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INSIGHT

July 2026

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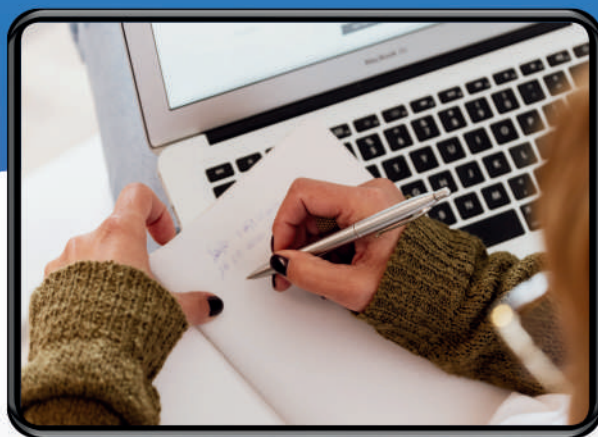


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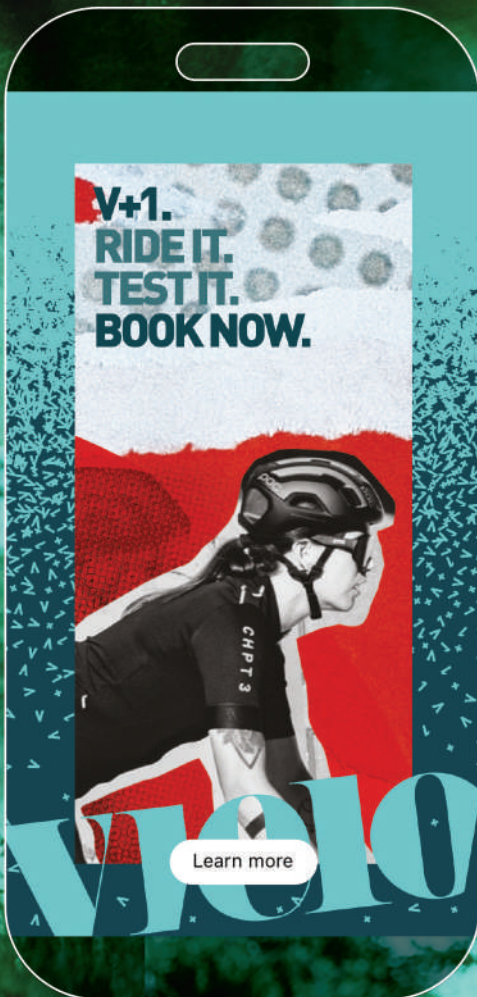
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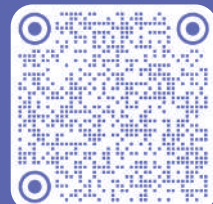


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Foreword

Welcome to the July issue of Northern Insight

As summer reaches its peak, July brings with it a renewed sense of energy across the North East. Our towns and cities come alive with community events, business innovation, cultural celebrations, and opportunities to connect, reminding us that the strength of our region lies in the people and organisations working together to shape its future.

This month's edition celebrates that spirit of progress. We shine a spotlight on inspiring local businesses, community champions, and forward-thinking leaders who continue to make a lasting impact despite the challenges that many sectors still face. From entrepreneurship and investment to health, education, sustainability, and the arts, our contributors share stories that inform, inspire, and encourage meaningful conversation.

We also recognise that success is built on collaboration. Whether you're a business owner, community leader, professional, or someone passionate about the North, we hope these pages provide valuable insights, fresh perspectives, and practical ideas that you can take into your own work and community.

As always, thank you to our readers, contributors, advertisers, and partners for your continued support. Your commitment allows Northern Insight to showcase the remarkable achievements and ambitions that define our region.

We hope you enjoy this edition and wish you a productive, successful, and enjoyable July.



Michael Grahamslaw, Publisher
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Till next month...

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Edwards Commercial Cleaning strengthens Yorkshire presence with new office

Edwards Commercial Cleaning has announced the opening of its new Yorkshire office at The Junction in Wakefield. This marks another significant milestone in the company's continued growth across the North East and Yorkshire.

The expansion reinforces Edwards' commitment to supporting clients across both regions while investing further in local presence, relationships and service delivery.

The new office will strengthen operational support and create additional opportunities for growth as the business continues to build on recent momentum.

Paul Edwards, Director at Edwards Commercial Cleaning, said: "This is an exciting step for the business and reflects the growth we have experienced over recent years. We have built strong relationships across Yorkshire and having a dedicated office gives us an even stronger local presence as we continue supporting clients across both regions."

Alongside continued growth, Edwards has also invested heavily in sustainability, technology and people development, ensuring high standards remain at the heart of the business.



APEX Unveils Vantage Communities

A major shift in how businesses connect, collaborate and grow has been unveiled with the introduction of APEX Phase 2: Vantage Communities, a pioneering regional platform designed to transform the way organisations access opportunity and build meaningful partnerships.

Following the success of the APEX membership community, founders have revealed this next evolution as a response to a rapidly changing business landscape where collaboration, connectivity and access to wider ecosystems are becoming critical drivers of growth.

Launched in January 2026, APEX is a collaboration between The Collective founders Claire Pickersgill and Julie Turnbull alongside the team behind Is This You? John Forth, Phil Gray, David Beharall and Steve Beharall, bringing together deep expertise across leadership, founder wellbeing, PR, business growth and community infrastructure.

The initiative reflects a growing recognition that the traditional business interface is evolving.

Networks, communities, investor groups and sector hubs can no longer operate in isolation and those that connect effectively have the opportunity to unlock disproportionate growth.

The unveiling comes during a period of strong momentum for the wider ecosystem. The Collective were recently named finalists in the prestigious BusinessIQ Awards for their impact on employee wellbeing and support for the North East business community, while Is This You? has secured a recent contract with FTSE 100 company Sage, reinforcing the growing credibility and reach of the organisations behind the platform.

Lumo named Best Small Employer at national Proud Scotland Awards

The rail operator Lumo has been recognised as the 'Best Small Employer' at the annual Proud Scotland Awards, Scotland's national LGBTQ+ celebration of the individuals and businesses that champion diversity and equality.

The positive news comes at the start of Pride Month, with Lumo this week announcing that it will be supporting more Prides this year than ever before. The company is proudly partnering with Glasgow's Pride, Stirling Pride, Pride Edinburgh and Pride in Gateshead. Lumo is also a headline partner for the Proud Scotland Awards.

As part of a commitment to creating an inclusive place of work for everyone, Lumo introduced gender-neutral uniforms for Customer Experience Ambassadors on its affordable and sustainable East Coast Main Line services last year. Trains on the route link Glasgow, Falkirk and Edinburgh with the North East of England and London.

The company also created around 100 new jobs with the launch of



its new West Coast Main Line service in May, which connects Stirling with London Euston. The new route also calls at Larbert, Greenfaulds, Whifflet, Motherwell, Lockerbie, Carlisle, Preston, Crewe, Nuneaton and Milton Keynes.

As part of the launch celebrations, Lumo partnered with Pride Radio, an inclusive station broadcasting across the UK. The radio station's Breakfast Show was broadcast live from a special 'Rail Roadshow' at Stirling Station, giving listeners the chance to win a range of exciting prizes and find out more about the new service. The bus has since visited Carlisle and Durham.



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The Alnwick Garden announces £400 million economic impact ahead of 25th celebrations

Internationally renowned visitor destination
The Alnwick Garden is marking a major milestone in the lead-up to its 25th anniversary, as new analysis highlights its significant contribution to the North East economy.

An independent report by Newcastle University Business School reveals that the attraction has generated £400 million in Gross Value Added (GVA) since opening, underlining its substantial influence on tourism, employment, and local supply chains across the region.

Established by the Duchess of Northumberland in 2001, the venue has since welcomed over nine million visitors, 80 percent of whom have travelled to Northumberland from outside the region. With tourism now worth an estimated £1.443bn to the local economy, this demonstrates The Garden's significant impact as a leading destination.

Speaking on the findings, Mark Brassell, CEO of The Alnwick Garden, said: "We are incredibly proud to be celebrating our Silver Anniversary, a milestone that means a great deal to us, and to the people of Northumberland."



"The Alnwick Garden is a charity, meaning all of our profits are proudly reinvested into the venue and our community programmes. The significant economic and social value captured in this report is therefore a testament to the hard work and dedication of our staff and volunteers, who are deeply committed to giving back."



Lockheed Martin UK unveils space jobs

The opportunity to be part of the fast-growing space industry is now on offer, with Lockheed Martin UK unveiling a range of exciting new job opportunities across the country.

The global defence giant has committed to building the space economy in the UK, with a long-term goal of creating as many as 2000 new, highly skilled jobs.

And as part of that commitment Lockheed Martin has announced its first tranche of vacancies with jobs in the North East, Helensburgh in Scotland and Havant in Hampshire.

The Newcastle-based roles highlight Lockheed Martin's commitment to the region, where it is already making great strides in helping it become a major player in space innovation.

This includes its support of the North East Space Skills and Technology Centre (NESST) based at Northumbria University which is due to open this autumn and offers a range of other space related initiatives to LM and the local industrial base.

The new opportunities are for both trainee and junior systems integration and testing engineers, along with roles for qualified system engineers, integration and test engineers, commercial managers, supply chain leads, cost analysts, trainer roles and senior project planners.

Rod Drury, Vice President for Global Space at Lockheed Martin said the first tranche of jobs showed the sheer variety of opportunities there was available in the sector and how many people already had transferable skills.

"This is about creating new jobs, building new capability, and ensuring the UK has what it needs to defend its critical assets in space," he said.



Lumo named best value rail operator

Innovative open access operator Lumo has been ranked the UK's top rail operator for value for money, while also securing a place among the top three long-distance UK operators for overall customer satisfaction, in the latest rail industry customer satisfaction survey results.

Lumo's top ranking for value for money reflects its long-standing commitment to offering affordable, high-quality rail travel, while providing a greener alternative to domestic air travel particularly on its fully-electric East Coast Main Line services connecting Glasgow, Edinburgh and Newcastle with London. More than three quarters of those surveyed felt Lumo offered value for money, higher than any other operator.

Also scoring an impressive 90% overall customer satisfaction score in the Rail Customer Experience Survey (RCXS), places Lumo firmly among the three highest-performing long-distance train operators for the period covering October 2025 to March 2026.

The RCXS is one of the rail industry's most important benchmarks. Carried out independently by the passenger watchdog, Transport Focus, it measures real customer experiences across multiple touchpoints including punctuality, onboard comfort and customer service.

Hull Trains, Lumo's sister company, also delivered an exceptional performance in the survey, achieving a 94% satisfaction score and ranking first place across the entire industry, further demonstrating the popularity of FirstGroup's open access rail operations.

Cover Story



L-R: Dougie Parmely (Facilities), Libby Walker (Community Associate), Yolandy Mario (Cleaning Supervisor), Leanne Bone (Community Associate), Tony Bell (Facilities), Jess Arkless (Community Associate), Sam Greaves (Centre Manager)

Hoults – Spaces with Soul

Spaces with soul? Meet the soul.

Anyone can give you a desk, a door fob, and a decent Wi-Fi signal. That's the easy part. What you can't bottle, what no spec sheet will ever capture, is the feeling of walking into a building where someone actually knows your name, remembers your dog, and has already sorted the thing you were about to email about.

That's the soul in "spaces with soul". And it doesn't live in the brickwork, though our buildings have plenty of stories of their own. It lives in the people who look after them, and you'll spot a few of them on this issue's cover.

A few, because there are a lot of us. Across Hoults Yard, Haylofts, Hypoint, and Blackfriars Court, our team keeps four very different sites feeling like the same thing: places where people are genuinely glad to come to work. No two of those buildings are alike — a former Maling pottery, a characterful conversion, a modern Gateshead hub, and a neighbour to one of the most historic spots in town — each asks something slightly different of the people who run it. The fact that they all feel like Hoults, wherever you walk in, isn't an accident. It's the team.

Some of the faces you meet have been here more than ten years. That matters more than it might sound. It means when something needs sorting, it's sorted by someone who's seen it before, knows the building inside and out, and cares how it turns out. It means the relationships run deep — they've watched businesses arrive as a one-person startup and grow into a team that needs a whole floor. That kind of continuity is rare, and you feel it the moment you arrive.

You'll meet our front of house and community team first, the reason each site hums, the ones who turn a building full of strangers into a building full of neighbours. They know when to put the kettle on, and when to make an introduction that turns into someone's next big client. Behind them, often before anyone's even arrived, is our facilities team: the quiet engine making sure the heating's on, the lights work, our heritage features are cared for rather than just admired behind glass, and our cleaning team who create every spotless morning. Looking after buildings like these isn't the same as managing a generic office block, it takes people who respect what these spaces were and are determined to keep them working beautifully for what they've become.

But the faces on the cover are only part of it. Our onsite security keeps everyone safe, day and night. The community events team turn a workplace into a genuine community, whether that's over pizza and a pint, or the chaos and joy of our annual dog show. And yes, even the accounts team, quietly making sure the unglamorous-but-essential bits are done properly, so nobody's day is interrupted by something that should never have been their problem.

This is the part that's hard to find when searching for workspace. You can build a smart building, you can match prices, and you can print the same words on a brochure. What you can't shortcut is a team who genuinely care whether your day went well, and who have been doing it long enough, together, to be very, very good at it.

“I'm lucky, I get to manage a team that genuinely loves what they do. A lot of us have been here for years, and you feel that the moment you walk in. We don't see ourselves as managing buildings; we see ourselves as looking after people. That's the bit you can't fake, and it's the bit I'm proudest of.”

— Sam Greaves, Centre Manager

So yes, anyone can offer you a workspace. But this isn't just a workspace. It's Hoults, four locations, one team, and a standard you feel rather than read about. It's the difference between somewhere you rent and somewhere you belong.

Come and feel it for yourself. We'll have the kettle on.

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Hay & Kilner launches enhanced 360-degree Private Family offering

North East law firm Hay & Kilner has strengthened its Private Family team with the appointment of leading family law barrister Kate Fenwick as Partner and Head of Family and Finance, supporting the firm's ambition to deliver a comprehensive 360-degree family law service for clients.

Kate joins Hay & Kilner during the firm's 80th anniversary year, bringing extensive experience from the independent Bar and a reputation for advising and representing clients in some of the most complex family law matters. Her arrival marks a significant investment in the firm's Private Family practice and its commitment to providing clients with seamless support across every aspect of family law.

As Partner and Head of Family and Finance, Kate will lead the development of an enhanced service that combines strategic legal advice, in-house advocacy, non-court dispute resolution and specialist expertise in international and high-net-worth family matters.

A specialist in disputes involving spouses, parents, co-habitees and other family members, Kate has particular expertise in international child relocation cases, matrimonial finance disputes and matters involving business valuations. Her practice spans complex children and financial remedy cases, including those involving allegations of serious financial and other abuse, cross-border jurisdictional issues, businesses, pensions and overseas assets.



Dome strengthens Leadership Team

Project and cost management consultancy Dome has strengthened its senior leadership team with the appointment of two experienced industry professionals as the business continues its growth across the North East.

The Newcastle-based consultancy has welcomed Tom Borsoi as Associate Director and Jenny Robertson as Senior Project Manager, bringing additional leadership, technical expertise and sector knowledge to support Dome's growing portfolio of projects and clients.

Tom joins the business with more than 15 years of industry experience, having recently worked on major infrastructure and regeneration projects including the refurbishment of the Tyne Bridge and the regeneration of Northumberland Street.

Jenny brings seven years of project management experience and joins most recently from Northumberland County Council, where she played a key role in the regeneration of Blyth town centre and the delivery of a range of strategic capital projects.

Founded in 2021 by directors Ross Hamilton and Andy Horsman, Dome has grown steadily to a team of seven, supporting clients across the public and private sectors.

"We are delighted to welcome Tom and Jenny to the team. Both bring a wealth of experience and expertise that will further strengthen our core service offering and support our continued growth," comments Andy.

"As we enter our fifth year in business, we are seeing real opportunities across a number of sectors. These appointments are crucial to ensuring we continue to deliver the excellent service our clients now expect, while growing the business in a sustainable and considered way.

"Our success has always been built on the quality of our people, and Tom and Jenny's appointments reflect our commitment to investing in experienced professionals who share our values and client-focused approach."



Muckle LLP strengthens construction team

Leading law firm for business, Muckle LLP, has strengthened its growing construction team with the appointment of experienced contentious construction specialist Claire Cutmore.

Claire rejoins the firm as a partner with more than 25 years of experience in construction law, having previously worked at Muckle 11 years ago before moving on to national law firms.

She joins one of the largest purely construction-focused legal teams in the North East. The eight-strong team, led by Adam Aston, head of construction, advises clients on both non-contentious and contentious construction matters.

The team supports projects from inception through to completion, helping clients with everything from drafting and negotiating contracts to resolving disputes when issues arise.

Claire's appointment adds further depth to Muckle's contentious construction offering at a time when demand for specialist legal support is increasing across the sector.

With regulations such as the Building Safety Act bringing greater scrutiny and responsibility to construction projects, businesses are increasingly seeking expert legal guidance to manage risk, avoid disputes, and resolve issues quickly when they arise.

Muckle's construction team has enjoyed another strong year despite ongoing economic pressures, billing more than £1m in the last financial year.

The team acts for a wide range of public and private sector clients, including Tees Valley Combined Authority, Teesside International Airport, McAleer & Rushe and Organon, the global pharmaceutical manufacturer based in Cramlington.



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A vibrant photograph of three young adults sitting at a restaurant table. On the left, a man with long dark hair and a mustache, wearing a red jacket, smiles while holding a fork over a plate of grilled chicken and salad. In the center, a woman with curly brown hair and red-tinted glasses, wearing a yellow turtleneck, smiles broadly. On the right, a man with curly hair and sunglasses, wearing a grey sweater with orange stripes, covers his mouth with his hands while laughing. The table is set with plates of food, including spaghetti with meatballs and a large salad. The background shows a restaurant interior with a red wall and a stainless steel range hood.

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Ammar Mirza CBE

It's coming home

By Ammar Mirza CBE

Every two years something remarkable happens.

Streets become quieter. Pubs become louder. Living rooms become mini stadiums. Complete strangers suddenly become experts in formations, substitutions and refereeing decisions. Hope rises. Expectations soar. Hearts inevitably race.

And, once again, we all start singing, "It's Coming Home."

Whether England ultimately lift the trophy or not almost becomes secondary. Football has an extraordinary ability to unite generations, communities and complete strangers in a way that very few things can.

Yet as I have found myself watching the World Cup unfold over the past few weeks, I have also been reflecting on something much closer to home.

Last month, whilst walking through

Sunderland in my role as High Sheriff of Tyne and Wear, I stumbled across one of the most fascinating plaques I have ever seen.

It commemorated Charles William Alcock.

Born in Sunderland in 1842, Alcock went on to change football forever.

He organised the very first official international football match between England and Scotland in 1872.

He was also the driving force behind creating the FA Cup, arguably the greatest domestic cup competition anywhere in the world.

Think about that for a moment.

Every year millions of people watch the FA Cup Final. Hundreds of thousands of clubs across the globe now compete in knockout cup competitions inspired by the very format that Alcock pioneered. Football has become a universal language spoken in virtually every country on earth.

And the architect behind much of that story first opened his eyes in Sunderland.

We often hear debates about where football was truly born.

Sheffield rightly celebrates the world's oldest football club. Others point to Cambridge, Nottingham or public schools that helped shape the early rules of the game.

But when it comes to the FA Cup,

international football and much of the organised structure that transformed football from a pastime into the global phenomenon we know today, the North East has every reason to stand proudly alongside that history.

It reminded me of something I have written about many times before.

The North East has always punched above its weight.

Whether it is engineering, shipbuilding, mining, science, innovation, music, sport or entrepreneurship, this region has consistently produced ideas and people that have shaped the world, often without receiving the recognition they deserve.

Sometimes we become so familiar with our surroundings that we stop noticing the extraordinary stories beneath our feet.

A simple plaque during a walk through Sunderland became a powerful reminder that history is often hiding in plain sight.

As England continue their World Cup journey, perhaps it is worth remembering that a small part of every international tournament can trace its origins back to our own region.

The first international fixture.

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A vision that changed global sport forever.

Not bad for a lad from Sunderland.

Football has always been about far more than ninety minutes. It creates friendships, strengthens communities, teaches teamwork, resilience and belonging. It gives children dreams, volunteers purpose and entire towns something to rally around.

Those values resonate far beyond the touchline.

As High Sheriff, I have seen firsthand how sport brings together people from every background, every faith and every generation. It creates healthier lives, stronger communities and opportunities that extend well beyond the final whistle. In many ways, football embodies exactly what our region is capable of when people come together with a shared purpose.

So, as millions once again sing, "It's Coming Home," perhaps we should pause for a moment and smile.

Because in one very important respect, it already did.

Long before football conquered the world, one of its greatest pioneers began his own journey here in the North East.

Sometimes the greatest stories are not found in the stadium.

They are found on a quiet street, on an overlooked plaque, reminding us that history, quite literally, began at home.

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.



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#MoreThanAShoeShop   

Stepping Back in Time

By Keith Newman

How The Brogue Trader is bringing traditional retail back to Newcastle.



In an era of self-service checkouts, online shopping and next-day deliveries, one new business on Newcastle's iconic Grey Street is doing something rather unusual by slowing things down.

At Barker at The Brogue Trader, customers are encouraged to sit down, enjoy a coffee or even a beer, have their feet professionally measured and take their time choosing the perfect pair of shoes.

It's a retail experience that feels refreshingly old-fashioned, and according to founder Chris Macnamara that's exactly the point.

"We've gone back a couple of decades to bring good, solid retailing back," he says as we sit among polished oak cabinets, Chesterfield furniture and rows upon rows of beautifully crafted British footwear.

"We measure every customer's feet; make sure they're getting the correct fit and spend time talking about how they'll wear the shoes. That level of service has disappeared from most places."

The new Grey Street store opened in February and has quickly established itself as a destination for men seeking quality footwear for life's important moments – weddings, graduations, black-tie events, promotions and job interviews.

For Chris, shoes have never just been about fashion.

"A lot of people only think about shoes for weddings or funerals," he smiles. "We try to encourage people to buy quality footwear that can be worn for lots of different occasions."

"If someone is coming in for a wedding, we'll talk about colours, what suits they'll wear, how versatile the shoe is. A good pair of shoes should become part of your life, not sit in a cupboard after the big day."

The store stocks around 130 styles from Barker, the renowned Northamptonshire shoemaker that has been producing footwear since 1880. Sizes range from four to 15, with half sizes and width fittings available, something increasingly rare on the high street.

But while the shoes are impressive, Chris believes the experience is what keeps customers coming back.

"Our customers are very broad," he says. "You might get a university graduate buying their first proper pair of shoes, somebody preparing for a job interview, a groom and his wedding party or a retired gentleman who simply appreciates quality."

"They're not necessarily wealthy people. They're aspirational people. They enjoy independent restaurants, independent hotels and businesses that care about what they do."

Chris certainly understands the independent business world. The Brogue Trader was established in 2013 after what he describes as a leap of faith.

"I'm just a normal working-class lad from a council estate," he says. "I don't really know why, but I decided I wanted to open a shoe shop."

"We managed to secure some funding and opened our first store in Cardiff. It was received incredibly well and from there we expanded into other cities."

Like many retailers, the business faced challenges during the pandemic, but as recovery began Chris started looking for the next location. Newcastle stood out immediately.

"I've always loved Newcastle," he says. "My wife and I would often come here for weekends. I enjoy wandering around city centres and seeing what retail they have to offer."

"What struck me was that there wasn't really anything like this here. Other cities had lost specialist gentleman's shoe retailers years ago and Newcastle deserved one."

Helping bring that vision to life is Head of Business James Taylor, who brings more than 30 years of retail experience to the store.

Having worked in independent fashion retail and previously managed menswear at Fenwick, James immediately recognised that this was something different.

"The thing that's always mattered to me is customer service," he says. "What we're doing here takes that to another level."

"We don't rush people. If someone wants to try several pairs of shoes, that's fine. If they want to sit and have a coffee while we talk through their options, that's fine too."

James believes many customers have forgotten what genuine personal service feels like.

"Some people haven't had their feet measured since they were children," he says. "When you take the time to do that properly and explain the differences between styles and fits, people really appreciate it."

"We want customers to leave feeling they've been looked after."

As we talk, it's easy to see why the store feels different. There is no hard sell, no rush and no pressure. Instead, there's an atmosphere more akin to a traditional gentleman's club than a modern retail outlet. For Chris, that's exactly how it should be.

"The customer is king," he says. "Come in, sit on the throne and let us look after you."

"Whether you're buying shoes for your wedding, your graduation, your first important interview or simply because you appreciate quality, we want it to be an experience you'll remember."

In a world where retail often feels increasingly impersonal, Barker at The Brogue Trader is making a simple but powerful statement: good old-fashioned customer service never goes out of style.

www.thebroguetrader.com



“

**I'm just
a normal
working-class
lad from a
council estate.**



Queens & Peacocks

A first-of-its-kind mastermind for women in business in the North East, recently sold out its inaugural event at Langley Castle.

Co-hosted by business growth mentor Laura Forsyth and Aly Johnson, founder of She's a Peach, the day brought together 27 women from across the region for practical, high-impact strategy around brand visibility, growth and connection.

The atmosphere was electric, with outstanding feedback and a waitlist of 15 already formed. Due to demand, the next Queens & Peacocks mastermind, Go Big, Finish Strong, will take place at Langley Castle on 17 and 24 September 2026.





With more than 40 years of experience in the property market, including 17 years leading RARE! At Sanderson Young, Ashleigh Sundin has seen the North East's prime market evolve in real time.

When people think of Ponteland, they often picture the grandest end of the market first: landmark homes, long driveways and headline prices. That reputation is well earned, with Darras Hall remaining one of the North East's most established prime residential addresses. But it is no longer the whole story.

What makes Ponteland so compelling today is not only its ability to produce £2 million-plus sales, but the strength and consistency beneath that level. Demand for high-quality detached family homes under £1 million has remained particularly strong, giving the area a depth many prestige markets struggle to sustain. Ashleigh Sundin says:

"What makes Ponteland unusual is that it offers both glamour and liquidity. Rightmove's latest sold price data shows Ponteland with an overall average sale price of around £565,000, with detached homes averaging close to £768,000 over the last year. Darras Hall sits higher still, with an overall average above £800,000, showing the continued strength of the premium market here. That mix is what makes it so attractive. You have genuine top-end prestige, but also a highly active family market below the seven-figure threshold."

That balance is central to Ponteland's appeal. Buyers are not drawn here by architecture alone. They are buying into a lifestyle that works: strong schooling, a polished village centre, leisure facilities, golf, green space and proximity to Newcastle International Airport all contribute to a location that offers both status and practicality.

At the very top of the market, the numbers continue to reinforce the area's standing. Recent Rightmove sold price data shows Runnymede Road with an average sale price of approximately £1.79 million over the last year, while detached homes there averaged around £2.18 million. Yet the more

revealing story is the market's breadth. Ponteland is not sustained by occasional trophy house sales alone, but by a broader pool of buyers seeking space, convenience and long-term lifestyle value.

That is what sets it apart from many other aspirational locations. In some markets, luxury can feel static. In Ponteland, it feels liveable. Families can access excellent amenities, community and connectivity without compromising on the quality and prestige associated with the address.

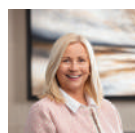
There are, of course, other exceptional places to live across the North East and Northumberland. Jesmond, Gosforth, Tynemouth and Corbridge all remain highly desirable. But Ponteland occupies a particularly strong position because it combines space, practicality and established prestige in a way that resonates powerfully with family buyers.

For Sanderson Young, that is where experience and local knowledge matter most. Prime property is never simply about price. It is about understanding the finer points of a market, the motivations of buyers and the lifestyle behind the sale. In Ponteland, that bespoke approach continues to make all the difference.

That is also where Sanderson Young RARE! stands apart. At the upper end of the market, success is rarely just about visibility. It is about timing, discretion, judgement and trust. Many of the most important conversations happen long before a property is launched publicly, and often long before a board is erected outside.

In this market, knowledge matters differently. It is not only about values, roads and buyer demand, but understanding intent: which owners may be preparing for a move, which buyers are waiting for the right house, and when a transaction needs careful handling rather than broad exposure. That level of intelligence is built over time through relationships, consistency and reputation, not data alone.

That is why RARE! continues to lead the conversation at the top end of the North East market. Not simply because of the properties we represent, but because of the way we represent them: with discretion, depth of knowledge and a clear understanding of what this market demands.



Ashleigh Sundin

0191 223 3500

ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk

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The Garden Cottage

High Gosforth Park, Gosforth

Price Guide: £1.95 Million

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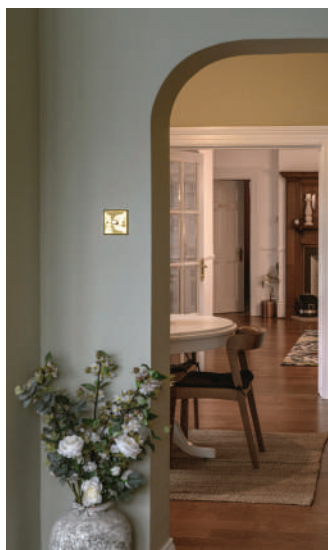


The Farmhouse

Newton, Stocksfield

Offers Over: £995,000





Eastfield House

Earsdon, North Tyneside

Price Guide: £1.35 Million

Eastfield House is an exceptional detached period family home in the coastal village of Earsdon, originally built circa 1890 and extending to over 4,000 sq ft. Set within a private plot of just over 0.6 acres, it offers a wealth of beautifully proportioned reception spaces, all finished to a high standard throughout.



Located in the sought-after village of Corbridge, Howden Close is a rare and exceptional North East home with elegant reception spaces, a superb kitchen, dining and family room, five bedrooms and circa three-acre landscaped grounds with tennis court.

Garden House is an attractive four-bedroom country home extending to 3,027 sq. ft., offering comfortable family accommodation, generous parking, gardens, summerhouse and greenhouse.

Howden Close & Garden House

Corbridge

Price Guide: £2.49 Million & £1.35 Million

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"Print still has a very important place in premium property marketing. Digital platforms are essential, but they often encourage people to move quickly from one listing to the next. With Collection by Sanderson Young, we wanted to create a publication people can spend time with, keep on a coffee table and read over the course of weeks."

-David Thirlwell
Head of Marketing

Friends of the Fog

Dr David Cliff, Gedanken

“Busy doing nothing, working the whole day through, trying to find lots of things not to do.”

The line comes from an old film song, but it could easily describe many modern organisations.

Few businesses suffer from a lack of activity. Emails fly across the organisation. Meetings fill calendars. Reports are generated. Dashboards are updated. Teams communicate constantly. Yet despite all this motion, progress can sometimes feel strangely elusive.

The problem is not always darkness. More often, it is fog.

Fog is different from darkness. In darkness we know we cannot see. In fog we can see just enough to convince ourselves that we understand what lies ahead, while much remains obscured. Shapes appear and disappear. Distances become distorted. Hazards emerge unexpectedly.

Organisational fog takes many forms. It can arise from excessive data, conflicting priorities, confused communication, unclear accountability, political manoeuvring or simple uncertainty about what comes next. Ironically, modern technology often increases the fog rather than reducing it. The challenge is rarely a shortage of information. More often it is the difficulty of distinguishing signal from noise.

One consequence is the phenomenon of being busy without being effective. Activity becomes a form of reassurance. We respond to emails, attend meetings and generate reports because these actions create the feeling of progress. Yet sometimes the most important question remains unanswered: are we moving in the right direction?

There is also a temptation to remain hidden in the fog. Clarity can be uncomfortable. Clear data may reveal declining performance. Honest conversations may expose unresolved tensions. Accurate feedback may challenge cherished



Dr David Cliff

assumptions. Fog offers a degree of protection from such realities.

The difficulty is that waiting for certainty rarely works. In business, certainty is often unavailable.

Entrepreneurs understand this instinctively. They rarely possess complete information before making a decision. Successful entrepreneurs are not fearless because they can see clearly. They succeed because they have learned to navigate despite limited visibility. This is where leadership becomes less about certainty and more about orientation. The leader's role is not to eliminate all ambiguity. Rather, it is to create sufficient clarity for purposeful action whilst acknowledging what remains unknown.

In my own work as a coach and consultant, I often think of coaching as a form of foghorn. When visibility is poor, a foghorn does not

remove the fog. It provides a point of reference. It offers orientation. It helps people establish their bearings.

Reflection, challenge, supervision, mentoring and coaching can all serve a similar purpose. They create moments in which assumptions can be tested, perspectives broadened and priorities clarified.

Perhaps the goal is not to eliminate the fog altogether. Some uncertainty is inevitable in complex systems and human affairs. The real challenge is to resist becoming a friend of the fog.

Clarity is not the absence of complexity. It is the ability to act wisely within complexity. The fog may never completely lift, but with courage, reflection and honest communication we can still find our way through it.

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FRIENDS OF THE FOG?

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but we can choose how we navigate the fog.
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Chartered accountant keeps it in the family to support business growth

A chartered accountant who set up on her own just over a year ago has announced that her husband has joined the business.

Laura Whittle from County Durham has worked in the accountancy sector for over 25 years.

But after welcoming two daughters, Grace and Sophia in 2019 and 2022 respectively, she decided to launch her own accountancy practice.

Now, just over 12 months into her self employment journey, Laura has confirmed that her husband, Rob, has joined the business.

Laura, who is ACA qualified and a fellow member, as she has held this qualification for over 10 years, said: "My first year as Laura Whittle Chartered Accountant has gone very well and I am now looking at growing my client portfolio.

"To do that I knew I needed additional support and rather fortuitously, my husband had left his engineering role and was keen to try something different.

"We had talked about him coming to join me, so we decided to give it a go.

"I know some people might say mixing homelife and work life can be detrimental, but we've found it really works. At the moment I am focussing on client management, while Rob is looking after the growth of the brand through networking, social media management and developing our website. It's really helping and gives us more of the work/life balance that we wanted, especially when having such a young family."



RG Corporate Finance continues growth with new Corporate Finance Executive appointment

RG Corporate Finance (RGCF), the North East-based, nationally focused independent corporate finance advisory boutique, has appointed Shannon Quinn as a Corporate Finance Executive as part of its continued growth strategy.

Shannon joins the firm from PwC's Newcastle office, where she worked within the Audit team and completed her ACA qualification.

A graduate of Newcastle University, Shannon achieved a BSc in Psychology & Mathematics Joint Honours and also completed both the ncl+ Award and ncl+ Advanced Business Basics Award alongside her studies.

Her appointment comes as RGCF continues to expand its operations across the North East, Yorkshire and London, supporting a growing national client base and increased deal activity across a range of sectors.

RGCF currently operates with a full-service corporate finance team of 22 delivering M&A advisory, Transactional Tax and Financial and Tax Due Diligence services to owner-managed businesses, private equity and corporates across the UK, with further recruitment planned during the year.

Shannon Quinn said: "RGCF has developed an excellent reputation as a highly respected and ambitious corporate finance boutique, with a strong track record of advising clients on significant transactions across a wide range of sectors.

"This is an exciting opportunity for the next stage of my career and I'm looking forward to working alongside such a dynamic and experienced team. RGCF's collaborative culture, national reach and client-focused approach made it a very attractive opportunity for me



Two Senior appointments at Hay & Kilner

Leading North East law firm Hay & Kilner has strengthened its commercial offering with the appointment of two new lawyers as it continues to invest in talent and support growing client demand across the region and beyond.

Jacob Ward has joined the firm as a Commercial Property Solicitor, while Peter Robinson has been appointed as a Consultant in the firm's Corporate team.

The appointments further enhance Hay & Kilner's commercial legal services as the firm continues its strategic growth during its 80th anniversary year.

Jacob joins Hay & Kilner after completing his training contract with a national legal firm. He brings more than two years' prior experience as a Commercial Property Paralegal having worked across a broad range of commercial property matters including landlord and tenant transactions, property finance, acquisitions, disposals and development projects.

In his new role, Jacob will advise a wide range of clients including business owners, commercial landlords and tenants, property investors, developers, and retail and leisure operators.

Peter Robinson joins as a Consultant in the Corporate team, bringing extensive experience from senior corporate roles across a number of North East law firms, as well as more recently running his own consultancy business.

Throughout his career, Peter has advised a broad spectrum of clients, from owner-managed businesses and start-ups through to listed companies, supporting them on mergers and acquisitions, strategic investments, business growth and corporate transactions.

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RMT Accountants invests in new London offices to build business recovery service in the south

RMT Accountants & Business Advisors is looking to extend its operations in the south of England after investing in new central London offices.

The Gosforth-headquartered firm has moved into new premises in Cavendish Square and is expecting to create a number of new jobs there as it builds its southern client base.

The new office will focus primarily on business recovery and restructuring service work, with experienced insolvency professional Manjit Shokar joining the firm as its head of recovery and insolvency for London and the south.

Manjit brings almost 25 years' professional services sector experience to his new role and is a licensed insolvency practitioner.

He began his career in the office of the Official Receiver and has held senior business recovery roles with a number of the best-known names in the professional services sector.

RMT Accountants is part of the Sumer Group, the UK's fastest-growing accountancy firm, which delivers professional support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across England, Scotland and Northern Ireland and employs over 3,000 staff across more than 80 offices.

Chris Ferguson, director of recovery and restructuring at RMT Accountants & Business



Advisors, say: "Our London team is already an important part of our restructuring offering, and our aim is to scale RMT's reach across these areas through the skills of our expert recovery specialists and by leveraging the additional resources that being part of the Sumer Group provides.

"Manjit's appointment is a key step in accelerating our growth plans in London and the south.

"His depth of industry experience and knowledge will help us deliver on our growth ambitions and we're very pleased to be welcoming him to the team."

Reeds Solicitors opens in Newcastle

Award-winning leading law firm Reeds Solicitors LLP (Reeds) has opened its newest office in Newcastle expanding its Mental Health Law services to communities in the North East.

The office is headed by associate solicitor Zac Sussex and led on the ground level by solicitor and Law Society Mental Health Panel Member, Melissa Ida Petty who joins the firm from Appletons Solicitors where she specialised in Mental Health Law and provided representation at First-Tier Tribunal.

Reeds' Mental Health Law team provides expert advice and representation to clients across England & Wales on a wide range of matters, including mental health tribunals, hospital managers' hearings, Section 117 aftercare, and CPA meetings.

Alongside Mental Health Law, the Newcastle office also provides Criminal Defence, Family, Prison Law, and Court of Protection services. This expansion in the North East follows the recent launch of the firm's new immigration department earlier this month.

Head of Mental Health Law, partner Sarah Griffiths-Jones, said: "The opening of our Newcastle branch is a fantastic milestone and clear evidence of our continued growth and development as a department. This achievement reflects not only the strength of our business, but also the dedication, commitment and hard work of everyone involved.

I would like to warmly welcome Melissa to the team and extend particular recognition to Zac Sussex, whose efforts, leadership and determination have been instrumental in making this expansion a reality. I have no doubt that like his Manchester branch, it will be a huge success and look forward to supporting the team every step of the way."

Jan Matthews, managing partner at Reeds Solicitors added: "We are excited to have opened an office in the North East and that Reeds solicitors continues its growth journey. Launching both this opening and new immigration services is testament to our hard working team across England & Wales. We look forward to supporting the community in Newcastle and its surrounds with all of their legal needs. We wish Zac, Melissa, and the wider team the very best in this new venture that we know will be a huge success."

The new office is located at Wansbeck Workspace, Rotary Parkway, Ashington, Northumberland, NE63 8QZ.

Johnston Carmichael marks 90 years with North East celebration

Founded in Scotland in 1936, Johnston Carmichael has grown significantly over the last nine decades and now supports clients across the UK. Its Newcastle office, which opened in 2023, has quickly become an important part of the firm's continued growth, building strong relationships with businesses and organisations across the North East.

Guests heard from John McCabe, CEO of the North East Chamber of Commerce, who used the occasion to highlight the importance of the region on the national stage, as well as the vital role professional services play in supporting regional economic growth and strategic planning.

The event brought together clients, colleagues and contacts for an evening that celebrated both Johnston Carmichael's Scottish heritage and its growing presence in the North East. Guests were welcomed by a traditional Northumbrian piper and enjoyed a mix of traditional North



Eastern and Scottish-inspired food and drinks throughout the evening.

Paul Shields, Head of Johnston Carmichael's Newcastle office, said: "This was a brilliant opportunity to mark Johnston Carmichael's 90th anniversary and to bring together so many of the people we work closely with here in the North East. The firm has achieved a great deal over the last 90 years but, for us in Newcastle, this also feels like the start of an exciting next chapter. We're really proud of the progress we've made so far and we're looking forward to continuing to grow our team and our client base."

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INTERESTING TIMES

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

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

ONE SUBJECT | THREE TIPS



There's a version of running a business that looks like success from the outside but feels like survival from the inside. Long hours, full diary, plenty of turnover. And yet somehow the owner is still the bottleneck, still underpaid, and still not sure where it's all heading. The difference often comes down to a few habits. Here are three worth looking at honestly.

1. Make decisions quickly.

Not recklessly. But successful owners know that sitting on a decision is itself a decision, and usually the worst one. A difficult conversation kept getting pushed back, a client you know isn't right but haven't let go of. Indecision has a cost, it just rarely shows up on a P&L. Get comfortable making the call on imperfect information, then adjust.

2. Protect your time like it's your most valuable asset.

Because it is. Unlike turnover, you can't grow it or replace it. Owners who make serious progress get ruthless about where their time goes. That means saying no more than feels comfortable, delegating what doesn't need them specifically, and protecting time to think rather than just do. If every hour is already spoken for, there's no space to work on the business rather than in it.

3. Pay yourself properly.

More owners get this wrong than you'd think. Taking what's left at the end of the month isn't a salary, it's a symptom. Treating your own pay as a commitment rather than an afterthought forces an honest question: is the business actually profitable, or just busy? The answer matters more than most owners want to admit.

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INTERESTING QUOTE

Get to 51 percent certainty, make the decision quickly, and be at peace with it

Steven Bartlett

JUST ONE THING

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

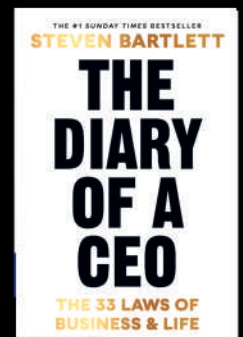
Look at the last three decisions you delayed. Not the ones you made, the ones you kept putting off. What were you actually waiting for? Chances are, certainty that was never going to arrive. Pick one this week and make the call.

HAVE A READ

The Diary of a CEO
Steven Bartlett

A useful read for any owner serious about building something that lasts. Bartlett covers the habits and decisions that separate people who talk about success from those who build it. Blunt, but worth it.

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Tier One Capital help shine a light on Sport Newcastle's Unsung Hero Awards

Newcastle-Upon-Tyne based wealth and fund management specialists, Tier One Capital has again helped recognise and celebrate the people at the heart of grassroots sport from across the North East region.

Tier One were main award sponsors of the Sport Newcastle Unsung Hero 2026 awards held at the home of Newcastle Redbolls, Kingston Park - where volunteers, coaches, officials and individuals from the region came together and were presented with their special recognition awards.

The Sport Newcastle Unsung Hero Awards help

to shine a light on the people who tirelessly dedicate their time and energy to grassroots sport and are the lifeblood of local sport, often working quietly behind the scenes to create opportunities for others to participate, compete and succeed.

Hosted by the Sport Newcastle volunteer committee, the special awards evening was attended by a wide range of athletes, volunteers, businesses and supporters from across the region to recognise those who have gone above and beyond for sport in our community.

Underlining the company's commitment to contributing to the local community and encouraging involvement Ian McElroy, Chief Executive, Tier One Capital presented Unsung Hero awards to Steve Beatty Snr, Cramlington Rockets RLFC; Will Maddison, Cramlington Rockets RLFC and Rockets Community Foundation and Steve Abbott, Northumberland Badminton and Tyneside Badminton Centre.

Ian, said "We are so proud to continue our long-term support for Sport Newcastle and the inspiring work they do to champion the next generation of local sporting heroes.

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

"The Unsung Hero awards typify what Sport Newcastle stand for and the awards really showcase what grassroots sport and the many dedicated people who give up their time to help young sports people achieve their dreams."

Mathew Squires, Sport Newcastle Trustee and Head of Fundraising, said, "The Unsung Hero awards honour and celebrate the remarkable

individuals who are the lifeblood of local sport.

"The continued support we receive from our partners like Tier One Capital enables us to not only to recognise and honour outstanding achievements, but allows us to back aspiring athletes, proactive community projects, ambitious clubs and forward-thinking coaches.

"It also allows us to showcase the very best of sport across the North East, from rising stars to the local heroes who inspire us all.

"Our sponsors help us to support the ongoing work of Sport Newcastle and distribute grants to promising athletes and grassroots sports organisations across the region.

"This is an evening to celebrate people that make it happen," he added.

The overall winners of the Unsung Hero awards were Danielle Dickinson, Little Swimming Company; Jonathan Poulter, Serenity BJJ; Andrew Clark, Blyth Cricket Club; Hayden McDonald, Sunderland Rowing Club; Jenny O'Neil, Eagles Community Foundation and South Tyneside Basketball Club; Harriet Lee, Tynemouth Amateur Swimming Club; Emily Betham, Tynemouth Swimming Club; Steve Beatty Snr, Cramlington Rockets RLFC; Will Maddison, Cramlington Rockets RLFC and Rockets Community Foundation and Steve Abbott, Northumberland Badminton and Tyneside Badminton Centre.

The sponsors and also long term supporters of Sport Newcastle on the night were SOS Group Ltd, GLL Sports Foundation, JC Events, Ward Hadaway and Central Employment.

www.tieronecapital.co.uk





HMRC announces major change to foreign branch tax rules

HMRC's proposed reforms to the foreign branch exemption regime could have important consequences for UK businesses expanding overseas. Andrew Fitton, Corporate and International Tax Partner at UNW, explains what is changing and why it matters.



UK companies expanding overseas have often chosen to do so through foreign branches, in part because of the tax reliefs and flexibility they can provide. HMRC's proposed changes to the foreign branch exemption rules may now prompt some groups to rethink that approach.

The profits and losses of overseas branches of UK companies are currently taxed, and reported for tax purposes, both in the territory in which the branch operates and in the UK as part of the company's wider UK corporation tax position, unless the company has elected for the foreign branch exemption.

HMRC has announced that the foreign branch exemption will no longer be optional and will instead become mandatory for accounting periods beginning on or after 1 January 2027. For most groups, this means overseas branch profits and losses will sit outside the UK tax net. For certain oil and gas activities, the change will apply earlier from 1 September 2026.

Historically, branch structures could be attractive in the early years of overseas expansion because foreign trading losses – and in some cases significant overseas capital expenditure – could help support the UK tax position.

The proposed changes alter that dynamic. HMRC's paper specifically references relief for foreign losses and capital allowances as part of the rationale for the reform. As those reliefs fall away, some of the traditional tax advantages of operating through a branch structure may reduce or disappear altogether.

The announcement could also have implications for UK tax incentives. Groups with overseas branches involved in innovation activity may find the UK tax value of that activity is lower than previously expected. Early commentary suggests the reform could reduce the benefit of some UK R&D claims where relevant expenditure is incurred through an overseas permanent establishment.

Although draft legislation has not yet been published, finance teams may want to begin considering the potential impact now – particularly where overseas expansion, branch structures or international R&D activity form part of wider growth plans.

For some groups, the changes may prompt a fresh review of whether a branch structure remains the right long-term fit, or whether operating through a subsidiary could now offer a more effective alternative.

If you would like to discuss how the proposed changes could affect your business or international structure, please contact Andrew Fitton at andrewfitton@unw.co.uk



Chris Moir, associate director and head of personal tax at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors

Action needed by business owners with new Inheritance Tax rules now in force

By Chris Moir, associate director and head of personal tax at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors

The start of the new financial year finally brought the long-awaited and much-debated changes to the availability of Business Property Relief and Agricultural Property Relief for Inheritance Tax (IHT) purposes into force.

The new rules mean that, as of 6 April 2026, when an individual passes away with assets that qualify for Business Property Relief or Agricultural Property Relief, the rate of relief will only be 100% on the first £2.5m of value attributable to those assets.

For qualifying assets that exceed £2.5m, the rate of relief is reduced to 50% on the excess over and above the £2.5m allowance, which will result in an effective rate of Inheritance Tax of 20%.

For any qualifying assets passing to a surviving spouse or civil partner, any unused allowance will also transfer to that individual, meaning that a joint estate can benefit from up to £5m of relief.

The focus for much of the debate around these changes has been the specific impact they are likely to have on the farming community, but what has perhaps been a little lost has been that this isn't the only business sector in the spotlight.

In fact, the owners of any trading business

are just as likely to be affected by the new rules as those in the agricultural sector, and now that it is clear that there is likely to be a long-term financial impact for those that don't plan properly in response to them, all business owners need to be reviewing their circumstances.

Part of this will be succession planning, which as ever comes with its own complications whether you are a family-run business or not.

Potential successors in a family business may not yet be ready to take on more senior roles, or indeed may have no interest in running the business at all.

Where a feasible succession plan cannot be put in place, the potential sale of the business may be a more likely outcome than passing it on.

We have been having conversations with clients about potentially bringing business sales forward, or how the passing on of business assets may impact beneficiaries in the longer term from a capital gains tax perspective, where a gain may be 'rolled over' to a beneficiary.

Where a business owner intends to retain their interest and pass this on via their wills, the business' future liquidity becomes paramount where other assets in the individual's estate are insufficient to settle any IHT due.

Business owners should be taking steps in advance to ensure that any IHT can be funded, and we are helping our clients evaluate what those potential liabilities may look like.

As part of the process, it makes sense to review any existing wills and any relevant shareholders agreement or partnership agreements that are in place, to ensure that these are up-to-date and are aligned with the recent legislative changes.

If there is any IHT to pay on business or agricultural assets, an election can be made by executors to settle the tax in instalments over a ten-year period. HMRC have confirmed that no interest will be charged on such arrangements.

Taking informed, professional advice is an essential first step for business owners and their families, so that they fully understand what their personal IHT position now looks like.

In addition, from 6 April 2027, new rules are due to come into force that will mean unspent private pension pots and some death benefits will be enveloped within an individual's total estate value for IHT purposes. These changes also need reviewing by a qualified advisor and as part of the planning process.

By ensuring you're fully aware of the evolving situation in the round, you can start to prepare a suitable plan for your and your family's future.

To discuss your personal Inheritance Tax situation, please contact Chris Moir at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors on 0191 256 9500 or via advice@r-m-t.co.uk



Decisive moments

By Peter Cromarty, Founder and Non-Executive Chairman at CCBS

What World Cup football can teach us about taking action at the right time

For many businesses, summer presents a familiar tension.

On one hand, it's a period where businesses need to keep moving forward, whether that's completing transactions, securing opportunities or simply maintaining momentum in day-to-day operations. On the other, it's a time when decision-making can slow, as stakeholders take leave, processes stretch, and momentum becomes harder to maintain.

It's in that tension that outcomes are often decided.

Remember the 2010 World Cup final? Spain and the Netherlands were still goalless deep into extra time, with penalties looming, when Andrés Iniesta struck in the 116th minute. In one moment, he secured Spain's first ever World Cup, deciding the outcome of an otherwise finely balanced game and defining an entire era for the team.

That is the nature of decisive moments. Long periods where little seems to change, followed by a narrow window where the right action makes all the difference. Hesitation, in those moments, can be the difference between progressing and missing out.

In business, the same dynamic plays out through timing pressure.

The summer slowdown effect

In practice, July and August tend to compress timelines.

Businesses are often working to complete transactions ahead of August disruption, meet tax or funding deadlines and act on opportunities that will not wait until September. At the same time credit processes don't accelerate, key decision-makers are less available and transactions can lose pace at critical stages.

