

MAYBORN GROUP - TOMMEE TIPPEE

STONE SHI

Ben Rennison, Gary Dawson, Angela Carney, Bianca Robinson, Tony Earnshaw,
Tania Cooper, Duncan Hedley, Michael Slavin, Deb Ions, Paul Pearson



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A photograph of a city street during a heavy rainstorm. In the foreground, a large blue umbrella is partially visible on the left. Behind it, a dense crowd of people is holding numerous white umbrellas, creating a sea of white. The background shows a city skyline with several tall buildings under a dark, overcast sky. Rain is visible as white streaks falling across the scene.

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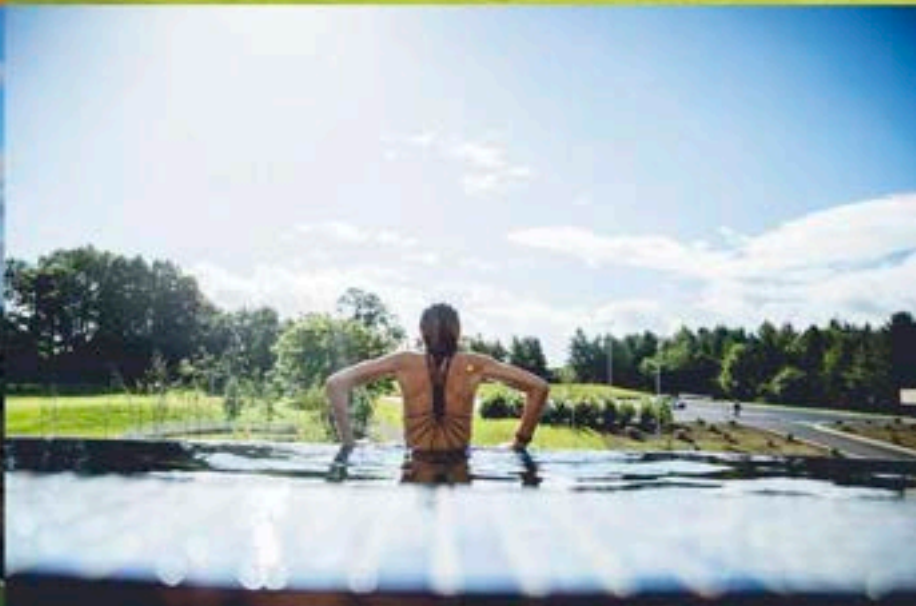
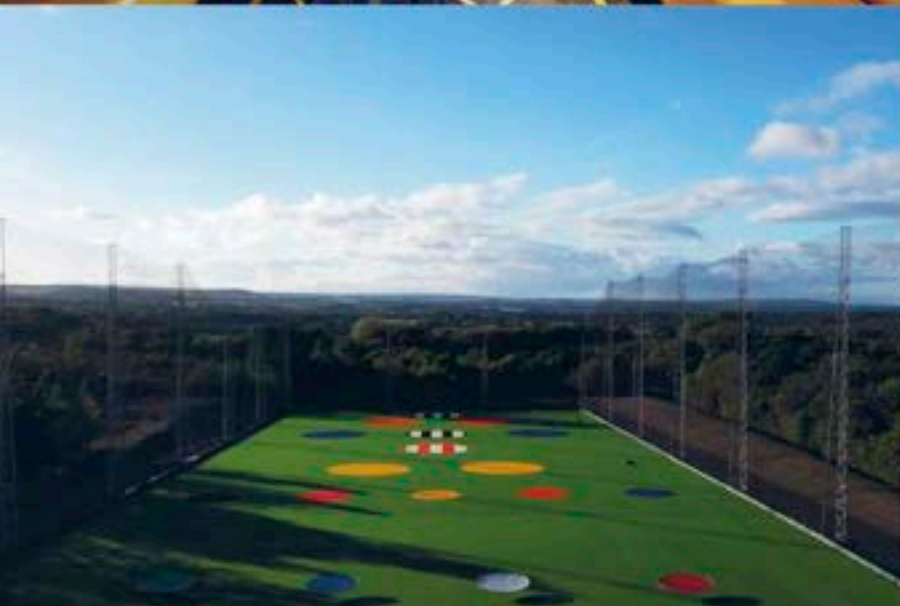
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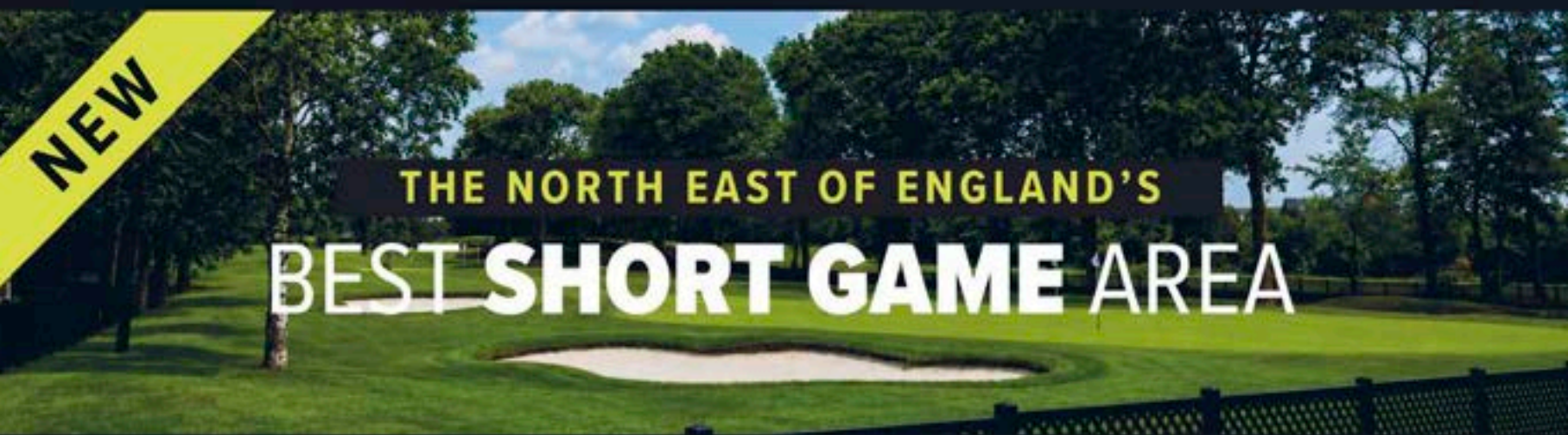


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WELCOME TO ISSUE 478

Editor's Word

From family foundations to future ambitions, connection and community are at the heart of this edition of N magazine. Here, Steven Hugill explores the power of heritage, the pursuit of progress and the people using their success to create lasting impact...



Hello and welcome to the latest edition of N magazine.

Life is many things, not least family.

It's where every story begins, where every chapter unfolds, where love endures.

Family provides the ties that bind, the bonds that last and the connections that shape our lives.

And the power of those relationships weaves like a golden thread through the long-read features in this very issue.

Ben Rennison's Kip & Nook hospitality and leisure venture is steeped in familial values.

Set in lush countryside, it straddles the border where the ceremonial county of Durham meets North Yorkshire just beyond the railway town of Darlington.

Today, the venue is a luxury retreat complete with restaurant, events space, eye-catching cars and more.

It wasn't always that way, though.

The site was once Ben's grandfather's farm, and despite childhood ambitions of following in his elder's footsteps, Ben headed down another path.

His direction was steered by another family member – his motorsport ace father – and endeavours came and went before the farm's ancestral pull became too strong to ignore.

Like so many business ventures, the COVID-19 lockdown period crystallised Ben's ambitions;

after creating his own space in a cabin on farmland, he explored the potential of renting it to holidaymakers.

The response was immediate and, flooded with interest, Ben recycled revenues into further cabins.

Such is the clamour that the business is today continuing to add more.

Around those cabins have come additions including a restaurant and The Club Room, an events space where Ben's inherited love of vehicles abounds through classic cars and quirky collectables.

And more is set to come, with Ben busily unfurling a blueprint to further bolster Kip & Nook's estate with a swimming pool and wellness centre.

The business is growing, evolving, shifting.

Yet it remains anchored by family.

By his own admission, Ben isn't creating an empire; instead, he's working hard today to lay foundations for tomorrow to spend more time with his loved ones.

As business plans go, it's one that resonates with us all.

You can read more on pages 30 to 37.

Family pervades our second long-form feature with Stone Shi, chief executive of Newcastle-based Mayborn Group, whose portfolio includes the Tommee Tippee brand.

A name synonymous with the wonder, warmth

(and weariness) that comes with bringing new life into the world, Tommee Tippee has become a shorthand term for parenting across more than 60 countries.

But that doesn't mean it is complacent.

On the contrary, former basketball player Stone reveals on pages 74 to 81 how great work is taking place to make Tommee Tippee "the most loved parent-care brand in the world".

That endeavour is centred on parents, specifically finding ways that incrementally make lives easier in those tricky and tiring first weeks and months.

For Stone and Tommee Tippee, that means drilling down into problems and finding solutions, be they making technology more efficient to help with tasks such as early morning feeds or brand collaborations that combine functionality with fashionable fun.

Helping deliver those changes is Mayborn Group's 300-strong Longbenton-based team, whose practicality and poise, says Stone, not only continue to cultivate a culture of community, but are creating platforms for decades of future success.

"We have a wonderful brand, a great heritage and fantastic people, but there is still so much more we can do," he says.

For parents the world over, and the North East where Tommee Tippee proudly calls home, that is a reassuring prospect.

I hope you enjoy this issue.

Steven

DRIVING A NEW ERA OF OPPORTUNITY

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N magazine publisher NET's headline investment campaign VISION 31 is returning to London. Building on successful 2026 summits in Newcastle and County Durham, VISION 31 will once again highlight the North East's innovative spirit, thriving commercial sectors and investment potential to the City in November. Here, NET editor-in-chief Steven Hugill reveals more about the campaign's third visit to the capital and how it will illuminate the North East's dynamic business landscape, connect investors with ambitious companies and reinforce the region's status as a leading destination for growth and opportunity.

AON



RAYMOND JAMES
Monument

Wubbleyou



Panellists speak at last year's London-based VISION 31 event

NET's flagship investment campaign is heading back to the City of London.

VISION 31 will take place in the capital in November.

Building on two hugely successful previous London summits – and following recent events at Northumbria University and Sedgefield's NETPark – the event will illuminate the North East's role at the forefront of moves to deliver tomorrow's world today.

Once again set for Aon's striking Leadenhall Building headquarters in the heart of the City's financial district, VISION 31 will highlight how the North East is redefining itself and boldly stepping into a brighter future.

“VISION 31 is all about highlighting the North East's enormous potential and the bold businesses driving its growth”

The event will feature founders and business leaders whose ventures have flourished from the North East, while also showcasing the region's plentiful investable qualities to senior City figures and investment houses.

It will also highlight the North East mayoral-led regeneration bodies driving watershed economic and social change, the region's ground-breaking manufacturers, pioneering green energy and digital moves, its headline cultural developments, pulsing healthcare and life sciences ecosystem and its flourishing professional services landscape.

VISION 31 was conceived in the immediate post-pandemic period by NET alongside Newcastle and Sunderland-based investment house Northstar Ventures to bolster investment into the region, with several initial roundtable discussions helping create a blueprint for change.

John Duns, NET business development director, says: “We're delighted to be returning to London with our VISION 31 campaign for another year.



Panellist Michelle Glendinning, head of human resources at Amazon, makes a point at the NETPark-based VISION 31 event earlier this year, alongside Lloyds Banking Group's Gary Chapman, right, and Dean Cook, Arlington Real Estate managing director



NET editor-in-chief Steven Hugill hosts a panel discussion at the NETPark-based VISION 31 event earlier this year



“VISION 31 was created to change perceptions of the North East and ensure the region’s success stories are being heard where they matter most”

“VISION 31 is all about highlighting the North East’s enormous potential and the bold businesses driving its growth.

“The North East has arguably never been more dynamic, and VISION 31 gives senior figures a front-row seat to the innovation, ambition and resilience that defines our region.

“From trailblazing manufacturers to leading digital and green energy initiatives, the North East is bursting with opportunity, and we’re excited to build on that momentum and demonstrate to investors why the region is worth backing.

“We’re hard at work planning this year’s event to make it the best yet – watch this space.”

Pete Mallon, NET creative and managing director, adds: “VISION 31 was created to change perceptions of the North East and ensure the region’s success stories are being heard where they matter most.

“Each event has built on the last, creating new connections between the North East’s business community and the investors, organisations and decision-makers who can help accelerate growth.

“Returning to London provides another opportunity to reinforce the message that this is a region with the talent, innovation and leadership to compete on the biggest stage.

“We’re delighted to be taking VISION 31 back to the City.”

NET is proudly working with a number of North East organisations to deliver VISION 31, which include Aon, Community Foundation North East, Lloyds Banking Group, Northumbria University, Raymond James Monument and Wubbleyou.



VISION 31

For more information about VISION 31, how your business could support the campaign and further details on its 2027 calendar of events, contact John Duns, NET business development director, at john@netimesmagazine.co.uk



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INTRODUCING THE NEXT CHAPTER FOR BDAILY

A brand is easy to see when it's finished.

The logo. The website. The photography. The campaigns. The polished version that arrives on launch day, ready to tell the world what it is.

But what about everything that comes before?

The ideas that change. The designs that don't make it. The conversations that run longer than expected. The decisions that seem small at the time but end up shaping something much bigger.

Increasingly, the story isn't just the outcome – it's the process.

That's the part of building a brand we want to share.

Bdaily is entering its next chapter, and we're taking people with us as we build it.

But that journey won't simply cover the finished product - it will include the people behind it too.

