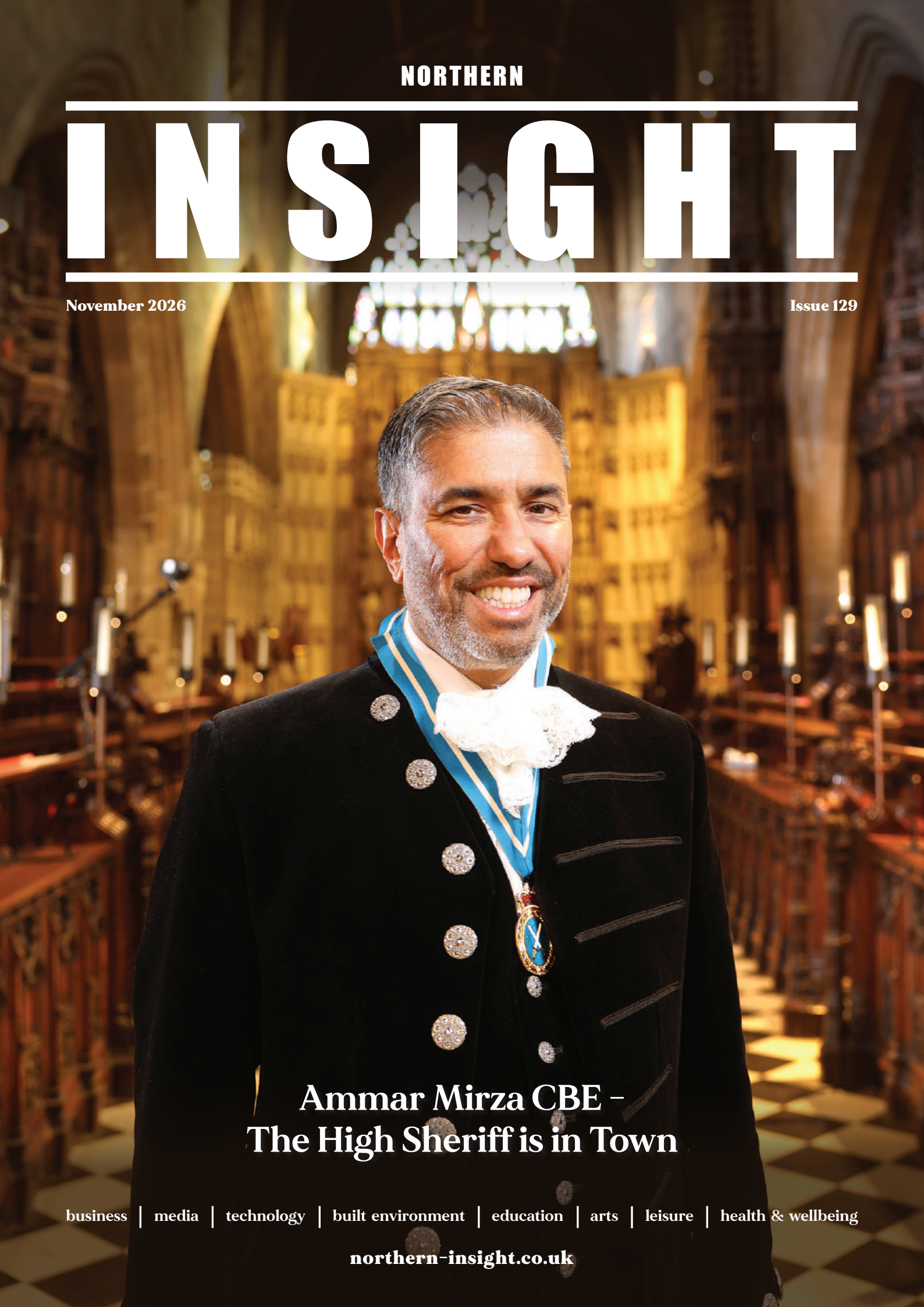
NORTHERN

INSIGHT

November 2026

Issue 129



Ammar Mirza CBE – The High Sheriff is in Town

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

northern-insight.co.uk



National Christmas TV campaign. Landsec.



Helping brands be less ordinary.

the Traveller & the Bear

Is Your Website On A HOST WITH THE MOST?

We open our phones or – for the more traditional among us – our morning papers, and the headlines tell us that even the biggest brands and government organisations are falling victim to cyberattacks, we learn quickly that keeping websites safe has never been more important.

We caught up with Nathan Cockburn, the 25-year-old Digital Director at AS Design North East (ASDNE), to find out what really goes into looking after a website, and why good hosting is about much more than keeping it online.

NI: We seem to hear about another big company being hacked every week, should smaller businesses be worried too? NC: Definitely. I think a lot of people assume hackers are only interested in big companies, but that's not really how it works. A lot of attacks are automated.

They're basically looking around the internet for websites with weaknesses, so it doesn't really matter whether you're a global company or a local business. You can't promise that a website will never be hacked, but there are things you can do to make it much harder for hackers.

NI: What's the difference between hosting a website and actually looking after it? NC: Hosting is just where your website lives – a physical server somewhere. Looking after it is everything else. We use SiteGround, which is one of the best hosting platforms out there, but having a decent server doesn't automatically mean your website is safe, fast or working properly. We've got real-time monitoring, daily backups and we're updating things behind the scenes every week, sometimes daily.

NI: What does all that maintenance involve? NC: Quite a lot, actually! It wasn't always the case – at one time you could happily forget about your website themes and plugins for months, but not anymore.

Most of the websites we look after are built using WordPress, which means they use plugins for different features. Those plugins need updating regularly, and sometimes developers stop supporting them altogether.

I look after the security side of things, as well as developing our own plugins when we need something specific or want to do things differently. Then my colleague Nic handles the day-to-day maintenance, keeping on top of updates, checking things are working and spotting anything that needs attention.

NI: And what about speed? Does hosting make a big difference? NC: It does, but it's not the only thing. You could have a really good server and still have a slow website if it's full of massive images, unnecessary plugins or badly written code.

For example we recently had a website that was running really slowly in the background, and it turned out the area where users add new posts was loading some unnecessary features of the builder. A five-second fix but lots of experience that led us there, and a massive difference for the users.



Nathan & Nic



Nathan

NI: You've recently taken on some new websites. How did that happen? NC: A web company we've worked with for years closed down, so we acquired around 50 of their websites. A lot of the customers were hosting-only, which we try and avoid simply because there isn't any value in us hosting a site for a company and not helping it stay online, stay safe and stay fast.

In transferring the sites, a couple had to be suspended as they were too out-dated, and a few that weren't already hosted with Siteground had already been compromised before we took them over. Hosts can delete your site if it becomes unsafe, having us as the go-between can help prevent that. We also found plugins that aren't supported anymore, things that could be running better and areas where we can improve security.

NI: With all the hacking stories in the news, can you ever make a website completely secure? NC: Not completely, no. And I wouldn't trust anyone who says they can. Even massive companies with huge IT teams get hacked, so nobody can guarantee it won't happen. What you can do is make sure you're not leaving obvious weaknesses lying around. Backups are a big part of this as well. We take daily backups, and we're also looking at additional offline backups options so we're not relying entirely on one system.

NI: You've gone from joining ASDNE in 2022 to becoming Digital Director in less than five years. Has the job changed much? NC: Massively! When I started, I was mainly helping out with websites and learning how everything fitted together. Now I pretty much build everything, from websites and portals to plugins and bespoke functionality.

NI: Finally, what should business owners be asking the people who host their websites? NC: I'd probably start with, "What are you actually doing to look after it?" Then how often is it updated? Are there backups? Is anyone checking for problems? And if something goes wrong, who's going to fix it? I think a lot of businesses assume all of that just happens automatically because they're paying for hosting. Sometimes it does. Sometimes it doesn't.

Credits

Managing Director
Michael Grahamslaw

Design
Lu O'Rourke

Additional Design
AS Design

Accounts Manager
Lisa Grahamslaw

Lead Photography
Crest Photography

Additional Photography
The Bigger Picture Agency Ltd

Editorial Contributors
Jack Grahamslaw, Holly Grahamslaw, Graham Courtney, Simon Rushworth, David Fairlamb, Barry Speker

Social Media
Jordan Marston (JAM Marketing)

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

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

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

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

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

Media Enquiries
Michael Grahamslaw
michael@northern-insight.co.uk

© 2026 Published by MJG Publishing Ltd

www.northern-insight.co.uk

facebook.com/northerninsight
@NInsightmag
@northerninsightmagazine
Northern Insight Magazine







Contents

8/9	**Business News**
12/15	**Cover Story** *Ammar Mirza CBE, The High Sheriff*
16	**Appointments News**
34/36	**Deals News**
40/42	**Accountancy and Legal News**
62/63	**Solicitor of the Month** *Phil Moir, Richard Reed Solicitors*
74	**Straight Talk with Speker** *Barry Speker OBE*
76/78	**Charity and Community News**
116/117	**Media News**
130/131	**Marketing and Media Matters** *Angela Carrington, The Bigger Picture Agency Ltd*
138	**Technology News**
144/145	**Talking Tech and Digital** *Warren Colby, Agilico Print Division*
158/160	**The Built Environment News**
182	**Education News**
192	**Arts News**
194	**Leisure News**
217	**Health and Wellbeing News**









Foreword

Welcome to the November edition of Northern Insight

As we move into November, the year is beginning to draw towards its close, offering a valuable opportunity to reflect on the achievements, challenges and ambitions that continue to shape our business community across the North East.

It has been another year in which businesses have had to demonstrate resilience, adaptability and a willingness to embrace change. From navigating economic uncertainty to investing in people, technology and new opportunities, organisations across the region continue to show that ambition and determination remain firmly at the heart of our local economy.

In this month's issue, we celebrate the individuals and organisations making a difference in their industries and communities. Their stories demonstrate the importance of strong leadership, collaboration and a shared commitment to building a prosperous future for our region.

At Northern Insight, we remain committed to shining a light on the people, ideas and achievements that make our region such a great place to live and work. By sharing these stories, we hope to encourage connections, inspire fresh thinking and strengthen the relationships that help our business community thrive.

Thank you to all our contributors, advertisers and readers for your continued support.

Till next month...

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



Edition Sponsors



Padelsphere celebrates successful first month

A Northumberland indoor padel venue has welcomed more than 3,000 visitors in its first month, as players and spectators go to experience one of the UK's fastest-growing sports.

Located in Blyth, Padelsphere opened its doors earlier this year with a vision of creating more than just a sports venue. Four weeks on, co-founders Akshay and Lorna say the response from the local community has exceeded even their ambitious expectations.

Akshay said: "The thing that still gets us every day is the reaction when people walk through the door.

"That first 'wow'. We've lost count of the number of people telling us it's one of the nicest padel venues they've played at, not just in the North East."

Since opening, more than 3,000 people have visited the venue, with around 70% of players trying padel for the first time.

Many newcomers had previously been unable to access the sport without travelling outside the county, highlighting the demand for a dedicated local venue.

"People tell us they wanted to try padel but couldn't face travelling to Newcastle or Durham, so they'd been waiting for us to open," said Akshay.

"Padel is one of the most accessible sports in the world and most people are enjoying a proper rally within minutes, which is why beginners keep coming back."



Successful sixth year for Sunderland Business Week

North East business leaders have hailed the success of a popular business event, with hundreds of people attending sessions across Sunderland.

Sunderland Business Week, which returned for a sixth year, ran from October 12 – 16, with headline speakers including entrepreneur and TV personality Spencer Matthews and Paralympic gold medallist and NatWest ambassador Jonnie Peacock. The pair took part in fireside chats, discussing their lives and careers at SunFest, a one-day conference that formed part of the week, on Thursday, October 15.

The week-long event included expert presentations, panel discussions, fireside chats, networking, workshops and more.

Councillor Chris Eynon, Leader of Sunderland City Council, said: “Sunderland is a city that’s open for business and a place where companies can thrive. Sunderland Business Week shone a spotlight on the fantastic opportunities there are here for growth and the major part Sunderland can play in the regional and national economy. It was a celebration of business and entrepreneurialism right here in our city and a great chance for people and businesses to connect and collaborate.”

The week was organised by Sunderland Business Partnership, a collective of organisations – large and small – all with an interest in the city’s development, creating opportunities for members to collaborate and grow, which in turn helps Sunderland to be a more dynamic destination for business



Endeavour Academy achieves prestigious Centre of Excellence status

Endeavour Academy in Peterlee, County Durham is celebrating a prestigious national achievement after being recognised as a Centre of Excellence in Financial Education by Young Enterprise, the UK’s leading financial and enterprise education charity.

This national accreditation is a significant endorsement of the school’s commitment to excellence, recognising the dedication of its staff and the positive impact of its work in preparing young people for life beyond the classroom.

The recognition celebrates Endeavour Academy’s commitment to empowering young people with the practical skills, knowledge and confidence to make informed financial decisions, embrace future opportunities and build brighter futures. It is also a moment of pride for Peterlee, shining a spotlight on the exceptional work taking place within the local community to inspire young people, raise aspirations and equip the next generation with the tools they need to thrive.

The Centre of Excellence programme is a whole-school improvement initiative that recognises and strengthens high-quality financial education. It helps schools identify pupils’ learning needs, embed financial education meaningfully across the curriculum, and equip teachers with the knowledge, skills and confidence to deliver learning that makes a lasting difference.

For Endeavour Academy, achieving this status celebrates the dedication, creativity and collaboration of its staff and wider school community, recognising the importance placed on giving every young person the opportunity to develop essential life skills and build a positive relationship with money.

BRADLEY O’MAHONEY
Making Clients Famous.
www.bradleyomahoney.co.uk

Raymond James Monument backs North East business owners

The Entrepreneurs' Forum has welcomed Newcastle-based wealth management business Raymond James Monument as its latest Corporate Partner.

Led by Branch Principal and Chartered Wealth Manager Gary Fawcett, Raymond James Monument provides financial planning and investment management to individuals, families, entrepreneurs and business owners across the North East and beyond.

Through the partnership, the team will work with the Forum and its members, sharing expertise around the financial decisions that often accompany building, growing, and eventually exiting a business.

Elaine Stroud, CEO of the Entrepreneurs' Forum, said: "We're really pleased to welcome Gary and the Raymond James Monument team to the Entrepreneurs' Forum community.

"Gary already knows the Forum and our members extremely well and understands the kind of support and expertise entrepreneurs value. That, combined with the wider experience of the Raymond James Monument team, makes this a very natural partnership for us."

Gary Fawcett, Branch Principal at Raymond James Monument, added: "We're delighted to join the Entrepreneurs' Forum and play an active part in sharing our experience with business owners where it can help.



"Having spent my career working with business owners and entrepreneurs across the North East, I've seen first-hand the value of the Forum community, and, at Raymond James Monument, we share their entrepreneurial mindset.

"We work with entrepreneurs at many different stages, from those still growing their businesses to people beginning to think about succession, exit or what financial freedom looks like beyond the business. Our ambition is to be more than simply wealth managers to our clients. We want to support them throughout their journey, build long-term relationships and use our network to help connect people and create opportunities. Becoming a Corporate Partner gives us another opportunity to do just that."



NEPO Wins Regional SME Apprenticeship Employer of the Year 2026

One of the UK's leading public sector procurement organisations, based in North East England, NEPO, has been named the region's SME Apprenticeship Employer of the Year 2026 at the National Apprenticeship Awards. The award recognises its Regional Procurement Apprenticeship Programme, which is growing the next generation of public sector procurement professionals across the region.

The regional winners were announced on Wednesday 30 September at the Hilton Newcastle Gateshead. NEPO won in one of the evening's most competitive categories. Entries go through a rigorous, quality-assured judging process led by a panel of independent judges from the region.

The judges praised NEPO's collaboration across the North East and Tees Valley and its clear vision for apprentices as a strategic part of local authority workforces. They also highlighted how apprentices are helping teams grow through succession planning, and the programme's impact on the learner.



Middlesbrough College and Lingfield Education Trust join forces

Primary school children across the region will have more opportunities to explore future careers and discover where their education could take them, thanks to a new partnership between Middlesbrough College and Lingfield Education Trust.

The two organisations have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to help children and young people see where their education could take them and understand the opportunities open to them from an early age.

By strengthening links between primary education, further education, training and employment, the partnership will offer careers advice and experiences, introduce young people to the variety of jobs across the region, and help them understand options such as further education and apprenticeships. It will also commit to linking the leadership teams together routinely to update each other on local context, and provide training and development opportunities for staff across the Trust's schools.

The partnership will put this ambition into practice from primary school, with plans for Year 5 pupils from Lingfield schools to attend a careers event at Middlesbrough College, featuring local employers and opportunities to explore key sectors and careers across the Tees Valley.

BRADLEY O'MAHONEY
Strategy. Marketing. Branding.
Public Relations. Social & Digital. Video.
www.bradleyomahoney.co.uk



We're delighted to welcome Sentis to Aspire.

Chris Fraser, CEO & Founder, Aspire

Aspire Expands into North West with fourth acquisition since 2024

Aspire Technology Solutions has acquired Warrington-based Sentis Managed Solutions, adding more than 80 customers and an experienced team as it continues to scale its UK operations.

Sentis is a long-established Managed Service Provider with a strong record of sustained growth. It has built a substantial base across the North West, with a clear focus on mid-sized organisations that closely aligns with Aspire's core market. The acquisition gives Aspire an immediate presence in the region and further expands its geographic reach.

The deal builds on Aspire's established position in the UK mid-market and supports the next stage of its growth strategy. Customers will gain access to Aspire's broader capabilities across cyber security, managed services, secure networks and enterprise voice, bringing a wider range of specialist services and expertise to their organisations.

All Sentis employees will become part of the Aspire group and trade under the Aspire brand. Co-founder Neil Homer will remain with the business, providing continuity of leadership and playing an active role in the integration, while fellow co-founders Martin Perry and Michael Cox will step back from day-to-day operations and continue to support the business in ambassadorial roles. Customers will continue to work with the existing team while benefiting from the breadth and expertise of the wider Aspire group.

The transaction continues Aspire's strategy of building its regional presence through targeted acquisitions, following Cloud Cover IT in January 2024, CloudCoCo's managed IT services business in November 2024 and NVT Group in March 2026. Together, these deals have expanded Aspire's UK operations, broadened the product range and support available to customers and advanced its ambition to grow annual revenue from £71.7 million in FY26 to £100 million by FY30.

Chris Fraser, CEO and founder of Aspire Technology Solutions, said: "We're delighted to welcome Sentis to Aspire and look forward to working together. Our previous acquisitions have given us a clear understanding of what effective integration requires. Building trusted relationships, nurturing talent, and doing the right thing for customers are key, and they're values we see clearly in Sentis.

"That gives us confidence in the fit between our two companies and in what we can achieve. Sentis has built an impressive position in the region, and bringing our teams and expertise together will create new opportunities for customers and colleagues alike."

Neil Homer, Co-founder of Sentis Managed Solutions, said: "Sentis has built real momentum, and joining Aspire gives us access to the investment and wider capabilities to take that forward. It enables us to offer more to our customers while retaining the relationships they value.

"This is an exciting milestone for the business. I'm looking forward to playing an active role in the next chapter."

Backed by leading private equity investor LDC, Aspire is pursuing a long-term business strategy combining organic expansion with selective acquisitions, focused on extending its UK presence and developing its capabilities to deliver greater value for customers. Its experience of previous transactions provides a proven framework for integrating businesses and helping them realise their potential.

LDC first backed the Aspire management team in 2022 and reinvested in November 2025, retaining a significant minority stake alongside new minority co-investor Federated Hermes to support the next phase of Aspire's growth journey.

Aspire was advised by Muckle LLP, Evolution Capital and BDO, while Sentis was advised by Mackrell LLP and KBS Corporate.

www.aspirets.com

Cover story...



Ammar Mirza CBE

High Sheriff. Higher order?

Ammar Mirza CBE on an office with over 1,000 years of history, and what we can achieve together today.

The uniform catches the eye. The history commands respect. But ask Ammar Mirza CBE what becoming High Sheriff of Tyne and Wear means to him, and the conversation turns to other people.

The volunteer sustaining a community project. The police officer whose compassion goes unseen. The entrepreneur creating a job. The young person waiting for an opportunity.

"You become part of something much bigger than yourself," he says. "The privilege lasts a year. The responsibility is to make it useful."

For the Newcastle-born entrepreneur, that responsibility connects enterprise, education, investment, international trade and public service. It also brings a proudly "PunjGeordie" perspective to an ancient office.

"Punjabi heritage, Geordie roots. Family, hospitality, humour, hard work and helping others are values I recognise in both. I have never felt I had to choose between them."

An ancient office with a living purpose

Dating back to Saxon England, the "Shire Reeve" represented the Crown within a county, collecting taxes and maintaining law and order.

Today, High Sheriff is an independent, non-political royal appointment held for one year. Supporting the Crown and judiciary remains central, alongside encouraging the police, prisons, probation, emergency services and voluntary organisations.

"People hear Sheriff and think of Robin Hood," Ammar smiles. "Thankfully, collecting taxes and organising executions are no longer in the job description."

His humour accompanies deep respect for the office and his predecessors.

"The traditions connect us with our history and remind us that justice and service carry responsibilities across generations. We honour that inheritance by making the office relevant today."

Since his appointment for 2026–27, visits to courts, charities and community organisations have offered opportunities to listen and recognise service.

Northumbria Police's Pride of Policing awards provided a particularly powerful insight.

"Behind the headlines are judgement, courage, compassion and teamwork. Officers, staff and volunteers make contributions we rarely see. Thanking them on behalf of our communities is a privilege."

Ammar established AmmarM in 2005 and co-founded Asian Business Connexions with Jalf Ali in 2009, addressing inequality, strengthening relationships and widening access to business support.

ABC's purpose remains straightforward. Connect, Support, Promote.

The SME Centre of Excellence followed in 2016. It reports supporting more than 20,000 SMEs and helping raise over £250 million in investment, reflecting the collective work of teams, partners and entrepreneurs.



Ammar with Lord Mayor of Newcastle Henry Gallagher

"Behind every business is a person, often a family, and considerable courage. Taking on staff or investing your savings in an idea is significant.

"Our role is to understand the ambition and help people move forward through finance, skills, premises, introductions or an honest conversation."

Enterprise education, he believes, has value far beyond business ownership.

"Solving problems, communicating, managing money and working with others gives you more choices, whatever future you pursue."

From primary to prosperity

Sixteen years as Chair of Governors at Tyneview Primary School in Walker showed Ammar how early those choices can narrow.

"You see children full of imagination and ability. Then you ask who gets encouraged, who meets somebody inspiring and who experiences a workplace where they can picture themselves belonging."

That experience helped shape the PIE Project, Primary Inspiration through Enterprise, and Primary to Prosperity, one of his two High Sheriff themes.

The ambition connects early aspiration with learning, qualifications, experience and routes into employment or enterprise.

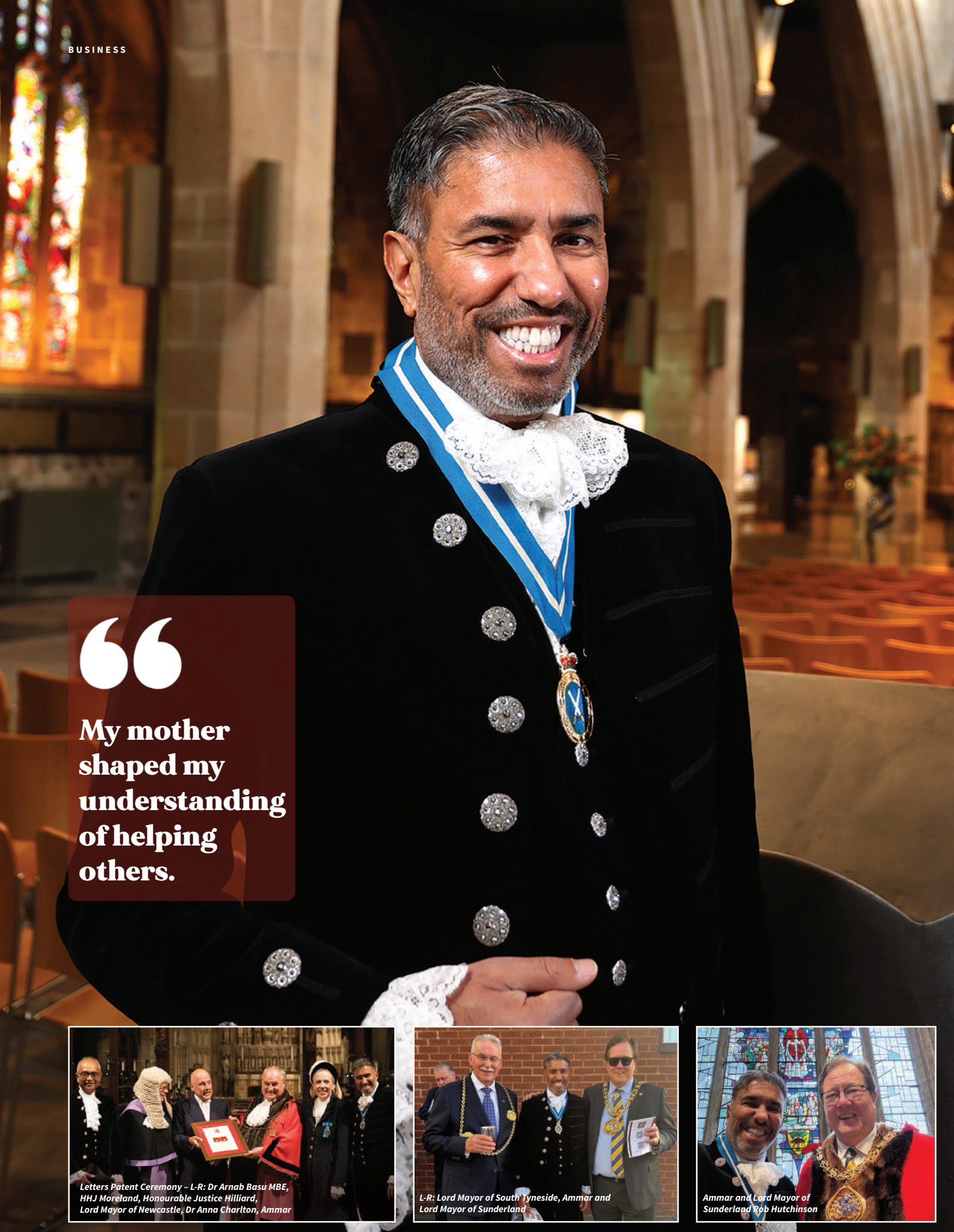
The developing PIE Factory puts this into practice through collaboration between the SME Centre of Excellence, ABC and the PIE charity.

Its offer for 16 to 24-year-olds combines real business challenges with opportunities to gain enterprise or artificial intelligence qualifications and membership of the Institute of Enterprise and Entrepreneurs.

"Confidence grows when experience supports it. We want young people leaving with skills they can demonstrate and a clearer next step."

The connection with community safety matters.

"Education, belonging and a realistic route forward all count. Schools, employers, charities and public services can achieve more when we connect our efforts."



> My mother shaped my understanding of helping others.

Letters Patent Ceremony – L-R: Dr Arnab Basu MBE, HHJ Moreland, Honourable Justice Hilliard, Lord Mayor of Newcastle, Dr Anna Charlton, Ammar

L-R: Lord Mayor of South Tyneside, Ammar and Lord Mayor of Sunderland

Ammar and Lord Mayor of Sunderland Rob Hutchinson

Ammar Mirza CBE



L-R: Ammar Yusuf Mirza CBE, Chaplain Pundit Ji Krishan Attri MBE, Chaplain Rev Dr Peter Adegbie, Lord Lieutenant Lucy Winskell OBE, Chaplain Imam Mohammed Rahman, Jo Curry MBE, past High Sheriff

Inclusion people can experience

His second theme, Inclusion by Default, asks who is missing and what must change so they can participate.

"Saying everyone is welcome is a beginning. Can people find your opportunity, access it and believe it is meant for them? Listening helps us understand what needs to change."

Three chaplains bring that commitment into his year. Imam Mohammed Roziur Rahman, Pundit Krishan Attri MBE and the Reverend Dr Peter Kayode Adegbie contribute Muslim, Hindu and Christian perspectives.

"They bring different traditions and a shared commitment to compassion and service. We can respect one another, learn together and contribute to our communities without sharing the same beliefs."

North East roots. Global relationships

Through ISS, Ammar works with colleagues and partners connecting investment, innovation and internationalisation.

ISS Airview at Newcastle Airport provides a base for businesses exploring overseas markets and international companies considering the region. Logistics infrastructure supports trade, alongside a presence across 12 countries.

ISS India's recent launch in Bengaluru, officially opened by North East Mayor Kim McGuinness during the Great North India Mission, extends those connections in both directions.

"Entering a new market becomes more realistic when somebody you trust understands the landscape. Our teams and partners provide local knowledge and practical support.

"Being a PunjGeordie helps me appreciate what we share across cultures while remaining proud of where I come from."

For him, international reach should create local opportunity.

"A new customer can help a business grow. A partnership brings knowledge. Investment creates jobs. Our region's businesses, universities and people have so much to offer globally."

The people who make it possible

Awarded a CBE in 2014, Ammar also serves as Honorary Colonel of the 101st Northumbrian Regiment Royal Artillery. His own cadet experience helped develop his appreciation of teamwork, responsibility and service.

As a Together TV trustee, he supports community connection and positive social action. Show Business, his weekly Spice FM programme with Jalf Ali, makes enterprise accessible through conversation and shared experience.

He credits his late mother as his greatest influence and his wife and children for their support.

"My mother shaped my understanding of helping others. My family make so much possible. Public commitments involve time they generously share.

"Colleagues, volunteers and partners bring knowledge, energy and care. Every achievement here belongs to many people."

What endures

Across these activities, the connections are clear. Growing businesses need capable people. Young people need experience and opportunity. Communities need trusted institutions and people prepared to serve.

His High Sheriff year offers an opportunity to strengthen those connections and celebrate the work already happening.

"Success means contributions recognised, useful relationships formed and doors opened. Some results will be public. Others will quietly change somebody's life."

So, High Sheriff. Higher Order?

For Ammar, the answer rests in the responsibility entrusted to him.

"You inherit the history for a year. You respect it through how you serve. If the opportunities and partnerships continue afterwards, we will have achieved something worthwhile together."

The uniform catches the eye. What people achieve together is what he hopes will endure.

High Sheriff of Tyne and Wear, Ammar Mirza CBE, is Chair and Founder of ABConnexions & 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.



Ammar in front of MLRS as HS



L-R: Chief Constable Vannessa Jardin, Ammar, Dean Lee Batson



Ammar and Lord Lieutenant Lucy Winskell OBE.

Sweeney Miller Law strengthens Commercial Property team with senior appointment



North East law firm Sweeney Miller Law has further strengthened its Commercial Property team with the appointment of Lydia Armstrong as Senior Associate.

Lydia Armstrong brings significant commercial property experience to the firm, having spent more than 10 years practising at a transatlantic law firm before joining Sweeney Miller Law.

Her appointment brings additional senior-level expertise to the firm's growing Commercial Property team and forms part of Sweeney Miller Law's wider investment in its specialist legal services across the North East and beyond.

Based at the firm's Sunderland office, Lydia joins the team following a number of recent internal promotions. Earlier this year, Matthew Smith was promoted to Senior Associate and Shahar Sadat to Associate Solicitor as part of a wide series of senior promotions across the firm.

Knight Frank expands Newcastle building consultancy team

Knight Frank has appointed a new, senior building consultancy professional to its Newcastle office to support a buoyant order book.

Taryn Wallace, who has over eight years' experience, joins as senior surveyor from Hollis. She is also a RICS APC assessor.

Taryn will be carrying out building surveys and project managing developments across the North East, including schemes such as the refurbishment of the iconic Toffee Factory in Ouseburn, Newcastle.

The appointment is a personal and professional milestone for Taryn, who has had her sights set on joining Knight Frank since completing her Building Surveying degree.

Taking a proactive approach earlier this year, Taryn approached Tom Jackson, associate partner at Knight Frank, to discuss potential opportunities within the growing Newcastle team.

"I'd always wanted to work for Knight Frank and applied for a placement role with them



back in 2018 whilst I was at uni," said Taryn.

"The strength of the team was a big factor in my decision to ask Knight Frank for a job. I've come across almost all the North East building consultancy teams previously and they were always great to deal with and have a fantastic reputation, locally. What also stood out to me was the longevity of the wider Newcastle team; loads of colleagues have spent decades with the business, which speaks volumes about Knight Frank as an employer.



Tax specialist Emma Harrison promoted to Senior Manager at RG

Ryecroft Glenton (RG), the North of England-based business advisory firm, has promoted Chartered Accountant and Chartered Tax Adviser Emma Harrison to Senior Manager in recognition of her technical expertise, client-focused approach and growing leadership role within the firm.

Emma joined RG's Accounts and Business Services team as an Assistant in September 2019, following the completion of her bachelor's degree in psychology.

She subsequently completed the combined ACA and CTA professional qualifications, becoming both a Chartered Accountant and Chartered Tax Adviser. She was promoted to Senior in January 2023 and Manager in October 2024, before progressing to Senior Manager in October 2026.

In her role, Emma manages a portfolio of clients, supports colleagues within RG's Personal Tax team and specialises in providing accounts and tax services for trusts.

Alongside her work at RG, Emma is branch chair of the North East England Branch of the Chartered Institute of Taxation and Association of Taxation Technicians, contributing to the development of the tax profession across the region.

Emma said: "RG has given me opportunities to develop throughout my career, from supporting me through the ACA and CTA qualifications to enabling me to take on greater responsibility for clients and within the wider team."

Peter Glenton, Partner at RG, said: "Emma has demonstrated an exceptional commitment to her professional development since joining RG and has become a highly respected member of the firm.

"Achieving both the ACA and CTA qualifications is a significant accomplishment, and Emma has combined that technical expertise with an excellent understanding of her clients and the issues that matter to them.

TALENTHEADS
RECRUITMENT. JUST NOT AS YOU KNOW IT...
CONTACT US
0191 300 8688
www.talentheads.co.uk
hello@talentheads.co.uk

Getting a GP appointment in the UK has quite literally become a battle.



How 1Stop4aGP can help

It's very simple. You or your employees get 24/7 access to fully qualified, GMC-registered, UK-based GPs by phone or video. There's no waiting rooms and no two-week waits. Just a call to a dedicated helpline, and a doctor calls them back at a convenient time.

There's no time limit on consultations, so your team can talk through whatever they need to properly. And if a prescription is needed, it can be delivered directly, often the very next day.

You get less absence of course, fewer disruptions and a healthier team.

SCAN ME

Give your employees or your family a practical way to seek medical advice when they need it.
Scan the QR code for prices & packages.

1Stop4aGP

Your employees could benefit from:

24/7 GP Access
from only £15 per year

via Phone/Video
UK Based GP's

SAEPIO
INSURANCE BROKERS

SME
CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE





Good luck to all our finalists.

Below are just some of this year's finalists. Join us on 11th November to discover the full line-up and celebrate their achievements.



Abbas Raza



Amar Chotai



Angelee Pandit



Claire Robinson



Councillor Khaled Musharraf



Mehru-Nisa Shah



Nabeela Ali



Roya Ghassemi



Shabnam Ali



Zak Hussain

The ABC Annual Awards is back at the Grand Hotel Gosforth Park on 11th November 2026. Eighteen years in, it's still the only night in the North East to celebrate inclusion, where a standing ovation and a proper belly laugh happen about ten seconds apart.

Corporate tables are filling up fast.

Book your tables or grab your tickets using the QR code.

Connect@abcconnexions.org

www.abconnexions.org

SHINE

ABC AWARDS 2026

THE GREAT NORTH EAST CELEBRATION

North East Mayoral Strategic Authority | Kim McGuinness North East Mayor

11th November 2026

The Grand Hotel, Gosforth Park



Jabir Ahmed

Fazals Sweets

Genee

Gentoo

My Delhi

Oseyo

Talentheads

Togther for Children

Autopark

Dancecity

Our partners and sponsors setting the standard this year

A big thank you to the organisations already behind the ABC Awards 2026. These are the businesses happy to put their name to inclusion and say it out loud.

North East Mayoral Strategic Authority | Kim McGuinness North East Mayor

Chadwick Lawrence Solicitors

ISS Airview

ammar m

SHINE

Spice FM

PIE Primary Inspiration through Enterprise

together. Loans, mortgages & finance.

SME Centre of Excellence

SAEPIO Insurance Brokers







Beyond the Hype

As Gold Sponsor of the Newcastle and North of England Law Society for 2026, Jungle IT was delighted to support and attend the Beyond the Hype: AI in Legal Practice seminar.

The event brought together legal professionals from across the region to explore how firms can adopt AI in a practical, meaningful way.

During the event, Jungle shared insights on how firms can get more from the technology they already have. Rather than focusing solely on new AI tools, the session explored how stronger adoption, better processes and a clearer understanding of existing systems can help firms improve efficiency, reduce frustration and create a stronger foundation for future innovation.




















COMPASS
From JUNGLE IT
Make technology a business advantage.
Start with compass.
The right decisions today can make your business better prepared for tomorrow. More effective. More adaptable. Ready to take advantage of what technology, AI and automation make possible, while staying focused on what matters most to your business.
Compass is Jungle's strategic framework for finding the way forward. It gives you a clear view of how well your people, technology and business ambitions are aligned.
So you know where to focus, where to start and how to turn that alignment into momentum.
Book your 60-Minute Compass Session

Facing reality

When co-founder David Broom exited financial services firm River Birch Newman, he expected to feel a mixture of relief and fulfilment. In a frank interview with Northern Insight, the Tyneside-based entrepreneur admits the reality was very different.

What were the short-term goals when you launched River Birch Newman?

We hoped to open up doors for ordinary people to meet with financial advisers and to gain the same benefits that people with a £5m investment pot would enjoy. One of the greatest things you can do is remove stress from someone. It's not necessarily all about wealth generation and accumulation of money — sometimes it's about reduction of stress and anxiety brought about by financial insecurity. That was important to me.

Why did you decide to exit River Birch Newman following such a successful post-launch period?

Things move fast in the financial services world and risk happens fast. My other businesses — Fintegrate and B7 — are growing fast and I realised that I couldn't continue to juggle so many balls. RBN deserved full-time attention from everyone involved. We opened up discussions with potential buyers and, in the spring of this year, we had offers on the table. As an entrepreneur, I became very excited at the prospect of freeing up time so that I could focus on the growth of B7 and Fintegrate. But what happened between that point and the sale was completely unexpected. What I thought would be a rich learning experience was brutal.

Looking back, do you feel you were a little naïve?

Maybe. But when you see people announcing that they've sold their business, it's always good news. There are smiling faces and handshakes and, to all intents and purposes, it's a positive story. It should be but, quite frankly, that's rubbish because all those pictures actually show are the tip of the iceberg. It's like you only watch the handing out of the trophy in the World Cup final — you don't see the extra time and the penalties and the blood, the sweat, the tears, the training, the time away from family, the pain it took to get there and all the trials and tribulations behind the scenes. You just see the trophy being handed out. That's nonsense. The reason you celebrate the trophy is because of everything you go through. What I didn't want to be was that guy who said 'we've just sold a business, look how amazing we are'.

How were you affected in the weeks leading up to the sale?

There were numerous occasions — particularly in the last four weeks — in the run-up to exit where I would sit in the car and I just couldn't bring myself to go into the office. There were times when my business partner at B7, Phil, had to come into the car and sit with me because I was in tears. Crying in front of your team is not something that you tend to do easily. I've never done that and there were times where I just couldn't stop crying.

Was it impacting upon your day-to-day life at work and at home?

I had to put on a brave face in front of customers, in front of clients, in front of the team and in front of my family. I was bottling it up. It was the most horrible experience. Selling a business ordinarily means you earn some money and I thought, heading into the exit, that that would be one of the biggest wins. It's been nice to bring money back into my other entities and to bring money into my household but I bought a bottle of champagne on October 8 — when the deal completed — and I went home and I put it in the fridge. It's still there now, four weeks on, because I've just not felt like celebrating.

Will you emerge stronger from the experience?

First of all, it's very unlikely that any future exits I may be involved in will be anywhere near as complex as the RBN sale. I know the whole experience will make me stronger but when it was happening I only ever felt weaker. Now, I'm much more present again, I'm starting to sleep better and it feels like there's light at the end of the tunnel. I'm beginning to feel less anxious when my phone starts to vibrate — during the sale I convinced myself that every text and every call would be the bad news my brain had told me to expect. I was so exhausted that I couldn't imagine a positive outcome.

Why have you decided to give such an honest appraisal of a career-defining experience?

I've had no end of people texting me and phoning me and every time I speak to someone they're saying 'well done' and 'congratulations'. But I can't be that fraud that sits here as a businessman and says 'yes I'm going to take all those plaudits' because it's nonsense.

If I sit here and say that I'm an entrepreneur who built a business and exited — and wear that as a badge of honour — then I'm doing myself a massive injustice. I just can't ignore the pain, the hurt and the problems that I've had to face up to over the last six months. I want people in the same position to know that I support them and that I understand.

weareb7.com
fintegrate.co.uk



> **There were times where I just couldn't stop crying.**

David Broom







Annual race day for Central Employment

Central Employment's annual race day at Newcastle Racecourse was once again a fantastic occasion, bringing together clients, partners and colleagues for an afternoon of great racing and even better company.

The event provided the perfect opportunity to thank those who continue to support and work alongside us, while celebrating the relationships that are central to everything we do.

A brilliant day was enjoyed by all, and with ambitious plans taking shape, there's an exciting 2027 ahead for Central Employment.
































Our *Lettings Experts* are Here to *Guide the Way*

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



www.sandersonyoung.co.uk

SANDERSON YOUNG

Highfield Road

Westerhope

Offers Over £565,000

4 Bedrooms

Semi-Detached

3 Bathrooms









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

Tenure: Freehold. Council Tax: Band E. EPC: C

Something is changing on the Tyne

Introducing The Moorings at Kelly's Wharf



A new chapter is beginning on Hebburn's waterfront, with the launch of The Moorings: nine detached, four-bedroom riverside homes forming the first residential phase of the Kelly's Wharf masterplan.

Available from £550,000, these contemporary homes bring together generous living spaces, carefully selected interiors and private balconies overlooking the River Tyne.

Plots 1–3 are available to reserve now, with completion expected in February 2027. For buyers, this is the first opportunity to become part of a new waterfront neighbourhood on a site with a remarkable story.







A waterfront with history

The former Hawthorn Leslie Shipyard helped shape both Hebburn and the wider region. Established by Andrew Leslie in the 1850s, the yard attracted skilled workers and their families, creating a community whose identity remains closely connected to the river.

It went on to build naval vessels during both World Wars and passenger ships for P&O during the growth of ocean travel in the 1920s. By the Second World War, the company employed more than 4,000 people.

Today, Kelly's Wharf begins the site's next chapter, with The Moorings introducing homes to a stretch of waterfront once defined by shipbuilding, engineering and craftsmanship.

Homes shaped by the river

The architecture takes a considered approach to its setting. Warm buff brickwork, gabled rooflines and understated grey detailing give the homes a distinctive character, while generous glazing makes the most of their riverside position.

Each home extends across three floors, providing approximately 1,690 sq ft of accommodation. On the ground floor, an open-plan kitchen and living area opens towards a private garden, while a separate dining room offers space for entertaining or family meals.

The first-floor riverside lounge is a particular highlight. Opening onto a private glass-fronted balcony, it provides an elevated outlook across the Tyne: somewhere to enjoy a morning coffee, watch the river's changing activity or settle in for the evening.

Four bedrooms are arranged across the upper floors, including two with en-suite facilities, alongside a family bathroom.

Considered details throughout

Kitchens feature Porcelanosa cabinetry, KRION worktops and Siemens appliances, complemented by Porcelanosa and Noken bathroom fittings.

Practical features include dedicated utility provision, private parking, EV charging for two cars per home and roof-integrated solar panels. An automatic gated entrance completes the development.

Beyond the doorstep, Hebburn's shops, schools and community facilities sit alongside established riverside walks, with Metro connections providing access to Newcastle and South Shields.

With just nine homes available, The Moorings offers an opportunity to be part of Kelly's Wharf from the beginning. Be part of the journey.

To request the brochure or discuss reserving a home, contact Sanderson Young's New Homes team on 0191 213 0033 or email newhomes@sandersonyoung.co.uk

SANDERSON YOUNG **Andrew Craig**

SANDERSON YOUNG

Springfield Avenue

Eighton Banks, Gateshead

Guide Price £615,000

4 Bedrooms

Semi-Detached

2 Bathrooms







Hugo Davison
0191 213 0033
hugo.davison@sandersonyoung.co.uk

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

Danemead

Melbury Road, Newcastle upon Tyne

SANDERSON YOUNG

Guide Price £3.25 Million

6 Bedrooms

Detached

6 Bathrooms







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

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


Dr David Cliff

Risk, Opportunity and the Courage to Decide

By Dr David Cliff, Gedanken

Risk is often discussed as though organisations should simply reduce it. Yet every meaningful decision carries uncertainty, and within uncertainty lie both threat and opportunity. The leadership task is not to eliminate risk, but to understand it well enough to act deliberately.

All organisations encounter risk. Some avoid it. Some run towards it. Some accept and live with it. Others reduce, transfer or mitigate it. Most do all of these things at different times.

What matters is that the response is deliberate.

Retreat is a decision. Charging ahead is a decision. Holding position is a decision. Doing nothing is also a decision, with consequences of its own.

Leaders cannot escape that logic.

This is where risk appetite becomes useful. It is not recklessness, nor simply an invitation to "take more chances". It is about how much uncertainty an organisation is prepared to tolerate in pursuit of a worthwhile outcome.

Risk only makes complete sense alongside potential reward.

A new market, unfamiliar client, investment or different way of working may look threatening from one perspective and full of possibility from another. What one person sees as instability, another may see as adaptability. What feels uncomfortable may sometimes be where opportunity resides.

But capricious risk-taking is not courage.

The Greek philosopher Democritus is credited with the observation that boldness may begin an action, but fortune determines how it ends. It is a useful corrective to the romantic idea that bravery alone produces success.

Machiavelli offers another useful tension. At times he argues that it is better to be impetuous than excessively cautious. Yet he also uses the metaphor of flooding: prudent people build banks and defences while conditions allow, so that when the waters rise their destructive force can be contained.

Those ideas belong together.

There are occasions when leaders must act before every fact is available. But decisiveness is different from impulsiveness. Louis Pasteur captures the balance neatly: chance favours the prepared mind.

Preparation does not remove uncertainty. It helps us recognise opportunity, judge consequences and distinguish considered enterprise from gambling.

The productive space lies somewhere between inertia and caprice.

This is also why risk management should not become the exclusive territory of registers, controls and spreadsheets. It requires conversation.

Leaders need to ask: What are we actually worried about? What assumptions sit behind that concern? What might happen if we proceed? What might happen if we do not? What opportunity might sit within the uncertainty making us uncomfortable?

Trust matters here. People are more likely to raise difficult information when they believe they can do so without punishment or embarrassment. Risks concealed because nobody wants to be the bearer of bad news rarely become smaller.

The same applies externally. Customers and suppliers often share uncertainty. Mature relationships involve more than transferring risk through contracts or protecting oneself through disclaimers. Sometimes the more effective and ethical response is to discuss openly what is known, what remains uncertain and how it will be managed together.

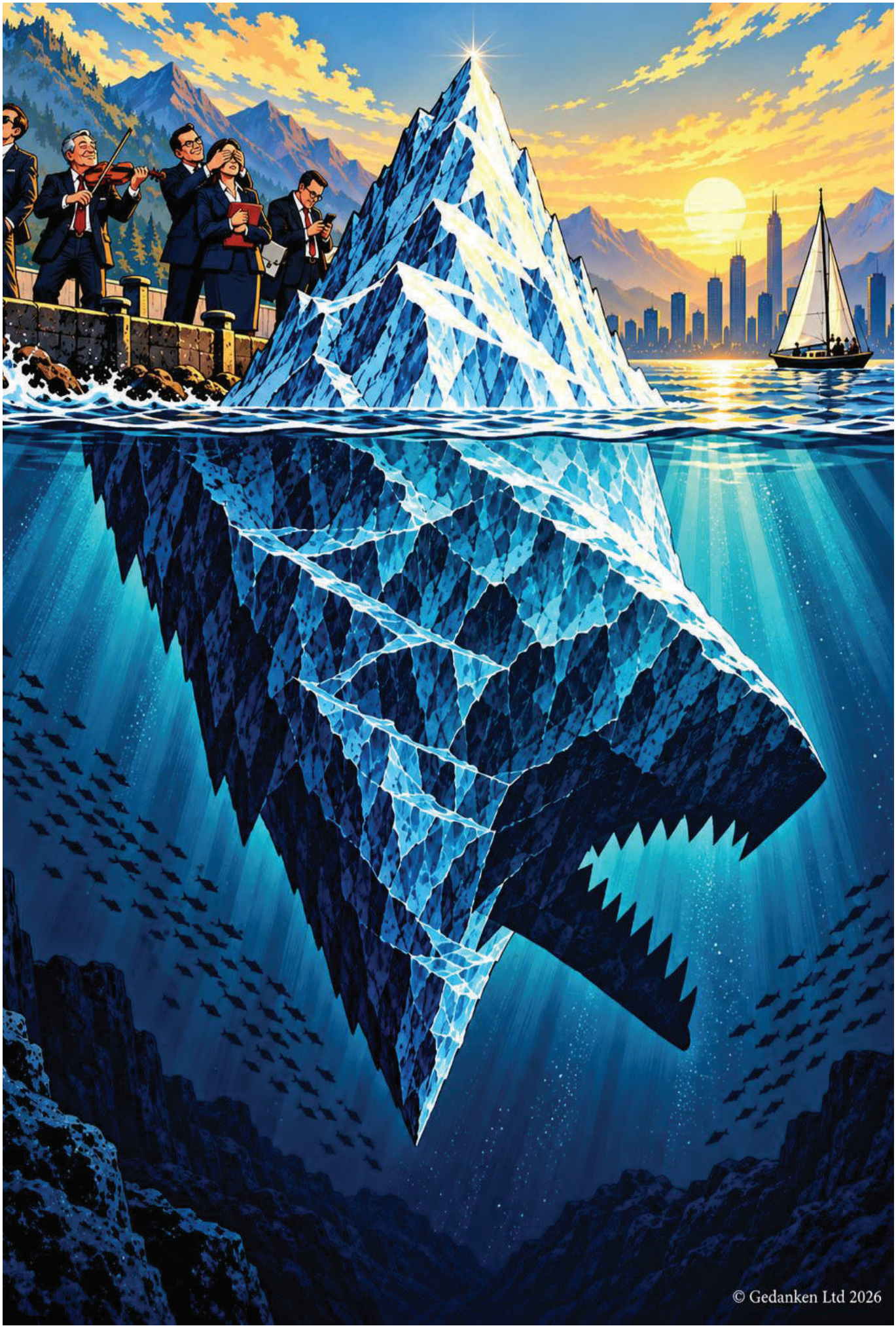
Risk should not simply be pushed towards whoever has the least bargaining power.

Good risk management therefore involves judgement rather than fear. It means distinguishing between risks to avoid, mitigate, tolerate or embrace because the opportunity justifies them.

The most dangerous organisation may not be the one that takes risks, but the one so preoccupied with avoiding them that it stops noticing opportunities passing by.

Leadership means making decisions without perfect knowledge. The challenge is not to manufacture certainty where none exists, but to understand uncertainty well enough to act responsibly within it.

www.gedanken.co.uk


© Gedanken Ltd 2026



Highway maintenance specialist enjoys rapid growth

North East specialist highway maintenance contractor, Galvmac has received a £300K investment from the North East Elevate Fund, managed by FW Capital, to assist its rapid growth.

Based in Newcastle, Galvmac was established in 2023. The firm delivers pothole repair and road surface maintenance services using Elastomac, a rubberised mastic asphalt (RMA) that uses recycled rubber tyres. The combination of performance and sustainability has attracted the attention of local authorities across the UK. Elastomac fills defects without excavation, bonds to the existing road surface and creates a durable, waterproof layer.

The investment from the North East Elevate Fund is assisting Galvmac's fast growth which comes off the back of significant new contract wins with a number of County Councils including Durham, Westmorland & Furness, East Midlands/Nottingham area as well as working with Balfour Beatty in Lincolnshire and M Group in Hampshire. Further contracts are being secured across the UK and new jobs have been created with up to 20 new roles.

The North East Elevate Fund 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.

Barry Gill, Galvmac said: "We started the business in 2023 after identifying the benefits of using RMA above tarmac to repair pot holes. We undertook a number of test projects and on the back of the successful results we have secured a number of UK wide council contracts. We are also proud to employ our own team and are investing in our people with the creation of new jobs and also a big focus on training and offering apprenticeships to develop our workforce. The funding from the North East Elevate Fund has given us the platform from which to meet the demands of our fast growth and has put the working capital in place to help us to buy materials and manage cashflow effectively.

"Working with FW Capital has been a game-changer for our rapid growth. They didn't just provide the funding right when we needed it; they truly understood our vision and acted as a strategic partner every step of the way. The entire process was remarkably fast and seamless, ensuring our capital was secured precisely when our momentum needed it."

Alex Gent, Senior Investment Executive at FW Capital added: "Galvmac is experiencing rapid growth with a surge of opportunities around the UK. The funding in place is ensuring they have are well positioned to meet this demand. It's also great to see the team's focus on investing in their people and creating jobs locally. Galvmac has a fantastic sustainability focus using recycled tyres in its Elastomac product. It's encouraging to see more councils across the UK recognising the benefits of this innovative approach."



Nirvana Europe Accelerates Digital Transformation with NPIF II – NEL Investment

A sports travel business founded as the official travel and accommodation partner to the Great North Run is set to accelerate its next phase of growth following a six-figure investment from NPIF II – NEL Debt Finance, managed by NEL Fund Managers as part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II (NPIF II).

Founded in 1999, Nirvana Europe has grown into a specialist event travel, accommodation, and logistics provider, with long-standing relationships across the endurance sports sector and a strong global presence in triathlon and IRONMAN travel.

NEL first invested in Nirvana Europe in 2024 to support its expansion into North America, providing the business with the backing to accelerate its growth in the region. Since then, North America has grown to represent a significant share of Nirvana's turnover, while the number of events the business supports each year has increased from 70 to 180 and its geographic reach has expanded to customers across 120 countries.

The latest NPIF II - NEL investment will support a major transformation programme focused on technology, data, and commercial development, with the finance being used to introduce a new sales and booking platform, strengthen marketing and data capabilities, expand the team and create capacity to pursue new partnerships, events and commercial opportunities.

The strategic programme roll-out will help Nirvana Europe build a more scalable business, improve operational efficiency, and enhance the customer experience, creating a stronger platform for long-term growth.