The result is a growing number of situations where timing, not viability, becomes the constraint. In many cases, those opportunities do not come around twice.

When timing becomes the real risk

In these situations, the instinct is often to pursue a single long-term funding solution.

But waiting for the right facility can introduce risk of its own:

- deals stall while approvals are finalised
- negotiating positions weaken
- opportunities fall away altogether

It is often the case that the delay itself creates the problem. In business, missing the right moment can carry a real cost.

Where short-term funding fits

Short-term secured lending is designed for these circumstances.

Not as a replacement for long-term finance, but as a tool that allows businesses to:

- act within the required timeframe
- complete transactions with certainty
- separate immediate decisions from longer-term funding structures

In simple terms, it allows the deal to move at the pace required, rather than waiting for funding to catch up.

From fallback option to planned strategy

There is still a perception that short-term lending is something to consider only when options are limited.

In reality, it is often most effective when used as part of a planned approach. Introducing

short-term funding at the right point can help businesses maintain control over timing, protect value in negotiations, and avoid unnecessary pressure to commit to long-term structures too early.

Keeping business moving

Summer doesn't reduce the number of opportunities available to businesses. If anything, it just increases the pressure to act on them quickly.

In any competitive environment, outcomes are often shaped by how well those moments are recognised and acted upon.

Short-term secured lending provides a practical way to do that, ensuring that timing supports the deal rather than holding it back.



Peter Cromarty

Peter Cromarty is a commercial finance expert and founder of CCBS, with more than 35 years' experience supporting SMEs and mid-corporate businesses. He specialises in structuring tailored funding solutions and advising on cash flow, refinancing and growth, helping clients navigate complex funding situations and deliver practical, time-sensitive outcomes.

www.ccbbs.co.uk | 0191 211 1471



L-R: Simon Hook, Hydeam Sulton and Stephen Harris

Strong momentum for Clive Owen LLP as it continues along its strategic growth journey

**Leading independent accountancy, business and tax advisory firm
Clive Owen LLP is continuing its ambitious growth trajectory, strengthening its presence across the North East and Yorkshire through investment in people, expanded service offerings and a growing regional footprint.**

The firm, which is headquartered in Darlington, but also has offices in York, Durham, Middlesbrough and, most recently, Newcastle, has enjoyed continued success in recent years.

Impressively, Clive Owen LLP has achieved significant growth on Tyneside, despite launching its first Newcastle office less than two years ago.

Since opening with a single member of staff, the office has grown rapidly to a team of 13 with additional roles being created to support continued expansion, and has recently relocated its Newcastle team to Gainsborough House, on Grey Street, reflecting increasing demand for the firm's services across the region and its long-term commitment to the city.

Stephen Harris, Tax Partner and Newcastle Office Lead, said: "Our growth in Newcastle has exceeded expectations since launching in 2024. What started with a skeleton team has quickly developed into a strong and ambitious office serving clients across the region.

"The move to Grey Street is a significant milestone for the firm and a clear statement of intent. Newcastle is an important business hub, and we are committed to continuing to invest in the city, our people, and the services we provide."

This latest investment forms part of Clive Owen LLP's wider strategic growth plans across the North of England, including plans to further enhance its presence in Darlington, amid further, recent successes throughout the firm.

In February, Clive Owen LLP was recognised as Mid-Tier Firm of the Year, with York office Partner, Phillipa Symington, named Partner of the Year at the prestigious 2026 Yorkshire Accountancy Awards.

These latest award wins marked a firm-wide year of growth and innovation, driven by strategic appointments, internal promotions and continued investment in an enhanced suite of specialist services.

Alongside geographic expansion, the firm has broadened its specialist expertise through the introduction of new, dedicated service lines. The launch of dedicated Consulting and VAT service lines marks an important milestone in the firm's evolution, enabling clients to access specialist expertise across a wider range of strategic, operational and compliance matters.

Associate Partner, Brad Haywood leads the firm's expanding consultancy service line, which includes finance system and ERP migration, outsourced FD and strategic board-level support. It is designed to work seamlessly alongside the firm's existing audit, tax and advisory teams, ensuring clients receive joined-up, consistent support as their businesses evolve.

He said: "There has been a real shift in how businesses access expertise, particularly in the mid-market. Rather than recruiting internally, many organisations now want experienced support that can deliver change efficiently and leave them stronger for the future. That's exactly where our consulting offering sits."

Further strengthening its offering to clients, the firm has recently welcomed experienced VAT specialist Hydeam Sulton as VAT Partner, who leads Clive Owen LLP's VAT and Indirect Tax provision, supporting clients in managing and optimising their VAT position while growing the firm's specialist VAT services.

Hydeam said: "VAT is a notoriously complex area of tax, and I believe there is significant value I can bring to new and existing clients across a range of sectors. My aim is to build a strong, specialist team around me over time to support this growth."

These latest developments reflect Clive Owen LLP's long-term commitment to supporting businesses across the region with practical, partner-led advice that helps organisations grow, adapt and succeed.

"We have seen significant growth across the entire business over recent years, as demand for our services continues to increase," says Kevin Shotton, Joint Managing Partner.

"The North East and Yorkshire has a vibrant and resilient business community, and we are proud to be supporting organisations of all sizes through every stage of their journey. Our growth is a direct result of the trust our clients place in us, combined with the dedication and expertise of our people."

"We are committed to investing in the communities we serve and ensuring clients have access to high-quality advice delivered by local specialists. As business owners ourselves, we understand the challenges and opportunities facing privately owned businesses in our regions.

"Our clients are operating in an environment where specialist advice has never been more important," continues Simon Hook, Joint Managing Partner.

"The addition of Consulting and VAT services allows us to offer deeper expertise in areas where businesses increasingly need support. Whether organisations are pursuing growth opportunities, navigating regulatory change or seeking greater operational efficiency, we can provide the insight and guidance required to help them achieve their objectives."

"One of our greatest strengths is our ability to bring together specialists from across the business to provide joined-up advice. Clients benefit from access to a broad range of expertise under one roof, delivered by people who take the time to understand their goals and challenges."

With a growing presence across the North and an enhanced portfolio of specialist services, the future is looking promising for Clive Owen LLP as it continues along its strategic growth journey.

www.cliveowen.com



L-R: Angela Mikola, Jonathan Doyle and Phillipa Symington

The most expensive sentence in business

By Mark Brown, Director, L4 Financial

In nearly every business there is a process that nobody particularly likes, nobody would design from scratch, yet everyone continues to follow.

Ask why it exists and you will often hear the same answer...

"We've always done it that way."

It sounds harmless enough. In reality, it can be one of the most expensive sentences in business. Over the years I have worked with businesses across a range of sectors and one thing has become increasingly clear. Very few organisations suffer from a lack of effort. Most people are working hard and want the business to succeed.

The challenge is that effort and effectiveness are not always the same thing.

I recently worked with a business where members of staff spent several hours each month producing reports. The information was accurate, the process was understood and everyone involved approached it professionally.

There was just one problem. Almost nobody used the reports to make decisions.

The process had evolved gradually. A report requested years earlier had become part of the monthly routine. Additional checks were added. More information was included. New spreadsheet tabs appeared. What began as a useful exercise slowly became an accepted way of working.

Nobody questioned it because it had always been done that way.

I have seen similar examples elsewhere.

Customer orders entered three separate times into three separate systems before an invoice is eventually raised.

Managers attending meetings because they have always attended them, despite no longer having a meaningful contribution to make.

Teams maintaining separate spreadsheets because they no longer trust the information held elsewhere.

Processes created to solve problems that disappeared years ago.

Individually these things seem insignificant. Collectively they can consume hundreds of hours every year.



Mark Brown

The cost rarely appears as a visible line on a set of accounts. Instead, it shows itself in slower decision-making, duplicated effort, frustrated employees and opportunities that never quite get pursued because people are too busy dealing with unnecessary work.

Many businesses unknowingly build processes around individuals rather than systems. Knowledge becomes concentrated in a handful of people. Workarounds become embedded in day-to-day operations. Everything functions perfectly well until somebody leaves, retires or is unexpectedly absent.

Only then does the weakness become visible.

The irony is that businesses often look externally for opportunities to improve performance whilst overlooking inefficiencies hiding in plain sight.

Whenever I spend time with a leadership team, I tend to ask a simple question... "What frustrates people the most?"

The answer usually arrives quickly. It might be a report. A system. A meeting. A process that everyone complains about but nobody has challenged.

That frustration is often a clue.

The businesses that address these issues successfully are rarely the ones with the biggest budgets. More often, they are the organisations willing to step back, challenge accepted practices and make time to work on the business rather than simply in it.

Not every process should be removed. Not every system needs replacing. However, continuous improvement begins with curiosity and a willingness to challenge assumptions.

The best leadership teams regularly ask simple questions.

Why do we do this? Who benefits from it? If we were starting again today, would we create it this way? The answers can be surprisingly revealing.

Most businesses do not need wholesale transformation. They simply need the courage to challenge assumptions that nobody has questioned for years.

Because the greatest cost in business is often not a bad decision. It is continuing with an old one.

L4 Financial Management

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

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

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- Developing finance teams, systems and financial discipline



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FW Capital reaches landmark £400 million funding milestone in England

More than £400 million has been invested by FW Capital across the North and South West of England, driving economic growth, encouraging innovation and boosting property development.

These investments have unlocked a further £592 million in private sector co-investment, amplifying the overall economic impact to nearly £1 billion and significantly boosting local communities and regional productivity.

Since launching its first fund in 2010, FW Capital has backed over 870 businesses across England with funding designed to unlock growth. The impact of this investment has seen 15,000 jobs created and safeguarded, with the majority of activity in the manufacturing and construction sectors.

As specialists in delivering finance to property developers, the funding has also delivered £90 million to support residential and commercial developments across the North East of England. This has resulted in close to 300 houses being built along with over 30,000 sq m of commercial development. In total 822 jobs have been created or safeguarded as a result of this investment.

Joanne Whitfield Fund Director at FW Capital added: "Reaching this £400 million milestone is a testament to the hard work of our whole team. By combining public sector vision and private sector agility, we are actively unlocking economic growth across multiple sectors. A key part of this is our strong footprint in the North East, Tees Valley and South Yorkshire. As we continue to grow and meet demand with new funds, we remain focused on delivering flexible

finance to SMEs, providing the foundations they need to scale while keeping innovation at the heart of the UK's regional economies."

Barrier Group is an example of a North East business that FW Capital has helped to achieve its ambitious expansion plans. Delivered through the £35m Elevate Fund alongside NPIF II – FW Capital Debt Finance FW Capital has supported the firm's rapid growth and diversification into the renewable energy sector. This has enabled the Barrier Group to capitalise on a series of major new contract wins in the renewables sector, including offshore wind projects, while also supporting the expansion of its workforce.

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

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

5 compliance questions every law firm should be asking

By Carolyn Beal, Legal Compliance Consultant,
Beal Cooper Compliance Ltd

In these days of constant regulatory change, what should firms focus on?

The following questions will help spotlight important areas for your firm:

1. Are we meeting regulatory expectations, or only ticking boxes?

This must be considered and is key to effective compliance. An approach of 'just get the box ticked' will never work. The same goes for beautifully written policies, which only their author knows about. Firms must demonstrate embedded compliance.

Check Regulators' expected outcomes. Evidence of compliance is key, as the slew of recent fines following SRA AML audits has shown. Are you up to date with current regulatory requirements? How do you demonstrate the requirements are met day-to-day? Do your file reviews check those requirements?

2. Can we demonstrate appropriate leadership oversight?

All Regulators expect good governance and clear ownership of compliance. Firms should periodically assess how well the oversight is working. Is compliance covered at Board-level meetings? Do your COLP and COFA receive support from the top?

Support for compliance roles is very topical after the recent request by the SRA for permission from the Legal Services Board to separate compliance and leadership roles. The proposals include: "Individuals who can make significant decisions about how the firm is run, cannot also be the compliance officers for legal practice and finance and administration." This may cause its own problems, but is driven by the high profile collapse of firms such as Axiom Inc. Governance and leadership must remain a focus.

3. How confident are we that colleagues know what to do when something goes wrong?

A problem reported early is much easier to manage than one kept under wraps, whether it's a mistake, a data breach, or ethical issue. When

did you last train your colleagues on what to do? Does your culture support it? Publication of 'near misses' or real life examples, and how to learn from them, are a great way to remind people of the importance of an appropriate response.

Policies should make expectations clear and include guidance for when something goes wrong. In June 2026, formal whistleblowing protections were granted to those working in or with the legal sector who report to the SRA, emphasising the importance of reporting duties.

4. Are our data protection and cybercrime protection processes fit for current threats?

Data protection has been shaken up with the recent Data Use and Access Act 2025. Cybercrime remains one of the biggest threats to law firms.

Would you be ready to respond to a data breach? Do you know the timescales for making a report to the Information Commissioner? Do you treat cyber-security only as an IT function, or is it considered at Board-level?

The SRA recently published a warning about the risk of AI deepfakes being used to bypass identity verification processes. Have you informed your colleagues of the risks and how to address them?

5. If we started the firm today, would our compliance look the way it does now?

Many long-established firms have 'Frankenstein' documents that have been changed and added to over the years, to meet changing regulatory needs. They can be outdated, confusing, and contain conflicting procedures. They often fail to meet their purpose. Periodic reviews ensure proportionality and relevance, so they always meet your firm's needs. Consider tech solutions, too. As firms grow and change, compliance must keep up.

It can feel impossible to find the time and resource to review compliance. Starting with these questions will provide reassurance, or a framework for starting the detailed review. Contact me if you would like support with it.

www.bealcoopercompliance.co.uk



Carolyn Beal

Solicitor of the Month

This month Northern Insight talks to...

Adeel Bashir

Legal Director, Nouveau Legal



Nouveau Legal Team, Adeel Bashir, Emma Peacock, Nathan Robson and Robert Hodgson

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

I've always enjoyed problem-solving and helping people navigate difficult situations. Law appealed to me because it combines analytical thinking with practical solutions that can make a real difference to someone's life or business. I followed the traditional route into the profession through legal studies, practical legal training, and gaining hands-on experience before qualifying as a Solicitor.

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

The issues vary depending on the client, but common enquiries often involve commercial disputes, contracts, debt recovery, and employment issues. My role is to understand the client's objectives, explain their legal position in clear terms, and guide them towards the most effective and cost-efficient solution. Often, clients simply want clarity, a practical way forward and cost transparency which is why we operate on fixed-fees.

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

The profession has become much more accessible and technology-driven. Clients expect quicker communication, greater transparency on costs, and more efficient processes. We're also seeing increased use of digital platforms, electronic signatures, and artificial intelligence to assist with routine tasks. I believe technology will continue to improve efficiency, allowing solicitors to spend more time focusing on strategic advice and client relationships.

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

A common misconception is that every legal issue ends up in court. In reality, many disputes are resolved through negotiation, mediation, or settlement. Another misconception is that solicitors create problems or make matters more complicated. Most solicitors are focused on resolving issues as efficiently and practically as possible while protecting their clients' interests.

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

Seek advice early and don't ignore the issue in the hope that it will go away. Keep records of relevant documents, communications, and events, as these can be crucial later on. Most importantly, focus on the desired outcome rather than the emotion of the dispute. Early legal advice can often save significant time, stress, and cost.

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

Many clients come to us during stressful periods in their lives or businesses. It's important to listen carefully, remain empathetic, and provide objective advice. At the same time, solicitors have professional and ethical obligations that must always be upheld. Maintaining that balance ensures clients receive honest advice, even when it may not be what they initially hoped to hear.

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

Technology has transformed how legal services are delivered. Tasks that once took hours can now be completed much more efficiently, and communication with clients is faster than ever. Looking ahead, I expect automation to play a larger role in document review, research, and administration. However, I don't believe technology will replace solicitors; legal judgment, negotiation, and client relationships remain fundamentally human skills.

What are the key qualities that make a great Solicitor?

Strong communication, attention to detail, commercial awareness, and integrity are all essential. A great solicitor must also be approachable and able to explain complex legal issues in a way clients can understand. Above all, clients need someone they can trust to act in their best interests.

How do you balance client advocacy with legal ethics and professional responsibility?

My responsibility is to represent my clients robustly while remaining within the law and professional regulations. Effective advocacy doesn't require bending the rules; it requires understanding the facts, applying the law correctly, and presenting the strongest possible case. Trust in the legal system depends on solicitors maintaining those professional standards.

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

The most rewarding aspect is helping clients achieve positive outcomes and providing reassurance during challenging situations. Whether it's resolving a dispute, protecting a business, or helping someone understand their legal position, it's satisfying to know you've made a meaningful difference. What keeps me motivated is the variety of work, the constant opportunity to learn, and the relationships built with clients over time.

www.nouveaulegal.co.uk



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**It's satisfying
to know
you've made
a meaningful
difference.**

Adeel Bashir

Shining a spotlight on emerging talent: Celebrating Will Toward

At Cascade, we've always believed that investing in the next generation is one of the most important things we can do - not just as a business, but as part of the wider fintech community.

Apprenticeships sit at the heart of that belief, offering a genuine pathway for motivated individuals to build real skills in a real environment. So it's with a great deal of pride that we celebrate Will Toward, who has recently completed his Level 3 Apprenticeship with us.

Will joined the team just over a year ago, and the impression he has made in that time has been quietly remarkable. From the outset, he brought an enthusiasm that went beyond simply getting up to speed. He wanted to understand how things worked, not just the tasks in front of him, but the broader picture: how the business operates, how teams collaborate, and where he could genuinely contribute.

That curiosity quickly became one of his most valued qualities. Rather than waiting to be guided through every step, Will actively sought opportunities to get involved, asking thoughtful questions and applying what he was learning in practical, meaningful ways. It's the kind of initiative that can't really be taught - it comes from someone who genuinely cares about doing good work.

What has also stood out is his approach to the people around him. Apprenticeships aren't just about technical development; they're about learning how to work well with others, how to adapt when things change, and how to keep going when things get challenging. Will has demonstrated all of this in abundance. Colleagues across the business have noticed his willingness to pitch in, his positive attitude, and the quiet confidence he has developed over the course of the year.

The fintech sector moves fast. New ideas, new tools, and new challenges arrive constantly, and the ability to learn on the go is more valuable than ever. What apprentices like Will bring to a team isn't just fresh energy - it's a perspective that isn't yet shaped by habit. That willingness to ask "why?" and to look at problems with fresh eyes is something the whole team has benefitted from.

Completing a Level 3 Apprenticeship is a genuine achievement. It requires consistent effort, the ability to balance on-the-job learning with formal study, and the resilience to keep developing even when things get difficult. Will has done all of that, and more. His progress over the past year is something the whole team has watched with real pride.

As we mark this milestone, we're not just celebrating the end of an apprenticeship - we're celebrating the beginning of what is shaping up to be a strong and promising career. Will has built a solid foundation of skills, professional insight, and confidence that will serve him well in whatever comes next.

Congratulations, Will. It has been a genuine pleasure watching you grow, and the whole team looks forward to seeing what you do next.

www.cascade.co.uk



Will Toward



L-R: Richard Fowler and Nick Williams

GrowthProvision: North East Roots, Global Reach

When Nick Williams and Richard Fowler founded GrowthProvision, they weren't looking to build another marketing agency.

Instead, they saw an opportunity to help financial services businesses achieve something many were struggling with: translating expertise into sustainable growth.

The pair arrived at that conclusion from different directions. Nick's background was in financial services, having worked within investment management and financial advice. Richard's experience came through entrepreneurship, business ownership and commercial growth. Together, they recognised a common challenge.

Across the financial services sector, there are countless businesses delivering real value to their clients, yet many struggle to clearly articulate what makes them different, build awareness in their target markets or create a consistent growth system.

That challenge is one of the reasons GrowthProvision was created.

The business works exclusively within financial services, supporting a wide range of organisations including financial planning firms, wealth managers, asset managers, lenders, fintech and wealth technology businesses, compliance providers, outsourced support firms and financial institutions.

For Nick and Richard, the sector's appeal goes far beyond commercial opportunity.

Financial services touches almost every aspect of modern life. It helps people prepare for retirement, build wealth, protect their families, access funding, go to market faster, more cost-effectively and efficiently, as well as manage risk and make better financial decisions. Businesses across the sector play a vital role in supporting economic growth and financial wellbeing.

There is also an enormous amount of innovation taking place.

Whilst financial services is sometimes viewed as a traditional industry, the reality is very different. Technology, automation, artificial intelligence and digital platforms are rapidly transforming how firms operate, engage with customers and deliver services. The pace of change continues to accelerate, creating exciting opportunities for businesses willing to adapt and evolve.

This progress, Nick and Richard believe, creates significant and growing untapped potential across the sector.

Many firms possess exceptional expertise, strong client outcomes and compelling propositions, but often struggle to communicate those strengths effectively or translate them into sustained client acquisition. In some cases, businesses

know exactly what they do but find it harder to explain why it matters to the people they are trying to reach.

And, of course, some know exactly what to do, but require the additional bolt-on specialist resource to achieve it.

That is where GrowthProvision focuses its efforts, helping financial services firms better understand their audiences, refine their positioning and develop client acquisition and, importantly, retention strategies that align with their commercial objectives.

That work often begins with customer insight, segmentation and strategic planning, before extending into branding, websites, content, digital marketing, lead generation and client communication programmes.

The goal is not simply greater visibility.

It is growth.

That may mean helping a business attract new clients, strengthen relationships with existing ones, launch a new proposition, enter a new market or build greater confidence in its brand.

Since its launch, GrowthProvision has grown to support a wide range of clients across the UK and internationally. Operating remote-first, the company continues to develop its people and systems to support both its own growth and that of its clients.

Whilst the client base has expanded far beyond the North East, Nick and Richard remain proud of the region they call home.

Both hailing from Guisborough, Nick still calls the town home, whilst Richard is now based in Newcastle. They believe some of the country's most ambitious businesses are being built outside London, and that modern technology has created opportunities for start-ups and established regional firms to compete nationally and globally in ways that were previously impossible.

Looking ahead, both founders remain ebullient on the future of financial services and the role the sector will continue to play in helping individuals and institutions achieve their goals.

For GrowthProvision, the mission remains unchanged: helping great financial services businesses of all sizes and shapes realise their growth ambitions and ensure the value they create reaches more of the people who need it.

www.growthprovision.com

In conversation with...

Simon Rushworth talks to...

Gary Fawcett

Chartered Wealth Manager and Branch Principal at Raymond James Monument

Describe your career path so far...

I've been helping clients with their finances since June 2000. In 2023 I took the plunge and co-launched Raymond James Monument. During my career I've seen a lot of consolidation in the financial services sector, which in my view has resulted in a less personal and more centralised service — I feel like I've gone full circle to help deliver something more local, tailored and service focused.

What challenges did you face in the early days and how did you overcome them?

I always remember a careers advisor once said to me that I would never succeed as a stockbroker (now wealth manager!) because it's a cliquey world and it's all about who you know and the strength of your network. Not having that ready-made network was a challenge — I overcame it by building strong relationships, gaining trust, helping people and building rapport.

What sets your business apart from competitors in your industry?

I believe it's the personal touch. Where we go the extra mile is in establishing that level of trust and connectivity with the people whose money we invest and the financial plan we build. We've signed up more than 300 clients in two-and-a-half years and the personal touch is what we've become known for. Our clients know how much we care.

How do you define success and how has that definition evolved over time?

In my opinion, the ultimate test of success is whether people are happy to recommend us. Whether that recommendation comes from an accountant or a solicitor or an existing client, it proves that we're doing things right, but we will never rest on our laurels. Referrals are a great measure of success — as is our client retention level. The other side of success is that we're able to give one per cent of our turnover back to the local community. The more we can give back, the more successful we are.

What strategies have you found most effective for growing your business?

We were prepared to put in the hard work from day one — whether that was supporting local organisations, backing local events, getting out and about to meet new people or reconnecting with people we'd worked with previously. Facilitating connections and putting our clients at the heart of what we do, is hugely important to us. Our aim is to be the number one wealth manager of choice in the North East, so continuing to build brand awareness is really important.

How do you stay ahead of industry trends and adapt to market change?

It's a case of how we embrace AI to remain relevant while not compromising on client service or the personal touch. Raymond James Financial in the US — Raymond James UK's parent company

— is investing almost \$1bn this year into technology and that should filter through to the UK over time. We should be able to use that technology to better service our clients and free up more time to focus on what matters most - personal relationships and tailored financial plans and investment strategies. Also, the younger generation of investor expects their adviser to be more tech enabled and so it's important to embrace technology.

What role does company culture play in your success and how do you foster a positive workplace environment?

We're a small team but within that team you'll find a range of personalities and therefore views, all of which feed into an evolving, organic culture. Our culture is informal, rather than forced. The foundation of Raymond James Monument is based on our client-first belief, and the culture comes from there. I'm proud that our team boasts the ethics and values that align with a positive workplace environment. Culture comes from within.

Can you share a defining moment or breakthrough that changed the course of your business?

The defining moment was when we became profitable and the business became financially sustainable. The moment when we covered all of our costs and we could reinvest with confidence was a real breakthrough. We built a strong dedicated team from day one — before we started making any money — and now we're in a great position to propel the business forward.

What advice would you give to aspiring entrepreneurs looking to start their own ventures?

I'd say back yourself, trust yourself and don't run before you can walk — try to put the team and the infrastructure in place first if you can. Always have mentors around you and they can be friends or family. Surround yourself with people you trust, otherwise it can be lonely. I've found it more fun building something together than alone, but it is important to have the right people on the journey with you.

What's next for your business? Any exciting projects or future plans on the horizon?

It's all about building on where we are at the moment. Our target is to get to £500 million funds under management over the next few years. We'll grow organically, add the right people to the team, embrace technology and keep doing what we're doing — refining our service to get better. However, if the right opportunity arises to acquire a firm where client care is the top priority, it's a path we are well-positioned to explore.

www.Monument.RaymondJames.uk.com



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**Referrals are
a great
measure of
success.**

Gary Fawcett



Jonathan Fletcher

Ever thought about selling up?

For many businesses owners, it's a thought that often crosses their minds - especially in the current climate.

If you do cash in your chips – be it for retirement or a fresh challenge - there are several points you must consider.

And more than likely, you'll need first-rate legal support.

For almost 200 years, business owners have turned to Tilly Bailey & Irvine's commercial legal advisors when they move.

Recognised as one of the region's biggest and most established law firms, they have five offices spread across the North East – in Hartlepool, Stockton, Wynard, Sunderland and Barnard Castle.

One of the award-winning firm's Corporate Solicitors, Jonathan Fletcher, has offered his top five things to consider should you decide to sell up.

1 - What next?

The buyer of your business will want to prevent you from competing with them for several years.

If your plans involve setting up again soon, you need to consider this and negotiate the length of any restrictions.

Even if you are planning to retire, business owners often get bored of retirement quickly and want to get back into business. It can therefore be sensible to negotiate these provisions - just in case.

2 - How are you getting paid?

Most business sales will have a payment structure that means only a portion of the purchase price is paid on the day of sale, with the rest "deferred" and paid over a period of years.

The risk to a seller is that these deferred payments are not paid, like any other unsecured debt.

Consider negotiating more cash up front, securing against an asset or obtaining a personal guarantee.

3 - Can you work for someone else?

There are many deals that involve owners of businesses selling to larger organisations to get value for their shareholding but remaining within the business as management.

This often sounds like a good deal from a financial perspective, but many sellers soon realise that they struggle no longer being their own boss.

This does not mean a deal of this nature cannot go ahead, but it leads back to sellers looking at point one and thinking about what you need to agree to give you the freedom to move on if needs be.

4 - How well do you know your business?

If you are selling the shares in a limited company then a buyer is not only acquiring the trading business it runs today, it is buying its entire history.

Therefore, a buyer will want to thoroughly investigate the business and look for contractual protection (usually in the form of warranties).

A seller needs to be ready to provide all this information and then properly negotiate the warranties to minimise its exposure.

There are also numerous "protection" provisions that lawyers acting for sellers should ensure are included to shield you from liability as much as possible.

5 - How much do you want to take home?

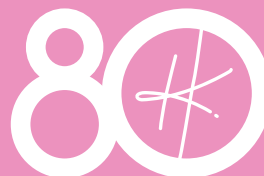
The difference between the sale price in a contract and the money transferred to your bank account will often be significant.

Many sellers forget about the impact of matters such as tax and professional fees. It is important to consult accountants, specialist lawyers and your IFA at an early stage to establish an estimate as to the costs involved and the likely tax position.

This allows you to set a budget and decide on a sale price you are happy with before agreeing the deal with the buyer.

To discuss any queries you have with TBI's business sale experts, please call 01740 646000 and ask to speak to "Corporate".

Alternatively, visit www.tbilaw.co.uk and lodge an online enquiry.



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Sintons announces St Oswald's Hospice as new charity partner for 2026–2028

Following a record-breaking two years of fundraising for The Percy Hedley Foundation, Sintons is proud to announce that St Oswald's Hospice has been selected by our colleagues to be our firm-wide charity partner for the next two years.



St Oswald's Hospice

L-R: Stacey Wilson, Peter Jennings, David Pritchard, Jill Hackworth

The partnership comes as we conclude our most successful CSR cycle to date, having raised over £23,000 for Percy Hedley through a series of ambitious challenges, from the “10 Peaks” trek in the Lake District to our historic charity golf days at Close House.

St Oswald's Hospice is a cornerstone of the North East community, providing specialist palliative and end-of-life care to babies, children, young adults, and adults. Their work goes beyond medical care, offering family support, bereavement services, and a “home-from-home” environment for those navigating life-limiting conditions.

Sintons has committed to a fundraising target of over £20,000 during this new two-year cycle. These funds will directly support the Hospice's vital services, ensuring they can continue to provide their expert care free of charge to those who need it most.

David Pritchard, Head of Marketing and Business Development and Chair of Sintons' CSR Committee, commented: “Choosing a new charity is always a significant moment for the firm. After the incredible energy our team put into supporting The Percy Hedley Foundation, we wanted to ensure our next partner was an organisation that resonated deeply with our people and our region.

St Oswald's Hospice is an institution that has touched the lives of so many families across the North East. Their dedication to dignity and care is unparalleled, and we are incredibly proud to be standing alongside them for the next two years. Our goal is to raise over £20,000 and knowing the competitive and compassionate spirit of the team here at Sintons, I have no doubt we will hit the ground running to achieve and hopefully surpass that target.”

Jane Hogan, Head of Fundraising at St Oswald's Hospice, said: “We are delighted to have the support of Sintons as their Charity of the Year partner for the next two years. 2026 marks the 40th anniversary of St Oswald's Hospice, and the fact that we are still here today, providing care and support free of charge to our local community, is only possible thanks to the generosity of our supporters. Partnerships with businesses like Sintons enable us to continue our vital work, and every penny they raise will help keep our doors open for those who need us most. We look forward to working together and making a meaningful difference to the lives of local people.”

www.sintons.co.uk

Mincoffs recognised as a top deal adviser in multiple regions



L-R: Paul Hughes, Chris Hughes and John Nicholson

Mincoffs Solicitors continues to demonstrate its reach across the UK, as an esteemed industry report reveals the firm's involvement in deals across a number of regions.

The Experian Market IQ M&A Review report has released its list of top deal advisers across the first quarter of the year, with Mincoffs retaining its position within the top three firms in the North East.

Elsewhere in the UK, the firm has been recognised as the fifth most active deal adviser in the North West and the ninth in Scotland.

These results position Mincoffs as the 11th most active deal adviser nationally, following a pattern of increased deal activity for the firm across the last few years.

Paul Hughes, senior partner and head of corporate at Mincoffs Solicitors, said: "We are delighted to have been recognised as a leading deal adviser across a number of regions, demonstrating the reach of our client activity across the UK.

"This result is a reflection of the talent and dedication within the corporate team, who bring genuine expertise and commitment to each transaction.

"We are proud to be a trusted partner for businesses navigating complex deals and we look forward to continuing to support their ambitions throughout the rest of the year."

The corporate team have expertise in all areas of corporate law, including company sales and acquisitions, corporate finance, flotations, share options, private equity investment, complex turnarounds, reorganisations and restructures, mergers, management buy-outs and buy-ins, as well as corporate rescues of distressed businesses.

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

For more information, contact the team by emailing enquiries@mincoffs.co.uk or call the office on 0191 281 6151.

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Ashley Shepard

Moving house? We've got an app for that!

Ashley Shepard, Solicitor Apprentice at Cartmell Shepherd Solicitors, says new tech is streamlining the conveyancing process, while the team still offers its personal service on your high street.

Anyone who's ever bought or sold a house knows the frustration. You feel you've provided everything, yet the process still takes longer than expected.

There are financial documents, proof of identity, property details, and information about fixtures and fittings – the list goes on. Add in posting documents, multiple emails, or even hand-delivering paperwork, and it can all feel slow and disjointed.

That's why Cartmell Shepherd Solicitors have introduced a bespoke app that brings everything together in one place, so you always know exactly where you stand.

Technology will never replace our commitment to personal service. We understand that digital communication isn't for everyone, which is why our team is always available by phone or in our town centre offices. But for those who value flexibility, the app comes into its own – allowing you to upload documents and complete tasks at

a time that suits you, following a clear step-by-step process.

This focus on client service is reflected in our recent recognition on the Review Solicitors website, where we were ranked in the top 10% of firms in the UK for Housing and Property Law.

Prepare yourself

There's plenty you can do before finding your dream home, and we'd always encourage speaking to us as early as possible.

Start by gathering your personal ID, such as your photo identification and National Insurance details. Buyers will also need to provide financial evidence showing where purchase funds are coming from – this could include savings, gifts, or loans from family. If you require a mortgage, apply as early as possible, as delays here are common.

We are legally required to carry out these checks to prevent money laundering, so having everything ready in advance will help keep things moving.

Once you've chosen a property, we'll need details such as any extensions and boundary information. It's also important to arrange surveys promptly, as surveyors often have busy schedules.

Even if you've moved before, processes and regulations change, so early advice is always valuable.

It's all in the timing

A typical house sale or purchase takes around 12 to 16 weeks. While some may promise faster timelines, this can lead to unrealistic expectations. Much depends on other parties involved, and many factors are beyond a solicitor's control.

A busy property market can add to delays, with hold-ups from mortgage lenders, searches, postal issues, or agreement of completion dates. One delay can affect the entire chain.

Being proactive can help – keep in touch with your estate agent, mortgage broker, and other parties rather than assuming progress is being made.

More about our app

The Cartmell Shepherd conveyancing app is designed to speed up the early stages of a transaction. In the time it takes to send an email, you can upload documents and track progress instantly.

Built-in guidance ensures you provide exactly what's needed, reducing errors and avoiding delays. There's no printing or posting, everything is secure, and payments can also be handled within the app.

It also allows us to calculate costs such as Stamp Duty early on, giving you clarity from the outset.

By giving you full visibility of what's completed and what's still required, the app helps keep transactions moving smoothly and can save significant time in the initial stages.

Smooth, streamlined, proactive and transparent – that's exactly what we aim to deliver.

If you're planning to buy or sell, please get in touch to see how we can help you move as efficiently as possible.

This column is for general information only and does not constitute legal advice. For an initial chat, contact Ashley and the team on 01434 603656 or email enquiries@cartmells.co.uk



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“People need to see people like themselves”

By Jason Sinclair, Trainee Solicitor, Muckle LLP on social mobility and a career in law

For many people, a career in law is something they’ve known about from an early age. For Jason Sinclair, now a trainee solicitor at Muckle, it wasn’t even on his radar.

Originally from Bristol, Jason was the first person in his family to go to university. Growing up, he says, a legal career wasn’t something that was talked about at school or at home.

“I didn’t really know that being a solicitor was an option,” says Jason. “It wasn’t a career that was visible to me when I was younger.”

That changed when he started studying A-level Law at college.

Pathways to law

“I chose law because it sounded interesting,” he explains. “I enjoyed it straight away, and my tutor noticed that I seemed to have a natural aptitude for it.”

His tutor encouraged him to apply for Pathways to Law, a social mobility programme run by the Sutton Trust that supports high-achieving students from underrepresented backgrounds who are interested in studying law.

The experience led to an offer from the University of Bristol. Jason also secured a place through the Access to Leeds scheme, a widening participation programme designed to support students from underrepresented backgrounds into higher education and ultimately, he chose to study law at the University of Leeds.

“It’s not what you know, it’s who you know”

Looking back, Jason says one of the biggest challenges wasn’t the law itself.

“The academic side of law was never the issue. What was harder was understanding everything around it.”

“People from more connected backgrounds often had more knowledge about how the profession worked. They knew about work experience, placements, networking and applications. I had to figure a lot of that out myself. But social mobility schemes like Pathways to Law helped with that.”

Why a career in law?

Jason is now in the second seat of his training contract at Muckle, working in our Sports, Education and Charities team, having previously completed a seat in Corporate.

What attracted him to law was the balance between working with people and solving problems.

“I’ve always liked that mix. At school, I enjoyed drama because I’m quite outgoing, but I also liked computer science because it’s logical and analytical.”

“Law combines those things. You need to be confident speaking to clients and building relationships, but you also need to be detail-focused and enjoy problem-solving.”

Working at Muckle

Muckle stood out for more than just its reputation.

“When I was applying for placements and training opportunities,

it was important to me that a firm had a genuine commitment to social mobility.”

“I spoke openly about my background during the application process, and it was really well received at Muckle. The firm’s values aligned with my own, and it was encouraging to see that reflected in practice.”

Why is social mobility important?

Today, Jason regularly attends school careers fairs and outreach events, helping raise awareness of law as a career option.

“People need to be visible. Young people need to see people like themselves working in these professions.”

“If nobody around you works in law, it’s much harder to imagine yourself doing it.”

The North East Solicitor Apprenticeship Scheme

At Muckle, improving access to the legal profession forms an important part of our wider social mobility strategy. We are a founding member of the North East Solicitor Apprenticeship Scheme (NESA), which was created to provide an alternative route into law and widen access to the profession for talented young people from all backgrounds.

The solicitor apprenticeship route allows individuals to qualify as solicitors while earning a salary and gaining practical experience, helping to remove some of the financial barriers traditionally associated with legal careers.

We also run an employability programme called Inspiring Careers. The programme, delivered in partnership with Mortal Fools, is a unique opportunity designed specifically for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (aged 14 – 16).

Although solicitor apprenticeships were not available when Jason was making decisions about his future, he believes he would have seriously considered the route.

“It gives people another way into the profession and helps remove barriers that might otherwise put them off pursuing law.”

For him, social mobility is about ensuring talent and ambition are not limited by background.

“There are brilliant people everywhere. The key is making sure they know these opportunities exist and helping them access them.”

“If someone from a similar background to mine reads this and thinks a career in law could be for them, then that’s a positive step.”

Find out more about the opportunities at Muckle on our website www.muckle-llp.com



“

Young people need to see people like themselves working in these professions.

Jason Sinclair



Rebecca Cresswell

Child Arrangements on Separation

By Rebecca Cresswell, Sweeney Miller

Child arrangement orders are designed to safeguard the welfare of children when their parents separate. These orders specify where a child will live, who they will spend time with, and other important details concerning their upbringing. The aim is always to put the child's best interests first.

When are Child Arrangement Orders needed?

These orders are commonly sought when parents cannot agree on living and contact arrangements for their children, however, an agreed plan can also be sent to the court for a Judge to approve. The court encourages families to resolve disputes amicably, often recommending mediation before legal proceedings begin. However, if an agreement cannot be reached, either party may apply to the court for a child arrangement order.

The application process

To apply for a child arrangement order, an individual must usually attend a Mediation Information and Assessment Meeting (MIAM) unless exemptions apply. If mediation fails or is not suitable, an application is made to the family court. The court will consider several factors, including the child's wishes and feelings (depending on their age), the child's physical, emotional, and educational needs, the capability of each parent, the likely effect of any change

in circumstances and any potential risks to the child's welfare or harm suffered.

After receiving the application, the court may request Cafcass to conduct initial safeguarding checks. Cafcass stands for Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service. They represent the interests of children and young people in family court cases. If the case is not resolved quickly, the judge may ask for more detailed reports from Cafcass.

The Child-Focused Court Pilot in the North East and North Yorkshire

The family courts have extended the Child-Focused Court pilot across the North East as of 2026 and we will see changes over the course of the year and into 2027. This pilot aims to place the needs, experiences, and welfare of children more clearly at the centre of private family law proceedings.

Under this approach, the court seeks to reduce delay and minimise conflict between parents, recognising that prolonged disputes can have a detrimental impact on children. The process encourages earlier identification of the key issues affecting the child and promotes more efficient case management.

Key features of the Child-Focused Court include:

- A greater emphasis on the child's voice being heard, with consideration given to their wishes and feelings at an early stage
- More proactive judicial case management, with fewer but more purposeful hearings
- Early engagement with Cafcass or other professionals to identify safeguarding concerns and assess risk
- A focus on resolving disputes swiftly, where it is safe and appropriate to do so

The pilot also seeks to ensure that court proceedings are less adversarial and more problem-solving in nature, helping parents to reach arrangements that support their child's long-term wellbeing.

For families in these regions, the Child-Focused Court represents a shift towards a more streamlined, child-centred process.

After the order is made

Once a child arrangement order is in place, both parties must comply with its terms. Breaching the order can lead to legal consequences, including fines or, in rare cases, imprisonment. Orders can be varied or discharged if circumstances change, but this requires further application to the court.

Conclusion

Child arrangement orders play a vital role in ensuring children are protected and cared for during family separations. Seeking legal advice and exploring mediation are recommended steps for anyone facing difficulties in agreeing arrangements.

Contact our Head of Family, Rebecca Cresswell at Sweeney Miller on Rebecca.cresswell@sweeneymiller.co.uk or on 0191 568 2050.



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Sweeney Miller Law Gotham Garden Glam Summer Drinks

Sweeney Miller Law welcomed clients and friends of the firm to the striking surroundings of Hotel Gotham, Newcastle on 18 June for its Gotham Garden Glam Summer Drinks.

While the Great British weather prompted a last-minute move indoors, it did little to dampen spirits, with guests enjoying an evening of relaxed networking.

Thanks go to the Hotel Gotham team for ensuring a seamless and memorable evening despite the change of plans.





Claimants, Respondents and Legal professionals: where do we all stand with AI?

By Hannah Close, Trainee Solicitor, CLR Law

The chatter around Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its intersection with the legal profession has become increasingly prominent in recent months. Like many other industries, AI has been responsible for a major shift in traditional practices and approaches, along with client behaviour.

Legal professionals

Upon starting my journey within the profession, I was surprised to learn of the increasing distrust in legal professionals as a result of legal advice provided by AI. There is a growing number of claimants accessing AI for advice and assessments on their cases prior to seeking advice from a qualified legal professional, which often leads to unrealistic expectations with regards to the strength of their case, the level of recoverable compensation and the overall progression of their matter. Additionally, AI lacks the nuanced thinking that a human can provide, which leads to errors in judgement and incorrect advice. When attempting to manage or correct these expectations, it is increasingly difficult for lawyers to navigate and redirect clients from the unrealistic AI advice as any contrary information can come as a disappointment when matters cannot progress in the expected way.

Legal professionals are qualified in what they do, meaning they offer reliable advice based on previous experience and in-depth research (usually using good AI tools to support this research). However, AI cannot mimic the sentience of a human, and its failure to do so can be particularly detrimental in an employment case where personal relationships are often central to the disputes. This is why we always

seek to understand the human element, and not just the law.

Claimants

This shift in claimant behaviour directly contributes to the second major challenge, which is the increased burden on respondents. Individuals can now easily generate written complaints, questions and grievances. While some may be using AI to assist them in voicing genuine concerns, the accessibility of this tool has led to a significant increase in the number of AI-assisted grievances, which are often extremely lengthy and difficult to approach due to the lack of contextual understanding. Sometimes, individuals may not even know exactly what material the grievance includes and will struggle to provide evidence for a point that they have raised when asked to provide clarity by the respondent.

Respondents

The length and convoluted nature of some of these documents requires respondents to spend substantial amounts of time (and money) attempting to evaluate and pinpoint concerns

before they can even seek to provide any resolution. This imposes an obvious burden on resources, particularly within SMEs and smaller respondents who may not have a large HR or administrative team ready and able to dedicate their time to dealing with such volumes of work.

Ultimately, the rise of AI in the legal sector presents a double-edged sword. While it can provide individuals with a basis for deciding whether they would like to pursue a matter, it can also mislead and misinform on a large scale. While sometimes making an individual's life easier in principle, it has adverse implications on that of their legal representative or employer in attempting to deal with AI generated queries and in reversing unrealistic expectations. It also leads to delay both before litigation and once a claim has been lodged.

If you would like to understand the impact of AI in employment matters, please do not hesitate to contact our team on hello@clrlaw.co.uk or 0191 603 0061 for more information.



Hannah Close



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Annaliese Barber and Helena Dar

Talking Probate with Richard Reed Solicitors

**Navigating a complex and
daunting time for families.**

Losing a loved one is an emotionally complex time, and families can quickly find themselves dealing with an unfamiliar legal process and uncertainty about what needs to happen next.

These challenges are explored in the latest episode of the Legally Sound podcast from Richard Reed, “Navigating Probate and Intestacy.” In the episode, Managing Director, Sarah Reid is joined by Annaliese Barber, Director and Solicitor, and Helena Dar, Solicitor at Richard Reed Solicitors.

Annaliese Barber, explains, “Probate can feel daunting to those unfamiliar with it, Executors may worry about the level of responsibility they have taken on, while beneficiaries can have unrealistic expectations about timescales and outcomes. At the same time, family dynamics can become strained, particularly where there

are differing views, financial pressures, or misunderstandings about the process.”

The reality is that probate is a legal procedure with strict requirements, and getting it right is essential to avoid delays or further complications.

Helena Dar added, “Many estates appear simple at first glance. However, once you look more closely at how assets are owned, how the Will was drafted, and whether a business or shareholdings are involved, complications can arise very quickly. Executors often do not realise the level of responsibility they are taking on.

It is important to recognise that acting as an executor or administrator is a crucial role that should not be taken lightly. The duty is significant, and if it is not carried out properly, individuals can potentially be held personally liable for any breach of their responsibilities.”

One of the key issues families face is the assumption that probate is purely administrative. In reality, executors must identify and value assets, deal with inheritance tax, settle debts, liaise with HMRC, prepare estate accounts and ensure the estate is distributed correctly. Each step must be completed in the right order, and mistakes can lead to delays or personal liability.

“Probate often comes at a time when people are grieving and trying to manage practical issues at the same time. The terminology alone can feel overwhelming, and expectations about how quickly things should be resolved are not always

realistic. Having clear advice from the outset can help reduce pressure and avoid unnecessary conflict.”

The podcast episode also examines intestacy rules, Annaliese stressed, “Where there is no valid will in place, the intestacy rules will apply. In some cases, this can lead to outcomes that feel unfair or unexpected, as assets are distributed according to a strict legal framework rather than personal wishes.

This may result in individuals inheriting who the deceased may not have intended to benefit, while others who were close to them may receive nothing at all. This is why wills are important.”

At its core, probate is a legal process, but it is also a human one, it sits at the intersection of law, grief and family relationships, which is why it can feel so overwhelming for those experiencing it for the first time.

This is where Richard Reed Solicitors’ ethos is particularly important. The private client team focuses not only on technical legal accuracy, but also on providing clarity, reassurance, and practical support. Helping clients understand what is happening, what comes next and why it matters is central to their approach.

Gather a greater understanding from latest episode of Richard Reed’s Legally Sound Podcast - Navigating Probate and Intestacy - available now across all major platforms.

richardreed.co.uk

Why British businesses should pay attention to €200m Temu fine

Temu's €200m fine for selling unsafe and illegal products to European customers is a stark warning to UK businesses, according to Lewis McKeown, commercial solicitor at Square One Law...

Temu was in the headlines for all the wrong reasons after the company was fined €200m by The European Commission under the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA).

The fine was the result of an investigation which discovered that Temu had not properly assessed or managed the risks on its platform, including the sale of unsafe and illegal products to European customers. This was not about a one-off failure, but wider shortcomings in how risk was identified and handled.

For many UK businesses, it will be easy to see this as an "EU problem" and something that isn't relevant to their operations. But that could be a huge mistake.

Even post-Brexit, the DSA and several other EU laws continue to apply to any business offering digital content, goods and services to people on the continent, regardless of where the business selling the products or services is based.

The real risk however lies in losing access to the EU market. Fines grab headlines, but they are only part of the picture. Businesses that fail to comply can face restrictions, or even be blocked, from operating in the EU altogether. For many companies, that commercial impact can be far more significant long term than any financial penalty.

Temu's fine highlights that "tick-box" compliance is not enough. Businesses are expected to actively understand how their own platforms work, where risks arise - for example, unsafe products or misleading content - and to take steps to address them. In other words, compliance needs to be built into day-to-day operations, not just written into policies.

Any business running a website, online marketplace or app therefore should act quickly to remove illegal or unsafe products, be transparent about how ads and recommendations are shown and provide users with a simple way to report problems. These, along with a number of other regulatory requirements, are basic standard expectations



Lewis McKeown

for making sales or collecting data in the EU market.

Should businesses fail to act, they could face significant fines of up to 6% of global turnover. In an increasingly interconnected global market, with a complex regulatory landscape which includes significant amounts of legislation with extra-territorial effects, the Temu decision is a clear reminder that where your customers are located matters far more than where your company is based.

If your UK business reaches into the EU, getting compliance right is not just about avoiding fines, it is about protecting your ability to trade, grow, and compete in the market.

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L-R: Sarah Laird, Kaye Cunningham, Lewis Brown, Abigail Zuk, Sharney Randhawa, Laura Murphy, Diane Hall, Catherine Lowther, Claire Wilson James Curran and Craig Foot

Swinburne Maddison announces firmwide promotions and new senior leadership roles

One of the North East's leading law firms, Swinburne Maddison LLP, has announced a series of firmwide promotions, recognising the continued growth of the firm and the outstanding contribution of its people across multiple teams.

Two lawyers have been promoted to Managing Associate, with Diane Hall (Commercial Property) and James Curran (Commercial Litigation) stepping into the role as part of the firm's ongoing investment in leadership and talent development. In addition, Claire Wilson, Kaye Cunningham and Sarah Laird have all been promoted to Associate within the Dispute Resolution team, reflecting their progression and growing expertise within their respective practice areas.

The firm has also confirmed that Laura Murphy has been appointed as the Head of the Private Client Department. Laura joined the team in 2025 as a Managing Associate and while carrying out the role on an interim basis has been widely praised for her leadership, commitment and ability to guide the department through change. Her appointment recognises both her performance in the role and her standing as a senior leader within the firm.

As part of a wider review of career progression at Swinburne Maddison, the firm is also introducing a new role of Senior Managing Associate. The position has been created to

recognise experienced Managing Associates who lead teams, demonstrate senior leadership qualities and play a prominent role both within their departments and across the firm more broadly. We are delighted to announce the newly appointed Senior Managing Associates will be Abigail Zuk (Probate Litigation), Catherine Lowther (Family Law), Charlotte Excell (Commercial Property),

Craig Foot (Residential Conveyancing), Laura Murphy (Private Client), Lewis Brown (Property Litigation) and Sharney Randhawa (Employment Law).

Commenting on the promotions, Jonathan Moreland, Managing Partner, said: "As our firm continues to grow, it is vital that our career structure evolves alongside it. These promotions recognise not only individual excellence, but also the leadership, commitment and professionalism that underpin our success as a firm.

Laura's appointment as Head of Private Client is particularly well deserved, and the introduction of our new Senior Managing Associate role is an important step in ensuring we continue to reward and retain senior talent who play a critical role in leading teams and shaping the future of the firm."

The promotions follow continued growth across Swinburne Maddison and reflect the firm's longterm commitment to supporting its people, providing clear progression pathways and strengthening leadership at every level.

www.swinburnemaddison.co.uk



L-R: Senior Managing Associates: Craig Foot, Catherine Lowther, Laura Murphy, Lewis Brown, Sharney Randhawa and Abigail Zuk

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In conversation with...

