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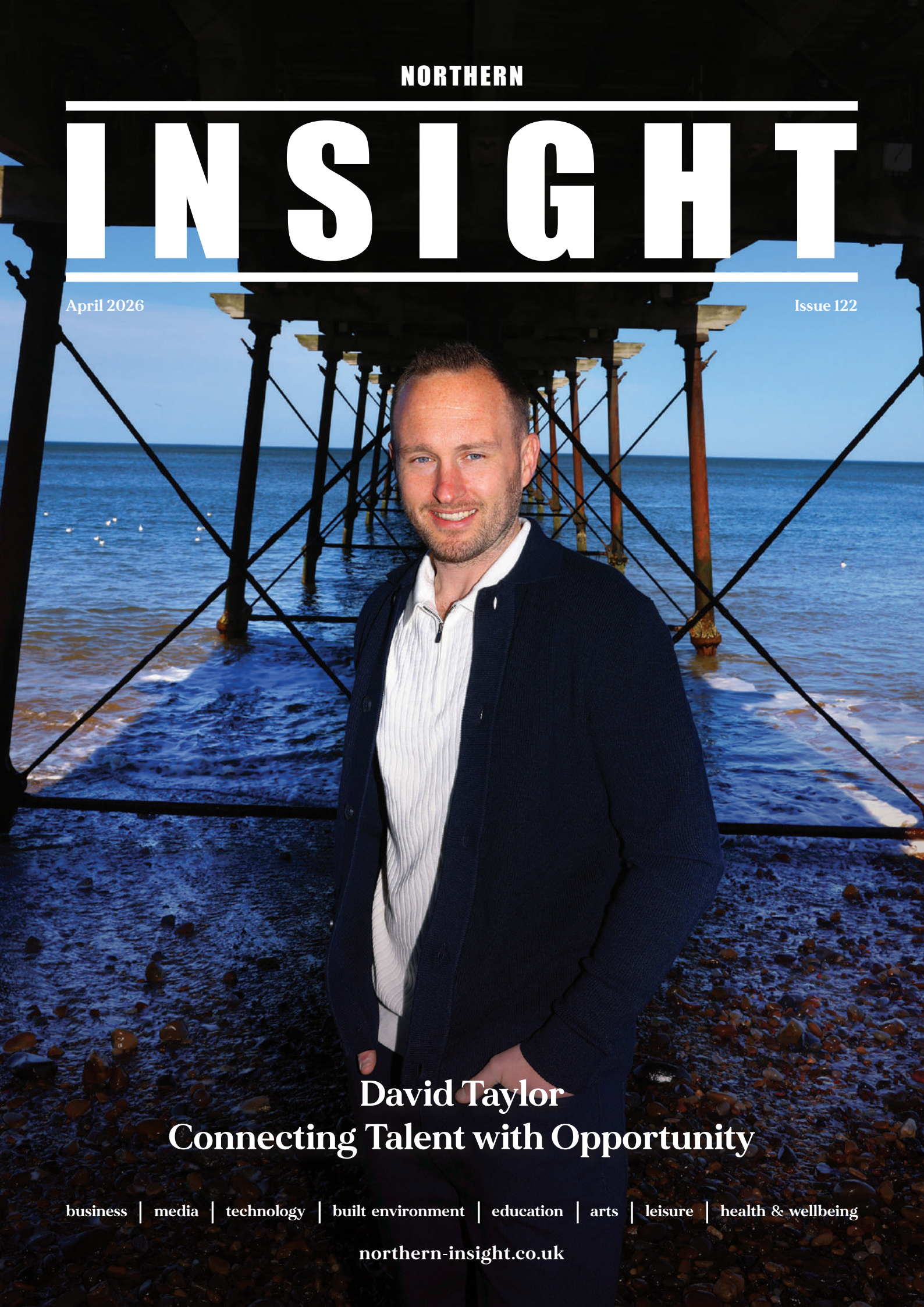

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Connecting Talent with Opportunity

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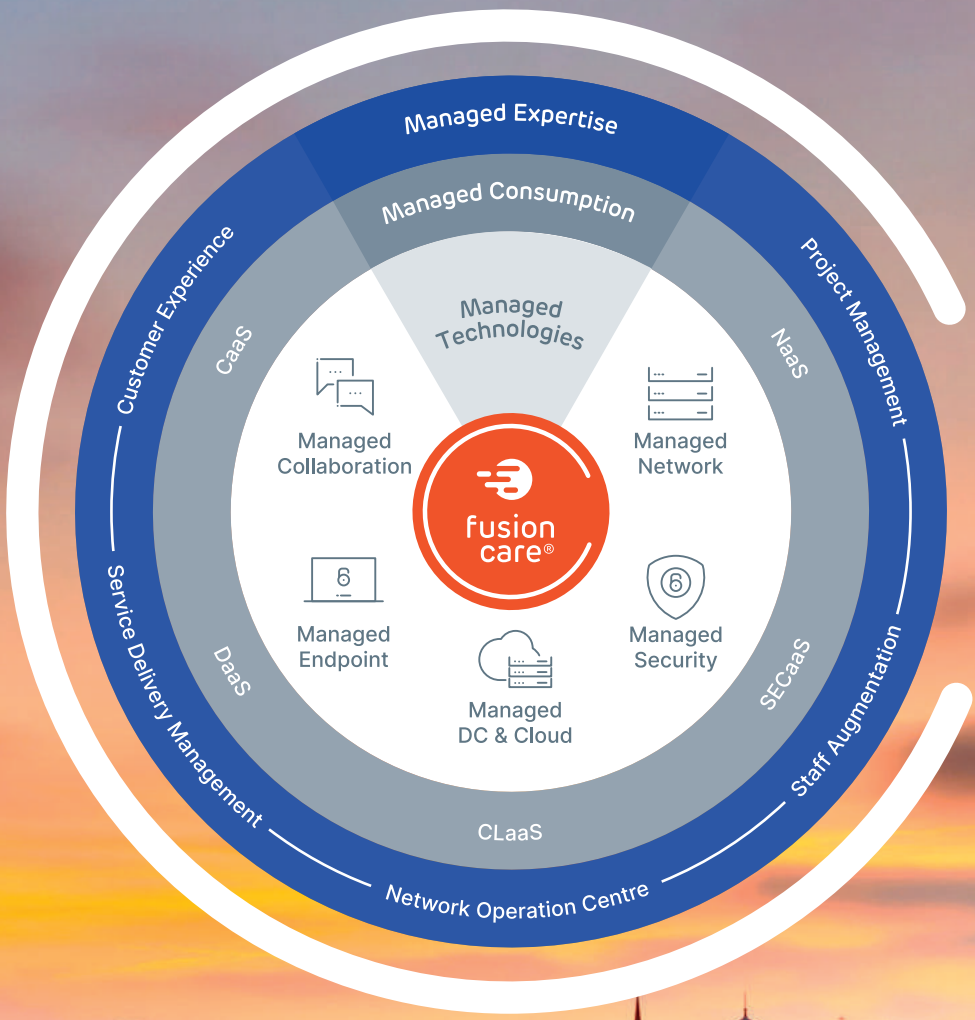

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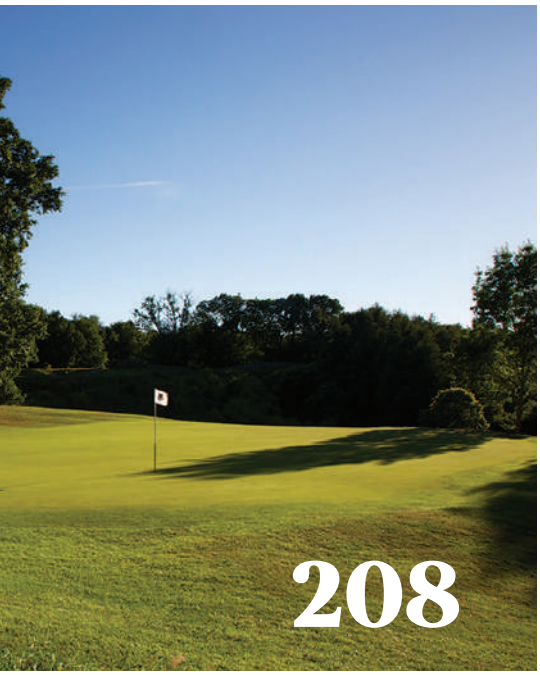

Foreword

Welcome to the April issue of Northern Insight

As we welcome a new month, we find ourselves at a point in the year where momentum begins to translate into measurable progress. The first quarter has offered valuable insight into shifting market dynamics, evolving customer expectations, and the resilience of businesses across the North East. It is within this context that this issue of Northern Insight seeks to inform, challenge, and inspire.

This April edition brings together perspectives from industry leaders, entrepreneurs, and those who are shaping the future of the North East. Through in-depth features and expert commentary we explore how businesses are not only responding to change but actively driving it. Whether through investment in talent, digital transformation, or strategic collaboration, the stories within these pages reflect a shared commitment to progress.

As always, our aim is to provide you with relevant content and practical takeaways that support informed decision making. We hope this edition serves as both a resource and a catalyst whilst encouraging new ideas, fostering connections, and supporting continued growth across the region.

Thank you as always for your continued support. Till next month...

Michael Grahamslaw, Publisher
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Entrepreneurs' Forum announces new partnership with Sage

The Entrepreneurs' Forum has announced Sage as its newest Corporate Partner, strengthening a long-standing relationship with one of the North East's most successful global businesses.

The three-year partnership will see Sage work closely with the Forum, supporting their entrepreneurial membership, events, creating connections, and initiatives designed to help founders and business leaders navigate growth, technology and leadership challenges.

Founded in the North East, Sage has grown into a global technology business, but remains deeply connected to the region. Its renewed partnership with the Entrepreneurs' Forum reflects a shared commitment to supporting ambitious businesses across the North East and re-energising Sage's regional presence.

Corporate Partnership with the Entrepreneurs' Forum offers businesses sector-exclusive access to its entrepreneurial community, alongside high-profile exposure. The Forum is funded through a mix of membership fees, commercial sponsorship, and local government support, with corporate partners playing a key role in sustaining its year-round programme.

Elaine Stroud, CEO of the Entrepreneurs' Forum, said, "We're absolutely delighted to welcome Sage back as a Corporate Partner. Sage is a North East success story with deep roots in our entrepreneurial community, and this partnership feels both natural and timely."

Flight Simulator Centre Newcastle unveils world-class Concorde simulator

The Flight Simulator Centre Newcastle, founded by former fighter jet pilot and aviation specialist Neil McCarthy, has unveiled its most ambitious and iconic simulator to date: a fully immersive Concorde flight simulator, marking a major milestone for aviation experiences in the North East.

Located near Newcastle International Airport, the Flight Simulator Centre has undergone major expansion over the past six years. After replacing its original fleet with top-of-the-range, fully functional, pilot-certified training simulators, the centre has grown into one of the UK's most comprehensive and authentic aviation experience venues.

The centrepiece of the expansion is the Concorde simulator, which has taken nearly three years to design and build. Created using original Concorde blueprints, the simulator has been engineered to be millimetre-perfect to the real aircraft.

"When you step inside, you're walking into Concorde," Neil explained. "From the two pilot seats and the full flight engineer's panel to the jump seat famously used by the Queen Mother, everything is exactly where it should be."

Beyond individual experiences, the Flight Simulator Centre Newcastle offers: Corporate events and team-building experiences, private group bookings, birthday celebrations and even 1-2-1 Fear of Flying sessions.The dedicated Fear of Flying programme provides structured, personalised sessions designed to help individuals overcome anxiety in a controlled and supportive simulator environment.

Thirst class: Lumo takes 'a taste of the North East' to London

Leading North East based open access rail operator Lumo has helped 20 local food and drink producers enjoy a unique opportunity to showcase their products in Westminster.

Lumo partnered with Sharon Hodgson MP, Member of Parliament for Washington and Gateshead South, to organise the special event in the Parliament's iconic Jubilee Room. Chi Onwurah MP, Member of Parliament for Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West, was also instrumental in the success of the day. MPs from across the country met with the small business owners presenting their products, as the day of the event coincided with weekly Prime Minister's Questions.

Delicious delicacies were on offer from the likes of Northumberland-based whisky and gin distillery Ad Gefrin, Davenports Chocolates in Gateshead, Doddington Dairy in Northumberland, Geordie Bangers in Newcastle, WL Distillery from County Durham and Northumberland Coffee.

Lumo's Head of Customer Experience Rachel Firth spoke with guests at the special event, offering invaluable advice for what the operator

looks for when deciding which products to offer customers. North East England based Marka, meanwhile, advised producers on how to secure an increasingly important sustainability accreditation. Lumo has secured officially outstanding status by Marka who are the first standardised sustainability ratings organisation for food and beverage.

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Borough unites to build a stronger South Tyneside workforce

Businesses and Council leaders have united to help more people find jobs in South Tyneside.

South Tyneside Council is working with companies that have initiated successful working practices to help people formerly excluded from employment opportunities to find, and flourish, in jobs.

The Council hosted "Building a Stronger South Tyneside" recently at Jarrow Focus, bringing together businesses, partners and community organisations, united in the aim of creating fairer access to employment.

Tackling social exclusion and economic inactivity is a pressing challenge across the North East, but Council leaders in South Tyneside want to create smooth pathways to work for residents and, hopefully, unlock the potential of the borough's workforce.

Cllr Tracey Dixon, leader of South Tyneside Council, said: "The organisations we invited to this important event are all going that extra mile to create inclusive, progressive workplaces that help people who, for a variety of reasons, have found it difficult to enter the jobs market. We need to recognise their effort and create a platform where they can talk about their journeys and share best practice.

"Economic inactivity and social exclusion are among the biggest challenges facing South Tyneside. Many residents face multiple and complex barriers to employment and no single organisation can address this alone. That is why our partnership with local businesses is vital."

The event follows the Council's Economic Summit, which examined complex barriers preventing many residents from accessing work. Barriers include long-term health conditions, disability, caring responsibilities and skills gaps.

Through closer collaboration with local employers, the Council aims to develop practical solutions that open doors to secure jobs, increase incomes and strengthen economic growth.

BIC-based collaboration helps business owner transform health and confidence

A chance connection between tenants at the North East BIC has led to a life-changing transformation and sparked a powerful new partnership.

When Laura Gillespie, Managing Director of Gillespie Recruitment, met Kelly Brougham and Amy Swan, co-founders of Active Families North East, at a networking event at the BIC, she didn't expect it to alter the course of her personal and professional life.

But within weeks of chatting to Kelly and Amy and finding out about the Community Interest Company's activity sessions, she was taking part in an ESCAPE-pain class – a programme designed to help people manage long-term conditions. And she describes the impact as "nothing short of incredible".

For more than two years, Laura had been battling chronic knee pain, limited mobility, and a loss of confidence that affected her daily life.

"I'd gone from being this really loud, confident person to feeling like a shadow of my former self." Laura said. "I couldn't lift my legs without pain. Even walking into a room felt daunting so going into that first session had me terrified. But the team and the people in the class were amazing.

"Week by week, something changed. My strength grew, my mobility improved and my confidence came back. Now I feel like I've got me back."

Since joining the classes in Washington in June, Laura has experienced significant improvements meaning she no longer relies on pain medication. She has new energy levels, and is planning to be driving again by the summer.

"I went in the hope of relieving some of my pain but it's totally transformed life for me and my family," Laura added. "My mindset has shifted from endurance to enjoyment. I used to just collapse after work and be straight into my pyjamas. Now I actively want to do things like gardening, getting outdoors and am now doing additional classes like Pilates.

L-R: Laura Gillespie, Amy Swan & Kelly Brougham

"At work I had started to withdraw from networking events. But now I'm hosting my own events at the BIC and getting out and about again – and am loving it."

Inspired by her own transformation, Laura has become a passionate advocate for Active Families, adopting the community organisation as Gillespie Recruitment's official good cause. She is now using her business network to help raise awareness, make introductions and is providing sponsorship for a wellness event later this year.

Active Families delivers around 30 programmes a week across the North East, supporting more than 700 people to improve their health, wellbeing and confidence through inclusive activity sessions.

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Connecting Talent with Opportunity: David Taylor's Recruitment Story

Tell us a bit about your background.

I was born in Ashington and moved around quite a bit growing up due to my parents' work. We spent time in Exeter and Norwich before eventually settling on Teesside.

I studied Business Management at university in Newcastle and completed a couple of summer placements with Howie White Resourcing. After graduating, I joined the company full time and later took over the running of the business in 2022.

What is your role at the company?

I'm the Managing Director of Howie White Resourcing.

For those who may not know, what does Howie White Resourcing do?

Howie White Resourcing was set up to offer a different approach to recruitment. Instead of relying on a database of candidates, we proactively search for the right people for each role.

We use our networks, contacts, and industry knowledge to identify and approach the best candidates for our clients.

What makes your approach to recruitment different?

We don't rely on a list of job seekers already on a database. Instead, we actively go out and find the right person for the role.

We take the time to understand not only the technical requirements of the job but also the culture and values of the business. When you understand what a company truly needs, you're far more likely to find the right person.

What services do you provide?

We provide search-based recruitment services. That means we identify and approach suitable candidates directly rather than waiting for applications. It sounds straightforward, but it requires experience, strong networks, and the ability to build trust with both clients and candidates.

What types of roles do you typically recruit for?

We work across a wide variety of sectors and roles. Because our approach is search-based, we can adapt to different industries and focus on finding the right individual for each appointment.

What do businesses often get wrong about recruitment?

Sometimes companies focus only on the technical skills required for a role and overlook cultural fit. The most successful hires tend to be those who align with the organisation's values and team dynamics as well as having the right experience.

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I always knew I wanted to run my own business one day, although I wasn't sure what industry it would be in.

It makes me proud that I've achieved that goal, but now the focus is on improving as a leader and continuing to develop the business.

What skills make someone successful in recruitment?

Strong communication, curiosity, and resilience are all important. Recruitment is about people, so being able to build relationships and understand what motivates both clients and candidates is key.

How has the recruitment industry changed in recent years?

Technology has changed the way people search for jobs and candidates, but the personal element is still incredibly important. Building relationships and having meaningful conversations is something technology can't replace.

What advice would you give someone looking for a new job?

Be clear about what you want from your next role and don't be afraid to ask questions. It's important that a job is the right fit for you, not just that you meet the job description.

What does a typical working day look like for you?

It's the cliché of business owners to say there isn't really a typical day, but it's true. Every role and client is different.

My day normally starts by taking my daughter to nursery and my son to school, which I really value. After that it's emails, calls, meetings and work for the rest of the day.

How do you like to unwind outside of work?

I enjoy spending time with my wife, our four-year-old son and our 15 month old daughter.

I also enjoy going to watch Newcastle United — although that's not always relaxing!

What are your plans for the future?

We're confident in our business model, so there are no major changes planned. The focus is on continuing to grow, improving what we do, and providing a first-class service to our clients.

What advice would you give someone starting a business?

Surround yourself with like-minded people, as well as people who know more than you do.

Build a strong network, set goals, and be prepared for setbacks. If you keep going and stay focused, things will start to fall into place.

What is your company's mission?

Our mission is to raise standards in the recruitment industry and consistently add value to the businesses we work with.

What has been a highlight of your career so far?

I'd say one of the biggest highlights has been taking on the responsibility of leading the business and shaping its direction. Being able to build on what was already there while putting my own stamp on it and seeing it continue to grow has been incredibly rewarding.

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> We actively go out and find the right person for the role.

David Taylor

North East Broadcaster Emil Franchi teams up with Lumo for Scottish Tourism Month

Emil tucking into lunch at The Last Bookstore in the city

Lumo, the leading open access rail operator, has joined forces with the North East broadcaster Emil Franchi to showcase the best places to eat, drink, explore and stay in Glasgow during Scottish Tourism Month.

Emil, an exciting new talent well known for his shows on BBC Radio 1 and popular social media following, has created a range of content for Lumo and Visit Glasgow's social channels.

Scottish Tourism Month is an opportunity to amplify the importance of tourism, celebrating its contribution to Scotland. Lumo makes it easy to visit Edinburgh, Falkirk and Glasgow, providing affordable and direct daily services from the North East of England and London. Customers can travel on 100% electric trains, which are 25 times cleaner than flying.

The newly released video sees Emil start his day by arriving at Glasgow Queen Street Station, before travelling to the thrilling Pinkston Watersports in the city – the home of Scotland's only artificial whitewater course. Here Emil tries whitewater tubing, an adrenaline fuelled activity that's particularly popular with those visiting the city for a stag or hen do.

One of the city's best hidden gems, The Last Bookstore, is also showcased in the video as Emil enjoys a haven for book worms, food lovers and cocktail aficionados. He then visits The Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum which is home to an incredible 22 galleries featuring art, animals, Ancient Egypt and much more.

Emil start his day by arriving at Glasgow Queen Street Station with Lumo

Viewers of the Scottish Tourism Month content are also treated to an exclusive glimpse of the luxurious Dakota Hotel on West Regent Street, offering impeccable service, luxury rooms and fine dining in the city centre.

Richard Salkeld, Director of Communications and Partnerships at Lumo, said: "We added Glasgow to our popular route on the East Coast during December last year and we're thrilled with the response from those travelling to and from this vibrant city. Scottish Tourism Month is the perfect opportunity to encourage even more people to visit Glasgow and experience the diverse mix of food, drink, activities and places to stay it has to offer. We've also been excited to celebrate the Glasgow International Comedy Festival taking place during March.

"I'd like to thank Visit Glasgow for supporting us with creating this fun and original content which is helping to showcase a small part of what Glasgow has to offer."

Emil Franchi, host of Lumo's Scottish Tourism Month content, added: "Lumo, like myself are proudly from the North East so being able to use their quick service from London to get home or visit two cities I love in Edinburgh or Glasgow is always a joy.

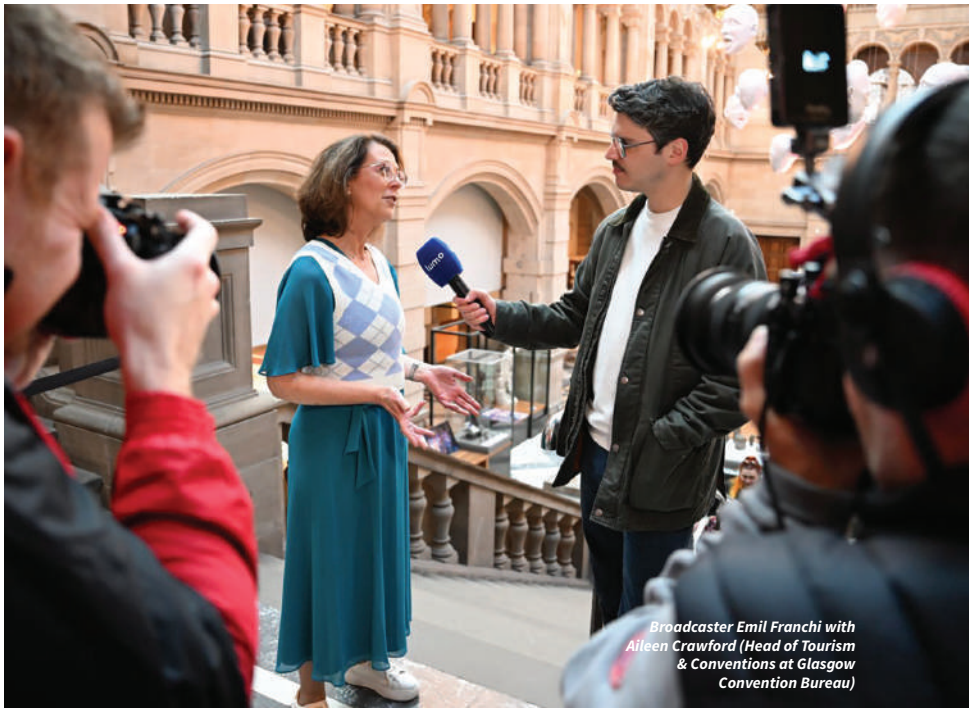
"The best part about visiting Scotland is that each time I leave with a love of a new place I've visited. Hopefully this content shows how much you can do in just a short trip!"

Aileen Crawford, Head of Tourism & Conventions at Glasgow Convention Bureau, said: "Scottish Tourism Month is a fantastic opportunity to celebrate everything that makes Glasgow such a vibrant and welcoming destination. From our world-class cultural attractions and unique experiences to our outstanding food and drink scene, the city has something for every visitor.

"Partnerships like this with Lumo help us showcase Glasgow to new audiences and make it easier than ever for people to discover all that the city has to offer."

Lumo operates services to and from Glasgow Queen Street with fares from Newcastle from £14.90 and £41.90 from London King's Cross.

www.lumo.co.uk



Broadcaster Emil Franchi with Aileen Crawford (Head of Tourism & Conventions at Glasgow Convention Bureau)

Emil visits The Kelvingrove Art Gallery & Museum – a free to visit attraction in the city

Emil tries whitewater tubing at Pinkston Watersports

The People First Property Entrepreneur

By Keith Newman, Highlights PR

If you spend even five minutes with Jamilah Hassan, one thing becomes immediately clear: she genuinely loves people.

Not in the vague, polite way many of us claim to, but in a way that energises her, drives her work, and shapes the growing success of her property business, JH Property Connect, based in South Tyneside.

"I honestly don't know what it is," she laughs. "But people just feed my soul."

While many talk about their "social battery" running out, Jamilah says she experiences the exact opposite.

"I hear people say they can't be in a room full of people for too long and I just can't wrap my head around that. For me, people energise me. I love hearing people's stories. I love hearing about their families, what they do for fun, what they do for work. "

That natural curiosity about others has become a powerful asset in her professional life.

From music to property

Before stepping into the world of property investment, Jamilah had another passion — music. At just 19 she joined a girl band that auditioned for The X Factor, making it to the final stage of boot camp.

"It was one of the most amazing experiences of my life," she recalls. "I was surrounded by some of the most incredible singers I've ever heard."

After leaving the competition, the group supported artists including Lemar, Taio Cruz and J.L.S., before Jamilah later moved to London to pursue a solo career, writing and recording music.

"Music has brought me so much joy for so long," she says. "And I'm still singing now. I've just finished recording new material."

But while music remained close to her heart, another opportunity was beginning to take shape.

Building a property business

After several years working in the property sector, Jamilah realised there was a growing demand from professionals who wanted to invest in property but simply didn't have the time or knowledge to manage the process.

That insight led her to launch JH Property Connect, a company that builds property portfolios on behalf of investors and busy professionals.

"Starting a business isn't easy," she says. "It takes a lot of time, effort and focus. For the first year I wasn't even really talking about it because I was so busy building it.

"Our clients are usually business owners or professionals who want to invest in property to create a better future for themselves and their families, but they don't have the time to do it themselves."

The process begins with an in-depth consultation where clients outline their budget, preferred location and investment goals.

"Some care more about rental income, others want long-term capital growth, and some are focused on tenant demand. Every client is different."

Once the criteria are clear, Jamilah and her team take over. Through relationships she has built with estate agents across the North East, the team sources suitable properties before conducting viewings, calculating refurbishment costs and presenting detailed investment figures to clients.

"If they like the numbers, we negotiate on their behalf, handle the legal process with solicitors, take it through to completion and even arrange refurbishment and tenant management if they want it."

In short, she says: "They come to us saying 'we want to invest in property, this is our budget', and we do the rest."

A people business

While property might appear to be about bricks and mortar, Jamilah insists the reality is very different.

"Property is a people business, regardless of what anyone says," she explains. "Yes, it's a building, but the whole process is about people — the investors, the sellers, the agents, the solicitors, the builders, the tenants. And the more people I get to interact with, the happier I am."

One of her favourite projects perfectly demonstrates the approach.

A two-bedroom terraced property in Newcastle was purchased for £83,000. Instead of simply refurbishing it, Jamilah saw an opportunity to add value by converting it into a three-bedroom home.

"With the refurbishment and conversion, the total investment was around £115,000," she explains. "But the estimated market value afterwards was between £155,000 and £160,000."

For her client, the strategy created immediate equity and a stronger long-term investment.

Business with purpose

Alongside growing her company, Jamilah has also ensured community support sits at the heart of the business.

Inspired by her work with the Banks Group, a Durham-based developer known for its community funding programmes, she created JH Cares, the charitable arm of her company.

"I knew that if I started a business, it had to give back," she says. "I couldn't do one without the other."

The organisation's first initiative was a Christmas Eve meal project supporting people facing homelessness and families in need.

Working with local restaurants, South Tyneside Council and the People's Kitchen in Newcastle, the project delivered 160 hot meals across the region.

"It was just incredible," she says. "We had so much support from businesses and the community. My son helped deliver meals with me, along with family and friends. Those moments are priceless."

For Jamilah Hassan, success isn't simply measured in properties or profits. It's measured in people. And in the North East communities she cares so deeply about that philosophy is already making a lasting difference.

jhpropertyconnect.co.uk

The Big Interview

Jamilah Hassan

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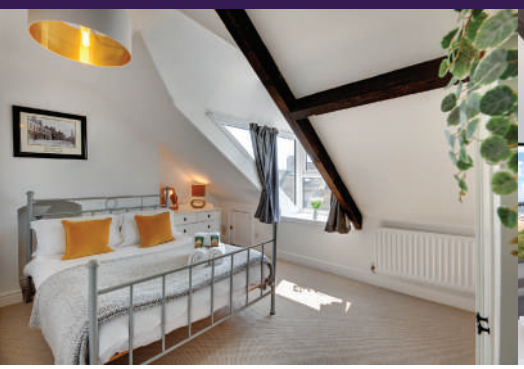

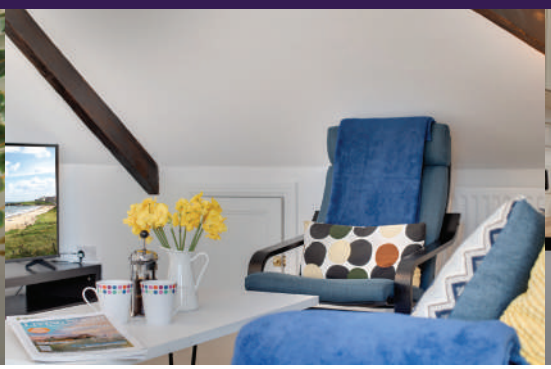

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SANDERSON YOUNG

IF YOU'RE SELLING IN GOSFORTH, YOU NEED TO BE SEEN.

Sanderson Young - One of the Leading Agents in NE3

1st

for new instructions
Sellers choose us first

for available stock
We dominate market presence

for sales agreed
We convert the most

Based on NE3 Rightmove sales data by branch, last 6 months, £200,000–£600,000

One of the Leading Agents for Gosforth

At Sanderson Young, we are often recognised for representing some of the North East's most prestigious homes. While that reputation is something we are incredibly proud of, it only tells part of the story.

In reality, the heart of the Gosforth property market (homes priced between £200,000 and £600,000) is where the majority of moves happen. It's where first-time buyers take their initial steps, and where long-term roots are established. It's a market where Sanderson Young is firmly established as one of the leading agents in NE3.

When buyers are actively searching in Gosforth, they are consistently engaging with Sanderson Young properties. And when sellers are considering their next move, they are increasingly turning to one of the leading agents in their specific price bracket. The Gosforth market is active, but it is also highly selective. Buyers are informed, motivated, and ready to act, but only when a property is priced correctly and presented professionally.

Homes that launch with a clear strategy are seeing excellent levels of engagement, while those that miss the mark can quickly lose momentum. As one of the leading agents in this sector, we are ideally positioned to guide our clients through these dynamics, ensuring that every property is launched, marketed, and negotiated with precision.

Performance Where it Matters Most

Over the past six months, Sanderson Young has handled more properties across this price range than any other individual branch in the NE3 postcode.

56 properties available, accounting for 14% of all stock
39 new instructions, representing 16% of the market
36 sales agreed, also 16% market share

These figures highlight a clear pattern: more sellers are choosing Sanderson Young to represent their homes, and more buyers are successfully securing properties through us than through any other individual branch in the local market.

This level of activity creates something incredibly powerful: visibility and momentum.

- Julie Summerbell, Branch Manager

SANDERSON YOUNG

A MARKET THAT REWARDS EXPERIENCE

Success in this sector is not simply about listing property, it's about understanding how to position it effectively in a competitive market.

Accurate Pricing from Day One

Understanding the nuances of Gosforth's micro-markets is essential. From street to street, property values and buyer demand can vary significantly. Our valuations are grounded in real-time market data and active buyer insight, ensuring your property is launched with impact.

Marketing that Creates Competition

We believe every home deserves to be presented at its very best. Through high-quality photography, targeted digital campaigns, and strategic exposure, we maximise visibility, generating strong levels of interest and competitive offers.

A Database of Active Buyers

With a large pool of registered applicants actively searching within the £200,000–£600,000 range, we are often able to introduce buyers quickly, sometimes even before a property reaches the open market.

Thinking of Selling? Now is the Time to Understand Your Position

With demand remaining strong across Gosforth, many homeowners are in a stronger position than they may realise. However, achieving the best possible result starts with understanding exactly where your property sits within the current market, and how to position it effectively from day one.

At Sanderson Young, we offer accurate, no-obligation valuations, providing clear, honest advice based on real market data and active buyer demand. From first homes to family homes, Sanderson Young is proud to support clients at every stage of their property journey. And with more new instructions, more available stock, and more sales agreed than any other individual branch in NE3 within this price range, you can be confident you are working with a team that delivers.

Contact our Gosforth team today to arrange your valuation, and discover what your home could achieve in today's market.

Phone: ***0191 213 0033***
Email: ***contact@sandersonyoung.co.uk***.

"As a family-run business, Sanderson Young has built its reputation on service and long-term client relationships. Many of our clients return to us time and again, or recommend us to friends and family, a clear reflection of the results we consistently deliver. Because whether it's a first home or a forever home, the level of care and attention remains exactly the same."

- Harry Young, Regional Valuer

SANDERSON YOUNG

Sanderson Young has stepped confidently into 2026, building on a dynamic start to the year that has already generated significant buyer engagement and exceptional results across the North East property market.

From the outset, activity levels have been strong, with motivated buyers competing for quality homes across a broad range of price brackets. Well-presented and accurately priced properties are continuing to attract immediate interest, with many achieving swift sales and impressive outcomes.

To showcase this sustained momentum, Sanderson Young highlights a selection of standout properties that demonstrate both the depth of demand in the market and the decisive action being taken by buyers when the right opportunities arise.

Salters Road
Gosforth

Offers Over £235,000
Sale Agreed Above the Asking Price | 10+ Viewings

Stunning three bedroom upper maisonette over two floors in Gosforth, near Newcastle. It features living space, modern kitchen, bathroom, and two bedrooms below, plus a top floor principal suite with ensuite. Benefits include parking, rear yard, amenities, green spaces, and excellent transport links.

Church Avenue
Gosforth

Offers Over £325,000
20+ Viewings

Three bedroom semi detached home on Church Avenue, South Gosforth, near shops, schools, park, and Metro. Features hallway, bay fronted sitting room, dining room, kitchen with pantry. Upstairs offers three bedrooms and bathroom. Includes driveway, garage, EV charging, and a landscaped rear garden with patio space for.

Northfield Road
Gosforth

Offers Over £400,000
Sale Agreed Above the Asking Price | 10+ Viewings

Tastefully refurbished three bedroom semi detached home in Gosforth, featuring a bay fronted living room, open plan kitchen/diner with French doors, and modern bathroom. Includes driveway parking, utility/store, and south west facing garden. Close to schools, amenities, transport links, and green spaces, offered with no onward chain.

SANDERSON YOUNG

Ridgewood Gardens
Gosforth

Ridgewood Gardens is a charming three bedroom terraced home in South Gosforth, close to schools, Metro, Jesmond Dene and amenities. Presented in turnkey condition with period features, it offers a bay fronted living room, well equipped kitchen, three spacious bedrooms, bathroom, loft storage with conversion potential, and a rear garden with decking area.
Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: Band G

3 1 1 C

Price Guide:
Offers Over £295,000

Emma Doran
0191 213 0033
emma.doran@sandersonyoung.co.uk

Elmfield Gardens
Gosforth

Extended four-bedroom semi detached home in Ashburton Village, near Gosforth amenities and green spaces. Features two reception rooms, kitchen/diner, downstairs WC, and period details. First floor offers three bedrooms and family bathroom, with a top floor suite and ensuite. Includes driveway, front garden, and south facing rear garden with patio and lawn.
Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: Band D

4 2 2 E

Price Guide:
£450,000

Beth Scott
0191 213 0033
beth.scott@sandersonyoung.co.uk

Alwinton Terrace
Gosforth

Beautifully presented Victorian end terraced home in central Gosforth, offering over 1,500 sq ft. Features sitting room, open plan kitchen/diner/living space, utility, three double bedrooms, study, and two bathrooms. Includes front garden and west facing courtyard with secure gated parking. Close to shops, schools, and transport links.
Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: Band C

3 2 2 D

Price Guide:
Offers Over £450,000

Emma Doran
0191 213 0033
emma.doran@sandersonyoung.co.uk

Ascot Drive
North Gosforth

Ascot Drive is a spacious four bedroom detached home with garage. Features include living room, WC, storage, and kitchen/diner with utility and French doors to a south facing garden. Upstairs offers four double bedrooms, including a principal with ensuite, plus family bathroom. Garden includes lawn, patio, and decking for entertaining and relaxation.
Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: Band D

4 2 2 B

Price Guide:
£325,000

Emma Doran
0191 213 0033
emma.doran@sandersonyoung.co.uk

On the Waterfront

By Michael Grahamslaw

Determined to wring every last drop out of the weekend, Lisa and I recently made the short dash down to Durham for an overnight stay that once again reminded us why this city never loses its charm.

Durham remains the quintessential British university city – a tapestry of cobbled lanes, nightlife and riverbanks so idyllic they practically beg to be painted. And being "not far, but far enough" from Northern Insight HQ in Newcastle, it continues to be a failsafe choice for a restorative staycation.

Perched enviably on the banks of the Wear, the Radisson remains one of the region's 'blu-riband' hotels, blending the convenience of a city centre base with the amenities of a sprawling, destination escape. Its spa, leisure facilities and upmarket restaurant make it a genuine allrounder for both business and leisure travellers.

The hotel's multi-million pound refurbishment – now well bedded in – has elevated the guest experience even further. The groundfloor transformation still impresses: a sleek reception, cutting edge conference spaces and a stylish bar area with views towards Durham Cathedral and Castle. Even in the depths of early year gloom, the chic space radiated warmth and sophistication.

We ditched the bags and headed straight out to reacquaint ourselves with downtown Durham. Few hotels can boast so many UNESCO World Heritage treasures within strolling distance, and it's a pleasure to simply wander and absorb the atmosphere.

Returning later, we were shown to our sumptuous secondfloor Riverview Room – a real highlight of the stay. Spacious, serene and beautifully finished, it offered plush seating, boutique toiletries, a hitech Nespresso machine and sweeping views across the river. It was the kind of room that instantly lowers the shoulders and quietens the mind.

Dinner at Jozef's Riverside Bar and Restaurant once again proved a standout. The venue pays homage to Count Józef Boruwalski, the Polishborn musician who famously retired to Durham in the early 19th century, and the restaurant's lively, slightly offbeat personality reflects this inspiration.

After a pair of inventive cocktails, I began with panfried scallops followed by slow cooked minted lamb, served with creamy mashed potato and a glossy red wine jus. Lisa plucked out a perfect roasted beetroot salad, followed up by the pan-fried seabass fillets with pea potato and baby onion fricassee, bathed in a dill cream sauce.

A glass of white for Lisa and a nice Rioja for yours truly completed this pretty picture.

A restful night's sleep later, we drifted down to the spa for a morning tuneup. With its modern cardio and resistance equipment, it provided just the right amount of exertion before a hearty breakfast back in the riverside restaurant.

What continues to impress about the Radisson Blu is its refusal to stand still. Its upgraded events spaces are now among the most versatile in the region, ideal for conferences, weddings and private celebrations, while the hotel strikes that rare balance between style, comfort and warm northern hospitality.

A wise choice, then, for anyone seeking a refined city break or a polished base for business.

For more information, visit www.radissonbludurham.com

Musings with
Mirza...

Ammar Mirza CBE

To be or not to be

By Ammar Mirza CBE

There is a moment in leadership that rarely gets spoken about. It is not the big stage or the public speech. It is quieter than that.

It is the moment where you know something is not quite right, and you have a choice to make. Say something or let it pass. Step in or stay out of it. Do what is right or do what keeps things comfortable.

That is what to be or not to be really feels like in the real world.

If I am honest, I have had my fair share of those moments, and I have not always leaned into them. There have been times where I have held back, telling myself it is better not to "upset the apple cart." It sounds sensible, almost wise. But when you actually unpack it, the phrase comes from market traders carefully stacking fruit, knowing that if someone knocked the cart, everything would spill and cause disruption.

Over time, it has come to mean do not interfere, do not challenge, keep things steady.

But here is the thing. That only works if what is being protected is right in the first place.

And often, it is not.

Some of the most powerful examples of leadership are not the ones we read about in textbooks. They are quieter, closer to home, and often overlooked.

Take Grace Darling, from our own North East coast. In 1838, she rowed out into a violent storm to rescue survivors from a shipwreck off the Farne Islands. No grand plan. No committee. Just a decision in the moment that something needed to be done, and she was willing to do it.

Or Mary Ann Macham, whose work in local communities never made headlines but changed lives in ways that statistics never capture. Quiet leadership. Consistent leadership. The kind that does not seek recognition but earns respect.

These are not stories of perfection or heroics in the way we often frame them. They are stories of people who chose to act when it would have been easier not to.

That is the thread.

And I see that same thread running right through the North East today. It is in the business owner who gives someone a chance when others will not. It is in the teacher who goes the extra mile without being asked. It is in the community volunteer who shows up week after week because they care.

There is a grounded honesty about this region. A sense that people will do the right thing, not because it is easy, but because it matters.

That is leadership.

Not a title. Not a position. A choice.

And yet, even with that, the hesitation is real. The voice that says, maybe this is not the moment. Maybe it is better to leave it. Maybe it is not worth the disruption.

I still hear it.

But I am learning that those are exactly the moments that define us. Because leadership is not about being fearless. It is about recognising the moment for what it is and stepping into it anyway.

Not dramatically. Not perfectly. Just honestly.

Because when we choose to stay silent, we are still making a choice. When we choose to look the other way, we are still shaping the outcome.

So, the question is not abstract. It is not Shakespearean. It is practical and it is personal.

When the moment comes, will we step forward or will we stay still?

In this region, we know what it means to look out for one another. We know what it means to stand together when it counts. The opportunity now is to carry that same mindset into every space we occupy, whether that is business, public life or our communities.

Not to create noise, but to create impact.

Because the future will not be shaped by those who kept everything neatly in place. It will be shaped by those who were willing to act when it mattered.

So, when that moment finds you, and it will, do not overcomplicate it.

Choose to be.

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.

> it's the people and the relationships that drive success.

Olivia Telfer

Marketing and Media Matters

In the latest in this popular series of features Michael Grahamslaw spoke to...

Olivia Telfer

Marketing Manager at Eldon Square

Did you always envisage a career in the Marketing industry?

I come from a family of creatives, so I developed an early interest in art and photography. I was also naturally good at maths and science, so when it came to choosing a degree, marketing felt like a natural fit where I could both express my creativity and use data and insights to inform decision making. I went on to do both my degree and a master's in marketing, and from there have never looked back.

What has been your career path so far?

After University, I started my career as a Marketing Executive with B Daily, but I really wanted to see the world. I spent two years travelling extensively across Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. This gave me great global experience and perspective, and whilst away I realised how much I loved Marketing and knew that was where my future lay.

When I returned, I did a couple of marketing jobs before becoming Marketing Manager at Alnwick Castle. As a proud Northumbrian, working for such a local institution was a fantastic opportunity and gave me deep insight into destination marketing.

Two years ago, I was delighted to join Eldon Square, one of the North East's most iconic destinations. The role allows me to champion amazing global brands and the region, combining my creativity and experience to make a real impact!

What has been your biggest challenge so far?

The retail landscape has evolved rapidly in recent years, with the pandemic accelerating a shift in customer expectations. Today, consumers are looking for more than just a place to shop - they want experience-led destinations that bring together retail, leisure, food and social interaction.

At Eldon Square, we've embraced this challenge as an opportunity to evolve our offer. We've strengthened our leisure and hospitality mix, with the addition of brands like Flight Club and Freight Island, while delivering customer-led campaigns and destination marketing that encourage visitors to spend more time with us and engage with the centre in new ways.

This approach has enabled us to successfully engage our audience, drive footfall and ensure Eldon Square continues to perform strongly as a leading retail and leisure destination in the region.

What is your proudest achievement in the role so far?

Smashing the 2025 UK retail performance benchmarks was really special and has certainly put Eldon Square and Newcastle on the map. Over last year we achieved a 1.7% year on year increase in footfall, welcomed 26.4 million visitors supported by a bumper Christmas season which saw 5.6 million visitors in November and December. Being a part of that growth is truly fantastic, and I can't wait to see what we achieve in 2026!

What is your greatest strength?

I'd say my greatest strength is getting things done in fast-paced environments. I'm used to working with lots of moving parts - like coordinating with 140 retailers and city stakeholders -and making sure projects move forward smoothly and on time. In a fast-paced retail environment, that ability is key to ensuring campaigns are delivered seamlessly and successfully.

What is your biggest weakness?

I naturally like to stay busy and involved across multiple projects, but I've learned the importance of stepping back and prioritising to ensure I'm working as effectively as possible. As such, I'm working on building better moments of selfcare into my routine.

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

This advice came from my mum: "It's not what you say or do, but how you make people feel that matters." I try to live by that mantra in everything I do - whether I'm working with my team, engaging stakeholders and retailers, or building marketing campaigns - because at the end of the day, it's the people and the relationships that drive success.

That same belief sits at the heart of Eldon Square, where strong relationships with our partners, retailers and community are fundamental to creating a destination that people feel connected to and want to return to time and again.

Who are your Heroes and Mentors?

It would be difficult to single out one person, but I really admire those who drive industry forward, are not afraid of challenging thinking and stand up for what they believe in. I've had the pleasure of working with many such people from across Newcastle!

What are you currently working on?

We're excited to be preparing for the launch of Freight Island, a 60,000 sq ft venue set to redefine Newcastle's cultural offer. Bringing together global street food, live entertainment, premium dining, and a dedicated space for music and events, it will introduce a dynamic new experience to the city centre.

At the same time, Eldon Square is celebrating its 50th anniversary, and we're working on an exciting strategic partnership with Fenwick and Newcastle College. As patrons of the British Fashion Council, this project will champion and showcase creative talent in Newcastle, reinforcing the city's growing reputation as a hub for fashion and culture.

How do you like to unwind?

I grew up in Northumberland, so I love being outdoors- walking along our region's beautiful beaches, or climbing a hill is undoubtedly my favourite way to unwind!

eldonsquare.co.uk

Sapphire HR completes strategic acquisition with second NPIF II – NEL investment

Newcastle Upon Tyne - An ambitious North East HR firm has secured a second round of investment from NPIF II – NEL Smaller Loans, which is managed by NEL Fund Managers as part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II (NPIF II). The strategic six figure sum will complete the acquisition of Manchester-based Heads HR Limited, and to refine its marketing strategy to accelerate expansion.

