement can help avoid this issue and they're becoming much more common.

A wise investment

It's important to revisit any legal agreement between you and a partner regularly, to make sure it's right for your current situation. This should be done every few years and definitely in the case of significant changes, like having children.

Ultimately, a judge has the final say on how assets are divided after divorce, but recent cases have shown that judges can and do uphold pre-marital agreements in the Family Court, so having such protection in place is a wise investment.

Find out more about Louise Masters and Sintons' team of family law experts at www.sintons.co.uk

In this month's feature we speak to...

Alex Craig

Partner and Head of the Commercial team at Muckle LLP

What is your role at Muckle?

I'm a commercial lawyer and head up the commercial team at Muckle. My role, and that of my team, essentially involves helping companies to effectively and compliantly trade. We do this in a variety of ways, including drafting contracts, exploiting their ideas, providing policies and reviewing their procedures. Whether a business is bricks and mortar or operates online, regardless of sector, we can help.

You also lead the digital and technology team.

What does this team do and how does it differ to the commercial team?

The digital and technology team is cross-discipline; it is made up of colleagues from our commercial, disputes and corporate finance teams. This means we can offer a terrific depth of experience across many areas and can easily speak to colleagues across the departments. Several members of the digital and technology team have been at Muckle almost as long as me!

Our colleagues in dispute resolution tend to get involved when something has gone (or is going) wrong or if you need a strategic plan on how to get something back on track. For example, if someone is using a client's intellectual property without permission, or if a client is suffering a ransomware attack or is the subject of an online misinformation campaign. Our colleagues in corporate work with digital and tech clients when they are acquiring a new business or seeking investment to facilitate growth.

You joined Muckle as a trainee in 1998. How has the world of technology changed over the years?

In 1998, most of the technological advances which are now out there hadn't even been thought about. We were just starting to see the use of computers in the workplace, emails, the Internet and the adoption of computer software in the world of work. I can vividly remember starting work with a manual time recording sheet, a tape cassette dictation machine and absolutely no computer. A far cry from what we're used to in the 21st century!

How did you first get involved with the legal side of technology?

I've always had an interest in technology, but my career has, in effect, grown alongside the development of technology in the .com boom and subsequent crash. I actually first specialised in intellectual property law in the early 2000s. As you can imagine, intellectual property law has developed alongside technology and data to become an increasingly important element of technology. This synergy between IP, tech and data has meant that my

legal work has shifted and changed, which is what has kept it interesting.

Going back to the present day...what are the most common issues you deal with?

These days it is mainly data protection. It could be a subject access request, a complicated controller/processor agreement, or a data-sharing agreement on a project. We might be assisting on a project to use AI in a particular way or to embed a new product into an organisation and support the risk assessment around that. It varies hugely and is really interesting, especially when that area of law and guidance is changing so rapidly.

Who are you working with at the moment?

We work in a wide variety of sectors, such as technology, sports, education, leisure, construction, property, entertainment, manufacturing and the public sector. Our clients include European operators such as Biscuit International, sports organisations like parkrun, local organisations like The Alnwick Gardens Trust, and public sector organisations like the Tees Valley Combined Authority. No matter the size of the business, they all need commercial support in some shape or form.

What is your proudest business achievement?

It's always nice to be personally recognised for the work you do, but I'm most proud of the recognition that the team has received over the years. Most recently, we won 'Law Firm of the Year for tech, media and telecoms' at the Legal 500 Northern Powerhouse Awards. Considering that we were up against firms from across the Northern regions, this is a hugely impressive achievement and a real testament to the team's knowledge and hard work.

Lastly, which part of your job gives you the most satisfaction?

I'd probably say it's helping entrepreneurs, start-ups and scaling businesses at the start of their business journey or when things are really starting to escalate. It's so rewarding to see a start-up grow and know that you've played a small part in that growth.

To find out more about how Muckle can support your business, contact Alex using alex.craig@muckle-llp.com or 0191 211 7911.

The Big Interview



Alex Craig

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Three mistakes that could result in a data breach

Data breaches can happen to anyone at any time, but your organisation could be making mistakes that make it more susceptible. Muckle LLP, experts in digital and data protection law, explain more.

A data breach occurs when confidential, sensitive, or private information is revealed to someone who is not authorised to access it. Although data breaches can happen for several reasons, it generally involves technology or human interaction (both deliberate and accidental).

Data breaches can be costly for your business, both monetary and reputational, and they aren't always preventable. However, you can minimise the risk of data breaches and reduce any potential impact.

Here are some of the top preventable mistakes that businesses make:

Mistake 1: Using outdated tech and software

Cyber threats are probably the most well-known types of data breaches. Types of cyber threats include ransomware and phishing and involve hackers stealing personal data.

According to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), the UK's data protection regulatory body, most ransomware incidents are usually the result of "poor cyber hygiene rather than sophisticated attack techniques".

In one of the largest data breaches in history, credit bureau company Equifax Ltd. was fined just over £11m in 2023 after a cyber attack in 2017. Hackers accessed the personal data of around 13.8m UK-based individuals (as well as 116m in the US and 19,000 in Canada).

The attack, which the Financial Conduct Authority described as "foreseeable and entirely preventable", began with hackers utilising an unpatched software loophole in Equifax's parent company (Equifax Inc) based in the US.

You must ensure that your organisation regularly implements the latest software updates, as these generally contain updated patches to known security loopholes. It's also important that the tech itself is current; old tech won't support the latest updates, which could leave you more vulnerable to data breaches.

Mistake 2: Overlooking the potential for human error

Although hackers can also exploit human vulnerabilities to steal data, breaches often happen by mistake. Most data breaches reported to the ICO are a result of human error; between 2019-2024, approximately 70% of reported data breaches were 'non-cyber'.

The most common type of 'non-cyber' data breach is failing to use BCC in emails. Other types include emailing/posting data to the wrong person and failing to redact sensitive information in communications.

In April of this year, The Central YMCA was reprimanded and fined £7,500 by the ICO for failing to use BCC in an email. The company disclosed the email addresses of 166 people by using CC in an email that discussed a sensitive medical condition. The ICO found that all 166 people could be at least partially

identified by their email addresses, and therefore inferred that all 166 identifiable recipients were likely living with the condition.

To prevent mistakes like this, your organisation should provide basic cyber security and data protection training to all employees, regardless of role, to mitigate mistakes. In addition, you should offer specialised training to staff members who have significant roles involving people's data.

Mistake 3: Being complacent with procedures

If your organisation's data protection policies and procedures aren't up to scratch, you could be more open to a potential data breach, whether from outside hackers or internal human error. The ICO states that "poor information security leaves your systems and services at risk and may cause real harm and distress to individuals".

In May, the ICO announced its intention to fine the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) £750,000 for its failure to protect the information of its 9,483 workforce. The incident revolved around personal information mistakenly included in a 'hidden' spreadsheet tab published online.

Of the breach, John Edwards, UK Information Commissioner, said: "Simple and practical-to-implement policies and procedures would have ensured this potentially life-threatening incident did not happen in the first place."

To minimise the risk of data breaches, organisations should have robust and appropriate safety procedures in place, such as data encrypting, adequate password protections and restricting access to files for only those essential.

Your organisation should also have a clear data protection policy so your staff know what to do and why. This could cover topics such as data management (including disposal) and the steps to take should you suffer a data breach.

Don't leave yourself vulnerable

These three points are not mutually exclusive. For example, a data breach could happen due to a combination of outdated software, human error, and a lack of procedures. What remains the same is your organisation's responsibility to ensure the safety of the personal data it holds as part of its compliance with data protection legislation.

There is no prescriptive way to ensure data protection law compliance as every organisation is different. That's where specialist legal advice can help.

For more information on how Muckle can support you with your data protection requirements, visit www.muckle-llp.com

Meet Mincoffs' Wills, Probate and Trusts Team

The team are experts when it comes to protecting what matters most.



Lydia McCaslin, Partner, Head of Wills, Probate and Trusts



Victoria Richer, Associate Solicitor

With nearly 60 years' of combined experience across partner Lydia McCaslin, associate solicitors Victoria Richer and Janine Kennedy, and solicitor Alicia Speed, clients can be assured they're in safe hands, whatever their query.

The private client team at Newcastle-based Mincoffs Solicitors are skilled in a wide variety of services, including wills, lasting powers of attorney, probate, trusts, and Court of Protection, to name just a few.

Since joining the firm six years ago as a solicitor, Lydia progressed to associate and then shortly to head of department, with the team going from strength to strength under her leadership and cementing her promotion to partner in 2023.

While a typical workday may include drafting relatively straightforward mirror wills for a newly married couple or advising a family on lasting powers of attorney, the team can just as easily see a complex case walk through the door.

This could involve anything from advising on succession planning for business assets, to following a complex paper trail overseas while trying to accurately determine the size of an estate.

“We have many clients who approach us specifically because they know we have the experience to take on the more complicated matters,” said Lydia.

“These could be individuals with a high net worth, involving assets held in a different country or even concerning a more complex family structure if they have dependants from more than one marriage.”

For those clients who have corporate or commercial aspects to their affairs, the team are able to draw on the expertise of colleagues across the firm who specialise in these areas of law.

The benefit of being part of a full service firm provides reassurance to clients that they are receiving high quality legal advice on every aspect of their matter, without having to turn elsewhere.

Their reputation for handling complex cases has gained the department recognition from leading legal directory Legal 500, which ranks the top law firms across the globe.

It also means the team are regarded as a safe pair of hands, evidenced most recently when a law firm which went into administration left a number of clients unable to access assets they had been advised to put into trusts.

Victoria, in particular, has had success in helping families unravel these trusts, resulting in more and more of these clients being referred into the firm for help.

While the department has built a strong standing across the North East, it is not unusual for the team to meet with clients from across the country and further afield.

In recent years, they have supported clients based as far away as France and Vietnam by utilising video chat to expand their reach and services.

Many clients may have had limited legal experience before needing advice on a will or the administration of an estate, and the team pride themselves on delivering their services with compassion and care.

Taking time to make sure everyone who they meet with understands each of the steps they are taking and why, and explaining everything in simple terms without confusing legal jargon.

This commitment is something the team continues to work on, with Lydia, Victoria and Janine all members of the Society of Trust and Estate Practitioners (STEP), a global professional body whose members are internationally recognised as experts in their field.

In addition, Lydia and Janine are fully accredited members of The Association of Lifetime Lawyers, making them two of the most qualified solicitors in the country supporting older people and those in vulnerable circumstances.

“Due to the nature of our work, many of our clients are getting in touch during what can be a really difficult time for their families,” said Lydia.

“It is therefore imperative for our team that we not only find them the best possible outcome for their specific set of circumstances, but that they also feel supported, confident and informed throughout the process.”

For friendly, sensitive advice, contact Lydia McCaslin, Head of Wills, Probate and Trusts on probate@mincoffs.co.uk or visit www.mincoffs.co.uk/services/wills-probate-trusts



Janine Kennedy, Associate Solicitor



Shahar Sadat

Leasehold and Freehold Reform Bill becomes law; what are the key takeaways?

On 24 May 2024, the former Leasehold and Freehold Reform Bill 2023-24 (LFRB 2023) received Royal Assent to now be enacted in UK law as the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024 (LFRA 2024).

In the UK, residential property ownership falls under two categories, freehold – in which the owner has total ownership of the property and the land it sits on – or leasehold – where the homeowner does not own the land but leases the land instead and pays a rent or service charge to the freeholder. Leasehold ownership is common with blocks of flats and many newer housing developments.

The new reform is designed to enhance the rights of residential long leaseholders in England and Wales through a series of significant reforms. Shahar Sadat from Sweeney Miller Law's Commercial Property department looks at some of the key provisions in the legislation and their impact on homeowners.

Prohibition of new long residential leases

The Act bans the granting of long residential

leases for houses, except under specific permitted exceptions.

Enhanced rights for residential leaseholders

The Act augments and increases the rights of residential leaseholders in relation to service charges, insurance payments, administration charges, provision of sales information upon assignment, and reduces leaseholders' liability for litigation costs.

Extended lease terms

The standard lease extension term has been increased to 990 years for houses and flats as opposed to previous limitations of 50 years for houses and 90 years for flats.

Right to manage (RTM)

The threshold preventing leaseholders from enforcing the right to manage the freehold of their building has been increased. Previously if there was a portion of the floor space that

was a non-residential element (for example a shop or a gym) that occupied more than 25% of the total space, then they would not be able to exercise a right to manage the freehold. This has been increased to 50% enabling more leaseholders to access RTM or the right to a collective enfranchisement (i.e the ability to buy the freehold with the other leaseholders).

Elimination of ownership period requirement

The Act removes the requirement for leaseholders to have owned their leasehold property for two years before they can extend their lease or purchase the freehold. This requirement led to a number of purchases of leasehold properties incurring additional legal costs for service of notices and assignments of the benefits from the seller to the prospective buyer. This can now be avoided altogether and, more importantly, can save a lot of money for leaseholders in certain circumstances.

Regulation of estate management charges

The LFRA 2024 provides freeholders with protections comparable to those enjoyed by residential leaseholders with regards to estate management charges. Landlords and estate management companies managing properties or estates must now sign up to a compulsory redress scheme.

Scrapping the presumptions

The Act aims to provide clarity regarding the presumption that leaseholders pay the freeholders' legal costs when challenging poor practice, something that has been a deterrent when leaseholders want to challenge their service charges.

Historic rent charges

The Act regulates demands and modifies remedies for the non-payment of historic rent charges, which have not been creatable since 22 August 1977.

A property lawyer's view

These reforms are poised to provide leaseholders with greater control and protection, thereby having a profound impact on leasehold and freehold transactions in England and Wales. Commenting on the new legislation, Shahar said: "Whilst it is a watered-down version of the Bill as it was originally proposed, the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024 represents significant advancements in the legal and financial protections primarily for the benefit of residential leaseholders. By extending lease terms, eliminating barriers to lease extensions and enfranchisement, and regulating estate management charges, the Act promotes fairness and transparency within the housing market."

Expert advice

At Sweeney Miller Law our expert property team has extensive experience in dealing with all types of transactions for individuals, businesses and landlords.

If you have any queries relating to the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024 or any aspect of property law, get in touch by calling 0345 900 5401, emailing enquiries@sweeneymiller.co.uk or visit www.sweeneymiller.co.uk



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New fee reductions for small businesses at the European Patent Office



Dominic Elsworth

Securing patent protection for inventions can be an expensive process. Along with attorney fees, there are official fees payable to the various patent offices, and these fees can be significant.

Some patent offices, such as the US and Canadian Patent Offices, offer fee reductions for small businesses, but until recently the European Patent Office (EPO) did not offer such discounts.

However, the EPO has recently introduced a new scheme allowing small companies to take advantage of a generous 30% reduction of most of the fees payable during the lifetime of a patent application filed at the EPO. This new scheme began on 1st April 2024 and is applicable to fees payable from that date. This initiative aims to improve access to the European patent system for small businesses and individual inventors, promoting innovation and growth.

Who is eligible to claim the discount?

The new scheme is available to individual inventors, non-profit

organisations, universities, public research organisations, and micro-enterprises. Micro-enterprises are defined by the EPO as applicants with fewer than ten employees, which also have an annual turnover or balance sheet total of less than €2 million (approximately £1.7 million). In addition, applicants need to have filed fewer than five patent applications at the EPO during the previous five year period. It is therefore expected to be of particular benefit to individual inventors and start-ups.

The reduction applies to most fees payable to the EPO, including filing, search, examination, designation, grant, and renewal fees, meaning that savings of around £2000 could be made, assuming the application remains pending for a period of five years.

Care must be taken to make sure any claim is valid at the time of paying the relevant fee, but this is a very welcome change, making the European patent system more accessible to small businesses.

www.heip.co.uk

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Patent Attorneys

For practical advice in relation to:

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Please contact:

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Bespoke legal support, courtesy of the Jacksons Acquisitions team...The A-Team!

How Jacksons Law Firm takes a teamwork approach to business acquisitions and disposals.

In 1876, Gilbert Jackson established a law firm on Albert Road, Middlesbrough to provide legal services to the burgeoning "Infant Hercules" of Teesside. That seed has grown into what is now known as Jacksons Law Firm, a North East regional legal practice operating from Stockton, Newcastle and Sunderland, offering the services of an A-Team of crack legal professionals. The modern legal world is complex. Legal transactions commonly have a multitude of different facets and issues which necessitate the input of an array of different legal skills. Teamwork is the ethos that runs to the core of Jacksons. Whoever you contact first, this crack outfit will call on their colleagues to pull together the team of legal specialists that you need. So, if you're looking to make a business acquisition or disposal, YOU can hire...The A-Team!



L-R: Tony Wentworth, Erica Turner, Rebecca Logue, John Bewick and Deborah Henning.

Tony Wentworth, managing partner of Jacksons and head of the corporate and commercial team is often the first port of call for clients.

He says the first step in any transaction is to gain a thorough understanding of the business which is to be bought or sold and the issues that are likely to arise.

"From that, we are then able to pull together a team of specialist lawyers from within our firm to meet the demands of the transaction," he says.

Recently, the firm acted for a management team who acquired the division of the business that they managed. As they acquired only part of the existing business, the acquisition was structured as a purchase of specific assets, which gave rise to some complex legal issues.

"There were employees of the selling company who worked across both the business division which was to be sold and the part of the business that was to be retained," Tony explains.

"This created some difficult TUPE (employee transfer) issues which had to be negotiated and resolved with the seller and which required significant input from one of our specialist employment lawyers.

"There were also existing customer contracts which required the continuing participation of both the transferring and retained parts of the business.

"Our contracts specialist was involved in preparing ongoing service level agreements under which the transferring business and the retained business were to continue to run those contracts between them."

As part of the acquisition, the clients also bought the premises from which the acquired part of the business operated.

However, the seller required the ongoing use of part of those premises.

"One of our specialist commercial property lawyers dealt with the purchase of the property and the lease-back, to the seller, of the part that the seller wished to retain," Tony says.

"Finally, the property that was bought was subject to an ongoing dispute with a neighbouring property owner in relation to a boundary and right of access.

"This was investigated and reported on as part of the purchase process by one of our litigation specialists."

As a consequence of the acquisition, the financial circumstances of the members of the MBO team had also changed significantly.

This led to them being referred to Jacksons' wills specialists, who reviewed their estate planning and put new wills in place.

Erica Turner, partner and head of commercial property says: "Just because we work in separate departments, doesn't mean we can't also work as a team on behalf of the clients when that is required.

"We already work closely together on behalf of a number of different commercial clients across a range of sectors including industrial, pharmaceutical and retail."

Deborah Henning, head of employment at Jacksons Law Firm, added the firm assists clients throughout the life cycle of their businesses.

"As an employment lawyer I am quite often brought into an acquisition process to review and report to the client on the existing employee issues within the business and manage the employee transfer process," she says.

"My role, however, seldom ends there.

"There will often be measures that have to be taken, post-acquisition, such as the rationalisation of the consolidated workforce or the harmonisation of their employment terms.

"All businesses have recurring employee issues and so the support that I provide through the acquisition process tends to be only the beginning of my relationship with the client."

She adds: "People come back to us because they build a positive relationship with us – and that's down to good teamwork."

So if you are in need of legal support in connection with a business acquisition or disposal, why call anyone else? Call the A-Team on 0333 091 3200.

Emmersons Solicitors invests in award-winning Private Client team

Leading local law firm, Emmersons Solicitors, has invested in its growing Private Client team to support an increased request from clients for Wills, Probate, Lasting Powers of Attorney and Contested Estates.

The firm, which was founded in Sunderland by Jacqueline Emmerson in 1998, has recently welcomed Faye Whitfield-Sykes to support the Private Client team and Michael Robinson who leads Contested Probate matters.

Having recently won at the British Wills and Probate Awards, Emmersons has seen an increased number of enquiries relating to Wills, Probate, house clearances, Lasting Powers of Attorney and Disputed Estates. The appointment of Faye and Michael has ensured that clients can be supported, often at difficult and emotional times in their lives, by a dedicated team member from the beginning to end of their case.

Jacqueline Emmerson, who heads up the Newcastle Private Client team, commented on the recent expansion: "It has been a pleasure to welcome Faye to the department as a Paralegal. She has joined us from Northumbria University where she earned a First in her degree and we are so pleased with her enthusiasm so far.

"Having Michael Robinson on the team has meant that the firm can deal with the increasing number of Disputed Estates that we are receiving.

"We have noticed a significant increase in enquiries for our services over the past few months, which is a reflection of our hard work and good reputation in the region. We have welcomed clients from all over the North East, nationally and internationally.

"We often visit clients in hospital, their own home or care home and we can now offer this service to even more clients."



Chief Executive, Michael Robinson, has also offered his expertise and is actively taking on Contested Estates clients together with Jacqueline Emmerson and Tracey Hammond, all of whom are over 30 years' qualified. This is a very specialist area of Law. For clients who do not marry, they can face losing their home if their partner dies without a Will in place and they are not Joint Tenants of the property. This can be an extremely upsetting time for people. Michael's extensive knowledge of Contested Estates has meant clients can remain in their homes, which has been greatly welcomed by those he has assisted and continues to assist.

Further investment in Personal Protective Equipment has also allowed the Private Client team to accept more Probate cases. Some homes have been empty for a number of months, or the deceased may have suffered with mental health difficulties which can lead to hoarding problems, and PPE allows the team to Clean and Clear homes, whilst ensuring they locate and store

valuables, important documents and family heirlooms to give to the next of kin.

This is a key part of the Private Client team's offering and something Jacqueline and the rest of the department feel strongly about.

"It is important for us to be safe in our clients' homes whilst ensuring we undertake all relevant checks and searches. Sometimes a home has a large amount of belongings that have been left untouched for months, or even years, and it is vital that we can protect all of our staff."

The Private Client department, which now numbers six full-time members of staff, are welcoming client enquiries from across the North East and beyond. Clients can be seen in their own homes, hospitals, by Teams or in either the Sunderland or Newcastle offices.

For more information, visit www.emmersons-solicitors.co.uk/index.php or call 0191 284 6989.



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Fizz in the City

Mincoffs Solicitors' latest Fizz in the City recently took place at Manahatta, Newcastle.

The popular event welcomes businesswomen from across the region for an afternoon of informal networking over a glass or two of fizz.

The summer event fundraised for True Colours Theatre, a fully inclusive theatre company and school which aims to inspire confidence and build friendships through performing arts classes.

Plans for the next Fizz in the City event are underway and will be announced at www.mincoffs.co.uk and on the firm's social media.



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Northern Voices Choir sings its praises for Northumberland Freemasons' Donation

LD North East, a Wallsend-based charity dedicated to supporting people with learning difficulties, has received a generous donation of £1,000 from Northumberland Freemasons. This vital funding will support the charity's choir, Northern Notes, ensuring its continued success and enabling further community engagement.

LD North East focuses on enhancing the quality of life for people with learning disabilities by helping them achieve three key goals: feeling good inside, maintaining physical health, and fostering social connections. The charity addresses serious issues such as social isolation, hate crime, and ensuring individuals receive the benefits and support they need. By offering activities and

support that many take for granted, LD North East helps individuals build essential social skills and live more fulfilled lives.

The Northern Notes choir, composed of around 30 adults with learning disabilities and autism, meets every Friday at a local church in Wallsend. The choir performs a repertoire of classic Geordie songs, including "Blaydon Races" and "Fog on the Tyne."

Stuart Cairns from Northumberland Freemasons explained that each year, the Provincial Grand Lodge of Northumberland through the Richard Henry Holmes Masonic Benevolent Fund donates around £160,000 to local charities and good causes including food banks to boost worthwhile and deserving projects throughout Northumberland, Newcastle, and North Tyneside.

"This is a great example of how a charity is going beyond its day-to-day activities by running a choir to help the people they support. We are delighted to help fund a small part of their activities and we look forward to hearing them sing across the region."

Charity fundraiser BiteBack raises £72,063 for Cancer Research UK

BiteBack Festival which took place at Wylam Brewery, Newcastle, on Sunday 09th June 2024 has been a triumphant success, raising a whopping £72,063 for Cancer Research UK.

The event, the brainchild of Sian Byerley, co-owner of Restaurant Pine, Northumberland, saw a stellar line up of fifteen chefs from some of the UK's leading restaurants, with 19 Michelin stars and Green stars between them, cook at the pop-up foodie event.

On the day, each individual chef and their teams served up 500 portions of their refined street food creations to eagerly waiting foodies who'd devoured online tokens in record time to secure dishes from their chosen food heroes.

The free to attend event saw thousands gather on the day to help raise much needed cash



to help Cancer Research UK support over 4,000 researchers, clinicians and nurses who are carrying out vital work transforming the prevention, diagnosing and treatment of cancer, and bring hope to millions of people, now and in the future in the process.



Rail Industry unites to inspire local children to travel safer on The Bishop Line

Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership brought together its many rail industry partners to inspire 180 students from primary schools in Bishop Auckland, Shildon and Darlington and prepare them for safe, independent train travel.

The event took place on Tuesday 4th and Wednesday 5th June at Locomotion, Shildon and aimed to tackle the growing problem of trespass on the railway through safety-based activities.

The year six students enjoyed a carousel of activities delivered by railway professionals covering rail safety, journey planning, mental well-being and driver experience. They heard first-hand what it's like to work in the rail industry from drivers, staff in customer services, those behind the scenes in roles like train performance plus they met community rail representatives who help connect the railways to the communities they serve. And for a hands-on experience, they explored the tools and vehicles used by colleagues and officers of Network Rail and British Transport Police who work to keep us all safe on the railway.

Sessions were delivered by British Transport Police, CrossCountry, Network Rail, Northern and the Railway Children charity and the event was supported by Community Rail Network, ISS, LNER, Locomotion, Shildon Station Adopters, TransPennine Express, Tyne Valley Community Rail Partnership and Weardale Railway.

WITH WELLBEING IN MIND.



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TALKWORKS

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Record breaking weekend for NE Youth annual Clay Pigeon Shoot as they raise £83k

NE Youth have hosted their clay pigeon shoot event for over 40 years- this year they smashed all previous fundraising targets raising a whopping £83k!

Held in the beautiful grounds of Hulne Priory, Alnwick the event was co-sponsored by Perspective Financial Group (Perspective North East) and Storey Homes.

The Sunday Memorial Shoot remembers one of the charities biggest supporters and friends- John Shallcross OBE.

John helped to raise over £1m during his 40 years as a trustee and volunteer.

CEO Jon Niblo commented: "This years event has literally blown me away. Both the corporate and memorial shoot were sold out. To raise £83k is incredible - so many more young people will be supported over the coming year. Massive thanks to to sponsors

Perspective and Storey Homes, also huge thanks to The Inn Collection Group, Bradley Hall, Northumberland Estates, Bywell Shooting Ground and the shoot committee.

What a weekend!"





Durham Area Youth march at Pride

Recently Durham Area Youth (DAY) young people and staff marched through the city, alongside the Durham Miners Banner, supporting the LGBTQ+ community at Durham Pride UK to show their support as an all inclusive youth provision.

DAY were joined in partnership with Redhills Durham and proudly walked alongside their banner. It was a significant milestone for Redhills as it marked 40 years of solidarity. It was a fantastic day, and the young people were proud to raise awareness for the miners, LGBTQ+ community and their charity.

Altius Group reveals final score for Newcastle Foodbank

A leading business broker has been donating to charity during the 2023/24 football season. Altius Group's Chairman has now revealed the final sum donated to Newcastle Food Bank.

Born and raised in Newcastle, Paul Miller has been an unwavering supporter of Newcastle United FC and enjoys giving back to his local communities. This season, Paul promised to donate £100 per goal scored by the team in each of their Premier League, European matches, Carabao Cup, and FA Cup matches.

With a total score of 102 goals, Altius has donated £10,200, which will be split between Newcastle Foodbank and Brian House Children's Hospice in Blackpool.

Gemma Whaley, Deputy Chief Executive at Newcastle Food Bank, shared her thanks: "We'd like to thank Paul for his incredible generosity to our Charity; when Paul agreed to donate £100 for every goal that Newcastle United scored, I can't imagine he thought they would have their highest-scoring season!"

"The money Paul has donated will directly benefit the people of Newcastle who use our services, as sadly, this past year was the busiest in the Foodbank's 10-year history, with 25,500 food parcels issued to help people who are unable to make ends meet. It took 337 tonnes of food to fill those parcels, of which 1/3 of the food was directly purchased by the Charity, and this donation will contribute to us being able to purchase additional, much-needed stock to fill our food parcels."

Talk Works marks tenth anniversary with twin business and environmental landscapes

A specialist North East mental health consultancy has marked its tenth anniversary by securing a new partnership with a national business organisation and a top level environmental certification.

Talk Works aims to help improve the mental health and well-being of individuals and organisations by delivering rapid access to evidence-based therapy, e-learning and training services both in person and online.

Its team of expert practitioners work alongside HR departments, occupational health teams and business managers to help employees work well, feel well and engage well at work.

The Gateshead-based firm has been named as the recommended mental health support provider for the Family Business Community, a nationwide network of more than 3,500 family-owned firms.

And after successfully completing a lengthy accreditation process, Talk Work has now also become B Corp certified in recognition of its high standards of social and environmental performance, transparency and accountability.

Talk Works worked with regional fund management firm NEL Fund Managers last year to bring in a five-figure investment from the North East Small Loan Fund, which is supporting an ongoing new business development and marketing drive that has already delivered a number of new clients.



The investment has also supported the recruitment of additional staff, with two new jobs being created within its head office team this year and the network of specialist practitioners that support the delivery of its services continuing to widen.



Enriching the lives of disabled children, young people and their families

www.gracehouse.co.uk • 0191 435 2088 • info@gracehouse.co.uk

Registered Charity No: 1100682

"Where Friends Become Family"





Dog walkers and canine friends wanted for fundraiser



The whistle has been blown – for dog lovers and their dogs if they have them, to step forward to take part in the annual ‘Walk for Wag’ fundraiser for a North East charity.

Dog walkers and their canine companions are being invited to take to their heels to raise thousands for Wag & Company, a regional charity that works to combat loneliness among older dog lovers.

Walk for Wag, which this year takes place at the new location of Derwent Reservoir and Waterside, in County Durham, on Saturday September 14, has become a popular annual event for families and those with dogs.

It's a chance for everyone to get together, older friends too, to walk 8km (five miles) along the beautiful Derwent Waterside - knowing that every sponsored step provides Wag friends for elderly dog lovers.

There is also a 3 kilometre (1.86 miles) walk where a shorter distance might be more appropriate for some and those with children or aged dogs. The 8km walk takes about 1.5 hours at a moderate pace and the 3 km about half an hour. Both walks are on generally good terrain and the 3km walk is wheelchair accessible. People are invited to

register - sign up online first to get a walker number - to take part in September.

In pre-Covid years, when the event was held at Kielder Water, it raised more than £10,000 for the charity and its activities. Money raised funds visiting Wag Teams for a whole year, enabling hundreds of visits to older people in their own homes.

Diane Morton, Founding Director of Wag & Company, said: "This is such an important fundraiser for us, our volunteers and supporters. Last year was a lovely day out and we hope it will be bigger and better supported this year, now we have a new location.

"This fabulous family day out would not be possible without all the walkers who support us, the event volunteers but also our business sponsors including Arco who provide all the walker T-shirts and, of course, Northumbrian Water's team at Derwent Reservoir who host the event and provide the PA system, radios and free parking for walkers.

"This year we're delighted that the amazing Hexham Uketeers as well as our friends from the Northumbria Police Dog section will be back with us too."

Diane added: "There is no charge to take part, but we rely on your fundraising. So, we need every adult who takes part to fundraise or donate to enable our work."

The Waggy Tails Fun Dog show - sponsored by Alex Clark of Alex Clark Art fame - is open to walker's dogs before the walk takes place.

Wag & Company was set up eight years ago to tackle loneliness and isolation among older and vulnerable dog lovers in the North East. The charity has a network of hundreds of volunteers who visit older dog lovers in their own homes as well in care homes or medical establishments - the only North East visiting dog charity to visit people at home.

The charity is urgently recruiting more volunteers with dogs and because Wag never charges anyone for their special befriending service, they are always in need of support from people, organisations and care homes who understand the importance of friendship and the company of a dog.

For more information on how to get involved contact:
www.wagandcompany.co.uk

Charity of the Month...



Northern Insight talks to...

Victoria Brown

CEO, Grace House

Why was the Charity formed?

The late TV presenter Kathy Secker upon retirement, carried out a tremendous amount of charitable work leading to the creation of Grace House Northeast. At the time she said, "Children deserve to have an amazing place where they can come to laugh, learn and live life to the full." Through her passion and energy, a community fundraising campaign resulted in the formation of a Charity that now enriches the lives of disabled children and young people through a whole catalogue of services. The Charity has now evolved to support the entire family of disabled children including their parents, carers and siblings. We believe treating the family as whole in a compassionate and holistic way benefits every member of the family unit.

Which area do you cover?

We cover all of the North East.



Victoria Brown



What type of fundraising events do you have?

We have a full programme of events scheduled for the year and all funds go back into the Charity.

Summer Spectacular – Saturday 6th July, 11am -3pm, Southwick Primary School. A day of summer fun for the whole family with our Race for Grace Colour run and Summer Fayre.

Car Boot Sales – Sunday 21st July, Sunday 18th August. They take place at Grace House from 11am-2pm. People can book a place to have a clear out or come along to grab a bargain.

Great North Run – Sunday 8th September, start time will change depending on person. Run the iconic Great North Run and raise for Grace House.

Beat The Chaser – Friday 27th September, 6.30pm till late at Sunderland Navy club. Assemble your team for our quiz night hosted by Shaun Wallace from ITV's the chase. Can you beat the chaser?

The GlitterBall – Saturday 19th October, 6pm till late, Rainton Arena. Our annual fundraising ball with an 80s theme. Lots of entertainment hosted by Alfie Joey and joined by band, The Reflex.

If you are interested in attending any of these or you would like to sponsor an event, please contact HF@gracehouse.co.uk

Who are your trustees?

Chair - Simon Britton, Tax lawyer

Vice Chair - Neil Henry, Local Business leader

Treasurer - Claire Miller, Accountant

Trustee - Wendy Mustard, Solicitor

Trustee - Chris Pretty, retired member of Grace House team

Trustee - Vicky Norman, Accountant

Trustee - Cllr Kelly Chequer, Deputy Leader, Sunderland City Council.

What have been your proudest moments so far?

So many proud moments. Stand outs, include how well the team work and this was demonstrated as to how well we navigated the pandemic. We instantly changed our ways of working, contacted every individual by telephone, continued to deliver important services and even grew in terms of numbers of people coming to Grace House for support.



Another is seeing a disabled young person coming into Grace House for the first time very nervous and lacking confidence. Then seeing the difference when they have attended youth groups, sports groups, work experience and counselling sessions. One notable example being Alexander one of our disabled young people who developed the confidence to appear in our anti bullying film and became a contestant for Rickshaw Relay on BBC Children in Need last year.

As a Charity we have also demonstrated adaptability as we continue to meet the ever-changing landscape of challenging family lives and changing economic environment. After listening to families, we now provide welfare advice with our partnership with Citizens Advice, and this is one example how we strive to constantly adapt with the times.

What are you currently working on?

As the disabled young person continues their journey with Grace House, they age out of our service delivery at 18 years old. Therefore, responding to the needs of families the Grace House Trustees were very keen to develop a Charity to support those young people into adulthood with appropriate support. Grace House Graduates is in the very early stages of its development and we are keen to share progress with everyone.

What does the future hold?

Lots of exciting times as we continue to respond to the needs of families we talk to. Including the development of new services and activities.

There will also be continuing organisational challenges such as meeting the growing need of service users, sustainability, recruitment of staff, fundraising and whatever else comes to the table. They are very exciting time for Grace House.

How do you get involved?

Grace House is a local Charity working to support local people. You can get involved in so many ways from volunteering, sponsorship, corporate volunteer days, fundraising and helping us to share our message.

If you are keen to help with the work this amazing Charity does, please contact vb@gracehouse.co.uk





George King

Advice from George King – The “Mr. 5% Man”

“Finding the guiding hand of success can be like treading water. Even seasoned individuals like myself; the hands-on guy behind Glengyle Commercial Consultants.

I have been charting courses for businesses since 2013. With a career that spans the Royal Navy and executive education, I am affectionately dubbed “Mr. 5%”, serving as a beacon of hope that individuals and businesses can tap into.

“My time in the Royal Navy instilled in me a sense of discipline and strategic thinking, qualities essential for steering businesses through stormy waters. Serving on HMS Richmond taught me the importance of adaptability and resilience—virtues I bring to every consultation session with my clients.

“At Glengyle Commercial Consultants, our strapline, “Your Success is My Business,” speaks volumes about our commitment to our clients. My role as a business mentor is multifaceted, ranging from business analysis to problem-solving. My aim is to empower individuals and decision-makers to take charge of their destinies, holding them accountable for their actions. Whether guiding a fledgling start-up or revitalising a stagnant enterprise, I am dedicated to fostering sustainable growth and longevity.

“The nickname “Mr. 5%” stems from the sobering statistic that only 5% of start-up companies survive beyond five years. My mission is to ensure that my clients

belong to that elite percentage. Through meticulous mentoring and strategic interventions, I strive to defy the odds and propel businesses towards enduring success.

“Two principles that guide my practice are “Management by Exception” and “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” These sayings underscore the importance of discernment and pragmatism in decision-making, ensuring that resources are allocated judiciously, and efforts are focused on areas ripe for improvement.

“In the dynamic realm of business consultancy, I stand as a stalwart advocate for efficacy and longevity. Armed with a wealth of experience and a no-nonsense approach, I continue to steer my clients towards the shores of success, one consultation at a time.”

For more information on me and Glengyle Commercial Consultants, visit www.glengyleconsultants.com

Fabulous 'Breakfast At Tiffany's' themed afternoon tea, supporting The Three Tumours charity



Special thanks go to Jane Morland from Margaret Rose Events, and the stunning Assembly Rooms, Newcastle for the beautiful venue

For more information on The Three Tumours events, contact: support@thethreetumours.co.uk
www.thethreetumours.co.uk



GO FORTH FAMILY CHIROPRACTIC

Headaches and Migraines

Stress can often induce headaches. Nerves can become pinched from misalignment, causing pressure and migraines. Chiropractic treatment for headaches and migraines may include spinal adjustments and nutritional counselling. Adjustments help to relieve tension and stress, reducing headache pain.

Muscle Sprains and Strains

Chiropractic treatment is a natural form of treatment for joints affected by a muscle sprain or strain. Joint manipulation can decrease inflammation and offer immediate pain relief.