Nigel Morris, Managing Director at Nirvana Europe says: "We're investing significantly in our technology, our people, and our commercial capability, which will allow us to operate more efficiently, make better use of our data and ultimately deliver an even better experience for our customers.

"We've had a really positive experience working with NEL. From the outset, the team took the time to properly understand Nirvana, our ambitions and what we are trying to achieve over the next few years. This investment gives us the ability to accelerate a transformation that is already well underway across the business.

"We see a significant opportunity to grow Nirvana over the coming years, both through our existing partnerships and by winning new business and having NEL supporting us on that journey gives us a really strong platform from which to do that."

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

www.BEFNorthEast.org

bef North East

Why a recent court ruling should prompt LLPs to review partner remuneration and governance

By Martin Hobson, Partner, Professional Services Team, Clive Owen LLP

The recent UK Supreme Court judgment in HMRC v BlueCrest Capital Management (UK) LLP is, in my view, the most significant development in LLP taxation since the salaried members rules were introduced in 2014.



Martin Hobson

While the decision provides welcome clarity in some areas, it also raises important questions for many professional firms operating as Limited Liability Partnerships. For legal practices, accountancy firms, PR firms, consultants and other LLPs, now is the right time to review whether existing remuneration and governance arrangements still support the intended tax treatment of members.

The salaried members legislation was introduced to prevent individuals who are, in reality, employees from benefiting from the more favourable tax treatment associated with self-employment. Under the legislation, an LLP member is treated as an employee for tax purposes if three statutory conditions are all met.

These conditions assess whether the majority of a member's remuneration amounts to disguised salary, whether they have significant influence over the affairs of the LLP, and whether they have made a sufficient capital contribution relative to their expected remuneration.

In the BlueCrest case, there was no dispute that the first and third conditions were satisfied. The key issue was the second condition – whether the members concerned exercised "significant influence" over the affairs of the LLP and the Supreme Court ultimately concluded that they did not.

For me, the most important aspect of the judgment is the Court's interpretation of what 'significant influence' actually means. It confirmed that such influence must arise from legally enforceable rights and responsibilities contained within the LLP agreement, or delegated under powers created by that agreement. Informal influence, professional seniority, technical expertise or commercial importance to the business are not enough on their own.

That represents a much narrower interpretation than many firms have relied upon in the past. Historically, some LLPs have looked at how a member operates within the business when assessing whether they had significant influence. The Supreme Court has made it clear that this is no longer sufficient.

In practical terms, if an LLP wishes to rely on the significant influence exemption, those governance rights need to be clearly documented within its legal framework. The wording of the LLP agreement has become considerably more important.

I don't believe this judgment means firms need to undertake wholesale restructuring. However, it should encourage them to revisit whether their existing arrangements genuinely reflect how members are remunerated and how decisions are made.

In particular, firms should consider whether profit-sharing arrangements are genuinely linked to the overall performance of the LLP rather than predominantly to individual or team performance. They should also review whether governance rights are appropriately documented, whether members' capital contributions remain sufficient under the legislation, and whether different classes of members have remuneration structures that accurately reflect their responsibilities and commercial risk.

Many professional firms now have a range of member categories, from equity partners to fixed-share and junior partners. The BlueCrest ruling reinforces the importance of ensuring these distinctions are supported by robust legal documentation as well as day-to-day practice.

Ultimately, the judgment is a reminder that tax status is determined not simply by how a business operates in reality, but by the legal rights and obligations that underpin those arrangements.

For LLPs that have not revisited their agreements since the salaried members rules came into force more than a decade ago, the BlueCrest decision provides a timely opportunity to review whether their governance and remuneration structures remain fit for purpose.

As LLP ownership models continue to evolve, I expect the judgment to become an important benchmark for firms and advisers alike. Those who take the opportunity to review their arrangements now will be better placed to understand the implications of the ruling and ensure their structures continue to reflect both the legislation and the way their business is intended to operate.

cliveowen.com



Alphagraphics targets growth following strategic acquisition of judges

A Tees Valley print and marketing company has reported strong summer trading following a strategic acquisition backed by NPIF II – NEL Debt Finance, managed by NEL Fund Managers as part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II (NPIF II).

Alphagraphics, an award-winning design, print and marketing specialist based in Stockton, acquired complementary printing business Judges as part of a strategic move to broaden its offer, reach new customers and stabilise seasonal trading.

The acquisition of Judges was supported by a six-figure investment from NPIF II - NEL, as part of a larger funding round, which has also helped fund further growth plans, including the recruitment of a sales director and the launch of a targeted ecommerce platform. The move is expected to increase Alphagraphics' annual turnover by 15%.

Founded in 1902, Judges has built a long-standing reputation for quality products, including printed gifts, postcards and souvenirs.

Judges' operations have now been integrated into Alphagraphics' Stockton facility, streamlining processes and reducing operating costs. With seasonal fluctuations now more balanced, the business has also reduced its reliance on temporary staff, supporting a larger permanent workforce.

The deal is the latest in a series of acquisitions by Alphagraphics. Four years ago, the company acquired former long-standing client Class Fundraising, before adding the sign and engraving division of fellow Stockton-on-Tees business NSign earlier this year.

Andrew Dalton, Managing Director at Alphagraphics, said: "The acquisition of Judges is an important step in our long-term growth strategy, bringing together two well-established businesses with complementary strengths and shared values around quality, service and customer relationships.

"Bringing Judges into Alphagraphics gives us a stronger platform to reach new customers, broaden our product range and create a more balanced trading profile across the year. NEL's support helped us move quickly and confidently, and we're excited about the opportunities this creates for the business, our team and our customers."

Jane Siddle, Senior Investment Executive at NEL, led on the investment. Jane comments: "Alphagraphics is a strong example of an ambitious business using strategic acquisition to build scale, strengthen its market position and create a more resilient operating model.

"The management team has a clear plan for growth, supported by a track record of successful acquisitions and a strong understanding of its customer base. We're pleased to support Alphagraphics as it continues to invest in its future and expand its presence across the North East and beyond."

Strategic NPIF II – NEL investment supports next phase of growth at Venda Search

Gateshead-based Venda Search Ltd has secured a strategic investment from NPIF II – NEL Smaller Loans Fund, managed by NEL Fund Managers as part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II (NPIF II), to support the next stage of its growth journey.

The investment will help the specialist recruitment business accelerate its next stage of growth by expanding into a new market and launching two new client service offerings that have been in development over the last six months.

The funding has also supported significant investment in the company's technology infrastructure, enhancing its tech stack to improve operational efficiency, strengthen service delivery and create the foundations for long-term recurring revenue streams.

Founded in 2018 and headquartered in Gateshead, Venda Search is a specialist recruitment partner serving the US power market, connecting engineering, project delivery, sales and leadership talent with businesses operating across transmission and distribution, critical power and data centre infrastructure sectors.

The investment follows a record financial year for the business, during which it surpassed a number of growth targets while continuing to expand its teams in both the UK and South Africa.

James Owen, Director at Venda Search, said: "The NEL investment comes at a key point in our growth journey. Alongside establishing a desk focused on a new market, we have spent the last six months developing two new service offerings that will help us build longer-term client relationships and create recurring revenue streams within the business.



"Delivering these plans has required significant investment in upgrading our technology infrastructure. By doing so, we are ensuring our consultants have the tools they need to operate at the highest level, allowing us to continue raising the standard of service we provide to both clients and candidates.

"This year has been about putting the right foundations in place for the future, and this investment helps ensure we are well positioned to continue building on that momentum."





RG Corporate Finance named Corporate Finance Advisory Firm of the Year

RG Corporate Finance (RGCF) has been named Corporate Finance Advisory Firm of the Year at the 2026 Insider North East Dealmakers Awards, as the business marks its 15th anniversary and another record year.

The Newcastle-headquartered, national corporate finance boutique received the award at a ceremony held at Hilton Newcastle Gateshead on 24 September, recognising a 12-month period in which RGCF advised on a wide range of significant transactions involving UK and international buyers.

Recent transactions completed by RGCF include advising the shareholders of Team Valley-based JR Holland Food Services on its sale to San Francisco food technology business GrubMarket, the US group's first UK acquisition. RGCF also advised London-based employment services and skills provider Get Set UK on its sale to international public service programme provider Palladium.

The firm has also recently advised the senior leadership team of Leeds-based workforce management and compliance specialist Nutral on a seven-figure management buyout. Funded by NEL Fund Managers, the deal saw founders Alex Gosney and Ben Wardleworth secure full ownership of Nutral following the exit of Human Capital Investment Group.

The significant M&A activity spans sectors in which RGCF has significant specialist knowledge and credentials, including human capital, technology, professional services, industrials and healthcare. The firm, which provides M&A, Financial & Tax DD and Transactional Tax advice, combines that sector focus with extensive buyer and target company research, identifying organisations whose strategic priorities, capabilities and appetite make them credible potential acquirers, or targets. This approach has helped RGCF connect UK businesses with buyers and investors from the US, mainland Europe and other international markets, whilst helping identify suitable off-market acquisition targets for acquisitive clients.

Carl Swansbury, Partner and Head of Corporate Finance at RGCF, said: "We have had a phenomenal 12 months, advising on a number of large and complex domestic and cross-border transactions. To win this award in our 15th anniversary year is brilliant recognition for every member of the team and the focus, hard work and commitment they bring to delivering the best possible outcomes for our clients.

"Completing another record year fee income and EBITDA-wise makes the award particularly significant. It reflects the trust placed in us by our clients and professional friends, and the strength and depth of the team we have built."

RGCF was founded by Carl in 2011 and has grown into a 22-strong, full-service corporate finance advisory business. It supports owner-managed businesses, private equity and sponsor-backed companies, family offices, corporates and management teams on company sales and acquisitions, equity and debt raising, refinancing, management buyouts and buyins, along with the provision of strategic advice.

Carl added: "Our sector knowledge and heavily invested research capabilities are central to the way we approach a transaction. We invest time in understanding where the strongest strategic fit exists and in finding the right potential strategic buyers, financial investors or acquisition targets, wherever they are based. The international reach we have due to our inhouse research capabilities and being a member firm within Prime Global, one of the world's largest associations of independent accounting and business advisory firms, helps us create highly competitive processes for our clients, whilst ensuring the right motivated, strategic partner, or custodian is found. "The macroeconomic and geopolitical market has remained volatile and uncertain, which makes this recognition even more rewarding. We are proud to have built a nationally active and internationally connected corporate finance advisory boutique from the North East, and we remain very ambitious about the next stage of RGCF's growth."

ryecroftglenton.com









Ryecroft Glenton 2026 Autumn Drinks Party

On Thursday, 8th October 2026, Ryecroft Glenton were delighted to host their Annual Autumn Drinks Party at the stylish Banyan Bar & Grill in Newcastle.

This year's event brought together many valued clients, professional contacts and friends for an evening of great conversation, networking and celebration






























RAFFLE PRIZE
£100
Fenwick





Tax expert expands team

Martin Wardle, founder of TH Ward Tax Consultancy, has recruited a new team member and taken on his first apprentice as demand for advice continues to grow following the introduction of HMRC's Making Tax Digital programme.

Martin launched TH Ward in 2025 after more than 30 years working in tax, a career he entered through a Youth Training Scheme placement in the early 1990s. The move has proved successful, with the consultancy now advising hundreds of clients particularly landlords and property owners. 90% of his clients are in the region with other landlords based both nationally and overseas.

However, Martin believes many landlords remain unaware of their obligations under Making Tax Digital, which requires qualifying taxpayers to maintain digital records and submit quarterly updates to HMRC.

"This is a change that has been talked about for almost a decade, yet there are still huge numbers of people who either don't know it applies to them or don't understand what they need to do," he said.

"For years people have completed one tax return annually. Now many will have to use software and report quarterly instead. That's a major shift and it's causing genuine confusion."

Martin says landlords are particularly affected by a wave of new legislation and compliance requirements, with many seeking advice for the first time.

"Some people actively choose to become landlords, while others inherit a property unexpectedly and suddenly find themselves responsible for tax returns and compliance requirements they know very little about," he said.



EMG Solicitors celebrates new rankings

EMG Solicitors is celebrating after excelling in the Chambers UK Guide 2027. The firm's Court of Protection Health & Welfare (COPHW) team has been ranked for the first time, at Band 4 and its Court of Protection Property & Affairs (COPPA) team has retained its excellent Band 1 ranking.

Chambers is a leading legal directory that recognises and ranks outstanding law firms, solicitors and legal teams across the UK.

The COPHW team has been praised as 'very responsive and balanced in their approach' and 'genuine specialists in the field'.

COPHW Director & Solicitor, Eilish Ferry-Kennington, has been ranked Up and Coming. She is described as 'excellent in the health and welfare field' and having 'judgement and wisdom beyond her years.' Lydia Dunford-Anderson, COPHW Associate Solicitor, is ranked Associate to Watch and described as 'very attentive getting the advice right and coordinating experts.'

Richard Shearing, Senior Partner in the COPPA team, is also newly ranked at Band 4. He is praised for his 'ability to deal with complex and sensitive situations involving vulnerable clients in a calm and structured way'.

The Court of Protection Property & Affairs team led by Emma Gaudern, Jemma Morland, Kate Edwards and Jane Bennett, received praise for being 'technically excellent and empathetic towards the clients and their families' and 'extremely diligent'.

Several EMG colleagues have also retained their individual rankings.

Emma Gaudern, EMG's CEO, is ranked Band 1 and described as a 'leading professional in her field' and 'an excellent lawyer'.

Jemma Morland, COPPA Director and EMG co-founder, is ranked Band 3. Chambers notes that 'she is always ready to roll up her sleeves and engage with clients and their families'.

Jane Bennett, Executive Director in COPPA, is Band 3 ranked, with one testimonial stating she is 'always brought into difficult cases because she is just so good'.

Rebecca Sparrow, Leadership Director in COPPA, is Band 4 and described as being 'very good with clients' and 'an excellent lawyer who is really on top of the law'.

Natasha Molloy, Leadership Director in COPPA, has retained her Band 4 ranking. Chambers describes her as 'extremely knowledgeable and an excellent team leader'.

Sophie Auckland, Partner – Brain Injury Team in COPPA, has been named Up and Coming by Chambers once again, with praise for being 'extremely efficient, personable and empathetic'.

Sue McArthur, Senior Associate, Solicitor and Mediator in our Family Law and Mediation team, has received the Spotlight ranking again this year. Chambers notes: 'Sue is experienced in what she does'.

RMT Accountants investing in the future

RMT Accountants & Business Advisors is investing in its future development with the recruitment of five new early career associates.

Harry Fletcher, Grace Robinson, Finn Rogers, Ellie Brown and Joey Macdonald have all taken up new roles with the Gosforth-headquartered firm. Harry and Grace have both joined RMT's Audit service line after graduating the University of Warwick and Newcastle University respectively. Finn also joined the Audit team on completion of his A Levels at Cramlington Learning Village Sixth Form, while after finishing their A Levels at Prudhoe Community High School and Gosforth Academy respectively, Ellie and Joey are now part of RMT's Accounting team.



Each new recruit will be working towards their professional qualifications while receiving on-the-job coaching and support from their managers and the practice's senior team. The new recruits will also take part in the Sumer Academy, a group-wide development programme designed to support them up to the point of qualifying.

Helping ambitious businesses thrive

Accountancy, business & wealth advice at every stage.

See how we can support your journey.



ROBSON / LAIDLER

robson-laidler.co.uk
wanttoknowmore@robson-laidler.co.uk
0191 281 8191

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



IS YOUR BUSINESS TOO COMPLICATED?

Running a business has never been simple, but are we making it harder than it needs to be? There's software for everything, along with dashboards, reports, meetings and processes. All designed to make us more efficient. Yet somehow, business owners seem busier than ever. Here are three ways to keep things manageable.

1. Measure what matters.

Modern software can produce more information than most owners could ever need. But having dozens of reports doesn't mean you're making better decisions. Pick a few numbers that actually help you run the business, understand what they're telling you and act on them. The rest may be interesting, but that doesn't make them useful.

2. Don't let technology create more work.

Every new system promises to save time. Before long, though, you're entering the same information twice, checking another dashboard and paying for subscriptions nobody uses. Technology should remove jobs from your day, not add to them. Take a look at the tools you've accumulated and ask which ones genuinely make life easier.

3. Challenge the way things are done.

Some processes stick around simply because nobody has questioned them. The weekly meeting with no decisions, the report nobody reads, the approval that slows everything down. Ask your team what's taking time without adding value. Removing one unnecessary step might not sound revolutionary, but a few small changes can make a surprisingly big difference.

WIN

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

INTERESTING QUOTE

If you don't prioritise your life, someone else will.

Greg McKeown

JUST ONE THING

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

Choose one regular task, meeting or report that seems to take more time than it's worth. Ask yourself what would actually happen if you stopped doing it for a month. If the answer is 'not much', you've probably found something worth removing from your routine.

HAVE A READ

It Doesn't Have to Be Crazy at Work

Jason Fried

A refreshing challenge to the idea that running a successful business requires constant busyness. The authors explain how fewer meetings, simpler processes and better priorities can create a calmer, more productive workplace.

£12 online.



INTERESTED?

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

PS

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

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

0191 603 1760
www.conceptaccountancy.co .uk
hello@conceptaccountancy.co.uk

CONCEPT ACCOUNTANCY
ACCOUNTANCY WITH INTEREST®

Swinburne Maddison expands private client team following major investment

Swinburne Maddison, one of the North East's leading full-service law firms, has significantly expanded its Private Client team increasing the firm's capacity to take on complex private client instructions across the North East and beyond.

Following major investment in people, expertise and resources, the firm has brought together its strongest Private Client team to date. The expanded department combines established specialists with new and emerging talent, supported by four dedicated legal assistants.

The growth follows the appointment of Laura Murphy as Head of Private Client and Senior Managing Associate in May 2026. Working alongside Laura Murphy are longstanding members of the department Amy Pyman, Managing Associate, and Akkelin Harris, Consultant, providing continuity and extensive experience in complex private client matters.

The team has grown further with the appointments of Hope Gallant,



Solicitor, who joined in January 2026; Jennifer Robinson, Associate Solicitor, who joined in June 2026; and Joanna Nolan, Solicitor, who joined in July 2026. Danielle Cruickshank also returned to the firm as a Paralegal in May 2026, bringing valuable previous experience of the department and its clients. Imogen Bosanko qualified into the Private Client team on the 1st October 2026, having undertaken her training contract at the firm, further strengthening its future development.



Square One Law backs creative economy

North East law firm Square One Law has announced its support for the North East International Film Festival (NEIFF) 2026 for the second consecutive year as Gold sponsor, backing the region's growing screen and creative industries.

Its sixth-year running, NEIFF kicks off on November 16th bringing together filmmakers, industry professionals, emerging talent, and audiences from across the UK and internationally for a carefully selected programme of film screenings, dedicated events, and networking opportunities. The partnership comes as the North East continues to strengthen its reputation as a destination for film and television production, with an expanding creative sector creating opportunities for businesses, freelancers, and emerging talent across the region. For Square One Law, the decision to support NEIFF reflects the firm's commitment to the wider North East business and cultural landscape, and to organisations, helping to raise the region's profile nationally and internationally.

Deb Ions, Marketing Director at Square One Law, said: "We're delighted to return as Gold sponsor of the North East International Film Festival once again and support an organisation that is doing so much to showcase the talent and ambition that exists within our region and puts the North East firmly on the international film map.

"The creative industries are an increasingly important part of the North East economy, and initiatives such as NEIFF create opportunities for people to connect, collaborate and build careers here.

"As a business, we believe it is important to invest in the organisations and initiatives that contribute to the region's future. NEIFF has an international outlook but is firmly rooted in the North East, which makes it a particularly exciting partnership for us."

Johnston Carmichael celebrates 90 years

Johnston Carmichael has marked its 90th birthday with a special celebration in Glasgow, bringing together more than 600 colleagues from across the firm, including its growing Newcastle team.

The evening celebrated nine decades of the accountancy and business advisory firm and the people behind its success, with entertainment and a packed dancefloor making for a memorable night. The anniversary comes as Johnston Carmichael continues to invest in the North East. Since opening its office in 2023, the team has grown from four people to 32, expanding its specialist advice for businesses throughout the region. Paul Shields, Partner and Head of Johnston Carmichael's Newcastle office, said: "It was brilliant to get together with colleagues from across the firm and celebrate everything that's been achieved over 90 years. For us, it was a chance to celebrate being part of that story and look ahead to what we can achieve together."

With a growing presence in the region, the Newcastle team continues to support ambitious North East businesses with the specialist advice needed to drive sustainable growth and success.



CARTMELL SHEPHERD SOLICITORS
Always at your side

YOUR FIRST CHOICE
Choose a team with the values, vision and drive to be the difference.
01434 603656
www.cartmells.co.uk

JOHNSTON CARMICHAEL
Where sharp minds meet
We're local, we're national, and we're all connected.

HAS THE PENNY DROPPED YET?

It's obvious when you think about it. Accountancy is upside down.

The main concern for many is Record Keeping. Then Compliance. Then Direction.

This is upside down because the part of most interest to the most ambitious and in-control businesses – is Direction.

Prioritising Direction means taking a (proper) interest in the numbers. It's pausing. Grabbing a coffee with your Concept Account Manager. And chatting.

So when the penny finally drops, and you're interested in turning your accountancy right-side-up, come to Concept.

We're interested in seeing you, too.

CONCEPT ACCOUNTANCY

ACCOUNTANCY WITH INTEREST®

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

0191 603 1760
www.conceptaccountancy.co.uk
hello@conceptaccountancy.co.uk

Could your biggest customer also be your biggest risk?

By Mark Brown, Director, L4 Financial

Most business owners can identify their biggest customers without much hesitation. They are often the relationships that have helped the business grow, provided a reliable source of income and justified investment in additional people, equipment or premises.


Mark Brown

But how many have considered what would happen financially if one of those customers disappeared?

Customer concentration is not necessarily a problem. Strong, long-standing relationships can provide stability and opportunities for growth. However, when a significant proportion of a business's income depends on a small number of customers, that stability can become a potential vulnerability.

Revenue doesn't tell the whole story

Imagine a business generating £2 million in annual revenue, with one customer accounting for £600,000.

At first glance, losing that relationship would mean a 30% reduction in turnover. But the financial consequences could be considerably more complicated.

How profitable is that customer? What costs would disappear if the work stopped, and which would remain? Could staffing levels, premises or equipment commitments be reduced quickly enough?

A customer contributing 30% of revenue might represent a substantially different proportion of profitability.

There is also the cash flow impact to consider. If the business has committed resources to delivering future orders, the loss of expected receipts could create immediate pressure, even where the underlying business remains profitable.

Understanding where the exposure sits

Customer concentration is one example of a wider issue that can develop gradually as businesses grow.

A company may become heavily dependent on a particular supplier, a key employee, one service line or a single source of finance.

These dependencies are often perfectly understandable. Relationships develop, individuals become indispensable and successful products attract investment.

The difficulty arises when those dependencies are not properly understood or reflected in financial planning.

For an established SME, reviewing the risks does not need to involve a complicated exercise.

It might start with some straightforward questions:

- What proportion of our revenue and gross profit comes from our five largest customers?
- How quickly could we replace a significant contract?
- Which overheads would remain if activity reduced?
- How much cash would we need to support the business during that period?
- Are we sufficiently diversified to withstand an unexpected setback?

The answers can reveal vulnerabilities that are not immediately apparent from a healthy profit and loss account.

Planning for what might happen

This is where forecasting becomes particularly valuable.

Rather than producing a single financial forecast based on expected performance, businesses can explore alternative scenarios.

What happens if a major customer reduces orders by 25%? What if a contract ends six months earlier than anticipated? Could the business absorb the impact without additional borrowing?

These exercises are not about predicting problems or being unnecessarily pessimistic.

They are about understanding the consequences of events that could reasonably occur and identifying the decisions available before they become urgent.

That might mean diversifying the customer base, reviewing costs, strengthening cash reserves or reducing reliance on a particular contract.

Confidence comes from understanding

Every business carries risk. The objective is not to eliminate it, particularly where taking calculated commercial risks creates opportunities.

But there is a considerable difference between knowingly accepting a risk and discovering its significance only when something goes wrong.

For SME owners and leadership teams, understanding where the business is most exposed is an important part of making informed decisions.

Sometimes the most valuable financial question is not how much the business could grow, but how resilient it would be if circumstances changed.

L4 Financial Management

L4 Financial provides fractional Finance Director and board level support to growing SMEs, helping business owners improve financial visibility, strengthen financial oversight and make more informed commercial decisions.

Mark@L4Financial.co.uk
L4Financial.co.uk | 07960 031554

Board-level financial leadership, part time

L4 Financial Management

Supporting owners, MDs and boards with confident financial decisions

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



07960 031554

Mark@L4Financial.co.uk

L4Financial.co.uk







UNW hosts Business Taxes Update seminar in Newcastle

Newcastle-based independent chartered accountancy and business advisory firm UNW welcomed around 100 clients and professional contacts to The Catalyst in Newcastle on Tuesday 6 October for its latest Business Taxes Update seminar.

The event brought together specialists from across UNW's Corporate, Employment and Private Client Tax teams to explore recent developments in the UK tax landscape and what they mean for businesses and their owners.

Topics included key tax changes introduced by the Finance Act 2026, forthcoming legislation and consultations, profit extraction and exit planning, and current themes in HMRC enquiries and challenges. The session also looked ahead to the Autumn Budget, with predictions on what businesses might expect.

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
















UNW'S
BUSINESS
TAXES
UPDATE













RMT Technology launches new cyber security division to help businesses strengthen their resilience



Stephen Slater, managing partner at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, with RMT Technology cyber director Stew Hogg

RMT Technology has launched a new cyber security division to help businesses understand and manage cyber risk, protect their operations and respond to an evolving threat landscape.

The specialist technology arm of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors is expecting to create eight new jobs in the coming 12 months and around 50 over the next five years through the new service line.

It is delivering a range of strategic consulting services around cyber strategy, compliance, training and exercising, alongside technical assurance through testing, certification and security architecture development.

The new service is being led by industry-leading cyber security specialist Stew Hogg, who has more than 15 years' experience of helping governmental, public and private sector organisations map out, enhance and implement their cyber security strategies.

Stew is one of the UK's most highly-qualified cyber professionals, holding the UK Cyber Security Council Chartership and a fellowship from the Chartered Institute of Information Security among many accreditations, and was awarded the Chief Constable's Commendation for Services to Cyber Security by Northumbria Police.

He has experience of working across a wide range of sectors, including higher education, energy, critical national infrastructure, healthcare, government, professional services, FinTech and manufacturing, and has regularly worked alongside government, regulators and national police forces.

Stew Hogg says: "Operational resilience is key to the survival and success of every modern business, and with the forthcoming Cyber Security & Resilience Bill set to introduce new requirements for organisations within its scope, cyber security must be high on the agenda for business leaders.

"Recent high-profile incidents have demonstrated just how significant the operational and commercial impact of a cyber incident can be, while developments in areas such as AI are changing the threat landscape at great speed.

"Our focus is on serving our clients, protecting their organisations and empowering them to make cyber security a core part of their wider business and growth strategies."

The Government's latest Cyber Security Breaches Survey found that 43 per cent of UK businesses had experienced a cyber breach or attack in the previous 12 months, while fewer than 30 per cent had a cyber incident response plan in place.

Stew Hogg continues: "Not every business can afford to have someone working full-time on cyber security matters, so we're tailoring our services to give SMEs and larger organisations access to specialist expertise at a level that reflects their needs, risks and ambitions.

"Businesses that proactively get ahead of evolving threats not only show their clients that they're serious about cyber security but can also gain competitive advantages and access to new commercial opportunities that might otherwise remain out of reach.

"Very few firms in the North East are offering professional services expertise alongside a comprehensive range of cyber security services and we see significant potential to build a leading regional capability."

Stephen Slater, managing partner at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, adds: "Our investment in this new division reflects the growing importance of cyber resilience to the businesses we work with and our ambition is to begin to quickly realise the significant growth potential we see in this area."

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

rmttechnology.co.uk

FW Capital announces new Managing Director and Fund Director for the North East and Yorkshire



L-R: Lindsey McMenamin and Joanne Whitfield FW Capital

FW Capital has strengthened its senior leadership team with two promotions.

Joanne Whitfield becomes Managing Director of FW Capital in England, while Lindsey McMenamin has been appointed Fund Director, leading teams across the North East and Yorkshire. FW Capital has invested more than £400m since 2010, leveraging more than £590m of private sector investment for nearly 1,000 businesses. The team currently manage a portfolio of nine funds across England.

Joanne joined FW Capital as its first employee in England in 2010 and has played a central role in its growth over the past 16 years.

In the newly created role, she will lead FW Capital's strategy and growth across England, including fund delivery, stakeholder engagement and new investment opportunities. She will work alongside Rhian Elston, Chief Investment Officer for the Development Bank of Wales Group and Chief Executive of FW Capital, following the retirement of Mike Owen.

FW Capital is part of the Development Bank of Wales Group, one of the UK's largest SME investors, which manages funds worth more than £2.6 billion.

Lindsey McMenamin becomes Fund Director after almost a decade with FW Capital and 25 years in SME fund management. Based in Newcastle, she will lead the investment and portfolio teams across the North East and Yorkshire, supporting fund delivery and economic impact.

Rhian Elston, Chief Executive of FW Capital, said: "Joanne and Lindsey's well-deserved appointments strengthen FW Capital's leadership team as we look to the next phase of growth. As part of the Development Bank of Wales Group, FW Capital combines deep regional knowledge with the scale and expertise of one of the UK's largest SME investors, helping us deliver more for our fund investors and the ambitious businesses that we support."

Joanne Whitfield, Managing Director at FW Capital, said: "It is a privilege to lead FW Capital's operations in England. Over the past 16 years, I have had the opportunity to work alongside an exceptional team, and I am proud of the impact we have delivered. I look forward to working with Rhian and Lindsey to build on that success, expand opportunities and help even more businesses access the finance they need. The work we do makes a tangible difference to businesses, communities and regional economies, and I'm deeply committed to supporting that growth."

Lindsey McMenamin, Fund Director, added: "I'm looking forward to leading our North East and Yorkshire teams and helping ambitious businesses access the finance and expertise they need to grow, innovate and create high-quality jobs. FW Capital has a strong track record of delivering positive outcomes for stakeholders, built on an outstanding culture and a focus on customer service. The regional investment funds we manage play a vital role in unlocking opportunities and breaking down barriers to growth, and I'm excited to work alongside our talented teams to help even more businesses realise their ambitions."

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



Is your 2027 plan built on the right assumptions?

By Graeme Harrison, Managing Director, CCBS

By November, many businesses have started turning next year's ambitions into budgets and forecasts. This year, however, the Autumn Budget has given business owners even more reason to revisit their numbers before signing off plans for 2027.

Many forecasts are built around revenue targets and profit expectations, but the assumptions beneath those figures deserve just as much attention. Changes to employment costs, investment incentives and borrowing conditions can all affect how achievable a plan really is.

A forecast can appear healthy while overlooking when money will actually move through the business. Growth often brings costs forward. Stock may need to be purchased, people recruited or equipment secured well before the resulting income reaches the bank.

The issue is not whether the opportunity is profitable on paper. It is whether the business has enough working capital to deliver it without putting day-to-day commitments under pressure.

The challenge is not just responding to the measures announced in the Budget. Businesses are also planning against a backdrop of continuing economic uncertainty, making it even more important to test the assumptions that underpin growth plans.

Test the assumptions behind the plan

Before committing to investment or growth, business owners should challenge the figures beneath the headline forecast.

When will new revenue actually be received? What must be paid before then? Have increases in wages, energy, materials and supplier costs been reflected? What happens if a customer pays later than expected, an order requires more stock, or implementation takes longer than planned?

The Autumn Budget has reinforced the importance of asking these questions. The National Living Wage will rise again from April 2027, increasing employment costs for many businesses. At the same time, enhanced first-year capital allowances may encourage investment, but tax relief does not remove the need to fund the upfront cost or understand the impact on cash flow.

Considering several scenarios can reveal a funding requirement that an annual profit forecast may hide. A stronger-than-expected order book can create pressure just as easily as slower trading if the cost of fulfilling demand arrives first.

Make room for the unexpected

Plans should also leave the business able to respond. An equipment failure, delayed payment, shifting market conditions or an unplanned opportunity can quickly alter cash requirements.

That flexibility may come from tighter credit control, different supplier terms, more disciplined stock management or a review of existing commitments. In some cases, external funding may be appropriate. The important point is to identify the requirement early, while there is time to consider the options properly.

Planning with confidence

The question for business owners is not simply whether their 2027 plan looks profitable. It is whether the assumptions behind it still stand up to scrutiny.

The Budget has introduced measures intended to encourage investment and support lending, but it has also increased costs for many employers. The result is a more complex planning environment where cash flow, affordability and timing may matter even more than headline growth targets.

Revisiting assumptions now can help directors distinguish between a plan that looks good on paper and one the business can deliver with confidence.



Graeme Harrison is Managing Director at CCBS. He works closely with business owners to understand their ambitions and challenges, helping them access appropriate finance for growth, investment and working capital.

www.ccbsg.co.uk | 0191 211 1471

Kinnery

Coaching for the humble and brave

* **Business coaching**
* **Scaling up**
* **Leadership team development**

kinnery.co.uk

RG
Ryecroft Glenton

Corporate Finance

Every **Step.**
Every **Decision.**

0191 281 1292
ryecroftglenton.com



CARL SWANSBURY
Partner – Corporate Finance

Sunderland Entrepreneur puts UK businesses on the map and opens the door to local funding



A University of Sunderland graduate who overcame rejection, financial struggles and countless setbacks is hoping to transform the fortunes of businesses across the UK with the launch of an innovative digital platform designed to help companies access billions of pounds in unclaimed support.

Michael Okare Shaba, who graduated with a Distinction in Project Management from the University of Sunderland, is the founder of Poundswise.com – a unique online platform that combines business promotion with access to local grants, loans and support schemes based on postcode.

The idea was born from personal experience.

After moving to the UK to study, Michael worked in a care home and took on factory night shifts to support himself while completing his degree. Despite graduating with distinction and later being recognised by Tech Nation as an Exceptional Global Talent – an honour awarded to only a select group of technology founders – securing funding for his own business proved far from easy.

Having developed a platform to support the healthcare sector, Michael applied for a £35,000 business grant but was unsuccessful because his company was registered in Sunderland rather than Teesside. Rather than giving up, he identified a bigger problem.

"I realised there was support available, but many businesses simply didn't know where to find it," said Michael. "The real gap isn't funding – it's awareness. Founders often spend all their energy building a business and don't have time to track down every grant, loan or support programme that could help them grow."

That insight led to the creation of Poundswise.com

The platform also allows businesses to purchase a digital space on an interactive UK map, placing their company logo directly onto their chosen location. Customers can click on the location to discover more about the business and visit its website, helping to boost visibility and drive traffic.

Businesses can also expand their digital footprint by purchasing neighbouring spaces, creating a larger presence on the map.

What makes Poundswise particularly distinctive is its ability to connect businesses with support opportunities linked specifically to their postcode. Users can discover local grants, loans, council-backed initiatives and business support programmes available in their area, all from a single platform.

The site also offers immersive 3D virtual tours capturing real places and transforming them into digital twins, allowing potential customers to step inside and explore a business from anywhere in the world, without compromising security or privacy.

Despite only recently launching, Poundswise is already helping businesses access opportunities they may otherwise have missed.

Poundswise.com



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

Business Distress and Insolvency is no joke

Directors of distressed businesses must proceed carefully.

Seeking good early professional advice usually means more options, and always means that a concerned Director is much better informed.

Northpoint is an established local firm with a personable, pragmatic approach to best assist in business distress situations with expertise in rescue, corporate restructuring, accelerated business sales, and closure options.

We advise on and act in most situations, advisory and formal, with fixed fees an option in many cases.

Call Greg Whitehead or Linda Farish for a confidential discussion with no obligation.

- **Rescue/Restructure**
- **Voluntary Arrangement**
- **Administration**
- **Liquidation**
- **HMRC negotiation**
- **Law of Property Act**
- **Bankruptcy**
- **Partnerships**
- **Bounce Back Loan Review**





Northpoint.
Licensed Insolvency Practitioners

Greg Whitehead
Tel: 07900 241 464
greg@northpoint.co.uk

Linda Farish
Tel: 07308 662 252
linda@northpoint.co.uk

Mincoffs strengthens marketing function with appointment of Marketing and PR Manager



L-R: Sean Raine and Matthew Flinders

Leading North East law firm, Mincoffs Solicitors, has strengthened its marketing team with the appointment of Sean Raine as marketing and PR manager.

Sean joins Mincoffs with experience in marketing and communications across the built environment and recruitment, with a background spanning brand development, design and campaigns for business and consumer audiences.

In his new role, he will work with teams across the firm to deliver its marketing and PR strategy, support brand development and raise the profile of its people and expertise. He will also oversee the development of marketing content and collateral, helping strengthen engagement with clients and the wider business community.

Commenting on his appointment, Sean said: "Mincoffs has a strong reputation in the North East, and the opportunity to build on that was a big attraction for me. The firm's heritage and recognisable brand provide a strong foundation, and I'm looking forward to helping shape how we communicate its expertise.

"There are plenty of stories to tell about the people here and the work they do. I'm keen to get to know colleagues across the firm and bring those stories to a wider audience, while making sure our marketing reflects what clients value about Mincoffs."

Matthew Flinders, commercial director at Mincoffs, added: "We are pleased to welcome Sean to the firm. He brings a strong combination of marketing and communications experience, together with a creative approach and valuable insight from working across a range of sectors.

"We have experienced significant growth in recent years, and Sean's appointment reflects our continued investment in the future of the firm. As we build on this momentum, attracting high-calibre professionals is essential to supporting our ambitions and ensuring we continue to provide an outstanding service to our clients. Sean brings valuable expertise and a fresh perspective, and we are delighted to have him join the team."

The appointment follows recognition for Mincoffs in Legal 500's client research, published in July 2026, which placed the firm first in its ranking of the most highly recommended law firms in the North.

Mincoffs has also been ranked among the top three most active legal advisers in the North East and within the top 20 across the UK in Experian MarketIQ's mergers and acquisitions adviser rankings.

For more information visit www.mincoffs.co.uk



City Quadrant, 11 Waterloo Square,
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 4DP

Tel: 0191 2557772 • www.cavucf.com

Local Advice, International Reach

Our Services include...

Private Equity • Development Capital • Company Sales • Company Acquisitions
Buy Outs/Buy Ins • M&A Support • Debt Advisory • Exit Planning and Strategy

cavu
corporate finance

CLRLaw
Doing law differently



"Exceptional, highly recommended"

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

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

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

We can support you with...

- Employment Contracts
- Mediation
- Settlement Agreements
- Commerical Litigation
- Tribunal

www.clrlaw.co.uk hello@clrlaw.co.uk 0191 603 0061


Shawn Bone


Fiona Douglas


Rakib Islam


Philip Ballantyne


Sahil Nayyar


Thomas Brunsnes


Will Douglas

Cavu...14 years and counting

By Shawn Bone, Managing Director, Cavu Corporate FInance

So here we are. 14 years after establishing Cavu Corporate Finance I guess I can say we are past the start up phase. Back in 2013 we started with no people (other than myself), no office, no brand, no clients, no pipeline. Just a reputation and a determination to create something.

Needless to say I am delighted with what we have built over 14 years. Now firmly established as a mid market specialist in M&A with a focus on private equity transactions.

But now is not the time to sit back and muse over 14 years of trading. Instead we relentlessly focus on our clients, the next deal, 2026, plans for 2027, geographic expansion, continuing to invest in our people. Underlying that we continue to focus on quality. Client service and clients experience of Cavu is something that underpins every deal and is essential to our reputation. And whilst delivering exceptional outcomes for clients is very much what we are about it is also important to focus on the journey, the time we take with clients before a deal is launched and during active negotiation phase to ensure their experience of Cavu is as good as it can be.

Looking back over the last 12 months its been another busy period for Cavu Corporate Finance with notable deals including...

- BGF £22m investment in Everflow alongside a debt package of £22m;
- Alcuin Private Equity investment into Oddballs;
- The £57.5m acquisition of Wood T&D for our client United Infrastructure backed by Apollo – a complex carve out and creating the foundation for a business in the Power sector for our client United Infrastructure; and
- And in the last few weeks the acquisition of Hodgson Sayers again for United Infrastructure.

These deals highlight much of what Cavu is about;

- Advising on complex deals often involving private equity and utilising our experience and deep knowledge of that market;
- Working with founders to achieve their objectives;
- A relentless focus on high quality service so founders are well advised and the private equity community receive the quality of engagement to support a deal;
- Developing deep client relationships.

Picking up on the latter – deep relationships are so fundamental to our business. They underpin what we do and the trust clients give us to deliver excellent outcomes.

So what does having a deep relationship with a client really mean. For us its time, listening, making clear what is to come and a clear articulation of the journey and the outcome and even life beyond the outcome. Its about always being there, dealing with stress and anxiety that can sit behind a deal, dealing with softer issues and making sure at all times clients are comfortable with the process and outcome.

On the outcomes we repeatedly test client objectives such as valuation and ideal deal structure as its common that some clients are not clear on the detail of what they want and this often requires explanation as to what is possible and refinement as you move through the deal process especially where there are multiple clients and they may all have differing objectives. By testing outcomes throughout the deal process we refine and ensure clients are clear about what a deal looks like before we arrive there.

But a deal is more than just outcomes. It's the softer things that are often discussed at length and take the most time – for example selling a business can feel like letting go of a lifetimes work – in some cases a business may have been owned for several generations so the emotional consequences of letting go need to be fully understood by an adviser, discussed and resolved. Early in my deal career I had a client who changed their mind at the 11th hour on selling their business– they decided not to sell.

If I am being honest I hadn't spent enough time talking to them about what was clearly some underlying anxiety of doing a deal and letting go. The deal was good but for them they were not ready. I never forgot that experience and in some ways its shaped the way I deal with clients now and was partly why I established Cavu to offer a more personalised service.

I spent several decades working for larger firms and rightly or wrongly my experience of that time was too much focus on "process". Not enough time listening and validating what the client wanted to achieve. What I took out of those years was that there needed to be more focus on relationships and truly understanding what clients want. More engagement. More tailoring of the deal to match varied and complex requests that clients often have. If we get that right then quality outcomes follow – yes the numbers have to be right for a client but there is so much more to a deal than just the numbers.

In essence that is what Cavu is about – deep relationships, listening, tailoring, to deliver high quality outcomes.

I would hope if some of my clients are reading this they will recognise what I am saying.

www.cavucf.com



Should you use AI to answer Subject Access Requests?

If you want to learn more about responding to SARs compliantly, the data protection experts at leading law firm Muckle LLP are offering in-person training in Teesside on Wednesday 25 November.

Through a subject access request (SAR), anyone can request access to the personal data an organisation holds about them at any time. For businesses, managing an influx of SARs can be time-consuming and demanding on resources, alongside the added pressure of responding within a strict timeframe.

It's unsurprising that organisations are turning to technology, including AI, to support the administrative burden of SARs. However, there are real legal risks to consider.

Alex Craig, partner in Muckle LLP's data protection team, explains the risks of using AI to respond to SARs.

The rise of AI adoption

As AI adoption increases with businesses looking to simplify their processes and save time, it's easy to see why they may be tempted to use AI to take on the administration involved in managing SARs.

Using AI to manage SARs could help to organise key documents and automate searching. However, while AI-automated processes can help from an efficiency perspective, they also pose serious legal risks, including potential data protection breaches.

Responding to SARs compliantly

Under UK data protection legislation, organisations must consider specific factors when responding to a SAR. The Information Commission's Office (ICO) guidance on producing a SAR response is a very useful steer on what should be included.

Responses need to include an individual's personal data whilst protecting the rights of third parties, supplementary information (purposes of processing, data categories, recipients, use of automated decision-making including AI, and more), and any further details relating to exemptions or refusals to disclose information.

But that's not all; organisations also have to respond to SARs within one month, except in special circumstances, such as complicated situations. Failure to deliver accurate, complete SAR responses can lead to reputational damage, fines, and in some cases prosecution, so it's vital that organisations using AI to support SAR responses do so responsibly and with human input.

The risks of using AI for SARs

As AI continues to learn and evolve, it becomes difficult to keep track of all of the risks associated with using it in the context of SARs.

We know that AI systems aren't always correct in their generated responses, which could result in important documents being categorised incorrectly or missed out altogether.

As SARs deal with personal data, which can include third-party or confidential personal data, the unpredictable nature of AI tools could lead to unlawful disclosures. For example, an unchecked response might disclose information relating to a different individual or matter, sensitive information or information which jeopardises an organisation's position. Identifying and processing personal information calls for careful, supervised management to prevent data breaches, so when using AI assistance for SARs, organisations should always have clear processes in place to ensure that supervision and oversight of the process.

Minimising risk with expert advice

AI tools shouldn't be used as a one-stop solution for responding to SARs. When built into a wider process, controlled by human input, AI can certainly reduce repetitive administrative tasks. Ultimately though, an organisation fulfilling its legal responsibility should always be the first priority when it comes to SARs to prevent fines and legal action.

It's essential that organisations understand how their AI tools process personal data before incorporating them into the SARs process. Sensitive, confidential files identified when using AI for the SAR response should always be thoroughly reviewed by humans to prevent data breaches. Consideration should also be given to exemptions, which ultimately require contextual consideration, not automation.

The best way forward when it comes to getting SARs right and mitigating risks to your business is to seek expert advice and ensure your teams are sufficiently trained to lawfully respond to SARs.

To access expert-led training on responding to SARs compliantly, visit muckle-llp.com/events or contact events@muckle-llp.com or 0191 211 7777.

muckle LLP

Certified B Corporation
Learn more at bcorp.com



Manage SARs with confidence and protect your business

Are you prepared to handle subject access requests (SARs)?

Responding to SARs quickly and in compliance with regulation is non-negotiable for any business. Getting it wrong can lead to regulatory fines, the loss of valuable trust from your customer base and even formal enforcement action.

The good news? Our data protection specialists are bringing **Subject Access Requests (SARs) Training to Teesside on Wednesday 25 November**, offering practical, step-by-step guidance on how to handle SARs properly in your business.

Book your place today.

SCAN ME!

muckle-llp.com

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE
We invest in people Platinum

5 compliance tasks for law firms before 2027

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

There's something about the end of a calendar year that makes it a good time to carry out a review. That includes compliance.

A focused review will help firms start 2027 with a clearer understanding of risks, controls and priorities.

Here are some practical actions to consider.

1. Update the risk register

A risk register should be a working management tool. It makes life so much easier if and when a risk materialises, providing a framework for response.

Look at regulatory, operational, financial and technological risks, as well as risks arising from particular work types or clients. What has changed within the firm this year? What about the regulatory changes on the horizon? Are there any wider economic risks to consider? How will these affect the firm and how can you plan for, and mitigate, the impact?

2. Review money laundering and all economic crime requirements

For firms undertaking work within scope of the Money Laundering Regulations, there has been significant change in this area during 2026, including an updated SRA sectoral risk assessment in September. Firms must make sure the changes are considered and recorded within the AML firm wide risk assessment, policies and procedures.

Are client and matter risk assessments relevant, rather than treated as a quick tick-box exercise? Check that the reasons for decisions in risk assessments are properly evidenced.

Firms should also consider whether they have implemented any recommendations from a recent independent Regulation 21 anti-money laundering audit.

All firms must consider their sanctions compliance and other non-AML economic crime provisions such as prevention of the facilitation of tax evasion. They are often forgotten. Do you have the procedures you need, and are they effective?



Carolyn Beal

3. Carry out a 'focused' file review

Pick a few high risk areas and review files based on those. Risks could include delay, inactivity, client identity checks or keeping clear records of advice. Consider areas where there have been themes in complaints received. Don't forget compliance with the Accounts Rules. Financial controls on files should regularly be checked for effectiveness.

4. Put appropriate controls around the use of AI

The use of artificial intelligence within legal services and by clients has increased rapidly. Firms without controls around AI often find that employees are using some sort of AI tool, even if managers believe they aren't. Without appropriate controls, the firm is at a much higher risk of negligence claims and regulatory action.

The SRA published its Misuse of AI warning notice on 17 August 2026. It highlighted concerns about inaccurate information, false citations and risks to client confidentiality. Using AI does not change the professional standards expected of law firms.

5. Create a compliance plan for 2027

Planning compliance work across the year means it is more likely to happen. No last minute scrabbles before SRA or Lexcel audits, and a reduced risk of other regulatory intervention.

Create a calendar for 2027 and group compliance areas together so that reviews are effective and any changes can be implemented together. Establish how progress will be reviewed. The plan should be proportionate to the size and nature of the firm, but enough to help manage expectations.

A short, structured review before the end of the year can provide managers and COLPs/COFAs with a clear picture of the firm's position. It can also turn compliance from a collection of policies into something that really supports the firm's performance and growth.

I work with law firms of all sizes and specialisms to help with their compliance requirements, so please contact me for a discussion if you would like support for your firm.

www.bealcoopercompliance.co.uk

RICHARD REED
SOLICITORS



Trusted Family Law Advice

Supporting families across Sunderland and the North East

Speak to our friendly local team today
CALL 0191 567 0465
richardreed.co.uk

Beal Cooper Compliance

Enhancing confidence in compliance

Compliance is more than a requirement

- Specialist regulatory compliance support for law firms
- Expert in AML compliance, audits, policies, training and regulatory reviews
- Practical solutions, not just technical advice

carolyn@bealcoopercompliance.co.uk | 07745621718 | www.bealcoopercompliance.co.uk

Solicitor of the month...

Phil Moir

Richard Reed Solicitors

Phil is Director and Solicitor, and Head of Company & Commercial and Dispute Resolution at the firm, helping clients navigate complex legal challenges with practical advice and a personal approach.

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

My dad was my biggest inspiration for pursuing a career in law. He worked as a legal executive for more than 40 years, and seeing his career, alongside other family members working in the legal profession across the North East, inspired me to follow a similar path.

I completed an undergraduate degree before undertaking the GDL conversion course and Legal Practice Course (LPC), both at Northumbria University. I then worked as a paralegal for around 18 months before securing a training contract and progressing to become a solicitor.

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

My work covers a varied range of legal matters, including landlord and tenant disputes, possession claims, buying and selling companies, and contested probate cases. No two cases are exactly the same, so I take the time to understand each client's circumstances and provide practical advice tailored to their situation.

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

I think some people assume the profession operates like it does on television. There is also a perception that solicitors are unapproachable, when in reality, we want to help people understand their options and find a way forward.

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

Seek guidance as early as possible, even if that initially means speaking to Citizens Advice. Disputes can be very emotive, and it is easy to become caught up in the situation rather than seeing it objectively.

Legal disputes can also become expensive, so exploring ways to resolve matters early, including mediation, can make a real difference, and in some cases, reaching an early resolution can even help preserve relationships.

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

I call it going into "job mode" as I need to remain focused on doing my job properly and acting in my client's best interests. Of course, I can be sympathetic to someone's circumstances, but becoming emotionally involved would make it harder to remain objective. The professional rules we follow as solicitors also provide a clear framework for dealing with ethical challenges.

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

Technology has transformed the legal profession, making communication and case management faster and more flexible. AI is increasingly useful, but I think we've become too reliant on technology in some areas. There's value in picking up the phone and speaking to someone, particularly at the courts; being unable to do so is a detriment.

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

I don't see it as a balancing act, as solicitors we must always act honestly, with integrity and within the rules of our profession. Our job is to represent clients to the best of our ability, give clear and realistic advice, and work towards the best possible outcome.

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

The most rewarding part is helping people resolve problems and guiding them through difficult situations. I'm also motivated by building a successful firm that supports my family, our team and their families.

richardreed.co.uk



> **The most rewarding part is helping people resolve problems.**

Phil Moir



L-R: Hannah Cullen, Laura Kerry, Thomas Halse, Erin Winship

Photo credit: Michael Gibson Creative Photography



New networking group launches to bring Sunderland's young professionals together

A new networking group aimed at bringing together the next generation of Sunderland's business community is set to officially launch in February 2027.

Sunderland Young Professionals has been created through a collaboration between Richard Reed Solicitors, Riverside Marketing Solutions and Riverside Mortgage Advice, with the aim of providing a fresh and more relaxed approach to professional networking for people in their 20s and 30s.

The group will officially launch on Thursday 4 February 2027 at Quinn's Sports Bar at the Stadium of Light, with the Stadium of Light kindly sponsoring the launch event.

Sunderland Young Professionals has been founded by Laura Kerry and Hannah Cullen of Richard Reed Solicitors, Thomas Halse of Riverside Marketing Solutions and Erin Winship of Riverside Mortgage Advice, who recognised an opportunity to create something different for younger professionals living and working in Sunderland.

Rather than traditional formal networking, Sunderland Young Professionals will focus on creating relaxed, social events where connections can develop naturally.

Future events will take place at different venues across Sunderland and will combine networking with activities, entertainment and social experiences, giving attendees the opportunity to meet people from different sectors, widen their professional circles and build genuine relationships.

Laura Kerry, Marketing Executive at Richard Reed Solicitors and one of the founders of Sunderland Young Professionals, said: "We're really excited to finally be launching Sunderland Young Professionals. There are so many talented and ambitious people in their 20s and 30s working in and around Sunderland, but we felt there was an opportunity to create something specifically for that community.

"Networking can be daunting, particularly when you're at the beginning of your career or walking into an event where you don't know anyone. We want to remove some of those barriers and create events that people genuinely look forward to attending."

Madeline Klimczak Event Sales Manager for Delaware North at The Stadium of Light said: "We're delighted to support the launch of Sunderland Young Professionals and to welcome the group to the Stadium of Light for its first event.

"Sunderland has a thriving and growing business community, and initiatives like this are a fantastic way of helping the next generation of professionals build relationships, share ideas and feel connected to the city.

"We're proud to be sponsoring the launch at Quinn's Sports Bar and look forward to welcoming Sunderland Young Professionals to the Stadium of Light in February."

The launch comes at an exciting time for Sunderland, with continued investment, regeneration and business growth creating new opportunities and attracting a growing number of professionals to the city.

Sunderland Young Professionals hopes to play a part in connecting that emerging talent and encouraging young professionals to become more involved in Sunderland's wider business community.

The official launch event will take place at Quinn's Sports Bar, Stadium of Light, on Thursday 4 February 2027, from 5.30pm.

To find out more about Sunderland Young Professionals, upcoming events and how to get involved, visit www.sunderlandyoungprofessionals.co.uk

TRUSTED ADVICE SINCE 1842

tbi Conveyancing

Get **strength** on your side...