Sapphire HR, which provides comprehensive HR solutions designed to alleviate the stress of HR management for small business owners, received the first round of investment in December 2024. Since then, the business has recruited two new HR advisers and significantly grown its client base.

This new investment played a pivotal role in the recent acquisition of Heads HR Limited, allowing the business to accelerate its next phase of growth in the education sector and unlock new opportunities across the UK to develop specialist teams within primary care, social care, NHS and education.

Sapphire HR was introduced to NEL Fund Managers by Michael Cantwell, Corporate Finance Partner at Clive Owen LLP, who oversaw the transaction alongside Craig Malarkey, Partner at Swinburne Maddison LLP . They were supported by Joe Vera-Sanso, Corporate Finance Executive, and Sophie Ayre, Corporate Associate Solicitor, working closely with Susan Snowdon, NEL Investment Executive, to deliver the deal successfully.

Michael Dobson, Founder and Managing Director at Sapphire HR, added: “I’m delighted to have worked with the teams at NEL Fund Managers, Clive Owen and Swinburne Maddison on this funding round. The unfailing support and guidance throughout the process have been invaluable, enabling us to realise our growth ambitions, and expand by acquiring another

specialist team to provide HR Services to the Education Sector and Schools across the Country from this team's base in Manchester.”

“The team at Heads HR have built a loyal client base over the last 10+ years and we look forward to working closely with the team over the coming months as the business moves forward with this exciting new chapter. This acquisition positions us to capitalise on the significant opportunities ahead as we continue to strengthen as a business and deliver HR solutions to a UK-wide client-base.”

Luxury wedding venue in the North Pennines secures strategic NPIF II – NEL Fund Managers investment

Barnard Castle, County Durham - A strategic investment is supporting the next stage of growth for luxury holiday home and wedding venue, Blackton Grange. The funding comes from NPIF II – NEL Smaller Loans, which is managed by NEL Fund Managers as part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II (NPIF II).

Born from a strong passion for property, interiors and finding the perfect place to entertain and celebrate with loved ones, twins Stella Laird and Jodi McSherry made their dream a reality by creating a modern and intimate wedding venue, tucked away in 11 acres of stunning countryside in the heart of the North Pennines.

The investment will support a new partnership between Blackton Grange and specialist marketing agency Venue Spark, to resource a dedicated online marketing team to promote the newly restored Wedding Barn in the heart of the estate and grow the Blackton Grange brand.

Stella and Jodi expressed excitement about their ongoing partnership with NEL Fund Managers: “Partnering with NEL has been a brilliant experience for us at Blackton Grange Estates and a very smooth process working with all levels of the management team, we are excited for the future working with NEL and how they can help accelerate our growth plans, not just with this project, but over the coming years as we continue to build and grow our brand and business”

Susan Snowdon, Investment Executive at NEL Fund Managers led this investment and commented: “Stella and the team were fantastic to work with and it’s so impressive to see what they have done with the space at Blackton Grange. I look forward to continuing to work with them and wish them both the best of luck for their next stage of business growth”

BEF North East is a not-for-profit social enterprise. They provide business loans in economically underserved areas to protect jobs, strengthen local economies, and help North East entrepreneurs stay competitive.

www.BEFNorthEast.org

bef North East

Paul Shields

What the Spring Statement means for North East Businesses

By Paul Shields, Partner and Head of Newcastle Office, Johnston Carmichael

The Chancellor positioned this year's Spring Statement as a steady update focused on fiscal discipline and stability. On paper, the message is one of gradual economic improvement, but for many businesses across the North East, the reality remains more uncertain.

The latest Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) forecasts show the UK economy expected to grow by 1.1% in 2026, down from the 1.4% forecast in November. Inflation is projected to fall faster than previously anticipated, reaching around 2.3% this year. These figures suggest the government's strategy is beginning to stabilise the economy.

However, forecasts rarely capture the full picture that businesses are navigating on the ground. Recent economic data highlights this disconnect, and new figures show the UK economy unexpectedly shrank by 0.1% in January, underlining the fragility of the recovery and reinforcing concerns about the short-term outlook for growth.

Across the North East, many organisations are already dealing with a complex combination of rising costs and uncertain market conditions. Employers continue to face higher wage bills, rising energy costs and increased employment taxes, all while operating in markets that are becoming more cautious and volatile.

The wider global backdrop only adds to this pressure. Ongoing geopolitical tensions, including conflict in the Middle East, have the potential to drive further instability in energy prices and global markets. While these risks were acknowledged in the OBR's analysis, the full impact of potential energy cost increases was not reflected in the projections.

For businesses in sectors such as manufacturing, construction, logistics and industries that are particularly significant to the North East economy, this creates a difficult environment in which to plan ahead.

A challenging operating environment

Many businesses across the region are already experiencing tightening margins and increased operational pressure. At the same time, there are signs of higher unemployment in certain sectors, reflecting the cautious approach many organisations are taking when it comes to recruitment and expansion.

In this environment, the ability to plan with confidence becomes increasingly difficult. Businesses need to make decisions about investment, hiring and growth strategies months or years in advance, yet the economic outlook continues to shift rapidly.

While the government's emphasis on fiscal discipline may offer reassurance in terms of economic management, stability alone does not fully address the challenges businesses are currently facing.

Why clarity matters for business confidence

For many businesses, the priority now is clarity.

A stable policy environment, clear tax framework and consistent long-term direction are essential if organisations are to invest and grow with confidence. Without that certainty, it is natural for businesses to become more cautious, delaying investment decisions or slowing recruitment plans.

This is particularly important for regional economies such as the North East, where businesses play a critical role in supporting local employment and driving economic activity.

Resilience in the North East economy

Despite these pressures, the resilience of North East businesses should not be underestimated.

The region has consistently demonstrated its ability to adapt to challenging economic conditions, with businesses innovating, diversifying and finding new ways to compete in changing markets.

Looking ahead, the months following the Spring Statement will be crucial. Ensuring businesses have the confidence and support to navigate this period of uncertainty will be key to protecting jobs, encouraging investment and sustaining regional growth.

For North East businesses, the message from the Spring Statement may be one of stability, but in practice, resilience, adaptability and long-term clarity will remain essential in the months ahead.

johnstoncarmichael.com

Seven Associate Partners appointed at Clive Owen LLP

Clive Owen LLP, one of the North's leading independent accountancy, business and tax advisory firms, has appointed seven Associate Partners as part of a newly created leadership development programme designed to support the next generation of senior leaders.

The appointments are part of the firm's new Associate Partner (AP) Pathway, which recognises individuals already making a significant leadership contribution while providing a clear route towards partnership.

The new pathway has been introduced as the firm continues to grow and evolve, ensuring its leadership structure and career development opportunities reflect the ambition and contribution of its senior team.

Those appointed as Associate Partners are existing team members Angela Mikola, Brad Haywood, Elizabeth Layfield, Leanne Leftley, Liz Rothery, Rebecca Davison and new recruit Suzanne Layfield.

Suzanne joined the firm in March 2026, bringing significant experience in audit and assurance. She began her career as a trainee at a small practice in North Yorkshire in 2007 before moving to the North East in 2015, gaining experience at both national and independent firms.

A Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (FCA), she specialises in the audit of owner managed businesses, with a particular interest in group structures, and has worked across sectors including hospitality and leisure, manufacturing and construction.

Alongside the Associate Partner Pathway, the firm has also introduced a Partner Track programme to provide greater transparency and support for those preparing for potential partnership in the future.

Kevin Shotton, Managing Partner, said: "We are delighted to recognise

the achievements of these six colleagues through our new Associate Partner Pathway, and welcome Suzanne to Clive Owen LLP. Each of them has demonstrated exceptional technical expertise, leadership and commitment to both our clients and the wider firm.

"The introduction of the Associate Partner role reflects our ambition to provide clear and meaningful career progression while strengthening the leadership of the business as we continue to grow. It also supports the development of future partners by giving talented individuals the opportunity to broaden their influence, build their commercial experience and contribute to the strategic direction of the firm."

Kevin added: "We are targeting significant growth over the next five years and are seeing increased demand from clients looking to appoint a local independent firm. These appointments will assist in us being able to increase capacity at the same time as maintaining client service."

Muckle LLP takes on new insolvency expert

Leading law firm Muckle LLP has strengthened its banking and restructuring team with the appointment of a specialist insolvency solicitor.

Ryan Butler joins the firm, bringing with him a wealth of experience in providing legal advice and taking on hands-on roles in various insolvency matters.

With an extensive background working across a range of commercial law and in-house firms, Ryan also holds a professional qualification in insolvency from the Insolvency Practitioners Association (IPA), further enhancing his expertise in this sector.

Now joining Muckle LLP's banking and restructuring team, Ryan will be working closely with insolvency expert and partner Kelly Jordan and associate Sarah Farish, advising insolvency practitioners on a wide range of insolvency and restructuring issues.

Kelly is widely recognised as a leading expert in insolvency practice across the North East. She also serves as Chair of the R3 North East Regional Committee, a professional association for business recovery and insolvency practitioners. Kelly plays a key role in shaping policy, driving initiatives and fostering networking opportunities for insolvency professionals throughout the region.

Ryan said: "I always knew I wanted to specialise in insolvency. I love the variety of the work and how no two days are ever the same. It is a fast-paced area, and you are often working against various deadlines and pressures, but that is what makes it so rewarding and allows you to make a meaningful impact.

"My previous in-house role gave me valuable hands-on experience and I'm keen to use this to contribute and support clients of the firm. Muckle has a brilliant reputation, with real experts, and its B Corp initiatives and commitment to giving back to the community are something I wanted to be a part of.

"I've already picked up a broad range of work and I'm looking forward to working closely with Kelly, who has an amazing reputation in the North East."

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

THE CLIENT WHO COSTS YOU MORE

Most Limited Company owners have at least one. The client who takes the most time, demands the most attention, and always finds a reason to delay paying your invoice. Individually manageable. Added together, a serious drain.

Not all clients are equal. Some are profitable and a pleasure to work with. Others consume time and energy that could be spent on work that actually moves your business forward.

1. Work out the real cost of every client
Most businesses price a job on the work itself. But the real cost includes scope creep, emails at awkward hours, and invoices chased three times. When you factor all of that in, some of your busiest clients are also your least profitable. That changes who you take on and who you hold onto.

2. Fix the system, not just the symptom.
Difficult client relationships rarely improve on their own. Clear contracts, defined scope, and agreed payment terms remove ambiguity from the start. When expectations are set properly, good clients respect them and the wrong ones often disqualify themselves.

3. Make deliberate decisions about who you work with.
Holding onto a client out of habit or fear of losing turnover limits growth. If a client is consistently late paying or simply not profitable enough to justify the time they take, that's a business decision not a personal one. The space created by letting the wrong clients go is almost always filled by better ones.

Your client list is one of the most powerful levers in your business. It's worth treating it that way.

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Alan Miltz

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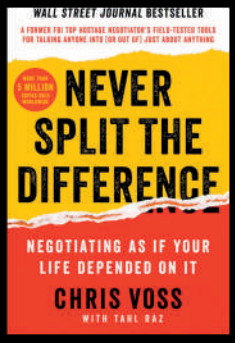

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Hay & Kilner strengthens commercial property team with appointment of James Stacey

Hay & Kilner has further strengthened its commercial property offering with the appointment of James Stacey as a Commercial Property Associate.

James joins the Newcastle-headquartered law firm from another regional law firm , where he worked as a commercial property solicitor advising on a wide range of complex property matters. In his new role, James will work closely with Hay & Kilner's established Commercial Property Team, supporting a broad client base ranging from individuals and charities to PLCs.

James brings extensive experience advising clients across the leisure and retail sectors, alongside charities, pension funds, care providers, banks and property developers. His appointment comes at a pivotal time for Hay & Kilner as it celebrates its 80th anniversary while accelerating its growth strategy. With a clear focus on innovation, investment in technology and strengthening sector expertise, the firm continues to evolve to meet the changing needs of clients across the region and beyond.

Speaking about his move, James said: "I was attracted to Hay & Kilner because of the opportunity to work closely with a highly respected team and to be part of a firm with real momentum. There's a clear forward-thinking approach here — from embracing new technologies and modern ways of working to its strong commitment to the local community. Stepping into an associate role also gives me greater responsibility and the platform to grow and develop my own client base, which is an exciting next step in my career.

Nicola Tiffen, Partner and Head of Commercial Property at Hay & Kilner, added: "James is an excellent addition to our commercial property team. He brings strong technical expertise, a commercial mindset and experience across a wide range of sectors that align perfectly with our client base. As we continue to grow the firm and invest in our people, James' appointment reflects our commitment to developing talent and providing a high-quality, forward-thinking service to our clients."

Magnificent Seven in at Square One...

Square One Law has bolstered its team with the recruitment of seven new faces across the business.

Ranging from partners to paralegals, solicitors to assistants, the new starters have all entered the business in recent months, working out of both the Newcastle and Leeds offices.

Commercial property partner, Rebecca Dawson, and employment solicitor, Annabel Doyle, joined Square One towards the end of last year.

A specialist in general commercial property, finance, development, and construction, Rebecca has developed an incredible CV, working at some of the North's largest law firms over the past two decades.

She said, "I am genuinely proud to join Square One. It's amazing to be part of a law firm doing things differently, whether that's making legal support more accessible, creating opportunity for marginalised groups, or delivering outstanding client service.

"It's a real thrill to join this incredible team with its brilliant B Corp values evident throughout the business."

Like Rebecca, Annabel will be based in Newcastle, having established an excellent reputation in the city, working at Burnett's and Collingwood Legal previously. "The fact that Square One Law is so focused on attracting new talent is a real bonus, and it's great to start at a time of real growth," she said.

The three newest faces are commercial property senior associate, Jill Anderson; legal support assistant, Maleehah Hussein; and commercial solicitor Lewis McKeowen, who all started .at the beginning of the year.

Jill is an experienced real estate lawyer, working in both the private and public sector in London, Leeds, and York, advising on land acquisitions, disposals, and land management matters.

She said: "Square One Law is an exciting and progressive law firm that has grown exponentially in recent years, and I'm delighted to join the team.

"I've worked in local government and private companies across a range of exciting projects and am very much looking forward to drawing on that experience to help Square One continue to build its excellent reputation for client delivery."

Maleehah, who has mainly worked in retail, will bolster the Leeds office's support team. She said: "Working retail really helps hone your people and organisational skills, so it's great to join a law firm so focused on people, its own and its clients. Everyone is operating at the top of their game here, and it's an inspiring environment in which to work."

Former Northumbria University student, Lewis, will be based within the Newcastle Commercial team, but will work for clients across both offices. "Having spent the last six years building my experience in commercial law at another Newcastle-based firm, I've watched Square One Law grow and really change the game for law firms. It's a real thrill to join a brilliant business and an incredibly talented Commercial team."

Rounding off the recent recruits are Ben Powell, joining as a commercial property paralegal, and employment solicitor Meagan Leightley.

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Rachel Warriner of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors

Finding the right incentives for your key employees

By Rachel Warriner, associate director and head of corporate tax, RMT Accountants & Business Advisors Ltd

Since it was first launched in the year 2000, the Enterprise Management Incentive (EMI) has been widely used by business owners as a tax efficient way of attracting new staff, encouraging loyalty from existing key employees and giving them all a stake in their employer's success.

According to HMRC's latest statistics, there were 5,200 companies who granted EMI options to their employees in the tax year 2023 to 2024 alone.

The EMI is a tax-advantaged share option scheme which allows staff to acquire shares over a period of time at a set price on which no income tax arises and no National Insurance contributions (NICs) are charged when the EMI options are granted.

There can also potentially be no income tax or NICs chargeable when these share options are eventually exercised, while EMI option shares which are exercised and ultimately sold may benefit from Business Asset Disposal Relief, resulting in an 18 per cent tax rate (as of the start of the new tax year) on their disposal.

The start of FY 26/27 has also brought about a widening of the qualifying criteria for the Enterprise Management Incentive, primarily to enable companies that are scaling up to participate alongside start-ups.

Businesses with up to 500 employees, rather than 250 as was, are now eligible to take part in it, while the value of the options that can be made available has doubled, from £3 million to £6 million, and gross assets that a participating company can have rising four-fold, from £30 million to £120 million.

Not all industries or employees qualify for an EMI scheme, so taking professional advice on how it might work for your business is essential, but for those that do, it can offer a flexible option which can make a significant difference to your business's short and long-term chances of commercial success.

However, it's important for employers to recognise that not every member of staff is going to be incentivised by share options and that a 'one size fits all' approach in unlikely to deliver the outcomes they're after, especially in light of the workplace changes ushered in during and after the pandemic.

The workplace benefits that you make available, such as private healthcare, gym memberships or motor vehicle purchase schemes, can play a significant role in attracting and retaining staff, while providing the chance to have a hybrid working week, if that's possible for you, has become fairly commonplace through this decade.

For older workers who might be starting to look towards retirement, the opportunity to reduce their hours in advance of that or offering additional, performance-related payments into their pensions may well encourage them to continue sharing their expertise with you and your team, rather than with a competitor.

Younger employees with plans to perhaps buy a house or start a family might instead prefer a more immediate bonus if they hit their targets, rather than waiting on returns from share sales that may be several years away.

The impact on a business's operations and commercial performance of either losing or keeping key staff can obviously be highly significant.

Putting the right incentives in place for each employee can make a big difference to their workplace commitment and therefore to the business's ongoing success.

For further information on the Enterprise Management Incentive scheme, issue around employee incentivisation and all aspects of corporate taxation, please contact Rachel Warriner at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors on 0191 256 9500 or visit www.r-m-t.co.uk

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L-R: at the back John Turnbull Lloyds and Jason Hobbs North East Fund

Seated: Dave Hawkins FW Capital, David Alderson and Tony Scott Barrier Group

No barriers to success as industrial services firm powers up expansion

Barrier Group is driving forward its ambitious expansion plans after securing significant backing from FW Capital and Lloyds to support the continued growth of its operations.

FW Capital's investment has been delivered through the £35m Elevate Fund alongside NPIF II – FW Capital Debt Finance, which is managed by FW Capital as part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II (NPIF II). It is supporting the firm's rapid growth and diversification into the renewable energy sector.

The £35m Elevate Fund, which was launched in October 2025, is part of the North East Fund's investment programme and is championed by North East Mayor Kim McGuinness to support business growth and innovation across the region.

Headquartered in Wallsend, North Tyneside, Barrier Group are a leading provider in industrial services, modular construction and passive fire protection, delivering turnkey design, build and protective solutions. The business has gone from strength to strength, building a strong reputation across offshore and onshore power generation projects, marine, petrochemical and oil and gas.

The latest investment will enable Barrier Group to capitalise on a series of major new contract wins in the renewables sector, including offshore wind projects, while also supporting the expansion of its workforce.

To complement this, Lloyds has provided a UK Export Finance-backed bonding line to underpin export contracts with global engineering leaders such as Hitachi and Siemens, alongside a Growth Guarantee Scheme facility designed to support Barrier Group's growing turnover and ambitious expansion pipeline.

David Alderson, Financial Director at Barrier Group, said: "We're experiencing a big growth cycle and it's important that we have the right partners to support us. Our work now spans a wide variety of sectors, from offshore and onshore power generation projects, marine, petrochemical and we're increasingly building our presence in renewables.

"The support from Lloyds and FW Capital is giving us the confidence to take on new projects, invest in our people and expand the business at pace. With this backing, we're well placed to deliver on a growing pipeline of opportunities and strengthen our position in the market for the long term."

Dave Hawkins, Portfolio Executive at FW Capital, said: "Barrier Group are experiencing impressive growth and is one of the many successful North East businesses we are proud to support. They've secured some exciting new contracts to design and build modular structures for wind farms and cladding on some new renewable energy projects. Our finance is helping fulfil these and support their continued growth journey in the UK and beyond."

John Turnbull, Relationship Director at Lloyds, said: "Our support for Barrier Group reflects our wider commitment to the region - including the £1 billion of new finance we're making available for businesses across the North East – alongside our partnership with the North East Combined Authority and the Office for Investment to unlock private sector funding in the region."

Jason Hobbs, Chief Executive of North East Fund added: "It's great to see Barrier Group capitalising on our Elevate Fund to support their ambitious expansion plans. This is exactly what the fund is designed to do: create jobs, bring investment into the region and stimulate the growth of key sectors in our economy."

Today, Barrier Group is celebrating its 50th anniversary. It has locations in Billingham, Wallsend, and North Vancouver and has recently consolidated all of its operations into one integrated business.

NPIF II - FW Capital Debt Finance can provide loans in the NPIF II area with a primary focus on the North West regions of Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside.

To find about more about the North East Fund and its Elevate and Accelerate Funds, visit www.northeastfund.org

If you want to find out how we can support your business please email info@fwcapital.co.uk or visit our website www.fwcapital.co.uk

RG strengthens Tax service line with appointment of new Director

Ryecroft Glenton (RG), one of the North of England's leading independent business advisory firms, has strengthened its Tax service line with the appointment of Laura Dickson as Director.

Laura joins RG with more than 20 years' experience in private client tax. After training at PwC, where she gained Chartered Tax Adviser status, she has held senior leadership roles at regional independent firms, most recently Haines Watts (now S&W).

She specialises in private client tax planning, supporting individuals and families with managing tax obligations, succession planning and retirement planning. Her work includes Inheritance Tax reviews and collaborating closely with financial advisers to provide holistic advice aligned to wider financial goals.

Laura's appointment further enhances RG's advisory capability as the firm continues to invest in senior expertise to support clients navigating an increasingly complex tax landscape.

RG's 23-strong Tax service line, including three Partners and four Directors, provides expertise across compliance, advisory and specialist tax areas. The team's focus on practical, forward-looking solutions ensures clients receive commercially relevant advice alongside technical excellence.

Laura Dickson said: "RG has a strong reputation for building long-term client relationships and providing genuinely tailored advice. That client-led approach was a major attraction for me, alongside the firm's clear commitment to personal and professional development.

L-R: Corporate Tax Partner Simon Whiteside, Tax Director Laura Dickson and Tax Partner Emma Reilly

"The strength of the client base and the collaborative culture across service lines means we can provide well-rounded advice that considers the bigger picture. I'm looking forward to supporting clients and contributing to the continued growth of the tax offering."

Emma Reilly, Tax Partner at RG, said: "We are delighted to welcome Laura to the firm. Her extensive experience in private client tax and her advisory mindset will further strengthen the depth of expertise within our Tax service line.

"As tax matters become increasingly complex, clients value clear, practical advice. Laura's appointment enhances our ability to provide proactive support and reinforces our commitment to delivering high quality advisory services that help clients plan confidently for the future."

ryecroftglenton.com

Mark Brown

What gross profit can tell you about your business

By Mark Brown, L4 Financial Management

Many SME owners understandably focus on revenue.

Sales growth often feels like the clearest signal that the business is moving in the right direction. Orders are increasing, customers are returning and the team is busy.

Yet revenue on its own rarely tells the full story.

One of the most revealing exercises in any growing business is to step back and analyse gross profit in more detail.

Looking beneath the headline numbers

A set of management accounts might show a healthy overall gross margin. On the surface, everything appears to be working.

However, when the numbers are broken down further, the picture can sometimes look quite different.

A detailed gross profit review might examine:

- individual product or service lines, practice areas or business units
- different customer or client segments
- the impact of discounts or pricing pressure
- how direct labour, staff time or delivery costs are allocated

It is often at this level that useful insights begin to emerge.

A common discovery

In a recent review of a growing SME, the headline numbers initially appeared reassuring. Revenue had increased steadily and the business had built a strong reputation in the market.

However, when the gross profit was analysed in more detail, a different pattern became visible.

Some products, services or areas of the business were delivering strong margins and clearly contributing to profitability.

Others, however, were producing very little margin at all. In a few cases, once the full cost of delivery, production or staff time was considered, those areas were effectively breaking even or even generating a loss.

The surprising part was that these parts of the business were often absorbing a disproportionate amount of management time and operational effort.

Without a detailed review of the numbers, this would have remained hidden.

Why this happens

This situation is more common than many business owners expect.

As businesses grow, they often expand their range of products, services or client offerings in response to opportunities in the market.

Over time, the mix becomes broader and more complex.

Some offerings turn out to be highly profitable. Others remain part of the business simply because they have always existed.

Unless margins are reviewed regularly and in sufficient detail, it is easy for these differences to remain unnoticed.

Better information leads to better decisions

The purpose of analysing gross profit is not simply to cut products or reduce choice.

Sometimes the right decision is to increase pricing.

Sometimes costs can be reduced through operational improvements.

In other cases, the business may decide that certain products, services or areas of activity are not strategically worthwhile.

What matters is that leadership teams can make these decisions with clear financial insight, rather than relying purely on instinct.

When the numbers are properly understood, businesses often find that relatively small changes in focus can have a meaningful impact on profitability.

The wider role of financial insight

This type of analysis is one example of how finance can support better decision making within a business.

When financial information is used not just for reporting, but for understanding how the business truly operates, it becomes a powerful tool for leadership.

For many SMEs, developing this level of visibility is an important step as the business grows and decisions become more complex.

Quite often the starting point is simply taking the time to look more closely at the numbers and asking a few deeper questions about where profit is really being generated within the business.

L4 Financial provides part-time Finance Director and board advisory support to SMEs, helping leadership teams improve financial visibility and strengthen decision-making as their businesses grow.

Mark works with SME owners and leadership teams who want clearer insight into profitability, cash flow and the key drivers of financial performance.

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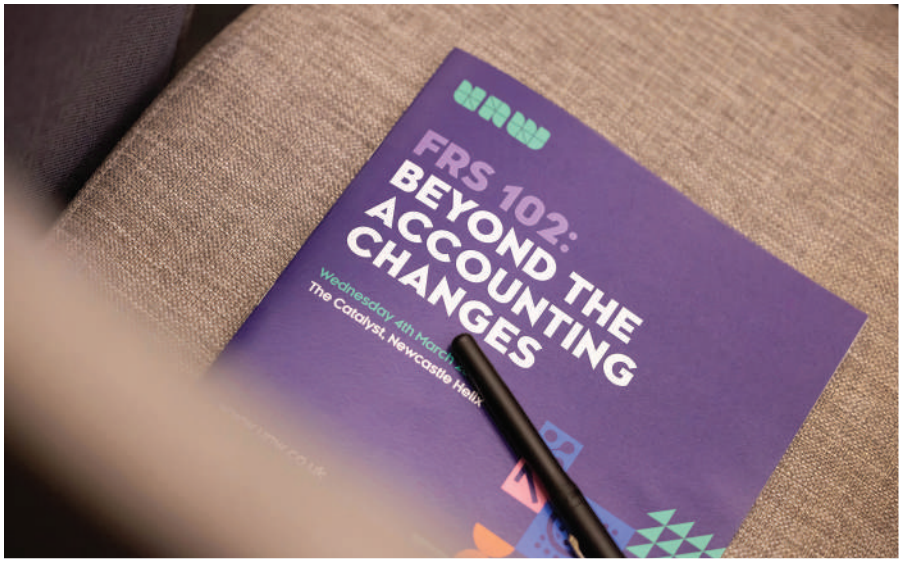

UNW hosts accounting update with a difference as businesses prepare for FRS 102 changes

North East independent accountancy and business advisory firm UNW recently welcomed around 100 finance leaders and business representatives from across the region to The Catalyst in Newcastle for a seminar exploring the amendments to FRS 102, the UK's principal accounting standard used by many medium-sized and privately owned businesses.

The session, led by experts from across UNW's audit, tax and deal advisory teams and featuring guest insight from Aaron Lawson-Clark of LDC, looked beyond the technical detail behind what is widely regarded as the biggest financial reporting update in a decade, focusing on what the changes will mean in practice for businesses and their finance teams.

Alongside the accounting updates, the discussion also explored the wider implications for organisations – from commercial considerations through to potential tax impacts and how the changes may influence funding, investment and transactions.

To learn more about UNW's upcoming events, visit unw.co.uk/events

FRS 102:
BEYOND THE
ACCOUNTING
CHANGES
Wednesday 4 March 2026
The Catalyst, Newcastle Helix

The Catalyst

The new landscape of property funding

By Michael Horner, Business Development Director at CCBS

How stability in the lending market is reshaping investor decisions.

The past few years have reshaped the way investors think about property funding. In early 2026, the backdrop has finally steadied: borrowing conditions are more predictable and lenders are taking a clearer, more consistent approach to new proposals.

As a result, many portfolio investors — and the advisers who support them — are revisiting their funding structures, preparing for upcoming maturities and exploring opportunities that were less practical during recent volatility. While funding specialists do not forecast property values, conversations across the lending market offer a reliable sense of shifting confidence and behaviour.

A calmer environment helps investors plan, not react

With borrowing costs stabilising, long-paused discussions are resurfacing. Many investors are restructuring older loans agreed during less predictable periods or releasing equity to support acquisitions or operational investment. Others are consolidating borrowing to simplify their position or reviewing semi-commercial and mixed-use opportunities in search of balanced income and long-term value. These conversations often begin with trusted advisers who recognise early when a funding review could unlock options.

What lenders are comfortable with in 2026

Although selective, lenders are showing a clearer appetite for certain assets. Mixed-use properties, commercial units with reliable tenants, well-managed residential blocks and industrial or logistics sites all fall within the areas of strongest confidence. Value-add opportunities also remain attractive where plans are detailed and deliverable.

Together, one of the specialist lenders on our panel, is reporting similar trends:

"We're seeing strong appetite for well-prepared cases this year," says Helen Calderley, Commercial Lending Specialist at Together. "Investors with mixed-use, commercial or value-add projects can move quickly when the proposal is clear, and the exit strategy is thought-through. Lenders are active — and they have appetite to support, even in the most complex scenarios, but they want clarity, structure and a professional approach."

Why larger portfolios need a funding strategy — not just a loan

As portfolios grow, funding decisions become more complex. Rather than selecting a single lender, most investors now require a coordinated approach: bridging finance to secure speed before refinancing; different lenders for different asset types; or development-exit facilities to allow works to complete without pressure. Many are also consolidating legacy borrowing to release capital or improve clarity over their wider position. In each case, the structure matters as much as the product.

What investors and advisers are seeing

Across the market, strategic thinking is returning. Businesses are directing more capital into their property interests; investors are upgrading weaker assets and mixed-use opportunities remain resilient. Those rolling off older fixed rates are reassessing their entire funding position, rather than replacing like-for-like.

Why work with a broker?

The commercial funding landscape is broad, and even strong lenders naturally focus on cases aligned with their criteria. A broker's role is to understand the whole market, shape proposals effectively and match each requirement to a lender best placed to support it. This brings clarity and efficiency for investors, while giving lenders accurately presented cases that meet their appetite.

Clarity gets attention; structure gets deals done.

Michael Horner

About the author

Michael Horner is Business Development Director at CCBS. He leads property funding product development and works with investors, advisers, and lenders in structuring effective funding strategies.

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Michelle Percy, CEO of Develop North with Oliver Hills

Develop North PLC supports young champions at Community Champion Awards

Newcastle-based Investment company, Develop North PLC (Develop North) has supported the achievements of young people across the region after sponsoring an award at the third annual NE Community Champion Awards.

The event, held at the Vertu Arena, home of the Newcastle Eagles, brought together more than 200 guests including nominees, families, teachers and community representatives to recognise young people making a positive contribution to their communities.

Opening the ceremony, the Lord Mayor of Newcastle, Cllr Henry Gallagher, congratulated the nominees and winners, describing their stories as a reminder that "positive change begins close to home".

Develop North sponsored the Special Recognition Award, which recognises young people whose actions demonstrate courage, resilience and compassion.

Michelle Percy, CEO of Develop North, said: "Events like this really help to shine a light on the very best of the North East community spirit and youth development and typify everything that is truly great about this wonderful region, its history and its roots. As a North East based business, we are honoured to present this year's Special Recognition award."

Two Special Recognition Awards were presented on the night.

Oliver Hills was recognised for the commitment he has shown as a young father. After learning at just 14 that he was going to become a parent, he chose to enter care so he could remain with his son when the child was placed into care. Despite moving through multiple foster placements, he has continued attending school, achieved Maths and English qualifications and is working towards his GCSEs while supporting his son's wellbeing.

A second award was presented to Caleb, Jake and Jayden, who helped a man in distress on Scotswood Bridge. The boys spoke to him calmly, reassured him and remained with him until emergency services arrived. Police later praised their bravery and maturity in a potentially dangerous situation.

The awards, organised by Northern Leaders Trust and the Association of Education Advisers, recognise achievements across eight categories including community contribution, volunteering, fundraising, environmental action and courage.

Northern Leaders Trust CEO Lee Kirtley said the evening was "a testament to the incredible contributions of our young people" and thanked sponsors for helping make the event possible.

Develop North was one of several regional organisations supporting the awards programme, alongside businesses including BAM Construction, AtkinsRéalis, Brims Construction, Muckle LLP, Ryder Architecture and The Education Network.

developnorth.co.uk

They say news travels fast

And it seems that word has spread further than many may have expected about TBI Law's conveyancing team.

One of the North East's oldest and biggest law firms, TBI Law has been helping clients through some of life's biggest moments for almost 200 years.

Whilst TBI carry out Conveyancing transactions across the North East, they now also offer their services further afield.

Jessica Garthwaite is a residential Conveyancer at the company's Hartlepool office. Amid growing demand for the team's services, she is now working almost exclusively with clients based outside of the region.

"Personally, I currently have around 200 clients I'm helping, and many are in the south of England," said Jessica.

"We have clients who have been so happy with our results, that they've told friends to come to us when they are buying a property which has resulted in growth across the country.

"Ultimately, distance doesn't matter when it is such an important decision on who oversees the legalities of your house move. You just want the best person for the job, and I think that's why we are so trusted."

And it isn't just trust.

TBI can offer clients access to one of the biggest and most experienced conveyancing teams in the North.

Spread across the firm's five North East offices are a team of over 80 skilled professionals.

From solicitors and Chartered Legal Executives to Residential Conveyancers, Paralegals and Legal Assistants - the team is set to grow even bigger.

TBI Law is currently recruiting Conveyancing Assistants for the Hartlepool office.

Additionally, they are also hiring Residential Conveyancers for both the Stockton site and the Sunderland office.

And the latter is another major new development for the firm.

Having expanded into Wearside for the first time last year after acquiring Scanlans, residential conveyancers are also being recruited for the Sunderland site which will have a six-strong conveyancing team by the end of the year.

"As one of the North East's leading firms, we are also proactively seeking talent," said Eve Graham, Partner.

"We are always happy to hear from experienced and skilled legal professionals who are seeking a fresh opportunity, and we welcome speculative applications."

However, there's nothing speculative about how they've grown their conveyancing team.

Working with agents across the North East and beyond, many recommend clients to TBI Law based on the success and knowledge their vast team possesses.

The team can confidently handle properties ranging from farms to flats - no matter how complex the transaction is, there is someone on hand to help.

The team pride themselves on going "above and beyond" for every client.

"We are not your typical high street law firm," added Jessica.

"We are very well established, and I think that holds a lot of weight, and I think the relationships we have with our clients truly sets us apart.

"That personal touch matters -we know that - and clients know there will always be someone trusted on the end of the phone if they need us.

"Nothing is ever too much trouble, and I think that high level of client support never waivers - and we are incredibly proud of that."

Visit www.tbilaw.co.uk

Sintons' Scott Halliday wins Private Client Lawyer of the Year at Legal 500 Northern Powerhouse Awards

Sintons are delighted that Partner Scott Halliday has been awarded Private Client Lawyer of the Year at the prestigious Legal 500 Northern Powerhouse Awards 2026. Scott had tough competition in a category packed with formidable nominees and it is testament to his skills and hard work that he has been recognised.

The awards, which were held at The Royal Armouries in Leeds on the evening of Thursday 12th March, celebrated the finest legal talent in the region and further cements Sintons reputation as a leading law firm.

Scott, who is Head of Family Law at Sintons and joined the firm last year, commented: "I am extremely proud and grateful to be named Private Client Lawyer of the Year 2026 at the Legal 500 Northern Powerhouse Awards. The shortlist was filled with some extremely strong and dynamic lawyers, so it is very special to me to have won this award. The award is testament to the quality of our department and the work we do for our clients. We undertake the very most complex and demanding cases. This is an award for the team as much as it is for me."

Legal 500 compile shortlists of lawyers after rounds of in-depth research and the Northern Powerhouse Awards aim to recognise the exceptional work undertaken by the best legal teams and individual lawyers in the region.

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> It is very special to me to have won this award.

Scott Halliday

Ready or not: Why employers must act now on the Employment Rights Act

By Inna Ratsebarska, Solicitor, Hay & Kilner

The Employment Rights Act represents one of the most significant shifts in UK employment law in recent years. The provisions within the Act will come into force over a phased two-year period.

Inna Ratsebarska

With key reforms expected to take effect from January 2027, businesses should already be preparing. The organisations that adapt early will be best placed to manage legal exposure, control costs and maintain a positive workplace culture.

Recruitment

A major change is the extension of unfair dismissal protection to employees with six months' service. Combined with the removal of the compensation cap for unfair dismissal claims, recruitment decisions will carry greater financial risk.

Employers should hire the right people for the right roles. That means:

- Clearly defining roles and expectations before advertising
- Using structured interviews and objective assessment criteria
- Adequately testing both skills and behavioural fit
- Ensuring fair and inclusive candidate selection

Managing well

Employers must ensure that probationary periods are used effectively from day 1 of employment when considering employees with six month service as at 1 January 2027 will be able to pursue unfair dismissal claims. Thought should also be given as to whether probationary periods should be shortened or have more regular interim reviews with progress made and areas for improvement well documented.

Strong onboarding helps employees understand expectations and engage with organisational values early. Regular check-ins, performance feedback and accessible support systems are essential.

Many organisations rely on "accidental managers", technically strong individuals with little people-management training. Under the new framework, this approach carries risk. Culturally, it is time to make a shift and invest in training managers who are equipped with the skills to lead.

Zero-hours contracts

The Act proposes significant protections for zero and low-hours workers, including:

- A right to guaranteed hours based on an average amount of hours that they have worked over a reference period
- Reasonable notice of shift changes
- Compensation for cancelled or curtailed shifts
- Protections extending to agency workers

Businesses with fluctuating demand, particularly seasonal sectors, should review their use of such contracts now. Alternatives such as annualised hours contracts may provide the flexibility needed, for example, and financial planning will also be key.

Sickness absence

Statutory sick pay will become an entitlement from day one of absence with the 3-day waiting period removed. This may increase sickness absence levels.

Employers should review how they manage sickness absences and introduce appropriate policies relating to the reporting of absences and when the instigation of return-to-work interviews, formal sickness absence processes and Occupational Health referrals are appropriate.

Equality, flexibility and workplace culture

Although flexible working reforms appear subtle, requiring employers to state why a flexible working request is unreasonable, it is clear that there is to be a continued focus on strengthening protection for workers from an equality and diversity perspective.

Larger employers with over 250 employees will need Equality Action Plans, and duties to prevent harassment will be extended. A wider review of family and parental leave is also expected.

Employers should urgently review their equality, diversity and inclusion strategies to ensure that those who are protected under the Equality Act 2010 are being adequately supported.

Trade unions

The Act will also make trade union recognition easier. For some employers, this may require a cultural shift in respect of their engagement with the trade unions.

How we can help

Employers who plan early will not only reduce legal risk but also build more resilient, inclusive and productive workplaces. Get in touch with Hay & Kilner's Employment Team who can support your organisation in preparing for these changes through policy reviews, contract updates, strategic advice and training for managers.

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Mincoffs Solicitors

Muckle LLP strengthens Teesside presence with two appointments in corporate and real estate

Teesside team – (L-R) Jack Reynolds, Leah Duffield, Rachel List, Samantha Alderton, Claire Rance, Oliver Hebdon

Office lead partner – Leah Duffield joined Muckle in March 2025

Leading law firm for businesses, Muckle LLP, is growing its real estate and corporate offering in Teesside as it continues to invest in growth and capability across the region.

The firm has appointed Oliver Hebdon as a partner in its corporate team and Samantha Alderton as an associate in its real estate team. Both will be based in Teesside, supporting clients across the region and beyond.

Samantha, from Stockton-on-Tees, will support Gail Bennett, head of real estate, and Rachel List, as well as the wider team on a variety of real estate legal matters.

Samantha said: "I was drawn to real estate law because of the transactional element of it; every transaction is unique. I get to know our clients and their business on a deeper level, which is really important."

Samantha advises on a wide range of general real estate transactions, including landlord-tenant, sales and acquisitions, secured lending and development.

Of joining Muckle, Samantha already knows she's made the right choice: "Joining Muckle seemed like the natural next step in my career, and being part of the firm's growth in Teesside is really exciting. I am already feeling settled into life at Muckle; everyone has been so welcoming."

Leading corporate advice

Oliver will primarily lead on M&A activity and support the acquisitive growth and succession planning of businesses in Teesside and beyond, drawing on support from the wider top-tier-ranked corporate finance team.

He said: "I love the fast-paced nature of corporate law and the combination of having genuine local knowledge, complex transaction experience and the firm's strong national reputation will be a real asset to Teesside.

Oliver is pleased to be joining Muckle at this time of growth: "When the opportunity came to join Muckle and further develop the firm's presence in Teesside, I knew it represented a very unique prospect. Muckle's shared values and its ability to develop and retain exceptional people really stand out – it's clearly a firm where people can build long-lasting careers which have a meaningful impact, and that is reflected in its culture and the commitment that its clients and wider community experience too."

Scaling up

The appointments form part of a wider period of investment in Teesside for the firm, following increasing demand for specialist legal expertise from businesses operating in and around Teesside.

Leah Duffield, private client partner and lead Teesside partner, said: "Building a strong foundation of people and capabilities is integral to Muckle's growth on Teesside, so we're focused on bringing in the right people with the right expertise that will help this office thrive.

"I am delighted to welcome Sam and Oli to Muckle. Both bring exceptional knowledge of their legal areas and the wider Teesside region, which will undoubtedly play a key role as we continue to grow our client base in the region.

"I joined Muckle in March last year as the first to be based in Teesside, and I am proud of the team's growth in such a short period of time. I am looking forward to seeing what the future holds for us as we continue to expand."

Regional commitment

As part of the firm's five-year strategic plan, Muckle aims for its Teesside and Cumbria offices to contribute 15% of the firm's overall revenue by 2031.

Muckle has been active on Teesside for many years, providing the full spectrum of legal services to clients such as Wilton Universal Group and Teesside International Airport. The firm has also played a key role in supporting local communities, providing charities such as Middlesbrough-based Clean Slate Solutions with ongoing grant funding, volunteering, and pro bono advice.

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Anthony Evans

Solicitor of the month

Northern Insight talks to...

Anthony Evans

Managing partner of Muckle LLP

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

My Dad was a lawyer, and my first job was working in the post room and file store at his firm, Taylor Vinters in Cambridge (now part of Mishcon de Reya). I grew up understanding what life was like in legal business, from both sides! I was also very lucky to go on after university to work with some great legal aid family and criminal lawyers in Cambridge. I didn't study law as a degree, I studied English, but when it came to choose a career, I was definitely influenced by the people I had met in the law; I guess I wanted to be like them.

In terms of career choices, being involved in running a business was something I have always been drawn to. The business I know the best is the law, so getting involved in leading a firm felt like a natural choice. The fantastic thing about being in the law is helping people develop and grow their careers; this is one of our core foundations at Muckle, we try to be a force for good for our people and the communities we work in. We don't just take pride in the service we provide; we take pride in the people we develop and their successes.

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

A lawyer's job is becoming increasingly challenging. That is particularly true in the last few years, as greater compliance and regulatory requirements are placed on the profession. We understand why this is needed, it is something we absolutely need to hit the highest standards on but what you can see is that the burden falls on individuals. It would be great to find ways to make lawyers' lives easier; hopefully, this is one of the things technology can support in future years.

In terms of trends, over the last few years, there has been significant consolidation and investment in the legal sector, following on from what we've seen in the accountancy sector. Some great businesses have been created through these transactions for sure, but in the future, though, I think more firms will see independence as a key to their success. Many of the lawyers we speak to recognise the value of independence and firms with leadership teams who see their role as custodians of the business for the next generation.

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

That lawyers are a necessary evil! I think most lawyers are predominantly motivated by helping their clients and achieving the best outcomes for them.

How do you handle the challenges of your job?

I have been in my current role for nearly a year now, but I'm learning every day. Asking lots of questions and never assuming anything has helped. I have focussed on understanding the whole business as best as I can and giving the talented team around me the space and trust to do their jobs, and having lots of conversations!

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

Technology has brought and will continue to bring significant change to the legal sector. How that evolves and its impact is not yet clear, I think; there are differing views on how things will evolve, particularly on how AI will impact us.

Providing legal advice for us is a people business; I don't think I see that changing for the foreseeable future. The clients we work with value the relationships they have with our team. Having the best people and creating a great culture will remain a key focus. That said, we must not put our heads in the sand! We need to remain curious about how AI and, in particular, automation can help us. We have introduced a number of products to help transform our behind-the-scenes processes to make us more efficient; that is where we see technology having an impact right now.

What is the most rewarding part of your job, and what keeps you motivated?

It is very rewarding to see how we have been able to make a difference in our communities. Being a successful business as a force for good is inspiring; it is what we try to do as a B Corp.

On a more personal note, seeing people realise their potential and being happy doing so is a big motivator for me; there is nothing better than seeing that personal success.

To paraphrase a quote from Bear Grylls (his actual quote is in more direct language!): "There's no point getting to the top of that mountain in life if you are an "unpleasant person"!."

It goes back to my initial point: lawyers like to help people and seeing them succeed, whether it's colleagues at Muckle or clients or where we live. It is incredibly rewarding.

What are you currently working on?

We recently launched our next five-year plan at our firmwide away day and are currently setting team and individual objectives to align with it for the next financial year.

How do you like to unwind?

I love to get outdoors; I enjoy cycling (mainly in Northumberland), walking, socialising and also a bit of cooking when I get the chance.

www.muckle-llp.com

Rishi Kohli

From Handshake to Headache

By Rishi Kohli, Corporate and Commercial Partner, Sweeney Miller Law

Why growing businesses need clear agreements.

Many successful businesses don't start with a contract. They start with a conversation. A shared idea. A handshake.

That informality often makes the early days work. Decisions are quick, trust is high, and everyone pulls in the same direction.

But as businesses grow, that same informality can start to cause problems.

It's a familiar situation: businesses doing well on paper but operating on assumptions that were never written down – until something changes.

That pattern shows up just as often in growing North East businesses as it does anywhere else.

When "it's fine" stops being fine

Early-stage businesses are usually built on trust – often between friends, family members, former colleagues or long-standing contacts.

At that stage, formal agreements can feel unnecessary. Nobody wants to say, "Should we get this written down?" when everything seems to be working.

Growth changes things.

As businesses scale, new pressures emerge. Money matters more. Roles evolve. Responsibilities blur. Investors, lenders or major customers enter the picture.

What once felt obvious suddenly isn't. And when expectations aren't aligned, misunderstandings follow.

The most common issues that arise

By the time a lawyer is involved, the issue is rarely theoretical. Common problems include:

- disagreements over ownership
- uncertainty around decision-making
- uneven contributions of time or money
- exit scenarios never discussed
- one party wanting to move faster than the other

Without a clear agreement, those issues become harder – not easier – to resolve.

Formalising agreements isn't about mistrust

One of the biggest misconceptions is that formal agreements signal a lack of trust.

