

NORTHERN

INSIGHT

September 2025

Issue 116



Tech brilliance delivered - Further growth for technology provider CMYK

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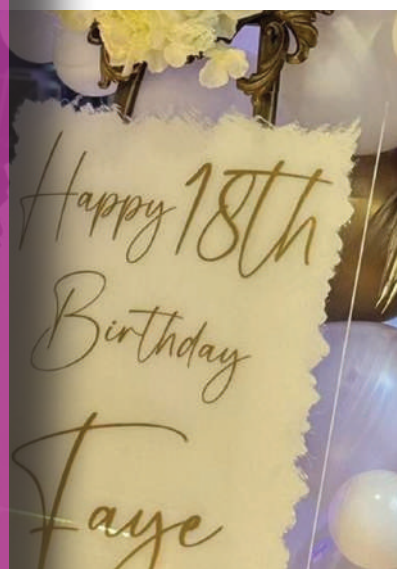
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Foreword

FOREWORD

Welcome to the September issue of Northern Insight

September often feels like a turning point – the start of a new season, a fresh chapter, and a chance to take stock before the year's end comes into view. Here in the North East, it's also a time of renewal and reconnection, as our communities return from summer breaks, businesses gather momentum for the final quarter, and new opportunities come into focus.

In this edition, we celebrate the resilience, creativity, and ambition that define our region. You'll find inspiring stories from local entrepreneurs, thought-provoking insights from business leaders, and features that showcase the North East's thriving cultural and professional landscape.

As always, Northern Insight is proud to champion the people and organisations shaping our future, while reflecting the values of collaboration, innovation, and community spirit that make this region so unique.

Whether you're here for inspiration, reflection, or simply to keep your finger on the pulse of the North East, we hope you enjoy this edition – and that it sparks ideas and connections to carry you into the autumn with renewed energy.

*Thank you to all concerned
for your continued support.
Till next month...*

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



Edition Sponsors





Headline speakers announced for North East business event

Radio 1's Jamie Laing - co-founder of gourmet confectionary brand Candy Kittens - and LadBible and UniLad founder Alex Partridge have been announced as headline speakers for a North East business event.

The duo will be part of the line up for SunFest, the headline event taking place during this year's Sunderland Business Week, running from 13 - 17 October.

Jamie is a British media personality, entrepreneur, and presenter, who rose to fame for his role on hit TV show, Made in Chelsea, and more recently his successful business ventures.

Alex, one of the pioneers of social media content as we know it, founded LADBible and UNILAD aged 21. They would go on to be two of the most popular social news and entertainment internet companies in the world, with an astonishing following of 100 million people around the globe.

The pair will be taking to the stage at SunFest, a day-long event at Sheepfolds Stables on Thursday 16 October.

Outstanding A-Level results for Royal Grammar School



Marking 500 years of academic heritage, the Royal Grammar School (RGS) Newcastle, marked its milestone anniversary with outstanding A-Level results and retaining its place as the highest performing academic independent school in the region.

Over the summer term, 164 Year 13 students secured 520 qualifications across 26 subjects - an extraordinary testament to the breadth of options at RGS.

RGS's Class of 2025 achieved exceptional outcomes, with 86% of grades at A*-B, 61% at A*-A1, and 24.8% of grades at A*2.

29 students achieved four A-Levels, of which five secured straight A*s.

Almost 40% of bursary students' grades were A* while students with Special Educational Needs also outperformed the rest of the cohort, with almost 90% of grades at A*-B.

Round Table Team from the North East joins European Charity Rally to support CALM



A team of four Round Table members from across the North East will be the first in the region to represent their area in the Skint Flint Rally, an international charity car rally across Europe. The team is taking on the challenge to raise awareness and funds for CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably), a leading UK charity dedicated to preventing male suicide.

The rally, now in its eighth year, invites participants to drive across Europe in a car costing no more than £500, testing endurance, teamwork, and resourcefulness over thousands of miles. This year marks the first

time a team from the North East has entered, with representatives from Whitley Bay Round Table, Newcastle Round Table, Alnwick Round Table, and the National E-Club Round Table.

The team will begin their journey in Newcastle, travelling to Dover to join approximately 40 other vehicles. From there, they will take the Eurotunnel to Calais, driving through France, Germany, and Poland, with the destination being Błędów, located in the snowy mountainous region of southern Poland.

The challenge stipulates that the vehicle must have a current MOT valid until at least the end of September, and must not exceed a purchase value of £500. If the car does not survive the journey, it will be legally scrapped at the point of failure.

To meet their £5,000 fundraising goal, the team is seeking: A suitable donated vehicle (under £500 in value, MOT valid through September). Corporate sponsorship for logo placements on the car, t-shirts, and team apparel. Individual donations via their official fundraising page: gofund.me/ecf99523

For sponsorship enquiries—logos on the car, kit branding, or vehicle donations—please contact: ecub@roundtable.org.uk

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North East experts on a global mission to transform local business productivity

Kim English and Colin Hastings, directors of Business Transformation Associates (BTA), have made a name for themselves as global leaders in manufacturing efficiency, travelling regularly to the USA, Canada, and Europe to transform the fortunes of businesses across a range of sectors.

But now, with a deep commitment to their roots in the North East, the pair based in their office in Cramlington are on a mission to deliver the same world-class impact for local companies right on their doorstep.

With decades of hands-on experience in improving production processes, cutting waste, and driving profitability, BTA specialises in working directly with the people on the shop floor—those who know the products, processes, and problems best. Their approach is collaborative, not prescriptive, ensuring long-lasting improvements that stick.

“We don’t just tell people what to do—we work with the teams who make things happen,” said Kim. “When staff are involved in identifying the solutions, the results are far more sustainable.”

With backgrounds rooted in the automotive and engineering sectors, both Kim and Colin honed their expertise through intensive training with Toyota in the USA and Japan, and in leadership roles across several manufacturing organisations. Since founding BTA in 2012, they’ve brought their complementary skillsets together—Kim focusing on systems, Colin on processes—to achieve results fast.



“We’ve saved businesses from closure, prevented redundancies, and delivered operational efficiency gains in excess of 40%,” said Colin. “That’s millions of pounds in value—at a fraction of the cost.”



New business-backed initiative takes flight to support women’s basketball in the North East

A brand-new initiative bringing together North East businesses to support women in sport officially launched today at the Vertu Arena, home of the Newcastle Eagles.

The Newcastle Eagles ‘W Club’ unites local business leaders who are pledging both financial backing and strategic support to Newcastle Eagles Women’s team for the 2025/26 season and beyond. The founding group, which met today for a launch photo call at the arena, is working closely with the club to create a supporter “Club” that will offer a range of benefits for businesses while helping raise the profile of women’s sport in the region.

Sophie Milliken, founding group member and CEO of Moja, said: “This is about more than sport – it’s about visibility, opportunity

and community. We’re proud to come together to back Newcastle Eagles Women and demonstrate what’s possible when business gets behind the next generation.”

Businesses joining the W Club will gain access to an exclusive launch event in early September, family tickets to the team’s first home game on Sunday 21st September, and opportunities for brand exposure and community involvement.

The initiative also aims to support outreach into grassroots sport and STEM, inspiring more young women to get involved.

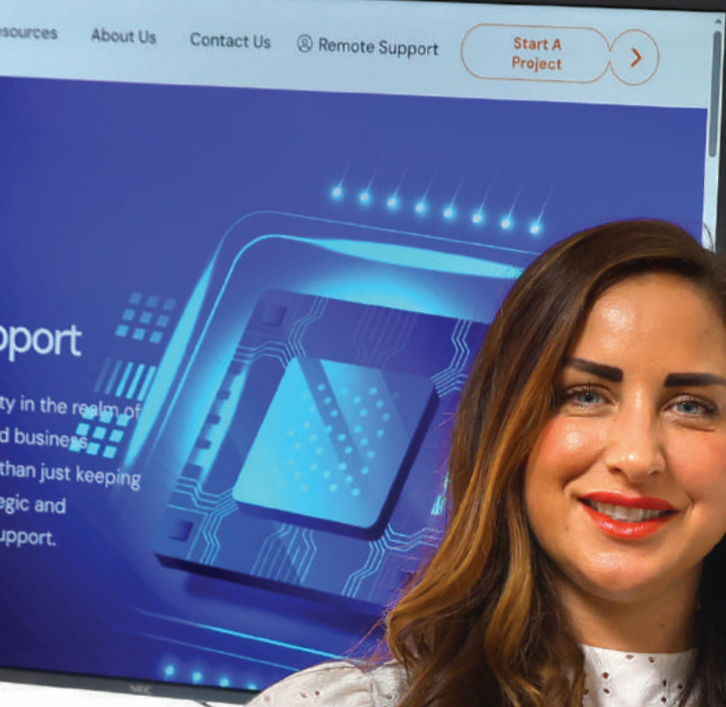
Dan Black, Newcastle Eagles, said: “We’re thrilled to see the business community rally behind the Eagles Women. The W Club is already creating a buzz, and we can’t wait to build on this momentum as the season begins.”

A limited number of places in the W Club are now open to other businesses and supporters who want to get involved, with sign-up options available from the Eagles website.

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Cover Story



“

*...We are
excited for the
coming year
ahead...*

Sarah Wharrier and Craig Pratt

Tech brilliance delivered

Further growth for technology provider CMYK who are expanding their North East team.

The Newcastle arm of National business technology supplier and managed IT services provider CMYK, headed by founding directors Craig Pratt and Sarah Wharrier pictured on this month's front cover caught up with Northern Insight to discuss their recent successes and plans for the coming year.

CMYK has swiftly built an exceptional reputation across the region for its technical expertise, support offering and client-centric approach. The team have found a real groove when it comes to supporting the regions rapidly growing tech and Manufacturing & Engineering sectors, and are becoming the go-to firm for managed IT and consultancy services throughout the North East region. CMYK's expansion into the North East is now entering its fifth year, and with further major client wins, they are looking to expand the team with two new members.

Craig commented "Our focus in the last 12 months has been on growing our Managed IT Services base and we have had several large client wins which is fantastic. We are now looking for another IT Technician to join our Newcastle team, as well as a junior sales consultant to assist with lead generation and promoting our brand across the region".

CMYK provide several core technology offerings these include: all aspects of Managed IT Services, Consultancy & Cyber Security; Managed Print and Integrated Scanning Services; Cloud Telecoms and Mobile; Business Connectivity; Visitor & Access Management Solutions, Meeting Room tech and Cyber Essentials Accreditation.

Sarah commented "As well as being a trusted IT Partner to our clients, we can also assist with Cyber Essentials Accreditations on their behalf and in the last 12 months we have invested in upskilling one of our team to become a Cyber Essentials Auditor. This enables us to guide clients through the whole CE Accreditation process seamlessly from start to finish, by completing the consultancy and prep work, assisting with the documentation process and then obtaining the Accreditation for the client inhouse, without needing to go a third-party auditor. This offers a premium service for our clients and makes us even more responsive at delivering the CE Accreditation." CMYK's branch locations and support network spans the entire UK with locations in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Warrington, London, and Newcastle. CMYK has a strong focus on forming local partnerships, and they continue to nurture and establish relationships with leading sector groups, such as the Engineering and Manufacturing Network, the North East Automotive Alliance, and the Entrepreneurs Forum. These partnerships help connect CMYK to industry networks and provides a gateway to demonstrate their expertise and service offerings.

Craig added; "We have onboarded some fantastic businesses this year so far, including Taopix, Quora Group, AEPartners and the North East Automotive Alliance to name a few. We are excited for the coming year ahead, as we continue to grow the team and our fantastic client base."

**For more information on how CMYK can support your business please contact Craig or Sarah.
c.pratt@cmyk-digital.co.uk | s.wharrier@cmyk-digital.co.uk**

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The Long Run: First Rail's new Open Access chief on shaping the future of UK rail

As Open Access takes on a growing role in UK rail strategy, Stuart Jones - Managing Director of First Rail Open Access - lays out his ambitions for innovation, expansion and making rail a mainstream alternative to road and air...



When Stuart Jones laces up his running shoes before dawn, he isn't just chasing personal bests. He's preparing for one of the most demanding endurance tests in British transport - making Open Access rail into a lasting part of the UK's rapidly evolving rail network.

Newly appointed as Managing Director of First Rail Open Access, Jones has already run a marathon in every sense of the word. From helping lay the commercial groundwork for the company's highly-successful Lumo brand nearly a decade ago to now overseeing an expanding portfolio of Open Access operations across the UK, he is one of the most influential figures in a corner of the industry once seen as niche, but now increasingly central to conversations about rail's role in decarbonisation, market growth, and innovation.

Yet, Jones' ascent comes at a time of huge change in the rail industry. As the long-anticipated Great British Railways (GBR) reforms inch forward and the wider rail sector faces increased scrutiny, Open Access sits in a curious space, independent of government subsidy, reliant on nimble strategy, and largely overlooked in the wider national narrative around transport. But not for much longer, if Jones has anything to do with it.

"We've proven Open Access works," he says, speaking from FirstGroup's head offices with characteristic calm. "We've proven it can attract new passengers, lower emissions, and create great customer experiences. Now we're focused on showing how far it can go."

A brand evolution, not revolution

While the spotlight today often falls on newer ventures, the story of Open Access in the UK stretches back decades - and FirstGroup has long been part of it. Hull Trains, one of the country's earliest Open Access operators, launched in 1999 to fill a gap left by the existing franchise, restoring direct rail services between Hull and London King's Cross. What began with just three daily services gradually grew into a robust timetable offering seven weekday and five weekend services by 2009.



Now under Jones's remit, Hull Trains is a major success story and evidence that Open Access isn't a disruptive idea, but a proven model for connecting underserved routes and growing the overall market. It laid the groundwork for First's wider Open Access ambitions. Lumo has become perhaps the clearest distillation of how that groundwork has allowed the company's vision to flourish. Launched in 2021 in the pandemic's aftermath, Lumo's all-electric, low-cost service between London and Edinburgh promised a greener, smarter alternative to domestic flights and road travel. Backed by no government funding and built on razor-sharp margins, it was a risk and Jones' was instrumental in its early development. He wrote the commercial case for the service as far back as 2015, long before most people had even heard the name.

"When we first proposed Lumo, Open Access was still seen as a fringe play," he recalls. "But we believed then, as we do now, that with the right model, Open Access can grow the overall market. It's not about taking passengers from others - it's about giving people another reason to choose rail."

And it has worked. Lumo quickly found an audience of budget-conscious, environmentally aware travellers and saw record-breaking passenger numbers in its early months. Its sleek blue livery and paperless, app-driven experience soon became a familiar sight on the East Coast Main Line, and it's regularly cited by ministers and campaigners as a model of success.

Now Jones oversees the company's whole Open Access operations, including new ventures under development via First Rail Sterling and First Rail Wales & Western. These new operators are set to follow in Hull Trains' and Lumo's footsteps, expanding the Open Access footprint far beyond its current stronghold in the north and east.

The man behind the vision

Jones is not your typical rail boss. He doesn't come from a traditional railway family. Nor does he trade in bravado or boardroom jargon. What he brings instead is a rare combination of commercial intellect, operational grounding, and personal humility.

After studying maths and later management science at the University of Kent, Jones worked in consultancy and cut his teeth on transport modelling and infrastructure forecasting.

His early projects included working on the business case for Crossrail and was involved in the early stages of HS2, particularly regarding its route into the East Midlands. "Big-picture stuff," as he puts it. It's a skillset that has proven invaluable as he's climbed the ranks within FirstGroup, helping translate large trends into real life service decisions.



But he's not just a boardroom strategist. Over his career, Jones has worked across multiple parts of the railway and has advised on international rail models across Europe, giving him a rare all-round perspective on how the system functions. This big picture insight makes him adept at navigating rail's notorious complexity. It also helps explain his measured approach to leadership. "Rail is never simple," he says with a smile. "But that's part of what makes it so rewarding. It's this living, breathing system that connects people, communities and economies. When you get it right, the impact is huge."

Outside of work, Jones is an endurance runner who has clocked countless miles in training for marathons and ultra-distance races, often squeezing in pre-sunrise runs before back-to-back meetings. "It helps me think," he says. "It clears the head, helps structure the day. There's a lot of crossover. You learn how to pace yourself, when to push, when to hold. Running teaches you discipline and resilience, which are qualities that are essential in leadership."

He's also preparing for another kind of marathon. Next year, he'll marry his long-term partner in her native South Africa, just outside Cape Town in Stellenbosch in the heart of the country's wine region.

"Being outdoors, running and being active is something we share," he says. "We use it to explore new places, decompress from the day, and just be present with each other. It's become a real part of our life together."

Growing the network

In work, Jones's challenge is how to take Open Access from outlier to mainstream. That means expanding the model across the UK and convincing policymakers and regulators that it deserves a permanent place in the rail industry as Great British Railways (GBR) takes shape.

First Rail currently has several proposals in play. Hull Trains, which connects London with the East Riding, remains a distinct brand





but sits within Jones' remit. So too do a series of new ventures operating under the Lumo name, as well as First Rail Stirling and First Rail Wales and Western.

Earlier this year, the company secured rolling stock for its planned Open Access service between London Euston and Stirling, due to launch in mid-2026. In July, the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) approved further proposals to enhance timetables between London and Hull, Newcastle, and Glasgow.

But progress hasn't been without setbacks. The ORR rejected some bids, including Hull Trains' proposed direct service to Sheffield, citing capacity constraints. A separate bid to restore a direct link between Rochdale and London was also turned down, due to concerns over available paths on the West Coast Main Line. That decision was particularly disappointing for a town that had rallied behind the proposal, inspired by the success of Lumo in the North East.

"It's disappointing, yes," Jones admits. "But we're not giving up on Rochdale. We're exploring other options and remain hopeful that as infrastructure capacity improves, especially with the government's renewed focus on rail upgrades, we'll be able to revisit the route."

He remains optimistic about the broader direction of travel, encouraged by recent government statements backing Open Access and referencing Lumo as a model for future services.

"We're grateful to the Department for Transport and the ORR for their continued engagement," he says. "We're aligned in wanting to grow the rail market and get people out of cars and planes. Open Access has a proven role to play in that."

A new kind of culture

Perhaps Jones' greatest strength lies not in trains, but in teams. From its inception, Lumo was built to feel different - not just to customers, but to staff as well. The team was recruited from diverse backgrounds, including aviation and hospitality. Roles were made flexible. Progression routes were prioritised. "One of our onboard ambassadors is now training to be a driver," he says proudly. "That kind of mobility is rare in rail. But it's part of the DNA we're trying to create."

This approach is now informing the wider Open Access division at

First Rail. Recruitment and training are being reimagined with an emphasis on experience and apprenticeships. Local sourcing, like using local coffee and bakeries for onboard catering, helps embed services into communities, too. Partnerships with regional tourism boards and local authorities help build deeper roots, he says.

"Ultimately, we want our services to feel like they belong to the places they serve," Jones says. "We want passengers to recognise themselves in the experience, whether that's through the staff, the food, the pricing or the branding."

The Open Access proposition

With the railway's future still hanging in the balance, Jones believes Open Access offers something uniquely aligned with modern passenger expectations: low-emission electric trains, simple fares, flexible digital-first booking, and strong local identity. But to survive and thrive, he says, it needs to be supported.

"Open Access has always operated without subsidy. That's a strength - it means we're agile and commercially disciplined. But it also means we depend on a fair and transparent path to access and expansion," he says. "As GBR takes shape, we need to ensure Open Access operators are fully integrated into the conversation. Because we have a lot to offer."

He points to the numbers. Lumo has taken market share from domestic aviation, achieved among the highest customer satisfaction scores in rail, and brought tens of thousands of new passengers to the network at no cost to the taxpayer, he says.

"We can't afford to ignore that kind of success," he says. "Especially when the industry is under pressure to cut costs, reduce emissions, and win back public trust."

The long view

As the conversation winds down, Jones reflects on the distance the company has already covered - and the journey ahead. He's realistic about the obstacles too. Regulatory hurdles, infrastructure limitations, and the inevitable resistance to change are all challenges he will face during his tenure, he says, but he remains convinced that the Open Access model he has helped shape is more relevant than ever.

"It's about showing that rail can be entrepreneurial," he says. "That it can listen to passengers, innovate quickly, and offer great value. We've shown that in spades."

And like any good endurance runner, he knows the key to success lies not in sprinting, but in sustaining momentum.

"Every mile counts," he says. "Every improvement we make, every new route we open, every person who chooses rail over a car or a plane - that's progress. And that's what keeps us going."

www.lumo.co.uk



From vision to delivery: Why every growth plan needs Project Management

You've put in the work. Your vision is clear, your strategy's on paper, and your team structure is mapped out. But now comes the hard part: actually making it happen.

Because while many businesses spend time defining what they want to achieve and who's going to do it, fewer take the next crucial step – putting a system in place to track progress, keep people accountable, and stay aligned day to day.

And that's where even the best-laid plans can quietly unravel.

The missing link in business growth

We often see this in businesses on the cusp of growth.

They've clarified their goals, sorted their structure, and identified the key moves they want to make. But the momentum gets lost somewhere in the middle – between intention and execution.

The truth is, it's not always a question of capability. It's a question of visibility.

When you don't have a clear way to track what's happening across the business,

things get stuck. Delays creep in, decisions are revisited, and people lose sight of what really matters.

That's why project management – however simple – is the glue that holds strategy and delivery together. Effective project management enables leaders to lead and focus on the bigger picture, whilst maintaining overall visibility of multiple project milestones.

It doesn't have to be complex

We're not talking about Gantt charts and corporate playbooks. We're talking about clear, practical systems that help you keep track of your priorities and stay agile.

We've recently worked with several businesses to put just that in place – helping them:

- Scope out what they need to track and why
- Define the process and choose a system that works for their size, sector, and ways of working
- Integrate that into the business in a way that supports (rather than disrupts) the team
- Provide training, support and review to make sure it sticks

The result?

Better visibility.

Clearer accountability.

More confident, focused decision-making.

Most importantly, leadership teams feel more in control. Because they can see what's working, what's not, and what needs to change – all in real time.

Why it matters now

With so many businesses navigating change – from market pressures to internal growth – the ability to stay agile and respond in real time is vital.

A simple project management process gives you the clarity to do that.

It turns strategy from a static document into a living, working part of the business.

It helps you adapt, align and deliver – without losing sight of the bigger picture.

So if you've got a growth plan, but no real structure behind how it's being delivered, this is your sign to take a closer look.

Because clarity isn't a luxury. It's the key to making things happen.

Want to talk it through?

We've helped dozens of businesses put the right systems in place to turn strategy into action. If that's something your business could benefit from, drop us a line at...

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MONTAGU AVENUE



KINGSWOOD AVE



FENCER HILL PARK



ESKDALE TERRACE



WEST AVENUE



THE GROVE



WESTFIELD DRIVE



GROSVENOR AVE



SANDERSON ROAD



HIGH STREET



ASHLEIGH GROVE



OAKLANDS



PRINCESS MARY COURT



ELMFIELD ROAD

SOLD STC IN GOSFORTH & JESMOND

This double page gives a flavour of some of the recent sales success Sanderson Young have enjoyed and to many people the market appears to be extremely buoyant and strong. The reality is that there is a mixed level of demand versus supply across various price points.

Family houses in Gosforth and Jesmond are, for the majority, over subscribed and we are regularly seeing best and final offers and up to 10% premiums. That demand stays strong up to circa £1.5 Million, where if the strategy is right those sales tend to be fairly brisk.

The market at £1.5 Million and above has seen some early signs of cooling, however we have still managed to navigate some strong sales at this level. The housing market remains strong when buyers feel safe in the knowledge that what they are buying is providing solid value for money and our job is to promote houses to our best ability to maximise prices for our clients.

We have been challenged by many eager buyers over the past 2 months to find their next home and there has been concern over a lack of stock coming to the market. The summer 'lull' is coming to an end and we have many exciting new properties to be launched in early September.

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Brandling Place *Jesmond*

Rare to the marketplace, this mid terrace Victorian cottage boasts beautifully presented accommodation and a private enclosed courtyard. The property is ideally located within walking distance of local amenities and the City Centre. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: D.

3 1 1 D

Price Guide:
Offers over £425,000

Harriet Scott
0191 213 0033
harriet.scott@sandersonyoung.co.uk

Sycamore Square *Gosforth*

Only two townhouses remain on this sought after development in the heart of Gosforth. These stylish properties offer excellent family accommodation over three floors, a walled rear garden and two parking spaces.

4 2 2

Price Guide:
£645,000

Debbie Brown
0191 213 0033
debbie.brown@sandersonyoung.co.uk





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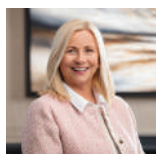
Montagu Avenue Gosforth

This outstanding link detached house is situated in a sought after location on Montagu Avenue within a leafy suburb of Gosforth. The lovely family home has versatile accommodation and a stunning rear garden with a lawned area, mature trees providing privacy and a patio terrace ideal for entertaining; to the front is a dual 'drive in' and 'drive out' semi circular entrance with parking for several vehicles. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: G.



6 3 6 D

Price Guide:
£2 Million



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





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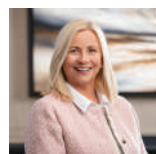
Winslow *The Croft, Gosforth*

This beautiful, detached house has been fully refurbished and extended throughout to an extremely high standard and boasts a delightful west facing rear garden. Located just off Kenton Road, Winslow offers a newly extended and fitted kitchen at the rear, a magnificent entertaining space to the front and is finished throughout with beautiful marble tiling, new flooring, painted paneling and Crittall style doors. Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax Band: F.



6 3 6 D

Price Guide:
Offers over £1.195 Million



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



Teresa Peters



Ascension by PREFAB77, aka Peter Manning

Let's talk about empathy, mountains, turning 50... and inspiring others

By Teresa Peters, Founder of Accelerator Coaching Ltd –
Inspire. Motivate. Succeed.

Empathy, mountains, and milestone birthdays—three things I didn't expect to go together quite so powerfully. But as I sit here, bags nearly packed for my Kilimanjaro climb, I've been reflecting on what it means to be an empath on a personal ascent—both literally and emotionally.

Empathy, as defined in the RocheMartin Emotional Capital Report (ECR) (one of our tools we are accredited to deliver), is “the ability to sense, understand and respond to the feelings of others.” It's a cornerstone of emotional intelligence and essential for strong leadership. But like any strength, it has its shadow side.

This week, I delivered a workshop for a group of senior leaders in the North East oil and gas sector. One leader in the USA had a surprising breakthrough during an empathy mapping exercise. He realised, that instead of mapping out someone else's experience, he was exploring his own. “I think I'm doing this about myself,” he said. A eureka moment—and one that mirrored my own growing awareness.

As a very high empath, I'm known for being tuned into people's energy. I can walk into a room and instantly sense the emotional climate. But sometimes, it's too much. I stonewall—not because I don't care, but

because I care deeply. I've learned that years of absorbing others' emotions can lead to emotional burnout if I don't create time to pause, replenish and reflect.

So that's why I'm climbing a mountain.

I'm turning 50 this year, and this trip to Kilimanjaro is a gift to myself—a stretch-zone challenge, a break from coaching (well, after a nap when I get back!), and a chance to turn my empathy inward. A chance to reconnect with me.

Each day of the climb, I'll be journaling with a quote as a guide. I want to breathe deeply, feel fully, and give my busy mind some space. I've bought a piece of art earlier this year that sums up this whole year—Ascension by North East artist PREFAB77, aka Peter Manning. It stopped me in my tracks. It's about rising. About grace under pressure. About transformation. Just like this climb.

Our brain is a muscle. Whether you're low or high in empathy, you can grow it:

If you're low in empathy, try:

- Listening without solving—just hear the other person.
- Observing body language in meetings—what's not being said?
- Asking “What might they be feeling?” before you react.

If you're highly empathic, try:

- Setting boundaries: it's okay to say “not now.”
- Creating quiet spaces where no one needs you.
- Remembering that you matter just as much as those you support.

At Accelerator Coaching, we talk a lot about turning the headlights on—looking forward with intention. But sometimes, it's the rear-view mirror and blind spots that teaches us the most. I've built a business that has grown significantly this year, coached hundreds of incredible people, and raised a family, with my hubby, I'm proud of. And now, I want to inspire all my kids and clients by showing them what's possible when you embrace discomfort and take the next step up your own mountain.

If you're reading this and feeling stuck, tired, or emotionally flat—maybe it's time to stretch. Not to impress anyone else, but to reconnect with your own heartbeat.

Empathy is powerful. It connects, empowers, and leads. But it's not just about others. Sometimes, the greatest act of empathy is turning it inward—and giving yourself permission to climb.

acceleratorcoaching.co.uk



DrivenNet brand launch a roaring success at local race circuit

DrivenNet connects business owners through networking groups based around a common love of cars. Nevil Tynemouth and the team rebranded and celebrated with an event at Croft circuit in Darlington.

The event brought members and guests together for the rebrand and a behind the scenes garage tour of local driver Max Coates as he raced in the Porsche Carrera cup across the weekend.

DrivenNet run business networking groups for directors and business owners who share a passion for cars and motorsports in the North East, Yorkshire and have launched two new Groups in the North West.

Find out more about DrivenNet -
www.drivenet.com/
Contact Nevil -
Nevil@drivenet.com





North East based investment company reports positive interim results and prepares for 'transformative period'



Develop North PLC (Develop North), the investment company managed by Newcastle-based fund management specialists Tier One Capital (Tier One), has reported a positive Net Asset Value (NAV) return from its investment portfolio in its latest interim results.

Announcing its interim trading update for six months ending 31st May 2025, London Stock Exchange-listed Develop North has reported an increase in revenue to £1.036m with a profit of £0.494m.

During current and fluctuating economic conditions, the company, which provides investors with access to North East investment opportunities, maintained its dividend strategy and made dividend payments totalling 2p per share during the six-month period. As a result, the NAV total return for the period was 2.5%.

The total value of Develop North's portfolio now stands at £21.6m from 15 live projects across the North of England and Scotland, with over two thirds located in North East England.

In this most recent six-month period, the investment company agreed two new facilities including a £2.4m, 11-month facility to support the development of a new retail scheme in South Shields, South Tyneside, being delivered by Newcastle-based developer Modo Bloc. Develop North also agreed a £1.2m 18-month loan to finance a boutique smart hotel in Edinburgh.

Three portfolio exits were completed during the period, bringing the number of exits to 26 since the investment company was founded in 2017. Since its inception, Develop North has helped create over 12,000 jobs and supported over 40 developments with a Gross Development Value (GDV) of more than £275m.

NPIF II investment fuels launch of FiftyPlus Longevity centre in Whitley Bay

Whitley Bay, North Tyneside - A new health and wellness centre purpose-built for older adults in North Tyneside is set to open its doors thanks to a strategic investment from NPIF II - NEL Debt Finance, which is managed by NEL Fund Managers as part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II (NPIF II).

FiftyPlus Longevity, led by Directors Peter Hartley and Mark Heaver, has secured the funding to support the transformation of a facility opposite the iconic Spanish City in Whitley Bay into a pioneering fitness and health centre specifically designed for the over-50s.

Led by Investment Executive Rachael Munro, the funding will



allow FiftyPlus Longevity to deliver a fully integrated approach to aging well, combining evidence-based fitness programs, holistic health optimisation, and community-building initiatives tailored for older adults.



NPIF II - NEL backs Mechplant with investment to drive regional growth

South Shields - One of the North East's most established plant hire businesses is set to build on decades of success after securing a significant investment from NPIF II - NEL Debt

Finance, which is managed by NEL Fund Managers as part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II (NPIF II).

Mechplant (North East) Limited (Mechplant), based at the Port of Tyne in South Shields, has secured the funding to help it scale and execute the next stage of its strategic development and ambitious growth plans.

Operating across Tyneside, Wearside, Durham, and Teesside, Mechplant is one of the most recognisable names in the regional plant hire industry. With a proud history spanning several decades, the company provides a wide range of specialist services focused on mobile crane hire.

The funding will be used to further strengthen Mechplant's operational capacity and invest in its equipment fleet, enabling it to better meet increasing demand from the construction and civil engineering sectors across the North East. It also supports Mechplant's strategy of scaling the business to serve a growing client base while maintaining its strong reputation for reliability, service, and safety.



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INTERESTING TIMES

The Finance Newsletter You Actually Want To Read | NORTHERN INSIGHT VERSION

"Business leaders get trapped inside their own business far too often. Let's change that."

ONE SUBJECT | THREE TIPS



STEP BACK TO GROW

It is easy to assume your job is to keep things running. Answer the emails. Handle the clients. Sign off the quotes. But when you are involved in everything, you end up limiting the very thing you are trying to grow.

At some point, every business owner has to shift from being the engine to being the architect. That means stepping away from the day-to-day and focusing on building something that works without you.

1. Make time to think, not just do

If your week is packed with delivery and admin, there is no space to lead. Your most valuable input is not your time, but your thinking. Create space for reviewing numbers, setting direction, and asking better questions. It is the only way to make decisions that move the business forward.

2. Build systems, not bottlenecks

If everything relies on you, growth will always hit a ceiling. The real goal is to make yourself operationally irrelevant. That means building systems, documenting processes, and trusting others to take ownership. When you stop being the bottleneck, the business can breathe.

3. Protect your energy, not just your calendar

Time management is not enough if you are constantly drained. Great leadership needs headspace. Focus on the parts of the business that energise you and delegate what does not. When you are working in your zone, you think better, lead better, and grow faster.

Redefining your role is not a luxury. It is essential if you want to grow a business that runs smoothly, scales sustainably, and gives you your life back

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INTERESTING QUOTE



If your business depends on you, you don't own a business, you have a job.

Michael E. Gerber.

JUST ONE THING

"Here. Mark. If you had to suggest **Just One Thing** to help my business financially (and my life!) – what would it be?"

Ask yourself: What decisions am I still making that someone else could handle confidently?

Choose one. Hand it over. That's how scale starts.

HAVE A READ

The E-Myth Revisited. Michael E Gerber.

This classic challenges the idea that being good at your trade means you are ready to run a business. Gerber explains why so many small businesses stay small, and how to fix it by building systems that work without constant owner involvement.

£10(ish) online. **Mark Melville**



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Johnston Carmichael and Constructing Excellence host key tax event for North East construction sector

Johnston Carmichael, in collaboration with Constructing Excellence in the North East (CENE), recently hosted an engaging and informative session at its Newcastle offices, focusing on the many challenges and opportunities that face the construction sector.

The session explored several key topics including capital allowances, VAT treatment on new developments, R&D tax credits, and employee ownership incentives. Attendees were offered practical insights on how to maximise reliefs and navigate increased scrutiny from HMRC.

Alex Nicholson commented: "This was a great opportunity to speak directly with businesses about the tangible tax efficiencies they can unlock, especially in areas like R&D and capital allowances, where many are leaving money on the table."

Glen Small added: "The collaboration with Constructing Excellence helped us reach businesses that really benefit from these insights, and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive."

The session featured contributions from Johnston Carmichael specialists including Michael Murray, Rab Winters, Rebecca McColl, Stephen Oates, and Zita Duggan, offering comprehensive coverage across all key tax disciplines.



Hay & Kilner makes a duo of senior appointments to strengthen central services team

Full-service law firm Hay & Kilner has announced the appointment of Parit Shah as Head of IT and Cyber Security, and Stephen Armstrong as Finance Director.

These key senior appointments will enhance the firm's central services team, which plays a vital role in delivering specialised services to the firm.

Parit Shah is an accomplished IT and Cyber Security professional with extensive leadership experience across a range of sectors including medical devices, agriculture, manufacturing and distribution, and fashion. Parit brings a proven track record in delivering secure, innovative, and future-ready technology strategies within complex and highly regulated environments.

Born in the UK and raised in Kenya, Parit returned to the UK 25 years ago and spent over a decade leading IT and digital innovation at a globally recognised international charity. He has been based in the North East for a number of years, inspired by its strong sense of community and appetite for innovation.

Parit is drawn to Hay & Kilner's commitment to digital transformation and its client-first, professional ethos—values that closely reflect his own. His deep technical expertise will support the firm's continued growth and service excellence in the North East.

Stephen Armstrong is an experienced Finance Director with previous law firm experience through being FD at a global maritime law firm. Prior to this, he worked in private practice, working with a variety of different clients, mostly in the North East but some further afield.

"I've known Hay & Kilner for years through its strong market reputation, professional connections, and personal ties. From day one, the open, supportive culture I'd heard about proved real and contributing to how we help our people thrive has been rewarding.

"Having always been North East based for my education and career, I've built a strong professional network in Newcastle and look forward to reconnecting through the firm's local presence."



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Building a robust finance function: how to establish strong financial management in your SME



Mark Brown

Establishing a solid finance function is about more than just keeping on top of the bookkeeping. It's about laying the foundation for scalable growth, informed decision-making, and long-term sustainability for your small to medium sized business.

Whether you're launching a new venture or navigating the challenges of growth, creating a robust financial structure will give you access to smarter insights and help you make more confident financial decisions.

Here are some tips to help you get it right!

Start with the right finance team structure

Like most SMEs, you probably started managing your finances with minimal staff. You might have even taken on these duties yourself. But as your business grows, this ad-hoc approach can lead to inefficiencies and risks. This is why building an efficient internal finance team or leveraging outsourced support is essential.

A hybrid model may work best, involving a lean internal team that's focused on day-to-day operations, supported by outsourced professionals for strategic input and compliance. Outsourcing elements such as payroll, tax filing, or even bookkeeping can also free up your valuable time and reduce overheads.

Develop strong financial processes from day one

You need to implement consistent procedures for budgeting, reporting, approvals, and cash flow monitoring. This

typically includes regular financial reviews, monthly management accounts, and timely tax submissions – all things that your part-time FD or CFO can assist you with on a flexible basis.

Establish key roles early

Your first hire is likely to be a bookkeeper or finance assistant. They will be responsible for processing transactions and maintaining solid, accurate records. As your company's financial needs increase, you may need to bring a Financial Controller or experienced accountant on board to manage reporting, budgeting, and compliance issues.

Remember, however, that working with a part-time Finance Director (FD) gives you access to senior-level expertise without the commitment or cost of a full-time hire. They can also help with financial forecasting, raising investment, and, crucially, building your business's financial resilience.

Implement integrated financial systems

Technology will play a critical role in scaling your finance function. Adopting cloud-based, integrated financial systems such as Xero and associated apps ensures your data remains accurate and visible,

and reports can be generated in a matter of minutes.

These systems streamline tasks such as invoice management, expense tracking, and bank reconciliations. This means you and your teams can focus more on strategic analysis and less on admin.

Integration is key, too. For example, purchase invoice automation tools such as Dext can be linked directly to your accounting software to automate the recording and categorisation of these costs – something that can otherwise be incredibly time-consuming.

What are the advantages of outsourcing strategic finance support?

You might not need a full-time CFO, but you'll certainly benefit from part-time strategic support!

Outsourcing to a part-time FD or CFO gives you access to high-level insights and financial leadership without bearing the full cost of employment. From general financial planning to securing funding and implementing sensible performance metrics, there are plenty of ways these flexible professionals can improve your finance function without blowing your staffing budget.

A robust finance function is vital to the health and growth of your SME. By building the right team, leveraging technology, and establishing clear processes, you can lay the groundwork for sustainable financial success. Contact me, Mark Brown at L4 Financial, for help achieving this in the most cost-effective way possible!

w: L4Financial.co.uk
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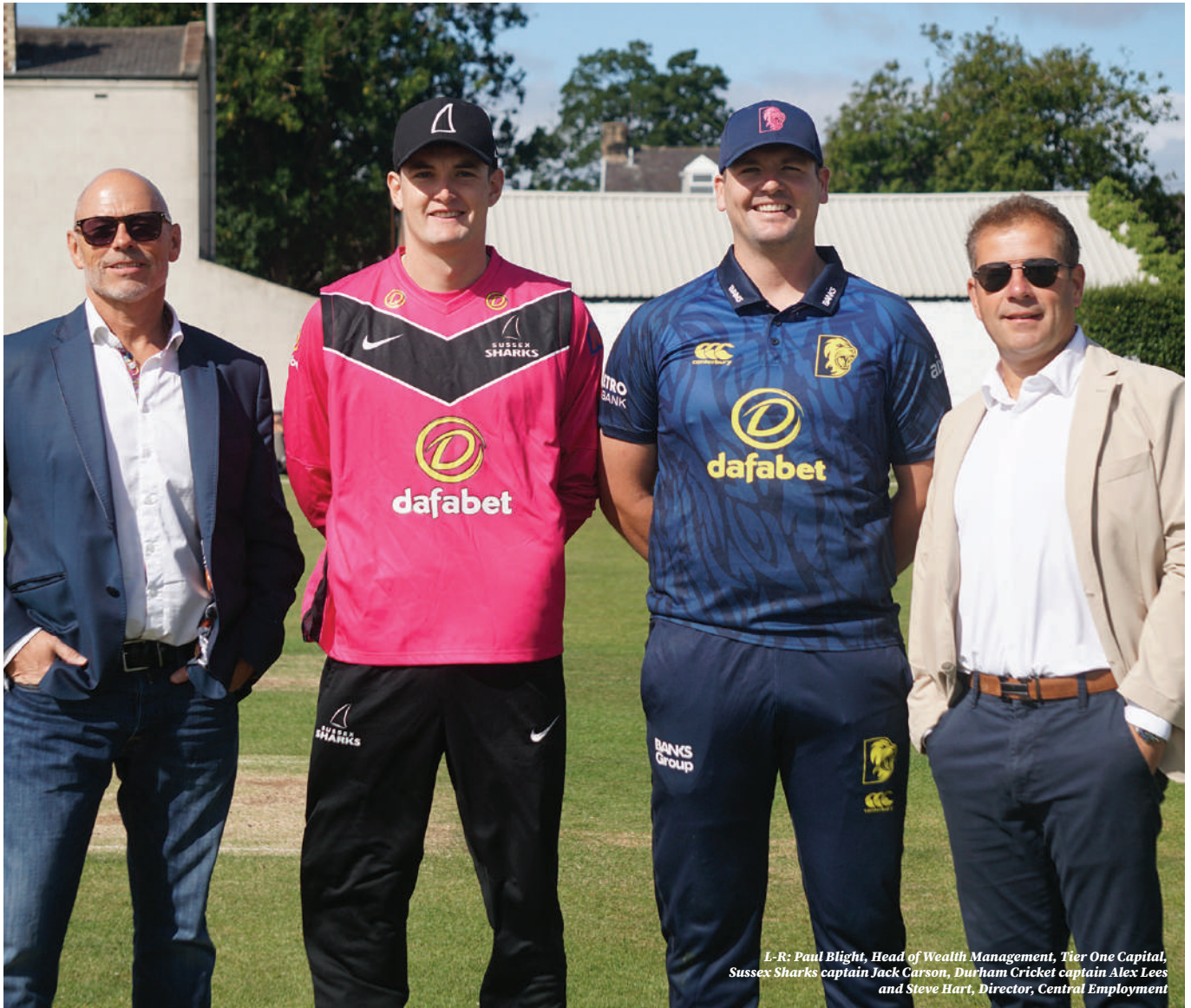
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✉ Mark@L4Financial.co.uk



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Wealth and fund managers team up with recruitment specialists to support Durham Cricket



L-R: Paul Blight, Head of Wealth Management, Tier One Capital, Sussex Sharks captain Jack Carson, Durham Cricket captain Alex Lees and Steve Hart, Director, Central Employment

Newcastle upon Tyne-based wealth and fund management experts, Tier One Capital and recruitment specialists, Central Employment, have formed a partnership to sponsor Durham Cricket's Metro Bank one-day cup fixture.