Children Law | Personal Injury | Conveyancing Quality | Wills & Inheritance Quality | CYBER ESSENTIALS CERTIFIED

Tilly Bailey & Irvine LLP

York Chambers | York Road | Hartlepool | TS26 9DP
Castle House | 11 Bridge Road | Stockton-on-Tees | TS18 3AD
Scanlan House | 23 John Street | Sunderland | SR1 1JG

12 Evolution | Wynyard Park | Wynyard | TS22 5TB
8 Newgate | Barnard Castle | DL12 8NG

T: 0333 444 4422 **W:** www.tbilaw.co.uk | www.tbiconveyancing.co.uk

@tbilaw | TillyBaileyIrvine | Tilly Bailey & Irvine

Tilly Bailey & Irvine LLP is authorised and regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority.



> **Behind every great company is a compelling story of resilience, strategy, and vision.**

Deborah Johnson with David Pritchard

Sintons launches 'The Advisory Board' podcast to reveal the stories behind North East business success

Sintons, one of the North East's premier full-service law firms, has launched The Advisory Board, a brand-new corporate podcast series designed to go inside the minds of today's leading entrepreneurs, innovators, and commercial leaders.

Spearheaded and hosted by Sintons' Head of Business Development and Marketing, David Pritchard and Business Development Lead Deborah Johnson, the successful series offers an unvarnished, behind-the-scenes look at what it truly takes to build, scale, and sustain a thriving business in modern commerce.

Designed to move past corporate jargon, The Advisory Board explores the raw insights, pivotal decisions, and hard-won lessons that have shaped the region's most dynamic companies. Each episode sits down with prominent regional figures, key clients, and industry trailblazers to discuss both their professional strategies and the personal philosophies driving their success.

Guests to date have included Geoff Thompson, founder of Utilitywise and owner of South Shields FC; investor Neil Stephenson; corporate finance entrepreneur Abu Ali; and founder of Northern Insight, Mike Grahamslaw.

David Pritchard, Head of Business Development and Marketing at Sintons, said: "Behind every great company is a compelling story of resilience, strategy, and vision. At Sintons, we are privileged to work alongside some of the most inspiring businesses across the region every single day. With The Advisory Board, we wanted to create a platform that pulls back the curtain and brings that wealth of expertise directly to the wider North East business community. The response to the series so far has been fantastic, proving there is a real appetite for authentic, peer-to-peer business insights."

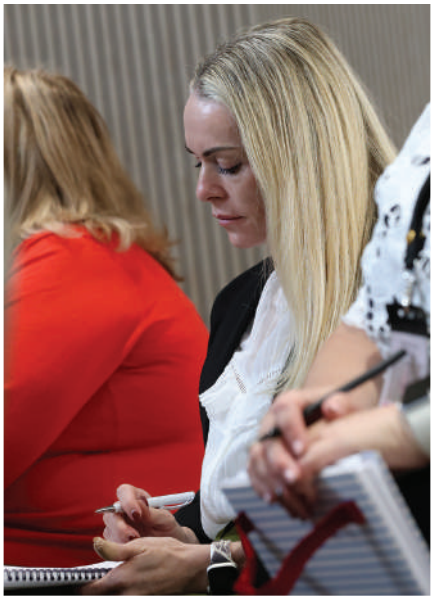


Deborah Johnson, Business Development Lead at Sintons, added: "We wanted to move away from standard legal commentary and instead focus on the human experiences behind business success—the breakthrough moments as well as how leaders navigate modern market challenges. The Advisory Board gives listeners a virtual seat at the table with the decision-makers shaping our regional economy."

The Advisory Board podcast is available now on all major streaming platforms.

For more information about Sintons or to listen to the latest episodes of The Advisory Board, visit www.sintons.co.uk









Employment Law Seminar: Ready for 2027?

Sweeney Miller Law welcomed businesses and HR professionals to its latest employment law seminar, led by Head of Employment, Paul Lott and Charlotte Garvey.

The event explored employment contracts, probation periods and performance management, alongside the changing employment law landscape as we look towards 2027.

Thank you to everyone who joined us for an informative and engaging session, with plenty of discussion, practical insight and an opportunity to connect with fellow North East businesses.

www.sweeneymiller.co.uk



















Northern Soul
National Reach.

Corporate and commercial legal experts.

Give us a call on **0345 900 5401** to find out more.

www.sweeneymiller.co.uk

sweeney miller LAW

Well known lawyer to support firm's ambitious growth plans

A well-known and highly respected employment lawyer will support independent law firm Jacksons with its strategic growth plans, beyond this year's 150th anniversary year celebrations.

Laura Wilson has joined Jacksons as a partner and head of employment, in a strategic move to increase the North East firm's revenue by 40% over three years.

Laura will support Jacksons with the growth of the employment law team alongside Sophie Little, who joined as an associate solicitor in employment a couple of months ago.

Erica Turner, the firm's head of legal, says Jacksons is "incredibly proud" of these key, strategic appointments, as the firm looks to expand key specialisms, to become the go-to legal firm for business-focused legal advice.

Erica says: "Despite challenging economic times, there is evidence that more and more businesses across the North East are starting up, developing and contributing to our regional economy.

"As a law firm with 150 years' experience, we recognise the legal needs of these businesses and want to position ourselves as an established source of exceptional legal advice and support.

"These appointments are crucial to enable us to do just that."

According to the North East Evidence Hub, which exists to empower people and policy makers with insights about the North East, SMEs in the region account for 99.9% of businesses, 67% of employment and 60% of turnover.



Laura Wilson

And as employment issues are not confined to large corporations with established HR departments, Jacksons' appointments will enable the firm to assist businesses of all sizes with everything from recruiting their first employees and employment contracts, to retaining talented employees and creating a positive workplace culture.

Laura says she has known the firm for many years and admired its reputation in the North East.

She is looking forward to using her skills to support businesses across the region with their employment law needs at Jacksons.

"I'm incredibly excited to be joining Jacksons as partner and head of employment," Laura said.

"Having known the firm and many of the team for years, I've always admired Jacksons' reputation, ambition and commitment to both its clients and its people.

"When the opportunity arose to join the firm, it felt like a natural fit.

"Joining a firm that has been part of the region's business community for 150 years - and which has such exciting plans for the future - is a real privilege."

Throughout her career, Laura says she has been "passionate" about supporting businesses across Teesside and the wider North East, helping them navigate challenges with legal issues concerning employment and helping them support their people and achieve their objectives.



L-R: Erica Turner, Laura Wilson, Sophie Little

"I'm looking forward to bringing that experience to Jacksons and working alongside such talented colleagues, as we continue to help businesses across the region thrive," she said.

"Most importantly, I'm excited to continue building trusted relationships, working with great people and delivering the pragmatic, responsive and high-quality service that has been at the heart of my career."

Erica says the team are looking forward to working with Laura and Sophie to help the firm towards it ambitious growth plans.

"With her wealth of knowledge and experience in employment law and business immigration, Laura is sure to be a real asset to the team," she says.

"Her input as a partner will also be highly valued by the senior leadership team, as we look to position ourselves as the go-to legal partner, providing business-focused advice to commercial organisations of all sizes across the region."

jacksons.law

SD Legal Services Ltd provide a full range of quality process serving, investigation and Enforcement services throughout the UK via a network of trusted agents.



SD LEGAL SERVICES

THE COMPLETE PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

NORTH EAST BASED.....NATIONALLY RESPECTED

07832 238441
SDLEGALSERVICES@BTINTERNET.COM
WWW.SDLEGALLTD.CO.UK

ABI
Association of British Investigators
Upholding Professional Values


Emma Canham

Divorcing?

By Emma Canham,
Senior Associate, Family Law, BHP Law

Why mediation could be your smartest first move.

When a relationship breaks down, it can be tempting to think immediately in terms of solicitors, court proceedings and two opposing sides.

But separation and divorce do not have to begin – or end – in a courtroom.

For many couples, mediation offers a more constructive way to navigate difficult decisions. For business owners and busy professionals in particular, the ability to retain control, protect privacy and manage both time and cost makes it an option worth considering.

Keeping control

One of the greatest advantages of mediation is that the people involved remain at the centre of the decision-making.

Rather than asking a court to determine what should happen, an independent mediator helps both parties identify the issues, communicate effectively and explore solutions. They do not take sides or impose an outcome; their role is to facilitate productive conversations and help find common ground.

That can be invaluable when emotions are running high. Separation brings difficult discussions about children, property, savings, pensions and sometimes business interests. A mediator can help lower the temperature and prevent disagreement from becoming entrenched.

Time, cost and privacy

For anyone managing a business or demanding career, time matters.

Court proceedings can involve lengthy correspondence, preparation and hearings, with progress often dictated by the court timetable. Mediation can provide greater flexibility, allowing discussions to focus on the issues preventing agreement.

There can be a financial benefit too. Mediation does not replace the need for independent legal advice, but resolving issues constructively can reduce the time and money spent on prolonged disputes.

Privacy may also be particularly important where separation involves company shareholdings, investments, remuneration structures or other commercially sensitive matters. Mediation provides a private and confidential setting in which those issues can be discussed.

Looking beyond the divorce

Where children are involved, the relationship between parents does not simply end when the marriage does.

There will still be decisions about schools, holidays, birthdays and future milestones. A highly adversarial divorce can make that relationship considerably harder.

Mediation encourages parents to focus on what their children need and establish workable arrangements for the future. You do not have to remain friends, but finding a way to communicate effectively as parents can be invaluable.

Why mediation matters

The family justice system increasingly encourages separating couples to consider resolving disputes outside court where it is safe and appropriate.

Before making many applications relating to children or finances, individuals will usually be expected to attend a Mediation Information and Assessment Meeting (MIAM), unless an exemption applies. Courts must also consider whether non-court dispute resolution may be appropriate as a case progresses.

Financial support may be available too. The Family Mediation Voucher Scheme can currently contribute up to £500 towards mediation in eligible cases involving children, while legal aid may be available to those who meet the relevant criteria.

Mediation will not be appropriate in every case, particularly where there is domestic abuse, safeguarding concerns or a significant imbalance of power. A mediator will assess suitability before the process begins.

But mediation is not just for couples who already agree. Disagreement is precisely why it exists. Handled well, it can shift the conversation away from "How do I win?" towards something far more useful: "How do we resolve this and move forward?"

For many separating couples, that could be the smartest first move they make.

Emma Canham is a Senior Associate in the Family Law team at BHP Law. If you are considering separation or divorce and would like to understand whether mediation could be right for you, contact Emma to discuss your circumstances and options.

EmmaCanham@bhplaw.co.uk
bhplaw.co.uk

Patents – Full steam ahead

By Dominic Elsworth, Hargreaves Elsworth

In our recent article, Patents - How to Milk Them, we looked at a patent strategy that involved industry wide licensing to develop market acceptance for a very new technology. Novel ways of patent licensing have been seen before.

This month we go back to the industrial revolution and the age of steam to see how the adoption of new technology was encouraged over 250 years ago.

On 5th January 1769 James Watt was granted his first patent for a steam engine with a separate condenser entitled, "Watt's Method of Lessening the Consumption of Steam and Fuel in Fire Engines".

Boulton and Watt manufactured steam engines, but they did not sell them. At the time the main use for steam engines was in pumping water from mines. Their approach was to sell savings in fuel instead of selling the steam engines. Boulton and Watt charged 1/3rd of the value of the coal saved by changing from a Newcomen engine to Watt's new engine. The value of coal saving was based on the number the strokes of the steam engine (counted by a locked counter accessible only by Boulton and Watt's inspectors).

By removing upfront costs, and basing payments on shared savings, Watt's new steam engine was adapted rapidly and in the long run was much more financially beneficial to Boulton and Watt than steam engines sales alone would have been.

Boulton and Watt's approach to licensing was unconventional, but at its heart were three essential elements: something to license (a patent); something to count (the strokes of the engine) and access to licensee's premises by inspectors. These elements are found in almost every patent licence agreement.

In today's world where service counts for a great deal it may be time for manufacturers to look again at using patent licensing to market their products as services. Boulton and Watt showed how this could be done.

www.heip.co.uk



Dominic Elsworth

Hargreaves Elsworth

Patent Attorneys

For practical advice in relation to:

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

Please contact:
Dominic Elsworth CPA, EPA (Head of Practice)

26 Northumberland Square, North Shields, Tyne & Wear, NE30 1PW
T: +44 (0) 191 570 0039 F: +44 (0) 191 247 7102 E: office@heip.co.uk www.heip.co.uk


Barry Speker OBE

Straight talk with Speker

By Barry Speker OBE

Ongoing concern at the illegal immigration crisis is expressed in constant imploration to successive governments to take effective action.

The continuous spectacle of 'small boats' of immigrants crossing the channel demonstrates that no one is willing or able to 'stop the boats' or 'smash the gangs'.

The extension of the crossings along the south coast in September saw 120 migrants being brought safely ashore in Portsmouth by the RNLI.

There was significant local indignation at the incident, the lack of facilities to process the arrivals and that we have no secure borders.

However balaclava wearing protesters blocked roads and directed their ire at the RNLI following their role in the rescue.

In Britain there are 7,800 men and women who selflessly volunteer in the RNLI. Since the charity was founded in 1824 it is estimated that they have saved more than 146,000 at sea, an amazing humanitarian achievement.

RNLI volunteers in Portsmouth were then accosted while off-duty in supermarkets, cars vandalised and even volunteers' children bullied at school because of their parents' association with the charity.

Such appalling hatred and intimidation towards RNLI crews for rescuing asylum seekers is surely a new low by people unable and unwilling to acknowledge the moral decency and selfless bravery of the admirable mission of the RNLI.

The Red Poppy is our national emblem of remembrance. By wearing it we remember those brave men and women who lost their lives fighting for our freedom against tyranny and fascism. The sale proceeds aid armed forces charities.

How regrettable and tasteless that a British-Pakistani NHS paediatrician should create a 'Palestine poppy' with proceeds going to Palestine activists. This is a man who supports Muslim punishments such as stoning and amputation, denies the Holocaust and defends the October 7th massacre.

Such cultural appropriation of the poppy is typical of many who espouse extreme cults and become single interest fanatics.

How can it be allowed for the poppy, our national symbol which unites the nation in honour and respectful remembrance, be allowed to be politicised and utilised by a group intent on promoting hatred and division?

It was a great pleasure to be at this year's annual dinner of Newcastle Law Society- now expanded as the Newcastle and North England Law Society incorporating Carlisle and Tees Valley. Importantly this marked the 200th anniversary of the Society, and I have been a member for 25% of the 200 years.

President Lesley Fairclough, Sanchia and their team provided a glittering occasion at the Hilton.

It was a pleasure to hear guest speaker, Shaun Wallace, famous as the Dark Destroyer, one of the experts in The Chase, a past winner of Mastermind and pin up for the Jane Plan diet which helped him lose two stones.

More appositely, he is also a barrister and movingly described his early struggles from modest beginnings, failing English Language O-level 4 times - and then after being called to the Bar, struggling for four years before being accepted by a set of Chambers.

He jokingly conceded that now being 'so famous and rich' he need practise rather less frequently as a barrister.

There can be no more deserving winner of the Pride of Britain Lifetime Achievement Award than Mr Asif Hasan. Asif became an internationally renowned Paediatric Cardiac surgeon at Newcastle's Freeman Hospital where he practised for 30 years until his recent retirement.

He was a pioneer in heart transplants for babies and young children and performed over 400 transplants. He also established various techniques which saved very many lives and devised new operations on those with congenital heart conditions.

It was immensely moving to see so many of Asif's young patients attending at the Grosvenor House to celebrate Asif's award. We can all be very proud of him.

barryspeker@hotmail.com







0191 232 8345 | hay-kilner.co.uk

CELEBRATING
80 YEARS

The law can be complex. Your advice shouldn't be.

Clear, practical legal support for you and your business.

Hay & Kilner

Here for you

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



Newcastle Mam's creative children's business Little Hooray named Theo Paphitis #SBS winner

A Newcastle Mam of three who launched a children's creative business earlier this year has been recognised by retail entrepreneur Theo Paphitis as one of his Small Business Sunday #SBS winners.

Little Hooray was founded by Vicky Youll and creates paint your own kits, activity boxes, personalised canvas painting kits and pre-filled party bags for children aged 3+.

Vicky shared Little Hooray with Theo through his weekly Small Business Sunday initiative and was selected as one of six businesses that week to join the #SBS community.

Before starting Little Hooray, Vicky spent 14 years working as a DT and Art teacher and previously worked as a freelance graphic designer.

After recently being made redundant, Vicky wanted to find a way to continue encouraging children to be creative, while also bringing together her love of designing and making.

Little Hooray brings together Vicky's background in design, making and working creatively with children. She makes the plaster casts used in many of the paint kits herself, as well as putting together, personalising and packing orders from home.

Vicky said: "I only launched Little Hooray this year, so to have the business recognised by Theo Paphitis so early on feels really special.

Creativity has always been such a big part of my life. I worked as a graphic designer before spending 14 years teaching DT and Art, so Little Hooray feels like such a natural next step for me.

After being made redundant, I decided it was time to really go for it and put more of my time into building something of my own.

I'm still very much at the beginning and learning as I go, so being chosen as an #SBS winner is a really lovely milestone. I'm excited to be part of the #SBS community and to see where I can take Little Hooray next."

Small Business Sunday was launched by Theo Paphitis in 2010 to recognise and support small businesses across the UK. Each week, six businesses are selected through X, Instagram and LinkedIn and welcomed into the #SBS network, which now includes more than 4,500 members.

Winners receive a profile on the official #SBS website and become part of a wider small-business community with opportunities to connect with other winners and take part in #SBS events and initiatives.

Children's Foundation getting cosy at Deckham Family Hub with new storytelling space

Young Gateshead families are building their love of reading and stories in greater comfort thanks to a North East children's charity and a regional employer.

The Children's Foundation has opened a new Cosy Corner within the Toddling On 'stay and play' cafe in its Deckham Family Hub on Elgin Road.

The new space is designed to give young children a comfortable, informal place to play, relax and listen to the Foundation's regular storytelling sessions.

A £2,013 grant from the Banks Group's Banks Community Fund enabled the Foundation to fit out the Cosy Corner, which will include new bookshelves, tactile and sensory elements, canopies and books being included.

The Children's Foundation opened the Toddling On café late last year to give local families with young children a warm, welcoming space to play, connect and make memories together in the heart of the community.

It offers good quality coffee and nutritious food at discounted prices to help ensure it remains accessible to all and hosts a range of fun activities designed to support children's development in their earliest years.

Founded in Newcastle in 1990 to help address what were the worst levels of child health in the country at the time, the Foundation works to improve the health and well-being of the most vulnerable and marginalised children and young people right across the North East.

Its 'Yellow Brick Road Appeal' raised £12m to build The Sir James Spence



Institute of Child Health, which sits within the Great North Children's Hospital and is one of the UK's leading NHS centres for research into childhood ill–health.

The Children's Foundation is an independent charity and receives no statutory funding.



Red Sky Foundation Golf Day Classic







A star-studded charity golf day held at Ramside Hall Hotel, Golf & Spa in County Durham, featuring former Premier League footballers and a former professional cricketer, has raised an incredible £16,538 for North East cardiac charity Red Sky Foundation, with funds helping to support families facing some of the most challenging moments of their lives.

The event welcomed some familiar faces from the world of professional sport, including former Premier League footballers Kevin Phillips, Grant Leadbitter, Gareth Barry, Seth Johnson and Steven Howard, alongside Phil Mustard, former England and Durham professional cricketer.

Their involvement helped make the occasion extra special, with guests enjoying the opportunity to take to the course alongside some well-known sporting names, while raising vital funds for a charity making a difference across the North East and beyond.

The incredible £16,538 raised will contribute towards Red Sky Foundation's Family Hardship Fund, which provides vital financial assistance to families caring for a loved one living with a serious and complex heart condition.

The charity is seeing an increasing demand for support from families facing extraordinary circumstances, including those travelling internationally to access specialist cardiac treatment and medical expertise that may not be available closer to home.

For many families, the emotional strain of caring for a seriously ill loved one is compounded by significant financial pressures, including travel, accommodation, loss of earnings and everyday living expenses.

The Family Hardship Fund aims to ease some of these burdens, allowing families to focus on what matters most – being there for their loved ones during incredibly difficult times.

Dr Sergio Petrucci MBE (Hon), Founder of Red Sky Foundation, said: "What an absolutely incredible day! We're completely blown away by the generosity and support we've received at this year's Golf Day Classic.

"To raise £16,538 is a fantastic achievement, and this money will make a real difference to families who desperately need our help.

"We're seeing an increasing number of families having to travel across the world to access specialist cardiac care for their loved ones. These are families already facing unimaginable challenges, and the last thing they should have to worry about is how they're going to afford accommodation, travel or simply keep up with everyday bills.

"Our new Family Hardship Fund is about making sure these families know they're not alone. We want to be there to offer practical support when they need it most.

"We simply couldn't do this without the incredible businesses, sporting legends and supporters who continue to get behind Red Sky Foundation. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you!"

The charity has also extended a special thank you to its generous Golf Day supporters, whose contributions played a significant role in the event's success.

Supporters included: BornGood, Ringtons, Robinson Brown Design, AB Roofing Solutions Ltd, TROO, Time2Train, Bethany Ganley at Taylor Rose, Par Petroleum Ltd, Everyone Active, NERAMS Ltd, Robertson Interiors Ltd, HMH Civils Limited, Plumbase South Shields, Fink Golfwear, SG Petch, W.H. Forster (Printers) Ltd and Kuro Health.

From supporting competitions and contributing prizes to helping bring the event together, the generosity of these businesses helped create a memorable day while raising much-needed funds.

The Golf Day Classic continues to highlight the power of the North East business community coming together for a shared purpose, demonstrating how generosity, community spirit and a little friendly competition can make a lasting difference.

Red Sky Foundation would like to thank every golfer, business, volunteer and supporter who helped make the 2026 Golf Day Classic such an outstanding success.

Following the success of this year's event, Red Sky Foundation is already looking ahead to its Golf Day Classic 2027.

Anyone interested in taking part, entering a team or supporting next year's event is encouraged to get in touch by emailing info@redskyfoundation.com to register their interest.













Major North East charity stages ‘restaurant take-over’ for people with swallowing difficulties

North East people with swallowing difficulties (dysphagia) got a rare chance to eat out with loved ones thanks to a restaurant take-over being organised by The Percy Hedley Foundation.

A group of people with dysphagia from the Foundation dined out at the Baltic Kitchen in Gateshead with their peers, as part of an event to raise awareness of the condition.

It is estimated that between four million and 5.2 million people in the UK live with some form of dysphagia, which is 1 in 8 adults. It can happen for a number of reasons, from neurological and gastro conditions, to strokes, learning difficulties and ageing.

The special dining-out experience - created in partnership with Wiltshire Farm Foods which specialises in texture-modified meals - allowed guests to enjoy a pleasure that most of us take for granted.

The International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (IDDSI) describes food and drink across a range from levels 0-7 and gives clear guidelines for modification. This event will provide meals that are level 7 regular as well as three specific modified textures - level 4 puréed, level 5 minced and level 6 soft and bite-sized.

The Percy Hedley Foundation is hoping that the occasion will help educate society and encourage the hospitality industry to make restaurants more accessible to people who may require a different food texture.



Changing Lives launches Christmas appeal

Changing Lives is calling on people across the North East to help provide Christmas meals for people experiencing the challenges of homelessness, working with partners in Newcastle.

The charity’s Christmas appeal asks people to donate £5 to provide a Christmas meal, helping someone enjoy a hot dinner, a place at the table and the company of others during what can be an especially difficult and lonely time of year.

This year, Changing Lives will once again work with Newcastle Cathedral, the city’s Anglican cathedral, and Café 16, run by The Oswin Project, to provide a Christmas meal at the cathedral on 22 December. The meal will welcome people experiencing the challenges of homelessness, including those sleeping rough, bringing people together over food and conversation in the days leading up to Christmas.

New figures published by the Office for National Statistics on 1st October estimate that 40 deaths of people experiencing homelessness were registered in the North East in 2025. Behind each number is a person and the people who knew and loved them.

The appeal comes amid growing pressure across the region. The Government’s latest annual rough sleeping snapshot estimated that 162 people were sleeping rough on a single night in the North East in autumn 2025, up from 124 in autumn 2024. That 31% increase was the largest percentage rise of any English region.

In Newcastle, the estimated number of people sleeping rough on a single night more than doubled, rising from 21 in autumn 2024 to 46 in autumn 2025, an increase of 119%.

This year’s campaign remembers those who have died while experiencing homelessness and calls on our communities to help more people find warmth, welcome and a place at the table this Christmas.

Cleveland Cable becomes Pioneer Partner with £25,000 donation to Teesside Hospice

Teesside-based Cleveland Cable has strengthened its support for Teesside Hospice by becoming the charity’s first-ever Pioneer Partner. Through the landmark partnership, the company will donate £25,000 each year, helping the Hospice provide vital end-of-life care and support to local people and their families across the region.

This is the next step in a long-standing partnership, which includes over 10 years of support and 8 years of consecutive giving. The £25,000 will provide over 900 hours of expert nursing care at Teesside Hospice, ensuring dignity, comfort, and support for patients receiving care in the 10-bed Inpatient Unit.

Glynn Bartliff, Renewable Energy & BESS Strategic Account Manager at Cleveland Cable, said: “We’re incredibly proud to become Teesside Hospice’s first-ever Pioneer Partner, strengthening a relationship that has meant a great deal to us for many years. Taking part in the Italian Job Rally earlier this year was a fantastic experience and a real reminder of the difference the Hospice makes across our community. We’re looking forward to continuing to build on this partnership and supporting its vital work for years to come.”



Justine Cook, Company Secretary at Cleveland Cable, added: “Teesside Hospice holds a very special place in our hearts. We’ve seen first-hand the care, compassion and support it provides, with one of our own colleagues having benefited from its services. Becoming their first Pioneer Partner means a great deal to us and reflects our commitment to helping ensure the Hospice can continue to be there for local people and their families at some of the most difficult times in their lives.”

Oasis Community Housing
Hope. Not Homelessness.
GIVING A HOME
Christmas Challenge
BigGive
Support your local homelessness charity this Christmas
All donations doubled when you give between 1 - 8 December 2026
Registered charity number 1107554



Sharon Nelson

Hope for Hope House

A charity has revealed a long-awaited new Hartlepool children's home is expected to be "up and running" by next Spring.

Planning permission for Hope House was granted in June by Hartlepool Borough Council.

The Granville Avenue site will house no more than four local children in care. It has been developed by Changing Futures North East, a Hartlepool-based charity.

Now the charity has revealed it hopes to open Hope House in around April 2027, with around a dozen new staff now needed – including a home manager.

"Hope House is the next step in our journey to provide long-term therapeutically informed support for local children in care, and now we need the right people to make that happen," said Sharon Nelson, from Changing Futures North East.

"The ideal manager and the homes residential workers will be people who share our passion for shaping young lives, and who are connected to our vision to provide long-term therapeutically informed support for children in care."

"We already offer foster homes to young people, and soon residential. In the future we will want to build support services to provide long term care to children as they become adults, so that they continue to thrive".

"We've already had informal interest from people keen on working at Hope House, and clearly there's a real appetite across Hartlepool to try and give these young people the chance in life that they deserve."

Currently, Hartlepool has the country's third highest rate of children in care.

Additionally, one in 88 children in the North East are in care – more than any other region.

As such, Sharon said the home would be a "sanctuary" for youngsters needing stability and TLC in their lives.

"Children in care are there through no fault of their own. Some young people really thrive after residential care, but too many don't for complex reasons – including a lack of long-term support. We are trying to change those outcomes," she added.

"We want Hope House to be a place where children feel the care and support that they may have missed out on, and we'd love for our community to be part of that. We have over 40 volunteers who befriend a young person in care in Hartlepool; that's just one way local residents might want to help.

"The children living there won't have complex behavioural issues, but they may not have had the start in life that all children deserve – that's why getting the right team and making sure children feel part of the community is crucial to making it a success."

It comes as work to start renovating Hope House is about to commence, with the unused detached property set to benefit from a "significant" investment to prepare it for use.

For mor more information, visit www.changingfuturesne.co.uk



Blue Plaque unveiled at North Farm Miners' Memorial Garden

A new Blue Plaque and information lectern recognising Blyth's mining heritage have been officially unveiled at North Farm Miners' Memorial Garden.

The unveiling took place with the Mayor of Blyth, Councillor Mark Peart, joined by Councillors, residents and members of the local mining community for the special occasion.

The Blue Plaque recognises the generations of miners who lived in the North Farm area and travelled along the pathway to and from Bates Colliery.

The plaque remembers those who worked at the colliery, many of whom lost their lives or suffered illnesses as a result of their work underground.

The garden remains a lasting reminder of the generations of miners who lived and worked in the area and the important role mining played in Blyth.

Mayor of Blyth, Councillor Mark Peart, said, "It has been a real privilege to recognise the miners who travelled this route to and from Bates Colliery.

"This memorial garden is a fantastic example of the importance of community action in preserving our heritage. The Blue Plaque and information lectern add to that legacy and will help residents and visitors understand the history of this special place for years to come."



New Marketing Officer sets sail with Blyth Tall Ship

Blyth Tall Ship has appointed experienced voluntary-sector professional Iain Riddell as its new Marketing Officer and he is determined to make sure one of Blyth's most distinctive attractions gets the attention it deserves.

Iain, who has spent his entire 22-year career working in the voluntary sector, has joined the charity with a passion for marketing, community engagement and the North East.

And he admits he has long regarded Blyth Tall Ship as "Blyth's best kept secret."

"I've always liked Blyth Tall Ship, and I've always thought it was Blyth's best kept secret," said Iain. "When I saw the opportunity to join the charity, I could really see myself doing a lot of good here and helping to take the organisation forward through its communications and marketing.

"There is so much potential. I want to help us do more exciting events, both on the ship and at external venues, really bang the drum for Blyth and celebrate the town's fantastic maritime heritage."

Iain began his career at Mencap at the age of 18, working on a pioneering regional fundraising model for the national charity which was subsequently rolled out across the country. He later joined St Oswald's Hospice, working in direct marketing on its lottery and regular giving programmes. It was there that he discovered his passion for marketing and decided to study the subject at university.

His career has also included working for the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and more recently Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter.

Now he wants to use that experience to raise the profile of the ship, attract new audiences and help create more opportunities for people to experience Blyth's maritime heritage.

Amble broadcaster celebrates 600 programmes with Radio Northumberland

An Amble broadcaster who thought he might do just half a dozen programmes for Radio Northumberland has gone on to present almost 600 shows after spending the past decade bringing classical music to listeners across Northumberland and beyond.

Rod Hardisty was one of the very first presenters to join Radio Northumberland when the community station was getting off the ground, alongside founders Stewart Allen and Keith Newman.

Now, his popular classical music programme remains a regular fixture on the station.

Rod's show is perhaps best described as classical music for people who don't necessarily think of themselves as classical music fans.

Rather than concentrating solely on the more challenging works of the classical repertoire, he plays the melodic, familiar pieces that many listeners will recognise, the sort of music that was once regularly heard on mainstream radio.

"I play the kind of classical music you used to hear years ago," he explained.



"You'd hear programmes with the grandest and best-known tunes on the BBC and other stations. It's light classical music, but most people would recognise it and enjoy it, even if they're not classical music fans.

"I think that's probably one of the reasons it has been so successful."

What happened before nine o'clock?

By Catherine Marchant, CEO, Impact Family Services

By the time most of us start work, we have already dealt with part of the day. Getting children ready, finding something missing just as we need to leave, negotiating traffic. A difficult morning can follow us into the first meeting.



Catherine Marchant

For a family experiencing domestic abuse, that morning may have involved threats, fear or a deliberate attempt to stop someone leaving the house. A child arriving late to school could have a parent who has worked very hard to get them there safely.

At Impact Family Services, we support children and adults affected by domestic abuse. We also work with schools, where the consequences of what happens at home can become visible without the cause being understood.

A child struggling to concentrate might be worrying about a parent's safety. School collection could be a source of anxiety. A seemingly straightforward request to update contact details might involve concerns about an abusive former partner finding out where a family lives.

There are many reasons for changes in attendance or behaviour, and staff should never assume abuse is the explanation. They do need the understanding to recognise a concern and know who to involve.

Many business owners and leaders also serve as school governors or academy trustees. Others support schools through partnerships, sponsorship or volunteering. Many are parents themselves.

When staff development is discussed, does domestic abuse awareness reach reception teams and lunchtime supervisors? Do those colleagues have opportunities to talk through situations relevant to their jobs?

A frightened parent may speak first to the person answering the phone. A child might say something worrying to an adult they trust during lunch. Neither conversation is guaranteed to happen in front of someone with "safeguarding" in their job title.

Schools have established safeguarding responsibilities and access to training. Our work with families helps us explain some of the situations school staff may encounter.

We understand why someone might disclose only part of what is happening, hesitate to accept help or fear the consequences of information being shared.

That experience gives context to procedures and helps staff understand why an apparently routine interaction needs care.

We deliver our Domestic Abuse Champions Training through our dedicated sister organisation, Connected Families CIC. For businesses considering how to support a local school, funding staff training could be a practical contribution worth discussing.

School leaders are best placed to identify what their teams need; a business partner may be able to help them access it.

As a governor or trustee, you can also ask who has received training and whether support staff are included.

Businesses already support schools through careers talks, work experience and sponsorship. Helping staff access domestic abuse training is another practical contribution, guided by what the school needs.

www.impactfs.co.uk

Let's break the cycle of domestic abuse

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

Impact Family Services

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

Feeling festive yet?

By Abu Ali, CEO Sleepout Chairman and Corporate Finance Partner at FRP

November is here, and Christmas suddenly feels not too distant.

For some, it is a magical time – but for too many in the North East, it is anything but.

Rough sleeping. Homelessness. Poverty.

Not the sort of topics that we want to think about at this time of year.

But we must.

Government data suggests around 162 people are sleeping rough in our region.

That's the tip of a very bleak iceberg.

Around one in ten NE households suffer fuel poverty, leaving many families facing the choice of heating or eating.

This shouldn't be.

That's why as our fundraising season at CEO Sleepout nears an end, we are urging as many people as possible to do something – anything – to support our most vulnerable this winter.

If you have the time, we'd still love to see you at our Sunderland and Darlington events later this month.

As someone who has taken part in multiple sleepouts, I can't state enough how life-affirming they are – and the impact they have locally is monumental.

But I also have an eye on 2027.

The work CEO Sleepout has done for well over a decade in supporting rough sleepers and Britain's homelessness has been truly remarkable.

We've helped keep some of the country's most vital charities going. We've helped bring back Nap Pads to York, giving the city's rough sleepers a warm, safe space for the night.

We've made – and continue to make – a tangible difference in people's lives.

But it is time to go further.

We need to start tackling the root causes that are fuelling this crisis, and pushing too many people closer to the edge.

That means poverty, particularly child poverty. I'm hoping to soon meet with Kim McGuiness, who pledged £28.6m to combat it across the region.

It also means taking a stance against other big social factors, like the number of youngsters not working.

In our region, 16 per cent - around one in six – young people are not working. That's too high.

But like a lot of the big issues CEO Sleepout tries to tackle, the business community can be the change-makers when it comes to fixing them.

Not sure how to start?
Simple. Grab a sleeping bag.


Abu Ali

I'll see you at one of the upcoming North East CEO Sleepouts.

Sunderland CEO Sleepout takes place on November 12 at the Stadium of Light.

Darlington CEO Sleepout is on November 19 at Mowden Park.

FRP Advisory | Real Expertise. Real Results. | Business Advisers

www.frpadvisory.com
www.ceosleepout.co.uk

L4
Board-level financial leadership, part time
Supporting owners and boards with confident financial decisions
07960 031554
Mark@L4Financial.co.uk
L4Financial.co.uk

The jargon-free, no-nonsense creative studio delivering great work for great brands and smart clients, day in, day out.
kenfolk.co.uk
dba Association Member
Kenfolk

- Rephrase owner Paul Fraser has spent more than 20 years working in the media for a variety of titles regionally and nationally, including a long stint at The Northern Echo
- Rephrase's range of services can be on a pay-as-you-go basis or as part of a longer-term package
- We will do all we can to advise and produce the best possible solution for your needs
- We aim to maintain long-term relationships to achieve goals


Paul Fraser

REPHRASE
PR AND MEDIA SERVICES
www.rephrasemedia.com
e:info@rephrasemedia.com

tell us north
Tell Us North is the host organisation for Healthwatch Newcastle and Healthwatch Gateshead
Email: info@tellusnorth.org.uk | Telephone: 0191 338 5722

Fresh Start:

Supporting women to rebuild their lives

For 80 years, St Cuthbert's Care has adapted to meet the changing needs of people across the North East. In June 2026, the charity opened Fresh Start, a supported accommodation service for women experiencing homelessness and multiple, complex challenges.

The service was developed after St Cuthbert's Care repeatedly saw women leaving prison, temporary accommodation and crisis situations without the time and help needed to make lasting changes in their lives.

Many of the women referred to Fresh Start have experienced trauma, domestic abuse, poor mental health, substance misuse, family breakdown, social isolation or involvement with the criminal justice system. These challenges rarely happen in isolation and can make it difficult to access the opportunities and services needed to move forward.

Fresh Start was created to offer something different. The six-bed service provides more than accommodation; it offers a safe, recovery-focused environment where women can regain confidence, improve wellbeing and begin creating the life they want for themselves.

Many women arrive at Fresh Start with very few belongings and little or no family or friendship network around them. The small size of the service allows staff to build trusted relationships and tailor assistance to each woman's strengths, needs and aspirations. This may include helping women access healthcare, reconnect with family, manage finances, engage with recovery services, develop life skills, pursue volunteering or education opportunities and prepare for independent living.

At Fresh Start, we recognise that recovery is rarely a straight path. Our role is not to define success for women, but to walk alongside them, offering encouragement, practical help and the opportunity to move forward at their own pace.

An important part of Fresh Start is creating a genuine sense of home and belonging. Women are encouraged to personalise their rooms, take part in shared activities, engage with volunteering opportunities and reconnect with their communities. These experiences help reduce isolation, strengthen relationships and create a greater sense of belonging.

Although the service is still in its early months, it is already making a difference. Women are engaging with recovery services, reconnecting with family members, accessing healthcare, establishing routines and taking positive steps towards independence.

One woman arrived at Fresh Start after experiencing rough sleeping and a period in prison. Carrying only a small bag of possessions, she found it difficult to trust that things could be different. Through patience, encouragement and personalised guidance, she has begun establishing routines, growing in confidence and looking ahead with renewed hope.

"For the first time, I feel like somebody cares."

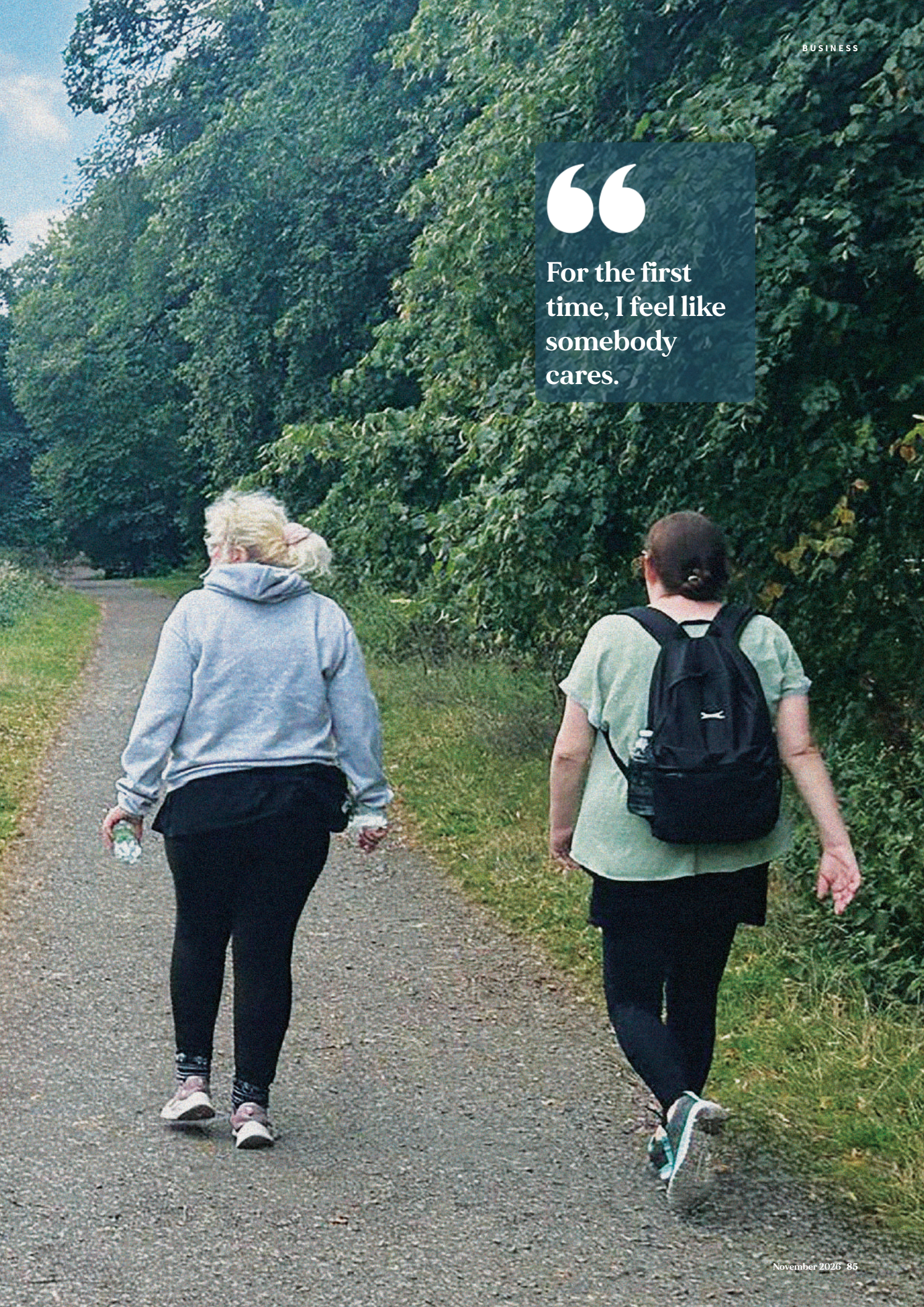
For the team at Fresh Start, this simple comment from one resident captures the importance of providing more than just accommodation. It highlights the value of trusted relationships, consistency and a place where women feel safe, valued and understood.

As communities across the region continue to face increasing pressures linked to housing, poverty and mental wellbeing, services such as Fresh Start play an important role in ensuring vulnerable women do not fall through the gaps. By combining safe accommodation with compassionate, trauma-informed care, Fresh Start is helping women move beyond crisis and towards healthier, more independent lives.

As a charity-funded service, Fresh Start relies on the generosity of supporters to meet its annual running costs. Local businesses, community groups and individuals can help by donating wellbeing items and practical essentials, volunteering their time or making a financial contribution towards the service.

Together, we can help more women move beyond crisis, regain their independence and look ahead with hope.

For more information, please contact Nicola Milne, Marketing, Communications and Engagement Manager, at nicolaj.milne@stcuthbertscare.org.uk



> For the first time, I feel like somebody cares.

A new name, the same human approach to HR

After more than 20 years in HR and a successful chapter with face2faceHR, Kathryn Aylott is stepping forward under her own independent brand, CuriousHR. Here, she explains what is changing, what is staying the same and why this relaunch feels personal as well as professional.

Change is something I have helped businesses and employees navigate throughout my career. Now, it is my turn to embrace a significant change of my own.

After a positive and rewarding time as part of the face2faceHR franchise, I am delighted to introduce CuriousHR: my new independent HR consultancy supporting businesses across the North East and beyond.

Leaving the franchise was not a decision I took lightly. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunities, relationships and support I received from face2faceHR and the wider franchise network. It has been an important part of my journey and helped me build strong relationships with businesses throughout the region.

CuriousHR is not about leaving that experience behind. It is about building upon it and creating a brand that reflects the way I work today.

Why CuriousHR?

Curiosity is one of the most valuable qualities we can bring to the workplace.

Good HR should never begin with assumptions, generic templates or a list of reasons why something cannot be done. It should begin with questions.

What is really happening here? How does the situation feel from the employee's perspective? What does the business need to achieve? Is there a more constructive way forward?

Taking the time to understand the full picture often reveals solutions that a purely procedural approach would miss.

The name CuriousHR reflects my belief that effective people management requires us to listen, explore and understand before we advise. Every workplace is different, so the support offered should be shaped around its people, culture and objectives.

A professional and personal relaunch

You may notice another change alongside the new business name: I am now Kathryn Aylott again.



That makes this feel like more than a business rebrand. It is a personal relaunch too, bringing together a new name, a new identity and the opportunity to shape the next chapter on my own terms.

Although the branding and my surname have changed, the person behind the business has not.

I remain a Chartered CIPD member, trained workplace mediator and HR professional with more than 20 years' experience across a variety of sectors. My approach will continue to be friendly, practical and grounded in the realities of running a business.

CuriousHR will support employers with everything from contracts, policies and employment-law compliance to performance management, workplace conflict, mediation, restructures and people development.

Businesses can access flexible support, whether they need guidance on one difficult situation, help with a particular project or an ongoing HR partnership.

Independence gives me greater freedom to develop services around the changing needs of the businesses I work with. It allows me to be more flexible in how support is delivered, how services are priced and how I collaborate with other trusted professionals across the region.

More than policies and paperwork

HR is sometimes viewed as the department that produces policies, manages problems and tells people what they cannot do – AKA the Fun Sponge.

While compliance and clear processes are essential, they are only part of the picture.

Great HR can help businesses recruit the right people, build confident managers, address issues before they escalate and create a culture where employees understand what is expected of them. It can help individuals feel heard and supported while giving business owners the clarity and confidence to make fair decisions.

At CuriousHR, the focus will be on four connected areas: people, performance, partnership and progress.

That means supporting people to thrive, helping teams perform at their best, working alongside businesses rather than simply advising from the sidelines and creating positive improvements that last.

There will be no unnecessary jargon, fear-based advice or tick-box exercises for the sake of appearances. Instead, CuriousHR will offer clear guidance, honest conversations and practical solutions that work in the real world.

This new chapter may come with a different business name, a fresh look and a familiar surname, but the purpose remains the same: helping businesses take care of their people while protecting and strengthening the organisation.

I am excited about what comes next, curious about the opportunities ahead and incredibly grateful to everyone who has supported the journey so far.

To find out more about CuriousHR or discuss your workplace needs, connect with Kathryn Aylott or get in touch for an informal conversation.



Curiosity is one of the most valuable qualities we can bring to the workplace.

Kathryn Aylott

North Tyneside businesses open up in new podcast series

The people behind some of North Tyneside's businesses are taking centre stage in a new podcast series designed to shine a light on the pathway to success.

"Behind the Business" brings together business owners and professionals from across the borough to talk openly about their experiences, challenges, lessons learned and the realities of running a business.

Rather than focusing solely on business advice or success stories, the podcasts aim to get beneath the surface and discover the real people behind the organisations, their journeys, the obstacles they have faced and the experiences that have shaped them.

Hosted by Jamilah Hassan of JH Property Connect, the series combines her passion for people and community engagement with a genuine interest in the stories that make North Tyneside's business community unique.

Complementing her on each podcast is a member of the Forum's management team helping to create a relaxed, informal conversation that allows guests to share their experiences in their own words.

The 11-episode line-up includes business owners including Paul Pringle of Solarglide, Terry Christie of Scaretech and menopause coach Cheryl Tanner. Together, their varied backgrounds and experiences offer a broad perspective on the people, pressures and personal journeys that sit behind businesses of all kinds.

Angela Tuplin, Chair of the North Tyneside Business Forum, said: "We have an incredible range of businesses across North Tyneside, but behind every business is a person with a story to tell.



L-R: Host Jamilah Hassan with co-host Keith Newman and guest Heywood Similon

"Running a business is about much more than figures, targets and success. It involves challenges, difficult decisions, unexpected opportunities and lessons learned along the way. We want these podcasts to give people the chance to talk honestly about those experiences and let others get to know the person behind the business.

"The idea is also to keep the conversation going between our Forum events, helping people feel more connected to the local business community. By sharing these stories, we hope to celebrate the diversity of businesses across North Tyneside and encourage more people to get involved."

The podcasts will be released weekly on the North Tyneside Business Forum's website and YouTube channel, with the first release on Wednesday 21st October. All 11 episodes were recorded at North Tyneside Council's new podcast studio in Howard Street, North Shields, which is free to use

The series is part of the Forum's wider work to bring local businesses together, encourage connections and provide opportunities for people to learn from one another through shared experiences.

The North Tyneside Business Forum is led by a management group made up of members from various industry sectors in the Borough and gives support in the form of networking, events and signposting for growth and development. Membership is free and open to any business of any size with a trading address within North Tyneside. The Business Forum is supported by but not run by North Tyneside Council.

The Forum is FREE to join and is for any business with a trading address in North Tyneside.

E: business.forum@northtyneside.gov.uk
www.northtynesidebusinessforum.org.uk
T:0191 643 6000



Andrew Silver

Who tells the boss they're getting it wrong?

By Andrew Silver, 360 Growth Partners

A question came up in a recent coaching conversation that has stayed with me: how do you know if you're actually a good leader?

We were talking about leadership role models. The people we had worked with who brought out the best in us, and equally, those who taught us how not to lead.

Simon Sinek talks in Leaders Eat Last about people willingly following leaders when they feel safe and supported by them. But there's an interesting challenge when you're the founder, MD or CEO.

Who tells you how you're doing?

Many of the business owners I work with are what I'd call accidental leaders.

They didn't necessarily set out to manage a growing team. They spotted an opportunity, built something people wanted and, through a mixture of expertise, determination and probably a fair amount of hard graft, found themselves leading a business.

The job changes.

Doing everything yourself is gradually replaced by setting direction, developing people, making difficult decisions and demonstrating the behaviours you expect from everyone else.

And yet, the further up an organisation you go, the less honest feedback you can sometimes receive.

There's no boss conducting your appraisal. Your team may understandably hesitate to challenge you. And it's very easy to surround yourself with people who broadly agree with you.

That can become an echo chamber.

I often use the phrase **"feedback is the food of champions."** If we genuinely want to improve, we need people who are prepared to tell us what we might not necessarily want to hear.

The important word there is prepared.

Good developmental feedback requires trust. You need to know it is being given because someone wants you to succeed, not because they want to score a point. And giving that feedback takes courage too.

One simple exercise I use is **Stop, Start, Continue.**

Ask people you trust:

- **What should I stop doing?**
- **What should I start doing?**
- **What should I continue doing?**

Then comes the difficult bit: **listen**.

Don't immediately explain or defend. Be curious about what sits behind the feedback and give yourself time to reflect on it.

That might come from your team, a peer, a mentor, a coach or a trusted critical friend. Ideally, probably more than one of them.

Leadership development doesn't happen on a course or in a coaching session alone. Most of it happens in the everyday interactions, decisions and conversations we have at work.

But if you're the person everyone else is looking towards, occasionally you need someone willing to hold the mirror up to you too.

And when they do? Be grateful, reflect on what you've heard and, most importantly, decide what you're going to do differently.

If any of this feels familiar and you'd value a sounding board, I'm always happy to have a conversation. Get in touch at andrew@360growthpartners.co.uk



Ian Kinnery

The right people

By Ian Kinnery, Kinnery

It is probably the most important concept in any business.

Getting the right people into the right seats – and doing the right things right.

I've lost count of the number of clients who've told me that by exiting their 'C players' – and then doing the above – was their single biggest transformation, both for themselves and their businesses.

Yet, we repeatedly make the same hiring mistakes.

So, I'm going to take you through a step by step guided to more successful recruitment.

When clients want to recruit the first question they must answer is 'what's the job?'. The answer is not a job title.

A job title is merely a label, and one person's business development manager will be very different to another person's.

To stand any chance of making a good hire, you must be absolutely clear on what the job is. That means understanding the results that you will want to see within three months that will allow you to say not only that recruiting was worthwhile, but that the new hire is doing a good job.

And that means metrics.

What are the numbers that will tell you? Sales of £100,000 in three months? Accurate management accounts by the 5th of the month following?

Debtor days down to 31 days by three months from start date? Remember, without metrics there can be no accountability.

When you are crystal clear on the outcomes you will have a much better idea about what skills and aptitudes the job requires.

So, what are they? You may be advised to include others that are closer to the job in this discussion. You can now draw up a specification sheet for the position of required skills and aptitudes.

I suggest you create two lists here. 'Must have' and 'would like to have'.

Asking yourself, 'is that a must have or a would like to have?' will offer even more clarity. If you find yourself answering 'would like to have' to the question of honesty, what you are saying is that you'd employ someone even if you knew they weren't honest.

Is that what you really mean? In my experience, a few of the 'must haves' will come down to qualifications.

You may insist on a certain level of education such as a first degree or a professional qualification, such as accountancy.

I know they aren't always an indicator of competence but it will say more than someone who ended education at sixteen.

Most will inevitably be attitudinal, honest, hard working, ambitious and so on. Try being as comprehensive as possible.

It is often the quality that we omit that bites us.

Remember, if we make a mistake when hiring we often live with the cost of that for a long time - so take the time to get it right.

Only when you are absolutely clear on the outcomes - and the metrics - will you have enough information to start thinking about the type of person who should be recruited.

kinnery.co.uk

Eothen Care Homes

Compassion, comfort and companionship





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

Living in Eothen Care Homes







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

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

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

Working in our homes

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

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

@EothenHomes ● www.eothenhomes.org.uk ● 0191 281 9100

From green claims to green evidence

By Jo Holmes, Genee

Recyclable, lower carbon, environmentally friendly, sustainable. Businesses use environmental claims like these every day, on websites and packaging, in tenders, on social media and in conversations with customers.


Jo Holmes

But there is an increasingly important question we should all be asking: if somebody asked you to prove what you're saying, could you?

New EU rules designed to tackle misleading environmental claims came into effect on 27th September. They strengthen the rules around how businesses communicate environmental information to consumers, including broad claims such as "green" or "environmentally friendly", sustainability labels and some claims linked to carbon offsetting.

For UK businesses selling into EU markets, that's an obvious reason to take notice. But if you only operate in the UK, it's still worth paying attention, as this is part of a much wider shift that is happening here too.

The UK's Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) already makes clear through its Green Claims Code that businesses should have good evidence to support environmental claims. Since April 2025, the CMA has also had significantly stronger powers to enforce consumer protection law.

Perhaps even more interesting for many businesses is what's happening within supply chains. In January, the CMA published further guidance specifically looking at environmental claims across supply chains, including the responsibilities of retailers, brands, manufacturers and suppliers.

Imagine you tell a customer your packaging contains recycled material, that you've reduced your carbon emissions or that you're sending less waste to landfill. Could you provide the evidence?

