

NORTHERN

# INSIGHT

August 2024

Issue 104



## SASS celebrates two years of success

business | built environment | technology | media | education | motors | arts | travel | leisure

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A portrait of Philippa Clothier, a woman with blonde hair, wearing a dark blue top and a patterned scarf, standing in front of a large green plant. The background is a blurred indoor setting with a staircase.

Philippa Clothier

## Clothier Lacey celebrates 25th Anniversary

Northern Insight talks to Philippa Clothier about the past 25 years...

### **How has the PR landscape changed since your company's inception 25 years ago?**

In 1998/9, I vividly remember sending out stories to the media with photos attached and delivering them by hand to the Red Star Parcels office. The fax machine was still in regular use, journalists had pages of editorial to fill each day and it was all very labour intensive! Digital and its immediacy, have totally transformed the landscape within the PR world.

### **What have been the most significant milestones or achievements for your company over the past 25 years?**

After the collapse of Northern Rock and the ensuing turmoil in the global financial markets we lost a significant amount of annual fee income in just one month, so I decided anything that did not contribute to profitability had to go. The water cooler has yet to find its way back! Surviving the recession was a major milestone.

### **Can you share some memorable campaigns or projects that highlight your company's evolution and success?**

I always say 'there are no mistakes in life'. So the month after our fee income took a massive hit, we won Work Wise North East - a three-year national campaign to promote smarter working practices. We continue to attract many successful businesses as clients, mostly through referral, such as Swinburne Maddison, Summers-Inman, TGA and Howarth Litchfield. Within the education sector, we launched Northern Education Trust in 2012, which grew to twenty academies under our watch. This provided unparalleled experience and led to us working with several other multi-academy-trusts - latterly Northern Leaders Trust.

### **How has your company adapted to the digital transformation?**

Totally - or we would not have survived. Our service spans every aspect of digital marketing which is fundamental to our future success and we are currently expanding the digital team.

### **What are some challenges your company faced over the years, and how did you overcome them?**

When there is a recession and companies are trying to reduce costs, mostly it is the PR/marketing/advertising or training budgets that are the first to attract the accountant's pen - very shortsighted but

often the case. Always knowing exactly where we stood financially with monthly management accounts was, and is, essential.

### **How has your company culture evolved over the past 25 years?**

After WFH during the pandemic the workplace changed for good, so I decided to introduce remote working for all staff on Mondays and Fridays. We have an open plan office so there is not much we don't discuss! We're committed to providing the best service for our clients, so having a good laugh together and being able to discuss absolutely anything makes for a good team spirit.

### **What is your fondest memory?**

I was delighted when my daughter, Zoe, decided to leave her role as land and new homes manager at Zoopla and formally establish a land and new homes division at Clothier Lacey in March 2022. So, alongside construction and the built environment, our residential and commercial property clients now play an increasingly important role in the business and we work for developers and their supply chains up and down the country.

### **How do you plan to celebrate this 25th anniversary, and what message do you want to share?**

We are supporting Veterans Launchpad, an amazing charity that provides accommodation and support to help veterans transition to civilian life together with Wellspring, a charity which promotes good mental health in the workplace. It's always good to give something back.

Looking ahead, we will continue to train graduates, invest in the team and build our reputation and client base. We are continually evolving but ensuring long term job security for the team and providing effectively delivered, high quality marketing, digital and PR support for all our clients - these are equally important drivers - as well as enjoying what we do and having fun!

*Thanks to all our clients, past, present and potentially future for trusting us to represent your companies and for accompanying us on our journey.*

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*Barry Speker OBE*



# Foreword

## FOREWORD

### Welcome to the August issue of Northern Insight.

Our 104th edition is one we are very proud of and bursting with the ingredients that have made the magazine so popular over the last 9 years.

SASS Media are our cover stars having recently celebrated their second anniversary. Since their launch they have gone from strength to strength in providing media support to a variety of organisations in the public, private and charity sectors.

Look out for our review of the prestigious Northern Law Awards celebrating the fantastic achievements and dedication of legal professionals across Northern England.

Within some outstanding event coverage we highlight the Just Williams Sales Academy Conference, as well as Staybridge Suites refurbishment party and the Grace House Golf Day.

Our Charity of the Month showcases the wonderful work of the People's Kitchen, a real beacon of hope.

On our travels we make a welcome return to the Blackbird in Ponteland and take a lovely trip to Ambleside.

We hope you enjoy this issue.



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



Thanks to all our wonderful clients,  
readers and suppliers for the  
fantastic support. Till next month...

Edition Sponsors





## Pride in the City Festival takeover achieves huge economic impact for Newcastle city centre

**Pride in the City, presented in partnership with Newcastle NE1, welcomed record numbers to this year's festival across Newcastle city centre, with over 82,000 people engaging with the joy of pride, supporting a positive economic impact of c £4m.**

"From the satellite events which started earlier in the month, to the main events and through visitors to Newcastle during the weekend, including those who were able to enjoy from the sidelines, the positive impact on the city has been huge," says Ste Dunn, Director of Northern Pride.

"After such a positive response from our community, supporters and partners, who have embraced the citywide takeover, to receiving our economic impact and satisfaction data this week, we've been overwhelmed at the success of this year's event. We set out to create a more accessible, unapologetically visible pride celebration, but also a festival which would benefit the city, local people, local bars, restaurants and hotels and we've achieved that together and we are so grateful to everyone who made this possible."

Stephen Patterson, Chief Executive at Newcastle NE1, said: "In what is our 10th year supporting Northern Pride, it is amazing to see the continued success of the festival following the move from the Town Moor into the heart of the city. To see such crowds enjoying the live performers and Market Village near Grey Street, to the Family & Youth Zone, satellite events and the main stage, the city was quite literally brimming with pride. This year's change in format created even more opportunities for local businesses and those in the city to support the festival and benefit from its positive impact and that should be celebrated."

Kim McGuinness, North East Mayor, added: "This year's celebrations are a huge milestone for Newcastle, with more people than ever able to experience pride in their own way. Across all events, but in particular with the march taking place through the city centre, this year's festival succeeded in bringing together even more of the LGBTQIA+ community, business partners, allies and supporters to stand in solidarity, in what will be a historic shift for the city centre celebrations."



## City Hall scoops top sustainability accolade

**Sunderland's City Hall has been awarded a prestigious environmental award for its efforts to reduce emissions and embrace sustainable practices.**

The building at Riverside Sunderland has been awarded the Silver Accreditation by the Investors in the Environment Scheme (iE).

From construction through to completion, ecological responsibility measures have been proactively put in place to improve the building's environmental impact from the offset.

A 'City Hall Green Champion Forum' was established early this year to carry on this work, focusing on various aspects affecting City Hall's carbon footprint, including energy efficiency, local procurement, waste reduction, and promoting active travel.

Discussions and ideas generated at the forum has already led to the introduction of waste and coffee cup recycling bins, eco-friendly products from local businesses being promoted, as well as a bug hotel on the building's green roof to attract more wildlife to the site.

City Hall has also taken part in activities such as office shutdowns to conserve energy and hosted free bike maintenance sessions, encouraging staff to participate in a more sustainable commute to work.

They have had great success with recycling rates skyrocketing from 7% in December 2022, to 50% in February 2023, with plans underway to surpass the 60% mark through continued collaboration with colleagues throughout City Hall to continue to increase recycling.

Looking ahead, they remain committed to further enhancing sustainability initiatives at City Hall, with plans to include a pool bike scheme for staff, as well as launching campaigns to reduce digital footprint and implement a car club for the wider Riverside Sunderland site.

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## RG strengthens Yorkshire market presence with new office in the city of York

**Ryecroft Glenton (RG), the North of England-based corporate finance, accountancy, tax and audit advisory firm, is strengthening its presence in the Yorkshire market by opening a new office within the walls of the beautiful and historic city of York.**

With its head office in Newcastle and satellite offices in Northumberland, Ryecroft Glenton will build on its existing activity in Yorkshire, and grow its cluster of clients in the region, with this new permanent base in York, on Micklegate (Norse for "Great Street").

This expansion and commitment to the Yorkshire market is built on the strong platform and growth of RG Corporate Finance (RGCF), one of the North East's most active corporate finance boutiques. RGCF has advised several Yorkshire based businesses on transactions in recent years, including the sale of Groundtrax to Origin plc, the sale of M2 Education to Humly, MAPD Group's acquisitions of law firms Bermans and Bromleys, and the MBO of Unite People, which was funded by Aldermore.

In addition, clients will be able to access RG's range of personal and business advisory services, ranging from personal and business tax, audit & assurance, accounts & business services, wealth management and its innovative outsourced finance function for SMEs, "Outsourced | FD".

On the ground in York will be Corporate Finance Partner Nick Johnson, who lives in North Yorkshire and who has spent much of his career in the region, along with Carl Swansbury, Partner and Head of Corporate Finance, who founded RGCF in May 2011.

They will be supported by the experienced, national RGCF team as well as several new recruits who will be based in the York office, including Ella McDonald, who recently joined RGCF as a CF Manager, having previously developed her career at PWC and Deloitte. Further recruits will be announced shortly including a CF Director, who will also be based out of the York office.



## Miller Homes swaps bricks for basketball

**One of the North East's leading housebuilders has helped pave the way for a top basketball team to take part in their own sporting Euros.**

Fresh from success at the Dublin Masters, in May, the FIMBA GB Women Over 55s Basketball Team set their sights on the European Masters – one of the sport's most prestigious competitions.

Thanks to support from Miller Homes North East, the 12-strong team were not only able to take part in the tournament, but made it to the quarter finals.

## Great North Care Record wins National Award

**A leading health and care record sharing system, the Great North Care Record (GNCR), has been awarded "Team of the Year" at the Digital Health Networks Awards 2024 - for its collaborative work on improving the quality and safety of patient care across the North East and North Cumbria.**

GNCR enables staff at NHS Trusts, local authorities, GPs, the North East Ambulance Service, community, 0-19, hospice, children, and out-of-hours services to securely access and share patient records from across multiple services and systems all in one place. This allows for a higher quality, more informed and safer experience for patients, regardless of where they are receiving care in the region.

Used by 100% of NHS foundation trusts

The team was one of several groups, organisations and charities across the region to benefit from a Miller Homes Community Fund grant, receiving £1,000 towards the purchase of new kit.

And team captain Pam Donnelly, from Roker, Sunderland, said: "The grant and the special new warm up tops we were able to buy with it, really made all the difference to us.

"We have to fund everything – from our kit to our travel and accommodation – ourselves and so we are always grateful for any help we receive.

"But Miller Homes didn't just award us money, they have backed us all the way through the European Championships and it was great knowing they were cheering us on."

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

across the North East and North Cumbria, GNCR currently has a record-breaking 800,000 monthly views and is one of the world's leading shared care record systems with 19 million views since its launch in 2020.

The team behind the GNCR recently attended the Digital Health Summer School at Durham University, which brought together digital leaders of NHS Trusts, ICSs, and ICBs from across the country. Throughout the two days, they explored and discussed the evolution and challenges of being an effective digital leader in the NHS and what is needed to support digital leaders going forward.

During the awards ceremony at the event, GNCR won the "Team of the Year" category – with GNCR being recognised for its collaborative efforts in successfully implementing digital initiatives, fostering innovation, and delivering tangible benefits to patients, clinicians, and health and care organisations.



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# Cover Story...



“

*...we pride ourselves on helping organisations get their key messages out...*

L-R: Sarah Dale and Sarah Walker. Photo and Front cover by Jason Hynes.

# SASS celebrates two years of success!

It's two years since SASS media Ltd won its first contract with Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, supporting more than 30 schools with their media requirements and helping them celebrate Ofsted and exam successes.

Since then, we're pleased to say SASS, a PR support, media relations and copywriting business, based on a foundation of success in journalism, has gone from strength to strength when it comes to providing media support to a variety of organisations in the public, private and charity sectors. Set up by two proud Middlesbrough lasses, Sarah Walker and Sarah Dale, SASS has packed a great deal into the last two years...

We have worked with 34 clients since September 2022, many of whom have been for short term contracts or one-off press releases, but 11 of whom have been with us on a long-term or retained basis.

In the last 12 months, we have taken on no less than eight new clients while retaining nine clients from the previous year.

A significant contract win for us was Jacksons Law, who we have been working with for two days per month since October 2023.

We are now starting to see momentum build in terms of the amount of press coverage we are attracting for the firm.

We also won a retainer contract with the charity Taste of Africa Northeast this year, after working with them for a shorter period last year. In October and November 2023, we achieved 17 pieces of online media coverage for them, which achieved an estimated 596,000 views, reaching a potential audience of 130 million and achieving more than 1,000 social media interactions. This was in addition to appearances on BBC Tees, Look North and ITV's Tyne Tees news.

In the last twelve months, our original client Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, which we had an 18-month contract with, also renewed until August 2025. Between September 2022 and February 2024, we achieved 194 pieces of online coverage for the Trust, in addition to several radio and TV appearances. The online coverage had a potential combined audience of 400 million, with 7.59 million estimated views and 1,800 interactions on social media.

As well as renewing our contract with Bishop Chadwick, we also continue to work with one of our first clients Benham Publishing, for whom we write and edit eight chamber of commerce magazines.

The success of SASS has also seen the two Sarahs take an office in Regus Fast Track House in Thornaby - and the pair of us enjoy working on the doorstep of the Tees Barrage, where we can regularly be found having walking business meetings!

In two years, we've written about everything from a new life-saving lung screening service to Jacksons Law Firm's awards success. Our work has also seen us writing about beauty pageants, big infrastructure projects like HS2, green cement production and financial services training.

We continue to work for Our Hospitals Charity, the fundraising arm of South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, creating a regular newsletter keeping fundraisers and other stakeholders up to date and we've recently enjoyed



writing about the success of Catrina McHugh MBE, who runs Open Clasp Theatre Company based in Newcastle.

We've covered events including the Saltburn Food Festival, the UK Top Influencer Awards and Taste of Africa's various events that tie in with Black History Month in October.

We've helped new businesses get established and supported longstanding businesses to take a new approach to their PR and marketing strategies.

However, we're aware it's still quite difficult for people outside of marketing and PR to get their heads around what exactly we do.

At SASS, we pride ourselves on helping organisations get their key messages out to stakeholders and/or sell more products and services through positive and proactive publicity.

We create press releases and send them out to the media, advise on strategies for dealing with negative publicity if appropriate and help organisations make the most of their own media channels including their websites and social media.

We write regular blog posts for clients and can offer a combination of blog posts and website content writing, press releases, media relations and crisis management support through our retainer packages.

We are also true to our journalism roots and continue to write for a wide range of B2B publications.

In our PR work, we are able to use our journalistic style and flair to give clients the best chance of achieving earned media coverage. We also measure our success in this area and share this data with clients.

We're pleased to say the future looks bright for SASS and we're hoping many more organisations across the North East will put their trust in us to tell their unique stories.

**For more information, visit us at [www.sassmedialtltd.co.uk](http://www.sassmedialtltd.co.uk) or call Sarah Walker on 07896 894538.**

# Taking Stock: is your business fit for growth?



Andrew Silver

In the ever-evolving landscape of the business world, it's crucial to take the time to pause and reflect on the progress you've made towards your vision and objectives. Reviewing the challenges faced, the changes made, and the lessons learnt are all essential elements in assessing where your business stands today.

**Have you recently paused to consider if your business has reached its targets, or have you had to pivot and adjust your strategies in response to an ever-changing environment? Whilst the fast pace of business eases over the summer, it's the perfect time to take the learnings and insights gained from your experiences over the first half of the year and use them as a guide for the future.**

***A goal without a plan is just a wish.***

***- Antoine de Saint-Exupéry***

In the fast-paced and ever-competitive business world, it's easy to get caught up in the whirlwind of daily operations and firefighting. Differentiating between the 'urgent' and 'important' requires a well-defined plan and strategy for your business. Even in the face of rapid changes and the need for agility, a clear plan provides the direction and goals necessary to realise your business objectives. It serves as the roadmap, guiding your business toward growth and success.

***If you don't know where you are going, how can you expect to get there?***

***- Basil S. Walsh***

To ensure that your business succeeds and achieves its goals, it's imperative to have

clear alignment between your business objectives and your overarching vision. Understanding your "why" provides your business with a purpose that goes beyond profit. Your vision provides the guiding star by which all business decisions and strategies should be steered. A clear understanding of your purpose not only motivates your team but also resonates with your customers, creating a strong connection that fosters growth.

***No one can whistle a symphony. It takes a whole orchestra to play it.***

***- H.E. Luccock***

Realising business growth is a collective effort. Your team is not just a group of individuals; they are the components of a well-orchestrated symphony. In times of reflection and decision-making, collaboration is key. Regular one-on-one check-ins with your team members allow you to understand their needs and perspectives, fostering a collaborative environment. Creating the right feedback channels for your internal stakeholders and customers can provide valuable insights for optimising your strategies. Involving your people in decision-making is a powerful way to harness the collective intelligence and creativity of your team.

***What gets measured gets done.***

***- Peter Drucker***

To ensure that your business is on the right path towards growth, it is important to track, report, and analyse your activities. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) provide the necessary metrics to measure progress and success. Regularly reviewing these enables you to adapt and optimise your tactics to align with your business plan. This data-driven approach ensures that your actions are aligned with your objectives and that you remain on course for sustainable growth.

***Accountability is the glue that ties commitment to results.***

***- Bob Proctor***

Transparency and accountability are the cornerstones of a successful and growing business. Sharing relevant information will ensure that each team member is clear about what they are personally responsible and accountable for, and remember it starts at the top! Regular check-ins and performance reviews will also help track progress and performance and translate these learnings into actionable insights. A critical friend, someone who has 'walked in your shoes' can be an invaluable support, providing challenge, constructive feedback and help to fine tune your business strategies.

To unlock the potential for growth in your business, we recommend leveraging the strengths of your people and your business. At 360 Growth Partners we work with many SMEs doing exactly that and support them in achieving their vision and long-term goals.

If you would like to know more about 360 Growth Partners and how we can help unlock your potential, then please get in touch and let's start the conversation.

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## Sales, Service is a SUCCESS

Returning for its third year, The Just Williams Sales Academy was proud to produce the Sales, Service and Success Conference – this time, travelling to the heart of Newcastle as the venue for 2024.

Since its launch in 2021, the Academy has trained and mentored close to 4,000 people on sales, business development, lead generation and more; and from there, our team has hosted an annual conference celebrating Sales and Customer Service in all its forms.

Moving from Middlesbrough in 2022, to Durham in 2023 and this year to The Common Room in Newcastle for its most recent iteration, the Sales, Service and Success conference welcomed almost 100 delegates to learn, be inspired and to grow. With a stellar line up of 17 speakers and panelists, the event was fantastically well received. Hosted by North East legend, Alfie Joey, the day consisted of keynotes and panels around The Culture of Sales, Storytelling, Presentation Skills, Mindset and High Performing Teams amongst others and gave attendees keen insight and tips to take away.

“Fantastic day from start to finish”  
*Stacey Grant, Head of Growth at Evolve Network.*

“Thank you for an awesome day... The Conference was so inspirational.”  
*Jill Aston, Head of Growth at Reclaro.*

“The entire day was full of highlights, really insightful and refreshing.”  
*Tatenda Nyavanhu, Skills Development Manager, Northern Skills.*

The event was generously supported by headline partner Hartlepool College of

Further Education and event sponsors Talenheads, The CEO Adventurer, Sullivan Brown, Mabo, 3 Point Media and RTC North. Thank you to these amazing organisations that helped make this event such an incredible success! Another huge thank you goes to the incredible speakers and panelists who joined us on the day too – Tim Johnson, Mark Bryce, Sam Spoons, Herb Kim, Jo Darby, Ben Drury, Alix Bolton, Becca Brighty, David Broom, Pete Wilkinson, Michaela Reaney, Claire Preston, Mike Grahamslaw, Zoe Maylam, Dom Lusardi, Doug Dinwiddie and Imran Anwar.

And of course – a huge thank you to everyone who attended too!

With a full schedule of upcoming events, The Just Williams Sales Academy is set to continue to motivate, inspire and train professionals from across the region for a long time to come! The Sales, Service and Success Conference will return in 2025, be sure to sign up to our mailing list for earlybird booking information and details on next year’s location, venue and line up!

**Check out the full line up of Masterclasses here at [www.justwilliamssales.academy](http://www.justwilliamssales.academy)**





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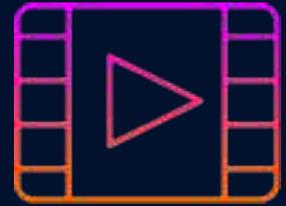
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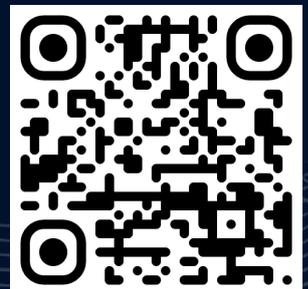
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From Sanderson Young



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# TWO OF THE FINEST PROPERTIES COME UP FOR SALE



Sanderson Young is delighted to see two very impressive country houses being launched onto the market for sale.

Firstly, Howden Close and its Cottage, providing a stunning country mansion on the edge of Corbridge and in such a desirable, high quality area. This magnificent house with a total of nine bedrooms and eight reception rooms has undergone an extensive, luxurious refurbishment to the very highest of standards. The property, set in circa. four acres of land, includes its own all-weather private tennis court and a magnificent entrance drive with superbly landscaped gardens and grounds. It is a truly special and very unique house and has the separate availability of a detached neighbouring property, The Stables, available for sale in due course.

***This very fine, beautiful home is available at a price guide from £4.95 Million.***

Linnels, set to the south of Hexham and Corbridge, is also a very prominent, fine country home which is set in 12.46 acres of land, including a beautiful meandering river, 17th century

stone bridge and picturesque views to an historical 18th century mill, all providing a fabulous backdrop to the stunning house. The property itself has been extensively renovated and provides five bedrooms and four reception rooms, with stunning interior design features throughout. The separate Coach House has also been extensively refurbished and finishing works are being completed this month, providing a beautiful five bedroomed property within the grounds of the fabulous house.

***Linnels is available for sale at a guide price of £3.5 Million.***

Both of these stunning properties have easy access in the Tyne Valley to the road connections into Newcastle's city centre, as well as the International Airport serving the North of England.

This is a very special opportunity to purchase either of these magnificent homes. All confidential enquiries are to be made through Sanderson Young's rare! team of Ashleigh Sundin, Regional Manager, on 0191 2233 500 or Duncan Young on 07715419795.



SANDERSON  
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## *Howden Close* Corbridge

Located in the sought after village of Corbridge is this magnificent, unique family home. Howden Close and its cottage have been extensively renovated and remodelled into a beautiful country residence offering outstanding presentation, interior design and architecture. This special home is surrounded by circa 4 acres of stunning landscaped grounds including a tennis court. Available by separate negotiation is the magnificent detached neighbouring property, The Stables. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: H.



9 8 8

**Price Guide:**  
£4.95 Million



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



SANDERSON  
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## *Linnels* *Hexham*

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5 6 5 E

**Price Guide:**  
£3.5 Million



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Emma McDonald

## Will we ever trust a robot?

By Emma McDonald

Yes, AI is on the rise, but can marketers ever really trust it?

**Like you, I am seeing countless articles about the rise and impact of this digital dynamo. Varying in degrees of venom from “it’ll be taking jobs soon!” to being the most supportive ‘digital assistant’ we have ever known; these pieces are usually designed to pique interest and create conversation (and perhaps, even a little bit of division too).**

So, where does AI lie in the actual working landscape today? Is it threatening livelihoods or simply supporting often winded multi-channel marketing staff? The answer is probably - a bit of both. As an outsourced agency, Just Williams has the genuine privilege to work with a wide range of clients in different sectors, and because of that we are able to see the varying degrees of impact AI is having on different organisations. It is genuinely fascinating, learning how different companies are embracing automations, and different variants of digitally-driven intelligence to support their work. But,

when it comes to Marketing – it is proving something more of a conversation point.

The way we operate means that everything we do and all the content that we create is designed with the client’s unique ambitions in mind – so, when you consider the introduction of AI and any supporting tools using this, it does throw into question “who” is actually doing the origination. Thankfully, AI is not yet at a stage of being self-aware enough to not need human interaction to govern its outputs, but in some cases, it is responsive enough to remove a lot of the direction stages for basic tasks.

I am, and will always be, a champion for ‘next generation thinking’ and development. That being said, I personally remain on the fence about using AI in Marketing. Knowing that I and my team get the absolute best out of ourselves by being ‘uniquely human’ and being agile to each customer’s needs is the crux of it – introducing ‘robots’ into the mix can have a place, but do I think it can really be a challenger to effective, personally-driven activity? No. I love the idea that systems and processes can be streamlined using digital tools, but from a creative perspective? I don’t think you can ever fully replace human imagination and skill.

Even though elements such as image creation have advanced significantly using AI – truthfully, there are still platforms and outputs that are noticeably computer-generated, and I often have to stop and think – does that best represent that brand

or company? Seeing a generated image can go one of two ways – looking impressive and being useful to the message you’re putting out or – and more often than not – it can appear just not quite right... Subconsciously, your market will follow a similar thought process too.

You may know that at Just Williams we are also huge advocates for supporting other businesses and improving a local supply chain too. So, when I see companies using obviously computer-generated images, over working with a local photographer, for example, I do begin to get a little bit more ‘anti-AI’. Adding value to your marketing shouldn’t come at a cost to a) representing your brand brilliantly, or b) supporting other businesses as and where you can.

Whilst AI tools most definitely have their place, knowing that the validity of the work will always need to be closely monitored to ensure the outputs are actually what the client wants will retain the need for human-controlled creation. And even though there are new platforms and software being released virtually daily to answer the evolving ‘needs’ of the marketplace, knowing that the most effective storytelling, creativity and true representation of the customer needs will come from a human is oddly comforting to me.

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

# How to tackle widespread employee disengagement

90% of the British workforce is either disengaged or actively disengaged according to the latest Gallup 'State of the Global Workplace' report and this is having a direct effect on how North East businesses can perform, according to workplace culture expert Ivan Hollingsworth.

**The report, carried out by global research house Gallup, found that employees in the UK are struggling, with 40% of people reporting daily stress, 27% experiencing daily sadness and under 50% saying that they are thriving in their everyday lives.**

Ivan Hollingsworth, founder and director of Centric Consultants is addressing the issue head-on in the region by working with leaders and teams to understand the root of the problem and put strategies in place to support North East businesses to reduce burnout, invest in staff retention, and increase performance.

Speaking on the opportunity for the North East to become leaders in performance and workplace culture, Ivan said, "Whether you are a business leader or a manager, this trend is something we really need to pay attention to. 90% of people are either 'quiet quitting' or actively looking for another job and with the job market in the North East being particularly buoyant, this is something that leaders have to be aware of. This is a problem across the UK and is a real opportunity for the North East businesses to rise to the challenge, increase investment in workplace culture, and compete on a national and international stage when it comes to attracting and retaining the best talent."

So, what can organisations do to address these issues?

## 1. Invest in training for managers and leaders

A high proportion of disengagement is attributable to the skills of managers and leaders. This isn't a blame game, but it is important to recognise the impact that these individuals have on teams and culture.



Ivan Hollingsworth

## 2. Consider skills that you need to develop in your management team

There are three attributes to look for in good managers and leaders, and all of these are trainable; a listener, a collaborator, and a coach. Listening is crucial in leadership, especially if we want to understand the needs of our diverse workforce. By truly listening, we can better understand the differences within the team and listen with an intent to understand and develop.

## 3. Go beyond the mindfulness app

When we are in a state of stress we are trapped in a fight, flight, or freeze response and our ability to collaborate and innovate is inhibited. Research from Oxford University shows that there is a direct correlation between businesses that take wellbeing and employee happiness seriously and increased profits, valuation, and how well they perform on the stock market.

## 4. Focus on meaningful connection and trust

When we trust our teammates we are much more likely to be authentic, collaborate, and ask for help if we need it. Take the time regularly and consistently to check in with their people, not just about how they are at work but how they are more broadly in their lives. Focus on the whole person and you will begin to support people's perception of where they are doing positive things and support them when they are struggling.

**Centric Consultants is based in Newcastle upon Tyne and delivers workshops and bespoke training across the UK.**

**To find out more and to speak to the team directly about the problems you are trying to solve email [ivan@centric-consultants.com](mailto:ivan@centric-consultants.com)**

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## RMT Accountants joins forces with Ribchesters

RMT Accountants & Business Advisors has completed its second growth milestone of the year, joining forces with Ribchesters Chartered Accountants, an award-winning and prominent practice, based in Durham City.

With a legacy spanning 70 years, RMT is part of Sumer, a top 15 UK accountancy practice with a mission to champion SMEs.

With Sumer's backing, the investment in Ribchesters enhances RMT's commercial strategy for growth, strengthening both firms' client service offerings across the North East and beyond. This includes audit and accounting, recovery and insolvency, specialist tax, business advice and corporate finance.

The Ribchesters team, now operating as RMT Ribchesters, will continue delivering its comprehensive range of services to corporates, owner-managed businesses and individuals. Their expertise in the charity, education and legal sectors will further bolster RMT's sector offering.

Together, the combined practice will include ten directors and a team of over 120 colleagues. Mike Pott, Managing Director at RMT Accountants said: "The unification of our practices reflects our shared commitment to provide top-tier professional services, with a personal touch. Ribchesters' renowned expertise will boost our ability to deliver specialised solutions to clients, both existing and new, across a much broader area."



## Armstrong Watson recruits record number of graduate trainees

Armstrong Watson has welcomed 37 new graduate trainees as it continues its commitment to investing in young people.

This is a record number for the North East accountancy, business and financial advisory firm, up from 28 in 2023.

Based at offices across the North of England and Scotland, the new students, including seven based in Newcastle, will be working towards their ACA qualification to become Chartered Accountants. Three of this year's graduate students are former trainees who have progressed from their AAT apprenticeship to go on to train as Chartered Accountants.

In September they will start their three-year programme which combines study with hands on experience, support, coaching and mentoring from the business.

Armstrong Watson takes on graduate trainees every year and as a result of continued growth over the past 12 months – during which the firm has made some key senior appointments, enabling it to offer a full service proposition from One Strawberry Lane - the 2024 intake is its biggest to date.



## Robson Laidler wins ESG Impact Award

Hot on the heels of being named one of the Best Places to Work in the Sunday Times, the accountancy and advisory firm, with offices in Newcastle and Durham, celebrates further success after being named winners in the ESG Impact category at a ceremony recently held at St James' Park.

The ESG Impact Award is for teams who can demonstrate commitment and achievements in the realm of Environmental, Social, and Governance and was presented by judge Gareth Phillips, managing director, CRL Food Limited.

Robson Laidler, who were also the first certified B Corp in the North East, has been hailed the standout winner for constantly being ahead of the curve, exemplifying excellence and innovation in environmental and social performance.

Announcing the award Mr Phillips said: "As the first B Corp certified business in the North East, Robson Laidler has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to continuous improvement from this distinguished platform. Their leadership in policy improvements has significantly promoted diversity, equity, inclusion, and education within the organisation."

Robson Laidler Managing Director Graham Purvis said: "We run our business on the triple bottom line principle of people, planet and profit, ensuring there is equal measure between these. We hope that our commitment to doing business differently will be an inspiration to others and promote the idea that we can redefine success in business to be as much about making a positive difference to people and planet as it is about profit."



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## "The Coastal Accountants"

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When purchasing standard buy-to-let residential properties, many lenders are available. However, property investors often face more complex situations. They might have reached the maximum number of mortgages a lender will offer or have trouble making rental income cover current interest payments. There could also be issues with the property, such as being above commercial premises, needing planning permission, or having too many rooms. The list goes on.

***This is where Bespoq can help.***

Lucy Hope founded Bespoq Commercial Solutions in 2016 and works with many property investors, especially those with unique needs. With specialist knowledge in the sector, she handles cases that don't meet standard criteria.

She says "I like a challenge! Many clients come to us after being declined by their High Street bank. However, numerous UK lenders can help with deals outside the typical lending criteria. The key is finding the right lender for each client's circumstances and tailoring a lending package to fit their needs."

Typical clients include business owners seeking to own their premises, investors purchasing commercial and residential properties, and those needing buy-to-let loans involving multiple properties. They also assist investors looking to let properties to housing associations or corporate organisations.

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Claire Lockey

## Lowes Financial Management strengthens board

Leading Newcastle based financial advisory firm, Lowes Financial Management, has strengthened its leadership team with the appointment of a new board director to its parent company Lowes Group Ltd.

**Claire Lockey has been appointed Operations Director, joining a seven-strong board, as part of an ongoing wider restructure and expansion of the national practice and its services.**

Claire, of Billingham, Teesside, has been part of the Executive Committee at Lowes for the past two years, joining initially as Project and Quality Manager, bringing her wide business experience to several existing initiatives across the firm.

In her new role she will lead on all transformation activities that range from people development, ongoing development of the company culture and the digitalisation of systems and processes.

With an extensive corporate background across multiple sectors including banking, utilities and transport, Claire has been involved in the delivery of major changes such as the HBOS merger, transition of Npower to Eon, and funding governance for national infrastructure projects. She

brings skills and expertise in project management, continuous improvement, Lean methodology and process redesign to the Lowes teams.

She said: "There are many great developments happening at Lowes, and I am delighted to be taking a more strategic role, working with the board and colleagues, to drive the ongoing transformation.

"It's a real pleasure to be taking up this new role at this exciting time. Lowes has some big plans to build on its strong traditions of personal finances being cared for personally whilst also embracing greater use of technology to enhance client service and our multi award winning investment proposition. During the last year and more we have developed an exciting new investment platform that we're now in the early stages of launching.

"Financial services is constantly evolving and we seek to further embrace technology, but only for those tasks that can and should

be automated. We recognise an increasing number of our younger prefer digital service-based solutions as a compliment to our traditional personal approach."

Ian Lowes, MD of Lowes Group, said: "For a successful business with over 50 years under our belt we're committed to continuing to evolve and transform the firm to meet client demands and a changing financial landscape.

"We need dynamic people like Claire, with her extensive background in change management, to help drive the business forwards, working with the board and executive team to cement Lowes position as one of the best financial advisers in the country.

"It's important that in the next few years we make Lowes the 'go to' company for financial advice – not just in the North East but at a national level."

Lowes advises clients across a wide range of financial aspects such as inheritance tax planning, investment management, pensions, tax mitigation, long term care and other general financial planning issues, helping clients and their families to build and secure their financial future. Lowes has regularly been recognised as one the best investment advice firms in the UK, helped in part by its unique approach to portfolio management honed over five decades.

**For more details about the firm visit [www.Lowes.co.uk](http://www.Lowes.co.uk)**



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# RMT Technology bolsters senior team as growth drive continues



L-R: Susan Bell, Stephen McNickle and Mike Hayes of RMT Technology

**RMT Technology, the specialist arm of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors has expanded its senior team, as it continues to grow its client base across the North of England.**

**RMT Technology works in partnership with a wide range of SMEs to identify and implement security first IT solutions which meet their specific business and operational needs around IT strategy, network infrastructure, information security and data management services.**

After twenty years at RMT Technology and two years as Technical Director, Mike Hayes has been promoted to become its Managing Director. Hayes' role will include implementing bespoke suites of managed service packages, while the business has also added two senior IT professionals to the team to bolster the expertise available to new and existing clients.

Stephen McNickle brings more than two decades of technology sector experience

to his new role as RMT Technology's Commercial Director. His background includes nurturing partnerships and presenting bespoke managed services and cyber-security solutions across the North of England, having led the growth of his previous organisation. McNickle has transitioned from a prominent regional technology consultancy.

At the same time, Susan Bell has joined RMT Technology, as Consultant. Bell has almost thirty years of experience working in privately owned businesses and corporate organisations—half of which has been at an executive level. She serves as an advisor to the boards of several regional businesses and organisations, having been a former CEO at North East technology consultancy Waterstons and Executive Director at UBS. Bell will assist in managing the expected growth of RMT Technology.

McNickle, RMT Technology Commercial Director said: "With the rapid advancements in technology, businesses need a trusted service provider that can recommend the right products and services for their success. "Building close client relationships and understanding their unique requirements is crucial to building this trust. It is also one of our core principles at RMT. The teams'

technical knowledge is exceptional, and the business is set for significant growth.

"We are building on our success by delivering a truly unique proposition to the North East market which will provide certainty, clarity and assurance to the IT estate of our clients. The value we can add will be unrivalled.

Stephen Slater, director of commercial services at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, adds: "We've seen immense growth at RMT Technology in the last few years with an increased need for remote, secure access to technology services. Growing our senior team marks a step change in our ambitious progress into becoming the most trusted technical advisor and market leader in the space."

Alongside RMT Accountants, RMT Technology is part of Sumer, a top 15 UK accountancy practice on a mission to champion SMEs. It has ten regional accountancy Hubs, with more than 40 offices, and over 1,300 colleagues. Sumer Law was also launched in June, offering legal services to Sumer's SME client base, focusing on corporate, commercial, and employment advice.

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# Tier One Capital continues it's support for Sport Newcastle

Newcastle-based wealth and fund management experts, Tier One Capital has continued its support for grass roots sport in the region, this time sponsoring Sport Newcastle's Unsung Hero awards and annual charity golf day.

**Tier One Capital's long running corporate sponsorship partnership with Sport Newcastle helps the charity deliver its ongoing quest to support the dreams of sporting talent and grassroots sport organisations in the region.**

The Unsung Hero awards were held at the Newcastle Falcons' Kingston Park and the golf day held at Ponteland Golf Club and raised further vital funds for local athletes, sports organisations and grassroots sports participation in the region.

The annual golf day was attended by a wide range of local like-minded businesses and was again supported by SOS Group, which is also a long-time supporter of Sport Newcastle fundraising events.

Teams taking part in the day included Ward Hadaway, Central Employment, Northumbria University, City of Newcastle Gymnastics Academy, Better GLL, Footprint PR, Trusted Red, Root Cause Consultancy and Pardoe Wray. Unite Group ran out the eventual winners on the day.

Tier One Capital's support for both events further underlines the company's commitment to contributing to the local community and encouraging involvement in sport at all levels.

Chief Executive, Ian McElroy said: "As a business deeply rooted in the North East, and with a team of active sports enthusiasts, we are thrilled to continue our long running support of Sport Newcastle.

"The Unsung Hero awards typify what Sport Newcastle stands for and the awards really show cases what grassroots sport and the many dedicated people who give up their time to help young sports people achieve their dreams. We were especially proud to present the awards to the deserving winners on the night."

Mike Booth, Vice Chair of Sport Newcastle, said: "The Unsung Hero awards recognised a wide range of sporting success stories and



people from sports organisations around the region and our annual Golf Day, played at one of the North East finest golf courses, was a tremendous success this year raising over £6,500.

"The support we receive from local businesses is crucial to our long-standing charity's efforts in promoting and nurturing young sporting talent in the region.

"We are immensely grateful for the continued support from Tier One Capital, a generous sponsor, which shares our values and enables emerging sports talents to realise their full potential." he added.

Sport Newcastle provides grants to promising athletes through its Rising Stars awards and also provides fund to sports organisations helping to promote increased participation at grassroots level.

The winners of the Unsung Hero awards were Dave Wilson (Rugby) Susan Gardener (Triathlon) Eric Wilson (Basketball) Ellen Davison (Badminton) Mille Mason (Netball) Kes School Morpeth Runners, Alison Thompson (Badminton) Dave North (Squash) Jeanette Shiple (Netball) Steve Coombs (Rugby) Linda Williamson (Basketball) Steve Cranston (Boxing).

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





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# Retreat Makes Leaders Clowns and Innovators

A group of the region's leaders has enjoyed a Retreat in the Lake District enabling a focus on wellbeing and business performance thanks to their Vistage membership.



**Organised by Vistage chair for the North East and Northumberland Andrew Marsh, the annual two-day retreat was hosted by Lemming House near Pooley Bridge. With views of Ullswater and stunning gardens, the cohort took time to relax as well as having two key note speaker days to encourage consideration about the way to run their businesses.**

Andrew said: "Our annual retreat is open to my Vistage groups every year, and we choose a place that we can unwind and focus on your own wellbeing and being better at your business.

"This year our key speakers dovetailed into each other and brought a combination of fun and focus, which was really well received."

Day one saw inspirational speaker and clown, Em Stroud, engaging the cohort of 18 in games, fun and play. Em, best-selling author of *Lessons from a Clown*, is uniquely positioned between the creative and the business worlds. An Entrepreneur, Performer, Clown, MC and a two times TEDx speaker she is on a mission to help all of us Laugh. Think and Play More.

The cohort laughed their way through the day, focusing on bonding, building relationships, interacting, trusting and applying the techniques to their own businesses. From an initial horror of there being no tables in the room on arrival, the peer groups reported back on having an amazing session before they retired to their rooms to relax and prepare for the evening together.

The takeaway for the day was "Be brave and curious. By being your more authentic self you will be happier in life and more successful in business."

Following a three-course dinner, the group retired to the bar where the playing theme continued with games of Zoof and Think While You Drink.

Day two started bright and early with guest speaker David Hall of the Ideas Centre Group taking the lead with his session. Split into two parts, David had the cohort looking

at the Strategic Role of Creativity and the ways that creative spirit can be brought into any scenario at work. This followed on nicely from Em's session the day before.

The closing afternoon saw some more serious activity, focusing on finance, profit and innovation to see what the company could look like on a "Berocca Day". He talked to the group about vision-led innovation funnels, showing that change doesn't have to be high risk but can bring big returns. Each of the attendees received a copy of his book 'Thinking Money Down the Drain' and left motivated to make changes to operations to grow, improve and innovate performance.

Andrew said of day two: "My favourite part of the day was when we all realised that innovation is simply a way of challenging what we do and how. David focused us on freeing up our thinking to generate fresh ideas.

"By identifying the blocks to creativity, it's possible to develop strategies to overcome them and therefore release the creative potential of every individual."

Some of the feedback on the two-day retreat from the cohort, which included people from finance, recruitment, marketing, property, charity, renewables, transport and more, included:

*"A fabulous two days with lots of ideas to apply to my way of working which will encourage the team to be more playful in our approach with confidence."*

*"Because of the healthy mix of play and focus, I not only enjoyed it, but took away some incredibly valuable lessons and tools."*

*"The highest quality speakers again...Vistage speakers are the best quality and always bring a new dimension to how you look at things. Excellent value for money, fun and educational, even after 30 years in business."*

*"Despite my reservation and worrying I may not have given my best to day one's session due to my own discomfort at bonding exercises, I actually did enjoy it and learnt a lot. By day two I was flying, and the benefits will show in the company performance soon."*

**Andrew runs a number of Vistage groups in the North East. One for Business Owners, another for CEO's and a new cohort launching this summer for C-suite Executives. He also runs a peer group for aspiring leaders, ideal for young talent, and a number for NEDS and Trustees with The Experience Bank.**

**You can reach out to Andrew on [Andrew.marsh@vistagechair.co.uk](mailto:Andrew.marsh@vistagechair.co.uk)**



“

*...innovation is simply a way of challenging what we do and how...*

Andrew Marsh

# New appointment through Experience Bank Group is key to charity's future



Rebecca Maw

**A North East charity that is committed to inspiring young people of the region to believe in themselves has made a 'key' appointment with the help of Experience Bank Group.**

**The team at The Key is delighted to announce Rebecca Maw as their new CEO.**

Introduced by expert senior leadership/board-level recruiter and founder of Experience Bank Group, Peter Neal, Rebecca will join The Key as CEO in late May 2024.