Neuropathy

This is a condition caused by a disruption in communication between the nerves and the brain. Sudden impact injuries, such as high-impact sports, or car accidents, can cause neuropathy. Misalignments in the vertebrae disrupt the communication between the nerves and the brain, causing numbness, tingling, and weakness. Chiropractic treatment using manual manipulation and spinal adjustments can help relieve the pressure on the nerves. Reduced pressure can alleviate the symptoms of neuropathy.

Jacob Palmer from Gosforth Family Chiropractic is dedicated to helping their patients live healthy and pain-free lives. Whether your pain is acute or chronic, their professional staff will work with you every step of the way to ensure you experience optimal relief.



If you're suffering from any of the above symptoms and require treatment then contact
GOSFORTH FAMILY CHIROPRACTIC on 07888 864 860 - or email: care@gosforthfamilychiropractic.com

www.gosforthfamilychiropractic.com

Celebrating Life and Legacy: Deborah Mitchell Independent Funeral Services opens its doors



Deborah Mitchell Independent Funeral Services opens in Washington.

Deborah Mitchell Independent Funeral Services proudly held its grand opening last month.

As the only female-owned independent funeral directors in Washington, Tyne and Wear, this new venture promises to bring a unique and compassionate approach to the funeral industry, offering heartfelt guidance when it is needed most.

Founded by Deborah Mitchell, this funeral service is inspired by a deeply personal place. Deborah's vision is to create a space where families can find solace and support during one of the most challenging times in their lives. Having worked for other funeral directors, she felt there was a need for a

more heartfelt and compassionate approach.

Deborah Mitchell Independent Funeral Services distinguishes itself through its unwavering dedication to serving the local community with integrity and compassion. The company is committed to honouring each individual's unique journey, ensuring their final farewell reflects their life and legacy.

The service is committed to sustainability. By offering eco-friendly options and utilising locally sourced materials and services whenever possible, Deborah Mitchell Independent Funeral Services minimises its environmental footprint while supporting the local community. Families can take comfort in knowing that their loved one's farewell will be both meaningful and mindful of the planet.

Deborah Mitchell Independent Funeral Services offers a range of personalised services designed to support families throughout the funeral process. From



Deborah Mitchell

arranging bespoke services to honouring veterans with special discounts, the company strives to exceed expectations and respect every family's wishes. Funeral service packages start at just £1295, making quality care accessible to all. A dedicated ceremony room is also available for those who prefer a more intimate setting.

As part of the grand opening a special tribute was held to honour those who sacrificed themselves at the Normandy landings. The tribute featured the Last Post bugle call and Reveille, commemorating their bravery and service on the 80th anniversary of this historic occasion.

The opening also coincides with the closure of T & I Bell, a historic Wearside family catering firm and former butcher that closed its doors in 2022 after 139 years. T & I Bell has a rich history, serving the community since 1883 and catering to notable figures, including the late Queen and Princess Diana. Alyson Chapman, the last family member working for the company, has retired, marking the end of an era for this beloved local business.

Families can contact Deborah Mitchell Independent Funeral Services 24 hours a day at 0191 722 1263 or visit the premises at 41 Station Road, Columbia, Washington NE38 8LY. Information is available via email at info@dmfuneralservices.co.uk or www.dmfuneralservices.co.uk





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RMT Accountants adds to growing specialist healthcare team

RMT Accountants & Business Advisors is building its specialist healthcare division with the appointment of two new accountants.

Monisa Shahzad and James Broomhead have joined Gosforth-based RMT Healthcare and are now working across all aspects of the personal and commercial finances of a range of healthcare businesses and practitioners right across the UK.

Originally from Northern Ireland, Monisa studied for an accounting degree at Ulster University in Derry before joining the Belfast office of global accounting firm PwC.

James, who is from Middlesbrough, completed an accounting and finance degree at Newcastle University before moving into practice with a regional firm four years ago.



Eddisons boosts Newcastle team with senior appointment

Property consultancy Eddisons has appointed valuation specialist Dan Nicholson to its Newcastle team as an associate director.

With almost 15 years' property industry experience, Dan specialises in land and property valuation across a range of sectors for secured lending, accounting and purchase or disposals.

Anthony Spencer, managing partner of Eddisons, which is headquartered in Leeds, said: "Valuation is a fast-growing area of our business. We are focused on growing the team in the North East and have further hires planned over the coming months. With more than 100 people in our valuation team nationally, demand continues to increase from our clients for outstanding valuation advice across the commercial and residential sectors."



RGCF continues to bolster its growing team with addition of new Corporate Finance Manager

RG Corporate Finance (RGCF) has further strengthened its team of dealmakers with the appointment of Ella McDonald as Corporate Finance Manager.

With experience of working for 'big four' accountancy firms, Ella is the latest recruit to the growing Newcastle-based corporate finance boutique, which is continuing to expand its team to meet demand for its advisory services, both in the North East and Yorkshire, and further afield.

Ella, who is based in Leeds, joins RGCF from Deloitte's West Yorkshire base, where she was a CF Assistant Manager, working on both buy-side and sell-side transactions from £10m up to £100m across the North of England.

Ella joins RGCF as the firm continues its positive growth trajectory, on the back of a strong period of transaction delivery, and an expanding pipeline for the remainder of 2024.



Dual promotions strengthen TGA's leading position at the forefront of Building Services Engineering

Expert provider of consulting engineering services, TGA Consulting Engineers (TGA), has announced dual promotions which will strengthen firm's position at the forefront of building services engineering.

Dave Warwick and Stephen Weddle have both been promoted to directors, on merit, having run specialist teams within TGA that are crucial to the success of the firm's long-term strategy.



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Kasia Durma, left, chats with Laura Barker, Head of Talent Development, Talentheads

How do we translate the unique essence of a firm into a leadership skills programme?

Newcastle-based independent chartered accountancy and business advisory firm UNW has built its strong reputation for expertise alongside an established guiding principle to do things differently and be 'unlike others'.

When it came to developing a leadership programme to invest in its people, this demanded something unique that could translate the essence of the firm into the skills needed to be the leaders of tomorrow.

As HR Manager at UNW, Kasia Durma was tasked with seeking out a solution and engaged talent business, Talentheads to design and deliver the programme.

Here, Laura Barker, Head of Talent Development at Talentheads, chats to her about the approach they took and how it is going so far.

What were your key priorities when looking to create this new approach to leadership development, Kasia?

We wanted to create something unique that celebrated the differences within our firm and played to everyone's strengths. We already offer fantastic technical training across the firm but wanted to ensure that we prioritised human skills equally. We knew that for a leadership programme to have real impact we had to create something bespoke to the personality of UNW.

The goal was to be creative in our approach,

whilst being guided by the determination to genuinely invest in the brilliant people we have here at UNW. The programme needed to encourage and facilitate their growth as individuals, while building a learning culture of continuous improvement for the whole firm.

What got you started?

We knew we wanted to engage with a partner who had true expertise and knowledge in

this field as this was such a huge priority for the firm. We wanted to get some help to make it as impactful as possible for our people. I therefore spoke to a number of different training providers, but quickly found that they were looking to impose their way of doing things on us. I respected their experience but wanted something that would feel unique and reflect what makes us so different. Our people deserve better than something 'off the shelf'.

That's when we came across Talentheads. From my first meeting with you I could feel that this business wasn't afraid to break the mold either. Your approach was so refreshing and I quickly felt excited about what we could achieve together. There was a genuine 'blank canvas' approach, with an openness to all ideas and never basing the programme on what worked elsewhere alone. We have been guided by the voices of the people at UNW; their objectives, ambitions and challenges. You and your team now really do work as if you are our Internal Talent Development function. We are true partners and you understand what the firm stands for, embracing this in all that you design and deliver for us.

How is the programme going now from your perspective?

I'm really proud that our 'Take the Lead' programme is now fully established with participation from our qualified team members right up to partner level, especially as we have seen 90% uptake of those who were eligible. Talentheads are using a combination of development and coaching approaches to ensure a truly active approach to learning that is personalised to each individual.

Although there was sometimes a temptation to stick within our comfort zone, we kept our focus on the outcomes that we aspired to, putting our people first. We are already seeing real impact and getting great feedback. I'm excited for the positive transformation this can bring for our people as well as us as a firm. I know talent development is crucial to the continued success of UNW.

If you want to find out more about partnering with Talentheads to transform your leadership approach call us on 0191 300 8668.



What does the Election mean for Recruitment?

Bryony Gibson, director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, shares an insight into how the General Election could impact the labour market.

Writing ahead of the General Election, there's a consensus in recruitment that whoever our government is, they must improve their strategy to support the labour market.

From bridging the skills gap to changing employment law and immigration policy to positively shape the talent pool, creating a correctly skilled workforce is essential to kick-start economic growth and productivity. That is why I've been looking into the two main party's policies, to see what the future holds...

Labour

Promising 'no surprises', largely because every announcement was shared before the launch of their manifesto, Labour plans to introduce a new 'Industrial Strategy' that works in partnership with commerce.

Focusing on growth, there is an emphasis on flexible training, a plan to modernise employment law, bring more clarity to workers' rights, and support compliance with flexible employment practices.

Establishing a new body called 'Skills England', they aim to bring businesses together with training providers, unions, the migration advisory committee, and the government in the hope of ensuring training in England meets the overall needs of the labour market.

With a pledge not to increase National Insurance, the basic, higher, or additional rates of Income Tax, VAT, and cap Corporation Tax at 25%, they promise a

'balanced approach' to immigration that will address skills shortages in healthcare and public services.

Conservative

Declaring to 'guarantee a more secure future for you, your family, and our country', the Conservative party promises to steer us towards prosperity and social unity through a 'modernised tax system for business'.

Including a 2p cut to National Insurance, the abolition of the main rate for the self-employed, and maintaining the National Living Wage at two-thirds of median earnings, they hope to help businesses and support workers.

With a focus on small companies, which make up 99% of the UK private sector, they plan to retain tax incentives that encourage growth, including EIS, SEIS, Venture Capital Trusts, Business Asset Disposal Relief, Agricultural Property Relief, and Business Relief.

Promising reform to better target disability benefits, the introduction of a legal cap on migration to protect public services whilst bringing in the skills business and the NHS need, they also plan to fund 100,000 new apprenticeships for young people and give working parents 30 hours of free childcare a week.

While there is plenty to ponder, the need

for an overarching strategy that seeks to understand and consider the skill needs of our workforce does not appear. I believe we need a skills policy that is suited to the needs of our economy, but it must go beyond skills. Investment and infrastructure matter if we want to build an economy that can grow at speed.

Currently, the number of overall job vacancies in the UK remains ahead of pre-pandemic levels and people are confident about being able to recruit. One of the biggest challenges I see each day is that pay growth continues to rise due to talent being in short supply.

The Office for National Statistics estimates that labour and skills shortages cost the economy £39bn annually. The next government needs to act quickly to ensure more people have access to the right training and skills for the market.

The first step is to understand what people want. If the government is to be successful, it must embrace this idea and recognise that there are many types of work, and all are equally valuable.

Improving transport links, enhancing childcare support, better education, addressing immigration issues in key sectors, and reviewing tax and regulation issues are also going to be crucial to building a vibrant and successful economy.



Bryony Gibson

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



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An in-house opportunity for an experienced Employment Tax specialist to join this large FTSE organisation. Instrumental to the business you will be recognised as an expert in all areas of UK employment tax. Working closely with a team of tax professionals, HR and finance colleagues you will enjoy shaping robust tax reporting processes and driving a culture of positive tax compliance across the business.

Responsibilities will include all UK employment tax and CIS matters, queries relating to PAYE/NI, tax treatment of benefits in kind, termination payments and employment status and IR35 status determinations. With expert employment tax knowledge you will be self-motivated and capable of working independently with minimal supervision. CTA/ACA not essential, both in-house or practice experience considered. **Quote Ref: 2260**

PERSONAL TAX ASSISTANT MANAGER

Newcastle, £32-43,000pa

Joining this accountancy practice is perfect timing as they engage on an exciting period of change and expansion. With change comes opportunities and as such they are looking to recruit a number of Personal Tax specialists including an Assistant Manager

As part of a specialist private client team you will manage your own portfolio of clients ranging from Directors, Consultants, HNWI and landlords, often with more complex returns. You will also be involved in reviewing the work of more juniors and providing coaching and technical advice on the tax return process. Supporting Senior Management with workflow and billing, will assist your development to Manager.

Applicants will have a minimum of 3 years UK tax experience, preferably ATT qualified along with good communication skills and some supervisory experience. The office has a friendly, open plan environment with flexible hours and an element of hybrid working. CTA support available. **Quote Ref: 2266**

PERSONAL TAX SENIOR

Gateshead, £26-35,000pa + bonus

Having enjoyed significant growth, this independent accountancy practice are looking to appoint a Personal Tax Senior to take full responsibility for their own client portfolio. You will be ensuring all self-assessment tax returns are prepared and submitted accurately and timely for all clients which will include Directors, HNWI's, Partnerships and Sole Traders.

Applicants will have a minimum of 18 months personal tax compliance experience, able to complete the tax return process from start to finish independently. The ability to communicate both with your clients, internal and external such as HMRC is essential. ATT is preferred but not essential.

Applications are open for those looking at either part or full-time hours, both can be accommodated. There is free parking and an annual bonus paid twice yearly. **Quote Ref: 2273**

CORPORATE TAX MANAGER

Newcastle, £45-60,000pa

A growing consultancy business providing tax compliance and advisory services to a wide range of business clients are looking for a CTA/ACA qualified Tax Manager.

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Kathryn Rodgers

Navigating changes in flexible working with Kathryn Rodgers at face2faceHR

With the summer holidays just around the corner, many employees may be considering requesting flexible working arrangements.

Now, more than ever, flexible working is becoming a significant part of the employment landscape.

Employees now have the right from day one

to make two requests per year for flexible working arrangements, and employers have two months to handle a request, including any appeals, fully. Employers must provide

a robust justification if they reject these requests in line with the statutory reasons.

Kathryn Rodgers at face2faceHR is a seasoned expert in helping businesses navigate these changes. She understands the benefits of flexible working and how to implement it effectively within an organisation.

Flexible working arrangements, such as reducing hours or working from home, might initially seem like a headache for small employers. However, if handled correctly, these arrangements can bring serious business benefits.

Recruitment and Retention

Flexible working arrangements can make a company more attractive to potential employees. By showing openness to reduced hours or homeworking, employers can attract talented individuals seeking a good work-life balance. Flexible working can help retain valuable staff, who might otherwise look elsewhere as their circumstances change.

Employee Relations

Employees in an environment where work-life balance is encouraged to feel more valued and empowered. This feeling can lead to increased motivation, commitment, and loyalty.

Productivity and Efficiency

Flexible working arrangements can significantly improve productivity and efficiency. Many employees work more effectively from home, and those who reduce their work hours often become more efficient in managing their workload.

Reducing Absenteeism

Flexible working arrangements can help reduce absenteeism by allowing employees to better manage the demands of their family lives.

Saving Money

Flexible working can also present cost-saving opportunities. For example, if several staff members are away from the office full time, you can save on office space by using a hot-desking arrangement. Additionally, if staff reduce their hours, their salaries usually decrease proportionately, reducing your overall salary bill, provided the work can be managed in shorter hours.

It is essential not to be shortsighted when considering flexible working requests. If you can agree to these requests where possible and foster a culture where flexible working is encouraged and supported, it can significantly improve your bottom line.

Kathryn Rodgers at face2faceHR can help you navigate these changes to make the most of flexible working arrangements for your business.

face2facehr.com

Are SMEs ready for the new government?



Diane Mactavish

This article was written before the country went to the polls, however by the time you will be reading this – barring one of the biggest polling miscalculations ever – it is likely we will have a new government.

But what does that mean for your business?

The trajectory of Conservative policy on employment law over their time in power has included a restriction on trade union activity, extension of the right to request flexible working and a ticking upwards of the National Minimum Wage and Living wage in line with Low Pay Commission recommendations.

The most radical thing has probably been the post-Brexit shake up of who has a right to work in the UK.

Things will be different under a Labour government, though.

Be prepared

As Labour presses ahead with its green paper “Plan to make work pay”, there is going to be a tsunami of employment law change in favour of employees; and, quite frankly, it could come at huge cost to employers.

It is crucial that employers get ahead of this. Labour state that they will be introducing legislation within the first 100 days of entering government, so time is of the essence.

What are we expecting?

Though it's early days, the Labour green paper gives us an idea of the direction Labour is likely to take.

One thing we would welcome, and indeed we have campaigned for at Westminster on behalf of SMEs, is the removal of the little understood worker status, whilst keeping self-employed and employed status. We think this will simplify employment status, helping everyone understand what employment rights they have. However, it does mean all employees (including those who were previously workers) would have access to full employment protection.

But beyond this, some of the ideas Labour talk of include...

- Employees will access unfair dismissal rights from day one, rather than after two years' continuous service. Employers will still be allowed to dismiss for reasons of capability, conduct or redundancy, though there will be a requirement of increased transparency in rules and processes during probationary periods.
- The time limit for making an employment claim will be increased from three months to six months, likely leading to an even bigger backlog in tribunals.

- Increases in the National Minimum Wage and reforming the Low Pay Commission to be more active in driving up wages further.
- The right to switch off – requiring policies to be put in place around contacting employees out of hours, only being able to do so when legitimately required.
- Increases to statutory pay including maternity pay, sick pay and bereavement pay and making statutory sick pay and parental leave a day one right.
- Banning ‘exploitative’ zero-hour contracts, using a twelve-week reference period to ensure workers have a right to a contract that reflects the hours they regularly work.
- A new Single Enforcement Body (SEB) which can carry out unannounced inspections checking for all worker rights such as NMW and discrimination.

More balance is required

While there are sure to be some worthy ambitions in this tidal wave of change, our fear is the cost to employers that it will entail. It may entail a huge amount of indirect and direct expense at a time when we know that SMEs are already struggling with rising costs, and recruitment and retention challenges.

But you can rest assured that The HR Dept will be by your side, providing pragmatic support to help you lead your team and navigate any challenges that arise.

Call us today for a FREE no obligation conversation. 0191 2838732. hrdept.co.uk

This article was written before the General Election took place and all information was correct at the time of writing.

Unlocking Growth: Why outsourcing operations management makes sense



Helen Butler

Running a small business often means juggling a million tasks at once—from planning for the future and managing finances to handling daily operations and coordinating a team. It's no wonder many business owners feel overwhelmed and struggle to keep everything running smoothly.

That's where outsourcing operations management can be a game-changer - even for small businesses! It helps streamline operations, improve performance, and enables owners to focus on what the business does best. So, what exactly is Outsourced Operations Management, and how can it benefit a small business?

Outsourced Operations Management involves handing over the reins of the business's operational activities to external experts. Unlike hiring a virtual assistant (VA) for specific admin tasks, this approach covers a wide range of strategic and operational activities. Think strategic planning, financial projections, process optimisation, and performance management—all handled by a team of experts.

Common Components of Outsourced Operations Management

1. Strategic Planning & Execution:

Developing and executing clear, actionable plans aligned with the business vision.

2. Financial Management: Creating budgets, forecasts, and cash flow projections to keep finances on track.

3. Process Optimisation: Regularly reviewing and improving processes to boost productivity and efficiency.

4. Team Management: Ensuring the team functions well through well defined roles, workload management, and performance reviews.

5. Communication & Coordination: Setting up effective communication plans and structures to manage day-to-day tasks.

6. Comprehensive Reporting: Providing dashboards and financial analyses for better decision-making.

What are the Benefits?

Outsourcing the oversight of the day to day operations comes with a heap of benefits for small businesses. It helps get the right systems in place, streamline processes, and keep everything running smoothly. Whether it's a longer term strategy or just until the business is ready to hire an in-house team, the flexibility and expertise that can be gained is invaluable.

For the business, this means cutting costs and boosting efficiency, which translates to better profit margins. Accurate budgeting and forecasting reduce financial stress and ensure more reliable cash flow. Plus, better team management and communication can lift employee morale and keep everyone happy and productive.

But let's not forget the personal benefits for owners. Outsourcing can free up time, so they can focus on strategic growth or enjoy a better work-life balance. It takes away the constant worry about daily operations, giving much-needed peace of mind. By avoiding costly mistakes and making processes work as efficiently as possible, it saves money that can be reinvested in the business or used to enjoy

life a little more. This added freedom and reduced stress can make a big difference!

When is the Right Time to Consider Outsourcing Operations Management?

Every business is different and faces unique challenges, but there are common signs that it might be time to bring in some external support. Spotting these signs early can help you avoid costly setbacks and missed growth opportunities.

Here are some common scenarios I see in businesses that have reached a point where adding support for operational management can make a real impact:

- **Owner Overwhelm and Burnout:** Constantly feeling overwhelmed by daily demands and a growing team.
- **Stagnant Growth:** Growth has plateaued despite continued efforts.
- **Operational Inefficiencies:** Persistent inefficiencies causing delays and quality issues.
- **Financial Uncertainty:** Struggling with cash flow, budgeting, or forecasting.
- **High Employee Turnover:** Frequent staff changes and morale issues.
- **Lack of Strategic Focus:** Spending too much time on operational details over strategic planning.
- **Visibility Issues:** Feeling unable to make informed decisions due to lack of performance visibility.

Outsourcing Operations Management offers a smart solution for small business owners feeling overwhelmed by the growing complexities of day-to-day operations. By leveraging external expertise, they can streamline their operations, improve financial health, and focus on what truly matters.

If you recognise any of these red flags or would like to know more about how it could work for your business, contact Helen at 07817 411 057 or visit www.simplifiedoperations.co.uk

Are you a Learn-it-all or a Know-it-all?

We're in an era which is becoming known for change and constant innovation. The recent rapid growth of generative AI is impacting the business landscape everywhere. This is providing us with a challenge; how do we keep up to date?

The speed of change is faster than we can learn, yet to lead successfully in the 21st Century, a continuous pursuit of learning may be the very thing we need to adopt.

When Satya Nadella took over as CEO of Microsoft in 2014 it was somewhat stagnant, and he knew he had to make the culture first class and had to make it different from his predecessors. He loved the idea of growth mindset having read the book by Carol Dweck and said "I want our company to be a team of 'learn-it-all's rather than 'know-it-alls'.

Let's think about that for a minute. How much does being a 'know-it-all' define who we are as leaders?

We spend years learning our craft, building a knowledge base, being seen as the expert. For many this is the core of our identity, and not knowing threatens our idea of competency. Yet to lead effectively, relying on old knowledge isn't enough anymore.

Consider, how you invest in your professional development? Are you the leader constantly exploring new concepts, or the one resting on your past knowledge and expertise?

It's a challenge, as to move forward we need to leave our comfort zones, become exposed as not knowing - which is scary. Yet to grow and develop we need to learn, which might involve experimentation and failure.

So how can we become more 'learn-it-all'?

1. Adopt a Growth Mindset

This concept was popularised by psychologist Carol Dweck. It's the belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed through dedication and hard work, in contrast to a fixed mindset where intelligence is static. To move from fixed to growth we need to embrace challenges, keep going when we hit setbacks, and see effort as a path to mastery. Recognising that failure is



Annabel Graham

not a reflection of our abilities but a valuable learning experience is also key.

2. Horizon Scanning

How do you become aware of emerging trends, technologies, and ideas that could impact your field or interests? This practice not only broadens our knowledge base but also prepares us for the inevitable shifts in our industry and enables us to identify areas of innovation. Carving time out regularly to do this is crucial, though often gets sacrificed in service of 'being busy'. By understanding where your field is headed, you can identify the skills and knowledge you'll need to remain relevant and competitive.

3. Crafting Your Personal Learning Environment

This involves curating resources, tools, and communities that enable your ongoing learning. This might include courses, podcasts, videos, books, professional networks and communities of practice and even a mentor or a coach.

A well-rounded learning environment not only provides access to information but also fosters connections with like-minded people who can offer us support and inspiration, so start to think about how you like to engage with content and how you can build a PLE for yourself.

4. Active Experimentation

This is about applying what we've learned in real-world scenarios to test and refine our

understanding. It could be through projects, simulations, or problem-solving activities. Don't be afraid to take risks and try new approaches. Each experiment, whether successful or not, provides valuable insights that helps us move forward and build confidence and competence in our abilities.

5. The power of 1%

How often have you not done something because it just seemed too big, too daunting? This is where the power of 1% or micro goals come in. Setting micro goals involves breaking down larger objectives into small, manageable tasks that can be achieved more easily. This makes it easier to maintain momentum and see progress over time as incremental improvements compound, leading to significant advancements in the long run.

Putting all this into practice requires intentional effort and a commitment to continuous learning. It doesn't need to cost anything, or take up much time, but it does need to be regular and whether we like it or not, it's now a crucial part of our professional practice. So why not see what a best fit for you is, and embrace the journey of lifelong learning and unlock your full potential.

Annabel is an Executive and Team Coach, Leadership Facilitator and Coach Supervisor. Contact Annabel via LinkedIn, annabel@successfultraining.co.uk, or visit www.successfultraining.co.uk



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*...Small wonder
there is
apathy in
the electorate...*

The Ordinary Citizen

Whatever the outcome of the 4th of July elections, our political system is currently far from bathed in glory. Dr David Cliff reflects on the dilemmas facing the 'ordinary' citizen.

Sir John Curtice is quite clear that mistrust of politicians is at an all-time high, and that as many as six out of ten of the public believe that politicians will put party interests over the national interest.

Our political system is populated by people whose motivations can range from seeking to access power, participating in various forms of tribalism, seeking to be a force for change amongst others, including increasingly single theme motivations such as nationalism or immigration and balancing self-interest and altruism in ways that are often hard for the public to sift. Increasingly we see a trend to have younger politicians who often lack statecraft yet have meteoric careers wherein they are over reliant upon some form of political ideology. They often lack the lived experience of understanding governments' relationship with the people longitudinally.

What we see in the political system reflects what we see in the world. Postmodern forces are evident, where the self-interests of the individual are foremost, and the abandonment of traditional roles and rituals are secondary to self-expression. Equally, 'neo-liberalism' now supersedes 'social liberalism' by assuming simple ideologies about the growth of the market and the belief that as the pool of economic growth fills, so everyone is floated up by it. The problem is many people in our communities are already drowning, unable to compete and be participative in society. If one needs an example and there are many, read the studies of the clear social disadvantage amongst young white working-class males who seem to be overlooked by all parties. We live with polarities of wealth and poverty, of those in influence and those who are disenfranchised and powerless.

More than ever the public is seeking electoral reform and whatever government ultimately manifests itself post July 4th, will have to begin to listen to the reality that the system is failing. The two-party first past the post, tribal polarities, with smaller parties not featuring, is frankly unhealthy. It leads to a divided state, fearing the far right, yet fearing the left even more. Even the centre is becoming just too nuanced to persuasively occupy. Indeed, so nuanced that there is a belief by some that the electorate cannot differentiate policies in that zone, hence we see policy extremes to enable

party differentiation by voters, not necessarily what is needed or wanted by them. The start truth is, whoever achieves office, the country is so 'maxed out' on credit there is very little room to manoeuvre anyway.

We have lost the art of consensus, just as we have lost the centre. We will not get it back by continuing with a tribal approach to our political system. The system that gives rise to the 'mother of all Parliaments', is now very much in need of reform. She is aged, incontinent of privileges for the incompetent, dementing over the experience of ordinary folk and retain beliefs of yesteryear whilst embracing faddish novelty. Governments are now more reactive than ever. We only need to see the vicissitudes of the internet, the perverse impact of social media upon our young people's mental health and the slowness of legislative response to this, to see a government that reacts when parents wind up on BBC television talking about the mass decease of their offspring.

For the people and of people? Let's face it, both sides of the "pond" are increasingly in situations where people who would once be the subject of comic characters, can legitimately apply for the highest posts in the land. A place where the truth is now subject to manipulation with selective perception, plain lies and the use of AI and other systems that can distort information in ways that create uncertainty as to just what is real.

Small wonder there is apathy in the electorate. Indeed, 30% of the electorate turned out for the recent local elections and a low turnout is feared for the July 4th election. Indeed, with turnout figures so low, one question's whether there is a 'democratic deficit' created by these minority turnouts and the true will of the people remains unheard.

If there was ever a system screaming for overhaul, it is the process that appoints and establishes governance to those who lead our country. None of us can be complacent in an increasingly unsafe world where serial crises seem increasingly subordinated to individual and party interests.

www.gedanken.co.uk

The Wins!

Are you guilty? Do you stop and reflect then celebrate? Are you an expert in focusing on what you have done wrong? Do you constantly push forward, looking towards the next thing?

I've been very guilty of this as a startup founder. But recently I was stopped in my tracks and made to look back.

To look back, not on the mistakes I have made, but at the impact Kind Currency has already made.

It's quite something...

- Supported 300+ independent and small ethical business; many of which have been underserved and disadvantaged.
- Supported 1900 individuals to take kind action; their kind action positively impacting people and the planet.
- Verified 80 businesses as KIND; businesses leading with action fuelled by kind values.
- Collaborated with 22 Kind Sponsors and 10 Kind Partners; businesses committed to their corporate social responsibility and using their platform to make a difference.
- Successfully delivered 9 oversubscribed immersive experiences and events; compounding the need and want for a kind action solution.
- Invested in three environmental initiatives; leading by example and putting our mission into action before we've moved into revenue generation.

And our most impactful achievements...

- Supported 378 families who are frontline essential workers living in deprivation; people whom society depends on.
- Indirectly supporting over 1000 households living in deprivation whom society depends on; levelling up to ensure kind people live a fair life.

Kind Currency is still very much in its early development. I've been developing in public since it was just a spark of an idea. The learning, the trying, the understanding, the testing, the pivots, to today. Currently we are focusing on the digital solution for Kind Currency, an opportunity to bring our kind action solution into every day living. And whilst I have addressed the impact we have made above, getting to this point in our startup journey is also an achievement; it has not been without blood, sweat and a monsoon of tears. And I'm taking this moment to realise what has been achieved.

This is your permission, not that you need it, to stop, and reflect on your wins and celebrate them.

It will do you good.

It will do your business good.

And if kindness is a big part of your achievement, share them with us, we will celebrate your kindness too!

And if kindness is missing, let us know and we can help ensure kind wins are part of your future success.

Stop. Reflect. Celebrate.

www.kindcurrency.co.uk

Michelle Jones



Our Kind Impact so far...



Eco Projects Supported

3 projects



Disadvantaged Essential
Worker Families Supported

378



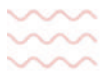
Businesses Supported

300+



Kind Action Takers

1900+

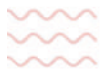


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How to get Involved...



Get Verified as KIND & be part of our Kind Club

Businesses and charities can apply to be verified for free!

- Be verified as a KIND Business
- Receive your Medals of Kindness
- Be listed in our Kind Directory
- Access opportunities to support your business
- Be celebrated and promoted
- Be part part of a community that aligns with your values
- Attract customers and supporters that share your values
- Opportunities to increase your trade, profit and purpose!



Subscribe to be a Kind Member our Kind Club

You can subscribe to access offers and opportunities!

- Access exclusive offers and incentives
- Receive rewards for your kind action
- Make kind choices easily with confidence
- Create a lifestyle that aligns with your values
- Be part part of a community that aligns with your values
- Find businesses and charities that share your values
- Ultimate Kind Person status
- Ease the poverty and climate crisis for the price of a cuppa!



Become a Kind Partner of our Kind Club

Partner with us to support your corporate responsibility!

- Be celebrated as a Kind Partner
- Receive your Medals of Kindness
- Ultimate Change-maker status
- Tangible support for your corporate responsibility
- Gain data for your ESG reporting
- Access opportunities to increase your trade, profit and purpose
- Be part part of a community that aligns with your values
- Be part of a community, working together to ease the poverty and climate crisis!



Summer in the City

By Ben Whitfield, Director of Communications, NE1 Ltd

In a crowded marketplace and busy season, where cities across the UK and Europe compete to stand out, Newcastle is gearing up to put on a great show to attract visitors this summer. The city's calendar is packed with a programme of curated events, designed to appeal to a wide audience with activities for all ages and interests, and lots of free things to see and do.

At NE1, we have worked closely with partner organisations to ensure that the summer programme in the heart of the city is well-timetabled and supported. Throughout the school holidays there will be a major themed event each weekend which will create a real buzz, attracting tens of thousands of visitors into the city centre, and even before our main events get underway, there are already some highly visible NE1 additions which herald the start of summer, and bring the city's streets to life.

The welcome return of NE1's Grey Street Gathering is always one of the first signs of the fun in store. The much-loved pocket park has returned to Grey Street, providing seating and a green space to chill in the heart of the city.

On the Quayside, another installation has returned with NE1's show-stopping Wesley Square mural, this year showcasing artist, Andy Welland. His 90m-long masterpiece decorates the pavement with a riot of colour and shapes, providing a novel backdrop for capturing summer photos and adding a new dimension to one of the city's most iconic vistas.

Over our coming five-year term, NE1 has committed to celebrating distinct quarters of the city and helping them forge their own unique identities. In Chinatown, we have worked closely with the local community to install lanterns spanning the length of Stowell Street, and we've worked with LGBTQIA+ groups to design and install a colourful crossing on Marlborough Crescent.

All of these wider placemaking efforts have been installed in time for the school holidays, a sign that the city is gearing up for the main event, NE1's Summer in the City programme.

The festivities commence at the beginning of July with the return of NE1's much-loved Screen on the Green in Old Eldon Square, its adopted home since 2016. The open-air movie theatre opens with sporting action before the main event, more than 90 free movies throughout the summer holidays.

This year, the whole of Old Eldon Square will be transformed into a hive of family-friendly fun with what we know will be a hugely popular and exciting new addition, Tiny Toon, a miniature Play Village of role-playing fun for children equipped with mini-versions of some of Newcastle's most iconic buildings and businesses.

Play Rebellion will also be returning, encouraging kids to embrace their creativity by building and playing with the installation's large colourful foam shapes to create their own structures.

All this will make Old Eldon Square the place for families all summer long with enough free activities to entertain the kids all day in the heart of the city.

The summer weekend fun starts on 19-21st July with Northern Pride. We are delighted to partner with the event for the 10th year running. Central to the celebrations will be the signature Pride march, and the weekend music festival staged at Central Park in Times Square. A Mini Pride pop-up will be staged at NE1's Screen on the Green with activities for all the family.

Our Summer in the City programme sees us team up with local businesses to deliver over 75 free activities for people to enjoy, with free dance classes run by Dance City and new twilight yoga sessions hosted on the Quayside. Another first this summer is free kayaking taster sessions on the Tyne thanks to our partners, CBK Adventures. We've also added two new weekend events; Music by the Marina, on Saturday 17th August, a day of live performances from local talent, and Dog on the Tyne, a canine extravaganza timed to coincide with International Dog Day, on Saturday 24th August.

Newcastle City Council's NOVUM Festival will provide the fun and focus for the weekend of 8th - 11th August with live performances, artistic installations, music and free family fun. One not-to-miss event will be artist Lawrence Malstaf's 'Shrink', with local people vacuum-sealed and suspended as living portraits.

Red Bull arrive in the city on Saturday 3rd August with the Red Bull Tyne Ride motorcycle race. Some of the world's best riders, including local Wallsend hero Billy Bolt, will compete in nail-biting races on a purpose-built course on the Quayside. The event is free and promises to be a thrilling spectacle and a high point of the summer schedule.

On top of all this, returning in August is one of the most anticipated events in the city's annual calendar, NE1's hugely popular Newcastle Restaurant Week. With discounted meals at over 100 participating restaurants, it's a firm favourite across the region and updates are eagerly awaited. The dates for the August event will be announced soon so keep an eye on NE1's social channels to secure your spot at your favourite restaurants.

With a packed calendar of free events across the city, we're confident that this will be one of the best summers ever in Newcastle. Here's to a bumper six-weeks, and beyond!

www.newcastlene1ltd.com



Ben Whitfield

Your personal story is creating your current reality

"I'm too busy," "I can't cope,"
"I'm too tired," "I don't
have enough energy,"
"It's because of X."

Whatever story you tell
yourself on a daily basis
will massively impact how
you show up and the
results you create.

I love the quote, "You can either make excuses or make progress; you can't do both."

Even though some of us may already know this information, unless you are conscious of your thoughts, you'll have very little ability to change them.

So, if you want to change your life, you really have to observe what you are thinking.

As well as this, I would also ask you to look at the biggest statement that you hold onto and believe, which you realize is a core limiting belief. For example, it could be, "I'll never be a millionaire," or "I'm an imposter and soon people will realize I can't do my job."

All of this is like a backpack of emotions that, if we keep carrying around with us and not dipping in to check on what they are telling us and how they are affecting us, we will keep moving on, applying the same actions and habits, and generating the same results.

Negative thoughts can impact us in the following ways: lower energy, procrastination, lack of motivation, and feeling overwhelmed. All of these symptoms then confirm the story we tell ourselves, keeping us stuck in a cycle of limitations.

What you are thinking about provides clues as to what is going well in your life and what is not happening for you.

You might be someone who is trying to focus on a desired outcome or specific goals, and you might even have a pretty vision board and really want to see change. But if you have the same personal story, you won't generate your desired results. We are wired



Jude Daunt

from past experiences and beliefs, and if we aren't doing the work to understand them and disconnect from them, they will still hold power over us.

A huge part of the work that I do with clients is to get them to understand themselves on a deeper level. Once we know this, we can then start to impact our beliefs, thoughts, actions, and results.

Steps and tips to change your personal story:

Awareness: Start by becoming aware of your inner dialogue. Keep a journal and write down the recurring thoughts and beliefs that shape your daily actions and emotions.

Challenge Limiting Beliefs: Identify the beliefs that hold you back. Ask yourself, "Is this belief absolutely true?" Often, you'll find that these beliefs are based on past experiences, not current reality.

Replace Negative Thoughts: Once you've identified a limiting belief, replace it with a positive affirmation. For example, change "I'll never be a millionaire" to "I am capable of achieving financial success."

Visualisation: Spend a few minutes each day visualising your desired outcome. Picture yourself succeeding, feeling confident, and living the life you want. This helps rewire your brain to focus on positive possibilities.

Take Action: Small, consistent actions lead to big changes. Set achievable goals and take steps every day toward them. Celebrate your progress, no matter how small.

Seek Support: Surround yourself with positive influences. Whether it's a mentor, coach, or supportive friends, having a strong support system can make a significant difference.

By implementing these steps, you can start to rewrite your personal story, break free from limiting beliefs, and create a reality that aligns with your true potential.

For 1-1 coaching visit:
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Woke me up before you go, go!

Ever been picked last for a team? Felt like the odd one out because you were different? That's how a lot of us feel in today's world, and it's not just about skin colour anymore. It's about feeling like your voice doesn't matter, like you're being left out of the conversation. And guess what? That feeling is fuelling the rise of the far left, creating even more division.

I've been there. Growing up as a Geordie Asian lad, I was often the only brown face in the room. I was told my accent wouldn't get me anywhere, that I needed to change who I was to fit in. But I learned that my unique background wasn't a weakness, it was my superpower. It allowed me to connect with people from all walks of life, to build bridges where others saw barriers.