It will include the journalists, the creatives, the developers, the photographers, the strategists and the partners who are shaping what Bdaily becomes.

And it will show the thinking, the work, the occasional disagreement, the things we're excited about and the things we're still figuring out.

Bdaily has always been about people and business. And rebuilding the brand gives us an opportunity to bring those two things even closer together.

At the heart of the build is a simple ambition: to create a B2B news platform for the next decade.

One with North East roots and a national, global outlook. A platform that feels at home in the way businesses consume information today – fast, visual, useful and digital-first – while retaining the journalism, credibility and local understanding that have made Bdaily part of the

region's business community.

We're building that alongside people who share the ambition.

Wubbleyou is our technology partner, bringing North East talent and expertise into the heart of the project. Together, we're working on the technology and digital experience that will underpin the next generation of Bdaily – a genuine collaboration between two businesses from the region, with ambitions that reach well beyond it.

Over the coming months, we'll be sharing the people behind the build, the creative process, the technology, the journalism, the partnerships and the decisions that take Bdaily from an idea to something people can experience.

We'll be documenting it through a new series, Building Bdaily, as well as sharing the moments in between: the work in progress, the thinking behind the work and the things that don't necessarily make it into the final cut.

It's an open invitation to come behind the scenes.

Follow Bdaily on Instagram and LinkedIn to see the journey as it happens, meet the people building it and get an early look at what's coming.



And if you'd like to go one step further, we're looking for a group of early testers, readers and businesses to get involved before launch – to see what we're building, to challenge it and help shape the experience before everyone else.



The brand new Bdaily is being built. Come behind the scenes and see it take shape.



Pictured, back row, from left to right, are Pete Mallon, creative and managing director; Pete Anderson, Bdaily digital content manager; Steven Hugill, NET editor-in-chief; Sian Anderson, digital marketing consultant; and Andrew Lowe, filmographer. Seated, from left to right, are John Duns, business development director; and Sarah Law, partnerships and marketing manager

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SPOT LIGHT

The Man with the Silver Bullet...?

By Steven Hugill





As Prime Minister Andy Burnham promises greater devolution spending powers, Steven Hugill looks at the significance of the policy for the North East and why, for the region to truly thrive in a post-Westminster-guided future, it must act with greater unity.

I've never been a fan of the 'silver bullet' phrase.

Increasingly shoehorned into business parlance, it always strikes me as the kind of hackneyed line Albert and Barbara Broccoli forgot to affix to a 1970s James Bond film title.

The Man with the Silver Bullet. Live and Let Tax. Dr No-Mandate.

I've stolen the last one from a god-awful video doing the rounds on YouTube.

Made using artificial intelligence that probably consumed the equivalent of a small island's annual electricity bill, it features an incredibly ropey Kemi Badenoch alongside Roger Moore – still stilted, despite technology's best efforts – as they crash a knock-off white Lotus Esprit into the sea to infiltrate Andy Burnham's underwater lair and put a stop to his 'mascara Marxism'.

It was created by The Crewkerne Gazette, the online satirical project led by Joshua Bonehill-Paine, no less – context sufficient for me to say no more.

Nonetheless, Andy Burnham has been coming over a little James Bond in recent weeks.

Britain's next-cab-off-the-rank Prime Minister has been behaving all 00-Saving since his ascension from Manchester back to the mainstream, finding monies down the back of the No. 10 settee in places where Sir Keir Starmer apparently forgot to look.

From cuts to pub business rates and VAT off electricity bills to cheaper bus fares and a commitment to ending rough sleeping in England, his honeymoon was packed with policies carefully cultivated to stand out against the tumbleweeds of the early summer holiday news period.

Those announcements, though, were quickly superseded by moves on devolution, specifically providing mayors of English city regions with a share of income tax and business rates revenues for the first time, to boost spending on housing, transport and skills.

For the North East, and our two mayoral-led authorities, the blueprint holds much potential.

But we must play our part.

For too long, the North East's political landscape has been fragmented and, at times, quite frankly unfathomable.

In the time since the south of the region welcomed the arrival of the Tees Valley Combined Authority a decade ago, further north our corner of the country has worked its way through the North East Combined Authority, the North of Tyne Combined Authority, the North East Combined Authority again (with a larger footprint) and now the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority.

That's all without mentioning the North East Local Enterprise Partnership, the Tees Valley Local Enterprise Partnership and One North East.

Too many names, too many costly branding exercises and too much confusion.

Indeed, it is very telling that when N magazine publisher NET holds its regular roundtable and panel discussion events, they come with repeated frustrations from participants about messaging clarity to both internal and external investors.

Throw in a good dose of parochialism – a legacy of the football terraces, industries of yesteryear and plenty in between – and the North East remains riddled by schisms that only threaten to undermine its ambitions.

Now, that isn't to denigrate the work of Tees Valley Combined Authority or the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority.

Much work is underway to bridge those divides and present a more unified region.

Indeed, a recent workshop I attended with the

latter, aimed at kickstarting a refreshed regional branding campaign, provided hope of further progress.

But it was led by the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority, albeit, as I understand, with prior consultation with its Tees Valley counterpart.

And therein lies my frustration.

Burnham's devolution plans hold promise of something we've been craving for decades, and have secured, in part, in recent years – greater local decision-making and spending power.

But I still cannot shift from my belief that without greater unity as a region, we might not truly realise the North East's full potential.

The North East is the North East. The Tees Valley is the North East.

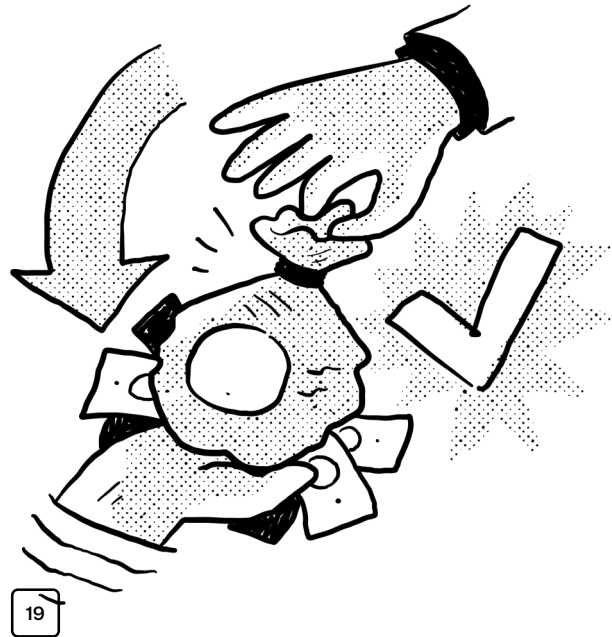
We might have politically split ourselves into two areas, but our thinking has to be distinct.

Discounting the old North Riding of Yorkshire boundary, the North East spans from the tip of Northumberland to the base of East Cleveland, just this side of Staithes Beck, which cuts through a valley on its way through the old fishing village that marks the border with the White Rose county.

It doesn't start at Berwick and end at County Durham with a supplementary Teesside area.

It is one geography.

And we must think, act and behave as one.



BIG QUESTION

Andy Burnham has promised the “biggest rebalancing of power our country has ever seen” through plans to hand more control to the country’s elected mayors. After numerous similar pledges from successive Westminster regimes, does the new Prime Minister’s blueprint mark a genuine turning point for devolution? And what should his strategy include to build on the work already under way at the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority and the Tees Valley Combined Authority?

By Steven Hugill



Join the discussion

Scan the QR code on the right to visit our LinkedIn page and add your thoughts to the conversation.



Gary Dawson
Chair

AV Dawson

Andy Burnham is right to argue decision-making should sit closer to the communities and businesses it affects.

Regional mayors have already demonstrated the value of devolved leadership by raising area profiles, championing investment opportunities and providing a single point of contact for investors.

In Tees Valley, we’ve seen how mayoral leadership has helped elevate the region’s standing nationally and internationally, supporting major investments such as SeAH Wind and BP, and giving investors greater long-term confidence.

However, for devolution to represent a genuine turning point, it must go beyond shifting responsibility and provide consistent powers and funding across regions.

Businesses need clarity, certainty and fairness.

Differences in policy and financial support between neighbouring authorities can create barriers and distort investment decisions.

A more aligned approach would strengthen our competitiveness.

Future strategy should also focus on skills and education.

Too often, responsibilities for schools, skills and workforce development sit across different organisations, creating fragmented priorities.

Greater alignment between local councils, combined authorities and employers would help ensure young people develop the skills businesses need and that investment translates into lasting economic opportunity.

Devolution could deliver real change, but only if it is backed by the powers, funding and collaboration needed to succeed.



Angela Carney
President

Northern Counties Builders
Federation

I see real potential in Andy Burnham's promise to deliver the "biggest rebalancing of power our country has ever seen."

After years of similar commitments from Westminster, genuine devolution of skills powers to our mayors could mark a turning point for the North East.

Our construction sector faces a serious skills shortage, yet the current model simply isn't working.

Around 80 per cent of full-time learners on construction courses never enter the industry, despite plenty of young people wanting to join.

The real stumbling block is getting smaller SMEs to take on apprentices.

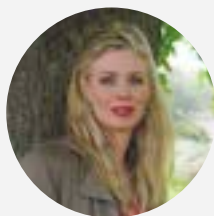
Employers, particularly the smaller firms that form the backbone of our industry, are not sufficiently incentivised.

Without stronger financial support, reduced bureaucracy and better apprenticeship wages, too many cannot take the risk.

To build on the progress of the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority and Tees Valley Combined Authority, Andy Burnham's strategy must re-examine this broken model.

We must fully devolve skills budgets, incentivise colleges to place learners into apprenticeships and put meaningful support packages in place for SMEs.

Only then will we convert willing young people into the skilled workforce that the North East needs.



Bianca Robinson
Chief executive

CEO Sleepout

The North East could become the first region in England to adopt a clear, mayor-led strategy to end rough sleeping and homelessness.

Greater Manchester has shown what's possible, and if Andy Burnham is serious about redistributing real power to the regions, the North East has an opportunity to go one better.

For me, devolution is measured by how much power reaches local communities and changes lives.

North East mayor Kim McGuinness is already showing what's possible by making child poverty her number one priority.

The North East benefits when decisions are made by people who understand the strengths and challenges of the region.

Through the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority and Tees Valley Combined Authority, we've seen renewed confidence in attracting investment, creating jobs, improving transport and championing sectors where we can lead, from clean energy to advanced manufacturing.

If this is to be the turning point we hope it will, mayors need long-term funding, greater fiscal freedom and the ability to make decisions on housing, skills, transport and regeneration without constantly returning to Westminster for permission.

People in the North East will judge Andy Burnham's success on jobs, affordable homes, thriving town centres and stronger communities.

To that end, he must also ensure child poverty and homelessness become relics of the past.



Tony Earnshaw
Chief executive

UK Commercial Group

Andy Burnham's blueprint could mark a genuine turning point, but only if it delivers meaningful power, rather than another layer of bureaucracy.

As a businessman with broadly Conservative, centre ground politics, I believe decisions should be made as close as possible to the people and businesses they affect.

Mayors understand their regional economies far better than Whitehall officials.

The North East Mayoral Strategic Authority and Tees Valley Combined Authority have already demonstrated the benefits of regional leadership, particularly in transport, investment and regeneration.

Andy Burnham's strategy should build on this by giving mayors greater control over skills funding, infrastructure, housing, planning and business support.

Regions should also retain a greater proportion of additional tax revenue generated by successful growth.

For the North East, the priorities must include improving transport links, accelerating brownfield development, supporting Newcastle International Airport, strengthening further education and ensuring training reflects employers' real needs.

There must also be safeguards.

Spending should be transparent, authorities should be independently assessed against clear economic targets and powers shouldn't be used to create unnecessary regulation or council duplication.

Real devolution is about giving regions the freedom, responsibility and financial incentives to grow.

If Andy Burnham's plan achieves that, it deserves support across party lines.

Planning for the next chapter

S&W

www.swgroup.com

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Succession planning is about far more than deciding when to step away from a business. It is a long-term process that gives owners the time, flexibility and confidence to shape what comes next on their own terms. Here, Raj Nayyar, Emma Glover and Kelly Morgan, of professional services firm S&W, speak to Peter Anderson about helping business owners plan for the future, navigating an evolving tax landscape and how joining a growing national firm has enabled them to deliver even greater value for clients.



Emma Glover, S&W partner

As any Year 7 pupil studying the Norman Conquest will tell you, a disputed succession rarely ends well.

Edward the Confessor's reluctance – or inability – to determine who should succeed him plunged England into a bitter struggle for the throne that culminated in invasion and the end of Anglo-Saxon rule.

Thankfully, the consequences of poor succession planning in today's business world are rarely quite so dramatic.

Yet it is not difficult to draw parallels.

There are countless examples of business owners whose departure, whatever the circumstances, has created uncertainty, conflict and avoidable costs because too little thought had been given to what came next.

It is a scenario S&W partners Emma Glover and Kelly Morgan, together with business tax director Raj Nayyar, encounter regularly.

Between them, they have helped countless business owners navigate the complexities of succession planning and, while no two businesses are alike, they are unanimous on one point: the earlier that conversations begin, the more likely it is that the right outcome can be achieved.

Raj, who advises owner-managed businesses on tax matters from start-up and growth through to succession and exit, believes one of the biggest misconceptions surrounding succession planning is that it begins when retirement is approaching.

He says: "The strongest succession plans are built alongside the business.

"People often think succession is simply about passing a business to the next generation, but that's only one option.

"It could be a sale to a third-party, a management buyout, an employee ownership trust or private equity investment.

"The earlier you start thinking about those possibilities, the more choices you'll have and the better placed you'll be to achieve the outcome that's right for you."

Drawing on years of advising families and business owners, Emma says the biggest benefit of starting early is the freedom it gives people to explore their options before circumstances begin to dictate the outcome.