Rebecca boasts an impressive range of skills including working with communities across the North East, bringing strengths in partnership work and first-hand experience in engaging across community and voluntary sector networks.

Rebecca said: "I am committed to fostering positive change and I don't shy away from trying out new ideas to get the best for people. When Peter mentioned the opportunity to join The Key as CEO, I

knew it was the perfect opportunity for me to bring my deep understanding of the challenges faced by today's young people, driven by my compassionate approach and the belief that everyone deserves equity."

Abbie Foster, Head of Income Generation and Marketing, and Interim CEO Maxine Tennet worked closely with Peter to find the right candidate.

Abbie said: "We have previously worked successfully with Peter on the recruitment of our Interim CEO and board members, so we turned to him again for this important appointment. With his historical knowledge of our organisation from his time as a trustee, Peter listened to us, provided proactive advice, and presented several, high quality, great-fit candidates. We are excited for Rebecca to join us and to take us into the next chapter as we support young people who need us most from the region."

Apart from spending time with her children and collecting multiple craft hobbies, Rebecca's spare time is taken up by her dog, Eric, or enjoying travelling to festivals in her motorhome.

Peter said: "Rebecca's previous extensive work in South Tyneside including leading Jarrow Hall, embedding community into the heart of the visitor attraction; leading

large scale social action and volunteering programmes in partnership with local communities and corporate organisations; and working with communities to develop opportunities for themselves focusing on what matters to them most made her the perfect candidate. She also chairs the board of the local infrastructure organisation in South Tyneside and has her finger on the pulse of many things affecting young people in the region. She is a high quality appointment and I look forward to seeing the already thriving charity flourish in the coming years growing their reach and helping even more young people!"

***Experience Bank Group focuses exclusively on recruiting Board Directors (Executive and Non-Executive), Trustees, and Senior Management roles. They identify existing and emerging talent, assess, track, and place the right candidates at the right time for clients. More information is available at [theexperiencebank.co.uk](http://theexperiencebank.co.uk)***

***If you are a young person who wants to take part in what The Key has to offer, a person supporting young people or would like to work with/donate to The Key, then you can find more information at [www.thekeyuk.org](http://www.thekeyuk.org)***

# Meet the Team...

## Alison Hedley

*Aspiring Wealth Manager at Raymond James Monument*

From excelling in a competitive firm in Paris, to swiftly securing a position at Raymond James Monument (RJM) in Newcastle, Alison is gaining vast insight into the world of investment management.

**As a Wealth Manager Trainee at RJM, Alison's unique educational background and professional journey have set her apart in the industry.**

Alison's journey began with a Master of Arts in French and Business from the University of Edinburgh, where she graduated First Class with distinction. This equipped her with the analytical and financial skills necessary to navigate the world of wealth management. During her studies, she spent a semester at the University of Nice, honing her French-speaking skills and this provided Alison with valuable insights into international business and finance.

Whilst in France, Alison joined Infopro Digital, a leading B2B firm in Paris, which exposed her to the competitive world of digital marketing. Alison's proficiency in both French and business made her a valuable asset, leading to further employment within the French firm even after returning to the UK.

Following University, Alison made the decision to settle in Northumberland and quickly secured a position in the wealth management industry where she demonstrated her willingness to learn by quickly achieving the Investment Advice Diploma, which gave her Associate Status with the Chartered Institute of Securities and Investments. Her performance and dedication caught the attention of Raymond James Monument, leading to her current role as a Wealth Manager Trainee within the growing team of six.

Being a Wealth Manager at Raymond James



Alison Hedley

Monument is about making a difference in clients' lives and being a trusted partner in their financial journey. For Alison, that's what makes this career truly rewarding. RJM is committed to building strong relationships based on trust and transparency with clients.

RJM adopts a tailored approach to meeting clients' needs by providing financial planning and tailored investment advice to help achieve their personal goals. Whether you are building wealth or preserving it for future generations, RJM provides the strategies and guidance necessary to help grow and protect clients' assets over time and Alison really enjoys this aspect of her work.

One of Alison's key aspirations is to contribute to the diversification of the finance industry by encouraging more

women to pursue careers in this field. By fostering an environment where women feel valued and supported, Alison hopes to contribute to a more diverse and dynamic financial industry that better serves the ever-growing number of female clients.

Looking ahead, Alison's goal is to become a Chartered Wealth Manager and continues to shine within Raymond James Monument. She is eager to take on more complex client portfolios, deepen her knowledge of global financial markets, and contribute to the firm's success.

In her free time, Alison is a keen violinist and has played in many orchestras across Scotland, and she has continued to play in several ensembles around Northumberland.

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

# Maven opens Middlesbrough office to further support North East businesses



L-R: Sarah Newbould of the British Business Bank and David Nixon and Rebecca MacDermid of Maven Capital Partners.

**Maven Capital Partners has opened a new office in Middlesbrough as part of Maven's commitment to the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II and continued dedication to Teesside and the rest of the North East.**

**Maven's new office is in Middlesbrough's Boho Zone which is the digital, creative, and business hub of the Tees Valley. As Maven continues to strengthen its core sector investments in technology, engineering and manufacturing, life sciences and renewables, this location will serve as a centre for Maven's activities in the Teesside region.**

Maven has also joined the Tees Valley Business Club to further connect with businesses, providing local companies in Teesside with the necessary help, both in terms of the initial investment process and the ongoing support needed to grow sustainably.

The new office further strengthens Maven's commitment to invest in the North East,

having invested over £50 million in more than 40 companies across the region to date, creating over 1200 new jobs. In addition, the office allows Maven to continue supporting local businesses in Teesside as the appointed equity fund manager in the North East for the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II, bringing £50m additional funding to the region.

Maven will also be embarking on a recruitment drive to expand its investment team and identify more local businesses with high potential. The Financial Times' European Cities and Regions of the Future report in February named Middlesbrough as the sixth best 'small city' for its foreign direct investment strategy, demonstrating its strong potential for economic growth and sustained innovation.

Maven is one of the UK's most active investors and provides essential capital investment to UK businesses. Over the last six years, Maven's North East team has made a significant and positive impact in the region from its existing base in Newcastle and Durham.

Michael Vassallo, Investment Partner at Maven, said; "With our great track record in the North East region, along with the business opportunities and economic potential present in Middlesbrough, it was clear that establishing an office presence here was the logical next step. We are excited to continue investing in this region

and unlock additional opportunities for innovative and ambitious companies."

Simon Cunnington, Director at British Business Bank, said: "The new Middlesbrough office is a demonstration of Maven's commitment to have a real presence in the Tees Valley as they continue to provide investment to support local business in the region to achieve their growth ambitions.

"With NPFI II now covering the whole of the North East, the expansion will leverage opportunities for the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II, helping to better identify and support high-potential businesses in the region."

The £660m Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II (NPIFII) covers the entire North of England and provides loans from £25k to £2m and equity investment up to £5m to help a range of small and medium sized businesses to start up, scale up or stay ahead.

***Maven is one of the UK's most active private equity investors and is passionate about working with ambitious businesses to achieve their strategic goals and maximise growth potential. If your business, or the business you advise, is looking at private equity as a solution to fund future growth we would love to hear from you. Please visit [mavencp.com](http://mavencp.com) to find out more.***

# 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.



[Listen to all episodes at mavencp.com/podcasts](https://mavencp.com/podcasts)

# Visualising your financial future with Cashflow Modelling

By Sarah Siddons,  
Principal of Siddons & Co Financial Planning in Ilkley.

As part of my client meetings, I always establish and then review the progress of my clients' financial and personal goals and check whether they're on track to achieve them.

To help with these conversations, I use an interactive cashflow modelling tool called Voyant which models the client's income and expenditure from now, into retirement and for the remainder of their life, based on a number of assumptions including inflation, growth rates, interest rates, taxes, retirement age etc.

It helps bring their financial future alive in a visual format which can play a crucial role in addressing significant questions such as: What would happen if...? Can I afford to...? Will I be okay if...?

To answer these questions, we can try different "what if" scenarios to see what effect a simple change in investment decisions now, can make to their financial situation later in life.

Always with the most important question front of mind: How much will they need to maintain their lifestyle in retirement and could they run out of money in their lifetime?

With Voyant, any shortfall in capital shows up in their graph as red which can be a real wake-up call to encourage clients to take action and make changes now.

The case study below explain how this software helped my clients answer some of their questions about their financial future, leading to better client outcomes.

Although it relates to an actual example, the names and figures have been changed for confidentiality purposes.



Sarah Siddons

## Case Study

A married couple, aged 48 and 49 years old, own their company and had done little to no retirement planning since starting their own business several years ago.

We modelled their report using their current savings and existing pension provisions and worked on the assumption that they would stop working at 65, with a 4% net growth projection.

Unfortunately, it showed a large shortfall in their retirement (showing red) and illustrated they would only have their state pensions to live off from ages 69/70 (fig 1).

By starting to make annual pension contributions of £15,000 each from their company, we could show that they would be able to afford to maintain their current lifestyle in retirement, with the company pension contributions also acting as a corporation tax reducer for their business.

**If you would like to explore your uncharted financial future using Voyant and check whether you are on track to achieve a comfortable retirement, visit: [www.siddonsand.co](http://www.siddonsand.co)**

The advice provided to this client was given after a full evaluation of their specific needs, circumstances and requirements. The solutions provided would not be suitable for most investors and the information provided does not constitute advice.

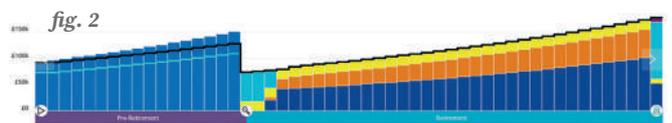
The value of an investment with St. James's Place will be directly linked to the performance of the funds you select and the value can therefore go down as well as up. You may get back less than you invested.

The levels and bases of taxation and reliefs from taxation can change at any time and are dependent on individual circumstances.

Siddons & Co Financial Planning is an Appointed Representative of and represents only St. James's Place Wealth Management plc (which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority) for the purpose of advising solely on the Group's wealth management products and services, more details of which are set out on the Group's website [www.sjp.co.uk/products](http://www.sjp.co.uk/products).



Current situation - family with 2 earners, expenses of £4k per month, £51k current pension provision plus State Pensions.



'What if' scenario: Using surplus income to invest into ISAs (£800 per month each) in addition to the pension contributions.



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Senior Partner Practice

**St  
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Place**

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The 'St. James's Place Partnership' and the titles 'Partner' and 'Partner Practice' are marketing terms used to describe St. James's Place representatives.

SJP Approved 16/07/2024

# In conversation with...

## Michael Horner

*Business Development Director – CCBS Group*

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

I remember vividly a careers day at school. We had a computer system that would calculate your perfect job, I put all in the information and it came out with fence erector! I'm not even sure that in isolation that is an actual job but that's what it spat out. I'd actually wanted to be something to do with movies, ideally on the writing or directing side as I loved movies as a kid. So, the heart of a film director and natural ability of a fence erector equals finance, who knew! Ironically, I am absolutely rubbish at DIY so the fences of the north are lucky I did not pursue that one.

### Tell us about your new role at CCBS Group?

I'm coming in as Business Development Director. For me the role is all about supporting local businesses and the wider business community from Northumberland down to Teesside. Securing finance has been difficult for SMEs and the last turbulent 4-5 years has not made this any easier. CCBS Group has the knowledge and experience to make this a lot simpler for our local businesses and I'm looking forward to being a part of this. My role is to spread the word, let the local business community and SMEs know we are here and to provide tailored solutions to help them with their next steps.

### What skills do you hope to bring to your new role?

For the last four and a half years I have been working solely on commercial mortgages so hoping to help the team build on this and go back to my roots working on more detailed solutions for trading businesses. Working in a new-start fintech bank is a great experience and you find yourself much closer to day-to-day operations that, in my early years at traditional big banks, I just took for granted and never really considered. Working within an independent North East business and directly with SMEs will allow me to pass on this experience. I also have the benefit of having been on the other side of the fence, so to speak. I worked for a bank looking after commercial finance brokers and stepping in to help ensure the deal completed, which will help me enormously in the new role. I have been in finance for over 20 years now and have near enough done it all, from structuring multi-million-pound complex ABL transactions to being in charge of making cups of tea and answering the branch phone.

### Within your career what has been your proudest business achievement?

Always a tricky question, this one. Being traditionally from a sales background you are always measured against performance, and overachieving those targets individually and collectively as a team is really rewarding. Over the years I have had individual accolades and our teams have won many an award, and at a new team being built up or most recently as a start-up bank these are the kind of things that make you immensely proud of how hard everyone has worked to get recognised as number one. But for me it's all about being proud of what you do every day, if you can look in the mirror and say you are always working hard and pushing for the right outcomes for your clients, you won't go far wrong.

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

I think it's fair to say that with Covid and the base rate hikes this is right up there with the biggest changes seen in my lifetime, excluding the crash. Key has been how businesses and funders have pivoted to navigate this - demonstrating that there will always be a place for innovative businesses and good people. We have also seen the emergence of digital in finance. Fintech has been around for some time now, but it's becoming more mainstream and it's now an integral part of finance compared to ten years ago. It will be really interesting to see where we go in the next decade, open banking and AI I expect to feature heavily in the very near future.

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

The team at CCBSG is a huge factor in me joining - I have known most of them for ten years or more. Incredibly experienced and genuinely some of the absolute best people in the industry. I can't wait to work with them. They have been doing great things over the last 10 years, supporting the North East business community.

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

Control the controllables. So easy to get worked up over a decision or an action that impacts you but if you genuinely can't change this then why waste the energy on it. Put this into something you can control and excel at it.

### How do you unwind outside of work?

I have two young (ish) children so I don't! In all seriousness my kids have an incredibly full calendar so I find myself at football and dance practices and competitions all the time - but I genuinely love it. Grassroots sports is so important in my view and I get as much out of supporting them as my kids do from participating. I really like that CCBS Group really buy into this too and have their own grassroots sponsorship program to support local clubs.

I am also a trustee for a charity that focuses on promoting walking locally to promote a healthy lifestyle and mental wellbeing, as well as bringing together communities in the North East. This involves providing guided walks, taking out schools into the local area and we have an ambitious goal of putting in 100 new walks into heritage areas of County Durham. We currently have 20, so plenty of work to do.

I also must confess that a key way to unwind for me on a less healthy note is to get the football on the TV at the weekend and crack open a beer! I also like to get away when possible and this usually involves me, my wife and the children going away in the campervan to North Yorkshire or Northumberland. We affectionally call the camper "Big Ned" after one of my new colleagues (who will remain nameless) suggested I looked like Ned Flanders from the Simpsons literally five mins after I bought the camper.

[Michael@cbsg.co.uk](mailto:Michael@cbsg.co.uk)



“

*...for me it's  
all about  
being proud of  
what you do  
every day...*

*Michael Horner*



## UNW bucks downsizing trend with office expansion

North East independent chartered accountancy and advisory firm UNW has significantly increased its office space in Newcastle's prominent Citygate II building in a move that is set to provide the business with more space to grow.

**The expansion, which comes as a result of continued success in the marketplace and a need to accommodate its growing team, sees the firm increase its office footprint at the site on St James' Boulevard by over 35%.**

Moving from its original 7,200sqft office space on the third floor, which it has occupied since 2008, UNW now occupies the entire 11,000sqft second floor. This is in addition to its existing 3,200sqft reception and client meeting suite on the ground floor.

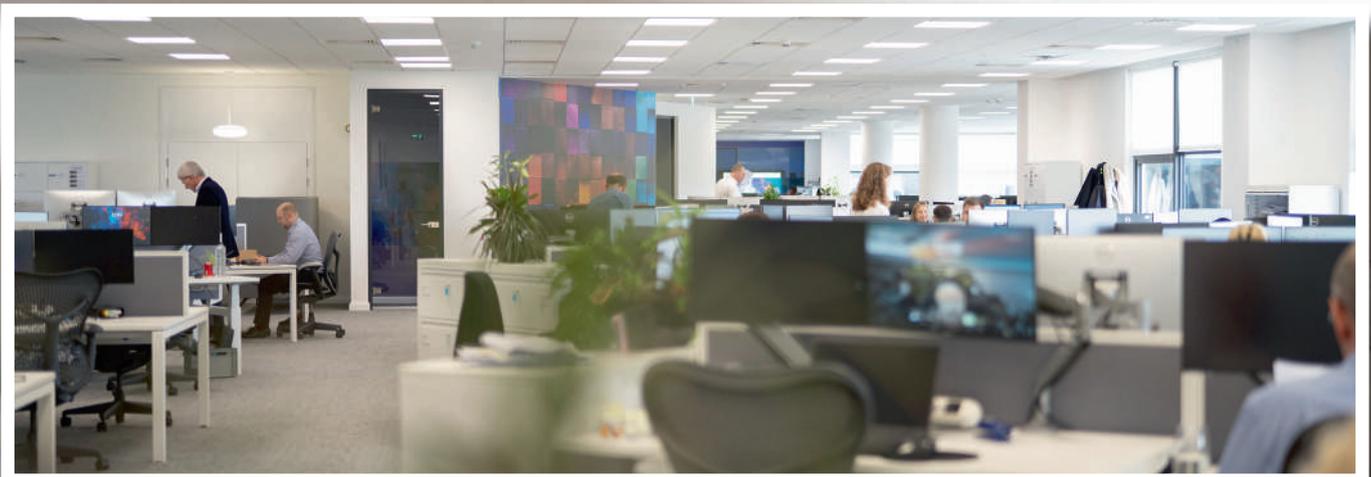
In contrast with the post-pandemic downsizing trend in the market, the move to a larger office at Citygate II will accommodate UNW's 185-strong team across one open plan space and allow for the creation of more jobs at the firm, including a further 15 graduate and apprentice roles in September 2024.

The newly acquired space has been transformed into a modern, open plan working environment and includes over a dozen internal meeting rooms and collaborative spaces, a state-of-the-art video conference room, as well as a large contemporary kitchen and social space.

Chris Wilson, Partner and Head of Corporate Finance at UNW, said: "This substantial investment in our facilities not only reflects our dedication to meeting the needs of our growing team but also ensures that we can continue to build on our success in recent years."

"We're creating a great place to work here at UNW. From the supportive, transparent, and inclusive culture that exists, right through to the high-quality training and development opportunities we provide. We know that providing our people, and those we plan to hire, with a first-class office environment where they can really thrive, will enable us to continue to recruit and retain some of the brightest and best talent in the region.

**Learn more at [www.unw.co.uk](http://www.unw.co.uk)**





# The benefits of connection vs. flexibility in the workplace: A balanced perspective for the accounting and advisory sector



The workplace landscape has undergone a dramatic transformation in recent years, with the rise of remote work challenging traditional office-based models.

This shift has sparked a debate about the benefits of connection versus flexibility, particularly in the professional services sector where precision, collaboration, and confidentiality are paramount.

Understanding the pros and cons of working in an office versus working from home is crucial for firms aiming to optimise productivity and employee satisfaction.

## Connection in the workplace

Connection in an office setting fosters a sense of community among employees. This is particularly important in accountancy, where collaboration and teamwork are essential.

**1. Enhanced Collaboration:** Colleagues can easily collaborate on complex financial projects. Face-to-face interactions facilitate quick problem-solving and brainstorming sessions that are often more challenging to replicate virtually. Spontaneous conversations can lead to innovative solutions.

**2. Stronger Mentorship:** New colleagues benefit significantly from in-person mentorship. It allows senior colleagues to provide immediate feedback and guidance, helping new hires quickly grasp complex concepts and improve their skills.

**3. Team Cohesion and Morale in a structured environment:** The office builds

a sense of camaraderie that can enhance team cohesion. Regular social interactions, team-building activities, and office events contribute to a positive work culture and can lead to increased job satisfaction and reduced turnover rates. A more structured environment can enhance productivity, creating a clear delineation between work and home life.

## Flexibility in the workplace

The flexibility offered by remote work has its own set of advantages, particularly for those juggling demanding schedules and tight deadlines.

**1. Increased Productivity:** Many people find that working from home increases their productivity. Without the distractions and interruptions within an office setting, they can complete tasks more efficiently.

**2. Improved Work-Life Balance and Well-being:** Flexibility is a significant benefit for employees with family commitments or long commutes. Remote work allows them to balance their personal and professional lives, leading to increased job satisfaction, better overall well-being, and reduced stress levels.

**3. Cost Savings:** Employees save on commuting costs. This in itself can reduce stress levels and therefore increase productivity and job satisfaction.

## Finding the balance

The key to maximising the benefits of both connection and flexibility lies in finding the right balance. A hybrid model, where employees split their time between the office and home, can offer the best of both worlds.

**1. Hybrid Work Model:** A hybrid approach allows employees to enjoy the flexibility of remote work while maintaining the connection and collaboration that comes from being in the office.



Dan Cooper,  
Partner, Head of  
Outsourced | FD

**2. Leveraging Technology:** To bridge the gap between remote and in-office work, firms can invest in robust communication and collaboration tools. Video conferencing, project management software, and secure file-sharing platforms can facilitate seamless interaction and ensure that remote employees remain integrated with the team.

**3. Creating a Culture of Trust:** For a hybrid model to succeed, firms must foster a culture of trust and accountability. Clear expectations, regular check-ins, and performance metrics can help ensure that all employees, whether remote or in-office, are meeting their goals and contributing to the firm's success.

The debate between connection and flexibility in the workplace is not a matter of choosing one over the other, but rather finding a harmonious balance that meets the needs of both the firm and its employees. As precision, confidentiality, and collaboration are crucial, a well-implemented hybrid model can provide the structure and connection of an office environment while leveraging the flexibility and productivity benefits of remote work. By embracing this balanced approach, firms can enhance employee satisfaction, increase productivity, and ultimately achieve greater success.

[ryecroftglenton.com](http://ryecroftglenton.com)

# Navigating Growth: Insights from industry leaders

We all know the phrase ‘cash is king’ but it takes more than that to grow a business.

On top of knowing your numbers, forecasting and deciding whether or not to raise investment, there’s a lot more to juggle.

**Co-founders of Blu Sky Chartered Accountants Jon Dudgeon and Dave Gibson recently held a round table with several leading North East business leaders to discuss the topic of navigating the scale-up journey.**

Round table attendees included Land Digital founder, Jon Leighton, Sullivan Brown founder Maureen Brown, People Science founder Julia Smith, SQCDP founder, Stephen Mitchell, Chief Executive at NEL, Jonathan Luke, Just Williams founder Jessica Williams, and Strategic Projects Director at Umi, Julie Cuthbertson.

Read on for the key themes that came up, including some of the considerations and challenges these business leaders have come across when growing and scaling their businesses.

## Cultural evolution and finding the right people

The group agreed that culture becomes more important as you grow. Stephen Mitchell explained: “We’re a very male-dominated business and the culture reflects this. We’ve talked about how we’ll make changes to diversify and welcome people from different backgrounds as we grow.”

Maureen Brown shared her experience: “I made a couple of hires and they didn’t land.



It disrupted the culture, and that impacted performance, so we had to re-group. As you welcome more people to your team, your culture will evolve and sometimes you won’t get it right, but you can overcome this.”

## Leading by example and not doing it on your own

As a leader, trying to do everything yourself can get overwhelming. The group agreed that you need to pick a few areas of focus and get comfortable with delegation.

Digital Agency owner, Jon Leighton explained: “Bring external people in to help establish your culture, brand and value proposition. Don’t try to do it all yourself.”

Jon continued: “Set the standard in terms of your own development and demonstrate that to your team. They will follow it.”

Jonathan Luke added: “Listen to other people and ask for their opinions, because nobody knows everything. Learn from other people’s experiences, adapt, reform and refine.”

## Preparing solid business plans

Dave Gibson covered the importance of solid business plans, especially when raising investment: “Your business plan is basically your CV. Like a CV, it can be disregarded straight away because of an error. Forecasts within your plan need to accurately reflect everything you’ll say when pitching to potential investors. If there are inconsistencies, you’ll fall at the first hurdle.”

Julie Cuthbertson reiterated that everything interlinks: “I’ve seen situations where the business plan was immaculately prepared. Financials were excellent, but the founder ineffectively delivered their culture and that was equally as jarring as a bad forecast.”

## Introducing new ways of working

The panel agreed that ways of working have changed, and the rate of change accelerates as more people join your team. Jessica Williams shared her observations: “Expectations have changed significantly from an employee’s perspective. Some want hybrid working, some don’t. Not everyone wants to be in the office all the time, so be mindful of where and how people want to work”.

Maureen added: “When you have new people coming in, you have to be more flexible because you need to support them to be successful. Change your approach to facilitate new people and ways of working.” Julia Smith added: “There’s been a real shift in terms of creating value for your people, not just extracting value from them.”

## Solidify your processes including onboarding

On the point of introducing new ways of working, Jon Dudgeon emphasised that scaling businesses should have solid onboarding processes. “The onboarding process is so important, especially with remote employees. Everything needs to be thought out. There needs to be many touch points and check-ins as people settle into their new roles.”

Jonathan Luke also discussed the importance of long-term development: “As your business grows, you need to consider if your people will still be able to fulfil their roles and what processes you’ll have in place to help them upskill.”

**Blu Sky work with scaling businesses across the UK. If you need support with your growth journey, visit: [www.blusky.co.uk/scaling-businesses](http://www.blusky.co.uk/scaling-businesses).**



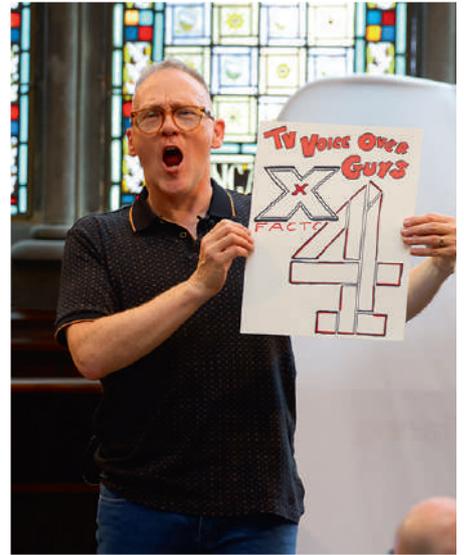


**Sales, Service & Success 24**

Hosted in the beautiful Common Room, Newcastle, The Just Williams Sales Academy presented the third year of the Sales, Service & Success Conference in late June.

Featuring a wide array of guest speakers from across Sales, Customer Service and Marketing fields, delegates enjoyed an action-packed agenda that inspired and educated! The feedback was amazing – thank you to everyone who supported and attended!

Be the first to know about 2025's event, join the mailing list at [www.justwilliamssales.academy](http://www.justwilliamssales.academy)







## Experience rewarded as several staff promoted at leading law firm

**A leading North East law firm's impressive growth has resulted in a string of key promotions.**

Having formed almost 200 years ago, Tilly, Bailey & Irvine has since expanded across the region with offices in Hartlepool, Wynyard, Barnard Castle, and Stockton.

Now six staff – who have well over a century of shared experience within the award-winning firm – have been promoted into more senior positions.

“We are delighted about the promotions here at Tilly, Bailey & Irvine,” said Kirstey Maloney, Partner and Head of Family Law.

Among them are Wendy Beacom and Jackie Blackwell, who both started their careers as secretaries. They've respectively been promoted to equity partner and family executive.

Another new family executive, Christine Smith, joined the company over 40 years ago and has over 30 years of experience within family law.

Additionally, Sara Garnett started at the firm's Hartlepool office as a trainee almost a quarter of a century ago and has since risen through the ranks to become an equity partner along with Andrew Beattie, who possesses over 20 years of commercial property experience.

Criminal defence solicitor Georgia Wilkinson has been promoted to associate solicitor and stated that she was “excited” with the new role, adding: “It is nice to see hard work paying off.”

Shamin Ali, an award-winning solicitor who has been made a salaried partner in the firm's Private Family division said the news came as a “lovely surprise”, adding: “I really enjoy working for the company – it is an amazing company to work for and I have a great team.”

With five of the six promotions being awarded to women, it continues the progressive firm's historic approach to a diverse workforce, which started a century ago when it became one of the first legal firms in the area to appoint a female solicitor.



## Kennedys expand healthcare practice with hire of Dawn McIntosh

**Global law firm Kennedys has appointed Dawn McIntosh as a partner in its Newcastle office.**

Dawn, who joins after more than 16 years at DAC Beachcroft, will work in the firm's private healthcare team. She has extensive experience in both public and private healthcare, assisting medical malpractice insurers, brokers, adjusters, leading hospital groups and healthcare professionals on a wide range of health and social care matters.

Senior associate, Katy Barraclough-Jones, senior claims administrator Vicky Gosling and litigation assistant James Wilson will make the move with her.



## Direct Line Supplies appoints Jacksons Law Firm for purchase of Mercurial Properties

**A need to increase the warehouse capacity for Direct Line Supplies has seen the company purchase a new business, which could facilitate exponential growth.**

Direct Line Supplies purchased Mercurial Properties in order to take over the warehouse at Lockheed Close, Preston Farm Industrial Estate.

The company will use the facility to increase its buying power of food supplies, which it imports and exports around the globe, while also creating capacity for other businesses to use some of its storage space under a new business name, Linxport.

Direct Line Supplies director Pedram Salahshouri engaged Jacksons Law Firm, which also has a base on Preston Farm Industrial Estate, to complete the purchase of Mercurial Properties and its warehouse.

Pedram Salahshouri, Director of DLS, expressed his gratitude to Jacksons Law Firm for their longstanding partnership and efficient handling of the transaction. “We have been working with Jacksons for over 30 years and have always valued their expertise and dedication,” he said.



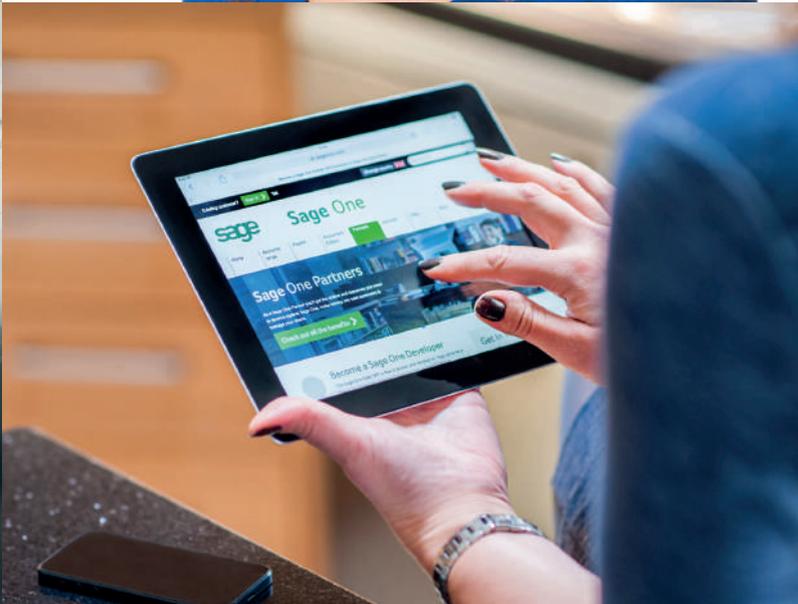
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Working as a business lifestyle photographer, my goal is to help companies elevate their brand through the use of striking photography. My service is especially useful for businesses who require photography in print and social media. I specialise in portraits, office, case studies and events.

# Northern Law Awards 2024

Recently held at the prestigious St James' Park. A resounding success, celebrating the outstanding achievements and dedication of legal professionals across Northern England. Hosted by the charismatic Alfie Joey, the evening brought together a diverse array of legal talent, recognising excellence across 17 award categories.

The event commenced with a lively drinks reception, followed by a warm welcome from Alfie Joey. Attendees enjoyed a sumptuous three-course dinner before the highlight of the evening: the awards ceremony. The night culminated in a celebration on the dance floor with entertainment provided by the renowned Storm Band.

## Awards Ceremony Highlights

The awards ceremony showcased the exceptional talent within the legal community, with awards spanning various categories, including Rising Star of the Year, Lawyer of the Year, and Law Firm of the Year. Notable winners included:

**Trainee of the Year:** Liam Musgrave of Swinburne Maddison LLP.

**Apprentice of the Year:** Saffron Sinclair from Sintons.

**Law Firm of the Year (6+ Partners):** Jacksons Law Firm.

**Law Teacher of the Year:** Toni Spencer from the University of Sunderland.

The prestigious Outstanding Achievement Award was the crowning moment of the evening, celebrating a lifetime of dedication and contributions to the legal profession. This was awarded to Alistair Smith of Watson Woodhouse Solicitors, closing the evening on a high for the firm who saw success in four categories across the evening.

## Supporting a Worthy Cause

In line with the tradition of supporting charitable causes, this year's awards partnered with CHUF (Children's Heart Unit Fund) at Newcastle's Freeman Hospital. CHUF provides vital support to the paediatric heart unit, one of only two such facilities in the UK. Through the generosity of attendees, £1942 was raised to support CHUF's Seven Appeal, ensuring continued excellence in cardiac care for children.

## Gratitude to Sponsors and Judges

The Northern Law Awards would not be possible without the unwavering support of its sponsors and judges. Their dedication and contributions are instrumental in celebrating and recognising the legal talent in the region. Special thanks are extended to Echo Events for their meticulous organisation of the evening.

## Engagement and Networking

The event provided an excellent opportunity for networking and engagement within the legal community. Attendees shared their experiences and celebrations on social media using the hashtag #NLA2024, creating a vibrant online presence for the awards.

## Looking Forward

As the Northern Law Awards 2024 concludes, the organisers look forward to continuing this tradition of excellence and recognition in the coming years. The event remains a cornerstone in the legal calendar, celebrating the dedication and achievements of legal professionals across Northern England.

**For more information about the Northern Law Awards, please visit [www.lawawards.co.uk](http://www.lawawards.co.uk)**







“  
*...This award really goes to our employees...*”

**Thanks to our employees – the heart of our business!**

The managing partner of a double award-winning law firm, where the team feel valued and clients are well-served, praised the whole team’s efforts, as he collected the coveted Law Firm of the Year award.



L-R: Sarah Hawkins with Amie Callan



L-R: John Bewick, Erica Turner, Amie Callan, Tony Wentworth, Emily Bentley, Richard Flounders, Toby Joel, Beckie Talbot, Ellie Honeyman, Emily Skillcorn.

**Jacksons Law Firm, which has offices in Teesside and Newcastle, as well as a presence in Sunderland, has two reasons to celebrate, after beating some stiff competition to take, not just the Law Firm of the Year Award, but also the Law Practice Management Award at this year's Northern Law Awards.**

Jacksons demonstrated it continues to lead the way when it comes to business and personal legal solutions, as it was shortlisted in three categories, including team of the year for the Litigation and Dispute Resolution Team.

And on the night, partners and the team were delighted when Jacksons Law Firm was named Law Firm of the Year and was also awarded the Law Practice Management Award, in recognition of the firm's operations team, who significantly contribute to the firm's success.

Speaking as the firm was presented with its Law Firm of the Year award, managing partner Tony Wentworth acknowledged the contribution the whole team make to achieving excellence.

"There may be only 10 of us on the stage to collect this award, but there are 89 other people contributing in equal measure to this award," he said.

"I'd like to thank all our team members for their hard work to get us here.

"You really deserve this award. You're a great team and we're grateful to the judges for recognising that."

The Law Firm of the Year award recognises a practice of six-plus partners and was presented by Joe Brown of category sponsor Robson Laidler Accountants.

Joe explained the decision to award Jacksons the prestigious title was unanimous and followed consideration of the "impressive" presentations from each of the five finalists. The decision was based upon Jacksons' excellence of delivery of legal services and outstanding business and financial performance.

"The firm has made substantial progress in innovative systems for developing the team and providing career opportunities," Mr Brown acknowledged.

"The organisation also contributes significantly by imaginative CSR initiatives and presents a modern and exemplary legal firm."

The Law Practice Management Award was presented to Jacksons by Sarah Hawkins, of Wokingham Borough Council.

She explained the firm had demonstrated a desire to make the business more efficient by implementing cost savings that didn't impact on the quality of service to clients or the welfare of the team.

"They implemented a method of working that made the team feel valued with many of the changes being directed to their wellbeing," Ms Hawkins said.

"We were impressed by the fact that such innovative changes were embraced by the firm's senior leadership team.

"Congratulations Jacksons Law Firm!"

Partner Amie Callan received the award, echoing Mr Wentworth's sentiment that it represented the hard work of all employees.

"This award really goes to our employees," she said.

"They really are the heart of our business and if it wasn't for them getting behind every initiative, every idea, we wouldn't have been able to achieve this.

"We just keep growing and it gets better and better but it's a testament to our employees."

The Northern Law Awards took place at St James' Park, Newcastle and shared the extraordinary achievements of those working in the legal industry.

The celebrations brought together and championed the many talented individuals working in the legal industry in firms, companies and in-house at a wide variety of organisations.

[www.jacksons-law.com](http://www.jacksons-law.com)



L-R: Joe Brown (Robson Laidler), Emily Bentley, Toby Joel, Erica Turner, Tony Wentworth, John Bewick, Richard Flounders, Ellie Honeyman, Emily Skillcorn, Beckie Talbot, Amie Callan.

# Trainee of the Year...

## Liam Musgrave

Liam recently scooped the Trainee of the Year prize at the prestigious Northern Law Awards. We spoke to him to discuss his story so far...



### What were your career ambitions growing up?

When I was younger, I wanted to be a singer as I used to love switching off and listening to music (and still do). I soon realised that I couldn't sing, and a more suitable career path would be wiser. I've always wanted to help people and, whilst at school, I discovered I had a passion for the law and wanted to pursue a career in this. It probably helps that I can be quite argumentative at times...

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

One of the things I enjoy most about working in the Dispute Resolution team is the variety of work involved. No two matters are the same; you might be working on a housing disrepair claim one minute and an Inheritance Act claim the next. The variety keeps work interesting and allows me to continually learn and research different areas of law.

I have recently finished work on a Multi-Track Proprietary Estoppel case in which we managed to reach a settlement which was incredibly favourable to our client. It was really rewarding to see how pleased the client was with this result.

### How did you feel about winning Trainee of the Year at the Northern Law Awards?

It was quite a shock to be honest. I wasn't expecting it at all, and I can't fully remember what I said in my acceptance speech because of my nerves and disbelief.

I recently qualified as a solicitor in April 2024 (so just made the cut) and I was nominated by one of the Partners in my name and I am incredibly grateful to be nominated for the award and even reach the interview stage. I want to thank the judges and everyone at Swinburne Maddison who has helped me in my career so far, as I honestly would not be here without them.

### What are you currently working on?

I handle a wide range of commercial disputes, including debt recovery, contractual disputes and injunctions and property litigation matters including possession applications, housing

disrepair and general landlord and tenant disputes. Property litigation makes up the majority of my caseload and I can definitely see myself specialising in this area in the future.

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

I work within quite a large team, consisting of 13 fee earners and four assistants in litigation alone. We handle a wide range of litigious matters from property litigation to negligence claims. Everyone is always willing to help, whether it's helping clients or colleagues. There is a genuine atmosphere of teamwork and collaboration within the team where everyone just wants the best for each other.

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

I would hope to have progressed further in my career, perhaps to a more senior position with increased responsibility, both in terms of workload and mentoring less-experienced members of the team.

Since qualifying, I often support our new and junior members of the team, answering questions which may come up.

I hope to perhaps specialise in a particular area of litigation, possibly property litigation and broaden my knowledge and really focus on this particular area - which is vast in itself!

### Who are your heroes and mentors?

I look up to my colleagues every day. They impress me with their knowledge and experience and they really inspire me to excel in my role and be a better person.

It goes without saying, my parents and family. I have a lot to thank them for in terms of my upbringing and values which I like to think I live by.

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

Taylor Swift, Taylor Swift, Taylor Swift, Taylor Swift - can you tell I'm a Swiftie?

### How do you unwind outside of work?

I enjoy trying to switch off and relax. I spend a lot of time at the gym trying to stay healthy and active. Despite my singing ambitions, I now enjoy listening to music and spending time with friends and family.

### Favourite book and boxset?

Anything Games of Thrones related. I can't count how many times I have watched the series in full - even Series 8... I'm currently enjoying House of the Dragon and not quite sure what I will watch once it finishes. I will probably just rewatch Game of Thrones again...

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



**2024** NORTHERN  
**LAW AWARDS**

Trainee of the Year

**Liam Musgrave**  
Swinburne Maddison LLP

Category Supported by:  Newcastle University

Liam Musgrave



Sarah Ellis

## What do new leasehold reforms mean for homeowners?

Many homeowners and landlords will long have been aware of changes being made to leasehold regulations. The Leasehold and Freehold Reform Bill became law on 24 May this year, bringing significant reform to the way that leases and freeholds operate. Sarah Ellis, a Chartered Legal Executive from Sintons, gives an overview of the changes and how they could affect you.

**Over the last year, a lot of our clients have been asking questions about the proposed changes to leasehold laws. We've known since 2019 that the government was planning new laws, and the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Bill has now been passed.**

Even though the bill has received royal assent, it's still not fully in force and many details are still to be confirmed. However, we do know some of the changes that are in the pipeline for the people who own and occupy the nearly 5 million leasehold properties in England.

### Benefits for homeowners

The sole purpose of the Act is to provide a much more reasonable market for homeowners. It will bring a number of benefits, including the removal of the requirement for people to have owned

their house or flat for two years before they are able to extend their lease or buy their freehold.

The sale of new leasehold houses will be banned, save for a handful of permitted exceptions – so most new houses sold will be freehold. And the act will make it simpler for people to challenge poor landlords and managing agents and to challenge unreasonable charges.

Something a lot of homeowners will have heard about is the fact that standard lease extension terms will be increased to 990 years for both houses and flats. Currently, the standard term is 50 years for houses and 90 years for flats. The new, longer term means people will not have to renew leases as often, saving time and money and avoiding delays or complications with sales,

purchases and remortgages.

It will also be cheaper to extend a lease or purchase a freehold. This will partly be due to the abolition of 'marriage value' – the amount that is currently paid to a landlord or freeholder when a lease is extended, after dropping below 80 years. This can total tens of thousands of pounds, so not having to pay it will be a huge benefit for homeowners.

In addition, certain leaseholders will have the right to vary their long leases so the rent becomes and will remain a peppercorn.

### Should you wait to extend your lease?

If you are currently considering whether or not you should wait to extend your lease this really depends on your future plans.

If your lease term is less than 80 years and you wish to mortgage or sell your property in the near future you may not have a choice but to extend the term, as short leases are not accepted by the majority of lenders.

These changes will be welcomed by many people, but there is still some time to wait until the benefits are seen and you should bear this in mind when making decisions.