Richard Ellison

Senior Associate, Dispute Resolution at BHP Law

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I'm going back a while here, but from memory I had a vague idea I would be either a footballer or a musician. Sadly, a lack of talent or application - or, probably, both - led me to law after a couple of initial false starts.

Tell us about your current role.

I recently joined regional law firm BHP Law as a Senior Associate in dispute resolution following a move "home" to County Durham, where I grew up, having spent my legal career in London and Paris thus far.

What is your proudest business achievement?

This is a true fact: in around 2012 I drafted, in French, portions of the Petroleum Code of the Republic of Chad, which is not something I would ever have imagined myself doing. I should add, though, that I have a degree of doubt as to how rigorously it has since been applied in practice.

How has your industry changed in the last decade?

It's a continuation of an ongoing trend, but there is a hugely increased acceptance of the concept that - whilst sometimes a necessary evil - court proceedings should ideally be a last resort: the likes of mediation, arbitration and expert determination have become far more common, which I think is to be welcomed. Separately, it's something of a cliché to say artificial intelligence, but I am already seeing work which would previously have required armies of paralegals being essentially automated to a large degree.

Tell us about the clients you work with.

Confidentiality obligations prevent me from saying too much, but after having previously worked on what were frequently quite abstract disputes worth up to the billions of dollars it is hugely refreshing now to be helping clients with matters which affect them on a personal level.



Richard Ellison

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

This will sound utterly mundane, but check, double check and treble check who your emails are addressed to...I have seen and been on the receiving end of some autofill shockers.

What has been your biggest challenge?

I'm sure I won't have been alone in finding the Covid period immensely challenging, both on a personal level and in terms of a very steep learning curve transitioning to remote working. A quick word of praise for the English court system, which despite what might have been expected coped admirably, giving benefits that have been ongoing ever since.

On a lighter note I attempted during a sabbatical to travel from County Durham to Australia without flying, which had some pretty

hairy moments; I did make it as far as Indonesia before I ran out of both time and available modes of transport.

Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

I have the dubious pleasure of supporting Darlington FC, so there can only be one answer: legendary former captain Craig Liddle from the last few Football League years.

How do you unwind outside of work?

Playing and watching football and cricket; I am also an obsessive consumer of material about news and politics. It dawns on me now that each of those is arguably more a source of frustration and disappointment than a way of unwinding...

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Intellectual Property – Brexit 10 years on – headache or freedom?

By Dominic Elsworth, Head of Practice, Hargreaves Elsworth

As I write this article on 23rd June 2026 it is exactly ten years since the United Kingdom voted to leave the EU. So what have been the consequences for intellectual property rights owners?

For owners of EU Trade Mark Registrations and EU Design Registrations there is additional administration and expense. On the one hand the EU excluded the UK from the territory protected by these registrations, but on the other the United Kingdom granted equivalent UK trade mark registrations and registered designs to the owners of EU rights existing at the time of the referendum. This may lead one to the conclusion to that nothing has changed. However, looking a little more deeply the whole picture has changed.

The advent of the EU Trade Mark Registration (1996) and the EU Registered Design (2003) meant that owners could obtain monopoly rights across the whole of EU instead of deciding which individual countries were important markets and obtaining the necessary protections in those countries. Since EU Registered Designs and EU Trade Mark Registrations are relatively cheap and give wide geographic coverage it makes sense for an owner to choose the EU rather than the national route. However, this has led to a proliferation of monopoly rights (for that is what registered designs and trade mark registrations are) owned by companies who have no real commercial interest in much of the geographic area their EU monopoly covers.

Since the Brexit withdrawal agreement anyone wanting to register a design or trade mark for the United Kingdom has only one option, that is at the UK Intellectual Property Office. In the long run the effect will be that only those businesses with a genuine commercial interest in the UK market will bother to file applications in the UK, meaning that there will be fewer unused monopolies cluttering up the UK market.



Dominic Elsworth

Meanwhile, UK business are still at liberty to file applications to register designs and trade marks in the EU in the same way that businesses from all over the world can. A UK business may have strong commercial interests in France, Spain, the Netherlands and Germany and protect these with EU rights (such EU rights are enforceable in Poland and Latvia where the UK business has no real interest - this is simply the nature of EU rights).

The costs and the administrative burden associated with Europe wide (including UK) intellectual property rights have gone up for the owners of rights, but at the same time there is a lower potential for infringement claims and the UK market is more free due to the absence of monopolies granted at an EU level but not used in the UK.

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Please contact:

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

True Potential supports Tiny Lives Trust to help North East families in need

True Potential, the leading wealth management firm based in Newcastle upon Tyne, has named local charity Tiny Lives Trust as its Charity of the Year.

The year long partnership combines fundraising, volunteering and a generous corporate donation to support the families of premature and sick newborn babies across the North East and North Cumbria.

Also headquartered in Newcastle, Tiny Lives Trust supports more than 800 families each year, providing emotional, practical and financial support that goes far beyond clinical care. This support includes practical financial help, support for Neonatal Unit staff, and developmental aids such as Claire's nests, which mimic the secure environment of the womb for premature babies, and MiniBoos – comforters used to promote bonding between premature babies and their parents. Tiny Lives also fund the vCreate video messaging service that keeps families connected to their babies during some of the most difficult moments of their lives.

To kickstart the partnership, True Potential has made a corporate donation of £50,000. This donation will go towards funding specialist psychological support and development to families in need, and a Neonatal Support and Development role within the charity to provide practical guidance, emotional reassurance and continuity of care.

Throughout the year, True Potential colleagues will take part in fundraising events and volunteering initiatives in support of the charity's work, with the firm matching every pound raised by colleagues.

The firm has also introduced a paid volunteering day for every employee, a new initiative designed to give colleagues dedicated time to support Tiny Lives or other causes that matter to them.

The partnership reflects a shared commitment to the region both organisations call home.



Nearly a thousand young athletes make history at Beamish

Close to 1,000 primary school pupils from 32 County Durham schools converged on the iconic Beamish Living Museum on the evening of Wednesday 17 June 2026 for the Durham Dash! — setting a new record for the event's biggest ever turn-out since its founding in 2012.

Bathed in summer sunshine, the open-air museum was transformed into a festival of running and field events as children from across North Durham competed, cheered each other on, and celebrated the joy of sport in one of the most distinctive sporting venues in the North East.

Delivered by the Durham & Chester-le-Street School Sport Partnership (DCSSP), the Dash! has been a highlight of the school sporting calendar for 14 years, inspiring generation after generation of young County Durham athletes. This year's theme — Move More, Grow Stronger, Feel Happy — reflected the event's enduring mission: to get children active, build confidence and foster a lifelong love of sport.

United for Sanctuary - Football Festival brings the community together at Wallsend Boys Club



The United for Sanctuary Football Festival, held at Wallsend Boys Club on Saturday 20th June, was a huge success, bringing together more than 140 participants from across the region for a day of football, friendship and community spirit.

The festival welcomed people of all ages and backgrounds, including refugees, sanctuary seekers and community organisations, creating an inclusive and welcoming environment where everyone connected through sport.

Wallsend Boys Club, Walking With (North Tyneside) NU Foundation and Newcastle City Council form the partnership that put together the football festival which has grown in size and impact over the last four years.

Throughout the day, participants took part in friendly matches, activities and celebrations that highlighted the power of football and sport to break down barriers, build relationships and promote understanding between different communities.

Shams Moussa, Walking With refugee charity commented: 'The most important part of this event is people coming together, sharing, laughing and being together. This is the fourth year we've put the football festival on and each year it makes our communities stronger. Watch out Soccer Aid- we're going to get as big as you!'

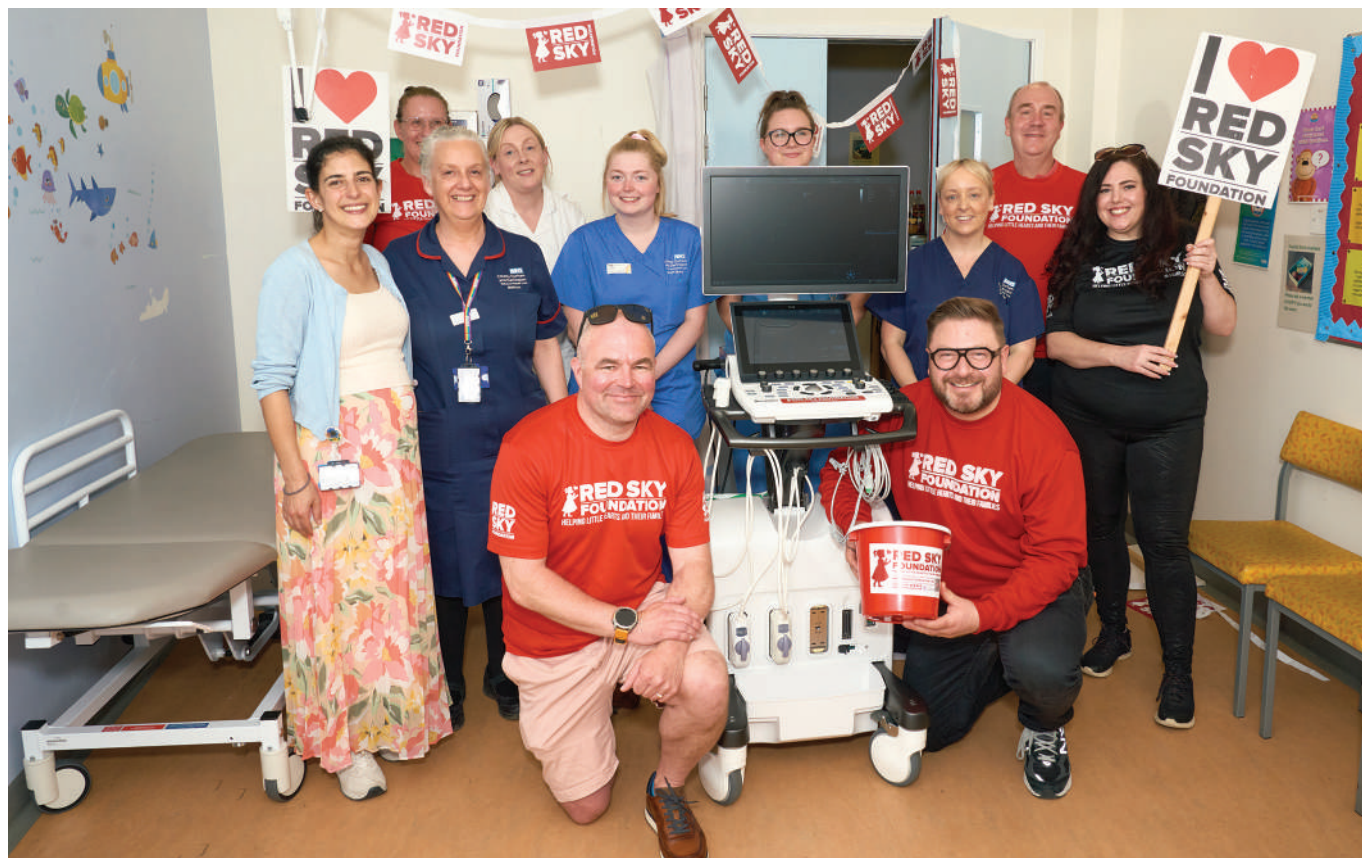
Organisers praised the fantastic turnout and positive atmosphere, thanking all players, volunteers, partners and supporters who helped make the event possible.

The success of the festival demonstrated how sport can unite people, create a sense of belonging and strengthen community connections, leaving a lasting impact on everyone who took part.

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New machine for Darlington Memorial Hospital

Red Sky Foundation is proud to announce the donation of a new £60,000 paediatric echocardiography machine to Darlington Memorial Hospital, helping to improve access to specialist heart diagnostics for babies and children across County Durham and Darlington.

The state-of-the-art equipment has been funded by Red Sky Foundation as part of its ongoing commitment to improving cardiac care and supporting local healthcare services. The new machine will help reduce waiting times for young patients requiring essential heart assessments and ensure children can access the care they need more quickly.

Paediatric echocardiograms are a vital diagnostic tool used to assess heart structure and function. The new machine will enable clinical teams to carry out detailed heart scans more efficiently, supporting earlier diagnosis, faster treatment and an improved experience for children and their families.

The funding for the machine was made possible through the incredible efforts of Red Sky Foundation supporters, including a dedicated team of fundraisers who undertook the challenge of trekking to Everest Base Camp. The group self-funded their expedition, ensuring that every penny raised could go directly towards supporting babies, children and adults living with heart conditions.

Dr Sergio Petrucci (Hon.) MBE, CEO and Founder of Red Sky Foundation, said: "At

Red Sky Foundation, we are passionate about improving heart care and ensuring families have access to the best possible support and equipment. We are incredibly proud to fund this much-needed paediatric echo machine for County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust.

Early diagnosis is absolutely vital when it comes to heart conditions, and this equipment will make a real difference to children and families across the region. This simply would not have been possible without our amazing Everest trekkers, whose commitment, determination and passion to help others has been nothing short of inspirational. Their challenge will leave a lasting legacy for so many families."

Mrs Terry Phillips, Network Manager at the NENC CHD Network, said: "Echo machines are an essential part of delivering a paediatric cardiology service. Most, if not all, children referred to the service will need an echo scan.

Until now there has been no dedicated machine for paediatrics. We have relied on the goodwill of the adult cardiology team in loaning their machine to support the paediatric clinics.

Having this machine in place is a significant achievement and will have a direct impact on waiting lists, average wait times and, most importantly, patient experience and care."

This latest donation represents another important milestone in Red Sky Foundation's mission to improve cardiac services and patient outcomes across the North East. By working in partnership with healthcare providers, supporters and fundraisers, the charity continues to invest in life-changing equipment that delivers lasting benefits for patients, families and NHS staff alike.

Lauren Faye, General Manager for Paediatrics and Neonates, added: "We look forward to continuing to work together and supporting one another in the future to make a lasting difference for children and families."

Everyone at Red Sky Foundation would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to our incredible Everest Base Camp team 2025. Your dedication, determination and generosity have helped make this project possible.

By taking on such an extraordinary challenge and fundraising every step of the way, you have played a vital role in bringing this life-saving equipment to children and families across our region. The impact of your efforts will be felt for years to come, helping young patients access faster diagnosis, treatment and care when they need it most.

If you're feeling inspired and fancy taking on a challenge for Red Sky Foundation, we'd love to have you on Team Red Sky! From runs and walks to epic fundraising adventures, there's something for everyone. Find your next challenge here: redskyfoundation.com/events

TT2 rescues Northumberland life-saving team's worn-out PPE kit with £5,000 donation

The operator of the Tyne Tunnels, TT2, has gifted a volunteer emergency search & rescue service which covers one of the largest and most remote regions in England, a £5,000 donation to replace worn-out personal protective uniform.

The Tyne Tunnels Community Fund, managed by TT2, is buying new, branded, operational waterproof jackets and trousers for some of the 40 volunteer rescuers at the Northumberland National Park Mountain Rescue Team (NNPMRT).

The specialist PPE clothing is essential for keeping the team warm, dry and safe during often lengthy and challenging search and rescue operations across the North East region.

The organisation's current waterproof clothing has reached the end of its lifespan, leaving some members struggling in poor weather.



The new kit will help ensure they can continue delivering their vital 24/7 service, supporting the Police, Ambulance and Fire & Rescue Services.

The team was formed in 1966 following a tragedy in the Cheviot Hills where two shepherds died in a blizzard and has since responded to thousands of incidents.

NNPMRT has expressed how grateful it is for the support, describing the funding as "desperately needed" and a huge boost to morale and safety.



Cramlington young people building confidence and capabilities with community charity's support

A Cramlington community charity is helping local young people build their self-confidence and capabilities with the help of a four-figure grant from a regional employer.

The Rockets Community Foundation has set up the Beyond The Classroom project to help highly vulnerable young people aged 13-16 who've experienced significant issues and problems with severe anxiety in their upbringing.

The project will feature a range of off-site experiences, creative and social activities which will help to reduce isolation, build confidence, strengthen peer relationships and encourage sustained engagement, all with the support of a team of trusted adults who understand the group's complex needs.

A £2,000 grant from the Banks Group's Banks Community Fund is covering the transport, activity and staff costs linked to the Beyond The Classroom project right through the year, so that financial barriers to participation can be removed for everyone.



GT3 Architects completes Yorkshire Three Peaks Challenge

17 team members from across GT3's studios have completed the Yorkshire Three Peaks Challenge, raising more than £4,000 for Thomas Pocklington Trust following the practice's ongoing collaboration with the charity on research, engagement and inclusive design.

The challenge, which took place on 15 May 2026, saw colleagues from across GT3's four studios take on one of the UK's best-known endurance hikes in support of Thomas Pocklington Trust, a charity working to create equality for blind and partially sighted people in every aspect of society.

The walk marked the culmination of six months of training, bringing colleagues together from across the practice for a demanding 12-hour challenge that saw all 17 team members support one another over the peaks and complete the endurance hike as a team.

The fundraising effort follows GT3's ongoing collaboration with Thomas Pocklington Trust, partnering with the charity on research and development, talks and community engagement, helping deepen its understanding of accessibility, inclusivity and the realities of different lived experiences.

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Businesses given charity honours for tackling homelessness

Local businesses have been recognised for their outstanding support of people facing homelessness at charity Oasis Community Housing's 'Hope Honours Awards' at Hilton Newcastle Tyne Bridge on 22 May 2026.



by the Hilton Newcastle Tyne Bridge, Leonard Curtis, Northern Print Solutions and RazorBlue.

www.oasiscommunityhousing.org

"Hope is at the heart of who we are, and what we do at Oasis Community Housing," said Sarah Gorman, CEO of Oasis Community Housing. "From sponsorship and fundraising to volunteering and long-term strategic support, our charity-corporate partnerships help us continue supporting people who often have nowhere else to turn. And our Hope Honours are a heartfelt thank you to our valued corporate partners for their long-standing support."

The Hope Honours reflect different levels of charity support provided by businesses over the past year, with the highest Luminary award presented to Lovell Partnerships for their overwhelming commitment and contribution to Oasis Community Housing's work with local people facing homelessness.

The Awards were presented at the charity's annual Black & Gold Ball, which was sponsored



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People *Doing* Good...



Build, Create and Learn in the Shadow of a Historic Sailing Ship

From crafting decorative keepsakes to building handmade paddles and wooden bodyboards, Blyth Tall Ship, a heritage and education charity based in Northumberland, is offering people the chance to learn traditional woodworking skills in one of the North East's most unique maritime settings.

Commercial woodworking courses now run through until November, giving complete beginners and experienced makers alike the opportunity to develop practical, transferable skills while helping to support the charity's maritime heritage work.

Leading the programme is Martin Haig, one of the project's shipwright trainers, who combines his role maintaining and restoring vessels with teaching traditional woodworking techniques to the public.

"We've got a fantastic facility here with all the tools and equipment people need," said Martin. "The courses were first piloted several years ago and have continued to grow in popularity. This year, our team is expanding the range of workshops on offer.

The money generated will support the ongoing restoration, maintenance and preservation of our traditional vessels."

One of the most popular workshops is the two-day paddle-making course. Participants select a design, work from professional templates and learn step-by-step techniques to shape the blade, handle and grip using traditional woodworking tools.

"We provide all the materials and equipment," Martin explained. "People don't need previous experience. We guide them through every stage and by the end they've created something unique."

What makes the courses particularly special is the setting. Unlike a modern training centre or college workshop, participants learn their skills inside a working maritime heritage facility surrounded by traditional boats, historic craftsmanship and the sights, sounds and smells of a busy boatyard.

The workshop is home to the restoration and maintenance of traditional vessels, giving visitors a rare opportunity to experience an authentic shipbuilding environment that few people ever get to see.

"You can't really recreate this atmosphere anywhere else," said Martin. "You're working in a genuine boatyard surrounded by boats under construction and repair. There's timber being shaped, traditional skills being used and people passing on knowledge that has been developed over generations."



Blyth Town Council Honours Community Champions

Outstanding volunteers, community champions and organisations were recognised for their dedication to Blyth during the Annual Town Meeting held at the Market Pavilion.

The evening, attended by 78 residents, included the presentation of Civic Awards by the Mayor of Blyth, Councillor Mark Peart, celebrating individuals whose efforts have made a lasting impact on the town and its communities.

The first Blyth Good Citizen Award was presented to Bobby Neal, nominated by Councillor David Swinhoe. Bobby has become a familiar and much-loved figure in the town centre through his tireless work helping to keep Blyth clean in all weathers. He was also recognised for his bravery during an incident in October 2025.

Paul Newton, nominated by Councillor Denise Nicholson, received a Blyth Good Citizen Award for spending the last six years voluntarily

improving neglected and run-down areas across Blyth, often funding materials himself to help transform community spaces.

Claire Young, nominated by Councillor David Johnson, was honoured for her longstanding involvement with numerous local organisations including Friends of Ridley Park, Blyth Community Volunteers and Blyth Shanty Singers, as well as her valued support for Blyth in Bloom.

Another Blyth Good Citizen Award was presented to Roy Marsh, nominated by Councillor Daniel Carr, in recognition of his dedicated litter-picking efforts across the town. Roy was praised for voluntarily collecting, sorting and recycling rubbish daily to help improve the local environment.

The evening's highest honour was then awarded posthumously in memory of Warrant Officer Class 2, Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant Rob Aldcroft.

Nominated by Councillor David Swinhoe, the award recognised Rob's extraordinary 43 years of service with the Army Cadet Force, mentoring generations of young people across Blyth, Cowpen and Cramlington.



People's Kitchen piano strikes a chord thanks to kind-hearted tuner

Volunteers at The People's Kitchen are hoping music will soon fill the building once again after a local piano tuner stepped in to help revive

an ageing instrument that had fallen silent.

The charity's much-loved piano had become virtually unplayable, with missing keys and years of wear leaving it badly out of tune. But thanks to the generosity of experienced piano tuner Lawrence Heppell, the instrument is now getting a second chance.

Lawrence, from Cramlington has worked as a piano tuner for 45 years and comes from a family involved in the piano trade since 1911. He volunteered his time to assess the piano and help the charity explore options for restoring music to the space.

Over the years Lawrence has tuned pianos for jazz festivals, music societies and historic venues across the North East, including a remarkable 1880s piano at Craggside once owned by Lord Armstrong.

Maggie Pavlou, a Trustee at The People's Kitchen said the piano, despite its condition, has brought comfort and enjoyment to many people over the years.

"We have a few Friends who are very good at playing the piano and it entertains everyone as the meals are served. Music brings people together and we are grateful for Lawrence's advice and practical support."

Founded in 1985, The People's Kitchen provides free hot meals, friendship and practical support to vulnerable people in Newcastle every day of the year. Run entirely by volunteers, the charity serves around 300 meals daily and relies on donations and community support to continue its work.

Looking beyond the CV

Catherine Marchant, CEO, Impact Family Services

If you spend any time in business circles, you'll hear a familiar concern: where is the next generation of talent coming from?

Employers talk about skills shortages, recruitment challenges and the difficulties of attracting and retaining young people. We discuss apprenticeships, training programmes and workforce development because we know our future success depends on the people coming behind us.

At the same time, many employers tell a similar story. Young people can arrive lacking confidence, struggling in interviews, finding it difficult to communicate their strengths or demonstrate their potential.

It's easy to view this purely through the lens of employment and skills, but the reality is often far more complicated.

Today's young people have grown up in a world that has been anything but predictable. Many spent key years of their development navigating a global pandemic, separated from friends, classrooms, sports clubs and support networks. Alongside that, they have experienced economic uncertainty, rising living costs and the pressures that come with growing up in a permanently connected digital world.

For some young people, those challenges have been accompanied by difficult experiences at home.

Not every young person starts from the same place. While some grow up surrounded by stability, encouragement and opportunity, others enter adulthood carrying experiences that have shaped their confidence, relationships and sense of self-worth long before they ever apply for their first job.

When a young person appears quiet in an interview or struggles to articulate their strengths, it can be tempting to make assumptions. Confidence and capability are not always the same thing, and the person who performs best in an interview is not necessarily the person with the greatest potential.

Most of us can probably identify a point in our own lives when somebody took a chance on us. It may have been a teacher who encouraged us,



Catherine Marchant

a mentor who challenged us or a manager who offered us an opportunity that, on paper at least, we hadn't quite earned.

What made the difference wasn't necessarily the opportunity itself. It was the fact that somebody saw more in us than we could see in ourselves at the time.

Most of us can probably still remember who that person was. Years later, their belief in us often remains clearer than the opportunity itself.

At Impact Family Services, we see the importance of that every day through Positive Impact, our programme supporting young people aged 12 to 18 who have experienced domestic abuse, unhealthy relationships or difficult circumstances at home.

I've met young people whose lack of confidence might easily be mistaken for a lack of ability. They seem convinced they will fail before they've even started, not because they lack talent or ambition, but because life has repeatedly taught them not to expect too much from themselves.

Given the right support, however, those same young people can be in a very different place a few years later. We've seen young people move

on to employment, education and volunteering opportunities, mentoring others, speaking confidently about their ambitions and taking opportunities they would once have avoided altogether.

Looking back, it becomes clear that the ability was never the issue. What changed was that somebody invested enough time, encouragement and belief for those young people to start recognising their own strengths. As employers, we often talk about finding talent. The reality is that some of the most promising people don't always make the strongest first impression.

I've met enough young people to know that confidence and capability don't always arrive together. Some people need time, encouragement and the right opportunity before they begin to show what they're capable of. The young people entering our communities today will become the workforce, leaders and business owners of tomorrow, and many are still waiting for somebody to offer the same belief, encouragement or opportunity that made a difference in our own lives.

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Making the right decisions when recruiting charity leaders

Recruiting senior leaders within charities is rarely just about filling a vacancy. Every appointment represents a strategic decision that influences culture, stakeholder confidence, financial sustainability, and the lives of the people/communities the charity serves.

Here Peter Neal, Founder of The Experience Bank Group, talks about the difference that thoughtful recruitment makes:

"Having spent many years supporting charities to recruit chief executives, trustees and chairs, I've seen first-hand the difference that thoughtful recruitment decisions make. Equally, I have witnessed challenges that arise when organisations rush the process or prioritise the wrong factors.

"So, what should charity boards and recruitment panels consider when making these important decisions?

"One of my key tips is to start with the future, not the past. A common mistake is recruiting solely on the basis of what has gone before. A departing leader leaves a template of responsibilities and expectations, meaning there is comfort in seeking a "like-for-like" replacement.

"Charities operate in an increasingly complex environment. Funding, beneficiary needs, technological change, governance expectations, and workforce challenges require leaders with differing skills at specific stages of an organisation's journey. Before drafting a job description, boards should ask themselves:

- What challenges will we face over the next three/five years?
- What opportunities are emerging?
- What capabilities are needed to navigate them successfully?
- What leadership will help us achieve our ambitions?

"Recruit for the future you are trying to create, rather than simply replacing the past.

"It's important to remember that values matter. Technical competence and sector knowledge are important. But charity leadership is heavily values-driven. Candidates may have impressive CVs, qualifications, and significant management experience. Yet if their values don't align with your mission and culture, difficulties emerge.

"The most successful appointments occur when there's genuine alignment between the charity's purpose and values; board expectations; leadership style of the candidate; and culture



Peter Neal

experienced by employees, volunteers, and beneficiaries. Skills can be developed. Values are harder to change.

"Key thinking includes focusing on potential as well as track record. Charity boards naturally seek reassurance through evidence of previous success. However, over-reliance on past titles narrows the talent pool. Some exceptional leaders may not have held the exact role before but possess transferable skills, emotional intelligence, resilience, and the capacity to learn quickly. The recruitment process should assess both capability and potential. Questions worth considering include how they respond to adversity, exhibit adaptability, inspire confidence and demonstrate curiosity and self-awareness.

"Prioritise diversity of thought - strong leadership teams aren't built through similarity. Charities benefit from diverse perspectives and experiences. Diverse leadership encourages healthy challenge, richer discussions, and better decision-making.

"Boards should continually ask themselves whether their recruitment practices encourage inclusion or reinforce familiarity. Broadening candidate reach, reviewing recruitment materials, challenging unconscious bias improve the quality of appointments.

"Involve stakeholders thoughtfully as senior charity leaders do not operate in isolation. Employees, volunteers, beneficiaries, donors, and partners are affected by leadership appointments - involving them in elements of the process provides valuable insight. This doesn't mean outsourcing decision-

making. Boards remain accountable. However, stakeholder engagement helps assess qualities in ways that formal interviews sometimes cannot.

"Recruitment is time-consuming but the cost of making the wrong appointment is significant. Financially, operationally, and emotionally, poor recruitment decisions can set organisations back considerably. Taking time to define the brief properly, undertake robust assessment, conduct meaningful conversations, and complete appropriate due diligence is an investment rather than a delay. A thorough process gives confidence that all available talent has been explored and the best decision made.

"Leadership appointments are among the most important decisions a charity board will ever make. Right leaders strengthens culture, improve governance, inspire teams, attract support, and help organisations navigate uncertainty with confidence. Wrong appointments create instability and distract charities from their purpose.

"Ultimately, successful recruitment is about identifying the individual whose experience, values, potential, and leadership style best align with where the organisation is today and where it hopes to be tomorrow. When boards approach recruitment with clarity, patience, and a focus on long-term impact, they give their charities the greatest opportunity to thrive."

If you need help with thoughtful charity leadership recruitment get in touch on peter@theexperiencebank.co.uk

Why it feels good to do good

By Abu Ali, Corporate Finance Partner at FRP

In corporate finance, much of the focus is on growth, transactions and value creation. But the conversations that stay with me are often about people, community and impact.



Abu Ali

Over time, I've noticed something consistent: the leaders who make the biggest difference are often the happiest. That may seem at odds with a world focused on profit and performance, but there's truth behind it. When we help others, we feel better — we're wired that way.

For me, this is personal.

I was born and raised in Newcastle, the son of an immigrant, in a community where people looked out for each other. That's why for me, giving back has always been a responsibility, not a choice. Success means more when it lifts others with it.

That spirit runs deep in the North East — a region shaped by resilience, where communities support one another through change and challenge. I see it every day in business owners backing local causes and leaders supporting their teams when it matters most.

Doing good doesn't come at the expense of business success. Purpose-led organisations build stronger teams, deeper loyalty and greater resilience.

That's why initiatives like CEO Sleepout matter. Spending just one night outside your comfort zone can give a real insight into the challenges of homelessness in our communities.

It's a simple way to raise awareness, funds and perspective.

If you can, I'd encourage you to get involved — whether at Sunderland's Stadium of Light or Darlington's Mowden Park this November. ceosleepout.co.uk

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NE Youth update

Now in its 91st year NE Youth have supported over 1.3 million young people, helping them to get involved in their communities, enjoy their lives and achieve their potential.

Times are tough for all charities right now but the team at NE Youth are working even harder to continue to change young lives.

ACT: NE Youth have an exciting new youth-led identity

ACT - Action Creates Change Together. Developed with and alongside young people, ACT brings together all of NE Youth's youth-led activity under one shared identity. More than just a new name, ACT represents their commitment to ensuring young people's voices are heard, valued and transformed into meaningful action. Through ACT, young people are helping to shape projects, influence decisions, challenge barriers and create positive change within their communities. It reflects a simple but powerful belief: when young people are given the opportunity to lead, real change happens. ACT is just getting started – and the team at NE Youth are excited to see where young people's ideas will take them.

Corporate Charity Football Tournament- 16th July

Are you enjoying the World Cup? If football is your thing why not gather a team and sign up for the NE Youth's Corporate Charity Football Tournament taking place on 16th July? The tournament, to be held at GOALS, will bring together teams from across the region for a day of football, networking and fundraising, all in support of young people. The event is part of NE Youth's wider summer focus

on supporting boys and young men. Using the power of football to spark conversations around confidence, wellbeing, identity and belonging, the charity is harnessing the game's ability to bring people together both on and off the pitch. So whether you're battling it out for the trophy or cheering from the sidelines, every team taking part will be helping NE Youth. Businesses interested in entering a team or exploring sponsorship opportunities are encouraged to get involved and be part of a fantastic day of football, fundraising and community spirit.

NEET

The recent report by Alan Milburn highlighted many issues including social mobility, opportunity and the growing gap between young people's aspirations and the support available to help them achieve them. At NE Youth, their Peer Ambassadors have been exploring these issues directly with young people across the North East. Their research paints a clear picture: support needs to start

earlier, be joined-up and reflect the realities of young people's lives. What young people consistently say is that they want opportunities, purpose and a chance to contribute to their communities.

As policymakers consider the recommendations of the Milburn report, the voices of young people themselves must remain central to the conversation. Their experiences provide a powerful reminder that improving opportunity requires more than isolated interventions – it requires a coordinated approach that addresses the barriers young people face in every aspect of their lives.

We need your support - it could change a young person's future. Sponsor an event, make a donation, or partner with NE Youth to help us provide vital programmes, safe spaces, and opportunities for the next generation.

**Jon Niblo, CEO, jon@neyouth.org.uk
www.neyouth.org.uk**

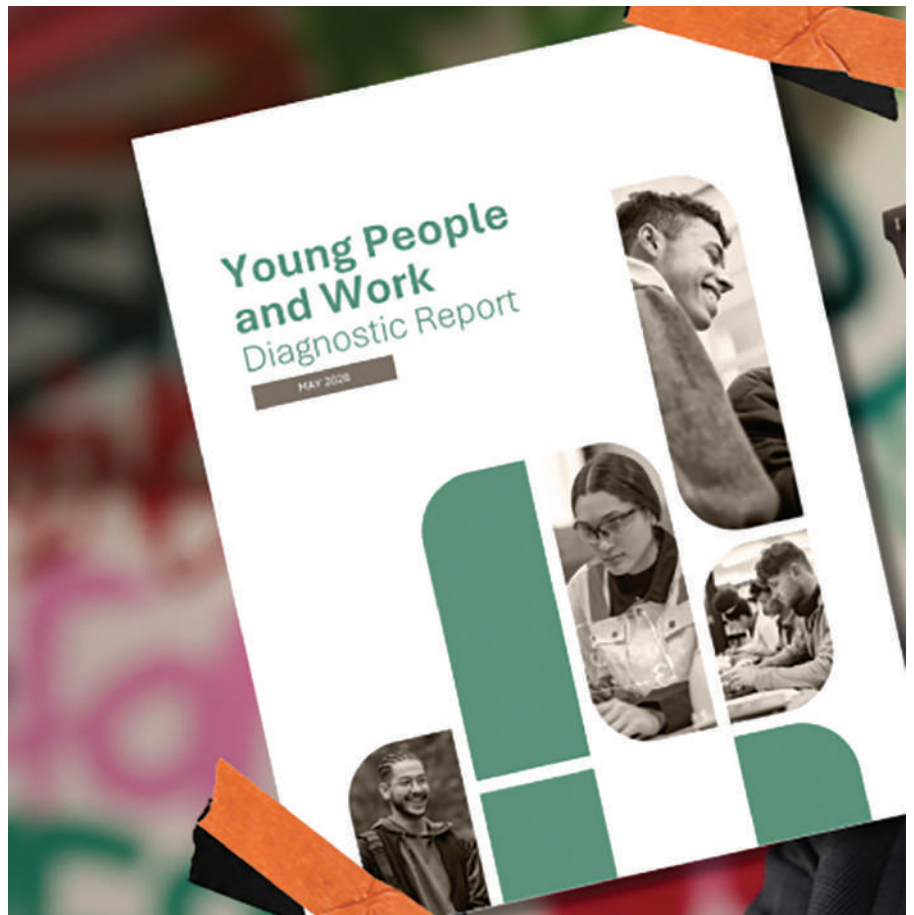


Image credit: kg photography



Teresa Peters

More than a label

By Teresa Peters, Executive Coach and Founder of Accelerator Coaching Ltd

What six months of training in neurodivergent inclusive coaching has taught me about myself, and the leaders I work with.

“What version of yourself do you want to greet on the other side of the choices you make?”

Here is a fact that stopped me in my tracks. Around one in seven people in the UK, more than ten million of us, are thought to be neurodivergent. One widely cited 2025 survey suggested that nearly half of executives and business owners identify as neurodivergent themselves. Whatever the precise figure, it makes you think! Many of the people driving our organisations think and process the world differently to the systemic norms they work within.

When most of us hear the word neurodivergent, our minds jump straight to ADHD, autism or dyslexia. But the picture is wider than that. It also includes dyspraxia, Tourette's syndrome, OCD and giftedness, and many other ways of thinking and experiencing the world. None of

these are flaws to fix. They are simply different operating systems.

I am not jumping on a bandwagon here. Anyone who knows my work knows I coach every person and team uniquely, drawing on empathy and intuition before reaching for any model. But over the last six months, training with In Good Company in neurodivergent inclusive coaching, something has struck me, and changed how I show up.

Central to this programme is the Executive Function Wheel, adapted from the work of Dr Thomas Brown. It maps eight functions, impulse control, emotional regulation, self monitoring, working memory, planning, organisation, task initiation and flexible thinking, that shape how we think, feel and act. Two of these sit close together for me, both under emotional regulation. Impulse control is the pause before I speak or act. Self monitoring is what happens afterwards, when I replay and assess it.

This is where it got personal. Before I say or do something, impulse control is quietly weighing it up. Afterwards, self monitoring takes over, and I am back analysing it, replaying the conversation, checking how I landed. Constantly. On one hand, sharp self awareness. On the other, left unchecked, exhausting over monitoring.

That coaching question at the top of this page has become a daily anchor. I have it as a reminder on my phone every morning. It is a simple nudge that every choice takes me one step closer to, or further from, the person I want to be. For me, that future self is authentic,

creative, compassionate, in service of my clients, over delivers, puts family first, prioritises health, and has vitality with glows of yellow of course, along the way.

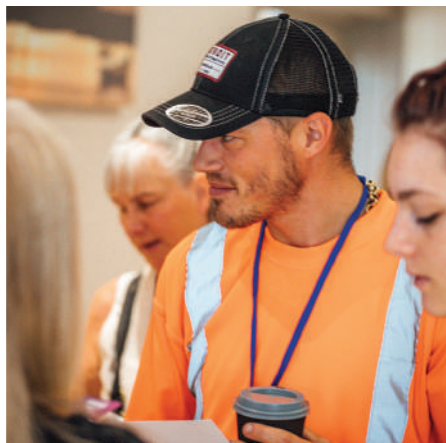
And yet I am also, by nature, gregarious and free. Some might say a little unorthodox. I act quickly, speak honestly, and trust my instincts. For years I saw that as something to manage. Now I see it as a genuine strength, bringing warmth, energy and authenticity into a room. The goal is not to silence either side of me. It is to know when each is useful, and when it is running the show without my permission.

This is exactly what I bring into my coaching now. When a client tells me they cannot stop replaying a conversation, or that they spoke before they thought it through, I have a deeper lens. Is this impulse control, self monitoring, or both, working together or against each other? Are these aligning with sought after values or compromising values? And what future self are they trying to greet?

Inclusive leadership is not about new policies or ticking a box. It begins with leaders understanding their own minds first, with curiosity rather than judgement.

Accelerator Coaching Ltd helps leaders and teams across the UK build self awareness, communicate with confidence and perform with purpose, using a blend of coaching psychology, profiling tools and emotional intelligence frameworks.

To find out more, get in touch at ignite@acceleratorcoaching.co.uk or visit [acceleratorcoaching.co.uk](https://www.acceleratorcoaching.co.uk)



A Breakfast Boost

Businesses from across the borough came together for North Tyneside Business Forum's latest Breakfast Boost event, enjoying a morning of networking, expert advice and practical business support.

Delegates made new connections, learned more about funding available through the Made Smarter Professional & Business Services Programme and heard inspiring insights on building resilient businesses through strong professional networks. Events like Breakfast Boost are just one of the ways the Business Forum helps North Tyneside businesses connect, grow, access support and make the most of new opportunities.



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Misaligned Intent

There are some fundamental questions we should all ask ourselves when we are setting up a business.

One is, “am I building a relationship-based business or a transactional business?” and the other one is “Where on the (low) price/ (high) value paradigm am I going to operate?”. The two questions are often related and being clear about the answers is important. Clarity is power, remember.

Right now it is almost impossible to avoid AI and the business world is scrambling to jump on this bandwagon with reckless abandon. AI has its place but as business leaders we have to be clear where that place is. I would argue that if your business model is relationship based the place for AI is anywhere but in front of the customer. It is impossible to have a relationship with a bot and

compelling a sentient human to communicate with a bot is only going to lead to frustration and distrust, which is probably the opposite of your intentions.

Steven M.R. Covey, in his book ‘The Speed of Trust’ argues that trust is founded on the two pillars of character and capabilities. Character in turn is based on integrity and intent. Intent refers to the question, is she focussed on her interests, or my interests? When we sense that the other party is driven primarily by their self interest that is certain to reduce trust, if not abolish it entirely. As human beings, we can sense this even when we aren’t consciously aware of it, like an animal can sense if we are scared of it.

The deployment of AI solutions is driven by many factors, often to save time, but I will always ask, whose time? If you are deploying AI to save your time and expense, at the cost of the customers frustration and exasperation, is that in conflict with your intent? If so beware.

One of the main reasons that strategies fail is that they aren’t aligned and the various strands work against each other. Does your intended use of AI smooth the way for the person trying to buy from you or is it silently getting in the way?

www.kinnery.co.uk

The Business Reset

A leading North East business coach has launched a new programme to help leaders identify their key growth priorities.

Award-winning coach Ian Kinnery has spent over two decades helping to grow both businesses and leaders across the region.

Now he’s created ‘The Business Reset’, with the goal of helping ten different businesses unlock their potential.

Leaders can apply for one of Ian’s 90-minute strategic working sessions designed to give them “clarity and direction” when growing their business.

“The Business Reset is aimed at those already leading established businesses, or large teams of up to 100 staff, who are finding that as they grow, those waters are becoming trickier to navigate,” said Ian, a previous European Business Coach of the Year recipient.

“It aims to help owners identify what works well, what could be improved and where changes may be needed.”

Given that Ian only works with a limited number of clients at any one time, The Business Reset is only open to ten eligible businesses every 90 days.

If selected, applicants partake in a strategic working session - leaving with a “clear action plan and not just ideas”.

“The session is one-to-one and gives us both enough time to establish what is limiting your growth - which could be anything from finances to leadership or strategy - and we work out what must change for you to unleash that potential,” added Ian.

“In my decades of experience, I’ve realised that growth rarely requires more effort - you just have to work smarter, not harder - and every participant leaves with three actionable priorities that can help you reach that next level over the next 90 days.”

“Sometimes the most important thing a business owner can do is stop and take a proper look at the business, and The Business Reset gives them an opportunity to do just that - and make informed decisions about what comes next.”

To apply or for information visit
www.kinnery.co.uk/business-reset

North East Space Conference highlights region's growing investment opportunity



L-R: Frazer Christie Airbus, John Bone Space Leadership Group, Ben Shaw Lockheed Martin, Tom Justice Muckle LLP, Andrew Husband Durham County Council, Lisa Mullen Space North East England, Kerry Walker Business Durham

The North East Space Conference 2026 demonstrated the growing strength and ambition of the region's space sector, bringing together more than 350 delegates from industry, academia, government and the investment community to explore future opportunities for growth, collaboration and inward investment.

Opened by North East Mayor Kim McGuinness, the conference highlighted the increasing role the sector is playing in driving innovation, attracting investment and creating high-value jobs across the region.

Hosted by Space North East England at the Radisson Blu Hotel in Durham, the conference focused on a clear ambition: converting the North East's growing reputation for innovation into increased national and international investment.

While the region's space sector has developed steadily over the past decade, this year's event reflected growing confidence that the North East is now positioned to play a much larger role in the UK's space economy.

Delegates heard from leading organisations including the UK Space Agency, European Space Agency, Lockheed Martin, Airbus, Seraphim Space and Telespazio, alongside businesses already driving innovation across the region.

A key theme throughout the conference was the strength of the North East's wider industrial ecosystem and the opportunities this creates for businesses both within and beyond the traditional space sector.

As space technologies become increasingly

important to communications, defence, manufacturing and environmental monitoring, opportunities are emerging for companies with capabilities that can be applied across multiple markets. Discussions highlighted how businesses operating in advanced manufacturing, cyber security, artificial intelligence, engineering and defence can diversify into the rapidly growing space economy.

The conference also highlighted the significant supply chain opportunities emerging across the sector. Lockheed Martin's £100 million proposal to build its UK satellite manufacturing facility at NETPark in County Durham demonstrates growing confidence in the capability of regions such as the North East to support globally significant space activity.

The region is well positioned to capitalise on this growth thanks to its concentration of advanced manufacturing and technology businesses, supported by world-class research and skills assets. Organisations including Durham University's Space Research Centre (SPARC), Northumbria University's North East Space Skills and Technology Centre (NESST) and New College Durham's North East Institute of Technology are helping to develop the talent and innovation pipeline required to support future demand.

Growing links between the space and defence sectors were another key talking point. As satellite technologies become increasingly important to national security and resilient communications, collaboration between the two sectors continues to strengthen.

County Durham is already home to a number of companies operating across both markets, including NETPark-based businesses such as Filtronic, Kromek, RED Scientific and Graphene Composites. Their expertise in advanced materials, semiconductors, communications and defence technologies aligns closely with future space sector requirements.

Alongside innovation and skills, the conference reinforced the North East's wider proposition for new businesses moving to the region. Businesses can access specialist facilities, connect to strong digital connectivity, a highly skilled workforce and, importantly, the space required to grow and scale.

The conference reinforced a clear message: the North East's space sector is no longer an emerging opportunity. It is becoming an increasingly important contributor to the UK's space ambitions and a compelling destination for investment, innovation and growth.

The North East's space sector continues to grow through collaboration between businesses, universities, investors and public sector partners.

To discover more about the organisations driving this growth, upcoming events, funding opportunities and the support available to businesses looking to enter or expand within the sector, visit www.spacenortheastengland.com



From high-end design to holistic health

Sunderland couple “reframe” regional wellness scene.

When Lauren and Matt Harding opened the doors to ReFrame Health and Wellness Club, they weren't simply launching a new business venture. They were responding to a life-changing wake-up call.

The Sunderland couple are the founders of the specialist reformer Pilates studio based at the North East BIC, but the inspiration behind the business came from a period of profound personal adversity.

Last year, Matt, who ran a successful high-end joinery company, was diagnosed with Lynch syndrome before suffering a stress-related stroke. The experience forced the pair to reassess the relentless pace of their working lives and ask themselves what mattered most.

The answer was ReFrame.

Officially opening its doors in May, the wellness club represents a complete shift in direction – one centred on health, balance and longevity, both for themselves and the community they serve.

“Navigating a serious health crisis was a wake-up call for us both as individuals and as



Lauren and Matt Harding

entrepreneurs,” says Lauren. “It was the moment we realised our lifestyle had to change.

“We decided to combine our professional expertise in design and construction to create something with a real sense of purpose – a business built on resilience and the importance of taking a holistic approach to health and longevity.”

Rather than following a traditional route into the wellness industry, the couple drew upon the skills they had already developed through their respective careers. Matt's technical joinery expertise and Lauren's experience as director of LC Interiors allowed them to design and commission their own bespoke reformer Pilates machines, bypassing standard suppliers in favour of a more tailored approach.

The studio's eight reformers feature imported German-engineered springs, creating a premium experience designed to rival leading international brands.

Attention to detail extends beyond the equipment. Inspired by Lauren's work in high-end residential interior design, the studio combines classic panelling with a calming colour palette to create a space intended to promote mental clarity as well as physical wellbeing.

ReFrame's timetable reflects its inclusive philosophy, offering sessions ranging from Beginner Foundations to Strength and HIIT classes, alongside yoga-inspired stretch sessions. Specialist equipment, including Wunda Chairs and Jump Boards, further broadens the experience available to clients.

For Lauren, creating an environment that feels welcoming was just as important as delivering high-quality instruction.

“In this industry it's easy to feel intimidated,” she says. “Our philosophy is about staying in your own lane.

“Our studio features individual mirrors for every bed so clients can focus entirely on their own process rather than feeling competitive.”

Steph Drinkald, Assistant Centre Manager at the North East BIC, believes the Hardings' journey demonstrates the resilience and adaptability often found among the region's entrepreneurs.

“By blending their existing professional skills with a new passion for wellness, they have created a unique service that adds real value to the diversity of businesses based here at the BIC,” she says.

At its core, ReFrame is about much more than exercise. Born from one family's experience of ill health and burnout, it offers a reminder that success sometimes means changing course entirely – and that reframing priorities can open the door to something even more meaningful.

For more information about ReFrame Health and Wellness Club, visit reframewellnessclub.co.uk

The Future of Sustainable Sport

By Jo Holmes, Genee

The Green Goals Conference brought together leaders from across the sports and leisure sector to explore one of the biggest challenges facing our industry: how do we create a more environmentally sustainable future for sport and physical activity?

As climate change impacts participation through extreme weather, rising costs and increasing pressure on facilities and infrastructure, organisations are being challenged to move beyond short-term actions and develop long-term sustainability strategies.

The recent launch of Sport England's environmental sustainability strategy, Every Move, alongside its £45 million commitment to help the sector reduce its carbon footprint, demonstrates that sustainability is now firmly embedded within the future of sport and physical activity in England.

The Growing Importance of Social Value

Across the public, voluntary and community sectors, funders and commissioners are increasingly seeking evidence of impact before allocating resources.

For organisations applying for grants, delivering community programmes or competing for contracts, the ability to demonstrate social value is becoming as important as financial viability.

Funders want to understand how projects contribute to wider outcomes, for example community resilience, environmental sustainability, and economic development. Organisations that cannot evidence these outcomes risk being overlooked in favour of those that can clearly demonstrate the value they create.

For sports clubs, charities, leisure trusts and community organisations, environmental management should not be viewed as a standalone exercise. Instead, it should form part of a wider story about the positive impact an organisation is having on people, communities and the environment.



Why Environmental Management Matters

Environmental sustainability is often associated with carbon reduction, waste management and energy efficiency. However, effective environmental management delivers much wider benefits, such as reduced costs, improved operational efficiency and strengthened governance, resilience and risk management. Environmental programmes can also engage staff, volunteers, participants and partners around a shared commitment to positive change.

Just as importantly, they generate measurable evidence that can support funding bids, procurement processes and stakeholder reporting. As social value becomes an increasingly important consideration, organisations that can demonstrate both environmental and community impact will be better placed to secure opportunities and thrive.

How Investors in the Environment Can Help

Investors in the Environment (iIE) provides a practical framework that helps organisations move from environmental ambition to measurable action.

Members receive access to:

- Practical templates and guidance
- Online training and resources
- Support from environmental specialists
- Independent verification of environmental performance
- Structured reporting to demonstrate progress and impact

This support enables organisations of all sizes,

including charities and voluntary organisations, to establish robust environmental management systems and build credible evidence of their sustainability achievements.

Organisations already participating in iIE are demonstrating what can be achieved. For example, RISE North East has strengthened engagement with suppliers around sustainability objectives and now confidently embeds environmental considerations into procurement and decision-making.

Looking Ahead

The conversations taking place at Green Goals reflect a wider shift across the sports and leisure sector. Organisations that can demonstrate environmental responsibility alongside wider community impact will be better positioned to secure funding, win contracts and build long-term resilience.

For those beginning their sustainability journey, the challenge can feel significant. However, as many iIE members have shown, meaningful progress starts with practical steps, clear measurement and the right support.

The future of sport depends on healthy communities, resilient organisations and a sustainable environment. By embedding environmental management into everyday operations and demonstrating the social value that follows, organisations can help ensure that future remains within reach.

To discuss how Genee can help your organisation manage your environmental impact, contact us on jo@genee.org.uk



Standing out in specialist B2B events: A Northern perspective

By Jack Saward, Founder of Saward Marketing and Events

We all know there's a version of events success that looks good on paper - record attendance figures, a well-known venue and a packed exhibitor floor.

But what actually moves the needle commercially? In my experience, they are often not the same things.

Specialist B2B events - aka sector-specific and often niche industry gatherings and exhibitions that are genuinely relevant to everyone in the room - often outperform their larger counterparts when it comes to lead quality and measurable commercial outcomes.

