

NORTHERN

INSIGHT

August 2026

Issue 126



**People First. AI Second:
The Roadmap Every Leader Needs**

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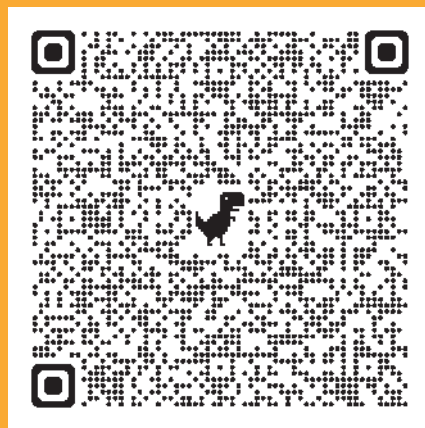
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Foreword

Welcome to the August issue of Northern Insight

As summer continues, this month's edition celebrates the people, places and achievements that make our region such a vibrant place to live and work. Across our wonderful North East, we continue to see inspiring examples of local success, resilience and collaboration, reminding us that even small achievements can have a lasting impact.

Inside this issue, you'll find stories highlighting the accomplishments of local individuals, businesses and organisations that are making a real difference. Whether it's community initiatives, business milestones or personal goals, these stories reflect the pride, determination and spirit that define the North.

August is also a time to enjoy the season and reconnect with family and friends before Autumn arrives and the run into Christmas.

Thank you to everyone who continues to share their stories and support Northern Insight. Your contributions help us shine a spotlight on the people and achievements that deserve recognition.

We hope you enjoy this month's edition.



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

Till next month...

Edition Sponsors





Gateshead fleet expert launches new venture

A Gateshead motor industry veteran with nearly three decades of experience is launching a new business aimed at transforming customer service in fleet management and has already secured a major nationwide contract within weeks of opening its doors.

North Star Vehicle Management founder Gavin Hewitt has launched the company from Blaydon Business Centre after spending 27 years working his way through the ranks in the commercial vehicle sector.

North Star Vehicle Management offers businesses a fully managed service for commercial vehicle fleets, handling everything from repairs and defect management to compliance documentation and live vehicle tracking.

The company's bespoke portal allows customers to monitor vehicle uptime, repairs and compliance in real time, helping businesses keep vehicles on the road and reduce costly downtime.

Despite only recently launching the business, North Star has already landed a major first contract with cash transportation company Loomis, covering 450 armoured vehicles across the UK.

Gavin said: "I set myself a target of managing 1,000 vehicles within the first 12 months, so to secure a contract of this size so early on is overwhelming.

"It's a nationwide contract, from the top of Scotland to the south coast, and we'll be making sure those vehicles are compliant, roadworthy and operating safely."



Gina Trick's new vision for North East entrepreneurs

A North East businesswoman is bringing entrepreneurs together for a major new business event in the heart of Newcastle upon Tyne.

Gina Trick, from Hazlerigg, has spent more than two decades building businesses ranging from online retail and the wedding industry to business coaching and AI strategy.

Her business Gina Trick Strategy is preparing to host The Edge, a new business development event taking place at The Catalyst on 7 October. The event will bring together entrepreneurs, speakers, exhibitors and sponsors from across the UK, with a strong focus on showcasing North East businesses and talent.

Gina said: "I help people make more money in their business. A lot of people think strategy sounds boring, but when you explain that strategy helps businesses grow and gives owners more freedom, people understand the value immediately.

The Edge event has been created alongside her business partner Kay Suthar and aims to combine expert speakers with meaningful networking opportunities.

Unlike many conferences, the event will include more than three hours of dedicated connection time between sessions, allowing delegates to build relationships and collaborations rather than simply listening to back-to-back talks. www.theedgeevent.com/newcastle2026

Lumo achieves new record in reducing carbon emissions

The UK's best value rail operator Lumo recently operated the highest capacity domestic intercity train in the UK.

The sold-out service carried 772 customers in each direction between Edinburgh, Newcastle and London; meaning more than 1,540 people were onboard the record-breaking return service. Travel on one of Lumo's fully electric services helps save 96% of CO₂e compared with flying.

Customers on the 08:26 from Edinburgh Waverley to London King's Cross and returning 14:15 service enjoyed Lumo's award-winning customer service, generous legroom and recently refreshed seating. Customers can also look forward to revolutionary Starlink Wi-Fi technology launching on Lumo's East Coast services this autumn, marking a significant step forward in onboard connectivity for the route.

The special 10-coach length train service follows a particularly successful period for Lumo, which recently launched new services on the West Coast Main Line between London Euston and Stirling. The new offering has



already created around 100 new jobs and brought an impressive level of affordability and enhanced connections to communities in Scotland and England.

Stuart Jones, Managing Director of First Rail Open Access, said: "As an open access operator, we're always looking for new ways we can provide affordable and reliable services to even more customers. Our team have worked hard to make this record-breaking return service happen and I think it's a clear example of how we can benefit the wider rail network.



Making Clients Famous.

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Banks Group gains second consecutive year of national recognition

County Durham-headquartered property, housebuilding and mining firm the Banks Group has been recognised as one of the UK's top-performing private businesses for a second consecutive year in a major national business excellence initiative.

Banks has been named as a winner in the 2026 UK Best Managed Companies programme, which is run by global advisory firm Deloitte and which aims to shine a spotlight on private businesses from across the UK and the exceptional performance that drives them.

The family-owned firm is one of just three North East winners and 19 winners across the UK in the programme, which ranks entrants against a range of global benchmarks for success and ask them to demonstrate their superior performance over the past three years in relation to their peers.

It follows on from Banks recently celebrating 25 years of accreditation from Investors In People for its performance in people management in what is its 50th anniversary year.

Harry Banks OBE DL, chairman and chief executive of the Banks Group, says: "In this landmark year for the business, it feels



especially pleasing to be identified once again as one of the UK's top managed private companies and to have the quality of the work that every member of our team delivers gaining this level of recognition.

"The company's long-term success has been built on continuous business improvement and innovation, and it remains at the heart of our operations today as much as it always has."



Lumo gives Pride partners a platform on Britain's railway

Community volunteers and a former Mr Gay GB helped unveil Newcastle-based Lumo's new Pride train celebrating the organisations and communities championing inclusion across the country.

The redesigned Pride train gives a platform to the LGBTQ+ organisations the low-cost operator proudly supports across its route, recognising the people, partnerships and communities that make Pride possible.

The all-electric train, which operates on the East Coast Main Line between London King's Cross, Newcastle, Edinburgh and Glasgow, now proudly features the logos of Lumo's Pride partners; Pride Radio, OUT North East, Edinburgh Pride and Glasgow's Pride, reflecting the operator's commitment to supporting inclusion not only during Pride season, but throughout the year.

Richard Salkeld, Director of Communications and Partnerships at Lumo, said: "We're proud to welcome everyone onboard at Lumo.

"Each logo featured on this train represents an organisation that works incredibly hard throughout the year to champion inclusion, support LGBTQ+ communities and create places where people can feel safe to be themselves. We are pleased to help shine a light on that great work."

Lumo is currently supporting more Pride events and organisations across the country than ever before. The company's year-round collaboration with community organisations recognises the important role they play in creating places where everyone feels welcome, respected and able to be themselves.



North East CSR leaders gather as NorthStandard marks £100,000 in sustainability impact

Leading marine insurer NorthStandard has brought together charity partners and community organisations from across the North East as it celebrates another year of investment in local communities, having directed £100,000 towards charities and community projects across the region.

Held at NorthStandard's Newcastle headquarters, the event followed the publication of the company's latest Sustainability Report and celebrated a year in which the organisation directed £100,000 towards North East charities and community projects, and contributed more than 780 volunteering hours across the region. This commitment to creating positive social impact was recognised through the Outstanding Contribution to Skills and Community Award at Maritime Innovation Week 2025.

Representatives from over twenty charities and community organisations gathered at the Quayside office for a Charity Community Impact Evening, to celebrate community champions, strengthen partnerships and encourage collaboration between organisations working to create positive change across the region.

The event featured presentations and a Q&A session with NorthStandard's Katherine Birchall, Global Head of FD&D Claims, Chloe Kelly, CSR Executive, and delegates from Stella Maris, Smart Works and Newcastle Hospitals Charity/Sir Bobby Robson Foundation, providing attendees with the opportunity to learn more about the challenges facing local communities and the initiatives helping to address them.

THE AI REVOLUTION WON'T SAVE YOU. YOUR PEOPLE WILL

Many AI transformations fail. Not just because of the technology. Here's how to get it right and how Brave & Heart can help you.

Organisations are pouring investment into AI. Yet real success remains stubbornly elusive, employee challenges are widespread, and all the while the gap between AI ambition and AI reality keeps growing. The reason is rarely just the technology. It's often also the absence of a people and process centred approach that tackles the real complex problems.

Have you created an AI driven HTML page and PowerPoint or actually solved a longstanding process and system issue that streamlines real world results? At Brave & Heart, we believe that lasting AI transformation is built on three interconnected pillars - and delivered through a clear, practical roadmap that puts your people centre stage.

THE THREE PILLARS OF PEOPLE-POWERED AI

PILLAR 1 STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Every successful AI transformation begins not with a tool, but with a question: what are we actually trying to achieve, and for whom? Without that clarity, technology and licence spend becomes noise. Leadership teams that aren't genuinely aligned - not just nominally agreed, but behaviourally consistent - create confusion that cascades through the organisation long before a single tool is deployed.

We work with leadership teams to define what true AI-enabled success looks like in practice: for their people, their customers, and their culture. That strategic foundation is what makes everything else coherent.

PILLAR 2 CULTURE & CAPABILITY

The cultural conditions for AI adoption have to be built deliberately. That means creating genuine psychological safety - an environment where people feel able to ask questions and engage honestly with what AI means for their role, without fear. It means upskilling with empathy, meeting people where they are rather than where you'd like them to be. And it means cultivating AI champions from within the organisation: people who understand both the culture, process and the tools, and who can bridge the gap between them.

PILLAR 3 APPLIED TECHNOLOGY

Technology is the third pillar - not the first. Approached this way, tool selection starts with real needs, not market trends or the last sales pitch in your inbox. Our BraveAI suite and BraveTranslate tool were both built from genuine use cases, tested with people who would use them, and designed to integrate into existing workflows without adding complexity. That's the difference between AI that gets used and AI that's quietly abandoned.

"When change is done to people rather than with them, they disengage - not just from the tool, but from the direction of the organisation."

A ROADMAP FOR LEADERS - SIX STEPS TO GET THERE

The pillars tell you what to build. The roadmap tells you how to begin. These six steps are the moves that distinguish transformations that endure from those that don't.

We run these steps inside a comprehensive series of tools that accurately measure your CMM (Capability Model Maturity) score for AI Transformation.



01 AUDIT

Be honest about where you are. Assess AI readiness across culture, capability, and clarity - the gaps you find here shape everything that follows.



02 ALIGN

Get leadership genuinely on the same page before anything goes to teams. Visible uncertainty at the top creates resistance at every level below it.



03 ENGAGE

Involve people early and design change with them, not at them. Genuine consultation - not a post-decision survey - is what earns the trust that makes adoption real.



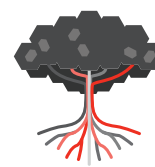
04 APPLY

Deploy tools purposefully, with real training and support built in. Know what problem you're solving, for whom, and how you'll measure it.



05 EMBED

Build internal capability so progress outlasts external support. The goal is an organisation that can keep moving on its own.



06 EVOLVE

Create feedback loops that keep the transformation adapting. The AI landscape changes fast - organisations that learn continuously are the ones that stay ahead.

BOLD, HUMAN, MEANINGFUL PROGRESS

The organisations that will navigate the AI era strongest aren't necessarily those with the biggest technology budgets. They're the ones that put their people at the centre of what they're building - and invest in culture, capability, and clarity to make it last.

That's what Brave & Heart does. Across strategy, technology and people - working together, because that's the only way transformation sticks.

LET'S START THE CONVERSATION

Whether you're exploring AI for the first time or troubleshooting a transformation that isn't delivering, we're here to help. Reach out to us at braveandheart.com





Lumo proudly supported Newcastle's 5K Pride Run, with Dame Kelly Holmes firing the starting gun (Credit: North News)

Lumo proudly supports record number of Pride events

Newcastle-based train operator Lumo is supporting more Pride events this year than ever before, proudly championing the LGBTQ+ community.



A total of 450 runners, many dressed in an array of colourful outfits, took part in the vibrant Pride Run in Leazes Park (Credit: North News)

One of those events is the biggest 5K Pride Run in recent years, which has taken place in Newcastle after sports legend Dame Kelly Holmes fired the starting gun.

A total of 450 runners, many dressed in an array of colourful outfits, took part in the vibrant race in Leazes Park.

The uplifting sell-out event, organised by LGBTQ+ community running club Newcastle Fronrunners (NFR) and sponsored by Lumo, kicked off the city's Pride weekend in style.

More than 80,000 people were thought to take part in the festivities across Friday, Saturday and Sunday, during which Nadine Coyle, Katy B, Bimini and Danny Beard performed at Times Square.

Andrew Melville, of NFR, said: "This has been the best 5K Pride Run in the history of the event.

"We sold out of tickets for the first time since the pandemic, which is brilliant.

"The run has been nine months in the planning. I am tired and relieved, but mostly just incredibly proud of what we have achieved.

"It was fantastic to have double Olympic gold medallist Dame Kelly Holmes start the race.

"She is a major person within the LGBT community. She's served in the armed forces, she's faced discrimination, and all while maintaining an incredible Olympic career."

After firing the gun, the former army sergeant took part in the race herself. She was joined by 2024 Mr Gay GB winner and dance artist Andrew Gardiner, who warmed up the runners at the start line ahead of the run.

Entertainment came from local Drag Queen Miss Gloria Love, singing group Heaton Jukebox, Northern Proud Voices and the Metrognomes.

The 5K Pride Run was the largest to have taken place since before the pandemic, when 600 gathered to race in 2018.

Andrew added: "It's been a difficult time for the LGBTQ+ community.

"There has been a lot of anti-LGBT and anti-trans sentiment, and for that reason we wanted to make this year's 5K event bigger and brighter than ever.

"There may be grey clouds, but we're not going anywhere.

"It's never been as important for us to shine brightly, and we have attracted the support of some brilliant sponsors.

"Lumo were the first to get involved and have offered us many opportunities and connections, which we are grateful for."

Dame Kelly Holmes said: "The Pride Run is more than running – it's about community, freedom and moving forward together.

"That's what makes a Pride Run so special. It brings LGBTQ+ people, friends, families and allies together to celebrate who we are, support one another and share the joy of being active and visible.

"Pride is about being proud of exactly who you are, and there's something incredibly powerful about running side by side with a community that celebrates you for it."

Richard Salkeld, Director of Communications and Partnerships at Lumo, added: "We're thrilled to support the 5K Pride Run and to play a part in such a joyful and inclusive event for Newcastle.

"At Lumo, we're passionate about connecting communities, and it's fantastic to see so many people coming together to celebrate Pride, diversity and everything that makes our region such a welcoming place."

As a further show of support for Pride, Lumo showcased many of the country's Pride organisations on Out of Home (OOH) screens across the city. It follows Lumo launching a train earlier this month featuring many of the LGBTQ+ organisations Lumo supports across England and Scotland.



The outdoor screen space was donated by Digital Out of Home advertising company Ocean Outdoor.

Keith Crisp, from Ocean Outdoor UK, said: "Like Lumo, Ocean has a long tradition of supporting Pride events in the communities where we live and work. We are pleased to extend that to Newcastle using five of our large format screens to celebrate and support the LGBTQ+ community."

Earlier this year Lumo was named Best Small Employer in Scotland, in part thanks to the company demonstrating a clear commitment to inclusivity from how it supports customers, colleagues and the communities served.

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.

www.lumo.co.uk





BUSINESS

The Big Interview

Martin Kendall

16 August 2026

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**If you're not
adapting,
you're falling
behind.**

Northern Insight

Martin Kendall: From the shopfloor to shaping the future of automotive

In the North East, where automotive manufacturing is as much a part of the landscape as its people, few careers reflect the sector's evolution quite like that of Martin Kendall.

From driving forklift trucks on Nissan's shopfloor in the mid-1980s to leading a global logistics operation – and now stepping into the role of Chair of the North East Automotive Alliance (NEAA) – his story is not just one of progression, but one rooted in belief: belief in people, innovation and the region itself.

"When you look back, it's been quite a journey," Martin reflects. "I started on the shopfloor in Material Handling, and we all learnt and adapted to the business together, and everything since then has been about continuous improvement – both personally and as a business."

His career began in 1986, the same year Nissan Motor Manufacturing UK opened in Sunderland. Starting in material handling, he progressed quickly – from FLT driver/Instructor, then team leader, supervisor and ultimately into Material Handling engineering.

It's a grounding that continues to shape his leadership today.

"I've always believed that understanding the detail – how things work on the ground – is critical. It gives you the foundation to make better decisions and support your teams more effectively."

In 2002, Martin made a pivotal move, joining what was then Autrans – later becoming Vantec Europe – as General Manager. At the time, the business was still closely aligned with Nissan, but under his leadership it began to evolve, diversifying into new sectors, expanding internationally and building a broader, more resilient customer base.

By the time he became Managing Director in 2012, the company had a £24 million turnover and around 600 employees. Today, it has grown into a £60 million business employing more than 1,200 people across the UK.

"From building bespoke Logistics centres, launching businesses in St Petersburg and in Canton, Mississippi, it has always been about taking on the challenge and pushing boundaries," he says. "Looking at where we can grow, diversify and future-proof the business."

That ambition has seen the company expand across sectors including luxury automotive, construction equipment, electric batteries and offshore renewable energy, supporting customers such as Rolls-Royce Motor Cars, Bentley Motors, Komatsu, BMW Mini, AESC and GE Vernova.

But growth is only part of the story. Innovation has been equally central to Martin's leadership.

One of the most notable examples is the development of the UK's first 'living warehouse' – an immersive training and safety environment.

"It was about thinking differently," he explains. "How can we train people in a safer, more engaging way? How can we use technology to reduce risk and improve performance?"

That thinking evolved further during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the creation of a purpose-built Virtual Interactive Experience (VIE) focused on immersive training, safety and continuous improvement, with a clear goal of zero harm.

From 3D interactive training suites to in-house digital systems, the business has embraced a technology-led approach, supported by dedicated innovation and digital transformation teams.

"We're in a different world now," Martin says. "Digitalisation, automation, data – these aren't future concepts, they're here now. If you're not adapting, you're falling behind."

That mindset underpins the company's most recent transformation: the move from Vantec Europe to LOGISTEED UK Limited.

The rebrand marks its integration into the global LOGISTEED Group, strengthening its position within an international logistics network operating across more than 30 countries. More importantly, it signals a shift towards fully integrated, end-to-end supply chain solutions.

"This is about evolution," Martin says. "We're becoming more connected globally, offering more integrated services and giving our customers access to a much wider network and capability."

Yet despite its global reach, the business remains firmly rooted in the North East.

"It all started here," he adds. "That connection to Sunderland, to the region – it's still a huge part of who we are."

It's this combination of operational experience, strategic thinking and innovation that has led to Martin's appointment as Chair of the NEAA.

Having previously served on the organisation's Executive and Advisory Boards, he brings a deep understanding of both the challenges and opportunities facing the sector.

"This is a pivotal time for automotive," he says.

"Electrification, global supply chains, cost pressures, new technologies – it's changing fast. The NEAA has a critical role to play in helping businesses navigate that and work together."

For Martin, collaboration is key. "No one organisation can do it alone. It's about bringing people together, sharing knowledge and creating opportunities across the region."

As Martin steps into his new role as Chair of the NEAA, there's a clear alignment between his own journey and the future of the sector he now represents.

From the shopfloor at Nissan to leading a globally connected logistics business, his career mirrors the transformation of the North East automotive landscape itself.

And while the industry continues to evolve at pace, his outlook remains firmly optimistic.

"The North East has always been about resilience, innovation and collaboration," he says. "If we build on those strengths, there's a really exciting future ahead."

UK.logisteed.com

Musings with Mirza...



Ammar Mirza CBE

Clash of the Titans

By Ammar Mirza CBE

**“Alone we can do so little;
together we can do so much.”**

Helen Keller

One of my favourite subjects at school was Greek mythology. I was fascinated by its extraordinary collection of gods, giants, heroes and monsters, and by the timeless stories, tales and fables that brought them vividly to life.

These were never simply stories about superhuman strength. They were stories about ambition and arrogance, courage and consequence, loyalty and leadership. They reminded us that even the most powerful could

fall, that the smallest act could alter history and that no hero, however gifted, ever truly succeeded alone.

Today, it sometimes feels as though we are witnessing our own Clash of the Titans.

Across politics, business, nations and neighbourhoods, powerful personalities and competing interests collide. Debate too easily becomes division. Difference becomes distrust. Social media can turn every disagreement into a battlefield, creating modern-day versions of Medusa, where anger, fear and misinformation threaten to turn compassion and common sense to stone.

The pressures are real. In March 2025, 87 per cent of adults identified the cost of living as an important issue facing Britain, 83 per cent named the NHS and 72 per cent the economy. By January 2026, almost one in four adults said they felt lonely often, always or some of the time.

Yet this is only part of the story.

The latest Community Life Survey found that 62 per cent of adults felt a strong sense of

belonging to their immediate neighbourhood. Some 44 per cent had helped someone informally during the previous year, while 28 per cent had volunteered through a group, club or organisation.

Behind every statistic stands a person choosing to care.

I see that spirit every day across the North East. It lives in the volunteer opening a community centre before sunrise, the teacher staying late to encourage a child, the business creating opportunities beyond its balance sheet, the emergency service worker protecting strangers and the neighbour checking that someone is safe, warm and well.

They may never command thunderbolts like Zeus or possess the strength of Hercules, but they carry something more important. Humanity, humility and hope.

Jason did not find the Golden Fleece alone. He needed the Argonauts, a crew of people with different strengths, experiences and abilities, united by a shared destination. Their greatest asset was not one individual hero. It was collective endeavour.

That lesson matters now.

We do not need to agree about everything to work together on something. We can challenge without condemning, compete without destroying and lead without diminishing others. We can choose dialogue over division, service over self-interest and practical action over performative outrage.

The North East has always understood this. Our greatest strength has never been found solely in institutions, buildings or balance sheets. It is found in our people, our pride, our passion and our instinct to stand shoulder to shoulder when circumstances demand it.

Perhaps our challenge is not to search for a mythical hero to rescue us, but to recognise the heroic potential present within ordinary people. Leadership is not reserved for those on mountaintops. It appears whenever someone steps forward, reaches back and brings another person with them.

The Titans may continue to clash. The monsters may appear larger and the seas more difficult to navigate. But history, mythology and lived experience teach us the same uplifting truth.

When good people come together around a shared purpose, giants can be overcome, communities can be transformed and even the impossible can become possible.

We may not be Gods.

But collectively and collaboratively, we possess the power to do extraordinary things.

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.

A male golfer is captured in the middle of a golf swing. He is wearing a black baseball cap with the 'FINK' logo in white. His shirt is a blue and white vertically striped polo shirt, also featuring the 'FINK' logo on the sleeve. He has extensive tattoos on his left arm and is wearing a white golf glove on his right hand. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

where modern design meets elite performance

FINK

a golf wear brand built on precision, performance,
and a relentless commitment to quality

www.finkgolfwear.com

“

Whether it's
engineering
or fashion, the
principles are
exactly the same.



Brenden Carr

From Engineering to Golfing Fashion

Why Brenden Carr is backing a bold new British brand

Brenden Carr, founder of Washington based Caztec Group, has grown a small electrical engineering business into a million-pound company working with some of Britain's biggest infrastructure organisations. But despite that success, he is now turning his entrepreneurial instincts towards a completely different challenge – creating FINK, a premium golf and lifestyle brand with international ambitions.

"I've always enjoyed building businesses," Brenden explains. "Engineering has been my business life for over 25 years, but I enjoy creating something new. FINK is about taking everything I've learned in business and applying it to a completely different industry."

Brenden began as an apprentice electrician before spending eight years working in London and on projects across the UK and overseas. He returned to the North East to establish Caztec Group in 2000.

Today the company employs 20 people and delivers specialist electrical engineering projects for major organisations including Network Rail, Siemens, Scottish Power, Hitachi and the NHS. National recognition has followed, including Contractor of the Year honours, but Brenden has always kept a low profile and concentrated on delivering solutions for his loyal client base.

This success has given Brenden the platform to pursue a long-held ambition of creating a premium brand with genuine international potential.

A passionate golfer, Brenden believes the values that underpin the sport – precision, respect, attention to detail and continual improvement – mirror the principles that have helped him build a successful engineering business. Those same values now sit at the heart of FINK.

The idea was born when Caztec Group began supporting a young North East professional golfer. Brenden and his son David combined their vision to create a premium golf wear brand designed to stand out in a competitive market.

Rather than rushing products to market, the pair spent months travelling internationally, visiting manufacturers, reviewing countless fabric samples and meeting suppliers before deciding who would produce the collection. They refused to compromise until they were completely satisfied that every garment met the standards associated with the FINK name.

"We wanted people to pick up one of our garments and immediately feel the quality," said David. "There are plenty of clothing brands out there, but we wanted to create something that genuinely stands out through its materials, style, fit and finish."

To ensure the collection combines performance with contemporary style, FINK works with an experienced fashion designer based in Manchester. Together they have created garments that perform on the golf course while looking equally at home away from the fairways, reinforcing the company's ambition to become a premium lifestyle brand rather than simply another golf clothing label.

Everything about Fink is UK based - artwork, website, online store, packaging and marketing. It's something the FINK brand

insisted on. They wanted UK companies involved in the journey.

Rather than relying on conventional advertising, FINK is building its reputation through the world of professional golf. The company sponsors two professional golfers who wear the brand while competing, helping introduce FINK to audiences across the UK as well as overseas.

Brenden is also a familiar face at golf tournaments, where he meets golfers, retailers and industry professionals while showcasing the collection. From championship events to prestigious golfing venues, these appearances have become an important part of the company's growth strategy, allowing potential customers to experience the quality of the garments first-hand.

"Golf attracts people who appreciate quality, craftsmanship and premium products," he says. "It's a natural environment for introducing FINK to people who value those things."

While golf provides an important platform, Brenden is keen to stress that FINK is not simply a golf clothing label.

"We're creating a premium lifestyle brand. Golf has given us an excellent opportunity to introduce people to FINK, but our ambition goes far beyond the fairways."

Every aspect of the business has been carefully considered with long-term growth in mind.

"This isn't a side project," Brenden says. "We're building a brand with its own identity and a clear vision for the future."

The launch collection of nine products proved an immediate success, selling out quickly, with orders shipped to customers around the world. The response has reinforced Brenden's belief that there is strong demand for a British premium brand that places quality above volume.

"We have Premier League footballers, professional golfers and England cricketers wearing our launch collection" Brenden stated. "The support we have had already has been amazing."

Although engineering remains at the heart of his business life, Brenden now spends much of his spare time developing the FINK brand, travelling to golfing events, meeting potential partners and retailers, and along with his son David, decide future collections as the brand continues to expand.

"Whether it's engineering or fashion, the principles are exactly the same," he says. "Success comes from quality, hard work, consistency and building trust."

As the Brand grows, so does the commitment of this father and son duo, who's work ethic is a testament to the focus, drive and desire that they possess in abundance.

www.finkgolfwear.com



Poppy's Light Foundation's Inaugural Summer Party

Businesses from across the North East were brought together for an evening of fundraising, enjoyment and awareness raising at Beamish Hall Hotel.

Welcoming businesses, families and children, the event celebrated community while supporting Poppy's Light Foundation's mission to raise awareness of inherited cardiac conditions (ICCs) and improve heart health education. Thanks to the incredible generosity of everyone who attended, the event was a huge success, helping to shine a light on this important cause while strengthening relationships and partnerships that will support the charity's work for years to come.







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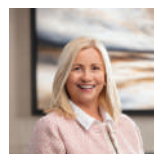
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YOUNG

Guide Price £2.49 Million

5 Bedrooms

Detached

5 Bathrooms



Ashleigh Sundin

0191 223 3500

ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk

Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: Band H. EPC: D



SANDERSON
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The Old Vicarage & Stanley Cottage

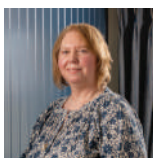
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Offers Over £1.2 Million

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+ Attached Cottage & Coach House



Gillian Greaves

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gillian.greaves@sandersonyoung.co.uk

Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: Band F & A. EPC: E & C



SANDERSON
YOUNG

The Old Lifeboat House



The Old Lifeboat House

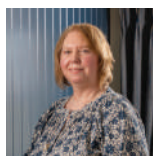
Low Hauxley, Nr Amble, Northumberland

Guide Price £1.1 Million

6 Bedrooms

Detached

3 Bathrooms



Gillian Greaves

01665 600 170

gillian.greaves@sandersonyoung.co.uk

Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: Band H. EPC: D



Dr David Cliff

Between what was and what will be

We often think of change as having a clear beginning and end. We set a goal, make a plan and focus on the outcome, assuming success lies simply in reaching the destination.

In reality, most of life is spent somewhere in between.

Businesses continually navigate transitions: growth, succession, restructuring, technological change, acquisitions, new markets or changing customer expectations. Individuals experience similar transitions through promotion, retirement, illness, family commitments or changing aspirations. Yet whilst these changes appear practical or commercial on the surface,

they are also deeply psychological.

Every organisational transition has a human transition running alongside it.

Perhaps that's why change often proves harder than expected. We devote considerable time to defining objectives but much less to understanding what people are leaving behind and how they will adapt to what comes next. Change affects confidence, identity, relationships and the sense of certainty that allows individuals and organisations to perform at their best.

I often compare transition to driving a car. On a straight road the vehicle is naturally stable. Introduce a bend and the forces acting upon it immediately change. Good drivers don't simply point the car at the exit of the corner and accelerate. They anticipate the curve, adjust their speed and make a series of small steering corrections that keep the vehicle balanced throughout the journey.

Successful organisations do much the same.

Leaders who focus solely on the destination can easily overlook the subtle adjustments required along the way. Markets change, people develop, assumptions prove inaccurate and unexpected opportunities emerge. Progress is rarely a straight line, but a series of thoughtful

adaptations that gradually move an organisation towards its intended future.

This is where reflection becomes invaluable. In a world that prizes speed and decisive action, taking time to think can feel like a luxury. In reality, it is often one of the most productive investments a leader can make. Reflection helps us distinguish between movement and progress, activity and purpose, certainty and understanding.

Whether working with founder-led businesses preparing for succession, organisations embracing new technologies or leadership teams navigating periods of growth, I have found that successful transitions rarely happen by accident. They succeed because people are given the opportunity to think, discuss, adjust and understand not only what is changing, but why it matters.

Change may be inevitable, but successful transition is not.

The organisations that thrive are rarely those that move the fastest. More often, they are those that recognise the journey between what was and what will be deserves as much attention as the destination itself.

gedanken.co.uk

BETWEEN WHAT WAS AND WHAT WILL BE

TRANSITION IS THE JOURNEY.
LEADERSHIP IS HOW WE NAVIGATE IT.

Change may be inevitable,
but successful transition is not.

Every organisational transition
has a human transition
running alongside it.

STRAIGHT ROAD



Certainty feels safe.
We rely on experience,
processes and what
we already know.

THE BEND



Forces shift.
Uncertainty, pressure
and unfamiliarity
create instability.

THROUGH THE CURVE



Small adjustments
create stability.
Reflection, learning and
adaptation keep us on
the right path.

NEW DIRECTION



A new state emerges.
The journey shapes the
outcome as much as
the destination.

TRANSITIONS TAKE MANY FORMS



LEADERSHIP &
SUCCESSION



GROWTH &
EXPANSION



TECHNOLOGY &
INNOVATION



MERGERS &
ACQUISITIONS



STRATEGY &
DIRECTION



PEOPLE &
CULTURE



PERSONAL
TRANSITIONS



RETIREMENT &
NEXT CHAPTER

PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION



CLARITY OF PURPOSE
Understand
the why.



REFLECTION
& DIALOGUE
Think before
you act.



ADAPT & ADJUST
Make small
corrections.



ATTENTION
TO PEOPLE
Address the
human side.



STAY THE COURSE
Build confidence
over time.

TRANSITION IS NOT A SINGLE LEAP.

IT IS A SERIES OF INTENTIONAL MOVEMENTS.
THE LEADERS WHO THRIVE ARE THOSE WHO
NAVIGATE THE JOURNEY WITH WISDOM, COURAGE
AND CONSIDERATION FOR OTHERS.



B7 strengthens its B2B marketing offer with new Social Media Manager hire

B7 has appointed Daniel Gourley as Social Media Manager following a period of continued growth for the business.

The appointment comes as B7 continues to go from strength to strength, expanding its client portfolio across financial services, utilities, data engineering and professional services, while also supporting the wider growth of the B7 group of businesses.

Daniel joins the Newcastle-based business after spending four years at leading performance marketing agency Silverbean, where he worked across a range of disciplines including graphic design, copywriting, strategy and video production.

Bringing experience across marketing, PR and international campaigns, Daniel has been brought in to support B7's growing portfolio of clients and help deliver strategic social media activity that creates measurable results.

Since joining just over a month ago, Daniel has already made a strong impact across a number of client accounts, including helping to increase inbound leads for one of B7's financial services businesses.

Speaking about the appointment, David Broom, Founder of B7, said: "B7 is continuing to grow, both in terms of our client base and the wider group, so it's important that we keep investing in the right people.

"Daniel has really hit the ground running since joining us. He's a problem solver, he thinks like we do, and he sees solutions to challenges while also being confident enough to challenge our thinking and lead us to better outcomes."

Naylors announces new senior hire to bolster property management team

Naylors announces new senior hire to bolster property management team
Commercial property consultancy, Naylors, has announced a senior appointment to support its ongoing expansion and nationwide client delivery.

Chris Wild has joined the 40-strong, Newcastle city centre-based firm as head of facilities management within the property & facilities management team, headed-up by partner, Katy Clark.

Chris brings over 30 years' experience to his role, including property and operations management positions at Groundwork and John Lewis.

He will be managing a diverse instruction portfolio spanning the whole of the UK across industrial, office, investment and retail assets.

Chris Wild said: "The opportunity to get back to managing property full time, leading a team of FMs, was too good to miss and



particularly for a business I knew well and respected.

"I am most looking forward to using my experience to help develop the slightly less-experienced members of the FM team and to support the property managers in their roles.

"I will also going be looking at processes and procedures with the aim of driving both efficiencies and standards to facilitate the growth we are looking for."



Tyneside's sector-leading hospitality supplier The Rudd Group announces key promotion

The newly appointed Group Operations Manager for one of the UK's leading suppliers to the hospitality industry insists innovation is the key to future success.

Zoe O'Sullivan has been promoted to her latest position just five years after joining Newcastle-based The Rudd Group as a trainee Business Development Manager.

And the former area manager for the

Stonegate Pub Group plans to play a key role in nurturing the next generation of forward-thinking hospitality professionals.

"At The Rudd Group we're always looking at what's next in terms of innovative technology that will improve the experience of clients and their customers," said Zoe.

"We're always driving forward and never standing still. That's what really excites me about my new role.

"In my new role I'm overseeing all of our depots and all of the operations managers at those depots.

"We have newer people in post in Nottingham and Haydock and I'm keen to support them, coach them and bring them on the journey that I love being a part of."

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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



WOULD YOU BACK YOURSELF?

Not every ambitious owner is looking for investment right now. But the ones who get taken seriously when they do are the ones who were ready long before they needed to be. Being investment-ready isn't about asking for money, it's about building a business that could stand up to scrutiny at any time, on any given day. Here's where to start.

1. Keep clean, current numbers.

Anyone assessing your business, a lender, an investor, even a buyer, will ask for your numbers first. Not a rough idea, the actual figures, up to date and easy to follow. Owners who keep clean, current accounts aren't scrambling when the question lands, they're already halfway to yes. Treat it as ongoing discipline, not a scramble before the meeting.

2. Have a forecast, not just a history.

A forecast shows where you're headed, not just where you've been. It doesn't need to be complicated, or perfect. What it needs to show is that you understand your own business well enough to predict it. Owners who can talk confidently about next year, not just last year, are the ones who get taken seriously when opportunity arrives.

3. Know your story, not just your spreadsheet.

Numbers get you in the room. The story behind them, why this business, why now, why you, is what keeps you there. Investors remember stories better than spreadsheets, and a business that can explain itself clearly is far more compelling than one hiding behind data. Know your numbers, but know your narrative too.

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INTERESTING QUOTE



We relate to and remember stories better than we do numbers.

Aswath Damodaran

JUST ONE THING

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

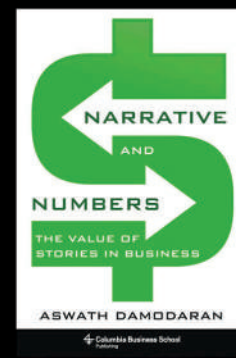
View your last set of accounts and read them as if you were a stranger deciding whether to back this business. Would you? If the answer's no, or you're not sure, that's not a reason to panic. It's exactly the sort of thing worth sorting out now, long before anyone asks.

HAVE A READ

Narrative and Numbers
Aswath Damodaran

A sharp look at why some businesses attract investment and others don't. Damodaran argues the best valuations combine solid numbers with a story that makes sense of them. Worth a read before your next big conversation.

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Specialist associate solicitor rejoins Muckle's leading employment team

Multidisciplinary law firm, Muckle LLP, was delighted to welcome legal expert Roland Fairlamb back to its growing employment team.

Roland qualified as a solicitor in 2016. With a decade of expertise in employment law, Roland has advised businesses and individuals across all aspects of employment. He has extensive experience in a range of contentious and non-contentious matters, including tribunal claims and workplace policies, restructuring, and corporate transactions. Drawn back to the firm's forward-thinking, proactive approach and focus on purpose-led work, Roland decided to rejoin the employment team, which has been consistently ranked top-tier by Legal 500.

As Roland is rejoining Muckle as an associate solicitor, he'll be contributing to the team's ongoing expansion and success, with a heightened focus on supporting the team's junior members and training the next generation of legal talent.

Roland said, "I'm thrilled to be rejoining Muckle and feel privileged to be able to reconnect with my former clients and colleagues. With the experience and skills I've gained in a specialist employment law environment, I'm hoping to bring a fresh set of eyes to the team."

"Employment is a very varied area of law that is fast-changing, especially with the introduction of changes under the Employment Rights Act and I'm really looking forward to advising on a range of matters whilst supporting the growth of the team."



EMG Solicitors Strengthens Private Client Service

Award-winning law firm EMG Solicitors is strengthening its private client offering with a string of new appointments in its Wills, Trusts and Probate team.

The team's recent expansion is at a time of significant growth for EMG Solicitors, which now has eight offices across the country following the opening of new locations in Oxford and Nottingham last month.

Recent appointments in the Wills, Trusts and Probate team includes Laura Clarke who has

joined EMG's Penrith office as Associate and Rachel Hunter, who joined the Gosforth office as a Solicitor in May 2026. Alex Lynas is a newly qualified Solicitor in the team, having qualified in March 2026.

EMG's private client team is nationally recognised in The Legal 500 - the UK's leading guide to law firms. Several of their solicitors, including Samantha Edward, are highlighted as leading individuals in their fields and are accredited members of STEP (The Society of Trust and Estate Practitioners). Deborah Jude was a Chair of the North East and Cumbria Branch of STEP for some years. The STEP accreditation is a recognised standard of excellence, specialist knowledge and integrity as well as ensuring its members are experts in inheritance and succession planning.

The team is led by Director Samantha Edward who is also co-author of 'The Practitioner's Guide to Probate and the Administration of Estates'. Samantha specialises in estate planning including inheritance tax mitigation, the drafting of Wills and Trusts together with Powers of Attorney, and estate and trust administration.

Samantha said: "We are seeing our team go from strength to strength, and I'm proud to be bringing together even more experience and expertise as EMG continues to expand across the country."

'Where sharp minds compete' podcast to return for second season

Johnston Carmichael's business and leadership podcast, Where Sharp Minds Compete, has wrapped up a successful first season. Across four episodes, the show brought together influential North East figures with experience in both the business and sporting worlds to share their unique journeys, lessons learnt and qualities to drive high performance.

Hosted by Paul Shields, Partner and Head of Johnston Carmichael's Newcastle office, the first series featured Olympic swimmer Chris Cook, England Physical Disability cricket captain Iain Nairn MBE, EFL assistant referee Shaun Hudson and Newcastle Eagles owners Paul and Sam Blake.

Throughout the season, guests offered insight and practical advice for business leaders navigating competition, change and growth, drawing clear parallels between sport and business.

Paul said: "The response to the first series has been fantastic. Our guests brought different experiences, but the same themes kept coming through: resilience, teamwork and performing



under pressure. We're looking forward to building on that in the second run of episodes and exploring even more of the similarities between success in sport and business."

Planning is now underway for the next season, with recording expected to begin in the coming months. The next season will continue to spotlight regional talent and offer fresh perspectives on leadership, progress and performance.

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L-R: Ian McElroy, Anthony Guest, Steve Hart and Shola Ameobi

'Top Tier Golf' for wealth and fund manager's sponsorship of Sport Newcastle's Charity Golf Day

Newcastle based wealth and fund management specialists, Tier One Capital (Tier One) has again supported Sport Newcastle's annual Golf Day, helping to raise vital funds for the charity and continue their support for grassroots sport in the region - and this year celebrating joint winning the golf day!

The fundraising event which took place on Thursday 25th June 2026 at Ponteland Golf Club helped to raise over £7,000 to support local athletes, sports organisations and wider participation in grassroots sport across the region.

The annual golf day was attended by 30 teams covering a wide range of local like-minded businesses and was again supported by SOS Group, which is also a long-time supporter of Sport Newcastle fundraising events.

Tier One's sponsorship of the golf day is part of an ongoing partnership with Sport Newcastle, underlining the company's commitment to contributing to the local community and encouraging involvement in sport at all levels.

Ian McElroy, Chief Executive, Tier One said: "The golf day is always a highlight of the year and we all enjoyed a great day's golf which was well organised, well attended and at the same time raised vital funds for grassroots sport.

"As a business deeply rooted in the North East,

and with a team of active sports enthusiasts, we are thrilled to support Sport Newcastle.

"We were also delighted to have a fantastic round of golf supported by our guest team members former NUFC footballer Shola Ameobi, Steve Hart, Central Employment and Anthony Guest running out joint winners with Root Cause Consultancy.

"I was also personally delighted to scoop the prize of nearest the pin on the 15th hole completing a fantastic day all round for team Tier One!"

Mike Booth, Vice Chair of Sport Newcastle, said: "We are delighted to have raised over £7,000 and we are eternally grateful to the businesses and golfers who attended. The day was a tremendous success and was played in great spirit at one of the North East's finest golf courses.

"The support we receive from businesses is crucial to our long-standing charity's efforts in promoting and nurturing young sporting talent in the region. We are immensely grateful for the continued support from Tier One, a generous sponsor who shares our values and enables emerging sports talents to realise their full potential.

Tier One entered two teams captained by Chief Executive, Ian McElroy and Fund Manager, Brendan O'Grady.

www.tieronecapital.co.uk





WHERE SHARP MINDS

COMPETE

The new podcast from
Johnston Carmichael

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Hosted by Paul Shields



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When summer payment delays start to impact cashflow

By Graeme Harrison, Managing Director at CCBS.

Delayed payments can create cashflow pressure, but businesses have more options than ever to improve working capital.

August is traditionally seen as a quieter month for many businesses. Staff take holidays, approval processes slow down and finance teams often operate with reduced capacity.

Unfortunately, invoices do not always stick to the same timetable.

For many SMEs, summer can highlight a challenge that has been building throughout the year: cashflow pressure caused by delayed customer payments. The issue is not necessarily a lack of sales or demand. More often, it is the gap between delivering work and receiving payment.

A business can be trading successfully, winning new orders and maintaining a healthy pipeline while still facing pressure because cash remains tied up in unpaid invoices.

The hidden impact of delayed payments

Long payment terms have become a reality for businesses across sectors including manufacturing, wholesale, recruitment, logistics and professional services.

During August, those payment cycles can

stretch even further. A key contact is on holiday. An invoice approval gets delayed. A routine payment slips into the following month.

Individually, these delays may seem minor. Collectively, they can affect supplier payments, payroll commitments and day-to-day working capital.

It's a situation many business owners recognise: the business is performing, but cashflow remains frustratingly tight.

For others, the challenge may be more acute. Rising costs, cautious customers and ongoing economic pressures mean that delayed payments can quickly become more than an inconvenience, placing genuine strain on trading operations.

Turning invoices into working capital

Earlier this year, we explored how perceptions of invoice finance have evolved and why many of the assumptions surrounding the product no longer reflect the modern reality.

What remains unchanged is the challenge it was designed to address.

Invoice finance enables businesses to unlock cash tied up in outstanding invoices, helping to improve working capital without waiting for customers to settle their accounts.

For some businesses, it can provide support during periods of growth. For others, it can help restore stability when cashflow becomes unpredictable or payment delays begin to impact day-to-day operations.

A changing funding landscape

Although invoice finance is often discussed as a single product, the reality is more varied. Different funders have different strengths, sector preferences and approaches to risk, meaning two facilities can look very different despite carrying the same label. For businesses exploring their options, understanding those differences can be just as important as deciding whether invoice finance is the right solution in the first place.

For businesses seeking to improve working capital, understanding the range of options available can be every bit as important as addressing the cashflow challenge itself.

Maintaining momentum beyond summer

As businesses move towards autumn, many will be preparing for increased activity and new opportunities.

For some, the priority will be growth. For others, it will simply be creating greater stability and reducing the stress that often accompanies unpredictable payment cycles.

Either way, access to working capital remains critical.

After all, success should not be measured solely by the invoices you issue, but by your ability to access the cash you have already earned.



Graeme Harrison is Managing Director of CCBS Group and has spent more than 15 years supporting SMEs with working capital and funding solutions, including extensive experience in invoice finance, asset-based lending and commercial banking. Backed by a team with over 125 years of collective lending experience, Graeme helps businesses navigate funding options and unlock sustainable growth.

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Raymond James Monument charity golf day

Clients, professional contacts and friends of Raymond James Monument were welcomed recently to their Golf Day at the outstanding Close House Golf Club. As corporate partners, guests were presented with the opportunity to play the Lee Westwood Colt Course.

Lots of excellent golf was played despite the challenging winds!

A strong emphasis was put on saying thank you to everyone for their continued support and looking forward to plenty more golf events in the near future.

Thanks is given to the generosity of those who contributed to their chosen charity partner, Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter where over £1,300 was raised.







Mark Brown

Your business is trying to tell you something

By Mark Brown, Director, L4 Financial

Growing businesses rarely run into difficulty overnight.

Long before profits begin to fall or cash becomes tight, there are usually signs that something is changing. Conversations around the leadership table become more reactive, decisions that once seemed straightforward become more difficult, and owners begin asking questions the business cannot answer with confidence.

Individually, none of those things is particularly unusual. Together, they often tell an important story.

One thing I have noticed over the years is that businesses rarely signal the need for change through the numbers alone. More often, they reveal it through the conversations taking place around them.

An owner tells me the business has never been busier, yet cash never seems to build up. Another is convinced they are making money but cannot say which customers or services generate the greatest profit. Someone else admits that management meetings keep returning to the same questions because the information

needed to answer them simply isn't available.

Those comments are rarely the problem. They are usually symptoms of a business that has evolved more quickly than the information supporting it.

Growth creates opportunity, but it also creates complexity. New customers arrive, teams expand, product and service lines evolve, and responsibilities become spread across more people. The processes that worked perfectly well a few years earlier gradually become stretched, often without anyone noticing because the change is so subtle.

I've seen finance teams spend days producing management reports that very few people ever use. I've also sat in leadership meetings where the same strategic questions surface month after month because nobody has the information needed to answer them with confidence.

None of those businesses were poorly run. In fact, many were ambitious, successful organisations. Their finance processes had simply evolved alongside the business without anyone stepping back to ask whether they were still providing the insight needed to support better decisions.

Eventually, every growing business reaches a point where the questions become more strategic. Should we recruit? Can we afford to invest? Is this customer genuinely profitable? Should we open another site? What happens if trading slows?

Those questions cannot be answered well using reporting designed for a business half the size.

The businesses that navigate this stage most

successfully are not necessarily those with the most sophisticated systems. More often, they are the ones prepared to pause, take an objective look at how the finance function supports the business and ask whether it is still fit for purpose.

That is why an independent review of the finance function can be so valuable. It isn't about finding fault or replacing an existing finance team. It is about bringing an experienced external perspective, challenging assumptions, identifying opportunities for improvement and ensuring that financial information, systems and processes have kept pace with the ambitions of the business.

The outcome of the review is usually confidence that decisions are being made using the right information, at the right time and with a clearer understanding of the opportunities and risks ahead.

Businesses are constantly telling us what they need. The question isn't whether the signs are there. It's whether we recognise them early enough to act.

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L4 Financial provides independent reviews of finance functions, fractional Finance Director support and board advisory services to ambitious SMEs.

Mark works with business owners and leadership teams to improve financial visibility, strengthen decision-making and ensure their finance function supports the next stage of growth.

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FW Capital and Mathewson team at Cameron Hall Developments' luxury residential Stoney Wood Development at Wynyard Village

Sunderland firm secures investment to accelerate growth in specialist underfloor heating sector

Washington-based Mathewson Limited, a specialist in underfloor heating (UFH) and screed solutions, has successfully secured a six-figure investment from the North East Elevate Fund which is managed by FW Capital.

The investment in Mathewson is providing working capital to scale operations and acquire stock, plant and equipment. It comes via the Elevate Fund, which is part of the North East Mayor Kim McGuinness' £100m regional investment framework administered by The North East Fund. Along with both the North East Accelerate and North East Spinout Inspire funds, it aims to strengthen access to early-stage finance for start up, scale up and growing companies in North East England, and tackle long-standing market failures that have hampered innovation-led growth in the region.

Mathewson Limited provides a turnkey solution for their clients from design through to installation of underfloor heating systems and screed for both commercial buildings as well as working with property developers on high-specification residential projects. The work they do is helping to address the increasing demand for high-performance, energy-efficient heating systems. Mathewson Limited also offers a niche service that can deliver underfloor heating for modular buildings, using prefabricated underfloor heating mats that

can be incorporated into concrete floor slabs. Mathewson is led by an impressive management team bringing over 40 years of collective experience in the heating and construction industry.