Your customer might need that information for a tender, their own environmental reporting or even to support a claim they're making to their customers.

For many SMEs, I suspect this is where the changing expectations around sustainability will really be felt – not through a regulator knocking at the door, but through customers asking more questions and expecting better answers.

The good news is that this doesn't mean every business suddenly needs a sustainability department or a 100-page environmental report, but it does mean getting your environmental house in order.

Look at what you're already saying about sustainability and then look at what sits behind it. Do you have reliable energy and waste data? Do you understand your carbon footprint? Is your environmental policy up to date? Are you setting objectives, taking action and recording the improvements you're making?

Through our work delivering Investors in the Environment (iiE) across the North, we often find organisations are already doing far more than they realise. What's missing is sometimes the structure around it – measuring what's happening, recording the evidence and bringing it together in a way that demonstrates progress.

That's one of the benefits of environmental management and independent accreditation. It isn't about earning a badge that gives you permission to call yourself "green". Specific environmental claims still need appropriate evidence, and it's about putting the policies, data, actions and continual improvement behind what you're saying.

And greater scrutiny shouldn't make businesses afraid to talk about sustainability. If you've cut energy use, reduced waste, changed materials or made another genuine improvement, talk about it. Just be specific and make sure you can demonstrate it.

If you'd like to hear how organisations are putting this into practice, join us at the iiE Sustainability Learning, Leadership & Celebration Conference in Newcastle on 25th November.

We'll be bringing together organisations at very different stages and of very different sizes – from major national businesses such as Greggs to small charities – to share how they're approaching environmental management, responding to growing expectations and turning sustainability commitments into practical action. The event is free to attend and open everyone.

Book your place at: welcome.iie.uk.com/iie-2026.

www.genee.org.uk



From £49 per week

Workspace that feels more like home

Flexible workspace with free parking, a welcoming reception, café, meeting rooms and onsite nursery.

Everything your business needs, all in one place.

BIC

To arrange a viewing or find out more contact:
0191 516 6000 or **info@ne-bic.co.uk**

Wearfield, Enterprise Park East, Sunderland, SR5 2TA

www.ne-bic.co.uk

A decade of growth for Adkins & Cheurfi as recruitment firm looks to the future



From a small, two-person office to a team of 11 working across England and Scotland, specialist recruitment firm Adkins & Cheurfi has spent the past decade building a business founded on industry expertise, relationships and a clear ambition to grow.

Founded in 2016 by Dean Adkins and Melika Cheurfi, the company is celebrating ten years in business with plans to strengthen its position in the legal and commercial recruitment markets while expanding its reach across the North West, Yorkshire and Scotland.

Initially focused on hospitality recruitment, Adkins & Cheurfi has gradually broadened its offering as the business has grown and new expertise has joined the team. Today, it works across hospitality, legal and commercial sectors, helping employers attract and secure talent in increasingly competitive markets.

For Melika, the company's tenth anniversary is an opportunity to reflect on how far it has come, as well as look ahead to the next stage of its development.

"It's amazing to look back over the last ten years and reflect on how much the company has grown. What started out as just Dean and I working out of a tiny, two-person office is now a team of 11 working with clients across England and Scotland.

"Initially, our focus was solely on hospitality, but as the team has grown and we've brought in additional expertise, we've gone on to establish ourselves in the legal and commercial sectors too, which has really opened up doors for the business."

The founders' ambitions now centre on building further momentum in these markets and developing relationships with clients in areas where the company has already made progress.

A constant throughout that journey has been the North East BIC, where Adkins & Cheurfi has been based since its launch. The business began in a small incubator office and has since relocated to larger premises five times as its team and operations have expanded.

Dean believes the flexibility to increase workspace as needed has played an important role in allowing the company to grow without the disruption often associated with moving premises.

"The BIC has been fantastic to us ever since we set up the business. Whenever we've needed to grow and bring in more staff, we've been able to almost immediately move into a larger space without the upheaval that comes with moving premises.

"We've also been fortunate to tap into numerous support programmes and government grants to help with everything from building our website to implementing new systems and processes. It has been a fantastic home for the business."

The support reflects the wider role business accommodation can play in helping growing companies navigate the practical challenges of expansion, from finding suitable space to accessing advice and development opportunities.

Doreen Howard, Centre Manager at the North East BIC, said: "It's fantastic to see Adkins & Cheurfi continue to go from strength to strength ten years after arriving at the BIC. The company has helped thousands of people secure employment over the past decade, and I'm looking forward to seeing how it continues to develop over the next ten years."

With an established team, a broader sector offering and plans to expand into new markets, Adkins & Cheurfi enters its second decade focused on building on the foundations it has created since 2016.

www.ne-bic.co.uk



Compassionate nursing and residential care in Newcastle and Sunderland

Dignity. Respect. Compassion.

Three simple values at the heart of the care we provide every day.

St Catherine's Nursing Home
Newcastle

West Road • Newcastle upon Tyne • NE15 7PY
Contact our Registered Manager Cheryl
0191 245 2400
cheryl.kennedy@stcuthbertscare.org.uk

Holy Cross Nursing Home
Sunderland

Ettrick Grove • Sunderland • SR4 8QA
Contact our Registered Manager Emma
0191 567 0862
emma.parkin@holycrosscarehome.org.uk

www.stcuthbertscarenursinghomes.org.uk

Could *your business* work *smarter?*

We pick up the baton. Build momentum. Hand back better.

We're **Relay Automation**, North East-based experts in AI and business automation.

We help businesses of all sizes automate repetitive work, reduce backlogs and give their teams more time for the work that matters.

Are manual processes costing you time and money?

Is admin taking your team away from valuable work?

Northern Insight readers can book a **FREE consultation**, with practical advice tailored to your business and no commitment.

Email us at **hello@relayautomation.co.uk**
or **scan below** to book your free consultation!

relay Automation

Hospitality, Legal & Commercial Recruitment serving North East England & Scotland

At Adkins & Cheurfi we understand the importance of attracting and securing the best talent in highly competitive markets. Getting those selection decisions right the first time is therefore vital to the long-term success of every business.

Adkins & Cheurfi
RECRUITMENT



Proven Expertise • Established Reputation • Cost-Effective Excellence • Comprehensive Support Services • Swift Placement Solutions

TEMP & PERM RECRUITMENT SOLUTIONS

www.adkinscheurfi.co.uk • 0191 516 6118


Jack Saward

The value of an early decision

By Jack Saward, Managing Director, Saward Marketing and Events

One of the most expensive phrases in business is: "We'll decide that later."

I see it regularly in events, decisions are delayed, budgets aren't properly tested, responsibilities remain unclear and difficult conversations are avoided. Eventually, "later" arrives and suddenly the options are fewer, the costs are higher and everyone is under pressure.

Making an early decision doesn't guarantee everything will go perfectly, but making an informed decision early enough and with the right people around the table can save an enormous amount of money, stress and heartache.

We were recently onsite at an exhibition and witnessed situations that nobody in our industry wants to see - some exhibitors were at risk of not having their stands completed because contractors simply hadn't priced the work correctly. Whether that was down to inexperience, a misunderstanding of the requirements, or trying too hard to win the business, the outcome was the same. In one case, we found ourselves consoling a young woman in tears because she knew her company's stand wasn't going to be finished. It wasn't our project or our client, but you don't just walk past someone in that situation.

Thankfully, these experiences aren't the norm but, when they do happen, the consequences stretch far beyond an unfinished stand. People become disillusioned with events, businesses become more risk-averse, and someone internally must explain what went wrong and why the investment didn't deliver what was promised. So, ultimately, the brand suffers too.

Why is this so important? Well, an exhibition is often one of the few occasions when your brand, people, products and customers come together in the same physical space. If that experience falls short, visitors don't necessarily know which supplier or contractor was responsible. They simply associate what they see and experience with your brand, and it isn't always something as dramatic as an unfinished stand. Poor graphic design or low-quality imagery can also instantly change the perception of a business. There's also the consideration of who you're choosing to represent you on the day, as the wrong people managing the space can undermine the visitor experience. Pre-planning is also crucial, as taking a stand that's too large for the available budget almost always leads to compromises somewhere else.

Then there's one of my favourite traps that people fall into: trying to display everything you sell. Suddenly, a carefully planned exhibition space starts to resemble a car boot sale. Sometimes less really is more, but someone has to be willing to say it.

This is why choosing the right event partner matters. This isn't necessarily the cheapest or the biggest option, and certainly not the one who simply says yes to everything. You need people who understand your objectives, share your values, recognise where they can genuinely add value and, importantly, appreciate the budget you're working with. A good partner should help you make better decisions before you start spending money, not simply deal with the consequences afterwards.

At Saward Marketing & Events, we're comfortable asking the difficult questions.

- Should the stand be smaller?
- Do you really need all that product?
- Who's going to manage the visitor experience?
- What are you trying to achieve?
- Are you giving yourself enough time to do this properly?
- And perhaps the biggest question of all: should you even be exhibiting at this event?

We're not the right partner for everyone and we're perfectly comfortable saying that. Equally, there are occasions when our advice is that a business isn't yet in the right position to do its brand justice through exhibiting. After all, an event isn't simply a cost on a spreadsheet, it's an investment in how people experience your brand. While the right decision may sometimes be to spend more, sometimes it's also to spend less and, sometimes, it's to change direction completely.

To summarise, the reason it's important to make decisions early is so that you leave enough time to give yourself a choice and to ensure you have the right people around the table who are confident enough to challenge you when necessary.

So, while we're comfortable asking the critical questions, the real question is: are you comfortable hearing the answers?

saward-me.com

HOULTS

BLACKFRIARS COURT

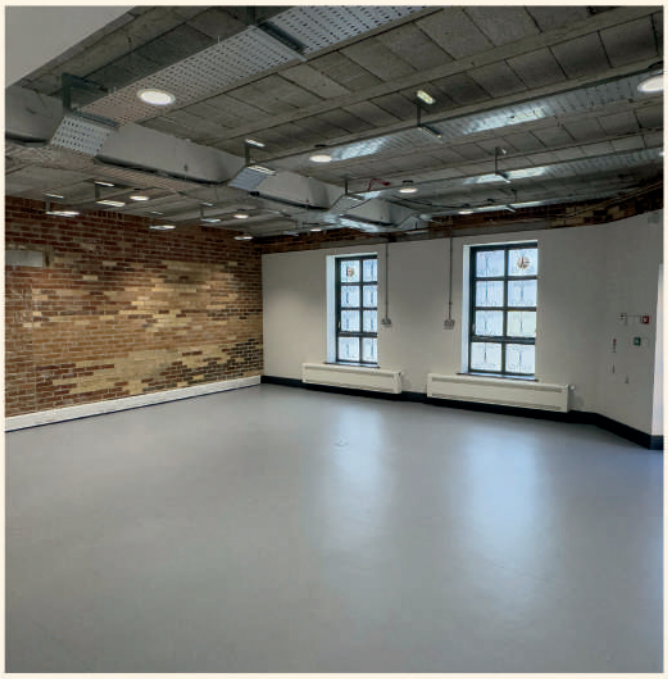
Available Now

Inspiring office space, located in Newcastle's historic Blackfriars.



About

A city centre workspace built for teams up to 40 desks, spread across three characterful floors. Each level pairs a large open-plan space with smaller offices or meeting rooms, plus its own kitchen.



Highlights

- Flooded with natural light across all three floors
- Steps from Newcastle city centre
- Excellent transport links for your whole team







Book a Viewing

0771 149 7337
HOULTSYARD.CO.UK
HELLO@HOULTSYARD.CO.UK

Feel at Home

Building stronger businesses through collaboration, leadership and shared experience

From bringing business leaders together across the North East and Cumbria to championing effective boards and developing the next generation of leadership talent, Andrew Marsh has made collaboration a theme of 2026 and he urges other leaders to do the same in 2027.

As Chair of Vistage North East/Cumbria and lead of The Experience Bank's peer groups and Board Effectiveness services, business development is more than individual success for Andrew. It's about creating opportunities for people to learn; challenge established thinking and turn shared experience into progress.

Andrew brings together business owners, senior executives, board directors, trustees and specialist speakers through a programme of events, leadership sessions and peer-learning opportunities. His work has spanned strategic business growth, AI, board governance and leadership development, reinforcing the value of collaboration.

As Vistage Chair, Andrew works with business-owners/senior leaders to help navigate challenges of running/growing organisations. The cohorts provide a confidential environment where members discuss business issues, exchange perspectives and make better-informed decisions.

Vistage retreats, organised for three leadership cohorts were at Gisborough Hall and Derwent Manor, combining professional development with strengthening relationships between members. The retreats incorporated shared dining, motivational activities and discussions about current challenges and future ambitions with leaders getting space to consider fresh perspectives.

Recently, Andrew brought Roger Martin-Fagg to the region. Held at The Catalyst, Andrew together with Ryecroft Glenton, Freeman Clark, Lumo, NE BIC and Jumping Rivers put the leading economist in front of 200 business leaders for the third year.

Other Vistage collaborations, with people like David Abbott and Les Murray, have seen sessions held in regional venues including Crowne Plaza, Hilton GatesheadNewcastle, Ramside Hall, Redworth Hall and more, challenging leaders to consider new routes to decisions.

Andrew has also continued to develop The Experience Bank's monthly peer-group for non-executive directors, trustees, board advisers and aspiring board-level professionals through collaboration with Peter Neal, with sessions held at Hay & Kilner and Weightmans LLP.

One notable event explored digital technology, artificial intelligence and the responsibilities of board members in an increasingly technology-driven business environment. Andrew collaborated with speakers Andrew Brindley, Alistair McLeod and Parry Jenkins, exploring areas including digital strategy, no-code and the current/future implications of AI. Hosted at North East BIC, the event combined expert inputs with group work and peer discussion.

The event reflected an important principle: effective leadership depends on being willing to learn from people with different expertise and perspectives. By bringing board-level professionals into the same room as technology specialists, it creates opportunities to connect technical developments with the practical realities of organisational leadership.

However, Andrew's work with The Experience Bank extends beyond peer learning to helping organisations develop more effective boards and improve governance.

In 2026, this included collaboration with Ryecroft Glenton on a Board Effectiveness Round Table, bringing together non-executive directors, trustees, board advisers and aspiring board members for a facilitated discussion about governance, boardroom dynamics and the contribution individuals make to board performance.

Andrew facilitated the conversation, helping participants share perspectives and reflect on how boards work more effectively. By creating a setting where professionals could discuss these issues openly, Andrew and Ryecroft Glenton supported the development of stronger board-level practice across the region.

Andrew's collaboration with North East BIC also provided engagement with the wider regional business community. As the keynote speaker for the Growth Lab Sunderland event, Should I Scale or Should I Grow? the focus helped understand the difference between growing a business and scaling, determining which best suits an organisation.

Collaboration has also been central to Andrew developing emerging talent.

This year eight participants graduated from a two-year programme. Designed for managers, the programme combined expert speakers, peer learning and discussion of workplace challenges improving decision-making, confidence and performance. For Andrew, this is all part of building a stronger regional business community: equipping today's managers with the skills, judgement, networks they will need as they progress.

Across Vistage, The Experience Bank, North East BIC and other regional collaborations, Andrew's work this year has covered a broad range of business and leadership challenges. The people he's worked with bring different expertise, from creativity and leadership development to digital transformation, governance and business growth. What connects the activities is a shared belief leaders are better with access to informed perspectives and constructive challenge.

Whether facilitating board effectiveness discussion, bringing entrepreneurs together, or helping experienced executives navigate uncertainty, Andrew champions collaborative leadership and urges others to have the same mindset.

His programme of activity reflects a wider ambition for the North East and Cumbria: to build stronger businesses, more effective boards and a deeper pool of capable leaders who contribute to the region's long-term success.

The value of these collaborations lies not simply in the events themselves, but in what participants take back into their organisations: new ideas, stronger relationships, practical actions and the confidence to approach challenges differently.

For Andrew, bringing the right people together is the starting point. The real measure of success is what they go on to achieve together.

andrew@marshbusinesstransformation.co.uk



Andrew Marsh

Showcase of collaboration

The Experience Bank launches showcase of collaboration to strengthen the boards and leadership teams of Charities and SMEs across the North East.

The Experience Bank Group has launched its new website, highlighting a collaborative approach to helping charities and small businesses across the North East access the experience, expertise and connections they need to succeed.

Complementary services and initiatives are brought together, spanning board-level recruitment, board effectiveness, networking, mentoring and peer group support. The approach is built on a straightforward belief: when the right people come together, share experience and work on a common goal, they achieve far more.

The website showcases how The Experience Bank connects leadership recruitment for small to medium sized charities by Peter Neal, to both Andrew Marsh's and Antonia Brindle's initiatives including EB Effective Boards, Tyneside Networking and NE Solopreneurs, alongside the transformative business mentoring service from Unlocked Expertise.

Together, these relationships create space for business leaders, entrepreneurs, charity leaders and experienced professionals to exchange ideas, develop relationships and access practical support to help them move forward.

For Peter, the website launch is an opportunity to communicate the wider vision behind The Experience Bank: making valuable experience more accessible and connecting it with the organisations and people who can benefit from it most.

Peter has worked with Charities and SMEs across the North East for more than 25 years, helping identify and appoint executive and non-executive directors and trustees. His work recognises the importance of having the right people around the table, bringing the skills, independence and perspective needed to support effective leadership today and sustainable growth for the future. He said: "Experience is an incredibly valuable asset, but its real value is realised when it is shared. Across the North East, there are talented people who can make a genuine difference to businesses, charities and entrepreneurs.

"The Experience Bank is about bringing those people together and making those connections count. Collaboration with Andrew, Antonia and the wider networks we work with allows us to offer more than an individual service. It creates spaces for people to learn, tackle challenges collectively and turn experience into positive action.



Peter Neal

"The new website brings that vision together in one place. It helps explain what we do, how our different activities complement one another and how people can get involved."

Effective governance and strong leadership are essential to organisational success. Through EB Effective Boards, Andrew Marsh brings specialist board performance and governance expertise to organisations looking to develop or improve their boards. Andrew supports leaders and organisations through a range of services, to strengthen governance, improve board performance, develop skills and navigate change.

The collaboration with The Experience Bank creates a natural connection between finding the right people for board positions and ensuring those boards have the capability, relationships and working practices to perform effectively. Andrew said: "Strong boards constructively challenge, have better conversations and make clearer decisions. By working collaboratively with Peter and Antonia, we can connect board recruitment and development through peer groups for trustees and NEDs, as well as bringing the wider support that boards and organisations need."

Tyneside Networking, hosted by Antonia, creates opportunities for people with purpose to meet, exchange experiences and develop connections across the NE community. Antonia said: "Through Tyneside Networking, NE Solopreneurs and my work with Peter and Andrew, I see the value of bringing people together, helping them share, making connections that lead to something meaningful. The Experience Bank provides a framework for that. We make connections purposeful, support people and recognise that everyone has something valuable to contribute."

Solo business owners often make important decisions without the benefit of an internal leadership team or a ready-made network of peers. NE Solopreneurs, developed through the collaboration between Peter and Antonia, helps create opportunities for those solopreneurs to find their support structure outside of their own organisation.

By encouraging peer support and shared learning, the initiative reflects the wider Experience Bank philosophy: people don't have to navigate challenges alone, as the experience of others provides valuable perspective when making decisions.

Experience Bank Group's vision is to support North East charities and businesses to achieve sustainable growth, create opportunities and contribute to the region's economic wealth and social prosperity. The website provides a clear view of a connected approach and offers a starting point for charities, entrepreneurs, professionals and potential partners who want to explore how they could work with the Group. Peter concluded:

"We want to see more organisations across the North East benefit from the experience and talent that already exists. That means blending different disciplines, building relationships, creating opportunities for people to contribute to make a real difference.

"Whether it's improving a board, supporting an entrepreneur or helping people make a connection that leads to something, collaboration's at the heart of what we do. The website is an important step in sharing that and inviting more people to be part of it."

Visit www.theexperiencebank.co.uk


Michael Dobson

A Christmas party should never come at the cost of workplace respect

By Michael Dobson, Director of Sapphire HR

Christmas parties are a chance for colleagues to celebrate the year and spend time together outside the usual surroundings. But for employers, they also bring responsibilities that are easy to overlook when the focus is on festive entertainment.

My advice is to plan for the people as carefully as you plan the party. A little bit of preparation can help everyone enjoy the night and limit the risk of behaviour that causes real harm or leaves a business facing an Employment Tribunal claim.

One of the biggest misconceptions I've heard is that a work party is separate from work. No matter it takes place in the office, a restaurant, or a hotel, it's still a work-related event. So, employers should deal with inappropriate conduct through their normal disciplinary procedures.

Alcohol can make matters more complicated. Someone might make an unwanted comment about a colleague's appearance or cross a physical boundary. What feels like harmless banter to one person can leave somebody else feeling humiliated or unsafe.

Employers should remind staff of the standards expected before the event, including the consequences of serious misconduct. Providing non-alcoholic drinks and thinking carefully about how alcohol is served can also help manage risk. It is worth making sure everyone has a safe way to get home, too.

Since October 2024, employers have had a legal duty to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment at work. From 30th October this year, that duty is strengthened to require all reasonable steps, alongside new protections relating to harassment by third parties like customers and clients.

For employers, the important point is that just having a policy is not enough. You need to consider the risks your people might face and what action would help prevent them.

That starts with reviewing your sexual harassment risk assessment and relevant policies. Are expectations clear? Do employees know how to report concerns? Do managers understand how to respond if something happens at the party, rather than waiting until everyone returns to work?

Training matters as well. Staff should understand what inappropriate behaviour looks like, while managers need to know how to intervene, record concerns, and seek advice. If an incident does occur, it should be taken seriously and handled consistently, even if it happens late in the evening or involves someone senior.

A successful event should allow people to take part comfortably without feeling pressured to drink or join activities that conflict with their beliefs or needs. Think about accessibility, dietary requirements, and quiet spaces. Attendance should be voluntary, and employers shouldn't make assumptions about who celebrates Christmas.

It's also sensible to remind employees of any relevant social media rules. Photographs or videos shared without permission can cause embarrassment and create further problems after the event.

I would encourage businesses to review their policies and risk assessments now, rather than waiting until an incident highlights a gap. Brief managers on their responsibilities, communicate expectations clearly, and make sure staff know where to raise concerns.

At Sapphire HR, we help businesses put practical HR measures in place, from reviewing policies and assessing risks to advising on difficult employee relations issues. The aim is to protect people and give employers confidence that they are taking their responsibilities seriously.

A Christmas party should be something colleagues look forward to. With sensible planning and clear expectations, businesses end the year on a high without losing sight of the respect everyone deserves.

www.sapphire-hr.co.uk

The future of accountancy

What happens when AI does all the easy bits?

Bryony Gibson, director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, shares her thoughts on AI and the skills accountants can't afford to lose.


Bryony Gibson

Most conversations about AI revolve around the time and money it can save, but in accountancy, I'm starting to wonder whether we're paying enough attention to what we might lose along the way.

Having recruited for accountancy practices for more than 20 years, I've seen the profession change considerably. While I'm all for technology making life easier, advances in AI raise some interesting questions about the people firms will need in the future.

There's no doubt about the opportunity. If AI can automate routine tasks and give accountants more time to solve problems, advise clients and add value, that's a good thing, but many of those routine tasks play an important role in developing the next generation of accountants.

How will people learn the ropes?

Preparing accounts, working through calculations, and resolving everyday queries might not be glamorous, but they help people build the technical understanding and experience that underpin sound professional judgement. If AI takes away that foundation, how will people develop the skills they need?

It's a question firms should be asking, especially as ICAEW research published in May 2026 found that 68% of the 35 mid-tier firms surveyed expected AI to reduce demand for some early-career roles. Yet only 17% felt able to assess its impact on their workforce.

That's quite a gap between embracing new technology and understanding what it means for your people.

What skills will matter most?

One of the most interesting questions AI raises is about technical knowledge itself. If intelligent systems can produce the answers, does the accountant of the future need to know as much?

I'd argue that understanding what sits behind those answers, and having the experience and know-how to challenge and ask the right questions, could become more important, not less.

Someone still needs to recognise when things don't look right, understand the implications, and take responsibility for the advice being given. Being able to generate an answer isn't the same as knowing whether it's correct or ethical, but technical knowledge alone has never been enough to make someone a great accountant.

Commercial awareness, communication, critical thinking, and the ability to build relationships look set to become even more valuable. As will curiosity, adaptability, and confidence using technology. This may present an opportunity to attract a different kind of person into the profession.

While firms can't simply change their recruitment criteria and expect the problem to solve itself, they can rethink how junior accountants learn, gain experience, and develop into future managers and partners.

Personally, I don't believe employers have a responsibility to preserve every task that technology can perform, but I do think they have an obligation to consider how their people can develop as the work changes.

AI needs to be part of a wider business and people strategy, rather than simply a way to improve efficiency and reduce costs.

The firm of 2030

So, what could an accountancy practice look like in 2030?

We could have a workplace where technology handles much of the routine work, accountants spend more time advising clients, and talented people progress faster through more interesting and rewarding careers.

Alternatively, we could find ourselves struggling to recruit experienced accountants because we've inadvertently removed the opportunities through which they once developed and learned.

I suspect the reality will fall somewhere between the two, but the decisions firms make today about technology, recruitment, and developing their people will go a long way towards determining where they end up.

BRYONY GIBSON CONSULTING
Jobs. Advice. Expertise.
With more than 40 live vacancies across the North East, whether you're hiring or hunting, head to BRYONYGIBSON.COM

Brilliant Brains . Wise Hearts
Better Workplaces



Combines Emotional
Intelligence +
neurodivergent experience
& understanding

"Scan to check out our signature offering - the Mini-Series. Includes 3 x 2-hour sessions, online or in-person delivery, interactive discussions, pre and post session resources and practical takeaways. Built for all kinds of brains to grow individual ability and shape a positive human workplace culture."

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

Breakfast served all day, every day!



Willi's
Café Jesmond

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





The MMC Research team

Putting people at the heart of product development

North East based MMC Research are used to asking questions, gathering insight and helping organisations make better-informed decisions.

Being invited into a project at an early stage, when ideas are still taking shape is where research can have a particularly valuable role to play, which is why they're delighted to be working with TREAT-NMD on an innovative new product.

TREAT-NMD is a global network of experts in the neuromuscular field, bringing together patients, clinicians, researchers, industry and other stakeholders to accelerate the development of effective treatments and improve diagnosis and care for people living with neuromuscular diseases.

Based in Newcastle, the organisation has an international reach and works across the neuromuscular community to address some of the challenges involved in developing new therapies. Its work spans areas including clinical trial readiness, education, global data and collaboration between the different groups involved in research and treatment development.

For MMC Research, working alongside an organisation with such a strong focus on collaboration makes this an especially interesting project. Supporting the business as they look to understand the different perspectives surrounding its development, their work will involve speaking to people across the spectrum, including pharmaceutical organisations, key clients and patients.

When a new product or service is being developed, the variety of the research is particularly important. It can be tempting to focus on the idea itself, however, understanding whether it will ultimately deliver value means looking beyond the product and listening to the people who will develop it, deliver it, influence it and, ultimately, use it.

By bringing different voices into the conversation, research can identify what matters to each audience, highlight potential challenges and uncover opportunities that may not otherwise be obvious. It can test assumptions, provide evidence behind decision-making and help organisations move forward with greater confidence.

Natasha, Managing Director at MMC Research, said: "We're delighted to be working with TREAT-NMD on this project. It's a great example of where research can add real value at an early stage, helping to bring together different perspectives and make sure decisions are informed by the people who matter most.

Projects like this are particularly rewarding because we're not simply looking at what people think about an existing product or service. We're helping to build an understanding of what different audiences need and where the opportunities may lie as something develops. That insight can be incredibly valuable in shaping the direction of a project."

Natasha continued, "For businesses, this is one of the key benefits of investing in research, it isn't simply about collecting opinions or producing a report at the end of a project. Done well, research provides evidence that can help reduce uncertainty, identify opportunities and support more confident commercial decisions.

For a project operating within such a complex and specialist environment, understanding those different perspectives is particularly important.

We're looking forward to getting stuck into the research, hearing directly from the people at the heart of the project and providing the insight TREAT-NMD needs as its new product continues to develop.

It's still early days but that's part of the excitement. Sometimes the most interesting research starts before all the answers and even the questions, are fully formed."

mmc.agency

North East opens its doors to The Big Cities Conference





Every year those who are at the heart of the place management industry gather together for a two day conference, traditionally in cities such as Manchester.

For the first time this prestigious event stepped away from its usual locations and decided to head to the North East, inspired by the great work which is making a really meaningful difference to the fortunes of the region.

The Big Cities Conference is organised by the Association of Town and City Management, formed in the 1990s because of the general decline in town and city centres.

While the reasons for that decline are many, one of the trigger points was seen as a lack of leadership and co-ordinated management.

It was retailers who took the initiative to try and reverse this decline, forming partnerships to help stem the downward spiral which eventually led to the formation of the ATCM.

Since then the organisation has become a force for good, dedicated to promoting the vitality and viability of urban centres at every opportunity.

Its annual conference allows people to come together from across the UK to "explore ideas, partnerships and projects shaping the future of city centres."

It was because both Sunderland and Newcastle could demonstrate forward-thinking initiatives, ambition and growth that the region was seen as the perfect location to explore the current state of towns and cities.

Hosted by Sunderland's BIDs – which comprises the City Centre BID and the Seafront BID – and Newcastle's NE1, delegates spent a day in each city, visiting key locations and listening to panel discussions by top players in their field.

On day one the delegates visited Newcastle's The Boiler Shop and heard about the £9m transformation of the Grainger Market, along with taking part in a range of discussions headed by experts on subjects ranging from the challenges facing the hospitality industry to making best use of waterfront space.

Sunderland was a revelation for those who were visiting for the first time – with attendees genuinely overwhelmed by what the city had to offer.

Around 100 people started their day with breakfast session by the sea, hearing from Frankie Francis, Music Officer at Sunderland Music City and Nick Malyan, CEO of Sunderland Culture, who has been involved in a range of high profile events in the region include Durham's Lumiere Festival and the Lindisfarne Gospels exhibitions.

It was followed by a quick stroll across Sunderland's newest bridge, Keel Crossing, before heading to Culture House and a welcome from Sunderland's BIDs' CEO, Sharon Appleby.

A panel discussion on the role of culture in shaping cities was led by Marty Longstaff, Music Officer at Sunderland Music City, Leanne Littlewood, Director of Culture House and Head of Cultural Services at Sunderland City Council, Alison Gwynn, CEO of North East Screen and Tania Love, Associate Partner Architect at FaulknerBrowns which has been involved in a range of innovative projects in both cities.

The feedback from attendees about what was happening in Sunderland was overwhelmingly positive, according to Sharon.

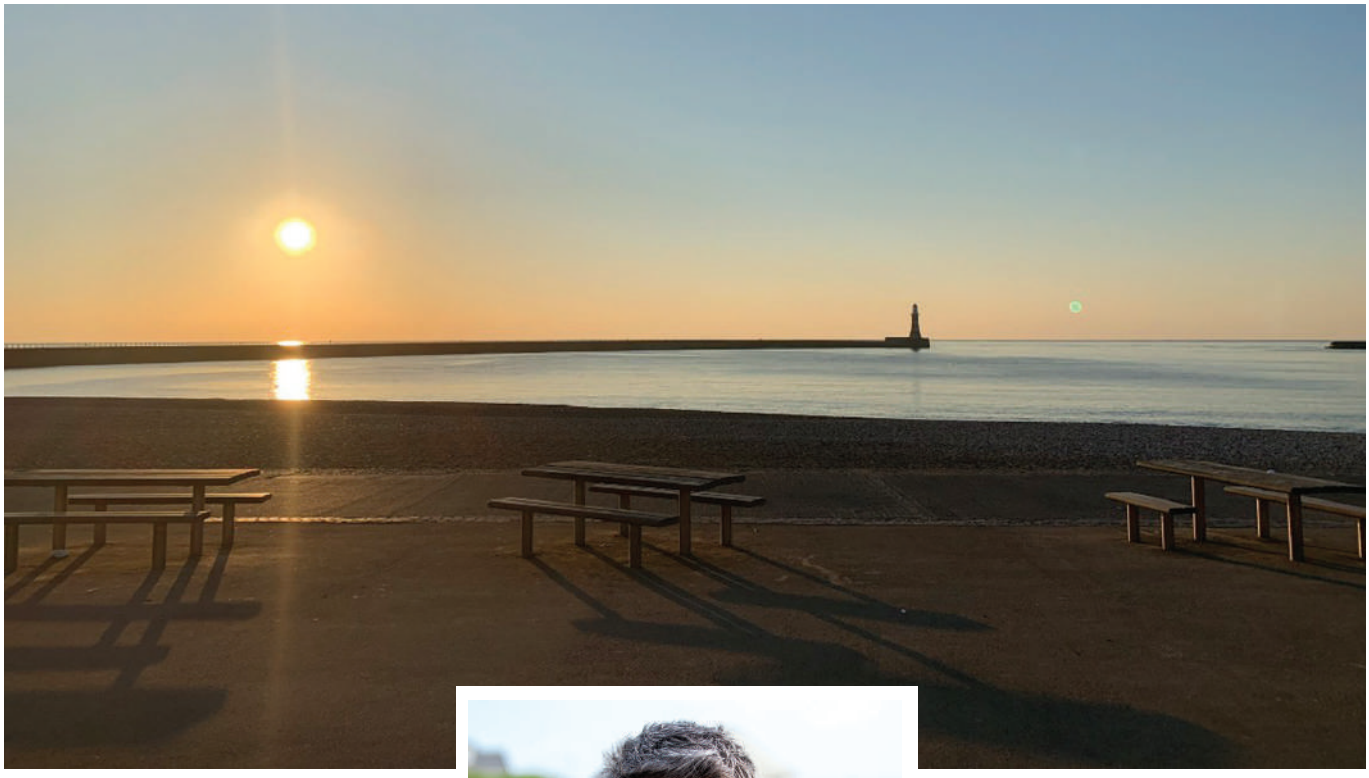
"Being able to showcase places like the recently-opened Culture House and to showcase all of the innovations taking place in the city met with an incredible response," she said.

"Bringing the ATCM conference to the North East was a huge honour and an incredible opportunity for us to collaborate with Newcastle to showcase how we are actively and proactively dealing with the challenges facing modern cities

"We were able to highlight the extent of our ambition and the real progress that has been made in bringing those ambitions to fruition."

sunderlandbid.co.uk





Finding your feet when the path isn't clearly defined

By Hayley Ramm, The Efficient Elephant


Hayley Ramm

1. Situation

A senior executive approached mentoring following a recent promotion into the senior leadership team.

Stepping into a more senior role brought greater responsibility, visibility and a much broader view of the business. It also highlighted some significant challenges.

For someone newly operating at this level, it was difficult to know when to get involved, when to step back and where leadership attention would have the greatest impact.

2. The Challenge

The challenge wasn't a lack of capability or commitment. It was finding the right balance within an environment which demanded their attention in so many areas; from team management to cultural shifts, from operation matters to strategy meetings.

There were constant needs competing for attention, with issues that could have quite easily pulled a senior leader into the time-consuming detail whilst at the same time, stepping back too far could mean important matters were overlooked.

For this senior exec it wasn't always easy for them to judge when to get involved, when to challenge, when to delegate or when to hold off and allow others to take ownership.

They needed objective support to provide perspective, challenge thinking and offer reassurance when navigating the demands of a new role.

3. The Mentoring Approach

The mentoring created a confidential space to step away from the pressures of the week and look at situations more objectively.

Conversations explored the challenges facing the business. We considered where leadership could have the greatest impact, what genuinely required involvement and where greater ownership could sit elsewhere.

Questions helped separate 'urgent' issues from 'important' ones and distinguish between situations that needed action and those that needed observation.

The focus wasn't on finding the perfect response to every challenge. It was about developing a more considered approach and greater trust in their own decision-making.

4. The Shift

Over time, the mentoring helped create a stronger sense of perspective and control.

The mentee became better able to recognise when involvement would add value and when stepping back was the more effective leadership choice.

Rather than feeling responsible for resolving every issue, attention could be directed towards the areas where leadership was genuinely needed. This created more headspace for strategic thinking while still responding appropriately to the demands of the role.

The role hadn't necessarily become simpler, but it became easier for them to navigate.

5. The Turning Point

A key shift came from recognising that effective senior leadership isn't about having control over everything.

Where structure and direction weren't always clear, the focus became less about compensating for every gap and more about understanding where their role could genuinely make a difference.

That distinction created greater confidence in themselves and a more measured approach to the demands of each week.

6. And finally...

Stepping into senior leadership doesn't always come with a clear roadmap.

Sometimes, the most valuable support is having someone who can challenge your thinking, provide perspective and help you navigate the complexity.

Because when you're leading through uncertainty, you don't always need another answer.

Sometimes, you need a trusted sounding board to help you find your feet.

theefficientelephant.co.uk

Strong partnerships

When vital services experience a rise in demand for community support, attention falls on visible operations: food parcels, counselling sessions, or a warm place for someone with nowhere else to go. Less visible is the organisational work that helps those services keep pace.



Elliott Pole, Angel Trust. Makosi McCaskill, Angel Trust. Aiden Taylor, HR2day Ltd

That balance between frontline delivery and behind-the-scenes resilience is increasingly important for Angel Trust. Founded in 2018 by chief executive Clair McGregor, the Bishop Auckland charity supports people across County Durham through crisis counselling, emergency accommodation, food support and donations of essential goods.

Its growth reflects the scale and complexity of local need. The Community Pantry now welcomes hundreds of customers each day, while profits from the Beehive Coffee Shop helped around 1,100 people access foodbanks, counselling and housing support in its first year. Angel Trust also runs an Emporium charity store and delivers Durham County Council's commissioned Safe Night Hub in Bishop Auckland, the only facility of its kind in the region.

The Hub offers food, warmth, emergency accommodation and practical help to people made homeless after a serious life event, including those fleeing domestic violence. Since April 2025, the charity's two in-house counsellors have supported around 300 clients. Its wider reach can also be seen in the 2025 Toy Appeal, which generated more than 15,000 donated toys for local children in need.

Expansion on that scale brings responsibilities as well as opportunities. With around 25 employees and a growing range of services, Angel Trust has had to consider whether its roles, management arrangements and people practices remain supportive of growth. For several years, it has worked with Darlington-based HR consultancy HR2day to address those questions as the organisation has evolved.

Over the past three months, HR consultant Aiden Taylor has supported the recruitment and onboarding of two apprentices. The appointments bring new talent into the charity, while giving managers a framework for expectations, support and development.

For Clair McGregor, this work is not separate from the charity's mission but part of sustaining it. "Our community's needs are constantly changing, and we have had to grow and adapt with them," she said. "We are proud of how Angel Trust has developed, but growth also means making sure the organisation behind our services remains strong."

She said advisers who understand the organisation are invaluable, allowing decisions about its structure and people to reflect Angel Trust's longer-term ambitions rather than isolated employment issues.

Nicky Jolley, managing director of HR2day, believes the charity's experience illustrates a broader point. Growth is often discussed in commercial terms, yet charities face many of the same organisational pressures. Roles change, responsibilities widen and structures that once worked well can become less effective as services expand.

"Angel Trust has developed enormously in response to community need," she said. "Our role is to make sure the people side of that growth keeps pace." She added that organisational change affects real people, making careful decisions, clear communication and fair treatment essential.

This is the less visible side of community support, but it matters. Sound employment advice, effective management and an appropriate structure give leaders more time and confidence to focus on delivery, while reducing the risk that rapid growth leaves staff without clarity or support.

Angel Trust's partnership with HR2day is therefore more than a supplier relationship or a conventional growth story. It shows how two organisations with different areas of expertise can contribute to the same outcome: resilient local services that are able to respond as needs change. In a sector where success is rightly measured by the difference made on the frontline, it is worth remembering that lasting impact often depends on the strength of what sits behind it.

www.angeltrust.co.uk



Lucy Evermore

Business is going for growth...and The Northumberland Small Business Service is leading the way

If you are involved in a small business, you need to get to know Lucy Evermore and her team.

Lucy is the Programme Manager for the Northumberland Small Business Service (NSBS). Don't be fooled by the name because NSBS is funded by the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority through its Rural Growth Programme and Integrated Settlement, and although Northumberland County Council acts as the Lead Delivery Partner, it is supported by Durham and Gateshead councils.

In other words, if you are a business owner based in those three areas, you can get involved.

"We're really lucky to have terrific support from the local authorities, but also from our partners who're involved in working closely with businesses such as Northumberland National Park Authority, Food and Drink North East Limited, and the North East Enterprise Agency," said Lucy. "It means we can provide funding but also allow business owners to tap into a raft of support networks.

"Running a small business can be very lonely at times, so we want to help them in any way we can. We have business advisors who're based across the region...they are a point of contact if you are looking for advice. They've got a vast amount of experience and a hefty contacts book. If you need some advice they can help point you in the right direction. They'll also assist in putting a business growth plan into place, discuss what sort of support is available and how they can tap into it.

"We regularly run workshops and networking events across the region where businesses can speak to experts and tap into the sort of information they need. Yes we can help with to source funding, but advice is free...and willingly given."

Northumberland Small Business Service was set up three years ago and was an immediate success...which is why Lucy is keen to develop the programme further. Over the course of those three years, 1400 businesses got involved...80 new businesses were established and 260 new jobs created. For a rural county like Northumberland, those are the sorts of figures which can make a big difference to a small business and an entire community.



"This year we've been allocated £8.5m from the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority to keep the scheme going and also to expand it. We started delivery of the latest programme in early April and I'm delighted to say that over 200 businesses are already involved across the North East Region. Because Northumberland is a rural county, our focus is Rural businesses, but the scope of the programme has now widened to include one particular growth area…food and drink. Delivered by our partners, Food and Drink North East, they run regular workshops which are relevant to any food or hospitality business…any size.

This November, the Northumberland Small Business Service Enterprise Festivals will bring together business owners, successful founders and experienced business experts to share practical advice, insights and inspiration to help businesses start, grow and thrive. With three events taking place across Northumberland, there will be opportunities to build confidence, develop essential business skills and connect with others on a similar journey. Spaces are limited, so businesses are encouraged to find their nearest festival and register now.

"We want to unlock opportunities for businesses that might otherwise struggle to secure investment. We want to help them get advice. We want to help them to scale-up. We have our team of experts who can visit them, get a feel for their business and then provide relevant expert advice. We want to remove any barriers that are preventing them from going forward and prospering."

The best idea is to get in touch with Lucy Evermore at Northumberland County Council. She and her team are there to help. They've already done successful work for businesses in our region…and they can help you too.



Ready to take your business to the next level? Register with the Northumberland Small Business Service to access support for your business, and book your place at an upcoming Enterprise Festival via the NSBS website Elevate Your Business with Northumberland Small Business Service or email the Business Northumberland team today business@businessnorthumberland.co.uk



NETPark

From Durham University spin-out to global drug discovery business

Magnitude Biosciences enters its next phase at NETPark.

From university spin-outs translating research into commercial applications to established companies developing technologies for global markets, the North East Technology Park (NETPark) in County Durham is home to a growing community of life sciences businesses.

Among them is Magnitude Biosciences, a Durham University spin-out that is combining whole-organism biology with automation, imaging and machine learning to help pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies make better decisions earlier in the drug discovery process.

Magnitude's ambition to screen one million compounds through a whole-organism model – giving drug researchers meaningful biological insight much earlier in the development process – is moving from the laboratory towards commercial scale.

The company has just closed its latest funding round, taking total investment secured to £4.2m. The new funding will allow Magnitude to take its latest technology, VivoScan™, to market, while its five-year growth plan sets out a route to significant expansion as revenues reach defined milestones.



Dr Fozia Salleem

Drug development can take more than a decade and billions of dollars, with large numbers of potential treatments failing along the way. For pharmaceutical companies, identifying which compounds are worth progressing – and which should be discarded – as early as possible can save significant time and cost.

Magnitude's CEO, Dr Fozia Saleem, explains: "Drug development can take 10 to 15 years and cost an average of around $2.3bn for a successful drug to reach the market. With so many compounds failing along the way, there is a real need for better biological information earlier in the process. That is the problem we are helping our customers address."

Magnitude helps pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies understand how potential treatments behave in a living organism, providing an additional layer of biological evidence earlier in the drug discovery process.

NETPark – space to develop and scale

As VivoScan™ moves towards commercialisation, Magnitude expects its requirements for laboratory, technology and office space to evolve. Its expansion plans are firmly centred on NETPark, where the company has been based since 2020.

"From a growth point of view, NETPark is brilliant because there is flexibility as your requirements change," explains Dr Saleem. "You can start with a laboratory or office space and, as the business grows, move into larger facilities and adapt them to what you need. There are options to retrofit existing space, and when you reach the point where you need something more bespoke, there is scope to develop that too."

That flexibility is particularly relevant to a specialist life sciences company whose facilities need to accommodate increasingly sophisticated technology.

"We are a global company, with customers from Australia to California, but we can operate that global business from NETPark," she adds. "Having specialist facilities around us, the ability to expand and a concentration of other science and technology businesses creates an environment where we can continue to develop the business without having to relocate every time our requirements change."

Dr Saleem says the wider NETPark community also provides a valuable level of support.

"I can pick up the phone to other CEOs on the park and share best practice," she says. "People are genuinely very collegiate and there is a willingness to help each other, whether that is around recruitment, finance, equipment or simply sharing experience."

Reflecting on Magnitude Biosciences' evolution from university spin-out to a growing international drug discovery business, and the support provided through NETPark, Business Durham and Finance Durham, Kerry Walker, Managing Director of Business Durham, which manages NETPark on behalf of Durham County Council, said:

"Magnitude Biosciences' growth is a powerful example of how pioneering scientific research can be transformed into a scalable, high-growth business with global market potential."

"As the company enters this exciting next phase, we are proud to have supported its journey through the specialist facilities available at NETPark, introductions to key partners and networks, and access to investment through Finance Durham. Together, these elements help create the environment that innovative businesses need to start, scale and succeed.

"Magnitude's success demonstrates the strength of the life sciences ecosystem at NETPark and reinforces the park's reputation as a place where pioneering science, technology and ambitious companies can thrive. We look forward to supporting the team as they continue to expand their global reach and create high-value jobs and opportunities in the region."

From ambitious start-ups to internationally recognised innovators, NETPark provides the space, specialist facilities and collaborative environment life sciences businesses need to succeed.

Find out more about locating your life sciences business at NETPark: www.northeasttechnologypark.com/life-sciences



Magnitude Biosciences lab at NETPark


Teresa
Peters
smart panda

Expensive therapy with business jargon? Why the brief changes everything

By Teresa Peters, EMCC Senior Practitioner Coach and Founder of Accelerator Coaching Ltd

Not therapy, not jargon: what makes coaching worth the investment for leaders and teams.

Gallup estimates that managers account for at least 70% of the variance in team engagement. So the question isn't whether managers matter. It's whether the coaching they get is the version that works.

"Is it just paying someone to listen to me talk about my feelings for an hour?"

A fair question

That question is doing the rounds online, and it deserves an honest answer. Coaching is unregulated and quality varies enormously, so if you have ever left a session feeling understood but with nothing to do differently on Monday, you have every right to be sceptical.

What good coaching actually is

The ICF defines coaching as "Partnering with clients in a thought provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential." Team coaching, as defined by the EMCC, works with the whole team through "sustained professional dialogue" that builds collective reflection and self awareness and challenges how the team thinks and behaves.

Does it actually work?

The evidence is encouraging. A 2023 meta analysis of 37 randomised controlled trials found a moderate positive effect of workplace and executive coaching on leadership and personal outcomes. Gallup found that regular, meaningful feedback, which it calls the coaching habit, is among the best predictors of engagement it has studied. Gallup's own meta analysis of strengths based development, covering 1.2 million employees, reported workgroup gains of up to 29% in profit and up to 15% in employee engagement. And emotional intelligence matters: a 2026 meta analysis found positive, significant links between emotional intelligence and team effectiveness.

The brief comes first

Research cannot tell you the most important thing: the brief. A great coach listens first, understands your business, your pressures and what success looks like, then tailors the approach and adapts it mid programme when needs change. I once turned up to deliver a sales training session to fill a gap when a team member booked for 1:1 coaching fell ill. I could have gone home and still been paid. But the client's needs come first, and that is where trust and rapport are built.

The magic is in the blend

We start with data: a leadership wheel, anonymous surveys, a 360, DiSC, Gallup Strengths and the Emotional Capital Report. Then we blend 1:1 coaching for personal blind spots, workshops for a shared language, and team coaching to bring it into the room, online or in person. Blended programmes appear to help learning stick. A four year study of 530 managers in a UK public sector organisation found integrated leadership programmes highly effective, with more coaching leading to greater learning transfer and retention. This matters most around 50 people, when connection starts to thin.



Teresa Peters

Read the room

Think of it like the gym. The best trainer in the world cannot help if you only turn up and listen. The change comes from the coachee, with a growth mindset and accountability between sessions. And the best coach in the world will not get you to be authentic and vulnerable if they cannot read the room. That is why emotional intelligence is, in my view, the most important quality in any coach, and why I keep learning. Alongside my EMCC Senior Practitioner status, I am accredited as a team coach, an advanced group coach and an emergent team coach through reputable professional bodies. I am also an Accredited Emotions Practitioner, accredited in neurodivergent inclusive coaching, training in breathwork and trained in working with grief. I practise what I preach, paying for a mentor, a coach and a consultant, and attending group supervision regularly.

I also always work with associates whose styles complement mine, which broadens what we can offer and means you get the right coach for the moment, not just the one who happens to be in the room.

When choosing a coach, weigh accreditation alongside referrals and years of experience. Together they give you a far better picture than any one of them alone.

If you lead an organisation of 50 or more and there is a challenge your team keeps circling without solving, email me at ignite@acceleratorcoaching.co.uk and I will be your sounding board. No pitch, just thinking time. If it is useful, we will take it from there. And if you work in HR or OD, try our programme builder test at acceleratorcoaching.co.uk







Lights, Camera, Confidence!

Businesses from across the Northeast came together at the North East BIC in Sunderland for a fantastic workshop hosted by Gillespie Recruitment.

Led by Ryan Briggs and Adrienne Hawkins from Shout Loud Social, the session explored how to create engaging video content, build confidence on camera, and make the most of social media.

With practical demonstrations, interactive challenges, and plenty of audience participation, it was a brilliant morning of learning, laughter and new connections between professionals from a wide range of sectors.



























Michael Rickwood

It's arrived...my book!

Newcastle, My Lens, Your Memories

A photography book full of my original prints.
***Plus* a potted history surrounding the buildings and memories of our iconic city, written by visitors to my exhibitions.**

On sale via my website...
www.mr-photography.co.uk or call on 07862 16 22 76

£10.99

with post and packaging



TSP Fulfilment appoints Karol Marketing Group as PR Partner

Karol Marketing Group has been appointed by TSP Fulfilment to lead its PR and communications activity. The North East-based third-party logistics (3PL) provider specialises in large and medium scale B2B and B2C e-commerce fulfilment over 400,000 square feet of warehouse space, delivering end-to-end global logistics solutions for its clients.

Karol Marketing Group secured the account following a competitive pitch process, further strengthening its reputation across the region and expanding its growing presence in the logistics sector. The appointment adds TSP Fulfilment to an established client portfolio including North East Procurement Organisation (NEPO), North Standard, Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal, Newcastle Hospitals Charity and SCJ Renewables.

The partnership is already delivering results, with early PR activity securing media coverage for the Alan Shearer Foundation's limited-edition hoodie campaign. The coverage highlighted TSP Fulfilment's role in managing the charity's e-commerce and logistics, helping to extend the campaign's reach as the foundation works towards its £1 million fundraising target.

Stefan Lepkowski, Managing Director of Karol Marketing Group, said: "TSP Fulfilment has built an exceptional operation in the logistics space, and we're proud to have been chosen to drive their communications.

"Securing this account underlines our expanding presence in the sector and strengthens our footprint here in the North East."

Paul Griffiths, CEO at TSP Fulfilment, said: "Appointing Karol Marketing Group was a natural step for us as we enter our next phase of ambitious growth. They understood our business from the outset and what we need, and they share our commitment of collaboration.

"We've already seen firsthand what they can deliver and are confident that Karol will be brilliant partners in raising our profile, demonstrating our end-to-end capabilities and reaching our goals."

The appointment will focus on continuing to raise TSP Fulfilment's profile as the North East's largest independent fulfilment partner for high-growth online brands, showing its expertise and supporting its ambitions for continued growth across the UK.



JAM scoops second award in less than six months

Sunderland-based JAM Marketing is celebrating another major achievement after being named Best Marketing & Social Media Management Agency 2026 – North East England, marking its second award win in less than six months.

The family-run marketing agency has received the prestigious regional title at the CEO Review Business Transformation Awards 2026, adding to its growing list of achievements following its recent recognition as Branding Agency of the Year at the My Local Awards 2026.

For the Sunderland business, the double win represents more than just two trophies. It is recognition of the agency's continued growth, creativity and commitment to helping businesses across the North East and beyond stand out in an increasingly competitive marketplace. JAM Marketing has a particularly meaningful story behind its success. Following a family bereavement, the business was passed down within the family, with its new leadership taking the reins just over two years ago.

Determined to build on the foundations already in place, the team introduced a fresh approach, modernised internal systems, expanded its services and brought new creative energy to the agency, all while maintaining the personal, family-run values at the heart of the business. Today, JAM Marketing offers a comprehensive range of services, including social media management, branding, public relations, digital advertising, website development, graphic design, content creation and event marketing. Working with businesses across a wide range of sectors, the agency has built its reputation on delivering creative, results-driven marketing with a personal touch.

Speaking about the latest award, the team at JAM Marketing said: "To win one award is incredible, but to be celebrating our second in less than six months is something we honestly never imagined.

"When we took over JAM Marketing, we had big ambitions for where we wanted to take the business. We knew we wanted to bring fresh ideas, build something special and make our family proud.

"It hasn't always been easy, and like any small business, there's been plenty of hard work, late nights and learning along the way. But moments like this make it all worthwhile.

"Being recognised for both our branding and our marketing and social media management in such a short space of time is a huge achievement for our team.

"And, of course, we're proud to be representing Sunderland and the wider North East. There's so much talent and ambition in this region, and we're delighted to be a small part of that story."

The CEO Review Business Transformation Awards recognise businesses making a positive impact through innovation, development and their approach to business.

For JAM Marketing, the latest recognition reinforces its ambition to continue growing while remaining true to the values that have shaped the agency.

Visit www.jam-marketing.co.uk or find JAM Marketing on social media.



Region's Businesses urged to get creative this Christmas

North East businesses are being encouraged to tap into the region's brightest emerging talent in the run-up to Christmas, to create content that will sparkle this festive season.