At Sintons, we always advise our clients to liaise with a specialist leasehold valuer, who is trained in assessing premiums, to decide whether it will be more cost effective extend your lease now, or to wait for the new Act to be implemented.

**Sarah Ellis is part of the specialist residential conveyancing team at Sintons. Find out more at [www.sintons.co.uk](http://www.sintons.co.uk)**

## Withdrawing job offers – a risky business?

Paul McGowan is Principal Solicitor at specialist employment law firm, Collingwood Legal. Paul considers a recent discrimination case concerning a job applicant's Christian beliefs.



Paul McGowan

**Job applicants are protected from discrimination during their application and the arrangements for deciding who to offer employment. A recent case highlights some of the risks to employers in withdrawing job offers.**

### **Ngole v Touchstone Leeds**

Mr Ngole applied for a discharge mental health support worker position at Touchstone Leeds ("the Respondent"). Mr Ngole disclosed his Christian faith during the application process. Having performed well in his interview, he was offered employment (subject to DBS checks and references). The Respondent was not satisfied with his factual references so conducted an internet search of Mr Ngole's name. This revealed articles concerning Mr Ngole losing his place on a course at Sheffield University over "anti-gay remarks" (but the Respondent had not seen Mr Ngole's successful legal action challenging this decision). The Respondent withdrew its job offer based on information which, in its view, did not align with its values concerning its alliance with the LGBTQI community. Mr Ngole challenged this decision, and the Respondent replied by inviting him to a meeting so assurances could be provided that his role wouldn't be compromised by his views. Mr Ngole confirmed he would not discriminate against anyone but said that he should not be asked to participate "in the promotion of homosexual rights". Following this meeting, the Respondent chose not to reinstate the job offer.

One component of Mr Ngole's claims was that the decisions to withdraw his job offer and not to reinstate it was unlawful discrimination resulting from his religious beliefs. The Employment Tribunal ("ET") concluded he was unlawfully discriminated against when his original offer was withdrawn as this was materially influenced by his religious beliefs. The ET rejected the claim in respect of the refusal to reinstate the job offer. It concluded that following the second interview the conclusion that the Respondent had not received the necessary assurances was proportionate and that this aspect of his discrimination claim must fail. The second interview was described as "the least intrusive way of proceeding" to balance Mr Ngole's rights against the risk to service users from encountering these beliefs. Therefore, it was decided that the refusal to reinstate the job offer was due to the objectionable manifestation of the belief and was permissible.

### **What should employers note from this case?**

Mr Ngole has indicated he will appeal the ET's findings in the Respondent's favour, but the ET's findings regarding why the initial rescission of the job offer was discriminatory are notable for employers.

The ET concluded that rescinding the job offer would obviously have a negative impact on Mr Ngole. The Respondent was, however, also concerned about the impact of

Mr Ngole's beliefs on the provision of their services, but the ET noted that rather than withdraw the offer, the Respondent could have provided Mr Ngole with the opportunity to provide the reassurances it needed. There was little prospect of any service users coming across Mr Ngole as he was not engaged yet so giving him this opportunity was a less intrusive way of seeking to resolve their concerns. The ET appears to have concluded that while the Respondent did give Mr Ngole this opportunity at the second interview, it was not reasonable to withdraw the job offer also.

The Equality Act 2010 protects not only religious beliefs but also philosophical beliefs and this can lead to conflicts between different types of protected rights under the law. Previous cases in the ET and appeal courts have made clear that when an employer becomes aware of beliefs which may run contrary to their values, they should consider how to act proportionately with reference to the job description and the risks of a conflict between the employee's belief and the employee's values.

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

***[www.collingwoodlegal.com](http://www.collingwoodlegal.com)  
0191 282 2880***

## How late is too late?

When it comes to chasing payments, small businesses typically spend more than a week each year pursuing what they're owed. With more than a third of businesses being hit by payment delays, the impact on growth and innovation can be significant.

**North East commercial law firm Muckle LLP is pushing against this trend, working closely with businesses in the region to ensure they keep a finger on the pulse of late payments, create strategies to deal with them and help avoid lost income.**

The North East has long been renowned for its industrial strength and entrepreneurial spirit, and the region's strong association with industry goes back many years. A whole host of prestigious companies set out their stall on the banks of the River Tyne, Wear and Tees, and these businesses had a reputation that spanned the entire globe.

Today, the region is a leading destination for manufacturing, engineering, digital and life science companies (to name but a few), with the business community consistently at the forefront of innovation and investment. Helping it continue such progress is Muckle, which is using its experience and knowledge in debt recovery to ensure that the trend continues.

In the midst of all this growth, the significance of maintaining a healthy cash flow cannot be overstated.

Colin Churchward, partner in Muckle's debt recovery team, says the firm is seeing an increased demand for its debt recovery services, with businesses struggling with cash flow due to late payments: "Late payments are very common. It can be tempting to give in and accept it as part and parcel of doing business, but it doesn't have to be."

"As a business, we've helped numerous organisations across the region move forward. Everyone at Muckle lives in



Colin Churchward

the North East, is enthusiastic about the region, and wants to see it thrive. We've got real capability in debt recovery; our team includes people with a lot of different disciplines, which allows us to provide an expert approach," says Colin, who himself specialises in providing public and private sector organisations with advice on debt recovery strategy and risk management.

"Our clients tell us that chasing customer payments is a significant distraction from their businesses' day-to-day running. But now isn't the time to be complacent. Your customers will likely have multiple creditors. Businesses that are proactive with their debt collection will see their invoices paid first.

"If you've already asked for payment but have not received it, then warned you'll escalate and still have not been paid, then you need to seek help. Using a professional service to collect payment will save you time, money and resources."

"With the right invoice recovery strategy in place, it's easy to take back control."

Muckle's legal expertise can make invoice recovery fast, efficient, and, most

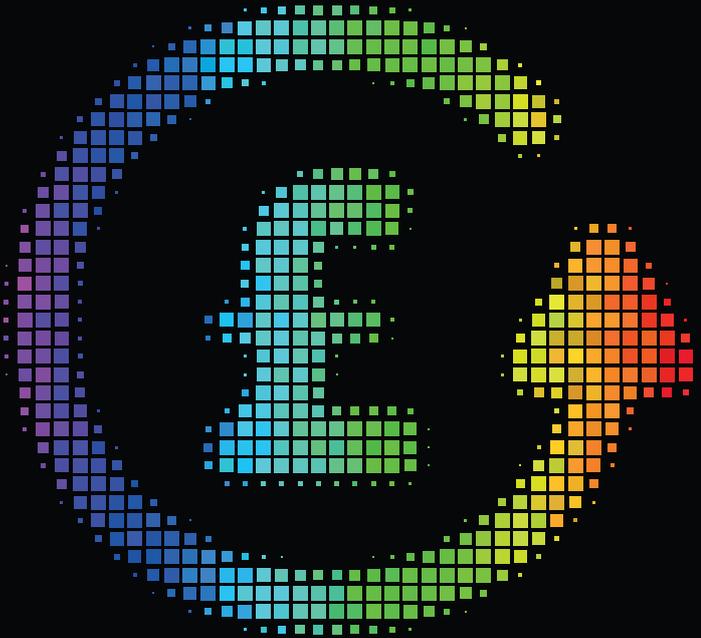
importantly, compliant. Colin says: "We're able to quickly assess your outstanding invoices, make recommendations and help you apply compensation, late fees or interest to the debt. We're professionals, so you don't have to worry about a heavy-handed approach damaging your client relationships."

Debt collection is becoming ever more sophisticated, with technology speeding up the process, using insights to find the best way to recover monies owed.

Muckle is leading the way in debt recovery with its easy-to-use online tool – Muckle Collect. Its online portal allows businesses 24/7 access to submit and manage outstanding debts. This makes it easier than ever to log each invoice, agree on a strategy for recovery, and track progress – either for a fixed cost or on a 'no recovery, no fee basis' basis.

***If you want to explore how Muckle can help support your business, please contact Colin Churchward at [colin.churchward@muckle-llp.com](mailto:colin.churchward@muckle-llp.com)***

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# Using Trusts to get blended family estate planning right

By Tom Bridge, Associate in the specialist Private Client Team at Hay & Kilner.

As every single one of us knows, all families have their own individualities and complexities.

**But in a blended family, where one or both partners bring children from previous relationships into the new family unit, there can often be additional complexities to navigate to ensure fair treatment for all family members.**

According to the latest Census, there were 781,000 blended families in the UK in 2021, a figure which has risen appreciably from the 717,000 families classified in this way in the 2011 Census.

Everybody should, of course, have a Will in place.

But for blended families, it is crucial that this requirement is properly addressed to ensure the surviving partner and their biological and stepchildren receive fair treatment, as choosing not to put a Will in place can have serious unintended consequences, particularly for blended families.

With the complexities involved, many couples decide to avoid it by simply doing nothing and relying on the survivor to 'do what is right.'

But sadly, we have seen many instances of surviving spouses not doing this and instead going back on their promises.

If an individual dies without a Will, the Intestacy Rules will apply. This can result in a loss of control in relation to how the estate can pass, and there is an order of priority as to who benefits.

Under the current Rules, where there is a surviving spouse and no children, the surviving spouse is entitled to the whole residuary estate.

Where there is a surviving spouse and children, the spouse is entitled to personal chattels and a statutory legacy, which is currently £322,000. The remaining estate is then divided equally between the spouse and children.

In addition, not having a Will also means you have no chosen executor appointed, you are



Tom Bridge

unable to appoint guardians for your infant children and there is no opportunity to put trusts in place.

Many couples opt to put Mirror Wills in place, and while this is likely to be better than no Will at all, this sort of straightforward solution can lead to unsatisfactory long-term results for blended families.

A typical Mirror Will might leave all assets to the surviving spouse and then, on the second death, to the surviving children.

While this seems fair, it relies on the surviving spouse not altering their Will after the first death, and providing they have capacity to do so, they could do this at any time.

The survivor could re-marry, or might fall out with the deceased's children, and choose to redirect assets to beneficiaries of their choosing.

For blended families, this may mean the children of the first partner to die may not benefit at all and their intended inheritance is diverted elsewhere.

The solution to avoiding such situations lies in utilising trusts, which are, despite other connotations, simply legal arrangements through which assets are held and

managed by trustees for the benefit of its beneficiaries.

They are invaluable in blended family estate planning, as they offer peace of mind that chosen beneficiaries will receive their intended inheritance.

There are many different Trust options available, but whichever one you choose, an individual can utilise them to ensure their partner has the necessary security and support while also preserving and ring-fencing their principal assets, such as the family home, for their children.

They are a key way for blended families to ensure that assets are distributed fairly and loved ones are provided for according to individual's personal wishes.

While thinking about what happens after you're gone can be difficult, making sure you have all the necessary arrangements in place well in advance to allow your wishes to be fulfilled will give you real peace of mind and certainty about your family's future.

**For further information and advice on estate planning for blended families, or on aspect of private client law, please contact Tom Bridge at [tom.bridge@hay-kilner.co.uk](mailto:tom.bridge@hay-kilner.co.uk) or on 0191 232 8345.**



## Sporty Spectacle at Hay & Kilner's Summer Party

Hay & Kilner welcomed around 200 clients, contacts, supporters, and friends to its annual summer party, which this year embraced a "Summer of Sport" theme. The event, hosted at the firm's headquarters in The Lumen on Newcastle Helix, celebrated the excitement of the Euros, Wimbledon, and the Paris Olympics.

Guests indulged in delicious food and cocktails with 'an assist' from The Duck House Pantry. Wimbledon-style strawberries and cream was also 'served up' alongside delicious branded ice cream.

There was a chance to have a foosball 'kickabout' whilst enjoying the iconic views of the Newcastle cityscape from the office's open-air balconies and everyone left with 'a taste of victory' in the form of a Hay & Kilner chocolate gold medal.

Managing Partner Jonathan Waters said, "The vibrant sporting atmosphere and delicious treats made for an unforgettable summer party. It was fantastic to see everyone enjoying the event against the backdrop of such a thrilling summer of sports."





Sarah McColl

## Where there's a will: Top five most frequently asked questions about Wills & Estate Planning

Wills and estate planning have recently been in the headlines as contested inheritance claims rise and loved ones are left to pick up the pieces of a poorly drafted Will.

Whether it's a simple mirror Will or a more complex document, the Private Client team at Sweeney Miller Law has found that the Will-writing process often uncovers a lot more questions from our clients.

Solicitor Sarah McColl answers some common queries:

### 1. What happens to my assets without a Will?

If you die without a valid Will, you are 'intestate', and your assets are distributed by intestacy rules, which benefit only married persons, civil partners, and close relatives. Cohabiting partners do not inherit automatically; they must be included in a Will. If your estate exceeds £322,000 with surviving children or grandchildren, your spouse

or civil partner will inherit your personal belongings, the first £322,000, and half of the remaining estate. Without descendants, your spouse inherits everything.

Jointly owned property passes automatically to the surviving partner if owned as Joint Tenants but not as Tenants in Common. Joint bank accounts transfer to the surviving holder.

### 2. How often should I review my Will?

Ideally, you should review your Will at least every five years to ensure it still reflects your wishes. We'd also recommend updating your Will after significant life changes such as marriage, civil partnership or divorce, the birth or death of a beneficiary, or major financial changes like buying a property or receiving an inheritance.

Minor changes may just require a codicil (a supplement to the Will), which is usually more cost-effective.

### 3. Who should I appoint as my Executor?

Executors—the individuals or professionals responsible for dealing with the estate—can be family members, friends, or professionals. It is important to carefully consider who you choose, it can be difficult and time-consuming for those involved, particularly if they are still grieving.

A way of avoiding emotional distress or difficulties for executors is to consider appointing a professional executor, like a solicitor. We can ensure that your estate is administered impartially and fairly without the emotional involvement of a friend or family member. This option can also avoid the issues that may arise if your executors die before you, leaving you without one, as the firm is the executor rather than one individual.

### 4. Should I put some of my assets 'in trust'?

A 'trust' can be an effective way to protect your assets and ensure that your beneficiaries are looked after financially following your death, particularly if they are underage, are not financially literate, or have a disability. Trusts can also help your beneficiaries avoid a significant inheritance tax bill, as the assets in the trust are no longer yours and are in the control of your appointed 'trustees'.

There are several types of trust, and not all options will be appropriate for all individuals' circumstances, so understanding the difference and which is suitable for you and your beneficiaries is key.

### 5. Should I consider a Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA)?

Some people believe they should have either a Will or an LPA, but it might be more appropriate for your circumstances to have both, as they each play different but equally important roles. Your Will ensures that your wishes are adhered to after you die, but an LPA is an important document that outlines your wishes if you lose capacity while you're alive, for example, if you suffer a severe brain injury or develop dementia.

### Speak to Sweeney Miller Law

Sarah McColl, specialist Wills, Trusts and Estates solicitor, commented: "If a Will is incorrectly drafted, contains errors or has missing information, this may cause problems and disputes after your death. Instructing a legal professional specialising in estate planning and Wills is particularly important if you have complicated finances or a more complex family structure."

Sweeney Miller Law can assist with estate planning beyond preparing your Will. We can assess the potential inheritance tax implications and offer advice on provisions for long-term care, including setting up a trust or LPA.

**Find out more, call 0345 900 5401, email [enquiries@sweeneymiller.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@sweeneymiller.co.uk) or visit [sweeneymiller.co.uk](http://sweeneymiller.co.uk)**

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# A new look for Mincoffs Solicitors



**A leading North East law firm, which was recently ranked as the region's most active deal adviser, has revealed ambitious plans for the future following the launch of its new branding.**

**Newcastle-based Mincoffs Solicitors is one of the region's oldest corporate and commercial firms, having provided exceptional legal services to the North East and further afield for more than 75 years.**

Throughout this time, the firm has grown in both reach and size, now employing a team of more than 100 and advising regional, national and international clients.

And to mark its rich history and complement its ongoing plans for further growth and expansion in the coming years, Mincoffs has unveiled the launch of a new website, an updated logo and new branding.

Staying true to the firm's signature blue and orange colour scheme, the new website streamlines the firm's offering – which

includes corporate, commercial, real estate, dispute resolution, licensing and gaming, employment, family, residential conveyancing and wills, probate and trusts – into business and personal services.

The rebrand comes during a period of prolonged growth for the firm, which was ranked as the North East's number one deal adviser for the entirety of 2023 and the first quarter of 2024, as per the Experian Market IQ M&A Review – with the rankings for quarter two still to be released.

The firm has welcomed a string of new starters across the last year and continues to develop both its fee earning and support teams, with plans for further recruitment to grow the team by 10 percent in the coming months.

The new website highlights the firm's clients across a wide range of sectors and industries, including manufacturing, leisure and hospitality, technology, healthcare, and media and entertainment, with the team providing a variety of legal services.

From start ups to multinational corporations and AIM-listed companies, the team is well placed to support businesses of all sizes, along with advising individuals on an array of personal matters.

Individual solicitors at Mincoffs and

departments alike are consistently praised in the Legal 500 and Chambers and Partners guides – two global legal directories which rank the best law firms across the globe.

Paul Hughes, senior partner and head of corporate, believes the new branding reflects the firm's position in the marketplace.

"Mincoffs Solicitors has a rich legacy going back all the way to 1948 and it was important that our rebrand acknowledged this, whilst also celebrating the place we are at today – with an ever-growing firm and fantastic client work being carried out across the business," he said.

"We've had amazing feedback from both our team and those outside of the business and we couldn't be happier with the result, which really shines a spotlight on where Mincoffs stands today.

"Our success in the first half of the year really is a testament to the hard work of every team across the business and it is brilliant to be in a position where we are looking to continue to grow and expand across the firm."

**For more information, visit [www.mincoffs.co.uk](http://www.mincoffs.co.uk) or call the office on 0191 281 6151.**

# Hargreaves Elsworth

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*Patent Attorneys*

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Please contact:

Dominic Elsworth CPA, EPA (Head of Practice)

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## Thirty Years of Volunteering Afloat

**Thirty years of volunteering afloat around the coastline of Britain was celebrated on the River Tyne by a national nautical charity.**

The MVS is a well-respected charity with a focus on nautical training and community service. It has 26 units around the UK coastline and inland waterways, operating a fleet of small vessels which are used to train members in seamanship, engineering, and communications.

The MVS trains its members (many of whom have had no previous connection with the sea) in nautical skills, following its own training pathway leading to RYA qualifications. These skills are then put into practice to serve the local and in some cases, the national community. In

recent years, MVS units have assisted in organised events such as the Tall Ships Race, International Festival of the Sea, the Clipper Race and the 2012 Olympics.

To celebrate the 30th anniversary, the Northumbria Unit of the MVS based in Newcastle opened their vessels to the public and gave short rides in their vessel Northumberland Freemason around the Swing Bridge.

Regional Volunteer Officer Angela Carrington said: "We were delighted to be able to talk to the public at Newcastle Quayside. We are hopeful that we will gain one or two more volunteers from the day. We train our members to RYA standards in boat handling, VHF radio operation and water safety. All our volunteers are uniformed, and no experience is necessary as full training is given and anyone from the age of 18 can apply to volunteer."



## Banks Group draws on Mount Oswald Families' ideas for estate's central park

**Families on the Mount Oswald estate in Durham City have been putting their ideas down on paper for what they'd like to see happening on the estate's central park.**

Working with the Mount Oswald Residents' Association, the Banks Group organised a workshop for residents to have their say on how the park, which sits behind the Mount Oswald Manor House, ought to look and what facilities it should feature.

The 25 adults and children who attended the event at Durham University's South College were each given a blank piece of paper and asked to draw what they'd like to see in and around the 1.75-hectare area.

Suggestions ranged from play areas, bug hotels and community allotments through to seating, stepping stones and woodland trails, while some of the younger children put forward more imaginative ideas, including a rocket-propelled roundabout, an underground cavern and a ladder that goes all the way into the clouds.

Banks' Mount Oswald project team will now factor all the families' suggestions into the final design that it expects to put forward for consideration by Durham City Council in the coming months.

If planning approval is granted this year, Banks is hoping to start work on the park early in 2025, with a view to it coming into use by next summer.

The Mount Oswald Manor House is now home to The Story, the newly-opened visitor attraction which celebrates the past, present and future of County Durham.

## Walkers 'hike into the light' in memory of loved ones who took their own lives

**A symbolic event to help a charity's mission to lower Teesside's "astonishingly high" suicide rate has raised thousands of pounds.**

The Headlight Project's annual 'Hike into the Light' fundraising event was held on July 5 alongside Teesside Charity, who were raising funds for local mental health charities.

40 fundraisers walked a 10-mile circular route through the night, starting and finishing at Cod Beck - many walking in memory of a loved one who'd tragically taken their own life.

The charity was founded in memory of Russ Devereux and aims to reduce the number of deaths by suicide in the Tees Valley area through therapy of those bereaved by suicide and preventative education and training in the community, schools and workplaces.

"As always, it was an incredibly emotional night but also one full of hope," said Anne Cullum, CEO.



"To hear everyone's own stories and experiences of suicide is a deeply moving and profound experience. I think a lot of people who take part gain an enormous amount in knowing that others have walked in their shoes and that they are not alone.

"The event is designed to raise awareness of the suicide problem across the Tees Valley, and also raise much-needed funds to help combat it. But it is also about bringing people together and to reinforce the message that even when we walk through the darkest hours, we can still find light at the end."



**Grace House**

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"Where Friends Become Family"







Andrew McGreevy

## Percy Hedley – open for business

The Percy Hedley Foundation is a North East icon. It supports and educates over 600 individuals through its two schools, college, adult day service and four specialist residential care homes which support people with physical and learning disabilities.

**As well as being one of the region's largest disability charities it employs over 1000 full time and part time staff, making it an important economic player.**

**Leading the Foundation's new commercial approach is Andrew McGreevy, Director of Business Development.**

**Hi Andrew. Tell us about your role at the Percy Hedley Foundation.**

I oversee the fundraising & engagement and marketing & communications teams, as well as spearheading the new business development function.

**Why did you want to join the Foundation?**

After holding several commercial roles with national providers in the private health and social care industries I wanted to work for an organisation that was truly at the heart of the community, that reinvests directly back into the North East. The Foundation couldn't have been a more perfect fit.

**How have you found things at the Foundation?**

I joined the Foundation in October 2023, just as we were celebrating our 70th anniversary. It's obvious to me that the Foundation has a big heart and that our colleagues do an amazing job for the people we support. We're

all custodians of the Foundation, which gives me a great sense of pride and responsibility and drives me forward in my role to ensure the Foundation is fit for the next 70 years.

**Revenue is the lifeblood of the Foundation. How will you maintain and grow that income?**

Our revenue comes mainly via local authority contracts for our education and residential services.

I've developed an ambitious growth plan for the Foundation that concentrates on developing new residential services across the region where the gap in provision of residential spaces for adults with learning disabilities that require specialist or complex care is growing.

We're working with partners to secure independent supported living services too as a step-down option for those able to move into less restrictive environments.

The Foundation also has an active fundraising and engagement team who are developing the supporter base upon which our events and other initiatives are launched. We're working particularly closely with businesses on CSR initiatives which is something that I find particularly exciting as an area of growth.

**Tell us more about your corporate approach.**

The Foundation is approached frequently by businesses wanting to be involved in the various projects we run; we're extremely fortunate in that respect.

Often we see donations from CSR pots for new equipment, which is great, but we have so much more to offer businesses. Which is why I've developed a new approach for those that want to build a more meaningful partnership.

This new approach means that we can return a tailored package of rights back to a business. These rights can be flexible enough to each organisation's budget and specific outcome requirements.

We need your support to help us on our mission to support more people with disabilities live their best lives across the North East.

We have a variety of ways in which everyone can get involved like buying tickets for our annual ball or taking part in the Great North Run or a Foundation golf day. Nominate Percy Hedley as your charity of the year or get involved in a business partnership.

We encourage you all to come and have a look at the amazing work we do every day and be inspired.

Andrew and his team are determined to make the Percy Hedley Foundation bigger and better than ever.

**For more information about the Foundation or if you'd like to find out more about fundraising or become a corporate partner, go to their website [www.percyhedley.org.uk](http://www.percyhedley.org.uk)**



# THE PEOPLE'S KITCHEN



THE PEOPLE'S KITCHEN  
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www.peopleskitchen.co.uk

THE PEOPLE'S KITCHEN charity Date 16<sup>th</sup> June 2024

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Birtley Athletics Club

# Charity of the Month

## The People's Kitchen Newcastle

*A Beacon of Hope*

### Why was the charity formed?

In 1985, after hearing about the tragic death of a homeless man, Alison Kay decided to act. With a heart full of compassion and a determination to make a difference, Alison founded The People's Kitchen. Her vision was simple yet profound: to offer food, clothes, and a warm fire to anyone in need. Within a year, she had rallied a team of 40 volunteers and opened the first People's Kitchen, igniting a movement that would transform countless lives.

Alison's dedication didn't go unnoticed. In 1997, she received an Honorary Degree from Newcastle University for her tireless work. Though she passed away in 2001 at the age of 91, her legacy lives on through The People's Kitchen, which continues to serve around 250 meals daily, year-round.

### Who do you help, and which area do you cover?

Based in Bath Lane, Newcastle, The People's Kitchen extends its support to vulnerable people from various parts of Tyneside, affectionately referred to as "Friends." These Friends often face harrowing circumstances, whether they're sleeping rough or have recently moved into housing with nothing but the clothes on their backs. Lacking access to nutritious food and a support system, they find solace and stability in The People's Kitchen.

### How do you help?

The volunteers provide more than just hot meals. They distribute clothing, toiletries, food packages, and sleeping bags, striving to ease the burdens of vulnerable people. By collaborating with other services, The People's Kitchen helps individuals transition off the streets and into homes, providing essential items like bedding. Beyond material support, they offer friendship and professional services aimed at improving mental wellbeing.

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

Operating without any government funding, The People's Kitchen relies entirely on the generosity of its supporters. Donations of cash and food come from individuals, businesses, and community groups, including schools and churches.

Many of the corporate supporters run their own fundraising events in aid of The People's Kitchen, businesses are generous with their time and their financial support and have helped The Kitchen to buy things like a new electric vehicle and new fridges this year. Many individuals do amazing things to help and support. One man sponsors a whole evening service, every year in memory of his late father, a young boy donated his 11th birthday money and Birtley Athletics Club raised over £900 for The Kitchen, when their club members took part in a 136-mile continuous relay run from York to The People's Kitchen.



People's Kitchen Great North run team



The Alison Kay with North Star's Steve Myers and Maggie Pavlou from The People's Kitchen

Their own main fundraising event is an annual winter appeal "Feed a Friend for a Fiver," which primarily tries to raise enough money to ensure that everyone can receive nutritious meals throughout the winter months.

As they do not pay for any third-party fundraiser, and as every single person who works as The Kitchen is a volunteer, all funds raised go directly to providing food and support to the Friends.

### Who are your trustees?

There is a Trustee Board, with eight Trustees, from a wide range of backgrounds who provide governance support to The Kitchen. A team of Team Leaders provide the management support for the whole operation.

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

The People's Kitchen takes immense pride in the stories of those they help and the generosity of their donors. Even the smallest donations, like a child giving up their pocket money, are deeply appreciated. A particularly proud moment was when a shipping company named one of their vessels after Alison Kay, honouring her legacy as an inspirational woman.

### What are you currently working on?

The People's Kitchen never stops moving forward. With The Great North Run approaching, they are preparing once again to participate. Last year, 30 volunteers, Friends, and supporters raised £10,000 through sponsorships, demonstrating incredible commitment to the charity. Additionally, they are gearing up for their Christmas appeal, "Feed a Friend for a Fiver," ensuring no one goes hungry during the festive season. However, with the increase in demand, the trustees are currently looking at how they can develop the centre to accommodate the rising numbers of people in need.

### How Can You Help?

Every donation counts in making a difference. Contributions can be made at [www.peopleskitchen.co.uk/donate](http://www.peopleskitchen.co.uk/donate). Every penny goes towards improving someone's life, continuing the legacy of compassion and support that Alison Kay envisioned nearly four decades ago.

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

# Durham Area Youth proudly take part in the 138th Miners Gala

DAY, a youth led charity working across many of the old pit villages on the outskirts of Durham, proudly marched in the Miners Gala carrying the Sherburn Collieries banner recently.

**Battling the rain and wind the young people and youth workers celebrated the 138th Gala. Over the last few years the charity have worked closely with Redhills, the Durham Miners Association.**

The youth groups have learnt a lot about the history of the Gala and the what the miners, their families and the communities when through during the strike. Brass bands played, there were speeches and performances all day and a real sense of community.

DAY will continue to work with Redhills to ensure the young people understand their heritage and look forward to the Big Meeting next year!



## Racing towards a cure: Great North Run 2024 highlights brain tumour awareness

**In the vibrant tapestry of community and charity events, the Great North Run 2024 stands out, highlighted by the participation of eight extraordinary individuals committed to supporting The Three Tumours charity. This group of runners is determined to exceed last year's remarkable fundraising achievement, which saw £7,337.00 raised to aid those affected by brain tumours.**

The mission of The Three Tumours charity is urgent and multifaceted, focusing on crucial aspects like research for cures, providing resources to sufferers and their families, and bolstering early diagnosis and care standards. With each stride and each pound raised in events like the Great North Run, the charity moves closer to its goals, driven by the hope of improving dire survival statistics and providing better outcomes for those diagnosed with brain tumours.

Brain tumours are a particularly insidious form of cancer in the UK, with mortality rates surpassing those of many other cancers among young adults and children. The situation is pressing, as brain tumours claim more lives under the age of 40 than

any other cancer and survival rates lag significantly behind other forms.

In 2024, these eight runners aim to generate even greater financial support. Such funds are vital, as they support the charity's collaborations with organisations like Lighthouse Therapy, which offers counselling to cancer patients. This comprehensive support system is crucial for treatment and fostering resilience and well-being among patients and their families.

As these athletes lace up their running shoes, they carry the weight of a noble cause, and each step is a testament to their solidarity and the collective will to enact change. As Claire Downs, the charity's chairperson, aptly says, "This year, we run not just for fitness, but for a future where brain tumours are no longer a death sentence. Together, we strive for a breakthrough, inspired by every heart and every donation that joins this fight."

**For further support or information on The Three Tumours, please call Claire Downs at 07930 326 905.**



Tony Gale

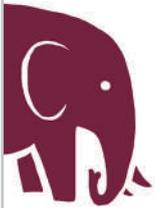


Ray Thompson



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## Love being active?

Did you know that Sporting Wallsend community hub runs weekly activities?

Including table tennis, jiu jitsu and so much more.

Keep the kids busy this summer, from Monday to Thursday. Starting from Monday 22nd July.

» £50 for all four days (or £15 per day)

» Ages 5 - 12 years old

» Limited free spaces available

### Get in touch for more information

Visit our website: [sportingwallsend.co.uk](http://sportingwallsend.co.uk)

Find us: Kirkley Park, Rheydt Ave, Newcastle upon Tyne NE28 8SX

fb @sportingwallsend X @SportWallsend

Sporting Wallsend is only 10 minutes from Newcastle City Centre, and 6 minutes from Heaton.



In association with Wallsend Boys Club



**Grace House Golf Day**

Grace House recently held their annual corporate golf day at Ramside Golf club! The day was sold out with 18 teams and 72 golfers attending all supporting Grace House.

The day was very successful raising over £4000 for Grace House which will help us provide vital support to disabled children, young people and their families from across the North East.

Thank you to everyone who took part and supported the event!







Paul Nixon second left and colleagues at South Shields bike shop

## Race to Portugal – A 10th anniversary cycle challenge from Tyneside

North East cyclist Paul Nixon and colleagues at regional charity Tyneside Outdoors are taking on a monumental challenge to cycle from South Shields to the Algarve in southern Portugal.

**The ambitious 1,250-mile journey marks the 10-year anniversary of the South Tyneside charity that promises to inspire, raise awareness, and generate vital funds for its ongoing charitable work.**

The 'Race to Portugal' not only covers an impressive distance but also a staggering 25,000 meters of ascent – nearly three times the height of Mount Everest. Paul Nixon,

one of Tyneside Outdoors' trustees, will physically ride the route, while the young people of the charity organisation will attempt to match or surpass the trustee's daily mileage virtually.

The race is due to start from the charity shop, TO Bike, South Shields, on August 24, with Paul aiming to cycle 70-80 miles per day over a 16-day duration. He will have car support from colleague Dave Harker who will follow and or travel ahead with cycle spares, repair and medical kit.

Paul 62, of Tynemouth, has been a keen cyclist for more than 30 years and regularly cycles around the North East as well as Portugal, which has become a second home.

Once he sets off on this new challenge, Paul expects to take around five days to reach Portsmouth, followed by a day on the ferry to Santander, through northern Spain into Portugal following the N2 route south to Faro.

This unique event has three primary goals:

- **Promote physical activity:** Encourage young people to engage in more exercise through cycling, both individually and as part of a group.
- **Environmental awareness:** Highlight the challenges and joys of being environmentally friendly while enjoying cycling.
- **Fundraising:** Raise essential funds to support and expand Tyneside Outdoors' community initiatives.

Paul said: "Supporters can follow the progress of this exhilarating race and contribute to the cause via the online fundraising page: Support the Race to Portugal. Every donation, no matter how small, will be gratefully received and put to beneficial use.

"We're inviting individuals and companies to join the challenge. Participants can set up their own fundraising pages to compete against Tyneside Outdoors or support the Temple Raiders by logging their own cycling miles, whether on the road, a Turbo Trainer, or in a spin class – every mile counts."

Tyneside Outdoors operates three vibrant groups: Way Out West in Benwell, Walker Park, and Temple Park in South Shields. Cycling is a core activity, featuring rides through the Tyne Valley and along Newcastle's bridges.

Temple Park hosts the majority of cycling events, including mountain biking, BMX racing, cycle speedway, and community rides. The Temple Raiders, the organisation's BMX team, trains here and recently opened TO Bike, a shop that serves as the charity's base, workspace, and retail outlet for pre-loved bikes and services.

**To support Paul and this North East charity visit: Fundraiser, Paul Nixon - My Race to Portugal ([tynesideoutdoors.org.uk](https://tynesideoutdoors.org.uk))**

# Explore the Frontiers of Health at the “Changing Minds with Pick Up A Penny” CPD Conference



November 9th, The Grand Hotel in Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne will open its doors to a pioneering event destined to redefine professional development in health care.

**The “Changing Minds with Pick Up A Penny - One Size Doesn't Fit All” conference is poised to be a landmark event for professionals and students across the mental and physical health sectors.**

As the first of its kind, it offers an unrivalled opportunity to explore the forefront of innovative psychological and physiological treatments, all while participants earn valuable Continuing Professional Development (CPD) certifications.

The conference is set to host a lineup of world-renowned experts, each bringing unique insights into the rapidly evolving world of health care. Attendees will have the chance to learn from Dr. William Walsh, a trailblazer in the study of biochemical imbalances, and

Patrick McKeown, who is celebrated for his expertise in breathing techniques and their impact on both mental and physical wellness. Further enriching the conference's robust agenda are Dr. Mari K. Swingle, Emma Beswick, and Dr. Rusty Turner, who are at the leading edge of neurodevelopment, genetic-based nutrition, and neurofeedback techniques, respectively.

The “Changing Minds with Pick Up A Penny” conference not only promises to deliver cutting-edge educational content but also unparalleled opportunities for networking. Participants will connect with peers, industry thought leaders, and innovative exhibitors, all sharing a commitment to enhancing health outcomes through groundbreaking services and products.

This event is an absolute MUST for educators, mental health professionals, GPs, doctors, and students eager to stay ahead in their respective fields. It offers a unique platform to deepen their knowledge of advanced treatment methodologies and to engage with innovations shaping the future of health care.

The comprehensive range of topics covered promises to ignite new ideas, foster collaborations, and perhaps most importantly, enhance attendees' ability to

effect positive change in their practices and communities. It is more than a conference - it is a beacon for those dedicated to pushing the boundaries of what is possible in health care.

Attendees will leave equipped not only with CPD points but with fresh perspectives and strategies ready to be implemented into their professional lives. The insights gained here are expected to drive forward personal career goals and contribute to the broader goal of improving patient care across disciplines.

Don't miss this unique opportunity to be part of a groundbreaking event that promises to shape the trajectory of health care education and practice. Reserve your spot at the “Changing Minds with Pick Up A Penny” conference and be part of a movement that is reshaping the future of comprehensive health care. This is where new horizons open, and professional transformations begin. Join us in November and turn new knowledge into powerful, practical action.

**For more information on the Changing Minds With Pick Up A Penny – One Size Doesn't Fit All Conference. Visit the website... [changingmindswithpickupapenny.co.uk/events](https://changingmindswithpickupapenny.co.uk/events)**



Bryony Gibson

## Post-holiday Blues?

Bryony Gibson, director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, talks about the fear of returning to work and how to know if a new job is right for you.

**Returning from a sun-soaked break to a sinking dread to face the daily grind can be a sign it's time for change. If you're not sure whether you're pining for more sun or it's the thought of work that's giving you post-holiday blues, then here is some advice on how to gain clarity and what to do next.**

### Identify the Signs of Discontent

Ending a relaxing vacation often sharpens feelings of unease at work. As a recruiter, I regularly speak to people in this predicament, especially in the accountancy sector, where the job market is driven by the limited availability of highly skilled professionals.

Even though people know they are unhappy about heading back into the office, fear of taking a risk holds them back. It's no

surprise really, as staying where you're comfortable is far easier than acting on the signs and taking a leap of faith into the relative unknown.

### Embrace the Thrill of Change

Currently, I am working with several accountancy firms that are seeking talented people. With a shortage of great candidates, the transition from job search to offer can be astonishingly swift. The rapid pace at which firms move can be unsettling if the thought of leaving your comfort zone is intimidating.

At work, when you feel secure and in control, your self-confidence grows. Delivering results consistently can enable you to shape your environment and enhance your work-life balance. This is an enviable position, but if you're driven by personal growth and learning, standing still can quickly lead to restless dissatisfaction.

### Evaluate New Opportunities

So, how do you determine if a new job is the right one for you? The truth is, you can never be 100% certain. Every change in your life, whether moving house, switching jobs, or trying a new restaurant, carries some risk. Yet, you can mitigate it with a careful and considered approach.

**Understand your Motivations:** Do you know what's making you unhappy in your current role? What do you want to change in your working life? Have you attempted to address any issues with your employer?

**Believe in Yourself:** Are you confident you can showcase your skills to your potential new employer as effectively as you have to your current one?

**Be Strategic:** There is no room for panic when weighing up a career move. Stay calm and level-headed and make a list of the pros and cons of your options. Think short and long term. Include your current role and drill down on the details. Make sure to address the core reason you want to change. Don't be afraid to take advice from trusted friends and confidants.

### Live a Life Without Regret

Having spent a lot of time with people who stay in unfulfilling jobs out of fear of the unknown, my advice is to put your emotions aside and evaluate the situation objectively.

Ask yourself if the new opportunity excites you more than your current role. Moving on is a big and brave decision, particularly if you've been with the same company for a long time. However, if your passion has faded and you've done your due diligence, what do you have to lose?

Returning from your summer holiday is the perfect time to reassess your career. So, if the thought of going back fills you with anxiety, use the moment to gauge if a change is for the best.

Most of all, remember that you only live once. Seize the moment, embrace the thrill of change, and embark on a journey towards a job that truly excites you.

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



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# Alleviate stress and anxiety with chiropractic care: How Gosforth Family Chiropractic can help

Chiropractic care, often associated with alleviating physical discomfort, can also be instrumental in managing stress and anxiety. This holistic approach not only focuses on the spine and musculoskeletal system but also promotes overall well-being, which includes mental health.

Jacob Palmer from Gosforth Family Chiropractic is a notable practitioner who specialises in this holistic approach. His expertise in chiropractic care extends beyond addressing physical ailments to improving overall mental health. Jacob uses a variety of techniques tailored to individual needs, ensuring that each patient receives comprehensive care. His approach includes spinal adjustments and lifestyle counselling, all aimed at reducing stress and anxiety.

Jacob told us: "Stress and anxiety often manifest physically, leading to symptoms like muscle tension, headaches, and sleep disturbances. These symptoms can create a vicious cycle, where physical discomfort exacerbates mental stress, and vice versa. Chiropractic care addresses this by realigning the spine and reducing physical tension, which can alleviate the physical symptoms of stress.

"One key method chiropractors use is spinal adjustments, adjustments help to balance the body and nervous system.



By improving nervous system function, chiropractic care can enhance the body's ability to manage stress and improve mood. Spinal adjustments can stimulate the release of endorphins, the body's natural painkillers and mood elevators, which help reduce anxiety and promote a sense of well-being."

Jacob's dedication to patient care ensures that everyone receives a personalised treatment plan. This holistic approach not only addresses the physical manifestations of stress and anxiety but also promotes better mental

health through improved bodily function. By visiting Gosforth Family Chiropractic, patients can expect to find relief from their symptoms and achieve a better quality of life, free from the constraints of stress and anxiety.

**Gosforth Family Chiropractic,  
The Grainger Suite, Dobson House,  
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Call 07888 864860 or email at  
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## Post-holiday blues?

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# New government, new rules – what does Labour’s manifesto mean for employers in terms of Human Resources?

We chat to Kathryn Rodgers from face2faceHR.com who tells us about the changes you’re likely to need to make.

**Day one right to protection against unfair dismissal – This could significantly impact small businesses, highlighting the need for well-trained managers and fair processes. Ensure that your management are fully familiar with this, as it will undoubtedly have an impact on companies, especially small businesses.**

Proposed “right to disconnect” for work/life balance – Similar to Belgium’s existing rights, employees at companies with 20+ workers would have the right not to be contacted outside working hours. The specifics are unclear, but this might involve reducing the discretion employers have to refuse flexible working requests and/or enhancing tribunal powers to review employer decisions. Labour states this would allow workers to benefit from flexi-time and term-time options, indicating a focus on supporting parents.

National Minimum Wage increases and the removal of the 18-20 age band – These changes would affect wage structures across businesses of all kinds. The National Living Wage saw a significant increase in April 2024. Labour has announced plans to secure further improvements by linking the wage explicitly to the cost of living. This would involve changing the Low Pay Commission’s remit to ensure they consider the cost of living when recommending new rates.

Labour has also pledged to eliminate the 18-20 age band, which currently allows employers to pay a lower hourly rate to workers under 21. This change would particularly affect the retail, leisure, and hospitality sectors, where many under 21s are often employed.

Single status of “worker” – individuals will either be employed or self-employed, affecting PAYE and NI contributions, particularly for small businesses where workers currently handle these as self-employed. Labour aims to eventually abolish the UK’s current three-tier system for employment status. The goal is to create a straightforward



Kathryn Rodgers

framework eliminating the current distinction between “employees” and “workers.” Labour acknowledges that this change cannot be implemented quickly and requires further consultation. The concept is that all workers would have the same employment rights. However, it remains unclear how rights such as sick pay and family leave would function within highly flexible work models.

Right to a written contract for self-employed individuals – This would have significant implications for small businesses, which may not currently have Contracts for Service in place.

