

NORTHERN

INSIGHT

May 2026

Issue 123



Castle Peak Group
Local roots with global perspective

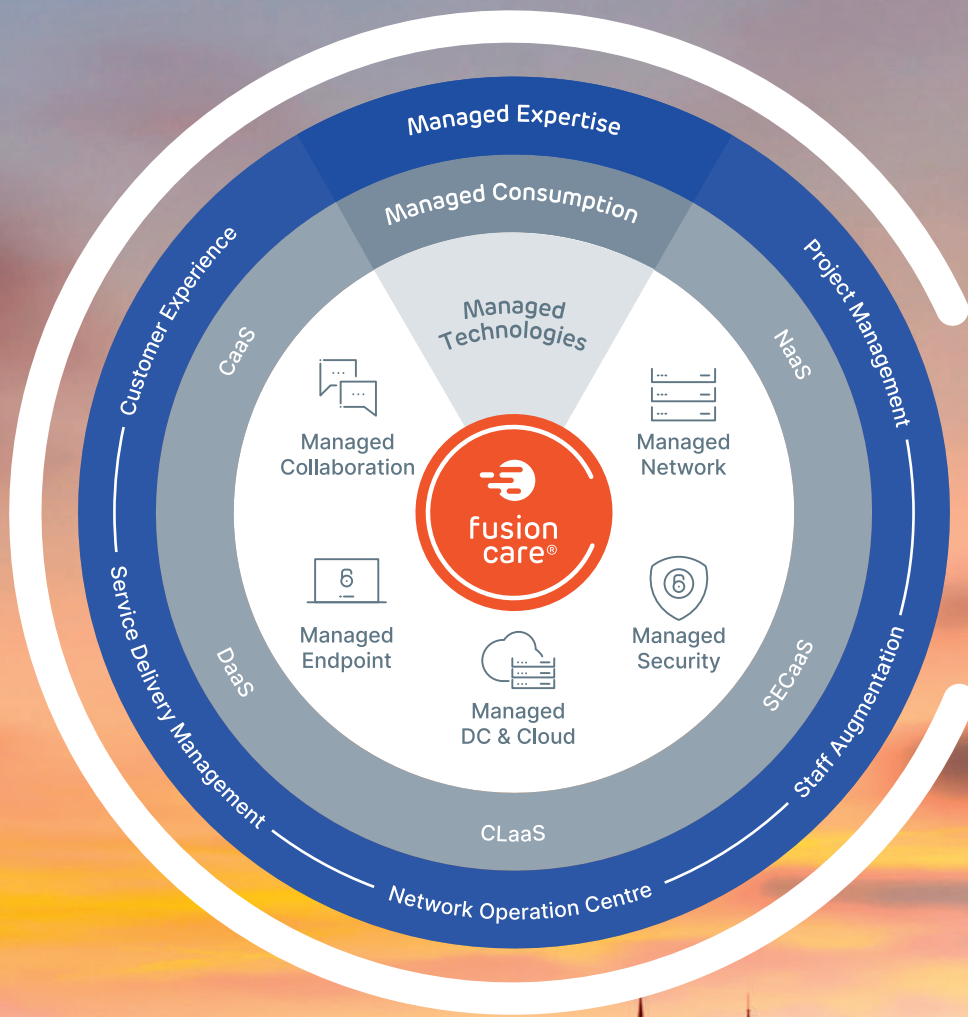
business | media | technology | built environment | education | arts | leisure | health & wellbeing

northern-insight.co.uk



FusionCare[®]

IT managed services exactly the way you want them



FusionCare® provides you with robust, flexible, secure and sustainable IT managed services. Developed in partnership with you and meeting your unique operational goals.

Our services can be customised and consumed according to your strategic objectives. Our comprehensive offering spans multiple integrated technology pillars and consumption-based services, leveraging our experts and serving as an extension to your team 24x7x365.

Delivering value from day one of your engagement, taking system availability, security and performance to new levels. We always balance risk and innovation to help you deliver and manage the ever-changing needs of hybrid IT.

Trusted by



Civil Service

Business Outcomes ↓



Sustainability and Responsibility



Enhanced User Experience



Optimisation and Efficiency



Security and Compliance



Return on Investment



Book a chat with our team today

0191 500 9100 hello@forfusion.com

To learn more visit

www.forfusion.com/services/fusioncare



Scan me

forfusion.com

SUCCESS IN THE CITY



WHERE BUSINESS MEETS INSPIRATION



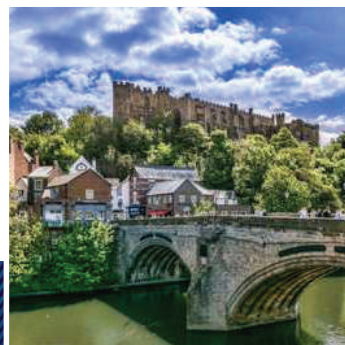
ELEVATE YOUR EVENTS

A venue designed for impact, set in the heart of historic Durham on the banks of the River Wear, we provide a sophisticated, distraction-free environment for your business objectives.

We look forward to welcoming you.

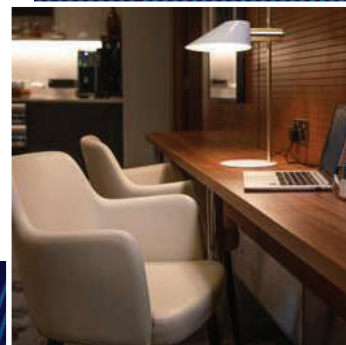
W Bryant

Wendy Bryant
Director of Groups,
Meetings and Events



AT A GLANCE

- Convenient location: a short drive to the AIM, a 5 min walk to Durham station (only 12 min from Newcastle by train)
- Carbon compensated meetings
- Central riverside with on-site parking
- Dedicated WhatsApp concierge, connecting your team with ours.

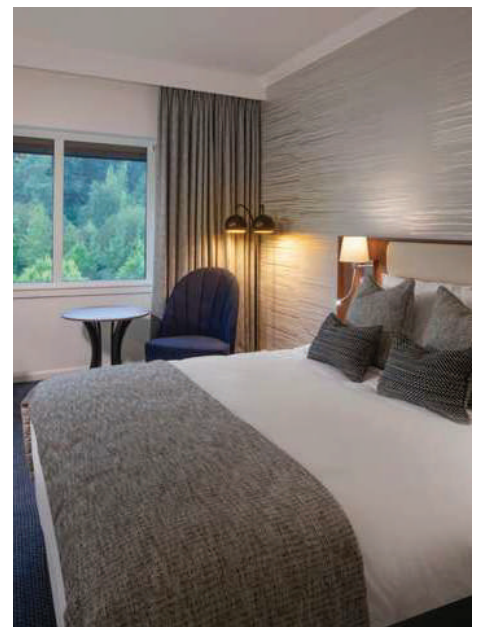
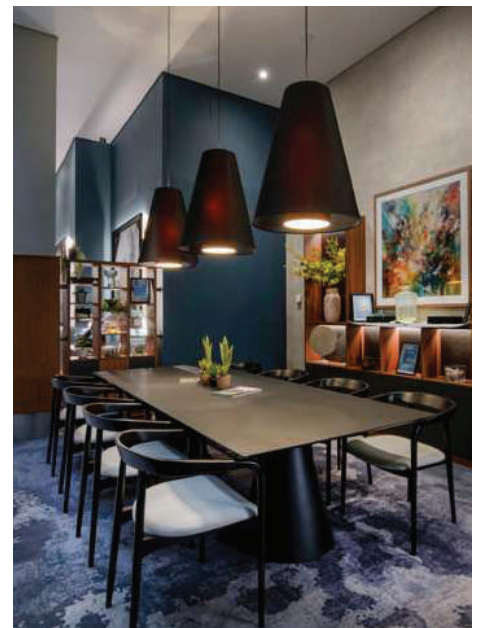


CARBON COMPENSATED MEETINGS

All of the events we host are environmentally responsible. We automatically compensate the total carbon footprint of every meeting and event we hold, at no additional cost to organisers or attendees.

Through a partnership with First Climate, Radisson invests in verified carbon standard projects that combat climate change and support global sustainable development goals.

This commitment is part of a broader, long-term sustainability strategy that also focuses on minimising food waste, eliminating single-use plastics and enhancing energy efficiency, ensuring that your business gatherings are both professional and eco-conscious. Find out more about this initiative here:



A new era of Country Living with...

youngsRPS 

Lauder Cottage

Stocksfield, Northumberland

Impressive four-bedroom detached home in the desirable village of High Mickley, offering spacious and well-balanced accommodation. Featuring generous reception space, modern kitchen and comfortable bedrooms. With attractive gardens, driveway parking and countryside surroundings, this property provides an excellent opportunity for family living within easy reach of Stocksfield and commuting links.

Asking Price £750,000



Harlow Keep

Catton, Northumberland

Attractive four-bedroom detached home set within the desirable village of Catton, offering spacious and versatile accommodation. Featuring generous reception rooms, well-appointed kitchen and comfortable bedrooms. With gardens, driveway parking and appealing rural surroundings, this property provides an excellent opportunity for family living within easy reach of Hexham and transport links.

Asking price £750,000



Townhead House

West Woodburn, Northumberland

Impressive four-bedroom stone-built farmhouse set in picturesque countryside, offering spacious and versatile accommodation. Featuring multiple reception rooms, characterful kitchen with AGA, outbuildings, workshop space and generous gardens. With private access, ample parking and stunning rural views, this property delivers an idyllic Northumberland lifestyle opportunity.

Asking Price £650,000



Hedley West Farmhouse

Marley Hill, Newcastle Upon Tyne

Hedley West Farmhouse is an exquisitely extended and modernised four-bedroom family home, ideal for equestrian buyers, with a 40x30m all-weather arena, four-bay stables, tack room and store, set within 5.2 acres of gardens and well-managed paddocks nearby for lifestyle appeal and privacy year-round enjoyment.

Offers in Excess of £950,000



DOBSON & PARNELL

ELEVATED DINING ON NEWCASTLE QUAYSIDE

Step into the new-look Dobson & Parnell and
experience a fresh take on modern British dining.

Open 7 days a week

Tel 0191 221 0904
dobsonandparnell.co.uk



DOBSON & PARNELL

QUEEN STREET, NEWCASTLE, NE1 3UG



THE GOOD
FOOD GUIDE

2026



TASTE OF THE
NORTH EAST

2025

Credits

Managing Director

Michael Grahamslaw

Design

Lu O'Rourke

Accounts Manager

Lisa Grahamslaw

Lead Photography

Crest Photography

Additional Photography

The Bigger Picture Agency

Editorial Contributors

Jack Grahamslaw, Holly Grahamslaw, Graham Courtney, Keith Newman, Simon Rushworth, David Fairlamb, Barry Speker

Social Media

Jordan Marston (JAM Marketing)

Cancellations

If an advert is cancelled by the booker within a 14 day period prior to our print deadline, the advert will be charged in full, with additional VAT.

Complaints

Any complaints regarding advertising will only be considered for up to a week after publication. No responsibility is accepted for error.

Editorial

No responsibility is accepted for drawings, photographs or literary contributions during transmission, or while in the Managing Director's or printer's hands. Editorial must be received by the 15th of the month or no responsibility is accepted for errors.

Advertisements

Although every care is taken to ensure accuracy the Publishers regret that they cannot accept responsibility for loss or damage caused by an error in the printing or damage to a loss of artwork. Complaints will only be considered for up to a week after publication. Advertising must be received by the 20th of the month. No responsibility is accepted for errors.

Advertising Charges

There is a £25 charge for every set of amendments, following the first initial set of amendments, which are free of charge, for adverts designed by Northern Insight (MJG Publishing Ltd).

Media Enquiries

Michael Grahamslaw
michael@northern-insight.co.uk

© 2026 Published by MJG Publishing Ltd
www.northern-insight.co.uk

Facebook: facebook.com/northerninsight

Twitter: @NInsightmag

Instagram: @northerninsightmagazine

LinkedIn: Northern Insight Magazine



Contents

- 10/11 Business News**
- 12/13 Cover Story**
Castle Peak Group
Local roots with global perspective
- 15 Musings with Mirza**
Ammar Mirza CBE
- 24/26 Marketing and Media Matters**
David Thirlwell, Head of Marketing,
Sanderson Young Estate Agents
- 28/30 Legal and Financial News**
- 56 Straight Talk with Speker**
Barry Speker OBE
- 64/68 Charity & Community News**
- 70/71 Charity of the Month**
Angel Trust
- 120/121 Media News**
- 140 Technology News**
- 154 The Built Environment News**
- 168 Manufacturing News**
- 172 Education News**
- 182/184 Arts News**
- 188/190 Leisure News**
- 212 Health and Wellbeing News**



Foreword

Welcome to the May issue of Northern Insight

With Summer finally upon us we are delighted to bring you another vibrant edition bristling with fantastic features, expert columnists and critical analysis.

Our cover star is James Carss who founded the Castle Peak executive search company two years ago and has almost three decades experience in the industry.

On the social front we showcase Richard Reeds new office celebration, highlight the incredible Red Sky Ball and look at another great event from North Tyneside Business Forum.

Look out also for our feature on regular columnist Ammar Mirza CBE being installed as High Sheriff of Tyne and Wear. Congratulations Ammar!

Our Health and Wellbeing section also continues to thrive and within this we look at the amazing work of both Civia Health and Everyone Active within the local community.

At 236 pages this is one of our biggest editions to date which has been great fun to put together.

We hope you all enjoy it.

Many thanks as always to everyone concerned for your kind support. Till next month...



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



230



170



198

Edition Sponsors



A grid of logos for edition sponsors including: Sunderland's Business Improvement Districts, lumo, HIGHLIGHTS PUBLIC RELATIONS, WEEK 2 WEEK SERVICED APARTMENTS, Hargreaves Elsworth, Kinnery, SINTONS, marriott communications, North Tyneside Business Forum, CHERYL TANNER, L4 Financial Management, swinburne maddison, CASTLE PEAK GROUP, ENTREPRENEURS' FORUM, Darlington College, sweeney miller LAW, BIGGER SCENE, GET Brindled, genee, epicurus, JAM MARKETING, VILLAGE HOTEL CLUB, youngsRPS, and Gillespie Recruitment Ltd.



Newcastle ceramic brand expands into County Durham

Popolo Ceramico is celebrating a significant business milestone with the launch of its 30th franchisee, now covering South Durham.

Founded 16 years ago by Christina Taylor Chisholm and situated in the Ouseburn area of Newcastle, the business has grown from a small, home-based venture into a thriving national franchise network spanning 64 territories across the UK.

What began as a small collection of personalised mugs, baubles and plates has evolved into a comprehensive range of handcrafted keepsakes and bespoke artwork. Today, Popolo Ceramico specialises in baby hand and footprint imprints in clay, paint and plaster, carefully framed or mounted to create timeless display pieces. Each piece is personalised with names, dates of birth and meaningful messages.

The business also creates detailed 3D castings, capturing newborn hands and feet, sibling casts, family hand casts and even generational casts featuring grandparents and grandchildren. Pregnancy bump casts are available as both natural keepsakes and fully decorated art pieces, with custom finishes including metallics, painted designs and framed installations.

Today, the business has grown to 30 franchisees operating across 64 territories, with several partners holding multiple areas.



Sunderland gift card delivers the goods

Sunderland Gift Card's contribution to the local economy has reached a new high, with news that sales have reached more than £500,000.

Sunderland BIDs – which include the City Centre BID and the Seafront BID – launched the scheme in 2020, as a way to get people to shop local.

And since then, hundreds of businesses from high street names to independents have joined up, with more than 200 outlets accepting the card.

Figures compiled recently highlighted that the half a million landmark had been reached, providing a huge boost to the city economy.

Karen Eve, Centre Director at the Bridges, said the scheme had proved a huge success.

“Gift card sales have hugely benefitted The Bridges retailers by encouraging additional spending beyond the cards face value, along with driving customer loyalty for Sunderland businesses,” she said.

Her words were echoed by Tamer Hassan, owner and chef patron of Ember restaurants at the Sheepfolds, which is one of the many independent businesses which have joined and have benefited from thousands of pounds of gift card spend.

“We’ve found it an absolute honour to be part of the Sunderland Gift Card scheme,” he said.

Roberta Redecke, Head of Business Services at Sunderland BIDs said the level of sales was a fantastic achievement.

True Potential opens door to growth with new Gateway House office

Newcastle-based financial services and technology organisation, True Potential has officially opened Gateway House, a new office building that expands its headquarters, strengthening its role as a major local employer and its commitment to the North East. Gateway House sits alongside True Potential's existing Newburn House headquarters, providing additional purpose-built space to support the organisation's future growth ambitions.

Colleagues gathered to celebrate the opening, with CEO Gerry Mallon leading proceedings and formally marking the occasion with a ribbon cutting at the building's main entrance. The event brought together teams from across the business who played a key role in delivering the project, recognising the collective effort behind the new space. Gateway House has been designed to support collaboration, development, and innovation, providing modern facilities that enable teams to work more effectively together and continue delivering exceptional results for clients.

Speaking at the opening, CEO Gerry Mallon said: “Gateway House



represents an important step forward for us. Newcastle has always been at the heart of our story, and this expansion is a reflection of how far we have come as one of the UK's leading wealth managers, the momentum we're building as an organisation and our commitment to investing in our people, our future and our region.”



Making Clients Famous.

www.bradleyomahoney.co.uk



Lumo celebrates graduation of first apprentice drivers ahead of West Coast launch

Ahead of the Spring launch of its pioneering new open access service on the West Coast Main Line, Lumo is celebrating the graduation of its first trainee drivers for the route.

The Apprentice Customer Drivers are now officially qualified after successfully completing an extensive training programme, which included both practical and theoretical elements, with the recruits learning from the experienced Lumo team.

Dame Chi Onwurah MP, Member of Parliament for Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West, joined the apprentices to celebrate their graduation at Lumo's East Coast route HQ in Newcastle – home to the company's state-of-the-art training simulator.

Lumo's new West Coast service is set to launch in the coming months, offering big savings for customers on the popular route, with tickets starting from just £29.90 between London Euston and Stirling. The service will also call at Milton Keynes, Nuneaton, Crewe, Preston, Carlisle, Lockerbie, Motherwell, Whifflet, Greenfaulds and Larbert.

Lindsay Gauntlett, Head of People and Culture at Lumo, said: "The graduation of this group of talented and dedicated apprentices is a key milestone as we prepare to launch our new West Coast route.

"Supporting people to enter the rail industry, regardless of their previous career and background, is incredibly important to us as a company. We're proud that 95% of our team have joined through our successful apprenticeship programme, in partnership with Train'd Up.

"Thank you to Dame Chi for joining us to mark this significant moment, as the drivers now begin their route learning on the West Coast, ready to serve our customers."



Pulman SEAT & CUPRA Sunderland Crowned 2025 Retailer of the Year

Pulman SEAT & CUPRA Sunderland is proud to announce it has been awarded the prestigious 2025 Retailer of the Year award. This accolade represents the highest honour a retailer can receive from the brand, with Pulman emerging as the 'best of the best' from a competitive network of 69 retailers across the UK.

The award recognises excellence across a comprehensive national scorecard monitored throughout the year. Rather than focusing solely on sales volume, the title is awarded based on three critical pillars: New Car Sales, Used Car Sales, and Aftersales. Within these categories, Pulman excelled by exceeding performance targets backed by an exceptional product line-up, including the award-winning CUPRA Formentor and Leon, the all-electric CUPRA Born, and the new Tavascan, while staying true to its core goal of 'Delivering a fantastic customer experience.'



Stephen Patterson of Newcastle NE1 to lead new national committee for UK bids

Stephen Patterson, CEO of the award-winning Newcastle NE1 Business Improvement District (BID) Company, has been appointed as the first Chair of the new national BID Steering Committee, part of the Association of Town and City Management, ATCM.

The Committee will be responsible for providing services to BIDs across the country including lobbying national Government, advocacy, working groups, professional development and peer support for BID staff. Stephen's appointment and the creation of the new Steering Group is a huge milestone for the ATCM, providing one unified voice for the sector after the BID Foundation was brought within its remit last year.

Stephen brings over 18 years' experience in the BIDs industry to the new role, and he was half of the two-man team that established NE1 in 2008. Internationally regarded as one of the most innovative and impactful BIDs, NE1 represents the interest of 1,400 city centre businesses, leading on place-based project delivery and lobbying at a local and national level.

Commenting on his appointment to this new role, Stephen Patterson, CEO of NE1 and now, Chair of the new national BIDs Steering Group said: "I'm honoured to take on this new role and excited by the opportunities it offers for NE1, Newcastle and other UK cities represented by BIDs. This is a pivotal time for the industry, with significant opportunities to grow and deliver even better outcomes for the places and businesses we represent.



**BRADLEY
O'MAHONEY**

**Strategy. Marketing. Branding.
Public Relations. Social & Digital. Video.**

www.bradleyomahoney.co.uk

Cover story



“

If there's one thing that experience has taught me, is that the North East is a special area.

James Carss

Castle Peak Group – Executive Search Leaders

Local roots with global perspective

It's just over two years since James Carss founded the Castle Peak Group executive search company. You might therefore assume this is a new firm getting established and finding its feet. Wrong!

James and his team have been involved in finding chairmen, chief executives, chief financial officers, company secretaries, board members and trustees for almost 30 years. Their reputation and experience is second to none.

This is certainly helped by the fact that along with being a front-line headhunter, James also has vast experience as an MD & CEO, when he was working in Hong Kong for 12 years he was running multiple offices of a NASDAQ listed firm. All this has helped him to shape a firm that understands exactly what the client wants.

But things are still evolving at Castle Peak Group.

James Carss has been involved in the appointment of many senior people across the UK. Many of those appointments have been in the public sector. Some of you reading this will have been involved with James as he either found the ideal candidate for your organisation or placed you into a new role.

However, people and organisations change...people move on...and they don't necessarily stay in the same sector...they switch.

James is getting far more requests now from clients in the private sector who are looking appoint some senior executives. No surprises therefore that the phone rings at Castle Peak Group.

"I'm fortunate in that I've worked within the public and private sector for many years and know precisely what sort of person is suitable for various senior positions," said James. "When I formed Castle Group after returning to the UK following many years working abroad in places like Hong Kong and Canada, I felt the public sector was an area which was badly under-represented when it came to inclusivity led executive search, especially in the housing, education and health sectors. I had immediate success...built a team of skilled colleagues...and have moved forward rapidly, so much so that last year we were named Professional Services Start-Up of the Year at the National Start-Up Awards which champions the best and brightest start-ups from across the UK. It's something I'm really proud of.

"We're now working 50-50 in terms of public and private sectors because clients I've worked with successfully in the past have

either changed or are wanting to change roles. We've moved with them! They like the way we operate at Castle Peak Group, they like our results and they want to maintain a successful relationship."

If you want an important position filling or are ambitious and want to find a key position, it's very tempting to assume that the only way you'll have any joy is by going to one of the big search firms in London. Here's what is likely to happen. You establish a contact and will then be passed around and rarely speak to the same person twice. If you like to build a trustworthy relationship, good luck. Oh, and you'll be paying a small fortune.

That won't happen with Castle Peak Group. Your first point of contact will always be James Carss. He always vets every single candidate. He always speaks to companies on your behalf. He always works face-to-face. He builds trust...and he's good. His current success rate is 96 per cent against an industry average in executive search of 77%. It would be 100 per cent if a handful of folk hadn't changed their mind!

"When it comes to the North East, you need to understand the dynamics of this area," added James. "I'm born and bred here but, having worked extensively in London and abroad, I fully understand how other regions and other countries operate. But, if there's one thing that experience has taught me, is that the North East is a special area. It's why we have success in attracting candidates to this area...and it's also why we're seeing an increasing number of boomerang talent...people who return to the region. It's why our work in both the public and private sectors, is increasing month on month."

Interested in what Castle Peak Group can do for you? You should be.

For more information, you can contact James Carss by calling 07802 531040 or emailing james.carss@castlepeak-group.com

You'll also find out more details by logging on to www.castlepeak-group.com



Places to go: Oban in Argyll

By Alex Nelson

I arrived in Oban the way many people do: stepping off a coach almost directly beside the railway station, both of them positioned at the edge of the harbour. It's one of the few towns in Scotland where long-distance coaches and trains converge at the same point, which makes onward travel to the Hebrides incredibly straightforward.

The moment I stepped out, I could see the ferries moving in and out of the bay, heading for Mull, Kerrera, Lismore and the more distant islands. The harbour is the town's engine, and the constant movement of CalMac vessels gives Oban a sense of purpose that never really stops.

From the waterfront it's only a short walk to Oban Distillery, one of Scotland's oldest licensed distilleries and a defining feature of the town. The stillhouse sits tucked against the hillside, and the tour explains how Oban's whisky occupies a stylistic middle ground between Highland and Island malts. I found the visit surprisingly technical, with a clear explanation of the small stills, the fermentation process and the influence of coastal air on maturation. It's a rare distillery where you can finish a tasting and be back at the harbour in under five minutes.

Above the town rises McCaug's Tower, the circular granite structure that resembles a Roman coliseum. I climbed the steep streets to reach it, and the reward was immediate: a panoramic view across Oban Bay to Mull and Kerrera, with the harbour laid out like a map below. The tower was built in the late 19th century as a philanthropic project to provide winter work for local stonemasons, and its scale is impressive when you stand inside the ring of arches.

Following the coast road north, I walked the easy onemile route to Dunollie Castle, a straightforward stroll that stays close to the shoreline. The castle sits on a rocky outcrop overlooking the entrance to the bay, and the museum beside it tells the story of the MacDougall clan, who controlled this part of Argyll for centuries. The site combines archaeology, clan history and sweeping sea views, and the walk itself is one of the simplest and most rewarding in the area.

On the way back into town I stopped at St Columba's Cathedral, a striking granite building that serves the Roman Catholic Diocese of Argyll and the Isles. Its position on the coastal road makes it impossible to miss, and the interior has a quiet, austere quality that contrasts with the bustle of the harbour.

Back in the centre, I visited the Oban War & Peace Museum, a volunteer-

run collection that documents the town's maritime, wartime and social history. The exhibits include photographs, uniforms, ship models and local accounts that show how Oban functioned as a strategic base during both world wars. It's small but densely informative, and I left with a much clearer sense of how the town's modern identity was shaped.

As for accommodation, I stayed at the Royal Hotel, paying £43 with breakfast included. I wasn't expecting much at that price, but the room was comfortable, the staff helpful and the location ideal—two minutes from the harbour and even closer to the shops and restaurants. For a budget stay in a central position, it exceeded expectations.

Oban may be compact, but it contains an unusual concentration of history, transport links and coastal scenery. Whether climbing to McCaug's Tower, walking out to Dunollie, touring the distillery or watching the ferries depart for the Hebrides, I found the town full of substance and remarkably easy to explore on foot.

alex@nationalrail.com | www.nationalrail.com

NationalRail.com

For bookings to and from North East England and trains all over Great Britain

- Advance and walk-up (on the day) tickets
- First and standard class
- Eco friendly trains
- Groups of up to nine, and all railcards accepted
- Split ticketing to maximise your savings all over England, Scotland and Wales

Our map is available for purchase at railmap.org.uk plus optional free pdf for personal use

Poster map for display is 63.5cm wide x 100cm deep

pdf only available for **£7.95** at railmap.org.uk

Alex Nelson (Ticket Guru)

We can advise on delay repay!

For help with bookings, email alex@nationalrail.com

Musings with Mirza...



Ammar Mirza CBE

Stranger Things

By Ammar Mirza CBE

It feels like we are living in two worlds at once. Not just different opinions, but entirely different realities.

If you have ever watched *Stranger Things*, you will know exactly what I mean. One moment everything looks normal. The next, you realise there is an “Upside Down” version of the same world, darker, distorted, misunderstood. And somewhere in between are the Demogorgons and Vecnas of the unknown, lurking in the spaces we do not quite understand.

That is exactly how this moment in time feels.

Just recently, I found myself trying to gently introduce the idea of AI to my mother-in-law. She had recently lost her husband, and like many people navigating grief, structure and routine had become both more important and more difficult. My intention was simple. Not to replace anything human, but to offer something practical. A tool that could help prompt her day, remind her of tasks, even act as a light touch sounding board when the house felt a little too quiet.

The response was immediate. Firm. Unmovable. A complete rejection.

And what struck me even more was that just the day before, she had been sat with friends and family of a similar generation, all discussing AI with a level of certainty that it was, without question, one of the worst things to happen. No nuance. No curiosity. Just a clear line drawn.

Now, I understand it. I really do.

Because if you pause for a moment and place

yourself back several decades, imagine the arrival of television. Before it, entertainment was live, local, human. Music halls, theatres, community gatherings. Then suddenly, people were appearing inside a box in your living room. Moving. Talking. Performing.

That must have felt extraordinary. And, if we are honest, probably unsettling.

Yet today, we do not even think about it. The extraordinary becomes ordinary. The unfamiliar becomes invisible.

And here is where it gets interesting.

At the other end of the spectrum, we have younger generations who move through digital environments with complete ease. AI, apps, platforms, content, creation. It is second nature. Effortless. Almost instinctive. And we, as the so called “grown ups,” often find ourselves trying to pull them back. Less screen time. More real world. More balance.

So on one side, we have fear of the new. On the other, complete immersion in it.

Two worlds. Same place.

What fascinates me is not that this tension exists, but that we seem surprised by it. History is full of these moments. Every major shift, every innovation, every leap forward has created its own version of the Upside Down. A space where uncertainty lives, where narratives form quickly, and where people either lean in or pull away.

AI just happens to be the latest.

But it is not the first, and it certainly will not be the last.

The real question is not whether AI is good or bad. That is far too simplistic. The question is how we choose to engage with it. With awareness. With responsibility. With humanity at the centre.

Because used well, it can support. It can enable. It can even comfort. But like anything powerful, without thought or balance, it can just as easily overwhelm.

Perhaps what we are really experiencing is not a technological shift, but a human one. A reminder that progress does not happen in a straight line. It moves in waves. It challenges. It disrupts. It asks us to reconsider what we know and how we feel.

And maybe, just maybe, stranger things have always been happening. We just did not have the language, or the lens, to recognise them at the time.

It feels like we are living in two worlds at once. The question is whether we choose to fear the other side, or find a way to understand it.

High Sheriff of Tyne and Wear, Ammar Mirza CBE, is Chair and Founder of ABCConnexions & Executive Chair of the AmmarM Group. He also serves as Honorary Colonel of the 101st (Northumbrian) Regiment Royal Artillery and holds a range of roles across the public and private sectors as a leader in inclusive innovation, investment and internationalisation.

The hidden reason strategy starts to stall

By Andrew Silver, 360 Growth Partners

When teams are busy and the strategy still makes sense, slower progress is often not a capability issue. More often, it is a clarity issue.

When hard work stops turning into momentum

There comes a point in many growing businesses where the team is working hard, the strategy still feels sound, and yet progress starts to feel slower than it should.

That can be difficult to pin down because, on the surface, everything may look fine. People are busy. Meetings are happening. Projects are moving. The effort is there.

But momentum dips anyway.

In my experience, this is rarely because people do not care, the plan is weak, or the team lacks capability. More often, it is because ownership has become less clear than it needs to be. As businesses grow, complexity grows with them. More people are involved, more priorities are in play, and more decisions need to be made. What once felt obvious in a smaller business can quickly become blurred.

When alignment starts to wobble

This is often when a familiar pattern starts to emerge. Decisions drift back to the owner or senior leader. Managers become less certain about what they genuinely own. Teams keep checking upwards. Priorities begin competing with one another.

From the outside, it can look like a performance issue.

In reality, it is usually a clarity issue.

Most leadership teams would say the business is broadly aligned, and at a high level that is often



“

Clearer ownership creates confidence. Confidence creates pace.

Andrew Silver

true. But alignment at headline level is not the same as clarity in day-to-day leadership.

The real test is whether people can answer simple questions with confidence: Who owns this? Where does this decision sit? What am I expected to lead without checking back? What matters most right now?

When those answers are vague, even good people hesitate. Not because they are unwilling, but because they are trying to avoid getting it wrong. That hesitation creates drag. Decisions slow down, accountability becomes harder to hold, and leaders often end up carrying more than they need to.

Make ownership visible

One of the most useful shifts a leadership team can make is to turn ownership into something more visible.

That does not require layers of bureaucracy. In many cases, it simply means being clearer on three things: who owns a piece of work, what they are responsible for driving, and when decisions, actions or reviews need to happen.

That clarity can be supported through simple project rhythms, shared planning tools, clearer review points, or more visible ways of tracking priorities and decisions. The method matters less than the principle. People move faster when they can clearly see what sits with them, what sits elsewhere, and what needs escalation.

It usually starts at the top

As businesses grow, many founders, MDs and CEOs are still operating with expectations shaped by an earlier stage of the business. The role that helped build the business is not always the role that helps it scale.

That is why one of the most useful questions a leader can ask is: what is my job now?

Because until there is clarity at the top, it is very hard to create clarity elsewhere.

Strategy rarely fails because of ideas. More often, it starts to stall when those ideas do not translate cleanly into ownership, responsibility and day-to-day action. When leaders make ownership clearer, progress usually starts to feel lighter again – not because people are doing more, but because they are clearer on what is theirs to lead.

If reading this has prompted you to pause and reflect on where clarity might be slipping in your own business, that's a useful place to be.

I spend much of my time working one-to-one with business owners and leaders – listening, asking the right questions, and helping turn thinking into shared direction and practical progress. If a conversation like that would be helpful, I'm always happy to talk things through.

Get in touch at:

start@360growthpartners.co.uk
www.360growthpartners.co.uk

Emotional Intelligence through a Neurodivergent Lens

Through our workshops and talks, we support organisations to create a deeper understanding of the neurodivergent experience, provide practical Emotional Intelligence skills and develop a workplace culture that enables all brains to flourish.



Scan to book a free
discovery call...



Shelley Farnham and Paul Cheetham

New North East boutique opens its doors – putting mothers at the heart of the wedding story



L-R: Jo Stott and Brogan Owen

A new luxury store dedicated to mothers of the bride and groom has officially opened in North Shields, offering a completely new experience for women at the heart of the wedding journey.

Ānela, based at The Exchange 1856, has been created to celebrate the role of mothers in a way the wedding industry has long overlooked, offering a carefully curated destination where women can feel confident, celebrated and truly seen.

Founded by Jo Stott and Brogan Owen, Ānela was born from their experience in the bridal industry and a desire to create a space that recognises the emotional and symbolic importance of mothers on a wedding day.

The luxury store officially launched on Friday 27 March, welcoming guests to experience its

beautifully designed space, luxury collections and highly personalised approach to occasion wear.

Speaking about the inspiration behind Ānela, co-founder Jo said, “Mothers are such a central part of the family and of the wedding day itself, yet so often the experience isn’t designed with them in mind and we wanted to change that. Ānela is about celebrating the amazing women who raise us - helping them feel confident, stylish and completely themselves at such an important moment for them and their family. It’s about giving them the space, the time and the experience they truly deserve.”

Ānela is more than a boutique, offering an intentionally personal and unhurried experience. Every appointment is designed to be individual and immersive, with a focus on exceptional fit, luxurious fabrics and thoughtful craftsmanship.

The brand has described its mission as “celebrating family, style and the fabulous women at the heart of it all,” and the boutique’s interior reflects this, combining soft textures, warm tones and elegant design to create a calm, elevated environment.

Collections at Ānela have been curated to offer a quietly confident alternative to traditional occasion wear, featuring contemporary designs and carefully selected labels that prioritise comfort, confidence and individuality. Co-founder Brogan has designed their first in-house collection which emulates their vision.

Since announcing its launch, Ānela has already generated excitement across social media, with many praising its focus on recognising the emotional significance of mothers during one of life’s most meaningful moments.

Jo added, “For many women, this is a huge moment, watching their son or daughter walk up the aisle, and they deserve to feel incredible. Everything we’ve created at Ānela is about honouring that.”

With its coastal location and emotionally driven concept, Ānela marks an exciting new chapter for the North East’s retail and wedding landscape, offering a fresh, empowering approach for women who want to look and feel their best on a day that means so much.

anela.co.uk



ānela

**Inspirational, refined wedding wear for
mothers of brides and grooms**



**The Exchange 1856 • Howard Street • North Shields NE30 1SE
07831 665888 • weddingwear@anela.co.uk**



rare!

From Sanderson Young

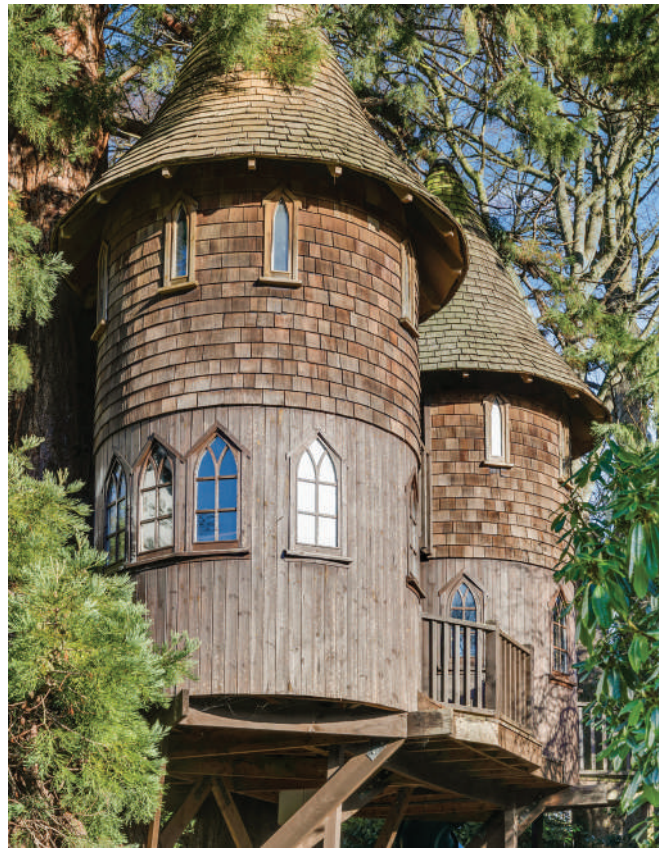


SERVING UP
SOMETHING
SPECIAL



"In my role as Branch Manager of RARE by Sanderson Young, I have the privilege of seeing many of the North East's finest homes, and Springfield has truly stayed with me for its exceptional rarity. Opportunities to acquire a home of this calibre, in such a sought-after location and with such remarkable qualities, are few and far between."

-Ashleigh Sundin



There are country houses that impress on arrival, and then there are those that seem to tell a story before you have even crossed the threshold. Springfield House, discreetly positioned in the heart of Corbridge, belongs firmly to the latter.

Built in 1874 and set within around 2.8 acres of private gardens and grounds, this remarkable Victorian home combines architectural pedigree, designer-led refinement and a sense of theatre rarely found in one address.

To start - there is also one extraordinary feature that you're not likely to find in any other home for sale in the north east - a twin turret treehouse built around 2 giant redwoods (most likely planted when the main house was built), complete with two floors, a bridge, spiral slide and fireman's pole, and commissioned by the same company behind the famous treehouse at Alnwick Garden. It sets the tone for everything else this Corbridge home does so well, combining imagination with quality.

Period features remain proudly intact, from tall ceilings and ornate architraves to handsome fireplaces and generous proportions, while a sophisticated refurbishment in collaboration with acclaimed British designer Fiona Barratt-Campbell has introduced interiors that feel timeless and deeply considered.

On the approach, electronic gates open onto a sweeping, tree-lined driveway that builds anticipation, before the stone-pillared portico and impressive front door come into view. Inside, decorative period detailing sits alongside contemporary lighting and bespoke design touches that bring warmth to the entrance hall, which indicates this is no ordinary family home, but a true hidden gem within one of the North East's most sought-after regions.

rare!
From Sanderson Young



A Home of Character and Craftsmanship

A library and seating area with bespoke shelving opens through French doors onto the terrace, while the drawing room, with its bay window and beautiful fireplace, offers a more traditional sense of grandeur, softened by fitted shelving and a striking cork feature wall. A study overlooking the manicured gardens proves that even the practical spaces here have been given equal thought. Hidden away below, an immaculate humidity- and temperature-controlled wine cellar, lined with cedar panelling and holding around 2,000 bottles, adds one of the home's most memorable indulgences.

At the centre of Springfield House is the dramatic kitchen, dining and family room, the kind of space that defines modern living. Bespoke cabinetry, richly veined quartz worktops, an electric AGA, twin Gaggenau ovens and a substantial island combine craftsmanship with performance, while pendant lighting and a handcrafted bronze feature wall add glamour and depth. From here, the house flows into a light-filled orangery extension with Crittall-style doors, a large bay window and bespoke skylight, creating an effortless connection between indoors and out.

Private Cinema & Entertainment Space

Practicality sits quietly behind the glamour. A generous utility and laundry room is tucked behind the kitchen, while a private gym and shower suite add convenience. The cinema room, meanwhile, is an unapologetically lavish retreat, complete with a 200-inch projector screen, double-row seating and a cocktail bar with illuminated shelving, fridge, dishwasher and even a draught ale hand pump.

Upstairs, a sweeping staircase rises to a galleried landing and split-level first floor leading to six bedrooms, four with en suites, while the principal suite feels like a private apartment within the home,



complete with a Juliet balcony, dressing room and luxurious bathroom finished with an Italian marble wall, freestanding bath and rainfall shower.

Gardens, Grounds & Outdoor Living

Outside, the landscaped grounds extend the home's lifestyle appeal even further. Manicured lawns, mature trees and shrubs create privacy and serenity, while an all-weather tennis court, raised sandstone terrace, Big Green Egg barbecue, pizza oven, Corten fire pits and hot tub make the outdoors part of everyday living. A greenhouse, woodland walk and newly built four-car garage complete the estate.

Yet the feature that truly sets Springfield House apart is hidden within the grounds: a one-of-a-kind twin turret treehouse, commissioned from the same company behind the iconic treehouse at The Alnwick Garden. Far from a whimsical afterthought, it is a full-scale fantasy with two floors, an internal ladder, a high-level bridge, a spiral slide and a fireman's pole. In another property, it might feel eccentric; here, it feels entirely in keeping.

Springfield house is truly something special, it combines luxury, space, light, whimsicality, and prestige all in one. Adults can host elegant parties indoors or out, or host a tasting session in the cellar.

Kids can explore the grounds and let their imagination run free in the treehouse, and families can settle into the cinema and be immersed in another world - this one-of-a-kind property has something for everyone.



**For all enquiries,
get in touch with
*Ashleigh Sundin***

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

Marketing and Media Matters

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

David Thirlwell

Head of Marketing, Sanderson Young Estate Agents

Did you always envisage a career in marketing?

Not initially. I studied Fine Art at university, so I always knew I wanted to work in a creative field, but marketing wasn't the obvious destination from day one. After graduating, I pivoted into graphic design and threw myself into learning as much as I could, studying the work of people far far better than me, freelancing at weekends for everyone from bike shops to bridal boutiques, and building a steadily dangerous collection of design books in the process.

Looking back, it was all part of the same thing, a curiosity about how good ideas are shaped and presented.

Describe your career path so far.

With a strong interest in architecture and design, I joined FaulknerBrowns after university, where I had the good fortune to train under a brilliant graphic designer who really helped instil strong practical foundations. Over time, I became heavily involved in major tender bids and complex presentation documents for multimillion-pound projects across the globe, which was both demanding and genuinely exciting.

I then joined West Nautical, a professional superyacht service provider, as a Graphic Designer. That was very much a baptism of fire into a global luxury industry, and it turned into an incredible eight-year journey that eventually led to me becoming Head of Marketing. It was a brilliantly varied role, from international photoshoots and the Monaco Yacht Show to events at country houses and supercar driving days. It certainly wasn't your average Tuesday. Being part of that world was a fantastic experience, and one that really rewarded hard work and adaptability.

Tell us about your current role.

As Head of Marketing at Sanderson Young, my focus is threefold.

First, I'm building out the Friends of SY Network, a connected partnership of trusted companies who can serve our clients to the same high standard we hold ourselves to.

Second, I oversee The Sanderson Collection Magazine, a 140-page luxury publication showcasing some of the finest property and lifestyle content in the North East.

And third, I'm focused on enhancing the marketing approach across every touchpoint of the Sanderson Young brand, from advertising, analytics and canvassing to brochures, photography, videography and everything in between. It's a broad role, but that's part of the appeal. No two days are ever quite the same, which is fortunate, because I'm not very good at sitting still.



What are you currently working on?

At the moment, we're building towards the launch of the 2026 Spring/Summer edition of The Sanderson Collection Magazine. It's shaping up to be a fantastic issue, with features including Hidden Al Fresco Gems in the North East, Aston Martin Works, and of course a superb selection of properties from across the region.

What makes the project especially rewarding is that so much of it is managed in-house, from logistics and design through to production and distribution, working closely with our partners to bring it all together twice a year.

I'm particularly excited because this will be my first full launch with Sanderson Young. And in a world where digital competes ferociously for every second of our attention, it's encouraging to see that beautifully produced print still has real weight and appetite. People still value something tangible, especially when it's done properly.

How important are AI and social media in your work?

Both are hugely important, but AI in particular has been a real game-changer.

For a while now, people have been using AI to support writing, structure documents and help shape ideas. That's all useful. But where it's really transforming things for us is in visual content. Tools such as Firefly have moved the needle dramatically. We can furnish empty development properties, turn static imagery into more dynamic social content using parallax effects, and more recently even generate 3D house visuals from site layouts and property floorplans. That would have sounded far-fetched not all that long ago

...continued



“

No two days are ever quite the same, which is fortunate, because I'm not very good at sitting still.

My attention right now is increasingly on GEO (Generative Engine Optimisation). More and more people are using large language models to ask detailed questions about property, and that behaviour is only going to grow. I think we're heading towards a major shift where, in many cases, people won't "Google" in the way they once did. They'll ask AI for advice, comparisons, scrutiny and recommendations.

That raises an important question for marketers. It's no longer just how do we become more searchable? It's how do we become the answer? That's where I want Sanderson Young to be, not just visible, but valuable.

What are the biggest challenges in your current role?

Like many in marketing, one of the biggest challenges is balancing the number of moving parts. There are always multiple projects demanding equal attention, and the skill lies in knowing what matters most, what can wait, and what genuinely makes a difference.

Alongside that, there are always external factors to navigate, particularly the wider uncertainty that can affect the property market. Marketing doesn't exist in a vacuum, so part of the role is staying commercially aware while still delivering creativity & consistency.

What is your greatest strength?

I'd say versatility.

I take pride in being able to turn my hand to a wide range of marketing disciplines. I come from a creative background, so design and visual communication are natural strengths, but I'm equally happy getting into the technical side, whether that's analysing data, refining copy, planning campaigns or organising events. I enjoy the variety, and I think that breadth helps me connect the dots between strategy and execution.

What is your biggest weakness?

Probably the belief that being busy automatically means being effective.

I've always been someone who takes on a lot and juggles multiple projects, but experience teaches you that not all activity is valuable activity. There's a real discipline in stripping away the 80% of tasks that feel productive but don't actually get you anywhere. I'm much more conscious of that now, or at least trying to be.



Who are your heroes and mentors?

At FaulknerBrowns, I have to give credit to Ian McNeil, who taught me a huge amount in terms of technical skill, and Geoff Moore - MD of West Nautical, who played a major role in bringing me out of my shell, building my confidence, and opening my eyes to the commercial side of business.

And lastly, my wife, Rosie. I genuinely wouldn't be where I am without her. She has backed my career decisions every step of the way, all while forging an impressive path of her own. Having that kind of support behind you makes an enormous difference.

From a creative point of view, I still find myself looking at the work of local agencies such as Jump and Altogether Creative. Their style, creativity and motion work consistently punch well above their weight.

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

Hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work.

It's simple, and most successful leaders I've met have one thing in common: they work hard. There's no glamorous twist to it. Just consistency, effort and showing up properly.

How do you like to unwind?

Beach with the family, Pizza, Cycling, Beer, Wild Camping...in that order!

www.sandersonyoung.co.uk

Our Lettings Experts are Here to Guide the Way



Gail McLean and
Ryan Hopkins
are here to help
landlords let with
confidence.

sandersonyoung.co.uk





Muckle LLP expands real estate dispute resolution team with solicitor appointment

Muckle LLP has strengthened its real estate dispute resolution expertise by welcoming a new solicitor.

Liam Musgrave has joined the firm’s highly regarded team, which has consistently earned a top tier ranking in Legal 500 UK.

Liam studied his undergraduate law degree at Leeds Beckett University and then completed his Legal Practice Course (LPC) during the pandemic. After completing his LPC, Liam returned to his native North East and began his legal career working as a paralegal in the commercial property team at a regional law firm before then starting his training contract, gaining experience in both commercial property and litigation. He then qualified as a solicitor in 2024.

Liam said: “I was ready for a new challenge, so when the opportunity came to work at Muckle, I just had to take it. Muckle’s reputation is fantastic – not only for its work and clients but for its commitment to its people.”



Armstrong Watson restructuring and insolvency director appointed R3 North East Chair

Armstrong Watson Restructuring and Insolvency Director Kerry Pearson has been appointed North East Chair of R3, the trade association for insolvency and restructuring professionals.

In her new role, Kerry will represent R3’s members across the North East, facilitate networking and knowledge-sharing opportunities, and ensure local voices are heard at a national level. She plans to organise events that encourage learning and engagement, and to build stronger relationships with key regional stakeholders.

“This appointment is both an honour and a responsibility,” said Kerry. “It provides an opportunity to influence positive change, share best practices, and strengthen collaboration in the North East.”

“I’ve always been passionate about promoting the value of our profession and ensuring businesses and individuals receive the right advice during challenging times. I’m committed to supporting the insolvency and restructuring profession and to contributing to the region’s business community. This role allows me to advocate for the sector and raise awareness of its importance.”



RG Corporate Finance announces trio of promotions as team continues to grow

RG Corporate Finance (RGCF), the North East-based, nationally focused independent corporate finance advisory boutique, has announced a series of internal promotions as part of its continued growth and development of talent within the team.

Tom Cosby has been promoted to Senior Manager, while Andy Alexander and Conor Quinn have both been promoted to Manager.

Tom joined the firm in 2018 as a trainee, gaining experience across Accounts, Audit and Assurance and Corporate Finance. Following the completion of his ACA and CTA qualifications, he joined the corporate finance team in 2020 and has since played a key role in advising on a range of transactions.

Andy joined RGCF in 2024 as an Executive from Azets, bringing with him the ACA qualification and experience in audit. Since joining RGCF, he has contributed to a number of deals including advising on the sale of AK Teaching to PE backed Zen, advising TDC backed AUXO on the sale of Simply Education and Healthii, and continues to support clients across a variety of sectors.

Conor also joined RGCF in 2024, having started his career at KPMG in 2021 within the firms audit team after completing a degree in Accounting and Finance at Newcastle. He has quickly established himself within RGCF, working on a range of transactions across a number of sectors.



We provide growing businesses with strategic financial guidance.

To find how we can help contact Andy Briggs

**enquiries@iagrowth.co.uk
07989 702010 | www.iagrowth.co.uk**



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



Most business owners build a team who are similar to them. People with similar backgrounds, similar thinking and skills. It feels comfortable. But a team that thinks like you has exactly the same blind spots as you.

The businesses that grow fastest aren't built around one person's strengths. They're built around a clear understanding of what the business needs.

1. Work out what only you should be doing.

Before thinking about who to hire, get clear on where your time is genuinely best spent. Most business owners are doing things that someone else could handle, which means the work that only they can do gets squeezed. Write down everything you do in a typical week. Anything that doesn't require your specific expertise is a candidate to hand over.

2. Hire for the gap, not the workload.

Most businesses hire when they're already overwhelmed, which means they hire fast and hire wrong. The best hiring decisions come from understanding what the business is missing rather than just who is needed to share the load.

3. Understand what a great team actually delivers.

There's a tendency to see hiring as a cost. The better way to look at it is as a return on investment. The right person in the right role frees up your time, improves what the business delivers, and creates the headspace to focus on growth. A business that depends entirely on its owner has a ceiling. A business with the right team around it doesn't.

The best thing you can do for your business might not be working harder. It might be building the team that means you don't have to.

WIN

Sign up to the email version of INTERESTING TIMES at www.conceptaccountancy.co.uk and WIN copies of the books we review, and more, every single month.

INTERESTING QUOTE

Hire people who are better than you are, then leave them to get on with it.

David Ogilvy

JUST ONE THING

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

Write down everything you did last week. Circle the things that only you can do. Everything else is a conversation about whether the right person is doing it. Most business owners are surprised how short that circled list actually is.

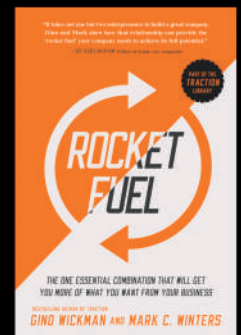
HAVE A READ

Rocket Fuel

Every business has a Visionary and an Integrator and most businesses owners are missing one. This book explains why so many businesses plateau and how finding the right person to complement your own strengths can transform how a business grows.

Practical, direct, and eye opening.

£10(ish) online.



INTERESTED?

If you're interested in working with an accountant that really is interested in you, you'll be interested in Concept Accountancy. Please call us on 0191 603 1760 or email us at hello@conceptaccountancy.co.uk.

PS

Don't forget to sign up to the email version of INTERESTING TIMES at www.conceptaccountancy.co.uk and WIN copies of the books we review, and more, every single month.

NOT ALL GOALS ARE FINANCIAL. AND NOT ALL BALANCE IS ABOUT NUMBERS.

0191 603 1760

www.conceptaccountancy.co.uk
hello@conceptaccountancy.co.uk

CONCEPT ACCOUNTANCY

ACCOUNTANCY WITH INTEREST®

New appointment for Clive Owen LLP

Clive Owen LLP, one of the North's leading independent accountancy, business and tax advisory firms, has further strengthened its senior management team following the promotion of one of its directors.

Chris Tindle joins the firm's partnership as Accounts and Business Advisory Partner who will operate across the firm's Durham and Newcastle offices.

Specialising in working with owner-managed businesses and SMEs across a range of sectors, Chris delivers compliance and advisory services and is passionate about helping clients add tangible value to their operations. He began his career as a trainee accountant at an independent firm, progressing to Practice Development Manager, before spending six years as a Partner at a Durham-based practice. Chris joined Clive Owen LLP in 2023 as Audit & Accounts Director, bringing with him significant experience and has been instrumental in growing the firm's non-audit service lines in Durham and Newcastle.

Chris Tindle said: "I am incredibly proud to be joining the partnership at Clive Owen LLP at such an exciting time and period of strong growth.