Sunderland Creatives Agency, a partnership between the University of Sunderland and creative marketing agency Creo Comms, is calling on businesses across the region to think differently about how they bring Christmas to life this year.

Through the agency, businesses can commission talented student designers, illustrators, animators and other creatives to develop original festive work, supporting with everything from eye-catching window displays and charming signage to creative social media content and decorations. Businesses are being offered the chance to stand out this Christmas while providing students with valuable, paid experience of working on real projects with real businesses.

Students can support local businesses with bespoke materials including Christmas cards, window vinyls and social media videos and graphics. And in the process, businesses will be giving the gift of paid work experience to students looking to break into the creative industries.

Sunderland Creatives Agency connects businesses with the creative talents coming through the University of Sunderland, enabling students to develop their portfolio while helping businesses access fresh ideas and creative expertise.





More than just a funder

A multi-award-winning Teesside business is continuing to go from strength to strength, more than a year after securing six-figure growth funding from UKSE, the business support subsidiary of Tata Steel, to accelerate its expansion plans.

Outrank, based at Riverside Park, Middlesbrough, added to a string of accolades in September, including the honour of having the best Agency Culture in Europe and being placed 81st in a list of best places to work across the whole of the continent.

These are just the latest in a long line of successes for the firm, which has also been placed in the Top 10 Sunday Times Best Places to Work list and ranked second on the UK's Great Places to Work list, alongside other awards recognising its positive workplace culture.

It also holds the current Tees Business Tees Tech Awards Tech Business of the Year title.

Stephen Robinson, founder and CEO of Outrank, said funding from UKSE enabled the firm to "put its foot to the metal" and experience significant year-on-year revenue growth, as it was able to take on more staff and move to bigger premises.

This helped the firm supercharge its ambitious growth plans and Stephen says that without the investment, it would have taken much longer to get the firm to where it is today.

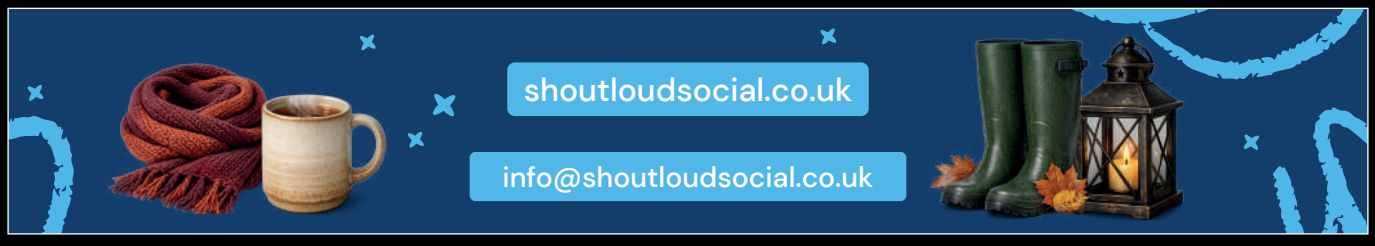
"We reached a point where headcount and revenue were both growing quickly, while customer retention remained extremely strong," says Stephen.

"We wanted to continue to grow, we had a platform we wanted to build and we wanted to take on some larger accounts - but we had to hold off on recruitment because space was a bit of an issue and we had reached a pinch point.

"We met Sarah Thorpe of UKSE to explore our options and immediately, we just got a really good vibe around a friendly funder, and it felt like a good cultural fit in terms of what we wanted to achieve and what they stood for."

He added: "We were trying to grow our local presence and create jobs on Teesside and that fit with their aims.

"With UKSE, it feels like you have got a partner, rather than just a lender."



The dark nights are drawing in...

Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us what they are doing to raise their spirits or enlighten their clients on the good things they are doing.



Slowing down and not rushing into things is a good thing. I let my clients know if they take their time and search the market, they will not put undue stress upon themselves. This gives more time to put documents together and make sure the file is right, it's stressful enough buying a property nowadays without putting yourself under more pressure than you need to. We should take care of each other and get there in the end together with a smile knowing you have done the right thing or at least know you've done it the best way possible.

Andrew Cooper, www.simplymortgagesonline.com



As the darker nights creep in, I'm choosing not to hibernate! Autumn is feeling exciting as I've been busy making music, collaborating and I've released my new single, "Scarier Things." Creating music has always been a way of finding light in unexpected places, taking thoughts, sounds and experiences and turning them into something that connects with other people. So, while the temperature might be dropping, I'm heading into the season feeling inspired, curious and very ready to share what I've been working on.

Annie Enclave, www.instagram.com

As the darker nights draw in, we are making a conscious effort to focus on the good things that are happening around us in the background. At Tell Us North, we love listening and sharing the stories that local people, community groups and organisations tell us, and especially as they are making a positive difference across the north.

These stories remind us that even during the colder months, there is plenty of kindness, resilience and achievements to celebrate. The north is full of remarkable people, and them sharing their stories with us is a privilege that never fails to lift our spirits.

Yvonne Probert, www.tellusnorth.org.uk





I must confess I'm not a fan of the darker nights and colder weather but I'm keeping my spirits up by helping my members feel more confidence and less stress. AskMrsWatson.com is all about making technology and data protection feel less intimidating, whether someone is wrestling with Microsoft 365, worried about a privacy issue or simply thinking, "there must be an easier way to do this." I get a real buzz when something suddenly clicks, and a person goes from frustrated to confident. Providing practical help in plain English and absolutely no judgement for asking is what always brightens my days whatever the season.

Kate Watson, www.askmrswatson.com/#join



The coming month promises to be one of the most exciting and significant periods in my spiritual journey to date. I've demonstrated evidential mediumship at the world-famous Chillingham Castle, widely regarded as one of the UK's most haunted castles, where I launched my first autobiography, "The Making of an XL Medium." The book shares my personal journey, exploring the experiences, challenges and defining moments that have shaped my life and development as an evidential medium. Throughout November, I will continue travelling to venues across the country, delivering demonstrations of mediumship and bringing audiences together through meaningful connections with loved ones in spirit. I am also delighted to be taking up residency at the exciting new Haunted Headquarters in Ashington, Northumberland, where I will be involved in regular paranormal investigations, movie nights and demonstrations of mediumship. Another significant highlight will be working alongside Chris McKinnell, grandson of renowned paranormal investigators Ed and Lorraine Warren, as he tours the UK. These opportunities represent an exciting new chapter in my career, allowing me to combine my passion for evidential mediumship with my interest in paranormal investigation, while reaching new audiences and continuing my commitment to connecting our two worlds and sharing the evidence that love continues beyond physical life.

James Leighton, www.facebook.com



At Our Local Tour, autumn and winter are often when travellers start planning their big trips for the year ahead. We use this time to showcase destinations that offer something truly special, whether that's tracking mountain gorillas in Uganda, exploring the ancient Silk Road cities of Central Asia, or discovering some of the lesser visited corners of Europe.

We're also sharing more stories from our local partners around the world, giving our clients a deeper insight into the people, cultures and communities they will meet when travelling with us. It's a great reminder that travel is about far more than escaping the weather, it's about meaningful experiences and genuine connections.

For us, there is no better antidote to the dark evenings than having an exciting journey on the horizon.

Aled Evans, www.ourlocaltour.com



With the night's drawing in and more people staying home of an evening hopefully reading my book "Newcastle, My Lens Your Memories" I'm going to be posting my local pictures on line and asking my followers to pen a memory that my photos might bring back to them. I'll use these with permission of course as part of a new book "North Tyneside, My lens, Your memories". Hopefully my photos will bring some cheer on a cold wet winters night.

Michael Rickwood, www.mr-photography.co.uk



At Kip McGrath, one of the greatest privileges is seeing children grow in confidence and begin to believe in themselves. Every week, we see students overcome challenges, achieve goals they once thought were out of reach, and discover that they are capable of more than they realised. Just as importantly, we work hard to create a warm and welcoming environment where families feel supported and staff feel valued. There is something incredibly uplifting about watching a child arrive feeling nervous or uncertain and gradually become happy, confident and enthusiastic about learning. As the colder months approach, we remain focused on creating a place where students can thrive, parents know they are not alone, and every success, no matter how small, is recognised and celebrated. In a world that can sometimes feel quite negative, it is a privilege to be surrounded by so many reasons to be hopeful about the future.

Carol Milne, www.kipmcgrath.co.uk/gateshead-east

Last month our RADAR members appeared on BBC TV, BBC Radio, Local TV and many magazines and newspapers. To find out more about the benefits of becoming a RADAR member, contact keith@highlightspr.co.uk or call Keith on 07814 397951

Stay ahead of the curve with **RADAR's** Media Reach







Join RADAR Today - Be Noticed Tomorrow!

Keith@highlightspr.co.uk • www.highlightspr.co.uk

HIGHLIGHTS PUBLIC RELATIONS



L-R: Ian McElroy, Brian Aitken and Steph McGovern

The Source for the North East

Newcastle based Wealth and Fund managers, Tier One Capital (Tier One) and North East Investment Company, Develop North PLC (Develop North) were delighted to team-up and support the launch of The Source - a new online news platform for public interest journalism, engaging columnists and launchpad for the next generation of great storytellers.

Founded by trusted journalist Brian Aitken and supported by former BBC TV presenter and journalist Steph McGovern and local journalist Simon Rushworth - The Source aims to hold decision makers to account, supporting local democracy and making sure the North East's voice is heard.

Just as importantly, The Source will provide a platform to tell the positive stories of a region that continues to punch above its weight, celebrating its local businesses, communities, people and places. At a time when devolution is giving the North East greater influence over its own economic future, having a strong regional voice matters.

Ian McElroy, Chief Executive, Tier One Capital and Develop North board member, is proud to support Brian and his team for the launch of this new and important news platform : -

"The North East has an increasingly powerful story to tell, from the businesses creating jobs and driving innovation to the investment transforming our towns, cities and communities.

"As companies focused on supporting sustainable economic growth and investment across the region, Tier One and Develop North understand the importance of showcasing that ambition and ensuring the North East's successes, opportunities and potential reach the widest possible audience.

"The Source provides another platform to highlight the very best of the North East and the people and organisations helping to shape its future. We wish Brian and the team every success."

Brian Aitken said "It was a privilege to welcome so many new readers to our launch event. Since the launch we have had more than 120 people sign up to get our journalism delivered straight into their inboxes every Monday and Friday - just like the rest of our thousands of subscribers.

"So what's changed? The Source is a new online newspaper for the North East, a modern platform for public interest journalism, engaging columnists and a launchpad for the next generation of great storytellers - and the new home of Eyes & Ears.

"Eyes & Ears isn't going anywhere. It will still be here week after week - as a column that sits inside The Source.

"The Source becomes the main brand that will provide an increasing amount of quality stories you can trust. Independent, politically-neutral but North East biased."

tieronecapital.co.uk
developnorth.co.uk

From placement student to Head of Design

Layers Studio, the UX-led design and development agency based in Gateshead, has promoted Jonny Tabiner to Head of Design, completing a journey that began when he joined the agency as a placement student.

Jonny, who studied Design for Industry at Northumbria University, approached Layers after his original placement fell through at the last moment. Quiet at first, he quickly came out of his shell and became an integral part of the team within weeks.

When his placement ended and he returned to university, Layers kept him on as a freelancer so he could continue working with the team while he finished his degree. He graduated in 2020, at the height of the pandemic, and joined Layers full time.

This week, Jonny stepped into the role of Head of Design.



James Hanson, Managing Director at Layers Studio, said: "Jonny has been a joy to work with. He's always open to learning, he's an incredibly talented designer, and he's a brilliant mentor to every design placement who comes through the studio. His story is a great example of the talent we have right here in the North East, and of our commitment to keeping it here."

Jonny Tabiner, Head of Design at Layers Studio, said: "I couldn't be happier to be stepping into my new role as Head of Design. Looking back, my original placement falling through was a real blessing in disguise. I've loved every second at Layers. The studio environment that James and Paula have created has given me the time, space, and resources to grow not just as a designer, but as a person. I'm so grateful to the amazing team, past and present, who have supported me along the way, and I can't wait to dive headfirst into this next chapter."

Layers Studio is a strong advocate for nurturing and retaining talent in the North East, and Jonny's story shows what that looks like in practice: giving young people a chance, supporting them through their studies and building a career for them in the region.

www.layers.studio



Jonny Tabiner

Photo credit: Christopher Owens



L-R: Sarah Dale and Sarah Walker

Providing high-quality PR support for your event

The Sarahs at SASS media Ltd love attending events!

But for us, it's not about the food and drink or the networking opportunities – although they are fantastic! It's about having the opportunity to write some great stories.

In our role as the official media partner of Female Founder UK, we have enjoyed presenting at recent events on Teesside and in Newcastle and London.

We were able to draw on our experience as journalists to talk about how businesswomen have been presented in the media over the years and discuss the power of storytelling to help give professional women support with their visibility - and how we can help provide them with greater recognition and validation.

But as much as we've enjoyed presenting to some of the fantastic female founders we have met this year, we are just as happy sitting in the background at your event as part of your media team.

In October, the Sarahs attended the first Tees Digital Exchange at the Riverside Stadium, an event organised through a partnership between Atomix Educational Trust, the Association of Education Advisors and the Institute of AI Education.

The event captured the thoughts and opinions of headteachers, CEOs and researchers working in education and teaching staff, about how organisations could work together in the best interests of students when it comes to using AI in teaching - and how learners could also be supported to get the best out of the technology.



Tarek Thoma with Ken Kutaragi "Father of the Playstation"

Dr Nichole Munro, CEO of Atomix Educational Trust, described it as "the beginning of a conversation about what we might collectively build together in the Tees Valley".

It was interesting to hear about how AI presents some real opportunities - and also poses some very serious questions in education.

Dr Munro highlighted how none of those questions can be answered by one school, one college, one Trust or one business and "we should not strive for answers alone".

We were able to support the event with media publicity beforehand and a post-event press release, which invited collaboration between all individuals involved in education across Teesside.

Anybody interested in contributing to the ongoing discussion about AI in education on Teesside can still email Noel Dennis, Atomix's director of community and partnerships, at noel.dennis@atomix.ac.uk – and more events will follow.

We also attended Bazaar restaurant, during Game Republic: New Horizons 2026 - an international gaming conference held in Middlesbrough.

We captured some great images of delegates tucking into tasty treats, as well as producing a post event press release.

Tarek Thoma, the owner of Bazaar, said he was "honoured" he and his team had the opportunity to cook a smorgasbord of delights for so many esteemed guests, who represented the great and the good of the gaming world, from companies like Sega, Nintendo and Microsoft XBox.

Speaking after meeting Mr Ken Kutaragi, known as the "father of the Playstation" Tarek said: "I'm so proud and chuffed to have a legend in my home – it's a dream!

"I'm honoured to see him enjoy it here – it's amazing.

"Hopefully the whole of Middlesbrough will be proud of this great event that the town has put on, attracting people of every nationality, which inspired us to create food from all over the world – and they seem to love it, so I couldn't be happier."

Jamie Sefton, managing director of Game Republic, which organised the conference, also had a seat at Mr Kutaragi's table.

He said he was extremely pleased that 450 people from around the world had attended the conference in Middlesbrough – including Mr Kutaragi as the guest of honour, who had inspired the many gaming professionals he knows in Teesside and beyond in their careers.



Tarek in front of the pizza oven

Are you having an event in the North East? We'd love to support you with publicity around it, so why not get in touch?

Call Sarah Walker on 07896 894538.



Speakers at the Inaugural Tees Digital Exchange – L-R: Al Kingsley MBE, Dr Beth Lane, Dr Nichole Munro, Dr Mansoor Somroo, Les Walton CBE, Dr Noel Dennis and Narinder Gill

Original Thinking with Joanna Feeley



L-R: Joanna Feeley, Kari Owers

What shapes the way successful people think, create and make decisions? O.agency's Original Thinking podcast brings together founders, creatives and business leaders for conversations about their careers and the lessons they've picked up along the way.

In the latest episode, O.agency Founder Kari Owers talks to Joanna Feeley, Founder of TrendBible, about trend forecasting, innovation and why brands need to understand where people, culture and behaviour are heading next.

Joanna began her career in fashion design before discovering trend forecasting, which aligned with her curiosity and need to understand consumer behaviour. Since then, she has built a career helping brands make sense of change and make better decisions about where things are heading.

Would you describe yourself as an original thinker?

Originality is almost like a core value for me. I've always felt that if something is worth doing, it deserves a distinctive viewpoint. In trend forecasting, you're seeking the new all the time, so originality and trends sit closely together. When I was writing my book, a big part of the process was asking whether I had anything different to say and what made my perspective unique.

How can brands use trends without all ending up in the same place?

It's often assumed that my job is to make sure as many people as possible do the same thing, but that's not how I see it. Trend forecasting is about helping brands understand what the future landscape might look like, then work towards that horizon in a way only they can. It has to encapsulate their beliefs, values and vision.

That's especially important where products are hard to differentiate. It's never just about selling something cheaper than the brand down the road – you have to speak to your customer in a way that feels distinctive.

Why is looking backwards not always the safe option?

When there is nervousness or fear, some businesses look to the past and say, "we know we sold this last year, so we'll do the same again." Directional businesses know it isn't necessarily safer to base decisions on the past than it is to imagine a better future and work towards it. The best brands stake their claim and say, this is where we're headed.

What kind of culture does innovation need?

If you want to innovate, you have to create a culture where mistakes are accepted as part of the process. When you move towards change, it won't be perfect and you shouldn't punish teams every time something doesn't work, otherwise fear wins.

It comes back to vision, mission and values. How do you want people to behave in order to move towards the future you are trying to create?

How do you see AI affecting trend forecasting?

AI creates opportunities around efficiency, but we don't use it to forecast trends. You can ask it to extrapolate from what has happened in the past, but that isn't the best route to originality or the best way to forecast.

One example I saw was an AI tool being used to design a kettle for 2028 based on the top-selling kettles available now. As soon as I looked at it, I knew the colour and the shape were both wrong. What that kettle should look like comes from broader product design, home décor, materials, colour, culture and how people are going to live. That's where human judgement still matters.

What advice would you give to young creatives starting out now?

It is tricky because there is such a big narrative around AI and the future of creative jobs, but we have to find a balance between technology and the originality of our own thinking. If I were interviewing a student or intern, I'd want to know their unique perspective on the world. I wouldn't want AI to be the source of their thinking.

To hear the whole conversation, head to O.agency's Original Thinking podcast on Spotify or via www.o.agency/news

H social

HUMAN-CENTRED GROWTH MARKETING

For ambitious North East Businesses

H Social is your outsourced marketing department, delivering creative, strategic and results-focused marketing rooted in local knowledge.

hsocial.agency
helen@hsocial.agency
07903 313 650





Sell your space *digitally.*

Our 3D Tours allow buyers and customers to explore your space from the comfort of their homes – turning your venue into a 24/7 selling and converting machine.

SEE FOR YOURSELF: SCAN A LIVE TOUR

Estate & letting agents
Sell faster, with fewer wasted viewings. Buyers arrive already sold on the layout and flow of the home.
Scan to tour a home

Bars, hotels & event spaces
Show off private-hire rooms 24/7. When one hire can be worth £1,000, one extra booking pays for it.
Scan to tour an event space

Wedding venues
Couples fall for your venue before the show round, ready for January's rush. 3D Tours get you on their 'need-to-visit' shortlist.
Scan to tour a wedding venue

PAIR IT WITH Film · Drone & FPV · Photography · Indoors · any weather

OnDisplay
PROPERTY MARKETING

07734 445944
ondisplaypropertymarketing.co.uk
enquiries@ondisplaypropertymarketing.co.uk





Charlotte Nichols

Blink. Go on. Just do it once

In less time than that one blink took, your next boss or client may have formed their opinion on you.

That may sound extreme, but first impressions are typically formed in around 0.129 of a second (for comparison, a blink takes around twice as long).

That's why your personal PR is vital. Yet, repeatedly, people neglect it – including those in our sector.

How you look, how you dress, how your socials come across – when it comes to your career, these are your shop windows to a better future.

This month, Harvey & Hugo has been recruiting. The Pack is growing. By interview stage, we had some fantastic candidates – yet so many people fell needlessly at the first hurdle. Applications submitted that were riddled with typos. Or one sent from a LinkedIn account, with a profile picture more akin to something you'd have used on your very first MySpace page.

Now I know the world changes. Shirts are increasingly being swapped in offices for shackets.

Yet while styles change, presenting yourself as professional hasn't.

It still matters, and that won't change – and in PR, optics are everything.

And that's the same for businesses. Your perception is everything, and in your business, that starts with you.

Remember - great PR isn't just positive headlines.

It's the story people tell themselves about you before you've had the chance to tell your own.

It's the impression your website leaves. The confidence your LinkedIn profile inspires.

How you communicate. The warm smile when you meet someone. The attentive listening. The firm (but not too firm) handshake that silently instils trust in you.

How you present online and offline all form part of your personal PR and all matter when it comes to how people view you - and your business.

And that's the thing about perception. You don't get to decide what people think of you.

But you absolutely can influence it. For individuals, that means taking ownership of your personal brand.

Proofread your CV - or even better, get a second set of eyes on it.

Update the profile picture. You might have had the best time on Dave's stag do, but is a pint in your hand really the optics you want to present to potential clients?

And think twice before posting something that might come back to bite you. That's why clients increasingly outsource this to agencies like Harvey & Hugo.

Because PR isn't just a quote in a magazine.

Your PR is your public 'PRception'.

For businesses, it's no different. You could have the best product or team on Earth, but if you and your brand don't exude trust and professionalism at every point, customers will look elsewhere.

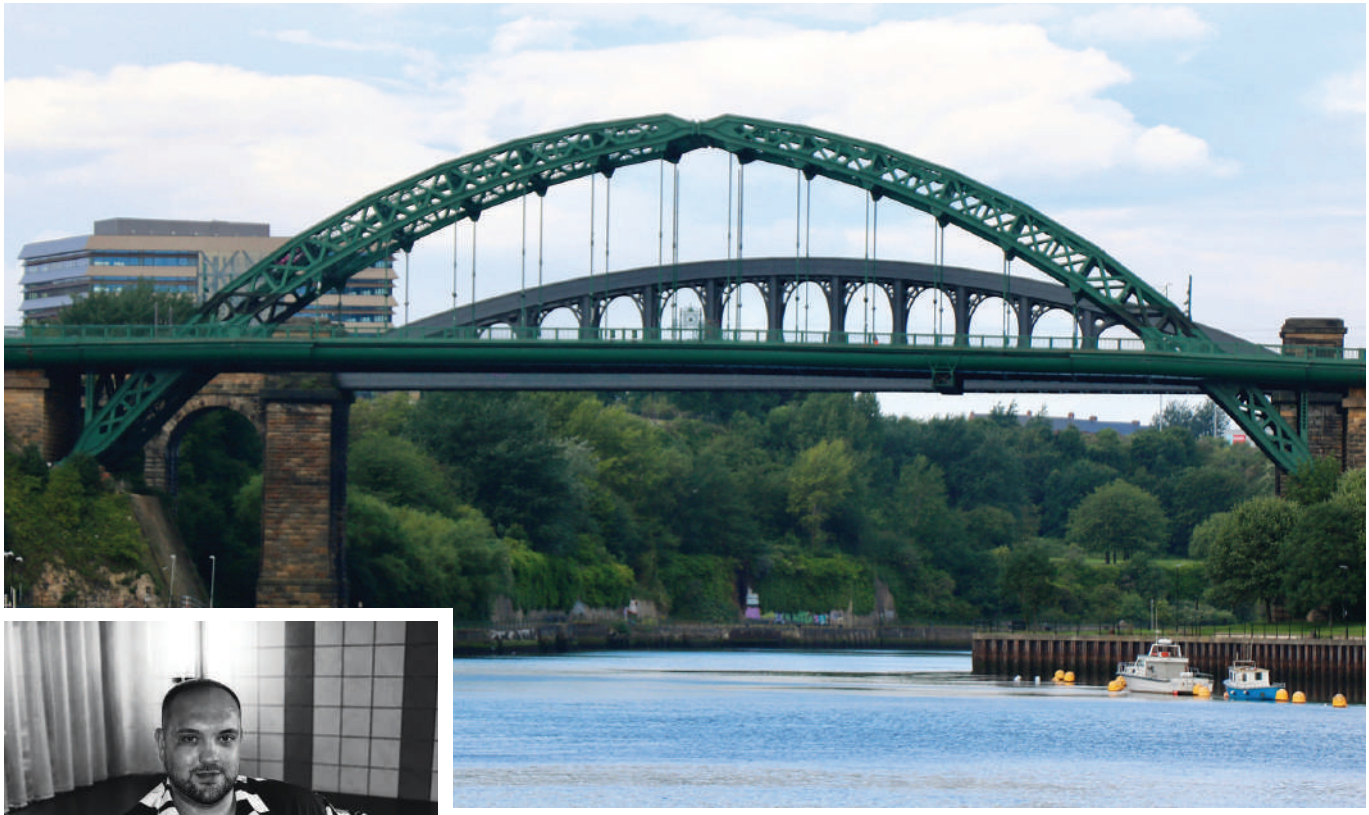
And in a world where opinions are formed in less than a blink of an eye – please - don't leave that to chance.

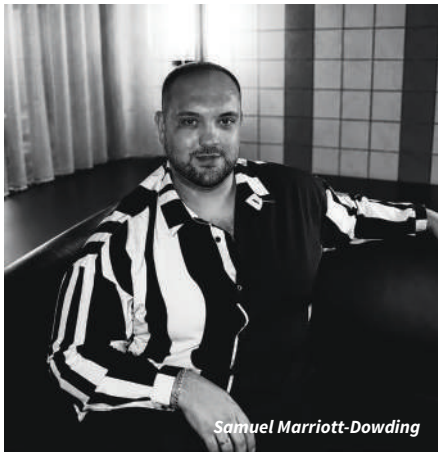
www.harveyandhugo.com

Strategy
Marketing
Branding
Public Relations
Social & Digital
Video

Making clients famous.

BRADLEY O'MAHONEY





Samuel Marriott-Dowding

Geography is not destiny

By Samuel Marriott-Dowding, Marriott Communications

Why ambition, expertise and influence are no longer defined by where you are, but by what you bring to the world

Geography has long been treated as a proxy for credibility.

Certain postcodes have become shorthand for ambition, sophistication and influence. Mayfair, Manhattan, Washington, Singapore. If you wanted to build an organisation of consequence, convention suggested you should go where consequence already existed.

There is undoubtedly logic to that thinking, but there is a difference between proximity to power and possession of it, and most importantly - Geography is not destiny.

I know this because I am building Marriott Communications in Sunderland. Not London, not New York. Not one of the traditional capitals of global consultancy or corporate influence.

That was never an accident, nor was it intended as a limitation. The ambition was always to build an independent firm with the intellectual ambition, commercial sophistication and international outlook to operate beyond the geography in which it was founded.

The objective is not to build something good for a regional firm, it is to build something that is simply good: capable of competing on judgement, expertise, creativity and results rather than a postcode.

The world has changed faster than many of our assumptions about it. An adviser can sit in Sunderland and counsel a client in Washington, a business can be founded in Newcastle and sell globally, expertise can be assembled across multiple countries before competitors have finished scheduling a meeting.

Yet, capability is increasingly distributed while institutional prestige remains geographically concentrated. We have created an economy in which organisations can operate globally, but still judge their credibility by where they are physically based.

For sophisticated businesses, the more important questions are what an adviser understands, whom they can reach, how they think and whether their counsel improves the quality of a decision.

Influence increasingly moves through networks rather than places. A policy decision in one capital can reshape a business on another continent; conflict thousands of miles away can transform energy prices and supply chains. The most valuable perspective does not always come from someone sitting closest to the institution making the decision. Sometimes, distance creates perspective.

For the North East, this distinction matters. Too often, ambition has been expected to travel South before it can be recognised. Talent leaves, businesses relocate, and the cycle reinforces itself.

The answer is not to turn the North East into London. Our region has its own industrial heritage, commercial strengths, culture and talent. The ambition should be to build organisations that can operate from here and beyond here.

At Marriott Communications, I am less interested in proving that a Sunderland-based firm can become a larger Sunderland-based firm than in proving that a globally minded advisory firm can be built here in the first place.

That means developing intelligence applicable across markets, counsel relevant to decision-makers wherever they are based, and an international network underpinned by work of the highest standard.

For businesses choosing advisers, geography should never substitute for judgement. The right address may signal credibility, but it cannot guarantee it. As information becomes more accessible, the real premium lies in interpretation, discernment and the ability to understand complex environments.

Building that credibility takes patience. One relationship, one client, one piece of work and one decision at a time.

I no longer see Sunderland as where Marriott Communications began, I see it as evidence that expertise does not become less valuable because it originates somewhere unexpected.

The world does not need every ambitious organisation to move to the same cities. It needs organisations willing to build where they are, think beyond where they are, and create enough value that the world has to pay attention.

marriottcommunications.com

One space left in our orbit. Who's it going to be?

We've spent the last six years challenging convention, simplifying the complicated and proving that big ideas don't need big agency barriers. Now we're looking for our next big partnership.

Every business starts with an idea.

Ours was pretty simple. What if we could take everything businesses love about having a brilliant in-house marketing team, combine it with the creativity and expertise of an agency, and remove all the unnecessary complications?

No layers of account management. No jargon-filled presentations. No creative egos. Just talented people, genuinely invested in helping businesses grow.
That was the thinking behind Blue Moon. And after six trips around the sun, it's still what gets us out of bed in the morning.

Not your typical agency. And that's the point.

The traditional agency model doesn't work for everyone. Neither does the cost, commitment or complexity of building a fully resourced marketing department.
So we created something different.

Our fractional model gives businesses access to an experienced team of strategists, creatives, marketers and problem-solvers, without the traditional overheads.
But it's about much more than outsourcing.

We get under the skin of a business. We challenge thinking, ask difficult questions, spot opportunities and become part of the furniture. The team you call when something exciting happens, when something isn't working or when you've got a wild idea that needs bringing down to earth. We don't just want a seat at the table. We want to help build what's next.

Ultimately, it starts with listening. Understanding the bigger picture. Asking why. Challenging what's always been done and finding a clearer, smarter way forward. From shaping brands and marketing strategies to creating campaigns, content and communications, our role is to connect the dots between ambition and action.

We've worked across a diverse mix of industries, from construction and technology to cybersecurity, luxury wellness and everything in between. Different sectors, different audiences, different ambitions. But the challenge is often the same: cutting through the noise, simplifying the complex and helping brands communicate with clarity, confidence and impact.

Because while we love creating something that looks out of this world, what matters most is making sure it delivers results in the real one.

Good people. Great chemistry.

If there's one thing we've learned along the way, it's that the magic isn't just in the creative. It's in the chemistry.
The relationships where conversations are honest, ideas are shared freely and everyone is pulling in the same direction. We're incredibly proud of the people who've helped shape Blue Moon, from our own team to the clients who've welcomed us into theirs. And we're ready to reach more people.

So, what have you got?

We're proud of what we've built. But standing still has never really been our thing.

We've got the appetite, the ambition and the capacity to welcome one more big client into the Blue Moon universe. Not just another logo on our website. A proper partnership.

A business ready to challenge the norm. A leadership team with big ambitions. A brand with untapped potential. Someone looking for more than an agency that simply takes a brief and delivers the expected. We've got the people. We've got the ideas. We've got the space.

blue moon

The question is, what have you got?
Our next big chapter is waiting to be written.
Do you want to be our latest success story?

hello@bluemoon-marketing.co.uk

Marketing and Media Matters

Northern Insight talks to...

Angela Carrington

Managing Director, The Bigger Picture Agency Ltd

Did you always envisage a career in the Marketing and Media Industry?

When I decided to study photography at university after a year out, I knew that I was going to work in the creative industries. I was very torn before that as I was interested in lots of very different potential careers, from the armed forces to philosophy!

What has been your career path so far?

Studio photographer > Photography degree > Photography Lecturer > Graphic Design/Print > Photographer > Director/Producer > Creative Consultant.

What have been the biggest challenges you have faced so far?

The death of the print industry and the last major recession in 2008/9 forced my hand to switch back to photography. It was probably the biggest blessing in disguise but it certainly didn't feel that way at the time! I'm not ashamed to say that I've been through quite a journey to where I am now. From enormous success in my 20's, difficult times in my early 30's, then a period of rebuilding and thriving once again. If you're not prepared to adapt and alter course when required, then you run the danger of stagnating creatively or even potentially failing.

Which fictional media character can you most relate to?

I often joke around on shoots and whip out a few Austin Powers quotes.

What is your greatest strength?

Creatively I would say the ability to know what will work for a client - a deep understanding of industry and people means I can see what will work for them and make them stand out from the crowd. Business-wise I would say resilience.

What is your biggest weakness?

Being kind to people that don't deserve it!

What has been your proudest achievement?

This is an easy one. Naturally I feel proud when I see our work on billboards and advertising campaigns, but the single proudest achievement for me is to have formed two media companies (one print, one digital) that have provided a living to many other creatives and specialists over the last 24 years. From employing apprentices right at the start of their journey, through to senior creative hires. I get a buzz from the pressure and the responsibility of that.

What are your future career aspirations?

I'm definitely more of a creative consultant than a photographer these days, and that definitely floats my boat!

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

Transfer a portion of money into your savings account every month. You need to build financial resilience into every company.

How do you see your industry evolving in the next 10 years?

AI is going to change the world. Not just our industry.

How do you like to unwind?

I like to play music, listen to music, watch live music and sometimes DJ. I can also often be spotted on a boat on the Tyne or up at Kielder Water with the Maritime Volunteer Service.

www.thisisthebiggerpicture.co.uk



> **I'm not ashamed to say that I've been through quite a journey to where I am now.**

Angela Carrington

Marriott Communications shortlisted for Independent Agency of the Year as firm advances international ambitions

Sunderland, UK - Marriott Communications has been shortlisted for Independent Agency of the Year at the Prolific North Marketing Awards 2026, recognising the firm's continued development as it prepares for its next stage of growth.



Samuel Marriott-Dowding

Founded by Samuel Marriott-Dowding, Marriott Communications has evolved beyond the traditional PR and marketing agency model to establish a strategic communications and advisory proposition spanning strategy, influence, reputation and intelligence.

The firm is now focused on strengthening its advisory capabilities and building an international network of specialist partners, bringing together expertise, relationships and regional insight across key markets.

This network will enable Marriott Communications to connect clients with trusted specialists and perspectives beyond its immediate geography, supporting cross-border opportunities and providing a more informed understanding of the political, commercial, cultural and reputational dynamics shaping their operating environments.

By combining its own strategic counsel with the knowledge and experience of partners in relevant markets, the firm aims to develop a connected, internationally minded advisory model that helps organisations navigate complexity, identify opportunities and make more confident strategic decisions.

Samuel Marriott-Dowding, Founder and CEO, said: "Our ambition is to develop an independent advisory firm with the reach, relationships and judgement to operate internationally. We are building that from Sunderland, bringing together specialist expertise and trusted partners to help organisations navigate complexity, understand their environment and make better strategic decisions. This shortlist is an encouraging milestone, but our focus is firmly on what comes next."

The firm's evolution reflects its belief that strategic communications increasingly sits at the intersection of corporate strategy, stakeholder influence, intelligence and reputation. Its next phase will prioritise deepening client relationships, developing international partnerships and building a connected advisory model with the capability to work across borders.

The recognition follows Marriott Communications' inclusion in Prolific North's Independent Agencies to Watch 2026 earlier this year.

While its foundations remain in the North East, the firm's ambition is to build an internationally connected advisory business that brings together local knowledge and global perspective.

marriottcommunications.com

RIVERSIDE MARKETING SOLUTIONS
MARKETING MADE EASY

Marketing made easy.

No ties, no contracts, no commitments.

nicola@riversidemarketingsolutions.co.uk

www.riversidemarketingsolutions.co.uk

RED BUTTON
MARKETING
TRAINING

Marketing Process Installations & Maintenance

We deliver and install a visible Management Process Of Marketing so you can keep your business fuelled and energised for success.



Installtions

Get a powered, connected and visible system in less than a day

Training

We show your team how to use the process to achieve optimum performance

Maintenance

We can make regular visits to ensure all is running smoothly to avoid any breakdowns

CONTACT

01325 582008
mags@redbuttonmarketingtraining.co.uk

CURRENTLY OFFERING SERVICE CHECKS TO COVER THE WINTER MONTHS

SQUIDGY

AWARDS WON TO DATE

0

Our trophy cabinet is empty.

Your marketing budget has better things to do.

Our business model isn't built on inflated retainers that bankroll thousands in award entries. We spend your marketing budget on campaigns that deliver results, not marketing awards that gather dust.

squidgy.co
SEO, PPC & PAID SOCIAL

Claire Barber PR

Multi-award winning public relations consultant Claire Barber PR has won two new PR accounts; Ruby Rae's XL Country Music Festival Newcastle and the Gateshead International Film Festival which is set to take place in July 2027.

CBPR have also been appointed to handle the publicity for broadband expert Alncom for the 7th year running.



Ruby Rae's



Claire Barber



Alncom



Ruby Rae's



L-R: Catarina de Cezanne, Steve Wraith and Neil Jackson, Gateshead International Film Festival



Ruby Rae's



Alan Shearer

Marketing trailblazer Fabric looks to the future

A pioneering North East businesswoman on a mission to modernise global marketing insists the decision to add key hires to her senior team will unlock a new era of growth.



L-R: Simon Moyle, Lisa Eaton, James Tilley

Lisa Eaton launched marketing capability platform Fabric five years ago and the firm's blue-chip clients already include NatWest Group, easyJet, Celonis and Lavazza.

Now, a new six-figure investment has opened the door for Fabric's game-changing service to scale at pace — helping more businesses build high-performing marketing teams faster.

And Lisa has been quick to add proven talent to an evolving senior management team as she seeks to capitalise on the opportunity to help Fabric flourish.

"I'm excited to confirm that Simon Moyle has been appointed as Fabric's new chairman and James Tilley has taken up a new role as Chief Commercial Officer," explains the former Great British Entrepreneurs Awards finalist.

"Simon and James have a fantastic track record for helping businesses to scale and for supporting founders like me to keep moving forward.

"The first two years of Fabric were about building the platform, the methodology and the proposition.

"The last three have been about proving the model in market, working with enterprise customers, learning what drives real behaviour change and refining the proposition around marketing capability.

"More than £500,000 has already been invested into building Fabric. We now have the proposition, customer evidence and foundations in place to move into the next phase of the business.

"Our ambition is to become the world's leading marketing capability platform for modern marketing teams."

A network of more than 40 senior marketers and coaches with significant real-world experience complements Fabric's six core pillars.

"We combine a 37-point capability and behavioural assessment with personalised development, strategy development, one-to-one coaching, expert masterclasses and group coaching," adds Lisa.

"We're continuing to evolve in order to meet the needs of modern marketing teams — our new Fabric Tracks provide continuous development around priority capability areas including AI For Modern Marketers and Personal Brand."

Simon is a trusted staple of the start-up community and is an award-winning CEO, Chairman and Non-Executive Director with a track record of scaling high-growth organisations and leading complex transformations.

"When I first met Lisa at an Entrepreneurs Forum event, I saw so many opportunities and I wanted to do more than invest," explains Simon, whose £150,000 is helping Fabric look to the future.

"What appealed to me, first of all, is that Lisa is an impressive business leader. She's got a very credible background with more than 25 years' experience in the marketing space."

James worked alongside Simon at Vivup (now Perkbox), where the two were instrumental in growing the leading UK employee benefits provider's ARR from £8m to £80m within five years.

"Fabric is really well placed to make a significant impact on marketers," he explains.

"The personalised pathway for individuals delivers a real and lasting impact. I don't know of any other networks that exist that make coaching so affordable and have the level of experience that our coaches have."

Simon's investment will enable Fabric to: build a more scalable commercial and sales operation; expand its enterprise customer base; invest in future-proofing technology; further develop the marketing capability proposition; and support expansion into international markets.

"Fabric has spent five years building and proving a marketing capability platform with enterprise customers," adds Lisa.

"We are now putting the investment, leadership team and commercial infrastructure around that platform to scale it."

fabric-academy.com



Regional advertising campaign. Metrocentre.



40 years with you.

METRO CENTRE

Nominated 'Best Integrated Campaign'

Nominated 'Best Retail Campaign'

Nominated 'Campaign of the Year Over £50K'

Helping brands be less ordinary.

the Traveller & the Bear

Record entries showcase North East tech talent

Dynamites Awards 2026 finalists announced, with public voting open for People's Choice and ticket sales supporting digital inclusion.

The shortlist recognises the people, businesses and projects shaping the North East's technology sector, with winners to be announced at Newcastle Civic Centre on Thursday 12 November. The ceremony is expected to sell out, welcoming 450 guests, predominantly leaders and stakeholders from the region's tech sector.

Organised by Dynamo North East, the not-for-profit technology membership organisation, the awards are backed by headline sponsor Accenture UK & Ireland alongside other sponsors. A percentage of every ticket sale will go towards the Dynamo Digital Inclusion Fund, helping more people across the region access and benefit from digital technology.

This year's finalists span 14 judged categories, recognising a broad range of achievements across the sector, from artificial intelligence and data to skills, international growth and technology for social good.

David Dunn, CEO of Dynamo North East, said: "The record number of submissions reflects the talent and ambition across the North East. These awards give us an opportunity to celebrate that achievement together and show what our region can do. We are stronger and more united when we speak with one voice.

"We want the benefits of technology to reach more people. Every ticket purchased will contribute towards tackling digital exclusion, connecting the sector's success with support for our wider communities."



Helen Faulds, Chief Information Officer at Cora Health and Chair of the 2026 Dynamites Awards judging panel, said: "A record number of submissions made this an especially competitive year. Congratulations to all the finalists. It has been a privilege to chair the judging panel and work alongside fellow volunteers who brought such care and commitment to assessing each entry."



Net-Defence marks 10 years of North East growth with anniversary celebration

Net-Defence has marked a decade in business with an anniversary celebration at Dakota Newcastle, bringing together customers, partners, and colleagues to celebrate the company's growth and look ahead to its next chapter.

The event marked 10 years for the managed IT and cyber security specialists, who have evolved from their telecommunications roots into a specialist provider of managed IT, cyber security, and business resilience services.

The anniversary provided an opportunity for the business to reflect on a decade of development, from expanding its technical capabilities and investing in its people to supporting organisations across the North East with the rapidly changing technology and cyber security landscape.

Debra Cairns, Managing Director at Net-Defence, said: "10 years is a significant milestone for Net-Defence, and it was fantastic to be able to celebrate it with so many of the people who have been part of our journey, the evening was really about our customers, partners, and our team.

We've built the business around long-term relationships and technical knowledge, and we wouldn't be where we are today without the trust and commitment of the people we've worked with over the last decade. We're particularly proud of our North East roots and the role we've been able to play in supporting businesses across the region."

Over the last decade, the role of technology within many organisations looked very different, since then, cloud technology, remote working, digital transformation, and increasingly connected supply chains have fundamentally changed how businesses operate, while cyber threats have become more sophisticated.

Net-Defence has evolved alongside those changes, developing from its telecommunications background into a broader managed IT and cyber security specialist. The business has invested in technical skills, automation, and internal talent, with a strong emphasis on developing people within the organisation and building long-term capability.

Its customer base now spans sectors including professional services with a heavy focus on the legal sphere, financial services, manufacturing, and engineering, where organisations are increasingly having to consider cyber security alongside wider operational and regulatory risks.



MANAGED TECHNOLOGY FOR GROWING UK BUSINESSES

One Thread.

Complex systems.
Perfectly orchestrated.

Technology should make your business stronger, faster and more resilient. But as organisations grow, technology often becomes fragmented: multiple suppliers, disconnected systems, siloed teams, overlapping contracts and unclear accountability.

That's where Unity comes in.

We bring every element of your technology together through one strategic approach. Connectivity, cloud, cyber security, IT support, automation and infrastructure – drawn into one clear thread that connects everything and keeps your business moving forward.

WHY UNITY?

Many threads, one Unity.

- One trusted technology partner
- Connected solutions, not isolated products
- Reduced complexity and supplier management
- Improved resilience, security and performance
- Strategic guidance aligned to your business goals

unity
unifying...

Your technology world, unified.

TECHNOLOGY HEALTH CHECK

Complete your IT Health Check today.

See how resilient your business really is – in just a few minutes.

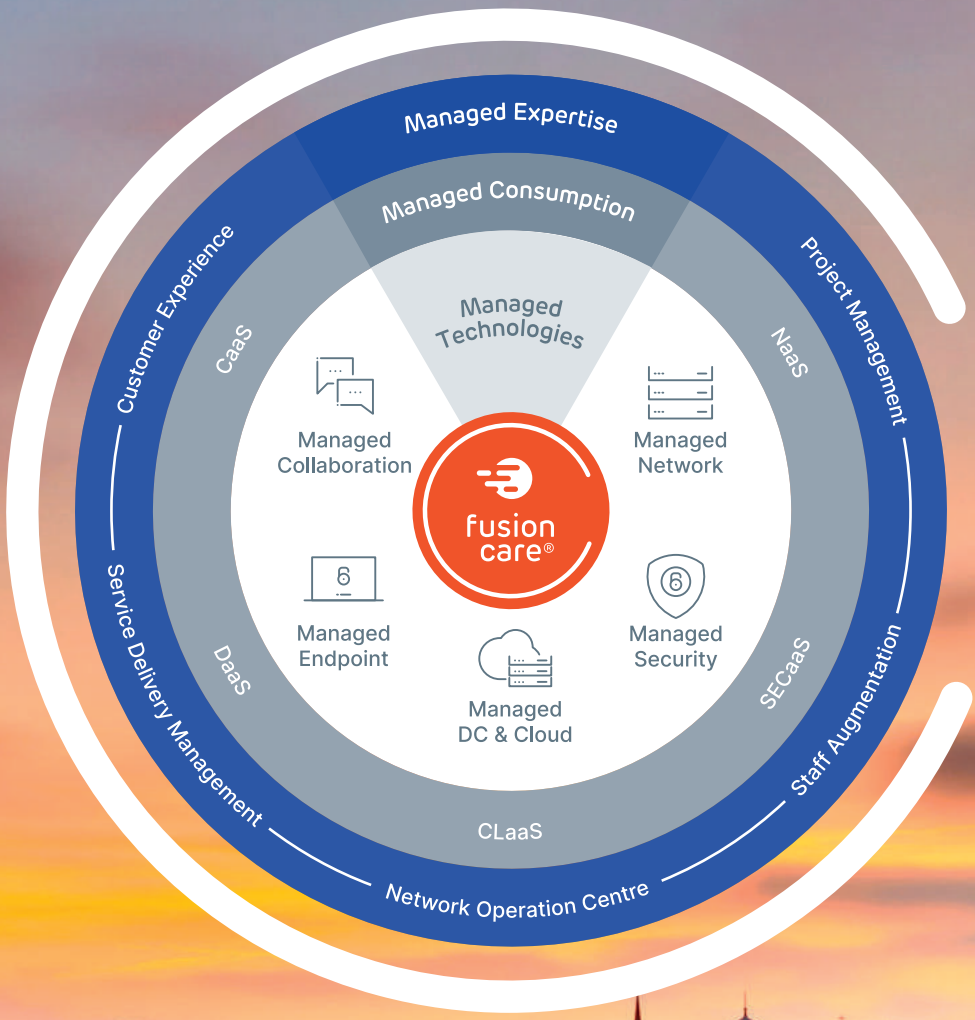
unity.world · sales@unity.world
0330 119 6666

SCAN TO START

forfusion

FusionCare®

IT managed services exactly the way you want them





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

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

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

Trusted by

cisco

NHS

Civil Service

Business Outcomes

- Sustainability and Responsibility
- Enhanced User Experience
- Optimisation and Efficiency
- Security and Compliance
- Return on Investment



Book a chat with our team today

0191 500 9100 hello@forfusion.com

To learn more visit

www.forfusion.com/services/fusioncare

Scan me

forfusion.com

The fulfilment gap

By Lee Gilmore, AWS Practice Lead, Leighton

Why retailers are losing customers after winning the sale.

New research from Leighton reveals how delivery issues, complicated returns and disconnected customer service are undermining retail loyalty and why fixing the foundations could be the key to closing the gap. In this article we explore some of the key findings from the new report and the implications for retailers.

Winning a customer's business is only half the battle. For retailers, the real test begins once an order has been placed, where fulfilling a delivery promise requires a complex network of systems, processes, and infrastructure to work together to deliver the experience shoppers expect.

Despite rising customer expectations being well documented and understood, new research from Leighton suggests that many retailers are still falling short. "The Fulfilment Gap: Why Retailers Keep Losing the Sale After They've Already Won It", is based on independent research with 1,000 UK consumers who have shopped online in the past 12 months and insights from a number of retail technology leaders.

The report highlights a significant disconnect between customer expectations and operational reality with nearly four in five online shoppers (79%) experiencing at least one fulfilment issue in the past year, demonstrating how frequently the post-purchase experience can fall short of the promise made at checkout.

Late deliveries remain a familiar frustration, affecting 37% of respondents. However, the research reveals that the problem is not simply about getting parcels to customers on time. Almost half (49%) identified poor or non-existent communication as the most frustrating aspect of delivery problems, compared with 21% who cited repeated delays.

For retailers, the message is clear. When something goes wrong, keeping customers informed and resolving issues quickly can be just as important as preventing the problem in the first place.

Returns continue to be a significant challenge with 43% of shoppers having returned an online purchase in the past year, the process has become an integral part of the retail experience. Paying to return items frustrates 37% of respondents, while 31% highlight slow refunds. When asked what would most improve the experience, 48% pointed to faster refunds.



Lee Gilmore

These frustrations often stem from operational complexity behind the scenes, where warehouse processes, inventory management, finance systems and customer service need to work together. When information is fragmented or processes rely on manual intervention, delays become harder to avoid, and customers are left chasing answers.

The commercial consequences extend well beyond a single transaction. The report found that 47% of consumers would be unlikely to buy from a retailer again after receiving damaged goods, while 41% identified poor customer service as a reason to take their business elsewhere. More than a quarter (28%) had cancelled an order following a poor purchasing experience.

Technology has a significant role to play in addressing these challenges, particularly as retailers explore artificial intelligence (AI). Almost half of respondents (49%) would feel comfortable using an AI-powered support assistant, provided it could securely access their order information and deliver meaningful answers.

However, automation alone is not the solution. AI can only be effective when supported by accurate, connected, and timely data. Without reliable information flowing between inventory, logistics, returns and customer service systems, retailers risk automating existing inefficiencies rather than improving the customer experience.

Ultimately, closing the fulfilment gap requires retailers to look beyond the digital shopfront and invest in the operational foundations that support the entire customer journey. Connected systems, accurate delivery promises, proactive communication and straightforward returns can help protect loyalty while improving efficiency.

As customer expectations continue to rise, the retailers that stand out will be those that deliver not just a compelling proposition at checkout, but a dependable experience from purchase to delivery and beyond.

To explore the findings in more detail, including expert perspectives, practical recommendations and real-world retail case studies, visit: www.leighton.com or scan the code below.....



agilico

Sustainable Managed Print.

Finance Automation.

Cloud Telephony.

Managed IT Services.

At Agilico, we Make Work Easy for businesses across the North East with sustainable workplace technology and expertise you can trust.

A Greener Way to Print.

Our Agilico Zero remanufactured MFDs now carry the **BSI Kitemark for Remanufactured Products**, so you'll get a device that:

- ✓ Looks like new
- ✓ Performs like new
- ✓ Produces 97.5% less CO_2 emissions than buying new

bsi

0330 058 0505 **hello@agilico.co.uk** **www.agilico.co.uk**

Talking Tech and Digital

This month Northern Insight talks to...

Warren Colby

Managing Director, Agilico Print Division

Did you always envisage a career in the world of Technology?

I have always been interested in technology and remain so today. I come from an era of the Commodore 64 and ZX Spectrum gaming consoles, so if you call playing games on the equivalent of the Xbox in the 80s technology! It's fair to say, tech did intrigue me and a subject that I did well at in school, learning basic programming which resulted in me achieving a CSE Grade 1.

What tips would you give to someone looking to work in the industry?

Obviously, todays tech differs slightly from the 80's, where you have so much more availability to content and information at a keystroke, so the tips of today may not be exactly the same as they did back then, but I would encourage anyone who is keen on utilising tech to join the industry for sure. Tips – immerse yourself in AI and embrace the process powers it provides, but more importantly learn how to articulate what these IT empowered systems can do in lay terms, so everyone can appreciate its value, and you too can become credible.

Tell us about the most exciting project you're currently working on?

My role means that I am working on multiple projects, some exciting and some not so. It also differs massively week to week. Last week I was stood up at our sales conference, speaking to 90 people and this part of my role is exciting as you get the opportunity to coach younger salespeople on how they can progress their careers, whereas this week I am moving 60 people from their office in Edinburgh to a brand new state of the art remanufacturing site which is exciting times for them and me.

Tell us about the Agilico team?

Agilico employs just over 400 people across the width and breath of the UK. As any business owner or entrepreneur will tell you, a company is made up of people, all are important. It is also essential that you build a culture that allows employees to grow, to challenge the status quo and have their say. Obviously the larger you get the more important it is for management to understand what customers require and more importantly how we as a business react to changing times to ensure we deliver first class support and knowledge, and this can only be achieved by investing in your teams and supporting them to develop.

What are the long-term plans for the business?

To grow all parts of the business by being better than others at what we do and by diversifying our product portfolio to meet the needs of our clients. We will utilise current and future technology to make work easy.

What's your favourite piece of technology?

From a personal point of view, it must be my Robot Mower and Robot Window Cleaner, they save time and energy and produce a better finish than me. Form a business perspective it has to be the office automation tools, which also save our client's time.

Do you have any heroes or mentors?

I have always admired Richard Branson and his desire to challenge the status quo and provide a product and service which rivals and exceed his competitors. He was fearless when starting business and took challenges in his stride. I first read his autobiography in 2002 and would recommend it to anyone.

What's your fondest career memory?

A cliché but there have been so many from starting my own business at 25 to qualifying for the UK best sales performers which entitled me to attend the Japan & Germany World Cups on all expenses paid trips come to mind.

What's the best piece of business advice you've received?

I have to say, I didn't really get any advice on business when growing up. Both my parents worked for others, and worked unsociable hours, so I suppose I didn't want that lifestyle and wanted more. I do have a piece of advice though from my 37 years of working in the technology industry, work hard and don't expect things to happen, make then happen yourself and don't expect others to do it for you.

When not working how do you like to relax?

I love to spoil others and see their reaction. It doesn't have to be a costly thing; it's more about showing that I care and that I think about them. I also love to take my grown-up kids on holiday, take them places, and show them what lifestyle is possible when you work hard. When I'm not travelling, I love nothing more than spending time at home with my wife and our third child (Coco the Miniature Dachshund).

agilico.co.uk



> Immerse yourself in AI and embrace the process powers it provides.

