

NORTHERN

# INSIGHT

December/January 2024-25

Issue 108



**A COMMUNITY HUB BY SANDERSON YOUNG**

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

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## Gosforth

## Wallsend



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# Foreword

## FOREWORD

Welcome to the December/January issue of Northern Insight.

To close a hugely enjoyable 2024 we are delighted to bring you our bumper December/January edition.

Our cover stars are long term contributors Sanderson Young who reflect on a busy year and look forward to 2025 with optimism.

Within some terrific event coverage look out for 10 year celebrations for CCBS Group and the 70th anniversary party for RMT Accountants.

Elsewhere in a new series of Arts interviews we talk to Jacqui Kell, Executive Director at Live Theatre which has been a vibrant cornerstone of Newcastle's cultural scene for five decades.

Meanwhile on our travels we take trips to the award winning My Delhi and visit the Seaburn Inn, another winner from the Inn Collection Group.

We hope you find something to enjoy and enthuse within one of our best ever issues.

*May I wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and prosperous New Year.*

*See you on the other side...*




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

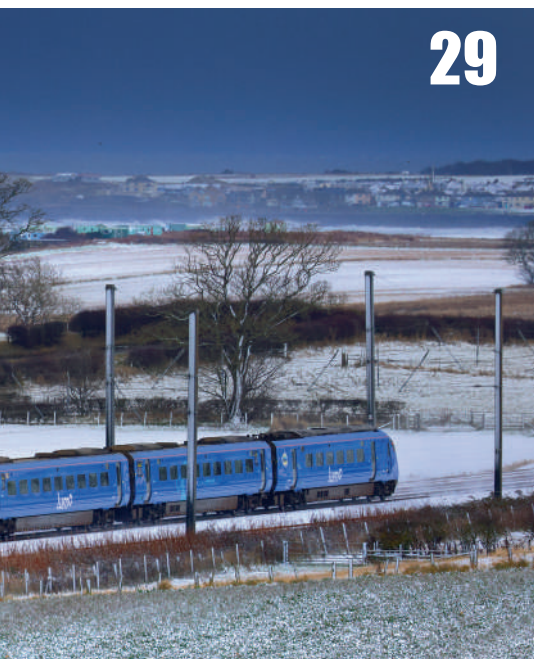
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## ABCA Systems Acquires Citrus Group

Newcastle-based ABCA Systems, one of the UK's leading providers of Fire, Security, and Electrical Compliance Solutions, has announced the acquisition of Citrus Group, marking their fourth acquisition in the last eight weeks. This acquisition follows the successful takeovers of Maintec Ltd, A.G.S. Tech Ltd, and HBS Fabrication Northwest Ltd, all based in the North West, further solidifying ABCA's dominant market position across the UK and northern footprint.

Based in Prescot, near Liverpool, Citrus specialises in electrical installation, repairs, and testing services, particularly for local authorities and housing associations across the Midlands and Northern England. The acquisition will significantly enhance ABCA's existing capabilities in the Electrical Compliance Solutions space, while also expanding their footprint in the North.

Phillip Miller, Group CEO of ABCA Systems, expressed enthusiasm about the latest acquisition: "Citrus aligns perfectly with our strategy to broaden our capabilities in key regions and service areas like Electrical Compliance, which are relevant to our existing and new customers and where we see growing demand. The Citrus team's expertise and dedication to safety and quality make them a valuable addition to ABCA. We are excited about the opportunities this partnership will unlock for both companies as we continue to grow and diversify our offerings. Once again, our company motto of getting "the right people, at the right place and at the right time" remains at the core of our values and growth strategy. We are thrilled to welcome the Citrus team to the ABCA family."

## All aboard for Lumo

A brand-new official 'MONOPOLY: Newcastle and Gateshead Edition' game recently launched featuring a range of iconic landmarks and organisations, including Newcastle-based train operator, Lumo.

In addition to securing the famous spot typically occupied by London King's Cross Station, Lumo's London terminus, the Newcastle edition sees Lumo proudly occupying Newcastle's iconic Central Station. Lumo also takes pride of place on the front cover of the popular boardgame, showing one of the operator's 100% electric trains crossing the River Tyne.

With 96% customer satisfaction scores, it's no surprise that Lumo was the train operator selected by MONOPOLY for the new edition, with the company becoming a significant part of life in the region, offering customers a sustainable, all-electric rail service that connects the North East with London and Edinburgh and redefines eco-friendly travel options.

The board, which features bespoke property spaces including The Glasshouse, Grey's



Monument and Baltic Centre is now on sale ready for Christmas. A series of launch events took place including at Newcastle Central Station with Mr Monopoly boarding a Lumo service.

Martijn Gilbert, Managing Director of Lumo, said: "As a proud Newcastle business, we're thrilled to be part of this iconic game that celebrates our vibrant community and many fantastic local organisations. It's a great opportunity to contribute to Newcastle's rich heritage and show our support for the region we're so passionate about."



## Phil gets his claws into Tiger Energy

Phil Young, a lawyer from Sunderland, is bringing a fresh wave of transparency and integrity to the business energy sales industry. After a distinguished legal career spanning two decades, Young is now focused on creating a more accountable and honest approach to business energy consultancy through his new venture, Tiger Energy Consultants.

Young's journey started with a solid legal foundation in Newcastle, where he trained as a commercial lawyer. After spending seven years at a leading law firm, he moved on to a national transport company, where as Head of Legal he played a pivotal role in major transport projects across Europe.

After more than eight years in the transport sector, Young realised his heart remained in the North East. "I was traveling too much and wanted to come back home," he said. He has since worked with a variety of businesses, including energy firms in the North East, where he spent three to four years gaining insight into the energy sector as Legal Director for a local energy broker. This experience inspired him to launch Tiger Energy Consultants.

At Tiger Energy, the focus is on SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises), providing tailored solutions based on each business's energy consumption patterns. By meticulously reviewing tariffs and suppliers, Tiger Energy ensures clients receive the most cost-effective energy deals.

In an era of economic uncertainty, Young believes businesses can no longer afford to overlook their energy costs. "The variation in tariffs and prices is huge," he warned. Tiger Energy's no-cost, no-obligation review service helps companies navigate this complex landscape, ensuring they are not locked into unfavourable contracts.

# Making Clients Famous.

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## Going for Growth: Morpeth leads the way on the East Coast Main Line

Morpeth is showing signs of significant growth for customer journeys on the East Coast Main Line with new data released by open access operator, Lumo.

Lumo believes the surge in demand for its services is due to a combination of an increasing focus on sustainability by leisure and business customers combined with the

incredibly strong tourism offer the town and wider area has to offer visitors.

Lumo has carried more than three million customers in the three years since it launched to great fanfare offering a low-cost, great value model to attract people from flying or driving the routes it serves between London, Newcastle and Edinburgh.

The North East based operator is a key partner for Destination North East England's newly launch Regenerative tourism plan to help make destinations more accessible, inclusive and sustainable. The operator's bright blue trains are 25 times greener than flying with around 96% CO2 saved compared to driving or flying.

Martijn Gilbert, Managing Director at Lumo, said: "Lumo's offer of affordable, green travel connecting Morpeth with Edinburgh, Newcastle and London is proving incredibly popular. Our one hundred percent electric trains are helping make journeys even cleaner and combined with our industry-leading customer satisfaction scores, we're proud to be seeing such incredible growth for Northumberland."



## Jade Thirlwall pays tribute to hometown football club

Pop star Jade Thirlwall showed her undying support to her hometown football club, South Shields Football Club, in her debut solo music video, 'Angel of My Dreams', where the South Shields born-and-raised star was adorned in the Mariners' scarf and eating famous Colmans fish and chips.

And since the successful release of the solo single that placed on the top 10 chart for two weeks, she has further reiterated her support for the club which was reluctantly put up for sale by its owner Geoff Thompson, after he was diagnosed with prostate cancer.

Jade, the club's honorary president and shareholder, said: "South Shields FC is a great club with a rich history. Coming from South Shields and seeing the sense of community the club brings, I have a strong emotional connection to South Shields FC."

Following the club being put up for sale, the singer backed the club to go on to even bigger and brighter things, after its successful turnaround over the past decade. In the last 10 years, the club has seen considerable growth. In 2015 South Shields FC were in the doldrums playing football in Peterlee, 30 miles from the natural home with fan numbers of roughly 70 per game.

Today, with fantastic stadium facilities and a loyal fanbase approaching 2,500 each home game, the club's fortunes have changed considerably. Jade truly believes the fans can continue to back the club, describing 'Sandancers' (people from South Shields) as brilliant fans. The club continues to play a huge role in her life as she explains: "My hometown and the club will always be special to me and I am proud to represent them."



## Camerons Brewery secures refinancing to support growth

Hartlepool-based brewer and pub operator Camerons Brewery has agreed a refinance and new funding package with Sandton Capital Partners ("Sandton") alongside Independent Growth Finance ("IGF") to support the Camerons Group's strategic growth strategy.

Sandton, a London and New York based investment fund provider and IGF, one of the UK's leading independent lenders, have structured a comprehensive financial package that includes the refinancing of the existing debt and the provision of new working capital. This is supporting Camerons Brewery's plans to invest in the Group which consists of two business operations: one of the largest

independent contract brewers in the UK and an estate of 44 pubs and bars throughout the UK, which includes their flagship Head of Steam and Urban Country Pub brands. The contract brewery side of the business manufactures a range of domestic and international beers and ales for a variety of customers from smaller growing craft customers to major global brand owners. Their facilities provide an extensive range of services including brewing, packaging into keg, cask, can and bottle, plus the manufacture of water and soft drinks. They have also recently agreed a national distribution listing with ASDA for their Tooth and Claw craft beer brand, Jellyfish Nebula.

Camerons Brewery is a family owned and managed business having been acquired by David Soley in April 2002. David remains Chairman of the business with Chris Soley running the business as the Group's CEO and John Foots supporting as CFO.

Marketing. Video. Branding. Public Relations.

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**10th Year Celebrations**

In 2014, Peter Cromarty opened CCBS Group's doors to the North East business community. Now celebrating its tenth birthday, CCBS has grown to seven team members, and two offices supporting businesses in the north and south of the region to navigate the ever-changing business funding landscape.

To celebrate this milestone, CCBS Group invited some of their professional intermediaries and clients who have helped them on their journey. The event at Tiger Hornsby's was a great success.





# Synergi launches newly branded practices following best year yet



**Peter Joynson**

*Chief Executive Officer, Synergi.*

**So, how has 2024 been for Synergi?**

We've made solid progress right across the business; whilst financially it's been our best year to date, which is very pleasing, we're most proud of the amazing talent we've nurtured and recruited. The constant investment in our people and the excitement of new and emerging products in our portfolio makes this year very satisfying, our best yet.

**What is to come in 2025?**

We're in a market of constant change, so we too will continue evolving, we are excited to be re-positioning our core practices to be clearer and address the needs of our clients and those looking to drive positive business improvement using today's modern & emerging technologies.

In summary, Synergi will continue to lead in business IT strategy, with our rebranded practices, Senti, Agiliti and Unifi delivering unrivalled product and customer experience.

We're perfectly positioned as an expert partner for businesses who want positive change.



**Paul Burns**

*Chief Technology Officer, Synergi.*

**What successes have you and your customers seen in 2024?**

Throughout 2024 we have seen increasing investment across many technology areas but once again, unsurprisingly, cyber protection solutions have seen significant share; as threats continue to become more complex, this is hardly surprising. Clients have focussed their investments on a few specific areas including;

- **Microsoft 365 Assessments** – regularly evaluating new features, gaps and vulnerabilities and implementing mitigations to safeguard employees, business systems and data.
- **Managed Detection & Response (MDR)** – an upgrade from traditional Endpoint AV solutions and XDR solutions. MDR incorporates feeds from multiple sources including Microsoft 365 delivering a 24/7/365 early threat detection and cleanup service, using AI detection and human investigation resources.

**What is coming next in 2025?**

For 2025 we are focussed on application protection with two new solutions being introduced;

- **Advanced Software Management** targets known vulnerabilities, this expands beyond the traditional patching of Windows, Office and browsers to include hundreds of the best known and used business applications.
- **ZeroTrust Application Management**, ZeroTrust allows clients to evaluate their estate, create policies that allow/deny applications and deals with complex elevation control and application testing, ensuring you know exactly what your teams are using and the applications in use across the business are safe.



**Justin Short**

*Chief Operating Officer, Synergi.*

**What successes have you and your customers seen in 2024?**

It comes as no surprise that AI has been the hottest topic this year, with clients looking to understand the vast potential of these exciting technology advancements, whilst also seeking our support to ensure that their organisations are ready for change.

In everyday tools, Outlook can catch-up on email to understand complex trails quickly, Word can summarise imperative points from complex documents, AI Copilots are streamlining our productivity and efficiency.

Low-code workflow and automation platforms like Power Platform have been

leading the way to drive efficiencies to deliver a return. These are now being supercharged into a new era, with amazing AI capabilities that can recognise processes, generate workflows, import data from documents and much more.

**What is coming next in 2025 in AI & Automation?**

We're working closely with customers to ensure that their platforms, applications, data and people are ready to optimise the potential of AI's acceleration.

Visualising projects across organisations, whilst aligning portfolio performance and benefits to strategic goals is exactly what our latest technology partner Altus PPM enables; combining a powerful streak of AI innovation, automating highlight reports, resource management and more.

With AI Copilots now spanning our technology landscape, we're seeing the benefits of these interacting increasingly powerfully, empowering user workloads and interaction that was unthinkable, even just a few months ago.



**Lee Mills**

*Unifi Practice Director.*

**What are the Unifi highlights of 2024?**

We've grown right across the practice; in terms of people, we are 30% up in new heads compared to 2023 with a growing client base. In terms of projects, there have been some real high points across the year, non-more so than the most recent go live with Hays Travel, one of our largest Microsoft Dynamics delivery projects to date. The experience and dedication shown by both Hays and Unifi to hit tight deadlines ahead of their busy festive period was a challenge but with our amazing team, together we did it.

**What is in store for Unifi in 2025?**

We're confident for more of the same double-digit growth, with some amazing new client projects in flight and scheduled. AI Copilots and integration with Power Platform are now becoming real game changers for progressive businesses so we will continue to work hard to educate the market, with events and webinars, and invest in our team to ensure they stay right with the pace of change in this space.

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# A COMMUNITY HUB



The changes that have taken place in recent years on many high streets throughout the United Kingdom have been quite alarming with the withdrawal of many banks, building societies and financial institutions from a day to day presence, leaving empty buildings and retail units all over the country.

The high street is a vital part of any community and brings together people, in a diverse way, of all age groups, ethnicities and neighbourhoods, ensuring that we keep an active community hub within the places we live.

I am particularly impressed recently by the work of the Gosforth Shopping Centre and the way that they have made considerable efforts to keep their retail units full and well displayed, with new initiatives including The Florence Tuition Studio which delivers outstanding Maths & Science tuition for 10 to 16 year olds. They have also involved the community in a number of initiatives, including the work in the Central Park for younger children and outdoor activities such as the fabulous cinema nights, which were very successful.

The rebirth of different styles of restaurants, bars, bistros and clubs is equally important to utilise buildings which are no longer required either as churches, banks or other prominent architectural landmarks. The creation of the town square in front of the fabulous Trinity Church is vital as a meeting point for all different age groups as they go about their daily life.

The increasing success of neighbourhood shopping for

specialised services is particularly pleasing to see, especially from those providing fresh breads, cakes and speciality foods as well as, of course, the excellent work of so many butchers remaining competitive and a tremendous guide to those of us who love to cook culinary delights!

The high street must continue to evolve and I think the efforts this year in the Christmas Winter Wonderland have been particularly interesting.

At the time of writing, we are supported by over 80% of businesses on the High Street with the erection of first floor real Christmas trees, which we hope to have in place by the end of November and lasting throughout December and the early part of January.

This effort has been immense and so many people have been extremely supportive, including our principal sponsors, the L.G.A Foundation, Reeves Independent Financial Services and my own company, who have donated significant time and financial support to enable this project to work.

The efforts to make the High Street feel more seasonal, special and attractive with its illuminated trees, I am sure will see greater levels of trade throughout all of our retail and hospitality businesses.

It is equally of note that some businesses have declined the opportunity to enhance the High Street, and I hope that they will think again for the following year when they see the success of this year. It is vital that we pull together as a community to use our high street and ensure that it provides a superb support to all the leisure, hospitality and retail opportunities that we require.

I would also like to thank Ridley Brothers without whom the wiring of the High Street would not be possible and the many independent traders, landlords and tenants who have added funds to bring this dream to reality. This also includes Sweeney Miller, a local law firm, who have also, without premises on the High Street, donated.

We encourage lots of new ideas to be brought forward in the future and I hope that if the Christmas Tree campaign is a success, that we will soon move onto a fully irrigated floral hanging basket system, which can be used in the spring and summer to dress our high street colourfully and beautifully.

I, for one, will always do my best to shop locally and I encourage many others to do the same and to enjoy the beauty of the high street and the friendship that surrounds it.



Duncan G Young  
SANDERSON YOUNG  
Chairman

Gosforth High Street, Christmas Tree Project Sponsors:







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# THE FEEL GOOD FACTOR

How is the housing market? Can I afford to move? What are the values like? The above three questions are some of the most frequent and common questions we are asked in the housing market and, often, the response to those questions is related to the economy and the general 'feel good factor'. We see this regularly in the housing cycle, and in recent times we have seen it play out in a number of other situations. The United States election forecast, one of the closest run results ever seen and, yet, the final outcome was a resounding success and win for President Trump and the Republican party which had not been accurately forecast at all, something we have seen regularly in the past in our own country, with the Brexit vote and other general election outcomes.

It is clear that the current inflation results and interest rates support a downward trend, meaning that over forthcoming years we are expecting to see interest rates reduce even further, and whilst they may not reach the historic lows that we have enjoyed over the last fifteen years or so, they are certainly coming down again and this will please the majority of people who have borrowed to purchase their home with a mortgage. Some parts of the country last year, and in recent times, have seen house prices rise by between 5% and even 10%, whilst in other regions and in varying values, house prices have settled, or even fallen a little, and this is confusing; however, at the end of the day, it all seems to come down to how we feel and whether we have the confidence in property to buy, move and invest.

In the lead up to the general election this year, we had the least amount of concern or worry that I have ever seen coming up to an election because the majority of people knew what the result and answer was going to be and yet, once the new government was elected, sweeping statements were somewhat naively made in July about deficits, losses and the cost of the economy and how this would have to be paid for in the forthcoming budget. This led to an immediate downturn in confidence, leading to a reduction in viewings, offers and sales over the months of July and August, yet come September and October that downturn was reversed and viewings increased and offers and sales were made. Here we are in November 2024, post budget, which has obvious concerns for a number of people, but the majority are now looking forward to a period of increased demand for housing as our



supply of property remains low and the number of people needing to move has increased, interest rates are low and are coming down and for the majority, viewing levels, offers and sales are now increasing at a time of year which would normally be quite quiet.

The feel good factor has a very significant contribution to any part of the economy and, whether you are a member of the Republican party in America who are now expecting sweeping changes for the better, you may feel good about the result of your election. Here in the UK, I am hoping that a lot of people feel good about the housing market at the moment, and I look forward to a positive and strong start to the beginning of 2025 and, going forward, for the next twelve months.

Our own local efforts have been reflected in a campaign which I have been heavily involved with, to improve the look of the High Street in Gosforth by adding festive, illuminated Christmas trees to the first floor of many buildings. I am very much hoping that it is a success and viewed by many of those travelling through, and living nearby, as being a positive factor in attracting people to enjoy meals and drinks out on the High Street as it will look more festive and will hopefully increase trade for those that work in that area, something very much needed. Yet another example of a feel good factor, I would like to thank personally our main sponsors, L.G.A. Foundation and Nigel Reeves of Reeves Independent Financial Advisors for their sponsorship of the campaign on Gosforth High Street, which would not happen

without their financial support.

I am pleased to see, again locally, many good stories about the resurgence of the market in Sunderland, the increasing success of Teesside and its efforts to bring greater employment and larger industry, and about the ongoing possibilities of wind farm and battery power employment businesses within the region. I hope that even Sunderland and Middlesbrough football clubs are successful in bringing them up into the Premiership so that we can all prosper and enjoy competitive football games in the region together!

Here at Sanderson Young, we are doing our best at feeling positive and feeling good, having refurbished many of our offices in the last twelve months, improved our social media campaigns and the way we market our houses, as well as the investment we make into the promotion and sale of new homes, with our New Homes Hub, a regional centre of excellence for the sale of newly built properties of which we have many great sites representing some of the increasing number of smaller and medium developers in the region. One of our greatest assets in estate agency continues to be our people and here in the company, we have seen further new posts being created and jobs being made for locals who we know have got the maturity, knowledge and skills we require to sell as many houses as possible.

As we end 2024, and look forward to 2025, we do so in the knowledge that the region is faring well and that we have many positive factors for trading in the next twelve months. Our company remains very proactive, positive and keen to help our clients move their homes and buy or sell, as well as rent in the near future. We will continue our efforts to accurately forecast and support our clients with strong marketing initiatives, excellent social media and great presentation to ensure the best results for their home move.

We hope that your world beliefs, home and work visions are positive and full of feel good factors for the future.

I very much look forward to being able to help our clients, and I am available to discuss any of your property requirements on my email [duncan.young@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:duncan.young@sandersonyoung.co.uk)

Very kind regards and best wishes,

**Duncan Young**  
Chairman  
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## *Holmwood* *Whitburn Road, Cleadon*

It is our privilege to offer for sale what is undoubtedly one of the finest houses we have had the pleasure of marketing in South Tyneside. Holmwood was originally built in the 1920s and occupies a magnificent, very private, mature and manicured garden site of 1.1 acres. This very impressive property has a great deal of style and has been renovated, refurbished and improved to a superb standard. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: G.



4 4 3 C

**Price Guide:**  
£3.25 Million



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





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## *Highbury House* *Highbury, Jesmond*

Highbury House is an impressive, double fronted, end terrace property within the heart of Jesmond. Known for being one of the most prominent houses within Jesmond, this magnificent family home, owned by the same family for over 50 years, has been lovingly maintained to a high standard. This special property offers fabulous period features including elaborate corning, period fireplaces and a magnificent stained glass window. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: G.



5 4 2 D

**Price Guide:**  
Offers over £1.2 Million



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



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## *Woodside*

*Milbourne, Ponteland*

Woodside provides a fabulous detached family home occupying a garden site of circa 7 acres with a three bedroom detached bungalow in the grounds. This country property offers over 11,000 sq ft of accommodation and has a Certificate of Lawful Development to create a leisure annexe to the rear garden. Planning is also in place to demolish the main house, replacing it with a new 5 bed dwelling (24/00204/FUL & 22/03788/FUL). Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: G.



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 5  5  5 D&E

**Price Guide:**  
£2.7 Million



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





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YOUNG



## *Westfield House*

*Western Way, Darras Hall*

A beautifully presented and substantially extended, five bedroom detached house, situated on this highly desirable road within Darras Hall. Positioned on a site of approximately 0.27 acres, located to the edge of the estate with the lovely surrounding fields and countryside and is well set out for outdoor entertaining. The property offers lovely mature gardens to the front and rear that give a great degree of privacy, as well as offering direct access in and out of the estate via Stamfordham Road. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: G.

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 5  3  5

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**Price Guide:**  
£1.15 Million



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**Mary Walker**  
0191 223 3500  
[mary.walker@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:mary.walker@sandersonyoung.co.uk)



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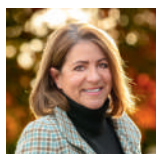
## *East Thornton Farm* *North Side, Morpeth*

This equestrian lover's dream home sits within circa 30 acres of formal grounds and paddocks with a traditional farmhouse, upgraded by the current owners. The impressive equestrian complex boasts extensive facilities including outdoor/barn stabling, a Monarch horse walker, a solarium, indoor/outdoor arenas, a canter track and multiple feed/store rooms. There is a detached triple garage with one bed apartment above. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: G.



5 3 3 E

**Price Guide:**  
£2.95 Million



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





Jessica Williams

## Communicate with confidence: The key to winning and keeping customers

In today's dynamic business landscape, the difference between a fleeting transaction and an enduring partnership often comes down to one critical skill: confident communication.

**At the Just Williams Sales Academy, we believe that communicating with clarity and confidence is essential for building successful, long-lasting relationships. Whether it's perfecting the art of the pitch or navigating networking events, confident communication makes a difference.**

### Mastering the Pitch

A confident pitch is not about speaking louder or faster, it's about speaking with

purpose. Our years of experience have revealed that customers remember merely a fraction of what they hear, but the feeling of the interaction stays with them long after the meeting ends. The most successful sales professionals understand this intrinsically, crafting conversations that address specific challenges while weaving in compelling evidence of past successes. Rather than delivering rehearsed monologues, they create meaningful dialogues that position them as strategic partners in their clients' success journey.

### The New Rules of Networking

The landscape of professional networking has evolved considerably. Gone are the days of merely collecting business cards and delivering rehearsed speeches. Today's networking demands a more sophisticated approach, especially as we navigate both digital and physical spaces. The most successful networkers have mastered the art of creating meaningful connections through thoughtful preparation and authentic engagement. They understand that a single, well-nurtured relationship often proves more valuable than dozens of superficial connections.

### The Communication Chameleon: Mastering Adaptability

Through our extensive work with sales professionals across the UK, we've observed that different personality types process information in distinctly different ways.

Some clients seek bottom-line results and quick decisions, whilst others prefer to explore options through stories and discussions. Many value stability and clear processes, and still others require detailed analysis before moving forward. Understanding these preferences—and adapting your approach accordingly—creates instant rapport and deeper understanding with any client.

### The Often Overlooked Skill of Listening

We emphasise that confident communication isn't only about speaking well; it's also about listening. When we truly listen, we're able to respond to clients' needs in a way that feels personal and relevant, deepening the relationship. Active listening builds trust, demonstrating that our focus is on helping clients achieve their goals.

### Building Lasting Confidence Through Expertise

At The Just Williams Sales Academy, we've developed a sophisticated approach to building genuine confidence through expertise. Our methodology combines deep knowledge building with practical application and continuous support. We focus on understanding industry dynamics, communication psychology, and current market trends, whilst providing opportunities for hands-on practice and expert mentorship.

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





**Northumbria  
University**  
NEWCASTLE

Just Williams 



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Sponsorship Opportunities:

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Our long term ambition is to connect academia, business and all organisations across all sectors.

If you'd like to get involved, we are looking for sponsors, volunteers and delegates.

We will be discussing topics such as:

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**Impact Reporting**

**Inside Out Engagement**

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Friday 24th January 2025

Newcastle Business School,  
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to find out more.



L-R: Sarah Wharrier, Steve Atkinson and Laura Dalal

## Tyneside Surgical Services partners with CMYK to deliver IT Services

Tyneside Surgical Services partnered with CMYK Business Technology earlier this year, to deliver Managed IT Services to their three sites across the North East and Manchester.

**Tyneside Surgical Services (TSS) is an independent provider of NHS care, established in 2007 and located on the Team Valley in Gateshead. They also run a number of out-patient services across the North East.**

TSS's newly refurbished premises opened to patients in January 2022 and provides Consultant led care for patients requiring day case surgery, pain services, endoscopy, MRI and ultrasound scans.

TSS deliver thousands of successful procedures every year both in the NHS and the private sector. Patients see their specialist at a first outpatient appointment and can be sure that their consultant will perform their operation and manage their follow up care. They have a dedicated administration team who ensure that

referrals are processed promptly. Patients currently wait an average of only 8 weeks from GP referral to treatment.

Since 2023, TSS have also offered a range of surgical aesthetic procedures for self-pay patients and are currently planning an exciting expansion of this portfolio to include non-surgical services to commence in early 2025.

Steve Atkinson, Commercial Director at TSS commented: 'A safe, robust and reliable IT infrastructure is key to the smooth running of the business and so in February 2024 we were delighted to place our trust in CMYK to provide our Managed IT services. The level of support and timeliness of response from them is exceptional. Our staff know that any issues which may arise can be resolved quickly and efficiently by local

CMYK staff who are professional, friendly and knowledgeable.'

Key services delivered by CMYK include Helpdesk, Business as Usual Support, Microsoft 365 Support, Cloud Back-Up, Anti-virus Software and Managed Print Services. CMYK also supply and support all IT hardware to TSS, helping to streamline the process of equipment being delivered to staff securely, quickly and efficiently.

Sarah Wharrier, Director at CMYK commented 'We were delighted to welcome TSS onboard earlier this year. We have assisted the business with many service level improvements and have strengthened their IT security posture, giving them a robust, reliable and proactive service so they can get on with their day-to-day business and care for their patients. Our team have developed a strong relationship with their staff over the last 10 months whilst getting to know the business and I feel that we now have a fantastic partnership moving forward. I very much look forward to supporting their team for many years to come'.

[www.tynesidesurgicalservices.co.uk](http://www.tynesidesurgicalservices.co.uk)  
[www.cmyk-digital.co.uk](http://www.cmyk-digital.co.uk)



Andrew Silver

## From Vision to Victory: Turning strategy into measurable results

When it comes to growing your business, having a clear vision is essential—but it's only the beginning. The real challenge lies in translating that vision into strategic objectives with tangible, measurable results to drive the growth and success you are looking for.

**For business owners and senior leaders, the ability to execute strategy effectively is the difference between aspiration and achievement. In this article, we explore some of the key activities that can help you turn your vision and strategy into measurable results.**

### Implementing your strategy

A well-crafted strategy is worthless unless it can be translated into action, so the first step is to ensure it is concise and visible within your business. The challenge with lots of strategic thinking and plans is they never become reality. A simple roadmap that clearly outlines what needs to be done, by whom, and when will serve as a guide, keeping everyone aligned and accountable.

### Navigating your way

Roadmaps are indispensable tools for turning your strategy into reality. A comprehensive roadmap ensures that everyone in your

organisation understands their role in executing the strategy. Individuals can then be assigned certain responsibilities for the delivery of the overall roadmap with 121s and regular management meetings becoming the place for collaboration and debate. We know that the 'only certainty is uncertainty' so regularly revisit and refine your roadmap so you can continually adapt to changing circumstances and emerging opportunities.

### Measuring Success

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are a great way to track your progress and performance against both your vision and strategic objectives. Establish clear, relevant KPIs and work to the principle of 'less is more'. None of us can manage and focus on multiple KPIs at the same time. Creating concise and meaningful reportable data is business critical so take the time to ensure you have a 360 view of all aspects of your business and not just financial metrics.

### Adjusting accordingly

Flexibility is crucial in the pursuit of measurable results. Use the insights gained from your KPI analysis to make informed adjustments to your strategy. Identify what's working well and what needs improvement. Be willing to pivot or reallocate resources to optimise outcomes. Your ability to adapt based on real-time data is key to staying agile and responsive in a competitive landscape.

### Have the difficult conversations

The right culture will build trust, and creating a safe space to be vulnerable is part of it. If individuals know the business is genuinely interested in their wellbeing and personal growth then difficult conversations are just the 'bumps in the road' to delivering great results. It isn't easy but successful companies make 'culture' a cornerstone of the organisation with a clear focus on time spent with team members to realise their full potential.

Turning your business strategy into measurable results requires a blend of strategic thinking, disciplined execution, and a commitment to continuous improvement. Remember, the journey from strategy to success is not linear - it's dynamic, requiring agility and perseverance. Embrace the process, stay focused on your goals, and remember to celebrate the successes along the way.

***If you would like to know more about 360 Growth Partners and how we can help turn your strategy into measurable results, then please get in touch and let's start the conversation. [360growthpartners.co.uk](https://360growthpartners.co.uk)***





## Lumo – No sleepers at this train company

A year with the North East success story that's blue...and green.

**It's three years since the blue-liveried Lumo trains first appeared on our tracks. They've been an instant success and continue to grow customer numbers, currently averaging at around one million per year and ambitions to run more routes.**

The blue trains are also green. They're 25 times kinder to the environment than flying with around 96% CO2 saved compared to driving or flying, so you can feel smug while travelling to Edinburgh, Morpeth, London King's Cross or Stevenage. If you need some proof, Lumo was awarded 'Green Innovation Business of the Year' at this summer's prestigious North East Chamber of Commerce awards and more recently Best Business at Reducing Carbon Emissions at the Institute of Supply Chain Management Awards. Not only are their all-electric trains eco-friendly, Lumo was also the first long-distance train company to replace onboard drinks in plastic bottles with sustainable alternatives.

Lumo has big ideas for the future.

Bit of background.

If you've ever stood at Newcastle Central Station, you'll know what a busy place it is ...as soon as one train departs, it's only a matter of minutes before another pulls in. So, how on Earth does a train company like Lumo come along and start running brand new services on a seriously busy route?

The answer is Open Access.

In plain English this means that the clever folk at Lumo identified gaps in the timetable to operate services to help attract more customers to rail. Their business model is also extremely streamlined... bit like their Hitachi trains which were built at Newton Aycliffe...which means they can offer seriously competitive fares while maintaining a high standard of service.

They also travel at convenient times. One of their most popular departures leaves Newcastle at just before 8.00am and gets 400 passengers...non-stop...to London for 10.46. If Morpeth station is handier for you...good news. That train, which started in Edinburgh at 06.23, calls into Morpeth at 07.38. Fares from Morpeth to Edinburgh start from £7.80 and £30.90 for Morpeth to London King's Cross. Customers can take advantage of fee-free booking when buying from the Lumo website with tickets available for several months in advance.

It's also no coincidence that since Lumo began operating its service from Morpeth that the Northumberland town has seen a host of new businesses opening and local visitor attractions, retail and hospitality reporting a steep rise in attendances.

Open Access allows Lumo to fit extra services into its schedule. For example, when England played Bosnia-Herzegovina in a friendly at James' Park in June (England won 3-nil by the way), Lumo helped fans by adding a 22.20 departure from Newcastle to King's Cross. The company also put on an extra service to help Gateshead FC fans return from London following the FA Trophy final which the Heed won on penalties.

Oh...and staying with the theme of extra services, Lumo is looking to the future. The company is aiming to launch a host of new services and new destinations.

First-up are plans for a new early departure from Newcastle and an additional return journey from London King's Cross. This will add a staggering 277,000 seats each year and see an overall increase of 15 per cent in the Lumo capacity.

Lumo is also hoping to extend some of its Edinburgh – King's Cross services across Scotland to begin and end in Glasgow.

Another route under discussion is between Rochdale and London, reviving a route which was closed in 2000. Lumo trains would call at Manchester Victoria, Eccles, Newton-le-Willows and Warrington Bank Quay before heading non-stop to London Euston.

Lumo will also continue to work closely with local organisations along its routes. For example they work closely with Newcastle Falcons, Newcastle Eagles, Northern Pride, Newcastle College, the Donzoko brewery, Beamish Museum and Tanfield Railway to name just a few. You'll find locally sourced products on their services with tea from Ringtons, Train beer from Donzoko, a specially commissioned single malt scotch whisky thanks to a new partnership with Holyrood Distillery in Edinburgh and, if you're feeling seriously peckish, why not tuck into a choice of stotties from Newcastle's Big River Bakery.

And Lumo never forgets those people who may need a bit of help. Every year they choose a charity to support. Their charity partner for 2024/25 is The Charlie & Carter Foundation which was launched in South Shields in 2013 to provide support to the parents of children with life limiting illnesses. Well done Lumo.

**For more information on what Lumo has to offer and to catch-up on departure times, log onto their website [www.lumo.co.uk](http://www.lumo.co.uk)**

**You'll also find details about things to do and places to visit in all of the Lumo destinations.**

# Train the Trainer

*Stay legal and get your message across*

**Most of you reading this will probably have undergone some sort of training. It might have been at the start of your career or it may have been an update on some new skills.**

**You may now be at the point of wanting to start training other people...show them what to do and, probably more importantly, what not to do.**

You may also be a business owner where employees need training or perhaps it is part of the requirements for being allowed to do whatever it is they do.

But, who is doing the training?

Is the trainer fully qualified?

Are they...and therefore you...fully compliant with the latest laws and regulations?

Thankfully there is a company, based here in the North East on the Newcastle Business Park, who can help.

ATC Training was formed during the COVID pandemic lockdown when Andrew Cumiskey suddenly found that things became rather quiet. He was working for Jet.com as General Manager of Ground Operations Training, and as with all airlines, flights were grounded and most employees furloughed.

“Having worked in senior training roles for various companies, I know how much work it takes to balance training requirements and operational needs and find a reliable training provider,” said Andrew. “Training is something that can often be taken for granted, but the success of a business can rely on it, and it’s usually a legal requirement. A company may have someone incredibly capable of training others, but are they qualified? If they aren’t, companies risk issues with insurance and credibility if something goes wrong.”

Consequently, Andrew decided to put his years of experience into practice and formed ATC Training.

“We now offer over 50 courses, with half of those aimed at those involved in training and assessment. They apply to anyone who provide training to other people, and great development for someone considering moving into a training or assessor role. The courses are available as distance learning self-study, or remote online with a tutor. Some of them can be done in a matter of days if you devote sufficient time. You can spread the course over a few weeks...you can even take an entire year. We can visit companies and provide training sessions in a classroom and can tailor courses to fit what a company is looking for.”

And don’t forget, all staff and volunteers should receive training in basic workplace safety and compliance topics. ATC Training also offers a simple

and affordable way to ensure companies meet their legal training obligations.

So what sort of courses are available?

ATC Training specialises in training tutors and assessors in the education sector as well as workplace trainers. They also provide a range of specialised aviation industry courses. If you have a business in those areas, you need to take note.

A typical course would be a Level 3 Award in Education and Training (RQF). This is a nationally recognised train the trainer and teaching qualification which is suitable for those starting a career in the FE and skills sector, or working as a workplace trainer.

Another popular course is the Level 3 Certificate in Assessing Vocational Achievement (RQF), known as CAVA. This is intended for those who assess both competence in the workplace and vocational skills, knowledge and understanding in the classroom or training environment. Other assessor qualifications are also available.

Andrew also combined his aviation experience with the success of the teaching and assessor qualifications to launch an exclusive Aviation Train the Trainer Certificate and Aviation Assessor Certificate, with students now enrolled worldwide.

ATC Training can also assist organisations keep their staff safe and compliant with induction and refresher training, with a 5-course business essentials package covering the basics of H&S, Data Protection and Equality.

In other words, if you own or run a business, you need to ensure that your staff are fully trained...and that the person doing the training is fully qualified.

And, because the majority of courses can be completed online, it means this North East company can operate all over the world...which they do.

The best idea is to check out their website, [www.atctraining.co.uk](http://www.atctraining.co.uk) where you’ll find details about all of the courses.

**Alternatively, get in touch with Andrew and his team by emailing [info@atctraining.co.uk](mailto:info@atctraining.co.uk) or call 0333 444 9526.**



“

*...Training is something that can often be taken for granted...*

Andrew Cumiskey



## Rycroft Glenton Corporate Finance welcomes Conor Quinn

Rycroft Glenton Corporate Finance (RGCF) has appointed Conor Quinn as a new Corporate Finance Executive, strengthening its team of expert dealmakers and enhancing its advisory capacity to meet growing client demand.

Conor, 25, from Northern Ireland, is a newly qualified ACA and joins RGCF from KPMG Newcastle, where he gained valuable experience in audit.

Conor's appointment is part of RGCF's ongoing strategy to build a robust team capable of supporting its diverse and expanding client base, which currently comprises 29 corporate finance, transactional tax, and advisory professionals.

This growth is attributed to RGCF's expertise, client-focused approach, and strong relationships with stakeholders, including privately owned business shareholders, private equity houses, debt funds, and tertiary lenders.

Conor Quinn said: "This is a fantastic opportunity to be part of such a dynamic corporate finance boutique. RGCF is highly active and supportive of its team, and I look forward to contributing to a wide range of transactions across multiple sectors."

Carl Swansbury, Partner and Head of Corporate Finance at RGCF, said: "Conor's appointment reflects RGCF's continued growth and our ability to attract talented professionals who can develop their careers with us. We remain committed to building a team that delivers the highest level of service to our clients while providing opportunities for personal and professional advancement."



## Johnston Carmichael optimistic for 2025

Leading UK accountancy and business advisory firm Johnston Carmichael is looking ahead to 2025 with optimism for the North East business community, following the first Labour Autumn Budget in 14 years. The firm's Newcastle office has seen increased demand for expert guidance in tax planning, investment, and strategic growth, as businesses across the region adapt to the evolving economic landscape.

Paul Shields, Partner and Head of Johnston Carmichael's Newcastle office, reflected on the impact of the Budget and the firm's role in supporting the region's businesses. He said: "The Budget has brought some challenges which we can't shy away from, especially around changes to taxation and investment opportunities. It's really prompted businesses to reassess their strategies, and we've had more enquiries from companies looking for support in adapting to these new challenges and building resilience. With our team's strong sector expertise and deep understanding of the local landscape, we're well placed to provide tailored advice that helps businesses not just navigate these challenges but thrive."

He added: "We're excited to continue to grow in 2025 and keep supporting our region's brilliant businesses. The North East is home to thriving sectors like engineering and manufacturing, food and drink, property, and technology, and we're proud to play a part in their success."

## Double promotions for Hay & Kilner

North East based full service law firm Hay & Kilner, is pleased to announce a duo of promotions, demonstrating their commitment to supporting future talent.

Ben Jackson has been promoted to Senior Associate in the corporate team and Bethany Herbertson to Associate in commercial disputes.

Ben provides specialist advice to a range of clients, across a variety of sectors, on all corporate aspects of transactional work with a primary focus is on corporate mergers and acquisitions. As the firm's Data Protection Officer, he also provides advice and training to clients on all aspects of data protection compliance, including internal and external policies.

Bethany undertakes work across a range of areas including commercial litigation, professional negligence, contentious probate and intellectual property disputes. She is also chair of the firm's CSR committee, sits on the Graduate Recruitment committee and oversees the work experience within the firm for those aged 16-18 years' old.

Jonathan Waters, who joined the firm as a trainee and worked his way up through the ranks before being appointed as Managing Partner at Hay & Kilner in 2016, said:

"I'm delighted to congratulate Ben and Bethany on their recent promotions. They bring a wealth of experience to the role and their promotions are testament to their hard work and dedication. These promotions reflect the importance we place on delivering the best service possible to our clients across the region."



"Like me, Ben and Bethany both trained with Hay & Kilner so it is very rewarding to see them advancing their career with the firm and reflects the importance we place on growing and investing in our own talent."



Where sharp minds meet  
We're local, we're national, and  
we're all connected.





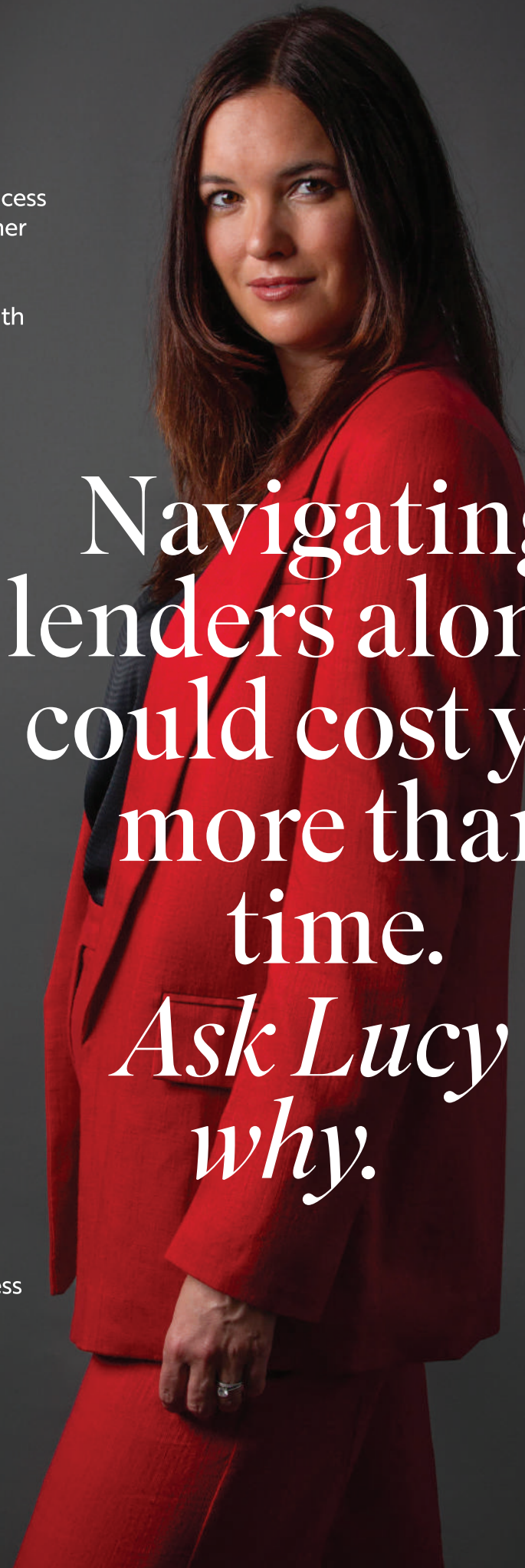
A good finance broker simplifies the funding process for you. As a business owner or property investor, do you have the time to research and negotiate with multiple lenders? It's a time-consuming task. We handle it for you, presenting the right information to lenders to give you the best chance of success.

If one lender declines your application, starting over with another can be frustrating and time-consuming. We take that hassle away, saving you time and effort.

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When dealing with high-value transactions, finding the right lender is crucial. It can mean the difference between success and failure.

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more than  
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*Chris Ferguson (front), director and head of recovery & restructuring at RMT, and KSA Group founder and managing director Keith Steven with (back, from left) Eric Walls of KSA Group, Stephen Slater of RMT, Iain Campbell of KSA Group and Mike Pott of RMT*

## RMT Accountants growing business recovery sector presence with KSA Group Acquisition

RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, part of the Sumer Group, is set to grow its presence in the business recovery and insolvency sector after completing the acquisition of a specialist restructuring practice for an undisclosed sum.

**RMT has acquired the KSA Group, which specialises in pre-insolvency solutions and works with the directors and owners of struggling businesses to effect rescues often without the need for a formal insolvency process.**

The 15-strong KSA team, which includes four directors and two Licensed Insolvency Practitioners, is staying in post, with the combined restructuring team being led by RMT director and head of recovery & restructuring, Chris Ferguson.

KSA has offices in Berwick-upon-Tweed, Gateshead, Edinburgh and London, and was one of the first UK insolvency practices to take a digital approach to delivering its services, with the [www.companyrescue.co.uk](http://www.companyrescue.co.uk) portal it first launched in 2001 providing a range of free information and advice to business owners who are looking for help.

It is also nationally renowned in its use of Company Voluntary Arrangements (CVAs) for small and medium sized companies, with more than £31m being returned to their

clients' creditors and HMRC through KSA's CVA work.

The deal marks RMT's third acquisition since it became part of the Sumer Group, the UK's leading mid-market accountancy practice for SMEs, and made growth by acquisition a key part of its commercial strategy.

RMT completed the acquisition of rural and agricultural specialists McCowie & Co in late 2023, while it joined forces in the summer with Durham-headquartered Ribchesters Chartered Accountants, which now operates as RMT Ribchesters.

Chris Ferguson, director and head of recovery & restructuring at RMT, says: "Much of the work done by insolvency professionals goes under the radar, with pre-emptive support and advice helping to save hundreds of companies and thousands of jobs across the UK every year without the need for a formal insolvency process.

"KSA has a particularly strong regional and national reputation in this respect, with the team's skills and experience complementing

RMT's existing recovery and insolvency offering extremely well.

"The increased resources that the combined team provides will enable us to widen the reach of our business rescue and restructuring work, both within the North East and across the UK.

"This is the latest example of how becoming part of a nationwide organisation like Sumer, with a clear strategy for growth, is providing us with opportunities to bring in additional expertise which enhances the services we offer to our clients."

Keith Steven, founder and managing director at KSA Group, adds: "Our long-term success has been based on working directly with owners and directors to provide a holistic picture of the options available to their struggling businesses and then delivering the support and advice they've needed to find the best way to move forward.

"Becoming part of a larger group will provide continuity for our expert team and a range of new opportunities, and we're excited to be moving into this next stage of our business's development."

RMT Accountants & Business Advisors provides the full range of financial and business advisory services through its specialist teams, and works with companies of all sizes within and outside the North East, as well as internationally.

Sumer is the UK and Ireland's leading mid-market accountancy practice, delivering professional support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and employs over 2,000 staff across more than 40 offices.

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



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& COMPANY

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## RMT Accountants & Business Advisors celebrates 70th Anniversary

More than 160 clients, contacts and friends of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors gathered in central Newcastle to celebrate the practice's 70th anniversary in style.

The event, held at the iconic Barluga on Grey Street, was also marking the end of another successful year for the Gosforth-based firm and helped to recognise the many achievements of its clients and contacts over the last 12 months.

Mike Pott, managing director at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, says: "We've had a real landmark year in terms of commercial performance, job creation and the businesses we've been able to bring into the fold, and it was fantastic to be able to celebrate our 70th anniversary with so many clients, contacts and colleagues old and new."





# The Economic Debate of 2024

Andrew Marsh, Chair of Vistage of North East and Northumberland, NED, Entrepreneur, and mentoring facilitator of a number for peer groups for the region's leaders brought an innovative event to the region that went so well, it is to be repeated in 2025. Here Andrew talks us through the event and what you need to do to be on next year's guest list!

**"I'm wondering if any of the Budget conversations around the region gave the injection of positivity that the Vistage members and esteemed guests at our post Budget event enjoyed?"**

"It was an absolute delight to host the Vistage North East economic debate, with Roger Martin-Fagg visiting us as our economic expert guest speaker.

"Roger is a renowned behavioural economist, who combines insight into the financial and policy worlds with management strategy. Specialising in making economic activity, trends and indicators understandable, cut through the jargon revealing what the numbers, market shifts and policy announcements really meant for us and our businesses."

Held at PROTO in Gateshead with media partner, NET, the event was kindly sponsored by Raymond James, Monument and Cascade Cash Management.

Andrew continued: "Following a light breakfast over networking and a warm welcome from PROTO where we were told all about the studio we were holding the event in, John Duns from NET said a few words to celebrate the relaunch of Bdaily following having recently acquired it. He also introduced us to the newly branded N magazine which is brim full of the region's business news.

"I then took to the floor to welcome my Vistage members assembled from my four peer groups and guests invited by myself, the sponsors and NET. It was amazing to see so many decision makers from our region in the room all keen to hear Roger's perspectives the day after the Budget announcement but none of us could have expected the injection of positivity that we received.

"Having met each other to network over breakfast, the first 30 minutes of general conversation had been centred

around what the Budget announcement was going to cost us. There was a negativity and concern around the financial impact for employers and a general feeling that this Budget wasn't going to be helpful for many.

"However, whilst there was a realism in Roger's presentation as he explained shifts and patterns, the overriding message was one that this is best situation we could have been in. His message was that as well as challenges there is a huge amount of opportunity facing us as long as we invest! He covered how our pool of resource is reducing as the working population age groups shrink but helped us focus on how we can work smarter to get results, invest in growth and create our own prospects. He demonstrated economic impact over the years and encouraged us to brave in our decision making.

"He really made us think, which was echoed in the questions from the room as we closed the event on a panel discussion that also included Gary Fawcett of Raymond James, Monument and Dr Emma Black of Cascade Cash Management. Again the overriding theme was to not get caught up the national negativity, especially from media channels or social media, and to focus on cracking on!

"What I took away with me, was the shift in the room's thinking. From concerned to energised. From disappointed to thoughtful. From frustrated to focused. Roger is an excellent speaker – together with the panel there was definitely the right balance of expertise and experience to bolster confidence and re-instil belief that as a region... we've got this!

"I'm over the moon to share that Roger enjoyed being in the North East so much that he has agreed to be held accountable a year from now – save the date for November 13th 2025, when we will re-meet to evaluate the impact made in the coming 12 months!"