Hannah Toward, Managing Director at Mathewson said: "By securing the funding to handle our working capital needs, we've built a business that is ready to perform at pace. Mathewson Limited was created in response to a fundamental shift in how buildings are designed and heated. As the industry moves towards lowtemperature, lowenergy systems aligned with heat pumps and modern construction methods, underfloor heating has become a critical part of the solution. Mathewson exists to deliver systems that are ready for the future. Our focus is on delivering highperformance systems with the operational capability to support projects at scale — combining technical excellence with the operational capability to support large scale commercial and residential developments. This is shown in our work with Cameron Hall Developments at their luxury residential Stoney Wood Development at Wynyard Village."

"Keith Charlton and the team at FW Capital couldn't have been more supportive, they were patient and ensured we got the funding quickly. That speed and understanding allowed us to move from the planning phase to being fully operational without losing any momentum."

Keith Charlton, Deputy Fund Manager at FW Capital added: "We've supported Mathewson's transition via the provision of working capital. It's great to see them capitalising on our Elevate Fund to support the business and its future plans. We were immediately impressed by the established management team at Mathewson and their extensive sector knowledge, combined with a unique capability to serve the modular building sector. We are proud to support a business that is not only poised for growth but is actively contributing to the UK's energy efficiency goals with the increased demand for underfloor heating."

Jason Hobbs, Chief Executive at The North East Fund said: "Congratulations to Hannah and the team at Mathewson on securing investment from our Elevate Fund, which will help the company to grow further from its Washington base. Improving access to finance for smaller companies from across our region is a key aim of the new funds programme which was launched by Mayor Kim last year. Our team is always happy to have an informal initial chat about eligibility and suitability for investment and so any interested business owners or managers should get in touch."

To find out more about the North East Fund and its Elevate and Accelerate Funds, visit www.northeastfund.org. If you want to find out how we can support your business please email info@fwcapital.co.uk or visit our website www.fwcapital.co.uk

8 Key Trends & Risks for Businesses & Professional Advisors to be aware of in 2026

We sat down with James Clinghan, the MD at Trusted Business Partner, an NACFB Registered Financial Brokerage in the North East, who shared what 8 key trends and risks businesses and professional advisors should be aware of in 2026.



James Clinghan, MD at TBP

1. Rise of short-term, high interest

loans: There's been an explosion in new debt providers offering very fast, high-rate funding to businesses that wouldn't normally qualify for traditional bank support. Some deals can be done in hours, even minutes, but speed often comes at a cost.

2. Lending being sold under the concept of GGS isn't always what it seems: The GGS is a brilliant product I, personally, think it is badly misrepresented or there is poor understanding in the market. The 70% guarantee protects the funder, not the borrower, and there can still be personal liabilities. It's not quite as cut and dry as many think.

3. Keep an eye on the challenger banks: We're at an exciting time in banking. The Big 4, is now the Big 5. While the big banks are increasing regional investment, challenger and specialist lenders now account for a record 60% of lending. They're smaller, more agile, and are bringing some genuinely innovative products to market.

4. Understand where your customers are in relation to their banks: This isn't bank bashing – banking has just changed since I started in the sector in 2005. Sadly, banking is no longer

a white-glove service for everyone, and many clients struggle to get support or even contact their bank. Technology will make this more self-serve and AI will support the next generation of customers. Knowing when the wider market can help is increasingly important.

5. Your personal credit can have an effect on your business credit: We see some really fantastic businesses that struggle to get funding purely due to a Director having a blip against their name but a poor credit score personally can, on occasions, effect your business too – many funders use it as a gauge of whether you're safe to lend to.

6. Credit Scores are becoming more and more important: Business credit scores now play a huge role in funding decisions, rates and trade terms. A strong score builds trust and improves cash flow, while a weak one limits options. Fixing credit early will be crucial in 2026.

7. Prepare for funding earlier: Different funding takes different times to get agreed and over the line. Leaving things until the last minute makes it difficult for everyone and reduces your client's options. Starting early

gives you time to prepare, approach lenders with the right appetite and consider the overall structure. The cheapest option is not always the best. Even if funding is not needed immediately, an early conversation with a professional adviser can help keep your options open.

8. Better to be over capitalised than undercapitalised: The market has seen a rise in PAYG facilities and funders putting in longer term credit facilities for clients – Knowing that you have an extra rainy day fund, or something you can tap into on a quiet month to keep suppliers happy is always great comfort.

Ultimately, none of this is about doom and gloom – it's about being better informed and having the right conversations earlier. The funding market has never been broader or more accessible, but it's also more complex than it's ever been. For business owners and advisors alike, understanding what's really going on behind the products, the lenders and the numbers will make a huge difference to outcomes in 2026 and beyond.

More insights available at www.tbp.co.uk
Get in touch hello@tbp.co.uk



Confessions of an Entrepreneur Live Event

More than 100 business leaders, entrepreneurs, investors, and professional advisors joined Ryecroft Glenton Corporate Finance and Ward Hadaway for the 2026 Confessions of an Entrepreneur Live event, the live version of Carl Swansbury's successful podcast series.

The evening featured an inspiring, no nonsense panel discussion, expertly facilitated by Carl, with successful entrepreneurs and campaigner Heather Mills, Andrew Hulbert, Charlie Hault and Kevin Fasting, who shared honest insights into starting up and building businesses, overcoming adversity and setbacks and achieving success.

Guests also enjoyed networking, canapes and drinks following an evening packed with practical advice, inspiration and entrepreneurial stories.





The Dealmaker

Building more than deals

For most people, corporate finance is measured in funds raised and deal completions. Spend a little time with Carl Swansbury, however, and it quickly becomes clear that, while he relishes the challenge of delivering complex M&A transactions, it's the people behind them that provide the real motivation.

That philosophy has shaped RG Corporate Finance over the past 15 years. As the business celebrates another record year and marks its anniversary with a 22-strong team advising clients across the UK and internationally, Swansbury reflects not just on what has been built, but why it was built.

Fifteen years ago, when Carl joined Rycroft Glenton (RG) to establish its corporate finance business, he wasn't simply taking on a new role. His ambition was to build a specialist advisory business that could compete nationally while remaining firmly rooted in the North East, combining technical expertise with a proactive, entrepreneurial approach.

"When I joined RG, I could have set up independently," he says. "But I believed entrepreneurs deserved more than isolated advice. As businesses grow, they need specialists around them, whether that's tax, accounting, corporate finance, wealth management or strategic advice. Bringing those disciplines together means clients receive joined-up advice throughout their journey."

Rather than viewing corporate finance simply as buying and selling businesses, Carl sees it as helping entrepreneurs navigate every stage of growth.

"We want to work with ambitious business owners throughout the lifecycle of their business and beyond," he explains. "Sometimes that's helping clients raise funding, sometimes supporting an acquisition and sometimes preparing a business for sale. Every business is different, but our objective is always the same: helping owners create more value and giving them more options for the future."

That long-term approach has shaped both RG Corporate Finance and the wider firm.

While the North East remains RG's home, the business has expanded nationally, opening offices in York and London and advising on increasingly complex cross-border transactions.

"Business today is national and international. Around half of the businesses we work with involve overseas buyers or investors. Our job is to make sure our clients can access the right opportunities wherever they are."

Carl is equally passionate about bringing investment into the region as he is about taking North East expertise to the rest of the UK.

"We've always believed the North East has exceptional businesses, inspiring entrepreneurs and highly experienced advisers. One of the things I'm proudest of is helping bring investment into the region and demonstrating that nationally recognised corporate finance advice doesn't have to come from London."

That philosophy extends beyond transactions.

Through industry events, entrepreneur networks and his Confessions of an Entrepreneur podcast, Carl has become a passionate advocate for sharing experience and supporting business leaders.

"I've always believed you can't advise someone until you've educated and inspired them first. That's why we create opportunities for entrepreneurs to hear real experiences from people who've built businesses before them. If those conversations help someone make a better decision, that's valuable in itself."

The same collaborative approach extends to the team he has built.

Over the past 15 years, RG Corporate Finance has grown consistently, with many team members progressing through the business while others have joined to strengthen specialist capabilities.

"We've built a genuinely collaborative team. People learn by working on live transactions across our core sectors, and they progress based on what they deliver. That's created an environment where talented people build rewarding careers while clients benefit from the depth of experience across the firm."

As the business enters its next chapter, Carl's ambitions remain focused on sustainable growth.

"Our objective isn't simply to do more deals. It's to continue attracting great people, supporting ambitious entrepreneurs and building long-term relationships with our clients across the UK."

"We're incredibly proud of what we've achieved over the last 15 years, but we've never stood still. There are always entrepreneurs to support, businesses to help scale and opportunities to create. That's what continues to motivate us every day."

rycroftglenton.com

Recent RG Corporate Finance deals...

Employability, Training and Skills	Technology	Education Staffing
 Provision of Corporate Finance advice to the shareholders of Get Set Employment and Training Limited (Get Set UK) on sale of the Business to Palladium (subsidiary of Global Infrastructure Solutions Inc).	 Provision of Corporate Finance advice to Quorum Development Limited, the leading UK Energy Technology provider, on its sale to Volue, a European Leader in Energy Technology.	 Provision of Corporate Finance advice to the shareholders of AK Teaching Limited on the sale of the business to international acquirer Zen Educate.



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Carl Swansbury



RMT Accountants adds three new recruits to Durham office team

Due to the continuing growth of its Durham office, RMT Accountants & Business Advisors has added to its existing team by bringing in three new recruits.

John Aitken has joined RMT's Belmont Business Park-based team as an assistant manager, with Aidan Turner and Oliver Swan taking up positions as accountants in the Corporate Services team.

John brings more than a decade's experience to his new role, which he gained at professional services firms across the North East.

He holds an Accounting & Finance degree from Northumbria University and is now responsible for managing the delivery of accounting services across the portfolio of SME and family company clients.

He has also taken on the responsibility of managing the office's Making Tax Digital service to relevant clients.

Aidan completed a three-year accountancy apprenticeship before moving to RMT, while Oliver has previously worked in banking and professional services positions.

Aidan holds the Level 3 diploma from the Association of Accounting Technicians, with Oliver holding the Level 2 AAT diploma. Both are now working towards completing their professional qualifications with RMT's support.

John Aitken says: "From our first meeting, I got a very positive impression of the firm and the people here, and I could see the opportunities for personal and professional progression that joining RMT would offer.

"I'm enjoying being part of a friendly, professional team that's been more than willing to help me as I've settled in.

"There's a lot for me to learn, but I'm very pleased to have made the move here and excited about my future career prospects."

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

David Holloway, director at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, adds: "John, Aidan and Oliver are all very impressive people and practitioners, and have already shown themselves to be excellent additions to the team.

"Our business is growing across all our different service lines and we're continuing to recruit talented people to ensure our clients always have access to the expertise they require."

Sumer is the UK and Ireland's leading mid-market accountancy practice, delivering professional support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and employs over 3,000 staff across more than 60 offices.

r-m-t.co.uk



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**I think clients,
above everything
else, still hugely
appreciate the
“human touch”.**

Claire Naughten

Solicitor of the month

This month Northern Insight talks to...

Claire Naughten

Partner, Muckle LLP

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

At school I wasn't entirely sure of my career intentions, but after graduating university with a history degree, I quickly decided to convert my studies to law after speaking with other students taking that path. I was the first person in my family to attend any form of Further Education, and my parents and teachers were hugely supportive of my ambitions.

I took the graduate diploma in law, then legal practice course at Northumbria University, before completing my training contract at a large North East firm. I moved to the real estate team at Muckle LLP in January 2015 and have never looked back!

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

I primarily work in real estate finance, acting for lenders in all sorts of transactions including secured property, development funding and refinancing. My role is to act for the lender overseeing due diligence and reporting, managing condition precedents and working with clients, brokers, valuers and the borrower's solicitor to ensure loans are completed as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The work can be fast-paced and demanding, particularly in times of economic uncertainty and with increasingly strict regulatory requirements. We can help by building close relationships with clients, maintaining service levels and making sure we are a trusted pair of hands to get the transaction done.

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

Technology is having a massive impact throughout our sector. AI tools can now summarise documents, help with legal research and draft correspondence far more quickly than traditional methods. I think it's important to remember that these technologies do not replace professional judgement, ethical responsibilities and client-focused advice. Instead, they should be viewed as tools to enhance legal practice rather than substitute it. How the impact of technology will continue to evolve is still somewhat unknown and I think clients, above everything else, still hugely appreciate the "human touch".

Equally, for anyone working in the legal sector, particularly on property transactions, the demands on solicitors to satisfy compliance and regulatory requirements is a challenging part of the job, especially over the last few years. On the whole, clients accept the need for this, but for me, it's still one of the more frustrating aspects of the job!

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

That lawyers are unapproachable and the legal system is there to work against them!

What are the key qualities that make a great solicitor?

It's not just technical ability and professionalism, but the ability to build relationships and understand your client's business and the market in which they operate. A human touch and genuinely enjoying the work we're involved with really makes the difference.

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

I am lucky in that I genuinely love my job and the people I work with! The work is interesting and varied and I've built up some really strong relationships over the years with clients and colleagues. I especially enjoy being part of the graduate recruitment process and being able to meet brilliant candidates who want to be part of the firm's future. As one of our trainee supervisors, I also work closely with trainees in the real estate department. As someone who has gone from assistant solicitor to partner at Muckle, it's hugely rewarding to see people who are just entering the industry grow and succeed.

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

That clients will value honesty over everything else. While we always aim to deliver first class service, sometimes we ultimately have to tell clients what they don't want to hear. That is part of our role as a solicitor - to manage expectations, deliver the uncomfortable truth and seek the best outcome we can for our clients.

Who are your heroes and mentors?

I'm not sure about heroes but I'm lucky to work with some inspiring and all-round brilliant colleagues who have helped me grow both personally and professionally over the last 10 plus years.

How do you like to unwind?

I have two young children who like to keep me busy! I do enjoy a Friday family movie night (with a glass of wine for the grown-ups), an early morning walk before the daily madness starts and spending time with friends when we can fit it in.

www.muckle-llp.com

Muckle continues to expand as two specialist lawyers return

Leading law firm Muckle LLP is continuing to invest in the best legal talent in the region, and is now over 200-strong, with the appointment of two expert lawyers, Claire Cutmore and Roland Fairlamb.

Investing in the region's best

Renowned for being one of the region's leading employers, the multidisciplinary law firm was proud to welcome Claire and Roland back to the fold, strengthening their fast-growing construction and employment teams respectively. The two appointments mark a significant milestone for Muckle, bringing the number of people across its legal and non-legal teams to over 200 and signifying the firm's continuous, sustainable growth.

The rapidly growing demand for specialist legal support in the North East is just one reason why the firm is continuing to expand and recruit legal advisors who understand the unique complexities of their sectors. But the firm has also maintained its reputation as an outstanding employer with a people-first culture that leaves its colleagues feeling empowered to 'return home' and make a significant impact for clients.

Returning talent, new beginnings

Experienced partner in contentious construction, Claire Cutmore rejoins the firm's construction team, having previously worked at Muckle 11 years ago before moving on to national law firms. Claire returns with more than 25 years in contentious construction law behind her, building on the firm's already diverse construction offering and the breadth of expertise in the team.

Claire said "I'm so happy to be back working in the region, especially at a time when demand for contentious construction work is significantly rising. I'm delighted to be rejoining a caring, experienced team that has exciting ambitions for growth."

Claire's focus will be helping businesses resolve issues involving delays, defects, payment disputes or contractual disagreements quickly and commercially.

Roland Fairlamb returns as an associate solicitor in Muckle's expanding employment team. He first joined the employment team in 2018 as a solicitor, before practising at a specialist employment firm from 2024. With a decade of experience in employment law, Roland advises businesses and individuals on a range of contentious and non-contentious matters, from tribunal claims to restructuring and workplace policies as well as transactional support work. And with employment legislation continuously evolving with the Employment Rights Act 2025 taking effect, the need for Roland's specific expertise has never been greater.

Roland said "Muckle isn't afraid to be bold and do things differently when it comes to prioritising its people, clients and communities, and that's always stood out to me. I feel privileged to be able to rejoin the firm with a fresh set of eyes and help clients in the sector navigate changing employment legislation."

Returning as an associate solicitor, Roland will not only be focused on the team's ongoing expansion and success, but he'll also be training the next generation of legal talent by supporting the team's junior members with structured training.

People-first culture

With Muckle's unwavering focus on making its people feel valued and supported, coupled with its deep commitment to its communities, it's no surprise that former colleagues are drawn back to the firm. In fact, experienced associate solicitor in Muckle's real estate team, Rhiannon Griffiths, returned to the firm in May 2026, wanting to be back at a firm where the values and culture aligned with her own.

As one of the first firms in the North East to achieve B Corp certification, Muckle has long understood the importance of giving back. Through supporting charities with grant funding from the Muckle Fund at the Community Foundation, carrying out pro bono work, and providing employees with two paid volunteering days per year, the firm has always demonstrated that business can and should be used as a force for good.

Muckle has also maintained its focus on driving social mobility and providing extensive learning and development opportunities through its North East Apprenticeship Scheme and work experience programme, which help talented young people access non-traditional routes into law.

In September 2025, the firm was reaccredited with Investors in People (IIP) Platinum status, reflecting the way it genuinely supports its people. And with only 7% of global organisations achieving Platinum status, it's a testament to how much Muckle stands out as being an ethical, forward-thinking employer.

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



Roland Fairlamb and Claire Cutmore



Hay & Kilner celebrates 80 years in true 80s style

Hay & Kilner welcomed 200 clients, contacts and friends to its annual Summer Social, which this year celebrated the firm's 80th anniversary with an 80s-themed evening at its Newcastle headquarters in The Lumen.

Guests enjoyed retro-inspired food, drinks and entertainment, including a DeLorean, arcade games and ice cream, while reconnecting with colleagues and making new connections.

Managing Partner Jonathan Waters said: "Celebrating our 80th anniversary with so many clients, contacts and friends made for a truly special evening. It was a fantastic opportunity to reflect on our journey, celebrate together and look forward to the future."





Kate Fenwick

Why a 360-degree approach is changing family law

Family law is often viewed through the lens of individual legal disputes, divorce, financial settlements or arrangements for children.

In reality, however, the issues facing families today are becoming increasingly interconnected, with many cases involving business interests, international assets, pensions, trusts and long-term wealth planning alongside deeply personal relationships.

As these complexities grow, so too does the need for legal advice that looks beyond a single issue and considers the wider picture.

That is why more firms are moving towards a 360-degree approach to private family law, one that brings together strategic advice, specialist legal expertise, dispute resolution and advocacy under one roof to provide clients with seamless support from the earliest stages of a matter through to its conclusion.

At Hay & Kilner, this philosophy has been further strengthened with the appointment of Kate Fenwick as Partner and Head of Family and Finance. Kate joins the firm after a distinguished career at the independent Bar, where she built a reputation for advising and representing clients in some of the most complex family law matters, both nationally and internationally.

Her arrival reflects a wider shift within the profession towards delivering truly integrated legal services that place clients at the centre of every decision.

One of the biggest challenges for individuals

experiencing family disputes is uncertainty. Whether someone is considering separation, dealing with complex financial arrangements or navigating issues involving children, they often face a series of difficult decisions with significant emotional and financial consequences.

Obtaining the right advice at an early stage can make a substantial difference.

A holistic approach means clients are supported not only with immediate legal questions but with a strategy that considers every aspect of their circumstances. This may involve working alongside colleagues specialising in private wealth, property, corporate law or international matters to ensure every element of a client's position is properly understood before decisions are made.

This joined-up thinking is particularly valuable as family structures and financial arrangements become more sophisticated.

Many modern relationships involve business ownership, inherited wealth, overseas property, pensions accumulated over lengthy careers or assets held across multiple jurisdictions. Others involve international relocation, blended families or cohabitation rather than marriage.

The firm also advises modern families on matters ranging from surrogacy and step-parent adoption to antenuptial agreements, while providing support and representation when

relationships break down.

These situations require specialist expertise that extends well beyond traditional family law.

Equally important is recognising that court proceedings are not always the most appropriate route. Alternative methods of resolving disputes, including negotiation and other forms of non-court dispute resolution, are increasingly helping families reach constructive outcomes while reducing both cost and conflict.

Where litigation does become necessary, having access to experienced advocacy from the outset provides continuity and consistency throughout the process.

Kate's background as both an experienced barrister and Deputy District Judge offers a unique perspective in this regard. Having represented clients in the Family Court, High Court and Court of Appeal, she understands not only how cases are argued but also how judicial decisions are reached. That insight helps clients make informed choices about the most effective strategy for achieving the best possible outcome.

Ultimately, family law is about people rather than legal processes.

Clients are often facing some of the most significant moments of their lives, making decisions that will affect their families and finances for many years to come. They need advisers who understand both the legal complexities and the personal impact of those decisions.

At Hay & Kilner, our enhanced 360-degree Private Family offering has been designed with exactly that objective in mind: providing tailored, end-to-end support that reflects the realities of modern family life and delivers practical solutions for every stage of the journey.

www.hay-kilner.co.uk

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**A fantastic
achievement
for the
whole team.**



David Pritchard with Peter Jennings

Sintons BD and Marketing Team crowned winners at prestigious Northern Law Awards 2026

The Business Development and Marketing team at Sintons has been named the winner of the Professional Support of the Year category at the Northern Law Awards 2026.

This major victory marks a significant milestone for the firm, highlighting the team's integral role in driving Sintons strategic growth and maintaining its reputation as a leading legal powerhouse in the North. The win is particularly poignant as it follows a landmark year for the department, which saw them take home the 'Marketing Team of the Year' trophy at the North East Marketing Awards 2025.

The Northern Law Awards celebrate the exceptional talent and success of the legal profession across the region. Securing the Professional Support of the Year title underscores the team's ability to provide high-level strategic value that goes far beyond traditional administrative support, directly contributing to the firm's commercial success and client engagement. The back-to-back recognition across both the legal and marketing sectors reflects a team operating at the peak of its industry. By blending innovative digital strategies with traditional relationship-building, the team has been instrumental in elevating the Sintons brand and supporting the firm's specialist legal departments during a period of sustained expansion.

David Pritchard, Head of Business Development and Marketing at Sintons, commented: "To win Professional Support of the Year at the Northern Law Awards is a fantastic achievement for the whole team. It's a testament to their hard work, creativity, and the genuine impact they have on the firm's success every day.

Coming off the back of our win at the North East Marketing Awards last year, this latest recognition shows that we are maintaining that momentum. We pride ourselves on being more than just a support function; we are strategic partners to our legal teams, and it's wonderful to see that dedication recognised by our peers in the legal community."

The judges noted the team's seamless integration with legal practice groups and their forward-thinking approach to business development in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

www.sintons.co.uk



L-R: Sarah Johnston, Danial Shafe

Mincoffs increases capacity in employment and corporate teams

A leading North East law firm has announced two solicitor appointments to bolster the offering in key teams.

Newcastle-based Mincoffs Solicitors has welcomed Danial Shafe to its corporate team and Sarah Johnston to its employment department.

Prior to joining the firm, Danial trained and qualified at a legal consultancy which provided outsourced contract management for banks, asset managers and hedge funds.

During this time Danial, who also has a master's degree in banking and finance, advised on a wide range of financial derivatives and led support to a FTSE 100 company. In his new role at Mincoffs, he will support the team on a wide range of corporate transactions.

"I am delighted to have joined the corporate team at Mincoffs. The firm has an impressive presence in the North East and renowned expertise in the corporate sector that goes beyond the region, and I am incredibly excited to be a part of it.

"I look forward to continuing to develop my skills within the team and learning from some of the best in the business!"

Originally from East Sussex, Sarah trained and qualified at the Newcastle office of a transatlantic firm, where she gained valuable experience across a range of complex legal disciplines.

Joining Mincoffs as a solicitor in the employment team, she will work closely with partner Nick Smith and associate solicitor Laura Liddle to advise clients on the full spectrum of employment matters, including employment tribunal disputes, employment contracts and policies, redundancies and restructures, and disciplinary issues.

"I am incredibly pleased to have joined the employment team at Mincoffs. The firm holds a strong reputation across the North East and I am looking forward to being a part of that established presence.

"Since joining everyone has been extremely welcoming and integrating into the firm has been a smooth process.

"With the recent shake up to UK employment law, it is a great time to be joining the department. I am keen to get stuck in, develop

my skills and support the team's ongoing growth."

The new starters are the latest in a string of new appointments across the firm over the last 12 months, including dispute resolution solicitor Jade Kennedy, corporate solicitor Charlotte Smyth, family solicitor Georgia Meyer, head of culture and people Aoife Owens, and commercial associate solicitor Chris Bowen.

Paul Hughes, senior partner at the firm and head of the corporate team, said: "We are delighted to grow the team at Mincoffs and welcome Danial and Sarah to the firm.

"While early on in their legal careers, both Danial and Sarah have gained valuable experience and insight which will provide a strong foundation as they move into the corporate and employment teams at Mincoffs.

"I have no doubt they will be an asset to their departments and we wish both of them every success in their new roles."

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

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

For more information visit
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Homegrown solicitor strengthens Richard Reed Dispute Resolution team as firm expands insolvency expertise



L-R: Alex Howarth, Phil Moir, Kat Moody, Lewis Cassap

Richard Reed Solicitors has strengthened its Dispute Resolution department with the appointment of solicitor Alex Howarth, reinforcing the firm's commitment to developing local talent and expanding its expertise in commercial litigation and insolvency work across the North East.

A Sunderland-born solicitor with a strong regional profile, Alex joins the firm's six-strong Dispute Resolution team, led by Director Phil Moir, bringing experience across a broad range of matters and a clear focus on building long-term relationships with clients, professional advisers and businesses throughout the region.

Alex graduated from Newcastle University, before completing the Legal Practice Course at Northumbria University, beginning his legal career working as a clinical negligence paralegal before securing a training contract and qualifying as a solicitor in 2021. He has since gained experience at firms across the region, building a broad foundation in dispute resolution work across both private and commercial sectors. Alex said his move to Richard Reed Solicitors reflects both

the strength of the firm's reputation and its growing presence within Sunderland's business community.

Alex added, "Richard Reed has a really strong presence in the region, and what stood out to me was how visible and connected the firm already is within the local business community. The new city centre office reflects the confidence and investment happening in Sunderland, and it's exciting to be part of a firm that is growing alongside the city. I'm looking forward to building relationships, getting involved in networking and supporting clients with practical, commercially focused advice."

Alex's work at the firm will predominantly focus on dispute resolution matters, with particular emphasis on insolvency-related disputes, commercial litigation and property-related conflicts. He is also expected to support growing demand in landlord and tenant disputes as legislative changes to renters' rights continue to evolve, prompting landlords and businesses to review processes and documentation.

He believes businesses increasingly require clear, commercially grounded advice in a challenging economic environment where recovery of debts and enforcement of contractual rights has become more complex.

Alex adds, "Clients don't just want legal answers, they want practical solutions that help them move forward. Disputes can often become emotional or unnecessarily complicated, so my approach is to simplify the process, explain options clearly and focus on outcomes. Attention to detail and communication are essential, particularly when balancing

commercial and private client interests."

Alongside his legal practice, Alex is passionate about Sunderland's wider cultural and sporting landscape. A lifelong Sunderland AFC season ticket holder, he also enjoys cricket, running, cycling, Formula 1 and live music. He is particularly interested in how legal services can support the city's growing creative and sports-related industries, including music and esports.

Phil Moir, Director and Head of Dispute Resolution at Richard Reed Solicitors said the appointment strengthens both the team's technical expertise and its client-focused approach.

"We are delighted to welcome Alex to Richard Reed Solicitors. His experience across a wide range of dispute resolution matters, particularly insolvency, enhances the services we can offer clients in-house and strengthens our ability to manage complex matters without the need for external support.

Equally important is his approach, at Richard Reed, we place real value on relationships, clear communication and commercial awareness. Alex shares those values and brings a practical, solutions-focused mindset that will be invaluable to our clients.

As a Sunderland native, he also understands the importance of being actively involved in the local business community. We are committed to supporting the continued growth of the city, and Alex will play an important role in strengthening our presence and connections across the region."

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Erica Turner, the law firm's head of legal, and Amie Callan, head of operations reflected on Jacksons' proud heritage - which is intertwined with Teesside's rich industrial history - while also taking an ambitious look at the future as a go-to, trusted practice for commercial expertise.





Pre-Nuptial Agreements: Why every couple should consider one

Whilst discussing a pre-nuptial agreement may feel uncomfortable, many couples are increasingly recognising that having honest conversations about finances before marriage is a sensible and practical step. Rebecca Cresswell at Sweeney Miller Law considers they should be considered like an insurance policy, “you have one, but you hope not to use it”.



Rebecca Cresswell

The Benefits of a Pre-Nuptial Agreement

When Should a Couple Consider a Pre-Nup?

Whilst pre-nuptial agreements are often associated with wealthy individuals, they may be beneficial for any couple. One of the primary reasons couples choose to enter into a pre-nuptial agreement is to protect assets they owned before the marriage. You may consider a pre-nup in the following circumstances:

- One party owns significant assets prior to the marriage such as property, savings and investments or pensions.
- A family or any business is involved.
- Safeguarding Family Wealth and Inheritances.
- There is a substantial difference in income or wealth.
- Either party has children from a previous relationship.
- Property is owned overseas.
- Supporting Second Marriages and Blended Families

A pre-nup can clearly identify these assets and set out how they should be treated in the event of a divorce, helping to avoid future disputes.

Providing financial certainty

A pre-nup encourages couples to discuss finances openly before marriage. By setting out expectations from the outset, both parties have greater certainty about their financial position and future arrangements. This can reduce anxiety and provide clarity should circumstances change later.

Reducing conflict in the event of separation

Divorce proceedings can become lengthy, stressful and expensive, particularly where there is disagreement about finances. Whilst a pre-nuptial agreement cannot prevent relationship breakdown, it can significantly narrow the issues in dispute and assist parties in reaching an agreement more quickly.

How to maximise the chances of a pre-nup being upheld

To ensure a pre-nuptial agreement is given significant weight by the court, it is important that:

- Both parties enter into the agreement voluntarily.
- There is full and frank financial disclosure.

- Each party receives independent legal advice.
- The agreement is signed well before the wedding.
- The terms are fair and do not leave one party in financial hardship.

Conclusion

Far from being a sign of mistrust, a pre-nuptial agreement can be viewed as a sensible form of financial planning. By encouraging transparency and allowing couples to make informed decisions about their future, a pre-nup can provide peace of mind and help protect both parties' interests.

Every relationship is unique, and specialist legal advice should always be obtained before entering into a pre-nuptial agreement. With the right advice and careful preparation, a pre-nup can provide valuable certainty and protection whilst supporting a strong foundation for married life.

Contact Rebecca Cresswell to arrange an appointment today on
Rebecca.cresswell@sweeneyml.com



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Preparing for the new unfair dismissal landscape

By Sara Devennie, CLR Law

What employers should do before and after January 2027.

The most significant change to UK unfair dismissal law in over a decade will take effect on 1 January 2027. You might think that you do not need to concern yourself with this yet, but read on...

Under the Employment Rights Act 2025, the qualifying period for an ordinary unfair dismissal claim reduces from two years' continuous employment to just six months, and the statutory cap on compensatory awards is removed. Employees who start work for a new employer from 1 July 2026 are already accruing time towards the new threshold, so some of this summer's hires will reach six months' service on the very day the reforms take effect. It is also worth being clear about what the reforms do not include: an earlier proposal for a lower-bar dismissal process during a statutory "initial period" was rejected in favour of a straightforward six-month cut-off. There is no reduced standard of fairness to rely on - tribunals will assess these dismissals exactly as they assess any other.

Many employers have treated the first two years of employment as relatively low-risk, provided there was no discrimination or other automatically unfair reason. That approach ends in January: six months passes quickly once recruitment, induction and training are accounted for.

What should employers be doing now to prepare?

Preparation should begin now. Employers should review probationary arrangements. Although probation remains contractual rather than statutory, a standard six-month period may no longer leave time to identify concerns, put support in place and reach a reasoned decision before protection arises. Shorter review intervals and earlier management intervention are worth considering.

Performance management deserves equal scrutiny. Managers should be trained to

identify concerns promptly, set measurable objectives, give constructive feedback and keep contemporaneous records - concerns raised informally but never documented leave little evidence if a dismissal is later challenged, and robust documentation matters more once protection arises after only six months.

Policies should be reviewed so that disciplinary, capability and probation procedures are consistent and legally compliant, with line managers clear on when to start formal processes and that dismissals rest on a potentially fair reason, properly evidenced. Recruitment and onboarding should also be reviewed so that expectations and standards are communicated from the outset.

The removal of the compensatory cap raises the stakes, particularly for senior or highly remunerated employees whose losses may exceed the previous £123,543 limit - though compensation will still reflect actual, evidenced loss rather than becoming unlimited in every

case. The consequences of getting it wrong are not only financial: the national employment tribunal backlog now exceeds 500,000 cases, up around 50% in the past year, and businesses with fewer than 50 employees are already involved in roughly seven in ten claims. A poorly handled dismissal can mean years of uncertainty before a case is even heard.

Ultimately, the reforms should encourage you as an employer to focus less on an employee's length of service and more on the quality of your employment practices. Organisations that invest now in manager training, effective probation management, clear documentation and fair procedures are likely to be best placed to minimise both the number and the cost of unfair dismissal claims when the new regime takes effect in January 2027.

Sara Devennie hello@clrlaw.co.uk
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Sara Devennie



*"WHAT IF WE DON'T CHANGE AT ALL...
AND SOMETHING MAGICAL JUST HAPPENS?"*

Business Distress and Insolvency is no joke

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Barry Speker OBE

Straight talk with Speker

By Barry Speker OBE

Out of the manufactured Makerfield majority, the Labour Party provided a coronation for Andy Burnham as the new Prime Minister - no election, no challenge, no policies or manifesto and no interviews or scrutiny. He even avoided a grilling from Laura Kuenssberg until he had been in post for over a week.

We now have the honeymoon period. The gimmick of 'Number 10 in the North' and a few minor crowdpleasing gestures - a £2 cap on bus fares, small reduction of vat on fuel, minor selective cut on business rates and a stated aim to ban rough sleeping, which he tried and failed to achieve in Manchester.

Nothing of significance said as to the immigration crisis, our precarious inadequate defence, unaffordable overblown welfare system...

The media are giving him a soft ride in view of the PM's mateyness, claimed skill as a communicator and a major cabinet shuffle to remove Starmer loyalists.

Will the professed aim of spreading the government by devolution and prioritising the provinces succeed or kill the golden goose which is our highly successful and internationally acclaimed capital?

The recent death of Kevin Keegan from cancer was widely publicised and tributes flowed in from far and wide, nationally and internationally. From modest beginnings at Scunthorpe United he was spotted by Bill Shankley and signed by Liverpool where he starred in a team which won many trophies including the European Cup. He also starred for England and became captain. He had success with Hamburg and was twice European Footballer of the year. He played for Newcastle United from 1982 to 1984 during which time the club won promotion.

He returned as Manager in 1992 and created a successful and entertaining team which won promotion and were twice runners up in the Premiership. He then went on to manage Fulham, England and Manchester City.

From such a glittering career he particularly endeared himself to Newcastle United and its supporters to whom he remains a legend and still features in chants.

On a daily basis fans laid flowers, shirts, pictures and memorabilia.

It will surely be fitting for a lasting tribute - a statue or dedication of a stand. He deserves nothing less.

Christopher Nolan's film *The Odyssey* looks like the cinematographic event of the year.

Visually and graphically stunning with some excellent acting, most people may not



be concerned by the dubious casting, the anachronisms and inappropriate colloquial dialogue. Scholars have pointed out there is significant uncertainty about the authorship of the epic, or who Homer actually was and even whether he existed. I am sure such niceties need not detract from enjoyment of the film.

No one can doubt that the Americans can put on a great show. Thus the climax of the World Cup should not have disappointed. Jennifer Hudson blasting out the Stars and Stripes - who would we get to do the same for God Save The King?

Then a 30minute half-time starring Shakira, Justin Bieber, Madonna and even Robbie Williams. All rather more exciting than the humdrum final itself.

At least there was one exciting game in the 3rd place play off, with England beating favourites France 6-4. Even Thomas Tuchel approved of that performance!

Not quite a sporting headline but I succeeded in winning some silverware- the Napier Clavering Trophy for the top score in the doubles at the annual Northumberland Masonic Golf Competition at Arcot Hall. I'm available for the 2027 Ryder Cup!

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**I help shape
how the
firm presents
itself.**

Caroline Smith

Marketing and Media Matters

Northern Insight talks to...

Caroline Smith

Marketing Director, Swinburne Maddison

What are the main marketing priorities you are focused on in your current role?

My main priorities are raising the profile of Swinburne Maddison, making sure our marketing activity supports the firm's strategic goals, and helping our teams communicate clearly with existing and prospective clients. In a professional services environment, it is important that marketing builds trust, strengthens relationships and shows the value of our expertise.

How would you describe the scope of your current marketing role and the areas you lead day to day?

My role covers a broad mix of strategic and hands-on marketing activity, from brand, campaigns and communications through to events, content, digital marketing and business development support. Day to day, I help shape how the firm presents itself, support lawyers with client-focused activity and make sure marketing is aligned with the needs of the business.

How has marketing shaped your career across different sectors?

One of the things I have enjoyed most about marketing is that it has allowed me to build a career across a really varied mix of sectors. I started my career in finance, then moved into outdoor, sports and fashion before working in professional services. That breadth has given me a strong appreciation of different audiences, brand personalities and commercial priorities, while also showing me that good marketing principles carry across every sector.

Which brands or campaigns influence the way you approach your current role?

I am influenced by confident brands that communicate clearly and consistently. In professional services, the strongest marketing is often not the loudest, but the most trusted and useful. I look to organisations that balance expertise with a human tone, and that make complex information feel accessible and relevant.

What strength do you rely on most in your current marketing role?

I rely most on being able to see the bigger picture while still paying attention to the details. Marketing in a law firm has to be commercially focused, but it also needs consistency and care. I think my strength is joining those things together and helping turn ideas into practical, effective activity.

What recent marketing achievement or project in your current role are you proudest of?

The achievement I am proudest of so far is the rebrand project. It has been a significant piece of work because it goes to the heart of how the firm presents itself, how people understand who we are, and how we communicate our values. It reflects who Swinburne Maddison truly is – the people, the culture our history and brought this together consistently, in a way that should have a lasting impact.

What piece of advice shapes how you lead marketing now?

A piece of advice I was given at Berghaus, and which has carried across every sector I have worked in, is to keep the client or customer at the heart of everything you do – it sounds obvious but it's amazing how quickly focus can move away. That has stayed with me because, regardless of the sector, effective marketing must start with understanding the audience. It is easy for marketing to become busy, but the most effective work is purposeful. I try to keep asking what our clients need, what we are trying to achieve, who we are speaking to and what action or impression we want to create.

How do you see the marketing landscape changing, and how is that influencing your current strategy?

The marketing landscape is becoming more digital, more content-led and more focused on authenticity. For a law firm, that means clients and contacts want useful insight, clear communication and a sense of the people behind the expertise. That is influencing my approach by continually demonstrating our experience and knowledge, stronger brand positioning and more joined-up activity across channels.

How do you stay energised and creative alongside the demands of your marketing role?

I'm an extrovert, so I enjoy being around people, collaborating and feeding off the energy of others. Working for a dynamic business of around 100 people keeps work interesting, because there is always a good balance between strategy, deadlines and detail. I find the creative side of brand, content and campaigns really motivating. I also have a life outside of work with hobbies and interests that keep me active and I really value the perspective that gives me.

swinburnemaddison.co.uk



Love, Money and Common Sense: Why prenups are becoming a business essential

For years, prenuptial agreements have suffered from an image problem. The word “prenup” often conjures images of celebrity marriages, family fortunes and planning for failure before the wedding has even taken place. Yet the reality is very different.

Increasingly, business owners, professionals, investors and families are viewing prenuptial agreements as a sensible part of financial planning. Much like insuring your home, business or income, a prenup is not about expecting something to go wrong. It is about putting sensible protections in place should life take an unexpected turn.

For many, particularly those who have built successful businesses, acquired investment portfolios or received support from the Bank of Mum and Dad, the conversation is no longer whether a prenup is necessary. It is whether they can afford the uncertainty of not having one.

Protecting more than personal wealth

A prenuptial agreement can protect assets owned before marriage, preserve family wealth, inheritances and gifts, safeguard business interests and help ensure children from previous relationships remain provided for as intended.

Just as importantly, it encourages open and honest discussions about finances before marriage. By setting out expectations in advance, couples can make their own decisions about how assets and liabilities should be treated, rather than leaving those decisions to the courts should the relationship break down.

For business owners, this can be particularly valuable. A company often represents years of hard work and may support employees, fellow shareholders and future generations. Protecting that legacy is not about mistrust; it is about sensible stewardship.

A well-prepared prenup can also reduce uncertainty, minimise conflict and potentially avoid significant legal costs associated with contested divorce proceedings.

What happens without one?

Many couples still enter marriage without a prenup, often believing they simply do not need one.

However, without an agreement in place, assets may be divided according to legal principles rather than personal wishes. Pre-marital wealth can become subject to claims, family businesses and investments may be exposed to risk, and inheritances earmarked for children could be affected.

The financial implications can be significant, but so too can the emotional impact. Uncertainty about property, pensions, savings and investments often adds further strain during what is already a difficult period.

In many cases, a prenup is far less costly than the consequences of resolving disputes after a relationship has ended.

Why your will should be part of the conversation

While discussions often focus on the prenup itself, private client lawyers regularly stress the importance of reviewing Wills at the same time.

Marriage is a major life event that can have significant consequences for estate planning.

Questions worth considering include whether property ownership remains appropriate, whether assets should ultimately pass to children or wider family members, and whether a surviving spouse should have the right to remain in a property during their lifetime while preserving the underlying inheritance for future generations.

Families may also need to review guardianship arrangements for children, consider the impact of Inheritance Tax planning and ensure family businesses are properly protected for the next generation.

Equally, following a separation or during or post-divorce proceedings, existing Wills should always be reviewed to ensure they still reflect current intentions. Wills are automatically revoked by a subsequent marriage (unless they were made in expectation of marriage).

Not getting married? Don't assume you're protected

Many people are surprised to learn that cohabiting couples do not enjoy the same legal protections as married couples, despite the enduring myth of the "common law spouse".

This remains the position today, although the Government recently launched a consultation exploring whether cohabiting couples should benefit from greater financial and inheritance rights in the future. While the proposals could lead to significant reform, they are not yet law.

Until any changes are introduced, cohabiting couples should give careful thought to property ownership, declarations of trust, inheritance planning and ensuring a surviving partner is adequately protected. Drawing up a cohabitation agreement should be given significant consideration. Those who separate should also consider whether a joint tenancy should be severed to safeguard their share of a property.

Taking a joined-up approach

The strongest outcomes are rarely achieved through legal advice alone.

Family solicitors, private client lawyers, financial advisers and accountants all play an important role in helping individuals and families protect wealth, plan succession and make informed decisions about the future.

Whether the focus is preserving a family business, protecting an inheritance or supporting the next generation, joined-up planning provides clarity and confidence.

The bottom line

A prenuptial agreement is not about expecting a marriage to fail. It is about thoughtful planning, sensible risk management and protecting the people and assets that matter most.

When combined with a review of your Will and broader financial arrangements, it forms part of a much bigger conversation about safeguarding family wealth, business interests and future generations.

After all, good planning is not about expecting the worst. It's about being prepared enough to enjoy the best with confidence.

Thinking about marriage, family wealth or succession planning?

As co-authors of this article, Emma Canham, Senior Associate in Family Law, and Stephen Bell, Senior Associate in Private Client Services at BHP Law, regularly advise individuals, families and business owners on protecting assets, planning for the future and navigating life's biggest decisions with confidence.

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Emma Canham



Northernism

By the time this article is published we will have a new prime minister.

What might a Burnham prime ministership mean for the innovation sector that Hargreaves Elsworth serves? Mr Burnham gave some clues in his speech at the People's History Museum in Manchester.

He said: "It comes from running sound finances, as we have done in Greater Manchester, which in turn gives businesses the stability and confidence to invest, increasing their productivity and adoption of new technology.

"It comes from placing our universities at the heart of local economies – as all the Mayors do - and bringing the innovation-led approach through start-ups and scale-ups."

What can we take from this? Will there be financial support to businesses in the North East to adopt new technologies? Can we expect to see increased funding and resource directed to the region's universities to assist spin-out companies? Will ONE North East return?

Another key change will be the establishment of No 10 North, which, will support the regions on three clear tasks:

- Reform of essential utilities;
- Reindustrialisation; and
- The regeneration of places.

The innovation sector may benefit from reindustrialisation, assuming that the reindustrialisation is at the higher end of manufacture.



Dominic Elsworth

Mr Burnham also described a Britain First industrial policy agenda: "We are such an inventive country and, going forward, we can be the world's leading innovation nation. This is the key to higher growth and I want more world-beating British manufacturers and service providers at the frontier of new technology and exporting to the world.

"I will back our scientists, technologists, entrepreneurs and creatives – as I have done here– and show how Britain will be the Innovation Nation of the next decade. We will get better at capturing full value from their ideas for UK plc by changing the culture in Whitehall when it comes to backing British industry.

"For too long, UK public procurement policy has been based on chasing cut-price deals around the world rather than helping our own British-based suppliers become more stable and competitive, and we will do that to make sure British-based companies

are in a better position to win contracts.

"We need to safeguard sovereign manufacturing and production capability across the country in critical sectors like steel, defence, energy, food and farming – rather than just being prepared to let it just go as we have sadly done in the past."

Over the coming months we will see how these words of hope manifest themselves. Will we see an invigoration of activity in the North Sea, both in the renewables and oil/gas sectors - will the businesses involved in these areas would be happy to see such a move? Will the advanced manufacturing sector that already exists in our region receive more orders to fulfil the country's defence needs - if so, this would be welcome. Policy takes time to play out so, for now, all we can do is watch on.

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What will a Burnham Government mean for employers?

Tom Clarke is a Senior Associate at specialist employment law firm, Collingwood Legal. Tom outlines the potential impact of a new Prime Minister on employment rights.

Now that Andy Burnham has been confirmed as Prime Minister, for employers across the North East and beyond, attention now turns from speculation to substance: what does a Burnham government actually mean for the way you run your business, and what should you be doing about it?

At this stage nobody can say with certainty how a Burnham government would legislate. But several signals are already visible, and each carries practical implications worth thinking through.

Employment Rights Act 2025: continuity, not reversal

The Employment Rights Act, the most significant overhaul of UK employment law in a generation, already has significant momentum behind it and is being implemented in phases. Nothing in Burnham's public statements suggests he would pause or unwind it. That means that the significant change to the law on unfair dismissal is set to stay, providing employees with full employment rights after six months of employment. Further changes such as those to Trade Union recognition and whistleblowing protections are also set to remain. Employers who have not yet reviewed their contracts, policies and processes in light of this should treat that as a priority.

Employer costs: national insurance and business rates

Burnham has said publicly that the 2024 increase to employer National Insurance contributions placed too heavy a burden on

business, and has floated a cut to business rates for pubs and smaller premises-based businesses. Neither is confirmed policy, but both suggest a government attentive to cost pressures facing SMEs, alongside its commitment to strengthening workers' rights. Here's where Burnham's approach is interesting; he has made clear that he believes strong employee protections create a productive workforce and a strong economy. This does not indicate any likelihood of recent developments being undone or watered down under his premiership.

Devolution and regional variation

Burnham's platform places real weight on devolving employment support to regional mayoral authorities, with specific reference to the North East. Employers here may, over time, see more regionally tailored support around recruitment, training and workforce participation than has historically been the case, particularly those working closely with local authorities or publicly funded training routes.

What should employers do now?

The sensible approach is the one that applies whenever the political weather changes: don't wait for certainty that may not arrive for months. Get contracts, policies and shift arrangements in good order in preparation for upcoming changes under the Employment Rights Act and keep a watching brief on National Insurance and business rates announcements as the new government's first Budget takes shape.

We will continue to track developments as they unfold and will keep clients updated as the picture becomes clearer. If you would like to discuss how any of this may affect your business, please get in touch with our team.

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

www.collingwoodlegal.com



Tom Clarke



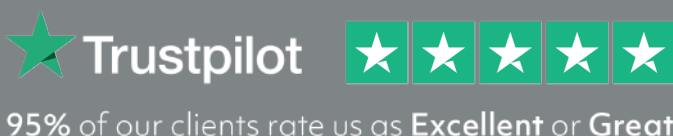
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A Night of Winn-ers

Winn Group marked its 2026 awards night, 'A Night of Winn-ers', celebrating staff achievements from across the group over the past 12 months.

The event was packed with glitz and glamour, with over 360 employees making their way in fine style to Newcastle's Civic Centre for a three-course meal, drinks, a chance to socialise, and evening entertainment.

It was another fantastic evening for staff, who are already looking forward to next year's event.







NE Youth host inaugural Corporate Football Tournament

Businesses from across the North East came together in July for the NE Youth Corporate Charity Football Tournament, raising vital funds to support NE Youth's work with boys and young men across the region.

Held at GOALS Newcastle, the tournament brought together teams from Cheesy Waffles, NE Youth, Mincoffs Solicitors, First Mortgage, Open Works and Progressive Legal Solutions for a day of competitive football, networking and fundraising.

After an exciting series of matches, Progressive Legal Solutions were crowned tournament champions, lifting the trophy following an impressive performance throughout the day.

The event concluded with a post-match dinner at the Grand Hotel Gosforth Park.

Funds raised will support NE Youth's growing programme of work with boys and young men, helping to build confidence, improve wellbeing and create safe spaces where young people can connect, develop positive relationships and reach their potential.

Earlier this year, NE Youth delivered the Kick About Cup, combining football with workshops exploring masculinity, stereotypes, social media and the challenges facing boys and young men today. Initiatives like these give young people the opportunity to develop resilience, improve their wellbeing and engage in conversations that are often difficult to have elsewhere.

NE Youth extends its thanks to GOALS Newcastle for hosting the tournament, the Grand Hotel Gosforth Park for the post-match dinner, and every business that took part and supported the event.



NE Youth raise nearly £70,000

NE Youth has raised almost £70,000 to help young people across the North East build brighter futures, thanks to the success of its annual Clay Pigeon shoot.

Held over two days at Hulne Priory in Alnwick, the charity's flagship fundraiser brought together businesses, supporters and experienced shooters, all helping to raise vital funds for NE Youth's life-changing work.

The Corporate Clay Pigeon Shoot welcomed 34 teams, including two from headline sponsor Bellway, raising more than £54,000. The John Shallcross Memorial Clay Pigeon Shoot followed on Sunday, with 25 teams raising a further £15,000.

Together, the events generated nearly £70,000 to support NE Youth's work with young people facing disadvantage, helping them develop confidence, life skills and resilience while improving their health, wellbeing and future opportunities.

Jon Niblo, CEO of NE Youth, said: "Every young person deserves the opportunity to reach their potential, and events like this help make that possible. Raising nearly £70,000 in the current climate is a fantastic achievement, and we're incredibly grateful to every team, sponsor, volunteer and supporter who helped make it happen."