Tier One Capital and Central Employment have collaborated to sponsor the 50-over one-day game between Durham Cricket and Sussex, held at South Northumberland cricket ground, in Gosforth.

Tom Seymour, Durham Cricket Commercial Director, said: "We are delighted that Tier One Capital and Central Employment have again come together to support the day.

"We are reliant on local businesses in the region supporting our fixture list and the one-day at game at South Northumberland is always a great day out and one of the

highlights our fixture calendar."

Paul Blight, Head of Wealth Management, Tier One Capital, said, "We are delighted to team up with Durham Cricket Club and Central Employment to show our ongoing commitment to sport in the region.

"We are a North East based business and it is very important that we work together with other like-minded businesses to get behind the sporting community within our region and heartland."

Steve Hart, director at Central Employment, said: "This is a high-profile

fixture in the Durham Cricket calendar, and we are also delighted to support South Northumberland Cricket Club, who are a family friendly cricket club. This annual event helps to unite the local cricket community and successfully brings together businesses with sport."

Tier One Capital Ltd are Newcastle based wealth management and fund management business providing independent financial planning and fund management services.

Specialising in financial planning and savings advice, investment management and fund management for senior executives, investors, entrepreneurs, business owners, professional partners and high net-worth individuals. They are also the investment adviser and fund manager for the London Stock Exchange main market listed Develop North PLC.

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Chris Brown promoted to director at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors



Chris Brown with RMT Accountants & Business Advisors' head of healthcare Maxine Pott

RMT Accountants & Business Advisors has further strengthened its senior leadership team with the promotion of Chris Brown to director within its specialist healthcare division.

Chris has been with the firm for over a decade and has played a central role in the development of RMT Healthcare, which is one of the UK's leading specialist medical and healthcare accountancy practices and the largest dedicated team of its kind outside London.

Originally from Northern Ireland, Chris moved to the North East 13 years ago and joined RMT in 2015.

He has since developed extensive expertise across the healthcare landscape through his work with GP practices, PCNs, GP federations, limited companies, dentists and pharmacies.

Chris Brown says: "Healthcare has always been a fast-moving sector, and never more so than today.

"With the recent publication of the latest ten-year NHS plan, the healthcare sector is entering a new phase of structural reform and financial pressure, and we're likely to see substantial changes that will impact directly on healthcare providers' operations and finances.

"I really enjoy working with a diverse mix of GP practices, Primary Care Networks and other healthcare organisations, with my focus always being on helping them stay on top of their finances, make informed decisions and protect their ability to deliver high-quality care.

"RMT has given me the opportunity to grow as part of an ambitious team. We have the right systems, people and expertise in place, and I'm excited to play a more significant role in shaping how we support our clients and continue expanding across the sector."

Maxine Pott, head of healthcare at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, adds:

"Chris is a highly respected practitioner with a deep understanding of the sector.

"His promotion to director is wholly deserved and reflects his consistent contribution to the strength and success of our healthcare team.

"The RMT Healthcare team works to help clients adapt, plan and thrive in the face of evolving funding models, partnership structures and compliance requirements.

"Chris will play a key role in leading the team's response to the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for our healthcare clients across the UK."

RMT Accountants & Business Advisors provides the full range of financial and business advisory services through its specialist accountancy, tax, medical and healthcare, corporate finance and restructuring teams, and is part of the Sumer Group, the UK's fastest-growing accountancy firm.

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Driving investment across Teesside

Joanne Whitfield, Fund Director at FW Capital talks about how the finance market is evolving, giving businesses more choice when seeking funding.

Helping businesses access finance is critical to driving economic growth. Businesses who are seeking investment, need to be aware of the options available beyond traditional lenders. Alternative funding options can be more accessible and often a much better fit to the needs of your business.

Last year FW Capital launched the Teesside Flexible Investment Fund which is focused on increasing this choice and driving investment for businesses across the region. It aims to transform the finance landscape for businesses in Teesside, helping to boost economic growth. Its success was seen in the first investment made under the Fund to Teesside stainless steel alloy specialist and manufacturer Paralloy Group, to assist their future growth strategy.

Launched with investment from the Teesside Pension Fund, the Teesside Flexible Investment Fund supports businesses in Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Stockton-on-Tees and Redcar and Cleveland through a mix of property development funding, contract-related bond finance and finance to support management teams in buying a business. Funding packages of £100,000 to £3million are available.

Focus on property development

Property development funding is an

important part of the Teesside Flexible Investment Fund. At FW Capital we've a strong track record of supporting property developers and we're excited to expand our expertise to Teesside. This follows the success of the North East Commercial Investment Property Fund and North East Property Fund from which have been invested to date over £60million and supported 71 schemes across the region.

Hartlepool-based Port Homes has recently received a £1.5million investment from the Teesside Flexible Investment Fund to assist an exclusive development of three homes at Cameron Court in Wynyard, Stockton-on-Tees.

Cameron Court is a small development of three, luxurious and bespoke A rated homes in one of the most sought after postcodes in the North East. Set within 885 acres of woodland, it will feature personalised, high specification five-bedroom homes that can be customised with plot sizes up to 1/3 of an acre with larger than average gardens, car chargers, solar panels and Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery (MVHR) systems.



CGI of the new development



L-R: Daniel Port, Lewis Blakelock and Christopher Port

Port Homes is a family run, North East established housing company founded by brothers Daniel and Christopher Port. The duo are focused on bringing fresh ideas to the housing industry, with bespoke designs and a 'Choose your floorplan' concept which ensures no two homes are the same.

Daniel Port, Director at Port Homes explains: "Cameron Court is our first venture into executive housing because previously we have been focused on first time homes. This is an exciting project for us in a prestigious and highly sought after postcode. We're a local developer with a deep-rooted commitment to identifying land for development across the North East. We're grateful to FW Capital for their investment and support which is helping us to provide beautiful new homes in a stunning part of the region. It has given us the working capital to assist the development at Cameron Court as well as the ability to manage multiple sites at once. The team have been efficient and supportive throughout the whole process."

Lewis Blakelock, Investment Executive at FW Capital added: "The aim of the Teesside Flexible Investment Fund is to enable growth across Teesside, and help local firms access much needed finance to realise their potential. We've been impressed by the team at Port Homes and this investment demonstrates how the Fund is making a positive impact. We're keen to talk to businesses across the region about their future plans and how we might be able to support them."

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Accountant of the month...

James Dale

Partner, Anderson Barrowcliff.

What inspired you to become an Accountant, and what path did you take to get here?

I originally studied law, but after spending time living and working in Australia, I was introduced to family tax planning. That experience really sparked my interest, and I returned to the UK to retrain.

I joined Anderson Barrowcliff to begin my professional exams and, along the way, gained a first-class degree in Applied Accountancy. I went on to place top in the North East and 17th worldwide in my financial management exam and was proud to be named New Accountant of the Year at the 2009 North East Accountancy Awards.

I was promoted to Partner at Anderson Barrowcliff in 2016 and now lead our Corporate Finance team. Most recently, I was pleased to be shortlisted as Partner of the Year at the 2025 North East Accountancy Awards, a career milestone that brought things full circle.

What do you enjoy most about being an Accountant, and what keeps you motivated in your profession?

For me, it's all about the people. I genuinely enjoy supporting clients through both their successes and their setbacks, being part of their journey and making a real impact along the way.

I've also been fortunate that my role has taken me around the world, working on transactions in places like San Francisco, the UAE and Toronto. But no matter where the work takes me, I always come back to what matters most: building relationships and doing meaningful work in a profession I truly enjoy. And to be able to do that every day, in a place like Teesside, makes it even more rewarding.

What qualities make a great Accountant, and how do you build strong client relationships?

Communication is everything, being approachable, listening on both a personal and business level, and being available when needed.

It's also about long-term trust: I focus on building relationships before revenue, often providing my time upfront to demonstrate value. Having strong technical knowledge is important, but it's just as key to show that you're invested and willing to go above and beyond to understand the client and their business needs.

How do you handle the pressure of working with tight deadlines and complex financial issues?

It's definitely something I've had to work on, especially as Anderson Barrowcliff has grown significantly in recent years. But I've built a strong team around me, both technically and operationally, which has been key to managing that pressure effectively.

For me, it comes down to clear priorities and honest communication. I'm upfront with clients about what's realistic and always aim to set expectations early. I've also learned the value of looking after my mental wellbeing, taking time to reset when needed so I can stay focused and lead effectively.

It's something I'm passionate about embedding across the firm too. We've brought in a dedicated mental health and wellbeing coach to support the wider team, ensuring that as we grow, we do so with a strong, balanced, and healthy culture.

What are the most common financial mistakes individuals and businesses make?

Throughout my years in accounting, the most common mistake I've come across is a lack of forecasting and not having a clear exit strategy. These are two critical things that every business owner should have in place, yet they're often overlooked, especially by smaller businesses or fast-growing companies.

What advice would you give to small business owners looking to improve their financial health?

Bring in a quality accountant early. The relationship you build with them can be critical to your business's success, not just for compliance, but for strategic decision-making, growth, and long-term planning.

How has technology changed the accounting profession, and what tools do you rely on most?

-Technology has massively transformed the way I work. Tools like Co-Pilot and AI are now essential for reporting, writing, and market research.

Platforms such as MarktoMarket and Deal Suite have also made transactions and financial processes much more efficient than ever before.

What are the biggest financial trends or challenges businesses should prepare for in the coming years?

The rise of AI and automation is reshaping how businesses manage forecasting, reporting, and decision-making. It's creating big opportunities, but also challenges for those not ready to adapt.

Staying agile, tech-savvy, and well-advised will be crucial in the years ahead, which is exactly what we do at Anderson Barrowcliff.

What's one piece of financial advice you think everyone should follow?

Make important financial decisions when you're thinking clearly, not in the heat of the moment. Set clear principles and a long-term strategy while you're calm, and use those as your guide when challenges arise.

Sticking to well-thought-out plans, rather than reacting emotionally, is one of the most effective ways to avoid costly mistakes and stay on track financially.

www.anderson-barrowcliff.co.uk



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*...it comes down
to clear priorities
and honest
communication...*

James Dale

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*...This is an
exciting time
to be joining
UNW...*

*Fran Rutherford,
Chief Finance and Operations Officer at UNW*

Going from strength to strength

UNW strengthens executive team with appointment of Chief Finance and Operations Officer.

North East independent chartered accountancy and business advisory firm UNW has formally announced the appointment of Fran Rutherford as Chief Finance and Operations Officer. A Chartered Accountant, Fran joined the firm in April 2025 and brings a wealth of strategic and financial leadership experience.

As CFOO, Fran oversees UNW's central support functions, leading on finance and IT, and plays a key role in shaping the firm's strategic direction as part of the Executive Team. Her focus is on strengthening operational foundations to ensure they continue to support the needs of a growing business.

This senior appointment follows several consecutive years of strong performance and reflects UNW's continued investment in its internal infrastructure. With over 200 people, including 19 partners, the Newcastle-based firm has increased headcount by more than 65% in the past five years. During that time, UNW has reinforced its leading position in the North East market for supporting privately-owned entrepreneurial businesses and delivering specialist services to a large number of international groups with operations in the region.

Fran began her career in audit at KPMG in Newcastle before joining The Vardy Group of Companies, where she worked closely with Sir Peter Vardy and held the role of Finance Director at Sonik Sports, one of the group's portfolio companies. She went on to become Finance Director at North East law firm Hay & Kilner, where she was responsible for finance, IT, HR and compliance during a sustained period of growth.

Reflecting on her appointment, Fran said: "I was drawn to UNW because of its clear ambition, strong local reputation, and commitment to its culture. It's a firm that not only delivers for clients but genuinely invests in its people. This is an exciting time to be joining UNW, and I'm looking forward to working alongside a talented team to help deliver on its ambitions."

Andrew Wilson, Managing Partner at UNW, added: "As we look ahead, it's crucial that we continue investing in the strength of our infrastructure – not just to support growth, but to attract and develop great people and deliver the quality and consistency our clients expect. Fran's experience and leadership make her a fantastic addition to the team. She brings both strategic insight and a collaborative approach, and we're delighted to have her on board as the firm continues to evolve. "There's been a lot of consolidation in the sector, bringing centralised support functions and increasing layers of policy and process for client facing teams. As an independent firm, we've chosen to do things differently. Fran is embedded in the team – working in the business, not just on it – and her appointment reflects the culture we're committed to protecting."

unw.co.uk

CARTMELL SHEPHERD



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*...can't beat
some wind in
the hair, flies
in the teeth
motoring...*

Joanne Stronach

HERI

Fast cars, motorhomes and MD of one of the North's top law firms

That'll be Joanne Stronach of Cartmell Shepherd Solicitors then.

With almost 130 staff and seven offices located in Carlisle (two of them), Penrith, Cockermouth, Brampton, Haltwhistle and Hexham, the award winning Cartmell Shepherd Solicitors are big by any stretch of the imagination.

The company has over 200 years' experience providing legal services, advising businesses and individuals both locally and nationally. They offer a wide range of services delivered by specialists in several practice areas to a diverse client base.

If you need any sort of personal, business or property advice, Cartmell Shepherd can help.

Fronting the Employment Law and HR side of the company is Joanne Stronach...but her job title is about to change.

She is to become Cartmell Shepherd's managing director, taking over from Peter Stafford who will retire at the end of September.

"I can't tell you how much I'm looking forward to this new position...and how proud I am," said Joanne who will become the first woman to assume the MD role at the company. "It's a massive honour to have a dynamic and innovative board of directors supporting me who understand that the legal industry is evolving rapidly. We are committed to embracing new technology to help us move with it. Having the confidence of the whole board and the wider Cartmell Shepherd team that I'm the right person for the job is hugely important to me."

Joanne has spent a career of 30 years advising businesses across the North East and Cumbria and plans to continue advising employers, with the support of the employment law team. She's been with Cartmell Shepherd since 2018, lives in the Tyne Valley and is one of the North's leading employment lawyers.

"I've been involved with employment law since I first qualified as a solicitor," added Joanne. "It's an area of law which I've always enjoyed because it involves working with people and communicating with them. In fact, communication was something which led me into the legal profession in the first place."

"As a child I used to have debates about all sorts of things with my father. It was huge fun, and I can still clearly remember the day when he said that I should become a lawyer because I could talk the hind legs off a donkey. Fate then intervened. I studied maths and sciences for my A' levels and was considering accountancy as a profession, but after a work experience placement at a solicitor's office, I was hooked. I loved the discussions about legal matters and how the law helped and protected individuals and businesses."

Which of course is precisely what she and the rest of the team at Cartmell Shepherd Solicitors are up to. Their pile of awards is testimony to how good they are.

And if you think being the MD of a large legal firm means that you're going to be a bit stuffy, think again. Joanne is a petrolhead and avid reader of crime novels.

"One of my favourite cars was my BMW Z3. You can't beat some wind in the hair, flies in the teeth motoring. I also loved my Alfa Romeo Spider and, bearing in mind that road conditions can sometime be a bit tricky in this part of the world at wintertime, I always feel secure in my Land Rover.

"As for holidays...give me my motorhome every time and the chance to read a murder mystery book. I particularly like crime novels about places where I've been."

The future for Cartmell Shepherd Solicitors is in good hands.

Cartmell Shepherd Solicitors...always at your side.

If you'd like more information about what Cartmell Shepherd can do for you, the best idea is to visit their website, www.cartmells.co.uk or email enquiries@cartmells.co.uk or call 01228 516 666.

From the experts: Five top tips for a strong debt recovery strategy

With the North East seeing a 49 per cent increase in insolvency-related activity in July, it's vital to keep your eye on the ball when it comes to debt recovery for your business.



Nailing down a solid debt recovery strategy is the key to reducing the stressful, time-consuming process of chasing unpaid invoices and mitigating risks to your business's financial health.

Colin Churchward, partner at North East law firm, Muckle LLP, shares his five top tips for taking control of your debt recovery.

1. Share the burden

Colin says: "Having a strong debt recovery strategy in place is key, and bringing in third-party legal expertise as part of that strategy can be the difference between getting paid on time or not at all."

Ranked top tier in the Legal 500 UK for its services, Muckle has been recovering debts for 30 years. Colin explains the firm's approach through its bespoke service Muckle Collect, is tried and tested. "We recover 92% of debts, significantly higher than the national average of 40-50%. Clients are able to upload their debts to our online portal and track progress in real time...they also have the security of knowing that we'll seek recovery of their outstanding debts without the heavy-handed approach that risks damaging important client relationships."

2. Act early

"My advice to businesses is simple – act early. The earlier you act, the more options you have. The longer a customer owes money, the greater the chance of their business facing difficulties, potentially leading to default on the debt. Also, your customers will likely have multiple creditors. Businesses that are proactive with their debt collection will see their invoices paid first."

"That includes working with a professional, accredited debt recovery service. Muckle can work to support you at all parts of the debt recovery process, but the sooner you engage with us – the less time, energy and money you're spending trying to recover these debts."

3. Ensure you have agreed conditions and a contract

"We would always advise that best practice is to have a contract in place that covers clear payment terms, policy on late fees and interest, and agreed conditions before working with your client. Even though it's tempting to trust a business connection, a properly drafted contract with payment terms that are clear and simple and that protect you has the benefit of ensuring clarity should a dispute ever arise."

"That's something we can help with...we can support with everything from T&Cs to contracts."

4. Reflect on what works well

"A famous man once said, 'if you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got' – looking back at what has worked and what hasn't worked can be a significant factor in successful debt recovery."

"Muckle Collect really comes into its own by allowing our team to get far greater insight into probability and predictability. In short, it helps determine the approaches that get the best results for a range of clients, and this can help inform the team's advice. This not only helps speed up the debt recovery process, but it also makes for better outcomes."

As Colin explains: "Ultimately, the data analytics and tracking aspect of what we're doing marks us out as being very different in debt recovery – it strengthens processes further and helps us become even better at debt recovery for clients."

5. Don't forget to charge interest

"When a client is late in paying, you are legally entitled to charge interest known as 'statutory interest'. Statutory interest is 8% plus the Bank of England base rate for business-to-business transactions; however, if you've already set a different interest charge for late payments in a contract, you cannot add statutory interest on top of it."

For more information on how Muckle can help you, contact Colin Churchward on 0191 211 7969 or email [colin.churchward@muckle-llp.com](mailto:churchward@muckle-llp.com)

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*...we can support
with everything
from T&Cs to
contracts...*

Colin Churchward, partner at Muckle LLP

Rise in disability discrimination claims: what do employers need to know?

Nathan May-O'Brien is a Solicitor at specialist employment law firm, Collingwood Legal.

Nathan considers the recent rise in disability discrimination claims in the Employment Tribunal.

A recent analysis of Employment Tribunal data published by Acas has suggested that between 2024 and 2025 more than one in six workplace disputes received by Acas involved allegations of disability discrimination. This represents a 41% increase in the number of claims relating to disability discrimination referred to Acas compared to 2023/2024.

Law firm Nockolds carried out the analysis and put the increase in claims relating to disability discrimination down to an improved understanding by employees as to what amounts to a disability under the Equality Act 2010 ("EqA 2010") and a failure of employers to ensure that there are "meaningful workplace policies" in place to support employees with disabilities.

With the latest statistics in mind, employers need to be mindful of the law and how to limit the risk of disability discrimination claims.

Disability and Employment

The EqA 2010 provides protection to employees who suffer from disabilities. Under the EqA 2010, disabilities for an employee are defined as "a physical or mental impairment", where "the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on [the employee's] ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities".

If an employee is disabled (meeting the criteria above), then they have the usual protections from direct and indirect discrimination, as well as harassment and victimisation, but there are also specific protections which exist for disabled employees, being:

- The right not to suffer "discrimination arising from disability" (section 15 EqA 2010); and
- The duty of their employer to make

"reasonable adjustments" to workplace premises and practices (section 20 EqA 2010).

Workplace policies can be challenged based on both the claims above. Indeed, the two can be interrelated. For example, an employee dismissed for repeated absences because of depression having been placed on an "absence trigger" under an absence policy may argue their dismissal constitutes discrimination arising from disability (because their absence is a consequence of their disability) and that reasonable adjustments should have been made to the absence management process to account for their disability (e.g. the triggers should have been adjusted).

How should employers react to this data?

It is important to remember that discrimination under section 15 can, in certain circumstances, be objectively justified if the unfavourable treatment is "a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim". Where reasonable adjustments have been explored, this can assist an employer in objectively justifying the treatment in question.

Using the example of the absence policy above, an employer who makes adjustments to "triggers" for disability related absence is more likely to be successful in evidencing that reasonable adjustments were made, but this evidence can also be helpful should, at a later

point, the employer decide to dismiss the employee, as the employer may argue the failure of previous adjustments suggests that dismissal was a proportionate response (with the "legitimate aim" being resolving long-term absence from the business). Objective justification is fact-sensitive, however, and will depend on the specific circumstances.

Employers should also be aware that while the Employment Rights Bill proposes no substantive changes to the law concerning disability discrimination, the proposed increase in the limitation period for bringing EqA 2010 claims from three months to six months will likely increase the number of claims. In addition, the incoming requirement for the refusal of a flexible working request to be "reasonable" will likely bring more discrimination arguments to a head.

A key consideration for businesses going forward is to understand where their policies could come under a disability discrimination challenge and to adopt a flexible (but proportionate) approach to disability related issues in the workplace.

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

**www.collingwoodlegal.com
0191 282 2880**



Nathan May-O'Brien



Claire Simmons

Tailored property advice backed by 115 years of experience

Claire Simmons, Partner and Head of Residential Conveyancing at Hay & Kilner, leads one of the North East's most trusted residential property teams.

With decades of experience, Claire is committed to delivering a personal, tailored service to every client, recognising that no two property transactions are the same.

A team you can trust

Hay & Kilner's residential conveyancing team comprises six specialists with over 115 years' combined experience. The team holds the Law Society's Conveyancing Quality Scheme (CQS) accreditation, a recognised benchmark for quality and client care.

Guiding you home with confidence

Their high net worth conveyancing team is equipped to handle a wide range of complex and high-value transactions, including:

- Freehold and leasehold sales and purchases
- Leasehold arrangements
- First registrations
- Deeds of variation
- Properties with private water or sewerage systems
- Declarations of trust

Comprehensive services

The team advises on all aspects of residential property and mortgage-related matters, including:

- Mortgages & remortgaging
- Powers of Attorney
- Shared ownership
- Transfers/Deeds of Gift
- Buy to Let & Right to Buy
- New-build and auction properties
- Help to Buy schemes
- Investor/portfolio sales and purchases
- First registration of unregistered land
- Complicated title issues
- The power of relationships

Claire and the team pride themselves on building long-standing relationships.

"We don't rely on referral arrangements. Most of our work comes through returning clients, recommendations, and cross-referrals from within the firm."

Continued growth

In response to rising demand, the team is expanding, with the recent addition of a new paralegal and another solicitor and paralegal joining soon, further strengthening their capability to deliver responsive, high-quality services.

What you can expect

Whether you're a first time buyer or embarking on a more complex property transaction, you can be assured of:

- Direct access to an experienced conveyancer

- Friendly, efficient and personal service
- Clear explanations throughout the process
- Transparent pricing with no hidden costs
- Regular progress updates at every stage

What clients say

The team consistently receives excellent feedback from clients and referrers alike. Common themes include:

- **Professional, supportive service** — especially during high-pressure or complex transactions.
- **Excellent communication** — clients are kept informed and can easily reach their solicitor.
- **Speed & efficiency** — transactions are handled promptly and proactively.
- **Friendly, approachable team** — particularly valued by first-time buyers.
- **Attention to detail** — ensuring smooth, accurate outcomes.
- **Problem-solving mindset** — calm and solutions-focused, even in challenging cases.

The Hay & Kilner way

At Hay & Kilner, we pride ourselves on being a modern and progressive full service law firm.

More than just lawyers, we combine our expertise with a refreshing and personable approach. We speak your language, explaining, guiding and supporting you through the entire legal process when you need it most.

And with over 70 years of experience, we are proud to have built a strong reputation in the market delivering high quality legal services and outstanding client care. Quite simply, we put you first.

To find out how Hay & Kilner can support your property journey, visit:
www.hay-kilner.co.uk

Solicitor of the month...

Amandeep Dhillon

Senior Associate, Dispute Resolution, Hay & Kilner.

What inspired you to pursue a career in law, and what path did you take to become a Solicitor?

At A-Level, Law was my strongest subject, which led me to explore a career in the field more seriously. Initially, I wanted to become a judge but didn't want to pursue the barrister route (as many judges do). I arranged work experience at several law firms, and quickly discovered that I enjoyed the variety and challenge of the work — that's when I decided to try and qualify as a solicitor.

What are the most common legal issues people seek advice on, and how do you help them?

I specialise in real estate disputes and mainly act for commercially focused clients. My work often involves advising on risk management, portfolio management, restrictive covenants, development disputes, and boundary issues. My approach is to first understand the client's business and risk profile, then tailor advice that will achieve their commercial objectives efficiently and effectively.

How has the legal profession changed in recent years, and what trends do you see emerging?

Technology is playing an increasingly important role in legal practice, becoming a vital tool for efficiency. At the same time, parties are more open to exploring alternative dispute resolution, and the courts are increasingly mandating engagement with ADR before cases proceed and whilst they are ongoing.

What are the biggest misconceptions people have about solicitors and the legal system?

A common misconception is that high-quality legal advice can be given instantly and for free — like calling a plumber for a quick fix. In reality, good advice requires reviewing documents, researching the law, and carefully considering the consequences. Another misconception is that if something feels "obvious" or "fair," the law will reflect that. In truth, the law is a complex mix of statutes, case law, and procedural rules, and the legal outcome can differ significantly from what feels morally right.

What advice would you give to someone facing a legal dispute for the first time?

Three things can make a real difference:

- **Be realistic and get advice early** — don't wait until the dispute has escalated.

- **Be honest with your advisers** — surprises are far worse for your own legal team than for the other side.
- **Keep thorough records** — maintain a clear timeline and preserve as much evidence as possible.

How do you handle the emotional and ethical challenges of your job?

It's important to show empathy without becoming emotionally entangled in a client's case — that can cloud judgment and undermine your ability to act in their best interests. Ethics must always remain front and centre. Our role is to find lawful ways to achieve the client's goals, often, in challenging situations.

What impact has technology had on the legal industry, and how do you see it evolving?

Artificial intelligence is already having a daily impact on legal practice, from document review to research support. As these tools become more sophisticated, I believe they will become an integral part of every solicitor's toolkit — if they aren't already.

What are the key qualities that make a great Solicitor?

The best solicitors I've encountered combine specialist legal knowledge, strong people skills, and commercial awareness. They have excellent technical expertise, communicate clearly, and give advice that's not only legally sound but also commercially sensible.

What is the most rewarding part of being a Solicitor, and what keeps you motivated?

As a property disputes specialist, one of the most rewarding aspects is seeing the tangible, real-world impact of my work — often on buildings and developments I can visit in person. I also enjoy solving complex problems and building long-term relationships with clients and colleagues. Earning trust takes time and maintaining it is one of my biggest motivators.

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*...show empathy
without becoming
emotionally
entangled...*

Amandeep Dhillon

Leasehold and Freehold Reform: What you need to know

The Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024 (LFRA) has officially landed. It received Royal Assent on 24 May 2024 after a swift push through Parliament in the pre-election wash-up period.

While many of its provisions aren't yet in force, the Act signals a seismic shift in how leasehold property is handled across England and Wales – and its implications for homeowners, solicitors, and property professionals are significant.

The reforms are rooted in long-standing commitments made in the Conservative government's 2017 housing white paper and shaped heavily by the Law Commission's 2020 leasehold reform recommendations. The aim? To modernise the leasehold system, improve consumer fairness, and ultimately, dismantle what's long been seen as an outdated and imbalanced form of ownership.

So, what's actually changing?

The LFRA introduces wide-ranging reforms designed to strengthen leaseholder rights, reduce costs, and increase transparency. Some headline changes include:

Cheaper and longer lease extensions: Leaseholders will now be entitled to a 990-year lease extension with ground rent reduced to a peppercorn (zero monetary value). Importantly, the controversial marriage value element – which often inflated the cost of extending leases – has been scrapped.

Expanded rights to buy freeholds and manage buildings: The Act widens eligibility for leaseholders to extend their lease, buy their freehold, or collectively take over the management of their block. The Right to Manage process has also been simplified, with leaseholders no longer automatically liable for the freeholder's legal costs.

Transparency overhaul: Landlords and managing agents must now provide clearer breakdowns of service charges, administration fees, and buildings insurance commissions. Leaseholders will also gain stronger rights to request and access property management information.

New leasehold houses banned: The sale of new leasehold houses is now prohibited, with limited exceptions.

Freehold homeowners protected too: The Act doesn't forget about freeholders on private or mixed-tenure estates, who often face service charges with little recourse. Their rights to challenge charges and demand transparency have also been enhanced.

Where are we now?

Although the Act has passed, most of its provisions require secondary legislation before they can take effect. The Labour government has pledged to implement the reforms "as quickly as possible" but acknowledges the complexity involved. A few key elements are already in force:

No more two-year wait to extend leases or buy freeholds – effective from 31 January 2025.

Reformed Right to Manage rules – in force since 3 March 2025.

Consultations underway on service charge transparency, insurance fees, and leaseholder protections, due to close by September 2025.

Later this summer, the government will consult on how the new cost calculation system for lease extensions and freehold acquisitions should work – crucially, setting the rates that will replace marriage value. These will then be enacted via secondary legislation.

What's on the horizon?

The Act is just one phase of a broader reform movement. In the King's Speech 2024, the government committed to "take steps to bring the feudal leasehold system to an end." To that end, a draft Leasehold and Commonhold Reform Bill is expected in late 2025.

That Bill is set to:

- Enact the remaining Law Commission recommendations
- Regulate ground rents for existing leases
- Abolish forfeiture as a remedy
- Revive and modernise commonhold as the future of flat ownership
- Restrict the sale of new leasehold flats

What about Wales?

The LFRA applies to both England and Wales, but the Welsh Government will implement it via its own secondary legislation. Updates have already been provided to the Senedd, and the Welsh Government remains committed to delivering the Law Commission's reform agenda.

Final thoughts

The LFRA 2024 marks a critical step toward modernising residential property ownership. While leaseholders won't see all the benefits overnight, the direction of travel is clear: fairer, cheaper, more transparent homeownership.

The era of leasehold domination is on its way out – and for homeowners across England and Wales, that is very good news.

At Sweeney Miller Law, our expert commercial department is ready to guide you through every aspect of the reform. Whether you're looking to extend your lease, buy your freehold, pursue a Right to Manage claim, or navigate leasehold enfranchisement – we have the legal insight and practical experience to get you results.

Get in touch today to discuss how these changes affect you and how we can help secure your property future.

Call 0345 900 5401, email enquiries@sweeneyml.com or visit www.sweeneyml.com

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*...our expert
commercial department
is ready to guide you
through every aspect
of the reform...*

Shahar Sadat

More than law, meet the people behind the scenes taking care of you

In our new regular feature, we shine a spotlight on the people who are taking care of you at Jacksons. Find out more about Erica Turner, Head of Legal, Partner - Commercial Property at Jacksons, a 'petrol-head' who loves wildlife, space and Metallica!

You're a self-confessed petrol-head – what is your dream car?

A McLaren Senna. It's a road legal race car inspired by the greatest driver of all time, Ayrton Senna.

Who would be your dream passenger?

Tim Peake. I'm absolutely fascinated by space and I'd love to delve into the mindset of an astronaut as well as hear firsthand about his space exploration experiences. My study at home is full of satellite images of the earth pictured from space.

What song would be playing?

Elton John's Rocketman would be very appropriate given the passenger! I have a very eclectic taste; I love anything from Dusty Springfield to Metallica. My preferred driving song would have to be Alannah Myles' Black Velvet.

What's your favourite drive?

The North Yorkshire Moors – anywhere between Castleton and Helmsley.

What got you into cars?

My dad has always been obsessed with cars and we'd spend many a weekend just heading out in the car, looking at cars or buying cars. I have two memories that always make me smile; the first being a picture of me at around two years old sitting in the driver's seat of his Ford Cortina beaming from ear to ear and the second being my mum telling me off when I'd constantly shout from the back seat, "Go faster, dad! Go faster!".

Favourite celebrity driver?

Lewis Hamilton. I've followed him since he first joined Formula 1 in 2007 and, until recently, he's had me on the edge of my seat every year ever since.

What are your favourite car snacks/sweets?

Sherbert Lemons. I love the tang!

What's one misconception people have about working in a law firm?

The most common is that it's necessary to be a lawyer to work in a law firm. There's an array of career options in a law firm such as marketing and business development executives, accountants, IT technicians, research analysts – the list goes on.

What's been the best piece of advice you've been given so far?

I recall, as a trainee solicitor, I approached one of the Partners with the words "I have a problem". The response was, "No, you have a challenge". It was surprising how this response changed my mindset. I'm a firm advocate for creating a positive working environment and a safe space where colleagues feel they can speak out if they're concerned, worried or confused and I feel that approach all stems from that conversation 15 years ago.



If you weren't in law, what career would you be in?

I'm a huge lover of wildlife and animals so I'd probably work in an animal care environment perhaps veterinary or rehabilitation. When I retire, I would like to volunteer at animal shelters or create an environment where I can foster or care for unwanted animals.

What role do you take in the office (not counting your official one)?

I'm very conscious that often colleagues and clients attend the office having a multitude of personal issues to deal with or a raft of work to get through. I like to create a supportive environment balanced with a bit of comedy from time to time! I also find that colleagues are keen to look after me, usually ensuring that above all else, I am well fed! If I have had a day full of meetings, there's always someone keen to offer me a snack or something sweet to fuel me for the rest of the day.

If we raided your Spotify, what's the most surprising song we'd find?

Dr Hook – Sylvia's Mother.



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Chris Birkett

Steady growth, deep roots

Interview by Keith Newman

Winn Solicitors' CEO Chris Birkett on expansion, leadership change and staying true to the North East.

It's a time of significant growth and change at Winn Solicitors, but if there's one thing CEO Chris Birkett is clear about, it's this: success doesn't mean losing sight of your roots.

"We've just had our year-end results and done really well again," Chris tells us. "We've grown in revenue and EBITDA, (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortisation) and our headcount's increased too. We're now up to about 750 staff across our four sites."

Winns is thriving across the board, particularly in Scotland, where the firm has seen steady success in a distinct legal landscape. "Scotland's a different jurisdiction to England and Wales, so we had to set up a separate legal entity, fully regulated by the Scottish authorities," Chris explains. "We've got offices in both Edinburgh and Glasgow now, and around 36 people working across the two sites. That operation is around 18 months old and is performing well."

Previously, Scottish cases requiring litigation had to be handed off to a partner firm. But as Winns grew nationally—particularly with its insurance clients—it became clear that bringing Scotland in-house made strategic sense. "It's allowed us to offer a truly national service with consistent quality," Chris says.

Impressive numbers and new opportunities

The financials reflect the momentum. Winn has increased turnover from £190 million in FY24 to £196 million in FY25. And for the first time, EBITDA has topped £40 million, finishing at £40.6 million compared to £37 million the previous year.

Chris attributes the growth to a rise in instructions, the winning of new accounts across the UK, and an increase in organic business from insurance partners. "Some of our partners have grown their own client bases and policy volumes, which has led to more work for us," he says. "We're also in discussions with two major insurers about supporting their telematics offerings with our 24/7 services."

That growth has translated into recruitment too. "We've expanded again here in Byker on Shields Road," Chris says. "We've taken on another floor at the top of the building—80 people there already, and space for another 80." It's been a measured, steady increase: "Around a 10% uplift in hire instructions. Nothing overwhelming, just nicely paced growth."

Leadership evolution

Winn is also experiencing a leadership transition. Founder and long-standing chairman Jeff Winn retired at the end of March, stepping back to spend more time with family and in Spain.

"He's still a major shareholder and board member, and he'll provide consultancy work, but he's no longer chairman," Chris says. "That role's now taken up by Callum Cusiter from our major investor, Souter Investments."

Souter Investments—a family charitable trust, not private equity—has been with Winns since 2013, offering continuity and shared values. "It's made that transition smooth. They know the firm, they know the people—it's all very stable."

Staying in Byker – and giving back

Despite its size and success, the firm has chosen to stay local rather than relocate to a more corporate setting. "We've been based in Byker since 2002," says Chris. "We've got secure parking, excellent transport links, and we're just a few minutes from the city centre. We looked at moving to a modern business park a few years ago, but it just didn't feel right."

There's also a tangible benefit to being in the community: "Our offices are close together, just a few minutes' walk from each other, and that encourages people to get up, move around, and get some fresh air. Plus, we've always been committed to giving back."

That commitment is more than words. The firm has supported several local junior football teams, sponsored community initiatives, and continued its partnership with the Rainbow Trust as its Charity of the Year. Recent fundraising efforts have included the Hadrian Wall Challenge and an ambitious 72 holes of golf in one day—raising £5,000 and a few blisters in the process.

Winn's has also invested in the Lighthouse Project in Byker, donating £12,000 of kitchen equipment to help children and families learn to cook and prepare meals in a welcoming community space.

Culture comes first

For Chris, though, the most rewarding part of the job is the people.

"The best part? It's got to be the engagement with staff," he says. "When I became CEO, one of my guiding principles was that I wanted people to come to work happy—to enjoy being here. A business is only as good as the people in it, and you'll only get the best from them if you give them what they need to succeed."

It's clear that culture isn't just a box-ticking exercise at Winns—it's a core part of how the business operates. "We've got people here who want to do well, and that shows in everything they do."

With strong leadership, a people-first culture, and community at its heart, Winn Solicitors continues to grow without losing sight of where it started—and why it matters.

www.winnsolicitors.com

In conversation with...

Claire Rolston

Principal Solicitor, CLR Law



L-R: Claire Rolston, Anna Ramsden and Sara Devennie

What inspired you to become a Solicitor and how did your journey begin?

I always wanted to study law as I'm drawn to problem-solving and people and I initially set my sights on becoming a barrister. I pursued a degree in Law and German at Liverpool University, but when I wasn't accepted into Bar School, it prompted me to reflect on my strengths and career direction. I soon realised that the role of a solicitor was a much better fit for me, and I went on to complete Law College with that path in mind.

What are your memories of your first year in practice?

I don't really remember my first year!! I remember relocating to Harrogate when I was two years' qualified and being the only employment lawyer in the firm. To say it was a baptism of fire is an understatement. I loved it though and it gave me tonnes of confidence with clients.

What does reaching the 15 year milestone mean to you personally and professionally?

Fifteen years is both humbling and rewarding. Personally, it's a moment to reflect on the journey and growth, as I've been through a lot in that time. Professionally, it marks the trust our clients have placed in me and my team over the years. It also reinforces my belief in staying true to our values: clarity, approachability, and strong client relationships.

How has the legal profession evolved since you started your career?

It's changed significantly. Technology has reshaped how we communicate and deliver services. Clients now expect more responsiveness and flexibility, and rightly so. There's also been a shift in culture away from formality and rigid hierarchies, towards more collaborative and agile ways of working, which is how CLR Law was set up all those years ago.

What advice would you give to newly qualified solicitors today?

Be curious and stay open to learning. Legal knowledge is important, but so is empathy, communication and resilience.

Understand your client's world; don't just give legal answers, give commercial, human solutions. And remember, you don't need to know everything right away. It's a career, not a race.

Has there been a mentor, colleague or client who has had a particularly significant impact on your career?

I've been fortunate to work with some incredibly supportive people over the years, but I'd say my clients have had the biggest impact. They've always embraced the different way that I've done things and encouraged me at every step of the way. The words of one client have always stuck with me and that is "Cash is King" when running a business.

How do you retain a work/life balance?

I'm not sure I've entirely mastered it but I am significantly better at it since my illness last year. Running CLR Law has given me the flexibility to shape the firm in a way that supports balance for me and my team and part of that is setting boundaries. Outside of work, I mostly focus on my two daughters who both play football. I coach the younger one as I'm an FA qualified coach and when I'm not coaching, I watch my eldest daughter playing. I occasionally squeeze in a game of golf and love to go skiing in Italy.

Has your connection with the local community influenced your work?

Absolutely. Being based in the North East means we're deeply rooted in the challenges and opportunities our clients face. Whether we're advising small businesses, charities or individuals, there's a real sense of shared purpose and pride in supporting our local economy and people. I am proud to be from Gateshead and want to keep building my business here.

What changes or trends do you see shaping the legal industry in the next 5-10 years?

Technology will continue to disrupt traditional models; AI and automation are already reshaping how we deliver services. Clients will expect even more transparency and cost certainty. But I believe the human side of law - listening, understanding, building trust - will remain at the heart of what we do.