#### Feedback on the event included:

"Very Insightful"

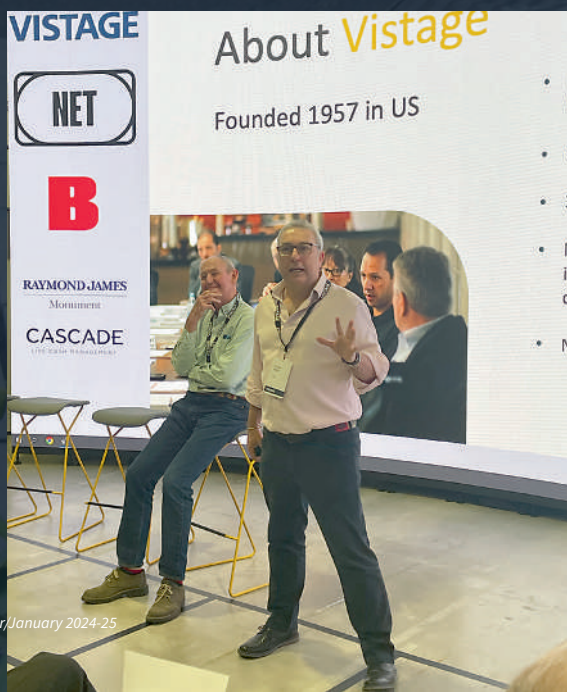
"Really thought provoking - came away feeling that whilst there's challenges if we look at things differently we can also find opportunity"

"A really interesting event. Roger provided a unique insight into the state of the economy, and it was refreshing to hear some positive news too!"

"Thanks for the invite, It was a very worthwhile event, and Roger was excellent with his knowledgeable insights."

"I came away feeling a lot more positive than what's been portrayed in the press..."

**If you would like to attend next year's event and other similar events contact [Andrew.Marsh@VistageChair.co.uk](mailto:Andrew.Marsh@VistageChair.co.uk)**





“

*...It was an absolute delight to host the Vistage North East economic debate...*

Andrew Marsh

# Things to consider before becoming a Trustee



**A charity trustee is a volunteer who is responsible for leading and governing a charity. Trustees are also known as board members, directors, governors, or committee members.**

**Trustees are legally responsible for ensuring that a charity is run to achieve its charitable purposes and benefit the public. They make decisions on behalf of the charity and are required to act collectively. Their role and duties are outlined in the charity's governing document.**

Being a trustee is a great way to give back or contribute to the causes you care about in your community, as well as getting to use and improve your strategic and leadership skills. Here, Peter Neal, founder of Experience Bank Group, shares some information on trustee positions and what you as a candidate should consider before becoming a trustee.

"Did you know that according to the Charity Commission there are 1 million trustees in the UK and around 100,000 further vacancies for trustees – the North East has a plethora of worthy causes and charities, all of which need a steady and dedicated board to steer their strategy.

"Anyone 18 or over can become a trustee, and boards thrive when they have a diversity of age, skills, ethnicity, knowledge and experience. It is, however, generally found that those later in their career bring the ability to commit more time, bring more experience and have a willingness to be accountable for the financial health of a charity. It is a big responsibility not only making decisions, but also ensuring that governance and policies are in place and that the charity is complying with all legal requirements.

"The average time given by trustees is 30 hours a year, but many charities require more, and some less! And of those who are currently trustees, a massive 96% said they had learnt new skills and 84% said it made them happy through purpose. If there's no other reason why, that one reason there sings why becoming a trustee is a great thing!

"So, armed with that knowledge, you decide that being a trustee could be for you, what do you need to know?

"First and foremost, you need to do your research on any charity that appeals to you. Speak to the recruiter and or the organisation, and do your own diligence. Research their financial and compliance history on the Register of Charities, which will give you a steer on any potential problems and its current performance. Speak to current trustees, staff and if possible, the charity's beneficiaries.

"If there are financial concerns then make sure you understand the structure and

any possible personal financial liabilities you may be exposing yourself to. Most charities fall into one of four structures. A Charitable Incorporated Organisation and a Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee bring additional protection from liability compared to Unincorporated Associations and Trusts.

"You should always receive an induction pack and a clear process of appointment. Within that pack, there should be a copy of the charity's governance policy, annual reports and accounts, current Budget and management accounts, an introduction to your fellow trustees, a risk register, board meeting minutes for the previous year and any strategic plans already in place.

"Make sure your eyes are fully open and be prepared to spend time on pre board meeting preparation, attending meetings, attending events, being visible to the operational team, attending other meetings such as planning, extraordinary board meetings and AGMs.

"If all of this entices you, then you can get in touch with me for an initial informal conversation. You can also visit a number of resources to see in more depth what the role entails – The Charity Commission booklet: The Essential Trustee, or the NVCO website."

**You can contact Peter on [peter@theexperiencebank.co.uk](mailto:peter@theexperiencebank.co.uk)**





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# A year in the life of...

## Gary Fawcett

Branch Principal at Raymond James, Monument

### What did you set out to achieve this year?

The team set out to establish Raymond James, Monument as one of the region's most trusted and 'go to' wealth managers. Our ambition is to build a reputation for accessibility, exceptional client service, good client outcomes and support for our local community. Looking after people and their families' finances is not a transaction to us, it is about building long term relationships, which we are very proud of.

### Has everything gone according to plan?

We're very happy with our progress this year and are delighted with what we've achieved. It hasn't been plain sailing by any means, but what matters is how you deal with what's in front of you and come through it in a stronger position. We're really pleased that over 200 clients have chosen to appoint us as their adviser over the last 12 months, most of whom have seen a saving in the fees they were previously paying, and I feel this is testament to the way the team looks after people and the care we take when formulating their financial plans and tailoring the investments to their needs.

It's also nice when people ask where you're from and when you tell them, they say, "you're the wealth management people, aren't you". It shows we've managed to create a presence since launching in June 2023, with a team, which has a collective experience of over 100 years advising clients! We've also managed to support many charitable initiatives, which is important to us.

### What are you most proud of this year?

I'm chuffed to bits that within a short space of time, we've managed to build a wealth management office that puts clients front and centre of what we do. I'm also particularly proud of the recent announcement of the office's five-year support of IntoUniversity Newcastle, which aims to provide life-changing opportunities for disadvantaged young people across Newcastle through education support and outreach. By partnering with Newcastle University to support IntoUniversity, we are making a long-term commitment to help address educational inequality.

Our support will enable the Newcastle East Centre to provide essential services to over 1,000 students annually. The financial backing will ensure the centre's programmes remain robust and accessible, creating life-changing opportunities for local young people.

### What's the best piece of business advice you've received this year?

Caroline Theobald said at the Entrepreneurs Forum Awards in September, that you should "do the right thing, for the right reasons". That has stayed with me and if you follow that advice, the rest should take care of itself.

### What has been the most enjoyable business event you've been to this year?

I'm very lucky to have attended some wonderful and inspirational day and evening events, mainly in aid of charity, ranging from the Newcastle United Foundation Awards, to the Sir Graham Wylie Foundation's Halloween Ball, the Entrepreneurs Forum Awards and An Evening With Kevin Keegan. Buy given my love of golf, having the opportunity to play at Royal Lytham St Annes and The Renaissance Club was a highlight!

### What have you learnt about yourself this year?

I've always thought of myself as resilient, but helping launch and grow a new office, with the various ups and downs which go with that, has put that to the test!

### Describe 2024 in three words....

Exciting, emotional and monumental!

### What are your aims for 2025?

We want to keep attracting clients, who will hopefully enjoy and benefit from our client centric focus, very high levels of client service and competitive fees. We're also keen to further strengthen our financial planning and investment manager team. Our most important aim, however, is to continue delivering for our clients.

### Any New Year resolutions?

I generally don't make New Year resolutions, but one that I must make is to spend more quality time with my family. Its not necessarily about more time, but instead the time I do spend should be purely focused on them. I am guilty of checking my phone when I really shouldn't!

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



“  
*...do the  
right thing,  
for the right  
reasons...*”

*L-R: Gary Fawcett, Alison Hedley, Jason Ryan, James Carrick, Rob Brotherton and Michael Rankin*

## OnPath Energy powering forward

Leading onshore renewable energy developer OnPath Energy is accelerating its project development plans across the UK after securing a new £120m business credit facility.

OnPath worked with NatWest, Barclays, Norway's largest bank DNB and the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC) to set up the new agreement, which will provide the working capital required by the business to make faster progress on more renewable energy generation schemes.

Headquartered in County Durham and with offices in Hamilton and London, OnPath Energy currently has five consented onshore wind and solar energy schemes across England and Scotland in development, with numerous further sites in planning.

It is expecting to make progress on the construction of its consented sites over the coming year.

Simon Fisher, Chief Financial Officer at OnPath Energy, says: "The enthusiasm our lenders showed for the development strategy we put before them reinforced the confidence we have in our future plans and we're excited to be moving into this next stage of our evolution."



"OnPath has ambitious plans to make further additional capital investment in high quality renewable energy infrastructure, which will amplify the part we can play in a net zero future for the UK that will help to lower consumer bills, improve the UK's energy security and deliver a just transition that is fair and inclusive for everyone."

"We will grow in terms of our diversity of projects and technologies, as well as geographically, and will deliver a range of high-quality projects that will contribute to both the UK's journey towards net zero and its essential domestic supplies of secure, affordable green energy."

OnPath Energy owns and operates onshore

wind farms across Scotland and northern England, and has more than three gigawatts of renewable energy generation and electricity storage projects in its pipeline, with more set to follow.

It was acquired last year by the leading global alternative asset manager, Brookfield, which has approximately 34GW of installed renewable energy capacity worldwide and a development pipeline of approximately 200GW of renewable power assets.

Simon Fisher continues: "Being part of the Brookfield portfolio has given us greater access to capital, global relationships for procurement and routes to market, all of which will have a galvanising effect on our pace of progress."

"This new agreement is another part of how we're already seeing tangible outcomes resulting and will contribute towards our long-term goal of becoming the UK's leading land-based renewable energy developer."

"The new government's clear commitment to doing everything it can to make the UK a clean energy superpower provides the ideal context for OnPath's future development and we're ready to make a meaningful contribution to delivering on this goal."

Norton Rose Fulbright provided legal advice to OnPath Energy during the transaction, with Ashurst working on behalf of the lenders.

## Pangea Talent Solutions embarks on strategic acquisition plan

Pangea Talent Solutions, a global staffing firm specialising in the energy sector, has appointed Rycroft Glenton Corporate Finance (RGCF) to advise on its ambitious acquisition strategy.

The company's focus spans battery and energy storage, future mobility, energy finance, supply and commodity trading, and innovative infrastructure markets. Now, with a forecasted revenue of approximately £23 million in FY24, Pangea is well positioned to significantly scale its operations.

The current management team, including CEO Sanjay Ramdhoney, COO Neil Greaves, CFO Jan Truter, CSO Amarveer Pannu and SVP North America Neil Jethwa, has restructured the business over the past year, optimising operational efficiency and establishing a strong platform for growth.

This transformation has set the stage for an acquisition strategy aimed at increasing the company's financial and operational scale, while also entering new sectors such as nuclear energy and cleantech.

Pangea's growth strategy is focused on expanding its geographical footprint and service offerings through strategic



acquisitions in Europe and the US. The company is particularly interested in acquiring profitable businesses generating up to £1 million EBITDA, but it is also open to acquire larger or unprofitable companies if they demonstrate strong Net Fee Income (NFI) generation and potential for profitability.

By targeting businesses that align with its core sectors and values, and working with RGCF, which has a strong M&A track record in the human capital sector, Pangea aims to create a more diversified and robust organisation that can adapt to the changing demands of the energy market.

Neil Greaves, COO of Pangea Talent Solutions, said: "We're excited to embark on this growth journey. By acquiring complementary businesses, we aim to enhance our service capabilities and strengthen our presence in key markets."

Carl Swansbury, Partner and Head of Corporate Finance at RGCF, said: "Pangea Talent Solutions is a dynamic company with a clear vision for growth. Our role is to support the Board with its strategic acquisitions, helping them identify, acquire and integrate businesses that will drive their expansion and enhance their service delivery."

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## CASCADE

LIVE CASH MANAGEMENT

# Develop North and Jaymac Pallet Services deal delivers new warehouse facility and long-term supermarket contract



Jaymac Pallet Solutions' Wesley Thompson and Brendan O'Grady from Tier One Capital at the facility in Faverdale, Darlington

Develop North PLC (Develop North), the Newcastle-based investment fund providing finance to property developers across the North of England and Scotland, has successfully exited its funding arrangement with Jaymac Pallet Services, marking the completion of a new warehouse facility on the Faverdale Industrial Estate in Darlington.

**Develop North, which is managed by Tier One Capital, the Newcastle-based wealth management and fund management specialists, provided £2.15m in funding to support the construction of the 17,000 sq ft facility, which provides storage, repair, and supply of pallets.**

The creation of this facility has enabled Jaymac Pallet Services to secure a long-term contract with a top four supermarket chain, providing its services to its nearby distribution centre, further cementing its growth trajectory.

Alongside the financial support provided by Develop North, the fund also helped build a team of professional advisors to guide the

transition of Jaymac Pallet Services from a growing owner-managed business to a scalable, successful business.

This has enabled the company to secure a commercial mortgage and refinance with mainstream finance provider NatWest.

Develop North's successful exit from the project marks another milestone in its strategy to support the development of businesses across North East England and Scotland. The fund has provided more than £74m in debt funding to 36 residential and commercial projects, creating significant economic growth in the regions.

Brendan O'Grady, Fund Manager at Tier One Capital, said: "We congratulate Jaymac

Pallet Services on the successful completion of their new facility. This bespoke deal is a model example of how alternative lending can create the ideal platform for small businesses to flourish and grow.

"It's particularly pleasing to see the company transition into a larger business, which has not only been supported by the funding Develop North provided but also by the close advisory support Tier One Capital gave. This again shows that alternative lending specialists can provide more than just finance, by actively engaging with clients to help them build successful, sustainable businesses."

Jay Macari, Managing Director of Jaymac Pallet Services, added: "We're incredibly grateful for the support from Develop North and the team at Tier One Capital. They have been instrumental in enabling our business to grow and in helping us secure our recent refinancing. With our new facility up and running, and the excellent relationship we've built with a leading supermarket, we are well-positioned for future growth."

**[info@tieronecapital.co.uk](mailto:info@tieronecapital.co.uk), 0191 222 0099  
[www.developnorth.co.uk](http://www.developnorth.co.uk)**

# The importance of financial and strategic planning for businesses post-autumn Budget 2024

The 2024 Autumn Budget has introduced several impactful changes for businesses in the UK, from increased labour costs to new tax obligations. For many businesses, these changes pose both immediate and long-term challenges that could strain profitability and disrupt growth plans.

**In this shifting fiscal landscape, robust financial and strategic planning is more essential than ever. Planning not only equips businesses to adapt to these specific changes but also builds resilience, allowing them to anticipate future challenges and make informed decisions that strengthen their position in the market. By actively planning around these Budget impacts, businesses can safeguard their financial stability, respond proactively to rising costs, and seize opportunities that might otherwise be overlooked.**

## Key Budget Changes

### ● National Minimum Wage Increase (NMW)

From April 2025, the NMW will rise from £11.44 to £12.21 per hour, a 6.7% increase, aimed at supporting over three million workers. While beneficial for employees, this change brings increased labour costs.

### ● Employer National Insurance Contributions

The main rate of class 1 employer national insurance contributions (NICs) will be increased from 13.8% to 15.0% with effect from 6 April 2025 and the secondary threshold at which NICs are payable will be reduced from £9,100 to £5,000, meaning more employees will fall within the taxable bracket, and increasing the overall cost of employment.

### ● Capital Gains Tax (CGT) and Business Asset Disposal Relief (BADR)

The main rates of capital gains tax will increase with immediate effect to 18% for non and basic rate taxpayers and 24% for higher and additional rate taxpayers. The rate for business asset disposal relief will rise to 14% for 2025/26 and 18% from 2026/27. These adjustments will reduce net proceeds for business owners considering asset sales and could influence the timing of disposals.

## Strategic and Financial Planning Considerations

### 1. Comprehensive Financial Review

Conducting a detailed financial review is a vital first step. Examine cash flows, overhead costs, and capital reserves to get a clear picture of your current financial health. Assess profit margins across different areas of the business, identifying high-cost, low-return segments that may benefit from cost-saving initiatives. This review should help you anticipate the impact of the Budget and adjust accordingly. Consider working with a suitable advisor or using advanced financial tools for deeper insights.

### 2. Budgeting

With changes in employment and tax obligations, revisit your Budgets and forecasts to align with the anticipated increase in expenses. This includes adjusting payroll to account for minimum wage hikes and National Insurance contribution increases. Evaluate each expense category for potential cost-cutting opportunities while ensuring that essential spending related to revenue generation and core operations remains prioritised. Establish a process for regular expense audits, as these help track the effectiveness of cost-saving measures

and identify new opportunities for improvement. Regularly revisiting your Budget will ensure that you remain financially flexible, enabling you to adapt quickly.

### 3. Pricing Strategy Evaluation

Rising labour and tax costs may necessitate adjustments to your pricing strategy. Begin by understanding how your customers might respond to price changes—if demand is relatively inelastic, a slight increase may be absorbed without loss of business. Transparent communication around price adjustments can foster customer trust, helping to retain loyalty as your business adapts to rising costs.

### 4. Tax Planning

With higher Capital Gains Tax rates and adjusted National Insurance contributions, effective tax planning is now critical. Consulting with a tax professional can help you identify reliefs or deductions applicable to your business. Consider strategic timing for asset sales, as the phased increases in BADR rates could influence when to make disposals.

### 5. Employee Engagement

Higher employment costs highlight the importance of fostering productivity and morale within your workforce. Engage employees with options such as flexible working arrangements or performance-based incentives. Upskilling programs can improve productivity and potentially reduce the need for additional hires. Transparent communication around company goals and financial health can also build loyalty, encouraging employees to suggest process improvements or cost-saving ideas. A motivated workforce is more likely to remain engaged, reducing costs and contributing positively to the wider business strategy.

### 6. Scenario Planning

Scenario planning allows businesses to prepare for different financial outcomes, such as further tax changes or unexpected increases in operational costs. By creating alternative action plans for various scenarios, you can address risks with a proactive approach, reducing the likelihood of disruptions to cash flow or operations. Regularly reviewing and updating scenarios can help identify areas of vulnerability and ensure your business remains resilient in a changing economic landscape.

The Autumn Budget 2024 presents both challenges and opportunities for businesses, emphasising the need for careful financial and strategic planning. By reviewing financials, adjusting Budgets, managing costs, and planning for contingencies, businesses can navigate the impacts with confidence. Proactive planning will be essential to maintaining stability and fostering growth in an evolving fiscal environment.

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“

*...robust financial  
and strategic  
planning is more  
essential than  
ever...*

Dan Cooper



*L-R: Peter Oram of PervasID, Sarah Newbould of the British Business Bank, Rebecca MacDermid of Maven and Sarah Slaven of Business Durham*

## Maven invests £750,000 in PervasID

Maven Capital Partners has completed a £750,000 investment in RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) technology innovator PervasID as part of a £3.25m investment round.





**Co-investing alongside leading EIS investors, Parkwalk Advisors, the transaction includes investment from two Maven-managed regional funds: a £375,000 investment from the Finance Durham Fund established by Durham County Council and overseen by Business Durham, and a £375,000 investment from NPIF II Maven Equity Finance, part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II, supported by the British Business Bank.**

PervasID has developed its own patent-protected RFID fixed readers, which offer world-class accuracy over range to track passive RFID tags and is now the first in the market to offer remote tracking capabilities. The business launched its Track Master solution in 2017, a real-time location tracking system with customers in a wide range of sectors including healthcare, logistics, retail and aerospace, which allows for more precise inventory and stock management, as well as the ability to use real-time data to understand customer purchasing insights and reduction in shrinkage (i.e. theft).

The business was originally a spin-out from Cambridge University in 2011, founded by Dr Sabesan Sithamparamathan, an award-winning entrepreneur in the IoT space. With the growth of the IoT industry in the North East and the appointment of experienced CEO Peter Oram in June 2023, the business opened a second base at NETPark in County Durham to take advantage of the skills and expertise within the area's growing RFID cluster.

Today's transaction will help fund PervasID's growth strategy to expand its customer base following increasing demand from large customers in retail and aerospace. The investment will also support further R&D to enhance its software products offering in data analytics to complement its world-leading hardware solutions.

IoT continues to experience huge growth and adoption across different sectors, with retail one of the fastest growing early adopters of passive RFID tags and systems. As the cost of passive tags continues to reduce, more and more businesses are adopting them for a range of purposes.

Peter Oram, CEO of PervasID, said: "We are delighted to close out this first phase of our investment round with the support of Parkwalk and Maven. Maven is joining us at what is a very exciting time in our journey as we head towards a new chapter. Having worked with Parkwalk for 6 years, it's fantastic to carry on our strong relationship as we deliver on our ambitious plans. The growth we have seen in recent years is a testament to our market-leading innovation and we can't wait to use this investment to take the business to the next level."

Rebecca MacDermid, Investment Manager at Maven said: "PervasID's passive RFID tracking technology is world-leading in terms of accuracy over range, and we are excited to work with industry experts Pete and Sabesan as they navigate a business that is on the cusp of rapid growth, with some exciting customers lined up across a range of sectors. With the increased demand for RFID tracking solutions, the company is primed for expansion and we are delighted to be part of this journey."

Sarah Newbould, Senior Manager at British Business Bank said: "NPIF II is continuing to back innovative, high-growth businesses throughout the North by providing vital investment. Whether it's to empower entrepreneurs to expand their customer base or enhance their R&D efforts, this investment into PervasID showcases how funding can cultivate a more innovative and prosperous regional economy."

*L-R: Sarah Newbould of the British Business Bank, Peter Oram of PervasID and Rebecca MacDermid of Maven*



Sarah Slaven, Managing Director of Business Durham said: "We are delighted to support PervasID's journey through the Finance Durham fund, strengthening their position within the thriving technology cluster at NETPark. Their decision to expand from Cambridge last year reflects the benefits of NETPark's collaborative environment and highly skilled workforce, which offer a strong foundation for pioneering companies like PervasID. We look forward to seeing them succeed as part of NETPark's innovative community, helping to drive economic growth and foster cutting-edge developments in County Durham."

***Maven can provide investment to support ambitious earlier and later stage businesses across the North East of England. If your business, or the business you advise, is looking for an equity investment as a solution to fund future growth, please visit [mavencp.com](https://mavencp.com)***



**Sage Wealth Management Charity Ball**

Sage Wealth Management hosted their first charity ball at Alnwick Gardens, with an evening of live entertainment, fine dining, and unique experiences supporting the Alnwick Garden Trust and the St. James's Place Charitable Foundation.

With St. James's Place match-funding, the event raised a total of £12,697, to be split amongst the charities.

Guests enjoyed performances from North East artists' and thrilling stories from Poison Garden Guides. A highlight was an extraordinary dance performance by Dame Allan's Schools' pupils alongside the Sage Wealth Management Grand Cascade. These captivating moments and the enchanting setting made the evening unforgettable for all.







L-R: John Heward Managing Director and Heather Heward Finance Director at JH Mechanical & Electrical with Dave Hawkins from FW Capital.

## Driving growth and boosting the local economy

Joanne Whitfield at FW Capital talks about the importance of supporting job creation and growth and FW Capital's role in boosting the North East economy.

**“By nurturing local businesses and industries, we reinforce socio-economic resilience. This empowers both individuals and communities to realise their growth ambitions which is critical to the prosperity of the region. This is why at FW Capital we put local businesses at the centre of what we do.**

We focus on building relationships which support a business throughout its journey. We don't just provide finance but integrate ourselves as a trusted business partner. We are genuinely interested and passionate about helping local businesses throughout their journey.

One business that has benefited from this long-term growth relationship approach is Stockton-on-Tees-based mechanical, electrical and water management services provider JH Mechanical & Electrical. The business has recently received its fourth round of funding from FW Capital with a six-figure loan from NPIF II-FW Capital Debt Finance to support

growth and the creation of new jobs.

JH Mechanical & Electrical provides a range of commercial installation, maintenance and repairs services for a wide range of clients including Newcastle and Teesside universities and local authorities such as North Yorkshire Council. It also services education establishments and trusts, such as the Northern Education Trust and Vision Academy Learning Trust. The company, which was established in 2013 by husband-and-wife team John and Heather Heward, has seen its workforce grow to 44.

The NPIF II funding will support a significant new contract win in the Yorkshire region, creating 10 new jobs. FW Capital provides debt finance options from £100,000 to £2million through NPIF II - FW Capital Debt Finance which is part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II, with a primary focus Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside.

This is the fourth round of finance that JH Mechanical & Electrical has received from FW Capital which is a long-term growth partner of the business.

Heather Heward, Finance Director at JH Mechanical & Electrical explained: “We've enjoyed fast growth which has led to a significant increase in our workforce over the years and we're delighted to be adding a further 10 new roles to the team.

“This new funding has made a big difference, providing working capital to support a significant new contract that increases our presence in Yorkshire. This is a game changer and will see us double the size of the business. The support from Dave Hawkins and the team at FW Capital has been invaluable. The financial backing means we're well equipped to fulfil new contracts with increased confidence and maintain our high quality of service.”

Dave Hawkins, FW Capital Portfolio Executive, said: “We're proud to support Teesside businesses like JH Mechanical & Electrical with access to funding that is helping them to scale up. Heather and John are valued clients with an impressive business model. Their success over the years has been fantastic to watch and assisting expanding businesses like JH Mechanical & Electrical is what the NPIF II funding is all about. The business continues to demonstrate growth, and this latest new contract win is driving further job creation to the local area and expanding their services into Yorkshire.”

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.

The Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II aims to build on the success of the initial fund, with the purpose of driving sustainable economic growth by supporting innovation and creating local opportunity for new and growing businesses across the North of England.

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

***If you're a business in the North East looking for finance, get in touch to find out more about how we can help. Call 0191 269 6969 or email [info@fwcapital.co.uk](mailto:info@fwcapital.co.uk) You'll also find additional details on website [www.fwcapital.co.uk](http://www.fwcapital.co.uk)***

# Siddons & Co Financial Planning in Ilkley unites with Bowcliffe Wealth Management

Sarah Siddons of Siddons & Co Financial Planning in Ilkley has announced that her St. James's Place practice has joined together with the well-established financial advice provider, Bowcliffe Wealth Management.

Bowcliffe Wealth Management, also a Senior Partner Practice of St. James's Place, is owned by Director Adrian Brook and located at Bowcliffe Hall near Wetherby.

The Siddons & Co Financial Planning offices, under new Bowcliffe Wealth Management branding, will still be based at 50-52 Skipton Road in Ilkley, with Sarah remaining as the Senior Adviser in the practice.

Sarah, an award-winning Chartered Financial Planner, set up her practice in 2008 and has enjoyed a rapid period of growth and success since then.

Her decision to join her practice with Bowcliffe Wealth Management allows her to be able to offer a broader level of service and support infrastructure for her clients.

Sarah Siddons, Senior Adviser said: "Setting up and running my own business these past 16 years has been a rewarding and fulfilling journey and I'm proud to have helped many clients along the way achieve their financial goals.

"As I think about the current rate of expansion of my business and the impact on my clients, my team and myself, I have decided that now is the right time to join forces with Bowcliffe Wealth Management.

"Adrian and I have collaborated regularly over the last decade which is one of the reasons we have decided to do this. We share the same values and principles of strong client relationships and responsible financial planning, and I have complete confidence that as part of Bowcliffe Wealth Management our clients will continue to receive the



Sarah Siddons & Adrian Brook outside the rebranded Ilkley offices

same quality of advice and expertise they have come to expect from me personally and St. James' Place."

Adrian Brook is also excited about this growth development opportunities and said: "We are delighted that Bowcliffe Wealth Management is joining forces with Siddons & Co Financial Planning and we're looking forward to working directly with Sarah and her experienced team. As SJP Partners, Sarah and I are both fully committed to providing an exceptional level of support and expert advice to our clients and this will allow the two Practices to be stronger together.

"We're also looking forward to getting to know Ilkley better. Not only is it a beautiful town but it has a strong and thriving business community which we hope to be an active part of in the months and years ahead."



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SJP Approved 12/11/2024

Senior Partner Practice

**St James's Place**

SJPI4334e\_DS B3 (08/24)



## EMG Solicitors raise £40,000 for charity Headway at annual WonderLAN Ball

Award-winning and B Corp listed law firm, EMG Solicitors, has raised £40,000 for national charity Headway - the brain injury association at its annual WonderLAN Ball.

The sold-out event at The Fed in Gateshead which took place on Thursday 14th November, saw 400 guests from across the UK come together to raise money for Headway's Look Ahead North (LAN) weekend, which provides brain injury survivors and their family members, carers, and volunteers, the chance to enjoy a fun-filled activity weekend at the Calvert Trust in Kielder.

Now in its 9th year, EMG Solicitors' WonderLAN Ball has raised over £140,000 for Headway and the brain injury survivors it supports since the event was launched in 2015. Embracing a different theme annually, this year saw a twist on the famous German festival, Oktoberfest - with the event branded Novemberfest.

Emma Gaudern, CEO of EMG Solicitors, said: "We're incredibly proud to continue our support for Headway and its outstanding work to improve life after brain injury. Every year our WonderLAN Ball raises tens of thousands of pounds to help deliver the charity's annual Look Ahead North weekend; giving brain injury survivors in the North East the opportunity to try new activities and experiences, and to come together to share their recovery journey and support one another.

"Because of our firm's specialism in Court of Protection (COP), a core part of our work is helping brain injury survivors and their families with legal matters. We want to give back to people living in our community and support their ongoing rehabilitation.

"I'd like to thank each and every person that joined us at this year's WonderLAN Ball for being so generous and supporting a charity so close to our hearts. And to all our wonderful sponsors, Frenkel Topping, Adroit Financial Planning, Active Care Group, PLG Consultants, Concerva, Winn Solicitors, and Handelsbanken, who we couldn't run the event without."



## Hay & Kilner advise Indigo Software shareholders on sale to Apteian Inc

Hay & Kilner LLP, the North East full-service law firm, has advised the shareholders of Indigo Software on its sale to USA headquartered Apteian Inc, a global provider of industry-specific software, for an undisclosed sum.

Founded in 1980 and based in Belmont Business Park in Durham, Indigo Software provides specialist warehouse management and supply chain software solutions designed for manufacturers, wholesalers, distributors, retailers and third-party logistics companies.

With significant industry expertise in the food and beverage, fashion, automotive and chemical sectors, Indigo's integrated platform provides users with real-time visibility and management, from receipt of stock, to final product dispatch, enabling its customers to optimise a wide range of warehouse operations. Its clients include Greene King, Puma, Regatta, Tommee Tippee and Walkers Shortbread.

Mark Adams, Corporate Partner at Hay & Kilner, commented: "We were delighted to advise a longstanding client on this transaction, and it was an absolute pleasure acting for the Indigo shareholders - it's fantastic to see the success of a North East company being recognised. The deal is yet another example of the region's impressive output in the software sector and will, I'm sure, complement and support Indigo's and Apteian's ambitious plans to deliver worldwide premier supply chain solutions. We wish them all the very best for the future."

## Burnetts Solicitors joins forces with national charity

**Burnetts Solicitors LLP is joining forces with national charity Hourglass to support its work to end the economic harm, abuse and exploitation of older people in Cumbria and the North East.**

This partnership launch coincides with Hourglass's 2025 Safer Ageing Week, themed 'Take Note' which is shedding light on the economic abuse of older people - a hidden epidemic that has led to devastating financial losses. In the past year alone, over £23.5 million was stolen or defrauded from older people in the UK, with an average of £87,000 taken per victim. Shockingly, 61% of these cases

involved perpetrators who were family members.

Hourglass's recent research reveals the scale of this crisis across Cumbria, Durham and Tyne and Wear. In the small number of calls where a monetary value was identified to Hourglass, these older people collectively lost almost £195,000 last year: £15,000 in Cumbria, £100,000 in Durham, and £80,000 in Tyne and Wear.

Burnetts, which has offices in Carlisle, Cockermouth, Kendal, Hexham and Newcastle, is now a partner of Hourglass's Give an Hour Scheme and contributes an hour of time each week, assisting Hourglass in staffing its free to call 24/7 helpline and offering free legal advice - providing a vital lifeline for older people and their families who may be suffering economic abuse.





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# emgsolicitors

#ImagineALawFirm



# Solicitors of the month...

## Erica Turner and Amie Callan

Erica Turner, head of commercial property and partner, has recently been promoted to head of legal at Jacksons, while chartered accountant Amie Callan is working alongside her as head of operations. Here, they share an insight into their new roles and lives.

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

**Erica:** I wanted to do something where I made an impact on a business or on people – and I also wanted a fast car! I've achieved the latter and I'm hoping people would say I've achieved the former! In my teenage years, I was attracted to being a big city lawyer in London. But studying in Teesside, I realised the North East had so much to offer and wanted to stay. I'm now a firm advocate for training, living and working in the region.

**Amie:** My initial goal was to be a chartered accountant. Once I was in a professional environment, I knew finance was my passion. I love the dynamics and the fast-paced environment. I'm very blessed to have family that have supported me to take my own career path and push and challenge me.

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

**Erica:** I am now responsible for the overall management of the firm as well as commercial property transactions. I really enjoy the people aspect of both roles, engaging with our employees on a daily basis and also engaging with clients to help them achieve their goals.

**Amie:** I love that no two days are the same and, just as some people can lose themselves in a book, I can lose myself in a spreadsheet! I genuinely love all the elements of my role, where employees are at the heart of our business. In my role, it's imperative everyone is happy and knowing I've achieved this gives me great job satisfaction.

### What is your proudest business achievement?

**Erica:** This recent promotion to head of legal. I'm quite proud of how my career has progressed over 20 years. For me, it demonstrates that no matter what background you're from or where you've trained, if you work hard and apply yourself, you really can achieve what you believe to be the impossible. I hope my career journey inspires others.

**Amie:** The recent Law Practice Management Award win at the Northern Law Awards was a clear recognition of the efforts of the Jacksons team. For a chartered accountant working in a professional legal environment to be recognised was a huge achievement.

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

**Erica:** There are a greater number of females in senior positions today. There is a bit more diversity overall and what I would like to see in the future is more diversity and inclusion – at the same time as evidence that firms are promoting people on merit.

**Amie:** The environment has become so much more dynamic and fast-paced, seeing how businesses adjusted to challenges such as covid was really commendable to see.

### What are you currently working on?

**Erica:** The sale of a business park, an energy from waste site and a solar option and lease agreement. It's very diverse, which goes to show all the opportunities there are in the North East. I'm also working with Amie on an employee engagement programme, our five-year plan – and something we can't talk about until next year!

**Amie:** We are working on a number of key employee engagement initiatives and strategy and growth plans for the business, looking at where we can apply process changes that are aligned with our continuous improvement philosophy.

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

**Erica:** Due to our roles, we work across many teams and all the teams are supportive, dynamic and the people are approachable and patient.

**Amie:** Due to the nature of my role, I can work with my immediate team within operations or with employees from other departments. Everyone at Jacksons is passionate, helpful and really engaged.

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

**Erica:** Be more confident! I remember it was only because one of the partners had attended university awards that they realised I had won an award, as I didn't tell anyone. Had I spoken up, I might have got my training contract sooner.

**Amie:** Don't be afraid to make mistakes. I'm a perfectionist, but now I really do believe failure and failing fast is the key to success – but don't make the same mistake twice!

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

**Erica:** At Jacksons, which I hope will be the most successful, diverse and innovative firm in the North East, in a position to hand over the reigns of the overall management of the firm to someone else who shares my ambition, enthusiasm and commitment.

**Amie:** Continuing my role at Jacksons working as part of a team to drive the firm forward and growing and mentoring other people to help take the reigns.

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

**Erica:** Freddie Mercury, Jeremy Clarkson, Ayrton Senna and my husband Graham. Graham and I are motorsports enthusiasts and Graham deserves to meet those people for all the support and assistance he's given me.

**Amie:** My Grandpa and Gran who have sadly passed away – they were big advocates for me in terms of my professional development. Celine Dion for a bit of karaoke and my husband Andrew – who would do the cooking! He's such a big part of my journey so I think it's only fair for him to be involved!

### How do you unwind outside of work?

**Erica:** Graham and I have a camper van and two German Shepherds, Loki and Vader, and we head off to the moors and spend time in the countryside.

**Amie:** With a toddler at home, not much! But seeing his face light up when I come into the room or hear him belly laugh makes the most difficult of days seem worthwhile.

### Favourite book and boxset?

**Erica:** I like Stephen King's *The Shining* and my favourite boxset is *Breaking Bad*.

**Amie:** My favourite boxset is *Downton Abbey* and my favourite book is Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight*.

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





“

*...I love that no two days are the same...*

“

*...I hope my career journey inspires others...*

L-R: Amie Callan and Erica Turner

## Group consultation not needed for “small-scale” redundancy, but “small-scale” to be redefined

Nathan May-O’Brien is a Solicitor at specialist employment law firm, Collingwood Legal. Nathan considers recent developments impacting the law concerning redundancies.



Nathan May-O'Brien

If an employer proposes to make 20 or more employees redundant at one establishment within 90 days, they are required to “collectively consult”. This may involve consulting with an established union or electing appropriate representatives where there is no such established union. Such collective consultation often requires the employer to consult with the workforce as a “group” (through the union or representatives) in addition to individual consultation with impacted employees.

It was previously understood, however, that where fewer than 20 employees were at risk of dismissal, an employer did not need to consult with the impacted employees as a group but could instead consult with the affected employees individually. However, an Employment Appeal Tribunal (“EAT”) decision threw this into question.

### EAT tips the scales

*De Bank Haycocks v ADP RPO UK Ltd* concerned a Claimant in a team of 16 employees. The Claimant was made redundant. The Claimant challenged the redundancy selection criteria and the lack of consultation over his scores in an unfair dismissal claim. The Claimant’s claim was unsuccessful at the Employment Tribunal, but the Claimant appealed.

The EAT allowed the Claimant’s appeal holding that there was no good reason why “general workforce consultation” about the redundancy proposal had not been carried out. It suggested general workforce

consultation reflected “good industrial relations” and failure to conduct such consultation would mean any subsequent dismissal was likely unfair. The EAT found that the Claimant’s dismissal was unfair.

### Court of Appeal rebalances

The Court of Appeal (“CoA”) reversed the EAT’s decision on appeal. It held that the EAT was wrong to suggest “small-scale” redundancies in non-unionised workforces required general workforce consultation as a requirement of good industrial relations. This was for several reasons including uncertainty over what a general workforce consultation would require or how such consultation would be effective when the group of employees has no representative to represent their interests.

### Redefining a “small-scale”

The decision of the CoA reaffirms the previous understanding that group consultation is not required for a fair redundancy process where fewer than 20 employees are impacted at the same establishment within 90 days.

However, the Labour Government’s Employment Rights Bill proposes to make group consultation in a redundancy situation more likely. The law has historically been interpreted so that the need to collectively consult is determined by the number of

employees impacted at a single workplace rather than a business as a whole. The Employment Rights Bill looks to change this so that where the numbers across a business reach 20 or more, the obligation to collectively consult will be triggered.

The impact of this proposal is that employers with multiple offices will need to ensure that they keep records of redundancies and dismissals across the business and ensure there is communication between offices so that an employer can prepare to collectively consult if necessary. The obligations in a collective consultation are more onerous than those of individual consultation and this change will mean it is more likely that these obligations are triggered.

We do not expect these proposals to come into force until 2026, but employers would be wise to prepare for this change, not least because of the proposed increase in the penalty for failure to comply from a maximum of 90 to 180 days gross pay per impacted employee.

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

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## The way the cookie crumbles: your guide to cookies and the law

Cookies are an essential feature of the internet as we know it, but they're still misunderstood by many, especially where the law is concerned. To cut through the confusion, the data protection experts at Muckle LLP answer some common questions about cookies.

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**If your organisation has a website, you will likely have heard of 'cookies' (and not the chocolate chip kind).**

Cookies play an important role in the digital ecosystem and can have massive benefits to your organisation's digital marketing efforts. However, to make sure you're leveraging cookies without breaking the law, you first need to understand what cookies are, how they work, and the legislation that applies.

**What is a cookie?**

A cookie is a small file of letters and numbers that is stored on a person's browser or computer hard drive after they view a website page.

Cookies store certain information about your website's users and, as a result, enable your organisation to better understand customer preferences, optimise your website's functionality, and target adverts more effectively.

**Which laws govern cookie use?**

The use of cookies in the UK is primarily governed by the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations (PECR), which sits alongside the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR.

Depending on what type of cookies you collect and their purpose, you will need to meet requirements from both PECR and UK GDPR.

**How many types of cookies are there?**

Although there is no definitive list of the different types of cookies, cookies can be categorised in various ways. Some of the most common are:

- Essential and non-essential.
- First-party and third-party.

**What are essential and non-essential cookies?**

Essential cookies, sometimes referred to as 'strictly necessary', are required for your website and its services to work properly. An example of an essential cookie is storing a user's login information to keep them logged in whilst browsing different pages of your website.

Non-essential cookies include:

- Performance or analytical cookies provide useful information about how people use your website, for example the most popular pages or products.

- Targeting or advertising cookies allow you to show adverts tailored to a particular user based on their online activity, such as browsing history.

Essential cookies are generally exempt from PECR and GDPR rules, whereas non-essential cookies are not.

**What are first and third-party cookies?**

First-party cookies are created and stored by your website server only. Examples of first-party cookies include storing and remembering login details or remembering items in a customer's shopping basket. These are often seen as the 'good' types of cookies, as they can be helpful to both businesses and service users.

Third-party cookies are set by a site other than the one you are visiting which enables, for example, the creation of a browsing history.

As a result, users can be targeted with bespoke information based on this browsing history, usually advertising.

**How can I ensure my organisation is cookie-compliant?**

The main issue we see is that many organisations do not realise that they must identify the cookies they use, their purpose and retention period to their website users.

In addition, websites should enable users to set their cookie preferences (as consent under PECR is consent for UK GDPR). Consent is required for all but a few essential cookies, but many websites do not allow proper preference setting.

However, there is no cookie-cutter approach to compliance. Although the rules and regulations are simple in principle, how they are applied is very much up to organisations.

This, coupled with ever-changing data protection laws, means it's essential to get the right legal advice.

**For more information on data protection law, including cookies, contact Alex Craig using 0191 211 7911 or [alex.craig@muckle-llp.com](mailto:alex.craig@muckle-llp.com)**



## Exploring every avenue

Over the years, Mincoffs Solicitors' residential conveyancing offering has grown from a department of two into one of the largest teams of its kind in the North East.

**From assisting investors in managing their property portfolios to supporting a young couple purchasing their very first home, no two days in the residential conveyancing team at Mincoffs are the same.**

At its offices at Jesmond's Osborne Terrace, the department is now home to a 30-strong team led by partner Emma Liddle.

The team work across the full spectrum of property matters, including buying or selling a house or flat, re-mortgaging, buy-to-let company transactions, transfer of equity, property auctions and equity release, among others.

But the high calibre of the team is made most evident through their skill in handling complex matters.

While a regular day at the office may involve a straightforward property purchase, it could just as easily bring in a matter requiring the

team to review covenants, easements, land obtained by way of adverse possession or, frequently, a Tyneside flat lease needing to be corrected.

With more than 150 years of experience within the team and further recruitment planned for the near future, the conveyancers at Mincoffs have a huge wealth of knowledge to draw from.

Aside from recruiting new members of the team, growth is a key pillar of the department itself – supporting a number of staff through professional qualifications to progress as chartered legal executives or solicitors.

Additionally, over the last few years, the firm has cultivated and maintained a reputation for its work in the residential investment space.

Emma leads the residential investment team at the firm alongside partner and head of real estate, Ryan Bannon, with a diverse range of experience from a multi-disciplinary team including residential conveyancing, real estate and dispute resolution.

Together, they provide an integrated service to clients, advising on property finance, buying and selling residential portfolios, leases, tenanted properties, property litigation, and management of investment portfolios and mixed-use properties.

Partner and head of residential conveyancing, Emma Liddle, prides herself on the fact her team goes above and beyond to support their clients.

“Whether a client is experienced or a

first time investor, the team take time to understand the needs and complexities of each particular matter to ensure a first class service,” she said.

“As we deal with such a wide range of clients, from a buy-to-let investor who has bought 100 properties to an individual who is buying and selling for the first time in 40 years, we tailor our advice and approach to make sure that the clients are comfortable and aware of how the transaction is progressing.

“Understandably some clients need a little more guidance than others – including our oldest first time buyer, who was 99 – and we’re always happy to spend the extra time to try and reduce stress and ensure our clients are acting with confidence.”

The residential property team have the Conveyancing Quality Scheme standard from the Law Society which requires certain protocols to be followed in order to achieve a more streamlined approach for clients.

Mincoffs Solicitors has provided expert legal services and advice across the North East and beyond for more than 75 years and has a team of more than 100 at its Jesmond offices.

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

**For more information, call Mincoffs on 0191 281 6151 or email [enquiries@mincoffs.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@mincoffs.co.uk) [www.mincoffs.co.uk](http://www.mincoffs.co.uk)**

# Illuminating Protection: How registered designs secured M&S's festive innovation



Dominic Elsworth

**Earlier this year, the Court of Appeal confirmed that the design of Aldi's light-up gin-based liqueur, sold in the run-up to Christmas 2021, infringed M&S's registered designs of a similar product.**

The M&S bottles, introduced in 2020, featured decorative elements such as edible gold flakes suspended in the liqueur to create the appearance of a snow globe, winter-themed silhouette designs on the exterior of the bottle, and an integrated LED light in the base to illuminate the contents. M&S protected this design with a series of UK registered designs.

Aldi released a similar product in 2021, which also included edible gold flakes, a built-in light, and a design of wintery tree silhouettes, prompting M&S to launch a claim of registered design infringement.

Whilst the term of a design registration is limited to 25 years, design registrations can be cheaper and easier to obtain than trade mark registrations and also have potential advantages in infringement cases, particularly in relation to lookalike products. For trade mark infringement claims, there is a requirement to demonstrate a likelihood of confusion on the part of the consumer, which can be difficult since a consumer shopping

in Aldi is unlikely to be confused as to the brand origin of the product. There is no requirement to show consumer confusion in relation to registered designs.

When bringing a registered design infringement action, there is no requirement to show that the design is copied; the assessment is whether the design creates the "same overall impression" on an "informed user" who is said to be a particularly observant user of the product in which the designs are intended to be incorporated.

This case highlights the advantages of having a variety of different IP rights in place to protect products and packaging. Registered designs can be a very effective means to protect innovation, maintain a competitive edge, and strengthen brand identity.

Businesses thinking about their approach to design registrations, whether they have existing portfolios or are considering registering new designs may be able to avail themselves of the UK IPO's IP Advance programme which provides targeted support to innovative, high growth potential SME's.

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

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## Planning for Life's Changes: Why regularly reviewing your Will matters

Life can be unpredictable, and over time, changes in family circumstances, finances, and even personal priorities can reshape what we want for the future.

**As a private client solicitor at Sweeney Miller Law, I work closely with clients navigating these transitions, and one of the most frequent topics we discuss is the importance of keeping their Will and estate plans up to date.**

A Will is one of the most significant documents you'll create; it reflects how you want your loved ones to be supported when you're gone. But if it's left untouched for years, it may no longer align with your wishes or adequately consider the people and assets most important to you.

### Why Reviewing Your Will Matters

Creating a Will is a critical first step, but it shouldn't be the only step. As the years go by, many things can change: family members may come and go, assets may grow or be reallocated, and tax laws may shift. Without regular updates, an older Will can unintentionally leave out loved ones, misallocate assets, or even spark conflicts among family members.

A regular review of your Will lets you reflect these life changes in your plans and helps prevent misunderstandings, tax complications, or costly disputes. It's an opportunity to ensure your intentions remain clear and that those closest to you are protected.

### When to Consider Reviewing Your Will

There are certain life events that should serve as a prompt to look over your Will:



Charlotte Cairns

- **Marriage or Divorce:** Marriage can sometimes revoke a Will unless it was specifically written in contemplation of the marriage, while a divorce may affect the way you wish to distribute your estate.
- **New Children or Grandchildren:** Welcoming new family members often brings a desire to ensure they're provided for in your estate plans.
- **Significant Asset Changes:** Major changes like purchasing property, selling a business, or new investments can alter how you want to structure your estate.
- **Retirement:** Shifting from an income-focused life to retirement can affect financial priorities and, by extension, your estate planning goals.

### Avoiding Disputes and Ensuring Clarity

One of the main reasons to review a Will regularly is to minimise the chance of disputes.

A Will is one of the simplest yet most effective documents you can create to ensure

your wishes are honoured and your loved ones are looked after. It's a small investment of time that can prevent significant complications and costs for your family down the line.

Taking the time to update your Will not only protects your intentions but also provides a sense of security for your family, helping them avoid the potential stress and financial burden of misunderstandings or legal challenges.

*If you'd like more information on how to approach your estate planning, feel free to reach out. Speaking to a solicitor who understands these complexities can make all the difference in ensuring your peace of mind. Contact Charlotte Cairns from Sweeney Miller Law's experienced Wills, Trusts and Estates team today by calling 0345 900 5401, emailing [charlotte.cairns@sweeneymiller.co.uk](mailto:charlotte.cairns@sweeneymiller.co.uk) or visiting [sweeneymiller.co.uk](http://sweeneymiller.co.uk)*



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## Employment law: making work pay?

The Labour government's new Employment Rights Bill brings echoes of political events of 1906, with numerous employment reforms, and criticisms that the changes will adversely affect business.

**Max Winthrop, a partner at law firm Sintons and a specialist in employment law, examines some of the parallels and asks whether the changes will be a boon or a curse to British productivity.**

Imagine the scenario: the Conservatives call an election early, only to suffer one of their greatest defeats at the polls. The former opposition then wastes no time at all in legislating to address what they see as the imbalance between capital and labour, despite a media frenzy that the legislation will cripple Britain's competitiveness...

This description is of what happened in 1906, not 2024, but the two elections have striking similarities. The then Liberal administration of Henry Campbell-Bannerman promoted the Trades Disputes Act 1906. Now we have a Labour party with its own new radical legislation: the Employment Rights Bill.

Employment law does not usually feature much in the public consciousness. It did in 1906 because of a notorious case on the liability of trade unions, and it has done in more recent times because of events such as the scandal surrounding the (mis)use of NDAs in sexual harassment cases, or the consequences of "hire and re-fire" tactics as applied by P&O Ferries.

However, the new Labour administration has started the parliament not just with a debate, but with a fully drafted Employment Rights Bill. Although the more dramatic effects will not bed in for at least two years, the new bill promises 28 individual employment reforms ranging from the abolition of the current two year qualifying period for unfair dismissal to creating a new overarching regulatory body – the Fair Work Agency.



Max Winthrop

Any re-set of existing laws will have its supporters – and its detractors. The Deputy PM, Angela Rayner, has said that the government "...is delivering the biggest upgrade to rights at work for a generation, boosting pay and productivity with employment laws fit for a modern economy. We're turning the page on an economy riven with insecurity, ravaged by dire productivity, and blighted by low pay." The opposing view is best summed up by Tina McKenzie, of the Federation of Small Businesses who has called the Bill a "rushed job, clumsy, chaotic and poorly planned."

There is no doubt that the government has given itself a difficult target: to produce legislation that increases job security but is not seen as a bar to increased productivity – or as the government put it, legislation that is "pro-worker and pro-business".

Traditionally, flexibility in the labour market – meaning the ease with which businesses can shed employees – has been seen as an adjunct to growth, and there was some empirical evidence for this assertion when Britain was in the EU: there were a number of firms from countries such as France or Belgium who chose London for their head offices, and today one can look at the USA where employment is subject to termination at will, but economic growth has outpaced European rivals.

So what's next for employers and employees? The short answer is a bit of a wait: it may

well be autumn 2026 before the day one right to claim unfair dismissal becomes law. Even then that right will be subject to potentially different rules during what the Bill refers to as "the initial period of employment".

There is of course more in the Bill's 157 pages, with the position of employees significantly strengthened when it comes to:

- **Statutory sick pay:** no more qualifying days before the entitlement kicks in, and no lower earnings limit;
- **Paternity leave:** this will become another day one right;
- **Unpaid parental and bereavement leave:** these too become day one rights;
- **Flexible working:** not only a day one right, but the request must be accepted unless the employer can prove the request is unreasonable.