In reality, they do the opposite.

A well-structured agreement:

- clarifies expectations
- removes ambiguity
- provides a growth framework
- protects relationships

Put simply, it allows people to focus on running the business.

The right time is earlier than you think

Many businesses only think about formal agreements when a dispute arises, when an investor asks for documentation, or when a sale or restructure is being discussed.

By then, views are often more fixed and options more limited.

The best time to formalise arrangements is when relationships are strong and everyone is aligned.

Keeping it proportionate

Formalising arrangements doesn't mean drowning a growing business in legal complexity.

The most effective agreements are:

- clear
- proportionate
- written in plain English
- consistent with how the business operates day to day

It's not about producing documents for the sake of it. It's about giving a growing business room to move without storing up problems for later.

A final thought

Many businesses don't struggle because they lack ambition or opportunity.

They stumble because the foundations they started with didn't evolve as the business did.

Moving from handshake to written agreement isn't a loss of trust.

It's a sign that a business is maturing – and planning to last.

If you're running a growing business and early arrangements no longer reflect reality, addressing it early can save significant time, cost and friction later.

Ready to move from handshake to clarity?

Get in touch with Rishi Kohli, Corporate and Commercial Partner at Sweeney Miller Law, to discuss how the right agreements can support your business as it grows. Email rishi.kohli@sweeneymiller.co.uk or call 0345 900 5401.

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Comments

By Barry Speker OBE

What does it say about a country and its values when looking at who is depicted on their banknotes?

We still do use paper currency despite the increasing preponderance of digital banking and electronic transfers. Recalling who currently appears on the back of a £10 or £20 note is a useful TV quiz question.

Historical figures have featured on our banknotes for more than 50 years and the monarch has been on our currency for more than 1000 years and will remain so. In 2016, Sir Winston Churchill replaced Elizabeth Fry on the £5 note. Other notes currently feature Jane Austen, JMW Turner and Alan Turing.

The Bank of England has now announced that following a survey, historical figures are to be replaced but not by architectural landmarks, arts, culture and sport, innovation or noteworthy milestones - but by nature.

The reason given is that images of wildlife will be more difficult to counterfeit and will be an opportunity to celebrate nature across the country.

A shortlist of possible candidates is to be announced later in the year - could it be a fox, badger, hedgehog, greyhound, barn owl or Sycamore Gap?

Or will there be a call to return to the opportunity to celebrate heroes and achievers?

The Prime Minister has been forced to face a reality check in relation to Britain's deplorably depleted military. President Trump has repeatedly pointed out that Europe and NATO have been relying disproportionately upon the USA and that the expected share of GDP spent on defence is far short of real need or fulfilling obligation.

Sir Keir Starmer recently abandoned a secret proposal to slash the foreign aid budget in order to allocate hundreds of millions to defence - but his left wing MPs intervened.

The PM pledged to raise the spending to 2.5% of GDP by April next year, rising to 3% in the next Parliament and 3.5% but only by 2035 - too little too late?

Jibes from the President about Sir Keir not being Churchill, that the NATO allies are cowards, UK's initial refusal to allow US to use British bases even for defence and the embarrassment of our base in Cyprus being under attack and the UK having neither the inclination nor capability to respond, have been a source of embarrassment.

The Government has been reminded that its first duty is to protect its citizens and not protecting its votes! The country must ensure it is able to defend its own territory. We rely on NATO but fail to contribute to the security of our European allies.

The Government must acknowledge the appalling deficiencies of the armed forces, navy and air force.

Dealing with this will require reallocating billions from the bloated welfare budget.

Protecting our 'special relationship' will take more than issuing invitations to the President to visit Buckingham Palace.

'If you can meet with triumph and disaster,
And meet these two imposters just the same'...

This famous Kipling quote from the poem 'If' came to mind in relation to Newcastle United Manager Eddie Howe. On 16 March he was awarded the Freedom of the City of Newcastle upon Tyne by Lord Mayor Councillor Henry Gallagher. This was on the anniversary of Newcastle's famous Wembley 2-1 victory over Liverpool to win the Carabao Cup 2025, the club's first domestic trophy in 70 years.

Eddie was suitably ecstatic at the honour, placing his name on the sandstone Civic Centre wall alongside legends Jackie Milburn, Sir Bobby Robson and Alan Shearer.

Within a week Eddie Howe's team had suffered the humiliation of a 7-2 (8-3 on aggregate) Champions League away defeat to Barcelona - itself an unwelcome record.

To his credit Eddie was suitably philosophical and concentrating on the next game - the first home derby game against Sunderland for 10 years. Very sadly another defeat but Eddie Howe remained calm and optimistic, managing the two imposters and moving on 'to talk with crowds and never lose your virtue'. The chants of 'Eddie Howe's Black and White Army' persisted.

Sheridan Smith starred at Sunderland Empire in Woman in Mind, a critically acclaimed revival of Alan Ayckbourn's psychological drama. The theme was of a woman with 'fractured reality'. Co-starring was comedian/actor Romesh Ranganathan adding some humour to the dark and troubling content.

Sheridan was on stage throughout and the mainly female audience gave her a standing ovation. For myself I was pleased to get to the excellent Aperitif restaurant next door to the Empire - much recommended.

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Neurodiversity in the workplace: What employers need to know

By Claire Rolston, Employment Solicitor/Founder of CLR Law

Neurodiversity is no longer a niche HR topic. As awareness grows and the workforce evolves, employers are increasingly encountering questions about neurodivergent employees and what the law requires of them.

Claire Rolston

And the numbers are stark: ADHD-related tribunal decisions have seen a 750% increase since 2020, while autism-related decisions have nearly doubled and dyslexia cases have risen by over 78%. If you're an employer, this is an area you can no longer afford to overlook.

What do we mean by neurodiversity?

The term covers a spectrum of neurological differences, including dyslexia, ADHD, autism spectrum conditions, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, and Tourette's syndrome, among others. Neurodivergent people may think, learn, and process information differently, but that difference is not a deficit. Many bring exceptional strengths: creativity, hyperfocus, pattern recognition, and lateral thinking. The question for employers isn't whether to accommodate difference, but how.

The Legal Framework

Under the Equality Act 2010, a person is disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Neurodivergent conditions frequently meet this threshold, though not automatically. Each case turns on its individual facts.

Where the definition is satisfied, you have a proactive duty to make reasonable adjustments.

What the tribunals are telling us

Recent case law offers clear and practical warnings for employers.

In Khorram v Capgemini UK Plc (2025), an employee with ADHD struggled with complex tasks and tight deadlines. After disclosing her diagnosis during her probationary period, Ms Khorram underwent an OH assessment. One of the recommendations was awareness training for her immediate team, but the company failed to implement this. When she raised a formal grievance, it went nowhere and she was eventually dismissed. The Tribunal found in her favour, ruling that the cost of awareness training was "not a prohibitive difficulty" and there was no plausible reason why it wasn't implemented. This is proof that reasonable adjustments need not be expensive to be legally required.

In James v The Venture (Wrexham) Ltd (2024), an employee requested adjustments to help manage their neurodivergent condition, including music being played in the workplace that affected their concentration. The request was only partially implemented, and inappropriate comments made by colleagues were found to have violated the claimant's dignity. The Tribunal upheld several claims and awarded over £17,000 in compensation.

A consistent theme runs through these cases: the onus was put on the employee to change their ways, rather than adjustments being made for them.

What counts as 'Reasonable'?

Reasonableness is assessed in context. Relevant factors include cost, your resources as a business, and how effective the change would be. Common adjustments include:

- flexible working hours
- written rather than verbal instructions
- a quieter workspace
- structured task-setting, and
- extended deadlines for written work.

The best source of information about what will help is always the individual themselves. Have a genuine, open conversation.

Where employers go wrong

The most common pitfall is inaction: waiting for a formal diagnosis before taking anything seriously. A diagnosis is not required for the Equality Act to apply. If an employee is struggling and you're aware of it, take steps.

Legal costs, compensation awards, and reputational damage for disability discrimination claims can be significant. Prevention is therefore far cheaper than litigation.

Act now

Review your recruitment and performance management processes, train your line managers, and ensure your absence procedures don't inadvertently penalise employees for disability-related difficulties.

This article is for general information only and does not constitute legal advice. If you have a specific employment law concern, seek advice from a qualified solicitor.

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Jonathan Moreland

In conversation with...

Jonathan Moreland

Managing Partner, Swinburne Maddison LLP

Leadership & Strategy

As Managing Partner, how do you balance the dual responsibilities of leading a business while maintaining legal excellence across the firm?

For me, these are not dual responsibilities. Legal excellence is fundamental to leading a successful law firm. It is futile to grow or develop the business without ensuring the highest standards of legal service for every client. As Managing Partner, I cannot focus solely on financial data, I must continue to support our lawyers, stay close to the work, and help ensure consistently outstanding client care.

What is your long-term strategic vision for the firm, and how are you positioning it to stay competitive in an evolving legal landscape?

We are the County Durham law firm with strong regional and increasingly national reach. Our vision is to remain a modern firm rooted in tradition, driven by strong values and culture. Above all, we want to be reassuring to know, so our clients feel safer and better protected by engaging us.

How do you define effective leadership within a modern law firm, and how has your leadership style evolved over time?

The core principles of leadership have barely changed. Being fair, consistent, leading by example, empowering staff, caring about people as individuals and serving them rather than expecting them to serve you, these remain essential. It is impossible to lead well without integrity, honesty, ethics, humility and a sense of humour.

Culture & Talent

In a competitive talent market, how does your firm attract, develop, and retain top legal professionals?

We aim to offer something a little different at Swinburne Maddison. Our location gives us a unique identity and allows us to stand out from the crowd. The worklife balance we actively encourage is a central part of our culture; our lawyers are not expected to be tied to their desks.

Because we are a closeknit firm, career opportunities are significant. Many of our Partners, including me, trained here, and that progression path is still a genuine possibility today. We give junior lawyers meaningful exposure early on, including direct involvement with clients, supported by appropriate supervision. Above all, we value our team as people, recognising that everyone has lives, challenges and interests beyond work.

What initiatives are in place to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion within your firm, and why are they important to you personally?

We have always encouraged diversity, equity and inclusion and have long supported social mobility. The profession has changed significantly since I began my career, and we are proud to contribute to that progress. Our recruitment focuses on talent and potential, not background and we work with local schools, colleges and universities to broaden access. A walk into any Partners' meeting or firm event shows our diversity clearly. This matters to me because it is the right thing to do and because different perspectives strengthen our business and better serve our clients.

How do you cultivate a strong firm culture while managing the pressures of billable targets and client demands?

A strong culture takes years to build and can be lost quickly, so it requires daily focus. We trust and empower our people and recognise that life outside the office will always take precedence over billable hours. Collaboration is key. Colleagues readily step in for each other when personal matters arise. Senior leaders also set the tone and must act with honour and integrity if they expect the same from their teams.

Innovation & Industry Trends

How is technology — including AI and legal tech — transforming your practice areas, and how is your firm adapting?

AI is impossible to ignore and while it must be embraced, it requires a measured approach. Many clients will always value a personal touch. We are investing in a new case management system with a closed AI function, led by our Head of Operations and Innovation, ensuring we stay aligned with emerging tech that will benefit our team and our clients.

What emerging trends do you believe will most significantly impact the legal profession over the next five years?

Technology will continue to dominate, particularly as AI moves into the judicial system. Workplace expectations are also shifting. Younger lawyers prioritise meaningful work, balance and culture over pay or partnership and that trend will continue.

Client Relationships & Community Impact

What differentiates your firm in terms of client service and how do you ensure long-term client relationships are maintained?

We focus on the entire client experience, not just the service. We take time to understand clients as people and businesses building deeper, longerterm relationships. This curiosity allows us to add real value and anticipate their needs.

Beyond business success, what role does your firm play in supporting the broader community and regional development?

With roots in Durham stretching back decades, we take our responsibility to the region seriously. We support numerous local charities and organisations and offer every team member a paid volunteer day each year. Personally, I have contributed to several regional development initiatives. Durham is central to who we are and supporting it is essential to our future.

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The Renters' Rights revolution: What landlords need to know

By Rob Winder, Senior Associate, Cartmell Shepherd

This is the biggest shake up of the private rental sector in nearly 40 years and understanding the new rules is going to be crucial for property owners.

The Renters' Rights Act received Royal Assent in October 2025 and delivers the most wide-reaching reform of the private rented sector in decades.

It replaces fixed-term tenancies with rolling periodic arrangements, reshapes how rent can be set and reviewed, and introduces a much stronger regulatory framework for landlords, including a Private Rental Sector (PRS) database. The new legislation applies purely to rented homes. Defined licensed student accommodation is exempt, as are holiday lets.

Is this good news for tenants?

The legislation has many pluses for those renting their homes. They include ending fixed term tenancies and preventing discrimination against tenants with children and pets, as well as those on benefits, except in special circumstances.

What does this mean for landlords?

Though the Act takes positive action for renters, it's giving landlords plenty to think about.

Under previous legislation, the Section 21 no fault eviction notice had created a system where tenants didn't know if they'd be able to stay in a property. Now they can stay as long as they want. Should a property owner find themselves with a problem tenant, with issues like late rent or anti-social behaviour, they won't have the option of using the Section 21 route as they had before. They will have to meet even more stringent grounds for eviction.

The new rules also control rent increases. They will only be able to happen once a year and in line with market levels. Tenants will be able to challenge them at a tribunal where a judge and surveyor will make the decision.

What are the key things to think about now?

The Renters' Rights Act says tenants will have a periodic month-by-month tenancy, rather than the old fixed term contracts. If a tenant doesn't want to leave, the landlord will, as they do now, need to go to court to get them out. In terms of what the courts will need, there are different mandatory grounds.

In relation to rent increases, the landlord won't be able to evict a tenant if they refuse the new proposed rent. The tenant has an automatic right to appeal. However, if it does go to tribunal and the increase is agreed, the rent only increases at the point of the tribunal decision, and it can't be backdated.

If the landlord is selling the property, they must give tenants at least four months' notice – and then they have to sell it. Speculative evictions aren't allowed. Meanwhile, if a tenant wishes to leave their rental property, they're now expected to give at least two months' notice.

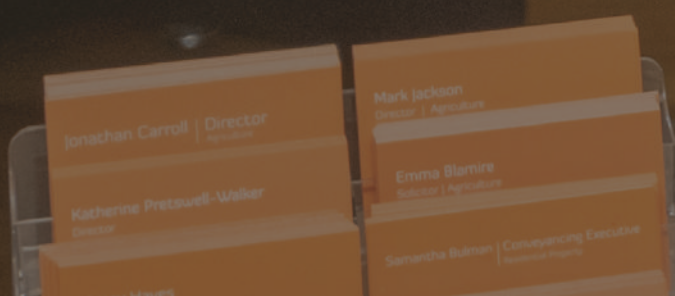
Are there more phases of the new Act to come?

Yes. Firstly, the PRS database, likely to come into force in late 2026, which is currently out for consultation.

Then there are the Decent Homes Standard and Awaab's Law which currently apply to social housing, tackling issues of emergency hazards, damp and mould. That will eventually apply to private landlords too. It's due to feature in Phase Three of the legislation's roll out, though no timeframe for this is yet in place.

Rob Winder is a Senior Associate at Cartmell Shepherd and heads up the firm's Property Litigation team. Rob specialises in property law and has particular expertise in both residential and commercial landlord and tenant disputes.

If you need expert support with any property issue or dispute, get in touch with Rob and the team by calling 01434 603656 or emailing enquiries@cartmells.co.uk



> **The legislation has many pluses for those renting their homes.**

Rob Winder

"Exciting times" as Jacksons attract new partner to the fold

David Adams' decision to move law firms for the first time in 20 years reflects "exciting growth trajectory" of 150-year-old firm.

A Teesside lawyer with almost 20 years' experience advising on a wide range of business transactions and acquisitions has joined the corporate and commercial team at Jacksons in a partner's role.

David Adams' appointment reflects Jacksons' ongoing commitment to growth, innovation and high-quality legal expertise, as the firm celebrates its landmark 150th anniversary in 2026.

The appointment sees David, who joined Archers Law LLP in 2007, qualified in 2009 and became a partner there in 2013, move firms for the first time in almost 20 years.

Reflecting on a "momentous few weeks" in which he has also moved house and found out where his twin daughters will be studying at secondary school, David said: "I've been a one-office lawyer throughout my career, but as I approach 43, I felt it was time for a refresh and a new challenge.

"I have a couple of long-standing friends at Jacksons, including Dan Flounders, who I worked with at Archers and later Knights for over 10 years.

"Seeing the changes at Jacksons sparked my interest, and what they're doing both at firm level and within the corporate team sounded very exciting."

He added: "Jacksons is already on an exciting growth trajectory, and Dan has really driven momentum within the corporate team, so I'm excited to see what we can achieve together over the next few years."

David said joining Jacksons felt like a natural continuation of the work he and Dan have built together over the years.

He and Dan grew the corporate offering at Archers into one of the most successful corporate teams in Teesside.

David gets most of his job satisfaction in working with local SMEs – and as a "Teesside lawyer through and through" loves working "with and for Teesside firms".

"Jacksons felt the right fit for me to continue supporting those clients," he said, adding the firm's independence and strong identity within the region were also key factors in his decision.

The firm's approach to flexible working and work–life balance also played an important role in his move.

"I wanted to be sure any move supported the flexibility and work–life balance I need, whilst also providing an exciting challenge for the next chapter of my career," said the father-of-two.

"All my interactions with Jacksons convinced me that they really care about their team.

"They're forward-thinking, they're focused on employee wellbeing, and it's so important to me."

Partner Erica Turner, Jacksons' head of legal, said David's wealth of experience would be a "huge asset" to the corporate and commercial department.

She added: "David's appointment also aligns with Jacksons' strategic aims to build a strong corporate proposition within the firm and we are thrilled to welcome him to the team."

Partner and head of corporate and commercial Dan Flounders said: "I'm really pleased to be welcoming David to the team who will no doubt be a key part of the corporate team's future growth.

"We worked together at Archers for many years having a great dynamic and supporting each other to create one of the go-to corporate law offerings in the area.

"This appointment highlights where Jacksons currently is as a firm and being able to attract one of the best corporate lawyers in the North East region, it's exciting to see where both the department and the firm go in the next few years."

jacksons.law

> **I'm excited to see what we can achieve together over the next few years.**

David Adams

L-R: Kat Moody, Phil Moir and Lewis Cassap

The Renters' Rights Act 2025 signals a new era for the Landlords and Tenants

With sweeping reforms on the horizon for the private rented sector, staying ahead of legislative change has never been more important.

At Richard Reed Solicitors, property litigation specialists, Phil Moir, Kat Moody and Lewis Cassap are closely monitoring developments surrounding the Renters' Rights Act 2025, providing practical guidance to landlords and agents preparing for a new regulatory framework that will fundamentally reshape residential tenancies.

Expected to come into force from 1 May 2026, the Renters' Rights Act 2025 represents a substantial overhaul of the private rented sector, aiming to strengthen tenant protections while establishing clearer and more consistent rules for landlords.

Phil Moir, Director/Solicitor comments: "These reforms represent one of the most significant shifts in housing law in recent years. Landlords and agents will need to familiarise themselves with the new framework well in advance of implementation to ensure they remain compliant."

One of the most significant structural changes introduced by the Act is the abolition of Assured Shorthold Tenancy agreements. Under the new system, fixed-term tenancies will be replaced by a single framework of periodic tenancies. This means that tenancies will no longer automatically end after a defined term but will instead continue on a rolling basis unless ended in accordance with the statutory rules.

Kat Moody, Associate Solicitor explains: "The move to periodic tenancies changes the dynamic of the landlord-tenant relationship. While it offers tenants greater security, it also means landlords must carefully understand the legal grounds available if they wish to regain possession."

Removal of "No-Fault" Evictions

Landlords will no longer be able to regain possession of their property using Section 21 notices. Instead, they will need to rely on specific statutory grounds for possession, such as selling the property, moving into it themselves, or where tenants have breached the terms of the tenancy.

Lewis Cassap, Solicitor, highlights: "The removal of Section 21 will inevitably lead to greater reliance on the statutory possession grounds. Landlords should ensure they understand the updated notice requirements and evidential standards before commencing possession proceedings."

In addition, there will be changes to Possession Procedures, updated notice rules and new conditions must be satisfied before the courts can grant a possession order. These reforms aim to ensure that possession claims are based on clearly defined legal grounds while improving transparency in the process.

The reforms also include a number of new measures designed to strengthen Tenant Protections and improve fairness within the rental market. These include limits on how and when rents may be increased, restrictions on advance rent payments, and measures intended to prevent rental bidding between prospective tenants.

Greater Regulation and Oversight

Alongside the tenancy reforms, the Act will introduce additional regulatory oversight. Local authorities are expected to receive stronger enforcement powers, and further initiatives are planned, including the creation of a Private Rented Sector Database and a new Landlord Ombudsman Scheme. These measures aim to improve compliance and raise standards across the sector.

Preparing for Implementation

Although the core provisions of the Renters' Rights Act 2025 are now in place, further guidance and secondary legislation are expected ahead of the anticipated implementation date of 1 May 2026.

The firms' legal specialists urge that landlords and property professionals should continue to monitor developments and consider seeking professional advice to ensure they are fully prepared for the changes ahead.

Take a deeper dive into Richards Reeds Legally Sound Podcast S01 E01– The Housing Act & 2025 Renters Bill Explained - available across all platforms.

richardreed.co.uk

Protecting Intellectual Property beyond the UK

By Dominic Elsworth, Head of Practice, Hargreaves Elsworth

For UK businesses with global ambitions, intellectual property (IP) protection should not stop at the border. Patents are territorial rights, meaning protection in the UK does not extend overseas. A considered international strategy is essential.

The Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property is fundamental to global patent strategy. This agreement allows a UK applicant to file in other member countries within defined time limits whilst retaining the original UK filing date. These "priority periods" are 12 months for patents, and six months for registered trade marks and designs. This gives businesses valuable time to test markets, secure funding, and refine commercial plans before committing to the cost of wider protection.

In practice, most patent owners focus on key economic regions. The United States is often a priority due to its market size and robust enforcement system. European protection is commonly pursued via the European Patent Office for patents, or via EU trade mark and Community design systems, offering streamlined access to multiple countries through a centralised process. However, filing national applications within individual European countries remains an alternative for some businesses, particularly those targeting specific markets or seeking to control costs. China is increasingly important, both as a manufacturing hub and a vast consumer market. Japan offers a major industrial and technology market, particularly in relation to automotive, electronics, and precision engineering sectors.

A filing strategy should reflect commercial realities. Different countries often develop strengths in particular technological fields. A mining technology company might prioritise South Africa and Australia; a business developing specialist fishing technology or maritime equipment may see value in protecting rights in jurisdictions linked to major marine industries, such as Greenland or Norway. Singapore, meanwhile, serves as a strategic gateway to Asian markets and has a strong reputation in relation to IP enforcement. The aim is to protect IP where competitors could exploit it, whether this is through sales, distribution, or manufacture.

Dominic Elsworth

Ultimately, effective overseas IP protection aligns with business strategy. The question is not "where can we file?" but "where should we file to support growth, manage risk, and protect value?"

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Please contact:
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Gateshead teacher launches music-led youth provision

Paula Halfpenny, a secondary school maths teacher from Gateshead, has launched a new alternative educational provision designed to support young people for whom mainstream school has not worked.

The provision offers a small-group learning environment for students aged 11–16, combining core subjects such as English and maths with music, DJ tuition and creative media.

Alternative provisions support students who may struggle in mainstream education and benefit from smaller class sizes, specialist staff, and a more personalised approach. While many alternative settings focus on areas such as hair and beauty, construction or outdoor learning, Paula's provision is unique in its specialism: music and DJing.

"I've been a teacher for 25 years and a DJ for over 20," Paula explains. "This project brings my two passions together. Students don't need to already love music — the aim is to help them become more creative, build confidence, and reconnect with learning."

Paula believes that creativity plays a vital role in education and wellbeing. Alongside Paula, the provision will work with classroom assistants as well as visiting professionals from the creative industries. These include professional DJs, actors, singers, filmmakers and behind-the-scenes media workers, offering masterclasses and insight into careers both on and off stage.

Grassroots Rugby leads the way on sustainability in Northumberland

Morpeth Rugby Club is showing how community rugby can also be a force for environmental responsibility, thanks to a partnership with Green Acres, an initiative founded by lifelong rugby fan and Stannington farmer Mike Dungait.

Mike Dungait's connection to the club runs deep. He first pulled on a Morpeth shirt as a seven-year-old in 1981, later returning as a player, then a coach, and remaining closely involved for more than four decades.

Green Acres works with the club to understand its environmental impact in real terms, from travel to matches through to energy use in the clubhouse and changing rooms. Rather than chasing slogans, the focus has been on balance and responsibility. Tree and hedge planting at Green Acres' land and around the rugby club site helps offset the club's footprint, while practical changes such as improved recycling systems, regular litter picks and more efficient waste management are embedding sustainability into the everyday life of the club.

The partnership has also strengthened the club's role as a community hub. Local schools are encouraged to see the rugby club as something to look after and take pride in, with Green Acres reinforcing messages around litter, respect for shared spaces and the value of looking after the environment collectively. Initiatives such as a proposed kit swap scheme aim to reduce waste while easing the cost of sport for families, ensuring rugby remains accessible to all.

Blyth prepares bid for UK Town of Culture 2028

With a proud cultural heritage shaped by its maritime, mining and industrial past, Blyth is preparing to bid for the title of UK Town of Culture 2028, with Blyth Town Council leading the initiative and working alongside partners from across the town's growing cultural network.

Today, Blyth is home to world-leading clean energy innovation while also investing in bold new cultural spaces, festivals and creative opportunities for young people. The proposed bid aims to celebrate that transformation — honouring the town's proud heritage while showcasing its growing cultural ambition.

Blyth is ready to share its story of energy — industrial, renewable and creative — with the rest of the country with the help of a network of partners including Blyth Culture Network, rePUBlic Gallery, Headway Arts, The Pheonix Theatre, Friends of Ridley Park and The Market Pavilion.

The UK Town of Culture competition is a UK-wide programme developed in collaboration with the devolved governments in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. It aims to celebrate the significant contributions towns make to the national story and encourage communities to use culture and creativity to tell the story of their place.

The winning town will receive £3 million to deliver a cultural programme lasting around six months in 2028. In addition, the two other finalists will each receive £250,000 to deliver elements of their proposed programmes.

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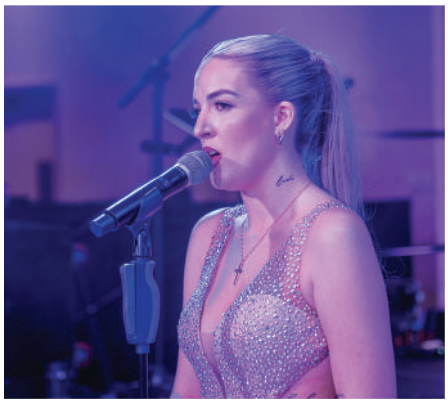
The Core Foundations Spring Ball

It was a fantastic night for a cause that's already making a real impact.

Guests enjoyed great food, conversation and live music, with plenty of smiles throughout. It's a simple reminder of what can be achieved when people unite to get behind something that really matters.

Thank you to everyone who attended and contributed on the night - your support will help Core Foundations continue its work, helping those experiencing homelessness rebuild and transform their lives, creating brighter, more stable futures for people across the North East.

Care Foundations


Care Foundations
12

Charity of the month...

Caroline and Phil Crawford

Core Foundations

Homes for the Homeless

Why was the charity formed?

After 30 years in the corporate retail world, my husband Phil Crawford did some work with a homelessness charity, Hope into Action, which operates over 100 homes in the south, with its head office in Peterborough.

He was drawn to their model, which recognises that homelessness is not just about a lack of a roof over someone's head, but also a lack of friendship and support. For people to truly move on, their lives need to change for good if they are to break out of the cycle many find themselves in.

As a Christian charity, Hope into Action partners each home with a local church. Volunteers from the church are trained to provide what they call 'friendship and support'. Their role is simple but powerful – to build relationships with tenants and offer non-judgemental friendship, whether that's going for a walk, helping with shopping, or simply being there.

They also employ empowerment workers who support tenants with their individual needs and help them make positive changes.

The homes themselves have no more than two tenants and are provided by investors who want to do some social good with their wealth while receiving a small return.

Phil and I felt this was a model we could bring to the North East through Core Foundations, helping people in our own communities. With support and guidance from Hope into Action, we set up Core Foundations as an independent charity in its own right, delivering the same approach locally.

Which area do you cover?

We currently have two homes in Hexham and one in Consett. However, we can work anywhere across the North East, as long as we have the right staff in place and a local church willing to support the homes.

What fundraising events do you have?

We've just held our second Spring Ball, and more generally we have a real mix of fundraising activities – from Burns suppers and runners taking part in the Great North Run, to afternoon teas, coffee mornings and bag packing.

We're very grateful for the support we receive from the community. The Glendale Choir organised a concert in Consett, with all proceeds going to the charity, and Snods Edge are hosting an Afternoon Tea on 19th July.

Alongside events, we have supporters who give one-off donations or commit to monthly giving, which really helps.

We also run our 20/20 Club, where we ask for a minimum of £20 a month. Each year, a member is chosen at random to win an overnight stay in a lodge with a wood-fired hot tub at Wood House Holiday Cottages and Lodges.

Who are your trustees and patrons?

We don't currently have a patron, but we're really fortunate to have a group of trustees with a wide range of experience and expertise.

I'm Chair of Trustees (Caroline Crawford, née Moody). Alongside me are John Morgan, a commercial property lawyer at Hay & Kilner; Dean Titterton, CEO of North Tyneside YMCA; and David Stewart, an accountant at Azets.

More recently, we've been joined by Karen Hall, a school teacher who has supported the charity from the start as a Friendship and Support volunteer, spending time with tenants over the past couple of years, and Neil Strike, a retired pastor from Hexham Community Church.

Your proudest moments so far?

In the last two years, we've opened three homes and supported six people through our programme, all of whom have moved on successfully into independent living and employment. We currently have a further six tenants living in our homes, continuing their journey with us.

What are you currently working on?

Another investor has recently stepped forward, which will allow us to open a further home, hopefully within the next six months.

How do you get involved?

There are a number of ways to get involved, whether that's becoming a trustee, volunteering through a local church as part of the Friendship and Support team, helping with fundraising, or supporting us through monthly giving.

Contact: Philip Crawford CEO
phil@corefoundations.org.uk, 07711 854253
or fundraising@corefoundations.org.uk

Entrepreneurs' Forum

From building a high-performance culture to honest conversations about tougher times, here are a few moments from recent Entrepreneurs' Forum events.

Different topics, different formats, but the same principle of entrepreneurs sharing real insight and experience openly.

entrepreneursforum.net

Fostering North East: Continuing a legacy of care

Across the North East, thousands of children rely on foster carers to provide stability, care and encouragement during difficult periods in their lives. Supporting some of those children is Fostering North East, the independent not-for-profit fostering agency operated by St Cuthbert's Care.

For more than seventy years, the agency has worked with local authorities to provide safe homes for children who cannot live with their birth families.

Through its experienced team and strong support network for carers, Fostering North East helps create the stable environments children need to build confidence and look towards the future.

We spoke to the team at Fostering North East about the agency's history, the challenges facing fostering today and the difference foster carers can make.

Can you tell us about the history of St Cuthbert's Care and its work with children?

St Cuthbert's Care has supported vulnerable children since 1946, when it was founded in the aftermath of the Second World War to provide safe homes for children who had been displaced or left without stable family support.

While services have evolved, the charity's commitment to supporting children has remained constant. Today, that legacy continues through Fostering North East and the charity's children's residential services.

What is Fostering North East and how does it support children?

Fostering North East is the not-for-profit fostering agency run by St Cuthbert's Care, working with local authorities to provide homes for children who cannot live with their birth families. The agency offers long-term, short-term and respite fostering, ensuring children receive the support they need at different stages of their lives.

Foster carers provide far more than a place to stay. They offer stability and encouragement during uncertain times. Fostering North East's experienced team supports carers through training, professional guidance and ongoing advice, helping them create nurturing environments where children can rebuild confidence and develop positive relationships.

What makes Fostering North East different?

One of the agency's greatest strengths is its small, friendly team. Foster carers often say they value the personal support they receive. With Fostering North East, carers are not just a number – they are part of a supportive community.

Carers benefit from 24/7 support from a team they know and trust, alongside regular support groups where carers can share experiences and build strong peer networks.

Young Stars, Fostering North East's youth group, brings together children in foster families and the birth children of foster carers, helping young people build friendships and grow in confidence.

For many carers, this close-knit support network ensures they never feel alone in the challenges and rewards of fostering.

What challenges are you currently facing in recruiting foster carers?

Like many fostering agencies across the UK, Fostering North East is experiencing a shortage of foster carers. While the need for foster homes continues to grow, fewer people are coming forward to consider fostering.

Many people assume they would not be suitable, when in reality a wide range of individuals and families could make excellent foster carers. Raising awareness about fostering is therefore more important than ever.

Do you have examples of the difference fostering can make?

Many children referred to Fostering North East arrive after experiencing significant disruption. The stability provided by foster carers can be life-changing.

Recently, one young person supported by Fostering North East was awarded a scholarship to attend Dame Allan's School in Newcastle, an achievement reflecting both their determination and the encouragement of their foster family.

We have also supported a young person with disabilities to move on to independent supported living, helping them develop the confidence and skills needed to live more independently.

Sometimes the progress is quieter. For some children, simply feeling safe and getting through the day can be a significant step forward.

What would you say to someone who has considered fostering?

Fostering is a big life decision and not everyone is ready to make that commitment straight away. But if you have ever wondered whether fostering might be right for you, we encourage you to start the conversation.

The team at Fostering North East are always happy to answer questions and explain what fostering involves.

To find out more, visit www.fosteringnortheast.org.uk or call 0191 242 4805.

People *Doing* Good...

Full Circle food project takes a 360° look at its future

Full Circle Food Project (FCFP), a community charity based in Ashington, has completed a strategic planning programme with Tell Us North to support the organisation's next phase of growth and impact.

Full Circle Food Project works with local communities to tackle food poverty, reduce food waste and address social isolation by bringing people together through food, cooking and gardening. The charity supports healthier lifestyles while creating inclusive, welcoming spaces where people of all ages can learn, share meals and build stronger community connections.The strategic work with Tell Us North brought together the charity's CEO and trustees to reflect on its objectives, core activities and long-term vision.

The one-day strategy workshop resulted in a clear three-year vision for the charity. As a direct outcome, Full Circle Food Project restructured its staffing model, streamlined job roles, and strengthened its recruitment approach.

Tell Us North is a Newcastle based community-focused organisation that works alongside local people and voluntary, community and public sector organisations to influence and improve the quality of health, wellbeing and social care services.

Young people take centre stage at The Phoenix Theatre

Young people across Blyth were given the opportunity to step behind – and in front of – the camera thanks to a creative partnership between Blyth Town Council and ACT 2 CAM .

For the third consecutive year, the popular Media Day returned to the Phoenix Theatre, offering children the chance to write, perform and produce their own short film – all in just one day.

Participants are given a theme at the start of the day before splitting into groups to devise their own scenes. While each group interprets the theme differently, the final film is brought together into one unique production. Importantly, the event is open to all young people – not just those already confident in drama or performance.

At the end of the day, the completed film is shared with parents, giving families a lasting keepsake of the children's creativity and hard work. While licensing restrictions prevent the film from being shared publicly, every family receives a copy to enjoy and share privately.

Grassroots Rugby leads the way on sustainability in Northumberland

Morpeth Rugby Club is showing how community rugby can also be a force for environmental responsibility, thanks to a partnership with Green Acres, an initiative founded by lifelong rugby fan and Stannington farmer Mike Dungait.

Mike first pulled on a Morpeth shirt as a seven-year-old in 1981, later returning as a player, then a coach, and remaining closely involved for more than four decades. When Green Acres was formed, focusing on honest, practical approaches to sustainability rooted in farming and education, Morpeth Rugby Club was a natural place to put those ideas into action.

Green Acres works with the club to understand its environmental impact in real terms, from travel to matches through to energy use in the clubhouse and changing rooms. Rather than chasing slogans, the focus has been on balance and responsibility. Tree and hedge planting at Green Acres' land and around the rugby club site helps offset the club's footprint, while practical changes such as improved recycling systems, regular litter picks and more efficient waste management are embedding sustainability into the everyday life of the club.

For Mike, the work goes far beyond carbon calculations. He believes rugby clubs are uniquely placed to reconnect people with the outdoors, particularly young people. Training, matches and social time at the club mean children and adults alike are outside, active, and grounded in nature, gaining physical, mental and wellbeing benefits that are often overlooked in modern life.

The partnership has also strengthened the club's role as a community hub. Local schools are encouraged to see the rugby club as something to look after and take pride in.

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

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Save my life

Red Sky Foundation launches "Save My Life, Not My Modesty" campaign to close the gender gap in Heart Health and CPR Response

Red Sky Foundation has launched a powerful new awareness campaign, "Save My Life, Not My Modesty," aimed at highlighting a critical yet often overlooked issue in emergency care: the gender gap in heart health outcomes and bystander response.

Heart disease remains the number one killer of women in the UK, claiming more than twice as many lives as breast cancer. Despite advances in treatment and lifesaving techniques, women experiencing cardiac emergencies are still less likely to receive immediate help from those around them.

Through its latest campaign, Red Sky Foundation is working to raise awareness, challenge misconceptions and encourage more people to act confidently in life-or-death situations.

At the heart of the campaign is a stark reality: women who suffer out-of-hospital cardiac arrest are less likely to receive cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) from bystanders than men. Research suggests this disparity is not due to differences in survival potential, but rather hesitation around performing CPR on female bodies.

A survey conducted by St John Ambulance found that nearly one third of men and 13% of women admitted they would feel reluctant to perform CPR on a woman, often due to fears of being accused of inappropriate touching. As a result, only around 68% of women are considered likely to receive bystander CPR, compared to 73% of men.

This hesitation has serious consequences. Previous research (2003-2013) suggests that more than 8,200 women in England and Wales might have survived heart attacks if they had received the same treatment as men.

International studies also show that women are consistently less likely to receive bystander CPR or defibrillation, leading to lower survival rates following cardiac arrest.

The campaign also highlights how training practices may unintentionally reinforce this bias. The vast majority of CPR training mannequins used in courses and public demonstrations are designed with flat, male-presenting torsos. While this may seem insignificant, research has shown that trainees who practise on mannequins featuring female anatomical characteristics, including breasts, report significantly higher confidence levels when performing CPR on women in real-life situations.

Red Sky Foundation encountered this issue first-hand when purchasing what was expected to be a female-form CPR mannequin for training and awareness sessions. Instead, the organisation received yet another flat-chested, male-style model, highlighting the lack of inclusive training equipment currently available.

Another barrier identified by the campaign relates to the use of automated external defibrillators (AEDs). For a defibrillator to work effectively, pads must be placed directly onto bare skin. Women's clothing, particularly bras with underwire, can complicate this process.

In some cases, hesitation or uncertainty about removing clothing may delay treatment. Underwire can also interfere with pad placement or cause burns if left in place during a shock.

Studies suggest women are around 15% less likely to survive defibrillator use compared with men, partly due to these delays and uncertainties.

Red Sky Foundation says these findings point to a wider cultural issue: women are not dying because their hearts are fundamentally different, but because people hesitate to help.

Laura Kemp, Head of Operations at Red Sky Foundation, said: "I was shocked to learn that one in three men say they would rather stand and watch a woman die than step in to help, simply because they feel uncomfortable performing CPR. What was even more alarming was discovering that one in eight women also say they would feel uncomfortable performing CPR on another woman.

"We need to talk about this. People need to understand that in an emergency, a life is far more important than modesty. I would always choose to have my life saved rather than my modesty spared, and I have yet to meet a woman who feels any differently."

Through the campaign, Red Sky Foundation is calling for wider public CPR and AED education that directly addresses gender bias and anatomical concerns. The charity is also advocating for greater inclusion of female-form training mannequins and clearer guidance on defibrillator pad placement and clothing removal during emergencies.

By opening up the conversation and improving training, the organisation hopes to remove the hesitation that could mean the difference between life and death.

Find out more about Red Sky Foundation at redskyfoundation.com/save-my-life-not-my-modesty

Scan here to get involved

THE CHARLIE & CARTER FOUNDATION

This April, we're inviting you to make a bold statement and raise much needed funds by participating in Wear Blue for Charlie and Carter. There are so many ways to get involved but the main thing to remember is to have fun and support The Charlie and Carter Foundation!

www.thecharlieandcarterfoundation.co.uk Registered Charity No: 1166538 laura@ccfemail.co.uk

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Prosper and JTC organise Charity Walk to raise funds for Maggie's

Staff from Prosper visited Maggie's Newcastle for a tour prior to their charity walk on 28 April

Staff from Prosper and JTC Furniture have joined forces to raise funds for Maggie's Newcastle, which provides vital support for individuals living with cancer and their families.

A team of more than 20 staff from both organisations will be joined by colleagues from North East Housing landlords, to take part in the 13-mile charity walk on Tuesday 28 April, setting off from Bamburgh Castle and taking in the stunning Northumberland coastline scenery, finishing at Dunstanburgh Castle.

The charity was specifically chosen by colleagues from both organisations whose family have been affected by cancer and have received support directly from the centre and wanted to give something back.

The team have set themselves an ambitious target of raising £3,000 for Maggie's centre in Newcastle, which is the equivalent of covering the operational costs to run the centre for one full day.

This year, the charity celebrates turning 30 years and has 27 centres across the UK and overseas and hopes to have 30 centres by the end of the year. The Maggie's Centre in Newcastle opened 13 years' ago and receives visits from people with cancer and their families, where they can feel supported and safe when cancer has turned their lives upside down. It costs more than £750,000 each year to provide the vital support people need.

Maggie's offers a range of psychological support, including one-to-one sessions, workshops and courses to manage stress. This support reduces anxiety and depression and empowers people to find ways to cope that work for them. Specialist benefits advisors are also available at each centre to offer free financial support to help people claim the support they are entitled.

The team will have a guide throughout the 13-miles who will organise the full route, lunch and transport.

Rebecca Griggs, Head of Procurement at Prosper, said: "During our strategy away day, we agreed to give something back to a local charity and chose an event all staff could participate in. We are delighted to be supporting Maggie's Centre in Newcastle which is very close to me and my family.

"We are also pleased to team up with staff from JTC Furniture, who will join us on the day. We hope to raise lots of money for this worthy charity and keep our fingers crossed for good weather. Please support us if you can."

Colin Tweddell, Executive Director – Social Housing at JTC, said: "Maggie's is a charity that holds a very special place in my heart, and for many of us across JTC and Prosper, it's something we feel a real and personal connection to. The support they provide to people and families navigating cancer is truly extraordinary — creating a space where people feel understood, supported and not alone.

"This challenge means a great deal to me personally. It's our way of giving something back to a charity that brings light and reassurance during some of life's most difficult moments. I'm incredibly proud to be part of this effort alongside such a committed team, and we're all determined to make a meaningful contribution to Maggie's Newcastle."

Karen Verrill, Centre Head at Maggie's Newcastle, said: "Cancer affects so many people and their families across our region. At Maggie's, we provide a different kind of cancer care, offering free emotional, financial and psychological help to anyone who needs us. We're delighted that Prosper and JTC have chosen to support our centre through their Castle to Castle walk. Everything we offer, from a simple cup of tea to our warm and welcoming building, is funded by our local community. The funds and awareness raised through this challenge will make a huge difference to the people who need us, whenever they need us. We wish the team the very best of luck."

To make a donation and support this worthwhile cause, please visit: www.justgiving.com/team/castletocastlecharitywalk

NE Youth celebrates International Women's Day with two inspiring events

NE Youth, the North East leading youth development charity marked International Women's Day with two vibrant events that brought women together to connect, celebrate, raise awareness and vital funds.

NE Youth, based in Blaydon, hosted both a small networking gathering at the stunning piano bar at 3 Sixty in Newcastle and a lively supper club at The Wood Oven in Wylam, raising more than £2,000 to support young women & girls across the region.

The IWD celebrations began with an intimate afternoon networking event at 3Sixty in Newcastle, bringing together local women from across business, charity and community sectors to share experiences, build connections and celebrate the achievements of women in the North East.

A few days later, around 40 women gathered for a special International Women's Day supper club at the Wood Oven. Guests enjoyed an evening of great food, conversation and entertainment while raising over £2000 for NE Youth's work with girls and young women.

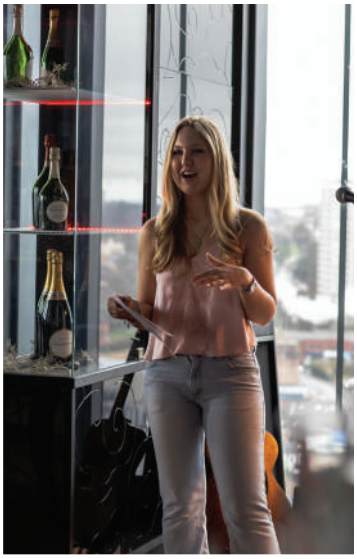
The night featured inspiring talks, delicious wood-fired pizza and live music from Channy and Georgina Gale, which had guests dancing and celebrating long into the evening.

Dee Macdonald commented; "International Women's Day is all about celebrating the power of women coming together, and that's exactly what these events achieved. It was incredible to see so many women connecting, supporting each other and raising funds for girls and young women in our region. We're so grateful to everyone who came along and helped make the events such a success. Big thanks to David Gray Solicitors who have sponsored the IWD Supper Club for ten years!"

NE Youth believes that all young people deserve to get involved in their communities, enjoy their lives and achieve their potential.

If you can support NE Youth with their programmes that support girls and young women please contact: jon@neyouth.org.uk

www.neyouth.org.uk



Entrance to Children's Unit

Hospice Gardens

St Oswald's Hospice – fantastic work – scary numbers

And much of their income comes from people and companies like those in this magazine.

St Oswald's Hospice in Newcastle is one of the North East's most important charitable healthcare organisations, providing specialist palliative and end-of-life care for people with life-limiting conditions. It's grown into a major regional centre supporting adults, children, and young people, as well as their families, through some of the most challenging periods of their lives. Its work extends far beyond medical treatment, focusing on improving quality of life, offering emotional support, and ensuring dignity in care.

CEO Steph Edusei

Some of the figures St Oswald's Hospice must cope with are mind boggling but bear in mind that the majority of the following figures are only possible when people and businesses kindly give their time and help financially with support.

- Over the course of a year, Hospices across the region provide around 20,000 bed nights. That's the sort of number you'd find with a small hospital.
- Just under 20% of those were provided at St Oswald's Hospice.
- Across all their services, over 3000 people, young and old, will be supported in some way by the hospice.
- It costs around £17m to operate St Oswald's Hospice last year.
- Government and local authority assistance helps, but around £11m needs to be raised every year from charitable donations.

- This year's increase in National Insurance has meant St Oswald's Hospice has had to find an additional £300,000 per annum/year.
- There are 360 staff, 25 shops and close to 1000 volunteers.
- This year will see the hospice celebrate its 40th anniversary.