"I have thoroughly enjoyed my time at the firm these last three years, and I am excited to play a key role in expanding our presence in Durham and Newcastle, supporting our clients and contributing to the firm's long-term success."



Hubexo relocates Newcastle office with Hay & Kilner's support

Hubexo, a global construction technology company operating across 25 countries, five regions, and more than 40 office locations worldwide, has relocated its Newcastle office as part of its continued investment in the region. The new workspace, located at One Trinity Gardens on the Newcastle Quayside, will serve as one of Hubexo's core Hub locations for software delivery.

Hay & Kilner has advised Hubexo on the relocation, as the business establishes a new workspace to

support its continued operations in the region. The transaction was led by Georgia Whitfield from Hay & Kilner's commercial property team.

"We were delighted to support Hubexo with the relocation of its Newcastle office," said Georgia Whitfield. "Finding the right space is an important step for any business and it was a pleasure to work with Pamela and the team to help deliver a new office that supports their operational needs."

Pamela Jowsey, Facilities Manager for Hubexo, said: "We're thrilled with the new space, and very pleased with the support provided by Hay & Kilner throughout the process. Georgia's guidance helped ensure the transaction progressed smoothly and efficiently, allowing us to move forward with establishing our new Newcastle Hub."

True Solicitors strengthens team with appointment of 12 new Associates

Newcastle upon Tyne law firm True Solicitors LLP is pleased to announce the appointment of 12 new Associate lawyers across the firm, reflecting both the firm's continued growth and its investment in legal talent.

The appointments span multiple practice areas and reflect the firm's ongoing commitment to developing its people and delivering exceptional service to clients.

Each of the newly appointed Associates has demonstrated outstanding legal expertise and dedication, and has made a strong contribution to client success.

These appointments highlight the depth of talent within the firm and reinforce its focus on nurturing career progression at every level.

The new Associates will play a key role in supporting the firm's strategic objectives and strengthening its offering across core practice areas.



WHAT'S YOUR NUMBER?

No, not your phone number. The other one. The number you are actually working towards.

Most business owners have a rough idea. But rough ideas don't build great businesses. Knowing your number means understanding exactly what your business needs to generate to fund your plans, your life and your future.

At Concept, we help ambitious business owners get precise about what their number is. Then we help them build towards it.

Because knowing your number changes everything. It turns your ambition into a plan and your hard work into real progress.

That's what Accountancy with Interest means. Let's chat.

CONCEPT ACCOUNTANCY

ACCOUNTANCY WITH INTEREST®

NOT ALL GOALS ARE FINANCIAL. AND NOT ALL BALANCE IS ABOUT NUMBERS.

0191 603 1760

www.conceptaccountancy.co.uk
hello@conceptaccountancy.co.uk



Jaspreet Lally

Starting from Xero delivering clear business benefits

By Jaspreet Lally, head of outsourcing at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors

The start of a new financial year is often the catalyst for businesses of all sizes to review how they manage their financial systems, and consider whether improvements could benefit operations and the bottom line.

With HMRC's Making Tax Digital drive becoming ever-more all-encompassing, the software that companies use to manage their financial responsibilities is one area that is becoming increasingly important.

This might be for reasons relating to cost, functionality, efficiency or access to better management information, or a combination of all four.

Whatever the reason, there are clear benefits to be had from making sure that the system chosen continues to meet businesses' evolving requirements.

For some, there may be a hesitation around changing software, often due to the perceived logistical nightmare of moving financial data from one platform to another.

However, with the support of RMT, the process of doing so is remarkably painless, and we have been successfully carried out Xero migrations

for a growing number of firms for many years, both regionally and across the UK.

The software is suitable for businesses of all sizes and sectors and we often receive great feedback about the significant time, cost and reporting benefits resulting from the move – indeed, our clients have found the decision to move a positive one that they wish they had made earlier.

As a cloud-based system, Xero also provides faster access to up-to-date financial information, enabling more timely and informed business decisions.

We have a tried and tested process in place for helping our clients work their way through every stage of the migration.

This begins with an initial exploratory phone call to understand how the business operates and identify the key areas for improvement.

From there, we map out the migration

process step-by-step, including advice on any customisations or add-on applications we believe would be useful to aid business operations and reporting.

A date is then agreed for the migration, typically aligned with the end of a VAT quarter or financial year end, to enable a clear break within the records and to allow a clean start to be made on Xero.

Once the necessary information is received, the migration itself can be completed within just a few days.

A bespoke training session is arranged which is provided by the expert RMT Outsourcing Team to ensure that the client's finance team is fully equipped to make the most of everything that the Xero platform offers.

This training is individually tailored and can be carried out on-site, remotely or at our offices.

Ongoing support is also provided, ensuring any queries or issues are resolved quickly and that your business continues to maximise the value of the system.

In addition, our Xero Healthcheck service is available for businesses already using the platform, offering practical recommendations to help both existing and new users improve the way they utilise the system.

For further information on migrating your business's financial data onto Xero's cloud-based platform with the help of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors' expert Outsourcing Team, please contact Jaspreet Lally on 0191 256 9500 or visit www.r-m-t.co.uk

Johnston Carmichael strengthens Newcastle team with five new hires



L-R: Cameron Greenwood, Gemma Gibson, Paul Shields, Julia Garrett, Alex Nicholson, Abbie Green, Kenn Gameuda

Leading UK accountancy and business advisory firm, Johnston Carmichael, has strengthened its Newcastle office with five new appointments across tax and audit, as the team continues to expand its presence in the North East.

The firm has welcomed Cameron Greenwood as Employer Services Assistant Manager, Kenn Gamueda as Financial Reporting Advisory Assistant, Julia Garrett as VAT Assistant and Abbie Green as Audit Assistant. The new hires follow the recent arrival of Gemma Gibson as Audit Partner, further strengthening the office's senior team.

Kenn, Julia and Abbie join the firm under training contracts, as part of the firm's long-term investment in developing future talent. They form part of a growing cohort of early career professionals in the office, with four already in place and a further three expected to join later this summer.

The appointments reflect Johnston Carmichael's continued investment in growing its Newcastle team, strengthening capability across both senior and early career roles.

Paul Shields, Partner and Head of the Newcastle office, said: "The continued growth of our team reflects both the strength of the local market and our long-term commitment to the North East. Our focus is on building a team with the depth, breadth and ambition to support clients at every stage of their growth. Alongside experienced hires, investing in early career talent is a key part of that – ensuring we continue to develop the next generation of advisers while strengthening our capability across the region."

Since launching its office in 2023, the firm has grown to a team of 25 and recently expanded its office to support its long-term ambitions in the North East.

johnstoncarmichael.com

BNI Cookson celebrates 21 years of driving local business growth

BNI Cookson, one of the North East's longest-standing business networking groups, is celebrating supporting local businesses through collaboration, trust, and referrals for 21 years.

Since it was founded on April 29, 2005, South Tyneside-based BNI Cookson has welcomed 266 members and generated more than £15million in business.

Steve Summerbell-Myers, of Paper Voice: Creative Design, is the group's longest serving member having attended 729 meetings since he joined in 2011.

Reflecting on his journey, Steve has branded the support from the group's members as "invaluable" over the years.

He said: "I joined BNI Cookson back in 2011 and, when I launched my own business in 2014, the support from members was invaluable.

"Nearly 15 years on, I genuinely believe I wouldn't have a business without the support of this network."

Claire Woods, a member of seven years, has highlighted the personal and professional impact that BNI Cookson has had on her life and business.

She commented: "BNI has not only helped grow my business through referrals, but it's also allowed me to build lasting relationships.

"The network extends far beyond the room – you never know where your next opportunity will come from."

As the group celebrates its 21st anniversary, it is pledging to continue



helping local businesses grow through trusted relationships and collaboration.

The business development group meets every Friday morning at the Little Haven Hotel, on River Drive, in South Shields.

North East fund manager celebrates fund impact milestone



Joanne Whitfield

FW Capital has announced the full realisation of the Tees Valley Catalyst Fund, a milestone marking the successful deployment and repayment of £26 million in bond finance to 29 companies across the region.

Backed by the Government's Regional Growth Fund via the Tees Valley Combined Authority, the fund has acted as a powerful economic engine. By providing the short-term loans necessary to secure performance bonds and warranties, the fund has helped North East businesses secure contracts worth nearly £330 million. The impact on the local workforce has been equally significant, with the fund helping to create 588 new jobs and safeguard 1,322 existing roles.

The fund has assisted companies in a wide range of sectors including manufacturing and construction with local businesses such as Wilton Engineering and Hambleton Steel benefitting from its support.

The Next Chapter: The Teesside Flexible Investment Fund

While the Tees Valley Catalyst Fund closed to new applications in 2023, FW Capital's mission to bridge the funding gap for ambitious firms continues. The firm is now actively

deploying capital through the Teesside Flexible Investment Fund, managed alongside backing from the Teesside Pension Fund. The fund is designed for businesses that find traditional lending restrictive, offering a versatile range of support.

Fuelling Innovation

The impact of this ongoing support is already visible. Parallooy Group, a Teesside-based stainless steel alloy specialist, was the first to receive investment from the Teesside Flexible Investment Fund. This backing has played a key role in Parallooy's next stage of growth, facilitating activities that are generating new jobs locally, delivering a significant impact on the Teesside economy while meeting the increased demands from industrial markets and advances in new technologies.

Joanne Whitfield, Fund Director at FW Capital explains: "The Tees Valley Catalyst Fund made a real difference to businesses in Teesside, helping them win contracts that wouldn't have otherwise been possible. Our commitment to assisting local businesses doesn't stop with the realisation of the Fund. We're currently working with businesses via the Teesside Flexible Investment Fund which we manage alongside backing from the Teesside Pension Fund. We want to encourage people to talk to us when looking to access bond finance and take advantage of the fund, which can help businesses successfully tender for contracts. This sits alongside our broader range of other

funds under management, allowing us to provide flexible capital to back growth and innovation for all types of businesses across the region."

The Teesside Flexible Investment Fund is designed for businesses that find traditional lending restrictive, offering a versatile range of support:

- Loans from £100,000 to £2 million for contract-related bonds including advance payment guarantees, performance, warranty, highways and water authority bonds. Repayment terms are available of up to two years.
- Loans from £250,000 to £3 million for residential and non-speculative commercial developments. Providing up to 100 percent of build costs for suitable schemes with repayment terms available up to three years.
- Loans and equity investments from £250,000 to £3 million for management teams seeking to own and run their own business. Investments are available between 1-7 years.

FW Capital manages a suite of funds across the North East providing the flexible capital required to back growth and innovation, and support property development.

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

One of the North's leading independent accountancy firms

Darlington | York | Durham | Middlesbrough | Newcastle

- Audit & Accountancy
- Business Planning
- Consulting
- Corporate Finance
- Grants Advisory
- Outsourcing
- Tax Compliance & Advisory
- VAT & Indirect Tax

Get in touch with the team today to find out how we
could support you or your business

 enquiries@cliveowen.com

 www.cliveowen.com

 Clive Owen LLP



Board Meetings

By Mark Brown, L4 Financial

Are you deciding the future or explaining the past?

In many SME boardrooms, the structure of a meeting looks broadly the same.

Management accounts are circulated. Variances are discussed. Questions are asked. Explanations are given.

By the end of the meeting, everyone understands what has already happened.

The problem is that very little has been decided about what happens next.

That distinction matters more than most realise.

The pattern most businesses fall into

Across SME boards I've worked with, a consistent pattern emerges.

As businesses grow, reporting becomes more detailed but not necessarily more useful.

Boards spend time reviewing revenue, costs and margins, often line by line. The focus is on understanding performance rather than shaping it.

Over time, the finance function becomes a mechanism for explanation rather than decision-making.

It is not unusual to see:

- Meetings dominated by historic performance
- Discussions centred on "why" rather than "what next"
- Limited forward-looking analysis
- Decisions delayed because the full picture is not clear

On the surface, everything appears under control. In reality, the business is reacting rather than leading.

Why this becomes a problem

Time is the one thing boards do not have.

If a meeting is largely spent reviewing the past, there is limited capacity left to address what will shape the next three, six or twelve months.

This is where risk builds quietly.

- Cash pressures are identified later than they should be
- Cost increases are understood but not addressed early enough to protect margin
- Opportunities are missed because the board lacks confidence to act early
- Decisions are delayed, often until the cost of inaction outweighs the risk of acting

The business does not suddenly go off track. It gradually loses momentum, often without a single obvious cause.

What strong boards do differently

High-performing SME boards still review the numbers.



What changes is the emphasis.

Financial information is used to support decisions, not dominate the conversation.

In practice:

- Performance is summarised clearly, not analysed line by line
- Focus is placed on the key drivers of the business
- Forward-looking insight is built into reporting
- Time is protected for discussion, challenge and decision-making
- The conversation shifts from "What happened?" to "What are we going to do about it?"

That is where value is created.

The role of financial leadership

This shift does not happen by accident.

It requires financial leadership at board level, not simply a finance function focused on reporting.

Producing accurate numbers is the baseline. The real impact comes from interpreting them, linking them to the business, and framing decisions.

That means:

- Connecting financial performance to operational activity
- Highlighting risks and opportunities early
- Creating simple, reliable reporting
- Supporting timely, informed decisions

When this is in place, the board is no longer reliant on hindsight. It operates with clarity, confidence and intent.

A simple test

At the end of your next board meeting, ask: Are we clearer on what has happened, or what we are going to do next?

Both matter, but only one moves the business forward.

Final thought

Most SMEs do not lack effort, ambition or capability.

Where things fall down is in how financial information is used at board level.

When reporting is aligned to decision-making, conversations change. Decisions happen earlier. Risk is reduced. Opportunities are acted on with greater confidence.

The numbers do not just describe the business. They start to drive it.

For businesses looking to strengthen decision-making at board level, the starting point is often not more data, but clearer visibility and structure.

That is where the real value of experienced financial leadership sits.

L4 Financial Management

L4 Financial provides fractional Finance Director and board advisory support to SMEs, helping leadership teams improve financial visibility and make more informed decisions as their businesses grow.

Mark works with SME owners and boards to strengthen reporting, forecasting and overall financial clarity, with a focus on supporting better, earlier decision-making.

Mark@L4Financial.co.uk

L4Financial.co.uk | 07960 031554

Board-level financial leadership, part time



Financial
Management

Supporting owners, MDs and boards with confident financial decisions

- Clear, independent financial input for owners and boards
- Decision-focused reporting, forecasting and cash flow
- Developing finance teams, systems and financial discipline



☎ 07960 031554

✉ Mark@L4Financial.co.uk



L4Financial.co.uk



UNW hosts annual Employment Taxes seminar in Newcastle

North East independent accountancy and business advisory firm UNW welcomed around 100 clients and contacts to The Catalyst in Newcastle on Wednesday 1 April for its latest Employment Taxes seminar, providing an update on a number of key areas affecting employers.

With a Charlie and the Chocolate Factory-inspired theme running throughout the morning, the firm's specialist Employment Taxes team delivered a session that brought together practical insight and real-world examples.

The session focused on what's changing, what it means in practice, and what employers should be thinking about now – drawing on insight from UNW's work with clients across a range of sectors.

A recording of the seminar is available on request. Please email events@unw.co.uk for details.







Michelle Percy

Develop North PLC reports strong performance and solid foundations for next phase of growth

North East investment company Develop North PLC (Develop North) has reported a year of strong performance in its annual results for the year ending 30 November 2025, creating a solid platform for its next phase of growth following the publication of its new investment strategy and fundraising.

During the year, Develop North achieved a Net Asset Value (NAV) total return of 2.1% while continuing its consistent income delivery to shareholders, distributing approximately £1.0 million in dividends, equivalent to 4 pence per share.

Investment income increased by 14.6% to £2.22 million, with £9.5 million deployed across nine projects and three successful exits, bringing total exits since inception to 26.

The company's total portfolio value increased to £24.7 million, with 70.3% of funds deployed in the North East of England, reflecting Develop North's growing regional focus.

Develop North is listed on the main market of the London Stock Exchange and during the reporting period provided finance solutions to credible professionals and businesses across the North of England and Scotland, while generating attractive returns for investors.

The company has since received shareholder approval for an expanded investment strategy, enabling it to operate as a broader real estate investment platform.

Since its inception in 2017, the company has supported more than 43 projects with a combined Gross Development Value exceeding £280 million, deploying approximately £90 million in capital, paying out a total of £10 million to investors and helping to support an estimated 12,000 jobs.

Recent projects supported during the year included a retail scheme in South Shields, the renovation of a historic wedding venue in County Durham, industrial unit development near Northallerton and a boutique smart hotel in Edinburgh.

In addition, during this year, Develop North's leadership team was strengthened by the appointment of Dr Sameer Al Ansari as a non-

executive director and Deputy Chairman. Dr Al-Ansari is an internationally respected figure in finance, investment and corporate governance, and his appointment supports the company's ambitions to raise its international profile and drive new investment into Develop North.

Following the year end, shareholders approved Develop North's new investment objective and policy, and the company published a prospectus outlining its ambition to become a £300 million assets-under-management multi-asset investment company, spanning residential real estate, commercial real estate and real estate lending. Michelle Percy was also appointed Chief Executive Officer to lead the next phase of growth.

Michelle Percy, CEO of Develop North PLC, said: "These results reflect the strength of the investment platform Develop North has built over nearly a decade. The company has established a strong track record, trusted regional relationships and a stable base from which to grow.

"Our next chapter is about scaling that success, attracting more capital into the North East and creating greater opportunities for both regional and national investors to participate in the region's growth. With significant investment, regeneration and economic momentum across the North East, Develop North is uniquely positioned to channel investment into projects that support jobs, development and long-term prosperity."

Develop North is advised by Newcastle-based fund management specialists Tier One Capital.

www.developnorth.co.uk
www.tieroncapital.co.uk

Funding doesn't need to feel complicated.

CCBS makes funding simple, structured, and certain - for ambitious SMEs across the North East.

At CCBS, we sit where business and funding meet.

We clarify the landscape, shape the right solution, and engage with lenders who actually have appetite — so you can move forward with confidence.

Whether you're planning an **acquisition**, **expanding** operations, freeing up **working capital**, or **investing in assets**, we explain your options in plain English and guide you through the right route, end-to-end.

We're local.

We're relationship-driven.

And we make funding feel a lot less stressful.



Scan the QR code to read our 5-minute **Funding Insights 2026 guide**

A clear overview of today's funding environment — perfect for SME owners looking to understand their options.

Or email us to start the conversation:
info@ccbsg.co.uk



Where business and funding converge.

www.ccbsg.co.uk

0191 211 1471



CCBS Group
Business & Funding Solutions



“

That first interaction with a customer has to be human.

Driving growth through innovation and partnership

Chris Birkett, CEO of Winn Group, on scaling a North East success story into a national force.

Founded in 2002 by Jeff Winn, Winn Group began as a regional legal practice focused on personal injury. When Chris joined in 2006, the business employed just 25 people—but its ambitions were already far bigger. Combining legal expertise with his insurance background, the leadership team set out early on to build a national operation.

Today, that ambition has evolved into a fully integrated accident management service. Winn Group supports drivers involved in non-fault accidents with an end-to-end approach—providing replacement vehicles, coordinating repairs and delivering in-house legal support where needed. Additional services, including vehicle storage, medical reporting and rehabilitation advice, ensure customers are supported throughout what is often a stressful experience.

That focus on practical, customer-first delivery continues to underpin the company's growth. A key milestone came late last year, when Winn Group completed a refinance deal designed to accelerate its next phase. Rather than a sale, the business secured a term loan of £95 million from partners PGIM and Nomura.

"The funding allows us to move faster," Chris explains. "It gives us the platform to really push on over the next three to four years."

The impact has been immediate. The final quarter of the last financial year delivered record volumes, and momentum has carried into the new year. "We've seen strong month-on-month growth," he says. "We're targeting over 28,000 replacement vehicle cases in the next 12 months, which would be another record for us."

Central to this expansion is a strategic shift in how Winn Group works with insurers. While the company has historically been associated with legal services, it is now positioning itself firmly as a partner to the insurance sector.

"We're not a litigation-led business in the way people might assume," Chris says. "In reality, fewer than 4% of our cases ever reach a court hearing."

Instead, the emphasis is on collaboration which is reflected in a growing number of insurer partnerships. Among them is a new agreement with Aviva, centred on a telematics-based product launching in mid-2026.

Telematics technology, often known as "black box" insurance, captures detailed data on driving behaviour, from speed and braking patterns to impact forces during an accident. While traditionally used for younger drivers, it is now being rolled out more widely.

"If the data shows you're a good driver, it can actually reduce your premium," Chris explains. "It's about creating a fairer picture of risk."

For Winn Group, telematics also plays a crucial role in incident response. Real-time data allows teams to assess accidents as they happen, including location, severity and potential risk to the driver.

"If we can't reach someone and the data suggests a serious incident, we can deploy emergency services," he says. "That's something we've built strong relationships around, and it's made a real difference in many cases."

Beyond safety, the technology is transforming how claims are handled. With clear data available from the outset, disputes over liability can often be resolved immediately removing delays and reducing costs.

This aligns with Winn Group's broader push towards protocol agreements with insurers. These arrangements allow claims to be settled within agreed frameworks, often within 30 days, without the need for litigation. Around half of the UK insurance market now operates with Winn Group under such agreements.

"It's about transparency and efficiency," Chris says. "We can demonstrate the savings to insurers, and customers benefit from a much smoother process."

Internally, the business is also embracing innovation. Investment in automation and AI is helping to streamline administrative processes, increasing capacity without expanding headcount. Over the past year, case volumes within the company's first notification of loss team have risen by 23%, while staffing levels have reduced against budget.

Even so, Chris is clear that technology has its limits.

"That first interaction with a customer has to be human," he says. "Every accident is different, and you need that understanding and empathy from the outset."

Customer communication has evolved alongside these changes. Digital tools, including an app-based portal, WhatsApp messaging and text updates, now sit alongside traditional phone support ensuring clients can engage in the way that suits them best.

Operating a true 24/7 service remains essential, particularly when working with major insurers. It also requires significant infrastructure, from staffing and systems to compliance standards such as ISO 27001.

"If you want to work with the biggest insurers, those things are a given," Chris notes.

Geographically, Winn Group continues to expand its footprint, with growing operations in Scotland complementing its North East base. Financially, the business remains on a strong trajectory, with turnover expected to exceed £200 million and EBITDA forecast to surpass £36 million.

Looking ahead, the strategy is clear: deepen partnerships, embrace innovation where it adds value, and maintain a strong human focus at the heart of the business. In an industry often defined by complexity, Winn Group is proving that simplicity, done well can be a powerful differentiator.

www.winngroup.co.uk

Tilly Bailey & Irvine

law firm



L-R: Rhiannon Melrose, Georgia Wilkinson, Sophie Wilding, Tyler Plunkett, Laura Nomaz, and Bethany Atkinson

A lot can happen over 12 months

And at Tilly Bailey and Irvine (TBI Law) our first year in Wearside has been nothing short of extraordinary.

Since expanding into Wearside late last Spring, after we acquired Scanlans, the site has continued to propel TBI Law and grow our regional footprint.

Staff numbers at the John Street office have more than doubled, rising from nine to 20, while demand generated by the new base has helped drive a 16 per cent year-on-year increase in new matters across our firm.

It is proof that as a business, you should never stop trying to grow.

And growing is what we've consistently done for almost 200 years.

From our first office in Hartlepool, TBI Law has been helping clients across the North East and beyond, expanding with bases in Wynard, Barnard Castle and Stockton.

The Sunderland move was a major moment

for the business, and we've treated it as such, investing over £40,000 to develop the site and the team within it.

That refurbishment created the physical space needed to grow the team and broaden the services available to our clients across Wearside.

Historically, Scanlans was well known locally for criminal defence, probate and conveyancing - services we still proudly offer leading expertise in.

However, under the TBI umbrella, we've now successfully grown it into a genuine full-service firm, offering the entire range services that TBI Law has long been synonymous with.

That includes family law, personal injury and commercial services.

It is an approach that mirrors a wider ethos within our company - to offer comprehensive support delivered under one roof.

Over the years, that approach has seen us become of the North East's biggest, oldest - and most trusted - law firms.

That trust and expertise means that we are often tasked with working on some of the highest-profile legal cases - among them recently, Medomsley and the Infected Blood Claims Inquiry.

Complex matters that demand both expertise and capacity.

And we have both; From that first office in 1842, our firm now employs more than 200 staff across the North East.

And we are growing in more ways than one.

Nine members of staff have recently received well-earned promotions.

Those include three solicitors - Laura Nomaz, Jessica Inman, and Georgia Wilkinson - promoted shortly after returning from maternity leave to senior associate roles.

Joining them in that position are Rhiannon Melrose and Tyler Plunkett, while Bethany Atkinson, Mollie Hall, Olivia Linton and Sophie Wilding have been promoted to associate-level roles.

Several of those promoted have progressed through the firm over several years, with some starting as secretaries, underlining a long-standing commitment within TBI Law to nurture talent from within.

It is an unwavering commitment that we really are very proud of.

Each year, we reward staff with promotions, and for a firm approaching its 200th anniversary, the message is crystal clear.

We never stop investing.

In our sites. In our business.

And, of course, in our people - be it in growing our team, or the time and effort we invest in achieving outstanding results for our clients.

And a year on from launching our Sunderland site, TBI Law is proof that even the most established names can still find new ways to move forward.

www.tbilaw.co.uk



"Exceptional, highly recommended"

"Really impressed from start to finish with the service I received."

Your Legal Partner, in the Heart of the North East.

Introducing our boutique firm of specialist solicitors, assisting individuals and businesses.

We can support you with...



Employment
Contracts



Mediation



Settlement
Agreements



Commercial
Litigation



Tribunal

www.clrlaw.co.uk

hello@clrlaw.co.uk

[0191 603 0061](tel:01916030061)



RICHARD REED
SOLICITORS

Legal advice for all aspects of personal and business life

GET IN TOUCH

0191 567 0465

info@richardreed.co.uk



richardreed.co.uk



“

**We are
delighted to
bring Cumbria
Employment
Solicitors into
the Sintons’
family.**

Christopher Welch

Sintons signals major expansion with acquisition of Cumbria Employment Law Specialists

Sintons, the North's premier full-service law firm, has announced a significant milestone in its continued growth strategy with the acquisition of Cumbria Employment Solicitors.

This move represents the next logical step for the Newcastle-based firm, further extending its reach across the North of England and reinforcing its reputation as a regional heavyweight in the legal sector. In acquiring Cumbria's leading niche employment practice, Sintons is not only extending its geographical footprint but also investing further in the acquisition of heavyweight legal talent.

For over 15 years, Cumbria Employment Solicitors has been the go-to firm for complex employment law in its region. By joining forces with Sintons, the firm is now able to provide all the benefits of a full-service law firm to its existing client base. The acquisition sees the highly respected Michael Bauer and his team fully integrated into the Sintons' employment team, adding to the expertise in employment law for which Sintons is known.

Christopher Welch, Managing Partner at Sintons notes that "Sintons are in a period of sustained, strategic growth. We are delighted to bring Cumbria Employment Solicitors into the Sintons' family. However, this isn't just a talent acquisition; this is part of our strategic drive to expand into different geographic regions by partnering with people who have a proven track record whilst sharing our values of client excellence. This latest move, when coupled with our continued growth in the Yorkshire region means that we are bigger, stronger, and more capable than ever."

"When I first started to speak to Michael, I was immediately struck not only by his talent as an employment lawyer but also by his passion for his clients and for the region in which he has lived and worked the majority of his career. I knew instantly that we had found people and a firm that we could work with for the benefit of all our clients."

Michael Bauer, Partner at Sintons, commented: "Joining forces with Sintons was the natural next step for us. To continue to compete at the highest level, you need the resources and backing of a larger firm. By joining with Sintons, we are giving our existing client base access to the range of services and to the expertise in other areas of law that only a firm of this stature can provide. We now have the right platform to drive the growth of our combined business across Cumbria whilst still delivering the excellent, and personal, service for which we are known."

www.sintons.co.uk



Jade Kennedy, Dispute Resolution Solicitor

Mincoffs grows team with solicitor appointment

A solicitor appointment has strengthened a core team at a leading North East corporate and commercial law firm.

The dispute resolution team at Mincoffs Solicitors has welcomed Jade Kennedy to support increased instructions across the department.

Jade trained and qualified at a regional firm in the North East, where she gained experience across residential and commercial disputes, including landlord and tenant, property litigation and small claims disputes.

Prior to her training, Jade spent seven years at the Newcastle office of an international law firm, managing her own workload as a paralegal and providing support to others in the team as an associate paralegal.

Jade said: "I am delighted to be joining Mincoffs' dispute resolution team. Mincoffs has a longstanding excellent reputation in the North East, which I am excited to become a part of.

"From my first interview I knew the firm was the right fit for me and have been made to feel incredibly welcome by everybody.

"I am looking forward to continuing to develop my skills in the team and being a part of their continuing success."

Mincoffs' dispute resolution team provides support to businesses and individuals on a wide range of matters, including contractual disputes, property litigation, debt recovery, alternative dispute resolution and contentious probate.

Stewart Irvine, partner and head of the dispute resolution team at Mincoffs, said: "We are very excited to welcome Jade to the team as a newly qualified solicitor. Her substantial experience as a paralegal before she secured her training contract with a local competitor, helped her to stand out during the interview process with us.

"Upon qualification, Jade wanted to secure a position with a successful commercial law firm, which offered a good client basis, a diverse workload, and the opportunity to be part of a thriving litigating team.

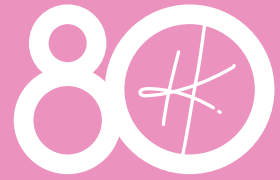
"We are pleased that Jade accepted our offer to join the team to help contribute to our continued success and we wish her all the best for her future with us."

Mincoffs Solicitors has provided expert legal services and advice across the North East and beyond for more than 75 years.

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

For more information visit www.mincoffs.co.uk

0191 232 8345 | hay-kilner.co.uk



CELEBRATING
80 YEARS

Trusted for when it matters most.

Advice built around you, your priorities and your future.

Hay & Kilner

Here for you

CORPORATE & COMMERCIAL | EMPLOYMENT | PROPERTY | CRIMINAL DEFENCE | CLINICAL NEGLIGENCE
DISPUTES | WILLS, TRUSTS, ESTATES & PROBATE | CONSTRUCTION | FAMILY & DIVORCE | AGRICULTURE



Muckle continues to invest in people with multiple promotions

Leading law firm Muckle LLP has made several key promotions, marking an exciting period of growth and succession and underlining its continued commitment to developing people.

The firm has built a reputation as one of the region's leading employers, recognised through its Investors in People Platinum and B Corp accreditations. The firm was named 'Best Place to Work – Tyne and Wear' at the North East Business Awards 2025.

Three senior promotions

Real estate specialists Carolyn McKay and Claire Naughten have been promoted to partner. Charity law expert Alison Jones has been promoted to partner and also head of the sports team.

Carolyn has extensive experience in dealing with leases, acting mostly for retail companies, charities and housing associations. Her work focuses on agreeing and managing commercial leases and dealing with estate management, alongside portfolio acquisitions, disposals and property finance work.

An experienced real estate lawyer, Claire Naughten specialises in the real estate aspects of

financial and corporate transactions and works with many leading financial institutions, with a particular specialism in development finance.

Alison Jones is hugely experienced in the charity and sports sectors. Alison advises a number of leading organisations in those sectors on a wide range of governance, constitutional, data and commercial matters. She also sits on various boards, including the board of the British Museum.

Promoting talent from within

A further seven promotions have also been made, reflecting the strength and depth of talent across the firm. Kate Rickett has been promoted to senior associate in the real estate team, where she advises repeat acquirers, banks, investors, landlords and tenants, as well as supports wider corporate transactions with specialist real estate expertise.

Promotions to associate include Tom Small and Lydia Stewart in real estate, both of whom work on a wide range of commercial property matters as part of a team handling everything from day-to-day transactions to complex, high-value deals, alongside Georgia Sproat in banking and finance, who is a trusted advisor to many of the region's leading lenders and borrowers.

In dispute resolution, Kieran O'Donoghue has been recognised for his work advising businesses and public sector bodies on a range of complex claims and contentious matters, including, in particular, his experience acting for both contracting authorities and unsuccessful bidders on procurement challenges. Amy

Carlton has been promoted to associate for her proactive and commercial approach to advising businesses on debt recovery actions.

Olivia Tindle has been promoted to associate within the corporate team, where she has gained a strong loyalty amongst her clients and colleagues for her excellent work with a range of acquirers, listed companies and investors.

Cultivating talent to accelerate success

Anthony Evans, managing partner at Muckle, said, "These promotions are a fantastic reflection of the talent, commitment and ambition we have across the firm. We are committed to supporting the personal and professional development of all of our people, and it is particularly heartening to watch the progress of lawyers who move up through the business to contribute to our ongoing success.

"Carolyn, Claire and Alison all bring a huge amount of experience to the table, and I'm confident that as partners, their contributions to the firm and their clients will be invaluable. "It's fantastic to see the promotions of Kate, Tom, Lydia, Georgia, Kieran, Olivia and Amy; it is a reflection of their hard work, ability and enthusiasm. We are immensely proud of each of them."

Alongside internal progression, Muckle continues to recruit into key roles to support increasing client demand and expand its service offering.

To learn more about roles at Muckle, visit www.muckle-llp.com/vacancies

muckle^{LLP}

Certified



Corporation

100% committed to your career

Access ongoing learning and development opportunities at a firm that progresses careers and puts its people first.



To learn more about our current vacancies, scan the QR code.

Call **0191 211 7777** or email **advice@muckle-llp.com**

muckle-llp.com

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE[®]
We invest in people Platinum



L-R: Matthew Smith, Sarah McColl, Chloe Cheeseborough, Shahar Sadat, Stephanie Rutherford and Faraz Manzur

Sweeney Miller Law announces senior promotions following record year

Sweeney Miller Law is pleased to announce a series of senior promotions, reflecting the firm's continued investment in talent, leadership and long-term growth, and following a record year and sustained year-on-year revenue growth.

Stephanie Rutherford, Head of Conveyancing in the firm's Sunderland office, has been promoted to Partner. Since joining the firm in 2018, Stephanie has played a key role in the continued success of the residential conveyancing team in Sunderland, advising clients on a wide range of residential property transactions and providing strong leadership within the office. Her appointment to the partnership recognises both her technical expertise and her significant contribution to the firm's ongoing growth and development.

The firm is also delighted to confirm the promotion of three solicitors to Senior Associate, reflecting their experience and continued commitment to client service. Matthew Smith is a senior member of the

commercial property team, supporting businesses and investors across the region and further afield. Sarah McColl plays a key role within the firm's private client team, advising on wills, lasting powers of attorney and probate and Melanie Finlay advises on all aspects of residential conveyancing and has extensive experience in complex transactions

In addition, three solicitors have been promoted to Associate Solicitor, recognising their professional development and dedication to their respective practice areas.

Shahar Sadat, specialises in commercial property work, advising on complex titles, lease creation and other specialist real estate matters. Faraz Manzur advises clients on a range of private client matters and Chloe Cheeseborough, a key

member of the firm's residential conveyancing team, specialises in sales, purchases, remortgages and transfers of equity.

These promotions follow a series of strategic hires at the end of the last financial year, including Rishi Kohli who joined as Commercial Partner, Senior Associate and Head of Employment Law, Paul Lott and Lewis Walker as Lead Generation and System Development Manager, further strengthening the firm's leadership and specialist expertise.

Commenting on the promotions, Surbhi Vedhara, Managing Partner at Sweeney Miller Law, said: "We are incredibly proud to announce these well-deserved promotions. Stephanie's appointment as Partner is a significant milestone and a reflection of her leadership, expertise and commitment to both our clients and our people. The promotions of Sarah, Matthew and Melanie to Senior Associate, alongside the progression of Faraz, Shahar and Chloe, demonstrate our commitment to recognising talent, supporting career progression and investing in the future of Sweeney Miller Law."

Sweeney Miller Law continues to invest in its people across its Newcastle and Sunderland offices, strengthening its ability to deliver high-quality legal advice supported by experienced and forward-thinking teams.

www.sweeneymiller.co.uk



April 2026 marks the introduction of major Employment Law changes

By Paul Lott, Sweeney Miller

The Employment Rights Bill received Royal Assent on 18th December 2025, officially becoming the Employment Rights Act 2025.

The changes that this new legislation will bring will be implemented gradually over a two-year period, with most changes expected to take effect during 2026 and into 2027.

What Employers Need to Know

April 2026 marks the introduction of some of the most significant changes brought by the new legislation, which are set out below.

Paternity Leave and Unpaid Parental Leave

- Paternity Leave – now a 'day one' right
- Employees will no longer need 26 weeks' service to give notice of paternity leave – they can now do so from their first day of employment.
- Unpaid Parental Leave – also a 'day one' right

- Previously requiring one year's service, ordinary unpaid parental leave is now accessible from day one of employment.
- Additional Bereavement Provision
- Eligible fathers/partners may take up to 52 weeks of unpaid bereaved partner's paternity leave if the mother or primary adopter dies.

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) Reforms

From 6th April 2026:

- SSP becomes payable from day one of illness, removing the current 3-day waiting period.
- The lower earnings limit is abolished, meaning more workers will qualify for SSP.
- SSP increased from £118.75 to £123.25 per week.

Collective Redundancy Protective Award Increases

The maximum protective award for failing to properly consult during a collective redundancy process will double from 90 to 180 days' pay.

Stronger Whistleblowing Protections

Sexual harassment will now count as a qualifying disclosure under whistleblowing laws. This gives workers protection from detriment and unfair dismissal when reporting sexual harassment.

Gender Pay Gap & Menopause Action Plans

From April 2026, employers will be encouraged to create action plans addressing:

- Gender pay gaps
- Menopause support in the workplace

These plans become mandatory for employers with 250+ employees in 2027.

Trade Union Changes

Changes include:

- Streamlined recognition processes
- Allowing electronic voting for union matters

Launch of the Fair Work Agency

A new Fair Work Agency will be introduced to:

- Consolidate various enforcement bodies
- Enforce rights such as holiday pay and SSP
- Conduct workplace inspections
- Bring tribunal cases on workers' behalf
- Provide legal advice

Updated compensation limits and statutory payments

From 6th April 2026:

- A week's pay (for redundancy and basic award for unfair dismissal calculations) rises from £719 to £751.
- The unfair dismissal compensatory award cap increases to £123,543.
- The minimum basic award in specific unfair dismissal cases increases to £9,157.
- Statutory maternity, paternity, adoption, shared parental, neonatal, and bereavement pay rise to £194.32 per week (or 90% of earnings if lower).

Taking Action

These changes mark a shift towards broader worker protections, simplified access to leave, and stronger enforcement, with even more significant changes on the horizon in October 2026 and January 2027.

To manage these changes, employers should ensure that all policies are up to date and followed, and ensure that they have HR/legal support in place and a clear understanding of the changes and their impact.

If you're unsure how the new rules apply to your business, now is the time to seek advice.

Speak to our specialist employment law team for tailored, practical support.

Email Paul.Lott@sweeneymiller.co.uk or call 0345 900 5401.



Helen Scott

Are you ready for the next wave of employment law change?

Helen Scott is a Partner at specialist employment law firm, Collingwood Legal. Helen highlights the next phase of employment law reform under the Employment Rights Act 2025 and what it means for employers as we move towards October 2026.

Employers are already grappling with the early changes introduced by the Employment Rights Act 2025, but the reality is that some of the most significant reforms are still to come. As we approach October 2026, businesses should

be preparing for a further shift in workplace obligations—particularly in areas that carry tangible legal and financial risk.

While much of the focus to date has been on statutory sick pay and family leave changes, attention is now turning to what many consider some operationally challenging aspects of the legislation.

What's coming in October 2026?

One of the key changes expected in October is the introduction of a strengthened duty on employers to take “all reasonable steps” to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. This is in addition to the reintroduction of employer liability for harassment by third parties, such as customers and clients, where the employer failed to take “all reasonable steps” to prevent the harassment in question. Employer liability for third party harassment will apply in relation to all protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

For many businesses, this represents a further step change. It will not be enough to simply have a policy in place—employers will need to demonstrate that they have taken proactive steps, including training, appropriate risk assessments and ongoing monitoring, to prevent issues arising. This is particularly important as while regulations specifying steps which would be regarded as “reasonable” for the purpose of

the duty to prevent sexual harassment are not expected until 2027/28, liability for employers is expected to be in place from October and employers will need to consider steps in advance of October to be prepared for this change in the law.

A further important change is that from October 2026, employers will have to give all workers a statement of their right to join a trade union. Trade unions will also have enhanced rights including access to the workplace and a new right to reasonable accommodation and facilities for representatives carrying out their duties.

It is also possible that from October 2026, the time limit for bringing most Employment Tribunal claims will increase from three months to six months. In practice, this will extend the window for claims and increase the likelihood of disputes being pursued.

Why this matters in practice

These changes continue the shift in employment law towards prevention and risk management.

The expansion of harassment obligations will require employers to think carefully about workplace culture, reporting processes and how they manage interactions with third parties. At the same time, longer limitation periods mean that issues may remain “live” for longer, increasing the importance of good record keeping and consistent decision-making.

Employers will also have to consider the obligation to notify the right to join a trade union, which may require that employment contracts be updated, and the impact of other enhanced trade union rights on their business.

The underlying shift is enhanced protection for individuals and increased accountability for employers.

What should employers be doing now?

Although some detail is still awaited, employers should already be preparing for these changes.

Practical steps include:

- Reviewing anti-harassment policies and training
- Identifying higher-risk areas, particularly involving third parties
- Ensuring managers can respond effectively to issues
- Reviewing documentation and record-keeping practices
- Factoring increased employment risk into business planning
- Planning to inform employees about right to join a trade union

The upcoming changes are not simply technical—they represent a meaningful shift in how workplaces are expected to operate.

Collingwood Legal is a specialist employment law firm and provides expert advice and training to organisations on all areas of employment law.

www.collingwoodlegal.com

0191 282 2880



strong.
personal.
focused.

“The team is very efficient, quick to react and respond, and they are excellent communicators.”

Chambers and Partners Legal Guide

Our lawyers are experts in employment law. We work with employers and senior executives and take a personal approach to achieve results for our clients.

COLLINGWOOD LEGAL 
Employment Lawyers

T: 0191 282 2880 www.collingwoodlegal.com

TOP TIER FIRM

Legal500

UNITED KINGDOM

2026



Straight Talk with Speker...

Comments

By Barry Speker OBE

The long planned four-day state visit by the King to the United States to mark the 250th anniversary of independence from British colonial rule has taken on more than ceremonial significance.

President Trump is known to be a great admirer of the late Queen, and of King Charles and our monarchy. He is a proud Anglophile or Britophile, his mother was Scottish and he has frequently favoured Britain and the 'special relationship' in trade deals.

That relationship has recently soured due to Britain's lack of support to the USA in the Iran war, the initial refusal to allow British bases to be used and the woeful deterioration in British



armed forces and contribution to NATO. The President's scorn at Sir Keir Starmer continues to be visceral. The relationship was also worsened by the ill-fated Chagos deal, now fortunately shelved under pressure from the President.

In this atmosphere it may have been felt the visit should be deferred, especially in view of the recent assassination attempt on President Trump in Washington DC and the attempts to embarrass the King into meeting Epstein victims or being pressurised into facilitating Andrew's attendance to be interviewed in the USA. At least there will be no embarrassment in greeting the British ambassador.

The hope is that the visit will resurrect the special relationship and that the King, when times get rough, will be a bridge over troubled water.

A recent Harvard study on ancient human DNA has revealed that natural selection is producing an increasing number of redheads. Approximately 1 to 2% of the global population (but in fact 10% of Scots) have red hair. The proportion of redheads has grown considerably over the last 10,000 years.

The Harvard study found that recent evolution favours the genetic variant MC1R which results in red hair and there is evidence that redheads are better at synthesising vitamin D.

In view of the prejudice, teasing and mockery endured by redheads, it might have been assumed that natural selection might have edited out the MC1R gene mutation long ago.

The Equality Act 2010 lists the growing number protected characteristics as to discrimination - on grounds of sex, race, disability, age, religion or belief, pregnancy, marriage, gender reassignment, sexual orientation - but no protection yet for gingers.

Susceptibility to health risks, sunburn and melanoma, sensitivity to pain requiring higher anaesthetic doses is noted, as well as the reputation of those with flaming locks being volatile.

Yet note the inclusion of Queen Elizabeth 1 and (in their younger days) George Washington, Napoleon and Winston Churchill in the red ranks, is nature seeking to promote star quality - did I mention that I was born ginger?

The country is in the midst of an energy crisis. Petrol prices are up 20%, diesel 36% and heating oil even more. Summer holidays are threatened with disruption because of jet fuel shortages causing surcharges and cancellations. Increase in the energy price cap is inevitable.



The causes of the crisis are Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Iran's response to the current war. This is a timely wake-up call. A reminder of the country's vulnerability and lack of energy security. Britain's not alone in being adversely affected by events in the Middle East but most countries do not have the UK's energy advantages, most particularly North Sea oil and gas.

It is infuriating that this advantage is being squandered for ideological reasons rather than genuine environmental concerns. The electorate is realising the hypocrisy - the UK happily importing oil and gas which is extracted in countries with less regard for the environment, and involving transport causing greater emissions.

While the Chancellor Rachel Reeves called for the unblocking of tens of millions of barrels of oil and gas from the North Sea, Ed Milliband, the energy and net zero Secretary, stubbornly maintains a position which sounds as if propounded by Greta Thunberg. He complains that allowing extensive drilling to exploit North Sea potential would be a 'climate disaster'.

However his protestation that the oil crisis stresses the need to move to renewables and nuclear fuel is both unrealistic and irresponsible. It will take years to approach being able to rely on renewables. In the meantime Britain is pursuing a masochistic policy of leaving untapped our reserves in the North Sea. While importing gas from Norway by pipeline and liquefied gas by tanker, (a process which involves four times the carbon emissions), the rest of the world continues using their fossil fuels. The UK produces less than 1% of CO2 emissions. Thus Milliband's policies not only harm this country but do nothing the save the planet. Gas will be needed for years - it may as well be British gas!

My cinema recommendation is 'The Drama' starring Zendaya and Robert Pattinson. It can be described as a riveting and 'uncomfortable' watch - but try to avoid any spoilers before seeing it. The film grossed over \$100million worldwide within its first three weeks.

barryspeker@hotmail.com





Richard Reed team expands amid rising demand for Conveyancing Services

Richard Reed Solicitors has announced a major expansion of its conveyancing department following a sharp rise in demand for property services, with new hires, internal promotions, and continued investment in talent underpinning its growth strategy.

Over the past six months, the department led by Nicola Bennell, Director and Solicitor has undergone a significant transformation, driven by increasing client instructions and a commitment to maintaining high standards of service.

Nicola explains, “We’ve seen a real surge in demand for our conveyancing services, it’s been building over the last year, but particularly in recent months it became clear that we needed to expand if we wanted to maintain the standards we’re known for.

That demand has been significant enough that, at times, the team had to make difficult decisions. “We were in a position where we had to turn work away,” she says. “That’s never something you want to do but protecting the quality of our service has always come first.”

The solution was a strategic investment in people—across all levels of the department.

“We didn’t just want to add numbers,” Nicola says. “We wanted to build a team that’s

sustainable for the future, with the right mix of experience and emerging talent.”

A key part of that has been recognising internal progression, including the promotion of Steven Douglas to Associate Solicitor. “Steven’s promotion was very well deserved,” Nicola notes. “He’s played a big role in supporting the team through a busy period, and it’s important to recognise that contribution.”

Alongside this, several new team members have joined, in December 2025, Kathryn Musgrove came on board as a Solicitor, along with Savannah Beckett as Apprentice Solicitor, reflecting the firm’s long-term approach to talent development. More recently, Hannah Cullen joined as Solicitor in March 2026, further strengthening the department.

“It’s been fantastic to welcome new people into the team,” Nicola says. “They’ve all brought different strengths, and that’s helped us not only manage the workload but continue to deliver a really high level of service.”

Support staff have also played a crucial role

in the expansion, with Lynn Little and Lucy Cardy joining as paralegals. “The support team is absolutely vital,” Nicola adds. “They keep everything running smoothly behind the scenes and make sure our clients have a seamless experience.”

The department’s recent growth builds on an already strong foundation. Over the past year, turnover increased by 48%, supported in part by the earlier addition of Hannah Parton, Solicitor in June 2024.

Reflecting on that progress, Nicola is clear about what has driven success: “It comes down to people. We’ve invested in the right individuals, and that’s allowed us to grow in a way that’s both sustainable and focused on client care.”

For Richard Reed, the past six months have been about more than just growth—they’ve been about building a department ready for the future.

Sarah Reid, Managing Director, Richard Reed said: “The strategic investment in people at all levels will not only address current demand but also future-proof the department as the property market continues to evolve.

We believe our people are our greatest asset, and we are committed to investing in our people at every stage of their careers. We remain dedicated to creating an environment where talent is nurtured, and success is shared.

With a strengthened team and a clear focus on growth, the conveyancing department is now well-positioned to support a growing client base while maintaining the standards that have driven success across the firm.”

richardreed.co.uk

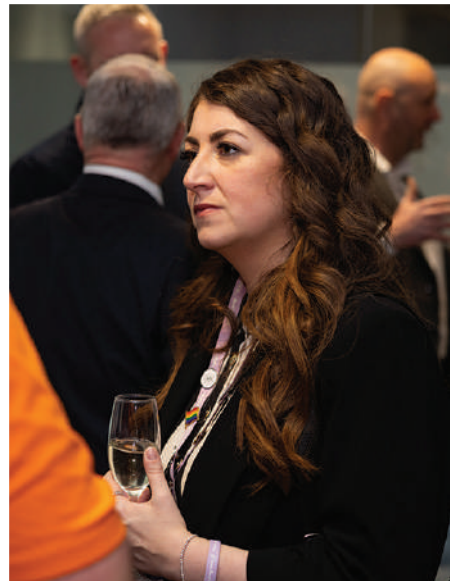


Richard Reed Solicitors celebrate move

Richard Reed Solicitors recently celebrated their move to The Beam in Sunderland with an office opening event, welcoming clients and members of the local business community.

The event provided an opportunity to showcase the firm's new, modern space, designed to support collaboration, enhance client experience and accommodate future growth.

With networking, guided tours and a great atmosphere throughout, the event marked an exciting milestone for the firm as it begins this next chapter.





In conversation with...

Carolyn Beal

Legal Compliance Consultant, Beal Cooper Compliance Ltd

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I went through a variety. I wanted to be in the Police, in the Army, in the Royal Military Police, or a midwife. Someone suggested being a Solicitor when I was about 16 and things took off from there.

Tell us about your current role?

I work with law firms to support them with their regulatory compliance needs. It's not everyone's favourite area, but really enjoy it. I work with COLPs, COFAs and MLROs, deal with firms' complaints on an outsourced basis, help firms after an SRA audit, help firms make sure they are compliant before it gets to that stage, provide independent Reg 21 AML audits, carry out outsourced file reviews and draft necessary policies and procedures for firms. Firms can struggle with compliance either because of time constraints or because it's difficult to keep up with the constant change. Being able to take some of that burden away is really satisfying.

What is your proudest business achievement?

Taking the leap away from being an equity Partner in a successful law firm to setting up my current business from scratch. Building my business to what it is now is something I am enormously proud of.

How has your industry changed in the last decade?

Law is one of the 'traditional' professions, but it's been subject to a lot of change. There's been a growth in opportunity for firms with rising numbers of ABS applications and an increase in mergers. The changes to legal aid and the general issues within the Court service have had to be absorbed and dealt with. Covid had a huge impact and the resulting increased use of technology has been a positive step. AI is a big change for firms. It's an advantage, but firms are having to be proactive about both the benefits and concerns it introduces. The expectations of clients and newly qualified lawyers have increased and firms are focussing more on culture and quality of service, as a result. I think one of the biggest changes has been the increase in regulation and oversight and the impact it's having on all firms, especially the introduction of increased requirements for



Carolyn Beal

AML, data protection and the SRA's Standards and Regulations. Ethics also has a new focus. It's resulted in compliance becoming an essential function.

What are you currently working on?

This week, I've drafted new policies for a firm, prepared for an independent Regulation 21 AML Audit I'm booked to carry out, worked on site with a firm for a day as part of a retainer to assess compliance gaps, and I've responded to some complaints for a firm on an outsourced basis. Lots of variety!

Tell us about the clients you work with?

Law firms of all sizes and specialisms, generally in the North East but some nationwide.

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

Remember your successes. It's a big help to keep them in mind when facing a challenge.

What has been your biggest challenge?

Overcoming my fear of networking! It doesn't come easily to everyone but after a lightbulb moment, it's definitely easier now.

Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

Inside business: Sara Davies. Sara has such a positive but realistic attitude to business and shines a bright light on our region.

Outside business: David Attenborough. Need I say more?

Favourite Book and Boxset ?

Can I have two? Box sets: *Game of Thrones* and *This is Us*.

Books: *My Friends* by Fredrik Backman and *On The Beach* by Neville Shute.

www.bealcoopercompliance.co.uk

When is Milk not Milk?

By Dominic Elsworth, Head of Practice, Hargreaves Elsworth

Oatly's POST MILK GENERATION trade mark has been in the news recently.

Dairy UK Ltd and Oatly AB were recently before the Supreme Court in a case involving Oatly's POST MILK GENERATION trade mark and the use of dairy-related terminology in marketing plant-based products.

Under the UK Trade Marks Act 1994, a trade mark cannot be registered if its use is prohibited in the UK by any enactment or rule of law, including retained EU law.

Oatly AB, a producer of oat-based drinks, registered the trade mark POST MILK GENERATION at the UK Intellectual Property Office (IPO) for use on its oat based products. Dairy UK Ltd, a trade association representing the UK dairy industry, filed an Invalidity Action arguing that the mark breached an EU Regulation that reserves terms like "milk" exclusively for animal-derived dairy products.

The IPO initially upheld Dairy UK Ltd's challenge, declaring the mark invalid for food and drink products. After appeals to the High Court and the Court of Appeal, Oatly appealed to the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court dismissed Oatly's appeal, addressing two key issues: first, whether "milk" in the phrase constituted a "designation" under the EU Regulation; and second, whether the phrase fell within an exception allowing certain descriptive uses.

The Supreme Court adopted a broad interpretation of "designation," holding that any use of a protected term in connection with a relevant product is prohibited under the EU Regulation. Therefore, using "milk" in a trade mark for a non-dairy product could fall within the prohibition.