The challenge is getting them right. And that's harder than it looks.

Know your audience before you know your venue

The most common mistake I see businesses make with specialist events is working backwards - booking the venue, setting the date, then wondering who to invite. It should always be the other way around. Who are you trying to reach? Directors or procurement teams? Existing clients or new prospects? The answer shapes everything that follows such as the format, the content and even the invitations themselves.

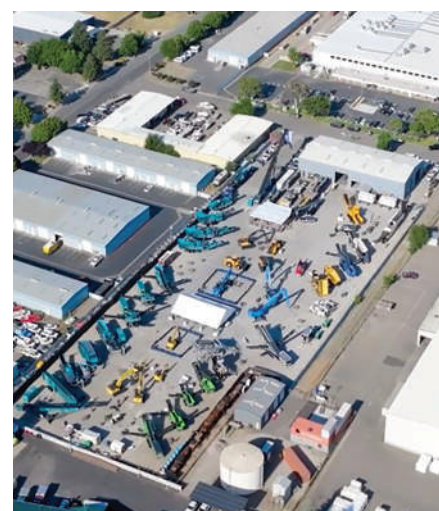
And those invitations matter more than most

people realise. In a specialist sector, comparisons to your peers start from the moment the invite lands. If your event looks like an afterthought before anyone has walked through the door, you've already lost ground.

In-house events: what works and what doesn't

Done well, in-house client and customer events can be one of the most powerful tools in a B2B marketing strategy. At Saward Marketing & Events we've helped deliver some genuinely impressive ones both here in the UK and abroad, that have strengthened long-term relationships, opened new commercial conversations and given clients a real sense of the business.

However, working in this industry you will always see events that were too ambitious for the budget or held at the wrong time of year when half the target audience was at a trade show. The events industry is unforgiving in that respect - you get one shot to make a first impression.



Timing, budget and the value of getting it right

Specialist sectors have busy event calendars. Before committing to an in-house event, it's worth mapping what else is happening in your industry - trade shows and association events, for example. As a business, we always try to ensure our clients are working during a blank space if we can. An event that clashes with something bigger will always lose.

Budget honesty is equally important. If you're going to do it properly, do it properly. That means being realistic about what accommodation, travel, catering and delegate experience actually cost - and building those numbers in from the start rather than cutting corners at the end.

The businesses that get specialist events right in the North are the ones that treat them as a strategic investment rather than a calendar obligation. The leads are better, the relationships are stronger and the return is almost always there.

It just means you need to plan properly and have the discipline to stick to it.

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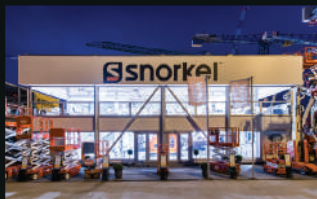
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Andrew Marsh

The Inspiring Leaders Class of 2026 Graduates

The latest cohort of Inspiring Leaders course has graduated this month, following two year's commitment to being better at what they do.

Facilitator and mentor of the cohort is Andrew Marsh, the Vistage Chair for the North East, Northumberland and Cumbria; he is also a NED, Business Mentor and previous CEO. Andrew has taken his career experience to create a programme perfect for middle management to improve their decision-making skills and performance.

This year's cohort sees eight talented individuals complete the intense series of bi-monthly sessions which has included world class speakers imparting knowledge, as well as the sharing and processing of real-time work issues and challenges.

From a range of industries, the cohort come from differing roles, with different experiences, training and expectations placed upon them from their employer.

Laura Kerr from The Wilf Ward Family Trust is a people partner working in the charity's people team. She said she had enjoyed the course immensely, and that it had been a huge learning curve. She said the most valuable thing for her was coming together with people from different backgrounds to spend protected time working on her own abilities. She also loved the quality of speakers citing her favourite as Brad Waldron's Seven Habits, as she took away applicable thoughts about the balance between work and personal life.

Beverley Scott, sales manager at merchandise expert Pro Ad Ltd said that the most inspirational thing she has learnt as part of the experience has been how empower the members of her team, especially focusing on how to help them grow and develop to achieve their full potential.

Sharron Evans is also from Pro Ad Ltd, acting as their Finance and Operations Manager. She found the two-year programme very helpful with many things changing how she approached her role at work. Every session gave her many things to take away as ideas to implement at work, with her particularly enjoying speaker Brad Walsh with his Naked Presenting topic. She credits the session for her having more confidence in presentation skills and dealing with the team.

Kayleigh Philipson, Delivery Manager in the Delivery and Innovation team at Citizens Advice Gateshead, said her biggest take away was around communication and managing change. She has found herself naturally thinking more strategically and seeing the bigger picture. She shared that she feels she is now a lot more effective in her role and recommends the programme to any manager saying "it is great for your own personal benefit and for that of your organisation too".

Ray Johnson-Smith, Legal Aid Services Manager at Citizens Advice Gateshead said that they found the last two years have really benefited them in their workplace. They shared that they had found the speakers exceptionally insightful, particularly Sue Firth who understood the way Ray worked – she spotted Ray's team's motivators quickly and gave amazing tips to bring out their strengths. Ray has already recommended a number of the legal aid team members to join the course in the future!

Phillip Capewell, partnerships director for Society Matters which offers socially conscious business support, loved the variety and perspective of the speakers. He commented that being able to apply his learnings to his role has been invaluable. He has also enjoyed



building a peer support network with people who he wouldn't have necessarily met without the cohort, and says they will keep in touch as alumni of the programme.

Matt Powell completed the cohort, graduating with flying colours too.

The final speaker of the programme was Simon Hartley, with a session on world class mindset. Simon was a real treat for the cohort as he works globally with brands like Nike, Addidas and sports clubs.

Andrew concluded: "This cohort has worked hard and has applied themselves to the process of learning, growing and changing. They have new skills, outlooks and a support network that they will fall back on in the future too.

"I strive to bring a variety of speakers, all Vistage recommended, to the programme and those speakers ensure that the content and take aways are appropriate for middle management – from how to manage people, be strategic, look at opportunity, respond to risk and presentation skills, the topics all include processing real-life work situations making them practical as well as learning theories.

"Well done to the whole cohort for their focus, attention and achievements on the journey. I am sure you will all do well with your future careers and I look forward to watching you all flourish."

According to statistics from mentoring networks and charity support organisations middle managers face immense pressure, with 45% reporting burnout, making them the most stressed occupational group. Peer groups mitigate this by providing safe- spaces to navigate unwritten expectations, share conflict-resolution strategies, and increase manager well-being by up to 32%.

A new cohort for 2026 has just started with a few last-minute places left – if this sounds like something you or a team member would benefit from then get in touch on Andrew@marshbusinessstransformation.co.uk

The Recruiter

In the latest of this popular series of features

Graham Courtney spoke to Jack Salkeld, Founder at Tynestack...

A recruitment agency that cares? Surely not.

Tynestack...the recruitment agency that does things differently.

Let's face facts here. Some recruitment agencies don't have a very good reputation. They become notorious for having a scattergun approach whereby they send a client dozens of potential candidates, even though the vast majority aren't appropriate. But hey, one of them might get lucky. It's called 'spray and pray,' which stands for volume over judgement.

This isn't fair on the client and it's certainly not fair on the candidates.

Having spent years working in recruitment, Jack Salkeld has seen from the inside how these agencies operate. He wanted to do things differently and have the freedom to build a consultancy centred around quality, transparency and long-term partnerships rather than volume-based recruitment and short-term targets."

Towards the end of last year, he took the plunge and established Tynestack Recruitment.

"Everything finally clicked into place on 1st March of this year, and I'm delighted to say that I'm really busy," said Jack. "Around 20 of my previous clients immediately moved to Tynestack, which gave me huge confidence that the relationship-first approach was something businesses genuinely valued. Many of those clients continue to trust me with key hires across technology, finance and commercial functions. They plainly like the way I operate.

"I don't encourage clients to have something which they don't need. Some clients might need me for three days a week, others may need me once a month. Some need a full day working with them, others may need just a couple of hours.

"It's all about trust and building relationships. I'm not going to grow Tynestack just for the sake of growing it...everything needs to be done properly. Successful recruitment is based on genuine understanding and lasting relationships rather than simply filling vacancies quickly. I value the way I work, and I value clients who want to work in a similar fashion. I like to speak directly to clients...I'm not keen on emails because they're too impersonal...so I prefer to meet them or, at the very least, have a detailed phone call so that we can fully understand each other, build a partnership and find out what their objectives are."

The same principles lead to Jack coming up with the name, Tynestack.

In a nutshell, Jack is from Newcastle...we have a lot of fantastic bridges across the River Tyne which connect communities. So, following the same idea, Jack builds bridges with clients and candidates; he connects with them.

Stack is a tower of strength and, as Jack works extensively in technology recruitment, a tech stack refers to the amount of technology which goes into computer applications or websites.

As well as technology, which other areas does Jack and his Tynestack business specialise in?

"It's mainly professional and technical recruitment, focussing on Information Technology, Finance and broader white-collar commercial positions. Our current vacancies are for software developers, SQL developers, IT support engineers and finance-related opportunities. We've previously found candidates to fill positions including .NET development, cloud technologies, data platforms, Microsoft 365 and infrastructure support."

Tynestack recruitment is a boutique specialist consultancy rather than a large-scale agency. If you contact Tynestack you'll be dealt with by Jack Salkeld. He's happy to give advice to clients and candidates, help with CVs and point candidates in the right direction. He'll speak to businesses and suggest possible recruitment solutions. Whether a business is making a critical hire, building a team or simply looking for market advice, Tynestack aims to provide honest guidance, specialist expertise and a genuine partnership throughout the recruitment process.

In other words, yes, shock, it's true. Jack Salkeld and Tynestack care about recruitment. It's not about numbers; it's about doing the right thing...and they can do the right thing for you.

If you'd like to speak to Jack about filling a position at your business, or if you are searching for a job or just fancy a change, the best idea is to visit his excellent website www.tynestack.com where you'll find additional information and how you can reach him.



“

**It's all about
trust and
building
relationships.**

Jack Salkeld

Summer is the perfect time for a career stocktake

Bryony Gibson, director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, explains why summer can be a valuable time to pause, reflect, and make sure your career is still heading in the right direction.

Summer has a habit of giving us a little more space. For some, that means holidays, family time, and a chance to step away from deadlines and work pressures. For others, it's a few slightly quieter weeks, when the pace changes just enough to allow room for thought.

Either way, it can be a useful moment to take stock of your career. But when I say this, I don't mean deciding you need to leave your job.

A career review is not the same as a job search. It's about taking the time to think about where you are right now, where you want to get to, and whether your current role is helping you move in that direction.

Be honest with yourself

In accountancy practice, career paths can appear quite structured. The path is laid out, but in reality, people's priorities and circumstances are different. The important thing is knowing what matters to you.

A good place to start is by asking yourself a few questions. Are you still learning? Are you being challenged in the right way? Do you know what your next step looks like? Have you had a proper conversation about progression, salary, training and development? Do you know what you need to do to move forward?

If the answers are unclear, it doesn't mean you're in the wrong place, but it probably does mean you need a conversation.



Bryony Gibson

Don't wait until you are frustrated

It's also worth thinking about whether your role still reflects your strengths. The work you enjoyed a couple of years ago may not be the work you want to continue doing. As you gain experience, your confidence grows, your interests change, and your expectations of work often shift, too.

In my experience, people tend to wait until they're unhappy before talking about their future. By that point, the issue can feel bigger than it needs to be. A good employer wants to understand your ambitions and help you achieve them, but they can't do that if they don't know what you want.

Keep in touch with the market

For accountancy professionals, summer can be a good time to look outward. Not because you are planning to move, but because understanding the wider market helps you understand your position within it.

Do you know what other firms are offering? What skills are in demand? What salary level is realistic for your experience?

Keeping your CV updated is part of that process. Not because you need to send it

anywhere tomorrow, but because it helps you reflect on what you have achieved, to think about the clients you have worked with, the responsibilities you have taken on, and the progress you have made.

Keep an open mind

Hopefully, this exercise confirms you are exactly where you should be. It could also highlight that you need to ask for more responsibility, clearer objectives, or better support, or that your current role no longer matches your goals.

If that happens, it is better to know than to drift.

Careers rarely go wrong because of one bad decision.

One of the biggest causes of unhappiness at work is when people just keep going. Summer gives us a natural pause, a chance to step back and check whether things still feel aligned.

The answer may be a conversation with your manager. It may be a fresh challenge in your current firm. Or, yes, it could be time to consider a new opportunity. But the point is not to make a rushed decision. It's to make a conscious one, because your career deserves more than autopilot.

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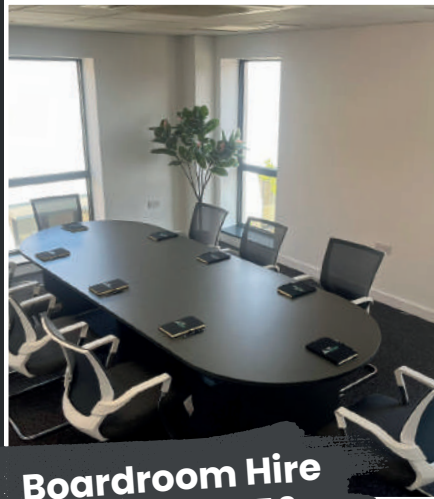
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Sharon Nelson

A crisis is unfolding

By Sharon Nelson, Senior Residential Home Manager

If you didn't already know, there's a fostering crisis unfolding in our region.

More than 6,000 children across the North East need foster families. Just let that sink in for a second.

The scale is unprecedented, and sadly albeit perhaps predictably, the North East's rate is higher than anywhere else in the country.

That's one of the reasons why we've pushed to create a new home in our hometown of Hartlepool, plans which last month were approved by the council.

The goal of the home – known as Hope House – is to create a safe place for some of the most vulnerable children in our region to call home. Because right now, for far too many children, there simply isn't one.

When a child comes into care, they need safety and stability. Familiar faces. And to be near friends and family – even if, for whatever reason, they can't be near their birth parents. Yet increasingly, that's becoming harder and harder.

A massive shortage of foster families and children's homes means some young people are being moved hundreds of miles away from everything familiar.

Step in their shoes and rewind back to your childhood for a second. Imagine having a comfortable bubble – then finding yourself stripped from that and placed somewhere like Hull or Nottingham.

Then imagine being a child who has already experienced trauma and uncertainty, only to be told you need to leave everything (and everybody) you know and love behind.

That should never, ever be normalised.

Every child deserves the chance to stay close to the people and places that matter to them.

They deserve the opportunity to grow up in the community they call home.

That's why the North East urgently needs more foster families. Good people who can help give that love and TLC that every child loves. We now have more children in care than families able to look after them.

That must change.

But while we work on trying to change that, we need more homes for these children.

But because when they do need care, it should be close to home. In their community. In our community. In the North East. Not hundreds of miles away in the middle of nowhere.

At Changing Futures North East, we've spent more than two decades supporting children, young people and families across our region.

As a not-for-profit organisation, we spend every penny we make on finding and supporting foster families, and ultimately, improving the lives of young people.

Everything we do is built around one simple belief: every child deserves the chance to have a better future.

Our proposed children's home is an extension of that work. A small, safe home for up to four children.



A place where they can have their own bedroom, round-the-clock support and – crucially – that stability that we often take for granted.

And just remember, if you have children, you can still foster. If you are single, you can still foster. LGBTQ? Not a homeowner? It doesn't matter one bit.

What matters is that if you are still reading this, you've probably thought before about fostering – and that feeling has ultimately never left you.

So please, get in touch – and give local children a better chance of remaining local.

Because these are not somebody else's children. They are our children. They are the North East's children.

And when there aren't enough homes or foster families available, we all pay the price.

Most of all, the young people themselves.

changingfuturesfostering.co.uk



Michelle Sheekey

Growth for business owner who left school at 16 – and now employs almost 40 staff

A Teesside entrepreneur who left school at 16 has grown two successful businesses - creating almost 40 jobs in the process.

On the day of her first exam, Michelle Sheekey's world was turned upside down when her beloved grandad died.

That heartache meant Michelle left school "with a couple of daft O-Levels" and little ambition. However, fast-forward over 40 years, and she's since become a leading life coach while also running the North East's largest independent nursery.

"A lot of people will leave school thinking all hope is lost, but I'm proof your story is never finished," said Michelle.

And that story includes the staggering growth for her pre-school - The Montessori People Nursery School, in Thornaby - with the business enjoying a bumper 12 months.

Sales are up 90 per cent, with 2026 on track to be the site's most successful to date, following an expansion of the Tedder Avenue site, which has also seen several new jobs created.

While pupil numbers have almost doubled, one of the biggest unique aspects of The Montessori People Nursery is that in a sector defined by

staff churn, not one member of the site's core teaching team has decided to leave in the past three years – something Michelle admits is a "massive rarity".

Additionally, it is currently the region's only nursery to be awarded Silver in Investors in People, for People and Wellbeing.

"Our team has grown by almost 20 per cent, but the stat I'm proudest of is that none of our staff choose to leave and I think that speaks volumes about the kind of culture we have here," said Michelle.

"We've got a waiting list running until September 2027, and I think a key factor behind that is word-of-mouth; Parents are really happy, and that starts with our staff, because they really love what they do and they love the kids."

For Michelle, it could have been much different.

"My only ambition as a teenager was to go be a hairdresser or work on a cruise ship because, like many Teessiders growing up in the 1980s, I just wanted to escape," she said.

Ultimately, she did - borrowing money from her

dad, who drove her to Peterborough to get her first passport.

Then she flew to America, where she worked in Beverley Hills as a nanny to a rich American family.

"The only qualification you needed then was a British accent, because they wanted their own Mary Poppins," laughs Michelle.

"It was totally surreal – the woman I worked for was dating Prince's manager – it was a million miles from home."

However, after eventually returning to the UK, gardening-mad Michelle's career blossomed.

She achieved other qualifications, including in HR, and worked for Sky TV before returning home and obtaining a life coaching qualification from Newcastle University.

She's since launched Michelle Sheekey Elite Coaching, a high-end coaching business for successful people.

Drawing on her own life experiences and entrepreneur journey Michelle feels success is not just about what you achieve, but how you feel along the way - and her approach gives clients the tools, accountability and motivation to keep pushing on.

"I basically coach people like myself, who have achieved their life goals but still want more," she added.

"My initial goals were never much, and I really didn't think it would ever be like this. I didn't even have my own business until my 40s, but it shows that if you have the will, you can succeed."

michellesheekey.co.uk



Step back in time

The Executive Group steps into the past, strengthening connections for the future.

The Executive Group, part of Durham Business Group, renowned champions of North East business welcomed Summer at a favourite venue, Beamish Museum, stepping back in time to enjoy the Georgian era.

A glorious day included pottery demonstrations, a guided tour of Pockerley Old Hall, followed by a delicious lunch at the Drovers Tavern. The day provided a relaxed, non-sales environment where senior directors and decision-makers could connect, share insights, and create memorable experiences.

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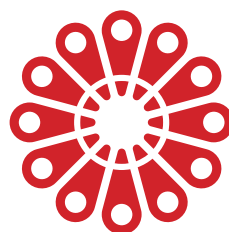
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MMC Research supports Prosper with stakeholder insight



Understanding how an organisation is perceived by its stakeholders can provide valuable direction for future growth. For Prosper, a procurement and property services specialist working across the social housing sector, gaining an external perspective on its reputation, relationships and future opportunities became an important part of its strategic planning process.

To support this work, Prosper partnered with MMC Research to undertake a qualitative stakeholder research programme designed to gather candid feedback from senior decision-makers across the housing sector and explore how the organisation could strengthen partnerships in the years ahead.

Working with social housing providers and contractors to deliver compliant procurement solutions and strategic support, Prosper helps organisations achieve value, efficiency and social impact through collaborative approaches. As the organisation continues to evolve, understanding stakeholder expectations and priorities was seen as critical to informing future business planning.

MMC Research designed and delivered a bespoke qualitative study involving ten senior leaders from across the social housing sector. Participants included C-level executives and senior decision-makers from both registered social housing providers and contracting organisations, ensuring a balanced perspective from key stakeholder groups.

The project began with the development of a tailored discussion guide, carefully designed to facilitate in-depth, iterative conversations. Each participant took part in a one-hour confidential interview, creating space for open and honest

discussions about the organisation, the wider housing landscape and opportunities for future partnership.

Natasha McDonough, Director at MMC Research, explains, “Qualitative research gives people the opportunity to move beyond simple survey responses and talk in detail about what’s really influencing their thinking. By creating space for meaningful conversations, organisations can gain a much deeper understanding of stakeholder perceptions, priorities and future needs.”

The findings, which provided Prosper with a rich source of strategic insight, were then analysed by MMC, resulting in a detailed insight report featuring an executive summary, thematic analysis, anonymised stakeholder quotations and a series of practical recommendations.

The research explored not only how Prosper is currently perceived but also how stakeholders would like to work with the organisation in the future. This provided valuable evidence to support an intentional, future-focused approach to business planning and strategic growth.

Following the conclusion of the project, MMC facilitated a dedicated insight workshop with Prosper’s executive team and partners with the session creating an opportunity to step back

from the research, reflect on its implications and explore how the findings could be translated into meaningful action.

“We see this as an important part of the process,” says Natasha. “Research on its own is only the starting point, the real value often comes afterwards, when insights are unpacked, challenged and translated into decisions, ideas and next steps with the people who will actually use them.”

“Workshops like this help bridge that gap, turning findings into shared understanding and new opportunities, while ensuring that insight doesn’t simply sit in a report but actively supports thinking and direction across the business.”

Reflecting on the collaboration, Prosper Chief Executive Officer, Rod Brasington, highlighted both the quality of the research and the practical value it delivered. “The MMC Research team provided a very detailed report on how our stakeholders view us,” he says. “The findings identified opportunities for us to consider, particularly around our strategic growth plan and how we communicate our proposition in the market.”

“Their deep sector knowledge enabled them to quickly understand our business and the service they provided was efficient and well thought out. It was a truly collaborative approach.

“The final report was brought to life through a workshop that MMC conducted with our executive team and partners. It got us thinking strategically and, most importantly, gave us a set of actions to be accountable to.”

For more information on MMC Research, visit their website at mmc.agency

Exit planning starts earlier than most owners realise

By Helen Butler, Simplified Operations

I've been having a lot of conversations recently with business owners who have an exit date in mind. Not a firm date. More of a rough plan.

"Maybe in five years."

"I'd like to slow down in a few years."

"The business is the pension."

The ambition is there, but what often surprises me is how little thought has been given to what needs to happen between now and then to make that exit possible.

Whether the goal is a trade sale, management buyout, succession plan or simply stepping back from day-to-day operations, the preparation required is often far greater than people expect.

According to research from the Federation of Small Businesses, a significant proportion of UK business owners are over 50. Over the next decade, thousands of owner-managed businesses will need to change hands in one form or another. Yet many owners remain heavily involved in the day-to-day running of their businesses, creating a challenge that is often underestimated.

Building a business and building a saleable business are not the same thing

Most business owners naturally focus on growth. More customers, more turnover and more profit.

All of those things matter, but they are not necessarily what makes a business attractive to a future buyer, investor or successor.

A business may be profitable and growing, but if every important decision goes through the owner, key customer relationships sit with the owner and operational knowledge exists only in the owner's head, the business becomes much harder to transition.

This is something I see regularly. In many cases, the owner has become the glue holding everything together. They've built the relationships, made the decisions and carry much of the knowledge. Often, that's exactly why the business has been successful.

The challenge is that the same things that helped build the business can make it harder to step away from.



Helen Butler

The five-year illusion

Five years sounds like a long time.

Until you start looking at what actually needs to change.

Developing leaders who can make decisions without the owner. Creating clear accountability. Building processes that create consistency. Improving visibility of performance. These things take time to embed and become part of how a business operates.

Most importantly, reducing owner dependency takes time. You cannot spend twenty years becoming the centre of everything and then expect to step away in six months.

Start earlier than you think

The businesses that are best prepared for an eventual exit are often not the biggest or fastest growing. They are the ones that have spent the time building capability around them and reducing reliance on the owner.

Interestingly, these are also the businesses that

owners tend to enjoy running the most. They spend less time firefighting and more time focusing on growth, opportunities and the future.

Rather than only asking what your business might be worth in five years, ask yourself an additional question:

"If I stepped away from the business for three months next year, what would break?"

The answer will probably tell you exactly where your exit planning needs to begin.

Ultimately, good exit planning isn't just about preparing for a transaction. It's about creating options. The more resilient and independent the business becomes, the more choice you have about what comes next.

If you're starting to think about what an eventual exit might look like for your business, get in touch - now is a good time to start the conversation.

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A taste of Sunderland

It's just hosted one of the UK's biggest bands, beat off competition to hold an acclaimed music festival and brought in tens of thousands of visitors to enjoy a whole host of entertainment and international cuisine – and for Sunderland that's just a taste of what 2026 has to offer.

A walk down Sunderland's High Street West a few weeks ago was a memorable experience and one for all the senses.

Firstly there was the unmistakable smell of delicious food – from rich spicy curries to roasting German sausages, to generous portions of noodles to colourful Caribbean dishes.

Then there was the sound – a rock choir one minute, an up-and-coming local singer the next, followed by tributes to Katy Perry, ABBA and Whitney Houston.

This was the latest Sunderland Food and Drink Festival, a weekend-long event created by Sunderland's BIDs which is now a firm fixture – and highly anticipated – date on the annual calendar.

There were throngs of people from literally the moment the festival began, eager to enjoy everything this great event has to offer.

The Food and Drink Festival also serves to consolidate the city's position as somewhere which offers endless experiences, tailored to



ensure there's something for everyone.

If further evidence of that was needed then look at the BBC Radio 1 Big Weekend which had the pick of every town and city in the country to host its massive music extravaganza – but decided to bring it to Sunderland's Herrington Park.

Not only did the weekend bring in thousands of people but it also created a legacy – showcasing that Sunderland means business when it comes to boosting its tourism trade and attracting visitors.

Sharon Appleby, Chief Executive at Sunderland's BIDs – which includes the City Centre BID and the Seafront BID – believes the positive vibe about the city is benefiting everyone.

"Having had Radio 1 Big Weekend and all the positive publicity that brings, followed quickly by Take That at the Stadium of Light turns a real spotlight on Sunderland," she said.

"And it's not just about the experience over those particular few days or one night, it creates a legacy which hopefully inspires people to return."

Certainly hotels, bars and restaurants benefit from these large scale events as they do from SAFC's continued success.

"Playing in the premier league means that once again we have people from across the UK heading to Sunderland, benefiting everyone in hospitality and leisure," said Sharon.

Not to be left out, the popular Summer Streets Festival returns in July to Roker's Cliffe Park, with a full programme of live music, arts and workshops, followed closely by the return of the Active Sunderland BIG Bike Ride on 12 July, monthly Mackem Markets at the train station along with food markets at the Sheepfolds Stables.

Keel Square, right in the heart of the city, has become the natural spot for live music, surrounded as it is by great bars and eateries – bringing a real slice of café society to Sunderland.

Among the many events it's hosting this summer is George Michael tribute act, Rob Lamberti on 21 August with the UK's Love the 90s festival the following day and Girly Pop Fest – featuring tributes to everyone from Sabrina Carpenter to Taylor Swift – the following day.

Sunderland is certainly living up to its title of Music City but arguably more importantly, is the impression the many positive changes are making – and the visitors those changes are attracting.

"There are so many great things to celebrate and so many events and experiences for everyone to enjoy," said Sharon.

For details of everything happening in Sunderland download the free Sunderland app or visit www.sunderlandbid.co.uk



Samuel Marriott-Dowding

Beyond Transaction

By Samuel Marriott-Dowding

Designer Exchange puts Newcastle back in fashion.

It comes as no surprise that retail is both changing and disappearing - the rise of online shopping, changing consumer habits, the decline of traditional high streets, and the endless conversation around whether physical stores still have a place in modern life.

Yet standing inside Designer Exchange Newcastle, surrounded by fashion, conversation and a genuine sense of excitement, it felt like a different story was unfolding.

In June, my MCPR partner, Chrissie Pringle and I, attended the opening of Designer Exchange Newcastle, and what stood out wasn't the fashion on display, it was the atmosphere; people weren't there to buy something; they were there to experience something.

Modern consumers are no longer just shopping for products. They're looking for identity,

community and connection. They want places that reflect their values and offer something they can't replicate with a quick online transaction - especially when disposable income is tighter than ever before. Designer Exchange taps into that shift perfectly.

The rise of pre-loved fashion is one of the biggest transformations happening across the industry. What was once viewed as second-hand shopping has evolved into something far more sophisticated - a movement built around sustainability, accessibility and the idea that luxury doesn't have to mean brand new.

A designer piece already has a story. It has history, character, and increasingly, consumers are recognising that this can be far more valuable than owning the latest or 'newest' thing.

There's another story here - one about Newcastle itself.

The city has always had a strong relationship with fashion, creativity and self-expression. From independent boutiques to global brands, Newcastle's retail identity has always been tied to confidence and personality.

What feels particularly exciting now is that retail is becoming more intertwined with hospitality, culture and community. The strongest destinations are no longer rows of shops, they are places where people spend time, discover new things, and create memories and communities. Across the city, we're seeing investment and innovation focused on making shopping destinations more experiential and engaging - and this is where the future of retail lies.

The brands that will thrive (and survive!) are the ones that understand they're not selling a product - they're creating a feeling, a moment in time.



This is also where communications plays such an important role.

A great opening isn't about unlocking the doors, it's about creating a connection. It's about telling the story behind the brand, connecting with the right audiences, and building a reputation that lasts beyond launch night.

Designer Exchange is ultimately part of a bigger conversation about where retail goes next.

It's not about online versus offline, it's about recognising that people still want places to gather, discover and belong.

The future of fashion isn't being worn, it's being experienced, and Newcastle, as always, is ready to put itself centre stage.

marriottcommunications.com

Events are more than just entertainment

By Ben Whitfield, Director of Communications at NE1

They are an investment in Newcastle's future.

Across the UK, the summer events season is ramping up and here in Newcastle, we are a frontrunner in the event stakes. The city enjoys a fantastic programme of award-winning events from music, arts and sports to family-friendly carnivals and vibrant cultural celebrations, there's something for everyone to enjoy.

This is important. Events put a city on the map. They give people reasons to visit, to stay longer and to keep coming back. Newcastle delivers this in volume, with variety, and at scale.

We are almost unique in the UK in having such a comprehensive year-round events calendar, but it is during the summer that the city puts on a fabulous show that sets us apart, not just regionally but nationally.

NE1's programme of events is a key part of this. These events alone attract hundreds of thousands of visitors into the city and deliver a significant economic boost to surrounding businesses. They create regular attention-grabbing ways to draw people into Newcastle and once here allow them to experience everything the city has to offer.

For many, the arrival of our Grey Street Gathering pocket park signals the start of summer. This splash of greenery adds to the beauty of one of the city's most iconic streets and provides a welcome space for people to meet and enjoy the city centre.

Other elements of the programme have also become firm fixtures in Newcastle's summer calendar and at the heart of it all sits Old Eldon Square which each year is transformed into a dedicated free family entertainment zone.

Screen on the Green, Tiny Toon and Stay and Play provide hours of free fun and activities throughout the six-week school holidays. Children can explore Tiny Toon's miniature Newcastle, while enjoying free outdoor movies at Screen on the Green or making use of the play and relaxation space at the Stay and Play zone. All these attractions encourage families to spend entire days in the city and their popularity continues to grow. Last year, Old Eldon Square's summer activities attracted a record-breaking 105,000 visits and bagged several national and international awards for NE1 for urban transformation and place making.

While Old Eldon Square provides a daily source of free summer entertainment, NE1 is bringing back the Quayside Carnival in August. A one-day carnival-themed extravaganza which was an instant success when we staged it for the first time last year. More than 10,000 people celebrated in carnival style on the Quayside and this year, we're bringing it back but bigger and better. It is an event not to be missed.

And August is a busy month for us. We also have NE1's Newcastle Restaurant Week to look forward to, a much-loved event and a significant date in the summer diary. Last year was the biggest week yet with over 59,000 diners enjoying some of the city's top restaurants for a fraction of the normal price and delivering a £1 million boost to participating restaurants. The dates for this August will soon be announced so get ready to book.

At the end of the month, we are also hosting Dog on the Tyne for the third year running, turning the Quayside into a mini-Crufts to be enjoyed by dog owners and canine enthusiasts.

NE1 is also proud sponsors of Mela in the City, and Pride which celebrate the city's diversity and cultural inclusivity with vibrant festivities that fill the city over two weekends.

Rounding off our summer events programme will be our Newcastle Dragon Boat Race in September. This too is coming back bigger and better with more competitors and a new fundraising partnership with the Sir Bobby Robson Foundation.

All told last summer, over 200,000 people visited events delivered by or sponsored by NE1, that's nearly ¼ million people encouraged to visit the city who may otherwise not have come. Their presence added spending on travel, dining, shopping and entertainment across the city.

And our events are only part of Newcastle's story. The city's wider activity calendar showcases the breadth on offer, starting with the historic Blaydon Race which got the ball rolling on the 6th June. We also have the world's largest half marathon, the Great North Run, in September, and the Great North 10k in July. Any other city might consider one large run quite enough!

Away from sport, music provides the other key pillar of the city's events programme and this summer, Exhibition Park will provide the venue for four-days of major concerts. In the Park festival returns in July with a stellar line up of artists: Lewis Capaldi, Paul Weller and Wolf Alice with Lost Minds Festival on the same site in between.

But there's more...After a year away, Newcastle City Council is bringing back their Novum festival with culture, creativity and fun filling the city's streets. Look out for one of the festival highlights, Dominoes, which will transform the city centre into a large-scale domino run with thousands of specially created giant dominoes.

Football fans also have plenty to enjoy with World Cup fan zones, pop-ups and venue takeovers throughout the city during the tournament.

Events are an incredibly important way to position Newcastle as a vibrant city with lots to see and do, they also allow us to compete regionally, nationally and internationally for visitors and give people plenty of reasons to visit for the first time and to keep returning.

Most importantly, events help lock in economic impact. People who attend events here spend here. Whether that's overnight stays or grabbing a bite to eat while out and about. Our compact city centre and strong retail offer also allows for a quick shopping trip. By bringing people into the city to enjoy a specific event we are guaranteeing spending in surrounding businesses and in times like these, every visitor counts.

Newcastle is in an enviable position with such a stacked events calendar, and the impact is why we invest so much time and energy delivering them. Poised as we are on the eve of another major summer season, we are looking forward to welcoming hundreds of thousands of visitors to the city to enjoy everything that's on offer.

www.newcastlene1ltd.com



Ben Whitfield

Edwards Commercial Cleaning

Family Values. Professional Standards.



When Paul Edwards launched Edwards Commercial Cleaning in 2003, it was a huge leap of faith.

After years working within the industry, Paul believed there was a better way to support clients. One built on reliability, relationships and high standards. To make it happen, he sold his home and invested everything into building the business.

More than twenty years later, Edwards Commercial Cleaning has grown into one of the region's leading commercial cleaning providers, supporting organisations across office, industrial, educational, healthcare and manufacturing environments throughout the North East and Yorkshire.

Despite that growth, Edwards remains a family-run business at heart.

"Family values are at the centre of everything we do," says Paul. "Trust, honesty and teamwork matter to us. We build long-term relationships with our clients and we genuinely care about the environments we work in."

"What makes this business work is our teams on the ground every single day," says Paul. "Our cleaners are the face of the company. They build relationships with clients; take pride in the environments they work in and play a huge role in maintaining standards."

Rather than a traditional top-down management style, Edwards focuses on supporting and empowering its teams across every level of the business.

"We believe in supporting our teams properly and giving them the tools, communication and encouragement they need to do the very best job possible. Our management team is there to support the cleaners because they are the people delivering the service day in and day out."

Working alongside Paul are members of his own family, supported by a wider team that plays a huge role in driving the business forward. That strong culture has helped Edwards build partnerships with organisations including Greggs, Unipres, Egger, Newcastle High School for Girls and many more across the region.

Alongside its continued growth, the company has recently strengthened its Yorkshire presence with the opening of a new office in Wakefield. The investment reflects the growing demand for Edwards' services and reinforces the company's commitment to supporting clients locally.

But growth is only one part of the story.

Sustainability has become a major focus for the business in recent years. Edwards Commercial Cleaning recently received the Sustainability Award (SME) at the NEAA Awards, recognising the company's commitment to reducing its environmental impact and operating more responsibly across all areas of the business.

From investing in safer cleaning products and reducing plastic usage to improving route planning and lowering fuel consumption, sustainability is embedded into day-to-day operations.

"We take our environmental responsibilities seriously," explains Paul. "We're always looking at ways to improve, whether that's through the products we use, reducing waste or investing in better systems and technology. Sustainability isn't something we do for recognition, it's something we believe is important for the future of the business and the industry."

Innovation also continues to shape the sector. Following a recent visit to InterClean, one of the world's largest cleaning industry exhibitions, the Edwards team explored the latest developments in robotics and specialist equipment.

However, for Paul, great service still comes back to people.

"You can have all the latest gear in the world, but cleaning is still a people business. It's about trust, communication and having teams that genuinely care about doing a good job."

That approach has helped Edwards Commercial Cleaning become a trusted long-term partner for businesses across the North East and Yorkshire.

As Edwards Commercial Cleaning continues to grow, the focus remains unchanged: delivering reliable, high-quality cleaning services to world-class businesses while continuing to invest in people, relationships and the future of the industry.

www.edwardscleaningltd.com



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**Our cleaners
are the face
of the
company.**

Paul Edwards

How can employers prepare for the effects of the World Cup?

By Michael Dobson, Director of Sapphire HR

The World Cup is an event that captures the attention of millions of people, regardless of whether they consider themselves football fans the rest of the year. It brings a real sense of occasion.

But from an employer's perspective, it can also bring a unique set of workplace challenges that require careful management.

Over the years, we've seen major sporting tournaments influence everything from attendance and productivity to workplace relationships and employee wellbeing. In fact, a recent study by UKG suggests that the World Cup could cost global employers around £12.6 billion in lost productivity. And while most employees approach these events responsibly, employers who fail to plan ahead can find themselves dealing with disruption that could've been avoided.

One of the most common issues is absence management. Late-night matches and celebrations can sometimes lead to an increase in short-term sickness absence or lateness the following morning. While it's important not to make assumptions about an employee's reason for being absent, businesses should make sure they have clear reporting procedures in place and apply them consistently. The key is to focus on patterns and documentation rather than speculation.

Holiday requests are another challenge that many employers will already be seeing. Popular fixtures often result in multiple employees requesting the same days off, particularly where matches coincide with working hours or fall close to weekends.

Employers aren't expected to approve every request, but they should have a fair and transparent process for making decisions. Consistency is crucial here. After all, if employees understand how decisions are being

made, they're far more likely to accept an outcome, even if it's not the one they'd hoped for.

There's also a people management aspect that businesses shouldn't overlook. Passionate support for different teams can create a fun atmosphere, true, but occasionally workplace banter can cross the line.

Comments intended as harmless jokes can be perceived differently by colleagues, particularly in diverse workplaces where employees might support different nations. Employers should take the opportunity to remind staff of expected standards of behaviour and make sure managers feel confident addressing concerns if they arise.

Instead of viewing the World Cup purely as a potential problem, employers should also consider it as an opportunity to embrace flexibility where possible. Flexible working arrangements really can provide a practical solution that benefits everyone. Adjusted start and finish times, temporary changes to working patterns, or hybrid arrangements can help employers enjoy the tournament while meeting their usual needs.

At Sapphire HR, we often encourage businesses to think proactively rather than reactively during major events. Outlining your expectations around attendance, annual leave, conduct, and flexible working from the outset can prevent issues before they arise. It also demonstrates that you consider employees' interests while staying focused on operational requirements.

So, what's my advice to North East business owners? Don't wait until problems arise. Review your policies, brief your managers, and think about where flexibility can work within your business. With a bit of planning, the World Cup can be something that brings people together, rather than just creating needless HR headaches.

After all, while the tournament itself only lasts a few weeks, the decisions you make as an employer during that time can have a rippling effect on employee morale, engagement, and workplace culture for a long while to come.

www.sapphire-hr.co.uk



BUSY ISN'T THE PROBLEM

IT'S WHAT YOU'RE BUSY WITH.

"I don't know what else to do... I'm flat out, but it still feels like I'm missing things."

That was how a senior leader opened a coaching session with me recently.

Their diary was full. The team relied on them. Pressure was coming from all directions. On paper, they were doing everything you would expect.

But it didn't feel like it was working.

So, we did something simple - we stopped. We created space to think. Even 30 minutes a week, protected and uninterrupted, can change how you approach the rest of it.

Nothing changed about the workload. But by the end, there was more clarity. A sharper sense of what mattered, and what didn't.

Being busy isn't the problem.

It's what you're busy with. Before adding more, it's worth asking:

- Does this move a priority forward?
- Am I the only person who can do this?
- What would happen if it didn't get done this week?

For many leaders, busyness has become the norm - full calendars, constant meetings, very little breathing space.

It's understandable. Expectations are high and everything feels urgent.

But over time, low-impact work creeps in. Tasks that feel important but don't move things forward. Meetings without purpose. Decisions that stay with you because no one else has the clarity to take them on.

Before long, you're working hard - just not always on the right things.

"Low-impact work will always fill the space - unless you're deliberate about what you stop."

Creating space to think (and to stop).

When things get busy, thinking time is often the first casualty. Not quick decisions between meetings, but time to step back and ask:

What actually needs my attention - and what doesn't?

Effective leaders don't just decide what to do. They decide what to stop. Without that, low-value work expands to fill the gaps.

Making time for your team.

When pressure builds, conversations become task-focused.

"Where are we up to?"

"What's the update?"

Important, but limited.

Better questions create better outcomes:

What are you thinking?

What do you need from me?

These conversations build trust, confidence, and accountability - and stop everything landing back with you.

Saying what needs to be said.

Feedback is often delayed when time is tight. But when things go unsaid, clarity suffers and small issues grow. Good feedback is simple and specific:

- What did you notice?
- Why does it matter?
- What needs to happen next?

Handled early, these conversations create momentum.

A more effective way to lead.

The shift from busy to effective isn't about doing more.

It's about being deliberate. Creating time to think. Letting go of what doesn't add value.

Focusing on conversations that move people forward.

So perhaps the better question is:

Is this moving the right things forward - or just filling my time?

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Durham DH1 1TH



From Supper Clubs to Creative Magazines

One of the partners of the Business & IP Centre North East (BIPC) has praised them for their work in the past three years supporting entrepreneurs and small businesses in the West End of Newcastle.

At the heart of the programme's community impact has been the partnership between BIPC North East and Reviving the Heart of the West End, whose grassroots knowledge, trusted local presence and people-first approach have helped entrepreneurs across Newcastle's West End access tailored business support, mentoring and confidence-building opportunities.

The partnership has helped real people whose businesses have grown, adapted and flourished through the support available.

Lulu Chen, founder of 35C Supper Club in Newcastle, has created a distinctive dining experience by hosting guests in her own home. Bringing together strangers around one table, she serves traditional Chinese dishes while sharing the stories, history and cultural significance behind each one.

Creative entrepreneur Thushara Chandrasiri, founder of Darkus Magazine, has also turned his passion into a profession. What began as blogging during university evolved into a full-scale magazine celebrating music, fashion, culture and creativity across the UK, as well as producing bespoke publications for brands.

Alexandra Johnson, CEO of Reviving the Heart of the West End, said the partnership has shown the value of delivering business support within communities and ensuring people feel encouraged and supported from the very beginning.



Hundreds of images, one North East story: Photographer opens huge pop-up shop

A photographer who moved to North Shields from Reading to document the North East is preparing for her biggest exhibition yet, celebrating the people, places and everyday moments that make the region special.

Gaby Zak, known for her striking landscape photography and documentary work, is to launch a large-scale pop-up shop at Newcastle Quays, North Shields from Thursday, July 9th, with a special event on Saturday, July 12 featuring local North East DJs, food stalls, and opportunities to meet the photographer behind the lens.

"I've always been creative," said Gaby. "I chose photography at A-level and I love the outdoors, the world amazes me, and I just wanted to capture it."

Today, she specialises in landscape and nature photography and has become known for her documentary projects capturing the North East. Her acclaimed black-and-white documentary series has now reached its third volume, documenting local people, communities and the character of North East. The work has been published as a series of books, with many residents collecting each edition.

"I love telling people's stories through photography," she said. "Often people don't even realise they're being photographed. It's about capturing genuine moments and showing the beauty in ordinary life," she said.

The pop-up shop represents Gaby's first pop-up store. The expanded venue will allow visitors to explore collections of her work, including landscapes across the North East and beyond, documentary photography and immersive projection displays featuring seasonal woodland scenes. Visitors can also book photo sessions during the event, with Gaby setting up a dedicated photography space.

Two join the team at Different Narrative

Award-winning North East marketing agency Different Narrative is continuing its growth journey with the appointment of two new team members, following a period of significant momentum for the business.

The Newcastle-based agency, known for its standout creative work and integrated marketing approach, has welcomed Dikshita Chakraborty as Client Manager and Angel Shaji as Junior Designer, adding fresh energy across client services and creative, as more brands look to Different Narrative for bold thinking and impactful marketing.



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North East-based CinePlatform aims to revolutionise film production

Two North East independent film makers are making waves in the film and television industry with the launch of what could become a world-leading production management platform.

CinePlatform, created by filmmakers Laura Lee Daly and Chris Darby, is an innovative all-in-one software platform designed specifically to streamline the complex process of film and TV production planning.

Built in the North East of England, CinePlatform has recently unveiled a series of major platform releases and updates aimed at helping production companies, independent filmmakers, universities, and creatives simplify everything part of the pre-production process from script prep, scheduling and documentation to communication and project management.

The company's rapid development has recently been supported through the ALT LABS



programme delivered by Tees Valley Labs, which supports ambitious digital and creative businesses across the region.



Marriott Communications launches new advisory-led model

Award-winning Sunderland-based Marriott Communications has announced a major strategic repositioning, reflecting the changing role communications plays within modern organisations.

The firm, founded by communications entrepreneur Samuel Marriott-Dowding, has launched a new advisory-led structure centred around three core disciplines: Strategy, Influence, and Reputation.

The move follows a period of international growth and increasing demand from organisations seeking support with stakeholder engagement, reputation management, public affairs, executive positioning, and strategic decision-making.

Rather than focusing solely on communications delivery, Marriott Communications now positions itself as a strategic communications and advisory firm, providing senior-level counsel to organisations navigating growth, transformation, stakeholder complexity, and reputational risk.

Founder and CEO, Samuel Marriott-Dowding, said: "The world has changed and organisations are facing increasingly complex environments. They are dealing with geopolitical issues, stakeholder expectations, reputation challenges, public scrutiny, organisational change, and growing competition.

What leaders often need is not another campaign or communications plan; they need trusted counsel that helps them navigate uncertainty, manage reputation, engage stakeholders, and make informed decisions.

This repositioning reflects both the work we are already delivering and where we believe the future of the communications profession is heading."



Next chapter of growth at the North East BIC for Sunderland creative agency

Sunderland brand and design studio Kenfolk has relocated to a larger space at the North East BIC, marking the next chapter in a period of significant growth for the agency.

The milestone marks a turning point for the Sunderland business, which has scaled since its launch in 2020. The move highlights the agency's recent evolution, transforming into a full-service creative agency having bolstered its core design offering with a host of new in-house services including PR and communications, social media management, photography and videography.

Alongside this, Kenfolk is also celebrating an ethical milestone by becoming the first brand

and design studio in Sunderland to register as an accredited Living Wage Employer.

Ross Palmer, Creative Director at Kenfolk, said: "It's great to have moved into a bigger space at the BIC, as we have expanded into a full service agency we needed a space that allows us to welcome our clients and take clients on a complete journey, from initial branding to video storytelling and impactful PR and social media campaigns.

"We're also really proud to be Sunderland's first Living Wage accredited design studio, cementing our commitment to putting our people first and helping keep the best creative talent in Sunderland, rather than losing them to London and Manchester."

The expansion reinforces the BIC's reputation as a thriving hub for growing creative enterprises, providing the flexible infrastructure needed for regional businesses to scale.

shoutloudsocial.co.uk

info@shoutloudsocial.co.uk

Marketing and Media Matters

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

Lisa Kirkbride

Owner, Lisa Kirkbride Design and Illustration

Did you always envisage a career in the Marketing and Media Industry?

I've always been creative and spent much of my childhood drawing and making things, but I didn't know what a creative career looked like. Once I discovered graphic design and illustration, I realised I could combine creativity with problem-solving and help businesses communicate their ideas more effectively.

What has been your career path so far?

I started my career in design and marketing agencies across the North East, where I spent seven years developing my skills and understanding the commercial side of creativity. In 2002, I founded Lisa Kirkbride Designs and have been running my own business ever since. Over the years I've worked with organisations of all sizes, creating brands, marketing campaigns, illustrations and licensed surface pattern designs. My artwork has been licensed internationally and I've exhibited at trade shows in New York and San Francisco. It's been a varied and rewarding journey that's constantly evolving.

What have been the biggest challenges you have faced so far?

Like any small business owner, I wear many hats, balancing creativity with the realities of running a business. More recently, adapting to rapid technological change and the rise of AI has required continual learning, but I see that as an opportunity. I enjoy finding new ways to improve how I work, streamline repetitive admin tasks and create more time for the creative side of the business that I love.

Who do you respect most in your industry?

I've always admired creatives who stay true to their own style rather than chasing trends. The people I respect most are those who continue to innovate, support others and build successful businesses without losing their authenticity.

Which fictional media character can you most relate to?

I'd probably say Edna Mode from *The Incredibles*.

Like Edna, I'm passionate about good design, pay close attention to detail and believe creativity should always have a purpose. I believe great design should be both beautiful and functional, helping people and brands present the best version of themselves.

I'd like to think I share her creative energy, determination and eye for detail. We also have a similar taste in eyewear!

What is your greatest strength?

My ability to see both the creative and commercial sides of a project. I love creating beautiful work, but I also understand it needs to connect with the right audience and achieve a purpose. Finding that balance is something I really enjoy.

What is your biggest weakness?

Saying no! I'm naturally enthusiastic and love helping people bring ideas to life, which can occasionally lead to a very full diary. Over time, I've become much better at setting boundaries, prioritising my workload and recognising that not every opportunity needs to be pursued. Sometimes saying no to one thing means being able to say yes to the right thing.

What has been your proudest achievement?

One of my proudest achievements was creating a series of prints during lockdown that helped raise more than £10,000 for Northumbria NHS Bright Charity. My Newcastle design was selected for inclusion in a time capsule at Newcastle Cathedral which is pretty cool! Knowing my work made a positive contribution during a difficult time was incredibly rewarding.

What are your future career aspirations?

My biggest aspiration is to stay curious and open to new opportunities. I'd like to continue growing my licensing portfolio, collaborating with inspiring clients and seeing where creativity takes me next. If I can keep doing work I love, making people smile and helping businesses succeed, I'll consider that a success.

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

"Don't try to be everything to everyone." The more I've focused on the work I genuinely enjoy and where I add the most value, the stronger my business has become. Understanding what makes you different is far more powerful than trying to please everyone.

How do you see your industry evolving in the next 10 years?

Technology and AI will undoubtedly change how we work, but I don't think they'll replace the value of original ideas. As creative tools become more accessible, I think businesses will place even greater value on personality, authenticity and distinctive brands. People still connect with people, and that's unlikely to change.

How do you like to unwind?

Living on the North East coast, I love spending time by the sea. Being outdoors helps me switch off, recharge and often sparks new ideas. I try to walk around six miles a day, which is probably where some of my best thinking happens. I love to read and I have a slightly unhealthy obsession with stationery, art supplies and reference books. Thankfully, in my line of work, I can usually justify adding to the collection!

www.lisakirkbride.com

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**I've always
admired
creatives who
stay true to
their own
style.**



How to simplify your marketing messaging

The products, services and expertise your business has to offer might be the best on the market – but if you can't communicate that value clearly, potential customers might never realise it.