What are your goals and plans for the next chapter of your legal journey?

Looking ahead, I want to continue growing CLR Law sustainably while staying true to our core values. That means investing in people, embracing more technology, and expanding the ways we support our clients. We've just recruited a paralegal with a view to a training contract and so I will be able to keep passing on the knowledge for another generation of lawyer.

Get in touch with Claire at claire@clrlaw.co.uk



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*...Be curious
and stay open
to learning...*

Claire Rolston

Stamp Duty on new build extras – what buyers need to know



Emma Liddle

Emma Liddle, partner and head of residential conveyancing at Mincoffs Solicitors, explores how buyers can mitigate unexpected surprises when purchasing a new build property.

Choosing to purchase a new build property and reserving a plot early enough means that buyers get a say on everything from carpet colours to the material used in the kitchen countertops. However, many new home owners aren't aware that some optional extras could also land them a much higher Stamp Duty Land Tax bill than they had budgeted for.

What is Stamp Duty?

Stamp Duty is a tax which is charged on property purchases over a certain threshold. Stamp Duty usually applies when buying a property or if someone is transferred land or property in exchange for payment. There can be exemptions or reliefs brought in by the government.

The total sum on which buyers pay Stamp Duty on is often called 'the consideration' and is the price paid for property or land.

The amount of tax payable depends on more and more factors as new regulations

are introduced. Things which affect this amount include being a first time buyer, owning other properties and living outside of the UK. It has become more and more complex over the last decade.

Could new build optional extras be adding to your Stamp Duty bill?

Stamp Duty applies to the full price paid to a new build developer at completion.

After reserving a plot, developers will often give buyers the option to upgrade certain areas of their new home. Some of these will be classed as chargeable consideration, which will then become part of the total price paid to the developer.

For an item to be chargeable for Stamp Duty purposes, it must be attached to the property. HMRC do not provide an exhaustive list of what they deem chargeable and it is assessed on a case by case basis. Examples of what could be included as taxable extras include sinks, underfloor heating and integrated appliances. What would not be included in the purchase price for Stamp Duty calculations includes carpets, curtains or a free-standing fridge-freezer.

How to avoid a Stamp Duty shock

Developers may not highlight the tax implication clearly when advertising their extras and an unexpected bill can throw a spanner in the works for buyers who are working to tight budgets.

It would be advisable to discuss what could be classed as additional charges with the

conveyancer acting on the purchase at the earliest possible opportunity. Buyers may also want to consider speaking to a specialist tax advisor regarding HMRC guidance on what constitutes chargeable consideration when it comes to the optional extras.

Buyers should ask developers for a full breakdown in terms of what's included and what's additional. It is also worth checking with a mortgage adviser, as changes to the purchase cost will likely affect agreed mortgage terms.

Experienced solicitors can spot these issues early

Buying a new build home should be an exciting step, not one overshadowed by surprise tax bills.

Mincoffs' conveyancers are experts in helping buyers navigate the complexities of property purchases and sales, including for new builds. With more than 100 years' combined experience across the conveyancing team, the firm offers clear, proactive communication and a meticulous approach to every transaction.

With the right advice and guidance, unexpected Stamp Duty charges on optional extras can be anticipated and managed.

Contact Mincoffs' expert conveyancing team by emailing enquiries@mincoffs.co.uk or call the office on 0191 281 6151. www.mincoffs.co.uk

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Protect What Matters Most

By Jason Smith, Financial Adviser

"We're all pretty good at protecting the everyday things in life – our phones, pets, cars, and we wouldn't dream of heading off on holiday without travel insurance.

But, when it comes to protecting ourselves, our income, or the future of our families and businesses, it's so easy to put it off – yet life doesn't always go to plan!"

"As a financial adviser, I speak to people who want to plan for their financial futures, and look after the people they love – one of the most important foundations for that is protection.

So, what does that actually look like?"

1. Life Cover

Nobody likes to think about it, but life insurance gives your family vital financial support if the worst happens. Whether it's a term policy to cover the mortgage, or a whole-of-life policy to help with Inheritance Tax, it's about creating peace of mind.

Many people don't realise that if you write your policy in trust, the payout can avoid probate delays and inheritance tax, ensuring funds reach your loved ones as quickly as possible.

2. Income Protection

This is one I talk about often, especially with self-employed clients. If you were suddenly unable to work due to illness or injury, how long could you manage financially?

Income protection is designed to pay you a regular monthly amount, helping cover the essentials like your mortgage and bills, leaving you to focus on recovery. In many circumstances, the monthly payments are considered to be a lifeline.

3. Critical Illness Cover

A serious illness can affect not only your health, but your finances too. Critical illness cover pays a lump sum if you're diagnosed with a major illness like

cancer, stroke or heart disease, providing you with flexibility when you need it most.

The lump sum could allow you to fund extra care, reduce your work hours, or simply allow you and your family some time together.

4. Shareholder Protection

If you're in business with others, this is crucial. What happens if one of you dies or becomes seriously ill? Shareholder Protection gives the surviving owners the funds to buy back shares, keeping control of the business and providing certainty for everyone involved – including family members.

5. Relevant Life Cover

This option is ideal for business owners or directors, and a great way to look after yourself and your employees. Relevant Life Policies are tax-efficient ways to offer life cover, with premiums usually paid by the business, and not treated as a benefit-in-kind."

"My advice...don't wait!"

Protection isn't just a policy, it's a way of making sure you, your loved ones, and your business are taken care of, no matter what life throws your way."

Please note, Income Protection and Relevant Life Cover plans do not have a cash-in value and will stop if payments to them cease.

Trusts are not regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

A little time spent planning now could make all the difference later, so if you're not sure where to start, I'm always happy to talk things through.

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Barry Speker OBE

Comment

By Barry Speker OBE

Britain is in the throes of a shoplifting epidemic. The Office of National Statistics reports that over half a million offences were logged by police forces in England and Wales in the year to March. This is the highest since records began and a 20% increase on the previous year.

In reality the police have given up on pursuing offenders having issued 411 fixed penalty notices in the year, a 98% reduction in a decade. The actual level of offences is inevitably much higher.

The British Retail Consortium recorded 16.7 million incidents of customer theft last year - 45,750 every day, costing its members almost £2billion a year.

More police resources are urgently needed and a Government commitment to prosecute and suitably sentence offenders. The public regard these offences as serious and the epidemic is significantly contributing to price rises and the cost of living.

Facial recognition data on offenders should be shared. And publicly offenders should be tagged to enable security to warn of

their presence. Serious deterrents are needed.

The 2025 film *28 Years Later*, produced and directed by Danny Boyle, is described as a 'worthwhile watch'. It stars Liverpool actor Jodie Comer from *Killing Eve*, where she was a Russian assassin, and *Prima Facie* the one woman play where she portrayed a leading barrister specialising in sexual offence trials.

In this apocalyptic horror movie, set nearly three decades after a rage virus outbreak, Comer plays a stricken woman in a group of survivors on a fortified island off the British coast. Interestingly this turns out to be Holy Island! Within a short walk through the woods, two characters come across the Angel of the North! 40 miles within three minutes! Almost as engaging as Jodie Comer's Geordie accent!

The new Premier League season should have been a time for enthusiasm and optimism for our local teams. For Sunderland a long-awaited return to the top flight after eight years of hurt and a winning start.

For Newcastle United, despite the prized trophy win after 70 years and qualification for the Champions League, there is frustration and uncertainty caused by star striker Alexander Isak having gone AWOL and declaring he intends not to play for NU again but seeks to join Liverpool.

So much for having signed a six year contract or of loyalty to the club, his teammates and the adoring fans.

That the game is dominated by money is not in doubt but there is a need for clarity about the rules to be applied equally to all and for players to fulfil their obligations.

The continued expansion of coffee shops may be in part attributed to the perceived beneficial effects of the desired caffeine boost as well as the development of social attitudes.

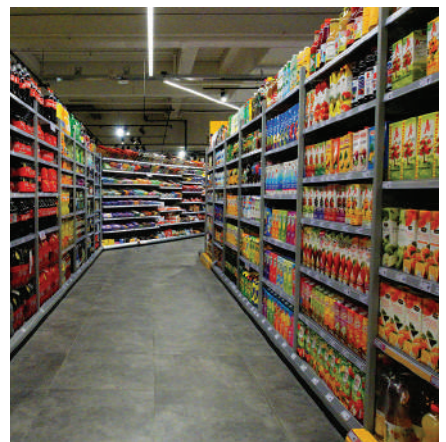
Most shopping areas and motorway services boast the usual Costa, Caffè Nero, Starbucks, Greggs and many local outlets.

Studies by the Universities of Warwick and Bielefeld have examined the extent to which coffee and other caffeine drinks do as claimed sharpen attention and raise spirits.

Their report concludes that caffeine consumption was linked to an immediate increase in positive emotions for two and a half hours after waking, particularly enthusiasm and happiness, as well as contentment and reduced sadness.

Claimed benefits outside the two and a half hour morning window are most likely to be psychological and social - most particularly those ordering 'decaff'. It is the ritual and the social environment which raise the mood. And the report warns of caffeine dependency.

barryspeker@hotmail.com



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Business owners from North Tyneside volunteer for key roles in the North Tyneside Business Forum



PR and media keith@highlightspr.co.uk 07814 397951

Two dedicated business owners from North Tyneside have voluntarily taken up key leadership roles within the North Tyneside Business Forum, reflecting their ongoing commitment to strengthening and supporting the local business community.

Angela Tuplin, who runs NE Display on the Chirton Industrial Estate, has been appointed Chair of the Forum. She is joined by Chris Wilson, owner of the Square and Compass Bar in Whitley Bay, who steps into the role of Vice Chair.

Angela said: "I'm honoured to take on the role of Chair and to continue the brilliant work of the Forum in championing local businesses. North Tyneside is full of entrepreneurial talent, and I'm passionate about helping those businesses grow and thrive through collaboration, support, and shared opportunities."

Chris added: "As a business owner and an operations manager at Network Plus, I know how valuable it is to have a platform like the Forum to turn to for

advice, networking, and development. I'm excited to work alongside Angela and the wider team to make a real difference for businesses across the Borough."

Angela and Chris take over from outgoing Chair Michael James, of NE1 Web Design, and outgoing Vice Chair Sangeeta Loomba, who runs Namaste: A Taste of India at Newcastle Quays Outlet Centre.

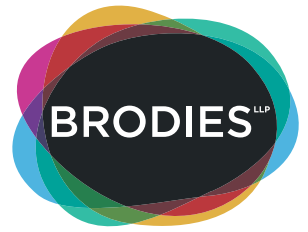
Reflecting on his time as Chair, Michael said: "It's been a privilege to work with such a dedicated team of business owners, and I'm proud of what we've achieved together. The Forum has gone from strength to strength, and I know Angela and Chris will bring fresh ideas and energy to continue that momentum."

Supported by North Tyneside Council, the North Tyneside Business Forum plays a vital role in fostering a vibrant and prosperous business community within the Borough. It facilitates growth, innovation, and success for businesses across all sectors and sizes through events, networking, peer support, and signposting to relevant services.

The Forum is run by a management group made up of business representatives from various industries across the Borough. Membership is free and open to any business with a trading address in North Tyneside, regardless of size or sector.

The first major event for the new leadership team will be the North Tyneside Business Awards, taking place on Thursday 20 November at the Village Hotel, Cobalt Business Park. Entries are now open, giving businesses across the Borough the opportunity to showcase their success and innovation.

To find out more, enter the awards, or join the Forum, visit:
www.northtynesidebusinessforum.org.uk



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Gosforth RFC scores with Player Safety Equipment Grant

A thriving Newcastle community rugby club is giving better protection to its most important assets with the help of a four-figure grant from a regional employer.

Gosforth Rugby Football Club has used a £2,000 grant from the Banks Group to buy new post protectors and flag protectors for use at its Broadway Playing Fields ground which help to prevent injuries if players collide with them during a game.

The customised protectors have been dedicated for use by the club's newly-reformed 2nd XV, Gosforth Phoenix, to ensure that the right safety equipment is always available for the team's training sessions and matches.

And the grant has also paid for new boundary markers which help to ensure there's enough space between junior players on the pitch and their families supporting from the sidelines.

Originally founded in the 1880s, the modern Gosforth RFC was formed in 1996 after the amateur players' split from what became Newcastle Falcons and moved to its current ground ten years ago.

After focusing on building up its junior section since the Covid pandemic, the volunteer-run club now has more than 120 younger players on its books, with teams running from under sixes to under 17 level.

Neil Jamieson, patron and funding coordinator at Gosforth RFC, says: "Safety is an absolute priority at all levels in the modern game and every club has to do all it can to minimise any risks to both players and spectators."



"Restarting our second XV is not only giving our growing number of senior players more opportunities to play, but also provides younger players with the chance to keep progressing with the club when their time with our junior section comes to an end."

"The new team is going really well while our junior section is absolutely thriving, but keeping everything going obviously comes at a cost, and as a small community club with a lot of costs to cover, our budgets are always stretched."

"Raising the money to pay for this essential equipment would have taken us a lot of time and effort and Banks' support will instead help us continue to focus on taking full advantage of the momentum we've built over the last few years by maximising playing opportunities for anyone who wants to come along."

Community golf day raises over £13,000 for North East charities



The operator of the Tyne Tunnels, TT2, has hosted a successful Community Golf Day, bringing together local businesses and partners for a day of sport and fundraising - all in support of four incredible North East charities.

The event, held at Slaley Hall on 23 July, raised over £13,000 for Percy Hedley Foundation, which supports people with physical and learning disabilities; foodbank, Feeding Families; transport charity Tiny Lives; and Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter.

The summer rain over the 18-hole course didn't dampen the spirits of the business teams from across the region who teed off in the spirit of giving back.

All 18 holes, along with a prize-packed charity raffle and auction, were sponsored by North East companies, reflecting the region's strong community values and generosity.

Cyber security experts, CyBit, proudly served as the headline sponsor, with digital agency, Land, sponsoring the awards presented.

The day concluded with a prize giving ceremony and raffle draw, all aimed at raising vital funds to support vulnerable families, children, and animals in the region.

A team from Stripe were the winners with APN Group and Newcastle Garage Group taking home titles for second and third place, respectively.

TT2 CEO Adrian Wallace said: "It was a privilege to bring together our colleagues, partners, and the wider business community for a day that was not only enjoyable but made a real difference. These four charities carry out life-changing work every day, and we're incredibly proud to support them."



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NE Youth launches '9 Wainwrights Walk for 90 Years' challenge in the beautiful Lake District

This autumn, NE Youth is calling on businesses, teams, and supporters to take on a breathtaking challenge for a brilliant cause. On Friday 10th October 2025, participants will step into the stunning Lake District to tackle nine iconic Wainwright peaks in celebration of NE Youth's 90th anniversary.

2025 also marks the 70th anniversary of Alfred Wainwright's *The Eastern Fells* guidebook, the first in his *Pictorial Guide to the Lakeland Fells* series that are so cherished by Lake District walkers.

The "9 Wainwrights Walk for 90 Years" is a fully guided, 11.6-mile trek around the Fairfield Horseshoe, offering panoramic views, dramatic ridgelines, and the chance to make a lasting impact on the lives of young people across the North East. The route begins and ends at Rydal, finishing with a serene stroll through the scenic grounds of Rydal Hall.

Simon Cataudo of NE Youth commented: "This challenge is about more than the

walk, it's an opportunity for businesses to demonstrate their commitment to community impact while giving their teams a unique and rewarding experience."

What's included...

- A professionally guided group walk covering nine peaks.
- Optional overnight stay at The Swan in

Grasmere, courtesy of The Inn Collection Group.

- Refreshments, support, and a chance to meet like-minded organisations.

Ways to get involved

- **Enter a Corporate Team:** Choose between the Silver Package (walk only) or Gold Package (Walk + D,B&B).
- **Sponsor the Event:** Opportunities for branded kit, transport, and visibility across campaign promotions.
- **Match Fundraising:** Amplify your impact by matching employee donations.

All proceeds support NE Youth's award-winning work providing mentoring, skills training, and development opportunities for young people across the North East.

When you sign up, don't forget a famous quote by Wainwright: "There's no such thing as bad weather, only unsuitable clothing."

To register a team or explore sponsorship opportunities email: info@neyouth.org.uk or call 0191 499 0571.



North East charities going from strength to strength with key fund backing



Two North East charities are celebrating remarkable growth after receiving vital backing from social investor, Key Fund.

Veterans at Ease, which provides therapy for serving personnel, veterans, and their families, received its first grant and loan investment from Key Fund in 2018 to open a fundraising shop in Whitley Bay.

Just a few years later, the charity now has eight revenue-generating shops across the UK – including five in the North East – and is expanding its reach nationally.

Another charity Africawad, which collects and recycles clothes then exports them to West Africa to fund the education of schoolgirls from Togo, has also experienced a welcome boost.

Both charities received vital investment from Key Fund when they encountered barriers from traditional lenders.

Veterans at Ease uses funds from its network of shops to deliver Neuro-Linguistic Psychotherapy (NLPT) through trained practitioners who are themselves veterans. Practitioners have previously received support from the charity before becoming qualified therapists.

“The beauty of Key Fund is it gave us just enough to get started,” said Christina Murrell, Managing Director of Veterans at Ease.

“It was a loan against the enterprise – meaning it didn’t risk the charity’s future if things went wrong. Since then, we’ve expanded nationally, and now support almost 500 veterans.

“The demand for our work is incredibly strong – every day we receive enquiries and referrals from those in urgent need.”

Founded in the North East, the charity’s roots are in a region that is home to 22% of the British Army – making it the natural home for the organisation’s mission.

Veterans at Ease supports individuals facing mental health



challenges such as anxiety, depression, flashbacks, PTSD, suicidal thoughts, and other combat stress-related conditions.

“Everyone here – whether they’re therapists, paid staff or volunteers – shares the same passion which is to ease the emotional and psychological suffering of every veteran who asks for help,” added Christina.

With demand rising, the charity is now working towards a 5–10-year growth plan to establish shops and therapy centres in key armed forces communities across the UK.

Key Fund, which specialises in investing in social enterprises and organisations making a measurable difference in their communities, has supported Veterans at Ease multiple times since 2018.

“This is why we invest in social enterprises,” said Matt Smith CBE, Chief Executive of Key Fund.

“Veterans at Ease is a perfect example of how social impact investment works. Veterans and their families across the UK can now access high-quality therapy, thanks to a sustainable funding model built on community shops. This means more people receiving the help they need and a stronger foundation for the charity’s ambitious national plans.”

Africawad was founded by Afi Dometi, an asylum seeker who fled to the UK when her life was in danger in West Africa.

A qualified accountant, Afi learned English and worked in hotels and kitchens while studying for a business degree before setting up Africawad, which recycles and sells clothes in Newcastle and West Africa.

Her business supports over 20 local women into education or employment each year, and saves 300,000 kilos of unwanted clothes from landfill.

Clothes are sold via eBay, wholesalers, and shop owners in the UK and 80% of products are exported to Togo and distributed to a network of companies across West Africa.

The charity’s Africa arm reinvests proceeds from the sale of clothes to pay for the annual tuition of more than 80 school girls in Togo.

Key Fund gave a loan of £15,400 and a £4,600 grant for working capital to help the charity expand its operations, as well as purchase a van to pick up stock.

Matt Smith CBE, Key Fund’s Chief Executive, added: “Key Fund has a proud history of backing underserved communities, but we know that many marginalised groups have historically struggled to access the finance they need.



TOGETHER WE MOVE AND CHANGE LIVES

North East based Homelessness Charity Changing Lives and We Move Fitness are hosting an incredible Bootcamp & early morning Sea Dip on the 4th of October at Whitley Bay Beach! Grab your ticket, come along and help to raise life changing funds for those facing sleeping rough across the region this Winter.

Scan the QR code to sign-up now and help us make a difference this World Homelessness Day.

CHANGING LIVES
We Move Fitness.

People *Doing* Good...

Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle welcomes new Enter and View Officer, Nooshin Shabani

Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle are pleased to announce the appointment of Nooshin Shabani as its new Enter and View Officer. In this important role, Nooshin, from Hebburn, will lead on delivering the statutory duty of conducting Enter and View visits across health and social care services in Gateshead and Newcastle.

Enter and View visits allow Healthwatch to speak directly to service users in publicly funded health and social care services—such as care homes, GP surgeries, and hospitals—to gather first-hand accounts of their experiences. These visits are not inspections; rather, they are opportunities to listen to people and understand what's working well and where improvements may be needed.

The feedback gathered is then compiled into a report, which is first shared with the service provider for comments. Once finalised, the report is published on the Healthwatch Gateshead or Healthwatch Newcastle website and shared with commissioners and relevant stakeholders to support service improvement.



Northumberland Freemasons donate over £6,000 to transform Shilbottle First School playground



Northumberland Freemasons have generously donated more than £6,000 to help transform the playground at Shilbottle First School, a small rural primary in a former mining village near Alnwick.

The donation funded the installation of vibrant thermoplastic playground markings designed to promote both physical activity and mental development. These markings—featuring games, activity trails, and learning prompts—have been professionally applied by a specialist company, creating a safe, engaging environment for the children.

Jim Thompson, an Alnwick based Freemason closely involved with the initiative, said: “We’re proud to support such a worthwhile project. The children at Shilbottle First School deserve every opportunity to learn and thrive, and we believe this new play area will bring them joy, energy, and important life skills through active play.”

Gary Parnaby, Headteacher at Shilbottle First School, added: “We’ve been working closely with Northumberland Freemasons to enhance our school environment. Thanks to their fundraising efforts, we’ve already been able to provide fitness equipment like skipping ropes, as well as gardening tools donated by members to support our garden—the most northerly RHS garden in England.”

West Jesmond School children bowled over by new cricket facility

The Freemen of Newcastle upon Tyne have unveiled a brand-new artificial cricket pitch on one of their open green spaces adjacent to Forsyth Road in Jesmond, marking a significant investment in grassroots sport, urban green space, and community wellbeing.

To celebrate the opening, pupils from West Jesmond Primary School joined representatives from the Freemen of the City, the English Cricket Board (ECB), and the Northumberland Cricket Board to give the pitch its maiden over. The event marked the beginning of what is hoped to become a hub for local cricketing activity and open-air play.

Nick Atkinson, Vice Chairman of the Freemen of Newcastle upon Tyne, explained: “This is Forsyth Road Playing Fields, one of the many areas we are privileged to steward as part of the various Town Moors - over 1,000 acres of open land at the heart of this city. Some of these moors are grazed by cattle, but others, like this one, are set aside solely for public air and exercise. With support from the ECB and Northumberland Cricket Board, we secured funding to install an artificial wicket and create a lasting space for grassroots sport.

“We believe strongly in promoting open-air exercise, access to nature, and mental wellbeing—all of which are central to our

mission. This new pitch is freely available to everyone, regardless of age, background, or ability. We want residents, families, and schools to feel empowered to come down and enjoy it.”

The Freemen of Newcastle upon Tyne have a long and proud history, dating back over 800 years. Today, they combine tradition with active stewardship of land, environment, and community opportunity.



Charity of the Month

In the latest of this popular series of features we spoke to...



Jamie Graham

Regional Chairman, Lord's Taverners

Why was the charity formed?

The Lord's Taverners charity was formed in 1950 with the aim of using sport and recreational activities to improve the lives of young people, particularly those with disabilities or facing social challenges. It started as a group of actors, broadcasters, and cricketers who wanted to give something back to the community by supporting disadvantaged children through cricket and other sports. Over time, the charity has grown to become one of the UK's leading youth-focused charities, helping empower young people by providing opportunities to participate in sport, build confidence, and develop life skills. Currently the Lord's Taverners programmes are:

- **Wicketz:** Cricket for disadvantaged youth to build skills and confidence.

- **Disability Cricket:** Inclusive cricket opportunities with adapted equipment and coaching.
- **Sports Ability:** Multi-sport coaching for young people with disabilities.
- **Walking Cricket:** Adapted cricket for older adults or those with limited mobility.
- **Grants:** Funding for sports facilities and equipment to support grassroots clubs and schools.
- **Social Inclusion:** Community sports projects to engage and support disadvantaged youth.

Which area do you cover?

As a Region we cover Northumberland and Durham but, the Lord's Taverners charity operates across the United Kingdom and Ireland. They support projects and initiatives in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland.

What type of fundraising events do you have?

Nationally there are a myriad of events but here in the Northumberland and Durham Region our events are Comedy Night, Golf Day, Race Day and Christmas lunch.

Who are your trustees and patrons?

Trustees:

Lucy Pearson - Chair of Trustees

Other Trustees:

Suzy Farthing -Vice-Chair, Abeer Janmohamed, Francis D'Souza, Gordon Kennedy, Jenn Barnett, Paul Walker, Rachel Kirby-Rider, Sukhjit Grewal.

Patrons:

President of the Charity – David Gower (former England cricket captain)
Sir Andrew Strauss (former England cricket captain)
Mark Butcher (former England cricketer)
Clare Balding (broadcaster and author)
Michael Vaughan (former England cricket captain)

What have been your proudest moments so far?

Being made the youngest ever Regional Chairman and along with our amazing regional committee carrying on the hard work of the previous chairs/committee and continually making the fundraising events a huge success. A few of the events were starting to lose their lustre but have been freshly reinvigorated to brilliant success, such as the comedy night and more recently the golf day. I'm also incredibly proud of the loyal supporters (individuals and companies) we have in this region. Their continued support of our events as well as willingness to provide raffle or auction prizes is really invaluable and humbling.

What are you currently working on?

The committee and I are making sure our upcoming events continue on the same trajectory of fundraising and high standards that our loyal supporters expect. This year is the Lord's Taverners 75 anniversary, so are ultimate goal at our flagship Christmas lunch event is to raise in excess of £75,000 for the charity. We have secured, Joe Marler, Neil 'Razor' Ruddock and David 'Bumble' Lloyd as speakers.

What does the future hold?

Hopefully much of the same and with support from our head office in London making our events bigger and better and in turn raising



more much needed funds for the amazing work the Charity does in the region and around the UK.

How did you get involved?

My father-in-law, Bill Ainsworth OBE, was the founding Regional Chairman in Northumbria and Durham. When I met my wife, Lucia, he shared the incredible impact the charity has in the region and the rewarding opportunities involved.

After agreeing to attending a committee meeting, I was invited to join and, a couple of years later, asked to become Regional Chairman. This is a role I accepted with pride and have thoroughly enjoyed of.

I'm fortunate to work alongside a fantastic regional committee: Mick Thompson, Gary Fawcett, Natalie Turner, Tom Seymour, Alex Rayner, Paul Dutton, and Mark Lockey.

A special thanks to Jan Mason, who is the vital driving force behind the region—our events wouldn't be nearly as successful without her!

For further information on forthcoming events please contact Jamie Graham on jamiegraham@aarsleff.co.uk



How businesses can support Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter



Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter will be 130 years old next year and has been a lifeline for animals in need across the North East. From providing safe refuge to abandoned pets, to rehoming and community outreach, the shelter's mission is simple yet powerful: to reunite, rescue, and rehome.

But behind the wagging tails and purring companions lies a constant challenge, funding. With no government support, the shelter relies almost entirely on the generosity of the community.

This is where the region's businesses can step in, making a tangible difference to animal welfare while also strengthening their own workplace culture and community ties.

Corporate Partnerships

One of the most direct ways companies can help is through corporate sponsorship. This year we have launched our Corporate partnership Packages with our Platinum package taken by Barbour. We are extremely excited to have them as our first official partner and have lots of exciting things in the pipeline with them. We still have Gold and Silver packages available. This month will be launching our Pawprints and Partnerships business membership which will include our monthly business networking events, all our events are listed on our website. Corporate Volunteering Days Many businesses now offer staff volunteering schemes, and the shelter

provides an ideal opportunity. Whether it's helping with maintenance, assisting at fundraising events, or simply spending time socialising the animals, volunteering creates team-building experiences that are both rewarding and memorable. Employees return to the workplace with boosted morale, new skills, and the satisfaction of having made a difference. After a fully booked 2025, our 2026 calendar is now open.

Charity of the Year

Nominating Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter as a company's "Charity of the Year" is another impactful way to offer support. This approach provides a focus for year-round fundraising, from bake sales and raffles to sponsored runs and gala dinners. Not only does this bring in crucial funds, but it also embeds philanthropy into company culture, allowing employees to feel more connected to their community.

Event Sponsorship and Participation

The shelter regularly hosts fundraising events, such as its annual Golf Day at Close House. Our Burns Night event at the Hilton, and in 2026 the year of our 130th birthday there will be more opportunities

than ever. Businesses can get involved by entering teams, sponsoring parts of the events, buying tables or donating raffle prizes. These events combine networking opportunities with philanthropy, providing companies with a platform to showcase their brand while directly supporting animal welfare.

The Win-Win of Giving Back

For businesses, supporting Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter isn't just an act of charity, it's an investment in community reputation, employee engagement, and social responsibility. In an era where customers and employees alike value companies with purpose, aligning with a cause that touches so many hearts can only strengthen a brand.

The Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter's doors are always open to collaboration, whether you're a small start-up, a family-run firm, or a large corporation. Every pound, every hour volunteered, and every skill shared helps to create brighter futures for animals who need it most.

For businesses looking to make a real difference, there's no better partner than a shelter dedicated to giving every dog and cat the second chance they deserve.

For more information on how your business could get involved contact out Corporate partnerships officer Emma at... emma.crowe@dogandcatshelter.com or visit our website... www.dogandcatshelter.com

Eothen Care Homes

Compassion, comfort and companionship



Eothen Care Homes enhances the lives of older people by providing experienced residential & dementia care at our three North East care homes

Living in Eothen Care Homes



We offer permanent, high-quality 24-hour residential care, short-term respite and day care places at our purpose-built homes in Whitley Bay, Gosforth and Wallsend. Each home provides our happy residents with spacious, en-suite rooms, as well as gorgeous, landscaped gardens and a range of events and activities, and are close to local transport links and shops. Our Wallsend home has been designed to enhance the lives of people living with dementia, with specially-trained staff seeing to their specific needs.

Our kind and caring staff are there at all of our homes to help residents live fuller, more rewarding lives. **'We are here with a place to call home'.**

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

Working in our homes

Our compassionate carers are dedicated to providing the best care to amazing residents. Can you help us make a difference?

Benefits include:

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- Full training provided
- Long service awards
- BUPA cash-back scheme
- Paid breaks
- Have your birthday off work

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The future of work: The dawn of the frontier firm

The August edition of Northern Insight featured digital and AI transformation, a hot topic currently. What didn't feature though is how we will upskill our leaders to lead in this new AI world.

AI is entering a new era, one defined not just by smarter tools, but by autonomous "agents" able to carry out complex business processes. In April The Work Trend Index Annual Report by Microsoft heralded a new type of workplace: The Frontier Firm. Organisations powered by hybrid human-AI teams, and a new leadership archetype—the agent boss.

Microsoft predicts that this new firm will emerge in three phases. Where are you currently?

- **Human with assistant:** AI boosts individual productivity, speeding up existing workflows.
- **Human-agent teams:** AI acts as a digital colleague, taking on specific tasks, freeing humans for higher-value work.
- **Human-led, agent-operated:** AI autonomously runs processes under broad human direction, reporting back only when necessary.

For organisations and leaders, this presents opportunities and challenges. Hybrid human-AI teams could unlock massive potential in AI's ability in analysis, automation, and data retrieval. It risks though being caught in a back lash where employees feel displaced or undervalued as AI handles large chunks of 'their work'.

As humans we dominate in creativity, strategy, and relationship management, but if we create this new hybrid workforce, we need to ensure that our leaders and teams develop skills in collaboration dynamics so we can create workflows and communication styles to integrate AI without creating competition. We need strong governance with clear rules, ethical safeguards, and accountability structures for AI. Who will be the responsible 'product owner' in a hybrid team? Human or AI? Surely it must be the human. Personally that risk sends me down a mental rabbit

hole of long since read dystopian sci-fi which leaves me in a cold sweat!

Through this we are seeing the emergence of a new type of leader, one with an 'agent boss' mindset. A leader who builds, delegates to, and manages AI agent treating them as another team member, a thought partner who can challenge ideas, brainstorm, and extend the capacity of human team members.

Whilst this seems an unlikely place, I remember the mid 1990s, when people were nervous of how the new 'computers' would take work away, yet they are now integral to our lives.

This will happen, we just must choose how and recognise this impacts our future resourcing strategies. Some of our workforce will expect AI enhancement in their roles, others will be terrified of it and will need upskilling, many will be wary. We should though integrate AI into our strategies as inaction is a tangible business risk.

Skills for Frontier Leadership

By 2030 the World Economic Forum sees AI & Technology literacy, creative thinking, resilience, lifelong learning, leadership & social influence as the key skills. Above all, we must upskill our leaders for this new

age, fusing traditional leadership strengths and AI-specific competencies:

- **Coaching & building psychological safety:** Asking questions, using inclusive "we" language, and building trust remain critical, even with AI teammates.
- **Critical thinking & Strategy:** Decision-making, adaptability, ethical judgment, and strategic vision will be essential for directing hybrid human-agent teams.
- **AI Management Skills:** Leaders must define clear role boundaries, optimise the human-agent ratio, refine prompts for better AI output, and measure AI's impact. Training agent, much like human employee, will be necessary.

This shift to agent-led work isn't just technology adoption, it's a fundamental rethinking of how our organisations operate, compete, and grow. The Frontier leaders who can harness human-AI collaboration, govern it responsibly, and adapt as capabilities accelerate will set the pace for the next era of business.

Annabel is an Executive and Team Coach, Leadership Facilitator and Coach Supervisor. You can reach out to Annabel via LinkedIn, annabel@successfultraining.co.uk, or visit www.successfultraining.co.uk



Annabel Graham

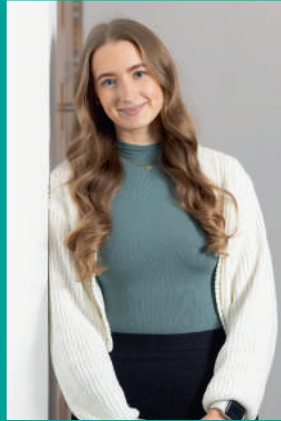
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Rethinking your website experience

By Pascal Fintoni

It is hard to believe sometimes that I recently celebrated 30 years in digital, and I've thoroughly enjoyed being part of the evolution of websites from basic HTML pages to today's AI-powered platforms.

Looking back, and ahead, one fundamental website challenge remains constant: businesses still struggle with under-communication, leaving prospective customers with unanswered questions and doubts about next steps.

What's needed is a system for regular, simple adjustments to your website content and overall visitor experience.

One approach is dividing website management into three main areas:

- Visual Content
- Promotional Content
- Social Content

Visual Content encompasses photos, graphics and colour themes selected for your 'go live' date but often not updated or aligned with current trends.

Be honest, how recent are your website photos and your graphics?

Start with a thorough review of your visual content's recency and appeal, plus create a simple update planner. The positive impact cannot be underestimated.

Promotional Content is what most business owners consider first. To avoid under-communication, focus on four key elements:

Products & Services: explain not just what you do, but who you help, how and why.

Biographies: customers like knowing their future contacts. When did you last update your About Us section?

Track record: visitors want stories of satisfied customers facing similar challenges. Are your case studies easy to relate to?

Call to action: most enquiry forms have the appeal of tax returns. How could you transform this crucial element?

Social Content fuels social media, SEO and email marketing, with lots of opportunities to impress from research papers to podcasting.

Again, I would focus on four key elements:

Industry news round up: curate updates to demonstrate expertise and build trust.

Expert Q&As: capture questions you regularly answer through written, video or audio content.

Free downloads: demonstrate customer service ethos with checklists, calculators, guides.

Company updates: tedious to you but valued by visitors keen to know you're active in your sector.

And what about AI? Can it help?

The key is viewing AI as your creative partner, handling time-consuming tasks while you focus on strategy and the uniquely human elements that make your website stand out.

Here are some options for you:

Visual content: use AI to generate fresh graphics, analyse design trends, and create personalised visual experiences based on visitor insights.

Promotional content: use AI to craft compelling descriptions for different customer segments, generate multiple call-to-action versions for testing, and analyse feedback to refine content.

Social content: use AI to curate industry news automatically, transform your expert knowledge into multiple formats, and optimise content distribution across platforms.

There you have it, a logical system based on your customers' preferences, with AI supporting your efforts and delivering superior online experiences for website visitors.

Getting started: Identify your biggest content challenge first. Choose AI tools addressing this specific need, then gradually expand your toolkit.

Pascal Fintoni is the co-author of 'WebProud: 5-Steps Roadmap to Feeling Proud of your Website Again!'

pascalfintoni.com/webproud-book

pascalfintoni.com

“

*...most enquiry
forms have the
appeal of tax
returns...*

Pascal Fintoni

Global big-hitters of the space sector converge on annual North East Space Conference



North East Space Conference 2025

Delegates from across the world attended the annual North East Space Conference as leading members of both American and European space agencies converged on Durham City.

More than 350 delegates and dozens of regional exhibitors packed into the Radisson Blu Hotel for a day of networking and information sharing which will boost the region's burgeoning space industry.

And John Bone, chair of Space North East England, said: "The day was exactly what we were hoping it would be.

"The event was sold out for the first time with more than 350 delegates registered and dozens of exhibitors.

"But just as important was the quality of the people and organisations we were able to attract to our region, and the opportunity to show them why they should be interested in what the North East has to offer."

Among the attendees was a high-profile delegation from the Florida Space Agency, with vice-president of business development, Matt Chesnutt giving a keynote speech and taking part in a panel discussion.

Nicolette Wagner of the European Space Agency and Matthew Archer of the UK Space Agency also gave keynote speeches



Matthew Archer

in front of representatives of some of the biggest names in the space sector, like Lockheed Martin and Raytheon.

Matthew Archer highlighted what an exciting time it was in the development of the UK space industry, with dozens of space launches planned from UK soil in the next few years.

He said: "People don't realise that 20% of the UK's economy is supported in one way or another by the space sector and it was one of the few industries that continued to grow even through Covid.

"It is only going to become more important.

"Our SaxaVord spaceport on Shetland is now fully operational, is set to employ up to 350 people, and within the next year will begin regular space launches from UK soil.

"For me there is a massive opportunity for the North East to support this growing industry.

"Some businesses in the region might be thinking is space for me, but actually a lot of businesses that do go into space are already successfully using their technologies down here and sometimes don't realise they can be applied in space technology too."

The Conference brings together businesses with agencies and academics, with the region's five universities key to driving the North East space industry forward.

Currently, more than 1,300 people are directly employed in the sector in the region but Space North East England is aiming to boost that number to 10,000 by 2030.

Professor James Osborn, of Durham University, is involved in the Space Research Centre (SPARC), which is benefiting from £5m investment, while up the road at Northumbria University, Lockheed Martin and the UK Space Agency are among the investors in a £50m North East Space Skills and Technology Centre.

James said: "The North East space cluster has been great for our universities in driving interest and development in the space sector.

"We're really hopeful now that the region is set to become a centre for cutting-edge space research and skills development on our doorsteps.

"It's a real opportunity to create the next generation of space pioneers and hopefully keep those skills in the North East, to our advantage.

"It just shows what can be accomplished when academics, businesses and organisations pull together."

To find out more about the space sector in the North East visit www.spacenortheastengland.com



The Boilerhouse

Inspiring workspace in the heart of Hoults Yard

Where history meets innovation

Once a bustling pottery factory, Hoults Yard has evolved into one of Newcastle upon Tyne's most vibrant business communities. Just east of the city centre, this dynamic hub is home to more than 100 diverse businesses, set within a striking blend of heritage architecture and modern design.

It's not just a place to work, it's a destination. Artisan bakeries, an onsite brewery, tattoo studios, beauty spots, and even an 18-hole indoor crazy golf course bring energy and variety to the yard, making it a place to connect, collaborate, and enjoy.

The Boilerhouse: A space with character

Nestled in the heart of Hoults Yard, The Boilerhouse is a rare opportunity to secure a self-contained workspace with all the benefits of a fully serviced office. Flooded with natural light and framed by original wooden trusses and beams, it's a space that combines historic charm with contemporary functionality.

Designed for productivity

Our proposed layout retains and celebrates The Boilerhouse's heritage features while reimagining the space for modern working. The design includes flexible workstations, meeting rooms, and breakout areas, all supported by the latest tech.

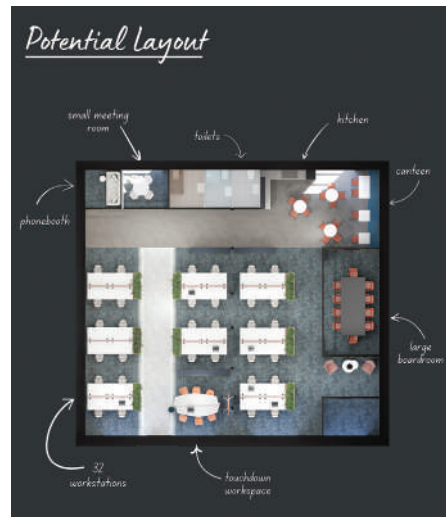
With a dedicated budget for fit-out—and scope for customisation—you can shape the space to reflect your brand and culture.

Whether you're looking to foster collaboration, inspire creativity, or simply enjoy a beautiful place to work, The Boilerhouse offers a setting that will help your business thrive.

Find out more

To arrange a viewing or discuss the possibilities, contact our team today and discover how The Boilerhouse could become your next business home.

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Dr David Cliff

Shopping is a symptom of our times

Dr David Cliff explores a lesser-known addictive behaviour, that is arguably more ubiquitous and pervasive than some of the well known ones.

“Shopping is an addiction,” reported the BBC recently. The headline captures a growing truth: compulsive buying is increasingly pathologised, yet the wider structural context is often ignored.

We live in an economic environment where credit is abundant, debt is normalised, and consumption is meticulously engineered through sophisticated marketing.

Individuals who accumulate excessive debt are not anomalies, but functioning participants in a system that depends on their spending. Global capitalism, while a driver of innovation and growth, also creates sharp inequalities. In the UK, the 50 wealthiest families now control more wealth than the poorest 50% — around 34 million people.

The problem is often framed as personal weakness, poor control and self-blame.