The Supreme Court also held that the phrase "POST MILK GENERATION" did not merely describe a product characteristic (such



Dominic Elsworth

as being milk-free), but rather functioned as a marketing slogan and could be interpreted in multiple ways. The trade mark was held invalid for oat-based food and drink products.

The decision has major implications for the plant-based food industry and confirms a strict approach to protecting dairy terms. In essence, if a mark could be interpreted as indicating a designated food or drink product, it will not be registrable as a trade mark. Based on this particular case dairy terminology should only be used in connection with plant based alternatives when clearly and unambiguously describing a product characteristic, for example "milk-free".

www.heip.co.uk

Hargreaves Elsworth

Patent Attorneys

For practical advice in relation to:

**Patents • Design right
Trade marks • Copyright
Know-how or related matters**

Please contact:

Dominic Elsworth CPA, EPA (Head of Practice)

26 Northumberland Square, North Shields, Tyne & Wear, NE30 1PW

T: +44 (0) 191 570 0039 F: +44 (0) 191 247 7102 E: office@heip.co.uk www.heip.co.uk

In conversation with...

Lee Vickers

Regional Director, BEF North East

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I never had any set direction like most do. Growing up in Essex you have two options really; pick a trade or wear a suit and go work in London. I chose the latter, with no real idea of what I wanted to do beyond providing for myself and my future family.

Tell us about your current role.

I'm currently Business Enterprise Fund's Regional Director for the North East. We're the region's only officially recognised community development finance institution (CDFI), supporting local SMEs with business loans.

The job sees me wearing multiple hats. As well as looking after the team in our Sunderland office, I handle sales, business development, marketing, admin, everything right down to making the cuppas.

What is your proudest business achievement?

Every time we support a local SME with finance they didn't think they could get because the bank said no. You never get tired of that feeling. Maybe that's because I used to be the one at the bank saying no, and now I get to be the one helping.

We've seen directors come to us for funding to get started, pretty soon they're employing 20 people, then selling the business for £7 million a few years later. Regardless of their growth trajectory, being able to say yes to business owners is always a source of pride.

How has your industry changed in the last decade?

A lot of the human connection and focus on relationships has gone. And when you outsource decisions to algorithms, people fall through the cracks. Then you add in the fact that most sectors have gotten more competitive, so everything has to move faster. More and more businesses get left behind. That's the problem we exist to fix.

What are you currently working on?

Workwise, we're currently in the process of securing a substantial amount of funding for the North East. Outside work, DIY.



Lee Vickers

Tell us about the team you work with?

Ant, Chris, Lizzie, Rory, Rowan, and Shannon, all embody the BEF North East mission. They give everything to support our local SMEs.

To say they make my job easier is a genuine understatement. Our Sunderland office is one of the brightest, happiest and funniest places I've ever set foot in.

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

20 years ago, I asked a successful business owner how she'd stayed on top of her game for so long.

"Simple, Lee," she told me, "I don't take offence at the word 'no.' It means nothing to me."

That always stuck with me. If someone tells you 'No,' don't stop. Keep going, find the people who can tell you 'Yes!'

What has been your biggest challenge?

Growing BEF North East from just myself lending around £1 million per year. Now, we're an independent CDFI with a team of seven, lending over £7 million to 301 businesses last year alone.

Others have tried and failed in the past to grow

a sustainable not-for-profit lender in the region. We succeeded.

Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

When we see a business go from struggling to thriving, it's clear who the heroes are: Everyone who puts their all into supporting local SMEs and startups. Our Loan Managers, our admin staff, our marketing team, everyone.

Outside of work, I've got to get some brownie points and shout out the wife, as well as Thierry Henry (what can I say, I'm an Arsenal fan).

How do you unwind outside of work?

It's got to be either family time or getting out on my motorbike. When I'm out there cruising along, getting battered by the wind, that feels like real freedom. I can instantly relax.

Favourite book and boxset?

I'm not much of a reader. The last book I read was Keith Richards' autobiography. But I do love a boxset; *Band of Brothers*, *Invincible*, *The Boys*, and *Stranger Things* are firm favourites.

www.BEFNorthEast.org

SD LEGAL SERVICES LTD PROVIDE A FULL RANGE OF QUALITY
PROCESS SERVING, INVESTIGATION AND ENFORCEMENT SERVICES
THROUGHOUT THE UK VIA A NETWORK OF TRUSTED AGENTS.



SD
LEGAL SERVICES
THE COMPLETE PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

SD **LEGAL SERVICES**
THE COMPLETE PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

NORTH EAST BASED.....NATIONALLY RESPECTED

07832 238441

SDLEGALSERVICES@BTINTERNET.COM

WWW.SDLEGAL LTD.CO.UK

ABI 
Association of British Investigators
Upholding Professional Values



North East charities collaborate for 'Heroes on the Hospital Walls' community abseiling event

Newcastle Hospitals Charity have partnered with Chuf (Children's Heart Unit Fund) to host the inaugural 'Heroes on the Hospital Walls' event.

The event, held over two days, celebrated the inspiring children and families cared for at the Great North Children's Hospital and the Children's Heart Unit at the Freeman Hospital. Recognising their courage and resilience, the symbolic abseil saw participants descend the hospital building as a tribute to the everyday bravery of young patients.

Over 200 patients, staff, family members and corporate supporters took part in the 70ft abseil, raising vital funds to support the Great North Children's Hospital Fund, part of Newcastle Hospitals Charity and Chuf. The funds will help provide enhanced care, equipment and experiences for children and their families undergoing treatment at both the Freeman Hospital's Children's Heart Unit and the Great North Children's Hospital.



Staff go the extra three mile to support Children's Cancer North

One of the North East's leading hospitality businesses is throwing its weight behind a major event next month (May) to support children and young people with cancer in the North East and Cumbria.

The 43rd Children's Cancer Run will take place on Sunday, 17 May at Newcastle Racecourse, Gosforth offering one-kilometre, three and five-mile fun runs for all ages and abilities.

It is expected to attract more than 10,000 runners and spectators and raise hundreds of thousands of pounds for Children's Cancer North; an independent charity which supports individuals and families affected by childhood cancer. And Malhotra Group plc – which chose Children's Cancer North as its nominated charity for 2026 – is lined up to help.

A Three Mile pop-up bar at the Racecourse will also be selling mini mocktail versions of a charity cocktail, Sweet Tooth, created by bartender Jake Oldham with all funds going to Children's Cancer North.

They are also offering a special reward in the form of a free dessert for little runners who decide to head to Pizza Dough Co after the race for something to eat.

Byker schoolchildren dig in to plant Sycamore Gap sapling at state-of-the-art community hub

Children from two Byker primary schools have been making their mark on the future by planting a Sycamore Gap sapling in the grounds of a unique local community venue.

Pupils from St Lawrence Catholic Primary School and Byker Primary School carried out the official planting ceremony at the Lighthouse Project on Saint Michael's Mount in front of family members, friends, teachers and local community leaders.

The Lighthouse Project, which opened last summer, was created through the 18-month long renovation of St Michael's Church, and hosts a broad range of activities and services centred around young people, including an open access youth club for juniors and seniors, family health & wellbeing programmes and homework clubs.

Pupils from both schools regularly use the Lighthouse Project's facilities for a range of different activities, including Forest School sessions in the area where the sapling has been planted.



Charlotte Robson, head of school at St Lawrence Catholic Primary School, says: "The Lighthouse Project is a wonderful community resource which has enhanced the opportunities we are able to offer our pupils.

"Being part of the Sycamore Gap sapling planting and seeing how new life can come from something negative aligns very closely with our school values."



THE WELLNESS COLLECTIVE NE

Events, festivals & retreats across the North East promoting movement, connection and community.

✉ info@activefamiliesne.co.uk 📱 The Wellness Collective NE 📸 thewellnesscollective_ne

📍 The Wellness Collective NE 🌐 www.activefamiliesne.co.uk/the-wellness-collective

In partnership with:



www.activefamiliesne.co.uk



The Toby Henderson Trust

An independently funded charity supporting autistic children, young people and adults, their families and carers in the North East of England.

🌐 www.ttht.co.uk
 ✉ support@ttht.co.uk
 ☎ 0300 365 3055



In association with Wallsend Boys & Girls Club

The perfect corporate and community event space for you

The Peter Olsen Community Hub is a brand new multi-functional facility, acting as the perfect venue for any corporate event, completely adaptable to your needs.

Perfect for:

- » Away Days
- » Award Ceremonies
- » Business Conferences
- » Parties
- » Corporate Volunteering
- » Exhibitions
- » Workshops
- » Presentations

Large & small rooms available for hire.

Book now and give back to the community in return.

 0191 263 9490

Visit our website & follow us on socials

Visit our website: sportingwallsend.co.uk

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

 @sportingwallsend

 @SportingWallsendNE





Williams II leaving Blyth Harbour

Picture credit: BTS volunteer

CEO Sets Ambitious Course for 2026

The Blyth Tall Ship charity is entering an exciting new phase under the leadership of CEO Siobhan Sargeant, who marks just over a year in the role with ambitious plans for growth, community engagement, and youth development.

Describing her first year as “transformative,” Siobhan said the charity has evolved significantly in both its delivery and its long-term vision. She pointed to the expansion of existing programmes as well as the development of brand-new initiatives supporting both learner experiences and income generation, increased community reach with an influx of new volunteers, and a renewed sense of ambition as key achievements during her tenure so far.

At the heart of the organisation is the historic Williams II, a 111-year-old vessel that serves as a living centrepiece for the charity’s work. While maritime heritage remains central, the organisation has grown into a multi-faceted community resource supporting people from across Blyth, Northumberland, and beyond with meaningful training, educational opportunities and family friendly services. Alongside preserving maritime history, the charity delivers training in woodworking and practical skills, helping individuals build confidence and improve their employability, while its archive centre provides a rich hub for research and engagement.



CEO Siobhan Sargeant

Picture credit: The Bigger Picture Agency

The charity offers a wide range of opportunities for the public to get involved. Volunteers can work alongside experienced shipwrights to help maintain the vessel, learning valuable heritage skills in the process which may otherwise be forgotten. For those looking for a different experience, the charity's sailing programme includes day sails and longer voyages, all designed to be accessible regardless of experience. Visitors can choose to relax and enjoy the journey or take a more active role on board, learning how to handle the ship under the guidance of a highly trained and experienced crew which is another area of significant growth.

The archive centre, currently based at Bates Terminal in the Port of Blyth, continues to attract visitors with an interest in maritime history, genealogy, and research. Plans are now underway for a major relocation in 2026, which will allow the charity to welcome larger groups, expand upon its recent regional exhibitions, and re-engage more schools from across the region. The move will also support the introduction of new activities, including genealogy courses designed to broaden the centre's appeal even further. Siobhan said "The main area of growth has really been our archive development. Thanks to our experienced and dedicated archive volunteers we have now catalogued the entire collection and began the digitisation process meaning we can look to accreditation. Recent exhibitions and events have opened new doors for us with funders and raising the profile of the archives has meant we have seen a record number of donations to the collection this year."

Community engagement remains at the core of the charity's mission. Following the success of its free "Deck the Hulls" Christmas event, which welcomed more than 400 people, the organisation is committed to continuing to break down barriers to participation by offering inclusive, accessible experiences for local families allowing them to learn and make memories together. In today's economy cost is often a barrier to participation and in an area like Blyth with high levels of poverty and deprivation, young people and families can miss out on educational experiences due to cost. Over the past year, the charity has run regular Blyth Tall Ship Open Days which are free to all and combine family fun with learning, entertainment and support services.

The charity is also expanding its outreach work by taking elements of its archive and training programmes directly into the community. By creating more flexible, accessible learning opportunities, it aims to connect with new audiences and inspire more people to engage with its work, whether as volunteers, participants, or supporters.

A busy events calendar lies ahead, including a first-ever appearance in the Blyth Carnival with a specially designed float created by young people involved in the Harbour Sparks programme. The organisation is also a key partner in Harbour Day on 2 May, working alongside RNLI Blyth, the Energy Central Learning Hub, and Blyth Town Council to deliver a day of free activities, ship tours, and community celebration expected to attract thousands of visitors to Blyth's South Harbour.

"We've a growing programme of activities and a clear focus on inclusion and opportunity and our aim is simple: to inspire people through history, hands-on experiences, and the unique opportunity to connect with heritage." said Siobhan.

www.blyhtallship.co.uk

Available Sailing Dates:

One Day Tasters

- June 25th, 27th, 30th
 - July 29th
 - August 1st, 2nd, 16th
- September 5th, 8th, 12th, 20th, 24th, 26th

Overnight Sail

July 18th • August 8th, 22nd, 29th

3-Day Sail

June 19th • July 24th



L-R: Shipwrights, Nik Hawthorne and John Bell



Tees charity boss ‘gobsmacked’ as tech firm come to his rescue with website

The founder of a charity launched after he saved a baby’s life has been left “gobsmacked” by the generosity of a Teesside businessman.

During a 2016 shopping trip, Jason Anderson’s life was changed forever when a nearby 11-month-old tot suffered a cardiac arrest. After performing CRP, he saved the child’s life. In the wake of that, Jason founded the award-winning Hartlepool Ambulance Charity. Every weekend, Jason and the charity’s volunteers help prop-up the NHS by dealing with everything from cuts and grazes to stabbings and spiking’s.

However, with the charity needing £24k-a-year just to stay afloat, a much-needed new website simply wasn’t realistic. That was until Jason bumped into Hartlepool tech entrepreneur Chris Carroll, founder of The Resolved Group, at a local awards show – and Chris offered to “do right” for one of his hometown’s most vital charities.

“The Resolved Group may be a business, but a big part of why I started it was to show that tech could be a force for good,” said Chris.

“Everyone’s struggling to pay their bills, but charities are all really feeling the pinch, and they have to make tough choices on how donations are spent.

“New websites aren’t cheap, but they are vital – they act as a shop window for charities - but ultimately the Hartlepool Ambulance Charity will always spend what it has helping people in their hour of need.

“But that’s why we wanted to help them in their hour of need and help do our bit to support an amazing service for our town.”



Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter marks 130 years with new £130 for 130 Years fundraising campaign

Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter is marking 130 years of animal welfare with the launch of its new £130 for 130 Years campaign, inviting people across the North East to raise £130 to support animals in need.

Created to celebrate the shelter’s 130th year, the campaign is designed to give supporters a simple and flexible way to get involved. The idea is simple: raise £130 in any way that suits you.

Individuals, schools, community groups and businesses are all being encouraged to take part, whether that means organising a bake sale, hosting a quiz, taking on a challenge, holding a dress down day or coming up with their own fundraising idea.

The campaign aims to raise £130,000 during the shelter’s 130th year, with supporters across the region and beyond encouraged to each raise £130 in a way that works for them.

Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter has been supporting animals in the North East since 1896, providing rescue, rehabilitation and rehoming for dogs and cats who need a safe place to go. Its work relies on public support and the generosity of local communities, supporters and businesses.

Organisers already teeing up next year’s Alice House Hospice golf day after more than £8,000 was raised

Organisers of the third annual Alice House Hospice & X-energy Charity Golf Day are already drawing up plans for next year’s event after a sell-out tournament raised thousands of pounds for vital local care.

A full line-up of 20 teams from across the local business community took to the fairways at Hartlepool Golf Club for the highly successful event, which was co-organised by Harrison Smith of Azalea Wealth Management and Paul Fraser of Rephrase. Supported by headline sponsors X-energy, the day successfully raised more than £8,000 for local hospice care. This fantastic fundraising total is set to be boosted even further thanks to matched funding provided by Lloyds Bank. The event was a community effort, with dedicated staff volunteering on the day from EDF Energy, Lloyds Bank, Geo Agriculture and Orangebox Training Solutions.

Greg Hildreth, business and communications manager at Alice House, said: “Huge thanks to everyone who supported this event, with special thanks to sponsors X-energy, Harrison Smith of Azalea, Paul Fraser of Rephrase along with Mark Davies and everyone at Hartlepool Golf Club.



“The event was a great success and a really enjoyable day. All involved were incredibly generous, which led to a fantastic fundraising total that will help to sustain local Hospice services and make a real difference to local families.”

The funds raised are crucial for Alice House Hospice, which provides specialist care and support to patients and families affected by life-limiting illnesses or the death of a loved one across Hartlepool, the Tees Valley and East Durham. It costs £3.7m to fund these essential services for just one year. With the Hospice receiving only 34 per cent of this in Government funding, there is a daunting shortfall of over £6,500 that must be raised every single day.

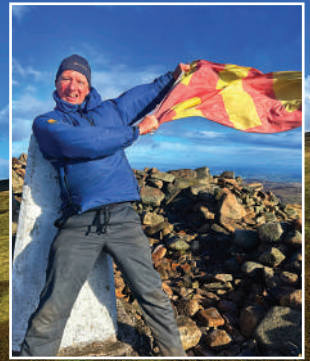


Poppy's Light Foundation

Supporting Young Cardiac Health

Protecting young lives through vital screening, awareness and expert psychological support for families facing Inherited Cardiac Conditions

www.poppyslightfoundation.com



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.

Introducing The Cheviot 7 Peaks Challenge - a stunning guided adventure through the wild and beautiful Northumberland hills, complete with gourmet catering! You just need to get your gang together, then turn up and walk. We take care of the catering.



the stats...

- 7 of Northumberland's highest peaks
- 24 miles
- 7000 feet of elevation gain
- Expect a proper day out — around 13-14 hours on the hill including breaks (cut offs will apply)

Pricing for 2026
£100pp
 (Pricing based upon a group size of 10 - 20 guests)



what's included...

- Fully guided hike over seven of Northumberland's highest peaks
- Two-course Fells Kitchen gourmet lunch — your "posh picnic" in the hills
- Homemade cakes and refreshments (tea/coffee/soft drinks) at vehicle checkpoints (x2)
- Mountain Leader support: two ML's with the group, plus a third providing vehicle support
- Commemorative sustainable wooden medal to celebrate your achievement
- All diets and allergies catered for



If you're looking for an unforgettable personal or corporate charity challenge for 2026, this is it! Get in touch to discuss dates and secure your group's place on The Cheviot 7 Peaks Challenge for 2026 - an adventure you'll be talking about for years to come...

Contact Chris Reay on...

Tel: 0191 2708540 | M: 07976 374629 | www.epicurus.co.uk | www.fellskitchen.co.uk





Charity of the Month

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

Angel Trust

A registered Charity that supports people in need across County Durham and Darlington.

What is the mission of your charity, and what inspired its creation?

The Angel Trust was created as, and always will remain a Charity For The People. Founded in 2018, the Trust originated as a Wish Granting charity, raising funds for poorly and vulnerable children to meet their favourite celebrity or go on holiday. The Trust is unique in its ability to diversify its services to meet the needs of the community at the time, recognising and responding to trends across the County, including Mental Health, Isolation and Homelessness. This adaptability has led to the Angel Trust creating new service arms, including an independent Foodbank, Community Pantry and the Safe Night Hub. The only facility of its kind in the area, the Safe Night Hub offers emergency accommodation and wrap-around support to vulnerable individuals. The Charity has also recently expanded into Mental Wellbeing support, with two counsellors, offering both post trauma and suicide prevention counselling to over 300 clients in the last 12 months. The Trust also runs large campaigns during the year, in 2025 its 'Toy Appeal' saw 15,000 toys donated to young children in local schools, hospitals and care settings.



What are the biggest challenges your organization faces in achieving its goals?

One of the biggest challenges the Angel Trust faces is a decline in fundraising income. With the rising cost of living, many previous events and fundraisers are no longer profitable, the entire landscape of fundraising has changed. Because of this, the Angel Trust has diversified the way it brings in money, opening a Coffee Shop, Community Pantry & Clothing Shop, with all profits raised being reinvested back into the wider charity.

Can you share a success story that highlights the impact of your work?

One of our previous Night Hub clients, 'K' was forced to sleep on the streets for several weeks, after losing her home through a no-fault eviction. As a vulnerable female, the streets were unforgiving, she felt cold and unsafe until she arrived at the Angel Trust Night Hub. She stayed at the Hub for three months, receiving vital support from trained key workers on her mental health, substance misuse and housing. We worked to get her rehoused in a local flat, we fully furnished the home and made sure she had all of the essential items she needed to feel safe and comfortable. During her time with us, she volunteered in the Beehive Coffee Shop, and we have recently offered her part time, paid employment as part of the Beehive Team. Our team worked incredibly hard to get this lady to where she is today, because of our support she is working, living comfortably and slowly working her way back into society.

How do you raise funds, and what are the most effective fundraising strategies you've used?

The Angel Trust has diversified its fundraising initiatives to cope with an ever-changing economic landscape. Opening an affordable market, coffee shop and clothing outlet has allowed the Trust to bring in revenue throughout the year. Corporate Partnership is another fundraising initiative setup by the Trust, where local businesses contribute £500 per year to the charity, and in return enjoy a host of benefits including social media coverage to some 1.5 million viewers per month alongside completing CSR requirements.

What role do volunteers play in your organization, and how can people get involved?

Volunteers play a crucial role in the Charity's success. Volunteers will not only play a hand in helping the staff, but also gain valuable experience and learn new skills such as communication and manual handling certification. Volunteers can help with all sorts of tasks, from maintaining stock in our foodbank to sorting through clothing donations and wrapping toys at Christmas!

How do you ensure transparency and accountability in how donations are used?

All donations are audited and tracked to ensure transparency inline with the Charity's commission's ethical standards. Donations are also physically shown on social media and press releases, as well as through written testimonials, ensuring complete transparency across the charity.

What partnerships or collaborations have been most beneficial to your mission?

Although we have lots of key collaborative partners, including Durham County Council, we have been heavily supported by Ramside Estates,



since our inception. The hospitality firm carry out several key events on our behalf, including recent Oyster Festivals, and an annual Children's Christmas Party. Without this collaboration and support from the team, we wouldn't be where we are today!

How has your charity adapted to recent challenges, such as economic downturns or global events?

The Charity continues to diversify and adapt to what is needed in the current climate. For example, after recognising that Food Poverty was a prevalent issue, the Trust opened its Foodbank to meet the needs of its people. Angel Trust is always looking to change its services and bring in new help lines to support everyone who comes through the doors. A 24/ Hour social media page and emergency phone number also allows for those in need to access support at any time, no matter the situation.

What's next for your charity? Any upcoming projects or long-term goals?

The Angel Trust continues to grow and expand, having recently secured our first supported accommodation, which offers care and support to vulnerable individuals in the area, many of which have been through our Safe Night Hub care. The Trust will also soon be launching a mobile team, offering crisis support across County Durham for issues such as mental health and housing. The Charity aims to become the largest independent organisation of its kind in the County, and has exciting plans for growth and development over the coming years.

www.angeltrust.co.uk | 01388 737270



What today's teen relationships mean for tomorrow's employers

By Catherine Marchant, CEO, Impact Family Services

In boardrooms across the country, leaders are talking about the future of work—AI readiness, hybrid strategies, the skills gap...

Yet one emerging issue rarely makes the agenda, despite its profound implications for workplace culture, productivity and wellbeing: the relationship experiences of today's teenagers.

At first glance, teen relationships may seem far removed from talent pipelines or organisational health. But as the CEO of a domestic abuse charity, I see firsthand how early patterns of behaviour—both healthy and harmful—shape the adults young people become. And those adults eventually become our employees, managers and leaders.

Today's teenagers are navigating relationship landscapes more complex than any generation before them. Technology has blurred boundaries, amplified pressures and created new forms of control. Behaviours such as constant digital surveillance, pressured sexting, and coercive control via social media—once thought niche—are now alarmingly common. Many young people struggle to distinguish between intensity and intimacy, between persistence and pressure, between love and manipulation.

Why does this matter to employers? Because relationship norms formed in adolescence do not simply vanish at the office door. They influence how people handle conflict, manage boundaries, exercise power, and communicate under stress. They shape expectations of respect, autonomy and emotional safety.

If coercive behaviours are normalised at 16, they can reappear at 26—manifesting as



Catherine Marchant

bullying, harassment, micromanagement or an inability to build trust within teams. And for those who experience harm in youth, the impacts often include diminished confidence, difficulty concentrating, absenteeism, or fear of authority—factors that directly affect workplace participation and progression.

Conversely, young people who learn early how to set boundaries, navigate consent, challenge disrespect and practise empathetic communication carry those skills into every environment they enter—including work. They become the colleagues who defuse tension, the managers who lead with fairness, and the leaders who understand the importance of psychological safety.

Employers therefore have a significant stake in the relationship education young people receive today. But they also have a role to play themselves. Many of the young people entering the workforce in the next decade will turn to their workplace—not their families—for support when they encounter controlling or abusive behaviour in their personal lives. Employers who are unprepared risk failing those individuals at critical moments.

So what can organisations do now?

First, recognise that domestic abuse is a workplace issue. It affects absenteeism, performance and retention, and can escalate inside the workplace if a perpetrator targets their partner during working hours.

Second, invest in training. Equip managers with the confidence to recognise signs of distress, respond safely and signpost support without overstepping boundaries.

Third, cultivate cultures where respect is modelled consistently—where power is exercised responsibly, boundaries are honoured, and employees feel safe raising concerns.

Finally, partner with experts. Charities like ours are ready to help employers understand the evolving realities of young people's relationships and what those realities mean for the future of work.

Tomorrow's workforce is already forming its expectations about wellbeing, inclusion and respect. Employers who pay attention now will not only protect their people—they will future-proof their organisations.

impactfs.co.uk



Let's break the cycle of domestic abuse

Providing specialised professional support to children,
young people and adults experiencing domestic abuse
in a safe, friendly and nurturing environment.

Relieving families and individuals of the life-long
impacts of domestic abuse.

Delivering workplace domestic abuse training to
employers from all sectors, across the North East.



Impact
Family Services

www.impactfs.co.uk • enquiries@impactfs.co.uk • t: 07357788835



The staggering grand total amount raised big reveal

Red carpet for the Red Sky Ball

Red Sky Foundation rolled out the red carpet once again to welcome a who's who guest list of VIP's to their flagship event of the year, the Red Sky Ball.

Held at The Beacon of Light in Sunderland, the Red Sky Ball saw over 800 individuals made up of celebrities, community champions, beneficiaries and corporate partners of the award winning Red Sky Foundation from across the UK. Each and everyone of the guests were there to witness and celebrate another record-breaking year of incredible achievements supporting families, communities and hospitals impacted by the life saving North East based registered charity, raising a staggering £180,960.

Billed as "the must go to event" on the North East social calendar, the Red Sky Ball was a glittering occasion filled with music, entertainment, and heartfelt recognition for the charity's life-saving work made extra special with heart-warming stories from cardiologists, Northumbria Police and families living with heart disease.

In a spectacular finale to celebrate the huge amount raised, musician Chesney Hawkes took to the stage, delivering a show-stopping performance that had the room singing and dancing along to songs from every genre before he belted out "The One and Only" classic raising the roof.



Red Sky Foundation founders Sergio and Emma Petrucci MBE with their children Enzo and Luna



Guests also enjoyed mingling with an array of celebrity faces, including patrons of the Red Sky Foundation Jill Scott MBE and Faye Tozer, who joined the evening to show their support and celebrate the remarkable impact over the past year.

It has been a truly record-breaking year for the charity, which has just celebrated its 6th birthday, achieving significant fundraising growth in many ways, including a record 1,200 runners taking part in the Great North Run weekend, alongside celebrating the achievements of an unforgettable group expedition to Everest Base Camp.

Red Sky Foundation continues to deliver groundbreaking support across the region. In addition to placing over 1,500 public access defibrillators in communities and donating 300 to grassroots sports teams, and in 2025, the organisation formed an incredible partnership with both Northumbria and Durham Police as they became the first police forces in the UK to have access to a defibrillator in every single response vehicle, an initiative made possible by the incredible support of donors and funds raised by the popular charity. Those funds directly contributed to over 300 life-saving defibrillators, which are already helping to save lives every week.

Altogether, these initiatives represent a remarkable investment of over £320,000 in life-saving equipment, ensuring that vital support is never far away in moments of emergency. Red Sky Foundation has continued to make a profound difference at the start of 2026, providing support to

families, raising awareness of congenital heart conditions, and keeping communities safe with defibrillators and vital medical programmes. In addition, the charity has funded opportunities for doctors to attend pioneering training in the latest advancements in open heart surgery, as well as investing in vital equipment for the NHS further strengthening the quality of care available to patients. The Red Sky Ball served as both a celebration of these achievements and a powerful reminder of the importance of continued community support.

“We are overjoyed by the incredible turnout and generosity shown at this year’s Red Sky Ball,” said Sergio Petrucci MBE, founder of the Red Sky Foundation. “It’s the highlight of our packed calendar of fundraising events and it’s always wonderful to see our supporters celebrating our success and the impact we are making. We’re all so grateful to everyone who champion our work and we’re already planning ahead to next year’s event.”

The Red Sky Ball 2026 wasn’t just an evening of glamour, it was a testimony to what can be achieved when a community comes together with a shared purpose: saving lives, supporting families, and raising hope.

For more information about Red Sky Ball 2027, visit:
www.zeffy.com/en-GB/ticketing/red-sky-ball-2027





Over £25,000 raised 'From Teesside With Love'

Teesside Hospice's 'From Teesside With Love' annual ball, held at the Riverside Stadium, has raised £25,800 to support the charity's vital services.

Business owners and supporters from across the region came together on Saturday 28th March for a special evening of community and entertainment, hosted by Compere Simon Robertson.

The James Bond-themed ball featured entertainment from Stockton Riverside College dancers and singers, and local band The Fallen; casino tables and photo booths; and a popular auction, raffle and prize draws which generated the much-needed funds to help operate the hospice's services.

Teesside Hospice provides care, compassion and dignity to patients and families who have been affected by life-limiting illness, offering support through its In-Patient Unit, outreach services, Wellbeing Centre, Bereavement Counselling Service and Lymphoedema Clinic.

Guests at the ball heard from Teesside Hospice's Chair of the Board of

Trustees Gary Whitehead and CEO Mike Thornicroft, as well as a video from Janet Gardener, whose husband Jeremy passed away at the hospice in 2024.

In the video, Janet shared how the hospice had provided the couple with 'a bubble of loveliness' for the final two weeks of Jeremy's life: "Jeremy was referred to the hospice once he'd been given a short prognosis. We moved ourselves into Jeremy's room and it became a home from home. The staff became extended family, we were loved, cared for.

"When Jeremy's final hours came around, he was able to spend them feeling loved, supported and peaceful. I was supported all the way through, and I felt loved just as much as he was.

"It gave us our two weeks of living in a bubble of loveliness, that I will carry with me forever."

Supporters at the Ball had the opportunity to bid on items including a stay at Gisborough Hall, signed Middlesbrough FC and Newcastle United FC shirts, Ramsdens jewellery and more on the night, which contributed towards the total.

Zoe Bellamy, Events Fundraiser at Teesside Hospice, said: "We're so grateful to all of the wonderful supporters and suppliers who made this evening possible. It was an incredible evening and, most importantly, raised a significant amount of money which will have a huge impact on the services we provide to over 4,000 each year across the region.

"A huge thank you to everyone involved and we can't wait to see you at the next one!"

To find out more about Teesside Hospice's services and future events, visit www.teessidehospice.org



Teesside Hospice opens new Superstore to raise funds for care

Teesside Hospice has officially opened the doors to its new Superstore on Portrack Lane, selling second-hand fashion, homeware and white goods to raise funds for its services, while also creating multiple jobs in the region.



The charity shop will stock a diverse range of pre-loved products from a wide range of brands in fashion, furniture homeware and white goods, with funds raised going directly towards providing better end of life care and support for people on Teesside.

And the store was opened with the help of a well-known BBC star and sustainable fashion influencer.

Jen Graham, known as Charity Shop Girl on Instagram and TikTok, runs a successful account documenting her charity shop finds and recently starred as an expert in the BBC show 'Shift The Thrift' with Joanna Page.

The star joined the Teesside Hospice team and guests, including Mayor of Middlesbrough Chris Cooke, for a VIP opening event on Friday 24th April, before the new store officially opened its doors on Saturday 25th April.

Speaking at the opening, Jen said: "I was honoured to be asked to cut the ribbon at the new Teesside Hospice Superstore.

"It's an incredible shop - a rummager's heaven! There is some beautiful stuff here and the prices are amazing. It's the best men's section I've ever seen.

"Teesside Hospice do such incredible work, providing care and support to local families during some of the hardest times in their lives, and to play even the smallest part in helping raise awareness for that is something I'm so proud of. You know that you're supporting an incredible charity while you're shopping here.

I've always said charity shops are so much more than shops. They're community, sustainability, stories, and in cases like this, they help fund vital care and support for local families when they need it most.

"I may have come for the charity shop, but I left with a full heart, beautiful memories, and some lovely new friends."

Mike Thornicroft, Teesside Hospice CEO, added: "Every day, our teams help patients and families make the most of every single moment, creating experiences and memories that last a lifetime. We meet people where they are, with humanity, humility and compassion

"But providing this level of care takes resources. It will cost £20,500 every single day this year to run Teesside Hospice and less than 30% of that comes from statutory funding, meaning the rest - almost £5.5 million - we must raise ourselves.

"That's why our retail outlets matter and why this superstore is really important.

"Thank you for helping Teesside Hospice continue to be the heart of this community."

To find out more about the Teesside Hospice Superstore, support with donations or support through volunteering, call 01642 811060 or visit www.teessidehospice.org/shop/locator/portrack-lane-superstore/.



People *Doing* Good...



Urgent Appeal: Sleeping bags needed to protect vulnerable people from cold spring nights

The People's Kitchen is issuing an urgent appeal to the public for donations of sleeping bags to support people facing cold spring nights without adequate shelter.

Despite the change in season, night-time temperatures remain dangerously low for those sleeping rough. The charity is calling on the local community to help by donating new or good-quality used sleeping bags. Financial contributions are also welcomed and will go directly towards purchasing essential items for those in need.

Donations can be dropped off directly at The People's Kitchen, where

they will be distributed to those who rely on the charity's vital support. Founded to support people experiencing homelessness, loneliness, and hardship, The People's Kitchen has become a vital lifeline within the community. In addition to providing hot, nutritious meals, the charity offers a warm, welcoming environment where individuals are treated with dignity, compassion, and respect. It also provides essential items such as clothing, toiletries, and practical support to those facing difficult circumstances.

Every single day of the year, The People's Kitchen serves around 300 meals, 365 days a year and it's all thanks to the dedication of approximately 300 volunteers. This extraordinary commitment ensures that no one who turns to the charity is left without food, warmth, or human connection.

Maggie Pavlou, a volunteer and trustee of the charity, said:

"While spring may be here, the nights are still cold, and for many of our Friends, a sleeping bag can make a real difference to the night they may have.

Our Friends face many challenges, support from the community is vital to help us try and make those challenges just a little easier for them to bear. Every single donation we receive really helps to make a positive difference to someone's life.

Community Food Festival celebrates culture, connection and inclusion in Ashington



Michelle Brannigan, CEO of Full Circle Food Project, has hailed the success of a vibrant community food festival held at Hirst Welfare, bringing together nearly 150 people from a wide range of cultural and religious backgrounds.

The event marked the finale of a series of community lunches designed to celebrate diversity through food, tradition and shared experience. Over the past year, the initiative has welcomed and showcased cultures including Bangladeshi, Kurdish, Polish, Ukrainian, Pakistani, Scottish and Namibian communities, alongside a summer barbecue and picnic.

The festival was a joyful culmination of that journey, with attendees enjoying an array of international dishes, lively conversation and entertainment, including traditional Highland dancing.

Michelle said: "Food has a unique way of bringing people together, and this project has shown just how powerful that can be. We've created opportunities for people to share their culture, learn from one another and build real connections within our community."

The programme was funded by the North East Combined Authority Mayor's Opportunity Fund, which focuses on strengthening community cohesion and integration.

Looking ahead, Full Circle Food Project is seeking further funding to build on this momentum. Plans include creating a community recipe book capturing the dishes and stories shared throughout the project, as well as establishing the food festival as an annual event in Ashington's calendar.

Lighting the way to Blyth: Lighthouse Association visits Tall Ship Charity

Blyth Tall Ship was delighted to welcome members of the Association of Lighthouse Keepers from across the UK, bringing with them not only a shared passion for maritime heritage—but also some welcome sunshine.

Visitors were treated to a behind-the-scenes tour of Blyth Tall Ship's busy workshops, where traditional skills and craftsmanship are kept alive for future generations. The highlight of the tour included an engaging and informative boat building talk delivered by Shipwright and Trainer, Nik, offering fascinating insight into the techniques and traditions that shape the vessels of today and tomorrow.

Guests also enjoyed a fantastic presentation from Janice and Astrid, who lead the much-loved Gansey Project. Their talk showcased the rich history and cultural significance of gansey knitting, as well as the project's ongoing work to preserve and celebrate this unique maritime tradition.

To round off the visit, the Blyth Tall Ship Shanty Singers sent guests on their way in true seafaring style, performing a rousing song that perfectly captured the spirit of the day.



CEO Siobhan Sargeant said: "We were thrilled to host such a passionate and knowledgeable group. It was a pleasure to share our work and celebrate the deep-rooted connections within our maritime community."

Blyth Tall Ship is also pleased to announce a range of upcoming sailing experiences available to both public and corporate customers.

For more information or to book, visit:
www.blythtallship.co.uk/sailing-season



Football club kicks off cancer fundraiser

A pioneering North East veterans' football club has vowed to put the boot into cancer after three members were diagnosed with the disease.

Marden FC's over 40s won the league and cup double in 2025 and have successfully extended the careers of amateur players since 1981.

But the club's on-field success has been tempered by a series of off-field setbacks – with three players forced to tackle prostate cancer in quick succession.

And now the Sunderland and District Sunderland Mill View Social Club Over 40s League members have revealed plans for a cycling-focused fundraiser in aid of Prostate Cancer UK.

"The good news story is that all three of our lads are still very much alive and doing well at various stages of their cancer battle," explains Marden vets manager Paul Copley.

"But as a club and as a community this has affected everyone and we wanted to go beyond supporting our players behind the scenes.

"As a management team we agreed that enough is enough. We can't just sit back and sympathise with people and offer words of encouragement.

"Prostate cancer is a horrible cancer but headway is being made. There are positive developments whether that's around prevention or treatment.

"This is our opportunity to help raise funds but, most importantly, to raise awareness.

"And when you're in a league of 70 teams – where every one of the players in those teams is in the demographic most at risk from prostate cancer – we're perfectly placed to spread the word.

"We started this initiative by adding the Prostate Cancer UK branding to our training kits but now we're taking it to the next level."

On June 13 Marden FC's over 40s will host Ride The 41 – a charity bike ride that begins and ends at the Blue Flames Sports Club on Tyneside and a challenge that will be the focal point for a day of fundraising and family fun.



"The first thing we thought about doing was riding from the southernmost club in the SDFL to the northernmost club," adds Paul. "That would have meant a mammoth trek from Richmond in North Yorkshire to Ashington!

"It was a bit far so I came up with the idea around the over 40s. Why don't we go that one mile extra and call it Ride The 41.

"It also fits with the fact that prostate cancer continues to aggressively target the over 40s."

Paul and the team at Marden FC are calling on all cyclists, football fans and families determined to tackle cancer from across the North East to join in on June 13.

And he adds: "It's a truly inclusive event open to everyone – the more the merrier! The cycling's just one element. The bar will be open all day, there's a bouncy castle for the kids and we've got food laid on.

"If you do like to cycle then it's a circular route around a 10-mile lap and there's no need to go for the full 41. Just come along, do what you can and enjoy the day!"

To find out more about Ride The 41 and to get involved on the day visit gofundme.com/f/marden-over-40s-charity-bike-ride-for-prostate-cancer or email cope505@yahoo.com



Eothen Care Homes

Compassion, comfort and companionship



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

Living in Eothen Care Homes



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

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

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

Working in our homes

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

Benefits include:

- Work with friendly and caring staff in a relaxed 'home-from-home' atmosphere
- Earn the Real Living Wage
- Full training provided
- Long service awards
- BUPA cash-back scheme
- Paid breaks
- Have your birthday off work

@EothenHomes

www.eothenhomes.org.uk

0191 281 9100

Sunderland's BIDs create new foundations for businesses



The first "graduates" from the Sunderland Foundational Businesses Academy with (centre, holding flowers) retail expert, Karen Williamson who ran the course

Since day one Sunderland's Business Improvement Districts have worked tirelessly to make the city a great place to live, work, visit and do business.

The organisation – which now comprises the City Centre BID, the Seafront BID and also covers the popular Sheepfolds – is well known for large scale events such as Restaurant Week, Urban Fest, The Food and Drink Festival and a whole host of other crowd-drawing initiatives.

Along with finding ways to bring people into the city, supporting businesses and helping them to thrive and grow has always been a key component of the BIDs' agenda.

It has achieved this in numerous ways – from using its street ranger team to make Sunderland look more inviting and attractive to running business breakfasts and lunches where people can network and hear from relevant and inspirational speakers to providing organisations with opportunities and a voice.

And now the BIDs have taken their commitment to businesses one step further, by setting up the Foundational Businesses Academy to help small, independently owned enterprises prepare for what the future has to offer.

"There's no doubt that we are entering a very exciting time for the city," said Sharon Appleby, Chief Executive of Sunderland's BIDs.

"Developments such as the new eye infirmary, the opening of Culture House and Sunderland's continued presence in the Premier League will all bring more and more people into Sunderland – so it's important that we are ready for this extra footfall and their requirements."

With that in mind, the BIDs launched a new initiative in December 2025 – the Foundational Businesses Academy.

Run by retail expert, Karen Williamson, this bronze level course – which comprised of a number of masterclasses around particular subjects – aimed at helping these independent businesses prepare for the future.

Seventeen businesses in all signed up to take part, committing to a number of workshops where subjects covered included everything from cashflow management to managing best sellers and supply chain, strategic pricing and margin management, cutting overheads and how to reduce waste across the business.

And for those who committed to the Academy, the outcomes have been truly lifechanging.

"The aim was to look at each business and give them the tools to grow successfully," said Karen.

"Through the work we did we had one company found that they were owed £11k in invoices which seemed to have slipped through the net – a very welcome finding at a time of year when money can be tight - while another recognised through taking part in the Academy that their profit margins were too low."

At the heart of the Academy however was to show how important it was not just to work in the business but to work ON it – to plan for the future and be more strategic.

The companies which took part were from

a range of backgrounds – from hospitality to retail.

Without exception every single participant praised the positive effect the Academy had on their business, helping them to move forward and take a long, hard look at what they could do better.

"We're no longer being busy fools," said Angela Tsang, owner of the popular Beach House in Sunderland.

"We have learned how to work on our businesses and really look at how we can create for future success."

The bronze course culminated in a special celebration at the Sheepfolds where guests and participants heard from a panel of experts including Dame Irene Hays of Hays Travel, Sunderland University Chancellor and former CEO of Bravissimo Leanne Cahill and Helen Milford, on the board of both Sunderland University and Hays Travel and who also has years of experience in retail.

At the same time the participants of the course showcased what they had learned and how valuable all the sessions had been to their businesses.

The success of this course means the plan is now to run both silver and gold academies, which will look at dealing with people management and personal behaviours.

"Everyone who took part will definitely sign up for the future," said Nicola Valley, owner of Valley's wine bar.

"The Academy has given us all a clearer direction, more confidence and has taught us control of our businesses."

sunderlandbid.co.uk



Board-level financial leadership, part time

Supporting owners and boards with
confident financial decisions



☎ 07960 031554

✉ Mark@L4Financial.co.uk

L4Financial.co.uk



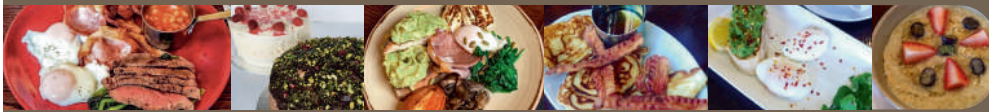
Help people feel at ease before they even arrive

3D virtual tours for clinics, care settings and businesses

ocean3d.co.uk

Designed to support accessibility and confidence

"To eat well in England, you should have breakfast three times a day." Somerset Maugham



23-25 Clayton Road Jesmond Newcastle upon Tyne 0191 212 1123

Willi's Café Jesmond

Breakfast served all day,
every day!

WARRIOR GENERATION FITNESS

LOW-IMPACT EXERCISE CLASSES IN YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY & WORKPLACE

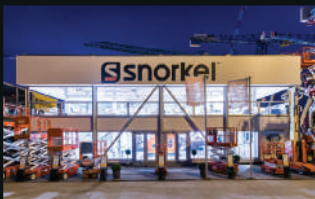
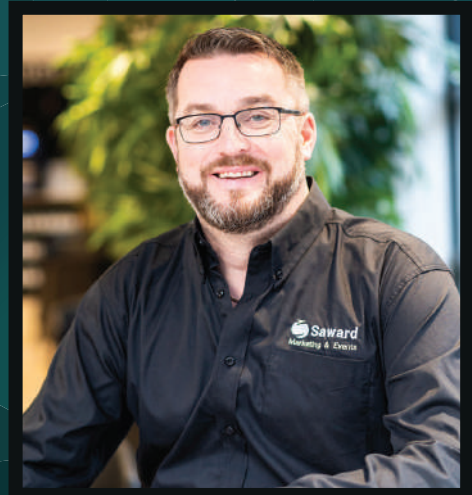
EMPOWERING EMPLOYEES AND LOCAL RESIDENTS TO STAY ACTIVE,
BUILD STRENGTH, AND ENHANCE WELLBEING

INFO@WARRIORGENERATION.CO.UK | WWW.WARRIORGENERATION.CO.UK | 07745 553574



Events That Impress

Global Specialists in corporate and trade events



www.saward-me.com



North Tyneside Business Forum hosted ShowBiz26: Stand Out & Scale

Held at the iconic Spanish City in Whitley Bay, bringing local business owners together to focus on confidence, visibility and mindset for business growth.

The event explored how speaking confidently about your business, building visibility and strengthening personal brand can support sustainable success. Attendees heard from expert speaker Sophie Milliken MBE, gaining practical ideas to promote themselves, attract customers and increase opportunities. They left inspired with new connections, mindset tools and strategies to help them show up confidently in business. ShowBiz26 reinforced the importance of visibility, confidence and action for long-term growth across the North Tyneside business community.





L-R: Angela Tuplin, Elected Mayor Karen Clark and Steffi Smith (Highlights PR)

A Golden Ticket visit: Mayor steps inside North Tyneside's Business of the Year

Award-winning chocolate manufacturer, The Chocolate Smiths, welcomed Karen Clark, Elected Mayor of North Tyneside, and Angela Tuplin, Chair of the North Tyneside Business Forum, to its factory in North Shields to celebrate its remarkable achievements.

The visit comes after The Chocolate Smiths secured two major accolades at the North Tyneside Business Awards, including the prestigious Business of the Year and Green Award.

Mayor Karen Clarke described her visit as "absolutely fantastic," highlighting the unique atmosphere of the factory.

"From the moment you walk in, the smell is incredible," she said. "The whole concept – from the designs to the packaging – feels like stepping into a real-life Willy Wonka chocolate factory."

She also praised the company's global reach, with products shipped worldwide from its North Tyneside base.

"It makes me feel extremely proud," she added. "The way they incorporate iconic North East imagery into their chocolate design really instils pride in place. To see that shared across the world is truly impressive."

Angela Tuplin echoed this sentiment, saying the

visit reinforced why the company was named Business of the Year.

"It's absolutely incredible," she said. "From humble beginnings making chocolates at home to becoming a globally recognised brand, their journey is inspiring. Their commitment to sustainability and innovation makes them stand out."

Managing Director Steffi Smith reflected on the company's growth over the past 12 years.

"I started making chocolate in my kitchen, producing around 30 bars at a time and selling at Tynemouth Market," she said. "Now we have a team of over 20 people, operate from an industrial unit, and ship our products all over the world."

The Chocolate Smiths has built an international customer base, exporting across Europe and to every state in the USA – even fulfilling a festive order to the North Pole.

Despite its global success, the company is now looking to strengthen its local presence. A new

shopfront is set to open soon offering customers the chance to experience the brand in person for the first time.

Sustainability remains a key focus for the business. Initiatives include significantly reducing food waste, recycling packaging materials, and repurposing cardboard from bulk deliveries into protective packing for online orders. The company continues to monitor its carbon footprint and improve efficiency across operations.

Steffi added: "We're passionate about what we do and the people who work here. You spend most of your life at work, so it's important that it's purposeful and enjoyable. I'm incredibly proud of our team."

The visit highlighted not only the success of The Chocolate Smiths but also the strength of North Tyneside's business community, showcasing how local innovation can achieve global impact.

The North Tyneside Business Forum is run by a management group made up of members from various industry sectors in the Borough and gives support in the form of networking, events and signposting for growth and development. Membership is free and open to any business of any size with a trading address within North Tyneside. The Business Forum is supported by, but not run by North Tyneside Council.

The Forum is FREE to join and is for any business with a trading address in North Tyneside.

**E: business.forum@northtyneside.gov.uk
www.northtynesidebusinessforum.org.uk**



Elaine Stroud

Optimistic, but under pressure: what North East entrepreneurs are facing right now

By Elaine Stroud, CEO of the Entrepreneurs' Forum

The Entrepreneurs' Forum supports over 350 business owners from across the North East who collectively turnover more than £2.6 billion and employ over 16,000 people.

Our quarterly "Pulse Survey" gathers the thoughts of over 100 of our members, giving real-time insight into business sentiment.

The latest results show that despite ongoing concerns about rising costs and wider economic uncertainty, entrepreneurs remain optimistic about their own businesses.

Determined Optimism

More than 70% of respondents say they feel optimistic about their prospects over the next 12 months. That's up more than 10% on 2025, with many founders reporting stronger pipelines, new opportunities, and encouraging levels of demand.

At the same time, the pressures facing SMEs are very real. Around 70% of entrepreneurs also cite rising costs as their biggest concern, with employment costs mentioned most frequently. Increases in minimum wage and National Insurance contributions are having a direct impact, particularly for labour-intensive businesses, alongside the broader cost of running a business.

Besides this, there is a clear concern about the wider economic environment. Nearly half of the respondents highlight government policy and regulatory uncertainty as a factor affecting confidence. For many founders, the challenge is not just the level of cost but the difficulty of planning with clarity.

What this creates is a very real tension. Entrepreneurs are seeing opportunities, but

they are operating in conditions that make those opportunities harder to realise.

Strong pipelines, slower decisions

One of the most important insights in this survey is the challenge of converting pipeline into revenue. Around four in ten entrepreneurs report that this is becoming more difficult. Clients are taking longer to make decisions, projects are being delayed, and payment terms are stretching beyond what many businesses are used to.

In many cases, the demand is still there. The challenge is the time it takes for that demand to translate into cash. That gap between opportunity and revenue is where pressure begins to build.

Despite this, the overall direction remains positive. Three-quarters of respondents expect their turnover to increase over the next 12 months, and more than half anticipate growing their teams. Many also continue to invest in new products, new markets, and new capabilities.

We are also seeing rapid adoption of technology. More than 90% of respondents say they are now using artificial intelligence in some form, often to improve productivity, speed and efficiency. For many businesses, this is quickly becoming part of how they operate day to day.

Entrepreneurial Mindset

What stands out most clearly is the mindset of entrepreneurs themselves. There is a strong sense of resilience running through the responses. Founders are not ignoring the challenges, but they are not standing still either. They are adapting, investing, and continuing to push forward.

That balance of optimism and realism is important. Entrepreneurs understand the environment they operate within, but they remain focused on what they can control within their own businesses.

This is why entrepreneurship continues to play such a critical role in the North East economy. These are businesses that are creating jobs, investing in growth and building for the long term, even when conditions are not straightforward.

The overall picture is one of determined optimism. Confidence is there, but it is being tested by external pressures. The businesses that navigate this period successfully will be those that can manage that tension, maintaining momentum while adapting to a more complex operating environment.

Read the full report at entrepreneursforum.net



"When you join, you meet people who've already been where you are, and that changes how you think about what's next."

Find out more





Tess Peters

Three models. One conversation you're probably avoiding

By Tess Peters, Founder, Accelerator Coaching

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."

George Bernard Shaw

I have had three coaching conversations this week, and every single one of them has circled back to the same place: a leader who is carrying work that should belong to someone else on their team, and a feedback conversation that hasn't happened yet.

Delegation and accountability come up constantly in my coaching work. Not because leaders don't understand the theory — most of them could talk about it fluently — but because when it comes to actually sitting down and saying the thing that needs to be said, something stalls.

I ran a Gear 5 workshop this week on authentic

leadership, and the room lit up when we got onto feedback. Not because people were excited to give it, but because they recognised themselves in the avoidance. The relief of hearing someone say "you're not the only one who finds this hard" was palpable.

The Conversation Behind the Conversation

Here's a version of an exchange I have regularly. The names and details are changed, but the pattern is real.

A senior leader — let's call her Sarah — came to a session frustrated. She was working late most evenings, picking up tasks her direct report, James, should have owned. When I asked what was getting in the way of handing them back, she said: "He's just not ready."

We unpicked that. James had been in the role for over a year. He'd had the training. What he hadn't had was a clear, honest conversation about what was expected and what would happen if it didn't land.

Sarah wasn't protecting James from the work. She was protecting herself from the discomfort of the conversation. And every week she didn't have it, the pattern got harder to break.

Three models that help

When I work with leaders on this, I draw on three frameworks that move things from avoidance to action.

1. The Skill-Will Matrix. Before you have the conversation, get clear on what you're actually dealing with. Is this a capability gap or a motivation gap? The conversation you need to have — and the support you offer afterwards —

looks very different depending on the answer. Sarah assumed James lacked skill. In reality, he'd never been given clear ownership, so his will had quietly eroded.

2. SBI: Situation-Behaviour-Impact. This framework takes the heat out of feedback. Instead of "You're not stepping up," you say: "In last week's client meeting [situation], you deferred every question to me [behaviour], which meant the client left unclear about who their point of contact is [impact]." Specific. Observable. Not personal.

3. Clear Contracting. Feedback without follow-through is just venting. After the conversation, agree what changes, by when, and how you'll both know it's working. Write it down. Revisit it. This is where delegation actually becomes accountability — not through surveillance, but through a shared understanding of what good looks like.

The Invitation

If you're reading this and recognising yourself in Sarah's story, you're in good company. The question isn't whether you know what to do. It's whether you're willing to feel uncomfortable long enough to do it.

The conversation you're avoiding is almost certainly shorter, kinder, and less dramatic than the version you've been rehearsing in your head. Have it this week.

Tess Peters is the founder of Accelerator Coaching. She works with leaders and teams on the conversations that matter most.
acceleratorcoaching.co.uk

Culture, the collective superpower

Many will be familiar with the assertion that culture eats strategy for breakfast.