Warren Colby

Back Yourself

By Simon Honeywood, Readysalted

I'm a southerner who has run a business in the North East for over 20 years. In that time I've noticed something that nobody here really says out loud.

It isn't a capability problem. The businesses here are as good as anywhere I've worked with. It's a confidence problem, and it shows up in a very specific way.

The London reflex

Listen to how businesses in this region talk about themselves. There's real pride, and it's deserved. But London always comes up. "We can do anything they can do down there." "You don't need to be in the capital to get this standard of work."

Both statements are true. That's not the point. The point is that we're still saying them.

A business genuinely confident in what it does doesn't reach for a comparison. It just gets on with it.

What I've watched change

We was lucky enough to work with the Dynamo founders in the early days, helping with the brand and building the first website. There was a genuine buzz about it. A region recognising what it already had rather than apologising for not being somewhere else.

From mining coal to mining data, as Paul Watson put it. That transformation was real and it happened here, on its own terms.

The cost of waiting for certainty

Where we still hold ourselves back is in caution. Businesses here are exceptionally good at waiting.

What if there's a downturn? What if the market shifts? What if something happens we can't control, and we've just committed to a campaign, or a conference, or a hire?

There's a North East instinct that says we'll feel it first if things turn. Sometimes that's been true. But it has quietly become a reason never to fully commit to anything.

Certainty doesn't arrive. The conditions are never perfect. Staying in your lane feels like prudence, but over a few years it's a slow decision to stand still while others move.

You can spot the ones who back themselves

I'll be honest about something. The business owners I most enjoy working with are the ones with genuine energy about what they do. They're ambitious, they care, and they want the thing done properly.

You can usually tell within one meeting. When a conversation is only about cost, who's cheapest, and there's no real sense that the person is behind what they're building, that tends not to work for either side. Not because of budget, but because the drive isn't there.

The businesses that back themselves are a pleasure to work with. They make better decisions, and they get better results.

So back yourself

Book the stand. Run the campaign. Make the hire you've been circling for six months.

And if you know you've got a weakness you've been aware of for a while, bring in someone who can address it rather than hoping it resolves itself. That isn't an admission of failure, it's what confident businesses do.

Confidence isn't recklessness. It's acting on what you already know to be true about your own business.

www.readysalted.co.uk



> **The businesses that back themselves are a pleasure to work with.**

Simon Honeywood



Bailiffgate Hotel, Alnwick


Gareth Carter and Katie Hilton

Built locally, fixed locally

Full fibre for North East businesses and homes, from a network built for the region. Northern Insight catches up with Alncom's Gareth Carter and Katie Hilton.

What makes Alncom different?

Katie Hilton: We own the network. We've built and maintain our own full-fibre network across the North East, so there are no third parties and no offshore call centres. Customers speak to our local team, and our own engineers fix any issue.

How has the business evolved?

Katie Hilton: We were founded in Alnwick in 2001. We've connected thousands of homes across the North East and earned a 5-star Trustpilot rating. Now we're bringing that same service to businesses.

What business connectivity options do you offer?

Gareth Carter: We have two, both on our own fibre. EoFTTP gives symmetrical speeds up to 325Mbps, a 99.9% uptime SLA and an 8-hour fix time. Fibre Ethernet gives dedicated leased lines up to 10Gbps, uncontended bandwidth, a 6-hour fix time and support seven days a week.

Do you connect apartment blocks and multi-dwelling developments?

Gareth Carter: Yes. St James Place in Morpeth is a great example. We work with developers, hotels such as the Bailiffgate Hotel in Alnwick, landlords and managing agents to bring full fibre into apartment blocks, student accommodation and new-build schemes. We plan the build into the development, so every flat can be connected from day one. Residents get a choice of gigabit-capable packages, backed by the same local team that looks after our business customers.

How do you keep customers connected?

Katie Hilton: Every connection has resilience built in. That includes diverse routing and proactive monitoring, plus automatic failover through a second line, 4G, 5G or Starlink where it's needed.

Who are your typical customers?

Gareth Carter: Holiday parks, hotels, rural businesses, professional services, industrial sites, multi-site organisations and housing developers. They all want a fast, reliable connection backed by people who care.

One message for North East businesses?

Katie Hilton: We're a North East business that has built a network for the region, with local expertise and local engineers.

Gareth Carter: If your business or development depends on its connection, we'd love to talk.

To speak to the Alncom Commercial Team:
01665 604816
business@alncom.co.uk
alncom.co.uk







Opening of Redesmere Newcastle Office

Redesmere officially opened its Newcastle office recently, marking an exciting milestone in the company's growth.

Under the banner of "award-winning digital transformation, for the North East, in the North East", the launch celebrated Newcastle's thriving tech ecosystem, depth of talent and collaborative approach to business.

Lee Murray will lead the Newcastle office, supported by directors Richard Porter and Stephen Bourne. The new office strengthens Redesmere's local presence, bringing its digital transformation expertise closer to organisations across the region.


















Corona
Extra










Smart
Digital
Solutions
Redesmere












Redesmere
NEWCASTLE
AWARD-WINNING
DIGITAL
TRANSFORMATION
FOR THE NORTH EAST
IN THE NORTH EAST



Pascal Fintoni

Photo Credit: Michael Gibson Creative Photography

Mind your Ps and Qs in the AI-first internet

By Pascal Fintoni, AI & Digital Storytelling Consultant

In 1960, E. Jerome McCarthy popularised the four Ps of marketing: Product, Price, Place and Promotion. In 1981, Bernard Booms and Mary Jo Bitner added three more for service businesses: People, Process and Physical Evidence. Forty-five years on, I still go back to that framework, albeit with a good helping of nostalgia.

Most businesses know the 7Ps as a planning exercise: something you complete once and, all too often, file away and forget. Inspired by my clients, I have found a way to use them differently, a way that can answer the question everyone dreads: what do we post next?

And in an AI-first internet, every P now comes with a Q: the question your customer asks before they ever get in touch.

Why being explicit matters now

Search has changed, simply ask Google a question and the first thing you read is often an AI Overview. That summary can only work with what you have published, it cannot read between the lines, and it cannot guess what you meant.

If you have never explained your process, the overview may not explain it for you (or worse make it up). If your values only live in your head, they do not exist online.

This is the art of being explicit: The Ps tell you what to talk about; and the Qs make sure you actually answer.

The 7Ps as your content compass

Think of each P as a direction of travel and together they cover every dimension of your business. Increasingly, your customers put their Qs to Google before they put them to you, so answer them publicly, before someone else does.

Product. What does it do, and is it right for me? Explain why it matters and how to get the most from it. Feature spotlights and tutorials live here.

Price. Is it worth it? Talk openly about the value customers get for their investment.

Place. Where can I find it, and where does it come from? Share the provenance of your materials and where your customers are. Then tell people where business has taken you, in the real world and online.

Promotion. What is the story behind it? Open the doors behind the scenes and share the making of a campaign or a product launch.

People. Who will I be dealing with? Introduce your team and the values behind your culture. Include nostalgic looks back, too. Nostalgia works. Never underestimate it.

Process. What happens after I say yes? Walk people through how an order is fulfilled and how your team handles a problem.

Physical Evidence. Can I see it for myself? Let people see your products, your packaging, your workspace, even your website.

The 8th P

Something I've borrowed from the world of film marketing: Praises and Proofs. This question is the one you cannot credibly answer by yourself: who else trusts them?

Reviews, testimonials, customer content and case stories answer it for you. You can tell the world you are excellent. It lands far harder when your customers say it. Make it a regular part of your plan.

Your content Swiss Army knife

In a nutshell, the 7Ps work like a Swiss Army knife. They give you structure, with plenty of room left for imagination. Work through each P, answer each Q, and you will cover every message your brand has to offer, explicitly, without missing a beat.

Try this prompt

Copy this into your AI assistant, then paste a short description of your business underneath:

"Using the 7Ps of marketing (Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, Physical Evidence) plus an 8th P, Praises and Proofs, write one question a customer would ask under each P for the business described below. Then suggest two content ideas that answer each question explicitly."

Choose one idea per P and write it in your own words. The AI can help you find the Qs. Only your stories can answer them.

To your success!

www.pascalfintoni.com

get-bright.

DIGITAL SCREENS FOR YOUR BUSINESS

MAKE YOUR BUSINESS IMPOSSIBLE TO IGNORE.

With shorter days, darker evenings and the Christmas shopping rush almost here, now is the perfect time to make your business stand out with high-brightness digital screens.

Digital screens, menu boards and outdoor waterproof screens available before Christmas.



INDOOR SCREENS | WINDOW DISPLAYS | INTERACTIVE TOUCHSCREENS | LED VIDEO WALLS | SCREEN HIRE (INDOOR & OUTDOOR)

FINANCE IS AVAILABLE subject to status

www.get-bright.co.uk

For more information
hello@get-bright.co.uk
or call **0191 367 0067**





Andrew Skelton

Event Thrills for disabled triathletes aged six to 74!

An enthusiastic group of 64 children and adults with disabilities, aged from six to 74-years-old, recently took part in what was the largest ever Reason To Disability Triathlon in Hexham.

Triathletes at the event, which is sponsored by SOS Group, have a wide variety of disabilities and were able to complete a traditional triathlon by swimming, running and cycling with support and specially adapted equipment.

They were joined by CBBC's 'Danny & Mick' star and performer, Danny Adams, who is all long-time supporter and Paralympian Lyndon Longhorne, from Crook, the first ever quad amputee to complete an Ironman distance event.

Organised by triathletes, Jo Shallcross and Tracey Sample, this very special triathlon was the first of its kind in the UK and began with only a handful of entrants.

Now in its 12th year, it continues to grow in popularity and this was the largest event to date with participants drawn from across the region to the Wentworth Leisure Centre on Wentworth Place.

Jo Shallcross was first inspired to organise a triathlon tailored to the individual needs of its entrants after seeing a child with disabilities enjoying the event in Hawaii.

Some of the children who have enjoyed taking part over the years are adults now and, after a successful trial run, Jo and Tracey opened the Reason To Triathlon to older entrants three years ago.

Jo says: "It's been another marvellous day and we're so proud of everyone involved. This is an opportunity for the participants to take part in a traditional triathlon and to really push themselves.

"Some of the triathletes have been part of this event for years and some are first timers, but everyone welcomes and supports each other regardless. There's no better day of the year for me and Tracey. The smiles are endless!"

Event sponsors, SOS Group, are based in Gateshead and provide digital office equipment services for businesses from startups to multi nationals.

The company also supports people and organisations making a positive difference to local communities within the North East and it takes a hands-on role in organising the triathlon, helping to set up and deliver the event and transporting the specially adapted bikes.

Andrew Skelton, an SOS Group Director, says: "We love being part of this very special day and it's obvious from the beaming smiles how much the triathlon means to the participants and their loved ones.

"It's an incredible event and you can see the pride the triathletes are feeling as they swim, cycle and run. We've been involved for 10 years now and it's wonderful to see it grow and grow.

"It's a life affirming event that has a hugely positive impact and SOS Group is proud to provide meaningful support for it."

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.

Over the last year, the company has provided hands-on and financial support for over 35 community projects, charities, sports clubs and talented individuals.

They helped deliver the Riding Disability Association's National Championships in Hartpury and were main award sponsors of the Sport Newcastle Unsung Hero 2026 Awards.

During 2026, SOS Group is also helping deliver high profile sports events for clients including Swim England, Aquatics GB, British Universities and Colleges Sports and UK Athletics.

Client 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.

For more information on how SOS Group can support the needs of any business or event, please visit: www.sosgroup-ltd.co.uk











When everyone uses AI, what makes you different?

You'd be hard-pressed to find a business that hasn't mentioned AI in its marketing recently.

Some are using it to speed up routine work. Others are building entire services around it. Either way, there's a lot of pressure to show you're keeping up, especially when your competitors seem to be talking about it at every opportunity.

But if everyone is using AI, is it still something that makes your business stand out?

Is using AI a selling point?

For some businesses, absolutely. AI might be central to their product or allow them to offer something their customers couldn't access before.

For others, it's a useful tool that makes parts of their work quicker.

There's nothing wrong with either approach, but it's worth thinking about why your customers should care.

Imagine you're choosing an accountant. You'd want someone who understands your business and can explain your finances without making your head hurt. If they're using AI to cut down on admin, great.

Does that mean they have more time to give you useful advice? That's what you'd actually want to know.

How much you say about AI depends on what you're using it for. If it's helping your team organise meeting notes, customers won't be that interested in the details.

But if it plays a part in work they're paying for or making decisions from, they'll likely want to know a little more.

You don't need to list every tool or explain the technical details. But being open about where AI fits into your process, and where you've chosen not to use it, can help build trust.

It also shows customers you've given the technology some thought, rather than adopting it because everyone else is.

Where does human expertise fit in?

This is something we've been thinking about at Vida, too.

AI plays a part in our processes, as it does for plenty of other businesses. It helps us work more efficiently, but it's only one part of what we do.

A lot of our work happens before anything is designed, written or built. We spend time understanding the businesses we work with, asking questions and sometimes challenging what they thought they needed in the first place.

AI can help us explore ideas, but deciding which ones are right for a particular business still takes human judgement and creativity.

And the same applies in plenty of other industries. Your expertise is what customers are paying for, even if technology changes how you deliver it.

So, how should you talk about AI?

If AI is changing what you can offer customers, explain how. If it's helping you work more efficiently, there's no reason to hide that either.

But you don't need to make it sound like a defining feature of your business - unless it genuinely is - just because your competitors are doing so.

Think about what customers value about working with you, and make sure that's coming across in your messaging.

There's room to talk about the technology you're using, but there's plenty worth saying about the people and expertise behind your business, too.

If you're working out how to communicate what makes your business different, we can help you find the right message.

Get in touch at hello@vidacreative.co.uk



NORTHERN

INSIGHT

The Built Environment

construction • commercial • residential • architectural

...in association with...

Clothier Lacey & Co.

Prime Group On target in Newton Aycliffe

Manchester based The Prime Group is on track to complete a new; circa 80,000 sq ft commercial development at Aycliffe Business Park named 'Prime Point Durham' by the end of the year.



Prime Point Durham is located at Carlbury Road, Newton Aycliffe, just off the A167 and close to the A1(M) and sits within the wider Aycliffe Business Park. Construction is well underway on two commercial warehouse units of 35,811 sq ft and 39,829 sq ft. Both will include ancillary office space and offer eaves heights of up to 12 metres, alongside 35 car parking spaces, including EV charging points.

Jonathan Simpson, director at Connect Property North East and joint letting agent said "We are delighted that our client has commenced construction, the two buildings are specifically designed to be both split and occupied as one in order to appeal to both regional/ local SME's as well as the wider industrial and logistics market. It is fantastic to see the buildings heading towards completion for the end of this year, with several viewings and expressions of early interest already received".

Joint letting agent Nick Atkinson of HTA commented "Aycliffe Business Park is a very popular location and new units of this size are very scarce throughout Durham and the wider region. New buildings offer occupiers improved efficiencies, lower maintenance costs, and the extra height equates to larger volumes for storage."

Prime Group Commercial director Imran Younus added "The Prime Group has a solid track record in industrial development, and these two buildings will add fresh industrial stock with a highly desirable specification to the North East market. We have no doubt as to their success."

Award-Winning Architecture Practice expands into Yorkshire with new studio

Award-winning architecture practice MawsonKerr has expanded into Yorkshire with the opening of a new studio at The Department in Leeds Dock, with plans to recruit as it grows its presence across the region.

The Newcastle-founded practice with offices in Charlotte Square, has appointed Associate Daniel Dyer to head the Leeds studio. Daniel, who lives in Garforth, has been with MawsonKerr for 12 years and has been project architect on many of the practice's award-winning low-carbon residential projects.

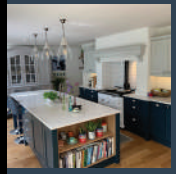
The expansion will enable MawsonKerr to build its presence across Leeds and the wider Yorkshire region, including York, Harrogate and South Yorkshire, as well as into the Peak District.

The practice is targeting opportunities with socially conscious property developers, private clients and public sector organisations, drawing on its established expertise in sustainable residential design, high-end individual homes, sensitive historic buildings and complex development sites.



Commenting on the move, Daniel Dyer said: "Opening in Leeds is an exciting step for MawsonKerr and gives us a permanent base from which to build relationships and grow our workload across Yorkshire.

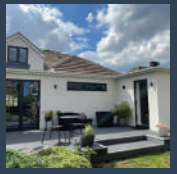
"We are an ambitious practice and will look to grow organically over the next year as the workload develops.".



J.W.Dickinson

Building Services, House Extensions, Loft Conversions, Home Refurbishments, New Home Builders. Beautiful transformations from design to build.

Book a free consultation | 07988 636 221
Mon to Fri 8am - 5pm | info@jwdickinsonltd.co.uk





JWD

jwdickinsonltd.co.uk



MAKE THE **SWITCH** TO EVERHOT

A complete range of flexible 13amp electric heat storage range cookers which work harmoniously with your lifestyle and cooking needs with efficient running costs and WiFi connectivity.

If you are yearning to have a heat storage range this is the cooker for you. No maintenance, no flue, just a simple electric socket and it's installed.

Made in Britain for over 40 years.









To find out more visit your local Everhot showroom at Walter Dix & Co

Walter Dix & Co

AGA and Range Cooker Specialists

1 Stirling Court, Eleventh Avenue North, Team Valley, Gateshead, NE11 0JF

www.wdix.co.uk • 0191 482 0033 • sales@wdix.co.uk

EVERHOT

From Blue Lights to Building Sites: Robert Peel gives former Police Station a new Beat

A former police station in Whitley Bay is being given a new lease of life as part of an ambitious residential development by North East housebuilder Bluerock Homes.

The former police station on Laburnum Avenue has been transformed over the past 18 months by Bluerock Homes, headed by co-founder Robbie Peel, with the company retaining many of the building's original features and historic character.

Robbie, a Chartered Building Surveyor by profession, established Bluerock Homes more than a decade ago with his two partners. The Gosforth-based company specialises in small to medium-sized residential developments across the North East.

The company's latest project has seen the former Laburnum Avenue police station sympathetically restored and converted into nine homes.

"We wanted to retain as much of the character of the original police station as possible," said Robbie.

"It isn't a listed building, but it is certainly a building of heritage interest, and the planning authority were keen to see the original features retained and restored where possible.

"I think we've achieved that."



The redevelopment has allowed Bluerock Homes to create four highly insulated, sustainable three-storey townhouses using structural insulated panels (SIPS), alongside the conversion of the original police station building.



Family ties build foundations for Newcastle construction firm

GMR Construction is proving that family values and a passion for traditional buildings can be a powerful combination as the Newcastle-based company develops a growing reputation for barn conversions across the North East.

The family-run business was established by Mark and Tracey Greenwell more than 30 years ago and has since grown into a true family affair, with all four of their children now playing key roles in the company.

Oldest son Adam is the company's manager, overseeing projects, health and safety, materials and the day-to-day running of work on site. His brother Lewis works as a joiner, brother Joe is a labourer, while sister Brogan is responsible for administration and finance.

GMR Construction undertakes a wide range of work across the North East, from new-build homes and major extensions to commercial projects, offices, warehouses and full property renovations.

However, it is barn conversions which are increasingly becoming one of the company's specialities.

"Barn conversions aren't the easiest projects because you're renovating a really old building," Adam said. "But they're more rewarding as well because you've put all that effort into it. When you see the finished article, you feel proud."

Teesside housebuilder grows production team ahead of busy 2027

A Teesside housebuilder with developments across the region, County Durham and North Yorkshire has brought in a wealth of experience to its production team ahead of significant growth plans in 2027 and beyond.

Miller Homes, based in Newton Aycliffe, Production Director Terence (Nick) McCluskey heads the department whilst Phil Conlin has been promoted from Contracts Manager to Build Manager. Two new Contracts Managers, Dan Levington and Barrie Dobson have joined the team from other housebuilders bringing with them a wealth of knowledge and experience.

"The two new additions to the production team plus Phil's promotion provides great structure to our production team ahead of new developments planned for 2027 and beyond and it is a pleasure to welcome Dan and Barrie to the team," said Mark Bayliss, Managing Director, Miller Homes Teesside. "It is excellent to have a team built on such strong foundations, as all have years of industry experience, which is vital to the delivery of our growth plans and the continued high



standards we deliver for our customers."

Nick and Phil have been with the business for 7 years and 8 years respectively whilst Dan and Barrie have rejoined Miller Homes after long careers in the housebuilding sector across the region.

"2027 is set to be another growth year for the Miller Homes business in Teesside and it was essential that we had the right team in place," said Mark. "With at least seven new developments set to launch during the year, and the potential for more, our production team will be pivotal in delivering the homes at these developments on time, within budget and meeting the five-star standards we are renowned for."

naylors Real Estate. Real Results.

Wright Residential prepares for a homecoming on Chillingham Road

After a challenging year following a fire that forced the closure of its Chillingham Road office, Wright Residential is preparing to return to the place it calls home.

The Newcastle-based property specialists are putting the finishing touches to their newly refurbished premises, marking an exciting new chapter for the business and its team.

Following the devastating fire last year, Wright Residential was forced to leave its familiar office behind. However, despite the disruption, the team remained committed to delivering the same high standards of service to landlords and tenants across the North East. Now, after months of planning, refurbishment and hard work behind the scenes, the much-anticipated return is finally within sight.

The office has undergone a transformation, with fresh interiors, new furniture and a welcoming environment designed to provide clients with a comfortable, professional space to discuss their property needs. While the surroundings may look different, the values at the heart of Wright Residential remain unchanged.

Known for its personal approach, local knowledge and commitment to both landlords and tenants, the business is looking forward to welcoming familiar faces through its doors once again, alongside new clients.

The reopening represents much more than a return to a physical premises. It is a significant milestone for the team, reflecting their resilience, determination and commitment to the local community following an incredibly challenging period. With the final stages of the refurbishment now underway, excitement is building as the team prepares to settle back into Chillingham Road. An official reopening date will be announced soon, with further updates and a first look at the completed office to follow.

For Wright Residential, it's not simply about reopening an office. It's about coming home.

For property enquiries or to find out more about Wright Residential's letting and property management services, visit www.wrightresidential.co.uk



CREATING SPACES WHICH MAKE THE ORDINARY FEEL EXTRAORDINARY

RESIDENTIAL & COMMERICAL INTERIOR DESIGN

jillsimpsoninteriors.co.uk jillsimpsoninteriors

JILL SIMPSON INTERIORS JS JILL SIMPSON INTERIORS





A short commute, a change of pace

For those whose working lives are centred on Newcastle, moving further into Northumberland can begin with a simple wish: a bigger garden, a quieter setting or somewhere to walk without first getting in the car.

The career stays in the city. What changes is the life around it.

"People often start by telling us they need another bedroom or more outside space," says William Thornton, Head of Residential at youngsRPS. "Once you get talking, there's usually a fuller picture. They want somewhere to work undisturbed, room for family to visit, or a home where they can properly switch off."

For buyers considering the Tyne Valley, villages north of Newcastle or locations further into rural Northumberland, the starting point should be an honest assessment of the working week.

"If you're in Newcastle every day, your priorities will be different from someone who needs to be there twice a week," William explains. "Think about when you travel, how often you finish late and how much flexibility you need."

That means considering the whole journey, including reaching a station, parking and onward travel to the office.

"I'd suggest trying the journey at your usual commuting time. You'll learn far more than from looking at the mileage. Think about the return journey too, particularly if you regularly stay in the city after work."

The attraction is what that journey brings you home to. Depending on location and budget, moving further out can offer greater privacy, space for a dedicated study or a garden that opens up new possibilities.

"It might mean somewhere for children to play, space to grow vegetables or simply a place to sit outside after work," says William. "Those everyday pleasures are often what people are hoping to gain."

Choosing the right community matters equally. A market town, a village with amenities and a secluded country property offer different experiences. Broadband, schools and maintenance deserve attention alongside the setting.

"A lovely view will draw you in, but picture an ordinary Tuesday there. Where will you work? Who's doing the school run? How much garden do you want to look after?"

The youngsRPS team's own experience of rural living brings a valuable perspective to those conversations.

"Members of our team live in the towns, villages and countryside we cover. We understand the appeal because we enjoy it ourselves, alongside the practicalities of commuting, school journeys and maintaining a country property.

"That helps us ask the right questions when guiding buyers. For sellers, understanding how life works in a particular location helps us explain their home's appeal and answer prospective buyers' questions with confidence."

For those whose careers remain rooted in Newcastle, that knowledge can also introduce places they might otherwise overlook.

"Buyers may know they want more space without knowing which areas will suit them," William says. "We can help them explore those choices through professional knowledge and experience of living here. The right home needs to work for the whole week, and understanding the place is an important part of understanding the property."

To discuss your next move, whether buying or selling in Northumberland, contact the youngsRPS residential team on 01434 608980 or visit youngsrps.com

A new era of Country Living with...

youngsRPS

South Farm

Slaley, Northumberland

With panoramic valley views towards Slaley Forest, South Farm offers an opportunity to create five distinctive homes in a sought-after village setting. Full planning permission provides for the conversion of traditional and agricultural buildings, including the Grade II listed Granary, combining historic character with contemporary design. Village amenities are within walking distance, while adjoining paddocks are available by separate negotiation.

From £900,000



Mylne House

Chollerford, Northumberland

Natural sandstone and timber frame this contemporary four-bedroom semi-detached home, with far-reaching countryside views and beautifully landscaped gardens. A generous kitchen and dining room provides a sociable heart to the house, complemented by versatile reception space and two en-suite bedrooms. Terraces offer space for outdoor entertaining, while an integral garage, driveway parking and access to the A69 add everyday convenience.

Asking Price £675,000



Deneside Cottage

Wooley, Slaley, Northumberland

Established gardens, an orchard and open countryside views provide an inviting setting for this three-bedroom detached home. Bi-fold doors connect the contemporary kitchen and dining space to the garden, while a separate timber home office offers space for working remotely. A ground-floor principal suite adds flexibility, with planning permission granted for a two-storey side extension and recladding of the timber-framed property in stone.

Offers over £450,000



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



01434 608 980 Priestpopple, Hexham, NE46 1PS www.youngsrps.com

Adriana Cafasso

Building investment opportunities and raising standards in the North East

From launching her business at just 22 to becoming an award-winning property investment specialist, Adriana Cafasso is helping investors across the UK and beyond unlock the potential of the North East property market.



L-R: Adriana Cafasso, James Positano

For Adriana Cafasso, property has always been more than bricks and mortar. It represents opportunity, financial growth and the chance to create high-quality homes that make a lasting difference.

After graduating from Northumbria University with a law degree, Adriana founded Cafasso Developments at just 22 years old, driven by an ambition to establish herself in the property industry.

While property investment had always been her passion, Adriana recognised that building the capital required to acquire assets personally would take time. Rather than waiting, she identified an opportunity to help established investors grow their portfolios across the North East.

Working closely with James Positano, Adriana has since built a business combining investment expertise, industry relationships and a shared commitment to delivering exceptional property developments. Together, they have helped establish Cafasso Developments as a trusted name in the region's investment market.

Making property investment more accessible

Built around the belief that successful property investment should combine strong financial returns with exceptional living environments, Cafasso Developments was established as a comprehensive turnkey investment service.

From identifying opportunities and sourcing properties to overseeing development and delivering completed investments, the business was designed to remove the complexities often associated with property investment, particularly for clients investing remotely.

Five years later, Adriana, James and their growing team have supported hundreds of investors from across the UK and internationally, helping them establish and expand high-quality property portfolios throughout the North East.

Their clients range from first-time investors taking their initial steps into property to experienced industry professionals looking to diversify and strengthen existing portfolios.

Breaking down barriers to investment

One of Adriana's greatest achievements has been challenging the perception that substantial experience and significant personal capital are essential to access larger property development opportunities.

Working alongside specialist lenders, Cafasso Developments has helped establish tailored funding solutions that enable clients with limited property experience or lower available capital to participate in more substantial development projects.

Supported by the established Cafasso brand, an experienced in-house professional team and a proven delivery model, these opportunities are helping open doors for a wider range of investors.

Through its partnership with Bold Developments, the business combines investment expertise with practical construction and development delivery, providing clients with a joined-up approach from initial opportunity through to completion.

An award-winning vision for the future

With well over 45 projects completed annually, Adriana's approach has earned recognition across the property industry. Her achievements include being named Young Investor of the Year at the National Property Awards 2025/26, alongside Investment Agency of the Year at the Property Investor Awards 2025/26.

Yet for Adriana, success is measured by more than awards or completed developments. Her ambition remains firmly focused on attracting investment into the North East, creating exceptional places to live and delivering sustainable, long-term value for those who place their trust in Cafasso Developments.

From a determined 22-year-old graduate with a vision to an award-winning entrepreneur helping shape the region's property investment landscape, Adriana's journey demonstrates what can be achieved through ambition, expertise and a genuine passion for property.

Looking to invest in the North East? Whether you're exploring your first property investment or expanding an established portfolio, contact Cafasso Developments at Info@cafassodevelopments.com to discuss your investment ambitions.

From heritage to new beginnings



MES Construction breathes new life into Sunderland City Centre.

An exciting transformation is underway on St Thomas' Street, as MES Construction North East Ltd takes on the redevelopment of a familiar Sunderland building, creating new opportunities for city-centre living and business.

For many years, 12 St Thomas' Street was home to John's Hairdressing Services, a well-established business that became a familiar part of Sunderland's city centre. Now, the building is preparing to enter an exciting new chapter, with local construction specialists MES Construction North East Ltd leading its transformation into retail premises and residential apartments.

The project represents more than a refurbishment. It is an opportunity to breathe new life into an existing property, preserving its connection to Sunderland's past while adapting it to meet the needs of the future.

A building with a story to tell

Buildings like 12 St Thomas' Street are part of the fabric of a city. Over the years, they become familiar landmarks, associated with the businesses, people and memories that give an area its character.

John's Hairdressing Services was one such business, serving as a recognisable presence on St Thomas' Street for many years.

While the doors of the former hairdressing salon have closed, the building itself still has an important role to play in the evolving city centre.

Rather than allowing the property to remain unused, the redevelopment will introduce a new mix of commercial and residential space, contributing to the ongoing regeneration of Sunderland.





Transforming spaces, creating opportunities

The refurbishment will see the former premises reimagined to accommodate retail units and residential apartments, creating a building that supports both local enterprise and city-centre living.

For MES Construction, the project demonstrates the company's expertise in commercial refurbishment, structural alterations and property development.

As a family-owned Sunderland business established in 2021, MES Construction has developed a reputation for delivering construction solutions across commercial, industrial and civil engineering sectors.

Its approach centres on providing a comprehensive service, managing projects from initial concepts and structural works through to the finishing details.

The St Thomas' Street redevelopment is another example of how existing buildings can be adapted to serve modern requirements, while making use of established spaces within the city.

Investing in Sunderland's future

With Sunderland continuing to evolve, the regeneration of existing properties plays an important part in creating a vibrant, sustainable city centre.

Projects such as this help unlock the potential of buildings that have served previous generations, introducing new uses without losing sight of their local significance.

For MES Construction, being involved in the transformation of a property with such a longstanding connection to Sunderland is particularly meaningful.

As work progresses, the team will be sharing updates from behind the scenes, offering an insight into the construction process and the changes taking place.

A familiar Sunderland address is getting a new lease of life, and MES Construction is proud to be part of its next chapter.

MES Construction North East Ltd
0191 816 0649
admin@mesconstruction.co.uk



Part of the team with (second from left) CEO Wes Thompson

Jaymac Solutions on course to double its turnover

It's not often that friends, family, clients, colleagues and investors sit comfortably side by side at an event.

These worlds are often oil and water, with each operating in their own distinct area and rarely having cause to come together.

So it was testament to the approach, commitment and attitude of North East company Jaymac Solutions that the decision to bring everyone together for a landmark occasion was a huge success.

What grew out of an initial modest business reusing pallets and selling them on to fruit and vegetable traders in the 1990s has grown to a large scale warehousing and packaging business which operates across six sites in the North East.

But the ambition doesn't stop there and having recently secured a £2.2m funding package through Lloyds, Jaymac Solutions is on course to achieve its growth ambition of doubling its turnover within five years.



CEO Wes Thompson

While the size of the company may have rocketed, it still remains true to its family values and family ownership.

Which is why the event to celebrate its success held recently at Ramside Hall Hotel, Golf and Spa saw not only funders and business colleagues out in force, but the youngest members of the families who are taking the business from strength to strength.

The company now has bases at Gateshead, Newcastle, Washington, Teesside Airport and Faverdale near Darlington where it continues to expand its services.

The latest site – a 30,000 sq ft warehouse which sits alongside the company's existing Washington operation, which recycles and repairs between 12,000 and 15,000 pallets every week – will allow the company to bring the manufacture of timber pallets and crates for export customers in house.

The new injection of cash includes a £1.52 million loan and a £681,000 business loan and asset finance facility and will also lead to the creation of eight new jobs.

It now offers a range of services including warehousing and logistics for a number of big high street names, along with specialist foam fabrication.

Earlier this year Jaymac Solutions moved into a site at Teesside Aiport to provide warehousing, packaging and fulfilment solutions for the air freight industry.

Wes Thompson, CEO at Jaymac Solutions, said the secret to the company's continued success was in asking customers how they can help them.

"Our business has grown through relationships. Someone giving us that first opportunity," he said.

"A customer trusting us with a little more responsibility. A supplier helping us out when we needed it. Someone making an introduction that opened a door.

"Over time, those opportunities have helped us build a broader business. A conversation about pallets becomes a conversation about packaging, then storage, transport or managing a customer's returns.

"Before you know it, "I think we can help with that" has become quite a substantial job list."

The company is constantly looking at ways to become a one-stop-shop for its clients, with some of the new funding invested in heat-treatment capability, which means it can manufacture, heat treat and store pallets all in on location.

"Across the business, our offer brings together pallets, packaging, storage, recovery and logistics support. The common thread is simple: understand what our customers need, get involved and do a good job," said Wes.



Founder of Jaymac Solutions Tony Macari (second from right) with the next generation of family now involved in the business

The event was also an opportunity to showcase the new Jaymac Solutions branding, designed to reflect the growth of the business and the new directions it is taking.

Its success to date has now gone unnoticed and the reason why it has won so much support from major financial institutions.

James Carruthers, Relationship Manager at Lloyds said that Jaymac Solutions "is a genuine North East success story."

"It has grown by listening carefully to what customers need and then building the capability to deliver it and bringing manufacturing and heat treatment in-house is the logical next step in that journey," he said.

"Businesses at this stage of growth often tell us it's payment terms rather than demand holding them back. Combining long-term funding with working capital support means the team can go after bigger contracts with confidence. It was a pleasure to spend time at their sites and understand the detail of what they do, and we're proud to be supporting the investment and the jobs that come with it."

For further information visit www.jaymacsolutions.co.uk


Guests at the celebration event



NCBF guests at the Lighthouse Charity anniversary dinner

NCBF and its members celebrate charity's 70th birthday

Several Northern Counties Builders Federation (NCBF) members came out in force to support the Lighthouse Charity and its 70th anniversary celebratory dinner.

Founded in 1956 in Whitley Bay, the charity, provides 24/7 holistic support to the UK and Ireland construction community on all aspects of emotional, physical and financial wellbeing.

Companies from across the North East construction sector, celebrated the milestone at the Hilton Newcastle Tyne Bridge.

The event raised just over £13,800 with an anonymous donor offered to match what was raised on the evening. In total the dinner raised a whopping £27,670

The night included speeches from Sarah Sidey, the charity's regional chair and its CEO, Sarah Bolton and guests were kept entertained by compere, Steve Walls and a live band.

As well as fundraising events, The Lighthouse Charity delivers talks and initiatives that champion wellbeing and mental health awareness within the North East construction industry. These include on-site sessions and roadshows designed to make support services highly visible and easily accessible to workers. Through its Company Supporter Scheme, businesses can also access free training to help safeguard and support their workforce.

NCBF members who attended included Carney Consultancy, a sponsor of the event, Compass Developments, John N Dunn Group, Hodgson Sayers, RE:GEN Group and the NCBF who took two tables which included its members -Vest Construction, Able Construction and Classic Masonry.

Both the NCBF and Lighthouse Charity have strong synergies as they operate across the construction sector and president of the NCBF, Angela Carney, also sits on the North East committee of the charity.

NCBF is a long-established membership association bringing together construction companies and contractors operating across the North East of England.

Angela Carney, said: "The NCBF has been a long-term supporter of the charity, and many member companies are very active within it.

"The night was a chance to celebrate the construction sector and all that it does in collectively supporting such a valued charity."

Sarah Sidey, chair of the Lighthouse Charity in the North East, said: "It was fantastic to see so many NCBF members and construction professionals come together to celebrate the Charity's 70th birthday.

"It is vital that we continue to prioritise wellbeing, lead with empathy and create an environment where people feel safe to talk and seek support when they need it. The funds raised on the night will help ensure construction workers and their families can access the emotional, physical and financial support they need, reminding them that they never have to face life's challenges alone.

"Every raffle ticket purchased, auction bid placed and donation made will contribute directly to supporting people across our industry. The generosity shown was truly inspiring and will make a genuine difference to lives throughout the construction community."

www.ncbf.uk

Key milestone reached at Riverside Sunderland

A key housing development in Sunderland city centre has hit a milestone with the external envelope of the first cluster of 18 houses now in place, following completion of the roofing, cladding and window installations.



Stephen O'Neill, director at Compass Developments

In September 2025, Cramlington-based Compass Developments was appointed by igloo Regeneration to deliver 34 homes within the Vaux Neighbourhood at Riverside Sunderland.

The homes include 16 innovative and sustainable properties inspired by award-winning designs produced by igloo Regeneration, Open Studios and Mawson Kerr for the Government's Home of 2030 design competition.

Compass has confirmed that the first cluster of 18 properties are now watertight meaning interior fit outs can continue at pace without weather delays.

The homes are part of the award-winning Riverside Sunderland regeneration project which is funded through the Housing Growth Partnership and a Research and Development grant from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to support the delivery of the development.

Stephen O'Neill, director at Compass Developments, said: "These homes set new benchmarks for sustainable, healthy, attractive, and future-ready living and provide a unique city centre housing and lifestyle offer.

"Completion of the external envelope to achieve weathertightness is a significant stage of the development and we're well on track to complete our work next year."

The development, which has been called The Maxim, as an ode to the old Vaux Brewery which previously occupied the site, is located between The Beam and the new Sunderland Specialist Eye Hospital and will include two-and three-bedroom townhouses and maisonettes. The first phase will be complete in early 2027. More details can be found on themaximvaux.com.

In total, 133 new homes will be built on the former Vaux site, and the ambitious Riverside Sunderland masterplan, led by Sunderland City Council, aims to double the city centre population from 2,500 to 5,000 while creating 10,000 new jobs.

Michelle Williams, project director at igloo Regeneration, said: "Reaching this stage is an important milestone for the Vaux neighbourhood and a visible sign of the progress being made at Riverside Sunderland.

"These homes have been designed to build communities and support the way people want to live, providing easy access to green space, local amenities and the city centre. As construction continues, we're starting to see that vision take shape, creating a new neighbourhood that will help shape Sunderland's future while delivering sustainable, high-quality homes for residents."

Based in Cramlington, Compass Developments delivers construction and development projects across commercial, industrial, and residential sectors, specialising in schemes up to £10 million in value. It provides full lifecycle support, including feasibility assessments, design management, project planning, and construction delivery. Its growth in recent years has been fuelled by repeat business, long-term client partnerships and a reputation for transparent communication, practical problem-solving, and consistent project outcomes.

www.compass-developments.co.uk

Jan Dale *introduces...*

inside property

Property has always been a passion of mine, and to me it's about so much more than bricks and mortar. It's about people, places, ambition and the vision to create something that connects with how we want to live today.

In this new feature, I'll be introducing some of the dynamic people, businesses and property opportunities catching my eye - both closer to home and further afield. From emerging developers and distinctive new homes to exciting destinations, I'll be sharing the stories and people behind the property.

MawsonKerr - Architects with Soul

From a childhood drawing of a Cumbrian library to a practice helping shape the North's changing places, Will Mawson's approach to architecture is rooted in people, landscape and the possibilities of good design. Jan Dale discovers what inspires one half of MawsonKerr.

Sometimes, a passing comment can shape a lifetime. For Will Mawson, it came at the age of seven, while drawing Cleator Moor Library at school. His teacher suggested he should become an architect. The idea stayed with him.

Growing up on a Cumbrian farm also instilled a strong work ethic and a love of the outdoors, influences that continue to shape his approach to architecture.



Dan Kerr, Daniel Dyer, Will Mawson

A Northern Foundation

Will met his business partner, Dan Kerr, at university. Years later, amid an economic crisis, they decided the time had come to establish their own practice.

"It was then or potentially never," Will recalls. "We did, and haven't looked back."

What began as an ambitious venture has grown into a respected North East architectural practice, with a recently opened second office in Leeds.

Despite spending 30 years in the North East, Will retains a deep connection to his Cumbrian roots. From the familiar hills of home to Newcastle's post-industrial Quayside, his appreciation of landscape and place is central to his architectural thinking.

Architecture That Makes a Difference

For Will, the greatest satisfaction comes from seeing ideas become reality.

> *"Nothing beats seeing something coming out of the ground, or an old forgotten building coming to life."*

He sees working with architecture as a privilege, particularly when it creates meaningful change in people's lives.

One project especially close to his heart is Sunbeams Music Trust, a Cumbrian charity for which MawsonKerr designed a building that has become a catalyst for positive change.

It exemplifies his belief that successful architecture goes beyond the physical structure to enrich the lives of those who experience it.

Designing for the Future

Sustainability is another fundamental consideration. Will believes buildings should be designed not simply for today's needs, but for generations to come.

> *"Buildings will need to have multiple lives."*

That means creating adaptable spaces capable of evolving as circumstances change, while balancing immediate pressures with long-term responsibility.

His creative curiosity remains as strong as ever. A childhood love of drawing and an admiration for eccentric inventors still influence his thinking. He even considers Wallace, of Wallace & Gromit fame, to have the dream job.

The Next Chapter

With significant regeneration and housing projects progressing, alongside the opportunities presented by the Leeds office, MawsonKerr continues to look ahead.

For Will, however, success isn't about global expansion. It's about meaningful projects, strong relationships and the satisfaction of creating places that positively influence people's lives.

And perhaps that's where the soul of architecture truly lies: understanding people, respecting place and designing buildings that continue to make a difference long after completion.

mawsonkerr

info@mawsonkerr.co.uk

0191 230 1799

www.mawsonkerr.co.uk



ARCHITECTS WITH SOUL

info@mawsonkerr.co.uk
0191 230 1799
mawsonkerr.co.uk

mawsonkerr


Neil Turner

The Value of Landscape

By Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield

As we move into Autumn and the colours in the landscape change, I am reminded of the value that gardens, landscape and nature bring to design.

I have written before on the changing environment, air conditioning use and energy costs and how we will need to re-design our offices and houses, but I haven't looked at the impact on landscape.

Planting trees around your house looks great and can also lower temperatures in summer. In addition, it can provide shade and shelter. The leaves on a tree release moisture, which cools the air in summer. In the winter, the tree becomes a wind barrier to protect a building and can reduce heating costs by 10%.

In recent years people have an ambivalent view on trees and landscape. Many towns are losing mature poplar trees in streets, often citing danger or shading. Too often they are not replaced.

Trees add more than landscape to our towns and suburbs. I drove around a modern estate the other week and was so disappointed at the harshness, lack of green spaces and trees - it's only when you see a place without any, do you truly recognise what is missing.

The desire to build more development in awkward and infill sites naturally leads to the removal of landscape and tress in forgotten parcels of land. As an architect I have worked on many sites where this occurs, but we must compensate and think about what is going back. The current national BNG rules (Biodiversity Net Gain) is a 'clunky blunt tool 'in planning that only annoys developers and landowners, rather than encouraging (or rewarding) people to complete well-conceived landscape schemes.

Trees reduce temperature, remove air pollution and sequester greenhouse gases by removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Trees improve the air we breathe and provide us with oxygen.



Burning fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas releases carbon dioxide and negatively affects trees, so reducing emissions is a key step in protecting the quality of our air.

We have some really talented landscape architects in the NE region who continue to amaze me with the clever and ingenious solutions they bring to design schemes, often on tight budgets. Landscape is often one of the early packages to be sacrificed in projects and landscape architects' resilience is to be applauded.

We should be putting landscape further up the agenda, so it is not based on a maths count of areas but on the quality and added value that it offers. Owners, developers (and architects) need to understand the value of trees, landscaping on their buildings, the wider urban setting and the health benefits. So, trust in your landscape architect and see the difference they can make to a scheme for now and in the long term.

I try to plant an extra tree each year in my own garden and love the variety of traditional willows, alders and oaks, the changes of colour and growth adding vitality to the garden. This year's choice is a Katsura tree, not native but (hopefully) some lovely colours to come and the promise of a smell of candy floss!

I seem to have become a tree hugger; it happens with age!

Neil Turner, Director, Howarth Litchfield can be contacted on 0191 384 9470 or email n.turner@hlpuk.com www.howarthlitchfield.com



North East charity expands bakery enterprise at HMP Northumberland

A joint venture between The Oswin Project and HMP Northumberland operators, Sodexo Justice, will see the expansion of the Oswin commercial bakery enterprise thanks to grant funding from Scottish Power, and other partners.

This latest step will see the expansion of the existing and successful commercial bakery through the transformation of a disused prison kitchen into state-of-the-art new premises.

This will allow The Oswin Project to meet the ever-growing demand for its highly popular bread, pies, quiches and cakes, and to expand its outside catering offer plus add new lines.

Run by a mix of professional staff and volunteers it will also allow the charity to offer up to an additional 20 training places to serving prisoners taking the total number to up to 30 working in the Catering Enterprises in HMP Northumberland.

These candidates will gain food safety qualifications as well as learning specialised baking techniques suitable for any bakery.

Fiona Sample, Chief Executive Officer at The Oswin Project, said: "We all want safer communities and fewer victims of crime, that is why the Oswin Project's Baking out project is so important. Through giving prisoners, the opportunity to work and learn, underpinned by mentoring, we put a wedge in the revolving door of reoffending.



"At Baking Out in partnership with HMP Northumberland we aim to change this – one loaf, one pie, one tray bake at a time."

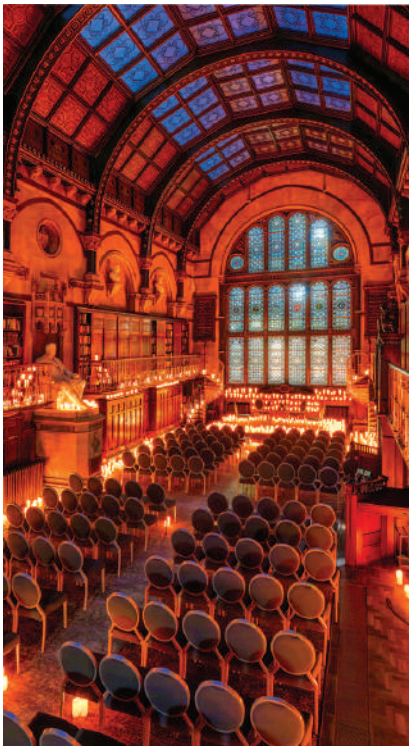
Vicky Robinson, Director at HMP Northumberland, said: "We are proud of the long-standing partnership we have built with The Oswin Project, which has helped design a truly rehabilitative offer at HMP Northumberland. The new bakery is a fantastic addition to an already diverse portfolio of purposeful activities we provide our prisoners."

oswinproject.org.uk
uk.sodexo.com/industries/justice?

EXPERTISE ACROSS MANY SECTORS WITH ONE THING IN COMMON || INSPIRING AND AWARD-WINNING







Commercial | Industrial | Education | Health | Heritage | Leisure | Hotels | Residential | Sustainabililty





HOWARTH LITCHFIELD

Liddon House, Belmont Business Park, Durham DH1 1TW | Tel: 0191 384 9470



Latest award is "great recognition for whole team"

David Lamb on prestigious award win.

Orange Sales and Lettings has been named Residential Agency of the Year, at the National Property Awards, held in Birmingham.

I was delighted to pick up the prestigious award on behalf of the whole team, during a ceremony which acknowledged excellence amongst property industry professionals from across the UK, including financial service providers and property developers.

We were named in the final 15 after competing with hundreds of nominees from all over the country - and Orange – which is built on my experience as a landlord - was eventually crowned the winner, after being judged by a panel of 12 professionals.

What made the award even more special was that someone nominated Orange independently - we had no part in putting ourselves forward.

Winning the award was great recognition for the whole team at Orange Sales and Lettings, and I am immensely proud of the efforts they put in for our landlord clients and our tenants day in, day out.

The panel looked at our growth, our customer reviews and the new building we have recently opened on Belasis Avenue in Billingham - and that all played a part in us winning the award.

We've recently opened an office in Sunderland too and that is supporting us with our growth across the North East.

When I saw there were bigger agencies than Orange up for the same award, I never imagined we would win, but we did.

I was shocked to be honest. It was amazing and I was delighted – very proud.

The staff are also very proud and happy with our new title.

Our latest award comes on the back of us being crowned UK Property Manager of the Year at the Blue Bricks Awards in Liverpool, at the Titanic Hotel, last year.

These awards just cement my belief that I have a great team behind me at Orange - and the awards are for them really – they are fantastic.

They are the ones who are in the office every day and they have built the reputation that we have got.

I started the business, and I lead the business, but ultimately, they are the ones that our customers are raving about.

Throughout 2026, Orange has continued to grow through acquisitions and I would now like to see Orange becoming the North East's go-to property management company.

Having recently purchased another two agencies, one in Hartlepool and one in Sunderland, we have taken on four more staff from one of those businesses, taking our current team of agents to 12.

In addition, we also contract a number of tradespeople to carry out repairs and refurbishments to a very high standard.

The National Property Awards took place at The Eastside Rooms in Birmingham.

The awards were free to nominate, due to the organisers' ethos to support the property sector by celebrating excellence without fees for taking part, which means they attract a significant amount of nominations from all over the UK.

For more information, visit www.orangesalesandlettings.co.uk







BERNARD
LONDON
CURATED INTERIORS

Timeless design, driven by a desire to craft







BERNARD
INTERIORS GROUP

Bernard Interiors Group
The Church, Greystoke Avenue
Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 1PN

bernardinteriorsgroup.com
enquiries@bernardinteriors.co.uk
01661 821 427

British Institute of Interior Design REGISTERED DESIGN PRACTICE

SBID ACCREDITED DESIGNER

SPEARS 500

THE INTERNATIONAL DESIGN & ARCHITECTURE AWARDS 2025 WINNER

New Durham student accommodation business launches and £1m property upgrade completes

A Durham family firm has launched a new student accommodation business and announced the completion of a major, £1m refurbishment of a student property in Durham.

Ward Group Investments' new sub-brand, Cabana Student Living, exclusively owns, lets and manages its own purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) properties in Durham.

The business has over 450 student units across five locations in Durham city – at Ward Court, The Printworks, Elvet Residences, St Andrews Chambers and Viaduct Residences.

A £1million, extensive back-to-brick refurbishment has recently completed at the 29-bedroom St Andrews Chambers on North Road in Durham, which is owned, let and managed by Cabana Student Living.

A £12m, 45-bed, student studio development is also under construction at Viaduct Residences, on Atherton Street, which is scheduled to complete in July 2027.

Cabana Student Living specialises in high-quality, centrally-located student accommodation and aims to set a new benchmark for student accommodation in Durham. Its buildings are highly-individual, characterful and located in prime locations throughout the city, with premium, modern rooms



Stunning, new student accommodation at St Andrews Chambers in Durham

The new Cabana Student Living website launches on Monday 26 October and will be taking bookings for the next academic year.

CEO, Andrew Ward, said: "We're a Durham family business that has owned and managed property in the city for over 25 years and we genuinely care about the buildings we look after and the experience we provide.

"Cabana Student Living will bring a personal approach to accommodation and service. Each of our properties has its own history and character and we want to preserve that, while ensuring students have a high standard of living, with high-quality rooms in central locations.

"What sets us apart is that we have the scale of the national operators with the service and care of a local, family-run business. We own the buildings, manage and maintain them ourselves and are here every day for our residents. When a student needs us, they can speak directly to the team responsible for their home. That level of accountability and personal service is what Cabana Student Living is all about."

For more information go to: www.cabanastudents.co.uk

North East landlords urged to 'Keep their eyes wide open' as property rules continue to change

Martin Wardle of specialist property tax advisers TH Ward is one of the founders of GB Landlords, a property education group which has been helping landlords across the North East stay informed for around eight years.

He is now encouraging landlords whether experienced investors or people considering entering the property market for the first time, to attend the GB Landlords Property Conference at the Britannia Hotel, Newcastle Airport, on Thursday, November 12.

The annual event brings together experts from across the property sector and is designed to give landlords the opportunity to hear directly from leading figures involved in regulation, taxation, property management and the wider industry.

Martin said the days when someone could simply buy a property and rent it out without having to understand the wider responsibilities of being a landlord were long gone.

"Keep your eyes open," he said. "There is a danger that you just think, 'I'm going to buy a house and rent it out'. But there are so many potential pitfalls."



The GB Landlords Property Conference is the fourth annual conference organised by the group, which was established to provide affordable property education and networking opportunities for landlords across the North East.

This year's confirmed speakers include Suzanne Smith, discussing the Renters' Rights Act six months on; property commentator and analyst Kate Faulkner OBE; Sean Hooker on property redress reform and the next phase of Renters' Rights; Gareth Harrison, Deputy Agent for the North East at the Bank of England, giving an autumn update and Timothy Douglas and Henry Griffiths of Propertymark.

The GB Landlords Property Conference takes place at the Britannia Hotel, Newcastle Airport, on November 12, 2026.

We provide growing businesses with strategic financial guidance.
To find how we can help contact Andy Briggs
enquiries@iagrowth.co.uk
07989 702010 | www.iagrowth.co.uk
IA GROWTH
FROM EXPERIENCE COMES INSIGHT

HOULTS YARD

SPACES WITH SOUL

MORE THAN *A Workplace*



SERVICED OFFICE SPACE

FROM 2 - 40 DESKS



MEETING ROOMS

BOOKINGS AVAILABLE HOURLY, HALF, OR FULL DAY



VIRTUAL OFFICE SERVICES

FROM £20 PER MONTH

OFFICE SPACE • MEETING ROOMS
INDUSTRIAL SPACE • VIRTUAL OFFICES

0191 607 0200

HOULTS

HOULTSYARD.CO.UK



Colin Tweddell, JTC Furniture with Laura Balaam-Wiseman, Prosper

Kitchen collaboration scores sector award sucess

A groundbreaking approach to programme delivery has received a commendation at the Housing Executive Awards, held at the Toughsheet Community Stadium in Bolton.