Labour has proposed several measures to enhance the rights of self-employed individuals:

- **Right to a Written Contract:** Self-employed people would be entitled to a written contract.
- **Action on Late Payments:** Measures will be introduced to tackle late payments to the self-employed.
- **Extended Protections:** Health and safety and blacklisting protections would be extended to self-employed individuals.

It remains unclear whether all self-employed people would be entitled to a written contract and whether the client must provide the contract if the individual does not have one.

Day one right to Statutory Sick Pay and removal of the Lower Earnings Limit for sick pay entitlement.

Labour plans to eliminate the waiting period, ensuring statutory sick pay (SSP) is paid from the first day of sickness rather than the fourth. They will also remove the lower earnings limit, allowing very low earners to qualify for sick pay.

However, it is unclear if Labour intends to increase the SSP rate, which is currently low compared to other countries. These reforms will raise costs for employers who rely on the waiting period for certain employee groups (e.g., those on probation) or who have low earners (such as part-time workers). Nonetheless, the changes will benefit low-income individuals who become ill.

Labour aims to implement some of these employment law changes within 100 days. Although passing such changes through parliament and obtaining Royal Assent within this timeframe seems unlikely, business owners should stay informed, anticipate financial impacts, and review their documentation for necessary adjustments.

**One thing for sure, Labour are going to want to make good on some of their promises, quickly, so if you are unsure how to stay ahead of the law changes and not get into hot water with the legislation as and when it happens, then feel free to contact me: 07946 330 025 or use the Contact Us form at: Kathryn.rodgers@face2faceHR.com**

# Election Result: The 'first 100 day' promises for employment law



Alison Schreiber

## After the recent election result with an historic win for Labour, what will our new government mean for your business?

As my colleague, Diane McTavish, described in her article last month, Labour made it clear, in their manifesto 'Change', of their intention to introduce a raft of new employment legislation within their first 100 days of government and, with the extension of parliament to the end of July, it looks like this is underway.

As they look to strengthen workers' rights, Labour proposals cover many different elements within the workplace. The HR Dept has already explored some of their key suggestions in our white paper, ones which are likely to present the biggest changes for small and medium sized businesses.

But to summarise what businesses can expect from the 'Plan to make work pay:

Delivering a new deal for working people':

- There will likely be increases in employee costs through raises to national minimum wage and sick pay being paid from the first day of absence.
- There will be changes to employment status and stopping what is described as "exploitative" zero-hour contracts.
- The right to unfair dismissal protection from day one will be granted, rather than the current two years, and employees will have longer to bring a claim.
- It is anticipated that a policy will be released relating to an employee's right to switch off.
- There will be more union involvement across the board and a statutory body to investigate firms.

Although not all proposed policies will take effect immediately, and the government will consult on some measures (so some may be changed or discarded), we do need to be prepared for what does come into place and when. Key to this is keeping abreast of the news, keeping employment contracts and policies/Handbooks up-to-date and making

sure staff, and particularly managers, understand the changes through training and effective communication.

Essentially, the tone of employment law will be markedly different in the coming years, with a balance of power swinging more in favour of employees. As well as the practicalities of this, it is important to be mentally prepared, as it will influence your recruitment practices, employee relations and workflows.

If you have been following The HR Dept updates in recent weeks, you will know that we have been preparing in advance of the election for potential outcomes and we are ready and waiting to help you futureproof your business, keeping you ahead of any changes.

**Please get in touch to discuss support on the above or any other HR issues or follow the latest updates on our dedicated election hub.**

**Alison Schreiber, HR Dept – Durham & Newcastle South. Call 01325 526 036 or email: [alison.schreiber@hrdept.co.uk](mailto:alison.schreiber@hrdept.co.uk)**



Hayley Ramm

## Don't let the pain kick in!

There's a nagging headache in the world of recruitment that simply won't be remedied with a couple of paracetamol!

### 1. The Client – you need to communicate and you need to be communicated with

Lots of organisations out there are being brilliantly proactive with their commitment to aligning their vision to their values and then applying these to the recruitment process and actively seeking candidates to fit their culture – bravo, as this takes time, energy and commitment but most certainly is worth it in the long run for employee engagement and retention.

However, there are lots of organisations out there that are forgetting the absolute basic still in the recruitment process – communication and communication throughout! I have experienced how little recruiting companies communicate with their applicants or if there is any communication there, it is rather blunt, basic or bewildering!

In the last month our daughter, has applied to eight different vacancies, she has had a reply from only three of these so if the others

advertise again she simply won't apply and these are local and national brands!

To those organisations, I suggest to you, that you can find the time to be polite, that you can find the time to be consistent, that you can find the time to reply to all applicants as ultimately your recruitment behaviour affects the image of your corporate and employer brand out there in the community.

### 2. The Candidate - you need to communicate and you need to be communicated with

Lots of candidates out there are being brilliantly professional with their commitment to recruiting organisations by spending dedicated time updating their LinkedIn profiles, reviewing the details of the role, researching the company, moulding their CV to the vacancy and applying for the position through the various applicant channels accordingly with patience and professionalism.

However, I believe there are lots of candidates out there that are forgetting the absolute basic still in the recruitment process – communication and communication throughout! I have experienced through clients advertising for candidates recently, how little candidates communicate with the recruiting organisation or if there is any communication there, it lacks commitment, it lacks care and it lacks clarity!

To those candidates, I suggest to you, that you only apply for that position if you want the role, if you are excited about the role, if you are invested in the organisation's beliefs and plans. If your head and your gut are

saying yes yes yes then go go go and fully commit and fully communicate throughout the process (even if your messages are not what the company wants to hear, it is better to hear it, than to be left guessing).

### 3. The prescription – it is a common condition that can be treated

The NHS describes a migraine as 'a very bad headache with a throbbing pain on one side' and the pain here, is lack of communication. In any recruitment process think about the foundations and get your basics of crystal-clear communications absolutely spot on before moving on. This is even more important as we embark upon a recruitment world of AI, technology, digitalisation and society demands.

And from a panellist at a recent workshop, we were informed of how they had turned their recruitment activities upside down and inside out recently to address their recruitment challenges, taking a refreshing approach to 'recruit on attitude and train on skill'. So sometimes, through trial and error, through listening to others, through considering our own individual business recruitment needs, we can find the prescription required to manage the migraine.

As I work with clients across the region, if you do feel a migraine coming on then give The Efficient Elephant a call to stop the pain before it kicks in!

**You can email Hayley on [hayley@theefficientelephant.co.uk](mailto:hayley@theefficientelephant.co.uk) or call her on 07739985959.**



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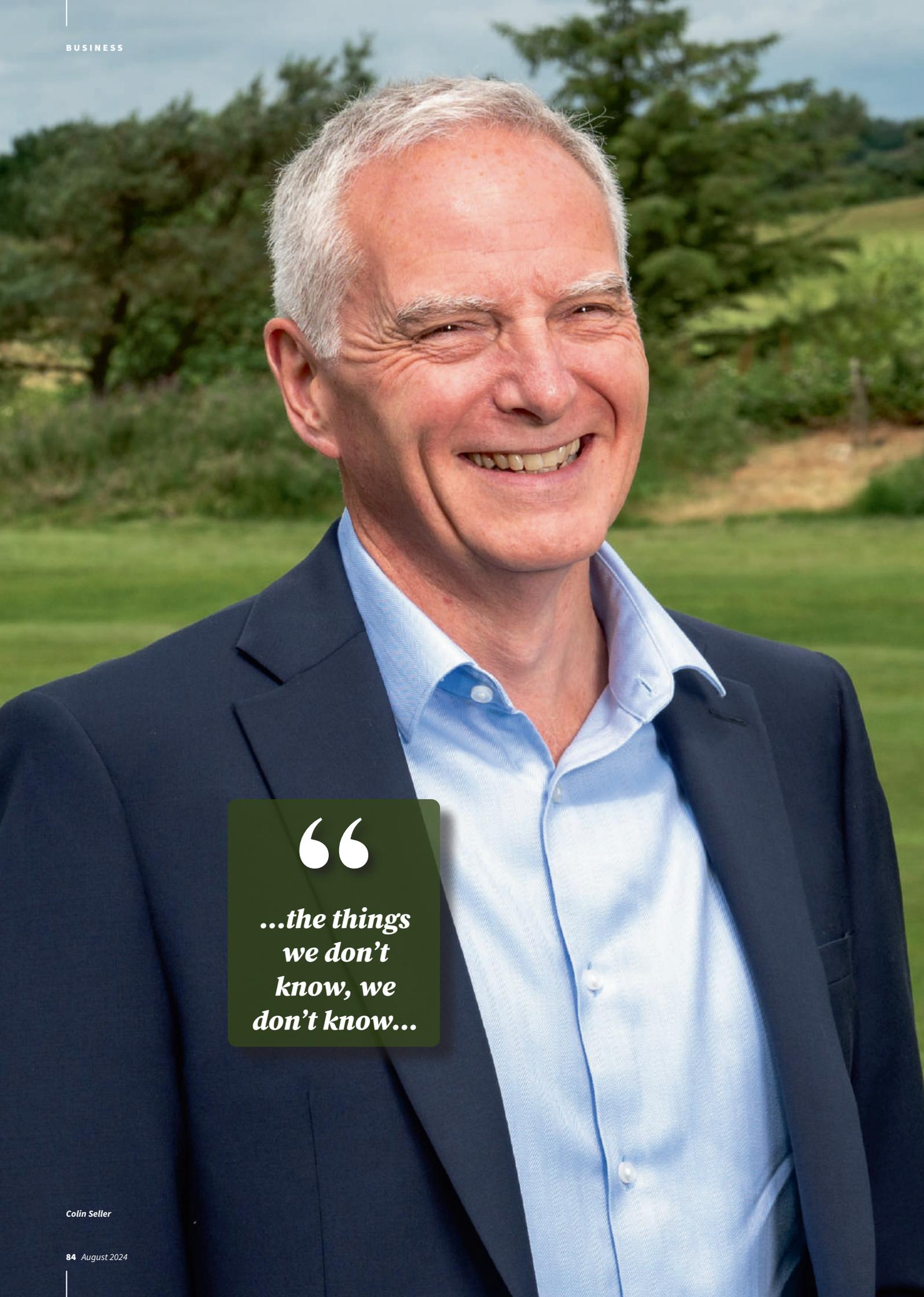
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*...the things  
we don't  
know, we  
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# In conversation with...

## Colin Seller

*Director and principal consultant at Seller HR and Business Solutions*

### **Can you tell us about Seller HR and Business Solutions and your role as a consultant?**

Seller HR and Business Solutions Limited was founded over 10 years ago by my wife who recognised the need for businesses in the North East and particularly SME's, to have access to HR/recruitment and business expertise from people who had "been there and done it" to help provide practical and pragmatic support to solve problems they knew (or didn't know) they had.

I joined in 2020 to offer businesses my experience in driving transformational change in manufacturing operations. I have led local and global businesses through major changes such as divestiture, merger and acquisition, performance turnarounds and fundamental redesigns of the business processes. This ranged from single site experience to a whole global supply organisation with a network of 68 sites, and my role as a consultant is to use this experience to support companies needing to address the performance challenges that we all face.

### **What is your background?**

I have over 30 years' experience as a senior leader in manufacturing operations, leading change at sites and across a large global network. Most of my career has been about helping people do things differently to deliver significantly increased value to the business.

This has included defining and implementing specific manufacturing process improvements, to leading large groups of people through incredibly challenging times and implementing transformational strategic change. My roles in businesses has been to define and implement step changes in people engagement and operational performance, which have delivered site turnarounds, enhanced profitability, improved capacity, site and business reliability, customer performance and supply chain optimisation.

I also have over 20 years of UK Board Level responsibilities.

### **Why should an organisation invest in a consultant?**

It is impossible for anyone in any single business to have an insight into everything that is possible to achieve their business outcomes. We all know "what we know" and use this to help us navigate our way through the challenges and opportunities we face every day. We all know what we believe works well for us, and we often have seen things

in other businesses that we look to copy, since they seem to work well for them. These can be valuable sources of competitive advantage or improvement for any business. Some of the biggest opportunities or even "game changers" come, however, from things outside of our experience and are things we are not even aware of, which I refer to as "the things we don't know, we don't know" and so have never been considered!

My approach to consultancy is extremely pragmatic and I prefer the term 'business partner' as I can diagnose, advise, mentor and coach, and if necessary, take a leadership role in implementing solutions. I have lived and breathed many of the problems businesses face and I know how tough it can be. I also know, what levers and drivers to look at quickly to generate results and help to practically navigate challenges. The learning, scars, or euphoria that comes from a lived experience where you are the owner or individual responsible for the change and the business outcomes, is different to the typical view of an "external consultant."

### **How do you measure success?**

With my background of leading businesses, I am 100% focussed on delivering improved "outcomes." This could be profit, lead time, capacity, customer delivery or satisfaction. True success only comes when these key business metrics achieve or surpass the level required by the organisation. However, my other passion is how these "outcomes" are achieved. Enabling the development of highly engaged teams, who know what's needed and look for improvements in what they do every day, is when the power of the organisation is unleashed. Success is then when the business "feels different" because everyone is pulling in the same direction.

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

If you can truly lead and support people to align them with the purpose (why) and what's important (what), they will find the best way to get it done (how) unleashing the potential of your organisation and making the impossible, possible!

[linkedin.com/in/colinseller](https://www.linkedin.com/in/colinseller)



Helen Butler

## Embracing AI for operational excellence in small businesses

Over the years, trends come and go when it comes to guiding small businesses toward operational excellence. Today, the biggest trend (and the most advanced development) is that of Artificial Intelligence (AI). While AI has been a topic of conversation for a little while now, many small businesses have yet to explore how it can specifically support and enhance their operations.

### The Promise of AI in Operational Efficiency

AI technologies, like machine learning and automation, have transitioned from theoretical concepts to practical tools that can transform business operations. Unlike older systems, AI can continuously improve data, foresee issues before they arise, and personalise customer interactions at scale which makes it essential for boosting productivity, sparking new ideas, and staying ahead of the competition.

Its ability to learn and adapt, handle complex tasks, predict outcomes, and process vast amounts of data quickly and accurately makes it something that shouldn't be ignored by small business owners.

### What can AI really help with?

Despite all of the talk about AI, I find many owners aren't really clear as to how it specifically can be used to benefit their business. What actually can it do? Here are a few ways it can be used to improve operational efficiency:

### Predictive Analytics for Inventory Management:

Maintain optimal stock levels by anticipating demand and reducing overstock or stockouts.

**Email Filtering and Response:** Filter and prioritise emails, and even draft responses to common inquiries, improving email management.

**Sales Forecasting:** Analyse historical sales data and market trends to provide accurate forecasts, aiding informed business decisions.

**Employee Scheduling:** Create optimal work schedules based on employee availability, preferences, and predicted business needs.

**Voice Recognition for Customer Support:** Implementing AI voice recognition can enhance customer support by providing quick and accurate responses to voice queries.

**Customer Feedback Analysis:** Analyse customer feedback from various sources to identify trends and areas for improvement.

**Fraud Detection:** Monitor transactions for unusual patterns and flag potential fraud, protecting a business from financial losses.

### The Essential Role of a Robust Operational Framework

The successful integration of AI is not just about technology. Before rushing into embracing the applications, it's crucial to have a strong operational framework on which it is built; ensuring effective human elements such as coordination, leadership, and control are fully embraced.

**Coordination:** Effective coordination ensures that all parts of the business are working towards the same goals. This involves clear communication, aligning resources, and synchronising activities across all areas.

**Leadership:** Strong leadership is essential for guiding a team through the changes that AI integration brings. This includes setting a vision, inspiring and motivating employees, and helping them to join the dots between the AI project and the wider business goals and objectives.

**Control:** Implementing robust control mechanisms ensures that operations run smoothly and standards are maintained. This involves monitoring performance, identifying variances, and taking corrective actions when necessary.

### AI as an Enabler, Not a Replacement

AI has the ability to significantly enhance business operations, but it should be viewed as an enabler rather than a replacement. By underpinning it with a strong operations management framework it will allow the benefits of AI to be fully leveraged.

While we are still in the early days of understanding all the opportunities AI brings, laying the right groundwork will position a business to make the most of them as they continue to evolve.

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# Stakeholder Relationships: How good are yours?

As you're reading this, we'll be a month into a new government with a new Prime Minister. Many of us have been in a similar position in the past. Not as Prime Minister, but as the leader who has been working long and hard towards a new role. And then it happens - we get the job! Now we have to show we can do it.

**We've seen the Prime Minister appointing the right people to job roles; setting expectations of his cabinet, kicking off projects at pace and assessing the situation he is inheriting. These behaviours and actions are all expected for leaders taking on a new role. He's also been spending time with other leaders and stakeholders. This has happened at pace, as he recognises he needs them on side.**

None of us work in a vacuum, so influencing is core to our leadership skill arsenal. However, it isn't one I always see leaders addressing so purposefully, yet they should. Stakeholders are the people who give us our mandate, experience our services and support our priorities. Building our influence with them is crucial, so how can we approach this successfully?

## Identify Key Players

First, we need to identify key parties internally & externally so we can engage. Who are our supporters, our blockers, our advocates and those who we're not sure about, but we need to find out more. Make this a list of individuals. We can rarely influence a function or team without a key point of contact in that team. Once we know who they are, we should discover what we mean to them, and how much work we have to do.

## Identify Priorities

Next identify and share priorities between both parties. It staggers me how rarely this happens. We try to assume what others want or need, or keep things secret. Why make our lives so hard? Why not be up front, and honest, and simply ask them what's important to them currently? What outcome are they looking for? How do they feel you link to this?



Annabel Graham

Then share your priorities and begin to find common ground. Starting with alignment is always easier than with differences.

## Build the Strength of your Relationships

How well do you know this person and do they know you? What type of conversations do you have? Are they always about facts and data?

Do you know their opinions and beliefs about what you're working on? Do they reach out to you for advice, guidance, input - or do they rarely speak to you? If you're answering no to many of these - then you need to get to know them better. Until you do, you haven't a hope of influencing unless, by fluke, you both want the same thing.

Never underestimate the strength of relationship in influencing. Thought leader Robert Cialdini cites 'liking' and 'reciprocity' as 2 of his 6 key influencing techniques. Both of these require us to get on well with our stakeholders and have a strong relationship.

## Agree Expectations

I've talked about this a lot in these columns. I believe it's essential with all our stakeholders and team members, and people don't do this enough. So start with the basics:

- What do we need to achieve together, and

what do we need from each other to do this?

- When will we meet, for how long, when, about what, and in what format?
- How will we feedback to each other? In a meeting, email, call, text/instant message?

We'd do this with service providers, so also should do this with stakeholders. It removes assumption and lessons conflict, because we are meeting each others' needs.

## Maintain Regular Contact

Finally, agree your frequency of meeting. Some will be weekly people, others monthly, some quarterly. Remember, without regular contact, you won't build the strength of relationship, which is so important.

If you're doing these things already - superb! Maybe check in with the other person that everything is still working well.

If not - then start scheduling calls into your diaries now, there is work to do!

*Annabel is an Executive and Team Coach, Leadership Facilitator and Coach Supervisor. She runs workshops on communication and influencing alongside other leadership subjects. Contact Annabel via LinkedIn, [annabel@successfultraining.co.uk](mailto:annabel@successfultraining.co.uk), or visit [www.successfultraining.co.uk](http://www.successfultraining.co.uk)*

## Gateshead based environmental consultancy receives international B Corp certification

Gateshead based Environmental Consultancy, Genee Consulting Ltd, announced today that it has been certified as a B Corporation™ (B Corp™), furthering the Company's commitment to operating its business with social and environmental impact at the forefront.

The B Corp™ verification process completed by B Lab measures a company's social and environmental performance against 5 Impact Area Pillars, looking at a Company's approach to their workers, the environment, the community, their customers, and their governance. Genee has undergone a thorough review of the impact of their operations and business model and ensured that they can provide evidence to meet B Corp's high standards of business.

As an Environmental Consultancy who work with organisations of all sizes and sectors, Genee operates with the objective that business can be used as a force for good and strives to support as many organisations as they can to achieve their environmental goals.

Genee is the North East Hub for the nationally recognised environmental accreditation, Investors in the Environment. This is a staged approach to sustainability for organisations, examining environmental management holistically, from policies and action plans to communications and initiatives. Like B Corp™, Investors in the Environment supports the idea that better business is built on continuous improvement and is an ongoing process for organisations seeking to be truly sustainable.

Having been through iE accreditation themselves, Genee recognised how well this prepared the business for their wider aspirations of becoming B Corp™ certified. The Investors in the Environment framework enabled Genee to evidence their environmental credentials and satisfy B Corp's environmental impact pillar.

However, for their B Corp™ Certification, environmental impact was just one part of the picture. Genee has also evidenced how



their operational model has a positive impact on their workforce, customers, and community alike.

Managing Director of Genee, Jo Holmes, said: "When we started looking into the B Corp movement, we could see how well this aligned with our mission and values at Genee. At Genee, we seek partnerships and projects which add value and benefit to our community, whilst supporting organisations across the North East region to embed sustainability into their operations. Becoming a part of the B Corp™ certified community is a fantastic step to fostering a business which continually meets high standards of social and environmental impact, while we support other businesses to do the same through our environmental consultancy."

Genee is joining a network of over 2,800 likeminded U.K. based B Corporations.

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## Time is not on our side

The manifestos of most political parties fielded in the recent general election downplayed climate issues over more immediate concerns within the economy. Dr David Cliff explores the attendant risks of more climate deferral.

**We are a funny species; we are predominantly short-term thinkers. It doesn't matter what existential threat we have, ultimately short-term expediencies get in the way. A global pandemic, for example, gave way to anti-vaccine and economic expediencies because of the inconvenience of infection control. It was easier to believe a world conspiracy about the virus rather than the fact that but for very small levels of increased virulence, it could have been a decimator of populations. Furthermore, hand hygiene has not improved since and still accounts, as it always has, for 1.3 million deaths per year across the planet, wherein mostly children, not the elderly succumb.**

More than any other cause however, this complacency relates to climate change. Our politicians and indeed, those across Europe and the rest of the world, seem to be in complete denial to the unified voice of the overwhelming bulk of the scientific community who conclude we have years, not decades to put this right.

We seem to be unable to link cause and effect on this. I remember a similar debate, years ago, around whether smoking was harmful to health. Most non-smokers could clearly see it was antisocial, unhygienic, unhealthy, caused fire risk and tainted the quality of one's environment, and research eventually concluded that it shortens the average lifespan by twelve years on average. Then we have the experts treating one problem – smoking, and creating a new addictive behaviour - vaping, which could materially affect the health of many who would have never considered smoking anyway. Cause and effect are never simple, much easier to deny it exists or kick a problem down the road until it can't be ignored.

Climate denial is everywhere. We are having regular heat waves across Europe; huge forest fires are increasingly in the news. People are now going on holiday and dying on holiday, not just TV presenters, but ordinary citizens who may have a vulnerability or misjudge conditions. Despite this, recent political manifestos have downplayed climate in favour of vote winning cost-of-living issues in the here and now. Whatever cost of living crises and levels of taxation we have to endure, these will pale into insignificance in a world that is riskier to live in and has uncertainties both in terms of physical safety and the stability of food supplies. For now, in the UK, we don't experience the worst of the heat visiting Europe in summer, although, we have to put up with the attendant and frequent rainstorms and flooding. So many property developments that have been increasingly occurring

in floodplain type land, the risk of flooding by deluge increases exponentially. Lives and property will be lost as a result of this.

We are only experiencing the precursors of what is yet to come, yet our leaders and others fail to see the wisdom of taking action now. Imagine a world where food prices are perpetually sky high because of shortage, there is migration on a scale that is ten times what we are experiencing now with the boats and legal migration debate, because other people in the world are being displaced as their lands become uninhabitable. Imagine the loss of species and habitats which is not just about birds in the garden gracing our lives, but medicines, chemical substances, food chains, pollination and other factors that make life for us possible. Imagine people staycationing not for economic reasons, but because the other parts of the world are simply too hot, arid and dangerous to go to. Imagine being licensed to have one flight per year and the real cost of carbon offset of that flight being something that trebles the price of your air ticket. This is not scaremongering. This is a reality that is less than a generation away.

For business, economic considerations cannot result in virtue signalling, greenwashing and other methods that try to suggest responsible CSR in a company. There are real legal consequences coming for this form of misrepresentation and the fact of the matter is one's corporate success becomes a lot less obvious when one's customers are suffering in droves.

Every business has to get behind an agenda for a sustainable planet and accept that the carbon neutral aim is not a pipe dream or something we can dispense with because other countries neglect it. It is something we need to lead the world by example upon, shaping society, industry, our lifestyles and population sizes. There's truly a long haul ahead that must be approached with vigour right now, to leave ourselves and other species with a fighting chance that four billion years of evolution does not succumb to the effects of around 400 years of industrialisation. If we fail, a fitting epitaph for humankind, might be to rename our species 'Homo-stupidus'.

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



“

*...a truly long haul ahead that must be approached with vigour...*



Michelle Jones

## Sweating the need to change

As I write this we have entered a period of change, with the dawn of a new Government. A change we created with a small action.

**Change is inevitable but change is something we tend to find difficult, it sends our flight or fight responses into overdrive. We get stuck in our ways, habits are comfortable and we question why we have to change, often coming up with enough excuses to justify not changing.**

But we are being asked, especially in business, to change our behaviours, our processes and our operations to protect the environment and support society. Much needed changes to protect the future.

The extent of the problems we face as a society, from the climate crisis to wars to poverty to water scarcity to economic instability, are formidable. And we end up sweating the intensity of the big things, and the intensity of the problems as a whole and it all becomes overwhelming, making it difficult to understand our part in it all. We end up believing we can't change it or even worse we fudge it, resulting in greenwashing, or kind washing as we like to call it at Kind Currency.

But change is much simpler than we believe. It's as simple as putting a tick in a box. And small changes make all the difference. Shifting our focus from the global needs of change to what is within our control and not only that, what is important to us, and our values, and what is realistic and achievable. And the balance between what is right for your business and what is not.

Consider what your business does:

- *Who it serves?* • *What are your values?* • *What is important to you?*
- *Which areas could change?* • *What can you resourcefully change?*
- *What can instantly change?* • *What change needs further insight?*

Change in business is a balancing act between your values, protecting your business and continuing to provide to your customers. If you move too big a piece too soon, the scales tip which has a negative impact on everyone and everything, so starting with the small manageable components that attain the required impact merely comes down to a much simpler strategy.

We work with small businesses to understand how they can play their part, in a climate where small businesses are fighting to stay alive, adding the need to be ethical into the pot can seem detrimental. But with more and more customers demanding kinder approaches, not making the change, could see a greater struggle in the future. We help businesses understand their values, what is important to them and identify the areas in their businesses that would enable them to work towards supporting those values, ensuring we protect the service and operations of the business. And we partner with larger organisations to help them with their environmental and social responsibility providing actionable and impactful opportunities.

**It's simple, achievable steps with big impact.**

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Everyone and a guy named Kevin

## The key to young people's success

This week saw some of the region's young people gather together at the Crowne Plaza for The Key Awards 2024.

**The awards, which are in their ninth year, celebrated the achievements of young people and the Key Community who work together to inspire belief in the younger community of the region.**

The event was organised and presented by young people and North East youth charity, The Key. Over 200 people in the room celebrated the shortlists and congratulated the winners, alongside enjoying a burger meal and challenging games on the tables courtesy of shortlisted nominees The 007s who created their own reusable escape room and activities for pupils to tackle and enjoy.

Winners from the line up included Spice Up Your Life, winners of the Key Community Champions of the Year. The group of young people from Throckley joined forces and have been supporting their local community. The group delivered a community fun day in the height of the cost-of-living crisis to ensure that children and families had something fun to do during the school holidays. Over 100 people came on the day and the group raised a humongous £765 which they then used to contribute to the purchase of a community defibrillator. Following this, the group took on the KEY+ Changemakers programme to deliver a community backed cinema in the half-term

holiday. The group also raised money which will be put to good use to fund further community events.

Adults in the room also received plaudits for their efforts in changing young people's lives. Exceptional KEY+ Facilitator of the Year was received by Claire Sharp who supports young people from Hebburn Comprehensive and 5th Tynemouth Scouts.

Claire said "Thank you to The Key for all of their support in helping young people. It is quite simply the best feeling in the world when you see these young people achieve things."

Other adults to be recognised include KEY+ Volunteer of the Year Laura Langdale-Bush, who the judges said blew them away with her enthusiasm and energy; and Key Outstanding Key Partner of the Year Gosforth east Middle School who ensure that pupils truly take the lead and are year on year advocates of KEY+ with facilitators going the extra mile to be innovative and champion young people.

Other highlights of the night included the Inspirational KEY+ group of the year being crowned as Bright Girl Squad who won after going to lengths to show that young women who are neurodivergent are just as capable. Confidence in Conversations also took away a title, NCS KEY+ Superstars. The eight-week conversational social action programme focused on helping young refugees arriving in Newcastle with not only information on conversing, transport and where to go, but on Geordie slang too!

Hungry Hippos took the title of KEY+ Unique Project of Year for their driving school consisting of VR simulation and road safety workshops to help young people in the face of escalating costs of driving lessons. KEY+ Pitch Innovators of the Year were The Epix, whose project was to record a series

of short videos about some of the issues young people may have to deal with in their communities. The young people worked extremely hard on the script and put an element of humour into the process.

And the final award of the night went to All Rounders as KEY+ Completers of the Year. The team completed all three stages of the KEY+ Challenge in quick time, running three very different but impactful projects. The group members are home educated and brilliantly came together to organise distributing winter packs to the homeless, a health and well-being sports day and a Pride event for young people in their local area. In total the group positively engaged with well over 100 people in their local community.

The Key's new CEO Rebecca Maw, said of the awards: "The KEY+ Challenge encourages young people to use their voice and ideas, build skills and confidence and make a real difference in communities across the region. The Key Awards is a night dedicated to celebrating the outstanding achievements of young people from the North East and highlights their hard work, creativity, and the positive impact they have made in their communities with The Key's support."

This sentiment was echoed by chair of the board Liz Watchorn who said: "This has been the highlight of the year so far for The Key. It is so inspiring to recognise the achievements of not only our young people but also our partners and funders. The young people we work with never cease to amaze us and their talents and contributions should never be overlooked. Congratulations to all winners and nominees whose dedication to the challenge earned them a seat a tonight's awards A big thank you also to the young team who also put on a dazzling event!"

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



“

*...If we build it,  
we know they  
will come...*

Stephen Patterson

# No more excuses – there's no time to waste

*By Stephen Patterson, Chief Executive of Newcastle NE1 Ltd*

**In the wake of Labour's landslide victory in the general election, I want to throw down the gauntlet. We have a new Labour Government, a Labour Mayor, and the vast majority of our region's councils are of the same political hue.**

**The scale of the Government's electoral success is significant. Goodwill from businesses and the electorate is abundant and there is tremendous optimism and ambition for the region's future, the new Government cannot afford to squander it. All the political levers are now in place to move the city and the region forward and there are no excuses for failing to act decisively to support the economic growth and prospects of this region.**

The electorate is right to have high expectations. In conversations with North East businesses, regional positivity and optimism are running high and locals feel that the stars are aligning for the city. Our time has come.

At NE1, we know only too well, that a five-year cycle should be treated as an extended job interview. We embark on each new BID term knowing that we have five years to prove our worth and deliver on what we promised. We want the Government to do the same, especially when it comes to delivering for this region. In five years' time, the Government should be able to look back and be proud of what has been delivered collectively with local, regional and national politicians all working together.

Top of the list for political support should be a firm commitment and unreserved support for Sage Arena and International Conference Centre. It would be a complete economic game-changer for Gateshead, for Newcastle and for the region. When delivered, the development would attract 1 million visitors each year, create 2,000 new jobs, and provide an annual boost to the region's economy to the tune of £69mn.

With collective political support and a willingness to collaborate, the conference and exhibition centre could, and should, be delivered within the next political cycle.

Across the region, greater focus should also be given to other monumental, once-in-a-generation projects that will deliver transformational change and set the North East on a different economic trajectory. The reopening of the disused Leamside railway line and Washington Loop Metro line will provide crucial transport links across the region.

The 21-mile Leamside route, last used by passengers in the 1960s, is hailed as the most important piece of transport infrastructure for the economic, social and environmental fortunes and future of the North East. Let's get it done.

Gateshead, Newcastle and the whole region need these projects to get off the ground and quickly. They say the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago, and the second-best time is now. It's great to see the new Mayor has been operating at pace already to inject momentum into her priorities and commit funds to develop the business case for the Metro extension. We wholly endorse her efforts and the speed at which she, and the new Labour Government, are operating – long may it continue.

We need action. We know that when certainty and a clear timescale are provided for the conference centre, there will be a huge amount of private sector investment to support and take advantage of the commercial opportunity.

Although the prospect of a £350 million build may seem daunting, the wider regional benefits delivered will be transformational.

We know from previous event experience that there is strong demand for Newcastle as a venue, and we put on a good show. Events held here raise the profile of the city on a national and international stage, are always well attended and deliver for the organisers. Magic Weekend, one of Super League's flagship annual events, is a prime example with four of the five highest-attended events ever held staged in Newcastle.

We have all the essential ingredients to be a great host city and one that can compete on a national and international stage. We have a compact and welcoming city centre, everything within walking distance and great transport links.

If we build it, we know they will come, and we shouldn't squander this golden opportunity.

Just imagine five years from now, the Tyne Bridge restoration complete, the Northumberland Line open, a gleaming new Metro fleet in service and Leamside Line and Washington Loop all approved and ready to go. Pilgrim Street, the Helix, Stephenson Quarter and Forth Yards are all finished and fully let. And, to top it off, the Quayside is teeming with visitors from across the globe, who are streaming into the city to attend the plethora of events being hosted in this amazing region.

Now that's a CV our politicians could be proud of.

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OPINION  
MATTERS**



**Inclusion**  
By Default



ABCConnexions is a non-profit social  
enterprise operating for over 15  
years in the North East.

## TV or not TV?

“Sit back from the Screen or you will go blind”, my late mother would say, echoing the concerns of parents worldwide since the dawn of television. Being fixated with this magical box that beamed people, programmes and places into our living room.

**Being brought up in a disciplined environment, we weren't allowed to watch very much TV in our early years. If at all. But when I was eight our family circumstances changed. Dad went off to Saudi and mum was left to bring us up. The Radio Rental's TV where we had to put 50p in the back to make it work, became a beacon of entertainment.**

From *He-Man* and *She-Ra* to *Kenny Everitt*, *Russ Abbot* and *Dusty Bin* we found the TV to provide much needed escapism from the brutal reality of life. Some of my fondest childhood memories were of mum hiring a video recorder and three Bollywood movies. Shutting the curtains and watching these mega-long magical productions back-to-back. Not knowing what time of day, it was, and being entertained in only a way Bollywood movies can, with their exaggerated and elaborate songs, sadness and superhuman stories.

Then everything changed! I got older and TV got bolder. Our screens went from fun to frightening. The launch of Jerry Springer saw abnormal behaviour being normalised. Our screens started sensationalising stupidity and silliness leading to real scariness. Jeremy Kyle came and millions of us sat at home during the day, were indoctrinated into thinking that rude and crude were OK. Both of these shows lead to deaths and eventually the shows being rightfully shelved.

But the changes had already taken place, the damage done. I may sound dramatic, but I genuinely feel that our society worsened through these types of live shows and our wider behaviours impacted. As young people, we would flip the channel or look away if people were kissing on a TV programme when watching. Now we see dating shows where you only chose your date based on their genitalia!



Ammar Mirza CBE

Yes, I sound like an old codger, and I probably am. But we have now moved on to being fixated with screens. Full stop. From TVs where we binge watch Netflix series; desktop computers where we get distracted with pop-ups and get lost down rabbit holes whilst doing some online work; to mobile devices which accompany us to the toilet or we pick up every 8-10 minutes to see if we have received any notifications. In a recent survey we in the UK were one of the worst at constantly checking our phones

Everyone, everywhere is always on. The first and last thing we do is look at our phones! Our children's behaviour has changed dramatically. Becoming more introverts and socially isolated. Spending hours in front of screen. Watching, worrying and wallowing in not being good enough. Ambitions to grow up and be an influencer. Have a YouTube

Channel and spend their lives showing-off their lives.

So, as I look back and remember Morecambe and Wise. Sharing a laugh, allowing us to switch off. Now watching my kids spend as much time as they can on devices, zombified. To now simply watching other people, live their lives.

**Enough is enough! Time for a digital detox. We are introducing one, at least one day a week. It is hard but incredibly rewarding. So definitely TV is not TV going forward.**

**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.**

For more information:  
abconnexions.org

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## When you worry you're not good enough

Feeling like you're not good enough at your job, that you don't deserve your title, or that people will find out you can't do your job is a debilitating weight to carry around.

**We now understand this as Imposter Syndrome: the persistent inability to believe that one's success is deserved or has been legitimately achieved as a result of one's own efforts or skills.**

As a mindset coach, this is something I am frequently asked about and often support my clients in overcoming.

Despite its debilitating and painful nature, Imposter Syndrome is entirely possible to overcome.

Consider someone struggling with Imposter Syndrome. Anxious thoughts are likely present daily; they will avoid tasks they believe they are not good at and often feel overwhelmed. This anxiety and sense of being out of control then reinforce the belief that they are not good enough, keeping them stuck in a vicious cycle.

As humans, we naturally avoid anything uncomfortable, whether that's an anxious thought or a challenging task.

Anxiety is in fact our brain's way of alerting us to something that needs our attention. Let me give you an example.

Typically, when faced with an anxious thought, we believe it. We accept it as truth so I we feel we aren't good enough we take it as fact and look for any scarp of evidence to prove we are right.

An anxious thought is just a thought; it is rarely factually correct. However, it should absolutely signal that something needs your attention and not be buried.

For instance, let's say you're anxious about attending a meeting because you're afraid someone will ask you a question you can't answer. The common response is to enter



Jude Daunt

the meeting with this anxiety, stay quiet, hope nobody notices you, and leave as quickly as possible.

Instead, if you view the anxious thought as an indication that something needs your attention, you can ask yourself why you feel anxious about meetings and what your ideal outcome would be. This allows you to work towards a practical solution, reducing your anxiety and in turn working on your development.

If your ideal outcome is to be more confident in meetings, consider what actions you need to take. Do you need to prepare more thoroughly with the information you bring to the meeting? Do you need to have a response ready for questions you can't immediately answer, such as, "I don't have that information right now, but I will get it to you after the meeting"?

There is always a solution when we focus on growth rather than fearing failure.

So, if your anxiety tells you that you aren't good enough, ask yourself where you want to grow and what actions you need to take.

Think of it as having a mini appraisal with yourself: identify your strengths and development areas, and actively work on those areas. This shifts the focus from dealing with emotions to dealing with facts, thereby alleviating anxious thoughts.

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Image: The bigger Picture

## North Tyneside Businesses chance to shine at Annual Awards

The North Tyneside Business Forum is thrilled to announce that applications for the prestigious North Tyneside Business Awards are now open. Celebrating its 27th year, these awards recognise the outstanding contributions made by local businesses to the economy, highlighting North Tyneside as a thriving hub of business prosperity.

Now in its 27th year, the North Tyneside Business Awards are once again organised by the North Tyneside Business Forum, and will take place on Thursday, 14th November at the Village Hotel, Cobalt Park, North Tyneside.

Chair of the Forum, Michael James said: "This is a huge night for local businesses to show everyone what they do and how they do it. As Chair, I am very proud of the way we do business in North Tyneside and these awards highlight the excellence we have in the Borough."

Applicants can enter any of five categories, and all category winners are automatically entered for the overall North Tyneside Business of the Year Award. Category winners receive a certificate, prize, and trophy as well as substantial recognition and publicity.

**The categories are:**

- **Technology Innovation** – Celebrating businesses that embrace digital technologies and drive innovation in their industries.
- **Action on Climate Change** – Honouring businesses that prioritise sustainability and

take action to combat climate change.

- **New Business** – A business that has made an impactful start since January 2023.
- **Heart of the Business** – Nominated by the business commending a member of staff who has proven to be a real asset to the business.
- **Retail and Service Provider** – Recognising outstanding businesses in the service and retail sector that excel in delivering exceptional customer experience.

In addition to the five categories, the public will nominate and vote for the Heart of the Community Award which recognises the way that businesses support their local community. Previous winners have supported local initiatives and causes, employed local people, provided excellent customer service, and basically went the extra mile to be at the heart of their local community.

Each of the categories are sponsored by a local organisation as Michael James explains: "We sincerely thank our sponsors for their unwavering support of local businesses

and innovation. Their commitment to fostering growth and excellence within the North Tyneside community is highly commendable. This year's headline sponsors are The Banks Group, Action on Climate Change, Collingwood, and supported by The Business Factory. We also have event sponsorship from Insulcon Technical, Crossling, Buston & Maughan, and NE Display Ltd. We are grateful to each and every one of them."

The awards are in partnership with North Tyneside Council and will be hosted by BBC Radio Newcastle presenter Anna Foster.

Applications are being accepted online at [www.northtynesidebusinessawards.co.uk](http://www.northtynesidebusinessawards.co.uk) and the nomination process is also open for the popular Heart of the Community Award and nominations can be made here [northtynesidebusinessawards.co.uk/nominate](http://northtynesidebusinessawards.co.uk/nominate).

**The closing date for all categories is midnight 6th September 2024.**

The North Tyneside Business Forum is run by a management group made up of members from various industry sectors in the Borough and gives support in the form of networking, events and signposting for growth and development. Membership is free and open to any business of any size with a trading address within North Tyneside. The Business Forum is supported by, but not run by North Tyneside Council.

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

**E: [business.forum@northtyneside.gov.uk](mailto:business.forum@northtyneside.gov.uk)  
www.northtynesidebusinessforum.org.uk  
T:0191 643 6000**

# Ensuring effective investigations into whistleblowing reports

By Tim Smith, director and head of investigations, Safecall.

For companies that have a whistleblowing policy it's important the process is trusted and that employees feel safe and supported in reporting misconduct in the workplace.



Tim Smith

**There needs to be a genuine culture where employees feel able to report wrongdoing and potentially challenge authority. If there is a culture of transparency and a leadership endorsing ethical behaviour this will lend credibility to any whistleblowing policy.**

The challenge for organisations is ensuring their whistleblowing system is as effective as possible.

As someone who has been on the front lines of these investigations, I've learned that the process can be intricate and fraught with challenges. Here's a step-by-step guide on how to effectively investigate a whistleblowing report.

## **Step 1: Acknowledge and assess the report**

**Do:** Act promptly and confidentially When a whistleblowing report lands on your desk, it's crucial to acknowledge it immediately. Once any report is received it's important to triage the complaint to determine if it falls under whistleblowing protections and if it's within your scope to investigate.

**Don't:** Ignore or delay One of the biggest mistakes is ignoring or delaying action on the complaint. Additionally, ignoring a complaint can lead to severe legal and reputational consequences for the organisation.

## **Step 2: The investigation team**

**Do:** Choose an impartial team Select a team of impartial, experienced professionals to conduct the investigation. Ideally, this team should include members from legal, human resources, and experienced external consultants, depending on the complexity and sensitivity of the issue.