But what exactly is culture? It's probably one of those things that is easier to experience than to define.

When we walk into an organisation that has a good culture, we can just sense it.

It is an intangible quality. When we join a business that feels active, responsive and caring, that's the culture we're picking up on.

I like to think of culture as the collective superpower of our team.

It's the secret sauce; a force multiplier when it's positive and, unfortunately, a force diminisher when it isn't. However, culture isn't a seemingly random result.

It can (and should) be consciously and thoughtfully designed.

It's moulded by what we reward and what we punish, by what we tolerate and what we cultivate.

And culture is always located in the people we employ and the interactions between them.

With every new hire or promotion, we can strengthen our culture.

But there's also the risk that we can dilute - or even damage it.

If your team has a collective superpower, it makes sense to hire only people who will fit well with that culture and add to it, while avoiding those who might do the opposite.

In other words, to deliberately and consciously hire for culture fit.

And if you don't yet have a collective superpower, what better time than now to start crafting one.

Kinnery.co.uk



Ian Kinnery

Kinnery

Coaching for the humble and brave

- * Business coaching
- * Scaling up
- * Leadership team development

kinnery.co.uk

New Managing Director Kerry Walker sets out vision for Business Durham



Kerry Walker has been appointed Managing Director of Business Durham, taking over from Sarah Slaven, who led the organisation for more than a decade and played a key role in strengthening Durham's reputation as a place to do business.

Business Durham is responsible for delivering business support and economic development on behalf of Durham County Council, working with companies at every stage of their journey, from start-up through to scale-up and inward investment.

Bringing extensive experience in economic development and regeneration, Kerry is focused on building on these strong foundations to support businesses, attract investment and drive growth across the county.

"I'm incredibly honoured to take on this role, particularly following Sarah's leadership and the strong reputation she helped establish for Business Durham," she said. "We have a fantastic team and a strong platform to build on as we continue to support businesses and deliver economic growth across Durham."

Business Durham works with companies at every stage of their journey, from individuals considering starting a business, through to established companies looking to grow, scale

and invest. The organisation also manages a diverse portfolio of business space across the county, helping businesses find the right environment to succeed.

"We're here to support businesses of every shape and size," Kerry explained. "Whether that's helping someone start a business, supporting a company to grow, or working with investors looking to locate in Durham, our role is to provide the right support at the right time."

Support is delivered through a range of programmes and initiatives, including Durham Business Growth and Durham Start-Ups, which provide specialist advice to enhance productivity, foster innovation, access finance and explore new markets.

As the funding landscape evolves, Business Durham is also helping companies become investment-ready and identify alternative sources of finance.

Businesses can also access the Finance Durham Fund, delivered by Maven Capital Partners, which provides flexible investment to help ambitious companies scale, innovate and create jobs.

"Access to finance is critical for growth," Kerry said. "Through initiatives like Finance Durham, we're helping businesses unlock investment and accelerate their plans."

Encouraging entrepreneurship is another priority, with programmes such as Future Business Magnates and the Durham City Incubator supporting the next generation of companies.

"We want to encourage more people to start businesses and ensure there are clear pathways for growth," Kerry added. "These programmes

help develop the next generation of businesses in Durham."

Business Durham also plays a key role in attracting inward investment and developing sites for growth. The organisation manages key locations including NETPark, one of the UK's premier science and technology parks, alongside a wide range of business centres and helps to unlock development at strategic employment sites across the county.

Recent investments, including the £100 million expansion of NETPark and plans for the emerging Durham Innovation District at Aykley Heads, are creating new opportunities for businesses to locate and grow in Durham.

"We have a diverse offer for businesses, combining high-quality workspace, strong partnerships and a collaborative business community," Kerry said.

Durham continues to see growth in sectors including advanced manufacturing, space, advanced materials, green technology and digital. Business Durham works closely with partners including universities, colleges and industry to support innovation and growth.

Looking ahead, Kerry is focused on ensuring Business Durham continues to deliver for businesses and communities across the county.

"Durham has huge potential," she said. "By building on our strengths and working closely with businesses and partners, we can create opportunities, attract investment and support sustainable economic growth across Durham."

To find out more about how Business Durham can support your business, visit www.businessdurham.co.uk

Ruff Retreat

By Dr David Cliff, Gedanken

Ethics, enterprise, and the evolving Pet Economy.

Those who know my work will recognise that animals—and more broadly, questions of welfare—sit close to my core belief system. Not as an abstract sentiment, but as a practical ethical consideration that increasingly intersects with how we live, consume, and lead.

There is a growing conversation around intersectionality in human systems, yet one dimension remains curiously underexamined: speciesism. The quiet assumption of human superiority continues to shape behaviours in ways that often go unchallenged. It surfaces in everyday language—“it’s just a dog”, “it’s only a cat”—but also in more consequential ways, particularly in the standards we accept for the products and environments we provide for animals.

Even where there is no conscious disregard, the outcomes can be troubling. Many pet products on the market are produced with minimal oversight compared to equivalent goods for children—despite entering the homes, and indeed the mouths, of animals we profess to care deeply about. Plastics, dyes, low-grade materials, and opaque supply chains are still commonplace. At the same time, pet ownership in the UK continues to rise, accompanied by significant emotional and financial investment. This creates a tension: we increasingly want the best for our animals, yet the market does not always make it easy to align that intent with genuinely ethical, safe, and environmentally responsible choices.

It is within this space that Ruff Retreat has emerged with both clarity and purpose.



Dr David Cliff

Founded by Rachel Fernie, Ruff Retreat is a relatively young business with a distinctly mature ethical stance. From its inception, the company has sought to challenge some of the prevailing norms within pet retail by curating products that are not only well-designed and functional, but also responsibly sourced and environmentally considered.

This is not simply a branding exercise. The company has placed significant emphasis on supply chain scrutiny, favouring UK-based and transparent sourcing wherever possible.

Materials, manufacturing processes, and environmental impact are all brought into consideration—an approach that reflects a broader shift in consumer expectations.

Research consistently suggests that over 80% of purchasing decisions are now influenced by ethical considerations. That figure is not just a statistic; it is a signal.

Consumers are increasingly discerning, and businesses that fail to recognise this risk

becoming misaligned with the values of their own market.

Rachel articulates this with clarity: “It’s really important that our organisation drives meaningful change and prioritises sustainability without compromising quality and design.”

That balance—between ethics, quality, and aesthetic appeal—is where many wellintentioned businesses struggle. Ruff Retreat, however, appears to be navigating this space with growing confidence.

Since its formation, the company has also begun to gain external recognition, including being named a finalist in the Green Startup of the Year Awards 2026.

From my own perspective, working alongside Ruff Retreat has been both professionally and personally rewarding. Through Gedanken, my role has been to provide challenge and strategic input—supporting rather than defining the organisation’s direction.

There is, perhaps, a broader lesson here for business leaders. Ethical positioning is increasingly visible, but too often remains superficial.

Ruff Retreat offers a counterpoint—an approach that is intentional, evolving, and grounded in a genuine commitment to doing things better.

Ruff Retreat is still early in its journey, yet it is already demonstrating that commercial success and ethical integrity can sit comfortably alongside one another.

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

Creative community welcomes Crown Works development



Sunderland's creative sector is poised for a significant leap forward as momentum builds behind the highly anticipated Crown Works Studios development.

Plans for the 125,000 sq ft production complex are progressing rapidly, with construction potentially beginning as early as July.

The development is expected to act as a catalyst for the wider creative economy, supporting a broad network of professionals, from animators and set designers to make-up artists and technical crews.

Across the River Wear, the news has been warmly received at the North East BIC, home to a thriving cluster of digital, media and creative enterprises.

Among them is Howell Media, which specialises in video production and live events. The company's head of production, Issy Howell, said: "It's really exciting to see something like this happening in Sunderland.

"Developments like this bring a real sense of momentum to the area and can have such a positive impact on the wider creative community.

"What feels especially important is the opportunity it could create for young people:

helping them see there are genuine careers in film, production and content creation here in the North East, and that they don't have to leave the region to build something creative and successful!"

Also based at the BIC is video production company Second Draft. Co-founder and director Glen Colledge said: "Crown Works Studios has the potential to be a real catalyst for the region, enabling a wider ecosystem of businesses, talent and facilities to grow around it.

"For independent production companies like ours, this brings significant indirect benefits - from access to a deeper pool of highly skilled freelance talent, to nearby rental houses that help us stay at the forefront of production technology.

"Being able to tap into this as needed will help support sustainable growth, while allowing us to remain agile and focused on delivering the highest standard of work across every project."

Jonny Smith, founder of Bonny Lad Productions, has spent more than a decade working as a freelance producer and director. He said: "The progression of the Crown Works Studios is a hugely positive step - not just for Sunderland, but for the North East and the wider screen production industry.

"In my 13 years in the industry, this is the most significant development I've seen - one with the potential for real generational impact.

"For businesses like Bonny Lad, it's

transformative, creating new opportunities, attracting productions and helping keep work in the region.

"This is a defining moment for the North East and one that could reshape the sector for years to come."

Graeme Stammers, owner of chauffeur company Wearside Executive Limited, is hoping the studios will attract big names looking for executive transport in and around the city.

Graeme said: "The studios will impact a lot of small businesses across the region as they require so many different moving parts. From executive vehicles, like we provide across the UK, to site security and of course staff.

"This will provide a boost in earnings helping these businesses not only to survive but to thrive. It's exciting for everyone in our opinion and we can't wait."

Paul McEldon OBE, Chief Executive at the BIC, said: "The Crown Works Studios will provide opportunities for the city which, a decade ago, we could never have imagined.

"For our young people, it will mean that anyone who wants a job in the creative industries no longer has to leave for the likes of London, Leeds or Manchester and economically, it will provide a huge lift to businesses across the supply chain, from make-up artists to joiners and electricians. It is yet another incredibly exciting development for the city."

www.ne-bic.co.uk



**From
£49
per week**

Workspace that feels more like home

Flexible workspace with free parking, a welcoming reception, café, meeting rooms and onsite nursery.

Everything your business needs, all in one place.



To arrange a viewing or find out more contact:
0191 516 6000 or info@ne-bic.co.uk

Wearfield, Enterprise Park East, Sunderland, SR5 2TA

www.ne-bic.co.uk





Jo Holmes

From Commitment to Connection: Turning ESG Ambition into Local Impact

By Jo Holmes, Genee

Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) is fast becoming a core expectation of doing business. Across the North East, organisations are feeling increasing pressure from customers, stakeholders, investors and employees to demonstrate meaningful action, not just intent. But while ambition is high, delivery can often feel complex, fragmented, or disconnected from real impact.

From our combined perspectives at Genee Consulting Ltd and Keepl Social, one challenge stands out: the gap between businesses striving to create social value and the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations that urgently need support.

Building ESG from the ground up

Genee and Keepl met at the NE Public Sector Sustainable & Social Value Supplier Event, where regional buyers and suppliers discussed supply chain expectations on environmental and social impact, and shared how suppliers are already taking action to meet them.

For many organisations, the starting point is environmental responsibility. Through the Investors in the Environment (iE) accreditation, Genee supports businesses to develop environmental management systems that genuinely work for them. This isn't about ticking boxes or adding another burden to already stretched teams, it's about embedding practical, achievable actions that deliver measurable benefits.

When implemented effectively, iE helps organisations uncover efficiencies, reduce costs, and strengthen their reputation. Crucially, it also encourages businesses to look beyond environmental performance alone, recognising

the wider ESG picture, including the additional projects and initiatives that create real value both internally and externally.

The Missing Link: social value in practice

It is within this broader ESG landscape that many organisations encounter a challenge. Businesses are increasingly motivated to give back, whether through volunteering days, skills sharing, or community investment, but often struggle to identify where their efforts will have the greatest impact.

At the same time, VCSE organisations across the North East are under increasing pressure. Demand for their services continues to grow, yet resources remain limited. Many lack the networks, visibility or capacity to connect with businesses that are actively looking to support causes like theirs.

The result is a disconnect - willingness on one side, need on the other, but no clear or efficient way to bring them together.

Connecting business with community

This is where platforms like Keepl Social are transforming the landscape. By digitising and simplifying the social value process, Keepl Social enables businesses to move from intention to action with far greater ease and clarity.

Through a single platform, organisations can connect with real-time, hyperlocal community needs, ensuring that their efforts are targeted, relevant and impactful. Whether it's a team volunteering day, donating resources, or offering professional expertise, businesses can align their contributions with genuine demand in the communities where they operate.

For VCSE organisations, the benefits are equally significant. They gain a space to showcase their needs, access support more efficiently, and build lasting relationships with businesses, strengthening their capacity to deliver vital services over the long term.

Creating value where it matters most

Michelle Jones, CSIO of Keepl Social, said "with Buyers now requiring evidence-backed Social Value, accounting for up to 30% weighting in bids, and explicitly stating they will only work with those actively working towards Net Zero, it's crucial that suppliers can access support to meet these demands. It was great to meet Genee and align our shared values in supporting businesses effectively and efficiently."

When environmental frameworks like iE are combined with practical tools that unlock social impact, ESG becomes far more than a reporting requirement. Businesses begin to see tangible benefits, such as stronger employee engagement, improved brand reputation, and deeper community connections. More importantly, they can see the difference they are making, often right on their own doorstep.

To get support to develop an environmental management system which works for your organisation, get in touch at jo@genee.org.uk, and to discover more about Keepl Social, contact michelle.jones@keepl.com



Why Treasurer Trustees are so hard to find – and why charities shouldn't go it alone

By Peter Neal, Founder, Experience Bank Group

One of the most consistent challenges I hear from charities across the North East is this: “We need a Treasurer Trustee... but we simply can't find one.”

It's not surprising.

Treasurer Trustees sit at the intersection of governance, finance, risk, and strategy. They are not just number-crunchers; they are custodians of sustainability, accountability, and long-term viability. In today's climate where scrutiny, regulation, and financial pressures are intensifying, the bar has never been higher.

And yet, the pool of individuals willing and able to take on this responsibility in a voluntary capacity remains incredibly small.

There are three key reasons why Treasurer Trustee recruitment is so difficult

Firstly, demand far outweighs supply because every charity needs financial oversight. But individuals with the right blend of financial expertise, strategic thinking, and governance awareness are already in high demand, often in executive careers.

Secondly, the Treasurer role carries perceived (and sometimes very real) personal and reputational risk. For many professionals, the accountability attached to charity finances, especially in uncertain economic times, can feel daunting.

And thirdly, charities often undersell the opportunity, relying on generic role descriptions and advertising. This simply

doesn't resonate with high-calibre candidates who are being selective about where they invest their time.

This is where working with a specialist partner becomes not just helpful, but essential. At Experience Bank Group, our role is to bridge that gap. We don't just “find people”. We help charities articulate what they need and position the opportunity in a way that attracts the right individuals.

Crucially, we focus as much on cultural fit and values alignment as we do on technical capability.

A great example of this in practice is our recent work with Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter.

Like many charities, their board was passionate and committed but largely made up of first-time trustees. When their Chair stepped down, it created a moment of reflection: what skills did they truly need at board level to support growth and sustainability?

The answer wasn't just “another trustee”, it was experienced leadership, including strong financial oversight.

Through a structured search process, we helped them and the result was the appointment of an experienced Chair and an additional trustee, strengthening governance and setting the organisation up for its next phase. Just

as importantly, we supported them with succession planning, ensuring they are not forced into reactive recruitment in the future.

We see similar challenges across organisations like FareShare North East where we recently placed new trustees including treasurer.

For charities tackling issues such as food poverty, financial governance is mission-critical. Every pound must be maximised, every risk understood, and every decision aligned with impact. In these contexts, the Treasurer Trustee is not a back-office role, it is central to delivering outcomes.

And yet, without the right support, many charities appoint in haste, or compromise on the calibre of candidate. We are pleased to report with our help FareShare North East didn't do either of these things!

If there is one message I would leave with charity leaders, it is this:

Stop hoping the right Treasurer Trustee will appear and start approaching recruitment strategically.

That means:

- Being clear on the skills and experience you actually need
- Investing in how you position the opportunity
- Investing in a partner that can access networks beyond your immediate reach
- And working with a specialist who understands the sector

Because when you get this right, the impact is transformative.

A strong Treasurer doesn't just safeguard your finances they unlock confidence, enable growth, and strengthen your entire board. And ultimately, that means your organisation can focus on what matters most: delivering meaningful, lasting impact.

If you are looking for a treasurer or any trustee, then get in touch!
Peter@theexperiencebank.co.uk

A Shared Future: Why Employee Ownership Trusts are reshaping business

In boardrooms across the UK, a quiet shift is taking place. Business owners who focused on trade sales or private equity exits are now considering a different path that prioritises legacy, culture, and people.

The rise of Employee Ownership Trusts (EOTs) isn't a trend; it reflects broader rethinking of what sustainable success looks like. Here Andrew Marsh, chair of Vistage in the North East, Northumberland and Cumbria, talks with Vistage member Poonam Kaur, CEO of FDS, an award-winning corporate finance boutique.

EOT is a structure where company shares are held in a trust company on behalf of all employees, giving them indirect ownership of the business. Unlike traditional share schemes, employees don't hold shares individually. Instead, the trust company is the controlling shareholder, ensuring decisions are made for the benefit of the workforce. Andrew said:

"Many of our business founder members, say that succession planning is one of the most challenging aspects of leadership. Who will take the business forward? How can its values be preserved? And how can employees, who helped build the company, share in its future? Enter Poonam!"

Poonam's company, FDS, specialises in assisting companies get EOTs right. She said: "EOTs have grown in popularity since the pandemic with nearly 3000 registered since 2014 when it became an approved scheme by the government. Only 500 of those were prior to lockdown. EOTs are a viable exit route, allowing owners gradual transition out if desired, aligning financial incentives with long-term stewardship. Sellers benefit from significant tax advantages, including a 50% relief from capital gains tax, provided certain conditions are met."

In addition to capital gains tax relief for sellers, employees in EOT-owned businesses can receive income tax-free bonuses of up to £3,600 per year, an incentive designed to encourage wider adoption of employee ownership across the UK.

But Poonam adds that to frame EOTs purely as a tax-efficient exit is missing the point. She says the most successful transitions are values driven, ensuring the business remains independent, preserving its identity, and rewarding those who contributed to its success on its journey.

Employee ownership changes the psychological contract between employer and employee. When people feel a stake in outcomes, behaviour shifts. Unsurprisingly, evidence shows that employee-owned businesses experience higher engagement and productivity. Ownership creates accountability, encourages collaboration, fostering a culture where success is shared.

Poonam has seen firsthand how communication plays a critical role in this transition. Becoming employee-owned isn't a one-off event; it's a cultural evolution. Employees should understand the ownership, how the trust operates, and how voices can be heard. Without this, the benefits of the model are diluted.

The governance structure of an EOT is both its strength and its complexity. Trustees are tasked with acting in the best interests of all employees, balancing commercial performance with fairness and sustainability. Transparency is critical. Employees must believe that the trust is acting on their behalf. Leadership must adapt to a model where authority is shared, and communication flows. This is where many organisations succeed or struggle; and where FDS is exceptionally talented.

Without the right leadership behaviours, governance structures, and communication strategies, an EOT will not deliver results. Done right, EOTs anchor businesses in communities, reduce risk, and create more resilient organisations.

There are pitfalls though. Poonam explains:

"EOTs are not a universal solution and require careful planning. Valuation is a key consideration. Owners may receive less than they would in a competitive traditional market sale, particularly where the purchase is funded over time from company profits. There are governance and ongoing compliance requirements to navigate. Employee ownership places greater emphasis on collective responsibility. If the team is not capable of leading in this environment, the model can falter. But, most importantly, a succession plan needs to be in place."

Despite these challenges, the momentum of EOTs is undeniable, reflecting a growing appetite for more inclusive forms of ownership reducing risk. Andrew concluded: "For leaders, the question is not whether an EOT is viable, but whether it aligns with their purpose. What legacy do they want to leave? Employee ownership is not about relinquishing control; it's about redefining it and recognising long-term success is best achieved when the people who drive the business have a meaningful stake in its future. In a world where trust is fragile, EOTs offer a powerful alternative: a model built on shared ownership, shared responsibility, and shared reward."

Since joining Vistage Poonam is helping other members understand the options. She concluded: "It can be lonely at the top, so being part of Vistage has allowed me to be in a community where there's support in processing issues and celebrating wins. It's like a family with Andrew at the helm; plus it's rewarding to impart my knowledge, add value and share what I know about EOTs and other exit strategies. Indeed, I am already helping one peer with their succession plan!"

If you want to know more about Vistage and its members contact Andrew.marsh@vistagechair.co.uk

Poonam Kaur





“

Succession planning is one of the most challenging aspects of leadership.

Andrew Marsh

When small problems quietly become how your business runs

By Helen Butler, Simplified Operations

One of the things that fascinates me about businesses is how rarely operational problems start because of one obvious moment. We often imagine them appearing after a specific situation - a surge in demand, a less-than-ideal hire or a new system being introduced. In reality, it's usually far less obvious than that.

Most businesses drift off course slowly, through dozens of small decisions that felt perfectly reasonable at the time.

I often hear the early signs of this when sitting with leadership teams. Someone might mention that things seem to take longer than they used to, or that the team has had to deal with an issue that feels suspiciously similar to the one they handled last month. The comment usually comes with a sensible explanation, everyone confirms it was dealt with, and the meeting moves on.

Those moments always make me pause, because they're rarely about one isolated issue. More often they are early signals that the business has started quietly working around problems rather than fixing them.

Individually those decisions don't feel significant. In fact, they usually seem entirely reasonable in the moment. But when they happen repeatedly they begin to shape how the organisation actually operates. What started as a workaround gradually becomes the normal way of doing things.

Before anyone really notices, the business is running in a way nobody intentionally designed - and it comes at a cost. Time gets lost, margins quietly shrink and teams end up working harder than they should have to.



Helen Butler

This pattern is common in successful, growing businesses. The leadership team is capable, people care about doing good work and the organisation has often grown precisely because the team is responsive and adaptable. But growth brings complexity. More customers, more people and more moving parts inevitably place pressure on the systems and habits that once worked perfectly well.

In that environment the focus naturally shifts towards the next opportunity or the bigger operational challenge that needs solving, and small issues rarely feel urgent enough to stop everything and address them properly.

Over time those small compromises accumulate.

Research by McKinsey suggests organisations can lose as much as 20–30% of productive capacity to what they describe as “organisational friction” - the small operational irritations that nobody quite deals with until they quietly become part of how the business runs.

In other words, the business slowly absorbs the problem.

The uncomfortable part is that fixing it usually requires doing something that feels completely counter-intuitive when the business is busy: stopping.

- Stopping to look properly at something that isn't working
- Stopping to reset expectations with the team.
- Stopping to deal with an issue everyone has quietly been working around.

When orders need shipping and customers need responding to, it's understandable that pausing can feel like the last thing the business can afford. But it's often the only way the drift stops.

One question I encourage leadership teams to introduce into their meetings is simple:

“What are we currently working around instead of fixing?”

It's a deceptively powerful question. It quickly surfaces the recurring issue everyone has learned to live with, the delay that keeps appearing on projects, or the workaround that has quietly become normal practice.

Address those things early and the business stays clear and consistent. Leave them unresolved for long enough and they eventually become the way the business operates.

Businesses rarely lose their standards overnight. They lose them a little at a time.

Does this feel familiar but you're unsure where to start? Get in touch — we'd love to help.

www.simplifiedoperations.co.uk



Sam Hook

When running a business feels too much

By Sam Hook, Uniquethinking

Running a business is often seen as exciting, rewarding, and full of purpose. But there is a side of business ownership that is talked about far less, and I see it every day in my work: the mental load.

Business owners come to me describing a similar pattern. One day they feel clear, capable, and in control. The next, they are questioning decisions, second-guessing themselves, and wondering if they are getting it wrong.

You are the one everyone looks to

When you run a business, you are the decision-maker. You are responsible for the direction, the finances, the people, and the outcomes. There is rarely anyone above you to sense-check ideas with or share the weight of those decisions. Over time, that builds pressure.

I work with business owners across the North East whose businesses are doing well on paper. Yet behind the scenes, they are dealing with self-doubt, stress, and a constant feeling that they should be coping better.

They often ask themselves, "Why do I feel like this when everything looks fine?"

The answer is simple: because you are carrying a lot, often without the space to process it.

When thinking time disappears

One of the biggest challenges I see is a lack of thinking time. Days are filled with clients, emails, team issues, and deadlines. There is always something more urgent to deal with.

What gets pushed aside is the time to step back and ask important questions like what do I want from this business now? What does success look like for me at this stage? What is getting in my way? Without that space, it is easy to stay busy but feel stuck.

Why coaching is essential

This is where coaching comes in. Not as a last resort, but as a practical tool for running a business well.

The people I work with are not failing. They are capable, driven, and ambitious. What they need is a space where they can think clearly, speak openly, and be challenged in the right way. Coaching provides that.

It helps business owners build confidence in their decisions, recognise unhelpful patterns, and move from constant firefighting to leading

with more clarity and intention. It also brings something many people underestimate, accountability.

When you are accountable to someone else, things happen. Ideas turn into action.

You do not have to do it alone

There is a shift happening. More business owners are recognising that getting support is not a weakness, it is part of being an effective leader.

In fact, the strongest leaders I work with are the ones who choose not to carry everything on their own.

Running a business will always come with challenges. But it should not feel like a constant weight.

Sometimes, the most valuable thing you can do is step back, create space to think, and allow yourself to be supported.

Fully funded coaching now available

If you run a business in the North East you can now access 12 hours of free coaching with Uniquethinking through the BIPC North East. In that time we can work on your business together and reduce the heavy load of running a business.

Please get in touch to arrange an introductory call to apply for the coaching and 'working on your business' sessions by emailing me at sam@uniquethinking.co.uk

Uniquethinking.co.uk

The power of your personal brand

Bryony Gibson, director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, shares why your personal brand is shaping your career long before you start looking for your next move.

If you ask people what drives career progression, the answers tend to be predictable. Qualifications, experience, and performance are all important, but they're not the full picture.

Opportunities often come down to something far less conventional, like who knows you? What do they know about you? And what do they say when you're not in the room?

That's your personal brand. And whether you're actively looking for a job or not, it's shaping your career.

Reputation matters

For many, the idea of "personal branding" can feel uncomfortable. It sounds like self-promotion, or something for influencers and entrepreneurs, but, at its core, it's much simpler than that.

Try to think of it as your visible reputation. How your experience, personality, and values show up consistently, both online and offline.

In recruitment, visibility matters. We're operating in a world where employers almost always look beyond a CV with a quick social media search. It's standard practice, and what they find shapes their first impression long before any conversation begins.

Increasingly, it also influences who gets approached in the first place, because the reality of a candidate-led market is that many of the best opportunities are never even advertised. People move through networks, following conversations and recommendations. That's where personal branding becomes powerful.

We're all brands, whether you like it or not

There's a well-known idea associated with Tom Peters, who wrote about "The Brand Called You" long before the world of social media. His



Bryony Gibson

claim was simple: you are already a brand. The question is whether you are actively shaping it or leaving it to chance.

Today, platforms like LinkedIn have amplified that reality by 1000%, but that doesn't mean you need to jump online and build a following by posting every day.

It's more important to be clear and visible enough that the right people understand what you do and what you stand for. When you consistently share your perspective, your experience, and your interests publicly, you make it easier for people to think of you when something relevant comes up.

How to build your brand

There is growing research that suggests professionals who are more visible in their field are more likely to be considered for opportunities, promotions, and leadership roles. Their personal brands are typically built on three things:

- Clarity around what you want to be known for.
- Consistency in your actions, conversations, and online presence.
- Credibility, built from offering experience and insight to back up what you say.

Rather than a complete reinvention, in most cases, it is about taking time to articulate what is already there. For example, sharing a short reflection on a project you have delivered, commenting on trends in your industry, or supporting and engaging with others in your network.

Small actions, but over time, they build a much clearer picture of who you are professionally. And importantly, they make you more memorable. From a recruitment perspective, that matters.

When I speak to employers in accountancy practices, they are not just looking for skills. They are looking for people who bring different perspectives and new ideas. They want employees who demonstrate curiosity and are willing to engage with their profession beyond the day job.

A visible personal brand is often a signal of exactly that. So, if you are thinking about your next career move, it is worth asking not just "what roles am I applying for?" but "what do people already know about me?" Because by the time the right opportunity comes up, your personal brand may already have done half the work for you.

Or none of it at all.

BRYONY GIBSON CONSULTING

Jobs. Advice. Expertise.

With more than 40 live vacancies across the North East, whether you're hiring or hunting, head to BRYONYGIBSON.COM





ZERO WASTE, PLASTIC FREE SHOPPING WITH AN IN-HOUSE ART GALLERY

DRIED GOODS - OILS AND VINEGARS - HOUSEHOLD CLEANING - PLASTIC FREE TOILETRIES AND MUCH MORE!



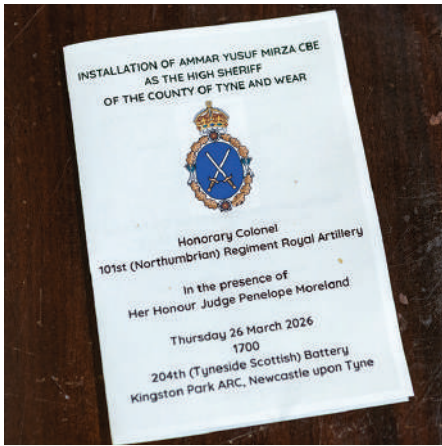
No 3 | Metro Station | The Sidings | Tynemouth | North Shields | NE30 2TF | www.buy-the-kilo.com



Your *future* depends upon many things, but mostly on *you*.

For a confidential conversation:
BRYONY@BRYONYGIBSON.COM

BRYONY GIBSON CONSULTING
Jobs. Advice. Expertise.



A new High Sheriff of Tyne and Wear

The installation of Ammar Mirza CBE as High Sheriff of Tyne and Wear marks the formal start of his year of service, following his appointment by His Majesty The King.

This historic role, dating back over 1,000 years, supports the Crown, judiciary, emergency services, and voluntary sector.

Held at the 101st (Northumbrian) Regiment Royal Artillery, where Ammar is Honorary Colonel, the ceremony brought together civic, military, and community leaders in a shared commitment to justice, inclusion, and improving the health, wealth and happiness of the region.

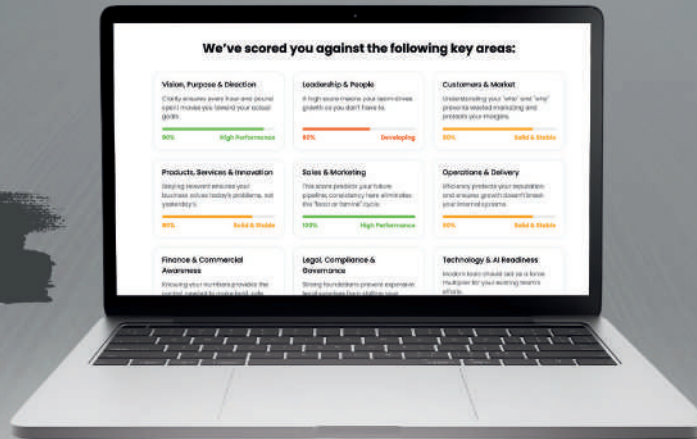




Annual **Business MOT**

Monitor yearly progress of 10 Critical Business Pillars

Most business owners are so busy driving the car they forget to check the engine. The Business MOT is a 30 minute guided self-reflection each year, designed to give you a clear, jargon-free map of where you are, what's working, and where the road ahead might need smoothing.



Audit your fixed costs

Operational **savings up to 20%**



Join the club.
Save money,
Make more.

Uncover hidden inefficiencies, auditing your fixed costs, and identifying real opportunities to cut operational expenses by up to 20%.

Most SME owners are too busy working in the business to spot what's draining it. We spot it for you and fix it.



Automate and save more

Time is money. Implementing AI automation could improve administrative productivity by 15-20%, and in turn more cost savings.

automate with AI



Business Club
By SME Centre of Excellence

www.smecofe.com/business-club

17 Main St, Ponteland, Newcastle upon Tyne NE20 9NH

hello@smecofe.com

How to **Create Authentic Social Video** That Earns Real Trust

SME Business Club Networking Event

Tuesday, 19th May 2026
10am to 12pm

ISS Airview, 1 Airview Park,
Newcastle International Airport,
NE13 8BR



Scan to get your tickets or find more information about the SME Business Club Network Event



This is a hands-on "Content Lab" not a lecture. You won't just listen to theory and leave with a head full of ideas you never act on. You'll get your phone out, plan real content, learn professional editing tools, and walk out with a ready-to-execute video blueprint for your business. Whether you've never posted a video or you've been creating content that gets crickets, this workshop meets you where you are and gives you a system that works.

Led by Steven Fee, digital strategist, full stack digital marketer and videographer at SME Centre of Excellence, this session is built around one core belief: you don't need to go viral, you just need to be visible, credible, and trusted by the right people.



Business Club

By SME Centre of Excellence

www.smecofe.com/business-club

17 Main St, Ponteland, Newcastle upon Tyne NE20 9NH

hello@smecofe.com

Want to sharpen your sales, business development and social networking?

You need Spear-heads!

Cheryl Spears is one of those people who is so enthusiastic and focussed about what she does, that she makes the rest of us feel inadequate.

But the good news is that she's using her proven record in recruitment, sales and business development to help other businesses...small and large... to grow.

And she can show you how to do it via her various training programmes.

"Business development is what Spear-heads is all about," said Cheryl. "I'm making full use of my 20 years of experience in recruitment and 5 years working in IT, to help businesses improve their sales and their image."

So...what exactly is Spear-heads able to do for you and your business?

In a nutshell, Spear-heads is a modern sales consultancy and training organisation. The business focuses on helping companies improve their sales performance, build stronger professional networks, and develop a powerful online presence particularly through the use of LinkedIn.

"We combine traditional sales techniques with modern digital strategies," adds Cheryl. "Many businesses struggle to adapt to the rapidly changing landscape of online networking and digital marketing, so I created Spear-heads to offer practical, straightforward support for companies wanting to generate leads, build relationships, and ultimately increase their revenue.

"We use traditional sales techniques such as cold calling, email marketing, and direct outreach, combined with digital networking methods that make use of platforms like LinkedIn. By blending these approaches, we help organisations create a balanced sales strategy that works both online and offline. It also means we can get up and running quickly.

"LinkedIn is an incredible tool which is undervalued by a lot of businesses. We see LinkedIn as an essential piece of kit for businesses, recruiters, and sales professionals which has massive potential. Here at Spear-heads we not only use LinkedIn ourselves, but



Cheryl Spears

we also offer training programmes designed to teach people how to turn the platform into a powerful business development tool. We shall very shortly be launching online training, but we also visit companies to show them how to create a strong and engaging LinkedIn profile that clearly explains what they or their business offers...their skills, expertise, and value...and help them attract attention from potential clients or employers. We explain how to write posts, share insights, and participate in conversations that build credibility within their industry. By learning how to comment effectively, respond to discussions, and publish relevant content, participants can increase their visibility and build stronger professional relationships. These strategies help transform LinkedIn from a simple networking site into a platform for thought leadership and brand building."

By combining traditional sales expertise with in-depth knowledge of LinkedIn, Spear-heads helps individuals, companies and organisations make full use of the digital age. Spear-heads will be expanding its training programmes and will continue to support businesses by helping them to develop their communication skills.

"You don't need days of training to improve sales performance; you need focused learning you can use straight away. These short, practical sessions cut out the fluff and get straight to real examples, clear frameworks, and tools you can apply immediately. Perfect for busy professionals who want genuine improvement without losing a full day to training. Each course is designed to fit around your schedule while still delivering results that stick. Buy all courses in one package to super-boost your overall sales or cherry-pick specific areas needing the most focus."

- 1 - How to be a successful networker
 - 2 - Winning business on LinkedIn - Content & Connection
 - 3 - Objection Handling
 - 4 - Sales Mix - Building your top 25 and 13 week tracker
 - 5 - Tele sales Success: Preparation, rapport & objection handling
 - 6 - Closing the sale with confidence
- £35+ VAT for 1 course
£175 + VAT for all 6 courses

The best idea is to have a chat with Cheryl Spears...you can contact her and get further information by logging onto her website www.spear-heads.co.uk

ONLINE SALES TRAINING



Want confident conversations and consistent results?

**The Sales Mix:
Building your top 25 & 13 week tracker**

**Telesales Success:
Preperation, Rapport & Objection Handling**

Objection Handling

Closing The Sale With Condifence

**Winning Business on LinkedIn:
Content & Communication**

How To Be A Successfull Networker

LEARN FAST. BUILD SKILLS. SELL BETTER

Scan for all course links here

1 Course £35 + VAT ---- Save with all 6 for £175 + VAT



High Stakes

By Michael Dobson, Director of Sapphire HR and Heads HR

The stakes for payroll and policy compliance were high as we entered the new tax year last month.

While April has always been a month of recalibration, the 2026 statutory rates adjustments have narrowed the margin for error, and oversight from the newly established Fair Work Agency means employers need to be one step ahead.

From Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) and redundancy caps to family-related leave payments, the cost of employment has shifted. For many SMEs, the most critical change is the new £129 weekly earnings threshold. This is the new minimum an employee must earn to qualify for statutory family leave, so it's worth reviewing your lower-earning or part-time contracts. While these figures represent the legal baseline, I am increasingly seeing the businesses we work with choose to offer enhanced packages to remain competitive in a tight talent market.

Getting it right is not just about safeguarding reputation and building a positive workplace culture, it is about business survival. The Fair Work Agency is now operating with a clear mandate to proactively investigate and penalise non-compliance. We've already seen the reputational damage caused by the government's naming and shaming of household brands for National Minimum Wage

(NMW) failures. For an SME, reputational damage, coupled with fines of up to 200% of arrears, could be catastrophic.

We must also look ahead to the total removal of the unfair dismissal compensatory cap. When this cap vanishes in January 2027, unfair dismissal claims will become an uncapped liability, much like discrimination claims are today. This makes the next few months a critical period for businesses to make their internal discipline and grievance procedures watertight before the statutory limit is removed.

At Sapphire HR, we've always believed that a robust foundation is the best defence against the stress of changing legislation. Since our expansion at Clavering House in Newcastle,



we've been focusing on helping North East businesses move away from reactive HR by getting the essentials right from the very start.

This begins with a thoughtful onboarding process. With the six-month statutory probation period now becoming the standard, it is the perfect time to create a structured start supported by clear documentation, ensuring that expectations are transparent and that your new hires feel fully supported as they integrate into your team.

That same attention to detail should extend to your employee handbook. We work alongside local directors to ensure these documents stay live and compliant. Whether we are conducting a comprehensive policy audit or acting as a second pair of eyes through our HR On

Demand (HROD) service, our goal is to catch those easily missed slip-ups (like an overlooked pay rise on an apprentice's birthday) before they have a chance to escalate.

I know that for many company directors, these constant shifts in legislation can feel like one more thing on an already overflowing plate. My message to fellow business owners is to see these updates as a chance to steady the ship. By auditing your payroll and refining your policies now, you aren't just staying on the right side of the Fair Work Agency, you're giving yourself the headspace to focus on growth, knowing your people policies are solid.

www.sapphire-hr.co.uk

Struggling with Gen Z?

New service to help businesses tackle 'generational conflict' in the workplace

A communication expert has launched a new training and support service aimed at helping businesses tackle growing "intergenerational friction" in the workplace.

Teesside's Liz Atkin – a TEDx speaker, author and former CEO – has spent over a decade helping organisations across the UK improve their internal communication.

Now, through her business Refreshing Comms, she's offering training aimed at helping employers to better support and manage teams made up of workers from very different generations.

"This is the first time in history where companies can have workers from up to five different generations," said Liz.

"And while there's always been intergenerational friction between younger and older staff, the pace of change in the past two decades means that the gap in understanding is wider than ever before.

"People entering work today have grown up with very different expectations around work - why they do it, what they want from a career and even how much time they are prepared to spend doing it.

"That can understandably cause tension within the team, and older, more seasoned staff may struggle to work alongside Gen Z staff"

Research backs that up. In the UK, three in every four managers say Generation Z – those born from the mid-1990s onwards – are the most challenging generation to work with.

However, as someone who has coached and guided scores of businesses on improving communication in the workplace, Liz believes the picture isn't as black and white. The topic of age gaps was one she tackled in a TEDx talk, that's amassed over 22,000 views on YouTube.

And having recently carried out successful 'Gen Z' training with Public Health Wales, Liz believes any organisation that has a diverse workforce would benefit from her support.

"Many of the frustrations come down to misunderstanding and mismatched expectations rather than the attitude of younger staff, but if businesses can help each generation to better understand the other, then tension can be turned into opportunity and advantage.

"Gen Z isn't the problem, but being viewed as such creates unnecessary barriers, detrimental to working relationships and ultimately performance. The answer to unlocking all available skills and expertise lies in managing these differences."

Yet as one recent report stated, it isn't just Gen Z that can cause communication issues in the workplace. The Local Skills Improvement Plan Progress Report found that 95 per cent of North East business admitted to having communication issues.



As such, Liz believes that targeted training can make a huge difference in improving that stat. "Most organisations know communication could be better, but they're not always sure where to start," she adds.

"My job is to give teams simple, practical tools so people understand each other better and work together more effectively because ultimately, when you get communication right, everything else in the business becomes easier."

For more information, please visit refreshingcomms.co.uk



Recruitment built
around fit, not volume.

Northeast Based,
Nationwide Recruitment Specialists.

Visit: gillespierecruitment.co.uk

Looking for the right person, not just any person?



Stronger than ever

How strength training became Kathryn Rodgers' foundation for resilience

For Kathryn Rodgers of Face2FaceHR, strength training has become far more than a way to stay fit. Over the past 14 years, it has played a key role in building resilience, supporting mental wellbeing, and helping her navigate life's challenges.

Can you tell us about your journey and what led you to take on this challenge?

I've been strength training for around 14 years. I got hooked because lifting heavy things is so empowering, but as I've got older, I've realised it's also essential for maintaining muscle mass and bone density, helping protect how well we move later in life.

Watching my parents age has reinforced how important that is. The idea of struggling with everyday things like carrying shopping or walking upstairs is quite scary, and something I'm motivated to fight against.

What inspired you to climb Snowdon?

I love having a goal to work towards. I climbed Scafell Pike last year, so Snowdon—and eventually Ben Nevis—felt like the natural next steps.

Walking is one of the most underrated forms of exercise, but without a clear goal, it's easy to let it slip. Working from home, even hitting 5,000 steps can be a challenge. Climbing Snowdon gives me something specific to aim towards, and as I'm doing it with colleagues from Robson Laidler, I'll be with a supportive group.

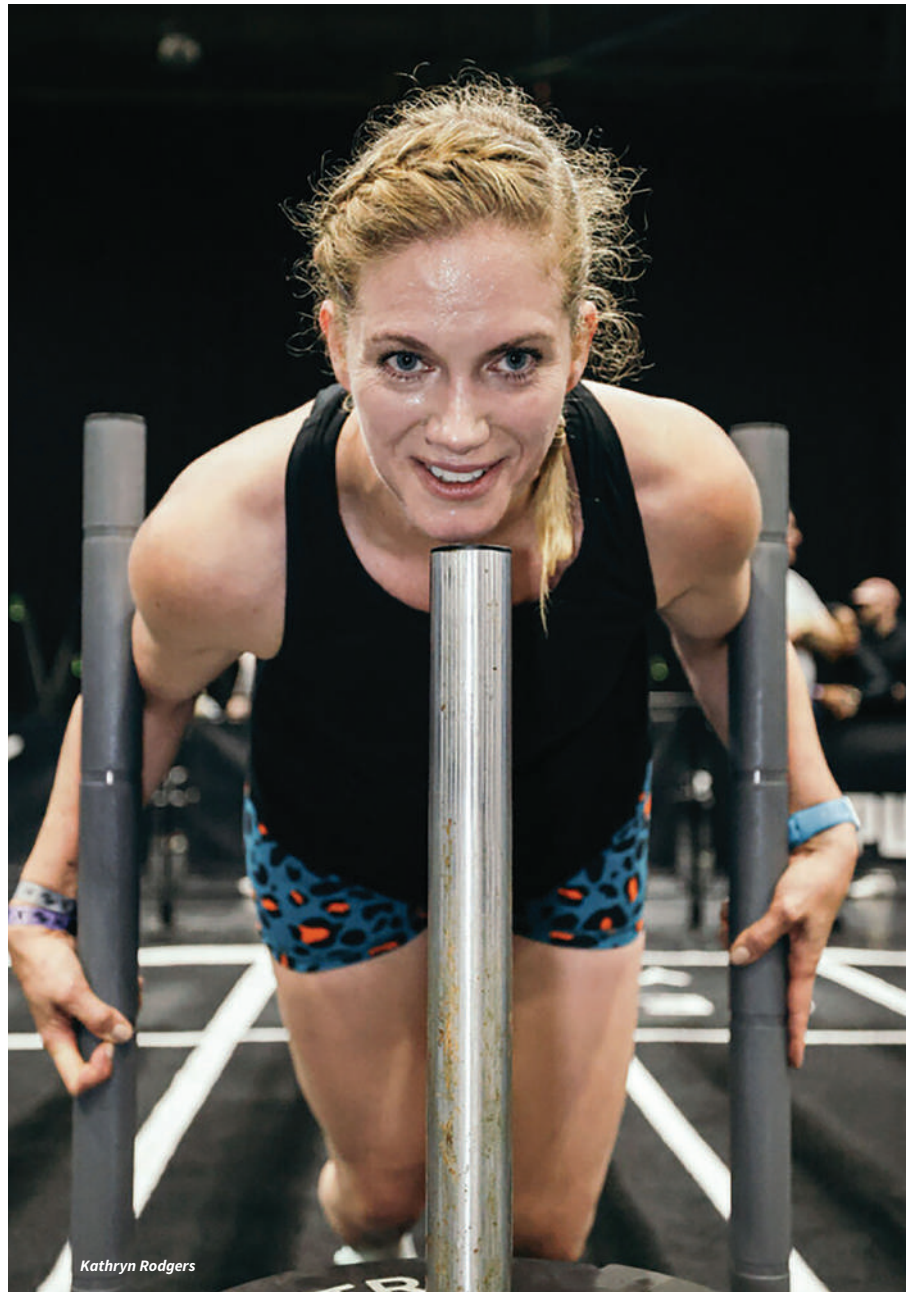
How have your personal experiences influenced your outlook on life and work?

It's made me think about how I spend my time. We're at work for so much of our lives, so it's important it feels fulfilling.

I'm lucky to work with great people, whether that's in my business, at Robson Laidler, or when I'm PTing.

How has strength training impacted your mental well-being?

It has a positive impact in so many ways. That hour at the gym is often the only time I don't have to think or do anything for someone else—I can just turn up and focus.



Kathryn Rodgers

Seeing improvements or learning something new brings a real sense of achievement. I even did a happy dance when I managed my first double under!

Do you think people underestimate the link between physical and mental well-being?

Absolutely. There's so much evidence showing how movement improves not just our physical health, but also mood, focus and sleep.

You don't need to be doing anything extreme—just finding something enjoyable and manageable can make a big difference.

What would you say to women who feel intimidated by starting fitness or strength training?

There's a type of movement for everyone. It doesn't have to be the gym—but doing something is always better than doing nothing.

If the gym feels intimidating, try small group classes or book a PT to build confidence and learn proper form.

How do you stay consistent and motivated?

I'm not always motivated—there are days I'd rather stay on the sofa. But consistency is what matters.

A sustainable routine, even just a couple of hours a week, will always have more long-term benefits than going all-in and burning out.

In your work with businesses, how often do you see well-being impacting performance?

Probably every day, often in subtle ways—people working too many hours, skipping breaks, or relying on caffeine.

These habits can quietly affect focus and productivity. Movement really is medicine—it has such a positive impact.

Kathryn will be climbing Snowdon as part of her latest challenge and is raising money for Point North. Later in the year, Kathryn is running to support Cancer Research, Macmillan and The Alzheimer's Society. To show your support, visit www.facebook.com/kathryn.rodgers.587 to find out how to donate.



Sarah Richardson

Call it what you want

By Sarah Richardson, Changing Futures

Fake news. Mistruths. Inaccuracies. Lies. Whatever you call it, it can cause damage - and fostering is no different.

Myths circulating about who can - and who can't - foster a child often stop people in their tracks before they've even enquired.

We speak with so many people who've ruled themselves out before they've even picked up a phone.

But the reality is so many of these people could foster, but they'd potentially be brilliant at it.

Our team at Changing Futures North East are trying to change that. And fast.

We are in a fostering crisis.

Simply put, there are too many children in care, and not enough families for them.

That's why people capable of fostering need to know that this isn't off limits - and why we want to bust these five main myths.

1) You must be in a relationship

Many people assume fostering is only open to couples.

That's simply not true.

Single applicants are welcome, and many go on to become successful foster carers.

What matters isn't your relationship status, but your ability to provide stability and care for a young person.

If a single parent can raise children, there's no reason a single foster parent can't.

2) You must have your own children

Total nonsense.

The truth is, people without children can bring a wide range of valuable life experiences to the table.

And at Changing Futures North East, we don't set up you up to fail. We provide ongoing training and support. That's our commitment to families, and one that is unwavering.

And it also means that you don't need to have walked the walk before with your own children.

We've had plenty of fostering families who don't have their own children. They've been brilliant.

So, it shouldn't stop you

3) You must own your home.

Owning your home isn't required - but having a stable one is.

Many foster carers rent privately or live in social housing. As long as you have a spare bedroom for a child, and the house is full of love, that is far more valuable than having the deeds.

As part of the fostering process, we of course visit to check it is suitable and safe.

But we don't expect a palace, nor does it have to be yours. So don't let it dissuade you.

4) You can't keep working – fostering is a full-time gig

I'll be honest - fostering isn't easy. If it were, then there wouldn't be a fostering crisis.

It requires time, energy and a big commitment from the family.

But what that doesn't automatically mean is giving up - or scaling back - your job.

Like traditional parenting, some foster parents do decide that they need to make adjustments. That can mean working a bit less or asking for more flexibility.

But it can be done. And fostering does include some financial support to help you on your journey.

5) You can't be LGBTQ+ and foster

A big one.

While an estimated 7,000 LGBTQ+ UK couples foster, that figure could be so much higher.

It is a myth that has long circulated, despite efforts to put it to bed.

At Changing Futures North East, we don't care how you identify. We welcome people from all backgrounds - as long as they can offer a supportive and nurturing home.

There are more children in care in the North East than anywhere else in the country.

If you can help to end that - whatever your background or circumstances - please get in touch.

Our door is always open.

For more information, please visit www.changingfuturesne.co.uk



From Boardroom to Courtroom: The Executive Group's unique approach to business networking

The Executive Group, part of Durham Business Group, renowned champions of North East business welcomed the Easter weekend at the iconic Lumley Castle.

Members were invited to take part in an interactive, jury-style trial hosted by Tall Tales Mysteries.

Guests enjoyed a delicious lunch in the stunning Barons Hall while carefully examining the evidence presented, ultimately delivering an overwhelming verdict of "not guilty." The event provided a relaxed, non-sales environment where senior directors and decision-makers could connect, share insights, and unwind in excellent company.

www.durhambusinessgroup.co.uk



Managed Office Spaces to Rent



**Join us at our prestigious
Portland House premises in
Belmont Durham, DH1.**

We currently have two managed offices available from 1 May 2026, one suitable for up to 3 people and the other for up to 6 people.

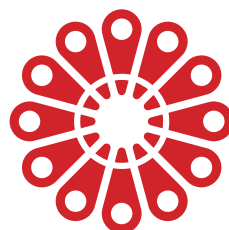
All-inclusive:

Rent · Utilities · Business WiFi · Parking · Cleaning
Reception services · Kitchen & breakout area
Mail handling · Tea & coffee

t: 0191 375 5700

e: aprile@durhambusinessgroup.co.uk

Arrange your viewing today



**DURHAM
BUSINESS
GROUP**



TURNING THE SCHOOL WALK INTO A SPACE WALK

One of the North East youngsters who attended Space Camp

The UK is building its opportunities in the space industry – and the North East is at the heart...

When children are asked what they might want to be when they grow up, there's a number of familiar answers which are inevitable.

Fireman, You Tuber, doctor, racing driver are just some of the popular choices and with the recent successful Artemis II mission, astronaut is likely to be the list.

It may seem wanting the latter career is little more than a pipe dream, however the truth of the matter is there are now more opportunities than ever before for young people to become involved in space – particularly here in the North East. Lockheed Martin is the biggest defence company in the world, working to support governments across air, land, sea and now space.

While it may be considered an American company, Lockheed Martin has in fact been working in the UK for around 80 years.



IT is a trusted British-American partner, contributing around £2 billion a year to the UK economy and supporting more than 24,000 British jobs – 2,000 directly plus 24,000 across some 800 supply chain partners, including about 500 Small and Medium Sized Enterprise companies.

In 2025 alone UK based suppliers received £2.93 billion of contracts – and now there is a very real opportunity for the North East to get a share of that particular piece.

Threats to national security are no longer limited to earth, which is why space has become such an important asset – it's foundational to national security, deterrence and decision-making.

And thanks to foresight and planned investment, the North East is going to play a pivotal role in helping to grow the UK space industry – and to create the next generation of workers with the skills to service that industry.

This autumn NESST – the North East Space Skills and Technology Centre – will open at Northumbria University, a £50m project funded by the uni, the UK Space Agency and Lockheed Martin.

The centre will act as a conduit between academia and industry, bringing together world-leading space experts and will transform the UK's space economy by creating a skilled workforce.

At the same time NESST will provide labs, test facilities, co-development space and routes to validate products to international standards – everything needed to move technology from prototype to market.

The project has already generated follow-on funding and interest, including a £2.5 million award for a North East Space Communications Accelerator, and has helped drive rising applications to related engineering courses.

NESST recently reached a milestone with a traditional topping out ceremony, bringing together dignitaries, academia and Lockheed Martin's national and international personnel to watch this traditional ceremony – and get a glimpse of what the future will bring.

Lockheed Martin Space President, Robert Lightfoot, flew in from the USA for the event and revealed that the North East has been an important part of their UK plans.

“Lockheed Martin has had a presence in the UK for nearly 80 years, and is beyond proud to extend our partnership in the North East region,” he said.

“It's clear the tremendous niche production capabilities here present a unique opportunity to develop a strong and engaged workforce.



NESST, currently being built at Northumbria University

“Through this partnership with NESST, we are excited about strengthening our space capabilities in the region and the potential to shape the future of space for decades to come.”