This year's Corporate Clay Pigeon Shoot was proudly sponsored by Bellway, whose support helped make the event another outstanding success.



Digital Inclusion Lead joins ELCAP to help bridge the digital divide

Easington Lane-based charity, ELCAP, has welcomed a new Digital Inclusion Lead as it strengthens its commitment to tackling digital exclusion across the local community.

Dominic Platt has joined the organisation following a recent funding success and will lead ELCAP's digital inclusion programme, helping people access the devices, skills and support they need to participate confidently in an increasingly digital world.

Working closely with community partners, volunteers and local organisations, Dominic will help reduce digital exclusion by refurbishing and redistributing technology, while developing practical, community-led solutions that make a real difference to people's lives.

Passionate about using technology as a force for good, Dominic believes digital access has the power to transform lives. His focus is on ensuring people of all ages and backgrounds can stay connected, access essential services, develop digital skills and build confidence in using technology.

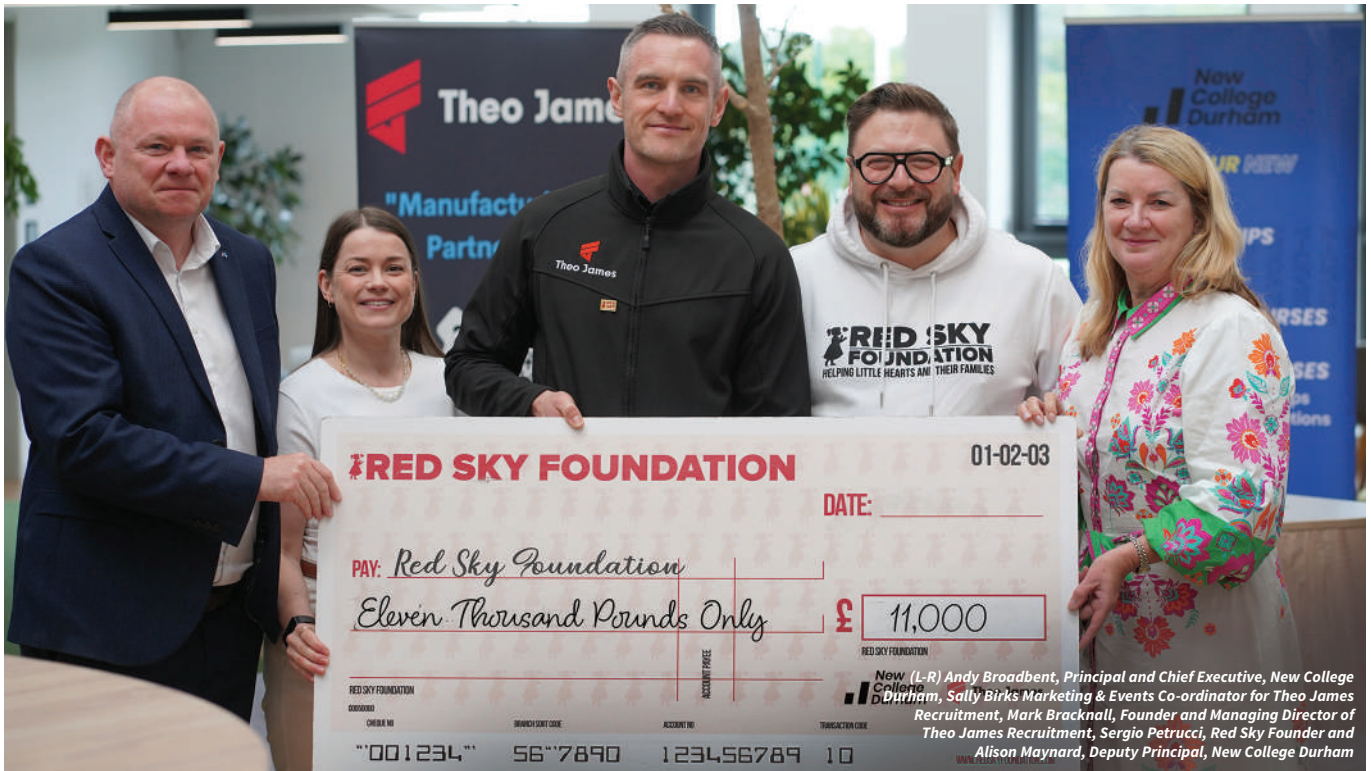
Everyone at ELCAP is delighted to welcome Dominic to the team and looks forward to the positive impact his work will have on volunteers, visitors and the wider community.

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Theo James Recruitment and New College Durham raise incredible £11,000 for Red Sky Foundation



Red Sky Foundation is incredibly proud to have been the charity partner of the inaugural Manufacturing Leaders' Summit, hosted by Theo James Recruitment in partnership with New College Durham, which raised an outstanding £11,000 to help support babies, children and adults living with complex heart conditions across the North East.

Held in April, the event welcomed more than 190 manufacturing professionals, business leaders, educators and industry partners for a day dedicated to collaboration, innovation and knowledge sharing, while raising vital funds for Red Sky Foundation.

Created to bring together the region's manufacturing community, the summit featured an inspiring programme of keynote speakers, panel discussions, breakout sessions and networking opportunities, encouraging meaningful conversations and strengthening relationships across the sector.

For Red Sky Foundation, the event represented far more than a fundraising opportunity. It created valuable new connections with businesses from across the North East and demonstrated the incredible impact that can be achieved when industry comes together to support a shared cause.

The £11,000 raised will help the charity continue funding specialist cardiac equipment, supporting NHS services, providing emergency financial assistance to families and installing life-saving defibrillators in schools and communities across the UK.

Mark Bracknall, Managing Director of Theo

James Recruitment, said: "The Manufacturing Leaders' Summit was always about more than a one-day event. Our goal was to bring people together, create valuable connections and strengthen the relationships that help our industry thrive. To have achieved that while raising £11,000 for Red Sky Foundation makes the day even more special. Having lost my Dad five years ago to a cardiac arrest, it is a charity that means an awful lot to me and my family."

A key part of the summit's success was the partnership with New College Durham, recently recognised by the Department for Education as one of only a handful of Advanced Manufacturing Technical Excellence Colleges in the country. The college continues to play a leading role in developing the next generation of manufacturing talent and strengthening collaboration between education and industry.

Dr Sergio Petrucci MBE (Hon), Founder of Red Sky Foundation, said: "We are incredibly grateful to Theo James Recruitment, New College Durham and everyone who attended, sponsored and supported the Manufacturing Leaders' Summit.

"Raising £11,000 is an incredible achievement, but what makes this event truly special is the number of people it has brought together.

Events like this not only raise vital funds that help us continue supporting babies, children and adults living with heart conditions, but they also create new partnerships that allow us to reach even more families in need.

"On behalf of everyone at Red Sky Foundation, thank you for believing in our mission and helping us continue making a real difference across our communities."

Red Sky Foundation would also like to extend its sincere thanks to headline sponsor SST Group, comprising Dyer Engineering and Q-Laser Limited, whose support helped bring the vision for the Manufacturing Leaders' Summit to life from the very beginning. Their early commitment played a significant role in establishing an event that has already made a lasting impact on both the manufacturing sector and the communities Red Sky Foundation serves.

The Manufacturing Leaders' Summit has shown what can be achieved when industry, education and the charitable sector unite with a shared purpose. As new partnerships and conversations continue to develop following the event, Red Sky Foundation looks forward to seeing the summit grow in the years ahead.

From everyone at Red Sky Foundation, thank you to Theo James Recruitment, New College Durham, SST Group, every sponsor, speaker and attendee for making the inaugural Manufacturing Leaders' Summit such a tremendous success. Together, you are helping improve cardiac care, support families when they need it most and save lives across our communities.

www.redskyfoundation.com



Hooked on Helping: Chippy nets £17,653 for Cancer Support

One of Northumberland's best-known fish and chip restaurants has earned another reason to celebrate after raising more than £17,000 to support people living with cancer.

Staff and customers at the Harbour View Fish and Chip Restaurant and Takeaway in Seaton Sluice have been fundraising for Macmillan Cancer Support, with their generosity helping the charity continue its vital work supporting people affected by cancer.

Manager Sharron Carr has announced that an impressive £17,653 has now been donated to the charity.

The fundraising total is the result of the combined efforts of staff and loyal customers, who have supported a range of fundraising activities while visiting one of the area's most popular eateries.

Sharron said: "We know that one out of every two people will be affected by cancer during their lifetime, which means that many of our customers, friends and families will face the disease at some stage.

"We wanted to do something that could make a real difference to people going through what is often the toughest time of their lives. The amount we have collectively raised will go some way towards helping those in need.

"I'd like to thank our wonderful staff for all the enthusiasm they have shown and, of course, our fantastic customers whose generosity has made this possible. Every donation, no matter how small, has helped us reach this amazing total."

Freemasons' grant helps keep Northumberland's Community Radio connected

Community radio listeners across Northumberland are set to benefit from improved digital broadcasts after Northumberland Freemasons donated £1,500 to help strengthen the county's DAB radio network.

The funding has been awarded to Northumberland Community Digital CIC, the not-for-profit organisation that operates the infrastructure carrying several local radio stations, including Radio Northumberland, Lionheart Radio, Koast Radio, Frisk Radio and Together Radio.

The grant from the Richard Henry Holmes Masonic Benevolent Fund has paid for specialist wireless equipment linking remote transmitter sites with high-speed broadband connections. The upgrade will improve the reliability of digital broadcasts, particularly in rural areas where internet connectivity can be inconsistent.



Community groups experience Blyth's Maritime Heritage aboard historic tall ship

Representatives from community organisations across Northumberland were given the opportunity to experience Blyth's rich maritime heritage during a series of special sailing experiences aboard Williams II, the historic vessel operated by the Blyth Tall Ship charity.

Among those taking part were representatives from Contact Morpeth Mental Health, The Blyth Battery, the Maritime Volunteer Service, CA Blyth Valley, NHS and several other local organisations, all of whom enjoyed a hands-on introduction to life aboard the traditional sailing ship. Northumberland Skills also visited and 20 young people aged from 17-25 sampled life at sea.

Rather than simply enjoying a sightseeing trip, participants became part of the crew for the afternoon. Under the guidance of experienced volunteers, they helped hoist the sails, learnt how the ship operates, took turns at the helm and discovered the teamwork required to sail a historic vessel safely.

Professional skipper Susan Gebbles said the sailing experiences were about far more than spending a few hours on the water. "We're a charity and we rely on people from the community coming along, participating and enjoying the vessel," she said. "The more community groups we can introduce to the ship, the more people discover what we do and the more opportunities we can create, particularly for young people."

The Blyth Tall Ship charity is run by a dedicated team of volunteers who are passionate about preserving traditional sailing skills while making them accessible to everyone. Through sailing experiences, heritage projects and practical training opportunities, the charity continues to connect local people with Blyth's proud maritime history.



Richard Finch, Director of Northumberland Community Digital CIC, said the support would make a real difference to listeners.

Norman West, representing Northumberland Freemasons and the Richard Henry Holmes Masonic Benevolent Fund, said supporting projects that benefit local people is at the heart of the organisation's charitable work.



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www.poppyslightfoundation.com



Peter Neal

From Campaign to Appointment

How charities can convert executive recruitment into leadership success.

For charities, choosing the right chief executive, director, or senior leader is probably the most important decision they will make. Yet often the focus of the recruitment campaign is on attracting candidates rather than securing the right appointment. The Experience Bank specialise in the recruitment of charity leaders, and Peter Neal shares his thoughts on campaign versus appointment.

“A strong campaign can generate impressive numbers of applicants, but numbers alone do not create impact. The measure of success is whether the chosen leader will strengthen the organisation’s mission, inspire stakeholders, and deliver sustainable results long after the recruitment process has ended. For that, you only need that one right person to apply, not hundreds!”

“At The Experience Bank, we have found that converting a recruitment campaign into the right appointment requires a shift in mindset: from filling a vacancy to identifying the leadership capability the charity genuinely needs.

“My main advice is to start with the mission, not the job description. Many recruitment campaigns begin with an updated version of a

previous job description. This can be a costly mistake.

“Before advertising the role, trustees should ask:

- What challenges face the organisation over the next three/five years?
- What leadership qualities are needed to navigate those challenges?
- Which skills are missing from the current executive team?
- What type of leader will strengthen the charity’s culture and values?

“The answers often reveal that the charity does not simply need another CEO or director; it needs a strategic change leader, a partnership builder, a fundraising catalyst, or a turnaround specialist.

“Defining future requirements of the role is the first step toward making the right appointment. A successful executive recruitment campaign is not about reaching everyone. It is about reaching the people who are most likely to succeed in the role.

“That means positioning a compelling narrative around the charity’s purpose, being honest about the challenges and undertaking a proactive search alongside advertising.

“Many outstanding leaders are not actively looking for a new charity role, but are attracted by mission, values, and making a difference. A well-designed campaign speaks directly to those motivations.

“One of the most common reasons appointments fail, is that organisations overvalue sector experience and undervalue leadership capability. Relevant experience matters, but it shouldn’t be the sole determinant. The key question is:

“Can this individual lead this organisation through its next chapter?

“Your tick list should be strategic thinking,

decision-making, relationship-building, cultural alignment, resilience, stakeholder engagement.

“Structured interviews, scenario-based discussions, and independent referencing provide far more insight than a traditional competency interview alone.

“Another critical factor is alignment among trustees. Often board members are looking for different things: one fundraising, another governance, another public profile, and another operational delivery. Without a shared definition of success, the recruitment process is fragmented.

Before interviewing candidates, the board should agree:

- Three most important outcomes for the new leader.
- Non-negotiable values and behaviours required.
- Risks the appointment must help address.
- How success will be measured.

“In conclusion, the charities that achieve the best outcomes are those that view recruitment as a strategic leadership appointment rather than an administrative task of filling an existing role. They define the future they want to create, design a campaign around that future, and assess candidates against the organisation’s long-term mission. When that happens, a recruitment campaign becomes more than a search process. It becomes the moment when a charity secures the leadership it needs to deliver greater impact for the communities it serves.”

Peter Neal is the Founder of The Experience Bank, specialising in executive search, interim leadership, and board-level recruitment across the charity sector in the North East.

Peter@theexperiencebank.co.uk

People *Doing* Good



Great North Swim Challenge helps keep Maritime Charity afloat

A dedicated Newcastle volunteer has raised more than £600 for a maritime charity after completing a challenging one-mile open water swim in Lake Windermere.

Angela Carrington, Regional Volunteer Officer for the Maritime Volunteer Service (MVS), spent six months training for the Great North Swim before successfully taking on the 1.6km challenge in the cold waters of England's largest lake.

The swim held special significance for Angela, who has been a member of the Maritime Volunteer Service for 15 years.

She explained: "I'd like to think that all of the training can do some good by fundraising for a cause very close to my heart."

The £600 raised will go directly to the Northumbria Unit of the Maritime

Volunteer Service, which receives no government funding and relies heavily on donations and fundraising efforts to continue its work across the North East's rivers, waterways and coastline.

Based at St Peter's Marina on the River Tyne, MVS Northumbria operates across a vast area stretching from the River Tees in the south to the River Tweed on the Scottish border. The volunteer-led unit supports a wide range of community, maritime and water safety activities throughout the region.

The unit currently operates two vessels – a 4.5-metre rigid inflatable boat (RHIB) and a Colvic Northerner patrol boat – which are used for training, community events, environmental projects and operational support tasks.

Children's book helps Dragonfly Cancer Trust

A children's story written by a nine-year-old schoolgirl more than four decades ago has finally been brought to life as a professionally published book, with proceeds helping children and families affected by cancer.

Karen Crear, from Chester-Le-Street, has published *Where There's a Wheel There's a Way*, a heartwarming tale she originally wrote when she was just nine years old. Now, 43 years later, the story has been lovingly reimagined with new illustrations and a fresh look for its star character, Humphrey the tortoise.

The book tells the story of Humphrey, who becomes upset because he cannot move as quickly as his friends. Determined to help, his friends come up with a variety of creative wheeled solutions, including bicycles, roller skates and wheelbarrows. Along the way, the story delivers an important message about friendship, acceptance and recognising that everyone is valuable just as they are.

The book has been published through Crear Publishing, the independent publishing company Karen runs alongside her husband Ryan.

Crear Publishing supports writers who may have struggled to gain the attention of larger



publishers or who are wary of costly vanity publishing schemes.

Ryan said: "Everybody says they've got a book inside them, but many people don't know what to do next. We want to help people turn that dream into reality. There is so much incredible writing talent in the North East and beyond, and we want to make sure those voices are heard."

Adding another layer of meaning to the project, a portion of every sale of *Where There's a Will, There's a Way* will be donated to the Newcastle-based charity The Dragonfly Cancer Trust.

The cause is particularly close to Karen's heart, having battled cancer herself twice.

"I've been through some very difficult times with cancer," she said. "The Dragonfly Cancer Trust supports children and young people with cancer, as well as their families, and it just felt like the perfect charity to support through this book."

To further celebrate the partnership, every page of the book contains a hidden dragonfly for young readers to find, adding an extra layer of fun and discovery.



North East community project launched to unite communities and inspire young people

A North East community campaign inspired by the legacy of boxing legend Muhammad

Ali is aiming to bring people together across cultures, faiths and backgrounds while inspiring the next generation ahead of the 50th anniversary of Ali's historic visit to the region.

Andy Mahmood, founder of the "Asians of the North" initiative, says the project is built around a simple message: "No unity without community."

"It's an open platform, inclusive to all and takes its name from the iconic Angel of the North.

Asians of the North are looking to encourage conversations, challenge misconceptions and celebrate the shared identity of people living across the region.

"We've become very individualistic as a society," said Andy. "Years ago, communities stuck together regardless of religion, culture or background. We want to bring some of that spirit back and remind people that we're all part of the same community."

The initiative has been inspired by Muhammad Ali's visit to Tyneside and South Shields in July 1977, a trip that left a lasting impact on local communities. During a recent visit to Louisville, Kentucky, Andy toured the Muhammad Ali Centre, Ali's childhood neighbourhood and his final resting place.

"It's a massive opportunity for the North East," said Andy. "Next year marks 50 years since Muhammad Ali came here and we want to celebrate that legacy in a way that brings people together."

A major focus of the project will be supporting and inspiring young people. Andy believes Muhammad Ali's life provides powerful lessons in confidence, resilience, leadership and standing up for what you believe in.

"Ali stood for much more than boxing," he said. "He stood for fairness, humanitarian values, respect and unity. Those are the messages we want young people to learn from."

“

What we're most passionate about is supporting grassroots charities.



Sue and Lauren Reece (centre) with Donna (left) and Claire (right) from Footsteps nursery

Charity of the Month

The LGA Foundation

(now known as The Reece Family Trust)

Founded by Sue Reece and John Reece MBE, the LGA Foundation (now known as The Reece Family Trust) is a North East family charitable trust dedicated to improving health, wellbeing and life opportunities across Tyneside and South Northumberland by supporting grassroots charities and community organisations creating lasting change.

Why was the charity formed?

The Trust was established from a simple belief that success brings with it a responsibility to give something back. Having built their businesses and spent most of their lives in the North East, Sue and John Reece wanted to invest in the communities that had supported them.

Previously known as the LGA Foundation – named after their three kids, Lauren, Greg and Ali – the Trust continues to build on those family values while reflecting its long-term vision and growing impact.

Rather than delivering services directly, the Trust provides flexible funding to charities and community organisations already making a meaningful difference, helping them grow their impact and reach more people.

Which area do you cover?

Our primary focus is Tyneside and South Northumberland, where we've supported charities tackling food poverty, improving mental health, reducing social isolation, supporting carers, and creating opportunities for children, young people and families. We believe grassroots organisations understand their communities better than anyone and can achieve extraordinary things with the right support.

Alongside our work in the North East, we also support projects further afield. Through Wallsend Boys Club's Hong Kong project, we've helped underprivileged children access football, supported refugee summer camps, funded facilities for young people with special educational needs and helped a student complete a Masters in Psychology to provide future mental health support through local charities.

Recently we've backed young sporting talent including boxer Nathan Cummiskey and golfer Harrison Sewell, while also funding humanitarian aid for Ukraine through vehicles and emergency supplies. We've also supported The Grove Special School in Northumberland with a wheelchair-accessible vehicle, helping pupils access education, outdoor spaces and sporting activities.

What have been your proudest moments so far?

The greatest measure of our success is the impact achieved by the organisations we support.

We've seen charities increase their capacity, introduce new services and improve the lives of thousands of people across the North East. Whether supporting a local nursery, helping young people pursue their ambitions or funding humanitarian projects overseas, it's incredibly rewarding to know our support is making a lasting difference.

We're equally proud that the Trust remains firmly rooted in family values. As the next generation becomes increasingly involved in shaping its future, we're creating a lasting legacy of community support for years to come.

What are you currently working on?

We're supporting a number of projects that will deliver long-term benefits across the region.

One of our flagship investments is Footsteps Nursery in Benwell, where funding is helping create a new building with significantly improved facilities for pre-school children, giving local families a welcoming, high-quality environment for learning and development.

We're also developing the Hedley Park Woodland Project, creating a new community woodland that will improve biodiversity and provide a lasting environmental legacy.

Alongside these projects, we continue to support organisations delivering mental health, youth, education, sport and arts initiatives that help people build confidence, improve wellbeing and strengthen community connections. We're also exploring opportunities with the local authority to improve city parks for local communities.

What does the future hold?

As the Reece Family Trust enters its next chapter, we're committed to growing our impact while remaining true to the values on which the Trust was founded.

Recent visits to the charities, community groups and social enterprises we support have reinforced the dedication and creativity that exists across the voluntary sector. We're continually inspired by the difference these organisations make every day.

Looking ahead, we want to support even more grassroots organisations, strengthen partnerships and continue investing in projects that create lasting social and environmental change. We know the challenges facing charities continue to grow, and we're committed to helping ensure they have the support they need to thrive.

How do you get involved?

If you're a charity or community organisation working to improve health, wellbeing or opportunities across Tyneside or South Northumberland, we'd encourage you to get in touch.

We aim to make applying for funding as straightforward as possible. Organisations complete a simple application before we begin our due diligence process, and we operate a rolling grants programme with no application deadlines.

The North East is home to an extraordinary charitable sector. Through the Reece Family Trust, we're proud to support organisations creating stronger, healthier and more connected communities while continuing to invest in projects that improve lives both locally and further afield.

reecefamilytrust.org

Beyond the Scoreline

Catherine Marchant, CEO, Impact Family Services

When sport and domestic abuse collide.

For millions of people, the FIFA World Cup is a time of excitement, celebration and togetherness. Families gather to watch matches, workplaces fill with friendly rivalry, and communities unite behind their teams. Whether it is England at a major tournament, a local derby or supporting a hometown club, sport has an incredible ability to bring people together.

But for some people, match day brings something very different.

Behind closed doors, major sporting events can be among the most dangerous times for people already living with domestic abuse.

Research from Lancaster University, which analysed police-recorded domestic abuse incidents during three FIFA World Cups, found reports increased by 26% when England won or drew, rising to 38% when England lost.

These statistics are frequently cited during major tournaments but are sometimes misunderstood. Football does not cause domestic abuse. Sport does not cause domestic abuse. Perpetrators cause domestic abuse.

What major sporting events can do is create conditions where existing abusive behaviour escalates. Heightened emotions, alcohol consumption, financial pressures, disrupted routines and large social gatherings can increase risk where abuse already exists.

That distinction matters.

Earlier this summer, comments suggesting England should simply “keep winning” to reduce domestic abuse were widely criticised. Refuge warned that such remarks risk allowing perpetrators to evade accountability, while the CPS reiterated that football does not cause domestic abuse and responsibility always lies with those who choose to abuse.

While the World Cup shines a spotlight on the issue, it extends far beyond international football. Across the country, families follow local football, rugby and cricket clubs. Sport should create memories, strengthen communities and give us something to celebrate together. Sadly, for some families, these occasions become moments of fear.



Catherine Marchant

For someone experiencing domestic abuse, the focus is rarely on the scoreline. Instead, it may be on reading the atmosphere in the room:

- Will they come home angry?
- How much have they had to drink?
- Will the children hear another argument?
- Should I say anything at all?

These are questions no one should have to ask because a match has finished.

At Impact Family Services, we see every day that domestic abuse is about far more than physical violence. It can involve coercive control, intimidation, emotional abuse, financial control, threats and isolation. It affects people of every age, gender and background, and its impact reaches far beyond the immediate victim.

Children are often the forgotten victims. For many young people, the final whistle does not signal the end of the game. Instead, it marks the beginning of anxiety, shouting, intimidation or violence within the home. Long after a tournament has ended, those experiences remain.

This is why awareness matters.

Domestic abuse is not solely an issue for

emergency services or specialist charities. Employers, colleagues, neighbours, friends and family members all have a role in recognising the signs. A colleague who suddenly becomes withdrawn, experiences increased anxiety, takes more sickness absence or struggles to concentrate may be facing difficulties behind closed doors.

Employers increasingly recognise that domestic abuse is also a workplace issue, affecting wellbeing, attendance, productivity and safety. Creating an environment where staff know they will be listened to, believed and supported can make a life-changing difference.

As another summer of sport captures the nation's attention, it is worth remembering that while most people will enjoy the occasion safely, not everyone has that experience.

We should celebrate the power of sport to unite communities and create lasting memories. No sporting result justifies abuse—not a missed penalty, a controversial refereeing decision, a last-minute defeat or even winning the trophy. The responsibility always lies with the perpetrator.

www.impactfs.co.uk



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I swapped careers to become a foster dad

A former prison officer and soldier who swapped careers to become a foster dad has urged others to 'scratch their fostering itch'.

County Durham's Peter Stevens parked his lifelong desire to foster after his wife, Rachel, fell pregnant with their daughter.

However, around five years ago, he turned to Changing Futures Fostering - a not-for-profit agency - and the family have since helped provide a home for four different youngsters.

"We had considered fostering via the council, but that experience left us disheartened. Then after going through fertility treatment, our daughter arrived," said Peter, 53.

"But the fostering itch never left.

"However, once we had our daughter, I wondered if I'd have the love to offer a foster child, as I was so desperate just to have our own child and I wasn't sure I'd have enough left over.

"But over the years, I've realised that just isn't the case, and it has been one of the most rewarding experiences for our entire family."

His comments come amid what Changing Futures Fostering say is a "crisis" in the North East.

Currently, one in 88 children in the region is looked after - more than anywhere else in the country - while that dramatically outweighs the number of foster families.

"The picture in County Durham, and across the North East, is DIRE, and because there aren't enough foster families, children are forced out of the region - potentially hundreds of miles from home," said Sarah Richardson, Fostering Manager at Changing Futures Fostering.

"That's why the likes of Peter and Rachel are priceless; They provide TLC and stability to some of our most vulnerable children, who have often experienced unimaginable trauma in their short lives."

According to Changing Futures, "myths" around who can - and can't - foster can deter potential foster families from coming forward.

These include having a career or your own children - although Peter insists he's proof these barriers needn't exist.



Peter Stevens



Peter Stevens with his family

"We put our trust in the matching process, and we've had children ranging from nine months old to one lad who was studying for his GCSEs," said Peter.

"Our daughter is 15, and has a really caring nature; She's been so supportive and understanding of any behaviour that's been challenging.

"We have regular "family meetings where fostering efforts are discussed and agreed. She is involved in the decision-making process and is an essential part of the team.

"And I'm still employed as a part-time private hire taxi driver doing while my background in the services has been very useful.

"I'm used to helping people who may have faced real challenges in life, but now there are no physical barriers - we feel we've made such a difference to some of these youngsters.

"One mum text to say she was back with her son, and he was living his best life now, and everything is now going to plan - that's

ultimately the goal.

"You just want to support these children to hopefully get them back home with their birth parents.

"Another child sends us a monthly newsletter, and we can still see him growing up even though we are not there."

Launched in Hartlepool, Changing Futures Fostering is an award-winning organisation that now supports foster families from Teesside up to County Durham.

The charity says it "urgently" needs more foster families in County Durham, with successful applicants able to access telephone support 24/7, including financial and training support.

"Our experience with Changing Futures compared to the council was worlds apart - Changing Futures greeted us with open arms," added Peter.

"It is one of the best things our family's done."

www.changingfuturesne.co.uk

We have normalised poverty. We shouldn't

By Abu Ali, Corporate Finance Partner at FRP

A few short years ago, food banks were an emergency response. Today, they have become part of everyday life.

We hear statistics about child poverty. We see people sleeping in doorways. We read about families choosing between heating and eating. Then we carry on with our day. That worries me.

I don't believe we've stopped caring, but I do believe we've become accustomed to it. Poverty has become normalised. And it shouldn't be.

It's easy to think this is someone else's problem — one for government, charities or society as a whole to solve. Yet each of us has more influence than we realise.

Business, in particular, has an extraordinary ability to change lives. We create jobs, develop talent, support suppliers and invest in our communities. Every decision we make has the potential to create opportunity for someone else.

That's why I believe tackling poverty isn't just a social issue. It's a leadership issue.

At CEO Sleepout, people often assume our work is about homelessness. It is, but homelessness is rarely the beginning of someone's story. More often, it's the result of financial hardship, poor mental health, insecure housing or one unexpected crisis too many.

If we're serious about reducing homelessness, we must be just as serious about preventing poverty.

The encouraging news is that many businesses across the North East already understand this. I see employers creating opportunities for overlooked young people, supporting colleagues through difficult times



Abu Ali

and backing local charities that strengthen communities.

This region has always been built on resilience and looking after one another.

Imagine what could happen if every business asked one simple question: What difference can we make?

Not because it's good for our reputation or helps meet an ESG target, but because stronger communities create stronger businesses.

Poverty isn't inevitable. It isn't something we should accept as the backdrop to modern life.

When we reduce poverty, we don't just change individual lives. We create stronger communities, stronger businesses and a stronger North East economy.

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Helping businesses through life's hardest moments

Serious illness, grief and bereavement do not stop at the workplace door. Here, Hassan Hameed, Corporate Partnerships Manager at Teesside Hospice, explains how the hospice can help northern businesses support their people through difficult times.

"Almost all organisations will, at some point, have a member of staff affected by cancer, serious illness or bereavement, either personally or through someone close to them.

"These experiences can affect every part of life, including how someone feels and copes at work. Managers want to do the right thing but may be unsure what to say, what to ask or how best to help.



"We often say it's not a compassion gap, it's a confidence gap. People care, but these conversations don't always come naturally, particularly when they're worried about saying the wrong thing.

"At Teesside Hospice, we have difficult and emotional conversations every day. We support people through uncertainty, loss and some of the hardest circumstances they will face. We want to share that experience with businesses, helping managers feel prepared and employees feel understood.

"One example is our new Working Through Cancer Together programme. Cancer affects every organisation. In a workforce of just 40 people, statistically one member of staff will be living with cancer.

"Work really matters. Macmillan's 2018 research found that 87% of working-age people with cancer felt staying in or returning to work was important. Yet one in five of those who returned said they had experienced discrimination at work.

"Those figures show how much a manager's response can matter. Through small-group learning, the programme gives managers practical advice and the confidence to have sensitive conversations, understand the impact on the individual and wider team, and appreciate their legal and practical responsibilities.

"Delivered in person over three hours for groups of up to ten, the session combines discussion, real-world scenarios and practical learning.

"But the support we can offer businesses goes beyond cancer. Bereavement can affect anyone at any time, and grief can have a profound and lasting impact on an employee and those around them.

"Employers often want to help but may be unsure what that support should look like, particularly once compassionate leave has ended. Grief does not follow a timetable, and understanding that can make a real difference.

"This isn't about turning managers into counsellors. It's about helping them listen, respond with compassion, recognise when someone needs specialist help and know where to signpost them.

"Following Teesside Hospice's recent merger with Butterwick Hospice, our reach extends further than ever before. We're here for patients, families and organisations from Bishop Auckland, through Stockton-on-

Tees and Middlesbrough to Redcar and Cleveland, as well as parts of North Yorkshire. This gives us the opportunity to share our skills with more employers and their people.

"We want to build lasting, sustainable partnerships with local businesses. That starts with listening, understanding their workforce and exploring where our experience could help.

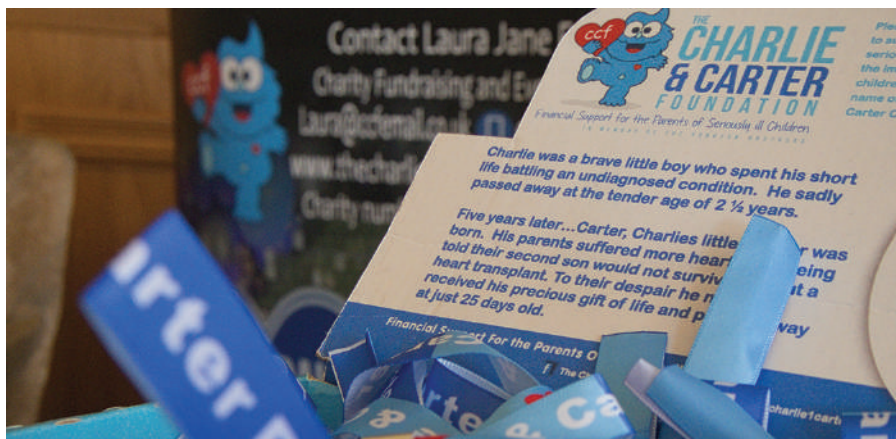
"Supporting people properly through serious illness or bereavement makes human sense, but it also makes business sense. When people feel understood and able to ask for what they need, they can work better, remain in work for longer and continue bringing valuable skills and experience to the organisation.

"That means better wellbeing, stronger teams and improved retention. Most importantly, people remember how they were treated when life was at its hardest.

"Our ambition is to bring the best of what hospices do to local businesses, helping them and their people be at their best, even when everything feels very hard."

To discuss Working Through Cancer Together, bereavement support or a wider partnership, contact hassanhameed@teessidehospice.co.uk





Social + Golf Day for The Charlie and Carter Foundation

Thank you to all of the teams who joined us at our Golf Day at Wearside Golf Club; we are incredibly proud to announce that we raised an amazing £6,387 for The Charlie & Carter Foundation.

Well done to our winning team from Root Cause Consultancy, Pete, Oliver, Andrew and Stuart, enjoy the bragging rights until next year!

We'd like to thank all of our brilliant tee sponsors: ID Card Processing, Ne Networking, SLW Mortgages, Gary Marsh Decorators, WorkerBee, PGS Law, Essential Thyme, Longden Walker and Renney, Delton Hall Financial Planning, Housley -Knight & Tampin, Evolux Web Design, Consultive Solutions, Lucid Technology, McClellands Bathroom and Tile Studio, Eley Insurance, Ager Building Services, APM Cleaning and Repair, Marrill Group.

A special thank you to Gorilla Media Ltd, who kindly sponsored the day with one of their amazing AdVans, and to Gavin Forster Photography for capturing the event.





The moments that matter

At St Cuthbert's Care, we understand the trust families place in us. Across our two nursing homes, St Catherine's in Newcastle and Holy Cross in Sunderland, our aim is simple: to provide compassionate care in places where people feel safe, valued and truly at home.





Although the homes are different in character, they share the same foundations: compassion, dignity, community and a belief that moving into residential care should never mean giving up the things that make life meaningful.

A Place to Call Home

For more than 150 years, Holy Cross has been part of Sunderland's community. Founded by the Little Sisters of the Poor, it has long been a place where generations of local people and Catholic families have found care, companionship and support. When the home faced closure in 2012, St Cuthbert's Care stepped in to secure its future, preserving not only the residents' home, but an important part of Sunderland's Catholic community.

St Catherine's offers a different setting. Purpose-built and designed around person-centred care, it provides a warm and welcoming environment where residents, families and staff know one another by name and relationships are built on trust and understanding.

Both our homes share something families often tell us matters most: they feel like home.

Life Beyond Care

Daily life is shaped around individual choice, with staff taking time to understand each person's interests and preferences.

For George, one of the highlights of the week is book club. An author himself, he enjoys sharing his books and discussing favourite reads with fellow residents. Others may choose arts and crafts, music sessions, time in the garden or simply the pleasure of sharing a cup of tea with friends and family.

At Holy Cross, one of the most anticipated events of the week is a visit from pupils at a local primary school. Children arrive carrying books and stories to share, creating friendships that bridge generations. Retired priest Fr Harry is a particular favourite, his stories, humour and enthusiasm never fail to attract an audience.

For residents, these visits bring companionship, connection and the chance to share their experiences. For the children, they offer an opportunity to learn from people whose lives span decades of history. These connections enrich the lives of both generations.

A Community Shaped by Residents

Through regular residents' and relatives' meetings, people are encouraged to share ideas and influence activities, events and day-to-day life within the home.

Together, residents, relatives, volunteers and staff create a community where everyone has a voice. Birthdays, celebrations, visits from local groups and shared experiences help create a strong sense of belonging.

Care Beyond the Practical

Many colleagues have worked within our homes for years, building trusted relationships with residents and families. That continuity helps create a familiar and reassuring environment where people feel understood and supported.

Residents join us with a lifetime of experiences, interests and values. Understanding what matters to each person, from lifelong hobbies and family traditions to how they like their tea, helps ensure care is shaped around the individual.

Faith remains an important part of daily life for many residents. Opportunities for prayer and regular Mass provide comfort, familiarity and spiritual support, reflecting the Catholic ethos that has been at the heart of St Cuthbert's Care for almost 80 years.

Recognised for Excellence

Our commitment to person-centred care has been recognised through both Holy Cross and St Catherine's achieving Gold Standards Framework accreditation for excellence in end-of-life care and support. At St Catherine's, the team was further acknowledged with an exceptional Local Authority inspection score of 399 out of 400.

While these achievements reflect the quality of care provided, feedback from residents and families brings that quality to life. One family member wrote to thank the team, describing their father's time at the home as "truly very happy months". She spoke of how he had been able to reconnect with his Catholic faith and reflected on the peace and comfort he experienced in his final days. As a nurse who had worked in many care homes, she added: "The care I witnessed truly was outstanding. Lovely home, lovely staff."

www.stcuthbertscare.org.uk





There's nowhere quite like Newcastle

Erm...actually...there is.

Okay, there isn't another Newcastle with a River Tyne flowing through it, but when it comes to the name...Newcastle...there are a surprising number around the world.

In fact, there are over a hundred, although that includes New Castle which, as any historians will gladly inform you, was the original name for 'our' Newcastle.

Most of you reading this will have heard...possibly visited...Newcastle in the Australian state of New South Wales. Obviously, the word 'Newcastle' has been translated into the language of various countries. Some are recognisable like, for example, the Newcastle in Switzerland is Neuchatel; the Newcastle in Germany is Neuburg and the Newcastle in Spain is Castilo-Neuvo. What about Neokastro in Greece or Kastel Novi in Croatia?

You'd struggle to guess some though. How about Shinshiro in Japan? In Japanese, Shin means New, and Shiro means Castle. In Iran, it's Qaleh-Now...Qaleh means Castle and Now is New. In Malaysia you can visit their New Castle...Kota Bharu. In Latvia there's Jaunpils, or why not pop over to Poland...easy from our Newcastle Airport...and have a trip to Nowy Zamek.

And there's even an organisation called Newcastles of the World.

"It all came about when the mayor of Shinshiro decided to organise a conference in 1998 to bring together delegates from as many countries as possible which had a town or city named Newcastle," said David Faulkner, who acts as administrator of the network. "He got in touch with dozens of mayors around the world but, when it came to the UK, rather than inviting the mayor of Newcastle upon Tyne, he invited the mayor of Staffordshire's Newcastle-under Lyme. However, in 2006, an invitation finally arrived at the Civic Centre in Newcastle, and we've been sending delegates ever since."

In 2012, it was the turn of 'the real' Newcastle to host what is now known as the Newcastles of the World event. Around 100 delegates travelled to Tyneside. It was such a success that Newcastle (upon Tyne) is now seen as the base for the organisation.

"Even though this is a friendship organisation, there's a serious side to bringing people together," adds David, who was one of the organisers of

The youth delegates at the 2025 Newcastles of the World conference in Jaunpils, Latvia



Gathering in Neuchatel, Switzerland for The Future for Young People in Europe workshop, April 2026.



the conference in his role as leader of the Liberal Democrats at Newcastle City Council. "There's no better way to do business than filling a room with people who want to promote their town or city. Conversation inevitably drifts around to talking about how places can work together, promote tourism, marketing, education, branding etc. Everyone has something in common...they all come from a Newcastle or New Castle... and as well as trying to promote themselves, there's a genuine warmth towards the other Newcastles so sharing information and best practice on matters of mutual interest comes naturally."

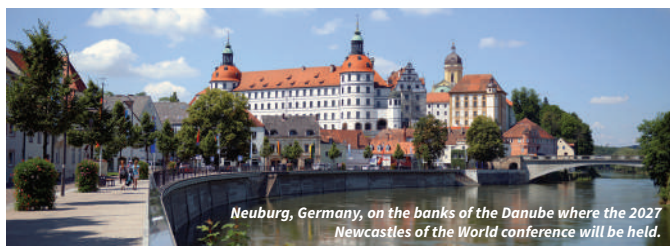
Several of the places are included in a Newcastles of the World 'passport' which provides benefits such as discounts to various attractions, hotel discounts, the offer of staying with a host family, finding local advice or getting in touch with someone who's willing to be a guide.

Another spin-off has been the chance to give young people the experience of travelling to a different Newcastle in a different country, but with the advantage of knowing that, when they arrive, they will instantly have something in common with their hosts. Several students have been able to gain work experience by having a placement with a foreign company.

"As we're now seen as the home of Newcastles of the World, we've developed the organisation to make it easier for everyone to keep up to date with what's going on at other Newcastles. We have an events calendar plus a regular newsletter. We're also promoting next year's Newcastles of the World conference which takes place in Germany at the Bavarian city of Neuburg."

They're Newcastles...United!

If you'd like more information about the organisation, visit their fascinating website www.newcastlesoftheworld.com



Neuburg, Germany, on the banks of the Danube where the 2027 Newcastles of the World conference will be held.



Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia, which is also twinned with Newcastle upon Tyne

A Zulu War Reenactment in Newcastle, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, April 2026



Dozens of Newcastles are united

» JOANNE BUTCHER

TODAY the city will ring with dozens of different languages as the Newcastles of the world unite on Tyneside.

Delegates from countries across the globe are arriving for the week-long event celebrating cities and towns sharing the Newcastle name.

From Newcastle-upon-Tyne to Neuchatel in Switzerland, and Newcastle, Canada, to Shinshiro City, Japan, it is the largest-ever gathering of its kind and the first to be held in the North East.

Coun David Faulkner, organiser of the project and leader of the Liberal Democrats at Newcastle City Council, hopes to build a lasting legacy of cultural, business and friendship links across the globe.

"There are over a hundred different 'Newcastles' or 'New Castles' around the world," said Coun Faulkner. "But we

Toon host to cities of Newcastle

think of ourselves as the first and original Newcastle. "This is a special opportunity to be able to welcome many of them here."

Tomorrow will see the start of a conference for around 100 delegates, including discussions on tourism, branding and marketing.

But the event is not just for the officials. From Monday, the city library is hosting an exhibition of postcards of Newcastles around the world.

The cards, letters and stamps – from the private collection of one Gosforth woman – give an insight into how similar and yet how different the various cities and towns really are. The exhibition also includes pho-

tographs and film clips of the cities.

Tomorrow, schoolchildren will take part in a parade along Northumberland Street at 1pm, and will help open a Friendship Garden at the Civic Centre ahead of the official start of the conference.

Youngsters have been working for weeks on a Song for Newcastle – based on the St James' Park anthem Home Newcastle by Ronnie "Busker" Lambert – with each city putting forward their take on the song.

On Monday evening, a Night on the Tyne at Newcastle's Live Theatre from 7.15pm will bring together poets and musicians, clog dancers and Ouseburn Young Voices, a choir of young people from schools in the east end of Newcastle.

● For more information and to get tickets, visit www.newcastlesoftheworld.wordpress.com.



Anything is Possible!

More than 120 representatives from organisations across the Tees Valley recently came together for **Anything is Possible: Tackling Child Poverty Together Across Tees Valley**.

Organised by a small group of community partners, including Close-Knit Families and the North East Child Poverty Commission, the event was created to explore how organisations can work more effectively together to tackle child poverty in the region.

The event included contributions from broadcaster Steph McGovern, Tees Valley Combined Authority chief executive Tom Bryant, and a panel of regional leaders.





Teresa Peters

The 50 person problem

By Teresa Peters, Founder of Accelerator Coaching Ltd

What happens to connection when a team scales, and how leaders can rebuild it without losing momentum.

"It's what we all want from our most important relationships, to be understood."

Dr Martyn Newman, RocheMartin

That line stops me every time, because so much of my coaching work comes back to exactly that: to be understood. Picture this. Twenty senior leaders, a room full of yellow notebooks, profiling packs stacked like a very serious version of party bags, and me somewhere in the middle trying to get grown adults to talk about their feelings before the coffee has even kicked in. Yes, that is genuinely how my Thursdays go. And here is the thing nobody tells you. Getting people to open up is rarely the hard part. Getting them to stay open once the team gets bigger, that is where it gets interesting.

There is no single tipping point. Research points to two, around 50 people, when informal

communication stops covering the gaps, and around 150, Dunbar's number, the limit on stable relationships we can hold. In my own work I see it hit hardest once teams cross 100. The pattern is the same either way. Connection stops being accidental and has to become a decision.

Two UK figures made me sit up recently. The Work AI Institute's UK 2026 report found 90% of UK digital workers are now required to use AI at work. The British Red Cross and the Campaign to End Loneliness found senior managers are nearly twice as likely as average to say they are often or always lonely. We are more assisted than ever, and more disconnected at the top.

This is exactly where team coaching earns its place. The International Coaching Federation defines it as partnering with a team to maximise its collective potential and shared purpose, treating the team as a single living system rather than a collection of individuals. You are not coaching people one after another. You are coaching the space between them.

Patrick Lencioni built an entire model on this. Trust sits at the bottom, underneath everything else a team needs, and it only forms through vulnerability. Brené Brown puts it more plainly still. Vulnerability is the birthplace of connection. I saw the truth of both this year, when a normally guarded operations director admitted, in front of his whole team, he had been carrying a decision alone for months. The

room did not judge him. It leaned in.

I am accredited in team and group coaching by three separate organisations, on top of accreditations in DiSC, Gallup Strengths and the RocheMartin Emotional Capital Report, and recently in neurodivergent inclusive coaching, changing how I hold space for teams who process and communicate differently. The tools are only ever the starting point. The real work happens in the room, with real people.

Team coaching is not a nice to have right now. It is close to essential. As AI takes over more of the transactional side of work, what remains is a basic human need, to feel safe and connected with other humans. No amount of automation changes that.

As your team has grown, what has quietly stopped happening that used to come naturally, and would a proper team conversation bring it back.

At Accelerator Coaching, my work sits in two places. I help leaders whose teams have scaled up and started to feel the strain, communication slipping, feedback getting harder, connection that used to be easy now taking real effort. I also work one to one with individuals navigating confidence. If you are a leader looking for a sounding board to reconnect your team, or space to think with a partner, I would love to hear from you. Take a look at our new website, or message me on LinkedIn.

acceleratorcoaching.co.uk

Passing the baton for business success in North Tyneside



Keith Newman and Kate Watson

Image: Steve Brock Photography, PR and Media keith@highlightspr.co.uk

A unique initiative designed to celebrate and promote business-to-business collaboration across North Tyneside is gathering pace thanks to the vision of the North Tyneside Business Forum.

Inspired by the spirit of the Olympic torch relay, Angela Tuplin, Managing Director of NE Display, and Chair of the Forum, commissioned and designed a bespoke athlete's baton which is being passed from one North Tyneside business to another whenever work, support or collaboration is exchanged. The aim is simple, to demonstrate that North Tyneside's business community is thriving and that local firms are actively supporting one another.

Angela said: "North Tyneside has a vibrant business community, and this baton is a visible symbol of the connections being made every

day. It's something people can get behind and share on social media, helping us shine a light on the fantastic businesses we have here."

The baton's journey began with coffee specialists Afuera and has since passed through businesses including Baristocracy Coffee Roasters, APS Detailing, NE Display and a growing number of firms across the borough. One of the latest recipients is Sangeeta Loomba of Namaste Taste of India at Newcastle Quays Retail Park. Sangeeta is currently working with the newly arriving Cue and Darts Lounge on plans for collaborative curry and games nights once the leisure venue opens later this summer. Sangeeta said: "It's a lovely idea because it shows businesses supporting each other. We're looking forward to working with the Cue and Darts Lounge and helping bring more people into Newcastle Quays."

The baton was then passed to public relations consultant Keith Newman of Highlights PR, and member of the Forum management team, who has been helping promote Sangeeta's business through media coverage and photography. Keith will now continue the relay by passing the baton to Ask Mrs Watson founder Kate Watson who supplies IT advice to the company.

Angela hopes the baton will continue to travel throughout the borough, creating a growing chain of collaboration and goodwill.

"It doesn't have to be a major contract," she said. "It could be a collaboration, a referral, a business exchange or simply an act of kindness. The important thing is showing that businesses are working together and supporting each other."

As the baton continues its journey from company to company, it is becoming a powerful symbol of a borough where businesses don't just operate side-by-side, they actively help each other succeed.

The North Tyneside Business Forum is run by a management group made up of members from various industry sectors in the Borough and gives support in the form of networking, events and signposting for growth and development. Membership is free and open to any business of any size with a trading address within North Tyneside. The Business Forum is supported by but not run by North Tyneside Council.

Follow the baton journey:
www.northtynesidebusinessforum.org.uk/baton-journey

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A Strategic Hedgehog

When Jim Collins wrote his iconic book, 'Good to Great', he aimed to identify the characteristics shared by businesses that - long-term - grew from good to great.

What emerged was what he famously called **The Hedgehog Principle**.

The name comes from the humble hedgehog, a creature with a sole strategy.

When faced with danger, it rolls itself into a ball and plays dead.

Every time.

It doesn't experiment with different tactics or try outsmarting its opponent.

It relies on doing one thing exceptionally well.

Its greatest predator is the fox, renowned as the most cunning of animals.

Yet when a fox encounters a hedgehog, usually the hedgehog prevails.

The fox may be clever, but the hedgehog is unwavering.

What Collins discovered was that companies that grew from good to great operated in a similar way.

Rather than constantly changing direction, they identified one core strategy and remained relentlessly committed to it.

So, what is your hedgehog?

Picture a Venn diagram made up of three overlapping circles:

- **What are you passionate about?**

Nothing truly great has ever been created without passion.

- **What can you be the best in the world at?** No great company was ever built on mediocre products or services.

- **What drives your economic engine?** Understanding how your passion and your capability combine to create a commercially sustainable business is crucial.

Where these three circles intersect is your hedgehog. It is your point of power.