Two years is a very long time in politics and what finally emerges in 2026 may be quite different from this year's Bill.

Time will tell whether in future years those rights promoted by the Bill that seem radical or at least overly worker friendly prove to be a boon or a curse to a much-needed increase in British productivity.

**Max Winthrop is part of Sintons' team of employment law experts, advising individuals and businesses on matters ranging from training to tribunals. Find out more at [www.sintons.co.uk](http://www.sintons.co.uk)**

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# The challenges of defending low-value employment tribunal claims

*A Guide for Employers*

In the UK, employment tribunals are a vital part of the legal framework that protects both employees and employers. However, for businesses, even low-value claims in the employment tribunal can present significant challenges.

**While these claims may not be financially catastrophic, they can still cause considerable stress, time consumption, and financial strain for employers. Understanding the difficulties associated with defending low-value claims is crucial for employers looking to navigate this complex and often unpredictable process.**

## 1. The Time and Resource Commitment

One of the most immediate challenges for employers facing a low-value claim is the time and resources required to mount a defence. Employment tribunal proceedings can be lengthy, often lasting several months, depending on the complexity of the case.

For smaller businesses, this can be an overwhelming distraction. Even in cases where the claim is relatively straightforward or the value low, the process of preparing for the tribunal can lead to a significant drain on internal resources, pulling attention away from day-to-day operations and strategic goals.

## 2. The Financial Impact Beyond the Claim

While the value of the claim may be low, the financial implications for an employer can extend well beyond the sum being disputed. Even if the employer is successful in defending the claim, they are not automatically entitled to recover their legal costs from the employee.

Where an employer loses a claim, they may still face legal fees and additional financial remedies, such as for loss of earnings or injury to feelings, depending on the nature of the claim.

## 3. Reputational Risk

Regardless of the financial outcome,



*Claire Rolston*

defending a claim in the tribunal brings the employer's practices and conduct into the spotlight. Even low-value claims can attract public attention, especially if they involve issues such as discrimination, harassment, or wrongful dismissal. For many businesses, the reputational risk far outweighs the potential financial cost of losing a low-value claim.

Employers must weigh this reputational risk when deciding whether to settle or contest a claim.

## 4. The Risk of Setting a Precedent

Employers often face a dilemma when it comes to defending low-value claims: should they settle quickly to avoid the hassle, or contest the claim in hopes of sending a clear message to both the claimant and future employees? While settling a claim can save time and potentially mitigate reputational damage, doing so may inadvertently encourage other employees to pursue similar claims.

On the other hand, choosing to contest a claim may send a message that the employer is prepared to stand their ground, but it risks an adverse tribunal decision. If the employer loses, it could embolden other employees with similar grievances, creating a cycle of low-value claims that may be difficult to break.

## 5. The Emotional and Psychological Toll

For employers, particularly those in small businesses, the emotional and psychological toll of defending a low-value claim can be

significant. The stress of legal proceedings, uncertainty about the outcome, and the fear of potential negative consequences can weigh heavily on employers. This is particularly true when the dispute involves personal matters, such as allegations of harassment or discrimination.

## 6. Navigating Legal and Procedural Complexities

Even in low-value claims, the legal and procedural aspects of employment tribunal cases are often complex. Employers must comply with strict deadlines for submitting documents and responses, and failure to do so can result in default judgments or adverse outcomes. Legal intricacies require expert understanding and can make even simple claims feel far more complicated.

## Conclusion

While low-value employment tribunal claims may seem relatively inconsequential, they can place a significant burden on employers in terms of time, resources, and emotional toll.

For employers, the best approach is often to handle disputes at an early stage, where possible, through effective internal processes, mediation, or settlement negotiations. Being proactive not only helps to avoid the pitfalls of tribunal hearings but can also contribute to a healthier, more productive workplace culture.

**hello@clrlaw.co.uk, 0191 603 0061**  
**www.clrlaw.co.uk**



Tom Clarke

## The Employment Rights Bill: what's changing and how can employers prepare?

The Employment Rights Bill was introduced before Parliament on 10th October 2024 as part of the Labour government's commitment to a comprehensive employment law reform.

**Although the majority of these changes will not be implemented until October 2026, there is plenty employers can do to begin preparing for them.**

**Unfair dismissal:** Arguably the biggest change, the Bill plans to make protection from unfair dismissal a day-one right, subject to a statutory probationary period, meaning that employees with less than two years' service will be entitled to bring an unfair dismissal claim in some circumstances.

Although the details are still unclear, employers will potentially be permitted to dismiss employees within a statutory probationary period without giving rise to an unfair dismissal claim although some formal process is likely to be required. However, employees will potentially still be entitled to bring an unfair dismissal claim in their probationary period if the reason for dismissal is redundancy. The length of the statutory probationary period is likely to be up to nine months, however this is subject to further government consultation. Although a substantial change to the law on unfair dismissal, there remains plenty of time until this is implemented.

**Zero-hour contracts:** The Bill introduces a right for zero-hour or "low-hour" contract

workers to be offered guaranteed hours based on an average number of hours that they have worked over a certain reference period. In an acknowledgement that many workers enjoy the flexibility of zero-hour contracts, the worker is not obligated to accept these guaranteed hours.

The Bill also introduces an entitlement for workers to reasonable notice of a cancellation of or change to a shift, and importantly, a right to payment if a shift is cancelled, moved or curtailed at short notice.

**Fire and re-hire:** The Bill makes it automatically unfair to dismiss an employee for refusing to agree to a change in their contract of employment, with a very limited exception if the employer can show evidence of severe financial difficulties (likely to be near-collapse) and demonstrate that there was no reasonable way to avoid making this change. The fire and re-hire practice is becoming increasingly scrutinised, so this change comes as no surprise.

**Flexible working:** The Bill provides that flexible working will be the default "unless the employer can prove it is unreasonable". This heavily caveated right only really requires the employer to state why the request is

unreasonable, meaning that, in practice, there is no significant change in this area.

**New day-one rights:** Alongside protection from unfair dismissal, employees will gain the right to parental leave (unpaid), paternity leave, bereavement leave and statutory sick pay from day one of their employment.

**Statutory sick pay:** Employees will be entitled to statutory sick pay from the first day of their sick leave, instead of the third, and the lower earnings limit to qualify will be removed.

**Collective redundancies:** Currently, employers only have an obligation to collectively consult their staff if they are proposing to make 20 or more employees in one establishment redundant. The Bill will abolish the requirement for all employees to be at one establishment, meaning that employers proposing to make 20 or more employees redundant across all establishments will be required to collectively consult.

**Sexual harassment:** The new, active duty on employers to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace, will be amended by the Bill to require employers to take all reasonable steps and to extend the duty so that it applies in respect of third-party harassment. Regulations may be put in place to specify these reasonable steps.

### Summary

While these are all certainly changes employers need to be aware of, the most impactful are likely to be the changes to the law on unfair dismissal and the reinforced protections for zero/low-hour workers. The Bill may still be subject to change as it goes through the consultation process, and further detail is still required in order to give a comprehensive overview of its impact.

**For further information contact Tom Clarke, Employment Law Associate at Hay & Kilner on 0191 232 8345 or [tom.clarke@hay-kilner.co.uk](mailto:tom.clarke@hay-kilner.co.uk)**

# SD Legal Services... The North East process serving and rapid tracing company

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They're based in the North East but are nationally respected with a global reach.

'Seven years ago, after spending around 13 years on the road carrying out instructions for other firms, I decided to launch SD Legal Services,' said Simon who previously worked as a Police Officer and is a full member of the Association of British Investigators. 'We are increasingly busy and have carried out instructions for over 400 clients in the past couple of years. By the end of 2024 I expect that the company will have achieved a 65 per cent increase in turnover compared to 2023. We'll also have got very close to...or exceeded...the £500,000 barrier for instructions carried out over the last 12 months.'

'The legal landscape has changed dramatically since I launched SD Legal Services. Law firms are now sending most documents to us digitally which means we are in a position where we can rapidly serve urgent documents anywhere in the UK. Some instructions can be carried out within a matter of minutes. I've had close to 20 years of experience of working in the investigation, process serving and enforcement industry which means I know how to tackle problems for clients head on.'



SD Legal Service's clients come from a wide spectrum of sectors including local authorities, property management companies, housing associations and of course law firms. Simon's experienced team assist law firm departments covering Debt Recovery, Dispute Resolution and Real Estate Litigation as well as Family Law which has seen their North East based agents alone serve 100 Non-Molestation Orders per month for local solicitors in the area.

The best idea is to have a chat with Simon Darby. Call him on 078322 38441 or email [sdlegalservices@btinternet.com](mailto:sdlegalservices@btinternet.com) We'd also point you in the direction of his website [www.sdlegaltd.co.uk](http://www.sdlegaltd.co.uk) where you'll find

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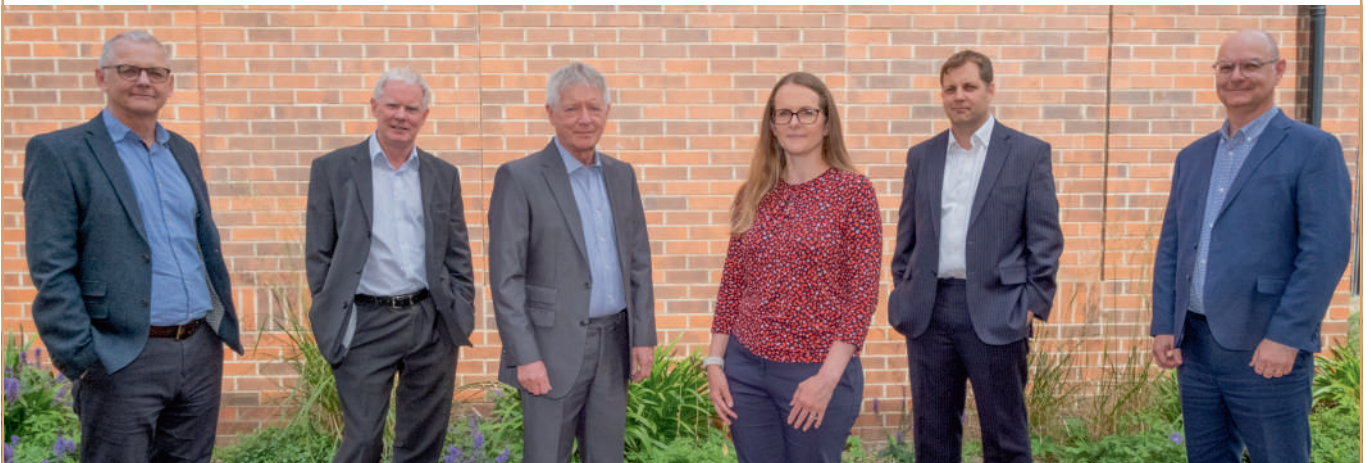
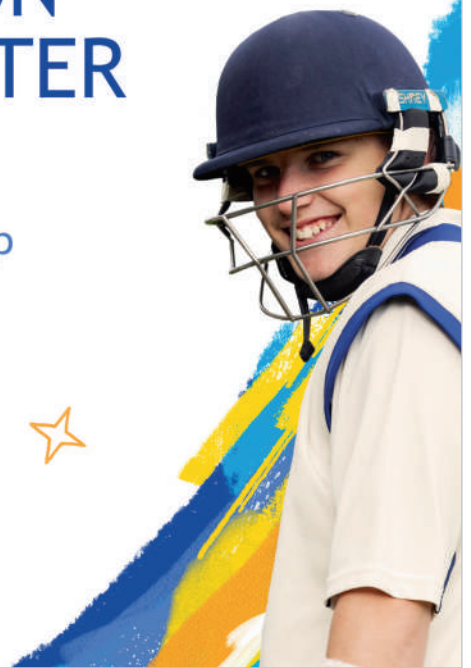
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*For an initial consultation speak to Geoff Maclauchlan...*

## Story Homes makes £15,000 contribution to Friends of the Stockton & Darlington Railway

The funding will be used by the community group to create heritage interpretation boards and rebuild a former waiting room on the railway line remains, allowing the local community to continue enjoying this important historical feature for years to come.

The remains of the Stockton & Darlington Railway, which operated from 1825 to 1863, are close to Story Homes' developments in Middleton St George, and the builder was therefore pleased to support the group with their mission of safeguarding and promoting the heritage of the railway.

The housebuilder made these significant community payments in line with the Planning and Section 106 Agreement\* requirements as part of its developments. £5,000 was donated to the community group as part of Story Homes' previous Paddocks View development which opened in 2016, and £10,000 has been paid as part of the upcoming



Ashwood Grange development, both of which are in Middleton St George.

Next year will mark 200 years since the opening of the Stockton & Darlington Railway and the donations from Story Homes will help the group to celebrate this milestone. Although the £10,000 payment was not required to be made until next year, Story Homes chose to expedite the contribution to enable the group to make best use of the funds ahead of the bicentenary.



## Royal Recognition for the North Northumberland Branch of the National Autistic Society

The North Northumberland Branch of the National Autistic Society have been awarded the King's Award for Voluntary Service for 2024. This is the highest award that a voluntary group can receive and is equivalent to an MBE. They are one of 281 charities, social enterprises and voluntary groups to receive this prestigious award this year, from across the UK and Channel Islands.

The branch was established in 2016 by a group of parents who felt there was very little pre and post diagnostic support for parents and carers of autistic individuals and their families in Northumberland. It is run by a friendly, experienced and dynamic committee who share responsibilities, and provide experience and stability across the various activities offered to the membership of over 500.

## James Cook staff help Teesside charity break fundraising record

NHS staff have helped a local Tees Valley charity break a fundraising record, with the money used to support local families bereaved by a suicide.

The Headlight Project raised over £17,000 after over 140 volunteers signed up to Walk 100 Miles in October. Previously, the record total was £8,000.

They included around 25 kind-hearted staff at James Cook University Hospital, in Middlesbrough.

The Stockton-based charity offers invaluable support, such as counselling to those bereaved by suicide and the delivery of preventative education across the Tees Valley. The Headlight Project organises several major fundraisers throughout the year to help raise money to fund its services.

"This is the third year we've organised Walk 100 Miles in October, and the response was staggering, and twice as many people took part compared to 2023," said Amelia Lily, the charity's Events and Fundraising Co-ordinator.

The Headlight Project also works with schools and colleges to deliver



preventative education as part of early intervention work to help tackle the issue.

"The charity has helped hundreds of people in the Tees Valley during their darkest days, but the sad reality is that more people in our area will suffer the heartbreak of losing someone special to suicide," added Amelia.

"That's why events such as Walk 100 Miles in October are incredibly vital as they enable the Headlight Project to keep providing the crucial support during an incredibly difficult time."

Another key supporter of the event was the Mandale Group, which is one of the charity's corporate partners and who contributed to the event's success, raising over £4,000.



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# Christmas Charity Round Up

People's Kitchen



The “Feed a Friend for a Fiver” campaign helps bring some much-needed festive cheer this Christmas to vulnerable people in the North East. The demand for The People’s Kitchen services has dramatically increased. Behind the scenes, over 300 volunteers prepare and cook meals, manage supplies and most importantly, offer a friendly listening ear to our Friends. Around 250-300 meals are prepared and served every day, with Christmas Day being no exception.

The Kitchen relies entirely on the generosity and good will of the public, local businesses and communities, who donate both food and money. No government funding is received, and they are exclusively volunteer led. Every penny given goes to helping others.

[justgiving.com/campaign/faffaf-2024](https://justgiving.com/campaign/faffaf-2024)

Mind and Sole Charity, supporting mental health and wellbeing, is running its annual Christmas Donation Drive aimed at helping families in need throughout the Alnwick community. The charity is collecting donations to ensure everyone can experience the joy of the festive season.

As the holiday season approaches, many families face financial hardship and uncertainty. The Mind and Sole Charity is committed to making a positive impact by providing essential items such as food, clothing, and toys to help brighten the holidays for those struggling in the community.

“We know that Christmas can be a particularly challenging time for many,” said Chrissy Smith “Our aim is to ensure that every family in Alnwick can enjoy the season, regardless of their circumstances. We invite everyone in the community to join us in making a difference.”



Mind and Sole

Birtley Community Pool



### Become a Corporate Sponsor for Birtley Community Pool!

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Join us in building a healthier, stronger community.

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

Northumberland Freemasons have pushed the boat out by giving several recent donations totalling £7,500 to Hexham Juniors Rowing Club, affirming their commitment to nurturing young talent and promoting community involvement. This support includes an initial £3,000 donation, £500 from Hextoldsham Lodge, and additional contributions of £2,000 each to Jacob Lloyd and Emma Nicholson, two promising young athletes within the club.



Freemasons

Leading Link



Once again, Northumberland Holiday Provision will be at the heart of Leading Link this coming Christmas as the team continue to offer children and their families a range of exciting and enriching opportunities over the school holidays working with a great group of providers and businesses across Northumberland. Leading Link Young Leaders are also gearing up to support a touring panto across selected sites in Northumberland. It's always busy at Leading Link but Christmas is even more so.

# How NCFE is staying focused on its mission



Deborah Jenkins

Following the launch of its latest Impact Report, Deborah Jenkins, Chair of the Board of Trustees at the awarding organisation and education charity NCFE, outlines how it's making a difference for learners, backing innovative initiatives, and influencing wider policy in the sector.

**Everyone at NCFE is very much aware of the purpose of working for an education charity and deeply committed to improving the quality of learning.**

As we enter a new academic year, it's important for us to reflect on what we have achieved over the past 12 months and review our impact on learners, institutions and educators, the education system and wider society.

As a charitable organisation, any profits we make are invested into creating outstanding learning experiences and supporting initiatives that improve the education system for every learner rather than paid to shareholders.

Each of our board members, whether trustee or executive, brings their skills, experience, and passion to ensuring that NCFE remains true to its charitable purpose – to promote and advance learning.

Part of the commitment to the standards we have set ourselves was the creation of our first Impact Report in 2022, designed to assess whether all of NCFE's activities are having the intended outcomes; from delivering learning and progression opportunities to tackling disadvantage and influencing wider education policy.

I am pleased that we're continuing this important undertaking which helps us understand how and to what extent we are supporting our beneficiaries, many of whom feature in this report.

It's heartening to see some of the strengths of NCFE brought to life in this study, including the strong collaborative relationships we hold with stakeholders, our commitment to learners and our investments in innovative projects.

It's crucial that we use the report's valuable data and insights to improve our work - as the world changes, we must ensure that everything we do continues to be fit for purpose. This includes increasing the quality of our resources and further strengthening our reputation and visibility as a leading voice in the sector.

It's always a delight to hear from the learners themselves, no matter what age or stage they're at, about their reasons for choosing NCFE's products and services.

Many point towards employability and the boost NCFE's qualifications have provided in enhancing their CV, building their confidence, or improving their service to customers. Others have more personal reasons, such as a sense of achievement or supporting family.

This Impact Report offers an opportunity to review NCFE's many collaborations, community initiatives, innovations, and investments – working with WorldSkills UK to develop educators through the Centre of Excellence, supporting autistic learners into apprenticeships with the Greater Manchester Learning Provider Network, investing over £1million in assessment innovation, and working with partners across the country.

All our projects are designed to tackle disadvantage, drive forward positive change or champion further education. For the board, which sponsors and reviews each investment, this is a vital strand of our work at NCFE.

As we, at NCFE, continue our journey to being a leader in vocational and technical education, it's essential that we continue to take stock and measure our impact, so that we remain focused on our mission – that no learner is left behind.

**To learn more about NCFE's impact and download the full report, visit [www.ncfe.org.uk/social-impact-report-2024](http://www.ncfe.org.uk/social-impact-report-2024)**



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A year in the life of...

## Grace House

Empowering young people and families through Confidence, Creativity, and Community Support

**This year, Grace House celebrated numerous milestones as we continued our mission to support disabled young people and their families. From hosting a successful Careers Fayre to expanding our youth groups and introducing new therapeutic programmes, we've seen remarkable outcomes in building confidence, fostering friendships, and enriching lives.**

Our Careers Fayre was a standout event, with many young people attending to explore accessible pathways in employment, and continued education. The event connected young people with employers, inspiring confidence and excitement as they discovered opportunities that align with their skills and interests. Employers left with a deep appreciation for the talent and enthusiasm of our disabled young people, while participants gained valuable insights into their potential paths forward.

Our Youth Groups also experienced notable growth, expanding from four weekly sessions to six, with activities that include cooking, Xbox gaming, pool, and crafts. These sessions offer a safe, supportive environment for disabled young people aged 10-18 to socialize, express themselves, and develop friendships.

A highlight this year was a new creative clay workshop, where participants explored their artistic sides. This inclusive, engaging environment has had a profound effect, helping 90% of our youth improve their confidence and communication skills.



For parent carers, Grace House provides two parent support groups, including a specialist group for parents who have recently received a diagnosis themselves. These groups offer a safe space to share experiences, gain insights, and find support from those facing similar challenges. In addition, we've hosted a series of creative sessions for parents, including silk painting, journaling, gelli plate printing, and sculpture. These activities provide parent carers with a chance to focus on their own well-being, reduce stress, and build lasting connections with others in the community.

Holistic therapies have been another powerful resource for families at Grace House. We introduced offerings such as sound baths and Reiki, creating a peaceful atmosphere where parents can recharge and find balance. These sessions, coupled with our family counseling services, have fostered healing and resilience within families. This past year, we provided 899 counseling sessions, with many families reporting positive outcomes in emotional well-being and coping skills. Our inclusive approach ensures that every family member has access to the support they need.

Additionally, our partnership with Citizens Advice has been invaluable for family's seeking guidance on financial support. Through confidential advice sessions, families receive help with income maximisation, benefits, and welfare challenges. These sessions have enabled families to navigate complex financial systems, giving them the support needed to secure financial stability and peace of mind.



Our impact goes beyond direct services, as we work to reduce feelings of isolation and build lasting bonds within the community. A significant achievement this year is that 90% of our participants reported an increase in confidence, which we see as a testament to the impact of Grace House's environment and programmes. These results demonstrate that by nurturing personal growth and well-being, we're helping young people and families develop the skills they need to lead fulfilling, empowered lives.

Grace House is proud of all we've accomplished together this year, and we're deeply grateful to everyone who has supported us—staff, partners, volunteers, and families. With their continued support, we look forward to another successful year of creating a vibrant, inclusive community that uplifts and empowers all who walk through our doors.

***If you would like to contact Grace House please email [info@gracehouse.co.uk](mailto:info@gracehouse.co.uk)***





**The Grace House Glitterball**

Recently, an opportunity for local businesses to come together for a night of 80s fun all while supporting local charity Grace House.

There were over 180 people in attendance on the evening which was hosted by Alfie Joey. Local Facilities management company FM4U LTD sponsored the event after being part of Grace House's recent refurbishment.

Long term supporters of Grace House Richard Reed Solicitors sponsored a table meaning young people who use Grace House could attend on the night.





# A year in the life of...



Great North Run



Mini and Junior Great North Run

## The Charlie and Carter Foundation

Laura Jane Forbes

Charity Fundraising and Events Manager.

### What did you set out to achieve this year?

The main aim for The Charlie and Carter Foundation in 2024 was to raise the profile of the charity and reach out to more families who could benefit from our support. It is heartbreaking to think that we could have helped someone caring for a child with life limiting illnesses, but they didn't receive any support simply because they didn't know about us.

We wanted to host more events to help with this and we have had a year full of exciting fundraisers like the Trek for Charlie and Carter, Snowdon at Sunrise, Great North Run, as well as our own Networking Events – C&C Connect.

### Has everything gone according to plan?

It has not been a smooth ride this year, there have been hiccups along the way! The rising costs and unexpected expenses have hit us hard which means we have to raise more to continue to financially support our families. Because we give out grants to families, we don't qualify for any grants from big funders, so we rely heavily on fundraising and donations. Saying that, since the charity started, we have helped 130 families thanks to the incredible generosity of our supporters.





Trek for Charlie and Carter

### What are you most proud of this year?

We are extremely proud of how all of our staff, volunteers and trustees have pulled together as a team to help the charity thrive and move forward. Even though it has been a tough year we are so proud we can still do what we set out to do in Charlie and Carter's memory.

### What was the most enjoyable event of the year?

Our favourite event this year was the Cookson Royale – Our Annual Ball! We welcomed over 250 guests to the Hilton to remember Charlie and Carter and the families we have supported in their memory. It is always an emotional rollercoaster hearing from Chris and Sarah, our founders, and the reason they set up The Charlie and Carter Foundation and we are so grateful to everyone who attended the event and helped us raise £21,686!

### What have you learnt about yourself this year?

We have learnt that the financial support we give to families is so desperately needed; there is no other support like ours. Families who are caring for a child with life limiting illnesses have so much stress and have to fight for everything, to be able to take away some of the financial pressure is life changing. Parents can be with their child and create precious memories while they can. We can't cure any illnesses, but we can relieve some of the pressure allowing families to be in the moment together.

### Describe 2024 in three words...

Uplifting, emotional and rewarding.

Reflecting on the year is always hard for us. Our families have children with life limiting illnesses, and we know when we support them that they might not have a long life. We have lost children this year, and at that point we can be there for the parents when all of the benefits stop and give them a bit of breathing space with our bereavement fund. This allows parents to take the time they need before they rush back to work.

### What are your aims for 2025?

We aim to continue doing what we always do – providing essential support to families. Alongside that we aim to introduce the charity to new audiences and give people the opportunity to support us.

We have an amazing shop in South Shields filled with pre-loved bargains and we will be working hard in 2025 to increase footfall there to help us raise much needed funds. We're at 18 Denmark Centre, South Shields, so please do pop in and see what we are about!

As part of the South Tyneside pledge, we work closely with South Tyneside Council on the South Shields Market, and our Charlie and Carter's Angels attend every Friday come wind rain or shine!

**If you would like to find out more about what we do at The Charlie and Carter Foundation, please contact Laura Jane Forbes on [Laura@ccfemail.co.uk](mailto:Laura@ccfemail.co.uk) or visit [www.thecharlieandcarterfoundation.co.uk](http://www.thecharlieandcarterfoundation.co.uk)**



Snowdon at Sunrise



The Cookson Royale



## NE Youth's Impact Awards

These celebrate all that is great about the young people and youth sector in the region.

**NE Youth are 90 years old next year and to celebrate the run up to the anniversary they are hosting a number of important celebrations. Their newly named 'Impact Awards' (formerly known as Projects with Pride) are a way of shining the light on the incredible achievements of young people, youth workers, volunteers and projects making a significant impact in their communities.**

The Impact Awards took place at the start of November at the Grand Hotel, Gosforth Park. With 370 people attending, 70% of which were young people from around the region- the atmosphere was electric. For so many of the young people this is THE event of the year where they can dress up, enjoy the glam of the red carpet, sip on a mocktails whilst celebrating the amazing projects they're part of. For many, this is the first time at a formal celebration event.

Jon Niblo - CEO at NE Youth commented: "At NE Youth, we deeply value the contributions that young people make within their youth groups and the wider community. Our annual awards night serves as a vital platform to acknowledge the achievements of young people and those who support them. This would not be possible without the loyal backing of our award category sponsors, and we are especially grateful to our headline sponsor, the University of Sunderland, for their generous support. As we approach our 90th anniversary in 2025, we are incredibly proud to celebrate all

that is great about the youth sector and the remarkable impact it has on young lives."

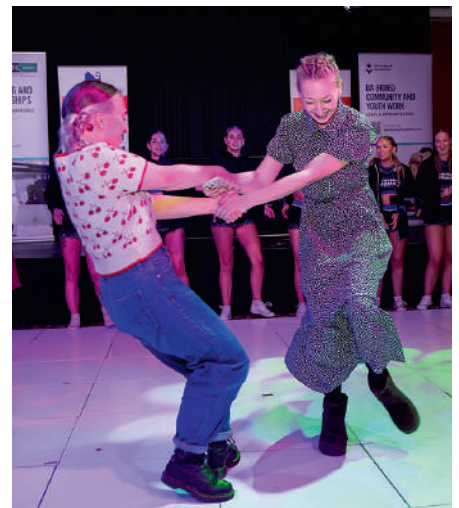
With the new name for the event came three new categories- Mentor of the Year, Member of the Year and the Going Green Award. This year there were a record breaking 118 nominations from all across the region stretching from Alnwick to Sunderland.

The Impact Awards were a lively and engaging evening, showcasing a diverse range of talents! The combination of young presenters from The Activity Den and performances from NE Youth member organisations such as Horizon Cheerleading, Dylan Pederson, Care To Dance, and ALF Hill created an exciting atmosphere.

Sarah Beck, Academic Director of Apprenticeships, University of Sunderland, Main Sponsor of the Impact Awards commented: 'We are absolutely delighted to be supporting the NE Youth Impact Awards. The University of Sunderland has a long history of providing education and training for community and youth workers in partnership with regional organisations in the sector, and last year we introduced an exciting new degree apprenticeship programme, enabling us to work even more closely together. We are fortunate to have received some additional funding from the Office for Students to help us to further develop the community and youth work apprenticeship, and this has enabled us to contribute towards sponsoring this year's awards. At a time when high quality youth work is needed more than ever, it is a great pleasure to be involved with this event and to hear about all the fantastic work going on across the region.'

The Impact Awards truly zoom in on the incredible potential of young people in the North East. NE Youth's commitment to recognising and nurturing this potential remains, ensuring a brighter future for generations to come.

[www.neyouth.org.uk](http://www.neyouth.org.uk)



- Rephrase owner Paul Fraser has spent more than 20 years working in the media for a variety of titles regionally and nationally, including a long stint at The Northern Echo
- Rephrase's range of services can be on a pay-as-you-go basis or as part of a longer-term package
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# CECA North East celebrate the civil engineering sector at Annual Awards and Gala dinner



CECA North East - (The Civil Engineering Contractors Association) hosted their annual gala dinner and Awards last week at the Grand Hotel, Newcastle. 350 members and their clients gathered together to celebrate all that is great about their sector and the night did not disappoint!

networks in transport, energy, water, and communications.

As well as the Awards the CECA North East members raised over £6000 on the night for Heel & Toe childrens charity, making the total raised over the past four years £23,000!

Stuart Miller, Director of CECA North East commented: "At CECA North East we place great value on all our members and our annual awards night provides us with the platform to recognise so many of their achievements. We could not do this without the loyal support of our sponsors. As we head towards the end of the year I'm incredibly proud to once again celebrate all that is great about the civil engineering sector here in the North East, whether that be the people that we employ and train, the way we operate or the projects that we deliver."

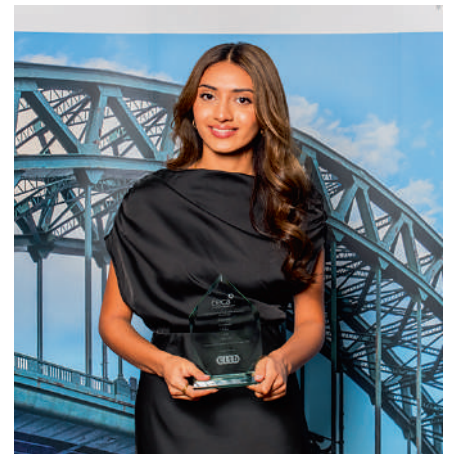
[www.ceca.co.uk/north-east](http://www.ceca.co.uk/north-east)

From the 15 awards given on the night, some of the standout ones included Trainee Quantity Surveyor of the Year, which was won by Megan Waring from Applebridge Construction, and Trainee Civil Engineer of the Year - won by Zara Hussein also from Applebridge and Apprentice of the Year which was won by Richard Stelling of Sir Robert McAlpine.

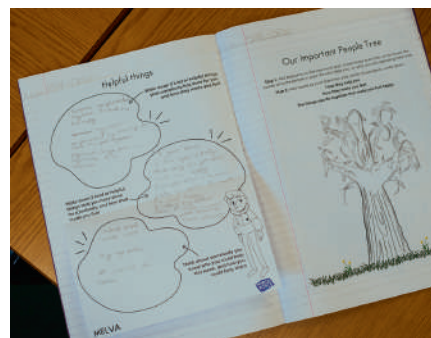
The Lifetime Achievement/Outstanding Contribution Award was won by Stephen Marshall who has recently retired from a career spanning 40 years as a Civil Engineer,

delivering major local infrastructure projects such as the Millenium Bridge on the River Tyne and the Silverlink Roundabout on the A19.

CECA NE represents over 70 members almost 80% of the companies carrying out civil engineering across the UK, ranging from large national contractors to small and medium sized regional contractors. They exist to support and champion the interests of their members who are building and maintaining the UK's infrastructure



# North East businesses tackle children's mental health crisis by supporting storytelling intervention



Photography: Von Fox Promotions

**Four North East businesses have demonstrated their commitment to supporting children's mental health by sponsoring a unique storytelling intervention.**

**Muckle LLP, Ryder Architecture, Sorella Sorella and Square One Law are this year's sponsors of MELVA, an award-winning intervention improving children and young people's understanding of mental health and teaching transformational self-management techniques.**

Developed by creative learning charity Mortal Fools, MELVA is delivered by teachers in primary schools and with older children in specialist provision. Through annual licences, MELVA uses storytelling and activities to help children learn how to understand, talk about and manage their mental wellbeing.

Public Health England statistics show that 1 in 5 young people have a probable mental health disorder, with suicide now the main cause of death in children in the UK.

This generation of young people have experienced uniquely challenging circumstances. During the pandemic many spent long periods isolated, and have grown up during times of political, social and economic turmoil, with factors like the cost-of-living crisis intensifying pressures.

The MELVA programme is designed for prevention and early intervention for all

children, not just those who are already struggling or in crisis. MELVA teaches young people foundational basic skills and the understanding they need to keep themselves well, whatever challenges they might face, to develop emotional literacy, resilience pathways, and healthy, supportive relationships.

Sorella Sorella and Square One Law are new MELVA sponsors this year, joining Muckle LLP and Ryder Architecture who return for a second year of sponsorship.

Roya Talai, Sorella Sorella Owner, said: "We are delighted to support Mortal Fools as our chosen charity for 2025. Mortal Fools, through their Melva programme, support children and young people with their emotional and mental health wellbeing.

"As parents ourselves, we recognise the importance of giving children the information they need to be able to manage and understand their emotions, and to be able to support a North East based charity doing this is fantastic."

Maria Brooks, Director of Operations at Square One Law, commented: "Now more than ever, supporting young people's mental health is absolutely crucial, and Mortal Fools is leading the way with their innovative Melva programme.

"We're happy to play a small part in helping to bring Melva to local schools - by using storytelling to teach practical wellbeing techniques, they make mental health accessible and engaging for children."

Nicola Leyden, Director of HR at Muckle LLP, said: "We are delighted to have been able to support Mortal Fools through its MELVA programme for a second year.

"The work they do in encouraging young people to increase their knowledge and understanding of mental health and connect with a language enabling them to talk about this openly is extremely important and is something we wholeheartedly support through our grant funding here at Muckle."

Richard Wise, Partner at Ryder Architecture, added: "As a business we're committed to helping young people to progress and thrive by supporting education initiatives in the communities in which we work.

"MELVA has never been more relevant. It tackles issues of anxiety, confidence and mental health in an imaginative and engaging way, and we are delighted to be supporting the programme for a second year."

At a time when school Budgets are squeezed more than ever, support from businesses enables children across the region and beyond to benefit from MELVA.

Kiz Crosbie, Mortal Fools CEO & Artistic Director, commented: "Sponsorship from compassionate and civic-minded businesses has enabled us to remove significant barriers for schools to access MELVA, placing effective mental health resources directly into the hands of the children who need it most.

"The more businesses we work with, the more children we can reach. We would love more businesses to invest in MELVA, so we can reach even more young people!"

**To find out more about how your business can support MELVA, visit [melva.org.uk/gift-melva](https://melva.org.uk/gift-melva)**



## 11 North East Local Authorities to join Sunderland City Council in innovative public procurement platform

This October, North East local authorities will transition to Open, a new procurement platform, developed by the North East Procurement Organisation (NEPO), to streamline procurement processes, enhance transparency and aid accessibility for local suppliers.

**The first ever organisation to join Open was NEPO back in 2022 using the system to publish their procurement opportunities, followed by a successful pilot with the first local authority, Sunderland City Council in June 2024.**

Following the initial success with both organisations, on 28 October 2024, the remaining 11 North East Local Authorities will officially transition to the revolutionary new platform. Since its launch, Open has facilitated several procurement projects, with over 7,000 suppliers registering since its inception.

Open marks a major step forward in public

procurement, streamlining tendering processes and enhancing efficiency for suppliers engaging with the public sector. To ensure a smooth transition, NEPO has developed a 12-month implementation strategy featuring a range of activities designed to support the integration of Open across 12 local authorities.

With an average of 6,000 competitive opportunities published annually by NEPO and its members, the organisation encourages the North East's business community, voluntary community, and social enterprises (VCSEs) to join the platform and access vital public sector tender opportunities.

Adam Smith, Head of Digital and E-procurement at NEPO said: "We are thrilled to announce that as a result of the successful pilot, from October all local authorities across the North East will be implementing Open. This milestone marks a huge step forward in streamlining procurement processes, increasing transparency, and driving greater efficiency across the region."

Since its successful launch with NEPO and Sunderland City Council, we've received a lot of positive feedback from users. This is just the beginning of our journey, and we have exciting ambitions and plans to continue improving and further developing Open to meet the ever-changing demands of public

sector procurement head-on."

Glenda Malone, Senior Manager – Procurement from Sunderland City Council added:

"We are thrilled to be the first local authority to adopt Open. Our commitment to improving and modernising service delivery is paramount, and the initial feedback from our procurement team has been very encouraging. We anticipate that this platform will greatly benefit our suppliers and contribute to the growth of the regional economy."

The remaining local authorities—Darlington Borough Council, Durham County Council, Gateshead Council, Hartlepool Borough Council, Middlesbrough Borough Council, Newcastle City Council, North Tyneside Council, Northumberland County Council, Redcar & Cleveland Council, South Tyneside Council, and Stockton Borough Council—will join the platform on October 28, 2024, transitioning all new procurement activities to the system.

If your business is based in the North East and interested in bidding for public sector opportunities, we encourage you to register on Open ([www.open-uk.org](http://www.open-uk.org)). By registering, you'll receive notifications about relevant opportunities and gain the ability to compete for public sector contracts.

[www.open-uk.org](http://www.open-uk.org)

# North East's first physical 'Safe Haven' service sees 182% increase in monthly referrals



**The national mental health non-profit, Everyturn Mental Health has seen a rise in monthly referrals to its Safe Haven service in Northumberland – increasing by 182% since opening earlier this year.**

**Everyturn, which provides crisis services across the North East, opened the Safe Haven in Ashington in April 2024, following a £1 million investment from NHS England and NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB).**

Since opening to the public six months ago, the Safe Haven based at 'The Bothy' in Ashington has seen 528 people referred to the service, with monthly referrals increasing by 182% from April to October.

This surge comes during a difficult time for many people in the region, facing various social, environmental, and economic challenges. Data shows that almost two fifths (39%) of people accessing the Safe Haven are experiencing issues with housing, food, finance, employment, or benefits.

The Safe Haven, which offers a dedicated high-street space for specialist support, has seen significant improvements in the people accessing the service – with 88% seeing a reduction in feelings of mental health distress.

Tracy Bruce, Head of Community and Crisis at Everyturn Mental Health, said: "It is incredible to see the positive impact that the Safe Haven has had so far for people across all of Northumberland and the physical presence in Ashington, has been welcomed as a place for local people to get support.

"We're expecting that demand for the Safe Haven will increase as we head into a winter of unknowns – so it's vital that people who are in mental health distress

know that there is support available to them and nobody has to struggle alone."

Following the initial success of the Ashington Safe Haven, Everyturn Mental Health is gearing up to open its second facility, with a referral-only space set to open in Newcastle city centre this month.

Levi Buckley, chief delivery officer at North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB), said: "Mental health distress can happen to any of us, and we're working to improve the range of services so people can get the right support at the right time.

"The Bothy offers something different – not just help in a crisis, but help with the problem that caused the crisis, like housing, money, alcohol or drugs. The team can also put you in touch with various services depending on what kind of support you need."

***The Bothy in Ashington, Northumberland is open from 2-10 pm, 365 days a year, with or without an appointment.***

***You can find out more at [www.everyturn.org/safe-havens](http://www.everyturn.org/safe-havens)***



## Flourishing in the face of adversity

2024 has been a difficult year for many in the charitable sector, but Northumberland-based Blyth Star Enterprises seems to be breaking the mould. Julie Dixon, Blyth Star's Chief Executive, comments on the charity's "remarkably unremarkable" year.

**As a third sector organisation, where your day-to-day business is so focused on the welfare of others, it can be difficult to find the time to sit down and take stock of the bigger picture in terms of your own success.**

For 37 years, Blyth Star Enterprises has done exactly this, we've kept our heads down and have been quietly going about our business, providing living support, day services and vocational training opportunities for adults with complex mental health needs and learning disabilities. At its essence, 2024 has been no exception, it has been a remarkably 'unremarkable' year, but in an economy where many charities are struggling to even survive, we're grateful to still be here and be able to continue our vital work supporting some of Northumberland's most vulnerable residents.

That's not to say we haven't had our share of newsworthy moments. In the past year, we've enjoyed some wonderful success with our philanthropic activities, raising funds towards two major projects – an extension for our residential apartments in Blyth to create an improved social and skill

development space for our live-in service users, and the creation of a new horticultural learning centre at our Stakeford Nurseries day service. A successful grant campaign also saw the delivery of a new, all-electric delivery van to improve the carbon footprint of our operations at The Woodfuel Centre – our vocational day service which reflects a real factory environment producing woodfuel products.

2024 also brought with it an influx of new commercial partnerships. The Woodfuel Centre is now the supplier of choice for two local restaurants (Davanti Italia in Whitley Lodge and Porky's in Blyth), supplying over a tonne of air-dried logs per week to each venue to fire their respective pizza ovens, while our green-fingered gardeners at Stakeford Nurseries won a fantastic contract to supply all of the hanging baskets and planters to Morpeth's Sanderson Arcade Shopping Centre. Staff and service users at our Woodwork Department have also been busy, making outdoor play equipment for

local primary schools.

Despite our successes, we never get complacent. Our commitment to providing quality services for the individuals in our care and our determination to not just survive, but thrive year on year means that we have to stay focused. The surplus raised from all of our activities is directly reinvested into Blyth Star and the further development of our services to ensure that we stay relevant and of course, future-proof.

Looking ahead to 2025, while the stability of the charitable sector as a whole may look uncertain, we hope that Blyth Star continues to flourish in the face of adversity. Having already survived for 37 years, we hope to still be around for the next 37 and beyond – continuing to create quality jobs for local people and provide opportunities for our service users to live independent, fulfilled lives within their communities.

[www.blythstar.org.uk](http://www.blythstar.org.uk)





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Alison Schreiber

## Managing staff through winter

It is that time of year when anyone occupied in a nine to five job is going to see scant sunshine during their working day.

**It is the same every year, of course. And it may apply just as much to you as them. But as we understand more about well-being and mental health, and the jobs market becomes more fluid, there is a greater business case to take a more flexible and understanding approach to managing staff through winter.**

### A real physical barrier to productivity

It is well accepted that most people on our shores do not get enough Vitamin D from natural sources – diet and sunshine. Vitamin D helps regulate calcium and phosphate in the body and so is strongly correlated with bone health.

There is research to suggest a link between a lack of Vitamin D and being more prone

to coughs, colds and chest infections. In addition, a Vitamin D deficiency can make you feel tired. These kind of symptoms are exactly the kind of thing that cause absence or at least slow workers down in their day-to-day tasks.

Greater exposure to sunlight in winter won't make sufficient difference (the sun simply does not burn strong enough), although it may boost mood which is good in itself. Some employers offer Vitamin D testing to staff to see if there may be a problem, and you could raise awareness about supplements to aid dietary intake. This is something that the NHS recommends over winter.

### Seasonal affective disorder (SAD)

A mental health condition linked to the winter is seasonal affective disorder. Harsh weather and long nights are triggers, and people who already suffer from depression or have a family member who does so are more at risk.

Some of the symptoms include:

- Wanting to stay indoors
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping excessively
- A lack of motivation or general malaise
- Feelings of irritability or anxiousness

Just as with a Vitamin D deficiency, it is easy to link this to a drop in productivity. Here are some ideas to counter the condition...

**Flexitime** – Consider offering flexible hours over the winter to staff who suffer from SAD. Either coming in and finishing earlier or later, to ensure these staff get a bit of non-working time in the daylight at the beginning or end of the day.

**Enforcing lunchbreaks** – Okay, “enforcing” is a strong word; but as you will know, many people are tempted to eat their lunch rooted to their desk and screens. Not only is a stroll in the fresh air good for physical health, but also for mental health, allowing for a change of scenery, a clearing of the mind, and if it's a nice day, even a bit of sunshine.

**SAD lamps** – Because seasonal affective disorder is linked to lack of daylight, light therapy can be a helpful treatment. Lightboxes, which can come in the form of desk lamps, emit a very bright (but appropriately filtered) light which has been shown to assist. This may be a simple investment to help certain employees fight SAD and stay productive.

### Take action with The HR Dept

If you would like to explore your options for keeping your workforce happy and productive this winter, HR Dept are here to help.

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

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## Diversity in the boardroom - good practice and good business

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### Does your boardroom reflect the company's workforce and customer base?

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Board members, trustees, governors and non-executive directors are, in effect, an example of your personal branding.

"Diversity through the lens of ability, race, neurodiversity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and beyond, helps strengthen organisations," said Castle Peak Group founder, James Carss. "Consequently, the interview process is critical. Obviously you want to find out about a person's work history and whether they can contribute to your business with their level of experience and ability, but the human side is also important. 'Authenticity' is one of the key words which I'm always considering when I either interview someone or recommend them for a particular role, but I also want to ensure that they'd fit into the company ethos.

Therefore, the job advert needs to be spot on. Designing and advertising a role means being clear and transparent on flexible working, salary and benefits, avoiding bias in the language you use, avoiding a requirement of aligning with existing organisational culture, and placing adverts where they'll find a diverse audience rather than just where you always put them. It requires additional research and preparation but, in the long term, it will make the whole interviewing process easier."

One advantage of using Castle Peak Group is that you deal with James Carss from start to finish. In a nutshell...he's been there...done it. He's been an MD, he's worked abroad and he knows how to deal with people who operate at a senior level. He knows what they're expecting. When you've had over 20 years of experience in the recruitment business, you can anticipate a lot of what people are looking for.

"When I'm first contacted by a company and discover exactly what they're looking for, I always try to visit them or at the very least do some research to ascertain who and what they are. I then set up a portal which the client can access. This is a rarity in executive search companies. The

vast majority of recruitment firms will simply draw-up a list of potential candidates and then present it to the client. Castle Peak Group doesn't operate like that. As soon as we start looking for a suitable recruit we show on the portal exactly what we're up to. This not only keeps the client fully informed, it also allows them to contact us if they want additional information or even slightly retune our search.

Two heads are better than one and, with the best will in the world, we will never know a company better than the person who's been MD there for 30 years or owns it. We can use our knowledge of the recruitment marketplace, include feedback from the client and therefore ensure that when the final list of candidates is provided, we can be confident that they'll be suitable for the role and also reflect the level of diversity which should be evident."

James Carss and the Castle Peak Group are championing diversity because it makes good business sense. James leads from the front but works closely with the client. He's consistent and transparent and will represent your business because he works in partnership with you.

And he's enjoying incredible success. Since he formed Castle Peak Group 12 months ago, things have gone from strength to strength. Which is hardly surprising bearing in mind that, although the company is new, James rates as one of the most recognised people in the region's executive search field. Equality, inclusion and belonging are at the forefront of everything he does. He's strives to find diverse candidates because he knows it is good for business.

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Castle Peak Group does recruitment the right way. They can help transform your business.

**For more information, you can contact James Carss by calling 07802 531040 or emailing [info@castlepeak-group.com](mailto:info@castlepeak-group.com)**

**You'll also find out more details by logging on to [www.castlepeak-group.com](http://www.castlepeak-group.com)**



## It has been quite the 2024 here at Talentheads

We've grown in size and stature, expanding into County Durham with a wonderful new office.

**Additionally, our pioneering approach to talent acquisition and development resulted in our founder Sam Spoor, being recognised as an 'innovative disruptor' at the Global 100 Women in Leadership awards.**

Both innovation and disruption have always been at the very core of Talentheads.

Our model is unlike any other business in the sector.

As talent acquisition, learning, and development specialists we take care of everything – from recruiting to coaching and training – embedding ourselves within your business to understand your values, helping us to find the talent that is a perfect fit both on paper and in personality.

That award-winning approach has resulted in the creation of our Talent Success Cycle, a model that has lit a fuse under the

businesses that have embraced it since it was launched earlier this year.

In fact, our innovative approach to recruitment and talent development has to date not only assisted almost 600 local people find their perfect job, but has also helped to develop 4,700 staff at around 80 businesses across the North East and beyond.

So with 2025 just around the corner, ask yourself this – is your team firing on all cylinders and could it be strengthened?

With green shoots in the economy, you may be right in thinking that the new year is the perfect time to look at growing your business and recruiting some fresh faces.

If so, take our advice to give yourself the best chance of finding the perfect candidates:

- **Widen the talent pool as much as possible** – don't impose a limit on who can and can't apply, include everyone.
- **Do your research** – before placing the advert, establish if that ideal candidate could be out there and make sure there's an audience there to engage with. Our advice? Check everything you need about the relevant job market before going live with your vacancy.
- **Map out every stage of your recruitment process, from the closing date to the interview period** – and make sure the job advert contains all of this information, as it can help set expectations for candidates.
- **Ensure your shop window accurately represents your business.** Sought-after

candidates need to be able to visualise how your company differs from competitors. What is your proposition?

However, if you really want to find that perfect candidate then why not connect with the experts?

At Talentheads, we know how to build high-performing teams. We do it every day and we're constantly recognised for the outstanding results we deliver.

Those results are driving our own business forward, and we are heading into 2025 with a talent development team that has grown at an exciting pace throughout the past year to help keep up with the unprecedented demand for our services.

Our learning and development service is already almost at full capacity, and we are proud to say that we recently upskilled our 1,500th (and counting) hiring manager, who is now armed with the confidence and skills needed to recruit and grow their team.

Yet for all the awards and growth milestones here at Talentheads, the key reason people trust us with their staff is the fact that we care.

We recruit to retain and don't just put bums on seats. We believe jobs matter – to employers and employees – and we genuinely believe staff are more than just a number.

So if your 2025 resolution is to grow your team, grow it with Talentheads.

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# Recruitment trends to watch in 2025

Bryony Gibson, director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, shares her thoughts on the recruitment trends set to shape the year ahead.

**If 2024 has taught us anything, it's to brace ourselves for the unexpected. It's been a challenging year, especially in recruitment, with unpredictable macro influences and economic pressures testing the market's resilience.**

Looking ahead, there are some key trends to consider if you plan to evolve your recruitment strategy and stay relevant in the face of another dynamic year.

## Economic Uncertainty

The November Budget has set the stage for a turbulent 2025. With an increase in the National Living Wage and rising National Insurance contributions from April, businesses are faced with rising costs. Although it's too early to predict exactly how this will affect the job market, many companies could find themselves adjusting Budgets and streamlining or slowing down the hiring process.

It's a trend to watch closely, as adaptability will be key to navigating this period of change and ensuring you retain and attract the best people.

## Wellness & Flexibility

In 2025, welfare and employee benefits are poised to become more important than ever. The workforce is increasingly prioritising its financial wellness, retirement planning, and support for mental health in their job searches.

In addition, the ongoing hybrid work debate continues to influence recruitment. While some companies are encouraging a return to the office, others remain committed to flexible working. For recruiters, understanding and aligning with people's personal preferences for financial and work-life balance benefits will be a valuable differentiator.



Bryony Gibson

## Investing in Growth

With skills shortages posing a challenge, internal learning and development programs should be high on your agenda.

Companies prioritising personal development initiatives by offering upskilling opportunities, formal certifications, and career progression, will be better positioned to retain talent and bridge skill gaps.

In today's quickly changing landscape, employees value the chance to grow, personally and professionally. If you're willing to invest in this area, you can expect to see stronger employee engagement and loyalty.