While NESST is a flagship project for Lockheed Martin, it is only one of many commitments the company has made to the region.

Recognising the need to showcase to the next generation about the possibilities of working in space, for the last few years it has run annual Space Camps for year six and year 12 pupils.

Rod Drury, Vice President of global space at Lockheed Martin – who also made the trip from Australia to attend the topping out ceremony – explained the importance of the camps.

“This event is becoming more and more popular, with young people from both age group taking part in hands-on activities, workshops and hearing from those working in space to fire up their enthusiasm and show them what is possible,” said Rod.

He also outlined Lockheed Martin's other potential projects in the region.

“We are also currently looking at an £85m assembly, integration and test facility at NETPark in County Durham,” he revealed.

“And once completed, these investments are projected to deliver around £1.2 billion in GVA for the region over 20 years and create roughly 500 high-skilled jobs per year.

“Broaden the lens to the national ecosystem and the impact rises to about £3.7 billion in GVA and some 2,000 jobs across the UK. Crucially, this also opens access to a global export market for British industry.”



The NESST topping out ceremony

Ink, Memory and Meaning

By Jordan Marston, Digital Marketing Manager,
Jam Print and Marketing

Why the Dark Arts Tattoo Studio stands in a league of its own.

There are tattoo studios, and then there are places that truly understand the weight of what they're creating. The Dark Arts Tattoo Studio firmly sits in the latter category – a studio where artistry meets empathy, and where every piece tells a story far deeper than ink on skin.

Offering a diverse range of services, the studio is more than just a tattoo destination. From paintings and pencil portraits to highly detailed tattoos – including realism, black and grey, colour work, coverups, portraits, memorial pieces and custom designs – the team's artistic scope is impressive. Alongside this, they provide laser tattoo removal, RF treatments, carbon facials, and IPL hair removal, making it a well-rounded creative and aesthetic space.

But what truly sets them apart is their approach to tribute tattoos.

After losing my father in 2025, I knew I wanted something permanent – something I could carry with me every day. A tattoo felt right, but I had no idea where to begin. Like most people, I turned to research, scrolling through countless studios and portfolios. Very quickly, one name kept standing out: The Dark Arts Tattoo Studio.

From my very first interaction with Martin and Sam, I knew I had made the right decision. There was no rush, no pressure – just genuine care. They took the time to learn about my dad, not just what I wanted visually, but who he was as a person.

Myself, my father and my sister were due to run the Great North Run together in 2025. Sadly, cancer had other plans. Running that race together never happened, but it became a central part of the tribute I wanted to create. My dad was a regular runner, even achieving an incredible 1 hour 52 minute personal best in his 50s.

I asked for the design to include the Great North Run medal – the one he should have



received running alongside us. Beyond that, I wanted elements that reflected his identity: born in Leeds, proudly Yorkshire through and through, a lifelong Leeds United supporter, and someone whose love of music shaped both his life and ours.

What Martin created was nothing short of exceptional.

Every detail was considered, every element meaningful. The balance of realism, symbolism and composition was flawless. More importantly, it felt personal. It felt like my dad. Martin's professionalism, understanding and attention to detail turned what could have been just a tattoo into something deeply emotional and truly special.

Looking ahead, the studio continues to evolve. Later this year, they are set to open a coffee

shop area within the space, offering protein coffee, collagen coffee, jacket potatoes and more – an innovative addition that reflects their forward-thinking approach and commitment to creating a welcoming environment.

For anyone considering a tattoo – particularly something as significant as a tribute – The Dark Arts Tattoo Studio is a place where you can feel confident your story will be understood and respected.

If you are thinking about something similar, you will not be disappointed.

**3 Fountain House, Coach Road,
Washington, NE37 2HF**

Telephone: 07842 140777

Facebook: The Dark Arts Tattoo Studio

Edwards Commercial Cleaning wins Sustainability Award at NEAA Awards 2026

Edwards Commercial Cleaning is proud to announce it has been awarded The Sustainability Award (SME) at the recent NEAA 2026 Awards.

Sponsored by Nissan, the award recognises the company's ongoing commitment to operating responsibly and reducing its environmental impact. This includes the careful selection of cleaning products, efficient working practices and continued investment in systems that support more sustainable service delivery.

Sustainability is embedded into day-to-day operations, shaping both how services are delivered and how the business continues to evolve.

The achievement also reflects the people behind the business. The team's consistency, attention to detail and high standards all played a key role in securing the award.

As part of the recognition, Edwards Commercial Cleaning received £1,000 to support STEM initiatives at a school of its choosing. The company has chosen Newcastle High School for Girls. This is a school Edwards works closely with and one that also holds a personal connection, with Director Paul Edwards' daughter having previously attended.

Supporting the next generation is something Edwards is passionate



about. The business regularly works with schools and colleges, offering opportunities for students to gain career insights, build confidence and better understand the world of work.

Paul commented: 'We're incredibly proud to receive this award. Sustainability is something we take seriously as a business, and this recognition is a reflection of the effort our team puts in every day.

Alongside that, giving back is something that really matters to us. I'm particularly passionate about supporting young people as they take their first steps into the world of work, whether that's through engaging with schools, sharing experiences or helping build confidence.

Being able to support STEM education at Newcastle High School for Girls through this award makes it even more special.'

This latest recognition marks another milestone for the company as it continues to grow across the North East and Yorkshire, supporting world-class businesses across office, industrial, educational and healthcare environments.

www.edwardscleaningltd.com





Commercial Cleaning Services

From offices and schools to medical facilities and industrial sites, we deliver reliable and sustainable results tailored to your needs.

Keeping Your People Safe & Buildings Clean

 **0191 300 0815**

 **info@edwardscleaningltd.com**

 **www.edwardscleaningltd.com**



L-R: *Natasha McDonough*
with *Vicki Shouksmith*

MMC Research reaches new markets

North East based research agency, MMC Research, is celebrating a series of recent client projects with new clients, in new markets that highlight both the diversity of organisations it works with and the growing importance of customer and stakeholder insight in shaping business strategy.

The company has recently delivered research projects for a range of organisations including leading UK homeware retailer, Dunelm, The University of Sunderland and RE:GEN Group. Each project focused on understanding behaviour and perceptions, helping them gain a clearer picture of how they're viewed.

Working in partnership with London-based creative studio, showpony, the MMC Research team delivered in-depth customer research to explore reactions to a branding project on behalf of Dunelm. Testing a concept with 1000 consumers that were a blend of customers and non-customers, the project demonstrated MMC's ability to deliver a fast-turnaround consumer project at a national level.

In the education sector, MMC Research partnered with The University of Sunderland to conduct stakeholder research informing the direction of a strategic project.

The agency also supported RE:GEN Group, a specialist provider of energy efficiency and regeneration services who work with social housing organisations across the North East and beyond. Through a programme of qualitative research, confidential client and stakeholder interviews were carried out, with the data being

analysed and reported to RE:GEN's board of directors, helping them shape their stakeholder communications strategy.

Founder and Managing Director of MMC Research, Natasha McDonough, is thrilled with the latest new projects, commenting, 'The latest client projects demonstrate the broad range of sectors that benefit from independent insight. Last year we celebrated our tenth anniversary and since then have gone from strength to strength. I'm surrounded by a hugely talented team and, as any business owner knows, good work leads to recommendations and further good work and that certainly seems to be the case for us right now.'

Ruth Dent, Director of Customer & Assets at RE:GEN Group, said, 'Working with MMC has helped us properly understand what matters most to our key clients and stakeholders, moving beyond conversations and assumptions to real evidence.'

MMC have taken the time to understand our business, challenge us constructively, and grow alongside us. It feels like a solid, long-term relationship that will continue to support our growth journey.'

mmc.agency

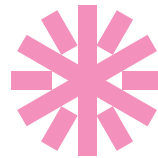
stop guessing, start knowing

We provide real insight from real people, helping you move beyond assumptions to uncover what truly drives your customers, employees, or stakeholders - getting straight to what works!

Get in touch, uncover what drives your audience.

hello@mmc.agency

www.mmc.agency



**mmc
research**

SHOUT
LOUD
SOCIAL

Help Your
Brand *Bloom*
This May

shoutloudsocial.co.uk



First batch of North East good causes ready to find their voice

A scheme to help North East good causes promote themselves through a free radio campaign has had an overwhelming response.

And now the Top 40 Community Voices programme – a joint initiative between Pride Radio and Metrocentre – has unveiled the first batch of recipients who will be enjoying a slice of the £100,000 project. Pride Radio has a long held relationship with Metrocentre, with both organisations deciding to use the shopping centre’s 40th anniversary celebrations to support 40 charities and community groups.

Applications were invited to apply for a free 12-week radio campaign on the station, giving them the opportunity to highlight the work of their organisation to Pride Radio’s huge local, regional, national and international audience. The first ten groups who have been selected have now been revealed, an eclectic mix but which all serve and support a particular community.

They include Bensham Grove Community Centre which delivers inclusive, creative and wellbeing-focused opportunities for adults across Tyneside, tackling social isolation, low confidence, poor mental health and poverty and The Drop-In at Dunston which creates welcoming and inclusive spaces for young people aged from eight to 25. Geordie Grandslammers – an inclusive LGBTQ+ tennis club promoting physical activity, new skills and social connection – will also now be heard across the station, as will The Northumberland and Newcastle Society which plays a vital role in protecting and championing the North East’s buildings and landscapes.

Community magazine Darkus, which supports emerging creative talent, North East Young Dads and Lads, PAPHYRUS Prevention of Young Suicide and arts organisation Cobalt Studios CIC will also all be able to share their message with a massive audience. Big Gay Fund, a mutual aid collective which supports trans+ people, raises funds for gender-affirming care and amplifying trans voices in the region has been selected, as has Pride Action North.

The organisation supports people affected by mental health challenges, sexual violence and domestic abuse and Service Manager, Rachel Robson, is delighted about the success of their application.

“Pride Action North is incredibly grateful to Metrocentre and Pride Radio for this opportunity to raise awareness of our work,” she said.



Carley adds client-side skills to growing team at Digital Lighthouse

Digital Lighthouse, the North East headquartered digital marketing specialists has added to its growing team with the appointment of client-side ecommerce specialist Carley Bolam.

Prior to joining Digital Lighthouse, Carley Bolam has gained in-depth experience through specialist social media marketing roles at women’s fashion retailers, Dress Me Zee and Pink Boutique as well as other consumer-facing operations like LeoVegas and My Pay weekly.

The Digital Lighthouse was only established in mid 2024, founded by young North East entrepreneur, Tom Chandler. It already boasts an enviable client roster, and has been recognised by a range of respected media outlets as having a bright future with its smart approach to data-led paid search and paid social strategies.

Carley said: “The Digital Lighthouse is a young, hungry organisation and I’m really excited to be joining them at this early stage of their journey. This is the perfect opportunity for me to start to implement my experience with consumer-facing brands in order to expand our skillsets with our clients here.”

Ed Long, senior paid social media manager at The Digital Lighthouse said: “We’ve transformed our paid social media capabilities in the last 12 months and Carley’s experience and focus with paid and organic social strategies gives us further depth in this field.”

Tom Chandler added: “Securing someone who has a depth of social experience and client-side knowledge is a great coup for us. We have a growing base of ecommerce clients and I know they’ll appreciate Carley’s deep experience and understanding of the digital challenges and opportunities they face day to day.

“From day one, we’ve been determined to prove the best returns on paid digital strategies can only be built on clear thinking and smart delivery, creating strong commercial outcomes. I’m thrilled to add her to a great team of experts in the field of paid digital media.”

Digital Lighthouse was founded in mid 2024 by Chandler, and has already grown to ten staff. In that time, he’s been listed as one to watch in Performance Marketing World’s 30 under 30 in 2025, and Digital Lighthouse was also named by Prolific North as one to watch in their list of best new agencies. In addition, it was also named Start Up at the North East Business Awards.

The agency works with a growing portfolio of leading ecommerce and professional services brands, delivering performance-driven digital strategies across paid media and advanced analytics.

SHOUT LOUD SOCIAL

Let your brand *hatch* something brilliant this spring.

Blaydon wrestling fan turns passion into Merch

Creative entrepreneur Wayne Denison has transformed a lifelong passion for wrestling and design into a growing international business with Unforgettable Vision, a creative graphics and merchandise brand working with talent across the UK, Europe and North America.

Unforgettable Vision provides professional graphic design services and merchandise production for entertainers, independent performers, sports teams, wrestlers, actors and podcasters. From personalised apparel and promotional artwork to full merchandise ranges, the business helps clients build their identity and connect with fans worldwide.

"I've always been a huge wrestling fan," Wayne said. "But I've also always been creative. One day I decided to test the waters and started making designs for people for free just to see what would happen. People liked my work, and that's when I realised, I had a real skill that I'd taught myself."

Breaking into the wrestling industry might seem difficult, but Wayne built his reputation organically through persistence and creativity.

"The UK wrestling scene isn't as big as the American scene," he said. "I started searching social media for wrestlers who were trying to break into the business. I would create designs for them and send them over. If they liked it, we'd work together. One person would introduce me to



another, and the network just kept growing."

Over time, Unforgettable Vision has collaborated with several well-known wrestling personalities. Among them is rising WWE star Solo Sikoa, son of WWE Hall of Famer Rikishi, whom Wayne worked with earlier in his career.



Agency 'launched in a Gateshead Starbucks' eyes up £1m turnover as it turns ten

A BUSINESS born at a table inside a North East branch of Starbucks has turned ten - and is on-course to turn over £1m for the first time.

Founded by former university lecturer Michael Knowles in 2016, digital marketing agency ROAR's first client was a hair and beauty salon near his North Tyneside home.

Yet without a penny of investment, ROAR has enjoyed solid year-on-year growth and now works exclusively with seven to eight figure niche and technical B2B brands - growing them into market leaders.

"Ten years ago, I was sat in the Gateshead Starbucks with my wife and her best friend registering ROAR on Companies House - it was absolutely terrifying, but we've grown so much and the business is in a better place than ever," said Michael.

Boasting a diverse portfolio of clients in sectors ranging from fintech and software to manufacturing and most recently defence, ROAR's helped more than 275 clients during the past decade - helping them to generate in excess of £54m in revenue.

"I previously worked for some toxic agencies that were purely profit-driven and often painted pictures to clients that were simply untrue," added Michael.

"I told my wife that the environment was killing me, and I wanted to create a values-led business where I could be transparent with clients."

From the approach came ROAR - an acronym that stands for 'Real Opportunities, Actual Results'. It is a mantra that's driven the business since day one.

For Michael, his own expertise has also been integral to the company's success.

Having caught Google's attention during ROAR's infancy, he was approached to be a Google Trainer - a role that also helped him gain invaluable training from some of the search giant's leading experts.

But besides expertise and results, it is ROAR's values that have often helped the business navigate even the choppiest waters.

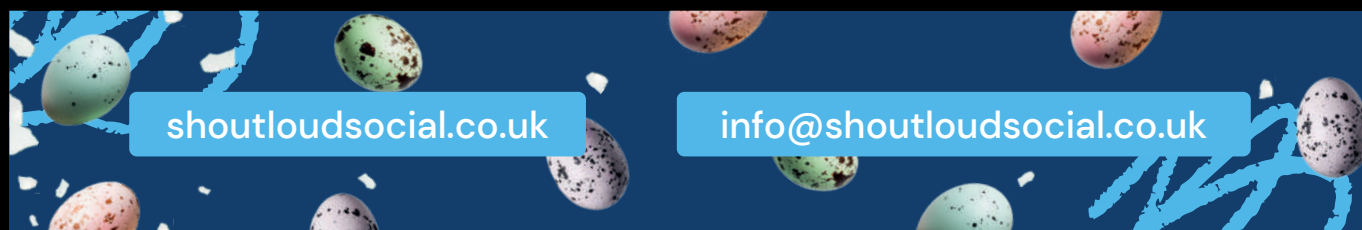
Integrity. Respect. Proactivity - the company's values are etched not just on their website, but as Michael points out, are lived and breathed.

"When lockdown happened, it decimated us and we lost 15 clients in three days. My wife was made redundant and I had a one-year-old," said Michael.

"But my mindset was that this wasn't forever and this was awful for all of us, not just ROAR, so I thought that if I look after these clients now, then they will hopefully come back - almost all of them did.

"We didn't try and hide behind T&Cs, but instead proactively tried to find a solution that would work for us both."

And from then on, the business has flourished.



Here's some sound advice for you...

Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us what the best piece of business advice they had received.



The best business advice I've ever been given is simple but powerful: be yourself and stay in your lane. It sounds obvious, but in a world, that's constantly evolving, especially with the rise of AI, it matters more than ever. What I'm seeing across our clients at H Social is a real shift back to the personal. People are choosing to buy from people. They are drawn to brands that feel human, that communicate with warmth, honesty and consistency. When you lean into who you are, what you stand for and the unique value you bring, you build trust naturally. That trust turns into loyalty. Kindness, approachability and authenticity are no longer just nice to have, they are what set businesses apart.

Helen Arnold, www.hsosocial.agency



The best piece of advice I was given is very simple and something I always try to do in my travel business: "Treat customers as you would like to be treated yourself."

John Dixon, Destinations by John, www.dby.co.uk



My dad told me when I started work at 18 that if I kept my nose clean, I would have a job for life. A simple philosophy, do your best and see what happens. That is what I do for my customers every time no matter how big or small the business is.

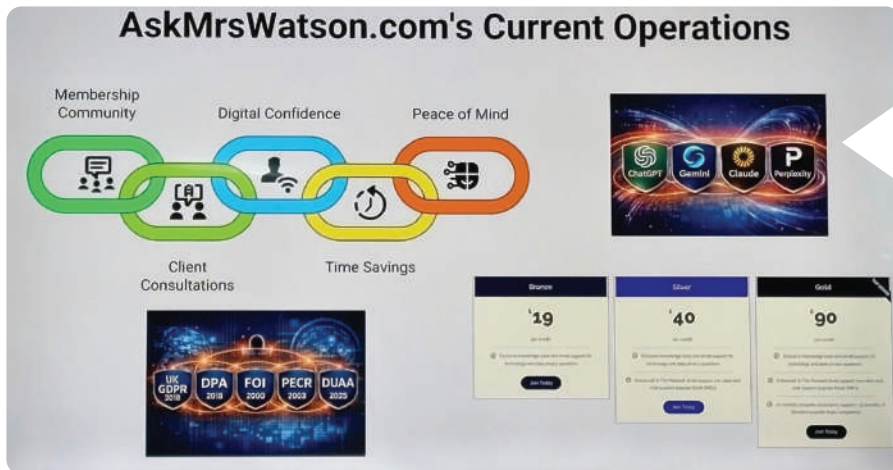
Keith Newman, www.highlightspr.co.uk



The best advice I ever received was to trust my instincts and never give away control of my own story. I didn't always follow that advice, and I was taken advantage of, but it's exactly what led me and my husband to build a strong and ethical business that protects others.

Karen Crear, www.crearpublishing.com

AskMrsWatson.com's Current Operations



The best piece of advice I've ever received in business was to join NetworkB2B over 20 years ago.

Before that, I focused mainly on working harder and trying to do everything myself, but through my group colleagues I gained opportunities, partnerships, referrals, and insights that I simply wouldn't have found alone. It taught me that business isn't just about what you know it's about who you connect with, how you support others, and build trust over time. It remains the best business decision I ever made.

The picture is a slide from my recent 10-minute presentation to my NetworkB2B group at Jesmond

Kate Watson, www.askmrswatson.com

The best advice I've ever received in business was from a retired HR manager. "You're better than you think you are, and worth more than you think you are worth. Trust in yourself you've made it this far, and don't under value your worth"

*Michael Rickwood,
www.mr-photography.co.uk*



Last month our RADAR members appeared on BBC TV, BBC Radio, Local TV and many magazines and newspapers. To find out more about the benefits of becoming a RADAR member, contact keith@highlightspr.co.uk or call Keith on 07814 397951

Stay ahead of the curve with RADAR's Media Reach



Join RADAR Today - Be Noticed Tomorrow!
Keith@highlightspr.co.uk • www.highlightspr.co.uk

HIGHLIGHTS
 PUBLIC RELATIONS

Tyneside Networking: Connecting people with purpose, free for charities!



In an increasingly connected world, meaningful relationships remain at the heart of lasting impact, especially for those driven by purpose.

Tyneside Networking is emerging as a vibrant space where individuals, charities, and socially minded professionals come together to share ideas, build partnerships, and strengthen their collective mission.

A community-focused event designed to bring together people who are passionate about making a difference, whether you're part of a charity, a social enterprise, or simply someone motivated by purpose-led work, this gathering provides an open and welcoming environment to connect with like-minded individuals.

Co-founder Jackie Latham said: "For people and organisations working toward social good, networking offers far more than just exchanging business cards. At Tyneside Networking, the focus is on:

- **Collaboration over competition** – Meet others who are eager to partner on projects, share resources, and amplify impact.
- **Knowledge sharing** – Learn from the experiences, challenges, and successes of others in the sector.
- **Increased visibility** – Raise awareness of your cause, initiatives, or organisation within a supportive community.
- **Personal growth** – Build confidence, gain fresh perspectives, and stay inspired by the passion of others.

For many attendees, the real value lies in the authenticity of the connections—people united not by profit, but by purpose."

Tyneside Networking events are the first Wednesday morning of every month at Whitley Bay Golf Course, making it easy for local professionals and organisations to attend.

Attendees can expect a relaxed and informal setting, with opportunities for open conversation, and introductions. Sometimes guest speakers. Always Gluten Free goodies and cake with plenty of tea and coffee.

Free for Charities

One of the standout aspects of Tyneside

Networking is its commitment to accessibility. Attendance is completely free for charities, ensuring that organisations working with limited budgets can still benefit from valuable networking opportunities.

This inclusive approach helps level the playing field and encourages a diverse mix of voices, experiences, and causes—ultimately strengthening the community as a whole.

Co-founder Antonia Brindle said: "In the charity and social impact space, collaboration is often the key to greater reach and effectiveness. Tyneside Networking recognises this and provides a platform where connections turn into partnerships, and conversations lead to action.

"For anyone driven by purpose, it's more than just a networking event, it's becoming a community."

If you're looking to expand your network, share your mission, or simply meet others who care about making a difference, Tyneside Networking really is well worth attending. The events are listed on Eventbrite.

More information is at www.tynesidenetworking.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 your time. Choose saying a lot without actually saying anything at all. Choose a bloody big presentation with fifty slides and no actual ideas. Choose bland campaigns that look exactly like every one else's. Choose logos made in twenty minutes. Choose a design style that looks like you've seen it before. 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 hell 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 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.



L-R: Sarah Dale and Sarah Walker, SASS media

Why perfection is bad for business – and why storytelling is your real secret weapon

For many people in business, the concept of perfection sits quietly in the background of everything we do. The perfect brand. The perfect strategy. The perfect messaging. The perfect balance between ambition, visibility and being “enough”.

But perfection isn't real – and trying to achieve it is exhausting.

As founders, leaders, parents, carers and creatives, we're constantly reevaluating ourselves because of outside pressures such as social media, comparison culture, and the pressure to have it all figured out.

SASS media cofounder and director Sarah Dale recently led a conversation with Max Freer, founder of Female Founder UK, exploring the idea of perfection in modern business.

Max introduced the concept of relaxed ambition – building meaningful businesses and lives without sacrificing ourselves in the process;



strength; something people even proudly declare in job interviews. But there's an important distinction here. High standards and attention to detail are positive. Perfectionism isn't.

Perfectionism is driven by anxiety. It's about earning approval and avoiding judgment, rather than delivering meaningful work. And left unchecked, it leads to overwhelm, burnout and silence.

For many people, particularly those juggling business alongside caring responsibilities, perfectionism carries an additional mental load and a pressure to be everything, to everyone, everywhere, all at once.

This constant state of alert is often mistaken for motivation. In reality, it is anxiety wearing a productivity mask.

Author Brené Brown describes perfectionism not as self-improvement, but as a protective shield, a way to avoid shame, criticism or the fear of not being "enough". Her work reminds us that real growth comes not from control, but from courage, compassion and connection.

In business, that means learning to move away from "perfect" and towards good enough, honest and aligned.

One of the most powerful antidotes to perfectionism is community.

When founders collaborate instead of compete, something shifts. Knowledge is shared instead of guarded. Comparison gives way to connection. Growth becomes collective rather than lonely. SASS lives this by regularly teaming up with other agencies to offer a wider breadth of skillsets and experience to clients. When people work together with clarity and trust, the result isn't diluted success; it's stronger, more sustainable businesses.

The rise of purpose-led networks and communities isn't accidental. It's a response to burnout culture and isolation. And it reminds us that success doesn't have to be loud or flawless to be real.

So what is perfection in business really?

Perhaps it's a business model that fits your life; systems that support you instead of drain you, decisions rooted in values rather than fear; work you're genuinely proud of; growth at a pace your wellbeing can sustain; and moments that spark joy. It's alignment rather than perfection.

Replacing the pursuit of perfection with clarity, integrity, purpose and relaxed ambition creates businesses that last – and leaders who can actually enjoy building them.

So how does this link to storytelling? This is where journalism comes in.

At SASS media, our roots are in newsrooms – writing headlines, chasing deadlines and learning firsthand what makes a story land. And the biggest lesson journalism teaches you is this: perfect stories don't perform; real ones do.

Journalists don't want soulless corporate press releases stuffed with clichés and bland quotes. Those get quietly "spiked" (a phrase that comes from the literal spikes reporters once used to kill unwanted stories).

What cuts through is authenticity. Humanity. A

clear narrative with texture and truth.

Good stories get clicks. They earn attention; they build trust.

And the most compelling stories in business are rarely about flawless success. They're about why someone started, what they've learned, and who they're trying to help.

If you built your business because of lived experience, for example, a career setback, parenthood, neurodiversity, financial struggle, trauma or reinvention, that story matters. Not because it's "inspirational", but because it makes you relatable.

This isn't about oversharing or "spilling the tea". It's about owning your story, on your terms.

When people share honest stories, not polished "success stories", they normalise the unseen parts of entrepreneurship. They create space for others.

Authenticity, when done with intention, isn't a buzzword. It's a strategy.

“

**Stories that
change
businesses –
and lives – are
never perfect.
They're human.**

The most effective PR doesn't come from perfection. It comes from clarity, lived experience and strong storytelling, delivered by people who understand the media landscape from the inside.

That's the real secret weapon.

As this conversation continues through the launch of specially curated workshops, the message is simple: Stop chasing perfection and start telling the truth.

Because the stories that change businesses – and lives – are never perfect. They're human.

SASS media is a PR, journalism and communications consultancy founded by Sarah Dale and Sarah Walker, based in Teesside with clients nationwide.

For enquiries about our new workshops on the power of storytelling, how to own your own imperfect story with confidence, share lived experience into compelling narratives; and learn how to tell stories that resonate with media and potential clients, email: sarah.dale@sassmedialtd.co.uk

whilst Sarah highlighted something fundamental: perfection doesn't connect; stories do.

The idea of the perfect founder is one of the most damaging myths in business. It suggests that growth happens in straight lines, founders never falter, strategy is always crystal clear, and confidence never wobbles.

In reality, business is messy. People question themselves daily. Plans evolve. Energy dips. Life intrudes. And yet many leaders internalise those struggles as personal failures rather than a normal part of building something meaningful.

Too often, "perfectionism" is framed as a

**40 years
with you.**

**MIETRO
CENTRE**





Helping brands be less ordinary.



Clear Internal Communication: How to Keep Your Team in the Loop



Internal communication can easily fall down the priority list, despite the impact it has on how well a business runs.

When communication isn't planned properly, updates become reactive rather than intentional. Messages go out late, details get lost and people are left trying to piece things together for themselves.

Over time, that creates confusion and slows things down, even when the wider strategy is clear.

Keeping people informed doesn't mean constant updates. It means making sure the right messages reach the right people, clearly and at the right time.

Why internal comms get left behind

Poor internal communication is rarely about a lack of care. More often, it gets missed because no one really owns it.

Leadership may assume it sits with marketing, while marketing assumes managers will pass updates on to their teams. Before long, everyone's just hoping the message will get out somehow. That tends to get harder as businesses grow and informal ways of communicating stop working as well.

It can also get pushed back when external work feels more urgent. Campaigns, launches and client-facing activity usually have clear deadlines. Internal messaging is often treated as something to deal with later, and later can quickly become too late.

Why internal messaging often falls flat

Even when businesses do communicate internally, the message doesn't always land well.

Common reasons include:

- Information overload from updates that try to cover every detail.
- Unclear messaging that hides the main point.
- Infrequent communication that makes each update harder to absorb.
- Overly formal tone that feels vague or full of jargon.
- Late updates that arrive after questions or rumours have already started.

A useful internal update should make the key message easy to find, explain why it matters and point people to any next steps.

What strong internal comms look like

Strong internal communication is clear, timely and easy to come back to. It should also suit the message being shared.

Regular updates, such as internal newsletters or leadership emails, can be a simple way to keep people informed without overwhelming them. For bigger changes, especially ones that affect external work, a short FAQ or central hub can help people find the latest information quickly.

The tone matters too. A formal update may be right for major business changes, while lighter culture-led updates can help people feel connected day to day.

Whatever the format, people should be able to get to the key points quickly. Most teams don't have time to read long updates just to work out what matters.

Why strong internal comms matter

Internal communication helps people feel

confident when things are changing. It gives them a clearer sense of what is happening, what it means for them and how to talk about it clearly.

That has a knock-on effect across the business. People are more likely to feel included when updates are shared clearly and at the right time. Trust is easier to build when communication feels open and consistent, and it can stop unnecessary worry from filling the gaps.

When teams have clear information, they're more likely to stay aligned in how they speak about the business. That matters during brand and marketing changes, but also during internal shifts such as new strategies or restructuring.

How external support can help

Internal comms often sit in an awkward space between leadership, marketing and operations. Everyone knows it matters, but it can still struggle to get the time and focus it needs.

External support can help by bringing more structure to the process. An outside team can help shape messages, simplify complex information and turn updates into something people are more likely to read.

There is also value in having some distance from the day-to-day. If a message only makes sense to the people closest to it, it probably needs more work before it goes wider. An external team can help spot that early and make sure the communication is clear and easier to act on.

Need support with internal comms?

If your business is going through change and your internal communication needs a clearer structure, get in touch at hello@vidacreative.co.uk

Riverside Marketing Solutions expands team

North East based Riverside Marketing Solutions is celebrating an exciting new chapter as it welcomes a new marketing assistant to the business.

Following a string of recent client wins, Thomas Halse has joined the team to support the organisation's growing portfolio. Thomas, who is the son of Riverside Marketing's owner, Nicola Halse, will be assisting with social media management, email campaigns and wider strategic marketing initiatives across a range of client accounts.

Having celebrated its sixth anniversary last month, Riverside Marketing Solutions has built a strong reputation for providing flexible, no-contract marketing support to organisations across the North East. The company specialises in fractional marketing manager services, enabling businesses to access professional marketing expertise without the full-time overheads. Based at The North East BIC in Sunderland for the past two years, Riverside Marketing has become a trusted partner for organisations looking to strengthen their marketing efforts, grow their reach and achieve measurable results.

With demand continuing to grow, including recent new clients Poppy's Light Foundation and SEP Management Company, Thomas' arrival couldn't have come at a better time. In his new role, he will be working across multiple client accounts, helping to manage social media channels, develop engaging content and support campaigns that align with clients' broader marketing objectives.

'Having Thomas join the team is a fantastic step', says owner Nicola Halse, 'With our recent client wins, I recognised the need for



Thomas Halse with Nicola Halse

additional support, Thomas is keen, talented and enthusiastic about marketing and this role will give him excellent hands-on experience while also allowing him to contribute to the continued growth of the business.

I'm really pleased that he will gain exposure to client-facing projects and events, which will help him build confidence and develop his knowledge in a professional setting. It's a great opportunity to learn from the inside and see how strategic marketing decisions are made and implemented on a day-to-day basis.

While he will be gaining valuable practical experience, I also think it's important to continue developing both personally and academically. Thomas will be starting a CIM-accredited marketing course in the coming weeks and this formal training will complement his work perfectly, giving him a strong understanding of marketing principles alongside real-world experience."

Thomas is looking forward to developing his skills while becoming more involved in the North East business community, commenting, 'I'm really excited to be joining Riverside and to

be part of a business that works with so many different organisations across the region. Every client is different so it's a great opportunity for me to learn quickly and gain experience across a wide range of industries.

I've already attended The BIC tenant meet-ups and Durham Business Group events and I've really enjoyed meeting people and hearing more about their businesses. It's been a great introduction to the local business community and everyone has been very welcoming.

I'm particularly looking forward to getting involved in more client work, developing my skills in social media and marketing campaigns and learning more about the strategy behind everything we do. It's a fantastic opportunity for me to build experience while studying and I'm excited to see what the next few months will bring.'

For more information on the services provided by Riverside Marketing Solutions, head to their website at www.riversidemarketingsolutions.co.uk

MUSIC PRINTZ

Unique Magazines: Championing the next generation

Too many great creative ideas never make it beyond the classroom. That is why we partnered with Fashion Communication students at Northumbria University on a live brief for Unique Magazines, challenging them to develop a campaign for our store and bring their ideas to life.

The project began with a visit to our space, where students explored who we are, gathered inspiration, and captured content before returning to the university to develop and present their ideas.

Each concept reflected a different creative perspective, showing the impact of fresh thinking when given the chance. Ideas ranged from children's reading sessions, to pairing wine with print, and even using magazines to explore luxury travel. Every campaign connected a category of magazine with an experience, from events to pop-ups and social content.

We knew it would be a shame to leave these ideas as concepts. So we focused on bringing the strongest and most achievable ones to life, turning student thinking into something real.

Music in Print – Lucy Mayor

Lucy's idea stood out immediately. Music in Print celebrates the connection between vinyl and magazines, two forms of physical collectables that continue to hold real cultural value. The aim was



to position Unique Magazines as a place where physical media truly thrives.

At a time where everything is becoming increasingly digital, vinyl and magazines remind people why physical media still matters. By collaborating with local record stores and businesses centred around physical media, the campaign became something bigger than magazines alone.

The campaign ran for just over four weeks, beginning with interviews featuring staff at HMV Newcastle discussing why vinyl still matters, the importance of physical media, and their experiences growing up with magazines. Each conversation, in its own way, came back to the same point: physical media, whether print, vinyl, CDs or books, is still deeply valued.

For the Record... It's Made to Last.



One of the standout moments was our “best spots in Newcastle for music and print lovers” post, which reached over 350 likes and sparked genuine engagement. Not just online, but in how people began sharing and rediscovering physical spaces across the city. This naturally led into further content and interviews, including a visit to Beatdown Records, one of the most recommended independent record stores in Newcastle.

Lucy's campaign opened up new opportunities, connecting us with different parts of the physical media world and encouraging us to explore it further.

Through Lucy leading this campaign with our support, it has been hugely valuable for everyone involved. It has brought fresh creative thinking into the business, while also giving Lucy the opportunity to build her portfolio and gain real-world experience ahead of finishing her degree.

Looking ahead, we will be supporting another student, Emily Bremer, as she launches her campaign The Curation Club, focused on hosting regular creative sessions for students in our Mag Studio.

This is exactly what Unique Magazines is here to do. Support new voices, back fresh ideas, and create real opportunities for the next generation to make their mark. Because the future of print and physical media depends on fresh perspectives, and those ideas deserve to be seen, shared and brought to life.

For more information on pricing, availability and collaboration opportunities with Unique Magazines, please get in touch with Ellie Purvis at ellie.purvis@uniquemagazines.co.uk

 @uniquemagazines  Unique Magazines  Unique Magazines

www.uniquemagazines.co.uk

Our Blog: www.themagazineclub.co.uk





New brand identity revealed

South Tyneside-based, marketing communications specialist, Bradley O'Mahoney, has announced a new brand identity and website, as it continues to win business across regeneration, construction and the built environment.

The firm, which was formed in Newcastle, in 1991, revealed the new branding at the All In conference, organised by Constructing Excellence in the North East.

Bradley O'Mahoney, established in 1991, was a headline sponsor of the conference along with the North East Combined Authority, RE:GEN Group, Workprove and RED Engineering.

The new brand was created by Bradley O'Mahoney's inhouse creative team, led by Ethan Murphy.

The firm, increasingly focussed on the areas of regeneration, construction

and built environment, has gained a number of clients in the last six months. These include Able Construction, True North Construction, Workprove, Greener Solutions Group, Falcon Fox Developments, Classic Masonry, White Knight Maintenance and Compass Developments. These, and other longer established clients, are supported with expertise in strategy, marketing comms, public relations, internal comms, branding, video and social media.

From its base on Boldon Business Park Bradley O'Mahoney - which is currently looking to hire an experienced PR and marketing account manager - is part of a team delivering a community and stakeholder engagement programme around the build of the new South Tyneside College and South Shields Marine School for which its client, Castle, is principal contractor.

Sarah O'Mahoney, director at Bradley O'Mahoney, said: "While we are wholly focussed on creating a positive image for our clients, we also recognise the need to refresh and reposition Bradley O'Mahoney in the market. We are delighted with the modern, confident brand that has been created by our colleague, Ethan Murphy and look forward to receiving the reaction from clients, associates and friends of the business.

"We wanted to launch it at Constructing Excellence in the North East's annual conference as we are currently highly focussed on regeneration, construction and the built environment, so what better place could there be to showcase the new brand."

www.bradleyomahoney.co.uk

**Strategy
Marketing
Branding
Public Relations
Social & Digital
Video**

**Making
clients
famous.**



BRADLEY O'MAHONEY



Should you let AI write your marketing strategy



As marketers, we love a shiny new toy. And few arrivals have generated as much hype, anticipation and, let's be honest, mild panic, as artificial intelligence.

AI promises to make our lives easier, our campaigns smarter, and our coffee breaks longer. It's being used to write copy, plan campaigns, analyse customer data, and generate images. Soon it'll be running the marketing department while we step out for a flat white.

This raises an important question: *Should we trust AI to write something as important as a marketing strategy, and how far should we let it lead our decisions?*

To answer that, we need to look at marketing properly, from planning to delivery – to see where AI genuinely helps versus where it falls short.

Fast analysis. Shallow understanding.

Every strong marketing plan starts with diagnosis. Stepping back, analysing the market, understanding customers, and defining the real problems.

This is where AI starts strong. It's already processing volumes of data at speed, identifying patterns, trends, and themes in seconds. It can highlight blind spots and summarise information that would take humans days.

That's powerful, but there's a catch. AI doesn't truly understand any of it. It can tell you what's happening, but not why it matters. It identifies correlations but lacks judgement. It can't distinguish between what's commercially critical, and what's noise.

Crucially, it has no real-world context. It hasn't sat in sales meetings, observed customer behaviour, or picked up on the chasm between what people say and what they really mean.

Good diagnosis requires significant emotional intelligence and experience, things AI doesn't possess.

Options are easy. Choices are harder.

Strategy isn't a plan or a channel list, it's a set of choices. Focus, prioritisation and, importantly, what not to do.

AI excels at rapidly generating options. Need segmentation, positioning, or value propositions? You'll get multiple polished versions instantly. It's a great tool for exploration and idea generation. But remember, AI is a people-pleaser. It avoids strong opinions and happily presents contradictory strategies side by side.

Real strategy requires conviction and trade-offs. Choosing one path and rejecting others. It involves accountability, budget ownership, and facing the consequences if things don't work. AI won't ever carry that weight in your boardroom. It can inspire better thinking, but it can't own the strategy without human leadership.

Bringing plans to life. Where AI earns its keep.

Execution is where AI truly delivers. It's fast, and scalable; ideal for drafting content, creating variations, and speeding up production. Used well, it can be a genuine productivity multiplier.

But even here, it needs human oversight. Left unchecked, AI produces content that's too often generic, safe, or slightly off-key. It lacks the nuance required to help you truly stand out. Strong execution still relies on human judgement: brand understanding, tone, and quality control.

So, should you rely on AI for your marketing strategy?

Not on its own. AI is a powerful assistant, but a poor lead strategist. It processes information, generates ideas, and accelerates execution; but lacks judgement, empathy, and accountability.

The sweet spot:

- Humans define the problem. AI accelerates the work.
- Humans make the decisions. AI supports execution, testing, and refinement.

Marketing leaders who understand where AI fits and where it doesn't, will outperform those looking for shortcuts.

Still not convinced? just ask your preferred LMM if it *alone* can be trusted to lead your marketing strategy.

Using AI for your marketing and need some human in the mix?

At Blue Moon, our team of chartered marketers, brand managers, creatives, and digital specialists fit around you on a flexible, fractional basis – giving you access to diverse expertise without the cost of a full-time hire.

Drop us an email: michael@bluemoon-marketing.co.uk



What's your big idea?

**The one that nails what
you do and why you do it.**

**The one your customers
fall in love with.**

**The one that gets
your people excited.**

Still thinking?

Let's put our heads together.

**Building compelling brands
and bringing them to life**

Gardiner Richardson



Mira Marketing moves to major new headquarters as agency sets sights on £5m growth journey



L-R: Stuart Bramley & Neil Stephenson

Mira Marketing has announced its relocation to a new flagship office in the heart of Ouseburn’s creative district, marking a significant milestone in the company’s ambitious growth plans.

Founded in 2018 by Stuart Bramley and local entrepreneur Neil Stephenson, the agency has grown rapidly from a start-up launched during the pandemic into a profitable, self-funded business with a current revenue run rate approaching £1 million.

Over the past 12 months alone, Mira has increased headcount by 25% to almost 20 employees, while revenues have risen by approximately 20%. The business now has its sights firmly set on reaching £5 million in annual turnover.

A space & site built for growth

The new space in Ouseburn, located within walking distance of Newcastle city centre and the Quayside, is three times the size of the agency’s former headquarters at St Peter’s Basin. Designed to support continued expansion, the site can accommodate up to 50 team members.

The office includes a dedicated customer suite for hosting strategy sessions and workshops, alongside a podcast studio, helping to fill a growing demand for high-quality content production facilities in the local area.

The move reflects both the agency’s strong performance and its confidence in the region’s business community during a challenging economic climate.

Full-service digital marketing for ambitious brands

Mira Marketing specialises in helping e-commerce and growth-focused brands scale their online sales. Its integrated service offering includes Google Ads, Meta (Facebook and Instagram) advertising, TikTok ads, email marketing, SEO, and website design and development.

Recent client wins have contributed to sustained growth, with the agency continuing to attract ambitious brands seeking measurable performance marketing strategies and long-term digital partnerships.

In 2025, Mira was named a finalist in the Marketing Agency of the Year awards, further cementing its reputation as one of the region’s rising stars.

Investing in talent

As part of its growth strategy, Mira continues to recruit apprentices and graduates from local universities, supporting emerging talent and strengthening the North East’s digital skills base.

Stuart Bramley, Co-Founder of Mira Marketing, said: “We’re incredibly proud of how far we’ve come in just a few years. Growing the team by 25% in the last year and reaching a £1 million revenue run rate is a testament to our people and our loyal clients.

“This new office isn’t just about space. It’s about

ambition. We’ve built an environment that allows us to scale quickly, attract top talent, and give our clients an even better experience. Our next milestone is £5 million in annual sales, and this move puts us in a strong position to achieve that.”

Neil Stephenson, Co-Founder, added: “We founded Mira in 2018 with a clear mission: to help growing companies sell more online through smart, data-driven marketing. We’ve remained profitable and self-funded throughout our journey, which makes this expansion even more rewarding. It’s fantastic to see a local business thriving and investing in the region. Ouseburn’s creative energy makes it the perfect home for our next chapter.”

Excitement from client partners

Joe Nicholson, Found & CEO of The Qualis Collection, has been a longstanding client partner with Mira. He commented: “Mira have been instrumental in accelerating our online growth. Their team feels like an extension of our own business: strategic, responsive and genuinely invested in our success. It’s exciting to see them expand, and we’re proud to be part of their journey.”

Sean Lavender, Business Director at MacLav, said: “Working with Mira has made a real difference to our business. Over the past few months, we’ve reached a level of growth and performance we had never been able to achieve before. Their team has been proactive, strategic, and genuinely committed to helping us move forward.”

www.miramarketing.co.uk



Cinematic property films
for the *North East*.

PROPERTY FILMS · PHOTOGRAPHY · DRONE · VIRTUAL TOURS

ondisplaypropertymarketing.co.uk

PREMIUM PROPERTY MARKETING IN THE NORTH EAST



SCAN TO VIEW OUR WORK

SM. SPOTTY
MEDIA



A creative digital marketing agency working
with ambitious hospitality, leisure and food
and drink brands to grow business



0191 249 3986 ● info@spotty.media



M I R A M A R K E T I N G

Marketing Strategy – Paid Social – Organic Social – PPC – SEO
Email Marketing – Branding – Design – Web Development

miramarketing.co.uk | hello@miramarketing.co.uk | 0191 435 4626



AI strategist launches “Mint Stitches” to tackle modern burnout through heritage craft

Social entrepreneur Dr Yulia Dzenkovska, founder of Mint Stitches CIC, is combining cutting-edge technology with centuries-old craft to help communities across the North East tackle stress, isolation and digital overload.

Yulia works as an AI strategist by day, supporting small businesses and charities in the region. Alongside this, she has launched Mint Stitches as a social enterprise focused on wellbeing through embroidery.

“AI is helping us become more productive than ever,” she says. “But instead of using that extra time to rest, we’re filling it with even more work. We’re more overwhelmed than ever.”

Her response has been to reintroduce slow, mindful craft into people’s lives. Mint Stitches workshops centre around embroidery techniques such as cross stitch and tent stitch; a simpler and more accessible method rooted in historical practice. Yulia highlights that embroidery has long been undervalued, historically seen as a domestic task rather than an art form, despite its deep cultural significance.

Mint Stitches designs are rooted in North East identity and heritage. Current patterns include the Angel of the North, heritage roses inspired by museum collections from the 19th century, a football-themed design reflecting the region’s culture, and a landscape inspired by the changing colours of Northumberland’s fields. Yulia says the aim is to create designs that resonate with adults and reflect a strong sense of place.

Yulia believes the growing interest in embroidery reflects a wider need to slow down and reconnect in an increasingly digital world. “We need something to replace doom scrolling,” she says. “Something that helps us switch off, even for a little while.”



Tech sector network announces five senior industry leaders to advisory board

The North East’s largest tech sector business network has strengthened its advisory board with five senior industry appointments, reinforcing its role in supporting the growth of the North East’s tech economy.

Dynamo North East C.I.C. has appointed David Elliott, Marc Russell, Martin Jackson, Peter Calvert and Sheree Rymer to its advisory board.

Together, the new members bring senior leadership experience from across healthcare, global consultancy, utilities, digital transformation and further education, reflecting the breadth and ambition of the region’s tech sector.

David Elliott is Chief Digital Officer for the Great North Healthcare Alliance, leading digital strategy across multiple NHS trusts.

Marc Russell is Vice President of Consulting Services at CGI, based in its Newcastle office and leading its North East operations.

Martin Jackson is Chief Information Officer at Northumbrian Water Group, overseeing transformation and innovation.

Peter Calvert is Managing Director of Embeddable, a Middlesbrough-based digital transformation business he founded in 2023.

Sheree Rymer is Associate Principal of Creative and Digital at Education Partnership North East and will represent the further education sector within Dynamo, ensuring the voices of member institutions are heard.

James Bunting, Chair of the Dynamo North East Advisory Board, said: “We are delighted to welcome David, Marc, Martin, Peter and Sheree to the advisory board. Their combined experience reflects the strength and diversity of the North East’s tech ecosystem and will help Dynamo continue to grow its reach and impact across the region.”

Waterstons and CyberNorth announce strategic partnership to accelerate growth of North East Cyber Ecosystem

Waterstons and CyberNorth have announced a new strategic partnership, marking another major milestone in CyberNorth’s next phase of growth following its renewed focus on scaling its impact across the region.

The partnership reflects a shared ambition to strengthen the North East’s cyber security sector, supporting talent development, business resilience, and regional growth while positioning the region as one of the UK’s leading cyber hubs.

Strategic partnerships are central to CyberNorth’s growth ambitions, and this alignment with Waterstons is proof of confidence in the organisation’s continued ability to spearhead the drive to make the North East a UK centre of excellence for cyber security. This new partnership further strengthens the powerful ecosystem of



collaborators, supporters and partners, including industry leaders such as Accenture, Gateshead College, and FTSE 100 company, Sage.

Technology and growth partners, Waterstons support organisations to achieve their ambitions through digital transformation, cyber security, and strategic IT services. As one of only a handful of National Cyber Security Centre’s (NCSC’s), Cyber Resilience Auditors, Waterstons are committed to elevating cyber resilience standards across the UK, helping organisations strengthen their defences in a time where cyber threats continue to rise.

Developing engaging websites and custom software for **successful** organisations

Readysalted
readysalted.co.uk



Simon Honeywood

The Silent Saboteur

By Simon Honeywood, Readysalted

Is your website quietly costing you business?

Nobody tells you when your website loses you a client. That's the problem.

A tender goes to a competitor. A strong candidate chooses somewhere else. A potential partner takes a look and moves on. You don't get a notification. No feedback form, no exit survey. Just silence. And in that silence, it's easy to assume everything is fine. It is rarely a dramatic failure. More often, it is quiet underperformance that builds over time.

The drift you don't notice

Websites and internal systems typically don't stop working overnight. They drift. As businesses evolve, adding new services, entering new markets, refining their positioning, their digital presence often stays where it was. The result is not always obvious. It is a gradual erosion of effectiveness and one that's easy to

overlook precisely because nothing has visibly broken.

There's always something more pressing. The website still loads. The contact form still functions. So it stays on the list, bumped forward another quarter, then another year. Even as a digital agency owner, we've been guilty of that.

What's harder to see is the cost of that delay. Not a bill, but an absence. The leads that self-qualify out before making contact. The opportunities that never materialise. A year of quietly lost business doesn't feel like a loss because you can't point to it. But it's there.

The AI problem nobody's talking about

There's an added complication now. AI tools have made it faster and cheaper than ever to produce website copy, social content, and marketing materials. Which sounds like good news, until you realise that everyone else is doing the same thing. The result is a creeping sameness across entire sectors. Confident headlines. Punchy bullet points. Optimised but oddly hollow. Prospects can feel it, even if they can't articulate why. If your digital presence sounds like it could belong to any business in your industry, it's not performing as it should. AI is a useful tool. But it works best in the hands of people who know what questions to ask and who understand the business well

enough to know when the output isn't quite right.

What taking it seriously actually looks like

It doesn't start with a proposal or a price. It starts with a proper conversation, one that goes beyond "what do you want the website to look like" and gets into where the business is heading, who you're trying to reach, and what's actually getting in the way.

That kind of thinking takes experience. Not just technical experience, but the pattern recognition that comes from working across different businesses and sectors, knowing what tends to work, what tends to fail, and what the right questions are before any work begins.

The case for doing it now

There's no dramatic moment when an outdated website announces itself as a problem. That's precisely the point. By the time it becomes obvious, you've already lost ground you can't measure.

Taking a step back to look honestly at your digital presence isn't a luxury. For most businesses, it's already overdue. The longer it waits, the more it costs, just not in any way you'll ever see on a spreadsheet.

www.readysalted.co.uk

The AI agent is knocking. Are we ready to answer the door?

By Pascal Fintoni, AI & Digital Marketing Strategist

And should we? Why responsible AI adoption isn't about the technology. And never was.

Something curiously familiar is happening on the way to the AI revolution. While the platforms are racing each other to market with ever more powerful tools, the rest of us are calmly, quietly reflecting on what this all means and trying to proceed in a manner of our choosing.



That gap between what the technology can do and what most of us are genuinely interested in is not a skills gap. It is a wisdom gap. And unless we close it deliberately, on our own terms, the consequences will be significant: reputational, operational and human.

We are being sold a story we have not really asked for

Every podcast, platform update, and breathless headline says the same thing: AI agents are here, and if you are not already building them into your operations, you are falling behind. You are missing the boat.

Let us be honest about what that message is. It is supply-driven, not demand-driven. Microsoft, Google, OpenAI, and the rest are not pushing AI agents because organisations have asked for them. They are pushing them because it is what their developers can now build. We have been here before.

If you surveyed your organisation honestly, how many people are using AI in a way that consistently adds value? In most sessions I facilitate, it is around a third. Sometimes fewer. That is ok. There is no rush.

“We’ve not missed the boat. The boat has not left. The boat has not even been built yet.”

So what exactly is an AI Agent, and why does it matter?

An AI agent is the evolution beyond the assistant most of us are only just beginning to use. Where an assistant responds to instructions, an agent acts on your behalf, autonomously, across systems, without input at each step. It can make decisions, send communications, and automate workflows, shaped by instructions you may not have written and logic you may not fully understand.

Who decided what values are built into that agent? Who wrote the workflows? Where is your data going? What happens when the platform changes next quarter?

I often think about the business owner who dismissed their long-standing PR agency, confident AI could do the same work more cheaply. A month later, press releases were going out unreviewed, relationships had gone cold, and the strategy had collapsed. False promises, embraced in haste, have a habit of becoming expensive lessons.

The human cost nobody is talking about

Beyond the operational risks, something else is happening inside organisations. Team members feel guilty using AI, worried colleagues will think them lazy. Others are anxious about employability. Early adopters brush up against resistant colleagues. Team leaders, already stretched, are navigating tensions they were never trained for.

This is not a fringe issue.

It sits alongside the reputational dimension: if you use platforms publicly found guilty of harmful practices, that association does not stay separate from your brand. The practical, ethical, emotional, and reputational consequences of AI adoption are intertwined. Treating them as separate problems is a common mistake.

“Four years on from the birth of ChatGPT, we should be having adult conversations about AI. The impact is practical, ethical, emotional and reputational. These are new challenges we should be talking about.”

What responsible adoption actually looks like

Responsible AI adoption does not mean ignoring the tools or waiting. It means being an informed adopter: asking the right questions, measuring impact honestly, and keeping the human being at the centre of every decision.

The journey moves through stages: AI assistance first, learning the tools, writing better prompts, understanding how large language models work. Most organisations are still here, with enormous value to unlock. Then come targeted agents in lower-risk internal contexts, and in time, applications built around your needs.

We have been here before. With social media, we trusted that because platforms built it, they would take responsibility for what it became. We know how that played out. This time, we can shape our relationship with AI before the defaults are set: frameworks that are values-led, not platform-led, and the confidence to say some applications are simply not right for us yet, perhaps never.

Three things worth doing now

1. Take an honest look at where your organisation actually is. Not where the strategy says. Where it genuinely is. How many people are using AI in a way that adds measurable value? What is the emotional temperature in your teams? An honest assessment is the foundation for good decisions.