**Don't:** Involve potentially biased parties Involving individuals who may have a stake in the outcome can compromise the investigation's integrity. Avoid appointing anyone who is mentioned in the complaint.

## **Step 3: Plan the investigation and best approach**

**Do:** Develop a clear plan Outline a clear, step-by-step investigation plan. This should include identifying key issues, defining the scope, setting timelines, and determining the methods for collecting evidence. A well-structured plan helps keep the investigation focused and efficient.

**Don't:** Rush the process While it's important to act promptly, rushing through the investigation can lead to oversights and errors. Take the necessary time to gather and review all relevant information thoroughly. You must be proportionate in your approach.

## **Step 4: Conducting an effective investigation – gathering evidence**

**Do:** Collect and document thoroughly Gather all relevant documents, emails, and other forms of evidence meticulously. It's important to have a laser-like focus on fact-finding and follow all reasonable lines of inquiry. Interview witnesses and subjects in a manner that ensures their confidentiality and encourages honest disclosure. Protect against retaliation throughout the investigation process.

**Don't:** Compromise confidentiality Maintaining confidentiality is critical. Avoid discussing the case with individuals who are not part of the investigation team.

## **Step 5: Analysing findings and decision making**

**Do:** Analyse objectively Review the collected evidence impartially. Cross-check facts and seek corroborative evidence to

substantiate the claims. Objective analysis is key to determining the validity of the whistleblower's allegations.

**Don't:** Jump to conclusions Avoid making premature judgments based on incomplete evidence. Let the facts guide your conclusions, not assumptions or external pressures.

## **Step 6: Report, recommend and implement**

**Do:** Provide a clear report and implement recommendations Prepare a comprehensive report detailing the investigation process, findings, conclusions, and any recommended actions. Determine appropriate disciplinary actions or corrective measures. Act on the investigation's recommendations promptly.

**Don't:** Conceal findings or retaliate against the whistleblower Do not withhold any findings, even if they are unfavourable to the organisation. Transparency is crucial to maintaining trust and integrity.

## **Post investigation follow-up and summary**

Just because an investigation has concluded and a course of action has been decided upon, it doesn't mean the work stops. Agreed actions must be implemented, and the success of decisions made must be monitored. Often the real value post-investigation is 'lessons learned' and the subsequent corrective changes to mitigate against any repeated behaviour.

Many organisations see the importance of publishing a summary outcome of the investigation.

**For details about Safecall's investigations service visit: [www.safecall.co.uk/workplace-investigations](http://www.safecall.co.uk/workplace-investigations)**

# Solar installation business powers ahead during 2024



## North East commercial solar and battery storage installer AR Power is to invest in a larger site and grow its workforce as it embarks on an ambitious growth drive.

**The Washington-based company, which manages a complete turnkey solution from design to installation, has invested heavily in staff and resources in the last 12 months with turnover hitting £5.5m for the year ending April 2024.**

With the workforce reaching 33 and set to grow, the company – established in 2011 by husband-and-wife team Mark and Maria Dunville – is aiming to hit revenues of £10m in the next 12 months. In three years, it is hoped that turnover will exceed £30m.

AR Power, the largest and longest established independent solar and battery storage installer in North East England, was last year named ‘Contractor of the Year’ at the National Solar and Storage Live Awards, held in Birmingham.

Maria Dunville, finance director and co-owner, explained: “This last year has been a busy period as we focussed on planning for future growth, investing in more staff, training, and securing further accreditations, including ISO 9001:2015. “We have done a lot of the hard work by

investing in skills and equipment, all while managing the business, ensuring we continued to deliver high impact energy solutions to businesses and organisations across the north and even further afield.”

The company expanded its fleet of vehicles to 11, with four new ones acquired during the last year. The owners are now actively seeking larger premises – ideally a unit of 20-30,000 sq. ft.

The recent appointments of Luke Lobo, as technical manager, and Stephen Armstrong, as head of commercial, will help strengthen the senior leadership team.

In addition, Will Illingworth joins as marketing manager, a new role, as the company aims to raise its profile and sales drive. There’s also been the appointment of Lynn Storey as a dedicated in-house health, safety and environment manager.

Last year AR Power appointed Phil Armstrong as operations and maintenance engineer to grow their capabilities and service offerings for the maintenance of commercial solar systems, overseeing a growing demand for annual service checks whether AR Power have installed the system or not.

Technical director Mark Dunville said: “Going forwards we intend to focus on competing for larger projects. We now have the senior team and greater in-house expertise including a stronger design team, which will enable us to undertake more mid to high-range solar installations. Our pipeline of new work looks strong as more companies and organisations see the huge

benefits of generating their own energy.”

AR Power has completed hundreds of commercial solar panel installations to businesses across the UK, from manufacturers, government buildings to universities and public buildings. Clients include Newcastle, Durham and South Tyneside Councils, Dunelm Group, University of Sunderland, Northumbria University, Bishop Auckland College, Atlas Copco, CPI, Port of Blyth and Slaters Electricals.

During the last 18 months, the company secured several big contracts including an installation at manufacturer BHK (UK) in Peterlee - the firm’s largest project to date and one of the largest rooftop solar installations in the North East with 2,344 panels and 1.3MW Solar PV power output.

Elsewhere, the team at AR Power has been working hard, putting measures in place to help achieve additional ISO certifications. In addition to the ISO 9001:2015 which the company was awarded last year, the team more recently achieved ISO 14001:2015 and 45001:2018.

ISO 14001:2015 demonstrates the company has all the relevant measures in place to manage its environmental responsibilities. ISO 45001:2018 is related to occupational health and safety. These latest accreditations add to a lengthy list of quality certifications from Safe Contractor and Cyber Essentials to CHAS Elite, MCS and NAPIT.

**To find out more about AR Power, visit: [www.arpower.co.uk](http://www.arpower.co.uk)**



## Wellbeing boost for young people in Northumberland through creative nature project

A project helping young people in the North East to be creative and connect with nature has been hugely successful in boosting wellbeing among participants.

**Natural England and Mortal Fools have completed a unique, innovative collaborative project combining wellbeing, outdoor activities and creativity to support young people aged between 11 and 18 in Northumberland.**

Between October 2023 and April 2024, Mortal Fools worked with two groups of young people in the Northumberland area to deliver a series of creative activities using nature-based themes and source material.

The aim of both projects was to explore their thoughts, ideas, feelings and experiences of nature and in their lives as young people. Activities such as drama exercises, collage & zine making, creative writing and sound design were used to explore ideas and interests, whilst also contributing to boosting wellbeing.

Participants created nature-based collage, imaginary maps, zines and soundscapes expressing their experiences of real and fantasy outdoor spaces, exploring the actual outdoors to record Foley-based sound effects.

In Autumn 2023, Mortal Fools' Creative Mondays Youth Sessions at YMCA Northumberland welcomed nine participants to a programme of free, bookable open-access sessions of freeform

creative activities supporting wellbeing and self-expression.

From January to March 2024, Mortal Fools delivered a 12-week creative intervention programme at NCEA Duke's Secondary School in Ashington with a group of 13 young people with intersectional needs such as neurodivergence, social emotional & mental health and family circumstances. Participants achieved an Explore Arts Award qualification as part of the programme, which was nature-based and included an outdoor creative session and a devised audio piece.

The NCEA Duke's project culminated in a creative showcase, where 40 teachers, youth workers, friends of participants and Natural England were invited to see what participants had worked on and experience the four theatre audio installations created using silent disco headphones.

Across both projects, 22 young people were engaged, with 13 Explore Arts Awards achieved. Data gathered throughout the project showed that participants experienced a sense of increased confidence and feeling valued and listened to, improved friendships, social interaction, trust with others, better self-management of emotions and emotional regulation. They also displayed an improved ability to

speak in front of people and express ideas, opportunities to talk to people about their interests and have new creative experiences to help them express themselves.

Natalie Cain, Head of Alternative Provision at NCEA Duke's Secondary School, said: "Our students have thrived during this project, the natural beauty of our surroundings have been brought into the classroom and enabled the students to connect learning and our local natural spaces.

"Students have thoroughly enjoyed working with Mortal Fools practitioners and with their expert guidance and support from Natural England they have been able to create a piece of work to be proud of!"

Helen Ferguson, Creative Producer at Mortal Fools, commented: "The collaboration with Natural England is a great example of two different organisations inspiring one another's work, working together with a shared objective of supporting children and young people whilst seeking to understand their lived experience and through the process, high quality, inclusive projects can unfold with creative outputs showcasing young people's voices and experiences.

"It's been a pleasure to work with the team at Natural England and after seeing the benefits of integrating the outdoors into our work supporting children and young people with intersectional needs, we are looking forward to doing more!"

Christine Venus, Natural England's Deputy Director for Northumbria, added: "We are delighted to have been working with Mortal Fools on this project. Once again, we see how nature-based activities are a powerful force for improving physical and mental wellbeing, and for building confidence. We will continue doing everything we can to make the natural world more accessible for all."

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





Paul McEldon OBE, Chief Executive at the North East BIC

## Research reveals £2.5billion impact of North East business support

A leading North East provider of workspace and business support has provided a £2.5bn boost to the region's economy since opening its doors 30 years ago, research has revealed.

**An impact report conducted by the North East BIC shows how one of the region's largest social enterprise – which currently houses over 300 companies across four business centres – has helped create and support thousands of jobs.**

Providing a home to over 1,100 businesses over three decades, the economic impact of the BIC's flexible workspace is estimated to be in excess of £1bn, with its free business start-up support also helping to launch over 6,000 firms, representing an economic contribution of over £750m.

Add to that the numerous other business support initiatives the BIC has delivered, including innovation advice and grant funding, and the research has calculated an overall economic boost of over £2.5bn.

Paul McEldon OBE, chief executive of the North East BIC, said: "Other than the usual metrics, such as how many firms we've housed and helped start up, we've never really delved into the wider impact of our day-to-day work, so it's been great undertaking an in-depth impact report of our activity.

"Through some pretty conservative calculations, the findings revealed that over the past 30 years, we have contributed over £2.5bn to the economy, which is an incredible feat, especially when you look

at the many challenges facing the region during that period.

"We've always been aware that we've helped thousands of businesses grow and even more to set up, but these findings have really made us sit up and realise just how impactful our support has been. It's been a real eye opener."

Set up in June 1994, the BIC began life as a business centre on the site of the former Austin & Pickersgill shipyard on the banks of the River Wear. Today, it operates two business centres in Sunderland and two in Darlington, totalling 249,000sq ft of workspace housing 1,080 people.

The £8m Innovation Central development is the latest addition to its portfolio in Darlington, which also includes Business Central, with the BIC managing the business centres on behalf of Darlington Borough Council. Since opening its doors, the business hub – which comprises state-of-the-art office, lab and coworking space – has proven a huge hit, attracting 114 businesses.

"We've been delighted by the success of our Darlington workspace so far," Paul added. "It has helped support hundreds of jobs while providing the high-quality space required to attract new businesses to the town and retain its existing talent.

"It's a great example of how, by working with like-minded partners from the public and private sectors, we can deliver the flexible, quality workspace required to help the region's businesses innovate and grow.

"Looking forward, our plan is very much to continue in this vein, by investing in improving our existing sites and working with existing and new partners, both public and private, to continue delivering more of our unique flexible workspace and support as regional demand continues to outstrip supply."

As well as introducing new business centres to its portfolio, the BIC is seeking to expand its business support offering.

Currently, the organisation works with partners including DCMS, Darlington Borough Council, Business Durham, North of Tyne Combined Authority, Gateshead Council and Sunderland City Council to deliver business support programmes across the region.

It also delivers a number of projects through the many external-facing organisations which are part of the BIC group, including NBSL, Sunderland Software City and TEDCO, as well as working collaboratively with North East Enterprise Agency Limited (NEEAL), a community of enterprise organisations working across the North East, which it chairs.

Paul added: "Our mission for the next 30 years is to continue working side by side with our partners, the region's business community and public bodies to change that mindset and continue providing the space and support required to help the region realise its full potential."

**For more information on the BIC, please visit: [www.ne-bic.co.uk](http://www.ne-bic.co.uk)**

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# My Weekend...

## Christine Smith

*(Chrissy) is CEO of Mind and Sole, an organisation in Alnwick that helps people with their well-being and health.*

They run walking and talking sessions, swimming dips and a multitude of classes from reading to knitting. They also facilitate support groups and peer to peer support programs which provide a safe and comfortable space for individuals to share their experiences and connect with others.

**Their team of mental health professionals is committed to providing the best care possible to help people in need achieve their mental wellness goals. Here she tells us about her weekends...**

### Do you ever have to work weekends?

Yes, we are either dipping or working in the hub so one day is very much like another. We love our swimming sessions and can regularly be seen in safe waters around Amble and up the Northumberland coast line. Dipping is good for your soul and your general health. It makes you feel alive and has a lot of health benefits too.

### Are most weekends the same?

Sometimes there are the odd weekends when the tides fall wrong, and we can't safely swim in the open sea so that is when I can take a bit of a back seat. I'll still be found at the Hub though.

### Do you find it hard to switch off?

Yes, Mind and Sole is very active, and I often find myself planning different events when I really should be resting. I've got a good team around me that helps me to manage my time though.



Christine Smith

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

I enjoy a second cup of tea without any pressure.

### Morning exercise or a recovery lie in?

A lie in! My morning exercise days (apart from dipping) are long gone.

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

I enjoy the comforts of home so a night in is perfect.

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

My son plays rugby so I enjoy watching his games.

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

I don't really eat out. I'm very much a person who enjoys being at home. I have recently returned from a cruise and that was a great

experience. The food was amazing, and I can't wait to go again next year.

### How important is the weekend to you?

Very, it's my time to enjoy family time.

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

The feeling of no pressure to be somewhere on time or have structure.

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

In the afternoon around roughly four o'clock, because I often work 8am to 8pm most days, I very rarely enjoy being in the house in the afternoons, so the weekends for me are my time to relax.

**To contact Mind and Sole Alnwick**  
[mindandsole1@gmail.com](mailto:mindandsole1@gmail.com)  
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NORTHERN

# INSIGHT

## The Built Environment

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## Farmer launches Green Acres

Mike Dungait, a farmer from Stanington, Northumberland, is pioneering new efforts to help businesses and individuals become more environmentally conscious and offset their carbon footprint locally. Through his initiative, Green Acres, Dungait aims to foster sustainability and biodiversity while enhancing the local economy.

Farming has been a cornerstone of the Dungait family for generations. Recognising the unsustainable nature of intensive farming, which often relies heavily on artificial inputs, Mike has turned to regenerative agriculture. This approach involves planting diverse crops, such as bumble bee bird feed mixes and various grasses, to rejuvenate the soil and attract beneficial predators that protect crops naturally.

Mike's innovative venture, Green Acres, is a ground-breaking initiative designed to provide transparent and effective carbon offsetting solutions. Unlike many large-scale, international offset programs, Green Acres emphasises local action and visible results. Through planting trees, hedges, cultivating bee hives, and maintaining grasslands, the initiative allows businesses and individuals to offset their carbon footprint directly in Northumberland.

"Our entire premise is to do something local and visible," says Mike. "We want people to understand why looking after our environment is important and to see the tangible impact of their contributions. We manage people's sustainability commitments with the knowledge that the offsetting is being done ethically and locally. We're also giving people solid green credentials that literally don't cost the earth."

## Seven figure funding supports new homes in Gateshead

Modern new family homes are being built in Gateshead, thanks to a £1.3million investment by FW Capital, which manages the North East Property Fund and is backed by the North East Combined Authority.

Local developer Cokain Developments is using the funding to build nine new homes on the site of a former tennis court and disused pavilion in Dunston. The Fund was established with the aim of supporting the development of small-scale property schemes like this. Cokain Developments was established in 2003 by Alan Kain and Graham Cox.

The development at Monkridge Court in Dunston features three different styles of four-bedroom detached and one style of six semi-detached homes with three bedrooms. Completion is expected in June/July 2024. Designed with the modern family in mind, the homes feature open plan living and use the highest quality materials for the build. Interest is high with one home already being sold before the site's official launch.

Alan Kain, Director at Cokain Developments said: "Without the support of FW Capital we wouldn't have been able to develop these



## Esh Group sees 50% rise in profits

One of the largest privately-owned contractors in the North of England has posted a 50 per cent increase in pre-tax profit for 2023 as its robust business model continues to yield results.

While the construction industry continued to wrestle with a range of challenges during the year, Esh Group reported pre-tax profits of £3.1 million, up from £2 million the previous year.

The firm's portfolio centres on work for local authorities, utility and environmental companies, registered affordable housing providers, as well as the private housing sector, and Chief Executive Andy Radcliffe is looking to the future with the largest forward order book in its 25-year history on the horizon.

He said: "Our strategically designed business model stands out for its inbuilt resilience. At its core is the ability to even out the peaks and troughs of the construction industry's demand profile over the economic cycle - this design has proven a success and seen us through the challenging times that the industry has experienced over the last few years.

"Our headline order book figure is substantial, and crucially it provides over 10 years of pipeline visibility for the group. Having invested heavily in capacity, resources and technology, we are equipped to execute our strategic growth plans and are actively seeking further opportunities within our core markets, and so expect to see both turnover growth and margin expansion over the coming years. Despite the broader economic picture demonstrating a degree of volatility, we remain optimistic about the future."



properties. We're thrilled to be bringing the Monkridge Court project to market which will improve the choice and quality of housing available locally. We have four different designs, all built to a very high standard and will be energy efficient, helping to keep energy bills down for homeowners. It's exciting to see the transformation of the site, rejuvenating the area around it and creating new family homes."

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

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“

*...My favourite building has to be the Sunderland Empire...*



Victoria Walton

# The Built Environment

*In this series of interviews with leading figures within this crucial sector  
Michael Grahamslaw spoke to...*

## Victoria Walton

*Partner and Head of the Commercial Property Team at Swinburne Maddison LLP.*

### **Did you always envisage a career working in and around The Built Environment?**

Since I was young, I had a clear ambition to succeed in my career. While I briefly considered other paths like veterinary medicine or accounting, my interest in becoming a solicitor was always strong.

Initially drawn to family law, my perspective shifted when I joined Swinburne Maddison and my training contract primarily involved property law. It was then that I discovered my enjoyment for this area, and since then, I haven't looked back or considered any other career path.

Over the years, my role has evolved to include work on significant regional developments.

### **Tell us about your current role?**

I wear three hats! Partner, Lawyer and Head of the Commercial Property team.

In addition to managing my own caseload, I oversee a team handling a wide spectrum of commercial property and development issues. I find great satisfaction in collaborating with clients to understand their commercial goals and key motivations, and devising strategic plans to achieve them together.

### **Tell us about your team?**

I am privileged to collaborate with an exceptional team of individuals at Swinburne Maddison. Our commitment to collaboration is a core value that ensures we integrate seamlessly across all departments, guaranteeing our clients receive optimal advice through a unified approach.

Our team is diverse, comprising both long-standing members who have grown with the firm and newcomers who bring fresh perspectives and experiences. It's truly inspiring to witness the genuine dedication of our team members to their clients and their work, reflected in the collective effort we put forth to achieve outstanding results.

### **What are you currently working on?**

Currently, I am working with multiple clients on a range of exciting projects. This includes completing on a third residential development site this year for a long-standing client and well as working on a number of other development projects across the team. We are seeing a lot of activity in all types of commercial property matters and as a team we are dealing with a lot of property finance work across all sectors throughout the whole of the UK.

### **What is your proudest career achievement?**

Being appointed as a Partner in 2006 stands out as a significant achievement for me. I take pride in contributing to the growth and development of the firm to its current size and reputation.

Additionally, winning Property Law Firm of the Year in 2022 was a remarkable achievement. We have also been consistently recognised as a Top Tier firm for Commercial Property by The Legal 500 for six consecutive years, which is an incredible feeling and testament to our ongoing dedication and excellence in the sector.

### **What is your own favourite building?**

My favourite building has to be the Sunderland Empire. This place, over 100 years old, is brimming with character and still has many of its original features. It holds a special place in my heart because I grew up watching musicals and performances there. Nowadays, I'm thrilled that my daughter shares my love for musicals, and we often go together.

### **How do you see your industry evolving over the next 10 years?**

Technological advancements will undoubtedly continue to progress, with Artificial Intelligence playing a significant role. While change can be daunting for some, embracing it will be essential for the success of our business and clients.

Following the recent general election and Labour's appointment, we anticipate several shifts. Labour's manifesto outlines plans to upskill the workforce in the construction sector and liberalise the apprenticeship levy. This aligns with their ambitious goal to build 1.5 million new homes on sustainable land, prioritising brownfield sites. Additionally, we expect an increased emphasis on climate change and the sustainability of buildings.

### **What does the future hold for your department?**

The future looks incredibly promising for our commercial property department. We continue to grow and are excited to announce the recruitment of several new team members who will be joining us over the next few months, as well continuing to recruit for additional lawyers to join the team.

Our expansion plans reflect our commitment to providing a top-tier service to our clients and ensuring we have the expertise and capacity to handle an increasing volume of significant projects. We are confident that our team will continue to achieve great results, drive forward exciting developments, and solidify our position as leaders in the commercial property sector.

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



Neil Turner

## New beginning for planning in our green belts

By Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield

Earlier in the year I wrote an article on the upcoming election and possible elements that could help the construction industry.

We now have a new government and there has already been commentary on green belts, housing and onshore wind farms.

**So, what can we see for the whole country and the North East in particular? Whatever your political view is now irrelevant as we consider what might be the direction of travel for the next five years.**

One of the major areas of contention will be development in the green belt, which seems to polarise views and emotions. In our region the Tyne and Wear green belt area stretches from Durham in the south to Hexham in the

west and north to Longhorsley and across to the coast in Whitburn. So, any change to green belt status will have a significant impact in our region.

Nobody is advocating opening the flood gates to development everywhere, but we need to look at what is important to preserve and what can be developed in a structured and sensible manner.

I know what it's like to be frustrated by development applications in the green belt across different authorities and the impact this has on our economy.

The first step should be to look at re defining the green belt. I think we need a layered approach including green, brown and grey

areas - (brown land is previously developed land suitable for housing and building development while grey land is defined as poor quality land and 'ugly' areas) - and if you examine the boundary in our region there are logical areas where new housing could be built without affecting the basis of protection of open countryside.

Developing former built areas seems logical but even this is not so under the current rules. Building and developing close or adjacent to towns, and cities has to be the way forward. So why is planning so subjective and feels like buying a lottery ticket?

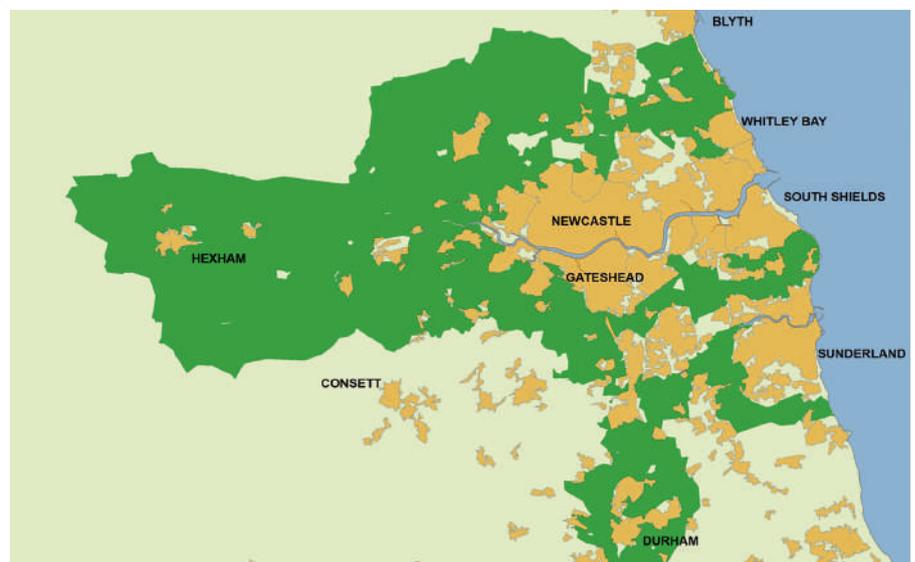
Current planning is complicated, time consuming and expensive for developers, clients and individuals. I have several clients awaiting planning decisions on major development projects which delay investment and the creation of jobs to feed our regional economy.

So, I will watch with interest to see how the new government will help speed up the planning system. My complaint is not against the hard-working planners working in the local authority but the rules and the regulations they have to work with (or against). We need to have rules and checks on all applications, but we also need a faster, quality-based system that encourages and welcomes proposals, not an adversarial system.

So, if it's new housing estates, one-off innovative housing, new industries or conversion proposals for old shops on our high streets, then give our local planners the ability to pass these applications and create new buildings. The presumption should be a 'yes' not a 'no' or worse still no answer and delay.

The problem no doubt will be the lack of resource available as we can't 'magic' new planners out of fresh air, but that is one for government, RTPI, universities and local authorities to solve.

**Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield can be contacted on 0191 3849470 or email [n.turner@hlpuk.com](mailto:n.turner@hlpuk.com) [www.howarthlitchfield.com](http://www.howarthlitchfield.com)**



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# In conversation with...

## Chris Morris

*Company secretary at Compass Developments and junior vice-president at Northern Counties Builders Federation (NCBF)*

### Tell us about Compass Developments?

Compass is a forward-thinking regional principal contractor with a strong track record of successfully delivering a diverse range of construction projects across commercial, industrial, academic and residential sectors. We work with our clients to offer a genuinely bespoke and tailored solution that meets their individual requirements.

I oversee all aspects of corporate and statutory governance through the establishment and implementation of our ISO-accredited management systems. My role also involves providing leadership and support to the pre-construction team by engaging with the client to understand their aspirations and ensure their projects get off to the best possible start.

### What projects is the company currently undertaking?

We have a proposed project pipeline of approximately £18 million for the remainder of 2024 and into 2025, which is a testament to the continued hard work and dedication of our team. At present, we are engaged in three significant refurbishment projects in partnership with both Northumberland and South Tyneside councils, which were awarded through our place on the NEPO framework. We are also working with the team at Eddisons, on behalf of several multi-academy trusts to deliver numerous enhanced learning facilities across their existing property portfolios. Additionally, through the Procure Partnerships framework, we are developing a state-of-the-art laboratory and accommodations facility for Natural England. This project is particularly noteworthy as it aims for a BREEAM rating of 'Excellent', incorporating numerous sustainable features that highlight our dedication to environmentally responsible construction practices.

### What are the biggest challenges and opportunities facing the sector?

The construction sector currently faces a blend of substantial challenges and promising opportunities. While the skill



Chris Morris

shortage remains a primary concern, we've also identified the persistent escalation in construction material costs as a critical hurdle that continues to create uncertainty. Although our supply chain has shown more stability recently, it remains vulnerable to external factors outside our control.

We've countered this by implementing cloud-based commercial, project management and HSQE systems, which have led to notable enhancements in productivity and service quality, bolstering our competitiveness in the marketplace.

We also see the rise of social value and the growing emphasis on community-centric projects as a significant opportunity for regional contractors like us.

### What can be done to bridge the skills gap in the construction sector?

We recognise the importance of nurturing the next generation of construction professionals, which is why we're actively involved in promoting apprenticeships throughout our business by working collaboratively with local schools, colleges and organisations such as the Northern Counties Builders Federation (NCBF) and Construction Industry Training Board (CITB)

to enhance the perception of our industry and showcase the many diverse career opportunities available.

### How does being aligned to a sector body such as the Northern Counties Builders Federation benefit Compass Developments?

We benefit from proactive advocacy and representation, with NCBF championing our interests at regional and national levels and influencing policies that directly impact our business environment.

It specifically addresses the unique challenges faced by regional SMEs with this targeted support levelling the playing field and empowering us to compete effectively alongside larger firms contributing proactively to our success within the sector. Moreover, NCBF facilitates invaluable networking opportunities within the construction industry. These connections foster collaboration, enabling us to share best practices, gain insights and forge partnerships that enhance our competitive edge.

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“  
*...there is  
a need for  
environmental  
and  
geotechnical  
services...*”

James Nairn of ERGO and Ben Pickard of Asbestos Audit

## Asbestos Audit enters strategic alliance with ERGO Environmental

As part of its commitment to support customers with a wide range of specialist services, rapidly expanding County Durham-based, Asbestos Audit, has entered a strategic alliance with geoenvironmental and geotechnical consultancy, ERGO.

**Operating across the UK, ERGO has provided services to over 900 clients and has extensive experience in many different sectors including contaminated land, geology, geotechnical testing, computer modelling and chemical testing services.**

ERGO and Asbestos Audit have collaborated on a number of projects from start to finish, including initial site investigations, testing of materials, remediation and waste strategies, removal of hazardous materials, site remediation and validation and completion.

Recently, Asbestos Audit worked alongside ERGO, providing comprehensive supervision of all contamination, geoenvironmental and geotechnical aspects of the works to a brownfield site on Wearside. This included the initial site investigation, testing, chemical assessment of materials to determine suitability for reuse and the removal of hotspots and unsuitable materials identified within the discovery stage.

The joint team also designed and implemented a large-scale earth works cut and fill operation with hazardous materials incorporated into the design, at depth. The materials were safely identified, moved, capped and validated within the work. ERGO then produced accurate completion drawings showing the exact areas of contamination for future land users and the management of the area going forwards.

Specialist services provided by Asbestos Audit include asbestos surveys, sampling and removal, contaminated ground testing and remediation, demolition and project management. The company is committed to achieving a £7 million turnover by 2025, through a strategic focus on key sectors, active participation in national frameworks and a strong emphasis on sustainable development.

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

Ben Pickard, managing director, Asbestos Audit, said: “We have had a very strong first half of the year and we are seeing a wide range of new and interesting developments, as we follow our strategic plan.

“Increasing legislation, heightened environmental awareness and greater use of brownfield land, is driving the need for an enhanced level of knowledge and information. There are many scenarios where Asbestos Audit works with clients and where, in addition to our own specialist skills, there is a need for environmental and geotechnical services. Our clients are increasingly looking to us to provide a one-stop service and so we are delighted to enter into a strategic alliance with ERGO.”

James Nairn, managing director, ERGO, said: “We have seen strong growth year-on-year and are seeing an increase in crossover with the services of Asbestos Audit. We see this as a great opportunity to work together and provide our clients with a seamless service by forming a strategic alliance.”

ERGO recently moved into larger premises with plenty of room for further expansion and purpose-built space to accommodate its growing fleet of vehicles and testing equipment.

In 2023 Asbestos Audit relocated its headquarters from Sunderland to Peterlee, alongside an operational base in County Durham, for its growing asbestos removal and demolition departments and its asbestos consultancy has expanded its offering with a new in-house asbestos laboratory and air monitoring division. The company has also witnessed a huge surge in project engagement, scaling up from 5,000 to 25,000 projects. It has also achieved recognition on a national scale by securing significant frameworks with clients such as SITEC, City Fibre, Landmarc MOD, Esh Group and SCCI Alphatrack.

[www.asbestosaudit.co](http://www.asbestosaudit.co)

# Labour's Housing Revolution: What northern property markets can expect

William Thornton, Head of Residential Agency at youngsRPS, shares some insights on what the recent shift from a Conservative to a Labour government might mean for the property market in the North of England over the next five years.

**Labour's policies often focus on increasing affordable housing and enhancing tenant rights. During their campaign, Labour pledged to build hundreds of thousands of new affordable homes, aiming to address the housing shortage and make homeownership more attainable.**

They also promised to introduce stronger tenant protections, including rent controls and longer tenancy agreements, to provide more security for renters. These initiatives could lead to an uptick in new housing developments and more stringent regulations for landlords. While these measures might increase rental availability and improve conditions for tenants, they could also mean higher compliance costs and operational adjustments for property owners.

Labour has also stated that first-time buyers will have priority access to new homes. Additionally, Labour intends to collaborate with housebuilders to give local people a right of first refusal on new houses before they are offered to international investors. This could help reinvigorate local communities, although this will only be effective if local people can afford these new homes. The current exemption from stamp duty land tax (SDLT) for first-time buyers purchasing homes priced up to £425,000 will aid affordability, but this exemption is set to end in March 2025. Furthermore, Labour plans to add 1% to the SDLT surcharge applied to overseas nationals buying UK residential property, raising the surcharge to 3%.

Unlocking potential development sites also requires addressing planning constraints.



William Thornton

Labour has pledged to fund 300 additional local planning officers, which translates to less than one new planning officer for each of the 337 local planning authorities. While this policy may help fill current vacancies, it does not significantly increase resources. This pressure on resources will be compounded by Labour's commitment to ensure that local plans are in place across all local authorities.

Labour's emphasis on infrastructure development could benefit the north of England, potentially boosting property values in areas that receive investment in transport, schools, and healthcare facilities. However, proposed changes to property taxes and the potential for increased regulation might create uncertainty among investors in the short term.

Additionally, potential interest rate changes are a critical factor to consider. It is expected that a smooth transition during the government handover would enable the economy to continue its current trajectory.

Nonetheless, any new or amended policies introduced by the Labour government may influence the Bank of England's decisions on interest rates. If policies are perceived to stimulate economic growth, we might see stable or even lower interest rates, which would be beneficial for mortgages and property investments. Equally, if policies lead to economic uncertainty or increased inflation, the Bank may decide to raise interest rates, potentially cooling the property market.

Overall, while the Labour government's policies aim to address housing shortages and improve living standards, the exact impact on the property market will depend on how these policies are implemented and received. Homebuyers, sellers, and investors should stay informed about legislative changes and consider both the opportunities and challenges these new policies might bring.

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

# Award-winning design studio expands senior leadership team amid rapid growth

**Bernard Interiors, a multi award-winning interior design studio headquartered in Newcastle upon Tyne, with offices in London, has made two senior leadership appointments to support the growing demand for its commercial and residential interior design services.**

Oliver Holmes joins as Operations Director alongside Business Development and Marketing Manager, Rachael Sellers. The duo will support Bernard Interiors as it develops new services and expands into overseas markets.

The studio, established in 2008 by Managing Director Jen Bernard, now employs over 20 people and specialises in turnkey solutions for later living design and high-quality residential interiors nationally.

On his appointment, Oliver said: "Having spent 10 years in financial services, with

three of those years spent as a Vice President of Banking Operations with Deutsche Bank, I am delighted to bring this experience to the dynamic team at Bernard Interiors.

"My focus is on supporting Jen and the business in realising our vision for growth. We're currently exploring opportunities for digital transformation, and developing new and dynamic services for our clients. I'm looking forward to the challenge.

Rachael Sellers brings 20 years of experience in marketing and business development across the professional services and healthcare sectors, including 11 years as Head of Marketing and Business Development at BW Medical Accountants.

Along with Oliver, she has high ambitions for the future of Bernard Interiors, commenting: "Having known and admired Jen and her business for many years, I am thrilled to join Bernard Interiors and be part of its exciting growth journey."

"The focus at Bernard is unique, in that as well as being an accomplished design studio, the business has a commercial outlook that ultimately adds tangible value for clients and investors. I'm very much looking forward to playing my part in Bernard Interiors' journey."

Bernard Interiors' portfolio of national clients includes Audley Villages, Retirement Villages Group and Hadrian Healthcare, complemented by a range of private clients in the UK and abroad, with a special focus on Marbella.



On the appointments of Oliver and Rachael, Founder and Managing Director Jen Bernard, said: "I am incredibly proud of all that our talented team has achieved over the past 15 years. We are a company that cares about every detail, resulting in positive change in the way people live.

"Oliver and Rachael add strength and depth to our already experienced design team, and I am excited for the next phase of our growth, continuing to bring value and warmth to every project, and always championing the successes of our brilliant team."

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



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*Esh Construction and Karbon Homes met recently as their Seaham Garden Village project got underway*

## Esh Construction powering up North East projects

Esh Construction is one of the North of England's largest privately-owned contractors. From infrastructure upgrades to new affordable housing stock, Esh has been busy on the ground kickstarting multiple new projects midway through 2024.

### Infrastructure developments

Esh is delivering a new bus station in Bishop Auckland after being awarded a £6.4 million contract by Durham County Council. The contract follows on from Esh's £1.8 million package to carry out enabling works on the site.

The new station will offer modern and accessible facilities to passengers, with eight stands and improved passenger information. It will also house a retail kiosk, CCTV, and more toilet facilities, including an accessible toilet, changing places unit, and a parent and child facility.

Alongside it will be a new 124 space car park, with high quality paving, street lighting, landscaping and cycle stands.

The scheme forms part of an £11.8 million investment in the town with funding secured through the Future High Streets Fund and an additional £3.6 million from Durham County Council.

Meanwhile, at the International Advanced Manufacturing Park (IAMP), the County Durham headquartered contractor has commenced work to widen the A1290. The project will see carriageway upgrades delivered on the A1290 to dual the existing

carriageway between the A1290/A19 junction and just beyond the southern entrance of International Drive within IAMP.

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 – one of the largest live schemes in the country.

### Sustainability in Seaham

Esh Construction has begun work on the first phase of affordable housing at County Durham's first 'garden village', marking a key milestone in the development of a landscape-led community.

Registered provider, Karbon Homes, has partnered with Esh as it commences the delivery of 750 affordable homes at Seaham Garden Village.

The new homes will be built to the very latest building standards, ensuring they are fit for the future, and will boast a range of energy efficient technologies, including solar photovoltaic panels and battery storage units. The aim is for all 750 homes to be net zero carbon.

The garden village will include a new

primary school, convenience retail and health and wellbeing facilities. Taking advantage of the location on the Durham heritage coast, around 50% of the garden village will be dedicated to managed green space and a range of landscapes and spaces, with over three miles of landscaped paths and cycle routes.

### Retrofitting existing homes

With the UK Green Building Council claiming there are 15 million homes in the UK that need retrofitting before 2030, the Government launched Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) opportunities for local authorities to provide energy efficiency upgrades and low carbon heating.

Darlington Borough Council in partnership with Hartlepool, Redcar and Cleveland, and Stockton-on-Tees Borough Councils, secured up to £2.1 million from the HUG Phase 2 scheme for retrofit work to be delivered in up to 120 eligible homes across the region, with Esh's retrofit division overseeing the home improvement upgrades through the Home Energy Efficiency Tees Valley (HEET) partnership.

Energy efficiency upgrades and low carbon heating can be installed in owner-occupied and private rented properties off the gas grid. The project will include improved ventilation, loft insulation, cavity wall insulation, air source heat pumps, smart heating controls and photovoltaic panels, with each property receiving bespoke upgrades.

All properties will undergo a retrofit assessment to establish which measures will improve them to an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) C rating.

**To find out more about Esh Construction, visit [www.eshgroup.co.uk](http://www.eshgroup.co.uk)**

# Premcor directors set sights on self-storage market



Nick Bellwood, MD, Yard Storage Solutions

Images: Premcor

## Six sites planned to open during 2024

**Directors of the privately-owned commercial property development company, Premcor Estates, (Premcor), which is based at Aycliffe Business Park, are supporting a newly formed self-storage company with development and site-finding expertise as well as direct investment.**

Yard Self Storage (Yard) launched its first self-storage site at Cobalt Park Way, Wallsend in February and Premcor directors, Rob Lane and Simon Hawkins, are currently exploring the possibilities offered by several more sites up and down the country.

The pair's investment in Yard, a standalone company, is complementary to their commercial development portfolio, which is not insignificant for a company which has only just celebrated its fifth anniversary. Hawkins, who began his career as a chartered surveyor and commercial agent, explains: "We are currently involved in several large planning applications for various sites under our ownership, which is taking up a great deal of our time, but the opportunity to have some involvement in Yard was too good to miss.



L-R: Rob Lane and Simon Hawkins, Premcor Directors

"We have known the managing director of Yard, Nick Bellwood, for many years. He is an experienced operator within the self-storage market, and we are pleased to be investing in his new business venture, which provides self-storage, drive up container storage and commercial storage.

"Storage has always been associated with office or house moves and these types of customers are definitely using the facilities, but we are also seeing a 50:50 split between those who are storing furniture and personal goods and businesses which benefit from having a safe, local storage facility where they can access their supplies on a flexible daily basis. Add in all the other factors such as death, divorce, downsizing and the challenging economic times of today, together, these factors combine to make self-storage a growth market."

Premcor has a second site under offer in Carlisle, subject to planning, another recently purchased in Newton Aycliffe and others in Co Durham, Sheffield and Rossington. In fact, a further six Yard sites are forecast to be up and running by the end of the year.

Premcor's Rob Lane sees the opening of the

first site at Silverlink Business Park in North Tyneside as a platform for future growth. He said: "The idea is to get one site up and running, prove the data and the model and if it works, we can draw a line in the sand for investors keen to roll out more.

"In its recent report CBRE noted that self-storage continues to demonstrate its operational resilience and attractiveness as a growth sector, and this looks set to continue in 2024. Because self-storage sites have relatively low overhead costs and do not require significant maintenance, this can result in high profit margins for investors when compared to residential or commercial property.

"Over the years and before launching Premcor, Simon and I have developed a strong network of contacts and potential JV partners, so together with Simon's knowledge of sites, particularly in the north of England, we are ideally placed to assist in the success of Yard."

Yard's managing director, Nick Bellwood, added: "Our first site is going well and it is great to have the Premcor guys in the background providing support – their advice so far has been excellent, particularly their knowledge of the planning process. I look forward to further developing the business with them in the future."

[premcors.com](http://premcors.com)

# Links in the Chain

Creating impact that goes beyond a simple hello and a handshake.

**In 2023, we hosted the first ever Constructing Links event in partnership with our Sales and Marketing partner, Just Williams. It was a sell-out success and gave an incredible platform to our Preferred Partners network, encouraging businesses to think differently and to help reap the benefits of working collaboratively with new contacts.**

At Lynas Engineers, we talk a lot about bringing people together, about working in partnership and ultimately how we prefer to work with our clients in a more holistic approach than traditional models have historically allowed.

It's the core of our business and we are passionate about being a truthfully and authentically honest partner on the projects we work on. But this way of working doesn't always resonate with others as we challenge the norm and push innovation; but when it works – it works incredibly well.

Constructing Links has now brought together dozens of businesses from across the region, given a voice to challenge embedded and often outdated practices, and it has given people the opportunity to know that their frustrations are often shared by others in the sector too. At our most recent event, we held a panel discussion dedicated to discussing supply chain and procurement concerns, sustainability throughout business, the teams we hire, our environment and how industry has shifted focus in various ways over recent years. Joined by Beverley Park from the Evolve Network, Tamma Carel from iCOR Systems, John Cartwright from Hartlepool College of Further Education and our own non-executive Director, Derek



Wayne Farrell

Smith, we were able to facilitate a frank and open conversation about the challenges and opportunities we are all facing.

The feedback on the day and since the event has been fantastic. Delegates all appreciated that everyone in the room were 'on the same page', were aiming to work together in any way they can and essentially champion each other's growth and development through collaborative working. An incredible result and whilst Constructing Links will return again in the future, it's the impact of events like these, and networks like ours, that will have far reaching value.