## Artificial Intelligence

AI is no longer a thing of the future in recruitment. Recruiters are already adopting AI-enabled tools to transform back-office roles throughout the industry. In 2025, expect to see the trend continue, streamlining processes from candidate sourcing and screening to analytics-driven decision-making.

For recruiters, the benefits are clear: faster, more efficient data-informed choices. For job seekers, it is not a given that everyone will be happy with the change as it comes with risk. If not managed well, AI can perpetuate existing biases rather than reduce them, inadvertently creating digital exclusion or even discriminatory job advertising.

## Rethink Recruitment

As employers look to stand out in a competitive job market, they are adopting a more innovative approach to their recruitment strategies.

Imagine treating candidates like customers. It makes sense, and delivering an excellent recruitment experience is now essential to attract the best people. From well-designed onboarding processes to clear, transparent communication throughout the hiring journey, the emphasis on "customer service" in recruitment is set to grow.

This new 'candidate-centric' approach not only attracts top talent but builds a strong employer brand that will benefit long-term growth.

## Looking Ahead

Despite another year of challenge and change, there's plenty to be optimistic about if we embrace our spirit of adaptability.

Start by prioritising your employees (and candidates) welfare. Lean into innovation to thrive. Whether it's through AI, a renewed focus on learning and development, or by creating a hiring experience that puts the candidate first, the recruitment industry is moving toward a more resilient and responsive future.

Of course, it's impossible to predict every twist and turn, but what I am absolutely sure of is that in 2025, recruitment will be defined by those brave enough to adapt, flex, and lead.

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



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# Healing: Listening to your body's wisdom

Healing begins by listening to your body's signals. Through nervous system alignment, you can enhance awareness of your health internally and externally. As you heal, old or new symptoms may appear, which can be unsettling. However, these sensations reflect a deeper healing phase, not a setback.

## Trusting the Process

True healing requires trust and a willingness to surrender control. When your body is aligned and functioning well, it naturally flows, creating the conditions needed for recovery. Patients often find peace and confidence as they regain trust in their bodies, realising that resistance only delays healing. Leaning into the process is essential.

## The Benefits of Chiropractic Adjustments

Chiropractic adjustments are powerful performance enhancers, improving reaction time, recovery, coordination, and mobility. These adjustments reconnect your brain's pathways, optimising your body's potential.

## A Holistic Approach to Healing

Healing involves more than physical recovery; it's about cultivating a relationship with your body and interpreting signals.



Developing body awareness means recognising discomfort as information, not an enemy, which can transform your healing journey.

## Aligning the Nervous System

A balanced nervous system enables you to notice subtle changes in your health and manage stress effectively. Practices like mindfulness, breathwork, and chiropractic adjustments strengthen resilience, allowing for a smoother healing journey.

## Embracing Trust and Letting Go

Healing often includes discomfort and uncertainty. Trusting your body's natural wisdom can create space for transformation, teaching us that healing is rarely linear but

an intricate dance of progress and setbacks. Embracing this journey fosters resilience and self-compassion, helping you find peace amidst the chaos.

Healing is a journey of patience and trust. Through chiropractic care, you can work towards health goals beyond returning to an old state, instead evolving into a more balanced, aware, and trusting version of yourself. With Dr. Jacob Palmer's expertise and personalised approach, you're supported on a path toward lasting vitality and wellness.

[www.gosforthfamilychiropractic.com](http://www.gosforthfamilychiropractic.com)  
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AIM HIGH  
FLY HIGHER

## Central Recruitment & Training launches new comprehensive online learning platform

In a strategic move to empower both employers and job seekers, leading North East specialist Central Recruitment & Training has unveiled a comprehensive new suite of CPD-accredited online training courses, marking a significant expansion of their professional development services.



**The timing of this launch appears strategic, as businesses across various sectors, particularly in industrial and manufacturing, are seeking ways to upskill their workforce while managing operational pressures. The platform's flexibility and comprehensive course selection make it particularly attractive to organisations looking to implement structured professional development programs without disrupting day-to-day operations.**

The new digital learning platform, which has been developed to meet modern business needs, offers a diverse range of professional development courses accessible to learners 24/7.

“The way business works these days, you can't afford to stand still - you've got to keep learning and growing,” says Steve Hart, Training Director at Central. “That's why we're excited about the launch of our new online training platform. We really want to help people and businesses across the UK reach their full potential. Our new online training platform is designed to provide accessible, engaging, and impactful learning opportunities to support the growth and development of job seekers, employees, and employers alike”.

“This launch represents more than just a new service offering,” explains Managing Director, Paul Ponton. “It's about providing our clients with the tools they need to build resilient, skilled teams ready to meet future challenges. The CPD accreditation ensures that the training meets rigorous quality standards and provides recognised professional development.”

Importantly, the courses are not limited to employer-sponsored programs but are also available to individual job seekers looking to develop their professional profiles and enhance their employability.

“We recognise that the path to success doesn't always flow through traditional employer channels,” explains Lead Tutor, Maureen Scott-Bell. “By offering these courses directly to job seekers, we're empowering individuals to take charge of their own career development and gain recognised credentials that can set them apart in a competitive job market.”

The course catalogue spans crucial contemporary business topics, including Mental Health First Aid, a particularly relevant offering given the growing focus on workplace wellbeing. Other key programs cover essential business competencies such as Manual Handling, Customer Service, Sales Skills, Stress Management, Leadership Development and so much more.

What sets these courses apart is their interactive approach to learning. Rather than traditional passive content delivery, the platform incorporates multimedia elements, interactive quizzes, and engaging assessment methods to ensure knowledge retention and practical application. This approach has been specifically designed to maintain learner engagement and drive better outcomes.

A unique feature of the new platform is the ability to create customised course bundles, allowing organisations to design learning pathways that align with their specific development needs while benefiting from cost efficiencies. Upon completion, learners receive CPD-accredited certification, adding valuable credentials to their professional profiles.

Central Recruitment & Training, which has over 45 years of industry experience and underwent a strategic management buyout in 2015, has positioned itself as a comprehensive talent development partner. The launch of these online courses builds upon their 2018 expansion into training services, creating a holistic approach to workforce development.

Companies interested in exploring these new online training opportunities can access the full course catalogue through Central Recruitment & Training's website or contact their dedicated training team for customised solutions. Given the company's established reputation in recruitment and training across the UK, this new digital offering is expected to significantly impact professional development accessibility and delivery.

**For more information about Central Recruitment & Training's new online courses and other services, visit their website at [www.centralemployment.co.uk/online-training](http://www.centralemployment.co.uk/online-training).**



# A Year in the Life...



Laura Gillespie

Northern Insight talks to

## Laura Gillespie

*Managing Director, Gillespie Recruitment.*

### What did you set out to achieve this year?

To grow the business with a team that has the same values as myself and a passion for helping people get their dream job! To continue to support our existing clients and develop new client relationships.

### Has everything gone according to plan?

In short, no, however life wouldn't be the same without challenges along the way. I am literally learning every day. If something isn't right I will change things sooner than I would have done in the past.

### What are you most proud of this year?

Celebrating our 4th year in business is up there in our achievements along with having the right team in place to support our clients and candidates. The positive feedback we receive on a regular basis also makes me very proud.

### What's the best piece of business advice you've received this year?

You don't have to have a huge team to be successful, in fact staying small is not a bad thing. Adding people to the team before you are ready for it has its challenges. Reducing my

personal interaction on social media is definitely something that has worked for me too.

### What has been the most enjoyable business event you've been to this year?

I haven't been to any this year which I intend to rectify in 2025.

### What have you learnt about yourself this year?

That I am capable of running a business, although it has taught me that I need to be tough and also that the word NO is a good word! I am working on this with Paul Cheetham, an emotional intelligence coach, and that has had a huge impact on the way I view situations both personally and within the work environment.

### Describe 2024 in three words...

Challenging, emotional and rewarding.

### What are your aims for 2025?

To build on where we are, and be the team that people want to work with.

### Any New Year Resolutions?

*Personally* – to maintain a better work/life balance, have a holiday and celebrate the small wins.

*Business* – to widen our reach across the UK and develop our business sectors.

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



# Champions of North East Business

The purpose of Durham Business Group is to support and champion businesses, and business people, in the North East of England – building relationships, fostering collaboration, and celebrating success.

Established in 1981 as a non-profit organisation to support small businesses, our range of members and clients now embraces everything from one-person start-ups to large corporates, but our focus on promoting North East business – and the values that inspire what we do – remain unchanged.

“What a privilege it is to be part of this incredible business group - quite an exceptional event made more special with the genuine friendships. Simply wonderful!”

Jan Dale, Director, Urban Base



Executive Group members at Ad Gefrin

**Celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2024, The Executive Group brings together North East senior directors and decision-makers in a relaxed, non-sales environment.**

We hold regular lunch events in stunning and unique venues across the region, with an emphasis on creating trusted long-term relationships. Membership is capped at 50 companies, to allow those connections between peers to deepen and flourish.

**Space for coworking**

## Tired of working from home?

We have a modern, comfortable coworking area with hot desks for hire at our Portland House HQ in Durham, DH1. Occupying a bright and dedicated area within our refurbished upstairs office suite, they're perfect if you're looking for a safe, welcoming and flexible place to work, away from the dining table. While you're here working with us, you benefit from free on-site parking, and inclusive access to tea, coffee and wi-fi – at the same time as being part of a vibrant and diverse business community.

Contact Alison Gittins, CEO Durham Business Group • [alison@durhambusinessgroup.co.uk](mailto:alison@durhambusinessgroup.co.uk) • [www.durhambusinessgroup.co.uk](http://www.durhambusinessgroup.co.uk)

# A year in the life of...

## Alison Gittins

Chief Executive, Durham Business Group

### What did you set out to achieve this year?

We set out every year to deliver our important work of championing and supporting North East businesses. The events calendar is planned with a mix of new venues and some old favourites, with an aim to achieve inspiring networking events across the region, bringing business and genuine friendships seamlessly together. We also set out to grow our Office Services clients, our co-working space at Portland House, and to hit the maximum 50 Executive Group members.

### Has everything gone according to plan?

In the world of events, plans change but that's part of the excitement, what keeps me on my toes and results in the best events! From a record turnout at the DBC January Showcase at Ramside Hall, we also celebrated ten amazing years of The Executive Group and grew the Group to capacity. At Durham Office Services it has gone to plan and some, as we smashed our targets with a record number of mailing clients and retained full occupancy at Portland House.

### What are you most proud of this year?

Bringing together sixteen member businesses to The Executive Group lunch at HMS Calliope to sign the Armed Forces Covenant, a promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces and their families are treated fairly. The occasion was supported by the Ministry of Defence, and up there with when I signed on behalf of Durham Business Group at Catterick Garrison in 2019. To go on to achieve the prestigious Gold Award in 2022 was a huge honour for us as a small not-for-profit business. I'm proud of my team every day, along with the support of our Chairman Graham Sault and Board of Directors, our hard work and dedication has been rewarded, and our 43rd year has certainly been one to remember!

### What's the best piece of business advice you've received this year?

Love what you do, do it with passion, and focus on your strengths and those of your team.

I am incredibly fortunate to work with amazing businesses and a wonderful extended community. This can involve long and late hours, so being advised to take time out is equally as

important as being advised to keep going. I believe this is important advice to all business owners – listen to your comrades.

### What has been the most enjoyable business event you've been to this year?

There truly are too many to mention! It has been an incredible year, the year for our region's castles, from Belsay to Lumley to The Rising at Raby, Auckland Palace and a mansion at Gibside! Next stop Alnwick Castle, following a magical preview night at Alnwick Garden and Lildorei festive lights. It still amazes me, after all these years, how there are always new venues to discover.

### What have you learnt about yourself this year?

To listen to my intuition, not to take things personally, embrace change and be open to opportunities. It is as important to be busy as it is to know when to take time out for some well-earned R&R. I am incredibly gifted to be surrounded by amazing people and a wealth of knowledge, and I've learnt to accept support and enjoy the journey.

### Describe 2024 in three words....

Growth, Reward, Grateful.

### What are your aims for 2025?

On a personal note I can't wait to welcome my first grandchild in January and so see many journeys south on the horizon. In the 44th year of DBG, we aim to continue to support and champion businesses, foster collaboration and celebrate success, and of course, have more cracking events lined up!

### Any New Year Resolutions?

I hope to revisit padel tennis at True Padel Durham, and to improve to a level where someone may swipe on Playtomic for me to join them in a game – forever the optimist. Live life to the full and carry on cruising!

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



“

*...Live life  
to the full  
and carry on  
cruising...*

*Alison Gittins*

# Proactive Harassment Prevention

Preparing your business for compliance with New Legislation.

As of Saturday, 26th October, a new layer of responsibility has been introduced to UK sexual harassment law. Employers are now required to take all reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace—not only from within the team but also by third parties, such as clients or customers.

This proactive obligation may seem daunting for small businesses, but Kathryn Rodgers of face2faceHR offers comprehensive guidance on ensuring compliance without disrupting workplace harmony. With the festive season approaching, now is the perfect time for businesses to address potential risks and reinforce policies.

## What Constitutes Sexual Harassment?

Under the Equality Act 2010, harassment involves unwanted conduct related to protected characteristics (such as sex, race, or disability) that creates a degrading, intimidating, or offensive environment for the individual affected. With the new amendment, harassment by third parties also falls under this duty to prevent, making it crucial for businesses to assess potential risk scenarios.

## Practical Steps for Small Businesses

The main change with this legislation is introducing a proactive element: rather than responding to incidents after they occur, employers must act in advance to minimise the likelihood of sexual harassment. Here's how small businesses can begin:

**Conduct a Risk Assessment:** Identify where and when employees might be exposed to potential harassment, especially at events such as Christmas parties or client meetings.



Kathryn Rodgers

This could involve assessing any high-risk areas or interactions, whether in person or online.

## Understand Key Concepts and Legislation:

Business owners and managers must know the definitions and implications of harassment, discrimination, and protected characteristics. Kathryn Rodgers provides tailored training materials to help teams get up to speed on these topics, making compliance manageable and effective.

## Set Clear Policies and Offer Training:

Small businesses should establish and communicate anti-harassment policies that reflect their unique workplace context. Training sessions should define unacceptable behaviours and outline reporting procedures. For a festive event, such as a Christmas party, communicating expectations to employees and setting a respectful tone can prevent misunderstandings or incidents.

**Empower Managers:** Managers are crucial in enforcing policies and maintaining a respectful work culture. They should be equipped to recognise potential issues and to handle complaints reasonably. Small businesses can benefit from setting boundaries around 'banter' and encouraging bystander support where colleagues can step in if they witness inappropriate conduct.

With face2faceHR's expertise, Kathryn Rodgers can assist businesses in embedding these changes into their operations, creating a safer, more respectful, and legally compliant workplace. For small businesses, staying informed and proactive can mitigate the risk of costly claims and promote a positive, inclusive environment for everyone.

**Contact Kathryn Rodgers, HR Consultant**  
**Mobile: 07946 330025**  
**face2faceHR**





Martin Potts

## Artificial Intelligence (AI): Reshaping the HR landscape

Using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in HR may seem contradictory. After all, the H in HR stands for 'human'! But the latest advances in AI are reshaping the role of HR and a shift in the way businesses operate. We're a big believer that AI is an opportunity for HR and not a threat.

**Many people think of AI as being a robot replacing humans. But fear not, you won't find a white animatronic machine in your office...anytime soon!**

Rather, AI is used in a variety of ways to augment human capabilities and make better informed HR decisions. It can also streamline operations, processes and creates an engaging workplace experience by using technologies such as machine learning and predictive analytics. And it also helps automate routine (and some might say dull) tasks.

Within this article we'll touch on how AI is used within modern HR systems, however, we're currently using AI tools to support businesses with recruitment, retention and development of employees, more of that to come in later editions.

### **So how can AI help SMEs with their HR functions?**

shrewd HR has partnered with a HR software provider which comes with an AI assistant built into the system, but what does this actually mean and how will it benefit your business?

### **The key benefits of an AI assistant**

- 1. Improving efficiency** – AI will help improve work experiences by automating routine, repetitive tasks while reducing the chance of errors.
- 2. Data at your fingertips** – search records and produce reports on data held in your HR system.
- 3. Create agendas** – imagine a super organised assistant who loves to help manage your HR plans, agendas and schedules like meetings and appraisals, that's your AI assistant.
- 4. Better employee experience** – starting the employment relationship off with engaging and effective recruitment and onboarding processes.
- 5. Discover insights** – explore your HR database to find fast answers about your workforce.
- 6. Write custom letters and policies.**
- 7. Hybrid working** is becoming the norm, but it can present challenges for managers. The use of AI helps monitor employees when they work remotely and measures

productivity. Helping to identify potential burnout or disengagement so that managers can intervene when necessary.

As with any piece of software or technology, AI should be used in the right way to get the most from it. We've come up with 3 shrewd top tips to help you navigate the complexities around AI:

- 1.** Use your HR system to drive your HR function – start using your HR system efficiently and effectively, using your system throughout every HR process, from onboarding to offboarding and everything in between.
- 2.** Keep your system up to date - this is vital important if you're going to use your HR system and AI to produce reports and ask it questions. AI assistants are contained within your HR database, so the answers to your questions or the data and information you are looking for needs to be held within your system and it is essential your data is kept up to date to enable accurate reporting.
- 3.** AI will not replace your HR function, but it will certainly support it – reducing the amount of admin tasks is surely music to everyone's ears! It will give them time back to work on the things that really makes a difference.

shrewd is here to support SMEs through change, to help your team work with, and make the most of, the latest technologies to enable your business to be a great place to work.

Whether you're considering your next HR software platform or interested in using AI to recruit your next hire, contact our team today.

[shrewd-hr.co.uk](https://shrewd-hr.co.uk)



Annabel Graham & Jamie Hanif of Develop Me Ltd on a walking coaching session

Photography courtesy of Becky Kerr photography.co.uk

## Where do you do your best thinking?

At this time of year, when daylight becomes a precious commodity, you'd be forgiven for relaxing into the warmth of a cosy sofa, and retreating from the world, especially at the end of a busy working week when you come home exhausted.

**All the clients I speak with are rushed, handling increasing pressures on time, resources, and cognitive load whilst being asked to cut costs, innovate and navigate the permacrisis generated by the unrest in the macro-economy and geopolitical landscape.**

*Result:* they are knackered, overloaded, time poor and distracted in their focus. This isn't a lack of capability, it's a lack of bandwidth, for space and time to think.

Does any of this resonate with you?

It also raises the question; where do you do your best thinking?

I doubt at a team meeting, when you're cramming in 10 agenda points in an hour, when juggling hundreds of emails or being asked for a rapid solution to the current problem. We're not great under pressure; we default to what we know and have done before. The problem is, they don't always fit the current situation, but in the hurry, we're blinded to that.

**Harnessing the power of movement and nature to drive creativity.**

What if I said to you: 'go for a walk outside instead', with the question you need to

resolve in your mind. You might just be more successful than at the laptop.

When we're busy, especially in winter, the very last thing we think of doing is going for a walk. But according to a Stanford University study in 2014, walking, whether indoor or outdoors increases our creative output by 60%. Walking itself is the key, but there are added benefits to getting outdoors.

Consider the times when you are walking and have stopped to look at the view, gazing at a landscape or building, and just letting your mind wander? This is called 'soft fascination', a term coined by psychologists Rachel and Stephen Kaplan. It's a way of calming ourselves, restoring our stressed brains by spending time in nature and allowing our focus to be gently engaged by the world around us.

**How can this help you now?**

Well I'm a big fan of walking outdoors for ideas. In fact I came up with this column back in the summer whilst dog walking on the beach. It's where I have my best ideas.

So, over this festive period, when the pace may be slowing a little, or you're taking a well-earned break, I'd encourage you to wrap up and take yourself outside, and allow

yourself time to reflect and ponder.

**Below are some questions to hold, which may be useful. Let me know how you get on!**

- 1.** Looking back, what will you celebrate and be grateful for this year in work and in life?
- 2.** What in your current life and work frustrates you the most?
- 3.** What patterns do you notice repeating that you need to hold in your awareness?
- 4.** What derails you and what nourishes you?
- 5.** Where, right now, do you feel the opening to a future possibility?
- 6.** What are your most important sources of energy that will resource you?
- 7.** What would be the best possible outcomes for the year ahead that you could wish for? Clarify, refine and crystallise this?
- 8.** Over the next three months, if you were to prototype a piece of the intended future in which you could discover 'the new' by doing something, what would that prototype look like?
- 9.** What would you like freedom from, and what would you like freedom for?
- 10.** What intention do you need to set for this year to enable the new future to come into being?

*Annabel is an Executive and Systemic Team Coach. She works with leaders one to one, in teams and also through her Leader's Lock In open group coaching programme.*

**If you would value an exploratory discussion on gaining space to think and reflect, then the next cohort starts in early January and you can contact Annabel via LinkedIn, [annabel@successfultraining.co.uk](mailto:annabel@successfultraining.co.uk), or visit [www.successfultraining.co.uk](http://www.successfultraining.co.uk)**

# Interview with People Spark Solutions: A year of Growth, Community, and Resilience

## What did you set out to achieve this year?

We wanted to focus on addressing what clients needed most - with external challenges like new governments and global conflicts, we noticed a significant rise in demand for one-on-one coaching. These complex challenges have impacted business leaders, making it harder for them to reach their financial goals and effectively manage their teams, and themselves. To support them, we planned to expand our leadership development services, creating more space for leaders to process, reflect, and build trust in a psychologically safe environment. We wanted to be a trusted sounding board for leaders who often feel they have nowhere to turn.

## Has everything gone according to plan?

We achieved our goal, seeing 50% growth in leadership development services this year, and broadening our client base - whilst remaining true to our aim of working with values-based organisations. We've worked with some amazing social enterprises this year and we have become a go-to partner for high-growth tech companies who want to nurture productive, healthy workplaces.

## What are you most proud of this year?

I'm immensely proud of our team's adaptability in responding to client needs. They've reacted with pace, energy, and integrity to fulfil client demands even when time was tight - always putting the clients first and doing what was right for them. We've purposefully carved out time for our own development too, which is reflected in our client work, for example this year we helped clients understand more about neurodivergence by working with a specialist partner.



## What advice have you been giving businesses this year?

My advice to leaders this year has been simple but critical: focus on the basics and practice gratitude. In challenging periods, gratitude and presence can be stabilising forces for business leaders and it's important to take time away from the day-to-day and reflect on small wins and what is going well. I also advise leaders to build trust, clarify roles and responsibilities, and foster strong connections within their teams. Trust is everything and we need to lean into it now more than ever.

## What was the most enjoyable business event you attended this year?

The CIPD Annual Conference and Exhibition (ACE) in Manchester stood out for me. The event, focused on people-centered practices, and provided a rare chance to stop, regroup, reconnect, and share. It was an opportunity to engage with peers, exchange ideas, and reflect on the journey - something I am always encouraging my own clients to do.

## What have you learned about yourself this year?

This year, I reflected that whilst People Spark

Solutions are experts in our field and the go-to organisation for leadership and team development, we shouldn't be afraid to ask for help in other areas. I worked with North East based The Experience Bank to form an independent advisory board to support the business side of People Spark - and ultimately provide another 'safe space' for myself and the team for ideas and reflection.

## Describe 2024 in three words.

It has to be "energising, focused, and uncertain". It's been an exciting year but there have also been so many unknowns and that's difficult in the people profession, but also for anyone running a small business.

## What are your aims for 2025?

In 2025 we will be celebrating our fifth birthday! To have launched and sustained a business through such volatile times feels like an achievement and we want to use the strengths and lessons of our journey so far to support other businesses in navigating the future's challenges, which we know will be equally unpredictable.

## Do you have any New Year's resolutions?

I hate New Year's resolutions! I just find them so unsustainable. I believe in incremental changes over time - small, consistent steps, whether in work, health, or wellbeing - are much more likely to lead to lasting improvement. I'm really proud of the team's community engagement which has been at an all-time high this year - I want us to continue to contribute our expertise to local causes in 2025 and deepen our community involvement. Supporting places that foster inclusivity and empowerment locally is really important, and I'd like to focus more on that whilst working with businesses who also have a social conscience, through People Spark.



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

# Keeping the busyness out of business

Dr David Cliff explores the issue of intended versus received messages amongst customers.

**I remember in my public service days a very busy chap. He always was giving off the emotional equivalent of 10,000 volts, always telling us how busy it was, how mad it is and how almost impossible the task was. It always struck me if he deployed as much time into his work as he deployed into describing its challenges, he may have been ultimately more efficient and delivered more. Instead, he preferred to ventilate both from an egocentric position, and from a position of institutional stress the workplace would never address, his personal angst. The message received, was this person was best avoided rather than an effective person to work with.**

The same is true in the private sector. There are so many businesses telling us how busy they are, how involved they are, how we will have to wait long periods of time before appointments. These things are actually repellent for potential business and devaluing to potential customers. Using automation and other systems, and this includes something as humble as the diary booking system, is a depersonalised way of creating a customer interface and whilst the scale of one's operation may ultimately require some of this performance, one should never lose sight of the importance of the personal.

Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) tells us that we are responsible for the messages we transmit. We cannot expect the listener to intuit what we are meaning. If our behaviours, verbal, non-verbal and process based, communicate that we are simply too busy to be properly involved in something, the perception is one of devaluation to the person we are in any particular given transaction with. Worst of all is complete silence, although recent years have seen a step beyond this which is the automated response, that goes on and on before you actually get to speak to another human being.

My clients know I constantly refer to the 'relational space' between the business and the customer. What we put into that needs to be authentic, valuing and demonstrate human interest in subtle, often subliminal ways. These communications reflect not only what is on offer, but the value base and integrity of those making that offer. It is a vital part of cementing transactional processes, but more so relational spaces that are durable, and engender mutual trust, respect and ultimately, are good for business by adding to trust, customer tolerance and customer lifetime values for the organisation.

This is often difficult to achieve in a target driven, sales focused environment where the results of 'now', transcend what may be happening in a year's time with the same customer. Of course, people often pay lip service to this, as targets tend to be in a sales sense, very short term. Short termism can then easily permeate right through an organisation and result in sales processes dictating the entire culture and pace of the rest of the organisation and the interrelationship of different systems within it.

So, we all need to be careful out there, we need to think about how we are coming over to folk and how they feel. We need to view people less as targets and prospects and truly start seeing them as humans, whether part of a large organisation or simply an end consumer. Honouring humanity is important, it builds relationships that can last.

***As 2024 closes and 2025 ensues, my heartfelt good wishes to all at Gedanken, its clients, its associates, the Northern Insight team and all its readers.***

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



“

*...we all need  
to be careful  
out there...*

*Dr David Clift*



“

*...Keep it simple and stay in your lane...*

Helen Butler

# A year in the life of...

## Helen Butler

Founder and Managing Director, Simplified Operations

As an Operations Director and Consultant she's experienced the good, the bad, and the ugly of how businesses work, and the systems, structures and teams that are needed to achieve the best results. She's now on a mission to enable small business owners to step out of the weeds and put in place the people, processes, and systems that make the big difference.

### What did you set out to achieve this year?

This year was all about building momentum. I wanted to get Simplified Operations out there—really increase our visibility, grow some solid connections, and continue building up our client base. At the same time, I wanted to take those first steps in putting together a great team so we're able to reach more businesses. It's been about setting the stage for growth while continuing to support clients achieve great results.

### Has everything gone according to plan?

Most of it, but not all—when does it ever? We've delivered some amazing transformation projects as well as launching our Fractional COO services, which has been a great addition to supporting clients on a regular basis. Along the way, we've gotten much clearer on who our ideal clients are—it turns out, who we thought they were wasn't quite right! That's evolved a lot this year, and we're now much more aligned with clients we can add most value to.

I've also loved building connections, meeting incredible people, and starting to grow the team. We brought on an operations specialist this summer and kicked off our associate network to support even more clients. It's been a busy, rewarding year with a few lessons along the way.

### What are you most proud of this year?

I'm particularly proud of seeing our clients' transformations, especially in terms of operational stability and growth. Seeing business owners who felt overwhelmed by constant firefighting find confidence and clarity through the processes we set up together is what it's all about - and is the reason I started the business initially. On a personal note, I'm also proud of how we've been able to attract interest from bigger businesses and have started to build a great support team, including bringing in associate consultants who can help extend our impact.

### What's the best piece of business advice you've received this year?

"Keep it simple and stay in your lane." It was such a great reminder that trying to do too much or be everything to everyone only slows you down. This advice has helped me focus on what we do best—supporting businesses with operational excellence—and let go of anything that doesn't fit. It's made decision-making so much easier! Sometimes the best advice really is the simplest.

### What has been the most enjoyable business event you've been to this year?

The Fashion Ball, without a doubt! Its Newcastle launch event in October had such a unique vibe compared to the usual business events. The mix of business networking and awards

added a fun twist, and getting to walk the catwalk in the fashion show was a great experience. It was a brilliant blend of work and play, bringing people together from a mix of businesses across the region.

### What have you learnt about yourself this year?

I've discovered that resilience really is one of my strengths. This year has thrown its fair share of challenges my way, but it's shown me how capable I am of pushing through and staying focused. It's also taught me the importance of playing bigger—letting go of self-doubt and stepping into opportunities with confidence. Most of all, I've learned to trust the bigger vision, even if I don't have all the answers yet. Trusting the process has been a huge part of the journey this year.

### Describe 2024 in three words...

Growth, Connection, Determination.

### What are your aims for 2025?

The aim is to continue the momentum from this year — expanding our client base, growing the team, and continuing to get the message out about how good operations can have a significant impact on profitability and longevity of a business. We're on a mission to educate more SME owners to understand what operational excellence really is and how it can transform their businesses. Right now, it's a concept that's often only discussed in larger organisations but the truth is, it is a game-changer for small businesses too. Education is the first step to unlocking the incredible potential for so many businesses, and we're working on an additional service to help give small businesses the tools and knowledge to embed real operational excellence simply and effectively.

### Any New Year Resolutions?

I'm more about embedding consistent habits than setting grand resolutions, so it's mostly about continuing what works—like taking regular time out of the business to recharge and making space for the things that matter. Travel will definitely be part of that plan!

I do love setting myself a physical challenge each year although I haven't decided on 2025's adventure yet—in the mix at the minute is a triathlon, a half marathon or maybe a Hyrox competition. Something that is quite out of my comfort zone and will therefore require some focus and effort!

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

# Connections that Count: The Ladies Collective celebrates phenomenal year of growth and diversification



Photography credit: Aitce Stee

The sell-out networking concept ‘The Ladies Collective’ has created quite a stir on the North East B2B scene this year with their take on bespoke networking events which facilitate a safe space for business women to connect, collaborate and thrive.

**The brainchild of business owners Claire Pickersgill and Julie Turnbull, The Ladies Collective’s sell-out formula has seen the duo create a community of over 1,000 and forge brand collaborations with major players including H Beauty, Fenwick and WBCo, creators of the Soap Brows, with event tickets selling out in under three hours.**

Those who manage to secure a ticket at these sought-after events have experienced an immersive networking event surrounded by like-minded women to help fuel their personal and professional growth with wellbeing and mindset running at the core, alongside inspiring guest speakers and carefully curated experiences.

The newly launched The Men’s Collective took flight in November 2024 and has seen the duo work in collaboration with Sport and Business Mindset Expert David Gleghorn (Success Is Mental Ltd) to roll-out events across the region which follow the similar

ethos of the tried and tested The Ladies Collective model. Again, The Men’s Collective events are more than just a networking opportunity, they are opportunities designed for men to focus on themselves, their mindset, and their wellbeing, and an opportunity for business leaders to connect with and leave feeling empowered, uplifted, and ready to elevate in all aspects of their life.

The newly formed ‘The Collective’ will embody The Mens Collective and The Ladies Collective networking concept and community offering a series of themed events and a digital resource platform to aid personal and professional growth, bringing in the support of leading industry experts for both in-person and online events.

The new ‘The Collective’ platform will launch in 2025 and will host comprehensive resources, including expert-led workshops, mindset masterclasses, priority event booking to their sell-out events and exclusive

content designed to empower members to reach new heights in their personal and professional life.

Claire Pickersgill, Co-Founder of The Collective said: “Since we launched the networking concept, the last few months have seen an epic amount of traction, coverage and demand for our events, and we have exciting plans to grow the concept further in 2025.

The brands we are working with are absolutely iconic, and to host our events in such magnificent retail surroundings of H Beauty and Fenwick was such a unique and immersive experience for our guests. We really can’t wait to see what 2025 brings.”

Julie Turnbull, Co-Founder of The Collective added: “Success thrives on connection, and that’s what The Collective is all about—finding the right people to support your journey, both personally and professionally. Our vision is to create a central hub where growth happens, whether it’s tackling a new business challenge, refining personal goals, or even planning life’s big moments. It’s about having a trusted network and the right tools to elevate every aspect of your life.”

**Registration is now open to join ‘The Collective’ - [www.groupcollective.co.uk](http://www.groupcollective.co.uk) and in-person networking events will return in 2025.**





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*Stephen Patterson*

# New Year, new Mayor, new Government, new president...

By Stephen Patterson, Chief Executive at NE1 Ltd

What's next for Newcastle – 2025 and beyond? 2024 has been a year of significant change - regionally, nationally and internationally. We've welcomed a new Mayor for the region, a new Government for the country and internationally a new president for the United States.

**Closer to home, in 2024 Newcastle has seen many of the city's transformational building projects coming to fruition or moving forward at pace – the Helix, Pilgrim Street and a raft of new buildings announced for the Stephenson Quarter.**

All these developments will have a monumental impact on the city and have been years in the making. It is exciting to see them progressing rapidly, and we warmly welcome the new business they will bring to the city, the jobs they will create and secure, and the opportunities they will generate, but their progress raises the question, what next?

Large-scale developments like these take time and vision, when they move into the construction phase we must have a pipeline of ideas and opportunities to keep Newcastle on this positive trajectory. Cities need to evolve and develop constantly or risk being left behind.

Thankfully, we have the Gateshead Conference and Exhibition Centre on the immediate horizon. This much-vaunted and game-changing development is an absolute must for the region, and we need to see spades in the ground quickly to make this vision a reality.

In another development and another dimension, we should thank our lucky stars that Northumbria University has secured £50 million worth of funding to create the world-leading North East Space Skills and Technology Centre, NESST, in the city. NESST is forecast to create over 350 jobs and boost the region's economy by more than £260 million over the next 30 years, as well as jet-propelling the UK's space sector from here in the north east. Consider the opportunities this will create for the region's youth.

Another of our world-leading educational institutions, Newcastle University, is leading another major city-centre development with the visionary regeneration of a 29-acre brownfield site in the west of the city on the former Newcastle General Hospital site.

Here the plan is to create a Health Innovation Neighbourhood to build on the city's already world-famous research into ageing and living well, with a centre that combines intergenerational living, with leisure, learning and employment all in one place.

World-class innovation is in Newcastle's DNA, and as a city, we're building on these historical foundations

for the future with plans like the new Neighbourhood, which are truly world-class and world-leading. The future of global health and ageing will be spearheaded by and from Newcastle, exactly where the city should be, at the forefront.

Across Newcastle, major pockets of redevelopment are also happening. On Newbridge Street, the locally-owned Gainford Group is planning a 37-storey, mixed-used development incorporating a hotel, housing

and leisure complex, all situated in what will be the region's tallest building. The development is long-awaited and will create up to 500 jobs during the skyscraper's construction and ample job opportunities when the development is complete. Combined with Northumbria University's NESST development across the road, they will completely transform the eastern gateway to the city.

One of the final pieces in Newcastle's transformation is increasing the number of residents in the city centre. Building homes and creating city centre communities is much needed and will boost the local economy, hard-wiring them into the city. Residents need facilities and amenities, and their presence and purchasing power help reinvigorate high streets.

Over 3,000 homes are earmarked for the combined Forth Yards and Utilita Arena sites. The development received a welcome boost recently, with £5 million in funding granted for reparation works on the site. It is hugely positive to finally see progress, and hopefully, now with this new impetus and cash injection, the site's redevelopment will proceed unhindered, quickly delivering homes for local people, combined with shops, green spaces and excellent transport links.

Transport and infrastructure are crucial and need to keep pace with the monumental change and building happening across the city and wider region, that's why we wholly endorse plans to reopen the Leamside Line and Washington Metro Loop. Transport links into and across the region must be improved; public transport must be kept affordable and accessible for all.

With the scale of residential and commercial development along the banks of the Tyne, the region will need to look at the Tyne Valley development plans as a whole and seriously consider the potential for a 'Tyne Clipper' river ferry service to improve connections between communities on the banks of the river.

We have always said that to survive and prosper, Newcastle, like other major regional capital cities, must continue to evolve. Change is essential but needs to be approached and planned with equal measures of vision and caution. One notable example of this is St. James' Park. Aspirations for the club from supporters and owners alike are ambitious, and rightly so. St. James' Park is our Cathedral on the hill and is unique in the country and rare across Europe to retain a major stadium so centrally in the city it represents. The stadium must remain at the heart of the city while expanding to deliver a fan experience commensurate with its position as a top-tier Premier League club.

With all these developments happening across Newcastle, we now need to take this golden opportunity to reset and refocus our ambitions for the long term. The plans for 2025- 2028 are significant and impactful. They will change the face of our city, but what comes next?

History will not look favourably on us if we put our feet up and coast. Instead, it is time to put our foot down and accelerate plans that will underpin the city's future for the next 10-15 years.

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## Inclusive Growth



ABCConnexions serves to connect, support and promote minority communities and aims to make the North East the UK's most inclusive region by the end of 2025.

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## The Parapet Parable

In medieval times, archery was both art and warfare. The term Spanish Archer became synonymous with dismissal (“El Bow”), and the two-finger salute—a gesture often flaunted by archers—traced its origins back to the Hundred Years’ War.

Legend has it that English longbowmen would raise their fingers to show they could still draw their bows, despite threats to maim them. These bold archers had to stick their heads above the parapet, risking becoming easy targets, simply to make their mark.

The parapet has always symbolised safety, yet progress demands peering over its edge, facing arrows from friend and foe alike. For me, sticking my head above the parapet has been both a necessity and a calling, driven by a need to chart my own path in the absence of role models during my formative years. For more than a decade, I had to find my own way—not an ideal recipe for teenage self-assurance.

If anything, I could write a handbook on what not to do, having learned lessons the hard way. By the time I finished education, I had packed my bags and fled to London. Working for the British Council, I lived in a whirlwind of global connections, expanding horizons, and cultural exchange. Yet, despite the allure of the big city, homesickness gnawed at me. **I missed the North East, its warmth, its people—and above all, my mum.**

When I returned, I threw myself into building my career, spending the next decade in the bubble of innovation. It was exhilarating yet insular, and I kept largely to myself. Something shifted in 2003 when I came home again, this time resigning from a national role. It wasn’t burnout or disillusionment—it was a calling to give back.

I began promoting others, dedicating my energy to causes that mattered and people who deserved the spotlight. Over the past



Ammar Mirza CBE

20 years, I’ve given away 50% of my time. Yes, you read that right—half of my time has gone into mentoring, championing, and advocating for others. **Why? Because there’s joy in seeing people succeed, especially those who might not otherwise get a chance to shine.**

**But here’s the rub: sticking your head above the parapet is never easy. In doing so, you make yourself visible—and visibility invites scrutiny.** Some question your motives, wondering if there’s an agenda behind your actions. It’s a strange paradox, using your platform to lift others, only to have your own integrity examined under a microscope.

So, why do I persist? Why keep sticking my head above the parapet? Because I’ve learned that **progress doesn’t come from hiding behind walls.** Change, innovation, and inclusion all require courage—not just for ourselves, but to inspire others to step up too.

The moral of the story? The arrows may fly, but the view from above the parapet is worth it. Whether you’re a medieval archer or a modern-day advocate, true impact lies

“

*...May I wish all of you a Spanish Archer’less joyful Christmas and an Arrow free New Year. God Bless...*

in daring to be seen, risking vulnerability to build a legacy that lifts others over the wall. Keep looking up—your courage just might be the catalyst someone else needs.

**Ammar Mirza CBE is Chair & Founder of Asian Business Connexions, Executive Chair of the AmmarM Group, Honorary Colonel of 101 Regiment RA and holds various positions across the public and private sectors with a deep interest in Inclusion, Innovation and Internationalisation.**



The Brighter Compliance team

## Brighter Compliance celebrate a year of growth

A year of investment and innovative new technology has ensured a year of success for the North Tyneside based business.

**As the UK focuses on sustainability, improved energy efficiencies and adherence to quality standards throughout the building, retrofit and construction industries, it's a time when the services of Brighter Compliance have never been more in demand.**

The company works with companies from across the UK in a variety of industries including engineering, IT, finance, construction and mechanical contracting. Their services include ISO and PAS management systems, fire door inspections, fire and legionella risk assessments and internal auditing, ensuring compliance and safety is made as achievable as possible for their clients.

With a strategic plan to grow the business in 2024, Managing Director, Austin Gibbons, invested in new innovative technology, recruited four full time members of staff, welcomed three expert consultants to the team and developed a comprehensive sales and marketing plan.

The new recruits, which included a Quality Manager, Health and Safety Consultant, Software Developer, Auditor and Marketing Manager have brought a wealth of knowledge and experience to the business,

with the company already experiencing impressive growth results.

Austin, who launched the business in 2020 and has over 10 years' experience in compliance consultancy, commented on the company's investment and growth plans, 'With the UK well-placed to be at the forefront of energy efficiency, sustainability and compliance for many years to come, I knew it was the right time to further invest in the business and ensure we could support clients across the country.

With several recent high-profile incidents such as the Grenfell Tower tragedy, businesses need to ensure they are compliant with all existing, updated and new regulations, while these are important and essential improvements, they also bring about their own challenges, especially for smaller companies.

By working with qualified external consultants such as ourselves, businesses have peace of mind knowing that they remain compliant and have expert advice and guidance on hand.

For businesses looking to gain or maintain an ISO standard such as 9001 (quality), 14001 (environmental), 27001 (information security) or 45001 (health and safety), we

know this can be a daunting process which is why we introduced our new and innovative ISO technology, 'ISO Hub'.

With the support of our new software developer, we successfully launched this in October with clients already seeing the benefits of using the user-friendly software. With our flexible packages, it's ideal for businesses who either don't have the expertise of a health & safety manager, need extra support with documentation or are investing in an ISO standard for the first time.'

Discussing the new marketing investment, Austin continued, 'It was also essential that moving forward, we had a comprehensive sales and marketing strategy in place to ensure we were receiving a return on our investments and working with a North East based consultant, this has helped us define our target market, update and increase our social media presence and with a new user-friendly website, has improved our overall company brand and exposure.

Recruiting qualified members of staff and collaborating with expert consultants has not only ensured we have the right people in the right place but their vast experience has been invaluable to the whole team and our clients.

With the changes and improvements we have made throughout the year, we have now welcomed 60 new clients to the business, which has resulted in a 32% increase in turnover.

With further improvements planned for 2025, we're hoping to support more businesses across the UK to remain compliant and ensure their workforce is safe. The future is definitely looking bright!'

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



## The Exchange 1856 takes the Top Spot

The Exchange 1856, a new business that has brought investment to North Tyneside, created 30 jobs, and established a vibrant cultural hub in the heart of North Shields, has won the prestigious North Tyneside Business Awards - Business of the Year.

Organised by the North Tyneside Business Forum, the awards recognise the dedication and innovation of businesses that make North Tyneside a great place to live, work, and visit.

### The Category Winners were:

- New Business Award** – The Exchange 1856
- Heart of the Community award** – NE Nipple Project
- Action on Climate Change Award** – Keel Row Books
- Heart of the Business Award** – Chelsea Jackson, Insulcon Technical
- Retail & Service Provider Award** – Direct Cars Taxes
- Technology Innovation Award** – Wubbleyou
- Significant Contribution Award** – Leica Biosystems
- Business of the Year** – The Exchange 1856

The event was sponsored by Cybit, The Banks Group, Action on Climate Change, Collingwood Learners, Layer 7 IT Security and supported by North Tyneside Council. Ceremony sponsors included Insulcon Technical, Crossling, Buston & Maughan, and NE Display Ltd.





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# Celebrating 35 years of the North East Recycling Forum

**This year, the North East Recycling Forum (NERF) is celebrating their 35th year supporting the North East’s waste and recycling sector.**

**The NERF offers a quarterly forum for the public, private and community sector to share best practice in waste and recycling issues. For over three decades, the NERF has delivered a space for the waste and recycling sector to network with their peers and hear about the latest developments and innovations relevant to the sector.**

The NERF is supported by the Friends of NERF scheme, a membership model, offering organisations of all sizes the opportunity to increase their profile. The Friends of NERF ensure the forum’s longevity, as a source of information and forum for discussion for the sector.

To celebrate this big milestone, the NERF held a special Annual Conference in Durham Town Hall. As well as excellent networking, the event had a lively exhibition area filled with key players from across the sector, and expert speakers. The keynote speech of the day was from CEO of WRAP, Harriet Lamb, as well as topical presentations from Suez and DEFRA.

Jo Holmes, Secretariat of the NERF and MD of Genee Consulting Ltd, said: “The Annual Conference was a fantastic celebration of 35 years of the NERF. The forum continues to grow and share best practice, proving its continued value across the region. We’re always welcoming new attendees and hope to see even more in 2025.”

The waste and recycling sector is particularly subject to change, as new legislation is introduced, new processes adopted, and innovations enter the sector. The North East Recycling Forum continues to be a valuable resource within the North East, supporting

the sector through changes and developments by inviting expert speakers to cover the current and big issues, encouraging thoughtful discussion and topical questions.

NERF Annual Conference was sponsored by main event sponsor Bio Capital; associate sponsors, LARAC and Contenur; and venue sponsors Durham County Council.

**To be the first to hear about upcoming events from the North East Recycling Forum, join their mailing list at [www.nerf.org.uk](http://www.nerf.org.uk)**



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## Altoria Homes: Pioneering sustainable luxury living in Northumberland

**Altoria Homes, a Northumberland-based luxury home developer founded in 2016 by Alan and Victoria Fleming, is building solid eco foundations with its dedication to environmentally friendly construction and sustainability.**

In a bold move to further boost their sustainability efforts, Altoria Homes has partnered with local entrepreneur and Stannington farmer Michael Dungait, founder of Green Acres, a Northumberland-based initiative that offers carbon offsetting solutions through local action. Rather than relying

on large-scale international carbon-offset programs, Green Acres focuses on localised efforts such as tree and hedge planting, bee hive cultivation, and grassland management. This partnership allows Altoria Homes to visibly reduce their carbon footprint right in their own backyard.

“Building homes that not only meet the highest standards of luxury but also contribute positively to the environment has always been at the core of what we do,” says Alan Fleming. “Our partnership with Green Acres allows us to take that commitment even further, ensuring that our developments have a lasting, positive impact on the local environment.”

Through the collaboration with Green Acres, Altoria Homes has already planted 150 trees, helping to offset the carbon produced during the construction process. These eco-friendly initiatives, combined with state-of-the-art energy systems like underfloor heating and air source heat pumps, ensure that Altoria's homes set a new standard for sustainability in luxury living. By working together, Altoria Homes and Green Acres are setting a new standard for sustainability in the construction industry, showing that luxury and eco-friendliness can go hand in hand.

## Miller Homes' new development open for business



**A new Sunderland housing development has opened its doors and is now offering its first batch of homes up for sale.**

Miller Homes is currently creating 165, three to five bedroom, new build homes at Blakeney Green, Chapelgarth, Sunderland.

And now the sales office at the development has opened, with a number of four and five bedroom homes ready to be reserved.

The houses – which start from £320,000 – and have been designed to the highest standard and with a number of energy saving features.

This includes external electric vehicle charging points, flue gas and waste water heat recovery systems and solar PV diverters which divert excess electricity to the hot water cylinder.

The brand new development offers a range of housing styles, including the four bedroom Skywood, and Kirkwood and five bedroom Denford and Grayford.

The houses all feature open plan kitchen and dining spaces with French doors leading to the garden, along with separate laundry rooms and flexible space for home working.

Blakeney Green is just four miles from the centre of Sunderland and has the added appeal of having open countryside to the south and views of the coast to the east.

It also has excellent transport links, with easy road and rail access to both Durham and Newcastle as well as Sunderland.

The development has also a range of other amenities almost on the doorstep including Doxford International Business Park, supermarkets, pharmacy, Post Office and spa and leisure facilities such as sports centres, pubs and restaurants.

## Landmark historic South Shields property is acquired

**A landmark historic property in South Shields town centre has been acquired by a private investor who will seek to change its use, from commercial to residential, in line with South Tyneside Council's regeneration masterplan for the area.**

Commercial property consultancy, Naylor's Gavin Black, brokered a deal for the sale of 1 King Street, on behalf of a private investor, to Regal Bifrons Properties.

The striking, curved, sandstone building, which was built in the early 1800's and was most recently a Barclays Bank, will be converted into 26 one-bedroom and studio apartments – subject to planning.

Converting the retail premises into homes will support the Council's vision for the town centre by bringing an empty property back into use and helping consolidate the town's retail offer and introduce more residential



properties and leisure operators to this area of the town.

The 12,410 sq. ft. building, which is dual aspect with frontages on King Street and 2 – 4 Fowler Street, is set over six floors including a basement.

Regal Bifrons is part of Hughes Alexander Property Management which has investors that are investing in other areas of the town including the former Maisy's Bar & Nightclub on Ocean Road, 10 Mile End Road and 26-28 Fowler Street, which it is also planning to convert to residential units.

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## Unique historical building to let

Courtyard with three storey  
4/6 Trinity Chare Newcastle  
upon Tyne NE1 3DF.

**It is not often a truly unique and historic building is brought to the market for let in the centre of Newcastle – and grade 4/6 Trinity Chare is exactly that.**

It is perfect for a company looking to promote a distinct brand image and create a point of differentiation from its competitors.

I am very proud that JK Property Consultants advised the historic Corporation of Newcastle upon Tyne Trinity House on this move.

Assisting the ‘House’ and the very special buildings that are part of its estate over many decades, has been one of my greatest pleasures in business.

Built in the 13th century as a Merchants House, 4/6 Trinity Chare, off Broad Chare, has gone through several uses over the centuries and, most recently, occupied by a chamber of barristers.

An application has been made for listed building consent to bring the interior up to modern day office and sustainable

standards. It is expected that consent will be received and adaptation works carried out from early next year. The building is on three floors totaling about 2,000 sq. ft. LED lighting, heat pumps with toilet and kitchen facilities and broadband.

The building is within the quiet Trinity Chare courtyard and offers a unique location with a high quality standard. It is ideal for a small business with the desire to showcase an exceptional brand and promote sustainable standards.

It is located on the Quayside, with shops, bars, restaurants, and theatre and is close to all amenities and the wider city centre and Gateshead. Transport is available from the

Quayside to the city centre and onward to the wider conurbation and national rail and air connections. Parking is available nearby at the Quayside multi-storey car park.

The lease is offered for five years, or multiples and should be ready for occupation by late summer 2025. Trinity House was established on the site from the 1500s and very special meeting and function rooms are available to hire.

Kevan Carrick.

**For further information, please contact Kevan Carrick on [Kevan@jkpropertyconsultants.com](mailto:Kevan@jkpropertyconsultants.com)**



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Mark Dutton

*A year in the life of...*

## Mark Dutton

*Summers-Inman*

### **What did you set out to achieve this year?**

We have implemented a long-term strategic business plan and our primary target was to meet the business goals set within that plan, which we have achieved. As a business we have been able to grow our client base, develop our team and give a little back through social value creation.

### **Has everything gone according to plan?**

We are very strategic in how we approach business, but sometimes not everything goes exactly to plan. 2024 provided opportunities and challenges, and I am pleased to say we have delivered on most of our plans this year.

### **What are you most proud of this year?**

Providing the opportunities for our staff to develop and to achieve their full potential. We are very successful at supporting team members through their professional RICS qualifications and have seen our investments in our mentoring and support networks resulting in four members of staff achieving

RICS Chartered status in the last 12 months, with another four currently signed up and taking part in the process. This is all part of our journey to become an employer of choice.

### **What's the best piece of business advice you've received this year?**

Don't be afraid to set targets that at first you might think are unachievable. Be more ambitious!