"This is a really challenging time for every hospice because the need for our services continues to increase whilst it is extremely difficult to maintain the required levels of funding," says CEO Steph Edusei. "We also need to bust the misconception that people must pay to use our services…they don't, it's free for patients, you never pay a penny, which is why we rely heavily on donations, fundraising, and community support to operate. Only part of our funding comes from statutory sources such as the NHS, meaning that public generosity plays a crucial role in sustaining what we do.

"Another misconception is that people only come into a hospice to die. In many cases patients will come to us for care and treatment and then go home. Take something like lymphoedema which is a debilitating condition, but it's treatable. Last year we helped over 500 local people manage this condition. We are about making the most of life, whether that's for days, weeks, months or years …it's about quality of life, no matter how long that might be. Our consultants, doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, social workers, and chaplains work together to support each patient. It should also be emphasised that for many people, we are their lifeline."

Much of St Oswald's Hospice's care is aimed at people living with serious illnesses such as cancer, neurological conditions, heart disease, and respiratory illnesses, but care is not limited to physical symptoms; it also addresses emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs. Therapies and bereavement support are also offered, ensuring that families and carers receive help alongside patients.

St Oswald's Hospice, spearheaded by CEO Steph Edusei, is far more than a medical facility; it is a beacon of excellence, community and kindness. Through compassion, respect and dignity, it supports and treats thousands of people each year through it wide range of specialist services. It has become an essential pillar of care in the North East. Steph's team of staff, volunteers, and donors, ensure the hospice continues to make a profound difference to patients and families when they need it most.

The best way to support St Oswald's Hospice is by donating monthly – this will help them ensure that no one faces their toughest times alone.

It will fund the work of the doctors and nurses, improvements to services (free of charge to all who need them), and protect the future of St Oswald's Hospice.

To donate and for more information, visit:
Donate Monthly | St Oswald's Hospice

www.stoswaldsuk.org

The kitchens

On the AIPU ward

Treating Lymphoedema

Spa bath

LANE charity celebrates grand opening of new premises in Wallsend

LANE, a Wallsend-based charity supporting young adults with mental and physical disabilities, proudly celebrated the opening of their new premises last month. The event drew an impressive turnout of more than 200 attendees, including family members, friends, supporters, local dignitaries, and community representatives.

The opening ceremony was made extra special by the attendance of North East singer-songwriter Andrew Cushin, who officially cut the ribbon and welcomed guests into the new space.

The new premises will enable LANE to continue and expand their vital work with young adults of varying abilities. Through tailored programmes focused on independence, employability, and social development, LANE provides meaningful learning experiences that empower individuals to build confidence and work towards their personal goals.

Danny Wilson, CEO at LANE said the celebration marked an exciting new chapter for the charity: "This new space allows us to offer even more opportunities for the incredible young adults we work with. Everything we do is centred around their ambitions, strengths, and wellbeing. Seeing so many families and supporters come together today shows just how valued this work is in our community."

Guests were given guided tours of the facility and learned about the programmes LANE delivers, which include life-skills training, community engagement activities, creative workshops, and pathways to employment.

Danny and all the team at LANE expressed gratitude to everyone who attended and helped make the opening a memorable occasion, adding that the building will serve as a vibrant and inclusive hub for years to come.

If you could support LANE on their mission contact Danny Wilson, daniel.wilson@lanecharity.org www.lanecharity.org

Tess Peters

The Spring Reset: Why April is the leadership month most people waste

By Tess Peters, Founder, Accelerator Coaching

"Self-knowing is the capacity to recognise how your feelings and emotions impact upon your personal opinions, attitudes and judgments."- *RocheMartin Emotional Capital Report*

Easter eggs, daffodils and fresh starts. April is bursting with new beginnings, and not just the chocolate kind.

The clocks have changed, the new financial year is here, and if you are anything like me, you are feeling that familiar itch to reset. My twins turned eighteen, officially stepping into adulthood and I turned fifty, last year and climbed Kilimanjaro. Everywhere I look, new chapters are opening.

I will be honest. Right now, I am not entirely leading by example. We are mid-rebrand at Accelerator Coaching, building new programmes, and my to-do list has a to-do list. But here is my little ritual that keeps me grounded: every morning, I climb into an ice bath. Three minutes of pure, teeth-chattering clarity whilst listening to my 'monk' App. It is my reset button. When I step out, my brain is sharper, my energy lifts, and I feel ready to begin again. Think of it as a very cold, very yellow Easter awakening. Fitting, really, since yellow is not just our brand colour. It is the colour of optimism, warmth and fresh starts. It is basically Easter in a brand.

But this piece is not really about me. It is about you.

I have been coaching a senior leader for three years now. We meet monthly. He has a few thousand employees looking to him for direction, and over those three years he has found his authentic leadership style. The trust is there, the team is performing, and things are good. Really good.

So when we sat down recently, I asked him a question he was not expecting: "What if good has become too comfortable?"

We explored where things had started to feel automatic. Where he was leading on cruise control rather than with intention. I asked him to think about the areas across his business where he could draw a line in the sand, start something new, or re-energise what had gone a bit stale. It was like giving the engine an MOT. Not because anything was broken, but because even the best cars need a check under the bonnet now and then.

This is where self-knowing comes in. It is the first competency in the RocheMartin Emotional Capital Report and one I come back to constantly in my coaching. You cannot change what you cannot see. Before you set a single goal for the new quarter, you need to understand how you are showing up right now and whether that is still serving you.

One of the tools I love using with leaders is Daniel Goleman's six leadership styles: Visionary, Coaching, Affiliative, Democratic, Pacesetting, and Commanding. Think of them as six different hats. The best leaders do not pick one and wear it forever. They swap depending on who they are with and what the moment needs.

So here is your April MOT. Two questions to sit with:

Which leadership hat are you wearing most right now, and is it the right one for the people around you? A pacesetting style might energise one team member and completely overwhelm another. An affiliative approach might build warmth but avoid the tough conversation someone actually needs.

And second: **If you did a Wheel of Life on your leadership right now, where would the flat tyre be? Energy? Communication? Boundaries?** The answer is usually the thing you have been avoiding.

April does not need to be dramatic. You do not need to climb a mountain or rebrand your entire business (although, yes, I am doing both). Sometimes the most powerful reset is simply pausing long enough to notice where you are, being honest about what you see, and choosing to lead the next quarter with a little more intention.

Spring is here. The window is open. Consider this your invitation to begin again.

So, what does your fresh start look like?

acceleratorcoaching.co.uk

Ian Kinnery

Know who you are looking for

By Ian Kinnery, business and scale up coach

Hiring well is notoriously difficult. In my experience, it often goes wrong right at the very beginning.

Too often, we simply don't have enough clarity about what we are looking for, which makes it almost impossible to make a good decision.

One of the first questions I ask clients is to define what the job is. Not the job title - that's largely meaningless - but what outcomes the role should deliver for the business when it is done well.

I remember one client telling me they needed to recruit a receptionist. When I asked them what the job actually was, I suggested that an ansaphone could fulfil the requirement and save them tens of thousands of pounds.

That was the moment they realised they didn't really understand what the job was.

When they stopped to think about it properly, they redefined the role as someone who would take care of incoming callers, make them feel welcome and valued, deal with their needs and connect them with the right person to help them.

Once they understood that, they could start building a much more accurate "spec sheet" of the ideal person.

The 'spec sheet', as I call it, has two fundamental parts.

The first part focuses on the skills and attributes needed to perform well in the job.

The second part focuses on cultural fit - in other words, the values and personal attributes that will enhance the team's collective superpower.

Once you are clear on both, you know exactly what you are looking for. And when you know exactly what you are looking for, you have a far better chance of finding the right person.

kinnery.co.uk

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Prepared, confident, successful: The NPS 11+ Story

This year marks another outstanding milestone for pupils at Newcastle Preparatory School, the region's only school of its kind. Our Year 6 children have once again achieved excellent 11+ results, securing places at leading independent secondary schools across the area.

Their success reflects not only their hard work, but the purposeful, specialist preparatory education they receive throughout their time with us. A key feature of this year's cohort has been the positive, balanced way they approached exam preparation. Far from being a stressful experience, pupils embraced learning with enthusiasm, resilience and a strong sense of teamwork. Our individualised approach ensures preparation is never at the expense of the broad, rich curriculum that helps every child thrive.

One of the most rewarding outcomes of this year's results is the genuine choice available to families. With offers from multiple highly respected schools, parents can select the setting that truly fits their child's personality, learning style and future ambitions. This freedom is a defining advantage of an NPS education; our specialist curriculum prepares children not for one path, but for many.

With scholarship awards, excellent results and a wide range of options ahead, our pupils leave us prepared, confident and excited for the next stage of their education. We are immensely proud of all they have achieved!

www.newcastleprep.org.uk

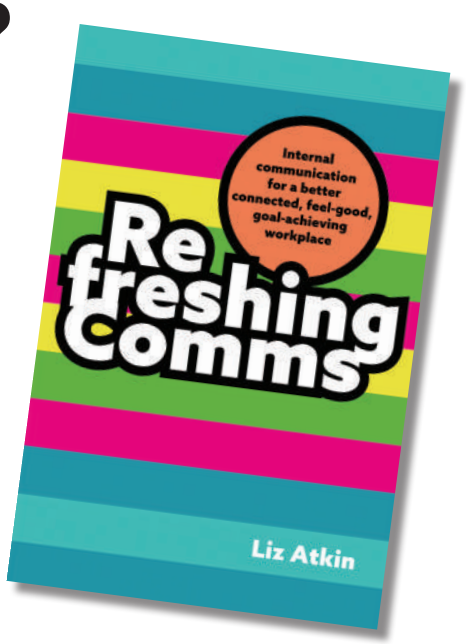
Problems in the Workplace?

If your reality is...

- Silos & disconnect between teams
- Change initiatives stalling
- Managers without people skills
- Fragmented understanding & buy-in

But you long for...

- Clearer communication
- Productive working relationships
- Confident managers who earn trust
- Teams that collaborate instead of collide



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Dr David Cliff

Shiny, Happy People?

Dr David Cliff explores well-being—and the risks of too much positivity.

Well-being has become one of the most familiar—and least examined—ideas in modern organisational life.

It appears everywhere: in strategy documents, leadership frameworks, and workplace initiatives. It is widely accepted as a marker of progressive thinking, a sign that organisations are taking people seriously.

But familiarity is not the same as understanding.

In focusing so heavily on well-being as something to be promoted, measured, and improved, we may be overlooking a more fundamental reality about human experience—one that is less comfortable, but ultimately more honest.

In my work across mental health and leadership, I have come to a simple conclusion: much of what we describe as stress or dissatisfaction is not purely psychological—it is existential.

This is not simply a philosophical observation. Increasingly, academic and clinical perspectives are beginning to recognise the importance of existential well-being—an approach that places meaning, identity, and purpose at the centre of how we understand people at work.

People are not only dealing with workloads and targets. They are grappling, often quietly, with deeper questions:

- Does my work matter?
- Am I using my abilities well?
- What is all this for?

These are not problems to be solved once and for all. They are part of being human, and they do not disappear simply because organisations introduce well-being initiatives or resilience programmes.

This is where a subtle but important tension emerges.

In moving away from older, more clinical models of mental health, organisations may unintentionally create a different kind of pressure. Where once individuals were labelled as "unwell," they may now feel expected to present as consistently positive, resilient, and engaged.

Well-being, in this context, becomes something to perform.

For those who are struggling, this can lead to a quieter form of withdrawal—where difficulties are managed privately rather than shared openly, for fear of appearing out of step with the prevailing culture.

This matters more than we might think.

Work is one of the few areas of life that brings together survival, identity, and purpose. When done well, it offers not just income, but a sense of contribution and engagement.

This is not limited to traditionally "vocational" roles. Whether someone is building, creating, managing, or supporting others, there is potential for deep absorption in what they do. Anyone who has been fully immersed in a task will recognise the satisfaction that comes from that focus—something that sits somewhere between meaning and relief.

Leaders cannot manufacture meaning for people. But they can create the conditions in which meaning becomes possible.

This includes:

- ensuring work has clarity and coherence
- aligning organisational values with everyday behaviour
- allowing space for challenge and difficulty—not just success
- avoiding cultures where positivity is expected at all times

It also requires a degree of honesty.

Life does not always resolve neatly. Careers are rarely linear. Organisations face uncertainty, and individuals experience setbacks. Pretending otherwise does not create resilience—it creates disconnection.

A more grounded approach to well-being recognises this reality. It allows for the possibility that people can be capable and struggling at the same time, and that not every difficulty leads to a clear or immediate resolution.

This is not a negative view. On the contrary, it is one that allows for genuine engagement and a more mature understanding of what it means to work and live well.

When individuals feel able to bring their full experience into their work—not just the polished version—they are more likely to connect with what they do, with others, and with the organisation itself.

Perhaps the next step in workplace well-being is not to increase positivity...
...but to deepen realism.

To recognise that meaning is not something imposed from above, but something that must be lived into—through action, relationship, and experience.

Gedanken offers seminars exploring existential awareness, leadership and organisational life.

For further information, contact us at www.gedanken.co.uk

Dr David Cliff

At Gedanken, we encourage leaders and entrepreneurs to think differently, it is not only about "thinking outside the box" but asking what the box is itself? Who built it? Why and whether it serves us well? We partner with leaders in organisations large and small who are serious about making meaningful change, grounded in vision, responsibility and great results.

Book a 45-minute, no-obligation conversation where we guarantee at the very least you will take away some valuable insights.

Gedanken

Contact us through our website: www.gedanken.co.uk or email: admin@gedanken.co.uk

Shaping the next decade for Newcastle

By Stephen Patterson, Chief Executive of NE1 Ltd, the Business Improvement District company for Newcastle city centre

Over the past ten years, Newcastle has undergone significant change. With many of the transformational projects scheduled for completion over the next two years, Stephen Patterson, Chief Executive of NE1 argues that the focus must shift to building on this momentum and planning for the next decade.

We've had an extremely successful 2025/26 at NE1. In the space of just 12 months, we have won four prestigious awards for our work animating Newcastle city centre, including international recognition for our placemaking efforts, from the International Downtown Association in the United States, and from the National BID Awards where we were recently crowned 'Overall Winner'.

While awards are never the goal, they are welcome recognition and provide an opportunity to pause and reflect on what has been achieved. These awards also highlight what can be delivered when businesses work together with shared passion and a vision for the city.

The honours also come at a time when Business Improvement District (BID) companies have never been more important in providing an independent voice for business. And for NE1, they come at an important juncture as we enter the third year of our current five-year term, our fourth term voted for by businesses. This continuity matters. It demonstrates the confidence Newcastle's business community has in NE1, and in our role as a consistent voice for businesses and the city centre.

In times of political change and uncertainty, independence matters. That is exactly what a BID provides. Our role is not to set the political agenda. BIDs are deliberately apolitical, designed to work with whoever is willing to collaborate to bring businesses together, encourage investment and champion the area they represent. This consistency provides stability and focus, ensuring the priorities of city centre businesses remain front and centre, regardless of the political climate.

For many, the term Business Improvement District, or BID, may still be unfamiliar. But BIDs have become one of the most effective tools places have at their disposal and in Newcastle, people know and recognise NE1 for what we deliver.

Central to what we do is lobbying and advocating for Newcastle and its businesses. When NE1 was first set up in 2009, there had been relatively little investment in Newcastle city centre. Working with partners we helped change that, championing projects that have been pivotal to the city's growth, including the redevelopment of Newcastle Central Station. This investment helped unlock the regeneration of the Stephenson Quarter and paved the way for the long-term vision for the redevelopment of Forth Yards.

More recently, we worked closely with city and regional partners over many years to bring forward the City Centre Transformation Programme delivered by Newcastle City Council which has delivered major investment in Northumberland Street, Grey Street and surrounding streets. The largest public investment in the city's retail core in a generation.

Our success ultimately depends on the businesses we represent. A BID is only as strong as the passion of the businesses it represents and their willingness to collaborate. It is not our job to be the 'big voice' in the room, but to reflect the priorities of our businesses and help turn their vision and ambition into reality.

After a hugely successful 2025, we are now at an important crossroads. With local government elections looming in May and NE1 at the midpoint of our current BID term, it is the right time to start looking ahead to 2029 and beyond.

Walk around Newcastle today and the scale of the change delivered over the last decade is both visible and impressive. Major infrastructure and regeneration projects that have reshaped the city are nearing completion. The Tyne Bridge restoration and central motorway improvements are visibly progressing, the impressive new HMRC offices at Pilgrim's Quarter will be fully occupied by 2027, while hospitality destinations like Hotel Gotham, WC Newcastle and the Maldron Hotel have completely revitalised areas and premises that once were underused or even derelict. The Helix's regeneration of the former Newcastle Brewery site over the last ten years is perhaps the clearest example of how the make-up of the city has changed. But, what comes next?

We must start thinking about the future of the city centre, and not just the next project, but the next decade. By the time our current BID term ends in 2029, NE1 will have been working on behalf of Newcastle and its businesses for a full twenty years.

As a BID and as a city we have demonstrated what can be achieved when the public and private sectors work together. The challenge now is to build on that success and ensure the next decade for Newcastle is as transformative as the last.

www.newcastlene1ltd.com

Stephen Patterson

Racheal Straughan (Market Collective CIC), Paul McEldon (North East BIC), Nicol and Alisha Lamb (Little Lambs)

Breathing new life into Sunderland's high streets

Independent retailers across Sunderland are proving that the high street still has plenty of life in it.

Across the city and surrounding communities, a growing number of small businesses are rediscovering their confidence and expanding their reach thanks to a programme designed to help them harness digital tools while staying true to their bricks-and-mortar roots.

Over the past year, the Digitising the High Street initiative has supported 22 independent retailers – from florists to cycle shops and children's boutiques – helping them improve their online presence, reach new audiences and strengthen their place at the heart of their communities.

Delivered as part of the Enterprising Sunderland programme and funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the support has extended far beyond the city centre. Businesses in neighbourhoods including Pallion, Grangetown, Fulwell, Ryhope and Houghton have all taken part.

For many traders, the experience has been transformational.

At Little Lambs in Pallion, owner Nicol Lamb had long known the boutique offered something special to customers who visited in person. Translating that experience online, however, had always proved more difficult.

Following a digital review, the business underwent a website overhaul, refreshed its branding and developed a more focused social media approach. The results have been striking: website traffic has increased by 42 per cent and the boutique's social media following has doubled.

More importantly, the changes have helped the business reach new customers beyond its immediate neighbourhood.

In Shiney Row, meanwhile, Carlos Cycles has experienced its busiest year yet after introducing an online booking system for repairs through a newly updated website. Demand has risen sharply, with cycle repairs up by 23 per cent, enabling owner Carl Hackles to reinvest in the shop and take a well-earned family holiday.

The programme was overseen by the North East BIC, with delivery led by Market Collective CIC. Its director, Racheal Straughan, says the aim was to make digital support accessible and practical for independent traders who may previously have felt overwhelmed by the technical language surrounding online marketing.

"People often talk about high streets as though they are disappearing," she says. "But across Sunderland there are fantastic independent businesses run by passionate local people who are the heart of our neighbourhoods. When those businesses are equipped with the right digital tools, it helps them raise their profile and bring more people back into their shops and local high streets."

Rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach, each participating business began with a digital audit before receiving tailored support. This ranged from website improvements and search engine optimisation to social media strategy, content planning and competitor analysis.

Alongside the practical support, the initiative has also helped strengthen connections between traders themselves. Out of the workshops grew Shop Talk, a monthly meet-up that has developed into a supportive network where local retailers can share ideas, challenges and experiences.

It's a reminder that while digital tools can open new opportunities, the real strength of the high street still lies in people – the independent shopkeepers who know their customers, care about their communities and bring character to Sunderland's neighbourhood shopping streets.

And if the early results from this initiative are anything to go by, many of the city's "hidden gems" are not just surviving – they are finding new ways to shine.

The support from the BIC forms part of Enterprising Sunderland which has received £523,541 from the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund Programme, managed in Sunderland by Sunderland City Council on behalf of the Sunderland Partnership.

www.ne-bic.co.uk

The Power of the Network

By Jo Holmes, Genee

Driving sustainability through collaboration.

Jo Holmes

Sustainability can sometimes feel like a daunting challenge for organisations. From understanding the whole agenda, reducing carbon emissions and managing waste to responding to increasing expectations from customers and regulators, organisations are navigating an increasingly complex landscape.

But one of the most powerful tools for accelerating sustainability progress isn't a new technology or policy, it's a strong network.

Networking is not just about exchanging information; it is about building trusted relationships, sharing ideas, and learning from the experiences of others. When organisations collaborate, they gain access to insights and solutions that might otherwise take years to discover alone.

The same principle applies when it comes to environmental action. No organisation has all the answers, and many sustainability challenges are shared across sectors. By working together, we can learn faster, overcome common barriers, and build momentum for change.

At Genee, we see the impact of strong networks every day through the communities we build, support and participate in. As a certified B Corp, we are proud to be part of a global network and movement to drive positive environmental and social change.

Closer to home, we also facilitate the North East Recycling Forum and the North West Resources Forum. These forums bring together professionals from across the waste, recycling, and resource management sectors to discuss emerging issues, share experiences and explore practical solutions. Often, the most valuable outcome is the opportunity to connect with others facing similar challenges or meet someone who might be part of the solution.

Genee is the northern delivery partner for Investors in the Environment (iiE), a network which not only celebrates your organisation's sustainability efforts, but helps you understand, measure and achieve them.

iiE provides organisations with a structured framework to improve their environmental performance, but what truly drives progress within the programme is the network itself. Organisations of all sectors and sizes come together under the iiE framework, creating a community that are committed to continual improvement.

Through workshops, events and shared learning opportunities, members connect with like-minded organisations on a similar sustainability journey. This creates a supportive environment where everyone can share ideas, discuss challenges, and learn from each other's successes and setbacks. This will be showcased at the iiE 2026: Sustainability Learning, Leadership & Celebration event, which this year takes place in the North East at Newcastle Civic Centre on the 25th of November.

The impact of this network has been particularly evident through our partnership on the Going Green Together programme. The initiative has supported numerous cohorts of voluntary sector organisations to tackle sustainability collectively while undertaking the Investors in the Environment programme. This collaborative approach helps build confidence and momentum, particularly for organisations taking their first steps on the sustainability journey.

Steve Mack at Newcastle United Foundation a long standing iiE member stated, "You can't do this alone – reach out and get support."

His words capture exactly why networks matter. When organisations see their peers taking meaningful action, such as reducing waste, cutting emissions or embedding sustainability into everyday operations, it creates a positive ripple effect. One organisation's progress inspires another's, raising ambition and accelerating change across the whole network.

As sustainability expectations continue to grow, collaboration will be essential. Organisations that engage with networks gain access to knowledge, inspiration and support that simply can't be developed in isolation.

If you're looking to strengthen your environmental performance while connecting with a community of organisations committed to making a difference, Investors in the Environment offers the perfect starting point.

To find out more about genee's work with Investors in the Environment, contact jo@genee.org.uk or visit www.genee.org.uk

Why the best leaders keep learning together: Reflections after a powerful session on Attention Intelligence

By Andrew Marsh, Vistage Chair

One of the privileges of chairing a Vistage group is witnessing the moment when a room full of experienced leaders suddenly leans forward at the same time.

It doesn't happen because someone shares a clever framework or a few slides of statistics. It happens when a speaker challenges how our behaviour sets the tone and culture.

That was exactly the reaction during our recent session with Alexander Bell, who joined two of my Vistage cohorts to speak about Attention Intelligence, a concept that resonated deeply with the CEOs, business owners and senior leaders in the room.

In a world of constant notifications, competing priorities and fragmented focus, Bell posed a simple but confronting idea: attention is now one of a leader's most valuable strategic resources. Not just our own attention, but the collective attention of our teams, organisation wide. How many times are we frustrated at a team member being on their phone? Or phones on tables and we observe people looking at their smart watches constantly as a new email pings in. But reality is we are doing it, so we are enabling others to do it!

Alexander's session moved beyond productivity tips. Instead, he explored how attention shapes decision-making, culture, innovation and ultimately business performance. Leaders left reflecting on questions such as:

- Where does our leadership attention actually go each day?
- Are we designing organisations that protect focus or destroy it?
- How much strategic thinking is lost to reactive noise?
- How many years, days and hours could we have been more productive without the digital interruption?
- How do I set the example and change the culture of my organisation?

Alexander Bell

The discussion that followed was exactly why Vistage works so well. A group of accomplished leaders from different sectors brought real challenges to the table. Scaling companies, managing complexity, navigating digital overload were thrown out as topics and together we examined them through the lens of attention and leadership clarity.

And by the way, the quality of that conversation wasn't accidental.

One of the defining features of Vistage is the calibre of the speakers we bring into the room. Experts like Alexander Bell don't just present ideas. We strive to book speakers that create conditions for leaders to think differently about the way they run their businesses.

For many members, these sessions become inflection points. A single idea, shared at the right time, among the right peer group can reshape priorities, unlock strategic thinking, or shift how a leadership team operates.

But the real power of Vistage lies in the combination of three elements:

Exceptional speakers. Thought leaders who challenge assumptions and introduce ideas leaders may not encounter elsewhere.

Trusted peer groups. A confidential environment where CEOs and executives can discuss real issues with people who truly understand the pressures of leadership.

Space to think. Something increasingly rare in modern business: time away from operational noise to reflect, question and make better decisions.

After our outstanding session on Attention Intelligence from Alexander, several members commented on the same thing: how valuable it was simply to pause and reconsider how they allocate their attention and focus as leaders. There were a number of take aways including living life to the full monty. We even received a little red thong to remind us to step away from our phones and be present!

That is the essence of Vistage. It isn't just about learning something new. It's about learning alongside other leaders who are equally committed to becoming better decision-makers, better strategists and better stewards of their organisations.

Sessions like the one with Alexander Bell remind me why so many leaders describe their Vistage group as one of the most valuable investments they make in their leadership. Because in a world competing for our attention, the best leaders choose carefully where they focus it and who they learn with.

Who you want to be a leader who focuses on being the best you can be, then do get in touch for a chat. My three North East cohorts have limited space to join, and I am about to launch Teesside, Carlisle and Penrith based groups soon.

Andrew.marsh@vistagechair.co.uk

Andrew Marsh

Memorabilia Museum and GC competitions – where sporting history helps make a genuine difference

Sir Geoff Hurst with Danny Mitchell

Danny Mitchell – turning sporting history into unforgettable experiences.

Danny Mitchell has two passions in life... making a genuine difference and sourcing iconic memorabilia.

At first glance, memorabilia is an unlikely way to support good causes, but Danny Mitchell knows more than most when it comes to helping charities and community organisations.

He's spent more than twenty years working in the charity sector and fundraising for numerous organisations, hosting black tie dinners, sporting events, guest speaker evenings, auctions and corporate hospitality experiences which have helped raise significant funds while showcasing unique memorabilia.

But it also means he has developed another way for charities to generate support.

"There's something about signed and authenticated items that attracts interest and encourages people to want to own them," says Danny. "Football shirts, photographs, a pair of boots, a ball, a racing helmet, an LP, an article of clothing, a certificate...the list is endless.

"My main business is sourcing all these things and then selling them via the Memorabilia Museum website www.memorabiliamuseum.co.uk which showcases authenticated collectibles from the worlds of sport, film, television and music. The museum's collection includes rare, signed items and framed memorabilia from well-known figures. Sometimes I work privately when a client wants a specific item and I use my contacts and expertise to find it.

"I also offer items via GC Competitions whereby people enter prize draws for signed memorabilia. Most tickets are only £1.99 and then, after a few weeks, the draw is made and the lucky winner receives their piece of memorabilia. It can be worth hundreds of pounds, but they get it for £1.99.

"I've also combined my love of memorabilia with my commitment to making a genuine difference. I do this by giving a particular charity one of my pieces of memorabilia. The charity and I then promote the draw and, at the end of the competition, 100 per cent of the money raised from ticket sales goes directly to the charity.

"In other words, I've created opportunities for fans to own unique collectibles while also supporting fundraising efforts for communities and charities."

If you go onto the GC Competitions website www.gccompetitions.co.uk you'll see a wide range of items which will be part of current and future draws. Tickets for all of them cost £1.99 each and there is one – a signed and framed print featuring Paul Gascoigne at Italia '90 – which will raise funds for a disability organisation.

Danny also hosts special sporting dinners

Kevin Keegan, Peter Beardsley Chris Waddle shirt

featuring legendary guests, where memorabilia plays a central role in the fundraising experience. Most recently he hosted a special event celebrating the 60th anniversary of England's 1966 World Cup victory with Geoff Hurst as guest of honour – an evening combining sporting history, memorabilia and fundraising.

Danny regularly works with businesses, charities and event organisers across the region to create unique experiences that bring people together while raising funds for good causes.

It's worth following Danny Mitchell, the Memorabilia Museum and GC Competitions to keep up to date with everything he's got going on.

Find out more at:
www.gccompetitions.co.uk
www.memorabiliamuseum.co.uk

For memorabilia sourcing, event enquiries or charity partnerships contact Danny directly at: danny@changefr.co.uk

Women leading the way In North Tyneside

To celebrate International Women's Day, the North Tyneside Business Forum focussed on the outstanding achievements of female entrepreneurs following a landmark year at the 2025 North Tyneside Business Awards.

Five of the six main award categories were won by female-led businesses — highlighting the innovation, resilience and leadership shaping North Tyneside's business community.

Among the winners, Amy Bewick of Nusa Studio took home the New Business Award, recognising her success in launching and growing a thriving new venture. Tara Warren of BASH Academy received the Heart of the Business Award for her commitment to empowering others through skills and education. Kerry Quinn of KORE+ was named Retail & Service Provider Award winner, while Steffi Smith of The Chocolate Smiths secured both The Green Award and the overall Business of the Year 2025 title. Cheryl Tanner, Menopause Coach, was honoured with the Heart of the Community Award for her impact supporting women's health and well-being. These accolades reflect not only commercial growth, but dedication to sustainability, community impact, confidence-building and innovation.

Cheryl Tanner said: "International Women's Day is incredibly important to me, both personally and professionally. My business is dedicated to supporting women — particularly through menopause — to feel strong, confident and empowered in their bodies and minds.

I see every day how transformative it is when women prioritise their health, build physical strength, and realise what they're truly capable of.

For me, International Women's Day is about celebrating resilience, progression, and the power of women supporting women."

Amy Bewick added: "Since opening my studio, the biggest thing I've noticed is just how supportive other women in business have been. It's been incredible to see women genuinely championing other women. International Women's Day is a reminder of how powerful that support network is and how much stronger we are when we lift each other up."

Kerry Quinn said: "Winning the Retail & Service Provider Award 2025 was a proud milestone for KORE+. It represents not just business growth, but the strength of a community built on excellence, resilience and innovation. International Women's Day reminds us that when women lead with vision, businesses thrive."

Tara Warren reflected: "International Women's Day is important to me because my business exists to help women build confidence, independence and financial freedom through skills and education. As a founder and a mum, I know how powerful it is when women feel capable of creating their own opportunities and shaping their lives on their own terms."

Steffi Smith said: "International Women's Day is a day to reflect on all the inspirational women we look up to. This is a reminder that we are setting an example for future generations and paving the way for ambitious little girls, showing them that anything is possible. Work-life balance will always remain a top priority here."

Angela Tuplin, Chair of the North Tyneside Business Forum, said: "We are incredibly proud that five of our six award categories were won by female-led businesses. It speaks volumes about the strength, talent and ambition of women in our local economy.

International Women's Day gives us the opportunity to celebrate not only individual success, but the culture of collaboration and support that exists within North Tyneside's business community. When women thrive in business, the whole region benefits."

The Forum is FREE to join and is for any business with a trading address in North Tyneside.

www.northtynesidebusinessforum.org.uk

Is it time to build a Leadership Team?

By Helen Butler, Simplified Operations

One of the most interesting parts of my work is the time I spend inside businesses at the start of a project. Whether it's an initial meeting with the owner or a short diagnostic across the organisation, it usually doesn't take long before the underlying operating patterns become clear.

Helen Butler

One pattern I see frequently is how decisions move around the business. During conversations with the managing director about strategy, growth, or operational challenges, the discussion is often interrupted.

Someone knocks on the door to check a decision before sending something to a client.

A team member appears with a quick operational question.

A message arrives asking for approval on a delivery commitment.

Individually these are small decisions that take seconds to answer. But when they happen repeatedly throughout the day, they reveal something important.

The business is still running through one person.

Why this happens in growing businesses

This situation is extremely common in businesses that have grown successfully.

The founder has built the company, knows the clients, understands the work, and has historically made most of the decisions. As the business grows and more people join, the natural instinct is for the team to continue checking things with the person who has always had the answers.

Over time this creates an unintended pattern where decisions gradually flow back to the founder.

This isn't usually because the team lacks capability. More often, it is because the leadership structure around the business has never been clearly defined.

Managers may exist across different areas of the business, but the boundaries of decision-making are often unclear.

When that happens, people default to asking the founder.

The role of a clear leadership structure

As businesses grow beyond the early stages, operational efficiency increasingly depends on having a clear leadership structure.

This goes beyond job titles. A leadership team should collectively provide direction, solve operational issues and ensure the business continues to move forward without every decision needing to be escalated.

For this to work effectively, three things need to be clear:

Defined leadership responsibility
Each leader should own a distinct part of the business such as sales, operations, delivery, or finance.

Decision ownership
Leaders must know which decisions they are responsible for making without seeking approval.

Collective leadership accountability
The leadership team should regularly meet to review performance, solve problems and coordinate activity across the business.

Without these elements in place, operational decisions naturally continue to flow back to the founder.

A practical tool: the decision matrix

One useful exercise for businesses experiencing this challenge is to create a simple decision matrix.

This involves listing the key operational decisions that regularly occur within the business and assigning ownership to the appropriate leadership role.

- Typical examples include:
- Pricing and commercial decisions
- Client acceptance or commitments
- Hiring approvals
- Supplier selection and spend
- Delivery timelines and operational commitments

Mapping these decisions helps clarify where authority sits and reduces unnecessary escalation.

It also allows leaders to step fully into the responsibility of running their area of the business.

Moving from founder-led to team-led operations

In many growing businesses, the founder initially acts as the central point of coordination and decision-making. While this is often necessary in the early stages, it becomes increasingly unsustainable as the organisation expands.

Creating a clear leadership structure, supported by defined decision ownership, allows businesses to operate more efficiently and reduces dependency on a single individual.

Ultimately, operational excellence in a growing business depends not only on having capable people, but also on ensuring that the right decisions sit in the right places.

www.simplifiedoperations.co.uk

Welcome to The Booth Revolution – A revenue stream snapshot

Today's hospitality industry faces challenges like never before. They are having to think smarter, be better and offer incredible value, all of which can chew into profit or revenue dramatically.

Here, Matt the founder of BluFin Photobooths, tells us about what he has designed as an offer to support the revenue streams of those in the hospitality industry, whilst making sure that customers get value and a memorable experience.

"Calling all hospitality gurus!!

"The more people I speak to in the industry, the more it becomes clear exactly what challenges we are facing - and the solution is clear to me – more collaboration.

"Customers expect more than ever before, and with the advent of digital, many want memories that they treasure, look back on and share. A great way to do that is with photos, digital as well as printed!

"So how does the installation of a fully custom, premium photobooth at no cost to you with profits split 50/50 sound? You invest nothing, we handle everything, and you gain extra income, stronger guest engagement, and built-in social media promotion which all marketeers simply love!

"Blue Fin Photobooths run highly profitable retro photobooths in venues across the UK — so, if you don't already have a booth, or you are currently paying for one or renting for events, this is one of the easiest new revenue streams you can add with zero effort or risk.

"Imagine making money while offering an easy to offer service that builds memories for your customers and cements your brand in their mind forever, with zero effort!

"The Deal is simple and risk-free:

- 50/50 revenue share
- No install fee
- No operating costs
- No contracts that lock you in unfairly
- No downside — only upside

"Venues we work with love this as it's a revenue stream with zero upfront cost or effort. They find that guests stay longer, spend more, and share their experience online. Customers love the branded photo souvenirs promoting your venue long after the visit and the booth itself is high-impact feature upgrading guest experience instantly.

"Our venues are completely hands-off — we manage install, maintenance, supplies, servicing, and support with Smart Revenue Flexibility. The booth runs in pay-to-use contactless mode, but if you host private events or brand activations, we can switch it to free mode remotely — making it a premium value-add for bookings.

"Our deal includes free install, ongoing maintenance, custom branding to match your venue; Paper, ink, repairs, servicing — all covered; digital sharing and optional data capture. The booth's compact retro design looks great without taking up space and we have remote management of all digital software.

"We are itching to show more venues real examples of booths already generating consistent venue income and explore how this would fit seamlessly into spaces across the region. Venues would be mad not to at least look at it this collaboration, so why don't you get in touch to set up a quick call or demo? You've nothing to lose and so much to gain!"

www.bluefinphotobooths.com
07498 488 620

The New World of Deliberate Recruitment

Bryony Gibson, director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, examines LinkedIn's latest labour market data and the shifting recruitment landscape in the North East.

Bryony Gibson

If you read the headlines about recruitment, you could easily assume AI is quietly replacing half the workforce and driving an industry-wide restructure.

With rising operational costs for businesses, there is no doubt that the job market is experiencing a period of lower hiring, but with a reduced number of vacancies, the reality is far more nuanced.

LinkedIn's latest 'Global Labour Market' report suggests hiring sits around 20% below pre-pandemic levels, with job moves at a 10-year low.

That broadly reflects what we're seeing here in the North East, and across the public practice accountancy firms I work with. There have been fewer number of vacancies over the winter months, however the Spring has started strong and we are far from a collapse in the job market. It's been more of a reset. And AI isn't the culprit.

LinkedIn's data points to macroeconomic factors. Specifically, economic uncertainty and interest rates being the real drivers behind the slowdown. It's global data, but it aligns with the conversations we're having.

We see very few firms replacing people with AI. What they are doing is asking existing teams to be more productive, while thinking more carefully about creating new roles. Recruitment has become more deliberate.

The rise of the quiet candidate

One of the most interesting shifts in the market is the behaviour of candidates. In most sectors, there are now significantly more applicants per vacancy than there were a few years ago, but that doesn't mean more people are actively job hunting.

In the North East, and in particular accountancy, many of the people we speak to fall into what I'd describe as a "quiet candidate". They aren't urgently looking to leave their current role, but they're open to the right opportunity if it appears.

LinkedIn suggests that around half of the workforce is keeping an eye on the market, has occasional conversations with recruiters, or spends time reflecting on their longer-term career plans. Interestingly, this group often represents the strongest candidates. But they will only move for the right reasons.

That's where networks make a big difference, and where recruiters can add real value, particularly in a region like the North East, where the professional community is relatively close-knit.

Relationships and reputations still matter, as often, the best opportunities never reach a job board.

Demand for skills is shifting

AI is undoubtedly changing the world of work, but not necessarily in the way people think.

While AI literacy is rising quickly, employers are also placing increasing importance on human capabilities, such as adaptability, communication, and problem-solving.

Technical ability and experience will always matter in professions like accountancy, but candidates who stand out most are those who combine strong technical foundations with the softer skills that help businesses grow.

In many ways, human capabilities, like communication, commercial awareness, leadership potential, and the ability to adapt, are becoming more valuable as technology evolves.

A more thoughtful market

The recruitment market has dipped, but it is not broken. It has changed to become more thoughtful.

Businesses are hiring carefully. Candidates are moving more selectively. And technology is changing how work gets done, rather than replacing people altogether.

For employers, the challenge is attracting and developing the right mix of skills. For professionals, the opportunity is staying visible, building relationships, and thinking proactively about the next step in their career, even if they're not actively looking today.

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Public Practice Vacancies

AUDIT PARTNER

NEWCASTLE, Ref: BGC2443

National accountancy firm seeking an ambitious Audit Partner to take a market-facing, business development role. Lead client growth, develop relationships in the local marketplace, and shape the audit strategy while managing a portfolio of key clients. Ideal for candidates who can bring an existing following or who are motivated and capable of building presence, driving new business, and contributing to the firm's regional expansion. **Office based.**

SENIOR TAX MANAGER

DARLINGTON, Ref: BGC2437

Join a highly respected professional services firm known for complex private client work across trusts, estates and wealth planning. Manage a portfolio of individuals, families and business owners while delivering trust administration, tax compliance and advisory services. Excellent opportunity to be part of an experienced team of tax and private wealth specialists in a strategic and influential capacity. **Hybrid working.**

EMPLOYMENT TAX SENIOR MANAGER

NEWCASTLE, LEEDS OR MANCHESTER
Ref: BGC2436

Client-facing role within a respected independent firm advising a broad portfolio of entrepreneurial businesses and corporate clients. Deliver Employment Tax advisory work across IR35, HMRC enquiries, NMW and compliance projects while helping develop a growing specialist service line. Excellent progression prospects including a clear pathway to Partner. **Hybrid working.**

ACCOUNTS MANAGER

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AUDIT ASSISTANT MANAGER

TEESSIDE, Ref: BGC2404

Join a large national accountancy firm supporting a diverse portfolio of international, national and local clients. Take ownership of audits from planning to completion, leading fieldwork, identifying key risks, and mentoring junior team members. Ideal for ACA/ACCA qualified Audit Seniors or those with relevant experience seeking career progression, technical development. **Hybrid working.**

PERSONAL TAX MANAGER

NEWCASTLE, Ref: BGC2410

A modern, expanding accountancy practice with a vibrant atmosphere offering a progressive opportunity to senior leadership in tax. Manage a portfolio of private client tax work, including IHT, income tax, and capital gains, while mentoring juniors and work shadowing the Tax Director to develop your expert knowledge. Ideal for ambitious ACA/CTA qualified Tax Managers. **Hybrid working.**

To express your interest in a vacancy, or for a confidential discussion, contact Bryony Gibson, Bryony Gibson Consulting, on 0191 375 9983 or visit BryonyGibson.com/Vacancies

Want cost-effective, personal service from a recruitment company? That'll be Lets Recruit then!

When you talk to Sam Bailey, Recruitment Director for Lets Recruit, you quickly discover that he and his team do recruitment differently.

From their North East offices in South Shields and Gosforth…as well as the company's head office in Derby…Lets Recruit has quickly built a reputation for offering an alternative to traditional recruitment agencies. You may recognise some of them…they're the ones that charge high placement fees and seem to operate using a policy of churning over as many work positions as quickly as possible. It all feels a bit like a conveyor belt.

"Those are some of the reasons why I decided to move away from working with large recruitment firms and concentrate on providing a personal service which is up-front about what we charge…and how we charge," said Sam. "It's not about numbers; it's about finding the right person for the right position. Doing that takes time but when we get some cracking feedback about how a candidate has fitted-in perfectly at a company or how much they're enjoying the job, it makes it all worthwhile.

"It's also why we're so proud of our high levels of retention in terms of client businesses. They keep coming back to us…there's no higher recommendation…and it proves they like how we operate and what sort of fees we charge. We're totally transparent about every stage of the recruitment process."

Lets Recruit operate locally and nationally. They're particularly busy across the North East, North West, Midlands and Birmingham areas. They mainly specialise in the financial, property and legal marketplace, but they also have contacts which can help in other sectors too.

"When we launched Lets Recruit, our main aim was to improve the recruitment experience for both employers and job seekers. We knew that companies and organisations were frustrated with high recruitment fees and unclear pricing structures. To address this, we introduced lower rates and a transparent model designed to offer a more affordable option for businesses seeking new staff. Instead of the large percentage fees commonly associated with recruitment agencies, we have a clear pricing structure with no hidden charges and a clear cost from the outset.

"We also wanted everything to be more personal. Whenever a company or a potential candidate gets in touch with us here at Lets Recruit, they will more than likely speak to me or one of the other directors. We will be the first point of contact.

If a company is looking for a candidate, we ascertain precisely what sort of person they're looking for. The advantage of personally dealing with firms is that I will already know what sort of candidate would be ideal for many of them. If it is an individual who contacts us and is looking for a new position, we always have an in-depth conversation with them because, apart from them knowing they want a different job or want to move from what they're currently doing, a lot of people don't really know what they want and what is already out there. They're not focused. They might see a job posting and think it would be something they'd fancy…but they haven't really done their research…so we do it and help them decide what position they'd be ideally suited to. We can also provide more details about the job market.

"It's also important when a company contacts us about a particular vacancy they want to fill, that we can offer them candidates with the appropriate skills and experience. We'd never simply fire over a load of CVs because that would mean the company then has to spend time sifting through them and doing additional research. Our aim is to do all of the leg work and send them a small selection of people we know can fulfil the job requirements."

Interested in what Lets Recruit can do for you? Check out their excellent website where you'll find all of their contact details. There's also a really interesting news section which highlights the latest trends in the jobs market.

www.letsrecruit.co.uk

> **It's not about numbers; it's about finding the right person for the right position.**

Sam Bailey

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What should you do if your charity falls below the minimum number of trustees required by your articles?

Peter Neal

Strong governance is the foundation of any successful charity/not-for-profit organisation. One of the most fundamental governance requirements is ensuring there is the number of trustees required by its governing document, articles of association.

But what happens if resignations, retirements, illness, or other circumstances mean your board drops below the minimum number of trustees required? Here Peter Neal, founder of the Experience Bank Group, outlines steps you should take.

"This situation is more common than many realise, particularly among smaller charities. The key is to act quickly, transparently, and in line with your governing document and the law.

"The first step is always to review your governing document carefully. Most specify the minimum and maximum number of trustees, as well as the process for appointing trustees. It may also specify who has the power to appoint them including the existing trustees, members of the organisation, or even an external appointing body.

"In many governing documents, if the number falls below the required minimum, the remaining trustees are restricted in actions they can take. Typically, authority is limited to:

- Calling a meeting of the trustees or members; and/or
- Appointing new trustees to restore the board to its minimum number.

"This principle exists to prevent a small number of individuals from making significant decisions without proper governance oversight.

"The priority should always be to recruit or appoint new trustees as soon as possible. This might involve co-opting trustees under powers in the governing document, holding an extraordinary meeting to elect trustees or requesting appointments from a nominating body.

"When recruiting, it's important to fill the vacancy quickly and to consider the skills and experience your organisation needs. Guidance for charities recommends thinking about the knowledge and expertise required to govern the organisation effectively.

"Even if you are still above the minimum number of trustees required by your governing document, you must ensure that board meetings remain quorate. If the board cannot reach a quorum, decisions made at meetings may be invalid. This is why many charities recruit additional trustees before vacancies arise.

"Operating below the required number of trustees can expose a charity to several other risks, including:

- Increased regulatory scrutiny
- Difficulty maintaining oversight of finances and compliance
- Reputational risk with stakeholders, donors, and regulators

"For these reasons, boards should treat trustee vacancies as a governance priority rather than an administrative task.

"Once the immediate issue has been resolved, it is wise to review the charity's succession planning. Many organisations run into difficulty because several trustees retire at the same time or recruitment only begins once a vacancy appears.

"Good practice includes maintaining a pipeline of potential trustees, staggering trustee terms, regularly reviewing the board's skills and diversity; and keeping recruitment processes ready to deploy quickly.

"Falling below the minimum number of trustees required by your articles is not uncommon. But if you follow the rules in your governing document, and restore the board to full strength as soon as possible all should be well. With clear processes and proactive recruitment, charities can turn a governance challenge into an opportunity, strengthening their board for the future."