She adds: "Even when you've got school-age children, it's not too early because you can make the most of all the opportunities open to you.

"It also helps you know what goal you're working towards.

"The key is that you stay in control of the process.

"If you leave it too late, you might become ill, find yourself under pressure to sell or simply discover that many of the options you once had are no longer available.

"Forward planning is the most important thing."

Kelly, who joined S&W with Emma following the firm's acquisition of Peppercorn Tax last year, says many business owners underestimate just how quickly their room for manoeuvre can disappear.

She says: "Once you're committed to a sale or an exit, there are often fewer opportunities to put the right structures in place.

"That's why those conversations are so important at an early stage."

That message has become even more pertinent in recent months.

Against a backdrop of significant tax changes, business owners are having to navigate a series of reforms.

Measures announced in the 2024 Autumn Budget, including changes to business and agricultural property relief, and plans to bring unused pension funds within the scope of inheritance tax from April 2027, have prompted many business owners to reassess their long-term succession plans.

Yet Raj says tax should never become the sole dictator of succession planning.

He says: "It's easy to focus on the latest tax changes, but they shouldn't drive every decision.

Kelly Morgan, S&W partner



Raj Nayyar, S&W business tax director



“Tax is one consideration, but it isn’t the whole picture.

“The tax rules will change in the future, but if you’ve built a plan around the client’s objectives, you’ve got something that’s much more robust.”

That people-first approach is something Emma and Kelly have championed throughout their careers.

Emma says: “People often think our role is about tax, but it’s really about people.

“You have to listen and understand what’s important to them and what they’re ultimately trying to achieve.”

Kelly adds: “These are often deeply personal conversations involving families, employees and businesses that have taken decades to build, so empathy is just as important as the advice itself.

“A big part of our job is helping people understand what can often be very complex issues, taking the time to explain their options and giving them the confidence to make the right decisions.

“The technical side is important, but it’s the relationship with the client that allows you to deliver it well.”

Being part of a national firm has also expanded what Raj, Emma and Kelly are able to offer clients, with the move giving them access to specialists from across the UK while retaining the personal relationships that remain at the heart of their approach.

Kelly says: “One of the biggest advantages of being part of S&W is the breadth of expertise we can draw on.

“As well as being able to offer services we simply couldn’t before, such as corporate finance, we also have access to colleagues across the country with experience in every area of tax.

“No matter what the question, I know there’s someone who has encountered that situation before and can help us find the best solution.”

Raj, who has spent his career advising businesses in Newcastle and joined S&W through its acquisition of Evelyn Partners’ professional services business, agrees the firm’s expanded capabilities ultimately translate into better outcomes for clients.

He adds: “We can support clients throughout the entire lifecycle of their business.

“Whether it’s raising finance, planning for growth, bringing in employees, preparing for a sale or thinking about what comes next, we have the expertise to help at every stage.

“It’s not about having a one-size-fits-all solution.

“Every client has different objectives, and our role is to understand those objectives, keep an open mind and help them achieve the best possible outcome in the most tax-efficient way.

“Ultimately, that’s what succession planning is all about – helping people make the right decisions at the right time, so they’re in the strongest possible position for whatever comes next.”



Kelly Morgan, S&W partner, left, with business tax director Raj Nayyar and fellow partner Emma Glover in the firm’s Newcastle Queens Lane office



S&W

For more information about S&W and how its expert services could support your succession planning goals, visit the website at the top of this article or email emma.glover@swgroup.com

Redefining HR recruitment

Shrewd HR

www.shrewd-hr.co.uk

LinkedIn: Shrewd HR

Recruitment is seldom a straightforward process. In a world of evolving employment law and regulatory reform, matching talent to businesses' commercial and cultural objectives requires a considered approach. Relief then for Chester-le-Street-based Shrewd HR, whose newly-launched Shrewd Hire venture is helping organisations roll out robust HR recruitment strategies. Here, founder and managing director Martin Potts and head of Shrewd Hire Natalie Macpherson tell Steven Huggill how the company is allowing clients to lay strong growth foundations.

Arranged in regimented rows of neatly framed headshots, Durham cricketers adorn an upper-floor wall of the club's Don Robson Pavilion.

Local heroes. County stalwarts. Global stars.

Each captures a moment in history, eras past and present colliding to create a sweeping pictorial timeline of the Chester-le-Street-based club's evolution.

To trace every portrait is to piece together a story of ambition, growth, strategy and timing.

The recruitment process, though, is never as linear as an orderly gallery on a brilliant white wall.

And helping a growing number of organisations make the right employment decisions is Shrewd HR.

From an office inside Durham County Cricket Club's Riverside Ground – which fittingly opens onto the long corridor of playing staff images – the firm has launched Shrewd Hire.

Focused on HR sector recruitment, it delivers nuance and equal measures of experience and expertise across an ever-evolving compliance

environment, supporting businesses to add staff from entry-level roles to director positions.

But the venture represents far more than simply filling roster responsibilities.

Harnessing Shrewd HR's wider portfolio, the service carries the same diagnostic approach that underpins the business' support functions, which extend from day-to-day SME assistance to retained packages, multinational business backing and expert employment law guidance.

At its core is a people-centred methodology that melds the individual complexities of clients' operations with honesty, challenge and careful judgement to provide unique responses to HR recruitment plans.

Martin Potts, Shrewd HR founder and managing director, says: "We are not a recruitment agency; however, if a business is seeking to recruit an HR employee, we can support that ambition through Shrewd Hire.

"But we go well beyond just creating a list of candidates.

"We call on the expertise of the wider Shrewd HR business to help clients assess if they need to employ an HR member of staff at that time, or if it might benefit from using our consultancy services to build towards a recruitment goal.

"It might not be the right time to recruit, but it could be in six months' or a year's time.

"And by providing support in that intervening period, we build an understanding of a business, which means, when the time is right to recruit, we know both the organisation's culture and the required characteristics of the job.

"That allows us to present a much more refined cohort of candidates – a maximum of three – to a business.

"It is a comprehensive and joined-up service."

Fostering such relationships, says head of Shrewd Hire Natalie Macpherson, provides clients with confidence while removing the spectre of a challenging cost cycle.

She says: "Businesses can often feel pressured to recruit, but when those decisions don't work,



Martin Potts, Shrewd HR founder and managing director, with Amy Chandler, head of HR projects and operations, left, and Natalie Macpherson, head of Shrewd Hire

they find themselves back in the same position.

“That is where Shrewd Hire is so valuable.

“By engaging with our wider services, clients can take a more cost-effective approach that buys time to reflect on what they really need: do they need to pursue a like-for-like staff replacement, or should they adjust their search criteria?”

The value of such a tailored toolkit, says CIPD-trained Natalie, extends to operational demands including maternity leave and employee crossover periods, with Shrewd Hire effectively operating from the centre of a wider Shrewd HR Venn diagram.

She says: “It all comes back to understanding the culture and character of a business.

“It also emphasises the value of being embedded in clients’ day-to-day HR operations,” says Natalie, who joined Shrewd HR – which is the official HR partner of Durham County Cricket Club, Newcastle Eagles, Durham-based True Padel and Durham Women Football Club – following time with a Sunderland-based HR recruitment agency.

She adds: “We show clients there is no need to rush an appointment.

“When it comes to maternity leave, for example, our wider suite of retained services ensures functions remain operational and compliant, while also helping the business financially because it isn’t needing to bring in a fixed-term member of staff.

“Similarly, if a business is recruiting a new head of HR, but hasn’t found a replacement before its existing staff member leaves, we can bridge the gap until it finds that right person.

“And we’re also adept at carrying out consultation sessions to deliver an information handover for that new member of staff, which not only provides them with great insight but takes the pressure and responsibility away from a business owner.”

Natalie adds: “Our support is hugely significant from a cultural perspective too.

“HR never stops, and our support ensures operations continue, while giving existing employees peace of mind that crucial HR functions are still being delivered.

“And it also provides business owners with fresh perspectives on staff development.

“Because our relationships allow us to have such open discussions, we are able to ask, for example, if they’ve considered recruiting an HR adviser alongside using our expertise to maintain services, so they can progress that person into an HR management role over future years.”

The focus on future growth is supported by Shrewd Hire’s sister venture Shrewd Coach, which is concentrated on nurturing HR



Amy Chandler, head of HR projects and operations, left, and Natalie Macpherson, head of Shrewd Hire

professionals across numerous sectors.

Leaning on the experience of Shrewd HR’s seven-strong team, Natalie – a former cruise ship HR officer – says it will provide valuable support for seasoned and emerging HR staff.

She says: “An emerging HR professional might have their qualifications, but, if they’re appointed in a standalone role, might not have a sounding board to discuss potentially complex issues.

“Through our experience, though, we’re able to act as a close confidant to help de-escalate any issues very quickly.”

That guidance will be spearheaded by quarterly roundtable discussions, which are set to take place in boardroom space at Durham County Cricket Club from October.

Natalie says: “We want to set up an HR community that sparks peer-led conversations and questions about challenges, successes and recommendations across different industries.

“To that end, the roundtables – which will feature 12 to 13 people – will separately cater for senior HR people and emerging HR professionals.

“For emerging professionals, they will act as safe spaces for people in their first roles to bounce ideas off peers at similar stages in their careers.

“The sessions might cover areas such as TUPE, redundancies or formal processes, and we’re exploring the possibility of bringing people from our senior HR roundtables to act as guest speakers, so participants can develop knowledge that sets them apart when applying for future positions.”

Martin adds: “It’s all about providing a comprehensive service, which comes without bias and looks at a business’ structure with objectivity.

“If an organisation – of any size or sector – wants HR consultancy support; wants to build infrastructure to employ an HR professional for the first time; wants to train managers; or wants to grow its HR team, we are the go-to business.”



Shrewd HR

To learn more about Shrewd Hire, Shrewd Coach and Shrewd HR’s wider portfolio of services, which stretch from day-to-day SME support to retainer packages, multinational business backing and expert employment law guidance, visit the website at the top of this article.

Bidding for a bright future

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Anderson & Garland Auctioneers

www.andersonandgarland.com

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After almost two decades with Anderson & Garland, Fred Wyrley-Birch and Alison Orgill have taken ownership of the historic Newcastle auction house following a management buyout. As the 186-year-old firm looks towards its bicentenary, the pair are preparing to enhance its reputation nationally, while preserving the personal service and North East identity that have shaped it for generations. Here, Fred and Alison speak to Peter Anderson about their respective journeys, the 'Northern Approach' at the heart of the business and their ambitions for the future.

When Anderson & Garland's story began in 1840, the then 21-year-old Queen Victoria had been on the throne for just three years.

Closer to home, a 29-year-old William Armstrong was still practising as a solicitor with Donkin, Stable and Armstrong, devoting his spare time to engineering experiments seven years before abandoning the law to establish his Elswick works on the banks of the Tyne.

In the 186 years since, fashions, fortunes and technologies have come and gone, yet the fundamental principles underpinning the business have remained remarkably consistent: expertise, trust and an ability to connect remarkable objects with the people who value them.

Now operating from a 20,000sq ft saleroom in Westerhope, with clients spanning more than 100 countries, the Newcastle auction house is preparing for another significant chapter as its bicentenary hoves into view.

Responsibility for shaping what comes next rests with two people whose careers have been entwined with Anderson & Garland for almost two decades.

Fred Wyrley-Birch and Alison Orgill have taken ownership following a management buyout from Julian Thomson, who remains as chair, completing a natural succession years in the making.

Fred's association with Anderson & Garland stretches back even further than his 2007 arrival as a porter.

Growing up in Tyne and Wear, he remembers accompanying his mother to the former Thomas Pattinson & Sons saleroom in Crawcrook, later operated by Anderson & Garland, before returning for work experience aged 16 and being unexpectedly invited onto the rostrum to sell ten lots.

Fred, whose infectious enthusiasm for auctioneering remains undiminished more than two decades later, says: "I absolutely loved it.

"I came back at 19 as a porter, unpacking boxes and shifting furniture, and learned on the job.

"Over time, I was told to put on a collared shirt, then a tie, then a jacket, before starting valuations.

"I spent a decade honing the craft before I was offered the opportunity to buy into the business.

"Taking ownership has given me a fresh challenge and a new level of enjoyment – and bringing Alison in with me was an obvious move."

Alison's route was markedly different.

Joining as a management accountant in 2009, she had never attended an auction and initially focused on bringing greater structure to the firm's finances.

But such was her organisational nous, her remit quickly expanded.

She says: "I'd look around and think, 'that needs sorting, that needs sorting and that needs sorting'. So, I'd sort it.

"Gradually, I became responsible for more and more – the people, HR, systems and how everything works operationally."

Those contrasting strengths made the pair obvious partners when Julian began considering his succession.

Alison, whose progression has seen her become the first female shareholder director in Anderson & Garland's history, adds: "Fred was always the natural successor.

"He's incredibly hardworking and has that expertise, enthusiasm and relationship with clients.