### **Tell us about your team?**

We have a strong team of Quantity Surveyors, Building Surveyors, Project Managers, Health & Safety Consultants, and support staff. Our people make the business. We champion diversity and really pride ourselves on providing excellent opportunities to people at all stages of their career.

### **What has been the most enjoyable deal you've been involved with?**

I had a small amount of involvement in a bid for the University of Sheffield framework, to provide multi-disciplinary consultancy services - a bid that we were successful in. It was a real pleasure to meet the client team and as a business we are very much looking forward to working with the university going forward.

### **What is the best business event you have been to?**

The Constructing Excellence North East (CENE) awards which many people believe are the Oscars of the construction industry up here. We were shortlisted for four awards and won in three of these categories, including building project of the year.

### **What have you learnt about yourself this year?**

To realise that, like everyone, I have limitations and not try to do everything all at once.

### **Describe 2024 in three words...**

Interesting, challenging and exciting.

### **What are your aims for 2025?**

2025 looks like a year of opportunity and we will continue to deliver our strategic business plan.

Our focus is to build on our strong capabilities, reputation and history to make sure we deliver quality for our clients.

A focus on quality is at the heart of what we do, all delivered by our team of competent, capable professionals.

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## What does the Autumn Budget mean for the UK housing market?

Now the dust has settled somewhat since the unveiling of the Autumn Budget, specialist property consultancy GFW's Lindsay French and Alison Kent share their views on its impact on the residential property market.



**Lindsay French**  
Partner



**Alison Kent**  
Associate, Valuer

The Labour government have introduced several updates impacting homebuyers, particularly in the areas of stamp duty, affordable housing, and mortgage support.

### What does this mean for first time buyers?

Currently, first-time buyers enjoy zero stamp duty on properties up to £425,000. This threshold is reverting to £300,000 as of March 2025, which for first-time buyers purchasing homes over this amount, means they may need to pay up to £3,500 in stamp duty. A significant change.

However, we're also told that the Mortgage Guarantee Scheme, which enables buyers to access mortgages with a 5% deposit, is set to become permanent. This is aimed at improving accessibility to homeownership by helping more buyers secure low-deposit mortgages. Good news, especially for younger buyers entering the market.

### What about additional homes?

The Autumn Budget announced changes to stamp duty for those purchasing additional properties, such as buy-to-let investments, second and holiday homes. Specifically, the stamp duty surcharge for these types of purchases has increased from 3% to 5% of the total property value.

This will of course have a bearing on landlords, as they may think twice about increasing their investment portfolio or decide to sell their rental properties rather than reinvest, which could reduce the supply of rental properties, giving renters less choice, and more competition with on average 16 applicants\* per property to let as things currently stand. The sale of these rental properties is of course good news for those who are active in the sales market.

### What's happening with interest rates?

We have recently seen an interest rate cut to of 0.25% to 4.75%, after the reduction in August, the first since 2020. This is a positive move for the broader housing market which will further stimulate lending, by offering buyers

greater affordability when choosing a mortgage. We also expect to see a wave of new buyer interest following the cut to interest rates, with those previously priced out of the market more able to re-enter. We don't doubt the reduction will entice more buyers to make their move.

### What does the market look like right now?

Nationally, sales are up 29% year on year\*, which shows the resilience of the UK market overall. Buyer demand remains high with good levels of activity this Autumn. We're seeing an increase in the number of homes available for buyers, with stock levels up 12%\*, which is the highest it's been since 2017.

Despite apprehension around the Budget, we are seeing more positive commitments from buyers than in the previous year, and nationally are on course to complete on 1.1 million homes in 2024, only slightly down on the previous year's figure of 1.2 million\*.

House values seem to have levelled out somewhat, certainly in the Northeast and Yorkshire region, with little growth. We predict values will remain static over the next twelve months as buyers continue to be cautious about overpaying, particularly considering energy prices and the cost of living remaining high. This caution is reflected in statistics around sales prices, which show that on average homes are selling for between 94% and 97% of their asking/guide price\*.

### What next?

We're witnessing a very strong end to the year and predict an even stronger start to 2025. We're confident that the UK housing market will remain resilient, and the recent cut to interest rates will only help boost affordability and get the market off to a flying start. Our team of experts are poised to help our clients navigate the changes made in the Autumn Budget, and suggest to anyone who is considering selling, to take steps and get advice now, to beat the new year rush of properties coming to the market.

*\*Information sourced from On The Market*

## Back to the Future

I have dug through previous issues of Northern Insight to find my predictions for 2024.

Of course there has been a dramatic shift in everybody's lives with the general election returning the former opposition with a huge majority. And boy-oh-boy are they making it known that things are different!

So looking back and looking forward at the same time here's my thoughts for 2025...

### Residential

I said in February that the finance market and government policy were combining to drive landlords out of the market. This has certainly come true and there is a woeful lack of homes to rent in the PRS. Rents have increased by up to 40% in the year and so in my view everyone's a loser. Looking ahead we are promised more legislation and whereas there are some new "big players" in the market – e.g. Lloyds Bank, as well as old established "corporate" ones such as Grainger PLC, the small time landlord with his or her half dozen or so "buy to lets" is being squeezed. At the same time tenants are facing ruinous rent hikes.

### Retail

The return to the High Street is still happening although it is anticipated that UK retail ecommerce sales will reach £177.11 billion in 2024, their highest level since 2021. However, ecommerce penetration has plateaued at 30.4%. One change I didn't anticipate but I very much welcome is the reversal of self scanning checkouts – both Asda and Morrisons are scaling back on their proportion of self scan checkouts against manned tills. This is good for job retention and potential creation and I believe the social interaction is also valuable.

### Offices

Office rents across the UK rose healthily (if you're a landlord) in 2024 and in Newcastle there seems to have been a growth rate of over 10%, pushing prime rents well over £30 per square foot (£330 per square metre).



Philip Bowe

Knight Frank and Avison Young have had success at Bank House with four full floors and four half floors let – with two of the occupiers moving from the 120 year old Milburn House. Milburn House itself has been recently acquired by the Gainford Group and it will be interesting to see their plans for it.

### Industrial

There continues to be demand for industrial and warehousing space if it is of the right size and in the right location. Team Valley, the "grand old man" of industrial space is seeing a change in character with alternative users but the industrial and warehousing properties are still letting at healthy figures.

### Leisure

We have seen some more pubs close but we have also seen others refurbished and rebranded and there is life in the sector. Wetherspoons have spent £2.8 million developing the Mile Castle to include 26 bedrooms and a little further out whereas Bar Luga has closed in Gosforth, the opportunity was jumped on by the operators

of Babucho to open a sister restaurant to their established unit on The Side. It does seem that a lot of the spend is concentrated around Friday and Saturday evenings for a number of operations but if this is sufficient to "pay the bills" all is well.

Of course we are promised by the new government that rates are going to change dramatically in 2025 with a complete rethink on how properties should be assessed for business rates. I think this time something will happen (I have seen many promises of an "overhaul" of the rates system over my last 44 years in practice with little effect) but let us see what happens.

I do think everyone is going to feel a squeeze in 2025 and as somebody said before, we maybe in different boats but we are all going to be in the same storm.

***BIV Bowes has had a very successful 2024 and on behalf of my colleagues and I, I wish everyone reading this a prosperous and peaceful New Year. And enjoy Christmas the week before!***

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

# Newcastle Household Support Fund extended

Up to 3,200 Newcastle households with a resident of pensionable age will receive a winter fuel payment of up to £300.

**Newcastle City Council has secured £2.9m from the UK Government's Household Support Fund with £950,000 allocated to helping older people on low incomes with winter fuel bills.**

To qualify for the payments older people need to be on Housing Benefit or getting help from the Council Tax Support scheme. The Council has also revealed that £1.1m of the Fund will again be used to provide food vouchers for up to 19,000 children and young people who receive free schools. This will help to financially support families during the school holidays over the Christmas and the February 2025 half term. The rest of the money will be used to provide cash help to residents in need through the local authority's 'welfare assistance' scheme alongside wider cost of living projects. Hardship payments of up to £200 are available through VCS bodies like Newcastle Citizens Advice.



Local councillors supporting Kenton Food Bank

Everyone who is identified as eligible for this help will be contacted directly in December 2024 by the council with their payments.

Kenton councillors Stephen Lambert, Ged Bell and Paula Maines said: "We know that thousands of pensioners in our city have been worried about not receiving their Winter Fuel Allowance. Extension of the Household Support Fund allows our council which has a detailed knowledge of its areas, to spend that money where it will have the greatest impact."

They added: "Our council looked at areas of greatest need and recognise the concern about these households who are no longer getting the Winter Fuel Allowance. We're

also proud to be able to continue to give 19,000 children and young people with food vouchers over the school holidays."

"We're committed to doing all we can to support our residents out of financial difficulty and will continue to work with our communities to get the help available to those who need it most", they said.

"Newcastle has some of the most deprived communities in the country and the Government recognise just how hard it is for some people, particularly as we approach winter, so we welcome the decision to continue the Household Support Fund and will make sure no penny goes goes to waste", the councillors added.

The continued adventures of...

# Ziggy *and Cally!*



Hi everyone,

**It is times like this that being old has its advantages. Days beside the fire far outweigh going out in the cold weather. A quick trot around the garden does me nowadays. Most of our work is indoor with everyone working frantically to get the outside work weathertight. Cally is the main dog now, but she still asked my advice.**

See ya!

**Q.** Can you suggest any safe woodworm fluid for an attic which has worm holes? We would be concerned for our children's health particularly. We have installed modern Velux windows and need to protect these from any live woodworm. What would you suggest?

**A.** I cannot recommend any woodworm fluids. They are all nerve poisons. Your worm holes are probably many years old. They are actually 'flight holes' of the

adult beetles leaving the wood. There is no justification for using insecticides unless you have definitive evidence that there is a continuing active infestation, and that this cannot be dealt with by normal construction methods, i.e. central heating and ventilation. Your new Velux windows are unlikely to be affected by wood-boring insects – the timber in them is kiln-dried and sealed with a water-based varnish.



Please send me your building queries through facebook - @WDLne, website: wdlnortheast.co.uk or through my Dad's good pal Michael at Northern Insight on [michael@northern-insight.co.uk](mailto:michael@northern-insight.co.uk)

# Rising Stars

## Rhys Patterson and Paul Hastings

WDL are based in Newcastle upon Tyne and provide a comprehensive building and property maintenance service throughout the North East. Over the past 40 years they have gained a wealth of commercial experience and launched numerous people into successful careers within the construction sector.

Here, Northern Insight spoke to two of their new recruits about their journey so far...



### Did you always envisage a career within the construction industry?

**Rhys:** No, I never considered becoming a tradesman until completing my A Levels.

**Paul:** Yes, ever since I was around ten years old.

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

**Rhys:** The fact that my job is constantly hands on and gets me out and about. That is certainly preferable to working in an office.

**Paul:** My current role is as an apprentice joiner and I most enjoy learning new things on the job and overcoming different problems in different ways.

### What are you currently working on?

**Rhys:** We are currently working on our first fix stud work and boarding.

**Paul:** At the moment we are working on a complete refurbishment of a local dentist which includes organising dropped ceilings.

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

**Rhys:** The team I'm working with are a brilliant bunch of lads who never fail to make a hard days work easy.

**Paul:** The team are a real pleasure to work with as they are all really professional and I have learned a lot already. We also have a laugh which makes a days work go much quicker.

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

**Rhys:** As a fully qualified joiner.

**Paul:** Producing high quality work as a fully qualified joiner and taking on jobs of my own.

### Who are your heroes and mentors?

**Rhys:** My heroes are my parents who are the reason who I am today. I will always be grateful to them. My mentors are my colleagues Dean and Josh who provide a really pleasant work environment and are really thorough in their demonstrations and explanations.

**Paul:** My heroes would be my Dad and Auntie and my mentors are my colleagues Dean and Josh.

### What is the best advice you have been given in your career so far?

**Rhys:** Measure twice, check twice and cut once!

**Paul:** To take my time for higher quality and better accuracy.

### How do you unwind outside of work?

**Rhys:** Usually spending time with my partner or boxing.

**Paul:** I enjoy spending time with friends and family and getting a lot of sleep.

### Favourite book and boxset?

**Rhys:** Arnold Schwarzenegger's autobiography was great and I loved *Breaking Bad*.

**Paul:** I'm not a big reader so I don't have a favourite book but my favourite boxset has to be *The Simpsons*.

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

*“It has been a pleasure over the last 46 years to bring so many apprentices in to the industry and it is great news that the government is finally putting the funds in place to back an increase in the apprenticeship initiative.*

*It is great to see young lads who are keen to learn. I would point out that the last two both got distinctions...so, no pressure lads!!*

*Brian Dickinson, Chairman, Brookvale Group Ltd.*



“

*...The team  
are a real  
pleasure to  
work with...*

“

*...Measure  
twice, check  
twice, cut  
once!..*

L-R: Paul Hastings and Rhys Patterson



# The UK Budget: Implications for Commercial Property Owners and Landlords

By Paul Fairlamb, Commercial Surveyor, youngsRPS

In November's issue, I examined the challenges and opportunities arising under the Labour Government. Here, I'll explore how recent Budgetary changes may impact commercial property investments. With new adjustments spanning interest rates, taxation, and green building incentives, property stakeholders face a diverse landscape of potential growth and challenges.

## Interest Rates and Borrowing Costs

One of the key outcomes of this Budget is its influence on interest rates and borrowing. In an effort to control inflation, the Bank of England has kept interest rates high, affecting borrowing costs for property owners. Elevated rates mean increased expenses for refinancing, acquisitions, and even maintenance on debt-financed projects. Smaller property portfolios that depend on loans may feel the impact through reduced margins and could face limits on further investment.

Yet, higher interest rates may promote creativity among investors, encouraging alternative funding and joint ventures to reduce reliance on traditional debt. While expansion may slow, this focus on stable, sustainable growth could encourage property owners to maximise the value of their current portfolios, positioning them well for future market opportunities as economic conditions settle.

## Business Rates Reform

Proposed rate relief for small businesses could offer essential support for high-street retailers and small service enterprises, boosting their

resilience in a challenging economic climate. This, in turn, may help stabilise occupancy rates for commercial property owners with retail tenants, particularly in urban and town centres.

For landlords with mixed portfolios, flexibility in lease structuring could become increasingly important. Small tenants benefiting from rate relief may be able to sustain longer leases, reducing vacancy rates, while larger tenants facing higher rate liabilities may need support through lease renegotiations. Adjustments to business rates could provide landlords with new opportunities to build stronger, long-term relationships with small business tenants, benefiting both parties over time.

## Energy Efficiency Requirements and Green Initiatives

The Budget's green focus brings both upfront costs and potential long-term benefits for landlords. Energy-efficient buildings are attractive to tenants who prioritise sustainability and seek lower utility bills. However, retrofitting older properties to align with green standards requires significant investment.

For landlords with a long-term view,

these improvements may enhance both property values and tenant satisfaction, especially as tenants increasingly prioritise environmentally friendly spaces. As tenant expectations shift towards energy-efficient buildings, investments in green upgrades could become a valuable strategic choice, with the potential for government incentives to help offset some of these initial costs.

## Commercial Property Taxation Adjustments

Capital gains tax changes in the Budget may affect how landlords manage their property portfolios. Higher capital gains taxes could encourage landlords to hold onto properties for longer, potentially tightening supply in high-demand areas and driving property values upwards.

These changes may prompt property owners to consider long-term leases rather than frequent turnover as a strategy to maximise returns. Landlords with larger portfolios might explore alternative structures, such as trusts or property funds, to reduce capital gains tax impacts. As a result, the market may see a trend towards a more conservative, long-term approach to portfolio management, with stable income becoming a greater focus.

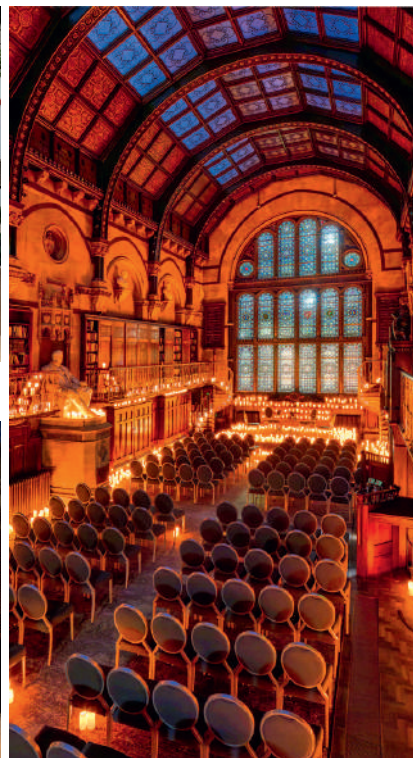
The recent Budget presents a complex but dynamic environment for commercial property owners and landlords. Rising interest rates may slow growth and reduce cash flow for debt-reliant portfolios, while business rate adjustments could benefit smaller business tenants but increase costs for higher-value properties. Green initiatives push property owners to weigh the costs of energy efficiency against the benefits of increased tenant satisfaction and property value.

For landlords, navigating these fiscal adjustments will require strategic flexibility. Considering green investments, exploring innovative financing options, and restructuring portfolio assets could help those who adapt effectively to thrive in this more regulated, high-cost market.

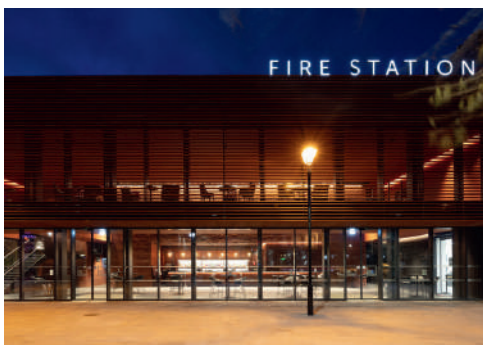
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## Season's Greetings from Wright Residential!

As we welcome the festive season, Wright Residential would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to our valued landlords, tenants, and community for your continued trust and support throughout the year.

### Our Services for You:

*Professional property lettings and management services designed to offer peace of mind for landlords*

*Local expertise and personalised service, helping you find the right property to call home*

*Comprehensive support for tenants, ensuring a smooth, comfortable rental experience*

*Access to quality, reliable tenants, plus guidance on compliance and the latest regulations for the private rented sector*

Whether you're a landlord seeking reliable management or a tenant looking for the perfect place to settle, Wright Residential is here to make every step straightforward and stress-free. Let us help you make this holiday season and the year ahead one to remember in a place you can truly call home.



*From all of us at Wright Residential,  
Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!*



Neil Turner

## New problems - old solutions

By Neil Turner, Director,  
Howarth Litchfield

We live in fascinating times; socially, politically and economically. How this manifests itself and affects the architecture world and the construction industry is equally interesting.

**I often chat and listen to the younger team members at HL and their views and concerns on life. The subjects range hugely together with the strength of opinions. The younger generation is often portrayed as not ambitious or wanting to work hard.**

We don't find this true and it's simply too general: we have terrific younger staff, full of 'get up and go'. But the younger generation do look at life through a different lens and we have to understand the difference.

The architecture world is reflective of differentiated generational developments

with an increasing reliance on technology in the use of drawing, cost and calculations for projects.

Now, while I am not the oldest in the practice, thankfully, I do have colleagues who remember the introduction of the fax machine, and its demise. I can remember the first PC and the first emails arriving. Try to explain to staff about life before emails, mobile phones - it's interesting!

So, you may wonder where my ramble is going this month.

Well, despite all the changes in technology and the political changes or social/moral lines being moved (or altered for us), the profession still needs to operate to the same key objectives.

Architecture is a service industry and our success, or failure, is down to how we listen, operate and deliver.

We have the ability to see one another and chat on line but never under estimate the benefit of having a real client meeting to listen, chat and discuss a building project - face-to-face. The energy and committed problem solving of a real site meeting can't be replicated on line. We remain more focused and intent when not staring through a portal - I am sure everyone has experience watching people do other things on line.

Our profession needs the skills, flair and being up to date on regulations, technology and products - never more so in a post-

Grenfell world. But a good architect needs to care and wants to find solutions that transcend generations and ages.

Throughout my career I have seen trends come and go and materials fall out of favour only to be replaced by a current 'new system' that is going to take over, yet at the heart of the profession, is knowledge and experience, which cannot simply be reproduced using the F2 button on the key board.

Like all businesses we respond, change and grow to reflect wider society and how society wants to see itself. We embrace the social media world and the instant ability to announce progress. We constantly invest to be up to date in training and hardware.

At the heart of our work, we still want to create great designs that are timeless and fit for purpose and we want our clients to be content and proud of their decisions to develop.

I will never stop enjoying the moment a building is open for business, a surgery opening its doors to patients or a factory ready to produce.

Yes, life moves on and alters - but the key values remain timeless.

**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)**

# Carbon reduction and virtual reality among latest Esh Construction initiatives



L-R: Thirteen Group Project Manager Sam White and Esh Construction Site Manager Lloyd Parkinson

As one of the North of England's largest privately-owned contractors, Esh Construction is committed to driving forward sustainability, community impact and innovation in construction, working in partnership with its clients and supply chain.

## Care home residents immerse themselves in Tyne Bridge virtual reality tour

Residents of two care homes in Newcastle and Gateshead have been the first to try out a brand-new and exciting virtual reality (VR) experience based on the Tyne Bridge.

Watched through a VR headset, this one-of-a-kind tour immerses viewers into the history of the iconic North East landmark through 360-degree footage and archive content from over the years. It features a local TV presenter who narrates the tour and discusses some of the bridge's important historical moments, right up to present day.

A collaboration between Esh Construction, Radius and VR Care has enabled the VR tour to be produced as part of the major restoration of the Tyne Bridge which got underway earlier this year.

Around 12 residents from Alexandra House Care Home in Gateshead and Orchard Mews Care Home in Benwell – the two closest

residential homes to the bridge – took part in an enriching session which saw them reminisce and share their memories of the Tyne Bridge, River Tyne and surrounding areas.

One resident commented: "Wow, it feels like I'm flying, I'm currently over St. James' Park and I can see a kittiwake flying right in-front of me, it's flying down to the Tyne Bridge."

## Net zero approach driving energy efficient homes in Tees Valley

Esh is helping raise the bar for sustainable living in Teesside as it develops 10 net-zero carbon homes for Thirteen Group.

Part of an £18 million development known as Kedward Avenue – one of three sites Esh is delivering for Thirteen in Middlesbrough – the new timber-framed homes will feature a raft of state-of-the-art technologies as the housing provider explores net-zero carbon opportunities in the region.

Four bungalows and six semi-detached two storey homes will benefit from enhanced insulation, triple-glazed windows, air source heat pumps and a mechanical ventilation heat recovery (MVHR) system. Photovoltaic solar panels, battery storage and electric vehicle charging points will also be installed externally.

To proclaim a property as net-zero carbon, homes must undergo rigorous energy performance standards testing, to meet a Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) score of two or lower – a much higher requirement than the standard home requirement of 5 or under.

Mark Binns, Operations Director for Esh's affordable housing division, said: "It is a landmark moment for Esh Construction

and Thirteen Group to be providing the net zero offer. The project marks a significant step forward in sustainable construction and underlines a shared commitment to delivering future-proofed and energy efficient homes."

## Esh recognised at CECA North East Awards

Esh Construction enjoyed double award success at the Civil Engineering Contractors Association North East Awards in Gosforth – picking up the Environmental Company of the Year and the Going the Extra Mile Award.

The Environmental award recognises Esh's commitment to becoming a more sustainable contractor through its 'Even Greener' strategy. As part of its carbon reduction plan, Esh's team of Carbon Champions are committed to identifying low carbon products, processes, ideas and innovations to become part of its 'trials and adoptions' initiative.

The Going the Extra Mile Award was presented for Esh's bespoke Building My Skills employability programme, which was delivered to 4,500 students across the North East and Tees Valley during the 2023-24 academic year.

The programme, which culminated in a Mock Interview Day in Newcastle, was fully coordinated by Apprentice Social Value Coordinator, Lucy Youlton, and planning for the 2025 edition is already well underway.

Esh's Woodside Avenue Remediation Scheme was also 'Highly Commended' in the Project of the Year (Over £5m) category.

**To find out more about Esh Construction, visit [www.eshgroup.co.uk](http://www.eshgroup.co.uk)**



# Sustainable Transport Goals

By Rob Lynas

In an era where sustainability and innovation are paramount, Lynas Engineers is proud to have contributed to Northumberland County Council's transformative Solar Car Ports project at County Hall, Morpeth.

This ambitious initiative required not only expertise in engineering design but also a steadfast commitment to sustainable practices and collaboration. It's a perfect example of our approach at Lynas Engineers: combining innovative solutions with practical, future-proof designs to deliver projects that exceed client expectations.

The project showcases how existing infrastructure can be reimagined to meet modern environmental challenges while serving practical community needs.

## Technical Innovation

At the heart of the project is a comprehensive solar car port array powering 142 vehicle charging points through an integrated system of solar generation and battery storage. The design accommodates charging facilities for 271 electric vehicles, positioning the site for the rapid growth in EV adoption. Working within existing site constraints, the engineering team collaborated with specialist solar companies and local authorities to develop practical solutions for power generation, storage, and distribution. The design prioritises user safety and operational efficiency, with careful consideration given to the positioning of control systems and maintenance access points.

## Sustainable Solutions

Beyond renewable energy generation, the project delivered significant environmental improvements through a complete overhaul of the surface water drainage system. Modern attenuation solutions, including underground storage tanks, protect

downstream properties, while oil separators and flow controls minimise environmental impact.

## Engineering Challenges

The project presented several complex challenges, particularly in coordinating multiple stakeholders and managing the integration of new technology with existing infrastructure. The team developed innovative solutions for cable and duct management, working around existing apparatus while ensuring future maintainability.

## Results and Impact

The completed project demonstrates how local authorities can successfully upgrade aging infrastructure while advancing sustainable transport goals. Delivered on time and under Budget, the new facility provides:

- Solar-powered charging for 271 electric vehicles.
- Modernised surface water management.
- Improved pedestrian access and safety.
- Future-proofed maintenance access.
- Full resurfacing with targeted reconstruction.

Reflecting on this project, Managing Director Rob Lynas emphasises, "This scheme encapsulates our vision at Lynas Engineers, to design and deliver infrastructure that not only meets today's demands but anticipates tomorrow's needs. By integrating renewable energy solutions, robust drainage systems, and future-ready designs, we're proud to have contributed to a project that exemplifies sustainable engineering."

This project serves as a practical example of how to modernise facilities while reducing your carbon footprint. It demonstrates how thoughtful engineering can balance ambitious environmental targets with practical infrastructure requirements.

**Lynas Engineers specialises in civil engineering solutions that combine technical innovation with practical sustainability. For more information about our infrastructure and renewable energy projects, visit our website: [lynasengineers.com](https://lynasengineers.com)**



# Newcastle Helix reaches important milestone



## The Core building is 10 Years old.

**Newcastle is certainly a city that is constantly evolving. None more so than the former home of Newcastle Brown Ale itself.**

In 2005 Scottish & Newcastle Breweries closed the site and the land was purchased in partnership with the City Council and the University – with a grand vision to create something transformational for the city and region.

This 24 acre site is now home to Newcastle Helix, a joint venture between Newcastle City Council, Newcastle University and Legal & General, and is designed to house businesses which are primarily tech and science focussed, as well as offering residential areas and being a hub for the local community.

At the centre of the Helix you'll find a seriously imposing office block appropriately called The Core. It stands proud at the front of the entire Helix estate where you'll find a multitude of businesses working towards challenges of the future

The Core has just turned 10 years old, it certainly doesn't feel 10 years when you look at the scale of the buildings that have been

erected since its opening. Being the first site to open its doors on 3rd November 2014, it is great to see how far the Helix has come over the last decade.

"Here at the Core we offer office space between 200 – 2,000 square feet over seven floors," said Tony Gray who, as part of Knight Frank is Centre Manager of the Core. "We have an ideal range of office spaces, smaller offices are ideal for start-ups whereas our larger space is suited for established SMEs. No matter which size of space a business goes for, we can offer flexibility. Every office is fully serviced and is customisable to each business including Mail Service/Cleaning/IT/Telephony/Catering and Meeting rooms."

Also on offer at the Core is an impressive event space which can hold up to 150 people and is fully customisable, from theatre style to workshops. In other words, the Core has a layout for just about all events.

"We do currently have space available at the Core. Our only stipulation is that any new business fits in with the overall ethos of working towards challenges of the future or digitally enabled sustainability and must be an SME.

"Being a part of the Helix creates a sense of community, lots of opportunity to collaborate with like minded companies and events which in turn can help grow your business"

And because it's at the heart of one of the most vibrant commercial areas in the region with a huge variety of businesses, it is the ideal base for any SME business to be based."

John Seager - Newcastle Helix Estates Director added, "Newcastle Helix is about our future. The development is designed to be a living lab - a place where we find out, collaboratively, how we can all live better lives. The Core building is the pioneer at Helix – the first building to be completed and home to many organisations leading the way in innovation that will have transformational, long term impacts across the region"

The Core can help you run your business. They'll look after the little things that can be so time consuming while you take care of the important stuff.

The best idea is to have a chat with Tony Gray and his team at the Core. Pop in for a tour or take a look at their website [www.thecorenewcastle.co.uk](http://www.thecorenewcastle.co.uk)

Here's to the next decade of success at the Core. Why not be part of it.

**For further details and confirmation of prices and availability, contact the Core on 0191 495 7300...or email: [info@thecorenewcastle.co.uk](mailto:info@thecorenewcastle.co.uk) or just call in.**





Lakeland House, Kirkby Lonsdale

## A balancing act

By David Thompson ARB RIBA, THAA Architects.

Our ambition is to create well designed and thought-provoking architecture. We are also passionate about being considerate to the natural world in which our architecture exists. In our work we strive for a balance between the buildings we create, the people who use them, and the environments they are built in.

**We design quality, bespoke, sustainable architecture with careful thought to minimise the build's impact on local flora and fauna, and where possible, to enhance it.**

The UK's biodiversity is declining faster than at any other time in history. Since the 1930s, 97% of all wildflower meadows have disappeared, and 90% of wetland habitats have disappeared. 75,000 miles of hedgerows have been torn down and thousands of ancient woodlands have disappeared, now only covering 3% of the UK. This demise in natural habitat has resulted in a quarter of our mammals and one-third of native birds are currently at risk of extinction, additionally in the last 20 years, flying insects essential for pollination have declined by 60%. The UK may appear green, but most of our land is made up of an interconnecting tapestry of intensively farmed agricultural land with little refuge for wildlife.



David Thompson



Ealing House, London



Lodges, Boroughbridge

Growing populations also means more homes need to be built and more food needs to be produced to feed people. Currently, 72% of land in the UK is used for agriculture with 8% being used for construction, this leaves little room for native wildlife to thrive. As well as being the main reasons for natural habitat loss, these industries are also major contributors to global greenhouse gas emissions, leading to the well-documented damaging effects of climate change. In the UK it is estimated that the built environment contributes around 40% towards the UK's total carbon emissions. Energy use significantly contributes to CO2 emissions, and even though the UK is developing its renewable energy infrastructure, primarily through wind and solar, 78% of our energy is still created from burning fossil fuels.

Architecture therefore has a huge role to play in preserving natural habitats and lowering CO2 emissions. How we use land, build new homes, restore old homes, and how we create and use energy for everyday living is fundamental for our health and the well-being of the natural world. Through responsible building practices and quality architecture, we can provide opportunities to enhance biodiversity and promote a positive impact on climate health.

The way we design and build at THAA Architects is influenced by environmental pressures. We are signatories of Architects Declare (Architects Declaration Climate and Biodiversity Emergency) and members of the Passivhaus Trust and Green Register, and the environmental impact of our designs is always at the forefront of our process. We do this by carefully



Valley House, Bradford on Avon



Newcastle College

considering methods of construction, external and internal material choices, building orientation, window placement, renewable energy systems, and the creation of habitat for nature through landscaping interventions. Our aim is for a building to have a minimal impact on the environment, provide a healthy living environment for its occupants, ensure energy efficiency, and to provide a place for nature to thrive.

This does not mean that the design of the architecture to be a second priority. On the contrary. We believe any piece of architecture has a responsibility to contribute positively to its surroundings both environmentally and visually. It should be well considered, of its place, vernacular and importantly, thought-provoking.

When creating a fully considered scheme it may seem like a drop in the ocean for one building project or landscape improvement to make a difference to the local ecosystem, but small changes can have significant impacts and play a vital role in the health of the surrounding wildlife. For example, a small pond or a dense patch of scrub can make a dramatic difference in an environment surrounded by intensively farmed land, as they can become refuges for a multitude of indigenous wildlife. Designing architecture that benefits the local environment is not a completely altruistic process by any means. In creating sustainable, energy efficient buildings and biodiverse environments we enhance the well-being of the human occupants whilst reducing carbon emissions for space heating thus reducing long term operational costs to the owner.

If this sounds like the sort of architecture that inspires you and allows you to make a positive impact on the built and natural environment and you are excited about working with a team of experienced forward thinking Architects then please get in contact and see what THAA can do for you.

[www.thaa.co.uk](http://www.thaa.co.uk)  
[thaa@thaa.co.uk](mailto:thaa@thaa.co.uk)

# Prosper nurtures new and emerging talent to support future growth aspirations



L-R: Heidi Molloy, Procurement Administrator, Dave Dawson, New Build Specialist, Tim Jennett, Head of Strategy and Governance and Finn Johnson, Management Trainee

**North East specialist procurement consultancy, Prosper has almost doubled the size of its team in the last six months to support its future growth aspirations.**

**The company, which creates bespoke construction and new build procurement solutions for public sector frameworks, has welcomed six new appointments since June.**

Founded in 2008, originally trading as NE Procurement but rebranding as Prosper in 2017, the not-for-profit company has a strong North East presence but operates nationally.

The team offers a depth of experience, knowledge and understanding of the Built Environment related procurement and builds a unique relationship to support contractor consultants and landlord partners.

The company aims to create a working environment to develop team members and enhance skills growth and retention. A good example of putting this into practice is the appointment of Heidi Molloy who joined Prosper in November 2022 as a Business Administrator, but excelled during her business apprenticeship and has now secured a permanent position within the

business as a Procurement Administrator.

In August, Prosper welcomed Finn Johnson to the team as a Management Trainee and he is learning about all the fundamental elements of how the business operates.

Both Heidi and Finn are being guided and are benefitting from highly experienced members of staff including Tim Jennett, Head of Strategy and Governance who has over 23 years' experience working in procurement and David Dawson, New Build Specialist who has worked at Prosper for the last 7 years, prior to which he spent more than 30 years in new build construction roles across the north of England.

Collectively, the team provides value, creates efficiency and is often seen as an extension of internal procurement teams. They spend time to understand the environment each client is working in and the challenges they face and build relationships that make a real difference.

Heidi and Finn support the team working on multiple contracts and are attending meetings with partner teams, which is accelerating their growth and development. Using the collective teams' experience and understanding of the environment and pressures that contractors and landlord partners are working in, the team will help to identify what the requirements of the project are so they can understand what good looks like and in doing so, they provide a procurement route that will deliver that.

For many projects, Prosper provides a high-

level contract management service from beginning to end life cycle managing and monitoring to ensure delivery is achieved and maintained.

The team attend an initial kick-start meeting at the beginning of project and have contact and provide regular updates with both the employing partner and supply chain partner. This helps to ensure the contract is delivered on Budget, in time and to the agreed specification.

Rod Brasington, Chief Executive of Prosper, said: "We've strategically developed our team and strengthened the skills that will deliver the best outcomes for our clients. Our approach is different and believe the best way for staff to excel and learn is to leverage the knowledge and expertise of our more experienced staff to develop our new and younger members of staff such as Heidi and Finn.

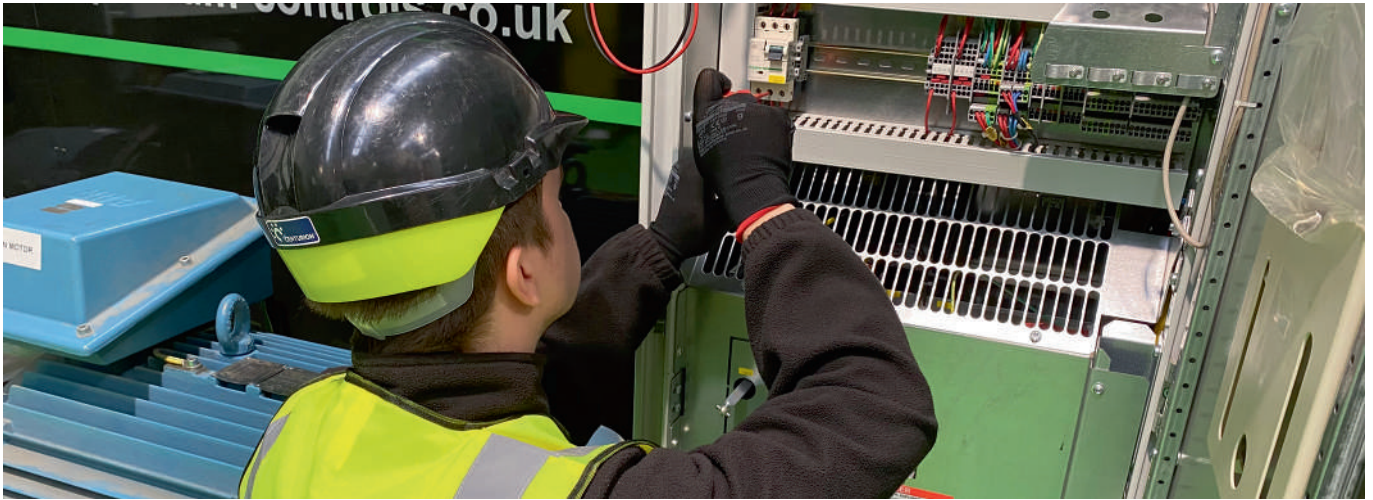
"The collective experience that Tim and Dave have means they are learning from the best. It gives us a unique proposition and a different perspective. We value the input Heidi and Finn provide as it gives their feedback from a young person's perspective.

"We will continue to promote apprenticeships and encourage the development of our younger team members to enable them to further enhance their learning and skills, they are our future."

[www.prosper.uk.com](http://www.prosper.uk.com)



# Tackling the skills shortage in engineering with Quantum Controls



The engineering sector in the UK is facing a growing challenge: a significant shortage of skilled engineering resources. With demands rising across industries, companies are struggling to maintain seamless operations due to a lack of available, highly trained engineers.

**This shortage has become a critical barrier to operational efficiency and reliability. In response, Quantum Controls offers a robust solution, providing businesses nationwide with an extensive, specialist engineering team available 24/7, 365 days a year.**

With over 320 companies already benefiting from Quantum Controls' service contracts, this partnership has become a strategic asset to ensure smooth and continuous operations.

## Engineering Resource Challenge

Partnering with Quantum Controls allows companies to supplement their workforce with specialised support, providing peace of mind that engineering resources are available whenever they're needed.

## Quantum Controls Service Contracts

With Quantum Controls' Electrical Equipment Breakdown and Maintenance Contracts, clients can mitigate the risk of unexpected downtime. This comprehensive service includes access to specialist electrical engineers around the clock, enabling businesses to build a resilient operational foundation. Key features of the service include:

- Specialist Electrical Engineering availability 24/7
- Thermal Imaging Surveys to identify overheating components
- Airflow Fan Assessments and Cleaning to ensure optimal cooling

- Terminal Tightening and Filter Replacement to prevent faults
- Obsolescence Reports to proactively address outdated equipment
- Unlimited Technical and Breakdown Troubleshooting
- Access to Contract Engineer Rates and Maintenance Day Shifts

By partnering with Quantum Controls, businesses can minimize one of the biggest barriers to operational continuity in today's market.

## PLC and HMI Maintenance Service

Quantum Controls understands the critical role that PLCs (Programmable Logic Controllers) and HMIs (Human-Machine Interfaces) play in the manufacturing industry. To keep these essential systems running at peak efficiency, they offer a PLC and HMI Maintenance Service designed to minimize downtime and extend equipment life. For businesses under contract, Quantum Controls delivers a full maintenance package, including:

- Site Surveys and Maintenance Visits covering:
  - Program Backups and Hardware Cleaning
  - Battery Replacement and Airflow Checks
  - Cabling and Software Patches
- Resilience Reports and Guaranteed Technical Support with:
  - 24/7 Telephone Support and Next-Day Engineer On-Site Guarantees
  - Remote Monitoring for real-time updates

This service aims to maintain manufacturing processes at the highest efficiency and safety standards.

## The OneCall Partnership: Rapid Response and First-Time Fix

In the fast-paced world of manufacturing, unplanned downtime can be costly—often averaging £15,000 per hour of lost production. Quantum Controls' OneCall Partnership was developed to keep critical drives and motors functioning at peak performance. The OneCall contract offers:

- 24/7 direct phone access to fully qualified engineers

- Immediate 'engineer to site' response upon request
- A 'first visit first fix' guarantee
- Coverage for all variable speed drives on-site, regardless of brand or model
- Access to the largest stock of variable speed drives, spares, and hire units in the UK

By establishing this partnership, companies ensure rapid on-site repair services, minimizing costly downtime.

## Total Contract: Comprehensive Coverage for Maximum Reliability

For businesses requiring maximum reliability, Quantum Controls offers the Total Contract. This premium contract not only includes the features of the OneCall Partnership but also provides additional proactive support to prevent breakdowns. Benefits include:

- Onsite Maintenance Days to conduct recommended checks
- Lifecycle Extension Reports to maximize equipment longevity
- Quarterly Contract Reviews with a dedicated account manager
- Drive Asset Management System (DAMS) for real-time asset tracking
- Resilience Reports, Recommendation Reports, and Remote Monitoring
- Exclusive discounts and online access to inventory

Quantum Controls' Total Contract is designed to offer an unparalleled level of service, ensuring businesses can operate with minimal disruptions and maximum confidence.

## A Strategic Solution to a National Challenge

In a time where engineering resource shortages are a pressing industry challenge, Quantum Controls provides an innovative solution that businesses across the UK can rely on. By partnering with Quantum Controls, UK businesses can safeguard their operations with access to industry-leading engineering support—365 days a year.

**Contact the team today**  
[marketing@quantum-controls.co.uk](mailto:marketing@quantum-controls.co.uk)



## The future of emotional wellness and mental health care begins in Gateshead

A North East-based mental health business is revolutionising mental health care by harnessing cutting-edge technologies to provide faster, more effective treatment for thousands in need. With applications in treating anxiety, autism, ADHD, PTSD, and phobias, the process is backed by a

decade of clinical research and boasts an impressive 94% success rate in achieving positive outcomes.

XR Therapeutics, based in Gateshead, is transforming mental health treatment by combining immersive technology with traditional therapeutic methods. XR Therapeutics aims to enhance the effectiveness of mental health care, reducing treatment times and improving the quality of life for those struggling with their mental health.

“We leverage immersive technology to make treatments like CBT and EMDR more efficient and effective,” explains Webber. “Instead of merely discussing challenges, patients can experience controlled scenarios. For example, for someone with social anxiety, a therapist can simulate a trip to a supermarket, adjusting factors like the number of people present, noise levels, and even the interaction with store staff. This helps patients confront their fears in a safe, customisable environment.”



## Software firm moves into new Sunderland office

An ambitious software company has moved to a new office in Sunderland as it targets growth.

Moralbox provides a platform for companies to track and manage their staff training, helping businesses ensure compliance and identify skill gaps.

The company has grown significantly, in the last 12 months it has doubled its turnover, secured accelerator funding, and had a delegation travel to San Francisco to promote its product across the Atlantic.

In San Francisco, the firm’s representatives met with the British consulate, visited Plug and Play Tech Center and attended several networking events, helping the company prepare for raising investment.

They also received a tour of Google HQ from Google Cloud Architect Richard Greaves who relocated to Silicon Valley from Sunderland 18 years ago.

Moralbox is now actively reaching out to international investors who support EdTech SaaS companies at seed stage in the UK, as well as looking at other accelerator programmes.

Co-founder, Gordon MacPherson, said: “We’ve been keen up to this point to develop our product with a small number of clients to make sure we have the product right and we feel like we have that now. Our customers love the product, we have great customer retention, we now want to grow so we can have a wider reach.

“We’re in a growth mindset now, looking to take the company to the next stage and raising investment. Everything is looking good, we’ve doubled our revenue in the last 12 months, so everything is pointing in the right direction.

“At the same time, we’ll continue to innovate and develop our product. We’re going to have our first AI based feature in the next software update. We’re in the process of developing an integration with the DVLA for driving licence checks, which is something that a lot of companies have been asking for.”

The company has recently relocated to the Evolve Business Centre, at Rainton Bridge Business Park.

## razorblue achieves Cyber Essentials Certification Body Status

razorblue, a leading Managed IT service provider is proud to announce that it has achieved Cyber Essentials Certification Body status. The government-backed cyber-security certification scheme is now an essential hallmark of a business that takes its cyber security posture seriously and a requirement for businesses who want to work with the public sector.

This milestone highlights razorblue’s continued commitment and strong credentials in the field.

Independently ranked in the UK’s top-10 IT Managed Service Providers, razorblue employs over 200 people across the country and has a dedicated team of Cyber Security experts.

Richard Bullock, Head of Cyber Security, who joined the company in 2019, has gained the Cyber Essentials Assessor Certification along with three other highly qualified consultants.

Richard commented: “Achieving Cyber Essentials certification is a crucial step for businesses in today’s digital landscape. Not only does it provide assurance that a business has implemented fundamental protection against the most common cyber threats, but it is also increasingly necessary to qualify for cyber insurance



and win business with new customers. Without meeting these baseline standards, businesses are exposed to significant risk.”

The Cyber Essentials and Cyber Essentials Plus certifications are becoming indispensable for companies looking to safeguard their digital assets, protect sensitive data, and ensure compliance with growing regulatory requirements. These certifications are also a vital component in obtaining cyber insurance, which is an essential layer of protection in an era of increasing cyber threats.

As a certification body, razorblue can carry out and issue Cyber Essentials certifications to businesses. This will enable the company to offer an even higher level of service to its clients, further demonstrating their commitment to best-in-class cyber security solutions.



Streamline your business tech with our Managed IT Services. We proactively monitor and manage your IT, ensuring peace of mind whether you're in the cloud, on mobile, or in the office. Plan ahead, reduce risk, and achieve your goals hassle-free.

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“

*...2025 is  
our platform  
to grow the  
business...*

Warren Colby

# A year in the life of...

## Warren Colby

*Managing Director, Agilico Workplace Technologies*

### **What did you set out to achieve this year?**

There were a number of objectives this year, with the most important project being the launch of the Agilico Zero range, our first no/low carbon emission range of Multifunctional devices which will replace the need for our clients to purchase brand new machines and reduce their carbon consumption.

### **Has everything gone according to plan?**

Better than expected. I anticipated a little bit of resistance if truth be known, but our employees have really engaged with our green agenda by embracing the sales of carbon avoiding devices. I think the high quality of the devices we refurbish has played its part as it is almost impossible to tell the difference between refurbished and new.

### **What are you most proud of this year?**

Our employees. It has been a hard year for everyone, both financially with the cost of living and economically with the uncertainty of the government, but we stuck to our plan to change and disrupt the industry. We will offer clients a choice; new or refurbished, or a mixture of the two. Our proposition will provide clients with a choice of products which are better for the planet, and their pocket. Without our dedicated employees, who have also evolved, our journey would not have been possible. Agilico moves at pace to get things achieved, and this demonstrates our Agility to become the leading workplace technology provider.

### **What's the best piece of business advice you've received this year?**

Stick to what you know best, and master what you do! I think you sometimes think that you should be doing something else, it might look more interesting or potentially provide a greater return, but in truth, if we all work harder and smarter at what we know best we can find new ways of working to deliver a better service and product...and Agilico Zero was born!

### **What has been the most enjoyable business event you've been to this year?**

Our annual sales conference held in Edinburgh was memorable. We held the daytime event at the renowned Edinburgh International Conference Centre which was a great venue to deliver our messaging, and this was followed by dinner in Edinburgh Castle, which was such a treat for everyone! I mean, who gets to have dinner in Edinburgh Castle!

### **What have you learnt about yourself this year?**

That I am more resilient and patient than I thought I was! There is always a challenge in business, and that is part of the job I enjoy, but even I like to have a rest at times! It seems that this year has been more challenging than most for a number of reasons, but you need to weigh those times up with the rewarding times, like seeing new initiatives take off and business being won off the back of them.

I have also learnt that I like my own bed, and given that my role is now national, it means I stay in hotels more often than I would like, but I do get to spend time in some wonderful cities and more importantly get to spend some quality time with our people in person, rather than over Teams.

As we end of the year, we move forward with a new government, and a new Budget, which brings greater challenges with increased costs for businesses being a real hurdle, but like most challenges, we will continue to evolve and find ways to overcome them.

### **Describe 2024 in three words...**

Re-use, Perfect, Repeat!

### **What are your aims for 2025?**

2025 is our platform to grow the business by providing clients with even more choice from our workplace technology portfolio.

Agilico Zero will help us penetrate many new market sectors and clients with our sustainably lead proposition. Further growth areas will come from our Telecoms & Automated Invoice Processing software platforms as clients look to work more effectively and efficiently, with many businesses looking to focus on reducing costs and improving efficiencies following the Budget announcement to increase Employee NI contributions and the national minimum wage.

### **Any New Year Resolutions?**

The same as every year, drink less, work less and exercise more. I will settle for two out of three though.

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

# A year in the life of...

## David Parkinson

*Owner, Brave and Heart.*

### What were your key achievements this year?

Becoming a B Corp certified company has been such a huge achievement for us and is really a testament to where we want to take the company in 2025 and beyond.

In addition, we have been named as a supplier on the Crown Commercial Services G-Cloud 14 framework across several products and services, which means that public sector organisations and charities can now find our products, services, and work with us easier than ever.

We're also really proud of the internal developments that have been made to look after our employees this year, which has included setting up an extensive benefits package with an innovative "pick and mix" concept designed by our HR team which provides employees with points and allows them to choose benefits that are truly tailored to them.

Finally, we also became a real Living Wage employer this year, committing to pay our team a salary that considers the actual cost of living in 2024.

### Has everything gone according to plan?

It is impossible for everything to go to plan all the time, and those bumps in the road and how you deal with them are what makes or breaks you as a company. We set ourselves a comprehensive set of 2024 objectives and are currently on track to meet them for the end of the year.

### What are you most proud of this year?

Becoming a B Corp certified company really was a huge achievement for us and combined effort by the team. As one of only 2,000 companies in the UK that are part of the B Corporation community, we really feel like we are going in the right direction to developing our company in the right way for all our futures.

### Did your customer base grow as expected?

We have managed to build and extend our customer base through the addition of new services such as the building of bespoke document and project management systems using the Microsoft Power Platform along with AI technology, led by our newest member of the team Max, who joined us earlier this year.



David Parkinson

### Tell us about your team.

We are an agile team of professionals with many different strengths and coming from lots of different walks of life and being so diverse helps us meet the varied challenges set to us by our clients. We combine the fresh mindsets of our graduates, Charlotte, Olivia and Chloe, with the experience of team members who have had careers as IT teachers before joining us, like Karen, or myself, who worked at Nissan for 27 years and managed global teams across multiple disciplines before leaving to create Brave & Heart.

### Whats the best piece of business advice you have received this year?

No matter how large or small your business you cannot afford to not be up to date on the law around HR and People matters. Looking after people is key and ensuring the company does so at all levels in an ethical way is paramount for us.

### What has been the most enjoyable business event you have been to this year?

Every other year we go to SXSW in Austin Texas. It is an amazing event where you really get to see what is new in technology, digital and social media. It is the perfect place to speak with like minded people and

even coming to London in 2025 which will enable more of the team to take part.

### What have you learnt about yourself this year?

I continue to learn something new monthly and specifically I am learning to delegate better as we grow. In our early days and up until fairly recently I had to be all roles - from Finance Director to CEO to HR Lead. As we grow and evolve, I have learnt to start to release those skillsets to the team and professionals who know a lot more than me.

### Describe 2024 in three words...

Challenging, fulfilling, and most of all, fun.

### What are your top three priorities for 2025?

Building the business, building our capabilities, and building our team.

### Any New Year Resolutions?

Continue to grow the company in the right direction and ensure all the team have the perfect balance of work and life to help them grown in Brave & Heart and in their personal lives.