If this article has struck a nerve and you need to talk about it, get in touch on peter@theexperiencebank.co.uk

L-R: Fiona Walls, fostering recruitment and business admin support, and fostering manager Sarah Richardson

No deadlines

In football, the transfer window shuts twice a year. But in fostering, there's no deadline day.

And often, like in any walk of life, foster families want to see if the grass is greener.

At Changing Futures, we've had several of our families transfer from other agencies.

It is a big step.

Many have been with that agency for years. They will have strong bonds.

But in the same way that you would look elsewhere if you weren't happy with any aspect of your life, be it your child's school or your mortgage, then foster families will do the same if they aren't getting the support they need.

And support is the big word.

At Changing Futures North East, that level of round-the-clock, high-level support is what sets us apart from dozens of other agencies.

Just take supervision for instance.

Having someone with you on your fostering journey - someone who knows the process and has worked with families like yours - is huge.

At Changing Futures North East, we pride ourselves on the fact that in your first year, supervision is fortnightly.

It means the support you enjoy from day one is second-to-none.

And it doesn't matter how long you've supported, we know that however much experience you have, you always need someone by your side.

One of our new foster families who transferred over recently called me three times in less than 24 hours.

Now in my opinion, these are capable, hands-on parents who know what they are doing.

But equally, they have children in their care and they've been with an agency where they never felt supported.

Because of that, we must treat them like they are new to this - and we refuse to take needless risks.

I know from my years of experience that each call could be an emergency.

That's why on Christmas Day, my work phone never leaves my side.

Because support isn't a mere marketing tool for our team. It is the right thing to do, and to offer.

And even after that first year, when perhaps any anxieties have eased - and they do - there's still monthly supervision.

Why? Because when support stops, that's when anxiety can creep back in.

So, we provide monthly supervision. But we still pick up the phone, and we still answer every email.

I've had families who have transferred from other agencies tell me they've called their previous agency at 9am with a safeguarding complaint, and nobody has replied until almost teatime.

That's not acceptable.

And while there are dozens of agencies across the North East working hard to support the soaring number of children needing care - full of staff with good hearts and good intentions - at Changing Futures North East, we like to think that we go that extra mile.

And we don't do so for money.

We are proudly a not-for-profit.

For us, it isn't about big houses and fancy offices for us. Our team doesn't do this because of the five-star holidays we go on.

We do it because it matters. Because we genuinely care.

If there's any money left in the pot, it goes back into caring for the children and families we support with standout services like detailed in-person training.

And we are a smaller agency which we like. Everyone knows each other, and one thing many fosterers who transfer will say, is that gives us a sense of community others can't offer.

So, if you foster already - or if you have thought about doing so - now is the time.

The transfer window is open.

www.changingfuturesfostering.co.uk

Looking ahead to the rest of 2026: The HR compliance countdown

By Michael Dobson, Director of Sapphire HR

As we settle into the wake of the April Employment Rights Act updates, it is tempting to take a breath. However, to maintain a resilient, high-performing culture, I'm encouraging business leaders to look ahead to the significant compliance updates landing in August, October, and December.

Michael Dobson

August: A new reality for industrial action

The mid-year point brings a fundamental modernisation of trade union engagement. By August, electronic and in-person balloting for industrial action will become the standard, provided mutual agreement exists. Crucially, the removal of the 50% turnout requirement lowers the barrier to entry for industrial action.

My advice is to not wait for a ballot to open and instead prioritise proactive employee engagement and transparent internal communication now.

October: The zero-tolerance standard

October marks an important regulatory milestone, specifically regarding workplace culture. We are moving to an 'all reasonable steps' mandate to prevent harassment. Critically, this includes third-party liability, holding employers accountable for the actions of clients or customers.

Additionally, the legal window for Employment Tribunals is doubling from three to six months. This is a permanent extension of the statutory limitation period.

I encourage businesses to audit their workplace culture today. These upcoming changes require evidence-based prevention to be woven into daily operations, which takes time to embed.

Strategic sector shifts

Beyond the broad protections, October to December introduces granular changes that will hit specific industries:

- New duties will require employers in hospitality to consult on tipping policies and update them every three years.
- Employers will be required to inform workers of their right to join a union.
- A dedicated negotiating body for the adult social care sector will launch.
- The Mandatory Seafarer's Charter will solidify higher standards for pay, job security, and health and safety.

The Sapphire HR perspective

Ultimately, these legislative developments should be viewed not as administrative burdens, but as a catalyst for professionalising your HR policies and procedures. In my experience, employers who audit their processes in advance find themselves in a significantly stronger position than those who wait for legislation to take effect.

At Sapphire HR, we focus on helping organisations build the infrastructure to navigate these shifts with confidence. The most effective time to align your procedures is now, so that your business is resilient, compliant, and prepared well before the deadlines.

www.sapphire-hr.co.uk

SQUARING UP TO CONFLICT.

CONFLICT AT WORK IS NOT NEW, BUT IT IS GROWING.

Research from ACAS suggests that two fifths (44%) of employees in Great Britain experienced conflict at work in the last year. Meanwhile, *The Myers-Briggs Company's Conflict at Work* report found that employees spend around 4.34 hours every week dealing with workplace conflict, a figure that continues to rise. That is more than half a working day.

But the real question is not why conflict exists. It is whether we have misunderstood what conflict is.

Is conflict really dysfunction? Or is it simply difference?

Modern organisations are more diverse than ever before. Different generations, experiences, communication styles, and cultural backgrounds are coming together in the same teams. Add the complexity of hybrid working, where misunderstandings can escalate more quickly through email, messaging platforms, and fewer face to face conversations, and it is no surprise that tensions emerge.

Difference is inevitable and without the right conditions, conflict often is too.

The challenge for leaders is recognising that we cannot change someone else's behaviour. What we can change is how conflict is managed and responded to.

When conflict becomes polarised, when people move from discussing ideas to defending positions, trust erodes quickly. Conversations stop being productive and can become personal.

In high performing teams, conflict can look quite different. People challenge ideas openly and test assumptions. They bring alternative perspectives to the table, while keeping disagreement focused on the issue, not the individual. In these environments, conflict can improve decision making and strengthen relationships because people feel heard and respected.

Trust plays a critical role here. In hybrid and high pressure environments, people can slip into assumptions about tone, intent, and competence. Without trust, conflict divides. With trust, it can sharpen thinking and deepen collaboration.

Not all workplace conflict resolves itself. Misunderstandings build, communication breaks down, and sometimes individuals become stuck in patterns that are difficult to shift alone.

What leaders can do

- **Set expectations for healthy disagreement (challenge ideas, not people) and model that behaviour in meetings.**
- **Surface issues early-use 1:1 conversations to clarify intent, reset tone, and prevent "sides" forming.**
- **Use structure when topics are tense: agree the question being decided, give equal airtime, and summarise points of agreement and disagreement.**
- **Make communication explicit in hybrid work (what goes in email vs chat vs a call; when to pick up the phone).**
- **Agree an escalation path, including when to bring in a neutral facilitator.**

This is where workplace mediation can help. Mediation provides a neutral and structured space for people to step back from entrenched positions, understand each other's perspectives, and rebuild dialogue.

Interestingly, the language we use around conflict also matters. At times, the word *mediation* can feel formal or even confrontational. Reframing the process as a facilitated conversation can help people engage more openly, focusing on what really matters, rebuilding understanding and finding a way forward.

Conflict is not something organisations can eliminate, and we should not try to.

In a world of growing diversity, evolving workplaces and hybrid teams, the challenge for leaders is learning how to square up to conflict rather than avoid it. Managed well, conflict does not weaken teams; it makes them stronger.

PEOPLESPARK

To discuss conflict management workshops or workplace mediation for your organisation

Get in touch....

email: **scott@peoplesparksolutions.co.uk**
tel: **07795 515 701**

peoplesparksolutions.co.uk

Mandale Business Park, Mullen Stoker House, Durham DH1 1TH

The quiet change that could transform workplace relations in 2026

By Kathryn Rogers, face2face HR

Preparing for change: The new landscape of union engagement.

Kathryn Rodgers

When discussing upcoming employment law changes, much of the focus has been on unfair dismissal rights and flexible working. However, one of the most significant – and often overlooked – developments is the shift in how trade unions can engage with businesses.

While it may not grab immediate headlines, these changes could have a meaningful impact on how organisations manage employee relations in the years ahead.

What's changing?

From October 2026, trade unions will be able to request an "access agreement", giving union representatives both physical and digital access to an employer's workforce. This is expected to apply to organisations with 21 or more employees.

If an agreement cannot be reached, unions can escalate the matter to the Central Arbitration Committee (CAC), which will have the authority to determine and enforce access arrangements.

Alongside this, the threshold for union recognition is expected to reduce. Currently, unions must demonstrate at least 10% membership to apply for recognition, but this could drop to between 2% and 10%, making it easier for unions to gain a formal role in collective bargaining.

What does this mean for employers?

These changes do not mean that businesses must automatically recognise a union. However, they do increase the likelihood of union approaches and recognition campaigns.

For many organisations – particularly SMEs with limited experience of union engagement – this introduces a more structured environment where responses need to be timely, consistent and legally sound. Having a clear approach in place will be essential.

A balanced perspective

It's easy to view increased union access as a challenge, but it isn't necessarily negative.

Well-trained union representatives can support more effective consultation and dispute resolution processes. They are often knowledgeable in employment law and procedures, which can lead to more structured and informed discussions.

However, a stronger union presence also means employers and managers need to be equally confident in their understanding of processes – or have access to the right support when needed.

Why preparation matters

The biggest risk for employers is not union involvement itself, but being unprepared.

The new framework is expected to bring:

- Shorter timelines for responding to recognition processes
- Greater procedural requirements
- Increased scrutiny on employer decision-making

Without clear processes and well-trained managers, businesses could face unnecessary employee relations challenges or legal risk.

How should businesses prepare?

There are several practical steps employers can take now:

Establish a clear response plan for handling union contact, access requests and recognition applications

Train managers and HR teams, ensuring they understand how to respond, when to escalate, and how to manage situations appropriately

Review policies and procedures to ensure they are robust, fair and consistently applied

Strengthen employee communication, as organisations where employees feel heard are less likely to see issues escalate

Looking ahead

These changes represent a shift towards more structured workplace dialogue. While this may feel unfamiliar for some employers, it also presents an opportunity to strengthen relationships and improve communication.

At face2faceHR, we are already developing training and support to help businesses prepare, ensuring confidence at every level of the organisation.

Final thoughts

Union engagement is set to become a more prominent feature of the employment landscape.

For employers, the message is clear: prepare early, understand your responsibilities, and ensure your managers are equipped to respond.

For more information or to register your interest contact Kathryn Rodgers - 07946 330025 | face2facehr.com

Summer 2026 bathroom trends

Your guide to a stylish, functional space.

As we step into Summer 2026, bathrooms are no longer just practical spaces—they've become personal sanctuaries. From spa-inspired interiors to smart technology, this year's trends are all about combining comfort, style, and efficiency.

Whether you're planning a full renovation or simply refreshing your space, here's your expert guide to what's in—and how to bring your dream bathroom to life.

1. Spa-inspired serenity

This summer, homeowners are embracing calming, wellness-focused designs. Think soft neutral tones, natural textures, and minimalist layouts. Freestanding baths, rainfall showers, and ambient lighting are key features that transform your bathroom into a relaxing retreat.

Tip: Incorporate materials like stone, wood finishes, and matte surfaces to create a soothing, high-end look without overwhelming the space.

2. Earthy colours & organic finishes

Warm beiges, clay tones, and muted greens are replacing colder greys. These earthy palettes bring warmth and a sense of nature indoors—perfect for creating a welcoming environment.

Tip: Pair natural colours with brushed brass or black fittings for a modern contrast that still feels timeless.

3. Smart bathrooms are here to stay

Technology continues to shape modern bathrooms. From LED mirrors with touch controls to digital showers and underfloor heating, convenience is key.

Tip: Invest in energy-efficient heating solutions and smart controls to improve both comfort and long-term savings.

4. Space-saving solutions

With many UK homes working with limited space, clever storage is more important than ever. Wall-hung vanities, recessed shelving, and multi-functional furniture help maximise every inch.

Tip: Opt for fitted furniture tailored to your layout—this ensures a seamless look while increasing practicality.

5. Statement pieces & personal touches

Bold tiles, feature walls, and unique basins are making waves this year. Bathrooms are becoming more expressive, allowing homeowners to showcase their personality.

Tip: Introduce a statement element—like patterned tiles or a standout vanity unit—while keeping the rest of the design balanced.

Bringing your vision to life

While trends provide inspiration, creating a bathroom that truly works for your home requires expert guidance. That's where Robinson & Co Bathroom and Heating come in.

Located at Unit 2b, Bede Trade Park, Abbotsway, Jarrow, NE32 3HE, their showroom at the Bede Industrial Estate is a one-stop destination for everything you need. From contemporary bathroom suites to high-quality heating solutions, they stock a wide range of products to suit every style and budget.

What sets Robinson & Co apart is their hands-on, customer-focused approach. Whether you're unsure where to start or have a clear vision in mind, their experienced team can guide you through the entire process—from selecting the right products to designing a space that works perfectly for your home.

Why choose Robinson & Co?

- Extensive showroom with a wide variety of bathroom and heating ranges
- Expert advice tailored to your space, style, and budget
- Quality products designed to last
- Friendly, local service you can rely on

Start your transformation today

Your bathroom should be more than just functional—it should be a space you enjoy every day. By combining the latest trends with expert design and quality products, you can create a bathroom that feels both luxurious and practical.

Whether you're updating a small en-suite or planning a complete renovation, Robinson & Co are ready to help turn your ideas into reality—just in time for Summer 2026.

Visit Robinson & Co Bathroom and Heating's showroom in Jarrow to explore their full range and get inspired.
0191 483 5888
info@robinsonbathroomsandheating.co.uk
robinsonbathroomsandheating.co.uk

In conversation with...

Gordon MacPherson

Co-founder and CEO at Workprove

Gordon MacPherson

Can you tell us about Workprove and your role?

Workprove is an AI-powered workforce training and compliance management platform. We help businesses, particularly in regulated industries like construction, care, food production and logistics, manage their training programmes, track compliance and issue digital credentials to employees. As co-founder and CEO, I'm across everything from product strategy and development through to investor relations and commercial growth. It's a hands-on role and I wouldn't have it any other way.

When was the company established?

We started out trading as Moralbox in 2013 before recently rebranding to Workprove, which much better reflects what we do and where we're headed.

What projects is the company currently undertaking?

We've just completed a £550,000 investment round, thanks to investors at Northstar Ventures, Creative UK, Paul Dyson and Invest North East. Right now we're focused on scaling our main platform, and building out CourseCloud, a training marketplace that connects employees with training providers for real-time course availability, booking and access to learning content. We're also developing Workpass, our mobile app that puts an employee's entire career in their pocket. It gives workers a verified record of their skills and training, while ensuring employers have the data they need to stay on top of training management and compliance. Workers and employers can identify skills gaps and take control of their professional development, all from a single app. On top of that, we're expanding our team, so it's an exciting period of growth for the business.

Which areas of the UK does your company operate within?

We're based in the North East but our platform operates nationally and we already have customers across multiple countries. International expansion is firmly on our roadmap and we're building on that existing global footprint to grow our presence even further in the year ahead.

What do you think it means to be a business person in the North East of England?

It means you don't wait for things to come your way, you build them yourself. There's a real grit and pragmatism to the North East business community that I think is genuinely underrated. We're not a region that shouts, but the quality of the companies being built here, and the talent we have access to, is exceptional. I'm proud to be building Workprove from here, and I think we're part of a generation of North East tech businesses that are going to put the region firmly on the map.

What does Workprove hope to achieve in the year ahead?

We're scaling rapidly and our focus is on growing across all three of our products. We want more employers using Workprove Manager to streamline their training and compliance, more individuals using Workpass to take ownership of their career development, and more providers joining CourseCloud to share their content with the people who need it. When all three come together, something powerful happens. Employers, workers and training providers all collaborating seamlessly on a single platform, contributing to a genuine solution to the skills gap. That's the vision and we're well on our way to making it a reality.

What's your proudest business achievement?

Honestly, closing our recent investment round ranks right up there, not just because of what the funding unlocks, but because of what it represents. Having investors believe in what you're building is a real validation of the years of work that went into getting here. But beyond that, I'm proud every time a customer tells us that Workprove has genuinely simplified the way they manage compliance. That's what it's all about.

workprove.com

marriott.
communications

Good PR tells a story
Great PR changes the ending

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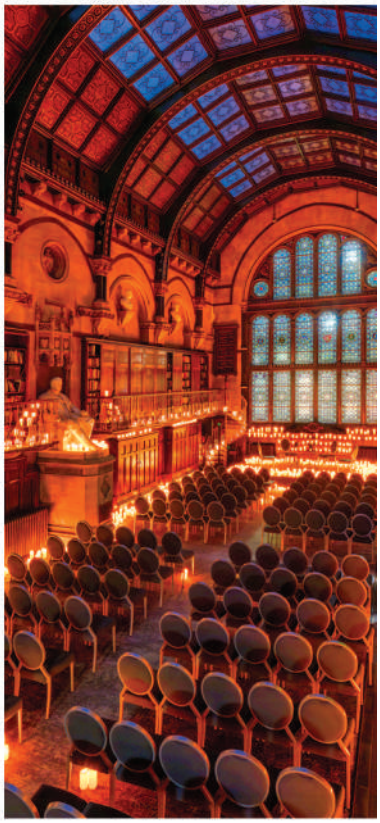

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Intentional leadership: Navigating Protect Behaviours

By Annabel Graham, Successful Training

We only have to look at any form of media to see we are operating in a volatile world. Global tensions, particularly around the Middle East, have heightened uncertainty everywhere.

Annabel Graham

Countries are protecting their interests; businesses their share price and margins; communities their way of life, beliefs and rights; and individuals their families and livelihoods. Everywhere we look, people are in protect mode.

This dynamic is not limited to global conflict. We see it every day in the workplace, although we rarely recognise it for what it is. Instead, we label colleagues as awkward, difficult or combative, rather than recognising that such behaviours often stem from feeling threatened in different ways.

When people feel under pressure they become more insular. They stick to what they know, resist change and defend their position; particularly if they believe their perspective, or that of those they trust, is not being acknowledged.

The annual Trust Barometer from Edelman highlights this growing retreat into insularity over the past three years. In reality, trust erosion has been building for two decades, accelerated by the rise of social media. As viewpoints polarise and grievances against systems increase, people retreat to positions that feel safe and familiar.

So how does this show up at work?

What we might see

- Reluctance to trust people who are different from us. Phrases like "that's not how we do it around here" become common.
- Difficulty seeing other perspectives, with individuals prioritising self-interest over shared outcomes.
- Fight, flight or freeze responses when our nervous system is triggered. This can appear as defensiveness, criticism, blame, avoiding responsibility, or disengaging altogether.

Importantly, this is not something that only affects others; we all do it. The difference is that we judge ourselves by our intentions, but others by their behaviour. This distorts how we interpret situations and allows us to justify our own responses.

Why this happens

When we or those around us show these behaviours, the useful question is not what is happening, but why. Much of this response is unconscious, so we need to pause, observe and consider what may be driving it.

- Our limbic brain seeks certainty and safety. When we feel threatened we may attack or defend (fight), deflect or avoid (flight), or withdraw (freeze).
- When insecurity continues, people may become overwhelmed: shutting down, behaving out of character and retreating to what feels familiar.
- Over time this can lead to insularity: becoming quieter, distrustful and reluctant to engage in case we are hurt.

What leaders can do

Leaders must recognise that today's media environment often means people arrive at work already feeling tense. Add changing team dynamics, organisational pressures and constant change, and these responses become more likely. Our role is to recognise them and ensure our behaviour builds trust rather than breaks it.

- **Be open.** Include others, listen carefully and stay curious. Seek solutions rather than focusing on being right.
- **Be transparent.** Provide clarity on direction, explain decisions and remain consistent. Understanding the "why" helps people feel safe.
- **Create genuine psychological safety.** People must be able to speak openly, challenge ideas, admit mistakes and raise concerns without blame. Behaviour matters more than words.
- **Be fair.** Avoid undermining others, overburdening individuals or excluding people from decisions that affect them.
- **Recognise protective behaviour.** If someone is acting out of character or showing fight, flight or freeze responses, approach the situation with curiosity rather than frustration.

Finally, remember that everyone has limits, ourselves included. Tackling difficult issues when we are calm is far more effective in turbulent environments. And while we cannot control others, leadership always begins with us!

www.successfultraining.co.uk

To Mentor or Not To Mentor, that is the question...

By Hayley Ramm, The Efficient Elephant

Hayley Ramm

You've likely wondered whether having a mentor could make a difference for you, in your Business as a Founder or in your Career as a Professional. But before you jump in, it's really important to understand what mentoring is—and of course what it isn't.

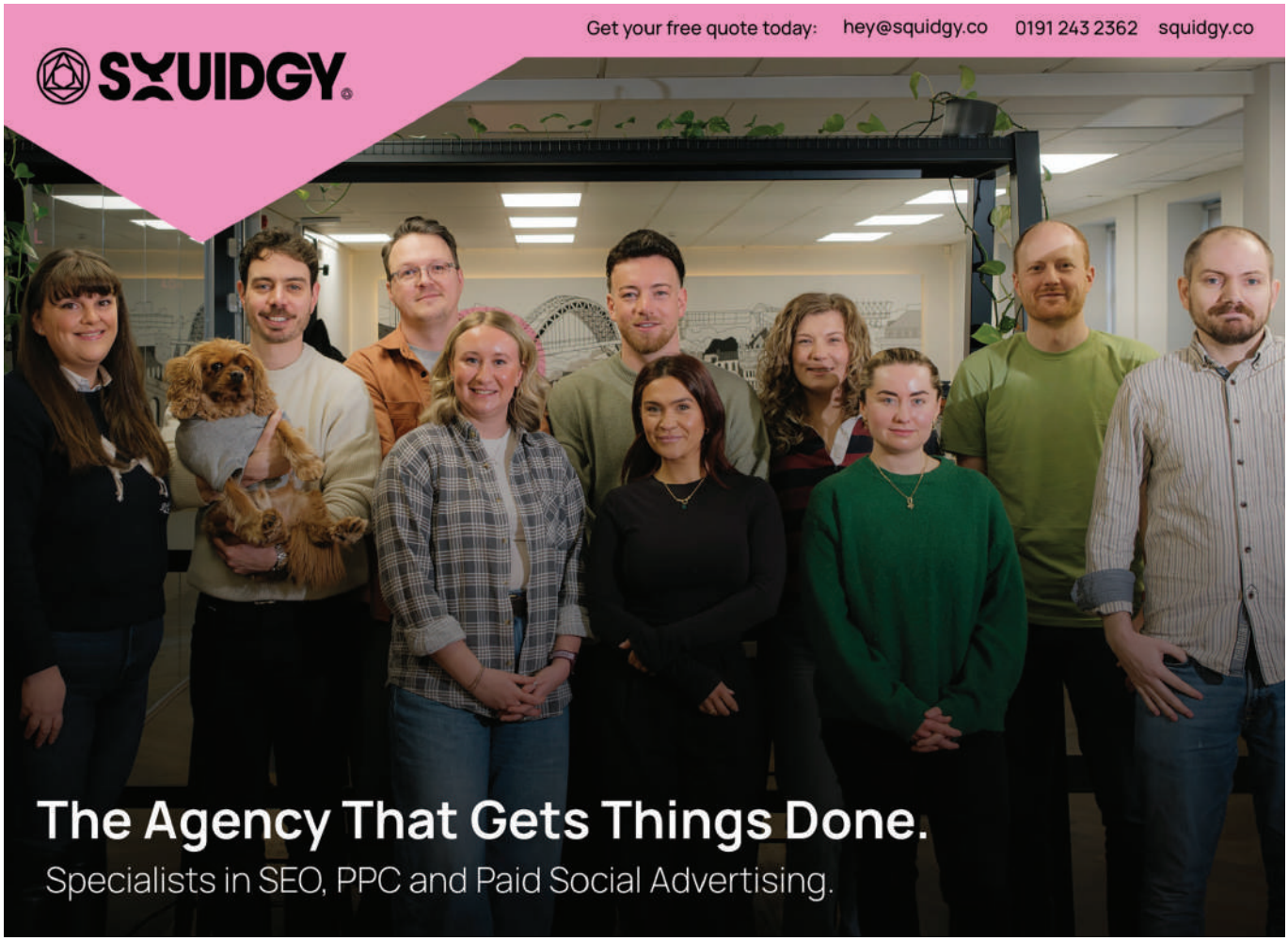
A mentor is someone who shares their experience, asks thoughtful questions, and helps you see possibilities you might not recognise on your own. A mentor won't give you a to-do list, solve your problems or tell you exactly what decisions to make but they will stand by your side, be a critical friend, challenge you and most importantly celebrate your wins.

This is very different from coaching, advising, or consulting. Each of these still absolutely have their place and can be more appropriate in some situations than mentoring, so it's super important to recognise these differences to choose the most suitable route for yourself. A coach is often focused on improving specific skills or performance, with clear metrics and goals. An advisor offers direct guidance or recommendations based on their expertise. A consultant usually provides solutions to a problem or helps implement a plan. Mentoring, is relational and ongoing—it's about your growth, perspective, and long-term development rather than immediate results.

Engaging with a mentor means entering a partnership where you are supported, challenged, and inspired. It's a chance to learn from someone who's walked similar paths, ask questions you might hesitate to ask elsewhere, and gain insights that only experience can provide.

Mentoring is about being asked questions, so that you find your answers, your way for your career and/or your business. Discovering your own answers, your way, will bring you calmness, clarity, choices and confidence to accelerate your personal and professional growth.

theefficientelephant.co.uk



North East Agency champions Northern film boom with Liverpool Film Office partnership

Sunderland-based creative agency Kenfolk are stamping their mark on the film and TV industry across the North after unveiling Liverpool Film Office's impact report.

Kenfolk supported the design and production of the 2019-2025 impact report, revealing record growth within the Liverpool City Region's booming film and TV industry - highlighting the lasting impact of Liverpool Film Office's work within the region.

Lynn Saunders, Head of the Liverpool Film Office, said: "This report is a pivotal moment for Liverpool Film Office and the development of the screen sector in our region and the Kenfolk team have played a vital role in bringing one of the most important chapters in our 35-year history to life.

"They've taken a complex, five-year journey of growth, creativity and regional impact, and transformed it into something visually compelling, clear and genuinely engaging to read. Kenfolk's work doesn't just present the facts of the period, it captures the energy of our industry and the pride we take in the positive impact our office's work continues to have on Liverpool City Region. We're incredibly grateful for the care, creativity and understanding Kenfolk brought in crafting every detail of this report."

This high-profile collaboration marks a significant milestone for the agency, which has rapidly expanded since its inception in 2020.

Kenfolk has plans for further growth after recently branching out into a full service agency with the addition of PR, comms, social media management, photography and videography, bolstering their client offering.

Sunderland is a city on the rise and the production landscape is evolving across the city, with work beginning on the Crown Work Studios across the river from Kenfolk. It's vital that the creative output matches the scale of ambition across the North and the agency is pleased to be playing a part in championing the North.

Aubergine supports Maki & Ramen Leeds to boost reach and hit sales targets

Leeds-based PR and content agency Aubergine has been credited with helping a Japanese restaurant in the city increase its reach and hit month-on-month targets once again.

Maki & Ramen Leeds appointed Aubergine in the summer of 2025, briefing the team of food and restaurant PR experts and former journalists to generate awareness and increase reach.

In the space of just two weeks from being commissioned, the agency developed a "quick win" PR and social media strategy that would really put the restaurant on the map.

They worked alongside Sophie Wang, Maki & Ramen's Executive Chef, to create a limited-edition Yorkshire Day mash-up menu. This featured the likes of; Yorkshire Tea Iced Matcha, Sunday Roast Ramen (complete with Yorkshire Pudding for dipping) and a Builder's Brew Crème Brûlée.

The creative campaign captured the imagination of both regional and national media, generating 30 pieces of coverage and reaching a combined audience of 3.2 million people. BBC Radio Leeds invited Sophie into the studio where the presenter tried the dishes, The Hoot created a viral Instagram video and accompanying blog to find out what the Sunday Roast Ramen tasted like and coverage also appeared in the likes of The Yorkshire Post and MSN.

Rebecca Cuthbertonson, Marketing Manager at Makin & Ramen, said: "We are absolutely thrilled with the PR and social media impact generated by Aubergine's Yorkshire Day campaign. Our Leeds site is now hitting targets week on week which is amazing and I definitely credit the agency with helping us achieve this."

Emma Gardner, Co-Founder of Aubergine and former BBC and Channel 4 News journalist, said: "When it comes to standing out in Leeds' bustling

food scene, sometimes it takes a bold, playful PR idea to really capture the media's attention. I'm really proud that with our journalistic "nose for news" we managed to come up with something really unique that turned journalists' heads - and ultimately, translated into an increase in people visiting Maki & Ramen."

North East community groups to benefit from free radio campaign to celebrate 40 years of Metrocentre

An award-winning North East radio station has come up with a gem of an idea to help celebrate Metrocentre's ruby anniversary -by giving away £100,000 worth of free advertising to community organisations.

Pride Radio based at the ONE Centre, Gateshead has worked closely with the leading shopping centre on a number of initiatives and have joined forces again, this time to benefit charities, community groups and organisations across the region.

To mark Metrocentre's 40th anniversary, Pride Radio is sharing £100,000 worth of airtime with 40 good causes – each receiving a free 12 week radio campaign.

The Top 40 Community Voices scheme will give groups the opportunity to promote their services, call out for volunteers or just showcase the good work they do.

And groups which may have no experience of running a radio campaign have no need to worry as Pride Radio will handle every aspect, including writing the script and looking after all of the production.

Peter Darrant of Pride Radio said the airtime would give "unsung organisations" the opportunity to get in front of a large and diverse audience.

"For many community organisations and charities paying for radio airtime is just not possible," he said.

"Which is why we thought that teaming up with Metrocentre in such a landmark year and using their on-going support of the community to benefit other good causes was a brilliant idea.

"We are now looking forward to hearing from any group, charity or organisation which would like to benefit from this offer."

Centre Director at Metrocentre, Gavin Prior, said: "Celebrating 40 years is not just about looking back at our history, but about recognising the communities that have supported us over the decades."

"We are incredibly proud to work alongside Out North East and Pride Radio on the Top 40 Community Voices initiative, which reflects our long-standing commitment to giving back to the North East.

"Community groups and charities play a vital role in supporting local people, often with limited resources. By helping to amplify their voices through this campaign, we hope to make a meaningful difference ensuring their work is seen, heard and supported across the region during this milestone year."

Anyone wanting to participate in The Top 40 Community Voices can apply at www.prideradio.co.uk

Pride Radio is now run by LGBTQ+ charity OUT North East, which works to support the community through practical, help, guidance and raising public awareness. It is based at the recently opened ONE Centre at the Stonehills Compex, Gateshead which offers range of spaces which will be used for counselling, workshops, community drop-ins and for training, along with hot desking areas which will be available to both charities and start-up businesses.

Information about the centre is available at www.outnortheast.org.uk

Advertising specialists invest in new Sunderland office

One of the UK's fastest growing independent digital outdoor advertising agencies has moved to a new North East HQ.

Smart Outdoor, experts in out-of-home advertising, has moved to a new 2,300 sq ft office at The Yard at Riverside Sunderland in the city centre.

Founded in 2019, the firm has grown its network of live screens to more than 1,100 covering over 190 towns and cities, from Edinburgh to London.

The firm will employ 50 people out of its Sunderland office, cementing the city as the company's home.

Mark Catterall, founder and chief executive of Smart Outdoor, said: "We're an ambitious, growing company and moving to this modern, new office will help us continue on our journey.

"It will be more than a workplace, it will be a hub where our team can collaborate, create, innovate and deliver for our clients.

"We're also a company that has long been based in Sunderland, with the North East historically being our heartland, and this move is testament to how great this area is to do business."

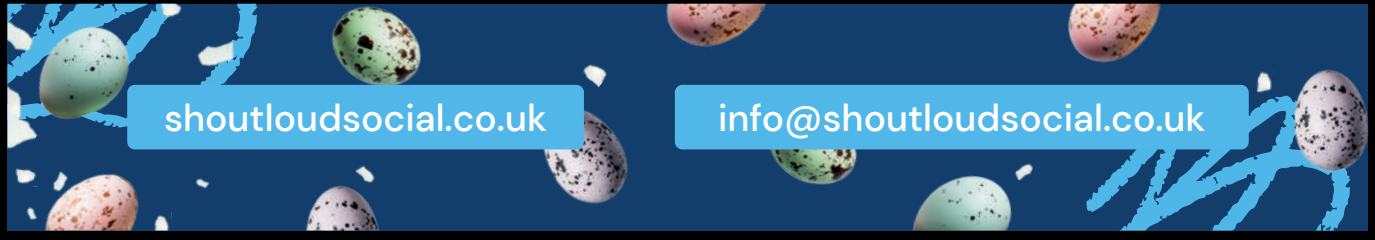
Last year Smart Outdoor began a new partnership with Shell, bringing 91 digital forecourt locations into its network. The deal was a major step in

expanding the company's footprint further south, giving its advertisers access to high-frequency, roadside environments across the UK.

Mark said: "We had a great 2025 and the partnership with Shell was a big part of that, it's a first-of-its-kind agreement, allowing us to roll out hundreds of screens at dozens of selected forecourts nationwide.

"We're a company that is always looking ahead whether it's our office space, partnerships or tech, we're continuously looking to innovate how we help brands connect with audiences."

Smart Outdoor has been supported since setting up in the city by the Business Investment Team at Sunderland City Council, who assisted the company with their property search.



April showers our clients with...

Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us what they give their customers above and beyond the norm.

I never see tutoring as a service — I see it as a commitment to a child's future.

At Kip McGrath, every student who walks through our doors receives far more than an hour's lesson. Families trust us with something precious, and I take that responsibility personally. That's why I go further than the norm in three key ways:

1. Tailored support that grows with the child

I spend time getting to know each student as an individual — their strengths, their anxieties, their learning style, and what motivates them. Lessons aren't offtheshelf; they're crafted to ensure every child feels seen, supported, and capable.

2. Honest, ongoing communication with families

Parents don't just receive termly updates in the form of hard data; they get regular, constructive feedback, open dialogue, and genuine partnership. They receive weekly feedback on their child's session via our parent portal. I'm always available to talk through concerns, celebrate wins, or offer advice outside of session times. If a child needs extra help, I provide it — even if it's not scheduled.

3. Creating a safe, confidencebuilding environment

For many children, tuition isn't just academic — it's emotional. I take great care to make the centre a place where students feel calm, valued, and able to take risks. Whether that means adapting materials, providing neurodiversefriendly strategies, or offering encouragement when it's needed most, I ensure every child leaves feeling more confident than when they arrived.

Going above and beyond isn't an addon for me — it's the heart of what I do. Every child deserves to believe they can succeed, and I'm proud to play a small part in helping that happen. If helping a young person grow means staying late, rewriting a lesson, calling a parent after hours, or finding a creative way to break through a barrier, then that's exactly what I'll do. Because for my students, families, and staff, nothing less will do.

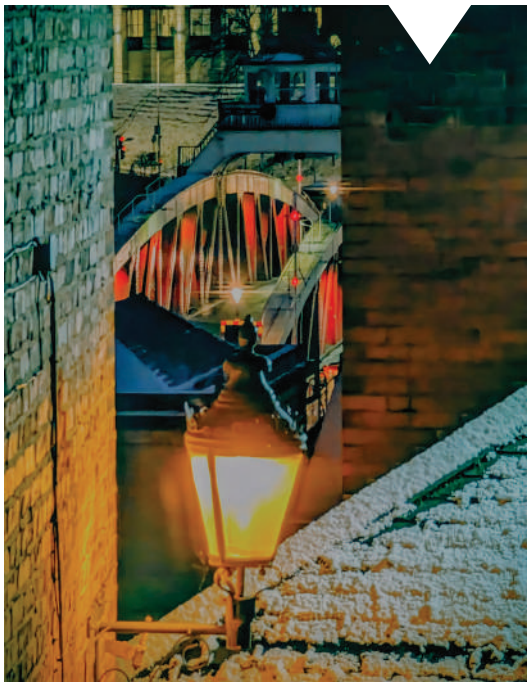
Carol Milne Kip McGrath Gateshead East, Washington & Chester le Street
www.kipmcgrath.co.uk/gateshead-west

Through my AskMrsWatson.com membership my members don't just get technical help. They gain a trusted partner in their business journey. Drawing on nearly four decades of practical experience, I deliver support that goes far beyond how-to for software apps or checking compliance boxes. From jargon-free guidance including platforms like Microsoft 365, AI tools and UK GDPR and other UK data protection legislation, I empower businesses to work smarter, stay secure and grow with confidence. What clients consistently praise is the peace of mind that comes with knowing someone has their back, whether it's turning a complex data protection question into a clear plan, making spreadsheets enjoyable, or simply being there with reliable, approachable guidance when technology feels overwhelming. To join our mailing list visit www.askmrswatson.com/#mailinglist

Kate Watson, www.askmrswatson.com

April showers my clients with memories. The "My Lens, Our City, Your Memories" exhibition was held at the Newcastle Civic Centre from 16-28 March, where visitors were asked to leave a memory that one of my photos has triggered in the memory book. From these memories and those left by other visitors at other exhibitions a memory photo book will be produced.

Michael Rickwood, www.mr-photography.co.uk



At Crear Publishing we believe every author and every story is unique, which is why we like to meet with each prospective author to understand their goals, their vision, and what they hope to achieve from publishing their book. This initial conversation helps ensure that we are the right fit for one another and allows us to guide them towards the publishing route that suits them best, whether that is self-publishing or publishing with us. We pride ourselves on being open and transparent throughout the entire process, making sure our authors fully understand each stage of their journey, including any potential costs. From the moment an author entrusts us with their completed manuscript to the exciting day their book is published and released, we keep them informed, supported, and involved every step of the way.

Ryan and Karen Crear, www.crearpublishing.com

Last month our RADAR members appeared on BBC TV, BBC Radio, Local TV and many magazines and newspapers. To find out more about the benefits of becoming a RADAR member, contact keith@highlightspr.co.uk or call Keith on 07814 397951

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HIGHLIGHTS PUBLIC RELATIONS

All aboard!

Keith Newman of Highlights PR has one of the region's most unusual offices—a boat moored at Royal Quays Marina in North Shields.

"Adventure" is the perfect place to work, meet clients, and connect with business contacts. Here are some of the organisations and businesses who have recently been onboard.

To book a coffee and a chat, email keith@highlightspr.co.uk

Choose an agency. Choose fluff. Choose buzzwords. Choose a flipping big retainer. Choose strategy decks full of absolutely nowt, shelving full of awards bought online, free stock photos and unusable DaFont typefaces. Choose safe headlines, boring copy and endless—em—dashes. Choose Canva templates. Choose synergy, disruption and thought leadership, choose wasted budgets and wasting time. Choose saying a lot without actually saying anything. Choose a bloody big presentation with fifty slides and no actual ideas. Choose bland campaigns that look exactly like every one else's marketing. Choose logos made in twenty minutes. Choose a design style that looks like everyone else's. Choose vanity metrics, false impressions and engagement rates that look lovely in a report but change absolutely nothing. Choose endless workshops, pointless meetings, brand pyramids and three-letter-acronyms in a range of flipping PowerPoint templates. Choose marketing tech you don't understand. Choose dashboards you never look at. Choose reports nobody reads. Choose hearing them tell you what you want to hear. Choose safe. Choose predictable. Choose the same thing your competitors are doing. Choose inflated timesheets and wondering why the flip they're emailing you on a Sunday morning. Choose wasting another year doing the same old waffle. Choose sitting on their reception sofa, watching mind-numbed, spirit-crushed staff walk in, and walk out, while having the 'we're like a family' line stuffed into your ears. Choose rotting away your budget at the end of it all, pishing away your last pennies on one last miserable invoice and wondering why the work still isn't working. Choose that agency...

But why would you want to do a thing like that? Choose to not to choose that agency. Choose somethin' better. Choose straight talking, proper ideas, real design craft and work that actually works. Choose actual creative experts, fair costs and definitely no bullshit.
Choose great work for great people.

Choose Kenfolk.

Kenfolk

kenfolk.co.uk

L-R: Sarah Dale and Sarah Walker

L-R: Sarah Dale and Alice Carruthers

Empowering young minds

Careers Navigator is shaping the next generation of creators.

As a board director at NetWORK NotWORK CIC, Sarah Dale – co-founder and director of PR, journalism and communications consultancy, SASS media – combines journalism, public relations, education and wellbeing to help young people build confidence, entrepreneurial thinking and realworld skills. Through Careers Navigator and The NetWORKer Junior magazine, she champions youth voice, creativity and lifelong learning – at a time when enterprise education has never been more vital.

My board role sits at the intersection of storytelling, education and opportunity. It's where my background in journalism, emotional wellbeing and youth development meets a mission I deeply believe in: ensuring every young person has the skills, confidence and support to shape their own future.

While my primary focus is PR and communications – helping amplify the CIC's message of a free, fun, multigenerational networking community – one of my greatest joys is writing and editing The NetWORKer Junior. The magazine is created with young people, not just for them. Working closely with 11-year-old Alice, daughter of CIC founders Dr Kat and Michael Carruthers, has been a masterclass in what genuine youth voice looks like: creativity without limits, fearless curiosity, and a refreshing tendency to ask: "why not?" rather than "why?".

At the heart of NetWORK NotWORK CIC is Careers Navigator, our flagship education programme. It helps children and young people explore industries, understand career pathways, and build the soft and practical skills employers increasingly value.

Having spent six years in primary education – as both a teaching assistant and an emotional wellbeing practitioner – I've seen firsthand how transformative it is to listen to young people and support their social and emotional development. Their needs go far beyond academic achievement. They need resilience, problem solving, curiosity and a strong work ethic to thrive.

Careers Navigator exists to spark that transformation. It isn't just about preparing young people for "jobs of the future"; it's about empowering them to become independent thinkers, creators and problem-solvers. The programme uses fun, realworld challenges set by businesses, and its mantra, Your Space to Succeed, sits at the heart of three innovative, gamified learning pathways:

- **Ignite XP!** – badge clubs and an online academy for 8–16 yearolds
- **Ascend XP!** – for 16–24 yearolds and anyone not in education, employment or training (NEET)
- **Orbit XP!** – for adults aged 18+ in employment or who are self-employed

Each pathway allows users to earn badges and accredited qualifications through progressively more challenging employer led tasks.

And when you give young people tools, trust and a platform, something special happens. They don't just learn, they shine.

There is a growing national recognition that enterprise education must become a core part of the UK curriculum. Research from the Federation of Small Businesses and Simply Business shows a stark gap between aspiration and opportunity: nearly 60% of young people want to own a business, yet only 16% actually do, while just 35% say they received any enterprise education at secondary school.

Meanwhile, wider curriculum reforms aim to modernise lifeskills education and prepare pupils for a fastchanging labour market. Planned updates will strengthen digital, STEM and critical thinking skills, all of which complement entrepreneurial learning and support the qualities young people need to navigate future careers confidently.

When you give young people tools, trust and a platform, something special happens. They don't just learn, they shine.

Within this national picture, the work of NetWORK NotWORK CIC, Careers Navigator and our Junior Journalism projects becomes even more important. We are helping to fill a gap that schools alone cannot bridge.

My own path has never been linear, but every step has shaped the work I do today. Journalism taught me to listen closely, ask meaningful questions and tell stories that matter. Working in primary schools taught me empathy, patience and the importance of nurturing confidence. Running SASS media with Sarah Walker has shown me how entrepreneurial thinking fuels independence, innovation and resilience.

These experiences shape my belief that young people deserve:

- Opportunities to explore entrepreneurship, not just learn about it
- Support for their wellbeing, because confidence and self-belief are the foundation of success
- Access to realworld storytelling and journalism
- Education that reflects modern life e.g. creative, digital, collaborative and grounded in practical skills

Working alongside young contributors like Alice and our Junior Journalists strengthens that belief every day. Their instinctive creativity and sharp editorial ideas prove why youth involvement isn't a token gesture; it is essential to developing relevant and empowering content.

And if there's one thing my journey has taught me – from newsrooms to classrooms to boardrooms – it's that lifelong learning isn't simply an idea. It's a culture. One we can nurture in every child when we give them the tools, support and belief they deserve.

Find out more about NetWORK NotWORK CIC: www.networknotwork.co.uk, Careers Navigator: www.careersnavigator.co.uk and SASS media: www.sassmedialtd.co.uk or email: sarah.dale@sassmedialtd.co.uk

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the Traveller & the Bear

Why every project Needs a Discovery Phase

In many businesses, the pressure to move quickly means projects start before the right questions have been asked.

Teams want momentum, leaders want progress, and everyone wants to see results. But when work begins without enough clarity, even the best ideas can become expensive, stressful and start to veer off course.

This is especially true with creative and strategic projects such as a new website, a marketing strategy, or a rebrand. These initiatives often carry high expectations and tight deadlines, so the focus naturally falls on delivery.

Moving fast doesn't always mean you're moving in the right direction. Taking time to step back at the beginning of your creative project will help you ensure that when work starts, you're solving the right problem.

What a Discovery Phase is

A discovery phase is the stage before the brief is finalised and the creative or strategic work begins. It is where an organisation makes space to understand the challenge it is trying to solve, the audience it needs to reach and the outcome it wants to achieve.

In simple terms, the discovery phase asks one important question: what is the real problem we're trying to solve?

Many teams find that the most effective way to navigate this stage is through a series of structured workshops. These workshops bring key stakeholders together to explore ideas, surface different perspectives, challenge assumptions and build a shared understanding of both the goal and how best to get there.

At first glance, a discovery phase might feel like an additional step in an already busy schedule. In reality, it'll help you save time (and costs!) in the long run.

Avoiding expensive assumptions

Assumption is one of the biggest risks in any project. Businesses sometimes assume they need a new brand when the real issue is inconsistent messaging. They may invest in a new website when the bigger challenge is a confusing customer journey or internal processes that make it difficult for customers to take the next step. Some teams launch campaigns before they have a clear view of who they are speaking to, what their audience values, or what should change as a result.

When assumptions sit untested at the start, they can shape the whole direction of the work. The result is often more revisions, shifting priorities, longer timelines and higher costs. A discovery phase reduces that risk by grounding decisions in insight rather than guesswork.

Creating alignment across the business

Different teams usually have different perspectives on what success means. Leadership may be focused on growth, marketing may be focused on visibility and lead quality and operational teams may be focused on capacity and delivery.

These differences are normal, but if they aren't discussed early, they tend to slow things down later. A discovery workshop creates space for the right conversations at the right time, allowing teams to agree on priorities, define clear goals and make decisions with shared context. That shared understanding reduces friction later and helps delivery move forward with fewer surprises.

Better work, better results

Before any project begins, it is worth asking three simple questions.

- What decision are we trying to make?
- What assumptions are we carrying into this?
- Who needs to agree what success means, and by when?

A discovery phase exists to answer these questions early, so the work that follows has the best chance of delivering value and making a meaningful impact.

If you have a creative or strategic project coming up and want to ensure you are solving the right problem from the outset, we can support you from discovery through to delivery. Get in touch to talk through your project and next steps.

vidacreative.co.uk

L-R: Ian Johnson, Becky Wade, Charlotte Nichols, Shannon Evans, Charl Ochler

In the Top 50!