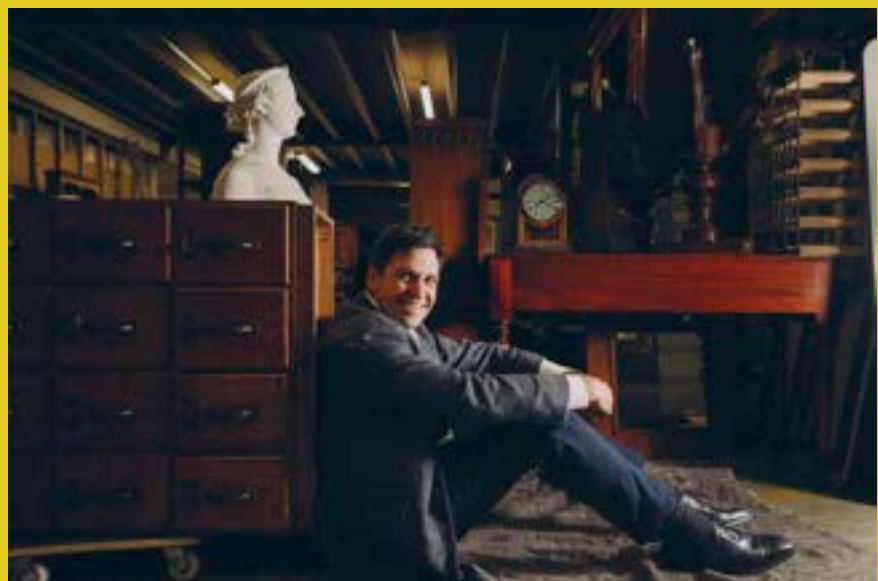


Anderson & Garland directors Fred Wyrley-Birch and Alison Orgill

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Anderson & Garland

To find out more about Anderson & Garland, and to learn about its full suite of services, visit the website and LinkedIn page at the top of this article.



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Anderson & Garland



“You look after people and build relationships that can last for decades and pass from one generation to the next; that’s how a reputation is built”

“When the opportunity arose, Fred and I were having Christmas lunch and I basically said, ‘If you’re looking for a business partner, I’m interested’.”

Fred adds: “Alison runs the internal side, which frees me up to do what I’m good at – being out with clients, valuing objects and talking about what comes through our doors.

“We’re completely different, but it works.”

Their combination of complementary skills also underpins a shared philosophy about how Anderson & Garland should do business.

Fred and Alison call it the ‘Northern Approach’.

For Alison, it means ensuring every interaction – whether with a buyer, seller or bereaved family disposing of a lifetime’s possessions – retains the personal touch she believes comes naturally in the North East: looking after people and treating them as you would hope to be treated yourself.

She says: “Customer experience is incredibly important to us.

“We want everyone who deals with Anderson & Garland to feel properly looked after.”

Fred describes it as doing things “with heart”.

He adds: “You might only need our auction services once in your lifetime, often at a very difficult time.

“It’s about treating people like human beings.

“If somebody has driven three hours to see us, you offer them a coffee and a slice of cake, ask how their journey was and make them feel welcome.

“It sounds simple, but people don’t always expect that anymore – and it makes a difference.”

Such relationships have repeatedly translated into extraordinary consignments.

Among them was Banksy’s The Merrivale Stable, a miniature thatched stable created as part of the artist’s Great British Spraycation in 2021, which sold for £1 million after its owners approached Anderson & Garland because the vendor’s mother had been a client three decades earlier.

For Fred, it perfectly illustrates the value of relationships cultivated over generations.

He says: “You look after people and build relationships that can last for decades and pass from one generation to the next.

“That’s how a reputation is built.”

Fred and Alison’s next challenge is taking that hard-earned reputation – and the personal service underpinning it – to a wider audience.

With London events and national valuation activity already broadening Anderson & Garland’s horizons, their ambition is to establish the firm as a major national name without sacrificing the identity that has long set it apart.

And the strategy is already bearing fruit.

Earlier this year, Anderson & Garland took the first tranche of Professor Brian Whitton’s remarkable collection of works by British modernist John Tunnard – described as the most comprehensive private holding ever to reach the market – to Mayfair for a dedicated viewing before returning to Newcastle for the auction.

It is precisely the kind of opportunity Fred and Alison hope to pursue more regularly as Anderson & Garland raises its profile.

Alison says: “Whether you’re in Cornwall, Edinburgh or Aberdeen, we want Anderson & Garland to be one of the auction houses that naturally comes to mind.”

And geographical expansion is only one way Fred and Alison see Anderson & Garland extending its offer.

Increasingly, the firm is working alongside solicitors, executors and families to provide formal professional valuations covering everything from individual possessions and specialist collections to entire estates.

Its probate work helps establish an estate’s value for inheritance tax purposes, while supporting the fair distribution of possessions between beneficiaries.

Alongside this, Anderson & Garland provides independent insurance valuations accepted by leading insurers and underwriters, with its expertise extending to the eventual disposal of entire estates and some clients even arranging for treasured possessions to be handled after their death.

Adding another dimension is sister company A&G Land & Property, launched in 2022, which enables executors – who may live hundreds of miles away – to entrust the sale of a home and its contents to one team.

Fred says: “It came from conversations with solicitors who would say, ‘You’ve dealt with everything in the house, why can’t you sell the house as well?’

“Now, somebody can hand us the keys and we can look after everything.

“For families and executors, particularly at a difficult time, that can make life considerably easier.”

Taken together, it is an increasingly comprehensive offer that Fred and Alison intend to build upon as Anderson & Garland begins the march towards its bicentenary.

Alison adds: “We’ve got 13 years until we reach 200, and there’s a lot we want to achieve.

“But we want to do it in the right way – taking our team and our clients with us and making sure we never lose sight of who we are.”

KE&



A SENSE OF BELONGING

Nook

From a single cabin on his grandfather's farm to a destination bringing together restaurants, cabins, padel, cars and soon a swimming pool and wellness centre, Ben Rennison has built Kip & Nook one idea at a time. Sian Anderson meets the man behind one of the region's most distinctive hospitality destinations to talk family, risk, ambition and why, ultimately, he wants to stop.



BEN

On a hot day in August, Kip & Nook feels less like the point where the ceremonial borders of North Yorkshire and County Durham meet and more like the South of France.

There are grandparents lingering over coffee, families spilling out with children in tow, influencers in designer wellies and friends gathering for lunch.

It's stylish without being pretentious, sociable without feeling exclusive and relaxed enough that nobody seems in a hurry to leave.

You can come for lunch and a game of padel, disappear into an off-grid pitch for a night under the stars or check into one of the luxurious cabins and spend the weekend barely seeing another soul.

Kip & Nook is many things at once – a restaurant, retreat, playground and escape, and increasingly a boutique destination in its own right.

But perhaps more than anything, it is a place designed to bring people together.

At the centre of this rather extraordinary operation is founder and chief ideas man Ben Rennison, who operates at 100 miles an hour.

His mind is permanently racing towards the next idea, while somehow keeping a remarkable number of plates spinning.

And around him, Kip & Nook remains very much a family affair.

There is wife Sarah and three-year-old Albert, with the couple expecting their second son.

Ben's mum also works in the business.

Then there is the 45-strong team, which is as much a part of the Kip & Nook story as the

cabins, padel court and restaurant – whether it is navigating a busy Saturday or taking part in a staff rounders match.

For Ben, creating that sense of belonging among the people who work there is every bit as important as the experience enjoyed by those who visit.

He says: "People always say I've done an amazing job, but it's not me.

"It's the team. Without these guys, we wouldn't be anything.

"I want people to enjoy coming to work and feel part of what we're building.

"If the team is happy and having a good time, guests feel that too."

And Kip & Nook is rooted much deeper in the land than its polished cabins and contemporary hospitality offering might initially suggest.

This was Ben's grandfather's farm, a place he grew up feeling an instinctive pull towards.

He says: "This was always a family farm; it was my grandad's farm.

"He passed away when I was ten and I always wanted to be a farmer."

His dad, however, encouraged him to find another path.

Ben adds: "My dad said, 'There's no money in farming. Go and do something else'."

For a while, Ben did.

Before Kip & Nook came a firewood business, furniture-making and a building company – each another chapter in what would eventually become a much bigger idea.

But the farm kept drawing him back.

RENNISON

And in 2020, during lockdown, Ben found himself there once again, doing what came naturally – building, experimenting and seeing what might work.

He constructed a small cabin in one of the fields, initially with little thought beyond creating somewhere of his own to escape to.

After spending a few nights there, however, he began to wonder whether other people might enjoy it too.

Ben put the cabin on Airbnb, and the response was immediate.

He says: “I think I stayed in it for about three nights and thought, ‘I could rent this out’.

“I put it up on the site and it was flooded with bookings.

“With the money from that one, we built another, then with the money from that, we built another.

“It just continued snowballing.

“Six years on, we’re still building cabins today.”

There was no fixed vision for what Kip & Nook might eventually become.

Instead, it evolved organically, growing in response to what worked and Ben’s instinct for what the place could become.

The farm’s existing barn was brought into the mix, followed by more accommodation, food, events and experiences.

And with each addition, Kip & Nook became less about simply giving people somewhere to stay and more about creating somewhere they wanted to spend time.

Ben adds: “I always envisaged it being an attraction – a place where people could hang out.

“I love people. I love hosting people and looking after them.

“There’s no demographic here, and I think that’s why we’re doing well.”

That breadth is now one of Kip & Nook’s defining characteristics.

Couples can disappear into the countryside for a secluded weekend, while families, groups of friends and businesses can use the same site in entirely different ways.

Yet building somewhere that looks this effortless has been anything but.

Behind the cabins, cocktails and carefully considered interiors is a business Ben admits has pushed him to his limits.

For someone whose instinct is always to move on to the next thing, however, the greater danger appears to lie in standing still.

He says: “I think the risk is continuously not stopping.

“But for me, the biggest risk would be stopping.”



Increasingly, Kip & Nook has also become somewhere Ben’s own passions find their way into the business.

And there is another, slightly unexpected thread running through the place: cars.

Ben says: “My dad has always been into motorsport. He used to race cars.

“I raced for three years myself, which I feel very fortunate to have done.

“I’ve always bought cars and had cars. That’s been my weak spot.”

Rather than keeping that passion separate from the business, Ben has found ways to weave it into the character of Kip & Nook.

Vintage models sit within the buildings, while car meets and events have become part of life on the farm.

The Club Room, meanwhile, can host everything from baby showers and corporate events to gatherings centred around the cars themselves.

Ben adds: “I thought, why not bring cars into Kip & Nook?



KIP & NOOK

"I remember looking at the workshop and thinking, 'What's cooler than an old BMW?'"

The trick was making them feel part of Kip & Nook's aesthetic, rather than allowing the place to resemble a car park.

It is an approach that says much about the wider business.

Rather than following a conventional hospitality blueprint, Ben has continued adding the things he likes and the experiences he believes other people will enjoy – gradually creating a destination that feels increasingly reflective of the man behind it.

That doesn't mean every idea has come easily.

The arrival of Albertos Farmhouse last year represented another significant step in Kip & Nook's evolution, transforming the site from



somewhere predominantly centred around stays and experiences into a destination people could visit simply to eat, drink and spend time.

But creating a restaurant from scratch brought an entirely different set of challenges – and even for someone accustomed to throwing himself headlong into new ideas, Ben admits the experience tested him.

He says: "I was completely stressed for two months.

"It was probably one of the hardest things we've done.

"I would never do it again. But now it's finished, I absolutely love it."

Named after his son, Albertos Farmhouse brings Italian-inspired dining to the heart of the site, with an interior that could sit comfortably in a members' club in central London but an atmosphere designed to remain relaxed and welcoming.

And despite the lessons of opening a restaurant, stopping clearly isn't part of Ben's immediate plan.

The evolution of Kip & Nook is set to continue, with plans for a large heated swimming pool in the Albertos courtyard alongside a dedicated wellness centre.

But, true to Ben's vision for the wider site, the emphasis will remain firmly on creating something everyone can enjoy, rather than an exclusive retreat reserved solely for adults paying a premium.

Ben adds: "I want kids to be able to have a dip while they wait for their pasta.

"It should be somewhere everyone can enjoy; that's what Kip & Nook has always been about."

It is a simple line that perhaps sums up Ben's philosophy for Kip & Nook better than any carefully crafted mission statement could.

Make it good. Make it beautiful. But make sure people can actually enjoy it.

And if the North is serious about competing with places such as the Cotswolds as somewhere to visit, stay, eat, do business and escape, it needs destinations confident enough to do things their own way.

Kip & Nook feels ambitious without trying to be London, luxurious without being stuffy and, crucially, unmistakably Northern.

Yet for someone with ideas pouring from every pore, Ben's five-year plan is surprisingly simple.

He doesn't want to build Kip & Nook forever.

In fact, he's determined not to.

He says: "I've always said that by the time I'm 40, I want to knock it on the head. Done. Finished."

It is perhaps the most revealing insight into what ultimately drives him.

For all the ambition, constant ideas and seemingly endless appetite to create something new, Ben isn't chasing an empire.

He's chasing freedom.

What he wants instead is remarkably ordinary, but perhaps all the more admirable for it: time with his family, the chance to travel and, most importantly, the opportunity to be present for his boys.

And perhaps that explains why he is moving at such extraordinary speed now.

He adds: "I just want to be a dad. I want to be a good partner, travel the world and enjoy time with my family.

"I'm working so hard now because I know life is a race.

"And when I'm done, I want to be done."