For us, and our team, we know that putting on events can be rewarding. They can look great, be held in impressive locations and have great food – but really, what is their value? Do you get what you need to out of them? Do you know what the return on the investment of your time really was? If not, we always advocate to rethink why you attend them in the first place. But knowing that this network is growing, the value of the contracts that are being drawn between partners is increasing, and that truly sustainable relationships are developing

is incredibly positive for Lynas Engineers and the Built Environment as a whole. We are seeing major changes in legislation, the ambitions of a new parliament will soon be seen and rolled out, and we know our communities are changing rapidly too. So, we know we have to move with the times – not only hosting great events but ensuring that our colleagues, associates and our own supply chain have a place where they feel they're valued and championed too.

The team we have built at Lynas Engineers are all deeply embedded in this way of thinking and our ambitions for the future are using it as the foundation of the way we go to work. We can provide impact and value in numerous different ways to our clients – but what we hope will be the company's longest lasting impact will be helping shape a new way of working across sectors.

All we can say is "watch this space..."

***If you're interested to learn more about Preferred Partners or Constructing Links, please visit our website at [www.lynasengineers.com](http://www.lynasengineers.com) or connect with me on LinkedIn.***



# Finding a NEET solution: Newcastle Council recommendations

Newcastle City Council's ruling Cabinet has been presented with findings and recommendations to improve support available to help the city's young people into post-16 education, employment, and training. NEET: not in education, employment or training.

A year-long Task and Finish Group was set up to explore what can be done by the council and its partner organisations to support those young adults who are not in education, work or training in Newcastle and to make sense how to prepare young people for the world of work.

Coun Stephen Lambert, Chair, Task and Finish Group, said: "The issue of young people who are not in education, training, or employment, or at risk of becoming so, is a great tragedy for both our city, due to wasted talent and potential, and for the young adults themselves.

"We welcome the work the City Council and its partners are doing, however we believe more is needed to support young people most in need. We're very grateful to everyone who has given their time to contribute to the work of the Task and Finish Group and we look forward to the feedback from Cabinet."



## Recommendations

In response to their findings the four councillor group has made a number of recommendations including:

- An increase in the number of part-time study programmes.
- Fund 'mentoring' for young people and support those at risk of becoming NEET.
- More opportunities for apprenticeships, work experience and supporting internships.

Coun Alex Hay, Cabinet Member for a Thriving City at the Council said: "As the future generation of our city it is of upmost importance that we support our young people with education and employment opportunities that best meet their needs."

The group pointed out that young people aged 16 to 19 are required to be in some form of full-time education, or to have begun an apprenticeship or traineeship, or spend 20 hours or more a week or volunteering while in part-time education or training.

In the UK there has been an increase in the number of young people who are aged 16 to 24 years and not in education, employment or training.

One in eight young people nationally are NEET with those lacking "good" qualifications and with poor mental health facing particular disadvantages.

For 16 to 24-year olds in October to December 2023 the North East had the highest NEET rate of all the regions at 17.2%.

The continued adventures of...



Hi everyone,

Been a busy time – cousin Dexter came for a few days when Uncle James was at the Open, and now cousin Kinnie comes every day while Auntie Lisa is in America with my bestie Emily.

**Q:** I have a wooden-framed, three-panelled lounge window, 4m x 2.5m, with no opening lights. I want to change it to one which opens onto a patio. The house was built in the early 50's and the window has a hidden lintel, I assume, with bricks forming the outside of the cavity wall appearing to be placed directly on top of the wooden frame. I have invited three specialist window installers to inspect, and to give me a quote.

Company One suggested that PVC-U or aluminium could be used - that a steel angle iron may be required upon further investigation (ie during the alteration) and that an external lintel may also be required.

Company Two said PVC-U would not be strong enough, and aluminium would be needed. This agent did inspect the outside of the window and said that Building

# Ziggy and Cally!

Regulations would not now allow the external bricks to just rest on the frame - they would need some independent support.

Company Three insisted that PVC-U would be the best material, and he brought small samples to demonstrate their strength. He did not go outside and did not mention lintels. So, could you please try to clear up my dilemma as to which company is right?

**A:** In your opening lines, you say you assume that this four-metre wide window opening has 'a hidden lintel' supporting the weight of the brickwork above. This is a dangerous assumption. Nowadays there are some clever designs of steel lintel, where the main structural support is up inside the cavity (although they all usually reveal a tell-tale strip of steel between the top of the window frame and the bricks).

In the early 1950s such a design did not exist. There was usually a substantial timber lintel above the inner leaf (sometimes steel), but it was common for the first course of outer-leaf bricks to be bedded directly onto the window frame. In other cases a 'flat' brick arch would have been designed to carry the load; in time, these too might have settled, meaning that the window frame became load-bearing.

Fitters working for replacement window firms are often ignorant of this fact, or perhaps they just don't care. All over the

UK you can see examples of houses that have been damaged by cheap replacement windows - whether PVC-U, aluminium alloy, or thin-section timber. The original window had been carrying the load of the wall above - whether by accident or design. The new window is not up to the job, and after a few years a characteristic cracking pattern emerges, with a triangle of brickwork detached from the rest of the wall, and perching on top of the sagging window frame.

Your first two companies at least acknowledge that a new lintel would be needed, but appear vague about the size or type. I suggest that rather than a "specialist window installer", what you really need is a Fenestration Surveyor or Structural Engineer to survey the property, specify the best product, and inspect the final installation.



Please send me your building queries through facebook - @WDLne, website: wdlnortheast.co.uk or through my Dad's good pal Michael at Northern Insight on michael@northern-insight.co.uk



Lucy Anderson and Jess Hall on the Steel Benders shopfloor

Picture: Steel Benders/Rephrase

## Steel Benders duo are a perfect team

Two of Steel Benders' technical sales team are driving each other forward to help the business grow even stronger.

**Sales estimator and administrator Jess Hall is learning more and more about the steel forming and profiling firm every day having joined in April 2021.**

And technical sales manager Lucy Anderson, who joined the company 16 years ago, is mentoring Jess along the way.

To mark the recent International Women in Engineering Day on June 23, the pair sat in the Steel Benders boardroom and described their roles within a business where Ashleigh Glass is also finance manager and Tania Cooper is managing director.

Operations director Phil Anderson said: "They are both massively important to the business in terms of the customer relationships they have formed - they are second to none.

"Jess and Lucy make the business tick

through hard work, confidence and efficiency.

"I do believe it is important to show the younger generation of females that we have moved on from the typical male dominated industries of the past and that they can be just as successful in any field they choose."

Lucy and Jess have both spent time on the shopfloor to learn more about what goes on after they have secured the work with clients.

Lucy originally started off on reception where she would work on delivery notes, invoicing and answering the phone.

She said: "Doing those things you start to pick up a greater understanding of what we offer, the various section sizes, grades of material as well as the terminology used for items produced for our customers. So, I started doing basic quotes for customers and gradually moved to the more in-depth ones."

From there she progressed to covering all aspects within the business including accounts and computer-aided design (CAD).

Lucy, who has always enjoyed maths and previously worked in a bank, reads complex drawings of projects and prices them up for materials and labour.

Steel Benders' skilled technicians then deliver using a variety of materials, including steel, stainless steel, aluminium, and copper. Such versatility allows them to cater to the unique needs of each client and project.

Jess, who also originally worked on reception when she joined Steel Benders during Covid after working at a local car

dealership, works closely with Lucy and manages various clients' contracts.

"I see myself as a mini-Lucy here at Steel Benders," said Jess. "She's a bit of a mentor and I tend to get the drawings after they have been broken down a little, not as complex, before pricing up the job.

"I didn't know what I wanted to do at school, I didn't think it would be this kind of work because I wasn't comfortable using maths and numbers as much as I do. But I love being here.

"In fact I was probably born to be in a male-dominated engineering environment, it suits me. Everyone here is brilliant, everyone has a modern way of thinking and I want to progress and do well here."

The drawings can lead to rolling, pressing or cutting projects of all shapes and sizes. Steel Benders can create structural components for buildings, bridges and other infrastructure projects. It can produce parts for machinery, vehicles, and industrial equipment.

Lucy added: "It is like a family here, and Jess helps to keep everyone smiling as the unofficial office banter coordinator.

"We are all good at what we do. It's a great place to work and the whole industry has moved on a lot, we certainly feel at home as women in engineering at Steel Benders."

**For more information and to look at Steel Benders' services check out [steelbenders.co.uk](http://steelbenders.co.uk)**

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## Wingrove and Citroën

A car brand and a motor dealership group to keep a very close eye on. There are times when two businesses are made for each other.

**Next year...August 10th 2025 to be precise...will see Wingrove Motors celebrate 100 years since it began trading from a garage on Newcastle's West Road. The company has always been owned by the same family.**

Although Wingrove is heavily involved with the Stellantis Group and sells Jeep, Alfa Romeo, DS and Peugeot cars from its Newcastle and Wallsend dealerships, one brand is synonymous with Wingrove. Citroën.

Wingrove Motors and Citroën have worked closely since the 1970s...but the motoring landscape has changed a lot since then.

Citroën, which celebrated its own centenary in 2019, is now one of the leading producers of electric cars and vans while continuing to offer a wide range of petrol and diesel models.



Battery power is the future of motoring. From 2035 you will no longer be able to buy a car which is powered solely by a conventional petrol or diesel engine.

Citroën is already at the forefront of producing electric cars... and they're winning an army admirers, including in the motoring media. Auto Express named the Citroën ë-C3 as their 2024 Car of the Year. The ë-C3 also collected the Car of the Year gong at the 2024 Company Car & Van awards.

As well as the price, other figures are equally impressive for the ë-C3. On a full charge you'll get close to an estimated 200 miles. You can top-up the battery from 20-80% in just 26 minutes. If you have access to a standard wallbox, the same sort of charge will take a shade over 4 hours. In other words, if you have a daily round trip of, say, 30 miles, you should manage the full working week without a need to recharge. Plug it in on Friday night and the ë-C3 will be ready for a weekend trip to the beach by the time you finish your breakfast. Brilliant.

Of course, electric power isn't for everyone.

In that case, if you want something which has similar dimensions to the ë-C3, why not go for the C3 hatchback or the C3 Aircross SUV? The C3 offers a petrol engine which has two different power levels while the Aircross is also available with a super-economical diesel engine.

If you'd like a dash of style, take a look at the Citroën C4 which is a coupé SUV. There's even a saloon version...the C4 X... which is also available as the ë-C4 X with electric power.

For those of you who need extra space, the C5 Aircross will be ideal. It's a family SUV which oozes class and has typical Citroën comfort. The guys at Car Wow loved it and gave it the award for Best Family Value at their annual awards ceremony. You can even go for the estate version...the C5 X which rates as Citroën's largest and arguably most luxurious car.

For additional versatility, check out the Berlingo, and if you want to carry up to nine people, the Spacetourer will be up to the job. Take out the seats and, bingo, you've got plenty of space to go to the tip.



Oh, and talking of jobs, the Citroën range of vans is ideal for anyone who needs to carry a load.

You can choose from the Berlingo, which is the UK's best-selling small van, Dispatch and Relay...and they're all available with the option of electric power.

In other words, Citroën has something for everyone!

**For more information head to [www.wingrovetorgroup.co.uk](http://www.wingrovetorgroup.co.uk) or call into their dealerships on Newcastle's West Road or the Silverlink in Wallsend.**



## Notify launch new Incident Reporting App to help reduce workplace accidents

After launching the world's first free forever hazard reporting App in 2017, leading Safety Tech company Notify Technology, is leveraging its 7 years' experience to launch a brand-new Incident Reporting Mobile App.

The free-to-use App empowers employees, members of the public, or an organisation's supply chain to capture safety, health, environmental or quality events in seconds. Whether it's an observation, hazard, near miss or accident, Notify's customisable App enables quick, easy, and accurate incident reporting from any location, in real-time, on or offline.

Automated e-mail and SMS notifications for high priority incidents such as lost time and RIDDOR-reportable incidents, ensure that Safety Teams can immediately respond in the event of a serious incident. Corrective actions can be assigned and tracked in Notify, and Safety Teams can keep the reporter of the event informed during investigations – closing the feedback loop and reinforcing that safety is seen as a priority.

Andy Dumbell – Chief Technology Officer at Notify commented: "For too long, organisations have been bogged down by manual processes, paper-based reporting, and Excel sheets to handle safety reporting. These outdated methods not only cause underreporting due to low engagement but also make it a nightmare for Safety Leaders to track, visualise, analyse, and act on frontline data.

Our new incident reporting mobile app changes the game by making it super easy to capture data, saving time, boosting engagement by 10x, and giving Safety Teams the insights they need to cut down on risks."

## Another award for managed service provider with national round to come



A leading managed service provider has added to its already impressive awards collection, with this latest win seeing it go through to the British Chamber of Commerce awards later this year.

razorblue has already won several accolades in 2024 including MSP of the Year in the Technology Reseller awards, and has now been awarded 'Local Economy Future Business of the Year' at the North East Chamber of Commerce Awards. The firm has also been featured in 'top 100' lists including Northern Tech 100 top 50 fast growing tech companies, and the E2E Tech 100 in the Independent.

Commercial Director, Mark Wilkinson said: "It's always an honour to be recognized

for the work that we do, and it's great for our people to see that their unwavering hard work and dedication is acknowledged by judging panels. This latest award is testament to this and the team is excited to be through to the British Chamber of Commerce Awards as a result."

razorblue's consistent commitment to ongoing commitment and seeking new ways to support its people as well as its customers, is one of the many reasons the business consistently achieves seven-figure growth year on year. The company's long-term growth strategy centres around putting customers first, constantly improving service, evolving its product offering, and employing the most skilled technical experts.

## Leading UK Microsoft Solution Partner acquired in multi-million pound investment

Technology Services Group (TSG), one of the UK's premier Microsoft Solution Partners focused on small and mid-sized businesses, has completed a management buy-out (MBO) with a multi-million pound investment from Pictet Alternative Advisors (Pictet).

TSG CEO Rory McKeand and his leadership team have partnered with Pictet to acquire the business from Sir Graham Wylie and other shareholders. Executive chairman David Stonehouse and Sir Graham Wylie, who co-founded TSG in 2003, will step away from the business.

The deal marks the next phase of TSG's expansion, which has seen the company record double-digit growth in both turnover and profits in recent years and seen its employee base expand to over 250 staff. TSG, which has offices in Newcastle, London and Glasgow, has established itself as one of the



UK's leading Microsoft Solution Partners, helping organisations to strategically invest in various technologies and assist clients in their transition to the cloud. Its client base is UK-wide stretching as far afield as Aberdeen to Southampton and encompasses a broad range of sectors.

Rory McKeand, CEO of TSG, said: "This transaction is fantastic news for all those associated with TSG. It reflects not only the diligence of our hardworking staff but also the loyalty of our customers and partners who've collectively underpinned our success to date."



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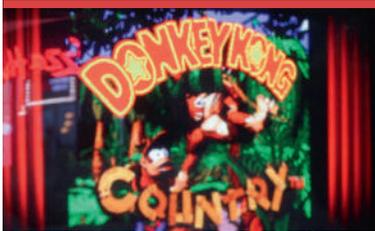


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“

*...It is a very  
fast-paced  
environment and  
it is very easy to  
fall behind...*

Rojin Yarahmadi with Nikolaos Benopoulos

# Talking Tech and Digital

In the latest of this popular series we talk to...

## Rojin Yarahmadi and Nikolaos Benopoulos

Co Founders, Polybox

### Did you always envision a career in the world of Technology?

We always thought that one way or another our expertise and genuine love for technology would lead us to a path related to tech. We never planned for it; it just came naturally as part of the journey. We are lucky enough to be born in an era where all the great technologies that shape our day-to-day activities were starting to form as we were growing up. That gave us an understanding from early on of how much technology would impact everything moving forward. So that led us to always be tech-oriented in everything we were working on or studying at school or university.

### What tips would you give to someone looking to work in the industry?

Start with the things that you are genuinely curious about and then build your knowledge base from there. If you want, for example, to know how calculators work, then try to learn how to program/build one yourself. The key is to always be curious and start small. That way, one can always have fun while learning.

Another important thing is to research all tech roles one can have in their career and then combine it with their interests and what is most needed out there in the real world. This deep search will lead to interesting insights into what someone can do within the tech industry. You will also be surprised by the things one can study in one discipline and then combine with a tech-oriented education.

Lastly, we would also emphasize the fact that anyone who is working within the tech/business world should always stay informed of all the updates and changes that happen in their space. It is a very fast-paced environment and it is very easy to fall behind.

### Tell us about the most exciting project you're currently working on?

Right now we are building a new platform for marketers to have all their reports for their clients in one place. We are building a powerful AI model that can answer any question a marketer can have by simply asking the reports directly. So instead of having to go through piles of data to extract useful information for clients now marketers will be able to just ask questions and have their reports ready to be used.

### Tell us about your team?

We are a small team of four. Essentially, it's the two co-founders Rojin Yarahmadi, Nikolaos Benopoulos and our two developers Owen Thomson and Michael Bailey who have recently joined after graduating from Durham University.

### What are your long-term plans for the business?

Expand as much as we can and become a known brand within the UK. After that, well, our world is a big place and we would love to get the opportunity to expand to other markets and help marketers all over the world if possible. We are also very excited to see what other needs the marketing industry has and try to see if we can create nice solutions for those as well.

### What's your favourite piece of technology?

AI and automation will always come first for both of us! But if you ask Nik, he would tell you tablets, GoPro cameras, and VR/AR headsets. As for Rojin, she likes DSLRs and wearable tech such as smartwatches.



### Do you have any heroes or mentors?

I don't know about heroes, but thankfully we have met a few very nice people who later on became our mentors from our time at Newcastle University, the Royal Academy of Engineering, the Ignite Accelerator program and more. Also, he had the privilege to have some of our investors as mentors and that is very valuable of us. We are very new to the whole startup game and it is nice that we have a few people that we can trust and seek their advice every time we have a situation that needs to be solved. Also, we have coaches that help us hone our skills in areas where we haven't had prior experience. I highly recommend that everyone hire coaches to up their game in anything that they do. We have found that having a mentor/coach is the fastest way to learn while you are building your business.

### When not working, how do you like to relax?

Chill walks by the sea, preferably with some nice coffee from our favourite place. Also, going to the movies is another thing we like to do whether it is in the theatre or at home. We try to fit in a gym routine from time to time, but that has been done with varying degrees of success.

### What's your fondest career memory?

Every time we hear we made somebody's work life less miserable and more productive is a happy day for us. We like to build tech in a way that can serve humans as much as possible and when we achieve that it feels nice.

### What's the best piece of business advice you've received?

Be mindful of sales cycles. This can either make or break your business. And it is so right as advice and something that is not talked about enough.

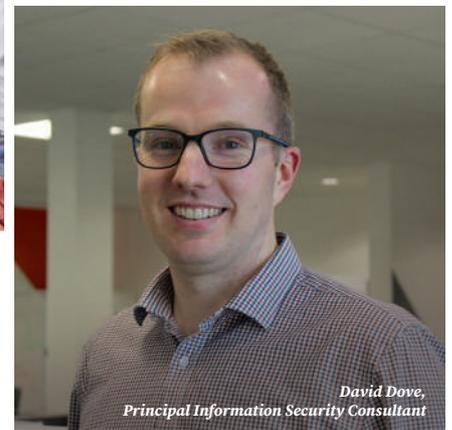
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# In a world of evolving cyber security threats, are your critical operations protected?



Over the past decade, many industries have experienced a surge in digitisation. From the introduction of digital twins, robotics and AI, to cloud computing and IoT, this technological boom has fuelled growth, efficiency and profitability, but also exposed organisations to a wider range of cyber threats by increasing the attack surface.



David Dove,  
Principal Information Security Consultant

**With digital transformation now embedded into processes, and a low tolerance for operational disruption within industries such as manufacturing, cyberattacks can have a significant impact on production, operations and costs, making many a lucrative target for cyber criminals looking to deploy ransomware attacks (malware that holds a victims data or IT systems hostage), knowing a ransom will be paid to avoid costly downtime.**

The latest statistics estimate that in 2023 the cost of cyber-crime in the UK was £254bn, with that expected to grow to £358bn in 2024. Despite this, the latest UK Cyber Security Breaches Survey reports that only three quarters of businesses consider cyber security to be a high-priority for senior management – a figure that has remained the same since the previous year, mostly likely due to the economic climate.

As rising costs continue to put pressure on operating profits, it's difficult to justify the cost of cyber resilience as there is no direct ROI, but for many, it is only after a cyberattack that senior management can see the value.

Investment in cyber resilience is not all

about spending money on the latest tech to prevent an attack, but also strengthening an organisation's ability to detect, effectively respond to and recover from a cyber incident, to minimise the operational impact at the earliest opportunity.

Response and recovery procedures should consider:

- **People** - trained first responders available 24/7.
- **Process** - formalised and tested incident and business continuity response plans.
- **Technology** - equipping staff with the necessary tools.

In the same way organisations conduct evacuation drills to respond to fire alarms, they should be testing their ability to respond to and recover from a cyberattack with the same success. This could be gained through tabletop rehearsal exercises which simulate a major cyberattack, as well as through regular training and awareness to test response strategies to quickly restore operations.

When it comes to investment, it is important to take a risk-based approach to establish a cyber resilience strategy. By understanding

the impact the most common cyber threats could have your organisation's ability to achieve its strategic vision, and how likely it is that they could occur based on current controls, senior management can make informed decisions on whether to invest in cyber resilience to treat the risks identified, or whether to accept and monitor the risk.

***If you want to understand more about the latest cyber threats that your organisation faces, assistance with getting started with a cyber strategy or you want to understand how to gain assurances over your response and recovery procedures, get in touch with David.dove@waterstons.com***

***To keep up to date with the latest cyber threat landscape, and access advice on how to learn from recent attacks across the globe, sign up to receive our monthly Cyber Threat Landscape Report directly to your inbox by scanning the QR code.***



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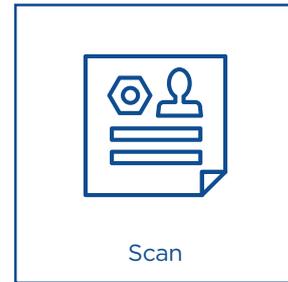
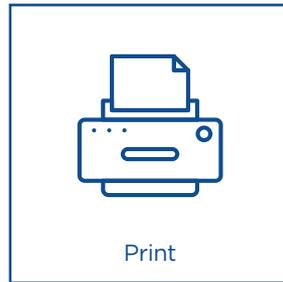


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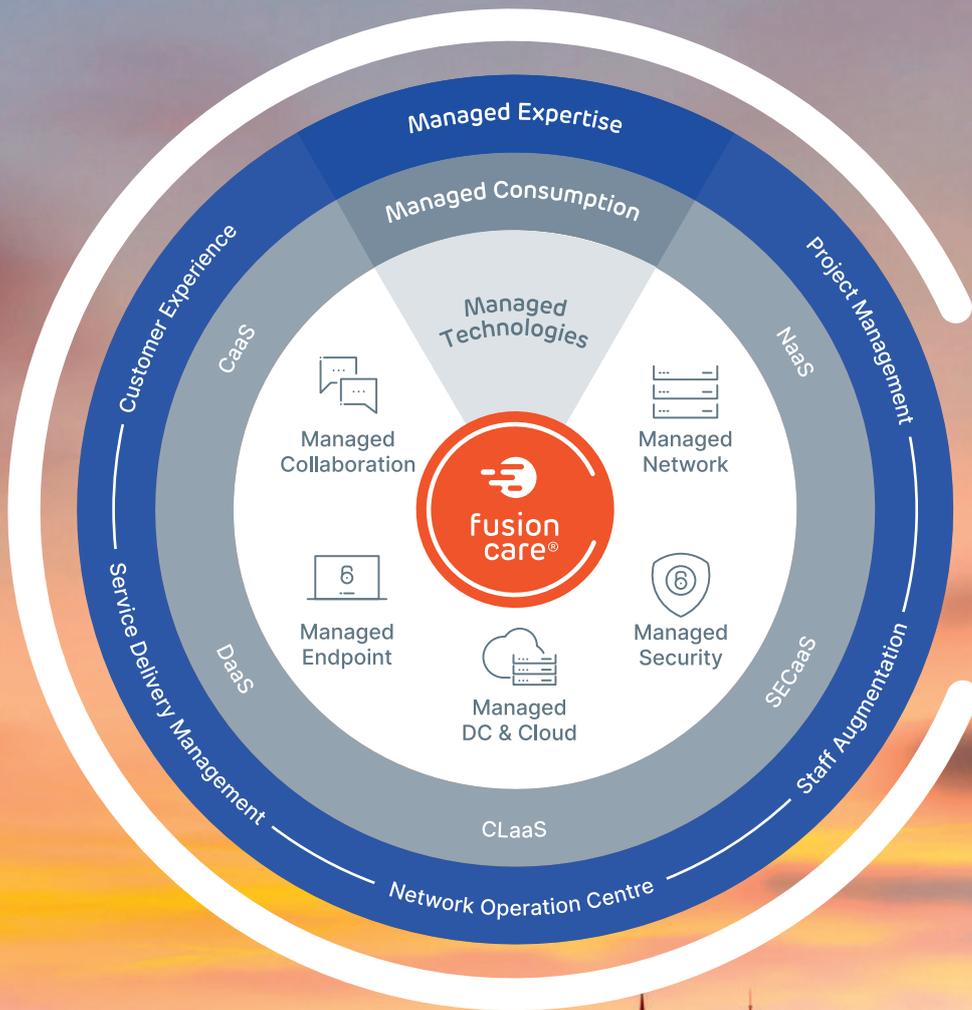
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Steve Morland

## Four steps for getting started with AI

By Steve Morland, CTO, Leighton

Artificial intelligence continues to dominate conversations as generative AI has become part of the everyday experience of most internet users, and machine learning is adopted in more and more industries.

**There's a lot of discourse already out there about AI's potential to transform our work and home lives, but thanks to the ChatGPT boom, it's becoming something most of us can't ignore. For business leaders, if you're not already using it, you might be feeling the pressure to just "get some AI". But like any technology, adopting it into your business should be considered strategically and deliberately.**

In this article, we'll explore the steps you can take to get started with AI, starting with the first crucial question: what problem you are trying to solve?

### 1. Put your business needs first

Successful AI adoption relies heavily on aligning initiatives with immediate business needs and goals. Rather than thinking about how you can adopt AI into your business, think about a problem you need to solve. Whether it's enhancing customer engagement, streamlining operations, or optimising a business-critical process, AI solutions must directly contribute to business outcomes and clear success measures.

### 2. Start small

Now you've identified a problem, it's a good idea to start small. Focus on manageable, isolated implementations which will allow your business to pilot AI technologies without disrupting existing systems or overburdening resources. Use it as a bit of a learning phase, enabling your teams to evaluate AI's impact on specific processes and refine strategies iteratively. You could tie this in with a proof-of-concept approach, where you trial different tools and technologies (or indeed custom software) to prove viability. Starting small means you can mitigate risks, optimise outcomes, and build confidence in AI's capabilities before scaling across the business.

### 3. Get your data ready

Before integrating AI into your business operations, it's important to ensure your data is prepared. AI and machine learning algorithms perform best with high-quality, well-organised data, and the outcomes are only as good as the data that goes in. To

ensure your data is ready, you might audit your data or carry out some data cleansing to eliminate inconsistencies, biases, and inaccuracies that could compromise AI-driven insights.

If you're in a heavily regulated industry or you have to comply with laws concerning data (hello GDPR) you need to establish data governance practices to protect sensitive data and ensure ongoing data integrity. Preparing your data accordingly will enhance the effectiveness of AI applications, enabling your businesses to gain accurate insights and make informed decisions.

### 4. Prepare your team

If you're considering AI adoption, it's important to adequately prepare not just your technical teams but also teams spanning all areas of the business. Whether it be change management initiatives or technical training, by investing in education and upskilling, businesses can not only equip their teams to leverage AI effectively but can ensure everyone understands AI's potential and can contribute effectively to its implementation and ultimate success.

By prioritising strategic alignment, iterative implementation, data integrity, and team readiness, you'll have everything you need to navigate the complexities of AI adoption with confidence.

[leighton.com](https://leighton.com)

# Outrank named as one of the UK's best places to work for learning & development and wellbeing

**Leading Teesside digital marketing agency, Outrank, has been named one of the 'UK's Best Workplaces for Wellbeing'.**

This follows the agency recently being announced as one of the 'UK's Best Workplaces for Development', an accolade awarded to just 100 similar-sized businesses in the country.

These lists, created by the global authority on workplace culture, Great Place To Work®, recognises UK companies that actively invest time, energy and money into the development and wellbeing of their employees.

Outrank has a dedicated People and Culture Manager who is committed to the personal and professional development and wellbeing of the overall team, coordinating regular group and individual training sessions to help everyone stay ahead in the fast-moving marketing game. Within the business, each department is also represented by a dedicated team member to form a council, which convenes weekly to raise ideas and issues and ensure action is taken.

Francesca Kosina, operations director at Outrank, comments: "We are over the moon to be recognised for our commitment to our people in both the wellbeing and development categories.

"Since launching in 2018, Outrank has always nurtured a people-first culture. Investing in the welfare of our colleagues, whilst helping



them progress in their careers, will always be top priorities for us - after all, our people are our business."

The business also hosts guest experts from companies such as Halfords and St. James's Place, to share valuable insights on everything from SEO practices to financial planning and pensions. What's more, it holds a membership with the NECC, allowing the team to leverage third-party opportunities for networking, knowledge and connectivity. Team members are actively encouraged to attend industry events during work time, such as Confidence Live and Teesside Expo, to expand their networks and knowledge.

Outrank is the only marketing agency in the region to make the list for small companies

with up to 49 employees. To determine the 2024 UK's Best Workplaces for Development, Great Place To Work® analyses confidential survey feedback shared by 240,000 employees working across the United Kingdom.

Outrank, based in Middlesbrough, currently employs 33 people to deliver world-class SEO, website design, digital PR and social media services to a broad range of clients, from start-ups through to large, established businesses. The growing business prides itself on its consistent delivery of industry-leading results over a 33-hour working week and is focussed on growing its talented team as the business goes from strength to strength.

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## Newcastle marketing agency invests in local future talent with internship programme

**A North East brand, marketing and digital transformation agency has affirmed its commitment to nurturing the talent of the future by embarking on a new internship scheme.**

Newcastle agency Vida Creative has joined forces with Newcastle University Careers Service to be a partner in its NCL Internships programme.

As part of the scheme, Vida Creative has appointed Jay Barber as the newest member of its team.

Jay, who is currently studying a Masters Degree in International Marketing at Newcastle University, will work with Vida for a total of 300 hours over the summer as part of the programme.

"I've been really enjoying putting the concepts that I've been taught into practice, and I've really enjoyed getting to know about what clients Vida work with, because it's such an interesting range of people and businesses," Jay explained.

"It's great to get out of the lecture hall and actually see what it's really like to work in whatever field you are studying, because it can be so different to what you're taught. And it's a good way to figure out what your actual skills are, what sort of things you want to do."

Having studied English Language at undergraduate level, Jay aspires to work in a marketing role within publishing, and is keen to make the most out of this valuable agency experience.

"For me, at least 50% of uni is what you make of it outside the classroom, whether it's volunteering, sports, societies or part-time jobs," Jay continued. "It makes sense to see what's out there in terms of internships, because when else are you going to get the chance to spend a few weeks working in a school or with a company or on a farm or whatever else is offered?"

Newcastle University Careers Service has funding available to North East companies like Vida Creative to subsidise internships and provide valuable experience for students as well as supporting local businesses.

Ellen Hedley, co-founder of Vida Creative, commented: "It is fantastic to be partnering with Newcastle University on this initiative to support emerging talent.

"At Vida we are committed to nurturing our people at all levels, so to have Jay with us putting her academic learning into industry practice is brilliant."



## Smart Media Group secures significant investment to boost UK market share and increase workforce

**Smart Media Group, the North East-based outdoor advertising, media and communications specialist, is embarking on the next phase of its growth after securing significant investment to boost its market presence and create additional employment.**

The business has received a seven-figure investment for a minority share in the group led by M Core Ventures, part of M Core.

This strategic investment will empower the group, the parent company of Smart Outdoor, Smart Vision, Smart Communications, and Smart Media Buying, to accelerate its growth trajectory and expand its market presence, throughout the UK and Europe.

Smart Media Group, which currently employs 27 members of staff across its subsidiaries, is poised for substantial growth, in the North East, Scotland, and London, which will include increasing its headcount by around 15 in the next 12 months.

Smart Outdoor, the largest provider of large-format digital out-of-home (DOOH) advertising screens in the North East of England, will benefit significantly from this investment.

The digital estate, which currently includes 450 screens across the UK, in locations such as Tyne Tunnel, Tyne Bridge, A19 and Murrayfield stadium, is expected to expand to 2,000 screens by the end of 2025.

The growth will also support the group's Smart Vision subsidiary, which supplies large and small format LED screens across hospitality, sport, retail, travel and manufacturing sectors.

M Core Ventures is the corporate venture capital arm of M Core, a pan European property collective with a combined portfolio worth more than £5.3billion.

Advising the shareholders of Smart Media Group was Nick Johnson, Corporate Finance Partner at Newcastle-based RG Corporate Finance. Legal advice was provided by Alex Wilby, Corporate Partner, and Ellie Bradshaw, Associate Solicitor, at Swinburne Maddison LLP.

Mark Clancey, Chief Commercial Officer of Smart Outdoor & Smart Media, said, "This is a significant moment in the history of Smart Media Group. Partnering with M Core Ventures will give us the opportunity to grow and futureproof the business. It enables us to create a North East media hub, investing in local talent who will ultimately drive our business forward."

Mark Catterall, CEO of Smart Media Group, added, "Through intelligent technological developments and the continuation of our outstanding customer services, this substantial investment will enable the Smart Media Group estate to become one of the largest in the UK. We are thrilled to be working in partnership M Core Ventures and are excited to see the impact our business growth will have upon the North East."



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## Creo Comms continues to grow with new hire

**A North East creative marketing agency has expanded its creative team as it continues to grow.**

Creo Comms has appointed experienced graphic designer Chris Pescod to boost its creative offer.

With a particular interest in brand projects, Chris has nearly 20 years' experience in the industry, having honed and developed his skills working with an array of clients including Mattel, Sage Gateshead, NHS, Newcastle United and Sunderland City Council.

"I'm really pleased to be joining Creo and I'm looking forward to working with the team on its wide range of exciting clients," said Chris.

"It's an exciting time to be joining the company as it continues to grow and expand its offering. I think it is a great move for me personally.

"I love brand projects and the challenge of creating something from nothing, then bringing it to life in print, online or anywhere else the design takes me. I think there'll be so much for me to get stuck into here."

Creo works with clients in a range of sectors from hospitality to manufacturing, and legal services to housing.



## Award-winning agencies keep it fresh with merger

**Two agencies have joined forces in the North East and North Yorkshire to create a full-service offering to its client base – with a fresh twist.**

Fresh Digital, based in Spennymoor and Peachy Digital, based in Northallerton, have worked together on projects for the last two years and have made the decision to merge the businesses to create a seamless whole-service agency experience for their combined clients.

Headlining as Fresh Digital, the agency offers a wide range of services including web design and development, SEO, social media management, content marketing and PR, among others.

Digital Director, Ashley Henderson explains: "We have worked closely with Peachy on so many projects and have found our ethos and values to be identical. This move enables us to continue with that work all under one roof, improving the customer experience and enabling us to capitalize on the skills both businesses offer – with exciting opportunity for growth."

Lizzie Turner, PR & Content Director said: "Ashley and her team are superb to work with and it just felt natural for us to take this step. We have a huge amount of synergy and have already welcomed new clients who are thrilled by the news. The existing Fresh team have an incredible skillset and range of experience, so I'm excited to start this new phase of our mutual journey."

Prior to the merger, Peachy Digital had been awarded a suite of accolades including 'most innovative food & drink marketing agency' in both the 2023 and 2024 SME News awards, and a shortlisting in the Yorkshire Post Excellence in Business Awards.

Finance Director, Callum Tingle added: "We have a strategic plan in place for our future growth, in which I have complete faith under the operational leadership of Ashley and Lizzie. It's a 'Fresh' outlook and an exciting future!"

## Set Sail For Free PR Advice

**What better way to spend an hour than on a boat drinking coffee in the sunshine?**

Keith Newman from Highlights PR is inviting businesses, charities and organisations to book a free slot to talk all things PR – and it's free!

Keith 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 love hearing people's stories about their businesses and how they work. I'm privileged to be 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. So far, I've helped a dance company, a website developer and a fitness



coach to get their message out to the media and a wider audience."

Keith will host the initial free consultation via zoom or on his floating office based at Royal Quays Marina. Visit: [www.bipcnortheast.co.uk/experts/public-relations-expert-keith-newman](http://www.bipcnortheast.co.uk/experts/public-relations-expert-keith-newman)



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# Marketing and Media Matters

In the latest of this popular series of features we spoke to...

## Kirsty Ostell

Managing Director, O Agency

### Did you always envisage a career in the Media Industry?

I don't think I really knew what a career in the creative industry was until I went to university. It certainly wasn't in our career talks at school and I was the first person in my family to work in this sector, so it wasn't really part of any discussion growing up. I was the typical person leaving school that didn't really know what they wanted to do, I thought I wanted to do something with numbers (I'm still a data geek), so I went off and did a business degree at Northumbria. I loved uni, learned so much about so many different things, including marketing. I knew that's what I wanted to do from the first lecture and (many) years later, here I am, still in love with marketing.

### What has been your career path so far?

I was incredibly lucky to do a placement year and I enjoyed myself so much I stayed for over a decade. I found the financial services sector fascinating and challenging, if you can market accountancy, you can market anything. My role and the business evolved so much over that time, I got to build teams, support with national and international expansion, move into strategy and BD and before I knew it 10 years had passed, and I was ready for a new challenge. I had a great agency to support that role, no surprises it was O, so when the time came, there was only ever one agency I wanted to join.

### What have been the biggest challenges you have faced so far?

I'm an eternal optimist, so I usually see everything as a lesson, but running a business certainly comes with challenges every day. I actually love a challenge though as I think it makes us all more creative, great ideas come in finding solutions.

### What is your greatest strength?

I'd say resilience is my super power, and it certainly helps with the above.

### What is your biggest weakness?

I'm sure there are plenty of examples here. But one is definitely that I talk too fast. I think that's been written on every school report and appraisal since I was three.

### Who do you respect most in your industry?

So many people, but I'm a big fan of Mary Portas. Her content is definitely on my go to list for trends, human data and creative outlook.

### What has been your proudest achievement?

Honestly, it's got to be supporting to grow the agency through the pandemic. When the world stopped, we used it as an opportunity to learn new skills, introduce new services, break into new sectors and supported our clients to recover and it was another turning point at O.

### What are your future career aspirations?

Being MD at O is the most creative and rewarding role I could have imagined. I love people and so the best part of my day is seeing the successes in the team, seeing an intern promoted or a long-standing member of the team take on a mega new role. It's what drives me to be better.

I've always been insanely ambitious, so learning new skills is always on my agenda – my latest obsession is AI. Now don't get me wrong, I hate it for content, I think you can see an AI generated article or a LinkedIn post a mile off, but we've used it to do some very cool things with data, to drive efficiency and to drive personalisation in campaigns and I think it's a game changer in our industry.

### How do you see your industry evolving in the next 10 years?

'Proper' brand building never goes out of fashion. I think we'll see a continued movement in the industry to shift back to long-term brand building, subculture creation and building real niche communities that are driven by brand loyalty. I think right across the industry there has been more and more recognition that relying solely on the quick results, performance-led marketing doesn't deliver long-term impact or value.

I also think we'll see another big shift in what's possible with creative campaigns (every year, never mind in the next decade). AI and CGI will keep pushing every brand into new spaces and I think that's really exciting, but I also think industry creative ideas will keep getting bolder and braver, they have to in order to grab attention on really noisy channels.

### How do you like to unwind?

I love to cook, I find it very therapeutic, but I can't follow a recipe to save my life. I'm most relaxed when I'm by a beach with a book, I'm a real sun worshiper and so holidays are my favourite way to spend some down time and really switch off.

*o.agency*



“

*...I'd say  
resilience  
is my  
super power...*

# ...Take a Break...

**August has a Bank Holiday and Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us how they spend their "day off"**



How do you feel about Bank Holidays? Do you long for them or just endure them? I've done both in my time and from that there are valuable lessons. Like most things in life, our perspective on Bank Holidays evolves over time and with experience. I've done the entire range of emotions about them ~ been ambivalent, joyous, dreaded, detested and appreciated them.

When we have the luxury of normal life and good health, they can be a blessing, a day to slow down and do happy things with happy people. We give ourselves permission to be joyous and make marvellous memories. They are a treat that makes a working week shorter and something to savour in ordinary times.

When we have the demands of too much work and not enough time, a Bank Holiday can be a blessed relief ~ a chance to rest or at least not work for a few hours. For the self-employed it is particularly important to use these rare chances of restitution wisely.

When life is tough everyday can feel the same. The sadness does not discriminate and hop away because everyone else is on a jolly. When you're very ill or taking care of someone who is suffering, the thought of messed up routines is dreadful. Worrying about hospital admissions and finding a pharmacy are additional concerns on top of an already heavy load.

Try to beat the system a bit with a plan beforehand to cope with the change. Realise that imposed change, however well-intentioned has ramifications.

Here are some tips that might just help...

1. Understand that life evolves, and your perceptions of Bank Holidays will change with circumstances. The next one might be your best yet!
2. It is perfectly acceptable to feel sad, alone or frustrated when the world is partying and you're far from it.
3. Your time might yet come. Hold on to that reality.
4. Sometimes difficult days are blessed with big lessons within them. Try to find some insight to enrich your soul.
5. Just get through. Just be bored and feel the feelings. Tomorrow might just be better.
6. Plan. That gives you some control over the hours.
7. Get a job done ~ occupy your mind as much as you can.
8. Phone someone up to cheer them. Send a card. Donate.
9. Declutter ~ make one of your spaces better.
10. You define your ideals of success. Leave your phone alone for the day. Be glad for others. They might just dream of swapping with you.

**Dr Rebecca Dinsdale, [www.drrebecca.org.uk](http://www.drrebecca.org.uk)**



The bank holiday will be a mixture of work and rest for me as a small business owner. I will have a planned day off on Saturday to rest and relax before what I hope will be a very busy Sunday Quayside Market. I started trading on the Quayside market at the beginning of 2024 and eight months on I am happy to say it has been a resounding success. Working through the winter months wasn't easy and some serious thermal layers had to be used every weekend. But now the weather has improved it is wonderful to be out in the thick of it getting to know the people that attend this historic market that was established in 1736. So, after what will hopefully be a very busy trade day I will be having a well-deserved rest on Bank Holiday Monday and putting my feet up.

**Corinne Lewis Ward, [www.powderbutterfly.com](http://www.powderbutterfly.com)**



"Our August Bank Holiday will be very busy working on four events across the UK. We will have a team of six spread across Aberdeen, Liverpool, Morpeth, and Newcastle, providing video for festival screens, event Wi-Fi, photography, and videography. It's going to be a jam-packed few days! My bank holiday will be spent travelling between these events to ensure everything is running okay and we provide the best service possible to our amazing clients!"