Therapists provide treatments for those who struggle with compulsive buying, and the NHS does its best to respond. But this focus on pathology obscures a systemic reality: industries and markets design the very conditions that lead people into harmful cycles, while the costs of repair are shouldered by public services.

This is more than a matter of personal choice. It is a systemic displacement of responsibility — profits remain private, while the burden of treatment and recovery is socialised. Algorithmic advertising, loyalty schemes, and buy-now-pay-later schemes nudge citizens into debt while maintaining the illusion of personal agency.

Here we might look to Pigouvian taxation, a concept introduced by economist Arthur Pigou. Pigouvian taxes aim to internalise the “negative externalities” of market activity — that is, the hidden social costs not captured in the sticker price. Familiar examples include carbon taxes for pollution or levies on tobacco to fund healthcare. Applied to consumer culture, a Pigouvian tax could ensure that industries whose marketing and credit mechanisms create mental-health and financial burdens contribute directly to the public services that manage those consequences. Such an approach would rebalance the equation, shifting part of the responsibility back to those who design and profit from harmful practices. Yet to date, no political leader has found the courage to advance such measures.

The real issue is agency. On the surface, individuals believe they are choosing

freely. But the framework of their choices has been pre-engineered — by algorithms that target vulnerability, by design systems that exploit cognitive bias, and by financial products structured to encourage dependency.

Philosophical traditions from Stoicism to Buddhism remind us that true strength lies not in accumulation but in detachment, generosity, and simplicity. Repairing, sharing, and consuming less are not only ecological imperatives; they are ways of reclaiming dignity and autonomy.

Theodor Adorno warned that rational systems adapt incrementally while often entrenching the inertia they claim to challenge. Today, consumer culture reflects that critique: endless interventions — more apps, more nudges, more therapies — while the underlying framework remains untouched.

We need a different approach, the climate change crisis alone demands it.

At Gedanken, we encourage leaders to think differently. It is not only about “thinking outside the box,” but about asking what the box itself is: who built it, why, and whether it still serves the common good.

We partner with leaders — whether in major organisations or local communities — who are serious about making meaningful change. Change not for novelty’s sake, but grounded in vision, responsibility, and human flourishing.

gedanken.co.uk



Dr David Cliff

Enjoyed this article? Take the next step!

If you've found David's perspective thought-provoking, why not explore how it could transform your leadership, work, business, teams, and personal development? You will never truly know if this approach is right for you just by browsing the web or window shopping online, you have to experience it.

***Book a 45-minute, no-obligation
conversation and see what's possible...***



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Why water wisdom matters more than ever

A call to action for North East Businesses.

In the North East, we're no strangers to rainfall. But the myth of water abundance is beginning to unravel quickly. As climate change accelerates, the UK is facing more frequent and intense periods of drought. For businesses, this is more than an environmental concern, it's an operational and financial risk.

If you're a business owner, it's time to treat water as a strategic asset.

The rising risk of water scarcity

According to the Environment Agency, parts of the UK could run out of water within 25 years if significant changes aren't made. The causes are a combination of increased demand, outdated infrastructure, and the impacts of climate change. Droughts in recent years have affected everything from agriculture to manufacturing, with supply chains disrupted and costs spiralling.

Businesses both large and small are at the front line. From offices and cafes to factories and leisure facilities, water is a critical yet often overlooked resource. As future droughts loom, now is the time for North East businesses to futureproof operations and cut waste.

The business case for water efficiency

Aside from environmental responsibility, being water wise makes financial sense. Many organisations are surprised to learn how much water they consume once they begin monitoring usage properly.

Every drop saved is a cost avoided not just in water bills, but also in the energy used to heat, move and treat it. Reducing your water footprint can also bring reputational benefits, support funding bids, and demonstrate environmental leadership to customers, staff, and suppliers.

And with sustainability now a key focus in supply chain assessments water efficiency should be integral to your sustainability strategy.

Five ways to become a water smart business

1. Audit your water use.

Start by reviewing where, when, and how water is used in your operations. Even simple checks can uncover hidden inefficiencies such as leaks. Environmental accreditation frameworks like Investors in the Environment (iE) offer step-by-step



Jo Holmes

guidance for monitoring and reducing water and other resource use.

2. Fix leaks and invest in low-cost tech.

A dripping tap can waste over 5,000 litres of water a year. You can also install aerated taps, dual flush toilets, and sensor-controlled appliances to reduce unnecessary water flow. In many cases, these pay for themselves within months.

3. Rethink staff engagement.

Water saving signage, internal campaigns, and even fun competitions can help shift behaviours in kitchens, toilet facilities, and across wider business culture. People tend to care more when they understand the 'why' and linking water waste to climate impacts or rising bills makes the issue feel real.

4. Consider your supply chain.

Water isn't just used on site. From the food in your café to the components in your products, water use is embedded in what you buy. Like carbon footprints, switch to working with suppliers who are also water responsible and choose products with a lower water footprint.

5. Collect rainwater where possible.

If your business has outdoor space, consider installing a water butt or a rainwater harvesting system. This can

be a great way to irrigate plants or clean external areas without tapping into mains supplies.

The role of accreditation

Frameworks like Investors in the Environment offer businesses a practical, structured path to managing resources, including water. Through accreditation, organisations can identify areas for improvement, set meaningful targets, and embed sustainable thinking across all levels of the business. Many North East organisations are already seeing real savings and building resilience through this approach.

Final thoughts

For today's businesses, building water resilience is about good environmental practice as well as staying competitive, saving money, and safeguarding the future.

By acting now, North East businesses can lead the way in turning the tide on waste and building a more sustainable economy; one drop at a time.

Want to find out more about Investors in the Environment and how it can help your business save water and reduce carbon? Visit [genee.org.uk](https://www.genee.org.uk) or send us an email jo@genee.org.uk



Why UK recruiters should consider joining an internationally focused executive search agency

The recruitment landscape in the United Kingdom is presenting increasing challenges for recruiters focused solely on the domestic market.

From intense competition and shrinking talent pools to rising costs and regulatory complexities, it's becoming harder than ever to sustain growth and secure top executive placements. For UK recruiters seeking fresh opportunities and strategic growth, joining an internationally focused company like Collaborative Search, a specialist Executive Search agency with strong presence in both Europe and the US, could be a smart, forward-looking move.

UK recruiters today face several significant hurdles. The aftermath of Brexit has tightened access to skilled overseas talent, worsening shortages in critical sectors such as technology, finance, and healthcare. Economic uncertainty and inflationary pressures mean clients are more cautious about hiring, limiting recruitment volumes and fee growth. Meanwhile, the UK market is crowded with agencies competing aggressively for the same talent and mandates, making differentiation increasingly difficult.

Navigating complex employment regulations and data protection laws further adds to operational burdens, requiring constant adaptability and resources.

The United States remains one of the world's largest and most dynamic labour markets. It offers a far broader and more diverse talent pool, particularly in high-demand executive roles across technology, healthcare, finance, and more. Demand for senior professionals is robust, and recruitment volumes often exceed those in the UK, presenting greater fee-earning potential.

Moreover, the US business environment encourages flexibility and innovation in recruitment approaches, often with less regulatory complexity compared to the UK. Collaborative Search is uniquely positioned to help UK recruiters overcome domestic market constraints by offering access to the US recruitment arena through an established, respected platform. Recruiters gain immediate access

to the US market through our well-established presence and extensive client relationships across both sides of the Atlantic. Recruiters benefit from shared expertise and advanced resources, including cutting-edge technology and in-depth market intelligence, which simplify the complexities of operating in a new geography. This environment fosters professional growth by providing opportunities to work on larger, more sophisticated executive search mandates and to build valuable international networks. Additionally, Collaborative Search's culture supports individual development while leveraging collective strength, enabling recruiters to compete successfully for major assignments and deliver outstanding results across both the European and US markets.

The current challenges facing UK recruiters demand innovative responses and new growth avenues. Collaborative Search offers UK-focused recruiters a compelling opportunity to overcome market limitations by stepping confidently into the US executive search market. This strategic move not only broadens career horizons but also positions recruiters to thrive in a larger, more dynamic environment with greater fee potential.

For UK recruiters ready to elevate their careers and business impact, partnering with Collaborative Search could be the intelligent next step to future-proof success and unlock new possibilities across borders.

For more information, please reach out to contact@collaborativesrch.com or www.collaborativesrch.com

NE1 CAN – Careers insight in focus

By Kerry McCabe, Business Network Manager at NE1 Ltd

NE1 needs little introduction in Newcastle. Our work is highly visible and businesses recognise the key role we play in shaping the city's business environment and public realm through events, activities, and on-street support such as the NE1 Street Rangers and Clean Team.

One of our other business support services, which may be less well known, but is equally vital, is our career insight programme, NE1 CAN, which we have been delivering for almost a decade.

Many city centre businesses will be familiar with the programme having worked with us over the last ten years, whilst for others, it may be a revelation that NE1 deliver such a unique and forward-thinking initiative.

Each school year, we deliver between 40 – 50 career insight events for young people in conjunction with local businesses, engaging with over 105 education providers from across the region. Our programme is built around the recently updated Gatsby Benchmarks, a framework of eight benchmarks central to government statutory guidance for secondary schools to deliver world-class career guidance.

Updated Gatsby Benchmarks call for more varied and meaningful encounters between young people and businesses, these changes have allowed us to rethink and develop our programme to deliver additional targeted work with smaller cohort groups.

An ambitious programme for this academic year has been designed in two parts, the first delivering our more traditional NE1 CAN events to KS3, 11 – 14 year olds and KS4, 14 – 16 year old students with 21 events for over 1,000 students delivered in partnership with 22 businesses.

The second part of the programme will focus on KS5 students, aged 16+, who are closer to the workforce and thinking about their next steps into higher education or employment.

Career cohort groups will bring together small groups of students from different education providers to attend a series of sector-specific events to increase their awareness and understanding of the industries and jobs they are interested in.

Delivery partners for this element of the programme include Northumbria Police, Bowmer + Kirkland, Primark, Scream for Pizza, Wagamama, Blackfriars and several city centre law firms.

As an example, our Chef Cohort will see students hosted by high-end city centre restaurant Blackfriars,

local street-food venue Scream for Pizza and national chain, Wagamama, before these students take their learnings and deliver a cook-off in the last event.

All students in this cohort will have an interest in becoming a Chef and will gain meaningful insight into the different types of restaurants operating in the city and where best suits their skills and personality.

Northumbria Police currently have three entry routes to becoming a Police Officer, they will work with NE1 CAN to host three events, one event for each route. Again, this approach is designed to help young people understand which direction is most appropriate for them, and help them to make informed decisions.

Another stand-out example of our work is with Primark, examining careers in International Retail Management. A global firm operating here in Newcastle and employing approximately 400 members of staff. Retail can sometimes be considered a stop-gap, but it is a sector with excellent and well-paid management opportunities. We will work with a cohort of students studying business and considering a future in global management to give them an insight into the opportunities within the retail giant, Primark.

Alongside our brand-new cohort work, we will continue to deliver our usual programme, including events with Newcastle Hospitals Trust for 500 young people, events which focus on Architecture, and events with partners including Nissan, Lycetts, Thompsons of Prudhoe, and Deloitte, amongst others.

If you're a business in NE1 or the wider North-East looking to engage with the workforce of the future, we are here to support you. Whether it's promoting apprenticeship opportunities directly to young people, showcasing your sector, or supporting the creation of meaningful and diverse work experience programmes, we have the infrastructure and established relationships with over 200 education and youth providers to make it happen.

www.newcastlene1ltd.com



Kerry McCabe

Power to the Positive People

We live in a strange and sad state of affairs. Somewhere along the way, society became obsessed with pointing fingers rather than lending a hand. We complain before we compliment, criticise before we congratulate, and rage before we reflect.

The age of aggression seems to have arrived — civil unrest, social division, and an almost industrial-scale appetite for outrage have become the norm. We see it online, on our streets, in our politics, and in our playgrounds.

And I get it — life is tough. People are hurting. But I've always believed that **we don't rise by pulling others down. We rise by lifting each other up.**

Growing up in the West End of Newcastle, I saw the best and worst of humanity. My late mother, Salim, worked 18-hour days just to put food on the table and still found time to help others in the community. She didn't ask for recognition. She simply believed in doing the right thing. I learned from her that **kindness isn't weakness — it's strength with purpose.**

So, when I saw the lack of genuine representation for the Asian community in the North East — no voice, no visibility, no vehicle for change — I didn't just complain. I created one.

That's how **Asian Business Connexions (ABConnexions)** was born. Not as an exclusive club, but as an inclusive movement. From day one, our mission wasn't just to connect the Asian community. It was to connect all communities, to support, celebrate, and showcase the talent and tenacity of every individual — regardless of race, religion, gender, or postcode.

And do you know what I'm most proud of? The fact that **more white people have been supported through our work than Asian — simply reflecting the make-up of our region.** That's inclusion. That's impact. That's what happens when you build bridges instead of barriers.

We've created a platform where people feel safe to speak and be heard. We've helped

individuals find their voice and their value. We've launched initiatives long before it was fashionable — or even understood — to do so.

We've:

Platformed women when others were still making token gestures.

Advocated for the unemployed and disengaged, not with pity, but with purpose.

Inspired primary school children to dream bigger through enterprise challenges.

Launched the largest inclusion survey in the North East, giving policymakers real data to drive real change.

Delivered grassroots and government-level programmes that made a tangible difference in people's lives.

Hosted inclusive awards that celebrate everyone — not just the usual suspects — with a smile, some fun, and a whole lot of heart.

And this year, on **9th October**, we'll do it again — with our **ABConnexions Awards**, a night where every story matters and every person is valued. Because this isn't about ticking boxes. It's about **changing the narrative.**

Our region is on a mission to become the most inclusive in the UK. And through our campaign, **#InclusionByDefault**, we're showing that progress doesn't have to be

polarising. It can be positive, proactive, and powerful.

We don't ignore problems — we face them. But we do it with a belief that **solutions are better built in solidarity, not in silos.**

Because when you strip away the noise, the anger, the fear — you realise something simple: *People just want to feel seen, heard, and hopeful.*

So here's my call to action: **let's celebrate more than we criticise, collaborate more than we compete, and connect more than we cancel.**

In the words of the late great Maya Angelou: *"Try to be a rainbow in someone else's cloud."*

Let's make that our default setting. **Power to the positive people** — because in a world full of division, **positivity is the most radical thing we can choose.**

And I, for one, am choosing it every single day.

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.



Ammar Mirza CBE

A different kind of investment

By Kerrey Baker,
Managing Director, Shared Interest

This is the first in a new monthly column exploring the role of ethical finance — what it means, why it matters, and how we can use money as a force for good in business and beyond.

Ethical investment is, at its heart, about aligning money with values rooted in making positive change. It means considering not just how much we earn from an investment, but what kind of world we are helping to shape with it. For some, that might mean avoiding harm — steering clear of industries like fossil fuels or arms.

For others, it is about actively supporting solutions: renewable energy, sustainable farming, access to finance in underserved communities. What unites ethical investors is a belief that profit should not come at the expense of people or planet.

At Shared Interest, we have seen the power of this approach first-hand. Based in Newcastle, we have been operating for 35 years - using investment from individuals across the UK to provide finance that enables fair trade. Our mission is to empower smallholder farmers and social businesses by improving access to capital - strengthening livelihoods and supporting long-term impact. Our investors are people from all walks of life who choose to use their money to make a difference, accepting a modest return in order to support livelihoods and long-term impact.

The investment raised allows us to lend to cocoa farmers in Ivory Coast securing better prices for their crops, coffee co-operatives in Peru expanding into international markets, and handcraft businesses in Kenya investing in climate-resilient practices. It is a form of investment that prioritises people over profit — and it works.



Kerrey Baker

Over the coming months, I will use this space to unpack different aspects of ethical finance. From supply chain resilience to climate adaptation and access to finance, we will explore how ethical finance can help address the challenges shaping today's business landscape - and the communities behind it.

For me, ethical finance is not about ticking

boxes. It is about asking better questions. What impact does my money have? Who benefits? And how can we build financial systems that serve both people and planet? Because when finance is fair, everyone benefits.

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Just some of our award winners from last year!



Limited tickets and tables available for 2025.

Don't miss out on being part of this unforgettable celebration!

With just one month remaining until the awards ceremony, some tickets or tables are still available for what promises to be an inspiring evening of recognition and community spirit.

Join us as we honor the remarkable people and organisations that make the North East such a special place.

Secure your seats today and be there when we celebrate the very best of our community!



VISIT: <https://www.abconnexions.org/abc-awards-nominations>



Surbhi Vedhara **Northern Business Woman Award**

Surbhi is a Managing Partner at Sweeney Miller Law. With over 14 years of experience in commercial property, Surbhi's leadership and client-focused approach have made her a standout in the legal community.



Uma Malhotra **Independent Award**

Uma Malhotra is the dynamic Managing Director of Cover Beauty, a thriving enterprise with six successful beauty businesses. Her inspiring journey from Wolverhampton to leading a multicultural team of over 35 employees in the North East showcases her resilience, vision, and commitment to women's empowerment and inclusivity.



Wenyan Sharp **Business Award**

Wenyan Sharp is the U.K. Marketing Director at SolaX Power, where she leads innovative marketing strategies for sustainable energy solutions. She also serves as an Enterprise Advisor for the North East Combined Authority and Director at Galaxy Industrial Supplies Ltd, showcasing her expertise across multiple industries.



Nicki Clarke OBE **Chairmans Award**

Nicki has experience of working across numerous sectors – she's been involved with many different cultures and ways of doing business. She is an active Volunteer, Director, Trustee, was awarded an OBE in June 2022 for services to Business and Social Enterprise in the North of England.



Ash Aggarwal **Lifetime Achievement Award**

Ashok has dedicated over 40 years to serving the NHS as a pharmacist and business owner, leading 15 pharmacies under the Ashchem Chemists banner. Known for his inspirational leadership, humility, and unwavering commitment to his community, Ashok's work has had a lasting impact on healthcare across the North East of England.



Helen Williamson returns to her roots with TUTTI

Former Whistles MD Helen Williamson has returned to her native North East coast as fractional Managing Director for TUTTI, the lifestyle brand started 20 years ago by Kate Rose.

Williamson brings over 30 years' experience and expertise in the fashion industry, holding C-Suite roles at Whistles, Hobbs and Ted Baker.

To mark celebrating 20 years in 2024, TUTTI has invested in a stylish new concept store and studio located at Harbour House in the heart of the regeneration of local fishing port North Shields, near Newcastle. Harbour House is a reimagined market building now a vibrant hub of lifestyle businesses, from an artisan bakery to a yoga studio.

Kate Rose, founder of TUTTI said: "Finding the right home was crucial. I would never have just picked a pretty store on a High Street for the brand, which is why we've never had our own shop until now - but this space is more than a store, it sums up a lifestyle. We have designed our studio and concept store to be a calming space that creates an emotional connection, where customers can see our designers at work."

Helen Williamson commented on her recent move: "I wanted to return to my native North East to give back my experience in the fashion industry and help more scaling businesses achieve success."

"We are seeing the growth of many more regional brands. The North West and Midlands have generated some very well-known success stories, and I'd like to see that replicated in the North East. As the industry evolves beyond London, the emergence of fast-growing regional brands gives more people opportunity to build careers closer to home."

Crisis comms expert joins Newcastle-based O.agency

O. agency has announced the appointment of Lucy McMahon as its new Senior Account Manager.

Lucy, who joined the agency earlier this summer brings an impressive track record at major regional organisations, including the Great North Air Ambulance Service, Lookers, Newcastle International Airport, and most recently, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service.

With a strong background in PR, campaigns and crisis communications, Lucy joins O's growing team where she will lead across a range of clients and some very exciting projects.

Kirsty Ostell, Managing Director at O, said: "Lucy's expertise is a perfect fit for our team. She brings not only a wealth of experience but also a fresh perspective that will strengthen the way we support clients through complex communications challenges and drive brand reputation



through campaigns. We're delighted to welcome her to the team."

Lucy McMahon added: "O has a fantastic reputation in the region, and I've loved getting to know the team and clients over the last few months. It's a privilege to be part of a team leading communications and campaigns for sector-leading organisations that I've admired from afar for many years."

"I'm looking forward to bringing my experience and passion for clear, human-centred communications that create meaningful connections and real engagement."

Key new appointments see staff at Homes by Carlton reunited

An award-winning site manager has "come home" to a leading North East housebuilder.

Over 20 years since first joining Homes by Carlton, Leigh Walton has returned as Senior Site Manager to oversee the company's luxurious £13m Saxon Vale development in County Durham.

His return is one of two key new hires for the County Durham-based company, which has also strengthened its team by appointing a vastly experienced Head of Construction, Dan Holyoak.

"When Homes by Carlton launched in 2000, I worked on the very first projects the company delivered," said Leigh, a National House Building Council award-winner.

"To return now, more than two decades later, feels really special."

"25 years ago, we were a small team with big ambitions. Now the company has grown into one of the region's most trusted housebuilders, delivering hundreds of homes for families across the North East."



"To become part of that journey again by overseeing what really is a special site in Saxon Vale, fills me with enormous pride."

And the new appointments have led to a reunion.

Both new hires had previously worked with Homes by Carlton's Co-Founder and Vice Chairman, Craig Peterson, for a different housebuilder in the late 1990s.

"Joining Homes by Carlton was a chance to once again work with some of the most talented, experienced, and determined staff in this industry," said Dan, who will work across all the company's developments.

"To work again with Craig and Leigh on so many incredible developments was impossible to turn down, especially for a company like Homes by Carlton, which is thriving."



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James Carss

Castle Peak Group – Doing recruitment the right way

Driven by Diversity and Inclusion

When it comes to Executive Search Recruitment, the name of Castle Peak Group will now be familiar to readers of Northern Insight.

Since the turn of the year, we've been featuring the company every month, looking closely at what they do, how they do it and why they are leaders when it comes to finding not only the right executive who can fulfil a particular role, but the right person who will reflect the business's level of diversity and inclusivity.

We've been reflecting on a key piece of research carried out by Castle Peak Group which looked at diversity at executive and boardroom level.

But what about the man who was behind the research?

He's the founder of Castle Peak Group, James Carss.

Many of you will recognise his name. He's one of the most well-known and respected

people in the recruitment business... especially Executive Search... here in the North East and across the UK. He's also worked extensively abroad. His incredible level of experience means you will be getting the sort of service you'd expect from a London-based agency.

And when you make your first contact with Castle Peak Group, we can guarantee that you won't be hanging on the telephone as you are passed around the office while someone desperately figures-out who you should be talking to.

Why can we guarantee that? Simple... because your first contact will be with James Carss. Bingo... you've gone straight to the top and you will be discussing precisely what you're looking for in terms of a candidate or vacancy, with him.

James then puts wheels into motion and he and his team will provide you with a small, vetted group if you are looking for a candidate, or some relevant positions if you are looking for a new position or career. At this point you will once again be dealt with by James.

Behind everything that James does he has one driving passion.

Diversity and Inclusion.

"Directors, board members and senior executives of any company, should reflect the company's workforce and their customers," said James. "If they don't, it can be very difficult to have any sort of discussions. This can have ramifications in terms of keeping staff fully on board and maintaining morale, and affect your sales

for the simple reason that customers prefer to deal with people they feel understand their needs. If there are similarities, it makes life a lot easier and frequently more comfortable for everyone. It can certainly make your business more efficient and profitable if all parties relate to each other."

Castle Peak Group have done extensive research into diversity and inclusivity within the workplace... it's called Progress Under Pressure. This in-depth piece of work noted that businesses and organisations with a diverse and inclusive culture saw operational benefits including better decision-making at board level and improvements in customer experiences.

If you are wondering how you can find out whether your business is inclusive and, if it isn't, what you can do about it, Castle Peak Group can help. They offer a service where they study a business via a unique evaluation framework. They'll show how to develop a workplace which practises inclusive leadership and inclusive recruitment, and how this can steadily build high-performing workplaces where people are content, valued, and feel like they belong. It's a win-win.

As we said at the start, Castle Peak Group does recruitment the right way. They can certainly help transform your business.

For more information, you can contact James Carss by calling 07802 531040 or emailing info@castlepeak-group.com

You'll also find out more details by logging on to www.castlepeak-group.com



Diane Mactavish

Paternity leave: Now and in the future

Did you know, that only one-third of fathers take paternity leave (and pay)? Should this concern you as an employer?

We'll explore the second question a little later; but first, let's take a look at the thinking behind paternity leave, what the current rules are and how this may change.

While fathers do not need to physically recover after pregnancy in the same way that a mother does, it is a key moment within the family lifecycle when bonding, support and readjustment all need to take place (not playing golf and celebrating the birth down the boozer).

Currently, the statutory paternity allowance is two weeks of paid leave at a rate the lower of £187.18 or 90% of average earnings. To qualify they must be employed (not self-employed) and earning at least £125 per week, with continuous service of 26 weeks (see below). In effect, paternity leave applies to all second parents, regardless of gender and secondary

adopters within adopting couples, too.

The £187.18/90%-of-average-earnings rate is actually less than 50% of the national living wage. This goes some way to explaining the low take-up of paternity leave – many cannot afford to take the financial hit, even if they are sacrificing that crucial bonding and support time.

Shared parental leave – where the two parents can co-ordinate a split of paid time off – sits alongside paternity, maternity and adoption leave, but also has a low take up. It is complicated and has the same payment thresholds, presenting the same financial constraints on would-be recipients.

Is the Employment Rights Bill going to change paternity?

Yes, the Employment Rights Bill will make paternity leave and pay a day one right. Currently, as touched on above, an employee must have been working with you for 26 weeks up to any day in the “qualifying week”. The qualifying week is the 15th week before the baby is due.

This will come into force in 2026.

Are any further changes planned for paternity leave?

No further changes are set in stone, but the Women and Equalities Committee (of MPs) has recently declared the whole statutory parental leave system is flawed and among the worst in the developed world.

This has sparked the government to launch a landmark review, due to take a year and a

half. Further down the line, this could lead to more fundamental change. But that is for later, if at all.

Paternity leave and your business

Working with SMEs up and down the country, we know the tight margins that many work to, and how difficult additional pressures are.

Some SMEs, as well as some larger businesses, choose to offer more generous family policies like paternity leave rather than the statutory minimums.

Doing the maths, they calculate that the value they get from this gesture is worth it – in terms of better recruitment and retention, perhaps lower sickness absence, enhanced workplace culture, and what things like this add up to: higher productivity. They may also feel it is “doing the right thing”, a contribution towards employee well-being and a better society.

It is a balancing act and every business needs to work out what is possible for themselves.

By your side

If you would like to be kept abreast of employment law changes, both in the near future and over the long term, get in touch.

We provide compliant and strategic advice to SMEs across the North East.

Contact Diane today on 0191 283 8732 or email diane.mactavish@hrdept.co.uk

Effective meetings

If a business is truly about a team of people working together, then the biggest challenge is clear: effective communication.

And when it comes to communicating with multiple people, meetings are the go-to solution.

Yet, ironically, meetings are often the most dreaded entry in a worker's calendar. Why? Probably because so many are poorly planned—and even more are poorly executed.

Every regular meeting should begin with a clearly defined purpose.

If we can't articulate why we're meeting in a single sentence, then we should question if the meeting is even needed.

If it isn't essential, there are plenty of other communication tools that might be more suitable.

However, once we know the purpose, we can build a focused agenda which gives everyone a chance to prepare.

With a proper agenda, we can set clear start and end times, ensuring meetings stay efficient and that no one's time is wasted. After all, busy people understandably resent having their time squandered.

Even with all that in place, one critical piece remains: capturing decisions and actions so things actually get done.

And above all, a meeting will never be truly effective without a strong chair. Someone who keeps the agenda on track, ensures everyone has a chance to speak—without dominating—and gives quieter voices space to be heard.

When people feel heard, valued, and that they've contributed meaningfully, only then can a meeting be considered effective.

Which may explain why truly effective meetings are still so rare.

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Ian Kinnery

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Counter offers are back!

Bryony Gibson, director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, talks about why you should be worried about the rise in counter-offers and the ongoing skills shortage.

The counteroffer is a tool many firms hoped they'd put behind them, but, with competition fierce and the cost of losing talent so high, they seem to have resurfaced as a regular feature in recruitment.

Serious talent shortages have led to firms pulling out all the stops to hold on to good people, even though this is rarely a long-term solution that either party ends up happy with.

So, if you're an employer weighing up whether to make a counter proposal, or an employee facing the decision on whether to accept, how should you respond?

The Employee

Ask yourself honestly why you were looking to leave in the first place. This point really matters. A counteroffer is always flattering, but unless your move is purely money-motivated, it doesn't help you. Rather, it muddles the waters, which is exactly its objective.

In my experience, the real reasons people explore a move are typically:

- A lack of progression or development
- Feeling undervalued or disconnected from leadership
- Long hours and poor work-life balance
- Cultural misalignment or changing team dynamics
- A desire for more responsibility or challenge

If any of those things were true before you resigned, are they going to change now?

Commonly, people accept a counteroffer in the moment because it feels good and is the easier, safer option. The reality is that statistics show most people leave within the next 6–12 months, regardless. Why?



Bryony Gibson

Because the core issues remain. And then the dynamic changes, with trust eroded and future progression often curtailed - at least in the short term - even if your manager is relieved to keep you.

The Employer

It's always tough to lose a good person, particularly in a competitive market where replacing them might take months. While you could almost always do without this problem, you need to ask yourself carefully whether you should try to keep them.

Counteroffers are very tempting. If for no other reason than they buy you time and avoid short-term disruption. But, before rushing in with more money or a new title, ask yourself:

- Was this completely unexpected?
- Have they raised concerns before?
- Is your offer solving the problem, or simply delaying it?

If the answer to the last question is "delaying", a counteroffer is more than likely kicking the can down the road. In some cases, it could also set an unhealthy precedent within the wider team.

However, if their concerns are clear,

solvable, and you genuinely believe they could have a positive future at your firm, a well-considered counteroffer (with changes that go beyond salary) might work. Just don't rely on financial incentives alone to keep someone engaged for the long term. It rarely buys you more than six months.

Be Honest, Be Strategic

Counteroffers are back because firms are under pressure, but that doesn't mean they're always wise.

Whether you're the one offering or receiving, clarity in your decision-making is key. Try to avoid emotion or short-term fear. Understand what's driving the desire to move and whether it can realistically be addressed.

Avoid purely transactional fixes. If the only reason to stay, or keep someone, is financial, it's rarely sustainable.

Sometimes, it's simply time to part ways. Growth often comes from moving on, for both employees and firms. If the relationship has run its course, leave on good terms and focus on finding the right long-term solution. Try to see it as an opportunity for a fresh start for everyone.

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Join a leading international firm's specialist VAT team, advising a wide range of clients on improving compliance, efficiency, and reducing costs. This hands-on role offers variety, client interaction, and the chance to work on complex projects alongside experienced colleagues. UK VAT experience is essential, with ATT/ACA/CTA (or equivalent) preferred. A great step for those seeking career growth in a collaborative environment. **Hybrid.**

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THE ULTRAMAPGLOBAL SERIES

“The most difficult thing to manage internally is inconsistency. And, from a customer perspective, inconsistency is definitely one of the most frustrating habits that any supplier can have. Consistency is very important to UltramapGlobal.”

This issue: **CONSISTENCY**

The global UltramapGlobal team looks after many of the world's most important subsea assets. Every second. Every minute. Every day of every year.

The team is consistently watching for threats, and intervening.

“It's important to know whether you're in the business of assurance or insurance when you are in a business that looks after people.” Explains Martin.

“Are you there to stop bad things happening? That's assurance. Or are you there to manage the fallout of bad things happening? That's insurance. For UltramapGlobal - it's the former.”

And once you know what camp you're in, attitude needs to be right, as well.

“UltramapGlobal is a ‘no if's and no but's’ business. We don't want to have conversations about why we failed. We must deliver. That's our mindset.”

People

So the main way that UltramapGlobal ensures consistency is through its people.

“Our people tend to stay with us. Customers know our team personally. And the relationships they have lead to really open conversation.

Consistency of interface means that we learn lots about how customers are really feeling. This helps a lot.

“And, of course, we're consistent at a delivery level, with response times and quality of reporting for example.

It's expected.”

Messaging

How UltramapGlobal's marketing speaks, is as important to those that know and work with UltramapGlobal already, as it is to those who do not.

“At a personal level, one of the biggest bugbears when anyone buys anything, I think, is when a company promises you one thing before you buy, then delivers something very different once you become a customer.

“We're very clear with what we're promising to prospects. 50 percent of all current UltramapGlobal customers have zero cable strikes at all from vessels.

“And 100 percent of current UltramapGlobal customers have fewer cable strikes once they become a customer, than they did before they chose us.

“Those percentages are what we suggest to prospects. And we consistently deliver.”

World Number One

UltramapGlobal's Asset Monitor software has consistently been the world's most used subsea cable monitoring software for a few years now.

“It took us over a decade to reach a point where we lead the category. And now that we do, consistency will be a very big part of why we should stay here.

“Getting here is one thing. Staying here, particularly as new alternatives enter the market, is a different challenge altogether.”

Find out more at www.ultramapglobal.com

PATIENCE | RESILIENCE | STORYTELLING | TRAVEL | TEAM | **CONSISTENCY** | NUMBERS



Martin Connelly
Co-Founder & Commercial Director

Outdoors is a habit

Jane Fisher, founder of Fresh Perspectives North East, believes that pure, accelerated, distraction-free thinking is best done outside.

“Outdoors is the place to pause. To think, clearly. About the clutter holding you back, and the opportunities passing you by. And not as a one-off. Because ‘Outdoors Is A Habit’.”

For Jane, the claustrophobia was real.

“25 years in senior education and local government roles, with a focus on Strategic Leadership, were rewarding and nourishing in so many ways,” explains the effervescent Jane.

“But it was claustrophobic. Restricting authenticity. Limiting strategic creativity. ‘Jane’ disappeared. So, I left. Downed tools. Escaped!”

Strategic Leadership

“One good decision. One bad decision. You can double a business or finish a business. So, it puzzles me why so many leaders make Strategic Leadership decision-making so much harder than it should be. For put simply: Clear thinking only happens in clear spaces.”

Change is closer than you think

Even though you’re most likely to find Jane hill walking or exploring Hadrian’s Wall, that’s not the only kind of ‘outdoors’ Jane promotes.

“The outdoors needs to be easily accessible to you. And it is. I’m exploring and mapping wonderful outdoor spaces in our North East cities right now, for example. And the change I’m advocating doesn’t take colleagues outside for hours at a time. It can literally take minutes.”

“Opportunities are like rainbows. Amazing. Spontaneous. Beautiful. Yet they disappear in an instant. I made the decision, and the change, to never miss another.”

Missed opportunity

It’s not just clear-thinking Strategic Leadership that Jane is fuelling. It’s seeing and seizing opportunities in business too.

“Opportunities are like rainbows. Amazing. Spontaneous. Beautiful. Yet they disappear in an instant. I made the decision, and the change, to never miss another!”

We all know how it works. We get the best ideas and see the best opportunities when showering. Or cycling. Or walking alone, phone-free. I add fresh structure and substance to this age-old principle.”

The Fresh Perspective 90-Day Challenge

In quarter 4 of 2025, Jane will launch ‘The Fresh Perspective 90-Day Challenge’.

It’s a limited space, community-driven initiative designed to fast-track a select few North East businesses towards developing the Outdoors Habit.

“Many of the world’s most progressive businesses - brands you know, are getting outdoors already. And I believe that within the next five to 10 years, all progressive businesses will spend at least 20 percent of their working week outdoors. Habitually.

“That’s why I’ve developed the Fresh Perspective 90-Day Challenge. So that business leaders here in the North East can explore, right now, how getting outside more, actually feels for them and their teams - with ease.

“Being outdoors, just for a little while, on an ongoing basis, will change how you and your teams think and operate in your business. I really do believe that when it comes to making great Strategic Leadership decisions, you can’t see anything, until you remove everything.”

To find out more about Fresh Perspectives North East, and the 90-Day Challenge, contact Jane: hello@fpne.co.uk or visit the website www.fpne.co.uk



“

*...you can't see
anything, until
you remove
everything...*

Jane Fisher, Founder, Fresh Perspectives North East



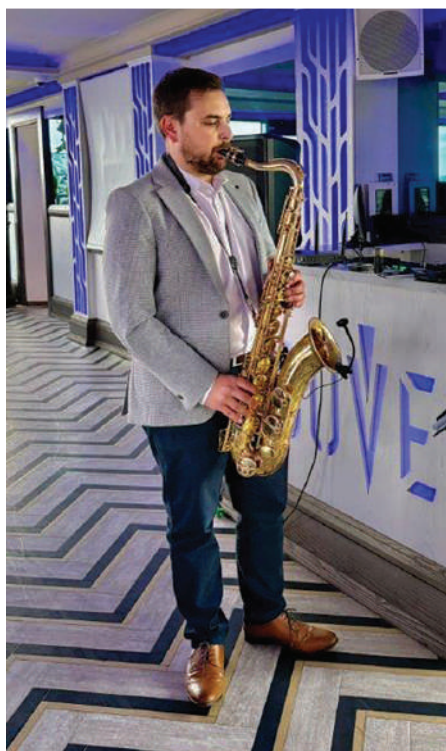
The Executive Group Summer Barbecue – A rooftop celebration of North East business

Members and guests of The Executive Group – which is proudly part of networking and office services organisation Durham Business Group – came together for their Summer Barbecue at the stunning ABOVE rooftop bar and restaurant, a flagship venue of The Gainford Group.

In true Executive Group style, the event provided a relaxed, non-sales environment where senior directors and decision-makers could come together to connect and unwind.

The day kicked off with a lively game of bingo, hosted by The Vermont Hotel's very own Lukas Common, setting the tone for a vibrant afternoon. This was followed by a delicious alfresco networking lunch, served against the panoramic backdrop of Newcastle's iconic skyline. Guests enjoyed the smooth sounds of live saxophonist Jamie Toms, adding a perfect touch of summer sophistication.

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Culture Club

Anna Brand

Anna runs a thriving consultancy, Anna Brand Creative, and hosts a fast-rising podcast, *B. with Anna Brand*.

Here Anna tells us about her taste in music, art and culture.

Who is your favourite author and why?

I love books that make you stop and think, question life, feel something emotional or learn something new. And business books, I still read a lot of those. Two authors who have always stuck with me though are Hermann Hesse and Paulo Coelho, but I still had to google the spellings, obviously!

What would be your three Desert Island Discs?

I hate this question, it's making me feel stressed having to narrow it down to three, but if choosing albums one would have to be Bowie's *Ziggy Stardust* because he's my star man and inspiration, then Amy Winehouse *Back to Black* for some funky tunes, then for a chill album Massive Attack, *Protection*.

Who is your favourite film star and why?

Jack Nicholson, he blows my mind with every performance. The gestures, his eyes, the way he becomes each character he plays with all of his soul.

What are your top three films?

Arthur 2 on the rocks. This movie is so underrated, I absolutely adore Dudley Moore in this film. I've seen it dozens of times, and each time I laugh and cry and fall in love with his character again.

Withnail and I. Poetic, clever, funny, emotional, a story about friendship and also loneliness. Again, you fall in love with the characters.

Planes Trains and Automobiles. Pure genius. Steve Martin and John Candy, together, need I say more?



Anna Brand

Which poem left a lasting impression on you?

The Man Who Thinks He Can Walter D. Wintle. I cried the first time I read it, genuinely. Look it up.

What box sets have you enjoyed?

I was fully addicted to *Braking Bad*, then very deflated by the ending. *House* though, that's a brilliant series, so clever and you're hooked every single episode.

Who is your favourite artist or performer?

David Bowie, on stage and in film too. I loved how he wasn't afraid to be him, try new things, always stepping out of his comfort zone. I regularly quote him saying "Always go a little further into the water than you feel you're capable of being in. Go a little bit out of your depth. And when you don't feel that your feet are quite touching the bottom, you're just about in the right place to do something exciting."

What is your favourite venue?

Hyde Park, even though it's outdoors, as I've just got back from seeing Stevie Wonder there for the third time.

Which musical instrument do you particularly enjoy?

Piano, every time. Have always loved piano. I still need to get back to learning it!

From the world of Arts and Culture who would be your ideal dinner party guests?

Bowie would be there and Freddie Mercury, I'd take up smoking again for a night of booze and banter with that guy. I'd like to chat with Kurt Cobain too, and Lady Gaga, as I like how she openly discusses her struggles. Wow what a dinner party that would be!

***B. with Anna Brand* is available on YouTube, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and all major podcast platforms.**

Zoe's Place Baby Hospice Middlesbrough: Supporting children and their families to live life to its fullest

Zoe's Place was founded in 1995 by Professor Jack Scarisbrick, when he recognised a gap for baby hospices in the UK. Zoe's place offers specialist care to babies from birth up to the age of 6 years old. We offer a nurturing and caring environment tailored to meet the unique needs of babies and their families.

We believe every child deserves a space where they can receive expert care and every family deserves the support to navigate the challenges they face. From early pregnancy complications to respite care for siblings, Zoe's Place supports not just the baby, but also parents, grandparents, siblings and the wider family. We aim to be there at the most critical times, offering sensory play, animal therapy, physiotherapy, relaxation and emotional support, making every moment count.

Zoe's Place provides respite care for babies and children with complex needs, allowing parents to take a break for anything ranging from an important self-care day, spending time with siblings or catching up on some well needed rest. And although that walk down our drive, to the hospice feels daunting, every baby and family member is met with reassurance, warmth and care.

Our essential work does come with a cost. While Zoe's Place receives 30% of the necessary funding from the NHS and local government grants, we depend on the generosity of businesses, community groups, and individuals to provide the remaining 70% through voluntary donations.

We need your help

Zoe's Place Middlesbrough is calling on your support! We'd love to encourage businesses, community groups, and individuals



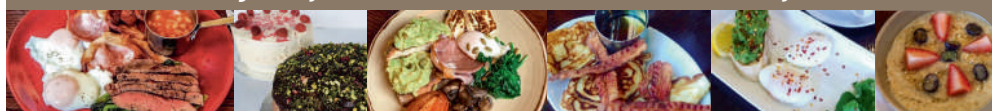
to fundraise for us in any way you can. Whether it's taking on a corporate challenge at work, hosting a local bake sale, or achieving a personal milestone, we invite you to do it in aid of Zoe's Place. Your efforts will directly benefit the hospice, ensuring that we can continue our vital work and make a real difference to the families who rely on us.