Move even slightly away from that centre, and your power begins to diminish.

Your competitive advantage weakens. Your chances of winning shrink.

Don't just take my word for it - prove it to yourself. Sit down and do the exercise.

What is your hedgehog?

What I've described is, if you like, a blueprint for building a business that is sustainable, resilient, purposeful - and full of potential.

Give it a try, and let me know how you get on.

You'll thank me later.

www.kinnery.co.uk



Kinnery summer garden party

There were sun, sparkles and speeches as Ian Kinnery marked another successful year with his annual summer garden party.

Over 50 guests recently attended the event at The Bay Horse, in Hurworth.

Guests nibbled on canapes - while the dogs enjoyed some paw-some ice cream!





Front right: Director and Mortgage Adviser Ashleigh Watson and the team at Riverside Mortgage Advice

From spare bedroom to business success: Riverside Mortgage Advice's rapid rise

When Ashleigh Watson launched Riverside Mortgage Advice from her spare bedroom in October 2023, her ambition was simple – to build a business that offered honest, independent mortgage advice with a personal touch.

Less than three years later, that ambition has grown into a thriving Sunderland business. Now based at the North East BIC, Riverside Mortgage Advice has expanded from a one-person operation into a team of four, reflecting increasing demand for independent mortgage advice across the region.

Drawing on years of experience in the industry, Ashleigh established the business to support people at every stage of their property journey. From first-time buyers and buy-to-let investors to self-employed clients, Riverside Mortgage Advice offers tailored guidance across a wide range of lending options. The firm has also built a reputation for helping clients with more complex circumstances, including specialist property purchases, adverse credit histories

and those rebuilding financially after the pandemic.

Much of the company's growth has come through recommendations, with its reputation built on providing straightforward advice and taking the time to understand each client's individual circumstances.

As demand increased, so did the business. Riverside Mortgage Advice now employs two additional mortgage advisors, Cheryl and Erin, while administrative apprentice James is working towards becoming a fully qualified mortgage advisor. The company has also launched a new website as it continues to invest in its future.

For Ashleigh, moving into the BIC has been a key step in the company's evolution.

"Starting the business on my own from

home, I never imagined we'd grow this quickly. Bringing Cheryl, Erin and James into the business means we can help more clients while continuing to offer the personal service that has always been so important to us.

"Moving into the BIC has been a big part of that journey. It's given us the space to grow, but just as importantly, it's connected us with a supportive community of businesses and created new opportunities."

The move has provided Riverside Mortgage Advice with the room to expand while becoming part of a wider network of growing businesses.

Doreen Howard, Centre Manager at the North East BIC, said: "It's fantastic to see how far Riverside Mortgage Advice has come in such a short time. Ashleigh has built a business founded on trust, expertise and exceptional customer service, and it's wonderful to see that success creating new jobs and supporting even more clients.

"We're proud to have Riverside Mortgage Advice as part of our business community and look forward to supporting the team as they continue to grow."

For Ashleigh, the journey from a box room to a growing business is proof that steady, customer-focused growth can quickly turn a small idea into an established enterprise – and with a growing team behind her, the next chapter is only just beginning.

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Building resilient North East businesses in a changing climate

By Jo Holmes, Genee

Sustainability conversations have often focused on how businesses affect the environment. Increasingly, organisations also need to consider how a changing environment affects their business. Both perspectives matter, and both require action.

From Storm Arwen's widespread power outages to increasingly intense rainfall affecting transport networks, businesses across the North East have already experienced how extreme weather can disrupt day-to-day operations. What were once considered exceptional events are becoming increasingly common, creating new risks for organisations of every size and sector.

Climate change is a business issue

Hotter temperatures can affect employee wellbeing, particularly for those working outdoors, in manufacturing settings, warehouses or older buildings with limited ventilation. Travel disruption can impact commuting and supply chains. Equipment may perform less efficiently during periods of sustained heat, while water shortages and flooding can create operational challenges that many organisations have never previously considered.

Staff productivity, comfort and concentration are all influenced by workplace conditions, while customers and stakeholders increasingly expect businesses to demonstrate how they are managing climate-related risks.

Adaptation is therefore not simply about responding to individual weather events; it is about creating organisations that can continue to thrive despite increasing uncertainty.

Looking beyond net zero

Many businesses have made significant progress in understanding and reducing their carbon footprints. Yet adaptation often remains overlooked.

There is no route to a resilient future without both mitigation and adaptation. We must continue to reduce emissions at pace to limit

the severity of climate change, while also preparing for the impacts that are already being felt today.

Forward-thinking organisations are now asking important questions:

- Which of our operations are most vulnerable to extreme weather?
- Are our buildings and infrastructure fit for future conditions?
- How resilient are our supply chains?
- Do our employees have the support they need during periods of extreme heat or severe weather?

Answering these questions helps move sustainability from a standalone initiative to an integral part of organisational resilience.

Planning ahead

Simple measures can have significant benefits, from improving shading and ventilation within buildings to reviewing maintenance schedules, introducing sustainable drainage solutions or considering alternative working patterns during periods of extreme heat.

Supply chain resilience also deserves greater attention. Organisations are increasingly dependent on complex networks of suppliers, many of whom may face their own climate challenges. Understanding vulnerabilities and maintaining strong communication with partners will become increasingly important.

The businesses that succeed in the future are unlikely to be those that simply react to disruption. They will be the organisations that anticipate change and prepare for it.

Understanding what matters most

Every organisation faces different environmental impacts, risks and opportunities. The key is understanding what matters most to your organisation and developing a structured plan for improvement, and the Investors in the Environment (iE) programme can support you to do that.

iE recognises that organisations are at different stages of their sustainability journey and offers a practical framework for continual improvement rather than expecting perfection from day one. The programme takes a holistic approach, examining not only resource use and operational performance, but also policies, leadership, culture, staff engagement and communication.

Through independent audits and detailed feedback, organisations gain a clearer understanding of both their environmental impacts and the risks that may affect future resilience. This enables businesses to prioritise actions, develop meaningful improvement plans and embed sustainability into everyday decision-making.

Importantly, the process helps organisations move beyond isolated projects and create long-term strategies that support both mitigation and adaptation objectives.

The businesses that invest in resilience today will be the ones best placed to succeed tomorrow. To discuss how we can support your organisation on your sustainability journey, get in touch at jo@genee.org.uk



Jo Holmes

Lockheed Martin Space UK Leader who helped bring space sector investment to the North East sees the progress



Pictured (third from left) is Rod Drury, vice president of Global Space next to - in the centre - Dan Tenney, senior vice president of Global Business Development and Strategy, with the team from NESST at Northumbria University during a site visit

A senior Lockheed Martin executive, who was instrumental in bringing space sector investment to the North East, has returned to the region to see the progress that has been made.

Dan Tenney, senior vice president of Global Business Development and Strategy, helped drive Lockheed Martin Space UK's commitment to the region and recognised its potential early on.

And this week he made a return visit alongside Rod Drury, vice president of Global Space, to see at first hand how Lockheed Martin's support has helped to strengthen the region's growing space and

technology sector.

He visited the North East Space Skills and Technology Centre (NESST), a joint project between Lockheed Martin Space UK, Northumbria University and the UK Space Agency which is due to open later this year.

Tenney expressed his admiration for what had been achieved since the investment was first conceived, highlighting the collaborative efforts between industry, Government and regional partners that have helped position the North East as an emerging hub for space and advanced technology

"The North East is building something unique for the UK," he said.

"The combination of world-class skills, industrial capability and regional leadership is creating the foundations for a sovereign space ecosystem that can support economic growth, innovation, and national capability.

"It has been inspiring to see the progress

made since our initial investment discussions and to see the vision becoming a reality."

They also met with North East Mayor, Kim McGuinness to discuss the progress and future impact of Lockheed Martin's investment in the region.

The visit was further evidence of Lockheed Martin's strong commitment to the North East, which it sees as a key partner in developing talent pipelines and in strengthening the UK's space capabilities.

It follows in the footsteps of a meeting earlier this year in Washington DC, where North East Mayor, Kim McGuinness and Lockheed Martin UK agreed to a new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to align investment, skills development and supply chain growth—bringing a more coordinated public-private approach to regional economic development.

Lockheedmartin.com



What the UK's largest quarrying & construction show taught us about exhibition success

By Jack Seward, Seward Marketing & Events

Every two years, thousands of people from the quarrying, construction and recycling industries gather for one of the UK's biggest outdoor exhibitions.



exhibition experience doesn't just cost money. It puts businesses off exhibiting again.

Held at Buxton's Hillhead Quarry in June, this year's show once again proved that exhibition success isn't accidental, it's planned, data-driven, and it all starts much earlier than most people think.

Our team at Seward Marketing & Events managed multiple client stands at the show, and here's what the results told us.

Planning really is everything - and visitors only see half of it

What attendees experienced at Hillhead was warm sunshine (hello UK heatwave!) and a busy, well-run show. What they didn't see was the high winds and heavy rain that dominated the first week of build.

Managing multiple stands in those conditions meant that every logistical detail from delivery schedules to structural considerations, had already been thought through. Our team are used to working outdoors and thanks to planning, when the weather turned, we were ready.

It's the age-old story, good exhibition management is largely invisible. When it works, nobody notices. When it doesn't, everyone does.

Every client matters equally

We worked with multiple clients of varying sizes and budgets at Hillhead this year.

What I find really interesting, is that a £1,000 budget for a small business at a critical stage of growth and awareness, can matter more to them than £100,000 does to a larger organisation.

At Seward Marketing & Events we ensure we approach every brief the same way: spending only where it genuinely adds value for the client and their audience, not to tick boxes or inflate costs.

That approach is something clients notice. Richard Medley of MMD, who has worked with us for many years, said: "Any suggestions which are offered always represent value added for the impact your stand will make. The team are always helpful and easy to work with."

The most important conversations happen 12 months before the show

If there's one piece of advice we'd give to any business considering Hillhead 2028, it's this: start talking now. Not about stand design or build specifications, but about whether the show is the right investment for your business in the first place.

Again it's something I always talk about - a bad

The trend worth watching: space

What was nice to see at Hillhead this year was that people were ensuring that more space was available on stands to allow visitor movement. This might be due to product availability in some circumstances, but it's also due to the realisation that it might be the only chance they have to interact with a visitor or customer that year, so they want to create the space for them to enter and engage in their event space.

Post-event: the data doesn't lie

After any show, the first question should be a simple one: did it work? How many leads were captured? What did footfall look like?

These aren't vanity metrics; they're the foundation of the decision about whether to return. Holly Cooke of Takeuchi UK, who used Seward Marketing & Events for Hillhead 2026, summed up: "The experience was excellent from start to finish. The team was professional, responsive, and easy to work with throughout the planning process. They delivered everything as promised, on time and to a high standard."

That's the benchmark. And it starts with a conversation, ideally, long before the next show.

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Retreats that paint a picture

Three cohorts of the North East Vistage group enjoyed their summer retreat last month, with each member leaving with their own painted memory.



Traditionally the Vistage retreats are a time to focus on yourself as a business leader, to bond with other members and to work on real time challenges and strategic issues.

This year the three groups split across two dates where they enjoyed a session from one of Vistage's leading speakers, a black tie dinner and a morning of motivational activity.

Held at Gisborough Hall and Derwent Manor respectively, the first day saw a session with Marie Ekerholm, focussing on Navigating Uncertainty With Creativity and Intuition.

Marie delivered the focused, experiential session in a full day workshop that saw nearly 20 of the region's leaders shift their thinking and respond to situations where there is no clear answer. With Marie's guidance the attendees stepped out of familiar patterns and began to see what is actually in front of them.

Andrew Marsh, chair for Vistage North East, Northumberland and Cumbria, organised the retreat for his cohorts. He said:

"The retreat is a fabulous time to take a step out of day-to-day leadership and enjoy some blue sky thinking time. We always try to find ways to do this creatively and this year, Marie hit the brief perfectly.

"Attendees took away not only their paintings, but awareness of the habits they use to form decisions, being more at ease with uncertainty, seeing patterns and broader perspectives and a gaining a feeling on understanding enjoyment beyond personal boundaries and familiar thinking. All in all, a very successful day!"

Feedback from the session included:

"This took me right out of my comfort zone. I resisted the first few steps and hadn't realised how set in my own thought pattern I was until I relaxed into what Marie was asking us to do."

Director of Marketing

"I ended up with something so far away from my initial imagined canvas. I went through stages of wanted to not do anymore, to wanting to change it completely. It really mirrored a thought pattern of decision making and change management!"

MD of merchandising company

"As well as my own reaction to Marie's directions, I enjoyed seeing those of my peers – nobody responded in the way I thought they would, which shows how many differing paths there are to the final decision."

Charity CEO

The cohorts continued to bond and discuss their challenges, issues and celebrations over a three-course black tie dinner that evening. The next day, walk and talks about future plans were on the agenda along with some fun, motivation, team building activities.

Ambitious MDs, CEOs and business owners join Vistage to connect with like-minded executives through a trusted leadership experience. Alongside one-to-one mentoring, a monthly peer group meeting and quarterly regional events, members enjoy this annual retreat, a bi-annual national CEO Connect Conference, monthly newsletters and a members' online area with access to webinars, support material and access to other members.

If you are interested in joining one of Andrew's cohorts, then get in touch on Andrew.marsh@vistage-chair.co.uk





Andrew Marsh

Are you rewarding effort over value?

By Helen Butler, Simplified Operations

Every generation of business leaders inherits assumptions from the one before it. Some deserve to endure. Others quietly outlive their usefulness.

One assumption I believe is overdue for re-examination is the way we think about productivity.

Spend a day with almost any business owner and you'll hear familiar language. The team is busy. Diaries are full. Everyone is working flat out. Productivity has become synonymous with effort, and effort with value. It made perfect sense when businesses won by producing more, building more or selling more than the competition.

I'm not convinced that's how most SMEs win today.

After more than twenty years working inside businesses, the organisations that consistently outperform their competitors rarely do so because they have people working harder than everyone else. More often, they've become exceptionally good at removing the work that never needed to exist in the first place.

It's a subtle distinction, but an important one.

The challenge is that activity is reassuring. A busy office feels productive. A packed diary feels important. The manager dealing with problem after problem appears indispensable.

Removing work is much quieter.

Nobody notices the meeting that never had to happen. Nobody celebrates the report that's no longer needed or the approval that's no longer required. When a recurring problem disappears, it quickly becomes invisible. Ironically, some of the most valuable improvements in a business leave very little evidence they ever happened.

I've lost count of the number of businesses where I've found highly capable people spending hours every week chasing approvals, searching for information, updating multiple spreadsheets or resolving issues that have simply become accepted as "the way we do things". None of those activities create value. They simply consume the capability the business already has.



Helen Butler

If your team looks busy all day, that's not automatically a sign of a healthy business. It may simply mean your business has become very good at keeping talented people occupied with work that perhaps shouldn't exist.

Take two employees.

One spends every Friday fixing the same recurring issue. They're always busy, everyone knows they're working hard and they never seem to stop.

The other spends a few hours redesigning the process so the issue never happens again.

Who contributed more to the business?

The first person's effort is highly visible.

The second person's impact is almost invisible.

Yet it's the second person who's quietly made everyone else's week easier.

Too often, businesses measure what is easiest to count rather than what matters most. Hours worked, utilisation, meetings attended and inboxes cleared all provide visible evidence of activity. Far harder to measure are better decisions, simpler processes, stronger customer

relationships or problems that never happen because someone had the foresight to remove their cause.

The measures themselves aren't wrong. They simply don't tell the whole story.

The businesses I see moving ahead haven't stopped caring about productivity. They've broadened their definition of it. They understand that eliminating ten hours of unnecessary work can create far more value than asking people to squeeze ten more hours of effort into the week.

Because the businesses that will thrive over the next decade won't necessarily be those with the busiest teams.

They'll be the ones that stop mistaking effort for value.

Perhaps the question isn't whether your people are productive enough. Perhaps it's whether your business is still rewarding the wrong things.

helen@simplifiedoperations.co.uk

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Don't wait for the resignation letter

Bryony Gibson, director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, shares how to spot the warning signs long before your best people leave.

If you know what to look for, you can spot most resignations long before the letter.

Choosing to leave a job isn't a decision people take lightly. By the time someone formally hands in their notice, it's usually been building for some time.

As an employer, when you're caught up in the day-to-day, it's easy to miss the signs, but being able to identify retention issues and act on them before it's too late matters.

Good people are hard to find and even harder to replace. When one of your best people leaves, a firm doesn't just lose a great pair of hands; it loses knowledge, relationships, confidence, and continuity.

That can take months to rebuild, which is why retention cannot be left to the point of resignation. Relying on a counter-offer might keep someone for a little longer, but it rarely fixes what made them look elsewhere in the first place.

Warning signs are quieter than you expect

One of the clearest signs someone has disengaged is when they stop asking about their future. Ambitious people want to know what's next. They ask how to progress, how to improve, and where their next opportunities might be.

This is particularly true for people who've been in a firm for a few years. They can feel like they have outgrown their role and are ready for more responsibility. And if they can't see a positive future, they will start to imagine one elsewhere.



Bryony Gibson

Silence is not always golden

Not everyone is naturally vocal, so you should look for changes in levels of engagement and communication.

For example, someone who used to challenge ideas might stop contributing. People who used to raise frustrations might stop speaking up. Or someone who actively cared about standards, systems, or service levels might revert to doing only what is required of them.

While not doing anything wrong, this is the kind of behaviour change that often indicates people are becoming detached.

Good performers can be especially difficult to read because they will keep delivering, doing the job well enough so that nobody thinks to worry. But when the extra effort starts to disappear and people no longer volunteer, bring new ideas to the table, or show interest beyond their personal workload, it's time to act.

While on paper, everything may look fine, in practice, they could already be halfway out the door.

Language gives you a clue

Engaged employees tend to talk about the company as "we". If that quietly becomes "you"

or "they", it suggests that they no longer feel part of the team.

You must be careful not to put everyone who changes the odd pronoun on your flight-risk list, as people are allowed to be reflective on platforms like LinkedIn, but patterns matter. When combined with a loss of energy, ambition, or emotional connection, it is worth having a proper conversation.

Employee Retention

Retention is not about trying to keep everyone forever. Some employees will naturally outgrow a role or decide their next step is elsewhere. That's normal but losing good people because no one spotted the signs early enough is different.

The firms that retain people well tend to talk to them before there's a problem. They ask what they need, what is frustrating them, and whether they can see a future with the firm. And listen to the answers.

The companies that win at retention are the ones that understand engagement declines over time. If a resignation comes as a complete shock, the uncomfortable truth is that the warning signs were probably there; you just missed them.

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To express your interest in a vacancy, or for a confidential discussion, contact Bryony Gibson, Bryony Gibson Consulting, on 0191 375 9983 or visit BryonyGibson.com/Vacancies

"I met Phil Andrew from SME Centre of Excellence, he came along and he was just so honest, It was so simple."

– **Jaf Ali, Dabbawal & Khai Khai**

How we cut costs and helped open a restaurant on time for an award-winning North East restaurateur



Jaf has spent over a decade building some of Newcastle's most recognised independent restaurants, from the UK's first Indian street food concept to a fire-and-smoke Josper kitchen. When you're running a multi-site hospitality group, energy and utilities aren't a footnote, they're one of your biggest controllable overheads. He brought us two very different problems

Challenge 1: Finding someone to trust with a multi-site energy review

Jaf Ali's multi-site restaurant group had quietly drifted onto rates nobody had reviewed in years. We audited and re-tendered his full portfolio across gas, electricity and water, benchmarking every site against live market rates.

Challenge 2: A new site that had to open on time

When his newest restaurant faced a hard opening date with the energy infrastructure not yet in place, we ran an audit to confirm the site needed a larger commercial meter, then project-managed it end to end, from specifying the meter to arranging the fitting through to full installation.

We audited and re-tendered Jaf's full portfolio against live market rates, delivering savings of several thousand pounds a year across the group with zero disruption to service.

For the new site, we ran an audit, confirmed it needed a larger commercial meter, and project-managed it end to end from specification to fitting to full installation.

The restaurant opened on schedule, no delays.

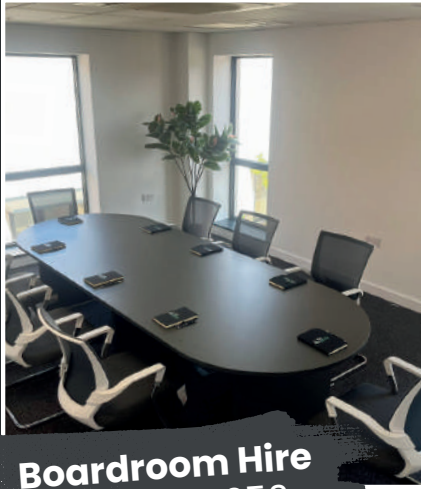
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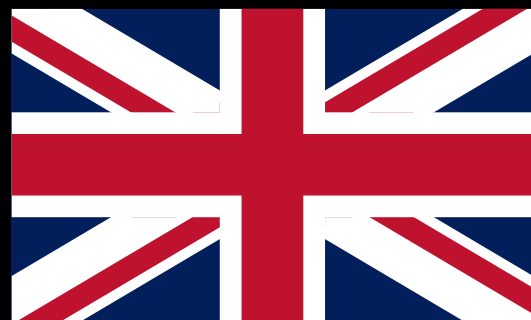
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The Biggest Trade Opportunity In A Generation Is On The Doorstep of the North East



The UK-India Free Trade Agreement is live. A North East delegation flies to India in October with Mayor Kim McGuinness. Expressions of interest close 10 August. ISS Airview explains why this one matters...

On 15 July 2026, the UK-India Free Trade Agreement came into force. It is the most comprehensive agreement India has ever signed, and the UK's most significant since leaving the European Union.

The numbers are not modest. Bilateral trade is forecast to rise by £25.5 billion a year in the long run, adding £4.8 billion to UK GDP annually. India's average tariff on UK goods falls from 15% to 3%. Ninety per cent of Indian tariff lines have opened to UK products, with around 64% becoming duty-free immediately, roughly £1.9 billion of current exports, rising to 85% over the coming years. UK exporters will save an estimated £400 million in tariffs in year one alone.

15% ➤ 3%

India's average tariff on UK goods

For some sectors it is transformational. Whisky and gin duties halve from 150% to 75%, falling to 40% by year ten. Automotive duties drop from over 100% to 10% under quota. Manufacturing, medtech, consumer goods and the creative industries all see broad, meaningful reductions.

Crucially, the agreement includes a pioneering standalone chapter for small and medium-sized businesses such as simpler customs, digital commitments and named contact points. Add 20,000 new professional visas and a five-year exemption from double social security contributions, and this starts to look less like a deal for multinationals and more like a deal built for exactly the ambitious, engineering-led, tech-literate scale-ups the North East does best. **However, the savings are not automatic.**



Meenu Malhotra DL, Honorary Consul General of India

To claim preferential rates, UK exporters must complete a one-time origin registration with HMRC through its Origin Registration portal. Until that is done, your goods pay the old rates, even though the deal is technically live. That single administrative step is the difference between shipping to India at 3% and shipping at 15%.

Then there is rules of origin, where most claims actually fall down. Preferential rates depend on proving where your goods are made, and the evidence needs to be in order before your next shipment, not after it.

But paperwork is the easy part. A lower tariff means nothing without a buyer, a distributor or a partner on the ground. That is the bit you cannot do from a desk in the North East.

Which is where October comes in...

North East Mayor Kim McGuinness is leading a Trade Mission to India in October 2026, supported by ISS Airview and the North East Combined Authority. It takes a delegation of North East businesses straight into the market at the precise moment the FTA takes hold.



UK-INDIA GROWING GLOBAL

INDIA NORTH EAST TRADE MISSION



Ammar Mirza CBE, Founder & Chairman of ISS Airview

Through the summer, ISS Airview has run a Grow Global programme of briefings, seminars and webinars, bringing North East businesses face to face with trade experts, Indian market partners and firms already trading in the corridor. Those sessions have hosted Meenu Malhotra DL, Honorary Consul General of India, and Michelle Duggan, Head of Inward Investment at the North East Combined Authority, alongside businesses at every stage of their India journey.

That was the groundwork. October is the destination, and early August is the last window to get on it.

Expressions of interest close on 10 August.



Michelle Duggan, Head of Inward Investment at NECA



Kim McGuinness
North East
Mayor



Not a bandwagon. A corridor built over years. ISS Airview sits inside Newcastle International Airport's Enterprise Zone, with direct connections to more than 80 destinations and a physical presence at both ends of the UK-India corridor.

"We've been building this corridor for years," says Ammar Mirza CBE, Founder and Executive Chairman. The team includes Sharon Jandu OBE, Director of Partnerships for India, and has spent years turning trade agreements into actual orders rather than headlines.

That works in both directions. For Indian businesses entering the UK, ISS Airview offers a structured, end-to-end market entry pathway, from validating the opportunity to a fully operational UK company in as little as 48 hours, all under one roof. For North East businesses looking outward, it is market intelligence, introductions, and a soft landing at the other end.

The tariffs are falling whether you act or not. The only question is whether your business is registered, ready and building relationships, or watching a competitor win the contracts you could have had.

The corridor is open. Stronger partnerships. Bigger opportunities. Brighter futures.

Join the North East Mayors' Trade Mission to India, led by Mayor Kim McGuinness and supported by ISS Airview.

Register your interest: grow.global@issairview.com
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NE13 8BR

Inside the booming North East Montessori nursery – where staff ‘never leave’

The North East’s largest independent nursery has enjoyed huge growth - not least because of what the founder believes is the Stockton site’s ‘secret sauce’.

Launched by Michelle Sheekey in 2011, The Montessori People Independent Nursery School, in Thornaby, is on course for its most successful year to date; Soaring demand, coupled with an expansion of the Tedder Avenue nursery, has seen pupil numbers soar by 98 per cent over the past 12 months.

Additionally, sales have soared by 90 per cent at the site, most recently rated ‘Good’ by Ofsted.

However, founder Michelle believes the real success story lies beyond the figures.

“In early years, staff retention is undoubtedly one of the sector’s biggest challenges,” said Michelle, who founded the nursery after struggling to find suitable childcare for her own children.

“We’ve grown significantly in a short period, but we’ve done it without losing the people who make The Montessori People so special.

“We’ve got almost 40 staff here, yet not one member of our teaching team has chosen to leave the past three years - in early years, this is completely unheard of.

“And it is amazing for everyone - our children have stronger relationships but so do the parents. At drop off and home time, they know

who will be there and the trust they have in our staff is something special.

“And for our staff, they know this is a place they can grow. We routinely promote and train - in fact, nine of our staff are studying in higher education alongside our jobs - and I really think it helps to set us apart.”

And while the nursery’s recent expansion has resulted in an extra classroom, demand still outstrips space - with a waiting list for places running well into 2027.

And the expansion has also drawn praise from Stockton Council.

The authority described the expansion as a “welcome and positive development”, saying it had increased access to high-quality childcare and widened choice for local families.

But despite the current success, Michelle admits it hasn’t always been an easy ride.

Several of the team, including Operations Manager Cheryl Lambert, have been with the business since the start “through thick and thin”.

“Like a lot of growing businesses, we’ve had periods where I couldn’t pay salaries that month and I had to hope that they believed and trusted in this - which they absolutely do,” said Michelle.

“Staff like that are priceless, and the success we are having now couldn’t have come without them.

“Our whole team is just passionate about the children and the area, and it has become somewhere our staff genuinely want to work.

“The fact no staff have chosen to leave suggests that’s the case - and as a boss, I couldn’t feel prouder about what we’ve all helped create.”

Having left school with a ‘few daft O-Levels’, Michelle now runs two successful businesses - while she has also recently been nominated for Sustainability Entrepreneur of the Year, for her work with the nursery, at The Great British Entrepreneur Awards.

For more information, visit themontessoripeople.co.uk



Michelle Sheekey

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



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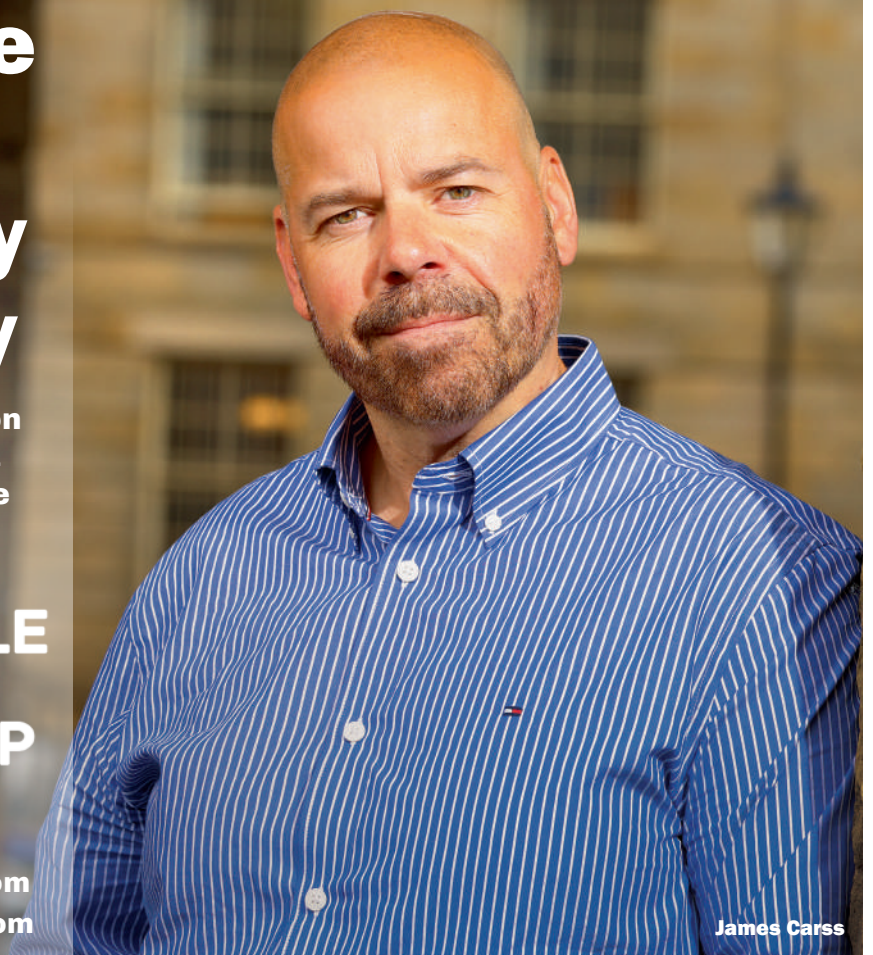
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James Carss



A night to remember at Durham Cricket for Durham Business Club Summer Social

More than 200 DBC guests gathered for the final T20 fixture of the season between Durham and Derbyshire Falcons.

Events Manager, Ythan Sale surprised Durham Business Group's CEO, Alison Gittins with an invite to the centre wicket to be presented with a signed cricket bat. Alison has proudly continued the remarkable legacy of the late Tom Moffat, whose vision founded Durham Business Group 45 years ago and whose contribution to Durham Cricket played an instrumental role in Durham Cricket's journey to first-class status.

The celebrations continued and an amazing £1k raised for Alison's fundraiser raffle in support of Alzheimer's Society and Durham securing an exciting 5-run victory over Derbyshire.

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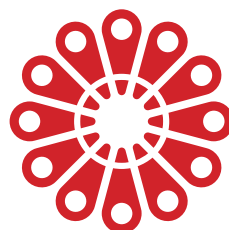
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For many businesses, understanding what customers really think can be invaluable. It helps shape strategy, strengthens marketing and provides reassurance that products and services are meeting expectations. Yet for many SMEs, market research can often feel like a luxury reserved for large businesses with sizeable budgets.

MMC Research is challenging that perception with its Pick 'n' Mix Customer Research service. A flexible, affordable solution that gives businesses meaningful customer insight without the cost of a fully bespoke research project.

Starting from just £1,200 + VAT, the service allows businesses to select from a range of professionally pre-designed research questions, tailoring the survey to suit their objectives while avoiding the time and expense of commissioning a completely bespoke piece of research.

One business to benefit from the service is Sunderland-based Oculus HR, which wanted to better understand how its clients viewed the business and the value of the services it provides.

"We wanted to gain a deeper understanding of what our customers really think about us," explains Managing Director, Louise Kennedy. "Whilst we receive regular feedback, we wanted independent insight that would validate our approach, identify what matters most to our clients and provide evidence we could use within our marketing."

Oculus HR was able to build a research programme that met its specific requirements using MMC Research's Pick 'n' Mix approach.

"The whole process was incredibly straightforward," says Louise. "MMC provided a selection of questions for us to choose from, allowing us to tailor the research to what was most relevant to our business. Communication throughout was excellent, clear, responsive and flexible and the team worked closely with us to make sure everything met our needs."

Customer participation also proved easier than expected. After sending a simple email containing the survey link, followed by a reminder a few days later, around 60% of customers took part.

While every business hopes for positive feedback, independent research often uncovers valuable opportunities for improvement. In Oculus HR's case, the findings reinforced that the business was delivering exactly the experience it strives to provide.

"We were genuinely delighted with the results," says Louise. "It was incredibly humbling to see how positively our customers view us and the impact of the work we do. The findings gave us

confidence that we're staying true to our values and delivering what's most important to our clients."

The value of the research didn't end once the report was delivered. Instead, Oculus HR has used the findings extensively across its marketing activity, creating an entire campaign based on the insights.

"We developed a dedicated customer insights campaign, including a 'Peace of Mind' campaign across LinkedIn and Instagram which generated fantastic engagement. We've also incorporated the findings into blogs, newsletters, videos, social media, our website, exhibition stands, marketing literature and printed materials."

Commenting on the service, Natasha McDonough, Managing Director at MMC Research, said, "Many small businesses know they should be listening to their customers more regularly, our Pick 'n' Mix service makes market research accessible to them.

It gives businesses access to professional, independent customer research that's tailored to their objectives without the cost of a fully bespoke project. It's an affordable way to gather meaningful insights that can shape business decisions, strengthen marketing campaigns and provide independent evidence of the value businesses deliver to their customers.

Whether a business is looking to improve its customer experience, generate testimonials, refine their messaging or simply understand what clients think, the insights gained can support the business long after the research has been completed."

mmc.agency

LEADING STRATEGIC CHANGE: WHY GREAT LEADERSHIP MATTERS MORE THAN EVER

In today's fast-moving business environment, change is no longer an occasional event - it is a constant reality. Whether it's adopting new technology, responding to market shifts, restructuring teams, or pursuing growth, organisations that manage change well are more likely to succeed. Yet while many change initiatives focus on processes, systems, and plans, one factor often determines success or failure: leadership.

Research consistently shows that people don't resist change as much as they resist uncertainty. This is where leadership becomes crucial. Employees look to leaders for clarity, confidence, and direction, particularly when the future feels unclear. Great leaders help people understand not only what is changing, but why it matters.

Models such as Kotter's Eight-Step Process and Lewin's Change Model highlight the importance of creating momentum, engaging stakeholders, and reinforcing new ways of working. However, these frameworks are only effective when leaders bring them to life through their daily behaviours.

Start with Clarity

One of the most common mistakes leaders make during change is assuming people understand the vision.

Ask yourself:

- Can my team clearly explain why this change is happening?
- Have I connected the change to organisational goals and customer needs?
- Am I communicating consistently and frequently?
(Tip: Repeat key messages more often than feels necessary.)

People are far more likely to support change when they understand its purpose and relevance to their work.

Create Psychological Safety

Change often creates anxiety. Employees may worry about their role, their performance, or their ability to adapt.

Psychological safety—the belief that people can speak up, ask questions, and challenge ideas without fear of embarrassment or punishment—is essential during periods of uncertainty.

Consider:

- Do people feel comfortable raising concerns with me?
- How do I respond when challenged?
- Am I encouraging honest conversations, or unintentionally shutting them down?
(Tip: Thank people for raising concerns, even when you cannot immediately resolve them.)

The organisations that adapt fastest are often those where people feel safest to learn, experiment, and make mistakes.

Make Feedback a Two-Way Street

During strategic change, communication should never be one-directional.

Strong leaders create regular opportunities for feedback and act on what they hear. Some of the most valuable insights often come from the people closest to the work.

Reflect on:

- Am I listening as much as I am talking?
- What mechanisms exist for people to provide feedback?
- Have I adjusted my approach based on what I have learned?

When employees see feedback leading to action, trust grows.

Balance Support with Accountability

Effective change leadership requires both empathy and accountability.

While people need support, coaching, and resources, they also need clarity about expectations.

Ask yourself:

- Are responsibilities clearly defined?
- Do people know what success looks like?
- Am I addressing resistance constructively and consistently?

Great leaders avoid the trap of being either too hard or too soft. They create an environment where people feel supported while remaining accountable for progress.

Final Thought

Strategic change is ultimately a people challenge, not just a business challenge. Plans, structures, and technology all matter, but leadership is what turns strategy into action.

As you navigate your next change initiative, remember this simple question:

"If I were experiencing this change as one of my team members, would I feel informed, included, supported, and clear about what is expected of me?"

PEOPLE SPARK

The answer may tell you everything you need to know about the effectiveness of your leadership during change.

For a conversation about leading your teams through change,
Get in touch....

email: scott@peoplesparkolutions.co.uk
tel: **07795 515 701**

peoplesparkolutions.co.uk

Mandale Business Park, Mullen Stoker House, Durham DH1 1TH

Partnerships at the heart of Sunderland's BIDS' success



It was the great business magnate Henry Ford that said “Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success”

That remark certainly resonates with Sunderland's BIDs – the city's Business Improvement District which encompasses both the City Centre BID and the Seafront BID.

For the past 12 years the organisation has worked tirelessly on behalf of the city, driving projects to help improve pride, give businesses a voice and positively promote Sunderland and everything it has to offer.

It has been behind successful initiatives like the Food and Drink Festival, Sunderland Restaurant Week, Urban Fest and so much more – all designed to showcase the city, drive footfall and boost the local economy.

At the heart of the BIDs' work is a commitment to partnerships, recognising that working with other key organisations and individuals brings people together in ways that everyone benefits from.

There are numerous examples of these initiatives, all very different but all with a similar outcome – creating a bond and benefiting the partners in a range of different ways.

The BID has had a long relationship with Nissan, previously involving the car giant's staff



in a number of city clean-up campaigns.

This strong partnership means the company jumped at the chance for a new project – teaming them with professional artists to design and create a series of sculptures.

The Material Thinking initiative saw 42 young people working alongside Sunderland-based artist, Sue Devine and Victoria Richardson from the BID to create art inspired by the heritage of Sunderland's coastline with a vision of its future.

The scheme was the brainwave of the Seafront BID – part of Sunderland's BIDs – working with Nissan to create a project which would involve the plant's new intake of apprentices.

The young people were encouraged to immerse themselves in the seafront, discovering its history, community and the local landscape before they used that experience to come up with concepts for sculptures and then presented their ideas before a panel.

Sharon Appleby, Chief Executive of Sunderland's BIDs, said the standard of the work had been exceptional.

“It was an absolutely unbelievable project which really unlocked both the creativity and the ability to work as a team in these young people,” she said.

“And it is a fantastic example of a real partnership working in tandem.”

This is far from an isolated example.

The BID regularly partners with Sunderland

University on a range of projects, from talks to hosting students on their placement year.

In fact that relationship is so successful that Sharon has been appointed a visiting professor.

One of the most successful recent partnerships has been the creation of the Foundational Businesses Academy, again set up with support and funding from the university, where SMEs were invited to sign up for four masterclasses to help boost their business, along with the opportunity to enjoy mentoring and coaching.

For all of the participants it was an invaluable and beneficial experience – so much so that the aim now is to roll this out again.

The BID takes much of its inspiration from the citywide attitude.

“Sunderland is a place which is very open to collaboration,” said Sharon.

“Initiatives like the tourism alliance which we are involved with alongside a range of partners and which has led organisations working together to support growth.”

And these are just the tip of the iceberg. Bringing together the city's charity retail sector to work with the LGBTQ+ community for their mutual benefit, teaming up Sunderland artists inspired by Moulin Rouge at the Empire Theatre to create the new Love Lane – there are endless examples of both large and small scale partnerships facilitated by the BID.

“Working and bringing people together for mutual benefit is at the heart of what we do,” said Sharon.

sunderlandbid.co.uk

North East solar specialist SCJ Renewables celebrate completion of major rooftop installation



L-R: Sean McIntyre and Chris Lyall,
Directors of SCJ Renewables

North East solar energy specialist SCJ Renewables is celebrating the completion of one of the region's largest rooftop solar installations at manufacturing and engineering company, CMP Products, in Cramlington.

The major project, which is not visible from ground level, has seen 1,518 solar panels installed across the roof of CMP Products, spanning an area roughly the size of a football pitch.

The system is capable of generating enough clean energy to power around 250 homes and converts sunlight into usable electricity through 8 x Solis 110KW inverters.

CMP Products is a leading global manufacturer of cable glands, cable cleats, and associated accessories, providing safe and reliable electrical connectivity solutions for hazardous and industrial environments. Part of the British Engines Group, CMP serves a wide range of sectors including oil and gas, renewable energy, rail, and construction, with a strong focus on innovation, quality, and compliance with international standards. With a global footprint and a commitment to engineering excellence, CMP Products supports customers worldwide in ensuring the integrity, safety, and performance of critical electrical infrastructure. CMP Product's decision to invest in the large-scale solar installation was driven by a combination of factors including their

sustainability ambitions and commitment to operational resilience.

The project was engineered to the highest safety and grid compliance standards and includes eight rapid shutdown boxes that automatically isolate all solar DC strings on the roof in the case of an emergency, such as a fire alarm activation - a critical safety feature for a site of this scale.

The solar installation will help CMP Products reduce its reliance on grid electricity, cut carbon emissions and lower long-term energy costs. Any surplus green power generated beyond the company's manufacturing requirements will be automatically exported to the National Grid, creating an additional revenue stream for the company while supporting households and businesses across the North East.

Sean McIntyre, managing director of SCJ Renewables, said: "This is a significant project, not just for CMP Products but for the wider North East renewable energy sector.

"There are not many rooftop solar installations of this size in the North East using rapid shutdown technology on this scale.

"As part of our turnkey service, we liaised with the Northern Powergrid to secure the appropriate export approvals required for CMP Products to export electricity at this scale," he said.

Award-winning SCJ Renewables, which is one of the fastest growing commercial installers in the North of England, said that the works were an example of modern day, best practice.

Sean McIntyre continued, "In designing and specifying the performance and safety features of the CMP Products installation we didn't just rely on off the shelf products, but we actively collaborated, and partnered, with acknowledged industry leaders like G59 Projects in designing

and manufacturing bespoke solutions for CMP."

G59 Projects supplies specialist electrical panels, switchgear and grid-compliance equipment for commercial renewable energy installations.

"CMP Products have a solar installation that ticks every box, both from a performance and safety perspective," said McIntyre.

Commenting on the installation, Kevin Glenn project manager at CMP Products said, "For a major manufacturer like CMP Products, solar power offers a practical way to reduce energy costs, improve sustainability and generate additional value from unused roof space. It is exactly the kind of project more commercial and industrial businesses across the region should be considering.

"We are now able to generate around 794,000kWh of clean energy annually and expect the system to pay for itself within around four years. To give that some context, a solar installation on an average home in the North East generates just 3,000kWh of clean energy annually.

"Investing in large-scale solar is an important step in our long-term sustainability strategy, and in working with SCJ Renewables we've been able to deliver a major solar installation with minimal disruption to our operations," said Kevin.

SCJ Renewables, based in Northumberland, designs, installs and maintains commercial solar PV and battery storage systems for businesses across the North East and beyond. The company provides a full turnkey service, from initial feasibility and design through to installation, grid liaison and ongoing maintenance.

www.scjelectrical.co.uk

Vision for the city, and the river

By Tariq Albassam, Director of Operations at NE1 Ltd

The transformation of the Port of Tyne into a world-class clean-energy hub demonstrates that the River Tyne remains at the economic heart of the North East.

Thanks to initial investment from the Port of Tyne, the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority, central Government and the private sector, billions of pounds has been channelled into the lower Tyne creating thousands of high-quality jobs and positioning our region at the forefront of the global energy transition.

This success deserves to be celebrated.

A truly great river should serve both prosperity and people.

While the 'outer Tyne' continues to power the region's industrial future, there is an equally exciting opportunity to transform the non-industrial sections of the river into places where people can experience, enjoy, and reconnect with the water.

Newcastle was built on the River Tyne, one of the country's great waterways. We crisscross it, photograph it, and host events alongside it, yet for much of the city-centre stretch we rarely use it. For a river that once powered the Industrial Revolution, there remains enormous, untapped potential to create new leisure, recreation and visitor experiences that complement the river's renewed industrial success.

This matters to us here at NE1 because, in cities across the UK and around the world, rivers are catalysts for economic growth, cultural development and environmental revitalisation.

NE1 has always focused on Newcastle's future, challenging the status quo and asking where we want and need the city to be in the next decade and beyond. One opportunity that consistently stands out is the river and the role it can play in shaping the city's future.

We believe that the whole region would benefit from a clear, coordinated vision that builds on the outstanding work already happening downstream. Industrial activity and public activation should not compete - they should strengthen one another, creating a river that works for business, communities and visitors and reestablishes the Tyne as one of the country's most important waterways.

NE1 recognised this opportunity in 2013 and created the Newcastle City Marina, which enabled boats to sail into the heart of the city and moor on the Tyne in the shadow of the Tyne Bridge. The marina quickly became a popular destination for leisure craft while unlocking exciting new opportunities for events and experiences, providing access to the water, something which is still surprisingly rare, especially in the city centre stretch.

Over the last decade, NE1 has used the marina to organise and host most of the river-based activities on the Tyne. From kayaking tours to Dragon Boat racing, and welcoming historic Spanish galleons, all have been extremely popular and while we are proud of what has been achieved, we know we have only scratched the surface of what is possible.

This summer we are delighted to have worked closely with Tyne Cruises Ltd, who are bringing river cruises back to the Tyne and using Newcastle City Marina as their home berth. From August, visitors and locals will once again be able to experience the city from the water, with regular cruises departing throughout the week.

It is another important step towards creating a river that is active, accessible and full of life.

Whilst we don't claim to have all the answers, we know there is significant untapped potential on the non-industrial stretches of the river, a growing appetite for river-based activity, and businesses waiting in the wings ready to invest.

Newcastle cannot afford to overlook one of its greatest natural assets. If we are serious about being a leading regional capital, we need a river that contributes not only to our economy through industry, but also to our identity, visitor offer and quality of life through leisure, recreation and culture.

What is needed to accelerate progress is a shared vision - one that brings together local authorities, the Port of Tyne, the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority, businesses and communities around a common ambition for the river's future.

The timing has never been better. The Port of Tyne's ambitious clean energy strategy, together with the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority's investment in maritime innovation and green growth, is transforming the lower Tyne into one of Europe's leading centres for offshore renewables and advanced manufacturing. Instead of seeing this as separate from the city, we should see it as an opportunity. A thriving industrial river creates confidence to invest further upstream, developing complementary leisure, tourism and cultural opportunities that celebrate our relationship with the water while respecting its role as a working river.

Momentum is already building. Alongside the return of river cruises, organisations are expressing interest in bringing floating saunas, plunge pools, cafés, paddle sports, river taxis and even floating hotels to the Tyne. At NE1, we have also signed the Swimmable Cities pledge, which aims to create swimmable open-water spaces in Newcastle by 2035. These ideas are not intended to compete with the river's industrial future - they complement it by creating new reasons for people to visit, spend time on the waterfront and experience the Tyne in new ways.

The River Tyne is already writing an exciting new chapter through its role in the green energy transition. Our ambition is to ensure local communities share in this success by creating more opportunities to experience, enjoy and connect with the non-industrial stretches of the river. By matching industrial and civic ambition, we can create a river that powers our economy, strengthens our visitor offer, improves health and wellbeing, and continues to be the beating heart of our city and region.

www.newcastlene1ltd.com



Tariq Albassam



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**Now is the ideal
time to review
contracts,
policies and
procedures.**

Could your business defend an unfair dismissal claim?

By Kathryn Rodgers, face2facehr

The Employment Rights Act 2025 is bringing the biggest changes to employment law in decades, and while many of the reforms won't come into force until January 2027, some significant changes are already here – with more just around the corner.

From 1 July 2026, employees starting a new role only need six months' service before they can bring an ordinary unfair dismissal claim, replacing the previous two-year qualifying period.

The changes don't stop there. From October 2026, the time limit for bringing most employment tribunal claims will double from three months to six months, giving employees longer to pursue legal action. Then, from January 2027, compensation for unfair dismissal is expected to become uncapped, with awards based on an employee's actual financial loss rather than being limited to a year's salary.

For employers, this is much more than another employment law update. It's a fundamental shift in how businesses need to think about managing people from day one.

A shorter qualifying period means greater risk

Previously, many employers viewed the first two years of employment as a relatively low-risk period. That doesn't mean employees could be dismissed without reason, but the reduced risk of an unfair dismissal claim often led to less formal processes.

That's no longer the case.

Employees recruited from July onwards will gain unfair dismissal rights after just six months, meaning businesses need to be confident they can justify any dismissal decision much earlier in the employment relationship.

The question employers should now be asking is:

If we had to defend this decision at an employment tribunal, could we?

If the answer isn't a confident yes, it's time to review your HR processes.

Good HR starts long before problems arise

The best way to reduce risk isn't by waiting until something goes wrong. It's by putting strong foundations in place from the very beginning.

That includes having clear employment contracts, well-structured probationary periods, regular one-to-one meetings, documented performance conversations and managers who understand how to deal with issues fairly and consistently.

Many businesses already do these things well. Others may find they've relied on informal conversations or verbal warnings that leave little evidence if a decision is later challenged.

Good documentation isn't about creating unnecessary paperwork. It's about protecting both your business and your employees by ensuring decisions are fair, transparent and consistent.

The next six months are an opportunity

Although the new qualifying period is now in force, employers still have a valuable window to prepare before the remaining Employment Rights Act changes arrive in January 2027.

Now is the ideal time to review contracts, policies and procedures, ensure probation processes are fit for purpose and provide managers with the training they need to confidently handle difficult conversations.

After all, even the best HR policies won't protect a business if they're not applied consistently.

Prevention is always better than cure

Employment tribunal cases continue to take longer to reach a hearing, with growing backlogs creating months, and sometimes years, of uncertainty for employers and employees alike.

Alongside legal costs and management time, future unfair dismissal awards could become significantly more expensive once compensation becomes uncapped. That makes following a fair process and keeping clear records more important than ever.

The reality is that most tribunal claims don't arise because employers intentionally do the wrong thing. They happen because businesses haven't followed a fair process or kept the evidence needed to support their decisions.

Looking ahead

The Employment Rights Act represents a significant change in how employers manage their people, but it doesn't need to be something to fear.

Businesses that take proactive steps now will be in a much stronger position as further reforms come into effect.