This is a common challenge, especially for tech and B2B businesses, where teams often rely on technical explanations or industry jargon to describe what they do. The problem is that customers don't always speak the same language.

Your marketing should make it easy for people to understand what you do, why it matters and why they should choose you over a competitor. In crowded markets, that can be the difference between being remembered and being overlooked.

Start with what makes you different

If your strategy is to communicate everything at once, you might end up not saying much at all.

A long list of features and capabilities has its place, but it's rarely the best starting point. Before you think about campaigns, content or copy, you need to define your unique value proposition.

A strong messaging strategy starts with focus. Once you've identified the value that sets you apart, it becomes much easier to build clear, consistent messaging around it.

Know how your customers talk about the problem

Creating strong customer personas helps you build a clearer picture of the people you're trying to reach. They can highlight common challenges, priorities and goals, giving your messaging more direction.

It's worth paying attention to the language customers use to describe those pain points. The words that come up in meetings are often far more effective than the terminology businesses create internally.

Another useful exercise is to test your messaging by asking, "so what?" If your platform saves time, what does that allow customers to do? If your service improves reporting, what impact does that have on the business?

Keep going until you reach the outcome that matters most. That's where the strongest messaging lives; it's not in what your product does, but in the impact it has.

Say less, but say it better

The best marketing messaging avoids unnecessary jargon and focuses on outcomes rather than technical detail.

That doesn't mean every piece of content needs to be short. Different audiences need different levels of information, and different channels serve different purposes.

A homepage headline needs to communicate value quickly. A LinkedIn post should grab attention and spark interest. A whitepaper or proposal can afford to go into more detail.

The key is understanding where someone is in their journey and giving them the information

they need at that moment, rather than trying to tell them everything at once.

Keep the core message consistent

Customers rarely interact with your business in one place. They might discover you through LinkedIn, visit your website, download a resource and speak to your sales team before making a decision.

Each touchpoint can and should do a slightly different job. Your social content might be more conversational, your website more direct and your sales materials more detailed.

While the format and tone may vary, the core message should remain consistent. Every channel should reinforce the same value, positioning and purpose.

When people encounter a consistent message across multiple touchpoints, they understand your business faster and are more likely to remember it when they're ready to make a decision.

Clarity creates confidence

Good messaging isn't about making your business sound less innovative. It's about making your value easier to understand.

When customers can quickly grasp who you are, what you do and why it matters, every part of your marketing starts to work harder.

If your messaging feels complicated, it might be time to strip it back and focus on what your audience really needs to know.

Need help defining your brand messaging?

A workshop can help uncover what makes your business different and turn it into clear, consistent communication that supports growth. Get in touch at hello@vidacreative.co.uk

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SCAN TO VIEW OUR WORK

In conversation with...

Dan Riley

Owner, OnDisplay Property Marketing

What inspired you to start your business, and what was the journey like from idea to execution?

My business began with a hobby of flying drones and taking quick snaps of my family when we were out on beautiful walks in Northumberland. Not long after I bought a camera for the same thing, and would use both for capturing the wonderful places we would stay for a long weekend. I used to send some of the pictures to the owners as a thanks, and twice I was asked back to do an actual paid shoot. That was when I realised I might be on to something!

What challenges did you face in the early stages, and how did you overcome them?

The challenges I face which I am still working on solving are visibility and connection. Coming out of university, I built an E-Commerce business from my home office and sold it after three years. When I became serious about this new business, I realised that I had no local connections, and this would likely be something that would grow through word of mouth and becoming known. Having no previous experience or contacts in the industry, I had to start from scratch, learn the industry, how it worked, what it wanted and try to build through showcasing quality, alongside plenty of outreach and networking.

What sets your business apart from competitors in your industry?

A lot of our work is very intentional and storytelling-based, and we make sure that always comes across in not just our signature property films but also in our still-photography work. We started creating property films because standard property video walk-arounds don't always do certain places justice - it doesn't immerse the viewer in the feel of the place. That is what we are always looking to capture - the feel and the mood - because that is what connects with people when they're envisioning themselves there.

How do you define success, and how has that definition evolved over time?

Success for me has always meant freedom. Growing a business and making enough money is of course still an important part of achieving that freedom, but as is the case for most entrepreneurs, the freedom to create, the freedom to build, the freedom to explore new ways of doing things is huge.

What type of businesses do you tend to work with?

While a lot of our work is focused on the luxury side of things, we do also operate as 'regular' property photographers and videographers. We are just as capable of working with companies

that want the bells and whistles on one showcase, as we are with those that want consistent, good-looking media multiple times a week. We are just as interested in raising the marketing floor for companies as we are raising the ceiling for others. We also do a lot of work in the luxury commercial property sector - hotels, bars, wedding venues.

How do you stay ahead of industry trends and adapt to market changes?

We have a small team and we dedicate a number of hours each week - no matter how busy we are - to exploring the latest tech, the latest software, and the latest way of doing things by industry leaders across the world. We then try and bring that with our own spin to the North East market. Things like AI are completely transforming the industry, as well as new methods of editing, capturing and storytelling. We invest time and money in all of these things so our clients don't have to. It's never been more important to stay ahead on these things because in my view, the ones who don't will quickly be left behind.

What advice would you give to aspiring entrepreneurs looking to start their own ventures?

As cliché as it is, I would recommend following your passions and interests. Or at least starting there. I don't believe that money can be or should be anyone's primary motivator for starting a venture and it certainly won't carry you through when times get tough. If you genuinely love and are interested in what you do, then no day ever feels like work, which is all you can ask for. Of course, the hobby or interest needs to align with some market gap you feel is there, but it is definitely the place to start and build from.

What's next for your business? Any exciting projects or future plans on the horizon?

The only thing that is next for us is to continue to grow our capabilities internally, and hopefully our client-base externally. Bringing new, creative ideas to the market that deliver results is what we love to do, so plenty more of that!

How do you like to unwind?

Long walks with the family, weekly 7-a-side football and drinks with mates - all of the standard stuff!

ondisplaypropertymarketing.co.uk



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**Success
for me has
always meant
freedom.**

Dan Riley

The better weather is here...

Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members what they were looking forward to this summer.



As Centre Director of Kip McGrath Gateshead East, Washington, Chester-le-Street, and Hebburn, I am incredibly honoured to have been invited to attend the APAC Kip McGrath International Conference.

This opportunity feels particularly meaningful when I reflect on where it all began. Ten years ago, when I first started my journey with Kip McGrath, I could never have imagined the position I am in today, leading multiple centres and now representing my work on an international stage. It is both humbling and a real privilege.

Attending this conference will allow me to collaborate with educators from across the globe, share best practice, and gain fresh insight into how we can continue to evolve our support for students and families. I am especially excited to bring back new ideas, renewed energy, and enhanced strategies that will enable us to reach even more children who need support.

Education is constantly evolving, and being part of an international network ensures we stay at the forefront of that change. I return not only more knowledgeable but more enthusiastic than ever and ready to continue making a difference in our communities.

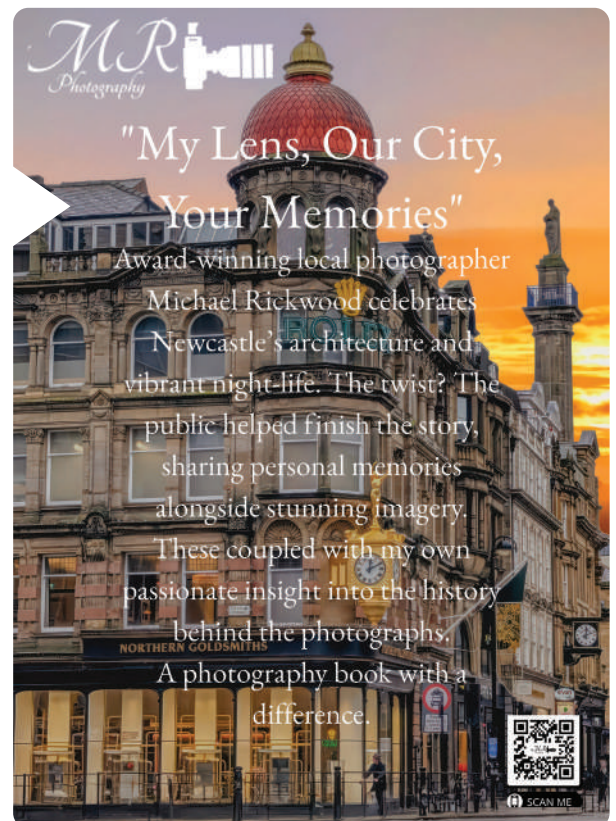
Carol Milne, www.kipmcgrath.co.uk/gateshead-east

While a scheduled knee replacement means I'll be trading my camera bag for a recovery chair this summer, my business is moving forward at full speed. Over the past year, my focus has successfully shifted away from public markets toward a more premium, exclusive model: bespoke private commissions and a dedicated gallery presence. Today, my work centres on capturing the soul of architectural landmarks, high-end private property, and specialised subject commissions for collectors.

I am leveraging this summer's downtime to put the final touches on my upcoming book, "My Lens, Our City, Your Memories."

This volume is more than a collection of photography; it is a collaborative cultural archive. It pairs my images of our city's iconic architecture with the deeply personal memories those landmarks have triggered in the public, alongside the creative inspiration behind each shot.

Michael Rickwood, www.mr-photography.co.uk



This summer I'm working with a company called Met Life to help people get cover who can't or who have struggled in the past. This is helping my clients protect their families in a way they haven't been able to before regardless of previous conditions such as cancer, stroke, multiple sclerosis, immune deficiencies height weight issues etc. It's fantastic to be able to help people that I haven't been able to help before.

Andrew Cooper, www.simplymortgagesonline.com



Over recent months we've welcomed some amazing new authors onto our books and we're really looking forward to helping bring their stories out into the world. One of the things we love most about being an independent publishing house is discovering brilliant new voices and giving them the opportunity to shine.

Alongside this exciting growth, we're also incredibly proud to be hosting something very special. On 25th July, we will be holding the first ever North East Indie Children's Book Fest at the fabulous Field & Fodder in Bearpark, Durham.

At Crear Publishing we feel incredibly strongly about encouraging children to read. We also want to champion all the amazing indie children's authors out there. These are fabulous books, written with passion and heart, that deserve to be discovered and celebrated. And that's exactly what we intend to do.

Ryan and Karen Crear; www.crearpublishing.com

Ridgetek is embarking on an exciting new chapter as the business transitions away from its traditional office space and embraces a more flexible way of working. As part of this move, Peter, the company's Director is planning to convert his garage into a dedicated office environment. While the transformation is not complete yet, the project represents a significant investment in creating a productive, professional workspace tailored to the evolving needs of the business.

The shift reflects the growing benefits of flexible and remote working. By reducing the overheads associated with maintaining larger office premises, Ridgetek can focus resources on innovation, customer service and help with work life balance by reducing timely commutes.

www.ridgetek.co.uk



I love to refresh my menu every year and add new recipes onto the menu. This Summer we are creating lots of Matcha drinks, Affogatos and Coffee Floats inspired by Indian flavours. Summer means lots of outdoor events so you will see Namaste popping up in Shopping centres and lots of outdoor markets with Indian Street Food and Sweets.

Sangeeta Loomba, www.namastetasteofindia.co.uk

Last month our RADAR members appeared on BBC TV, BBC Radio, Local TV and many magazines and newspapers. To find out more about the benefits of becoming a RADAR member, contact keith@highlightspr.co.uk or call Keith on 07814 397951

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HIGHLIGHTS
PUBLIC RELATIONS

FEMALE FOUNDER UK™



Female Founders unite to demand what they need for success in business

SASS media directors Sarah Walker and Sarah Dale hosted trademarked brand Female Founder UK's first 'Founder Live' event at Teesside University.

Female founders from across Teesside were joined by captains of industry, education providers and finance experts at a landmark event to discuss the need to back female entrepreneurs – and capitalise on one of the greatest economic opportunities of our time.

The inaugural Female Founder UK 'Founder Live' event, held at The Curve in the heart of Teesside University, examined how women in business have been represented by the media since 2000 and the entrenched cultural norms that prevent them from achieving their unique aspirations in business.

The event encouraged the audience to explore what support female entrepreneurs need if they are to access a portion of the £310bn that could be added to the UK economy, if women were given the same support as their male counterparts.

Max Freer, a successful brand strategist and the visionary behind Female Founder UK, trademarked the brand three years ago, after years of informally supporting women in business at different stages of foundership.

Female Founder UK now brings together an ecosystem of female-led businesses on Teesside and beyond to offer strategic business support and deliver sustainable business plans that fit with every female business owner's unique aspirations, whatever age and stage they may be at. It also supports their psychological health, wellbeing and longevity.

Max said: "This was a landmark event, drawing a line in the sand about the lack of support female entrepreneurs have experienced at different stages of running a business and asking what we can do now to support women to help grow the economy – on Teesside and beyond.

"It was unique in bringing together senior leaders across a wide range of sectors and industries – including education and finance – together with female business owners and executives, to discuss the challenges female founders face – and how these can be overcome."

At the event journalists and PR experts Sarah Dale and Sarah Walker, of SASS media Ltd, Female Founder UK's official media partner, looked back at the way women in the media have been treated since the early noughties – and how that translates to female entrepreneurs.

Sarah Dale also presented an emotive interview with fashion designer and beacon of British creativity Kate Fearnley, who recently closed her successful business, after years of dressing celebrities on the red carpet and brides in her exquisite designs.

For creatives like Kate, business acumen and the ability to successfully market products in an online, increasingly AI-driven world can be weak areas – and this is where tailored support from the likes of Female Founder UK comes into play.

The audience were invited to share their experiences during a roundtable event and discuss what needs to change in the way we support women in business going forward.

Joanna Wake, an AI strategy and skills consultant, with 15 years at the sharp end of digital and AI adoption, said during the engaging 'Question Time' element of the event: "Women's jobs are three times more likely to be taken over by AI – but there is also a lot of exciting growth opportunity with AI.

"We need more of a focus on women's understanding of how this could work for them – but could also work against them if they don't embrace the potential that's there.

"Teesside could be the AI literacy capital of the UK – we have to be, so we're not left behind."

Samantha Anderson, CEO of Wolviston Group, said: "I've never been around a round table with so many women before. I'm usually the only woman round a table of men. We need more opportunities to come together like this and advocate for change. If I had something like this early in my career I would have flown."

Kelly Whitfield, founder and CEO of KLIK SaaS®, said: "As women, we are far too modest. We don't shout loud enough. We have to champion each other; promote our ideas and the problems we solve."

The event was also attended by representatives from HSBC; Atomix Educational Trust, which runs Prior Pursglove College and Stockton

Sixth Form College; and the Education Training Collective (Etc.), which runs Stockton Riverside College, Bede Sixth Form, NETA Training Group and Redcar and Cleveland College.

Female Founder UK recently helped independent financial adviser Christine Tarran launch a new brand called Her Invest, aimed at supporting women to be more financially savvy.

Sarah Dale said: "Following the event at Porsche Teesside, where I had the pleasure of interviewing Christine in front of an audience about the need to support other women, it was exciting to present the first Founder Live event for Female Founder UK.

"Foundership for women is complex and women have very differing and unique perspectives on what success looks like for them – and why they want to venture into being their own boss.

"It's not always about wanting to be the next multi-million-pound turnover business and Female Founder UK recognises that; and provides a strategic direction that meets women where they're at, whether they want to turnover enough to pay the mortgage and be independent, work towards becoming VAT registered or turnover £250,000 and more."

Sarah Walker added: "Talent is everywhere – in the Tees Valley and beyond – but opportunity isn't.

"With the possibility of creating £310bn in revenue if women are backed in the same way as male business owners, unlocking female entrepreneurial talent is one of the greatest economic opportunities of our time.

"The question is not whether Tees Valley can afford to invest in women entrepreneurs – it's whether it can afford not to."

Find out more about Female Founder UK at
www.femalefounderuk.co.uk

For more information on SASS media, visit
www.sassmedialtd.co.uk or email: sarah.dale@sassmedialtd.co.uk





Jodi Stephenson

Building the North East economy, one brand at a time

By Jodi Stephenson, PR and Content Account Director at Gardiner Richardson

Every business tells a story, but no business tells its story in isolation.

Collectively, our brands and organisations help shape the reputation of our region. The way we communicate, the standards we set and what we seek to achieve all contribute to a bigger narrative. Effective brand communications is not only beneficial for individual business needs, but beneficial to the wider community of businesses and organisations based here.

I've worked across different campaigns for a range of clients in the North East and across the UK. I've seen how strategic communications can not only drive growth and commercial opportunities, but also progress societal change,

generate a sense of collective pride and build a picture of innovation.

Whatever your communication goals, here are a few crucial ingredients to success.

Stories and belonging

We're wired to seek stories, shared values and a sense of belonging. The brands that succeed understand their audiences and position themselves as part of the solution to their challenges.

That begins with knowing who you are talking to and why they should care. This creates space for interesting ideas to flourish and the opportunity to create content that really connects.

The power of imagery

Your biggest brand building tool is your visual identity.

Before a single word is read or spoken, people will judge what they see, so it needs to land well and resonate positively with them.

At Gardiner Richardson we build brands and bring them to life. We help clients all the way from brand strategy to the creation of quality assets - meaning you stand out from the crowd for all the right reasons.

Collaboration is key

The more a brand communicates its values to the world, the more opportunities will

come knocking. Businesses that consistently communicate their values start to draw like-minded people towards them. This could include joint event opportunities or social media collaborations, which can generate interesting content and make your messages travel further.

Test and learn

It's rewarding when the early seeds of strategic brand communications start to bear fruits. But the pace of change is rapid and it's up to us to keep up. AI, evolving social platforms and shifting audience expectations are providing exciting new opportunities to test and learn from.

At Gardiner Richardson, we've spent almost 30 years building and managing brands across the region - including heritage brands like Ringtons, Dicksons and the Grainger Market, and organisations like Egger UK and Northumbria University, where we help to inspire and influence new audiences.

The strategic communications activity taking place within individual organisations all across our region is contributing to the wider story of who we are, where we're going and what we represent.

If you would like your brand to be part of this journey, get in touch.

www.gardiner-richardson.com

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Straight talking, honest, design and digital marketing

Northern Digital...making your brand stand out online.

If you've ever dealt with a marketing agency, it's very easy to feel as though you're being steered into something which suits the agency rather than you and your business.

Okay, they can trot out previous successes but are they really on the ball...are they using latest techniques...will they be able to push your business forward and help you stand out from the crowd?

While working as a marketing manager, Dave repeatedly watched agencies charge clients too much for too little...big retainers, thin output. "I told people the truth and didn't fit in. That's what pushed me to start Northern Digital and do things differently," said Dave Head who founded Northern Digital in June 2024, drawing on 13+ years in the industry. "It was tempting to convince a client to use something which we, in effect, already had on the shelf.

"Here at Northern Digital, we offer custom marketing solutions and are increasingly offering AI-powered content creation and marketing automation. Using artificial intelligence tools, we generate first-draft website copy, blog articles, social media posts, email campaigns, and SEO-focused content more efficiently. AI assists with research, keyword analysis, content planning, analytics, audience targeting, and performance optimisation. The team here check everything to make sure it fits in exactly with what the client is looking for, ensuring quality, accuracy, and brand consistency.

"It's important to make everything personalised...but AI handles the heavy lifting so the team can spend their time on the creative and strategic calls that move the needle. Every piece of AI-assisted work is checked, shaped and signed off by the

team for accuracy, tone and brand fit. AI speeds up Northern Digital; it doesn't replace the people. The combination of automation and creative oversight allows clients to publish more content, respond faster to market opportunities, and achieve greater marketing efficiency without sacrificing authenticity or effectiveness. It's a win-win for every business."

Spend five minutes chatting with Dave and you can instantly tell that AI has changed the digital marketing landscape. Agencies which aren't making full use of AI are missing a trick...they're falling behind...which means they're also failing their clients

Many of you reading this will be bamboozled by artificial intelligence and won't have a clue how it can affect your advertising and promotional work, but this is where Dave Head can put you at ease because people buy from people.

"When I decided to form Northern Digital, I knew it would be fruitless sending emails or printed material to explain what my business would be able to offer for the simple reason that people wouldn't be able to grasp how everything worked. Consequently, I spent every available hour networking. Once I had face to face conversations and explained what we were all about, how we would promote their business and improve their profits, I quickly gained clients. Businesses don't talk to businesses...you talk to a person from that business."

Dave and his team have come up with the perfect blend to get your business noticed, combining automation with creative oversight, allowing clients to publish more relevant content, respond faster to market opportunities, and achieve greater marketing efficiency whilst keeping everything personal. They can include photos and videos, allowing you to add personal and targeted information.

Branding, design, and web development are taken care of in a friendly, jargon-free manner, helping your business or organisation improve its visual identity, increase its digital presence, find new customers and raise profits. Northern Digital is rated 5* on Google...here's what some of the reviews say...

"In Dave We Trust." - *Medical Menopause*

"...amazing integrations using AI, which will save us countless hours of manual input." - *Graham Miller*

"Had a website made from scratch...done within four days. Turnaround was great." - *Reece Storey*

Interested? The best idea is to contact Dave Head and his team. Contact him directly on dave@northern.digital or 07476 934535, visit www.northern.digital for further details.



“

**AI speeds up
Northern
Digital;
it doesn't
replace the
people.**

Dave Head



UNIQUE
magazines

Start your holiday early

The thinking behind our
Print Before You Fly Campaign.

Over the years of working with print, there is one thing we hear time and time again: magazines are something people buy at the airport before boarding their flight.

And it makes sense. You're about to spend three hours on a plane, there's no Wi-Fi to scroll through your reels, and so print it is.

For some, this has turned print into a holiday luxury; something you buy when you're about to escape everyday life. But it makes us wonder why it takes a trip away for us to truly appreciate the benefits of print over digital. Why does it take a last-minute dash to WHSmith when the experience of choosing your next read could be so much more enjoyable?

At Unique Magazines, we're lovers of all things print. Whether that's mainstream favourites covering trending topics, niche independent publications packed with fresh perspectives, or books filled with knitting inspiration, travel stories and creative ideas, we're here for it. We love seeing publishing drive positive change, spark curiosity and conversations through their print.

Something we do notice, however, is that options can often be limited in traditional newsagents and airports. Usually, it's the mainstream favourites that make it onto the shelves. Don't get us wrong, we're glad those options exist, but your choice can be so much broader when you choose to shop local and independent before you travel.





It opens the door to discoveries that simply aren't possible when you're choosing from a limited selection moments before boarding your flight.

To us, browsing slowly and intentionally is what makes print so special. It isn't about picking up something because it'll fill the journey. It's about choosing something that genuinely interests you. It's about using your hard-earned holiday funds on a publication that helps your mind wander away from the digital noise of everyday life and into something that feeds your curiosity, creativity or passion.

That's why we're excited to launch our Print Before You Fly campaign.

A celebration of shopping local, independent and intentionally before you jet off, giving yourself more choice, more inspiration and a chance to start your holiday experience before you've even stepped into the airport.

Print Before You Fly celebrates all forms of print, from food and travel to specialist interests such as surfing, cycling, sailing, mindfulness, football and cars. It's about taking whatever you love with you, wherever you're going.

It's that precious "me time" we all search for when we go away. The out-of-office is on, the work version of yourself has been left behind, and suddenly you're sitting by the pool reading about those retro cars your dad always talked about, or rediscovering your love of surfing after trying it years ago with a friend.

It's a glimpse into who you are outside of work, routine and responsibilities. A chance to reconnect with the things that genuinely interest you and switch off with something reliable, immersive and real.

We believe everyone deserves to find something that makes them feel seen. By visiting Unique Magazines before your holiday, you're giving yourself the time to browse, explore and handpick a magazine that's right for you. With thousands of mainstream, independent and specialist titles available, you're far more likely to discover something you genuinely won't want to put down.

And to make it even better, every magazine in our store is available at the standard UK cover price, making it no more expensive than buying at the airport, just with a much wider choice and a more enjoyable experience.

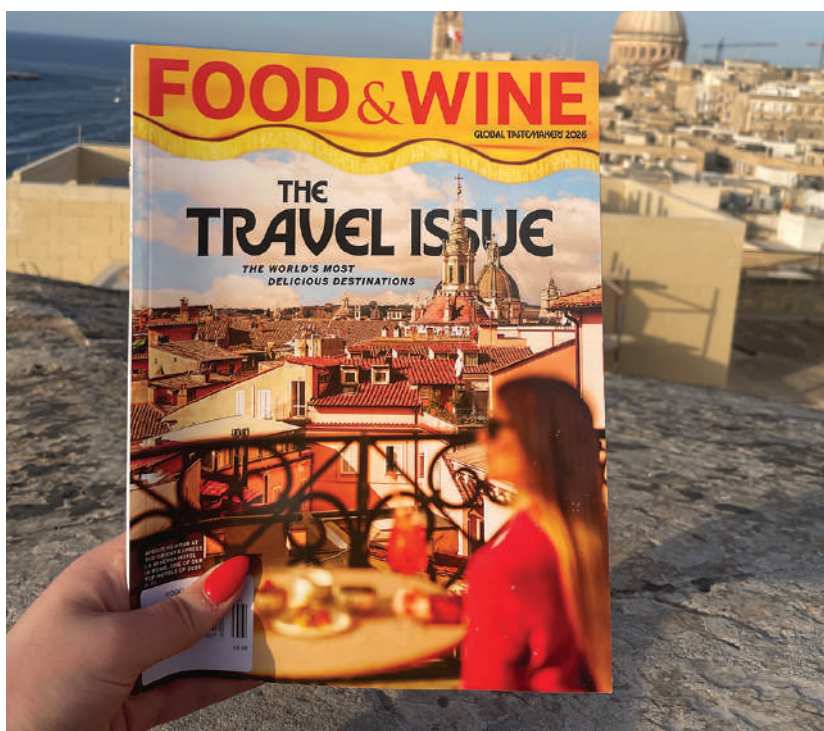
And if you're not local, you don't have to miss out, our full range is available online, with delivery to your door before you head to the airport!

After years of hearing, "I usually just pick up a magazine at the airport before I go away," we'd love people to start associating print with more than just holidays.

We want people to start their holiday early and bring that feeling home with them afterwards. To make print part of everyday life, not just a travel essential. To turn finding your next read into something memorable, immersive and personal, rather than a last-minute purchase.

Throughout the campaign, you can expect packing hauls, print abroad, magazine and destination pairings, and a series of summer events celebrating food, travel, cocktails and creativity.

We can't wait to help more people discover print and find the perfect holiday read before they fly.

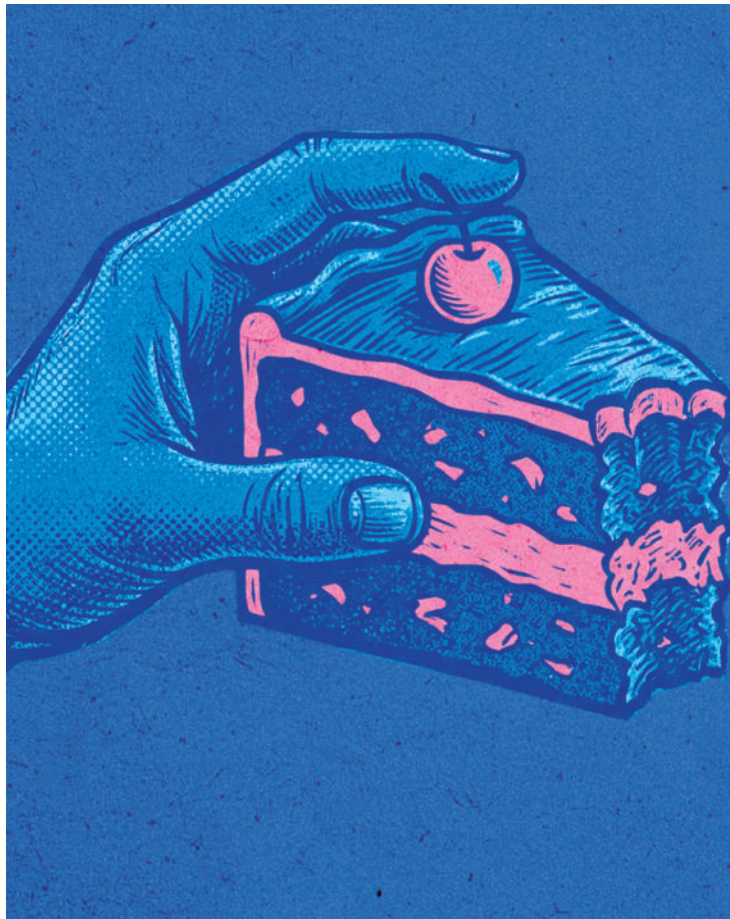


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www.uniquemagazines.co.uk

Our Blog: www.themagazineclub.co.uk



WTF is Fractional?

And why is everyone suddenly using it?

Fractional Marketing

The smarter solution many businesses are missing.

'Fractional', a word gracing email footers and LinkedIn profiles across the globe, but if it comes up in conversation most of us just nod our heads, hoping nobody asks the obvious question:

"Sorry... What does fractional mean?"

It sounds vaguely mathematical. Slightly obscure. Possibly expensive.

But in reality, it's very simple and far from cost-prohibitive.

Fractional is a low commitment way to bring specialist knowledge or senior expertise into your business. Instead of hiring a full-time Marketing Director, Finance Director, or CTO, you hire them for the fraction of time you need them.

Fractional isn't new. Lawyers have been doing it for years and consultants have built entire industries on it.

The only thing that's changed is that more businesses are seeing the obvious benefits of the fractional model, and applying the same thinking to other core roles, increasingly in marketing.

And that shift is happening for a reason.

The gap every growing business feels

Many businesses have a marketing team, but the skillset in that team can vary significantly. Often it's a combination of eager juniors and perhaps a senior non-marketer having to wear a marketing hat for a couple of days a week.

This means marketing is happening; but underneath the social posts, website updates, and email newsletters there's a nagging feeling: "Is any of this working?"

If that question isn't answerable, the logical next step is to get someone senior in. But genuinely experienced Marketing leadership isn't cheap - and most businesses don't need it five days a week.

This is where fractional comes in.

A fractional marketer brings senior-level thinking into the business. They'll give you a strategy to help you focus on what matters and ignore what doesn't. And importantly, they'll put a plan in place for measuring impact.

They sit in that hard-to-fill space between leadership and the day-to-day. Senior enough to challenge when something isn't right (even if others are convinced it is), but close enough to the delivery team to roll their sleeves up and get involved.

Why it works

The appeal isn't just about cost-saving, although that is a happy by-product.

Firstly, you get experience without over-hiring. You're bringing in someone, or a small, agile team who's done this before, multiple times, in multiple businesses - without needing to find them 40 hours of work every week.

Secondly, you get objectivity and an outside perspective. Internal teams are often too close to the problem. Fractional leaders have no sacred cows, no history, and no reason not to ask, "Why are we doing it this way?"

And finally, you get flexibility. As the business evolves, the role can flex with it. No restructures. No awkward conversations. No suddenly realising you've built a role you no longer need.

It's the equivalent of having your cake and eating it.

So... is it right for you?

If your business feels busy but not entirely effective then fractional marketing might be exactly what you need.

It won't replace your team and it won't solve everything overnight.

But it will bring clarity, direction and a level of thinking that's often missing when everyone's too busy doing the doing.

And in a world where most businesses are doubling down on more tactical activity; doing less, properly, can be a surprisingly powerful move.

Got a gap to fill? Need a clear marketing strategy that delivers? At Blue Moon, our team of 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:

anne@bluemoon-marketing.co.uk

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The stuff of legend.

The reality? You rarely need all that expertise full time. You just need access to a team that adapts to your needs.

That's where Blue Moon comes in.

With fractional marketing you really can have your cake and eat it – accessing specific expertise, only when you need it.

Flexible, affordable, and built for growth.

Book a discovery call today:
hello@bluemoon-marketing.co.uk



The Fractional Marketing Partner

bluemoon-marketing.co.uk





Nicola Halse

Sunderland businesses urged to seize new funding opportunity for marketing growth

Businesses across Sunderland are being encouraged to take advantage of Phase 3 of a funding programme that could significantly reduce the cost of investing in marketing, digital development and strategic business support.

The Sunderland Business Support Fund, delivered by NBSL, entered its latest phase last month, offering eligible Sunderland-based businesses the chance to claim up to 40% funding towards approved business improvement projects. The scheme has been designed to help growing SMEs access external expertise that can support growth, improve resilience and unlock new opportunities.

For many businesses, marketing is often one of the first areas to be scaled back when budgets are tight, however, with competition increasing across sectors and customer expectations continuing to evolve, investing in a strong marketing strategy, digital presence and brand visibility has never been more important. This latest funding offer presents a timely opportunity for Sunderland businesses to access specialist support at a reduced cost and invest in activity that can deliver long-term value.

The fund is open to trading SMEs based in Sunderland that employ fewer than 250 members of staff, with further eligibility criteria outlined by NBSL. Grants are available for projects costing between £3,000 and £6,000, with up to 40% of eligible costs covered through the programme.

Importantly for businesses looking to strengthen their marketing activity, the fund can be used for a wide range of marketing-related services. These include marketing planning, marketing strategy development, web design and development, video production, design costs for marketing, social media management and access to fractional marketing manager support.

For Sunderland businesses unsure where to begin, Riverside Marketing Solutions, based at the North East BIC, is encouraging local companies to explore the fund and consider how it could support their next stage of growth. As a registered NBSL provider, Riverside Marketing can support businesses through both the application process and the delivery of eligible marketing projects.

Riverside Marketing works with businesses across the North East, providing practical, tailored support designed around the needs of ambitious SMEs. The business offers a broad range of services, from strategic marketing planning and campaign development through to website projects, social media management and outsourced senior marketing support. For businesses that need expert input but do not require a full-time in-house marketing lead,

fractional marketing manager support can offer a flexible and cost-effective solution.

Nicola Halse, owner of Riverside Marketing, said: "As a registered provider with NBSL, this fund is a fantastic opportunity for Sunderland businesses to take a more strategic approach to their marketing and future growth.

For businesses that know they need to strengthen their marketing but have held back because of budget constraints, this support can provide the confidence to move forward with a clearer plan and real momentum behind their investment.

We have already worked with two clients to support applications for marketing strategy and website redevelopment projects and with up to 40% funding available, the scheme can make initiatives that may previously have felt out of reach far more achievable.

The scale of growth and investment happening across Sunderland is clear to see and it's vital that local businesses capitalise on that opportunity. Having the right marketing strategy in place will help businesses raise their profile, stay competitive and put themselves in the strongest possible position for future growth."

For growing businesses across Sunderland, the message is clear, if marketing investment is on the agenda this year, this funding programme could provide the ideal boost to get plans moving.

www.riversidemarketingsolutions.co.uk

JAM Marketing named Branding Agency of the Year at the My Local Awards 2026

JAM Marketing is celebrating after being crowned Branding Agency of the Year at the prestigious My Local Awards 2026, recognising the agency's continued success in helping businesses across the North East and beyond build stronger brands and achieve sustainable growth.

Founded in 2004 and based in Sunderland, JAM Marketing has spent more than two decades supporting businesses with creative and practical marketing solutions. Offering a full range of services including branding, public relations, social media management, website design, print, advertising, SEO, PPC and digital marketing, the agency has built a reputation for delivering results while maintaining a highly personal approach.

The award recognises not only the quality of JAM Marketing's work but also its commitment to long-term client relationships. Unlike many agencies, JAM focuses on providing honest advice and tailored strategies, ensuring clients invest in marketing activity that genuinely benefits their business rather than simply adding services to a package.

Many of the agency's clients have remained with JAM Marketing for more than 20 years, reflecting the trust, consistency and value that the team continues to deliver.

Sara Marston, Director of JAM Marketing, said: "Winning Branding Agency of the Year is an incredible achievement for our team and something we're immensely proud of. What makes this award particularly special is that it's driven by the support of our clients, partners and local business community."



Sara Marston with Jordan Marston

Since day one, our goal has been simple – help businesses grow through creative ideas, honest advice and marketing that actually works. We've built lasting relationships with clients by always putting their interests first, and this award is recognition of that approach.

We'd like to thank everyone who voted for us, supported us and trusted us with their marketing over the years. This award belongs to them as much as it does to us."

As the agency looks ahead, the team remains focused on continuing to deliver innovative marketing solutions while staying true to the values that have driven its success for more than two decades.

For more information about JAM Marketing, visit their website www.jam-marketing.co.uk, or contact the team directly on 0191 917 0819.

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My weekend

Amanda Patterson

Amanda runs Amanda Jo Skin in Wallsend where she is a restorative skin artist.

Here she tells us about her weekends.

Do you ever have to work weekends?

Occasionally, but I'll only do it for certain clients, because I try and keep the weekends free for me.

Are most weekends the same?

I try and add variety but pretty much each weekend has a lot of downtime. I'll run my little girl around her social activities. I'll go to the gym, and I'll create some time to draw. I love to spend time with my daughter and we'll do something together, something nice like the cinema.

How important is the weekend to you?

Really important. It's the time when I kind of switch off from the world.

Do you find it hard to switch off?

Yes. I've got something in my phone where every single project that I want to complete is listed. My mind is constantly switching back and forward with new ideas, new things I kind of like to try and I get a buzz from creating new projects.

What do you do that you can't fit in through the week?

I would say downtime with my little girl – real quality time. It's difficult through the week because of work and life, school and after school clubs. So, I try and make some space for her on a weekend.

My week is busy, as I could be working long hours. And we've got to factor in my little girls' social activities, like after school clubs, any homework, etc

So, for the week, we're literally out the house from about 8 o'clock in the morning. Sometimes we don't arrive back until 7 o'clock at night.



Amanda Patterson

Do you prefer big night out or a big night in?

Big night in, always. A big night in for me isn't watching TV as I'm in by myself, I love to draw. I just prefer to put my music on and draw. I listen to quite a lot of soul music. When I was drawing my Amy Winehouse, I listened to a lot of her music to help me get into her space and where she was. Usually though it's always quite relaxing music.

My best night out recently was winning an award from the North Tyneside Business Forum with my project partner Megan. What a night that was.

Do you watch or play any sports at the weekend?

I go to the gym on a Saturday morning, and I've actually just took up roller skating.

Where do you like to eat out?

I don't eat out a lot. I'd much prefer to grab a bag of chips and go for a walk on the coast.

That's kind of more my thing. If I was going to eat out, I would choose something like Greek food but most of the time it would be eat and walk.

How important are your weekends?

Really important. What I've learned a lot is that downtime is more important than anything else. I used to just go, go, go, and I still do, but I make sure on a weekend that I try and switch off completely from work. I spend more quality time with my little girl. I'll be with my family more and I make sure that I don't do a lot of work on a weekend unless I really have to.

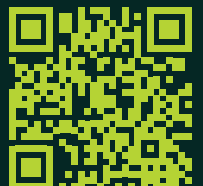
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BRADLEY O'MAHONEY





Peter Oram, Original Thinking in the retail world

Marketing consultancy O.agency's Original Thinking podcast explores a whole host of topics facing modern leaders today, from finding originality in a world of AI to how to manage the pace of change in your business.

In June's episode of the podcast, O.agency Managing Director Kirsty Ostell talks to Peter Oram, Chief Executive at PervasID.

PervasID is a world leading RFID technology business, supporting retail brands all over the world. They are the tech behind the tags you see on every item of clothing in a store. Their tech ensures tags can be detected by in-store sensors, and that data helps retailers manage stock, support the supply chain and create a smoother customer experience. Very clever stuff!

Read some of the conversation Kirsty and Pete had around brand, business growth, creative thinking and why clear messaging matters in a crowded global market.

When you joined the business, what did you think the brand needed?

The company needed to do more than just fit in with global competitors. In a market crowded with corporate blue and white sameness, PervasID had to stand out. Moving to a black-

and-red visual identity, while retaining elements of the company's heritage was part of a broader strategy to define the sector rather than be defined by it.

Was that rebrand mainly about the visual identity?

The brand was visually important, but the real work was in clarifying the message. In a space where RFID can feel like black magic, the business needed language that explained not just what the technology is, but what it delivers. As the messaging sharpened, clients stopped asking what PervasID does and started asking how it works and what more it could offer them.

You have been on a big funding journey. How important has that clarity been in conversations with investors and the board?

It's been essential, we needed to stand out from the crowd, be different and lead in the industry. If a business is willing to invest in sales, it should recognise brand-building as just as critical to growth. Since we've changed our brand, we've quadrupled our website hits and inbound enquiries began increasing straight away.

What happens next once that brand platform is in place?

We are now bringing more sales resource in-house, particularly in the US and Europe. Without a clear brand and message already in the market, that wouldn't be possible, because they would lack the sales enablement tools they need. You want that message to be clean and clear from the start, so you know how you're being perceived in every country.

Where do your best ideas tend to come from?

Training for endurance events such as triathlons gives me time to really focus in on something, because you're out there running for a long time! I also look outside my own sector for inspiration, to see what they are doing differently that we can bring into our industry.

Have you ever taken creative risks with businesses?

When I started my own business, Evolution MRO, there were multiple businesses called 'evolution' at the time. But we stuck to our guns because we knew the company was on an evolution journey and, in the end, we stood out from the crowd because the tagline was different.

Have you ever had an idea that you've really had to fight for and how do you get people behind it?

You'll always get pushback on new ideas initially. As long as the message is clear, then people will start to come on board. Can you explain the impact in a sentence on the back of a post-it note? For example, we use RFID in the healthcare space, where the impact of losing medical equipment is very different to the impact of a consumer not being able to buy the top that they thought was in the store. Put simply, our technology is saving lives.

What is your view on AI and originality?

AI is a good thing as long as it's managed correctly, so I am a pro AI guy! We use a lot of AI now and it really assists in what we do, it speeds the process up of a lot of things. However, I think the problem we have is when you ask a question, it is always looking at the past and it's not necessarily looking at the future. So, getting original thought coming out of AI doesn't necessarily happen. Original ideas generally still come from that a human element.

To hear to the whole conversation head to O.agency's Original Thinking podcast on Spotify or via www.o.agency/news





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.

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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.

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SCAN ME



Venue owner launches safety platform for Live Events and Night-Time Industries

A North Shields health and safety expert has combined more than 20 years of professional experience with a lifelong passion for live music to launch an innovative digital platform designed to raise safety standards across the music, events and night-time economy sectors.

Mark Elliott, who runs the grassroots live music venue The Engine Room in North Shields alongside his business partner, has created Gigsavvy, a digital compliance and training platform aimed at helping venues, promoters, engineers and event organisers improve health and safety compliance, workforce training and operational accountability.

By day, Mark works as a health and safety trainer, assessor and advisor, delivering training across sectors including oil and gas, construction, engineering, manufacturing and renewables, both in the UK and internationally. But outside work, music has always played a central part in his life.

Through his involvement in live events, Mark began noticing gaps in how health and safety procedures were managed across the music and night-time economy sectors.

His experience led Mark to develop Gigsavvy — a digital compliance and training platform tailored specifically to the music, events and night-time industries. The platform offers IOSH-approved bite-size e-learning courses covering health and safety, security awareness, equality, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding and neurodiversity, alongside digital risk assessment tools, incident reporting, compliance monitoring and a verified directory of trained professionals working within the sector.



Kate's Club Ctrl Alt and Deletes IT and Cyber Worries

A New Hartley-based technology and data protection specialist is helping businesses and charities gain confidence in the digital world through her unique support membership, Ask Mrs Watson.

Kate Watson has spent more than 40 years working in IT, software training and data protection, supporting organisations ranging from international shipping firms and insurance companies to dentists, estate agencies, hotels and charities.

Now, through her business Ask Mrs Watson, she is offering practical, judgement-free support designed especially for small businesses and organisations that may not have the budgets of larger corporations but still face growing cyber security risks and can feel overwhelmed and unsure of what they need to do to comply with what can feel like complex data protection laws.

Kate explained: "The data protection side and the software training side really go hand in hand. If people feel more confident using technology, they are less likely to make mistakes or click on something they shouldn't."

One of Kate's clients, Fiona Pallister from Durham Christian Partnership said: "Kate supported our charity initially with our GDPR compliance and now with our IT software training. It has been great working with Kate, she has really supported extending our knowledge, implementing new policies, and all with her infectious enthusiasm and positivity."

Teesside agency named one of the UK's top 10 best workplaces by the Sunday Times

Middlesbrough-based digital marketing agency Outrank has been named in The Sunday Times Best Places to Work, cementing its status as one of the UK's leading employers and one of the most recognised workplace cultures in the digital marketing sector.

Outrank, the full-service digital marketing agency headquartered in Middlesbrough, has been named in the Top 10 Best Small Places to Work in The Sunday Times Best Places to Work, securing one of the most coveted employer accolades in the UK alongside some of the country's leading businesses.

The Sunday Times ranking marks the second consecutive year Outrank has appeared on that list, and the first time it has broken into the top 10.

Outrank achieved a 99% average engagement score in the assessment, with a 96% response rate from across the team - placing it 12% above the Marketing and Advertising sector benchmark.

The result reflects Outrank's sustained growth over recent years. The agency now employs more than 60 people - up from 43 just over a year ago - following a major recruitment drive in 2026 that included two



senior board appointments: M&A specialist Amit Aggarwal and former Branded3 MD David Crawford. Throughout that expansion, the business has continued to prioritise culture as a driver of performance rather than a by-product of it.



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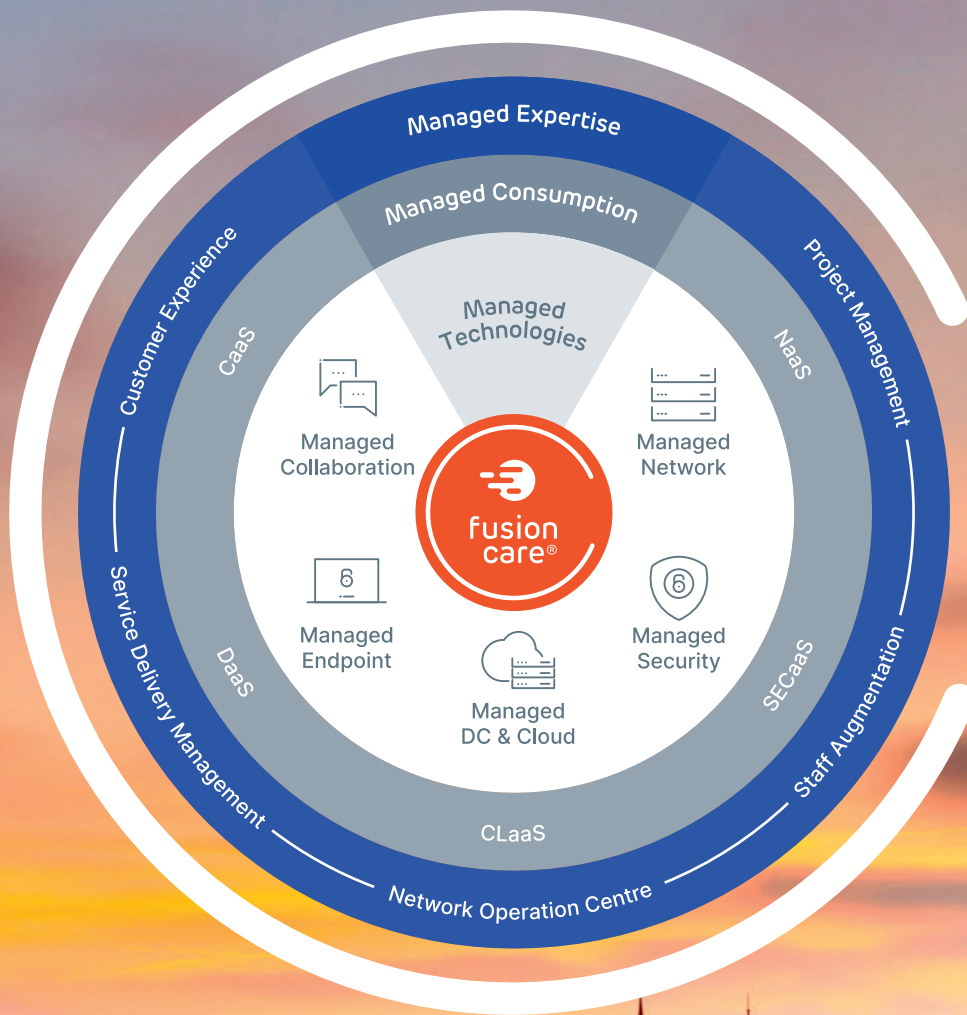
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**Stay curious
and don't be
afraid to get
hands-on.**

Wajeeha Moazzam

Talking Tech and Digital

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

Wajeeha Moazzam

Senior Account Manager, Brave & Heart

Did you always envisage a career in the world of Technology?

I've always had a keen interest in tech. From a young age I was pulling things apart to understand how computers worked, and I was the first in my family to really gravitate towards technology. I had an inquisitive mind, always wanting to know what was going on under the hood. That curiosity led me to study Computer Science and into a career in it, and I still get a kick out of figuring out how things work.

What tips would you give to someone looking to work in the industry?

Stay curious and don't be afraid to get hands-on. The people who do well keep asking how and why, and aren't put off when something breaks. You don't need to know everything on day one. Be willing to learn constantly, find problems you enjoy solving and surround yourself with people who challenge you. The tech will keep changing, but curiosity never goes out of date.

Tell us about the most exciting project you're currently working on?

We've been weaving AI into our tools in a smarter, more considered way. What's been exciting is launching translations for one of our biggest clients, customers can now read company communications in their preferred language, which makes a real difference when English isn't your first. Suddenly people can read and understand what's happening around them far more clearly. Seeing the impact on our clients, and the results that come from it, has been heartwarming.

Tell us about your team?

We're a small team of talented developers. My role is looking after our products end-to-end, making sure everything we build lands well for the people using it. I'm lucky to work alongside people who care about the detail and take real pride in what they ship.

What are your long-term plans for the business?

Brave & Heart is a genuinely exciting company to work for, we get to act with bravery while keeping our empathy intact. That balance of being bold but leading with heart is at the core of what we do. We've got a lot of innovation coming, and I see us making a real difference across every company we work with. This year is all about innovation and impact, and I'm excited about where we're heading.

What's your favourite piece of technology?

Speech-to-text. Something so simple, yet it makes technology more accessible and more human. It meets people where they are rather than forcing them to adapt. We've built it into BraveAI, and it's been a game changer. Being able to find information quickly just by speaking, without using my hands, has changed how I work day to day. It removes so much friction.

Do you have any heroes or mentors?

I really admire Reshma Saujani, the founder of Girls Who Code. She's made it her mission to get more women and girls into tech, and as someone who didn't see many people like me when I started out, that work means a lot. Closer to home, my real mentors have been the managers who backed me before I'd fully backed myself. That blend of being championed and trusted to grow is what I try to pass on now.

What's your fondest career memory?

My time as a placement student at Nissan. I built a project management system in Access for the PMO team, replacing the spreadsheets we'd been wrestling with in Excel. Seeing it save the team real time, and knowing something I'd built was making their day-to-day easier, was incredibly rewarding. It was early in my career but it's stuck with me, it was the first time I really saw the impact technology could have on people's working lives. I think that moment is a big part of what I still love about this job.

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

Someone told me early on that people will forget what you've built, but they'll remember how you made them feel working with you. It reframed success for me as something human, not just technical.

When not working how do you like to relax?

Running is my reset button; there's nothing like it for clearing my head after a busy week. Beyond that, I love losing myself in a good book, and cooking is my creative outlet. Going completely off-script with a recipe switches my brain off in the best way, and you get something good to eat at the end of it.

www.braveandheart.com

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**Quiet spells
tend to arrive
with less
capacity, not
more.**

Simon Honeywood

Your competitors are already having this conversation

By Simon Honeywood, Readysalted

You're busy. The work is coming in, the team is delivering, and the diary is full. By most measures, things are going well.

So why does it feel like others are pulling ahead?