Thank you for your support!

Scan the QR code to access our fundraising page or visit www.zoes-place.org.uk to find out more!



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



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Global demand results in Teesside tech firm's valuation doubling

GLOBAL demand for a Teesside tech firm's innovative service has put the company on course to double its valuation by the end of the decade.

Despite only launching in 2024, The Resolved Group has grown rapidly - largely due to the company's cost-saving approach that has already saved clients millions.

While The Resolved Group provides digital support and maintenance, its niche is that it repairs existing platforms - like apps, websites or e-commerce sites - even if the company didn't build it themselves.

"Other companies often run a mile when asked to fix another developer's system, but if it can be fixed, then we will do that instead of pushing clients towards rebuilds that cost the earth and are often completely needless," said founder and Managing Director, Chris Carroll.

Word-of-mouth and glowing testimonials have fuelled much of that growth, although Chris has also quickly turned the business into a 24/7 operation by establishing an office in India.

"Hartlepool is our home, but the Indian site has been our passport to international trade," added Chris, who has over 25 years' experience within the sector.

"While much of our business is in Britain, it has allowed us to offer round-the-clock services for clients in Asia, Europe, the Middle East and the USA, and the results we've delivered our helping us to consistently expand our global footprint."



That has helped drive phenomenal growth in what is still a young business.

Turnover is forecast to be up 500 per cent this year, while the team has been boosted by 20 key new hires - including head office staff at the firm's base inside Hartlepool's Innovation Centre.

However, system maintenance and repairs are just one aspect of The Resolved Group, which is focussed on sustainable growth whilst also giving back to the local community.

One way it achieves this is through Resolve Academy, which aims to unlock career opportunities in tech for people who may not have otherwise had access - or aspirations - within the sector.

Additionally, the company also runs Resolve Changing Lives, the charitable arm of the business which helps provide digital technology for social good - improving systems for causes in areas like mental health, dyslexia, and dementia - while the company also donates one free mobile app to a charity each year.



CyberNorth Powers Sector Growth with New Appointment

North East Cyber Cluster CyberNorth is celebrating a key moment of further staff expansion in their mission to supercharge the North East cyber security community with the appointment of Helen Matthews as Delivery Manager - Skills.

The further expansion forms part of their roadmap for growth and comes as Danielle Phillips officially steps into the role of CEO following a transition period ahead of the recent retirement of Phil Jackman. The staff expansion follows recent partnership development news which has seen CyberNorth cement partnerships with key industry players including Accenture, Hicomply, Gateshead College and a monumental partnership with FTSE 100 company, Sage, the leader in accounting, financial, HR and payroll technology for small and mid-sized businesses (SMBs) to spearhead and leverage the capabilities of the North East cyber security community.

The growth and investment in CyberNorth are very timely with news that the UK's growing cyber security sector is set to be boosted by millions in new investment and a new Cyber Growth Action Plan, as part of the government's Plan for Change, in a bid to grow the UK's £13.2 billion cyber sector.

Helen takes on the tenure following 18 months at UKC3, the UK Cyber Cluster Collaboration (UKC3) which exists to support the Cyber Clusters in their mission to drive economic growth in the cyber security sector. In her role at UKC3 she played a key role in shaping the operations, and in this newly established role at CyberNorth, Helen will be engaging and working closely with the North East education sector to ensure our cyber workforce of today and tomorrow are skilled and equipped for success.

As a key contributor to the UK's overall cyber strategy through their partnership with UKC3 and Department for Science, Innovation and Growth, CyberNorth spearheads the growth of a thriving cyber security community in the North East by promoting all things cyber, to ensure the region gets noticed internationally and nationally as a centre for excellence for the cyber security sector.



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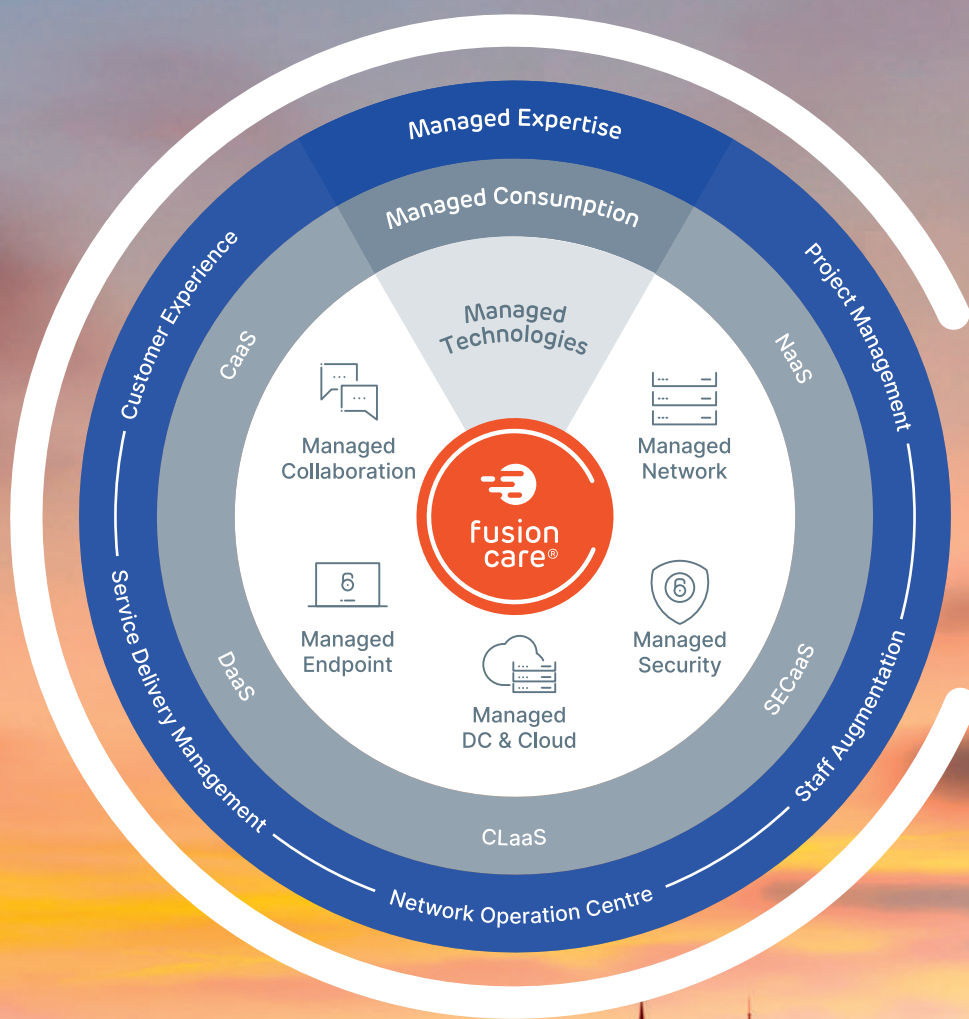
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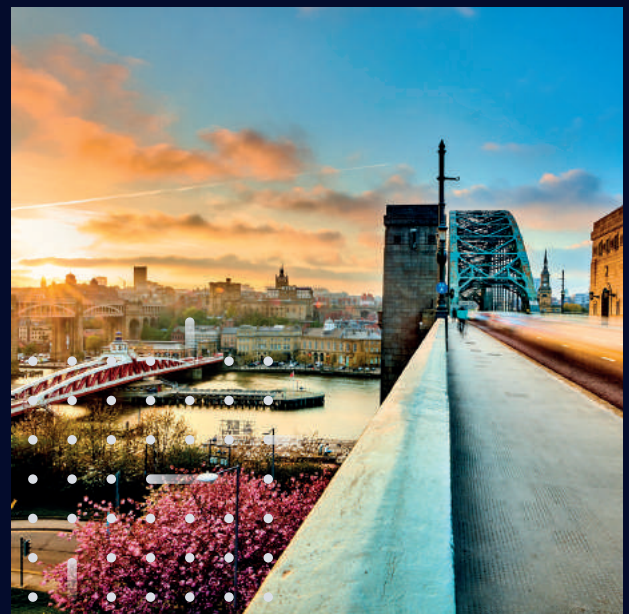
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Supporting people into employment

Gateshead-based office technology company, SOS Group, is continuing to support men seeking employment by entering into a new partnership with Community Interest Company, Society Matters.

Society Matters has now taken over the reins of Suitability, which for seven years has been providing help for men who find the cost of interview attire a barrier to employment opportunities.

Suitability removes that barrier by using donated suitable clothing to provide the necessary outfit at no cost and SOS Group is providing a new donation station at its Team Valley headquarters to help Society Matters continue the greatly-valued service.

Provision of the donation station is an extension of the long-term support SOS Group has previously given to Suitability and the copy, print, scan specialists have also commissioned a mobile donation station, which they will use to encourage wider business community support at relevant events.

Andrew Skelton, a Director at SOS Group, says: "We've been very proud to support the work of Suitability for many years and we



Andrew Skelton (SOS Group Director) and Helen Boyd (Smart Works Newcastle Centre Manager)



Stephanie Patterson (SOS Group) with Phillip Capewell (Director of Partnerships Society Matters)

know the positive difference it makes the lives of men seeking employment.

"Finding a job is obviously important from a financial point of view but it also makes an enormous difference to mental health and family relationships, and Suitability's service directly addresses a barrier some men face before they even reach the interview stage.

"Looking good is part of feeling confident and presenting the best possible 'face' to a potential employer. We're happy to help and very pleased the project is continuing through Society Matters."

Phillip Capewell, Director of Partnerships at Society Matters, says: "We're very grateful to SOS Group, who are providing us with our first clothing donation station in Gateshead and also supporting our work with much-needed warehouse space.

"Local men requiring assistance are referred to us for potential support and demand for our help is huge. Meeting that demand is a challenge and we're currently seeking sponsorship, volunteers and additional support from the North East business community.

"That support can be as simple as rifling through wardrobes to donate clothes that are no longer worn and we're not only looking for suits and ties.

"Men seeking employment within manufacturing or technical roles often require more casual, but still interview appropriate, clothing like jeans, chinos, polo shirts and smart jumpers.

"Giving any of these items of clothing a second life could make an enormous difference for the long-term future for men currently seeking employment in our region."

SOS Group also supports the work of Smart Works Newcastle, an employment charity helping local women who need assistance getting into work.

The charity provides women with quality clothing and one-to-one interview coaching.

Established in 2002, SOS Group facilitates all business and event requirements, including communications and IT, and specialises in providing copy, print, scan solutions for clients from local start-ups to multi nationals.

Awarded both ISO 9001 and ISO 27001, it has a centralised office on the Team Valley and six regional hubs in London, Scotland, the North West, Midlands, South Yorkshire, South West and North East.

For more information, please visit:
www.sosgroup-ltd.co.uk

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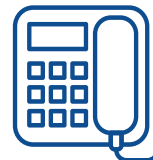
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CMYK | Business Technology and AEPartners forge international IT support partnership

In a move that reflects the increasingly globalised nature of business and technology, AEPartners has announced a strategic IT support partnership with CMYK | Business Technology.

This collaboration is designed to provide seamless, round-the-clock technical support to AEPartners' staff across both the United Kingdom and the United States.

AEPartners is a specialist recruitment consultancy serving the energy, infrastructure, engineering, construction, and oil & gas industries. The company provides both temporary and permanent staffing solutions, offering a highly personalised, expert-led service tailored to the unique needs of each client.

Its services are designed to support organisations requiring dependable, high-quality recruitment across a variety of operating models. From flexible workforce solutions to specialist executive search, AEPartners' experienced teams are well equipped to meet the diverse needs of both clients and candidates.

Since its founding in 2018, AEPartners has expanded significantly, now operating across the UK and US, with an annual group turnover exceeding £80 million.

Ryan Alder, president at AEPartners commented on the partnership; "We've worked with CMYK on and off over the years but recently made the decision to hand over all our IT and infrastructure to them and honestly, we haven't looked back since."

"From the start, they've been brilliant to work with. Their customer service is on another level compared to what we've experienced before. Whenever we've had an issue, they've had someone dialled in immediately, or on-site within a couple of hours, no fuss, no delays — just straight to the point and sorted" added Ryan.

As the company continues to grow globally, maintaining a robust and scalable IT infrastructure has become a strategic



L-R: Ryan Alder with Craig Pratt

priority for AEPartners. To support this expansion, they partnered with trusted and leading managed IT services provider CMYK. This collaboration ensures consistent, high-quality IT support for their teams across both sides of the Atlantic, enabling AEPartners to remain focused on delivering exceptional recruitment services.

CMYK, a market leader in IT services and workplace technology with nearly 30 years of experience delivering tailored solutions to their clients. With deep expertise in all facets of IT services, cloud infrastructure, cybersecurity, and remote workforce enablement, CMYK is recognised for its ability to support modern, agile business environments.

AEPartners selected CMYK based on their proactive service model, 24/7 helpdesk, and round-the-clock security operations centre - all critical in delivering consistent, secure, and scalable IT support. This international partnership ensures AE Partners' workforce across the UK and US remains fully supported, connected, and protected.

Delighted to share the news is CMYK's regional director Craig Pratt; "Working with AEPartners is a great opportunity to demonstrate the scalability of our international support model. We're proud to apart of AEPartners next phase of growth, enabling a seamless support model to facilitate their teams continue to expansion. This partnership reflects our capability to scale IT support across international operations whilst continuing to maintain our personal, responsive service that we're known for."

Craig continued; "We're not just providing BAU support we're embedding ourselves in AEPartners operations, ensuring that IT is an enabler of productivity and collaboration, not a barrier. This marks

another fantastic win for CMYK, our service delivery and integration teams and further highlights our capabilities as a service provider."

The partnership is expected to play a key role in AEPartners' continued expansion, underpinning its digital operations and supporting its commitment to exceptional client and candidate services worldwide.

Ryan concluded; "Craig, in particular, has been fantastic. He's super transparent, easy to talk to, and clearly knows his stuff. It's made the whole onboarding process smooth and stress free."

"What we really like about CMYK, though, is that they're not just our IT partner. They're really well connected in the business community, and they've actually helped us grow our own network too. That kind of support is rare, and it's made a big difference for us."

This partnership emerges amid an increasingly complex and dynamic cybersecurity landscape that is reshaping how global businesses operate. CMYK brings enterprise levels of cyber protection and knowledge to the table, ensuring robust cybersecurity posture. AEPartners and CMYK view this collaboration not merely as a support arrangement, but as a strategic alignment and one that ensures AEPartners' IT infrastructure evolves in tandem with its international growth and operational needs.

Looking ahead, with evolving cyber threats and tightening data protection standards in both the UK and US, the partnership is designed to provide AEPartners with the resilience, adaptability, and oversight needed to thrive in a rapidly changing digital environment.

www.cmyk-digital.co.uk



Chris Carroll

Rebuilding apps that educate and engage

Resolved Group is changing the narrative on screen time for children.

There's recently been a lot of noise about screen time. Rightfully so.

From growing mental health concerns to Australia's headline-grabbing move to ban under-16s from social media, we are waking to the dangers of unrestricted digital access for children.

As a dad myself, I'm with the majority who feel the need for better protection on platforms like TikTok and Instagram.

Yet while conversations rage about what children shouldn't do online, there's far less focus on what they could do.

That's where we come in.

At Resolved Group, we know a screen is more than just a device to keep the kids awake on long journeys.

Technology isn't just a distraction - used properly, it is a powerful developmental tool that can help grow a child's brain and boost development.

That doesn't mean unlimited screen time.

Limits are vital. Too much of anything can make you sick.

However, the idea that any screen time is bad is outdated.

When designed properly, tech can be a

force for good and help unlock your child's potential.

The evidence speaks for itself.

Children using high-quality educational apps consistently see measurable gains in core skills, including literacy and numeracy.

University College London research revealed 90% of the leading maths apps benefited their young users' learning.

Additionally, 96% of teachers believe tech boosts classroom participation and learning while most teachers feel tech boosts the 'fun factor'.

In fact, some schools report test score improvements of over 20% where interactive apps are integrated into learning.

That's game-changing.

In areas with limited access to traditional schooling, AI-powered mobile learning apps are bridging the gap, with children learning maths on phones rather than textbooks.

When it comes to engagement, educational apps have shown they can hold attention far better than any worksheet ever could.

A 2022 study by Medium found e-learning improved knowledge retention by 60%.

We're seeing smart use of gamification, reward systems, and personalised learning pathways. Kids aren't just tapping screens — they are becoming more skilful and confident whilst enjoying the process.

It is easy to panic and paint all screen time as bad. But it mustn't be lumped into one category.

There's a gigantic difference between endless doom scrolling and 30 minutes of focused spelling challenges.

Ultimately, the screen isn't the problem; it is what comes out of it.

Once it was feared that TV would rot a generation of young minds - but how many learned to count from Sesame Street?

Of course, balance is essential.

Apps can't replace real-life play or social interaction.

But equally, we shouldn't throw the tablet out with the bathwater.

The conversation needs to evolve - and at The Resolved Group, we are trying to move it on by creating apps that do more than merely teach.

They engage, adapt, and grow with the child.

From early years to pre-teens, we've seen how powerful the right digital tools can be when made with care, tested properly, and built to support real outcomes.

And a big part of our business is about making existing apps sing - even if we didn't build them.

Just ask Christopher Withers, the entrepreneur behind Mi-Box-Live, an award-winning maths game. A different developer created an app for his game that simply wasn't fit for purpose.

We fixed that - at a fraction of the cost of a rebuild - and now it is thriving.

Our work is grounded in purpose. We don't just see apps as products — we see them as platforms for change.

Especially now, when the world is scrutinising how kids use tech, we believe it's more vital than ever to build things that earn their screen time.

resolvedgroup.co.uk

If you use a computer, you need Howell Technology Group

Is that computer secure? Is your personal and business data safe? Everyone is vulnerable.

Thankfully, help is close to home. Howell Technology Group (HTG), is a specialist cybersecurity firm based in Hebburn, South Tyneside, helping local businesses stay secure through ethical, expert-led Microsoft solutions.

Company founder and director Kevin Howell told us... "Our purpose is clear: to protect and empower small and medium businesses by strengthening security at every touchpoint, through innovative Microsoft 365 solutions, knowledge sharing, and continuous improvement.

"This isn't just about software. It's about people, relationships, and long-term trust. Every conversation, every implementation, every training session is an opportunity to leave our customers more secure and more resilient. We're not here to upsell, we're here to enable. As a Microsoft Advanced Specialist and a Partner of the Year Finalist for Secure Productivity, HTG brings both global credibility and deep local knowledge to every engagement."

One of their flagship products is HTG Overwatch – a cybersecurity service that protects businesses from attacks and outages at an affordable price. Nobody wants to be the next high-profile breach like Marks & Spencer, but if the worst does happen, HTG can recover your business in under 15 minutes...and that's for less than the cost of a coffee per user per day.

"Behind every business is someone who's grafted hard to build it. Our mission is to make sure that hard work isn't undone by cyber threats," adds Kevin. "The more businesses we protect with Overwatch, the more jobs we can create here, and the more we can invest in the next generation of local talent."

HTG's ethical approach extends beyond cybersecurity. They actively invest in apprenticeships, offer work experience, and champion diversity in tech – all while working closely with local schools and colleges. One of the many reasons they're a great partner is their commitment to developing future talent. They

employ apprentices and train them to become fully skilled professionals in IT and software, equipping them for long-term success. Kevin works closely with local colleges and is always keen to share his knowledge with the next generation. HTG also provides work experience opportunities and is a strong advocate for getting more women into tech. Beyond business, they proudly sponsor Hebburn Town FC and support local charities – showing their deep commitment to the community they're rooted in.

HTG has an ambitious target to attract 2,250 users (around 30 new customers) onto its Overwatch service over the next 12 months. That's up to 30 new customers, each supported with a clear path to secure productivity, and priced for the cost of a cup of coffee per user per day

"This isn't just about numbers. It's investing in the North East's long-term digital resilience. We want to be more than a service provider... we want to be a pillar of secure growth in our region. We're a local firm, founded in the North East and still based in the North East, creating tech jobs and developing a centre of excellence for cloud security. We already partner with local secondary schools to offer careers insight and we're building a diverse team committed to continuous learning and innovation."

Kevin's a local guy with North East values and, as HTG's pile of awards testifies, he and his firm are experts at what they do.

HTG is offering a cracking deal. Readers can contact HTG and if they mention NorthernInsight25 they'll be eligible for a free non-obligation Cybersecurity Review - a perfect starting point to futureproof your IT.

If you'd like more information, go to www.htg.co.uk, alternatively call... 0330 460 9828 or email info@htg.co.uk



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*...This isn't just
about software.
It's about
people...*

Kevin Howell

“

*...We have a vast
amount of talent
in this region...*

Laura Sharpe

Connect events - Connecting you – Connecting businesses

Laura Sharpe brings people and businesses together.

There are certain people in life...and in business...who are natural organisers. They have a knack of having an idea and bringing it to fruition, even though it requires hours of organising and getting people and equipment into the right place at the right time.

Laura Sharpe is one of those people...and she's having terrific success with her company, Connect Events.

But it didn't start this way.

"I originally ran a tech and creative recruitment agency with my mother Julie called Sharpe Recruitment," said Laura. "In February she retired, and I must admit that I was already thinking about a change in my career direction. Organising and staging events was something I'd always done. Clients who we'd worked for, frequently wanted some sort of recruitment event to attract potential employees and promote their company."

"Then in 2021 I had my daughter. She has special needs and I had to reassess what I was going to do for a career. I eventually got involved with helping local Downs Syndrome charities with events...and one thing has led to another."

Laura's regularly attended the Alan Shearer Centre with her daughter and is now on the point of becoming a trustee of St.Cuthbert's Care who run the centre.

It's worth pointing out that because Laura is now so heavily involved with charity work and organising events, if anyone is looking for a Non-Exec Director position which relates to either of those fields, it's worth getting in touch with her. She'd be an asset to any organisation or business.

Connect Events was set-up earlier this year and it's gone from strength to strength. The company's latest event is Tech Connect 2025: The Future of AI...and it's taking place at The Catalyst, Newcastle, on September 30th.

It's promising to be an incredible day of insights with inspirational speakers and expert panelists exploring key topics including -

- **AI Architectures** – What's shaping the future of AI?
- **AI Ethics** – The challenges and responsibilities ahead.
- **AI Applications** – How AI is transforming industries today.

"We have a vast amount of talent in this region but we don't have a lot of specialised tech events where individuals and businesses can talk about latest trends. Of course, AI is a hot topic at the moment. Businesses are very wary of something that's new...it's the fear of the unknown...but when technology is used correctly it can

be a massive boost for anyone. Tech Connect 2025 will give people a platform to listen, educate and be inspired. You can guarantee that a lot of myths about AI will be discussed, and attendees will hear all about the pros and cons of AI."

There are seven speakers...all experts in their field. The closing keynote speaker is Dr. Suzie Imber who won the BBC2 Programme Astronauts – Do You Have What It Takes. She lectures in Astro Physics and will be talking about space exploration and machine learning ...how computers are learning from data to make predictions or decisions without being explicitly programmed.

And the good news is that Tech Connect will return next year. In the meantime, it's worth putting March 24th 2026 into your diary for Laura's next event...Creative Connect...where one of the main speakers will be MD of Layers Studio, James Hanson, who'll be talking about branding. There's also going to be an IT Connect event later in 2026.

If you'd like more information and how to buy tickets for Tech Connect 2025: The Future of AI, the best idea is to go onto the Connect Events website...

www.weareconnectevents.com

It promises to be a fascinating day.



Pictures by Debbie Todd



James Drake

Eclipse Wholesale launches 'Channel Corner with James Drake'

Eclipse Wholesale is thrilled to announce the launch of 'Channel Corner with James Drake', an exciting new video format designed to provide our partners, and the wider telecoms industry, with quick, real-time advice, insights and expertise straight from our Managing Director and the wider Eclipse team.

This new monthly series of short-form videos is aimed at delivering valuable, actionable content in a way that's easy to access and digest. Channel Corner is our way of sharing Eclipse Wholesale's experience and industry knowledge, tackling the topics that matter most to the channel. By embracing video, we can bring you quick, insightful conversations on the topics that matter most to our partners and the wider channel.

Each month, our team will deliver short, engaging videos covering key issues, pressing queries and hot talking points across the telecoms channel. From industry changes and growth strategies to operational tips and partner-focused discussions, Channel Corner aims to become a valuable platform for sharing

knowledge and sparking conversation. Our goal is to provide content that helps our partners stay informed and ready to tackle our ever-changing industry.

The timing of our first Channel Corner video couldn't be more fitting, as Eclipse Wholesale celebrates an incredible milestone, our 21st anniversary. For more than two decades, we have been committed to delivering the very best solutions with the highest levels of care and support to our channel partners. So, what's the secret to still delivering results after two decades in business?

To explore this question, our very first video instalment features none other than our Managing Director, James Drake. Having been at the forefront of Eclipse

Wholesale's journey since day one, James shares his insights into what has driven our success over the past two decades. From building strong vendor relationships to adopting a channel-first approach and creating a dedicated team, James discusses the practices that have been instrumental in positioning Eclipse Wholesale as a trusted leader in wholesale telecoms.

The launch of Channel Corner provides the opportunity to open a two-way conversation across the channel. We want to create a platform for real, actionable discussions about the issues that matter most to our partners.

Looking ahead, we'll be covering a wide range of topics, from strengthening partner-vendor relationships to practical advice for new resellers entering the industry. Whether you're an established partner or just starting out in the channel, Channel Corner will offer insights you can put into action.

The first episode of Channel Corner with Eclipse Wholesale is now live and we can't wait for you to watch it. Join us as James Drake reflects on two decades of success and shares the strategies that have kept Eclipse Wholesale at the forefront of the industry.

Stay tuned...

Channel Corner with James Drake

0344 243 5555

partner@eclipsenet.co.uk

Eclipse Wholesale



watch here



Eclipse Wholesale celebrates internal promotions



Matthew Begg



Sherri Lockey

At Eclipse Wholesale, our people are at the heart of everything we do. We believe in investing in our team and recognising long-standing contributions and hard work that drive our business forward.

This month, we're pleased to announce two well-deserved internal promotions. Matthew Begg has been promoted to Sales Director and Sherri Lockey has been promoted to Head of Customer Service.

**Matthew Begg:
Promoted to Sales Director**

Matthew joined Eclipse Wholesale in 2020 and has since played a key role in transforming our sales function into a consistently successful and highly competitive part of the business. Over the past five years, he has recruited and managed additional sales resources to support our expanding reseller base,

ensuring that our partners continue to receive the high level of care and attention they deserve.

Working closely with the leadership team, Matthew has been instrumental in refining our sales strategy, ensuring it remains sharp, relevant and aligned with our wider business goals. His commitment to driving Eclipse Wholesale forward has made a significant impact on our growth trajectory and our ability to deliver for our partners.

Commenting on the promotion, Managing Director James Drake said, "Matthew has demonstrated outstanding leadership and vision during his time at Eclipse Wholesale. His ability to build and lead a strong sales team, combined with his deep understanding of the channel, has been vital in our success. This promotion is a well-deserved recognition of his hard work and commitment to our continued growth."

**Sherri Lockey:
Promoted to Head of Customer Service**

Sherri Lockey is one of Eclipse Wholesale's longest-standing team members, celebrating her 11th anniversary with us this August. Throughout her time with us, Sherri has been a driving force in our Customer Service team, always going above

and beyond to ensure that our partners receive exceptional support.

While her primary focus has been Customer Service, Sherri has collaborated across a wide variety of teams and resources, demonstrating a unique ability to adapt and keep Eclipse Wholesale's best interests at heart. Her "cando, willdo" attitude has made her an invaluable member of the team, and her promotion reflects her exceptional commitment and contribution to the business.

Managing Director James Drake added, "Sherri has been an integral part of Eclipse Wholesale for over a decade, and her dedication to customer service has been unmatched. I cannot commend her enough for her commitment to Eclipse as a whole. I'm especially pleased to announce this promotion at a time when the team she will be leading is performing at such a high standard."

These promotions reflect Eclipse Wholesale's continued commitment to recognising and rewarding the incredible talent within our team. By investing in our people and providing opportunities for growth, we ensure that our business and our partners continue to grow.

Check out our latest roles

0344 243 5555
partner@eclipsenet.co.uk
Eclipse Wholesale



find out more



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*...We've been
blown away by
the interest in the
event so far ...*

Steve Moreland

Bringing the cloud community together to explore the future of cloud computing

This October the AWS North Community Conference will bring together professionals from across the cloud computing community, right here in the North East.

AWS North Community Conference

Taking place at the Catalyst in Newcastle, the event will see everyone from global technology leaders, developers and innovators to graduates with an interest in AWS, benefit from a jam-packed schedule dedicated to creating opportunities for learning, sharing experiences, and offering peer-driven insight into cloud transformation.

Featuring international, national and regional speakers the full day event will see presenters and delegates explore how AWS is transforming the way organisations build, innovate and scale software solutions.

Here, Steve Moreland, Chief Technology Officer at Leighton – who are powering the event – tells us what attendees can expect to see, what he's looking forward to most and what his hopes are for future years.

Offering global opportunities in our own back yard

Traditionally those based in the region have had to travel to Manchester or London for opportunities like this so this event really is a first for the North East. Throughout the day we will have some exceptional speakers joining us from across the globe to talk about what they've achieved in their careers and their various approaches to building on AWS.

This is a really good opportunity for the regional AWS community and will give them the chance to hear from some really key players from across the UK and beyond. It's also a chance for us to showcase some of the outstanding work going on in the North East to an international audience.

Speakers in focus: a snapshot of what to expect

There has been a huge level of interest from potential speakers, so much so that we've added a fourth track. Personally, I am incredibly excited to hear from Ricardo Cino from Post NL about his work on the parcel locker system across the Netherlands. An AWS Community Builder and experienced developer when it comes to building applications at scale, Ricardo promises to be a hugely engaging presenter with an exciting story to tell.

Equally we have two very impressive keynotes in AWS Hero, Sheen Brisals, who has been responsible for a huge amount of innovation within lego.com and Luca Mezzalana, an experienced solutions architect at AWS and author of monthly newsletter, Dear Architects, who has a passion for micro frontend architecture. Having learnt a lot from both of them over the years, I'm really looking forward to having them in Newcastle.

We will also see lightning talks from regional speakers and AWS Community Builders, Rob Bulmer and Jake Bazin which I'm really excited about. As a community-led event, it was really important to us to carve out time in the agenda for local AWS talent to share their experiences.

We've also got Chris Dobson and David Boyne delivering talks on 'Streamlining an Event-Driven Architecture: A Real World Transformation' and 'The Three Guardrails to Manage Complexity with Event-Driven Architectures'. I have a real passion for event-driven architecture so I'm also looking forward to both of those.

Finally, AWS Hero and host of tech blog and podcast 'Ready, Set, Cloud!', Allen Helton will be joining us all the way from Texas. Allen has done so much in the AWS space and is dedicated to building for impact, so it'll be great to hear more from him.

In addition to a very exciting line up we also have some great sponsors including AWS who we're delighted to have on board, and North East-headquartered AWS specialist, Leighton. We also have support from Dynamo North East, which is a great membership organisation dedicated to supporting the North East's thriving tech ecosystem and the AWS North East User Group.

Looking forward – what's next?

Ultimately, we wanted to create an event in the North East that would allow attendees to make connections across the worldwide AWS community without having to leave the region. We wanted to promote examples of best practice and provide a platform for continued learning and development. We also want to highlight the career opportunities in AWS, stimulate and ignite new ideas and really change the way people are doing things in the industry for the better.

We've been blown away by the interest in the event so far so we're expecting it to be a huge success, we want this to become an annual event that gets bigger and better each year. Hopefully as we grow and develop the shape and size of AWS North Community Conference we can see more lightning talks from local practitioners, offer workshops that give attendees hands on programming opportunities with these experts and ultimately provide more opportunities for people in our region and beyond.

For more information about AWS North Community Conference, for sponsorship opportunities or to purchase tickets please visit: www.northcommunityconf.com

Discounted tickets are available for Dynamo North East members.

AWS North Community Conference

16 October 2025

The Catalyst Newcastle upon Tyne

Aspire celebrates record-breaking year surpassing £50m revenue milestone two years early

EBITDA rose by a third and revenue by more than a quarter, driven by investment in new technology and exceptional customer service.

Founded in 2006, Gateshead-based Aspire Technology Solutions is one of the UK's leading providers of managed IT, cyber security, and modern workplace solutions. In May 2025, it received a Royal Warrant from King Charles III in recognition of its services to the Royal Household.

In the financial year ending February 2025, Aspire's adjusted EBITDA rose by 33% to £8.8m (FY24: £6.6m) and revenue rose by 28% to £50.9m (FY24: £39.6m), with 83% of total revenue generated through long-term service relationships. Performance was underpinned by £1.7m in technology investment, including private cloud and network enhancements, alongside new AI-powered tools that improved service speed and resolution.

This achievement sees the company surpass its £50 million revenue target for 2027 two years ahead of schedule, continuing a long-standing pattern of outperforming bold growth goals. Over the last 10 years, revenue has grown by almost 600% from £8m in 2015.

With the 2027 goal now exceeded, the company has set its sights on a new milestone: over £100 million turnover by 2030, supported by a strategic growth plan.

Aspire has added 250 customers over the past year, supported by a team of more than 300 experts. This growth reflects their continued investment in scalable technology, service excellence and targeted regional expansion. Customer satisfaction remained exceptionally high, with the business achieving a Net Promoter Score (NPS) of 87.2, well ahead of industry benchmarks.

During the year, Aspire expanded its regional presence, most notably through the acquisition of CloudCoco Limited in October 2024, strengthening its position in Leeds and the wider Yorkshire area. This followed the earlier acquisition of Glasgow-based Cloud Cover IT in December 2023. Since then, Aspire has opened a new city-centre office in Glasgow and expanded its local team to meet increasing customer needs. Plans are also

underway to establish a new, expanded office in Leeds and further grow the company's presence across the region.

Aspire's growth continues to be supported by private equity firm LDC, part of Lloyds Banking Group, who invested in March 2022 for a significant minority stake which valued the business at £85 million. This backing has enabled long-term investment in people, infrastructure and innovation, supporting increased demand for secure, scalable IT services, particularly in managed services and cyber security.

Chris Fraser, CEO of Aspire, commented:

"Our strategy continues to focus on delivering measurable value for our customers. From staying at the forefront of service innovation to expanding our regional presence, every decision this year has built on our strengths, making us even faster, more responsive, and easier for customers to work with. We're proud of the growth we've achieved, but even more so of the trust our customers continue to place in us."

Alongside infrastructure investment, Aspire continued to advance its in-house R&D efforts, focusing on cloud platform development, secure communications and billing tools based on customer feedback and market demand.

Tom Howard, CFO of Aspire, added: "We've continued to invest where it has the greatest impact for customers, focusing on the platforms, processes and teams that keep our service running smoothly as we grow. Innovation has played a key role, helping us work more efficiently and maintain consistently high standards at scale. This approach is central to our mission to deliver technology like no other."

With momentum building and demand accelerating, Aspire is firmly on course to reach £100 million turnover by 2030.

www.aspirets.com



L-R: Tom Howard, CFO and Chris Fraser, CEO outside Aspire's vibrant Quayside-based HQ



Award-winning marketing agency Bumbl is celebrating 10 years in business.

Founded in 2015 by managing director Greg Miles, Bumbl has grown from a one-person startup into an established firm with a global client base and headquarters on Newcastle's Quayside.

The agency's portfolio includes work for notable names such as Nike, Bandai Namco, Northumbria University, Tommee Tippee, and Newcastle Building Society.

Commenting on the 10-year milestone, Greg said: "Bumbl has come a long way since I launched the company from my parents-in-laws' sofa as a 22 year old with no resources and no connections.

"We've had some public highlights like working with category-defining brands and winning a global award, but the biggest achievement is perseverance. There's no finish line, only possibility, every day. The journey is the real reward."

A significant moment in that journey came in 2023, when Bumbl was awarded 'Best Small Agency' at the Global Social Media Awards, recognising the creativity, innovation, and international impact of its campaigns.

Lois Miles, creative director at Bumbl, added: "We're beyond grateful to all of our clients, team, collaborators, suppliers and everyone who has supported us over the past decade."

Looking ahead, Greg commented: "The pace of change in technology can create a tug-of-war between apprehension and excitement, but my philosophy is to go with the flow rather than resist.

"In marketing, this new era has already unlocked creative possibilities that were only accessible with a big-brand budget a matter of months ago. Our goal is to keep pushing what's possible. We're excited to see where the next ten years take us."



Harbour House launches

Formerly an indoor market and furniture warehouse, Harbour House on Little Bedford Street has undergone a bold and beautifully executed transformation, bringing a new lease of life to the heart of North Shields. The building is now a three-storey creative space and community destination, is now officially open and already pulsing with the energy of some of the North East's most exciting independent businesses.

Founded by Skye-Alexander Ferry with support from Director of Experience and Events Amy-Bose Wilson, Harbour House is the result of a deeply personal, hands-on three-year restoration of what was once North Shields Indoor Market, and later Kasbah Furniture Market. Today, it's home to a curated mix of creative studios, wellness spaces, hospitality offerings, and retail, all designed to foster community and collaboration under one roof.

The couple, who named the space after their daughter, Harbour, started renovations in January 2023 and have poured a seven-figure, self-funded investment into every layer of its development, from structural renovations to interiors, branding and digital infrastructure.

"Harbour House was never just about creating a workspace," said Skye-Alexander Ferry, Founder and Creative Director. "It was about building something that brings people together, creatively and culturally. We wanted to create a space where designers, makers, artists, and independents could create meaningful work, while also connecting socially. We wanted to prove that world-class creative spaces don't need to exist only in big cities, but you can build them right here, in the place you're from."

From Grassroots to Netflix: New North East studio rivals London's post-production scene

Red Stamp Post, a post-production studio founded by filmmakers Connor Langley and Michael Lambert, is throwing open its doors to producers, filmmakers, and agencies across the UK with a bold mission: elevate the standard of film and TV production in the North East, without sacrificing accessibility or authenticity.

Born from a need to fill a widening industry gap and built with support from Innovate UK and South Tyneside Council, Red Stamp Post is a purpose-built facility offering professional grade post services typically reserved for Soho or Shoreditch, at a fraction of the cost.

The team, comprised entirely of local talent, has delivered a fully immersive and technically advanced studio experience that meets the high standards of feature productions while remaining accessible and flexible for independent filmmakers.

"We're committed to telling stories we love from the North East to help create a thriving film production industry here," says Langley.

The founders, both born and raised in the North East, are fiercely proud of their roots. Their vision is about more than technical specs, it's about identity, resilience, and shifting the balance of creative power.

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Claire Maddison Chats Paid Search

Bonded is the digital and media agency that prioritises connection. Join us as we connect with a different member of the team each month to get their take on all things digital media.

CONNECTING WITH

Claire Maddison, Paid Search Manager at Bonded, shares her thoughts on the evolving world of paid media, why connection underpins everything from teamwork to client success, and how visual results and smart data are shaping the future.



Claire Maddison
Paid Search Manager

Q: What brought you to Bonded?

Claire: I'd worked with many of the Bonded team previously, during my time at a network agency. After graduating, I spent several years there, and when I heard Bonded was hiring, it felt like the right time for a change.

The idea of joining an independent agency was appealing, especially one where I already knew and trusted the people. I'd followed Bonded's journey from the start and could see how much exciting work was happening — I knew I wanted to be part of it.

Q: What are some key areas of paid search that people may not expect?

Claire: Search is always evolving. Even as a channel specialist, we're constantly learning and unlearning because of how fast the landscape changes.

In the past there were much more rigid ideas about how accounts should be set up and structured, but with all of the developments in the channel we really have to be ready to test

what works best in each instance for each client to achieve their goals.

Q: Are there any upcoming innovations that you're excited about?

Claire: Definitely. As account structures become simpler, the quality of inputs becomes more important. Creative strategies, the use of client data, and deep business understanding are all playing a bigger role. Search results are becoming more visual too, with platforms encouraging that shift.

AI makes it easier for brands to create assets, and I think we'll see a huge transformation in how visual search becomes. Client data is also being used more strategically now — it's less about traditional activations and more about how we turn insights into impactful strategies.

“Connection is about making the effort to really get to know the people you work with.”

Q: What does connection mean to you?

Claire: To me, connection is about making the effort to really get to know the people you work with. It creates an open, supportive environment where everyone feels empowered.

At Bonded, we prioritise coming together regularly — whether for collaboration or just catching up — and that creates a strong foundation for working well together. From a client perspective, it's about digging deeper to understand their brands on an authentic level.

BONDED
DIGITAL & MEDIA

For more information visit:
www.bondedagency.com





Cool Blue amplifies communications with key strategic hires

Leading brand and communications agency, Cool Blue, has further strengthened its northern team with the strategic appointment of two communications professionals.

Vicky Sanderson brings over 20 years' PR experience to the role of Head of Communications, having worked across a broad range of sectors and industries, developing and overseeing campaigns that drive impactful results. Vicky will play a key role in fostering collaborative working practices and leading the team to help shape effective brand strategies for its clients.

With a background in SEO copywriting and expertise in brand storytelling, Amy McGarahan joins the Cool Blue team to create unique content that effectively delivers across all media channels.

Victoria McCartney, Executive Director at Cool Blue said: "We're delighted to welcome Vicky and Amy to Cool Blue, at a particularly exciting period of growth for the agency. Our new team members bring an injection of fresh expertise and a large dose of enthusiasm, enhancing campaign results across our client portfolio, which includes high profile public sector, regeneration, retail and national consumer brands.

"Over the past 26 years, we're proud to have built a strong industry reputation for our thoughtful and creative approach to brand amplification. We look forward to continuing to deliver exceptional work, as our team continues to grow."