Today, as a business leader, I see the same struggle playing out in companies around the world. **We're told that diversity is important, but often it feels like a box-ticking exercise.** We hire people who look different, but we don't always create a culture where they feel safe to speak up, to challenge the status quo, to bring their whole selves to work.

And it's not just about race or gender. It's about class, background, neurodiversity, and a whole host of other factors that make us who we are. **It's about recognising that everyone has something valuable to contribute, even if they don't fit the mould.**

We fail to consider the majority in our decisions or focus exclusively on the minority, marginalising our main stakeholders. I am truly concerned for white young boys and middle-aged white men, whose capability, credibility and commitment are being questioned through the diversity and inclusion initiatives.

The truth is, we're all sick of the tick-box approach to diversity and inclusion. It's time for a new way of thinking, one that embraces our differences and sees them as strengths, not weaknesses. That's why we developed the Inclusive Innovation Framework, a model that goes beyond tokenism and creates a truly inclusive culture where everyone feels valued and heard.

This isn't just about being nice or doing the right thing. It's about unleashing the full potential of your workforce. Companies with diverse leadership are 70% more likely to capture new markets. Inclusive workplaces are six times more likely to be innovative and agile.

But here's the kicker: we can't achieve true inclusion if we silence those who disagree with us. The rise of the far left has created a climate of fear, where people are afraid to speak their minds for fear of being "cancelled." This is not the way forward.

We need to create spaces where everyone feels safe to express their views, even if we don't agree with them. We need to listen with empathy, challenge our own biases, and find common ground. Only then can we build a truly inclusive society where everyone has a seat at the table.

So, let's ditch the tick boxes and embrace real inclusion. Let's celebrate our differences, learn from each other, and build a future where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. It's not just the right thing to do; it's the smart thing to do. And it's the only way we'll create a world where everyone feels like they belong, where we are awake rather than a woke!

Interested in joining our Inclusion by Default Campaign to help make the North East the most inclusive region in the UK by the end of 2025? Where everyone, including white young boys and white men have a voice, then please reach out.

Ammar Mirza CBE is Chair & Founder of Asian Business Connexions, Chair of the NELEP Business Growth Board, Honorary Colonel of 101 Regiment RA and holds various positions across the public and private sectors.

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Meet the team

The North Tyneside Business Forum is a supportive network providing information, signposting, connections, and encouragement for members to grow.

The Forum is run on a voluntary basis by a management team made of local businesses. Here we meet some of them.

Michael James,

The Chair and has his own business NE1 Web Design

"I provide Web design solutions for local businesses to help you get more sales or clients. I decided to join the Forum to help bring businesses across the region together. I received lots of help and support from The Business Factory and The Forum when I set my business up, so I wanted to be able to give something back.

My Fun Fact – I'm a bit of a James Bond geek and often combine my passion of travelling to some of the movie locations."

Keith Hardy,

Deputy CEO of VODA North Tyneside

"VODA is a local infrastructure organisation supporting the Voluntary, Community and Enterprise Sector (VCSE) in North Tyneside. The sector has over 700 organisations employing over 2,500 people. I joined the Forum to connect business to the VCSE sector. Most charities and organisations require goods and services and the sector would like to invest in local businesses where possible.

My Fun Fact - I have abseiled down St Mary's Lighthouse."

David Hodgson,

MBE, FCA, Chartered Accountant and Chartered Banker

He has been a partner in the Coastal Accountancy Practice, Read Milburn & Co. in North Shields for over 50 years.

"The practice was established over 100 years ago and acts for a variety of businesses, charities, and individuals removing stress from compliance issues and allowing business owners to have more time. I decided to join the Forum as I volunteer as a trustee, secretary or treasurer with over 12 charities. As a founder member, I joined the Forum to be able to give some further assistance to the wider business community.

My Fun Fact - I am a keen Padi Diver, glider pilot and DIY enthusiast when not involved in overseas Charity Challenges which have taken me to South Africa, The Grand Canyon, Cuba, Machu Picchu in Peru, and the Cameron Highlands of Malaya. My next trip is to climb Mount Toubkal in Morocco in October 2024."

Angela Tuplin,

Director at NE Display Limited

"We are a large format print production company. From design, print, signage, exhibition to vehicle and architectural wrapping. Producing graphics to elevating brands.

I decided to join the forum as having 20 successful traded years in the North Tyneside area, NE Display would often utilise the Business Forum's connections and be signposted in the right direction. And although the support was always there to fall back on it wasn't until the covid pandemic hit that I genuinely understood the importance of having a business community around you. With an uncertain future for many industries and sectors - some even reinvented themselves to achieve growth and sustainability. My perspective changed on the business world, and I felt a need to not only belong to a network of people, but I wanted to contribute to the growth and development of businesses in our region.

My Fun Fact - I can have a good morning, or I can get my kids to school on time, but I can't have both. Juggling tweens and teens since 2006."



Michael James



Keith Hardy



David Hodgson



Angela Tuplin

The Forum is FREE to join and is for any business with a trading address in North Tyneside.
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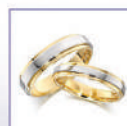
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Transformational change sees Faltec Europe win Employer of the Year Award

In recognition of the transformational change in staff development, wellbeing and community involvement, Sunderland-based, Faltec Europe, won Employer of the Year at the North East Automotive Alliance (NEAA) Annual Awards at the end of March 2024.



The NEAA Awards 2024 winners

The company, which produces metal and plastic trim products and employs 320 staff, received £2,000 which was donated to Our Lady & St Thomas Catholic Primary School in Willington, County Durham to support its STEM provision. In total, the award winners of all categories have donated £16,500 to future talent, schools and STEM related programmes.

Hosted by national journalist and campaigner, Charlie Charlton, 300 guests were taken through eight categories, with Vantec Europe having double success in the Digital Transformation and Outstanding Contribution categories, the latter of which went to its managing director, Martin Kendall. It has donated £4,000 to Washington Academy.

The awards celebrated future talent, inspirational leaders and forward-thinking businesses who are cementing their position within the automotive industry.

Paul Butler, chief executive of the NEAA, said: "This was a spectacular evening that shone a light on the amazing companies that make the automotive supply chain the dynamic, innovative and forward-looking sector that it is. More than that, it also reminded us in the most powerful way that, while technology plays an increasingly important role in all that we do, it is people that make our sector what it is.

"This was brought to life in remarkable style by the career journey outlined by Martin Kendall, managing director of Vantec Europe who won the Outstanding Contribution Award.

"Martin told us that he arrived in South Shields as a 17-year-old with £40 and an O Level in woodwork. He worked on the shopfloor at Nissan as a forklift driver and, eventually, became managing director of Vantec Europe, a preferred third party logistics provider, with 12 operations in the UK and a key customer base including automotive and premium vehicles. Quite a remarkable life journey that oozes resilience, perseverance, belief, humility and self-confidence."

Martin Kendall, managing director, at Vantec Europe Limited said: "I was very surprised and humbled but delighted to receive the Outstanding Contribution Award. I have had an amazing career in the advanced manufacturing, automotive and logistics industry.

"For me, it's always been about the people at Vantec Europe, at every level from the shop floor, our apprentices, through to senior management; making sure we can deliver what our partners require. Every single person is important, and I'm passionate about getting the right people with the right attitude into the sector; they are the ones going to make a difference in the future."

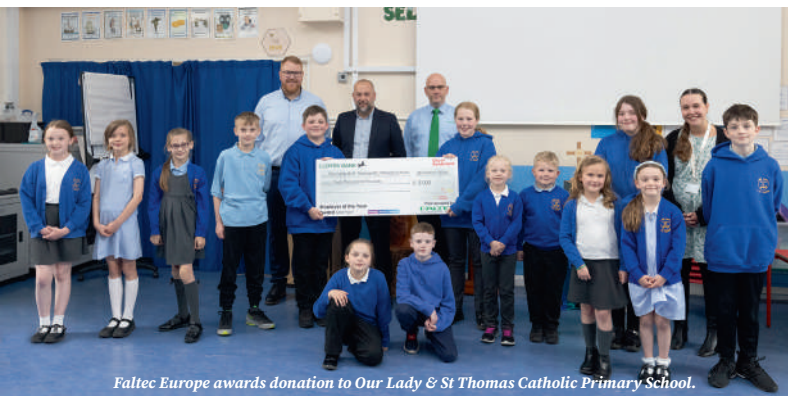
Then, there was the inspiring work undertaken by the management team at Faltec Europe to develop a truly transformational people development programme that is setting the company up perfectly for future growth but, most of all, shows that it truly values and cares for its staff.

Bruce Mair, human resources and general affairs manager, at Faltec Europe, said: "We already had a very high retention rate, with the average length of service standing at 12.5 years. However, we wanted to be a better employer, to put real focus on the most important area of our business - our people. The senior management team was absolutely committed to taking our engagement with colleagues to a much higher level and be a stand-out, Tier 1, employer.

"The platform for this was consultation, every step of the way, with colleagues to establish core values - integrity, innovation, collaboration, respect and resilience - that we all signed up to and which guide every interaction we have with colleagues, suppliers, customers and wider stakeholders. We constantly review where we are and challenge whether our behaviours are in line with our values.

"We believe that getting better never stops and that we are on a journey of continuous improvement, in the knowledge that whilst there is still much to do we have transformed our business and our people."

northeastautomotivealliance.com



Faltec Europe awards donation to Our Lady & St Thomas Catholic Primary School.



Vantec Europe awards donation to Washington Academy

The full list of winners and sponsors are:-

- Geoff Ford MBE Apprentice Award, sponsored by Gateshead College*
- Megan Gorman - Unipres (UK) Limited*
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- Graduate Award, sponsored by Marelli*
- Nathan Tshibuyi - Nissan Motor Manufacturing UK*
-
- Innovation Award, sponsored by Newcastle University*
- Multinational: Komatsu UK Ltd*
- Highly Commended: Marelli*
- SME: Charpak Ltd*
-
- Digital Transformation Award, sponsored by NA College*
- Vantec Europe Limited*
-
- Environmental & Sustainability Award, sponsored by Nissan Motor Manufacturing UK*
- Multinational: Lear Sunderland*
- SME: Houghton International*
-
- Employer of the Year Award, sponsored by Invest South Tyneside*
- Faltec Europe Limited*
-
- SME of the Year Award, sponsored by North East Institute of Technology (NEIoT)*
- CMYK Digital Solutions Limited*
-
- Outstanding Contribution Award, sponsored by Sunderland City Council*
- Martin Kendall, Managing Director at Vantec Europe*
-
- A drinks reception was sponsored by Smart Manufacturing Solutions and SMS Technology and the awards brochure sponsor was Horizon Works.*

Beaconhouse Events celebrates 10th anniversary with a community commitment

Beaconhouse Events, a leading events agency headquartered in Newcastle upon Tyne, is celebrating a decade in business by launching a campaign to support ten local charities and community initiatives over the next twelve months.

From launching as a team of two back in 2014, BeaconHouse Events has now delivered over 1000 events over its decade in business, and today employs a talented team of experts to bring events to life for a high-profile client portfolio which stretches across the UK.

Despite the global pandemic delivering a major blow to the global events sector, the agency is thriving; reporting a 25% increase in turnover in 2023/24 through a mix of in-person, digital, and hybrid events for their national client portfolio. Co-founders Catherine Duhaut and Sarah Thackray are keen to invest their success back into the local community by supporting initiatives that contribute to creating a thriving North East economy for the people who live and work here in the region.

BeaconHouse Events was established in 2014 to design environments and experiences that bring people and ideas together; creating space for conversations that could change the world. After careers in media, linguistics, HR services and events, co-founders Catherine Duhaut and Sarah Thackray joined forces to create an organisation that delivered brilliant events through clever thinking, sustainable solutions, and exceptional customer service – and BeaconHouse Events was born.

Co-founder and director Catherine Duhaut said, “We’ve been reflecting on the past ten years and while there have been some major achievements, including national award wins and our largest capacity event which welcomed over 24,000 attendees, there have been some turbulent times to navigate too. In 2020 the future of events looked bleak, but with the support and dedication of our



Catherine Duhaut and Sarah Thackray

incredible team, we were able to pivot the business and invest in technology solutions that still allowed people to connect when they needed it most. Since then, we have continued to evolve the experiences that we create to better suit today’s working patterns and global teams, but our vision remains to drive lasting, positive impact with every event that we deliver, whether it be a conference, exhibition, membership, awards ceremony, celebration, virtual, hybrid, outdoor event, or festival.

“It feels like only yesterday that Sarah and I decided to embark on this journey together. We wanted to take the learnings from our individual career experiences and use them to create something better than what the sector was doing already; something that had a positive impact on the people working to deliver the events, that offered a great experience to clients and that fitted with our joint and individual ambitions for the future. One major driver was being able to partner with clients who were delivering great work that we believed in to allow us to have a positive impact on our team and the communities around us.

Co-founder and director Sarah Thackray continued, “While our client portfolio has taken us around the world over the past 10 years, we are proud to call the North East home. Events are ultimately about people, and we would like to mark this milestone year by partnering with charities and community groups who are working hard to raise aspirations and create opportunities for people who live and work in our region. This forms a key part of our ESG strategy which aims to position us as a leading voice when it comes to driving positive change across the event sector. It includes a considered and consistent commitment to support projects focused on health and wellbeing, quality education, and climate action in the North East.

“We would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who has supported us and believed in the power of events over the last ten years. We have some big plans for the next decade so watch this space!”

For more information on BeaconHouse Events visit www.beaconhouse-events.co.uk



The PFC Trust's Frances Connolly and Patrick Connolly (front, centre) are joined by the other Uchangelives Golf Day steering group members Paul Fraser (Rephrase), Tania Cooper (North East STEM Foundation and Steel Benders) and Jonathan Ward (England Golf) alongside Alex Shaw (Seaton Carew Golf Club) at host club Seaton Carew Golf Club.

Picture: Michael Cartwright/SCGC.

Uchangelives Golf Day at Seaton Carew GC offering tickets to The Open

Organisers have marked the official launch of the inaugural Uchangelives Charity Golf Day by announcing that a £25,000 car will be up for grabs for a hole-in-one and the overall winners will claim a four-day package worth around £10,000 for The Open.

Twenty-two fourballs consisting of 88 amateur golfers from across the country, and possibly the odd celebrity, will compete at the historic Seaton Carew Golf Club in September to raise money in support of local charities The PFC Trust and the North-East STEM Foundation.

Among the fantastic prizes are the incredible four-day passes for next year's The Open at Royal Portrush with nearby accommodation as well as the opportunity to win a car by hitting a hole-in-one on the prestigious links. The PFC Trust's founder Frances Connolly said: "This is a fantastic opportunity for our community to come together, enjoy a day of golf, and make a real difference in the lives of young people in our region.

"The day promises a fantastic round of golf

at the outstanding Seaton Carew Golf Club, followed by an afternoon of networking and celebration. Participants will enjoy a delicious barbecue, an exciting raffle and the chance to win fantastic prizes.

"This is the first time we have held a golf day and we have been overwhelmed by the response so far – and hopefully we can make this an annual occasion."

This exclusive competition - which will be 100 days away on June 10 - provides an exceptional opportunity for businesses and individuals to network with like-minded professionals while supporting the vital work of both organisations.

But it also offers a unique opportunity to compete on the tenth oldest course in England that will celebrate its 150th

anniversary by hosting the English Amateur Championship, when hundreds of golfers from around the world will play at Seaton Carew Golf Club this summer.

There are still sponsorship opportunities available for the Uchangelives golf day.

Tania Cooper, chair of the North East STEM Foundation and managing director of sponsor Steel Benders, said: "This is a perfect chance for businesses to gain visibility and show their commitment to the community by supporting education and innovation initiatives in the North-East.

"The sponsorship package includes prominent signage at the sponsored hole, recognition in the event programme, and a chance to network with participants throughout the day."

The PFC Trust's Uchangelives campaign takes place each September and focuses on raising money to improve the lives of disadvantaged children and young people through education, health, and community development projects.

The Trust collaborates regularly with the North-East STEM Foundation to promote education and careers in the North-East, providing opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge.

If you are interested in sponsoring or participating in the event register your interest by please visiting lnkd.in/gWEeY-Wi or contact The PFC Trust directly.

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Step 2: Review - In the next stage, your Adviser will gather your personal and financial information and any details of your existing commitments. They'll also gain an understanding of how much risk, if any, you're willing to take with your money. Your Adviser will evaluate your current financial situation and explore various options to create your own tailored financial plan.

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Approved by The Openwork Partnership on 02/05/2024

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How the North East is Fast Becoming the Epicentre of a New Wave of Innovation and Care

An Interview with Jennine Jonczyk: Programme Lead of the Internet of Caring Things® Programme

The North East of England is witnessing a transformative wave of innovation, particularly in the realm of digital and connected technologies designed to enhance the quality of life of its residents.

Leading this charge is the Internet of Caring Things® (IoCT™) Programme led by the UK National Innovation Centre for Ageing (NICA), in partnership with the Centre for Process Innovation (CPI). We had the opportunity to speak with Programme Lead Dr Jennine Jonczyk about the exciting developments and opportunities this initiative brings to the region.

The Vision Behind IoCT™

Can you tell us a bit about you, your organisation, and your role in IoCT™?

I am the Programme Lead of the Internet of Caring Things®, part of the National Innovation Centre for Ageing, one of Newcastle University's key innovation hubs. As the lead of a business support programme, I assist businesses in developing and repurposing products and services that enable people to live better for longer. Our goal is to foster an Internet of Caring Things® (IoCT™) Cluster, aimed at boosting economic growth, creating jobs, and enhancing resident wellbeing. By building a world-class innovation ecosystem focused on citizens and community, we aim to position the North of Tyne region - comprising Newcastle, Northumberland, and North Tyneside - as an international leader in innovation.

Building a Caring Community

What inspired the creation of this programme, and what does its existence mean for the North East Business Community?

It was conceived out of a recognition of the potential economic and social benefits that connected caring technologies could bring. By focusing on innovations that help people care about what matters to them - whether it's personal health, family, environmental quality, or lifelong learning - we can address diverse needs and improve overall well-being. For the North East business community, this means access to a unique support system that nurtures innovation and helps turn creative ideas into tangible solutions.

Inclusive Criteria and Broad Scope

Can any business in the North East join, or are there any criteria for them?

We take start-ups and small businesses at any stage of their respective journeys all the way up to large, well-established organisations, but they must be registered in Newcastle, North Tyneside, or Northumberland and demonstrate the potential to develop a connected, caring product.

Diverse Innovators in IoCT™

Could you talk more about some of the businesses that are in the programme or have been through the programme?

Our programme supports a wide range of businesses. In traditional care sectors, we have companies like MyFolks, Sensmart, Affotek, Carer's Room, and Peggi. But IoCT™ isn't limited to elder care; it spans across various industries:

- Mibox Live in Edtech.
- KeepL in cybersecurity, addressing data safety.
- STTAA CIC focuses on inclusivity and accessibility in transport.

- Cleva in gardening, promoting independent living with robotic mowers.
- Spark Epos bringing automation to hospitality, tourism, and leisure.

These examples highlight our commitment to supporting innovations that benefit all age groups and bring positive changes to the region.

Overcoming Challenges Together

What are some common challenges that North East businesses face today, and how does your programme help address them?

Businesses often struggle with gauging public openness to new technologies, especially among older adults. Our co-design workshops and one-on-one sessions with community members provide valuable insights into user preferences and accessibility needs. Proof of concept and validation are critical, and our Voice® work offers companies the chance to engage with citizens for real-world feedback, enhancing their applications for further funding and trials.

Resources and Support

Could you explain what resources (financial, educational, technological) are available to businesses through your programme?

Eligible businesses receive free initial support, including a 70% discount on tailored projects. They gain access to expertise in various fields such as sensors, data, materials, human behaviours, UI and UX design, and healthy longevity from our in-house experts at NICA and CPI.

Advice for Entrepreneurs

What advice would you give to entrepreneurs and small business owners in the North East looking to grow their businesses?

The North East has a great ecosystem of support so seek help and advice but ensure it meets your specific needs. Each organisation has its own specialisms - IoCT™, for example, is a healthy longevity lens to access a wider demographic, with a focus on human-centric design and the know-how to build technology. Utilise the ecosystem effectively and maintain a record of interactions and support received.

Engage with independent testers for unbiased feedback on your products. Leverage the expertise available at NICA, as our team can help you access wider markets and validate your ideas.

Most importantly, take advantage of the expertise on your doorstep - we are a national centre with a global reach and our team are genuine innovation specialists; we are partnered with a centre of process innovation and have access to world-class facilities. A 30 - 60 min conversation to see if we can help you access a wider market is a fantastic return on time invested!

Connecting with IoCT™

How can businesses interested in your programme get in touch or apply?

Businesses can reach out through various channels, which can all be found on our website: ioct.uknica.co.uk; you can also simply drop us an email at ioct@newcastle.ac.uk or pop in to see us at our offices in The Catalyst.

Hayley Ramm – The Efficient Elephant

HR and Recruitment Support Specialist.

With a name like Hayley Ramm she was destined to work in Human Resources. For HR you need HR!

Anyway, that's probably a bit convoluted so she came up with something more fun.

The Efficient Elephant.

And why an elephant, well because her personality type is caring, cautious, critical and creative who loves to follow systems and guidelines.

Hayley has many years of experience in HR & Recruitment, working within a range of sectors from the Motor Industry, Call Centre Sector to Manufacturing organisations which have each helped her to gain valuable HR skills and qualifications whilst living, breathing and delivering throughout the employee life cycle.

During her career Hayley recognised how demanding the days can be for HR & Recruitment professionals, as they are often required to deliver on operational, strategic and project levels.

With this in mind, Hayley spotted a niche in the market to become a freelance HR & Recruitment Support Specialist so that she could help tackle the To Do lists of those busy professionals.

The Efficient Elephant was born nine years ago and has lived through the challenges of running a business with a young family, survived the challenges of running a business whilst battling breast cancer and experienced the challenges of pivoting a business during the global pandemic.

Hayley explained how these challenges can now all be seen as positives, they have shaped her and her business, focusing her to provide outstanding efficient service to her clients every step of the way.

Hayley is now excited to be building momentum in her business, enjoying being a mentor for The Princes Trust and proud to have completed a recent qualification of Accredited Certificate in Coaching. The progression in her business and learning has cemented her plans to add further services to The Efficient Elephant, which will include SME Business Coaching and Career Coaching, so watch this space!

"My number one aim is to make the lives of HR and Recruitment Consultants easier," said Hayley. "I remove the day-to-day but very necessary aspects of someone's work and let them focus on the important task of running their departments or their business."

Unlike an elephant, Hayley won't like to blow her own trumpet, but by going onto her LinkedIn page you will be able to flick through some amazing testimonials...there are dozens of them...they'll give you a clear view of what she does and how well she does it.

For example, Suzanna Elderbrant, a leadership development specialist said...

"Hayley has been an absolute godsend to me at a time where my business commitments have meant I needed to be client facing with a strong external coaching focus. I had some requirements that would have taken me hours to complete. Hayley had the ability to take those requirements and add both her personal and professional touch."

Or how about Market Research Agency founder, Natasha McDonough....

"Hayley produced CVs for us to include in tenders and proposal submissions. She understood the brief and then delivered - with icing on top! A selection of Business CVs to choose from, all delivered to meet our tight deadline."

And then there's this from recruitment business owner Laura Gillespie...

"When my business started to take off quicker than I expected I knew I needed some extra support on a freelance basis. I cannot recommend Hayley highly enough, she is like a breath of fresh air, who has calmly taken over the things that I don't like to do, leaving me to get on with my day job!"

Praise indeed, but that's a just a snapshot of what Hayley Ramm can do for you.

"My background has seen me working for companies such as Benfield Motors, Capita Resourcing, NSK, and Solutions Recruitment," adds Hayley. "I take care of your contract amends, produce employee survey analysis, create essential HR document templates, research employee benefits, write reports following investigations, support online employee meetings, design handbooks, review policies...the sort of HR work that can all be done in the background. I work remotely for my clients, so that I can really focus on their projects and complete their work effectively and efficiently, without all the interruptions they may face in their own office."

"When it comes to recruitment I write recruitment strategies, draft job adverts, produce job descriptions, compile relevant interview questions with scoring systems which are all specific to the vacancy and of course to the culture of the business. I put everything together and then send all of the information to my client for their final tweaking and approval."

"I work alongside HR & Recruitment professionals who are in the need of an extra pair of hands to help them get through a busy period. This frequently happens when a company is growing, and they just need that extra specialist support to get them through their volume of work, their project, or their expansion period."

So, do you need an experienced HR and Recruitment Support Specialist?

For unforgettable service and support, why not get in touch with The Efficient Elephant.

You can email Hayley on hayley@theefficientelephant.co.uk or call her on 07739985959. You can also reach her via her LinkedIn account. Just type Hayley Ramm - Efficient Elephant in your browser and she'll pop up.

“

*...My number
one aim is to
make the lives
of HR and
Recruitment
Consultants easier...*



Middlesbrough Amazon agency, Seller Presto, eyes £1m revenue goal

Seller Presto, a specialist in Amazon store management and advertising, has announced it is set to double its turnover for its current financial year, before aiming to double this once more, taking the business to £1m in annual revenue by the end of 2025.

Established in 2019 by Graeme Coyle, the agency, situated in Middlesbrough's thriving Boho zone, currently has five team members and works with the likes of TJ Hughes, Helix and the board game brand, Football Billionaire, which was featured on Dragon's Den and received investment from Peter Jones.

The agency was recently named a Finalist in the Amazon Partner Awards, a prestigious event held in New York, and consistently achieving Verified Partner status with Amazon. This certification displays Seller Presto's adherence to the strict codes of conduct and service delivery standards expected by the Amazon platform.

Graeme Coyle, MD and founder, spoke of the recent growth of the agency, saying: "We've doubled our turnover in the last year, thanks to strengthening our team

with talented Amazon selling experts and a host of new clients coming on board such as Helix. As a Teesside native, I'm passionate about developing Seller Presto even further into a pure-play, sustainable, and profitable business to aid increased skilled job creation in the Tees Valley area and beyond.

"We are now striving to double turnover again by the financial year end 2025, which will take us to the £1m in annual revenue mark, and we'll be adding around 5 new people to the team during this time. It's an inspiring time for the business and I'm hoping our 5th year as an agency will be our best yet."

Seller Presto helps clients increase revenue through the Amazon channel by delivering specialist support services to seller businesses on the platform, encompassing account management, ad management,

listing creation, Amazon store set-up, full-service management and consultancy. It's a competitive, cut-throat space, with its fair share of issues such as a worrying increase in fake reviews, however with specialist help, Coyle and his team believe that there are significant opportunities to be had on the Amazon platform.

Amazon-specialist agencies in the UK are in short supply, and Seller Presto hopes to bring new talent into this area by investing in emerging talent via internships and paid placements, whilst continuing its ongoing education of existing staff to keep their expertise at the forefront of this burgeoning market.

For now, Seller Presto is focused on achieving its ambitious commercial objectives and will soon be looking to introduce Business Development to the Operations setup, along with additional hires in Account Management.

Founder Graeme Coyle added: "As a past graduate of Teesside University, I know how fortunate we are to have the university on the doorstep, providing us access to its impressive cohort of digital-focused students and graduates. We'll be offering some exciting job opportunities to future graduates from marketing, business and digital courses, and are always keen to hear from enthusiastic people who want to specialise in this unique area of eCommerce."

sellerpresto.com

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Clearwater Developments latest acquisition in Spectrum Business Park Seaham

Clearwater Developments, led by Ranj Gill and Gursh Kahlon, has announced the acquisition of another building, 1b Lighthouse View, in Spectrum Business Park Seaham.

The Seaham-based development company, which began trading in 2011, is on a mission to rejuvenate disused buildings in the local area. This recent acquisition aligns with their ongoing commitment to contributing to the region's development.

Since its inception, Clearwater Developments has been responsible for remarkable transformations, including the completion of 1a Lighthouse View in Spectrum Business Park, a 40,000-square-foot building that was fully let in 2023. This project provided the region with a high-spec gym and luxury sea-front offices, attracting employment, visitors, and business to the area.

The location of 1b Lighthouse View at the heart of Spectrum Business Park offers both a stunning coastal view and strong connectivity links to the A19. An abundance of amenities are also close by, providing plenty of options for food and beverages.

The Building is a two-story office building with an impressive 3m floor-to-ceiling height, raised flooring, LED lighting, shower and WC facilities, external cycle storage, heating, and cooling, and an eight-person passenger lift. The total accommodation size is 2,875.7 m²/30,954 sq. ft.

Ranj Gill said, "We're excited about the acquisition of another building in Spectrum Business Park. This aligns with our commitment to rejuvenate disused buildings and contribute to the development of the local area."



Solicitor qualifies into Muckle LLP's renowned construction and engineering team

A newly qualified solicitor with a passion for development and construction law has qualified into Muckle LLP's construction and engineering team.

Kieran Woonton, who is originally from the Brighton area and graduated from Northumbria University with an M Law degree in 2021, will be working with a spectrum of clients in both the public and private sectors, including public authorities, developers and construction firms.

With a growing interest in infrastructure and the built environment, Kieran initially joined Muckle as a paralegal before sitting – and passing – the Solicitors Qualifying Examination.

Kieran said: "I couldn't be more pleased to be qualifying into the Muckle construction and engineering team. It's a fascinating area of law to get stuck into and I love being a part of some of the truly breathtaking construction projects going on in the North East and in Cumbria.

"I have found my feet really quickly and instantly been given a good level of responsibility. It's nice to come into a bigger team working alongside specialist lawyers like Adam Aston, Ross Galbraith and Lucilla Waugh, and I am grateful for the training and support I've received during my exams."



Investment delivers new Darlington town-centre offices

Following the success of its recent six-figure investment to transform outdated offices at Coniscliffe House in Darlington - property investment company, Landteam, is investing in the town once again.

With the newly-renovated office space at Coniscliffe House now fully let, Landteam, together with Appleshed Consulting, has renovated an additional 2,442 sq. ft. of space on High Row, to create much-needed Grade A studio offices.

Commercial property consultants, Knight Frank, has been appointed to market the space at the high street development which is called Clock Tower Studios.

The terraced property, located in a prime, town centre location, has been transformed from run-down office accommodation into highly sustainable, contemporary studios – each with their own kitchen facility, urban concept interiors and communal areas and WCs.

Todd Milburn

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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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The Banks Group records £21m operating profit in the lead up to the sale of its renewable energy business

County Durham-headquartered energy, property and mining firm the Banks Group delivered a robust performance in 2023 across all of its business areas in the lead up to the sale of its renewable energy arm.

In the family firm's final set of annual results while still operating in the renewable energy sector, it has reported a combined operating profit of £21m across all its businesses for the financial year ending 30 September 2023, down from £36m in the previous year. Overall group sales for the year were £90m, down from £112m in the previous period.

During the year, the Group negotiated the sale of Banks Renewables to the Brookfield Global Transition Fund in a transaction that was announced in October last year and completed in December. It has since rebranded as OnPath Energy and will operate from its new headquarters in Rainton Bridge.

The Group launched a dedicated regional housebuilding company, Banks Homes, which is focussing on building its own houses on sites of all sizes across North East England and Yorkshire.

Banks Homes operates independently from, but alongside, the Group's existing property development arm, Banks Property, which is continuing to work with many of the UK's best-known housebuilders, as it has done successfully over the last 35 years.

Harry Banks, Chairman and Chief Executive of the Banks Group, says: "In line with our expectations, the performance of our business in 2023 was at a lower level than the previous year, while we have managed the sale of the Group's renewable interests and focussed on enhancing the group's future growth prospects across all our retained business areas."



Naylors Gavin Black sells office for £2.6m

Commercial property consultancy, Naylors Gavin Black, has brokered the sale of an out-of-town office investment for £2.6 million.

Partner, Chris Donabie, has disposed of the 32,000 sq. ft. Tyneside House on Newcastle Business Park, in Newcastle, on behalf their client, C.G.I.S (a MARCOL company).

Defra has acquired the three-storey building as an office for the Environment Agency which is a longstanding tenant at Tyneside House, having leased the building for over 25 years.

Built in the 1990's, Tyneside House overlooks the River Tyne and includes studio and storage facilities as well as office space over three floors and a generous parking allocation.

Chris Donabie, partner at Naylors Gavin Black, comments: "We are pleased to have been able to dispose of Tyneside House for our client in what remains a challenging office market."



AspinallVerdi drive growth with key appointment at Newcastle office

Independent nationwide property regeneration consultants AspinallVerdi continue to expand with a key appointment at its Newcastle-upon-Tyne office serving public and private sector clients across the North East of England.

Amy Bennett joins the firm at its office at The Core, Bath Lane, Newcastle Helix as a development consultant having initially started in January 2024 while completing her RICS-accredited BSc (Hons) Real Estate degree at Northumbria University.

Originally from the Isle of Man, Amy began her career at KPMG, undertaking an apprenticeship programme where she worked with high-net-worth clients and development companies. This role provided her with valuable experience in the real estate sector through the firm's audit and tax functions.

Alongside her studies, Amy worked at estate agents Bailey & Co. as a part-time sales & lettings negotiator, while also gaining work experience at Knight Frank, Savills and Johnson Tucker in Newcastle, where she worked on development, capital markets, valuation, agency, and property management departments.



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Double win for Ad Gefrin in prestigious property awards

Ad Gefrin Anglo Saxon Museum and Whisky Distillery has been named Commercial Development of the Year at the North East Property Awards and crowned winner in the Heritage category at the RICS North East Awards.

The impressive £16 million project in Wooler was nominated by Todd Milburn, who provided Contract Administration, Quantity Surveying, and CDM services to support the client's vision of delivering a world-class visitor experience.

The project includes a museum, visitor centre, and Northumberland's first-ever whisky distillery, creating over 50 new job opportunities for the local community.

The buildings have been designed to fit in with the historical site by renowned Northumberland architect, Richard Elphick, reflecting the great hall aesthetics of 7th-century Northumbrian Kings, while incorporating the latest design practices, technologies, and sustainability principles.



Mark Berry, Director at Todd Milburn, said: "On behalf of Todd Milburn and the entire project team including Brims, Richard Elphick, and JCP, we are thrilled to see the landmark project receive the recognition it deserves. Our clients, the Ferguson family, have truly achieved their goal to build a world-class destination that is supported and celebrated by the people of Wooler."

Alongside the breathtaking design and complex details delivered across the project, the judges were impressed by the local support it has received and the involvement of local schools in educating students about the site's heritage and historical significance.



Esh Construction to deliver £6.7 million IAMP infrastructure upgrades

Esh Construction has been appointed to provide infrastructure upgrades to widen the existing A1290 at the International Advanced Manufacturing Park (IAMP).

The IAMP is situated to the north of the Nissan Motor Manufacturing plant, adjacent to the A19 with excellent links to the A1(M), and is recognised as a nationally significant project. One of the largest live schemes in the country, it spans 370-acres and is expected to create more than 7,000 new jobs over the next 10 years.

The £6.7 million contract was awarded through NEPO and will be delivered in partnership with IAMP LLP, a limited liability

partnership established by South Tyneside Council and Sunderland City Council to promote and deliver IAMP.

The project will see carriageway upgrade works on the A1290 to dual the existing carriageway between the A1290/A19 junction and just beyond the southern entrance of International Drive within IAMP.

Esh's Divisional Director, Steven Garrigan, said: "This latest award builds on our successful delivery of the infrastructure for the first phase of IAMP which completed in 2020.

"IAMP is a huge investment by two local authorities which will deliver a world-class destination for advanced manufacturing and create thousands of jobs for the region. We are proud to be creating greater transport access for businesses while helping to support the enhanced economic growth of the Sunderland and South Tyneside areas."

The project will be split across three main construction areas which have been phased to minimise the use of lane closures and temporary traffic lights, with the majority of new 1,550m length of carriageway being constructed off-line before tying it into the existing road infrastructure. Accompanying drainage system works, including the construction of supporting swales and attenuation ponds, as well as street lighting, traffic signals, pedestrian crossings and landscaping works will also be delivered.

Morpeth leisure centre now multi-award-winning with latest National recognition

A sport and leisure centre in Morpeth is celebrating becoming a multi-award-winning facility after winning the Community Benefit award at this year's RICS North East Awards.

Since opening its doors in April 2023, the centre has seen huge engagement from the community, with an increase of 200 to 260% in swim, gym and class visits, as well as a 165% increase in community members.

The project has now won best 'Community Benefit' at the RICS North East Awards, and 'Design Excellence' at Insider's North East Property Awards. This comes after being ranked as 'best in the country' in a Quest appraisal last year.

Bookending the existing high street, the centre sits at the edge of town beside the River Wansbeck on Gas House Lane. As well as offering sporting facilities – including a six-lane swimming pool and spectator gallery, learning pool, spa and fitness suites, alongside multi-use sports halls and studios – this facility acts as a local community hub.

Morpeth Leisure Centre was commissioned and funded by Northumberland County



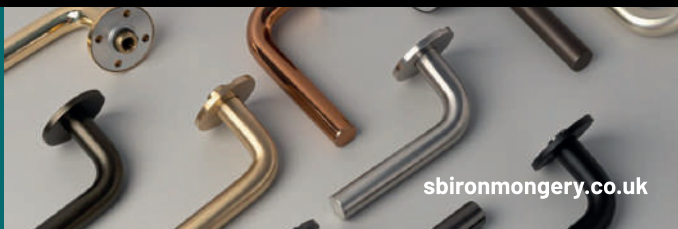
Council and Advance Northumberland, designed by leading firm GT3 Architects and constructed by Willmott Dixon. The planning application was prepared and managed by DPP Planning.



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The Built Environment

In this new series of interviews with leading figures working within this crucial sector, Northern Insight spoke to...

Adam Finch

Newcastle-based director at property consultant Eddisons

Did you always envisage a career working in and around The Built Environment?

I never purposely set out to pursue a career in construction! When I was in my early 20s and unsure which career path to take, I decided to enrol on a university course – but couldn't decide which course. I threw the prospectus down and it opened on Building Surveying. Thankfully, it was the right fit and the rest, as they say, is history.

Tell us about your current role?

Every day is very different. As a director at Eddisons in Newcastle, my role is managing the growing team here in the North East. It also involves generating business opportunities, planning my local business case six months in advance, and making sure all our jobs are being delivered to the highest standard and with excellent client satisfaction. I also manage some interesting capital-funded projects, which enables me to get out of the office when the sun is shining.

Tell us about your team.

I'm extremely fortunate to work with people I consider friends as well as colleagues. We have a terrific team morale and each of us shares the desire to be the best version of ourselves in both our professional and personal lives.