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



# Community took us from the earth to the moon.

**The future belongs to those that build communities.**

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A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Kelly M. Whitfield".

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Founder & CEO

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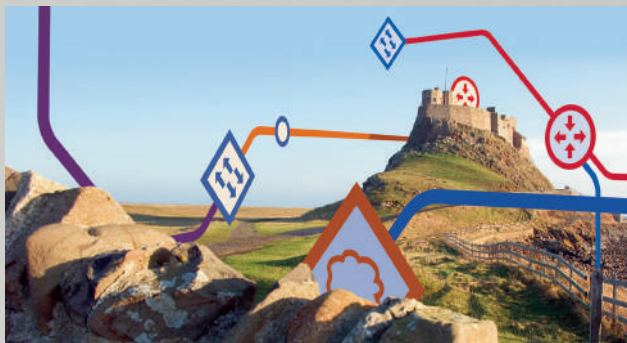


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*...The importance of reliable, fast connectivity has increased dramatically over the last decade...*

Steve Wood





## Commsworld... bringing connectivity to your world

And that world could be in the middle of a city or the middle of nowhere.

**Here in the North East we're blessed with vibrant cities and stunning countryside, but no matter where we live or where we do business, there is something that we all need.**

Connectivity.

It doesn't matter whether it's streaming a film at home or running an international conglomerate, if the connectivity is either slow, non-existent or unreliable, it's not only frustrating, it can also ruin your potential to work successfully.

At some point you realise that you need to do something....and when you do it's very easy to simply go for a recognised provider who advertises on TV.

But....think again. You do have an option.

And that option is Commsworld.

Commsworld may be a name that's new to a lot of you, but they are expanding in the North East and have already secured a 20-year contract to provide connectivity to Northumberland County Council.

They have contracts across the UK but have predominantly worked in Scotland from their HQ in Edinburgh. However that has changed in recent years, and they are already recognised as a leading privately-owned UK-wide provider of networking solutions.

And if you need some recommendations as to which businesses and organisations use using Commsworld services, how does the Scottish Government, Edinburgh and Glasgow airports and City of Edinburgh Council sound? They all require mission critical infrastructure, and they put their trust in Commsworld. Recommendations don't come any bigger.

"Trust and security are vitally important to any person and any business or organisation, and it is something on which we base our reputation," said Commsworld Regional Director, Steve Wood. "For example, with Northumberland County Council we provide connectivity across the council's locations...and that includes over 100 schools, many of which are in remote areas. Participating schools are gaining access to the fastest full fibre internet connection with speeds from 1Gb to 10GB per school. This includes full reliability, enhanced security and safeguarding support with a fully filtered real-time connectivity to ensure all pupils are kept safe online. We really are bringing the 21st Century to a lot of these schools.

"We have over 260kms of our own fibre optic cabling across the county which allows us to bring fast and reliable connectivity to SMEs in towns like Alnwick and Morpeth, but also to small businesses in the outlying districts. We work closely with local broadband providers who can link into our network. For example in Northumberland we've worked with the Alnwick-based company, Alncom, which allowed us to reach the village communities of Longframlington, Longhorsley and Longhoughton and enable access for more than 120,000 residential and business properties to Fibre To The Premises (FTTP), many of which have never enjoyed access to gigabit-capable fibre networks before."

Commsworld, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary, could easily be described as a boutique telecoms business which means they have the sort of flexibility and approachable attitude which the bigger firms can only dream about. But they are a national company and are currently experiencing terrific growth across the UK. This is down to the fact that they have over 3500kms of their own core, designated, fibre optic cabling. The Lancashire town of Wigan has just been added to the list of places where Commsworld is now helping businesses have access to safe and secure connectivity.

They're also keen to get involved with local communities. Here in the North East they're now sponsoring a couple of youth football teams...Ellington Phoenix U12 boys and the Bedlington U16 girls.

"The importance of reliable, fast connectivity has increased dramatically over the last decade," said Commsworld Regional Account Manager Gary Ross who looks after our region.

"Companies small and large used to invariably have a room with computer servers of varying sizes ticking away. But that has all changed with the advent of the Cloud. Companies now need to be able to work via the Cloud and know that their information is accessible and secure.

"We work extensively with other communications companies to ensure that customers can quickly source our nationwide ultra-fast Optical Core Network. It means we can react quickly to install vital connectivity or resolve any problems... for instance, we recently connected a small village in Northumberland in under two weeks."

Commsworld now has a digital footprint across Northumberland and can now provide you with rapid and secure connectivity. In today's digital age, staying connected is more crucial than ever. They provide a comprehensive suite of business connectivity services designed to seamlessly enhance your IT strategy.

**For more information on how they can help you and your business go to [commsworld.com](https://commsworld.com)**



Gary Ross



BATTERED & BROKE TECHNOLOGY OF 2020  
MISPLACED HOPE & SHATTERED DREAMS W/ HAD PLENTY  
BUT DIFFERENT WORRY CAUSE 'I' KNOWS THIS YEAR ENDS  
I'LL THINK ABOUT WHAT MATTERS, 'I' FAMILY & FRIENDS  
MET ONE SEEN THIS COMING & FEELING DOWN IS ALLOWED  
BUT YOU MADE IT THIS FAR & I THINK YOU SHOULD BE PROUD  
BEHIND THE SCENE IT'S HARD TO SEE A SILVER LINING  
THINGS STICK TOGETHER & WE'VE COME OUT SHINING  
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# WiFi is wonderful but Cable is King

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**It's highly likely that every single person reading this article will have a mobile phone. Some of you will have two...one for work, one for your personal calls.**

We take mobile phones and WiFi for granted. You can be on a beach in the Caribbean but your neighbour can still call you as though were in the house next door.

The workplace is full of mobiles, main frame computers, PCs, laptops...some will operate via broadband WiFi while others will have an ethernet cable or by finding a 3G/4G/5G signal.

But behind the scenes, there will be cabling. Cables provide a strong, steady flow whereas WiFi, broadband and internet can sometimes be weak, patchy or non-existent.

"We all use technology for work and pleasure, but very few of us actually know how all of it works," said Gemma Levers, Director and Co-Founder of Beaver Broadband and Networks. "Lots of businesses are falling behind in keeping pace with technology. It's largely down to the Covid pandemic when companies stopped updating and maintaining their equipment. The only snag with that policy is that technology hasn't stopped moving forward and businesses are finding that equipment has become obsolete or is no longer adequate for what people either need or expect.

For example we work extensively with the hospitality industry which was hit badly by Covid. We're busy all over the UK updating technology in hotels, bars and restaurants. It's not an easy fix in many places because it's not a simple case of plugging in some new kit. We're having to re-cable a lot of buildings to ensure that the latest equipment works correctly."

One area in which Gemma and the Beaver Broadband and Networks team are incredibly busy is security, especially cameras. Some businesses are finding that there is becoming a police or insurance requirement that cameras are in operation.

"We are also working more closely with construction companies and architects. Cabled technology has been viewed as a bit of an afterthought...but that is a false economy because we then need to go into a business and often have to undertake extensive work in order to install cabling. If it had been installed during construction or, even better, at the planning stage, then there wouldn't need to be so much disruption. This especially applies to hotels where we need to cable televisions into every room. Obviously the hotel needs to take that room out of operation while we're working there.

It's been a major challenge for us but we've been really successful and have attracted new clients because other hotels, bars and restaurants have recommended us. A lot of hotels are doing major refurbishments...particularly smaller, boutique hotels...because guests now expect to have reliable technology in their rooms."



Beaver Broadband and Networks pride themselves on their customer service. They'll keep you fully informed if, for example, there may be some new technology which would be perfect for you. Perhaps a new fibre network is now available for your area. Is your internet security up to date and effective?

There's a selection of contracts. Long or short term with a full range of internet connection options suitable for your needs. Beaver Broadband and Networks will find out about your company and, thanks to their experience, will point you in the right direction both in terms of price and suitability. They never skimp on quality and only work with the best suppliers and sub-contractors.

"We talk to our customers... we explain what is available and what is relevant to their needs...we ask questions and find solutions. Nothing is off the shelf...everything is tailored to the company or the individual."

From installing fibre optic cables to constructing custom designed server rooms, Beaver Broadband and Networks will provide infrastructure that truly works for you and there will always be someone on-hand to ensure that your business communications are fast, streamlined, and above all, reliable.

**Go onto [www.beaverbroadband.com](http://www.beaverbroadband.com) you'll be able to find out more details of what Beaver Broadband and Networks can do for you. You can also call them on 0191 466 1610.**

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# Insights from Leighton's on:tech event: how personalisation transforms software products



Featuring: Steve Morland (CTO at Leighton), Catherine Shuttleworth (CEO and Founder of Savvy Marketing), Aidan Connor (Digital Product and Data Director at Bulk) and Jonathan Prest (CTO at SaleCycle)

Last month, IT and software leaders from across the North East gathered at SIX Rooftop for the latest edition of Leighton's on:tech series. This exclusive event focused on the power of personalisation and how it's redefining customer experiences.

Titled "Beyond one-size-fits-all: how personalisation transforms software products" the panel discussion brought together experts from Bulk, Savvy Marketing, and SaleCycle to unpack personalisation's growing importance in an era of rising consumer expectations, exploring its impact on engagement, the role of data, and the practical challenges businesses face in implementation.

While personalisation isn't new, its evolution has been driven by digital-savvy consumers who now expect brands to engage with them as individuals. What began as simple customisations has advanced into data-powered strategies aimed at understanding not just preferences but also customer motivations.

"Brands want to engage their consumers on a personal level," shared Jonathan Prest, CTO at SaleCycle. "They aim to turn a casual website visitor into a purchaser, a repeat purchaser, and ultimately, an advocate for the brand." Customers today willingly exchange data for tailored experiences, making personalisation both an opportunity and an expectation.



### Redefining personalisation: relationships, value, and trust

What does personalisation really mean today? For Catherine Shuttleworth, CEO and Founder of Savvy Marketing, it's about building stronger relationships. "It's about improving that relationship to get a better outcome," she said, whether that's increasing sales or strengthening loyalty. Aidan Connor, Digital Product and Data Director at Bulk described it as a "value exchange," where individuals share data in return for better experiences.

Jonathan noted that personalisation requires brands to understand customers beyond transactions, translating interpersonal interactions into the digital space. "How do you encourage someone to share more information because they see the value in doing that?" he asked. It's about trust, relevance, and making each interaction meaningful.

### Demographics and expectations: personalisation for everyone

The panel also discussed how personalisation resonates across demographics. While younger, digitally-native consumers are often more comfortable sharing data, older generations are not as hesitant as many assume. Catherine shared that "55% of baby boomers are happy to share data if they see the value in doing so." Personalisation, she stressed, is no longer optional; it's an expectation. The challenge for brands lies in delivering these experiences without being invasive.

Jonathan explained how brands can personalise subtly by observing user behaviour and tailoring interactions accordingly. This approach respects privacy while enhancing the customer journey, a balance that's increasingly important.

### Breaking down data silos: data as the backbone of personalisation

The conversation highlighted a critical hurdle for many businesses: data. Aidan observed that companies frequently gather data without fully utilising it or storing it in actionable ways. Jonathan emphasised the need for a "single customer view" that consolidates transactional, behavioural, and demographic information to better understand the individual.

For Catherine, breaking down internal silos is vital. When data is fragmented across departments, it becomes nearly impossible to deliver cohesive customer experiences. Centralising data, she argued, is the first step in creating a seamless and personalised interaction. Moderator Steve Morland, CTO at Leighton, echoed this, noting that integrated data can act as a "multiplier effect," enhancing collaboration between marketing, operations, and other teams.

### The role of AI in personalisation's future

Naturally, the discussion turned to artificial intelligence (AI) and its role in advancing personalisation. While AI can generate highly-customised experiences, the panel cautioned against overcomplicating processes. Jonathan highlighted how machine learning can be used to group customers into personas based on behaviours, which simplifies personalisation efforts without losing relevance.

Catherine and Jonathan both highlighted the value of blending AI-driven insights with human interaction. For example, abandoned cart data could trigger not only automated responses but also personalised follow-ups from customer service teams. This omnichannel approach combines the efficiency of AI with the empathy of human outreach, creating a more balanced and impactful experience.

As consumers demand more meaningful interactions, personalisation has become a standard expectation. It represents a powerful value exchange, where customers willingly share their data for experiences that feel tailored and relevant. As the on:tech panellists demonstrated, successful personalisation requires more than just technology; it's about understanding your customers, breaking down silos, and starting with clear problems to solve.

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*L-R: Jorge Aguilera, Director, Forfusion with Mike Highfield, Head of Portfolio, Evolving Networks Ltd*



## Celebrating three years of partnership: Forfusion and Evolving Networks

Tyneside-based IT consultancy, Forfusion, proudly celebrates three years of partnership with Evolving Networks.

Since joining forces, they've been transforming how North East businesses approach networking by leveraging the innovative power of Software-Defined Wide Area Networks (SD-WAN), to create innovative, flexible solutions that exceed customer expectations.

Many businesses face challenges with their wide-area network (WAN) providers, such as inconsistent connectivity, billing issues, and poor customer service. Forfusion set out to address these issues by designing a network solution tailored to resilience requirements site-by-site and anticipating ISP circuit failures.

This is where the partnership began: with a shared goal to provide an intelligent SD-WAN solution for clients, using highly resilient technologies.

Ian Musgrave, Forfusion's CTO, remarked, "The results speak for themselves. Over the past three years, we've worked together to deliver projects that enable businesses to modernise their infrastructure, improve performance, and enhance customer experience. We look forward to continuing this journey with Evolving Networks, delivering innovative, future-proof solutions for our customers.

Evolving Networks is known for its cutting-edge connectivity solutions, so they brought the perfect technology to complement our digital transformation expertise. Unlike other ISPs, their solution aggregates IP traffic across all available links, not just secondary backups. This innovative approach combined with our customer-centric managed service is transforming the ISP landscape and supporting organisations in every sector."

Nick Johnson, CEO of Evolving Networks, commented, "We exist to solve problems through the clever application of software to connectivity. Delivering transformative network projects is hugely rewarding. Large telcos have dominated the market for too long without innovating or providing quality customer service. Our mission is to change that by partnering with forward-thinking Managed Service Providers (MSPs) like Forfusion. Forfusion shares our vision of delivering an outstanding end-user experience, and we're excited to continue our partnership with them."

Forfusion's partnership with Evolving Networks is continuing to push boundaries in the ISP space, offering unprecedented agility and connectivity solutions for a range of clients. Whether you're looking to enhance your business's network resilience or embark on a digital transformation journey, visit [www.forfusion.com](http://www.forfusion.com) to view their case studies or contact the team.

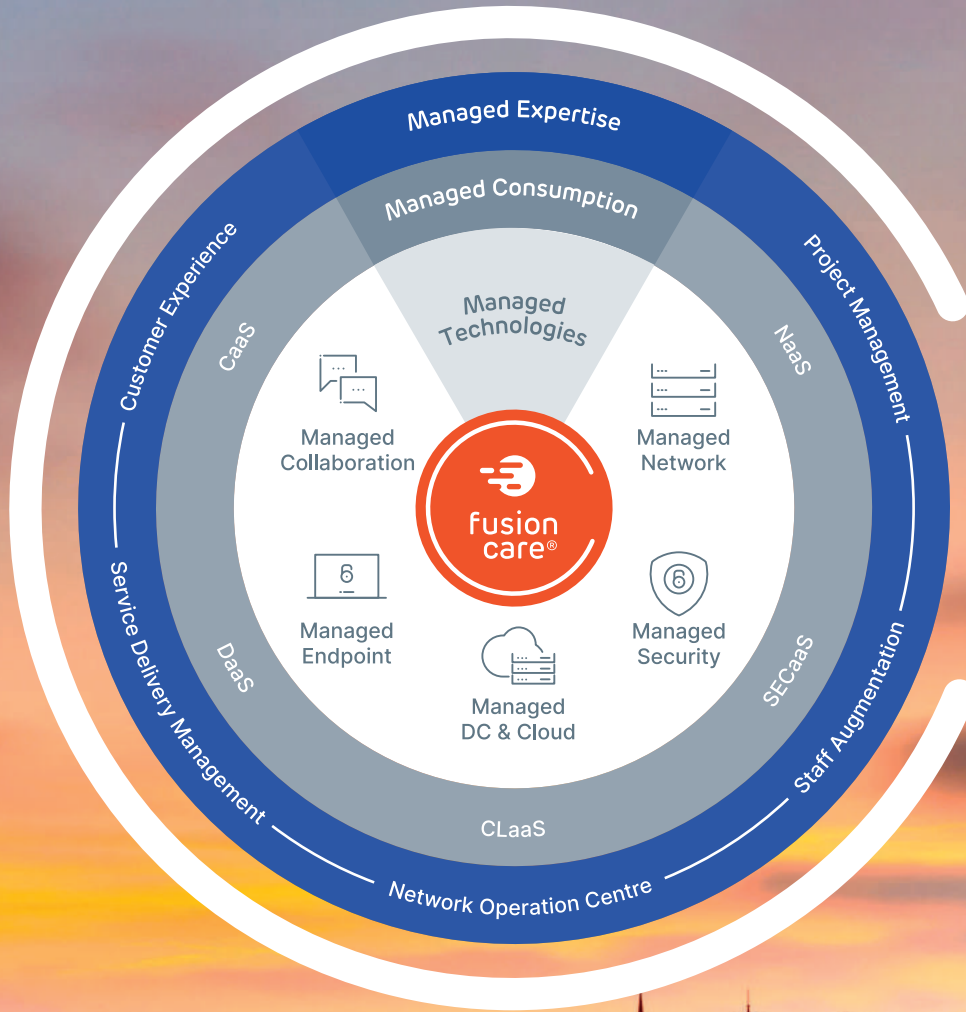
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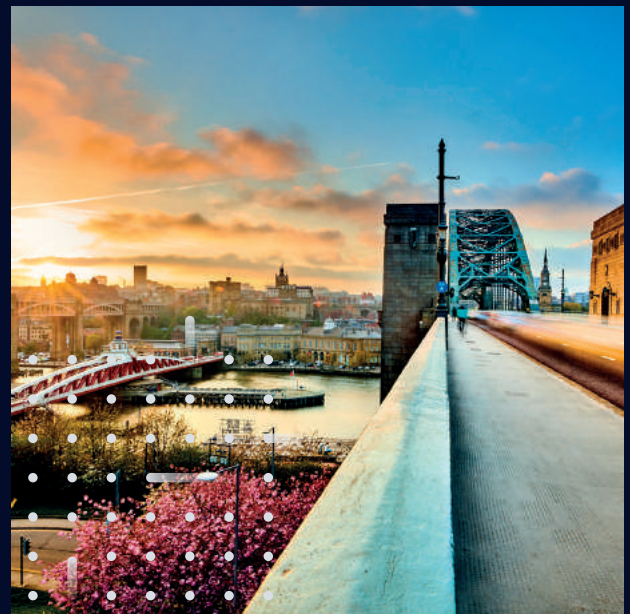
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# Lending a 'Paw' to support Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter

Supporting our community is very important to everyone here at SOS Group and that extends to lending a helping paw to local animals in need.

**We are very proud to provide digital office equipment to Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter, a charity which has been reuniting lost pets with their owners and finding loving new homes for animals in need since 1896.**

Andrew Skelton, an SOS Group Director, recently visited the shelter in Benton, Newcastle, to find out more about its work.

Andrew says: "We've provided equipment to support the shelter for as long as I can remember and recently updated two devices to ensure they have the most suitable and energy efficient technology available to ensure the smooth running of their services.

"Finding loving new homes for the animals in their care is a passion for whole shelter team and it was a pleasure to meet just some of the dogs and cats they're helping."

Newcastle Dog and Cat Shelter successfully rehomes around 1,000 animals each year and needs to raise round £1.2m every year to cover its costs.

It does not receive any Government funding and is facing a number of significant issues, with a steep increase in running costs combined with an increase in calls for its services.



L-R: Chris Bray, CEO of The Newcastle Dog and Cat Shelter with Andrew Skelton

To provide additional support for the charity, SOS Group's Call Control Handler, Jeanette Coombs, ensures the whole company gets involved by running a fundraising 'tuckshop' and our Director, George Young, has been a trustee for the charity for the last 12 years.

George describes himself as "a sucker for a furry face and a wet nose" and he and his wife have rehomed 11 dogs, every one of which came from Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter.

George says: "We rehomed our first dog back in 1983 and can't imagine not having at least a couple of dogs at home. In fact, most of the

team at SOS Group has a pet and everyone is keen to support the shelter's work.

"It does a fantastic job taking in animals when they most need support and giving them all the care and affection they deserve along with the medical treatment, and sometimes the behavioural training, to help them find their forever homes."

**To support Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter with a regular donation or with any animal rehoming query please visit: [www.dogandcatshelter.com](http://www.dogandcatshelter.com)**



Andrew and one of the dogs at the shelter



Chris Bray with Andrew Skelton



George Young, Director of SoS Group with one of his dogs



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# A year in the life of...

## Kieran Turnbull

Owner, Zenith Systems

### What did you set out to achieve this year?

My primary goal this year was to pivot Zenith Systems from a consultancy-focused service to managed IT services as our main offering. This shift allows us to forge deeper connections with our customers, enabling us to proactively support their workflows and strategic goals. By focusing on managed IT services, we're able to become a true partner to our clients, dedicating more time and resources to understanding and enabling their operations and processes. Ultimately, this move aims to empower businesses to focus on growth while we take care of their tech needs.

### Has everything gone according to plan?

Growth has been somewhat slower than I anticipated, primarily because many potential customers are holding off on technology investments until the spring. To address this, we're actively working with them to develop strategic roadmaps, so they're prepared to tackle high-priority issues once their funding is ready. Although it's a slight setback, I see it as an opportunity to engage customers in meaningful conversations about their future goals and how we can support them when the timing is right.

### What are you most proud of this year?

Customer feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, and it's something we take great pride in. Our customers are telling us that our coaching and strategic approach have boosted their confidence that technology can provide value to their businesses. They feel empowered to concentrate on their core business, knowing they have a dependable IT partner behind them. This reinforces our commitment to not just being a service provider but a trusted advisor that helps clients make tech work for their businesses.

### What's the best piece of business advice you've received this year?

"Are you sweating the right sprouts?", courtesy of Dave Algeo. It's a playful yet profound reminder to focus on what truly matters. The main driver being that when managing mental health, it's easy to spend time and energy worrying about the wrong things. This particularly struck me as it visualises big and small stresses using cabbages and sprouts. It's timely for the season we're in and well worth checking out at [davealgeo.com](http://davealgeo.com) as I can't do it justice here.

### What has been the most enjoyable deal you've been involved with?

I've found that supporting Community Interest Companies (CICs) has been especially rewarding. These social enterprises aim to make a positive

impact, particularly in the North East, but often miss out on the same funding or support that charities receive. By helping them optimize Microsoft 365 and other resources, we're able to stretch their tech Budgets further, enabling them to focus on their missions. Working with CICs aligns with our commitment to supporting organizations that do good as part of my longer-term plans to turn Zenith Systems into a B-Corp, and I certainly sleep better at night feeling like I've played my part.

### What is the most enjoyable business event you have attended?

I attend quite a few and my standout by far has been the Platform events run by Paul Lancaster. You can see and hear from new startups in the North East, as well as hear the various journeys and challenges that more established entrepreneurs have had. I always walk away having had my perceptions challenged. That's why I try to make time in the calendar to attend. These events are incredibly valuable for anyone in the business community, and I highly recommend you visit [ukstartupweek.com](http://ukstartupweek.com) to get yourself tickets.

### What have you learnt about yourself this year?

This year reminded me that I'm still very much a tech enthusiast at heart. I often find myself drawn to ideas for improving systems or processes, even if they're not immediate priorities. My family can attest to this, as it took me almost a year to finally finish redecorating our utility! To stay focused, I've dusted off some old time-management books, helping me prioritise the areas that matter most, both in my business and personal life.

### Describe 2024 in three words....

Change. Challenge. Purpose. These words encapsulate our vision for the coming year, as we continue to adapt, confront new challenges, and remain steadfast in our purpose of supporting our customers' growth.

### What are your aims for 2025?

Looking ahead, our goal is to grow the managed IT side of our business to the point where we can expand our support team. This will allow us to further our mission of helping clients get the most out of their technology, ensuring they have reliable, strategic support every step of the way.

[www.zenith.systems](http://www.zenith.systems)



“

*...Prioritise  
the areas  
that matter  
most...*

*Kieran Turnbull*



## Supporting the nation's cyber security

We are proud to announce our selection as one of just seven consultancies chosen to be part of the National Cyber Security Centre's (NCSC), Cyber Resilience Audit scheme.

**This significant recognition highlights the expertise and trusted capabilities of our cyber security team, whose accreditation will enable us to conduct independent cyber audits, beginning with assessments aligned to the Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF).**

This latest accomplishment shows our commitment to elevating cyber resilience standards across the UK, helping organisations strengthen their defences in a time where cyber threats continue to rise.

### Raising the bar for cyber resilience

As an NCSC-assured service provider, we are uniquely positioned to assist organisations in navigating the complexities of today's cyber landscape. The CAF is designed to help businesses assess, manage, and enhance their cyber security processes. Our team's involvement means we're ready to guide you

Kieran Fowler



through this framework, delivering audits that evaluate critical areas like governance, risk management, operational resilience, and data security.

### What does this mean for you?

In essence, it's an opportunity to work with a team that combines both technical depth and a knack for translating complex cyber requirements into practical, achievable steps. Our accreditation by the NCSC means we meet the high standards set by the UK's leading cyber authority, giving you peace of mind and confidence as you undertake your own journey toward cyber resilience.

The CAF audits we'll be conducting aren't about checklists and paperwork (though we love a good checklist as much as the next consultancy). They're about ensuring you have a real, actionable understanding of your cyber security strengths and areas for improvement. From board-level insights to operational adjustments, we're here to make cyber security something that works for your whole organisation—rather than something that simply adds to the to-do list.

Stew Hogg



### A proud achievement for Waterstons

Our team has worked tirelessly to build and maintain the level of expertise and trust for this achievement. Now, with our place in the scheme, we're excited to begin partnering with clients across sectors to deliver impactful, independent cyber audits that make a real difference.

"We're delighted to be announced as one of a short number of consultancies who are able to support the critical national infrastructure. We'll be able to help our clients to spot gaps and areas where they could improve their cyber defences, as well as assure that those cyber defences are operating in line with best practice."

*Stew Hogg - Director of cyber at Waterstons*

**For more on our involvement in the NCSC cyber resilience scheme, or to learn more about how we can help you, please contact [cyber@waterstons.com](mailto:cyber@waterstons.com) and to enquire about a cyber resilience audit contact [Kieran.fowler@waterstons.com](mailto:Kieran.fowler@waterstons.com)**



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## Phantom Frequencies

Radio Northumberland's "Phantom Frequencies" podcast, hosted by Keith Newman and Richard Craig, is captivating audiences with its unique focus on supernatural storytelling. The podcast, which invites ordinary people to share extraordinary encounters with the paranormal, has been gaining significant traction and is now seeing impressive listening figures on various podcast platforms.

The growing success of "Phantom Frequencies" has allowed the team to expand, welcoming both a videographer and a former murder squad detective to enhance its storytelling depth. The addition of a videographer brings an exciting visual element to complement the show's eerie tales, while the expertise of the ex-detective adds a layer of investigative rigour, exploring the unexplained with a new level of insight.



Keith Newman said, "We're thrilled by the positive response from listeners and excited to keep exploring stories that inspire curiosity and chills." With its

engaging approach to real-life paranormal experiences, "Phantom Frequencies" is quickly becoming a must-listen for fans of the supernatural.



## Three new hires as Newcastle creative agency continues expansion

A leading creative agency has made three key appointments, including a new head of design, as it pushes towards its next growth phase. Jump, a Newcastle-based agency, has been working on growing the team, both internally and through additional appointments, expanding its capacity to deliver high-quality projects to clients globally.

Annabel Furness has moved from London

to the North East, working alongside creative director Andy Baxter, and helping to oversee the seven-strong design team.

With a background in illustration and experience working as a freelance designer for leading London agencies, as well as in-house at organisations including national charity Stonewall, Annabel will support the day-to-day running of the design team and the delivery of design projects.

Annabel is a versatile graphic designer who specialises in communications and brand development for both print and digital platforms, while also creating campaigns, branding and identity development, animation and video.

Andy will continue to deliver strategic

advice and creative direction for brands including North East Ambulance Service, NE1, Newcastle College, and Marlish Water. He will also oversee the highest standards of design excellence across Jump's portfolio of national and international clients.

The senior leadership team at Jump has undergone leadership training with 360 Growth Partners to help strengthen their skills and attributes. As Jump grows and expands, it has been important to remain focused on providing development for all employees throughout the business, which in turn supports the delivery of high-quality results for clients.

Other recent appointments include content marketing assistant Lucy Middleton and designer Connor Reed.

Lucy joins having spent two years working in the education sector, most recently with Education Partnership North East. She will assist the marketing team at Jump with content creation, having studied Fashion Marketing at Northumbria University.

Connor spent over three years working for global engineering consultancy Arup, delivering design solutions in-house, across a wide range of sectors including energy, sustainability, transport and urban planning. He is particularly skilled at translating technical subjects into visual assets and campaigns that audiences can easily engage with.

The three hires bring Jump's total headcount to 18 working across design, development and marketing as the company continues to see strong demand for its end-to-end services across all three areas.

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# Connecting with Bonded Through the Festive Season

As the festive season approaches, we take a moment to connect with our team, sharing how they're making the most of the holidays while preparing for the exciting year ahead. In this special Christmas edition, we not only explore how our team members are celebrating the season but also reflect on the media landscape during the holidays and give you a sneak peek at what's to come in 2025.



CONNECTING WITH

## How the Bonded team are staying connected this Christmas

At Bonded, connection is at the heart of everything we do—whether it's with clients, colleagues, or the wider community. As the year winds down, our team shares how they're embracing the holiday spirit.



"I would eat Christmas Dinner every day if I could, so I'm really looking forward to sitting around the table with my family."

**Katie Jago**, *Paid Search Manager*



"Christmas for me is all about returning to Cambridge to spend quality time with my family, friends and labrador, Jessie."

**Harry King**, *Digital Marketing Apprentice*

## The Media Landscape: Navigating the Holidays

While many businesses slow down over Christmas, the media space tends to stay busy with last-minute campaigns, holiday shopping pushes, and planning for the new year. For brands and marketers, this time of year requires careful strategy and agile content planning.

Our media experts share their insights into how businesses can best navigate the festive media landscape:



"During the holidays, timing and placement are key. With so much festive content, brands need to ensure their campaigns stand out across the right channels. Creative, targeted content can make all the difference in cutting through the noise."

**Kevin McEwan**, *Media Director*



"The holidays are perfect for authentic, value-driven content. For brands, it's about balancing festive messaging with storytelling, while ensuring consistency across channels. Looking ahead and keeping that momentum into 2025 is crucial."

**Josie Middleton**, *Digital PR & Content Director*

The end of the year is also a great time to start planning for 2025, and we've seen that brands who plan early, with data-driven insights, have a better chance at hitting the ground running in the new year.

## Looking Ahead: Our 2025 Trend Report, Red January, and Even More Events

As we prepare for the exciting year ahead, we're focusing on what's next for the media industry. We'll be releasing our annual Future Trends Report this month, providing an in-depth look at emerging media trends, technological innovations, and strategies for businesses to thrive in 2025.



"Our very first Future Trends Report inspired a sold-out series of festivals in Newcastle, Edinburgh, and London—so we had to bring it back for 2025. This edition explores AI-driven content, interactive experiences, and sustainability, helping businesses stay ahead in what it set to be a transformative year."

**Steve Underwood**, *Managing Director*

To get your hands on a copy of our 2025 Future Trends Report or hear about our upcoming events, be sure to follow us on socials @bondedagency.

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



## dwmedia Recruits new Director to take events and festivals by storm



Northumberland based Daniel Wilkinson, founder of dwmedia, is excited to announce the addition of Mark Orr, a seasoned professional in the video production industry, as co-director of the company. With Mark's expertise, dwmedia is poised to continue its rapid growth in the world of video production, having already made significant strides in the industry.

Prior to teaming up with Mark, dwmedia found a niche in live-streaming funerals, especially for clients in remote areas or locations with poor internet connections. A family friend's request led to a long-term partnership with local funeral directors enabling Daniel and his team to support grieving families.

Mark Orr, formerly of MC Media, brings a

wealth of experience to dwmedia. Originally starting in broadcast TV 40 years ago and then running his own video production company, as well as teaching others how to create content with their smartphones, Mark found himself increasingly in demand for video editing services.

Together, Daniel and Mark have transformed dwmedia, recently investing in a custom-built mobile production vehicle—an ex-ambulance redesigned into a mobile studio equipped for on-site production in any weather conditions.

This mobile studio is fitted with high-tech monitors, satellite internet and live-streaming equipment, enabling global audiences to experience live events as they happen.

dwmedia has also expanded to provide IMAG services, including for Liverpool based UK Events Group, in turn, working with artists like UB40, JLS, and Sam Ryder, taking on major festivals, such as Reggae Land, Boogietown, as well as Newcastle Mela. "We provide everything from cameras with crew to production equipment and have recently worked on events featuring Chase and Status, Yungblud, McFly, and The Jacksons. We're gearing up for more exciting events in the coming months," says Daniel.



## UK print giants hire experienced ecommerce expert

Sunderland-based operation WTTB, formerly known as Where The Trade Buys, has installed Scott Holland to advise the board on the businesses digital and ecommerce strategies.

WTTB has become one of the go-to delivery partners for a host of operators in the reseller print market, as well as with a growing number of marketing and creative agencies looking for smart print solutions. They deliver a wide range of specialist, high quality print solutions, ranging from super-sized outdoor banners and flyers, to personalised promotional products and a wide range of books and brochure printing.

Louise Stephenson, managing director at WTTB, says: "Scott's experience and talents are second to none, and we're thrilled to be able to call on that knowledge to help our own growth and expansion plans. As well as better serving what have been long-established links in the print reseller market, alongside a host of marketing agencies and direct clients, there are huge opportunities for us to diversify into exciting new markets.

Holland departed Gateshead-based digital marketing agency, Mediaworks in the summer of 2023, having held the group commercial director position for most of his eight years there. Following his departure from Mediaworks, he immediately launched his own agency, Scott Holland Consulting advising business on growth strategy and aligning commercial and marketing functions.

Scott said: "WTTB is one of the UK's most successful online print providers. They've maintained their position there by always staying one step ahead. I'm really excited to get started with the team in developing robust and cohesive ecommerce strategies that allow them to take advantage of future opportunities in the industry."

## Cool Blue strengthens market position with significant new client wins

Newcastle-headquartered brand and communications agency, Cool Blue, continues its impressive growth, securing high-profile client partnerships over the past six months.

This year, Cool Blue has successfully added leading names to its portfolio, including Teesworks Limited, Tyneside Cinema, Point North and Middleton Grange Shopping Centre, contributing to a 15% uplift in annual fees.

These notable wins bolster the agency's presence across its key sectors including industrial, retail and hospitality.

Cool Blue's involvement in the Teesworks project, the UK's largest freeport, reinforces its reputation as a leader in regeneration and large-scale industrial projects.

In addition to its new clients, Cool Blue has also deepened relationships with its long-standing partners, securing expanded work from key clients such as Harrogate Spring Water, which is part of Danone, Barker and Stonehouse, GB Bank and the North East Ambulance Service.



Victoria McCartney, executive director at Cool Blue, commented: "These new partnerships reflect not only the expertise of our team but also the trust and relationships being built through our client portfolio.

"As we continue to grow and evolve, our commitment remains steadfast in delivering exceptional results by deeply understanding the unique needs and goals of each of our clients."

The agency is also delighted to welcome The Heritage Wardrobe Company, a bespoke manufacturing brand, to its specialist interiors team. This addition reinforces Cool Blue's ability to serve niche clients in specialised sectors.

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Veronica Swindale and Paul Sutherland from nesma, with Mike Guellard, Senior Investment Executive at NEL.

## New funding will support nesma's ambitious growth plans

Veronica Swindale, Founder and Managing Director, set up nesma to deliver marketing training as she is passionate about empowering people.

**"I'm really proud nesma has helped thousands of students complete their qualifications and supported them in reaching their development goals; now it is time to build on our impressive track record."**

Securing funding from the NPIF II - NEL Smaller Loans, which NEL Fund Managers manages as part of Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II (NPIF II), will help us capitalise on our creative expansion plans to double our revenue year on year over the next five years. This funding is a significant milestone for us, as it validates our growth strategy and provides the necessary financial support to execute our plans.

Veronica founded nesma in 2009 to deliver accredited training qualifications from the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM), the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), and a wide range of related training courses. This loan will enable nesma to extend its training offer and SkillsPartner programme. To support this development, we will add more specialised staff to create new content and courses, streamline delivery and enter new markets.



Veronica Swindale

nesma can boast that it is the only training provider North of the Watford Gap that delivers training on behalf of the CIM and CIPR institutes. As an accomplished study centre for these prestigious institutes, we adhere to strict criteria regarding staff quality, evidence of results, and governance. nesma is also a licensed SOSTAC® training provider, the only one in the UK authorised to deliver this unique collection of training.

In recent years, nesma has successfully transitioned 99% of its training to an online model. We take pride in maintaining a classroom environment through live professional tutoring, facilitating rich discussions, and fostering relationships among learners. With a 94-100% pass rate every quarter, our online training model has enabled us to grow our international client base from 0 in 2019 to 10% of all learners, delivering training across 30 countries.

Veronica says, "I am extremely pleased to have got the business to a point where we can add value, not only to individuals but to whole organisations' marketing and communications capability through our



Paul Sutherland

SkillsPartner programme. I made a strategic decision to bring Paul Sutherland into the business as our Commercial Director last year, and he has helped me shape our vision and led the transition to make us future fit. He recommended that I approach NEL to support our plans to expand. I found working with them very straightforward, and I look forward to continuing the relationship with them as we grow.”

She continues, “Our new approach to delivering marketing and communications qualifications means that team members can complete all qualifications or use a pick-and-mix approach to individual modules. CIM has recently introduced a more agile syllabus whereby students can complete an Award in as little as six weeks in various topics, including marketing essentials, customer journey mapping, social responsibility, SEO, AI, MarTech at introductory through to Masters Level. Most of the modules are assessed online with multiple-choice questions, so there is no need for arduous assignments and no fixed exam date. Our courses start every three months with several complimentary programmes available on demand and sometimes free of charge for SkillsPartners”.

Paul Sutherland, Commercial Director, shares Veronica’s enthusiasm, “It’s a fantastic time to be part of nesma, working alongside a loyal and enthusiastic community. nesma already has many brilliant brand ambassadors! Our SkillsPartner programme has received excellent feedback from companies and agencies, such as ‘this is a great idea’ and ‘it’s a no-brainer’. They appreciate finding one organisation to deliver all their marketing and communications training, relieving them of one headache. Heads of Departments are delighted to find introductory programmes for team members who may have never studied marketing but need a good understanding to support their marketing colleagues”.

Mike Guellard, Senior Investment Executive at NEL adds, “nesma has solid foundations within its market. The plans presented to us were ambitious but achievable, with a clear focus on expanding into UK and international markets. The launch of SkillsPartner provides yet further opportunity for growth, and we were pleased to be able to provide the NPIF II funding needed to make that growth a reality.”

Veronica summarises, “The funding nesma secured from NEL will enable us to realise a plan we created about 18 months ago; with their support, we are confident we can achieve our vision for the next five years”.

As a training organisation, prioritising growth and development is essential to delivering exceptional outcomes for our learning community. We continually evolve our expertise and approaches to keep our programmes relevant, innovative, and impactful. Our dedication to growth strengthens our organisation and empowers our community to achieve the best possible results.

[hello@nesma.co.uk](mailto:hello@nesma.co.uk)

# nesma

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# ...Tis the season...it's a busy Christmas for Highlights PR...

*Christmas is a busy time for Highlights PR. Here Keith Newman tells us what some of his clients are doing over this festive period:*



This Xmas period is always a special but often challenging time of year for the families we work with. The average family now seems to face never ending life challenges on so many levels. Most of the people we meet and work with show such incredible resilience with what they can deal with and adapt to, it never ceases to amaze us what can be achieved with a positive mindset!

This year we have supported over 500 families through our mentoring & activity programmes with the youngest at just five years old and most senior at 94 years. We have done everything from playing bingo to big bridge abseils and plan to do a lot more activities next year to engage and support even more.

At the end of each year, we do review what we have delivered with our clients and amazing funders to plan for next year. If you interested in what we do, or want to work with us in the new year just get in touch for a coffee and check out our website [www.offthegrid-adventures.co.uk](http://www.offthegrid-adventures.co.uk)

**Paul Kirkpatrick, [offthegrid-adventures.co.uk](http://offthegrid-adventures.co.uk)**

Christmas at the Cathedral is a festive night of carols, popular music and sketches all delivered in the wonderful setting of Newcastle Cathedral. Performed in front of a sell-out audience, the event raises much needed funds for the Sir Bobby Robson Foundation. Christmas at the Cathedral is on 12th December.

**Tickets are available from the Theatre Royal box office.**



Over the festive period, we focus on Christmas for All, helping with the digital support and logistics! Last year we helped over 2,000 children within the North East receive Christmas presents and helped deliver over 8,000 presents around the local area. We expect this year to be busier so we're currently working on the digital platforms to help the referral process."

**Dan Wilkinson, [www.thedwmedia.co.uk](http://www.thedwmedia.co.uk)**



This year for Christmas I am celebrating by creating lots of new Christmas-themed products. I trade at Newcastle Quayside Market every Sunday, and this has been a great opportunity to gather customer's ideas about what they want to see me create next.

So, I have created a series of new baubles that are selling fast, a new calendar for 2025 inspired by my work with St Oswald's Hospice. I have also just created some of my new gift-wrap which will make my customer's presents extra special this year.

This is my first-year trading on Newcastle Quayside so I am super excited to see what my customers think of my new products, and I can't wait to get into the Christmas spirit every Sunday.

**Corinne Lewis- Ward, [www.powderbutterfly.com](http://www.powderbutterfly.com)**



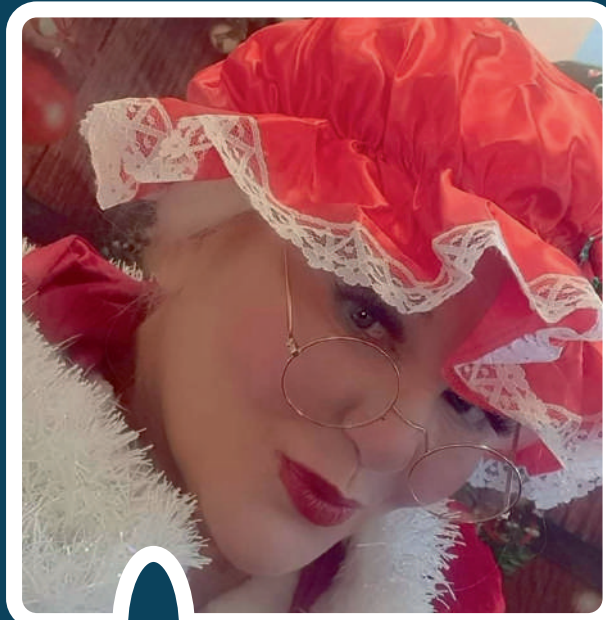




Perhaps the best piece of Christmas advice came from the late great Denise Robertson. She said that after her husband had died, she was left alone with a young son. For them, Christmas was desperately sad. Living near the coast allowed her to sit on a bench and think. She said that she realised that Christmas was essentially two days to endure and then she started to make a list of about ten things she would do to make their lives better. For me, this is the ultimate wisdom, where great grief is acknowledged and then some effort taken to make it a bit less bad. Sometimes that action can be miniscule, but it is the very intention that matters. She explained that she only managed a couple of things on her list which was more than good enough: it was heroic.

Let's not wait until we are grief-stricken to harness her greatness and glory. Let's look at our lives with hope and action to make things just a little bit better all the time. Endurance can deliver lessons and lessons can deliver blessings. We are almost always more blessed than we realise. From that viewpoint, we regain some power and can offer that care to someone else. Giving our time and care is one of the most effective antidotes to sadness. With that thought, we might just remember that Christ is for life, not just for Christmas.

*Rebecca Williams Dinsdale, [www.drrebecca.org.uk](http://www.drrebecca.org.uk)*



As an actor/entertainer December is one of the busiest times of year. When everyone else is enjoying Christmas drinks and parties, I'm normally the entertainment saying cheers with a peppermint tea! It's busy but every day is different from acting roles and singing to embracing my Mrs Claus alto ego and visiting excited kids and parents! This is lovely!

Visiting kids is great and they do make me laugh! I always like to help already stressed parents out by letting their kids into a little secret, that Santa's favourite food is sausages. Parents are always really excited to have to cook Santa a plate full of sausages on Christmas Eve instead of bunging out mince pies...thank me later...Merry Christmas everybody!

*Alison Stanley, [www.stanleycreatives.org](http://www.stanleycreatives.org)*

*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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Sarah Dale and Sarah Walker

## Celebrations for SASS!

SASS media Ltd named New Creative Business of the Year at the Best New Tees Business Awards.

**The Sarahs from SASS media Ltd are celebrating, after being named Best New Creative Business at Tees Business' Best New Tees Business Awards, 2024.**

Sarah Walker also picked up the Standout Achievement Award, recognising the progress she has made since setting up her own freelance business in July 2020, developing it to the point where both Sarahs were able to set up SASS in September 2022.

After a second episode of severe postnatal mental illness following the birth of her second son William, now seven, Sarah W, who has a background in journalism and NHS PR embarked on a career change. She decided to become a peer support worker in perinatal mental health, supporting other mums experiencing mental ill health during pregnancy or postnatally.

However, she soon found working in an environment where mental health issues were always the topic of discussion was keeping her stuck in her own recovery. So when, owing to her background as a health reporter and NHS PR specialist, she got a message on LinkedIn asking if she would be interested in writing some case studies for UK Pods Ltd, she jumped at the chance.

"I met Palkesh and Genevieve Darbar at UK Pods Ltd and immediately warmed to them and their fantastic business," Sarah says.

"Genevieve was a real inspiration, as she kept telling me there are a lot of small businesses who require someone who can write, whether it's to get them featured in the press or to improve the content on their website or social media.

"That became a catalyst for becoming a freelance writer, which also fit nicely around my new role as Mum to two boisterous boys!"

After the first lockdown, Sarah registered as self employed and embarked on a number of courses with Enterprise Made Simple, which were fantastic for helping her to navigate the new challenge of starting out in business.

The flexibility to choose her own hours also enabled her to properly recover from the mental ill health episode she experienced in December 2018.

Sarah says: "Recovery from an episode of psychosis, whether postnatal or related to some other condition, is an extremely long process, as, once the psychosis has been addressed, you then have the fallout of severe depression and anxiety.

"Doing something I enjoyed – writing – enabled me to focus on subjects that had nothing to do with mental illness and meet new people who I could choose not to talk to about my mental health issues, but get immersed in their interesting business stories instead."

Sarah still supports other Mums when she feels able as a voluntary peer support worker for the charity Action on Postpartum Psychosis (APP).

She is also proud of the warmth and empathy both Sarahs offer their diverse range of clients.

Sarah says: "At first when I went into business, I was reluctant to mention my experiences with my mental health.

"However, I now believe it has shaped me into the businesswoman I am today - and I can't not be open and honest about the journey I've been on.

"If people choose not to work with us based on what I have been through, both Sarah and I are absolutely fine with that – and for me, it has become my superpower as I understand myself and what I need to do to be well in ways a lot of other people don't."

Sarah Dale added: "We are very happy to have won the Best New Creative Business Award, because in a world of AI-generated content, we bring authenticity, originality and creativity to everything that we do."

**For more information on SASS's award-winning work, visit [www.sassmedialtd.co.uk](http://www.sassmedialtd.co.uk)**



# Media Borne: Cutting-edge production in the heart of the North East



**In today's digital world, visual content reigns supreme, and businesses are constantly searching for new and innovative ways to engage their audiences.**

**With the surgance of content marketing and the importance of engaging target markets visually, it's essential to find unique and impactful ways to stand out. For Media Borne, the launch of their Virtual Production services and Virtual Studio, "Borne Studios", has solidified their place as a cutting-edge agency in the heart of the North East.**

Founded by Chris Thompson in 2018, Media Borne has long been a leading creative agency offering video production and photography services throughout the North East and beyond. Having had the pleasure of working with high profile clients such as Malhotra Group PLC, Stena Line, United Living, and the Cricket World Cup 2023, to name a few; Media Borne's latest service development, Virtual Production, is challenging industry standards and proving

that there is no glass ceiling for creatives.

As Media Borne states: "Virtual production is a cutting-edge filmmaking technique that combines real-time computer-generated imagery (CGI) with live-action video footage. It allows filmmakers to seamlessly blend physical and digital elements, providing an immersive and highly flexible way to create inspiring video content.

At the core of virtual production is the use of advanced technologies like green screens, motion capture, and powerful software solutions. These elements work in harmony to create a unified visual experience. By shooting in a controlled environment, often referred to as a "Volume" or "Virtual Production Studio," filmmakers can manipulate the backdrop, scenery, and even characters in real time.

This groundbreaking approach drastically reduces post-production time and costs, enabling filmmakers to see the final product while on set."

The resurgence of advancements in real time computer graphics and the ability to seamlessly produce content with unrivalled speed and efficiency, enables this technology to be utilised by a broad range of corporate businesses and even advertising bodies, who will no longer find themselves constrained by Budgets or a lack of technical skills

training. With many new technologies there are always transitional periods in which businesses have to work out for themselves whether these digital tools, processes, and platforms are for them; however, as a fellow agency owner myself, I can foresee virtual production being an incredibly useful and exciting service.

The integration of virtual production into a business' marketing and communications strategy will no doubt soon become integral, and many will have to adapt to this emerging digital landscape if they wish to maintain pace with their competitors - an adaptation supported by agencies like Media Borne who are not just ahead of the metaphorical 'curve', but are in many ways creating the curve themselves.

Whilst being the only agency in the North East to currently offer this particular production service; Media Borne are successfully adapting to shifts in the digital landscape and by incorporating this revolutionary technology, are offering businesses the opportunity to engage with their target audiences visually with what is a truly flexible, wholly immersive, and more affordable means.

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

# Marriott Communications - end of year

Northern Insight talks to Samuel Marriott-Dowding about how his year has gone.

## What did you set out to achieve this year?

This has been an incredibly exciting year for Marriott Communications.

I started this year off knowing that I wanted to refine the agency branding, and most importantly our value propositions. We began the year with the launch of our new logo, messaging, website, and new communications services.

Through these changes and developments we were able to attract new high-value clients and grow our presence and influence nationally and internationally.

## Has everything gone according to plan?

For once, yes!

I learned a lot in 2023, and mostly through making mistakes. As an entrepreneur I will no doubt always make a mistake somewhere along the way, but I always ensure that I never make the same mistake twice.

I started this year knowing where I wanted Marriott Communications to go; I wanted to grow our client base, build my own public profile, and expand further internationally - and we did!

That's not to say that there has not been hiccups or challenges along the way, but it has meant I now have more experience to be able to adapt and overcome more efficiently.

## What are you most proud of this year?

Receiving a lot of industry recognition and commendations has been really special this year, and has validated the fact that I am on the right path both in life and as an agency owner.

I have been shortlisted for several awards including North East Marketing Awards' Marketer of the Year, Prolific North's Marketer of the Year, and Insider Media's Young PR, Marketing and Media Professional of the Year.

I am also incredibly proud to share that Marriott Communications won PR Agency of the Year in Corporate Vision's Global Business Awards 2024.



Samuel Marriott-Dowding

## What's the best piece of business advice you've received this year?

"Every no is a blessing in disguise, because it leaves the door open for opportunities that are even greater than what you missed out on"

## What has been the most enjoyable deal you've been involved with?

I had the incredible privilege of consulting with The United Nations this year - which was just such an exciting, yet surreal experience.