North East leaders make history at PRCA with first all-women leadership team

The Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA) has announced the appointment of Kirsty Leighton, Founder and Group CEO of Milk & Honey PR, as the new Chair of its Management Board, effective following the Association's Annual General Meeting (AGM) in September.

The Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA) is the world's leading professional body for PR, communications and public affairs. It acts as the industry's voice and champion, ensuring government, policy makers and business leaders recognise PR and public affairs' vital social and economic impact.

Leighton, who hails from Northumberland, joins Sarah Waddington CBE, a long-time North East resident, who was appointed as the PRCA's CEO earlier this month. This marks a historic milestone for the global PR body, being the first time in its history that two women will lead the organisation.


Their appointments signal a bold and progressive step forward for the PRCA as it continues its mission to represent and advance the communications profession worldwide.

New partnerships for County Durham's radio station

Durham OnAir has announced two new sponsorship partnerships, one for its new Breakfast Show and a second tie up to promote its hourly weather reports for the county.


The Riverwalk in Durham, the city centre development with a range of shops, restaurants and leisure venues and an unrivalled view of the World Heritage site, is sponsoring the radio station's brand new breakfast show hosted by Sam Lupton. Durham Breakfast, on air Monday to Thursday from 7 to 10am, combines news, entertainment, interviews and updates on events across the county with the best music from the 60s to today. Alan Day, Centre Manager for The Riverwalk, commented: "We are delighted to be sponsoring the new Durham Breakfast with Sam Lupton. Connecting with the local community is incredibly important to us, and we believe this new breakfast show will be a fantastic way to spread the news about what makes Durham and the North East so special."

Durham OnAir has also announced a tie up with YuMe World which has state of the art games and entertainment centres in Durham and Newcastle. The entertainment destination, which has just added YuMe Desserts to its offering, delivering in Durham via Deliveroo, is sponsoring hourly weather reports for the county, as well as the 24 hour weather updates through the radio station app. John Sullivan, Managing Director of YuMe World, said: "We're thrilled to be partnering with Durham OnAir. As a business rooted in the North East, what better way to connect with our audience than by helping everyone plan their day, come rain or shine."



Let's *spice* up your marketing this season.

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Everything you need to know about the latest version of Google Consent Mode

When a user lands on your site, before they've even chosen a consent preference, google analytics sends data, but it does not process this data at this stage.

Let's make this simple, if the user accepts your sites cookie agreement and gives consent, their pageview is then sent, processed, stored, meaning it then shows in reports. If the users denies their consent only anonymous pings are sent, these pings are only used for modelling and therefore do not show in reports.

Google Consent Mode Explained

Put simply, Google's consent mode refers to handling of users tracking preferences when visiting your site and interacting with a cookie banner.

How this works depends on how your cookie banner is implemented. Take a look at your sites cookie banner, does it have a simple accept/reject message, or does it have something more in depth?

The latest version of Consent Mode, Version 2, was released in 2023 with a deadline of March 2024 for sites to comply.

If you are using Google Analytics you will need to be compliant with the rules around consent mode v2. This varies by country, but in places such as the UK and EU require you to have a "denied first" approach, requiring explicit consent to track the users on your site.



Without this, you will find services such as Google Analytics, Google Ads and Floodlight won't work as expected and you will run into issues with remarketing campaigns, meaning your conversion data will be affected.

Why does this exist?

This isn't just a tech tweak, it's part of Google's effort to fall in line with the EU's Digital Markets Act. Although the DMA is EU law, it still applies to UK businesses targeting EU users.

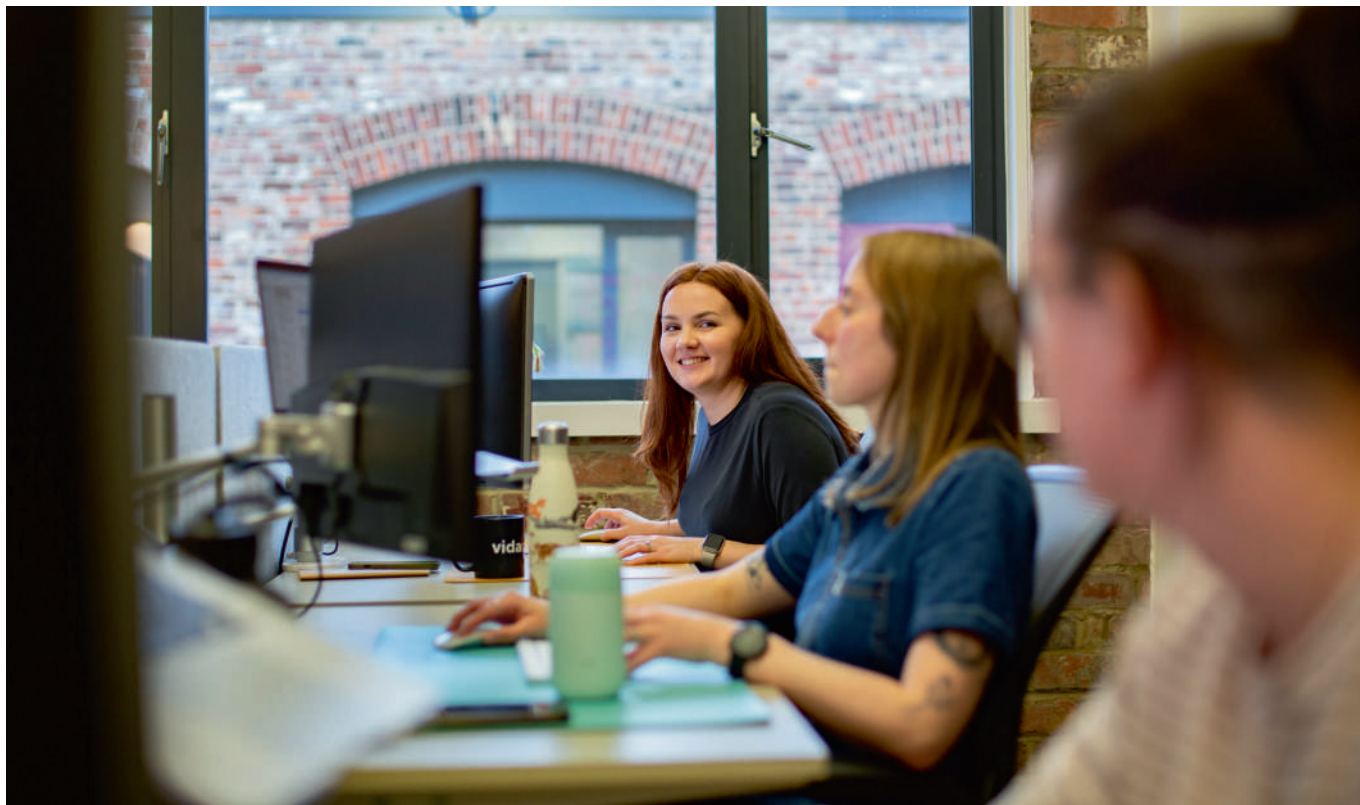
If you're unsure whether your setup's compliant or your just not sure where to start, we can help. We can audit your websites tracking consent configuration, fix your GTM tags, and get you privacy-ready without losing valuable insights.

Get in touch at hello@phoneticdigital.co.uk

marriott.
communications

Good Marketing is in our genes,
bad PR isn't





The Personal Brand Advantage: Stand out, earn trust, win business

Personal brand might sound like an overhyped buzzword, but there's a reason everyone's talking about it.

When you build your personal brand with clarity and intention, you can build trust with the right people, strengthen connections and be more memorable. And when you have a business to grow, you'll know these are all essential for driving that growth.

Read on to explore what a personal brand is, why it matters and how to shape yours in an authentic way that gets results.

What is a personal brand, really?

Your personal brand is your reputation and how you're perceived. It's what people say about you when you're not in the room.

Consciously shaping your personal brand means taking control of that perception through how you speak, show up and share your ideas.

It's shaped by your values, experience and communication style, but also wherever you show up. LinkedIn is the obvious one, but don't forget things like podcasts you're invited on, blogs you author, and of course, in-person settings.

Why personal branding matters

Your personal brand is about far more than likes and followers. In sectors where trust, credibility, and connection are essential, it supports all three.

A strong personal brand can:

- Attract leads and opportunities
- Open doors to investment
- Build influential networks
- Raise awareness of your business in ways traditional marketing can't

And in a sea of copycat content it's the thoughtful, human voices that cut through the noise.

How to build a personal brand that resonates

1. Choose your niche

Rather than chasing every trend, focus on a few key topics you're clued up on and comfortable talking about. Once you've decided on your expert topics you can base your content around these themes, and keep coming back with fresh perspectives to build recognition and trust.

2. Find your voice

How you say something is just as important as what you say. Whether your tone is reflective, bold or straight-talking, it should always feel recognisably yours.

Practice telling stories in a way that feels true to how you speak. If someone who knows you read one of your LinkedIn posts, would they hear your voice in it?

3. Know what sets you apart

Think beyond job titles. It could be your credentials, side projects, personal values or lived experience. Whether you're a founder-turned-investor or a creative with a technical edge, these details help people understand and remember you.

4. Show up consistently (and intentionally)

Personal branding is a long-term habit. You don't need to post every day but you do need to be consistent. Speak at relevant events, share your take on industry shifts and go for opportunities that align with the brand you're building.

5. Getting started with support

Many people hold back from developing their personal brand because they're unsure where to start or think it'll feel fake. That's where the right support makes a difference.

Agencies like ours help shape your strategy, craft your message and guide your content so it lands in the right way with the right people. If funding's a concern, support is available. Through programmes like the NBSL Business Support Fund, eligible businesses can currently access grant funding towards the cost of projects that'll help grow your business - including marketing.

Ready to give your personal brand the attention it deserves?

If you have a marketing challenge or project in mind, drop us an email to hello@vidacreative.co.uk

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Unique Magazines: Advocating for the creative future of students

When students are hunting for a spark of creativity, printed magazines deliver. Let me say that again: print delivers inspiration.

You can scroll for hours on Instagram, guided by an algorithm you think you've trained — searching for that one idea to spark something new. But here's the thing: those ideas? They're not yours. They're often borrowed, recycled, and part of a trend that's already peaking.

What's missing is the originality — the passion and raw feeling that comes from discovering something with depth. Something you can return to again and again. Not a post you double-tap, save to a folder, and never look at again — but a piece of print you hold, mark up, and pull off a shelf when you need that creative nudge.

Now don't get me wrong — I'm an advocate for digital media and the doors it's opened. After all, my job revolves around promoting print through a social media channel. Ironic, isn't it? We can't ignore its importance. But even in a digital-first world, there's still space — and need — for print.

Here's a few reasons why print is just as vital as digital media — especially for students.

1. Print is a space away from distraction

We've all been there — picking up your phone to quickly find something you need, maybe a photo to add to an article, a look at your LinkedIn profile, or to finally reply to that friend you left on read. Next thing you know, you're doom-scrolling, ignoring everything else, and your productivity has hit an all-time low.

Here's the thing: your phone is designed to be addictive. So, you're not alone. But print doesn't do that.

It doesn't throw ads in your face or interrupt your reading with a "10% off if you subscribe!" pop-up halfway through an article. It doesn't pull you in ten different directions.

Print offers something rare: pure presence.

Absorption. Focus. A distraction-free experience that supports deep thinking — without the eye strain, mental fatigue, or constant pull of the next notification.

2. It's tactile, visual, and hands-on

Print is real — something you can hold, smell, and use. It engages your senses in a way digital never quite can. And for students, that matters.

Everyone learns differently. When you're revising for an exam or planning your next creative project, a physical, visual resource can make all the difference.

You can cut, collage, and annotate a magazine — adding inspiration to mood boards, sketchbooks, presentations, or research.

It's raw. It's real. It's hands-on. That physical connection helps spark ideas and boost productivity in a way scrolling just doesn't.





3. It's a trusted, curated source

Unlike random blogs or AI-generated posts, magazines are created by passionate enthusiasts — people genuinely invested in the topics they write about.

They're reliable, well-edited, and thoughtfully produced. A magazine is more than content — it's quality, it's curated, and it's a keepsake.

You're not bombarded by five different accounts shouting conflicting advice. You're reading real submissions from real people, who care deeply about what they're sharing. These aren't posts made to go viral — they're ideas rooted in knowledge, creativity, and purpose.

4. It helps break the digital overload

Students are online — a lot. Between online lectures, research, social media, and course group chats, much of their day is spent on screens.

Magazines offer a mindful break from that — a chance to disconnect from the noise, while still engaging with something productive and inspiring.

Stepping away from screens, even briefly, can help reduce burnout and support better mental wellbeing — without sacrificing creativity or focus.

How we support students with print

More and more, we're seeing students come to us for printed materials — whether it's collector's items like classic Vogue, design books to spark new ideas, or fashion magazines to support their final projects as they create their own publications.

We've been proud to support students in person, too — from attending exhibition parties with the Magazine Society at Northumbria University, to sponsoring pop-ups at Newcastle College, and visiting Northumbria's Fashion Communication students. We also celebrated creativity at Teesside University, attending a fashion show showcasing final-year projects.

And there's more to come. We've got exciting plans ahead, including guest lectures in the new year and a confirmed pop-up presence at Teesside University — with 10 pop-up shops running throughout the academic year.

You can also catch us at Freshers' Week this September:

15th September – Teesside University

17th September – Sunderland University

22nd-23rd September – Northumbria University

The relationship between students and print is evolving — not fading. And we're proud to be part of what comes next.

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Our Blog: www.themagazineclub.co.uk



Marketing and Media Matters

This month we talk to...

Jane Imrie

Founder & Director, Tyger Comms

Did you always envisage a career in the Marketing and Media Industry?

I always wanted to be a writer ever since childhood, and I did study Media & Cultural Studies at university, so I think in some sense I did always envisage this career.

Back when I was in education though, marketing looked so different. Social media was in its infancy, and lecturers were still talking about concepts like the 'global village' and 'new media'!

What I did always know is that I wanted to tell stories with meaning and purpose, and help others to do the same - which is exactly what Tyger Comms does today.

What has been your career path so far?

My career has definitely not been straightforward! After graduation, I found that getting into marketing was difficult if you didn't live in London or couldn't afford to do unpaid internships. So I ended up in retail banking of all places - to keep a roof over my head rather than out of a burning desire to learn about interest rates!

It wasn't until my thirties that I felt able to step away from that secure career to pursue my passions. I did a lot of soul-searching on a journey through affiliate marketing, business journalism, corporate comms and purpose-led PR, which led me to where I am today.

For just over two years I've been a PR and content freelancer, supporting various clients across martech, arts & culture, engineering, logistics, cybersecurity and the third sector.

Over that time I've learned about the projects I truly love to work on - ones that make a difference to the world - which inspired me to take my business to the next level, and so Tyger was born.

What are your future career aspirations?

I'm excited to see what the future holds for Tyger as the business grows. It's my hope that we can become the go-to comms brand for organisations wanting to make a difference in the world, whether that be through art, culture, social change or innovation.

I'd like to continue working with brilliant changemaking clients, collaborating with some of the amazing creative talent that we have here in the region and beyond to deliver campaigns with meaning and authenticity.

Alongside Tyger, I also would love to launch an initiative to support career-changers to pivot into

creative industries. For those from working class backgrounds in particular, financial pressures often mean creative careers can feel like a far-off dream, and something they have to sacrifice to keep a roof over their head and food on the table.

How do you see your industry evolving in the next 10 years?

The rise of AI is inevitably going to transform PR - whether we like it or not - and we've got to be ready to adapt. Artificial intelligence and machine learning is not just shaping the way organisations create content, but also how audiences consume it.

We're already seeing changes, and in time traditional search rankings will give way to AI-powered search. The likes of Google ads alone won't cut it anymore - businesses will need PR to cut through the noise and ensure they are the ones AI uses to answer queries.

I do think that truly human content will absolutely still be king. As tech evolves, I believe that humanity will become more of a valued quality than ever.

Companies might think they're saving time by churning out masses of this content. But the reality is: when it comes to getting audiences to buy into a product, service or idea, it's the person you need to speak to, not the algorithm.

How do you like to unwind?

I'm trying to get better at switching off and taking time for myself, but it's notoriously difficult as a solopreneur! I spend time with my partner, who I live with along with our extremely pampered cat, and love catching up with friends and family when I can.

I've become a bit of a fitness fanatic in recent years and try to get several sessions a week in at my local gym. I'm also, unsurprisingly, a huge supporter of arts and culture, and am an avid music lover and gig-goer.

One of my favourite things to do is travel. I've already done various solo trips to Europe, Africa and Asia - and there are plenty more places on my bucket list!

I'm also a bit of a bookworm and enjoy creative writing when time allows. Both really help to keep me inspired and my storytelling skills fresh!

www.tygercomms.co.uk



“

...I do think that truly human content will absolutely still be king...

Jane Imrie



L-R: Sarah Dale and Sarah Walker

From headlines to head starts

SASS media directors Sarah Dale and Sarah Walker share their insights on why their journalism roots makes them PR naturals.

When we say we understand the media, we really mean it.

At SASS media, we're not just PR professionals – we're qualified, experienced journalists. We've worked in newsrooms, written the headlines, chased the deadlines, and navigated the fast-paced world of media from the inside. That gives our clients a serious advantage – because we don't just know how the media works, we've lived it.

We've been on the other side of the inbox. We know what makes a story land, what gets binned, and what makes a journalist's eyes light up. So when we pitch your story, we're not guessing what might work – we know what will.

That's our edge. And it's your edge, too.

We speak fluent "media"

Because we've worked in journalism, we understand how to craft a story that cuts through the noise. We know how to find the angle that matters, the hook that grabs attention, and the timing that makes all the difference.

We don't just send out press releases and hope for the best. We tailor every pitch to the right journalist, at the right outlet, with the right message. And because we've built relationships in the industry, we know how to get your story in front of the people who matter.

We also understand the pressures journalists face – tight deadlines, overflowing inboxes, and the constant need for fresh, relevant content. That's why we make their job easier. We give them what they need, when they need it, in a format that works.

We know what journalists want – and what they don't

Let's be honest: journalists are busy. They don't have time for waffle, jargon or vague pitches. That's why we keep things sharp, relevant and respectful of their time.

We know how to make your story easy to cover – with clear angles, strong quotes and everything a journalist needs to say "yes" quickly. It's not just about getting coverage; it's about making it easy for the media to say yes to you.

And because we've been in their shoes, we know what not to do. We avoid the common PR pitfalls – generic emails, irrelevant pitches and overused buzzwords – and instead focus on building genuine, respectful relationships with the media.

We're storytellers at heart

Our journalistic roots mean we're natural storytellers. We don't just promote, we connect. We help your audience understand who you are, what you stand for, and why you matter.

Whether it's a national news piece, a trade feature, or a thought leadership article, we know how to shape your

message so it resonates – not just with journalists, but with the people you want to reach.

We also know how to spot a story where others might not. Sometimes the most powerful narratives are hidden in the everyday – a team achievement, a community initiative, a personal journey. We help you uncover those stories and share them in a way that feels authentic and compelling.

The best of both worlds

At SASS media, we bring the best of both worlds: the strategic thinking of PR and the sharp instincts of journalism. It's a powerful combo – and it's what makes us different.

We're not just here to get you coverage. We're here to help you build credibility, connect with your audience, and grow your brand in a way that feels real and lasting.

So if you're looking for a PR team that truly gets the media – and knows how to make it work for you – you've found your people.

Find out more at www.sassmedialtd.co.uk or email: sarah.dale@sassmedialtd.co.uk





From Local to Global

One summit's stand for LGBTQIA+ Rights

LGBTQIA+ rights are under increasing threat and the call for unity, visibility, and action has never felt more urgent.

Stood at the forefront of that call is Drew Dalton (CEO of ReportOUT), Peter Darrant (Chair of Out North East), and Angela Budenell (Charity Manager of Pride Action North) - fierce advocates and changemakers who are shaping one of the UK's most powerful platforms for solidarity and change: the #SaferToBeMe Summit.

In this interview, Angela shares the story behind the summit's founding, the personal experiences that shaped its mission, and the growing need for bold action in the face of rising global hostility.

What inspired you to collaborate on this year's Summit?

What truly inspired me was hearing Drew Dalton, ReportOut's CEO, speak so passionately about the importance of solidarity and taking action. Over time, I've come to deeply admire the incredible work ReportOut does around the world, advocating for LGBTQIA+ people in places where it's dangerous to be yourself.

This year's theme is 'Local to Global' - why did you choose it, and what impact do you hope it has?

The core mission of #SaferToBeMe is to create safer, more inclusive communities where LGBTQIA+ people—and all marginalised groups—can live openly, freely, and with respect.

We want to inspire real change by bringing people together to learn, share, and act in ways that improve lives both locally and globally. This year's theme, 'Local to Global', highlights that while challenges may look different around the world, we are all connected in this fight for equality.

What does success look like for #SaferToBeMe in the next five years?

We don't truly know what #SaferToBeMe will look like in five years—and honestly, wouldn't it be wonderful if we didn't need it at all?

I hope that by then, the world will have changed. That the tide we're currently fighting will have turned. I want to pass on hope—because we have to believe in something better. I want to see a rapid decline in the hostility we've seen in recent years. I want to live in a UK where there are no more protests outside hotels housing refugees, where trans people have access to compassionate and inclusive healthcare, and where laws protect us all, equally and fairly.

How do you see the summit contributing to global conversations about LGBT+ equality?

We see #SaferToBeMe as a contribution to a much bigger, global conversation. What's happening in the UK is not unique—there's a coordinated rollback of rights across the world. This summit is both a response and a rallying cry. It's a way of saying: we see what's happening, and we will not be silent.

By connecting our local experiences to global struggles, we hope to show solidarity across borders, challenge oppression in all its forms, and keep pushing the conversation toward justice, equity, and change.

If you could send one message to the next generation of LGBT+ activists, what would it be?

If I could leave just one message, it would be this: don't allow another genocide. Whatever it takes, we must never let history repeat itself.

In amplifying diverse voices, fostering global solidarity, and refusing to let history repeat itself, Angela and her collaborators are building more than a summit - they're building a movement rooted in hope, compassion, and defiance.

The road ahead may be uncertain, but one thing is clear: the fight for equality must be louder, broader, and more united than ever.

If we stand together-local to global-then perhaps the future really can be safer. Not just for some, but for all.

AI isn't just a trend.

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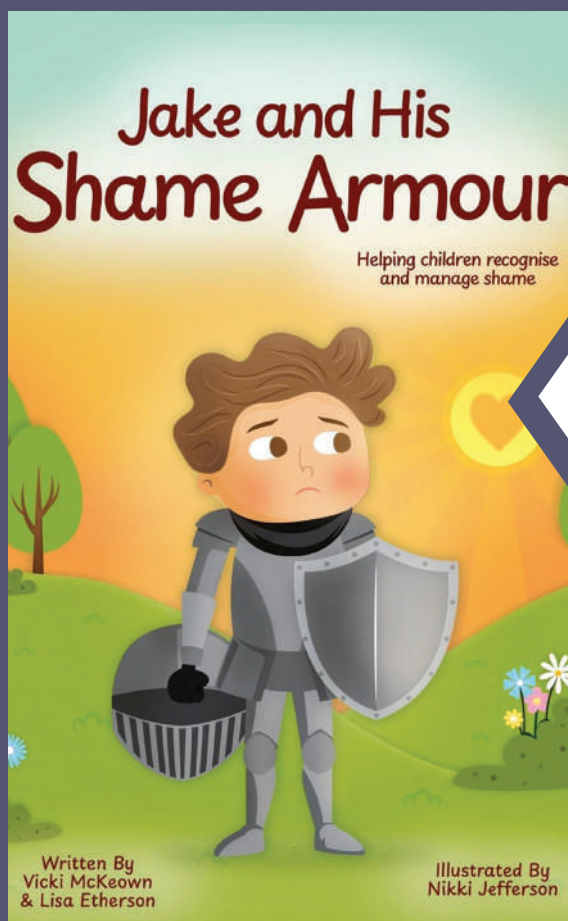
The schools are back after six long weeks holiday. Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us what they do to add education to their working life or that of their customers.



One of the things that I am so proud of is that all my souvenirs are designed by me and made in Britain. Why is this so important? The main reason is that every time a customer buys from me says that they are buying from multiple small British businesses. Meaning that their money is working harder to support my supply chain. Most customers totally get this. But some customers compare what I do to what they can buy in High Street chains that offer a mass-produced product. There is some education needed around the damage that these companies do to the environment and the fact that most of their products are imported. Because of this, customers often don't see the hidden cost of mass-produced cheaper products. This is why I have started using a new hashtag in my social media #MadeToLastNoForLandfill. This hashtag helps me educate my audience and attract customers that want to support a small business to make a difference and spend their money responsibly.

My customers feel really excited about supporting a small business that buys from other small businesses. They like to know where their money is going and what impact it will have. International customers love taking home a souvenir of the UK that was made in Britain. All round this is the best decision I made, and it adds so much value to my brand.

Corinne Lewis Ward, www.powderbutterfly.com



Alongside my co-author, Vicki McKeown who is a child therapist and social worker, we have created "Jake and His Shame Armour".

This is an educational children's book, designed to help adults help children understand the complex emotion of shame. The story follows Jake as he navigates feelings of shame and learns strategies to manage it, aiming to empower both kids and adults in their emotional well-being.

amzn.eu/d/caMuB8H

*Lisa Etherson Psychosexual
Therapist-PhD Researcher,
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Rutva Patel, www.ridgetek.co.uk



We explain why holiday prices go up at school holidays and what they can do to minimise the rises, so they are less inclined to take children out of school and pay the fine. We will always do our best to get the best deal for families and use our vast experience of visiting places, acting on customer feedback and keeping ahead of market trends.

Pop in to see us at Destinations by John in the heart of Whitley Bay.

John Dixon, www.dbyg.co.uk

Last month our RADAR members appeared on BBC TV, BBC Radio, Local TV and many magazines and newspapers. To find out more about the benefits of becoming a RADAR member, contact keith@highlightspr.co.uk or call Keith on 07814 397951.

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Alan Sawyers

Pretty doesn't pay the bills. Strategy does

In the third instalment of their Design Insights series, Alan Sawyers of AS Design reflects on how the company has grown — not by chasing volume, but by focusing on strategic value, developing talent, and helping clients think differently.

“Clients don't come to us for basic. They come to us for insight, structure and clarity,” Alan said.

It's not just about making things look good — they have to work well too.

“Years ago,” Alan says, “I worked in a corporate business where the MD banned phrases like ‘pretty this up’ or ‘beautify this’ from senior managers asking me to brand things like sales proposals and pitch decks. He understood that what I did wasn't decoration — it was adding real value to the business. He saw the difference between design as styling and design as strategy. That stuck with me.”

It still defines AS Design's approach today.



Growing intentionally, not massively

AS Design hasn't grown by accident. It started with Alan, doubled within a year of Nathan joining, and grew again with the addition of Josh. Most recently, Nic has become a more permanent member of the team — but not because the goal is to “scale up.”

“We're not trying to become an agency with dozens of staff,” Alan said. “We're trying to be brilliant at what we do, build a team that works to its strengths, and grow in a way that fits with our own values and goals.”

The aim is to become more efficient and more proficient — not just bigger. That's why Josh and Nic are being supported to develop their own expertise, while Alan and Nathan focus more on strategy and oversight.

Strategic by design

As AS Design grew, and Nathan became more and more able to take on the work Alan had built the company up on, Alan's own role with clients started to venture far beyond logos and layouts. Sometimes it's leadership, mentorship, and direction.

“Clients have often seen me as an extension of their own teams,” he said. “But today that can often mean I actually spend time with clients at their own offices, helping them to strategise and develop their marketing and branding. I could never have done that if I didn't have a team I could trust to do the work I'm no longer doing — especially when it still has my name — or at least initials — on it.”

Developing a business mindset

There's a certain mindset that runs deep in the AS Design team. Alan has always turned hobbies into income — even AS Design started as a hobby — and that entrepreneurial attitude is being passed on.

“It's an investment in people,” Alan said. “They benefit from that, as does the business — as do I.”



Nathan Cockburn



Josh Cockburn



Nic Sawyers

Nathan is now a co-owner of AS Design's sister company, SNAC Digital, and leads major web projects across both brands. Josh, the youngest member of the team, recently launched his own car valeting venture — NMB Detailing — with a friend from school.

Alan said: “Josh designed his own logo, built his own website with a booking calendar, had banners printed, sorted merch, and opened a business bank account. I told him never to feel he needs to do this in secret and that I wanted to be his first customer. And I was.”

“That's what I mean by investment. I'd rather get five really good years from people who care than ten with staff who just clock in and out — or, even worse, be stuck constantly recruiting people who don't have the drive.”

Play to your strengths

AS Design's current strategy is simple: get better and faster by working to each team member's strengths.

Nathan leads on creative and technical execution. Josh brings fresh ideas and growing capability in design and marketing. Nic supports operations and communication. And Alan guides the business with a focus on vision, value, and client experience.

“We've been working up to this for three years now,” Alan says. “And it's working. Clients come back. They recommend us. They trust us to not just deliver — but to lead.”

asdne.co.uk

Karol + Fusion marks new era with female leadership, fresh talent, and major client wins



L-R: Jagoda Waszkowiak, Jess Volpe, Fiona Morgan, Barbora Gray, and Adela Rokytova

Karol Marketing Group, one of the North East's longest-established PR and communications agencies is celebrating a new chapter as it drives forward a new female leadership team, brings in fresh talent, and sees several major business wins.

Karol Marketing, which also owns Fusion PR Creative, is continuing to cement its commitment to nurturing talent and promoting diversity through the promotion of Jess Volpe, Barbora Gray, and Fiona Morgan to Account Directors, and Juliana Veiga to Junior Account Manager.

Each has been with the Karol Group for a number of years, playing pivotal roles in delivering major client wins such as Northumbria University, Sunderland City Council, Newcastle Hospitals Charity, and marine insurer NorthStandard. Jess, Barbora, and Fiona join Managing Director

Stefan Lepkowski, Associate Director Kathie Wilcox, and Creative lead Will Johnston to make up the new dynamic senior leadership team.

The team has also welcomed two new additions: Jagoda Waszkowiak joins as Senior Account Executive, and Adela Rokytova as Account Executive. Together they bring fresh perspectives and specialist skills in social media strategy, content creation, and PR to the agency's growing portfolio.

Account Director, Fiona Morgan said: "I am so proud to be part of such a brilliant team to bring Karol + Fusion into its next exciting chapter. Our collective experience and passion mean we're ready to deliver even greater results for our clients and the North East. Being part of Karol's journey and now stepping into a leadership role alongside such talented women is a true privilege."

Coinciding with the internal milestones, Karol Marketing has unveiled a new website and brand, designed to reflect its position as a trusted partner for brands in sectors including energy and renewables, health and wellbeing, tourism and hospitality, and brand and consumer. The new platform highlights the agency's dynamic expertise, as well as its expanding portfolio of regional, national, and international clients, with a full-service offering across

PR, digital, public affairs, stakeholder engagement, and creative strategy.

Recent business wins include the Great North Children's Hospital, and NorthFutures, further establishing Karol as a partner of choice for ambitious organisations across the North East and beyond.

Managing Director, Stefan Lepkowski said: "I am incredibly happy with the team we have at Karol + Fusion, and these promotions and new members demonstrate the exceptional talent within our team and our commitment to nurturing future leaders.

"As we launch our new website and celebrate client wins, I'm very excited for our most dynamic chapter yet."

Recently recognised in the Prolific North Top 50 PR Agencies and shortlisted for the North East Marketing Awards, Karol Marketing continues to set the standard for creative excellence and strategic impact in the region and beyond. Clients include Bernicia Living, NHS, Keela Outdoors, UK Pellet Council, and Hadrian's Wall. For more information about Karol Marketing, visit www.karolmarketing.com

karolmarketing.com

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Big Interview

Anne Reynolds

144 September 2021



Why marketing deserves a seat at the board table

By Anne Reynolds, Founder of Blue Moon Marketing

...and how a Fractional CMO can help your business grow from the inside out!

Marketing is often misunderstood - written off as “the colouring-in department” or seen as a cost centre rather than a strategic force. But here’s the truth: for any organisation to grow, communicate its value, and nurture its internal culture, marketing isn’t optional - it’s fundamental.

And yet, despite its importance, marketing is still missing from the rooms where the big decisions are made. In the UK, just 17% of board-level positions are held by marketing professionals (CIM, 2024) and in many organisations, there’s no marketing voice at the table at all.

That’s not just a gap - it’s a missed opportunity.

And it’s one that fractional CMOs are perfectly positioned to fill.

From consultant to confidant

I spent over a decade in marketing agencies - working hard, delivering results, building campaigns. But no matter how good the work was, there was always a wall. I was a service provider. Brought in to do a job. Rarely invited into the heart of the business and very much sitting on the periphery. Expected to deliver results without ever being shown the full picture.

That changes the moment you’re truly let in.

Becoming a fractional CMO shifted everything for me. I wasn’t just reacting to briefs - I was shaping them. But that kind of access doesn’t come with a title. It comes with trust. That trust isn’t earned through polished strategies or slick presentations. It’s built on psychological safety - often ignited by unexpected but deeply human interactions.

I recall many moments now where I have connected deeply with a client over something totally unrelated to marketing. They are raw, real conversations - the kind you don’t plan for. But these memorable moments break down walls. From there, you’re let in. Not just to the marketing brief, but to the wider challenges of the business, the politics, the ambitions, and even the unspoken concerns.

That’s when the real power of comms comes in.

Fractional, but not half-in

A great example of this is my role as fractional CMO at RE:GEN Group; a leading name in the social housing space. The level of access and integration I have has transformed the quality and depth of my marketing work. I’m no longer trying to solve one part of the puzzle - I’m holding the glue that brings the whole picture together.

You start to see how marketing isn’t a silo. It’s not just one department. It’s internal culture, strategic direction, employee engagement, customer experience, sales enablement, reputation management - everything.

As a fractional CMO, I’ve become a bridge between teams, a sounding board for leadership, and a storyteller-in-chief. I’m not an outsider - I’m a committed partner, just without the full-time overhead.

Why isn’t marketing at the table?

Marketing is one of the only disciplines that sees the entire business - from culture to customer. It’s the function that



translates vision into narrative. It gives your people something to believe in and your customers something to rally around.

So why is it still fighting for a seat?

One reason? Marketing is a hard sell. It’s intangible, complex, and easy to deprioritise.

But let’s reframe that: Support isn’t a hard sell. Leadership isn’t. Belief isn’t.

That’s where we come in. At Blue Moon, that’s what we offer through our fractional CMO model - embedded leadership, aligned strategy, and someone in your corner who’s fully focused on your business success.

We help businesses find clarity, build belief, and create meaningful connection within their teams and with their audiences. Because marketing shouldn’t sit on the sidelines; it belongs at the heart of every leadership conversation.

Communication is everything

Every business wants to grow but not every business recognises the role communication plays in making that growth happen.

I’ve long believed that your employees are your first customers. If they don’t believe in your business, why should anyone else? That’s why, to build a brand that’s truly credible from the inside out, you need a marketing leader who can make that belief visible, shareable, and scalable.

Whether it’s a full-time CMO or a fractional one, now is the time to stop treating marketing as a support function and start seeing it as the strategic engine driving your business forward.

At Blue Moon, we’re the fractional marketing partner who can help you make that shift.

bluemoon-marketing.co.uk



L-R: Maisie Stedman, Hayden O'Neill, Aidan Smith and Leanne Tweddle
- the new faces at Canny Creative

Creative agency strengthens team with four key appointments

A Northumberland-based branding agency has strengthened its creative, technical and management teams with four key new appointments.

Canny Creative, which will be celebrating its 10th business anniversary in November, has enjoyed fantastic success since its incorporation in 2015, creating brands and digital solutions for clients across the globe including the World YMCA, International Hospital Federation and multi-national recruitment firm, Macdonald & Company.

These most recent appointments come as the 10-strong agency gears itself up for further expansion into the B2B market, with a strategic focus on clients within the tech, healthcare and recruitment sectors.

Having introduced content development as a standalone service for its clients back in 2020, Canny's first key appointment has bolstered its team of in-house content creators. Maisie Stedman has joined the Blyth-based organisation as Content Strategist. Using her expertise in SEO to generate high-performing digital content

for both the web and social media, Maisie will play a leading role on a number of client projects as well as provide support to Canny's design and development teams.

Aidan Smith has joined the team at Canny as Brand Designer. An award winning graphic and web designer with experience of working with leading brands such as Lego and Stanley Black and Decker, Aidan will bring valuable expertise to the table on a range of creative projects for Canny.

A graduate of Northumbria University with a First Class Honours degree in Computer Science, Hayden O'Neill has joined Canny's in-house development team as a Junior Web Developer. Working alongside the wider team, Hayden will be leveraging his knowledge in WordPress, SASS, JS, and PHP to support dynamic website development projects on behalf of Canny's international client base.

The fourth and final new face at Canny

is Leanne Tweddle. An experienced marketing and project manager with a wide range of skills spanning PR, brand development, content creation and account management, in her capacity as Client Delivery Lead, Leanne will play an integral role in ensuring the smooth delivery of client projects as well as helping to further develop and grow the Canny brand.

Tony Hardy, Founder and Director at Canny Creative, commented: "It's a really exciting time here at Canny and we're delighted to welcome Maisie, Aidan, Hayden and Leanne to the team.

"As the business approaches its 10th anniversary, we've been taking some time to reflect on our successes and our learning points from across the years and we're now looking to the future with renewed focus and a strong team to help us to continue to deliver the highest quality creative outputs for our clients worldwide."

Canny Creative is a leading brand design and web agency based in the North East. Specialising in custom marketing solutions which drive real results, Canny is proud to work with industry leaders in more than 20 countries across the globe.

To find out more, visit canny-creative.com

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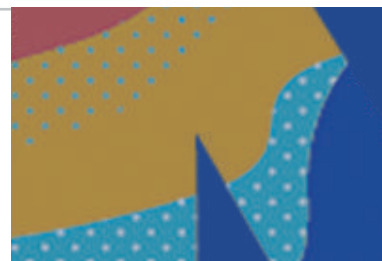
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Two minds, one vision: Meet the discerning duo behind Curate Creative

Curate Creative isn't your typical creative agency. Founded by Michelle Pegg and David Marston, they believe in creative alchemy, built on strategy, soul, and deep collaboration.

David Marston and Michelle Pegg

Curate Creative has carved out a distinct identity over the last eight years—what inspired you both to start the agency, and what gap did you see in the market?

We'd both had many years of experience both in agencies and in-house. In-house was for some great hotel brands - Malmaison, Hotel du Vin, De Vere, Village - which is where we met, both learning a lot about the effectiveness of what we were creating and commercial design. Cut to years later, we both own individual businesses - we had the opportunity to work with a big brand, but we needed to join forces to make it possible. So we did. We put £200 each in a pot for some business cards, and off we went... got the client, and almost 9 years later, here we are, with a lot more clients on the books. The gap in the market was more that we realised we were able to specialise in the hospitality and leisure sector, with a lot of the previous gained knowledge and insights under our belts. But also that even if a client isn't in this sector, we apply our 'hospitality' approach - to make people and brands feel welcome and special, to consider every touch point in the brands customer journey, and to include thoughtfulness each step of the way.

You work across branding, design, and digital—how would you describe your creative approach?

We've refined and are always refining our creative approach. Where we can, we include a tailored Curate workshop at the beginning which always has really interesting and effective results. We've created and developed processes for each part of the business whether it's branding, websites, advertisements and social content, which we explain before we begin so that clients understand and have buy in with no surprises. At the end of the day, we want to do good work that has impact and that we've worked on with our clients in a collaborative way - we call ourselves 'your creative partner' because we want to be seen and thought of as part of your team, like its a partnership - which we feel is the best way of working and gets the best results.

How does being based in Newcastle influence your work and the kind of clients you attract?

It is! And we love that. We want the North to thrive and be seen for being a creative hub- as part of that we want to champion it in any way we can. We don't see other creatives as competition, there's enough to go round. We see it more as a support network for each other to put the North on the map as a go-to for exciting creative, and to keep busting the myth that you have to be in London to be effective and creative. Distance is nothing, we regularly make trips up and down the country for face to face meetings, and of course zoom etc made things easier too. We do have international clients and this hasn't been an issue at all. The majority of our clients in fact are London/Southern based with a smaller percentage of locals, although we would like to work with more local businesses for sure. We're trying to get out and network a bit more as all of our work has been from referrals, recommendations and relationships we have built over the years, so we're looking to expand our network and keep growing.

Tell us about a couple of projects that really captures what Curate is all about?

The 'Can do Andrew' campaign for Virgin Active. To attract new joiners, we've worked on several campaigns over the years, but this one stands out, as it was fun, energetic, hit a tone of voice, and style, included TV for VOD and we worked



on such an amazing collaboration of teams for the production that we were really proud of the results and the client was equally as happy.

Working on The Ivy Collection menus is a huge and intricate process that we have refined and developed with the teams there for over 7 years now. This one is about attention to detail, organisation, intricate knowledge of their menus and menu design as a whole. Never to be underestimated - this is one we're proud of.

The creative industry is constantly evolving—how do you stay ahead of trends while keeping your work true to your core values?

Keeping it real. We're not the first or only people to say this, but it's about relationships, having an understanding of the people and clients you work with, what their challenges are, and how you can be part of the solution. An audience needs a human connection with a brand just as we need a human connection with the people we work with. So we build relationships. Trends come and go, so of course we need to be on top of them - adapt or fail, is that what they say? We just have to be aware, and adapt where we feel is right, and make sure we keep creating, so there's an idea and a reason at the heart of everything.

Whats your dream account?

Short answer - Everyman Cinema, Tiffany's, Fortnam & Mason, Campari, Hoxton, Under Armour... and Mead, I think the team would like a local mead brand!

If Curate had a motto or unofficial tagline, what would it be?

We do good things by working together. Curate is what it is because of the team and the partners. Everyone is greatly valued and brings something to the table. Also have fun. The creative industry is a great sector to be involved in.

www.curatecreative.co.uk



Super sweet 16th for Harvey & Hugo as 'paw-fect' PR agency marks milestone

Harvey & Hugo threw the 'paw-fect' party to help mark the company's 16th anniversary in style.