2. Treat AI agents like any other significant software purchase.

Start with a genuine needs analysis. What problem are you solving? What does the workflow look like, and who designed it? Where will your data sit, and does that meet your obligations? What happens if the platform changes pricing or functionality next year?

New, heavily marketed, or bundled into an existing subscription is not a business case. Apply the same due diligence you would anywhere else.

3. Join the Human-First Responsible AI Pledge.

Build a values framework alongside your AI policy, addressing the ethical, emotional, and reputational dimensions a policy document was not designed to cover.

The Human-First Responsible AI Pledge offers exactly that. Built around five core values and 10 principles, it asks a more enduring question: what kind of organisation do you want to be as you navigate this? Timeless in principle, flexible in practice, and yours to shape.

Find out more at <https://humanfirsrresponsibleaipledge.org/>

The agent may be knocking. But you decide when, and whether, you open the door.

To your success!

www.pascalfintoni.com



John Behan, a director at SOS Group

Green Solutions in Print and Business

By John Behan, SOS Group Director

Every SOS Group client is committed to improving their environmental performance and the company has a solutions-based approach to making that possible in easy steps.

Not only that, the Gateshead-based office technology company is conscious of its own environmental impact and has recently addressed areas of improvement within its own operations.

John Behan, a director at SOS Group, explains: "It's 2026, so every single business and organisation is already well aware of the responsibility we all have towards our environment.

"And it's not only important for us to support clients towards their sustainability goals, helping them to reduce their energy usage and waste makes commercial sense too.

"It's something we're acutely aware of within our own set up and we

recently upgraded our entire vehicle fleet to plug in hybrids.

"We're also increasing use of remote care tools with our devices, which means a swift response time for our clients and less physical travel required. And we've updated our HQ with LED lighting throughout and energy saving heating.

"Ultimately, every business and organisation is unique and it's our role to support our clients to make the best environmental decisions to produce efficiency and cost benefits.

"The approach varies and obviously differs from start-up companies to multinational manufacturers or big hitters in the service industry, but the end goal is always the same.

"Step by step, we can all make changes that make significant differences"

One especially challenging area for environmental improvements is within the delivery of large, high-pressure sporting and political party events, where intensive printing is often still required.

During 2026, SOS Group will be providing copy print scan services at high profile events for big name clients including Swim England, UK Athletics and a major political party.

Last year, the company helped deliver at events including the Swim England Open Water National Championships, the Riding Disability Association's National Championships, the Aquatics GB Diving Championships and Novuna UK Athletics Championships.

Events can range from one day to two weeks in duration, and venues can be as large as 13,000 square metres, requiring as many as 50 devices.

John continues: “In an ideal world, everything would be digital but in a packed out arena or stadium, it’s not always possible to rely on digital communication. In fact, in most cases, we find print is still the preferred methodology for our event clients.

“We have to look at ways for them to minimise the environmental impact that has and this is where practical solutions such as Epson’s heat-free inkjet technology can reduce energy usage and waste.”

Epson’s heat-free inkjet printers offer significant cost-saving and environmental benefits by consuming dramatically less energy than equivalent laser printers, using fewer consumables, producing lower CO2 emissions and requiring less intervention from engineers.

In addition, SOS Group’s zero-waste recycling programme gives all used ink and toner cartridges a new life, enabling the creation of new products from what were previously ‘single-use’ plastics.

It provides a specialist solution for used printer and copier consumables and has significant environmental benefits including reduced landfill waste, resource conservation and lowered pollution.

John adds: “While looking at our own green initiatives, we feel it’s very clear that every other business and organisation will not only be facing

the same challenges, but will be searching for, or considering, the same solutions and outcomes.

“Our business has evolved so much over our 24 years of trading and we’re in no doubt that we can share our accumulated knowledge in the print vertical but also in the general business operations arena.”

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, the company has grown into an SME that counts multinationals within its established client base and also works closely to support start-ups and community organisations.

It has a central office on the Team Valley and staff, including specialist engineers servicing accounts nationally from six regional hubs in London, Scotland, the North West, Midlands, South Yorkshire, South West and North East.

For more information on how SOS Group can support business sustainability goals, please visit: www.sosgroup-ltd.co.uk



SOS Group's new 'green' fleet

Aspire completes third acquisition in two years with Scotland-based NVT Group Deal

Aspire Technology Solutions, one of the UK's leading providers of managed IT, cyber security, and modern workplace solutions, has completed the acquisition of managed service provider NVT Group, headquartered in Bellshill, North Lanarkshire.

The deal marks the company's third acquisition in two years, reinforcing its strategic expansion across the UK, with a strengthened market position in Scotland.

The acquisition forms part of Aspire's continued UK growth strategy, further scaling its presence in Scotland and enhancing its ability to deliver secure, integrated technology solutions. NVT Group supports over 90 organisations and brings a highly experienced team of 49 employees, alongside long-standing customer relationships.

NVT Group's strong customer base closely aligns with Aspire's core market in both profile and service requirements. The organisations it supports reflect Aspire's core focus on mid-sized UK businesses that require secure, high-quality managed services, creating a natural extension of Aspire's existing customer portfolio.

Founded in 1988, NVT Group is a well-established IT services provider with a longstanding presence across Scotland. Aspire's acquisition provides immediate assurance for customers and employees, while introducing the scale, resilience and investment required to support long-term growth.

All employees have transferred to Aspire as part of the transaction, and the combined team will operate from the Glasgow hub under Aspire's leadership, with services integrated into its delivery model.

Chris Fraser, CEO and founder of Aspire, commented: "We are delighted to welcome the team at NVT Group into Aspire. They have built a strong business with an established customer base and deep expertise.

Our priority is to provide immediate continuity for both customers and the team, while enhancing the service they receive through Aspire's scale and capability. This acquisition strengthens our presence in Scotland, while maintaining the high level of service and support

our customers expect. Bringing the teams together in Glasgow will create a stronger platform for growth as we continue to invest in the region."

Stephen Park Brown, Executive Chairman of NVT Group, added: "Joining Aspire marks an important step for the business, giving our customers and team confidence in the future. Aspire's culture is strongly aligned with NVT, demonstrated by both organisations' long term customer relationships. Dougie Weir, Group Operations Director, and, Hamish Fraser, Group Managing Director, will continue to play a key role in the business, maintaining strong relationships with customers and colleagues. This creates a strong platform for further technical development of our people and a broader solution portfolio for our customers."

Aspire continues to invest in its UK-wide capabilities, including its next-generation Security Operations Centre, managed IT services, and modern workplace solutions. Backed by leading private equity firm LDC, the company is focused on sustainable growth, innovation, and delivering secure, high-quality technology outcomes for customers. It is also pursuing further growth through acquisition, strengthening its current position in Scotland, the North East and Yorkshire, while expanding into new regions including the Midlands, the North West and London.

With a broad regional footprint and enhanced capability, Aspire is well positioned to support organisations across the UK, combining local expertise with a fully integrated national delivery model.

www.aspirets.com



Chris Fraser, CEO, and Tom Howard, CFO of Aspire Technology Solutions, pictured outside the company's HQ



L-R: David Crawford and Amit Aggarwal

Outrank strengthens expertise with two senior board appointments among 10 new hires

Middlesbrough-based agency expands team and leadership as it scales services and invests in regional talent.

Digital marketing agency Outrank has announced a major expansion of its business, welcoming 10 new hires in the past month, including two board appointments to strengthen its leadership team.

Joining the board as a non-executive advisor is David Crawford, former MD of Branded3, one of the UK's most respected search and digital agencies. David brings extensive experience in scaling search-led businesses, alongside deep expertise in SEO as a performance channel. In his role, he will provide strategic oversight across growth, positioning and operational development, working closely with the leadership team to support Outrank's continued evolution.

The agency has also appointed experienced M&A specialist Amit Aggarwal to its advisory board, bringing nearly three decades of experience across leading financial institutions, including JPMorgan, Baugur Group and PwC. Having advised privately-owned, private equity-backed and listed businesses on growth strategy, his appointment is expected to play a key role in shaping Outrank's next phase of expansion.

Founder Stephen Robinson said: "We've

always been ambitious about where we want to take the business, and bringing in the right people at board level is critical to doing that in the right way. David's experience in building and scaling a leading search agency adds an important dimension, particularly as we continue to strengthen our offering in SEO and performance marketing. Amit brings a huge amount of commercial experience and strategic insight, and his input is already helping us think bigger about the future of Outrank."

Amit Aggarwal added: "Outrank has built a strong foundation, combining technical expertise with a clear focus on delivering results for clients. There's a real energy and ambition within the business, and I'm looking forward to supporting the team as they scale and continue to evolve their offering."

David Crawford said: "Outrank has a strong platform to build from, with clear strengths in search and a leadership team that understands where it wants to go. I'm looking forward to working with the business at a strategic level, helping to refine its positioning, strengthen its operational approach and support its continued growth in an increasingly competitive and fast-moving digital landscape."

Alongside its board appointments, the business has also welcomed an additional eight new recruits across a range of roles, further enhancing its capabilities in SEO, web development, social media and AI-led technology.

The hires build on Outrank's existing team of more than 60 employees, reflecting a period of sustained growth for the Middlesbrough-headquartered agency as it continues to expand its client base and service offering.

Outrank's approach to recruitment focuses on identifying and developing talent rather than hiring solely to fill vacancies. This has enabled the agency to scale while maintaining a strong, collaborative culture.

That culture was recently recognised at a national level, with Outrank ranked among the UK's Best Medium Workplaces by Great Place to Work in 2026, having previously placed third in the small business category.

Operations Director Francesca Kosina added: "We're proud to be creating opportunities in the region and attracting people who want to be part of something we're building long-term."

The latest round of hiring highlights Outrank's continued investment in the North East, contributing to job creation and supporting the region's growing reputation as a hub for digital and tech talent.

With new talent joining across multiple disciplines and strengthened leadership at board level, Outrank is well positioned to continue expanding its reach and supporting businesses across the UK with performance-driven digital marketing.

www.outrank.co.uk



marriott.
communications

Good PR tells a story
Great PR changes the ending



 **PhoneticDigital**
Sustainable Digital Solutions

Websites • Marketing • Training

phoneticdigital.co.uk





L-R: Lee Gilmore, Dan Pudwell, Mark Sailes and Steve Morland

Steve Morland

Chief Technology Officer, Leighton

AWS North Community Conference will return to Newcastle on Thursday 15 October 2026, this time at the BALTIC in Gateshead.

Following the announcement, we spoke to organiser Steve Morland, Chief Technology Officer at Leighton, about the vision behind the event, its impact, and what attendees can expect.

What inspired you to launch the conference?

From the outset, the goal was to create something meaningful for the North of England's tech community. There's huge talent here, but many major events have traditionally been held elsewhere. We wanted to create a space where people could connect locally, share ideas and explore AWS without the need for long-distance travel.

How did the inaugural event meet your expectations?

It exceeded them. We welcomed over 150 attendees, 24 speakers and six AWS Heroes from around the world. What stood out most was the quality of engagement. The energy in the room and the conversations taking place showed there's a strong appetite for this kind of event in the North.

What feedback did you receive?

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive. We achieved a 100% satisfaction rate, with more than 92% of attendees planning to return. That's encouraging, but it also creates a responsibility to build on that success. We've taken delegate insights seriously and used them to shape this year's event.

What can attendees expect in 2026?

We're expanding both the scale and ambition while keeping what people valued most. The event will offer a full day of talks, discussions and networking. Topics will include modernisation, migration, serverless and AI, alongside practical insights into how organisations can design, build and scale more effectively using cloud technologies.

Who is shaping the programme?

I'm working with a fantastic team including Lee Gilmore, Mark Sailes and Dan Pudwell, who are all deeply involved in the AWS community. Their input ensures the programme reflects both global trends and regional relevance. We're also supported by the wider Leighton team and the BeaconHouse team.

What are you hoping for from this year's call for speakers?

Last year brought a high volume of strong submissions, which led to a diverse agenda. We're hoping to see the same again. Fresh perspectives, real-world experience and ideas that challenge and inspire. It's a great opportunity for people to contribute to the community.



How important is community to the event?

It's central. This isn't just about technology, it's about people. The North has a growing digital ecosystem, and events like this help bring it together. By connecting developers, engineers, businesses, academics and students, we create an environment where collaboration and innovation can thrive.

Accessibility is a focus this year, can you tell us more?

Yes, that's really important to us. We've introduced a social impact ticket allocation to support underrepresented groups, non-profits, students and those early in their careers. If we want a truly inclusive tech community, we need to ensure opportunities like this are accessible to as many people as possible.

What are your ambitions moving forward?

The focus is on building something that delivers real value, not just for attendees, but for the region. Last year showed what's possible when people come together with a shared purpose. This year, we want to go further and continue to strengthen the North's position as a hub for technology and innovation.

For more information, visit: www.northcommunityconf.com

dodio.
DO STUDIO

GET ON THE RIGHT PATH

*Whether you need a new website,
stronger brand or ongoing marketing
support, it starts with getting the
strategy right.*

Data driven

Informed decisions

Engaging experiences

Measurable growth

10

A DECADE OF DODIO

*From strategy through to delivery
we support every step of your marketing journey.*



dodio.co.uk



SEO | PAID SOCIAL | PPC

The non-award winning agency

squidgy.co

NORTHERN

INSIGHT

The Built Environment

construction • commercial • residential • architectural

...in association with...

Clothier
& Lacey
Co.



Banks Group celebrates second season as Durham Cricket's principal partner

County Durham-based property, housebuilding and mining firm the Banks Group is heading back into bat for Durham Cricket at the start of its second season as the club's principal partner.

The family-owned firm agreed a multi-year sponsorship deal as part of its 50th anniversary celebrations which includes the naming rights to what is now the Banks Homes Riverside Stadium in Chester-le-Street.

The agreement has also seen Banks' branding featuring on the Durham Cricket men's, women's and junior Pathway teams' kits, as well as around the stadium.

Founded in Tow Law in 1976, the Banks Group is a longstanding supporter of Durham Cricket, with its partnership with the club beginning before Durham became a First Class county. Its initial sponsorship enabled it to set up and run the County under-19 team in 1989, and then helped the senior club to become the first county to be granted first class status for 70 years three years later.

Banks has also supported Durham Cricket's junior player pathway courses since 2006, contributed to the development of the nursery ground at the Banks Homes Riverside and sponsored the County's boys' and girls' age group sides for many years.

Harry Banks OBE DL, chairman and chief executive at the Banks Group, who also served as President of Durham County Cricket Club in 1998 and 1999, says: "The start of a new cricket season is always a landmark time in our business year and the connection with our 50th anniversary celebrations makes this season an especially important one for us.

"We've been part of the Durham Cricket story for over 35 years and are looking forward to seeing all the club's teams and players succeeding through the summer."

Developer shares vision for new community of homes in Amble

Amble is set to benefit from 480 new homes, supporting the area's growth opportunities and demand for quality housing.

A North East developer is behind the ambitious plans for 'Tantallon Parks', which will offer one-bedroom apartments right up to five-bedroom homes, and everything in between.

Tantallon Homes is delivering the scheme, following completion of several sold-out developments in the region. The family-run company based in Cramlington is headed up by Craig McClen.

"This isn't just another new build development. It is for local people, by local people." Craig shared. "We know the region and we're invested in its success. We want to create more opportunities for people like us to keep building their lives here, living in quality homes that are aspirational but affordable, integrated within existing communities.

"Young families want to stay close to where they grew up. Local workers want to live near their jobs. Older residents are looking to downsize without leaving their communities. But too often, the right homes simply aren't available, and this can't go on.



"However, this isn't just about building houses. For us, it's always about building communities. When we get that right – quality homes, thoughtful design, shaping developments around local needs and genuine community focus, everybody benefits. This development is an exciting opportunity to be part of Amble's next chapter as a thriving place to live."

Families will benefit from the location of the new homes on the southern edge of Amble, with close proximity to the James Calvert Spence College campus, and easy accessibility to nearby towns and villages including Alnwick, Morpeth and Warkworth.



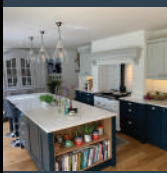
Ward Group Investments acquires Durham student accommodation

Ward Group Investments (WGI) has acquired Elvet Residences Ltd and its landmark Three Tuns student accommodation scheme in Durham - and delivered a half-a-million-pound upgrade.

The Three Tuns in Durham city centre is a premium, purpose-built student accommodation located at the site of the historic, former Three Tuns Hotel. The development blends the original Grade II listed, 18th-century coaching inn with three modern residential wings housing 178 rooms. Since the acquisition, WGI has assumed full operational control of the site and delivered capital investment and operational restructuring - with improvements to amenities, compliance, fire safety and energy efficiency. The works have addressed all regulatory requirements and Elvet Residences has exceeded baseline compliance thresholds across key operational and safety metrics.

The six-figure investment programme included the installation of an industry-leading smart energy management system and air source heat pumps to improve efficiency across the buildings. As a result, the majority of rooms now achieve EPC ratings of A, supporting the company's commitment to sustainable and energy-efficient operations.

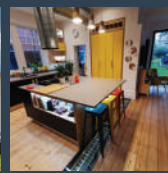
To further strengthen governance, experienced PBSA specialist Shane Oldridge has been appointed as compliance manager. Oldridge previously worked as compliance manager at Student Cribs.



J.W.Dickinson

Building Services, House Extensions, Loft Conversions, Home Refurbishments, New Home Builders. Beautiful transformations from design to build.

Book a free consultation | 07988 636 221
Mon to Fri 8am - 5pm | info@jwdickinsonltd.co.uk



JWD

jwdickinsonltd.co.uk



PREMIUM COOKING & REFRIGERATION
AT

Walter Dix & Co



| Stirling Court, Eleventh Avenue North, Team Valley, Gateshead, NE11 0JF
www.wdix.co.uk • 0191 482 0033 • sales@wdix.co.uk

Banks Homes' new Wynyard Pines development moving forward



How Banks Homes' new Wynyard Pines residential development will look

Housebuilder Banks Homes' plans for a new residential development in one of the Tees Valley's most exclusive locations are moving forward after it completed the acquisition of the site from Cameron Hall Developments.

Banks Homes is set to build 54 new detached homes on the Wynyard Estate, with each of the executive four and five bedrooed detached properties being created from Banks' bespoke range of house designs.

Banks Homes will act as principal contractor on its Wynyard Pines development, working alongside a carefully selected network of regional sub-contractors to ensure exceptional quality throughout.

Each of the contemporary properties at the development will feature underfloor heating across the ground floor and impressive 2.6 metre ground floor ceiling heights, creating a greater sense of light and space from the moment you step inside.

With "More built in as standard," properties

will also include premium integrated kitchens, electric vehicle charging points and generous landscaped front gardens to ensure that homeowners benefit from a higher level of specification from the day they move in.

Construction at Wynyard Pines is now underway, with the first homes expected to be ready for occupation next year.

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 development also currently under way at sites in Durham, Hambleton in North Yorkshire and in Yarm, where two showhomes are now open for viewing five days a week.

The company is also currently progressing plans for three further North East developments, at Redmarshall near Stockton, High Shincliffe near Durham City and Sedgfield, which will include a total of more than 200 new family homes.

Russ Hall, managing director at Banks Homes, says: "Wynyard has set the benchmark for living in the region for many years and we're very pleased to be working with a fellow North East family business in Cameron Hall Developments to bring our bespoke range of property designs to this enduringly popular location.

"This site offers a fantastic opportunity to deliver an exceptional development in a highly-

desirable position, while its proximity to our other sites will enable us to bring it forward with maximum efficiency.

"We're moving on with the construction phase of this exceptional project as quickly as we can and are already looking forward to welcoming our first homeowners to Wynyard Pines next year."

Mark Antonopoulos, director at Cameron Hall Developments, adds: "This site represents one of the final stages of development on the western side of Wynyard, is close to the community hub that is currently being created and comes with magnificent views across The Racecourse area.

"Banks Homes' commitment to investing in and delivering a high-quality product matches our own standards, with their fantastic bespoke house designs fitting in perfectly with the aspirational nature of the overall Wynyard development.

"Our family relationship with Banks goes back many decades and we're very pleased to be extending it through what will be an outstanding residential development."

For further information on Wynyard Pines and on Banks Homes' full portfolio of high-quality residential developments, please visit www.bankshomes.co.uk



“ We all have things to say. Yet most of the time it’s best to listen first, reflect, and speak second. ”

Each issue, founder Michael Richardson answers one of twenty questions.

Questions that explore twenty eventful years of ups, downs and more, at the Northeast of England headquartered ACT Group.

In this issue, the focus is customers.

What makes great customer and supplier relationships?

Ah! OK. Important. Here’s my list.

1. Listening (properly).

We were given two ears and one mouth and that, in my opinion, is for a reason. Listen before speaking. We all have something to say, yet most of the time it’s best to listen first, reflect, and speak second. When listening it’s always important to take a written note of key points too.

2. Open and honest two-way communication.

I believe in being transparent. Never lie. Always be honest. Being straight with people has sometimes got me into bother over the years. But only in the short term.

Being straight with people is the right way to be – for good or for bad – in order to build long term relationships.

3. Don’t take negative feedback or criticism personally. Instead, see it as an opportunity to get better.

This is linked to having an open, honest and transparent approach to relationship-building with customers. I encourage the ACT team to absorb feedback in order to improve, because without listening to other points of view we can end up staying safely inside our comfort zone. And there’s no growth there.

The only way to truly develop is to step outside of what we’re most comfortable doing, and that opportunity can come from considering constructive feedback and new ways of working.

4. Anticipate problems with a customer before they happen.

We don’t need a crystal ball for this. Instinct and intuition play a big part. We just need to really care about, and be attuned to, how the customer relationship is going. How it feels – for them. And the best way to find out? Ask them. Often.

On a parallel subject, as MD, risk assessment is naturally a main responsibility of mine. What might happen with every decision the business makes. I must be able to anticipate how decisions, both big and small, might affect every customer relationship.

5. Focus on loyalty and the long-term.

I believe enduring business relationships come from treating people the way you hope they’d treat you. It’s a human thing, not just a business think. Trust can take quite a while to build fully, but can be broken with a single short-sighted decision. So patience, fairness and a whole load of give-and-take play a big part in building customer loyalty.

Never miss a story. Join GROUPTHINK Newsletter at www.my-act.co.uk

ACT GROUP - THE **RIGHT** CUTTING TOOLS & LUBRICANTS. ON TIME. EVERY TIME.

ACTGROUP

The **Right** Cutting Tools & Lubricants.
On Time. Every Time.

ACTHUB

PRODUCTION IMPROVEMENT FACILITY

My Factory[®]

The Cutting Tool & Lubricant Search Engine



Red Bricks versus Blue Chips: Building a resilient investment strategy

In an era of shifting economic tides and evolving market dynamics, the question of where to invest capital has never been more relevant.

Property, equities and alternative assets all have their place, but understanding how they work together is key to building a resilient, long-term investment strategy.

This was the focus of a recent business seminar hosted jointly by youngsRPS and Money Penny Wealth at the Aston Martin Workshops near Beamish.

Bringing together more than 40 business leaders and private investors, the event explored the key themes of traditional property compared

to stocks and shares with a central focus around the need for a diversified portfolio to help navigate uncertainty while identifying opportunities.

While the backdrop of classic Aston Martins provided a fitting metaphor for passion investments, the core discussion centred on something far more enduring: the value of professional advice and strategic property expertise. The event also highlighted the strength and depth of youngsRPS' commercial and rural teams, with insights from Paul Fairlamb and Tom Whitehead.

Paul Fairlamb, Senior Associate Director in the youngsRPS Newcastle commercial team, shared his perspective on the evolving regional commercial market. With more than two decades of experience, he emphasised the importance of resilience and forward-thinking consultancy.

"The commercial landscape is shifting," Paul explained. "Economic pressures and changing workplace habits mean clients now require tailored, strategic advice to ensure their portfolios remain robust and adaptable."

From industrial investments to office repositioning and mixed-use opportunities, the regional commercial sector continues to offer strong potential, particularly when guided by local market intelligence and long-term planning.

Complementing this, Tom Whitehead, Director and Rural Chartered Surveyor, explored the traditional residential and growing role of rural

assets within diversified portfolios. Operating across the North East and Yorkshire, Tom highlighted how land and rural property can provide stability while also unlocking new income streams.

"Rural assets are no longer viewed as passive investments," Tom noted. "Through diversification, renewables and strategic development, they can become highly dynamic components of a wider portfolio."

From renewable energy schemes to tourism ventures and estate restructuring, rural property continues to be recognised as both a resilient and progressive investment class.

Together, the commercial and rural perspectives demonstrate the strength of the youngsRPS approach. By combining regional insight with cross-sector expertise, the firm supports a wide range of clients across the full spectrum of property investment; from city-based commercial opportunities to long-term rural assets.

As the investment landscape continues to evolve, one message remains consistent: diversification and opportunity are key, but the quality of advice behind each decision is what truly drives long-term success.

Whether investing in property, equities or alternative assets, informed strategy and professional guidance remain the most valuable components of any portfolio.

With a legacy spanning more than 140 years, youngsRPS continues to support clients across the North of England, combining traditional expertise with modern thinking to help investors navigate both challenges and opportunities.

www.youngsrps.com



“Red Bricks vs Blue Chips” with youngsRPS and Money Penny Wealth at Aston Workshop, Beamish

This exclusive seminar brought together over 40 business leaders to explore resilient, long-term portfolios.

youngsRPS advisors Paul Fairlamb and Tom Whitehead provided expert insights into combining property and equities, offering strategic advice on current market trends and emerging opportunities.

The event underscored the value of professional guidance in navigating today’s investment landscape.





Dame Margaret Barbour building, Newcastle University

New chapter for trusted consultancy firm as Summers-Inman becomes part of Bellrock

By Mark Dutton, Senior Director, Bellrock

A long-established name in project management and cost consultancy across the North East has entered a new phase.

On the 7th of April, the Newcastle office of Summers-Inman, alongside the firm's other six UK offices, became part of the consulting division of Bellrock Group (Bellrock) – bringing together familiar, highly regarded local teams with the strength and scale of a national, Top 30 consultancy.

For clients across the region, however, the message is simple: the people they know, the service they trust and the delivery they depend on, all remain unchanged.

Summers-Inman has been a respected presence in the North East since it was established in 1920 as JW Summers F.S.I (Building and Quantity Surveyors) becoming JW Summers & Partners in 1944.

From its Newcastle base, the team has built long-standing relationships with major organisations including Greggs, Aldi, Severn Trent Water,



Mark Dutton

many NHS Trusts, universities, local authorities and global brands such as Walkers, PepsiCo and McDonald's, delivering cost consultancy, project management and building surveying services across complex programmes and high-profile developments.

Known for bringing both innovation and dependability to projects, the business has earned a reputation for consistent delivery, strong technical capability and a pragmatic, client-focused approach.

Now, as part of Bellrock, the Newcastle office is operating within a larger Central region, working alongside its colleagues from the former Summers-Inman offices in Leeds, Manchester, Leicester and Birmingham to provide a more connected, national service.

Meanwhile, the Edinburgh office team now forms part of Bellrock's Scotland region, while London sits within London and the South East.

The full integration, which went live on the 7th of April, brings together Summers-Inman's established consultancy expertise with Bellrock's wider capabilities across property, technology, engineering and facilities management.

Mark Dutton, Senior Director, who has led the Newcastle office since 2016, said: "As Summers-Inman, it has been a privilege to lead such a talented and ambitious team. They have proved themselves repeatedly – consistently winning places on a substantial number of major frameworks, delivering complex projects and playing a key role in shaping the built environment across the North East region.

"Additionally, clients value consistency and reliability when appointing a consultant. They need to feel confident that the team delivering their project understands their goals and priorities. This makes a huge difference, which is why this aspect of our service will never change."

Bellrock describes its approach as "optimising today, transforming tomorrow" – bringing together data, technology and expertise to transform how clients manage their estates. From improving sustainability to streamlining operations, its focus is on delivering smarter, more connected services that lead the way in intelligent property management.

For clients, this means continuity where it matters most – combined with access to a deeper pool of technical expertise, enhanced data capability and a more joined-up approach to managing property assets across their full lifecycle.

At the same time, Bellrock's growing consulting capability reflects a wider shift in the market. Clients are increasingly looking for stronger alignment between project delivery and the long-term performance of their buildings and estates – an area where Bellrock's operational expertise provides additional insight.



National Horizons Centre, Teesside University.



Cornell Quarter, Teesside University

Credit: John Kees photography



BIOS building, Teesside University



Hive-Central, Sheffield



Buzz Station, Whitehaven



Neptune North, Bank House, Newcastle



St Swithins, Wakefield

For the Newcastle team, this creates new opportunities to support clients not only in delivering projects, but in being able to ensure optimum performance of their property assets over time.

Mark continued: "Despite the change in name and branding, the fundamentals remain firmly in place.

"The same regional teams continue to deliver services across utilities, higher education, healthcare, residential and commercial sectors, maintaining the long-term relationships that have underpinned our success as Summers-Inman.

"For clients who have worked with the business for many years, the transition is designed to be seamless – with no changes to project teams, contacts or delivery. Instead, as part of Bellrock, it marks the start of a new chapter built on the same foundations: trusted advice, dependable delivery and strong local knowledge.

"With the backing of a national organisation, that offer is simply stronger, so I am very much looking forward to the next chapter of our success story, as Bellrock."

Mark Dutton, Senior Director, Bellrock, can be contacted on 0191 284 1121 or email him at mark.dutton@bellrock.co.uk



Powering the Future: The North East startup making high-voltage moves

In an industry where precision, safety and expertise are non-negotiable, one North East startup is rapidly making its mark. Founded in 2025, Robinson HVPD has wasted no time establishing itself as a key player in high-voltage electrical engineering—delivering more than 80 projects in its first year alone.

That impressive momentum has now earned the company national recognition, with Robinson HVPD shortlisted in the Business-to-Business StartUp of the Year category at the prestigious UK StartUp Awards 2026 for the North East, Yorkshire and The Humber. Specialising in high-voltage power distribution, the company supports construction, utilities and industrial sectors with essential services ranging from installation and maintenance to compliance. At a time when the UK is rapidly expanding its energy and digital infrastructure, the demand for this level of specialist expertise has never been greater.

From large-scale renewable energy projects to the continued growth of data centres and infrastructure developments, the need for reliable power systems is accelerating—and Robinson HVPD is positioning itself right at the heart of that transformation.

Founder and CEO Connor Robinson believes the company's early success is a direct result of both market demand and a strong internal ethos.

"Delivering over 80 projects in our first year is something we're incredibly proud of," he says. "It highlights the growing demand for specialist high-voltage expertise across the UK. We've built the business around strong values, high standards and the right people, and being named a finalist is a great reflection of the team's hard work."

He adds: "Put good people around you, choose those who share your values, and treat them with respect—that's when a business thrives."

The recognition comes amid a surge in entrepreneurial activity across the UK. In 2025 alone, approximately 832,000 new businesses were registered, underlining the strength and resilience of the startup ecosystem. The awards themselves attracted more than 2,000 entries this year, with over 900 companies shortlisted across ten regions.

Collectively, these businesses are not just ideas on paper—they are major contributors to the economy, generating more than £150 million in annual revenue and creating nearly 5,000 jobs.

Robinson HVPD's inclusion in this competitive field highlights both its rapid growth and its alignment with wider industry trends. As the UK continues to invest heavily in renewable energy, digital infrastructure and power resilience, companies capable of delivering high-quality, compliant electrical solutions are becoming indispensable.

Looking ahead, the next milestone for Robinson HVPD is the national stage. Regional winners will progress to the final at Ideas Fest this September, where the UK's most exciting startups will gather to celebrate innovation and achievement.

For Robinson and his team, however, the focus remains firmly on what got them here: delivering reliable, high-standard work in a sector where there is no room for compromise.

With a strong first year behind them and national recognition already under their belt, Robinson HVPD is not just keeping up with the UK's energy demands—it's helping to power the future.

Find out more: robinsonhvpd.com



Connor Robinson



BIV BOWES

**Independent Surveyors
Practitioners in Property**

**Commercial Rent Reviews
and Lease Renewals**

**Schedules of Dilapidation
and Condition**

Rating Challenges

Tax Valuations

“Phil's expertise gave us real confidence throughout the process. The service also represented excellent value for money, and we would not hesitate to recommend BIV Bowes.”

www.bivbowes.uk

**Ellison House, 2 Osborne Road, Jesmond, Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 2AA
0191 462 6 264 | 0191 281 1 222 | 07 544 605 944**



Keith Handy

Howarth Litchfield strengthens national custodial portfolio

By Keith Handy, Director, Howarth Litchfield

Howarth Litchfield has cemented its growing reputation in the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) sector, securing a raft of national custodial projects with leading construction group, Galliford Try.

The firm's expertise has been called upon for multiple schemes within the MoJ's £2.5bn Constructor Services Framework - a programme designed to deliver new build, refurbishment, maintenance and associated services across the prison estate. Galliford Try is one of only eight contractors appointed to the national lot for projects valued between £10m and £30m.

Howarth Litchfield's director, Keith Handy, has been at the forefront of this work, drawing on

his long-standing relationship with Galliford Try to develop a significant and diverse custodial portfolio in a short space of time.

Delivering in a live custodial environment

Recent Howarth Litchfield projects with Galliford Try span the North East, Yorkshire, the Midlands and Southern England. These include schemes at high-security facilities in Durham, Stockton and Barnard Castle as well as projects in London, Wakefield and Hemel Hempstead.

The work is varied - from refurbishment and alteration works to accommodation blocks, through to feasibility studies and the design/construction of new ancillary buildings for education, catering, training and reception facilities.

One major driver is the MoJ's Rapid Deployment Cell (RDC) Programme. While Galliford Try is not on the modular build framework, the contractor and Howarth Litchfield are creating space within existing estates to accommodate these units, which in turn triggers a need for redeveloping ancillary facilities.

"The RDC initiative is essential to helping the MoJ manage pressures on capacity," says Matt Raynor, who heads up Galliford Try's framework in the North East. "Our collaboration with Howarth Litchfield is enabling us to respond quickly and effectively to opportunities across the country - delivering high-quality, secure facilities that meet the Ministry's operational needs."

A growing national role

What began as work with Galliford Try's North East and Yorkshire offices has evolved into a national remit. Howarth Litchfield is now supporting the contractor's Southern, East Midlands and West Midlands regions on custodial schemes.

Amy Surguy, Galliford Try's national framework manager for custodial works, comments: "Keith and his team have become a trusted design partner on our MoJ projects. Their adaptability, understanding of custodial operational requirements and ability to coordinate with multiple stakeholders have been instrumental in helping us maintain our reputation for delivery on this framework."

Regional expertise, national impact

While the firm's custodial work stretches from the North East to London and the South West, its base in Durham remains central to its identity.

"We're proud to be a North East practice contributing to a national programme of works that's vital to the safe and effective operation of the prison estate," says Keith. "The MoJ sector is highly specialist and comes with a host of operational and logistical complexities - but that's where our strengths in problem-solving, collaboration and pragmatic design really come to the fore."

howarthlitchfield.com



The recently completed Sunderland Magistrates Court which Howarth Litchfield worked on



A typical example of a new build modularised prison expansion project

HOULTS YARD

MORE THAN *A Workplace*

SPACES WITH
SOUL

**SERVICED
OFFICE SPACE**
AVAILABLE
FOR 2 - 50
DESKS



**MAJOLICA
MEETING
ROOM**
FROM £25
PER HOUR



**VIRTUAL
OFFICE
ADDRESS**
FROM £20
PER MONTH



**OFFICE SPACE • CREATIVE STUDIOS
MEETING ROOMS • INDUSTRIAL SPACE
VIRTUAL OFFICES • STORAGE SOLUTIONS**



0191 607 0200

HOULTS

HOULTSYARD.CO.UK



Daniel Wilson-Bell



From fixing homes to securing them: A smarter way to grow

By Samuel Marriott-Dowding, Marriott Communications

Some of the smartest moves in business are the ones that feel obvious in hindsight - the kind that doesn't necessarily reinvent the wheel, but quietly make the wheel turn faster.

They're not always the most talked about decisions, but over time, they tend to be the ones that actually move a business forward in a meaningful way.

That's exactly what's happening with Daniel Wilson-Bell, Founder of HD Maintenance, who has recently moved into locksmithing with the expansion of the service agency opening the aptly named, Viking Locksmiths. It's a simple shift on the surface, but one that says a lot about how local businesses can grow in a way that actually works.

The currency of any local business is trust. Yet, this is something that national chains and

faceless platforms can't easily replicate. When something goes wrong at home, whether it's a broken door, a faulty lock or being locked out altogether, people don't want to gamble on the unknown. They want someone reliable, someone local, someone they've heard of, or better yet, someone they've used before.

That familiarity is a powerful tool for any local business, and by expanding into locksmithing, it is less about offering a new service, but more so about staying within that sphere of trust. This kind of continuity is what builds a strong, sustainable business.

Rather than treating growth as an opportunity to chase entirely new audiences, more local operators are beginning to recognise the value in serving their current customers more completely. It's a shift in mindset - from being a single-service provider to becoming a broader solution within the same system of needs. There's also a smart branding decision behind it. Launching Viking Locksmiths as its own identity gives the maintenance group clarity and focus. Locksmithing is often urgent and sensitive - people want reassurance that they're dealing with a specialist. A clear brand helps

create that confidence straight away, while still benefiting from the reputation already built through HD Maintenance.

It's a balance a lot of businesses struggle to get right.

Too often, services are bundled together without much thought for how they're perceived, but in industries built on trust, perception matters just as much as capability. People need to feel confident before they even pick up the phone.

What I like about this approach is that it doesn't try to overcomplicate things, it builds on what's already working, it leans into local reputation, and it focuses on being more useful, not just bigger.

Business growth doesn't always mean expanding outwards, or building a bigger team. Sometimes it's about strengthening what's already there - deepening relationships, solving more problems, and becoming harder to replace.

For Daniel, going from maintaining homes to securing them, it's not a radical move, it's a smart one - and in local business, smart always wins.





Charlotte Rudd and Nick Rudd

North East pub services powerhouse expands UK operation

Two of the UK's principal suppliers of gaming machines to the hospitality trade have joined forces to deliver an industry-leading service to 1,000 pub venues nationwide.

Tyneside-based Bob Rudd and SX Leisure, based in Essex, were appointed by Inspired Entertainment to deliver turnkey supply and service support across the pub sector.

And with the transition complete, both firms have strengthened their position as key players in the hospitality supply chain — with significant business growth and the creation of new jobs the headline outcomes of a mutually beneficial move.

“It’s been a busy few months but we couldn’t be happier with how things have gone,” said Nick Rudd, Managing Director, Bob Rudd.

“Being selected to support a significant portfolio of pub venues previously supplied by Inspired has given us the opportunity to bring



Machines supplied by Rudd Group

our service-first model to even more venues and the feedback from customers has been fantastic.

“It’s a real testament to the dedication of our entire team — both existing staff and new arrivals.”

The transition from Inspired’s supplier services — retaining core Inspired game content and machines — has expanded Bob Rudd’s operational estate by nearly a third.

Inspired machines have been successfully transferred and fully integrated into an existing network stretching from Northumberland and Cumbria to the West Midlands.

Nick added: “The move has also strengthened staffing — with 40 new colleagues joining the business — and enhanced our ability to provide responsive, high-quality support nationwide.

“We’re seeing the benefits of scale without compromising the independent, service-led approach for which the business is known.”

Founded in 1989 by Bob Rudd and still proudly independent and family-run, the Newcastle-based company is led by brother and sister team Nick and Charlotte Rudd.

It continues to provide an impartial, flexible route to the industry’s best-performing machines, offering equipment from all major manufacturers.

Bob Rudd has underpinned its position as the UK’s largest independent operator and, in tandem with SX Leisure, is perfectly placed to

absorb Inspired Entertainment’s extensive client book.

Together the two companies have onboarded more than 1,800 machines across 1,000 venues with SX Leisure reporting a 30% uptick in business.

“It’s been an exciting challenge for both our existing team and those who’ve joined us during this process,” said Greg Wood, Director at SX Leisure.

“Our new colleagues at Rudd Group have hit the ground running and I can’t thank the entire team enough for delivering the full SX Leisure experience at scale.”

The decision to engage Bob Rudd and SX Leisure reflects Inspired Entertainment’s strategy to focus its direct operational resources in core retail environments.

Inspired continues to directly supply both companies as well as retaining its position as a leading supplier to retail gaming and betting businesses — including licensed betting shops, bingo and slots rooms, motorway services and pubs.

“This partnership has been everything we hoped for,” said Ian Shreeve, VP and GM Gaming Sales UK at Inspired.

“Both the Bob Rudd and SX Leisure teams have delivered on every level — providing efficient operations, dependable service and a customer-first mindset.

“Inspired remains fully committed to the UK pub market and this collaboration ensures that pubs and customers continue to receive the highest-quality games, terminals, service and support.”

bobrudd.co.uk



School strengthens North East industry links with DME Systems visit

A Newcastle school is expanding its alumni mentoring initiative through direct industry engagement, with a recent visit to subsea engineering firm DME Systems highlighting the role of business partnerships in developing future talent.

Dame Allan's Schools has extended its Dame Allan's Connect programme with a visit to North East engineering firm DME Systems, as part of a broader push to strengthen links between education and industry.

Launched as a targeted mentoring initiative, Dame Allan's Connect brings together pupils, recent leavers and industry professionals through discipline-focused engagement, designed to provide practical insight alongside academic study. The latest event saw Allanian undergraduates visit DME Systems in South Tyneside for a tour of the facility, a presentation on the business and its operations, and a question-and-answer session exploring careers in engineering.

DME Systems, co-founded by Michael van Zwanenberg and Darren Coombe, specialises in the design and manufacture of subsea equipment, trenchers and control systems, operating in a highly specialised global market. The visit gave students direct exposure to the scale, complexity and application of engineering in a commercial environment. For co-founder Mr van Zwanenberg, initiatives such as Dame Allan's Connect play an important role in bridging the gap between education and industry.

"Much of school work is theoretical skill building. Being able to see how this is put into practice and its relevance has obvious benefits — I know I would have benefited from this during my school career," he said. "Young people represent the building blocks of the next economy, both in the North East and the wider country." He also highlighted the importance of showcasing regional capability. "It's important to showcase that the North East has world-leading industries and talent, and that if students wish to remain in the region, those opportunities are available to them."

The visit was designed to give students a clearer understanding of how academic study translates into industry. "It gives their current studies some grounding, realism and potential motivation," Mr van Zwanenberg added. "It also builds awareness of the companies and industries where we have significant expertise, and the types of roles available once they graduate."

Kinewell completes ForeCoast® Marine acquisition

BRITISH clean-tech scale-up Kinewell has announced the acquisition of ForeCoast® Marine, a leading marine weather risk software solution for the offshore wind industry.

The acquisition will see ForeCoast® Marine incorporated into the Kinewell business and complement its existing software-as-a-service (SaaS) solutions.

The offshore wind industry – which the Global Wind Energy Council (GWEC) expects to reach a global capacity of 2TW by 2030 - faces increasing pressure to deliver projects faster, at lower cost, and more reliably and the addition of ForeCoast® Marine will enable Kinewell's award-winning solutions to be used throughout the entire lifespan of an offshore wind farm.

Kinewell's existing software solutions support the planning and design phase, optimising inter-array cable layouts, enhancing export system design and maximising energy by optimising turbine placement, saving developers millions of pounds and hundreds of hours in development time.

By simulating marine operations and entire sea campaigns using historical metocean data and real-world operational constraints, ForeCoast® Marine will allow project teams to see how projects would have performed across past seasons. This further strengthens Kinewell's offering by giving developers, contractors, operators and consultants actionable insights that help them forecast future uncertainty and make informed, de-risked decisions.

Tony Appleton, Chief Commercial Officer at Kinewell, said: "The future of offshore wind depends on digitalisation and adding ForeCoast® Marine to our software portfolio will enable Kinewell's solutions to



optimise every single stage of a project lifecycle, from installation to the operational and decommissioning stages.

"It will help the industry to move faster, de-risk projects and lower costs, while positioning Kinewell at the forefront of offshore wind digital transformation. We are delighted to welcome it into the Kinewell family."

The marine management software market is swiftly becoming a global industry, with the latest findings from Market Research Future revealing that it is worth \$2.5billion per year and is forecast to continue growing by around 10-11% per annum.

The acquisition of ForeCoast® Marine will allow the King's Award winner to establish itself within this rapidly emerging market, while allowing its team to continue supporting the global transition to a net-zero society and increase its total revenue by approximate

We Are Hiring.

Are You Ready To Do The Best Work of Your Life?

Learn More:





Professor Matt Boyle OBE with his Outstanding Contribution award alongside winners at the NEAA annual awards

Matt Boyle OBE presented with outstanding contribution award

Leading North East businessman, Professor Matt Boyle, OBE, has gained yet further recognition with an Outstanding Contribution award from the North East Automotive Alliance (NEAA), where he has served as chair since 2010.

The award was made at the NEAA Annual Awards dinner, which recognises those hugely talented businesses and individuals who are making their mark in the North East automotive supply chain.

Paul Butler, CEO of the NEAA, said: "The announcement of the award was greeted by guests at the dinner, the vast majority of whom are more than aware of the contribution Matt has made not just to the NEAA but to the manufacturing sector across the UK, over many years.

"Matt's award, alongside those presented to the Apprentice and Graduate of the Year and the Women Who Inspire in Automotive winners, drew enormous applause from guests. These moments are always highlights of the event, reflecting the deep respect the industry has for those who have dedicated a lifetime to automotive, while equally championing and encouraging those at the start of their careers. It speaks volumes about the culture of our supply chain and its strong commitment to inclusion."

Matt also holds a series of other titles including director of Electrification at the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland, and chair of trustees at The Common Room of the Great North.

In recognition of his outstanding contribution to engineering and skills, he was awarded an OBE and, more recently, elected a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering.

Guests at the dinner also heard that more than £100,000 has now been raised to support STEM education across the North East.

The milestone highlights the ongoing commitment of the sector to invest in future skills and inspire the next generation of engineers and advanced manufacturing professionals.

The initiative plays a vital role in connecting industry with education, supporting outreach activity in schools and helping young people better understand the wide range of career opportunities available within the automotive sector.

Paul Butler, said: "We are incredibly proud of what the NEAA awards continue to achieve, not only in recognising the outstanding talent and innovation within our sector but in supporting the future pipeline of skills. Surpassing £100,000 raised for STEM initiatives is a fantastic milestone and a testament to the generosity and commitment of our industry."

NEAA Awards 2026 Winners:

Geoff Ford MBE Apprentice Award
Faye Moody, Magna Exteriors Sunderland

Graduate Award
Eve Kennedy, Nissan Motor
Manufacturing UK

Special recognition:
Luke Marinan and Matthew Swan,
Nissan Motor Manufacturing UK

Women Who Inspire in Automotive Award
Maissae Drissennek,
Magna Exteriors Sunderland

Innovation Award (Multinational)
Chemetall Ltd (Viant Product)

Innovation Award (SME)
SMS Technology

Sustainability Award (Multinational)
Marelli

Sustainability Award (SME)
Edwards Commercial Cleaning

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Employer Award
Gateshead College

Special recognition:
Lear Corporation and Nissan Motor
Manufacturing UK

SME of the Year (Service Provider)
SMS Technology

SME of the Year (Manufacturer)
Jenks & Cattell Engineering Ltd

Outstanding Contribution Award
Professor Matt Boyle OBE FREng

“

From a customer point of view, we're almost there.

Shaping the history of the Tyne and Wear Metro

It's not every day that you go to work and get to make history, but that is exactly what the programme lead rolling out the new Metro trains, Michael Richardson, has been doing for the last five years. We caught up with Michael as the many hours of demanding work finally come to fruition.

When the idea of a Tyne and Wear Metro system was first mooted in 1971, the PTE Director General at the time famously quipped: 'you'll never get away with it. But that is exactly what did happen. It was a pioneering solution to regional road congestion, and created a public transport revolution in North East England.

When Metro opened in 1980 it made history as the first brand new rapid light rail transit system of its kind outside of London. It remains one of our region's finest post-war engineering projects. In short, it put Tyneside on the map, securing place in the pantheon of great world cities to have underground railways.

Forty-six years later and a new team are making history all over again, delivering the roll out of Metro's £362m new train fleet. It's the biggest project since it was built, and one that is now nearing completion after five years of hard work.

Leading the transition team has been Michael Richardson, the Head of Fleet and Depot Replacement Programme for Metro's operator, Nexus. At the age of 40, Michael readily concedes it's been the biggest, most challenging, and the most rewarding opportunity of his career.

He jumped at the chance to head up the project, taking on the task from start of production through to the present day. He was thrust into the hotseat in late 2021 when the role became vacant. He was undaunted and hasn't looked back since. There is a keen sense of pride there, too, and of having made history all over again.

Stadler, the Swiss train manufacturer, has supplied Nexus with all 46 new trains as part of the programme, which got under way in January 2020.

"I do feel that sense of history with this project", said Michael, of Birtley in Gateshead. "Bringing in a new fleet for the Metro is massive and I'm proud to have played my part in it. In years to come I can reflect on the role I had in securing the future of such an iconic public transport network.

"I joined Nexus in 2013 as a project manager and I'd previously been focused on infrastructure renewal schemes. When the opportunity arose to deliver the new rolling stock I was elated. It's a career high point. To go from contract award in 2020 to the first new train in customer service in 2024 is great going for a project of this size. It's high profile. I've never worked on something that's had so much media and customer interest before."

Challenges along the way

Since Stadler secured the Metro fleet contract, a new depot has been built and all 46 trains successfully delivered to the region. Progress has been good, but it's also come with challenges along the way.

"We started off in a pandemic, and then in 2022 war broke out in Ukraine which hampered the supply chain and presented both logistical and cost challenges," explained Michael. "We always knew such a big programme would hit bumps in the road, and there has also been technical issues while the new trains bedded in.

"The transition from the old to the new is a tremendous change for our customers, and as they are becoming accustomed to the new



trains, we're assessing all the feedback, to see what we can improve on. There has been a lot of stakeholder involvement, and we've tried to be as transparent as possible with customers during the transition to the new fleet, and their patience and support shouldn't go unrecognised.

"There have been moments of stress, and it very much mirrors Metro's infancy when the team faced what looked like insurmountable issues during the construction phase, but they got there in the end. We're taking the self-same approach."

He added: "What has got us through has been the strength and resilience of the project team and the wider workforce at Nexus, supported by our stakeholders and customers. Everyone has pulled together and it's been rewarding to see that. The cornerstone of our success has been our people and the good working relationships that we all have, underpinned by excellent technical know-how and an ability work under pressure. I am so proud. It's been a team effort from day one. The work we've done has helped to make a difference for our customers and the communities that Metro serves."

Hard work still lies ahead

By the end of 2026, all the new Metro trains will be available for customer service. The last of the old carriages will be removed from service by this summer. But the hard work isn't over just yet.

"From a customer point of view, we're almost there. But we'll be together as a project team until 2028, finalising everything and ensuring that the trains are performing as they should be," explained Michael.

"The end of this year is going to be a big moment; this is when all the trains will be in customer service. It's the culmination of so much effort and commitment. The weight of Metro's proud history is upon us, and it inspires us to see the job through to fruition, delivering the world class Metro system the region deserves. Metro was once the envy of other UK cities, and will be again very soon."

www.nexus.org.uk



Sunderland students raise £5,000 for Air Ambulance in memory of much-loved classmate

Students at St Anthony's Girls' Catholic Academy in Sunderland have raised £4,700 for the Great North Air Ambulance Service (GNAAS) in a heartfelt fundraising campaign held in memory of a much loved member of the school community.

The campaign was organised in tribute to Maggie, a Year 7 student who was airlifted by GNAAS following a medical emergency last year. Despite the efforts of medical teams, Maggie sadly passed away. Students chose to support GNAAS both to honour her memory and to recognise the vital role the charity played during an incredibly difficult time for the school and wider community.

The fundraising brought together students from both the school and St. Aidan's and St. Anthony's Catholic Sixth Form, staff, families, and local businesses, with activities ranging from bake sales and raffles to a Christmas market. The collective effort reflected the strong sense of unity and compassion within the school, which is part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust.

Laura Dudley, assistant headteacher at St Anthony's Girls' Catholic Academy, said: "We are incredibly proud of our students, staff and families for coming together to raise such an incredible amount for a

charity that means so much to our school community.

"Their generosity and commitment reflect the values we strive to nurture every day – compassion, resilience, and a willingness to make a difference. This achievement shows what young people can accomplish when they unite behind a cause close to their hearts, and we couldn't be more inspired by their efforts."

Sophia, a Year 10 student, who ran a stall at the Christmas market to raise money, added: "It was amazing to be able to raise so much for such a worthy cause, and we hope it will help the Great North Air Ambulance service with the important work they do for so many people."

Sophie Snowdon, fundraising lead for the Great North Air Ambulance Service, said: "We are deeply grateful to everyone involved in the fundraising efforts at St Anthony's Girls' Catholic Academy. The generosity and hard work shown by the entire school community is truly appreciated and the funds raised will help our critical care team continue to respond to those in need."

If you would like to donate to GNAAS visit www.greatnorthairambulance.co.uk

For more information about St Anthony's Girls' Catholic Academy on Thornhill Terrace, visit www.st-anthonys-academy.com

For more information about BCCET, visit www.bccet.org.uk

Students shine at Sunderland Young Achievers Awards

Sunderland students are celebrating their outstanding achievements at the Sunderland Young Achievers Awards.

Two students of St. Anthony's Girls Catholic Academy, part of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, were named as winners in their respective categories.

Year 11 pupil Millie, who won the Sport and Physical Activity Award for her achievements as a golfer, said: "I am extremely proud, all the hard work I have put in has paid off. I am looking forward to continuing to work towards my ambition to become a professional golfer, and along the way, to go to university in America to study business and golf."

Monica, in Year 8, who won the Arts and Culture Award for her achievements in ballet, said: "The atmosphere was amazing, and seeing all those young people achieving and smiling was even better. I am thankful for this award and this opportunity."

The annual event is held to recognise the talent and resilience of young people across the city. In addition to the two category winners, Emili, in Year 8, was highly commended in the Young Environmental Champion category for her exceptional commitment and contribution to her school's Eco Committee.

Isabella, in Year 7, delivered a captivating performance that entertained guests and highlighted the school's vibrant performing arts community. Headteacher Marie Lanaghan said: "We are incredibly proud of all our students who were recognised at the Sunderland Young Achievers Awards. Their achievements reflect their personal talents and dedication. It was wonderful to see their hard work celebrated on such a prestigious platform."