**Dan Wilkinson, [www.thedwmedia.co.uk](http://www.thedwmedia.co.uk)**



I'm normally at work August Bank Holiday. As part of an ABBA tribute the 'ABBA GIRLS' we normally have bookings on most Bank Holidays, Christmas, New Year etc. When most people are dressing up, eating, drinking, I will be humping speakers, lights and wearing a lovely shade of 1970's blue eyeshadow and sparkly boots!

I actually can't complain as I really enjoy it and you know what they say 'If you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life.'

*Alison Stanley, [www.stanleycreatives.org](http://www.stanleycreatives.org)*



I'll be working on PR at the Newcastle Mela Festival at Exhibition Park. It's a great free event full of music, culture, food and arts and crafts. A super event that links communities and cultures.

See you there!

*Keith Newman, [www.highlightspr.co.uk](http://www.highlightspr.co.uk)*

*Last month our RADAR members appeared on BBC TV, BBC Radio, Local TV and many magazines and newspapers. To find out more about the benefits of becoming a RADAR member, contact [keith@highlightspr.co.uk](mailto:keith@highlightspr.co.uk) or call Keith on 07814 397951*

## Are you on the media's RADAR?

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**Become a member of Highlights PR's RADAR programme.**

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**Special bonus for RADAR clients:**

- Interview on Radio Northumberland
- Crisis PR management advice
- Feature in Highlights PR's newsletter
- Exclusive offers on PR, media training and more
- LED advert beamed from the floating office



**Contact Keith Newman for more details.**

Visit him on his floating office

[keith@highlightspr.co.uk](mailto:keith@highlightspr.co.uk)

07814 397951

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





## Key Highlights of the New CIM Syllabus

The new Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) syllabus for 2024 introduces several key updates to keep the curriculum current and relevant for today’s marketers.

**The updates are designed to equip marketing professionals with the skills and knowledge necessary to excel in a dynamic, digital-driven market environment.**

Starting in September, all new learners with nesma will begin on one of the new pathways. Hence, it’s a good time to share why the team thinks CIM qualifications should remain at the top of your training and development agenda for marketing and communication skills.

Here’s a quick overview of the key benefits of the CIM qualifications.

### Enhanced Skills and Knowledge

The new syllabus integrates digital marketing throughout its modules, equipping learners with the latest digital skills, which is crucial for businesses seeking a competitive edge in a digitally driven market.

### Customisable Learning Paths

The new syllabus allows for a customisable approach, letting learners choose modules most relevant to their roles and career aspirations. Ensuring the learning experience is highly relevant and immediately applicable to their job functions.

### Self-Paced Learning

nesma’s online and virtual learning options ensure minimal study disruption to busy work schedules. This flexibility makes it easier for businesses to invest in employee development without losing productivity.

### Improved Team Performance

Qualifications at the Level 6 Diploma and the Level 7 Leadership Programme focus on strategic marketing and management skills, allowing your team to contribute to business strategy and leadership. All modules focus on real-world applications and interactive learning so that team members can develop better collaboration and problem-solving skills for effective teamwork.

### Leadership Development

The new CIM syllabus includes modules designed to enhance strategic thinking and planning. It allows learners to understand the bigger picture and make decisions that align with business goals. The leadership focus at Level 7, the Marketing Leadership Programme, is designed to help senior marketers turn business challenges into opportunities. It can foster a culture of innovation and adaptability within your team and is the perfect reward for Senior Managers.

**Jen Lorimer**  
Client Relationship Manager



I feel the new CIM syllabus gives individuals the power to shape their qualifications to support their chosen career path. It is now easier to customise each qualification to fit your aspirations. You can tailor the qualifications to match your career goals with flexible module choices at every level. This latest update to the syllabus has given the qualifications more pace and edge with the introduction of several new and exciting modules. So far, responses from students confirm that they can fit studying more comfortably around their busy schedules and the convenience of online exams for most modules makes assessments more streamlined.

**Mark Cooley**  
Business Development Manager



I have received overwhelmingly positive feedback from our clients on the brand-new CIM syllabus, particularly its high quality and relevance. Everyone I have spoken to agrees that the new cutting-edge content, with its enhanced focus on data analytics and insight and, most importantly, its practical approach to real-world applications, has given the qualifications a contemporary feel. Employers should feel confident in their applicability to their marketing and communications team, especially with modernised module subjects like AI and MarTech, to help their team make the most of a digital world.

**Paul Sutherland**  
Commercial Director



By investing in the new CIM syllabus, businesses can ensure their teams are well-equipped with the latest marketing skills and motivated and capable of contributing to the company's strategic goals. Supporting your team in gaining recognised qualifications can boost their morale and motivation, leading to higher job satisfaction and retention rates. The CIM qualifications are globally recognised and respected. Having a team with CIM qualifications can enhance your business's credibility and professionalism in the eyes of clients and stakeholders, fostering a culture of innovation and adaptability within your team.

**Veronica Swindale**  
Managing Director



The new CIM syllabus creates fantastic opportunities for organisations to use the qualifications to fill skill gaps with industry-relevant capability. If you are looking for a retention strategy for key managers, we can help you delve into the skills profile of your team and suggest the best options. As strategic plans are the lynchpin of all marketing activity, I am particularly delighted that preparing a 10-page plan remains in the new syllabus, allowing our learners to demonstrate a thorough understanding of applied strategic marketing theory. Studying CIM qualifications can address the strategic challenges navigated in the workplace. Once you reach the CIM Marketing Leadership Programme at Level 7, you will gain skills that will take you through your career.

**For more details on specific modules and to plan your CIM study programme, call Jen, our Client Relationship Manager, on 07734 222 254 or email her at [hello@nesma.co.uk](mailto:hello@nesma.co.uk), and she will call you back.**

# nesma

## START THE NEW CIM SYLLABUS IN SEPTEMBER

The new CIM syllabus is designed to be highly beneficial for individual and team development.

It is structured to develop not just marketing competencies but also strategic and leadership capabilities.

### TALK TO JEN ABOUT STARTING A CIM QUALIFICATION.



Accredited Study Centre

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

T: 07734 222 254 E: [hello@nesma.co.uk](mailto:hello@nesma.co.uk)



Samuel Marriott-Dowding

## Public Relations goes Pro Bono

For businesses big and small, pro bono (or voluntary) work is the provision of professional services for people, organisations, or other businesses that either may not be able to afford these services, or who face barriers when trying to access them.

**Whilst the act of offering your companies services free of charge is a cause for caution in some cases, pro bono work provides the opportunity for positive business developments and collective social improvements.**

In our case, Marriott Communications has had the opportunity to work with a multitude of third sector organisations and start ups across the UK, and have donated over 700 hours of pro bono support - totalling over £200,000 worth of services donated to these charities. Through our involvement with voluntary work, we have been involved with and have collaborated on several socially transformative projects - including with one of our current clients, Held In Our Hearts.

We have seen first hand the value of participating in this type of work, especially as a start-up agency. For any new business starting trading within a previously unexplored market, there is always the inherent risk that clients will not be acquired quickly and that services go unused - ultimately risking investment and a companies long term financial position. However, whilst pro bono work may not prove to be profitable, it does in fact provide the opportunity to develop best practice through real-world experience. Working on voluntary projects allows a business - and in our case an agency - to develop a portfolio of case studies that ultimately highlights the quality of your work and the positive impact that you are able to have on a business or organisation. These case studies can subsequently be used for digital promotions of your business, as well as, for when responding to tenders and creating proposals for any briefs or projects.

At our agency we have also been able to use these professional experiences to identify shortcomings in terms of practice and within our business model which allowed us to adjust our service provision and structure

- ultimately meaning that we were able to implement positive business developments and growth.

Community collaboration on the basis of pro bono service provision offers the chance to enact real, tangible change in the form of collective social improvement. This collaboration brings socially transformative projects into fruition, and subsequently works to support social causes and people that are often marginalised, underserved, underfunded, and in fact disenfranchised. Working towards a collective common good, not only creates a socially responsible reputation for a business or an organisation, but also develops a personal and professional sense of fulfilment and contribution as you are working towards a goal or achievement that is greater than even your business, or yourselves.

The value of participating in pro bono projects is strongly tied to initial business developments and the creation of best practice. For Marriott Communications, and hopefully other small businesses, we have successfully been able to gain real-world experience of how our business operates within an active market, and through such an endeavour, we have been able to demonstrate our social and ethical responsibility at a community level, humanise our position as an agency, and ultimately ensure that our business practices, processes, and business model could successfully survive and thrive in the saturated market of Communications and Public Relations.

[marriottcommunications.com](http://marriottcommunications.com)

# Sustainable digital agency opens Sunderland office

**A sustainable digital agency has opened headquarters in Sunderland as it targets growth.**

**Phonetic Digital, which provides website design and development, digital marketing and training services, has chosen Mackie's Corner in Sunderland city centre as the location for its new office.**

The company has opened its first office with the support of Sunderland City Council.

Currently employing two members of staff, the agency plans to grow its headcount to double figures over the next three years.

Founder Steven Parker said: "I'm from Sunderland and wanted the business to be based here. The support we've had from businesses based in the city has been brilliant.

"For me it is about wanting to create a sustainable business, and that's sustainable in the sense of our people, our environment, and our finances.

"We were always going to set up in Sunderland and we will always be based in the city. We want to create more and better jobs and have a positive impact in the city."

Phonetic Digital is already well established and gaining a solid reputation in Sunderland, with clients including North East Screen, BDN, Sunderland BID, KirtleyCo, and Aztec Colour Print, and it has plans to scale up over the next three years. The team were keen to be based in the city centre and Mackie's Corner provided the perfect opportunity.

The Grade II listed building on High Street West has been lovingly restored by property developer KirtleyCo over recent years, following a £2million investment into the site.

"I love what has been done here at Mackie's Corner," said Steven. "It's a building I remember coming to every weekend over 20 years' ago, so to see it brought back to life in the way it has is great and that also aligns with our values around sustainability.

"It's got a brilliant central location. It means there's lots of clients we can walk to or jump on the Metro to meet with. I love being based in the city centre, there is so much happening in Sunderland right now which as a native Mackem is terrific to see.

"We also received a grant from Sunderland City Council, which was to help with office set up costs and all the office furniture is recycled or has been sourced from a local company in Sunderland."

Peter McIntyre, Executive Director of City Development at Sunderland City Council, said: "I'm delighted that Phonetic Digital chose Sunderland for its first office.

"It's a company with ambitious plans to bring skilled jobs to the city and I look forward to seeing the company grow over the coming years."

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



## Sustainable Digital Solutions

Websites. Marketing. Training.

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

 Phonetic Digital

# Marketing consultancy locates to the North East BIC following recent client wins

A marketing and business development consultancy which was launched during the height of the Covid pandemic has taken up co-working space at the North East BIC following a raft of new client wins.

**Riverside Marketing Solutions, who recently celebrated their 4th year anniversary is headed up by owner Nicola Halse. They provide services including social media management, marketing strategies & implementation, business development support and LinkedIn training sessions to sole traders and small businesses across the North East.**

Following an increase in demand for their marketing services, Nicola decided to relocate to the BIC, enabling her to take advantage of the accessible co-working areas, spacious meeting rooms and tap into their friendly community.

The BIC, which recently celebrated their 30th anniversary in the city, has helped over 4,000 people set up businesses and created over 7,500 jobs, they continually reinvest the money they make into launching new services and facilities to ensure the region's businesses and entrepreneurs have the tools they need.

Delighted with the move, Nicola commented, 'Riverside Marketing has grown year on year since I launched the business in April 2020, working with a variety of industries including engineering, logistics, HR and IT sectors, I've found that the flexibility of my services is appealing to companies as many sole traders and SME's are reluctant to tie into long term contracts with agencies.



Nicola Halse

Having worked for SME's throughout my career, I know it can be a daunting prospect to sign a three, six or twelve month marketing contract when you're not sure if you're going to get a return on the investment. With my flexible rolling month on month model, businesses can use my services for as long or as short as they need to, it's ideal for companies that are in-between marketing or social media managers or simply want to dip their toe into the marketing world.

The developments which are taking place in Sunderland at the moment are huge and

with many opportunities for businesses across the region, I thought now was the perfect time to take the plunge.

I've always been an admirer of the BIC and the work they do in supporting businesses in the area, I'll now not only be able to make use of the brilliant facilities but will also receive support from their business advisers, have the opportunity to network with fellow co-workers at their regular get-together events and take advantage of a lovely riverside walk at lunch time!

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

# Northumberland design firm trades up to larger offices

A Northumberland design company has moved into new, larger offices as part of its continuing growth strategy.

AS Design North East is now based at the Spetchells Centre on Front Street in Prudhoe, having moved across from its former location on the nearby Dukes Industrial Estate.

The new offices, which are more than 50 per cent bigger than the company's previous home, provide the business with the room it needs to expand the range of services it can offer and accommodate the new recruits who will deliver them.

AS Design North East already provides graphic design services across print and digital media for a range of different functions, including branding, logo design, web design, social media and marketing.

And having worked with regional fund management firm NEL Fund Managers earlier in the year to bring in a growth capital investment from the North East Small Loan Fund, it is now adding further services to this list, including SEO, e-commerce, digital advertising management and coding.

Over the past two years, the team has grown to five people, including young designer and web developer Nathan Cockburn, who was originally recruited via the Government's Kickstart programme and who has since gone on to become a senior member of the team, leading work around the launch of and co-owning AS Design's sister company, SNAC Digital.

Nathan's younger brother Josh has now started a new role within the business as a Junior Digital Marketing specialist after spending two years working part-time for the firm whilst at school.

AS Design's clients include a range of North East SMEs as well as influential musicians Toyah Willcox and Robert Fripp.

Alan Sawyers says: "With both our team and our range of services continuing to grow, we knew we needed somewhere with a bit more space and we were also keen to stay local.



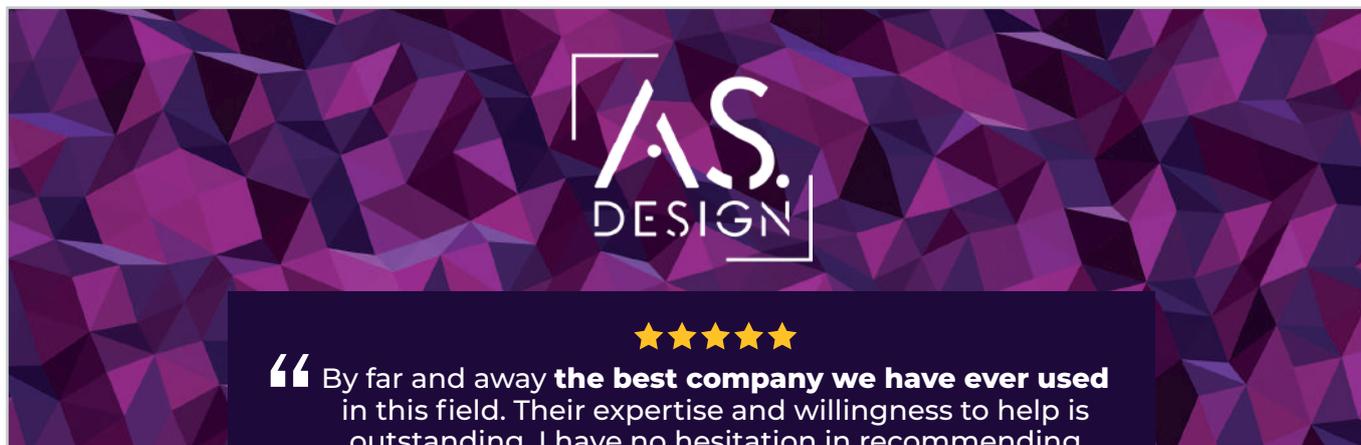
"The Spetchells Centre offers us a perfect central space in the middle of the town and has its own community of businesses, organisations and groups that make it the ideal venue for us.

"Josh has regularly helped Nathan and I out over the last couple of years, with his role being predominantly working for our ecommerce and production clients, and our new office allows for us all to work together in the same place while we train him up.

"Providing a wider range of services means we can meet more of our clients' requirements and offer them an efficient single point of contact that delivers more of what they need, and we're already seeing demand for them growing among both existing and new clients."

Josh Cockburn adds: "I'm really enjoying my new role, especially learning how to use Photoshop and AI to help create social media content.

"I've loved seeing how well Nathan has done over the past couple of years and I hope that I can do the same."



“By far and away **the best company we have ever used** in this field. Their expertise and willingness to help is outstanding. I have no hesitation in recommending them and **we wouldn't use anyone else.**”

STUART HENDERSON, G.T. HARVEY & PARTNERS

## DESIGN FOR WEB

We design websites and online shops for small businesses.

## DESIGN FOR PRINT

We design magazines, brochures, catalogues and company newsletters.

## DESIGN FOR SOCIAL

We design and curate social media channels, including branded grids.

## DESIGN FOR MUSIC

We design artwork packages for music releases on CD, vinyl and digital.

## DESIGN FOR PRODUCTS

We design realistic digital product shots for online and print promotion.

## DESIGN FOR VIDEO

We design and edit promotional clips and social media videos.

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



@asdesignne



# ME... UNIQUE magazines

Sarah Johnson with John Porrett

# 15 Years in Business - From the beginning to the present

Launched officially in 2009, a business model was created for the vision of Unique Magazines. The original idea was based on providing publishers with magazine orders, which were obtained from our website. Over the years, we've grown into a global hub.



**Today, we pride ourselves in offering over 2000 different magazines and dispatching orders from our own distribution centre. With a customer focused service, established partnerships built worldwide, customers in over 100 countries and a brand known for quality in the print magazine industry.**

After 15 years in business, we have created an ever-growing streamlined focused business delivering printed magazines to customers worldwide based on our three most essential values; service, quality and trust.

We invite you to reminisce and explore some milestones with us, which reshaped our trajectory, from over the past 15 years in business.

**Navigating the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic:** When the pandemic struck, the world shut down and small businesses were hit hard. Classified as an essential retailer, we continued operations, focusing on delivering magazines like TV guides to those confined at home. This service not only kept our customers safe but also provided a crucial connection to the world outside and a sense of familiarity during all that was lost. Even years later, customers have decided to stay with us even when life has returned to normal, due to our convenient, consistent and trusted service. We have built personal relationships and take pride in the repeating names and faces we get to see.

**Royal Mail Cyber Attack, January 2023:** An unexpected cyber-attack paralyzed our ability to ship internationally for six weeks. We persevered immensely and responded by partnering with a new logistics company, MHI, enhancing our international delivery capabilities and ensuring continuous service for our customers. We overcame a challenge, by creating a long-lasting business partnership, which still positively impacts us and our loyal customers today!

**Launching a New Website, June 2024:** After much deliberation, we revamped our website to improve user experience. Despite this being a huge project coming with initial challenges, the new site today offers a modern, customer-friendly interface that represents our brand's evolution. We chose challenge and change, over safety and comfortability. Despite teething errors, we take immense pride in our website that now proudly represents our brand, business and values.

**Creating a Local Magazine Room:** We recently developed an in-store browsing experience in the Northeast, providing a space for customers to physically explore our diverse range of magazines. There is nothing like the feel of high-quality print and the smell of freshly printed pages, so creating this room felt essential for others to explore magazines and all their elements! We wanted to create an experience. This addition has become a beloved part of the local community!

Our team and the future of Unique Magazines.

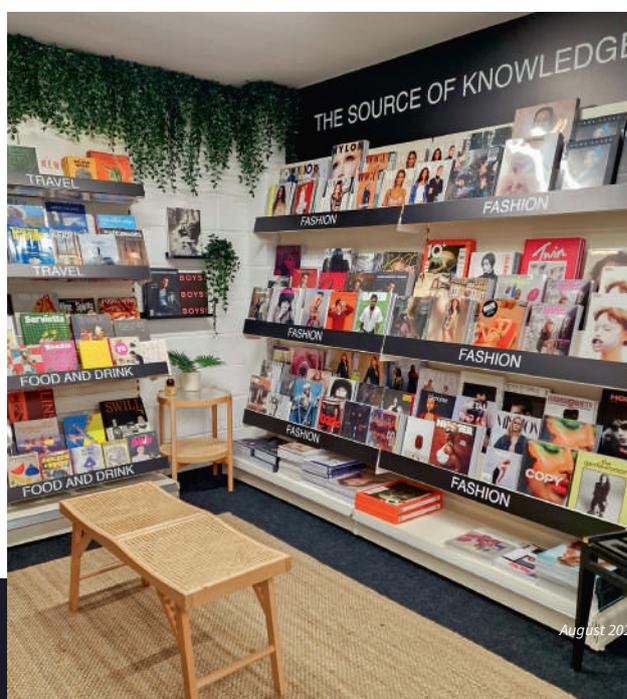
Our Managing Director, John, often says the secret to our success is "Our team." The dedication and passion of our staff has been instrumental in our growth. Over the years, we have seen many staff come and go and we will always feel grateful to be a part of their story and have them as part of ours.

As we look forward, we envision the higher quality, less frequent, and more exclusive publications, becoming the norm. We aim to support this ongoing shift by showcasing these in our magazine room, to encourage discovery of something new. Going forward we aim to focus on our independent magazines that resonate across modern generations, motivating change through artistic expression, whilst still being the customer's choice for all types of printed magazines.

As we celebrate our 15th anniversary, we're reminded of the bright future ahead. We're committed to enhancing every aspect of our customer's experience, from the browsing stage to regular renewals. We are excited to expand our reach globally.

This reflection not only marks past achievements but also sets the stage for the exciting developments we anticipate in the evolving world of magazines. Here's to 15 years in counting and many more years in business to come.

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

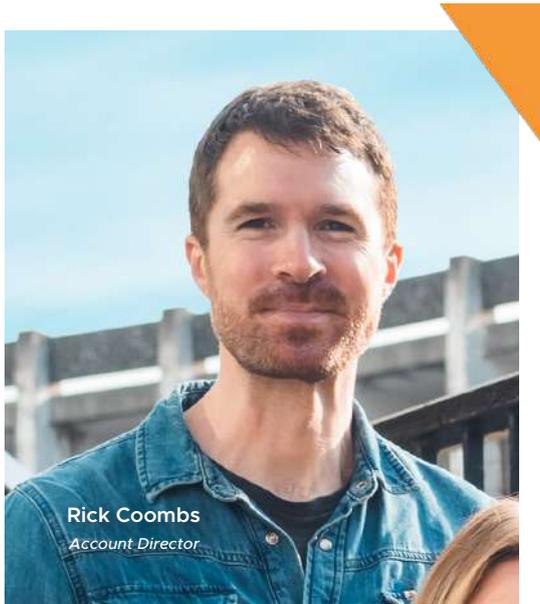


# Rick Coombs: Mastering Client Management

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

**Rick Coombs, Account Director at Bonded Agency, discusses the delicacy of client management, the impact of removing third-party cookies on media budgets, and the significance of connection both professionally and personally.**



**Rick Coombs**  
Account Director

### ***What made you want to join Bonded?***

Having previously worked with the founding directors, I understood their drive, ethos and vision for Bonded. As a relatively new agency, I knew that Bonded would embody these qualities, particularly the emphasis on investing in experienced media practitioners. This investment ensures that clients receive valuable partnerships at a business-shaping level and provides opportunities for training and developing growing teams. Indie agencies are having something of a moment, the freedom and challenge of this also appealed to me!

### ***What do you wish more people understood about your role as Account Director?***

Even amongst those who work in marketing, there can be a perception that Client Management roles involve simply passing information back and forth, which doesn't even meet the lowest definition of the role. A Client Director must deeply understand the client's business, objectives and challenges to add value and spot opportunities. That, and the invaluable role that 'soft skills' such as communication, humour and collaboration can bring in bridging differing views, managing expectations and guiding direction!

### ***Are there any upcoming developments in the media world that you are excited by?***

With a digital hat firmly on, I'm particularly excited about the ongoing and inevitable shift to first-party data over cookies. This change promises to sharpen targeting by moving away from often-opaque modeled, blended, and extrapolated data sets that frequently overlook the diversity of individual behaviours and interests. Instead we'll focus on anonymous but well-defined cohorts - like people who have actually purchased a product, subscribed to a service, or visited a store. This approach should make media budgets more effective in driving desired results.

### ***And finally, what does 'Connection' mean to you?***

In a professional, media planning sense, connection is all about investing time into people. This includes the time taken to talk to clients, to meet wider stakeholders beyond the marketing teams, to trial their products and to understand what works and what doesn't.

It's about figuring out how to provide meaningful support to help grow their businesses. Consistency within agency teams and this time investment can foster long-term client relationships built on trust and mutually beneficial planning. Outside of work, connection is about shared experiences, laughter and family.

**“Connection is all about investing time into people.”**



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

# Digital marketing agency aims for £1M turnover

**SQUIDGY, the Newcastle-based digital marketing agency specialising in SEO, PPC and paid social, has announced that it is on track to reach a turnover of nearly £1 million as well as aiming to double its headcount by 2026.**

**Founder and agency director, Andy Robson, said: “2024 is proving a milestone year for SQUIDGY, and our projections point to even stronger agency performance in the next two years.**

“Turnover has grown steadily year-on-year since SQUIDGY became a fully-fledged agency in 2020 but this past year has seen our growth double and we are aiming to hit seven figures by 2026.

“Referrals have been key to our growth, which is a positive reflection of our reputation, results and the stellar service we provide to our clients and the genuine care the entire team demonstrates across all of our customers. We have always positioned the agency as a specialist, not a generalist, something that is now baked into our DNA and can be credited to getting us to this point in our scaleup journey.

“We are fortunate enough to work with amazing clients both in the North-East region and nationally, and if this growth trajectory



L-R: Kate Thompson, Jack Fenwick and Andy Robson

continues, then we will need to take on at least eight new team members over the next year or so.”

Based in central Newcastle, SQUIDGY works with major clients such as Alnwick Castle, Visit Northumberland, Jackson Hogg and GigPig. SQUIDGY was initially set up in 2010 as a brand for Andy's freelance digital marketing consultancy which evolved into an agency in 2020.

Alongside Andy Robson, the senior team includes Jack Fenwick, head of marketing and Kate Thompson, head of commercial. SQUIDGY focuses on working with SMEs, particularly challenger brands, providing digital marketing strategies to help businesses stand out from the competition.

Paid Media Executive, Amy Rowell recently

joined the agency. Two additional hires joining in August will see its total headcount rise to ten.

“At SQUIDGY, we genuinely believe that our straightforward approach to digital marketing and transparency with clients is what sets us apart,” Andy Robson added.

“We cut out unnecessary layers to streamline our services with a clear onus on our clients, ensuring their budgets go further and ultimately we deliver long-term sustainable results. We are focused on the right growth, working with the right people, for the right reasons.”

We are focused on the right growth, working with the right people, for the right reasons.”

**For more information, visit: [squidgy.co](https://www.squidgy.co)**



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## NE businesses join forces at Vertu Motors Arena for Mock Interview Day

More than 300 students from schools across the North East and Tees Valley attended the Building My Skills Mock Interview Day at the home of Newcastle Eagles, Vertu Motors Arena on July 11th.

The Mock Interview Day is the culmination of the multi award-winning programme – coordinated by Esh Group on behalf of the region’s businesses and schools - which aims to raise students’ career aspirations by providing them with an introduction to the world of work, and an insight into sectors and jobs they may not otherwise have been aware of. Over 30 businesses from sectors such as legal, housing and banking took part in 2024’s Building My Skills and between them delivered a total of 94 sessions.

25 businesses from the programme attended the Mock Interview Day where they hosted a panel of interviews for students aged between 13 and 18-year-old. The event gives students first-hand experience of what an interview is like in a professional environment, as well as an opportunity to explore their aspirational career further through one-to-one discussions with business role models.



## School carnival to celebrate homecoming after RAAC issue

Children, staff and families reunited for a special carnival parade to celebrate returning to their Hebburn school following the RAAC issue.

St James Catholic Primary School was one of three schools in Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, and amongst many across the country, which was forced to close due to the Government’s announcement last September that any school which had Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) used in its buildings would have to close while safety mitigations were put in place.

Despite the challenges of having to close the school building and spreading the children across different sites, every pupil received face-to-face education throughout. The children were educated at St Aloysius Catholic Federation and St Joseph’s Catholic Academy – which are both in the Trust – and the Emmaus Room, which is part of St James Catholic Church. To celebrate their full return to school in the summer term, St James held a special sponsored parade and carnival walk.

Everyone wore their brightest outfits and walked together as a school in the local community. They played instruments, sang songs and held their banners high for all to see. Headteacher Frances Heslop said: “This was a true celebration of our togetherness which is always at the heart of St James. Home is where the heart is! I am extremely proud of our children, staff, families and whole school community. It was wonderful to celebrate our long-awaited homecoming”

## Newcastle High School for Girls appoints new Chair to School Governing Board

Newcastle High School for Girls (NHSG) – recently shortlisted in the Independent Prep School of the Year as well as the TES Independent Senior School of the Year Awards – has announced the appointment of a new Chair of its School Governing Board.

Lesley Moody OBE will be taking on the role, picking up the reins from Patricia Alexander who served seven years as Chair and eleven as Board Member.

Managing Director of AES Digital Solutions Ltd and Past President of North East Chamber of Commerce and sitting as Vice Chair on their board currently, Lesley brings a wealth of business and commercial acumen to the board. Indeed, she was awarded an OBE in 2022 to recognise her services to Business and Community, and, as a passionate advocate for quality education, she has previously served on several school boards, including spending several years as a board member with NHSG.

Lesley said: “Having been a governor at NHSG for five years with Patricia as Chair, I know I am stepping into big shoes and am very much looking forward to taking up the mantle of supporting the school as it goes from strength to strength. I’ll be Chairing a board of very committed governors with a wealth of experience and expertise



and I am looking forward to working with them, NHSG’s Head, Amanda Hardie, and the Senior team as it delivers on its vision to champion excellence in all-girl education and provide an exceptional education for girls in the North East.”

[www.newcastleprepschool.org.uk](http://www.newcastleprepschool.org.uk)  
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## A night to remember: Celebrating young heroes at the Community Champion Awards

The second Northern Leaders Trust Community Champion Awards celebrated nine outstanding young achievers from Newcastle's primary and secondary schools.

Guest speakers Chi Onwurah, Labour MP for Central Newcastle and West, Major General David Shaw CBE, CEO of charity partner Launchpad Veterans, and Jack Lewis, the previous winner of the Courage Award, inspired attendees with their speeches.

Lee Kirtley, CEO of Northern Leaders Trust and awards founder, hosted a dazzling ceremony at Kenton School, which commended individual achievements and created a palpable sense of community spirit.





... is confident, positive, passionate and deserves recognition for all of his hard work making a difference to so many lives in the community.



SEN student Daniel struggles with social skills and verbalising but has achieved so much through his courage and determination - he is an inspiration, so resilient, strong, brave and most importantly, always smiling.



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# 'It's not a building that makes a school, it's the people'

A Sunderland headteacher whose school had to close over the RAAC issue has received a special award – voted for by her adoring pupils.

**Lianne Peart, of St John Bosco Catholic Primary School, was one of the worthy winners at Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust's Chadwick Celebration Awards 2024.**

She won the Inspirational Staff Award at the event held at Ramside Hall in Durham.

Her mantra that "it's not a building that makes the school, it's the people" helped her guide her pupils during the transition to Gabriel House last September.

"I'm proud to be part of the community and make a difference with such a fabulous team," she said.

"This recognises the challenges we have faced and that in adversity, I think we've found strength in the community and in each other."



Mrs Peart praised the "team effort" in creating a new temporary home for pupils within seven days in what she likened to a DIY SOS challenge.

Other winners included Anthony Maratty, who was "over the moon" to scoop the SCITT Trainee of the Year Award.

Having been a teaching assistant for four years, he started the School-Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) course at St Bede's Catholic Primary School, South Shields, last September.

BCCET, which has 30 schools across South Tyneside, Sunderland and East Durham, runs the 12-month course in partnership with Teach First.

Rachel Cameron, of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Sunderland, was recognised as an active member of the school's Local Governing Committee (LGC), winning the Governance Award.

"St Mary's has been a part of my life since I was four in 1986," she said.

"My Mum worked there and my daughter attended, so St Mary's has always felt very much a family environment to me."

**For information about applying for a SCITT or becoming a governor, visit [www.bccet.org.uk](http://www.bccet.org.uk)**

 Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust		<a href="http://www.bccet.org.uk">www.bccet.org.uk</a>	
	<b>St. Aidan's Catholic Academy</b> <b>YEAR 6 OPEN EVENING</b> <a href="http://www.staidanscatholicacademy.co.uk">www.staidanscatholicacademy.co.uk</a>	<b>TUESDAY 17 SEPTEMBER 2024</b> 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm	
	<b>St. Anthony's Catholic Academy</b> <b>YEAR 6 OPEN EVENING</b> <a href="http://www.st-anthonys-academy.com">www.st-anthonys-academy.com</a>	<b>TUESDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2024</b> 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm	
	<b>St. Bede's Catholic School</b> <b>YEAR 6 OPEN EVENING</b> <a href="http://www.st-bedes.org">www.st-bedes.org</a>	<b>TUESDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2024</b> 5.30 pm - 8:00 pm	
	<b>St. Joseph's Catholic Academy</b> <b>YEAR 6 OPEN EVENING</b> <a href="http://www.stjosephs.uk.net">www.stjosephs.uk.net</a>	<b>THURSDAY 26 SEPTEMBER 2024</b> 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm	
	<b>St. Wilfrid's R.C. College</b> <b>YEAR 6 OPEN EVENING</b> <a href="http://www.st-wilfrids.org">www.st-wilfrids.org</a>	<b>THURSDAY 3 OCTOBER 2024</b> 6:00pm - 8:00pm	

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# Boarding at Queen Ethelburga's Collegiate (QE)



QE is set within a 220-acre, secluded site within the beautiful North Yorkshire countryside between Harrogate and York where it welcomes boarders from Year 3 to Year 13. At the heart of QE boarding there are three characteristics; opportunity, individuality, and a supportive community.

Children are cared for by specialist staff who make boarding feel like home, promote independence, and who are separate to academic staff. QE has won or been a finalist in several prestigious boarding awards including BSA Belonging and Inclusion (finalist, 2024), BSA Innovation in Boarding (won, 2022), TES Boarding School of the Year (finalist, 2022) and Muddy Stiletto's Outstanding Pastoral Care (finalist, 2022).

The hustle around campus makes the school feel like a town. Students have access to an activity centre with a home cinema, climbing wall, weekend fast-food café and a selection of board games and game consoles. In addition, the campus has a medical centre, gym, swimming pool, uniform and essentials shop, tuck shop, coffee shop, 312-seat theatre, practice rooms, and plenty of outdoor space.

Students take advantage of specialist academic support during 'Power Hour' and homework prep sessions to boost their understanding and knowledge of various topics. There

are over 100 extra-curricular activities onsite covering a wide range of sports, art and design subjects, music, dance, drama, technology, life skills, and academic areas. There is plenty on offer at weekends too, including performing arts and creative arts academies, timetabled activities, and exciting trips to local cities, towns and activity centres.

QE prides itself on its quality accommodation. Students in Years 6 to 13 have ensuite bedrooms with TVs, phones, desks and storage and every boarding house includes a modern, well-equipped common room for socialising and downtime. Sixth form students also have items like game consoles, coffee machines, ovens, kettles and washing machines whereas younger students have specialised dorms and common rooms designed for little people. There are chill-out spaces, a wellness room and study pods in addition to a communal open plan kitchen dining space.

**To learn more, visit [qe.org](http://qe.org), attend our September 28th open morning, or email [admissions@qe.org](mailto:admissions@qe.org) to book a tour.**

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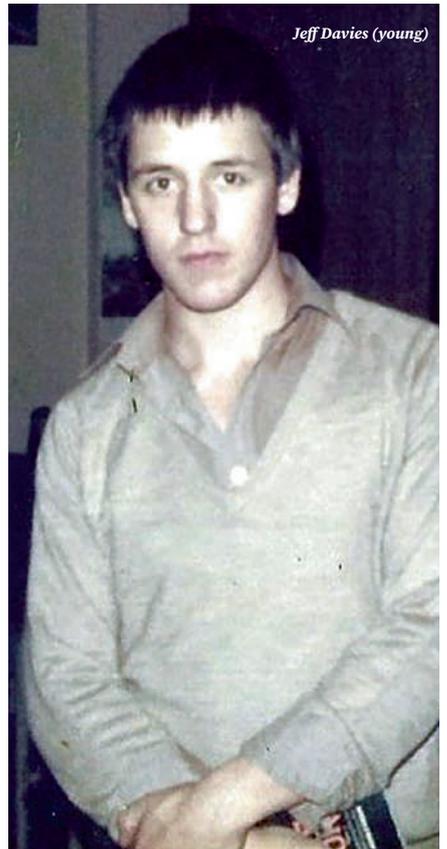
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## Dear Jeff: A letter to my 16-year-old self

To mark Youth Employment Week last month, North East based education charity and awarding organisation NCFE invited its colleagues to reflect on the advice they would have valued as young people embarking on their careers.

**Here, from the view of his 60s, Customer Support Advisor Jeff Davies shares some words of wisdom and encouragement to his younger self.**

*Dear Jeff,*

You don't know me yet, as I know you hardly know yourself.

You've joined the army and I know you have questions. Loads of questions. You were at a fork in the road. Join the army and follow a long family tradition or be the first member of our family to go to university. Is there a right path?

You have courage in spadefuls and think you are invincible. However, you know you are vulnerable as a young gay man, and your chosen path is not welcoming. But you will blossom. There will be amazing times when you can be you and the experiences you are going to have will blow your mind. In a few years, the world is really going to change.

You are you. You're going to love and be loved. You're going to like and be disliked, but it is not selfish to take care of yourself first. Speak when it makes a difference and stay quiet when it makes sense.

Don't be afraid of failure. Don't let the fear of failure stop you from succeeding and don't let those who may fear you dim your enthusiasm. You are curious. Questions will get you answers.

Be you and know your worth. Pay attention to your health and finances. Having cheques left at the end of the month does not mean you have money left to spend.

It is not your job to make everyone around you happy, kind or fulfilled. That is their life and do not sacrifice your health or happiness for success.

Right now, you are being shouted at by strangers and learning some amazing skills (some of which you will still be using in your 60s). But remember, this is your life. Be yourself and follow your own dreams, not the dreams of others. Learn to mediate and be present in the lives of those you hold dear. Sometimes it is too late.

At 16, you probably don't think you'll ever get old, but the good news is there are robust genes in the family!

Trust that you know what is right. You are blessed with the family moral compass.

There is so much more I could share, but you know that you will be more than OK, more than enough. You will shine.

Life is going to be fun. Trust me. You're going to see the world and the challenges that come with that.

In the words of RuPaul (a famous drag queen), "If you don't love yourself, how in the hell are you gonna love somebody else?"

*Signed,  
Future Jeff*

**To learn more about Youth Employment Week, visit [www.ncfe.org.uk/careers/youth-employment-week](http://www.ncfe.org.uk/careers/youth-employment-week)**

**To find out about current career opportunities at NCFE, visit [www.ncfe.org.uk/careers](http://www.ncfe.org.uk/careers)**

# Blagdon Gallery



**Blagdon Gallery, Milkhope Centre, Berwick Hill Road, Newcastle upon Tyne NE13 6DA**  
t: 01670 789 944 e: [hello@blagdongallery.co.uk](mailto:hello@blagdongallery.co.uk)



## Eliot Smith: From Dyslexia to Dance Stardom

Eliot Smith, a talented dancer from Warkworth, has spent his life overcoming the challenges of dyslexia to pursue his passion for dance. From a young age, Eliot found solace and expression in movement, leading him to become a prominent figure in the dance community. He is now Creative Director of his own company, Eliot Smith Dance. (ESD)

The journey to becoming a renowned choreographer and dancer was not without its challenges. Diagnosed with dyslexia at a young age, Smith found traditional academic subjects difficult, but discovered a unique language and a sense of belonging in dance. Despite the obstacles, including years of speech therapy, Smith's determination and passion for dance have propelled him to create works that resonate deeply with audiences.

Eliot Smith's introduction to dance came at the age of nine when he attended a pop-step class with his sister. Although his initial interest was in popular dance, an audition for a youth contemporary dance company revealed his true calling. "I remember going to the studio and seeing ballet and contemporary dance, and I realised this is who I am. Dance became my language," recalls Smith.

Currently, Eliot is excited about the upcoming season featuring his company, Eliot Smith Dance. "We're embracing both the past and the future," he explains. "We've been given the opportunity to stage Paul Taylor's Duet, created in 1964, which has only been performed a few times worldwide. Alongside that, we'll be reviving my latest work, Human, which received great audience responses last year."

Duet is set to the music of Franz Josef Haydn, and is performed by two ESD dancers, Rowan Parker, and Yamit Salazar. Human also features Yamit Salazar, and explores the joys, sorrows, idiocies, and the brilliance of anything human, set to powerful music by ESD's composer in residence Adam Johnson.



## Martin Stephenson and the Daintees to Play 'The Church on the Hill'

Martin Stephenson and the Daintees are set to return to their home town on Saturday, 31st August, for a heartwarming performance at Holy Trinity Church, Washington. This special concert is not only a musical event but also a celebration of community and heritage, held in the very church where Martin's parents Alfred and Francis Stephenson were married.

"It's always lovely coming back to Washington to play in front of an audience where I potentially know so many people, some who I have known all my life. Playing a gig in a church is very unusual and Holy Trinity is very special to me as its part of my family history," said Martin.

Martin and the band signed with Kitchenware Records and released their first single in 1982. They gained critical acclaim and commercial success with their most successful album, Boat to Bolivia, released in 1986. Since then, they have released three albums and they also participated in the Glastonbury Festival in 1989 headlining on the Pyramid Stage along with The Waterboys and The Hothouse Flowers. In 2012, they returned to the Acoustic Roots Stage and their most recent appearance there was in 2023.

"This is an intimate setting and is well suited to The Daintees style of pop, rock, blues with even a hint of punk. It'll be a very emotional evening with the connection to my parents, but I'll be among friends old and new, and we'll all have a good time and a few laughs along the way," added Martin. "I always enjoy playing in the North East and this one will be extra special."

Tickets for the evening are available from [www.wegotickets.com/event/613533](http://www.wegotickets.com/event/613533)



## There is nothing more then to love and be loved

Award-winning actor Max Bowden, best known for the roles of Ben Mitchell in *Eastenders* and Justin Fitzgerald in *Waterloo Road*, will star as Jack Firebrace in *Birdsong*, Sebastian Faulks' epic story of love and loss, when it returns to the Newcastle Theatre Royal stage (Tue 21 – Sat 25 Jan 2025).

The critically acclaimed show, adapted by Rachel Wagstaff and directed by Alastair Whatley, tells the story of one man's journey through an all-consuming love affair and into the horror of the First World War.

In pre-war France, a young Englishman, Stephen Wraysford, embarks on a passionate and dangerous affair with the beautiful Isabelle Azaire that turns their world upside down. As the war breaks out over the idyll of his former life, Stephen must lead his men through the carnage of the Battle of the Somme and through the sprawling tunnels that lie deep underground. Faced with the unprecedented horror of the war Stephen clings to the memory of Isabelle as his world explodes around him.