The Darlington-based PR agency welcomed clients, friends and a few furry four-legged VIPs to Kip & Nook.

Offering traditional journalist-led PR services alongside everything from social media, videography and podcasting, Harvey & Hugo has firmly established itself as one of the North's leading boutique PR agencies.

And true to the agency's dog friendly ethos, the event was a howling success!

"We've spent 16 years building brands and helping our clients voices be heard," said founder Charlotte Nichols.

"It felt only right to 'paws' for celebration and thank our wonderful clients who've been part of our wonderful journey."

Guests at the stunning venue enjoyed a morning of coffee, croissants and even condoms - with Harvey & Hugo dishing out the prophylactics as part of a cheeky stunt to launch their latest innovative service.

Harvey & Hugo's Brand Protection Plan provides businesses with peace of mind, by helping them combat the growing numbers of threats capable of leaving a company's reputation in tatters - from just £50-a-month.

"Brands have never been more exposed, but the Brand Protection Plan aims to give businesses rapid access to our in-house PR, social media, and crisis comms experts if an emergency happens," added Charlotte.

**For more information on Harvey & Hugo,
www.harveyandhugo.com**



Not the only medium

Kaleidoscope are known for the outstanding films and video they produce, but they also have an animation department which brings the same level of creativity, craft, and storytelling. Northern Insight recently caught up with Christian Wright, Head of Animation.

Kaleidoscope offers both film/video and animation in-house — how do you decide which medium best suits a project?

We work closely with our film department and often collaborate from the outset of a project. The decision between film, animation, or a hybrid approach depends largely on the client's needs—why they're making the piece, what they want to communicate, and who they're trying to reach. It ultimately comes down to which medium can best represent their ideas and goals.

Your team distils complex ideas into simple, impactful animations. What's the secret?

Once the script is finalised, we spend a lot of time developing the visuals. We brainstorm styles and ways of representing key ideas—always guided by the project's tone, aims, and context. The team's diverse creative backgrounds and experiences are key to this process, and we always aim to marry our vision with the client's brief.

Your work spans explainer videos to social snippets. How do you tailor animations for different platforms?

It's always about the client's goals. We ensure the content not only meets technical specifications but is also culturally and tonally appropriate for the platform. For example, complex medical animations might exist online but may not suit social media audiences. Conversely, promotional content for a brand like adidas belongs



Christian Wright

squarely on social platforms. It's about using the right medium for the right message.

How do you ensure your animations stand out in a crowded content market?

We stay aware of trends but focus on what fits the client and their audience. Often, trends aren't the best fit. We aim to create bespoke, meaningful content that aligns with the project's goals. An on-trend, flashy animation about diabetes, for example, might not connect with those who actually need the information. But a thoughtful 10-minute documentary could. Ultimately, understanding the brief and the audience is more important than chasing trends. Interestingly, long-form content is making a comeback, with platforms like YouTube now rivalling traditional broadcasters like the BBC.

What recent project best represents Kaleidoscope's capabilities?

A recent project on Anti-Racism for a university researcher stands out. It was both informative and emotionally resonant, allowing us to push creative boundaries without the constraints of brand guidelines. We experimented with new techniques

and delivered something that worked on multiple levels. It's one of our proudest pieces to date.

What advice would you give businesses new to animation?

Be open-minded. Many businesses still see animation as quirky or youth-focused, but it's incredibly versatile. It can convey mature, abstract, and emotionally rich content that might be impossible—or too expensive—to achieve in live action.

Has AI or automation changed your creative workflow?

We believe in the power of human creativity. While some AI tools within our software have helped speed up workflow, we're strongly against generative AI replacing the creative process. Creativity is a muscle—we train it constantly to deliver original, human-centric stories. We've seen AI-generated content like job applications and showreels, and it's clear when something lacks that human touch. You can't replace real creativity—nor should you.

kaleidoscopecfa.com





Nicola Halse

Why I'm returning as an Enterprise Adviser for a fourth year

The owner of Riverside Marketing Solutions, Nicola Halse, is about to embark on her fourth year as an Enterprise Adviser at Durham Sixth Form Centre.

Working closely with leadership teams within the business and marketing departments at the Ofsted rated 'Outstanding' sixth form, Nicola reflects on how the role has supported the students while also shaping her own personal and professional growth and why she would encourage people to also take up the opportunity.

"Following an initial request by the sixth form to take part in mock interviews with the students, I was quickly asked to take up a more formal role as a Enterprise Advisor and if I'm being honest, at that point, I wasn't entirely sure what to expect!

As a previous trustee and volunteer within schools, I've always been committed to supporting young people but stepping into an advisory role felt like unfamiliar territory. Fast forward to now, and I can confidently say it's been one of the most rewarding decisions I've made.

The role of an Enterprise Adviser goes far beyond a few meetings or the occasional careers event, it's about building a meaningful bridge between education and industry. The North East Combined

Authority have advisors in place to be that bridge between yourself and the education provider and my contact, David Coe, has been a fantastic support.

For me, there's something incredibly special about supporting young people in discovering how their talents and passions can translate into real, meaningful careers. Taking part in a 'day in the life of' talks and supporting the students with communication and marketing campaigns is so valuable for them, helping them to see what the real world of work is like (and they never let you down on the brilliant questions too!).

From a personal perspective, being an Enterprise Adviser has significantly boosted my own confidence, I've found myself speaking more comfortably in front of large groups, refining my presentation skills and learning to communicate effectively with a wide range of stakeholders, including educators, business leaders and students.

The role has also challenged me to step outside of my day-to-day work and look at the broader picture, what skills the next

generation will need, how the creative sector is evolving and what businesses like mine can do to support future talent. Mixing and chatting with the younger generation has given me great insights and ideas which I can transfer to my own clients too so it's definitely a two way street with regards to learning.

I've also formed valuable connections through the wider Enterprise Adviser Network with other professionals who are just as committed to making a difference. The shared passion across the network is truly inspiring and I've learned so much from the collaboration and exchange of ideas.

Returning for a fourth year feels like a natural decision and I can honestly say it's a joy to play even a small part in a student's journey. To anyone considering becoming an Enterprise Adviser or a business leader looking to give their staff time to do this, I would say, 'Do it. You don't have to give hours of your time, the education providers are more than happy to work around you and your timescales, you'll become a better communicator, a more thoughtful leader and a stronger advocate for your industry. And most importantly, you'll help shape the future, not in some abstract way but by directly supporting the ambitions of real young people in your local community.

I'm proud to be part of the journey at Durham Sixth Form Centre and I'm excited to see what the next year brings."

www.riversidemarketingsolutions.co.uk



“Our customers are Gen Z...” but which ones?

By Emma Roberts, Insights & Strategy Lead at O.agency

All too often we hear people say “we want to target Gen Z” with our marketing campaigns.

We believe that stereotyping entire generations isn't a strategy, because today's consumers don't fit into neat demographic boxes.

As the digital landscape becomes more nuanced, the old ways of targeting no longer deliver. Understanding and engaging with audiences through the lens of behavioural Tribes allows marketers to:

- Identify the emotional, cultural, and contextual drivers behind purchase decisions.
- Create marketing strategies that meet audiences where they are digitally, socially, and psychologically.
- Make use of real-time insights to evolve campaigns in step with consumer expectations.

At O.agency, we help brands get under the skin of their audiences, and truly understand what makes them tick, not just who they are on paper. We turn these insights into sharper messaging, stronger community engagement and smarter social media strategy. By moving beyond demographics and into the realm of

real human behaviour, we offer a firmer foundation for long-term brand building.

We work together with marketers to decode their audience, define their Tribes, and design a strategy that keeps up with the future of consumer culture.

Social media is the obvious place to reach a younger target audience like Gen Z for example, but it's no longer an easy place to map your audiences. Social media is actually a plethora of channels with differing behaviours in how people engage, so the likes of age, gender and location are not enough to grow your brand.

The average internet user now spends over two hours a day on social media (GWI), switching between 7+ platforms every month.

There is a broad spectrum of change that has shifted dramatically in recent months from constantly updating algorithms to polarised echo chambers. This shift is full of opportunity but will be difficult to navigate for brands that are operating on outdated customer persona maps.

The landscape has shifted. We're no longer marketing to audiences with fixed traits. We're marketing to mindsets, behaviours and real-time contexts.

It's time to get more nuanced with marketing segmentation and become much more effective.

Social Tribes is our new insights report set to widen your understanding of audiences based on how they behave, not just who they are on paper.

We've identified six Social Tribes dominating the way people consume content and connect with brands online:

- **Latent Voyeurs** – the silent scrollers who never like or follow, but see everything.
- **Experience Collectors** – here for the memory, not the merch.

- **Keyboard Conscious** – values-led, publicly vocal and allergic to greenwashing.
- **Scroll Hardened** – desensitised digital natives who demand humour, chaos or novelty.
- **Identity Seekers** – using brands to project a curated version of self.
- **Community Catalysts** – seeking belonging, feedback and shared purpose.

In our report we explore each Tribe in detail to discover:

- Engagement styles.
- Motivators to purchase or interact.
- Brand strategy recommendations.
- Real-world brands getting it right.

We recommend anyone designing a marketing strategy today follows these four key steps:

- Embrace behavioural segmentation as standard.
- Rethink how we define and interpret engagement.
- Build creative and campaigns with platform-specific context in mind.
- Let go of personas that were built five years ago (and never updated).

Our Social Tribes report is your guidebook to doing just that.

Download the report here or email emma@o.agency for a copy.



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Bank House office fit out completes with Summers-Inman

Award-winning construction and project management consultancy, Summers-Inman, has announced completion of the fit out of a 10,000 sq ft office for Neptune North within Newcastle's leading office building, Bank House on Pilgrim Street.

The firm, which specialises in providing software development and consulting services to businesses operating in the financial services and alternative investment markets, will occupy the eighth floor in the Category A/BREEAM excellent building.

Neptune North appointed Summers-Inman, at the end of last year in the capacity of employers agent and cost consultant to manage the 12-week fit out.

Commenting on Summers-Inman's appointment, associate director and project lead, Andy Rapmund, said: "We have plenty of similar experience on both large and small projects up and down the country, so we were delighted to be recommended for this project. We began with a shell and floorplate and from this blank canvas a high quality, ergonomic and attractive modern office and work space has been created in the heart of the city.

"We have been working closely with the Manchester-based design and build contractor, ADT Workplace, which is highly experienced and well-known for its award-winning office interiors for clients across the UK.

"ADT Workplace recently undertook a similar fitout within Bank House, so its team was well versed with the way the building operates and how to minimise disruption and noise within the building, which is now 80% occupied, while still working to programme. I am pleased to report that the project has gone extremely well, thanks also to building managers, Avison Young, who have been a tremendous help."



Plans submitted for proposed new Tudhoe residential development

Plans for a new high-quality residential development to the south of Durham City have been submitted to Durham County Council for review.

North East developer Banks Property is looking to build around 350 new homes on a 15-hectare site off York Hill Road in Tudhoe, which would include a 15 per cent allocation of affordable housing.

The County Durham-headquartered firm recently held two community events to share information about the development with local people and to give them a chance to provide feedback to the project team about what's being put forward.

And it has now submitted a planning application to the County Council, which also includes provision for a small convenience store close to York Hill Road.

The planning application is expected to come before the Council's planning committee around the end of the year.

The proposed Tudhoe development would include a range of modern, energy efficient and sustainable house types, including bungalows.

A range of contract opportunities will also be made available to local suppliers for different aspects of the scheme, while a local biodiversity net gain of at least ten per cent would also be delivered, with a full ecological strategy now in development to ensure the maximum range of environmental benefits can be achieved.



Historic Quayside building changes hands

Specialist property consultancy GFW has facilitated the sale of a listed building in Newcastle, securing its future in the city.

Standing proudly on the Quayside and dating back to the 1800s, 26 Sandhill is a four-storey sandstone structure, home to a cinema supported by National Lottery funding, a gallery, a Thai restaurant and an apartment listed on Airbnb. The significant sale sees the building move into the ownership of a local property investor, after remaining in the same ownership for over 50 years.

This is just one of the many high value transactions GFW has facilitated in recent months, with a rise in demand for its commercial property expertise as the regional market is experiencing a period of growth.

GFW's commercial property team, offers expertise across all areas of Commercial property with the advantage of accessing GFW's multidisciplinary approach.

Gary Robinson, Partner said: "It was an honour to have facilitated the sale of 26 Sandhill and play a part in securing the future of one of Newcastle's heritage properties. It was a rare gem to enter the market. The gallery alone offers an impressive archive with photographs from World War II, film reels of shipyards and mines. It's these kinds of projects that remind us how deeply property connects to people, places and history.

"Careful support was key in helping the owner decide whether to retain 26 Sandhill as a family legacy or pass it on to someone new. Kristian Sorenson, Senior Associate at GFW worked closely with the owner to find the right buyer, matching the building with a local property investor to take it into its next phase of life."

Specialist property consultancy GFW has facilitated the sale of a listed building in Newcastle, securing its future in the city.

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Neil Turner

Designing in a warmer climate - even in the North East

By Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield.

We are well through the summer for 2025, and it's been a warm one: in fact, it's been overly dry and when rain comes, it comes with intensity and stronger winds. We have had four heatwaves this year.

All of these factors will affect how we design buildings and alter our existing buildings to cope as we move away from a maritime climate in the UK, to a more temperate zone.

So how will this affect buildings and more importantly the occupants of buildings?

At the moment only 5% of properties in the UK have air conditioning (AC) and most are using inefficient portable units. This figure is higher in Europe at 20% and at an incredible 90% in the United States.

Of course, if we all fitted AC into our homes, then our energy consumption would increase and our costs would also

increase, at a time when energy costs are not only high but a major political issue.

All of these factors are connected and it's up to the building industry and architects to find ways to make buildings stay cool, avoiding expensive retrofit and adaptation to include AC, where possible.

We designers must look at our buildings and devise strategies that seek to reduce energy consumption, keep people cool and avoid buildings overheating. Not an easy challenge.

A lot of the thinking is actually common sense and makes you wonder why more of the basic thinking is not in every building. I have written before about the condition of building stock in the UK – some 15% of which was built before 1900.

If the building is new, then in many ways, the challenge is easier. Orientation is key, so you can take advantage of the sun in winter and shelter from it in the summer. Levels of insulation can help avoid wide swings in the fabric of the building heating up.

The real challenge is older houses and buildings. This is where an experienced architect can bring real improvement and enjoyment to a building.

We are now undertaking more environmental and energy surveys on buildings with an emphasis on the



reduction of carbon, but more needs to be done on the building assessment phase when introducing improvements for the occupants.

Ventilation together with thermal performance are the keys. The more stable the building temperature, the better for the occupants. So, to avoid freezing in winter and overheating in summer, consideration should be given to adding wall, roof and floor insulation.

Ventilation is more than simply opening a window – and some people fail to do this. Ventilation is about getting air movement through and up a building. Adding high level windows or extractors to allow hot air to escape and cross ventilation - air movement across a building - will create a welcome draft and keep down the temperature.

All buildings can be altered and improved so that you are not forced into expensive alterations like AC. Better to invest in shading, insulation and ventilation. Take some advice and the impact will be revealing.

It's just a shame that the country is still designing and building houses that are not suitable for our warmer climate. While lip service is paid to carbon reduction, a lot is missing on the fundamental approaches to creating cooler designs. For many architects, 'cool' is a compliment on the design of a building instead of it being a requirement for its success in use.

Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield can be contacted on 0191 384 9470 or email n.turner@hlpuk.com www.howarthlitchfield.com



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Matthew Clarke

The Built Environment

In the latest of this popular series of features, we spoke to...

Matthew Clarke

Partner, Sanderson Wetherall

Did you always envisage a career working in and around The Built Environment?

Yes I did - I actually started university doing a degree in civil engineering which by the end of year 1, realised wasn't for me so I changed course to geography which provided me with a passion for physical geography so I do love to explore a map or a plan as part of my job.

Tell us about your current role?

My current role involves managing my team, dealing with clients, understanding their needs and providing solutions, the Teesside office is part of the wider north east team and I am also a shareholding partner in the practice. My day job is still providing valuation reports for a range of property types, mainly commercial for secured lending.

Tell us about your team?

I am lucky to have a great team - Graham Blenkarne who rejoined us recently, Matthew Ternent and Ocean Atkinson and Celine Balthazard. They are a fantastic bunch of chartered surveyors who are the go-to experts for property valuations in the region. Being locals, they're familiar with the local market and the ins and outs of everything from retail units in Middlesbrough to large industrial warehouses in Stockton-on-Tees.

What are you currently working on?

My work is ever changing, we don't tend to have long standing projects, there is usually a start and a finish fairly quickly.

What is your proudest career achievement?

Going back a fair few years, I still remember the exhilaration of passing my professional qualification (APC) - in the days before the results were posted online, it was an anxious wait for the post! Being asked to be a shareholder was also a great milestone for me, having been at the firm for over 25 years now, being part of the bigger picture is really important to me.

What is your own favourite building?

Like many I do love iconic historical buildings and enjoy seeing amazing architecture, however from a work perspective, there is nothing I like more than a massive industrial unit!

How do you see your industry evolving over the next 10 years?

I believe the property and surveying industry will continue to remain people focused and driven by what our clients want and need, the use of AI will no doubt

increase and it is important we use it to our advantage to benefit and progress the industry rather than work against it. The shift towards sustainability and net-zero targets will fundamentally change how commercial properties are valued. This change is driven by a combination of new regulations, shifting tenant and investor demand, and the financial risks associated with climate change.

What does the future hold?

For me, being the best I can be and continuing to direct my passion for the job and the company into making it a success and doing the best for our clients, I am a big believer in you are only as good as your last job. Additionally, I am passionate about the place I live and work, and will continue to tell everyone about how great Teesside is.

Who would be your four ideal dinner guests?

I love rugby so I would say world cup winner and former Lions captain Martin Johnson, a born leader and winner, and I do love the Boro so it would have to be the Brazilian legend that is Juninho, the recently retired cyclist and winner of the most tour de France stages, Mark Cavendish, and then to mix it up the amazing singer Stevie Wonder!

How do you like to unwind ?

I do enjoy getting out on my bike however since buying a Victorian house with a fair-sized garden, there hasn't been so much free time, so now I would say outdoor cooking, I do love firing up my Kamado and cooking a good steak to enjoy with my family. I also help coach an U11 rugby team and it is so great seeing them improve and develop a love for the game. And of course, following the Boro!

Favourite boxset?

I don't really do boxsets but I do love watching sport such as the Tour de France or the Lions, as well as Netflix crime series from my favourite authors like Harlan Coben.

Favourite book?

I do like to read as it helps me relax (although refer to previous comment on time!) and I love anything by Peter Robinson, Lee Child, Michael Connelly or Conn Iggulden who does amazing historical fiction.

sw.co.uk



J T Dove among the UK's best privately managed companies

As the North East's leading Builders Merchant, J T Dove, releases its latest annual profits, the company has also been recognised as one of ten top-performing private businesses in the UK's 2025 Best Managed Companies awards.

The award comes hot on the heels of a positive trading year for the company. Whilst industry benchmarking data suggests a reduction in demand, the company saw increased sales volumes and increased revenue, increasing turnover by 2.3% to £96.6m.

This is the inaugural year of the UK's Best Managed Companies awards, with the programme already established in over 45 territories across the world. It recognises top private companies for their organisational success and contributions to their industry and the economy.

The programme highlights the role of private companies as key innovators and major contributors to the UK's economic

growth. Independent judges assessed applicants based on four critical pillars: strategy, culture and commitment, capabilities and innovation, and governance and financial performance.

J T Dove Managing Director, Michael Young commented: "We are thrilled to be recognised as one of the UK's top managed private companies and are proud to have our strategic vision, innovation efforts, and organisational capabilities acknowledged by Deloitte Private and the Best Managed Companies judges in this way."

On the current performance of the company, Michael said: "After a first quarter of 2025 which largely mirrored 2024 performance, we are seeing a clear

increase in demand in the second quarter. A gradual increase in trading activity is anticipated across the industry as a whole in the second half of 2025 and the directors remain optimistic for the future. It remains the company's strategy to pursue sustainable growth opportunities."

The UK's Best Managed Companies programme shines a spotlight on private businesses from across the UK and the performance that drives them. The programme is an initiative of Deloitte Private, which provides personalised solutions to privately owned businesses and family enterprises.

Claire Evans, Deloitte Private partner and UK Best Managed Companies leader, said: "The Best Managed Companies programme celebrates the passion, resilience, and focus on sustainable growth that are hallmarks of the UK's leading private businesses. These businesses are purpose-driven, disciplined, and industry-leading. They are confidently navigating the future and setting an inspiring standard for success among private businesses in the UK."

www.jtdove.co.uk

Admin and accounts teams bolstered by new arrivals



L-R: Karen Breen, Karen Britton, Tracey Dalkin, Marcia Forrest, Lisa Moore and Michelle Reed

Stanley-based, Hodgson Sayers has welcomed Marcia Forrest and Michelle Reed to its administration team and Karen Britton as purchase ledger within accounts.

The appointments reflect a buoyant order book and the need for further resource to support the growing volume of work.

Hodgson Sayers specialises in roofing, building maintenance and security products and operates across the UK and with a dedicated base in the Midlands.

John Sayers, managing director at Hodgson Sayers, said: "Bringing Marcia, Michelle and Karen into the team reflects our ongoing commitment to strengthening the support behind our core operations. Their combined skills and experience will help us maintain the high standards our clients expect and ensure we continue to deliver projects smoothly and efficiently as we continue to grow."

Marcia, Michelle and Karen are joined in the administration and accounts team by longer established colleagues Karen Breen, Tracey Dalkin and Lisa Moore.

Marcia and Michelle form part of a team which manages a broad range of essential tasks that keep the company running effectively. Michelle brings extensive administrative experience, while Marcia's role involves overseeing a variety of office processes. Both contribute additional skills with Marcia being a qualified first aider and Michelle serving as a fire marshal and mental health first aider.

Marcia, said: "Hodgson Sayers stands out for its strong focus on process and organisation. The team is close-knit and extremely focused, making it an enjoyable and rewarding place to work."

Michelle, added: "It is fantastic to be part of a team that values not only efficiency but the wellbeing of its people. I look forward to contributing to this positive environment."

Joining the accounts department as purchase ledger, Karen brings valuable financial expertise to manage supplier accounts and support the wider finance

team. Her background in accounts management is set to strengthen the firm's financial operations.

Karen, said: "Joining Hodgson Sayers is a great opportunity to apply my skills in a supportive and dynamic environment. I look forward to contributing to the continued growth and success of the business."

With a focus on efficiency, collaboration and client service, Hodgson Sayers continues to develop its teams to meet the evolving demands of the construction industry while maintaining a friendly and professional workplace culture.

In addition to a raft of new hires, the company, which employs 100 people, recently bolstered its board of directors with new members, Marie Errington (Beckwith) and Peter Condren.

Both are long-established members of the senior management team. Marie has moved from office manager to bid and administration director, while Peter moves from operations manager to operations director.

hodgson-sayers.co.uk

Profits up 80% at Esh Group and cash levels at an all-time high

Profits have increased by 80% in the latest financial results posted by North of England contractor, Esh Group.



Operating profits jumped to £5.2 million for 2024, up from £2.9 million in the previous year, and the privately-owned firm more than doubled its cash balance to £36 million by the year end – the highest ever on record.

Driven by a strategically designed business model which targets sectors that are underpinned by strong and sustainable demand drivers, Esh Group has over £2 billion worth of visibility in its forward order book, which gives rise to long-term confidence in future revenues for the business, according to Chief Executive Andy Radcliffe.

He said: “We’ve made real progress as a business over the past few years as we fundamentally repositioned our group to target the most attractive segments of the market, and we’re in a really good place right now – which, many would argue is at odds with the broader industry narrative that suggests challenging trading conditions are persisting.

“During the first half of 2024, we closed out the majority of contracts that had been impacted by the aggressive rise in cost inflation over the previous two years, and in the second half of the year, every division of the group performed exceptionally well. With liquidity at an all-time-high, expanding gross profit margins, and a business plan delivering as intended, our group is well-positioned for continued success, with 2025 set to show an even greater improvement in profitability.

“That being said, we are certainly not being complacent – we must continue the relentless execution of our group strategy – a strategy that saw us through the challenging times during and after the pandemic. This, coupled with our prudent approach to working capital management, sensible work winning strategies, and quality and safe delivery, will provide a solid foundation for a prosperous future.”

The Group continues to benefit from an undrawn £6 million credit facility and made a capital investment of £2 million during the year to purchase new, more sustainable plant and equipment to support its strategic growth and carbon reduction plans.

Turnover was up by £4 million to £265 million, with delivery improvements in both its contracting and development divisions driving the increase in gross profit margins to 8%.

Esh maintains a finely balanced portfolio of work covering local authorities, utility and environmental companies, registered affordable housing providers, as well as the private housing sector, which enables the firm to ‘even out the peaks and troughs of the construction industry’s demand profile over the economic cycle,’ explained Radcliffe.

He added: “Our strategy of focusing on resilient market segments has served us well in recent years, culminating in a headline order book exceeding £2 billion. Building on this momentum, we are actively pursuing additional opportunities within our core markets and anticipate continued growth in both turnover and margins into the future.”

The 800-strong contractor was recently appointed as sole delivery partner for Northumbrian Water Group’s (NWG) wastewater networks planned and reactive repairs and maintenance framework, further strengthening its forward order book by £160 million. The new contract, combined with existing frameworks for the AMP 8 programme, has primed Esh for significant growth in the wastewater and environmental sector.

Flagship schemes such as the Tyne Bridge Restoration, Stockton Waterfront Urban Park, and the 750-home Seaham Garden Village highlight Esh’s trusted capabilities in delivering complex major investment projects.

Meanwhile the redevelopment of Eston Precinct, an education hub at Newton Aycliffe’s Greenfield Academy, and the new Bishop Auckland Bus Station, will see Esh provide improved facilities for local communities alongside delivering one of the most comprehensive social value offerings within the industry.

Responding to the rising demand for new and improved affordable housing, Esh has significantly expanded its delivery across the North East and Tees Valley through both competitive tenders and its land-led route to market. Being chosen as a key delivery partner for Gentoo Group’s new £170 million ‘Gentoogether’ programme has provided a 10-year pipeline of work for Esh’s refurbishment delivery teams, and, with a bustling pipeline of projects underway or set to begin in all corners of the region, Esh is on track for a 45% uplift in new build homes delivered by the end of 2025.

This year, Esh Group was named by Deloitte as one of the UK’s Best Managed Companies for 2025 which Radcliffe attributed to the skill and dedication of the vast array of talented people in the business.

He concluded: “Our long-term vision is clear and we are strongly positioned to navigate the ups, downs and challenges that all businesses face, particularly in the construction industry. I’m genuinely proud of the dedication shown by everyone in the business – their incredible hard work, technical brilliance and laser focus on delighting our clients has helped shape the strong position we are in today. And, as ever, we are enormously grateful to our valued clients and our loyal supply chains for their continued support.”

www.eshgroup.co.uk



“

*...our group is
well-positioned
for continued
success...*

Andy Radcliffe



CGI of The Cornfields

Banks Homes starts work at first Tees Valley development

Housebuilder Banks Homes has started construction work at its first residential site in the Tees Valley.

The County Durham-headquartered developer has begun building up to 109 high quality family homes at its new Cornfields site, which sits on the southern edge of the town.

And it has awarded contracts to a number of regional firms to carry out different aspects of the required development work, including Leyburn-based groundworks firm Biker Group, BS Scaffolding of Middlesbrough and Team Valley's Tri-Floor, which is supplying the underfloor heating.

The Cornfields will include a total of 11 different property designs, ranging from three-to-five-bedroomed homes.

All the properties will be fitted with smart heating systems, air source heat pumps and electric vehicle car charging points, while a number of the house types will also come with underfloor heating.

A marketing suite will open at the new development soon, while the site's Sheraton and Hawthorne show homes are expected to be ready to open their doors in late



autumn after local specialists Furnish and Cocoon & Bauer were appointed as their interior designers.

The first homes at The Cornfields are expected to be ready for buyers to move into before the end of the year.

Russ Hall, managing director at Banks Homes, says: "Seeing work starting is always an exciting landmark at any development and it's great to see the progress that's already being made at our first site in the Tees Valley.

"The Cornfields is just a ten-minute walk from the centre of Yarm, one of the region's most beautiful and sought-after places to live, and we know there's going to be a huge

amount of interest in the new homes that we're now building.

"Banks has a longstanding policy of investing in the expertise of regional businesses wherever possible and we're very pleased to be able to call upon the services of these expert providers for the different aspects of The Cornfields' development."

New homes are now available at The Cornfields in Yarm from £325,995.

For further information, please visit www.bankshomes.co.uk/developments/the-cornfields or call 0191 378 6205.

ONE OF THE NORTH OF ENGLAND'S LARGEST PRIVATELY-OWNED CONSTRUCTION BUSINESSES.

WWW.ESHGROUP.CO.UK





Landmark year for True North Construction

Newcastle-based, True North Construction, is celebrating a landmark year, with its workforce doubling from 14 to 30 employees, alongside a 60% increase in turnover.

The rapid growth reflects the company's expanding residential and commercial project portfolio, alongside a strong commitment to team culture and its position as an employer of choice.

Founded in 2019, True North Construction has quickly established itself as a trusted provider of full turnkey construction solutions, delivering both contemporary and modern high-end extensions, refurbishments and bespoke new builds across the region. Additionally, it stands out as one of the few regional and award-winning specialists in the construction of certified Passivhaus homes, demonstrating its commitment to sustainability and energy efficiency.

This dedication to excellence was recently

recognised when its bespoke residential project in Tynemouth was awarded Residential Project of the Year at the Constructing Excellence North East Awards 2025. It marked the second time in three years the company secured this honour.

To keep pace with its rapid growth, the company has significantly strengthened its senior management team, with experienced site managers, supervisors and project staff. Alongside this, it has expanded its joinery and bespoke interiors division to provide clients with enhanced craftsmanship and detail and has broadened its market focus beyond traditional residential developments, successfully securing contracts in the hospitality, healthcare, childcare and office sectors. This diversification underscores the company's ambition to build a versatile and resilient portfolio.

Director, Steven Henderson, said: "Our growth has been fast but strategic and reflects the quality services we provide to our clients, many of whom have been with us since True North Construction was established in 2019. We've prioritised recruiting the right people who share our passion for quality and attention to detail. Winning the award for the Tynemouth project is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our entire team and the eye for detail that we put into all of our work."

Director, David Roberts, added: "We have ambitious plans for the future. Doubling our workforce and turnover in the past year shows we're on the right path and we're

just getting started. Our goal is to continue expanding our reach across the North East, attracting top talent and delivering sustainable, high-quality projects that make a real difference for our clients and communities."

Looking ahead, the company has ambitious plans to undertake larger residential projects valued at over £5 million and to expand its commercial operations further. To support these goals, it is actively recruiting skilled professionals across multiple disciplines, including site management, project delivery and specialist trades.

True North works tirelessly to produce a high-quality bespoke finish, whilst managing the delivery of the project – on time, safely and within budget. It does this by developing close working relationships with its clients, other local trades and architects. It is passionate about the use of novel building materials and techniques and has vast experience working with environmentally conscious products.

Safety is the top priority, and the company adheres to the highest industry standards and implements rigorous safety protocols to safeguard its employees, clients and communities. Its commitment to sustainability drives it to incorporate environmentally friendly practices and materials whenever possible, contributing to a greener future for generations to come.

truenorthconstruction.co.uk



Michael Richardson
20 Questions for
20 Years

“ Failure, most times, doesn’t mean failure.

It just means you have to find a better way.

Question 2 of 20

Each issue, founder Michael Richardson answers one of 20 questions, exploring 20 eventful years of ups, downs and more, at the Northeast of England headquartered ACT Group.

What were 3 key turning points for ACT in the first 20 years?

1. A Fast Growth Opportunity. In the early days of ACT, a significant competitor ceased trading. This sad event for them, presented a big opportunity for the market. I had to decide if and how to help the hundreds of businesses left without a key supplier. How fast could ACT grow? How big could ACT grow? We reacted quickly and well. And within a few months our turnover had increased by £1m, and the team had grown by 25%.

2. Covid. Nobody knew how to react to Covid. Not me. Not my accountant. Not the bank. A letter from the Government urging ACT to trade on - somehow - as a key supplier to the engineering sector fuelled our determination to survive. But it was hard. Turnover dropped by £1m. Nevertheless, we furloughed nobody. After months of hard work, tears, anger and frustration, we’d made it through. Covid didn’t kill us. But it did make ACT stronger.

3. Scotland. I tried expanding ACT into Scotland twice. Both times, I failed. In 2023, I tried again. A new approach. New people. A different time. And we are doing really well. A great lesson in resilience for ACT. Failure, most times, doesn’t mean failure. It just means you have to find a better way.

Next Time: What’s been the hardest year for ACT Group? And why?

Irresistibly Interesting Stories for Engineers, Creatives, Designers & Makers

BRAIN CHIPS

Elon. Divisive! Here’s how people around him are (trying to) harness world class engineering and tech – for good.

<https://www.my-act.co.uk/act-news/brain-chips/>

HANDY

Now here’s a thing. A bracelet – wearable tech – that’s set on replacing keyboards and mice. Whatever next?

<https://www.my-act.co.uk/act-news/handy/>

4 MONTHS TO GO

It’s only four months until Christmas (!) So let’s take a look at great toys for inventive little engineers.

<https://www.my-act.co.uk/act-news/4-months-to-go/>

THE 10 HARDEST ENGINEERING DEGREES

Here’s a Top Ten Ranking of Engineering Degrees. Hardest to easiest – in the world. Do you agree?

<https://www.my-act.co.uk/act-news/10-hardest-engineering-degrees-in-the-world/>

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ACT GROUP - THE **RIGHT** CUTTING TOOLS & LUBRICANTS. ON TIME. EVERY TIME.

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DRA PAT Testing – Electrical safety with a personal touch

Electrical safety is a legal responsibility for every business – but it's also about looking after the people who make your workplace tick.

For more than 15 years, DRA PAT Testing has been doing exactly that for businesses across the North East and beyond.

Founded in 2009 by Richard Ayre, DRA PAT Testing has grown from a one-man operation in Seaham to the largest PAT Testing company in the region. Now based in North Shields, the company has a team of five full-time engineers, office staff, and a client base of more than 1,500 organisations. In that time, they have tested over 1.5 million appliances.

Richard is also the founder and director of the Portable Appliance Testing Trade Association (PATTA) – established to improve industry standards and professionalism nationwide. Through PATTA, he works to ensure that UK businesses can expect competence, safety, and integrity from their testing providers.

From banking to business owner

Before launching DRA PAT Testing, Richard spent 10 years in banking. After retraining in electrical safety, he started the business from his home in Seaham before moving both home and operations to Wallsend in 2011.

With his background in office work, Richard understands the pressures managers face. Many SMEs don't have an in-house health and safety manager, so he works closely with them – offering guidance on electrical safety, fire prevention, and other essential safety measures. Over the years, he has also built a trusted network of contacts to recommend for specialist needs outside his own services.

A Personal Approach to Safety

Richard lives in Wallsend with his wife, three children (two now grown up), and two cockerpoos. Outside of work, he enjoys paddleboarding and keeps his coffee black but his tea white.

While DRA PAT Testing has grown significantly, Richard remains hands-on with many long-term customers. "I like



Richard Ayre

getting to know the people behind the businesses," he explains. "It's not just about ticking a box – it's about building relationships and keeping people safe without unnecessary costs or disruption."

What DRA PAT Testing offers

DRA PAT Testing provides Portable Appliance Testing – routine checks to ensure electrical items are safe to use. This helps businesses meet their legal duties under the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989 and reduces the risk of accidents, fires, and costly downtime.

The company also offers:

- **Fixed Wiring Inspections (EICR)** – checking the safety of the electrical installation.
- **Emergency Lighting Inspections** – ensuring lighting functions in an evacuation.

Their ethos is simple: only the testing you need, delivered with professionalism and efficiency.

Trusted by Leading Names

DRA PAT Testing's client list includes:

- Centre for Life
- Durham Police
- Nexus
- Beacon of Light
- Scream for Pizza
- The Stack
- Frank Recruitment Group
- Jackson Hogg

From large public sector bodies to small independent businesses, DRA adapts its

service to meet the client's needs while maintaining high standards.

Why businesses choose DRA

- Over 15 years in business and 1.5 million appliances tested
- Founder/director of PATTA, improving standards nationwide
- The largest PAT Testing company in the North East
- Flexible scheduling with minimal disruption
- Detailed compliance reports and asset registers
- Additional services for complete electrical safety

As Richard puts it: "We make sure your electrical equipment is safe – and we make the process as easy as possible for you."

Make safety simple – work with DRA PAT Testing

If you're an office manager, facilities manager, or business owner, let DRA PAT Testing handle your electrical safety needs so you can focus on running your business.

With proven experience, a reputation for reliability, and a friendly, approachable team, DRA PAT Testing is the clear choice for keeping your workplace compliant and your people protected.

Contact DRA PAT Testing Today

Website: www.draelectricals.co.uk

Email: info@draelectricals.co.uk

Phone: 0191 666 1009/07778 416850

DRA PAT Testing – the North East's trusted name in electrical safety.



Catherine McKinnell



New motorbike barriers in place

By Catherine McKinnell

In my recent surveys, many residents across Kenton and Fawdon have raised their concerns about illegal motorbikes, often ridden at high speeds.

I met with the Neighbourhood Inspector from Northumbria Police to discuss their work tackling this issue. They showed me examples of this, such as a new barrier to slow bikes down.

So that they can take further action, the police need as much evidence as possible - so please do make reports via 111 or by visiting www.northumbria.police.uk.

I will continue to work with the police and community to tackle this issue and will follow any developments closely.



Hi everyone,

Been really exciting as Gordon (Uncle James' new puppy) has been allowed his first sleepover. He had to stay in his cage overnight so I could get some sleep, but we had a great time during the day and we had some long walks together. Still busy at work but enjoying myself.

See ya, Cally

Q: I have a wooden-framed, three-panelled lounge window, 4m x 2.5m, with no opening lights. I want to change it to one which opens onto a patio. The house was built in the early 50's and the window has a hidden lintel, I assume, with bricks forming the outside of the cavity wall appearing to be placed directly on top of the wooden frame. I have invited three specialist window installers to inspect, and to give me a quote. Company One suggested that PVC-U or aluminium could be used - that a steel angle iron may be required upon further investigation (ie during the alteration) and that an external lintel may also be required. Company Two said PVC-U would not be strong enough, and aluminium would be needed. This agent did inspect the outside of the window and said that Building Regulations would not now allow the external bricks to just rest on the frame - they would need some independent support. Company Three insisted that PVC-U would be the best material, and he brought small samples

The continued adventures of...

Cally

to demonstrate their strength. He did not go outside and did not mention lintels. So, could you please try to clear up my dilemma as to which company is right?

A: In your opening lines, you say you assume that this four-metre wide window opening has 'a hidden lintel' supporting the weight of the brickwork above. This is a dangerous assumption. Nowadays there are some clever designs of steel lintel, where the main structural support is up inside the cavity. In the early 1950s such a design did not exist. There was usually a substantial timber lintel above the inner leaf (sometimes steel), but it was common for the first course of outer-leaf bricks to be bedded directly onto the window frame. In other cases a 'flat' brick arch would have been designed to carry the load; in time, these too might have settled, meaning that the window frame became load-bearing. Fitters working for replacement window firms are often ignorant of this fact, or perhaps they just don't care. All over the UK you can see examples of houses that have been damaged by cheap replacement windows - whether PVC-U, aluminium alloy, or thin-section timber. The original window had been carrying the load of the wall above - whether by accident or design. The new window is not up to the job, and after a few years a characteristic cracking pattern emerges, with a triangle of brickwork detached from the rest of the wall, and perching on top of the sagging window frame. Your first two companies at least acknowledge that a new lintel would be needed, but appear vague about the size or type. I suggest that rather than a "specialist window installer", what you really need is a Fenestration Surveyor or Structural Engineer to survey the property, specify the best product, and inspect the final installation.



Please send me your building queries through facebook - @WDLne or wdlnortheast.co.uk or through my Dad's good pal Michael at Northern Insight on michael@northern-insight.co.uk

Wright Residential – Specialists in lettings, not sales

When it comes to managing rental properties, Wright Residential takes a clear and focused approach: we do lettings – and only lettings.

Unlike estate agents who split their time between sales and rentals, our sole priority is looking after landlords and tenants. This means 100% of our expertise, resources, and attention is dedicated to providing the best possible lettings service across Sunderland and the surrounding areas.

We understand the unique challenges landlords face – from finding reliable tenants to ensuring properties remain compliant with ever-changing regulations. That's why we offer a comprehensive, tailored service designed to take the stress out of property management. Whether you own a single flat or a large portfolio, you can expect the same high standard of care and professionalism.

For tenants, our commitment is just as strong. We pride ourselves on matching people to homes where they feel comfortable, secure, and valued. By focusing exclusively on lettings, we ensure a smooth process from the first viewing to moving in – and beyond.

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We're not distracted by sales targets – our only goal is to make lettings work for you.

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Wright Residential – Lettings are our business.



THE NEWCASTLE SCHOOL

NEW NAME, SAME VISION

Newcastle School for Boys is transitioning to The Newcastle School. Girls will be welcomed into our Junior School and Sixth Form in 2026, followed by full integration into the Senior School in 2027. Join us for one of our Open Days to learn more!

OPEN DAYS

Junior School:

27th September, 10am-12pm

Senior School and Sixth Form:

4th October, 10am-12pm

newcastleschool.co.uk

Sunderland girls' school celebrates national success in STEM design competition



Talented Year 9 students from St Anthony's Girls' Catholic Academy in Sunderland have secured third place in a prestigious national livery design competition, earning them a place to compete in STEM on Track in the next academic year.

The challenge required students to create a motorsport livery design that reflected their school, community and the motorsport industry. Their creative and thoughtful entry stood out among hundreds of schools across the UK.