For more information about St Anthony's, visit www.st-anthonys-academy.com





MOWDEN HALL SCHOOL
AGES 2-13

FROM NEWCASTLE TO MOWDEN

AN AWARD-WINNING PREP SCHOOL
IS CLOSER THAN YOU THINK

Book your personal tour today and discover the
#MagicofMowden for yourself:

✉ admissions@mowdenhall.org.uk

☎ 01661 842147



RADLEY
SCHOOLS GROUP



City Schools vs Country Prep: Why families are making the move

At Mowden Hall School, we are often asked what makes a rural Prep school different from, and preferable to, a larger city school. Our answer is simple: space, community and childhood.

Set in the heart of the Northumberland countryside, Mowden Hall offers children the freedom to learn, play and grow in an environment designed entirely around their wellbeing and development. We believe this setting gives our pupils something truly special.

1. Space to be children

One of the greatest advantages of life at Mowden Hall is the space. This is not just physical space, but mental and emotional space too. Our extensive grounds allow our children to run, explore, play sport, climb trees, build dens and generally enjoy the outdoors every day. Learning is never confined to just four walls; nature is part of our curriculum and our culture.



In contrast to many city schools, where outdoor areas are limited and time outside can be restrictive, our pupils benefit from fresh air, freedom of movement and a strong connection to the natural world – all of which we know supports concentration, confidence and happiness.

2. A Nurturing Community

As a rural prep school, we are proud of our close-knit community. Class sizes at Mowden Hall are deliberately small, allowing our teachers to know each child academically, socially and emotionally. No child is overlooked, and every pupil is encouraged, challenged and supported in equal measure.

Our size allows us to offer:

- Personalised teaching
- Outstanding pastoral care
- Strong relationships between pupils, staff and families
- This sense of belonging is at the heart of what we do and is often what families value most when they join our school.

3. A Balanced Education

We believe that childhood education should be about more than academic results alone. At Mowden Hall, we offer a broad and balanced curriculum that develops the whole child: intellectually, physically and creatively. Alongside strong academic foundations, our pupils enjoy:

- Extensive sporting opportunities across our fields and facilities
- Music, drama and creative arts woven into school life
- Outdoor learning that builds resilience, teamwork and confidence

This balance is easier to achieve in a rural setting, where time and space allow children to pursue a wide range of interests without pressure or haste.

4. Less Rush, More Time

Life at Mowden Hall has a different rhythm. Free from the congestion, noise and pace of city life, our pupils experience a calmer school day. It is one that allows them to focus, reflect and enjoy learning. For families, this often means less stress and a more positive start to each day.

We see the difference this makes: confident children who are happy to come to school, willing to try new things and comfortable being themselves.

5. Strong Preparation for the Future

Choosing a rural Prep school does not mean compromising on ambition. Mowden Hall pupils consistently move on to leading senior schools, often with academic, sporting, music or all-rounder scholarships. Our aim is to prepare children not just for the next stage of education, but for life beyond the classroom.

The confidence, independence and curiosity developed here stay with them long after they leave our gates.

But; don't just take our word for it. Book your personal tour today and discover the #MagicofMowden for yourself.

Call our friendly admissions team on 01661 842147 or email admissions@mowdenhall.org.uk, and start your journey with us today.





Starting Strong

Experience, expertise and a girls first approach in early years at Newcastle High School for Girls.

For parents making decisions that will shape their child's future, Early Years education matters. At Newcastle High School for Girls (NHSG), Nursery and Reception are rooted in decades of specialist experience in early childhood education and a deep understanding of how girls develop confidence, independence and leadership skills from the very earliest age.

This month, NHSG has been shortlisted for Early Years Setting of the Year at the Tes Schools Awards 2026, a national awards programme recognising excellence across both state and independent schools throughout the UK. The Tes Schools Awards attract a record number of entries each year and are judged by a panel of experienced school leaders and education specialists. Being shortlisted is a significant achievement in its own right and reflects the strength, quality and distinctiveness of education at NHSG.

The shortlisting comes as the school celebrates its 150th anniversary of championing girls' education in the North East, highlighting the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) as

the foundation of its all-through, girls-only education from age three to eighteen.

What distinguishes NHSG's Early Years provision is not simply what is taught, but the intention behind it. Led by an experienced Early Years team with long-standing expertise in educating girls, the setting is carefully designed to nurture confidence, curiosity and character – the building blocks of future leadership. The school's Girls First philosophy is embedded in everyday practice in age-appropriate ways, ensuring girls feel listened to, capable and encouraged to take initiative.

Head Amanda Hardie explains: "The first five years of a child's development play a critical role in shaping attitudes to learning, confidence and self-belief. At Newcastle High, we use our experience in girls' education to ensure that from the very beginning, girls understand their voice matters and that challenge is something to embrace."

Situated within the Junior School site in Sandyford, and set across five acres of grounds, the Early Years environment has been purposefully designed to support both exploration and structure. Bright classrooms open directly onto outdoor learning spaces, allowing girls to move seamlessly between indoor and outdoor learning throughout the day. The curriculum balances play-based learning with focused teaching, supporting early literacy, numeracy and communication while fostering independence and problem-solving.

Beyond the statutory EYFS framework, girls benefit from specialist teaching in music, Spanish, physical education and Forest School.

These experiences help develop collaboration, resilience and creativity – qualities that underpin confident leadership in later life. Girls are encouraged to "have a go", work together, negotiate ideas and learn from mistakes in a supportive and nurturing environment.

A key measure of success is transition. When girls leave Nursery and Reception, they consistently meet Early Learning Goals and move smoothly into Key Stage 1, confident, curious and well prepared for more formal learning. This reflects a curriculum that is ambitious yet carefully scaffolded, ensuring academic challenge is balanced with high-quality pastoral care.

As NHSG marks its 150th anniversary, its pioneering history is shared thoughtfully with the youngest pupils. Through stories, classroom discussions and simple reflections, girls begin to understand they are part of a long lineage of trailblazing women who created a pathway to opportunity for future generations. These early messages help shape a sense of identity and belonging, reinforcing the belief that leadership is something girls can grow into naturally.

At Newcastle High School for Girls, excellence in Early Years is not new. It is the result of purposeful vision, professional expertise and a clear belief that confident female leaders are not created overnight – they are nurtured from the very beginning.

Girls can join NHSG Nursery from age three, and eligible parents can receive up to 30 hours Government Early Years Grant funding.

newcastlehigh.gdst.net



NEWCASTLE
HIGH SCHOOL
FOR GIRLS

GDST
GIRLS' DAY SCHOOL TRUST

150 YEARS
OF NEXT GENERATION
TRAILBLAZERS

Girls First. Then. Now. For Good.

From the first classrooms for girls in 1876 to leading the way in girls' education today, we've been empowering the next generation for 150 years.

**Whole School Open Week
Monday 8th June - Friday 12th June**

To book your visit, please register here newcastlehigh.gdst.net



**Tes Schools
Awards 2026**

Shortlisted

Early Years Foundation
Stage (EYFS) Setting
of the Year



Muddy's
BEST SCHOOLS
AWARDS 2025

WINNER

THE DEBRETTS EDUCATION AWARD FOR
OUTSTANDING PASTORAL CARE

In association with



DEBRETTS
EDUCATION

LONDON 1763

RGS Culture Week: Belonging, Leadership, Brave Conversations

By Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster, RGS Newcastle

Each spring, I am reminded why schools matter so profoundly to the societies they serve. Our student-led Culture Week at the Royal Grammar School, Newcastle, has become one of the most powerful expressions of who we are as a community and who we aspire to be.

What began as a modest series of lunchtime events has grown into a confident and thoughtful celebration of identity, heritage and shared humanity.

For many students, the celebrations have become an annual highlight, as Year 13 student Aditi K explains: “Watching the school come together every year to celebrate every individual’s culture strengthens the diversity of RGS. It is a wonderful way to feel at home, even so far from my home country.”

From the outset, our pupils have driven RGS Culture Week. They have shaped its themes, curated its programme and led its delivery. Crucially, the celebrations have never felt like a bolt-on to school life. Instead, they have become embedded in the rhythms of the school.



Our early events understandably focused on visibility, sharing traditions, and opening conversations that some had previously felt uncertain about initiating. Over time, those conversations have deepened. Students now ask braver questions about belonging, intersectionality and fairness. They unite not just in celebration, but in meaningful discussion about the challenges and responsibilities of a diverse society.

This journey began six years ago, when RGS undertook a comprehensive Equality, Diversity and Inclusion audit. That process asked us to look honestly at our policies, curriculum, staffing, pastoral systems and school culture, present and past. It was challenging but ultimately transformative. From that audit emerged a deliberate and sustained EDI action plan, overseen by governors, staff and pupils working together.

RGS Culture Week is one visible outcome of that strategic work that sits alongside curriculum review, staff training, changes to recruitment practice and focus on ensuring student voice is heard and acted upon. In our most recent ISI inspection, inspectors judged our approach to diversity and inclusion to be a “Significant Strength”. We were deeply proud of that recognition, not because it marked an endpoint, but because it affirmed the value of intentional, long-term work.

At a time when the political climate, both within the UK and across the wider world, often feels polarised and unsettled, the importance of celebrating diversity cannot be overstated.

Schools have a responsibility not to shield pupils from complexity but to equip them to navigate it thoughtfully and compassionately. RGS Culture Week creates opportunities for pupils to listen to one another, to ask respectful



questions and recognise shared values alongside differences. It reminds us that inclusion is not about erasing distinction but about ensuring that every individual feels safe, valued and able to contribute fully to the life of the community.

As a consequence of our conscious efforts, I am consistently struck by the maturity our students show. They understand that culture is dynamic, that identity is multifaceted, and that belonging is something we build together through daily choices. They also recognise that inclusion requires action, standing up for others, challenging assumptions and being willing to learn when we get things wrong.

As Headmaster, I could not be prouder of our inclusive culture. RGS Culture Week has become a cornerstone of our school calendar. It reflects a school confident enough to listen to and empower its young people and committed to continual improvement.

This is also a reminder that education, at its best, shapes not only successful learners but also generous, informed and engaged citizens. In uncertain times, that feels like work worth doing and worth doing together.

www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk



From constructing gliders to baking cookies – extraordinary clubs for all!

Newcastle Preparatory School is proud to offer a rich and varied programme of extra-curricular clubs that inspire children to explore their interests, discover new activities they enjoy and grow in confidence.

Whether pupils enjoy being creative, active or a challenge, there is something for everyone.

Creative clubs such as baking, arts and crafts, choir and dance allow children to express themselves while learning valuable skills. Whether entering national competitions or rehearsing for a performance, pupils develop patience, teamwork and pride in their achievements. Our British Sign Language (BSL) club also gives children the opportunity to learn a completely new language and way to communicate, promoting inclusion.

For those who enjoy physical activity, a variety of sports clubs, including yoga, provide exciting opportunities to stay active and develop resilience. While our technology, robotics, philosophy and debate, chess and digital clubs encourage problem-solving, creativity and depth of thinking, helping children develop skills that are vital in the modern world. Alongside these, Junior Duke and Mini Duke programmes promote independence, resilience and responsibility as children work towards their coveted awards.

Together, these clubs help children enjoy learning new skills, work with others, take on challenges and develop into well-rounded, confident individuals.

www.newcastleprepschool.org.uk



DURHAM
SIXTH FORM CENTRE

CITY CENTRE LOCATION



durhamsixthformcentre.org.uk







Est 1885

Newcastle Preparatory School


Newcastle Preparatory School, 6 Eslington Road, Jesmond NE2 4RH
www.newcastleprepschool.org.uk

 Vibrant and engaging co-educational curriculum for children aged 3-11

 Convenient location in Newcastle, easily accessible by Metro or car

 Warm, family atmosphere where friends are made for life

 Bespoke facilities and incredible extra-curricular opportunities

 Small class sizes and dedicated, specialist staff

 140 years of outstanding pupil achievement

ENQUIRE NOW

Book your personal tour of the school

SCAN ME




Funded, bursary places available





START YOUR DEGREE JOURNEY WITH AN ACCESS COURSE AT DARLINGTON COLLEGE

Ready for a career change or returning to education?

Our Access to Higher Education courses give you the qualifications, confidence and skills to progress to University in just one year. With flexible study options designed for adults, our pathways open doors to exciting futures in Health, Science, Education, Business and more.

Your future starts here – take the next step today.

New courses starting in September include:

- Games Design
- Business and Marketing
- Education

Scan the QR code to apply today



Come along to our next open event

Monday 8th June 2026 3.30pm until 6.30pm

www.darlington.ac.uk



Annie Enclave transforms audience stories

Gateshead artist Annie Enclave transforms audience stories into live, improvised songs through Unique masked music project.

A Gateshead musician is redefining live performance by turning audience-submitted thoughts, memories, and ideas into fully improvised songs on stage, using a masked persona designed to remove fear, inspire connection, and give everyone a voice.

Annie Enclave is an artist whose music is rooted in connection, creativity, and community. Her journey into music began not on a stage, but in the playground where she discovered that singing could build bridges.

As a child, Annie would perform theme songs from popular cartoons for classmates, often improvising songs about their favourite characters, pets, or stories. It became her way of connecting with others at a time when making friends didn't come easily. Creativity for Annie, became belonging, not just expression.

Through her performances, Annie invites audiences to become part of the creative process. Using a simple but profound concept. She asks audience members to submit words, phrases, or personal stories into a basket. During the show, she selects submissions at random and transforms them into fully improvised songs on the spot. The result is a



shared experience where audience members see their thoughts, emotions, and ideas brought to life in real time.

The mask, once intended as a shield, has become a symbol of collective expression. It allows not only Annie, but everyone watching, to feel safe in sharing a part of themselves, without fear of judgment.

"I created the mask because I feared being seen but it's become something much bigger than me. Now it's not about hiding, it's about giving other people a safe space to be heard. Every song I create on stage carries a piece of someone else's story, and that's what makes it so powerful."



Education programme gets in tune with local young people's creative needs

An alternative education programme in Darlington is extending musical opportunities for local young people with the help of a four-figure grant from a regional employer.

Blackbird Creative Arts runs the Key Stage Door project, which gives local young people who are struggling with school attendance the chance to keep learning and building their self-confidence in a different environment.

The twice-weekly Key Stage Door sessions, which take place in partnership with the Darlington Hippodrome, include a range of different arts and performance classes, including dance, singing, music and theatre skills.

Classes are delivered by a team of expert tutors and enable the 11-16 year-old participants to work towards achieving Bronze & Silver Arts Awards qualifications offered by Trinity College of London.

To extend the creative opportunities that Key Stage Door provides, Blackbird Creative Arts has now used a £2,000 grant from the Banks Group's Banks Community Fund to buy new musical instruments and equipment for the students to try out, practice on and perform with, including guitars, percussion instruments, amps, microphones and a PA system.



North East comedian celebrates 60th episode of podcast "Bazookaaaah"

One of the North East's most distinctive comedy voices is celebrating a milestone with his topical podcast "Bazookaaaah". Recorded from his home in North Tyneside, comedian Gavin Webster takes aim at the week's headlines, firing off sharp observations, irreverent humour and gloriously unpredictable takes on the news — with UK politics firmly in the comedic firing line.

Now marking its 60th edition, Bazookaaaah has built a loyal audience for Webster's unfiltered take on current affairs, cultural oddities and the everyday absurdities of modern life.

Each episode sees Gavin dissect the stories everyone's talking about, delivering punchlines as explosive as the podcast's title suggests. From Westminster chaos to global headlines, nothing is off-limits as the news is satirised from his house in North Tyneside.

As well as entertaining his loyal fans across the North East and the wider UK comedy circuit, Gavin says the podcast is also aimed at Geordies living overseas who might be missing a little bit of home.

The podcast offers fans both old and new the chance to hear the comedian at his most candid — riffing on the week's news, satirising UK politics and uncovering the strange, hilarious angles others might miss.

"Bazookaaaah" is available on major podcast platforms, with its 60th edition now released.

Not your average meeting room.



Mary Ann Rogers



An artists life

By Mary Ann Rogers

With the annual summer exhibition in June on the horizon, several of the new paintings have been professionally scanned, prior to heading off to the fine art printers to be made into lithographic prints, on a press, by craftsmen printers using the most lightfast inks available, and printmaking skills built up over many years.

Deciding which of the 20+ new paintings might become successful prints is a mixture of hunch, and public opinion. I might consider a certain painting to be a contender, but during the past few weeks, I've collared gallery visitors and asked them to choose between a handful of paintings. My opinion is less important, as I'm not the one who might ultimately choose a print for my own wall, or as a gift.

As usual, we take a few days away at the end of April to recharge the

batteries and discover a new part of the UK. We chose a holiday house north of Scarborough for a cycling holiday. The house is close to the Cinder Track, a former railway line running from Scarborough to Whitby, which provided great, safe cycling days out. We also cycled to Flamborough head via Bempton cliffs, where the nesting birds were in full swing. Not only did we watch hundreds of gannets, terns, razorbills, cormorants and guillemots, but by pure chance a pod of bottle nose dolphins happened to be passing by which was a real treat.

Sadly, no swimming this trip. The sea was fairly rough due to recent east winds, plus the tides were inconvenient, and steep rocky cliff paths made the hot tub more appealing!

Back home the river is a little warmer, and a short bike ride away. Shandy coloured waters, frequent kingfisher sightings, oystercatchers, herons and mallard provide endless interest, along with the primrose covered banks.

While we were away, the bluebells have appeared all along the track and in the woodland surrounding Leam Cottage. They will be appearing in the new paintings very soon I think.

Mary Ann Rogers summer exhibition preview weekend - Sat 27th June & Sunday 28th June 3-6pm, all welcome.

**Mary Ann Rogers Gallery,
West Woodburn, Hexham NE48 2SE
Open Tues, Thurs, Fri 10-4 • Sundays 2-5
07967 550772 • www.marogers.com**





Sunderland Empire announce support for new nominated local charities for 2026

Sunderland Empire are delighted to announce their nominated charities for 2026 after a phenomenal year fundraising £12,339.60 for Sunderland Empire Theatre Trust. The theatre this year have chosen to support two fantastic local charities, Daft as a Brush Cancer Patient Care and a continued support of Sunderland Empire Theatre Trust.

The theatre has been raising money for staff nominated local charities for the past four years, charities who are close to the hearts of its staff and its local communities. Sunderland Empire have this year decided to extend their support further by supporting two worthy causes.

New for 2026, Daft as a Brush Cancer Patient Care have been selected for their dedication to providing free transport to and from hospital appointments for patients undergoing chemotherapy and radiotherapy, a service which has been a support for a number of theatre staff and their families.

The charity is powered by 300+ passionate and dedicated volunteers, many with a close association to cancer who offer a friendly, reliable and comfortable service throughout each patient's journey to recovery. After beginning with just one ambulance and a few volunteers, the charity is proud to now complete thousands of patient journeys each year with their fleet of shiny new Ford ambulances.



Jerry J Clothing presents "Shy Bairns Get Nowt", a runway show celebrating Newcastle's creative culture

Jerry J Clothing, founded by Newcastle-based designer and creative Lamin Gibba, will present its upcoming runway show, "Shy Bairns Get Nowt," on June 10th at the Boiler Shop, Newcastle.

The event is set to bring together a dynamic mix of fashion, culture, and community, showcasing the strength and identity of Newcastle's creative scene. Inspired by the well-known Geordie phrase meaning "don't be shy, go for it," the show represents ambition, opportunity, and the power of taking initiative.

More than a fashion show, Shy Bairns Get Nowt is a platform designed to connect creatives across the North East. From designers and musicians to media and emerging talent, the event creates space for collaboration and real industry opportunities.

Following the success of last year's show which over 300 people attended, Lamin Gibba went on to work with Chi Onwurah MP, designing her outfit to receive her Damehood, as a direct result of connections made through the event.

This year's event continues to expand in both scale and influence, with ongoing conversations regarding the potential attendance of the First Lady of The Gambia. This reflects the show's growing cultural significance and its ability to connect local creativity with an international audience.

DR Hannibal Lecter will see you now

Indigo Productions and Crossroads Live, in association with Curve, are delighted to announce first casting for the upcoming UK and Ireland tour of *The Silence of the Lambs*, ahead of the global cultural phenomenon's world premiere play debut. The electrifying new production will visit Sunderland Empire from Monday 21 – Saturday 26 June 2027.

It is today revealed that British actor, singer, presenter, writer and director John Partridge, known for his long-running role as Christian Clarke in BBC 1's *EastEnders* and extensive range of West End credits from *CATS* to *Everybody's Talking About Jamie*, will don the iconic mask as the refined and sadistic Dr Hannibal Lecter.

When FBI trainee Clarice Starling is sent to interview the psychiatrist and infamous murderer Hannibal Lecter, it's hoped his brilliant mind will help catch the sadistic new serial killer, Buffalo Bill. Another girl is missing, and time is running out.

Acclaimed television writer and playwright



Gina Gionfriddo (*Law & Order* (NBC), *House of Cards* (Netflix), *Becky Shaw*) brings Thomas Harris's gripping literary masterpiece to the stage in a new modern adaptation directed by Curve's Artistic Director, Nikolai Foster. Gionfriddo's theatrical adaptation delves into the psychological tension of Thomas Harris's landmark novel, drawing the audience deep into Clarice and Lecter's intelligent, intricate, and bone-chilling game of cat-and-mouse, as the FBI scramble to catch Buffalo Bill, a serial killer still at large.

8 -23 MAY
TICKETS FROM £12
NORTHERNSTAGE.CO.UK

*A transaction fee may apply

LITTLE SHOP of HORRORS
THE CLASSIC CULT MUSICAL COMEDY TO DIE FOR

NORTHERN STAGE

Culture Club



Charlotte Bruce

Charlotte Bruce

Sales and Marketing Coordinator at Blyth Tall Ship

Here she tells us her favourite pieces from the world of culture.

Who is your favourite author and why?

I read more cookbooks than anything else, I love cooking Nigella Lawson's recipes, or Ottolenghi. After a day of looking at screens, my eyes often feel a little too tired to whip out a book, but I am slowly reading *The Dinner Guest* by P.B. Walter which is perfect for picking up after a little break.

What would be your three Desert Island Discs?

I love jazz, I feel like I do best in confusing and unexpected situations and jazz feels like the musical equivalent of this; as soon as you think you know where it's going, there's always a twist. I like to go for a little old and a little more modern so:

"Wonderful life" – Louis Armstrong,
"Feeling Good" – Nina Simone and "Valerie" – Amy Winehouse.

Who is your favourite film star and why?

Angelina Jolie because anyone that can go from *Girl Interrupted* to Disney villain has such an incredible talent. She's had an incredible career that has spanned nearly every genre, she was even in *Kung Fu Panda*, which seems like a questionable choice - but she was great even in that!

What are your top three films?

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban - when my family was living in Turkey, my dad went out of his way to find a version in the local cinema that wasn't dubbed over in Turkish, which took him quite a while and I love that he spent time doing that for my sister and I. The film did scare the life out of my sister, but that also brought me a bit of joy too.

Wanted - It's strange from top to end, and the concept is so weird it shouldn't work, but I think the incredible cast manage to make it entertaining.

Pride and Prejudice - It helped me understand the book and realise that I do not have the temperament nor patience to have survived in that era.

Which poem left a lasting impression on you?

The Odyssey by Homer - The classics hold a special place in my heart, and this story created so many famous literary themes and terrifying mythical villains that are still used in literature now.

What box sets have you enjoyed?

I love *Dinner Ladies*, I feel like that's a Victoria Wood classic that never fails to make me laugh. I don't watch much TV now, so I tend to watch more podcasts than anything else.

Who is your favourite artist or performer?

I love Lewis Capaldi, he's always hilarious and able to bring his humour into his shows and his singing is second to none.

What is your favourite venue?

At the risk of sounding like a recluse, I don't go to venues very often!

I started working on the weekends at 14, so I've never had much time. I've been to the Theatre Royal in Newcastle and it's a pretty venue.

Which musical instrument do you particularly enjoy?

The trumpet improves any song, without a doubt.

From the world of Arts and Culture who would be your ideal dinner party guests?

I would invite William Smith, the sailor from Blyth that discovered the Antarctic as so much of his story after the discovery is lost - he's such an important cultural icon in Blyth!

I would also invite Dawn French, because she seems like such a lovely funny person and Lewis Capaldi too.

www.blythtallship.co.uk

There is a wood at Brinkburn that we do not manage. It's too difficult to get machinery in, so it has been left to find its own way.

It is untidy, with dead trees standing, fallen trunks scattered, and light broken and uneven. At first glance, it feels like chaos. Hard to read. Hard to move through.

And yet, it is alive with its own logic, just not one designed for us.

The expression "can't see the wood for the trees" suggests that detail obscures direction. In business, though, the real danger isn't chaos, it's comfort.

Comfort has a particular feel. There's enough capital to take the pressure off. A good team that knows how things work. Repeat customers return without much effort. Bad debt is low. The system hums.

Everything looks healthy, even successful.

But comfort has a shadow. It breeds inertia. We begin to optimise what already exists, adding layers, refining processes, and building more reporting. Complexity creeps in. The business turns inward. We get better at managing ourselves, but less attuned to what's changing around us.

Unlike the unmanaged wood, which is constantly adapting, a comfortable business can become fixed in its patterns.

That's where stepping back becomes a discipline, not a luxury.

It needs to be intentional: time away from the day-to-day, conversations that shift from performance to perspective, and voices from outside the system who aren't shaped by the same assumptions. A pause that asks a different question: not how are we doing? but what are we missing?

Because what matters isn't just performance, but direction.

Where are customers behaving differently? What are we too quick to dismiss? Which assumptions have gone unchallenged? Where have we stopped learning?

The real risk of comfort isn't failure.

It's the slow erosion of relevance.

One Walk: Wild Wood

To even find a way into the Wild Wood is a challenge. There are no paths, only gaps worn over time by deer and badger, their movements slowly shaping a way through. You follow these traces, twisting and turning, never quite seeing the whole. The wood resists easy understanding.

And yet, within it stands an extraordinary dead oak. Upright, almost human, with two outstretched arms. Its power lies in the twist of its grain, the whole tree having rotated as it grew, slowly turning in search of light.

“

Comfort has a shadow. It breeds inertia.

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.

One Thought: Stepping back becomes a discipline, not a luxury.



*Mark Fenwick at Brinkburn, Northumberland
Photo: Jodie Beardmore*



Tenth Anniversary for Dobson & Parnell

A Newcastle restaurant is marking its tenth anniversary with a complete refurbishment and a bold new dining concept, reflecting how people want to eat today.

Dobson & Parnell has officially reopened on the Quayside following an extensive transformation, unveiling a reimagined space and menu centred on elevated modern British dining. The relaunch introduces an open kitchen, a more sociable layout, and a flexible approach designed to suit everything from casual drinks and small plates to celebratory shared feasts.

Originally opened in 2016, the restaurant has

built a strong reputation over the past decade for its refined yet approachable cooking, earning industry recognition, awards and a loyal following. The decision to fully redevelop the space came after a period of reflection by owner Andy Hook, who sought to evolve the restaurant in line with changing dining habits.

Led by head chef Kyle Bowman, the new menu focuses on modern British cuisine, celebrating the best of the North East through fresh, seasonal ingredients and subtle global influences. Dishes range from whole North Shields wild turbot and classic Beef Wellington to soy-braised short rib and grilled monkfish, alongside plant-based plates such as charred hispi cabbage with wild garlic emulsion, and vegan nduja bhaji with lentil dhal.

The new concept allows guests to dine in a way that suits the, whether enjoying drinks and sharing plates in the bar area, or settling in for a more substantial meal.

The interior has been completely reimagined, with warm tones, polished wood and exposed brick enhancing the character of the Victorian building. A newly introduced open kitchen and social bar bring a sense of theatre and energy to the dining room, creating a more relaxed and inviting atmosphere.

Sustainability remains central to Dobson & Parnell's ethos. A zero-waste philosophy underpins the kitchen, with a focus on nose-to-tail cooking, close relationships with local suppliers, and the use of traditional preservation techniques.



Newcastle Hotels welcome Malissa Charlton as new Cluster Sales Manager

Newcastle's Malmaison and Hotel du Vin hotels have a new commercial leader at the helm, following the appointment of Malissa Charlton as Cluster Sales Manager.

Texas-born Malissa brings more than 20 years' experience in the hospitality industry from both sides of the Atlantic to her new role, where she is now responsible for driving commercial performance across both hotels.

Malmaison, situated on Newcastle's Quayside and just a stone's throw away from the iconic Gateshead Millennium Bridge, has recently undergone a quiet overhaul of bedrooms and public spaces as it cements itself as the Quayside's leading hotel and hospitality destination.

Hotel du Vin, meanwhile, is located just a short walk from the Quayside. The restored Edwardian building is perched on the edge of Newcastle's trendy Ouseburn area. Home to 42 boutique rooms and suites, it's famous for its French cuisine with a British twist.

Malissa, who took up her new post in late February, is focussing on building strong client relationships, identifying new revenue opportunities and raising the profiles and awareness of both hotels.

Willow at Hadrian's Hotel now serving the best Sunday lunch in Northumberland

Tucked away in the Northumberland village of Wall, Hadrian's Hotel has entered an exciting new chapter with the opening of Willow, its refined dining concept that is already generating a buzz among food lovers.

Sunday lunch at Willow feels like a modern take on a beloved British tradition. Expect beautifully presented plates built around seasonal, locally sourced ingredients, with a clear emphasis on quality and thoughtful cooking. The menu reflects a balance between comforting classics and elevated touches, bringing a sense of occasion to the familiar roast. Early visitors have praised not only the food but the atmosphere too—warm, welcoming, and quietly stylish—making it as suited to a leisurely family gathering as it is to a destination dining experience.

Though still newly opened, Willow is already earning impressive word-of-mouth acclaim, with



many highlighting the attention to detail and genuine hospitality at its core. It's the kind of place that feels both exciting and reassuring, a fresh addition to Northumberland's food scene that still honours the simple pleasure of a well-executed Sunday lunch.

To celebrate Bank Holiday 4th May, Hadrian's Hotel will be hosting a BBQ from 12 noon with a cocktail bar and live music—everyone is welcome.

Epicurus Catering & Fells' Kitchen Adventures Ltd.

Event Catering | Cater Hire | Staff Hire | Catered Outdoor Adventures

17 Mandale Business Park, Wallsend Rd, North Shields, NE29 7FN

Tel: 0191 2708540 • M: 07976 374629 • www.epicurus.co.uk • www.fellskitchen.co.uk



epicurus



fratelli

RISTORANTE • BAR • TERRACE

Al Fresco Dining and Drinks



BOOK A TABLE ON
OUR TERRACE
www.fratelliponteland.co.uk

NEST restaurant appoints new head chef

NEST is an intimate neighbourhood restaurant on Chillingham Road, Heaton, known for its relaxed approach to tasting menus, combining high-level cooking with an informal, welcoming atmosphere...they've been listed in the Michelin Guide for the last four years.

Built around a love of good food and wine, they offer multi-course menus designed to feel indulgent but never intimidating.

They've just appointed a brilliant new Head Chef, Gav Kinnersley, who was previously the sous chef at Peace & Loaf.

Gav brings with him experiences and a real passion for food. He has a great reputation for innovative, seasonal cuisine and his expertise lies in blending classic techniques with modern flavours, promising a refreshed and exciting menu for guests.

What makes NEST stand out is their sense of fun. Their menus often lean into themed or theatrical elements that bring a sense of surprise and personality to each course. Paired with thoughtful drinks and a cosy setting, it's a tasting menu experience that feels imaginative, sociable, and distinctly unpretentious.

www.nestinthenorth.com



The Curious Grouse welcomes Weardale community in standout first month



A beautifully refurbished family-friendly restaurant with a new beer garden and soft play has marked a successful first month at Heather View holiday park, offering one of the most picturesque dining and leisure settings in the region with breathtaking views down by the idyllic River Wear.

Situated at Stanhope in the heart of Weardale, with spectacular views across the river and surrounding Durham Dales countryside, The Curious Grouse has been transformed through a £400,000 investment. The refresh has elevated the venue into an inviting space where guests can relax, dine and play both indoors and out as a family, whether staying on park or visiting locally on a day out.

One of the venue's stand-out features is its stunning, spacious riverside beer garden, perfect for socialising in the sunshine. A newly created play park also adds opportunities for active fun, making the venue a year-round destination for families.

Families are catered for inside the new venue too, with a dedicated soft play area and games room providing a lively and safe environment for children to enjoy, whatever the weather.

Big Fat Greek Fest returns for another smashing event

A much-loved celebration which brings a taste of the Greek Islands – and the music of ABBA – to the North East is set to return for a third time.

The Big Fat Greek Fest has become a hugely popular date on the calendar at Sedgefield's Hardwick Hall Hotel, held in the venue's Grand Marquee with an afternoon filled with music, meze and Mediterranean magic.

And now lovers of Mamma Mia! can once again enjoy a trip to the fictional island of Kalokairi on Saturday 26 September.

Running from 12pm until 6pm, guests can expect a jam-packed afternoon of entertainment, starting with a traditional Greek cocktail on arrival, followed by a three course Greek lunch and a spectacular show.

The event's centrepiece is a cast of 20 performers, including singers, dancers and acrobats, who will bring the Greek party spirit to life with non stop routines, live vocals and audience interaction.



Hand Crafted Spirits
Made in County Durham

WLDISTILLERY.COM · HELLO@WLDISTILLERY.COM



THINK NEXT LEVEL LUXURY

STAY STYLISH AT MALMAISON

Hotel
du Vin
& Bistro

HOTELDUVIN.COM



Malmaison

MALMAISON.COM



**CLASSIC.
CHARACTERFUL.**

Completely yours.

Fine dining, world-class wine & rooms full of story.

Something to wine about...

Newcastle Wine Week is about to return for a second time – which is definitely something to raise a glass about.

When Leah Newman goes to a restaurant, looking at the food options is second to perusing the wine list.

Rather than looking at what compliments what she's about to eat, for Leah it all about looking at it the other way round – what wine would she like to try and what would be best to eat with it?

It's this passion that have made Leah part of a very elite group, not only one of the UK's few female wine collectors but also one of a handful which have the prestigious WSET (Wine Spirit Education Trust) diploma.

The positive news is that Leah – who lives in East Boldon – is putting her extensive knowledge to good use, as she is once again running the second Newcastle Wine Week.

The premise is simple – from 19-28 June anyone who buys a wine week wristband gets access to exclusive, half price wine offers, tasting flights and other special deals at participating venues.

“The whole idea was about making great wine more accessible,” said Leah.

“It means that people can really experience wines at a price that isn't often available and hopefully discover a whole new world.”

Last year's event was a huge success – so much so that Leah is also now running a simultaneous wine week in Edinburgh over the same period.

The participants read like the who's who of Newcastle's top eateries – Michelin-starred



Leah Newman

House of Tides, Jesmond Wine Co The French Quarter, Kultur Wine Bar, Dood, Blackfriars, – just some of the 40 plus venues signed up to take part.

It's the latest initiative from Leah – and a far cry from her original career.

Originally working pharma and animal health, Leah found herself organising high level equine events.

“I often got stuck with ordering the wine and from that started to develop a real interest,” she said.

While pregnant with her daughter, Leah decided to pursue that interest, studying for a diploma with the WSET to formalise her training.

In 2017 she set up Whispering Wine, a company dedicated to creating wine-related events, teaching people about wines, along with selling wines and helping people to build their own wine sellers.

“I'm extremely passionate about wine education, particularly for the hospitality industry in the North East,” said Leah.

“I want to expand people's wine knowledge,

open them to everything that's out there and also encourage other women into a career around wine.”

While the focus currently is on wine in the North East, Leah also takes that interest further afield.

She's organised a range of wine-focussed travel trips, having recently taken a group to Reims, Champagne to experience to a variety of wines.

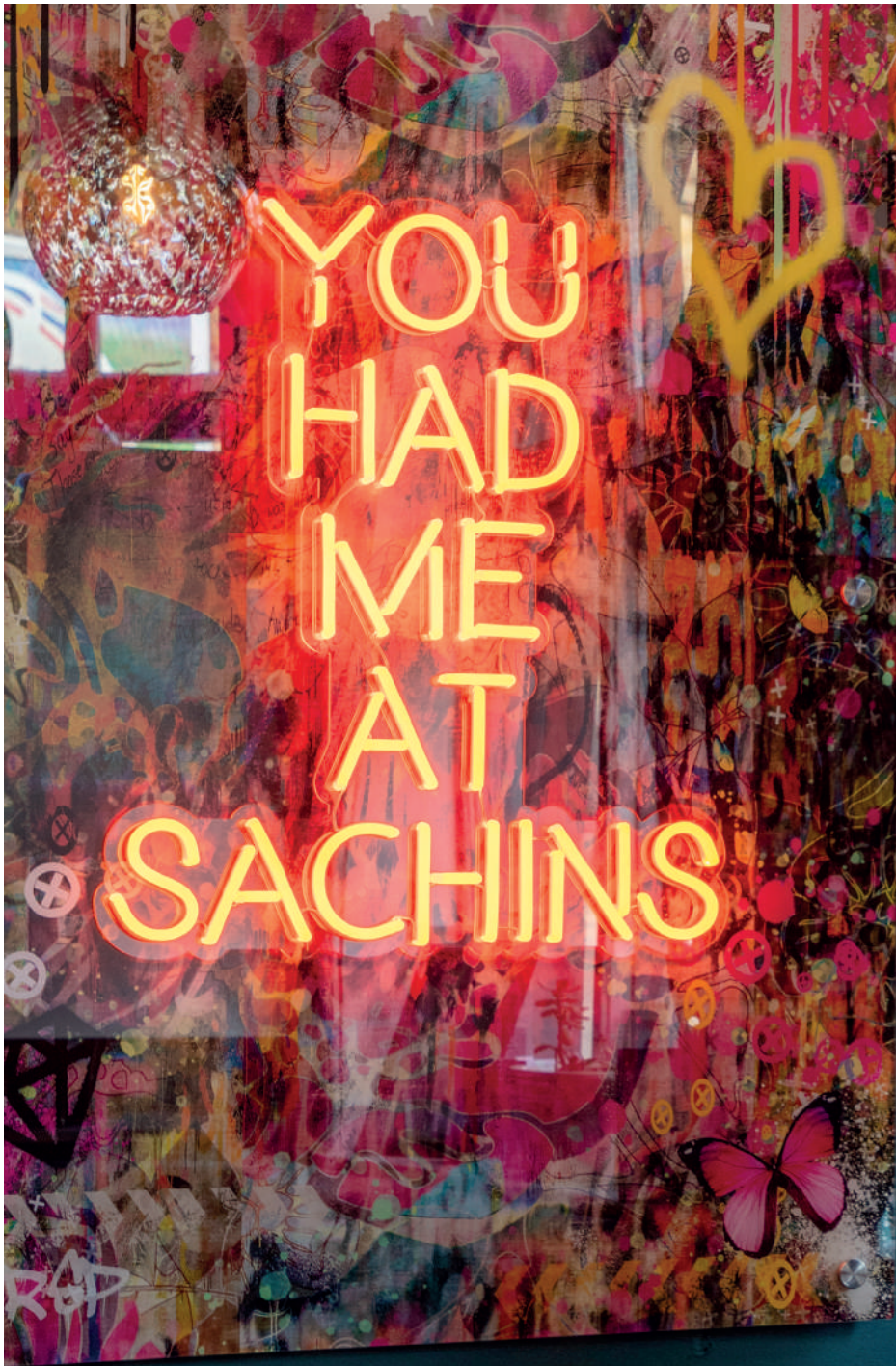
Long term her plan is roll out the Wine Week concept nationwide, helping to build a country of discerning wine lovers.

She is a collector in her own right and helps other people interested in creating a wine cellar with ideas of what they should be looking at and where to go.

“Wine is a great investment because it holds and increases in value,” said Leah.

“Or even if you just want to collect decent wine that you can enjoy yourself – what's better than that?”

Wristbands and further information about Newcastle Wine Week are available at www.wine-week.co.uk



Make your next event **unforgettable**

Classic hospitality and the finest Punjabi cuisine, situated in the city's historic Forth Banks. Private room hire for up to 50 guests.



0191 261 9035 | INFO@SACHINS.CO.UK | WWW.SACHINS.CO.UK

FORTH BANKS | NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE | NE1 3SG





Winners of Accessible and Inclusive Destination North East Tourism Awards

*Richard Kaye – Centre Manager,
Matt McWhinnie – Brand and Partnerships Manager,
Jenny Banks – Director at Savills,
Rebecca Wilkes – Associate Director at Savills*

Dalton Park recognised with double win at North East Tourism Awards

- Gold Regenerative Tourism Award
- Silver Accessible and Inclusive Award

Dalton Park Outlet & Outdoors, the North East's largest outlet shopping destination, has secured a double win at the North East Tourism Awards, achieving Gold in the Regenerative Tourism category and Silver for the Accessible and Inclusive Award. The recognition reinforces Dalton Park's position as a leader in sustainable retail destinations and inclusive visitor experiences across the region.

The awards celebrate Dalton Park's long-term commitment to regenerative tourism, demonstrated by a wide-ranging programme of environmental, community and accessibility initiatives. Central to this is the outlet's unique

55-acre landscaped parkland, created from reclaimed land and now home to woodland, wetlands and wildflower meadows, alongside the North's first Pollinator Parks Garden designed to support biodiversity and enhance visitor wellbeing.

Dalton Park has also developed strong partnerships to drive positive environmental and social impact. Its collaboration with Climate Action North delivers regular wellbeing walks, biodiversity surveys and educational activities, while community-focused initiatives include artisan markets, school engagement programmes and environmental projects such as beach cleans and public art installations.

A range of sustainability measures have also been implemented across the scheme, including on-site solar energy generation, water-saving technologies and refill stations to reduce single-use plastics. Over the past year, Dalton Park generated over 193,000 kWh of renewable energy onsite, saving more than 47 tonnes of CO₂. In 2025, the outlet installed its Water Refill Stations in line with its commitment to reducing single-use plastic, providing visitors with a free, on-the-go hydration solution. Other initiatives included the installation of a solar-powered e-bike charging hub to encourage sustainable travel and is working towards carbon neutrality by 2050 or earlier, supported by its recent ISO 14001 certification*.

Accessibility remains a key priority, with Dalton Park recognised for its inclusive approach to visitor experience. Initiatives delivered in partnership with the North East Autism Society include Quiet Mornings, sensory support tools

and clear wayfinding resources, ensuring the destination is welcoming and accessible to all.

Notably, following the introduction of Quiet Mornings on Tuesdays 10am – 12pm and Saturdays from 9:30am – 10:30am, sales during this period reported a +5.1% versus the same period the year before, demonstrating clear and growing demand for inclusive retail experiences.

Richard Kaye, Centre Manager at Dalton Park commented: "Winning Gold for Regenerative Tourism and Silver for Accessible and Inclusive is a fantastic achievement for the entire park and reflects our commitment to creating a destination that is both environmentally responsible and genuinely inclusive.

We are proud to offer a retail and leisure experience that goes beyond shopping to one that connects visitors with nature, supports our local community and ensures everyone feels welcome. These awards are a testament to the passion and dedication of Dalton Park and we remain focused on continuing this journey in the years ahead"

Owned by Patron Capital and managed by Global Mutual, Dalton Park is home to more than 65 premium and high street brands, alongside extensive outdoor space and leisure amenities. The outlet continues to evolve its offer, combining strong retail performance with a clear strategy focused on sustainability, community engagement and accessibility leadership.

For more information about the new stores, visit www.dalton-park.co.uk

THE 23RD ANNUAL
North East
Oyster
Festival

FRIDAY 25TH SEPTEMBER 2026

11:30AM UNTIL 6PM

HARDWICK HALL HOTEL, SEDGEMAN, CO. DURHAM, TS21 2EH



LIVE PERFORMANCE BY

★ **SCOUTING FOR GIRLS** ★

PLUS

★ **CAL HALBERT** ★

COMEDIAN / BRITAIN'S GOT TALENT

★ **EMERALD THIEVES** ★

PURVEYORS OF FINE IRISH MUSIC

★ **JJ GALWAY BAND** ★

★ **BRANDON BLOCK** ★

★ **COMPÈRE STEVE WALLS** ★

A notoriously superb afternoon event, where the all inclusive price includes a
Fantastic Seafood Menu, Oyster Stalls, free flowing Guinness, Wine, Beer and Lager.



Fantastic entertainment, its just like having a day at the races, but without the horses!

TICKETS
£220.00 + VAT
PER PERSON

BOOKING OFFICE
01740 620253

Email events@hardwickhallhotel.co.uk

In conversation with...



Wayne Topley

Wayne Topley

Managing director, Cedar Court hotels

Your career spans more than 25 years in hospitality leadership – what have been the defining moments that have shaped your approach as Managing Director today?

Every business I've joined has influenced my approach. You learn as much from challenges as you do from success, and those lessons stay with you.

The defining moment, though, was leading our team through COVID-19. It changed the industry, but more importantly, how we value people. Supporting teams through that uncertainty brought real clarity to my leadership. It reinforced that hospitality is, and always will be, about people first.

You're leading the transformation of Cedar Court Hotels. What attracted you, and what excites you about its future?

I was drawn to the opportunity. Cedar Court had a strong heritage but needed direction and investment to unlock its potential.

That's what excited me then and still does now. We're building something people can be proud of, and seeing the team grow in confidence and capability is incredibly rewarding.

Cedar Court is built on "proper Yorkshire hospitality" – what does that mean in practice?

It's simple. Welcome people as you would into your own home. No overcomplication – just being genuine, warm and attentive, ensuring every guest feels looked after from the moment

they arrive. Done right, it leaves a lasting impression.

Since 2019, the group has undergone significant investment – what have been the key priorities?

We chose to be bold, investing over £10 million into bedrooms, meeting spaces and public areas to meet modern expectations.

But it's not just physical – it's about relevance. We've reshaped our offer around how people travel, work and meet today. And while we've made strong progress, we're not standing still.

Each hotel has its own identity – how do you balance that with a strong group ethos?

It comes down to people. While we have clear standards, we encourage teams to be themselves, engage naturally and even make mistakes. That freedom builds confidence and authenticity, which guests connect with. Our role is to support that fully.

What does a high-performing hospitality team look like in 2026?

Engaged, empowered and always learning. Since 2020, we've developed our own programmes – from short "Cedar Feeders" sessions to our six-month Cedar Leaders course.

Over 75% of management roles are filled internally, which I'm incredibly proud of. When our teams thrive, the business thrives.

Sustainability and community partnerships are a big focus – how are these shaping the business?

They're embedded in everything we do. We've invested around £2 million into energy efficiency, including solar across three hotels.

Beyond that, how we manage waste and choose partners are conscious decisions. It's about building a sustainable operation that benefits both the business and our communities.

What does the next chapter of Cedar Court Hotels look like?

We're rethinking how we use our spaces. Demand for traditional meeting rooms has shifted, so we've adapted – transforming areas into community-focused spaces like salons, gyms and flexible offices.

It's a "business within a business" approach, and it's already proving successful.

You're helping to launch Hospitality Live in Leeds – what's the vision?

We wanted something fit for today's industry. Traditional trade shows can feel rigid, so Hospitality Live is more dynamic – a one-day event flowing into an evening experience, focused on meaningful conversations rather than transactions.

What advice would you give to someone building a career in hospitality?


Go for it – the rewards can be incredible. Be prepared to work hard, and most importantly, engage. Build relationships, grow your network and put yourself out there. It makes a real difference.

Finally, how do you switch off?

I enjoy simple things done well – great food, good company and travel when I can. And when I need to reset, a long walk with the dog helps clear my head and refocus for the week ahead.

cedarcourthotels.co.uk



Proudly serving at  Hadrian's Hotel

WHERE EVERY DETAIL IS *A delicacy.*

We create moments worth lingering over, where conversation flows and every flavour tells a story.

Step into an atmosphere of understated luxury. From the first sip to the final bite, our menu is a celebration of seasonality, artistry, and impeccable service.

Your table is waiting.

BOOK ONLINE AT
www.hadrianshotel.com





Hotel Gotham sets Newcastle ablaze

By Michael Gramshaw

Like all of the best hotels, Hotel Gotham arrives with a lobby-full of history.

For almost a century, this striking, grade-II listed building on Newcastle's Pilgrim Street, served as the city's fire and police station, and has now been transformed into a plush, five-star hotel with a taste for the theatrical.

Originally designed by pre-eminent architects Cackett, Burns Dick & Mackellar, the building's transformation is nothing short of spectacular, retaining its bones while dialling up the glamour to the shrieking shrill of a fire alarm.

Having long admired the building's grand stone façade, it feels like I've watched its restoration take place brick by brick while on business in the city. Given a suitable gap in the weather, my wife Lisa and I booked in for all it had to offer.

As one would expect from a luxury boutique hotel group, Hotel Gotham really emits that 'Wow' factor on arrival. Lisa - who loves all things Golden Age cinema - was quick to acknowledge its Art Deco influences with modern amenities. Interiors soon seduce with inky-black walls, ornate curves and bold splashes of fire-engine red.



Behind the similarly bright red doors of the bedrooms, guests will find havens of comfort and luxury. These continue the aesthetic narrative: monochrome with pops of red, zig-zag carpets, quirky art and statement headboards. The large bathroom, comprising swish rainfall shower, was put to good use after a morning run.

Other amenities include flat screen TV, high-speed complimentary WiFi and a minibar carefully curated with local goodies.

What came next was a touch of pure Hotel Gotham. A knock on the door heralded the arrival of the 'martini trolley'. Rolling into the room with reassuring clink, our expert mixologist swiftly spun up a crisp gin martini for Lisa and a Vesper for yours truly. Together, we raised a glass to the full five-star treatment.

Nicely fortified, we were eager to get out and explore the rest of the hotel and its surroundings. While a warm reception should always be a given at hotels of this calibre, this one came a little closer to home. We were delighted to find our (future) son-in-law Josh's friend, Jorge, working as concierge with charm to burn.

Jorge told us more about Hotel Gotham's deluxe concierge service. From traditional touches such as flowers, chocolates and champagne to more adventurous requests like sports and entertainment tickets (even hot air balloon flights were mentioned), nothing is too much trouble.

As locals we had no trouble finding our bearings, but it was nice to find cultural attractions such as the Theatre Royal, Quayside, Hancock Museum and St James' Park within reassuring proximity.

Returning to the hotel, we discovered reception buzzing with Barcelona supporters who had made Gotham their base ahead of that week's impending Champions League fixture.

Their presence underlined the hotel's growing status as a destination in its own right: a place where international fans, weekend visitors and locals naturally converge.

Our Sunday lunch at Siren - former firefighters' mess hall turned dining room - proved a highlight. Lisa began with a beautifully balanced ham hock terrine with pease pudding and saffron shallots, followed by a pan-fried chicken supreme with crisp roast potatoes.

I opted for heritage beetroots with hazelnut and shallot dressing before moving to a treacle-cured sirloin of beef, a standout among the restaurant's modern British, locally sourced Sunday lunch menu.

For pairings, a chilled Picpoul de Pinet worked well with the terrine, while a full-bodied Rioja Reserva complemented the richness of the beef.

We adjourned to 'Fire Bar' to round off what had been a fabulous stay. Since opening, Gotham has established itself as one of Newcastle's most distinctive stays. Classy, hospitable and unafraid of a little spectacle, it should appeal to destination-seeking locals, business travellers and weekend city breakers alike.

The city has long cried out for a hotel of this standard, and much like the firefighters of yesteryear, Hotel Gotham answers the call with aplomb.

For more information, visit
www.hotelgotham.co.uk/newcastle



Dabbawal serve up their Sunday best

Michael Grahamslaw finds the perfect way to round off the weekend in the heart of Newcastle.

Being an avowed lover of both traditional Sunday Lunch and Indian cuisine, I had thought never the twain shall meet. However, as is my most irritating wont, I was once again proved wrong.

The Indian street food pioneers Dabbawal have reimagined the British classic, bringing their inventive 'Dabba Sunday Roast' first to its Jesmond restaurant and now, its similarly crowd-pleasing outpost on Newcastle's High Bridge Street.

Positioned a mere two minutes from Monument Metro, it's perfectly placed for shoppers, families and visitors looking for a relaxed Sunday afternoon in Newcastle city centre.

Speaking ahead of the launch of this brand-new concept, the Dabbawal team said: "After the huge success of The Dabba Sunday Roast in Jesmond, we felt the city centre deserved something new.

"Roast dinners are a real institution in the UK, and Indian food is right up there as one of Newcastle's most loved cuisines. Bringing the two together on High Bridge felt like the best of both worlds."

While simultaneously hearing many good reports and having no idea how this would pan out, my son Jack and I pitched up one Sunday afternoon a mixture of excitement and apprehension entwined.

One thing always guaranteed at Dabbawal is a warm, friendly welcome. This visit proved no exception as we were shown to an expansive corner table and soon kicking back with beers and poppadoms.

While Sunday afternoons may typically consist of lounging around with Super Sunday and the Sunday papers, or hacking our way round the region's golf courses, Dabbawal was evidently a welcome point of difference. The dining area possessed a lovely, languid hum while aromas of Sunday lunch via the tandoor pervaded the air.

I kicked off with the Palak Patta Chaat, a dish I've enjoyed at Dabbawal before but which also worked as a prelude to a roast.



The batterfried spinach leaves arrived crisp and layered with sweet yoghurt and zingy tamarind. It's a dish that captures the restaurant at its best - playful, textured, and distinctly Dabbawal.

Jack, meanwhile, opted for the Onion & Palak Bhajis, a stack of thinly sliced onions bound in spiced batter and fried-off to a golden crunch. He's something of a bhaji connoisseur, and these earned an immediate nod of approval.

For the main event, diners have the choice of chicken tikka roast, lamb boti roast, roast salmon or the vegetarian roast vegetable bhuna. All roasts are served up with saffron mash, gunpowder roasted potatoes, seasonal vegetables, Yorkshire pudding and a choice of Rogan Josh gravy or Makhani Masala sauce.

I chose the chicken tikka roast, marinated in yoghurt and spices before being roasted off in the tandoor. The meat arrived succulent, with smoky edges set off exquisitely by the rich makhani sauce.

Jack's lamb boti roast was equally impressive. Tender and boldly spiced, the lamb was perfectly suited to the concept, blending British tradition with the wondrous depth of Indian home cooking. The rogan josh gravy - which sat so nicely atop the saffron-infused mashed potato - was another welcome Indian inflection.

While desserts featuring sticky toffee pudding and apple crumble were mooted, we left totally replete reflecting upon what could be a new North East tradition.

There are few rituals more deeply woven into British culinary culture than the Sunday roast. Yet Dabbawal have found the confidence and craft to reimagine a classic. A perfect fusion of East meets West.