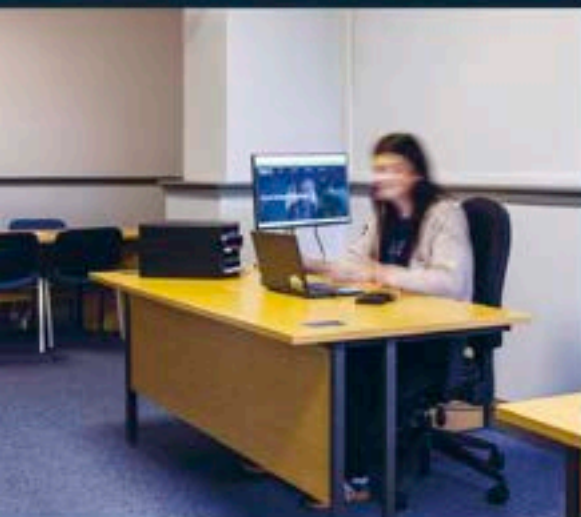
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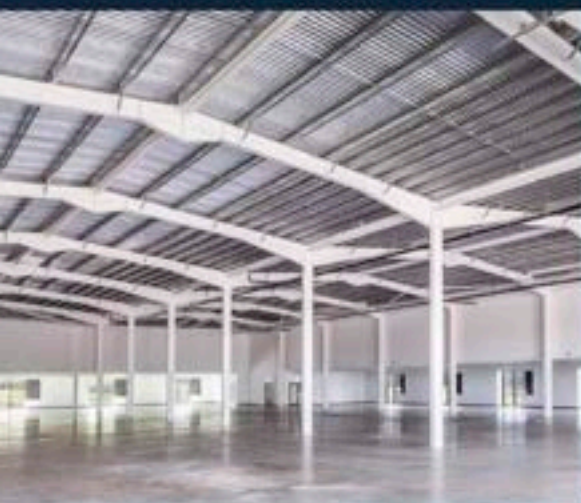
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The Place to Rise

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LinkedIn: Entrepreneurs' Forum

Entrepreneurs, investors, educators and business organisations will come together in November for the inaugural North East Entrepreneurship Week. Led by the Entrepreneurs' Forum, under the banner of The Place to Rise, the regionwide initiative aims to inspire more people to start businesses and help ambitious companies fulfil their growth potential. Here, Entrepreneurs' Forum chief executive Elaine Stroud speaks to Peter Anderson about the programme, the challenges it is seeking to address and her ambition to make a lasting difference.



Entrepreneurs' Forum chief executive Elaine Stroud says the inaugural North East Entrepreneurship Week will encourage more people to start, build and grow businesses

The Austrian-born economist and political scientist Joseph Schumpeter once observed that “the economy does not grow into higher forms by itself”.

A long-time Harvard professor and one of the 20th century's most influential thinkers on entrepreneurship, Schumpeter believed entrepreneurs were fundamental drivers of economic progress – disrupting the status quo through new products, technologies and business models.

It is a theory the North East has spent generations putting into practice.

From the ingenuity that helped power the Industrial Revolution to successive generations of entrepreneurs who have broken new ground, the North East has an extraordinary entrepreneurial inheritance – one synonymous with invention, enterprise and people whose ideas and businesses have quite literally changed the world.

That spirit of enterprise remains very much alive today.

Across the region, ambitious founders are building businesses, developing new technologies and taking North East ideas to national and international markets.

Yet considerable entrepreneurial potential remains untapped.

Today, the North East has 744 businesses for every 10,000 adults, compared to an average of 1062 across England – the lowest rate of any English region.

Just 43 businesses are started for every 10,000 adults in the North East, compared to 60 across England outside London – equating to around 2800 fewer new businesses each year.

Looking to help close that gap is Entrepreneurs' Forum chief executive Elaine Stroud.

This November, Elaine and the organisation will spearhead the inaugural North East Entrepreneurship Week, which will encourage more people to start, build and grow businesses.

Running from November 11 to 20, with N magazine publisher NET as media partner, the initiative will bring together entrepreneurs, investors, educators and business organisations from across the region.

For Elaine, however, the ambition extends far beyond delivering a successful ten-day programme.

At its heart is a much bigger objective: creating the conditions for more North East businesses

to start, scale and ultimately become the multi-million-pound businesses capable of driving the region's economy forward.

Elaine says: “We want to inspire more people to start businesses in the North East and help more of the brilliant businesses we already have to grow.

“We know the talent, ideas and ambition are here.

“What we want to do is harness that, bring people together and show you can start a business here, you can build it here and you can scale it here.”

For Elaine, that ambition has been several years in the making.

Having watched the region's business density – the number of businesses relative to its population – remain stubbornly behind other parts of the country, she began asking what the Entrepreneurs' Forum and its experienced founders could do to help shift the dial.

The answer, she believes, lies partly in making entrepreneurship more visible.

Elaine adds: “We have some fantastic businesses and entrepreneurs in the North East, but we need to shout about them more.

"You look at Greggs, Sage and Fenwick, but where is the next generation coming from to fill those shoes?"

"We need successful entrepreneurs to be more visible and say, 'I've done it here', because that can inspire somebody else to believe they can too."

And the region certainly does not lack the raw ingredients.

From technology and creative companies to advanced manufacturers and businesses at the forefront of energy and healthcare, North East success stories span a diverse range of industries.

Rather than defining its future through any single sector, Elaine believes the region's greatest strength is its ability to create ambitious businesses of every kind.

She adds: "I actually think our speciality is our people.

"We have an enormous amount of experience and people who are hugely passionate about the region.

"If we can channel that energy, share that experience and inspire more people to follow, there is a real opportunity to create something incredibly positive."

Elaine's belief in the North East's ability to create and grow businesses is neatly encapsulated in the banner under which Entrepreneurship Week will take place: The Place to Rise.

The phrase has its roots in NET's *Raising the bar: A blueprint to supercharge North East growth* white paper, in which Castrius Capital Partners' co-founder and chief executive Lee Hartley played an integral role through a series of roundtable discussions.

Elaine says: "Lee talked about the North East being a place where businesses can rise, and it resonated.

"That's what we want this to be about – starting here, growing here and showing you can build a really successful business from the North East."

Shaped around conversations with entrepreneurs and partners, rather than a predetermined programme, its regional reach has also been deliberate.

Activity will span Durham, Newcastle, Sunderland and Middlesbrough, with three national ScaleUp Summits taking place on consecutive days at Ward Hadaway, in Newcastle; Sheepfolds, in Sunderland; and Double Eleven, in Middlesbrough.

Elaine says: "We wanted entrepreneurs everywhere to feel part of it.

"It's North East Entrepreneurship Week, so it has to represent the whole region."

Backed by the ScaleUp Institute's Scale Up Britain campaign, the summits will put entrepreneurs, rather than advisers, centre



Elaine Stroud, Entrepreneurs' Forum chief executive

stage, with at least 25 founders and business leaders sharing their experiences, including Sara Davies, Bill Scott and Paul Callaghan.

ScaleUp Institute chief executive Irene Graham will also provide a national perspective on what the region needs to create more high-growth companies.

Another cornerstone is the Ones to Watch Index, which will showcase 20 emerging businesses to investors at Durham University Business School on November 4.

Supported by British Business Bank and Castrius Capital Partners, the initiative is designed not simply to celebrate promising businesses, but to put them directly in front of investors.

Elaine adds: "Investors are always asking me, 'What's coming through? Who should we be looking at?'

"This gives us something credible that we can take to them and say, 'These are 20 businesses you need to know about'.

"It isn't a marketing list; we want to follow these businesses and see where they are in three or five years' time."

That same emphasis on creating meaningful connections runs throughout the programme.

More than 50 experienced founders have volunteered to visit schools through a partnership with RTC North, while mentoring clinics will connect earlier-stage founders with entrepreneurs who have already navigated many of the challenges they are now facing.

A regionwide fringe programme will also enable organisations to host their own events, while

London Stock Exchange Group will explore how ambitious businesses can access public markets before the North East Entrepreneurial Awards gala dinner on November 19.

The breadth of activity is matched by the coalition behind it, with the Entrepreneurs' Forum working alongside organisations spanning business, finance, education and the public sector.

North Shields, Newcastle and London-based accountancy firm Blu Sky is supporting the campaign as lead partner, with national backing from the ScaleUp Institute and London Stock Exchange Group, while the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority and Tees Valley Combined Authority underline its regionwide ambitions.

NatWest Group and NatWest Accelerator, British Business Bank, RTC North and Castrius Capital are bringing further expertise across entrepreneurship, investment and mentoring, with Newcastle University, FW Capital and Ward Hadaway also supporting the programme.

For all the ambition surrounding its inaugural year, Elaine is realistic that Entrepreneurship Week cannot transform the region's business landscape overnight.

Instead, she sees it as the starting point for something much bigger.

She says: "Success is about bringing everybody together behind the same goal, building momentum and placing entrepreneurs at the heart of it."

And that means making Entrepreneurship Week much more than a one-off.

Elaine adds: "Entrepreneurs helping entrepreneurs has always been at the heart of the Forum, and that's what this is about.

"We're starting with a bit of a splash this year, but we want to build on it every year and create something that genuinely makes a difference."



North East Entrepreneurship Week

Businesses, entrepreneurs and organisations from across the region can get involved by hosting a fringe event, mentoring an early-stage founder, visiting a school or booking a place at one of the summits, workshops and events taking place throughout the week.

Almost all activity is free to access, with priority for summit places given to founders.

Scan the QR code to discover the programme and find out how to get involved, or visit the websites at the top of this article.



Building foundations for stronger communities

Karbon Foundation

www.karbonfoundation.co.uk

LinkedIn: Karbon Foundation

More than just bricks and mortar, housing has the power to transform lives. Here, as North East-headquartered Karbon Homes launches its Karbon Foundation, director Phil Pollard tells N magazine how the new charitable arm will help unlock opportunities, strengthen partnerships and create an even greater impact for people and communities across the region and beyond.



Phil Pollard, Karbon Foundation group director, speaks at the housing provider's charitable arm launch event, which was held at The Common Room, in Newcastle, earlier this year

"Housing associations are more than just bricks and mortar; they're about building communities."

It's a simple statement, but one that sits at the heart of Phil Pollard's belief in the transformative power of social housing providers to impact customers and those living alongside them.

After more than two decades in the housing sector, including five years leading Karbon Homes' customer and community engagement programmes across the North East and Yorkshire, Phil has seen first-hand how housing associations can help people overcome barriers, build skills, improve financial wellbeing and access new opportunities.

Now, Karbon Homes is ready to take the next step in its ambitions, with the launch of Karbon Foundation, a registered charity within the Karbon Group.

Karbon Foundation is designed to build on the housing association's longstanding commitment to community investment,

while creating new opportunities to work in partnerships with more organisations across the region.

Phil, who is taking the lead as the foundation's group director, tells N magazine: "As an anchor institution within the communities we operate, our vision for the Karbon Foundation was to build an organisation that would strengthen our commitment to supporting communities in the region.

"We see first-hand the challenges our communities face, challenges that are only getting more acute as the cost of living continues to rise and access to support services from the third sector becomes more difficult.

"Its creation will really amplify the work of our long-established community engagement and support services, including financial inclusion and employability programmes, community investment and place-shaping initiatives and social value partnerships."

Charitable status will enable the organisation to access previously out of reach grant funding opportunities, which would help boost the impact of its engagement programmes.

Take Karbon Homes' Money Matters team, which has generated around £8 million in income gains for customers in the last financial year alone, helping people maximise their income, access support and improve financial stability.

Phil says: "Accessing our Money Matters service has the potential to have a huge, often life-changing impact on residents.

"It makes a big difference to individual lives and the wider economy too.

"If we look at just that team, with additional grant funding through Karbon Foundation, we could really grow that support and extend it to more people across the region who need help."

But, as Phil makes clear, funding is just one piece of the puzzle.

He says: "Though it does open up new avenues for us, it's not just about bringing in funding.

"What excites me most is the potential to expand the number of partner organisations we

work with, achieving more collectively than we could alone.

“A lot of individuals, organisations and community groups were unaware they could access support from, or work with Karbon Homes, because either they didn’t live in a Karbon home or they didn’t work directly with Karbon customers.

“But through the foundation, we’ll be able to make what we do more accessible and open doors to new partnerships, which both strengthen and extend our offer and help build the offerings of others.”

That collaborative spirit was on display at the foundation’s launch event, where housing providers, charities, community groups, contractors and businesses came together to explore opportunities for future partnership working.

For Phil, those relationships will be key to driving meaningful change.

Taking employment and skills as an example, one of the foundation’s major areas of focus, Phil says: “We’re committed to helping people get ready for work, or to get back into work, supporting them to take that next step on the ladder.

“Partnership working is key in providing a more comprehensive, tailored support system, which leads to better outcomes for those in need.”

One example is Karbon’s Step into Driving programme, developed with County Durham coach company Stanley Travel and Jobcentre Plus.

Participants are supported through their driving theory test and on to gaining a driving licence, before progressing to bus and coach driver training, with successful candidates offered employment by Stanley Travel.

Phil says: “Step into Driving is a fantastic example of partners identifying a local need and coming together to pool expertise and resources to support residents.

“The process of becoming a bus driver is one with multiple steps, one that any single partner would struggle to take someone through from start to finish.

“But together, we’ve achieved fantastic outcomes that are making a tangible difference to lives long-term.”

Karbon Foundation is now exploring how similar partnership-led programmes can be developed with other employers or training providers and skills organisations across the region.

Karbon’s approach to social value is another strong example of the power of partnership working.

Using its spending power to create wider benefits for its communities, the foundation works with Karbon’s contractors and suppliers



Phil Pollard, Karbon Foundation group director, far left, hosts an event at The Common Room, in Newcastle, earlier this year to officially launch the housing provider’s new charitable arm

to deliver benefits that go beyond financial investment and are rooted in local need, making a meaningful difference to people’s lives.

In the last year alone, Karbon unlocked £5.7 million of contributions, which has been channelled through the foundation to help turn social value commitments into opportunities.

For Phil, the principle is straightforward.

He says: “It all comes down to where we can make the biggest impact for customers and communities.

“Whether that’s offering apprenticeship opportunities, donating volunteer hours or contributing time and materials to support community projects, through the foundation we can ensure every contribution made has the greatest possible impact.”

And Phil has a clear message for organisations that share the foundation’s ambition to create lasting social impact in the North East.

He adds: “Through Karbon Foundation, we’re making a call to arms.

“We want to hear from charities, community groups, other foundations, training providers, skills groups, colleges and local employers – we want to work with you.

“We want to help create the conditions people need to move forward with confidence and achieve.

“That’s what Karbon’s customer and community engagement has always been about.”