Review your contracts. Refresh your policies. Train your managers. Most importantly, make sure your people processes are robust enough to stand up to scrutiny.

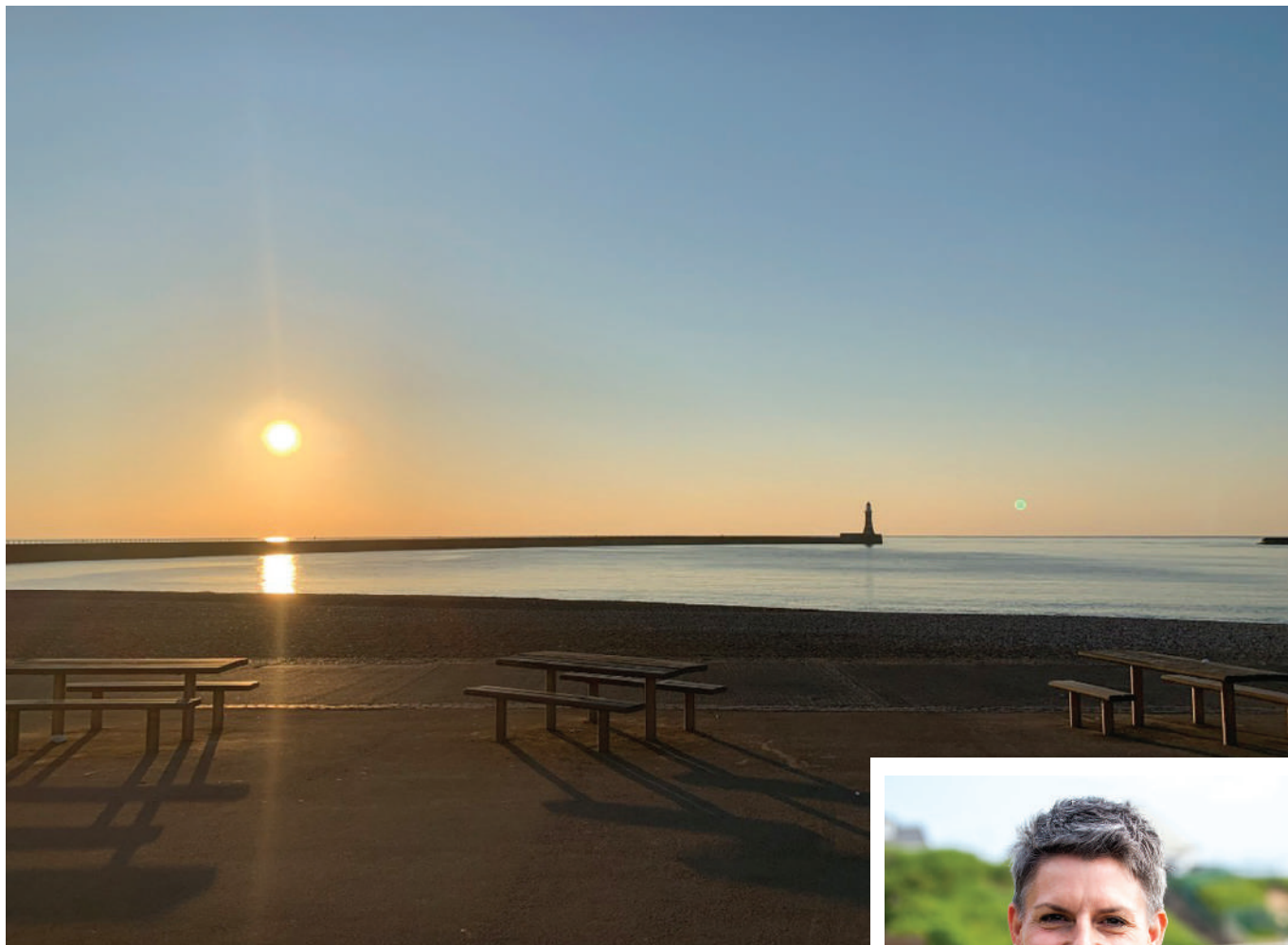
The legal landscape is changing, but good HR has always been about treating people fairly, communicating clearly and making well-informed decisions.

The key question every employer should be asking themselves over the next six months is this:

Are our processes robust enough to protect us against an uncapped compensation claim?

Getting the right processes in place today could save your business significant time, cost and stress tomorrow.

face2facehr.com



Sometimes the most important thing a business owner can do is STOP!

By Hayley Ramm, *The Efficient Elephant*

1. Situation

A Founder in the veterinary sector approached mentoring at a point where the business was performing well but growth was creating new leadership challenges. Like many owner-managers, they were balancing operational demands with the need to think more strategically about the future of the business.

2. The Challenge

While the business was successful, the Founder often found themselves absorbed in day-to-day activity. Time for reflection was limited, and decisions were increasingly being made reactively rather than proactively. The challenge was not a lack of capability but creating space to step back and consider the bigger picture.

3. The Mentoring Approach

A consistent theme throughout our work was creating space for reflection. Rather than focusing solely on immediate business issues, conversations explored how the Founder was experiencing the challenges they faced.

Through questioning, reflection and discussion, assumptions were tested and alternative perspectives considered.

4. The Shift

The most significant change was not in the business itself, but in the way the Business Owner viewed it.

Through regular reflection and structured conversation, they began to move from reacting to events towards thinking more intentionally about the future. Issues that had once felt overwhelming were no longer viewed as isolated problems to solve, but as part of a wider leadership picture.

This shift created greater clarity around priorities, decision-making and the role of the team in supporting future growth. Conversations increasingly focused on what only the Owner could do, rather than everything they felt responsible for doing.

As a result, attention moved away from the constant demands of the present and towards the opportunities and challenges that lay ahead.



Hayley Ramm

They were not short of capability; they simply needed the space to think differently. Once that space was created, confidence, clarity and direction began to follow.

5. The Turning Point

During one session, a simple future-focused question prompted a pause. They reflected on what it would mean if the following year looked exactly the same as the current one.

The emotional response that followed opened up a much deeper conversation about priorities, leadership and change.

6. And finally...

Sometimes, the greatest value a Mentor brings is not an answer, but the space for a better question.

theefficientelephant.co.uk

Sixteen years, thousands of conversations

By Nicky Jolley, Founder and MD, HR2day Limited

When people ask me what I've learnt after more than sixteen years of running HR2day, they usually expect the answer to be something about employment law.

It isn't.

Employment law matters, of course. Businesses need to stay compliant and legislation continues to evolve. But if there's one lesson that has stayed with me throughout the years, it's that people are remarkably predictable. Not because everyone behaves the same, but because human behaviour follows patterns. Once you understand those patterns, you stop reacting to problems and start recognising them much earlier.

One of the biggest misconceptions about HR is that our job starts when something goes wrong. In reality, it shouldn't go wrong if you have the right foundations in place.

Take grievances for example. Over the years, I've found that formal grievances rarely uncover just one issue. They often reveal a chain of smaller moments that, on their own, didn't seem significant enough to act on. The problem is, by the time a concern becomes formal, the issue itself has often grown far beyond the original matter.

I don't believe the most valuable question is, "How do we deal with this grievance?" A far better question is, "What allowed it to become necessary?"

For me, that's where good leadership begins.

One thing I've noticed is that many leaders spend their time looking for certainty before taking action. This is understandable as nobody wants to overreact, but people rarely communicate in neat, obvious ways. Often, the signs are much more subtle. A change in behaviour doesn't always mean something is wrong, but it can be a signal that something has

shifted and is worth understanding. And this is an opportunity to become curious rather than make assumptions.

Curiosity is probably the most underrated leadership skill there is.

The best leaders I've worked with don't have all the answers. They simply ask better questions. They create environments where people feel comfortable being honest before frustration turns into conflict. They don't assume silence means everything is fine, and they don't see difficult conversations as something to fear, they see them as part of building trust.

Perhaps the biggest surprise for many business owners is that good HR isn't just compliant paperwork and records. Policies, contracts and procedures matter because they provide clarity and consistency, but they don't build relationships. People do. The conversations managers have every day will shape your business culture far more than any document ever could.

At HR2day, we're often brought into organisations when an issue has already become formal, but most of the work I'm proudest of

never reaches that stage. It's helping a manager have a conversation they were nervous about. Giving a business owner the confidence to deal with an issue early, or helping leaders understand not just what happened, but why. That's the work that strengthens teams in the long term.

If there's one thought I'd leave you with, it's this: don't judge the health of your organisation by the absence of problems. Judge it by whether your people feel able to talk about small problems before they become big ones.

After sixteen years and thousands of conversations, that's still one of the most useful pieces of advice I give to clients. You won't build a strong team by avoiding the truth, but by creating cultures where those conversations happen early, openly and with trust.

It's always worth paying attention to the conversations that are, or are not, happening in your own organisation, and staying curious enough to catch issues before they escalate.



Nicky Jolley

hr2day.co.uk



A SPARK of genius

Cleaning up everything from shopping malls to garden centres to warehouses plus adding a practical – but wow – factor to hospitality. The North East company leading the way in robotics...

Statistics shows that room service has become a loss leader for the hotel industry. While guests – particularly those staying in top quality hotels – expect it, hoteliers have come up with a range of outrageous options to help boost the service.

A London hotel for example offers room service with a side order of a concert by the Royal Philharmonic, while one New York five star establishment has a caviar hotline.

For the main bulk of hotels however, room service has become something of a millstone around their necks.



It's not just the actual food itself that affects the hotel bottom line, the biggest cost is the labour it requires to deliver the meal, which has the knock-on effect of taking hard working staff away from other jobs at a time when labour is at a premium.

What the industry needs is there very own fairy godmother and this comes in the unlikely form of Newcastle-based SPARK Robotics.

This trail blazing company is one of the biggest providers of robots which are now being used across a whole host of industries to carry out a variety of vital tasks.

And that includes delivering room service straight to guests, who not surprisingly love the novelty of opening their room door and seeing a robot there with their order.

Newcastle's Maldron Hotel has become one of the first in the North East to use the robots - they have a ButlerBot W3 -and have seen their room service requests soar, which no doubt is partly due to guests loving the idea of coming face to face with robot waiters.

It's not just hospitality however that benefits from what the robots can offer - they are equally as adept at servicing industries including retail, logistics and a whole host of other operational environments.

But, as company director Eric Guo explains, the robots have many other important applications.

Eric is quick to point out that the robots are not there to put humans out of jobs - they simply carry out particular tasks which free up staff to use their time more effectively.

"Hotels, hospitality venues, logistics sites, shopping centres and large buildings all manage repetitive work, staff pressure, consistency requirements and high-volume routines," he said.

"SPARK Robotics helps organisations identify where robots can support those tasks in real working environments."

SPARK Robotics grew out of parent company, New APEX Ltd, which sold - and continues to sell - electronic point of sale equipment to hospitality and leisure.

This also gave the founders of SPARK a clear vision of where the pinch points were for the industry - and recognised how robots could help smooth the way.

The company set up an office in China where the robots are developed, with the main headquarters of the operation based at The Catalyst at Newcastle University. From here they showcase the main useful and practical applications their robots can offer, particularly on sites where repetitive tasks, staffing pressures and labour-intensive work could benefit from a special solution.



For shopping centres which need out-of-hours cleaning the robots are a real asset - and are currently in use at Eldon Square - with SPARK Robotics also selling to garden centres, amusement arcades and the warehousing industry.

Each bot is programmed for the particular task it is required to carry out, with the opportunity for more public facing machines to be branded or even "dressed" in a memorable way.

"We have one robot which has been made to look like a bee," said Eric.

The combination of an eye-catching but practical solution to a whole host of challenges is helping SPARK Robotics grow, so much so that the company is moving to new, larger offices this autumn.

"The robots have so many practical applications," said Eric.

"In hospitality, robotics can support service teams with room delivery or repetitive item movement, while in cleaning, robotics can support teams responsible for large or high-footfall areas.

"It's the same in logistics or large-site operations, robotics can support repeated movement, cleaning or operational routines.

"We are proud of the rate of growth of the company and the fact that we continue to be able to offer so many solutions across a wide range of industries."

For further information visit www.spark-robotics.com



Experienced North East freelancers launch new communications collective

A team of leading North East freelancers have joined forces to create a new Partnership that gives organisations in the public, private and third sectors access to specialist skills across communications, marketing, digital, creative and design.

The newly launched NE Comms Collective comprises David Brookbanks (Ludlow Street), Becky Madeley, Emma Pybus, Ben Miners (Ben & Viv), Jade Gillham, and Simon Canaway (Supanaught), all of whom are established names in the North East's communications and creative sectors.

David Brookbanks, founding partner of NE Comms Collective, said: "As freelance practitioners, we all have a flexible, adaptable and collaborative approach to working. We also have decades of experience and provide the kind of senior counsel organisations really benefit from."

All members of NE Comms Collective run successful freelance businesses and have collaborated on projects over a period of more than ten years. Individually, they have decades of communications, marketing and design experience, having worked in in-house roles and as part of consultancies.

Freelance PR, communications and marketing specialist David Brookbanks is the director of Ludlow Street, a company he founded in 2014. David works with clients including the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority, Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, and The Glasshouse International Centre for Music.

After a 11-year career delivering communications for Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums (now North East Museums), Emma Pybus has been running her freelance business since 2011. Current clients include North Tyneside Council and North East-based charity Blue Cabin.

Becky Madeley is an experienced marketing professional and has had senior roles at Berghaus and NewcastleGateshead Initiative. Becky has worked as a freelance marketing consultant since 2018 and clients have included Museums Northumberland, Novo Theatre, Alnwick Playhouse and Newcastle Rugby.

Ben Miners leads independent creative partnership Ben & Viv, which was founded in 2015. Ben & Viv's clients include North East Mayoral Strategic Authority, North East Screen and Invest North East England.

Jade Gillham is a PPC and LinkedIn Ads specialist working with clients including North East Growth Hub, The Works, Gateshead College, and University Centre Quayside. She also founded the North East Freelance Network, a community supporting the region's freelance workforce.

Simon Canaway is the founder of Supanaught, a highly respected creative studio that provides design consultancy for brand, print and digital. Simon has delivered work for Art Network North East, Tyne & Wear Building Preservation Trust, and Ways to Wellness.



Mediaworks appoints Michael Sherwood as Chief Customer Officer to support future growth plans

Mediaworks has appointed Michael Sherwood as Chief Customer Officer, enhancing its senior leadership team as the agency continues to build momentum and further strengthen its commitment to building long term client partnerships.

Michael joins from Worldpay, where he was Director of Onboarding, and brings more than 25 years' experience across customer, digital, operations and organisational leadership.

As Chief Customer Officer, Michael will be responsible for strengthening how clients work with Mediaworks. His role will focus on building even stronger agency relationships, creating more consistency across the client experience and ensuring Mediaworks' work is closely aligned to the commercial priorities of the organisations it supports.

His appointment supports Mediaworks' continued focus on building long term client partnerships that connect brand, marketing, technology, performance and customer insight to deliver stronger commercial results.

Michael has held senior roles at Atom bank, Virgin Money, Tesco Bank, BGL Group and Orange. At Atom bank, he played a key role in the development of the UK's first app only bank, leading digital, experience and brand functions during a period of significant growth.

Throughout his career, Michael has led customer operations at scale, supported the launch and growth of new service propositions, and helped organisations use customer insight to reduce friction, improve service quality and create better outcomes for both customers and businesses.

Michael Sherwood said: "I'm delighted to be joining Mediaworks as Chief Customer Officer. The agency has a strong reputation for combining strategic thinking with digital expertise, and I'm looking forward to working with the team to help clients create better, more effective experiences for their customers."

"Strong client partnerships are built on understanding, consistency and commercial focus. I'm looking forward to bringing my experience in customer leadership, operations and service improvement into Mediaworks to help clients get even more value from their relationship with the agency."



Wish you were here?
We'll help your brand
make waves this August.



Sun, sea and
standout social
content.





The hills are alive with the sound of Aubergine

Opera North has partnered with Leeds-based PR and content agency Aubergine to deliver a targeted influencer campaign for its summer musical *The Sound of Music*, which recently opened at the Grand Theatre in Leeds.

Aubergine, founded by former journalists, is working with Opera North to create a series of story-led content moments and bespoke influencer collaborations in the lead-up to opening night.

The agency also worked to secure 10 top tier influencers to attend the show itself, designed to spotlight *The Sound of Music* as a major cultural moment for Leeds this summer and drive ticket sales.

The focus of the project has also been around showcasing the scale, magic and cross-generational appeal of the production through engaging digital storytelling.

Elizabeth Simmonds, Brand and Communications Lead, Opera North, said: "When we met the Aubergine team, their passion for the arts, theatre, social media and media relations really shone through. We have been so impressed with the work they've been doing for Harewood House, and we're looking forward to working together on *The Sound of Music*."

Emma Gardner, co-founder of Aubergine and former BBC and Channel 4 News journalist, said: "We're delighted to be working with Opera North on such a loved and recognisable production. *The Sound of Music* has huge cross-generational appeal, which makes it perfect for influencer storytelling. Our focus is on creating thumb-stopping content that builds excitement in the lead-up to opening night."

Aubergine is led by former journalists Emma Gardner and Verity Clarke, specialising in lifestyle, culture, food and travel PR, content and social media. The team works as a remote agency across the UK, blending sharp media instincts with creative campaigns. They are also the retained PR agency for Harewood House.



Century up for PRsonal as popular NE business podcast marks 100th episode

ONE of the North East's most popular business podcasts has turned 100. Launched in 2023, PRsonal has featured guests ranging from entrepreneurs and CEOs to Olympians and celebrities.

Created by the award-winning PR agency, Harvey & Hugo, the show has celebrated its 100th episode with an exclusive interview with Sir Peter Vardy.

"PRsonal's premise has always been to discuss topics deemed off-limits at work – be it stoma bags or suicide – and the feedback we've had from the North East business community has been mind-blowing," said the show's host, Charlotte Nichols.

She created PRsonal after cancelling a meeting following a miscarriage – something she realised would probably be viewed as "too taboo" to air in the office.

Since then, the show has become a "safe haven" for guests to share deeply emotional personal stories – often for the first time.

"I've had guests pull me to one side afterwards to say 'I can't believe I've just told the whole world that', but later they've got in touch to say that they felt a weight had been lifted," revealed Charlotte.

"Some have even specifically asked to come on the show to share their story because others have told them how safe they felt doing so.

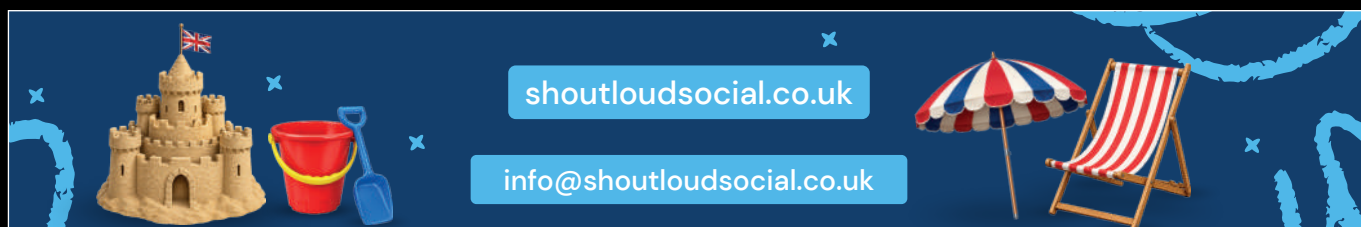
"And a big part of PRsonal's longevity has been about the variety of the stories. As a PR agency, we know what makes a good one.

"We've had deeply traumatic tales of people who have almost died or lost a child – then in the next episode, we will have a ghost story or, like in one case, a dog shaman."

The show's success resulted in Charlotte hosting live episodes, including one at TedX Teesside – thought to be the first ever live podcast at a TedX event anywhere in the world.

Additionally, it was also shortlisted for an International Women's Podcast Award.

The show is recorded at Darlington's Business Central, where Harvey & Hugo is also based.



The Weird and Wonderful...

Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members what was the weirdest thing they encountered at work.



Many years ago (mid -1990s) I acted as the retained surveyor and valuer to Alnwick District Council, looking at all sorts of properties across the portfolio from council houses to large industrial estates.

The very first job I was ever instructed by them on was it when a resident in Amble wanted to buy a public toilet. Yes, on first reading it seems a bit mental, and even the deputy Chief Executive found it amusing.

But the reality was, this was a stone built structure at the foot of the resident's garden – and for around £500, he got a stone built structure, way more solid than a standard timber shed and around three times the size. So maybe it wasn't such a sh*t idea!

Philip M Bowe, BIV Bowe

One of the most unusual experiences our clients encounter on our Uganda safari and gorilla tours takes place in Bigodi Swamp, where visitors are welcomed into the local community and introduced to Waragi, which is a locally distilled banana gin with a 60% alcohol content, and yes, it is as rough as it sounds!

However, sharing a drink with villagers while learning how it is made is certainly not something most travellers get to experience in the middle of rural Uganda.

Another favourite is being encouraged to eat a "Rolex", which is a popular Ugandan street food. Despite the name, it has nothing to do with luxury watches, it's a freshly cooked omelette with cabbage and tomatoes rolled inside a chapati. It is delicious and there are not many places where you can order a Rolex for less than a pound!

Aled Evans, www.ourlocaltour.com



The strangest thing that's happened lately is the amount of appreciation for the new product I have found with Met Life that is allowing me to help people get cover that never thought they could have it before. The wonderful emails of thanks and calls has been wonderful to receive and really made me feel that what I'm doing is of real value.

Andrew Cooper, www.simplymortgagesonline.com

As an independent publisher, we're constantly warning our authors about unsolicited emails from "big publishers", influencers and PR companies promising fame, fortune and bestseller status. The reality? Most are scams. In fact, we've become so passionate about helping authors avoid them that we've even written blog posts explaining exactly how to spot the warning signs. Suffice to say, we're naturally suspicious of just about every unexpected opportunity that lands in our inbox.

So, when an email arrived from a major Swedish publishing house asking to acquire the translation rights to *Playing with Fire*, we immediately assumed it was another scam. It had even been sent to our business email rather than directly to Karen, the author, which only fuelled our suspicions. After a lot of detective work, however, we realised it was the real deal. Today, *Playing with Fire* has been translated into eight languages and is reaching readers across Europe. The strangest part? The one email we were most convinced was a scam turned out to be the biggest opportunity our little publishing company has ever received. Sometimes, the best stories really do begin with, "This can't possibly be genuine.."

Ryan Crear, www.crearpublishing.com



Part of my work with AskMrsWatson.com is responding to 'how-to' or 'help I don't know what I've done and I think I've broke it!' emergencies. The other evening I got a phone call on Teams from a learner I was supporting with an Excel emergency! Although I didn't have my laptop with me, I did have the Teams app on my phone so I said 'don't worry I'll pull off the motorway and find somewhere to park up and you can screenshare on my iPhone and we'll see what we can do!'

To her delight I was able to spot what the issue was and help her sort it there and then. Smiles all round and I was able to get back on the road to my waiting pals for a Summer get together with good food and good fun having averted a crisis! Just call me the Excel Emergency Service!!

Kate Watson, www.askmrswatson.com

One evening I managed to capture a shot of the Ketch James Cook sailing up the River Tyne. A few months later I was at a craft fayre in Co. Durham where a man was looking at the print and asked me if I knew the history. He told me he had raised £100,000 to have the ketch built at Hebburn under the Youth Opportunity Scheme. He bought the print then came back to show me the plans. The same thing happened at Corbridge when a young girl pointed to the same print and said to her grandma "look that's me at the back of the Ketch".

Michael Rickwood, www.mr-photography.co.uk



Recently I met a guy from the Ambassador Cruise Line who came to buy Indian groceries as he is a Chef onboard.

He told me there was film shooting taking place on the ship with Bollywood Actors filming *Housefull 5*. I just froze as one of the leading actors is my all-time favourite Akshay Kumar. I was so excited. I asked when they are returning and he told me. I found out that they were travelling by train, so I made a special hamper with different snacks in it for them for their journey. I met the actors and they were all so kind and happy to talk to us and click pictures together. It really made my day, and they couldn't believe I came there to give them a hamper.

Sangeeta Loomba, www.Namastetasteofindia.co.uk



When asked about the most unusual thing that has happened in my business, I struggled to think of a single dramatic story. There have been no celebrity visits, runaway animals, or headline-grabbing moments. Instead, what continues to surprise me is the impact that seemingly ordinary moments can have. A child quietly telling me they've achieved their first ever good mark in maths. A parent becoming emotional because their son or daughter is happy to go to school again. Former students returning years later to tell us about their GCSE results, university place, or first job. Ten years ago, I thought I was starting a tuition business. What I didn't realise was that I would have the privilege of becoming part of so many families' journeys. Looking back, perhaps that's the most unusual thing of all – that something as simple as helping a child believe in themselves can have a lasting impact, not only on their future, but on yours too.

Carol Milne. www.kipmcgrath.co.uk/gateshead-east



One of the best things about working in marketing is that no two days are ever the same. This month we'll be in the middle of Jesmond filming a video about incontinence, which somehow involves jumping on a trampoline. Over the years I've had footballs kicked at my face to capture the perfect shot, balanced on a paddleboard at sunrise for a client's social media, and even convinced one of the team to dress up as a cowboy. Sometimes the strangest ideas turn into the most memorable content.

The important bit, though, is that none of it is weird for the sake of it. Every creative idea has a purpose. We work with brilliant businesses who are happy to think differently, have a laugh and trust us to bring their brand to life. The fun is part of the job, but behind every video, photo and slightly ridiculous moment is a strategy designed to get people talking, get businesses noticed and, most importantly, get results.

Helen Arnold, www.bsocial.agency

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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Vida Creative promotes Chris Stephenson to Creative Director following record year



Chris Stephenson

The promotion comes as the North East creative agency reports 20% revenue growth and prepares to celebrate its tenth anniversary this December.

Vida Creative has promoted Design Director Chris Stephenson to Creative Director following a record 12 months of trading, during which the agency increased revenue by 20% compared with the previous year.

The promotion also comes as the Newcastle-based independent creative agency prepares to celebrate its tenth anniversary in December.

Chris has been part of the Vida team for more than four years, working with organisations across the North East, the UK and internationally to strategically evolve their brands and bring them to life across campaigns, digital platforms and customer touchpoints.

His portfolio at Vida includes work for Soccer Aid for UNICEF, Elddis, Hoult's Yard, Northumberland Cultural Education Partnership and the Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme, alongside a broad range of businesses, charities and purpose-led organisations.

During Chris's time with Vida, the agency has also supported a US business with a brand evolution following a \$10 million Series A funding round. Vida's long-standing relationship with Soccer Aid for UNICEF has continued during a period in which the campaign reached



L-R: Henry Coggin Director, Chris Stephenson, Ellen Hedley Director

the milestone of £100 million raised for UNICEF.

In his new role, Chris will lead Vida's creative direction across branding, campaigns, websites, UX and digital projects. He will also play a central role in shaping the agency's creative standards, developing its team and helping clients respond to a rapidly changing marketing and technology landscape.

Ellen Hedley, Director of Vida Creative, said: "Chris has made an enormous contribution to Vida over the past four years. He combines original creative thinking with a real understanding of strategy, commercial objectives and what audiences need from a brand.

"He's earned the trust of our team and our clients, and his promotion reflects both the quality of his work and the role he'll play in Vida's next chapter.

"Our 20% revenue growth and strongest year of trading to date give us real momentum as we approach our tenth anniversary. Chris's promotion is an important part of how we're investing in the agency's future and continuing to raise the ambition of our work.

"As new technologies continue to change our

industry, we're actively exploring how AI can help us work more effectively and create better outcomes for clients. But technology can't replace the judgement, curiosity and human understanding behind genuinely impactful creative work.

"Our clients come back to us because they value honest collaboration, strategic thinking and work that feels distinctive to them. Chris embodies that approach, and we're delighted to recognise his contribution with this promotion."

Chris Stephenson, Creative Director at Vida Creative, said: "The strongest creative work comes from properly understanding the people, organisations and ambitions behind it. Technology can help us explore ideas, improve processes and open up new possibilities, but it still needs experienced people asking the right questions and making thoughtful decisions.

"I'm incredibly proud of the work we've delivered over the past four years and of the long-term relationships we've built with our clients. Taking on the Creative Director role at such an important point in Vida's journey is a genuine privilege, and I'm excited about what we can achieve next."

Founded in 2016, Vida Creative works with tech startups, scale-ups and spin-outs, B2B service businesses, charities and community-focused organisations across branding, marketing, websites, UX, product design and campaigns.

The agency's approach combines strategic clarity, creative thinking and open collaboration, helping clients communicate complex ideas, strengthen their positioning and build brands that support long-term growth.

vidacreative.co.uk

“I don’t need marketing, I rely on word of mouth”

By Mags Bradshaw,
Red Button Marketing Training Limited

Ok, now we are past the headline, how are you feeling?
What do you think?

Perhaps a bold move however, here is why I felt the need to start with something a little punchy perhaps, a bit edgy even.

Over the past 30 years, I would love even a penny for the amount of times I have heard that phrase, so often people use that as a way to really say what an incredible reputation they have.

Now, I am totally in agreement that in fact, the best way to grow or succeed is by other people sharing their positive experiences.

Should we leave it there? Is that enough? Could you imagine having to access funding or apply for a loan and as part of that you need to include a marketing or growth strategy and your input was “we will rely on word of mouth”.

If any of you remember the movie “Educating Rita” you may recall the great line “do it on the radio”. Each time I hear “rely on word of mouth” it reminds me of that and I must confess to having a slight chuckle to myself. In that film, “Rita” soon discovered how to dig a bit deeper, learn, explore, research and then come up with a much more sustainable answer.

Why am I focusing on this point? Because somewhere along the line we need to understand what word of mouth really means in today’s commercial world and at the same time deal with the other elephant in the room which is “what is marketing anyway?”

It does in fact come down to education, continued learning and development. Ironical that the very process in every business that gives space for that is in fact...marketing!

Just going back to the point of what word of mouth means, I feel its so important to harness the absolute gold dust that this brings to any business. Does it still refer to what Bob says to

Brenda at the pub about his recent experience with his accountant for example, is that a sustainable growth strategy?

When we consider that clients are impacted in so many different ways now and are dealing with significant challenges, not only from within their business but also through external issues, such as legislation, employment, global impact and environmental.

The way that businesses deal with clients needs to shift to accommodate that.

Every person in a business is part of the brand story. How we impact “word of mouth” is through the nature of that story and how our clients are part of that. How do they feel? How often do we check? What do we do with the findings?

All of that is a connected part of the overall management process of marketing. Yes, that is exactly what marketing is, a business function.

When that is visible and shared, so much

becomes heaps easier. When we can see “how” and “why” joined up thinking is something we can do in our sleep.

Marketing as a process needs space, needs visibility and needs to be designed with “why” from the start. Like anything in life that needs to withstand time and all kinds of elements, the underlying structure needs to be robust.

When you build your marketing process with robust business outcomes as the starting point you create a long term diagnostic and discovery friend.

So, word of mouth, we love you, however, you are part of the marketing process and when we make you friends with operations, content creation, market research and client service to name just a few, we can start to “rely” so much more.

Be like “Rita” take time to explore and educate.

www.redbuttonmarketingtraining.co.uk



Mags Bradshaw

When the headlines aren't in your favour

Why experience matters in a PR crisis.

No organisation sets out to become the subject of negative headlines, but when a crisis does arise, how you respond in those first few hours can have a lasting impact on your reputation.

At SASS Media, crisis communications isn't about making bad news disappear. It is about helping organisations navigate difficult situations with honesty, professionalism and confidence, ensuring their voice is heard fairly when it matters most.



As journalists by background, SASS Media founders Sarah Walker and Sarah Dale have spent their careers on both sides of the story. Before advising organisations through challenging situations, they were the reporters asking the difficult questions in busy newsrooms, working to tight deadlines and covering stories that often placed businesses, schools, care providers, NHS organisations and public bodies under intense public scrutiny.

From Care Quality Commission inspections and OFSTED reports to General Medical Council hearings, employment tribunals, industrial disputes and workplace concerns, they understand exactly how journalists approach these stories - because they have been there themselves.

That experience is invaluable when organisations suddenly find themselves facing adverse publicity.

Whether the issue is a poor food hygiene rating, environmental health concerns, regulatory action or union-backed unrest, the media will inevitably seek answers. Journalists are working against the clock, often with limited time to wait for a response. Knowing what questions are likely to be asked, what information is genuinely needed and how deadlines operate allows SASS Media to support clients quickly and effectively.

Just as importantly, a background in journalism provides a thorough understanding of media law and the responsibilities journalists have when reporting sensitive stories. Every

organisation deserves a fair opportunity to respond before publication, and reputable news organisations understand the importance of offering that right of reply.

If a story risks becoming unfair, inaccurate or potentially defamatory, SASS Media has the confidence and experience to challenge reporting where appropriate. That includes ensuring clients are treated fairly throughout the process and, where necessary, raising concerns about defamatory reader comments appearing on publishers' websites or social media channels.

However, effective crisis communications is never about trying to silence the media.

Stories that are genuinely in the public interest will, quite rightly, be reported. Any agency claiming it can simply stop legitimate stories reaching publication should be approached with caution. Responsible public relations is about managing communication, not manipulating it.

Instead, the focus should always be on helping organisations respond in the right way: with transparency where appropriate, humility when mistakes have been made and clear, carefully considered messaging that demonstrates accountability, while protecting reputation.

SASS Media has repeatedly helped organisations achieve exactly that. In some cases, carefully prepared responses have changed the direction of coverage, ensuring important context was included. In others, providing accurate information promptly has prevented stories from developing further or corrected misunderstandings before publication.

Every situation is different, but the principle remains the same. Good crisis communications cannot erase difficult circumstances, but it can ensure organisations present themselves professionally, maintain trust with stakeholders and emerge with their reputation as intact as possible.

Preparation is equally important. Having an experienced communications partner before a crisis occurs means organisations can respond immediately rather than scrambling to decide what to say once journalists are already calling.

In today's 24-hour news cycle, reputations can be shaped within minutes. Having advisers who understand both the newsroom and the boardroom gives organisations a significant advantage when navigating difficult moments.

At SASS Media, we believe every organisation deserves to have its voice heard fairly. Our role is to help clients communicate calmly, credibly and confidently, ensuring that even in the most challenging circumstances, they are able to put their best foot forward.

For more information, visit www.sassmedialtd.co.uk or call Sarah Walker on 07896 894538.

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We believe every organisation deserves to have its voice heard fairly.

Sarah Dale and Sarah Walker



ORIGINAL THINKING.

Original Thinking with Michele Gettins

Marketing consultancy O.agency's Original Thinking podcast explores a range of topics facing today's leaders, from finding originality in a world of AI to managing the pace of change in business.

In the latest episode, O.agency Managing Director Kirsty Ostell talks to Michele Gettins, award-winning CMO at iamproperty, about more than 23 years in marketing, building brands with personality, and why B2B and B2C businesses have more in common than people often think.



L-R: Michele Gettins with Kirsty Ostell

Michele began her career at Sage plc, spending 15 years in fintech and working her way up from graduate to Head of Commercial Marketing.

She later moved into FMCG with Mayborn Group, working on the Tommee Tippee brand, before joining iamproperty, the Newcastle-headquartered proptech business. When Michele joined, iamproperty employed around 220 people. Today, it has a team of more than 700 and works with 7,000 Partner Agents across the UK.

Read some of the conversation Kirsty and Michele had around creativity, growth, AI and why brand should never be treated as just a logo...

What's the danger with marketing still focusing too much on B2B and B2C?

We're all people at the end of the day. It doesn't matter if we're at work or at home, we're still human. We're looking for things that inspire us, interest us, motivate us or make life easier. I don't become a completely different person when I'm in my role as CMO compared to when I'm at home as a mum. So why would marketers treat those audiences as if they're entirely separate? Business to people is so much better as a principle.

iamproperty has always had personality as a brand. How important is that?

It's a huge part of the brand mix. If you want to build a great brand, it has to have a personality

and that usually comes from the people in the business.

At iamproperty, we've been lucky to have two very big personalities in our founders, so the brand personality reflects them and the entrepreneurial nature of the business. We have lots of fab people in the team too who really embody our values and what we're all about. That's what makes it feel true.

Does original thinking always have to mean a big new idea?

Not always. Sometimes creativity is about looking at a problem in a slightly different way.

At Sage, we created a reseller pack that brought everything partners needed into one place – product features, benefits, sales tools, collateral and guidance.

It was simple, but it changed how information was shared through the channel. A lot of great ideas are like that. They make sense once you look at the problem differently.

O recently helped iamproperty launch National Estate Agent Day. Why was that important?

iamproperty is a champion of Estate Agents. They're our customers and we want them to feel proud of what they do.

National Estate Agent Day was a really simple idea, but the impact was huge because it gave a whole industry one day to celebrate the work they do. Agents got behind it, suppliers got behind it, our team loved it and even competitors supported it. That's when you know an idea has real purpose and will stand the test of time.

How important has brand been through iamproperty's growth journey?

It's been incredibly important – it has given us authenticity, consistency and the ability to stand out. A brand is the DNA of the business and when you can wrap that DNA into a brand that grows with the business, it has real commercial value.

What's your view on AI and creativity?

Every business needs to understand what it will use AI for and what it won't.

AI can help people become more efficient, it can take away admin and give teams better tools, but it should never own the outcomes. People still need to own the nuance, the impact, the consequences and the personalities behind decisions.

Creativity comes from being curious, it comes from asking better questions, talking to people, listening to customers and constantly looking for ways to improve.

To hear to the whole conversation head to O.agency's Original Thinking podcast on Spotify or via www.o.agency/news

In conversation with...

Kieron Goldsborough

Managing Director, Different Narrative

What first attracted you to a career in marketing and communications?

It probably wasn't marketing that attracted me in the first place. Growing up, I was equally interested in art and rugby. I loved creating things, but I also enjoyed being part of a team and working towards a common goal. I studied art before starting my career in newspaper production, then moved into agencies.

Newspapers taught me something that's stayed with me ever since: you can't stand still. They were brilliant environments to learn in – fast-paced, collaborative and deadline-driven – but they also showed what happens when an industry struggles to adapt. That's shaped how I've tried to build Different Narrative. We never assume the way we've always done something is the way it should always be done.

What does your role involve today?

People often think agency life is all about campaigns and creative ideas, but most of my job is asking questions.

One of the first questions I ask any client is, "Why are you doing marketing?" It sounds obvious, but it's surprising how often businesses jump straight to tactics. "We need to be on TikTok." "We need to use AI." My response is always the same: why?

Once you understand what success looks like, the right marketing approach usually becomes much clearer.

What achievement are you most proud of?

The team we've built.

Someone once told me, "Don't hire rockstars," and it's probably the best business advice I've ever received. Skills can be developed, but attitude, curiosity and generosity are much harder to teach.

We've built a culture where people genuinely enjoy solving problems together, challenge each other's thinking and care about the work they're producing. Clients don't just benefit from one person's ideas – they benefit from the collective thinking of the whole team.

Launching our All In partnership model last year was another milestone. It grew directly from conversations with clients who wanted ongoing strategic support without the stop-start nature of traditional agency relationships. 'All In' clients have unlimited access to our team - and typically save up to 20% on their monthly agency costs. It's a simpler way of working and, importantly, it allows us to spend more time helping clients solve problems rather than writing proposals.

How has the industry changed?

Technology has transformed marketing, but I think we've become a little obsessed with activity. There's more data than ever before, more platforms and now readily accessible AI, but none of those things replace good judgement. In fact, they make it more important.

What are you working on at the moment?

Alongside Different Narrative, we're developing Marketing Engine, our proprietary marketing attribution platform.

We didn't build it because we wanted to become a software company. We built it because clients kept asking sensible questions that the industry wasn't answering particularly well. They had plenty of reports but struggled to understand what was genuinely driving results or where to invest next.

Rather than accept that, we decided to solve the problem ourselves. It's been an exciting challenge because it combines technology with the strategic thinking that's always been at the heart of what we do.

We're testing at the moment but will take to full commercial launch later this year.

What's next for Different Narrative?

We'll keep evolving.

That doesn't necessarily mean becoming bigger. It means becoming better. We'll continue developing All In, investing in Marketing Engine and finding better ways to support clients as their challenges change.

If we've learned anything over the years, it's that businesses don't succeed by repeating what worked yesterday. They succeed by staying curious, being willing to challenge assumptions and never losing sight of why they're doing something in the first place.

How do you switch off outside work?

Running helps me clear my head, and I enjoy cooking because it's one of the few things where you're completely focused on the moment. Most importantly, I love spending time with my family.

Ironically, some of the best ideas arrive when I'm doing those things. Sometimes stepping away from work is the best way to see it more clearly.

differentnarrative.com



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**Businesses
don't succeed
by repeating
what worked
yesterday.**

The power of saying yes

Consistency, collaboration and community have shaped the journey behind PR agency House of Hype & Co., with founder Claire Pickersgill believing that the biggest opportunities rarely arrive fully formed.

“More often than not, they begin with a conversation,” Claire says, “Success is rarely built from one defining moment. It’s built through consistency, curiosity and being open to opportunity.”

At House of Hype & Co., no two weeks look the same. From securing national media coverage for tech businesses to supporting clients in cyber security, legal services, education, renewable energy and hospitality, the agency focuses on building visibility through strategic storytelling.

“Great PR isn’t about chasing headlines,” Claire explains. “It’s about understanding businesses, building relationships and showing up consistently. Every story and every opportunity contributes to something much bigger.”

That approach has helped clients secure speaking engagements, expert commentary opportunities and long-term brand visibility. As Claire puts it, visibility creates familiarity, familiarity builds trust, and trust creates opportunity.

The same philosophy extends beyond PR through The Ladies Collective, co-founded by Claire and Julie Turnbull. What started as a simple networking idea has grown into one of the North East’s most engaged female business communities, connecting thousands of women through events, collaborations and meaningful relationships.

“When women genuinely champion one another, incredible things happen,” says Claire. “We’ve collaborated with brands including Aston Martin, Fenwick, H Beauty, TUTTI and MyBlend. Every partnership reinforces the same message: when brands share values and put community first, everyone benefits.”

This September marks another milestone as The Ladies Collective partners with MyBlend and Clarins to host an exclusive event in Harrods’ Lower Ground Events Space in Knightsbridge.



“It’s a genuine pinch-me moment,” Claire reflects. “To see an idea built on conversations and trust evolve into a collaboration with one of the world’s most iconic retailers is something we’re incredibly proud of. Consistency opens doors, but relationships keep them open.”

That belief in collaboration also led to another successful venture. After introducing fellow business leader Sarah Pike to The Ladies Collective co-founder Julie Turnbull, the trio quickly discovered a shared vision. Within an hour, they had mapped out a new concept that would become The Seasons Series.

Launched at Grantley Hall and followed by retreats at Seaham Hall, with Langdale Chase hosting this September, The Seasons Series offers luxury wellness experiences centred around one philosophy: You First.

“In a world where women constantly balance careers, businesses and family life, these retreats create space to pause, reconnect and invest in themselves without guilt,” Claire says. “It’s not about escaping life—it’s about returning to it feeling stronger, clearer and more connected.”

The retreats have consistently sold out, with returning guests helping to build a growing community. Plans are already underway to expand the concept in 2027.

Looking back, Claire believes every milestone shares a common thread.

“House of Hype & Co. has grown because of consistency, The Ladies Collective has flourished because of community, and The Seasons Series exists because three women trusted an instinct before they had a complete roadmap.”

The agency’s approach has also received industry recognition, with House of Hype & Co. recently named Best SME PR Strategy & Campaigns Agency 2026 – North East.

For Claire, however, awards are not the end goal.

“The real reward is seeing clients grow, watching women support one another and creating spaces where collaboration genuinely changes lives and businesses.”

Her message is simple: don’t wait until everything feels certain. Say yes to the coffee meeting, reach out to the person you’ve admired from afar, share the idea and back yourself.

“The opportunities that shape your future often begin with one conversation—and the courage to believe it’s worth having.”

www.hypeco.co.uk



Graeme Miller



Samuel Marriott-Dowding

From Leith to Leadership: In conversation with Graeme Miller

By Samuel Marriott-Dowding

When you strip away the titles, positions, and public roles - who is Graeme Miller, and what experiences have shaped the person you are today?

A relaxed, generous, kind and compassionate human being. Always working, sometimes

with cleverer, better people made me realise that getting the task done was the key matter, being part of a successful effort was equally as rewarding as a solo effort, sometimes more so.

You grew up in Leith and have spoken about having to work your way up. How much of who you are today stems from those early experiences and the determination to create opportunities rather than wait for them?

I am that presbyterian work ethic Scot that my mother and father spent my early years drilling into me. Leith in the 60's and 70's was a crime ridden slum by comparison to the vista it shows the world today. Being a teenager, getting my O and H levels at school, going onto Napier College to get a science qualification, all of it was supported by a loving family, and great teachers at Trinity Academy. But the key driver was everyone saying grab what comes before you and run with it. There were very few opportunities in Leith back then and I was being told 'Get out and expand your horizons'.

Do you think your journey has influenced the type of leader you've become?

Without a doubt. I have had some great people as my boss, they taught me many people skills over the years, smoothing that 'rough diamond' down. I learned that a team approach works better where everyone benefits from success and shares the pain of failure equally, I learned that it is better to work with your people rather than them working for you, more respect and consideration all round. But in the end a leader must make decisions, sometimes there is no good outcome, only the least bad scenario.

The North East is often described through what it lacks rather than what it creates. What do you think people misunderstand about the region?

That the North East is full of flat cap wearing, whipper owning ex-miners and shipyard workers. They have no idea of the creativity that exists throughout the North East, and we have so moved on from the heavy industry days of the 70's and 80's. We are a well spring of modern creative businesses, from Nissan and its automotive supply chain, through our port network that is delivering 21st century power solutions from the Dogger Bank wind turbines in the North Sea, and so much more.

What kind of legacy are you hoping to leave - not in terms of titles, but in terms of people and places?

I would like to think most people who know me through work and politics will say that "I mean what I say, and I say what I mean" and that I always deliver. The transformed ongoing regeneration of Sunderland is testament to this leadership with a great team still delivering to this day on the city plan drawn up in 2018, and implemented from 2019.

What are you most excited to build next?

If the dominos fall the right way I might build my consultancy (We Build Bridges) into a regional and then national source of advice and guidance to the business and political community, or I might just build a house in Spain with my wife and retire to have many dogs, fish and shoot, it's a toss-up. Life eh?

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Launching the Emerging Creative Talent Magazine Awards

Supporting the next generation of creatives through real industry opportunities.

It is so important to invest in the next generation of creatives, helping to keep talent in the North and giving young people real reasons to stay inspired by creative work.

That is why we have loved working with third-year Fashion Communication students from Northumbria University, following their progress, sharing our love of print and seeing them develop their final major projects.

It all began in September 2025, when the students visited The Mag Room at Unique Magazines to browse our shelves, immerse themselves in the world of print and develop a campaign promoting our store and services. That first visit marked the beginning of a fantastic partnership, and we've enjoyed following their creative journeys ever since as they designed, created and printed their own magazines.

After seeing the thought, creativity and dedication that went into these publications, we wanted to do more than admire the finished work. We



wanted to recognise it, support it and give students the opportunity to see their work exist beyond university.

And so, the Emerging Creative Talent Magazine Awards were born.

The awards celebrate the next generation of creatives through collaboration, inspiration and real industry opportunities, while supporting something we care deeply about at Unique Magazines: the future of print.

Choosing Our First Winners

We read every magazine the students had created, considering everything from design and photography to editorial content, themes and ideas.

But one question kept coming back:

Could we see this being published and stocked in our store?

After plenty of discussion, two publications stood out.

Runner-Up: Lois Dawson – Common Ground

Our runner-up was Lois Dawson with Common Ground.

The publication celebrates working-class life through family, friendship and local culture, exploring how identity is shaped by place and lived experience. Centred on Teesside, where Lois grew up, it tells honest stories rooted in community.

We felt Common Ground reflected many of the values we champion at Unique Magazines. It was authentic, personal and accessible.

As runner-up, Lois will have five copies of Common Ground professionally printed and stocked in our store. Seeing a university project become a magazine that customers can discover and buy is exactly the kind of opportunity we wanted these awards to create.

Winner: Abbie Reardon – Hot Mess

Our winner was Abbie Reardon with Hot Mess.

Already shortlisted for the Terry Mansfield Fashion Publication Award 2026 at Graduate Fashion Week, it immediately stood out for its exceptional quality.

Abbie produced all of the photography herself alongside 104 beautifully designed pages exploring life in your twenties. From the moment we picked it up, Hot Mess felt completely at home in The Mag Room, sitting comfortably alongside the independent magazines we already stock.

From the editorial and interviews to the photography, design and even the advertisements throughout, it felt like a fully realised independent publication. Professionally printing it and bringing it into our store felt like the perfect next step.

We were delighted to present Abbie with our first Emerging Creative Talent Magazine Award while announcing that Common Ground would also be professionally printed and stocked.

We later attended the students' final exhibition, viewed their finished work, watched the graduate fashion show and had the privilege of saying a few words as official partners. It was a wonderful way to celebrate everything they had achieved.

Taking Student Work Beyond a Grade

By printing and stocking these publications, we hope to help bridge the gap between university and the creative industry.

These magazines will no longer exist only as final major projects. They



will become real publications that customers can browse, discover and purchase, giving emerging creatives the chance to see their work in a professional retail environment.

For Abbie and Lois, it provides valuable industry experience and something tangible to be proud of after years of hard work. For us, it is an opportunity to play a small part in supporting the future of print.

If we want magazines and physical media to continue to thrive, we need to support the people creating them, giving new voices and fresh ideas the opportunity to be seen beyond the classroom.

Following the success of our first Emerging Creative Talent Magazine Awards, we are now expanding the programme across universities throughout the North East, giving even more students the chance to have their creativity recognised and their work showcased in a real retail environment.

This is only the beginning, and we cannot wait to discover the next generation of emerging creatives and the publications they will bring to life.

 @uniquemagazines

 Unique Magazines  Unique Magazines

www.uniquemagazines.co.uk

Our Blog: www.themagazineclub.co.uk



Can you beat the cow?



No, this isn't an anti-vegan call to arms. The cow in question is the star of an Arla ad. The ad features a cow, in a field, chewing grass, for 20 seconds. That's it.

Who cares? Well, about 50% of the audience. The ad scores a modest 2.8 stars on the System 1 Test Your Ad database. While this isn't a great score and isn't one you should aspire to, it outperforms 1 in 4 ads. Yep, 25% of ads are more ignorable than a cow chewing grass. Advertising is meant to be the fun bit. So, why is most of it so boring?

Boring ads are a symptom of:

- Bad strategy: an undefined audience and/or positioning
- Playing it safe: being too scared to stand out
- Prioritising the rational: product over emotion

Let's fix these together.