Our growing team has a great mix, from apprentices through to directors, which helps everyone gain professional experience and creates opportunities to progress. Our apprentice building surveyor Anne, for example, moved from an admin support role.

What are you currently working on?

I'm mainly project managing capital funded refurbishment and expansion projects in the education sector. As the summer holidays approach, this time of year is always stressful as we need to commence work on schools projects work out of term time. I am also working on a number of Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Stage 2 and 3 planning reports for several local authority clients.

I am also involved in a number of heat decarbonisation plans for public sector buildings which will reduce energy consumption. Sustainability and decarbonisation are growth areas of business for Eddisons and we have a specialist team doing some ground-breaking work for clients in this arena.

What is your proudest career achievement?

The journey from setting up a building consultancy practice in Newcastle in 2017 with little more than a biro and a handful of loyal clients, to now managing a team of eight surveyors and offering a multi-disciplinary service.

What is your own favourite building?

It has to be St James' Park! I love that the stadium has undergone a number of extensions since its original construction in 1880, making it one of the world's oldest football destinations. If further extensions are feasible the capacity could be increased to 65,000. That would generate some noise on a match day!

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

With the tech-based software available to us now, it's inevitable that we'll soon see AI introduced. In fact, I am currently working on a few templates that may be adopted by a software company's AI programme to accelerate design documentation and associated reports. We will also see changes to the building materials and structures used to progress sustainable construction practices as the Government strives to realise net zero goals.

What does the future hold?

Hopefully, further growth for our fantastic Eddisons team in the North East and new business opportunities generated by our excellent reputation in the region.

Who would be your four ideal dinner guests?

Sadly they are not all still with us, but Kevin Keegan, Michelle Keegan, Nelson Mandela and my Granda Tom would make fascinating company.

How do you like to unwind?

Playing golf is one of a few activities where I can totally forget about what is going on in the world and switch off from work pressures. Five hours' peace and quiet, hitting a little white ball round a field, does me the world of good!

Favourite Boxset?

I have never watched a box set in my life – I can't sit still for long enough! Football and golf are my main go-to TV.

Favourite Book?

I don't do much reading – again, mainly because I can't switch off for long enough, but I do enjoy reading the odd autobiography when I'm relaxing on holiday, preferably while sipping a gin and tonic in the sun.

www.eddisons.com

A portrait of Adam Finch, a middle-aged man with a shaved head and a short beard, smiling. He is wearing a dark blue suit jacket over a light blue checkered shirt and a light blue tie. The background is a blurred indoor setting.

“

*...Sustainability and
decarbonisation
are growth areas
of business for
Eddisons...*

Adam Finch

CAN continues to build momentum

Tim Barrett, chair of Construction Alliance North East (CAN), explains how the lobby group is building momentum and winning support across the public and private sectors for the role the construction sector plays in regional growth and job creation.

Can you tell us about Construction Alliance North East (CAN) – What is its aim and objectives?

CAN is a network of regional construction and engineering companies, representing over 500 member companies, operating at a combined turnover of £3billion and employing more than 100,000 people in the North East of England.

We play a strategic role in supporting and promoting the North East's competent and capable SME contractors. We lobby Government, MPs, local authorities and other procurement organisations, to remind them of the wider benefits to our region's economy of working with North East firms. We campaign to raise awareness and to create a level playing field, to allow local companies to win more work.

Our three pillars are based on Intelligent procurement, fair payment and skills and training.

CAN is a unique alliance. We focus on working collaboratively with each other and external organisations for the sole benefit of the region's contractors. The four organisations which make up CAN are Northern Counties Builders Federation (NCBF), Civil Engineering Contractors Association (CECA), the Federation of Master Builders (FMB) and the National Federation of Builders (NFB). As a collective, the board meets regularly to proactively engage at a strategic level with those involved in the North East construction sector.

What does CAN have planned to support the SME sector in the North East?

CAN works collaboratively with other organisations such as Constructing Excellence North East and the construction industry council, as well as working independently on behalf of its members. This year we are planning events and



Tim Barrett

summits on various topics around contracts, local skills and talents and the new procurement bill.

These events are aimed at improving the links between clients and contractors and promoting simple, quick wins, like early engagement and choosing the right contracts.

We are also hoping to have a summit around procurement during the year, aimed at leaders of procurement and leaders at local authority level, promoting North East construction and simplifying the procurement process, so local contractors can undertake local works benefiting the local economy and communities.

How close do you work with the local authorities and procurement organisations such as NEPO?

CAN works very closely with NEPO, having quarterly meetings to run through any issues they are seeing in local procurement and offering advice and suggestions on where processes and procedure could be improved. They are a very important link to construction clients and help us provide a two-way discussion over procurement.

Where do you believe CAN has had the greatest impact since its formation?

One of the biggest impacts CAN has had is bringing together more than 500 companies

through its member bodies – Northern Counties Builders Federation (NCBF), Federation of Master Builders (FMB), National Federation of Builders (NFB) and Civil Engineering Contractors Association (CECA) to one place for promotion and lobbying to local clients.

One of the great things about the North East is the will to work locally and we hope that, alongside helping promote our three main pillars, we can carry on the good work in making sure North East companies are seen by clients as leaders in the construction and civil engineering fields.

How important is it that you link in and support other regional bodies such as Constructing Excellence North East?

Collaboration is vital to our regional bodies. We all share similar visions and direction for the construction and civil engineering industry in the North East and, by working together, we can be a much louder and impactful voice. This enables us to share the workload and target specific areas. Construction is a very broad church and we all want to see the sector at the forefront of the minds of local and regional government and influencing policy that will help the North East.

www.constructionalliancenenortheast.co.uk

Procurement experts Prosper has further strengthened its team with two key appointments

Rachel Hunter and Kirsty Dodd have joined the company and will be based at the firm's office at the Silverlink in North Shields.

Rachel joins as a Procurement and Contracts Manager and will be responsible for providing procurement support on projects, strategic procurement activities and call-off procurement activity. She will liaise with many of Prosper's clients across Central, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

She joins the company after working as a supply contracts manager for an energy company – a role she held for six years. After graduating from the University of Sunderland with a degree in media production, Rachel has worked in various planning and production roles.

Commenting on her appointment, she said: "I'm really looking forward to working with Prosper's clients and supply chain partners. My role will be to support them through the delivery of compliant, cost-efficient and effective procurement solutions and supporting them to meet their objectives."

Outside of work, Rachel's hobbies and interests are music and attending gigs, watching films, reading and travelling.

Meanwhile, Kirsty Dodd joins the company as Project Manager and is responsible for

business planning and strategy. Working alongside Prosper's Head of Strategy & Governance, she brings with her a wealth of experience and knowledge of procurement from her previous roles working in the financial and legal sectors.

Kirsty also holds a BA in English Literature, an MA in Creative Writing and a PGCE in Secondary Education. After a brief spell in teaching, she founded a company developing an innovative product to reduce the carbon footprint of the construction industry. Prosper's focus on sustainability in this sector drew her to the position.

She said, "My love of strategy makes this role a perfect fit. I'm really excited to be joining such an ambitious and forward-thinking company and I'm looking forward to helping Prosper develop, grow and achieve its vision. The decarbonisation and sustainability areas of the business align so well with my background and ambitions."

In her spare time, Kirsty likes hiking, running, reading, writing, and travelling.

Rod Brasington, CEO of Prosper, said: "These are two significant appointments and I'd like to welcome Rachel and Kirsty to the Prosper team. We've restructured the business to align with our growth aspirations and



Rachel Hunter (left) and Kirsty Dodd have been appointed by procurement experts Prosper.

build sufficient resources and expertise to continue to provide an excellent service to our clients. They will be able to support the team with our increased work volumes.

"Rachel will work alongside and support our Head of Procurement and Kirsty will focus on business planning and strategy to align with our Executive Board's commitment to growing and developing Prosper effectively, sustainably and responsibly. These are really exciting times ahead."

www.prosper.uk.com

Joiner dovetails woodworking with mindfulness



Chris Garvey, who runs CG Joinery and Building in Bedlington, has embarked on a new venture to address the critical need for education among young children on the power of a positive mindset.

His unusual deviation from his day job

came after Chris took a personal journey of self-discovery through mental and physical challenges to help create a more confident and resilient version of himself. He recognised the lack of resources available for children to develop their mental resilience and self-confidence. In response, he has

incorporated Wolf Instinct Mindset, and within this business he has written a book and organised outdoor challenges aimed at fostering self-belief and resilience in young people. He is also creating a community and podcast all with the intention of educating parents on the power of a positive mindset and helping children forge a positive mindset.

"My daughter struggled with her mindset and mental health a few years ago; he explains. I searched for resources to help her but found a glaring gap in the market for education tailored to children to help them understand and create a positive mindset. That's when I decided to leverage my own personal growth journey to create something impactful for kids. Looking ahead, I believe that the next huge pandemic on the horizon will be young people's mental health and we must act now to prevent this happening."

He has launched Wolf Instinct's Alpha Outdoor Challenges, a programme that exposes children to challenges, takes them safely out of their comfort zone and encourages them to overcome fears through outdoor activities.

The challenges are conducted in a safe environment under the supervision of trained professionals, with an emphasis on building confidence and perseverance.

New owners move in at Tyne Valley estate agency

Jessica and Jonathan Landale take over Anton Estates.



Anyone who has bought or sold a house will know what a stressful time it can be. It's a similar story if you have rental property. Every Budget announcement always seems to include some complicated legislation.

Thankfully the new owners of one of the region's most established property firms, have the sort of experience that can lead you through the maze.

Jessica and Jonathan Landale, who between them have spent 40 years in the property business, have recently completed their own bit of property buying...they've taken over Anton Estates in Corbridge.

"It's a perfect fit for us because we live in the Tyne Valley, we know the state of the property market in this part of the North East and we're taking over a fully established estate agency which has been successful for approaching 30 years," said Jessica Landale. "The foundations of this estate agency are solid...and we're going to build on them and make our own mark because we will do things differently to the previous owner.

The key thing to remember when it comes to any sort of buying, selling or renting of property is that, although you're dealing with bricks and mortar, you're also dealing with people. We put people at the heart of everything we do."

Taking over an established estate agency in their own back yard was a logical move for Jessica and Jonathan.

"Jessica has been involved in the property business since she left school, and I have worked as a land agent since I was at university," adds Jonathan. "We have our own successful property rental company, Cosmo Grace Property based in Newcastle, and we also have

our own property portfolio. Consequently, this was the next logical move for us. We've been looking at various businesses across the region and have been planning to extend our rental and property management business into the Tyne Valley, so when we were approached about taking over Anton Estates, which is situated in the centre of Corbridge, it was the perfect fit...we jumped at it and are overjoyed with the response."

There will still be the familiar team working from the existing agency on Corbridge Middle Street. The company has worked closely with many of the families who live in and around Corbridge and along the Tyne Valley and Jessica and Jonathan want to maintain those relationships.

"Anton Estates is so well-established that we're now dealing with the second generation of some families," says Jessica. "That's part of the benefit of an estate agency like this...it has such a wonderful reputation that it's become a go-to business for anyone who is looking to buy, sell or rent property in the Tyne Valley region. We'll also be extending the lettings and property maintenance aspect of Anton Estates. Property rental is tricky due to the amount of legislation but thanks to our extensive experience in this field, we can help point people in the right direction. We're also proactive when it comes to property. We have a list of clients and we actively contact them whenever we feel there is something in which they'll be interested."

Jessica and Jonathan Landale have accumulated the sort of experience which is invaluable to anyone who is looking to buy, sell or rent. Such is Jessica's level of experience that she's recently completed her Propertymark Level 4 Certificate in Residential Lettings and Property Management for which she is now the ARLA Regional Executive for the North East.

And they've hit the ground running when it comes to properties they can offer. Go onto their website www.antonestates.co.uk and you'll see some very desirable properties which are available to buy. There's also a terrific selection for those of you want to rent. The website includes plenty of information for landlords or anyone interested in offering property for rent.

Feel at home in the Tyne Valley with Anton Estates.

You can contact Jessica, Jonathan and the Anton Estates team via their website or by calling 01434 632080.

Or of course you can pop into their estate agency office in the centre of Corbridge.



Jonathan and Jessica Landale

Investment boosts Brocksbushes 30,000 sq ft premises



Brocksbushes team with Richard Swan ICE3 Group and Chris Dixon and Lesley Telford, FW Capital

Corbridge-based Brocksbushes has received a funding boost to support the development of a new 30,000 sq ft building which will house a new modern Farm Shop, Deli, Butchery, Café and Playbarn, offering all year-round entertainment for children.

A family run business, Brocksbushes has been trading for 40 years, developing from selling home-grown produce from a flat-bed trailer to a thriving Farm Shop, Tea Room and "Pick Your Own Farm." Increased footfall has led the business to develop a new site which means Brocksbushes will move from its 7,500 sq ft premises, relocating to the new, larger, modern facilities. Work is well under way and the development is expected to open in the summer and will create 15 to 20 new jobs, taking the total team to nearly 50.

The current Farm Shop continues business as usual, selling local and home grown produce along with the Tea Rooms while the construction work continues. It is located just off the A69 to the east of Corbridge.

An undisclosed funding package for the new development has been provided by FW Capital using the North East Commercial Property Investment Fund. This is managed by FW Capital and backed by the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). It aims to address the funding gap in the market and drive economic growth and create new jobs in the North East LEP area. Chris Dixon and Lesley Telford represented FW Capital and were introduced to Harry Dickinson by Richard Swan of ICE3 Group.

Harry Dickinson, Director at Brocksbushes said: "We're passionate about the fantastic local produce that is made and grown in Northumberland and the development will continue our ethos of shop, eat, and pick local. The decision to expand came about because we are literally bursting to capacity and our current building has been extended multiple times but has reached its limit!"

"We're excited to open in the summer and the backing of FW Capital has made that possible. They have been brilliant to work with, took the time to understand our business, and it's evident they are passionate about supporting local businesses."

Chris Dixon, Senior Investment Executive, Property FW Capital said: "Brocksbushes is a very well-known brand in Northumberland. It's fantastic to be working with them to support this impressive new development which will futureproof the business for the next 40 years. Construction work is well underway with the roofing added last

month. Everything has also been designed to complement its countryside setting in the heart of the Tyne Valley."

Helen Golightly OBE, Chief Executive of the North East Local Enterprise Partnership, said: "As a proud North East business with its roots firmly placed in the region, it's fantastic that Brocksbushes are expanding and creating more jobs for local people. With the support of the Local Enterprise Partnership's North East Commercial Property Investment Fund, the company is starting its next 40 years in business with new, modern premises that will deliver its ambitious growth plans for the future."

The North East Commercial Property Investment Fund is a £35million fund which provides loans of up to £7 million to support both non speculative and speculative developments for new build or refurbished commercial projects. This includes industrial units, distribution facilities or office schemes located in the seven authority areas: Northumberland, County Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle upon Tyne, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland. Repayments will be reinvested in new schemes, creating a total investment of £119 million into commercial property in 15 years. It aims to create 5,600 jobs and develop 140,000 sq m of commercial space.

For more information please visit www.fwcapital.co.uk/property or email info@fwcapital.co.uk

Are you a developer in the North East?



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schemes



Mixed use
schemes



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and warehouse
developments



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developments

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Funding is available to construction companies and property developers* looking to build projects in the seven local authority areas of the North East:

Northumberland • County Durham • Gateshead • Newcastle upon Tyne • North Tyneside • South Tyneside • Sunderland

**The developer doesn't have to be based in the region, as long as the project is.*

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

North East
Local Enterprise Partnership 

North East
Commercial Property
Investment Fund

Renovating an older house

By Neil Turner, Director,
Howarth Litchfield

Buying a historic house or older property is the dream for many people in the North East, which could be a Victorian townhouse or Georgian manor house in the country or something simpler such as a lodge house or country cottage.

For many people they offer character, charm and quirkiness that a modern estate house simply can't match. They also offer the opportunity to be remodelled and altered.

As a specialist conservation architect, I have a natural interest (and knowledge) of older buildings along with a keen interest in modern design solutions that can blend with historic fabric. So how do you go about altering your house to create the dream heritage home?

Firstly, I would check if the property were listed - for a direct impact on the building - or in a conservation area, which can affect some of the decisions on the building in terms of its relationship to other buildings.

Secondly, what is it that attracted you to the house in the first place? Consider this when looking to alter or radically redesign a house. Is it the height of the rooms or the intimacy of the spaces? Could it be the features and fireplaces, the detailing or the patina of the floors?

So, when you consider any alterations think about how they might affect these features or even improve them.

Budget: This is key when considering the priorities for your alterations. Sounds obvious, but your budget will drive all aspects. And do look for advice from your architect or quantity surveyor at the beginning of your alteration journey. I have written before about the value of a cost plan at the early stages of a design project.

Maintenance: This aspect is often overlooked on older properties, so when you are planning a build or renovation, solve the existing problems now or even before a new development. So often, I have seen people install beautiful new kitchens or undertake alterations when the original roof or gutters still leak.

Scale and proportion: If your house has a grand scale, then a new build should match or at least harmonise with the scale. There is nothing worse than seeing extensions on older buildings that are simply inappropriate in scale, form and materials.

Am I saying that you shouldn't contrast an old building? Certainly not - and in fact, there is a good case for having a new extension or form to be clearly seen as new and not a slavish copy of the original house.

Impact and ambition can be well rewarded with the right design, so long as the budget exists to do this justice.

When altering a historic building this is an ideal time to look at the thermal performance of the house and what improvements can be made - from the simple and easy wins to the more capital-intensive installation of new heating, boilers and batteries.

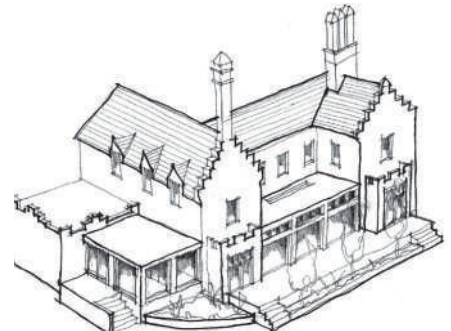
The challenge of older buildings is to make them more energy efficient, lighter and of a design that enhances the circulation space required for modern day living. At the same time, you want to balance the historic features and charm with the new building plans.

Once completed, the success of your renovation should be judged by asking yourself - 'has this house been improved and made more beautiful than when you started?'

Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield can be contacted on 0191 3849470 or email n.turner@hlpuk.com www.howarthlitchfield.com



Neil Turner





Energy efficiency properties

With the recent postponement to Grade B EPC requirements, Paul Fairlamb explains why energy efficiency commercial properties are still crucial long term...

In a recent announcement, Claire Coutinho, the Secretary of State for the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ), confirmed a significant shift in the timeline for commercial property landlords to achieve a Grade B Energy Performance Certificate (EPC).

The initial mandate to reach this grade by 2025 has been scrapped, with rumours of a new deadline being set for 2030. This decision has stirred mixed reactions, raising questions about the future of energy efficiency in commercial property.

The Grade B EPC requirement, a cornerstone of the UK's efforts to combat climate change and attain net zero, aimed to drive improvements in the energy efficiency of commercial properties. However, the postponement of this target has sparked concerns among environmental advocates and industry experts alike.

While the decision to extend the deadline may provide some relief for landlords facing financial constraints, it also risks slowing down progress towards a more sustainable built environment.

The move to postpone the target reflects

a delicate balancing act between environmental ambitions and economic realities. Many commercial property owners have expressed difficulties in meeting the stringent requirements within the original timeframe, citing challenges such as high upfront costs and limited access to suitable technologies.

However, environmental campaigners have voiced their disappointment, warning that delaying the Grade B EPC target could undermine efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate climate change. They argue that the built environment, including commercial properties, plays a crucial role in achieving net-zero carbon emissions and that any postponement sends the wrong signal about the urgency of addressing climate-related challenges.

While compliance with EPC standards is essential, it is equally vital for landlords to prioritise energy-saving measures to future-proof their properties and minimise risks associated with climate change.

Even though the deadline for achieving Grade B EPC rating has been extended, landlords should not lose sight of the long-term benefits of energy efficiency. Improving energy performance not only reduces operating costs but also enhances the attractiveness of properties to tenants and investors.

There are also much broader implications for commercial property values. Buildings with lower energy performance ratings may face diminished market appeal and could experience depreciation in capital value over time. As investors increasingly prioritise sustainability and environmental considerations, properties with higher energy efficiency ratings are likely to command premium prices and enjoy greater resilience in the face of regulatory changes and market fluctuations.

In light of these considerations, stakeholders



across the commercial property sector are urged to adopt a proactive approach to energy efficiency. This entails not only meeting regulatory requirements but also embracing innovative technologies and sustainable practices to create more resilient and environmentally responsible built environments.

As the (possible) countdown to 2030 begins, the debate surrounding energy efficiency in commercial properties is set to intensify. While the postponement of the Grade B EPC target offers a reprieve for landlords, it also underscores the need for concerted action to accelerate progress towards a greener and more sustainable future. Balancing economic imperatives with environmental objectives remains a critical challenge, one that requires collaboration and commitment from all stakeholders involved.

Paul is an experienced commercial property surveyor dealing with property management, sales and lettings, lease renewals and rent reviews across a wide range of property types including retail, industrial and office property.

**Email paul.fairlamb@youngsrps.com
www.youngsrps.com**

Montagu Estate Pop-up Recycling Centre hailed as a big success

Newcastle City Council staged their fifth Pop Up Recycling Centre of the year last month on Montagu Estate, Kenton Ward – on Mornington Ave.

This event was the Council's most successful yet – collecting over 3.5 tonnes of recyclable waste!

“Despite the rain, residents came along in their droves to recycle their items, mainly on foot”, said Councillor Stephen Lambert, Chair of the Kenton Ward committee.

144 residents used the event and recycled:

- 1560 kg of Wood (2 x full skips)
- 560kg Sofas and Domestic Seating
- 380kg Hard Plastics
- 39 Large electronic items equating to 900kg
- 100kg of Small electronic items equating to 129 items.
- 2 x 1100l bins worth of cardboard

Kenton Councillor Paula Maines said: “This was a brilliant initiative and fully supported by Montagu residents. We've received lots of positive feedback at this event from local residents.”

“Recycling waste and looking after our local environment is a key ward priority”, councillor Ged Bell added.

Later in the month another environmental event took place at

North Kenton Park with litter picking and rubbish removal the main activity of the morning. The event was organised by ASDA in partnership with Kenton Park Sports Centre.

Volunteers and residents joined ASDA, Sports Centre staff and local Kenton councillors with over 20 bags filled with rubbish and litter.



The continued adventures of...



Ziggy and Tally!

Hi everyone,

Here we are in 'Flaming June' and it is freezing – glad my fur is growing back. Dexter has been to stay and I had a few days at the coast. Lets hope the rain goes away soon. See ya, Ziggy.

Q: For thirteen years since our house was built we have had difficulty with paint peeling from the window frames, mainly the drip bars. The builder prevaricated and delayed for five years so we went to NHBC who declined our case because we had only informed the builder, not the developer, both with the same address, same tel number and same staff!

No matter whether peeling paint is stripped to the bare wood, primed, undercoated and top coated, it always peels – sometimes within a few months. I have tried the paint manufacturers for solutions and followed their instructions to the letter but to no avail.

I am beginning to think my only option is to have all the glazing bars removed and replaced because there seems to be some problem with the wood. What would your advice be, please?

A: I can't say why your window frames won't hold a coat of paint without inspecting them. Some species of hardwood are oily and difficult to paint, and some cuts of softwood can be resinous, and also resist painting. You don't say if you are using oil-based paint or water-based acrylic paint – the former is likely to give better results.

Also you mention there being a particular problem with the glazing bars, and I wonder if these windows are glazed using traditional putty.

If so, and if you have been using water-based paint, then it would explain the problem – the linseed oil in the putty will not take a coat of water-based paint.

And perhaps some of the linseed oil has also impregnated the adjacent timber, with similar results?

Try again, using a good oil-based painting system, perhaps starting with an aluminium-oxide primer, which is usually the best first coat for problem timber.



Please send me your building queries through facebook - @WDLne, website: wdlnortheast.co.uk or through my Dad's good pal Michael Grahamslaw at Northern Insight on micahael@northern-insight.co.uk

dunwoodieswift architects

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www.dunwoodieswift.co.uk



The Spruce

Branch out into luxury living

Just outside Durham lies a country estate so beautiful it has been home to the Earls of Durham for 1000 years - and it could be your home, but only if you're quick...

There can be few house hunters who don't dream of a beautiful home, surrounded by acres of historic parkland, yet with major cities, coastal walks and quiet villages nearby.

A home which combines the charm of period living with all the conveniences of modern life - on wide, tree-lined streets, where the only sound is birdsong and where a fairytale castle can be glimpsed through the woodland.

So, it is no wonder that, when Miller Homes North East unveiled its Lambton Park development of luxurious homes - designed by the same architect that created HM

The King's Poundbury estate in Dorset - it attracted nationwide interest.

Their buildings' design - and that of the entire estate - was inspired by natural features such as the curve of the River Wear and the surrounding open green spaces.

And Miller Homes is set to open its latest showroom on its second and last phase of development; the stunning five-bedroom Spruce, inspired by the Victorian Arts and Crafts Movement.

The movement developed in the late 19th century and placed high importance on the decorative arts with artists, sculptors, designers and craftspeople looking to nature - and a romantic interpretation of rural life - for their inspiration.

And Lambton Park reflects that - with just a final, few homes still available to buy.

The Spruce's breathtaking dual aspect kitchen, dining and family room is perfect for large gatherings and there is a separate laundry room and ground floor toilet.

An elegant lounge and a charming snug look out over the garden while, upstairs, a spacious feature landing leads to five bedrooms, two of them dual aspect and two en-suite.

Indeed, light and space are hallmarks of this development, which features wide streets with a circular 'village green' and all parking

spaces and garages are at the rear of the properties to ensure views from homes are not interrupted by cars and other vehicles.

The homes themselves have a wealth of traditional features such as multi-paned sash and bay windows, elaborate wood detailing on porches and the combination of grey bricks and red terracotta roof tiles favoured by the Arts and Crafts Movement.

Owners can also enjoy exclusive access to private areas of Lambton Estate with around 11.5km of footpaths through some of the most unspoilt woodland in Britain and the Grade II listed Lambton Castle - the ancestral seat of the Lambton family - at its heart.

Lauren Angus, sales director at Miller Homes North East, said the Spruce is "one of our finest show homes so far and, with only a few homes still remaining on this prestigious development, we expect interest to be very high indeed."

For further information about Lambton Park, visit www.millerhomes.co.uk/new-homes/north-east/lambton-park-lambton-park.aspx

For details of other developments across the North East, offering a selection of two to five bedroom homes, visit www.millerhomes.co.uk/locations/north-east-of-england.aspx



AR Power helps County Durham college offset its carbon footprint

North East commercial solar and battery storage installer AR Power recently completed a large rooftop panel installation for a County Durham FE college as part of a £4m capital investment programme.

The Washington-based company, which manages a complete turnkey solution from design to installation, was awarded the contract by Bishop Auckland College following a competitive tender.

From the 2021/22 academic year, the college chose to redouble its commitment to addressing the climate emergency agenda and used the Climate Action Roadmap for Further Education Colleges as a route towards achieving Net Zero emissions.

All operations were reviewed to help achieve the initial target of a 15% reduction in the college's carbon footprint by 2025. Having carried out an independent energy and carbon report to identify the size of their footprint, the college decided to look at and implement measures to reduce this. Leaders also wanted to reduce their energy costs and reliance on energy from the grid and investigated installing solar panels.

The technical team at AR Power created the overall designs as part of the initial proposal to the college, then their in-house installation team deployed the commercial solar PV system shortly after the college awarded the contract to the company. During the installation, qualified electricians used a boom lift to safely take cables down from the roof to the inverter room, enclosing them with HDG tray and HDG lids for protection.

This was a 253.38kWp SolarEdge system, made up of 618 panels which could generate 227,218 kWh of energy per year. The college expects to consume 86.2% of the energy generated by the panels and benefit from sending the remainder back to the grid.

An independent report estimated the college was generating 647,727.81kgs of CO₂ per year, however the solar PV system will help reduce this number by 44,383kgs every year massively contributing to helping them achieve their Net Zero targets.

To mitigate against the impact of bird droppings, which can significantly reduce the amount of energy the system can produce if they soil the panels, AR Power also installed an audible bird deterrent system as part of the installation to help combat this.

While at the college, AR Power project manager Adam Black met with some of the construction and engineering students where he talked about all things solar including his career from his apprenticeship through to his current position.

Adam said: "We are very mindful of STEM at AR Power, and it is vital that we as a company do everything we can to inspire and engage the students of today, tomorrow, and the future, hopefully bringing the next generation of renewable energy professionals into the industry. Without them, we are unable to continue our work in creating a more sustainable future for everyone."

Clare Groves, Director of Service Standards and Safeguarding Lead at the college, said: "The team were very professional, and we really couldn't fault anything. There were no disruptions to the day-to-day operations at the college. There were parts of the install that took place outside of college hours, but we were given plenty of notice and the communication via the project manager was excellent. I was kept informed at all stages of the install and I would highly recommend AR Power to anyone looking to install solar."

AR Power has completed hundreds of solar installs to businesses across the UK, from manufacturers, government buildings to universities and public buildings. Clients include Newcastle, Durham and South Tyneside Councils, Dunelm Stores, University of Sunderland, Northumbria University, BHK, Durham University, Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council, The Metal Drum Company, and many more.

To find out more about AR Power, visit: www.arpower.co.uk



Subsea demand drives growth at Express Engineering



Express Engineering management team

Global demand in subsea markets for oil and gas continues to help drive growth at manufacturing, assembly and testing specialist Express Engineering, which is investing in capital equipment and its workforce.

The international business, based in Gateshead in the North of England, has been enjoying buoyant growth during the last 12-18 months – growing its workforce while building a record pipeline of new work.

With buoyant oil and gas prices and optimistic five-year forecasts from energy specialists like Westwood, Express Engineering is seeing a strong upturn in sales for its key products and services.

Chris Thompson, chair of Express Engineering Group said: “The subsea sector is in a strong position for the next five years. I am delighted to say our orderbook has reached record levels, the highest in our 50-year history, and it’s only expected to

increase further across the remainder of 2024.

“With demand for product high, we hope to invest further in our capability this year, which will include a new CMM machine and a new horizontal borer to be situated in our Gateshead factories.”

The current order book stands at around £70m for the next 12-18 months – with the group receiving an intake of £10m in new orders in the last month alone.

Express Engineering has seen sales in the oil and gas sector grow significantly in recent years resulting in a jump in revenues from £20m in 2019 to more than £60m in 2024/25

Mr Thompson added that the acquisition of QA Weld Tech, based on Riverside Industrial Park, Middlesbrough, in 2023 had made a positive contribution to the overall group. QA Weld Tech is a leading provider of integrated welding and engineering services.

He said: “Since acquiring QA Weld Tech we have integrated the business into the group and invested in new processes, shift patterns and capital equipment while also building the team in Middlesbrough.

“We have doubled turnover and are securing work from overseas, breaking into new international markets. The future bodes well for all our sites on Teesside and Tyneside.”

Building and strengthening the workforce and skill levels has been a major priority

during the last year or more. Around 260 people work across multiple Team Valley sites for Express Engineering, while the headcount at QA Weld Tech has risen to 46.

Gary Thirlwell, MD of Express Engineering, said: “Our overall order book is so strong that we expect to increase our shift patterns and grow our head count even further during 2024, both in Gateshead and Middlesbrough. We are looking to take on a lot more apprentices.”

The group is looking to recruit fitters, assembly and test operators and CNC machinists at Express Engineering. Welders, platers and technical support staff are required at QA Weld Tech.

Internationally, Express Engineering has become a renowned global supply specialist for actuator assemblies, connection systems and tooling for wellheads, drilling and subsea tree structures. The company is also getting involved in subsea carbon capture projects.

Collaborating with customers like TechnipFMC, Baker Hughes, OneSubsea and Aker Solutions, Express Engineering is a significant exporter of products, operating within various geographical areas, including the North Sea, Gulf of Mexico, east coast of Brazil, east and west coasts of Africa, Malaysia and Australasia.

www.express-engineering.co.uk

Stop, Collaborate, and Listen

The Futureproof Way of Working within the Built Environment.

It is becoming more evident that historical ways of working, or following a 'traditional' model of practice, are losing their previous impact. Following processes and procedures that were designed decades ago are not only outdated from an environmental perspective (and having a devastating effect on the communities they are developed in), but they are also running out of steam from a business-to-business model as well.

Since establishing Lynas Engineers, my team and I have worked hard to ensure that not only are we designing and delivering projects that have true longevity and positive impact in each and every scenario, but that we're also thinking ahead to help develop the industry as a whole too. Throughout my career I have been fortunate to have seen shifts across Civil Engineering and the Built Environment as a whole that has helped create the landscape we operate in today. Moving through the 'old school' of tradition and the 'way it's always been done' to today's fresher and more considered approaches to a rapidly changing world, and one that

requires more immediate innovation than ever before. Today, we work in a mixed field and whilst there are benefits to both the legacy of the industry and today's innovation aspirations – one thing remains glaringly obvious.

Progress of any kind is not achievable without collaboration.

No one company can truly provide every single solution whilst they work alone or in silos. No single organisation can support true innovation without first learning from the origins of the concern or projects – and to do that, we need to engage with others and we need to listen.

Over the past few years, my team and I have been building a network of relationships that is designed to work in partnership, celebrating achievements together and ultimately helping us all learn from each other to best deliver our own works. Oftentimes this is in partnership with each other, offering a unique and collaborative

solution to a project or scheme, but ultimately the way in which we go to work on a project with a true partner delivers immeasurable benefits to us, our clients, and the project at hand. Blending skills, knowledge, experiences, and practices gives our clients a fresh solution, delivered with passion and pride. And that is what will drive the industry forward.

These relationships have been formed into a network, operating across the North, called Preferred Partners. As Preferred Partners we are ramping up for the return of Constructing Links, our exhibition-style event in Middlesbrough this month, we can see the appetite of people and businesses who want to work closer together, to form a true and sustainable local supply chain as registrations pour in. Following its sell-out success in 2023, this year's event is on a larger scale as we take over the Legends Lounge at the Riverside Stadium. Whilst I hope to see many Northern Insight readers at Constructing Links, what I am keen to encourage is a change of mindset for all across the Built Environment. I cannot predict the future, but what we can say with some surety is that as our world continues to change, we have to change alongside it. Without it, without working closer together and challenging the norm, our industries are doomed to stagnate, and with it – our communities too.

Do you want to find out more about our Preferred Partners network? Visit our website at www.lynasengineers.com, or connect with me on LinkedIn. We need to stop, collaborate and truly listen to our partners, communities and work towards a sector that is responsive and innovative in every way it can be.
lynasengineers.com



Rob Lynas





GFW's Summer Social at By The River Brew Co.

With spectacular views across the Tyne, summertime was in the air for perhaps the first time this year.

GFW's Summer Social saw clients, associates and friends connect over a cold drink and a slice (or two) of Circo's delicious pizza.

With sincerest thanks to the weather gods, guests were lucky enough to soak up some sunshine alongside sparkling conversation.

We're already looking forward to the next one!







“

*...there's always
a solution and
a way forward...*

Sally Hart

In conversation with...

Sally Hart

Managing Partner, GFW

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I was lucky in that I really enjoyed school. I didn't have a favourite subject or definite vocation I wanted to pursue so it wasn't an easy decision when it came to choosing a career path. I chose to go down the creative and media route in the end and I'm so pleased I did.

Tell us about your current role?

It might sound cliché but I wear many hats. I'm joint Managing Partner, making me responsible for the development of business strategies, ensuring that results are aligned to our business development and growth plans. As part of this, I lead the business support team but I also oversee the residential agency arm of the business. A large part of my role is to support our people, because when it comes down to it, they are the business.

What is your proudest business achievement?

The last 12 months have seen the wheels set in motion for change at GFW. Building on our foundations, we've grown, we've met challenges head on and we're now thriving because of this. Formerly known as George F. White, this year has seen us unveil a renewed vision and plan for the future under our new brand name, GFW. I think the fact we've adapted and evolved at a time where it would have been easier to stand still, becoming even stronger, is my proudest achievement to date.

How has your industry changed in the last decade?

We have seen significant leaps forward in the last decade around technological advancement improving efficiencies and opportunities for diversity. The industry as a whole has become more professional bringing with it more red tape and improved compliance.

What are you currently working on?

Our vision for growth means a lot of my focus is on driving our strategy forward to achieve that. Alongside a concentrated recruitment drive, bringing in new talent to add to our expertise and ever growing TeamGFW.

Tell us about the team you work with.

I might be biased but we have an amazing team. Having the right attitude makes all the difference and we're lucky because our team have that in abundance. Not only that but we can confidently say we have a team of experts in our field. This combination of personality and professionalism is what I believe sets us apart.

What does the future hold?

This is the question that excites me the most. Growth, it's what we're successfully achieving and it's what we can see in our future. We want to create opportunities for our people, to make GFW 'the go to' property consultant,

continuing to expand our management and framework portfolio. But as well as that, we want to have fun. We've got a great culture at GFW and we want our people to continue enjoying themselves doing what they do best. If our staff are happy, our clients are happy.

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

More through learned experience than verbal advice I've received, but I'd say perseverance. If you have a clear goal, don't give up on it or falter when you reach a hurdle, because you will. That's part of business, but there's always a solution and a way forward.

What has been your biggest challenge?

The role I do now has changed significantly since I first started at GFW. Changing skillsets from a creative role to a strategic leadership role has meant I've needed to continuously adapt my skills to meet the needs of the business. Whilst that in itself has been a challenge, building respect and belief takes time and I would advise that you always need to keep your self-belief even in times of challenge, be true to who you are and what and who you stand for.

Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

At GFW the people are the business and it'd be impossible to single out a person or a team. Our people are the reason we've gotten to where we are, and I think they're all heroes.

Outside of work, I have a huge amount of admiration for Roisin Currie, Chief Exec at Greggs. Her drive, innovation and vision for growth are an inspiration. She's a prime example of why we need more women in leadership, look what can be achieved!

How do you unwind outside of work?

I read, I enjoy long walks with my husband and daughter in the beautiful North East countryside, and if the weather is nice, I enjoy hosting my friends for BBQ's. Fingers crossed we get a summer this year.

Favourite Book and Boxset?

Book, I'd have to say either *Young Mungo* or *Shuggie Bain* by Douglas Stewart. Box set, has to be *Derry Girls*.

www.georgefwhite.co.uk

The Digital Gene launches pioneering Carbon Literacy training course for the tech industry



The Digital Gene, a sustainable web and software development agency, proudly announces the launch of their accredited Carbon Literacy training course tailored specifically for the digital and tech industry. As the first of its kind, this innovative program aims to equip professionals with the knowledge and tools needed to significantly reduce their carbon footprint and promote digital sustainability.