It's not dramatic. Nobody's overtaken you in a single leap. But there's a growing sense, if you're being honest about it, that some of your competitors seem sharper, better presented, and somehow more together than they were a couple of years ago. They're winning tenders you expected to be competitive for. They're attracting candidates you'd have liked to speak to. They seem to be moving with a confidence that's hard to put your finger on.

The answer, more often than not, is that they made time for a conversation you've been deferring.

The false security of a full diary

Good times are dangerous in a quiet way. When the work is coming in and the team is stretched, investment decisions don't get cancelled, they get pushed back. The website review can wait. The systems assessment can wait. The strategic conversation about where the business is actually heading can definitely wait.

And then a year passes. Then two. The gap doesn't announce itself. It just opens.

There's a phrase that does real damage in business. "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." It sounds like pragmatism, but it often masks something else. The longer something goes without an internal review, the more it becomes the new normal. The baseline shifts without anyone deciding it should.

What they know that you don't yet

Your competitors who are pulling ahead aren't necessarily better resourced or smarter. They've made different decisions about where to spend their headspace. Let's be honest, we are all time poor and guilty of this.

They've invested in how they present before a prospect ever picks up the phone. They've looked at where their processes create friction and quietly fixed it. They've started getting to grips with AI in a considered way, not grabbing every new shiny tool that appears, but understanding where it genuinely helps and where it creates more noise than signal.

The gap between businesses using technology thoughtfully and those who haven't started thinking about it yet is widening faster than most people realise. It's not about having the most tools. It's about having the thinking in place before you reach for them.

The window is when you don't need to...

Here's the uncomfortable truth about strategic reviews. The best time to do one is when business is good, the diary is full, and nothing is visibly broken. That's precisely when there's capacity to think clearly, act without panic, and make decisions that hold up.

Waiting for a quiet spell is understandable. But quiet spells tend to arrive with less capacity, not more.

The businesses that grow most sustainably are rarely the ones that acted in a crisis. They're the ones that paused, on purpose, when everything seemed fine, and asked honestly whether fine was good enough.

Your competitors already asked that question. Some of them asked it a while ago.

www.readysalted.co.uk



The difference between curiosity vs true product-market fit

By Craig Jones, Product Consultant at Leighton

Across every industry, organisations invest significant time, money and expertise developing products they believe customers will want. Yet one of the biggest challenges in product development remains, how do you know when you've found genuine product-market fit?

The difficulty lies in separating signals from noise. Markets are constantly changing, customer expectations evolve rapidly and new technologies create waves of excitement that can be difficult to interpret. Businesses often receive encouraging feedback during the early stages of a product's development, but understanding whether that feedback represents genuine demand or simple interest is an important distinction.

Many products don't fail due to poor execution; they fail because organisations mistake market curiosity for evidence that they have solved a meaningful problem. It's an understandable mistake, early signs can be incredibly encouraging – prospective customers book demos, investors ask questions, industry peers share positive feedback, website traffic grows and social posts gain engagement. The market appears interested. However, while interest can open the door, product-market fit requires something much deeper.

This curiosity is often driven by novelty. People are naturally drawn to new ideas, emerging technologies and innovative concepts. They

want to understand what something does and how it works. The current AI-driven environment is amplifying that curiosity further. Organisations are exploring possibilities, investigating opportunities and seeking to understand how new technologies could affect their businesses. The challenge is that curiosity creates noise and many products fail not because the idea was poor, but because the signals were misread.

True product-market fit occurs when a product solves a meaningful problem for a specific group of people and they actively seek it out because they need it. Customers are willing to pay, they return repeatedly and they recommend it to others. Growth becomes increasingly driven by the value of the product itself rather than the effort required to promote it.

One of the most useful questions to test product-market fit is what would you do tomorrow if this product didn't exist? The answer will give you a concrete workflow which reveals whether you're replacing something painful or if you're just offering something that is a nice to have. It will also help you to

understand where your real competition is.

Businesses pursuing product-market fit should focus less on collecting positive feedback and more on uncovering evidence of real behavioural change. Are customers changing their processes because of the product? Are they investing time and budget? Are they returning without being prompted? Are they disappointed when the product isn't available? These are far stronger indicators than expressions of interest alone.

This is particularly important in uncertain economic conditions. Organisations have less tolerance for experimentation and are increasingly focused on measurable outcomes. Products that solve genuine problems will continue to find buyers. Products built around assumptions or market excitement will struggle once the initial curiosity fades.

For leaders developing new digital products, the lesson is clear. Treat curiosity as an invitation to learn, not proof that you've succeeded. The goal is not to build something that captures attention, it is to build something customers would genuinely miss if it no longer existed. That is the point at which curiosity becomes traction, and traction becomes sustainable growth.

At Leighton, we work with product leaders and technology teams to reduce uncertainty around product-market fit. Through structured product discovery, strategy and iterative delivery we help organisations validate whether a problem is commercially meaningful before committing to large-scale build.

Whether you're searching for product-market fit or scaling an existing platform, we'd love to hear from you: hello@leighton.com



Entrepreneurs' Forum ASCENT launch

The Entrepreneurs' Forum has launched ASCENT, a new programme designed to support North East founders of smaller businesses with serious growth ambition.

Created around the Forum's long-standing principle of entrepreneurs helping entrepreneurs, ASCENT brings together like-minded founders for practical, honest, and grounded conversations with entrepreneurs who have already navigated the challenges of growth.

The first ASCENT Founder Event explored the question: "What does a £1million company look like?" The discussion focused on the realities of growing from early traction towards a more structured, sustainable business, including the changing role of the founder, when to make the first hires, how to bring in senior leadership, and the importance of protecting both cash and culture.

Kari Owers (O.Agency), Dean Benson (Visualsoft), and Jon Dudgeon (Blu Sky) shared their experience on the uncertainty of the early stages, the importance of finding trusted mentors, and the need to recruit people who complement the founder's strengths. The conversation also explored how culture is shaped as a business grows, why honesty matters in a team, and how founders can benefit from opening themselves up to advice from people with real experience.

ASCENT offers founders a supportive environment to ask questions, learn from others, and build the confidence, clarity and connections needed to grow well.

www.entrepreneursforum.net/ASCENT





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Cyber security
is one of the
biggest threats
to every
business in
today's world.

John Behan

Be secure with your Cyber Security

With the advent of AI, cyber threats today are more sophisticated and relentless than ever, and for every business safeguarding any area vulnerable to attack is vital.

Even major financial institutions and high street retailers have found themselves outdone and every organisation should consider, not the cost of providing security, but the considerably greater price that could potentially be paid if security issues are not addressed.

Team Valley-based office technology company, SOS Group, is well-placed to provide IT security advice and support and highlights two specific areas that are often overlooked.

SOS Group Director, John Behan, says: "It's vital to consider every area vulnerable to attack, including technology like multifunction printers that can go unnoticed in IT security planning.

"For us, as a company that specialises in copy, print, scan, it's second nature to think about this element of cyber security but it's amazing how many organisations fail to consider it. It's like a back door that cyber threats can enter if it's not properly secured.

"Multifunction printers are often connected to networks, process sensitive data, and interact with devices such as USB drives and email systems. These functions make them a prime target for hackers.

"It's vital to consider every possible weak point and to provide a strong defence, and we can provide the seamless setup and support to ensure a smooth transition to a secure print environment."

Established in 2002, SOS Group specialises in providing copy, print, scan solutions for clients from local start-ups to multi nationals and holds both ISO 9001, the internationally recognised Quality Management System standard, and ISO 27001, the highly prized IT security accreditation.

John adds: "Achieving ISO 27001 shows we have the policies, procedures and risk controls needed for really robust IT security management.

"It also demonstrates how securely we treat client data and information, and our expertise to support clients to do the same.

"Cyber security is one of the biggest threats to every business in today's world and the move to remote working and change in practice by most businesses has heightened risks still further.

"It's never been more important to integrate effective cybersecurity throughout your business and that must now include print systems."

But technology is only half the battle in creating robust cyber security and the other half is far more complex, as John explains.

"The second major and often overlooked weakness in any organisation is the human element. For your business to be truly resilient, your training needs to sit alongside your IT support, your comms, and your mobile security.



"Cybercriminals are now using AI to write the kind of emails that can bypass traditional filters and this makes the ability to 'gut-check' a request more important than ever.

"We've moved way beyond phishing emails from 'princes' in 2026, they look like realistic invoices, HR updates, or even urgent messages from your own senior management.

"Training your team to spot subtle red flags that AI can't hide, like unusual requests for data or strange links, should be a key element of any security planning.

"It's the one security gap software can't fix. You can have the best firewall in the world, but it only takes one accidental click from a busy employee to allow a threat in and we can help address this.

"It's not something any organisation should vacillate on. The potential cost of a security breach could bring a business down.

"The answer needs to be a full wraparound solution and the best tech is potentially useless without educated and savvy users. A holistic view is the only way to undertake your technology security and that's something our team can help with."

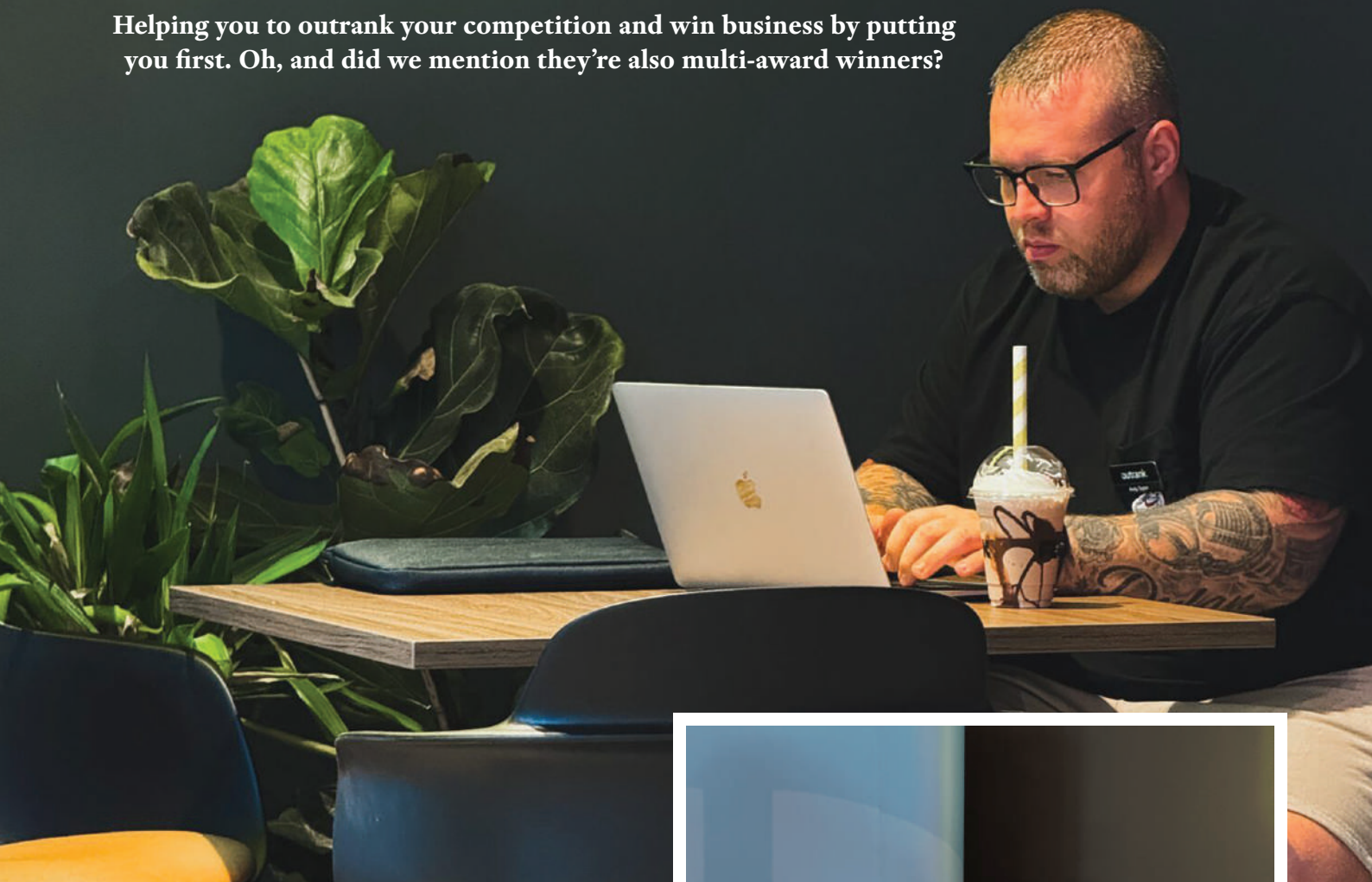
SOS Group offers network security processes, software, training and support to give customers the tools to prevent and protect against unauthorised intrusion.

For more information on how SOS Group can support the security needs of any organisation, please visit:

www.sosgroup-ltd.co.uk

Outrank – The UK's leading digital marketing agency for SMEs

Helping you to outrank your competition and win business by putting you first. Oh, and did we mention they're also multi-award winners?



At this rate, Outrank, the Teesside based full service digital marketing agency, is going to need a bigger trophy cabinet.

In the recent Ward Hadaway rankings, Outrank was named 30th in the North East Fastest 50, highlighting strong financial health, sustained profitability, and revenue growth. They were praised for expanding from a small local team into a highly successful national agency while maintaining headquarters here in the region.

They also won Small Business of the Year at the Teesside Business Awards...they were ranked no.2 in the 2026 Great Places to Work - Best Workplaces Award and Top 10 Best Small Places to Work in The Sunday Times Best Places to Work...they won Agency Culture of the Year at the Northern Digital Awards...and took the silver gong home at the Company Culture Awards.

Good going for a firm that was only established in 2018.

A bit of background. Outrank is a digital marketing agency which helps the UK's small and medium-sized businesses, competing online against bigger, better-funded rivals. Outrank exists to level that playing field. Working with more than 4,000 SMEs nationwide, the platform generates over 1,500 leads every month through SEO, website design, PPC, social media and e-commerce with every campaign built around one thing: results you can measure.

They specialise in a broad range of digital marketing services helping businesses compete online via search engine optimisation (SEO), website design, pay-per-click advertising (PPC), social media marketing, e-commerce development, email marketing and hosting solutions.



And if hanging on to clients is a sign of how good a company is, Outrank continues to impress. Their retention rate is 96 per cent, which is well ahead of industry averages. Praise indeed.

“When I speak to people outside the North East, they’re amazed by the sort of success we’re having. They don’t realise how strong the region...especially Teesside...is in terms of tech businesses. We are a powerhouse. The advantage is that our overheads are lower in the North East when compared to somewhere like London, Manchester or Edinburgh. We can be ultra-competitive when it comes to pricing but not at the expense of quality and results.”

Talking of results, one of Outrank’s biggest strengths is its focus on SEO and local search visibility for small businesses. By improving website rankings on Google and optimising content for targeted keywords, Outrank helps businesses attract customers actively searching for their products or services online and in their location. This leads to increased traffic, higher conversion rates and long-term growth. The agency also creates bespoke websites that are designed not only to look professional but also convert visitors into customers.

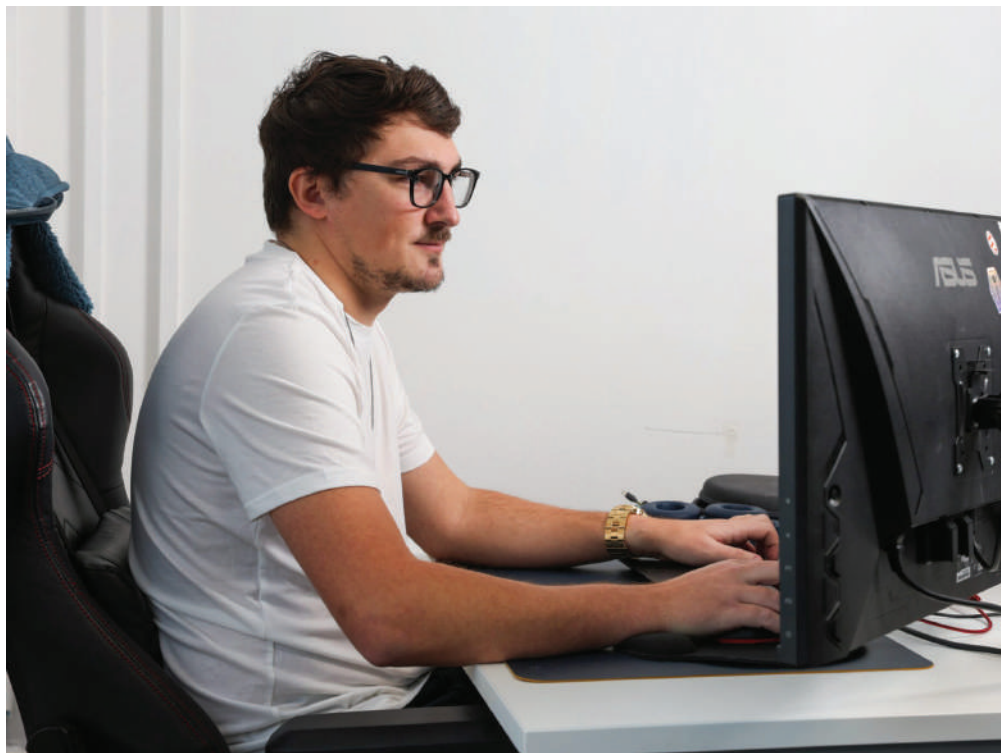
“Our expertise in PPC and paid media campaigns, helps businesses achieve quicker visibility through platforms such as Google Ads and Meta advertising. Combined with creative branding and content strategies, these campaigns allow companies to strengthen their digital presence and compete more effectively in crowded markets. We’re getting particularly strong results across healthcare, retail and professional services sectors.”

Outrank is now a major player in the digital marketing sector. They’re continuing to grow both in terms of staff members and investing in the latest technology as AI-driven marketing strategies become increasingly popular.

If you need to boost your company profile and generate leads, the best idea is to have a chat with any of the Outrank team. They’ll get you noticed.

Call 01642 931 380...email hello@outrank.co.uk...or pop into their Middlesbrough offices.

You’ll find further details of what Outrank can do for you by heading to their excellent website www.outrank.co.uk





Pascal Fintoni

Slow Down, Show Up

By Pascal Fintoni, AI & Digital Storytelling

Getting AI right means moving carefully and standing visibly for what you believe.

Every headline about AI tells you to move faster, adopt more, automate everything. But the most honest conversations I am having with leaders right now tell a different story entirely.

Going slowly could be the wisest approach of all

I recently sat down with a leader from a professional services business. Thoughtful, measured, and very clear about one thing: getting this AI thing right matters more than getting it done fast.

We did not begin with tools or technology. We began with people. That is exactly where these conversations should start.

Before reaching for any platform, gather your colleagues. Map out what you would love to work differently. Not how, just what. Use common sense rather than technical

knowledge. What you are really doing is writing a specification: a description of a better working day.

Then, before looking anywhere else, go back to the software you already use. You would be amazed how much is already possible that nobody told you about. Start there.

Two reminders matter most in those sessions. First, caution beats the chase for productivity every time. Move too fast and you create a poorer experience for everyone.

Second, when automation frees up time, be ready to tell your colleagues what that time is for. Nobody wants to feel replaced. Everyone wants to know they are moving forward.

This is also the biggest change most teams have faced since computers first arrived in the office. Treat it that way.

The AI backlash is already here

While leaders wrestle with adoption questions, something else is unfolding across our social feeds. There seems to be no limit to the flood of AI-generated audio, images, and video filling every platform.

Experimentation is fine. Targeted use of AI-generated media probably is too. But that is not what I am watching happen.

I find myself blaming the platforms, which seem to reward synthetic content and favour fake messages over real voices. That leaves the rest of us, the ones who care deeply about ethical practice, facing an uncomfortable question.

How do we make sure current and future clients do not confuse us with the worst examples in our sector? The answer, I think, is just a little bit.

Just a little bit more storytelling about our ethical practices. Sharing how we actually use AI in our work, and where we choose not to.

Just a little bit more leading by example. Showing our working and letting people see the human thinking behind the content we publish. Suspect use of AI is loud. Thoughtful use needs to be visible. Not in a noisy way. Just a little bit more.

What These Two Things Have in Common

Slow adoption and visible ethics are not separate conversations. They are the same one. Both ask you to resist the pressure to perform urgency. Both put people before platforms. Both require you to lead from your values rather than your feed.

The noise will not quieten down. Thoughtful practice does not have to match it. It just needs to be seen.

To your success!

Pascal Fintoni is an AI and digital marketing strategist with 30 years of experience working with business leaders on responsible AI adoption, content strategy, and digital marketing.

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Army Benevolent Fund welcomes support from Newcastle engineering firm

Pearson Engineering has been named an official corporate member of the Army Benevolent Fund (ABF), the Army's national charity.

As a Gold Award holder under the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme for the Armed Forces Covenant, Pearson Engineering employs a significant number of military veterans, reservists and ex-forces personnel across its 400+ strong workforce.

This partnership represents a natural evolution for the company, scaling its long-established military partnership portfolio which includes monetary and personnel backing for programmes including the Newcastle Rugby Foundation's Veterans Fund, the North East Armed Forces Business Forum, and regional Cadet and Officer Training Corps.

The relationship was formalised following a recent visit by the ABF to the organisation's historic Armstrong Works site. During the visit, the charity's Chief Executive, Major General Tim Hyams CB OBE, addressed personnel from Pearson Engineering and its sister company, Responsive Engineering, highlighting the importance of corporate partnerships in helping to fund the charity's vital work.

Major General Tim Hyams said: "We are delighted that Pearson Engineering has chosen to support the Army Benevolent Fund and the Army family. This valuable partnership will enable us to provide essential support for soldiers, former soldiers, and their families, affording them the opportunity to avoid hardship and live with independence and dignity."

Miller Homes wins Large Business of the Year Award

Miller Homes has been named as Large Business of the Year at the British Business Awards.

Announced at a ceremony in Edinburgh attended by some of the UK's most influential business figures, the award recognises significant milestones in Miller Homes' growth and industry impact. The accolade acknowledges not only strong financial performance, but also leadership and a sustained commitment to employees, customers and the wider community.

Miller Homes was shortlisted for the Large Business of the Year Award alongside some of the UK's most notable companies, including SEGRO, Menzies Aviation and Centurion. Judges noted the extremely high standards of winners across the awards, the strength in the business community they represent, and the bright future of our economy.

Stewart Lynes, CEO of Miller Homes, said: "We are honoured to be recognised as Large Business of the Year, an award that reflects the collective dedication, high standards and customer focus across our organisation.

"This achievement underscores our commitment to sustainable growth, operational excellence, and the pride we take in building high-quality, sustainable homes that meet the evolving needs of our customers and communities."



The Banks Group increasing investment in future growth plans after reporting £8.4m operating profit

North East property, housebuilding and mining firm the Banks Group is continuing to invest in its future growth prospects after reporting a healthy set of annual results.

The County Durham-headquartered firm has reported turnover from continuing operations across the group of £43.4m for the year ended 30 September 2025, up from £26.1m in the previous 12 months, and a combined operating profit across all its businesses of £8.4m, compared to an operating loss of £5.7m in 2024.

Founded as HJ Banks & Company Limited in Tow Law by Harry Banks OBE DL, who remains chairman and chief executive today, the family-owned firm is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year and has always retained its headquarters in County Durham. Harry Banks says: "We're immensely proud of our County Durham and North East heritage, which has been the foundation on which our growth, diversification and success has been based over the last 50 years.

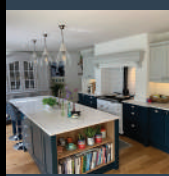
"We have continued to invest in our new house building arm, Banks Homes, which is well placed to deliver future growth and earnings, and believe we will deliver good growth and earnings in the coming years from the investments we are making across all our operations."



The event is the largest business dinner in the UK and raised over £1million for homelessness charity, Social Bite.

The award was presented by event host Elaine C Smith and received by Miller Homes' Executive Managing Director, David McGrath, Group Company Secretary, Beth Ford, General Counsel, Moira Kinniburgh, Regional Managing Director, Gary Heaney, and Land Director, Arthur Mann.

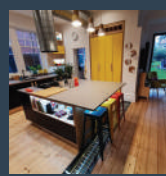
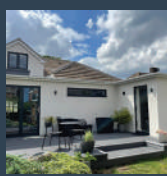
Miller Homes currently has nine active sites across the North East, with more set to come to market over the coming months. The housebuilder is also accelerating the roll-out of its St. Modwen brand in the North East and as a result, opted to open its first dedicated show home for the brand and the hugely anticipated Seaham Garden Village development in County Durham.



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Commercial Property: The Art of Reinvention

Across the North East and North Yorkshire, some of our most cherished buildings have adapted to the changing needs of the communities around them.

Former schools, traditional farm buildings, pubs and historic commercial premises, forgotten corners of our towns and villages that have all found new purpose, proving that progress and heritage can sit comfortably side by side.

It is easy to think of commercial property as simply bricks and mortar, but the reality is often far more interesting. Buildings tell the story of the places they belong to and the people who use them. As industries evolve and ways of working change, so too do the spaces that support them.

In recent years, there has been a growing appreciation for character and individuality.



Paul Fairlamb

Businesses are looking beyond standard office blocks and retail units, choosing properties with history, charm and a sense of place. A former agricultural building might become a thriving rural enterprise, while a period property could provide the perfect setting for an independent business. Elsewhere, waterside and coastal locations are being reimagined, bringing fresh opportunities to communities with deep historic roots.

The North East has always been remarkably

good at reinvention. Ours is a region built on innovation and enterprise, and that spirit continues today. Rather than leaving buildings behind as times change, there is an increasing desire to preserve what makes them special while finding practical and sustainable new uses for them.

At youngsrps, the commercial property team has the privilege of seeing this transformation first hand. Every instruction is different, but there is often a common thread. Behind every building is someone with a vision, whether that is an entrepreneur starting a new venture, an established business looking for room to grow or an investor keen to breathe fresh life into a landmark property.

As Commercial Property Partner Paul Fairlamb explains: "People often see commercial property as a reflection of the economy. I prefer to see it as a reflection of optimism. Every school, workshop, barn or historic building that finds a new purpose represents someone's belief in the future of our communities, and that is a story worth celebrating."

Perhaps that is the real appeal of these buildings with second acts. They connect our past with our future, preserving the character of the places we know while creating opportunities for the next generation. In a fast changing world, there is something quietly encouraging about knowing that some of our oldest buildings still have plenty of stories left to tell.

www.youngsrps.com

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Greystead Rectory and Cottage

Tarset, Northumberland

Greystead Rectory is an exceptional Grade II listed Georgian home set within the Northumberland National Park, offering elegant interiors, sweeping countryside views and North Tyne river frontage with fishing rights. Complete with a detached cottage and income potential, this is a truly rare lifestyle opportunity.

Asking Price £1,500,000



Lander 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



Building the Future

Investing in the next generation of Construction Professionals.

The construction industry has always been built on skills, knowledge, and experience passed down from one generation to the next. At MES Construction, we recognise that the future of our industry depends on developing talented individuals who are willing to learn, grow, and build successful careers within the sector.

As a family-owned construction, civil engineering, and property development contractor operating across the North East, we are proud to play an active role in supporting apprenticeships and creating opportunities for local people.

Today, MES Construction employs six apprentices across a range of disciplines, including three apprentice bricklayers, two apprentice groundworkers, and one apprentice joiner. These individuals are gaining valuable hands-on experience while working alongside experienced tradespeople on live projects throughout the region.

For us, apprenticeships are about much more than filling vacancies. They are an investment in the future of our business, our industry, and our local communities. By providing practical training, mentorship, and real-world experience, we help apprentices develop the skills, confidence, and knowledge required to become highly skilled tradespeople.

We have already seen the benefits of this commitment firsthand. One of our recent apprentices has successfully completed their training and progressed into a fully qualified role within the company. Their journey demonstrates the opportunities available to those willing to work hard, learn from



experienced professionals, and build a career in construction.

The construction industry continues to face a significant skills shortage across many trades. As demand for housing, infrastructure, commercial developments, and civil engineering projects continues to increase, the need for skilled workers has never been greater. Apprenticeships provide a vital pathway into the industry while helping businesses develop a workforce equipped to meet future challenges.

At MES Construction, apprentices are given the opportunity to work on a diverse range of projects, gaining experience across residential, commercial, industrial, and civil engineering sectors. This exposure enables them to develop a broad skillset while understanding the high standards of workmanship, safety, and professionalism that our clients expect.

We believe in creating careers, not simply jobs. Many of today's industry leaders began their journey as apprentices, and we are proud to play a role in helping the next generation achieve their potential. By investing in people, we are strengthening our business and helping to

secure the future of the construction industry throughout the North East.

As our business continues to grow, we are always interested in hearing from talented and motivated individuals looking to start or further their careers within the sector. We are particularly keen to hear from aspiring joiners, bricklayers, and groundworkers who are eager to learn, develop their skills, and become part of a professional and supportive team.

By supporting apprenticeships today, we are helping to build the skilled workforce that will deliver the projects of tomorrow.

Interested in joining the team?

MES Construction is always looking for the next generation of construction professionals.

For apprenticeship opportunities or to find out more about working with MES Construction get in touch, 0191 816 0649 | Email: admin@mesconstruction.co.uk

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From bedroom start-up to global exporter

What started in a bedroom in 2008 has grown into one of North Tyneside's leading maritime exporters.

Paul Pringle, Managing Director of Solarglide, has built the Wallsend-based company into a globally recognised supplier of blinds, window wipers, window films and specialist glazing solutions for vessels of every size, from superyachts to some of the world's largest cruise ships.

Now approaching 18 years in business, Solarglide employs 14 staff across its Silverlink sales and marketing office and its dedicated manufacturing facility in Cramlington. Every product is custom-made to the exact specifications of each vessel, ensuring a perfect fit for wheelhouses, bridges and onboard living spaces.

Shipping is firmly in Paul's blood. He is the fourth generation of the Pringle family to work in the maritime sector, and his son will create the fifth generation when he leaves university.

"My great-grandfather was a shipbuilder at Smith's Dock on the Tyne. My grandfather followed him into the industry. My dad

has spent 45 years in the maritime sector, working in gas detection for commercial ships and tankers, and he now works with me at Solarglide." Originally from Blyth, itself a proud maritime port, Paul says the industry has always been part of his heritage.

"It's always been in the blood. I'm proud of where I'm from."

When Paul founded the company, his ambition was clear: to work with the world's top five cruise companies. "We're now doing exactly that," he said.

Recent projects include work on a Cunard vessel, solar screens for Disney Fantasy, multiple fishing vessels, tugboats operating in the Panama Canal, and a new contract supplying a series of tugboats in Egypt.

The company is heavily involved in cruise ship outfitting and provides specialist glare and heat-reduction solutions for wheelhouses, improving safety and comfort for crews. Closer

to home, Solarglide recently completed work on the Blyth pilot boat Endeavour, installing solar screens to combat extreme glare and heat in the wheelhouse.

Solarglide exports daily to destinations including Vietnam, America, Canada, China and across Europe, making it one of North Tyneside's significant international exporters.

Exporting has become more complex in recent years, but the company has adapted.

"Brexit changed procedures and made things more difficult, and shipping is slower than it used to be. But we've become experts in export. Our products are going to moving destinations as ships don't sit still, so we must be certain we can get goods there before they depart. If we don't think we can get it there in time, we won't send it."

That careful logistical planning has become one of Solarglide's competitive strengths.

While the Silverlink base handles sales and marketing, manufacturing remains firmly rooted in the region. All blinds are produced in-house at the company's factory, along with window wipers and film supply, ensuring full quality control and bespoke precision.

"Everything we supply is made to the exact size of the ship window. Every product is custom-built for that vessel."

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Joel Dickinson



Carpet Diem: Seizing every flooring opportunity

Karpet Mills – A North East success story built on nearly 150 years of excellence.

Approaching 150 years in business is a remarkable achievement for any company. It speaks not only of longevity, but of resilience, trust, and an unwavering commitment to quality. Businesses do not thrive across six generations by chance; they succeed by consistently delivering exceptional products, outstanding service, and genuine value to their customers.

That enduring philosophy is precisely why Karpet Mills has become one of the North East's most respected and established flooring specialists.

Today, the business remains proudly family-owned, with the sixth generation at the helm. Managing Director Joel Dickinson continues to drive the company forward, combining traditional family values with a progressive approach to modern flooring retail.

"We're incredibly proud of our history, but we never stand still," says Joel. "At Karpet Mills, we're constantly looking to develop our product offering, discover new innovations, and enhance the service we provide. Continuous investment in the business has allowed us to remain at the forefront of the industry, and today we are one of the largest independent providers of carpets and flooring in the North East."

With showrooms located in Kingston Park, Gateshead, Hetton-le-Hole, Hexham, and Benton, Karpet Mills has made finding quality flooring both convenient and accessible. Step into any showroom and you'll find experienced flooring specialists ready to guide you through the options, whether you're furnishing a family home, renovating a period property, or specifying flooring for a commercial environment.

"Flooring is something that needs to be seen and felt," Joel explains. "Images online can never fully capture the texture, quality, and character of a product. Different environments require different solutions, particularly in commercial settings where durability and performance are critical. Our team takes the time to understand each customer's needs and recommend the most suitable flooring for their space."

Visitors to Karpet Mills' showrooms can explore an extensive collection of premium flooring from some of the industry's most recognised manufacturers, including Amtico, Ted Todd, Axminster, Crucial Trading, and Hugh Mackay. Whether you're searching for luxurious carpets, luxury vinyl tiles, laminate flooring or vinyl flooring, you'll find an impressive selection to suit every style and budget.

Thanks to substantial purchasing power and significant stock holdings, Karpet Mills is also able to offer highly competitive pricing without compromising on quality.

For those seeking something truly unique, Karpet Mills has invested in cutting-edge design technology that allows customers to create bespoke flooring solutions from leading brands such as Amtico and Hugh Mackay. Available at the Kingston Park and Hexham showrooms, this innovative service enables customers to design personalised flooring and visualise how it will appear within their own home before making a final decision.

The company's bespoke offering extends further with its custom stair runner service, allowing customers to tailor carpets with a variety of binding and tape border options. Examples of these beautifully crafted installations can be viewed at the Kingston Park and Hexham showrooms.

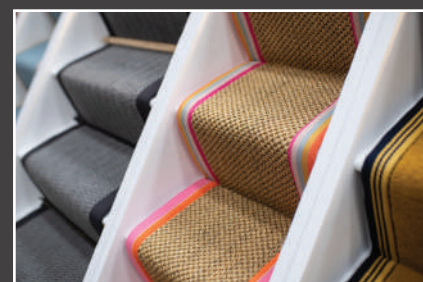
Karpet Mills' reputation for quality extends well beyond domestic projects. Travellers passing through Newcastle International Airport will be familiar with the company's branding, while visitors to the prestigious Matfen Hall hotel may already have experienced their craftsmanship firsthand. Karpet Mills supplied and managed flooring throughout the hotel's extensive refurbishment programme, including the installation of a bespoke, one-of-a-kind stair carpet manufactured exclusively by Hugh Mackay.

Reflecting on the company's recent success, Joel adds:

"Last year was the strongest financial year in our history. Karpet Mills has never been in a better position, and our showrooms have never looked better. We have an incredibly knowledgeable team, an outstanding range of products, and the expertise to deliver everything from straightforward bedroom updates to fully bespoke projects."

Whether you're looking for a single room carpet, flooring for an entire property, or a completely bespoke design solution, Karpet Mills has the experience, resources, and expertise to bring your vision to life.

To discover more, explore the full range of products and services at www.karpetmills.co.uk.



Architectural innovation and heritage expertise secure transformative Durham PBSA for Howarth Litchfield



Leading architecture practice, Durham-based Howarth Litchfield, has been appointed architect for Ward Group Investments' (WGI) latest purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) development, Hopper House, in Durham.

The multi-million-pound scheme recently received unanimous approval from Durham County Council's planning committee who were appreciative of the consideration given to the gym, fitness room and large kitchen/living space for mixing and mingling in the transformative proposals as well as the additional fenestration to maximise the amount of daylight entering the building,

The development will transform the 18,000 sq. ft. Hopper House on Atherton Street - a "nondescript" 1980s office building that has stood vacant for over 12 years - into 45 high-spec, self-contained studio apartments.

Transformational vision

While the scheme has already garnered significant attention, the design was specifically commended by the Council's planning department for its innovative approach to internal amenity and heritage sensitivity.

The planning department praised the proposed increase in window heights and the introduction of larger sash windows, which create a "lighter and more active" appearance to the elevations.



Furthermore, the thoughtful use of existing roof voids to create duplex apartments was a standout feature. By introducing contemporary dormer windows, Howarth Litchfield has transformed previously "landlocked" areas of the floor plate into sun-filled living spaces with long-range views of Durham Castle and Durham Cathedral.

Jonathan Yates, managing director of Howarth Litchfield and lead architect on the scheme, commented: "It's our first time working with Ward Group and we are delighted with the way the design brief has put us through our paces to produce an innovative solution to maximise useable space. We have designed some amazing studios with great communal spaces to enhance the study experience in Durham. The building had many constraints, so it has taken significant remodelling of the roof space resulting in some exciting duplex units with feature dormers and skylights."

The design for the transformation of Hopper House leveraged the practice's extensive experience in the student accommodation sector as well as its vast conservation architecture expertise. In this way the team unlocked the potential of the roof voids to create premium duplex units. Maximising daylight penetration was a central pillar of the design and a key factor in securing the positive backing of the planning department.

Sustainability and Community

The repurposed building will be highly energy-efficient, featuring air source heat pumps and high-performance window designs. Beyond the 45 self-contained studio apartments, the scheme includes a naturally lit central amenity hub, a cinema room, a residents' gym and a south-facing landscaped study garden created from a former car park.

Leading the development day-to-day, WGI Director, Charlie Ward, added: "The unanimous approval from the planning committee is a strong endorsement of the collaborative approach we took throughout the design development process. Working closely with Jonathan and his team has allowed us to deliver a sustainable development that supports the city's demand for high-quality PBSA while bringing a prominent, long-vacant building back into productive use."

Andrew Ward, Chairman of WGI, and founder of the company in the early 2000s, said: "Ward Group Investments was built on a commitment to high-quality assets and purposeful growth. This project reflects our long-term dedication to Durham. By partnering with experts like Howarth Litchfield, who possess deep expertise in both student living and historically sensitive sites, we are ensuring that our developments offer a best-in-class experience for residents and the city alike".

howarthlitchfield.com



“ When the day is done, can we look ourselves in the mirror and know we have given it our absolute best shot?

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.

What's your attitude towards 'Going the Extra Mile?'

When it comes to ongoing improvement at ACT, and going the extra mile, I'm... restless. The key, I think, is always doing more than you have to. Here are some examples.

1. Coffee?

When a scheduled visitor comes to ACT HQ, everybody knows their name, and whoever welcomes them offers, and makes, coffee. The little things matter as much as the big things.

2. Behind the Scenes

There's no 'Behind The Scenes' at ACT. We're the same whether in front of customers or not. There's no 'front'. What you see is what you get. We always want what's best for customers.

3. Try Harder by Default

'Try harder' is our default setting. No cruising. We want to be better tomorrow than today. So, if we can beat the price, the deadline or the quality requested – we do.

4. A Proper Team

We're bonded as a team. No blame culture. If someone messes up, they feel safe to say so and ask for help. We genuinely want to help each other shine.

5. The 'End Of The Day' Test

When the day is done, can we look ourselves in the mirror and know we have given it our absolute best shot?

6. Get On With It!

At ACT we don't shout about we do*. In the day to day, we just get on with things. Heads down, one thing after the other. Delivering the right cutting tool – on time, every time.

7. Work Hard(er)

We're aware that, however talented we are or may become, without hard work we can never be at our best.

In summary, I suppose you could say that, at ACT Group, the extra mile is not extra at all! 'Extra' is what we do.

*Except in the occasional article like this, of course!

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David Connor

Roseburch starts Summer with a Boom

The last two months has seen Roseburch, one of the region's leading shopfitting experts, busy with some impactful activity.

Committing to mental health awareness month, Kimberley Flynn has ensured that the team are aware of the support that is available to them. Concentrating on wellbeing, communication to the team on the importance of hydration, breaks and sun lotion if working outside has been paramount. Guidance has also been given for those suffering with hayfever and taking medication.

Kimberley said: "We care about our team and know how hard they all work - we want to encourage taking time to unwind, to take a break for a drink and make sure they keep hydrated, and if possible, make sure they have lunch away from their work station or desk. These breaks are good for your body and great for productivity!

"If working outside, we are reminding the team that sun lotion should be applied. And of course, hay fever is upon us so if taking medication for it, we are encouraging



appropriate steps to stay safe when using machinery. The timing of taking antihistamines is key and we recommend that you take it when leaving work to give 24 hours cover without suffering with tiredness in the working day.

"If their mental health takes a dip, our whole team have access to The Lighthouse group. The company's healthcare scheme also gives access to support through Vitality. As a responsible employer it's imperative to us that there is such support."

The team also receive Carney's Tool Box Talks every Tuesday in their inbox – Roseburch has appointed Carney's to audit the health and safety policies, which the team are being tested on and now form part of the team's KPI's.

In other news at Roseburch, after seven years on Roseburch's shop floor, David Connor has a new role.

Following many years as a time-served bench joiner and cabinet maker, David is now Roseburch's project estimator. The role was created as the business grows and more new opportunities come in, and to enable MD Stephen Flynn to share the load and concentrate on other aspects of the business.

David, who did particularly well to land the

role, which was advertised externally as well as internally, is excited to be off the shop floor and carving himself a new career at the age of 61! In his previous jobs, David ran a small company for seven years and held management positions in manufacturing and production, meaning he is getting to utilise the skills and knowledge gleaned over the years. He said: "The role is very busy but that doesn't phase me – I am relishing getting to grips with the responsibilities, making a difference to our ever-growing company."

Outside of work David, who lives in Gateshead, spends time with his family and grandchildren and is a season ticket holder for Newcastle United.

And as if that isn't all enough Roseburch was delighted to be shortlisted in the Constructing Excellence North East Awards for Best Small Business. Sadly, the company didn't win on the night, coming closely in behind True North Construction. MD Stephen Flynn said: "We were honoured to be in the room with some incredible talent in the region's construction industry, attending with five of the Roseburch team, two of which (Max and Conor) are coming to the end of their three year apprenticeships. From the closing statements it sounds like it was a close-run competition so congratulations to True North Construction! It was an enjoyable night and we hope to back in the running again next year!"

If you have shopfitting needs and want to work with a forward-thinking caring supplier, then do get in touch with Roseburch on info@roseburch.co.uk



Joe Pearson, (foreground) business development admin at Classic Masonry with Mike Moody (left) managing director and Tony Kay (right), business development director

Classic Masonry appoints business development specialist

One of the UK's leading specialists in stonemasonry and architectural precast concrete, Classic Masonry has announced the appointment of Joe Pearson.

Joe, 35, from Newcastle, joins the company in a business development admin role.

With extensive experience working within the construction sector, formerly as an operations assistant at Wates Group, Joe was also office manager at Sir Robert McAlpine for nearly 12 years.

In his new role at Classic Masonry, Joe will analyse all of the company data, organising and optimising it to improve quality and maximise usability for growth.

Joe said: "Having previously worked with tier 1 contractors, I wanted the opportunity to look at things with a different perspective – that of a subcontractor lens.

"Classic Masonry has an excellent reputation and the team is very focused and hands on. This is an opportunity to make a difference and really put my stamp on the role. I am looking to streamline and rationalise company data making it more user friendly while also ensuring we are compliant for procurement.

"I will be working closely with our business

development director, Tony Kay and taking on more responsibility in the months ahead."

Established 35 years ago, Classic Masonry, offers a comprehensive range of services, including design development, stone sourcing and selection, cutting, profiling, carving and fabrication. It undertakes both new build masonry construction and restoration and conservation projects, which include cleaning, decontamination and facade consolidation. Its expertise spans both modern and historic environments.

Mike Moody, managing director at Classic Masonry, said: "We warmly welcome Joe to the team, who brings a great blend of knowledge and enthusiasm. The fact he has spent a great deal of his career working with tier 1 contractors will be of enormous benefit to us as we plan for future growth. He will bring a new dimension to our business development and procurement processes."

classicmasonry.co.uk

Investment increases as roofing and civils contracts drive growth

County Durham-based, Hodgson Sayers, has signalled its intention to further invest in the business as it sees robust growth across its key operating areas.

Established in 1979, the firm is recognised for its vast expertise in roofing and, for which, it continues to win significant high value contracts.

However, it is the civils and construction division that has seen the most significant growth in recent years, now representing 50% of company turnover, which currently stands at £15.4 million.

With a base in Nottingham and specialising in roofing, construction and civils, metal fabrication and security products, the company's primary markets are education, heritage, utilities, housing and healthcare sectors.

Amongst the investment being made is £100,000 in IT infrastructure which will bring together finance, procurement, project management and operations into a single integrated platform. It will allow heightened levels of reporting to support planning and decision making.

Via a knowledge transfer partnership with Teesside University, the company has also embarked on a significant AI project to embed a real-time, scalable Digital Twin platform tailored to the company's product lines - security doors, frames, roofing systems. This will enable dynamic, automated updates across the full design, manufacture and construction lifecycle.



John Sayers, managing director, Hodgson Sayers

Elsewhere, there are plans to take on larger premises in Nottingham and to hire additional staff in the North East and the Midlands to meet further demand forecasted for the next three years.

John Sayers, managing director, Hodgson Sayers, said: "The Directors are committed to further investment in the business based partly on our financial performance in the last two years and our projections for the next three years, where we anticipate growth of 15% year-on-year.

"We can make realistic assessments on the basis that much of our work is based on

strong relationships with existing clients and our participation on long-term, high-quality frameworks.

"We have always had a very strong and capable construction and civils capability, which is focussed on the utilities sector, and it is now matching that of our roofing expertise in terms of turnover, which is very pleasing. It has been steadily growing because of the team's ability to forge exceptional relationships with clients based on the delivery of a top-quality service."

hodgson-sayers.co.uk



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L-R: Nicola Frain, Development Sales Manager at St. Modwen Homes and John Taylor, Site Manager at Woodcroft Park

St. Modwen launches first North East show homes

Five-star housebuilder St. Modwen Homes has opened its first Sunderland show home – the housebuilder’s third in the region in the past six months.

The latest property, on the Woodcroft Park development at Chapelgarth, follows the successful launches of show homes at Valley Rise in Consett and a much-anticipated first show home at Seaham Garden Village.

It’s proving to be an incredible 2026 for St. Modwen, which has plans to build 100 new homes across the North East this year.

St. Modwen Homes was acquired by Miller Homes in February 2025 and the opening of the Valley Rise show home - its second in the region - was unveiled less than a month after the launch of its first ever North East show home at Seaham Garden Village.

Over 100 people visited that site across the opening weekend, and it was the same at Woodcroft Park, with the launch of the five-bedroom Bowness-style home.

St Modwen have also arranged for independent financial advisors from In Touch Financial to discuss options with potential buyers, while they can tuck into stone baked pizzas courtesy of a pizza van from Lucca Pizza.

Boasting five bedrooms and three bathrooms, the Bowness at Woodcroft Park is the largest show home that St. Modwen has launched in the North East.

The property offers generous space for growing families, with a separate living room and an L-shaped kitchen, dining and family room opening onto the garden through French doors.

Harry McMullen, sales manager at St Modwen Homes, said: “It was fantastic to see so many people visiting Woodcroft Park for the opening of the Bowness show home.

“The Bowness is a stunning house type boasting spacious living and outdoor areas, a double garage and open-plan kitchen and the plush décor chosen by our stylists has really helped capture the art of the possible for those fortunate enough to purchase these homes.

“We have already received a significant number of enquiries following the event so we would recommend anyone interested in the development to visit the show home sooner rather than later to avoid potentially missing out on their dream home.”

Woodcroft Park is a striking new development of three, four and five-bedroom homes on the outskirts of Sunderland.

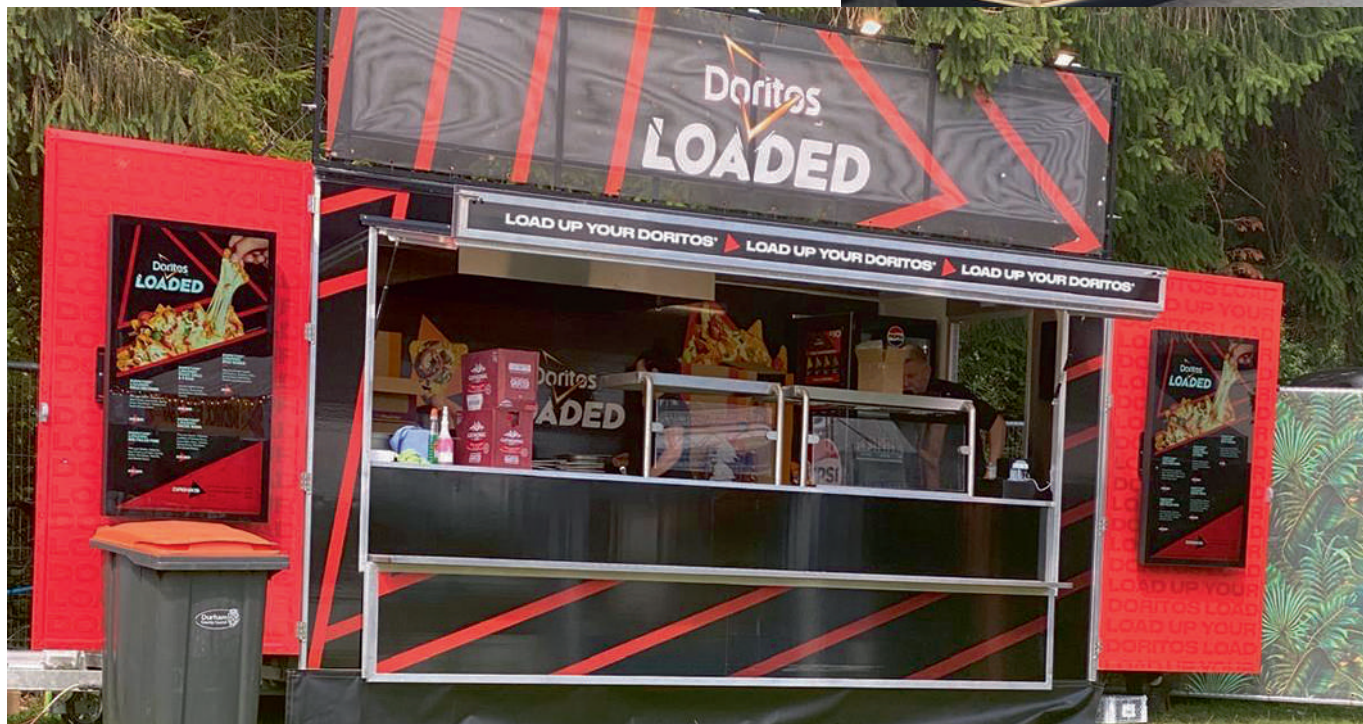
St. Modwen Homes is also offering a range of incentives for eligible buyers, including up to 5% towards a deposit, subsidised stamp duty, part-exchange, assisted move and carpets throughout homes reserved before the end of July.

St. Modwen Homes has a reputation for building high-quality, distinctly designed family homes and providing excellent customer service and was awarded a 5-star rating by the Home Builders Federation (HBF) in 2026.

Further information is available at www.stmodwenhomes.co.uk

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Groundbreaking new musical aims to awaken the spirit of the North East

A bold and visionary new folk opera, *No More Sleeping*, is set to premiere in September 2026, offering audiences an unforgettable journey through history, imagination and innovation. The project was officially launched in June with the help of Durham University's humanoid robot Alan.

Created by pupils from Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, the production is the result of a unique collaboration with acclaimed writer Richard O'Neill MBE, renowned musician and community leader Mike McGrother, illustrator Michelle Russell, and Seven Stories - The National Centre for Children's Books. *No More Sleeping* tells the story of Ella, a teenage girl struggling with the loss of her grandparents. Her world transforms when she receives Marra, a Multifunctioning Autonomous Robotic Resource Assistant; not just a machine but a living archive of her family's history and untold stories of the North East.