The ten-year collaboration which unites Prosper, the North East Housing Partnership and Northern Housing Consortium with leading kitchen manufacturer, JTC Furniture, scooped the "Commended Award" in the Partnership of the Year category during an evening of sector celebration.

The planned investment programme was facilitated by collaboration creators, Prosper, and is expected to generate savings of over £10 million during a decade of transformation for social landlords.

Laura Balaam-Wiseman, Collaboration Director at Prosper said: "The ongoing success of the kitchen collaboration highlights the power of collaboration and the lasting value that can be created when organisations come together around a shared goal.

"Through standardisation and smarter procurement, our aim was to identify where cost, complexity or duplication could be reduced without compromising quality or service to residents, generating significant value benefits."

The partnership is not only improving kitchen spaces for tenants across the North East, but has also created multiple local jobs.

Colin Tweddell, Executive Director - Social Housing, JTC Furniture said: "With thousands of homes across the North East projected to benefit, it made perfect sense to establish our regional kitchen assembly hub within the communities in which we serve.

"We've expanded our site in Cramlington by securing a 10-year lease for assembly and distribution, creating pathways into employment for locals including social housing residents. This includes the appointment of trainee warehouse operatives, a general manager, customer service administrator and three surveyors."

The ripple effects are ongoing proof-of concept for Prosper's innovative Opti-Value delivery model. Laura continued: "It was a thrill to see our shared value recognised at an emerging fixture in the social housing calendar.

"Our Opti-Value concept delivers a regional approach to supply and distribution and brings together planned investment across multiple landlords. It allows us to move away from fragmented, landlord-by-landlord procurement towards a coordinated, long-term model which can amplify the social value benefits."

The evening marked the second iteration of the Housing Executive Awards which aims to shine the spotlight on the sector's brightest talent. Prosper was also nominated in the Decarbonisation of the Year category for its work with the Synergy Partnership.

Laura concluded: "We're enormously proud of the partnership which remains one of the first of its kind nationally. We look to go one better in future!"

prosper.uk.com

Greetham Gilbert announces opening of new Whitley Bay branch



Independent award-winning North East estate agency Greetham Gilbert has expanded into Whitley Bay with the opening of a new flagship branch, marking the latest milestone in the company's continued growth across the region.

Located at 232 Park View, the new 853 sq ft office offers sales, lettings and property management services and within its first month of opening the new branch has sold 10 properties and taken instruction from 16 vendors.

The Whitley Bay site complements Greetham Gilbert's head office in Jesmond, Newcastle, and forms part of the business's long-term expansion plans. Founders Simon and Louise Greetham and Roger Gilbert, who have more than 60 years' combined experience in the estate agency sector, said the move has personal significance alongside business expansion.

Simon Greetham said: "Whitley Bay is an area that has always felt like home to us – living at the coast ourselves, we know the nature of Park View is vibrant and has a strong community feel with lots of other independent businesses based here.

"There's a real sense of character and creativity here, and it reflects the type of high-end, aspirational homes that we represent. Opening our new branch in Whitley Bay is a very proud moment for us.

"We have created a business that focuses on people first, whether that is sellers, buyers landlords or tenants and we are proud to be growing across the region while keeping that personal approach at the heart of everything we do. We already have plans to expand into other parts of the region and are excited about what the future holds."

Leading the new office is Isabella Stewart, with strong local knowledge and extensive industry experience, she will help establish Greetham Gilbert in the area. She will be supported by three sales & lettings negotiators, increasing the company's headcount to 13.

Supporting Greetham Gilbert through its growth is business advisor Daniel Adamson at Robson Laidler Accountants. Specialist advice has included financial forecasting, management reporting, strategic business planning and staff development, helping the business make informed decisions as it continues to expand.

Daniel Adamson said: "It's been a pleasure to support Simon, Louise and Roger throughout their growth journey. From the outset, they have had a clear vision for building a premium estate agency with exceptional customer service at its core.

"The business has grown sustainably over the past three years, making a strong profit in its first year and continuing to achieve impressive year-on-year growth.

"The opening of the Whitley Bay branch is a significant milestone and demonstrates the value of careful planning, investing in the right people and maintaining a clear long-term strategy. We look forward to continuing to support Greetham Gilbert as they expand further across the North East."

Established in 2023, Greetham Gilbert has built a strong reputation by combining modern marketing, proactive communication and a customer focused service model that challenges the traditional estate agency approach. The business, which won Best Estate Agency Award at England's Business Awards last year, has become known for its cinematic-style property videos and high-quality editorial photography, helping buyers experience a home before they step through the door.

Greetham Gilbert is committed to supporting the local community, currently sponsoring Cullercoats FC and supports Whitley Bay Golf Club with further plans to increase its charitable giving and community support in the area.

www.greethamgilbert.co.uk
www.robson-laidler.co.uk

Brims builds on record £70m turnover with £89.5m secured workload



L-R: Senior Project Manager, John Fish, Brims' Director, Richard Wood, Quantity Surveyor, Tim Begg and Site Manager, Luke Oldfield

North East independent contractor increases profits by 26%, invests in new headquarters and strengthens its platform for continued growth.

Brims Construction has delivered its fifth consecutive year of revenue growth, achieving record turnover of £70 million and a 26% increase in pre-tax profits as it continues to build its reputation as a trusted construction partner across the North East.

The independently owned contractor reported turnover of £70.01 million for the year ended 31 March 2026, up from £64.43 million, with pre-tax profit rising to £5.31 million.

With a workforce averaging 200 people, year-end cash balances of £19.37 million and no bank debt, Brims combines the resources to deliver major projects with the personal approach and long-term relationships of an independent business.

That approach continues to attract new and returning clients. Secured future workload stood at £89.46 million at the end of August 2026, providing a strong foundation for the year ahead.

Commercial Director Ian Clift said: "These results demonstrate the strength of Brims and the confidence our clients place in us. Five consecutive years of revenue growth, alongside increased profitability, reflect the hard work of our people and a clear focus on delivering projects well.

"For our clients, financial strength matters. They need confidence that their contractor has the people, resources and resilience to see a project through. Our strong cash position and absence of bank debt allow us to plan for the long term, invest in the business and support our supply chain.

"We are ambitious for Brims. Our focus is on building a business that clients want to work with again, talented people want to join and suppliers can depend on."

The results follow a busy year of project delivery across education, commercial property, industry and specialist facilities.

Among the projects completed was the £15.6 million Housing Innovation and Construction Skills Academy at Riverside Sunderland. Combining the restoration of a former engine shed with a substantial new extension, the scheme demonstrates Brims' ability to deliver technically demanding projects that support the region's future.

Other completions included a £4.5 million refurbishment and fit-out for Barbour, a new sixth form centre in Northumberland and an office and factory refurbishment incorporating a specialist remotely operated vehicle test tank for subsea engineering company, SMD. Brims also delivered works at Newcastle International Airport and civil engineering projects at Wilton, Teesside.

Operations Director Jason Wood said: "Our strength is the combination of our people, our technical experience and the relationships we build with clients. We take time to understand what each project needs and bring the right team together to deliver it safely and to a high standard.

"Repeat business is particularly important to us. When a client chooses Brims again, it is a strong endorsement of the service our team has provided.

"Our experience across different sectors gives us a broad base of expertise, while our selective approach to new work helps us maintain the attention and commitment that every client deserves."

The year also saw Brims complete its move to Ravensworth House on Team Valley in September 2025, investing in a new headquarters to support the next stage of its development.

Director Richard Wood said: "Our new headquarters represents our confidence in the future of Brims and our commitment to the North East. It gives our people a modern working environment and a strong base from which to support clients across the region and beyond.

"Behind these results is a team that really cares about the quality of its work. Their knowledge, professionalism and commitment are what turn opportunities into successful projects and first-time clients into long-term partners.

"With a strong secured workload and the capacity to invest in our future, we are well placed to build on that success."

Brims also achieved the Fair Payment Code Bronze Award, recognising payment of at least 95% of invoices within 60 days and reinforcing its commitment to its supply chain.

Looking ahead, the company will continue to pursue sustainable, profitable growth through carefully selected projects, investment in its people and lasting client relationships.

brimsconstruction.com

WE CATER TO YOUR EVERY NEED...

We are a family owned and managed company who together have over 25 years in the catering and manufacturing industry. Our hands on experience in the outdoor catering sector gives us great insight into the every changing needs of the mobile caterer.





Our recent customers include: • Apartment group • Ramside event catering Newcastle Falcons Rugby Club • Doritos • Salvation Army...to name but a few!









We take time to listen to your needs and always go the extra mile to meet them. Your unit will be unique to you, visually and functionally. We will do all we can to help you stand out from the crowd and give you a head start in making your business a successful one.



We employ a loyal team of craftsmen who have many years of experience between them and our attention to detail is such that we see clients return to us time and time again. We manufacture bespoke catering units using high quality materials to a very high standard, at competitive prices.

Orders being taken now • Deliveries within 6-8 weeks

CATERING UNITS

For further information contact CateringUnits.co.uk • Tel: 0845 519 5065 • Email: info@cateringunits.co.uk

Unit 28, Team Valley Business Centre, Team Valley, Gateshead NE11 0QH



Freya as Dot



Pupils bring bold new folk opera to life

A bold new folk opera, No More Sleeping brought together professional artists, pupils, and community groups from across Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust (BCCET) and two robots in a spectacular performance at 02 City Hall in Newcastle.

Created in collaboration with pupils from the Trust's 31 schools across East Durham, Sunderland and South Tyneside, the production was the result of a unique partnership with writer Richard O'Neill MBE, musician and community leader Mike McGrother, illustrator Michelle Russell, and Seven Stories, The National Centre for Children's Books.

The opera followed the story of Dot, a teenage girl navigating the loss of her grandmother. Her life changes when she receives Marra, a Multifunctioning Autonomous Robotic Resource Assistant, which becomes both a guide and a living archive of her family history and the region's untold stories. Robots Alan and Pixel, from Durham University, also starred in the performance.

The lead role was played by 13-year-old Freya, a Year 9 pupil at St Anthony's Girls' Catholic Academy, Sunderland, who said: "I saw myself in Dot. When I got the role, I was over the moon. It's been such a rewarding experience, and I've gained so much confidence. Working with pupils from other schools and alongside professionals has been amazing. Everyone has been so supportive. I think the show will bring the whole community together."

The production was eloquently narrated by author Richard O'Neill, who opened with the words: "This is a place of rivers and bridges carried by wind and water…built on sweat and stories." He said: "There are people who talk about change, and people who get on and make it November 2026 happen. Brendan Tapping (CEO, BCCET), is one of the doers, the person who backed the original idea for a new North East story and gave Mike McGrother and me the freedom to create something bold, ambitious, and unapologetically North East.

"At the O2 City Hall in Newcastle, hundreds of children stood on that stage and proved exactly why this region's future is worth believing in. If we want our young people to know a fabulous future is waiting for them here, we must help them build it, not just by talking, but by modelling what's possible and creating real opportunities to do it. "No More Sleeping is the result of that belief." He added the performance was supported by staff across the Trust and its school, who were "central to making this production possible" while also thanking cast and collaborators included the "extraordinary" Alfie Joey.

Durham University's Computer Science team, led by Dr Amir Atapour Abarghouei, saw the performance make a little bit of North East history with the first humanoid robot ever cast in a major regional production. Pupils have also collaborated on a companion picture book inspired by the story.

Brendan Tapping OBE, said: "At its heart, No More Sleeping is a story of resilience, transformation, and community. It reminds us that the North East is not just a region of proud history, but one of boundless creativity and innovation."

No More Sleeping is the latest in a series of successful, collaborative creative projects, following Footsteps into Paradise at Durham Cathedral in 2022, and JOY in my Heart at Rainton Arena in 2023.

For more information about BCCET, visit www.bccet.org.uk







Alfie Joey

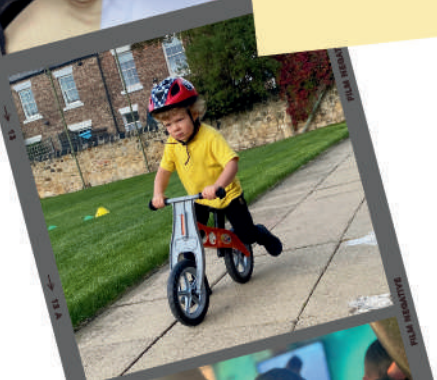
Est 1885

Newcastle Preparatory School

- Vibrant and engaging co-educational curriculum for children aged 3-11
- Convenient location in Newcastle, easily accessible by Metro or car
- Warm, family atmosphere where friends are made for life
- Bespoke facilities and incredible extra-curricular opportunities
- Small class sizes and dedicated, specialist staff
- 140 years of outstanding pupil achievement











ENQUIRE NOW

Book your personal tour of the school

Funded, bursary places available

Newcastle Preparatory School, 6 Eslington Road, Jesmond NE2 4RH

www.newcastleprepschool.org.uk

SCAN ME







More than academic success: Discover RGS Newcastle

At Royal Grammar School Newcastle, academic excellence sits alongside a rich educational experience, giving pupils the freedom to explore their interests, challenge themselves and discover where their talents lie.

We foster an environment where students, in Year 3 to Year 13, learn alongside and from one another, developing the confidence, collaboration skills and respect that will serve them throughout their lives.

Guided by our philosophy of "There's More to Life", we believe that families are investing in far more than a set of exam results. Through exceptional teaching, extensive co-curricular opportunities, outstanding pastoral care and a vibrant school community, students gain the confidence, experiences and life skills that can shape their futures. Families can experience this first-hand at RGS Newcastle's Open Morning on Saturday 14th November.

This approach was recently recognised when RGS Newcastle was named the Best Value Independent School in the Borders and Tyne region by The Telegraph.

As Headmaster Geoffrey Stanford explains: "At the RGS we believe that exam results should the consequence, not the purpose of a good education. We seek to provide an education that gives young people opportunities and experiences that can shape the rest of their lives."

From Junior School onwards, students are encouraged to be ambitious and embrace new opportunities. Guided by the RGS Superpowers of Able, Strong, Calm and Kind, younger pupils build strong academic foundations alongside resilience, self-belief and a love of learning.

As students' progress through the school, opportunities broaden further. Alongside a challenging academic curriculum, RGS offers more than 170 co-curricular activities spanning music, drama, debating, volunteering, academic societies and sport.

Whether performing on stage, taking part in a musical ensemble, competing for a sports team, joining the Combined Cadet Force or engaging in the wide range of clubs and activities, pupils are encouraged to discover their strengths and pursue their passions.

As a co-educational school, RGS brings together students with different perspectives and experiences, helping them learn how to work alongside others and respect the contributions that others make in a way that will serve them well beyond their school years.

Students joining Sixth Form from schools across the North East become part of one of the largest and most dynamic independent school Sixth Forms in the country. Alongside more than 30 A-Level options, students benefit from programmes such as PLUS, Complementary Studies and Futures, helping them prepare for university, degree apprenticeships, careers and life beyond school.

The impact of this approach can be seen in the achievements of our students. This year, students progressed to a wide range of destinations including Russell Group universities, specialist institutions and degree apprenticeships pursuing pathways as diverse as medicine, engineering, business, the creative industries and public service.

As Headmaster Mr Stanford, Sixth Form Head Miss Enevoldson and Junior School Head Mr Miller all agree: "Our aim is to help every young person develop the confidence and character to make the most of the opportunities ahead of them."

Located in the heart of Newcastle with excellent public transport links, RGS attracts students from across the North East. Families are warmly invited to discover the RGS difference at the school's Open Morning on Saturday 14th November 2026. It is an opportunity to meet staff and students, explore the school and see first-hand how RGS helps young people thrive from their earliest school years through to university and beyond.

www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk/admissions











Darlington College

OPEN EVENT

WEDNESDAY 18TH NOVEMBER

5.30PM UNTIL 7.30PM

- MEET TUTORS AND FIND OUT ABOUT OUR COURSES
- TAKE A TOUR OF OUR FACILITIES
- FIND OUT WHICH COURSE IS RIGHT FOR YOU
- FIND OUT ABOUT ADULT COURSES

Scan the QR code to see what Darlington College has to offer.

www.darlington.ac.uk

Darlington College, Central Park, Haughton Road, Darlington, DL1 1DR

Asking for help!

By Michelle Sheekey

Why is it that children find it so easy to ask for help - yet as adults, we often run a mile?


Michelle Sheekey

At my nursery, The Montessori People in Thornaby, youngsters won't bat an eyelid at the idea of asking someone to zip their coat or take them to the loo.

But in business, adults baulk at the prospect of asking for a helping hand – even when they are drowning.

It is a strange phenomenon that I've encountered time after time.

Besides the pre-school, I run Michelle Sheekey Elite Coaching, a high-end coaching business for successful people.

These are the people who have the sense to get that bit of extra support – but so many are falling through the cracks.

A study of SME owners submitted to Parliament revealed that almost half (45 per cent) of them were unlikely to ask for support from their peers.

Additionally, 72 per cent didn't seek any external business advice in the past year.

The key takeaway is that by and large, too many business leaders are still happy to be drowning – and not asking for anyone to chuck them a lifejacket.

Why? Because somewhere along the way, we lose that childlike ability to just say 'can you help me please'.

We develop this idea that asking for help means we can't cope. We link independence with help, so inevitably link the idea of asking for help as us failing.

Rubbish. Total rubbish.

Yet I see it all the time, especially among the successful people I've coached.

Often, they refuse help because they think that's admitting defeat.

They are so used to being capable that asking for a bit of hand-holding terrifies them.

But it doesn't matter if you've alive 40 years or 40 months.

Seeking help isn't something to feel ashamed about.

I've helped scale The Montessori People to the point it is now - the North East's biggest independent nursery. We've just had our best year yet, recording a turnover of over £1.2m while creating a host of new jobs enroute.

And I'd be a total fibber to say it was all me.

We've achieved this as a team. Every single person pulling together, believing in what we do and helping each other out when we need it.

And as a business owner, I've no shame in admitting needed help from my team. A lot of it.

Because I'm a human being. And needing help is normal.

As a coach, that's what I want to give back.

I draw on my own life experiences and entrepreneurial journey to help those who have already achieved great things, but still want more – giving them the tools, accountability and motivation to keep pushing on.

I'm told it makes a difference - yet too many feel a strange stigma about even asking for help.

So, they plod on, at home and at work- then wonder why they feel so stuck.

If you don't ask for help, then you won't grow - simple as.

I've spent years watching children grow and develop, and they do so because they've got the sense to seek help when they need it.

That's why smart leaders do ask for help when they seek out a coach.

It helps them to ask better questions, challenges their thinking and helps them see what they often don't see in themselves.

Crucially, it doesn't mean they are failing.

It just means they are human.

michellesheekey.co.uk



A Spectacular Weekend of Cross Country

Mowden Hall School was alive with energy, determination and sporting spirit as the school hosted back-to-back Cross Country events across its fantastic 50-acre grounds.

Welcoming hundreds of young runners, families, and visiting staff the events delivered fantastic competition and proved once again why this weekend is a highlight of the calendar for so many.

The action kicked off with our Pre-Prep Cross Country Competition. Pupils from Years 1, 2, and 3 took on custom courses ranging from 1.04 km to 1.30 km, navigating a mixture of terrain designed to challenge and inspire our younger runners. With cheer, enthusiasm, and plenty of determination on display, every pupil from every school gave their all from the starting line right through to the finish. The afternoon ended with a celebration of effort, as children gathered for refreshments and the presentation of medals.

On Saturday, the momentum continued with the Prep School Invitational Cross Country Competition. Mowden Hall was proud to host visiting teams from across the region, including RGS, Dame Allan's, Barnard Castle, and Hunter Hall among others.

Runners competed across U9, U11, and U13 categories in both boys' and girls' races. The longer, multi-lap courses took full advantage of the Mowden landscape, testing the stamina and team spirit of every competitor. The atmosphere throughout the afternoon was electric, with spectators lining the course to cheer on every single runner.

Reflecting on the success of the weekend, the Head Phil Sturt shared his pride: "There is a unique magic to cross country at Mowden, and these two competitions showed our school off at its absolute finest."

Congratulations to all the runners who took part and we look forward to welcoming everyone back next year!

www.mowdenhall.org.uk







The Nest celebrates first anniversary at Mowden

Mowden Hall School's youngest pupils have been celebrating the first anniversary of The Nest with a special party complete with dancing and, of course, cake!

The Nest opened its doors in late 2025, extending Mowden Hall's Early Years provision to welcome children from the age of two. Since opening, The Nest has provided a nurturing and stimulating environment where young children can begin their educational journey in the heart of the Northumbrian countryside.

The nursery offers flexible childcare for families and is open for 50 weeks of the year, providing continuity for children as they progress from The Nest into Treetops at age three and then into Reception and the wider Mowden Hall School community.

Phil Sturt, Head of Mowden Hall School, said: "It is wonderful to see The Nest celebrating its first birthday. The decision to extend our Early Years provision to two-year-olds has been a really exciting development for Mowden, and seeing the children grow in confidence over their first year has been incredibly rewarding.

"The Nest has quickly become a special part of our school community. We want children to feel happy, secure and at home from their very first day with us, and The Nest gives our youngest children the time, space and support to explore, play and develop at their own pace."

The Nest forms part of Mowden Hall's integrated Early Years provision, alongside Treetops for three-year-olds. Children benefit from being part of the wider school from the very beginning, with access to specialist facilities, outdoor spaces and a continuous educational journey through to the end of Year 8.

www.mowdenhall.org.uk

MOWDEN HALL SCHOOL
AGES 2-13

FROM MORPETH TO MOWDEN

AN AWARD-WINNING PREP SCHOOL
IS CLOSER THAN YOU THINK

Book your personal tour today and discover the **#MagicofMowden** for yourself:

admissions@mowdenhall.org.uk
01661 842147



WINNER 2025
INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS OF THE YEAR AWARDS
IN ASSOCIATION WITH schoolblazer

FINALIST 2026
INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS OF THE YEAR AWARDS
IN ASSOCIATION WITH schoolblazer

RADLEY SCHOOLS GROUP



Principal Neil Seaton opens the Whispering Woods alongside Head of the Junior School Geoff Laidler and junior school pupils

The Whispering Woods

By Geoff Laidler, Head of Dame Allan's Junior School

Developing our outdoor learning provision.

Like most senior business leaders, as the Head of Dame Allan's Junior School, my team and I are always looking for ways to improve the offering that we provide. It is critical that we continue to develop and improve our resources, listening to pupils' and parents' suggestions and, of course, utilising our own expertise as teachers. This ensures that we continue to provide the best education possible to our pupils.

I was therefore thrilled to recently open The Whispering Woods alongside Principal Neil Seaton and representatives of the school's parent association, DASPA, which helped raise funds for the project. A woodland adventure course, bespoke storytelling chair, mud kitchen and den-building area are among the new features that were unveiled as part of our major revamp of the woodland space.

Our investment in the continued development of the school's outdoor facilities builds on our established outdoor learning programme, including the adoption of Skogsmulle – a Swedish approach centred on nature and imaginative play – and timetabled sessions for every year group from nursery through to Year 6.

As our Reception teacher, Skogsmulle and Forest School leader Mrs Williams, who helped shape the layout of the space, said: "Whispering Woods is so much more than an outdoor classroom. It's a space for adventure where imagination can run wild. We want our pupils to take ownership – to explore, create, get muddy, take supported risks, make mistakes, try again and have fun together."

The woodland has been divided into a series of distinct zones designed to encourage physical challenge, creativity and exploration. Among the key additions is Woodland Warriors, a large obstacle course featuring wooden logs and stumps, slacklines and cargo nets, designed to test balance and agility.

In contrast, Natter Nook, offers a quiet, reflective area for reading, writing and creative inspiration. Its centrepiece is a bespoke storytelling chair hand-crafted by Flow, a North Shields-based community interest company that uses art to support young adults with diverse and complex needs.

Made from wood, the chair incorporates resin containing objects collected by Flow participants during beachcombing trips, including shells, stones and a washed-up key. The chair represents a strong focal point for storytelling and creativity and is a beautiful connection between the coast, the community, and our children.

The Whispering Woods also features a Mud Kitchen, custom-built at varying heights to engage children from Year 1 through to Year 6, and a Camp Headquarters, a central meeting place where pupils gather for outdoor learning activities and challenges.

The redevelopment of Whispering Woods forms part of Dame Allan's wider commitment to outdoor learning, which begins in the Early Years with Skogsmulle, a Swedish approach developed in the 1950s that uses imaginative play and a fictional forest character to encourage young children to explore nature and care for the environment.

Principal Mr Seaton, who officially opened Whispering Woods with me, said: "Outdoor education is a real strength of Dame Allan's, and it's something that pupils can continue to enjoy as they move through the Senior School and into the Sixth Form.

"It's important that this starts early. Giving our youngest children the freedom to explore, get muddy, try things out and develop a connection with the natural world gives them experiences that will stay with them as they grow."

For more information about the Junior School and Nursery, or to arrange to come and visit the Whispering Woods, contact the Head of Admissions on 0191 275 1500 or visit dameallans.co.uk








WHERE GIRLS THRIVE
Because we put girls first every single day.
Find out how at one of our open days.
Senior Saturday 7th November
Junior Saturday 21st November
Register at **newcastlehigh.gdst.net**
NEWCASTLE HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS
GDST
GIRLS' DAY SCHOOL TRUST

Pretty Woman : The Musical

The producers of the smash hit PRETTY WOMAN: THE MUSICAL are delighted to announce casting for the upcoming UK tour, visiting Sunderland Empire from Tuesday 29 June – Saturday 3 July 2027.

PRETTY WOMAN: THE MUSICAL will star Molly Rainford as Vivian Ward, making her stage debut, Danny Walters as Edward Lewis and Bernadette Bangura as Kit De Luca. They are joined by Selena Barron, Jabari Braham, Jack Campbell, Cletus Chan, Josh Crowther, Sophie Cullen, Benjamin Dawson, Sian Gentle Green, Rebecca Ibbott, Kai Cameron Jay, Callum Martin, Brogan McFarlane, LJ Neilson, Matthew Prime, Alana M Robinson, Roshaan Saulnier, Morgan Scott, Ellie Seaton, Sario Solomon, Tomas Wolstenholme and Tara Yasmin. Further casting to be announced.

Molly Rainford is an actress, singer and television presenter. Her on screen credits include Anna Knight in BBC's EastEnders, and the titular role in CBBC's Nova Jones. Molly was a finalist on both Britain's Got Talent in 2012 and Strictly Come Dancing in 2022. Last year she also competed in Celebrity Race Across the World with her partner Tyler West.

Danny Walters is best known for his award-winning role as Keanu Taylor in BBC's EastEnders, gaining an International Achievement Recognition Award for Best Young Actor, National Television Award for Best Newcomer, and Radio Times Soap Award for Best Exit. His further screen credits include the role of Tiger Dyke in ITV's Benidorm, BBC's Call the Midwife and the Bafta-nominated BBC miniseries Our World War. His stage credits include The Greater Game at Southwark Playhouse and Spring Awakening at the Brighton Pavilion.

Bernadette Bangura recently starred as Becky in the UK and Ireland tour



of Waitress. Her other theatre credits include the UK tour of Priscilla Queen of the Desert, Moulin Rouge! at the Piccadilly Theatre, Once On This Island at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre, My Fair Lady at the London Coliseum and on its UK tour, Jesus Christ Superstar at the Barbican, and UK tours of Hairspray and Sunset Boulevard.

Brought to life by a powerhouse creative team representing the best of music, Hollywood and Broadway, PRETTY WOMAN: THE MUSICAL features direction and choreography by two-time Tony Award® winner Jerry Mitchell (Kinky Boots, Legally Blonde, Hairspray), an original 'blazing rock score' (Daily Mail) score by Grammy® winner Bryan Adams and Jim Vallance ('Summer of '69', 'Heaven') and a book by the movie's legendary director Garry Marshall and screenwriter J.F. Lawton.

Tickets for are available online now at ATGTickets.com/ Sunderland



Debbie McGee joins the cast of GREASE

Much-loved TV, radio and stage presenter and personality Debbie McGee will join the cast of Grease The Musical when it visits Newcastle Theatre Royal Mon 10 – Sat 15 May 2027.

Having trained at the Royal Ballet School, in the early part of her career Debbie performed as a dancer with The Second Generation, appearing with artists including ABBA and Chris de Burgh. In 1979 Debbie appeared as a dancer in The Paul Daniels Summer Show, going on to become Paul's assistant and appearing with him in the longest running TV magic show in the world: The Paul Daniels Magic Show for the BBC. In 1991, Debbie was one of the first female magicians to become a member of The Magic Circle who later awarded her with The Maskelyne Award for outstanding services to British magic. Today she serves as their Honorary Vice President.

Debbie appeared in the 2017 series of Strictly Come Dancing, achieving the earliest top score of 40 in the show's history, and being the oldest celebrity contestant to reach the final. 2026 marks Debbie's 50th year in showbusiness and sees the release of her much-anticipated autobiography, A Magical Life.

Mercury Prize-nominated Knats to run free music sessions for young musicians

Mercury Prize-nominated band Knats are teaming up with The Glasshouse International Centre for Music to launch The Geordie Music Foundation, a series of free monthly sessions for young musicians aged 13-17 from the North East.

Starting on Sunday 24 January 2027, Stan, King and Ferg from the band will work with a group of up to 15 young musicians, helping them build their playing skills, improvise with others and meet like-minded musicians from across the region.

Knats' album A Great Day In Newcastle has been nominated for the 2026 Mercury Prize. The band describes its sound as Geordie Jazz, mixing jazz with rock, spoken word and big, groove-led arrangements. The members have all taken different routes into music, with two of them teaching themselves to play. Stan and King were both playing on their own when they met growing up in Newcastle, and they felt there was nowhere for them to go to meet other like-minded young people. The idea for the



Geordie Music Foundation grew out of their wish to help other young people find their way into music and show what's possible here in the North East.

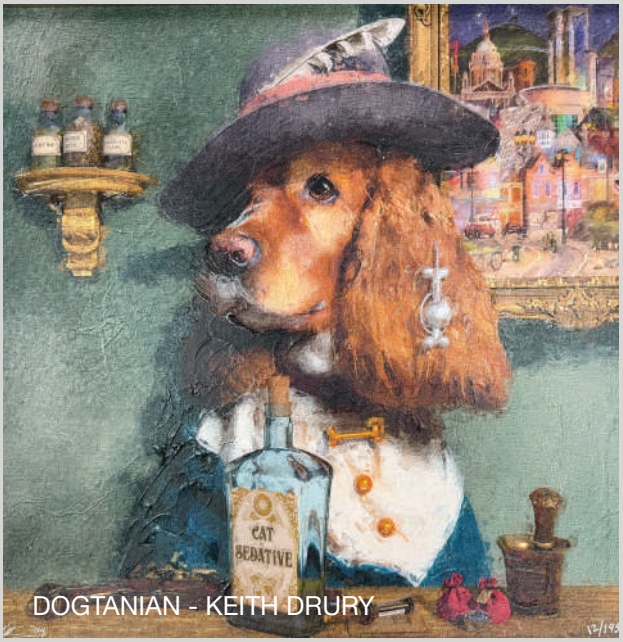


Blagdon Gallery


ONCE UPON A TIME- KEITH PROCTOR


CANE VASES - RICHARD GLASS


LEATHER RHINO FOOTSTOOL - OMERSA & CO



DOGTANIAN - KEITH DRURY


L'HERBARIUM DE THEOPHILE

Blagdon Gallery, Milkhope Centre, Berwick Hill Road, Newcastle upon Tyne NE13 6DA

w: **blagdongallery.co.uk** | *t:* **01670 789 944** | *e:* **hello@blagdongallery.co.uk**

Dazzle this New Year's Eve at Wynyard Hall's Diamond Ball

WYNYARD Hall is set to welcome 2027 in spectacular style, with an evening of black tie glamour, Gatsby-inspired decadence and Bond-worthy sophistication.

The beautiful 18th Century, Grade II listed country house in County Durham will be seeing out the old and bringing in the new with its exclusive Diamond Ball on New Year's Eve.

Guests will be welcomed with a glass of fizz on arrival at 7pm along with elegant canapes before sitting down to a delicious three course dinner. This will be followed by music from a live band and DJ, with further entertainment including casino tables and blackjack throughout the night.

As midnight approaches, guests will be invited to raise a glass under the stars as 2027 arrives to a backdrop of fireworks before heading back into the Hall for more dancing and partying before the night draws to a close at 1.30am.



And to add a touch of further sparkle to the night, all guests will receive an entry into a Diamond Raffle which will be drawn on the night with the chance to win the incredible prize of a £3000 diamond.

Tickets to the Diamond Ball are priced at £175 per person. Each table seats 10 guests and smaller parties are advised they may be seated on mixed tables.

Tickets are already selling quickly and can be booked via the website: wynyardhall.wearegifted.co.uk/new-years-eve-diamond-b



Whitley Bay micropub The Living Room shortlisted for national Best New Business award

The Living Room on Station Road, Whitley Bay, has been named a finalist in the Best New Business category at The UK Small Business Awards 2026.

The independent micropub joins businesses from across the country in a national celebration of small business success, bringing recognition to North Tyneside's thriving independent business community.

Founded by local entrepreneur Paul Hughes, The Living Room brings people together over craft beer, wine, spirits and alcohol-free drinks in a relaxed, welcoming setting. Its weekly Sunday quiz and community activities give residents opportunities to meet, make friends and enjoy their local high street.

For Paul, the recognition is about more than the drinks behind the bar.

"When we created The Living Room, the idea was simple: give people somewhere they feel comfortable walking into, whether they come with friends or on their own," said Paul Hughes, founder of The Living Room.

"Building a small business takes a lot of hard work, and being recognised nationally means a great deal. This is also a thank-you to everyone who has popped in, brought a friend, joined the quiz or spread the word. They are helping us build something special here in Whitley Bay."

The UK Small Business Awards ceremony will take place on 19 December 2026 at The Eastside Rooms in Birmingham, where the National Top 10 will be revealed. The event will also be live-streamed for those unable to attend.

Residents can find The Living Room at 20 Station Road, Whitley Bay, and follow @livingroomwb on Instagram for news, events and opening times.

'The Future's Bright, the Future's Black and White'

Two born-and-bred Geordies are on a passion filled mission to show the world what Newcastle and the North East have to offer while helping local businesses cash in on the growing visitor economy.

Fiona Surrey, known as Geordie Lass, and Mark Breillat, aka Sparky Buddy, are the people behind The Geordieland Experience, a new venture designed to bring tourism, hospitality and events together and make it easier for visitors to experience everything the region has to offer.

And their message is simple: don't just come to Newcastle for the football – stay, explore, spend and come back.

"It's about travelling with a purpose," said Fiona.

"Someone might come here because they want to watch Newcastle United, but why should their experience stop when the final whistle goes?

"We can show them the history, the culture, the food, the Quayside, the bridges, the coast and everything else the North East has to offer.

"If we can turn a two-day visit into a week-long experience, that benefits the whole region."



The Geordieland Experience has been created around what Fiona and Mark describe as a THE ecosystem – Tourism, Hospitality and Events, bringing the three sectors closer together. And the pair have discovered that international visitors are particularly interested in experiencing Newcastle beyond the football.

One of their favourite moments comes when they take first-time visitors down Newcastle's steep Dean Street before revealing the Tyne and its famous bridges.

"They just stand there in awe," said Fiona. "To see their faces when they see the bridges and the Quayside for the first time is absolutely priceless. "You can't put a price on it."

Epicurus Catering & Fells' Kitchen Adventures Ltd.
Event Catering | Cater Hire | Staff Hire | Catered Outdoor Adventures
17 Mandale Business Park, Wallsend Rd, North Shields, NE29 7FN
Tel: 0191 2708540 • M: 07976 374629 • www.epicurus.co.uk • www.fellskitchen.co.uk
epicurus
FELLS KITCHEN

fratelli

RISTORANTE • BAR • TERRACE

NEW YEAR *Celebration*

31 DEC

FOOD
DRINKS
LIVE MUSIC

VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.fratelliponteland.co.uk



IMMERSIVE DINING

RADISSON BLU DURHAM

A CHRISTMAS NIGHT OUT WITH A TWIST

Seven courses. Seven artists.

One unforgettable evening.



7 Paintings is coming to Radisson Blu Durham this November and December. An immersive dinner show where 3D projection brings the work of seven legendary artists to life on your plate and across the room. Solve da Vinci's riddles, guess the artist and create your own Pollock-style masterpiece with edible colours.

Book now

Scan the code to book your table

YOUR EVENING IN SEVEN ACTS

1. **Michelangelo**
   Salmon rillette on a shell crostini
2. **Banksy**
   Charcuterie with truffle mayo
3. **Picasso**
   Sea bream, lemon & celery
4. **Pollock**
   Paint your own vegetable plate
5. **Warhol**
   Beef tenderloin, balsamic jus
6. **Dalí**
   Crema catalana, salted caramel
7. **Van Gogh**
   Chocolate painting, citrus cake

DATES AVAILABLE

NOV & DEC 26

Radisson BLU DURHAM

Bookings: **events.durham@radissonblu.com** or call **0191 372 7200**

For future dates, please see our website **www.radissonbludurham.com/whats-on**









Ruby Rae's Country Music Festival goes XL as Nashville comes to Newcastle

Over 1000 country music and line dancing fans danced the night away at the Ruby Rae's XL Indoor Country Festival whilst enjoying a spectacular night of live music and Tennessee-style entertainment.

The six-act tribute line-up included The Ella Langley Experience, Zach Bryan UK, The Lainey Wilson experience Tribute and Almost Wallen with their tour bands, Shania Twain by Tia Dodds and Jo Fry as the iconic Dolly Parton.

The event is the latest venture from Dean Saunders, one of the founders of country music bar Ruby Rae's, co-owned with Dan Cooke in Newcastle and York.















Tourist Tax

By Jeff Hodgson,
General Manager, Lumley Castle Hotel

What could it mean for the North East?



Jeff Hodgson

Visitors to the North East could soon be asked to pay a little more when staying overnight, following a major change in Government policy that gives regional mayors the power to introduce a new Overnight Visitor Levy.

And North East Mayor Kim McGuinness has already made it clear that she supports the idea.

The announcement means the North East could introduce a charge on stays in hotels, guest houses and other paid accommodation. The exact amount has not yet been confirmed, although figures of around £2 per night have previously been discussed in connection with the North East. More recently, Labour mayors have indicated that they expect levies to be around 5% or below, although the Government has not imposed a national cap.

So where would the money go?

At the moment, there is no final North East spending plan. However, Mayor McGuinness has previously argued that money raised should be invested directly back into the region's visitor economy.

In June 2025, North East Mayoral Combined Authority papers recorded her support for an overnight levy, with the money being invested in major regional events designed to attract more visitors to the North East.

The Government's latest announcement gives a broader indication of what the money could potentially support. It says revenue from the levy could be used for local services, public spaces and tourist attractions, helping areas deal with the pressures created by large numbers of visitors while also making destinations more attractive.

For the North East, that could mean investment in the things visitors — and residents — actually see and use: attractions, public spaces, events, cultural activity and improvements that make towns and cities more appealing places to visit.

There is certainly an argument for it. Tourism brings significant economic benefits to the North East, but visitors also place demands on public spaces, transport, streets and attractions. Supporters say it is reasonable for people staying overnight to make a small contribution towards maintaining and improving the places they are enjoying. But there are concerns too.

The hospitality industry has warned that an additional charge could make holidays and overnight stays more expensive and potentially make the North East less competitive with other destinations. Industry groups have also questioned whether a levy could discourage visitors or put additional pressure on already struggling accommodation businesses.

There is therefore an important question for Kim McGuinness and the North East Mayoral Combined Authority: if visitors are going to be charged, how exactly will every pound raised be spent?

For the scheme to win public and business support, transparency will be crucial. People will want to see a clear link between the money collected and improvements to the North East's visitor economy.

The Government says mayors should have the new powers in place by March 2028, meaning the North East now has time to decide whether to introduce the levy and, if so, how it will operate.

A tourist tax is therefore no longer simply an idea being discussed. The power to introduce one is coming. The debate now moves on to the most important question: what will the North East get in return?

www.lumleycastle.com

50
1976 - 2026
LUMLEY CASTLE
CELEBRATING
50 YEARS OF
LUMLEY CASTLE HOTEL



Newcastle's Bob Rudd pockets UK-wide pool partnership

Pool-loving punters across the North East will soon be able to play like the pros as one of the nation's best-loved pub games prepares for a thrilling revamp.

Industry insiders insist pool is fast approaching its very own 'darts' moment with many predicting the sport's explosive popularity is set to surge.

The timeless pub classic is already hot on the heels of Luke Littler and co. thanks to a new generation of cue kings and queens fronting televised events around the world.

And now Newcastle-based supplier to the hospitality industry Bob Rudd has teamed up with Ultimate Pool to maintain the momentum.

The Ultimate Pool Pack — featuring top-class add-ons and unique opportunities — launched last month.

And Nick Rudd, Managing Director of Bob Rudd, said: "Pool has always belonged in pubs but we think there is a real opportunity to make much more of it.

"Ultimate Pool has created huge energy around the sport with weekly televised media and this partnership gives us the opportunity to bring some of that excitement directly into venues and give customers another reason to pick up a cue.

"We've seen what is possible through our partnership with Target Darts. Target Dartzone is now in more than 600 venues and that experience has shown us the power of combining a brilliant, specialist brand with Bob Rudd's relationships, service network and understanding of the licensed trade.

"We want to take that same collaborative approach with Ultimate Pool. The Pack is the starting point, but what really excites us is what comes next — Beat the Pro events, pub leagues and new ways of getting customers involved. We want to help write an exciting new chapter for pool in pubs."

Jason Gains, Director of Ultimate Pool, added: "Our brand has always been about taking the game forward — creating excitement around pool, building a community of players and giving people more opportunities to get involved with the sport.

"Pubs are a hugely important part of that future. They are where so many people first discover pool, where friends become rivals and where competitive play can become part of a regular night out.

"Bob Rudd understands that environment exceptionally well. Their experience across the licensed trade, and the success they have already had working collaboratively with Target Darts, made them a natural partner for us.

"The Ultimate Pool Pack gives us a fantastic foundation but our ambition together goes much further.

"We're excited about getting into venues, engaging directly with players through events and leagues and ultimately helping more people play more pool in more pubs."

bobrudd.co.uk

Christmas menus bring festive cheer to Hadrian's Hotel and The Northumberland Arms



With Christmas on the horizon, two Northumberland venues are inviting diners to get into the festive spirit, having unveiled their Christmas menus offering the perfect excuse to gather friends and family for a seasonal celebration.

From the rolling countryside and rich Roman history around Hadrian's Hotel to the riverside charm of the Northumberland Arms in Felton, both venues offer settings that capture the character and appeal of Northumberland at this special time of year.

Nestled in the village of Wall, close to the iconic Hadrian's Wall, Hadrian's Hotel is surrounded by the landscapes that make this part of the county so distinctive. With its blend of countryside tranquillity, historic surroundings and welcoming country pub atmosphere, it provides a tempting setting for a festive meal. Guests can settle in for a relaxed seasonal gathering, enjoying the warmth and comfort of a traditional country inn as winter takes hold.

Further east, the Northumberland Arms in Felton offers a different but equally appealing backdrop. This historic coaching inn, dating back to the 1820s, sits beside the River Coquet, with views towards the village's striking 16th-century bridge. Its combination of historic character, riverside surroundings and inviting dining spaces makes it an attractive destination for those looking to celebrate the season with good food and great company.

Both venues are well placed to appeal to those looking to make more of their Christmas celebrations, whether that means a festive lunch with friends, a family get-together or an evening out with colleagues. Expect the traditional offerings with all the trimmings ...and lots more including Chicken, leek and apricot terrine with leek top emulsion or smoked salmon, crème fraiche, toasted sourdough, capers and lemon for starters, shortcrust venison pie or braised ox cheek, creamed potato with sauce bourguignon for mains and Christmas pud or sticky toffee pudding for dessert!

For anyone hoping to secure a table before December's busiest dates arrive, now is the time to start making plans and look forward to a little seasonal indulgence in the heart of Northumberland.

Just a note - Christmas Day lunch at The Northumberland Arms is already fully booked but there's lots of availability on other dates!

- **If you fancy doing something special before Christmas takes over how about celebrating the arrival of the new Beaujolais?**

On Thursday 19th November at The Northumberland Arms you can enjoy a three course menu & half a bottle of Beaujolais Nouveau per person.



The menu includes French onion soup, Boeuf bourguignon, and Crème brûlee (Beaujolais Nouveau is a fresh, fruity light bodied red wine made from gamay grapes in the Beaujolais region of France. Known to be a 'vin de primeur' or early wine, its is bottled and released six to eight weeks after harvest on the third Thursday of November!)

Head across to their websites for more information...

northumberlandarms-felton.co.uk
hadrianshotel.com

OUR FAVOURITE TIME OF DAY

HAPPY HOUR

MON–FRI 15:00–19:00 + DJ EVERY FRIDAY FROM 18:00







CRUZCAMPO

~~£6.8~~ £4.5/1 PINT

PROSECCO

~~£8~~ £6/125ML GLASS

818 MARGARITAS

TOMMY'S MARGARITA
SPICY MARGARITA
CARAJILLO

~~£14~~ £8

Chez Mal AT Malmaison

SCAN TO BOOK OR VISIT MALMAISON.COM

MALMAISON NEWCASTLE | 104 Quayside, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE1 3DX



Dabbawal comes home

Eighteen years after bringing Indian street food to Newcastle, Dabbawal is entering a new chapter — one that goes back to where the best food has always started: home.

Since opening in 2008, Dabbawal has built its name around bold regional Indian cooking, an independent spirit and a different kind of dining experience in Newcastle. Now, after 18 years, the restaurant is bringing the stories behind its food into focus.

The new direction is simple: treasured recipes from homes across India.

For Dabbawal, "home cooking" isn't about nostalgia or recreating one idea of a traditional Indian home. It is about recipes remembered by heart — dishes passed between families, friends and communities, cooked without measuring and adapted over generations. It is about the people behind those recipes too, and the memories that make certain dishes worth passing on.

That idea now sits at the heart of Dabbawal's refreshed Home Stories menu.

The new menu brings together much-loved Dabbawal favourites with dishes inspired by home kitchens and regional cooking from across India. New additions include Egg Curry Masala, Aloo Keema Matar, Lamb Chop Piyaza, Bengali Chicken Curry and Sardine Bhuna, alongside chaats, charcoal-cooked kebabs and Southern seafood dishes — all celebrating the flavours, techniques and stories that make Indian home cooking so varied.

The inspiration goes right back to Dabbawal's name.

Every lunchtime in Mumbai, dabbawalas travel across the city carrying tiffins filled with freshly cooked meals from people's homes to their workplaces. Inside those lunchboxes are dishes made with care, often from recipes that have been cooked and shared for generations. That connection between food, home and people has always been part of Dabbawal's story. Now, it comes more clearly to the foreground.

This next chapter is not about leaving the old Dabbawal behind. The dishes guests love, the quality of the cooking and the relaxed hospitality remain. What is changing is the way those stories are being told.

In the City Centre, where Dabbawal's Newcastle story began, the restaurant remains a favourite for casual lunches, pre-theatre dinners and evenings out. In Jesmond veranda and neighbourhood atmosphere offer a relaxed place to gather over good food. Two different settings, but the same idea at the heart of both: food made with care and served with warmth.

After 18 years in Newcastle, Dabbawal is still evolving — and in many ways, coming home.

www.dabbawal.com



Drink, dine & dream with us this Christmas

Escape to one of our warm, inviting Northumberland getaways this festive season.

Whether you're looking for a cosy coastal retreat at Northumberland Arms, countryside charm, and rich history at Hadrian's Hotel or a celebration of seasonality, and impeccable service at Willow, we have something to suit you.

email to secure your booking today

hello@hadrianshotel.com | hello@northumberlandarms-felton.co.uk

Northumberland Group proudly presents

Hadrian's Hotel

Willow

THE NORTHUMBERLAND ARMS



The key is rolling your sleeves up and getting stuck in.

Katie Lowery

Meet the GM...

Katie Lowery

General Manager of Sandman Signature Newcastle Hotel

The 170-bedroom hotel recently celebrated its 15th birthday. Situated in a prime position directly opposite NUFC's St James' Park, the hotel sits alongside bar and restaurant Shark Club.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the hospitality industry, and how did you become a General Manager?

I actually started at Sandman Signature Newcastle Hotel in sales, but I was fascinated with the operational work. An opportunity came along to start on the internal Manager in Training programme, which gives you the opportunity to get under the skin of every department. My completion of that coincided with the hotel's need for an Interim General Manager, which then became a permanent position.

What are the biggest challenges of running a successful hotel, and how do you overcome them?

There's no denying being a GM is a challenging role. But to me, the key is rolling your sleeves up and getting stuck in. If someone is out sick in housekeeping or the front desk, I stand in myself. I don't want to be behind a desk 24x7, I want to make sure I'm still out there meeting guests and being part of the team.

You also never know what might happen – like the day I walked into a flooded basement. And for that, it's vital to have reliable contacts/ contractors who you know you can call on!

How do you ensure guests have an exceptional experience from check-in to check-out?

I try and home in on the unbeatable Geordie hospitality and warm welcome. We're not scripted, we are just our natural, friendly, helpful, chatty selves. But it's also about understanding each guest is an individual and adapting to them and what they want and need. I know every hotel probably says it, but we genuinely go above and beyond for our guests. I've been known to run a guest to the station when their taxi didn't turn up!

What strategies do you use to keep your staff motivated and maintain high service standards?

Our parent company, Northland Properties, runs some excellent monthly and quarterly awards for people across the business. In addition, I have my own motivational rubber duck which I give to people with a thank you card on an ad hoc basis. Saying thank you and being genuinely appreciative of the things your team does goes a long way. I think I say thank you more than I say anything else!

What role does sustainability play in modern hotel management, and what initiatives have you implemented?

Sustainability is a big focus for us and we were delighted to recently be awarded the coveted Green Key certification in recognition of our commitment to environmental excellence. Specific initiatives include water saving restrictors, refillable toiletries, a centrally controlled system operating the heating in guest bedrooms, and swapping regularly used items for more sustainable products. Bird boxes have been installed to support wildlife too.



How do you handle difficult guests or unexpected crises while maintaining the hotel's reputation?

We've welcomed over a million guests in the last 15 years and thankfully have very few problems. But I think the key thing is to stay calm and to really listen to what guests are saying. A lot of frustration can be avoided if people feel they're genuinely being listened to.

When it comes to an unexpected crisis, honesty is key, as is keeping lines of communication open. Things happen, and people can be understanding if kept in the loop. As GM it's important to be visible and available – although no one loves a 3am start for a power cut!

What trends are shaping the future of hospitality, and how do you see hotels evolving?

Tech will be a big thing – it's just how that's balanced with people still wanting the human touch. Sustainability is also something which will continue to have an ever-growing role in hospitality, which is positive.

What's the most memorable experience you've had while managing a hotel?

I think at Sandman Signature Newcastle Hotel we come into our own when there's a big event and the team all pulls together to make it extra special. One example is the Great North Run. The buzz and the vibe are brilliant. We put on a special 'Runner's Spread' for those competing – last minute essentials like sweets, water, Vaseline, plasters, bananas – free of charge. We really celebrate their successes and everyone pulls out all the stops.

www.sandmansignature.co.uk



Aldwark Manor – Class is Permanent

By Michael Grahamslaw

Aldwark Manor, situated halfway between Harrogate and York, has a long and fascinating history. Its name (from the Saxon language meaning 'Old Fort') likely comes from its historic Roman purpose: the defence of a crossing point of the nearby river Ure.

The building has been used for various purposes since then (a school and an WW2 Airforce base among them), until in 1978 when it was converted into a country house hotel.

Recently, there's been another twist in the tale. The hotel has undergone massive transformation, following a 25 million multi-year investment. On a warm October Sunday, my wife Lisa and I took the short trip up the A19 to see what all the fuss was about.

Our immediate impression went a long way to answering this question. The beautifully maintained grounds reflect the atmosphere of the classic setting while the presence of the gently flowing nearby river is felt in the lushness and vitality of the foliage.

Add to that a newly re-designed 18-holer, and you can see why Aldwark is attracting golfers from all over the country. I kicked myself for allowing Lisa to persuade me to leave the clubs at home!

Arriving early, we had to content ourselves with a retreat to the Squadron bar. Admittedly, my yearning for a round of golf was nicely assuaged by a creamy pint of Theakston's (when in Yorkshire) while Lisa was more than content with a chilled glass of vino.















We ordered sandwiches: club and oak smoked salmon on sourdough. The expertly equipped Squadron bar perfectly balances antiquity of decor with varied, international drink and food menus.

After a cheery check in we were shown up to the stunning room. Again, the pairing of tradition and modernity is tastefully done. Old Victorian windows let in generous light and afforded views of those historic grounds, but a look back at the slick bathroom (complete with walk-in, tiled shower), spacious dresser, flat screen TV and comfy beds serve as a nice reminder of the modern convenience and luxury that Aldwark Manor has to offer.

After a quick change it was time to check out the Salus Spa, recipient of a large chunk of the recent investment. This certainly shows - the spa is visually stunning and equipped with cutting edge technology. We spent time exploring the garden, featuring the new hydrotherapy pool and woodland sauna, unique features which make the Aldwark stand out as a spa-break option.

Guests can also visit Sal's, the health-conscious spa-side cafe, featuring light options such as smoothies served in an informal atmosphere so that guests can enjoy in robe and slipper ensemble (provided on spa days or overnight packages).

After checking out all of the flash new features, we repaired inside for a swim, sauna, steam and snooze. As well as all the bells and whistles, the Salus gets the simple parts right as well - nice and quiet, lovely and warm - we were dozing off in seconds.

We changed back at the room and then headed down to Elements Restaurant for a more formal dinner. Elements is yet another example of Aldwark seamlessly fusing the traditional and the contemporary. Leather seated booths provide comfort and privacy while the huge paned windows let in a beautiful light.

We perused a varied menu before settling on contrasting dishes – I opted for the "Not just any Prawn Cocktail," followed by Teriyaki grilled salmon, while Lisa went for the Heritage Beetroot followed by Butterflied Cornfed Chicken.

Staff were highly knowledgeable about the wine list and helped us to select a bottle of Vermentino – a lovely nod to our Italian summer escape as the light faded outside and winter began to draw in.

Often with big investments my worry is that the character of the original building is lost. This is not the case with Aldwark at all: its stunning grounds, characterful rooms, state of the art spa and beautiful contemporary restaurants are a perfect mix of tradition and technology.

Next time, I am bringing those golf clubs!