Co-founded six years ago by Sharon Sinclair-Williams, The Digital Gene has evolved into a purpose-driven company dedicated to sustainability. Drawing from her rich background in the digital and creative sector, Sharon has guided the organisation to a path where technology meets environmental responsibility.

Recognising a gap in carbon literacy training for the digital and tech sector, The Digital Gene has taken the initiative to create a specialised course. Certified by The Carbon Literacy Project in November 2023, Sharon successfully trained her first cohort in January 2024.

It was The Digital Gene's own journey towards becoming Carbon Literate that underscored the importance of understanding climate science and implementing actionable steps towards sustainability. This commitment led them to draft their own sustainability pledge, which continues to grow and evolve alongside the company.

Carbon literacy is defined by The Carbon Literacy Project as 'an awareness of the

carbon costs and impacts of everyday activities and the ability and motivation to reduce emissions on an individual, community and organisational basis.'

Sharon explained: "We are on a mission to tackle the hidden environmental cost of companies' digital presence by building sustainable websites in light of our own sustainability journey. It has come to our attention that the technology we rely on daily is responsible for almost 4% of global greenhouse emissions, which surpasses aviation emissions. While the focus is often on reducing air travel, the importance of decreasing our digital consumption is often overlooked.

"Our business model is driven by technology that benefits both the planet and the people who use it. Having recognised the benefits of our own training, I was keen to develop something specifically for our own sector. The course provides participants with a robust understanding of climate change science and practical strategies to make impactful changes both personally and professionally.

As well as delivering their own accredited course for the digital and tech sector, The Digital Gene offers custom content tailored to various sectors, including senior management, marketing teams and agency teams. They provide sector-specific training utilising carbon literacy toolkits for sectors such as local authorities, sports, social housing, and universities and colleges. Future specialisations will target the legal sector, fashion, ecommerce and HR professionals.

Software development pioneer, Luminous XR, scoops top tech award

Software development firm Luminous XR is celebrating after winning a major industry award.

The innovative company, based in Newcastle, was announced as winner in the Best Manufacturing, Industrial & Construction Solution category at the prestigious XR Awards recently.

Organised by XR Today, a hub for extended reality industry news, the awards are held annually and recognise the new and established firms developing transformative and immersive technologies for the workplace.

Luminous XR CEO Ben Bennett welcomed the news. "It's fantastic to have been awarded Best Industrial, Manufacturing and Construction Solution in the XR Awards, this is wonderful recognition for the whole team and testament to all their rigour, hard work, expertise and creative innovation," he said.

"I'd like to thank XR Today and the judges for recognising our efforts in providing quality training solutions across these sectors and what we do to help companies implement impactful, immersive learning through virtual reality."



The win comes as Luminous XR is set to create 10 new positions after securing a multi-million pound contract.

The business recently won a seven figure contract from a large Middle East oil provider and will recruit the new developers in the coming months as it expands further and moves to a new city location.

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For this month's leading tech feature, we speak to...

Steven Forrest

CEO of Forfusion

What exactly does Forfusion offer?

Forfusion is a Cisco Gold Certified systems integrator. We excel in designing, implementing, and managing mission-critical IT infrastructure for large public and private sector companies. Our specialisations include IT-managed services, networking, connectivity, IoT, data centre and cloud solutions, all underpinned by security. We're trusted by the NHS, local and central government, and prestigious private sector companies, which speaks volumes about our expertise and disruptive approach, outperforming much larger and slower-moving suppliers.

Tell us something about yourself and how you got to where you are.

Born and bred in Newcastle, I'm an age group triathlete, judo practitioner, and armed forces veteran. My journey to Forfusion began during my time in the army, where I worked with technology. It wasn't long before linking computers via networks and communicating securely over wires piqued my interest. I couldn't imagine not being involved with technology.

As CEO, what is your role?

I take pride in leading and being part of a cohesive team. At Forfusion, we are building something extraordinary. We've challenged industry giants by taking a different approach and are now reaping the rewards. We have in-house apprenticeship schemes, STEM initiatives, and other socially responsible activities that support our local communities. Our focus is not solely on profit but on giving back to society, particularly our beloved North East.

What is Forfusion up to at the moment?

It's been our best trading year to date. We've moved offices, doubled our capacity for growth, taken on four prominent household names, and significantly elevated our profile within Cisco and across the industry. We have momentum and are on an upward trajectory. Our primary focus is on managed services and creating flexible ways for our clients to consume services based on their risk profile, appetite for change and budget, all of which we can help them define.

What can Forfusion do for businesses reading this?

When working with Cisco technologies, there's not a lot we can't do. The initial contact is typically when organisations need strategic as well as technological direction or when an incumbent supplier is not performing as they should. We follow our own proven Assess, Design, Integrate, and Operate (ADIO) methodology, which typically involves a current state assessment and a mapping or gap analysis exercise to help businesses reach their desired future state. This approach is not common because it is difficult; however, it is infinitely more valuable to our clients; it finds a balance between innovation and risk, and critically, it ensures any investment they make is future-proof.

What are the main changes you've seen in your business/sector, and what are the challenges?

With the adoption of the cloud accelerating and the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML), the pace of change is greater than ever. It presents challenges for businesses of all shapes and sizes, which is further compounded due to skill shortages for certain technologies. However, Forfusion can change direction quicker than most, which has always been one of our unique selling points. We're ahead of the game when it comes to AI and delivering AIOps through managed services. We embrace change and use agility and responsiveness to dissolve barriers and create competitive advantage.

What is the importance of Cisco Gold?

We hold Cisco Gold Provider and Cisco Gold Integrator (globally). This reflects our team's hard work, expertise, and unwavering commitment to providing an exceptional experience. As the first North East-based company to achieve this dual recognition, we're setting new standards in technology excellence. We're here to facilitate the consumption and adoption of secure, seamless IT solutions.

What's your fondest memory of a career in the industry?

It was our first taste of displacing a global incumbent supplier for a multi-million-pound managed services contract. It showed we could find ways to help clients mitigate risk and innovate in parallel. We operate in the mid-market and enterprise space where risk is relatively high, but so is the reward. We have the capability of large, more cumbersome integrators, but we retain the ability to be agile and flexible, putting our customers first, always.

What is the best advice or support you've been given in business?

It came from my father. "Don't ever give up, no matter what life throws at you." Business-wise, the best advice is "manage your energy, not your calendar" from one of my all-time favourite books – *The Positive Leader*, Jan Muhlfelt.

How do you like to spend your spare time?

My priority is my young daughter, so I like to spend quality time with her, whether taking her swimming, clip and climb, or soft play. I believe that a healthy body is a healthy mind. A lot of my time is spent on triathlon and training. I've managed to get my other half involved with cycling, so it kills two birds with one stone. Lastly, when not watching my weight or about to enter a race, I enjoy wining, dining, and eating loads of chocolate.

www.forfusion.com

The Big Interview

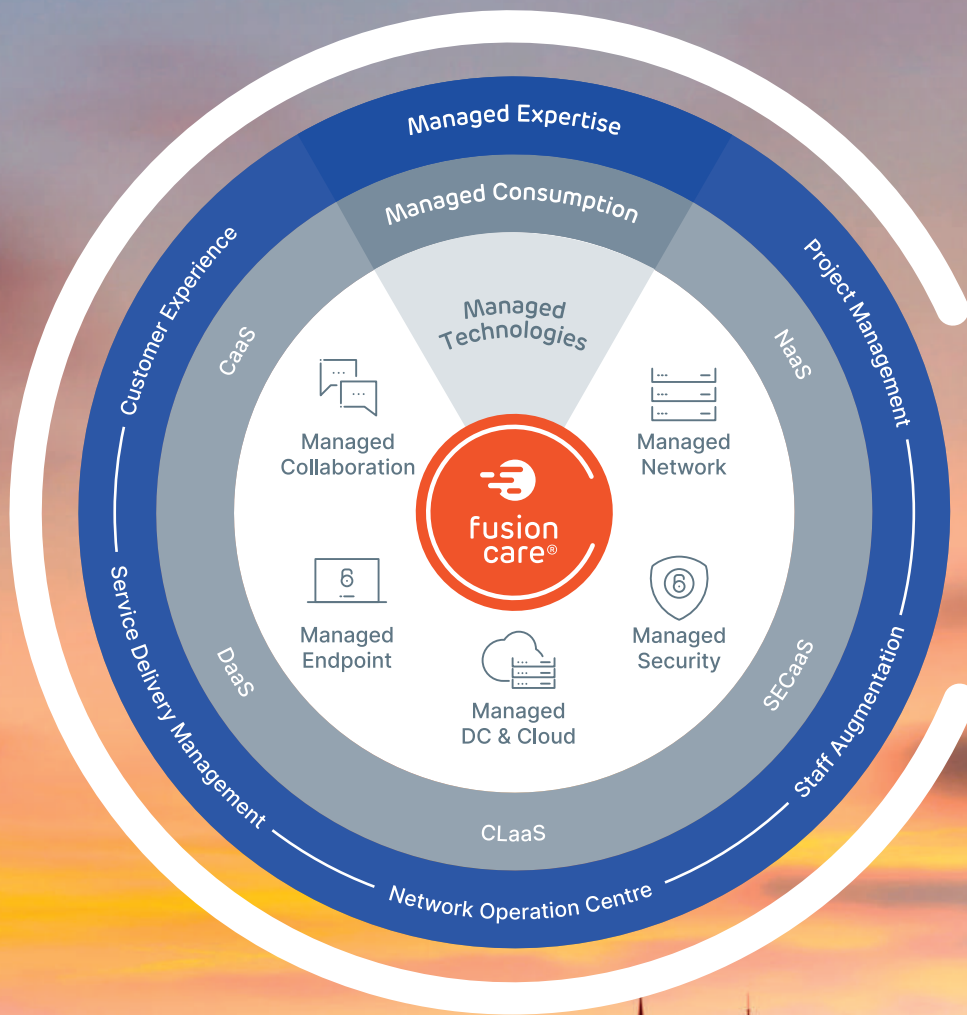
Steven Forrest

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The Waterstons team who will be taking on the UK three peaks

£30k for 30 years

A Durham-based digital and cyber security consultancy has pledged to raise £30,000 throughout 2024 to honour 30 years in business.

As a people-first organisation, Waterstons agreed that the 30th anniversary celebrations should have a community focus, so the 300-strong team pledged to raise a minimum of £30,000 throughout this special year through a series of challenges and fundraising activities, for four selected charities including St Cuthbert's Hospice.

CEO, Michael Stirrup, said: "Our organisation has always been focused on how we can support our people, our clients and our communities, so it made sense to come together and make a real difference to charities that mean something to our team."

"The charities were chosen by our people through voting, and we're proud to be supporting local as well as national organisations."

St Cuthbert's Hospice, which supports people with life-limiting illnesses across County Durham, supporting not only the individual, but also their families, from diagnosis to their last days, was chosen by the Durham team through a vote.

Teams have pledged to take on several challenges including the Durham City Run Festival, a sponsored

to climb Snowdon at sunrise, and take on the UK Three Peaks.

Stew Hogg, Associate Director for Cyber Security at Waterstons explained why the team chose the three peaks: "As a cyber security division, we've wanted to take on this challenge for a while, but our 30th anniversary and the fundraising pledge meant now is the perfect time."

"As individuals, a team and a company, we are proud to support not only organisations close to our hearts, but also each other. This will not only challenge our physical and mental strength, but also our bonds as a team which we hope will only become stronger as a result."

The team of 20 will take on Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Snowdon in a 24-hour period on July 5th.

To find out more about the challenges, and donate, visit www.waterstons.com/waterstons30

For more information, to get involved or suggest challenges the team could take on, get in touch at info@waterstons.com

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Can AI really help you with your HR strategy?



Lauren Parkinson

If AI is really revolutionising the world of work, how can it help you with your HR strategy?

While AI tools are simply that, tools, they can be effective in streamlining HR processes to give you more time to take care of your people and deliver strategic value, and bringing some depth and attention to detail that the human eye might miss.

We hear a lot about what we “could” do with AI in the future, but what interests us is how we can actually use AI technology in HR right now.

Let our Account Manager and host of our Tech & Trends podcast, Lauren, tell you how.

Large Language Models

Starting out simple, ChatGPT and other Large Language Model software can be used for support in writing job descriptions and internal communications in a less time-consuming way.

Certainly for job descriptions, LLM software can be useful in ensuring that you write a JD which captures all elements of the job, without missing anything.

Using AI tools like ChatGPT can be a great way to kickstart any writing task you need to do, leaving you with more time to devote to strategic HR, and less time struggling with writer's block.

However, it is important to note that all LLMs, despite being framed as a replacement to people, have enormous limitations, and the inherent biases that they

all pick up on from the information fed into them means they should be used with great caution in people practise.

Chatbots

Chatbot technology works by training the chatbot on information provided by you. Once programmed, the Chatbot will respond to questions from employees with the answers provided by you.

Once trained to answer the basics, HR staff will be freed up for more complex enquiries, and deeper strategic work. Chatbots can therefore give employees the access to 24/7 support which is tailored to your organization and your staff – giving them a personalized and fast-paced service.

They can also be used during recruitment. A chatbot integrated into your recruitment website will encourage potential candidates to reach out with any questions they may have, keeping them warm and bringing them one step closer to a job application.

We recommend the Microsoft Azure Chatbots. In comparison to other chatbot services, is that you control exactly what goes into them, and ultimately what comes out of them, which is the greatest risk when it comes to AI.

Language Check Software

AI-powered software on the market can remove bias and maladapted language in your HR written work – job descriptions,

emails, internal communications – to ensure you're fostering inclusion and diversity, and appealing to the best talent out there, while making internal talent feel safe and valued.

This technology can also be used in the context of feedback, ensuring that language is honed to give fair and actionable feedback to team members and empowering managers to know they can get it right.

In addition, words which encourage gender bias can be picked out and replaced with more neutral words.

There are a few options on the market, such as Textio, or the free tool Gender Decoder.

Key Takeaways

While AI can't run your HR department for you, what these tools can do is to allow you to change your approach and bring more power to your strategy.

By allowing your team to move their focus away from administrative practices to strategic HR, and giving them the capability to prioritise teamwork and performance management by bringing automation to the day-to-day HR tasks that are incredibly necessary, but also incredibly time-consuming.

When it comes to strategy, however, Artificial Intelligence isn't your ideal partner to ensure that your company has the right strategy in place to ensure employee engagement, talent retention and boost your employer brand.

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KLIK SaaS is a powerful digital platform that businesses can adapt to suit their unique needs. Imagine a technology that could seamlessly connect business parks and organisations, or even manage internal recruitment for entire businesses.

That's the beauty of KLIK SaaS – it's a comprehensive solution to a lot of different problems.

Powering Business Parks

Consider the needs of a modern business park. KLIK SaaS connects every business on site, providing everyone with the same services. If licensed by a county council, KLIK SaaS could create a direct line to educational institutions, inspiring people to pursue careers and support the businesses within the park.

This platform would facilitate interactions, drive engagement, and foster a community of innovation and growth. It's about creating an ecosystem where businesses and talent can thrive together.

Membership Organisations

KLIK SaaS shines when it powers a membership organisation like a business club, trade association or a local charity. The platform can be used to manage members, host events, and run podcasts, groups, and forums for engagement and knowledge sharing.

The platform supports training programs and even features a robust job board and CV database. This turns KLIK into a hub of activity, promoting opportunities and facilitating growth for both the organisation and its members.

Beyond Jobs: Adaptable Applications

The flexibility of KLIK SaaS is one of its strongest attributes. The job board feature, for instance, can be repurposed for various applications. Imagine it being used by an estate agency to list houses or by a franchise

community to advertise opportunities. The possibilities are endless, making KLIK SaaS a truly multipurpose platform.

Benefits of SaaS

One of the key advantages of KLIK being a SaaS platform is its accessibility. As a cloud-based solution, it can be accessed from anywhere, on any device. This eliminates the need for additional hardware and ensures that users always have access to the latest features and security updates. KLIK SaaS handles all software maintenance, allowing businesses to focus on their core activities without worrying about technical issues.

Taking Control of Recruitment

While KLIK SaaS is versatile, its roots in recruitment offer significant benefits. By bringing recruitment in-house, businesses can take control of the process, ensuring that new hires align with their values and culture. Recruitment consultants often face high-pressure environments that prevent them from dedicating the necessary time to each candidate. With KLIK SaaS, companies can directly engage with job seekers, making the recruitment process more personal and effective.

KLIK SaaS opens up a unique talent pool of candidates who would never place their CVs with agencies or on job boards. That in itself is gold dust.

Building a Positive Workplace

Creating a positive workplace is a powerful tool for attracting talent. When employees

thrive, it reflects positively on the company, making it an attractive option for potential candidates. KLIK SaaS supports this by providing tools for employee surveys, HR materials, staff training, and personality tests. These features help businesses build a supportive and engaging work environment.

The Bottom Line

KLIK SaaS is more than just a platform; it's a versatile technology capable of powering various applications. Whether it's enhancing a business park, supporting a membership organisation, or adapting to specific community needs, KLIK SaaS offers a customisable solution. Its white-labelled nature ensures that the platform appears as an extension of the business using it, maintaining brand consistency while delivering powerful functionality.

In essence, KLIK SaaS empowers businesses to achieve more, fostering engagement, growth, and innovation. Whether for recruitment, member management, or community building, KLIK SaaS provides the tools needed to thrive in today's competitive landscape. The possibilities are endless.

So, ask yourself, what can KLIK SaaS do for you?

KLIK SaaS is the brainchild of accomplished entrepreneur Kelly M. Whitfield, whose mission is to transform businesses and institutions through technology.



Kelly M. Whitfield

www.kliksaas.com

SOS Group helps young boxer get fighting fit



Charlie Lewis with SOS Group Director, Andrew Skelton

A young boxer from Jarrow who has overcome significant health issues is being supported to achieve his sporting goals by local company, SOS Group, which has delivered office services on the world stage at internationally significant sports competitions.

Charlie Lewis, aged 14 attends Jarrow School, and has struggled with fitness all his life, having been born prematurely and diagnosed with chronic lung disease. When he was younger, he suffered from regular chest infections and had numerous hospital admissions.

Tina Lewis, Charlie's mam, has always been keen for him to try and build his fitness and improve his lung strength, but finding the right kind of activity proved difficult at first.

Tina says: "I wanted Charlie to have the opportunity to improve his fitness and his lung strength suffers in the winter weather, so outdoor sports like football were no good. "His brother was going to a local boxing gym and suggested boxing for fitness might be a good option and he's really taken to it.

"His first coach, Sean Hughes, has been absolutely brilliant and helped him develop at his own pace, building his fitness and

learning skills in a safe and controlled environment. Charlie's either boxing or at the gym every night. His commitment is amazing."

Office technology company, SOS Group, has a long history of supporting talented young individuals within the North East. After hearing about Charlie's passion for boxing and the difficulties he has faced, they offered a sponsorship package to support him.

Not only has this enabled Charlie to buy kit for his first fight, including a vest, shorts and headguard, it has given him additional confidence to pursue his sporting ambitions and he is now a member of The Legion Boxing Club in Boldon Colliery.

Tina adds: "The sponsorship from SOS Group has come along at just the right time. Charlie is waiting to hear about his first fight and he's so focussed on preparing well for that.

"Charlie's very keen to continue boxing and

is factoring the sport into his college choices. His ultimate aim is to become a national boxer or a professional. It's amazing to think how far he's come."

Established in 2002, SOS Group is an award-winning company based on the Team Valley and providing digital office equipment services for business from startups to multi nationals.

It also has a proven track record in the sporting events sector and is trusted to help deliver international competitions including the 2024 World Athletics Indoor Championships, IAAF World Athletics Championships, the Special Olympics GB National Games, British Swimming Summer Championships and World Para Athletics Championships.

Andrew Skelton, a Director at SOS Group, says: "We're all very proud to support Charlie, who has overcome challenging health issues to become a boxer.

"SOS Group began as a small company and we've grown to provide office services at some of the world's largest sporting events. It's a pleasure to support others to achieve their ambitions and look forward to the day we see Charlie on the big stage."

SOS Group has always supported the people and organisations who are making a positive difference to local communities within the North East. Over the last year, the company has provided hands-on and financial support for more than 30 community projects, charities, sports clubs and talented individuals.

For more information, please visit www.sosgroup-ltd.co.uk

“

*...The customer
is at the
centre of
everything
we do...*

In conversation with...

James Drake

Managing Director, Eclipse Wholesale

Looking back over the past two decades, what do you consider to be the most significant milestones or accomplishments of the business?

I look back with fond memories of many milestones, our first sale, our first Channel Partner, buying our business property and winning our first award. However, the most significant milestone is the decision to go Channel first and move away from direct sales. This pivotal change has allowed Eclipse Wholesale to enjoy substantial growth, increase our staff team and expand into new locations, most noteworthy our move to Scotland in 2023.

How has the business landscape changed since the inception of the company, and how has the business adapted to these changes?

The business landscape has changed significantly over the past two decades. Eclipse Wholesale has remained at the forefront of these changes by continuously updating processes and operations to stay competitive and relevant. This adaptability has been crucial in maintaining our position in the industry.

What core values or principles have guided the business throughout its 20-year journey, and how have they contributed to its success?

The core values have been refined over time, but our work ethic and commitment to our customers have never changed. These simple principles have definitely contributed massively to our success and longevity. Eclipse now operates to four key pillars (trust, expertise, teamwork and solutions) so we can maintain high standards in everything we do.

Can you share any memorable anecdotes or experiences from the early years of the business that have had a lasting impact?

We once had a police raid on our premises! It turned out that they had the wrong company, and it was just an error on their part. The lasting impact of this was to always remain calm - you never know what unexpected challenges the day will throw at you.

How has the business contributed to the community or industry over the past two decades?

Eclipse Wholesale has won countless industry awards over the past 20 years, worked in partnership with some of the leading vendors in the telecom marketplace and hopefully provided a useful contribution to our vendors and the industry as a whole. We regularly support local charities and community groups with donations or fundraising activities, as well as staff volunteering time where possible. Thanks to a bunch of keen cricketers on our payroll, we have also recently sponsored an international player at a local cricket team.

What challenges has the business faced along the way, and how were they overcome?

We have faced numerous business challenges over the years with margin erosion, market consolidation and recruitment being some of the most difficult. We have overcome all the challenges in the same way. Remaining agile, changing strategy when needed and focusing on the end goal have always been the secrets of our success.

What is your proudest achievement?

I'm most proud of our commitment to training and the development of those who work here at Eclipse Wholesale. With an ongoing commitment to Continuing Professional Development (CPD), we strive to help our people to flourish both personally and professionally.

In what ways have customer feedback and loyalty played a role in shaping the direction of the business over the years?

The customer is at the centre of everything we do. Listening and reacting to our customers' feedback has assisted in developing our strategies and processes and most critically has helped mitigate potential mistakes. We are lucky that our customers have remained loyal and still enjoy working with us after 20 years.

How has the team evolved and grown since the company was founded, and what role have they played in the business's success?

The team has evolved significantly, both in terms of size and skill. We have always been keen to seek out the brightest and best people for the roles, building a committed and cohesive team and providing a supportive working environment in which they can thrive. As a result, our staff retention is high and we have some staff members who have been with us from the start. Our staff team are talented, dedicated and share the same values. We couldn't have done it without them.

Looking ahead to the future, what are the aspirations and goals for the business as it enters its third decade of operation?

Our goal is to make Eclipse Wholesale the number one Channel aggregator in the Small and Medium Partner channel. We hope to achieve this goal by spreading the Eclipse Wholesale message; our desire to help, extolling the virtues of a full-fibre future and working damn hard to make sure it happens.

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Eclipse Wholesale





Digital agency Climb & Conquer moves towards £1.3m turnover

A Durham-based SEO and PPC consultancy has rebranded a fully-fledged agency named Climb & Conquer and projected ambitious financial goals for the next two years.

The burgeoning business now has a team of 12 situated in the North East primarily, with additional digital expertise on a remote basis around the UK.

Climb & Conquer is founded and led by SEO and PPC consultant, Shane Parkins, who began his digital career in 2010 and has held senior digital roles at Frank Recruitment Group, Silverbean, Workwear Express and The Tanning Shop.

The firm has enjoyed impressive growth so far, projecting a £500,000 turnover by the end of its current financial year (August 2024), followed by £750,000 in 2025, and £1.3m by EOFY 2026.

The agency has enjoyed consistent lead generation, driving inbound leads and wins from clients such as CustomerSure, Mallet London and MotorEasy.

A unique aspect of the agency is its hiring style, with every member of the Climb & Conquer team initially joining the business at trainee level and benefiting from on-the-job training and mentoring, giving them a wider view of digital services and performance as a whole across Technical SEO, Content, Paid Search, Outreach, Analytics and Data, before allowing them to choose the discipline they wish to specialise in and progress further into.

"I'm deeply passionate about bringing everyone up with the agency. As it grows, everyone grows with it, hence why we don't recruit anyone above anyone else. Early starters can genuinely be rewarded and have options to grow, whilst understanding digital marketing on a broad scale before choosing their specialism", explains Parkins.

This fresh approach is attracting talent, as recently advertised roles have resulted in over 500 applications being received.

The rebrand to Climb & Conquer requires a senior leadership team, with Victor Stasiak and Blanaid May stepping up into more senior roles and playing a more active role in the business direction. Both have been with Parkins since 2022.

The launch also signals ambitious plans for Climb & Conquer, with further job opportunities to be advertised over the coming months as the business approaches a new financial year.

New space for Radio Northumberland

Radio Northumberland, a popular community radio station run entirely by dedicated volunteers, is on the lookout for a new studio space. With limited funds available, the station is appealing to local businesses and organisations to offer a space free of charge.

In return for their generosity, the benefactor will receive free radio advertising and the immense satisfaction of knowing they are contributing to the community by helping to keep this vital service on air. Radio Northumberland plays a crucial role in connecting the people of Northumberland, providing a platform for local news, music, and culture.

"We're looking for a new home as our current hosts have moved location and sadly there isn't enough room for us there. We need a small room



to fit two desks for our equipment and access for our presenters," said Keith Newman Volunteer Director. "In the meantime, we will continue to produce pre-recorded shows but live is where we want to be."

Any business or organisation interested in supporting this cause is encouraged to get in touch with Keith at keith@highlightspr.co.uk



Elanders UK retains major print contract for fifth year

North Tyneside-based international print, packaging and supply chain solutions provider, Elanders UK, is celebrating being retained as print partner for a fifth consecutive year by White Rose Education - a partnership that has seen the educational resources provider produce over 24 million books and turn print into its primary revenue stream.

White Rose Education, based in Halifax, West Yorkshire, has a team of teaching experts who create maths and science resources for over 140 countries, 40% of UK secondary schools, and 80% of UK primary schools.

The company - originally called White Rose Maths - was established in 2017 to support the national agenda of improving maths outcomes across England. White Rose Education has gone on to develop popular learning schemes, evidenced-based digital teaching resources and professional development programmes.

Since creating the partnership with Elanders in 2020, White Rose has printed 24.1 million workbooks - taking it from a zero revenue on print to £6m in four years which is set to grow further with the imminent launch of White Rose Science and an expansion of some of its international products.



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Free PR Advice from BIPC North East

Keith Newman from Highlights PR has joined the team of experts at the Business & IP Centre North East. This means that SMEs have the incredible opportunity to tap into Keith's expertise with free consultations.

In addition, eligible businesses in Newcastle, Gateshead or Sunderland can also unlock the exclusive Citylife Business Support package, designed to empower businesses to navigate today's economic landscape with confidence and foresight.

"I'm proud and delighted to be part of the team and being in a position where I can share my PR experience and advice for free with up to twelve hours of support from BIPC North East via the Citylife Business Support Package."

Keith will host the initial free consultation via zoom or on his floating office based at Royal Quays Marina.

To find out more: www.bipcnortheast.co.uk/experts/public-relations-expert-keith-newman

Firm launched during recession celebrates 15 years – and grows with key hires

A PR agency launched at the height of the financial crisis has celebrated 15 years in business – and bolstered its ranks with a string of key appointments.

Darlington-based Harvey & Hugo was founded by Charlotte Nichols in 2009, offering unique and affordable PR packages to firms struggling during what was then the deepest UK recession since World War Two. She's since grown the Darlington-based firm from a one-person operation into an award-winning business.

And to mark the major milestone, the company has enjoyed a major rebrand launched recently at an event held at Kip & Nook.

"I launched Harvey & Hugo at a time when many businesses couldn't afford to invest in PR, but our unique model has since given hundreds of companies a platform to be heard," said Charlotte.

"Back in 2009, PR was dominated by lengthy, inflexible contracts but we broke that mould by creating our pioneering Pay-as-Hugo model which was a huge hit with clients, and opened their eyes to just how much benefit PR can bring to a business.

"Whilst our Pay-as-Hugo model is still very popular, our output of services has evolved. Many of those who started on it and now retained clients, whilst we offer every aspect of PR – from press releases and social media, to videography and even podcasting.

"And as our services have evolved, so has the business. In 15 years, we've weathered everything from pandemics to multiple recessions and the cost-of-living crisis.

"However, our resilience, expertise and our ability to quickly pivot the business model meant that Harvey & Hugo hasn't just survived, it has flourished."

The firm's growth has resulted in several major hires in recent months, including Stephen Heslop as Business Development Director, who will oversee the expansion of Harvey & Hugo's client base. Former journalist Ian Johnson has joined as PR and Content Manager,



bringing with him well over a decade of experience working as both chief reporter and news editor at some of the North East's leading news titles.

And Becky Wade has been promoted to Relationship Director as a reward for her work with the firm's fleet of clients.

Having named the businesses after her two dogs, Charlotte affectionately refers to the team as 'The Pack' – and said the new appointments will only help grow the business even further.

"We always prioritise quality over quantity, and each addition has injected priceless expertise into our team.

"It is already leading to some brilliant results for our clients, and this rebrand hopefully marks the start of an exciting new chapter for Harvey & Hugo."

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Rise of female founders – but NE lagging behind national figures



Stacey Nottingham

More than 150,000 new all-women-led companies were founded in the UK in 2022 – more than any year previously – according to new research.

Finder's report also revealed that almost one in five UK companies (18%) are led by women in 2024 – more than 880,000.

However, when the figures are broken down regionally, the North East is lagging behind the national picture. London has the highest percentage of women-led businesses (19.8%) with Northern Ireland with the lowest

at 14.7%. The percentage of women-led businesses in the North East is 16.2%.

A rise in the number of female-led companies in the UK is a fact that Teesside business owner Stacey Nottingham relishes.

And it shows a more diverse change in the business community since she founded her creative design and digital marketing agency, Bombshell Design, 23 years ago.

"It was inevitable I would become a designer," says Stacey, who was born and raised in Thornaby. "My Mum said I was always out in the backyard drawing – and I have always wanted to run my own business for as long as I can remember."

At university, Stacey discovered a passion for digital art but on leaving higher education, she found competing for a job in what was then a male-dominated industry much harder than she ever imagined.

She had moved down to London where she got talking to an old school friend about wanting to move back up north.

"We decided we would create our own jobs and set up our own business," she says.

"At that time, in my experience there were no other design companies run solely by women in Teesside and a very limited number across the North East."

They knew they were onto something good and were soon winning accolades including the Young Entrepreneur award at the Women

in Business awards in 2004. A year later, Stacey's business partner decided being a business owner wasn't for her so Stacey bought her out and has run Bombshell ever since.

Now Stacey has a team behind her which includes a head designer, website designer, admin and social media executive and a recently appointed head of web and digital SEO.

Over the years, Bombshell has grown from a graphic design company to incorporate other services including branding, website design and development, SEO (search engine optimisation), social media marketing and printed literature.

"In the next year, I want to grow the team with a junior designer and a social media apprentice," says Stacey, who lives in Wynyard.

"At present, the team works remotely but once we have a junior designer and/or an apprentice, I want to return to an office setting to ensure they can learn from us all face-to-face.

"It's fantastic to see so many women-led creative design companies in Teesside. I still think we have a long way to go but seeing the rise in female entrepreneurs is great to see and very different from when I started out. Having more women in business is better for all of us."

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Marketing and Media Matters

In the latest of this popular series of features we spoke to...

Stacey Penrose

Owner, Race Marketing

Did you always envisage a career in the media?

In some form, yes—journalism piqued my interest first, and choosing Media Studies as a GCSE option confirmed that this was the industry for me. There was a brief period when I considered pursuing a career in Law, but the realisation of many years of study put paid to that!

What has been your career path so far?

Sky provided me with an incredible launchpad for my career. I learned my craft working alongside the giants of the Sky channels and specifically across joint venture channels such as National Geographic and The History Channel. In addition to media, I had the opportunity to explore different aspects of the industry such as programming, licensing, and one of my passions—sponsorship. My time at Sky was a highlight of my life, both professionally and socially.

Discovery Networks was my next stop, responsible for generating cross-media income against their varied channel portfolio. The close relationship between all elements of the business was something I thoroughly enjoyed learning about the intricacies of a global business.

Disney was my subsequent stop as Pan European Media Manager, where leading a sales team to achieve high stakes targets across 33 countries was a pivotal chapter in my career, one that I look back on with pride.

Always eager for a challenge, I decided to hop over the media owner fence and joined the agency world. Being closer to the clients and fostering relationships with them really resonated with me, and I've never really looked back. Moving back to my beloved North Yorkshire and launching Race felt like a logical step on my journey. I feel privileged to be a part of a brand's success, whether that be a global brand or an independent start-up.

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

The pressure of managing a team responsible for delivering high budget targets during challenging economic times was, at times, intense, but I've always been incredibly lucky with the colleagues I have worked with.

Need I say more about 2020? Very tricky times indeed.

Also, we often have to deal with a rather negative perception of marketing—that it is a 'nice to have,' 'the fluffy stuff,' or just 'a few social media posts' when, in reality, a well-executed marketing strategy is transformative for any brand.

Who do you respect most in your industry?

There are several names that spring to mind but two people who deserve a special mention are advertising guru Eddie Lloyd Barnes (aka the nicest man in media) and my current business partner, Nicole Bilham.

More than anything, though, the independent business owners who take that leap and juggle the many pressures that come with owning a business are truly inspiring to me.

What is your greatest strength/weakness?

I think these are interlinked. I care—deeply—about the brands I work with, and while this passion can sometimes lead to overcommitment, it fosters wonderful results. My career so far has demonstrated a keen commercial acumen with the ability to identify and seize opportunities.

Does a caramel latte and a cookie count as a weakness? Hopefully not.

What has been your proudest achievement?

Without a doubt, my children. Creating a successful business that allows me to be present for family life is gold dust to me. On a professional level, Nicole and I have recently launched a marketing foundation course designed to empower business owners to successfully run their own marketing with confidence at a time when outsourcing often isn't viable. The feedback from our first couple of events has really touched us—knowing that we are having a positive impact on so many brands is a huge source of pride.

What are your future career aspirations?

Continuing to shine a light on more brands alongside growing our training academy to empower as many entrepreneurs as possible.

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

Over the next decade, I anticipate significant shifts in the media landscape driven by advancements in technology, changing consumer behaviours, and societal trends. Personalised content experiences, immersive storytelling, and the integration of AI and data analytics will continue to reshape how brands engage with audiences. Also, I foresee a greater emphasis on sustainability and ethical practices, as consumers increasingly demand transparency and accountability from media entities.

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

Ah, hindsight! Trust your instincts and be open to unexpected opportunities.

How do you like to unwind?

I am beyond lucky to have the Yorkshire Dales as my backyard and spend many an hour walking my little lurcher, Ted, while listening to a podcast.

racemarketingagency.co.uk



Stacey Penrose

...We're all going on a summer holiday...

July is a great month for a holiday. Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us about their holiday memories and why it was so special.



Running a small business is tough so finding moments where you can restore and bring balance to your life is key. Last year, time and money were in short supply, so we booked a short stay in Northumberland. We had several places on our list to visit, one of which was Sycamore Gap. The walk to Sycamore Gap was challenging, my son struggled with it as it was very windy and noisy. But when we got to the Gap he didn't want to leave. After an hour of hugging the tree and thanking it for a special family moment, we said our goodbyes and headed back to our cottage. Little did we know it would be our first and last visit to the tree before it was illegally felled.

Sycamore Gap gave me so much more than just a nice visit, a memorable story, and a special moment. It gave me some peace and a moment to breathe. It symbolised strength in a time of adversity, it made me thankful. And it reminded me to do that thing that is on your list before it is too late. For this, I will always be thankful to Sycamore Gap and the long hug that I had with this beautiful tree.

A month after our visit our son was diagnosed with Autism which explained why it had been such a challenging walk for him. I am so grateful that he will always have this memory to draw on after one of the most challenging years that we faced as a family. This for me is the healing power of nature. And I would urge you, if there is a place on your list that you haven't visited yet, then plan a visit before it's too late!!

Corinne Lewis Ward, www.powderbutterfly.com



Summer holidays programmes are always the busiest time of the year, this summer will be no exception.

We have our biggest programme to date running with paddle boarding, raft building, rock climbing, bushcraft, archery, and overnight camps. We work with over 200 young people every summer from some of the most disadvantaged areas in the region and it's always great to see how engaged they become with what we offer. If you are interested in working with us, have an unusual skill or something that could add value to our programmes please get in touch. We are always looking for new and innovative ways to engage with young people. Give me a call on 07867795586 or drop an email to paul@off-the-grid-cic.uk for an informal chat and coffee.

Paul Kirkpatrick, www.offthegrid-adventures.co.uk

I enjoy an escape to the Lake District, with my family, as a no signal zone comes as a welcome break. However, due to the nature of our work, it isn't hard to miss projects we have done in the past over in the lakes, such as way finder signs etc. or I look at projects that we may be able to assist with, varying from a new shop opening that requires signage or opening banners to a new building development that will require safety signs. I know it is the classic phrase of "you should try and switch off" but when an industry is so interesting due to the endless possibility that is Printing, it isn't something you wish to shut off for a week or just a weekend. Ask me again in a couple of years though and I may say different, hopefully not though! The picture is of myself and my brother who was giving me a piggyback to the pub after a long walk!

*Rebecca Thompson
www.pmpnameplates.co.uk*





I've never been on a plane! That's how much illness has dominated my life. I have learned to be joyously content with a trip to our local seaside and rejoice in all the countryside around us. Going into service stations is still an adventure and I love people-watching. Seeing generations of families going away together, business trips and those moving around the country for good reasons is inspiring. Seeing the bus trips and camper vans and school trips reminds me of how fortunate we are if we can contemplate such things. Joy is found in the tiny triumphs of life. I have plans for a plane! I have worked so hard for so long to build my business and take care of my family that I cannot wait for more time off to savour all the things that I spend so much talking to clients about! When they message me and let me know that they have accomplished something so simple as a day trip out, I am overjoyed. So, if you're at the seaside in the North-East ~ give me a wave!