Bad Strategy

Strategy is targeting and positioning – simple, but not easy. Targeting is rarely defined well, which often leads to watered-down ads that try to talk to everyone.

The fix? We map the category into segments that share psychographic and behavioural characteristics and have similar needs.

With your shiny new map in hand, pick segments which offer the biggest growth for the lowest investment. Ask what these people need, that your brand offers, and your competition doesn't – this is your positioning. Not a product feature. Positioning is what informs how your brand looks, acts and feels to a customer. The test: if you took away the logo, would it work for another brand in the category?

Playing it safe

In the world of brands, awareness beats sentiment, especially for small and challenger brands. We see this play out time and time again in the market. Not all publicity is good publicity, but if Pepsi can come away from the notorious Kendall Jenner ad unscathed, you can recover from pissing off some millennials in Croydon.

The easy fix is to say, 'be braver', but what does that mean in practice? Ask yourself: "Is there something in this ad that scares me?" If the answer is yes, you're on the right track.

Prioritising the rational

According to Ehrenberg-Bass ~95% of your target audience aren't in market right now. And if you're a B2B brand with long sales cycles, they won't be for a while.

When we're not in market, we rarely pay attention to ads, especially if they're trying to sell us something. Most ads focus on product features and technical details. A spec sheet with a soundtrack.

The best-performing ads tell a story – they surprise, they entertain. They give people something to laugh at, to cry at, to scrunch up their fists and frown at. These ads build memories, which means on the odd occasion a potential buyer of the category becomes a now-buyer of the category, the brand is more likely to come to mind.

Look at your ad through the eyes of someone else: does it make you feel something?

It has never been more dangerous to be boring. The diversification of available channels, the unprecedented access to 'creative' tools and the pressure to do more with less are pushing everyone to average.

Fortune favours the bold, and people buy brands they remember.



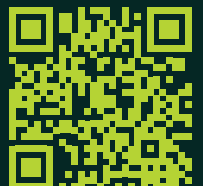
Ready to start beating the cow? We can help.
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BRADLEY O'MAHONEY



In conversation with...

Michael Rickwood

Photographer, MR Photography

Can you tell us about your journey into professional photography and what inspired you to pursue it as a career?

My journey began at age ten when my grandmother gave me a Box Brownie. I've always loved capturing the unusual. While my parents would look at my photos and ask, "Why is there no one in it?", I'd respond, "But can't you see what I see?" Decades later, while managing volunteers for the Red Cross during the pandemic, I needed something to ground me. My wife suggested picking up the camera again. I began capturing the roses and wildlife in our garden. Someone asked to buy a print, so I sold it. From there, I moved to craft fairs, and momentum built. Today, I hold regular exhibitions, and three of my prints are on permanent display at the Newcastle Civic Centre and City Library.

How has living and working in the North influenced your style and creative approach?

We are incredibly fortunate in the North of England. We are surrounded by striking architecture, coastal paths, castles, and wild, heather-covered hills—I am utterly spoilt for choice. I don't restrict myself to a single genre; I photograph what makes my soul soar. As Rod Stewart famously said, "Every picture tells a story," and I view myself entirely as a visual storyteller.

What makes a photograph memorable in your eyes, and what do you hope people feel when they see your work?

A photograph is memorable if it speaks directly to the viewer. While I know the narrative I want to portray, everyone sees something different. For example, I have a photograph of the ketch James Cook sailing up the Tyne at sunset. At a recent event, a gentleman stood with me for over an hour discussing it. We didn't talk about the lighting or reflections; we talked about how he had raised £100,000 to build that specific vessel under a youth scheme and sailed it to Tahiti. That print meant one thing to me, but something entirely different to him. That emotional connection is what I strive for.



Michael Rickwood

Your corporate work requires a distinct approach. How do you build trust with clients to capture authentic moments?

I don't do weddings, so my commercial and corporate work is where I focus. I believe the key is listening intently to the client's brief and bringing a portfolio to align on settings and formats beforehand. On the day of the shoot, I introduce myself to the room and then effectively disappear. I use a telephoto lens so I am never intrusive. Ultimately, I always remember that the client is right, and my job is to seamlessly deliver their vision.

Technology is evolving rapidly. How do you balance new digital tools while maintaining your artistic vision?

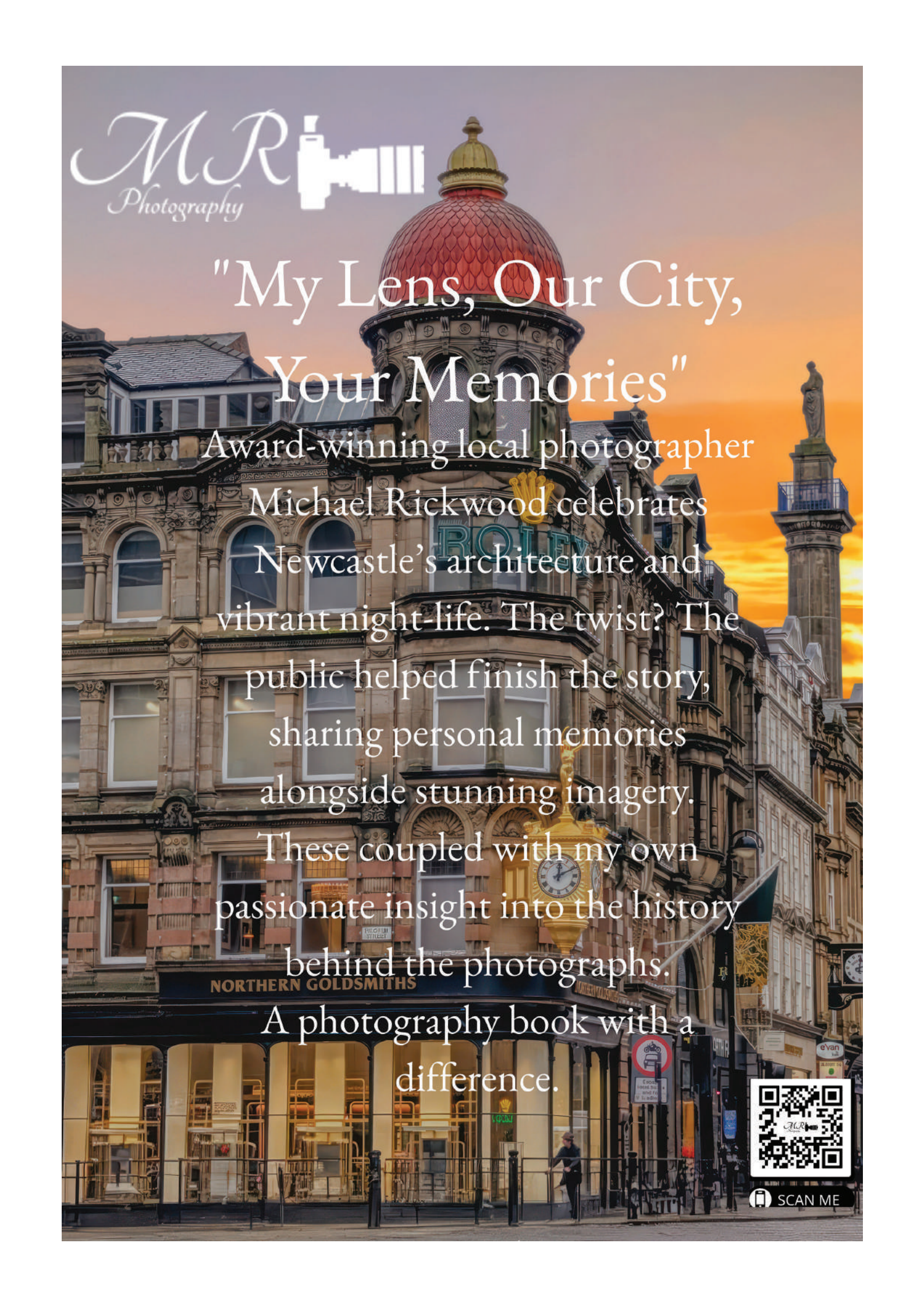
Striking imagery isn't about expensive equipment; it's about having an eye and a feeling for the shot. AI can generate images on demand, but they are completely soulless. While I use Adobe Photoshop to create digital composites, they are always built from my own original photographs. For instance, my piece featuring the 'Tommy' sculpture at Seaham merges a

headshot of the sculpture, my photography of the Bamburgh poppies, a stone wall, and a map of the Western Front. It uses modern tools to tell a deeply human story.

Looking ahead, what projects are you most excited about, and where can readers follow your work?

I am currently finalizing a book titled "My Lens, Our City, Your Memories," launching at the end of September. It features over 100 original photographs of Newcastle City Centre, complete with technical data, the stories behind the shots, and reflections from visitors to my exhibitions. I have also been offered a permanent space at the 24NE gallery art collective in Sunderland. So I will be exhibiting my work from 1st September 2026. My next exhibition runs at the Newcastle Civic Centre from November 10th to 20th, 2026.

Readers can view my portfolio at www.MR-photography.co.uk, or follow me on Facebook (MRphotography) and TikTok (@MRphotographyne)



MR
Photography

"My Lens, Our City, Your Memories"

Award-winning local photographer
Michael Rickwood celebrates
Newcastle's architecture and
vibrant night-life. The twist? The
public helped finish the story,
sharing personal memories
alongside stunning imagery.
These coupled with my own
passionate insight into the history
behind the photographs.

A photography book with a
difference.



SCAN ME



Front centre: Creative Director Ross Palmer and the team at Kenfolk

Creative growth: Kenfolk enters a new chapter at the North East BIC

Five years after launching as a Sunderland brand and design studio, Kenfolk is entering a new phase of growth – expanding both its team and its services while remaining committed to investing in the city’s creative talent.

The agency has recently relocated to a larger office at the North East BIC, reflecting a period of sustained growth that has seen it evolve from a specialist design studio into a full-service creative agency.

Since opening its doors in 2020, Kenfolk has broadened its offering well beyond branding and design. Today, clients can access everything from PR and communications to social media management, photography and videography, allowing the agency to support organisations throughout every stage of their marketing journey.

For Creative Director Ross Palmer, the move is

about more than simply gaining additional office space – it’s about creating an environment that matches the agency’s ambitions.

“As we’ve expanded into a full-service agency, we needed a space that allows us to welcome clients and showcase the breadth of what we do. We can now take businesses on a complete creative journey, from developing their brand identity through to producing video content, managing PR and delivering impactful social media campaigns.”

Alongside its business growth, Kenfolk has also reached an important milestone in its commitment to its people, becoming the first brand and design studio in Sunderland to achieve accreditation as a Living Wage Employer.

Ross believes the accreditation reflects the agency’s ambition to help strengthen the region’s creative sector by attracting and retaining talented people.

“We’re incredibly proud to be Sunderland’s first Living Wage accredited design studio. Investing in our team is fundamental to what we do, and we’re passionate about creating opportunities for creative professionals to build successful careers here in the North East, rather than

feeling they have to move elsewhere.”

Kenfolk’s expansion also highlights the role flexible business space can play in supporting ambitious companies as they grow. Having spent the past 18 months based at the BIC, the agency has been able to scale its operations while remaining rooted in Sunderland.

Steph Drinkald, Assistant Centre Manager at the North East BIC, said: “It’s been fantastic to see Kenfolk’s journey over the past 18 months. They’ve continued to evolve their services while staying true to their creative values, and we’re delighted to support them as they move into this next stage of growth.

“Their commitment to becoming a Living Wage Employer is particularly encouraging and demonstrates how business growth can go hand in hand with investing in people. They’re a brilliant example of the innovative businesses choosing to grow here in Sunderland.”

With a larger home, an expanded service offering and a people-first approach, Kenfolk is continuing to demonstrate how creative businesses can grow, innovate and build lasting careers in the North East.

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Sunderland engineer brings revolutionary technology to the UK

A Sunderland entrepreneur whose career has taken him from the Falklands War to factories across China, Russia and Mongolia is now helping businesses, heritage sites and homeowners solve problems using cutting-edge laser technology.

Terence (Terry) South, from East Herrington, runs Instant Surface Recovery (ISR Laser), a specialist engineering company that uses advanced laser cleaning systems to restore and preserve everything from classic cars and historic buildings to industrial machinery and residential driveways.

Following his military career, Terry spent decades working on major engineering projects around the world, including in Russia, China and Mongolia.

It was during his time in China that he first encountered laser cleaning technology. "Before it was even being talked about in the UK, I could see how lasers were transforming engineering overseas," said Terry. "They could clean metal, remove rust, reveal cracks and prepare surfaces without damaging them and without using chemicals or abrasive materials. I knew it was technology that had huge potential."

Recent work has included restoring staircases at Bamburgh Castle, removing graffiti from historic brickwork in Newcastle, cleaning valuable classic cars while preserving their originality, helping engineers inspect critical machinery components, and removing stubborn oil stains from domestic driveways without the need for costly replacement work.

Women in Tech North East strengthens its board with three new appointments

Women in Tech North East (WiTNE), the community interest company championing women and allies across the region's tech sector, has added three new faces to its board as it looks to expand its activity further across the region.

The organisation has appointed three new non-executive directors: Jo Larby, Jen Taylor, and Laurie Stirling. The three new additions have been heavily involved with the organisation for a number of years and will bring invaluable experience and different perspectives to the board's operations.

Jo Larby, Technical Product Manager at Leighton and accessibility champion, has previously supported WiTNE as a panellist, a host and a co-producer. Jen Taylor, Marketing and Communications Manager at NIHR Innovation Observatory, has championed WiTNE from the very early days. Laurie Stirling brings expertise in operations and business growth through her own consultancy and is a long-time advocate for what WiTNE is building.

The trio join co-founders and directors Kathryn Wharton and Rachel



Another accolade for Agilico as it scoops major sustainability award

Workplace technology provider Agilico is celebrating another accolade this week after picking up a major industry sustainability award.

Agilico was named the winner of the Commitment to Carbon Reduction & Sustainability Award at the 2026 Crescent Purchasing Consortium (CPC) Awards ceremony, held in Manchester.

The accolade recognises Agilico's work to reduce carbon, cut waste and support more sustainable technology choices across education, the public sector and workplaces across the UK.

Crescent Purchasing Consortium is a not-for-profit organisation which supports the education sector by providing purchasing frameworks, dynamic purchasing systems and procurement consultancy services for schools, colleges, universities and other education institutions.

Held annually, the CPC awards celebrate achievements across various frameworks, showcasing the work its approved suppliers are doing to help drive quality and innovation, along with recognising work which has exceeded expectations.

Beating off heavyweights such as Ricoh UK and the Schools Advisory Service, Agilico took the Commitment to Carbon Reduction & Sustainability Award in recognition of its sustainable workforce technology and efforts to cut waste.

Judges highlighted the firm's Agilico Zero circular technology programme, which offers remanufactured devices in an evidence-led approach to reducing carbon, minimising waste and supporting customers in achieving their own sustainability goals



Pattinson, alongside existing non-executive director Jen Wood, bringing the board to six in total.

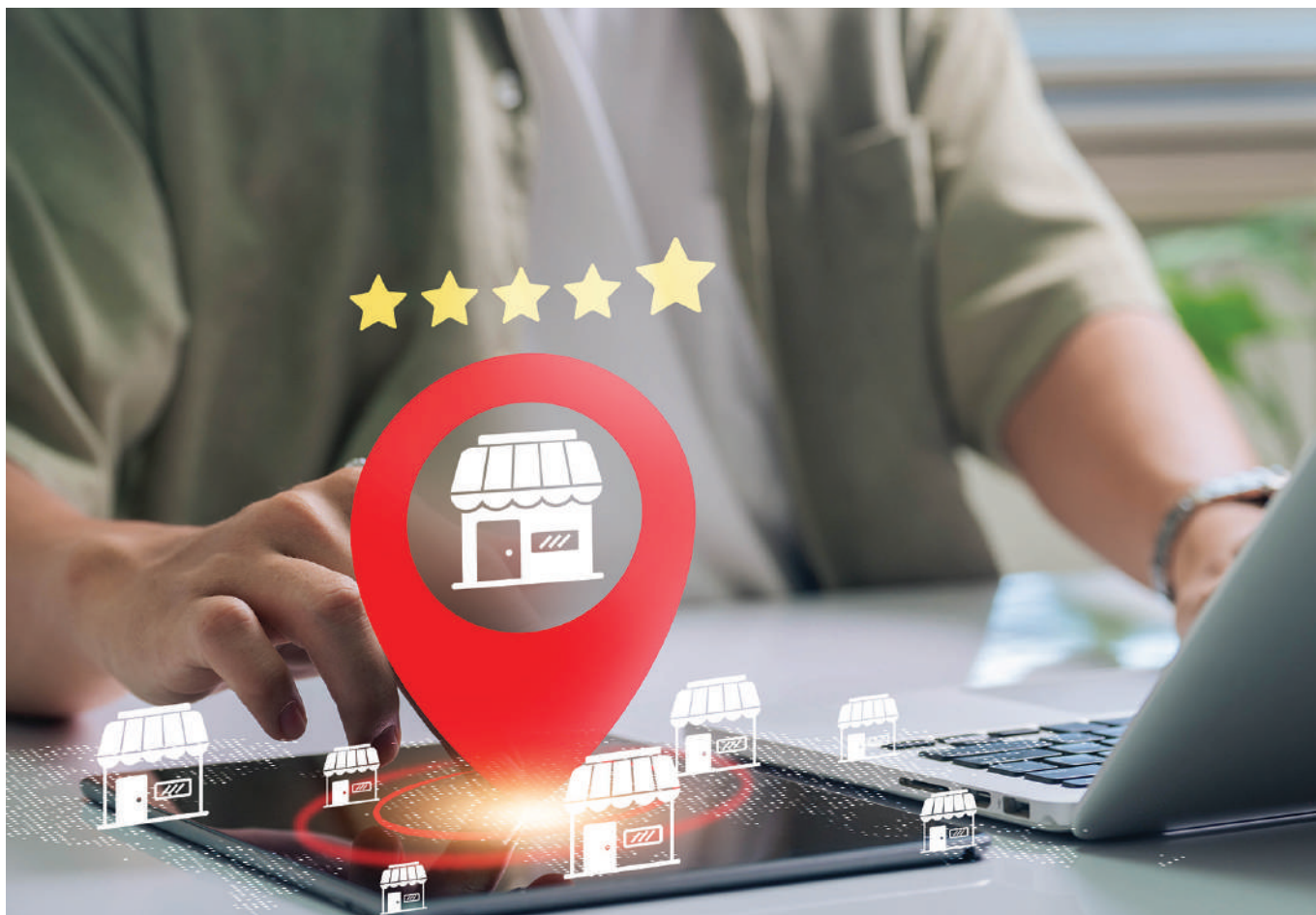
Together, these three appointments represent a significant step forward for WiTNE. Each brings specialist expertise that complements the existing board's skills, helping to fill gaps, strengthen operations, and make the organisation more sustainable for the long term, all while ensuring the work remains genuinely manageable alongside the personal lives of everyone involved.

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For further information visit elisian.co.uk





Google Maps is the new homepage

By Pascal Fintoni, AI & Digital Marketing Strategist

The new AI Mode first Internet starts on the map, not on your website.

I recently tested out a new masterclass called AI Overviews: The New Rules to Website, SEO and Blogging, and there was one practical group activity that proved a major breakthrough for the participants. We opened up their Google Business Profiles together, and they quickly realised how much was sitting there unused.

Once they've had a proper look, they stopped treating it as a directory entry they filled in once and forgot about. They started running it like a second website: adding photos, updating hours, posting the odd bit of news, completing the FAQs. Clients tell me they genuinely enjoy it once they get going. It's one of the few marketing jobs that gives you a result that same afternoon.

Why it matters more than it used to

I've always been a massive fan of Google Maps for swift online visibility, but even more so

now as the Profiles that are kept in good order are the ones turning up inside AI Overviews, inside Google's AI Mode, and in answers from other large language models too. That's not a coincidence. If your Profile is thin or out of date, the AI has nothing to lift from it. If it's rich and current, you become one of the sources it draws on.

There's good data behind this as well. BrightLocal's research this year has Google Business Profile signals as the single biggest factor in local search rankings, ahead of your website's SEO, your reviews, and your backlinks put together. Google's own figures show a complete profile earns seven times more clicks than an unfinished one, and the businesses sitting in positions one to three on the map tend to have far more photos and far more reviews than everyone below them.

Google Maps wants to be your front door

Google is spending heavily on Maps, particularly on voice. Ask it a question out loud rather than typing it, and you get a sense of where this is heading. More people, and soon, will open Maps the way they currently open a browser to access the Internet.

For a good chunk of your future customers, that Profile could be the first thing they meet. Not your homepage. Your Google Business Profile. Leave it half done, and you've lost them before your website gets a look in.

Nearly half of all Google searches now have local intent, and most people check a business online before they ever walk through the door. Verified, fully completed profiles bring in far

more direction requests, calls and website visits than the ones left unfinished, and businesses that post regularly and reply to their reviews see a genuine lift in engagement. This isn't a fringe habit. It's increasingly how people decide who to call now.

Let's get ready for the new Internet

Treat your Google Business Profile the way you treat your website, because for a lot of your customers, it is your official online presence. Rather than me listing every field and setting here, go to your favourite LLM and add this AI brief:

"Acting as my expert Google Business Profile consultant and local SEO advisor, I would like you to help me with the following: I need to understand what is possible, please provide a comprehensive list of all the sections and details that I can add and edit on my Google Business Profile. What are the key strategies to have my Google Business Profile ranking highly on Google Maps? Please provide a list in a table format highlighting the benefits and clever tactics for each strategy."

Run it, work through what comes back, and start editing.

To your success!

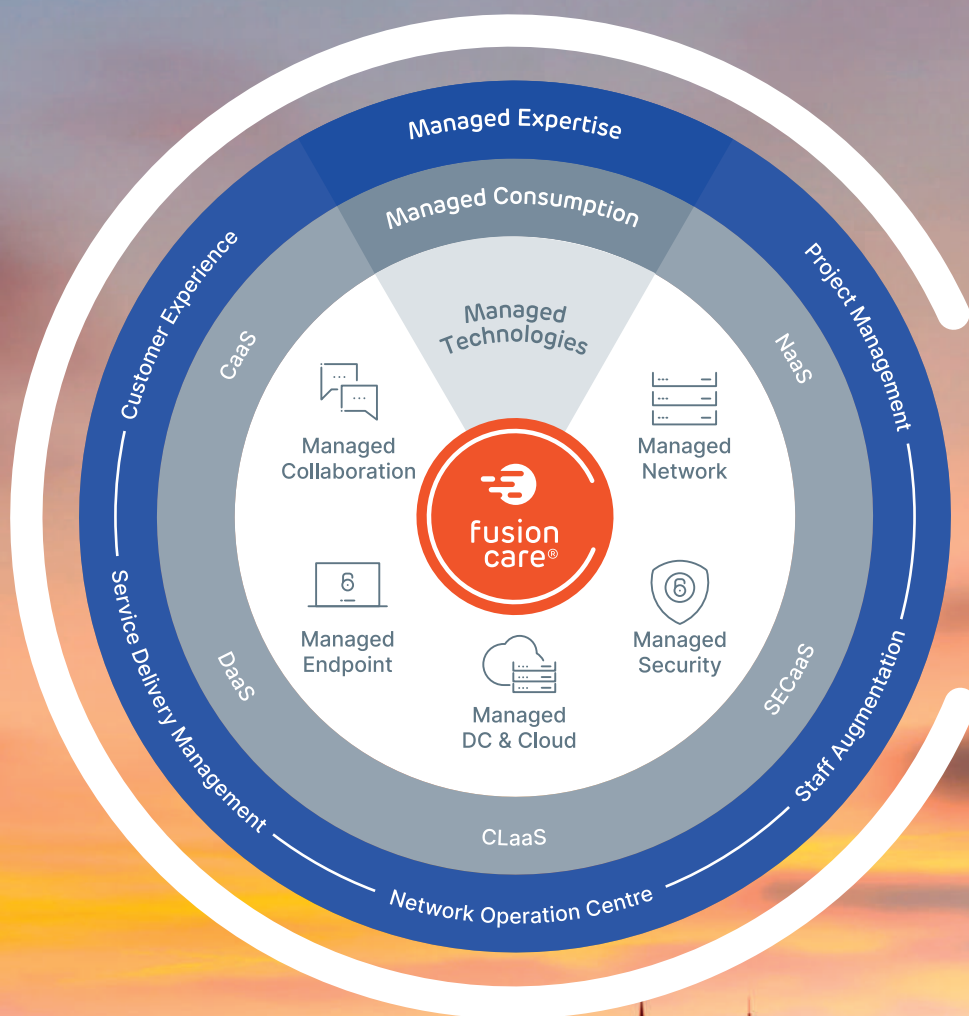
One last thing. Share this article with your network. As a business community, the North East needs to be well represented in this new search era. We've been here before. Let's not repeat the early 2000s.

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Talking Tech and Digital

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

Tom Smith

Regional Growth Director at Purple

Did you always envisage a career in technology?

No. My background is in commercial leadership and media, including roles with Mail Metro Media, Checkatrade and Clear Channel, as well as launching a publication in Cambridge with a London publishing house. I also had a public house for three years in Essex, so my route into technology has not been linear.

What drew me to Purple was not technology for technology's sake, but what it can make possible. Done properly, connectivity helps organisations understand how spaces are used, improve visitor experiences and support local economies. That is why Purple's B Corp status matters to me, alongside the commercial opportunity, so does the responsibility around digital inclusion.

What tips would you give to someone looking to work in the industry?

Lead with the problem, not the product. The people who do well are often not the most technical in the room, but the ones who can translate what a platform does into what it changes for a customer, a community or an organisation. Stay curious, stay close to the end user, and do not be put off if your background is commercial, marketing or operations. Those skills are valuable, because technology only matters when it solves a real-world problem.

Tell us about the most exciting project you're currently working on.

Building on Purple's partnership with Newcastle City Council and helping develop the North East as a leading region for connected places. Purple provides guest WiFi, location analytics and customer insight, but the bigger opportunity is what that enables. Councils, venues and visitor-economy organisations can better understand how people move through places and where connectivity can improve the experience. It is about turning everyday connectivity into useful intelligence while supporting the wider challenge of digital exclusion.

Tell us about your team.

I lead Purple's growth across the North East, but none of this happens in isolation. I am supported by a strong commercial, marketing, product and customer success team, and work closely with partners across local government, the visitor economy and the regional technology community. The people I work most closely with include Andrew Gardner, our SVP Global Sales, Pete Lee, COO; Claudia Hill, Product Marketing Manager. The opportunities we work on are rarely one-dimensional.

What are your long-term plans for the business?

To help prove that commercial growth and social impact can work together. For the North East, that means partnerships that make connectivity more useful, accessible and measurable, and helping the region become a national reference point for how public WiFi, visitor insight and digital inclusion support better decision-making.

What's your favourite piece of technology?

The smartphone. It may not be glamorous, but it is probably the most powerful piece of technology most of us own. It is my office when I travel across the region, how I taught myself guitar, and how I built an audience online. That is exactly why getting people connected matters.

Do you have any heroes or mentors?

My father. He raised four children alone and made sure we never went without, through nothing but graft. Watching what that takes, the consistency, the sacrifice, year after year with no one sharing the load, shaped how I think about work more than any manager or mentor since. If I've taken anything from him, it's that showing up properly, every day, for a long time, is the whole game.

What's your fondest career memory?

Being asked to come back. I started in telesales at Cambridge Newspapers, working from inbound to outbound to senior telesales, then into field sales once I'd passed my driving test. I left after several years, and was later asked to return as sales manager, running my own office with telesales, field sales and front of house staff. Being trusted to come back and run the whole operation is still one of my proudest moments.

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

Relationships compound. Invest in them before you need them. The value is in showing up consistently, being useful and adding something long before you ask for anything back.

When not working, how do you like to relax?

I walk around five miles a day with Foxy, my Belgian Malinois cross Siberian Husky. Outside of that, I play guitar and sing. I first picked up the guitar in 2007 as stress relief when I moved into sales management at Cambridge Newspapers.

www.purple.ai



“

**Lead with
the problem,
not the
product.**

Tom Smith



Simon Honeywood

AI is giving everybody a voice, but have you just lost your own?

By Simon Honeywood, Readysalted

**Artificial intelligence is extraordinary.
Nobody serious is arguing otherwise.**

But something is happening quietly across business marketing, and it is worth paying attention to. The poster in the airport bar that looks polished but says nothing. The website that could belong to any company in any sector. The LinkedIn post that sounds like every other LinkedIn post. We are, whether we like it or not, entering an era of impressive mediocrity.

The shiny new toy

AI has handed a design eye to people who never had one, and a voice to people who struggled to articulate themselves. That is genuinely valuable, and I include myself in that. AI helps me eradicate spelling mistakes, proof my writing and communicate more clearly. I am grateful for it.

But a tool that makes average easier also makes average more common. The bar for good enough has dropped precisely because good enough is now effortless. Most people cannot articulate why something feels generic. They just feel it and move on.

This year alone, we have received several website briefs where prospective clients have used AI to generate their designs before approaching us to build them. The results were impressive in one sense. AI can produce something that looks pretty credible at a glance. But almost none of it was fit for purpose. There was no understanding of the business behind it, the audience it was meant to serve or the purpose behind a single page. It looked like “a website”. It just was not their website.

What gets lost

Brand is not just a logo or a colour palette. It is the accumulation of decisions that make a business feel like itself. Generic content does not just blend in, it actively undermines the credibility you have spent years building. It affects how your clients feel about your

business. Your audience may not be able to pinpoint why something feels off. But they feel it and make decisions based on it.

What AI cannot do is understand what makes your business different. That requires knowing your business inside and out, and knowing your business requires time, questions and honest conversation.

The work that happens before the work

Before a single word is written or a design decision is made, the most important work is understanding. Who is the audience? What do they need? What does the business genuinely do well? What does it want to be known for?

Skipping this and reaching straight for a tool is like building on sand. A website that works, one that genuinely reflects your brand, serves your audience and is accessible to everyone who lands on it, requires considered human judgement. AI can support that process. It cannot replace it.

Using AI in the right order

The businesses whose content stands out will be the ones that use AI to sharpen their thinking, not substitute for it. Your brand is not a prompt. Treat it like one and your audience will notice, even if they cannot say exactly why.

Step back. Think about what your business stands for and who you are talking to. Then use the tools.

In that order.

www.readysalted.co.uk

SOS Group Supports Community Sports and Unsung Heroes



Sport Newcastle Unsung Hero winners 2026

Team Valley-based office technology company, SOS Group, has once again helped recognise and celebrate the people at the heart of grassroots sport from across the North East region.

SOS Group 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 to receive their special recognition awards.

The awards help shine a light on the people who tirelessly dedicate their time and energy to grassroots 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 event was attended by a range of athletes, volunteers, businesses and supporters from across the region and honoured people from different sports and communities for their dedication, passion and inspiring others through sport.

SOS Group Director, John Behan, helped present the awards and said: "We're 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 within the company, we're 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 SOS Group, 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"

The overall winners of the Sport Newcastle Unsung Hero Awards were Danielle Dickinson (Little Swimming Company), Jonathan Poulter (Serenity BJJ), Andrew Clark (Blyth Cricket Club), Hayden MacDonald (Sunderland Rowing Club), Jenny O'Neil (Eagles Community Foundation and South Tyneside Basketball Club), Harriet Lee (Tynemouth Amateur



L-R John Behan (SOS Group Director) with Andrew Clark (Blyth Cricket Club)



The Riding Disability Association's 2026 National Championships

Swimming Club), Emily Betham (Tynemouth Swimming Club), Steve Beatty Snr (Cramlington Rockets RLFC), Will Maddison (Cramlington Rockets RLFC and Rockets Community Foundation) and Steve Abbot (Northumberland Badminton and Tyneside Badminton Centre).

During 2026, SOS Group will be helping deliver high profile events for clients including Swim England, Aquatics GB, British Universities and Colleges Sports, English Schools Swimming Association and UK Athletics.

Events can range from one day to two weeks in duration in venues as large as 13,000 square metres and requiring as many as 50 devices.

Last year, the company provided office technology solutions at events including the Swim England Open Water National Championships, the Aquatics GB Diving Championships and Novuna UK Athletics Championships.

The Gateshead-based firm was also recently awarded the contract to supply the European Athletics Championships 2026 being held in Birmingham.

Given their involvement in sport, the copy print scan specialists are strong supporters of all sporting talent, whether that is sponsoring individuals and teams or supporting inclusion.

Most recently, SOS Group has supported activities as diverse as lawn bowling, triathlon and basketball.

It also recently helped deliver the Riding Disability Association's National Championships in Hartpury and has committed to supporting the event for the next five years.

The most inclusive equestrian event of its kind, over three days competitors took part in classes from dressage and show jumping to carriage driving and vaulting.

As well as helping ensure the event's smooth running, SOS Group utilised Heat Free Epson devices to contribute to its sustainability.

SOS Group Director, Andrew Skelton, was on hand for the entire championships and said: "Each year, the Riding Disability Association supports an incredible 39,000 children and adults with disabilities.

"The equestrian activities enabled are enjoyable, sometimes competitive, and help boost mental and physical well-being, as well as building self-confidence.

"We're proud to have supported the association since 2018 and look forward to the next five years."

Established in 2002, SOS Group is an award-winning office technology company facilitating business requirements across all sectors and specialising in providing copy, print, scan solutions.

For more information on how SOS Group can support the needs of any business or event, please visit: www.sosgroup-ltd.co.uk

In conversation with...

Jo Larby

*Technical Product Manager and
Accessibility Lead at Leighton*

Following her appointment to the board of Women in Tech North East (WiTNE) we spoke to Jo Larby, Technical Product Manager and Accessibility Lead at Leighton about the organisations plans for the coming year and the importance of organisations like WiTNE.

How did you first get involved with Women in Tech North East?

When I first started working in tech, I didn't really appreciate how important communities like Women in Tech North East could be. My university course had fewer than a dozen women on it, and I just assumed that being one of the few women in the room was normal.

One of my managers suggested I attend a Women in Tech North East event after seeing it on LinkedIn. At first, I was hesitant. I didn't know anyone and definitely felt imposter syndrome creeping in. But I went along, and the discussion happened to focus on imposter syndrome and challenges that many women experience in the workplace. It was the first time I realised these weren't experiences unique to me.

From then on, I kept going back. Over the years, I've met an incredible network of people, spoken on a role model panel, and built relationships that have extended far beyond the events themselves. What started as a daunting first step has become a genuine community for me.

What inspired you to join the board?

As the organisation evolved, it became clear there was an opportunity to help shape its future. Coming from a technical background, I felt I could bring a different perspective to the board.

Many women in tech communities naturally attract people from across recruitment, marketing, operations and other supporting roles, which is fantastic. But it's equally

important that software engineers, developers and other technical professionals feel represented too. I wanted to help ensure the organisation continues to support the full breadth of the tech community while further enabling technical discussions, learning and confidence building.

Why are organisations like Women in Tech North East still so important?

Tech remains a male-dominated industry, and women are statistically more likely to leave it during different stages of their careers, whether that's due to caring responsibilities, career breaks or other life changes.

Communities like Women in Tech North East create a space where people can have honest conversations they might not feel comfortable having within their own workplace. They provide support, encouragement and practical advice from people who've experienced similar challenges.

They're also about creating better workplaces for everyone. By bringing together women, allies and advocates, these communities help start conversations around equity, inclusive policies and career progression that benefit the wider industry.

What are you most looking forward to in your new role?

The appointment was genuinely a surprise. Even after applying and interviewing, hearing

I'd been selected was a real honour.

What excites me most is the opportunity to help others experience the same sense of belonging that I found. Looking back, it's amazing to think I was once nervous to attend my first event, and now I have the chance to help someone else feel welcomed and included.

Sometimes seeing someone with a similar background succeeding reminds you that they're just another person who's worked hard and wants to make a positive difference. That's something I'd love to pass on.

What would you like Women in Tech North East to achieve over the next year?

The community has grown incredibly already, and I'd love to see that continue organically.

Alongside our successful quarterly events, I'd like to explore more technical learning opportunities, mentoring, webinars and shared resources that help people develop their skills and confidence. Technology is evolving rapidly, particularly with AI lowering barriers to entry for many people, so there's a real opportunity to support both newcomers and experienced professionals as they continue learning.

Ultimately, it's about ensuring everyone feels they have a place within the community, whatever stage they're at in their career.

leighton.com



Jo Larby



L-R: Jamie Mablesen (Fuse) with Anne Wilson and Eddie Scott

Fuse finds the perfect solution to ambitious growth plans

Reputation, reliability and the potential to scale at pace sits behind a bold new partnership promising to take full circle property services to the next level.

Fast-growing North East-based data connectivity firm Fuse is taking a stake in sector-leading data and fibre cabling, supply and installation specialist NE IT Solutions (NEIT).

Together the two ambitious businesses are in a position to offer a broader set of service lines and tackle a greater share of the UK market.

As part of the deal, Fuse Managing Director Jamie Mablesen is making a significant investment in NEIT and will join the board alongside directors Anne Wilson and Eddie Scott.

"We started working together on projects at the beginning of this year and what impressed me was NEIT's consistency," explains Jamie.

"Their client retention, their attitude, their reputation and their reliability is just as advertised.

"That doesn't happen by accident. It's built over years of repeated delivery.

"The team has been dependable project after

project, both on technical delivery and on the things that are easy to overlook: planning, scheduling, and doing what they said they'd do, when they said they'd do it. That's something we value highly at Fuse.

"As part of the deal, I'm joining the board. The investment will help NEIT scale and I'll be putting time into sales strategy and operational systems alongside the existing team.

"When you're handing a partner a growing share of your delivery work, at some point it makes sense to back that relationship properly rather than just keep buying from them.

"For clients, there's no disruption with NEIT continuing to operate as an independently managed company. What they'll see is more resource behind the business and, over time, a broader set of service offerings."

Earlier this year Newcastle-based Fuse rebranded with a fresh focus on connecting, managing and protecting properties for landlords and their tenants across the UK.

The forward-thinking firm has forged a strong reputation for delivering fast and reliable connectivity, managed services and the behind-the-scenes infrastructure that keeps commercial buildings running.

As a trusted service provider NEIT represents an ideal partner and both Anne and Eddie can see the benefits to both businesses after a game-changing deal was rubber-stamped earlier this month.

"Working together we can offer customers a much wider service and Fuse can do the same," explains Eddie.

"I think Jamie appreciated the fact that we can point to a strong track record in customer retention and our references speak for themselves.

"We're two like-minded businesses with a strong commitment to the North East and an ambition to broaden our reach nationally and internationally.

"Our client base extends far beyond this region but a priority for NEIT is taking on local apprentices and investing in the region's workforce.

"This partnership will help us achieve both."

North Tyneside-based NEIT's client base includes Hitachi, Hepple Engineering Services and Nathaniel Litchfields and the link-up with Fuse looks set to bring more blue-chip clients through the door in the future.

"Jamie, Eddie and I are like-minded people who understand the value of clear communication and trusted relationships," adds Anne.

"When we first met to discuss a possible partnership it was clear that we all got on and that we share the same vision.

"Customers keep coming back to NEIT because they know we do a good job, they know the service will be consistent and, most importantly, they know that they can pick up the phone and talk things through at any time.

"People like people. And that's something we all agreed on from day one."

Visit fusemediagroup.co.uk



Gareth Carter with Katie Hilton



Why businesses should choose a network built for the North East

From Rural roots to Business Backbone; Northern Insight talks to Alncom about full fibre and why your business should choose them as their broadband providers.

Many businesses assume all broadband providers are the same. What makes Alncom different?

Katie Hilton: The biggest difference is that we own the network. We don't resell someone else's infrastructure – we've built and continue to maintain our own full-fibre network across the North East. That means there are no third parties, no offshore call centres and no passing the buck. If a customer needs support, they speak directly to our local team and our own engineers resolve the issue.

Why is owning the network such an advantage for businesses?

Gareth Carter: It gives us complete control over the service we deliver. Businesses don't want delays or complicated support processes when they're relying on their internet to trade. Because it's our network, we can respond quickly, solve problems faster and provide the personal service you'd expect from a local company.

Alncom has been around for quite some time. How has the business evolved?

Katie Hilton: We were founded in Alnwick in 2001 and have spent more than two decades building one of the region's largest independent full-fibre networks. We've connected thousands of homes across the North East, earned a 5-star Trustpilot rating, and we're now bringing that same dependable network and customer service to businesses throughout the county.

What business connectivity options do you offer?

Gareth Carter: We have two main solutions, both running entirely on our own fibre network. EoFTTP offers symmetrical speeds up to 325Mbps, a 99.9% uptime SLA and an 8-hour fix time, making it ideal for many businesses. For organisations that need maximum performance, our Fibre Ethernet service provides dedicated leased lines up to 10Gbps, uncontended bandwidth, a 6-hour fix time and business support seven days a week.

Reliability is critical for businesses today. How do you ensure customers stay connected?

Katie Hilton: We build resilience into every connection. Our network benefits from diverse routing, proactive monitoring and, where required, automatic failover options including second leased lines, 4G, 5G or Starlink. The aim is simple – to keep businesses operating even if the unexpected happens.

Who are your typical business customers?

Gareth Carter: We work with a wide range of organisations including holiday parks, hotels, rural businesses, professional services, industrial sites and multi-site organisations. Whatever the sector, our customers all value the same thing – a fast, reliable connection backed by people who genuinely care.

Finally, if there was one message you'd like businesses in the North East to remember, what would it be?

Katie Hilton: We're not just another broadband provider. We're a North East business that has built a network specifically for the region. When you choose Alncom, you're choosing local expertise, local engineers and a team that's committed to keeping your business connected.

Gareth Carter: If your business depends on its internet connection – and most do – we'd love to have a conversation about how we can help you.

To speak to the Alncom Commercial Team:

01665 604816 | business@alncom.co.uk | alncom.co.uk



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Eclipse Wholesale's expanding alt-net portfolio

Gateshead-based Eclipse Wholesale has been helping UK telecoms resellers grow their businesses for over two decades, through a comprehensive portfolio of connectivity and communications solutions.

As demand for faster, more resilient connectivity continues to increase, the team has remained committed to expanding their alternative network portfolio, giving partners greater choice and wider coverage across the UK.

The UK's fibre landscape has evolved rapidly over recent years, with alternative network providers investing heavily in new infrastructure to complement the Openreach network. Recognising the value this brings to the channel, Eclipse Wholesale has continued to strengthen their partnerships with some of the country's leading alt-nets, ensuring resellers can access the right connectivity solution for every customer.



Long-standing partnerships with CityFibre and ITS have played a key role in this strategy. Both providers have continued to expand their footprints, with recent builds taking place across the Northeast, creating more opportunities for partners to deliver high-speed fibre to businesses throughout the region.

Building on this success, Eclipse Wholesale has recently expanded its portfolio even further by welcoming KCOM, MS3, Freedom Fibre and Trooli. Each provider strengthens coverage in key parts of the UK, allowing partners to reach more customers than ever before.

Trooli brings extensive fibre coverage across Scotland and the Southeast, while Freedom Fibre continues to expand its network throughout the Northwest. Meanwhile, KCOM and MS3 provide strong coverage across the Humber region, giving partners access to high-quality connectivity in areas that have historically been served by a smaller number of network providers.

For Eclipse Wholesale's Managing Director, James Drake, the addition of KCOM is particularly significant. James began his career in telecommunications as an apprentice at KCOM over 30 years ago, making the new partnership a genuine full-circle moment. Having started his journey with the company at the beginning of his telecoms career, returning as a valued wholesale partner represents both a personal milestone and another important step in Eclipse Wholesale's continued growth.

The expansion of the alt-net portfolio reflects Eclipse Wholesale's wider commitment to providing a truly channel-focused service. Rather than relying on a single network, partners can choose from multiple infrastructure providers to find the best solution for each customer based on location, availability, performance and commercial requirements.

This flexibility not only improves service availability but also helps resellers remain competitive in an increasingly dynamic market. Whether supporting businesses in major cities or reaching customers in previously underserved areas, Eclipse Wholesale's growing network portfolio enables partners to deliver reliable, future-ready connectivity.

Eclipse Wholesale remains committed to expanding their portfolio and supporting partners with the widest possible range of connectivity solutions. By combining nationwide coverage with a growing choice of leading alternative networks, the company is helping channel partners win more business and deliver high-quality connectivity to customers across the country.

www.eclipsewholesale.co.uk

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James Drake



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iamproperty revenue tops £60M in major year of growth

North East success story iamproperty has reported revenue exceeding £60m during a milestone year of innovation and network growth.

Financial results for the year ending 31 October 2025 show strong revenue of £61.2m, seeing an increase of 20% year-on-year. Adjusted EBITDA also rose to £17.2m, up by over 14%.

iamproperty is one of the UK's fastest growing prop tech businesses, with its digital solutions supporting Estate Agents across the entire buying, selling and lettings process.

FY25 saw major investment in innovation, strategic acquisitions, expansion into new markets and continued growth across iamproperty's ecosystem of solutions.

Key innovations included AI enhancements and the launch of a Market Appraisals tool. The business also acquired The ValPal Network which completed earlier this year, enabling iamproperty to offer the most powerful end-to-end lead-generation capability currently available in the UK residential property market.

Auction's consistent growth saw the market leader help Estate Agents sell £2.1bn worth of property, up from £1.8bn the previous year. An exciting new partnership was formed becoming Yopa's strategic Auction partner, as well as a targeted expansion into central London, which is a huge area of opportunity. Early wins in this new territory included partnering with Kinleigh Folkard & Hayward (KFH).

iamproperty was founded by Ben Ridgway and Jamie Cooke in 2009 to empower agents to succeed with market-leading tech and support. The business now works with over 7,000 branches across the UK.



Homes by Esh secures planning approval for 49 new homes in Tunstall

North East housebuilder Homes by Esh has received planning approval to build 49 high-quality new homes in Tunstall, marking a key step in expanding its presence within the South Sunderland Growth Area.

Brought forward by Esh Group's private housebuilding division, the Burdon Road development sits around four miles from Sunderland city centre and will deliver a mix of three- and four-bedroom, detached and semi-detached homes.

The scheme was approved by Sunderland City Council as it aligns with the council's wider strategic masterplan for Land North of Burdon Lane through its Core Strategy and Development Plan.

Technical Director at Homes by Esh, Dale Morris, said: "Securing planning approval for our Burdon Road development is a significant milestone for the team and a positive step forward for housing delivery in Sunderland.

"Our focus has been to design homes that not only meet the needs of modern families but also integrate seamlessly with the local area and its long-term growth plans. With sustainability, energy performance and community at the heart of the scheme, we look forward to bringing these homes to life and working with local partners to generate real economic benefit for the region."

Several house types, including The Juniper, The Magnolia and The Laurel – all seen on Homes by Esh's Collier Gardens development at Philadelphia Lane – are included in the plans, offering a variety of housing options.

Designed to support modern living, each of the 49 homes will meet the 2021 Building Regulations Uplift, incorporating enhanced insulation, ventilation, and a range of energy-efficient features including electric vehicle charging points, solar panels and smart thermostats.



North East property company launches new service to 'ease region's housing crisis'

A North East company has launched a new venture aimed at helping ease the region's housing crisis.

Since launching in 2019, Middlesbrough-based Horizon has grown rapidly, building a portfolio of hundreds of properties across the North East.

Now, after being approved as a temporary accommodation provider in 2025, the firm has launched Horizon Community Living, a community interest company designed to support both tenants and landlords by maintaining stable tenancies and removing barriers to housing.

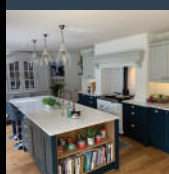
The ultimate goal, according to co-founder Denis Shail, is to reduce the reliance on temporary accommodation across the region and provide more stable homes.

"The need for housing has never been greater, yet we are seeing a growing number of landlords leaving the sector due to tax changes and increased regulation," added Denis.

"Horizon Community Living creates a bridge between those challenges.

"We take properties on long-term leases of around seven years, offering landlords a guaranteed, hands-off income with no rental arrears, whilst providing safe, supported accommodation for people who may struggle to access mainstream housing."

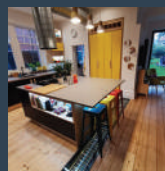
It comes as new stats show there are over 2,000 people currently on the housing waiting list in Middlesbrough alone – with approximately 10,000 enquiries for emergency housing in the North East in the past year.



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Political change, property decisions and the value of long-term thinking



Harry Morshead



Will Thornton



Paul Fairlamb

Periods of political change often generate headlines, but for property owners, landowners and businesses, the questions that follow are usually far more practical.

Will policies change? Will investment decisions be delayed? Could planning rules, taxation or regulation evolve? These are understandable concerns, particularly when the wider economic landscape continues to shift.

While political events naturally attract attention, history shows that successful property decisions are rarely made in response to a single headline. Instead, they are built on sound advice, careful planning and a clear understanding of long-term objectives.

At youngsRPS, we work with clients across the rural, residential and commercial sectors, and while each market faces its own challenges, they all share one common requirement: confidence in making informed decisions.

Harry Morshead, Rural Surveyor & Director,

explains: "The rural sector has always been resilient. Farmers and landowners are accustomed to adapting to changing policy, funding arrangements and market conditions. While political change may influence future direction, the fundamentals of good estate management, careful planning and informed decision making remain unchanged."

Across the residential market, buyers and sellers continue to respond to a combination of affordability, mortgage availability, housing supply and local demand. These factors often have a greater day-to-day influence on the market than short-term political developments.

Will Thornton, Head of Residential Agency, says: "Confidence is one of the biggest drivers of the housing market. Political change may create uncertainty in the short term, but people continue to move home for work, family and lifestyle reasons. Understanding local market conditions and taking professional advice remains the best approach for both buyers and sellers."

The commercial property sector continues to evolve as businesses adapt to changing working patterns, investment priorities and economic conditions. Occupiers and investors alike are increasingly focused on flexibility, efficiency and long-term value.

Paul Fairlamb, Commercial Surveyor & Senior Associate Director, comments: "Businesses thrive on certainty wherever possible, but commercial property has always evolved alongside economic and political change. The key is to remain agile, regularly review property strategies and ensure decisions are based on commercial objectives rather than short-term uncertainty."

As the policy landscape continues to develop, property owners are likely to see ongoing discussion around planning reform, housing delivery, infrastructure investment and support for rural businesses. While the detail may change over time, the importance of taking professional, independent advice remains constant.

Political transitions come and go, but well-informed property decisions stand the test of time. Whether managing rural estates, buying or selling a home, or reviewing a commercial portfolio, a long-term perspective will always provide the strongest foundation.

At youngsRPS, our role is not to predict political outcomes but to help clients navigate change with confidence, whatever the future may bring.