Guided by Marra, she embarks on an adventure, encountering historical figures from the heritage of the North East. Together, they uncover the region's rich industrial and cultural legacy, sparking a movement towards

a future driven by arts, technology, sustainability and innovation.

Pupils at Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School in Horden had the exclusive opportunity to meet Alan the humanoid robot.

Year 5 pupil Mia-Rose said: "I am really excited to meet Alan, the robot, and I have been working on designs for the *No More Sleeping* picture book – it is going to be cool."

Jack, also in Year 5, said: "I am singing as part of *No More Sleeping*. I was really excited to see Alan and the robot dog. The show will be really entertaining and I am pleased to be in it."

Dr. Amir Atapour-Abarghouei, associate professor in computer vision and machine learning at Durham University, said: "It was a real privilege to bring Alan to Our Lady Star of the Sea and to be part of the launch of *No More Sleeping*."

"The pupils' curiosity, energy and confidence were fantastic to see, and this is exactly the kind of collaboration that can inspire the next generation of innovators in the North East."

There will also be a professional, published picture book created by the children. Brendan Tapping, CEO of Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, and the driving force behind the project, said: "We are delighted to once more be working with pupils right across our Trust to produce a spectacular performance. Following our previous successful ventures – *Footsteps into Paradise* at Durham Cathedral in 2022, and *JOY in my Heart* at Rainton Arena in 2023.

"At its heart, *No More Sleeping* is a story of resilience, transformation and community. It reminds us that the North East is not just a region of history, but one of boundless creativity and innovation."

Richard O'Neill MBE said: "With a dynamic and electrifying score blending folk, rock and contemporary musical theatre, *No More Sleeping* brings the North East's past and future to life in an immersive, high-energy production. *No More Sleeping* is more than a musical; it is a movement, a celebration, and a call to action."

The Trust is asking the region's schools, colleges and businesses to unite in building the North East's next creative generation. If you are interested in getting involved, email enquiries@bccet.org.uk www.bccet.org.uk



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Year 8 pupils head off on their next adventure

Mowden Hall is immensely proud of its Year 8 pupils and the exciting next steps they are taking as they move on to senior school.

Mowden believes success is about far more than academic results alone. Pupils thrive across a wide range of areas, including sport, music, art, and drama, and this year's cohort have achieved an impressive range of destinations and awards.

Pupils will be heading to senior schools including Eton College, Sedbergh School, Shrewsbury School, and Oundle School, with others opting to stay more local at Barnard Castle School, Newcastle High School for Girls, and Ampleforth College.

The school is also delighted to celebrate scholarship and award success across sport, music, and all-round achievement. Awards include Sports Scholarships to Sedbergh School and Ampleforth College, a Music Scholarship to Oundle School, several Exhibition awards and one pupil receiving the prestigious Michael Palin All-Rounder Scholarship to Shrewsbury School.

mowdenhall.org.uk





Mowden celebrating more awards success

Since 2021, the LuxLife Private Education Awards have aimed to highlight the standout entities within a market of such high value to our communities and society. No matter the challenges this industry faces, the winners this year persist in creating better opportunities for themselves and the children they support.

Mowden Hall School was awarded Prep School of the Year – North East, a recognition that is a true testament to the dedication and commitment of the whole school community.



This achievement follows the school's success in the Independent Schools of the Year Awards last autumn, which underpins the school's continued commitment to providing an exceptional all-round education.

Phil Sturt, Head at Mowden Hall School, said: "We are absolutely delighted to be recognised again as Prep School of the Year. This accolade is a wonderful reflection of the dedication and passion of the whole community at Mowden

Hall, including staff, pupils and families.

"At Mowden, we believe that the best education is one that inspires curiosity, builds confidence and enables every child to discover their own strengths. This most recent award celebrates the core vision of our school, which is to be the best co-educational independent day and boarding school in the North East."

mowdenhall.org.uk



A Royal Quincentenary Visit

By Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster, RGS Newcastle

Rarely does a single day capture both the heritage and the future of a school. The recent visit from His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh proved to be one such occasion, bringing our year of Quincentenary celebrations to a meaningful close.



On Tuesday 16 June 2026, there was a palpable sense of occasion. From our youngest pupils in Year 3, proudly lining the pavements and waving flags, to the many students who had the opportunity to meet The Duke, the warmth of the welcome reflected the spirit of our school community. What stood out most was the time His Royal Highness took to speak with pupils about their interests, ambitions and experiences with genuine curiosity and encouragement.

The visit was not only a celebration of 500 years of RGS but also of the values that continue to shape us. In meeting students from our partner schools, observing lessons and hearing about the impact of our partnership and bursary programmes, The Duke saw first-hand our enduring commitment to widening opportunity. These principles have guided the school for centuries and remain central to our purpose today.

Music, as ever, brought the community together. Our Junior School pupils delivered a joyful and confident performance, followed by the whole school's rendition of *Triumphans*, which served as a powerful reminder of the shared traditions and sense of belonging that unite generations of RGS students.

Addressing students and staff, The Duke said: "I am delighted to join you in marking this special day. It has been a pleasure speaking with so

many of you and hearing about your interests, achievements, and future ambitions... I wish you all every success for the future, whatever you choose to do."

There were also quieter, reflective moments. In the RGS Archive, His Royal Highness met members of the Junior History Society and viewed The Great Charter of 1600, the school's own "Magna Carta", which granted RGS its Royal designation and is rarely displayed.

Twisha D and Hannah T in Year 12 invited the Duke to sign a new visitor book for the school, which they had illustrated using calligraphy. They said: "It was wonderful to meet His Royal Highness. He took time to speak with everyone and was very complimentary about the design. It was a real privilege to have his signature as the first entry in the book."

As the school's Quincentenary celebrations draw to a close, the royal visit provided a fitting tribute to 500 years of learning, opportunity and service.

For the students who shared their stories, the youngest pupils who lined the pathways waving flags, and the wider school community gathered for this historic occasion, it was a day that will remain part of RGS Newcastle's story for generations to come.

www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk



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From the moment students enrol, our award-winning progression team offer personalised support to explore their ambitions and plan for life after sixth form.

Whether aiming for university, higher apprenticeships or employment, students benefit from tailored guidance, workshops and one-to-one advice that ensures every pathway is carefully considered.

We also place a strong emphasis on career pathways, helping students connect their studies with real-world opportunities. Through

employer partnerships, competitions and work-related projects, students gain valuable insight into industries and develop the skills that universities and employers are looking for.

Life at Durham Sixth Form also offers a vibrant enrichment programme allowing students to explore new interests, build friendships and develop leadership skills.

From clubs and societies to the Duke of Edinburgh Silver Award, international trips such as skiing in Italy and cultural visits have included Borneo, India and Vietnam.

There are countless opportunities to broaden horizons and create unforgettable experiences.

Located in an unrivalled city centre setting, Durham Sixth Form Centre offers easy access to transport links, cultural venues, and organisations, giving students a dynamic environment in which to learn and grow.

We look forward to welcoming students who have been offered a place to study with us this September at enrolment, which takes place from 24th–27th August.

For more information, please visit www.durhamsixthformcentre.org.uk



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LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

Beyond Masterclasses

By David Gartland, Darlington College

What true employer partnership really looks like.

For many years colleges and businesses have worked together in familiar ways. A guest lecture here. A careers talk there and perhaps the opportunity for an occasional site visit or placement.

These experiences really matter as they inspire our students and help them understand the world of work but if we are honest, they can feel a little bit transactional and they don't fully reflect the scale of what colleges and employers can achieve together.

The pace of change in skills is accelerating. Roles are evolving, new technologies are reshaping industries and businesses are under increasing pressure to find people who are not just qualified, but truly work-ready. At the same time, colleges are being asked to deliver education that is more relevant, more responsive and more closely aligned to real-world needs.

This is where a more traditional model of teaching needs to embrace change and work in sync with the business community that surrounds them. Ad hoc interactions however well intentioned, cannot keep pace with the changing demands of modern business. What is needed is not necessarily more activity, but a different kind of relationship.

True employer partnership goes beyond occasional involvement and is built on three key principles...

Firstly, it is long-term. Real partnerships develop over time. They are based on regular dialogue, shared priorities, and a commitment to building something together. It is the difference between asking an employer to speak to students once and working with them to shape a future workforce over several years.

Secondly, it is collaborative. In the strongest partnerships, employers are not just contributors, they start to become co-creators. They help shape curriculum, they inform emerging skills needs and bring real business challenges into the learning experience, through employer led projects. When this happens,

education becomes more relevant and students see the value in what they are being taught. This in turn ensure that they are better prepared for employment.

Thirdly, it is mutually beneficial. Partnership is not about one side giving and the other receiving, it is about shared value. Employers gain access to talent, they feel they have more influence over skills development and gain fresh perspectives. Colleges gain vital industry insight and stronger outcomes for learners. When both sides benefit, partnerships become sustainable.

In reality, this means moving beyond isolated activities and towards structured, ongoing collaboration. This approach is not just for large organisations. In fact, some of the most exciting partnerships come from small and medium-sized businesses, as those are often closest to the day-to-day realities of our local economy.

We are lucky at Darlington College to have a number of such partnerships in place. Our role as a college is to make it easier for employers to engage and bring more of the local business community on board too. We need to be flexible, accessible and clear about the value of getting involved.

This is our invitation to work differently
If we want to close skills gaps, support business

growth and truly prepare students for the future, we need partnerships that are long-term and built on shared ambition.

We know that the most impactful partnerships start with a conversation. If you are an employer interested in shaping the future workforce, we would welcome the opportunity to connect and explore how we can work together in a more strategic and meaningful way. Looking ahead, there will be exciting opportunities to get involved as we develop our new STEM Centre and continue to grow our Higher Education offer, creating a powerful platform for deeper collaboration with industry.

As we approach the end of August, enrolment for adult skills and higher education courses will be taking place, offering a valuable opportunity for individuals and local businesses to upskill and grow. With a wide range of flexible courses designed to meet industry needs, employers can benefit from developing their workforce with relevant, up-to-date knowledge and skills.

To explore the full range of courses on offer and find out how they could support your business or to be part of this journey we would be delighted to hear from you. Contact business@darlington.ac.uk for more information.



David Gartland



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Here he tells us about his taste in music, art and culture.

Who is your favourite author and why?

It must be Douglas Adams. He turns absurdity into insight, blending satire, science fiction, and philosophy effortlessly. His unique imagination, memorable characters, and clever observations about life are always a joy to read.

What would be your three Desert Island Discs?

I'm a bit of a rebel inside and love music that has an edge and that challenges authority. So firstly, it would have to be Rage Against the Machine and Killing in the Name. I've loved this song, and the whole album since first hearing it when I was 16 and still listen to it regularly. My second choice would be Johnny Cash and Folsom Prison Blues. There is something about this song that is very simple, but still emotionally powerful. Finally, it would have to be Arctic Monkeys and I Bet You Look Good on the Dancefloor. This was the song that we had played as our first dance when I got married!

Who is your favourite film star and why?

Sean Connery. Effortlessly cool, combining quiet confidence with natural authority. Apart from being the best James Bond, his performance in The Untouchables was unforgettable.

What are your top three films?

Pulp Fiction as I am a fan of all the Tarantino films, Star Wars (the original 1977 not any of the later version) and Amelie, which is always a joy to watch.

Which poem left a lasting impression on you?

Being Welsh, I grew up with Dylan Thomas, and my grandmother lived near Laugharne, where he did much of his writing. That said, choosing a favourite poem feels impossible, rather like being asked to pick a favourite child.

What box sets have you enjoyed?

I really enjoyed *The Penguin*. Colin Farrell was unrecognisable and it was an amazing performance under a huge amount of makeup and a large body suit. *Chernobyl* was a hard watch but worthwhile and I still like to go back to *Mr Robot* with Rami Malek, maybe it's that



Aled Evans

rebellious side of me again wanting to take down global corporations!

Who is your favourite artist or performer?

I was lucky enough to see Iggy Pop perform live in 2025 and even at the age of 78, his presence and energy were electrifying. I'm also a big Prodigy fan and have seen them numerous times over the years. I can't bounce around as much these days so stay at the back and enjoy the show.

What is your favourite venue?

The Piece Hall in Halifax is a unique venue and wonderful for a concert. It is a restored cloth merchants trading hall with a large, enclosed courtyard and stunning Georgian architecture. They have concerts on throughout the summer, and I'd highly recommend going if you get the chance.

Which musical instrument do you particularly enjoy?

Despite my love of loud guitars and drums, I'd have to choose the harp. It produces such a beautiful sound, and there's something incredibly calming about watching it being played.

From the world of Arts and Culture who would be your ideal dinner party guests?

Anthony Bourdain would have been my ideal guest. With a shared love of food and travel, I think we would have got on brilliantly. If he were joined by Patti Smith, Grayson Perry, and Tracey Emin, I imagine it would have made for a truly memorable evening.

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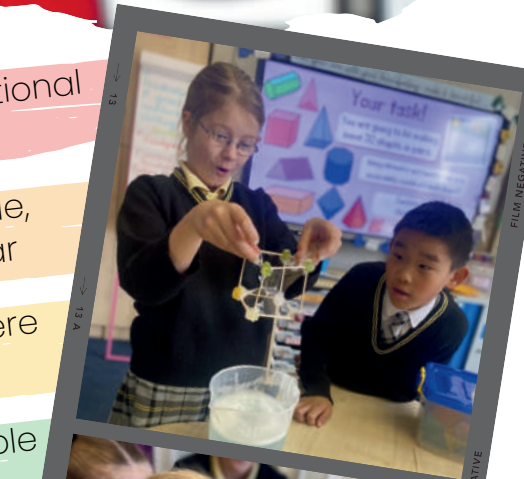
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Sheku Kanneh-Mason to open new Middlesbrough Classics season

Middlesbrough Town Hall and The Glasshouse International Centre for Music have announced a new Middlesbrough Classics season, bringing a year of live orchestral music to the town with performances from Royal Northern Sinfonia and a line-up of leading classical artists.

The 2026/27 season will take place across both Middlesbrough Town Hall and Middlesbrough Theatre, with concerts continuing across the town while restoration works take place at the Town Hall later in the season.

The season opens on 15 October 2026 with cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason performing Saint-Saëns' Cello Concerto, conducted by Dinis Sousa, Music Director of Royal Northern Sinfonia. One of the UK's most in-demand classical musicians, Sheku will perform alongside Royal Northern Sinfonia in a programme that also includes music from Grieg's Peer Gynt and Sibelius' Symphony No. 3.



Newcastle Pride 2026: Theatre Royal opens doors for family & youth zone celebration

Newcastle Theatre Royal has teamed up with Newcastle Pride to welcome families, children and young people as this year's celebrations return to the heart of the city this summer.

For the second year running, Newcastle Theatre Royal will host the festival's Family & Youth Zone, creating a vibrant, safe and inclusive space where LGBTQIA+ families, young people and allies can come together to connect and celebrate. The free drop-in programme will take place on Sunday 26 July from 10:30am to 4:30pm throughout the iconic Grey Street venue.

City of Hope. Streets of Joy is the theme for Newcastle Pride 2026, which also sees the festival delivered for the first time by LGBTQIA+ arts, youth and heritage charity, Curious Arts.

In the Theatre's Studio space, audiences can join singing sweetheart of the North Gloria Love for a fun-filled family karaoke sing-along featuring favourite songs for all ages, while acclaimed choreographer Darren Pritchard brings two performances of the dazzling Family Catwalk Extravaganza by Ghetto Fabulous. A Mini Disco, delivered in collaboration with Dance City, invites families to dance along to party anthems in an energetic shared celebration.

Strictly host to appear at Sunderland Empire

ROYO are delighted to announce that beloved dancer, Strictly Come Dancing host and star of the West End smash-hit musical Kinky Boots, JOHANNES RADEBE will tour the UK from 1 April – 13 June 2027 with a performance at Sunderland Empire for one night only on Sunday 23 May 2027.

Following three record-breaking, sold-out tours across the UK and Ireland, JOHANNES RADEBE: FINALLY HOME marks a joyful new chapter. Packed with dazzling choreography, sensational live vocals, spectacular costumes and the warmth and energy that have made him a national favourite, this unforgettable show brings together the music and moments that have shaped his journey. From ballroom classics to South African rhythms and beloved pop anthems, Finally Home is a heartfelt celebration—and everyone is invited.

2026 has been a remarkable year for JoJo. He became a British citizen, made his West End debut and stepped into his dream role as host of Strictly Come Dancing. Yet one thing remains unchanged: Johannes was born to dance.

Johannes said: "People have been asking if I won't be dancing



anymore...darling, I'm just getting started! Bringing this tour FINALLY HOME across the UK and Ireland is my way of saying thank you to everyone who has supported my journey. So come ready for joy, fun and celebration, because we're bringing the biggest party to your town and I cannot wait to dance with you all!"

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An artists life

By Mary Ann Rogers

With the summer exhibition here at Mary Ann Rogers Gallery underway, there is a huge sense of achievement, to see all the paintings from the first half of the year framed and up on the walls. The four new prints, always a big decision, are also framed and looking good.



Mary Ann Rogers

One cannot underestimate the amount of work and thought which goes into the production of new prints. First and foremost, the paintings need to be created as a direct result of inspiration, mostly from the landscape and wildlife of the surrounding garden, fields and hills. The decision to publish a painting as a limited edition print is major, and involves several steps, involving highly skilled and dedicated people to scan the painting and make a true to life digital file, which then passes to the fine art printing team.

The process I use is called offset lithography, which is a tried and tested, traditional method involving computer to plate to roller. Four separate aluminium sheets carry the four colours which make up the full range - cyan, magenta, yellow and key (black), which each pass over the roller which is laden with the coloured ink - a heavy 'paste' which is smeared onto the roller and spread across. The blankets and rollers need to be thoroughly cleaned inbetween each colour, and the paper needs to be laid in a series of wire racks to dry before the next colour is applied. It's a highly skilled, time consuming job, but produces prints which are identical and uses lightfast inks and acid free paper. The process is very costly upfront, as the entire edition of 200 is made in one go.

Once the printing process is complete, and the edition is complete, the artist traditionally destroys the plates, ensuring that no unauthorised prints will ever be made.

Over the (many) years since I published the very first edition of prints, I can honestly say there have been very few which have not gone on to be popular and sell well. Many editions have sold out completely, which, given that the edition size was 500 up until the last ten years, is astonishing. Nowadays, my editions are 200, this is a manageable number, and means the word 'limited' is exactly that.

When I decided to go down this route, I took advice from older, more experienced artists as well as evaluating things for myself. I felt that if I published my own art myself, I would remain in control as opposed to being published by a fine art publishing house, who would undertake the whole process, pay for the scanning and printing, then distribute the prints through their own avenues- galleries and frame shops up and down the country, as well as overseas. It became apparent that artists would be frequently 'spotted' by publishers, who would then produce and sell prints, often with contracts where artists were obliged to produce paintings on quite a punishing schedule, and turn



Northern Insight



up all over the country for personal signings and photoshoots. I noticed that once these artists were no longer in favour, or their work was not 'fashionable' they would be simply set adrift, but not permitted to approach certain galleries etc, and picking up the pieces of their careers without the backing of a publishing house has seen many artists forced to change career.

Deciding to 'self-publish' turned out to be a good move. I believe the only person with a long term interest in my career is me. It has been the harder road, but the rewards have been worth it, and I have no regrets about turning down offers from all the major fine art publishing houses over the years.

One of my career highlights was receiving the 'best selling published artist' award from the Fine Art Trade Guild. Never before won by a self-publishing artist. This was a huge achievement which I was very proud of.

Most years I produce 2-4 new prints. This year, I found myself obsessed with the momentum of spring- such an exciting season when bare trees, bare earth, ice cold and short days seems to burst into a rapid change, with the ground giving way to delicate daffodils which our guinea fowl and ducks wander among, and the wild hare dashes through.

**Visit Mary Ann Rogers Gallery,
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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: Not everything valuable should be harvested immediately

Not Every Field Should Be Harvested Continuously.

A few years ago, a haugh at Brinkburn was planted with young trees and then largely left alone.

No obsessive shaping. No constant intervention. No pressure to become something quickly.

At first glance it can look neglected, as though nothing much is happening. But return year after year and you notice the changes. Roots spreading beneath the surface. Different species establishing themselves. A different type of landscape.

Relationships forming between plants, insects, birds, and soil. The ecology reorganising itself over time. It is the old farming principle of lying fallow, where land is deliberately left to rest with minimal intervention because continuous cultivation eventually exhausts the soil.

Not every field should be harvested continuously.

The pause is not a failure of the system. The pause is what allows the system to recover its capacity to grow. That feels increasingly relevant beyond farming.

We live in what is often called the attention economy, where everything competes to be seen, shared, measured, and amplified. The expectation is that ideas should become content, conversations should become actions, and experiences should become stories almost as soon as they happen. Visibility has become a proxy for value.

The bigger the audience, the better. The faster the response, the better.

Against that backdrop, there is a tension I keep noticing between growth and extraction.

Growth is often slow, relational, and invisible at first. Extraction is impatient. It demands visible progress, measurable outcomes, and constant proof that something valuable is happening. Increasingly, I see how easy it is to confuse the two.

There have certainly been periods in my own work where every idea needed to become something immediately – a project, a strategy, a result. But I've

started to notice that some ideas weaken when exposed too early. Some conversations become shallower when rushed towards conclusions. Some forms of understanding only emerge slowly, beyond visibility and beyond performance.

I'm beginning to think that not everything valuable should be harvested immediately.

Sometimes the most important changes are happening quietly beneath the surface, in ways that cannot yet be measured or explained. Perhaps part of maturity is recognising when enough has already been reached – enough activity, enough optimisation, enough intervention. Some things grow stronger when left alone for a while.

One Walk: The Coquet Riverside Haugh

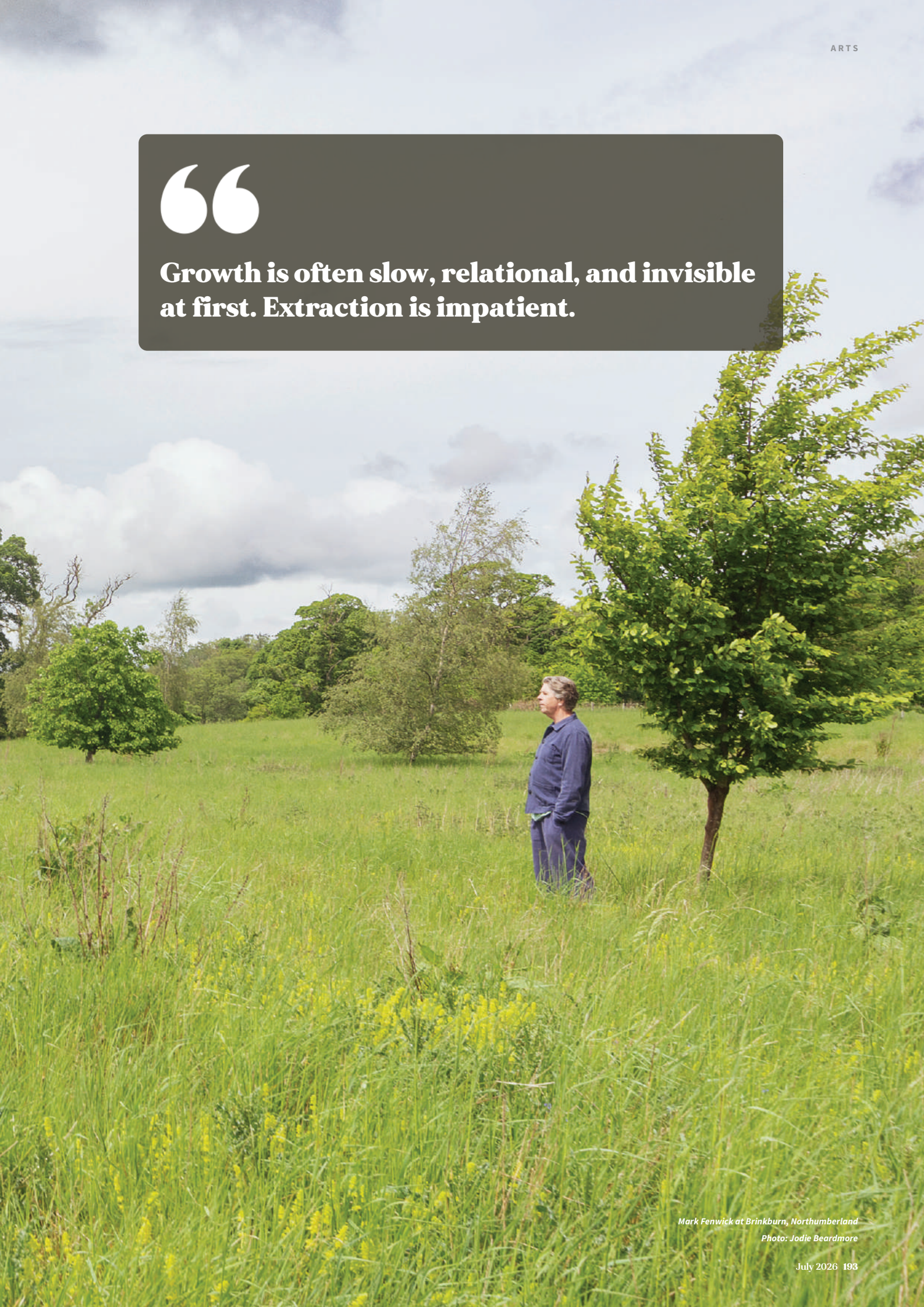
In the Coquet Valley we have three categories of land, all shaped by old English and Viking language: haugh, heugh, and moor. Around Brinkburn the haughs are softened with descriptors – Thorney Haugh, Thistly Haugh, Pauperhaugh – fertile riverside land carrying traces of use, memory, and character. Haughs sit beside the Coquet itself: low, green, flood-fed ground where people historically grazed animals, cut hay, and settled close to water.

The heughs rise differently. Brink Heugh and Middle Heugh speak of edges and elevation – steeper landforms, wooded escarpments, places where the valley suddenly lifts and the landscape becomes more exposed. There is something watchful about a heugh.

And then there are the moors, standing alone without qualification. Open, weathered, uncultivated land needing no descriptor because the word itself already carries enough meaning: distance, exposure, rough grass, heather, sky. Together they describe not just landscape, but ways of living within it.

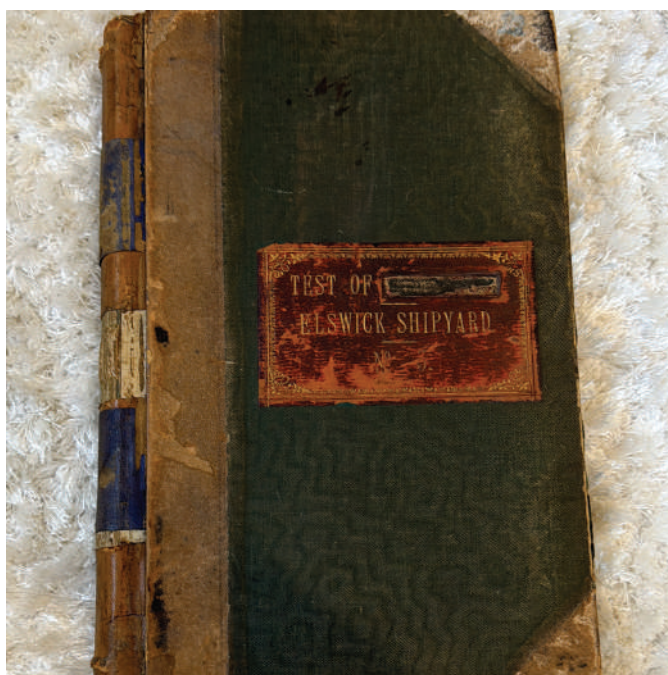
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Growth is often slow, relational, and invisible at first. Extraction is impatient.



Mark Fenwick at Brinkburn, Northumberland

Photo: Jodie Beardmore



Forging a Future from Tyneside's Past

A growing community-led campaign to establish a permanent shipyard heritage museum in the North East is continuing to gather momentum, with increasing public support, university involvement and regional interest in preserving one of Britain's most important industrial legacies.

The proposed Shipyard Heritage Museum aims to create a permanent home dedicated to celebrating, preserving and teaching the story of shipbuilding on the Rivers Tyne, Wear and Tees; industries that helped shape not only the North East, but the modern world.

At the centre of the campaign are Bronwyn Mogie, Andrew Leslie, Dr Mark Stoddart and historian Prof. John Wilson, a group brought together by a shared passion for protecting the North East's industrial heritage while helping create opportunities for future generations.

The campaign itself was founded by Bronwyn Mogie after researching her own family history and discovering generations of relatives who had worked in shipyards along the Tyne.

"At the end of 2025, we found out through family tree research that all of the men in our family had worked in the shipyards from the 1870s onwards," said Bronwyn. "We realised we were probably the last generation with direct family connections to the yards."

That discovery inspired her to launch a public petition supporting a permanent shipyard museum and heritage centre.

"It quickly gained community support. We met local MPs who were supportive, and then Andrew got in touch through LinkedIn because our interests lined up so well."

For Andrew Leslie, the campaign has both a deeply personal and regional significance. His ancestor, Andrew Leslie, founded Leslie's Shipyard, later known as Hawthorn Leslie, one of Tyneside's most important shipbuilding firms building around 800 ships between 1853 and the early 1980s.

Andrew originally began researching his family history with plans for a book and documentary project before becoming involved in the museum campaign.

"These industrialists didn't just build ships — they built communities," he says. "They funded churches, schools and hospitals. It was a period of massive entrepreneurship and industrial development when the North East really was a global powerhouse."

He believes the region's influence on world shipbuilding has never truly been recognised.

"We've been using the phrase that Tyneside was the Silicon Valley of shipbuilding, and it really was," he says. "At one point between 30 and 50 percent of the world's ships came out of this region."

For Dr Mark Stephenson, whose background is in engineering and technical management, the campaign grew out of frustration at how little physical evidence remains of Tyneside's industrial importance.

"I worked on Newcastle Business Park, where the Armstrong site used to be, and I was constantly amazed by the lack of any real evidence showing what once existed there," he says. "You could arrive there and have absolutely no idea how important engineering and shipbuilding once were in that area."

Mark later completed a PhD focused on shipbuilding and engineering on Tyneside, uncovering what he describes as extraordinary stories about the people and industries that shaped the region.

"One of the biggest revelations was how little material survives to explain the scale and significance of what happened here," he says. Now working alongside Prof. John Wilson on a forthcoming book about the history of shipbuilding and the entrepreneurs behind it, Mark says the museum campaign has accelerated rapidly in recent months.

"It's gone from zero to 200 miles an hour very quickly," he says.

"But everybody you speak to seems to have a family connection to the yards. People have stories, photographs and memories that need to be preserved before they disappear."

The group has been working continuously to build support, speaking with councillors, heritage organisations, businesses, educational institutions and potential funding partners. The petition has already attracted more than 1,300 signatures, while thousands more engage with historic photographs, memories and shipyard stories shared through the project's social media pages.

"We are the region that helped build the modern world, yet we still have no permanent venue dedicated to preserving and teaching our extraordinary shipbuilding history," said Bronwyn.

"This project is about making sure future generations understand the skill, sacrifice, resilience and innovation that came from our communities. The yards fed families-built cities and supported the country through war, trade and engineering excellence. That legacy deserves a permanent home."

Although no final venue has been identified, the group hopes the museum can be located on the banks of the Tyne, but they remain open to opportunities elsewhere if necessary. Importantly, the vision extends far beyond a traditional museum space.

"We want this to be much more than somewhere displaying artefacts," Mark explains. "There'll be educational opportunities, apprenticeships, spaces for the community to gather and hopefully somewhere that helps young people gain engineering skills."

The long-term ambition includes educational programmes, digital archives, community storytelling projects, apprenticeships, events and opportunities to reconnect younger generations with the North East's industrial heritage.

The project has also received offers of support and donations from members of the public, including historic artwork, shipyard memorabilia and personal collections connected to the region's maritime past.

The group recently visited the A&P shipyard facilities on the Tyne and were encouraged to see that shipbuilding capability still exists within the region.

"It would be fantastic if one day ships were being built on the Tyne again," Andrew says. "But right now our focus is creating a centre that preserves the past while helping shape the future."

Supporters can learn more, share stories or donate artefacts through www.shipyardheritagemuseum.org.uk and via the project's Facebook page.



Northumberland chef launches roadside catering pod

A Northumberland chef with more than 40 years' experience in the kitchen has launched a new roadside catering venture bringing homemade breakfasts, lunches and gourmet street food to customers travelling between Alnwick and Lesbury.

Adele, owner of The Real Taste of Northumberland has opened a welcoming catering pod at Hawk Hill Business Park on the A1068, offering freshly prepared food made with local produce and decades of culinary expertise.

Having worked in pubs from the age of 13, travelled extensively and cooked in restaurants, hotels, fish and chip shops and event venues, Adele says the move to a smaller, more flexible business model allows her to continue doing what she loves while keeping quality at the heart of everything she serves.

"We are a catering company who like to provide delicious food using local produce," she said. "I've been a chef for 40 years and I just love what I do. We provide the food people want, and everything is homemade."

The catering pod has quickly built a reputation



for food that goes far beyond the traditional roadside burger van.

Customers can enjoy homemade cakes, breakfasts, lunches and the business's well-known sausage rolls, including a new pork, chutney and cheese version now on sale at the pod.

Located at Hawkhill Business Park between Alnwick and Lesbury, the business also benefits from outdoor seating and easy access from the main road.

"You can't really miss us," Adele said. "We've got a big flag outside and we're right at the bottom as you pull into Hawkhill Business Park. It's lovely out here and we're just friendly people. Anybody can come and see us."



Colmans acquire beloved village café

A chance meeting over breakfast between family friends has secured the future of a much-loved café at the heart of a South Tyneside community.

The Village Café in Whitburn has been in the Hopper family for more than half a century and boasts a reputation for delicious home cooked food and friendly service.

However, owners Peter and Francis decided to sell their business towards the end of last year — with Richard Colman Ord making his friends and neighbours an offer they couldn't refuse.

Richard, co-owner and director of Colmans Fish and Chips, explains: "I popped into the café for breakfast the day after Peter and Fran had decided to put it up for sale.

"We got chatting and I put in an offer later that day. Whitburn is our family's home and the Village Café holds so many fond memories for all of us.

As part of the transition, Colmans will retain two existing members of staff with plans to create more roles as the business develops. A managerial post has already been advertised.

The Hoppers launched the café in 1972 but the business officially changed hands earlier this month and the Colman family intends to reopen the Village Café later this summer.

"We're going to refurbish the café and put our own stamp on it but we won't change too much," adds Richard. "Why would we?"

Colmans have added the Village Café to an expanding hospitality portfolio that includes the family run business's original restaurant on South Shields' Ocean Road, the seafront Seafood Temple and a popular Newcastle base within Fenwick's department store.



Set menu offers Michelin standard food for less

Diners can enjoy Michelin standard food at an unbeatable price at one of Newcastle's top restaurants.

At selected times of the week Ostera, at Gosforth — which this year retained its listing in the prestigious Michelin Guide — is offering a set menu alongside its à la carte menu.

And it offers exactly the same dishes as the more expensive menu with no difference in portion size or quality of ingredients, skill or presentation.

"The thinking behind it is perfectly simple," said chef patron Kleo Tabaku, who also owns Lovage, at Jesmond; "everyone should have the chance to eat the best quality food, even if their budget wouldn't normally run to it."

The set menu, which costs £25 for two courses and £30 for three, is available on Wednesday and Thursday between 5pm and 9pm, on Friday from 5pm to 5.45pm, on Saturday from 12 noon to 2pm and on Sunday from 5pm to 5.45pm.

It offers an ever-changing choice of starters, main courses and desserts, all of which have appeared or currently feature on the à la carte menu.

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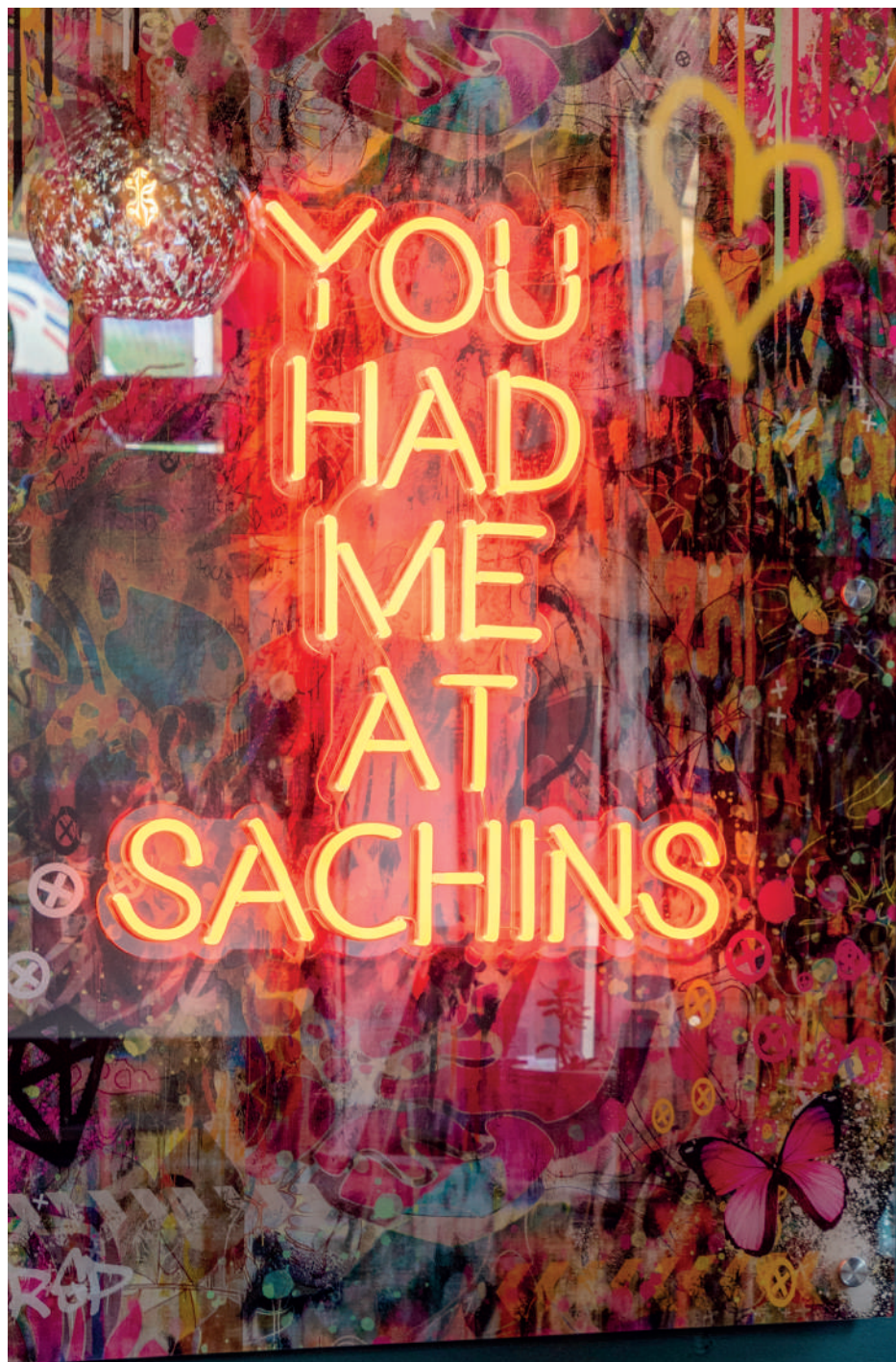
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In conversation with...



Stuart Lloyd

*Fresh from being awarded
Durham City Good Citizen of the Year,*

Stuart Lloyd

*General Manager at the Radisson Durham, spoke
to Michael Grahamslaw about his career in
hospitality as well as plans for the Hotel.*

What initially attracted you to a career in the hospitality sector?

It sounds a bit shallow but I simply wanted to work where footballers and famous people stayed! I originally started my journey at the beautiful Mottram Hall Hotel where I loved getting involved in their exciting events. We saw a lot of David Beckham at the time as well as Sir Alex Ferguson who was a golf member.

How has the Radisson Durham evolved during your time there?

It has been a privilege to be at the helm over the past seven years. During that period we have been fortunate to receive a lot of investment which has transformed our bedrooms, meeting areas and public areas.

With 46 million visitors to Durham City in 2025, resulting in a 1.36 billion impact on the regional economy, we are proud to be one of the go to hotels in the area.

What is the Radisson Durhams USP?

Our riverside location, with views of a Unesco World Heritage site, is very special. Close proximity to the railway station is important too.

How are you addressing the challenges facing the hospitality sector?

With costs continually rising we are undoubtedly navigating a difficult period. This makes it imperative that we price everything correctly and give our customers the finest experience possible.

What approaches have worked best for staff development and retention?

We have our own dedicated People and Culture Manager which has made a huge difference. As we are competing with the best venues for the best talent in the region we have to make sure our staff are well looked after. We have our own monthly awards which have proven to be a great way of celebrating their success.

Sustainability is increasingly important for travellers. Are there any initiatives you've introduced to reduce your environmental impact?

We now have filtered water on each floor which has allowed us to replace plastic bottles. We also have a focus from waste to landfill with the intent to reduce to zero by the end of the year. Going forward we intend to explore renewable energy more and build further upon our Silver Green Tourism Award.

How do you engage and support the local community and business?

In a multitude of varied ways. Until recently we were proud to be long term supporters of Durham Women Football Club. We have also just raised a fantastic £20k for the brilliant St.Cuthberts Care. As a keen runner I am also delighted that we are involved with the Durham Dash aimed at Year 5 and 6 children. On an

ongoing basis we are involved with numerous community initiatives including the clean up of the River Wear.

What trends do you expect to shape hospitality over the next 5 years?

I think we will see advances in technology to support delivery of a great guest experience but real people will of course always be at the heart of our business. The future of hospitality will be more personalised, technology-driven, sustainable, and focused on experiences rather than just accommodation.

What has been your proudest achievement whilst at the Hotel?

Winning the Durham City Citizen of the Year was very special as it shows that what we are doing is working. Seeing the Hotel through a multimillion development has also been very satisfying.

What are you currently working on?

As ever in hospitality you never stand still so at the moment we have plans to enhance and refurbish the spa. We are also going to redevelop our events space where we will introduce a range of wellness packages aimed at enhancing the customer experience. Whisper it quietly our Christmas brochure has also just been launched!

How do you like to unwind?

I enjoy the gym after work as well as the Park Run at the weekend. I'm also a huge Manchester United fan.

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Behind every “I’m fine” is a story most leaders never ask about

By Jeff Hodgson, General Manager, Lumley Castle Hotel

Trust rarely breaks in dramatic moments. More often, it fades quietly—inside meetings, missed opportunities to listen, and the everyday reactions leaders give when it matters most.

Behind every “I’m fine” is a story that most leaders never pause to explore. And in many workplaces, that silence is mistaken for stability.

Early in my leadership journey, I believed kindness and high performance were in tension. I assumed empathy might soften standards, dilute accountability, or blur expectations. The concern was simple: if I leaned too far into understanding people, would results suffer?

I was wrong.

Kindness does not lower the bar. It raises the likelihood that people will reach it. Because performance is not simply demanded—it is invited. And the invitation is built on trust.



Leadership always multiplies. Respect multiplies trust. Belief multiplies confidence. Clarity multiplies action. But the opposite is equally true.

Dismissiveness multiplies silence. Blame multiplies fear. And pressure, rather than solving either, often accelerates both.

Anyone can lead when results are strong and morale is high. Real leadership is revealed when things begin to fracture—when uncertainty creeps in, deadlines slip, or people start to withdraw.

It is in these quieter moments that leadership is truly decided.

1. The quiet “I’m fine”

Most leaders hear the words. Few notice the weight behind them. Often, it is not a statement of truth but a protective layer—masking fatigue, frustration, or uncertainty. What you choose to do next determines whether honesty is safe in your culture.

2. When bad news travels upward

Every organisation filters reality on its way to the top. The question is not whether problems exist, but whether people feel safe enough to share them. Your reaction either keeps truth flowing or shuts it down.

3. When someone challenges you in a meeting

Disagreement is not disrespect. In many cases, it is a sign of engagement, or a test of whether authority is secure enough to hold it. Leaders who respond defensively often get compliance. Leaders who respond thoughtfully earn trust.

4. When a deadline is missed

In that moment, leadership has a choice: create fear or create clarity. Fear may produce short-term correction, but clarity builds long-term reliability.

5. When the same mistake happens twice

It is easy to label individuals. It is harder—but far more effective—to examine systems. Most repeated errors are not people problems; they are process problems waiting to be understood.

6. When a team member is quietly burning out

Burnout rarely announces itself. It builds gradually, often hidden behind continued output. The question is whether a leader notices early signals or only recognises the issue when resignation arrives.

7. When a top performer leaves

This moment often reveals more about leadership than performance ever did. People do not usually leave because they have stopped growing—they leave because they no longer believe growth is supported.

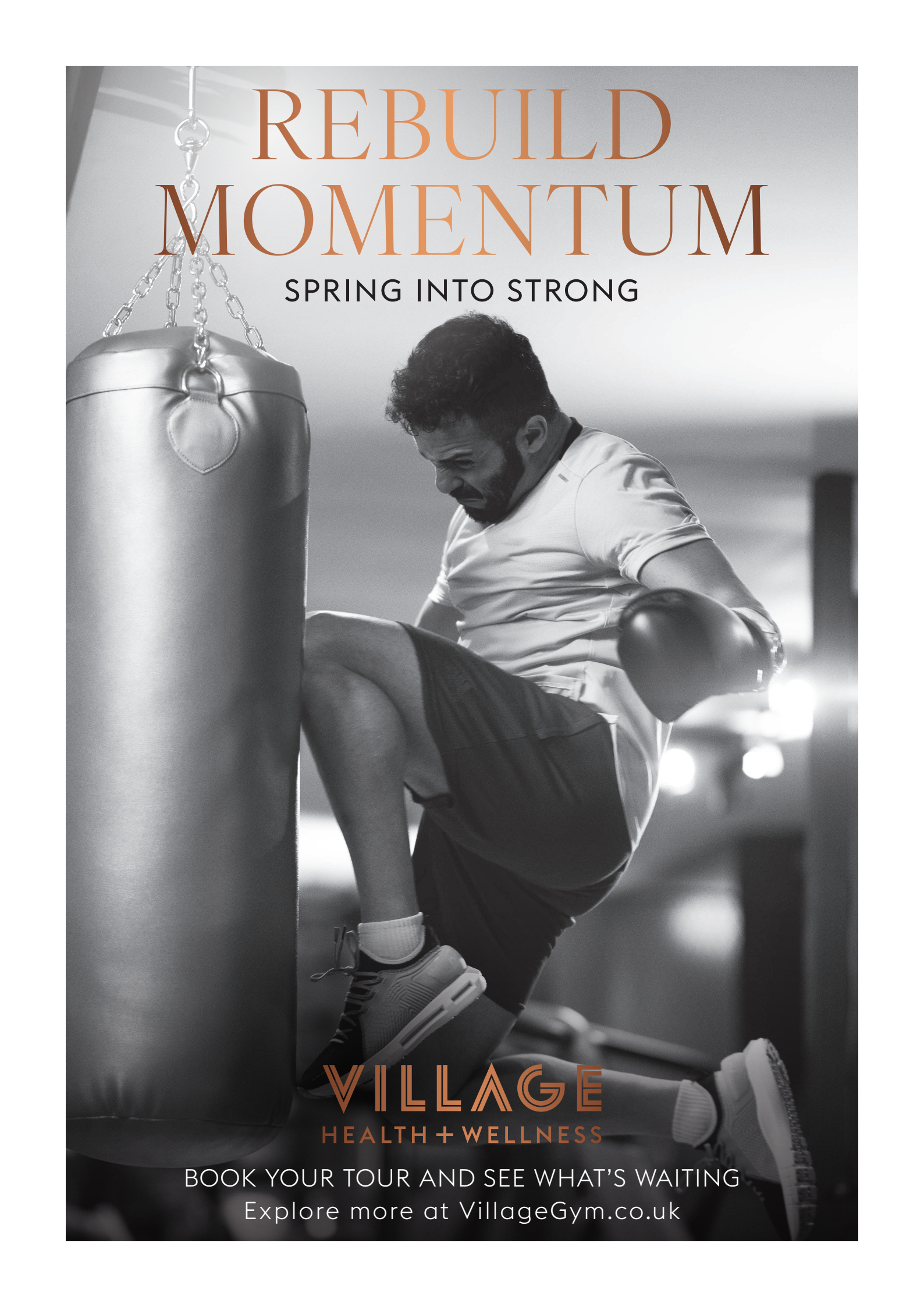
These moments may appear small in isolation. They are not.

Together, they determine who feels safe to speak up, whether risk is possible without punishment, and how much of people’s capability is ever fully seen.

The truth is simple: trust is not announced. It is earned in the responses that rarely make it into reports or performance reviews.

And over time, those responses shape everything. Be the leader people grow with—not the one they recover from.

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The future of the workplace

By Wayne Topley, Managing Director,
Cedar Court Hotels

Young people deserve more credit – and hospitality deserves more recognition.

There is an all too familiar narrative that surfaces whenever discussions turn to young people and the future of the workplace. We hear claims that younger generations lack commitment, expect too much, or are unwilling to put in the effort required to build successful careers.

The reality I see every day tells a very different story.

Across the UK, and particularly in regions such as the North where hospitality remains a major employer, thousands of young people are entering workplaces every day, balancing education, family commitments, and financial pressures while gaining valuable experience and developing essential life skills.

Hospitality is often where that journey begins. Many of those young people go on to build long and successful careers in the sector.

For generations, hotels, restaurants, bars and visitor attractions have provided young people with their first opportunity to earn a wage, build confidence and learn skills that will stay with them throughout their working lives. Long before employability became a policy buzzword, hospitality was helping young people develop communication, teamwork, resilience and leadership skills. Many of our own managers and senior leaders began their careers in entry-level roles.

Yet both young people and the hospitality industry are frequently underestimated.

The world is always changing, and it is correct for the expectations of our younger generations to also change about what work can and should mean to them. As leaders, we need to raise our game in how we attract, develop, and retain the next generation of talent.

Too often, hospitality is viewed as a temporary option rather than a sector offering meaningful and rewarding careers. At the same time, younger workers are associated with negative stereotypes that fail to recognise the value they bring.

In my experience, young people are ambitious, adaptable and eager to learn when given the right environment and support. They also have much to teach more experienced generations, particularly in areas such as technology, communication, and changing customer expectations.

The lessons learned in hospitality go far beyond the workplace. Young people develop confidence, problem-solving abilities, customer service skills and emotional intelligence – qualities that benefit communities, businesses, and the wider economy.

Throughout my career, and especially during the challenges of the pandemic, I have seen first-hand the difference that investing in people can make. When organisations create opportunities for development and progression, individuals thrive.

That is why businesses have a responsibility to nurture talent and make career opportunities visible. People need to see not just the first job, but the career that could follow.

Of course, changing perceptions will take time. It may take years to fully challenge the outdated idea that hospitality is "just a job" or that younger generations are somehow less capable than those who came before them. I have been trying for 30 years and counting.

But if we are serious about building stronger communities, supporting regional economies, and creating opportunities for future generations, we need to start telling a different story.

Young people are not a problem to solve, but a generation to invest in. And hospitality is one of the best places to start.

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HOTELS



DOOD's nomad's Sunday Roast arrives on the quayside

At DOOD, Sunday lunch has been reimaged through the flavours of the Silk Road.

Available every Sunday from 12pm to 4:30pm, Nomad's Sunday Roast combines the comfort of a traditional British roast with the bold flavours, charcoal cooking and generous hospitality that define the restaurant's Persian and Levantine-inspired menu.