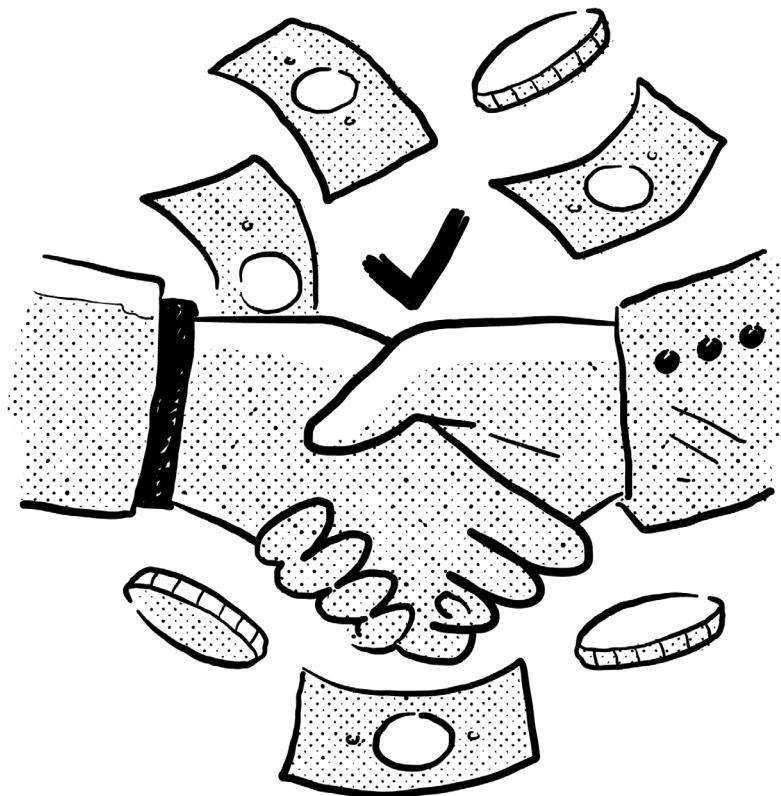


Karbon Foundation

For more information about Karbon Homes’ services and the support provided by Karbon Foundation, visit the website at the top of this article.

Forging a new future for Britain's steel industry

The Government entered the summer Parliamentary recess heralding its decision to nationalise British Steel, which ministers say will “safeguard a vital national capability”. While much of the attention focused on the operator’s flagship Scunthorpe works, the deal also carries significant implications for the North East, where hundreds of people are employed at the Teesside Beam Mill, near Redcar, which produces large steel sections for the construction industry, and a special profiles plant in Skinningrove, East Cleveland, which makes parts for the construction, earthmoving, forklift and mining sectors. How do you view British Steel’s return to public ownership? What could the move mean for its North East operations, and do you believe it will provide the UK steel industry with the long-term stability, investment and confidence the Government has pledged?



Join the discussion

Scan the QR code below to visit our LinkedIn page and add your thoughts to the conversation.





Tania Cooper
Managing director,
Steel Benders UK
Chair, North East STEM
Foundation

Securing vital industrial capability

The Government's intervention recognises steel as a strategic national asset, particularly at a time when the UK is investing in energy, transport, defence and major construction projects.

From a project delivery perspective, the priority isn't ownership in itself, but ensuring we have a stable, competitive domestic steel industry capable of supporting these programmes in the long-term.

For the North East, the implications are significant.

The Teesside Beam Mill produces the large structural steel sections used in buildings, bridges and infrastructure projects, while the Skinningrove plant manufactures specialised hot-rolled steel sections and profiles.

Protecting these capabilities is about preserving skills and expertise that are difficult to replace once lost.

Nationalisation must be viewed as a beginning, rather

than an end, of the process.

It offers the opportunity to secure vital industrial capability, but lasting success depends on sustained investment, modernisation and a clear commercial strategy.

Otherwise, the risk is that nationalisation simply postpones the sector's underlying challenges.

For those delivering major infrastructure and energy projects, certainty is critical.

Reliable access to UK-produced steel can strengthen supply chain resilience and reduce delivery risk, but it needs to remain commercially competitive.

The real measure of success will be whether nationalisation creates a stronger, more sustainable steel industry that gives investors, contractors and the wider supply chain confidence to invest, plan and deliver at scale.



Duncan Hedley
Managing director
Berger Closures

Providing confidence to be a world leader

As a company that uses steel for many of our products, the return of British Steel to public ownership is certainly positive.

Although we purchase from a cutting mill, rather than directly from the steel producers, we still want it to be British and as cost-effective as possible to buy.

And it's the cost of steel which isn't clear at the moment – how will this move impact what we pay?

We will be watching the market closely to see how things develop.

We also hope that having British Steel back in public ownership will not only bring financial benefits to companies like ours, but also some stability to the UK industry, which includes the Teesside Beam Mill.

It will be interesting too to see whether there are any developments with the Tata Steel plant in South Wales.

It was shut last year with plans to convert it into an electrical furnace, but it is possible that the British Steel decision will prompt a review of the situation in Port Talbot.

The ideal situation for manufacturers which rely on steel would be having both British Steel and Tata Steel producing in the UK.

It would make the market more competitive, with the price of steel likely to drop.

Britain is synonymous with steel production, and the North East has a proud history of supplying steel to some of the world's most recognisable landmarks, including The Shard in London and the new World Trade Centre.

If the Government's decision restores confidence that we can once again be a world leader in its production, the move will have paid off.



Hay & Kilner at 80: Honouring North East heritage, while investing in Teesside's future

With a history stretching back 80 years, law firm Hay & Kilner has played a longstanding role in the North East's business community. That heritage is being matched by fresh ambition, with investment in technology and people development designed to support growth for decades to come.



www.hay-kilner.co.uk

LinkedIn: Hay & Kilner

Instagram: hay_kilner



Pictured, from left to right, are solicitor Maryam Ahmed, managing partner Jonathan Waters and partner David Bradshaw

As Hay & Kilner celebrates its 80th anniversary, the Newcastle-headquartered law firm is looking firmly to the future, combining record financial performance with ambitious plans for growth, investment and regional expansion.

Founded in 1946, the independent firm has spent eight decades supporting businesses, organisations and individuals across the North East.

Today, employing more than 130 people and recording its strongest financial performance to date, it is embarking on the next chapter of its history with a clear ambition: to deepen its presence across the region, while remaining true to the values that have underpinned its success for generations.

Central to that vision is the opening of a new office at Preston Farm, in Stockton-on-Tees, which has created a permanent base in a part of the region where the firm has advised clients for many years.

For managing partner Jonathan Waters, the investment is a natural evolution, rather than a change in direction.

He says: "Reaching our 80th anniversary is a real milestone for everyone at Hay & Kilner.

"It gives us the chance to reflect on how far we've come, but also to think about where we're going next.

"We've been part of the North East for eight decades, and we're enormously proud of that.

"The relationships we've built over that time are incredibly important to us and have helped shape the firm we are today.

"Teesside has been part of that story for many years, so opening a permanent office there feels like a very natural step."

Investing where opportunity is growing

Few parts of the North East have experienced such significant economic transformation in recent years as Teesside.

Major investment in clean energy, advanced manufacturing, offshore industries, logistics and regeneration has helped position the area as one of the UK's fastest-growing regional economies.

And Hay & Kilner believes long-term investment should mirror that momentum.

Rather than simply servicing clients from its Newcastle base, the firm's new Stockton-on-Tees office will allow lawyers to work more closely with businesses already operating in the area, while creating opportunities to develop new relationships across the region.

It's an approach Jonathan says has always been central to the firm.

He says: "Our business is all about people, and I'm a huge believer that the strongest relationships are built by spending time with clients, understanding what matters to them and being there whenever they need us.

"There is huge investment happening across Teesside, but what really excites me are the people behind it.

"There are some fantastic businesses and ambitious individuals, and we're really looking forward to supporting them and becoming a bigger part of the community."

Built by people

While the firm's financial performance provides plenty to celebrate, Jonathan believes Hay & Kilner's greatest strength remains its people.

Indeed, that people-first approach was recognised when Hay & Kilner received the Employer of the Year title at the North East Chamber of Commerce Inspiring Women in Business Awards.

The recognition reflected the firm's ongoing commitment to creating an inclusive workplace where people can build rewarding and long-term careers.

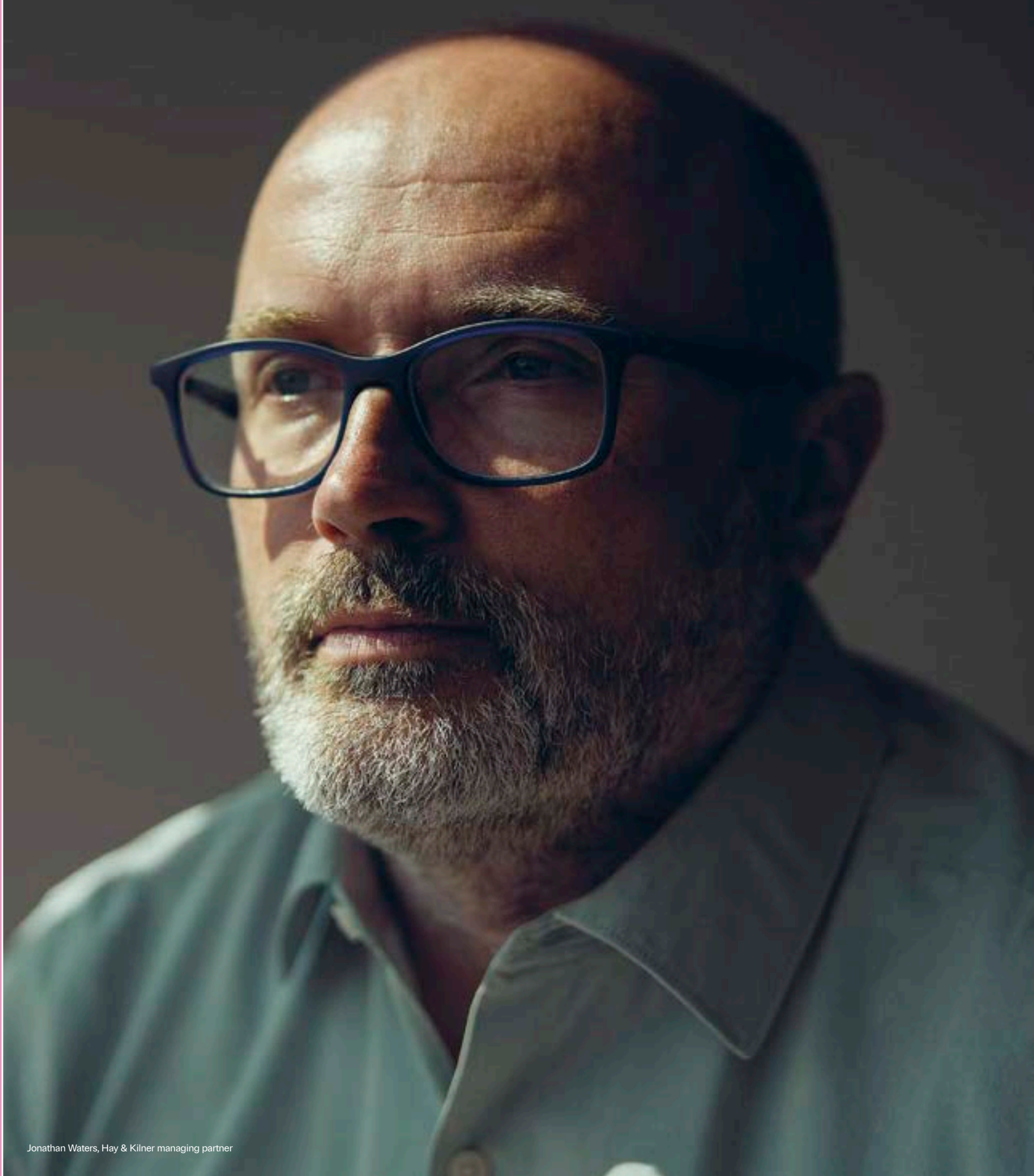
Over the past 12 months, the firm has welcomed 24 new colleagues, including experienced partners Kate Fenwick, Andrew Steel and Sean Jackson, strengthening expertise across a number of practice areas.

At the same time, Hay & Kilner continues to value the loyalty and experience of colleagues who have helped shape the business over many years.

Among them is David Bradshaw, who has been with the firm for more than 50 years.



Jennifer Boynton, Hay & Kilner senior associate, left, with associate James Stacey



Jonathan Waters, Hay & Kilner managing partner



His career reflects a culture where people are encouraged to build long-term careers, develop specialist expertise and pass that knowledge to the next generation.

For Jonathan, who joined Hay & Kilner as a trainee more than 28 years ago, the firm's greatest strength has always been its people.

He says: "One of the things I've always loved about Hay & Kilner is that people really enjoy working here, and because of that they choose to stay.

"When I joined as a trainee, I was struck by the culture and the sense of community, and I can honestly say I still feel exactly the same way today.

"People like David have helped build the firm into what it is – you simply cannot put a value on that kind of knowledge, experience and loyalty.

"Equally, it's about bringing in talented new colleagues with fresh ideas and perspectives.

"Getting the balance between experience and new energy is what makes Hay & Kilner such an exciting and great place to be."

Looking beyond recruitment

Investment in people extends beyond experienced hires.

Hay & Kilner has continued to strengthen its trainee programme, recognising that developing talent is essential to the firm's future and the wider legal profession.

Maryam Ahmed recently qualified into Hay & Kilner's commercial property team after completing her training contract with the firm.

Maryam says the opportunity to train at an independent North East firm gave her the chance to gain experience across a broad range

of work, while learning from colleagues with decades of expertise.

She says: "From the moment I joined Hay & Kilner, I felt part of the team.