A strong year has resulted in an award-winning PR agency being named one of the Top 50 in the North.

Harvey & Hugo was founded in 2009 by Charlotte Nichols, who has spent the past 16 years helping to build and protect hundreds of brands.

Now the Darlington-based agency has secured a place in the prestigious Prolific North Top 50 PR Agencies for 2025.

"2025 wasn't easy for any business, so this recognition feels extra special," said Charlotte.

Like most years, the list is dominated by large Manchester agencies, with Citypress – which employs more than 100 staff – topping the table.

Comparatively, Harvey & Hugo's team consists of just six.

"At Harvey & Hugo, our team is small but mighty, so just being mentioned in the same breath as these massive city-based agencies speaks volumes about the team's talent and our results," Charlotte added.

Those results reflect a year in which the agency secured new clients across sectors including education, fostering, food and drink, and technology.

"One of our key strengths is our ability to turn our hand to any industry and deliver results," said Charlotte.

"We've consistently secured top-tier coverage in regional and national newspapers, as well as TV and radio, and in a world where value for money matters, it is old-fashioned results driving Harvey & Hugo forward."

And the company's success comes at a time where top-tier coverage for clients is making an increasingly big impact when it comes to AI.

"Some people thought AI would cripple PR but in reality, the opposite has happened," said Charlotte, who presents both the PRsonal and Pocket-Sized PR podcasts.

"AI is increasingly replacing the likes of Google as people's go-to search engine, and how people gather their information.

"But AI feeds off information sourced from high quality publications, so securing coverage in a well-respected title can make a monumental difference to your brand's visibility."

As such, the company has put more emphasis on 'high quality over vast quantity' in the past year - with the results speaking for themselves.

Following the appointment of former Evening Gazette chief reporter Ian Johnson as PR Director last year, the company has secured clients print and digital coverage in titles ranging from the BBC, The Sun, ITV, Daily Mirror, iNews and every major regional publication.

Additionally, the Business Central-based company has also helped clients secure podcasting and speaking opportunities alongside multiple award nominations.

"In this AI world, one meaningful, high-quality placement can now be far more powerful than a dozen forgettable mentions," added Charlotte.

"Additionally, in a world where most news is read online, the regional press is increasingly holding more sway than many businesses appreciate.

"Millions of people in the UK consume local news online each month, with audiences stretching far beyond their geographic patch and that reach means strong regional coverage can travel far wider than many businesses expect - while these titles are also held in very high regard by the likes of ChatGTP."

Artificial intelligence may be transforming the communications landscape, but Charlotte believes it has also made professional PR more crucial than ever.

"Ultimately, AI isn't replacing PR," she said.

"If anything, it's turbo-charging it - but ultimately, storytelling will always be at the heart of PR.

"That's what we've done for the past 16 years, and will keep doing for many to more to come."

www.harveyandhugo.com

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Build a brand that doesn't depend on what you sell.

Anne Reynolds

Building a brand when the only constant is change

At Blue Moon we see a lot of businesses tie their brand to what they do or what they sell. And we get it – they're proud of their product, their service, their expertise – so they make it the centre of everything.

But markets move and their priorities shift. What the world needed three years ago isn't necessarily what it needs today. If you build your brand around a specific product or service you could wake up one day to a market that's moved on and your brand no longer means anything to them.

Our client, RE:GEN Group is a case study in what can happen when you separate your brand from what you do and put more focus on your 'why'.

They've appeared in 'Ward Hadaway North East Fastest 50' three years running – winning overall fastest growing business back-to-back. They've grown from nothing to ~£150M revenue in five years. But what those headlines don't tell you is that RE:GEN today is a fundamentally different business to the one that opened its doors five years ago.

Most businesses don't survive one pivot cleanly. RE:GEN has navigated several. How does a business manage this? We sat down with Anne Reynolds, Founder of Blue Moon and fractional CMO of RE:GEN Group, to dig a little deeper.

It would be impossible to distill five years of marketing strategy into a 750 word article, but here are our two big takeaways from the conversation:

Build a brand that doesn't depend on what you sell

"We've built RE:GEN's brand around a simple idea: 'delivering on our promises'.

It might sound straightforward, but that's exactly the point.

Without tying ourselves to a single product, service, or niche, our positioning doesn't date, dilute, or disappear.

And when it's applied to what we do, it lands with real weight, because in our world, as much as our customers', delivery is everything."

What this means in practice is that every time the business has had to change shape with a new offering, expand with a new acquisition, or talk to a new audience, the brand has travelled with it. Seamlessly. From renewables to new regions; from asbestos removal to a skills academy.

When your brand is pinned to what you do, a pivot can be a contradiction. But when your brand is pinned to how and why you do it, a pivot gives you an opportunity to grow.

Building what the market needs, not what you want to build

"From the beginning we were wholly focused on the customer. We had visions of what we wanted to do, but we knew that had to be secondary to what the audience needed.

We also knew that we couldn't be everything to everyone, so we focussed our attention on the audiences where we had a right to win.

We ignored huge market segments, segments with money that would make your eyes water, but we knew our lane and we stuck to it. That lane has twisted and turned over the years, but because we've always focussed on the demands of the market, we've always been able to see where it's going"

This second thing RE:GEN got right is harder to replicate, because it requires an ego check that most organisations fail.

Most businesses build their offering and then go looking for demand. RE:GEN looked at the market and built what it needed. Then they kept looking at the market, and when those needs changed, they changed with them. Over and over again.

That's what we call 'market orientation', and it's rare. Very rare.

So what can we learn?

Your brand is the only thing you own that can survive your product or service becoming irrelevant.

If it's wrapped too tightly around what you currently sell, you've built a business that's one market shift away from a very bad day in the office.

But if you keep your brand separate from what you're doing today, it stays relevant for what you might end up doing tomorrow.

That's where market orientation becomes a superpower. Compared to competitors who aren't tuned in, it can feel like having a crystal ball; seeing what's coming and pivoting in real time while others are still reacting.

If you want to build a marketing plan that balances brand building with sales activation, let's talk. At Blue Moon we offer brand management, marketing strategy, and tactical delivery under a fractional model, giving you access to the full marketing suite for the monthly cost of a single hire.

We can't promise you'll make the Fastest Growing 50, but we'll give it a damn good shot!

Drop us an email: anne@bluemoon-marketing.co.uk

L-R: Darren Richardson, Creative Director of Gardiner Richardson, with Ross Truman, a Grainger Market Inspector, at the Grainger Market.

Gardiner Richardson wins international award

Newcastle-based strategic brand communications agency, Gardiner Richardson, has won silver at the international DBA Design Effectiveness Awards for its brand and communications work to help drive footfall to the historic Grainger Market in Newcastle city centre.

Established in 1989, the DBA awards demonstrate and prove the effectiveness and impact of design work. They are widely known as the benchmark for measuring the commercial value of design with a focus on recognising work that delivers measurable results for businesses and communities.

Newcastle City Council, which owns and operates the market, appointed Gardiner Richardson to refresh the market's brand as part of a wider programme of UK government-funded work to restore this beloved icon to its former glory, increase footfall and attract new traders.

Darren Richardson, creative director at Gardiner Richardson, said: "At the heart of our strategy was a simple guiding idea, 'Wander and wonder in every alley and arcade', and a strong brand character, the 'Geordie hero'. A play on words, the guiding idea evokes a 'wander' through the market's maze-like alleys and the 'wonder' of discovering the extraordinary every day. It's also a return to the market's turn-of-the-century 'age of wonder' glory days. This was to drive excitement, ramp up the 'maze-like adventure' visitors can enjoy while meandering the historic alleyways. Not gentrified, not generic; strongly rooted in Newcastle and the North East.

"The new brand positioning and identity had to be authentic to the history and community of the market while appealing to new traders, customers and creating a wider buzz in the city and region. The identity needed to work for all: the generations of long-standing traders and the new ones, the foodies, the eco shoppers and the canny customers looking for a deal."

Cllr Abdul Samad, Cabinet Member for Culture, Music and Arts at Newcastle City Council, said: "What a fantastic achievement for Gardiner Richardson. On behalf of Newcastle City Council, I would like to congratulate them on winning silver in such a prestigious international award for design.

"It is so important to the council that we have a local company leading on this work for the city's much-loved Grainger Market and Gardiner Richardson's vision and enthusiasm fitted the bill perfectly."

Darren Richardson

At almost 200 years old, the Grainger Market is a very special place in the heart of central Newcastle. Owned and operated by Newcastle City Council, Grainger is a historic covered market which continues to play a pivotal role in retail and dining culture.

Constructed as part of the city's redevelopment by architect Richard Grainger in the 1830s, Grainger Market first opened in 1835 and is one of the few market halls in the UK that remain in use for its original purpose. It is a Grade I Listed Market which retains the same architecture, details and nuances created by the original architect, John Dobson.

Home to local traders and small businesses from Newcastle and the wider North East region, Grainger Market has provided a base for traders such as cobblers, florists, jewellers, haberdasheries, bakeries, high-quality butchers, fishmongers and greengrocers.

For more information visit gardiner-richardson.com, Gardiner Richardson on LinkedIn and @inspirebelief_ on Instagram.

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BRADLEY O'MAHONEY

In conversation with...

A new North East agency is challenging the way ecommerce brands approach affiliate marketing.

Michael Grahamslaw sat down with Studio Two co-founders...

Ross Longhorn and Shaun Brown

to look at the story so far.

What inspired you to start this business ?

Shaun: I worked for another agency and saw a gap in the market to link digital PR and affiliate marketing. Having met Ross we had a lightbulb moment and decided to test the process on that basis and give it a go. Over the past 6-8 months we have experienced rapid growth.

What challenges have you faced so far?

Ross: There have been constant challenges as we have gone along. Initially nobody knew who we were and many thought affiliate PR didnt exist. We have also had to establish where we need resource within the business and put consistent focus in for growth.

What sets you apart from your competitors?

Shaun: There is only one similar agency to us in the country and that uniqueness puts us in a great place to be super flexible with clients. Blending traditional channels under one roof has been brilliant and our performance model helps. If results are down we won't hide.

Where would you like to see the business in 3-5 years?

Ross: After hitting the ground running we need to keep momentum, build the team and consistently beat targets and milestones. We are very ambitious and there is no reason why we can't grow to a 5 to 10 million turnover and be the biggest marketing agency in the North East.

L-R: Ellis Longhorn, Shaun Brown, Ross Longhorn and Alice Eyre

> **You don't have to be the brightest candle in the room.**

What key strategies have you found most for growing the business?

Shaun: There is a growing trend for companies to use fractional marketing officers so we nurture and get leads from them. We are also building great relationships with journalists. In more recent times we have ran a guerilla marketing campaign sending empty cassette cases into businesses aimed at cutting through the noise and asking if you are still doing marketing like the 90s. We are also embracing AI whilst retaining our human touch.

What are you currently working on?

Ross: We have recently delivered a 71% year on year increase in affiliate revenue for Hornby Hobbies, revitalising performance across Hornby, Scalextric, Airfix and Corgi.

Elsewhere we are working with the William Smith Group, a leading trade supplier to the sign and graphics industry, as well as the Edinburgh based retailer TBCo and Relish who have a range of products that help people with Alzheimer's live happily at home for longer.

We are on the cusp of winning our biggest client and have a great pipeline in place across the e-commerce, lifestyle, food and drink and travel sectors.

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

Shaun: You dont have to be the brightest candle in the room, you just have to burn the longest.

Ross: Surround yourself with likeminded people.

Who are your Heroes and Mentors?

Shaun: My late Grandmother who had a huge impact on me as she was always buoyant in every situation.

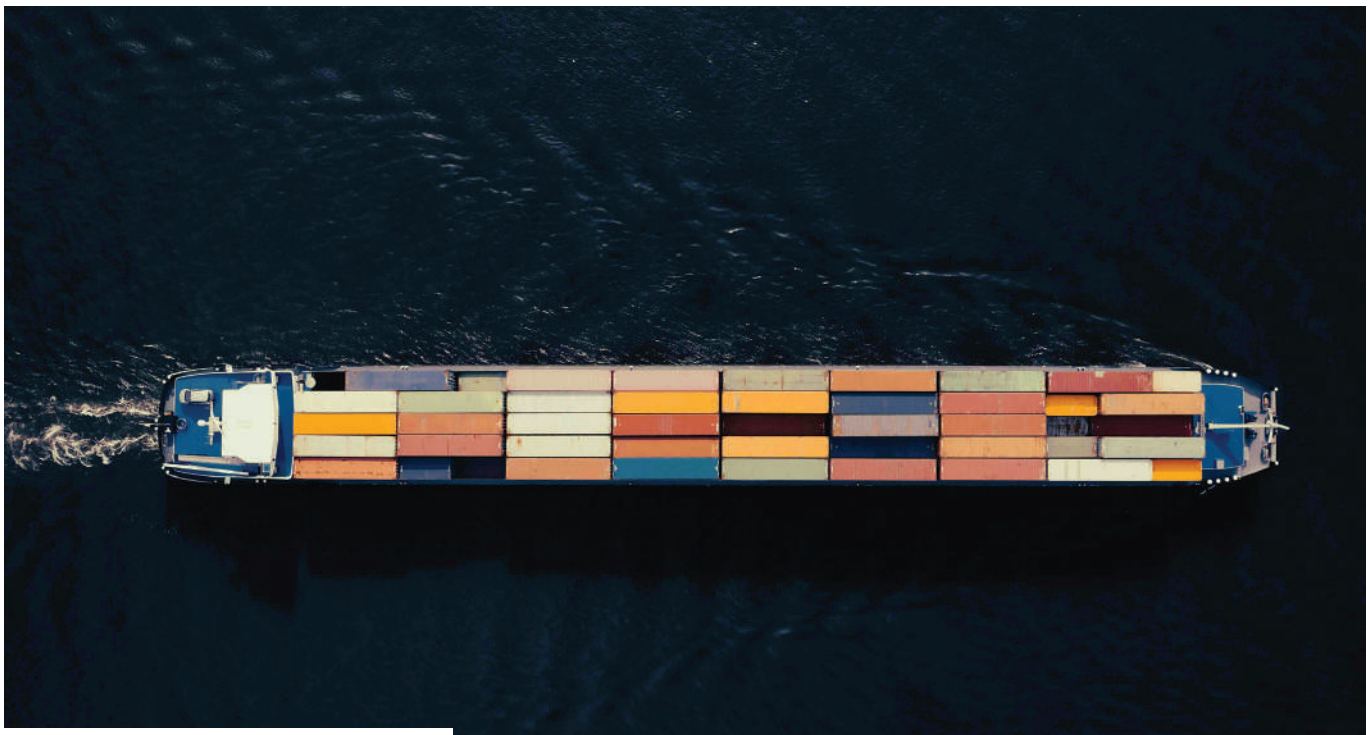
Ross: My father who passed away at the age of 56. This has taught me time is short and it is important to push on from an entrepreneurial perspective.

How do you like to unwind?

Shaun: Going to the gym, enjoying a sauna and watching my son play football.

Ross: Going to the gym and spending time outdoors to escape the noise.

For more information visit studiotwoagency.com



Samuel Marriott-Dowding

The Business of Risk

By Samuel Marriott-Dowding

For many businesses in the North East, conflict can feel distant. Something that plays out on television screens thousands of miles away.

Yet the escalating tensions between Iran, the United States and Israel are a reminder that in a globally connected economy, distant conflicts rarely stay distant for long.

In recent weeks, the closure of airspace across parts of the Middle East has forced airlines to reroute flights, extend travel times and in some cases suspend routes entirely. At the same time, oil markets have reacted with the predictable volatility that accompanies instability in one of the world's most strategically important regions. The result is rising fuel costs, disrupted logistics, and renewed uncertainty across international supply chains.

For businesses, the consequences ripple quickly. Aviation, tourism and logistics feel the immediate impact, but the knock-on effects spread much wider. Manufacturing costs climb as energy prices increase, import and export timelines stretch, international partnerships face unexpected disruption. Even organisations with little direct exposure to the Middle East can suddenly find themselves navigating an unpredictable environment.

This is where modern business is increasingly intersecting with geopolitical awareness.

The reality is that risk today emerges through complex global systems - energy markets, transportation networks, political alliances and information ecosystems. When disruption happens, the organisations best placed to respond are those that have already considered the possibilities.

Crisis management, reputation protection and strategic foresight are no longer tools reserved for multinational corporations or governments. They are becoming essential functions for businesses of every size operating in interconnected markets.

A sudden supply chain disruption requires clear communication with partners, clients and stakeholders. Market volatility demands careful narrative management to maintain confidence and stability, and for when information travels instantly, the reputational implications of global events can be just as significant as the operational ones.

That is why more organisations are recognising the importance of structured threat assessment and intelligence-led decision making. Understanding emerging risks, anticipating potential disruptions, and preparing clear response frameworks allows leadership teams to act quickly and confidently when uncertainty strikes.

Preparation doesn't eliminate risk, but it dramatically reduces chaos.

I see far too many organisations still treating crisis planning as something to consider after something has gone wrong. By then, decisions are reactive, and this approach is no longer sustainable.

Businesses need to be asking tougher questions: Where are our operational vulnerabilities? How exposed are our supply chains to geopolitical disruption? If a crisis hits tomorrow, who is responsible for communications, strategy, stakeholder management and reputational protection?

At Marriott Communications, this thinking is exactly why we developed our Intelligence service. It exists to help organisations anticipate risk before it becomes a crisis - combining geopolitical awareness, intelligence cycles, reputation monitoring, threat assessment and strategic communications planning to give businesses the foresight they need to operate confidently in complex environments.

In the global economy of today, the biggest threat to a business is rarely the event itself, but being unprepared for the consequences.

The companies that navigate uncertainty successfully are not the ones hoping disruption never comes. They are the ones who have had the foresight, built the frameworks, and prepared for the worst whilst remaining hopeful for the best.

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Plexus Innovation relocates to Sunderland

A fast growing technology consultancy has relocated to Houghton-le-Spring, marking an exciting new chapter for the business.

Founded in County Durham, Plexus Innovation produces advanced Internet of Things (IoT) technology that delivers remote monitoring solutions for managing water systems, improving health and safety, and supporting regulatory compliance through real-time data and monitoring.

The firm's technology is currently used by more than 35 NHS Trusts, alongside a range of high-profile public and commercial sector clients. Its solutions are also deployed in complex and historically significant buildings, including major London landmarks such as the Old Bailey and Tower Bridge.

Previously based in Tanfield Lea, Stanley, the move to the Evolve Business Centre in Houghton-le-Spring reinforces the company's commitment to the region while providing it with the space required to support its ongoing growth.

Managing Director Steve Todd said: "We chose Evolve because of its modern facilities, flexible workspace, and the supportive business ecosystem it offers.

"The new office will provide us with the space and infrastructure needed to support our expanding team, enhance collaboration, and continue developing innovative solutions for our growing client base."

Owned and operated by Sunderland City Council, Evolve Business Centre is home to scores of businesses, offering high-quality, flexible workspace and tailored support for growing, ambitious companies

CyberNorth unveils new look and leadership as organisation enters next phase of growth

CyberNorth, the focal point for cyber security in the North East, has unveiled a refreshed brand while announcing key appointments, marking an important step forward in the organisation's continued growth and development.

At the centre of this announcement is the appointment of Jon Holden as Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Jon previously served as CyberNorth's Lead for Cyber and FinTech and has supported the organisation in recent months as interim CEO, following Danielle Phillips' move to the North East Combined Authority.

Jon's focus will be on growing the North East region's skills and creating a national hub for the National Cyber Security centre (NCSC) in the region. Under his tenure, CyberNorth will be looking to scale the ambitions of the region to make the North East the place for cyber security, as well as the ongoing commitment to developing local talent, strengthening collaboration between education and industry, and ensuring students are well connected to real-world cyber security opportunities.

Jon brings with him three decades of executive security experience leading cyber strategy, digital risk and technology transformation across global banking, fintech and regulated financial services. He is the former Chief Information Security Officer (CISO) at Atom Bank, where he built and led the security function for the UK's first app-only bank, delivering regulatory assurance and secure digital banking at scale. Jon has also held a number of senior positions in major financial institutions, including Citibank, Northern Rock, Egg and Virgin Money, shaping security strategy in highly regulated banking environments.

Strengthening the team further, CyberNorth has also welcomed Sarah Raw as Head of Operations. An experienced operations and programme delivery professional with a strong track record of supporting the growth and development of the UK's cyber security ecosystem.

Marketing Manager, Emily Perella, specialises in growth and strategy in the technology sector and has worked with start-ups and tech companies across the region, blending analytical insights with creative planning to lead digital platform development and deliver effective marketing campaigns.

The trio will join Helen Matthews, Head of Portfolio Delivery and Thea Scott, Head of Regional Growth, where the team will focus on expanding CyberNorth's impact, strengthening partnerships, and continuing to support the growth of the cyber security ecosystem across the North of England and beyond.

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When the stakes are highest

By Brave & Heart

How Brave & Heart shows up in a crisis.

There's a phrase that gets thrown around a lot: trusted partner. But what does it actually mean when things go wrong? When the phones don't stop ringing, when employees are scared and anxious, and when EVERY word your organisation puts out carries real weight?

For Brave & Heart - a North East born digital consultancy operating globally - it means showing up at 2am. It means having the right message ready before the crisis breaks. And it means standing together with clients when the situation is anything but stable.

That's exactly what happened when conflict escalated in the UAE. Brave & Heart mobilised a dedicated digital crisis response unit immediately, giving direct access to senior counsel and round-the-clock support. No waiting. No ticketing system. Just experienced, calm heads in the room when they were needed most.

Keeping people informed when it matters most

The first challenge in any crisis isn't always external - it's internal. Employees need reassurance. They need clarity. And they need it fast. Brave & Heart worked alongside internal communications teams with the tools they built for them to ensure staff across multiple regions received timely, consistent updates, even as the situation shifted hour by hour. When client teams couldn't be available out of hours, Brave & Heart stepped in to publish critical updates themselves.

It's a challenge that will resonate right here in the North East. Whether it's a manufacturing plant dealing with an unexpected operational incident or a public sector organisation navigating a political storm - the pressure to communicate quickly and credibly is just as real on Teesside as it is in Dubai.

The Digital Architecture of Calm

Beyond the messaging itself, Brave & Heart built the digital global infrastructure that internal communications teams need to stay coherent under pressure. For their UAE clients this meant they could build and rollout a centralised wellness hub in less than 12 hours, developing FAQs for the questions employees were asking, and optimising a real-time SharePoint Intranet banner tool they developed - so that critical updates appeared the moment someone logged in. Just as important was the AI driven language pages their SharePoint Intranet can serve to clients at the click of a button. Over 130 languages available and published in the one each employee actually needs.

Think of it as a single source of truth: one place, always current, always trusted. For a region like the North East - where major employers span vast shift-based workforces across logistics, energy, and manufacturing - that kind of infrastructure isn't a nice-to-have. It's essential.

Proactive, not reactive

What set Brave & Heart's work apart wasn't just speed - it was anticipation. Rather than waiting for events to unfold, the team prepared messaging in advance, mapped potential scenarios, and equipped leadership with the tools and confidence to communicate clearly before they needed to.

The North East is no stranger to change. From the ongoing transformation of the energy sector to the growth of Teesside's freeport and the evolving NHS landscape, organisations across our region are operating in environments where disruption is a matter of when, not if.

Having a strategic communications ally - not just a "supplier" - ready to move when it counts could make all the difference.

More than a service provider

Brave & Heart's experience in the UAE has reinforced something the team has always believed: great communications support isn't just about the words. It's about showing up, staying proactive, and being the calm in someone else's storm.

For organisations looking for that kind of partnership, the message is simple — they're already here, and they're ready.

Contact info@braveandheart.com today to discuss your digital communication needs.

Brave & Heart

> I'd much prefer a printed book over a phone or Kindle.

Steven Parker

Talking Tech and Digital

In the latest in this popular series of features Michael Grahamslaw spoke to...

Steven Parker

Managing Director at Sunderland based Phonetic Digital.

Did you always envisage a career in the world of Tech?

It would be fair to say that looking back I didn't have a clue what I wanted to do and at the time I certainly wasn't mature enough to go to college.

I initially stacked shelves for City Electrical Factors and moved to the trade counter where I discovered I was good at communicating with people.

I then followed a good friend into the motor trade which I enjoyed. However my wife is a teacher so I knew long term that this wasn't compatible as I worked weekends and we rarely managed to get time off together.

I turned my attention to the world of advertising and thrived in a six year spell at Newcastle Chronicle and Journal where I gained the Media Skills Qualification from the Newspaper Society. I really feel this is where my career started and I learned so much.

As the digital world emerged, I was part of a national steering group for Trinity Mirror looking into how this could impact and improve the business. Naturally some were resistant to change but I retained my interest and at the time was delighted to be part of the team in the early days at Mediaworks back in 2009. This was such an exciting period as everyone wanted to know about SEO at it was an emerging marketing tactic. I remember Facebook advertising launching and realising the impact that had and how we could use tech for good.

My profile grew and I got the start up bug and subsequently went onto to co-found Digital Allies where I had a lot of fun and made some great memories. I left the business amicably in November 2020 and went on to spend three years as a consultant before launching Phonetic Digital in January 2024.

What tips would you give anyone looking to work in the world of Tech?

The industry is moving with such velocity so my advice would be to get hands on in the platforms and gain operational experience.

What are you currently working on?

We are fortunate to be trusted by a wide range of fantastic clients from a wide variety of sectors. These include Gateshead College, Darlington College, North East Screen, Sunderland BID, Sweeney Miller Law, GFW Estate Agents, Swinburne Maddison Solicitors, and Oculus HR. On a national level we also work with Responsible Finance.

Tell us about your team?

Towards the end of my three year spell as a consultant I started to feel unfulfilled and lacked drive and motivation. I saw a great office space on Mackies Corner in Sunderland and from there Phonetic was born. Matthew Bryson has been with me from day one as Technical Director. Ron Binningsley then joined us as a senior front end developer & graphic designer, and we recruited Jess Davey as a digital marketing executive last year. Further team expansion is very much on the horizon...watch this space!

What are your long term plans?

To build a credible well governed business that will have impact and benefit the people of Sunderland, and the North East.

We treat clients well and all of our staff have private medical insurance and monthly use of an alternative therapist.

I work very closely with our fractional CFO Aly Henderson to drive the business forward and we are already the only agency in the North East which has both B Corp Certification and ISO 9001 accreditation.

We do a lot in the community and I chair the work of The Living Wage Foundation in Sunderland, and am a member of the board at The Foundation of Light - coupling community impact with football, two passions of mine outside of work.

What is your favourite piece of Technology?

My digital piano, although this is purely for personal pleasure! Away from work I'd much prefer a printed book over a phone or Kindle.

What has been your fondest career memory?

It would be very difficult to pinpoint one. Starting Digital Allies and seeing it succeed was a great experience. Watching staff engaged and Phonetic prosper has also been very rewarding.

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

Act swiftly and with conviction.

How do you like to unwind?

Playing piano, reading books and getting out in to the countryside...how cliche!

www.phoneticdigital.co.uk

John Behan

Microsoft changes need action

By John Behan, SOS Group Director

Almost everyone at SOS Group would acknowledge that Microsoft SMTP authentication changes do not, on the surface at least, provide the kind of topic that encourages readers to continue past the first paragraph.

However, SOS Group Director, John Behan, would argue that these important and imminent changes to the way printers and scanners work, will only lack interest until the day they suddenly happen and cause issues in unprepared workplaces.

John says: "We're more passionate than most about printers and scanners, but even I can see discussing these changes wouldn't make for lively dinner party conversation.

"For larger organisations, that have their own IT departments, preparations should already have been made for this changeover. And we'd strongly recommend smaller companies and organisations look now at what the changes will mean, and how they will affect their day-to-day activities."

Established in 2002, SOS Group is an award-winning office technology company facilitating business requirements across all sectors.

Based on the Team Valley and specialising in providing copy, print, scan solutions, it is an SME that counts multinationals within its established client base. The company also works closely with small businesses and supports start-ups as they grow, as well as helping to deliver internationally significant sporting and political party events.

John continues: "Even companies using only one or two printer scanners will need to be aware, and take action, as these Microsoft changes come into effect.

"Designed to continue to strengthen security across Microsoft 365, Microsoft will soon be phasing out Basic Authentication in Exchange Online in favour of OAuth 2.0, or Modern Authentication as it's also known.

"I appreciate, that's a lot of IT information for many people to get their heads around, but essentially it means devices and applications that rely on older authentication methods will need to be updated.

"And for many organisations, this change will affect multifunction printers (MFPs), scanners and other devices that send emails using SMTP, particularly when using scan-to-email features.

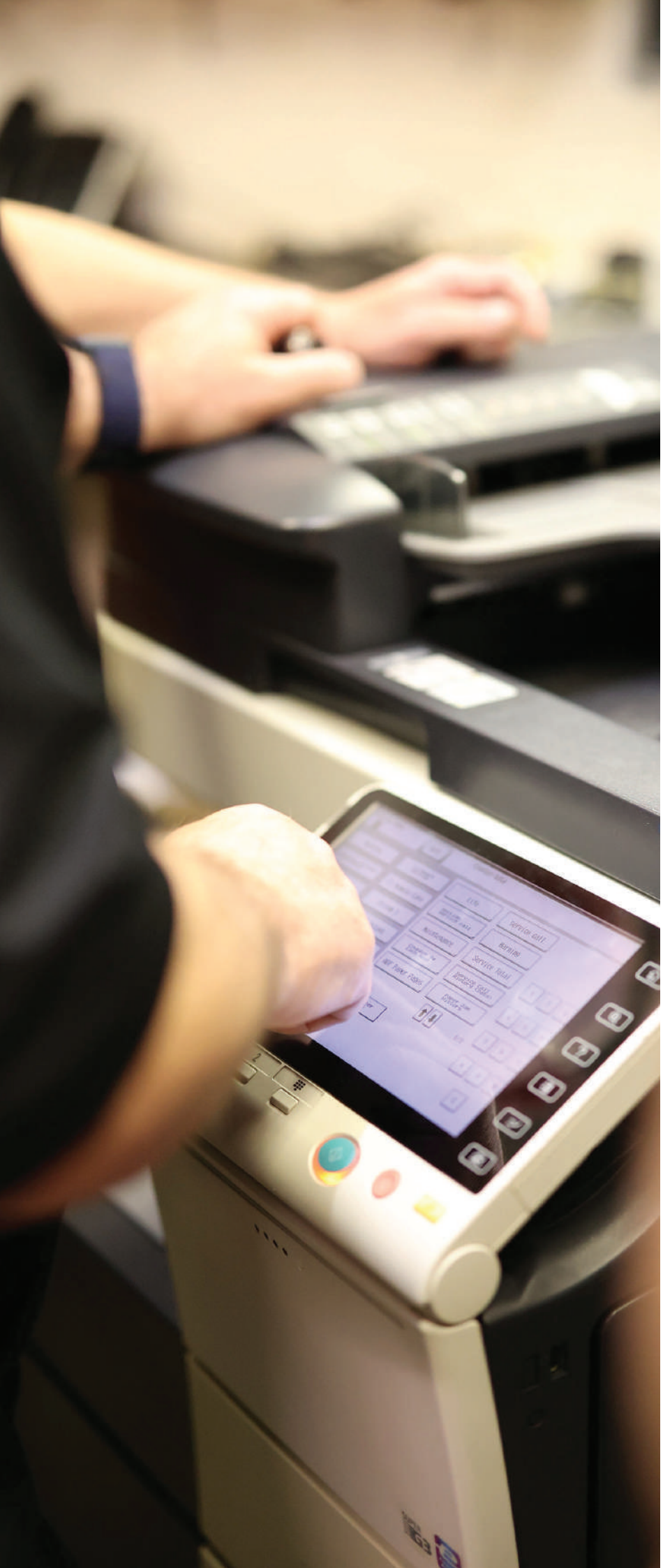
"As scan-to-email is far and away the majority method of using these devices for most companies and organisations, understanding what this change means and taking action early is vital to avoid disruption to everyday workflows."

Why Microsoft Is Disabling Basic Authentication

Basic Authentication relies on usernames and passwords being transmitted with each request. While this approach was once standard, it is now considered less secure and more vulnerable to cyber threats such as credential theft and brute-force attacks.

OAuth 2.0, also known as Modern Authentication, provides a far more secure framework. Instead of sending login credentials repeatedly, OAuth uses token-based authentication and multi-factor support to protect access to systems and data.

Because of these security advantages, Microsoft is replacing older authentication methods across its cloud services, including Exchange Online.



How this change could affect your organisation

Many office devices, particularly printers and multifunction devices used for scan-to-email workflows, rely on SMTP authentication to send messages through Microsoft 365.

If your devices are currently using Basic SMTP authentication, they may stop sending emails once Microsoft disables this method.

As a result, common features may stop working unless devices are updated to support OAuth 2.0 authentication.

These include:

- scan to email
- automated document delivery
- internal email routing

John adds: "It's important to note that these changes apply across all printer and MFP brands, not just specific manufacturers.

"Some existing office devices, including printers and scanners, may still be configured to use traditional SMTP authentication. If this is the case, they will require reconfiguration to support OAuth 2.0.

"Importantly, if your organisation already uses SMTP with OAuth 2.0 enabled, then you should not need to make further adjustments.

"To support organisations during this transition, many device manufacturers have published guidance on enabling OAuth 2.0 authentication, and we have links to the useful guides from Epson, Konica Minolta (Develop), Lexmark and Kyocera on our website.

"They explain how OAuth 2.0 authentication can be configured depending on the brand and model of your device. However, if you're unsure how your devices are currently configured, it's recommended that you review your settings with your IT provider as soon as possible."

The role of your IT Provider

In most cases, these authentication changes must be carried out by your IT provider, as they involve Microsoft 365 configuration and device-level authentication settings.

Your IT team will typically:

- confirm how devices currently authenticate with Microsoft 365
- configure OAuth 2.0 authentication where required
- update device settings to support secure email delivery
- test scan-to-email functionality after changes are applied

Working with your IT provider ensures the process is completed correctly and securely.

Next steps

If your organisation uses Microsoft 365 with scan-to-email devices, now is the right time to review your authentication settings.

Speak with your IT department or provider to confirm whether your printers or multifunction devices require updates. Addressing the change early will help ensure your systems continue to operate smoothly.

If you require assistance with reconfiguration or would like a quote for support, the SOS Group team is here to help.

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Helping landlords and tenants to light the Fuse

One of the UK's fastest-growing providers of commercial property solutions has connected the past with the future — thanks to new name Fuse.

A full rebrand reflects managing director Jamie Mableson's ongoing commitment to delivering a sector-leading end-to-end service for landlords and their tenants.

And the switch to Fuse — incorporating Fuse Media and Fuse Connect — has sparked a fresh approach to streamlining costs, connecting businesses and igniting growth.

"The rebrand reflects Fuse's renewed focus on providing integrated solutions to the commercial property sector," explains Jamie.

"We're all about helping landlords reduce the costs associated with vacant buildings and, at the same time, enabling businesses to move into properties and begin operating faster.

"Key to that is ensuring new tenants can do business from day one. In 2026 data connectivity is as critical as a consistent supply of electricity or water.

"Without reliable internet access, companies are unable to operate their systems, communicate with customers or conduct day-to-day business activity.

"By addressing connectivity challenges at the point of occupation, Fuse helps remove a significant barrier that frequently delays commercial lettings."

A dynamic move by the Newcastle-based business takes place against the backdrop of a consolidation of ownership.

Jamie stepped away from previous roles within the telecoms sector — including work with Fusion Connected (later rebranded to Fuse Telecom) — to focus fully on the development and growth of Fuse.

Fuse works closely with commercial property agents, landlords and tenants to address two key challenges in the commercial property lifecycle: the financial impact of vacant buildings and the delays that often occur when tenants attempt to establish reliable data connectivity.

"Many businesses simply can't operate without reliable internet access but traditional data installations can take several weeks — or even months — to complete," adds Jamie.

"Just imagine how frustrating that can be? Your business has moved into brand new premises, it's in the perfect position to grow and yet you can't connect with your suppliers or customers!

"Fuse helps remove this obstacle by providing almost immediate data connectivity, enabling tenants to become operational from day one while permanent connectivity solutions are arranged."

Visit www.fusemediagroup.co.uk

Banks Group looking forward to bright future after reaching 50th anniversary

North East property, housebuilding and mining firm the Banks Group is looking forward to a bright future after reaching its 50th anniversary.

The family-owned firm was founded as HJ Banks & Co in Tow Law in 1976 by Harry Banks OBE DL, who is still chairman and chief executive, and has always retained its headquarters in County Durham.

A special programme of events and activities has been devised to help mark its golden anniversary, with a company history project also being undertaken.

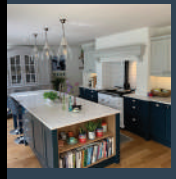
Banks began life as a surface coal mining business, with the Edward Pit at Tow Law being its first surface coal mine, and it went on to successfully develop, operate and restore more than 115 surface coal mining sites through the following 46 years.

The Group began to diversify in the 1980s, with successful new businesses in transport, property, landfill and plant maintenance all being added to the group, which is thought to have been unique in using revenues from mining operations to set up and grow a substantial renewable energy business, Banks Renewables.

After the ending of UK coal mining in 2020, Banks Mining turned its hand to the mining of gypsum for use in construction. After generating more than three million MWh of renewable electricity from its portfolio of onshore wind farms over almost 20 years, Banks Renewables was sold to the world's largest dedicated transition investor, Brookfield Asset Management, in 2023.

In the same year, Banks established its own housebuilding division, Banks Homes, which is now developing a growing portfolio of high-quality residential developments across the North East and Yorkshire, where the company opened its Harewood office in 2020.

As part of its longstanding 'Development with Care' approach to its work, Banks has also awarded grants totalling more than £7.5m to more than 1,300 community groups, voluntary organisations and environmental projects, with further significant community investment now in the pipeline.



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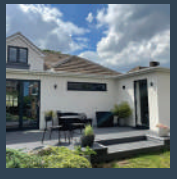

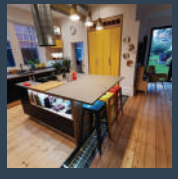

JWD

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Myth Busters Coming Soon: The Renters' Rights Act Explained

With the Renters' Rights Act set to come into effect on 1st May, it's no surprise that many landlords are feeling uncertain about what lies ahead. Change in legislation can often bring concern — especially when there's a flood of conflicting information circulating online and across the industry.

At Wright Residential, we understand these concerns. That's why, over the coming weeks, we'll be launching a dedicated "Myth Busters" series — designed to separate fact from fiction and give landlords the clarity they need to move forward with confidence.

Why the Confusion?

Whenever new legislation is introduced, speculation follows. Unfortunately, not all of it is accurate.

We're already hearing a range of statements such as:

- "Landlords won't be able to regain possession of their property"
- "All tenancies will become indefinite overnight"
- "It will be impossible to manage problem tenants"

While there are significant changes coming, many of these claims are exaggerated or misunderstood. The reality is far more balanced — and importantly, there will still be clear processes and protections in place for landlords.

Our Approach: Supporting Landlords Through Change

Our goal is simple: to keep you informed, reassured, and prepared.

Through our upcoming Myth Busters series, we'll:

- Break down key elements of the Renters' Rights Act
- Address common misconceptions
- Provide clear, practical guidance
- Help you understand how the changes will impact your portfolio

We believe that with the right information, landlords can continue to operate successfully and confidently — even as the landscape evolves.

You're Not Alone

It's completely understandable to feel cautious about these upcoming changes. For many landlords, property is not just an investment — it's a long-term financial plan, and stability matters.

That's exactly why we're here.

Whether you're a seasoned landlord or just starting out, our team at Wright Residential is committed to offering honest advice, clear communication, and ongoing support.

Let's Talk

If you'd like to discuss how the Renters' Rights Act may affect you, or simply want some reassurance ahead of the changes, we'd love to hear from you.

Pop in for a coffee and a chat, send us an email, or give us a call — we're always happy to help.

Coming Next Month...

Keep an eye out for our Myth Busters series launching next month, where we'll be tackling the biggest misconceptions head-on and giving you the facts you can trust.

Until then, remember — not everything you hear is true.

And with Wright Residential by your side, you'll always have clarity when it matters most.

www.wrightresidential.co.uk

Esh Construction strengthens communities through housing and public realm delivery

Hillside Gardens, Middlesbrough

Planning permission has been granted for an extra care facility at Seaham Garden Village

With a growing pipeline of residential and regeneration schemes now moving forward, Esh Construction is delivering tangible progress across the region.

The regional contractor is advancing major housing developments, affordable homes and high-profile public realm projects that are designed to support long-term community growth, improve local environments and create places people can be proud of.

Extra care planning permission secured

Plans to deliver an extra care scheme and two apartment blocks for over 55s at Seaham Garden Village have been given the go ahead by Durham County Council's planning committee.

The development, led by northern housing association Karbon Homes, will deliver 118 extra care apartments, designed to help people with differing levels of care and support needs to live well and independently, and 93 apartments for over 55s.

Esh Construction is the lead contractor for the 750-home Seaham Garden Village development, and the recent planning approval will mark the fourth phase of the project.

Grant Watson, Construction Director at Esh Construction, said: "We're proud to be continuing our strong relationship with Karbon on the next phase of Seaham Garden Village, bringing forward an extra care development that will make a real difference to people's lives.

"The scheme responds directly to a growing need for high-quality, supported housing in the area, helping residents to live independently while remaining part of a thriving community - we're looking forward to working closely with Karbon to help realise the long-term vision for the garden village."

Homes handed over in Middlesbrough

Esh Construction's affordable housing team has also reached a major milestone in Middlesbrough where more than half of the 296 new homes at its Hillside Gardens development have been handed over to social housing provider Thirteen Group.

149 of the properties have now been handed over at the £56 million development, with the remaining 147 homes expected to be completed this summer.

Mark Binns, Operations Director at Esh Construction, said: "Reaching this major milestone at Hillside Gardens is a significant moment for everyone involved and reflects the strong partnership between Esh Construction, Thirteen Group and Middlesbrough Council. Handing over 149 highquality, affordable homes on a site that lay vacant for more than a decade underlines our shared commitment to creating sustainable communities that will benefit the area for generations to come.

"Hillside Gardens marks the final phase of three key projects delivered for Thirteen Group in Middlesbrough which has brought more than 540 new affordable homes to the town."

Restoring connections across the Tees

Work is progressing at Stockton Waterfront Urban Park, a transformational regeneration scheme that will reconnect Stockton town centre with the River Tees and create a vibrant new public space for residents and visitors.

Delivered by Esh Construction on behalf of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, the £23 million urban park is a central part of the council's long-term vision to revitalise the town centre.

A recent milestone has involved the extension of the Millennium Footbridge, which spans the River Tees. Once complete, it will reinstate an important pedestrian connection between the High Street and the riverside, improving accessibility to the new urban park. The works have involved the installation of a 16.8metre main span, weighing approximately 19 tonnes, lifted into position using a 110tonne crane, with additional wing sections installed using a 60tonne crane.

Construction continues across the park, including landscaping, public realm works and the formation of an amphitheatre and terraced seating overlooking the river.

Stockton Waterfront Urban Park is expected to open in late spring 2026.

To find out more about Esh Construction, visit www.eshgroup.co.uk

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Banks Homes opens doors to new residential developments

The four-bedroom Broadoak at Banks Homes' Cornfields development in Yarm

Housebuilder Banks Homes has opened the doors to some of the new homes at its latest residential developments.

The County Durham-headquartered developer held two Open House weekend events at its Cornfields site in Yarm to give homebuyers the chance to look around some of the different property types that are on offer there and that will also be available at its forthcoming Pastures development in Hambleton in North Yorkshire.

And after welcoming dozens of visitors to The Cornfields over two busy and successful weekends, more than 20 of the new properties have already been reserved across the two developments.

Banks Homes is building up to 109 high quality family homes at its Cornfields site, which is the first of its developments to feature show homes based on the company's bespoke range of property designs.

A total of 11 different house types will be available at The Cornfields, with all the properties being fitted with advanced smart heating systems, air source heat pumps and electric vehicle car charging points.

The four and five-bedroom homes come with ground floor underfloor heating as standard, along with selected house types having 2.6m high ceilings on the ground floor.

The Pastures, which is Banks Homes's first residential development in North Yorkshire, will include 62 high-quality private and affordable homes of different sizes and types, including ten bungalows.

Each home at The Pastures will feature an advanced smart heating system, a full range of integrated kitchen appliances, a Ring doorbell and a fully-turfed rear garden, while some of the properties will include underfloor heating and higher ceilings.

Part of the County Durham-headquartered Banks Group, Banks Homes is building a growing portfolio of high-quality residential sites across North East England and Yorkshire, with work well under way at its Cathedral Meadows site in West Rainton and a number of new developments set to come through the planning system this year.

Aisling Ramshaw, sales and marketing director at Banks Homes, says: "Our Open House weekends were designed to give visitors the chance to see how we're creating our different types of sustainable, future-proofed homes and to decide which ones might provide the best options for them and their families.

"The response we had from visitors and their comments on the quality of the new homes we're creating couldn't have been more positive.

"We're already seeing a huge amount of interest in our bespoke range of new home designs and very pleased to see this translating into homebuyers taking increasing numbers of pre-reservations off plan from us."

New homes are now available at The Cornfields from £328,950, with the five-bedroom Sheraton and four-bedroom Hawthorne show home properties open for viewing there five days a week.

New homes are also available at The Pastures from £275,950, with its show home set to open later in the spring.

For further information on all Banks Homes' developments, please call 0191 378 6205 or visit www.bankshomes.co.uk

Neil Turner

Energy woes – moving to a more sustainable solution

By Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield

As we move towards spring and warmer weather – yes, I do live in hope - I am very conscious of the current turmoil in the Middle East on energy prices.

Separately, from April, the Energy capped prices are coming down with a 6% reduction in gas and a 13% reduction in the electricity (for domestic properties). It is quite possible that we will see an increase later in the year if the current issues in Iran continue much longer.

There has been remarkably little news on the energy cap and its significance. Various elements of the electricity bill, including a contribution towards PV and heat pumps, are being moved to general taxation. This is very sensible and starts the gradual shift – and need – for electricity to become cheaper relative to gas.

If consumers and commercial clients are going to move across to electricity-based heating, which is more efficient than gas heating, then the core unit costs of electricity must come down. This is an important first step and more reductions will be needed.

I have seen lots of commentators and knowledgeable people noting that electricity prices need to come down to generate interest in heat pumps and create a real demand. That demand will create the marketplace. Only when the maths makes sense will the majority of people change their decisions on new boilers.

I have written before that I am fan of heat pumps for many reasons. They are reliable, safe and use less carbon than fossil-fuelled alternatives. They can be made even more efficient when combined with PV / wind turbines and further again, with batteries.

Even if you are not convinced by the green credentials and sadly many people still deny the issues surrounding climate, then financially we need to see the argument become so much stronger. More people will be influenced by economics alongside the green arguments.

What the events of the last month have shown, once more, is how we all are reliant on fossil fuels and affected by the volatility of price fluctuations. I am not going to comment on those events, but the impact shows why all property development must try to mitigate the potential impact of rising fuel prices with strategies that avoid gas/oil and focus on self-generation.