Designed for gathering around the table with family and friends, the experience begins with Kashke Bademjan, a rich aubergine dip served with freshly baked taftoon bread before moving on to a choice of Lamb Ouzi Roast, featuring 12-hour slow-cooked lamb shoulder with carrot and walnut purée and rich sabzi lamb jus, Morgh-e-Bereshte, a harissa-roasted baby chicken cooked until golden and succulent, Mahi Kababi, house-spiced grilled barramundi served with carrot and walnut purée and saffron seafood sauce, or Mangal Cauliflower, an Advieh-spiced cauliflower dish cooked over the mangal and served with burnt cauliflower purée, roasted cumin pumpkin seeds, barberries and chilli oil.

Guests can add Hellimli Yorkshire, flavoured with halloumi, nigella seeds, sesame seeds and dried mint, alongside Aleppo Chips served with toum.

Desserts continue the journey through the region's flavours with a choice of Riz Bi Haleeb, a delicate vanilla and rose rice pudding, or Date Tart served with pistachios and spiced crème fraîche.

Priced at £30 per person, or £37 with dessert, Nomad's Sunday Roast reflects the same philosophy found throughout DOOD's menu: generous food, bold flavours and unhurried hospitality.

Nomad's Sunday Roast is available every Sunday from 12pm to 4:30pm at DOOD, Newcastle Quayside.

For reservations and further information, visit www.thedood.co.uk





The 'North East's No.1 golf destination' is about to get even better

Few leisure destinations in the North East have undergone as much transformation in recent years as Ramside Hall Hotel, Golf & Spa.

Already established as one of the region's leading golf resorts, the Durham venue has spent the past 18 months investing heavily in its facilities, creating a destination that appeals not only to golfers, but also to families, staycation visitors and those seeking a high-quality leisure experience in the heart of County Durham.

The latest development comes this summer with the opening of a new multifunctional short-game area, representing another significant step in Ramside Hall's ongoing evolution. Designed by renowned golf course architect Jonathan Gaunt, the floodlit facility has been created to offer a dedicated space for coaching, practice and player development, while also providing a flexible environment that can be enjoyed by golfers of all ages and abilities.

Featuring two large greens and multiple playing and coaching areas, the new facility has been designed to reflect the changing nature of the game, where practice, learning and informal

participation are becoming increasingly important alongside traditional course play. It will support Ramside Hall's growing coaching programme while also providing members and visitors with a new way to experience and enjoy the sport.

The opening follows a period of significant investment across the wider golf operation. Extensive improvement works have been carried out on both the Cathedral and Prince Bishop's courses, including the reconfiguration of parts of the Cathedral Course and the creation of two new holes. Ongoing drainage projects are also helping to improve year-round playing conditions and support the long-term future of both championship layouts.

Away from the fairways, Ramside Hall has also expanded its appeal through the launch of The PIN, an entertainment venue that has quickly become one of the resort's standout attractions. Combining a 43-bay two-tier TopTracer driving range with bowling, food, drink and live sport, The PIN has broadened the destination's

audience considerably, attracting families, groups and first-time golfers alongside the resort's traditional golfing clientele.

The development reflects a wider trend within the industry, where golf venues are increasingly evolving into multi-purpose leisure destinations. At Ramside Hall, visitors can now combine championship golf with family entertainment, coaching, hospitality and luxury accommodation, creating an experience that extends well beyond the golf course itself.

The momentum continues later this summer with a visit from acclaimed short-game coach Dan Grieve. Widely recognised for his modern approach to coaching and player development, his visit further underlines Ramside Hall's growing reputation within the game.

As investment continues and new facilities open, Ramside Hall is strengthening its position as one of the North East's most ambitious leisure destinations. For golfers, families and visitors alike, the resort's latest developments are further evidence of how one of the region's best-known venues continues to evolve and adapt for a new generation of guest.

**Ramside Hall Hotel, Golf & Spa, Carville, Durham, DH1 1TD.
0191 386 5282**





Straight Talk with Speker...

Comments

By Barry Speker OBE

As I was putting pen to paper - or clicking on my iPad - Sir Keir emerged from No10 to make his much predicted resignation speech. He had just been to inform King Charles of his decision.

The broadcast was interspersed by coverage of the saviour of the Labour Party, or of the country, former Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham, complete with signature black T-shirt, boarding the train to London.

Commentators predicted that no contest for the leadership will follow and that Andy Burnham will have a coronation as PM early in July.

Starmer's lack of political nous has been his downfall. Not merely was he undone by poor policies and u-turns but by his inability to inspire loyalty in his own party, MPs or cabinet. From his record breaking Labour majority in 2024, his party crashed to major unpopularity,

clearly demonstrated by the disastrous local election results. His cabinet colleagues were quick to abandon ship and ingratiate themselves in the hope of new posts from the King of the North! So much for loyalty.

In 1876 Newcastle's iconic Swing Bridge was opened. Designed by Sir William Armstrong, it was then the world's largest swing bridge, being able to rotate 360 degrees to allow larger ships to access the upper reaches of the River Tyne west of Newcastle including Swan Hunters. The bridge's hydraulic engines were powered by the river. Through lack of repair the bridge has not managed to rotate since 2019. Hardly a glorious 150th anniversary celebration this year, even though the bridge copes with its vehicular and pedestrian functions.

A similar story with the iconic Tyne Bridge which should be valued as the world wide signature of the city. Significantly delayed repairs and maintenance of the bridge lumber on, causing delay and obstruction as well as an embarrassing view of the gateway to the City. Next year is the centenary of the opening of the Tyne Bridge in 1927. Will Andy Burnham make it a priority and also agree to put money into dualling the A1?

One tradition still followed was to entertain the primary school class of my granddaughters - Olivia is the 5th. The teacher limited photo opportunities in order to comply with the safeguarding policy!! However my song list remained as valid as the first gig, featuring 'I know an old lady who swallowed a fly', 'If you're happy and you know it' and 'Gilly Gilly Ossenfeffer'. One classmate did ask for something by Oasis. Contact me for bookings.

The World Cup has shown that the US no longer views soccer as a marginal sport played mainly by schoolgirls. There is now genuine excitement about the game. The competition has provided some entertaining coverage with quite a few surprises - such as Newcastle's Elanga and Wissa scoring goals - (for their countries). Amazing results achieved by minnows such as Curaçao and Cape Verde made watching unlikely contests worthwhile and impossible to predict the traditional giants of the game will come out on top. There may be some early tickets home for fancied teams.

And as we enjoy the hot summer months, what will Andy Burnham's position be on welfare reform, defence spending, NATO, social media, NEET, immigration, taxation, fiscal restraint, net zero, Ukraine...? We live in interesting times.

barryspeker@hotmail.com





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Home to  Willow



Plastic free, refillable shopping – the feelgood factor comes free!

Buy The Kilo in Tynemouth – the waste-free way to shop.



Most of you reading this will have a routine where once a week or fortnight, you put out a rubbish bin for collection by the local council. It's the bin where you throw away plastic, paper, glass, cardboard...the sort of stuff which might be recycled. Other bins are for non-recyclable materials.

A large chunk of that waste will have come from food and liquid packaging.

But wouldn't it be nice if we could buy food products such as cereals, rice, pasta, nuts, berries, seeds, tea and coffee as well as liquids such as cooking oils, detergents, sauces, shampoo, toiletries, cleaning fluid etc in a totally waste free, refillable format?

You can. Go to Buy The Kilo at Tynemouth Metro Station.

"The business was created to help people reduce plastic waste while making everyday shopping more sustainable and affordable," said founder Jackie Sewell. "It all came about when I visited my daughter and discovered she and her friends were following sustainable living practices by visiting a zero-waste shop, a local butcher and baker, and got their vegetables delivered. After a lot of research, I realised there were no zero waste stores between Darlington and Berwick...and so our journey began. We opened in 2019 with the number one aim being to provide a shop where customers could buy exactly what they need and avoid waste. I also wanted to create a community-focused shop to showcase what other local producers have on offer."

Buy The Kilo is a simple idea and gives shoppers the chance to do the right thing for the environment. Rather than purchasing pre-packaged products in fixed quantities, customers can choose the exact amount they require. This cuts down on packaging and prevents surplus food and household products from being thrown away.

"We make refilling at Buy The Kilo as simple and easy as possible. All customers have to do is bring clean, empty jars, bottles, tubs or containers from home. We weigh the empty container and then allow shoppers to fill with as much or as little product as they need. We then weigh the container again to calculate the final price. We also sell reusable jars and bottles."

Buy The Kilo is also an official refill station for UpCircle cosmetics, a leading sustainable skincare brand that featured on the hit TV programme, Dragons' Den. Customers can purchase and refill selected UpCircle products, helping to reduce packaging waste while supporting a brand known for transforming natural by-products from the food, drink, and botanical industries into vegan and cruelty-free skincare products.

"UpCircle has been a huge success," adds Jackie. "We have shoppers travelling to us here in Tynemouth from across the region. For many of them, the idea of waste free shopping is new, and they can't believe what else can be bought without damaging the environment. We're always happy to share advice on reducing waste and adopting practical alternatives to everyday plastic items."

So, do you fancy joining the zero-waste movement and help preserve the environment?

You'll find Jackie and her team at the wonderful Tynemouth Metro station. The shop, which has a new frontage...you can't miss it...is open Thursday – Sunday. You can also order online.

Visit her lovely website... www.buy-the-kilo.com where you can see exactly what's on offer.





A Slice of Gosforth

By Michael Grahmslaw

Bank holidays in the Grahmslaw household tend to follow a familiar pattern: a leisurely morning, some seriously shabby golf, and then – inevitably – the irresistible pull of good food.

This latest one proved no exception. With the sun blazing its rays upon the parish, my wife Lisa and I made our way up the Great North Road to Gosforth's ever-impressive Three Mile Inn development.

Here, the venue's New-York inspired pizza restaurant, Pizza Dough Co., was celebrating its fifth anniversary – a milestone that felt like the perfect excuse for a long, lazy afternoon of indulgence.

As regular readers will know, I am an avowed pizza aficionado, and fortunately the restaurant serves up some of the most serious slices in the city.

Upon arrival, Pizza Dough Co. feels like an old friend. Neon glows, the atmosphere is warm and welcoming and the open kitchen glows with the heat of the pizza oven.

We slid into a booth with a perfect view of the pizzaioli at work. Lisa ordering her

favourite bank holiday spritz while I, ever the spice enthusiast, armed myself with a cold Italian lager in anticipation of the heat to come.

While waiting, we kicked off in true Italian-American fashion, gorging on garlic doughballs and a platter of chicken wings with enough Buffalo hot sauce to set the tastebuds tingling.

Simple fayre but executed with a confidence and charm as is customary at the Three Mile Inn.

It is of course, however, the pizza which assumes centre stage. Pizza Dough Co.'s artisan style pizzas are stretched to roughly 12 inches and cooked at 400 degrees to create the signature charring of the crust.

Lisa, ever a glutton for bold, earthy flavours, picked out the mushroom, artichoke and truffle pizza, with garlic mayo and rocket atop a beautifully blistered base.

Yours truly meanwhile, couldn't refuse the spiced mixed meats pizza, revved up with fresh chili, nduja and jalapeno ketchup.

Service throughout was upbeat and instinctive, with the team who seemed delighted to be swept up in the restaurant's fifth birthday buzz.

As we stepped out into the late-afternoon sunshine, totally replete and plotting our return, it struck me that Pizza Dough Co. has earned every bit of its reputation.

Five years in, it remains a vibrant, flavour-packed slice of Gosforth life – and on this bank holiday weekend, proved an absolute banker.

For more information, visit pizzadoughco.uk





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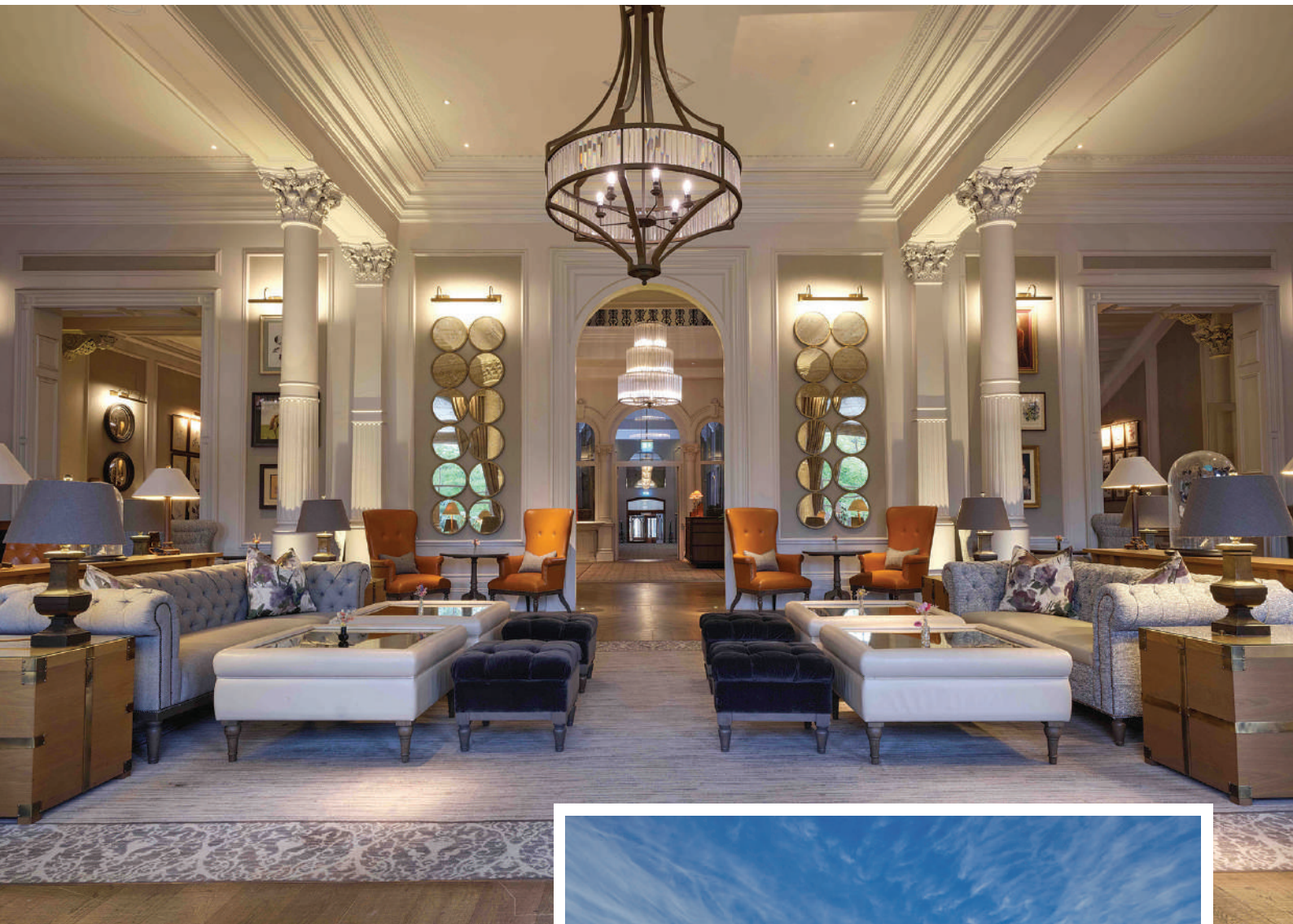
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The Grande Old Dame of York

By Michael Grahamslaw

The Milner Hotel York creeps up on you at first, slowly, and then very suddenly. When alighting at the station, this “Grand Dame of York Hotels”, is mere steps around the corner, before its late-Victorian architecture sweeps majestically into view.

My wife Lisa and I have holidayed in York since our “courting days”, when I was a mere doe-eyed publisher with dark hair. The city holds a special place in our affections, having stayed in every bolthole imaginable from the ridiculous to the sublime.

It soon grew apparent; The Milner sits firmly in the realms of the latter.

A stone's throw away from all the cultural attractions – both within and without the castle walls – The Milner offers the perfect reprieve from the hustle, punctuated by moments of comfort and luxury.



Opened in 1878, The Milner flaunts its history in abundance. Ornate high ceilings combine with cast iron staircases and plush viewing galleries to create a backdrop of timeless elegance.

This immediately captured Lisa's attention, as would the warm Yorkshire welcome. Bags were whisked away, check-in was effortless, and within a few minutes, we were heading upstairs to our deluxe accommodation.

Our room was a picture of boutique design: soft lighting, cosy textures and a palette of deep blues and warm neutrals that felt both modern and timeless.

A super-comfortable bed dominated the space, dressed in crisp cotton sheets that promised -and later delivered - an exceptional night's sleep.

Touche of York's heritage were woven subtly throughout: framed illustrations of the Minster, locally crafted ceramics, and a window view that captured the city's rooftops in all their storybook charm. The bathroom, meanwhile, was decidedly modern, comprising rainfall shower, sleek tiling and luxury toiletries that immediately found their way into Lisa's washbag.

High-speed WiFi, a smart TV, and a well-stocked minibar rounded off the amenities, proving that The Milner understands the modern traveller's place within its historic surroundings.

With bags dropped, we ventured out to sample all York's cobbled shopping streets had to offer. The city remains handsome and historic with immersive attractions such as the Jorvik Viking Centre and the National Railway Museum on the doorstep.

Returning to the hotel in high spirits, we freshened up for dinner in 'the Swollen Gambler'. This sits across from York Station and is steeped in character. Named after railway pioneer, George Hudson, the pub blends Victorian charm with contemporary culinary flair.

This felt the perfect ambience to slide quietly off the rails, so we ordered up a stunning bottle of Cotes de Provence, ideal for balmy summer sipping.

This was followed by bar snacks to share, including the Homemade Scotch Egg, complete with runny yolk and mustard mayonnaise, and the Smoked Paprika Hummus with warm hunks of pitta bread.

For the main event, Lisa enjoyed the gourmet 'Whitby scampi & chips' singing with tartare sauce and fresh lemon juice. Yours truly chose another of the 'Gambler Pub Classics': the Steak & Stout pie on a bed of mashed potatoes and a moat of roasted carrots and red wine gravy.

The following morning brought sunshine and the smell of fresh coffee drifting through the corridors. Breakfast at The Milner is served in a bright, elegant dining room overlooking a quiet courtyard. The menu champions local produce, and my full Yorkshire breakfast was a triumph. Lisa's smashed avocado waffle with poached eggs was equally impressive.

As we checked out, refreshed and already plotting our return, it struck me that The Milner York has achieved something rather special.

It blends the intimacy of a boutique hotel with the polish of a larger establishment, all while celebrating the charm of one of Britain's most historic cities.

For more information,
visit www.themilneryork.com





Coffee to go!

Adventure is brewing for a beloved coffee company after a vintage caravan - bought on eBay - has been transformed into a quirky mobile coffee shop.

For almost five months, the team at Rounton Coffee painstakingly converted a 60-year-old Viking Fibreline caravan into a fully equipped café on wheels.

And the caravan is expected to do a 'latte' miles over the summer - with 10,000 cups expected to be brewed at various events across Yorkshire and the North East.

Launched in 2013, Rounton Coffee has steadily grown into one of the region's best-known speciality coffee brands, and last year, the company secured eight Great Taste Awards.

But having tired of setting up marquees at events, founder David Beattie wanted something different.

"We started life on farmers' markets, and events have always been a huge part of the business, but setting up marquees ate up so much time and energy," he said.

"It always felt like we were building a coffee shop from scratch, so having the coffee caravan is a breath of fresh air."





And rather than buy a horsebox, the eco-minded company - a 1% For the Planet member - chose to salvage an existing vehicle instead. Having sourced the iconic vintage caravan from a farm in nearby Thirsk, the team got to work gutting and spray-painting it - while installing everything from food-preparation areas to LED lighting, alongside a state-of-the-art Victoria Arduino Eagle One coffee machine.

The caravan made its debut at Darlington's Hopetown Vintage Fair, while Rounton Coffee's team will tow it to several events over the summer, including the Deer Shed Festival over the weekend of July 25-28.

And David said Rounton Coffee's long-standing relationship with the popular indie music event was a driving force behind the project.

"We've been trusted to provide coffee there for years and, without that partnership, we probably wouldn't have had the motivation to make this leap," he added.

"The caravan has been a big investment, both in time and money, but we're excited about that it can hopefully open us up to more events throughout the year."

routoncoffee.co.uk



Lui's – The past, present and future

By Michael Grahamslaw

Once I have a holiday all booked up, there is not much that I can do to take my mind off it. This summer it will be Sardinia, famous for its turquoise waters, white sand beaches, culture, history.

But this alluring prospect leaves me with a problem: how do I distract myself in the meantime..?





On a balmy May evening, Lui's Italian restaurant provided the answer. Lui's is situated on the banks of the River Tyne, a place which boasts its own culture and history. It would perhaps be a stretch to suggest that the waters of the Tyne are quite as crystal clear as those of Sardinia, but we will leave that debate for another day.

The story of the establishment of Lui's is touching, one that immediately began to distract me from the pangs of holiday anticipation. Owner and Head Chef Daniel Bernardelli took over and rebranded in 2022, naming it after his Grandad, Luigi Bernardelli. Daniel, 27, from Whitley Bay, brought the heritage of his family to the banks of the River Tyne in the form of a slick, versatile restaurant that was to cure my pre-holiday blues, at least for the evening.

In celebration of yet another one of Lisa's 30th birthdays, the whole tribe was out. Myself, Lisa, son Jack, daughter Holly, and her newly appointed fiance Josh. We were celebrating more than one event on this occasion! Daniel is omnipresent in his Grandad's old restaurant. When he's not behind the scenes directing operations, he can be found warmly greeting guests front-of-house with father, Mark.

We were shown to comfortable tables and guided through an extensive wine list with sumptuous offerings from all corners of the Boot. Elsewhere on the drinks menu, there is plenty for those whose taste buds are not in training for an Italian experience and enough to keep the designated drivers and kids happy too. We opted for a bottle of Vernaccia Di San Gimignano, from the Piedmonte region of Italy, which is a lot easier to drink than it is to pronounce. This kicked the tastebuds and the imagination into action: it really is an authentic Italian experience.

The food told a similar story. There is something for everybody on this menu, which adds a modern twist to authentic Italian dishes with some Sardinian specialities thrown in. We enjoyed the informal, feel-good atmosphere whilst waiting for starters: king prawn arrabiatta, bruschetta, garlic bread mozzarella, and Jack's beloved mussels. Exquisite mains followed: Pollo Marsala for myself and Lisa (after all these years, we are still very much birds of a feather), Jack opted for pan fried duck, Holly for the Salmon Toscana and young Romeo chose to celebrate his recent engagement to my daughter with a nice ribeye, cooked to perfection. The menu is diverse: classic yet contemporary, modern yet faithful to its heritage. Nonno Luigi would be proud of his grandson for the work that has gone into it.

The ideal location of Lui's left us with plenty of options for the rest of the evening. However, the wine continued to flow and I have still not mastered the skill of turning down an affogato - perhaps something I need to get a handle on ahead of my summer vacation. For now, though, I will be content with Lui's.

Ideally located, friendly staff and beautiful Italian heritage food. It was the perfect place for that evening: another birthday for Lisa, the anticipation of another holiday to the old country, and the hope of my daughter's engagement in the not so distant future. The past, the present, and the future.

For more information, visit
luisbarandkitchen.co.uk

Oysters aren't just on the menu at one of this year's top North East festivals...



It has become one of the most eagerly anticipated and well attended events on the North East calendar, a combination of top entertainment, free flowing drinks and sumptuous seafood.

Hardwick Hall Hotel's annual Oyster Festival has taken place for the past 20 years and will return again on September 25, this time headlined by Scouting For Girls and an eclectic range of support acts covering everything from Tina Turner tribute, Just Tina and Irish bands The Emerald Thieves and The JJ Galway Band.

The event has also been a great source of support for local charities, with the main recipient once again Angel Trust.

But organisers have also made room to showcase a very different kind of good cause – and one which has an obvious link with the event.

While guests can tuck into oysters from a number of top suppliers, they will also be able to learn about an important project taking place across the North East to help bring European native oysters – not normally eaten – back into the region's waters.

The Wild Oyster Project: Tyne & Wear is being run by community and environmental charity, Groundwork NE & Cumbria in collaboration with conservation charity ZSL



(Zoological Society of London) and aims to restore the near extinct species of native oysters and reverse the 95 per cent loss of native oyster reefs.

And now Groundwork is teaming up with the Oyster Festival to showcase the project – and to highlight how people can get behind it.

There will be a dedicated stand at the festival where guests can discover more about this worthwhile cause and can also take home a unique souvenir.

Groundwork's has been running a project where supporters from around the world have been knitting and crocheting oysters which are then "adopted" for a small donation – and even come with their own certificate of ownership.

Staff at Hardwick Hall Hotel are also getting behind the scheme – by creating their own giant oyster which will be on display at the event.

"We are delighted that Hardwick Hall Hotel is allowing us to become involved with the

Oyster Festival," said Laura Farrell-Pronesti, Partnership Development Lead|Groundwork NE & Cumbria.

"Oysters are a keystone species: a single oyster can filter up to 200 litres of water a day, improving water quality, supporting biodiversity, and strengthening coastal ecosystems."

The efforts are part of The Wild Oysters Project: Tyne and Wear, a five-year restoration and conservation project, currently funded by the Stronger Shores Partnership and led by South Tyneside Council, with funding from DEFRA as part of the £200 million Flood and Coastal Innovation Programmes (FCIP) which is managed by the Environment Agency. The programmes will drive innovation in flood and coastal resilience and adaptation to a changing climate.

"The Oyster Festival is always a sellout event and we have got a spectacular line-up this time round," said John Adamson, owner of Hardwick Hall.

"We always like to get behind worthy causes so along with our continued support of Angel Trust, we're delighted to be able to showcase the important work being done on the Wild Oyster Restoration Programme.

"It's a fitting partnership and we hope our guests will be interested in finding out more."

Tickets for the Oyster Festival are £220 plus VAT per person. For further information or to book email events@hardwickhallhotel.co.uk or call 01740 620253.



A new chapter for Dobson & Parnell

By Michael Grahamslaw

The World Cup sure has a way of sharpening the appetite.

Sandwiched between early evening kick-offs and the perennial hope that this might finally be our year (England remain in the tournament at time of writing), my son Jack and I found ourselves in need of something more reliable than the English national team - a well-earned dinner before the football.

Arise, the newly relaunched Dobson & Parnell.

Regular readers will know this is a restaurant close to our hearts. Since opening in 2016, it has built a reputation as one of Newcastle's best dining destinations.

Now, marking its tenth anniversary, it has undergone a bold transformation - not just a cosmetic refresh, but also a rethink of what Tyneside diners want today.

Arriving early evening, there was already a palpable buzz about the place, as we were warmly welcomed and shown to a cosy corner table.

The redesigned interior strikes a nice balance: exposed brick and dazzling white tiling remain, while an open kitchen and sociable layout bring a welcome energy and immediacy.

The new concept leans into flexibility: small plates and sharing dishes bring a relaxed flow to the experience - all of which suited us perfectly.

As is customary on 'boy's nights' such as these, we opened with a full-blooded seafood trio. Oysters were first up: fresh, briny and neatly

presented. Alongside, citrus-cured mackerel delivered bright, clean flavours while North Shields crab completed this pretty picture. A nice reminder of the quality of produce on our doorstep.

Dobson & Parnell continues to celebrate modern British cooking rooted in the North East, with an emphasis on seasonal ingredients and subtle global influences. This ethos was evident throughout.

For mains, we each went our separate ways. I opted for the soy-braised short rib which in a beef stock glaze, packed a wondrous depth of flavour.

Jack, meanwhile, chose the Northumbrian goat loin. As is his wont, the selection proved inspired, the tender meat falling apart on the fork and paired with bhaji, leg curry, curd and coriander.

These were supplemented these with a pair of sharing sides: thyme-roasted Jersey royals and buttered greens.

To drink, I selected a bottle of Grillo, its crisp Sicilian profile cutting neatly through the seafood and carrying me, momentarily, to thoughts of my forthcoming Italian escape. Jack also enjoyed a glass of excellent house red.

Between courses, conversation ebbed and flowed - football predictions, family updates, the usual good-natured back and forth. Around us, the restaurant ticked along at an easy rhythm, the open kitchen adding a quiet sense of theatre.

Dessert was tempting, though with kick-off looming, we exercised rare restraint. Still, as we finished our wine, it was clear that Dobson & Parnell has entered a compelling new phase.

If it aint broke don't fix it, right? Wrong. Dobson & Parnell is a classy venue seemingly not content to rest on its laurels - and is now even better for it.

For more information, visit www.dobsonandparnell.co.uk





Ryton Mum turns personal journey into mission to help others communicate

A busy Ryton-based author, trainer and newly elected councillor is helping families, schools and workplaces across the North East create more inclusive environments through specialist Makaton training inspired by her daughter Ava.

Eleanor Baggeley says learning Makaton transformed communication within her own family after her youngest daughter was diagnosed with Down syndrome shortly after birth.

"Makaton uses signs, symbols and spoken language together to support communication," explained Eleanor. "It helps people with communication difficulties and learning disabilities to understand the world around them and helps others understand them too."

Unlike traditional sign language, Makaton is designed to support and encourage speech rather than replace it.

"It's based on British Sign Language, but we use signs in spoken word order," she said. "It's there to aid communication, reduce frustration and help people develop speech and confidence."

Eleanor and her family began learning Makaton when Ava was still a baby.

What started as a personal necessity has since become a professional calling. Around 18 months ago, Eleanor completed the rigorous process required by the Makaton Charity to become a licensed tutor.

"It was quite a gruelling process," she admitted. "Although I already had experience as a teacher, this was another level entirely. It's important that parents, carers, professionals and workplaces are taught the right skills and tools to create truly inclusive environments."



Two midwives launch clinic

Two experienced NHS professionals have launched a new pregnancy scanning clinic in North Tyneside, aiming to give expectant families more time, reassurance and a more personal experience during pregnancy.

Sereniti Scan, based in Benton's North Tyne Industrial Estate, has been founded by highly experienced midwives and sonographers Jennifer Moore and Victoria Hamoodi, who together bring more than four decades of combined experience in maternity care, ultrasound and fetal medicine.

The pair say the idea for Sereniti Scan has been "a long time coming" after witnessing how pressures within the NHS have changed the experience for many families.

"We both still absolutely love our NHS roles and are very proud of the work we do," said Victoria. "But the reality is there are pressures on the system that are outside of our control. Appointments are often much more rushed now, and families don't always get the time and reassurance they would like."

"We wanted to create somewhere calm, welcoming and personal, where families can enjoy the experience and ask questions without feeling rushed."

Sereniti Scan offers private pregnancy scans including 4D imaging, early pregnancy reassurance scans, gender scans and screening services. The clinic is equipped with a brand new 4D ultrasound machine, designed to provide detailed images and memorable keepsakes for families. The clinic also offers screening and blood testing services, including first trimester screening for certain chromosomal conditions and gender blood tests.

Located within the No 33 business hub in Benton, the clinic has been designed with accessibility in mind, offering easy parking and convenient links from the A19, Newcastle and surrounding areas.



Therapy from the Past

A former social worker who walked away from a decade in child protection to follow her instincts is now helping people tackle trauma, anxiety and emotional struggles through hypnotherapy, and an increasingly sought-after approach known as Past Life Regression.

Silvia Sutherland Hypnotherapy founder Silvia Sutherland says her journey into alternative therapy was driven by a lifelong interest in mental health and a growing feeling that traditional systems no longer aligned with her values.

Based in Throckley, Silvia launched her hypnotherapy business to help people struggling with anxiety, trauma, depression, stress and habits linked to food or smoking. Silvia says hypnotherapy works by accessing the subconscious mind rather than simply talking through problems.

"People often think hypnotherapy means you're completely out of control, but it's nothing like stage hypnosis," she explained. "You remain aware throughout the process. It's about guiding people into a deeply relaxed state where they can explore the root causes of what they're experiencing."

After several years in practice, Silvia began exploring a deeper form of therapy following what she describes as a life-changing encounter with a spiritual mentor.

That experience led her to train in Past Life Regression, a therapy that combines hypnosis with guided soul exploration, helping clients uncover memories, emotions or experiences they believe may influence their current lives.

Silvia says while some clients approach regression therapy from a spiritual perspective, others simply see it as a tool for reflection, emotional healing and self-understanding.

"I'm not here to persuade anybody what to believe," she said. "People take from it what feels right to them. For many clients, it's about understanding themselves better and finding peace."



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**THE BLAZE W
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Emma Rozgowska

Back to their roots

Morpeth is the home of family-friendly Roots Dental – a new practice combining cutting-edge clinical care with a calming patient experience. Simon Rushworth hears how husband and wife team Dr Michael Barrell and Emma Rozgowska have achieved a lifetime's ambition.

Step into the warm and welcoming reception area of Roots Dental and it's like walking into the lobby of a boutique hotel. The chilled atmosphere, delightful décor and the smell of freshly brewed coffee is utterly at odds with the preconception of a clinical and cramped waiting room framed by bright white walls and cold plastic seats. Here you'll find designer sofas, a soothing soundtrack and even a play area replete with a fully stocked bookshelf.



The chance to read and relax is entirely appropriate. Roots Dental is based on the site of Morpeth's former public library and the private practice's story is well worth telling. It's a tale of bold reinvention and the realisation of a lifelong dream.

"I grew up in Morpeth and I always imagined coming back here one day," explains Emma Rozgowska, Business Manager at Roots Dental. The former King Edward VI pupil met her husband, Michael, at university in Edinburgh before the couple set up home in Sheffield.

"We loved it in South Yorkshire but after lockdown it felt like time to come 'home,'" she adds. "Michael always looked forward to coming up to Northumberland and we wanted to be somewhere where the sea wasn't too far away. We moved up here in 2021 and started the search for our first practice."

Emma, a qualified teacher and STEM specialist with a PhD in organic chemistry, and Michael, who studied dentistry in Sheffield, set about identifying a building to match their vision of a friendly, accessible, modern-day practice that combines the latest technology with traditional values.

"It took us some time to find the right place," adds Michael. "I worked as an associate dentist in and around Morpeth to start with and realised there was a demand for something a bit different. It was always my ambition to open my own practice but for what I wanted to achieve we knew it would take some time."

Roots Dental has been two years in the planning but what Michael and Emma have achieved so far is remarkable. Given the size and scope of the former Manchester Street library, just a stone's throw from Morpeth town centre, this is only the start.

"So much planning, background work and research went into getting this right," adds Emma. "We were very conscious of the fact that when you do a build like this, there's a lot of infrastructure you need to build in. When we found this place new knew it would be amazing. But it was big!"

So big, in fact, that Emma and Michael have only just scratched the surface. "We've got two surgeries built — one that's functioning and one that's ready once a new chair is installed. There's space to add another three chairs.

"We'd like to be able to offer training courses and create additional meeting rooms and community spaces. We're taking things one step at a time but we have big ambitions and we know where we're headed."

Last month Roots Dental was revealed as a winner in the latest My Local Awards, celebrating the North East's best-rated businesses. "We've only been open since March and so we weren't expecting anything," admits Emma. "We were stunned to find out that we'd won and, given that the awards are based on public votes, we feel very proud."

What Emma and Michael have created is something unique. Roots Dental's reception area is comfortable, spacious, bright and calming. Colour coordinated decor and staff uniforms create a luxury spa feel, while the patient-friendly surgery has been designed to maintain an overriding sense of serenity. Step-free access throughout adds to a stress-free patient experience.

"I'm not a dentist and so I came at the practice design from a completely different angle," explains Emma. "But I was also very conscious of the fact that Michael's approach is very calming and he makes even the most anxious patients feel at ease.

"The practice needed to reflect his personality and approach. What doesn't help when patients visit the dentist is bright lights, white walls, hard plastic chairs and tight spaces — all of that just builds up anxiety.

"So we were very conscious that we wanted to make Roots Dental completely different.

Because we have the big windows and so much space, we've gone for a lovely green theme and tried to give everything a natural feel. Even the surgeries use colours to help put our patients at ease."

To find out more visit wearerootsdental.com



Dr Michael Barrell





Tennis Elbow: Don't let it stop your July activities

July is a great time for holidays, outdoor activities and friendly competitions. With Wimbledon on, many people think of tennis elbow as a racquet-sport injury, but it can also be triggered by DIY, painting fences, gardening, gripping tools, other repetitive wrist or forearm movements.

What is tennis elbow?

Tennis elbow, also called lateral epicondylitis, causes pain around the outside of the elbow and may spread into the forearm. It is usually linked to overuse of the tendons that help lift the wrist and fingers, especially when activities involve repeated gripping, lifting, pulling or twisting.

How to reduce your risk during summer activities

- **Build up gradually:** avoid suddenly doing hours of painting, gardening, cycling or racquet sport if your arm is not used to it.
- **Take regular breaks:** use short “micro-breaks” before pain builds up, especially during DIY, decorating or tool use.
- **Change your grip:** avoid gripping tools, handlebars or racquets too tightly; use padded handles or gloves if helpful.
- **Lift smarter:** keep loads close to your body and try lifting with your palm facing upwards

rather than downwards when comfortable.

- **Vary tasks:** alternate heavy gripping jobs with lighter activities so the same tendons are not overloaded.
 - **Check technique and equipment:** make sure racquets, tools, brushes and bike set-up suit you and do not force awkward wrist positions.
- If symptoms start manage it early...
- **Reduce aggravating activity:** do not push through repeated gripping, twisting or lifting pain.
 - **Keep moving gently:** simple pain-free bending and straightening of the elbow can help maintain movement.
 - **Try support if useful:** a forearm strap, wrist support or elbow brace may reduce strain for short periods, especially during unavoidable tasks.

When to get help

Early physiotherapy can help reduce strain, prevent symptoms from worsening, and support a gradual, confident return to normal activity.

It is important to seek advice from a physiotherapist if you cannot use your arm normally, or elbow pain does not improve after a period of rest and self-care or if your pain is severe. At SWISSPHYSIO we will assess the cause of your symptoms, guide you on safe activity changes and provide a tailored exercises programme. If appropriate we will use Shockwave therapy and other supporting treatments.

Enjoy July without overloading your elbow

Tennis elbow does not have to stop the pleasure of summer. SWISSPHYSIO is here to help you. With early self-management, most people can continue enjoying holidays, Wimbledon-inspired games, cycling tours and DIY projects while protecting the elbows.

If in doubt you can book a 15 minute Free consultation by calling us on 0191 296 0567 or book online via www.swissphysio.co.uk or scan the qr code.



In conversation with...

Angela Petrocchi

Owner, SWISSPHYSIO

What inspired you to have a career in physiotherapy?

I always loved sport and been interested in medicine, but I also I was often injured. So physiotherapy has been a “natural choice” I feel very lucky to do what I love every day, since more than 30 years in the iconic Metro station in Tynemouth.; helping patients become pain-free and return to the activities they enjoy.

How has physiotherapy changed in recent years?

Physiotherapy is developing into a digital, evidence-based and patient-centred profession focused on self-management, injury prevention, function and long-term outcomes. Digital tools such as telehealth, wearables, exercise software, ultrasound and shockwave therapy now support more accurate diagnosis, personalised treatment and remote rehabilitation.

What are the most common misconceptions people have about physiotherapy when they first walk through your doors?

There are still a few classic myths, even with “Dr Google.” Many people think they need a scan before treatment, that one session should fix everything, or that pain is just part of getting older. In reality, physiotherapy is about understanding the problem, building confidence, and helping people move and function better over time.

Can you share a patient success story that really highlights the difference physiotherapy can make to someone?

A patient with severe shoulder and arm pain had been off work for over five months and was told it was neck-related. Following assessment, I identified a rotator cuff tear, arranged a steroid injection, and guided active rehabilitation and strengthening. He has now returned to lighter duties, showing how physiotherapy restores function and benefits both patient and employer.

Many people associate physiotherapy with sports injuries. What other conditions or challenges can physiotherapy help address?

Physiotherapy supports much more than sports injuries or muscle and joint problems. It helps people manage conditions affecting neurological health like a stroke or MS, breathing, balance, pain, recovery after surgery, pregnancy and postnatal wellbeing, and long-term health.



Overall, physiotherapy helps people reduce pain, improve mobility, build strength, increase independence, and live better with ongoing conditions.

How important is the relationship between physiotherapist and patient in achieving successful outcomes? A strong therapeutic relationship helps patients feel listened to, respected, and understood increasing trust and motivation, engaging with their rehabilitation.

It also allows the physiotherapist to tailor treatment to the patient's goals and lifestyle. Empathy, encouragement, and clear explanations can also reduce anxiety and improve confidence, especially when recovery is slow or painful.

Physiotherapy isn't about blaming the body—it's about helping people understand it, trust it, and use it better.

What emerging treatments, technologies, or trends in physiotherapy are you most excited about?

I'd be most excited about treatments and technologies that make physiotherapy more personalised, measurable, and accessible. I also think tele-rehabilitation and app-based exercise programmes are valuable because they can support consistency, especially for people who struggle to attend regular appointments. Overall, I'm interested in innovations that keep the patient at the centre — technology should support clinical reasoning and human connection, not replace it.

What role does your practice play within the local community?

I am honoured to have earned the trust of so many people in the Tynemouth community, where I live and work. Through SWISSPHYSIO I support residents, businesses, schools, and sports clubs with recovery, injury prevention, posture education, and long-term wellbeing. I have helped companies reduce sickness absence linked to lower back pain, delivered educational talks and proudly sponsor Marden Volleyball Club.

Looking ahead, what are your ambitions for the business and for the future of physiotherapy in the region?

My ambition is to grow a sustainable physiotherapy business known for excellent outcomes and genuinely personal, patient-centred, accessible care. I want physiotherapy to play a bigger role across the region in prevention, education and long-term wellbeing, working with communities, healthcare providers, sports organisations and employers to help people stay active, manage pain earlier and avoid decline.

How do you unwind?

Movement is my passion, as a profession as well as relaxation. I love to keep fit in the gym challenging myself, I love playing a team sport such as volleyball and I love playing golf with my husband as well as dancing and teaching Argentine tango. And before sleeping I need my dose of crime fiction reading L.J. Ross books.

www.swissphysio.co.uk



The opportunities you never planned for

By Bethany Ainsley

When we think about career success, we often picture a clear path.

We set goals, create plans and imagine where we want to be in one, five or even ten years' time. We map out the next promotion, the next business milestone or the next big opportunity, believing that progress comes from following a carefully designed route.

But in my experience, some of the most meaningful opportunities arrive completely unplanned.

Recently, I found myself stepping into a new project that, if I'm honest, wasn't on any vision board or business plan. It wasn't something I had actively pursued years ago, nor something I could have predicted when I first started my career. Yet it emerged because of a series of experiences, conversations and decisions that gradually led me there. In fact, it's taken me into an entirely new space: film-making and documentary production.

It made me reflect on how often we underestimate the power of simply staying open to what comes next.

The documentary project isn't a new direction away from the businesses, projects and work

I've built over the years. In many ways, it's a result of them. The relationships, experiences and opportunities developed throughout my career have all contributed to opening a door that I never expected to walk through.

And that's a lesson that extends far beyond my own experience.

Too often, we focus solely on the destination we're working towards and overlook the value of the journey itself. Yet every conversation, challenge, project and relationship has the potential to create opportunities we can't yet see.

Looking back, a number of the opportunities that have shaped my career weren't part of a carefully constructed master plan. From dancing professionally to growing businesses, writing a book and hosting a podcast, the most significant opportunities often emerged from taking the next step rather than seeing the entire staircase.

Many of us place enormous pressure on ourselves to have everything figured out. We tell ourselves we need a clear roadmap and that successful people know exactly where they're heading.

But careers rarely follow a straight line.

New industries emerge, interests evolve and opportunities appear where we least expect them.

The challenge is that these opportunities rarely arrive looking comfortable. More often, they require us to learn something new, work with different people or step into environments where we don't yet feel like an expert.

And that's often where people hesitate.

Not because they lack talent or ambition, but because they're waiting to feel ready.

Yet if there's one thing I've learned, it's that readiness is often something we develop after we start, not before.

Being open to opportunity isn't about saying

yes to everything. It's about remaining curious enough to recognise when something aligns with your values, strengths or interests, even if it wasn't part of the original plan.

If you're feeling stuck, or wondering what's next in your own career, it may be worth asking yourself:

- What opportunities have I dismissed because they didn't fit my original plan?
- What interests or ideas have I been curious about but never explored?
- Where am I waiting for certainty when I could simply take the next step?
- What conversations, invitations or opportunities keep appearing that I continue to overlook?

These questions aren't about making dramatic changes overnight, they're about creating awareness. Because sometimes the next chapter of our career isn't hidden behind a major breakthrough. Sometimes it's hidden behind a conversation, a project or an opportunity that we haven't yet given ourselves permission to explore.

As leaders, professionals and business owners, it's important to have direction. Goals matter, ambition matters, but perhaps we also need to leave room for possibility.

Because while plans help us move forward, they shouldn't become so rigid that we miss opportunities developing around us.

The opportunities you never planned for are often being created by the work you're doing today. The relationship you're building, the skill you're developing, the challenge you're overcoming, the project you're leading.

You may not see where they're leading yet.

But that doesn't mean they aren't taking you somewhere valuable.

bethanyainsley.com



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From Nursing to Nurturing: Trudy's Mission to help minds Blossom

A former nurse from Gateshead is transforming lives through movement, music and meaningful conversation with her growing community interest company, Pathways to Blossom.

Founded by Trudy Carruthers, the organisation supports people living with dementia, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and isolation through specially adapted "brain gymnastics" sessions designed to stimulate both sides of the brain while bringing people together for fun and friendship.

Using music from the 1940s right through to the 1980s, Trudy's sessions combine seated exercise with rhythm, coordination and memory recall –



helping participants stay mentally and physically active without even realising they are exercising. "There's a lot more people now being diagnosed younger with dementia, even in their 50s, so we use music from different eras that people connect with," said Trudy. "People come along and they're laughing, singing and enjoying themselves, but all the while they're working both sides of the brain. It's brilliant to watch."

The sessions are based on the "Love to

Move" programme developed by the British Gymnastics Foundation, although Trudy jokes many people initially expect "handstands and cartwheels".

"It's mainly seated exercise and it's suitable for everyone," she added. "I've got people aged 65 and people aged 95 attending. There's no age limit and we never turn anyone away."

pathwaystoblossom.com

Stay strong this Summer

As we step into July and the summer holiday season, it's easy to get swept up in travel, relaxation, and a break from routine. But if you're adding strength training to your agenda, fueling your body is just as vital as the workouts themselves.

What I'm seeing behind the scenes is that many busy professionals, eager to get strong, are under-fueling meaning their calorie and protein intake is too low. As a result, instead of building muscle, your body breaks it down for fuel, slowing metabolism and making it harder to lose fat.

So, here's a simple tip: Aim for a protein rich breakfast, even on holiday. Pack snacks like fruit and nuts, or a protein bar for when you're on the go. By staying consistent with your meals, even when your schedule changes, you give your body the fuel it needs to grow stronger, so you come back from summer not just rested, but even more powerful.

If you feel overwhelmed, I'm here to help you build a balanced, sustainable plan. Let's keep it simple and stay strong this summer.

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Just a bit of common sense

By David Fairlamb, David Fairlamb Fitness

While many people worry that exercising in the heat may be unsafe, the key is preparation, common sense and adjusting your routine sensibly. With the right approach, there is no reason you cannot stay active and enjoy training throughout the warmer months.

Choose the right time to exercise

One of the smartest things you can do is train at the right time of day. Early mornings and later evenings are usually far cooler and more comfortable, reducing the risk of overheating and allowing you to exercise more effectively.

Pick cooler locations

Whenever possible, choose shaded routes such as parks, woodland trails, or coastal areas where temperatures are naturally lower. Be especially

cautious in built-up towns and cities, where heat can become trapped between buildings and concrete surfaces, making conditions feel far hotter than the actual temperature.

Dress for the conditions

Wear light-coloured, loose-fitting, breathable clothing that allows heat to escape more easily. Technical sports fabrics that wick sweat away from the skin can also help keep your body cooler and more comfortable during exercise.

Keep your head cool

Your head plays a major role in regulating body temperature, so wearing a lightweight cap can make a big difference. For extra cooling, soak it in cold water before or during your workout. Cooling the head and neck area can help reduce fatigue and prevent that sluggish feeling often experienced in hot weather.

Slow the pace

Many people try to train at the same intensity regardless of conditions, but heat places extra stress on the body. During very warm weather, slightly reducing your pace, shortening your sessions or allowing longer recovery periods can help you train more safely and effectively.

Hydration is essential

Staying hydrated is critical during hot weather. Around two litres of water per day is often considered a good baseline under normal

conditions, but during periods of heat, especially when exercising, your body will require considerably more fluids.

Replace lost salts

Although we are often advised to limit salt intake, prolonged sweating during exercise can cause the body to lose important electrolytes, particularly sodium. Adding a small amount of salt to meals or using electrolyte tablets or drinks can help maintain fluid balance and reduce the risk of cramping and dehydration.

Rehydrate after night sweats

Warm nights can often leave you dehydrated before the day has even begun. Keeping a pint of water beside your bed and drinking it first thing in the morning is a simple but effective habit to quickly restore hydration levels.

Limit caffeine before long sessions

Before long training sessions in the heat, it may help to reduce caffeine intake. Drinks such as strong coffee can increase trips to the toilet and contribute to additional fluid loss at a time when your body is already working hard to stay hydrated.

Don't forget hydration when swimming

Swimming may feel cooler than running or cycling, but you still lose fluids through sweat while in the water, even if you do not notice it. Hydration remains just as important during swimming sessions as it does with any other form of exercise.

Listen to your body

If you begin to feel dizzy, unusually fatigued, nauseous or develop a headache, stop exercising immediately, move into the shade and cool down. Heat exhaustion can develop quickly if warning signs are ignored.

Exercising in heat can burn more calories

Training in warm conditions forces your body and heart to work harder to regulate temperature, which can increase calorie expenditure. However, extreme heat can also reduce performance and shorten workouts. Moderate warmth is usually ideal, allowing you to train effectively while still benefiting from the additional work your body does to cool itself.

davidfairlambfitness.co.uk

David's summing up

Exercising in the heat is perfectly manageable when you prepare properly before, during and after your workout. Plan when and where you train, dress appropriately and pay close attention to your hydration levels throughout the day.



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On the Tee Box



Chester-le-Street Golf Club

Location

Situated conveniently between Newcastle and Durham, a mile from junction 63 of the A1(M). The course is lovingly blended into the countryside surrounding Lumley Castle and meanders along the banks of the River Wear.

Setting

The mature and mainly parkland golf course, although virtually flat, has four minor inclines giving uphill and downhill fairways. Individual trees and copses are major attractions and hazards, as is the River Wear which skirts around the edge of a number of holes.

Length of Course

White Tees – 6486 yds

Yellow Tees – 6191 yds

Red Tees – 5870 yds

Facilities

18 Hole Parkland Course designed by Sandy Herd (Royal Liverpool 1902) and Ted E Ray (Muirfield 1912). Purpose built Club House offering a warm welcome to members and visitors alike. Fully stocked Pro Shop run by Lee Findley. Meeting and functions rooms available for hire.

Longest Drive

6th Hole –

Long drive required on this challenging Par 5. After a good drive,

you can look to lay up short of the bunker on the right, which is about 120 yards short of the green, while the longer hitters may be able to reach the green in two.

Toughest Hole

15th Hole –

A long, tough Par 4. After a good tee shot, you will still have a long shot into the sloping green. Beware of the out of bounds to the left of the green.

Signature Hole

12th Hole –

This Par 3 is uphill and will play its full yardage. It is also well protected by bunkers to the front, while the back of the hole offers fantastic views of Lumley Castle.

Course Record

Old Course: 65 – Keith Flinn

Competitions

Member competitions run throughout the year, and the course is a regular host of County and National competitions.

Prices

Summer: £35/£30 Monday–Thursday | £45/£35 Friday–Sunday

Contact: Jessica Trotman, General Manager | gm@clsgolfclub.co.uk | 0191 388 3218

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