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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



Middle Rigg

Ninebanks, Northumberland

Set amidst approximately two acres in the heart of the North Pennines National Landscape, Middle Rigg is a beautifully converted stone barn that perfectly balances timeless character with contemporary family living. Vaulted ceilings, exposed stonework and generous open-plan spaces create a home designed for both everyday comfort and entertaining, while the landscaped gardens, woodland, ponds and stable block offer endless opportunities to embrace the outdoors.

Asking price £650,000



Beacon View

West Woodburn, Northumberland

Occupying a peaceful position in the sought-after village of West Woodburn, this impressive detached family home offers the perfect blend of generous living space and an exceptional rural setting. Designed with modern family life in mind, the versatile accommodation is complemented by beautifully maintained gardens and far-reaching views across the surrounding Northumberland countryside.

Asking Price £525,000





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Groundworks are often one of the most challenging phases of any build. Poor preparation can lead to costly delays, structural issues, and increased long-term maintenance. That's why our team takes a meticulous approach to every project, ensuring the work beneath the surface is completed to the highest possible standard before construction continues above ground.

Whether working on commercial developments, industrial facilities, residential schemes or public sector projects, we pride ourselves on

delivering reliable solutions that stand the test of time. Our investment in skilled operatives, modern equipment and effective project management enables us to complete projects efficiently while maintaining exceptional standards of workmanship.

Safety is fundamental to everything we do. Construction sites present a variety of risks, particularly during excavation and groundwork operations, making robust health and safety procedures essential. MES Construction is proud to be SMAS Accredited, demonstrating our commitment to maintaining the highest standards of health, safety, and compliance across every project we undertake.

SMAS (Safety Management Advisory Services) accreditation provides clients with the confidence that our health and safety management systems have been independently assessed and meet recognised industry standards. It reflects our ongoing commitment to protecting our workforce, our

clients, subcontractors, and members of the public, while ensuring projects are delivered responsibly and professionally.

For clients, choosing an accredited contractor offers reassurance that health and safety is never an afterthought. From risk assessments and site-specific planning to ongoing monitoring and compliance, our team works proactively to minimise risk and maintain safe working environments throughout every stage of a project.

At MES Construction, we believe that successful projects are built on more than quality materials alone. They are built on experience, trust, strong communication and attention to detail. Our reputation has been established through consistently delivering dependable groundwork and civil engineering solutions across the North East, earning the confidence of clients who return to us time and time again.

Whether you're planning a commercial development, industrial expansion, infrastructure project or residential scheme, partnering with an experienced groundwork contractor can make all the difference to the success of your build.

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Sinead Kay and Dave Pickersgill inspect progress at the new state-of-the-art Kendal College campus, Westmorland shopping centre

Key role for Howarth Litchfield at Kendal College

Durham-based architectural practice, Howarth Litchfield, has been appointed to the third phase in a unique staged development of the Westmorland Shopping Centre in Kendal to create a state-of-the-art campus for Kendal College.

Renowned for its extensive experience of working on transformational further and higher education schemes, Howarth Litchfield's appointment follows a competitive tender process operated by the Crescent Purchasing Consortium (CPC) framework, which saw the firm secure maximum marks for quality.

This latest project adds to the firm's portfolio in the northeast education sector, which includes high-profile work for New College Durham and Derwentside College.



Dave Pickersgill at the Westmorland shopping centre

Technical director at Howarth Litchfield, Dave Pickersgill, explains how the college has seen a dramatic surge in student numbers over recent years.

"These works are required to address the urgent need for more space," he said. "Between 2001 and 2021, the number of full-time learners aged 16–18 tripled from 405 to over 1,300, reflecting the growing demand for Kendal College's education and training provision across Cumbria and beyond.

"I believe the new Westmorland campus will ultimately accommodate around 450 students who will benefit from a range of specialist spaces and facilities and we are delighted to be able to carry on the good work already undertaken to date during phases one and two."

Once the upper floors of the shopping centre were vacated, the college took over the leases of the first-floor shop units and second-floor storage areas to convert the space into an additional campus, which is now open and operational.

A campus in the heart of the town

Key features of the Phase 3 refurbishment include:

- **The Atrium** - which has been transformed to create a new heart of the college.

- **Specialist facilities** - construction of digital media & performance spaces, IT hubs, and a mock health ward.
- **Student infrastructure** - a new reception and student entrance, new staffrooms, and solutions to complex accessibility issues.

While the upper floors have been transformed, the ground floor will remain an active retail environment, with tenants such as Greggs and O2 continuing to operate.

Project Timeline and Challenges

The project will be delivered in three phases with multiple sectional completions. Some facilities are expected to be ready for the September 2026 academic year, with further handovers in December 2026 and a final completion target of Easter 2027.

Mr Pickersgill continued: "The project is not without its challenges as we will be working within a "live" environment, managing construction above an operational shopping centre and alongside an active college campus with access for building works being managed through repurposed service routes originally used by the retail units."

Sinead Kay, Chief Operating Officer & CFO at Kendal College, added: "We are committed to cementing the college's place at the heart of the town and its community and contributing to the social and economic rejuvenation of the area. We are delighted with the way that the project is progressing and look forward to being able to offer our students a high-quality environment to study in."

howarthlitchfield.com

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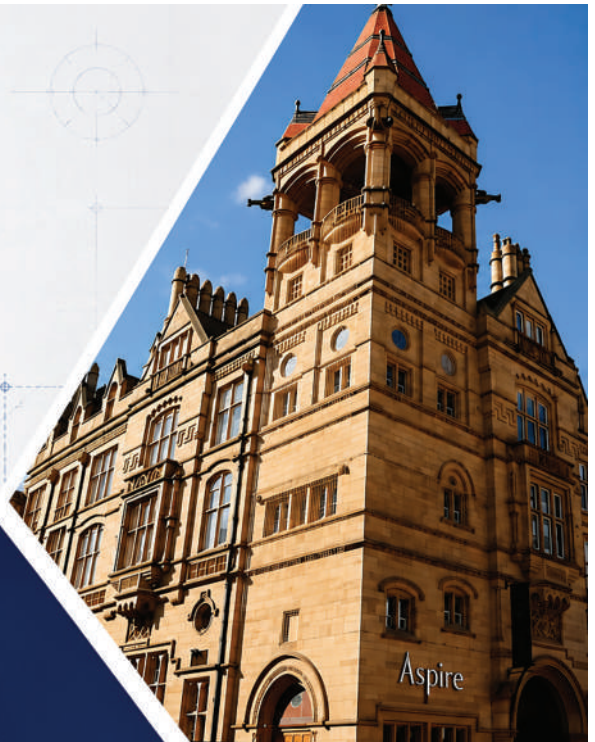
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THE NORTH BLUEPRINT: DELIVERING ACTION TOGETHER



North to unite at Constructing Excellence North Conference

Construction leaders from across the North of England will unite this autumn at the Constructing Excellence North Conference 2026, taking place on Thursday 17 September at Aspire, Leeds.

Under the theme “The North’s Blueprint: Delivering Action Together”, the event will bring members of the Constructing Excellence regional networks across Yorkshire & Humber, the North West and the North East for a day focused on collaboration, shared priorities and a unified approach to shaping the future of the built environment.

The conference is designed to strengthen cross-regional working throughout the North, bringing together clients, contractors, consultants, SMEs, innovators and industry leaders to align thinking on the challenges and opportunities facing the construction sector as a whole.

A key focus will be how the North can work effectively as a connected region, turning shared ambition into practical delivery across procurement, infrastructure, housing, sustainability and major project delivery.

Constructing Excellence is a national industry movement dedicated to improving the performance of the built environment through collaboration, best practice and innovation. Its regional networks connect organisations across the supply chain to share knowledge, drive continuous improvement and support better outcomes for projects, communities and the wider industry.

Caroline Key, co-chair for Constructing Excellence Yorkshire and Humber Club, said:

“The North has a real opportunity to lead the way in how the built environment collaborates, innovates and delivers at scale. This conference is about bringing together the full breadth of expertise across our regions to focus on shared challenges and turn them into practical, deliverable solutions.

“By working more closely across boundaries, we can strengthen outcomes, improve consistency and ensure the North is better connected in how it plans and delivers future growth.”

Confirmed speakers include Lucy Howard, UK major bids lead at Turner & Townsend, Alison Nicholl, head of Constructing Excellence, Jane Turner, construction lead at NEPO, Mike Raven, client engagement lead at YORhub, professor David Glew, director of the Leeds Sustainability Institute and head of efficiency and policy, Andrea Leigh, senior associate, Trowers & Hamlin LLP, Ross Markwell, director of business development at Esh Group, Phil Morrison, partner, Tyr Law, Stephanie Parker, senior advisor, Catapult and Kieron McGaughey, consultant solicitor and procurement law trainer.

The programme will include interactive sessions and workshops designed to challenge traditional thinking and demonstrate practical approaches to improving outcomes across the sector.

A key session will feature a “Value vs. Cost” Lego simulation workshop, using role-based

team exercises to explore how competing priorities can impact project delivery. Delegates will take on different instructions—such as delivering at lowest cost, highest quality, or maximum speed—before collaborating on a single outcome without shared objectives. The session will highlight how misaligned priorities can undermine wider goals such as carbon reduction and how the Value Toolkit can be used to align outcomes from the outset of a project. The session will be led by Kathryn Gardner, director at Avison Young and Constructing Excellence North East Value Group Chair

Another session will focus on SME and Tier 1 collaboration, examining how procurement processes can be streamlined to reduce administrative burdens on smaller firms working within frameworks. Kieran McGaughey, consultant solicitor and procurement law trainer, will deliver an update on the latest developments in procurement legislation, followed by a panel discussion exploring whether new legislation is delivering meaningful benefits for SMEs, how contracting authorities are adapting and where further opportunities exist to improve delivery and engagement across the supply chain.

Sessions will also explore future approaches to procurement, including new legislation, frameworks and public sector delivery models, alongside retrofit and net zero, focusing on low-carbon delivery and sustainable infrastructure across the region.

Headline sponsor of the conference is YORhub with confirmed event partners including Blazetrapp, Bradley O’Mahoney and Tyr Law.

Further details on speakers and event partners will be announced in due course.

For more information or to register interest in attending, please contact:
admin@ceyhclub.co.uk



L-R: Duncan Bowman, Ritchie Wharton (both directors at Falcon Fox) and Darren Talbot, site manager at Falcon Fox Construction

Falcon Fox creates more jobs in Sunderland

Falcon Fox Construction is continuing to deliver on its commitment to hire local people as a direct result of winning two major contracts on Wearside.

Recently, it was announced that David Reagan, from Seaham, has taken the role as site manager on Nile+Villiers, a key part of Sunderland City Council's Sunnyside Place Strategy - a ten-year plan to bring new life, activity and investment to the area.

Robyn Wright, from Grangetown, is site coordinator at Nile+Villiers and at the Vaux Housing phase II development, which Falcon Fox has also been appointed onto, in a principal contractor role. The project, is a flagship scheme at the heart of the city centre which will deliver 93 sustainable homes.

Most recently, Darren Talbot from Hetton-le-Hole has been appointed as site manager, joining Robyn on the Vaux Housing phase II development.

Situated on the site of the former Vaux brewery, rapidly becoming a vibrant business and residential neighbourhood, the scheme will offer panoramic views over the River Wear, as well as access to Riverside Park and shared spaces.

Falcon Fox director, Duncan Bowman, said: "We said we would give back to the local area when we commenced this project and that is what we are doing. By directly hiring both senior management and highly skilled tradespeople from Sunderland and the surrounding area, we are contributing to the local economy and helping to leave a lasting legacy."

Darren Talbot, site manager, said: "Having worked in construction for 40 years, the Vaux Housing site holds significant sentimental value to many people in the local area.

"To be working on a project close to home and seeing the benefits that it will bring to the city and its people is a great feeling."

www.falconfox.co.uk



Esh completes key Riverside Sunderland regeneration projects

Sheepfolds public realm scheme and Riverside Park delivered to support city transformation.

Esh Construction has completed two major projects for Sunderland City Council, marking significant milestones in the ongoing Riverside Sunderland regeneration programme.

Delivered in partnership with Sunderland City Council, the schemes have transformed key areas of the city's riverside environment, improving connectivity, enhancing public spaces and supporting the long-term vision for Sunderland's continued growth.

At Sheepfolds, Esh has completed a public realm scheme surrounding the Stadium of Light and Sheepfolds Stables, creating high-quality pedestrian infrastructure and strengthening connections between the city centre, the Stadium of Light and the wider Sheepfolds development area.

Esh has also completed its work at Riverside Park – a major new green space being delivered as part of the wider Riverside Sunderland masterplan – where the Southern Gateway and Kingsley Gardens have been transformed. The Southern Gateway public realm connects the Farringdon Row neighbourhood and Riverside multi-storey car park, with the new Sunderland Strategic Eye hospital, Vaux housing development, and central business district.

Steven Garrigan, Divisional Director at Esh Construction, said: "The completion of both the Sheepfolds public realm scheme and our Riverside Park work represents another proud milestone for Esh in Sunderland and reinforces our long-term commitment to supporting the city's regeneration ambitions.

"While the projects are very different in nature, they share a common goal of creating high-quality places that enhance connectivity, celebrate local heritage and provide lasting benefits for the community. Together, they demonstrate how investment in public realm and green infrastructure can support wider regeneration and help attract people to live, work and spend time in the city."

A central feature of the Sheepfolds project is a new pedestrian overpass constructed above the site's historic cobbled wagonway. The works have included the restoration of the former industrial route while integrating it into a modern, accessible thoroughfare, providing a direct link between the Stadium of Light, Sheepfolds Stables and Keel Square, with onward access to the city centre.

Alongside the overpass, the project has delivered enhanced pedestrian and cycle routes through the installation of natural stone paving, new trees and landscaping, and critical infrastructure to support future phases of development.

Situated between the Riverside multi-storey car park and new Sunderland Strategic Eye Hospital, the Southern Gateway includes a new park entrance, attractive landscaped spaces, ponds, and social areas. Kingsley Gardens has been developed as a community growing space, providing opportunities for healthy living and social interaction.

With both sites handed back to Sunderland City Council, work is now focused on readying the new spaces for public use in the coming weeks.

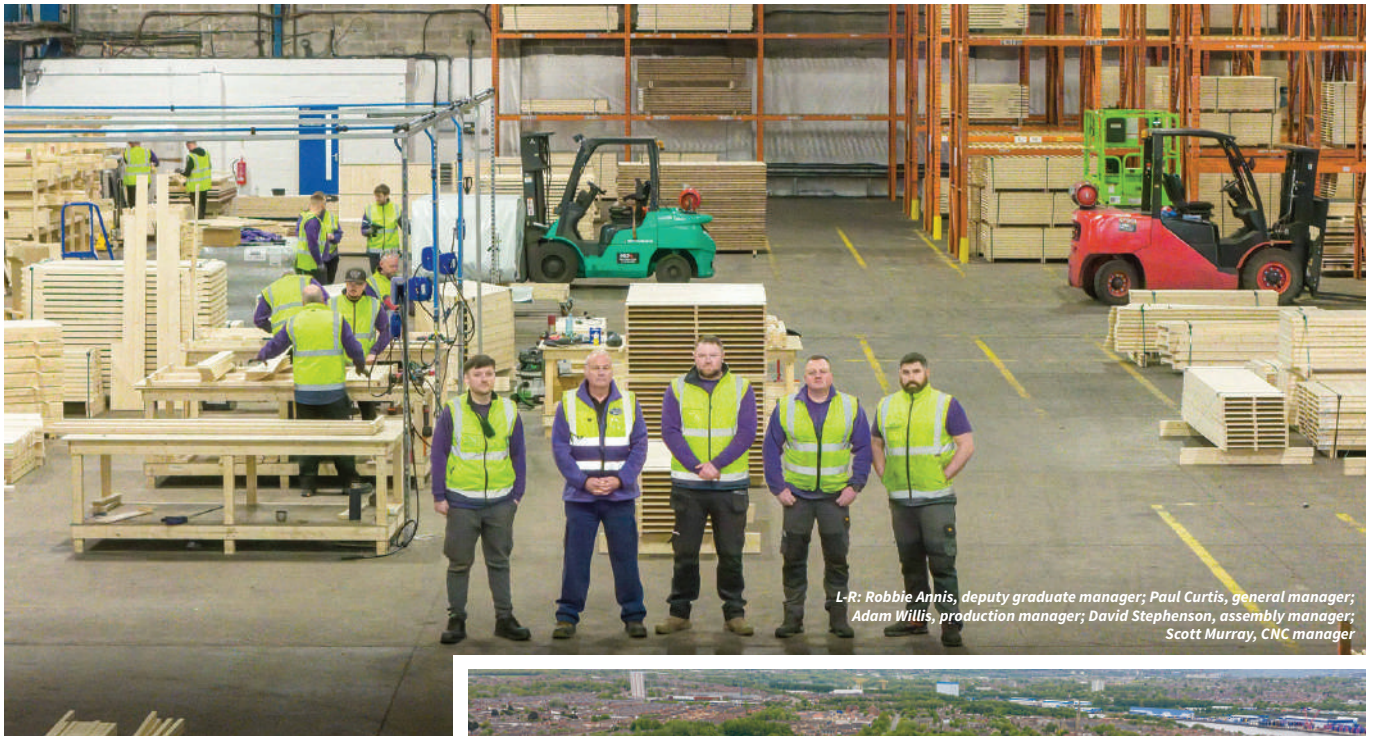
Cllr James Jackson, Portfolio Holder for Business, Housing and Regeneration at Sunderland City Council, said: "It's fantastic to see work complete on the next phase of Riverside Sunderland, which will see the opening of the first phase of our stunning new city park and further enhance the area around Sheepfolds and the Stadium of Light.

"Over the coming months and years, Riverside Sunderland is set to see hundreds of new homes, the national esports arena and new retail and leisure units rise from the ground and the completion of these critical infrastructure projects mark the latest milestone in the ongoing transformation of the city."

To find out more about Esh Construction, visit www.eshgroup.co.uk



Wood works – garden buildings business creating 60 new jobs



L-R: Robbie Annis, deputy graduate manager; Paul Curtis, general manager; Adam Willis, production manager; David Stephenson, assembly manager; Scott Murray, CNC manager

One of the UK's leading manufacturers of wooden garden and outdoor buildings is creating a £4.5m base and bringing over 60 new jobs to South Tyneside.



Family-owned Dunster House, which has manufacturing, distribution and sales operations across the UK and sister companies in Europe, has purchased a nine-acre site in Hebburn at which it will build a variety of timber garden buildings, from sheds to log cabins.

The business is headquartered in Bedford and has 20 sites and 35 manufacturing and branch units from northern Scotland to southern England. It bought the Hebburn plant in November and is working with South Tyneside Council to recruit people from the borough for new roles in the factory.

Managing Director, Chris Murphy, said: "Dunster House is a business that's all about people - creating this base in South Tyneside and providing good jobs for local people is great for both our company and for Hebburn.

"We want to create opportunities for people who have found themselves excluded from the jobs market and we are especially passionate about the work we do to create employment for Armed Forces veterans, who tend to have the exact skills required to succeed in our sector."

Dunster House and its sister businesses employ over 1,000 people across the UK and Europe

and has already invested in new machinery and manpower to help it hit the ground running in Hebburn. With top quality timber imported from Scandinavia, the firm has purchased a leading-edge pressure treatment machine, which infuses timber with preservatives to protect it against rot, decay and insects, and a large industrial kiln to remove all moisture from the wood enhancing its longevity.

"We will invest around £4.5m in the new plant," added Chris. "It's a sizeable sum but demonstrates the belief we have in the area and how integral it will be to the company as we continue to grow.

"For more than 30 years we've proudly done things differently. As a family-run business we make decisions quickly and move forward on projects at pace. We'd been looking for property on Tyneside for quite some time so when the opportunity to secure this site presented itself - so close to our Stockton base - we didn't hang about."

The ethos of "business for good" runs through Dunster House. Chris, who served in the British Army for four years, firmly believes that the role of a responsible business is creating opportunity

for people and to "give something back."

Dunster House supplies sanitation solutions to OXFAM and UNICEF as part of our social responsibilities, Chris bought a farm in Wales that he donated to veterans' charity "Woody's Lodge" and started a military medals and book shop in Bedford from which all profit is channelled towards Armed Forces charities. He also has a flat currently lets free of charge to Ukrainian refugees.

"The best part of this job is helping people - seeing someone's face change when you tell them they have the job," added Chris. "The way they light-up and you can tell that they can't wait to get out of the interview to call their wife or parents - it's amazing.

"We're a business and here to make money and succeed, but what's the point of success if you can't share it with others? We do that by creating jobs, rewarding dedication and hard work and by supporting people that sometimes require a little more help to get that all important job."

dunsterhouse.co.uk



Karen Nairstone and Jen Bernard

A zest for living

Bernard Interiors launches Zest Living to bring specialist later-living design expertise to a wider market.

Bernard Interiors, the award-winning design group behind many of the UK's leading care home and retirement living developments, has launched Zest Living, a specialist interior architectural design business created to extend the Group's expertise across the wider care home and healthcare market.

Known for delivering exceptional environments across the prime residential, hospitality, retirement living, care home and healthcare sectors, Bernard Interiors has built a reputation for combining creative design with commercial insight. With projects spanning the UK and Spain, the Group has become a recognised leader in the longevity sector.

The launch of Zest Living marks the next stage in the Group's evolution. Bernard Interiors

now operates through three specialist brands: Jen Bernard Interiors (JBI), Bernard London (prime residential) and Zest Living, enabling the business to offer tailored design solutions while maintaining a shared focus on design excellence, operational performance and long-term value.

JBI has delivered many flagship care home and integrated retirement community (IRC) developments, helping to set new standards for resident experience and innovation. As JBI increasingly focuses on flagship commercial projects and luxury residential estates globally, Zest Living has been created to serve the wider care home and healthcare market with a creative, scalable and performance-driven design offer.



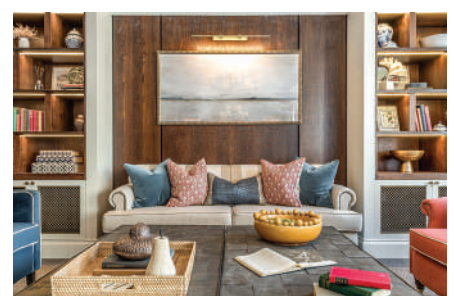
The new business is supported by Director of Strategic Growth, Rachael Sellers, and strengthened by the appointment of Karen Nairstone as Head of Partnerships. With more than 20 years' experience in person-centred design, Karen will help expand Zest Living's reach across the sector.

"Zest Living is about making specialist later-living design expertise accessible to more developers and operators," says Founder Jen Bernard. "Great design isn't about following trends, it's about understanding how people live, work and receive care. When environments are thoughtfully created around those needs, they enhance wellbeing, improve operational performance and create lasting value for residents, operators and investors alike."

Group Operations Director Oliver Holmes says the new business addresses a growing need within the sector.

"The impact of great design on resident experience, occupancy, staff retention and asset performance is increasingly recognised, yet many operators have lacked access to the specialist expertise available on flagship developments. Through Zest Living, we're bringing established sector knowledge and design rigour to a wider market. Successful care home and healthcare environments require far more than selecting finishes and furnishings, they demand a deep understanding of how people live, work and receive care."

www.zest-living.com



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Awards ceremony celebrates 'inspirational' and 'passionate' staff at education trust



From Trainee Teacher of the Year to experienced leaders, all corners of an educational trust were honoured at a prestigious awards ceremony held at Ramside Hall Hotel in County Durham.

It was the fifth Chadwick Celebration Awards, organised by Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, to honour and celebrate the heroes across the 31 schools across East Durham, South Tyneside and Sunderland.

They included newly qualified teachers – Ryan Gooch, an ECT (early career teacher) of St Bede's Catholic School & Byron Sixth Form in Peterlee, who won the Inspirational Staff Award voted for by pupils; SCITT Trainee Teacher of the Year Award, won by Bobbi Bowman, of St Godric's Catholic Primary School, Thornley; and the New Teacher Award, won by Amy Watson, of St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School, Seaham.

Ryan said teaching was his calling and winning the award – especially one voted for by his students – cemented that fact to him whereas Bobbi couldn't contain her excitement to not only win the SCITT Trainee Teacher of the Year but to also secure another year's contract at St Godric's, the primary school she attended as a child.

The Teacher of the Year (Secondary) was awarded to Dr Rachel Bennett, of St Wilfrid's RC College, South Shields, and the Teacher of the Year (Primary) was won by Laura Laverick, of St Patrick's Catholic Primary School, Sunderland.

Laura was particularly moved by the part of the nomination which said she had strong relationships with pupils' families and colleagues, "built on warmth, trust and genuine care".

"I try to make the classroom a place where every child can enjoy the same experiences, regardless of their different backgrounds, create equity and give the children something a little bit different," she says.

Rachel was described as an "inspiring teacher whose resilience, strength and unwavering dedication are evident in all she does".

But it wasn't only teaching staff under the spotlight. The Heart of Our Trust Award was won by caretaker Paul Baldesara, known as Mr B, of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School, Shotton, and St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Blackhall, who was recognised for being the "heartbeat" of the school community and for his "tireless work, good humour, and genuine care". Paul said his win was a "privilege".

The Governance Award was won by Patricia Alexander, of St Oswald's Catholic Primary School, South Shields, a former pupil. Her nomination said: "Patricia's dedication, empathy, calm manner, and high standards make her an outstanding governor."

Other winners included Living the Gospel Award, won by Sophie Barnfather, of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Sunderland; Guiding Light Award, won by Sarah McKeown, of St Anthony's Girls' Catholic Academy, Sunderland; Staff Member of the Year Award (Support/Central Team), won by Laura Bolam, of St Leonard's Catholic Primary School, Sunderland; Staff Member of the Year (Classroom based), won by Bernadette Robson, of Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Primary School, Peterlee; Leadership & Management Award, won by Laura Dudley, of St Anthony's Girls' Catholic Academy, Sunderland; Team of the Year Award, won by Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School, Shotton, Our Lady of the Star Catholic Primary School, Horden, and St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Blackhall; and Faith in the Community Award, won by Lucie Campbell, of St Gregory's Catholic Primary School, South Shields.

www.bccet.org.uk



Heart of Our Trust winner Paul Baldesara, Our Lady of Lourdes, Shotton



Inspirational Ryan Gooch, St Bede's & Byron, Peterlee



SCITT trainee, Bobbi Bowman St Godric's



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The best of both worlds: How boarding prepares children for Senior School

More than just a practical arrangement, boarding at Mowden Hall School gives outstanding preparation for Senior School, whether pupils go on to day schools or boarding schools after Year 8. Here's why...

1. A gentle introduction to independence

Boarding during the week at Mowden allows children to develop independence gradually and confidently. Pupils learn to organise their belongings, manage daily routines, and take responsibility for Prep work and activities. These vital life skills are nurtured in a supportive environment. Returning home on Saturday evening gives children the chance to recharge, reflect and stay closely connected to family life.

2. Strong routines that build resilience

The weekday boarding experience at Mowden Hall establishes clear, consistent routines. Pupils quickly learn to structure their days with lessons, prep, activities, meals and downtime. This helps children develop excellent time management skills and resilience, qualities that are essential for success in later life. Children moving to a Senior day school often arrive exceptionally organised and self-motivated. Those progressing to a Senior boarding school find the transition natural and familiar.

3. Academic focus in the right environment

The boarding environment at Mowden is designed to support learning. Dedicated Prep time, access to support and opportunities for peer collaboration help pupils develop strong study habits early on. Children learn to work independently, ask for help when needed and balance academic effort with rest and activity.

4. Social confidence and emotional intelligence

Living and learning together during the week fosters deep friendships and strong social skills. Pupils develop the ability to communicate, compromise and support one another, which is essential for adolescence and beyond. Weekly boarding helps children develop emotional intelligence by managing homesickness, resolving disagreements and adapting to group living.

5. Exposure to a rich Co-Curricular experience

Boarding at Mowden gives pupils the opportunity to engage fully in after-school activities without the pressure of commuting. Pupils enjoy sports, music, drama and a wide range of clubs, often discovering new passions and talents. This enrichment develops well-rounded individuals who are curious, confident and eager to participate, qualities highly valued by senior schools of all types.

6. Maintaining family balance

Weekly boarding offers structure during the week, while preserving family time at weekends. Parents remain closely involved in their child's life, sharing weekends, attending fixtures, events and performances, and maintaining strong relationships.

7. Preparing for Senior School

The greatest strength of Monday-to-Saturday boarding at Mowden Hall is its versatility. It does not limit future choices; it expands them. Pupils moving to Senior boarding schools are already comfortable with boarding routines and community life. Pupils moving to Senior day schools bring maturity, independence and excellent organisational skills that set them apart.

8. A confident step forward

Boarding at Mowden Hall is not simply a halfway point; it is a carefully designed experience that nurtures independence, resilience and self-belief. It offers children the chance to grow, explore and thrive within a supportive framework, while still enjoying the stability of home life.

As preparation for Senior School, whether day or boarding, it truly offers the best of both worlds.

mowdenhall.org.uk



Taking the next step: Sixth Form

By Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster, RGS Newcastle

As a father of two teenagers, I know all too well the feeling families of GCSE students are currently experiencing as they await results day.

I also understand that while some students have their plans mapped out well in advance, others wait until results day to decide their next steps. There is no right or wrong approach. Ultimately, the right choice is the one that best supports each student's ambitions, unlocks their potential and sets them up for future success.

Drawing from my own personal experience as well as my role as Head of the Royal Grammar School (RGS), Newcastle, below are some of my key considerations to keep in mind when deciding on the right Sixth Form.

Personal Growth

Sixth Form is about much more than academic study; it is a period of significant personal development, growing independence and preparing for life beyond school. I believe education is not simply about achieving excellent grades; it is about helping young people develop into confident, capable and kind individuals who are well prepared for the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

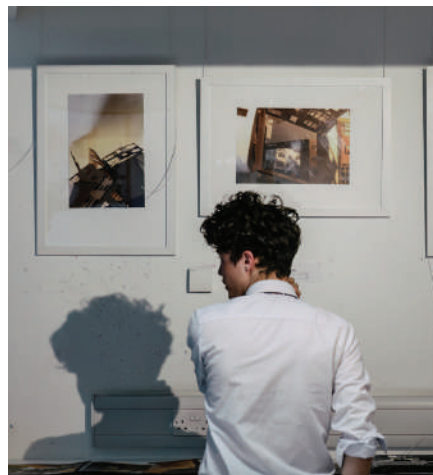
Young people are most likely to succeed when they feel they belong to a supportive community where they can be themselves and make the most of the opportunities available to them.

Breadth of Choice

Of course, academic considerations do matter. Families should ensure that any Sixth Form they are considering offers the range of courses that they genuinely want to study.

A wide choice of over 30 A-Level subjects sits at the heart of the RGS Sixth Form experience, including A-Level Business Studies and Photography, as well as BTEC Sport & Exercise Science from September 2026 - allowing students to pursue their strengths and explore new interests.

It is also important to consider the value Sixth Form adds. At RGS, our 2025 A-Level results placed students in the top 10% nationally when compared with peers of similar prior



attainment, highlighting the impact of excellent teaching, guidance and support.

Reflecting Real-Life

Parents of students moving from single-sex schools may also wish to consider whether they would benefit from a coeducational Sixth Form experience.

For many, learning within a coeducational setting provides valuable preparation for university and the workplace, where collaboration with people from a wide variety of backgrounds and perspectives is the norm.

Preparing for Success

It is vital that students feel valued and supported as they pursue their ambitions, whether that means starting their own business, undertaking an apprenticeship or progressing to university.

At RGS, students' progress to a wide range of leading courses, from Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Science, Engineering and Economics to subjects such as Modern Languages, English, History and Classics at Oxbridge and other top universities. Our students also look beyond the



UK, thanks to specialist support, to apply for universities in the USA, Europe and beyond.

Beyond the Classroom

Academic success, however, is only part of the picture. I would strongly encourage students to investigate the co-curricular opportunities on offer.

Whether through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Combined Cadet Force, music, drama, charity initiatives or student-led societies, RGS fosters an environment in which students develop confidence, leadership and teamwork. These experiences are an integral part of Sixth Form life, encouraging students to broaden their horizons, discover new passions and build friendships and memories that will last a lifetime.

Ultimately, choosing a Sixth Form is about finding the environment where a young person will flourish. My advice is simple: trust your instincts. You know your child best, and the right Sixth Form will help them fulfil their potential and succeed in whatever path they choose.

www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk



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OFSTED expert creates new system so early years have ‘nothing to fear’

An early year’s expert has launched a new digital guide to show childminders and nursery staff they “have nothing to fear” from Ofsted.

Claire Budge has spent over 30 years in education and has seen the inspection system from every angle – as a teacher, inspector and as the owner of her own “outstanding” early years setting in Darlington.

She has now created A to Exceptional, a practical A-Z guide designed to support early years settings through the pressures of inspection.

“My hope is that it will show educators and childminders that they have nothing to fear,” said Claire.

“I know first-hand how daunting Ofsted inspections can feel – I still get nervous when my own setting is inspected – and even hearing the word can unsettle experienced staff.

“But they really shouldn’t be. Ofsted is there to support settings, and I wanted to create something practical that would help staff feel more confident and prepared ahead of an inspection.

“From my experience, many practitioners are already doing many things well, so A to Exceptional is about reassurance as much as guidance.

“It exists to help people feel prepared rather than panicked.”

The resource is made up of 26 digital units covering key areas including Assessment, Behaviour, Curriculum and Inclusion.

Each section includes checklists, examples and straightforward guidance aimed at making inspection expectations easier to understand for busy practitioners and childminders.

Claire, who also holds a Master’s Degree in SEND and worked for the Covid Recovery Taskforce, originally created the system for her own staff.

She believes the “unique” guide is unlike anything else currently available in the sector because of its practical, easy-to-follow approach.

“It’s not about theory or ticking boxes,” she added.

“It’s about giving staff something clear and supportive they can actually use day-to-day.

“A lot of settings already deliver brilliant care and education, but confidence can disappear as soon as Ofsted is mentioned.”

Claire said one of the biggest current worries for early years practitioners is maths, following changes in inspection expectations.

“Ofsted say mathematics must be taught explicitly, but many settings are asking how you teach maths to children as young as two in a meaningful way,” she said.

“That uncertainty is causing a lot of stress for staff, and those are exactly the kinds of issues this guide is designed to help with.

“But more than helping people prepare for inspections, the aim is to strengthen the excellent work they are already doing every day.”

To find out more, visit: www.atoexceptional.com

“

**Confidence
can disappear
as soon as
Ofsted is
mentioned.**

Claire Budge



Translating passion for languages into national success

Students across the North East are bucking the trend for a nationwide decline in language learning after claiming top honours in the UK's biggest translation prize.

All eyes are on this month's A Level and GCSE results as education bosses anxiously await what's expected to be a further fall in the numbers of pupils taking language courses.

But our region's emerging linguists were among a record-breaking 25,000-plus students who tested their translation skills to the limit earlier this year.

The sixth annual Anthea Bell Prize for Young Translators brought together young people with a shared passion for exploring diverse languages, cultures and communities.

A bumper entry of secondary school pupils aged 11-18 at UK schools and British schools overseas set about translating texts from six different languages.

And competition organisers at the Queen's Translation Exchange, based at the University of Oxford, insist more must be done to support pupils and teachers determined to make modern languages popular again.

"For six years we've seen more and more young people engage with the Anthea Bell Prize," said Charlotte Ryland, Director of QTE. "There's clearly an enthusiasm for languages that we need to encourage."

"Teachers and pupils recognise the opportunity to broaden their horizons and better understand the creative and cultural impact of learning languages. And employers often talk about the value of language skills in the workplace."

"The Anthea Bell Prize meets a real need for a different approach to languages and it's inspiring to see so many students, teachers and their schools get on board."

"It's vital that we redress the balance between the demand for language learning and the reported decline in students sitting GCSE and A Level exams."

Students were tasked with translating French (into English and Welsh), Spanish, German, Italian, Mandarin and Russian texts.

And a team of 36 judges, including professional literary translators and Oxford Modern Languages students, assessed more than 5,400 entries.

The big North East winner in the national category was Year 10 student Holly Swales, from Middlesbrough's Macmillan Academy, who attained a Level 4 award translating Mandarin to English.

Runners-up at national level included Year 10 student Ines Viela, from Hartlepool's English Martyrs Catholic School and Sixth Form College, who translated French texts into English, and Gosforth Academy pair Julian Lee and Sidi Dang who worked on German translations.

"The standard of entries was incredibly high and choosing the regional and national winners was a tough task," added Charlotte.

"What's clear is that our young people



absolutely love taking part in the Anthea Bell Prize and we need to find a way to translate that enthusiasm into a lifelong passion for languages."

The North East area winners joining Holly, Ines, Julian and Sidi were Mari Fairclough (Gosforth Academy) and Alex McCutcheon and Lily Kenyon (both North Gosforth Academy) who translated Spanish texts into English.

The Anthea Bell Prize, named in honour of the celebrated Asterix translator, saw entries surge by more than 500 compared to 2025.

Schools taking part in the largest competition of its kind in the country received free access to a suite of innovative resources, with Russian included for the second successive year.

But the rise in engagement comes as language education faces significant challenges.

Languages have been identified as needing urgent intervention under the UK's current Curriculum and Assessment Review.

And Charlotte added: "The popularity of the Anthea Bell Prize indicates that creative, cultural content is the key to increasing uptake and attainment in languages."

"We need to ensure languages classrooms are exciting and vibrant spaces where students want to learn."

Schools can register for the 2027 Anthea Bell Prize for Young Translators at www.queens.ox.ac.uk

North Tyneside couple strike a chord with thriving guitar business

A shared passion for music, determination through adversity, and a willingness to take risks have helped Natalie and Graeme Bevan build one of the North East's most respected guitar businesses from their home in West Allotment.

Together, the couple run Geordie Riffs, a specialist guitar business offering lessons, repairs, maintenance and technical support to musicians ranging from complete beginners to professional performers.

While Graeme focuses on teaching and session work, Natalie has carved out a reputation as one of the region's few female guitar technicians, attracting customers from across the UK. Natalie's love of guitars began as a teenager inspired by Oasis and Noel Gallagher.

"My dad bought me the cheapest classical guitar he could find and told me if I could make it sound like something recognisable, he'd buy me a better one," she recalled.



Her fascination soon extended beyond playing to understanding how guitars worked. Following voluntary redundancy from her previous career as a project manager, she pursued professional training under renowned guitar technician Robbie Gladwell, whose clients have included Eric Clapton, B.B. King and Elvis Presley.

Today, Geordie Riffs attracts customers from across Britain and even overseas. Musicians regularly travel hundreds of miles to benefit from Natalie's repair expertise and Graeme's highly personalised teaching approach.

Natalie believes she may be the only female guitar technician currently operating in the immediate North East area, something that often surprises customers.

Public invited to nominate local heroes as part of new cultural venue opening

Sunderland residents are being invited to nominate people who make a real difference to life in the city as part of the opening celebrations for Culture House Sunderland.

Those nominated could become part of local history when the landmark venue officially opens on Saturday 12 September.

The venue is looking for up to 52 individuals from across Sunderland to take part in a unique, large-scale ribbon-cutting ceremony, ensuring local people are at the heart of this major civic milestone.

Organisers expect to receive a huge number of nominations from across the city. To help select the final 52 representatives, a panel of people from across Sunderland will review submissions and identify those whose stories best reflect the city's spirit, pride and sense of community.

Following the opening, the stories of 52 local heroes will continue to be celebrated, with one individual featured each week over the following year in Culture House Sunderland's Local Studies space, creating a lasting record of the people who help make Sunderland special.

Cllr Ciera Hudspeth, Portfolio Holder for Culture, Tourism and Heritage at Sunderland City Council, said: "Culture House is for the people of Sunderland, so it feels only right that residents from across the city should be front and centre when it opens.

"We know there are countless individuals in our city who go above and beyond for others, often without recognition. This is an opportunity to shine a light on those people and celebrate the positive impact they make, day in and day out, in Sunderland."



Restorative skin artist expanding her passion for fine art

A North Tyneside restorative skin artist whose lifelong passion for art helped shape her business is now looking to develop her career as a professional artist alongside her growing list of paramedical clients.

Amanda Patterson, from Camperdown, runs Wallsend-based Amanda Jo Skin Artist, specialising in restorative skin treatments including realistic areola restoration and permanent makeup and scalp micropigmentation. Very soon she will also offer scar camouflage treatments. However, long before entering the restorative skin industry, Amanda's first love was always art.

From school onwards, portraiture, realism and

drawing became a huge part of her life, with her fascination for faces, features, light and shading eventually helping guide her into the detailed restorative work she now carries out professionally.

Amanda said: "Art has always been my passion. It was the one thing at school that really clicked for me and something I've continued throughout my life. Everything I do now in my business comes from those artistic foundations." During lockdown, Amanda reassessed her future and decided to combine her artistic ability with a career where she could directly help people rebuild confidence following surgery, hair loss or trauma.

Amanda has now started releasing prints of her artwork under the name "The Geordie Artist" and hopes to continue building a larger collection and series of pieces in the future.

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Civic
Theatre**

**Not your average
meeting room.**



Sangeeta Loomba

Culture Club

Sangeeta Loomba

Owner of *Namaste the Taste of India* at
Newcastle Quays, North Shields.

Here she tells us about her taste in music, art and culture.

Who is your favourite author and why?

J.K. Rowling I think she is a real superstar. Harry Potter is known worldwide by all ages. She is so successful in her work and helps charities too.

Your three Desert Island Discs?

Ed Sheeran Divide, Rhianna Loud, Dhurandar Part 2.

Who is your favourite film star and why?

Akshay Kumar (Bollywood Actor). I have always been mad for him since he started in movies in the early 1990s and have met him in Mumbai and in Newcastle. As well as acting he is well

known for being a stunt man. He is one of the highest paid actors but so humble.

What are your top three films? Tell me about them.

Home Alone is one of my favourite movies as I watched this with my family as a child every Christmas and now, I watch it with my kids. It brings back all my childhood memories and it's now a family tradition.

No Time to Die is another favourite as I'm a big James Bond fan. I loved the shooting in Italy as it's one of my favourite places to visit.

Dhurandhar (Bollywood) is a spy action thriller. I love the soundtracks in this movie and how the actors have been portrayed.

What box sets have you enjoyed?

I loved *Bridgerton* for the costumes and the storyline and *Lord of the Rings* as a bit of fantasy and escapism.

Who is your favourite artist or performer?

Sonu Nigam who I went to see at the Arena in Leeds. He has done over 6000 songs in 32 languages.

What is your favourite venue?

St James' Park. I just love being there for any event as it gives you a proud feeling. I'm also a cricket lover so some of the major grounds are great too.

Which musical instrument do you particularly enjoy?

I don't play any instrument but would love to learn the Violin. I think the music from it has such power.

From the world of Arts and Culture who would be your ideal dinner party guests?

I would love to invite Priyanka Chopra Jonas. I really admire her what she has become. She loves her family and her career and balances it all perfectly. Also, my favourite film star Akshay Kumar. I would serve them an Indian Afternoon Tea which consists of Pakoras and Samosas for starters. Lamb Keema with Cheese Toastie, Onion Bhaji Wrap and Chicken Tikka for mains then a selection of Barfi (Indian Sweets) for dessert. All of course hand made by me at Namaste the Taste of India.

www.namastetasteofindia.co.uk

Sunday for Sammy Trust Awards

The Sunday for Sammy Trust has reinforced its commitment to nurturing the North East's next generation of creative talent by awarding £500 bursaries to ten students at Gateshead College.

The £5,000 initiative recognises the outstanding support Gateshead College has provided to the Trust over recent years while helping talented students take their next steps into careers across the creative industries.

The bursaries have been awarded to ten students studying the Level 4 Creative Entrepreneur programme, a course designed to prepare aspiring creatives for careers ranging from music performance and production to filmmaking, technical production, media, and other self-employed creative professions.

The partnership between the Trust and Gateshead College has grown significantly since the charity announced that their arena show would return last February. College staff and students have played an important role in supporting Sunday for Sammy events, providing everything from flash mob performances and videography to promotional content, audition venues and event support.

The bursaries will help the students invest in equipment, travel, networking and other opportunities as they continue their journey into the creative sector.



The Sunday for Sammy Trust exists to encourage, support and develop emerging performing arts talent across the North East, ensuring the region continues to produce world-class performers, technicians and creative professionals for generations to come.

Blyth Carnival delights!



Thousands of people turned out to enjoy a spectacular day of colour, music and community spirit as Blyth Town Council's annual Blyth Carnival proved to be another outstanding success.

The highlight of the day was the vibrant carnival parade, featuring impressive floats and hundreds of participants dressed in colourful costumes, which wound its way through the town centre to the delight of spectators lining the streets.

Throughout the day, visitors enjoyed a packed programme of entertainment and activities. The Market Pavilion Creative Space was a hive of activity, with PURPLE CIC hosting popular Lego and craft workshops that kept younger visitors entertained. Families also took part in acrobatics sessions with Control & Move Acrobatics, martial arts workshops led by the Northern Freestyle Karate Association, met the crew from the RNLI and tried on their lifesaving equipment, while the Blyth Tall Ship charity created its own mini version of the Williams II for the parade.

The entertainment programme featured a diverse line-up that appealed to all ages while showcasing the wealth of talent from across Blyth. Live music performances created a true carnival atmosphere, while a variety of dance acts and stage performances kept audiences entertained throughout the day.

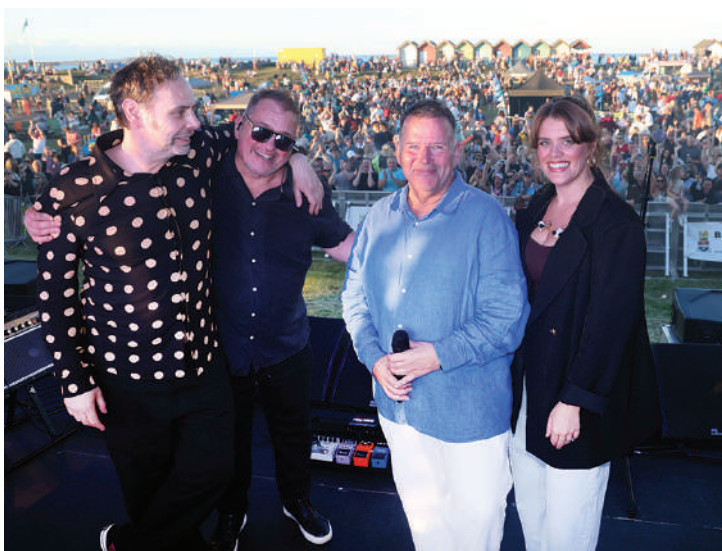
Blyth Live is a D:Ream

Now a staple of the town's summer calendar, Blyth Live is a free, family-friendly festival that attracts thousands of visitors each year with its mix of live music, street theatre, food, and family entertainment.

This year's festival was bigger and better than ever, featuring headline performances by 90's dance icons D:Ream and a return for the Bay City Rollers whose show last year was cut short by a lightning strike.

The line up for the whole family included Naomi Smyth a tribute act to Taylor Swift, Groove Train, She the Show, Harriet Rose, Be Right Back and Rosie. Community entertainment was provided by Community Voices, Blyth Valley Samba and Linsey School of Dance.

The Blyth Live Festival is a real family orientated festival and one of the highlights of the town's events calendar. It continues to grow in popularity and scale, putting the town on the cultural map.





Traitors star David Olusoga visits world famous fish and chip restaurant

It was another one for the history books as Traitors star David Olusoga became the latest big name to sample one of the North East's most famous menus.

The Gateshead-raised television presenter and producer proved to be a popular diner at Colmans' Ocean Road restaurant — chatting with staff and posing for pictures at the award-winning South Shields staple.

And after wowing a sold-out audience at the annual South Shields Lecture, historian Olusoga tucked into his post-event meal alongside invited guests from across the worlds of politics, entertainment and business.

"David was an absolute gentleman and everybody loved him," said Richard Colman Ord, director of Colmans Hospitality Group.

"We've been lucky enough to welcome a few famous faces to our restaurants over the years and David's visit will live long in the memory.

"As anyone who heard him in conversation with David Milliband will know, he's passionate about the North East and is such an engaging storyteller.

"To welcome one of the world's greatest historians to Ocean Road, in the year Colmans celebrates its centenary, is incredibly fitting.

"He was keen to find out about our own place in the history of South Shields and find out more about the family's story and our roots."

Prior to visiting Colmans, an honest and forthright Olusoga had thrilled a capacity crowd at Harton Academy during an 80-minute South Shields Lecture.

Hot topics included North East culture, his own upbringing as a mixed-race child on Tyneside and, of course, his memorable stint as a Faithful in the ratings-topping Celebrity Traitors.

Olusoga talked of the time Paul Gascoigne picked him off the floor in the schoolyard after bullies had bundled him over. And he revealed how his mother's fight to secure a dyslexia diagnosis in the early 80s transformed his life.



Newcastle hotel gains coveted Green Key sustainable tourism certification

The four-star Sandman Signature Newcastle Hotel has implemented a number of initiatives which have improved the ecological footprint of its operations. A Green Key task force, pulling together team members from across the hotel's various departments, has been created to ensure the hotel is future-proofed from a sustainability perspective.

Specific initiatives introduced to date include water saving restrictors on all bedroom taps and showers and refillable toiletries, saving tens of thousands of single use plastic bottles. A new centrally controlled system operates the heating in guest bedrooms, ensuring it isn't accidentally left on when rooms are unoccupied, helping to reduce energy

consumption. Regularly used items have been swapped for more sustainable products where possible, such as recycled paper, bamboo tissues and paper straws, and recycling dividers have been added to guest bins to help them recycle their rubbish. Bird boxes have also been installed to support wildlife in the area.

Green Key sets the standard for excellence in the field of environmental responsibility and sustainable operation within the tourism sector, operating in 30 countries across the world. During the rigorous judging process each establishment is assessed against 150 criteria, in line with guidelines from the UN Tourism. The aim is for businesses to achieve year-on-year environmental improvements and reduce climate-change-causing greenhouse gas emissions. It is one of the leading ecolabels recognised by the Google-powered booking engine Google Travel as part of its 'Sustainability Labelling'.

Equipment firm tops £2m revenue

Newcastle-based Clear Cool - which provides the hospitality sector with everything from ice machines to glass washers and dryers - has increased turnover from £1.43m in 2023/24 to £2.1m in 2025/26, while expanding its work with major national operators across the UK.

The company recently completed its 90th ice machine installation for a major Starbucks franchise and now carries out more than 80% of service work on ice makers at 180 sites nationally.

Clear Cool said its growth had been driven by a focus on helping hospitality businesses improve operational efficiency, reduce unnecessary costs and respond quickly when essential equipment breaks down.



"Hospitality businesses are under immense pressure, and every operational decision now carries more weight than ever," said Barrie Webster, Managing Director at Clear Cool.