## What has been the most enjoyable event you have been to?

I had the pleasure of being a keynote speaker at the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) North East Business Bootcamp at Wynyard Hall - presenting "The Purpose of PR" keynote to dozens of North East businesses and business leaders.

It was such a special day to see so many North East businesses come together, learn from each other, and most importantly, support each other.

## What have you learnt about yourself this year?

I have learned the importance of a healthy work/life balance!

I can't possibly be the best agency owner I can be without taking the time to nurture my own personal interests and hobbies, travelling, or spending quality time with friends and family.

There is more to life than work, and it's time we celebrated creating these boundaries for ourselves, rather than the idea of having to hustle and grind 24/7.

## Describe 2024 in three words?

Rebirth. Growth. Focus.

## What are your aims for 2025?

Growth, growth, growth.

I am aiming to explore new opportunities both nationally and internationally, continue to build my personal brand and public profile, and for the first time, I am looking to form partnerships with other creative agencies to tackle those really big contracts!

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



*L-R: Jenni King, Sophie Kyle, Alex Savage, Sharon Starkey, Kirbie Bestford, Lotty Reeves*

## A decade of success at Resolution

This year marked a decade of accomplishments for Resolution, a Teesside-based strategic PR, marketing and design agency led by managing director Sharon Starkey.

**In that time, the company has built an impressive portfolio of clients across various sectors including commercial law firm The Endeavour Partnership, process industry cluster NEPIC, national franchise organisation Complete Weed Control and Sofia Offshore Wind Farm, set to be one of the world's largest wind farms. They also represent fast growing JH Mechanical & Electrical, business network Tees Valley Business Club and notable charities like The Teesside Charity and the Charlie Dallas Lancaster Foundation.**

Resolution's commitment to excellence is at the core of the business and integral to its success. With customised strategies and a

clear desire to truly understand client needs, Sharon and her team have consistently delivered campaigns that enhance brand visibility, engage audiences and produce measurable results. "Our team works closely with each client to understand their unique needs, allowing us to create tailored solutions that genuinely reflect their values and goals," Sharon explains.

Based in the North East and operating nationally, the team proudly acknowledges the talent of the region's workforce. "There's something truly special about our area" says Sharon, "I'm incredibly proud of our Teesside roots and the innovative, driven people here. I couldn't imagine a better place to grow a business."

As Resolution looks toward its next chapter, the company is preparing to recruit new talent in 2025. Sharon is passionate about creating a supportive work environment, where creativity, collaboration and professional growth are encouraged. "Growing up, I wasn't sure what I wanted to be, but I knew I loved language, problem-solving and design," she reflects "I wish I'd known more about careers in communications." Her own career path fuels her commitment to supporting the next generation of creative professionals and the team actively supports students by partnering with educational institutions to highlight the opportunities in the industry. Sharon's journey to agency leadership came from a drive to work on projects she loves rather than a desire to run a business. "I never planned to be a business owner,"

she admits "Resolution was a way to focus on what I enjoy, and it's grown into a team-focused organisation." For aspiring professionals, Resolution offers a dynamic workplace to develop skills and make an impact on the brands they work with.

Her dedication to her clients, her team and her community is a reflection of her passion. Resolution's success is driven by Sharon's belief that marketing is far from a "fluffy" industry but essential to shaping and maintaining brand image. She champions the critical role of clear, considered communication and recognises the value that skilled professionals bring to their clients and the industry as a whole.

As Resolution prepares to welcome new team members, Sharon is excited about the future and remains dedicated to nurturing a culture of innovation, creativity and mutual respect. Her vision for the company extends beyond revenue and client wins; she is focused on creating an environment where ideas flourish, team members feel valued and every project is approached with passion and integrity.

With a decade of achievements behind it, the future looks bright for Resolution. Firmly established in Teesside's vibrant community, the agency is well-positioned to continue making a significant impact on behalf of its clients, connecting brands with their target markets.

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



# JAM

PRINTS &

Marketing

*Celebrating Success  
Together: A Year of  
Growth with JAM  
Prints and Marketing*

As the year draws to a close, JAM Prints and Marketing extends a heartfelt thank you to all our clients for trusting us to be part of their journey. This year, together, we've achieved remarkable results across social media, Google Ads, and PR campaigns that have elevated brands, connected with communities, and delivered tangible growth.

### *A Year in Numbers:*

Highlighting the successes of the year, we break down key statistics that showcase our impact:

**Social Media Reach:** Over 20 million total impressions across all platforms, driving engagement and brand recognition.

**Google Ads Performance:** More than 50,000 leads were generated, with a 80% increase in click-through rates, resulting in higher conversions and growth for our clients.

**PR Milestones:** 150 successful media placements, ensuring that our clients' stories reached their target audiences effectively.

**Creative Campaigns Delivered:** 20 campaigns launched this year, tailored to each brand's unique voice and goals, with measurable results that matter.

### *Celebrating Relationships:*

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# 2024...what a year!

## Northern Insight talks to Nicola Halse of Riverside Marketing about her 2024.

### What did you set out to achieve this year?

I'm terrible at taking time away from the business, so this year I really wanted to make an effort to take more breaks and a holiday where I switched off and I'm pleased to say I did that.

Setting goals doesn't always have to be about business growth or profits, I think it's just as important to take time away to make sure you're refreshed and don't burn out. I've definitely been guilty of that in the past so it was great this year to have a lovely family holiday (without taking my laptop!) and enjoy quite a few overnight stays in the UK too.

### Has everything gone according to plan?

No, does it ever? Part of running a business means that you're hit with curve balls sometimes, however, it's how you deal with these that matter most.

Whether that's changes in clients, strategies that haven't worked as well as you hoped or family pressures, you simply have to adjust to the situation, try something different, keep calm and generally, things always work out for the best.

### What are you most proud of this year?

Deciding to invest in a co-working space at the North East BIC. From starting the business at the very start of the Covid pandemic in 2020 (which now seems like a million years ago!), I was very proud to see just how far I've come in that time.

Working as a freelancer can be isolating at times so it's been a great move for me, the atmosphere, fellow tenants and business advisors are fantastic and having several clients based here as well, it made perfect sense.

### What's the best piece of business advice you've received this year?

I was lucky to attend the Women in Leadership event as part of the Sunderland Business Festival and one piece of advice which a panellist had received really struck a chord with me, 'Anything you ignore, you accept.'

Thinking about previous employment roles I've had, it really resonated with me, I think it's so true and a great piece of business advice.

### What has been the most enjoyable business event you've been to this year?

That was definitely the chocolate making experience at The Canny Chocolate Company in South Shields. Organised by Rachel Skeoch from Truenorth Marketing, it was a fantastic afternoon going behind the scenes into the art of chocolate making. We got to make our own chocolate bar, use the amazing chocolate machine and all while networking with a great group of North East business women. I would highly recommend the experience to any chocolate lover!

### What have you learnt about yourself this year?

I'm more resilient than I thought. When things don't go to plan, which they often don't in business, it's important to react in the right way. As somebody who is very laid back and pragmatic, there have been instances this year both in my business and family life where my character has certainly been tested. As generally happens, everything works out well and I'm pleased to say that my reactions to events have certainly make me realise that I'm more resilient and my character is stronger for it.

### Describe 2024 in three words...

Enjoyable. Challenging. Fun.

### What are your aims for 2025?

With the business celebrating its fifth anniversary in April, I'm hoping to continue working with great North East clients and of course, continue in my role as Enterprise Advisor at Durham Sixth Form Centre, something which I really enjoy doing.

Ultimately, however, I think it's important to simply be healthy and happy!

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





“

*...Anything  
you ignore,  
you accept...*



## A New Chapter: Our shared vision with Sunday Girl Magazine

We had been watching Sunday Girl Magazine from afar for some time, impressed by their bold and inspirational presence within our local North East community, our desire to be part of their journey was profound.

**Sunday Girl is an independent print magazine rooted in the North East, specialising in intellectual discussions on girl talk and fashion. However, their influence extends beyond the printed pages. Sunday Girl's essence and sense of belonging radiates from their launch events.**

These events are key to building a community of creatives, providing a safe space for self-expression for hundreds of people. It's a space where like-minded women can gather to foster connections and feel inspired to achieve their ambitious goals.



The magazine was brought to life by Abigail whilst at university. Today as well as being editor in chief, Abigail is also a fashion and journalism lecturer at Teesside University. Deputy editor, Milly is now a valuable member of the Sunday Girl team, after admiring the publication from afar for a while. Both women juggle full-time jobs alongside their roles at the magazine, pouring endless discipline, hard work, and passion into Sunday Girl.

What drew us to them was the sense of community they have nurtured, as we were similarly eager to cultivate a community ourselves. Following their journey closely, we always felt a deep alignment between our missions and values, particularly our shared belief in the enduring power of print. Both of our entities are deeply committed to the future and longevity of publishing and print, alongside the promotion of independent titles which have such a passion for what they produce.

Our engagement began with several discussions, the first of which took place in our magazine room, enveloped by the distinct smell of fresh print. This meeting led to more catch ups which soon led us to the exact position we had long envisioned: being in partnership with Sunday Girl! We left this meeting feeling incredibly inspired, and with plans to be headline sponsors at their launch event for issue 15, which at the time was a mere three weeks away.

Preparations were swiftly made, and we were soon ready to host our pop-up stand at the event held at the Biscuit Factory. There, we were introduced as headline sponsors and ongoing partners. This relationship was a significant achievement for us, something we had long aspired to establish.

Our evening consisted of chatting to print enthusiasts, listening to inspirational talks from a profound panel of women, sharing a space with local businesses and emphasising our main message, that print is not just alive but thriving!

The event reminded us of the importance of local community in business. It wasn't about the number of magazines we sold; rather, it was about igniting the passion and creativity of those attending. They came with big dreams and sought tools to inspire their journeys and we felt so lucky to be apart of it all.

This partnership marks just the beginning of our collaboration. Looking ahead, we are planning a series of workshops aimed at fashion students, where we will provide hundreds of printed magazines, for creative workshops and activities. Additionally, we will host more intimate events in our magazine room for smaller groups who wish to dive deep into the journey of Sunday Girl!

Community is the heart of everything we do here at Unique Magazines. Opening our unique space for locals to convene was merely the start of a broader endeavour. Being part of something significantly larger is what truly matters to us.

Looking ahead, Unique Magazines aims to make greater use of our own space here by hosting a variety of personal events. These will include student evenings, drop-in browsing sessions, talks from leading figures in the creative industry, and late-night shopping experiences. Stay updated on our upcoming events by following us on Instagram, where we'll share details and offer tickets through Eventbrite.

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



*“The event reminded us of the importance of local community in business...Community is the heart of everything we do here at Unique Magazines.”*





## Leading Link locks in over 40 key connections at new Blyth Offices

Leading Link, a Northumberland-based charity known for supporting young people through a wide range of innovative programmes, has relocated its offices to the heart of Blyth town centre.

Operations & Finance Manager Chris Johnson said, "We are thrilled to have had such strong support from the community as we move into this exciting new chapter in Blyth. Our new offices will allow us to continue expanding our reach, offering even more young people the chance to access vital programs and services. We are deeply grateful to everyone who has helped make this move possible.

"Leading Link would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all the donors who contributed to the refurbishment of the new offices, including a substantial donation from Layer 7 IT Security and a generous contribution from Northumberland Freemasons. Their support has been instrumental in transforming the new space into a welcoming and vibrant space for young people," he added.

Stuart Cairns of Northumberland Freemasons commented, "We have seen the good work the charity does with young people all over Northumberland, and when we heard they needed funding to refurbish their new offices, we decided to help. The new offices are fantastic, and we know they will be used to great effect."



## New iPads

In an exciting leap forward for educational technology, over 1,000 Year 5 and 6 pupils at Laidlaw Schools Trust (LST) have received brand-new iPads as part of the Trust's groundbreaking PedTech initiative, designed to enhance learning through innovative digital tools.

Paul Tullock, Executive Lead of PedTech and Innovation at LST, has been leading a captivating unboxing roadshow. During these events, each student has the unique opportunity to unbox, set up, and personalise their iPad, tailoring it to their individual learning needs. As an Apple Professional Learning Specialist and Apple Distinguished Educator, Paul has played a pivotal role in crafting this initiative alongside Rob Atkin, LST's Head of IT.

Paul emphasises the necessity of integrating modern technology into the classroom, stating, "The world is constantly changing, and we must reflect this evolution in our educational practices if our pupils are to thrive in life after school and in their future careers. Our goal is to redefine teaching and learning, offering experiences and opportunities that are only possible with technology."

## Wallsend Boys Club host 'Spotlight on the impact of grassroots football' event to share research

Wallsend Boys Club have been supporting girls and boys for almost 120 years providing a variety of activities to the young people of North Tyneside. Grassroots football has been at the heart of the club since it opened back in 1904.

Despite the huge numbers of children and young people that play grassroots football each week, little is known about the impact this has on their lives, the lives of their families, and the lives of the volunteers and officials involved in the game. Grassroots football has not been researched nearly as much as other elements of the sport, or other aspects of children and young people's lives.

An event took place recently at WBC which highlighted some of the work that grassroots and community football clubs do. The objective of the night was to share emerging findings from the research ongoing with the club and provide an example of youth-led research involving Northumberland FA and NE Youth.

The North East Mayor, Kim McGuinness, opened the event and shared her passion for grassroots sports clubs, then Dr Stephen Crossley from Durham University talked about the initial findings from the research, followed by an open debate which heard the views



of a range of stakeholders involved with grassroots football, including researchers, policymakers, volunteers, and funders. The event was part of the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) Festival of Social Science which encourages the sharing of academic research with public audiences.



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## Primary school choir performs at Sunderland Minster

**“I wish we could have sung more songs, it made me happy to sing with the band. Their music made me happy.”**

Edie Milburn, a Year 5 pupil at St Leonard’s Catholic Primary School, Silksworth, sums up perfectly the pride and joy of singing with Fishburn Brass Band at Sunderland Minster.

The school choir was thrilled to be asked to sing at a fundraising event for the Marie Curie charity and have spent hours learning and practising eight songs, led by choir lead Ashleigh Hayes.

The school, which is part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, was offered a fee for performing at the special event, which was donated back to the charity.

Parents and members of the local community attended, alongside members from the local authority.

Ashleigh Hayes, teaching assistant and choir lead, said: “The children did extremely well and performed to a very high standard. I am so proud of the hard work they have put in during choir practice. They are a credit to their families and our school.”

St Leonard’s, which is rated ‘Good’ by Ofsted, has a few spaces available. Please email the school office for more information at: [sle\\_office@stleonardsprimary.org.uk](mailto:sle_office@stleonardsprimary.org.uk)

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



## South Shields school is an ‘oasis’ for the community it serves

**A primary school in South Shields, which fosters “outstanding levels of pastoral care and inclusivity” and provides a “high-quality learning environment”, has been rated ‘Good’ following an inspection by the Catholic Schools Inspectorate.**

SS Peter and Paul Catholic Primary School, which is part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, was visited recently by the CSI on behalf of Bishop Stephen Wright, Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.

CSI lead inspector Leigh-Anne Young said in her report: “SS Peter and Paul Catholic Primary is a true ‘oasis’ for the community which it serves.

“The school offers a high-quality learning environment. Pupil attitudes, behaviour for learning and general behaviour in and around school is exceptional. They are secure in the fact that they are known and cared for by the staff and as a result they flourish.”

Headteacher Maria Butt said: “This outstanding report highlights the many excellent features of our wonderful inclusive school, which inspectors describe as a ‘true oasis’.

“To have the report state that children ‘flourish’ in our school because they are valued and cared for fills us with joy. The inspectors described our pupils as wonderful, and their attitudes and behaviour as exceptional. I am very proud and feel truly blessed to be the headteacher.”

## Children in South Tyneside learn how to fill their ‘happy tank’

**St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School, which is part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, welcomed John Magee, AKA the Kindness Coach and UK Kindness Ambassador, for a special Happy Tank Super Learning Day.**

John Magee visited the school, on St Joseph’s Way, last year to deliver a special Kindness Matters Day. Founded in 2012 by John Magee, Kindness Matters teaches kindness and wellbeing to schoolchildren and teachers. St Joseph’s was the first Kindness Matters school in South Tyneside.

John returned recently to hold a Happy Tank Super Learning Day teaching pupils from Nursery to Year 6 different techniques to learn how to self-regulate, improve their self-confidence and resilience, and support their mental health and wellbeing. The Happy Tank Super Learning Day covers six therapeutic areas: breathing, self-reflection, kindness, affirmations, gratitude and happy tapping (EFT).

Headteacher Paul Craig said: “Happy Tank Day has been an opportunity for our pupils and staff to stop and think about



themselves, and how we need to have a full ‘happy tank’ in order to share our own positivity. It’s a message that is so important to everyone.”

There are some places available in Nursery and Reception and visits are welcomed.

To book a visit, email: [enquiries@stjosephsjarrow.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@stjosephsjarrow.co.uk)

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# Navigating the future of independent education

By Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster, Royal Grammar School, Newcastle

In the 2024 Autumn Budget, the Chancellor announced the introduction of VAT on independent school fees, to be implemented from 1st January 2025.

**This controversial decision has sparked passionate debate (and several legal challenges) within the education sector at a local, national and international level.**

Before I share my perspective, I want to highlight and remind readers what is at the heart of this ongoing debate: children, their futures and their parents' right to choose their school; not financial forecasts or politicians. This is about encouraging a spectrum of different types of schools that meet the needs of different children, enabling all young people to fulfil their potential.

Over the past few months, I have observed the severe lack of meaningful dialogue or consultation about the principle of taxing education. Despite the Government's repeated assertions, there is no firm link between VAT on independent school fees and state school funding. Whatever your opinion on taxing education, our MPs must now ensure that the tax raised here in the North East is reinvested back into the region to deliver new teachers, improved facilities, and greater opportunities for state school students. We cannot, as a region, as teachers and as parents, face this uncertain future without some tangible gain for our young people. I expect that North East MPs from across the region, whose constituents include RGS families, will have had little choice but to vote in favour of the 20 per cent VAT on independent school fees due to the whip. I also hope that despite the vote, our politicians, in their heart of hearts, want the Royal Grammar School Newcastle to remain inclusive and as socially diverse as we are proud to be today.

We have, and always will, strive to ensure that our fees are accessible to those families who choose to, despite the sacrifices, educate their children at no cost to the taxpayer. That is why we have decided to share with all current parents the burden of the extra cost for the upcoming Spring and Summer terms of 2025; in effect the school is absorbing 12 per cent of the additional costs next year. As a 500



Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster

year old school, we are confident that RGS is financially robust and we can weather the challenges.

However, across the independent education sector as a whole, the reality of VAT is that, ultimately, the number of students will shrink, threatening the viability of some independent schools, at a time when the region has limited state school capacity.

Now, more than ever, our state schools need support in the face of increased demand while dealing with acute systemic issues including poverty and health inequality. As a Trustee for a Multi-Academy Trust, I am under no illusion about how tough things are for our state sector colleagues. I believe it takes a city to educate its children, which is reflected in our partnership work. Each year, RGS runs 50 projects in over 100 schools, engaging with more than 10,000 students and 700 teachers. While, thanks to our amazing RGS Bursary donors, we are changing the lives of 90 exceptional students who come to the RGS, our partnerships programme aims to change the lives of many more students across the North East.

Much of our partnership work revolves around

STEM as a result of both RGS' reputation and access to funding streams. However, music, art and sport are also vital areas that the Government wants to develop. The creative and sports projects in our partnerships programme have also had significant impact. We stand ready to scale-up and replicate this work more widely if the local Government wants to engage with the support we offer to feed into the regional educational landscape.

While public perception of what an independent school consists of is primarily based on the stereotype of a few big names, the reality is that nearly half of the independent schools have fewer than 100 students. Many are faith schools or focus on special needs or performing arts. At a national level over the past year, public understanding and appreciation of the impact of their local independent school has increased enormously. Enabling tax-paying families to choose an independent education at no cost to government never was and is still not the problem. It can and should be part of the solution.

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RGS is proud to be celebrating its quincentenary in 2025. Despite being the oldest learning institution in the city, we are ambitious about retaining our place as a leader of innovative teaching and learning in Newcastle.

RGS's 500-year legacy of nurturing student success offers the perfect foundation to inspire your child's next chapter and unlock a bright future.

Located in the heart of Newcastle, directly opposite Jesmond Metro Station, our nationally renowned co-educational school welcomes students aged 7-18. Our central location and easy access to transport links enable students from across the North East region to attend RGS.

While we are an independent, fee-paying school, we provide a number of fee-assisted places. Currently we have 90 bursary students in the school across all age groups.



RGS is an exciting place to learn that is forward thinking and inclusive. We aim to create a sense of belonging; to foster a belief in each other, inspire a love for learning and encourage an ambition to succeed.

We encourage students to be intellectually curious, to think creatively and to challenge themselves in everything they undertake.

To find out more, please visit [www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk](http://www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk)



## Recruitment with Heart

How The Education Network is supporting SEND students.

**When Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves, announced she planned to allocate an additional £1 billion to support children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), no one was more delighted than Genna Sinclair.**

As the SEND recruitment manager for The Education Network, a specialist recruitment agency for the education sector, Genna knows only too well about the massive shortage of SEND teachers and the lack of resources.

She has not always worked in recruitment - or education - with a spell at Hewlett Packard Enterprise Services working on outsourced contracts for eight years, then onboarding staff for a health and social care domiciliary care provider - all of which provided ideal experience when she eventually found her way into recruitment.

Since then, she has not looked back. Her tenacity as an individual, sees her tirelessly thriving on the challenges of the everyday.

She says: "I was thrilled when I was approached to take up this dedicated SEND role for The Education Network because it is an increasingly important aspect of education and not all recruitment agencies specialise in it as we do. Finding suitable candidates is also one of the most pressing challenges.

"Contrary to what many believe, you don't



always need teaching qualifications to do a SEND job and we are always looking for candidates. If they have the right mindset and transferable skills - possibly gained in the health and social care sector - I am confident I can get them work. For example, it's an ideal job for parents in between the school run or for people studying in the evening.

"A good SEND candidate will have several attributes along with transferable skills. Firstly, a sense of humour; secondly, an open-mind; thirdly, resilience; and top of the list is lived experience, such as close contact with a child, or adult, with a SEND diagnosis. This leads to greater understanding and it's a big plus if candidates possess it.

"You are dealing with a wide range of disabilities - profound learning difficulties, wheelchair users, social, emotional and mental health problems and behavioural challenges - the situation has deteriorated since the pandemic."

Filling a vacancy such as this must be difficult, so is there a right and a wrong

way to go about it? Genna says it's all about asking the right questions.

"If we don't know what the real issues are, we won't get the right person. I want to know the whole truth - warts and all! Only then can I feel confident I am putting forward the right person. SEND roles vary from setting to setting so you need someone who has an open-minded, 'can do' attitude. The person fit is the most important."

With the growing number of children suffering from mental health problems (one in six children aged 5-16 is likely to have a mental health problem, a figure which has increased by 50% in the last three years), not enough is being done to support those who look after them and the subject is not discussed adequately, Genna believes:

"Our candidates don't always have the same day-to-day connections within schools, so I make sure they know they can reach out to me if they need a listening ear as I am part of their team. While it sometimes feels like I'm playing the role of a confidante, it's actually an essential part of the job and helps me to build close, supportive, and confidential relationships with them. This is really important to me, as it brings a personal touch to recruitment - being approachable and understanding - not just a consultant.

"Fortunately, The Education Network treats all candidates as individuals and prioritises their best interests, welfare and career. We are also heavily involved in the communities nearby the schools we serve and provide far-reaching support, not just vacancy filling. I always feel we provide recruitment with heart."

**For more information, Genna Sinclair can be reached on 0191 823 9752 or by email at [Genna.Sinclair@ednetwork.co.uk](mailto:Genna.Sinclair@ednetwork.co.uk)**



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## Northern Leaders Trust: Driving excellence in Education across two schools

The Northern Leaders Trust Education Improvement Team, a specialised group of education experts, is making a significant impact in enhancing teaching standards and student outcomes across Studio West and Kenton School.

**By focusing on collaboration, sharing best practices, and implementing innovative strategies, the team aims to deliver a high-quality education to every student. With a mission to empower educators and inspire learners, their work is already transforming classroom experiences and driving positive change.**

The team comprises of 10 dedicated staff members who work across both schools to support teachers and implement proven systems and processes. John Pacey, Director of Teaching and Learning, enhances instructional quality and fosters professional growth. Noel Stoddart, Director of Curriculum and Data, ensures the academic framework is inclusive and forward-thinking, preparing students for future success. Lucy Rodderick, Director of SEND and Safeguarding, focuses on supporting students with special educational needs while maintaining a safe, nurturing environment. Helen Wilson, Director of Attendance and Inclusion, works to boost student engagement and remove barriers to learning.



### Empowering Excellence Through Subject Leadership

Central to the Trust's vision of placing students at the centre of everything it does are its Trust Directors of Subject. Amy Cadwallendar (English), Tom Grayson (Mathematics), Georgia Turner (Science), Rob Carradice (Modern Foreign Languages), Chris O'Neil (Humanities), and Aimee Kirtley (Performing Arts and Music) bring expertise and innovation to their respective disciplines. Our Directors of Subject work across both schools supporting leaders and students. Their collaborative efforts deliver an inclusive curriculum that prepares students for success both in and beyond the classroom.

### Elevating the Curriculum to Meet Modern Demands

As Director of Curriculum, Noel Stoddart, plays a pivotal role in crafting an enriched educational experience for students which goes beyond the national curriculum to prepare students for success in further education, training or employment.

An important part of the curriculum is the focus on personal development and the ambition to develop students to grow into happy and healthy adults who are positive contributors to local and global communities.

Personal development strands are evident in all subjects as teachers start new learning by explaining 'why this, why now?' to provide context and a rationale for lessons.

This year, the Trust launched a unique elective curriculum programme, enabling students to participate in an activity of their choice for 35 minutes at the end of each day. This broadens their horizons and builds cultural capital – opportunities that are especially significant given the socio-economic diversity within the student body and the fact that the Trust serves some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the city.

### Data-driven Improvements

We have developed new systems to ensure that best practice is readily shared and lesson planning is of the highest quality, whilst at the same time, reducing the workload for teaching staff.

### Supporting SEND and Safeguarding with Innovation

Lucy Rodderick has established exemplary safeguarding practices and robust SEND provision by working closely with school SENDCOs and safeguarding leads. Her work ensures every student feels safe and supported, with tailored strategies to help SEND students succeed academically and personally.

### Tackling Attendance Challenges

Helen Wilson has overseen significant improvements in attendance, with a 4.5% rise at Kenton School and 1.8% at Studio West. She also leads initiatives like The Haven Project, designed to support students facing emotionally-based school nonattendance, helping them reintegrate in to school. Improving attendance and supporting students' well-being go hand-in-hand. Helen and her team support the schools to create a supportive environment where every student feels seen, valued and equipped to succeed.

### A Unified Vision for Success

Executive Principal Martyn Gordon supports principals in delivering a vibrant and positive culture across the Trust. He reflects: "The impact of our work is clear in the record results achieved by our students, and our commitment to providing the best education every day remains unwavering."

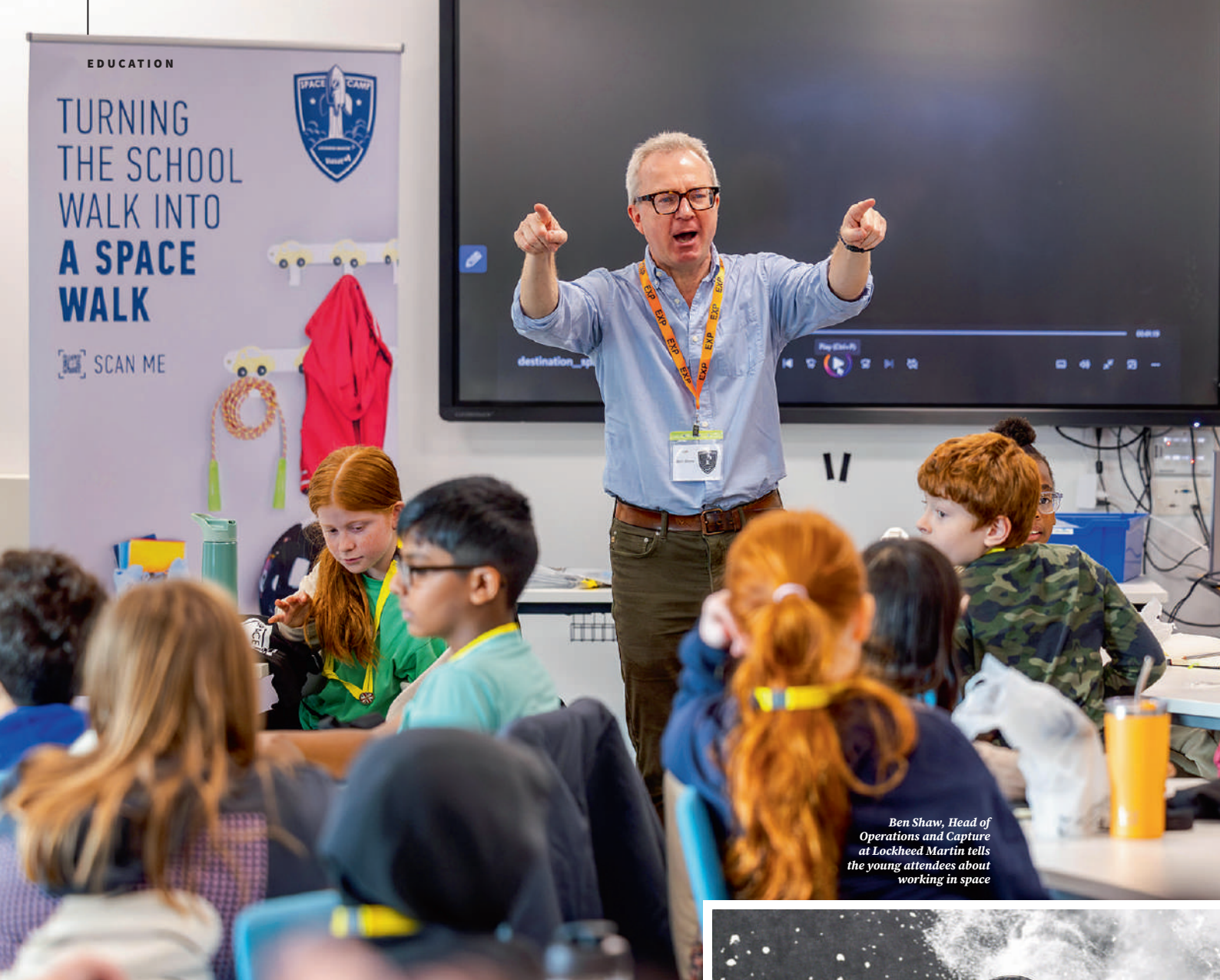
"I am very proud to be part of this journey and see first-hand each day what an incredible difference our schools make to our fantastic students."

CEO Lee Kirtley added: "Building this incredible team has been a priority since I joined the Trust. Their dedication and expertise are making a tangible difference to students' lives and the schools' success. I couldn't be prouder of their daily commitment to our students and staff."

"The Northern Leaders Trust Education Improvement Team stands as a shining example of what focused collaboration and expertise can achieve."

[northernleaderstrust.org](http://northernleaderstrust.org)





*Ben Shaw, Head of Operations and Capture at Lockheed Martin tells the young attendees about working in space*

## North East youngsters have a blast at Space Camp

Pupils from schools across the North East have had a taste of out-of-this-world career prospects, thanks to a unique event.

**Around 60 young people from years six and 12 spent their half term at Northumbria University, discovering the very real opportunities available in the fast-growing UK space industry.**

Organised by international aerospace and defence company, Lockheed Martin and global communications company, Viasat, the students were able to listen to experts already working in the space industry, as well as being involved in a range of practical workshops and projects.

The event was hosted at Northumbria University which is already working closely with Lockheed Martin and the UK Space Agency on NESST – the North East Space Skills and Technology Centre.

The £50m facility will provide in-demand skills provision to power the space sector workforce of the future and drive world-leading research and technology development.

Ten-year-olds from Newcastle's St John's Primary School, Cheviot Primary School, St Teresa's Roman Catholic School and St Lawrence Primary School were joined by youngsters from Wardley Primary School, Kibblesworth Academy, Washington's Oxclose Primary School and Broadway Junior School in Sunderland.



*Patrick Hoggins of St Cuthbert's Catholic School for Boys, Newcastle trying a real astronaut's suit on for size*

The young people were involved in everything from making – and launching – rockets to learning about the prospects of colonisation on Mars to robot workshops.

Ten-year-old Eva Noorkhalid from St Teresa's said Space Camp had been an amazing experience.

"I am really interested in science and space and we have learned about it in a really fun way," she said.

Her words were echoed by 16-year-old Patrick Hoggins from St Cuthbert's Catholic High School for Boys.

"We've done so much and it's been really interesting," he said.

"You wouldn't really think there was so much opportunity to work in space but this is a fantastic way to find out all of the different things you can do."

Ben Shaw, Head of Operations and Capture with Lockheed Martin, launched the week and emphasised the importance of the event.

"The North East Space Skills and Technology Centre - or NESST- is a £50 million investment between the UK Space Agency, Northumbria University and Lockheed Martin," he said.

"But this facility is only part of the story. Without the development of a talent pipeline we will not have the students taking STEM subjects at higher education.

"Space Camp is part of the narrative which encourages students to develop their science identity and their pathway to a STEM career; hopefully into the growing space sector."

Professor John Woodward, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International) at Northumbria University, said that "Space Camp speaks to everything we do at Northumbria University to drive social mobility."

"Our ambition is to ignite aspiration, remove barriers for the communities that we serve and offer routes for young people from all backgrounds to access and succeed in higher education,"

"Through the development of our North East Space Skills and Technology Centre we are working with local schools and industry partners to further our commitment to promoting STEM careers by delivering programmes such as Space Camp – opportunities that



*Year six pupils taking part in a rocket making challenge which they then had to "launch" into "space"*

simply didn't exist in the region when I was at school."

On the final day the year 12 groups gave a presentation to a panel on how to deal with the problem of space debris, which included MP for Cramlington and Killingworth, Emma Foody.

"It was amazing to see the work these young people did and how much they realise the importance of STEM subjects," she said.

"I was so impressed, all of the presentations were absolutely fantastic."



*One of the students trying out a VR experience*



## Incredible year for North East Education Trust

*Pupils at St John Bosco Catholic Primary School, Sunderland inspect their school site post RAAC*

Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust has 25 primary schools and five secondaries across South Tyneside, Sunderland and East Durham. The Multi-Academy Trust looks back at its success stories of 2024.

**From academic and sporting successes to charity events, Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust has celebrated a wealth of positive stories throughout the year.**

All of the Trust's schools have Good or Outstanding ratings from Ofsted and the Catholic Schools Inspectorate.

In 2024, Ofsted visited eight of BCCET's schools and their reports were exemplary, showcasing the hard work and care of all the staff and the excellent behaviour and learning of the pupils.

Ofsted described St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary, Sunderland as a "caring" school where pupils feel proud, safe and keen to learn. Pupils' behaviour at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary, Shotton Colliery was described as "outstanding".

St Bede's Catholic Primary, South Shields was called "exemplary" in its Ofsted report while St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary, Seaham was called a "vibrant and positive" school. St Mary's Catholic Primary, Wingate was praised for being "highly inclusive" and SS Peter and Paul Catholic Primary, South Shields was highlighted for its commitment to pupils' personal development. The "small but mighty" St Patrick's Catholic Primary, Sunderland was praised for its "compassion and tolerance" and St Wilfrid's RC College, South Shields, is described as a "calm and welcoming school" in its report.

The Catholic Schools Inspectorate visited SS Peter and Paul Catholic Primary, South Shields and praised the primary for providing "outstanding levels of pastoral care and inclusivity" in a "high-quality learning environment".

The Trust's five secondary schools and four sixth forms – St Aidan's Catholic Academy and St Anthony's Girls' Catholic Academy and their joint sixth form in Sunderland, St Bede's Catholic School and Byron Sixth Form College, Peterlee, St Joseph's Catholic



*St Bede's Catholic School and Byron Sixth Form girls U16 team celebrate winning the English Schools' Football Association (ESEA) National Cup*





Academy, Hebburn, and St Wilfrid's RC College, South Shields – celebrated strong attainment in GCSE and A Level results. This demonstrated the fantastic resilience of pupils and staff at St Bede's who faced moving sites due to RAAC-enforced closures.

It was not only academic success that has seen talented and hardworking pupils in the spotlight but their sporting wins too. From the gymnastics teams at St Leonard's Catholic Primary, Sunderland and St Bede's Catholic Primary, South Shields, jumping for joy with their fantastic performances to St Mary Magdalen's Catholic Primary, Seaham winning the Easington final in swimming, there were a lot of medals handed out.

Football was a highly successful sport within the Trust too with notable wins from St Bede's Catholic School and Byron Sixth Form College in Peterlee, St Joseph's Catholic Academy in Hebburn, and St Matthew's Catholic Primary School in Jarrow, the latter scooping a double cup win at Durham County Cup and the EFL Kids Cup.

One of the Trust's key values is community and the schools endeavour to work with their communities whenever they can whether it be through litter-picking, supporting charity days or special events.

Children in Year 1 at St Gregory's Catholic Primary, South Shields loved their visit to a local care home to read with residents earlier this year and the school also invited pupils' families for special Mother's Day and Father's Day events to thank and celebrate the mums, dads, grandparents and aunts and uncles.

Pupils from St Patrick's Catholic Primary, Sunderland were thrilled to take a step back in time to enjoy a sneak peek at the new Beamish Museum cinema, a reproduction of The Grand Cinema that stood a couple of streets away from their school in the 1950s.



St James Catholic Primary, Hebburn was awarded the CAFOD LiveSimply award for working together for the good of others despite being split over three sites during the RAAC-enforced closures. St James' pupils also united with children from St John Bosco in Sunderland to inspect the work builders were carrying out at their respective schools to make the buildings suitable to house the pupils again.

Taking pride in their community led to pupils from Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Primary, Peterlee starting a litter-picking group thanks to grant funding.

Supporting charity is also integral to the Trust's values and their numerous fundraising days throughout the year included taking part in Wear Red for CHUF at St Leonard's, Sunderland in honour of one of their pupils.

And the Trust's CEO, Brendan Tapping, showed that he leads from the front by taking part in the CEO Sleepout in Sunderland, joining a group of bighearted business leaders at the Stadium of Light to raise vital funds for families affected by homelessness in the city.

The children and young people at the schools are at the centre of everything the Trust does but the hardworking, caring staff, across all its schools and central team, were also showcased at the annual Chadwick Celebrates awards held at Ramside Hall in the summer.

**Find out more about BCCET at [www.bccet.org.uk](http://www.bccet.org.uk)**

# Developing the spark of Entrepreneurship

By Mr Will Scott, Principal at Dame Allan's Schools, Newcastle.

What do Year 7 pupils and business owners have in common? As a School Principal who sees first hand these young people at work, I would say there are many similarities, and indeed, many skills that we work hard to encourage in the young people under our care.



Debating Club

**First up, enthusiasm.** When you're a fresh-faced secondary school pupil, aged 11 and looking forward to your time in 'big school' for the most part you are eager to get started and learn.

Those who take the leap and start their own business too are often those who are eager, keen to learn new things and not phased by new beginnings. Vera Wang, the hugely successful fashion designer, was an editor at Vogue before turning her hand to bridal gowns. And, before that, she was a figure skater.

Learning to look at a new start as something exciting, rather than something to be feared, is a great skill. Our Year 7 pupils have many chances to learn more about Dame Allan's before they officially begin their schooling, including Open Days and 'Jump In' classroom taster sessions. These touchpoints help to reduce nerves and build excitement and enthusiasm.

Resilience is another key skill that is integral to entrepreneurs, and to our Year 7 pupils. Learning to try something new, fail, learn, and try again is something we are passionate about developing in all of our pupils. For example, every pupil is encouraged to take part in at least one co-curricular club a week to try out a new hobby or sport. Our co-curricular programme offers a wide range of opportunities to suit all tastes - from chess and dance, to the fencing and plant club. Reframing failure as progress and a tool for learning is not only a great way to build confidence in young people, but also an essential mindset for any budding business owner; just look at James Dyson, who created 5,127 prototypes to reach the first bagless vacuum! This 'growth mindset' was recently championed amongst our pupils in a talk by renowned journalist and author Matthew Syed, who spoke in the most recent edition of our inspirational speaker series, The Lectures.

When it comes to the vital spark that makes an idea become a business reality, a level of creativity is also required. At Dame Allan's, we ensure that our pupils nurture their creative spirit from their first weeks in school, with art, dance, drama, and music classes part of every Year 7 pupil's timetable. With our dedicated dance studio, high quality art rooms and studio space, plus our music labs, we hope to nurture that spark of creativity - what may be a painting, a dance piece, or a melody at a young age, could become the plans for an innovative, problem-solving business as an adult. Co-curricular clubs can also be a basis for a whole range of useful entrepreneurial skills, for example, pupils in Debating Club learn to become confident and articulate speakers, and to formulate opinions well, whilst others may develop robust leadership skills when captaining their sports team.

Older pupils too carry these lessons throughout their schooling, with pupils from Years 9 - 13 invited to attend The Lectures - a series of inspirational talks - that have often featured renowned business owners sharing their stories and tips for success. Previous speakers have included Dragons' Den star Sara Davies, bakery boss Jonathan Warburton, and Jo Fairley, of Green & Black's chocolate fame. Once they reach the Sixth Form, students can formally study business and economics, with many choosing to take their interest in entrepreneurship to fruition with an enterprise module. This sees them set up their very own small business; in the past we have had Dame Allan's merchandise created, a staff car wash set up, and raffles a-plenty.

So, for anyone reading who may be thinking about setting up their own business, why not think like a Year 7 pupil? Embrace your enthusiasm, resilience, and creativity, and see where it may take you.

**Find out more at [dameallans.co.uk](http://dameallans.co.uk)**



Matthew Syed meets with Sixth Form Psychology Students

# DAME ALLAN'S SCHOOLS



“

*...look at a new start as something exciting, rather than something to be feared...*

Will Scott

# Northumbria University helps businesses turn waste streams into new products



Members of Northumbria University's Applied Sciences department

Following its part in the successful delivery of a £4.7 million, three-year government funded research consortium, Northumbria University aims to engage with companies eager to commercialise their waste streams, increase their efficiency and bolster profitability.

**The Government's Transforming Foundation Industries Research and Innovation (TransFIRE) Hub, has a focus on UK manufacturing and its supply chain, specifically, those companies that are part of the chemicals, cement, ceramics, glass, metals, and paper industries.**

Northumbria University, which has been recognised as Modern University of the Year 2025 by The Times and also recorded the biggest rise in research power of any UK university for the second time in a row in REF2021, is ideally positioned to facilitate real impact through knowledge exchange and collaboration for organisations of all sizes, from multinationals to SMEs, based in the North East of England.

According to a report by BiGGAR Economics, Northumbria's research and knowledge exchange activities contributed £181 million to the UK economy, supporting over 3,100 jobs in the academic year 2021-2022.

As part of the consortium, Professor Justin Perry and Professor Matt Unthank, from Northumbria's Department of Applied Sciences, led research focussed on the bulk chemicals sector. Their research has showcased that it is not only possible but, also, potentially profitable, to take zero

value waste from one industry and turn it into valuable feedstocks or components for another industry.

One of the collaborations established through the research was with coatings specialists AkzoNobel and Jayplas, a specialist in post-consumer plastic recycling, reprocessing and manufacturing. The project showcases what is achievable by working across discipline boundaries in the manufacturing, polymer and construction industries.

The team has shown that it is possible to further optimise current plastic bottle recycling technology, which recycles a plastic called PET, used in single-use water and soft drink bottles, by taking its currently unrecyclable waste and transforming it into a novel, high-performance protective coating, for industrial applications, using only sustainable feedstocks. This demonstrates it is viable to convert a waste material into a high-value, high-performance product which can supply a coating market with global consumption reported as high as one million tonnes per annum.

Professor Matt Unthank, co-lead on the project for Northumbria University, said: "This research was undertaken to showcase

what is attainable when bringing businesses from different industries together to implement science-led, solution-based, projects.

"The UK government is making a real push to enable the manufacturing sector to become more sustainable and investment in research is key. We are keen to help businesses of all sizes develop their R&D to take advantage of sustainability as a driver of profitability. We have shown with this coating how one such 'waste stream' can create value for another industry and it is just one step towards a closed loop economy where there is no such thing as waste."

Together, the foundation industries are worth £52 billion to the UK economy and produce 28 million tonnes of materials per year, accounting for about 10% of the UK total CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

Ralph Slikkerveer, R&D Director at AkzoNobel's Marine Protective & Yacht business unit, said: "At AkzoNobel, advancing more sustainable coatings is a top priority. Our collaboration with Northumbria University on projects like this is vital for achieving our sustainability ambitions, including 100% circular use of materials in our own operations by 2030.

"Although it may take time to fully implement these innovations, they represent more than just exciting advancements—they are essential for inspiring collaboration and driving entire industries toward a brighter, more sustainable future."

**For more information visit [www.northumbria.ac.uk/spin](http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/spin)**



Phil Douglas

## North East Culture Leader awarded prestigious Clore Leadership Fellowship 2024

Phil Douglas, founder and CEO of North East arts and youth charity, Curious Arts has been selected to be part of the prestigious Clore Leadership Fellowship 2024.

The Clore Fellowships are awarded to dynamic change-makers from across the arts and culture sector who exhibit vision, strategic thinking, and an appetite for

collaboration in leading the arts, culture, and creativity for a positive impact on society.

This Clore 2024 cohort, comprises 24 exceptional leaders operating on a global scale with Phil being one of only two representatives chosen from the North East of England, alongside Rachel Lennon, a curator and cultural practitioner now based at Newcastle University.

According to the Clore website, “bold and courageous leadership has never been more crucial” and the fellowship is specifically designed to equip cultural leaders with the mindset, skills, and resilience they need to navigate these complex circumstances and thrive. By fostering leaders who can imagine it differently and drive meaningful impact, the programme aims to strengthen the cultural sector’s capacity to address societal challenges and create interventions for change.

Speaking about what being part of the 2024 fellowship means, Phil said, “The recruitment process is highly competitive and I am immensely proud to be representing the North East arts sector

and LGBT+ community alongside culture leaders from across the UK and around the world who are delivering incredible projects while still navigating a complex cultural landscape which includes balancing social responsibility with sustainability, digital advancements, the wellbeing of our teams and challenging economic environments.

Clore Fellows are chosen for their leadership ambitions and potential, creativity, and vision.

Phil continued, “It’s fantastic to be chosen to be part of a cohort of leaders underpinning the future of a resilient and thriving arts and cultural sector here in the UK and worldwide. I believe it is important to focus on collaboration and continued learning, not only to push our sector forward but to empower our communities to flourish.”

The 2024 cohort includes artists, curators, producers, directors, and educators, many of whom work across disciplines and co-create with communities and underrepresented groups.

[curiousarts.org.uk](https://curiousarts.org.uk)  
[www.cloreleadership.org](https://www.cloreleadership.org)



## Newcastle Theatre Royal announce a brand-new panto for 2025/26 - Aladdin

Whilst cast and crew are in rehearsals ahead of diving into this year's pantomime, *The Little Mermaid*, Newcastle Theatre Royal and Crossroads Pantomimes are delighted to announce that a brand-new version of *Aladdin* will fly into the Grey Street venue in 2025/26.

In celebration of Danny and Clive's 20th year as the stars of the Theatre Royal panto, audiences will enter a whole new world of pantomime with a brand-new version of *Aladdin*. Michael Harrison's retelling of the legendary story is set in the Royal Kingdom of Pantomania, where a whole host of fairytale characters come together in a pantomime for the 21st century where wicked witches meet dancing geese, colliding with one very magical flying carpet!

Chris Hayward once again dons the Dame's frocks as *Aladdin's* mum, Mother Goose, and Joe McElderry returns as *The Spirit of the Ring*. This is *Aladdin* as it's never been seen before - with a Tyneside twist! With brand-new sets and costumes designed especially for Newcastle Theatre Royal, *Aladdin* promises to be a Genie-us of a pantomime.

Michael Harrison, Producer and Director of the Theatre Royal pantomime said: "We're absolutely delighted to announce the return of Danny, Clive, Chris and Joe next Christmas in a brand-new staging of *Aladdin*. Opening spectacular new pantomimes at the Theatre Royal is becoming somewhat of a tradition, with our new production of *The Little Mermaid* following the huge success of *Pinocchio* last year."

## Simon & Garfunkel: Through the Years. Performed by Bookends

Simon & Garfunkel: *Through the Years* is the most authentic sounding concert to the unforgettable music of Simon & Garfunkel. Made up of Dan Haynes & Pete Richards, Bookends have toured the globe extensively with their concerts being described as 'simply breath-taking'.

Performing the songs in a truly captivating way, against a backdrop of iconic imagery, their delicate recreation of the unmistakable sound of the American folk-rock duo is something of a masterpiece. Bookends have

been performing their unique, world-class concert to audiences in some of the finest theatres and concert halls across the UK, Europe and the United States.

Hear many of the hits such as *The Sound of Silence*, *Mrs Robinson*, *The Boxer* and Bookends' own beautiful rendition of the unforgettable *Bridge Over Troubled Water*. This is without doubt the closest thing to Simon & Garfunkel touring the world today.

Simon & Garfunkel: *Through the Years* will be performing at the Tyne Theatre & Opera House on Friday 9th May 2025.

**Tickets cost £41.50 – £29.50 and can be purchased from: [www.tynetheatreandoperahouse.uk/whatonsimon-and-garfunkel-through-the-years](http://www.tynetheatreandoperahouse.uk/whatonsimon-and-garfunkel-through-the-years)**



## Newcastle Theatre Royal to open brand-new production of Miss Saigon in 2025

Michael Harrison in association with Cameron Mackintosh is delighted to present a new touring production of the global stage sensation, *Miss Saigon* and audiences in Newcastle will be the first to see the epic spectacular when it opens at Newcastle Theatre Royal (Sat 4 – Sat 25 Oct 2025) before embarking on a major UK tour.

*Miss Saigon* has been performed in 33 countries, in 15 different languages and has won 75 major awards including 2 Olivier Awards, 3 Tony Awards, and 4 Drama Desk Awards. Boublil and Schönberg's legendary musical has been seen by over 38 million people worldwide, the new production will be touring the UK in 2025/26.

In the last days of the Vietnam War, 17-year-old Kim is forced to work in a Saigon bar run by a notorious character known as *The Engineer*. There she meets and falls in love with an American GI named Chris, but they are torn apart by the fall of Saigon. For 3 years Kim goes on an epic journey of survival to find her way back to Chris, who has no idea he's fathered a son.

This year marks 35 years since *Miss Saigon* made its West End premiere and became one of the most successful musicals in history. The original Broadway production, which played for almost 10 years, opened in 1991 and was attended by more than 6.3 million people.

# Blagdon Gallery

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

## Culture Club

### Chris Tait

Founder of Layer 7

Layer 7, solving business challenges through technology and positive secure digital experiences.

Chris is also the main sponsor for the Christmas at the Cathedral concert in December. Here he tells us about his favourite music, writing and entertainment.

#### Who is your favourite author and why?

Tom Sharpe is my favourite author due to his sharp wit and incisive social commentary. His satirical take on the absurdities of society, paired with his masterful storytelling, creates a blend of humour and depth that leaves a lasting impression. His novels are a reminder that even the most serious issues can be approached with levity, challenging readers to reflect on the world around them.

#### What would be your three Desert Island Discs?

Creedence Clearwater Revival - *'Have You Ever Seen the Rain'*: This timeless classic speaks to the soul, capturing the bittersweet nature of life's storms and silver linings. Its nostalgic resonance would bring comfort and reflection.

Bob Dylan - *'The Times They Are A-Changin'*: Dylan's anthem of change and social upheaval is an eternal reminder of resilience and the power of transformation—a fitting message for isolation on a desert island.

Luciano Pavarotti - *'Ah! mes amis'*: Pavarotti's breathtaking vocal mastery in this aria lifts the spirit. The sheer emotion and power of his voice would be both a source of solace and inspiration in solitude.