All developments for domestic and commercial use need to reduce energy use, so it's essential that improving the U values (thermal efficiency targets) must be a constant focus. The better insulated a building, then the less energy it uses. It sounds so obvious doesn't it.

So, designing low energy buildings in combination with sustainable plant energy choices helps isolate you from the wider world issues, and the potential increases in gas and electric prices.

With the knowledge and help of mechanical and electrical engineers (M+E), as architects we encourage clients to think about green energy. It's always complicated when telling a client that an element of their project will have a higher capital outlay, but over time the payback and the green credentials will be worth it. Life is about choices and, at the moment, it never seems to get easier.

Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield can be contacted on 0191 384 9470 or email n.turner@hlpuk.com www.howarthlitchfield.com

youngsRPS announces Associate Director promotions to strengthen future leadership

(L-R) William Thornton, Kirsty Meek, Helen Proud, Emma Smith, Emma Todd, Justin Coan and Katie Proctor

youngsRPS, a property consultancy firm working across the rural, residential, commercial and development sectors in Northern England and Yorkshire, has appointed seven Associate Directors, marking a significant and strategic investment in the long-term future of the business.

The appointments recognise leadership and expertise from across the firm, with promotions spanning different professional disciplines, geographical areas and business functions - including both fee-earning and operational roles. This approach reflects the firm's belief that its success is driven by collaboration across the whole organisation.

The following team members have been promoted to Associate Director:

- **Emma Smith**, Rural Chartered Surveyor - Sedgefield
- **Emma Todd**, Head of Marketing
- **Helen Johnston**, Rural Chartered Surveyor – Hexham and Scotland
- **Justin Coan**, Rural Chartered Surveyor - Hexham
- **Katie Proctor**, Rural Chartered Surveyor – Hexham Mart
- **Kirsty Meek**, Rural Chartered Surveyor - Hexham
- **William Thornton**, Head of Residential - Hexham

By promoting from within and across diverse sectors and regions, youngsRPS is reinforcing a leadership structure that reflects how the business operates today, while positioning it strongly for the future.

The promotions follow senior leadership appointments made in 2025, when Harry Morshead and Tom Whitehead were appointed as Directors and Joanne Metcalfe and Paul Fairlamb were appointed to the Board.

Together, these steps form part of a clear and considered approach to leadership continuity, ensuring experience is retained while the next generation of leaders is developed from within the business.

Graeme Bruce, Managing Director said: "These promotions represent an important investment in the future leadership of the firm. By recognising talent from across different teams and locations, we are strengthening the business with individuals who understand our clients, our culture and the direction we are taking.

The firm is committed to developing people from within and to creating clear progression opportunities for those who contribute to performance, culture and long-term growth; not solely through fee-earning roles, but through leadership and impact across the business."

The business has been operating for over 140 years and has a strong presence across Northern England, North Yorkshire and Scotland. youngsRPS continues to take a thoughtful, future-focused approach to leadership development and succession planning.

www.youngsrps.com

Cochran bolsters its team with senior appointment

Leading industrial boiler specialist, Cochran has appointed Leigh Freeman as Head of People and Culture. Based at its headquarters in Newbie in South-West Scotland, Leigh will lead on the company's recruitment, people strategy, talent development and culture.

Hailing from the North East, Leigh brings more than 30 years' experience in HR and recruitment to this newly created role and holds an MA in Human Resource Management, a NEBOSH general certificate, and is a qualified workplace mediator and Fellow of the CIPD (FCIPD).

Leigh's expertise and strategic outlook will benefit Cochran as she spearheads aligning the company's talent strategy with business growth. She will lead the company's people and culture strategy and help to enhance employee engagement and attract future talent.

Leigh said: "I'm excited to be joining as Head of People and Culture - a new role that underlines Cochran's commitment to putting its people first.

"I've had the pleasure of getting to know and supporting the senior team over the last few years in a consultancy role and this has given me a clear insight into the company's culture and ambitions. I'm really forward to building on the strong foundations already in place and helping to shape the next phase of growth."

Devine Chemicals sets sights on the future following relocation

Devine Chemicals, an additives manufacturer and global distributor to the coatings and construction industries, has moved to larger premises to support further business growth.

The move follows several years of strong and sustained business growth and forms a key part of Devine Chemicals' strategy to drive expansion.

The 30,000 sq ft modern premises in County Durham, is double the size of its previous site five miles away and meets the company's current operational needs and long-term growth ambitions. The expansion plans include the installation of a bespoke innovation and production area from which the next generation of Devine Chemicals' additives will be developed, as well as investment in machinery and warehousing capabilities. This will enable the company to increase production capabilities and reduce logistic overheads.

This move will allow Devine Chemicals, which has locations in Haslingden, UK, Holland, Europe and the U.S., to further expand its services and manufacturing capacity to meet the growing demand for its products from across the globe.

Daniel Devine, Managing Director, said: "This move marks a transformative milestone for Devine Chemicals as it gives us the capacity we need to grow, drive further innovation in our industry through creating new products and support our customers in delivering their own solutions."

Horizon Works announces new national series of Invented podcast

North East-based industrial marketing company Horizon Works has announced the next evolution of its innovation-focused podcast, Invented, with a new series set to launch in April.

The refreshed programme will feature more frequent episodes and a broader national reach, shining a spotlight on the UK's most exciting innovators, engineers, scientists, and technology leaders.

Invented was created to give pioneering organisations and individuals a platform to share the ideas, technologies, and breakthroughs shaping the future. Each episode offers listeners an inside look at the challenges, opportunities and creative thinking driving progress across industries including advanced manufacturing, renewables, subsea engineering, space and life sciences.

The upcoming series marks a significant step forward for the podcast. Horizon Works will broaden its focus to include innovators from across the country, delivering richer insights and more frequent episodes to meet growing demand.

Samantha Vassallo, founder of Horizon Works and Invented said: "I founded Invented because I'm genuinely inspired by the people pushing boundaries. I wanted to build a platform that celebrates the brilliant minds pushing boundaries across the UK and gives them the space to tell the stories that often go unheard.

"This next chapter gives us the chance to celebrate even more innovators from across the UK."

Finding your space

By Lucy Davenport, Centre Manager, Hoults

When people first come to see me, they're usually looking for an office. But what they really need is something a bit more personal than that.

Lucy Davenport

Every business I meet is different. Some are just starting out, two people, big ideas, and not quite enough room at the kitchen table anymore. Others are growing fast and need space that can keep up with them. And then there are the established teams who want a fresh environment that reflects who they are now, not who they were five years ago.

That's why I never start with the space itself. I start with the people.

I'll always ask a few simple questions. How does your team actually work day to day? Do you need quiet focus, or are you constantly collaborating? Are you planning to grow in the next year? What kind of environment helps you do your best work?

Because the truth is, the "perfect" office looks completely different depending on the answers.

At Hoults Yard, we're lucky to have a real mix of spaces, from smaller setups for a couple of desks right through to larger offices for growing teams. But it's not just about size. It's about how a space feels, how it functions, and how it supports the way you work.

I've seen businesses arrive needing just a couple of desks, then gradually expand as their team grows. I've watched collaborations spark simply because people share the same building. And I've had clients tell me they feel more motivated just by being in a space that actually works for them.

That's the part I enjoy most, helping people find somewhere they can see themselves, not just somewhere they can fit.

Because an office should be more than four walls and a few desks. It should give you room to think, to grow, and to build something.

So, when someone walks through the door and says, "We're just looking for an office," I always smile a little.

We'll find you more than that.

And if you're starting to explore your own space, I'd love to help you find the right fit for you and your team.

lucy.davenport@houltsyard.co.uk
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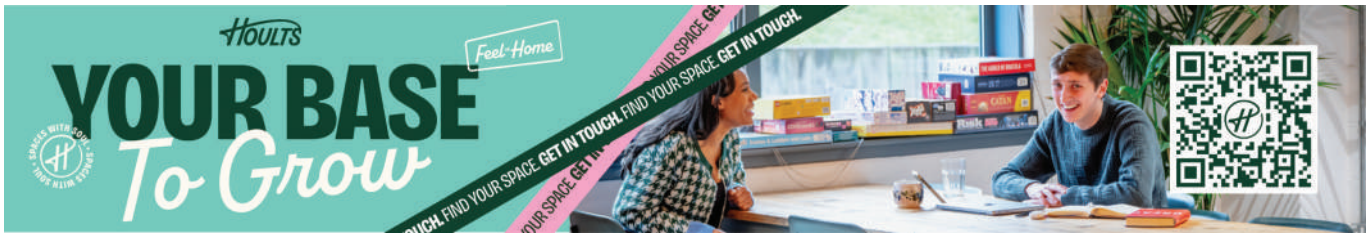

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The joke's on us!

By Philip M Bowe, BIV Bowes

I know we've just had April Fools' Day, and I like a laugh at least as much as anyone else, but some April Fools' tricks are mean and nasty. And I feel Rachel Reeves is playing several on the British economy.

As regular readers of my column will know, I do have strong opinions on many subjects (a friend calls them my 'Rants'), but I try to balance my views with an argument for the other side to show that I do understand there is an alternative point of view to most arguments. But there comes a time when we all have to stand up for what we believe is right without excuses.

We are about to see swathes of the property and business markets decimated by the latest proposals from Rachel Reeves and our fine Government. I won't dwell on the effect on the Private Rented Sector that the new Renters Right Act is already having and is only going to get worse (for both landlords and tenants) but I will talk about business rates.

Business rates are supposed to be set at a level that reflect market rent for a premises; the official definition by the Valuation Office Agency (the part of HMRC that does the work) as "The estimated annual rent a non-domestic property could have been let for on the open market at a fixed valuation date, assuming certain standard conditions."

The previous administration gave some quite generous subsidies during and following the covid situation to businesses, particularly in the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure sectors. However, publicans and restaurateurs in particular are seeing their Rateable Values not just increase in the latest list, but skyrocket. I do have some clients who are looking at relatively nominal increases – but from a falsely high, 2023 figure. Many others are seeing already incorrect figures being exploded into totally unfeasible figures.

If Rateable Value is supposed to reflect Market Rent, how do the Government and the Valuation Office Agency justify an increase for one of my clients from RV £125,0000 to £242,000? And in another case, between 2023 and 2026 an increase in the RV at their restaurant from £40,250 to £41,750 – which doesn't seem too bad, until one realises that the 2017 figure was only £11,750.

This madness must stop or even more pubs and restaurants will go to the wall.

The trade is already hard enough with less people eating out and increased overheads from raw goods to staff costs and energy costs and it seems that this Government and the Valuation Office Agency mandarins are working in tandem in a coffin factory for much of British business.

Can somebody please explain to me (and my clients) the fairness of this? I'll give a reward for anybody who can give me a reasoned argument for these mental increases.

As I said at the beginning of this article, I normally try to be balanced in my arguments and look at the other side – but here I'm afraid I just can't see it.

Final thought...

We have a new logo, see opposite! What do you all make of it?

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Preserving the past through conservation engineering

By Dominic Echlin, Director, Narro Associates

At Narro Associates, we've long had a passion for old buildings. Whether it's a medieval timber frame hidden behind a modern ceiling, a leaning churchyard tomb, or a centuries-old watermill, these structures carry stories that deserve to be cared for thoughtfully and responsibly.

Narro has five engineers who hold the Conservation Accredited Engineer (CARE) qualification, a specialist accreditation recognising expertise in the sensitive care of historic buildings. Our Newcastle team also has extensive experience working with a wide range of older and listed structures.

A hidden medieval timber frame – Saddler Street, Durham

Sometimes the most exciting discoveries happen by accident. During refurbishment works at a property on Saddler Street in Durham, builders removed a modern ceiling and uncovered a timber roof structure likely dating back to the late medieval period. It had been there all along, hidden from view. As repairs were required, the Local Authority specified that a conservation-led approach should be adopted.

Working with Musson Brown Architects, our team was appointed to assess the condition of the timbers and develop a strategy to preserve them. We combined traditional survey techniques with handheld laser scanning – a technology that creates precise three-dimensional records of a structure without physical contact – to document every beam, joint, and area of damage in detail.

Saddler Street

Interestingly, many of the timbers appeared to have been reused from an even older building, a common practice in earlier centuries when good-quality timber was too valuable to waste. This added an additional layer of historical significance. Our repair strategy was guided by a simple but important principle: retain as much original material as possible. Where timbers were damaged, they were supported with supplementary timber rather than replaced. All repairs were designed to be reversible and clearly distinguishable from the original fabric, allowing future generations to understand what is historic and what is new.

Much of the project's success was due to the skill and enthusiasm of the on-site carpenters, who took real pride in working with the historic timberwork and carefully considered every repair detail.

Dominic Echlin

A tilting tomb and a church under investigation – St Andrew's, Newcastle

St Andrew's Church in Newcastle is one of the city's four original medieval parishes, with parts of the building dating back to the 12th century. Its churchyard contains a number of historic monuments, including the table tomb of James Glynn, an iron founder from the Ouseburn Foundry who died in 1826.

Over time, the tomb had gradually tilted and settled, giving it a dramatic appearance. Working alongside architect Michael Atkinson and a team of archaeologists, we carefully dismantled the tomb and investigated the ground beneath to understand the cause of the movement. Our solution was deliberately

low-impact. Rather than installing deep foundations or pouring concrete, which could have disturbed buried archaeology, the stone base was lifted and reset on a carefully prepared bed of compacted crushed stone. This approach solved the problem while respecting the historic fabric and archaeological context.

We are now turning our attention to the church building itself, where there are signs of cracking and movement within the stone walls. Like many historic churches, St Andrew's has been altered and extended many times over the centuries. Understanding this complex history is essential in diagnosing why the building is behaving as it is today and determining whether intervention is required.

St Andrew's

A riverside mill in need of care – The Old Fulling Mill, Durham

Located beside the River Wear at the foot of Durham Cathedral, the Old Fulling Mill is a Grade II listed building with origins in the 17th and 18th centuries. Durham University appointed us to undertake a detailed structural assessment to establish the building's condition and identify appropriate repair options.

Our inspection identified several issues, including timber decay to first-floor joists, insect damage to roof timbers, and ground movement associated with an old culvert beneath the building that once carried the mill race. Each issue required specialist investigation to correctly diagnose the underlying causes. Our recommendations ranged from improving ventilation and reducing damp within the walls to commissioning a CCTV survey of the culvert to assess its condition internally.

The Old Fulling Mill

This type of investigative work is at the heart of conservation engineering: understanding how a building has evolved over decades or centuries and identifying solutions that address defects without causing unnecessary harm.

Why conservation engineering matters

What unites these projects is a shared philosophy: take time to understand the building before intervening; keep repairs as minimal as possible (often reducing costs in the process); and always consider long-term performance. Historic buildings are irreplaceable. Once original material is lost, it cannot be recovered.

At Narro Associates in Newcastle, we combine rigorous structural engineering with a deep respect for historic fabric. Conservation engineering is painstaking work, but it is also immensely rewarding, helping to ensure that the North East's remarkable built heritage survives for future generations to use and enjoy.

For more information contact Dominic Echlin, Narro, The Cluny Works, 36 Lime Street, Newcastle Upon Tyne NE1 2PQ on 0191 300 3514 or mail@narroassociates.com

Forefront – Derek Nicholson, commercial manager at Classic Masonry with Ann Turner, church warden, St Hilda's Grade I listed parish church in Hartlepool and Ian Lightfoot, Lottery bid co-ordinator

Specialist knowledge of heritage projects

A £250,000 contract to provide a multi-trade principal contractor role for St Hilda's Church, Hartlepool, is one of several ecclesiastical projects completed by North Shields-based Classic Masonry.

Further contracts worth a total of £100,000 were undertaken at locations across the North East, including Christ Church, Shieldfield and St Andrew's Church, both Newcastle.

Classic Masonry is one of Northern England's leading specialists in stonemasonry and architectural precast concrete, with over thirty years of experience in all sectors of the construction industry.

The company offers a comprehensive range of services, including design development, stone sourcing and selection, cutting, profiling, carving and fabrication. It undertakes both new build masonry construction and restoration and conservation projects, which include cleaning, decontamination and facade consolidation. Its expertise spans both modern and historic environments.

St Hilda's is a Grade I listed parish church in Hartlepool, renowned as a masterpiece of Early English architecture. Standing in a commanding position on the Headland overlooking the North Sea, it is believed to occupy the site of a 7th-century double monastery where St Hilda served as Abbess before founding Whitby Abbey. Among its many architectural features are massive flying buttresses that support the tower, originally built to prevent the structure from shifting due to its proximity to the sea.

In its principal contractor role, Classic Masonry undertook masonry repair, re-roofing, leadwork and rainwater goods, together with restoration of clerestory windows, installation of internal glazed partitions and associated electrical work.

Funding for the project came via the National Lottery Heritage at Risk programme which identifies all sites most at risk of being lost because of neglect, decay or inappropriate development.

St Andrew's Church is widely considered the oldest church in Newcastle. Dating back to the 12th century, it serves as an active Anglican parish church known for its historic architecture and peaceful grounds. The building contains more original 12th-century stonework than any other church in the city, including a notable Norman chancel arch with chevron ornamentation. Classic Masonry was commissioned to take down and rebuild the tomb of Ouseburn Foundry owner, James Glynn, which had become unsafe. The works were undertaken in liaison with an archaeologist.

Christchurch, in Shieldfield, Newcastle, is a Grade II listed Anglican parish church, built between 1859 and 1861 in the Victorian Gothic style, it serves as both a place of worship and a multi-purpose community hub.

The company undertook a range of works including selected areas of repointing of the walls to the adjoining church hall, hoodmould repairs to one of the principle main arch windows and the lifting and rebedding of water tables to one of the gable ends. The proper care, repair and maintenance of stone in a building or structure is crucial to its longevity.

Mike Moody, managing director at Classic Masonry said: "The three churches all had different requirements and it is a tribute to the depth of skill and expertise within our teams that we were able to provide solutions we know will stand the test of time. While each project differed, the combining element that brought them together was their wonderful history and heritage that goes back many hundreds of years. It was a pleasure to play our part in restoring and protecting them for other generations to enjoy well into the future."

classicmasonry.co.uk

Education Trust CEO receives OBE at Windsor Castle

The CEO of a multi-academy trust in the North East who was awarded an OBE for services to education has called it a "wonderful but surprising" honour.

Brendan Tapping OBE and his wife, Sarah

Brendan Tapping OBE attended Windsor Castle with his wife Sarah, younger brother Bernard and sister-in-law Angelica to be presented with his prestigious medal by the Princess Royal.

"The evening before the ceremony, we were on our way out for dinner and I looked up at Windsor Castle and thought, 'These things don't happen to people like me from a small mining village in County Durham' – I think that was the moment it really hit me," said Brendan, who has led Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust as CEO for more than five years.

"I was born into a wonderful family in Murton, a mining community I remain rooted in.

"I thoroughly enjoyed the day. Seeing the State Apartments was mind-blowing and Princess Anne was lovely. She talked about Bishop Chadwick and she knew that one of our schools – St Bede's in Peterlee – was my old school.

"It was very special to have my family in the room with me to share that recognition. Just like the fantastic people I work with, they have contributed to this achievement too, especially my wife Sarah who has always supported me."

Brendan's first teaching post was in Hartlepool in 1991, before moving on to various roles, including headteacher and executive headteacher, across schools in South Shields, Peterlee and Hebburn.

His OBE was announced in the King's New Year's Honours List. On the announcement, he said he was "humbled" and thanked his wife, family and colleagues, past and present for their support and contribution to education in the North-east.

"Ultimately, they have contributed to the work that we've done together in education in the North East, so I feel that it's recognition, not just for me, but of the people who I've worked with as well," he added.

"I am driven by my genuine belief that education is the key that opens doors for people, enabling them to be the best versions of themselves and live fulfilling lives."

Daniel O'Mahoney, chair of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, said: "Brendan has, for many years, been recognised as amongst the elite senior education professionals in the UK and this accolade is confirmation of his outstanding leadership qualities.

"There is much more that Brendan and the Trust will achieve in the coming years, not least an exciting new school build programme that will, as with all we do, be focused on allowing pupils to excel and be the very best versions of themselves."

Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust has 31 schools (26 primary, five secondary, four sixth forms and 15 nurseries), 1,350 employees and 11,000 pupils aged from two to 18.

In addition to his role with the Trust, Brendan is also on various boards including Schools North East, Housing Innovation and Construction Skills Academy (HICSA, Sunderland), Teach First Strategy Board and the Regional Schools Commissioner CEO Board.

www.bccet.org.uk

The RGS Newcastle Group: Two schools, one vision, a shared future

By Geoffrey Stanford, Executive Head of the RGS Newcastle Group and Neil Walker, Head of Westfield School

This spring marks an important milestone for education in the North East as Westfield School is to join the Royal Grammar School, Newcastle (RGS) to form the RGS Newcastle Group of Schools.

It is a development rooted in shared values, a commitment to exceptional pastoral care, and a deep belief in the transformative power of education.

Above all, it reflects our determination to secure a breadth of school options to suit a range of children and a strong and sustainable future for both school communities.

Westfield is a school with a long and proud history of nurturing its pupils. Families deeply value its warm ethos, small class sizes and excellent pastoral care. However, as many will recognise, the smallest independent schools have been feeling most sharply the effects of increasing financial pressures.

We believe that combining our expertise, facilities, and resources to form a group of schools, as is occurring in the independent schools' sector across the country, will provide an even richer educational experience for all students at RGS and at Westfield.

Royal Grammar School

Westfield School

For RGS, this partnership aligns closely with our long-held aspiration to offer high-quality early years provision. Our city centre site does not have the physical space to do so alone. The intended merger aims to strengthen both schools, providing a foundation for thoughtful collaboration while retaining distinct identities.

We understand that what matters most to families within our respective communities is continuity, stability and the protection of what makes each school special. Both schools will continue to operate as they do now, on their own sites, with their own staff, routines, admissions policies and cultures.

RGS will continue as an academically selective school, aiming to stretch and challenge its students. Westfield will remain proudly academically inclusive, offering a broad education that focuses on the development of the whole person.

There will also be positive opportunities for further collaboration in time. As relationships deepen, pupils may benefit from a wider range of clubs, activities, trips and shared expertise. These developments will grow gradually and with care, but the potential is exciting.

Geoffrey Stanford, RGS

Neil Walker, WS

Both schools are united by a belief in opportunity, ambition and the transformative power of exceptional education. This new chapter strengthens that vision. It ensures long-term resilience, opens the door to thoughtful collaboration and places both Westfield and RGS in a strong position to serve future generations.

www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk/about-us/group

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Pupils celebrate British Science Week 2026

Pupils across Mowden Hall enjoyed a week of experiments, demonstrations and inspiring talks as part of British Science Week 2026.

The nationwide celebration, organised by the British Science Association, aims to inspire young people to explore science, technology, engineering and maths and to recognise the role science plays in everyday life.

The week began with Year 8 girls leading mixed-age teams in researching female STEM "superheroes". Each group created a poster exploring their scientist's journey, achievements and impact on the world of science.

Year 7 pupils then entertained the school with an outdoor science show featuring exploding poppers, the classic Coke and Mentos reaction, floating tattoos, disappearing ink and even turning water into "wine". The Science Department also welcomed Year 1 and Year 2 pupils from Pre Prep into the laboratories, where they watched a dramatic Elephant's Toothpaste demonstration before creating their own erupting volcanoes.

On Thursday evening, pupils and families enjoyed a STEM Roadshow from Gordon Montgomery of Oundle School Outreach, who amazed the audience with mathematical tricks and puzzles. The week concluded with an assembly from Christoph Oing of the Northern Centre for Cancer Care, who spoke about his work in cancer research and the persistence required to make scientific breakthroughs.

Head of Mowden Hall, Phil Sturt, said: "It was fantastic to see pupils of all ages so engaged and enthusiastic about science. British Science Week is a wonderful opportunity to spark curiosity and inspire the next generation of scientists."

www.mowdenhall.org.uk

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Mowden marks World Book Day

The pupils and staff at Mowden marked World Book Day with a week full of stories, imagination, and the joy of reading.

This year, the school celebrated the theme Reading for Pleasure, highlighting how books can inspire enjoyment well beyond the classroom.

The week kicked off with the Prep School Librarians delighting the youngest pupils during the Pre Prep assembly by reading The Tiger Who Came to Tea. Judith Kerr's much-loved story, featuring the unforgettable tiger with his extraordinary appetite, captivated children and set a joyful tone for the celebrations. Across the school, pupils joined in a Famous Five-themed treasure hunt, following clues inspired by Enid Blyton's adventurous tales.

One of the highlights was Tuesday's special reading sessions, which evoked memories of the classic BBC programme Jackanory. Dubbed "Mowdenory", with staff bringing stories to life for pupils, capturing their imaginations with some vivid performances.

"Listening to a good reader is one of the great pleasures of childhood," said Mrs Jo Phillipson, Head of English and Drama at Mowden Hall School.

"A well-told story brings characters to life and draws children into new worlds. Hearing stories read aloud helps develop understanding of language, rhythm, and expression, while also nurturing imagination and curiosity."

In Pre Prep, pupils enjoyed dressing up as their favourite storybook characters, from classic fairytale figures to adventurous heroes. Their colourful costumes added a touch of magic and enthusiasm to the day, as children shared stories and celebrated reading together.

www.mowdenhall.org.uk

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Darlington College: A year of innovation, influence and investment in the future

An artists impression of STEM Centre

Darlington College has stepped confidently into a landmark year, blending regional influence, national engagement and transformative plans that will reshape opportunities for learners and employers alike.

In one of the College's most inspiring recent achievements, environmentally conscious science students will take their pioneering water-saving research to the House of Lords.

Learners on the Level 3 BTEC Extended Diploma in Applied Science have spent months exploring how both the farming sector and AI-driven industries can reduce water consumption on a massive scale. Their proposals, ranging from shifting farmland irrigation practices to exploring non-traditional cooling methods for data storage, showcase not only scientific rigour but a remarkable sense of civic responsibility. Eight second-year students and five first-year students will present their findings to the Lords' Environment and Climate Change Committee, with potential for the ideas to influence live pilot projects nationwide.

This extraordinary opportunity is both academically enriching and personally empowering. As senior lecturer Stephen Ashfield noted, the chance to inform real policy and present directly to ministers gives students "a real opportunity to make a difference in the world." Their

passion is echoed in the voices of students like Olivia Richardson, who highlighted that switching from sprinkler systems to drip irrigation could save farmers up to 70% of their current water usage, an insight with enormous environmental value.

The College's involvement with the committee demonstrates not only vocational excellence, but also the forward-looking, solution-focused thinking that defines Darlington College's ethos.

Alongside these remarkable student achievements, large strides have been taken towards one of the most significant educational developments in the region. A state-of-the-art STEM Centre to be constructed at Darlington's growing Science Park and forming part of the new Education Quarter.

With Cabinet approval now secured, the Centre will be positioned alongside the rest of the campus, next to Teesside University and CPI, creating a vibrant hub for science, innovation and skills development. Construction is expected to begin later this year.

The purpose of the STEM Centre is clear. The Science Park steering group, working with The local MP, other partners and the Department for Business and Trade identified a skills gap in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The STEM Centre directly answers that need, creating structured pathways from school into high-value careers. The facility will allow major employers to recruit and upskill locally, reducing the region's dependence on external labour markets and strengthening the local economy.

Darlington College Principal and CEO David Gartland described the initiative as "a powerful example of what we can achieve when we work towards a common goal. Together, we are creating a world-class, state-of-the-art STEM facility for Darlington. It is intentionally inclusive, ensuring people from under-represented groups can thrive."

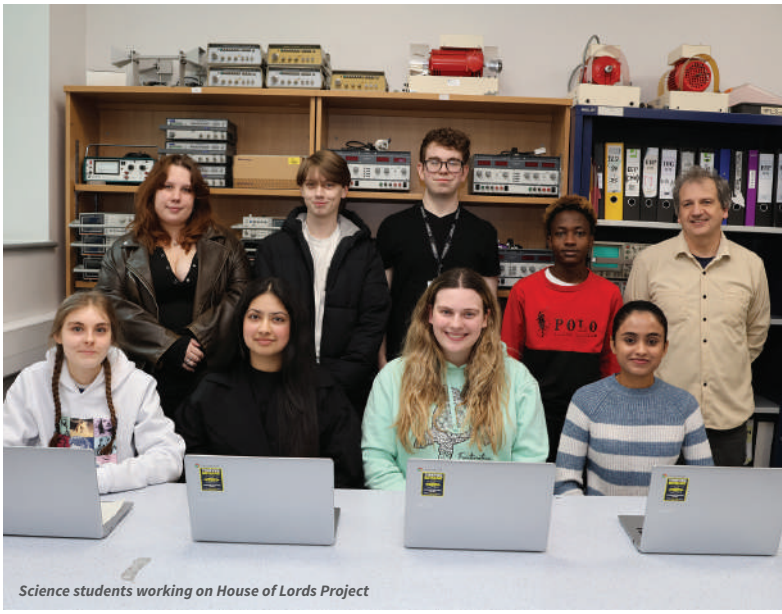
Funding momentum behind the project has been significant. Chancellor Rachel Reeves has confirmed £16m through the Growth Mission Fund, complemented by £5m from Darlington's Pride in Place programme. Final progression is now subject to Government approval of the full business case and release of grant funding.

To support the development of the Centre and the region's future skills needs, Darlington College is also expanding its curriculum offer. As part of the ongoing enhancement of digital and technical learning, two brand new T-Levels will launch for school leavers to enrol on to from September 2026:

T-Level in Software Development

T-Level in Digital Support and Cyber Security

The 2 year qualifications studied at Level 3 are designed to prepare learners for a career in the ever expanding digital sector. Combining classroom learning with a 45-day industry placement, these programmes give the knowledge, technical skills and workplace experience needed to progress into skilled employment, that employers are looking for in the region. Learners can progress on to an apprenticeship or higher education to further their knowledge before entering the workplace.



Science students working on House of Lords Project

These additions cement the College's commitment to cutting-edge digital education and respond directly to employer demand in high-growth, high-value sectors. Curriculum planning for full time provision and additional training and development is also in progress to be released from 2027 in further preparations for the STEM Centre opening in 2028.

Darlington College stands at a pivotal moment. From students shaping national environmental policy, to major investment in STEM and to progressive curriculum expansion the College is a powerful blend of aspiration and action.

2026 promises to be a year defined by ambition and realised through collaboration, innovation and community impact. The foundations being laid today will open doors for generations of learners, ensuring that Darlington not only keeps pace with the future, but helps shape it.

darlington.ac.uk

Science students in London preparing to go into House of Lords for their presentation

In conversation with...

Abbey Wood-Dobby

Abbey Wood-Dobby

Director, Little Adventurers Day Nursery

What inspired your vision for the LADN group, and how has that vision shaped the way Little Adventurers Day Nursery operates today?

My vision for Little Adventurers Day Nursery grew from a deep belief that childhood should feel calm, meaningful and full of curiosity.

Having worked across schools, the private sector and charities, I saw how powerful the early years are in shaping a child's confidence and sense of belonging. I wanted to create environments where children are truly known as individuals and where learning grows naturally through relationships, exploration and conversation.

That vision continues to guide everything we do. Our spaces are intentionally calm and inviting, and our practitioners focus on observing children closely and responding to their interests. Childhood should not be rushed – it should be a time to grow, explore and discover.

When you think about the ideal early years experience for a child, what does that look like within your nursery environment?

For me, the ideal early years experience is one where a child feels safe, valued and curious about the world around them.

In our nurseries, children are surrounded by adults who truly notice them – their interests, their ideas and the moments that spark their imagination. Our environments invite exploration rather than overwhelm children with noise or distraction.

We place a strong emphasis on language, relationships and meaningful play. When children have time, space and supportive adults around them, their confidence and love of learning grows naturally.

The EY sector is incredibly competitive. What sets Little Adventurers apart?

While beautiful environments matter, what truly sets Little Adventurers apart is the strength of our relationships with children and families.

Parents often tell us our nurseries feel calm and welcoming. That atmosphere is intentional. We invest heavily in our team, because skilled and confident practitioners create the best experiences for children.

We also see ourselves as part of a wider community, supporting families and building strong partnerships that help children thrive.

How do you create a culture where staff feel supported and motivated?

Creating a strong culture starts with listening. Early years practitioners do incredibly important work, and they deserve to feel respected and supported.

We invest in training, mentoring and leadership development so our team can grow professionally and feel proud of the work they do. We also encourage our team to step outside their comfort zones in a supportive way – reflecting on practice, trying new ideas and continually improving together.

When practitioners feel valued and confident, that positivity flows directly into the experiences children have each day.

Looking ahead, what opportunities excite you most?

There is growing national recognition of the importance of early childhood education, particularly around early language and strong leadership in the sector.

We are committed to continuing to develop evidence-informed practice and sharing what we have learned, contributing to the wider conversation through collaboration, training and sector leadership, while continuing to grow Little Adventurers in ways that stay true to our values.

Where would you hope the LADN group is in five years?

In five years, I hope Little Adventurers is recognised not only for the quality of our nurseries but also for supporting the development of the wider early years sector.

Most importantly, I hope the children and families who pass through our doors remember it as a place where they felt safe, valued and inspired to explore the world around them.

www.littleadventurersdaynursery.co.uk

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A Sporting Education

By Will Scott, Principal at Dame Allan's Schools

School sports can be a divisive subject. For some, it evokes memories of football triumphs, hard-earned trophies, and time spent with friends, and for others, memories of cold, wet fields and exhausting cross country runs.

Will Scott

Often, this depended on the school you went to, and how much they valued or were able to prioritise physical education.

Writing as Principal at Dame Allan's Schools, in Newcastle, sport is a huge part of our educational offering. We want all of our pupils to leave us with happy memories of their time in games lessons, understanding that moving their body is about much more than simply running laps of a field.

Sports build character. They help our young pupils discover true teamwork, recover from losses with courage, test themselves past their perceived limits, and discover new talents.

Every pupil, regardless of ability, can access top class sport at Dame Allan's. From Early Years, our youngest pupils have dedicated PE and games lessons with specialist staff, progressing to learning lots of different sports as they age through the Schools - from football, to hockey, netball, cricket, dance, rowing, rugby and more. Our aim is to embed physical activity in everyday life, allowing our pupils to benefit from the multitude of social, physical and mental benefits that regular exercise brings.

Alongside a dedicated physical education curriculum, our co-curriculum allows for exploration of even more sports and games. Table tennis, fencing, padel and more help to offer suitable sporting opportunities for as many pupils as possible. Often, our parents will tell us that their child - who they would not have considered 'sporty' - has flourished with these diverse opportunities. They may not be a natural rugby player, but they excel rowing in our Boat Club. Or may be shy in lessons, but thrive as part of our Year 9 hockey team. It's very much about identifying individual strengths, and encouraging pupils to have a go.

These opportunities to 'have a go' are often the first shoots that lead to sporting excellence for young people - having the confidence to try, try and try again. We are very proud to have many top-level young athletes amongst our pupils, including: an U16 England hockey player; several players on the Newcastle Red Bulls rugby pathway; basketball players training with the Newcastle Eagles; county cricketers, and NUFC junior footballers. Recently, our 1st XV rugby team played at Twickenham for a schools national final, whilst our netball team also secured a place in the national finals in Sheffield, in late March.

In order to create even more opportunities for all of our pupils, we have committed to continually improving our sporting facilities. Work will begin on our brand new all-weather pitch next term, with it expected to be finished in the autumn of this year. This pitch will widen access to sport for our pupils, giving them top-class facilities on-site and removing the need to bus pupils off-site for training and competitions. It will also be open for community use, supporting grassroots hockey and providing an additional income stream for the Schools.

With lots of inspiring sport on show recently, from the rugby Six Nations, to NUFC in the Champions League, and the Winter Olympics, we hope that our pupils will be brave enough to dream big in their sporting aspirations, but if their success is simply joining in a game of netball, we're very proud of them too.

We're here to support them, for every run, try, serve, and pass.

Find out more about Dame Allan's Schools by visiting their website www.dameallans.co.uk or contact the Head of Admissions on 0191 275 0608

Sunderland BIDs' Professionals Lunch

Representatives from businesses across Sunderland joined Sunderland BIDs' latest Professionals Lunch, where guests heard from guest speaker Kirsti McKernan of Just Eat about the company's decision to move into the city, along with their plans for future growth.

These regular, popular events, held at Sunderland College's City Bistro, bring together people from a wide range of backgrounds who enjoy the opportunity to network, as well as being kept up to date with relevant developments.

Independent production company tells communities' stories

North East–based production company Here You Belong is reshaping storytelling in the region by bringing untold, authentic stories to the forefront of documentary filmmaking—highlighting people's own words, lived experiences, and the voices of local communities.

Founded by North Shields business partners Kelly Hodgkiss and Gaby Zak, the company specialises in independent film and media production, with a focus on documentaries that amplify the voices of under-represented individuals and organisations. They prioritise community stories, using their expertise in film, photography, media, and business to help others share their authentic experiences. By working collaboratively with clients, they bridge gaps in knowledge, time, and budget—making high-quality media accessible to smaller organisations and using storytelling to reduce isolation and strengthen local communities.

The company helps people tell their real stories — in their own words — capturing real moments through photography and film that also helps to evidence positive social impact in local communities.

One standout project includes a short documentary created in collaboration with Cramlington Town Council, showcasing the council's shift to a people-first approach. The film captured voices from across the community, including Age UK, CVYP, The Wildlife Trust and local community groups, highlighting how the council actively asked residents what they wanted and worked collaboratively to deliver it.

"It wasn't about telling the community what they needed," says Gaby. "It was about listening to them — and that aligns perfectly with what we stand for. When it was completed, we screened it at Vue Cinema Cramlington, giving the community an opportunity to come together to celebrate each other and see their own stories."

Savannah shines at Sunday for Sammy

18-year-old Jarrow singer-songwriter Savannah Lily has described performing at this year's Sunday for Sammy concert as "an absolute honour" after taking to the stage at the Utilita Arena Newcastle in front of more than 5,500 people – twice in one night.

The talented young artist, a Sunday for Sammy grant recipient, was part of the charity's landmark 25th anniversary show – its first in six years following the pandemic hiatus – sharing the same bill as global stars including Sting, Lewis Capaldi and Matty Healy.

Savannah was awarded a Sunday for Sammy grant and for the arena performance, she delivered a stunning rendition of I Can't Make You Love Me by Bonnie Raitt — a song she has performed for several years.

Savannah first came to national attention when she appeared on The Voice Kids UK at just 14, later becoming a finalist in 2021. Following the show, she released her debut single – a rendition of Goodbye Yellow Brick Road by Elton John – the song she performed at her Blind Audition.

She has since released original singles including Twisted (2022) and most recently No More, continuing to develop her distinctive country-tinged pop sound while studying at Gateshead College.

Sunday for Sammy producer Ray Laidlaw said: "As a Sunday for Sammy grantee, Savannah Lilly represents the next generation of North East talent to emerge and with support from her tutors and peers at Gateshead College, the future looks bright for her."

Her latest single, No More, is out now.

Visitors welcome at Mary Ann Rogers Gallery

At last the sun has reappeared, the thermal underwear stowed away and the drive up to the gallery is lined with daffodils.

Visitors are welcome to wander round the country house gallery viewing paintings and prints reflecting the landscape and wildlife of this area through all the seasons of the year.

You might be lucky to catch Mary Ann mid-painting, and visitors are often treated to a quick demo of her unique style of watercolour painting.

A visit to Mary Ann rogers gallery, in the rugged landscape of the Reded valley, with sheep grazing the fields, and guinea fowl pecking round the gallery will leave you in no doubt as to where her inspiration lies.

www.marogers.com
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In conversation with...

Michael Slavin

Chief Executive, Northern Stage

As Chief Executive of Northern Stage, Michael Slavin has returned to a place that has shaped his personal and professional journey. More than 20 years after first visiting the venue as a student at Newcastle University (when it was still Newcastle Playhouse) he is now six months into his leadership role at the region's largest producing theatre.

With a career spanning senior roles at 11Arches (the charity behind Kynren) and York Theatre Royal, Michael brings a blend of cultural, commercial and operational experience, alongside a deep-rooted connection to the North East.

How are you settling into your role at Northern Stage?

It feels both new and incredibly familiar at the same time - there's a real sense of coming home. Northern Stage has always held a special place for me, so stepping into this role is both a privilege and a responsibility. What's struck me most in these early months is the energy of the team and the openness of the organisation. There's a genuine appetite to do bold, meaningful work. Working alongside Natalie (Ibu) is also hugely exciting - we share a belief in the power of theatre to connect people and reflect the communities we serve. My focus right now is listening, understanding and building on what's already a very strong foundation.

What impact do you think venues like Northern Stage have on the North East economy?

The impact is significant, and sometimes underestimated. Venues like Northern Stage are not just cultural assets; they're economic drivers. They bring people into the city, support local businesses, create jobs and contribute to the wider visitor economy but beyond that, they help shape the identity of a place. Newcastle has an extraordinary theatre ecology, arguably one of the most vibrant in the country and Northern Stage plays a key role as a producing voice within that. We create work here, with and for the people of this region, and that has a ripple effect across skills, talent development and long-term growth.

There's also something important about pride. When audiences see their stories, their accents and their experiences represented on stage, it strengthens that connection between culture and place and that's incredibly powerful.

How can businesses support regional culture to thrive?

Partnership is key. We've seen what's possible when businesses and cultural organisations work together in meaningful ways. It's not just about sponsorship, although that's important, it's about shared values and long-term collaboration. Businesses can support by investing in cultural programmes, by engaging their employees, by using their platforms to champion the arts.

At the same time, we as cultural organisations need to be clear about our purpose and the value we bring. Funding has been relatively stagnant for over a decade, and there isn't a quick fix or a 'fairy godmother' moment coming. So we have to be proactive, entrepreneurial and outward-looking. That includes getting out of our buildings more, working across sectors and finding new ways to connect with audiences and communities.

What are you most looking forward to in the next twelve months?

I'm really looking forward to seeing the next programme come to life, particularly productions that reflect the breadth and talent of the North East. Our upcoming show Little Shop of Horrors, is a great example, it's our first musical production in a little while and we have co-produced the show with Derby Theatre and I can't wait for the region to see this fantastic cast of performers and creatives in a cult classic.

More broadly, I'm excited about deepening our relationships with artists, with audiences and with partners across the region. There's a real opportunity to build momentum and to ensure Northern Stage continues to be a place where people feel welcome, inspired and represented.

What does the future hold for Northern Stage?

The future is about growth, relevance and connection. We want Northern Stage to continue to be a beacon for creativity in the North East - producing ambitious work, nurturing talent and telling stories that matter. That also means thinking beyond our walls. How do we reach more people? How do we engage with communities who may not yet see theatre as something for them?

We'll be looking at how we expand our reach, strengthen our partnerships and ensure that everything we do reflects the diversity and dynamism of the region. Ultimately, it's about building a sustainable, resilient organisation that continues to serve its audiences for generations to come—and I'm incredibly excited to be part of that journey.

northernstage.co.uk

> **Venues like Northern Stage are not just cultural assets; they're economic drivers.**

Michael Slavin

Newcastle-based Hotelier honoured for commitment to charitable causes

Jane Heath, Head of Sales at Grand Hotel Gosforth Park, was named Inspiring Woman of the Year for her charity work in the Inspiring Women in Business Awards 2025.

Jane was named Community & CSR Inspiring Business Woman of the Year by the North East Chamber of Commerce, for her efforts to use her extensive network to actively support charities and community groups. She was also hailed for implementing numerous initiatives that make a tangible difference to fundraising, including establishing Elite's 'Charity Partnership Programme' which offers reduced rates and complimentary services.

Jane was presented with her accolade at Newcastle Civic Centre in front of an audience of 400 guests who came together to celebrate women leading innovation, driving growth and shaping opportunity in the North East.

Based at the newly-refurbished Grand Hotel Gosforth Park, part of the Elite Venue Selection portfolio of 15 luxurious hotel experiences, Jane is responsible for building relationships with corporate, public sector and charitable organisations and has been responsible for the delivery of 70 charity events in the past year at the Grand Hotel alone.

Having been part of the Elite Venue Selection team since its inception in 2018, Jane has more than 30 years of hospitality sector experience in events, sales and revenue roles across Yorkshire, Oxfordshire and the North East.

Centuries of brewing come alive as Blackfriars announces return of beer festival

A beer festival celebrating heritage, local brewing and community spirit is set to return to Newcastle this spring led by Blackfriars Restaurant and St Dominic's Brewery.

Now in its second year, the three-day celebration will run from 22–24 May 2026, will bring together local brewers, live music and medieval history within the walls of the city's 13th-century former Dominican friary.

Featuring eight local breweries including Flash House, Wear Beer and other regional favourites. Blackfriars' onsite brewery, St Dominic's, launched in 2024, will unveil an expanded range of brews including a Porter, Blonde and Triple, alongside its established beers.

The event takes inspiration from the medieval practice of 'Church Ales'- community gatherings where brewers sold their products to raise funds for local good causes. That tradition continues today, with £1 from every ticket supporting the Newcastle United Foundation. Organisers say the charity partnership is central to this year's event, celebrating the Foundation's work in improving lives across the region through the power of football. The festival will be in Blackfriars' all-weather, dog-friendly Cloister Garden, where visitors can enjoy BBQ street food, expanded merchandise stalls, and live music performed.

The Magic of Maldron

From their first on site management meeting in hard hats and High-Vis vests back in 2018, it was clear Maldron Newcastle wanted to be more than just a hotel. With a prime city centre location and a largely local team of proud Geordies, it was always about being part of the community, contributing to the city and its people and building a business with longevity and sustainability in mind.

Since opening theyve strived hard to achieve that, whether that be local partnerships with the Newcastle Eagles and Newcastle United foundation supporting their causes or the team and General Manager climbing mountains to raise funds for local charities. They are proud to have been a champion of inclusive hospitality careers, hosting work placements from all over the region for young people from all walks of life. Their green team work tirelessly to ensure the business is living green every day and coming up with innovative ways to become more sustainable They have maintained their green tourism gold award now for several years.

Winning silver at the North East England tourism awards in regenerative Tourism is a fantastic achievement and a true testament to all of the team's dedication and hard work.

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Robin Sheppard – An inspirational leader in Hospitality

By Jeff Hodgson, General Manager, Lumley Castle Hotel

In the world of hospitality, true leadership is not measured simply by titles or achievements, but by resilience, integrity, and the ability to inspire others. Few embody those qualities more profoundly than Robin Sheppard.

Robin Sheppard

Having recently read his deeply moving book, A Solitary Confinement, I felt compelled to dedicate this month's article to a man whose journey — both personal and professional — continues to inspire so many of us.

The book is an extraordinary account of Robin's battle with Guillain-Barré syndrome, a condition that left him temporarily paralysed and fighting for his independence. His story of determination, mental strength and refusal to give in is nothing short of remarkable. It is honest, humbling and ultimately uplifting — and I would wholeheartedly recommend it to anyone.

I have been incredibly fortunate to work directly with Robin during his time as former President of Bespoke Hotels. Leadership in hospitality can be demanding, complex and at times relentless — yet Robin always led with clarity, vision and compassion. He had (and continues to have) that rare ability to offer constructive feedback in a way that motivates rather than discourages. He encourages you to think bigger, do better and believe in yourself.

As General Manager of Lumley Castle Hotel, it has been a privilege to work closely with him. Robin consistently championed individuality within our properties, empowering general managers to lead with personality while upholding exceptional standards. He understood that hospitality is not just about buildings — it's about people.