Dr Rebecca Dinsdale, www.drrebecca.org.uk



My best holiday memory is from my first visit to the Caribbean. We arrived in darkness with just the sound of some unknown creatures in the darkness to welcome us. Next morning when we drew back the curtains we had an amazing view of the bright turquoise sea lapping on the perfect golden sands. Over the next few days we had early walks along the beach without another human in viewthe Caribbean at its best. I'm now in the lovely position of being able to help other people find their dream holiday. Get in touch as we would love to help you.

John Dixon

Destinations By John 0800 1777 857



My favourite place to go on holiday is Orlando in Florida. We always go in October for the Halloween horror nights in Universal studios. As a theatre maker, Actor & writer I get really inspired (and absolutely terrified!) at the way they do these events. Monsters & mayhem delivered in the most spectacular way gives me food for thought about set design, staging & story ideas. Of course not having universal's budget I still get ideas of things I can do on a budget and of course that's not to mention the sun, the food, the drinks, the people, the drinks, the sights...did I mention the drinks?

Alison Stanley, Stanley Creatives

Holidays are a time when you can switch off and relax. Not necessarily though when you have a PR company. I've recently come back from Mallorca and had a most relaxing time. Although I kept up to date with emails, I didn't have any appointments, no deadlines and it did me the world of good. I did take time to see my client Paul Martin who sings there. I'll travel to the ends of the world for my clients!

Keith Newman, www.highlights.co.uk



Last month our RADAR members appeared on BBC TV, BBC Radio, Local TV and many magazines and newspapers. To find out more about the benefits of becoming a RADAR member, contact keith@highlightspr.co.uk or call Keith on 07814 397951



Crisis communication skills matter – even without a crisis!

Amanda Little is a distinguished professional in her field. She holds the prestigious CIPR Professional PR Diploma (L7) and the advanced CIPR Specialist Diploma—Crisis Communications (L7), both master-level qualifications.



Veronica Swindale



Amanda Little

She oversees the internal and external communications of VetPartners, its veterinary practices, and animal healthcare businesses. Amanda's mastery of communication skills is not just about gaining a series of qualifications; it's a practical necessity as she uses all the skills and knowledge gained to raise awareness of VetPartners' identity, values, and culture, both internally and externally.

Veronica Swindale, nesma MD, asked Amanda about the transformative power of continuous professional development and why Crisis Communications skills can empower you to navigate crisis situations effectively. This growth journey is not just about protecting the organisation's reputation and maintaining stakeholder trust; it's about your personal and professional development.

What strategies have you successfully used to build stakeholder trust and transparency?

Trust is the cornerstone of any successful business. Trust is necessary to retain valued employees, revenue, customers, reputation, etc. It takes years to build a reputation and only moments to lose it. Respected businesses will do everything they can to guard their brand reputation. Communicating openly and honestly builds stronger relationships, which are crucial to the bottom line, whether with their employees, clients, the media, shareholders, or the wider public. Moloney's Reputation Bank, a familiar concept to professional PR practitioners, illustrates this perfectly.

Every positive PR piece is like a credit going into your reputation bank, which builds trust.

Building up lots of credit can help preserve your reputation if you face a severe PR crisis and are more likely to recover quickly and fully. It's probably the most successful strategy for building stakeholder trust and enhancing your brand's reputation – it's about what you do daily, not just when things go wrong.

What internal communications have worked best to keep your team informed and motivated?

Successful businesses put people first and communicate openly and honestly about what's happening within the organisation and any challenges it may face, which builds employee trust. When team members believe in the business they work for, they are more likely to be engaged and motivated and are powerful brand ambassadors. Good employees will want to stay with a respected business where they feel valued. They may feel embarrassed, or even ashamed, to work for a company with a poor reputation, leading to a high turnover and difficulty attracting new talent. When you have a lot of employees working across multiple sites – and even countries – communicating with them is always a challenge, and that's why it is essential to have various channels to reach everyone, whether it is a staff magazine, intranet, Facebook page, newsletter or email updates from your CEO. Ensuring an accurate and aligned cascade of information to employees during a crisis through an effective line management structure is essential. Employee engagement surveys are a great tool for receiving feedback – two-way communication is critical to the success of any business – and being willing to listen to employee feedback builds trust and respect.

Has studying the CIPR qualifications supported you in making decisions?

Communications Directors need a strategic mindset. Studying the CIPR qualifications changed my thinking and made me work more holistically, ensuring our communications align with our values and business objectives. You need to act swiftly in a crisis, and my CIPR training has supported me in making well-informed decisions quickly and confidently.

Why should businesses value crisis communication skills even without a crisis?

If you speak to any Communications Director, they will say they are increasingly reaching for their Crisis Management Plan, especially given the power of social media and the global uncertainty we're all facing. Even if everything is going smoothly, you never know when a crisis will hit you—or how—and being prepared is essential to dampen any fires quickly. The best crisis management starts before a crisis has even arisen, and that preparation enables you to recover much more effectively.

You don't need to be in a crisis to benefit from crisis communication skills, so why not call Jen at 07734 222 254 or email hello@nesma.co.uk to learn more about the CIPR Specialist Awards?

Crisis Communication Skills are not just about managing the immediate impact of a crisis; they also play a crucial role in long-term success and sustainability. By bolstering reputation, stakeholder trust, organisational learning, and overall resilience, they become a vital component of a strategic approach that ensures the organisation's ability to tackle any challenge, thereby securing its long-term success.

Call Jen to help you grow your marketing and communication skills at 07734 222 254 or email hello@nesma.co.uk

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Dealing with the media in good times and bad

At SASS media Ltd, we will support you in good times and bad when it comes to your dealings with the media.

In the last few weeks, we've accompanied Martins Ushie and his colleagues at Afro Kings Barbershop, as he was interviewed by ITV, the BBC and Zetland FM.

The media attention came after we put out a press release during mental health awareness week.

There was great interest in the former Army corporal's safe haven, which he has created within his barber shop for men to talk about their mental health.

This is something which has been of paramount importance to Martins, who left the Army three years ago having witnessed the mental health struggles of his comrades. Martins was one of the first members of the Black Creatives and Arts Network (BCAN), established in 2022 to be a community for black creatives to network, connect and collaborate in the North-east.

BCAN, which is part of Taste of Africa Northeast, includes musicians, writers, designers, filmmakers, content creators, chefs, and more.

The inaugural BCAN Showcase was held at Teesside University last year which was a celebration of artistic expression and entrepreneurship.



Martins at Zetland FM

When the TV cameras arrived at Afro Kings, we were on hand to support Martins and his staff with what can be a nerve-racking prospect.

We accompanied Martins to radio interviews to talk about what can be a delicate subject and we also took our own high-quality images for print media, to eliminate the need for press photographers to attend the shop.

Through Martins story, we have achieved some excellent media coverage for both the Afro Kings barber shop and BCAN.

This has been a fantastic 'good news' story about an entrepreneur who has created something unique within his business for the benefit of the local community.

However, we can also support businesses

when something goes wrong and they find themselves the focus of adverse media attention.

When we take on new clients, we talk to them at length about any risks within their business and the potential for adverse publicity in scenarios where someone is unhappy with a product or service or if something terrible happens within their workplace.

Nobody likes to think about the things that can go wrong in a business, especially disasters that could attract media attention, but by preparing in advance for these scenarios 'just in case,' we can help you put your best foot forward, should the worst happen.

What's more, we can deal with the media on your behalf during these times, by directing journalists' calls to us.

Should a journalist visit your premises, we can also be on hand to help you deal with the situation calmly and effectively.

Of course, our favourite times are when we are able to proactively support businesses to achieve positive media coverage, like in the case of Martins, Afro Kings and BCAN.

We are looking forward to continuing our work with the charity A Taste of Africa Northeast and meeting some more interesting individuals and businesses through this work!

For a no obligation chat about how we can support your business or organisation with your publicity requirements, please contact Sarah Walker on 07896 894538.



Martins being interviewed in his barber shop by ITV

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Baba Cooks. Created by owner of North East restaurants, My Delhi, who has had more than two million likes on Instagram.

Finding Found!

It's a company that has revolutionised the publishing industry and has grown its income by around 7000% in the first year – and it just happens to be based in the North East...

From Miami to Texas, from North Carolina to Pittsburgh, from Middlesbrough to Nottingham – these might be far flung corners of the world, but they all have something in common.

And what links them is a revolutionary print and publishing company that is taking the content produced by top creators from both sides of the pond and turns it into a lucrative business model.

Found's website might be found.us but the home of this fast-growing business is in fact at North East BIC in Sunderland.

The Wearside base is also home to one of the UK's leading online print companies, WTTB, which is a success story in its own right and is a sister company to Found.

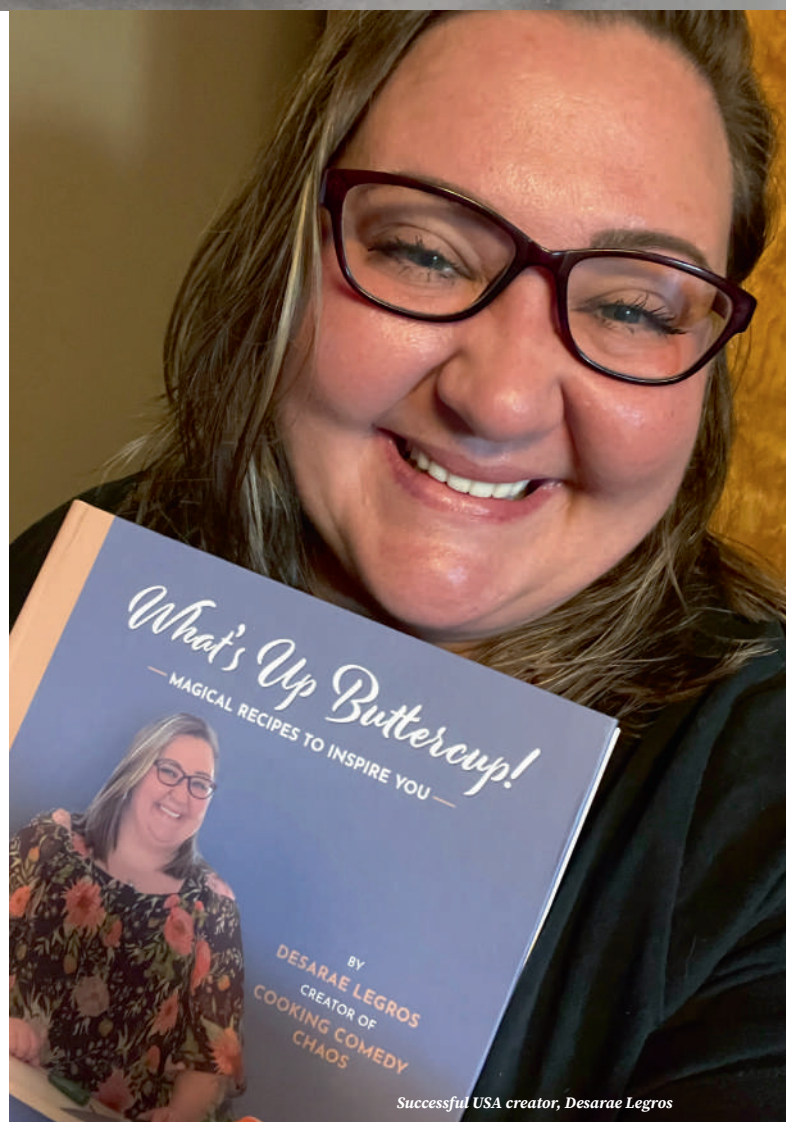
Heading up both of these organisations is Louise Stephenson, who has years of experience in the print industry and so is perfectly placed to drive Found.

The company was initially set up by technology giants HP, who came up with the concept of taking online content posted by top creators and turning this into books.

Although the main bulk of Found's creators are mainly home cooks who share their recipes, this is growing to take on board those who post on lifestyle, health and wellbeing.

The concept is simply – but brilliant. Currently Found is working with around 150 creators in both the UK and USA whose only commitment is to promote their books via their channels.

Because the books are produced by print on demand there's little outlay – so no warehouses full of books gathering dust – and Found does all the work in terms of design and print.



Successful USA creator, Desarae Legros

“We really are revolutionising the print industry,” said Louise.

“If someone normally wants to publish a book they have to get an agent, find a publisher and that can take a year or more.

“We can take a book from concept to creation in around 60 days, which means the process is so much quicker.

“We have creators who are selling thousands of books and have changed their lives around because of Found and are now able to earn their living through their creativity.”

In fact the success of some of the creators – particularly in the USA – means they’ve given up their day jobs to concentrate on becoming a full time influencer.

“The creative social media economy allows individuals to find highly connected audiences,” said Louise.

“Our model allows the creator to generate meaningful income from published products like never before.”

Many of the creators took to social media during lockdown, simply using the extra time they had when being stuck at home to share their recipes – mainly family favourites which strike a chord with their audience.

“What makes these books different is their followers are invested in their lives,” said Louise.

“It is a very special relationship and we often see people who may have never bought a cookery book in their life, buying one from their favourite creator.

Newton Aycliffe's Sophie Clothier who turned her Fit Food Diary into a successful cookbook.



Louise Stephenson

“Many of the creators didn’t even consider that they could monetise their content, particularly by just sharing the information about their books with their followers on a regular basis.”

Because for so many of the creators marketing and promoting their books is a new experience, Found also gives them support with ideas and tips on how to push their products to their audience.

“The results for many of them have been phenomenal and life changing.

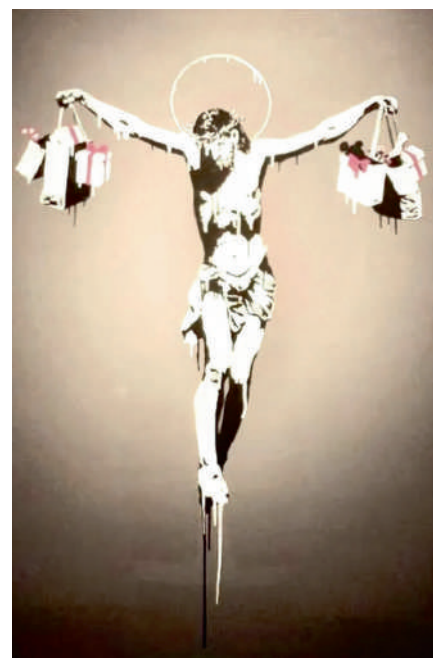
“We have creators who are selling thousands of books and have transformed their lives thanks to Found. They are now able to earn their living through their creativity.”

For further information visit www.found.us and www.wttb.co.uk



Quinn's Fine Art: Banksy, Hambleton, and the art of the deal

Combining artistic excellence with investment security, Quinn's Fine Art are cementing their own corner in the Northern art space; unafraid to challenge the status quo, and underpinned with the prestige of brokering the sales of rare blue chip works of art - this Art Advisory is where art and commerce seamlessly converge, creating a space that celebrates the enduring power and value of fine art.



Quinn's Fine art was founded by Danielle Quinn, an accomplished art dealer and curator who has spent over fifteen years working in both the public and private sectors of the art market. Quinn has recently collaborated with the experienced Art Dealer and gallery director, Georgina Llewelyn as Head of Private Clients - Quinn's Fine Art are striving to bring a fresh energy to the Northern art scene.

From original *Domingo Zapata's* to *Vincent Kamp's*, Quinn's Fine Art is not afraid to celebrate eccentricity, expression, and creativity; so it comes as no surprise to learn that they have been entrusted to sell several blue chip masterpieces. For those (like me), who had no idea of what blue chip pieces were, they are some of the most prestigious works - high value, a history of selling success, and their creators renowned for their craft.

The first two by the internationally renowned street art sensation, *Banksy*. *Christ With Shopping Bags* (2004) and *Trolley Hunters PP 2/12* (2006), captures both

Banksy's unique style and his unabashed artistic commentary on social and political issues. *Christ With Shopping Bags* (2004) is one of only 82 in existence, which not only makes this signed piece exceedingly rare, but a shrewd investment opportunity for any street art enthusiast, or for anyone who enjoys satirical commentary on modern consumerism.

The next pieces are by legendary artist, *Richard Hambleton*; a highly influential figure in the New York art scene in the 1970s and 1980s, someone who was even responsible for influencing the likes of *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, *Blek le Rat* and even the aforementioned *Banksy*. Known for pushing the boundaries of the contemporary, whilst skillfully blending fine art with street art, Quinn's Fine Art has the proud responsibility of brokering three iconic "Shadowman" pieces. Raw, evocative, mesmerising; these pieces are the embodiment of the talent, skill, and vision that has led Hambleton to global acclaim and cemented his legacy in art history.

Whilst the artwork available is undoubtedly extraordinary, it is Quinn's Fine Art themselves which provide the quality value to any buyer or investor. Quinn's Fine Art tailor their services to suit any requirements from establishing collection goals, advising on artistic investment opportunities, sourcing artworks, negotiating private sales and shipments, to the expert curation of private collections.

Quinn's Fine Art truly knows how to navigate the Art of the Deal.

To find out more about these exceptional art pieces, or for any questions you may have please get in touch with Quinn's Fine Art on dani.quinn@quinnfineart.com or georgina.llewelyn@quinnfineart.com



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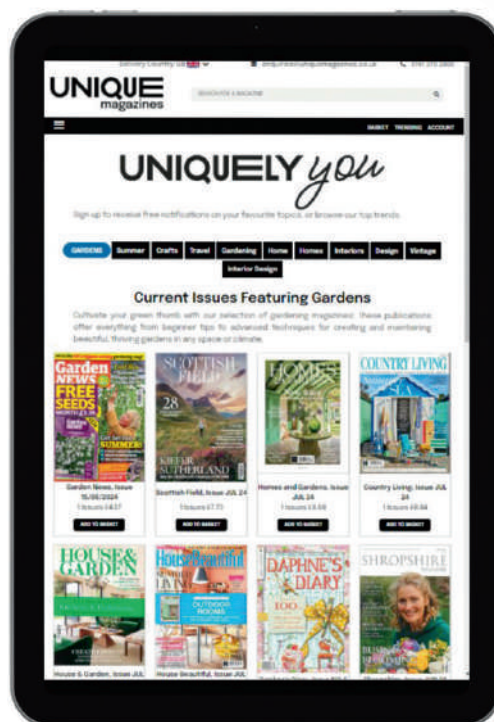
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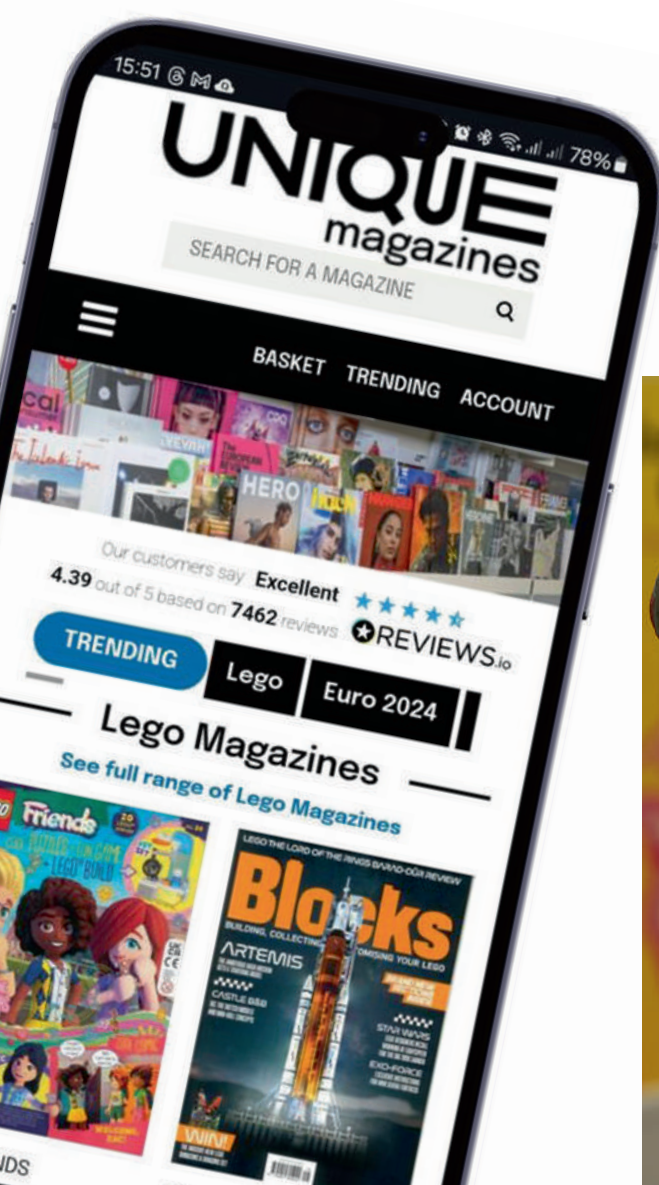
Embracing Change: The launch of our new website

Originally launched 15 years ago, our website had become outdated. Initially, a modest update seemed sufficient, but the compelling new logo designed by the talented North East-based designer at Design by Kinship inspired us to undertake a more comprehensive overhaul.

This realisation led to a complete rebrand and the launch of a redesigned website, aiming to provide the best possible user experience in this new era. Change, a constant and unstoppable force, offers exciting opportunities and opens doors to new possibilities, which we at Unique Magazines are eager to explore.

Our passion for print is profound, and we are eager to share it with the world. Through our website, we aim to showcase our enthusiasm and establish a hub brimming with endless opportunities. Our mission is to be the customers choice for printed magazines and we want our website to be a proud example of the passion we have for the world of print.





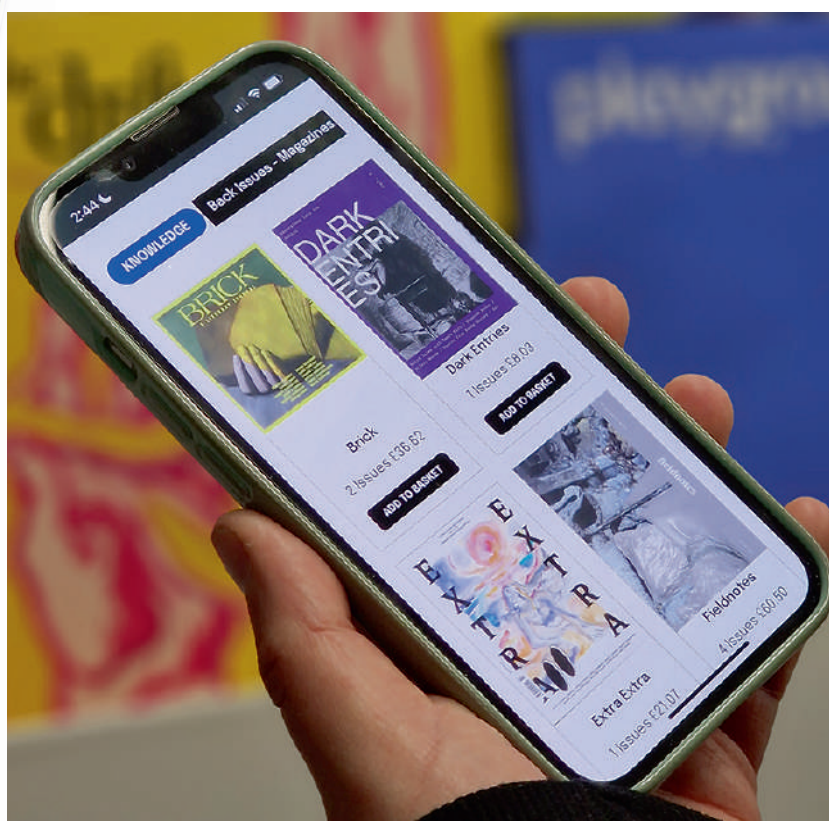
Why launch a new website?

Our goals for the new website were clear and centred around enhancing user experience:

- **Modernisation:** We aimed for a modern, responsive design that performs seamlessly across all devices, particularly mobiles, to ensure that our customers can quickly and effortlessly access our services.
- **Enhanced Navigation:** Our vast array of mainstream and independent publications is now easier to browse with the introduction of the new icon scroll feature, which allows customers to view magazine covers and find subscription details efficiently.
- **Personalised Experiences:** Unique Magazines' 'Uniquely You' feature displays the latest trending magazines and personalises the browsing experience. Users can select their interests, and updates are customised to ensure they never miss an issue. This feature keeps users informed and engaged with content that is tailored specifically for them.
- **Subscription Management:** We introduced a more user-friendly system for managing subscriptions, renewals and printed orders, giving customers complete control over their experience. While we cherish direct interactions with our customers, we understand the value of offering them the independence to manage their subscriptions.

Ultimately, our focus is on the customer experience. We want visitors to our website to feel in control, at ease, and inspired as they discover the magazines that speak to them. With our new website, we are not just keeping pace with change; we are setting the stage for the future of Unique Magazines. We are moving with the times and creating an experience that will always be the most modern and up to date, with the customer at the heart of everything we do.

www.uniquemagazines.co.uk





Daniel Wade

A unique interview...

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Daniel Wade

Wade Construction Management Consultants

How did you end up building a construction management company?

I'd worked for a large Tier 1 company for 10 years. I'd been able to see and work on some incredible projects, shaping communities and learning different ways of working. However, I knew that I wanted to develop something different, taking what I had learned and combining it with what I wanted to achieve - I built Wade Construction Management Consultants.

The business operates on a collaborative delivery model - the same one that helped build the Empire State Building in New York, in record time. This model brings together the most effective ways of working, shortening project timelines, but most importantly - without compromising on quality, safety or putting businesses in the supply chain at risk too.

Anyone who knows me, knows I work on a basis of open communication - and that's the way Wade operates too, providing significantly more transparency and trust between the partners, alleviating risk whilst delivering maximum efficiencies. I saw a gap in the market for something like this, started Wade and here we are, proving it works and that it works well.

Who or what inspires you?

Honestly, I am inspired by supporting change in the industry. I know that might sound pretty lofty, but ultimately, it needs to change. Time and time again, I am speaking with companies that report the same issues with project delivery, and the issues they are facing are breakdown in communications, being over-promised by contractors who then under-deliver and that impact is massive. Working collaboratively shouldn't be novel, it should be the norm - and that's what I and my team are trying to do. There have been casualties in the supply chain caused in part by Tier 1 companies ultimately facilitating their downfall through crushingly long payment terms, ambiguous project briefs and their expectations being hugely mismanaged. We don't do that at Wade - it's not fair or right, and can kill companies - why is that now an accepted way of working? It's not right - and I want to change it.

Alongside my professional inspiration, I am hugely inspired by my relationships. I am lucky to be surrounded by incredible people both at home and at work that keep me focussed, and pretty humble too!

What advice would you give to anyone interested in getting into the construction business?

Don't underestimate any challenges you face - construction is an ever-evolving industry so every day something new will land with you that you need to deal with immediately, and sometimes, it's the unsuspecting queries that have the biggest, or longest impact. Always understand that cashflow is king and that you need great people in your roles - no matter what the position. We are built on communication and collaboration, and that is unstable when the wrong people are in the company. Hire right, you'll be fine.

And one final one - find your own understanding of Cost and Value - they are two very separate concepts, and you should never underestimate the value of your own expertise, for example. Value is something much bigger than the pounds and pence at the bottom of a page. Knowing the difference is crucial to survival.

What is your favourite part of your job?

Such a hard question to pinpoint one answer for! Ultimately, for



me, it comes down to knowing that we are making a difference as a business - accelerating the delivery of medicine or safeguarding companies in the supply chain etc - it all has real impact and that is incredible.

I also love the team, and actually seeing our projects coming to life; seeing different cultures as a global business now and understanding how we align values to deliver great projects is phenomenal. Basically, I love what I do.

What has been your most memorable business moment?

There have been multiple! Last year I won the Emerging Talent award with the Entrepreneurs' Forum which was incredible - and it was fantastic to have my wife, Sophie, by my side on the night too. But also, the business was a shortlisted finalist in the Consultancy of the Year category Construction News Awards too. Even though we didn't win, I was able to look around our table on the night and could see just how much the team wanted it. It shows we share the same vision, and THAT is a moment I'll treasure.

What are your favourite magazines?

It's quite rare I get to read any. It used to be Men's Health when I was fitter(!). But I also like to look through some of the specialist publications for Construction, and regional interest ones too, such as Northern Insight.

What's the future hold for Daniel Wade and Wade Construction Management Consultants?

We are a now global business, operating in 19 countries across the EMEA, Americas and AsiaPac. Our vision is to continue with our growth model, delivering high quality collaborative projects that are aligned to client goals. I want to see the Wade way of working help improve industry standards, raise aspirations and I want the team to be able to thrive doing it too.

We have also undertaken The Wade Academy too, which is designed to train entrants to the industry in more sustainable and collaborative practices, as well as upskill and develop our existing staff too. Over time I hope to be able to open this up to the industry as a not-for-profit organisation that will raise standards in its own way too. Last year we took our first learner into the Academy, Rees, and he is doing very well. And we are preparing another intake in September this year.

www.wadecmc.com
www.uniquemagazines.co.uk

People first:

a different narrative



What's business for, if not for people? Happy people make healthy businesses, empowered to do great work that benefits others in turn. It's been a very people-focused year at Different Narrative, celebrating team accolades and working on a clutch of exciting projects that made business personal.

As an end-to-end marketing partner supporting clients with advertising, design, brand identity, media planning and buying, social media, content, and web and app development, we're one of only 60 agencies nationwide out of 16,000 in total (and just 2 in the North East) to be accredited for excellence in effectiveness by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA), with a proven culture of marketing effectiveness excellence baked into everything we do. That takes a lot of commitment, but commitment only feels like hard work if you're not enjoying what you do. Most of us in the creative marketing sector chose to enter the industry because we have a passion for it. What's important to us is fostering an environment where that passion is given the freedom, encouragement and support to thrive.

The pledge that gives people the edge

The Good Work Pledge is an initiative all about work that's reliable, pays a decent wage, and encourages wellness and development, enabling more people to live a more fulfilling life. Run by the North East Combined Authority, the pledge recognises employers that actively do the right thing by their people. We were delighted in 2023 to maintain our Advanced Good Work Pledge employer status, having blazed a trail as the first marketing agency in the North East to sign up and achieve it in 2022. "Our continued status as an Advanced Good Work Pledge organisation means a lot to us," says our CEO Kieron Goldsborough, "both in terms of recognition for the work we put in to ensure our own people feel happy, motivated, and supported to be their best, and also because we passionately believe that every employer should be fully behind the standards of support and empowerment that the Good Work Pledge campaigns for."

As further testament to this, we were very proud to be appointed in 2023 as the marketing partner tasked with helping the North East Combined Authority to promote the Good Work Pledge campaign to other employers across the region. The campaign has been highly successful and it's given us great pleasure to use our skills and expertise to help spread the word.



Every day's a school day

We all feel that access to continuous learning helps us feel confident and in control in our roles and responsibilities, especially in such a fast-paced, ever-evolving industry. CPD is a key priority for us and we're proud to have been awarded IPA CPD Gold accreditation two years' running for outstanding investment in the professional development and wellbeing of our people. We make sure everyone gets as much value as possible out of each course, webinar or white paper by passing on insights to colleagues through our internal knowledge-sharing programme DN Know-how. That way we're not only benefiting from the original learning, but also practising our teaching and presentation skills. Win-win.



We rise by lifting others

Often a great way to put your own people first is to put other people first! We're fortunate at Different Narrative to have a strong commitment to CSR, with outreach activities built into our calendar. Last autumn we were very proud to win the 'Best Use of CSR' category at the North East Marketing Awards, in recognition of a year in which our team volunteered for a combined total of over 120 hours.

All of this activity combined has helped earn us the IPA's People First Promise badge in May this year.



Projects for people

Having been marketing partner to recruitment specialist Nigel Wright Group in the past, we knew we'd be working with kindred spirits when the company tasked us with evolving its brand look and feel this spring. As Nigel Wright is all about people and service, we redesigned its logo as a personal signoff, underlining the firm's declaration that 'trust is our signature'.

We've also been helping NHS North East and North Cumbria remind at-risk people to get their winter Covid and flu immunisations and spring boosters. We've been breaking down barriers in talking about intimate products to help pregnant and new mums for US client Dr. Talbot's Mom. And we created the awareness campaign for the North East Combined Authority's first ever mayoral election in May, urging the people of County Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Sunderland to use their power to choose.

Got a project that needs a human touch?
Say hello@differentnarrative.com

DIFFERENT
NARRATIVE

How North East businesses can maintain their culture when scaling up

For North East entrepreneurs, the sky can be the limit. As a region, we have a real appetite for scaling up, and a wealth of expertise to support growing businesses.

As companies expand and evolve, it's inevitable that workplace dynamics and relationships change. But growth doesn't have to come at the expense of a company's culture.

Fresh from completing Entrepreneurs Forum Scale-up Leaders' Academy, Ellen Hedley, co-founder of Vida Creative, shares her top tips on how businesses can maintain a strong work culture while scaling.

Be clear on the vision

Scaling your business requires a full team effort. For people to know where their time and effort is best spent, they need to know the end goal.

So have a clear vision and goals for the whole organisation, including individual goals, so that everyone is confident in the role they play within the company and what they're working towards.

Communicate with consistency

Regular, honest and transparent communication with your team, especially in times of growth and change, is crucial. Make sure you complete regular check-ins and 1-2-1s with your team - no matter how busy you get. It can be tempting to reschedule these when things are busy, but they really are an essential part of your internal communications and building trust with your people.



Ellen Hedley

Prioritise your people

When things are changing rapidly, employees can start to feel disconnected from their company. Even with clear communication, new dynamics and aims can be hard to keep up with. That's why it's important to make sure that people feel supported throughout periods of transition.

The key is to offer plenty of opportunities for people to talk openly and share how they feel about any changes within the business. This is more than a tick box exercise - people should know that their feedback is listened to and acknowledged - that way they'll be more likely to share their thoughts in the first place.

Review and reflect

Fast growth can mean huge shifts within a business - sometimes without you even realising it. Therefore, this is the ideal time to revisit your company values and purpose to ensure they are still core to what you do and how you do it.

Your values and purpose may have changed. If they have, involve the full team in updating them, taking everyone's ideas on board. If they haven't changed, reviewing them is a good opportunity to make sure you're still living and breathing the values, and set out

clearly what that looks like day-to-day.

Stay true to yourself

It can be daunting when your business starts scaling and entering new phases and markets, and it's easy to get pulled into new areas regardless of whether or not they are a good fit for the company.

At this point it's vital to stay confident in your abilities and remember what your business is good at. Don't pretend you're something you're not and stay authentic to yourself and your business. Instead, focus on doing what you do best, and continuing to do it well.

Don't forget the fun

Last but not most definitely not least, don't forget to keep having fun! A growing business is an incredibly exciting place to be, so keeping your people happy and nurturing a positive environment will only add to the buzz.

Social events and opportunities for your team to relax and enjoy themselves are a fantastic way to keep everyone motivated. Time together away from the daily grind can be hugely helpful in keeping teams feeling connected in times of significant change.

vidacreative.co.uk

Kevin Sung: The Future of Performance Media

Bonded is the digital and media agency that prioritises connection. Join us as we connect with a different member of the team each month to get their take on all things digital media.

CONNECTING WITH

Co-Founder and Performance Media Director at Bonded, Kevin Sung, shares his motivation for founding Bonded, the evolving landscape of performance media, and the crucial role of connection in client relationships.



Kevin Sung
Founder & Performance Media Director

What made you want to start Bonded?

After gaining over 15 years of experience across various agencies and client-side roles in paid media, I noticed a significant opportunity in the market. Many agencies either offered the innovation and expertise typical of large network agencies or the agility and flexibility of independents, but rarely both. There seemed to be a widespread gap in truly connecting with and understanding client businesses at a profound level.

Recognising this gap, the concept of Bonded was born - aiming to blend the best of both worlds: the expertise and innovation of a network agency with the nimbleness, agility, and flexibility of an independent, all while placing a strong emphasis on genuine connection with our clients.

What do you wish more people understood about paid media?

Paid media is constantly evolving, and while there has traditionally been a heavy emphasis on metrics and optimisation strategies, the landscape is shifting. What is less commonly understood is the increasing importance of creativity, vision and framework testing in the strategic success of paid media campaigns. The fusion of creativity with strategic media planning is becoming a critical

determinant of success. This blend not only enhances the effectiveness of campaigns but also drives innovation, setting new benchmarks for what can be achieved in digital advertising space.

Are there any upcoming developments in the media world that you are excited by?

The performance media sector is currently undergoing transformative changes, primarily influenced by the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and evolving privacy standards.

Generative AI tools are at the forefront of this shift, significantly enhancing the efficiency of paid search and content creation. These advancements are pushing marketers towards a pivotal balance between maintaining authenticity and leveraging technological innovation.

The gradual phasing out of third-party cookies and the move towards more privacy-centric strategies, such as Google Ads' decreasing reliance on user-defined data, mark a shift towards automation and data privacy. Coupled with the rise of social commerce and the exploration of new subscription models in social media, these developments signal a comprehensive reshaping of the digital marketing landscape.

And finally, what does 'Connection' mean to you?

Connection is about being fully immersed and present in any given moment. It's about applying undivided focus, attention, and care to whatever situation I find myself in, ensuring that I am completely aligned with the present.

This philosophy of connection goes beyond just interpersonal relationships; it extends to how we engage with our work, our clients, and the world around us. By fostering this sense of connection, we can achieve a higher level of understanding and empathy, enabling us to deliver work that truly resonates.

For more information visit:
www.bondedagency.com



Can you Supercharge your Summer?

Written by Mr Will Scott, Principal at Dame Allan's Schools, Newcastle.

Summer is finally here, and whilst we can't be assured of the sunshine thanks to the fickle British weather, we can hopefully all look forward to taking a bit of a break from the everyday work routine. Whether you're jetting off to foreign shores with family, opting for a UK break, or squeezing in a long weekend of socialising, taking some time off is a sure way to reset and refresh.

As a School Principal, I know summer break is a much-anticipated period of freedom for our pupils. They have worked so hard during their exam period and certainly deserve the time to relax. However, one of the bits of advice that I share with our school community is to make sure to use your free time wisely. It's great to switch off, but for our pupils it can make the return of study in September something of a shock if they have spent all of their summer break glued to Netflix marathons!

So, how does this bit of advice apply to you and your family?

When considering how you are spending your time together in the summer, ask yourself could you supercharge it? And by 'supercharge', I mean look for the added value in each activity.

Keeping young minds engaged and curious does not have to take away from your summer fun. At the weekend BBQ, encourage your child to learn some cooking skills, or some basic nutrition facts, before

they devour their burger. Off on a family outing? Why not learn a bit more about the history of the area that you're visiting, or squeeze in a cultural visit? Lucky enough to be taking a foreign holiday? An ideal time for you all to learn some of the local language and customs!