#### Who is your favourite film star and why?

Robert De Niro is my choice for his extraordinary range and depth as an actor. From the intense focus in *'Taxi Driver'* to the nuanced subtlety in *'The Irishman'*, De Niro embodies each character with a raw authenticity that leaves a profound impact. His ability to explore the complexities of the human psyche makes him a legend in the world of cinema.

#### What are your top three films? Tell me about them.

*The Shawshank Redemption*: A profound



exploration of hope, redemption, and the enduring human spirit. The film's narrative arc and its unforgettable characters are a testament to resilience in the face of despair.

*Leon: The Professional*: This film delves into the unlikely bond between a hitman and a young girl. It is a raw, emotional story about loss, loyalty, and the complexities of morality.

*Seven Samurai*: Akira Kurosawa's masterpiece is a timeless study of honour, sacrifice, and the human condition. Its epic scale and intricate storytelling have influenced countless films and remain a touchstone in the art of cinema.

#### Which poem left a lasting impression on you?

John Keats' *"Ode on a Grecian Urn"* continues to captivate me with its meditation on beauty, art, and eternity. Keats' exploration of the timeless nature of art, contrasted with the transience of human life, speaks to the enduring quest for meaning and the pursuit of truth.

#### What box sets have you enjoyed?

*Slow Horses*: A gripping portrayal of flawed intelligence officers, blending dark humour with suspenseful narratives, exploring the shadowy corners of espionage.

*The Night Manager*: This series is a perfect marriage of John le Carré's storytelling and contemporary cinematic style. It's an engaging, sophisticated thriller that delves

into the complexities of loyalty, betrayal, and global corruption.

#### Who is your favourite artist or performer?

Bruce Springsteen is my favourite artist for his storytelling prowess and ability to capture the spirit of the working-class struggle. His music embodies the raw energy of rock 'n' roll while delivering deeply personal narratives that resonate universally.

#### What is your favourite venue?

Cheviot Hill stands out as a place of profound beauty and solitude. The sweeping views, open skies, and rugged landscape make it a perfect retreat for reflection, away from the chaos of modern life. There's something grounding about being surrounded by nature's vastness. I also love Newcastle Cathedral where the Christmas at the Cathedral concert takes place on 12th December. It's a lovely night of carols, entertainment and its raising funds for The Sir Bobby Robson Foundation.

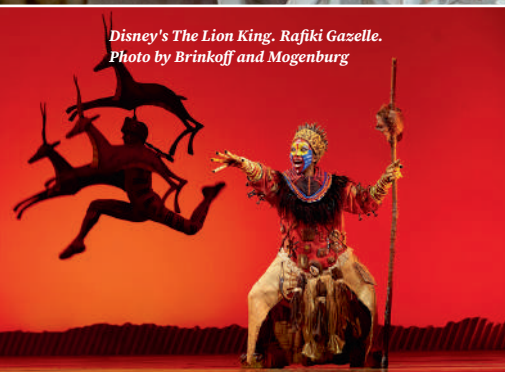
#### Which musical instrument do you particularly enjoy?

The piano captivates me the most for its versatility and emotional range. It can convey the most delicate nuances of feeling, from the gentle melancholy of a nocturne to the powerful crescendo of a symphony. The piano's ability to both comfort and challenge the listener is truly unique.

[www.layer7.uk](http://www.layer7.uk)



Marie Nixon



Disney's The Lion King. Rafiki Gazelle.  
Photo by Brinkoff and Mogenburg



Sunderland Empire Auditorium



Maya Britto, Aisha Jawando and Gabriela Benedetti.  
Photo by Danny Kaan



# In Conversation With...

## Marie Nixon

*Theatre Director, Sunderland Empire.*

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

My dad was a welder, and my mam worked in a sewing factory, but music was where my heart was. Diana Ross was my big inspiration—her power, costumes and presence on stage were everything to me. So, I set my sights on being a performer, I was in a 90s band, *Kenickie*, and we appeared on *Top of the Pops* not once, but twice – an unforgettable time! After that, I shifted gears into artist management, helping guide musicians as they climbed the charts. But that love for performance has stayed with me, and now I get to bring big shows to the stage in a different way.

### Tell us about your current role.

I'm Theatre Director at the Sunderland Empire, which is owned by Sunderland City Council, and operated by ATG Entertainment. It's a big job, but I'm lucky to work with a fantastic team across ATG Entertainment, from Broadway to Bristol, Woking to the West End. It's an incredible theatre with such history, and it's truly the beating heart of cultural life in Sunderland. We're constantly striving to bring the very best shows to the region, like *Hamilton* in Summer 2025 – what a privilege!

### What is your proudest business achievement?

I'm incredibly proud of how we've been able to bring people to Sunderland's city centre in their hundreds of thousands. We work closely with the local council, Sunderland BID, and other partners to make sure the theatre's success benefits the city in terms of its economy, vibrancy, and regeneration. But personally, I'm proud of how we've been able to bring some of the biggest shows in the world to the North East, including Disney Theatrical Productions such as *Lion King* and *Beauty and the Beast*. These shows not only provide incredible entertainment but also draw people from across the UK to Sunderland, which is great for the whole region.

### What are you currently working on?

We're always looking ahead; programming shows up to 2027 and beyond. Our team is working tirelessly to secure Sunderland slots on the biggest national tours, which is a huge responsibility, but exciting too. One of the standout projects we're working on is a partnership with the National Theatre and Sunderland Culture. It's a play with music, *Public Record*, which will be performed by and starring a cast of local Sunderland residents. It's a celebration of the community and its stories, and it's set to take place in April 2025. I'm incredibly excited about this one—it's going to be something special.

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

I'm incredibly lucky to work with such a passionate and dedicated team. We have the best team in show business, no doubt about it. Everyone here expects high performance from one another, but there's also a deep care for each other, and that's what makes it such a special place to work. Every department is vital in bringing the magic of the theatre to the audience. We also have a small management team, which includes myself, our amazing Theatre Manager, and our Administrator. It's a real privilege to lead such a fantastic group of people.

### Tell us something people may not know about Sunderland Empire.

Most people know about the fantastic shows they can see at Sunderland Empire but may not realise that we have an award-winning Creative Learning team here. They work with local communities and schools, with the aim of increasing access to the performing arts. From our weekly Academy for ages 6-18 to our inclusive special educational needs provision, to our over 55s choir and dance classes: their work is truly inspiring. All the work is funded by Sunderland Empire Theatre Trust, and our in-house team are constantly fundraising and applying for grants to ensure these important groups can continue and thrive.

### What's been your biggest challenge?

Without a doubt, the biggest challenge I've faced was reopening the theatre after the extended closure due to COVID-19. There was so much uncertainty, and we had to do everything we could to ensure the safety of our audiences, productions, and staff. To see 2,000 people in the theatre enjoying themselves again after so long—was a truly emotional experience.

### Who are your heroes, both inside and outside of business?

Mary Wollstonecraft is a hero of mine—she was such a trailblazer and visionary, always ahead of her time. Her commitment to education, equality and rights for women still resonates today. Then there's Dame Irene Hays, whose achievements at Hays Travel are well known, but I also admire her for her role in transforming the Sunderland Empire. She saw the potential of investing in the theatre's technical side, and her vision helped turn the Empire into the major force it is today in the UK's touring circuit. She brought people together, saw the bigger picture, and made it happen—something I truly admire.

### How do you unwind outside of work?

I'm a big fan of audiobooks. I subscribe to every audiobook service known to humanity! I love reading, particularly romantic fiction like Mhairi McFarlane's novels, and literary fiction from authors like Doris Lessing and Ann Patchett. I find it's a great way to relax after a busy day.

[www.atgtickets.com/venues/sunderland-empire](http://www.atgtickets.com/venues/sunderland-empire)



# Say goodbye to winter blues this January at the Tyneside Americana Blues Festival

Two passionate music fans are bringing together their musical heroes for a spectacular festival in North Shields. Following the success of the first Tyneside Americana Blues Festival in January 2024, the second edition promises to be even bigger and better. Scheduled for January 10th-12th, 2025, this year's event will take place at the newly renovated Exchange 1856, an iconic Grade II listed building in North Shields.

The 2025 festival boasts a stellar lineup, including John Verity, Deborah Bonham, and John Steel from The Animals. Fans of Medicine Head, with their unique sound combining didgeridoo and slide guitar, will also have the chance to see the band perform live—a special treat for long-time followers.

The event isn't just a musical celebration—it's also giving a boost to the local economy. "Last year, hotel occupancy in the area shot up from 28% to 80%, and local businesses—restaurants, bars, and even public transport—benefited significantly. We're confident this year's festival will have the same positive impact," Stephen Donnelly co-organiser explained.

In addition to established stars, the festival will also feature performances by up-and-coming local bands, creating opportunities for new talent to shine. "For some local acts, playing last year's festival led to additional bookings, including gigs in iconic venues like London's 100 Club," Stephen added.

Fellow organiser Jonny Clegg shared his excitement about the new venue, saying, "The Exchange 1856 is perfect for this event. It has

a professional setup, with stages, dressing rooms, and multiple performance areas. It's also easily accessible by public transport, making it convenient for everyone to attend."

Tickets for the Tyneside Americana Blues Festival 2025 are available at [tynesidefest.co.uk](https://tynesidefest.co.uk). Options include day tickets, weekend passes, and VIP packages that offer exclusive perks, such as meeting the artists and enjoying discounts on food and drinks.

"This is a wonderful opportunity for music fans who watched their heroes perform at the Newcastle City Hall and The Mayfair, to see them up close and personal at the Exchange. It's going to be a fantastic experience," said Jonny.



Jonny Clegg and Stephen Donnelly

## Christmas at the Cathedral

The Sir Bobby Robson Foundation, part of Newcastle Hospitals Charity, is thrilled to announce its 12th annual entertainment show, Christmas at the Cathedral, will take place on Thursday, 12th December.

This popular fundraising event, held at Newcastle Cathedral, has become a local festive staple, renowned for its star-studded

lineup and festive ambiance. For many, including Lady Elsie, this event marks the beginning of their Christmas celebrations.

The show promises another evening of exceptional entertainment, featuring a mix of celebrities and local stars delivering songs, readings, and comedy sketches, all wrapped in a heart-warming Christmas theme.

The roster of performers is being kept under wraps, adding to the excitement and anticipation. Past events have

featured personalities such as Tim Healy, Melanie Hill, Billy Mitchell, Chelsea and Jill Halfpenny, Charlie Hardwick, Catherine Dryden, Jimmy Nail, Paul Smith, Rachel Unthank, Steffen Peddie, Stephen Tomkinson, The Caffreys, The Futureheads, and Lorraine Crosby.

With the generous support of attendees and sponsors, including this year's main sponsor Layer 7 IT Security from Ashington, the Christmas at the Cathedral show has become a treasured community tradition.



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# Snow White

& The Seven Dwarfs



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Entertainment

In the first of a new series of features with leading figures in the North East Arts and Culture sector Keith Newman spoke to...

## Jacqui Kell

*Executive Director at Live Theatre*

For over five decades, Live Theatre has been a vibrant cornerstone of Newcastle's cultural scene. Sitting on the Quayside, it's known for its commitment to new and aspiring writers, artists, and creatives, nurturing the freelance sector across the city and region.



**Jacqui Kell, Live Theatre's Executive Director and Joint Chief Executive, has been steering this dynamic organisation since 2018, bringing a unique blend of economic development experience and a deep passion for the arts.**

### Why Live Theatre?

According to Jacqui, Live Theatre's mission goes beyond just entertainment; it's about fostering creative growth and offering a space for artistic experimentation. "We're a new writing theatre. Our focus is supporting emerging talent and providing a platform for creativity in the North East," she shares.

Jacqui's previous career focused on economic regeneration, which she feels ties directly into her work in the cultural sector. "It's all connected," she explains. "When I first worked with Live Theatre, I helped secure funding for the renovation of our historic buildings, and it's amazing to see how that investment has allowed us to support a wide range of activities."

### Not just a Theatre

Live Theatre isn't just a venue for plays; it's a multi-faceted organisation. Apart from producing its own shows, it runs a thriving children and young people's programme including a youth theatre, offering free creative opportunities to young people in the community. Their initiative, Live Tales, brings the magic of storytelling to schoolchildren, nurturing skills like confidence and social interaction. "It's about more than acting," Jacqui says. "It's about building self-confidence and connecting with others. We employ a lot of freelance facilitators to work with the young people and on our artist development programmes, and I like to think everyone who walks through the doors at Live Theatre just loves it. It's got a lovely feel. I always say it kind of wraps its arms around you. And that's exactly what we want to encourage."

She also highlights the importance of such programmes for mental health, especially in collaboration with Northumbria University who are helping to research the benefits of creative activities.

With a unique central location on the bustling Quayside, Live Theatre has a main theatre, an adaptable studio space, a series of writing and rehearsal rooms, an atmospheric bar (where Sam Fender once played the piano!) and the Lives Tales creative writing centre.

The theatre's financial model relies on more than simply just ticket sales. Their property portfolio, including partnerships with restaurants and tech companies, ensures sustainability. "We have amazing tenants," Jacqui says, referencing names like St. Vincent's Restaurant, The Broad Chare, a new restaurant called DOOD, Generator, the music development agency, Allies Group and ZeroLight, a tech company. "We're not your typical landlord. We work closely with our tenants and value the community we've built."

### Passionate support

Live Theatre has earned the support of big names, including musician Sting, actor Jimmy Nail and actress Charlie Hardwick. Jacqui is particularly touched by their commitment: "Sting is one of our 'Best Friends' supporters. Last year, he even did an intimate show for us."

### The joy of her role


Jacqui's favourite part of her job? Watching the creative process unfold. "Sometimes I escape to watch a dress rehearsal or hear the first reading of a new play. It's refreshing and fulfilling, especially after years in more corporate settings. My team's passion is inspiring and challenging—they push us to find the funding to keep doing the work we love."

### Supporting the Theatre

For those looking to support Live Theatre, Jacqui suggests simple steps: come to a show, join the Friends scheme, buy a coffee, or sponsor a ticket for someone who might not otherwise attend. Every bit helps Live Theatre continue its vital work in Newcastle and beyond.

As Jacqui and her team gear up for next year's programme, which features the eagerly awaited play "Champion" by Ishy Din—a family drama about Muhammad Ali's 1977 visit to South Shields—Live Theatre continues to be a vibrant hub on the Quayside, fostering storytelling, community, and creative development in the region.

[www.live.org.uk](http://www.live.org.uk)



“Our focus is supporting emerging talent and providing a platform for creativity in the North East...”



Mary Ann Rogers Gallery



Mary Ann Rogers

## An Artist's Year

By Mary Ann Rogers

As we head into winter here at Mary Ann Rogers Gallery, the daylight hours are short, but visitors are more frequent.

**The rhythm of the years always catches me by surprise, and I have no sooner become used to the long days of summer, painting until quite late, long evening walks and plenty of outside time, when I'm taken aback by darkness falling long before I have completed my daytime activities.**

Walking with a head torch becomes the norm, trying not to lose my little dark black & tan miniature dachshund, Dorothy, who is apt to head off after a hare if she gets the chance!

Designing the Christmas catalogue, bursting with prints, cards and gifts, takes most of September. The proofing, printing and preparing to mail out takes most of October, and by the time they pop through letterboxes up and down the UK, we are just about ready to deal with all the orders for paintings, prints, cards, calendars and gifts that (hopefully) follow!

The fox who ate all our chickens, ducks and one guinea fowl back in June seems to be back. We got eight new young guinea fowl, raised by a farmer friend near Gretna, and it was all going smoothly. They had all begun to roost safely up the tree by the stream, and come down to be fed in the morning, but just this week, we counted only nine, where there used to be the two old ones, plus eight young ones. Needless to say, the missing guinea fowl was not an old one, but a lovely new young one. Now we are worrying in case this will become a daily occurrence until our lovely flock is wiped out again.



The guinea fowl are without doubt, the funniest of birds. They prowl around in a gang, making a hideous racket if anything is out of place or unusual. I have seen them scare a fox away with my own eyes, after screeching and rushing forward repeatedly towards the fox, then retreating, allowing another guinea fowl to screech and rush forward, with its wings lifted high, making it appear much more intimidating.

The gallery has been completely refreshed- paintwork and new paintings, ready for the onslaught of our lovely Christmas visitors, on our open weekends. Soon the aroma of cloves, cinnamon and nutmeg will fill the place, mulled wine will be served, along with mince pies and wide smiles!

**Mary Ann Rogers Gallery Christmas open days:  
22, 23, 24 Nov, 30 Nov, 1 Dec, also 7 & 8 Dec, 10am-5pm**

**Mary Ann Rogers Gallery, West Woodburn, Hexham, NE48 2SE  
www.marogers.com • 07967550772**





## A banging break in the Scottish Borders

By Stuart Forster

The grey disk gains trajectory from behind a grassy hillock and I track it with the shotgun my cheek rests against. Drawing the jutting gunsight forward, just a tad in front of the approaching object, I squeeze the trigger and the weapon recoils into my shoulder. The clay pigeon shatters.

**Twenty minutes ago I'd not so much as held a shotgun, never mind fired one, so a sense of surprise precedes the elation of hitting the target. The instructions we've received at the shooting range that's part of SCHLOSS Roxburghe's 300-acre estate have been clearly and calmly delivered, helping me feel like a natural at clay pigeon shooting.**

It's just one of the 'country sports' offered at this luxury hotel in the Scottish Borders. Archery is another and multicoloured targets are arranged on the lawn by the conservatory of the manor house where guests check-in. So too is fly fishing on the trout loch or the two-and-a-half mile stretch of the River Teviot that are part of the estate.

"Always give us a call first...ask about what the river is doing if you're wanting to go fishing. We can check what our country sports instructors say and we can check availability for you," suggests Jack Cameron, Groups and Events Coordinator at SCHLOSS Roxburghe, when I ask what he'd recommend to guests who want to make the most of their stay.

"Come when the fires are on, come when it's cold: it's always lovely," he adds,

recommending a winter break while gesturing towards one of the grand fireplaces that remain purely ornamental on warm and sunny autumn days like today.

I started the morning with a pre-breakfast stroll on the golf course, whose signature fifth hole was still shrouded in mist when I reached the tee box that normally offers views of the Victorian viaduct spanning the Teviot. Being an awful golfer, my only shots were with my camera.

That said, teeing up a few drives on the driving range was fun. The Toptracer technology installed there enabled me to simulate playing holes – badly, of course – on a handful of the world's top courses.

Last night's top course was tender venison served with braised red cabbage and parsnip plus a rich jus. That was in Charlie's, where breakfast, lunch and dinner are served. Tonight I'm looking forward to dinner in Sunlaws, the property's fine-dining restaurant, whose menu, like Charlie's, draws on regional and seasonal ingredients.

Charlie's is within the Estate House extension that holds 58 of SCHLOSS Roxburghe's bedrooms. Completed in 2022, it also hosts the gym and spa, where I earlier steeped in the hot tub after sweating in the Finnish sauna and lazily swimming a couple of lengths in the heated outdoor pool.

Sunlaws, meanwhile, is in the manor house that has 20 guestrooms and suites. Its library has been converted into Bar 1745, whose name references the Jacobite Rising that reputedly saw Bonnie Prince Charlie stay on the estate. It was there, after dinner, that I participated in a whisky tasting led by Carrie-Anne Jones. The leather-backed books, wood shelving and comfy armchairs were an ideal backdrop for Carrie-Anne to share her knowledge of whisky.

From there it was a five-minute walk to my cottage. It is one of 51 added to the estate during the course of 2024. Their kitchens give guests a self-catering option while staying at SCHLOSS Roxburghe.

Formerly owned by the Duke of Roxburghe, this luxury hotel now has owners from Germany, where the word 'Schloss' means 'palace'. It's proving a grand place to enjoy a break in the countryside.



Photography: Stuart Forster

### Travel information

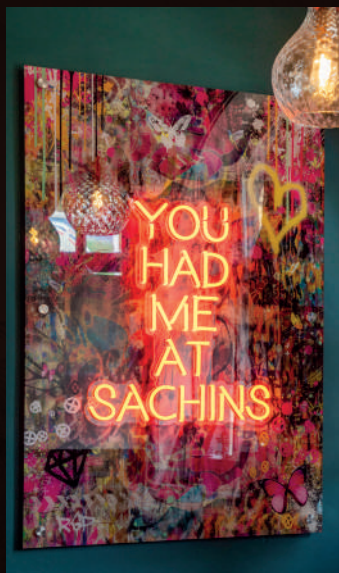
A Destination by Hyatt hotel, SCHLOSS Roxburghe ([schlosshotel-roxburghe.com](https://schlosshotel-roxburghe.com)) is at Heiton near Kelso in the Scottish Borders. Driving there from Newcastle takes about one hour and 40 minutes.

Low-season rates for a two-bed cottage start at £352 a night, one-bedroom cottages start at £285 a night and king-bed courtyard rooms are from £153 a night.

Day spa packages start at £70pp. The cost per hour for clay pigeon tuition, including 50 cartridges, is £100. Sunlaws' tasting menu is priced at £95pp plus £55pp for the option of wine pairing.







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## The Harbour View Fish and Chip Shop thanks customers for supporting the RNLI with £75 Donation



The Harbour View Fish and Chip Restaurant in Seaton Sluice has expressed its heartfelt gratitude to loyal customers who helped raise £75 in support of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI). Known for its generous portions of cod and appearances in TV documentaries, including one by National Geographic for Australian audiences, the restaurant has been a local favourite for years.

Manager Sharron Carr emphasised the importance of supporting those who work tirelessly to keep others safe at sea: "We appreciate that the fishing fleet are out at sea in all weathers, risking their lives so that we can enjoy their catch. It's only right that we support the RNLI's work."

The RNLI operates lifeboat stations in nearby Blyth and Cullercoats, both of which play a crucial role in safeguarding the local fishing fleet and recreational boaters along this stretch of the North East coastline. These stations are staffed by dedicated volunteers who respond to emergencies day and night, often in challenging conditions, to save lives at sea.

The Harbour View team is proud to contribute to the RNLI's mission and extends its thanks once more to customers for supporting this vital cause.

## Tyne to Shine: Aspire Licensing navigates smooth waters for Tavern on the Tyne

Based in Wallsend Town Hall, Aspire Licensing specialises in securing licenses for pubs, clubs, restaurants, events, festivals and other hospitality establishments.

Run by Beverley Smith, Aspire Licensing works with local hoteliers and businesses, ranging from bars and restaurants to convenience stores. The firm ensures that all necessary licenses are submitted to local authorities, including premises licenses and staff personal licenses, ensuring compliance with local laws. While Aspire primarily operates in the North East, their services extend across the UK, except for Scotland, which has different licensing regulations.

Their latest client is Tavern on the Tyne situated next to the Swing Bridge on the Gateshead side of the river while just opposite is her longest serving client, restaurateurs Sambuca's based in Newcastle and locations across the north of England.

Aspire Licensing's success is bolstered by Beverley's 20 years of



experience working in the legal sector and close relationships with local authorities. "We have established trust with councils and the police, enabling us to address their concerns and negotiate solutions, often avoiding the need for formal hearings. We pride ourselves on making the process less daunting for our clients."

## Seafood and Steak brings fine dining to Stack Seaburn

A North East fish and chip restaurant chain is flexing its culinary "mussels" by launching its first fine dining eatery.

Downys, renowned across the region for its traditional fish and chips, has opened Seafood and Steak Co at STACK Seaburn.

Its former unit at STACK has undergone a £200k refurbishment to create the 34 cover restaurant, which will offer a range of menus from an Early Bird deal to A La Carte, along with a special Sunday lunch offering.

The Early Bird menu will operate Wednesday to Saturday from noon to 4pm with dishes including Scotch eggs, fresh mussels and black tiger prawns for starters with mains of pan seared seabass, linguine with clams and prawns and soft shell crab sourdough.

Meat dishes including steak and sourdough and chargilled rump will also feature on the menu, with two courses for £15 and three for £20.



The a la carte menu will operate from 5pm to 9pm, with starters of mussels, king prawns and a terrine of black pudding and chorizo among the dishes on offer.

Mains include lobster with thermidor butter, pan-seared hake, monkfish, seabass and fresh mussels with a choice of sauces.

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# Here's to a genuine New Year!

Can you honestly say your social and environmental commitments are genuine?

Who do they benefit the most? People, nature, the environment or you and your business?

**A UK Government analysis of 500 businesses, found 40% made false claims, and a further 37% are not acting upon their environmental and social responsibilities at all.**

So as we come to the end of 2024, it's devastating but not surprising to learn that things are getting worse, not better!

The crisis's we face are urgent. And business has a vital role to play in turning the tide.

The Centre for Justice has reported that 921 charities closed this year, with the announcements of increased National Insurance contributions, it's expected that this figure will continue to rise dramatically in 2025.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation announced 30% of children are living in poverty despite living in one of the richest countries in the world. Most of these children live in working family homes, 60% of people living in deprivation are in work.

We are still producing record highs of greenhouse gas emissions, and trend forecasters advise this is not slowing down.

The World Benchmarking Alliance, which assess the worlds leading businesses found that 90% are failing to deliver fair human rights and meet ethical standards.

As we come to the end of the year Social Enterprise UK report that 180,000 ethical enterprises are at risk of closure.



The United Nations announced on World Humanitarian Day that record numbers of aid workers have died, in action, this year.

Save the Children reported nearly half a billion children are living in conflict around the world, with record numbers of children dying in wars.

The World Wildlife Fund has warned of significant biodiversity loss, a dangerous decline in nature, with one million species are facing extinction, vertebrate wildlife has dropped by 73%.

340,000 UK people left roles that protect us at our most vulnerable, putting vast pressure on the caring services that meet human need.

Extreme weather such as floods and droughts are having a direct impact on food security. The World Human Rights Watch reported an increase in discrimination, with The Challenge charity exposing segregation

in UK schools. We are regressing and becoming more divided.

It's not a Merry Christmas, unfortunately.

At Kind Currency, we believe that you can deliver genuine tangible transparent social value. That business can make a difference with the right support. And we can help you do your little bit to improve the crisis situations we face today. It's not about putting people and planet before profit, it's about sustaining profits without having a negative influence on the world, and ensuring need is a priority.

Our Social Value Partnership is designed to enable you to concentrate on the service you deliver, increase sales, and win contracts, whilst we provide efficient, targeted and evidence based social value for you, helping you to protect people, nature, planet and be audit ready, ultimately protecting your business!

The recent floods in Spain were very close to home, Reuters calculated the impact on the Spanish economy is 10 billion euros at least. Hundreds of lives, homes and businesses are lost. Could our tiny island cope?

It's overwhelming, isn't it?

The future isn't stable. But working together we can ensure we change the tide and ensure it is sustainable because to keep going in the direction we are will be painful for us all.

Make 2025, the year you commit to genuine kind action, to protect your business and the future.

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



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We hope to see you soon.

Merry Christmas from everyone at The Zen Group.

[zengroup.uk](http://zengroup.uk)



## A Merry Maldron Christmas

By Michael Grahamslaw

Nothing quite beats the city during the festive build up. Matchdays under the floodlights, welcome pints in cosy pubs, retail therapy amidst the Christmas hustle and bustle; there's really no place like it.

**With this in mind, and after putting the November edition of Northern Insight to bed, we decided to blend some early Christmas shopping with a relaxing stay at the Maldron Hotel in Newcastle.**

Opened in 2018, the Maldron – part of the Irish hotel chain - has swiftly carved out a reputation for its comfortable accommodations, versatile events facilities and a food & drink offering that consistently impresses.

Having stayed here previously, we've always been struck by the team's friendly and professional approach, a hallmark of Anna Wadcock's expert management. Anna, who I've known for many years, ensures service levels are consistently high, blending youthful energy with seasoned expertise.

This visit was no exception: we were met with the warmest of welcomes upon check-in, setting the tone for what was to be a memorable stay.

On arrival, there was a palpable buzz about the place with Sunday Lunch diners mingling in the lounge area with Newcastle fans settling down to watch the afternoon's game away to Chelsea. Not even a crushing defeat could spoil our first impressions as we made our way to our deluxe double room.



Our room was everything you'd expect from a modern city-centre hotel - and more. At its centrepiece was a luxurious King Koil bed, promising a restful night's sleep replete with plush pillows and linen. The room also featured complimentary toiletries, high-speed Wi-Fi, and a flat-screen TV, perfect for unwinding after a busy day.

Attention to detail was evident throughout, from the thoughtful ambient lighting to the generous tea and coffee-making facilities. Subtle pops of Maldron yellow punctuate the décor - an emblem of that classy, four-star hotel appeal.

After a quick freshen-up, we parted ways: Lisa headed off for her Christmas shopping spree, while I lingered behind to watch the remainder of the Toon game in the lounge with a few pints of Vitamin G.

When in an Irish hotel, you must understand!

The bar area is both stylish and welcoming, making it an ideal spot to relax with a drink.



As evening fell, we reconvened in the hotel's restaurant, a tastefully appointed space that combines a contemporary aesthetic with a warm and inviting ambiance. The menu was extensive, showcasing a wide array of dishes to suit all palates.

To start, I opted for the Original Buffalo Wings, which were perfectly crispy with just the right amount of spice, accompanied by a creamy blue cheese dip. Lisa chose the tomato, goat's cheese, and basil tart, a dish as elegant - and artfully presented - as it was flavourful.

For mains, I couldn't resist the traditional fish and chips, which arrived golden, crispy, and served with a generous portion of mushy peas and tartare sauce. Lisa, meanwhile, went for the slow-braised featherblade of British beef, a melt-in-the-mouth triumph served with rich gravy and buttery mash.

Although we were nearing capacity, the dessert menu proved similarly irresistible. We shared the warm chocolate pudding with salted caramel ice cream, a decadent finale to a thoroughly enjoyable meal and a nice pre-cursor to inevitable festive overindulgence.

The Maldron's restaurant deserves special mention for its attentive service and impeccable presentation. Every dish was delivered with care, and the staff ensured our dining experience was seamless from start to finish.

The Maldron Hotel ticks all the boxes for a city-centre getaway. Its central location makes it an excellent base for exploring Newcastle's shopping, nightlife, and cultural offerings, while the hotel itself provides a haven of comfort and top-notch hospitality.

Ireland has spawned many Christmas heroes over the years; Shane MacGowan, Liam Neeson in *Love Actually*, James Joyce's short stories, Jameson Coffees on those sleepy afternoons between Christmas and New Year; and now, most recently, the Maldron Hotel!

**For more information, visit [www.maldronhotels.com/newcastle](http://www.maldronhotels.com/newcastle)**





## Delhi Capitals

By Michael Grahmslaw

No aspiring foodie on Tyneside could have missed the meteoric rise of My Delhi. Clayton Street's curry temple has blazed its spice trail through the city, scooping award after award.

**A couple of the gongs in question include the prestigious Street Food Restaurant of the Year - not to mention BBC's Britain's Top Takeaways. Such success has led to further culinary outposts emerging in Sunderland and Leicester.**

This is certainly a hugely impressive feat; however, one question remains unanswered: how does the restaurant stand up for an old school 'Dads and lads' curry club?

Sunday evening pre-concert proved the perfect time to visit, so my son Jack and I pitched up to sample all My Delhi had to offer.

Upon arrival, we were impressed to find a dining area already in full swing. Live at five, there was already a palpable buzz about the

place with enticing Indian aromas pervading the air.

The interior is bathed in browns and mustard tones with bright pops of pink hinting at the restaurant's vibrant culinary flair. Corrugated steel walls and an imitation tuk-tuk chassis pay homage to the city from which it derives its name.

With the cobras in full swing, these two curry aficionados settled in for a memorable meal.

Its menu comprises street food plates and roadside curries from the bustling streets of Delhi, alongside dishes inspired by the royal Mughal kitchens, bringing together a blend of rustic flavours and regal indulgence.

In doing so, My Delhi captures the vim and vigour of Indian street food - think tasty bhajis, samosas, momos, kebabs and curries.

With a full selection available across the all-day menu, this lends itself perfectly to a full-blooded, tapas-style feast.

Between a few pulls on our beers and some good-natured table talk, dishes arrived cooked to order and as-and-when-ready, in keeping with the street food experience. Onion bhajis were little golden fritters, very well done while desirably crispy on the outside and soft-and-flavourful, within.

Chilli chicken was another street food staple - a chilli fiend's delight, tossed up in a wok and infused with chef's 'secret hot sauce' and chilli. Suffice to say, this was mopped up with gusto by a supplementary garlic naan.

Inspired by India's highway dhabas, Highway 24 was another poultry-based standout featuring chicken marinated in cream and ginger, and tossed in spices, green chillies and crushed black peppercorns.

As is his irritating wont, Jack picked out a real winner in the Afghani lamb kebab: a neat fusion of centuries-old Indian, Persian and Mongolian cooking.

Undoubtedly, however, the star of the show was the Aslam smoked tandoori chicken - served with a touch of theatre lent by a smoky, domed, glass-cloche lid. The dish is inspired by Old Delhi's famed butter chicken which uses the ancient dhungar technique over hot coals to imbue dishes with that smoky, buttery flavour.

Well worth the visit indeed.

Over coffees, we toasted what had been one of the best meals in recent times before heading out - thoroughly replete - into the cold Newcastle air.

My Delhi deserves all the plaudits.

**For more information, visit [www.mydelhistreetfood.com](http://www.mydelhistreetfood.com)**







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# Football loving friends want others to embrace the thrill of the unknown with Mystery Gamedays



Co-founders of Mystery Gamedays Alex Weegram and Alan Harrison with the Reveal Packs

Picture: Chris Booth/Rephrase

Lifelong friends and grassroots football teammates, Alan Harrison and Alex Weegram, have turned their shared passion for football and travel into a unique business venture - Mystery Gamedays.

**This recently launched company offers fans the chance to experience the beautiful game with a twist - surprise destinations revealed just days before departure.**

The idea stemmed from Hartlepool-born co-founders Alan and Alex's own adventures, starting with a trip to Villarreal v Levante in Spain with secondary school eight years ago before attending AC Milan v Atalanta in 2022.

Alan said: "We quickly realised how much we enjoyed combining travel with watching live football in different countries. It was after a trip to see Ajax v Heerenveen last year when we decided to turn this passion into a business, adding the element of surprise to make it even more exciting."

Mystery Gamedays operates on a simple but thrilling premise. Customers choose their preferred travel dates and group size, select a package that suits their Budget (including flights, accommodation and match tickets), and then prepare for the big reveal.

Airports are used nationwide, with the main packages departing from Edinburgh, Manchester, Dublin, Bristol, Birmingham and any London airport.



There is also the option to fly from Newcastle or Leeds if selected via the bespoke Mystery Weekend package option, although other northern airports such as Edinburgh and Manchester offer exceptional value for customers using the regular packages.

Online packages start from £299 and range to £424 per person and include two-night accommodation at a three or four-star hotel. A bespoke option to add extra days, for example, alters the price.

And 10-15 days before the travel date, customers receive a 'Reveal Pack' containing all travel details, including the destination city, flight information, accommodation details and, of course, the match tickets.

"We want that Reveal Pack to be a big deal," says Alex. "It's designed to be sleek to fit through the letter box and exciting, perfect for a surprise gift or to build anticipation for a stag do. The first order we received was for a 15-man stag do - it's ideal for groups like that."

Mystery Gamedays is aiming to offer much more than just attending a match, it wants people to explore new cities and cultures and sharing unforgettable experiences with friends or on their own.

"The mystery element allows people to go somewhere they wouldn't ordinarily book themselves," Alan said. "We sent a competition winner to the Geneva derby between Servette and Lausanne on September 28 - that's a game you wouldn't typically consider, but it offers a unique and exciting experience. A fantastic trip."

"The Reveal Pack could also be the perfect gift under people's Christmas trees this Christmas, for example."

The company offers packages to a wide range of top European leagues, including La Liga in Spain, Serie A in Italy, the Bundesliga in Germany, and Ligue 1 in France. Special requests mean customers don't end up repeating a previous trip.

"Whether it is Switzerland, Italy for Inter v Juventus or Germany for Munich v Dortmund, you can end up anywhere in Europe really," adds Alex.

To provide peace of mind, Mystery Gamedays is fully ATOL protected and accredited by the CAA, offering financial security for travellers.

"We have trusted suppliers in the football and travel industry," explained Alan. "This allows us to access a network of reliable services and pass on the benefits to our customers. It's hassle-free for them."

Mystery Gamedays will deliver for solo travellers, families, large groups of friends or corporate parties.

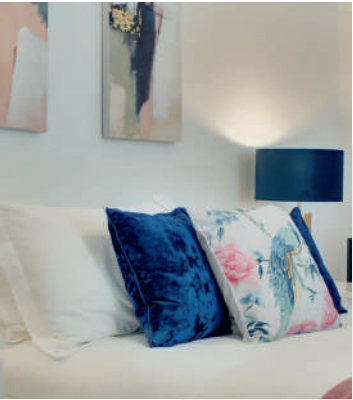
**\*Visit [www.mysterygamedays.com](http://www.mysterygamedays.com) to browse packages and book a trip. Follow MysteryGamedays on Facebook and Instagram for updates, travel inspiration, and announcements.**



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# Over 2,700 Places to go

If you have ever wondered what the railway network looks like in Northern Ireland, or how commuter railways in London combine with one another, or where the request stops are, the National Rail map of the United Kingdom is the ideal purchase or Christmas present for you. The new edition was released on 26th November and is now on sale on line at [www.railmap.org.uk](http://www.railmap.org.uk). Every station is mentioned, even those that are under construction or in the advance stage of planning. It's a big poster size, ideal for an office wall, or the inside of a cupboard at home, and this year - being the 200th Anniversary of the Opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway there are loads of QR codes connecting to the sites of early railways, major railway museums and a few other places of interest. Purchasers of the map are also entitled to a digital option which is a .pdf of the printed map for their personal use.

Since the Places to Go series started in some magazines in 2003, I have written over 250 articles on places to go by train, and occasionally by bus or ferry. All these are designed to be with minimal carbon emissions, and be much more of an adventure than going by car. Although you can calculate emissions based on passengers on the bus or train, the fact is that since public transport is operating anyway your emissions are related to the cost of moving your bodyweight only, plus maybe a bit of paper for the ticket. Indeed on many routes now - as shown on the new map - you don't need a ticket at all, just tapping in at your origin and out at your destination using a credit or debit card or Apple/Google Pay for a contactless payment. It is so much easier to use buses and trains nowadays with improved information systems, including [bustimes.org](http://bustimes.org) which reassures you

that the bus is coming. That's helps at what is often the worst bit of the journey: knowing whether or not the bus is on its way.

I am always pleased to have suggestions of Places to Go, and if there is a good reason I will revisit somewhere I have been to before. Places close by can be done as a daytrip, but I would always recommend staying overnight for one or two nights

when greater distance is involved, otherwise you'll spend all day travelling and not get to see the your destination properly. Wherever you're going by train, you will find this map uniquely helpful in planning your trips.



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## The Perfect Hat-Trick

By Michael Grahamslaw

As many readers will attest, I am a fan of the pub.

This may therefore be why I've followed the journey of the Inn Collection Group so closely.

**The leisure company has rightfully earned its reputation as a North East success story, with multiple awards under its belt and a growing portfolio of venues stretching across the North East, North West, and into the Lake District.**

With further expansion plans on the horizon, this group of 'pubs-with-rooms' continues to breath fresh life into previously overlooked locations and deliver outstanding experiences to its pint-loving clientele.

Having already enjoyed stays at the Tynemouth Castle Inn and the Ambleside Inn this year, my wife Lisa and I decided to complete our personal ICG "hat trick" with a visit to the charming Seaburn Inn along Sunderland's seaside.

The hotel occupies an enviable location right

on the seaside with sweeping views along the coastline. Guest rooms are havens of comfort and luxury with many offering sea views and balconies.

Arriving in good time, the fresh sea air was calling us, so we ditched the bags and set out on foot.

We took a bracing autumnal walk along the seafront, admiring the views of Roker Pier and the beach stretching out ahead. The area around Seaburn has long been a beloved spot for walkers, and we could see why.

The crisp breeze, combined with the gentle sound of the waves, made for a perfect coastal stroll. Along the way, we stopped at a couple of the adjacent hostelries to sample the local offerings.

The lively atmosphere of nearby pubs and cafés added to the charm of the afternoon, and we returned to the Seaburn Inn refreshed and ready for a leisurely late Sunday lunch.

The menu at The Seaburn Inn is extensive and brimming with hearty pub fayre that's perfect for warming up after an autumn walk. In keeping with ICG's reputation for serving up traditional favourites with many modern inflections - we were spoilt for choice.

I kicked off with prawn cocktail, a classic done to perfection, with plump prawns and a tangy sauce that struck just the right balance. Following up, chicken and chorizo skewers arrived tender, flavourful and singing with fresh chilli.

Inspired by our recent travels on the



continent, Lisa's meal took on an Italian flavour with the Tuscan-inspired bruschetta, which was fresh and vibrant, followed by a delicious, pan-fried chicken breast, cooked to juicy perfection.

As we tucked in, we couldn't help but admire our tastefully-appointed surroundings. The Seaburn Inn, like its sister venues in the ICG collection, has been lovingly furnished with attention to detail in every corner.

From the elegant but comfortable furnishings to the artwork that celebrates the local area, the Inn offers a relaxed yet refined ambience that invites guests to linger.

And, linger we did! Wrapped up in the Seaburn Inn's cosy embrace, we decided to make the most of our stay by joining in on the weekly pub quiz. It was the perfect way to stave off the Sunday night blues, and we weren't the only ones with the idea. The pub soon filled up with local boffins the atmosphere quickly became lively and engaging.

After recovering from a sluggish start to a respectable top-half finish, a stellar night's sleep was always assured - with surrounding seaside (and super comfy mattress) making for an incredibly peaceful night.

The following morning, we breakfasted regally before taking the coastal route home. The Seaburn Inn is yet another winner from a company that continues to impress.

**For more information, visit [www.inncollectiongroup.com/seaburn-inn](http://www.inncollectiongroup.com/seaburn-inn)**



# Luis's

The Perfect Festive Destination



## Christmas Menu

2 courses, £27.50 • 3 courses, £32.50

## Christmas Bottomless Brunch

£45pp

*Free flowing food and drink including  
beer and prosecco and assorted cocktails*



## Tis the season of indulgence

The festive season and over indulgence seem to go hand in hand. If this is the year where you would like to take a step back and be more mindful of what you are eating and drinking here are some tips and some shocking Xmas day stats...

**Pick and choose** - Choose the days you are potentially going to eat more and pull back on the days between.

**A sensible breakfast** - Look to have a protein based breakfast such as eggs with smoked salmon.

**Water** - Keep your water levels up this will keep you feeling fuller and help to avoid overeating.

**Nibbles** - Stay away from them! It's too easy to sit and eat your way through a large amount of nibbles without even registering how much you've eaten.

**Cut down on carbs** - Avoid overloading on starchy carbs by replacing roast spuds with parsnips or sweet potatoes.

Avoid grazing - Once you've selected your food from the buffet, step away. When food is within easy reach you will be prone to grazing and take in calories you didn't need.

**Don't skip meals** - If you're going to a party straight after work, don't ditch lunch for fear of overdoing your daily calorie intake, you will end up extremely hungry and eat way more than you would normally.

**Clear the table** - Dinner with family and friends often means spending longer sitting around the table. The longer you linger the more likely you are to keep eating even though you have had enough. Clear the table therefore avoiding any further temptations.

**Factor in the drinks** - Alcohol is packed with empty calories. Research shows alcohol not only increases your appetite but can weaken your willpower, meaning you are even more likely to overindulge on festive nibbles. Adding ice to alcoholic drinks will dilute them. Choosing lower-alcohol drinks such as spritzers and slimline mixers will also cut the calorie count.

**Be mindful** - Don't lose touch with your appetite regulators, listen to your body and give it a chance to feel hungry before you eat. Try to eat slowly and savour your food.

**Treat sweets as treats** - If you have a box of chocolates, avoid eating the whole lot at once. Put a small handful in a bowl and the rest out of sight, making it an occasional treat means you'll enjoy it more.

### Xmas Day stats...

On Christmas Day, the average person in the UK may consume a staggering number of calories.

A typical Christmas dinner, featuring roast turkey, stuffing, roast potatoes, pigs in blankets, and an array of rich desserts, can easily double or even treble the recommended daily caloric intake.

According to estimates, many of us consume between 5,000 to 7,000 calories on Christmas Day alone, way higher than the daily recommended intake of around 2,000 to 2,500 calories for an average adult.

### Burning off the Feast

Post Xmas exercise becomes crucial to offset the huge caloric surplus here are some scary stats...

**Brisk Walking** - A leisurely stroll may seem gentle, but it can be an effective calorie burner. On average, a person weighing around 155 pounds can burn approximately 314 calories per hour of brisk walking. To burn off a 7,000-calorie Christmas Feast, it would take a massive 22 hours of continuous brisk walking.

**Running** - For those with a more intense workout regimen, running proves to be a quicker calorie burning option. Running at a moderate pace can burn around 590 calories per hour for a person weighing 155 pounds. To counteract the Christmas Feast, it would take roughly 12 hours of continuous running.

**Cycling** - Whether on a stationary bike or cycling outdoors, at a moderate pace, cycling can burn approximately 470 calories per hour for a person weighing 155 pounds. Therefore it would take approximately 15 hours of continuous cycling.

**High-Intensity Interval Training** - HIIT workouts involve short bursts of intense exercise followed by brief periods of rest. This high-intensity approach can burn a substantial amount of calories in a shorter time. For a 155-pound individual, HIIT may burn around 700 calories per hour. Even so, it would still take around 10 hours of HIIT to offset a 7,000-calorie Christmas day.

For many the joy of Christmas festivities is undeniable but the caloric aftermath calls for a conscious effort to maintain a balance between indulgence and a healthy lifestyle.

Recognising the huge caloric intake at Christmas should prompt you to consider incorporating physical activity into your holiday routine. Finding the right balance is key for the enjoyment of holiday treats without compromising long term health and well being.

Try to strike a balance during the festive season ensuring that Christmas is not only celebrated around the table but also through an active and health conscious lifestyle.

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





## Prepare for change!

As we find ourselves in early December, the festive season may already be influencing your lifestyle and for many, your waistline. Why not defy the usual trend this year?

**Instead of making those inebriated New Year promises that will likely be forgotten by morning, or that you never intended to keep, make deliberate, positive choices to improve your health and well being, so they're ready to set 2025 off to a strong start.**

Perhaps this is the year to genuinely prepare for change, adopt a healthier lifestyle, embrace nutritious eating habits, and make those small daily adjustments that, over the year, can lead to remarkable positive changes. Here are my reflections on why, and how, you can break the usual pattern and make a fresh start in 2025.

### Set a clear goal

Without a clear objective, 75% of resolutions fail, it's that simple. Set short term goals to keep yourself focused, such as losing 4 pounds in the first month, then 3 pounds the next, and so on. Entering an event in 2025, like a 10K run, obstacle course, or charity walk, could also help keep you on track. Choose an event that suits you, then commit to the necessary training. With a fixed routine, you're more likely to stay motivated and engaged.

### Seek support

Avoid making hasty, unrealistic goals as New Year's resolutions. I'm mentioning this now so you have time to thoughtfully

plan a way forward. If you're serious about improving your lifestyle and well-being, plan carefully and consider seeking support to guide you towards lasting success.

### Is this the right time?

Is the New Year truly the best time to make changes? In my experience, it isn't necessarily so. Start when you feel positive and prepared to focus, regardless of the time of year. Why not begin now?

### Ease the pressure

There often seems to be unnecessary pressure from yourself or family to make major changes at the start of the year. While it's good to discuss ideas, beginning a new regime and failing because you weren't ready could discourage you from trying again. Take the time to prepare without the added stress.

### Be patient

Many people look to their summer holiday as motivation to look and feel their best, which is ideal as it provides a few months to make gradual, positive changes. By starting small with your food choices and exercise habits, you can establish routines that become lasting habits and a permanent part of your lifestyle.



David Fairlamb

### Shift your perspective on exercise

Exercise isn't all about pushing to the limit, lifting the heaviest weights, or competing with others. There are countless types of classes to try. Explore what suits you and what you might look forward to rather than dread. Our sessions are designed for all abilities, with the only competition being between you and your personal goals. When you conquer one goal, set your sights on the next challenge.

### A resolution doesn't mean giving something up

A resolution can also be about beginning something new in 2025. Consider taking up a new class, such as bootcamp, or trying salsa dancing. Aim for an activity that is enjoyable, constructive, and something you look forward to. This will boost your mood, enhance your self-esteem, and help you feel positive.

**Begin planning now, and you'll enjoy December all the more, knowing you've already set your goals for a fresh, fulfilling 2025.**

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



Barry Speker OBE

## The Last Word

By Barry Speker OBE.

**The compendious Christmas Card list may well be a relic of bygone days, particularly with the introduction of the lazy practice of transmitting emails and e-cards - not even the need to affix a signature.**

**Remaining on a list would be at least a tenuous retention of friendships, relationships or acquaintance. A death would justify removal or commission of some heinous crime or transgression.**

Now it is down to strained family Budget leading to the list being culled - especially as the cost of a first-class stamp has risen to an eye-watering £1.65.

Not receiving what was a regular card from you may be taken badly. It has been suggested that if sending 70 or more cards, an economy flight to post them from a charming European capital would be cheaper.

As Elon Musk worldwide influence increases, most recently from his appointment by President-Elect Trump to head up the Department of Government Efficiency. SpaceX and Tesla continue to flourish. Bur what of Twitter now known as X?

Only 10% of the UK are now on it compared with 46% of the population who are on Instagram or 68% who are on Facebook.

It seems young people are not on X. They are on Tik Tok. X is dominated by media, cultural and political figures.

However it was important enough for the world's richest and most controversial man to pay \$44 billion for it. He uses it to attack Keir Starmer and is facing an EU wide ban if he does not comply with regulations against fake news. It became full of the highest proportion of disinformation posts.

There was nothing to replace it - until BluSky appeared. On 14 November a million people decamped from X to BluSky and the next day another million. Its users rocketed from 9million in early September to 20million. Its CEO Jay Graber said that 10,000 were joining every 10 minutes, as well as big news organisations including The Times, The Sunday Times, Channel 4 News, the BBC - as well as Carol Vorderman, Stephen Fry, Rory Stewart and Stephen King. Even Clifton Suspension Bridge, Stonehenge and St Paul's.

As this epic migration of media, politics, celebrities and landmarks to BluSky will it be fated to become as awful as all other social media which went before?

How long before Elon Musk becomes irritated by its BluSky thinking and shells out a few billion dollars to buy it?

You may well plan to see the new film version of Wicked as a Christmas treat. I may give it a miss having endured the live show in London some time ago and despite my granddaughters assuring me it was a great show, I dozed off.

The new film -worryingly described as Part One, stars Ariana Grande. Cinemas are warning audiences the 'silence is golden' and they should not singalong as this would affect the enjoyment of others.

Certainly it would not disturb performers on screen - but it could awake those who might be enjoying sleeping through the film.

The Farmer v Starmer rally of more than 10,000 protestors in London wanted to impress upon the Labour Government the continuing contribution of Britain's farmers to the country's fortunes. They complain about the heavy blow dealt to the sector by the changes in inheritance tax announced in the Budget.

Agriculture provides half of the food consumed by British households and employs half a million people. They are suffering from various factors - climate change, reduction in subsidies and competitive pressures arising from Brexit and pressure on margins.

The government mistakenly views agricultural assets as an easy source of revenue. Although land values have increased, the inheritance tax change will be far from painless. The threshold of £1m is far too low. The Budget proposals will catch a substantial number of ordinary family concerns in farming. They will be discouraged from engaging in long-term investment. If family farms are not supported they will wither and die. We will reap the ill benefit by increasing what we need to import.

Labour won 100 rural seats at the election. Keir Starmer had said he wanted a relationship with the countryside based on "respect and genuine partnership". He added "Once a family farm has gone it can't be brought back". Nor can their trust!

I was persuaded that I would enjoy 'An Evening with Lucy Worsley' at the splendid Tyne Theatre. The eminent historian, curator, author and television presenter was promoting her new book on the life of Jane Austen. The theatre was packed with an enthusiastic audience in rapt attention at the detailed account. A surprisingly entertaining evening.

***I wish you all a very  
happy Christmas and an  
Insightful 2025!***

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