The Dabba Sunday Roast is served 12 noon - 4.30pm every Sunday. Two courses are available at £23.50 per person with three courses £28.50 per person. For more information, visit www.dabbawal.com



Your adventure starts here

at Maldron Hotel Newcastle

Located in the very heart of Newcastle city centre
265 bedrooms, three meeting rooms, gym
Grain & Grill Restaurant and Bar
Outdoor courtyard
Red Bean Roastery coffee

To book, please contact:

T: 0191 640 9500
E: res.newcastle@maldronhotels.com
W: maldronhotels.com

maldron^o
HOTELS



The Maldron Magic

By Michael Grahamslaw

Easter amongst the Grahamslaw clan is a rather coveted tradition. We are not religious but the public holiday brings a chance to come together and raise a glass, bolstered by the prospect of brighter nights, warmer days and the impending promise of Summer.

Easter Sunday typically brings mornings with the papers followed by live sport and the aromas of home cooking.

However, while leafing through the sports section, disaster struck. Lisa came running into the living room: the oven seemed to have conked out before she even had the chance to load it up with her famous leg of lamb and roast potatoes. A family conference ensued and soon became a hell of a lot more heated than our oven. It was my daughter Holly who reminded us of a great Sunday lunch we had previously had at the Grain and Grill - the Maldron Hotel Newcastle's very own, in-house eatery.

Upon arrival, the charming staff of the Maldron took all of the stress of mid morning off our shoulders, ushering us to comfortable seating and immediately providing drinks menus. They say that waiting staff develop an antenna for this kind of thing but for the Maldron team it seemed instinctive. After ten minutes sipping a nice vino verde in the bright and buzzy Grain and Grill, all of our oven worries dissolved into nothing.

Sunday Lunch at Maldron Newcastle is a generous and decidedly regal affair. Expert chefs champion only the freshest, seasonal ingredients with portions hearty and abundant. Good value is available too with two courses available for £22 pound and three for £26.





In the rare absence of my son Jack, daughter Holly selected the pick of the starters; a sumptuous caesar salad, leafy, verdant and boasting all the crispness of an early spring day. Lisa, ever the traditionalist, picked out a tomato and roasted red pepper soup (croutons et al) to inject the warmth that an early spring is sometimes lacking. Meanwhile yours truly tucked into chicken gyozas, once again underlining the international inflections of the Maldron menu.

After a satisfying selection of starters and a couple of enjoyable vinos, the oven debacle was now far from our minds. However, a moment of tension descended as mains of beef and chicken supreme arrived: were they going to live up to the lofty standards of Lisa's usual Easter offering?

A first slice into the daube of beef cut through any lingering worries. Cooked to a gratifying, flavourful tenderness, the meat was perfectly paired with potatoes of both mashed and roasted variety. Topped off with a yorkshire pudding and surrounded with a moat of vegetables, we soon realised that this was going to be a meal to remember rather than forget. Holly's chicken supreme confirmed that there was no greater stage for an Easter resurrection than The Maldron.

This had been the most remarkable comeback. Totally replete, we sat contented, in the Grain and Grill's cosy embrace. Conversation flowed, wine did too. We were reminded about the important things in life: food, family, and (with a nudge from the waiter) sticky toffee pudding.

Bellies full, we bade goodbye to our genial hosts. It was at this moment that Lisa dropped the bombshell news: there had been nothing wrong with the oven in the first place! Holly then revealed that she had also been in on it. They had tempted me out of my slippers and peeled me away from my throne to the Maldron Hotel to remind me how Easter Sunday should be done: with the fun, family and fresh cooking that the Maldron provided so exquisitely today.

An Easter Sunday to remember!

For more information, visit www.maldronhotels.com/newcastle/dining



WE CATER TO YOUR EVERY NEED...

We are a family owned and managed company who together have over 25 years in the catering and manufacturing industry. Our hands on experience in the outdoor catering sector gives us great insight into the every changing needs of the mobile caterer.



Our recent customers include: • Apartment group • Ramside event catering Newcastle Falcons Rugby Club • Doritos • Salvation Army...to name but a few!



We take time to listen to your needs and always go the extra mile to meet them. Your unit will be unique to you, visually and functionally. We will do all we can to help you stand out from the crowd and give you a head start in making your business a successful one.



We employ a loyal team of craftsmen who have many years of experience between them and our attention to detail is such that we see clients return to us time and time again. We manufacture bespoke catering units using high quality materials to a very high standard, at competitive prices.

Orders being taken now • Deliveries within 6-8 weeks

CATERING UNITS

For further information contact CateringUnits.co.uk • Tel: 0845 519 5065 • Email: info@cateringunits.co.uk

Unit 28, Team Valley Business Centre, Team Valley, Gateshead NE11 0QH



fish

Superior Wet Fish

513 Durham Road, Low Fell High Street, NE9 5EY



Here at fish we pride ourselves on our super fresh seafood, shellfish and wet fish, with a fresh delivery everyday

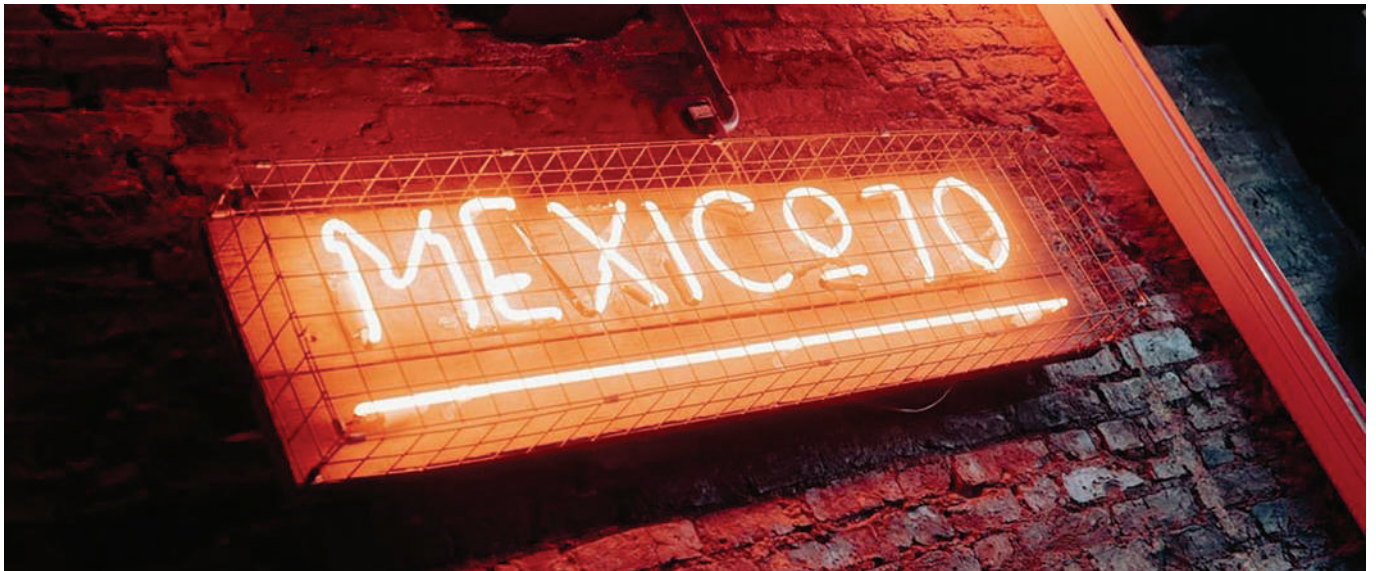
We have a very delicious tapas menu, including oysters, lobster, calamari and a very British classic mini fish and chips

Inside we have 14 covers and a large selection of wine, we highly recommend booking as it gets very busy at the weekend. We can also offer a fabulous selection for a seafood buffet

Daily specials..fish pasta, fish pie • See our facebook page for specials



Call 0191 4326444 or follow us for our latest deals on facebook- www.facebook.com/fishlowfell



Mexico 70: Sunderland's boldest bite of flavour

Tucked away on High Street West, just opposite the Sunderland Empire, Mexico 70 has been turning up the heat on Sunderland's food scene since 2018—and one visit is all it takes to see why.

Step inside and you're instantly transported. The low lighting, glowing red ambience, and electric playlists create a vibe that feels more late-night Mexico City than North East England. It's loud, it's lively, and it's completely unapologetic.

At the heart of Mexico 70's menu is authenticity. Their tortillas are made fresh daily using Mexican organic masa harina, each one pressed by hand before service. It's this dedication to craft that sets the tone—everything here is designed to be shared, enjoyed, and talked about.

We were lucky enough to sample some standout specials, including the restaurant's famed crab tostada. This dish was a revelation. Sweet, delicate fresh crab paired beautifully with creamy guacamole, while a punchy hot sauce cut through with just the right level of heat. For someone who doesn't typically lean towards seafood, this was a game-changer—light, vibrant, and completely addictive.

From the main tapas selection, the Korean pork belly taco was a standout. Melt-in-the-mouth pork, cooked to perfection, was lifted by the freshness of red cabbage and apple, with coriander and guacamole adding layers of flavour.

Equally impressive were the fried chicken gringa and beef bulgogi. The gringa delivered a satisfying combination of crispy chicken, gooey cheese, crunchy slaw and a tangy buffalo kick, all wrapped in a soft flour tortilla. Meanwhile, the beef bulgogi brought bold, punchy flavours—tender glazed steak paired with Asian slaw, gochujang crema, sesame, and coriander for a dish that was both comforting and exciting.

But let's talk sides—because at Mexico 70, they're far from an afterthought. The Parmesan fries were outrageously good: golden, crisp, and generously coated in salty, nutty cheese, served alongside a luxurious truffle mayo. Then came the crispy smashed potatoes—arguably the star of the show. Drizzled in chipotle and garlic butter, topped with candied jalapeños and finished with queso fresco, they delivered a perfect mix of crunch, heat, sweetness, and creaminess. Absolutely unforgettable.

What truly ties the experience together is the kitchen's ability to balance bold, global flavours with precision. Each dish feels thoughtfully constructed, with contrasting textures and complementary profiles that keep your palate constantly engaged.

And that's before you even get to the drinks. Mexico 70 boasts an impressive selection of cocktails, beers, wines and spirits. Whether you're sipping on a fruity Spicy Mango or something more complex like a Jungle Bird, the drinks menu is just as vibrant and adventurous as the food.

Perfectly positioned in the city centre, Mexico 70 is an ideal stop for a pre-theatre bite, a midweek treat, or a lively evening out with friends. It's more than just a meal—it's an experience.

One thing's for certain—once you've experienced Mexico 70, you'll be coming back for more.

To keep up with their latest specials and offers, check out their social media: Facebook @mexi70sunderland and Instagram @mexico__70, or visit them at 312 High Street West, Sunderland, SR1 3ET.





WEEK 2 WEEK[®]

SERVICED APARTMENTS

Your hotel alternative



Business | Corporate | Leisure | Contractor



**North East and Nationwide | Relocation | Extended Stays
Corporate Housing | Contractor Accommodation | Property Management**

Experience the ultimate in home-away-from-home with Week2Week

www.week2week.co.uk +44 (0) 191 281 3129 info@week2week.co.uk



Shaping ideas together

In the heart of Chester-le-Street, something special is taking shape—three local businesses coming together with a shared vision to strengthen community ties, enhance visitor experiences, and showcase the very best our area has to offer.

At Lumley Castle Hotel, we have always believed that collaboration is key to creating memorable guest experiences. That belief has recently been brought to life through our growing partnership with Durham Cricket Club and Chester-le-Street Golf Club—two fantastic organisations that share our passion for quality, hospitality, and community spirit.

Our relationship with Durham Cricket Club has gone from strength to strength. Working closely with Tom and Stef, we've developed a genuine partnership built on trust, creativity, and a shared ambition to deliver exceptional experiences. Whether it's welcoming visiting teams and supporters, supporting matchday hospitality, or creating tailored packages for guests attending fixtures, the synergy between our teams has been clear from the outset. The cricket ground is not just a sporting venue—it's a hub for the region, and we're proud to play a part in enhancing what it offers.

Equally exciting is our growing connection with Chester-le-Street Golf Club, where we've had the pleasure of working with Jessica, the club's new General Manager. Jessica brings fresh energy and vision, and it's been inspiring to begin shaping ideas together. The golf club is a hidden gem, offering not only a beautiful course but also a welcoming environment for members and visitors alike. By aligning our efforts, we're exploring ways to create seamless experiences for guests—whether that's combining a relaxing stay at Lumley Castle with a round of golf or enhancing corporate and leisure packages across all three venues.

What makes this collaboration truly special is

the shared commitment to putting Chester-le-Street on the map. Each of our businesses brings something unique: the historic charm and luxury of Lumley Castle, the excitement and prestige of Durham Cricket, and the scenic appeal and community focus of the golf club. Together, we can offer something far greater than the sum of our parts.

For visitors, this means more choice, better experiences, and a stronger sense of place. For the local community, it means investment, opportunity, and a celebration of what makes our town so distinctive. And for us as businesses, it's a reminder that by working together, we can achieve far more than we ever could alone.

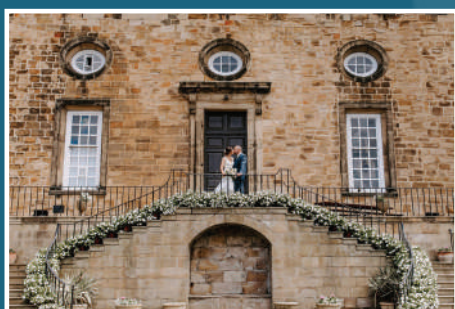
This is just the beginning. As we continue to build these relationships, we're excited about what lies ahead—new ideas, joint initiatives, and opportunities to welcome even more people to experience everything Chester-le-Street has to offer.

Collaboration, after all, is at the heart of great hospitality. And here in Chester-le-Street, it's something we're proud to be part of.

www.lumleycastle.com



CELEBRATING
50 YEARS OF
LUMLEY CASTLE HOTEL



Spring 2026 Wedding Offer*

Begin your forever in the timeless
romance of Lumley Castle Hotel

26% OFF our Elegance Wedding Package
Valid for weddings booked for 2026 - 2027
Offer available 20 March - 20 June 2026

Historic castle setting for an unforgettable wedding day
Dedicated wedding team to guide every detail



LUMLEY
CASTLE

If you would like to enquire, please contact our experienced weddings team
via email weddings@lumleycastle.com or telephone 0191 389 1111.

*Weddings booked for 2026 also receive additional wedding enhancements



Northumbrian Heritage Meats

The village butcher and farm shop in one!

Established 2015



Selling a range of locally sourced quality meats and offering a range of oven ready products.

Large selection of pies and sandwiches including hot beef and pulled pork, along with bacon and sausage breakfast baps.

Open...

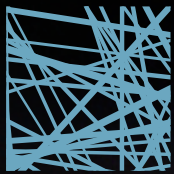
Monday to Thursday 9am to 5pm

Friday 8am to 5pm | Saturday 8am to 1pm



592-596 Durham Road, Low Fell | 0191 4879063

northumbrian-heritage-meats-ltd.sumupstore.com



NEST
DINING

A JOURNEY OF FLAVOUR

INDULGE IN OUR LUNCH & DINNER TASTING MENUS

Experience the best of our kitchen with thoughtfully crafted lunch and dinner tasting menus, designed to take you on a journey through seasonal flavours and signature dishes.



BOOK NOW

WWW.NESTINTHENORTH.COM

Ashington cycle hub relaunch celebrated with Community Open Day

Ashington's much-loved Cycle Hub shifted into a new phase, hit the road and rolled into an exciting future as it joined the Full Circle Food Project—marking the occasion with a lively community open day full of activity.

The special relaunch event brought together local residents, partners and cycling enthusiasts to celebrate the Hub's next chapter. Visitors enjoyed a range of activities, including refurbished bike sales, live repair demonstrations in the workshop, refreshments, and guided rides.

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 is now 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.

Throughout the day, visitors were able to browse a wide selection of refurbished bikes, restored by skilled volunteers and staff, and available at low cost. The workshop was also open, giving people the chance to see repairs in action and learn more about maintaining their own bikes.

A highlight of the event was a women-only guided group ride, delivered in partnership with Cycle with Jan and British Cycling's



Breeze programme. The ride welcomed new and returning cyclists and celebrated notable North East women, including Cissie Charlton and Bella Arkle with a route from Ashington to Newbiggin.

Jan Chisholm, Director of Cycling 4 Everyone and Northumberland Cycling Campaign, said: "This is a fantastic moment for the Cycle Hub. Over the past five years, it's been powered by volunteers delivering training, rides and repairs. Now, working in partnership with Full Circle Food Project, it has the energy and resources for its next phase. It really feels like a new dawn."

Powerful new play brings laughter, honesty and awareness to Breast Cancer

A bold, moving and unexpectedly uplifting new stage production, *Tits Up*, has made people think about the effects of cancer.

Written by Cramlington based Alison Stanley and Bedlington's Leah Bell, the play explores the realities of breast cancer through the lives of four very different women brought together in an oncology waiting room. Drawing on real-life experiences from women attending the Live Well With Cancer group in North Shields, the play delivers an authentic and deeply human portrayal of illness, resilience and connection.

Despite its serious subject matter, the production is infused with humour, warmth and camaraderie — reflecting the real-life coping mechanisms of those facing cancer.

Cleodon based Katie Potts (18) plays Rosie, representing the often-overlooked reality that cancer can affect young people. Leah Bell plays Tina Slater, an older woman who faces her diagnosis with humour, curiosity and quiet strength. Chrissy Rock plays Brenda, a brash and outspoken character whose tough exterior masks deep vulnerability and fear while Alison Stanley plays Rachel, a driven, career-focused woman forced to confront her own assumptions and mortality. Speaking about the inspiration behind the play, Alison said: "Cancer is a leveller. It doesn't matter who you are, what you earn, or where you come from, everyone faces it on the same terms. I wanted to tell that story honestly but also show the humour and friendships that help people get through."



Girls confront everyday abuse in viral video

A powerful new video created by South Tyneside charity Impact Family Services is sparking national conversation after exposing the shocking language and abuse young girls face daily.

The organisation's CEO, Catherine Marchant, who is from Consett, has led the initiative as part of ongoing efforts to challenge harmful behaviours and break cycles of domestic abuse.

The video, which has already reached tens of thousands of viewers online, features school-aged girls holding up handwritten

messages revealing real comments directed at them by boys and men. The content is deliberately uncensored, highlighting the raw and often disturbing reality many young females experience.

Impact Family Services supports individuals aged 4 to 82, offering crisis intervention, safety planning, one-to-one support, group programmes, and in-house counselling.

The charity works with individuals and families affected by domestic abuse, often across generations. In some communities, patterns of abuse are deeply embedded.

"In some communities, we are seeing fourth-generation domestic abuse," she explained. "For many, this behaviour has become normalised, which makes it incredibly difficult to break the cycle."

The idea for the video came after discussions with education professionals working with teenage girls, who shared written accounts of the daily verbal abuse pupils were experiencing.

"The comments were horrific," said Catherine. "We knew we couldn't sanitise this—we had to show it as it really is."

Since launching, the video has received more than 129,000 views and has been shared over 1,000 times, sparking widespread online debate and discussion.

The video is available on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn via Impact Family Services.



Burnout costs UK businesses £28 billion a year.

What is it costing yours?

One app. Six pillars of wellbeing.

AI personalised support for everyone.

www.optimewellbeing.com

Scan QR code to start your FREE trial



Let your celebrations take flight



DOUBLETREE
by Hilton™

at the DoubleTree
by Hilton Newcastle
International Airport.

contact us on
events@doubletree-newcastle.co.uk
or 01661 824266

 **DoubleTree by Hilton Newcastle International Airport,**
Woolsington Newcastle upon Tyne, NE13 8BZ



T20 ON SALE NOW

22 MAY - 12 JULY

**BANKSHomes
RIVERSIDE**



**Vitality
DOUBLE
HEADER**



T20 BLAST
BIG HITS
LIVE MUSIC
GIVEAWAYS
RIVALRY CLASHES



**DURHAM
CRICKET**

T20 BLAST 



HAMPSHIRE HAWKS W
LEICESTERSHIRE FOXES M

SUN
24 MAY



WARWICKSHIRE BEARS W
YORKSHIRE M

FRI
29 MAY



NORTHANTS STEELBACKS M

SAT
06 JUN



YORKSHIRE W
LANCASHIRE LIGHTNING M

TUE
09 JUN



LANCASHIRE THUNDER W

FRI
03 JUL



THE BLAZE W
NOTTS OUTLAWS M

SUN
05 JUL



ESSEX W
DERBYSHIRE FALCONS M

FRI
10 JUL



PACKAGES FROM
£179+VAT

CONTACT:
TOM.SEYMOUR@DURHAMCRICKET.CO.UK



The Spa at Ramside brings the zen

Anyone craving some inner calm and the ultimate relaxation experience should head to a top County Durham spa.

The Spa at Ramside at Ramside Hall Hotel, Golf and Spa near Durham has unveiled details of its Spring Slumber event, an evening of therapeutic sounds and floatation in the hotel's 25 metre swimming pool.

Participants will first immerse themselves in the

sounds of singing bowls created by SoulScape, a company which specialises in meditation, sound baths and organising retreats.

Guests will take part in a guided meditation experience, followed by a healing sound journey using sacred instruments such as symphonic gong, singing bowls, chimes, and gentle percussion.

And it will all take place in the spa's main pool, where people will be supported by floats to ensure they can drift into a state of calmness.

Spring Slumber takes place on Wednesday 13 May and costs £149 per person, which also includes a two course meal in the spa's acclaimed Fusion Asian restaurant.

Fay Pratt, Spa Director, said the experience was perfect for anyone dealing with stress or who just wanted to let go of outside pressures.

"This really is an incredible experience, aimed at helping people relax and enjoy the opportunity to shut out the outside world," said Fay.

"It's deeply restorative and leaves people feeling reenergised but blissful at the same time.

"We deliberately limit the amount of spaces available so it's not too crowded, which means we encourage people to book as soon as possible to avoid being disappointed."

Spring Slumber can be booked at: ramsidehallhotel.try.be/items/6840713716a26abe1400b938/spring-slumber

Anyone who attends is advised not to have a heavy meal or alcohol prior to the experience and is not suitable for anyone who is in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy or who suffers from epilepsy.

Sound baths are also not advised for people with certain medical condition and a doctor's advice should be sought by anyone who suffers ear infections, severe mental illnesses or severe osteoporosis.

Those who have had recent joint operations, are fitted with a pacemaker, are in advanced stages of cancer or have Ménière's disease or tinnitus should also take professional advice.

www.ramsidehallhotel.co.uk



Grand Hotel

GOSFORTH PARK

ELITE VENUE SELECTION



The Perfect Venue For Every Occasion

- 232 En-suite Bedrooms
- 14 Event Rooms
(Up to 600 guests)
- 300 Complimentary
Parking Spaces
- Chats Bar & Lounge
- Restaurant
- Private Dining
- Leisure Club

Scan the QR
code to visit
our socials



Call us on 0191 236 4111 or email sales760@theelitevenueselection.co.uk
Grand Hotel Gosforth Park, High Gosforth Park, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE3 5HN
www.theelitevenueselection.co.uk



Bethany Ainsley

Turning Awareness into Action

By Bethany Ainsley,
Founder of Nuvo Wellbeing and OptiMe

Supporting Mental Health Awareness Week (11–17 May)

We've made real progress in talking about mental health at work, but awareness on its own isn't enough.

I've seen first-hand how it can leave people more informed, but still overwhelmed and

unsure how to manage their wellbeing day to day. The challenge is that there's no one-size-fits-all approach, which is what makes this so complex. And while many organisations have come a long way, there's still more to be done.

That's why this next step matters. During Mental Health Awareness Week, the focus is on taking action, and that's where the real opportunity sits. Not in doing more, but in helping people take small, manageable steps that actually fit into their day. Because wellbeing isn't one-dimensional. It's influenced by multiple areas of life, our mental and physical health, our relationships, our finances and our overall sense of balance. Understanding that is often the first step to making meaningful change.

Through building OptiMe, I've seen how important it is to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach. People engage with wellbeing in very different ways, and when support doesn't

reflect that, it can feel out of reach or difficult to maintain.

So what does that actually look like in practice? For many people, it's about finding an approach to wellbeing that feels personal and realistic, something they can connect with, rather than something they feel they should be doing.

One thing I've seen make a real difference is shifting the focus from big changes to small, consistent actions. But the reality is, many people don't always know what those actions are, or where to start. If someone is feeling overwhelmed because of financial pressure, they may not know what steps to take. If they're stressed, they might have heard of mindfulness or breathwork, but not understand how it actually helps or how to apply it in their day.

That's where simple prompts, or micro nudges, can be powerful, guiding people towards small, practical actions they can take in the moment. A reminder to pause, to step outside, or to check in with someone rather than push through. These actions might seem small, but when they're repeated, they start to change how people feel and respond day to day.

I've also seen how powerful it can be when these actions are shared. Simple things like peer support, team challenges, or creating space for people to check in with each other can build real momentum. It makes wellbeing feel more visible, more normal, and something people are part of together, rather than something they have to manage on their own.

This is something we've thought a lot about as we've developed the next phase of OptiMe. With OptiMe 4.0, the focus has been on making those small actions easier, through personalised support and simple nudges that help people build habits in a way that works for them. Because if it doesn't feel relevant or fit into someone's day, it simply won't happen.

At its core, this is about protecting both mental and physical health. Not just in moments of crisis, but in how people feel day to day, how supported they are, how much pressure they're carrying, and whether they feel able to step back before things escalate.

As we approach Mental Health Awareness Week, the opportunity is simple.

For leaders, it's about making wellbeing visible in the day to day, through simple actions like encouraging regular check-ins, creating space for peer support, and role modelling behaviours like switching off and taking breaks. Because when people see it in action, they feel able to do the same.

For individuals, what's one thing you can do today that supports how you feel? It might be stepping outside between meetings, setting a boundary, or reaching out to someone. It doesn't need to be perfect, it just needs to be a start.

Awareness starts the conversation and helps people understand what they can do but it's action, taken consistently, that helps people access the support they need and feel better day to day.

bethanyainsley.com



FRIDAY 29TH MAY 2026 · 6:30PM

DURHAM V YORKSHIRE, T20 GAME

HOSTED BY STEVE HARMISON

BANKS HOMES RIVERSIDE, CHESTER-LE-STREET, COUNTY DURHAM, DH3 3QR

£1,200 PER TABLE OF 10



FRIDAY 26TH JUNE 2026 · 12:00PM

T20 DURHAM LEGENDS V PCA LEGENDS

SOUTH NORTHUMBERLAND CRICKET CLUB, ROSEWORTH TERRACE,
GOSFORTH, NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE NE3 1LU

£1,200 PER TABLE OF 10



Close House

THURSDAY 23RD JULY 2026

CLOSE HOUSE GOLF CLUB

CLOSE HOUSE, HEDDON ON THE WALL, NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE, NE15 0HT

TEAM OF 4: £500

THURSDAY 8TH OCTOBER 2026

LORD'S LEGENDS DINNER

STEVE HARMISON IN CONVERSATION WITH ENGLAND CAPTAIN BEN STOKES

LORD'S CRICKET GROUND, ST JOHN'S WOOD RD, LONDON, NW8 8QN

TABLE OF 10: £5,000

Email: Sbttestimonial2026@gmail.com

Mobile: 07710 324215

Mixing business with pleasure



Corporate Membership at Northumberland Golf Club

Golf has long been associated with the world of business, offering an ideal environment for relationship building, networking, and informal discussions.

It provides a unique setting in which to foster trust and rapport, while also allowing you to unwind and enjoy physical activity away from the pressures of the working day.

Northumberland Golf Club has established itself as a premier destination for corporate hospitality, enabling businesses to host clients on a championship-standard course with an excellent 15 bay practice range, before continuing conversations in the refined surroundings of the clubhouse. This combination of high-quality golf and first-class hospitality creates a memorable experience, whilst strengthening professional relationships in a relaxed yet prestigious environment, far removed from the constraints of a traditional boardroom setting.

Tony Rutter, Director of S V Rutter Ltd, highlights the value of this approach: "As with any business, I am always looking for ways to create memorable experiences for clients and contacts while ensuring value for money. We have explored a variety of options, but nothing compares to the Corporate Membership Package at Northumberland Golf Club. We are consistently impressed by the championship course, the practice facilities and the quality of the hospitality on offer."

Corporate Membership can also serve as an effective employee benefit, supporting staff wellbeing and engagement. Through informal rounds, internal competitions, and company golf

days, employees can stay active, build stronger connections with colleagues, and enjoy time away from the workplace. This contributes to improved morale and fosters a greater sense of community within the organisation.

Mark Armstrong, Managing Director of Todd & Cue, emphasises the broader business benefits: "We utilise our corporate membership for networking, meeting prospective clients, and conducting business in a relaxed and enjoyable setting. Beyond the course itself, the clubhouse facilities are integral to our experience—whether hosting client lunches or larger events. The high standard of service ensures every visit leaves a lasting positive impression. Aligning with a respected institution such as Northumberland Golf Club also enhances our company's reputation."

Northumberland Golf Club offers two tiers of corporate membership designed to suit varying business needs:

The Silver Partner Membership, includes 60 midweek rounds of golf, a corporate guest day for up to 40 attendees, discounted food and beverage, one individual membership, electric buggy vouchers, advertising opportunities and a four ball attendance at Sponsors Day.

The Gold Partner Membership, provides enhanced benefits, including two individual memberships, 200 midweek rounds a year, a larger guest golf day for up to 80 attendees, and the opportunity for two four-ball groups to enjoy Sponsors Day.

For full details on Corporate Membership contact Julie Stephenson on 0191 236 2498 or email admin@thengc.co.uk, or Tim Weightman, Commercial Director at Northumberland Golf Club to discuss bespoke corporate golf packages on 07850880830 or tim.weightman@hotmail.com



Healthier teams. Smarter businesses.

Your people are your biggest asset - but accessing timely, preventative healthcare is still harder than it should be.

Civia Health is changing that.

Through our **membership and app**, we connect your workforce to a more proactive, accessible model of health - combining preventative support, digital tools and opportunities to engage with cutting-edge clinical research.

Designed to complement existing wellbeing programmes, Civia helps employers:



Support workforce health in a more meaningful, measurable way



Improve engagement with preventative care



Provide access to innovation beyond traditional healthcare routes

Built for communities, delivered through employers, and designed to scale.

Partner with Civia to support a healthier, more engaged workforce.

jointhrive.civiahealth.com

info@civiahealth.com



Proud to support healthier communities across **Sunderland and the North East**.

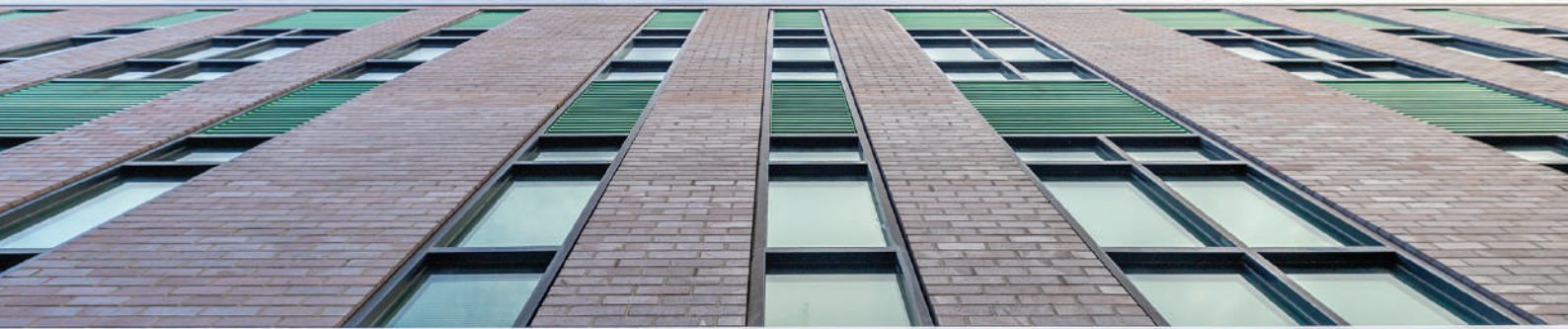


Empowering people today for a healthier tomorrow.



Secure. Trusted.
Always confidential.





Civia Health

Civia Health – Helping us all to live healthily

Sunderland firm combining community health and research.

It's a simple fact of life that many people reading this will, at some point in their lives, face a serious health condition.

It's also a fact that some life-threatening conditions are preventable... conditions such as obesity, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, heart disease and stroke. Many of these conditions are influenced by lifestyle, environment and access to support, and can often be better managed or reduced through earlier awareness, preventative action and appropriate care.

And one of the leaders taking this approach into local communities, is Sunderland-based Civia Health.

“When people think about clinical research, they often picture large hospitals or academic medical centres, but the future of healthcare innovation will increasingly be built in communities, in the places where people live, work and access everyday care,” said Civia Health CEO, Mark Campbell. “That’s one of the reasons why Sunderland is such an important location for Civia.

“Conditions we focus on affect working-age populations, families and communities across the UK. If we want clinical research to reflect real-world populations, it needs to be embedded in those communities, not separated from them. Sunderland is an ideal environment for this approach because it’s a city with a strong sense of community, a diverse workforce, and employers who are increasingly focused on employee wellbeing and preventative health. At the same time, this region faces a disproportionate burden of conditions like type 2 diabetes, obesity and high blood pressure, meaning there is both a need and an opportunity to improve access to research and preventative care locally.”



While research is a key part of Civia Health’s work, its model starts earlier focusing on engagement, education and access within the community. The company operates clinical research centres and community health hubs to support earlier engagement with health and improve access to care and research.

The aim is to support earlier awareness and ongoing engagement with health, helping individuals better understand and manage their risk over time. One of the best ways to do this is to make people fully aware of those diseases and give them the information which explains what they can do to improve their situation. This includes accessible screening, education and ongoing interaction rather than one-off interventions.



Of course, this is not only something which benefits the individual... it also benefits companies by reducing the levels of absenteeism, improving mental health and therefore increasing levels of productivity.

“By working with local employers, we can bring preventative health activity closer to the workplace by offering screenings, raising awareness of health risks and supporting individuals who may benefit from further evaluation,” adds Mark. “For businesses, this supports existing wellbeing strategies. For employees, it provides accessible insight into their health, and the option to consider participation in relevant research which helps ensure studies reflect working populations, not just those already engaged with healthcare services.”

It’s a win-win for people and businesses. People gain valuable information about their standard of health and how they can stay healthy. Businesses benefit from a healthier and more motivated workforce, and Civia Health and their valued partners such as Boots, gain key information about how they can formulate new health strategies and undertake targeted research. Over time, this also helps build stronger connections between communities and research.

“It is about building a more informed and engaged community over time. When individuals become familiar with clinical research, what it involves, why it matters, and how it is delivered, participation becomes a considered choice rather than an unfamiliar proposition. That benefits both research and the wider healthcare system.”

Through its Civia Membership, a community-based programme, it enables individuals to engage with their health through screening, education and ongoing interaction. Civia Health is looking for companies to share details of their Civia Membership with their teams and, if relevant support clinical study participation. Civia is engaging with a number of businesses in the area who are keen to offer this as part of their health and wellness programmes.

It is a Civia sponsored opportunity for firms to give something back to their employees and Civia Health will offer a 30-40 minute health check and, at the end, participants can join Civia Health membership and access tools and resources that can help them better manage their health. Over time, this approach helps individuals build a clearer picture of their health and become more confident in considering participation in research if appropriate.

Interested? If you would like your company to be involved in ‘Thrive with Civia’, contact Rebecca Granger at Thrive on info@civiahealth.com





REBUILD MOMENTUM

SPRING INTO STRONG

VILLAGE
HEALTH + WELLNESS

BOOK YOUR TOUR AND SEE WHAT'S WAITING
Explore more at VillageGym.co.uk



THE CARNIVAL EDITION JULY 2026



A vibrant carnival-inspired wellness experience, combining energy, fun and creativity with opportunities to relax, refocus and reconnect.

From beach sessions, Pilates and sound baths to creative workshops, treatments and high-energy fun, this is your space to reset, recharge and enjoy something truly different.

Sunday 5th July 2026

**The Grand Hotel Sunderland
Queens Parade, Sunderland SR6 8DB**

9am – 5pm (registration from 8am)

Scan the QR code for more information & to book tickets

[✉ info@activefamiliesne.co.uk](mailto:info@activefamiliesne.co.uk) [f The Wellness Collective NE](https://www.facebook.com/TheWellnessCollectiveNE)

[📷 thewellnesscollective_ne](https://www.instagram.com/thewellnesscollective_ne) [in The Wellness Collective NE](https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-wellness-collective)

[🌐 www.activefamiliesne.co.uk/the-wellness-collective](http://www.activefamiliesne.co.uk/the-wellness-collective)

Charity of choice:



Sponsored by:



Live music
sponsored by:



In Partnership with:





Ema Devereaux



Sit, stand and dance your way to fitness

How Warrior Generation Fitness is transforming wellbeing in communities and workplaces!

Warrior Generation Fitness is helping people of all ages and abilities get moving, socialise, and feel better, whether it be in community halls, offices, or even from a chair.

We spoke to founder Ema Devereaux to find out more.

Warrior Generation Fitness is a unique concept. How did it begin?

It all started during the COVID lockdown. I had been running classes before at various venues, but everything had to stop with the pandemic. When restrictions eased and the rule of six came in, I restarted with small outdoor sessions at home.

The people who came along were a real mix of ages and abilities.

Some didn't want to get down on the floor, some preferred low impact movement, while others wanted something more challenging and were up for high impact. That is when it really clicked, I realised everyone could take part in the same class, we just needed to adapt it to the individual.

Tell us about your sessions, starting with Armchair Warriors.

Armchair Warriors is our most popular class. It's a community-based session, there's no age limit, and the name was inspired by the idea of getting people out of their armchairs and moving more.

Although the classes were originally aimed at those over 50, we quickly found they attracted a much wider audience. This included younger individuals that could be recovering from injury or surgery, people living with mental health challenges, and anyone just looking to ease themselves back into regular activity. Everyone can join in, either standing or seated, depending on their ability.

We run classes across North Tyneside and Northumberland and will be expanding into other areas this year.

How do you support businesses and employee wellbeing?

For this we have our Office Warriors sessions. Some of the worst culprits for prolonged sitting are office workers. We focus on posture and getting people out of that hunched position and away from the keyboard. We work on mobility, gentle movement, and breaking up long periods of sitting to reduce issues like back, neck and shoulder pain, obesity, and type 2 diabetes.

The sessions are low impact, we're not trying to make people sweaty for going back to work, but we get the blood flowing and encourage movement and educate people on what stretches they should be doing whilst sitting at their desks and how often they should be getting up and moving.

Sitting is the new smoking, and it carries many of the same risks.

Are the sessions an enjoyable way to keep fit?

Our classes are designed to be fun. Two of our other community classes are Boogie Warriors and Rodeo Warriors, which are both dance inspired and low impact. Rodeo Warriors (Line dancing) is our newest class, launching on May 13th at Shiremoor Community Association Centre, we are offering both morning and evening classes to suit everyone and these classes are also available for private bookings and corporate events. We also offer a Water Warriors class, a low impact aqua therapy session aimed at people with hip and knee replacements.



Do you support people in other ways too?

Our instructors are passionate about what they do and tailor exercises to suit different abilities and age groups. They take time to chat with participants and build relationships. For some of our older attendees, we even carry out informal welfare checks if they miss a class.

We also host social events where people from all sessions can come together. Our next event is the Warriors Summer Social.

What kind of feedback do you receive?

The feedback has been incredible. Some of the comments we hear include:

"I am not out of breath when I get to the top of the stairs now."

"I can finally touch my toes."

"Every business needs this."

Is there a membership fee or an expectation to block book?

No. There are no sign-up fees, no subscriptions, and no requirement to attend every week. Prices are kept low in our community classes thanks to support from local charities and organisations.

To find your nearest class or bring Warrior Generation Fitness into your community or workplace, you can get in touch via our social channels (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn) or by contacting us directly via info@warriorgeneration.co.uk

0774 555 3573 www.warriorgeneration.co.uk

Warrior Generation is also looking for additional instructors who want to expand their existing schedule and become part of the team. Anyone interested is encouraged to get in touch.



Craig Robinson

Flowing through the unexpected

By Craig Robinson, Meditation Teacher (DipBSOM), Clear Mind Meditation

Most of us imagine that flow is something that happens when life is going well.

“When things calm down...”
 “When everything is sorted...”
 “When the timing is right...”

But flow isn't what happens when life is perfect. Flow is what happens when we soften in the middle of the imperfect.

This month, as I've been preparing to open my new wellness studio (Clear Mind Collective in Forest Hall) life has given me plenty of opportunities to remember that. The power being disconnected (and it still is!). A flat tyre at the exact moment I needed my car to transport supplies. A mountain of work squeezed into a very small window of time. None of it convenient. All of it a practice.

Where resistance shows up

When things go “wrong”, the first thing that appears is resistance. The mind tightens. The breath shortens. The body braces as if life should not be happening this way. We all know that feeling, the internal “No, not this.”

But finding flow allows something beautifully simple: Life flows the way a river flows. It moves around rocks, through narrow spaces, over obstacles. It doesn't argue with the landscape. It adapts.

And every time something unexpected happened with the studio, I noticed two choices:

Resist the moment. Or meet it.

A simple way to practise flow

If you want to experience flow in your own life, try this: When something unexpected happens – big or small – pause for just a few seconds. Feel your feet. Notice your breath. Let the shoulders drop. Soften the jaw. Sense the whole body as one field of awareness.

Then ask yourself gently: “Can I allow this moment to be exactly as it is?”

You don't have to like it. You just have to stop fighting it. That tiny shift is the beginning of flow.

Flow is not the absence of challenge. Flow is the presence of acceptance.

And you can choose it today, right in the middle of your busy, beautiful, unpredictable life.

www.clearmindmeditation.co.uk

Mental health & Menopause

Supporting women to perform at their best

By Cheryl Tanner, Menopause Fitness & Wellness Coach



Cheryl Tanner

Menopause is often talked about in terms of physical symptoms, but for many women, the mental and emotional impact can be just as significant, especially in the workplace.

Anxiety, low mood, brain fog, reduced confidence and disrupted sleep are all common during this transition. These changes can feel unsettling, particularly when they begin to affect performance, focus and self-belief at work.

Hormonal fluctuations, particularly changes in oestrogen, directly influence brain chemistry. This affects mood regulation, stress response, memory and cognitive function. So when things feel harder than usual, there is a clear physiological reason, not a lack of capability or resilience.

Many organisations have made positive steps, introducing menopause policies, training managers and encouraging open conversations. But awareness alone isn't always enough. Women need practical tools and strategies to manage symptoms and maintain confidence at work.

Simple strategies can make a real difference:

- Prioritising sleep and recovery
- Incorporating movement to support mood and focus
- Eating regularly to stabilise energy
- Creating supportive, informed environments

This isn't about lowering expectations, it's about enabling women to perform, contribute and thrive.

How I can help: I deliver practical, results-driven workplace sessions that move beyond awareness, helping reduce absenteeism, improve focus and productivity, and support staff retention.

Cheryl Tanner, Menopause Fitness & Wellness Coach
cheryltannerpt.co.uk



Scan me!..
 to find out more
 or book a session





NURTURE THE **WELLBEING** OF YOUR EMPLOYEES

Workplace sickness costs UK businesses billions of pounds every year.

A healthy workforce is key to successful businesses, and Everyone Active is here to support your business.

Whether your company is looking for a simple gym membership option or you wish to build a full range of benefits for your employees and their families, Everyone Active can tailor a corporate membership package to suit your company.

CORPORATE MEMBERSHIP PACKAGES IN SUNDERLAND

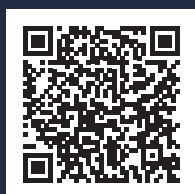
BENEFITS TO YOUR COMPANY

- ✓ Free health awareness days for all corporate partners
- ✓ A range of fantastic team building days
- ✓ Usage reports*
- ✓ Employee wellbeing progress survey
- ✓ Wellness days
- ✓ Corporate classes
- ✓ Health checks
- ✓ Work place wellness support

*On agreement

BENEFITS TO YOUR EMPLOYEES

- ✓ No joining fees
- ✓ Flexible packages to suit your company needs including monthly and annual discounts
- ✓ Free trial days
- ✓ Range of facilities and activities including state-of-the-art gyms, swimming pools and group fitness classes
- ✓ Memberships available for nationwide access to all Everyone Active centres
- ✓ We offer a range of activities for the whole family



For more information or to sign up, scan the QR code.

www.everyoneactive.com

**Sunderland
City Council**

everyone
ACTIVE



**HELPING YOU
BECOME YOUR
BEST VERSION
OF YOURSELF**

“

Healthier employees tend to have better concentration, higher morale and improved teamwork.

Ian Bradgate, Contract Manager

Everyone Active is aiming to keep everyone active

National company helping local and regional communities to stay fit.

Everyone Active may be a company you've not heard of, but they are one of the largest leisure management businesses in the UK. They're part of the enormous Sports and Leisure Management organisation which was founded in 1987.

So, you may not have heard of Everyone Active, but you will very likely have used some of the public leisure services which come under their wing because they currently manage more than 230 leisure facilities across the country and work closely with over 60 local authorities.

And one of those authorities is Sunderland, with Everyone Active looking after:-

- Sunderland Aquatic Centre (Stadium Village)
- Silksworth Tennis & Ski Centre
- Raich Carter Sports Centre (Hendon)
- Washington Leisure Centre
- Houghton Sports & Wellness Centre
- Bunny Hill Wellness Centre
- Hetton Community Pool & Wellness Centre.

"One of our main aims is to improve public health and wellbeing by encouraging people of all ages and abilities to become more physically active," said Contract Manager, Ian Bradgate. "We want people to follow the six pillars of wellness... movement, nutrition, sleep, recovery, brain health and social wellness. If everyone follows one of those pillars for twelve weeks, their overall health and fitness will improve. Do 150 mins Cardio work, 60 mins strength and 60 minutes balance/stretch. It's a lifestyle change but you will notice the difference."

Everyone Active is also focussing more attention on the corporate sector because companies are realising that a healthy, fit and content workforce is not only morally right, it can also help productivity.

"By encouraging employees to engage in regular exercise, it helps reduce stress, improves mood and increases overall energy levels. These improvements can lead to fewer sick days and higher levels of motivation in the workplace. We're involved with more and more companies where we provide health awareness days, team-building activities and flexible fitness programmes tailored to company needs. This ensures that wellbeing becomes part of the company culture. Healthier employees tend to have better concentration, higher morale and improved teamwork as well as a more

favourable outlook towards the company."

Many of you reading this will be interested in staying fit and healthy either as an individual or as a family or group. Everyone Active offers two levels of membership, YOU+ and YOU+ ULTIMATE. Both options aim to improve long-term wellness rather than just providing gym access.

YOU+ Membership focuses on personalised support across the six wellbeing pillars mentioned earlier: movement, sleep, nutrition, recovery, brain health, and social wellness. It provides unlimited access to gyms, swimming pools, and a wide variety of group exercise classes at your local centre. Members also get 14-day advance booking, access to the "Everyone On Demand" app with workouts, and personalised fitness plans guided by coaches.

YOU+ ULTIMATE Membership includes all YOU+ benefits but now gets two monthly guest passes, and access to additional facilities like saunas, toning suites, and HIIT (High Intensity Interval Training) classes. Additionally, YOU+ ULTIMATE offers discounts, health reviews, and access to a GP for information and 14-days priority booking.

One of the reviews, for example, studies your nutrition. It's called 'Rate My Plate'. You take a photo of your meal and then an expert will study it and tell you if it's nutritional... or not.

Being fit and healthy is good for you personally...and a fit and healthy workforce is good for your business. Why not offer Everyone Active membership as a perk or incentive for your employees. It's a win-win.

If you'd like more information about YOU+, or what your local leisure centre can offer, the best idea is to pop in and have a chat with some of the staff. They'll also let you know how your business can benefit.

Everyone Active...keeping you AND your business active.

You'll find further information on the excellent website www.everyoneactive.com



The struggle is real

By David Fairlamb, David Fairlamb Fitness

Looking after health, fitness, appearance and mindset sounds straightforward... eat better, move more, stay consistent and take pride in showing up and you'll achieve it.

So why do so many people struggle to do it all year round?

Because it's not about knowledge, it's about discipline, identity and control over your own thinking.

Motivation is unreliable plus it comes and goes. The people who stay consistent aren't more motivated, they have just stopped fighting with themselves and act no matter how they feel.

I believe if you are capable of doing it but consistently don't, you have to ask if you really want it enough? You need to be honest with yourself because when you truly want something you will continually push to get it.

For many people, the struggle isn't just physical, it's mental. It's built from years of habits, where comfort becomes the default and a mindset of saying 'I'll start tomorrow, I'm too tired, or it doesn't matter that much. Over time, those thoughts become automatic and begin to control your actions. When you add stress, responsibilities and constant distractions, it becomes easy to drift not because you're incapable, but because you've never fully taken control of your thoughts.

But remember you are fortunate to even have the ability to improve yourself, because there are people who, due to health, circumstances or life situations, simply don't have that option. What you see as effort, others would see as opportunity.

My advice on how to take control:

1. Treat it like a job (at least at first)

Stop relying on how you feel. You don't skip work because you're not in the mood. Apply that same standard to your health and over time it will become automatic.

2. Take control of your thoughts

Your thoughts drive everything. If your mind is full of excuses, your actions will follow. Learn to override that and do it anyway, if you want it enough you will.

3. Use perspective as fuel

You are well enough to take care of yourself. That alone is something many people don't have. Recognize that privilege and act on it. Not out of guilt but out of responsibility.

4. Do it for your future and your family

If you have children, this goes beyond you. This is about being there longer, being active with

them and actually enjoying life together. Your effort today shapes the years you'll be able to share with them.

5. Make quitting unacceptable

Anyone can quit, that's easy which is why most people do. Decide that quitting is no longer an option, you don't need perfect days, you need consistency.

6. Raise your standards

When you decide you're someone who looks after themselves, your actions align with that identity.

7. Focus on control, not perfection

Perfection is unrealistic but control is powerful. A controlled day is where you do what needs to be done regardless of your mood. These actions will start very quickly to become the norm.

8. Take pride in being strong

There is pride in discipline, in doing hard things when it would be easier not to. Strength is built in those moments when you choose action over excuses.

www.davidfairlambfitness.co.uk
www.climbahub.co.uk

David's summing up

Now is the time to take control of your life or you will end up continually drifting, be strong with yourself going forward.



Great fun,
safe,
non weight
bearing and only
£12
per class!



David Fairlamb

THERE AIN'T NO MOUNTAIN HIGH ENOUGH!

Supercharge your metabolism at the only
gym in the UK with a custom designed
VersaClimber hub...



David Fairlamb Fitness

Beyond the Surface: IPL Hair Removal at SELF

By Hannah Dodds, Founder of SELF Medical Aesthetics

There is often a quiet frustration that brings patients to consider laser hair removal. It's rarely just about hair.

It's about the time spent managing it, the irritation that follows, the loss of confidence in situations that should feel effortless. Like many aspects of aesthetics, what appears simple on the surface is often layered with personal experience.

At SELF, we approach treatments like IPL hair removal with the same philosophy that underpins everything we do: thoughtful, medical-led care that prioritises long term outcomes over quick fixes.

Hair removal has evolved significantly over the years, yet misconceptions still exist. Many people arrive expecting instant, permanent results after a single session. The reality is more nuanced. Hair grows in cycles, and effective reduction requires a consistent, tailored approach. It's a process, not a one off solution. Understanding this from the outset allows us to set realistic expectations and build trust with our patients.

This is where the quality of technology, and how it is used, truly matters.

At SELF, we have introduced the UltraLux IPL device into our clinic, not as a trend driven addition, but as a considered investment in safer, more effective treatments. What sets this technology apart is its ability to deliver consistent energy with precision, allowing us to treat a wide range of skin types while maintaining comfort and skin integrity.

But technology alone is never the full story.

Every patient who comes to us for IPL begins with a detailed consultation. We assess not only skin type and hair growth patterns, but also medical history, lifestyle, and long term goals. Some patients are managing hormonal changes, others struggle with ingrown hairs or skin



sensitivity. These details matter. They shape how we treat, how we pace sessions, and how we support the skin throughout the process.

This is what medical-led aesthetics should look like. Not rushed appointments or standardised settings, but care that adapts to the individual.

IPL, when performed correctly, offers more than hair reduction. Patients often notice improvements in skin texture, reduced inflammation, and fewer ingrown hairs. It becomes not just a convenience, but a confidence restoring treatment that simplifies daily routines and supports healthier skin.

However, it is equally important to acknowledge that IPL is not suitable for everyone. Honest conversations are a key part of our approach. If a treatment is unlikely to deliver the outcome a patient hopes for, we will say so. Protecting patient trust will always matter more than providing a service.

As we continue to grow in 2026, introducing treatments like UltraLux reflects our commitment to raising standards within the industry. It allows us to offer advanced solutions while staying grounded in the principles that define SELF: safety, education, and integrity.

The goal has never been to offer more treatments for the sake of it. It has always been to offer better ones.

For many of our patients, IPL becomes part of a wider journey, one that is not about perfection, but about feeling more comfortable and confident in their own skin. And that, ultimately, is what drives every decision we make within the clinic.

Because true results are not just seen, they are felt, in the quiet confidence of everyday life.

www.selfmedicaesthetics.com



We are currently living through the era of the “Infinite Glance”. Every day, we are submerged in a sea of sameness—AI-generated fillers, and low-effort content designed to be consumed in a heartbeat and forgotten in a breath. We see it, we swipe it, we forget it. My photography is designed to be the antidote to that liquid experience. I create work that is solid.

If you are tired of the scroll-and-forget culture, my work is designed for you.

I believe that the art of photography is more than just the act of capturing a subject; it is the craft of preserving a moment. Every photograph I produce is an exploration of light, shadow, and the profound weight of a single second. It is a rebellion against the “disposable image,” proving that a captured moment, when handled with craft, can hold its power for a lifetime.

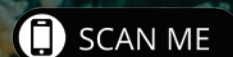
Commissions taken.

Workshops, training sessions and promotional work carried out.

Visit

www.MR-photography.co.uk
TikTok @mrphotographyne
Insta Mrphotographyne
Facebook MR Photography

info@mr-photography.co.uk
07862 16 22 76





Imagine a team that wears their heart on their sleeve

For over 10 years we've continued to build a passionate team that work tirelessly to help protect, serve and support our clients each and everyday. We see nothing but potential in our people, our community and you.

Imagine, together what we could do.

emgsolicitors

#ImagineALawFirm