And, if you're working for the majority of the summer, why not take the opportunity to introduce your child to your industry or job role? Take some time to encourage questions and to share more about the nitty gritty of your day - you might be pleasantly surprised in how much they want to learn. These little opportunities will help to keep your family's minds active and engaged throughout the summer break, encourage you all to try new things, and can create some really special memories. Helping your child to see learning as fun and part of

the everyday, will set them in good stead for both their educational and working lives.

On a more practical level, I always encourage our pupils to do some reading too before the new academic year starts in September. Getting a jump on certain subjects means they will be raring to go when the time comes, and can add some valuable structure to their long summer break.

With all of that said, the most important thing, of course, is to enjoy any time you do get to spend with friends and family this summer - hopefully with a few new experiences along the way. Here's hoping for BBQ weather.

To find out more about Dame Allan's Schools, from Nursery to Sixth Form, please visit dameallans.co.uk



Will Scott

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Supporting Higher Education Choices

By Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster of Newcastle Royal Grammar School.

Each year I enjoy acting as a UCAS referee for some of our Sixth Formers, helping them navigate their choice of course and university. The most important thing for students to decide is what they want to spend the next few years of their life studying.

Despite being a difficult decision to make, it is fine to change one's mind – for example, I recently advised a student who started the Sixth Form thinking he wanted to be a doctor but is now studying Classics at Oxford.

During the university application process, students need to consider how far from home they are willing to travel and whether they want to live in a city or attend a campus based university. Another factor is whether they would prefer a course taught more through tutorials or lectures, or even these days with a significant proportion online. Some still see an Oxbridge application as the gold standard but, for many subjects, there are equally good if not better courses elsewhere, though one cannot deny the value of having Oxford or Cambridge on a CV.

Before I moved into teaching, I worked in finance and distinctly remember a German colleague being surprised that I have a Classics degree. In Germany, he said, if you wanted a business career you needed a business degree. It is still the case in the UK that your choice of degree does not define your future career but it is notable that many

of the leading degree choices increasingly are vocation related. There will be a number of factors driving this including the changing graduate labour market with employers increasingly expressing the need for a more skills based graduate intake. Similarly, universities are becoming more market driven with fee paying clients looking for a tangible return on their investment. That said, government initiatives pushing STEM degrees should not underestimate the cultural capital of the humanities or economic value of the creative sector and one should not forget the wider importance of scholarship in its own right.

Over the next five years, UCAS anticipate that university applications may increase by a third to reach 1million. This is due to an approaching demographic bulge along with anticipation of wider participation. Meanwhile, the number of international candidates may be only slightly tempered by visa restrictions and a decline in applicants from countries like Nigeria where economies are struggling. With UK university places likely to become more competitive over the next few years, some

students will look instead at the option of studying abroad.

An alternative to the traditional university route that young people would be well advised to consider would be a degree apprenticeship. I was particularly struck by this when visiting the Dyson Institute of Technology recently, which has been fully accredited as a university in its own right and takes fifty apprentices each year. This route allows students to study for a degree while also gaining significant experience in the workplace that will likely see them far more employable later. At a time when the cost of student loans has become so much more expensive, there is also a significant financial advantage of earning a salary rather than getting into debt. However, relatively few employers have the scale to be able to offer degree apprenticeships so there are not nearly enough places available meaning that it can be as competitive to secure a place as applying to a top university.

For many, a university degree is still likely to continue to be seen as the passport to a future career and, particularly for those who have been academically successful, there is likely to be a higher opportunity cost of not following this route. However, employers are getting better at delivering workplace training and continuing with academia is not right for everyone. Indeed, a number of students that I have taught have chosen to move straight into the workplace with considerable entrepreneurial success. I am always fascinated by the variety of what our alumni go on to do and this is perhaps why I so enjoy the responsibility of mentoring our young people as they make decisions about their future.

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Bafta Winner Phil Mealey inspires students at Studio West

Studio West recently buzzed with a mix of excitement and creativity as BAFTA-winning writer and actor, Phil Mealey, paid a visit to the secondary school which is part of Newcastle-based multi-academy trust, Northern Leaders Trust (NLT). Mealey brought his comprehensive experience in the performing arts industry to the students when he hosted a script-writing workshop which left a lasting impression on their flourishing talents and aspirations.

Phil Mealey reached out to Studio West with a desire to share his knowledge and inspire any budding writers and performers. His proposal was warmly received, resulting in an organised visit which highlighted the positive impact that professional workshops and visits have on student development.

The visit was organised by the school's staff, including Head of Drama, Nicole Mavin. It saw enthusiastic Year 9 students, who have chosen to study drama at GCSE level, and performers from the recent school production of 'Bugsy Malone' invited to a script-writing workshop. The selection process aimed to gather students who had previously shown a passion for the performing arts to ensure that Mealey's visit had the utmost impact.



During the workshop, students were put into groups where they developed ideas and drafted scripts whilst receiving feedback and guidance from Mealey. His approach was hands-on and engaging, as he encouraged students to create realistic and comical characters and storylines. This direct approach enhanced their engagement, script-writing skills and confidence in their creative abilities.

Students' reactions were extremely positive: "I really liked it. I think he was good at helping us figure out different sections of the story and making it all sound connected," one student shared. Another added, "the workshop was fun! It was a good experience and taught me a lot about what happens between leaving school and becoming a writer." These sentiments echoed throughout the group, with many expressing newfound inspiration and a desire for more similar opportunities.

Since the workshop, the impact of Mealey's visit has been evident in the school's atmosphere. The workshop participants are actively seeking additional script writing opportunities. This highlights the impact of Mealey's visit, in which his message was that: 'it doesn't matter where you start; what truly matters is where you aspire to be.'

The recent visit seamlessly aligned with Northern Leaders Trust's vision of placing students at the centre of everything they do and providing opportunities to nurture both academic and personal development. This initiative aims to support students' academic potential while bestowing the confidence they need to become future leaders. Mealey's interaction with the students epitomised this vision by offering them a glimpse into the real-world possibilities of pursuing a career in the performing arts.

The impact of Mealey's visit continued throughout the school. Auditions for the next annual school production took place just a week after his visit, and the number of aspiring actors doubled compared to last year. The success of this year's production is likely to have played a huge role in this increase, however, the effect that Mealey's visit had on the students proves that professional mentorship is vital for student engagement. Nicole Mavin has noted

that: "students are increasingly challenging themselves and nurturing their creative aspirations", which is critical in an age where the student aspiration gap is at its lowest level in six years (Source: Unifrog).

Nicole Mavin highlights the importance of hosting these types of visits and experiences at Studio West: "We want to give our students as many opportunities as possible and for them to engage with professionals in a range of industries in which we hope can inspire them to pursue their own careers, should they wish. We want students to feel they can overcome obstacles in their way to achieve whatever they want!"

Phil Mealey himself reflected on the visit with enthusiasm, expressing his delight at the students' engagement and creativity: "Inspiring young writers and performers at Studio West was a delight. Their enthusiasm and creativity stood out, showcasing the incredible potential of that generation."

In conclusion, Phil Mealey's visit to Studio West School exemplified the powerful impact that professional mentorship can have on students. It highlighted the school's commitment to providing diverse and enriching opportunities, aligned with Northern Leaders Trust's vision of student-centered education. The visit instilled a lasting confidence that will undoubtedly influence the students' future endeavours.

northernleaderstrust.org



Emma Barnett

Newcastle High School for Girls' new Head of Junior School

Following a competitive recruitment process, Emma Barnett has been appointed as Head of Junior School for Newcastle High School for Girls (NHSG). We chatted to her about her career, her future plans for the Junior School, and what makes NHSG such a special place.



Can you tell us a little bit about your career to date?

I've actually been with NHSG, or at least with Church High one of its founding schools, since I graduated. That's over 25 years and I've loved every moment.

I began as a class teacher and am absolutely delighted to now be the Head of the Junior School; it's a real honour.

Over the years, I've seen pupils join our Junior School, continue right through NHSG until age 18, go on to achieve great things beyond school, and then return as parents bringing their daughters back to the school. That really is testament to how special the school is.

You're clearly passionate about the Junior School at NHSG. So what is it that makes it so unique?

The sense of community is really special – we have great relationships with both the parents and the pupils which we build on from a girl's very first steps into Nursery and school at age three or four. We work in partnership to support the girls to develop a real love of learning and intellectual curiosity from day one, and then we nurture it to set the foundation for all future learning. We do this brilliantly at NHSG.

Another trait of NHSG that really stands out for me is how progressive we are. We embrace change, for example, we've always been clear that the role of tech isn't simply confined to computing skills – it's an enabler to learn in more flexible, dynamic and creative ways across all curriculum subjects. You can find knowledge at the click of a button these days, but it's what you do with it and how you apply it that really sets young minds up for the world. Our Junior School classrooms are stimulating places that encourage lively discussion. A classroom where the girls are talking more than the teacher is a genuinely exciting place to be.

Why are you passionate about an all-girl education?

Despite great strides, sadly, there are still some barriers faced by girls and women. Our new generation of girls are too young to see those barriers but with the absence of boys competing for attention and opportunities in the classroom, they are free and confident enough to pursue whatever they want to do. Nobody is going to suggest to them that they shouldn't become a scientist or a footballer one day. They literally have the whole world at their fingertips from the age of three and, as they grow older, they'll be better equipped and empowered to compete for those roles because they'll have never doubted their right to succeed in traditionally male-dominated sectors.

The world is their oyster.

How do you encourage interest in more traditional male roles?

We had a fantastic assembly recently with visitors from the RAF, two female officers, and you could see from the look on the girls' faces that they were just mesmerised by the stories the officers were telling about their jobs and what they do on a day-to-day basis. That's a real inspiration for our girls to see. I'm planning to bring in a software designer who was a former NHSG pupil soon to talk about her role and how that has been achievable.

What are your future aims for NHSG Junior School?

For me it's about ensuring that what we are teaching and how we teach it remains dynamic and future focused. So this will involve keeping abreast of what's going on in the world, and continually auditing, reviewing and reflecting on what we are doing. This extends to the pastoral system in school too. Technological development, particularly connected to social media, means that new challenges are faced regularly, even for younger girls, and we need to acknowledge and address these issues. Society is changing rapidly all the time, and we have to change with it. As long as the girls are happy, feel safe, secure and confident in their learning environment they will do well and achieve great things.

Applications to join the Junior School are open for September 2024 and beyond. For more information please visit www.newcastlehigh.gdst.net

STEE SCHOOL LS



“

...We work in partnership to support the girls to develop a real love of learning and intellectual curiosity from day one....



No one left offline: understanding your employees' digital skills

The education charity and awarding organisation NCFE has launched a new campaign to raise awareness of the importance of digital skills. David Redden, Commercial Manager, explains why employers must think about their workforce's skills.

In 2017, the European Commission estimated that over 1.2 million UK businesses are underperforming due to "insufficient digital awareness and lack of necessary skills".

As far back as 2015, the House of Lords stated that digital skills should be taught as the third "core subject" alongside numeracy and literacy.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport's report in June 2019 – No Longer Optional: Employer Demand for Digital Skills – found digital skills are becoming near-universal requirements for employment.

What's key for employers is providing their employees with a basic level of digital skill and creating the platform for them to progress.

A lack of digital skills

Too often, companies invest in expensive software and systems to improve digital performance and wonder why it hasn't done what they thought.

FutureDotNow carried out research based on 20 digital skills tasks that industry and government agree are essential for work, and the number one missing skill was using

digital tools in the workplace.

Embedding digital skills from top down is also essential. There's still some shame attached to admitting you're not digitally confident, however it could easily be the chief executive lacking the skills.

I spent a lot of time talking to employers, training providers, schools and colleges about digital skills; pointing out the need to not only train learners but look within and check your own employees had the skills needed for their job.

It was then that it dawned on me that despite working for an educational charity, we hadn't practiced what I was preaching. What was the state of NCFE's digital skills amongst its staff? Do we have a need to develop them further?

Understanding digital skills

Digital Skills is different to maths where people are quite open in admitting their weaknesses. There's embarrassment in admitting to poor digital skills, particularly in an increasingly digital world.

NCFE set out to provide a route to allow its staff to understand their digital skills levels without the fear of being named and shamed

and providing a route to improve those skills.

We set up a page for colleagues that took them straight into an initial assessment for essential digital skills. From there, they could identify the level they were working at. Following that they had several options:

- plug their skills gap with some online learning.
- do an Essential Digital Skills Qualification through training provider, Learning Curve Group.
- do nothing.

The results

The data showed that 229 members of staff, from the CEO to flexible workers, underwent an initial assessment; 7% came out at Entry Level 3 and 93% at Level 1. For those worried about the time taken up by employees, the average time was 15 minutes.

Of the 229, we saw 173 access resources to develop their essential digital skills. While the numbers don't show how far they went, even if a colleague did one thing to gain more confidence, that will have a significant impact on their ability to perform at work or in life.

The point of this is to show how you can measure your own employees' confidence and abilities in digital skills - while providing an easy path to upskill. That this can be done privately without embarrassing or uncomfortable conversations with line managers enhances participation.

If you're interested in understanding more about how you can support your staff with digital skills and learning more about our No One Left Offline campaign, visit www.ncfe.org.uk/no-one-left-offline

Three brothers' business comes of age

Ord House Country Park, nestled in the Border town of Berwick, celebrates 21 years of hospitality under the stewardship of the Maguire family. As children, brothers Billy, (38) Gilbert (36), and Nathan (25) were raised amidst the hustle and bustle of the family business, learning the ropes, doing everything from delivering gas bottles to unblocking drains.

This unique upbringing, and the business know-how passed on by their father and grandfather, Billy Senior, and Billy, have stood them in good stead. Now, with the trio at the helm of the Country Parks business, a new chapter in the Maguire's family history is unfolding.

Maguires Country Parks, based in Darlington, now owns eight parks, from Berwick, north Northumberland, down to Topcliffe, North Yorkshire, offering a combination of luxurious holiday homes, residential park homes and pitches for touring holidays.

Spanning 44 acres of picturesque landscape, Ord House Country Park offers a diverse range of accommodation, from touring pitches to holiday caravans and residential lodges. "Every area has its own personality,"



says Gilbert Maguire. "There's a tailored experience for everyone who comes: We have weekenders, seasonal visitors, second homers. Even those who want to move to the countryside full-time in our fully licensed residential areas".

The Maguire brothers have kept the family feeling at Ord House Country Park, with longstanding team members embodying their commitment to excellence: "Some of them have been with us the whole 21 years",

emphasises Gilbert. "Their passion and dedication make every visit memorable for our customers and we appreciate the hard work they put into making the park home for so many people."

Looking ahead, The Maguires Country Parks Group and Ord House Country Park show no signs of slowing down. Expansion plans are underway, with new developments and more residential opportunities on the horizon.

maguirescountryparks.co.uk



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Stick a Pony in your Pocket

Casting has been announced for the 2024/25 UK & Dublin tour of the smash hit show **Only Fools and Horses The Musical**. Starring Sam Lupton (*Wicked*, *Little Shop of Horrors*) as Del Boy and Tom Major, making his professional theatre debut, as Rodney. They are joined by Philip Childs in the role of Grandad.

Direct from a record-breaking sold-out four-year run in London's West End, the 10-month tour will visit Sunderland Empire from Monday 25 – Saturday 30 November 2024. Tickets are on sale now at [ATGTickets.com/sunderland](https://www.atgtickets.com/sunderland).

Georgina Hagan (*Everybody's Talking About Jamie*, *Heathers The Musical*) reprises her role as Raquel, Craig Berry (*The Bodyguard*, *Mama Mia*) returns to his role as Boycie and Nicola Munns (*Spring Awakening*, *Don Giovanni*) steps back into the high heels of his long-suffering wife Marlene. Nicola also plays the role of Cassandra. They are joined by their original West End co-stars Lee VG (Les

Miserables) as Trigger, Bradley John (Pandora's Box) as Denzil; Darryl Paul (*The Commitments*, *We Will Rock You*) as Mike / Tony Driscoll / Cripps and Rhys Owen (*The Full Monty*, *Spamalot*); Christopher Arkeston (*Oh! What a Lovely War*) and Andrew Bryant (who is also the Resident Director). The company is completed by Peter Watts (*The Threepenny Opera*, *Assassins*) as Danny Driscoll / Mickey Pearce; Richard J Hunt (*Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*) as Dating Agent; Gloria Acquah-Harrison (*Mawa Monologue Slam 2022* winner) as Mrs Obooko / Wedding Fitter. Kieran Andrew (*The Snow Queen*, *The Brunch Club*); Katie Paine (*Heathers*, *We Will Rock You*); Amanda Coutts (*We Will Rock You*, *Starlight Express*) and Oscar Dobbins.

Directed by the originating West End director Caroline Jay Ranger and based on John Sullivan's legendary record-breaking television show, this critically acclaimed home-grown musical spectacular features cherished material from Britain's best loved TV series.



Award Winning adaptation of The Kite Runner returns to The Theatre Royal stage

The Kite Runner, adapted by Matthew Spangler from Khaled Hosseini's award winning novel, and directed by Giles Croft, is set to visit Newcastle Theatre Royal (Tue 25 – Sat 29 Jun 2024), the unforgettable, theatrical tour de force returns to the region as its penultimate venue on its UK tour.

This compelling production explores themes of friendship, betrayal, and redemption amidst Afghanistan's turbulent history. Based on Khaled Hosseini's international bestselling novel, this haunting tale of friendship spans cultures and continents and follows one man's journey to confront his past and find redemption.

Afghanistan is a country on the verge of war and best friends are about to be torn apart. It's a beautiful afternoon in Kabul, the skies are full of colour and the streets are full of the excitement of a kite flying tournament, but neither Hassan nor Amir can foresee the terrible incident that will shatter their lives forever.

England Cricketing Great comes to Tyne Theatre & Opera House

Fresh off the field from retirement, join one of England's greatest cricketers, Stuart Broad, as he takes to the stage! Celebrating the release of his brand-new sporting memoir, **Stuart Broad: The Autobiography**, Stuart heads to the Tyne Theatre & Opera House on Monday 18th November 2024.

Stuart Broad will be discussing his career as one of England's greatest Test bowlers of all time, becoming England's second-highest wicket taker in Test cricket. Fans won't want to miss Stuart recounting some of the most exciting moments of the Ashes series, including hitting a six with his last shot

as a batsman and his now infamous ball-swapping.

Now that he's retired, he'll be delving into the highs and lows of his career like never-before to coincide with his brand-new memoir release. Discussing all things cricket, including his controversial Ashes series and the bond with his long-term bowling partner, Jimmy Anderson, fans will get to know the man behind the cricket bat.

Tickets cost £51.50 - £33.50 plus fees (top price tickets include a book) and can be purchased from: www.tynetheatreandoperahouse.uk/portfolio/an-evening-with-stuart-broad



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Mary Ann Rogers

The Artist's Year

By Mary Ann Rogers

Suddenly the countryside is lush and green, the garden is producing the annual display of wild flowers which were never planted, but turn up every year, a gift!

It has been a difficult few months when my mother's ill health took absolute priority, I feel that spring passed me by in a blur of trips up and down the road to Newcastle every day, to my mother's house, then to St Oswald's hospice where she died peacefully in May. We were very close and the grief hits me hard most days.



Still, the snowdrops, daffodils, bluebells, pink campion, aconites burst through, blossomed, faded and died. Watching hares racing around the fields and our guinea fowl and ducks prowling through the undergrowth has inspired the most recent paintings. Here is a sneak preview of two paintings which will be published as limited edition lithographic prints this summer.

With the regular summer exhibition here in the gallery having to be shelved, it is the perfect time to catch up with the lovely Scottish galleries which represent me, also hurl myself into a few new lochs and rivers on the way!

The House of Bruar gallery is quite close to 'Soldier's Leap' at Killiecrankie, where famously, a fleeing soldier made the 18' leap across the fast flowing River Garry. I've always imagined this as a high, spectacular leap with a deep gorge below, but in reality, it is only a few feet above the narrow rocky stretch of river, and a very wet bashing about would be the pitfall. Stupidly I didn't take my swimming things as the pool below the narrow gorge opens out into a beautiful swimming pool- next time!

Our Airbnb for a couple of nights up at Lossiemouth was perfectly located for sea swims, but the high winds from the north west created a surf which was WILD, definitely too dangerous for swimming while we stayed there.

A swim in the River Clunie, upriver from the Braemar Gallery was just the thing after a long drive, next time I plan to take my waterproof towfloat, carry my clothes, then swim a longer stretch of that beautiful river.





It was great to finally meet the owners of the new Portsoy Gallery, right up at the top of Aberdeenshire. A lovely gallery with some fabulous artwork, run by a couple of true enthusiasts. We walked round the harbours and watched some huge waves smash on the walls before another vicious shower drove us back to the car, drenched!

A quick detour into South Queensferry, Edinburgh, for a swim in the sea under the bridges, dodging little pink jellyfish was a great diversion, followed by a bit of searching for sea glass. These city beaches are great places for finding smooth, worn pieces of glass, although I didn't manage to find any deep blue glass this time.

Back home and the gallery here in West Woodburn is getting busier now that summer seems to be almost here, plus the garden is beginning to produce the delicious home grown vegetables that taste like none other!

Mary Ann Rogers Gallery, West Woodburn, Hexham NE48 2SE.
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Penshaw View becomes Ambassador Lounge sponsor at local theatre, Sunderland Empire



Philippa Breckon and Chris Breckon

Sunderland Empire have announced that leading training provider, Penshaw View, have become the new Ambassador Lounge sponsor at their Edwardian grade II listed theatre.

The partnership will strengthen the ties between local businesses and support for the arts, offering brand awareness to the highly engaged audience members from around the region and VIP tickets to the best theatre shows in the region.

Penshaw View is a family-run business that has been providing apprenticeships, health and safety consultancy, training, and recruitment services for over 15 years. Based in the city of Sunderland in the North-East, the team supports businesses across the country, helping teams to reach their full potential and upgrade their skill sets. This exciting and unique sponsorship opportunity also comprises of full naming

rights to the exclusive 30-seater Ambassador Lounge. Signage throughout the theatre and all marketing material online and in print will now feature 'The Ambassador Lounge in association with Penshaw View.'

The lounge offers all patrons the opportunity to add an exceptional luxurious experience to their visit. Guests can arrive early to relax before the show and avoid the rush by escaping to this exclusive space in the interval with private washroom and dedicated host table service.

Paula Mitchell, Sales and Development Manager at Sunderland Empire said: "I am delighted to announce the sponsorship of our Ambassador Lounge with Penshaw View, we also welcome them warmly to our 1907 Corporate Club.

I look forward to the year ahead building a mutually beneficial partnership with the team at Penshaw View and giving them a starring role within our beloved theatre!"

Sunderland Empire's 1907 Corporate Club is a yearly membership scheme giving businesses a host of first-class benefits including generous ticket allocations, hospitality, and the all-important brand awareness.



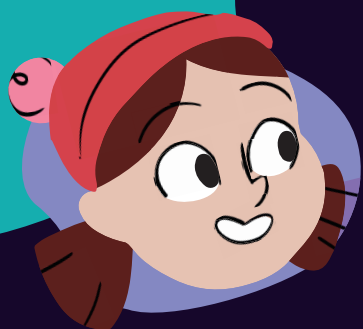
Paula Mitchell (left) with Philippa Breckon and Chris Breckon

In 2024, Sunderland Empire welcomed over 370,000 audience members through their doors, upcoming West-End productions such as & Juliet, Wicked and Hamilton provide the perfect time for businesses to align their brand with these spectacular shows and increase their brand presence within the region.

Philippa Breckon, Director said: "We are immensely proud to have partnered with Sunderland Empire to sponsor the Ambassador Lounge. The theatre is a wonderful venue and has a real wow factor. We are excited to entertain our clients in this amazing venue and develop a strong partnership with the Empire."

**penshawview.co.uk
atgtix.co/sunderlandcorporate**

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It is delivered by teachers in primary school settings and with older young people in specialist provision.

For businesses passionate about ESG and evidencing corporate social responsibility, sponsoring MELVA is a very tangible, measurable and high impact way, to demonstrate an investment in children and local communities.

MELVA is proudly created by creative children's charity Mortal Fools.

For more information and to download our sponsorship brochure visit:
melva.org.uk/gift-melva



www.mortalfools.org.uk

Culture Club



Eliot Smith

Eliot Smith

Founder and creative director of one of the region's leading contemporary dance companies – Eliot Smith Dance.

Eliot's latest programme are two distinct and captivating dance works that are filled with passion and commitment. In spring and summer 2024, Eliot Smith Dance (ESD) embraces the past and future with the premiere of Paul Taylor's 'DUET' from 1964, alongside Eliot Smith's latest work – 'HUMAN'.

Here Eliot tells us what he enjoys from the world of culture.

Who is your favourite author and why?

I'm dyslexic and I find reading very difficult. However, I do like reading all things about dance history, spirituality, and ancient history, books with images. I recently read Charles Dickens 'A Christmas Carol' which inspired me to choreograph 'The Three Jolly Ghosts of Christmas' at Eliot Smith Dance.

What would be your three Desert Island Discs?

That's a difficult one because I love all genres of music. If I had to choose three now (bearing in mind it might change depending on my mood) I would say, *La Isla Bonita* by Madonna, *Been Thinking* by Tyla, and *Alleluia*. Vidimus Stellam From the vaults

of Westminster Cathedral by Westminster Cathedral Choir & Martin Baker.

Who is your favourite film star and why?

Again, this is a tricky one, so many! I would say Mel Gibson because of his various roles he has played from *Braveheart* to *Lethal Weapon* as well as the gift to direct films.

What are your top three films?

Braveheart: although loosely based on the story of 13th-century Scottish leader William Wallace, it's still an epic.

House of Flying Daggers: love, culture, trust, dancing, beauty, it has it all.

Hocus Pocus: I mean, who doesn't love a bit of hocus pocus!

Which poem left a lasting impression on you?

Not a poem, but a quote:

"There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique.

And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and will be lost."

Martha Graham

Martha Graham was and still is a huge inspiration in my career. She founded the Martha Graham School in New York City in 1926 where I was honoured to attend to learn from some of the best dance teachers in the world. She revolutionised dance and her contribution to the art is immense.

What box sets have you enjoyed?

Band of Brothers, *The Crown*, *The Last Kingdom*.

Who is your favourite artist or performer?

Obviously, Martha Graham and many are surprised that my other favourite is, Ken Dodd.

What is your favourite venue?

Royal Albert Hall has been a top favourite since I was young. It's like a modern-day Colosseum. Can I be cheeky and add a few more, *Sadlers Wells* – the powerhouse for dance, and our very own *Newcastle Theatre Royal* and *Tyne Theatre & Opera House*. I would also have to add *Jacob's Pillow*.

Which musical instrument do you particularly enjoy?

I love percussion, I usually play djembe when teaching contemporary dance, although not the best haha! But it gives us a beat.

From the world of Arts and Culture who would be your ideal dinner party guests?

I would have to say, Martha Graham, Ken Dodd, Robin Howard, and Jesus for a few miracles.

To find out more:

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The Culture Review

Putting your culture and performance at the heart of teambuilding

With Ivan Hollingsworth,
Founder of Centric Consultants

Are you starting to plan your summer team-building retreat or activities?

Trying to find activities that everyone will enjoy can be a minefield, and while it can be tempting to opt for an activity that is just great fun (though that is important) it's critical to consider how the experience you create links to your business cultural and performance goals for the future.

Effective team building is intrinsically linked to your vision, value, and performance objectives and should make space for people to connect with each other in a really meaningful way. Having a great culture isn't just about the nice, fun stuff – research shows they go hand in hand with high-performance teams.

Summer team building days are often a rare opportunity to get colleagues together in one place, away from the rush of day-to-day to-do lists, and are a fantastic opportunity to re-establish your company vision, stimulate conversations, and build trust. A traditional team-building activity combined with an interactive session focused on your company values and what those behaviours look like in action can be a powerful catalyst to reaching your business goals and will strengthen the ways that team members can work together when everyone is back to their day job.

By understanding and building a thriving culture you are in turn investing in creating a performance-centric organisation where everyone succeeds together.

At Centric we can work with you to add value to your summer away days and improve the way your team connects and works together while making sure everyone still has a



Ivan Hollingsworth

brilliant time. That doesn't mean skipping the fun activity, which is still important, it's just about reframing how you bring in your values to the day and use the experience to build connection or trust within your team.

Corporate Rebels by Joost Minnaar

If you're looking for a quick and easy read on what great thinkers and organisations are doing when it comes to company culture, this is the book for you. Corporate Rebels shares 8 radical lessons from 100 of the world's most inspiring companies and gives direct evidence that you can make work enjoyable and rewarding while boosting performance and success.

Reinventing Organisations by Frederic Laloux and Ken Wilber

This is a great accompanying read to Corporate Rebels examining human evolution, how we have developed to form groups, and what that means in the workplace. In this in-depth book, the

authors discuss how the management of organizations seems increasingly out of date and why the problem goes much further than people leaving sectors like education and healthcare in increasingly high volumes. This book looks at how businesses can tackle power games at the top, powerlessness at lower levels, infighting, bureaucracy, and the trend of seemingly endless meetings, change, and cost-cutting programs.

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. For more insights on what company culture truly means, and how to can implement change across your business follow Centric Consultants on LinkedIn or email Ivan directly at ivan@centric-consultants.com

10TH ANNIVERSARY

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Saturday 17th August

SNOW PATROL
THE CHARLATANS
HEAVEN 17
SOPHIE ELLIS-BEXTOR
THE SHERLOCKS
CORELLA
PARA ALTA
CORTNEY DIXON

Sunday 18th August

Richard Ashcroft
BLOSSOMS
JAMIE WEBSTER
LIGHTNING SEEDS
FLEETWOOD BAC
NEW YORK BRASS BAND
HAYLEY MCKAY

Friday 16th August

CRAZY P
SOUNDSYSTEM
JIMPSTER
ABEL
PETE WHARRIER

Saturday 17th August

CALLUM BEATTIE
KEVIN & PERRY
DJ SET
GOOD COP BAD COP
THE DOLLY SHOW
HAUNT THE WOODS
BEAR PARK

Sunday 18th August

REVEREND & THE MAKERS
TOM MEIGHAN
SWIM DEEP
SHELF LIVES
BLACKOUT THE ARCADE
ABBIE OZARD
THE VOLUNTEARS

Saturday 17th August

RICHY AHMED
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MYLES O'BRIEN

THE
COURTYARD



Sunday 18th August

EATS EVERYTHING
FAT TONY
NEVER DULL
HIFI SEAN

Saturday 17th August

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Orangegrass restaurant relocates to enhance accessibility for all

Orangegrass Restaurant in South Shields has relocated to the ground floor of the same building in an effort to become more inclusive for patrons with limited mobility.

Orangegrass Restaurant has been trading since 2010 and has always occupied the upstairs of the building on Mount Terrace, South Shields. However, after some clients found it difficult to navigate the upstairs location, the decision was made to relocate downstairs to make the venue more inclusive.

Known for its authentic Thai food, Orangegrass Restaurant has been a stalwart in the South Shields community. The new ground floor location will continue to offer the same high-quality dining experience while



ensuring greater accessibility for all guests.

Manager at Orangegrass, Titu Akhtar said: "It was clear that the location of the venue was affecting some clients with limited mobility, so the decision was made to relocate downstairs for their ease. We want to include all of our clients, so if this is one positive step that we can do to improve things for them, we will."



Café chain granted licences for two new sites

A North East chain of cafés is expanding, with licences being granted for new sites in Jesmond and Whitley Bay.

The Flower Café, which already has branches in Newcastle city centre and Alnwick, has been granted licences for a new venue on Marine Avenue in Whitley Bay and, most recently, on Osborne Road in Jesmond.

Zafer Sayglier, CEO of hospitality and leisure firm, Sayturk Group, said: "Two years ago we opened the first Flower Café near Monument in Newcastle city centre and it's been a huge hit – it's regularly referred to as one of the most Instagrammable places in town."

"We serve coffee, brunch and gourmet sandwiches and then, in the evening,

the café takes on more of a cocktail bar vibe."

Licences have now been secured for two new Flower Cafés which will also be day-to-evening venues and will be decked out in the distinctive, floral style of the original venue.

Sarah Smith, licensing specialist at Newcastle law firm Sintons, which managed the process, said: "Zafer and his team have already shown that there's an appetite in the North East for places which offer top quality food, drinks and atmosphere, and which also stand out because of their stunning décor."

"The Flower Café is always a visual feast and it will bring something really special to each of its new locations."



Young NE chef cooks up a storm

A young North East chef is making a name for herself after winning a regional cooking accolade and securing a job with James Close, the former chef patron of 2 Michelin star Raby Hunt.

Abigail Smith, a commis chef at Rockliffe Hall, near Darlington, recently competed against other chefs to win the coveted title of North East Young Chef of the Year. She was both the youngest entrant and only young woman in the competition.

It might have been her first serious competition, but cooking is in her family DNA with both her uncle and grandfather former chefs.

This top accolade was secured at the North East Culinary and Trade Awards (NECTA) held at Crowne Plaza Newcastle, organised by Food and Drink North East (FADNE), a regional network supporting and promoting the sector across the region.

As a result of her win, Abigail has earned a coveted spot in the semi-final of the national competition Young Chef of the Year, organised by the Craft Guild of Chefs.

The 18-year-old from Darlington caught the eye of many top regional chefs but it was James Close who offered her a job and promotion to chef de partie at his new summer residency TERRA, which opens at Rockliffe Hall on June 13.

Abigail, who is still studying at New College Durham, explained the competition was a nerve-wracking exercise: "It was a little bit intimidating. I was up against older chefs. I was both the youngest and only girl in the competition."

"Everything went fairly smoothly during the morning competition. The only issues were my equipment, which kept breaking on me, but somehow, I got on with it. When the result was announced I did get a bit emotional – relief as much as anything."

She is delighted to get the new job with James Close and one day hopes to become a head chef and even run her own restaurant.

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Newcastle Aspire Lounge Marks a World First

Aspire, Swissport's lounge business, has unveiled a new three-tier service product across the expanded lounge space at Newcastle Airport, offering travelers an unrivalled choice in luxury and comfort ahead of their journeys.

Aspire Executive Lounges and Newcastle Airport have opened their brand-new lounge, following a multi-million refurbishment and expansion to the lounge footprint, offering a significant increase to capacity for passengers wishing to relax and make use of the facilities during the busy summer period.

As part of its strategy to bring innovation and an enhanced customer experience, Newcastle will be the first lounge to offer three lounge products to passengers. Alongside the core Aspire offering will be two new options, Luxe by Aspire and The Suite by Aspire.

Luxe by Aspire benefits from exclusive self-service food and beverage options and bespoke private and open working spaces aimed particularly for the business traveler.

The Suite by Aspire provides dedicated staff providing meet and greet and a fully hosted table service akin to a high-end restaurant and serving freshly prepared meals.

All three tiers will benefit from a wide range of delicious food and beverages as well as convenient charging facilities, high speed internet, digital newspapers and magazines, plus HD television and flight screens.

The new lounge was meticulously designed in collaboration with award-winning commercial interior designers DV8 Designs and will create an additional 17 permanent job roles.

David Collyer, Global Vice President of Executive Lounges, says: "We're delighted to bring this new product to Newcastle. This new approach is the result of extensive research and a deep understanding of what our customers truly want from their lounge experience."

“

Our vision is to translate the premium hotel experience into the executive lounge experience

"Lounges have seen a huge increase in demand from passengers wanting an elegant space to relax and dine, whether for business or pleasure. The addition of Luxe and The Suite will mark a real step-change in delivering the premium service our guests are looking for."

He adds: "Our vision is to translate the premium hotel experience into the executive lounge experience. Aspire is the first in the aviation sector to join the prestigious Institute of Hospitality and UK Hospitality, and we are fully committed to becoming the world's leading airport hospitality brand."

Dean Ward, Director of Commercial at Newcastle International Airport, says: "We are committed to



giving our passengers the best possible Airport experience and work closely with our business partners to ensure that we continue to provide the products and services that are passengers are looking for.

"The new Aspire Lounge is stunning and will provide passengers with a luxurious environment to enjoy prior to boarding their flight. The lounge is just one of several, multi-million pound improvement projects that we have been working hard on over the past 12 months, which we are very much looking forward to passengers seeing on their next visit!"

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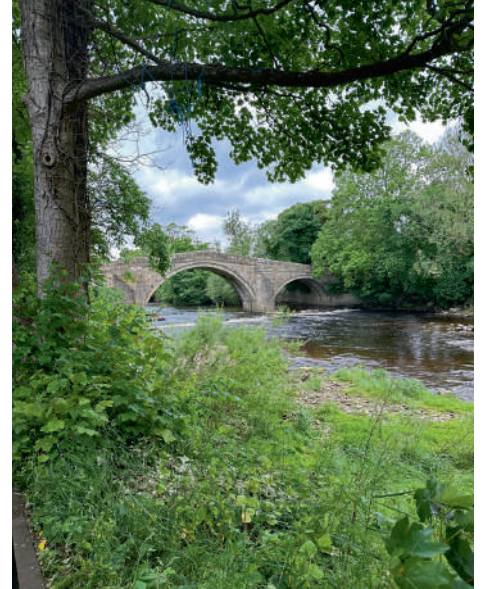
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Places to go...24 hours in Ilkley

Before I introduce you to this month's Yorkshire delight, I would remind you that the Saltburn Food Festival takes place on Sunday 28 July starting at 10am until 6pm. Saltburn is a small town and the difficulty of finding a car parking place alone should persuade you to go by train to the station at the heart of the action, with a new service hourly by TransPennine from Yarm, as well as the half-hourly Northern service from Darlington. I have been earlier this season but the highly atmospheric sea fret stopped me getting decent photographs.



So I have been also 18 miles north west of Leeds to Ilkley, another town now at the end of the line, with a half-hourly electrified train service. Several pubs around the railway station offer accommodation but the best value was at the Craiglunds, a former hydropathic resort on the very edge of Ilkley Moor which involved a haul with my overnight bag up Cowpasture Road.

It's the only spa site which is still operating as a hotel. I checked in at the first opportunity at 1500 and took a hotel towel with my trunks down to the Lido, a marvellous 1930s creation where the water temperature was only 16OC. The indoor pool was in use for lessons so I remained in the open air and after a brief plodge in the foot-deep shallow end headed instead to the equally marvellous 1930s café. A lovely place for a summer's day out, but not quite warm enough on 7th June.