The results were unveiled during an event held at Whilton Mill Circuit in Northampton, where the winning design was showcased. Students from St Anthony's, which is part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, were thrilled to see their work recognised on a national platform and are now preparing to take their STEM journey to the next level.

Participation in STEM on Track – a nationwide initiative using motorsport to inspire young people in science, technology, engineering and maths, by building a go-kart from scratch and then racing it – comes with a cost. The team has already received £1,250 in funding towards the £6,100 needed to take part next year but is now seeking additional sponsors and supporters to help them achieve their goal.

Assistant headteacher Laura Dudley said: "This has been an incredible experience for our students. Their dedication, creativity and teamwork have been outstanding, and we're so proud of them all. With the right support, they can go even further and share their passion of motorsports and love of STEM by building and racing their own go-kart in the finals next June."

Hannah, one of the Year 9 team members, said: "Designing something that represents our school and seeing it come to life would be amazing! We've learned so much, and now we want to keep pushing forward in the competition."

The academy is calling on businesses, community groups and individuals to consider sponsoring the team. Sponsors will benefit from branding opportunities on the team's livery and promotional materials. Email Laura Dudley at ldudley@staga.co.uk

www.st-anthonys-academy.com



Y7 boys' football team enjoy National Cup Final success

A local U12 boys' football team is celebrating winning the English Schools' Football Association (ESFA) National Cup following a triumphant 2-0 win in the final.

Pupils from St. Joseph's Catholic Academy, Hebburn, which is part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, beat Shenfield High School from Essex, to bring the cup back to the North East.

The squad comprised Hayden Cassin, Tom Connolly, Jax Davis, Ralphie Dinnery (captain), Joey Greenwood, Matthew Henderson, Tyler Hogg, Riley Jennings, Harvey Lee, Jacob Parker and Harry Price. All of whom are part of the Elite Football Academy at St. Joseph's run in partnership with Fast Feet Football Academy.

Hayden Cassin, the St Joseph's Man of the Match in the final, said: "It was a really good experience for the lads, I was really happy when we won. I was happy with my performance with two assists for Tom's two goals. It has made us want to get there again and experience it as many times as possible."

Fast Feet team managers at the event Charlie Bews and Isaac Gamblin, said: "The boys represented the school very well with a

professional performance. The trophy is a result of their season-long hard work."

This is not the school's only footballing success this year – the Year 8 girls' team also reached the ESFA final but lost 3-1 to a strong Surbiton team, the Year 8 boys' team also reached the semi-final of the ESFA National Cup, the Year 10 boys' team won the Londonderry Cup (County Cup) for the fourth year in a row, the U16 girls won their County Cup, and the U13 girls won their County Cup too.

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RGS Alumni - 500 Years of Influence

*By Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster,
RGS Newcastle.*

As part of our ongoing Quincentenary celebrations (until Spring 2026), we are proudly honouring the remarkable individuals who have attended the school and helped shape its legacy.

Over the past five centuries, the Royal Grammar School (RGS) in the heart of Newcastle has welcomed many distinguished individuals - initially boys upon the school's founding in 1525 and, over the past two decades of co-education, girls from across the region - who have helped shape its enduring legacy.

As a result of this shared experience, they are known as Old Novocastrians. Each year, I have the privilege of speaking to many of our Old Novos, and it is always fascinating to see the breadth of careers they go on to carve out, with many serving in positions of great distinction.

Their impact stretches not merely across the North East, nor even just across the UK, but across the whole world. Indeed, a recent legacy, very generously donated to us by an ON who lived in Australia, has enabled the school, within our Quincentenary, to welcome our 500th bursary student since the founding of our bursary campaign just over twenty years ago. They will be one of 100 bursary students at the school in September (up from 90 in the last academic year).

When talking with ONs, many fondly recall the positive influence of particular teachers in helping them to achieve their aspirations. Indeed, one BAFTA winning film producer includes his former Film Studies teacher in the credits for each of his films. Meanwhile, one of the portraits hanging in our historic Main Hall shows Hugh Moises who was Headmaster of the School for 38 years from 1749 to 1787. Moises' reputation was that he turned out more distinguished men than any other schoolmaster in England at that time.



Geoffrey Stanford

Among them were William Scott, who became Lord Stowell, and his brother John Scott, who later became the Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain and was given the title Lord Eldon. Illustrating the school's longstanding commitment to supporting bursary students, Eldon later recalled, "Cuthbert Collingwood and I were class fellows at Newcastle. We were placed at that School because neither his father nor mine could afford to place us elsewhere." Cuthbert Collingwood went on to be Admiral Lord Nelson's second in command. He is arguably the forgotten hero of the battle of Trafalgar and George III remarked on the excellence of Collingwood's naval dispatches, crediting his early education as "one of Moises' boys."

Other more recent ONs include Peter Taylor who became Lord Chief Justice, Sir Max Hill who succeeded Keir Starmer as Director of Public Prosecutions, and Gregory Winter who received a Nobel prize in Chemistry. However, while some of our former pupils have achieved great public acclaim, many others within the RGS Family have quietly gone out into the world, making meaningful contributions to society through their dedication to public service and community causes - often

without recognition or fanfare. This often leads me to wonder what our current students will go on to achieve.

At our annual Founder's Service, I encourage our Year 7 students joining the Senior School to reflect not only on how they will make the most of being part of such a special community but also on how they will contribute to it. Many may not yet know what path they will take, and that is perfectly natural. However, I hope that throughout their time at RGS and long after they leave they will continue to return to these questions of purpose and strive to make a positive impact in the world.

I encourage you to explore the RGS 500 microsite and discover more about our alumni, from pioneering scientists and influential artists to dedicated teachers and trailblazing innovators. Our microsite is home to a wealth of treasured artefacts and beloved stories.

Throughout the Autumn Term, we will launch five new themes exploring our rich heritage - from RGS Sport to our regional impact - so please, stay tuned for more anniversary celebrations and RGS historical insights.

www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk/500th



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Education for all at Darlington College

New Principal drives growth in campus and student numbers.

Over the past two years, Darlington College has continued its trajectory of growth and transformation under the leadership of Principal, David Gartland. Building on strong foundations, the college has seen staff numbers rise to nearly 500 and student enrolments increase dramatically, reaching approximately 7,000 learners. This sustained momentum reflects a clear strategic vision and an ongoing commitment to expanding opportunities for learners across the region.

The number of courses has risen, and the Darlington College campus has increased to include several other buildings within the town.

A working relationship with Teesside University has seen the arrival of the ATMOS building which caters for those students following Higher Education courses. One of the biggest developments is a newbuild, dedicated skills centre for 14-16-year olds on the main campus.

And in the centre of Darlington in what used to be the Northern Echo newspaper offices, there'll be dedicated adult skills centre to support learners looking to develop new skills, retrain or enrol onto maths and English.

Bearing in mind that David is the CEO of Darlington College as well as being the Principal, he's a busy chap.

"The pace of change within Darlington College reflects the ambitions we have for the college, our students, for the town and for the North East in general," said David. "We offer a wide range of subjects at various levels that are designed to help students of all abilities achieve their career ambitions. Alongside our full-time courses, we work closely with a wide range of businesses to provide apprenticeship opportunities for anyone over the age of 16. Employers also inform our curriculum planning and come together to give their sector specific expertise on how they would wish to shape the future workforce. Our overriding aim is to provide all students... no matter what their age...with an exceptional education that allows them to progress in education or be ready for the workplace."

The college's skills centre for 14-16-year olds gives young people a career-focussed education. Some students of that age can find traditional school settings rather challenging, so there's a focus on helping them learn skills that will suit them. They still work towards their GCSE's in maths and English but this is contextualised into the career areas such as automotive engineering, construction, hospitality, hairdressing, healthcare and tourism.

"We work closely with businesses to ensure that the skills which these young people learn are relevant for the workplace and hopefully lead them to an apprenticeship or further study. Our tutors have a huge amount of industry experience, and our students benefit from this.

"We are having terrific success in finding employment for students who may have, initially, struggled with education. Several have recently joined an airline to become cabin crew. Another is the youngest train driver on the Wensleydale Railway. We give students 'real world' experience travelling to places such as Brazil, Tanzania, Cambodia, Finland and Thailand to discover how other countries approach various careers. For example, some of our hospitality students were keen on developing their Thai cooking skills, so we sent them to Bangkok. The spin-off for everyone was that they put those new-found skills to use in the college restaurant.

"The universal student success at the college is also largely attributed to the robust wraparound support services that we have in place," explains David. "From mental health and wellbeing care to financial and learning support, we ensure our students are equipped to thrive."

Darlington College is plainly an incredible place to study with students enjoying being part of a community, learning new skills, developing knowledge, and learning to work with others as well as independently.

Darlington College is a forward-looking place. Why not look forward with them?

If you'd like more information about what David Gartland and his team can offer you at Darlington College, the best idea is to go onto their excellent website... www.darlington.ac.uk where you'll find full details of the courses on offer as well as how to get in touch.



“

...we ensure our students are equipped to thrive...



David Gartland



Mowden announces new catering partnership with Thomas Franks

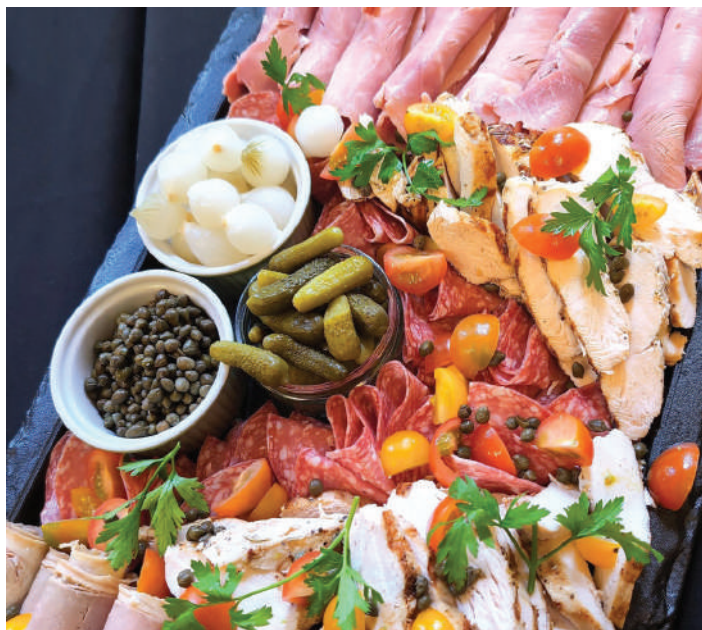
Mowden Hall is delighted to be entering into a partnership with Thomas Franks, a family-owned catering company with a global reputation for serving exceptional food made from locally sourced produce.

Founded by Frank and Emma Bothwell in 2004, Thomas Franks has a significant presence across the UK and around the world.

The company works with many of the world's leading independent schools including Wycombe Abbey, Eltham College, Summer Fields, City of London Freeman's School, Inspired Education and the Girls Day School Trust, and has an extensive portfolio of clients in business and industry, including Autotrader, Barings, Britvic, Burberry, Cushman & Wakefield, Dentons, Edinburgh Airport, PZ Cussons, Somerset County Cricket Club and Withers. Internationally, they have quickly become the go-to catering partner for ambitious brands in Portugal, Malta, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Italy and the Bahamas.

They are renowned for producing great food is bursting with flavour. Their ingredients are fresh, seasonal and sourced from local, family-owned suppliers in line with their commitment to support small businesses. Chefs work in partnership with an in-house Nutrition Team to curate menus that meet rigorous standards of quality and nutritional value. The Mowden Hall team will have access to an extensive support network, which includes development chefs, culinary directors, nutritionists and sustainability experts. Thomas Franks knows that some children don't find eating easy and Mowden Hall will work collaboratively with their team to help our pupils to make positive food choices.

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Mowden shortlisted for prestigious school award

Mowden Hall is thrilled to have been shortlisted for Independent Prep School of the Year at the Independent Schools of the Year 2025 awards.

As the independent school sector's leading awards programme, the focus this year is on celebrating the demonstrable benefits of an independent school education and showcasing the innovative, caring and life-enhancing student experience which pupils in our schools receive.

At Mowden, we believe every child deserves a truly magical school experience. We strive to create a place where each child feels at home, with the time, space, and encouragement to grow, develop, and enjoy their childhood to the fullest. Our nurturing, caring, and creative environment is at the heart of everything we do - and this award nomination is a wonderful reflection of that commitment. We're now eagerly looking ahead to the next stage, with finalists to be announced in September before the awards ceremony later this autumn.

www.mowdenhallpst.org



OPEN EVENT

Thursday 23rd October
4:30pm - 7:30pm



durhamsixthformcentre.org.uk



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St. Aidan's Catholic Academy, Sunderland, SR2 7HJ

Year 6 Open Evening: 6.00 – 8.00 pm Tuesday 16 September 2025



st-anthonys-academy.com

St. Anthony's Girls Catholic Academy, Sunderland, SR2 7JN

Year 6 Open Evening: 6.00 – 8.00 pm Tuesday 23 September 2025



aaasixthform.com

St. Aidan's & St. Anthony's Catholic 6th Form, Sunderland, SR2 7JN

6th Form Open Evening: 5.30 – 7.30 pm Tuesday 14 October 2025



st-bedes.org

St. Bede's Catholic School & Byron 6th Form, Peterlee, SR8 1DE

Year 6 Open Evening: 6.00 – 8.00 pm Thursday 25 September 2025
6th Form Open Evening: 6.00 – 8.00 pm Thursday 9 October 2025



stjosephs.uk.net

St. Joseph's Catholic Academy, Hebburn, NE31 2ET

Year 6 Open Evening: 6.00 – 8.00 pm Thursday 25 September 2025
6th Form Open Evening: 5.30 – 7.30 pm Thursday 13 November 2025



st-wilfrids.org

St. Wilfrid's R.C. College, South Shields, NE34 0QA

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6th Form Open Evening: 5.00 – 6.30 pm Monday 13 October 2025

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Alexander Millar closes Newcastle gallery

After decades of extraordinary success as one of the UK's most cherished artists, Alexander Millar – best known for creating the iconic 'Gadgie' – has officially closed the doors of his Newcastle Gallery for the final time.

Alexander has locked up the gallery on Grey Street, marking the end of an era and the beginning of a new, slower-paced chapter in his creative life. While the closure is bittersweet, it reflects a conscious decision to step back from the daily demands of running a gallery and focus on the things he loves most: painting, travelling, and enjoying a more flexible lifestyle.

"It's not retirement – it's more like turning the page to a new chapter," Alexander says. "Closing the Newcastle Gallery was one of the hardest decisions I've ever made. It's been a part of me for so long, and saying goodbye felt like letting go of an old friend. But deep down, I know it's time to return to my roots – to pick up the brush, follow inspiration wherever it leads, and reconnect with the joy that first made me fall in love with painting."



The Sunday for Sammy Trust named finalist

The Sunday for Sammy Trust is proud to announce that it has been shortlisted as a finalist in the Uniquely North East category at the 2025 North East Charity Awards.

The prestigious awards celebrate the incredible work of charities, the voluntary sector, and the individuals and companies who support them across the region. The North East Charity Awards shine a light on the organisations that make a real difference to people's lives and recognise the tireless efforts of those working to build a better, fairer North East.

The Sunday for Sammy Trust, well known for supporting creative talent in the region and funding opportunities in the performing arts, is honoured to be recognised for its uniquely North East contribution to cultural and community life.

Chair of the Sunday for Sammy Trust, actor Tim Healy said: "We're incredibly proud to be shortlisted for this award. Sunday for Sammy has always been about the North East – its talent, its humour, its heart. Over the years, we've seen unforgettable moments on our stage from legends like Marc Knopfler, Jill Halfpenny, Chris Ramsey and Jason Cook, and we've helped launch the careers of countless young performers. This recognition is for them – and for Sammy."

Fans can look forward to the next Sunday for Sammy extravaganza on Sunday 15 February 2026 at the Newcastle Utilita Arena.



Gerry & Sewell is back

With the new Premier League season underway, Tyneside audiences have another reason to celebrate: Gerry & Sewell, Olivier award winning Jamie Eastlake's hit stage adaptation of Jonathan Tulloch's novel *The Season Ticket*, is making a triumphant return to Newcastle Theatre Royal in 2026 (Tue 9 – Sat 13 Jun 2026).

Following its sensational, sell-out run last year, Gerry & Sewell is back by popular demand – and it'll be bigger, belter, and more black-and-white than ever when it storms back onto the Newcastle Theatre Royal stage next year!

Gerry & Sewell is a tale rooted in the North East. Adapted by Olivier Award-winning Jamie Eastlake from Jonathan Tulloch's beloved novel *The Season Ticket* – which inspired the cult Geordie film *Purely Belter* – this raw, funny and heart-filled production tells the story of two Gateshead lads, Gerry and Sewell, and their mission to secure season tickets to watch their beloved Toon.

This is a story of hope and heartbreak that will resonate with anyone from the region and beyond. Whether you bleed black and white, red and white, or aren't a fan at all, this is a story about far more than football.



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Planning permission granted for Sakura Spa at Gisborough Hall – A restorative woodland retreat opening in 2026

Gisborough Hall is delighted to announce that planning permission has been granted for Sakura Spa, a new destination spa experience set to open in spring 2026. Tucked away in the sun-dappled woodlands of North Yorkshire, Sakura Spa will offer guests a peaceful retreat where wellbeing is shaped by the healing power of nature and the quiet beauty of simplicity.

Created with deep respect for the landscape that surrounds it, Sakura Spa will be set within a secluded woodland garden and feature six tranquil treatment rooms, relaxation lounges, an extensive thermal garden featuring a vitality pool, saunas, steam room, garden relaxation rooms, and a dining space exclusive to spa guests.

The project team includes international interior designer Nic Tamlin (nictamlin.com), leading spa consultant Nicki Kurran (spaconsultant.co.uk), and is being project managed by Glenn Bland Chartered Surveyors, a team experienced in creating wellness spaces that blend creativity, sustainability, and meaningful guest experiences.

Lord Gisborough commented: "As a family, we remain deeply committed to the long-term future of Gisborough Hall. The creation of Sakura Spa is a significant investment that reflects our belief of the potential of our hotel."

"For generations, the Chaloner family has been deeply rooted in this cherished corner of the country, committed not only to preserving its natural beauty but to nurturing the community. The Sakura Spa represents more than just a new chapter for our hotel, it is a heartfelt investment in wellbeing, inspired by the surrounding woodland."



A slice of Sicily comes to Durham with the opening of Veeno Wine Bar and Kitchen

Italian wine bar and kitchen Veeno is set to open in Durham, bringing Italian Aperitivo and Spuntini to the city.

Veeno will open its doors at The Riverwalk this month, pairing Sicilian wine with sharing boards of Italian meats and cheeses and creating up to 20 new jobs.

The new venue will also feature Italian pizzas and pasta on the menu, which focuses on the Italian Aperitivo concept - drinking, nibbling and relaxing after work.

Durham duo Dan and Donna Lewis have purchased the franchise from business partners Nino Caruso and Rodrigue Trouillet - who operate five Veeno sites across the UK.

The new wine bar and kitchen will follow the company's model of offering wines from Nino's family vineyard, Caruso and Minini, based in Marsala in the west of Sicily. Spuntini - platters of meats and cheese - will be imported from specialist artisan Italian suppliers which Veeno has built up relationships with throughout the years. Plus, a full range of Italian cocktails and spritz will also be available.

"We can not wait to bring a slice of Sicily to Durham city," said Dan, who has spent time with Donna in Marsala learning all the wines they will be offering.

"The wines at Veeno are a true expression of Sicilian soul - bold, elegant, and rooted in generations of craftsmanship. Every bottle tells a story of sun-drenched vineyards, family heritage, and a deep respect for the land."

"The commitment to tradition, innovation, and sustainability shines through in each vintage, capturing the unique terroir of western Sicily with authenticity and finesse," said Dan, former clubhouse manager of Bishop Auckland Rugby Club.



STACK secures further investment from Westbrooke UK

One of the UK's fastest growing leisure operators has secured further investment to support its plans to roll out nationwide.

Westbrooke Alternative Asset Management UK (Westbrooke UK) has provided a bespoke growth credit facility to STACK Leisure, which currently operates four sites, with plans for many more.

STACK's model - which offers both purpose-build entertainment and leisure operations created out of shipping containers along with repurposing existing, empty buildings - has proved highly successful to date.

The facility has been structured to refinance existing debt and provide flexible capital to accelerate STACK's roll-out of new sites, which includes new developments at Leeds, Manchester, Sheffield, Carlisle, Durham, Bishop Auckland, Whitley Bay and Northampton.

STACK currently operates three sites across the North East - STACK Seaburn at Sunderland, STACK Middlesbrough and St. James' STACK in collaboration with Newcastle United - along with STACK Lincoln.

A second Tyneside site - STACK Newcastle - is also due to open this autumn at the city's Worswick Chambers and will replicate the winning formula of offering a range of top street food vendors, a selection of bars and entertainment spaces.



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The return of the derby

By Stuart Forster

The 2025-26 football season will see the long-awaited return of Tyne-Wear derby matches to the Premier League.

The intensity of the famously passionate support for Newcastle United and Sunderland ratchets to another level on derby days. Experiencing the electric intensity of that rivalry is what following the beautiful game is all about.

The new season's Premier League fixtures were published on 18 June. Like many fellow fans, I hovered on my phone awaiting their release.

My prime objective in skimming the list of games was to determine the dates of league matches between the region's teams – the first since the 2015-16 season. Would there be an early clash, potentially before the squads and playing styles settle? Or maybe one in the season's critical closing weeks?

I had another concern. Might one of the derby matches take place in early December, over the only weekend in all of the months ahead when I'd already planned a trip away? Booking early to experience Budapest's Christmas markets seemed a

smart idea on a dreary day back in January. It seemed a lot less clever ahead of the Premier League announcing its fixture list.

My heart fluttered on seeing that the Sunderland-Newcastle game at the Stadium of Light was scheduled for December. The joy of then realising it would be on the weekend of the 13th – a week later than my Budapest trip – was akin to seeing a match-winning 25-yard screamer smash into the top corner of a net.

The season's second derby, at St James' Park, is scheduled for 21 March. That's a fortnight before the Easter weekend, which is widely recognised as the beginning of the football season's "business end."

The clubs have played each other in the league 142 times, with the Tynesiders recording 57 wins to the Wearsiders' 47. Yet Sunderland have recorded the biggest victory, a 9-1 win away at St James' Park in December 1908. Those historical facts have no bearing on what comes next but are a source of pride among fans.

It's pretty rare for siblings to support rival clubs but that's how it was in our house. As youngsters, our dad took my brother and me to both Sunderland and Newcastle games. That fostered a fondness for both. Vaguely, I recall my dad talking about an approaching derby game when I was still very young. That confused me. We weren't about to play Derby County, so why was he going to watch them? He smiled and explained that the atmosphere of games between local clubs was compared with a famous horse race, called the Derby. Looking back, that question was naïve.

As a journalist, I'm now paid to ask them. Occasionally, I wonder if some of mine have the capacity to disprove the popular phrase, "there's no such thing as a stupid question."

Admirably, both Eddie Howe, Newcastle's Head Coach, and Régis Le Bris, his counterpart at Sunderland, appear to contemplate the questions that they are asked in press conferences before answering. Fans of the respective clubs will inevitably hope that they can provide the answers needed to have successful seasons.

Following Newcastle's Carabao Cup win last season and what appears to be a successful phase of recruitment by Sunderland during the close season, there's an elevated air of anticipation about what the 2025-26 derby games will bring.

In his press conference following the final match of last season, Eddie Howe said: "I think the derby games are obviously very intense games, and they are challenging for both teams, but I think we'll have the attitude that we'll look forward to it, and I think it's great for the area. I think it brings more energy and drama to the game. So let's bring it on."

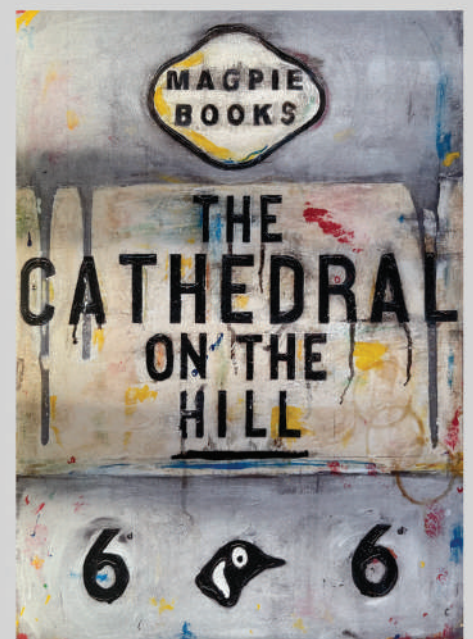
Supporters of both clubs undoubtedly share that sentiment.

Club information and ticketing

Find information about the North East's Premier League football clubs, and information about how to buy match tickets, on the Newcastle United (newcastleunited.com) and Sunderland AFC (safc.com) websites.



Blagdon Gallery



Blagdon Gallery, Milkhope Centre, Berwick Hill Road, Newcastle upon Tyne NE13 6DA

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Diary of a GM



Jeff Hodgson

From F&B to GM: Evolving with the times

There was a time when climbing the ladder to become a General Manager often meant starting in Food & Beverage. I know this because I was one of them.

The skills developed in the restaurant or banquet room — operational focus, team management, guest experience — were once the key stepping stones to leading an entire hotel.

But times have changed.

Today, while operational experience remains valuable, the ability to drive revenue through effective room management, sales, and marketing strategy has become critical. Hotels today are revenue engines, and room sales form the core of that engine.

The reality is this: the fewer guests occupying rooms, the fewer will dine in your outlets or use your ancillary services. And with the rise of digital bookings, third-party platforms, and shifting guest behaviors, room revenue isn't just about occupancy — it's about strategic pricing, segmentation, distribution, and a deep understanding of the sales funnel.

Why Sales & Marketing Strategy Now Matter More Than Ever

I've seen it firsthand — GMs who came up through operations or F&B, like I did, often find themselves playing catch-up when it comes to understanding the mechanics of room revenue. Today's hotel General

Manager must know more than just how to manage departments; they must understand how to lead a hotel business.

It's no longer enough to delegate sales strategy to your DOS (Director of Sales) and hope for the best. A GM must be able to collaborate intelligently with their sales and revenue leaders, interpret data, forecast accurately, and guide the team toward profitability.

Yes, you can still become a GM from an F&B background — I'm living proof of that. But if you want to be a great one today, you need to invest time in learning hotel sales, marketing, and distribution. That means taking courses, mentoring under experienced DOSMs, and immersing yourself in the revenue conversation.

As I've come to learn: to lead a hotel, you must understand its business. And in today's market, that business starts with the rooms.

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L-R: Jonathon Beattie (Food and Beverage Manager), Wendy Bryant (Director of Events), Stuart Lloyd (General Manager), Paul Nicholson (Chef), Lewis Graydon (Commercial Director)

Credit: Lee Dobson Photography

Radisson Blu Durham: Next phase of £5 Million transformation driving demand

Radisson Blu Durham is entering an exciting new chapter as it completes the latest stage of its £5 million refurbishment and the results are already speaking for themselves.

Demand is growing across both leisure and business travel, alongside a sharp rise in meetings and events bookings, as the riverside hotel cements its reputation as one of the North East's most desirable destinations.

Premium bedrooms driving demand

The latest phase focused on upgrading its bedrooms, starting with the fourth-floor Executive Collection, now featuring premium cosy beds, floor-to-ceiling mirrors, mini fridges, Chromecast TVs and high-spec bathrooms.

The second of the two floors completed so far followed with a full décor refresh with further work planned for the two remaining floors. The project has also seen the introduction of refillable water stations on each floor, supporting the hotel's sustainability goals.

Uptake for the premium room upgrade has surged, with guests choosing these rooms for the enhanced comfort, style and thoughtful design.

"It's about elevating the guest experience without losing our Durham soul," says

General Manager Stuart Lloyd. "The response to the new bedrooms, in particular the premium riverside rooms, has been fantastic. They've helped us attract more bookings and deliver even greater comfort."

Jozef's: A five star destination in its own right

Alongside the refurbished bedrooms, Jozef's Bar and Restaurant, launched in the first phase of the investment, featuring outdoor space on the riverside and views towards the castle and Durham Cathedral, continues to impress.

Named after a lesser-known figure from Durham's past, Jozef's combines heritage with a contemporary twist, earning consistent five-star TripAdvisor reviews and a loyal following from hotel guests and local diners alike.

Offering panoramic views of the River Wear and Durham Cathedral, Jozef's serves locally inspired dishes featuring Durham Gin, KAFFEEHAUS coffee and even a nod to the city's mustard-making heritage.

Enhanced meeting, conference and event facilities

The hotel has also invested heavily in its main event space. The function suite has been transformed into a versatile setting, complete with a large private function bar, Tempus Hub, which can be hired for weddings, birthdays, christenings, anniversaries and corporate events.

An enhanced tech infrastructure including InstaShow wireless presentation tech means organisers and delegates no longer need to plug in laptops, streamlining setup and improving event flow.

Combined with capacity for up to 400, free on-site parking and breathtaking views of the River Wear and majestic cathedral this makes every event seamless, scenic and spectacular.

A vision for the future

The transformation is part of a long-term investment programme running into 2026, continuing investment in improved facilities including bedrooms.

"Our ambition is to offer a lifestyle-led experience that resonates with both regional guests and national conference delegates," adds Lloyd.

"We've modernised our spaces, but the people and place that make Radisson Blu Durham special will never change."

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L-R: Victor Kwesi and John Nwachukwu with their fashion collection in Centre Square, Middlesbrough.

Fashion – a language everyone understands

Entrepreneurs who grew up in Nigeria before moving to Middlesbrough to study, launch collection with a purpose.

A fashion entrepreneur and a writer/creative director who grew up together in Nigeria before moving to Middlesbrough to study at Teesside University have launched a new fashion collection with a purpose.

Victor Kwesi and John Nwachukwu have been friends for 25 years and grew up in a city in the Eastern part of Nigeria, before “fate” brought them to Middlesbrough to pursue their careers in business and public health.

“There are other cities we could have gone to, but Teesside University brought us here and John studied public health, while I studied business,” said Victor, whose Victor Kwesi brand of clothing creates hoodies and casual clothing, while John’s ‘Casual Billionaires’ brand creates smart casual outfits for all occasions with an African influence.

Both Victor and John work to support individuals with their mental health through the organisation PIPS (Positive Individual proactive Support) which helps people with learning disabilities, autism and mental health needs across Teesside.

Now the pair have launched a new clothing collection, which combines their shared interest in promoting positive mental wellbeing amongst men on Teesside, with looking good and feeling great.

Victor says: “Fashion can be used as a tool to drive mental health awareness, especially in the black communities in Middlesbrough and I believe that a good outfit is worn best when someone has a sound mind.

“We studied this back home in Nigeria – we grew up together – he’s into clothes making and fashion artistry and I shared the idea with him about how much I feel like fashion can be used as a tool to tell people more about how much they’re caring for their mental health.

“When I told him about my idea for a fashion collection that supports positive mental health and wellbeing, he thought it was a good idea.”

Their Spring/Summer menswear collection, REBIRTH includes five-looks inspired by people overcoming trauma, healing, and spiritual awakening.

The collection uses plant symbols, natural fabrics, and soft, earthy color palettes to echo internal rebirth: “from silence to self-acceptance, from numbness to wholeness”.

Victor says: “Gone are the days when fashion was only skin-deep.

“With REBIRTH, Casual Billionaires steps into the deeper conversation about mental health, emotional vulnerability, and the masculine journey of transformation.

“Each look is more than a fit — it’s a ritual. A quiet rebellion against cultural silence around emotional pain.”

John adds that when Victor brought the idea of a fashion collection supporting positive mental health, he immediately saw the need for men, particularly for men in Middlesbrough.

“Some of the clothes that we make, the materials are light and quite calming on the skin and they make you feel relaxed when you wear them with pride,” he says.

“Wearing them brings you back to sanity, as sometimes the clothes you wear can bring you calmness and help take down your anxiety.”



Victor and John’s summer collection features breathable, soft and cool luxury fabrics at an affordable price.

One particularly striking yellow outfit “represents each and every black man you see in Middlesbrough” according to Victor, because everything about the outfit from the fabric and the idea for the style was made back home in Nigeria.

John says: “We’re bringing the culture of where we come from to the UK – but the clothes are not just for the African community.

“They are smart clothes that can be worn for any occasion.

“Fashion is a language everyone understands – everyone wears clothes and if you put on clothes that help you reduce your anxiety and give you charisma it can benefit your mental health.”

The five looks include ‘Buried Seed’ - a soil brown and faded stone minimal look symbolising emotional shutdown and representing a beginning unseen, but full of latent power.

Meanwhile, Bloom Theory is a soft, joyful ensemble celebrating vulnerability as masculine beauty and unapologetically expressive. The palette for this look features sun yellow, blush, and cream.

The pair are happy to see the black community growing on Teesside and have encouraged friends back home to consider Teesside University as international students since they found a home away from home here in 2021.

Victor, who also writes about positive mental health and wellbeing and has a novel entitled ‘Whispers of the Soul’ coming out next month, says: “As a writer I’ve been able to publish articles on mental health awareness here in Middlesbrough and the work on the fashion collection goes hand in hand with that advocacy work.

“Every three months I write a flyer and post them around offices and shops where I know that the target audience, which is men in Middlesbrough, can get access to it and through our work with PIPS we help people to experience and express life to the fullest.

“My book will shed more light on how men need support to deconstruct their mindset and be able to take care of their mental health better.”

Watch this space!

Places to go...Arran



Having enjoyed my visit to the Isle of Arran in the Spring, I wondered where else I could reach by rail and have as good a time exploring the local area.

Thus my third visit to midge-free Scotland this year was centred on Dunoon, which is on the Cowal Peninsula – it feels like an island but is actually on the mainland, reached by a Calmac ferry from Gourock and I travelled there from Newcastle for only £11.65 on an Advance Purchase ticket with a railcard.

The journey back was only slightly more expensive at £16.60 travelling via Glasgow and Carlisle.

Dunoon is a pleasant town, although its glory days of catering for visitors from Glasgow sailing “doon the watter” are well gone. I was amused by the sign, pictured, of the attractions of Dunoon with the ones no longer available painted over in white, but still readable. I stayed for three nights in the Argyll Hotel which was a Victorian three story building with one room at the top of a tower at the front (ask for room 126), and including a modern restaurant.

In accordance with my objective to minimise carbon emissions on these “Places to Go”, I planned to use local buses to travel about, avoiding car hire or taxis. Vehicles are provided by West Coast Motors, a mixture of express coaches, single deck buses and minibuses. On the Saturday, I purchased on line the Dunoon/Cowal 24 hour ticket which covers Portavadie (ferry port for Tarbert to the west) and Inveraray to the north. Using the bus stop outside the hotel, I joined punctual and clean minibus 486 to Inveraray.

I used my Historic Houses pass to visit Inveraray Castle, home of the Dukes of Argyll. The gardens are excellent, and the house itself, contained between four huge turrets, better still, with armour, ceramics, ancient kitchens and state rooms and ghost stories all to be enjoyed. Then it was over to the town to visit the old jail, which told the story of many penitentiaries in Scotland, and included a court room where cases could be heard sitting amongst waxwork figures. I crept in and out to avoid invading their space.

Having toured the jail, I was feeling hungry and ready to ride on bus 486 to the top of Loch Fyne for the Oyster Bar. I had four Oysters for lunch, prepared and served by several passengers who used the morning bus there with me. As Hector Bolitho wrote: “Oysters are the most tender and delicate of all seafoods. They stay in bed all day and night. They never work or take exercise, are stupendous drinkers, and wait for their meals to come to them.” Delicious!

There was a later bus from the Oyster Bar back to Dunoon, to take

the staff back home on the way, but I had decided to strike out on the Mull of Kintyre and waited for the afternoon express coach from Glasgow to Campbelltown to take me to Tarbert, a picturesque port which I could have done with more time to explore.

The Oyster Bar was a request stop so I booked on line on my phone just in case, and the journey was a steep £14, given that I had travelled from Newcastle for less than this. The ferry landing for Portavadie was on the road out of Tarbert to the East and by the time I reached it I had no wish to retrace my steps back and forth again, so I waited for the last ferry of the day to Portavadie at 1800, which connected into the last bus 478 back to Dunoon.

Hold tight for part two!

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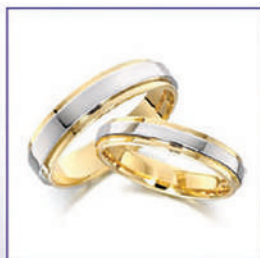
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Cheryl Tanner



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From October, I'll be sharing monthly workplace wellness insights here in
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The new school year

The school holidays are over and September signals the start of a new school year. It's a natural time to reset and re-establish daily routines after the relaxed pace of summer.

While the holidays are great for rest and play, getting back into rhythm helps kids feel focused, secure, and ready to learn. A few small changes can set a positive tone for the months ahead.

Rebuilding morning routines

After weeks of later bedtimes and slow starts, mornings can feel rushed. A consistent morning routine helps ease the transition. Try waking up a bit earlier, eating breakfast together, and keeping the start of the day screen free. Even five minutes of quiet reading or stretching can help kids feel calmer before school.

Staying hydrated

Over summer, kids tend to drink more water naturally. But once back in the classroom, hydration is often overlooked. Encourage your child to bring a reusable



water bottle to school and sip throughout the day. Even mild dehydration can affect energy and focus. Adding lemon or cucumber slices can make water more appealing.

Nutritious lunch and snacks

A balanced lunch supports focus and energy throughout the day. Aim to include whole grains, lean protein, fruits, and vegetables. Try a turkey and avocado whole grain sandwich, cucumber slices, cherry tomatoes, and an orange. For after school snacks, consider air-popped popcorn, low-fat cottage cheese with sliced peaches, or a hard-boiled egg with baby carrots.

After-school downtime and movement

Kids often come home mentally tired. Before homework or screens, give them time to reset. A short walk, playing outside, riding a bike, or even listening to music can refresh their energy and mood.

Establishing a sleep routine

Late summer nights can throw off sleep patterns, but quality rest is key for learning and emotional balance. Aim for a regular bedtime, even on weekends. A calming

wind-down routine helps signal it's time to sleep. Keep bedrooms cool, dark, and screen free for better rest.

Building in time for connection

Back to school can be overwhelming. Make space to check in each day. It doesn't need to be a big conversation or spend ten minutes doing something they enjoy. These small moments help them feel supported and grounded.

Supporting focus through routine and environment

Kids thrive on structure. A regular homework spot and predictable after school routine help reduce stress. Set up a quiet, tidy area with few distractions, and allow short breaks this improves focus and prevents frustration.

www.davidfairlambfitness.co.uk

David's Summing Up

September can be a time of transition, but it's also a great opportunity for a fresh start. By focusing on simple, healthy habits like hydration, nutrition, movement, sleep, and emotional connection, you're helping your child feel confident, settled, and ready to take on the new school year.



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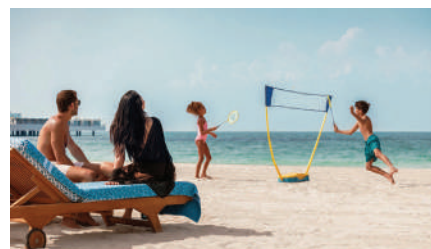
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David Fairlamb Fitness



David Fairlamb





When is the right time to get a good deal?

In June's edition I introduced myself and my services, feel free to go back and have a read. I talked about my shared values looking for value, while maintaining good customer service to build relationships.

My franchise Travel Counsellors winning many awards over more than 30 years using these values while building a travel community sharing experiences, for me all a benefit to my customers.

Thinking about this month and this article I didn't want to make all about sales and book with me now, although feel free. No I hope I can give some tips or insight into the travel industry, maybe blowing some myths regarding when best to book and where do you get value.

Same place every year

I do wonder how or why quite a number of us end up going back to the same place, same hotel, when there's so much to experience and see in this world and

certainly getting to the stage when literally you get more for your money the further you travel.

In peak season, school holidays in recent years I've noticed for the average cost of a Mediterranean family holiday you'd be paying the same say for a family holiday in Thailand. Your pound does go further, depending on the age of your children you'll find a time when they don't necessarily don't want to spend all day on the beach, that phrase starts coming out...I am bored!

Getting back to the same place, it could be you've had a bad experience in the past and eventually found somewhere you like, the hotel is just what you want.

With young families beach, pool and water slides are perfect, it could be like many who book online you start with good intentions and your looking for somewhere or something different, the kids are starting to get older and don't want to spend all day at the beach. But after a couple of hours scrolling you end up saying either that'll do or going back to where you know and happy with.

Scrambling and frantic

I also believe we all wait for January as we all know, Christmas tree comes down (sorry for using the C word) dark nights, excitement of the party season comes to an end and need something to look forward to. January sales equals booking holidays!

We go through above, get laptop out, Friday night and even a couple of glasses of wine while searching. Eventually you find the holiday, could be perfect or could be that'll do and deposit paid. Over the next few days and weeks while thinking about the holiday your mind wanders towards the

practical side, such as... I know I booked two rooms for us and I am sure they'll have us connecting or side by side? Seats on the plane we'll be sitting together, they'd never split a family up, would they? Along with all the other finer details thought about.

My tip, as you read this, plan ahead, think where you want to go in 2026, think about the hotels and rooms you'd like or need. Think about this summer, how was it? Could anything have made the holiday better? Think about your best holiday? What was so good, equally what was your worst and why?

Different look into my world

I've tried not to make this about me and book now all about the sales numbers. I've tried to maybe challenge you in your thoughts, also an insight into how the industry works. Getting in early definitely gives you the value, easy payments with deposits, many hotels offer early booking deals, maybe free nights, board upgrades and sometimes a mix of all these. Also keeps you in control and maybe getting the room(s) that work for you, where possible get them guaranteed (not a word hotels like too much) could be the way the room is configured. Finally maybe looking at your holiday, budget and giving a few different options.

Welcome to my world, the advantages of using a personal travel advisor, some see as a luxury, I see myself as an extension of your life, getting to know your likes, looking for value in the most important your time or family time. Lots have life coach or personal trainer, why not have a travel advisor for your time?

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