"Our role is to help operators run smarter - reducing avoidable costs, preventing equipment failures disrupting service, and ensuring their venues stay fully operational. When margins are tight, reliability isn't a luxury; it's essential," added Barrie.

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“

**I fell into
the business,
and I love it.**

Wendy Bryant

Ten years of 'Ta-Dah!' moments

A decade with Wendy Bryant

As events specialist Wendy Bryant celebrates a decade at Radisson Blu Durham, she reflects on secret weddings, five-day miracles and why the riverside venue can turn its hand to any occasion.

If you've held a wedding, conference, charity ball or Christmas party at Radisson Blu Durham over the past decade, there's a good chance Wendy Bryant was the person quietly making sure everything ran perfectly.

This year, Wendy celebrates ten years at the hotel - ten years of seating plans and site visits, of last-minute changes handled without a flicker, and of hundreds of events brought to life in one of the North East's most impressive riverside venues. From intimate boardroom meetings to celebrations for hundreds of guests in the hotel's largest suites, Wendy has seen it all, and planned most of it, too.

"I remember feeling really excited," she says of her first day back in 2016. "Excited to be promoting such a prestigious event space and to build solid working relationships. Like many of us in hospitality, I fell into the business, and I love it."

Ask Wendy for her proudest moment and she doesn't hesitate. "We delivered a wedding in five days because the couple's original venue closed down. It turned out to be one of the best days of their lives." Then there was the New Year's Eve 'engagement party' that was, in fact, a surprise wedding reception, with the newlyweds greeting their unsuspecting guests as Mr and Mrs. "Don't worry," she laughs, "close family and friends were there for the ceremony!"

There have been near misses, too - like the football team who turned up a day early. "All was well. They had a great stay, and they came back to us. Booked direct, too!"

A decade in events has given Wendy a front-row seat to how the industry has evolved. "Clients now want an experience rather than a standard conference," she explains. "We've seen a big increase in dietary requirements and allergens, which we cater for and advise on, and a real focus on wellbeing, we have specific packages designed to meet those needs. Flexibility is key."

Happily, flexibility is something the venue was made for. Wendy describes Radisson Blu Durham as "a hidden gem, ready to bring your event to life" - equally at home hosting corporate conferences, expos, sports teams, weddings and everything in between. Her favourite corner of the hotel? Its largest spaces: the Auger and Seam suites and the pre-event area. "They're so versatile. One day it's a great conference space and then, 'ta-dah!', it's transformed into a night full of fun and celebration."

Then there's the setting. Perched on the banks of the River Wear, just five minutes from Durham railway station and moments from the A1(M), the hotel pairs a smooth, stress-free journey with a backdrop most venues can only dream of. "The riverside is a stunning setting for photos," says Wendy, "whether that's a wedding, a family celebration or a team awards shot."

Weddings, though, hold a special place in her heart. "I genuinely love every type of event, because they're all different and each one needs different elements to make it work. But weddings are so personal. It's one of the biggest days of someone's life, and you get to be part of it."

Away from the events diary, you'll find Wendy walking, reading, listening to "a wide genre of music" and enjoying her famous Thursday-night 'rave clean'. Her perfect day off sounds like a love letter to her city: "Coffee at a café by the river watching the world go by, walking the cobbled streets, exploring Durham's quirky shops, a visit to the Cathedral, a spot of lunch, and maybe a cheeky chilled glass of wine."

So what would she say to a couple, or a company, who walked in tomorrow with a blank canvas and a big idea? "Anything and everything is possible here, to be honest. Whatever the occasion, we'll do our utmost to make it happen and bring your vision to life." It's a promise backed by ten years of proof: gala dinners and boardroom briefings, award ceremonies and afternoon teas, and every kind of celebration in between.

And her advice for anyone planning a big event, after ten years, hundreds of occasions and more ta-dah moments than she can count? "Your vision is what matters and we will make it happen."

Whether you're planning a conference, a wedding, a Christmas party or a charity ball, the events team at Radisson Blu Durham would love to bring your vision to life. To arrange a show-round or discuss your event, contact the team.

0191 372 7200

Events.durham@radissonblu.com

www.radissonbludurham.com

DOOD: A journey along the Silk Road, right here on Newcastle Quayside



There are restaurants you visit for dinner, and there are restaurants that transport you somewhere else entirely. Perched on Newcastle's Quayside, with sweeping views of the River Tyne and The Glasshouse International Centre for Music, DOOD is firmly in the second category.

Inspired by the ancient Silk Road, DOOD brings together the vibrant flavours of Persia and the Levant in a menu designed for sharing, discovery and conversation. Every dish tells part of a story that stretches across centuries of trade, culture and culinary tradition, reimagined through a modern lens.

At the heart of the kitchen is the mangal – a traditional charcoal grill that plays a central role in many of DOOD's signature dishes. Its unique design combines live charcoal with a specially shaped hood, creating intense heat while locking in moisture. The result is beautifully charred meats, fish and vegetables that remain incredibly juicy and full of flavour. It's a cooking method that has been perfected over generations and remains one of the defining features of the DOOD experience.

That philosophy runs throughout the menu.

House-made dips, fresh breads baked daily, vibrant salads, charcoal-grilled meats and seafood, and carefully layered spices all celebrate the generosity and warmth of Middle Eastern hospitality. Rather than focusing on a single cuisine, DOOD embraces the diverse influences found along the Silk Road, creating dishes that feel both familiar and unexpected.

The drinks list follows the same approach, with thoughtfully selected wines chosen to complement the bold flavours of the food, alongside signature cocktails and refreshing alcohol-free creations inspired by ingredients from across the region.

The setting is just as memorable. Floor-to-ceiling windows frame one of Newcastle's most iconic views, making DOOD equally suited to a relaxed lunch, an evening with friends or a special celebration. As the light changes across

the Quayside, the restaurant transforms with it, creating an atmosphere that is both elegant and welcoming.

DOOD continues to evolve with seasonal menus and new experiences, including the recently launched Nomad's Sunday Roast. Rather than recreating the traditional British roast, the team has reimagined it through the flavours of Persia and the Levant, featuring dishes such as Lamb Ouzi Roast, Mahi Kababi, Morgh-e-Bereshte and Mangal Cauliflower alongside signature sides including Hellimli Yorkshire and Batata Harra. It's a fresh take on one of Britain's best-loved traditions while staying true to the restaurant's identity.

Whether you're discovering Persian and Levantine cuisine for the first time or returning for your favourite dish from the mangal, DOOD offers something that feels genuinely different. In a city known for its growing food scene, it has carved out its own place – where exceptional cooking, thoughtful hospitality and one of Newcastle's best views come together around the table.

For reservations and further information, visit www.thedood.co.uk

Kota

HARROGATE

A hidden space for gathering, celebrating, and sharing stories

Kota (pronounced Koh-tah) is inspired by a traditional Finnish shelter where people gather around a fire. Kota is rooted in Nordic heritage and shaped by Yorkshire character. Tucked within the gardens of Cedar Court Harrogate, and overlooking the Stray, it offers a setting that feels both relaxed and quietly distinctive. Kota brings together Nordic spirit with Yorkshire hospitality.

This summer, Kota comes to life with a brand-new events series, think Tapas Nights, Bottomless Brunch, and Kota Social evenings with Pizza & Prosecco and Mediterranean Mezze, all set alongside live acoustic music. Kota is designed for moments that feel personal, welcoming, and worth remembering. A hidden gem, waiting to be discovered.



Cedar Court Harrogate, Park Parade,
off Knaresborough Road, Harrogate, HG1 5AH

cedarcourthotels.co.uk/kota-harrogate-tipi-events
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One of the best hotels in the UK

**And it's here, in the heart of Newcastle.
Don't believe us? Then believe
The Times newspaper. And the Telegraph.**

It's no surprise, therefore that as Hotel Gotham approaches its first full year of operation in Newcastle, it has also been awarded five stars...the only hotel in the city to achieve that official recognition.

Oh, and if you're thinking of finding somewhere extra-special for your Christmas event, look no further.

Located within the original fire station on Pilgrim Street, Hotel Gotham occupies one of Newcastle's landmark buildings. It retains its striking 1930s Gothic and Art-Deco architecture and remains very much in keeping with the heritage of the original building. It looks fabulous.

Step inside and both the glamorous 1930s style and attention to detail immediately strike you. That's before you even reach the reception desk.

Put it this way, if you rate a hotel or restaurant on first impressions, you are going to be stunned.

And they're not finished yet. Building work is underway to convert the neighbouring police station and courtrooms into a function suite, restaurant and 30 additional bedrooms. They'll be ready for Christmas and, as with the fire station, the historical theme will continue.



"Keeping faith with the original building has been a key part of our vision for Hotel Gotham," said General Manager Chris Thompson. "Our Fire bar is set within the original engine room, while Siren occupies what was once the mess room where the firefighters used to eat. Wine is served in fire engine red buckets and menu covers are made from recycled fire hoses. Siren is inspired by the golden age of New York dining, drawing influence from the restaurants and supper clubs that defined Manhattan in the 1920s. Expect handcrafted pasta, premium steaks, fresh seafood, indulgent desserts and expertly mixed cocktails, all served in a setting that captures the glamour and excitement of a bygone era.

"We have as much memorabilia as possible displayed throughout the hotel to reflect its past. We've even managed to secure the original hand drawn plans for the building which are on display in reception. You can navigate your way to where horses were stabled and even see where the smithy worked.

"And the historical theme will continue when we open the former police station. I'm already working with the Police Federation to see what sort of artefacts may be available."

It's also wonderful to note that, when it comes to dining, as much local produce as possible is used. The hotel proudly states...' Our farm-to-fork approach highlights the best local produce from North Shields to Northumberland."

For something a little more intimate, Hotel Gotham has Club Brass, it's exclusive two-floor members-only club. Guests staying in one of the hotel's suites also have access to this area.

If you're familiar with Newcastle, you'll know how the Pilgrim Street area is being transformed. The arrival of Hotel Gotham couldn't have been timed better. For those of you unfamiliar with Newcastle, let's just say Pilgrim Street is well worth a visit.

And if you are looking for a super-stylish hotel in a perfect location, Hotel Gotham is ideal. The Theatre Royal, O2 City Hall and railway station are only minutes away, the Quayside is a gentle stroll, and leading High Street shops are on your doorstep.

"We want Hotel Gotham not only to reflect the wonderful history of our building, but also be a true part of Newcastle, which is why a large number of our team, including me, are from the region," adds Chris. "We love our guests to ask questions and find out more about Newcastle and the North East in general. It's also why we work with as many local suppliers as possible."

Hotel Gotham is different. It mixes tradition with everything you would expect from a five-star hotel. It's quirky in a way that makes you admire the time and effort that has gone into creating a truly outstanding, landmark hotel.

For more details visit their excellent website
www.hotelgotham.co.uk/newcastle





You had me at the view: Why travel still takes our breath away

By Graham Townsley, Travel Counsellor

There is always that one moment on a journey when everything else falls away. You round a corner, step onto a balcony, crest a hill, and suddenly: you had me at the view. Your breath catches and you know you will remember it for the rest of your life.

As August arrives many of us are about to take to the skies or seas for our annual escape. It is more than “getting away”. It is pressing pause on routine and pressing play on something far richer: time with the people we love, and memories that last.



Travel: More Than Sun, Sea and Sand

Travel is no longer just beaches and water parks. Inspired by films, box sets and social media, we are becoming more curious and courageous.

Families who once automatically booked a fortnight in the Med are now pulling on cowboy boots and Stetsons, heading to ranches in the USA. Days on horseback, nights around a campfire: still a family holiday, but dialled up to adventure.

A Workout For The Senses

At its best, travel is a full sensory reboot. It switches off the autopilot of everyday life and replaces it with a delicious sense of “wow”.

Think of:

- Seeing skylines or landscapes you have only known from a screen
- Tasting new flavours and feeling your taste bud's dance
- Walking unfamiliar streets where every corner hints at discovery
- Hearing church bells, market chatter or waves instead of notifications

Whether it is white sand between your toes, a great world wonder, or dawn on safari, these are the moments that remind us we are alive. For a long time, safaris or epic trails felt reserved for the few. Increasingly, with thoughtful planning, they are within reach.

Planning Your Own Adventure

So how do you plan a trip that feels truly special? Start by giving yourself permission to daydream.

Ask yourself:

- **Why this trip, and why now?** Birthday, retirement, honeymoon, anniversary, or simply “because”.
- **What draws you to it?** Wildlife, food, history, scenery, or time together?
- **What is your must-see?** Plan as if you may never return and build around that.

For honeymooners, try this: each of you secretly writes down your dream destination and style of trip. Then compare and see how you can weave them together. A few days in one partner's dream city followed by the other's dream beach can create something perfectly yours.

Big Trends, Near And Far

You do not have to go to the ends of the earth to find an unforgettable view, but it helps to know where the current magic lies.

Canada is a standout, with dramatic mountains, mirror-still lakes and, if you are lucky, grizzly bears in the wild. Japan and South Korea are also capturing imaginations: neon-lit cities balanced by tranquil temples and walking trails.

Closer to home, Slovenia is finally in the spotlight. Lake Bled, ringed by mountains and crowned with a tiny island church, looks like something from a storybook and pairs beautifully with island-hopping along Croatia's coast.

Even familiar Spain can be reimagined. Instead of a simple fly-and-flop, consider a road or rail trip through Andalusia. Fly into Malaga, continue to Seville with its Moorish architecture and flamenco, then on to Granada's Alhambra and the clifftop drama of Ronda before looping back to the sea. The same country, a completely different story.

From Holiday To Adventure

This is the joy of thoughtful planning: turning “just a holiday” into an adventure that challenges your senses and lights up your mind.

If you are already dreaming ahead, remember it does not have to be far-flung to be unforgettable. With the right ideas and care, even a short break can deliver that one perfect instant when you look up and think:

You had me at the view!

www.travelcounsellors.co.uk/graham.townesley





Family time matters

By Jeff Hodgson, General Manager, Lumley Castle Hotel

In today's fast-paced world, it's easy to become consumed by work.

Deadlines, meetings and the day-to-day demands of our roles can often leave little room for what truly matters. As General Manager, one of the things I feel most strongly about is the importance of family time and ensuring our team has the opportunity to switch off, recharge and create lasting memories with the people who matter most.

I firmly believe that when we're at work, we should give our best. Equally, when we're away from work, we should be fully present with our families. Time is something we can never get back, and those moments spent with children, partners, parents or friends are invaluable.

That's why we actively encourage everyone across the business to take their annual leave and enjoy a proper break. Holidays aren't a



luxury—they're essential. Rested, refreshed colleagues return to work happier, more motivated and better equipped to face new challenges. Looking after our wellbeing isn't just good for us as individuals; it's good for our teams and the business too.

One of the highlights of our year is our annual Family Fun Day. It's an opportunity for colleagues and their families to come together outside of the workplace, enjoy themselves and strengthen the relationships that make our team so special. Seeing children laughing together, partners meeting one another and colleagues relaxing away from the pressures of work reminds us that we're more than just a workforce—we're a community.

The Family Fun Day is always a fantastic success and receives wonderful feedback from both our team members and their families. It reinforces the importance of taking time to celebrate not only our achievements at work but also the people who support us behind the scenes every single day.

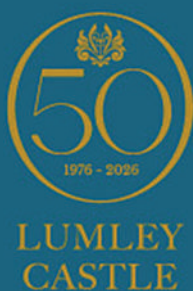
I also believe in leading by example. If I'm off work, then I'm away. I encourage my managers and colleagues to do exactly the same. Unless there's an emergency, annual leave should mean exactly that—leave. Everyone deserves the chance to disconnect, recharge and return feeling refreshed rather than checking emails from a hotel room or answering calls from the beach.

Creating a positive workplace isn't only about what happens between nine and five. It's about recognising that our people have lives beyond work, and supporting them in achieving a healthy balance. When employees know they're trusted to take time off without guilt, they feel valued, respected and more engaged when they return.

Family time looks different for everyone. Whether it's a holiday abroad, a weekend exploring the local countryside, a family barbecue or simply sitting around the dinner table together, those moments matter.

As leaders, we have a responsibility to create a culture where people don't feel guilty for putting family first from time to time. After all, work will always be there—but the memories we make with our loved ones are what stay with us forever.

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A home coming for Alice Lawson

The Northumberland Arms in Felton has recently been acquired by rising hospitality stars Alice Lawson & Jack Brown (they also took over Hadrian's Hotel in Northumberland earlier this year).

For Alice, taking over the pub & hotel is far more than a business venture, it's a homecoming. Generations of her family have called the Northumberland village home, and as a teenager she worked behind the bar of the much-loved inn.

Alice you grew up in Felton – what does it mean to you personally to now own The Northumberland Arms?

Taking on The Northumberland Arms is a big full circle moment for me, from working there on and off from the age of 17 to now owning the business. It's always been one of my favourite pubs.

What are your earliest memories of the pub, and did you ever imagine you'd one day be running it?

My memories of the pub is back when I worked here, all the locals were in every Friday night including my family. The atmosphere was always great. This is something that we want to bring back, the real local pub feeling.

Can you tell us about your journey into hospitality and what led you this amazing aquisition?

I have worked in hospitality since I was 15 working in many different venues from pubs, restaurants and wedding venues. I came out of the industry for a couple of years however fell back into it when Jack opened his venues in Heaton where we worked together to make them successful businesses.

When the opportunity to take over The Northumberland Arms came along, what made you and Jack decide to go for it?

The Northumberland Arms has always been on our radar so when the opportunity to take over came a long we couldn't say no even though we were already in the early stages of taking over Hadrian's Hotel as well- it was fun on but we are so happy we did it.



Jack Brown & Alice Lawson

The Northumberland Arms has such a strong reputation – how do you balance respecting its heritage while bringing your own ideas to it?

We don't plan on making massive changes to the pub but look to continue growing the brand and bringing our own personality into the interior and service.

What kind of experience do you want guests, whether they're locals or visitors, to have when they walk through the door?

We want everyone to have a warm & welcoming experience. The offer is simple- a comfortable and relaxed setting, great food, wine and atmosphere.

How important is it to you to keep the pub at the heart of the Felton community?

Keeping the pub at the heart of the Felton community is extremely important. A village pub is much more than a place to eat and drink, it is a meeting place where people of all ages can come together, build friendships, and support one another. We want the pub to be a welcoming, inclusive space that reflects the needs of the local community while also attracting visitors to the village.



What do you think you and Jack bring as a team, and how do your strengths complement each other?

We have always been hands on operators from opening the Heaton venues and recently opening Hadrian's Hotel so we will continue to bring that attitude to the Northumberland Arms.

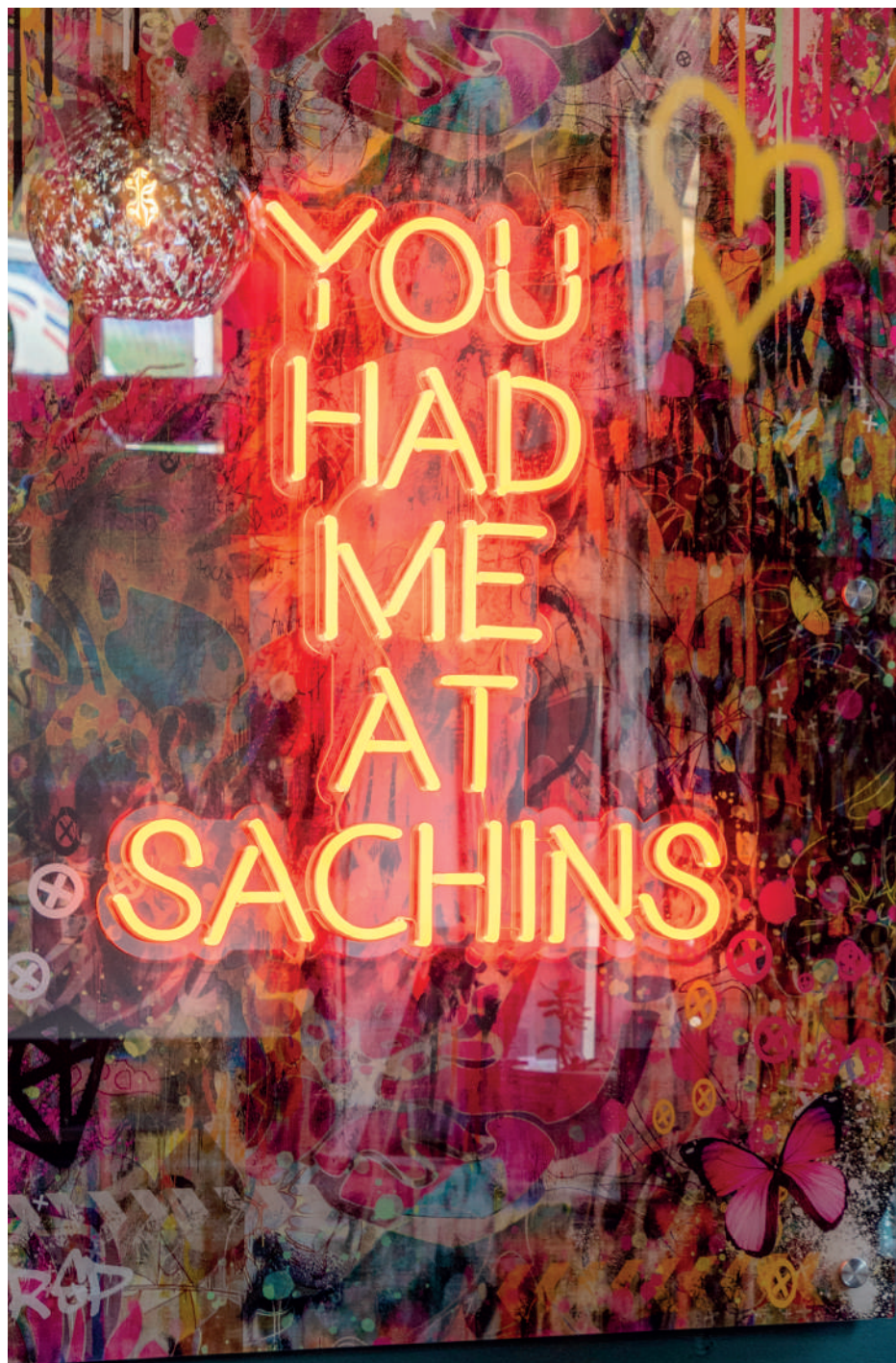
What has been the biggest challenge since taking over?

Finding the balance between wanting to do new things in the pub and not changing too much of an already successful business is probably the main thing.

If you could describe your hopes for The Northumberland Arms over the next five years, what would that picture look like?

To grow the brand and reputation, whilst keeping The Northumberland Arms right in the centre of the community for everyone.

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A Taste of the Old Country

By Holly Grahamslaw

To celebrate our anniversary, my partner, Josh, and I visited Veenobars Durham for an evening of authentic Italian dining.

Located in the heart of Durham city centre within The Riverwalk complex, Veenobars is perfectly placed for exploring the city's bars, sights and shops before or after your visit. As a former Durham University student, I was delighted to return to the city, and this relatively new addition to its dining scene certainly did not disappoint.

Founded in 2013 by Nino Caruso, Veenobars is rooted in a rich family heritage dating back to the 1880s, when Nino's great-grandfather established the family's vineyards in Marsala, Sicily, that continue to produce the wines sold in Veenobars' restaurants today.

Inspired by the Italian tradition of aperitivo – the art of enjoying exceptional wine with delicious food and great company – Veenobars has since grown into a boutique collection of wine bars and restaurants across the UK. With the opening of its Durham venue in September 2025, Veenobars has now brought this authentic experience to the North East, pairing traditional Italian cuisine with wines from the Caruso vineyard in Sicily.

From the moment we arrived, we were immediately impressed by the warm welcome and the friendly, attentive service. We were greeted by owner Donna Lewis, who explained the menu in detail and provided us with some thoughtful recommendations.

Feeling thirsty, we were delighted to begin with a wine tasting experience. We first sampled the Catalù – Catarratto, a crisp white wine with delicate floral aromas and fresh notes of apple and pear, followed by the Vualà – Nero d'Avola,

a berry and peppery red. We also enjoyed the Sirà – Syrah, a smooth red wine bursting with vibrant, fruity flavours. Produced using indigenous grape varieties from the Caruso vineyard, each wine reflected the quality and authenticity that lie at the heart of the Veenobars experience.

Customers can also explore Veenobars' wines through their Wine Journeys experiences, pairing a curated selection of wines with the finest Italian meats, cheeses and traditional nibbles.

At Veenobars, just as much thought has gone into crafting the food menu, with each dish carefully designed to complement the wines on offer, whilst showcasing some rich and authentic Italian flavours.

To begin, we chose the highly recommended Italia Board, Veenobars' signature sharing platter. Filled with a generous selection of artisan cheeses, cured meats, warm focaccia, olives and a variety of Italian specialities, the dish was as impressive to look at as it was to eat. Tucking in with gusto, we were delighted by the delicious combination of flavours and the exceptional quality of every ingredient.

To follow, I opted for the Pesto tradizionale Genovese pasta, a dish personally recommended by Donna herself. Featuring trofie – a short, twisted pasta originating from the Liguria region of northern Italy, the dish was tossed in a

fragrant and creamy basil pesto alongside green beans and crushed potatoes. Rich, comforting and beautifully balanced, the pasta was absolutely exquisite and was served in a hearty, generous portion.

Meanwhile, Josh enjoyed the Ragù alla bolognese, Veenobars' Sicilian interpretation of the Italian classic. This delicious, homemade dish was slow-cooked in the Caruso family's own Nero d'Avola wine, adding a wonderful richness and depth to this timeless favourite.

To finish, guests can enjoy a range of Italian classics, such as the Tiramisu Della Nonna, made using a treasured family recipe, and the Cannolo Siciliano, featuring crisp pastry filled with sweet ricotta. On this occasion, we shared the rich and indulgent Chocolate Fudge Cake, served warm with vanilla ice cream – a firm favourite of mine and the perfect ending to a memorable evening spent at Veenobars.

From the warm hospitality to the outstanding food and exceptional wines, Veenobars brings an authentic taste of Sicily to the heart of Durham. Veenobars is a welcome addition to Durham's dining scene, showcasing a passion for quality, tradition and bringing people together. We can't wait to return.

For more information, call 0191 367 0121 or visit their website, www.veenobars.com





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Home to  Willow



Publisher has an ear for hearing health

When he was 18, Ryan Crear worked in the mines in South Africa, nearly two and a half miles below ground. Years of repeated exposure to underground explosions left him with permanent hearing damage. Today, he lives with constant tinnitus and significant hearing loss.

The experience has undoubtedly shaped both his personal life and his career, but Ryan has always chosen to adapt rather than let it define him.

Running Crear Publishing from a home office with his wife, Karen, has certainly helped. They can work at their own pace, and Karen is wonderfully patient when he occasionally asks her to repeat something. Over the years, Ryan has also become adept at lip reading, while television subtitles have become an essential part of everyday life.

Because he understands the challenges of hearing loss first-hand, Ryan is committed to making the publishing process as accessible as possible for authors who are deaf or hard of hearing. Crear Publishing is happy to tailor communication to suit individual needs, whether that means using email and written feedback instead of phone calls, arranging video meetings with live captions, speaking clearly and at an unhurried pace, or allowing extra time for discussions. His aim is to ensure that communication never becomes a barrier to bringing an author's story to life. They also have chosen the National Deaf Children's Society as one of their supported charities.



Box&Build founder Matt McKenna transforming confidence through new boxing gym

A Newcastle-based fitness entrepreneur is helping people rebuild confidence, strength and self-belief through boxing – after transforming his own life in the process.

Matt McKenna, founder of Box&Build, launched the business following a personal journey that began seven years ago when, aged 20, he found himself lacking confidence, direction, and self-belief.

"I wasn't in the shape I wanted to be in, and I wasn't the confident person I knew I could be," Matt explains. "Boxing became the tool I used to build myself into the man I always aspired to be."

Through dedication and discipline, he achieved a dramatic physical and mental transformation, losing significant weight and developing a new level of confidence.

Located in Gosforth, Newcastle, Box&Build was created to challenge the intimidating reputation often associated with traditional boxing gyms.

Matt recalls his own first experience: "I walked into a boxing gym for the first time and left with a black eye and concussion. I can laugh now, but it was a traumatic experience, and it puts a lot of people off for life."

I felt intimidated, experienced poor results in the gyms I visited and found that there was no real coaching in boxfit classes. As a result, his business model for Box&Build offers a middle ground combining authentic boxing training with a safe, supportive environment.

The facility, based on Salters Road in central Gosforth, has been carefully designed to feel welcoming and inspiring. With a heritage boxing aesthetic, classic fight posters, a full-size ring, and a dedicated strength training space, it's a gym people feel proud to be part of. Training is delivered through small group sessions and one-to-one coaching, ensuring every member receives focused, high-quality guidance.

Radio Northumberland launches new Health & Wellness show

Community radio station Radio Northumberland is expanding its programming with the launch of a brand-new Health & Wellness Show, hosted by broadcaster Heywood Similon-Taylor.

The new programme will explore a wide range of health-related topics, providing listeners with practical advice, expert interviews and inspiring stories designed to support healthier lives across Northumberland and beyond.

Each episode will cover issues affecting people of all ages, from physical wellbeing and healthy

lifestyles to mental health, emotional resilience and community support. The show aims to tackle important subjects openly and honestly while helping to break down stigma surrounding mental health.

Stewart Allen for Radio Northumberland said: "As a community radio station, we're committed to producing programmes that make a real difference to people's lives. Health and wellbeing are subjects that touch every family, and we're delighted to welcome Heywood Similon-Taylor to the station to front this exciting new programme. We believe it will become an invaluable source of information, inspiration and support for our listeners."

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North East biggest sport day leaves a positive impact on local schools

Last year WASP (Wallsend Active School Partnership) hosted their inaugural 'NE Biggest Sports Day' for schools across Wallsend/North Tyneside, 250 students attended.

This year the event was even bigger! WASP hosted over 300 Year 6 children at Sporting Wallsend, providing the most fun, non competitive sports days the North East has ever seen! The partnership is made up from Wallsend Rugby Club, Wallsend Football Club, Cricketqube, North East Barbells, Power Through Sport, Hellcats Cheerleading and Wallsend Children's Charity.

Martyn Clark, Development Manager at Sporting Wallsend/WASP partner commented: 'Hosting WASP's biggest sports festival at Sporting Wallsend has been a fantastic opportunity to bring 300 students together to experience the enjoyment and benefits of being active.'



Sunderland gift card gets active

The popular Sunderland Gift Card is showing its fit for purpose, with the addition of a leading activity chain.

Everyone Active has signed up five of its popular sites to the scheme, which means that recipients can now enjoy a range of experiences, covering everything from swimming to skiing.

And that's good news for anyone wanting to buy a special gift for someone with a sense of adventure or who is interested in health and fitness. Having a top gym chain on board is a first for the card, which is now accepted in more than 200 businesses across the city.

The latest additions mean it can now be used at Everyone Active's Raich Carter Centre, Sunderland Aquatic Centre, Hetton Pool and Fitness Centre, Silksworth Ski Slope and Washington Leisure Centre.

"Everyone Active plays a really important role in the local community so we are absolutely delighted to have them involved in the Sunderland Gift Card scheme," said Roberta Redecke, Head of Business Services at Sunderland's BIDs which runs the gift card scheme.

Listening to Newcastle's voice on health and care

Nearly 10,000 people across Newcastle have been supported by Healthwatch Newcastle over the past year, with the organisation continuing to play a vital role in ensuring local people's experiences help shape health and social care services.

The charity's latest Annual Report reveals that 9,889 residents received advice, support or opportunities to share their views during 2025/26. More than 9,100 people contributed feedback on services, while hundreds took part in research projects examining issues ranging from mental health crises to hospital discharge and respite care.

Access to GPs and NHS dentistry remains one of the biggest concerns raised by local people, alongside issues surrounding community pharmacies, hospital services and mental health provision. Healthwatch says these real-life experiences continue to guide its work with NHS organisations, Newcastle City Council and other partners to improve services.

Throughout the year, Newcastle Healthwatch expanded its presence in communities across the city, introducing new drop-in locations, attending major events including Newcastle Mela and Northern Pride,



and working with family hubs, universities and refugee organisations to ensure the voices of often under-represented groups are heard.

The organisation also carried out a number of influential research projects and statutory "Enter and View" inspections. One such review at Castle Dene Respite Centre resulted in nine recommendations, leading to improvements in communication with carers, more consistent care practices and clearer information for families.

Healthwatch Newcastle says its priorities for the coming year remain clear: improving access to GPs, NHS dentistry and hospital services while continuing to ensure the voices of local people remain at the heart of health and social care decision-making.



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L-R: Allison Rose Mannell, Antonia Brindle, Melanie Foo Saad

A pathway to wellness

The Trilogy Pathway to Wellbeing launches to support neurodiverse and emotionally challenged individuals.

Three experienced wellbeing advocates have joined forces to launch **The Trilogy Pathway to Wellbeing**, a new initiative designed to provide practical and compassionate support for neurodiverse, SEND families and emotionally challenged individuals seeking greater independence, confidence and opportunity.

Founded by Antonia Brindle, Melanie Foo Saad and Allison Rose Mannell, the service offers a holistic pathway that bridges emotional wellbeing, workplace readiness and access to tailored support services.

The launch comes at a time when increasing numbers of neurodiverse adults and people experiencing emotional challenges are seeking support that is both accessible and personalised. The Trilogy Pathway to Wellbeing aims to fill gaps often encountered in traditional systems by providing guidance that addresses both emotional health and practical life outcomes.

“Our vision is to create a pathway where people feel seen, understood and empowered,” said Allison Rose-Mannell. “Too often individuals

face barriers not because they lack ability, but because they lack the right support at the right time.”

A key feature of the service is that it can be accessed with Access to Work funding, helping eligible individuals navigate the process of securing workplace accommodations, coaching support and other adjustments that can make employment more sustainable and successful.

For many neurodiverse people, completing complex application processes can be overwhelming. The Trilogy team provides step-by-step guidance, helping clients understand eligibility requirements, gather supporting information and present their needs clearly.

“Employment can be transformative when the right adjustments are in place,” explained Antonia Brindle. “We want people to feel confident in pursuing work opportunities or operating within their current role, confidently to their best ability without being discouraged by personal hurdles.”

In addition to workplace support, The Trilogy Pathway to Wellbeing offers private referral services, connecting clients with the three trusted professionals and the specialist resources they provide which are suited to their individual circumstances.

Areas of support include:

- Emotional wellbeing coaching
- SEND parent support
- ADHD assessment and diagnosis
- Neurodiversity-informed guidance
- Workplace readiness support
- Confidence-building strategies
- Counselling and issues addressing
- Person informed counselling

● Ongoing practical advocacy

The service is designed to be flexible, recognising that each person's experience of neurodiversity or emotional challenge is unique.

Melanie Foo Saad said the strength of the initiative lies in its collaborative foundation.

“The Trilogy Pathway to Wellbeing brings together different professional perspectives with one shared goal: helping people move forward. Whether someone is seeking employment support, emotional guidance or access to specialist services, we want them to know they do not have to navigate the journey alone.”

The founders hope the launch will encourage wider conversations about inclusive support for neurodiverse and emotionally challenged individuals, particularly in relation to employment, relationships, independence and long-term wellbeing.

By combining practical assistance with compassionate, person-centred support, The Trilogy Pathway to Wellbeing aims to create meaningful opportunities for individuals who may previously have struggled to access the help they need.

As the service begins accepting enquiries and referrals, the founders say their mission is simple: to help people build confidence, access opportunities and develop a sustainable pathway towards wellbeing and participation in work and community life.

For further information about The Trilogy Pathway to Wellbeing, please contact the founders directly via hello@trilogypathway.com



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 - Preferred Car Parking Pass 1:4
 - Private Hospitality Entrance (Queue Jump)
 - Personal Waiting Service All Day
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Gates open at 10:30 am with breakfast being served at 11:00 am

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:
Nature reminds us that growth is rarely the starting point.
It is the consequence.

How do you find what conditions are preventing growth?

Most organisations ask the same question.

How do we grow?

Nature asks a different one.

What conditions are preventing growth?

It is a subtle difference, but it changes where we place our attention.

Walking beside the River Coquet, there is a sandstone cliff that has made me think differently about this question. Across its face, trees appear to grow from solid rock. At first glance it seems impossible. There is no obvious soil, nowhere for roots to establish themselves and little to sustain life. Yet the trees are there.

The answer is not found in the trees themselves. Long before a tree could take root, the cliff had already begun to change. Lichens settled first, followed by mosses that trapped moisture and tiny fragments of organic matter. Frost opened minute cracks. Rain carried nutrients deeper into the rock. Fungi and microorganisms transformed the surface. Season after season, the conditions slowly changed.

None of it looked dramatic.

None of it looked like growth.

But without those almost invisible pioneers, the trees could never have existed.

It strikes me that organisations often overlook the same lesson. We celebrate visible outcomes, growth, innovation, market share, successful leaders, while paying far less attention to the conditions that made those outcomes possible.

Nature reminds us that growth is rarely the starting point. It is the consequence.

Perhaps this is where attention matters most. When we pay attention, we stop chasing growth as though it were something to manufacture. Instead, we begin noticing the conditions that either encourage it or prevent it.

Trust. Psychological safety. Curiosity. Time to think. Good conversations. Shared purpose. These are the organisational equivalent of the lichens and mosses on the cliff face. They may appear insignificant, but together they build the capacity from which healthy growth naturally emerges.

Every tree growing across that sandstone cliff tells the same story.

The visible achievement is rarely where the story begins.

The real work is creating the conditions in which growth becomes possible.

“

**What conditions are preventing growth?
It is a subtle difference, but it changes where
we place our attention.**

One Walk: The Priory.

At the centre of Brinkburn Estate is the Priory. To get to The Priory you have to walk down a track which takes you past an ancient sandstone quarry. It is the home of the rocks shaped and formed and used to build the priory in the 12th century. Growing onto the cliff face is a sycamore tree. I have known it from when I was a boy, I used to climb up it and hide between the tree and the rock in a tiny cave. The sycamore is now host to a lime tree which is growing from a pocket in its roots. Many people wonder at this tree, its position, its structure. It is a tenacious tree.



Mark Fenwick at Brinkburn, Northumberland
Photo: Del Stevyn



Bethany Ainsley

Happiness isn't a business strategy, but it might be your competitive advantage?

August marks Happiness Happens Month, a campaign that invites us to notice and celebrate the good moments in life. I'll be honest, I love it. I've built my career on the belief that people deserve to feel well, at work as much as anywhere else.

I also know how that sounds to some business leaders. Happiness feels soft. You can't put it on a dashboard, you can't audit it, and no employer can promise it. Our health, our relationships and our finances all shape how happy we are, and most of that sits well outside any manager's control.

So who's right, the idealists or the realists?

In my experience, both.

The idealists are right that happiness matters more than most business plans admit. Early in my career, teaching dance, I saw how dramatically people changed when they felt good. Confidence grew, participation increased and people achieved more than they believed possible. The same is true in the workplace.

The realists are right too. Warm words don't pay wages, and a wellbeing initiative that can't show its value won't survive its first budget review, nor should it.

A University of Oxford study of nearly 1,800 BT call centre employees found that those who

reported higher levels of happiness were around 13% more productive than their colleagues. Deloitte puts the cost of poor mental health to UK employers at £51 billion a year, much of it down to people who are at work but struggling to work. Employee experience is a commercial question, whether we treat it as one or not.

The bridge between the two positions is simpler than it looks. Stop trying to make happiness a target and start treating it as a signal. No organisation can manufacture happiness, but every organisation can understand whether its people feel trusted, whether they feel heard, whether they feel recognised when they've done a good job, and whether their managers are equipped to support them when work and life gets heavy. None of those questions measures happiness directly. They measure the conditions that make people more likely to thrive.

The honest difficulty is that most leaders can't answer those questions with confidence. Few people will tell their manager to their face that

something is wrong, and an annual survey is out of date almost as soon as it lands. Without a regular, safe way for people to say how things really are, the truth tends to surface in exit interviews, when it no longer helps.

For businesses here in the North East, and across the North, competing for talent with employers who have deeper pockets, this matters more than most. Pay can be matched and perks can be copied. Being the employer that genuinely listens and acts on feedback is far harder to replicate, and it's often what persuades good people to stay.

So this August I won't pretend that any business can promise happiness. What I will say is that the businesses doing best by their people are the ones honest enough to hold both truths at once. Happiness isn't a business strategy, understanding how people experience work absolutely is.

You may never be able to measure happiness perfectly, but you can understand the workplace experiences that influence it. OptiMe Pulse uses regular, anonymous check-ins to help leaders understand how their people are really experiencing work, identify emerging issues before they become bigger problems, and provide employees with personalised wellbeing support along the way. Find out more at www.optimewellbeing.com/pulse.

Bethany Ainsley is the Founder and CEO of OptiMe, an award-winning workplace wellbeing platform built in the North East of England.

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Why strength matters more than ever during midlife

By Cheryl Tanner, Menopause Fitness & Wellness Coach



Cheryl Tanner

When we think about workplace wellbeing, we often focus on stress, resilience and mental health. But there's another factor that has a huge impact on energy, productivity and long-term health that is often overlooked- muscle.

From our 30s onwards, we naturally begin to lose muscle mass, and this accelerates during menopause. Reduced muscle strength doesn't just affect how we move, it influences energy levels, posture, balance, bone health and even our ability to cope with the physical and mental demands of everyday life.

The good news? Strength training is one of the most effective ways to slow and even reverse many of these changes.

Research consistently shows that regular resistance training can improve strength, reduce fatigue, enhance mood, support bone density and help maintain independence as we age. It isn't about lifting the heaviest weights, it's about building a stronger, healthier body for life.

For employers, encouraging strength based wellbeing can have a real impact. Employees who feel physically stronger often report greater confidence, improved resilience and better overall wellbeing.

This summer, instead of simply encouraging your team to "move more", encourage them to move with purpose.

Whether that's bodyweight exercises, resistance bands or supervised strength sessions, every small step counts.

Healthy ageing isn't about adding years to life, it's about adding life to years.

Ready to build a stronger, healthier workforce?

Scan the QR code to find out more about my menopause wellbeing workshops, workplace strength sessions and coaching programmes.

www.cheryltannerpt.co.uk



Scan me!

Burnout alarm: Stop the slow collapse

By Craig Robinson, Meditation Teacher (DipBSoM)

Targets, deadlines, to-do lists, responsibilities, expectations...Arghhhhhhhhhhh!



Craig Robinson

Doesn't it often feel like we are always moving a million miles an hour with an ever growing "to do" list ?

Without proper regulation, release and rest, burnout creeps in slowly, over time. In the workplace it is becoming a real issue...964,000 workers in the UK were affected by workrelated stress, depression or anxiety in 2024/25. This accounted for 22.1 million working days lost, a sharp and costly rise employers can no longer ignore. This isn't about weakness. It's about a nervous system that's been asked to run too fast for too long.

The power of Meditation

Mental health is now the leading cause of work-related absence and a major driver of lost productivity. Meditation is a training of the mind. If the mind is calm and peaceful, this brings regulation to the body. Regular meditators are shown to have vastly reduced stress levels, improved focus, better performance and higher levels of job satisfaction.

Workplace delivery

I bring short, practical meditations into workplaces: 10minute guided sessions that fit into lunch breaks, shift handovers or team checkins. These sessions teach simple regulation tools staff can use in the moment, and managers can adopt micropractices to support culture change.

Try these practices

- **Microreset (2-3 minutes)** — Sit tall; take three slow, full breaths; on each outbreath release any bodily tension. Repeat as needed.
- **Box breathing at your desk (5 minutes)** — Inhale 4; hold 4; exhale 4; hold 4. Six cycles to restore calm before meetings or moving on to the next task.
- **Evening boundary (10 minutes)** — Body scan from feet to head; breathe into tight areas; visualise releasing tension from the day on the outbreath.

Quick implementation for managers

1. **Book** a weekly 10minute guided practice.
2. **Encourage** microresets after intense meetings.
3. **Track** absence and wellbeing to measure impact.

Burnout is preventable when organisations treat energy like an asset, not an infinite resource. If you want a short workplace programme with tailored sessions that fits your team and schedule, I can help.

www.clearmindmeditation.co.uk

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Top golf club honoured again by DP World Tour



A leading North East golf club has been chosen to host the prestigious DP World Tour Qualifying School this summer for the second year running.

From 8th to 11th September, players from around the world will descend on The Northumberland Golf Club in the hope of making the cut to play in the DP World Tour. The Club, which is one of just 10 venues worldwide to be picked to host the first stage Qualifying School, now has a three-year agreement to do so until at least 2028. The premier men's professional golf tour in Europe, the DP World Tour, features top international players and a global schedule of tournaments.

The Northumberland Golf Club will be welcoming visitors to the club as free spectators. This will give golf fans across the region the chance to watch the sport's rising stars, as well as some famous senior players wishing to regain their tour cards.

Over the past 12 months the golf club has



enhanced its facilities to include a new chipping green while improvements to the driving range are underway ahead of September.

General Manager James Thomas says the club is leaving "no stone unturned" to once again deliver the best possible experience for players, officials, members and spectators alike.

He said: "We were incredibly pleased with how the week went last year. The DP World Tour operates to exceptionally high standards and every aspect of the event is scrutinised. To come through that process and secure a long-term agreement was a tremendous achievement for everyone involved."

Spectators at this year's event will once again be able to watch players from Europe, North

America, Australasia & Asia, compete for a place on the Tour.

And James said: "We want as many people as possible to come and experience the event, whether they're golfers or not. You don't have to play the game to enjoy something like this."

Being asked to host the DP Qualifying School has raised Northumberland Golf Club's profile within the game and reinforced its credentials as a venue capable of hosting elite championship golf. But James believes it has wider significance for the North East in general.

"It's tremendous for the club, Newcastle and the wider North East. We've now hosted championships for the Royal and Ancient, England Golf, and the DP World Tour and there won't be many clubs in the country that can say they've hosted events from all three governing bodies. It has helped put Northumberland Golf Club – and the North East firmly on the global golfing map."

For more information about The Northumberland Golf Club, contact Julie Stephenson.

Email: admin@thengc.co.uk

Tel: 0191 236 2498

Visit www.thengc.co.uk



Stay on track

By Angela Petrocchi, SWISSPHYSIO

Avoiding running injuries before your half marathon.

You've put in the miles, pushed through the weather and carved out time you didn't think you had. As race day approaches, whether it's the Great North Run or another big event, you're fitter, stronger and ready to go. The last thing you need now is an injury that derails your hard work.

Most running injuries don't arrive with a dramatic "snap". They creep in quietly: a tight calf, a niggly heel, a knee that doesn't feel quite right. It's easy to brush these off, especially when your training plan says you should be running. But those early warning signs matter. They're often linked to training load, warmup habits (skip the long static stretches before running), recovery, footwear, strength, flexibility or running technique.

Common culprits include muscle strains - the calves, hamstrings and quads are all vulnerable when fatigue, dehydration or sudden intensity spikes hit. Tendon issues, like Achilles irritation, often start with morning stiffness or discomfort



at the beginning of a run. Plantar fasciitis can make those first steps out of bed feel like you're walking on a stone. Then there's knee pain, shin pain or general aches that don't settle between sessions.

The key message is simple: pain that keeps returning, changes your running style or worsens with training should not be ignored. It's a sign your body wants attention.

Here's the good news: preventing injury doesn't

mean stopping. A physiotherapy assessment can pinpoint what's going on and help you adjust your training without losing momentum. Video analysis, hands-on treatment, strength work, shockwave therapy, mobility drills, taping and a structured return to running plan can all keep you moving forward. And yes regular sports massage is a gamechanger for keeping muscles fresh.

At SWISSPHYSIO, we know how much your race means to you. Whether you're managing a niggle or simply want reassurance before the big day, we're here to help you stay healthy, confident and ready to enjoy every mile.

Take the first step toward your winning recovery. Scan the QR code below for targeted advice on specific running injuries and to book your appointment, or call 0191 296 0567





David Fairlamb

Same ol' mistakes again and again

By David Fairlamb, David Fairlamb Fitness

After more than 30 years as a personal trainer, I've had the privilege of helping thousands of people improve their health, lose weight, build strength and regain their self confidence. During that time, I've seen incredible transformations, but I've also seen the same mistakes made time and time again.

The good news is that these mistakes are completely avoidable. If you can steer clear of them, you'll give yourself a far greater chance of achieving lasting results.

One of the biggest mistakes I see is people doing too much, too soon.

Motivation is a wonderful thing, but it can also work against us. Someone decides it's time to get fit and suddenly they're exercising six days a week, cutting out all their favourite foods and expecting to transform their body in a month. It might work for a week or two, but eventually exhaustion, soreness and frustration sets in. As a result they often stop altogether.

Fitness is a marathon, not a sprint. Small, consistent improvements will always beat short bursts of extreme effort.

Every year there's a new miracle diet, fat-burning supplement or secret workout promising incredible results in record time. The reality is that there are no shortcuts, successful people aren't that lucky they are simply consistent. They focus on eating well most of the time, exercising regularly and sticking

with it long after the excitement of starting has faded.

One area many people continue to overlook is strength training. Some still believe cardio is the only way to lose weight, while others worry that lifting weights will make them bulky. In reality, strength training is one of the best things you can do for your body. It helps build muscle, strengthens bones, improves posture, boosts your metabolism and makes everyday life easier. As we get older, it becomes even more important because maintaining muscle is essential for staying active and independent.

Perhaps one of the biggest changes I've seen over the past decade is the influence of social media. While there is some excellent advice available online, there's also a huge amount of misinformation. Every week there's a new trend, challenge or exercise that promises to be the answer to everyone's fitness goals. People jump from one programme to another without giving anything enough time to work.

Remember, social media is often designed to entertain rather than educate. What works for an influencer with unlimited time, perfect lighting and carefully edited videos may not be appropriate for the average person trying to balance work, family and everyday life.

We live in a world where everything is instant, but fitness doesn't work like that. Your body needs time to adapt. Fat loss, muscle gain and improved fitness all happen gradually. There will be weeks where the scales don't move, sessions that feel harder than expected and days where motivation is low. That's completely normal.

The people who succeed aren't necessarily the fittest or the most talented. They are the ones who keep turning up, even when progress feels slow.

When I look back over three decades in this profession the people who achieve the greatest success aren't those looking for perfection. They're ordinary people who build simple habits, trust the process and keep going.

You don't need the latest fitness trend, the most expensive equipment or a perfect diet. You need patience, consistency and the willingness to make exercise part of your lifestyle rather than something you do for a few weeks.

'After 30 years, I can confidently say that success in fitness isn't complicated. It's about doing the basics well, week after week, month after month. Those small actions soon become life-changing results.

www.davidfairlambfitness.co.uk

David's summing up

Instead of trying to change everything at once, focus on one positive habit this week. It could be completing two strength sessions, walking 10,000 steps a day or drinking more water. Master one habit before adding another.



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