On taking on the lead role in a tour marking the 30th anniversary of the international best-selling novel, Max Bowden said: "I'm so excited to be collaborating with Original Theatre again on a project close to my heart. *Birdsong* highlights the tragedy of war, yet the beauty of humanity simultaneously through strong relationships under extreme circumstances, and I can't wait to bring Jack Firebrace to life under their guidance."

# Blagdon Gallery

Milkhope Centre, Seaton Burn, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE13 6DA Tel : 01670 789944 [www.blagdongallery.co.uk](http://www.blagdongallery.co.uk)



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## Sunderland law firm joins 1907 Corporate Club

Richard Reed Solicitors are further expanding their brand awareness within the region by aligning with Sunderland Empire's corporate membership scheme.

Richard Reed Solicitors, a reputable law firm based in Sunderland, offer comprehensive legal services for both individuals and businesses. Combining legal expertise with a friendly, down-to-earth approach to achieve the best outcomes for their clients.

Over 350,000 theatregoers will see the leading law firm's logo in upcoming what's on guides, on posters in-venue and on atgtickets.com, just one of the many benefits of the partnership.

Richard Reed are proud to showcase their backing for the local arts which plays a crucial role in the growth of the city with huge shows like Wicked, War Horse and Hamilton welcomed to the Sunderland theatre.

"As a Sunderland-based firm, we are thrilled to become a corporate partner of the 1907 Corporate Club. This collaboration allows us to support the vibrant local arts scene and further embed ourselves within the community. The Empire Theatre is a cornerstone of cultural life in Sunderland, and we are proud to contribute to its continued success." Sarah Reid, Managing Director, Richard Reed Solicitors.

New businesses are always welcome to join the 1907 Corporate Club at Sunderland Empire, with many benefits included, such as ticket allocations to the best that live theatre has to offer, brand awareness and more.

**For more information, please contact PaulaMitchell@theambassadors.com**



“

*...We regularly secure big purchases for clients as far away as LA and Sydney...*

Chris Morgan



## The North East gallery that's got it down to a fine art

Discover the North East art gallery defying economic downturns, putting art investment first and showcasing some of the most sought-after artwork in the heart of Newcastle.

**In 2019, Hancock Gallery was established in a beautifully renovated Georgian townhouse located in Newcastle's City Centre, adjacent to the chic suburb of Jesmond. It was founded by local business owner and art enthusiast, Lee Stobbart, with the aim to provide those who love art with the opportunity to acquire world-class pieces.**

Hancock Gallery, which borrows its name from its former next-door neighbour, John Hancock, now boasts an impressive selection of high-quality artwork from around the world. Displaying exquisite oil paintings, ceramics and limited edition collectors' prints, it features renowned artwork from the likes of British painter Mark Demstader, American artists SJ Fuerst and Ron Hicks, Ukrainian artist Iryna Yermolova, and many more.

To find out more about Hancock Gallery and its aims for the future, we sat down with Curatorial Manager, Chris Morgan.

### **How have trends evolved in the industry over the past few years, and what challenges do you foresee for art galleries in the near future?**

"Post-pandemic, the art world has certainly seen a trend away from big exhibition previews. We now see more attention being paid to online collections, print drops, and that goes hand in hand with art collectors being far more confident to buy art online. We regularly secure big purchases for clients as far away as LA and Sydney. So I think the future challenges for galleries will be providing experiences, exhibitions and events for their clients and gallery visitors. To re-engage people to physically view artwork in the pristine and tailored environment of an art gallery."

### **Speaking of experiences, exhibitions and events, are there any in particular that have taken place at Hancock Gallery that are a highlight for you?**

"One of the most recent highlights was our sponsorship and participation in 2023's Shaun the Sheep on The Tyne with St Oswald's Hospice.

It was designed to draw people around the city on an art trail with giant Shaun the Sheep sculptures featuring alongside local businesses. We designed our own 'Shaunalisa'. Shaun's head was bursting through a replica of the famous Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci. It was an incredible opportunity to draw in new audiences to our activity room designed for children of all ages! This year, we're very excited to be planning a big exhibition with local art sensation, Mul, and fellow street artist, Prefab77.

We've also worked hard to consign artwork from a number of collectors who are looking to sell on parts of their personal collections. We've seen iconic pieces come through the gallery by artists such as Roy Lichtenstein, Peter Blake, Damien Hirst, Edgar Degas, L.S Lowry, Henry Moore, Picasso, and many more. It's been really wonderful to sell these pieces for our clients and help them realise their investments, whilst also giving our local audience the opportunity to see these pieces up close."

Gallery Owner, Lee Stobbart, also added "To be able to showcase these iconic pieces in Newcastle makes me incredibly proud of the work Hancock Gallery has achieved over the last five years."

Hancock Gallery's advisory team has nearly 15 years of experience in guiding art lovers to invest in artwork for their homes, businesses and portfolios, providing tailored insights and knowledge, as they know the market inside out.

To keep up to date with what's new and what's coming up, follow Hancock Gallery's socials on Facebook and Instagram, or visit the website to find out more about what's proudly presented on the gallery's walls for you to browse and buy.

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

# Newcastle Mela celebrates 30 years of culture and diversity in Newcastle



Some of the sponsors and organisers at Exhibition Park

Image: Steve Brock Photography

The Newcastle Mela, a vibrant celebration of culture and diversity, is set to mark its 30th anniversary this year. Organised by Newcastle Asian Art and Music, this established event will take place on the 25th and 26th of August in the beautiful setting of Exhibition Park.

**With up to 40,000 visitors expected to visit from across the region and beyond, Newcastle Mela is one of the most vibrant and popular multicultural events in the North East. The event is based around Pakistani, Bengali, Indian and other South Asian cultures and celebrates the music, food, entertainment and culture associated with these areas.**

Taj Mohammed, chairperson of Newcastle Asian Arts and Music, shared his excitement about the milestone celebration. "I've been involved with the Mela for almost 30 years, and it's incredible to see how much the event has grown and

how it increases with popularity year on year. It's free, family friendly and everyone is welcome."

"If you love food, you'll be in for a treat," he said. "We have a variety of stalls featuring different types of food that will delight everyone."

The event will feature numerous attractions, including clothing, jewellery, henna artists, a fun fair, free activities and workshops and a vibrant array of musical and cultural performances. There will be international, national and local community performances on the main stage giving everyone a wonderful opportunity to experience different cultures and enjoy a sense of community.

Over its 30-year history, Newcastle Mela has seen many families attend annually, sometimes spanning three or four generations, making it a truly unique event.

The Mela is funded by Newcastle City Council, Unison, Newcastle Building Society, Arts Council England, Sir James Knott Trust, Newcastle Cultural Investment Fund, and supported by Urban Green Newcastle, The Army and the Freemen of Newcastle Upon Tyne.

David Wilson, chairman of the Freemen of Newcastle upon Tyne said: "We're really

proud to support the Mela, it's one of the best and most important cultural events in the country and it's a great credit to the team that the Mela continues to grow in popularity and is now celebrating its 30th anniversary."

Carol Pyrah, Chief Executive of Urban Green Newcastle, said: "I'm delighted that Urban Green Newcastle is continuing its support for Newcastle Mela this year. This is another great event in the city's calendar which we are proud to be hosting in Exhibition Park."

'Mela in the City', delivered in partnership with NE1, brings all the excitement of the Mela to Grey's Monument in the heart of the Newcastle's city centre on Saturday 24 August, between 11am and 4pm, Mela in the City will showcase performances and shows as well as free activities.

The main event, the Newcastle Mela, takes place on Sunday 25 and Bank Holiday Monday 26 August at Exhibition Park, Claremont Road between 12 noon and 8.30pm each day. Exhibition Park is in the City Centre and is accessible by metro and bus. Carparking for the event is on the Town Moor with access from Grandstand Road.

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

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## Body Image Fitness celebrates third anniversary with exciting growth and innovative NHS Partnership

**Body Image Fitness, founded by Gosforth based Kim Stacey, marks its third anniversary with significant growth and a ground-breaking partnership with the NHS to tackle weight stigma and promote inclusive fitness.**

Kim Stacey started Body Image Fitness to create a welcoming space for people of all sizes, free from judgment and the shame often associated with traditional fitness environments. The rapid expansion of the business is a testament to the demand for inclusive fitness options that prioritise overall health and well-being over weight loss alone.

In a significant development, Body Image Fitness has been collaborating with the NHS for over a year to educate primary care workers in Nottingham on weight stigma and inclusive health practices. This initiative has been so successful that it has led to a second phase, where selected patients will receive six-month memberships to Body Image Fitness as part of a pilot program.

"We're moving away from the traditional BMI-focused methods and emphasising holistic health," Kim explained. "Patients will benefit from engaging in fitness that makes them feel good, rather than focusing on the number on the scales."

The partnership aims to provide an alternative to typical weight loss programs, offering a more sustainable and positive approach to health and fitness. The online membership model of Body Image Fitness includes live classes every day and a vast library of on-demand sessions, ensuring that participants can stay active and motivated from the comfort of their homes.



## Karl is 100% proof Whisky Festival is a hit

**Whisky enthusiasts, mark your calendars! The Indie Whisky Festival 2024 is set to return for its third year at Anarchy Brewery in Walkergate, Newcastle. Known for being one of the largest independent whisky-focused festivals in the world, this year's event promises to be bigger and better than ever before.**

Organised by Karl Glenn from Earsdon, North Tyneside, founder of the North East Whisky Appreciation Society, this event promises to offer an unforgettable experience for all who attend.

The Indie Whisky Festival is not just about tasting exceptional whiskies. It's a social event where attendees can meet fellow whisky lovers, engage with industry experts, and discover new favourites among small-batch

and single-cask offerings. The festival's venue, Anarchy Brewery, provides a vibrant and accessible location just five minutes from Walkergate Metro, ensuring an enjoyable and convenient experience for all.

This year, the festival features an increased number of exhibitors, bringing even more diverse and exquisite whiskies to sample. New Independent Bottlers: Newcomers like Dram Mor and North Star, alongside returning favourites such as Cadenhead's, James Eadie, and The Single Cask. Every participant will also receive a special collectible festival glass sponsored by The Single cask.

The festival will feature three sessions, Friday, September 13th: 6:00 PM - 9:30 PM. Saturday, September 14th: First Session: 12:00 PM - 3:30 PM. Second Session: 4:30 PM - 8:00 PM.

There are still tickets available and can be purchased online at [www.trybooking.com/uk/CYFF](http://www.trybooking.com/uk/CYFF).

## Lovage receives its first AA Rosette

**A Newcastle restaurant is celebrating being awarded a prestigious AA rosette for "culinary excellence."**

Lovage, at St George's Terrace, Jesmond, has received a string of accolades since it opened less than two years ago under renowned chef and co-owner Kleo Tabaku.

Last year it received inclusion in the Michelin Guide and this latest award puts it at the forefront of Tyneside's culinary scene.

The awarding of a sought-after AA rosette is a highly prized feather in the cap of Albanian-born Kleo, who always dreamed of having his own restaurant.

"It's a genuine honour," he said, "and I am absolutely delighted that we will now be able to display a plaque with the famous rosette - it's wonderful news."

Lovage's Mediterranean style, bistro food has proved a big hit with customers and critics



alike with the Telegraph's William Sitwell awarding it five out of five stars for its "neat, delicate, good and honest cooking."

Stuart Young, co-owner of Lovage and its sister restaurant Osters, at Gosforth High Street, said the AA rosette was testament "not only to Kleo and his wife Lisa, who does a superb job front of house, but to the skill and commitment of their entire team."

"They have achieved, in a very short time, what it takes most restaurants years to achieve," he said, "and this recognition is richly deserved."

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



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# VILLAGE

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## Blackbird sings in the heart of Ponteland

By Michael Grahmslaw

Regular readers will be aware I am an enormous fan of proprietor Stuart Young's venues, including the Northumberland Arms in Felton and most recently, the classy Osters restaurant in Gosforth.

**A balmy Summer's evening merited a return to another much-loved local favourite, the Blackbird Inn in Ponteland.**

We hadn't visited the Blackbird since the dark days of Covid so it was a delight to see the charming gastropub back in full swing. The weather was set fair for a change in this bleakest of Midsummer's, so we made the short journey from Northern Insight HQ and found the sun-soaked beer garden replete

with throngs of revellers. A good omen.

The venue is one of the most remarkable inns in England having originally been built by warriors in the 14th century. It's said that the signing of the peace treaty between Henry III - England's longest serving Medieval King - and Alexander of Scotland took place on the very site the Blackbird stands today.

It's fair to say the venue has had a facelift since then but it retains a cosy, sleepy England appeal with low ceilings, original Tudor fireplace and frothy pints of the good stuff on keg and cask.

Most impressively, this is a pub with real culinary credentials and a menu befitting of its swanky rural clientele.

We were shown to a lovely, spacious corner table and perused a menu resplendent with rustic, country favourites with some contemporary inflections. Wafts of beer-battered haddock and steak & ale pie pervade the air and really got the digestive juices flowing while we sipped on an excellent bottle of Pinot Grigio.

Under starter's orders, I kicked off with the crispy Asian beef salad, a vibrant, visually appealing dish which was a feast for the eyes as well as the tastebuds. Suitably seasoned hunks of beef sat atop a verdant green pak choi salad lent real depth of flavour by the sharpness of the red onions.

Lisa was similarly gushing about her chicken

and leek croquettes, set off exquisitely by a slick of wild garlic mayo.

These starters had really awakened the palate and after a brief intermission, we tucked into our main courses with gusto. Nourishing, freshly-prepared pub fayre was the order of the day for yours truly as I enjoyed 8oz fillet steak with all the accoutrements. A silky and seductive malbec complemented this majestically.

As is her wont, Lisa picked out another revelation in the chicken supreme with tender spring cabbage and fondant potatoes. A silky-smooth cauliflower puree added a refined touch while a fragrant tarragon jus tied everything together with aplomb.

With a recent trip to Lake Garda derailing my summer diet plans, we decided to finish with a flourish. A warm chocolate brownie with sour cherry ice cream provided a memorable finale, rounding off one of our most enjoyable meals of the year.

Totally replete, we toasted to an afternoon well spent. With a leisurely, laid-back feel this classic country pub is perfect for drinking in the last of the summer wine and well worth a visit for its destination dining pedigree.

With service warm and attentive throughout, this blackbird is flying high.

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

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# The Inn Collection Group named as regional champions



**The Inn Collection Group are celebrating further recognition at the National Pub & Bar Awards following Finals Night in London, with two inns named as regional champions for 2024.**

**The Harrogate Inn built on its North Yorkshire county win back in April to be named Pub & Bar of the Year for Yorkshire and The Humber, whilst Beaumaris' The Bull's Head Inn walks away with the same title for Wales.**

Both sites had to beat off stiff competition with a total of five pubs making up the Yorkshire and Humber region and eight vying for the honour of being top dog in Wales, whilst in the north west, Cumbria county winner The Swan saw its regional gong go to the entry from Cheshire.

Organised in conjunction with Pub & Bar magazine and now in its eighth year, the National Pub & Bar Awards showcases the UK's finest pubs and bars nationally, each year crowning the best venues within 94 counties across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The 94 County Winners are then invited to the National Pub & Bar Awards Grand Final. There, 13 Regional Winners and one overall

National Pub & Bar of the Year are revealed in front of hundreds of industry leaders.

Hailed for offering classic hospitality to locals and tourists alike at the heart of its town, The Bull was praised for providing everything expected from a site that has been part of its community for hundreds of years.

Bought by the group in November 2022, Beaumaris' The Bull's Head Inn dates to the 15th century and retains all the character it has acquired over six centuries.

From its listed bar decorated with an array of memorabilia including antique weaponry and reputedly the town's original ducking stool to a newly renovated lounge, The Bull boasts plenty of comfy spots all get cosy by open log fires.

General manager Paul Garth said: "It's a real proud dad moment and I'm made up that we've been named the best pub in Wales.

"We have a brilliant team at The Bull, and they thoroughly deserve this recognition. They are what makes the pub such a welcoming place that people want to spend time in.

"The county award has been great for us, with a lot of familiar local faces returning to us for food and drinks and a good spring in terms of room occupancy. I can't wait to see what this regional award does!"

The Harrogate Inn meanwhile was hailed as another impressive conversion by The Inn Collection Group and praised for providing an environment in keeping with the spa

town's upmarket hospitality scene.

Opening after a multi-million-pound renovation in July 2023, The Harrogate Inn and more specifically Barking George has quickly established itself as a destination venue.

With opulent, Instagram-able surroundings, there is a sense of grandeur far removed from Barking George's previous incarnation whilst its new outdoor terrace is the perfect spot from which to look out onto the hustle and bustle of Crescent Gardens.

General manager Henry White said: "We're thrilled with this award, all of the county winners that made up the region are very strong venues so to be named best of is quite special.

"We've had an incredible first year as Barking George and The Harrogate Inn and the response to the change from the old hotel to a vibrant new bar has been so well received.

"With our first anniversary of our opening coming up in a few days, winning the Yorkshire and Humber title is such a good way for the team at the inn to mark that milestone."

As with all of The Inn Collection Group's properties, both The Bull's Head Inn and The Harrogate Inn have a host of comfortable bedrooms perfect for enjoying a relaxing getaway in picture postcard locations.

**For the full list of destinations and the best rates, visit [inncollectiongroup.com](http://inncollectiongroup.com)**



## 300 Years of Hospitality

By Michael Grahamslaw

As the 32nd anniversary of my wife Lisa's 21st birthday is a particularly special occasion, I deemed it necessary to pull out all the stops. With this in mind, I scanned my rolodex: did this warrant a trip to beautiful Northumberland? Sunny Scotland? Perhaps even further afield?

**Then it clicked. With the hope that my dearly beloved would agree with Ruskin's famous observation that 'mountains are the beginning and the end of all natural scenery,' we set off to the famous Lake District.**

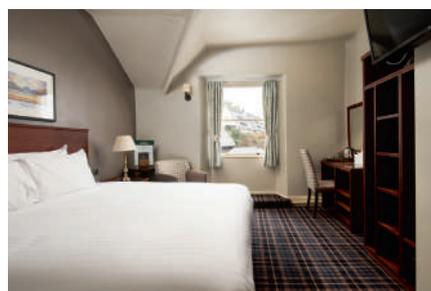
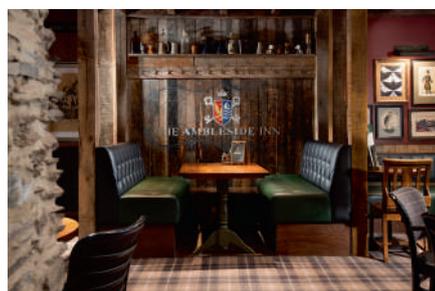
And there truly was no more quaint, idyllic and frankly breathtaking setting than Ambleside. The Ambleside Inn - part of the award winning Inn Collection Group's portfolio of venues - was our warm, authentic home for the weekend. Located in the heart of the beautiful town, it has been welcoming visitors for over 300 years. The sheer presence of the building left me wondering: what great minds were enriched by this place? Had Ruskin himself graced these corridors? Did inspiration strike Wordsworth nearby? Would, in the 21st century, this humble magazine proprietor spill Guinness down his best Ben Sherman shirt?

The Inn boasts deluxe double rooms, comfortable beds, spacious en-suite facilities and a range of amenities such as wifi, flat-screen TVs and tea and coffee

making facilities. Downstairs, the cosy, well-appointed bar offers guests the opportunity to socialise and bask in the afterglow of their outdoor pursuits. I was beginning to understand why these pillows have been the haven of who-knows-how-many heads for three centuries.

We were conscious of the surrounding beauty, so reluctantly peeled ourselves away from the luxurious comfort provided in order to investigate. I am ashamed to admit that in my 53 years I had only visited the Lakes two or three times. Fortunately, Ambleside is the perfect base to explore other jewels steeped in similar history. We were able to fit in visits to Bowness-on-Windermere and Grasmere, areas which are understandably tourist attractions due to their outstanding natural beauty.

Upon our return, we perused an extensive menu offering hearty pub fayre. We kicked off with a dish reminiscent of meals on my recent trip to Lake Garda: The Ambleside Grazing Platter. A selection of sourdough garlic bread, olives, hummus, aioli, roasted vegetables and olive oil and balsamic dip. We



truly could have been anywhere in the world at this point.

The better half then enjoyed Fillet fish in crisp batter served with thick cut chips and chef's tartare sauce. Meanwhile, I devoured locally sourced Cumberland sausage ring, served with mash onion rings and gravy. A staunch reminder that, despite the undertones of Northern Italy in the starter, we could be in no other place but the heart of the iconic Lake District.

Suffice to say, this was washed down with apertivi: glasses of bubbly for Lisa, a few pints of excellent Vitamin G for myself, and friendly banter with professional yet endearing staff.

The next morning, a comforting full English braced us for another day of exploring. The locality offers something for everyone. The world is your oyster from here: watersports and boat rides on Windermere for adventurous types; a five minute walk to the Armitage Museum for insights into local history; fifteen minute drive to Lorigg fell for fresh-aired hikes. However, for the dearly beloved (and, I must admit, myself), the charm of the local shopping scene was too much to resist.

With 30 inns across the group and ten in the Lake District alone, the Inn Collection offers unbeatable value for money and the perfect quick getaway experience. The Ambleside was our caro amore this weekend, and with this absolute gem now on my radar, I can guarantee that I will no longer be remiss in visiting this beautiful part of the world.

**For more information, visit [inncollectiongroup.com/ambleside-inn](http://inncollectiongroup.com/ambleside-inn)**





## High expectations exceeded at Highbury Cottage, Rothbury

Review by Jackie Marston

As the heading suggest, my husband and I had high expectations of this venue, and it certainly lived up to the hype.

**From the outside, this cottage doesn't look that big, but don't let first impressions deceive you. It's large inside and absolutely beautifully, tastefully decorated and furnished. Dog-friendly too, so taking our Golden Retriever was a great added bonus for us. She absolutely loved exploring their garden, filled with home-grown goodies, including my favourite, rhubarb.**

Lovely little touches await you when visiting this cottage, a home-made sponge cake on the bench in the kitchen and even a bag of dog treats for the four-legged lodgers!

A perfect space to share with family or friends, ideally located just a short walk from Rothbury and perfectly positioned to enjoy the Northumberland coast and countryside. It features three double bedrooms, accommodating up to six guests, with one bathroom, one shower room, and one en-suite.

The living room has a large Smart TV, a wood burner, French doors leading to a quaint outside decked terrace, which also overlooks the rest of the spacious garden. The kitchen is fitted with an electric oven, hob, microwave, fridge/freezer, dishwasher, and French sliding doors leading to the

conservatory. There is also a utility room containing a washer, dryer, and microwave.

The conservatory is cosy with a dining area, TV, and a sofa to relax on. This was our favourite room, as it was a hot day when we went.

As it was hot, we didn't use the wood burner, but we could imagine how tranquil this would be, on the cold nights.

This cottage is in the heart of Northumberland's charming Rothbury, and enjoys an elevated position, giving us captivating views across the small town. It promises the perfect blend of relaxation and exploration.

Outside, a decked terrace invites al fresco dining, extending down to a lawned area with fruit trees and a peaceful seating area. It's the perfect setting for both relaxation and play. Unfortunately, the day we had spent in Rothbury itself, where the sun shone, the evening it was a little drizzly, so we couldn't enjoy the garden as much as we'd hoped!

Rothbury itself has a range of café's, pubs, independent shops, etc. and there is literally something for all age groups. It's big if you're into cycling and we saw a lot of them enjoying the quaint village whilst we wandered around. Alnwick Gardens is only 14 miles away, so next time we visit, we will definitely be popping in there.

This great place can be hired for as little as £97 per night, which for six of you, is less than £17 per person. Even in peak season the maximum it goes up to is £155 per night, so still absolutely excellent value for money. There is a minimum two-night stay, but believe me when I say this, one night wasn't enough, we could've stayed a week and enjoyed everything that Rothbury and the surrounding areas had to offer.

**For the booking of Highbury Cottage, I suggest that you go direct, through the owners, Claire, from YH Property, as the fees are less than going through an agent. Contact details are – [info@highbury-cottage.co.uk](mailto:info@highbury-cottage.co.uk) – 07817 392 367. Don't leave it too late to book though, as it's incredibly popular and one of the nicest cottages we've stayed in for a long time.**

# Crowdfunding campaign makes a splash for Birtley Community Pool

The Birtley Community Aquatic Centre (BCAC) has launched a new crowdfunding campaign to raise the final £20,000 needed to renovate and open Birtley Community Pool. Gateshead Council closed Birtley Swimming Centre in July 2023, and the newly established charity is set to reopen it in September 2024.

Matthew Grant, Treasurer of Trustees at BCAC, explained why it was necessary to raise the funds.

“We started this project in March 2023, initially as a small team of two, following the council’s announcement of the pool’s closure. We began by developing a business case to prove the pool’s financial viability, which was provisionally accepted by the council after a few months. We then expanded our team by reaching out to the community for individuals with the necessary skills, forming a group of trustees and a wider project team.”

Fundraising has been a significant focus, as nearly £400,000 is needed to reopen the pool, primarily to replace the old, inefficient boilers. Other expenses include resurfacing of the car park, repairing the water slide, buying new equipment for the pool and health and safety, and various other upgrades.

To date, BCAC has raised over £300,000 through various sources and the group have launched a second crowdfunding campaign to raise £20,000. Sport England has pledged £10,000, provided BCAC can match this amount through community contributions. This final piece of funding will secure the necessary match funding required by the Community Ownership Fund, enabling the team to achieve their goal of reopening in September.



BCAC aims to open the pool on September 2, initially as a trail for club use and training sessions. Public swimming activities, such as family swimming, lanes and AquaFit, will commence the following week. Starting in mid-September, BCAC will extend their offer to include swimming lessons for local schools and the public, in collaboration with a high-quality swim school provider, Swim City.

“People can also support us through monetary donations on our crowdfunding page. Additionally, we offer rewards, which are goods or services donated by supporters and local businesses, available for purchase at significantly discounted prices. These rewards provide excellent value for money and support our cause. We are all committed to opening in early September and the public show of support we’ve already experienced is much appreciated. I’d like to thank everyone who has or will donate to help us,” Matthew added.

**The crowdfunding link is [www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/help-us-open-birtley-community-pool-in-september24](http://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/help-us-open-birtley-community-pool-in-september24)**

# Pink Lane Coffee Collective unveils fresh branding to mark a new era



**Pink Lane Coffee Collective, an esteemed coffee roaster and independent cafe in Newcastle Upon Tyne, today announces the launch of its refreshed branding. The update marks the most significant change since the company’s inception in 2012 and aims to modernise its image and introduce the company to a new audience.**

The business’s Newcastle cafe serves a selection of single-origin coffees that attract rave reviews and boasts a full cafe menu, including vegan and gluten-free options. However, some have confused it with a similarly named local bakery.

Pink Lane Coffee Collective Founder Anth

Atkinson explains, “We love making great coffee and welcoming customers to our home on Pink Lane. Over the years, we’ve encountered numerous mix-ups with the bakery, and I’m sure they hear it too. Our new brand modernises our look and sets us apart as a distinct business in Newcastle’s vibrant coffee scene.”

The spirit of Pink Lane Coffee Collective runs through the new branding, reflecting the business’s ethical and sustainable credentials, from product sourcing to its transition to a shared ownership collective in 2022.

“We genuinely want to do things well and make a positive impact.” says Anth Atkinson, “We formed the collective to ensure our core team all have a stake in a business they’ve given their hearts to.”

The revamped branding, which includes a new logo, updated website, and redesigned packaging, is now live on [pinklanecoffee.co.uk](http://pinklanecoffee.co.uk), where customers can explore and purchase a variety of speciality coffees to enjoy at home.

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



**PINK LANE COFFEE**  
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# JÓZEF'S

RIVERSIDE BAR & RESTAURANT



## Look what's NEW at the Radisson Blu

By Holly Grahamslaw

With our anniversary just around the corner, I recently visited the Radisson Blu hotel in Durham with my partner, Josh. Situated in the heart of Durham City overlooking the River Wear and within walking distance of the historic market town, the hotel boasts 207 modern bedrooms, catering for business & leisure events, and luxurious in-house spa & leisure facilities.

**With recent investment being made into the venue's ground floor bar & restaurant area, we were delighted to return to the Radisson Blu for a dinner, bed and breakfast stay.**

After a warm welcome, we checked into our room. With a large king-sized bed, flatscreen TV and contemporary ensuite bathroom, the superior room promoted both comfort and relaxation. Quickly ditching the bags, we returned to the ground floor to explore the recent refurbishments.

The hotel's previous lounge area has been transformed into an elegant bar & restaurant area that greets you immediately upon entrance to the hotel. With plush, velvet seating, ambient lighting, and marble furnishings, the area fuses shades of grey, black and gold to create a sophisticated space, whilst a new bar stands out as an attractive focal point offering a range of cocktails and alcoholic beverages.



Rebranded under the name of Józef's, the venue references polish dwarf Count Józef who found sanctuary in Durham in the 1800s and is now buried in Durham Cathedral, acknowledging Durham's rich and quintessential history.

The venue's in-house eatery has also been refurbished to create a warm and relaxing new space. Combining shades of green with floral undertones, the restaurant promotes a natural and cosy ambience, whilst the large windows continue to showcase the hotel's idyllic riverside views. The menu at Józef's similarly offers much delight, serving high-class British dishes with innovative touches, and using only the freshest and finest ingredients.

To start, I opted for the chef's soup of the day, a tasty carrot & coriander blend served with warm, artisan bread rolls, whilst Josh sampled the steamed bao buns. Deliciously soft and doughy, these consisted of mouth-watering shredded duck, vegetables and a zingy plum & hoisin sauce. Both starters were hearty and nutritious and were accompanied by the excellent and attentive service on offer during the evening.

Following up, customers can enjoy a plethora of choice, including the pan roasted fillet of bream, the chargrilled beef burger and the slow-cooked trio of pork. Here, I tasted the roast chicken breast, a succulent dish with creamed cabbage and bacon, rich dauphinoise potato and chicken jus. Josh meanwhile devoured the 10oz ribeye steak, embellished with triple cooked chunky chips, tomatoes, mushrooms and a creamy peppercorn sauce.

Despite feeling fit to burst, we enjoyed a large slab of sticky toffee pudding served with salted caramel sauce and sweet vanilla ice cream, which rounded off a thoroughly pleasant evening spent at Józef's.



After a peaceful night's sleep, the following morning we decided to visit the hotel's in-house health club, Pace. With state-of-the-art gym facilities, a 15m pool, steam room, sauna and jacuzzi, Pace offers the ideal environment to both rest and rejuvenate. Guests can also sample a range of deluxe spa treatments and packages at the club's adjacent NUSPA, adding to the luxurious experience on offer at the Radisson Blu.

Having burnt off some calories from our evening of indulgence, we then returned to Józef's restaurant for a delicious breakfast. The hotel offers an abundance of choice from its large breakfast buffet, including tasty cooked items, continental classics, buttery pastries and fresh breads. The breakfast was absolutely exquisite and concluded a relaxing and enjoyable stay spent at the Radisson Blu.

All in all, the hotel really provides the perfect place to relax and unwind. The hotel is ideally situated for you to delight in all that Durham city has to offer, whilst simultaneously experiencing a serene escape from daily life. We can't wait to return again soon.

***The Radisson Blu can be found at Frankland Lane, Durham, DH1 5TA. For more information, visit their website [www.radissonhotels.com](http://www.radissonhotels.com) or call 0191 372 7200.***

# Places to go...Ford and Etal

Tourist information for the Ford and Etal estate in north Northumberland suggests that the best way to get there is by car. But that's not the most environmentally friendly way to get there, which is to enjoy the scenery over the hedgerows by country bus.



**Take advantage of vehicles which are travelling anyway and support the local economy. The nationwide DaySaver for £6.80 makes this excursion inexpensive as it is long! I made a trip from Co. Durham on 22 June to Lord Joicey's beautiful estate and enjoyed lunch with the man himself in the only thatched pub in Northumberland: the Black Bull in Etal, which is managed by the Cheviot Brewery. They offer glamping and alpaca walking elsewhere on the estate.**

On enquiring about the buildings on the estate, Lord Joicey tells me there two Grade I buildings, four Grade II\*, 42 Grade II, 14 scheduled monuments and one registered battlefield. The latter is the Flodden field where on 9th September 1513, fifteen thousand English and Scots soldiers died in the space of three hours.

It's a long way to the twin villages of Ford and Etal, so I elected to travel northbound by train using an Advance Purchase single by LNER from Newcastle to Berwick which whizzed me north in just 42 minutes, for the 64 miles. I therefore arrived at Ford at 1123. Outside Berwick station the stop is visible for the Borders Buses 267 which plies between Berwick (outside the Castle Hotel) and Wooler. The ticket I had bought in County Durham earlier was happily accepted by the the driver of the 267. He or she will be your friend for the day moving between Ford, Etal, Heatherslaw and the turn for the road to Hay Farm Heavy Horse Centre. The latter protects rare breeds, not only horses but also pigs, geese and ducks, including fine Clydesdales. This summer a new Clydesdale foal is an additional attraction.

There's a corn mill and galleries to visit at Heatherslaw, mid way between the two villages. The 15 inch gauge Heatherslaw Light Railway runs from alongside the River Till (walks available) to Etal where its Castle is a fine ruin in the care of English Heritage. I walked around the buildings which might be found on a jigsaw puzzle and found the church of St Mary the Virgin designed by noted Gothic revival architect William Butterfield at the height of his powers in 1859.

Back at Ford I visited the Lady Waterford Hall, once a village school. The legacy of Louisa Anne, The Marchioness of Waterford, is the beautiful village of Ford that we see today. It was rare for a lady of high birth to care about working people in the area, but Louisa was no regular lady!

Having inherited the Ford estate from her late husband, she was quick to work in creating housing for her tenants and a schoolroom for children in 1860. As well as a humanitarian, Louisa Anne was a talented painter from a young age and we can see her finest works in the Lady Waterford Hall.

The journey back was by bus using well-connected journeys using the 267 into Wooler, the Glen Valley Tours 473 from Wooler to Alnwick picking up the Arriva express X15 which is semi-fast to Morpeth and then fast into Newcastle, connecting into my local bus home, arriving 2106 with time for an evening meal in Newcastle. Hardly any carbon emissions and an enjoyable day out.

***www.ford-and-etale.co.uk/attractions bustimes.org not only has all bus timetables but shows the location of your bus when waiting for it.***

***alexnelson@nationalrail.com, www.nationalrail.com***

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Four amazing venues in Durham



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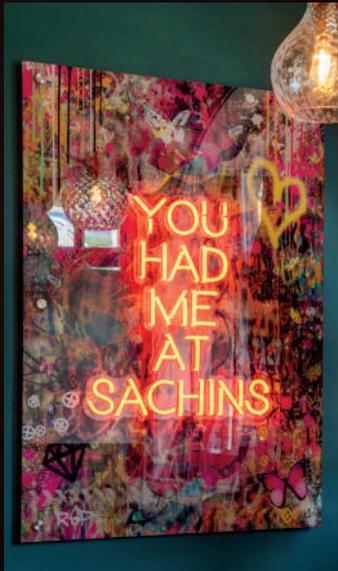
**Refurbishment Party**

Staybridge Newcastle is the perfect hotel with a home away from home feel in the city centre, just a 5-minute walk to the Quayside.

Recently refurbished, spending £1.8 million the stylish studio and one-bedroom suites offer spacious bedrooms and bathrooms, living spaces and fully equipped kitchens.

To thank valued business and leisure guests who have supported them during the refurbishment, they had in true Staybridge Suites style a Retro Refurbishment Party with music, food, dancing and lots of laughter.





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## Having the right attitude

When you exercise, whether it's a leisurely walk or an intense workout, your mindset and approach to your routines can significantly impact your motivation levels.

Here are a few tips to help you adjust your workouts and maintain a positive attitude during your sessions:

- Plan a short, intense workout that keeps your heart rate up and your intensity high. Limit it to 30 minutes after a warm-up, so you can continue with your day feeling energized.
- If you're feeling tired, choose a routine you enjoy to quickly reset your mindset to positive and boost your energy levels.
- Increase your pace beyond your normal level and challenge yourself to go the extra mile. You'll experience a great sense of achievement, motivating you to improve further next time.
- Listen to your favourite music on repeat to inspire you to push harder and enhance your performance.
- Combine a mixture of cardio and strength training sessions to break the monotony of a long workout. Mixing things up is key, and it all comes down to planning.



David Fairlamb

- Use one session to focus specifically on your technique, if you're unsure, seek help.

Ten strength exercises executed with perfect form will be safer and more effective than thirty done incorrectly. This will improve your performance and target the muscles you aim to work on, serving as another motivator.

- Finish the workout you set for yourself,

skipping the last few seconds of an interval or the last few reps of a set means you're only cheating yourself, and it could lead to a bad habits.

- During aerobic workouts, think of something happy and positive to take your mind off the training. A strong mind will result in a positive body response.
- If you're struggling during a workout, think about a sporting event that inspired you. This can reignite your energy to complete your session.

### David's summing up

*Everyone has their own unique way of finding inspiration or motivation. Discover what works for you, as this can be a powerful tool not only for exercise but for any aspect of life. We all need a boost from time to time, and often it doesn't take much to shift our mindset to a positive one.*

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





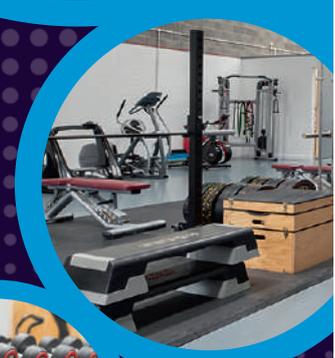
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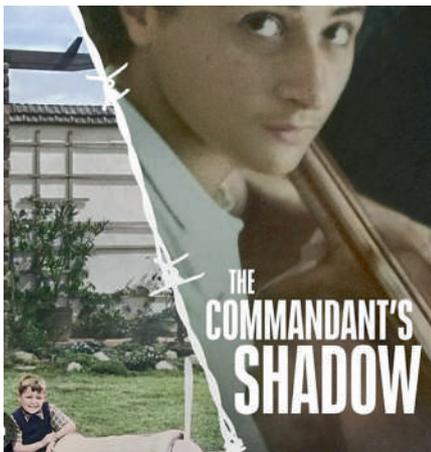


## The Last Word

By Barry Speker OBE

**Far from being a blow to the right to 'peaceful protest', the long prison sentences imposed on the five Just Stop Oil protesters are a triumph for the rule of law.**

**Five years imprisonment for Roger Hallam and four years each for his co-conspirators. Their antics in 2022 in clambering on gantries and sitting in the fast lane of the M25 brought the motorway to a halt for four days. The criminal disruption caused economic damage of £765,000 and cost to the Metropolitan Police of £1.1million. For people who missed flights, were unable to receive cancer treatment or attend family funerals, those antics were totally unacceptable.**



Even in Court the protesters continued to harangue the jury.

In sentencing them Judge Christopher Hehir told them they had crossed the line 'from concerned campaigners to fanatics' and appointed themselves as the sole arbiters of what should be done about climate change.

That some Labour backbenchers and climate activists were among those describing the sentences as 'draconian' and calling for Government intervention, is no surprise. Sagely and constitutionally, ministers say that is impossible. New laws aimed at stopping attempts to paralyse cities, deface public monuments or disrupt public life will not be repealed. This is a strong message that Just Stop Oil is not above the law.

After a Euros campaign in which England battled to the final again without producing aesthetically pleasing football, Gareth Southgate did not bask in his achievement or lose his cool with the barrage of armchair experts, challenging his every decision.

With dignity he called it a day but with a record making him the most successful England manager since Sir Alf Ramsey in 1966. To quote Rudyard Kipling "Risk everything, face disaster and never breathe a word about your loss".

What he did do was instil national pride in his players and give the nation a cause to support until the last few minutes of the final.

The Prince of Wales spoke for many in his message of thanks to Gareth - 'not as President of the FA but as an England fan' - in creating a team which stands shoulder to shoulder with the finest and 'for showing humility, compassion and true leadership under the most intense pressure and scrutiny'.

No doubt this is some comfort in the face of the press barrage and the anonymous multitude on social media.

I recommend the film *The Commandant's Shadow*, a documentary which follows Hans Jürgen Höss, the 87-year-old son of Rudolf Höss, the Camp Commandant of Auschwitz who master-minded the murder of more than a million Jews. The life is Höss and



his family was recently fictionalised in the Academy Award-winning 'The Zone of Interest'.

Now *The Commandant's Shadow* tells the story of the real people who lived beside the camp. It culminates in Hans meeting Anita Laker-Wallfisch who survived because she could play the cello and was seconded to the camp's orchestra, playing as prisoners went to their deaths.

The film shows Hans belatedly acknowledging what happened in the death camp, catalogued in the autobiography written in German by Rudolf Höss whilst awaiting his execution.

Anita Laker-Wallfisch laments that the story and the Holocaust lesson of 'never again' remain harshly relevant in the wake of October 7th and the level of anti-semitism.

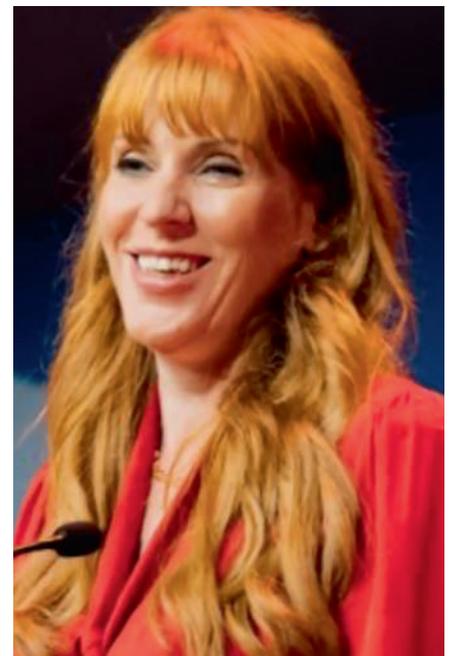
Starmer-geddon arrived on 4th July, and the arrival of 335 new members of Parliament, a larger number of political freshmen and women than even the Labour landslide of 1945. It is appropriate and reassuring that the Speaker, Sir Lindsay Hoyle, reminded honourable members - the men, that is - that they should wear a tie in the Palace of Westminster, and certainly in the chamber of the House of Commons. "Wear a tie or you might not catch my eye".

This is a reminder of the pushback against the attempts of predecessor John Bercow who in 2017 declared ties were not necessary - and we remember what became of him.

Ties still have their place in public life and convey respect for one's office, the institution of which a member is part and to the voters. A degree of humility in submitting to a dress-code is no bad thing. Tradition, but not necessarily conservatism!

How will this be interpreted by deputy PM, Angela Rayner, who once described herself as 'Prescott in a skirt'? No doubt the 44 year old grandmother from Stockport will still keep the red skirt flying.

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