"Throughout my training, I was trusted with meaningful work and encouraged to learn from experienced colleagues, who were genuinely invested in my development.

"Knowing I'm building my career at a firm that is continuing to grow and invest in the North East is really exciting.

"It shows there are fantastic opportunities here for graduates who want to develop their careers without leaving the region."

Supporting early careers is a longstanding priority for the firm, which continues to invest in trainee solicitors and professional development across every stage of a legal career.

Culture through growth

As Hay & Kilner has expanded, maintaining its culture has become just as important as increasing turnover.

Jonathan believes sustainable growth depends on creating an environment where people enjoy coming to work, collaborate effectively and feel able to build fulfilling long-term careers.

He says: "Growth is important, but only if we do it in the right way.

"We've worked so hard over the years to build a culture that people genuinely enjoy being part of, and that is something we'll always protect.

"As the business grows, keeping that sense of community becomes even more important.

"We want Hay & Kilner to remain a place where people feel valued, supported and able to build long and rewarding careers."

Just getting started

For many businesses, an anniversary is an opportunity to look backwards.

For Hay & Kilner, though, it is equally a chance to look forward.

The firm's Teesside investment reflects confidence in its future, but confidence too in the wider North East economy.

Combined with continued recruitment, investment in technology and a commitment to developing future talent, it represents the next chapter for one of the region's longest-established independent law firms.

Jonathan sees the firm's heritage as a foundation, rather than a finish line.

He adds: "We've been part of the North East for 80 years, and we're incredibly proud of the role we've played in its story so far.

"As we look ahead, we're excited to strengthen our presence across the region, continue investing in our people and support the businesses, families and communities that have supported us for so many years.

"The first 80 years have been a privilege, and we can't wait to see where the next chapter takes us."



Hay & Kilner marked its 80th anniversary with an event that celebrated its trusted position within the North East's business community



Hay & Kilner

For more information about Hay & Kilner's portfolio of legal support, its Teesside office investment and its commitment to employee progression, visit the website at the top of this article or call 0191 232 8345.

A record-breaking festival of innovation

Northumbrian Water Group

www.nwl.co.uk

LinkedIn: NWG (Northumbrian Water Group)

Northumbrian Water Group recently marked the tenth anniversary of its flagship Innovation Festival, with the milestone event once again delivering celebration, collaboration and no little creativity. Here, the organisation tells N magazine more, reflecting on a record-breaking festival and how the ideas it sparked are primed to shape the water industry of tomorrow.

Teams worked at pace during this year's Innovation Festival, filling more than 133,000 recyclable Post-it Notes with ideas, observations and solutions

The tenth iteration of Northumbrian Water's flagship Innovation Festival came to an end in record-breaking fashion earlier this summer.

But while the tents have been packed away, the hard work is only just beginning.

More than 3500 innovators, industry experts, students, businesses and creatives put their minds together at Newcastle Racecourse in July for the largest and most impactful event in the festival's history.

What started a decade ago as an ambitious water industry experiment has grown tenfold into one of the UK's most iconic innovation events.

The milestone festival saw four action-packed days of music, entertainment and ideas, as Newcastle Racecourse was transformed into a hub of creativity.

Innovators from sectors including utilities, local authority, technology, construction and more worked side by side in design sprints, sharing expertise, challenging traditional thinking and developing ideas designed to address some of society's most pressing issues.

From improving river health and reducing the impact of storm overflows, the sprints also explored the potential of sustainable artificial intelligence and developing new approaches to customer support.

With scores of people on site adorned in face paint and neon clothing, the appearance reflected the atmosphere, which was alight with determination and optimism.

Teams worked at pace, filling more than 133,000 recyclable Post-it Notes with ideas, observations and solutions.

Every wall, table and workspace became a visual representation of collective creativity as participants pushed themselves to think differently and find new ways forward.

For Angela MacOscar, head of innovation at Northumbrian Water, the tenth festival represented a fitting celebration of everything the event has achieved over the last decade.

She says: "This year's festival was simply phenomenal.

"The energy, creativity and determination from everyone involved was incredible to see, and it felt like the perfect way to celebrate ten years of the Innovation Festival.

"What has always made the festival special is the willingness of people from different organisations, backgrounds and industries to come together and tackle challenges collectively.

"This year proved once again that when passionate people unite behind a shared purpose, amazing things can happen."

That spirit of collaboration has been the hallmark of the Innovation Festival since its launch.

Rather than relying on traditional conference formats where ideas are discussed – but rarely developed – the festival focuses on rapid innovation.

Participants work intensively in sprint teams, developing concepts that can be tested, refined and ultimately implemented after the event itself has ended – a process that is starting now.



This year generated a host of promising ideas with the potential to deliver real-world benefits.

One concept saw the creation of a rapid test-and-learn asset management innovation hub, which is set to revolutionise the way innovation can be adopted at pace.

It will help new and exciting technologies to be trialled quickly and with lower levels of risk, and could accelerate the adoption of innovations faster than ever before.

Another sprint focused on transforming capital design processes, reducing the delivery time of projects from 18 months to just one.

As expected, artificial intelligence emerged as a major theme throughout the week.

Multiple sprint teams examined how it could help organisations work smarter and better serve customers.

Among the ideas explored were applications that could improve the efficiency of water meter installations, as well as new systems capable of helping teams make faster, more informed operational decisions.

One of the ideas involved the creation of 'synthetic audiences' – artificial intelligence-driven models that can predict customer responses and behaviours before campaigns are launched.

Such technology could help organisations refine engagement strategies and improve participation of local communities with marketing campaigns.

Another idea set out an artificial intelligence assessment framework that scores the energy use of the technology – with ethics, human impact, value, sustainability and feasibility – before grading it from A to G like a fridge label.

While innovation was at the heart of every

sprint, the festival also continued its tradition of inspiring participants through a diverse programme of guest speakers.

This year's line-up included Britpop icon and Blur bassist Alex James, TV Gladiator and former rugby union player Jodie 'Fury' Ounsley, pioneering astronaut Helen Sharman and legendary ski jumper Eddie 'the Eagle' Edwards.

Their stories of resilience, creativity and determination provided additional inspiration for attendees as they tackled challenges throughout the week.

The variety of speakers reflected the festival's core philosophy that innovation can come from anywhere.

Whether from science, sport, music, business or community organisations, diverse perspectives often prove essential in generating breakthrough ideas.

Yet for Northumbrian Water, the true measure of success extends far beyond attendance figures, celebrity speakers or even the thousands of ideas generated during the week.

The real value lies in what happens next.

Many of the concepts developed at previous festivals have gone on to become funded projects, operational improvements and industry-leading initiatives, such as the National Underground Asset Register, which was adopted by the Government, as well as Smart Skies, Healthy Waters, Smart Sewers and River Deep Mountain AI.

Organisers hope this year's ideas will follow the same path, evolving from sketches on Post-it Notes into practical solutions delivering tangible benefits for people and the environment.

Angela says: "The real success of the Innovation Festival isn't measured by what happens during



This year's Innovation Festival included guest speakers such as legendary ski jumper Eddie 'the Eagle' Edwards

the week itself, but by what happens next.

"The ideas generated over the five days won't stay in the sprint tents, they'll continue to evolve, be tested and become solutions that make a real difference for customers, communities and the environment.

"Ten years on, I'm more convinced than ever that collaboration is one of the most powerful tools we have for creating positive change.

"The latest festival showed the power of ten in action."

As the event celebrated its tenth anniversary, the record-breaking turnout and extraordinary level of participation suggest its influence is continuing to grow.

More importantly, it demonstrates that when organisations are willing to share knowledge, challenge convention and work together toward common goals, innovation can move beyond theory and become a powerful force for positive change.

Ten years after its launch, Northumbrian Water's Innovation Festival remains a vivid reminder that some of the best ideas emerge when people come together and imagine a better future.



Northumbrian Water Group

To find out more about Northumbrian Water, the services it provides and the organisation's flagship Innovation Festival, visit the website at the top of this article.



Building Newcastle's future brick-by-brick

Invest Newcastle

www.investnewcastle.com

invest@experiencenee.co.uk

For more than a decade, Invest Newcastle has led a delegation of public and private sector organisations to MIPIM. One of the world's largest real estate forums, the event unites dozens of businesses in the real estate supply chain to showcase the city's shared vision to an audience of global investors from more than 90 countries.

Invest Newcastle is an award-winning investment promotion agency dedicated to driving economic growth by securing investment. It is led by Newcastle City Council and Gateshead Council in collaboration with Experience North East England.

Here, N magazine speaks to Jen Hartley, assistant director of capital investment and growth at Newcastle City Council, about how the city's story is developing and what ambitions for the future look like.

Cranes have felt like a constant presence across Newcastle's skyline over the past five years. How would you say Newcastle has transformed in that time?

It's been incredible to see and not without its challenges, but we're a city that doesn't stand still. Our focus has been on making sure that our residents have exceptional places to work and good quality places to live.

Particularly around the city centre, we've seen the weaving of culture, heritage and innovation come to fruition through the thoughtful transformation of Pilgrim Street. The development has maintained so many heritage features, but has brought vibrancy back into the east of the city centre too.

More care is also being put into public realm. The £50 million city centre transformation has added more outdoor seating, trees and planting to the city and reimaged the beloved Grainger Market, which is being rediscovered as a dynamic shopping, culinary and experiential destination. And the most exciting part is that

this is only the beginning; transformational schemes like Forth Yards and City Campus East are still to come.

What story does Newcastle want to tell the international property market at MIPIM 2027?

From welcoming the Mercury Prize back to the city in October, following its incredible success last year, to the up-and-coming opening of Quayside Music Studios and as a host city for the UEFA Euro 2028 tournament, Newcastle is a culturally significant city that is driving forward innovative, creative and knowledge-based industries. Our creative industries are the fastest growing in the UK, and our space sector is making real strides with the North East Space Skills & Technology Centre (NESST) due to open imminently at Northumbria University.

We are looking for investors that are aligned with our ambition, that want to be part of the next phase of our transformation – as a global competitor for impactful and sustainable investment.



Jen Hartley, Newcastle City Council assistant director of capital investment and growth



MIPIM is a huge event with more than 20,000 attendees each year. How does the city make itself stand out to investors?

Each year, people pull me aside to comment on how impressive our delegation is. Every one of our partners is bought into the vision; they're passionate about the city and are our biggest ambassadors.

Investors also appreciate the access to our key decision makers. There have been a number of projects and schemes that have come to fruition as a result of conversations that initially took place at MIPIM.

Where are some of the major opportunities for investors and developers to get involved?

Recent research has revealed how tightly supplied our Grade A office market is, with only two years of supply currently in the pipeline. This is one of our biggest opportunities. We know we have the demand, so we now need bold investors to work with us to meet it.

The forthcoming UEFA Euro 2028 tournament will be hosted in the city at the iconic St James' Park and will see thousands of European fans visit our city. We currently have around 14,000 hotel beds, so there is a major opportunity for us to build out our hotel stock.

How will you be showcasing these at MIPIM this year?

We'll be discussing our Strategic Regeneration Framework, which sets out the city's vision and maps the pipeline of opportunities including major residential and mixed-use schemes.

It also highlights the growth of our future industries, with projects such as NESST strengthening our position in space and technological innovation.

What role does the private sector play in the city's story?

The private sector, from developers, architects, construction companies through to law firms and education providers, plays an integral role in shaping Newcastle's future. It provides the expertise that take projects from vision to reality, benefitting our residents, businesses and the local economy.

Our presence at MIPIM is a real reflection of this. Our combined ambition and passion is hard to ignore. The event continues to play a role in cultivating our international relationships and supercharging development in the city. I look forward to bringing together our private sector again to showcase the best of Newcastle.



Invest Newcastle

MIPIM 2027 will take place between March 16 and 19. For more information, and to register your interest in joining the Newcastle delegation, contact the email address at the top of this article.

ROUNDTABLE

Creating the infrastructure of opportunity

Building a better tomorrow

One need only travel across the Redheugh Bridge or the new Wear Footbridge to witness the scale of transformation sweeping across the North East. From the £950 million Forth Yards scheme and Riverside Sunderland's ambitious redevelopment of the former Vaux brewery site to the opening of Stockton's Waterfront Urban Park, the region is undergoing one of the most significant periods of regeneration in its recent history, fuelled by devolution and backed by billions of pounds of public and private investment.

Yet while the cranes on the skyline point to progress, the built environment sector faces a series of significant challenges. An ageing workforce, persistent skills shortages, rapidly evolving technologies, net-zero ambitions and ever-increasing demand for new homes and infrastructure are placing unprecedented pressure on the industry.

At the same time, employers, educators and professional bodies are grappling with how best to attract, develop and retain the talent needed to turn that ambition into reality.

Here, in a roundtable discussion hosted by Northumbria University alongside N magazine publisher NET, senior figures from industry, education and regional organisations explore how greater collaboration could lay foundations for a proposed North East Built Environment Futures Alliance – a regional forum that builds on the considerable strengths already present across the North East, connecting existing initiatives, expertise and partnerships to create the conditions for a more coordinated and responsive education system.

This is an abridged version of the full roundtable discussion, which you can read by visiting N magazine's sister publication Bdaily at www.bdaily.co.uk

What are the biggest challenges facing the North East's built environment sector?

The Government's pledge to "get Britain building again" has placed construction firmly at the centre of its economic agenda.

Alongside plans to deliver 1.5 million new homes in England by the end of this Parliament, ministers have promised to accelerate infrastructure investment, reform the planning system and unlock growth through regeneration and development.

Yet after years of political volatility, a constant revolving door in Westminster and successive shifts in policy direction, the sector continues to contend with uncertainty alongside long-standing workforce and skills challenges.