Duly changed, I explored the riverside parks on both sides of the river and found the old bridge at the start/finish point of the Dales Way, an 82-mile walk to Bowness on Windermere, and a good pint of Timothy Taylor at the handily located Riverside Inn. Heading back East, I found the town has a thriving arts scene and a great deal of entertainment, and I enjoyed a live broadcast from the National Theatre of the play Nye, about Aneurin Bevan (father of the National Health Service), broadcasting to the entirely full sofas of the Ilkley Cinema, apparently the 100th cinema release of National Theatre Live.

The following morning after breakfast I was up on the Moor (baht 'at, without a hat) to find the White Wells spa which does not have its own website, nor leaflet, only a telephone number and a sign at the entrance to the Moor which states the Spa is open when the flag is flying. It was, but the water temperature was only 50C, making yesterday's Lido experience seem positively Mediterranean. The gentleman there made me a cup of coffee and I saw the spa railings around a small pool with floor covered with small coins. I felt the attraction could surely be developed better as the only original spa still in use. He told me my hotel had been built in 1859, but no longer offers spa treatments. I walked across the Moor past a tarn and down into the hotel grounds. Spa treatments in Ilkley mostly revolved around cold water treatments of pure water, not imbibing mineral salts.

Not wanting to go back again for my bag, I wheeled it to the Toy Museum (20 min max), up the enchanting Mill Ghyll at the top of

Brook Street, round past Bettys (with its signature accompanying queue), had a free visit to the interesting Manor House built on the site of the Roman fort Olicana. Local people are therefore Olicanians. An enjoyable lunch at the Brooks' Sri Lankan restaurant had me ready for the 1440 train to Leeds and home.

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Off China's beaten tourist track

By Stuart Forster

Travel has the potential to both impress and help us reevaluate our understanding of the world. Spending six nights in China's Hunan province made me realise how little I knew about the dynamic country that supplies most of the items I buy from Amazon and discover it offers much for travellers beyond Beijing's Forbidden City.

At the turn of the year, finding Changsha on a map would have been beyond me. Hunan is in China's southeast and, as I discovered during a six-day group tour, its provincial capital is home to more than 10 million people.

Mao Zedong, China's leader from 1949 until his death in 1976, studied in Changsha. In 1925 he wrote the poem *Changsha*, which mentions standing alone on Orange Island looking at surrounding hills. Stretching for 3.7 miles in the Xiang River, the world's longest inland river island bears a monumental sculpture of Mao which is illuminated at night.

A river cruise, which set sail from the island shortly after nightfall, proved a way of appreciating illuminated waterfront buildings. Impressively, LED lighting on high-rise facades was programmed to display colourful animations, including a cartoon train speeding along the riverside.

Accommodation in a stylish room on the 47th floor of the Meixi Lake Hotel, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Changsha, provided fine views of the surrounding area. Following an

overnight flight to China, I woke at 5.30 am and decided on a pre-breakfast stroll to view and photograph the neighbouring culture and arts centre. Spaceship-like, the vast building was designed by Zaha Hadid Architects and completed in 2019.

On the plaza in front of the arts centre, a group of tai chi enthusiasts began their morning ritual. They approved my non-verbal request to photograph and indicated I should join them. Doing so provided a gentle yet surprisingly thorough workout.

International breakfast options were available in my hotel but I decided to try local delicacies. After slurping a bowl of rice noodles topped with stir-fried pork and chilli, I gingerly tried a slice of the blackened dish known as 'stinky tofu'. Surprisingly pleasant to eat – given a name that no international marketing agency would bestow today – I added a couple more pieces onto my plate.

That fuelled a visit to the Hunan Museum, which houses a Chinese archaeological find eclipsed only by the discovery of the Terracotta Army in Xian. Our guide explained

that we would see the mummified remains of Lady Dai. Discovered during the construction of a hospital near Changsha, the contents of her and neighbouring tombs provide a wealth of insights into life more than 2,000 years ago.

We travelled to Zhangjiajie, approximately 200 miles northwest of the provincial capital, by bullet train. Displays within the cabin stated that we were speeding above paddy fields in excess of 240km/h (150mph). Zhangjiajie is the gateway to the Wulingyuan Scenic Area, whose pillar-like rocks and dense forestation provided film director James Cameron with inspiration for the scenery in *Avatar*.

Travelling as part of a tour group with priority access to the Bailong Elevator, a cliffside glass-fronted lift that runs for 326 metres (almost 1,070ft), meant avoiding queuing for more than two hours. Any tinge of guilt evaporated on viewing the rugged landscape from scenic lookouts.

The area is also home to the world's highest glass bridge. I was pleased simply to nervously shuffle across while gawping at Zhangjiajie Grand Canyon 260 metres (853ft) below. Four of my travelling companions enjoyed the buzz of bungee jumping.

Riding China's longest cable car the 30 minutes towards Tianmen Shan, whose name means Heaven's Gate Mountain in English, how could any traveller feel anything other than blessed while appreciating the region's remarkable natural beauty?



Travel information

Wendy Wu Tours' (wendywutours.co.uk) operates group tours that visit Zhangjiajie, including the 16-day Gems of China (priced from £3,990) and new six-day Zhangjiajie and Changsha tour.

Hainan Airlines (hainanairlines.com) operates direct flights between London Heathrow and Changsha.



Zen Group in Durham thriving

Exciting times for family owned Zen Group in Durham.

Tango has launched its new Brunch Menu which is served daily from 10am- 12 noon.

The extensive menu means that there's something for everyone including the Breakfast Burger (smashed sausage patty, thick cut farmhouse bacon, folded omelette, rosti potato & American cheese) The Full Tango, Turkish Eggs, Sourdough crumpets three ways...and lots of kids options. If you fancy a brunch tippie they've got Mimosas, Bellinis and three different Bloody Mary's!

The new brunch menu's timing is perfect as Tango have also just opened their new outdoor terrace with fabulous views across the river.

Whitechurch is the newest edition to Zen Group- located at the busy Church Street cross road- they are famous for their

warm and inviting atmosphere...and their Sunday roast! The team at Whitechurch pride themselves on serving fresh, locally sourced produce. The vibrant and inviting space offers a unique dining experience for all those who appreciate high-quality ingredients and a commitment to supporting local farmers and suppliers. They've also built up a strong following for their coffee, brunch, beers and wine...and are super popular with residents, students and visitors to the city. They've got something pretty exciting in the pipeline - so if you are thinking about tying the knot or hosting a beautiful, understated party watch this space... (and their socials).

The Rabbit Hole isn't your average restaurant- it's a place where good times and great food come together. The Cantonese-fusion food has been designed for sharing and has been putting smiles on diners' faces for years. It's all about affordable luxury.

In a world of indeed city of big chains the The Rabbit Hole flies the flag for individuality. Not far from the madding crowds of Durham's streets, you can find it on Hallgarth Street, less than an eight minute walk from the centre...when you enter you are transported from the historic

cobble stones to the elegance of a 1920's Shanghai speakeasy. If you haven't been- it's time to book a table and find out what all the fuss is about.

ZEN restaurant has been open for 19 years. The first and original Thai Asian dining in Durham, it quite simply is an institution. Situated near the feet of the cathedral in a hidden street where the bad guys reside (Court Lane) it offers a peaceful dining experience with flavours to tickle your tastebuds. Zen has stood the test of time, a perfect sanctuary in the leafy city.

At lunchtime find some calm at Zen, indulge in some light Asian tapas to refuel, or maybe unwind with an exotic mocktail for a mid-afternoon pick-me-up. Come the evening things liven up a little; the lights go down, and the volume goes up as you are transported to a little piece of Bangkok in Durham.

So whether you fancy Thai, Cantonese, brunch or Sunday lunch- Zen Group in Durham has it covered!

www.zendurham.co.uk

www.therabbitholedurham.co.uk

www.tangodurham.co.uk

www.whitechurchdurham.com





A Tale As Old As Tyne

A mother and daughter are bringing smiles to the region's children and adults alike, with their latest venture.

Tale As Old As Tyne is a North East based character company that strives to add extra magic to events from private parties to restaurant openings and public celebrations!

Launched by Sophie Brindle-Clifford and Antonia Brindle, the company offers a wide range of packages for parties and events of all sizes. With a choice of six princesses, and Wednesday Adams, customers are spoilt for choice. The team even offer a bedtime reading package for sleep over parties! 20-year-old Sophie, who is also a second-year student at Newcastle University, said:

"I have been part of stage schools and working with another character company for as long as I can remember, but with my studies I wanted to be able to be flexible and do more, so we set up Tale As Old As Tyne and so far we have done some amazing events.

"As well as private parties, we regularly appear at Sambucas in Forest Hall for "Lunch with..." events, have done summer festivals and fetes, appeared at fayres and entertained children at adult's parties and appeared at fund raising events. I love every job we do and now we have expanded the team with other experienced princesses we can have more than one at any one time!"

On offer is a range of princesses including Princess Beauty, the Snow Princess, the Ice Queen, Tower Princess, Mermaid Princess and Princess Cinders.

Co-Director on Tale As Old As Tyne and director of marketing consultancy, Get Brindled, Mum Antonia said: "We love working with a wide range of companies and non-for-profit organisations. All our corporate event services are specifically catered to suit your business and event needs. Working alongside your team, we can create your perfect package and love the opportunity to be really creative.

"Our princess don't just appear, smile and wave. They do activities, sing, read, and educate children too. Our costumes are also of the highest quality having been sourced from all over the world."

Packages can be chosen bespoke or built to specific needs and include an option perfect for under 3s, crowning ceremonies, meet and greets, themed arts and crafts, magical makeovers, and sing-alongs.

Ranging from 30 minute to 2-hour bookings, all the prices are available on www.taleasoldastyne.co.uk



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The Week2Week team from L-R: Amanda Lambert, Janine Russell, Sarah Buck, Claire Parry and Caroline Blackett.

Week2Week wins Highly Commended at the Relocate Global Awards

Week2Week is proud to announce that it has been awarded Highly Commended by the Judges in the category of Best Local Serviced Apartment Provider at the 20th anniversary of the Relocate Global Awards. The prestigious event took place recently at the historic Two Temple Place in London.

dedication to customer satisfaction, innovative solutions, and superior service standards.

The evening at Two Temple Place was not only a celebration of the industry's finest but also an opportunity to network and share insights with peers. The beautiful venue, with its rich history and stunning architecture, provided the perfect backdrop for this milestone event.

"We are grateful to the Relocate Global Awards for this recognition and for organising such a fantastic evening," added Claire Parry. "We look forward to continuing to set the standard for serviced apartment providers and to serving our guests with the same dedication and excellence that has earned us this commendation."

About Week2Week:

Week2Week is a leading provider of serviced accommodation, offering high-quality, fully furnished properties for short and long-term stays. With a focus on comfort, convenience, and exceptional service, Week2Week ensures that every guest enjoys a home-away-from-home experience.

For more information about Week2Week and their serviced apartments and houses, please visit: www.week2week.co.uk or contact: +44 (0)191 281 3129.

The Relocate Global Awards are a renowned event celebrating excellence and innovation within the relocation and serviced apartment industry. This year's 20th-anniversary gala was a spectacular evening, bringing together industry leaders, experts, and distinguished guests from around the world to honour the achievements and advancements of the past year.

"We are thrilled to have been recognised by Relocate Global in the Best Local Serviced Apartment Provider category and to have been awarded Highly Commended," said Claire Parry, Director of Week2Week. "This accolade is a testament to our commitment

in providing exceptional service and high-quality accommodations to our guests. It is an honour to be acknowledged among such esteemed companies in the industry."

The judges praised Week2Week, stating, "Week2Week Serviced Apartments are a people-centred company that employs high standards to provide a welcoming and supportive environment to those on the move and who are clearly committed to local developments and causes."

Week2Week has consistently demonstrated excellence in delivering premium serviced apartment solutions, ensuring a comfortable and seamless experience for their guests. This recognition highlights the company's





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We are happy to arrange cleaning and supply fresh linen and towels. We cater for team changes too.



The Inn Collection Group is Traveller's Choice winners



Cosy Inn stays across the North of England and Wales now come with the reassurance of a Tripadvisor Traveller's Choice award, with 20 of The Inn Collection Group's pubs with rooms earning the accolade for 2024.

Formerly Certificates of Excellence, Traveller's Choice awards honour the favourite destinations, hotels, restaurants and things to do, based on the reviews and opinions collected from travellers and diners worldwide on Tripadvisor over 12 months.

The accolades recognise businesses that consistently demonstrate a commitment to hospitality excellence and consistently earn great reviews, with award-winners among the top 10% of listings on Tripadvisor.

With winners in all seven counties where The Inn Collection Group's properties are found, there's a wealth of choice in the destinations to head to and enjoy.

The Amble Inn, The Hog's Head Inn and The Lindisfarne Inn are perfectly placed to explore the stunning coast and rugged country of Northumberland while The Commissioners Quay Inn offers the

opportunity to discover the lesser-known draws around Blyth.

The golden sands at Seaburn can be sampled from their namesake inn, whilst The Seaton Lane Inn is ideal for treasure hunters on the search for sea glass in Seaham.

A pair of King's are also present, with a Durham city centre break beckoning at The Kingslodge Inn and a more active ramble around Roseberry Topping ideally suited from The King's Head Inn at Newton under Roseberry.

Its six out of 10 in Cumbria with The Angel Inn (Bowness), The Coniston Inn and The Pheasant Inn (Bassenthwaite) joining two Ambleside properties The Temperance Inn and The Waterhead Inn, alongside one of the oldest pubs in the Lake District, The Swan Grasmere

There is strong representation in Yorkshire too, with The King's Head joined by The Northallerton Inn, The Ripon Inn, Whitby's The Stables and York's Dean Court making the grade.

Completing the collection, Morecambe's renowned art deco marvel, the Midland Hotel and the groups sole trading site in North Wales, The Bull's Head Inn at Beaumaris are ideal for an adventure outside of the group's main heartlands.

Reacting to the wins, head of marketing at The Inn Collection Group Louise Harris said: "We are delighted that so many of our fabulous pubs with rooms have struck such a chord with our guests and that their feedback has generated these awards.

"Tripadvisor is one of the go-to platforms

people use to plan their getaways because its rankings are based on what visitors are saying about where they are staying, so it's great for the teams at the inns that their efforts and service are being celebrated.

"The awards are also a testament to the significant investments and renovations that many of our inns have undergone recently, all adding to the experience that The Inn Collection Group can offer."

As the world's largest travel guidance platform, Tripadvisor has unparalleled authority with travellers and diners. With the awards based on genuine guest feedback, they are a valuable and trustworthy designation of great places to stay and visit.

To be eligible, properties, destinations or points of interest must have been listed on Tripadvisor for at least 12 months, and must receive a threshold number of reviews within the evaluation period that maintain or exceed a minimum bubble rating.

The Inn Collection Group's Traveller's Choice winners for 2024 are:

The Amble Inn • The Angel Inn • The Bull's Head Inn • The Commissioners Quay Inn • The Coniston Inn • Dean Court • The Hog's Head Inn • The King's Head Inn • The Kingslodge Inn • The Lindisfarne Inn • Midland Hotel • The Northallerton Inn • The Pheasant Inn • The Ripon Inn • The Seaburn Inn • The Seaton Lane Inn • The Stables • The Swan, Grasmere • The Temperance Inn • The Waterhead Inn

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Branches – Where flavours and atmosphere flourish

By Jackie Marston

I don't know if everyone is like us, but since Covid, some excellent restaurants that we used to frequent have just fallen off the radar. One such place, for us, was Branches in Jesmond. We used to absolutely love it, especially their legendary Sunday lunches. We decided to go recently, as it popped up on my Facebook newsfeed and we were so glad we did. To say that it was one of the best lunches we've had for a long time would be an understatement.

We arrived at the lovely, floral, airy restaurant and warmly greeted by front of house manager, Stuart, who in turn explained that our waitress was Yve. Both so friendly, warming and knowledgeable when it came to the menu.

The venue itself is so beautiful, with eye-catching flowers all over the place – it looks stunning. Before ordering, we were brought hot, crusty bread, with whipped butter and basil salt, which was so good. I had to stop myself, as I could have feasted on this until the basket was empty!

Richard went with the marinated slow cooked beetroot and goats cheese. This was made up of multi-coloured beets, French goats cheese, which was extremely creamy, fennel seeds, infused filo pastry and fresh honeycomb and apple. The honeycomb was a new one to both of us and absolutely set this dish alight. Again, a work of art on the plate, but a real delight on the tongue too. I chose from the Prix Fixe menu and had pan fried chilli and garlic king prawns. This came

with a lovely zingy mango salsa, coriander, charred lime, and salsa. A delight for the tastebuds!

In between the starter and main course there was also a savoury bon-bon each, which was crunchy, herby, and filled with chorizo. One bite of deliciousness was in this parcel of goodness, and it was gratefully eaten in record time.

For main I had chosen tagliatelle carbonara, which came with a crispy, soft in the middle, poached egg. The smoked pancetta and the aged Grana Padano was so complementary to this dish, and although I could only eat a couple of mouthfuls of it, they were fine with me taking it home, as I knew my appetite wouldn't manage three courses and I had my eyes firmly set on dessert. The egg, oozing over the carbonara was a sight to behold and enhanced the flavour to another level.

Richard chose the oven roasted bass and shellfish. This came with a huge piece of fish, cooked to perfection, cream, spring greens, buttered new potatoes and a hint of

lobster oil. In his words, the best fish dish he'd eaten in a long time.

Again, in between this course and our chosen desserts was the cabaret of smoking strawberries and cream, done the Branches Way! This was a strawberries and cream infusion, which when the flavoured essence and dry ice added, was not only a sight for sore eyes, but it also smelt of fresh strawberries in a field. A lovely, artistic touch which just added to the whole experience.

Desserts were bourbon sticky toffee pudding with caramel ice cream and cinder toffee and my absolute favourite. Not usually one for sweets, my husband, but he said this ticked every box; creamy ice cream, deliciously thick and rich toffee sauce and a light pudding texture made this dish extremely moreish. We were sharing desserts and so the other one was their Valrhona Dulcey Cremieux with dulce de leche, nougatine, dark chocolate aero and Jersey mile ice cream. A rich, creamy dessert with flavours galore going on, each one complementing the others. This was a light dessert and ideal for someone who wants to finish their meal off with a creamy, sweet treat.

For a glass of white wine, a pint of lager, a coffee, an espresso martini, and a bottle of water, along with the meal itself the total bill was £130.55, which considering some of the dishes we ordered incurred a supplement was exceptionally good value for money. Their prix fixe menu is just £27.95 at lunch!

Like I said at the beginning of this review, some places just fall off your map for one reason or another, but we'll be sure to make sure this one doesn't again, as it was one of the best restaurants we've been to in a long time!

Branches Jesmond, 9 Osborne Road, NE2 2AE. 0191 239 9924. www.branchesrestaurant.co.uk



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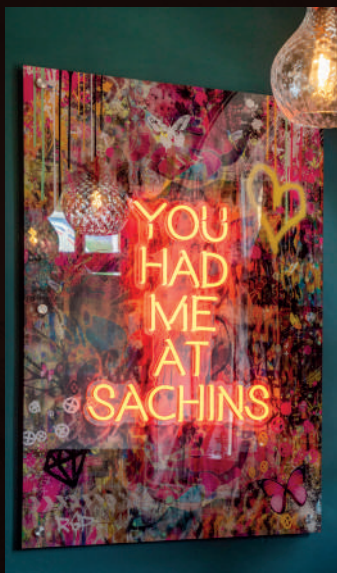
Durham Cricket Shoot Day

Durham Cricket recently welcomed 30 teams to their shoot day, hosted at Thornley Hall Farm with JC Marsh Sporting Clays.

All teams shot at 6 stands, including pigeon, rabbit, woodcock, pheasant, partridge and duck.

We would like to thank Story Homes and Wisemove for sponsoring the day, and of course all our guests. The winning team was Permatt Forklifts Trucks, followed by Dere Street Homes and Berry's Jewellers.





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From South Shields to Bangkok: A gastronomic adventure with Thai Home Cooking North East By Geeta Patel-Ral



Attending Santana's traditional Thai cooking class in her South Shields home was an absolute delight and a gastronomical revelation. As avid cooks and Thai food enthusiasts, we had the opportunity to explore and recreate some of our favourite Thai dishes from scratch.

Santana's love for Thai cuisine, honed from her early years assisting her mother in their native street food café outside Bangkok, is evident in her passion for teaching. Her transition into the business in 2019 and the subsequent shift to online cook-alongs during the COVID-19 pandemic are testaments to her adaptability, resilience, and commitment to sharing her love for Thai cuisine.

What makes Santana's class unique is her unwavering dedication to authenticity. Her insistence on using traditional Thai ingredients, like Kaffir lime leaves and lemongrass, whose exotic aromas transport you straight to the heart of Thailand, enriches the cooking experience. As we cooked, she carefully explained the importance and unique profiles of

these ingredients, further enhancing our understanding and appreciation of Thai cuisine.

We enjoyed cooking from Menu C, which included Tom Yum Soup, Thai Green Curry, and Pork Dim Sum - all personal favourites. The Tom Yum Soup was so delicious that I craved it days after the session. Santana's commitment to hygiene is commendable, as evidenced by her level 2 food hygiene certification and the immaculate condition of her kitchen.

Santana's Thai cooking class is more than just a culinary course. It's an immersive cultural and sensory experience, a heartwarming journey into the soul of Thai cuisine, and a testament to Santana's love for food and her desire to share her culinary heritage with others. Whether you are a seasoned cook or a beginner in the kitchen, a session with Santana will leave you with cherished memories and delicious recipes to recreate at home.

Santana's classes provide a practical guide to cooking Thai dishes and delve into the cultural significance and traditional methods of Thai cooking. Each session is structured to ensure participants get a hands-on experience, from chopping vegetables to balancing the flavours, all under Santana's watchful and encouraging guidance.

The class starts with a warm welcome and a brief introduction to Thai cuisine, its history, and its influence on Santana's cooking style. We then move on to the practical part, where Santana demonstrates each recipe step before we try our hands at it. Her patience and clear instructions make it easy for

everyone to follow along, regardless of their cooking experience.

One of the highlights of the class was making the Thai Green Curry. Santana showed us how to enhance the curry paste, blending fresh ingredients in a mortar and pestle, making all the flavour difference. The rich, aromatic curry we created was a true highlight and a testament to the importance of traditional cooking techniques.

The Pork Dim Sum was another standout dish. Santana's expertise in folding the dim sum and steaming them to perfection was impressive. She shared tips and tricks that only someone with deep knowledge and experience could provide, making the entire process feel approachable and rewarding.

Santana's Thai cooking class is a must-try for anyone interested in Thai cuisine. It's an educational, fun, and deeply satisfying experience offering much more than cooking lessons. It's a journey into the rich culinary traditions of Thailand, guided by someone who lives and breathes Thai food. The upcoming 4th set menu for autumn/winter 2024 promises to bring her students even more excitement and delicious dishes. With plans to offer private dinner parties and an openness to new opportunities in the North East's food industry, Santana's culinary journey is one to watch and be a part of.

With prices starting at £55 per person, it's an experience not to be missed.

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The Blackbird's descendent returns to the nest



Margaret - seated - with son Steve and daughter in law Julie

A Sunderland great grandmother, who learned in lockdown that she is descended from one of Northumberland's oldest families, has paid an emotional visit to a former ancestral home.

Margaret Pickard – formerly Errington – 84, from Fulwell, had no idea her family could trace its roots back for centuries.

But, while shielding at home during the pandemic, her son Steve started researching the family tree.

And his research revealed that, not only have Erringtons lived in Northumberland since before the Norman Conquest in 1066, but that an historic building linked to the family still survives.

Now a multi award-winning pub, The Blackbird, at Ponteland, stands on the exact site where Henry III of England and Alexander of Scotland, signed a peace treaty in the 13th century.

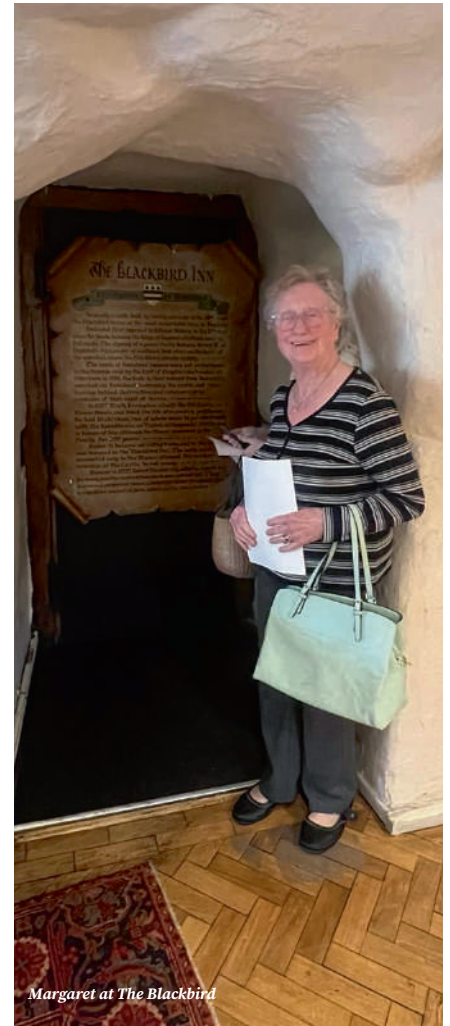
Peace was not to last, however and a century later the building – and much of the village – was ruined by an army of Scots retreating north from battle.

It remained almost derelict until, in 1597, Mark Errington – one of Margaret's ancestors – rebuilt the Old Castle as a manor house and lived the life of a country gentleman.

Little is known of him other than that he had 16 children, but the Manor remained in the family for 200 years before, later, becoming an eating house and, in the last century, licensed as 'The Blackbird Inn'.

The early publicans allowed the ancient remains of the castle to rot away. However, in 1935, Robert Deuchar Ltd, carried out extensive restoration work, preserving the ancient tower, Tudor fireplace and many other features, which can be seen today.

And when Steve – whose research has also



Margaret at The Blackbird

revealed "we're descended from Plantagenet kings" - contacted its current owner, the Northumberland Pub Company, staff made sure Margaret and the family received a right royal welcome.

"It was so emotional for mam," said Steve. "They looked after us beautifully and they showed us where our ancestor's memory is preserved on a plaque."

"We've always been interested in history as a family but when you can place your own family members at the heart of it all it just makes it really come alive."

"We can't stop thinking about Mark Errington and his family and the lives they must have lived and it's fantastic that his home is not only still standing but has been so carefully preserved and cared for."

Stuart Young, owner of Northumberland Pub Company said it had been a "genuine pleasure to welcome Margaret and her family."

"The Blackbird is one of the oldest inns in the North East," he said, "and it was lovely to welcome the descendants of a family who had once called it home."



The Blackbird

For more information about the Blackbird, or to book, visit www.theblackbirdponteland.co.uk



Fathers Day Fun

By Michael Grahamslaw

After the success of our 100th edition I treated the Northern Insight team to a night at the wonderful Lui's restaurant in the heart of Newcastle's Quayside.

We had a faultless evening so when the opportunity arose to return and sample their Sunday lunch menu, on Fathers Day with my family, I jumped at the chance.

The day also heralded the start of England's Euros campaign and it was great to see the the Lui's team decked out in three lions finery on arrival.

Shown to a lovely spacious table by our genial host Mark, we perused the mouthwatering menu over a lovely chilled glass of Pinot Grigio.

I kicked off with the classic prawn cocktail which ticked all of the boxes with its simplicity, elegance and refreshing taste.

Mrs G enjoyed spicy arancini which consisted of risotto rice balls with nduja sausage, mozzarella cheese and a breadcrumb coating. She devoured every mouthful and pronounced this delicious.

My daughter Holly and son Jack meanwhile both really enjoyed stuffed mushrooms with garlic, goats cheese and red onion.

After a suitable comfort break we moved onto the mains which certainly didn't disappoint either.

I chose roasted rump of beef which was a delectable and hearty dish that showcased the rich flavours and texture of this superb cut of beef.

Lisa and Holly both chose roast chicken breast supreme which was succulent and flavourful and provided a delightful and satisfying culinary experience.

Jack enjoyed confit lamb shoulder which he pronounced as one of the most tasty Sunday roasts he'd ever had. High praise indeed!

All dishes were served with crispy roast potatoes, creamy mash, seasonal vegetables and the most amazing 'bin lid' Yorkshire puddings.

This was fabulous fayre befitting of one of my favourite days of the year.

Admitting defeat we sidestepped dessert although the cheesecake of the day certainly caught my eye for next time around.

With exemplary service throughout Lui's again ticked every box. Highly recommended.

Reservations can be made via the website on www.luisbarandkitchen.co.uk





“

*...we have always
prided ourselves on
being a showcase
for what is good
about our region...*

3 + 2 = 99

Wingrove adds new brands as century approaches. Next year is going to be a major milestone for the Wingrove Motor Company because it will be celebrating its centenary.

Wingrove will continue with its proud record of being the region's largest family owned and family operated car dealership group. The company has been in the same family since day one...August 10th 1925 to be precise.

The names of Citroen and, more recently, Peugeot and DS Automobiles, have been synonymous with Wingrove....but now two more manufacturers will be added to the choice of new cars available at Wingrove.

Alfa Romeo and Jeep make a welcome return to the North East.

It doesn't end there because Wingrove Motor Company will also be operating a servicing facility for Fiat, Abarth and Fiat Professional at its dealerships.

"This has been a logical move for us as we push ahead with a 5-10 plan which will see the Wingrove Motor Company restructure and grow," said Managing Director Josh Parker who is now the 5th generation of his family to lead the company. "Alfa Romeo, Jeep, Fiat and Abarth are part of the Stellantis group which also includes Citroen, Peugeot and DS, so it's something we've been considering for over a year.

It also means that we can expand our dealership offering and increase the size of our workforce at both of our main sites on Newcastle West Road and the Silverlink in Wallsend. By the end of this year I expect our staff numbers to have reached the 100 mark. This is in line with our projections which show a workforce increase of around 10 per cent over the next year or so and a 20 per cent increase in our turnover, taking it to an estimated £60 million."

Wingrove's hugely impressive Silverlink dealership will see the name of Jeep added to the Citroen and Peugeot brands, making it the single largest site in the region for electric and hybrid cars and vans. Silverlink will also offer servicing for Fiat Professional commercial vehicles as well as for Citroen and Peugeot vans. The latest Jeep Wrangler and award-winning Jeep Avenger models will be available.

The Newcastle West Road site will become the North East's new home for Alfa Romeo. The Italian manufacturer's exciting range of cars, including the Stelvio, Tonale and recently updated Giulia, will be on show. The West Road dealership will also be the base for Wingrove's DS Automobiles operation as well as adding servicing facilities for Fiat and Abarth to those which are currently in place for Peugeot and Citroen.

"As a family company, born and bred in the North East, we have always prided ourselves on being a showcase for what is good about our region. We cherish family values and, from the feedback we receive, it is obvious that our customers appreciate the way in which we operate. The fact that two prestigious brands like Jeep and Alfa Romeo are wanting to join Wingrove and return to the North East, is not only an expression of how confident Stellantis is about our company but also in the North East as a whole.



Needless to say that we're really excited about having Alfa Romeo and Jeep join our Citroen, Peugeot and DS brands, as well as offering servicing for Fiat, Fiat Professional and Abarth. We see this as another forward step in our future plans. This latest move will boost our commercial performance and allow the company to increase its head count."

Consequently, it's no surprise to find that the Wingrove Motor Company has been nominated for two awards by the North East Chamber of Commerce. They're up for the national Local Economy of the Future, Business of the Year award, as well as being finalists in the regional Larger Business of the Year category. Praise indeed.

These are hugely exciting times for the Wingrove Motor Company. Their dealerships have always been the go-to places for Peugeot, Citroen and DS...but now they're also the places for Jeep and Alfa Romeo as well offering servicing for Fiat, Fiat Professional and Abarth.

As the firm heads into its 100th year, it looks like the latest chapter in the company's history is going to be another success.

For more information on any of the brands, head to www.wingrovetorgroup.co.uk or call into their dealerships on Newcastle's West Road or the Silverlink in Wallsend.



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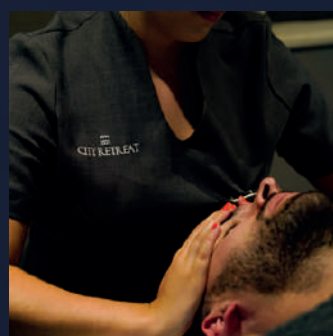
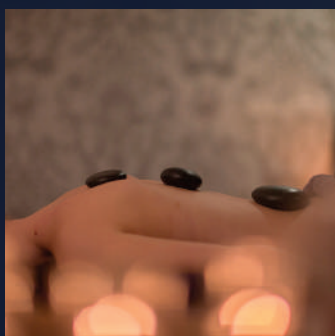
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David Fairlamb

Out of your Comfort Zone

Exercising beyond your comfort zone offers benefits that extend far beyond physical health. It is a practice that fosters mental resilience, boosts self-confidence, and enhances overall well-being, making it invaluable at any age.

Physical Benefits

Enhanced physical fitness

Challenging workouts, whether through intensity, duration, or complexity, push your body to adapt and improve. When you constantly push out of your comfort zone, your cardiovascular system becomes more efficient, your muscles grow stronger, and your endurance increases. This leads to better overall physical health, reducing the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and obesity.

Improved flexibility and balance

Engaging in diverse and demanding physical activities can improve flexibility and balance, which are crucial as we age. Yoga, pilates, or even dance can help maintain and enhance these attributes, reducing the risk of falls and injuries.

Accelerated weight loss and maintenance

Pushing beyond your comfort zone often involves high-intensity workouts that burn more calories. This not only boosts your metabolism and weight loss but also helps maintain a healthy weight, contributing to better metabolic health and reduced strain on your joints and organs.

Mental and Emotional Benefits

Increased mental resilience

Pushing outside of your comfort zone requires mental toughness and discipline. The ability to endure physical discomfort and push through fatigue creates a resilience that translates to other areas of life. This mental strength is invaluable when facing personal and professional challenges, making it easier to cope with day to day stress and adversity.

Enhanced cognitive function

Intense physical activity has been linked to improved cognitive function. It stimulates the production of brain-derived neurotrophic factor, which supports brain health and enhances learning, memory, and cognitive performance. Regularly challenging yourself physically can lead to you being sharper mentally allowing better decision-making skills.

Improved mood and emotional well-being

Exercise, particularly when it is demanding, triggers the release of endorphins, often referred to as feel good hormones. These endorphins help reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, leading to an improved overall mood. Moreover, the sense of achievement after completing a challenging workout can significantly boost self-esteem and emotional well-being.

Building confidence through exercise

Pushing your physical limits in exercise translates to increased confidence in your ability to face and overcome challenges. This confidence stems from several sources.

Sense of accomplishment

Overcoming physical challenges fosters a profound sense of accomplishment. Each milestone reached, whether it's running an extra mile, lifting heavier weights, or mastering a difficult yoga pose, reinforces the belief in your ability. This sense of achievement boosts self-confidence, empowering you to tackle other life challenges with the same determination and belief in your capabilities.

Goal setting and achievement

Regularly setting and achieving fitness goals teaches the value of perseverance and discipline. The skills learned in setting realistic goals, creating plans to achieve them, and persevering through difficulties are directly applicable to personal and professional life. This process enhances self-efficacy, the belief that you can influence outcomes in your life.

Overcoming fear and discomfort

Facing and overcoming physical discomfort and fear during exercise builds a tolerance for other forms of discomfort in life. Whether it's the fear of failure, the discomfort of starting a new job, or the emotional pain of a personal loss, the resilience developed through challenging physical activity helps in tough times with greater ease and confidence.

Exercise at any age

It is crucial to note that the benefits of pushing beyond your comfort zone through exercise are not confined to any specific age group. Older adults can particularly benefit from challenging themselves physically.

David's summing up

Maintaining an active lifestyle can reverse the natural decline in muscle mass, bone density and cognitive function associated with aging. This will allow you to continue to enjoy the things you love the most, for longer in life.

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Barry Speker OBE

The Last Word

By Barry Speker OBE

Writing this piece in advance of our 4th July General Election, I am understandably wary of making detailed predictions.

The polls and the media say a Labour landslide is inevitable and not avoided by inflation coming down to 2%. The Tories are set for the worst result for 200 years - or will last minute jitters pull floating voters back from the brink?

Nigel Farage resisted being at Donald Trump's side to launch Reform UK as the 'real official opposition'? Has the Green Party retained any credibility as the principled conscience of climate-friendly politics or become the threatening refuge of hardline deluded extremists and cranks?

When Parliament meets again, proceedings are unlikely to be more cordial or collegiate.

The American election campaign is always a show biz event, utilising the likes of George Clooney and Julia Roberts at fundraisers to help a man in his eighties win re-election to the White House; both sides lining up star personalities to influence the electorate. Recollections that 'Sinatra backed FDR!' Will Taylor Swift be unwise enough to side with one of the candidates?

This side of the Atlantic, stars tend to



stay out of politics unless you count Gary Lineker's interventions as serious.

Our 80+ year olds do not take key positions in Government other than as wise old heads in the House of Lords. But our 85 year olds can still play a leading role - Sir Ian McKellen starring in an adaptation of King Henry IV Parts 1 and 2 at the Noel Coward Theatre, lost his balance and fell off the stage. He seems to be Presidential material! As Falstaff said: "Discretion may the better part of valour". The show must go on.

An exhilarating event on the Quayside featured a dramatic light show on the expansive wall of the Baltic. Staged by Newcastle United sponsor SELA, thousands were crammed along the riverside to witness a raucous celebration of the club, the supporters, many legends of the past and the inspiring current manager and squad.

Enormous images of Jackie Milburn, Sir Bobby Robson and Alan Shearer thrilled the assembled throng. It was a great display. What if we actually won a trophy!

Moves to ban books considered to contain controversial material have long existed. There was the memorable furore and long court action about *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Such censorship used to focus on sedition, treason and obscenity.

However, research shows that many books are being removed from public libraries even after a single complaint.

In the UK there is no central authority tracking 'book challenges'. Public libraries tend to follow guidance from the Chartered Institute of Library Professionals, that books should not be banned unless found to be 'unlawful'.

It seems that bans are being wokeishly enforced. Examples are *Five Weeks in a Balloon* by Jules Verne, *Fungus the Bogeyman* by Raymond Briggs, *Three Monsters* by David McKee and many more. Grounds cited include racist language and stereotypes and unhealthy attitudes of young people.

There must be concern at books being removed from the shelves based on a single subjective challenge.

Wonderful night at the Tyne Theatre seeing the amazing UOGB - the Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain. They have been performing for over 40 years and are much in demand around the world. Perhaps a mainly silver audience but their music is of wide appeal and frequently hilarious.

An extremely wide repertoire such as *The Harry Lime Theme*, *Pinball Wizard*, *Ode to Joy*, *Life on Mars* and *Wuthering Heights*. A real treat if you check them on YouTube.

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