For more information, visit www.aldwarkmanorestate.co.uk









The Met Leeds – where business meets pleasure

By Michael Grahamslaw

There was a time when a business trip meant a motorway hotel, a lukewarm breakfast and an evening spent wondering whether the Columbo omnibus meant company entertainment. Fortunately, those days appear to be disappearing.

When my wife Lisa and I travelled to Leeds for an overnight stay recently, I had a conference to attend the following day in the city. Rather than make a rushed early-morning dash from the North East, we decided to travel down the evening before and make a short break of it.

Our base for the night was The Met Leeds, one of the city's most iconic hotels.

Situated just a stone's throw from Leeds railway station, The Met occupies a commanding position in the centre of the city. First opened in 1899, the Grade II listed building has long been a landmark for visitors arriving in Leeds, its distinctive terracotta façade and grand Victorian architecture offering a reminder of the city's industrial prosperity.

Like many historic hotels, The Met has undergone significant refurbishment in recent years, but what struck us immediately was how successfully it has retained its character.

The grand staircase, vaulted ceilings and original architectural details remain at the heart of the building, while contemporary styling brings a freshness and sophistication that never feels at odds with its heritage.

After a friendly and efficient check-in, we were soon making our way to our room.

The accommodation reflects the wider philosophy of the hotel. Rather than attempting to disguise the building's Victorian origins, the designers appear to have embraced them. Original proportions, large windows and period features combine with comfortable furnishings and modern conveniences to create rooms that feel distinctive rather than generic.

Having arrived in Leeds after a full working day, neither of us required much persuasion to abandon any ambitious sightseeing plans. Instead, we headed downstairs to explore the newly introduced Gott's Bar & Kitchen, which has become the social heart of the hotel's recent transformation.

The restaurant has been designed with the same balance of heritage and modernity found throughout the building. The atmosphere is relaxed but stylish, busy without feeling hectic, and equally suited to hotel guests, local diners and business travellers seeking refuge after a long day.

The menu places a clear emphasis on locally-sourced produce and international flavours. We feasted on Nerano linguine and the Gott's speciality parmo accompanied by a glass of wine while taking in the surroundings.

Following a comfortable night's sleep, our plans diverged.

I set off into the city for a day of networking while Lisa embarked upon a spot of retail therapy.

Leeds has built a formidable reputation as one of the North's premier retail destinations and its compact city centre makes it remarkably easy to navigate. While I spent the day moving between meeting rooms and conference halls, Lisa was free to explore the city's shops, arcades and department stores at a considerably more enjoyable pace.

By late afternoon, both of us had accumulated enough miles on our feet, which meant returning to the hotel felt rather like coming home.

We settled into the bar with a well-earned drink and reflected on our very different days. Around us, the hotel had taken on a new energy as guests returned from work, meetings and sightseeing. The atmosphere was lively but comfortable, exactly as a city-centre hotel should be.

The Met had delivered exactly what we both needed: a stylish place to stay, a comfortable place to unwind and a reminder that mixing business with pleasure is sometimes a very good idea indeed.

For more information, www.leedsmet-hotel.com









Seeing the Bigger Picture develop

North East creative agency The Bigger Picture Agency is entering an exciting new phase of growth, with new specialist talent joining its creative team, and an additional studio space.

Founded in 2009, The Bigger Picture Agency has built a strong reputation for photography and video production, working with clients across the UK. Now, founder and creative director Angela Carrington is developing the business further, combining its established production expertise with a growing creative consultancy service.

As part of the development, existing team member Charlotte Beeckmans has been promoted to Senior Creative, taking on an expanded role within the agency.

Anna Petty has joined the business full time as studio manager, working to oversee and post-production across the agency. Experienced creative strategist Katherine Wildman is also joining the business on a freelance basis to support the agency's expanding creative consultancy work. In addition, the business is engaging with a new range of freelance film-makers in the region to supplement the core team.

Angela said the changes reflect the direction in which clients are increasingly asking the agency to work.

"We are developing the business around what our clients need from us, and that is much more than simply producing videos or photographs.

"We are increasingly being brought into projects at the planning stage, where clients and marketing agencies want our advice on what visual and audio content they should be creating, how it should look and what will work best for their audience."

The Bigger Picture Agency has also expanded its footprint at The Biscuit Factory, adding a further dedicated studio space alongside its existing office and studio facilities.The additional space provides greater capacity for photography, video production, podcast production and creative projects as the agency continues to expand its services.

The Extra Large Medium continues to grow



Medium James Leighton is building a growing national reputation for his evidential mediumship and has launched his autobiography at one of England's most haunted castles.

James, who affectionately describes himself as the "Extra Large Medium", has come a long way from the days when he was giving demonstrations in small pubs and social clubs across the North East.

He has now toured extensively throughout the UK and Ireland, building a loyal following and regularly selling out his appearances.

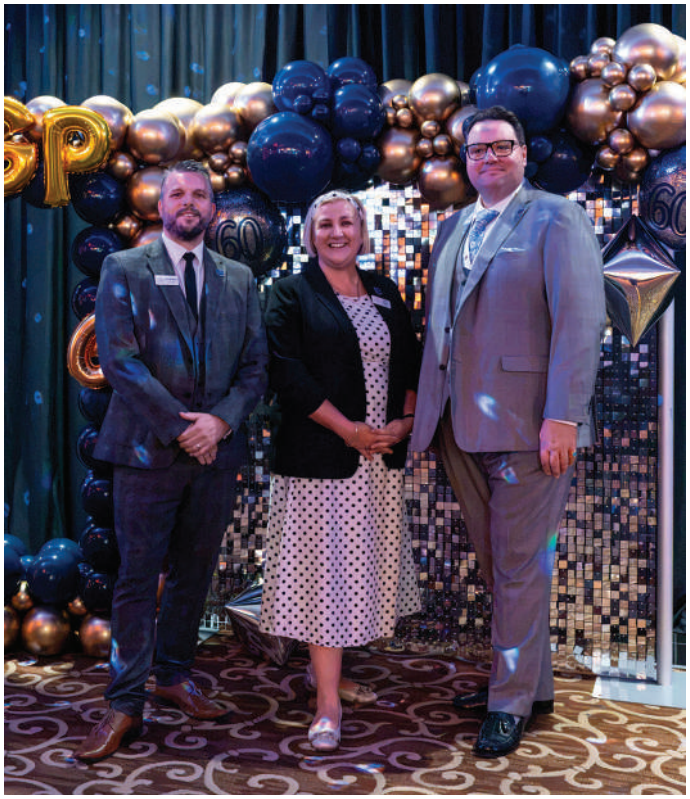
His new autobiography chronicles those early experiences and traces the journey that eventually led him from a young boy growing up in Hexham to a professional medium performing to audiences across Britain and Ireland.

James describes himself as an evidential medium, meaning that he does not simply make general statements and attempt to make them fit members of an audience.

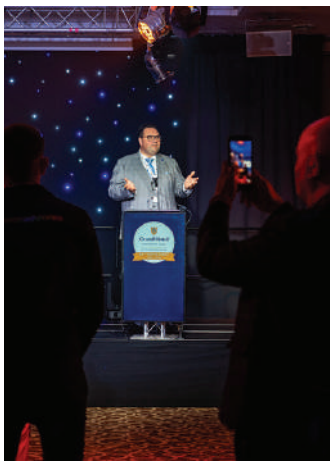
Instead, his approach is to provide specific evidence which he believes can be recognised by the person receiving the reading including dates, descriptions, names, circumstances and even phrases which may have a particular significance to their loved ones.

It is this emphasis on evidence that James says is at the heart of his work.

Hos book was launched at a sell out show at Chillingham Castle which is renowned for its supernatural reputation.









60th Anniversary Celebrations

The Grand Hotel Gosforth Park celebrated its 60th anniversary recently with a special event bringing together loyal customers and long-serving team members - while raising funds for its chosen charity partner, the MS Society's Newcastle & Gateshead Group.



















The anniversary party, held at the hotel on 6th October, marked six decades since Gosforth Park Hotel first opened its doors in 1966 and provided an opportunity to recognise the people who have played a significant part in the hotel's history - from guests and local community groups, to colleagues who have dedicated many years to the hotel.

As part of the anniversary activities, the hotel team will be presenting a cheque of almost £1,300 to the MS Society, following a programme of fundraising held throughout its 60th year.

These have included a coffee morning, row-a-thon, 60s-themed aquagym and boxercise sessions, raffle and children's treasure hunt and a car wash, with hotel guests and colleagues and the local community getting involved to help raise funds.

The MS Society's invaluable work to help find a cure while enabling those with MS to live well is particularly meaningful to Gosforth Park Hotel as a member of the hotel's leisure club team lives with Multiple Sclerosis (MS).

Jane Heath, Head of Sales at the Grand Hotel Gosforth Park, added: "Reaching 60 years is a special milestone for Gosforth Park Hotel and we wanted to celebrate it by bringing together the people who have helped make the hotel the success it is today."

"From our loyal guests and local community partners to our colleagues, including those who have been part of the hotel for many years, there are so many people who have played a role in our story."

"We're particularly proud that our anniversary celebrations have allowed us to support the MS Society. This charity has a very personal connection to our team and we hope the funds raised through our activities will help support the important work it does for people affected by MS."

The hotel also marked its diamond anniversary by launching a series of special offers inspired by its 60-year history. These included a Diamond Afternoon Tea and Diamond Dip & Dine, both priced at £19.66 - a nod to the hotel's opening year. For those looking to celebrate a special occasion, the hotel's Diamond Celebration Package (still available to book throughout November), suitable for events including parties, weddings and christenings, is available for £1,966.

The Grand Hotel Gosforth Park forms part of the Elite Venue Selection portfolio of 17 luxurious hotel experiences. The hotel is set within 12 acres of parkland and located just minutes from the A1 and Newcastle Racecourse. It features 232 generous guest rooms, a place to meet, large and flexible event space and impressive leisure facilities.

theelitevenueselection.co.uk





Dave and Jamiel

There's change afoot at Rounton Coffee

The award-winning roaster has just moved into a spacious 6,000sqft unit in Thornaby.

The roastery – tucked away on Teesside Industrial Estate - is three times the size of their previous base near Northallerton.

And the move should further grow a business that's already one of the region's most treasured independent coffee brands.

"The size of our new home should allow us to double production, which is great news for us and our growing customer base," said founder Dave Beattie.

And he's not wrong.

Having launched at local farmers' markets in 2013, Rounton Coffee's reach is now truly national.

Their Great Taste-winning beans are supplied as far away as the Outer Hebrides and Ireland, while their booming subscription service has attracted a loyal fanbase in every corner of Britain.



The new HQ represents a near six-figure investment for the business, with the extra space expected to create new jobs and future-proof the business for any further scaling-up in the coming years.

But that extra size will also benefit the company's loyal customers.

"This will open the door to coffee education sessions, barista training, cupping events – everything is aimed at giving our customers even more opportunities to discover what makes a truly great cuppa," said Dave.

Despite the change of scenery, though, the recipe for success remains the same.

"We are still the same independent coffee roaster we've always been," he added.

"What's changed is the infrastructure around us."

And while the new roastery lays the foundations for an exciting next chapter, there's another reason to get your hands on a bag of Rounton Coffee this Christmas.

Their latest exciting product is their Advent Calendar, available to pre-order ahead of what's expected to be a busy festive period for the company.

A gift made for coffee lovers by coffee lovers, it features four 150g bags of limited-edition speciality coffees, each handpicked by Rounton's expert team to showcase a different origin, producer or flavour profile.

Each coffee remains a surprise until Advent begins, with a fresh discovery to unwrap each week.

"It is a great Christmas present either for a coffee enthusiast – or to yourself," laughed Dave.

"It is beautifully packaged and the coffee inside will be the perfect thing to enjoy on a cold winter morning."

The calendar can be pre-ordered now and will be dispatched from November 16.

For more information, visit rountoncoffee.co.uk



Make your next event **unforgettable**

Classic hospitality and the finest Punjabi cuisine, situated in the city's historic Forth Banks. Private room hire for up to 50 guests.

0191 261 9035 | INFO@SACHINS.CO.UK | WWW.SACHINS.CO.UK

FORTH BANKS | NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE | NE1 3SG

Burnhopeside Hall launches as luxury Country-estate Venue



Historic County Durham estate Burnhopeside Hall has opened its doors as a luxury self-catering country estate, with its new owners estimating a first-year revenue of £150,000 from holiday lets, weddings, events and corporate stays.

The Grade II*-listed Georgian house and 15-acre formal grounds all set on the 450 acre estate, near Lanchester has undergone a nine-month, family-led restoration designed to return the property to its former character rather than modernise it.

The launch marks a new commercial chapter for an estate with a history stretching back three centuries and a particularly strong connection to the North East railway age.

The cottage at Burnhopeside Hall was built in 1745, and the main Hall in the early 1800s, while the estate's walled garden dates from 1893. It was home to railway engineer William Hedley, whose early locomotive work launched the railway age. Hedley died at the Hall in 1843, and original lengths of railway track used during his locomotive testing remain on the estate, incorporated into the farmhouse and grounds.

The Hall was subsequently held by the Hedley family for around 150 years before passing into the current family in the mid-20th century.

It was bought by the maternal grandfather of brothers Andy and James Hewitt. Their mother, Christine, subsequently restored the property and ran it as a well-known bed and breakfast from 2015 until her death in 2025. Now, Andy, his wife Helen and his brother James have spent the past nine months bringing the estate back into commercial use.

The proposition is deliberately different from a conventional hotel.

Burnhopeside Hall is operating primarily as a luxury, self-catering country-house rental, allowing guests to take the estate as a whole or book the Hall and Cottage separately. The Hall sleeps 12+4 and the Cottage sleeps 4.

The business is aiming to build its core occupancy through premium leisure stays, complimented by a carefully selected programme of retreats, private events and corporate bookings.

Helen, who has put love, sweat and tears into the restoration describes the philosophy simply: “the same but better” as the family has focused on restoring and highlighting the features that make the estate distinctive.

Among them are Victorian engineering details including cast-iron underground heating pipes, remnants of the original Victorian boiler house and greenhouse, and a family-built greenhouse wall constructed by the brothers when they were boys.

The result is intended to sell more than accommodation: the estate itself becomes the experience. For the family, that also creates a story that can underpin multiple parts of the business from leisure stays to filming sets and corporate or wellbeing retreats.

“We wanted to bring the estate back to life in a way that felt true to its history,” says the family. “Restoring rather than modernising, in Christine’s spirit.”

Location is another part of the proposition. Burnhopeside sits around three hours from London by train and approximately 30 minutes from Newcastle and 15 minutes from Durham, giving the estate access to both regional and national markets while retaining the appeal of a rural retreat.

The launch also creates an opportunity to reconnect the estate with the local economy. The family’s positioning puts emphasis on Durham, local suppliers and the surrounding community, while the property's railway history provides a natural bridge to heritage organisations and the wider North East visitor economy. The team is also thinking up and delivering strategic uses for the land, including enclosed dog walking paddocks and business office domes for rent.

The challenge now is converting that distinctive proposition into sustained occupancy and a balanced events calendar. The business has already begun rebuilding its marketing infrastructure, with a new website positioning the estate around its history, the Hall and beyond-stay experiences, while distribution partnerships are being reviewed and expanded. Helen concluded: “We feel incredibly lucky to have the opportunity to turn a historic family home into a commercially sustainable modern estate business, without losing the qualities that made the property worth preserving in the first place. It really is a special place and it’s uses are endless from holidays to retreats to private business events. We are raring to go and looking forward to the next challenge!”

Three centuries, three generations of custodians and now a new business chapter for Burnhopeside Hall.

Burnhopsidehall.co.uk

My weekend...



Martin Wardle

Director of TH Ward, property tax specialists. Here he tells us about his weekends.

Do you ever have to work weekends?

I try not to and don't expect the team to either. That said sometimes clients have things that need to be dealt with. It's very rare that a tax emergency will happen on a Saturday or Sunday though unless a client's Saturday post drops a bombshell from HMRC.

Are most weekends the same?

I've spent 50 years working out what I like so yes, my weekends are now largely the same. Breakfast and a cuppa with my wife before we get started. DIY on either our home or one of our rentals will take up some of the time most weekends. We use weekends to catch up with each other so evening meals are always together normally followed by a film or favourite TV show.

Do you find it hard to switch off?

Not so much these days but it was a big issue for me for many years though. Having the right team around me means I am not in a bottleneck in the way I once was. The weekend work is generally now limited to those "eureka" moments on a client matter that simply come to you while doing something else or working on business development/marketing.

What do you do at a weekend which you can't fit in through the week?

My 9-5 is generally spent in the office so anything that needs daylight gets done at the weekend and of course family time. I am a huge advocate of simply relaxing rather than trying to fill every moment. Work hard in the week and rest hard at the weekend. Hobbies tend to land in the weekend as well.

Morning exercise or a recovery lie in?

Neither! I'm up early but not exercising. I exercise like a typical Geordie middle aged bloke. I will do a couple of huge things a few times a year like climb a mountain and leave all the training until literally three weeks before. I don't drink so the main reason people have for a lie in doesn't apply to me. Boring but there you go!

Big night out or a night in the house?

House every time. If I am out, I am working. Mixing with industry peers or work introducers is a necessary part of what I do and that scratches any itch I have for being out and about.

Do you watch or play sport at a weekend?

Nope! I turn out for big NUFC or England football matches but that's about it. My five a side career is well behind me now thanks to my knees!

Where do you like to eat out at a weekend?

If we do eat out, we will either go for Ahad in Gosforth, Dosa in Jesmond or a simple pizza from Santana's in Jesmond. We like to get out and get back so don't travel too far.

How important is the weekend to you?

Critical. Now that I have managed to essentially switch off from work, I often don't even know what day it is even over a normal weekend because I manage to relax so much. Had I learned to do this 30 years ago I am sure my health would be all the better for it.

Of a weekend, you'll usually find me most happy...

with protective goggles and earphones on a power tool making something out of wood. I'm determined one day to sell my end products and give the money to MacMillan but I'm not quite there yet.

www.thward.co.uk



Space to settle in with Week2Week

When work takes you away from home, where you stay can make a real difference to your daily routine.

For businesses arranging accommodation for employees, the priorities extend beyond location; people need somewhere comfortable to work, rest and feel settled, especially when an assignment lasts several weeks or months.

Week2Week's St James Apartment offers a welcoming base in Newcastle city centre. With two double bedrooms, a spacious living and dining area and a fully equipped kitchen, it gives guests the freedom to make themselves at home. Within walking distance of Newcastle Central Station, it also provides convenient access to transport, shops and restaurants, helping guests find their feet from the start of their stay.

The freedom to feel at home

For colleagues working on a project, a professional relocating to the region or a family accompanying someone on an extended assignment, an apartment offers valuable flexibility. Guests can prepare breakfast before an early start, enjoy a home-cooked dinner and spend the evening relaxing in their own space. Having room to both work and unwind makes it easier to maintain familiar routines while away.

These everyday benefits become particularly valuable during longer stays. A fully equipped kitchen gives guests greater control over meals and spending, while comfortable living space allows them to switch off at the end of the working day. For employers, choosing accommodation that supports those routines is a practical way to put staff wellbeing at the heart of travel arrangements.

A family-run North East business, Week2Week welcomes corporate travellers, contractors, healthcare professionals, visiting academics and people relocating, alongside leisure guests and families needing a temporary home. Its accommodation ranges from studios to four-bedroom houses, offering options for individual travellers, colleagues sharing and larger households. Parking is available at selected properties, and the local team helps match each enquiry with suitable accommodation.

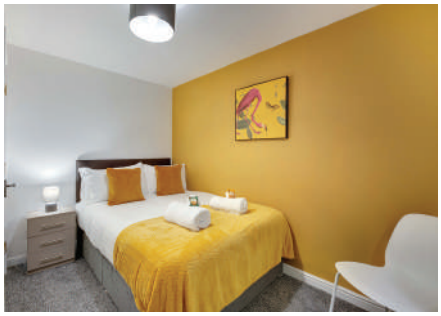
Guest care and wellbeing at the heart of every stay

Quality and reassurance are central to that approach. Week2Week is audited and accredited annually, with Quality in Tourism Gold Award recognition reflecting its commitment to guest experience and standards. Its Guest Care Philosophy brings a personal touch to each stay, supported by a team who know the properties and the surrounding area.

Wellbeing also means making time to enjoy life beyond work. Through Week2Week Perks, guests can take advantage of discounts at local attractions and restaurants, alongside access to discounted gym and swim passes. Whether that means keeping up an exercise routine, discovering somewhere new to eat or exploring the North East on a day off, the scheme encourages guests to enjoy the area and make time for themselves.

St James Apartment brings these benefits together: a convenient city base, space to settle in and the freedom to shape each day around work and personal time. For businesses looking for short or extended stays, that combination helps create a more comfortable experience for the people at the heart of every booking.

Explore accommodation at week2week.co.uk or speak to the team on 0191 281 3129.









Healthwatch Plans for the Future at AJM

The Annual Joint Meeting of Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle brought together stakeholders and the public to review achievements, conduct annual business, and discuss future priorities.

The meeting opened with welcomes and introductions from committee chairs, senior staff and the leadership team who delivers both local Healthwatch services.

Attendees were introduced to the purpose of Healthwatch as an independent organisation established to ensure the public's views influence health and social care services and improve outcomes for local communities. The presentation highlighted the organisations' shared vision, mission and values, focusing on equity, collaboration, independence, honesty and impact.

Both Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle presented highlights from their 2025/26 Annual Reports and recognised the contributions of committee members, staff, volunteers, stakeholders and local residents who share their experiences to shape service improvements. The formal Annual General Meetings were held for both organisations, covering annual reports, financial summaries, and appointments of committee members and chairs.

The latter part of the meeting focused on future priorities for 2026/27. Gateshead discussions explored the impact of Long Covid-19 clinic closures, mental health pathways, the public understanding of healthcare services and access to chiropody services. Newcastle considered priorities relating to hospitals, GP services and NHS dentistry. Attendees contributed views through facilitated discussions to help shape each organisation's work programme for the coming year.



North East Martial Arts Academy fit for Champions

Burns School of Black Belts, based in Benton, Newcastle, provides a friendly, inclusive and family-focused environment.

Unlike many clubs which hire community halls for training, Burns School of Black Belts has its own dedicated training facility in Benton, providing a permanent home where students of all ages and abilities can learn and develop.

The spacious training area is equipped to accommodate everything from beginners taking their first steps in martial arts to experienced competitors preparing for international competition. The center also provides dedicated seating for parents, allowing families to watch and support their children during training.

The purpose-built environment enables instructors to work closely with students and provides a consistent, safe and professional setting in which they can build fitness, confidence, discipline and technical ability.

Classes cater for a wide range of ages, including the academy's youngest Mini Dragons, as well as children, teenagers and adults.

Academy founder Rick Burns has more than four decades of experience in martial arts. He began training in judo in 1984 before going on to study a wide range of disciplines including Aikido, Taekwondo, kickboxing, freestyle karate and Sambo.

He eventually concentrated on kickboxing and freestyle karate and has continued to train throughout his career.

Now a sixth Dan black belt, 16-time world champion and holder of 26 European titles, Rick says one of his greatest achievements is being able to pass his knowledge and enthusiasm on to the next generation.

For Burns School of Black Belts, success is not simply about winning medals. The aim is to give students the opportunity to become fitter, more confident and more disciplined, while developing skills and attitudes that can benefit them both inside and outside the dojo.



From Community Hubs to KULT

A North East entrepreneur has swapped managing community facilities for coffee, protein shakes and overnight oats after taking the plunge and opening his own wellness-focused café at the age of 40.

Mark Graham is the man behind KULT, a new café on Gosforth High Street which combines specialty coffee with a growing range of wellness and fitness-focused food and drinks.

After years working in the management of community facilities and school lettings, Mark decided it was time to follow a long-held ambition and create a business of his own.

Recently opened, KULT is located at 161-163 Gosforth High Street, opposite The Brandling Arms and next door to The Gym Group.

Despite having no previous experience as a barista, Mark undertook intensive barista training before opening KULT and has spent the first nine months learning and developing the business.

The café serves a range of coffees alongside protein drinks, macro-friendly snacks, matcha and protein-packed overnight oats.

One of its biggest sellers is the Biscoff protein overnight oats, which Mark says have become something of a customer favourite.

"They're absolutely flying," Mark said. "You get more than 30 grams of protein and they're like a full meal, but they taste like a dessert. People come in and buy three or four at a time."

The peanut butter and banana protein shake is another popular choice, while the café's iced matcha has proved particularly successful with Mark admitting he has been surprised to find that it outsells cappuccinos.

"I didn't expect the matcha to be as popular as it is," he said. "We're actually selling more iced matchas than cappuccinos, which has surprised us, but it's a huge trend at the moment."

OptiMe
Burnout costs UK businesses £28 billion a year.
What is it costing yours?
One app. Six pillars of wellbeing.
AI personalised support for everyone.
www.optimewellbeing.com
Scan QR code to start your FREE trial







NE Youth Annual Golf Day

NE Youth annual golf day at Ramside Hall brought together local businesses and supporters to raise awareness and funds for the charity's work with young people.

The event provides an opportunity to recognise the contribution of the local business community and highlight the importance of investing in opportunities for young people.

NE Youth would like to thank everyone who supported the day and contributed to its success.































From desk-bound to downhill-ready

By Angela Petrocchi, ***SWISSPHYSIO***

Your Ski-Season Fitness Plan.

Skiing looks effortless—until your thighs start burning halfway down the first run. If you are bound to the desk all day, the leap from office chair to mountain can expose weak legs, stiff hips and limited stamina quickly.

The good news? A focused programme started six to eight weeks before your trip can help you ski longer, recover faster and feel more confident from the first lift.

Scan here for Swiss PT.

Your body needs a run-up

Hours of sitting can reduce leg and core strength, tighten the hips and hamstrings, and dull balance and cardiovascular fitness. Put that body on skis for several hours and fatigue arrives. As tiredness builds, technique slips: turns become less controlled and falls become more likely. Consequences include knee-ligament sprains, muscle strains, lower-back pain and injuries to the shoulders, wrists or thumbs. Preparation cannot eliminate risk, but it can build the strength and control that help you respond when the terrain surprises you.

Train the muscles skiing uses most

Your quadriceps work continuously to hold your skiing position and absorb uneven terrain. The glutes provide power and stability through turns, while the hamstrings support the knees and help control movement. A strong core keeps the torso steady so the legs can work efficiently. Meanwhile, the calves and smaller hip muscles manage ankle control, balance and rapid changes of direction. A programme combines squats or sit-to-stands, lunges, calf raises, glute bridges and core exercises.

Turn the working day into training time

You don't need a gym to begin. Stand and move every hour. Take a brisk walk, complete a short set of bodyweight squats, rise onto your toes for calf raises, or mobilise the hips and hamstrings. These brief movement breaks reduce stiffness and wake up muscles that become quiet during prolonged sitting. Before a workout, use dynamic movements such as walking lunges, leg swings and controlled side steps to improve mobility and coordination.

Build endurance, balance and control

Skiing involves thousands of repeated contractions across a long day. Add cardiovascular sessions such as brisk walking, cycling or stair climbing, and gradually extend their duration. For muscular endurance, try wall sits, slow squats and repeated step-ups. Balance work can be as simple as standing on one leg while brushing your teeth, then progressing to controlled single-leg bends. Lateral lunges and side steps prepare the body for the side-to-side forces of turning.

Already fit? Make it ski-specific

Regular gym-goers have an advantage, but a heavy squat does not guarantee all-day ski

stamina. Standard routines often favour short, intense efforts and symmetrical movements. Skiing demands sustained endurance, single-leg stability, shock absorption and quick directional changes. Keep your usual training, but add longer leg sets, lateral work and balance drills. A wall sit offers a revealing test: holding good form for two to three minutes can challenge even strong recreational skiers.

Arrive ready for the mountain

Aim for several short sessions each week rather than occasional punishing workouts. Combine leg and core strength, mobility, balance, lateral movement and cardiovascular exercise, while continuing to break up long spells at your desk. Increase the challenge gradually and allow time for recovery.

Your holiday should be remembered for spectacular views and runs—not aching legs after day one. Invest a little time before you travel and you will arrive stronger and better equipped to enjoy the mountain. Skiing rewards more endurance, balance and control than only strength. Prepare those qualities now, and you will have more energy for every run, from the first lift to the last.

Book your appointment now and enjoy a 10% introductory discount on your first session.

CiviaHealth

SUNDERLAND

Global research. Real people.



A new model for clinical research, with Sunderland at its heart.

Connecting local people with health screening, research opportunities and the chance to help shape future medicines.

LOCAL PEOPLE

More opportunities to take part.

BETTER HEALTH

Earlier insights and innovative medicines.

STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Investment in local talent, skills and partnerships.

CiviaHealth | **Generating valid evidence at scale.** Improving the human experience of clinical research. | civiahealth.com

Organisations join forces to bring the North East's biggest wellness festival to Sunderland



L-R: Amy Swan (AFNE), Nikki Vokes (Community Opportunities), Kelly Brougham (AFNE), Colin Burnicle (Hylton Castle Trust) and Gaynor Lewis (The Wellness Collective)

Four North East organisations are teaming up to host the region's biggest wellness festival next Summer.

Active Families North East, Hylton Castle Trust, Community Opportunities and The Wellness Collective will transform Hylton Castle and its grounds into a three-day wellness extravaganza from Friday 4 to Sunday 6 June 2027.

The North East Health and Wellness Festival has been designed so that each day has a different audience in mind, offering a packed programme of activities, workshops and fun, all centred on health and wellness.

The festival will open on Friday 4 June with THRIVE: Workplace Wellbeing, Festival Style, a day created for employers looking for a fresh way to support their teams away from the pressures of work. Employees, founders and business leaders will be able to choose from inspiring speakers, fireside conversations, movement sessions, sound baths and creative workshops, as well as relaxed spaces to connect. Organisers hope attendees will leave with shared memories and practical ideas to take back into the workplace.



On Saturday 5 June, RESET: The Adults-Only Wellness Festival will give guests the chance to focus entirely on themselves. Visitors can shape their own experience from a programme of yoga, Pilates, breathwork, sound baths, talks, treatments, food and creative workshops, whether they want to get moving, try something new or simply slow down and recharge.

The festival will close on Sunday 6 June with TOGETHER: Family & Community Wellness day, bringing families from across the region together for a lively day of movement, creativity and fun. Alongside activities designed especially for children, there will be plenty of opportunities for parents, carers and grandparents to join in, making wellbeing something every generation can enjoy.

Designated festival tents will separate different activities and the festival has already welcomed its first sponsor, North East leading HR Consultancy Oculus HR, which has backed The Wellness Collective and supported its wider community benefits since the organisation's first event.

All profits from the event will go back into delivering free and subsidised wellness activities for residents across the region.

Colin Burnicle, Trustee at Hylton Castle Trust said: "Here at Hylton Castle Trust, we're dedicated to giving back to the community that surrounds us. Across the year we run everything from family activities, sessions to let people develop their hobbies like our photography and crafts groups through to child-friendly activities like broomstick making, school visits, and family fun days. We also run a series of themed events at Easter, Halloween, Christmas and our recent Battle Re-enactments have attracted thousands of visitors.



"This Wellness Festival embodies everything we stand for. It's about bringing people together, opening up our historic grounds to the whole community and making wellbeing something everyone can enjoy.

"We can't wait to welcome visitors to Hylton Castle for what promises to be an unforgettable weekend."

Louise Kennedy, Owner and Director of Oculus HR, said: "We supported The Wellness Collective events right from the start because we could see the clear passion and purpose behind them. Events which bring people together, inspire them to prioritise their own wellness and raise vital funds to allow the communities that need it most to access wellness activities again.

"Here at Oculus HR, we're dedicated to empowering businesses and their people to help them thrive, and we share so many of the values at the heart of this festival, from a growth mindset, to making a real difference. We're proud to be sponsoring the Inspire tent and can't wait to be part of the region's ultimate health and wellness celebration."

Kelly Brougham, Director at Active Families North East, said: "This year we've already run a number of Wellness Collective events at Hylton Castle, giving ticket-holders the chance to take time out of their busy schedules and prioritise their own wellbeing.

"After selling out our last 12 events, we want to come back bigger and better next year, to provide even more opportunities for people from across the region and beyond to prioritise their wellbeing.

"Although we've been dedicated to giving adults that much-needed 'me-time', we've also noticed a real gap in the wellness space for busy professionals and also their families, which is why we wanted to extend the festival to three days, to make sure there was space for everyone to take time out to focus on their health and wellbeing."

Festival organisers will be putting a callout for suppliers and workshop leads in the coming weeks and those interested are urged to follow The North East Health and Wellness Festival's social media channels for updates.

Kelly added: "We really want the very best of what the region has to offer in terms of wellness and health activities, which is why we wanted to open the event out even further to local suppliers, practitioners and businesses.

Whether you run yoga classes, offer holistic therapies or have a fresh idea for a family-friendly workshop, we'd love to hear from you."

Tickets will be released in the coming months. To be the first to hear when they go on sale, and for all the latest festival news, follow The North East Health and Wellness Festival on Facebook and Instagram, or visit thewellnesscollectivene.co.uk















A King's Send Off

A night of footballing memories, laughter and heartfelt tributes brought together Kevin Keegan's legendary Newcastle United team of 1995/96 at the Grand Hotel Gosforth Park in early October.

Originally planned with Kevin to celebrate the 30th anniversary of that unforgettable season, the gathering took on a deeper significance following Keegan's passing in July. The night was in association with Kevin's friends at Pinpoint Healthcare.

Former teammates travelled from across the world to pay their respects, with Tino Asprilla and Warren Barton making special journeys from Colombia and the USA. Joined by Sir John Hall, the Keegan family and other familiar faces from the club, the players shared stories and celebrated the man who helped transform Newcastle United's fortunes.

As the Grand Hotel marked its 60th anniversary that same weekend, the occasion felt all the more poignant and ensured all guests left walking in a Keegan wonderland.














KEVIN KE


















adidas


SIR JOHN HALL
1
adidas





> **You cannot expect a wellbeing programme to compensate for poor management.**

Emily Pearson

Solving a CEO's Blind Spot: Human Sustainability

Could the way you lead your business be affecting its greatest competitive advantage?

If you run, manage or influence a business, the decisions you make every day are shaping the health and performance of the people who work for you, whether or not you see it.

According to the Health and Safety Executive, 964,000 workers in Great Britain were suffering from work-related stress, depression or anxiety in 2024/25. These conditions accounted for 52% of all work-related ill health and 22.1 million working days lost. In the North East, more than a quarter of working-age adults are economically inactive, the highest rate in England.

For Emily Pearson, human sustainability pioneer and founder of the County Durham-based Wellbeing Lead Academy, those numbers point to something many leaders have yet to recognise.

"Every business depends on human energy, health, judgement and capability, yet we behave as though these things are infinitely renewable. They're not. When organisations continually take more from people than the conditions of work allow them to replenish, eventually something gives, and the business feels it too."

Emily brings more than 25 years' experience across mental health, health and social care and workplace wellbeing. Her perspective is also personal. While building a successful wellbeing business, she was privately navigating burnout and a three-year struggle with addiction.

"I built a business dedicated to improving people's wellbeing, yet behind the scenes I was struggling to sustain my own. It made me look beyond the individual and ask a bigger question: what are the systems around us doing to our health, and how much of that can we influence?"

That question shaped her book, **Solving a CEO's Blind Spot: Human Sustainability**. Its central argument is that responsibility for whether work sustains or depletes people sits with CEOs and boards. Workload, staffing, targets, restructures and management capability are business decisions, and they shape health, culture and performance.

"We've spent decades saying people are our greatest asset, yet many organisations still treat wellbeing as separate from business strategy. We measure financial performance and efficiency, but rarely ask whether the way we achieve those results is sustainable for the people delivering them."

The financial case is hard to ignore. Deloitte estimated in 2024 that poor mental health costs UK employers £51 billion a year through absence, presenteeism and turnover, with an average return of around £4.70 for every £1 invested in supporting employee mental health.

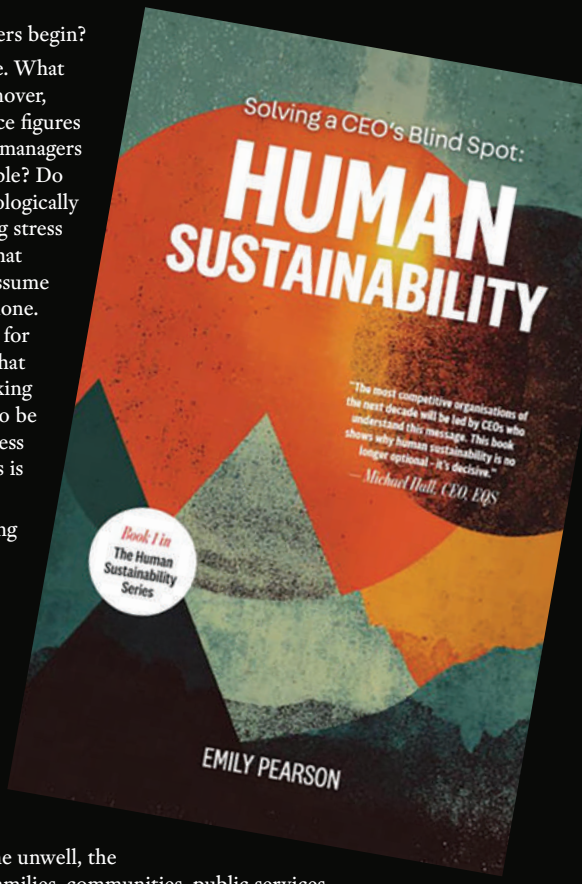
But Emily is clear that initiatives alone will not fix it.

"You cannot expect a wellbeing programme to compensate for poor management, excessive workloads or a culture where people are afraid to speak up. We have to stop trying to make people more resilient to conditions that are making them unwell, and start addressing those conditions."

Employers already have a legal duty to assess and manage the risk of work-related stress, yet many still respond only once people are struggling.

So where should leaders begin?

"Look at the evidence. What are your absence, turnover, overtime and grievance figures telling you? Are your managers equipped to lead people? Do employees feel psychologically safe? Are you assessing stress risks and acting on what you find? And don't assume HR can resolve this alone. It cannot compensate for leadership decisions that create unhealthy working conditions. This has to be part of how the business is led and how success is measured."



Through the Wellbeing Lead Academy, Emily is professionalising workplace wellbeing leadership, building the strategic capability organisations need to embed health into planning, leadership and governance.

"When people become unwell, the consequences reach families, communities, public services and the economy. Human thriving and business thriving are not competing priorities. The future belongs to leaders who understand how to achieve both."

ABOUT THE BOOK

Solving a CEO's Blind Spot: Human Sustainability reached No. 4 in Amazon UK's Human Resources and Personnel Management bestseller chart in its launch week.

Written for CEOs, business owners, boards and senior leaders, it combines lived experience, business research and leadership insight to show why human sustainability must sit at the centre of business strategy.

Available now in paperback and Kindle on Amazon.
Find out more at wellbeingleadacademy.uk

In conversation with...

Steve Fear

Chairman of Wallsend Rugby Club talks about his passion for grassroots rugby, future plans and the impact the club continues to have on the local community.



Steve Fear



For someone who doesn't know Wallsend Rugby Club, how would you describe what the club is all about?

For those unfamiliar with Wallsend Rugby Club, we are a family in disguise. I think our history tells a story of resilience, spirit and determination. Tracing our roots back to 1881, we lived a nomadic existence. The club's DNA embodies the hardworking spirit of Tyneside, reflected in our 1960s shipyard connections. Remarkably, people involved from that period remain with the club. That continuity between generations makes us something very special. Today, at our permanent home, whether it's our enthusiastic five-year-old 'mini tots,' our dedicated Senior XVs, or our loyal 'Owld Boys,' we provide them with a true sense of belonging.

What do you think makes Wallsend RFC different from other rugby clubs, and what is it about the club that keeps people coming back?

What sets us apart is our genuine commitment to inclusivity and to creating a welcoming, safe environment. Our values of teamwork, respect, enjoyment, discipline and sportsmanship (TREDS) run through the club's DNA. Our charity foundation ensures that financial barriers never prevent a child from playing rugby. You become part of something bigger. Players become coaches, parents become volunteers, and children grow up to bring their own families back, with friendships lasting a lifetime. The club belongs just as much to the person serving food, marking a pitch or coaching children on a Sunday morning as it does to the seniors running out on a Saturday. All of this without a permanent clubhouse.

How important are the people (players, families, coaches, volunteers and supporters) to the identity of the club?

Our people are the heartbeat of Wallsend RFC. Operating entirely voluntarily, we wouldn't exist without the selflessness of our coaches, parents, committee members, and supporters. Our true identity lies in our volunteers standing in the freezing rain at St Peter's Fields, mentoring the next generation, and in the families who turn up to support us week in, week out. Our people give everything they have, and that collective spirit shapes the character of everyone who wears the green and gold.

What values and ethos do you want Wallsend Rugby Club to be known for, both on and off the pitch?

On the pitch, I want Wallsend to be synonymous with TREDS, playing a highly competitive, exciting brand of rugby, always underpinned by total respect for match officials and our opposition. Off the pitch, our ethos is defined by integrity and humility. I want us to be known as a club that never forgets its roots and as a place universally recognised as a safe, supportive, and aspirational environment for anyone who walks through our gates.

When you look at the membership today, what makes you most proud of the club and the community it has created?

We have seen the incredible growth, diversity, and vibrancy of our current membership. We have recently celebrated fantastic milestones on the field: national titles, league promotions, cup finals, and the creation of our first women's team. But beyond this, I am proud of how our members embrace our community role, such as through Wallsend Active School Partnership (WASP), which seeks to 'improve lives through sport'. Similarly, seeing players who came through our youth system now returning as senior players, coaches, and volunteers proves that we are successfully building a sustainable, proud rugby community.

Looking ahead, what do you want Wallsend Rugby Club to represent and achieve for its members and the wider community?

Looking ahead, my vision for Wallsend RFC is to embrace opportunity and growth, ensure sustained success across all our sections, and bring our first-ever Community Rugby Hub to life as a welcoming place for our local community. Ultimately, I want to ensure that, for generations to come, Wallsend RFC remains a beacon of local pride—a financially secure, modern club where anyone, regardless of background, can find a second family and realise their full potential.

www.wallsendrfc.com

ballipinar
dental clinic

FREE DENTAL MEET-UP

LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR SMILE

28 NOVEMBER
Newcastle

29 NOVEMBER
Middlesbrough



50 years
OF DENTAL EXPERIENCE

Expert dental team.
Advanced digital technology.

BOOK YOUR FREE
Dental meet-up

Scan the QR code to book.

ballipinartr +90 533 810 16 96 ballipinar.net


PADEL
AT VILLAGE
DUNLOP
COMING SOON
SERVE, SMASH AND RALLY ON OUR
BRAND NEW CHAMPIONSHIP
LEVEL PADEL COURTS
Scan for detail
NEWCASTLE
VILLAGE
HEALTH + WELLNESS

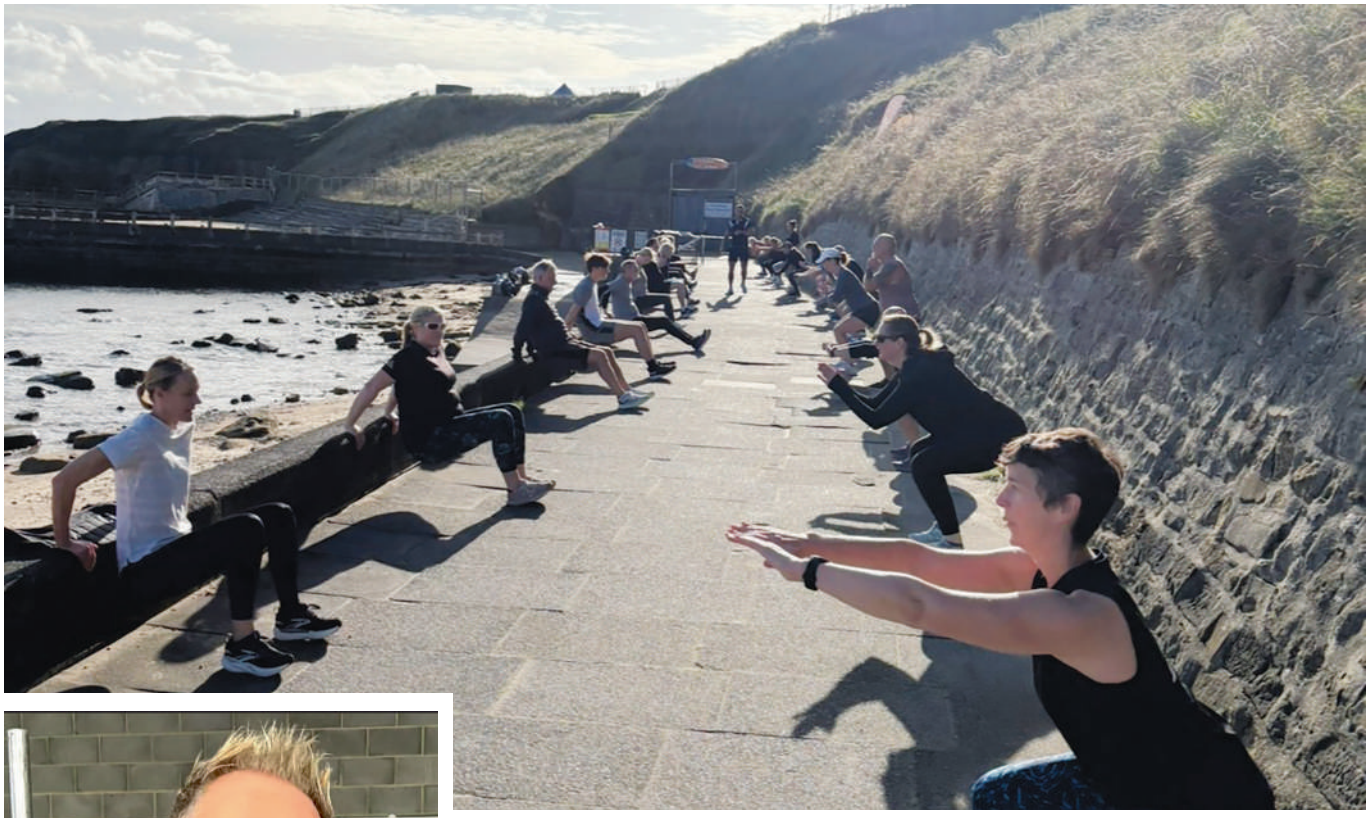
everyone ACTIVE

HAVE A DAY ON US!

www.everyoneactive.com/HaveADayOnUs



16+. For further details visit everyoneactive.com/haveadayonus. Classes must be booked in advance to avoid disappointment and will be subject to availability. New customers only.




David Fairlamb

Mind your mindset

By David Fairlamb

When it comes to exercise, your mindset can be just as important as the workout itself.

Whether you are heading out for a daily walk, completing a strength session or pushing yourself through a hard workout, the way you approach that session can have a huge influence on how you feel and how consistently you train.

Make the most of 30 minutes

We all have days when motivation is low. You might feel tired, jaded or simply not in the mood to exercise. The key is finding ways to change your mindset and give yourself a reason to get moving.

One of the best ways to stay motivated is to keep some workouts short and sharp. After a warm-up, aim for 30 minutes of quality exercise, working hard and keeping the intensity high. You can finish feeling energised rather than spending hours exercising and still have plenty of time left to get on with your day.

Our 30 min high energy VersaClimber classes at ClimbAhub in Jesmond typify this.

Choose something you enjoy

If you are having a low-energy day, choose an activity you genuinely enjoy. Sometimes the hardest part is simply getting started. Once you are moving, your mindset can quickly change and you can begin to feel more positive.

Step outside your comfort zone

Another great way to stay motivated is to occasionally push yourself outside your normal comfort zone. Increase the pace, add a little more resistance or challenge yourself to complete something slightly faster than usual. That feeling of achievement can be a powerful motivator for your next session.

Let music lift your mood

Music can also make a difference. Put on a song that gets you moving and use it to help lift your energy when the workout starts to feel difficult. We all have that one song that can instantly change our mood.

Keep your training interesting

Variety is equally important. Combining cardio and strength training can prevent your workouts from becoming repetitive. You could even use one session specifically to concentrate on technique.

Ten strength exercises performed with good form will be safer and more effective than 30 performed incorrectly.

Finish what you start

And once you have started a workout, finish what you planned. Skipping the final few seconds of an interval or the last few repetitions of a set might seem insignificant, but consistently cutting corners can quickly become a habit. Learning to finish what you start builds discipline as well as fitness.

Use your mind to push through

Your mind can also help you through the tougher moments. When you are working aerobically, think about something positive, a happy memory, a future goal or a sporting achievement that has inspired you. Taking your mind away from the discomfort can help you keep going when your body is telling you to stop.

We all have our own ways of finding motivation. The important thing is discovering what works for you and using it when you need that extra push. It might be music, a training partner, a particular type of exercise or simply reminding yourself why you started.

David's summing up

Sometimes we don't need a complete change of lifestyle. We just need to change the way we approach what we are already doing.

CLIMBAHUB

RISE TO THE BEAT!

THE UK'S FIRST & ONLY
STAND ALONE VERSACLIMBER HUB



FIRST CLASS ONLY £10!

30 MINUTES. TOTAL BODY. MAX RESULTS.

A high-energy, full-body workout that fits your life.

WHY YOU'LL LOVE CLIMBAHUB

30 MINUTE FULL BODY WORKOUT
Designed for all fitness levels and ages.

TRAINER-LED SESSIONS
Immersive wireless-headphone experience.

HIGH CALORIE BURN
Build strength, improve cardio, boost endurance – all in half an hour!

LOW IMPACT, HIGH BENEFIT
A non-weight-bearing machine, perfect for injury recovery.

NO JOINING FEE. NO MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTIONS.
Pay as you go sessions that work for you.



DOWNLOAD THE CLIMBAHUB APP ON THE APP STORE.

- Book sessions
- Manage your account
- Buy credit packs
- Stay up to date

NOT JUST EXERCISE. IT'S AN EXPERIENCE.

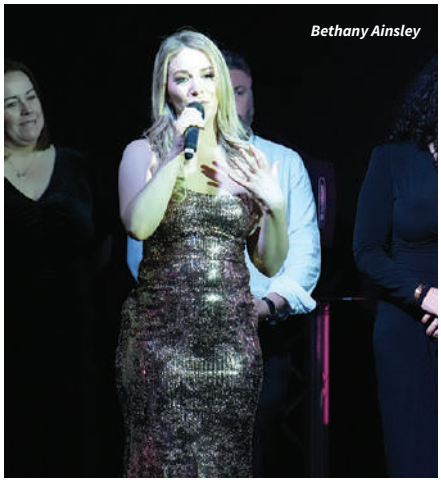
- Feel the beat. Stay in your zone.
- Push your limits. We'll guide you.
- Stronger body. Stronger you.



261 Jesmond Road
Newcastle Upon Tyne
NE2 1LB
England

WWW.CLIMBAHUB.CO.UK | @CLIMBAHUB





Bethany Ainsley

Is giving back the most underrated business advantage?

By Bethany Ainsley, OptiMe

What do a managing director, a solicitor and a group of NHS nurses have in common?

Put them on a dancefloor, ask them to learn a routine and perform in front of hundreds of people, and you might be surprised by what happens.

Beyond the laughter, the nerves and the occasional wrong step, something much more meaningful begins to take shape. People connect, professional barriers disappear and businesses come together to support causes that matter. It's a reminder that giving back isn't just about raising money, it can also bring out the very best in people and the organisations they represent.

Throughout my career, from delivering dance and wellbeing programmes across the North East to building businesses, I've seen what happens when people come together around a shared purpose. And sometimes, stepping outside our usual roles reveals something we don't often see at work.

We tend to know people through their job titles and professional achievements. We see the confident managing director, the experienced solicitor or the colleague who always seems to have everything under control. But put those same people on a dancefloor and suddenly everyone is a beginner. They make mistakes, laugh at themselves, encourage one another and, most importantly, have great fun.

It's a chance to see the person behind the job title, and it's one of the things I love most about Strictly Nuvo, the annual fundraising event organised by Nuvo Wellbeing, which I founded in 2008. It brings together my background in dance, my passion for wellbeing and a business community that's always willing to get involved.

Last year, Strictly Nuvo raised £10,000 for charitable causes, including North Tees Children's Ward. One of the highlights was watching nurses from the ward take to the dancefloor themselves, raising funds while showing everyone another side of the people who care for local children and families.

On 20 November, Strictly Nuvo returns to Hardwick Hall Hotel, Sedgefield, for A Night at the Movies. This year, we're raising funds for Nuvo Wellbeing's Cancer Prehabilitation Programmes, helping people prepare physically and emotionally for cancer treatment, and The Teesside Charity Hardship Fund, supporting people experiencing financial hardship.

Our participants include Anthony Hutton, Bill Scott OBE DL and Alisdair Beveridge, alongside teams from organisations including Ward Hadaway and the NHS. I can't wait to see everyone take on the challenge and bring their personalities to the dancefloor.



For businesses, I think there's something valuable in supporting an experience that combines generosity with genuine enjoyment. We talk a lot about workplace culture, employee engagement and connection, but sometimes those things grow most naturally when people let their guard down and do something different together.

Of course, you don't need to dance to contribute. We're inviting Northern Insight readers to donate whatever they can, with businesses that contribute receiving a thank-you on Nuvo Wellbeing's social media channels.

A special thank you to this year's sponsors and supporters: Venture Stream, AlphaGraphics, East Durham College, KM Electrical Services, Opus Building Services, Dräger, Learning Curve Group, Newcastle College and Savaria. We're incredibly grateful for their generosity.

Giving back should always begin with wanting to make a difference, but when it also brings people together, strengthens relationships and creates lasting memories, surely that's something worth celebrating.

Please scan the QR code to support Strictly Nuvo 2026. To enter a team for 2027 or discuss sponsorship, contact natalie@nuvowellbeing.com

AI isn't just a trend.

While you deliberate, your competitors are deploying it.

Your teams are already experimenting with it.

The question is: **who's leading it?**

Clothier Lacey has been helping businesses navigate change for over 25 years. As AI transforms how we work, compete and connect, we bring strategic clarity and practical support to help you lead with confidence. From boardroom to workflow, we help you make it count.

Ready to lead with AI?

Let's start with a conversation.

Clothier Lacey & Co, Albany Court, Monarch Road,
Newcastle Business Park, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE4 7YB

Call: 0191 273 9897 / 07711 356 972
Email: zoe.leahy@clothierlacey.co.uk
www.clothierlacey.co.uk

Clothier Lacey & Co.


Imagine if distinction
was matched with success
For over 10 years we've continued to build a passionate team that work tirelessly
to help protect, serve and support our clients each and everyday.
We see nothing but potential in our people, our community and you.
Imagine, together what we could do.
emgsolicitors
#ImagineALawFirm
emg