Now working in consultancy, Robin remains someone you want in your corner if you're seeking guidance, direction or simply wise counsel. His experience across the industry is vast, but it's his humanity that sets him apart.

He continues to be heavily involved with Gotham Hotels including the much-anticipated new opening in Bristol later this summer. His influence was also instrumental in the recent launch of Hotel Gotham Newcastle, a property that reflects his passion for distinctive, experience-led hospitality.

What makes Robin such an inspirational role model is not just his professional success — though that alone would be impressive — but the way he overcame profound personal adversity and returned to the industry with even greater perspective. Guillain-Barré syndrome may have tested him physically, but it strengthened him mentally. A Solitary Confinement shows us that resilience is built in the quietest, most challenging moments.

In hospitality, we often speak about service, standards and strategy. Robin reminds us that leadership is about courage, empathy and belief — especially when facing life's toughest trials.

I am proud to dedicate this article to one of the most inspirational men I have had the privilege to work alongside. Thank you, Robin, for your guidance, your encouragement and for continuing to lead by example.

Your story truly is worth reading — and even more, worth learning from.

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Places to go: Ampleforth

By Alex Nelson

The ancient City of York, now with no Duke to its name – which is a situation its residents are pleased to welcome – is the stopping off point for many journeys in all directions.

I have travelled to Blackpool, Scarborough, Hull and frequently London using the station to change trains, and in the past have connected by bus to RAF Elvington and Eden Camp. In mid-February I was going to Ampleforth, the Roman Catholic monastery on the North Yorkshire Moors, and found that York was the best route to visit, using the East Yorkshire/Coastliner 31X service to get there from York.

East Yorkshire is rebranding its York and Country services to be called "North Riding" which seems a very well chosen name given the three original Ridings of the large County of Yorkshire, there also being an East and West but not South. And Riding (the bus) is the operative word.

Turning left out of York station there's a lot of work going on to upgrade the bus stopping arrangements. Keep going past the Milner Hotel and stop RM is near the junction with Leeman Road. Whilst waiting there for the 0946 service to Kirkbymoorside, a white coach appeared showing Ampleforth College. It was the first day of the half-term holiday and the students were being dropped off for York Station to travel home by train. After a straight run up the A19 to Easingwold, we turned off through the attractive market place and onward via Husthwaite, Coxwold and Byland Abbey. The road beside the ruined Byland Abbey was under water but the bus ploughed through in a way that would defeat smaller vehicles, and we arrived at Ampleforth Abbey at the scheduled 1048, slightly over an hour from York.

I headed first to the Visitor Centre for some welcome coffee and met up with the delightful Catherine Hodgson who is encouraging more visitors to this Benedictine monastery which was established in 1802. Visitors are welcome to explore the Abbey (but not the adjacent school) and enjoy the tea rooms, a helpful exhibition and see the orchard and cider mill which hosts 70 types of apple. For the past twenty years, the monks (faced with a surplus of 30 tonnes of apples in a good year) have been making cider which together with apple juice is sold in the tea rooms and further afield.

With more than 1,500 trees and over 5 acres, the Ampleforth Abbey Orchard is one of the largest commercial orchards in the North of England. Apples ripen naturally between August and January in the traditionally managed orchards. The full juice cider is crafted from a blend of dessert and culinary apples, pressed in the Cider Mill where it is fermented and matured for eight months.

You are welcome to join the monks for prayer during the day, and the service most appropriate for visitors is at 1300 which is the office of Sext. There are now 35 monks in the community, and whilst there are vacancies they are not advertised. Interested men are invited to commit to the lengthy discernment process.

The Abbey Church was opened in 1961, about the time of the Vatican II reforms, which led to changes in the design by Giles Gilbert Scott. He was also intending to use London craftsmen to create the furniture, until he was introduced to Robert Thompson, the Mouseman of Kilburn, and engaged him to do the woodwork with his trademark mouse design which can be found throughout this peaceful and holy space. The return bus at 1611 arrives back at York station about 1725 for onward trains.

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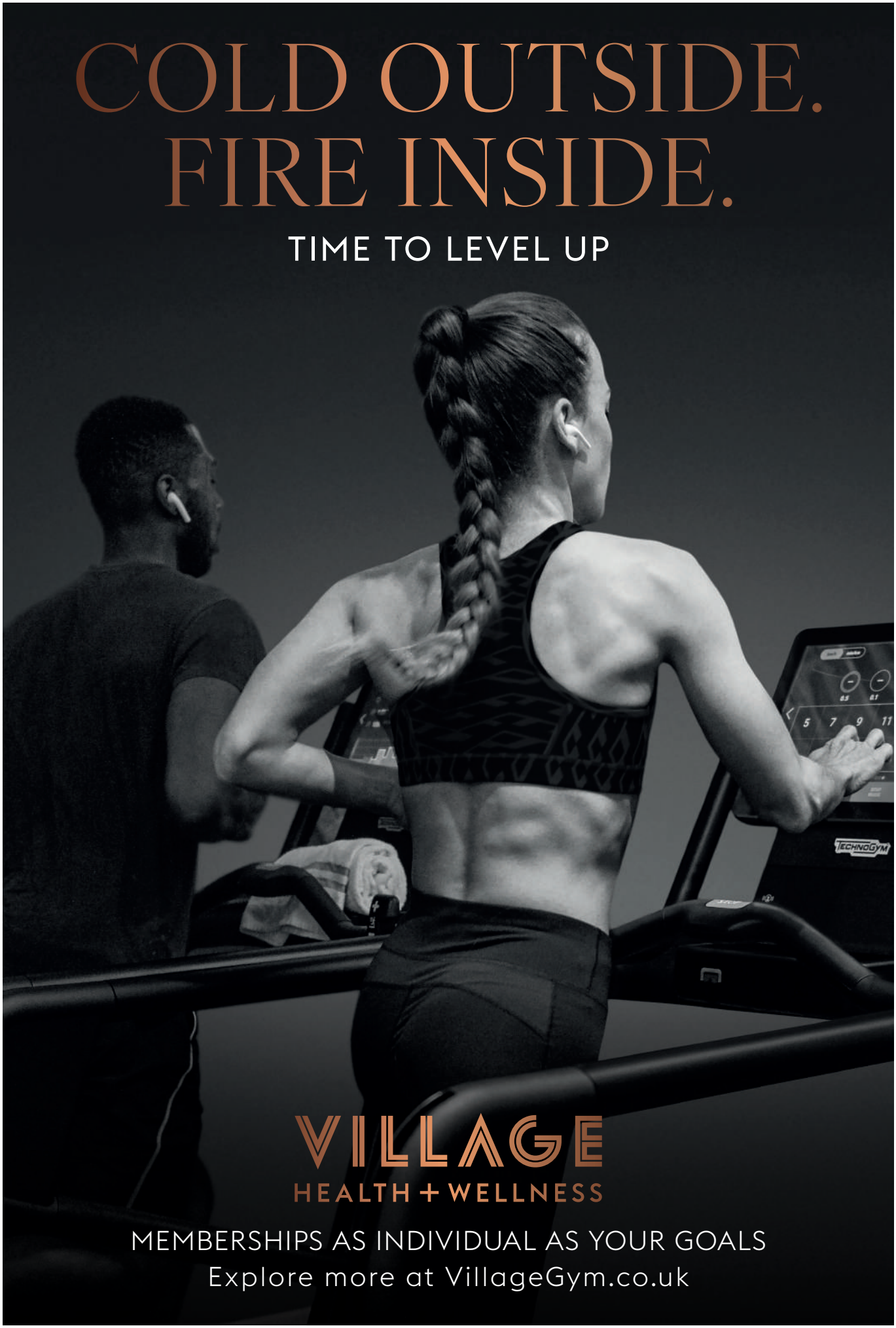
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At Brinkburn, we have the remnants of an old pinetum, a collection of conifer trees.

Victorian estates built pineta for several overlapping reasons: curiosity, status, learning, and beauty.

But beneath those motives was something deeper, a desire to collect, cultivate, and understand a living system over time.

The Brinkburn pinetum has been replanted at least three times since it was first created.

A few of the original trees still remain, witnesses to earlier plantings. They came from far beyond Northumberland, from Chile, North America, and Asia, part of the great nineteenth-century movement of botanical exploration and exchange.

One tree remained a mystery for many years. Recently, a visitor identified it as a Japanese umbrella pine, Sciadopitys verticillata. In Japan, they grow almost like weeds, but in Britain, they were only introduced after 1860. Today, they appear in a handful of arboreal research collections across the UK and, no doubt, in the remains of other forgotten pineta in old estate gardens.

It is an unusual tree for scientists because it is the only living representative of an ancient branch of the conifer family tree.

Significance

Botanists sometimes call this a "living fossil", because it is the last surviving member of a much older evolutionary line that once had more species millions of years ago.

At Brinkburn, this solitary tree has taken on significance.

A pinetum is not a plantation of identical trees. It is a curated landscape, where different species grow at their own pace and reveal their character over time. Some flourish quickly. Others take decades to find their form.

In that sense, the pinetum has become a metaphor for how we think about our own work: patient, diverse, and shaped through careful stewardship rather than control. Like the gardeners who planted these trees, our role is simply to create the conditions in which good things can grow. Unhurried is unmatched.

One Walk: Pinetum

The Old Pinetum sits along the edge of a deep river valley. Within it lies one of the three historic fording points across the River Coquet, once the main route used to reach The Priory. Before modern roads, travellers, pilgrims, and local people would cross the river here as they made their way to trade, celebrate, worship and reflect.

Nearby, the remains of a medieval bridge abutment can still be seen. These stones once supported a bridge linking the Priory to The Devil's Causeway, an old Roman road that ran north through Northumberland towards the fort at Learchild (Alavana) and Berwick.

For centuries, this valley formed part of a wider network of movement through the region. Roman soldiers, medieval traders, and later estate traffic would all have passed along this route.

Botanists sometimes call this a "living fossil", because it is the last surviving member of a much older evolutionary line that once had more species millions of years ago.

One Walk. One Thought.

Each issue, Brinkburn Co-Founder Mark Fenwick introduces us to One Walk around the 52-acre Brinkburn Estate in Northumberland. Alongside, because the greatest outdoor spaces cultivate the greatest thinking – there's a focus on One Thought, too.

Our role is to simply create the conditions...

Mark Fenwick at Brinkburn, Northumberland
Photo: Jodie Beardmore

Enjoying a Taste of Chester

By Stuart Forster

With its easily walkable centre, numerous historic sites and traditional pubs, Chester is ideal for a weekend away. And I'm finding that participating in a Taste of Chester Food Tour is providing a wealth of insights into the Cheshire city's heritage and culinary offerings.

Gareth Boyd established Walking Food Tours UK in 2018 and has just asked the group if we know where the phrase "going to the gee-gees" comes from. I'd always assumed it was Cockney rhyming slang but that isn't the case. Henry Gee was a mayor of Chester during the reign of King Henry VIII and in 1539 he organised horse racing. The racecourse is the world's oldest, says Gareth, and Gee's surname explains the origin of the phrase.

At The Cheese Shop on Northgate Street, Ann Faulkner explains that her mother, Carole, established the business in 1985. Back then, finding artisanal British cheeses was tricky but now the majority of the products sold in the shop are from the UK and Ireland. Ann has selected a handful of local cheeses for us to try.

Cheshire cheese was, she informs us, mentioned in the Domesday Book in the 1080s. It was a valuable commodity in the Middle Ages and around 2,000 farms were producing it a little more than 100 years ago. Nowadays, just two make it, and one of those is in Shropshire rather than Cheshire. Sampling a traditional Cheshire cheese, I'm impressed by its creamy mouth feel and depth of flavour – it bears little resemblance to crumbly supermarket-bought stuff that shares its name.

Outside of the cheese shop, Gareth guides us up onto the walls that were once part of Chester's defences. In the early 1400s, Welsh people were not allowed into the city between sunset and sunrise. Originally from Cardiff, our guide jokes that, back then, he might have been shot with an arrow for being up on the wall.

We pause at a stone Phoenix Tower that was formerly a meeting place for medieval guilds and used as a royalist gun platform during the Siege of Chester. In 1645, King Charles watched his army's defeat at the nearby Battle of Rowton Moor from this spot. That, explains Gareth, is why the structure is also known as King Charles Tower.

The king stayed with supporters at Gamul House, on Lower Bridge Street. Our tour guide recommends heading there later to visit The Brewery Tap to sample local craft beers. He also suggests that we continue along all 1.9 miles of the city walls – the most complete in Britain. The walls skirt by Chester's castle, along the River Dee and past Britain's second-most photographed timepiece – the ornate Eastgate Clock, which commemorates Queen Victoria's golden jubilee in 1897.

We continue to the Roman amphitheatre, which was rediscovered during building works in 1929. Stone from the venue was used in construction across the city during the Middle Ages. Our final stop is at the dual-level shopping gallery known as The Rows. We head into Vin Santo's 600-year-old cellar to sample locally produced still and sparkling wines.

Tomorrow, before driving home, we'll head to the Cheshire Oaks outlet shopping mall to browse the designer shops. This evening, the plan is to pop by the Rooftop Social Club to play outsized games and a beer or two.

Travel information

*See **visitcheshire.com** for information on things to do in Chester and elsewhere in Cheshire.*
Chester is a 3.5-hour drive southwest of Newcastle. By train, the journey takes a little under four hours.
*The Chester Grosvenor (**chestergrosvenor.com**) is a luxury hotel in the city's heart.*
*The four-hour Taste of Chester Food Tour (**walkingfoodtoursuk.co.uk**) has five stops and is priced from £90.*

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Booking travel isn't always as smooth as we'd planned

By Graham Townsley, Travel Counsellor

I had every intention this month of writing a light, feelgood piece packed with travel news and inspiration. Then, as often happens in travel, life threw a curve ball and the tone had to change.

In a way, that's the perfect metaphor for travel itself. We plan, we book, we get excited, and we give ourselves something to look forward to. Then real life steps in: a change of job, a family wedding no one knew about when you booked, an illness, or, on a bigger scale, world events like those in the Middle East.

Some of those curve balls are happy ones, some are worrying, but almost all of them have an impact on your travel plans. Dates need to move, routes need to change, and suddenly that "simple" online booking does not feel quite so simple.

So who do you trust, and where do you turn for support?

In over 25 years in travel I have seen a lot: 9/11, ash clouds, financial crises, Covid, and now the latest unrest in the Middle East. What has stayed constant through all of it is how people feel: anxious, uncertain and often overwhelmed.

For me, the most important thing in these moments is communication. Letting my customers know I am here, I am already thinking two steps ahead about how to keep their plans safe or get them home. It is not just about flights and forms, it is about reassurance and honesty.

You want one trusted contact: the person who booked your trip, knows your family, understands what matters to you and is prepared to sit in the mess with you until it is sorted.

It is also why I always say: do not confuse a cheap .com with real value. The cost of feeling alone, stressed and unsure where to turn is far higher than the saving on a headline price.

Of course, we still want to travel.

By the time you read this, the current Middle East crisis may have eased, and I genuinely hope it has. But experience tells me that even when things look calmer, the questions remain:

- Where is safe?
- Where feels right for us?
- If I invest in this trip, what happens if another curve ball appears?

Travel to create memories

This is true whether you are travelling solo, as a couple, with family, or chasing a big adventure. I never want these columns to feel like a sales pitch. I would much rather they give you insipiration.

If you had plans involving the Middle East, or even transiting through the region, it does not mean you have to give up on your holiday. Far from it.

For summer getaways, the Mediterranean is full of options: the culture and cuisine of Italy, French sophistication on the Riviera, or tried and trusted favourites in Spain and the islands.

If you are craving something more exotic, you might be pleasantly surprised at how competitive some longhaul destinations can be: the lagoon dotted shores of Mauritius, the beaches and culture of underrated Sri Lanka. Heading west for a Caribbean island escape or a Canadian adventure.

The world is still very much open; just about choosing wisely.

Reassurance

Ultimately, how you book and who you book with will decide whether your travel feels seamless or stressful.

Do not take unnecessary chances. Protect yourself, your loved ones and your pocket put your plans in the hands of someone who will stand beside you when those curve balls come.

Until next time, here is to safe travels, smart choices and plenty of future inspiration.

www.travelcounsellors.co.uk/graham.townsley

The Cheviot 7 Peaks Challenge

with Gourmet Lunch

You've probably heard of the Yorkshire Three Peaks - the classic charity challenge that takes on three of Yorkshire's highest summits.

Well, now there's a local alternative… and it's every bit as epic.

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FELLS KITCHEN

Ramside Estates continues to add the WOW factor to corporate events

In a world where so many interactions take place remotely, it's easy to forget the importance of face-to-face connections.

And yet for businesses it is something to ignore at your peril, as the opportunity to meet and mix with colleagues and clients has real value.

The highly respected international Forbes magazine claimed that attending events is a "timeless marketing strategy" which is "absolutely crucial for sustainable business growth."

A recent article added that "hosting and attending events should be an integral part of a growth marketing strategy because they can elevate your brand, foster connections, and drive tangible results."

It's something that one of the North East's leisure organisations is well aware of – and why it has a whole host of options which appeal to the business community along with the public at large.

Ramside Estates owns some of the most prestigious properties in the region including Ramside Hall Hotel Golf and Spa and Hardwick Hall Hotel.

And these both offer some very real – and exciting -opportunities for savvy businesses to engage with potential new clients, cement existing relationships and promote their own offering.

This autumn Hardwick Hall will once again be hosting an event which has become a highlight of the North East's events calendar- it's annual Oyster Festival.

Returning for the 23rd year, this unique daytime experience brings together a huge name performer as headliner, combined with the finest seafood – and of course the opportunity to eat an abundance of oysters.

Held on 25 September in the giant marquee at Hardwick, guests will be entertained by Scouting for Girls, along with Britain's Got Talent comedian Cal Halbert, Irish music favourites Emerald Thieves, JJ Galway Band and DJ Brandon Block, with Steve Walls hosting the day.

The day kicks off with Champagne on arrival, followed by a three-course fruits de mer lunch. Fresh oyster stalls and complimentary lager, beer and wine are served throughout the event, which runs from 11.30am to 6pm.

Tickets for the Oyster Festival cost £220 each and are available by calling 01740 620253 or emailing helen.attley@hardwickhallhotel.co.uk with the event set to follow in the footsteps of previous years and be a complete sellout.

For businesses who also see the value in creating their own corporate event, the latest addition to Ramside Hall Hotel, Golf and Spa also offers a range of exciting opportunities.

Since it opened its doors in September last year, The Pin has been a huge success – attracting not only thousands of leisure visitors but also bringing in companies in their droves.

The purpose-built venue proves that you can be all things to all people, with spaces for entertaining clients, hosting networking events, delivering team meetings and conferences and incentivising and rewarding staff.

The Pin has a range of exciting facilities including a 43 bay, two tier Toptracer driving range, a six lane bowling alley and interactive darts and shuffleboard.

At the same time it has a range of private spaces – including a mezzanine level which overlooks the vast bar and food area to the Cathedral Suite which overlooks the 18th hole of Cathedral golf course.

The VIP bay on the driving range not only has a private seating area, a screen and a small kitchen area but also included bottomless Prosecco and Heineken for those who book it.

The sheer numbers of people who have already visited The Pin also means that it's a great opportunity for businesses to also promote their offering.

A huge 18 metre curved video wall takes pride of place at the venue – a great way for companies to advertise their products or services.

John Adamson, head of Ramside Estates, believes the organisation has some of the strongest options for corporates across the region and beyond.

"We have always had the go-to venues for companies to host their own events or to use our imaginative programme to entertain clients or reward staff or loyal customers," he said.

"And the good news is that it's not just about a great day – or night – out, it absolutely makes great business sense."

Anyone wanting to find out more about opportunities at The Pin should contact: cheryl.flowers@ramsideestates.co.uk

Ryan and Karen Crear

Our Weekend

Ryan and Karen Crear

Owners of the independent book publishing company, Crear Publishing.

Here they tell us about their weekends.

Do you ever have to work weekends?

Yes, we often meet with authors or potential clients on weekends, as many of them have day jobs during the week. It's never really a hardship though, because we genuinely love what we do and enjoy spending time with authors, hearing their ideas and helping them bring their stories to life.

Weekends are also when many book launches, signings and literary events take place, so we're often out meeting readers and supporting our authors. It's a great way to stay connected with the indie book community and see first-hand what readers are enjoying. And really, any job that involves talking about books at the weekend can't be all bad.

Are most weekends the same?

Absolutely not. Most weekends are completely different from one another. We could find ourselves anywhere across the North East meeting some incredibly talented people, so we tend to take a relaxed approach and go with the flow rather than sticking to a rigid plan.

Do you find it hard to switch off?

Not really, although a lovely glass of red wine certainly helps. We do try to make time away from work so we can properly switch off, recharge and come back refreshed.

What do you do at a weekend which you can't fit in through the week?

Mostly the dreaded housework and grocery shopping. Like most people, those are the things that somehow never quite fit into the working week.

Big night out or a night in the house?

Definitely a big night out. We enjoy kicking our heels up whenever we can, especially if there's live music playing in one of the local pubs.

Do you watch or play sport at a weekend?

Ryan: I'm a huge rugby fan. Unfortunately, bad knees have put an end to playing, but I still watch whenever I get the chance, usually on catch-up or by squeezing in the highlights when time allows. During rugby season this tends to make Karen something of a rugby widow.

Karen: I'm afraid sport isn't really my thing. While Ryan is happily watching rugby, I'm far more likely to be curled up with a good book or scary horror movie instead. It works out quite well for both of us really.

Where do you like to eat out at a weekend?

When we get the opportunity, we usually head to our local Italian, which is Ryan's favourite. You can't really go wrong with good pasta, good wine and a relaxed atmosphere.

If we venture a little further afield, we often go into Durham for Thai food, which is Karen's favourite.

How important is the weekend to you?

It's very important to us because it's often the only time we can properly catch up with family.

Often, that means getting together for a braai, a South African BBQ, sharing good food, having a chat and enjoying time with the people we love. It's simple, but those moments are special.

What's the best thing about weekends?

The best thing is the chance for a little lie-in, something that's quite rare during the week. It's also nice when the work phone rings a bit less, giving us a chance to slow down and relax.

Of a weekend, you'll usually find me most happy...?

Karen: With my nose in a good book, a big bag of Flamin' Hot Monster Munch and a bar of Dairy Milk close by. That's my perfect way to relax and switch off for a while.

Ryan: You'll usually find me with my feet up watching rugby, whether it's a live match, a replay or just the highlights. The great thing about rugby is that there's always a game somewhere in the world, whether it's in the northern or southern hemisphere.

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Ashington Cycle Hub Promotes Health

Ashington's much-loved Cycle Hub is changing gears, pumping up the tyres and setting off on an exciting new ride as it joins the Full Circle Food Project. With a fresh burst of energy and a steady pair of hands on the handlebars, the Hub is gearing up to keep the wheels spinning for the community, helping more people get back in the saddle and enjoy the ride towards a healthier, greener Ashington.

The Hub recently transferred from Cycling 4 Everyone to Full Circle Food Project, ensuring the long-term stability and growth of a community resource that has already supported hundreds of local people.

By bringing the Cycle Hub under its umbrella, Full Circle Food Project will now be able to connect cycling with its wider work tackling food inequality, improving health and empowering local people. Based in Hirst Park, the charity sees the Hub as a natural extension of its mission to build a healthier, greener and more resilient community.

Michelle Brannigan, CEO of Full Circle Food Project, said: "The Ashington Cycle Hub has already made a real difference to so many local people. Bringing it into Full Circle Food Project means we can protect what's been built and help it grow. We want to link cycling with our wider work around health, food and sustainability, and make sure it's accessible to everyone. This is about building on the fantastic work of Cycling 4 Everyone and taking it to the next level."

The North East founder behind "Nee Nonsense" Pilates

A North East fitness entrepreneur who opened her first Reformer Pilates studio after a serious back injury is now celebrating the launch of her fifth PilatEASE studio – and the training of more than 100 Pilates teachers across the region.

Founded by Nicci Rowlands in 2019, PilatEASE was built out of frustration. After sustaining a serious back injury while teaching kettlebells, Nicci was advised by health professionals to try Pilates. What she found didn't reflect what she needed.

"The classes were beautiful," Nicci said. "But they weren't built for people like me – injured, in pain and trying to rebuild. Health professionals were referring people to Pilates, but the reality didn't match the need. It felt exclusive. Aesthetic. Not rehabilitative."

So, she created the studio she wished had existed. Her first site opened in Denton Burn, Newcastle, just months before the pandemic. Five years on, PilatEASE now operates five studios across Denton Burn, Ryton, Morpeth, Consett and Whitley Bay, delivering nearly 200 classes a week. But growth has never meant going glossy. A sixth will open soon in Seaham.

Robert Little turns his health challenges into a superpower

Robert Little has transformed his lifelong struggles with attention and behaviour into a story of self-discovery, resilience, and inspiration. He has written a book, My ADHD Superpower, which explores how understanding his ADHD has turned his challenges into strengths.

Growing up, Robert often found himself on the wrong side of the classroom rules.

Robert was told he was too much, too hyper, too loud, but it wasn't until adulthood that Robert discovered his ADHD was his superpower, a revelation that allowed him to reframe his past and see his unique traits as assets rather than liabilities.

"My ADHD Superpower" is more than a memoir. It is a practical guide and workbook

that helps readers, particularly young people, understand ADHD, recognise their own strengths, or understand someone who does, and develop strategies to thrive."

The book has already reached Amazon's Number One spot for downloads in its category in UK, Canada and USA, with readers praising its ability to empower and educate.

"ADHD can be a superpower," Robert explains. "There are times when I'm bursting with energy and creativity, and other times when I need to hibernate and recharge. The key is to understand your own rhythms, embrace your strengths, and be kind to yourself along the way."

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Entrepreneurs, can we really have it all?

By Bethany Ainsley,
Founder of Nuvo Wellbeing and OptiMe

Entrepreneurship is often presented as the ultimate freedom. The freedom to build something meaningful, to choose how you spend your time and to create the impact you want to see in the world. For many of us, that promise is exactly what inspires us to start a business in the first place.

Bethany Ainsley

But behind the inspiring headlines and success stories, another reality often emerges. Many entrepreneurs discover that the freedom they imagined gradually becomes replaced by pressure. Long hours, constant decision-making and the weight of responsibility can begin to take their toll. Over time, balancing the demands of the business with health, wellbeing and relationships can become increasingly difficult.

It raises an important question: does success truly require personal sacrifice, or have we simply normalised burnout as part of the entrepreneurial journey?

As someone who has spent many years building businesses and working in the wellbeing space, I have seen how easy it is for driven leaders to push themselves beyond healthy limits. Ambition is a powerful force, but when it is fuelled only by pressure and expectation, it can quickly lead to exhaustion rather than fulfilment.

This is something I explore in my book Don't Burn Out, Stand Out. One of the core messages is that sustainable ambition is not about doing less, it is about doing things differently.

In the early stages of building a business, it is natural to invest significant energy and focus. There is excitement, risk and often a strong sense of purpose. But when that intense pace becomes the permanent way of working, problems begin to emerge. Sleep is sacrificed, boundaries blur and time with family and friends becomes increasingly limited. Eventually, the business that once felt energising can start to feel overwhelming.

The truth is that entrepreneurship should never be a test of endurance. Businesses rely on leaders who can think clearly, make thoughtful decisions and maintain the energy required to guide their teams forward. When wellbeing is ignored, performance eventually suffers.

Protecting your wellbeing is not a luxury as a leader, it is part of responsible leadership. One of the first shifts I encourage entrepreneurs to make is moving away from the idea that productivity is measured purely by hours worked. Some of the most effective leaders understand that focus, clarity and recovery are just as important as effort. Stepping away from the business to rest, reflect and regain perspective often leads to better decisions and stronger ideas.

It is also important to observe the signals your body and mind are sending. Stress, fatigue and overwhelm are not signs of weakness. They are indicators that something needs attention. Ignoring them may deliver short-term results, but it often creates long-term consequences.

Another challenge many entrepreneurs face is the belief that they must carry everything themselves. Building a business can feel deeply personal, and many founders struggle to let go of control, but sustainable businesses are not built alone. Delegating responsibility, building supportive teams and creating systems that reduce constant pressure are essential steps in protecting both the business and the person behind it.

Perhaps the most important shift of all is redefining what success really means. For many entrepreneurs, success has traditionally been defined by growth, revenue or external recognition. While those achievements can be valuable, they should not come at the cost of your health, your relationships or your sense of fulfilment. True success is building a business that enhances your life, not one that consumes it.

So can we really have it all? Maybe the real answer is that we can build something better. a version of success where ambition and wellbeing are not in competition with each other. Where thriving businesses are built by leaders who are thriving too, and in the long run, that is the kind of success that truly lasts.

bethanyainsley.com

Advancing Skin Health

By Hannah Dodds, Founder of SELF Medical Aesthetics

Why innovation matters in Aesthetic Medicine.

Growth in medicine rarely happens by accident. It evolves through listening to patients, continuing to learn as practitioners, and asking how we can deliver care that is not only effective, but thoughtful and responsible.

As SELF Medical Aesthetics continues to grow, we are entering another important chapter in the clinic's journey. Over the past year, we have been expanding our space, strengthening our team, and refining our focus on treatments that support long-term skin health rather than quick fixes. Alongside this growth, we are also introducing new technology designed to enhance the way we care for our patients.

One of the most exciting developments this year is the introduction of the UltraLux skin resurfacing system.

Innovation in aesthetic medicine moves quickly, but at SELF we approach new technology with care. Every treatment and device we introduce must align with our medical-led philosophy. That means evidence-based practice, patient safety, and treatments that genuinely improve skin health rather than simply following trends.

UltraLux represents a natural progression in the way we approach skin rejuvenation.

Skin resurfacing technologies have become increasingly important as patients look for treatments that improve the overall quality of their skin. Concerns such as uneven tone, pigmentation, fine lines, and texture are rarely isolated issues. They are often connected to the skin's natural ageing process and the effects of environmental stress over time.

Modern technologies allow us to address these concerns more intelligently by supporting the skin's own regenerative processes. UltraLux works to stimulate skin renewal and improve overall skin quality, helping patients achieve brighter, smoother and healthier looking skin over time.

For patients, this means treatments that focus not just on correction, but on restoration and long term skin confidence.

Introducing new technology has never been about expanding a treatment menu. For me, it has always been about strengthening the way we care for people. From the very beginning, SELF was built on the belief that aesthetic medicine should be rooted in medical integrity and thoughtful decision making.

Patients are not simply seeking treatments; they are looking for guidance, reassurance, and a personalised plan that respects the individuality of their skin and their lifestyle.

The addition of UltraLux allows us to further support that philosophy. It gives us another tool to help patients improve their skin quality through carefully designed treatment plans that prioritise regeneration, prevention, and natural results.

As the aesthetics industry continues to evolve, I believe clinics have a responsibility to lead with integrity. New technologies should be introduced with purpose, supported by education, and delivered within a framework of genuine patient care.

At SELF Medical Aesthetics, every step forward is guided by those principles.

The introduction of UltraLux marks another milestone for the clinic, but it is also a continuation of the values that have shaped our journey so far: medical expertise, innovation with intention, and a commitment to helping patients feel confident in their own skin.

As we continue to grow into 2026, I remain incredibly grateful for the patients who place their trust in us. Their confidence allows us to keep learning, evolving, and investing in treatments that support healthy, resilient skin for the long term.

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In conversation with...

Ahead of the new domestic season Michael Grahamslaw met

Ryan Campbell

Head Coach at Durham Cricket

to look at the team's prospects and ambitions for the months ahead.

Looking to the 2026 season what are the key goals you've set for Durham?

Naturally getting back to Division 1 has to be our absolute priority. 2025 was so disappointing from so many perspectives. In a tough league we didn't dominate when able and suffered lots of bowling injuries. The reality is you can't have a bad hour never mind day. This has led to a tough off season and much introspection as to the way forward.

What have you focussed on improving most over the winter after reviewing last year?

Its fair to say there has been no holiday and I have spent much of the time staring at a whiteboard, writing and analysing why things went wrong. The reality is we had too many players out of form and batters who struggled to get big scores which meant we were constantly bowling under pressure. A lot of injuries added to the pinch points and meant we ended one point away from where we needed to be.

Durham has an enviable reputation for producing exciting young talent. How important is the pathway from the academy to the first team in your plans for this year?

The importance of the academy is beyond belief. After the sale of the hundred teams we have eight counties who are happy where they sit while ten aren't. This means we have to produce our own players to help us win games of cricket.

What has pre season preparation looked like for the squad?

With our pre-season tour to Abu Dhabi cancelled it hasn't been ideal but some things you can't control. After this I sat down with our Director of Cricket, Marcus North, to calmly look at what we could do. We have fortunately been able to send our bowling staff to Spain to get some miles in their legs and also manage a two day game against Sussex and a three day match against Durham University.

With a cluttered schedule across Championship, ODI Cup and T20 how do you approach managing the squad across such different formats?

Well one thing we don't do is call it the county grind and grump about it. Playing cricket for a living is an absolute privilege. We try to be clear in our planning and look at the season and divvy it up accordingly. This includes factoring in rest periods for key players and ensuring our youngsters are ready when needed. It is always hard to prepare 100% as we have six four day games followed by T20 but that is a challenge we welcome and meet head on.

Who are the new signings or emerging players Durham supporters should be excited about?

We have recruited Kasey Aldridge from Somerset. He is an allrounder who can open the bowling, bat as high as five or six and, after Jacob Bethell, is probably the second best fielder in the country.

Ben McKinney and Emilio Gay are also on the fringe of the England squad. Our captain Alex Lees really took relegation to heart and is primed and ready to take it out on the opposition.

From a coaching perspective what modern trends - tactically or analytically- are influencing how Durham plays the game today?

Analytics are hugely important and if you don't use them you are robbing your club of opportunity. T20 transformed the game and players can't hide. We have video footage of them from Under 16 and Under 18 level upwards and use regularly to find an opponents weaknesses. There are constantly new ways emerging on how to do things. I also like to encourage my coaches to go and experience franchise cricket and gain more knowledge of how the game is evolving.

How would you describe the culture within the squad right now?

The dressing room is so important. Cricket is unique as no other job means you spend four days together and then spend a lot of time travelling and in hotels with each other.

We set high standards but everyone has an equal say. I encourage a learning environment and like my players to be cricketing anoraks who enjoy and love the game.

Where do you take your inspiration from?

My late parents both loved sport and as a young man I listened to their words, they are my inspiration. I had a near death experience a couple of years ago and have realised how precious time is and how fortunate I am to work in this wonderful game.

Finally what would success look like for Durham at the end of 2026?

Naturally as a coach I want us to gain promotion. However I also want us to play a brand of cricket which excites, produces England players, allow young people to do well and most importantly represent the wonderful North East with pride.

www.durhamcricket.co.uk

We set high standards but everyone has an equal say.

Ryan Campbell

New site for Civia Health

Civia Health has opened its flagship clinical research and community health centre in Sunderland, marking a major boost for the city's health services.

The new site will give residents easier access to free health checks, advice and opportunities to take part in research tackling conditions like diabetes and heart disease. By bringing cutting-edge research into the heart of the community, the centre aims to improve everyday health, reduce inequalities and put Sunderland at the forefront of future healthcare innovation.

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David Fairlamb

Small and steady

By David Fairlamb, David Fairlamb Fitness

Small, consistent changes to your daily routine can create huge transformations. By building positive habits and sticking to them, you can improve your health, confidence, energy, and even your appearance.

If you start today, you can see noticeable results in just 120 days which will take you to August. That's a short commitment for the amazing changes you can achieve when you stay consistent.

For some the thought of looking and feeling good this summer is a real incentive and making changes now will stop the panic three weeks before you go on holiday:

Simple changes that add up

- 15 push-ups a day - 1,800 push-ups in four months
- Eat 200 fewer calories daily - Lose around seven pounds (24,000 calories saved)
- Walk or run one mile a day - 120 miles, equivalent to over nine Great North Runs
- Swap two biscuits for one - 9,500 fewer calories consumed
- 30 squats a day - 3,600 squats, building stronger legs
- 1-minute plank daily - two hours of cumulative planking
- Climb 100 stairs a day - 11,200 stairs climbed in total
- Cut alcohol from two glasses to one - 14,000 calories saved
- Reduce bread from four slices to two daily - 120 fewer slices in four months
- Eliminate one sugary drink a day- Over 1,200 teaspoons less sugar
- 40 crunches daily - 4,800 crunches (break into sets if needed)
- Cut sugar from three daily coffees- 360 teaspoons less sugar and 57,600 calories saved

When you see the numbers add up, it becomes clear, small habits create big results.

davidfairlambfitness.co.uk

David's summing up

Neglecting exercise or overindulging may gradually harm your health but the good news is, you don't have to wait. You can take control today and feel fantastic in just a few months.

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Getting into the swing of things at Hexham Golf Club

And there's one of the game's leading pros who can stop that hook and slice.

There's something rather special about a golf course which is next to a town. If you live locally, you might be able to walk to the first tee and the all-important 19th hole.

Which is exactly what you'll find with Hexham Golf Club. It's one of the oldest and most respected golf clubs in the North East, having been established in 1892.

Some of us at Northern Insight magazine are lucky enough to have been invited for a couple of rounds. We're a bunch of mixed ability players…one chap plays off 6 while another struggles to get the ball away from the tee. We've all been there!

But that's fine at Hexham Golf Club because it's a course which challenges decent players yet won't demoralise those who're still trying to get the hang of the game. The course lies to the west of Hexham in the stunning Tyne Valley countryside. The parkland setting of gently undulating terrain and tree-lined fairways means you need to be reasonably accurate. It also manages to stay in pristine condition throughout the year. Temporary tees and greens are a rarity.

Over the years, the club has hosted numerous county competitions and regional events, highlighting the quality of the course and its facilities.

It's a forward-thinking club, something which the members appreciate, although there's always a nod to the club's proud history. A new irrigation system has been installed. Behind the scenes operations and services are constantly monitored and modernised. And yes, you can book tee times online. The Gallery Restaurant within the historic clubhouse has been relaunched with an art partnership that showcases work from local artists, creating a vibrant space where members can dine, relax, and enjoy exhibitions.

The club has moved with the times and has a modern indoor swing studio which includes hi-tech equipment that records ball and club data and allows you to judge ball launch and club delivery in real time. In other words, it can help you adjust your swing or find out which clubs are likely to work for you. There's also custom fitting of clubs in the club shop.

Hexham Golf Club is also fortunate in having one of the country's most respected PGA golfing professionals…Andy Paisley.

Andy plays a central role in supporting members, developing players, and promoting the game of golf in the region. He comes from a golfing family…his brother Chris won the South African Open…and started playing at the age of 7. He originates from Stocksfield and has been with Hexham Golf Club for 18 years, managing the professional shop and offering coaching to golfers of all abilities. He is particularly known for his expertise in putting and performance improvement, using modern coaching technology and data analysis to help golfers refine their skills.

And he not only helps players like you and I; he also works closely with many of the world's leadings pros like Lee Westwood. He's a regular coach on the LIV and European Tour as well as working with many of the game's current and up and coming ladies' players. He'll be heading off to the US Masters very shortly…but that's after visits to South Africa, Hong Kong and Dubai. When you're good, you're in demand.

Having Andy as the professional and ensuring that the club continues to evolve while also respecting tradition, shows that Hexham Golf Club is in safe hands. Continued investment in both its facilities and digital services, proves that the club strives to provide an outstanding environment for golfers while strengthening its position as one of the premier golf venues in the North East of England.

Why not call in for a tour of the facilities. Experienced players and absolute novices are more than welcome. Peter Smith is the General Manager…he'd be delighted to show you what's on offer.

For further information and contact details, visit their excellent website… www.hexhamgolf.co.uk or call Peter on 01434 603072 option 2 or alternatively email manager@hexhamgolf.co.uk

Move more, feel better: Why midlife bodies thrive with natural light

By Cheryl Tanner, Menopause Fitness & Nutrition Coach

As spring arrives and the days grow longer, many of us feel a natural lift in our energy and mood. For women in midlife, this seasonal shift can be more powerful than we realise. Movement, combined with exposure to natural light, is one of the simplest ways to support the body through perimenopause and menopause.

Hormonal changes during this stage of life can affect sleep, mood, energy levels and metabolism. Many women notice they feel more sluggish, stiff or mentally drained than they used to. The good news is that gentle, consistent movement can help reset both body and mind.

Natural daylight plays an important role in regulating our circadian rhythm, the body's internal clock that influences sleep, recovery and daytime energy. Exposure to natural light during the day helps improve sleep quality, boost alertness and support overall wellbeing.

That's why creating the right training environment matters. In my studio, large windows and skylights flood the space with natural light, bringing the benefits of the outdoors inside. Training in a bright, light-filled environment can help lift mood, improve focus and make movement feel more energising.

Strength training is particularly important during midlife. Maintaining muscle helps support bone health, posture and metabolic health, which naturally change during menopause. It doesn't require hours in the gym, short, focused sessions a few times a week can make a real difference.

Midlife isn't about slowing down, it's about moving smarter and supporting your body in the way it needs now. As I often tell my clients, strength builds confidence and confidence builds momentum.

Due to demand, my small-group menopause strength sessions have recently launched and are already proving popular with women looking for supportive, expert-led training during midlife.

If you'd like to find out more about upcoming sessions or availability, simply scan the QR code.

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Northumberland Golf Club launches ‘Get into Golf’ programme for beginners

Have you considered learning to play golf, but, for one reason or another, haven’t taken that first step? Thankfully we have the answer to your hesitancy.

Northumberland Golf Club in High Gosforth Park has launched its annual ‘Get into Golf’ Academy aimed at beginners. The initiative offers a welcoming introduction to the sport, encouraging anyone curious about golf to visit the club and give it a try.

For the price of just £60 you’ll be able to enjoy six introductory coaching sessions. You’ll be guided by one of the club’s experienced PGA Professionals who will take you through the fundamentals of the game, including what equipment you need, basic set-up, and how to get the ball away. There’ll be a friendly atmosphere and after every session you can make use of the clubhouse and enjoy a social drink. It’s a great opportunity to make a whole new group of friends.

If you’re concerned about the initial expense of buying golf clubs, don’t worry, all equipment will be provided by the club.

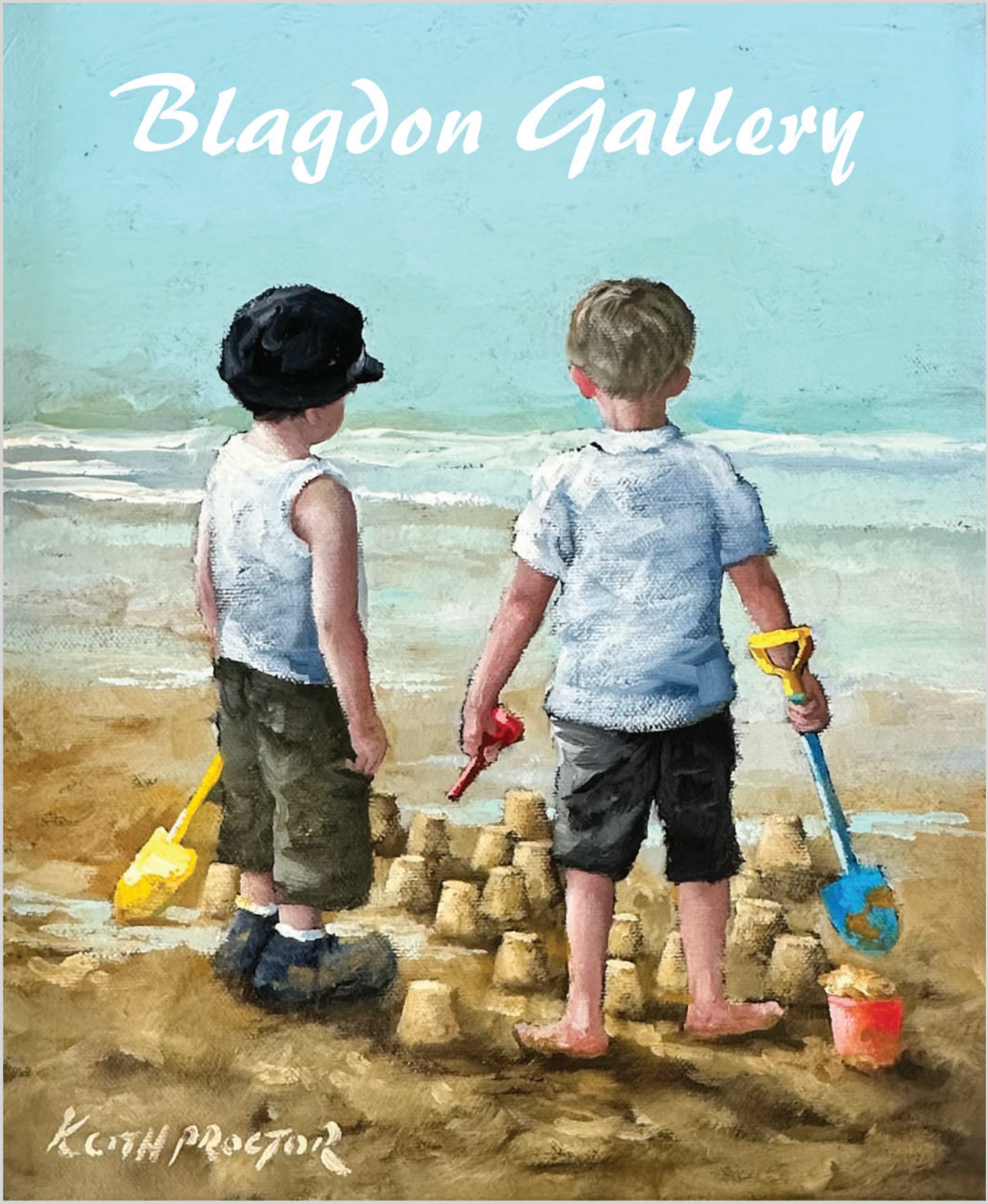
If you have previously taken some initial golf lessons, but need more to progress with your game, you will also be very welcome as there will be an “improvers” Get into Golf group.

“Our Get into Golf campaign is designed to make golf more accessible to beginners and encourage new players to take up the sport,” said Northumberland Golf Club Membership Director, Gail Peters. “Through these six competitively priced coaching sessions, a welcoming club environment, and the chance to enjoy a rewarding and healthy sport, we want to remove common barriers that can discourage people from trying golf for the first time.”

The initial lessons have been scheduled to accommodate a range of lifestyles. Weekend sessions will be held every Sunday between 17th May and 21st June and will take place late morning. If you prefer midweek, sessions will take place every Wednesday evening between 13th May and 17th June.

“A typical session will involve a small group of beginners on the driving range. Once they’ve started to grasp what golf is all about, further group lessons will give them the opportunity to use some of Northumberland Golf Club’s other facilities like our chipping area, putting green and the four full size holes which are ideal for a beginner’s first foray onto a golf course” adds Gail. “For most learners it’s a case of practice and building confidence. The emphasis is on enjoyment, learning and social interaction, creating an inclusive environment for adults of all ages and abilities.”

Interested? For more information about the Get into Golf campaign at Northumberland Golf Club and to sign-up for the six coaching sessions, contact Julie Stephenson on 0191 236 2498 or email admin@thengc.co.uk



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