Against that backdrop, roundtable members examined the structural challenges facing the sector and considered whether the industry's greatest obstacle is not a lack of opportunity, but rather its ability to organise, develop and connect the people needed to deliver it.

For Mark Gardham, sector director at building and infrastructure company Sir Robert McAlpine, many of the sector's challenges stem from a lack of confidence.

He said: "The visibility of the pipeline has been one of the biggest challenges throughout my career.

"Businesses are far more willing to invest in people, skills and innovation when they have confidence that work is coming – but too many projects continue to be delayed because the economic conditions simply aren't there."

The sentiment was echoed by Mark Thompson, principal and managing director at Ryder Architecture, the Newcastle-headquartered employee-owned practice behind major regeneration and placemaking projects such as The Spark at Newcastle Helix, who suggested political consistency is just as important as financial investment.

He added: "One of the biggest frustrations for the industry has been the constant change in direction.

"Businesses need stability.

"Whether it's apprenticeships, procurement or skills policy, businesses need a stable framework they can plan around."

However, participants agreed uncertainty alone does not explain the scale of the challenge.

They argued the construction sector's fragmented structure, dominated by thousands of predominantly small businesses, often limits investment in innovation, research and workforce development, while making collaboration far more difficult.

Professor Paul Jones, professor of architecture at Northumbria University, said: "Around 95 per cent of construction companies employ fewer than five people.

"That creates a very fragmented industry.

"Until we address that structural challenge, many of the issues we're discussing will remain."

Roundtable members also highlighted the pace of change facing the sector.

Alongside delivering more homes and infrastructure, employers are preparing for digital transformation, modern methods of construction, net-zero requirements and the growing influence of artificial intelligence.

For Leanne Nicholson, digital adoption manager at global engineering and infrastructure consultancy Mott MacDonald, the challenge extends beyond simply recruiting more people into the industry.

She said: "We need to build a workforce that's adaptable, digitally confident and ready for changing technologies, artificial intelligence and new ways of working.

"Continuous learning, collaboration and innovation are becoming just as important as technical expertise."

However, participants questioned whether the industry is doing enough, not only to attract the next generation, but to retain them too.

While colleges and universities continue to recruit students to construction-related courses, too many fail to complete their training or ultimately pursue careers elsewhere.

And with competition for talent intensifying across every sector, roundtable members argued the industry must become easier to navigate and that more needs to be done to communicate the breadth of careers available, as well as challenging outdated perceptions.

Simon Cassells, account manager at CBRE Global Workplace Solutions, which works with Northumbria University to manage and maintain its campus estate, said: "Why would a young person today choose construction?



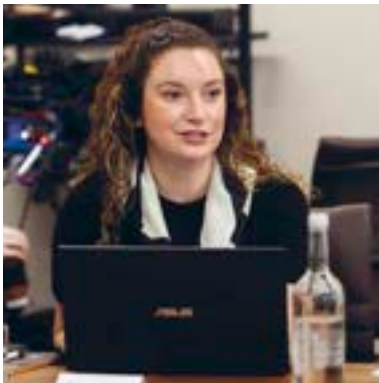
"Sometimes, it's not about creating entirely new degree programmes, but offering smaller courses, CPD and lifelong learning opportunities that respond much more quickly to industry needs"

Professor Niraj Thurairajah
Professor in built environment
Northumbria University





Dr Susan Dawson, Northumbria University associate professor, educational partnerships lead, chats to Ryan Doyle, Building Design Northern director of operations, ahead of the built environment roundtable



“There’s already a huge amount of good work taking place across the region; we need to share what works and make it easier for employers, colleges and universities to work together, rather than duplicating effort”

Rebecca Storey
Regional construction skills director
North East Construction Technical
Excellence College

“Unless we can answer that question with confidence, we’re always going to struggle to attract the people we need.

“We have to recognise that careers don’t have to follow a single path.

“There are opportunities to move between construction, maintenance and other parts of the built environment that we perhaps don’t talk about enough.”

That point was reinforced by Stuart Miller, director at Civil Engineering Contractors Association (North East).

He added: “One of the biggest barriers is that the industry can be difficult to navigate.

“Opportunities often aren’t visible, the language can be impenetrable and too many careers remain hidden from the people we’re trying to attract.

“Construction has an incredible story to tell – we need to do a better job of telling it.”

Why does the disconnect between education and industry still exist – and how can it be bridged?

The construction sector has long wrestled with the challenge of attracting and retaining enough skilled people.

Yet as the Construction Industry Training Board’s Industry Picture 2026 report makes clear, the sector’s greatest challenge is no longer simply recruiting more workers, but better connecting workforce planning, education, training and employer demand to meet future need.

That diagnosis resonated strongly with roundtable members, who argued the challenge is not a lack of activity, but a lack of alignment.

For Dr Susan Dawson, associate professor, educational partnerships lead at Northumbria University, the conversation needs to move beyond talking about skills shortages and focus on creating a system that supports the region’s long-term workforce ambitions.

She said: “We have employers who want to work with education and examples of partnerships that work incredibly well, but we’re not yet connecting those successes or making them easy to access.

“It’s about creating a system that’s simpler, more collaborative and aligned with what the region actually needs.”

That view was reiterated by Rebecca Storey, regional construction skills director at North East Construction Technical Excellence College, the training centre led by Sunderland College and based at the Housing Innovation and Construction Skills Academy in the Riverside Sunderland regeneration development.

The greater challenge, she suggested, is ensuring education providers receive clear and consistent guidance from industry about the skills employers will need in the years ahead.

Rebecca said: “Education responds when industry tells us what’s needed.

“We’ve invested in new equipment, developed new courses and adapted provision before, but we need confidence that demand is there.

“Sometimes the message from industry is clear, but just as often different parts of the sector are asking for different things, which makes it difficult to plan with certainty.”

From a higher education perspective, Professor Niraj Thurairajah, professor in built environment at Northumbria University, said uncertainty presents similar challenges.

He said: “We need a better understanding of where the demand is going to come from.

“Sometimes, it’s not about creating entirely new degree programmes, but offering smaller courses, CPD and lifelong learning opportunities that respond much more quickly to industry needs.

“To do that, education and industry have to plan together, rather than in isolation.”

Roundtable members agreed employers have an equally important role to play in shaping future talent by helping influence curricula, offering meaningful work experience and exposing students to careers across the built environment.

Greg Humphreyson, associate director at Sunderland-headquartered multi-disciplinary construction consultancy Identity Consult, said: “Employers have a responsibility to play a much more active role in education.

“Whether that’s through guest lectures, helping shape courses or engaging directly with students, we can produce more rounded professionals by bringing real-world experience into the classroom.”

Greg went on to highlight the value of meaningful work placements, suggesting they provide students with a far better understanding of the profession than can be gained through formal education alone.

He added: “The earlier we can expose students to the realities of the profession, the better prepared they’ll be when they graduate.

“At the same time, it gives employers the opportunity to build relationships with future talent, identify potential recruits and help shape the workforce the industry will need in the years ahead.”

For Ryan Doyle, director of operations at Building Design Northern, the Sunderland and Ulverston-based architectural and engineering practice behind Sheepfolds Stables and the award-winning restoration of Simpson Street School, greater collaboration is already beginning to demonstrate its value.

Drawing on Building Design Northern’s experience of hosting T-Level students, Ryan said: “We’ve found T-Level placements incredibly valuable because students get to experience different parts of the business, rather than seeing just one profession.

“That exposure helps them understand what’s possible, identify where their interests lie and often opens their eyes to career opportunities they didn’t know existed.”

How can the North East build a more connected built environment ecosystem?

The North East’s devolution deal has handed the region greater influence over economic development, investment and skills than at any point in its recent history.

Coupled with significant regeneration programmes and the Government’s ambition to accelerate housebuilding and infrastructure delivery, devolution presents what many participants described as a once-in-a-generation opportunity for the North East to shape its own built environment workforce.

However, while examples of successful collaboration exist across the region, roundtable members suggested much of that activity remains confined to individual organisations, projects and initiatives, with the discussion turning to how those efforts could be better connected.

Mark Thompson said success will depend on organisations thinking beyond their own immediate needs and embracing a more collaborative approach.

He said: “We’ve been given a real opportunity through devolution, and we have to seize it.

“We’re still educating people in silos, but we’re constructing buildings in very different ways.

“If we’re training people, we’re training them for the industry, not just for one company, and that requires a much more joined-up approach.”

Prof Jones added: “The built environment touches almost every aspect of our lives, yet we rarely present it that way.

“We should be helping young people understand the whole ecosystem and creating a stronger foundation that connects education, industry and the region’s long-term ambitions.”

Participants agreed achieving that vision does not necessarily require new organisations or entirely new initiatives.

Nicola Komzolik-Nawn, senior social sustainability manager at construction and infrastructure company BAM UK & Ireland, said: “There is already some fantastic work happening across the North East, but too often we’re working in parallel, rather than together.

“If we can bring those conversations together, share ideas and learn from one another, we’ll have a far greater impact than if every

organisation continues trying to solve the same challenges independently.”

Prof Thurairajah added: “If education, industry and regional partners are sharing knowledge and actively planning together, we’re far better placed to respond to future demand and create opportunities that benefit the whole sector.”

What practical steps are needed to turn collaboration into coordinated action?

While roundtable members broadly agreed on the challenges facing the sector, there was equal consensus the North East does not need another talking shop.

Instead, attention turned to the practical actions, partnerships and leadership needed to ensure the proposed North East Built Environment Futures Alliance becomes a catalyst for translating shared ambition into measurable impact.

For Mark Gardham, that means resisting the temptation to tackle every challenge at once.

He argued the Alliance should instead focus on identifying a small number of achievable priorities capable of demonstrating tangible progress, while building confidence among partners.

He said: “We don’t need to solve everything overnight.

“If we can identify a handful of workstreams, bring together the right people and demonstrate real progress, that creates momentum.

“If we position construction as one of the driving forces behind ‘North East PLC’, people will begin to understand the role the sector plays in generating economic growth.”

Rebecca argued the foundations for a more connected sector already exist, with the challenge now to bring them together more effectively.

She said: “There’s already a huge amount of good work taking place across the region.

“We need to share what works and make it easier for employers, colleges and universities to work together, rather than duplicating effort.”

Nicola said: “We’ve got an opportunity to create something that’s genuinely collaborative, but we have to keep the momentum going.

“By sharing ideas, learning from one another and presenting a more consistent message, we can achieve far more together than we ever could individually.”

Dr Dawson added: “We’ve already got many of the right people around the table and a genuine willingness to work together.

“The challenge now is to keep building those relationships, connect the fantastic work that’s already happening and create something that delivers real value for industry, education and the next generation.”



Greg Humphreyson, Identity Consult associate director, chats to Leanne Nicholson, Mott MacDonald digital adoption manager

Getting businesses their due: How Muckle's commercial debt recovery team is protecting cash flow

Muckle LLP

www.muckle-llp.com

LinkedIn: Muckle LLP

With late payments continuing to halt organisations' progress, law firm Muckle LLP's expert debt recovery team is ensuring more companies are securing monies owed to protect their financial positions and support growth plans. Here, Colin Churchward, the firm's head of commercial debt recovery, and associate solicitor Amy Carlton tell N magazine how its market-leading support is helping clients overcome payment challenges, unlock growth and build long-term success.

Healthy cash flow is the engine of any successful business.

For the approximately 166,000 small and medium-sized enterprises operating across the North East, timely payments are a key factor in enabling businesses to reinvest, expand and innovate.

As rising levels of late payments drive increased demand for debt recovery support, leading law firm for businesses Muckle LLP has significantly invested in its commercial debt recovery team, strengthening its ability to provide businesses with expert, strategic support.

Ranked Tier 1 by the Legal 500 for more than 20 years, Muckle's commercial debt recovery team has welcomed paralegals James Daggett and Chloe Base to an eight-strong team.

It is actively recruiting for two additional roles.

This ongoing investment reflects the clear market need for businesses wanting expert, commercial advice to handle collections efficiently before they impact the bottom line.

According to data published by London Economics, 14,000 businesses close each year as a direct result of late payments.

With recent figures showing late payment times rose by up to five per cent in the first quarter of the year alone in the region, protecting cash flow has never been more critical.

Rather than viewing debt recovery as a negative last resort, forward-thinking business owners are increasingly treating it as a proactive commercial strategy, partnering with

Muckle to achieve long-term business resilience.

Colin Churchward, Muckle's head of commercial debt recovery, believes early intervention and preparation are the best ways to cut through the noise.

He says: "Late payments are on the rise and cash flow is critical, especially for SMEs.

"Figures show businesses are spending up to

86 hours a year chasing payments themselves.

"That is valuable time that could be handed over to professionals, allowing business owners to focus on what they do best – running and growing their company."

Colin also highlights the importance of taking preventative steps, with Muckle's commercial team working closely with clients to ensure terms, conditions and commercial contracts are



Amy Carlton, Muckle associate solicitor, with Colin Churchward, partner and head of commercial debt recovery



Muckle's commercial debt recovery team

watertight long before an invoice is ever issued.

Colin says: "When a business' terms and conditions are solid, they have a clear legal basis for recovering unpaid debts.

"Many businesses are unaware there is legislation that entitles them to claim statutory interest and compensation on overdue invoices, helping to offset some of the costs of recovering outstanding debts.

"Furthermore, the new Commercial Payments Bill, which is going through Parliament, aims to transform how relationships are managed.

"The bill will tackle late payments between businesses and improve the flow of cash through supply chains, introducing mandatory payment terms and aspects such as reporting obligations, which will hopefully improve cash flow across the board."

Understanding the legal options available is only part of the solution: having the right support to act on them is equally important.

Muckle offers unique in-house technology, which provides a pragmatic approach to disputed debts.

Colin says: "We take a highly informed, data-driven approach.

"We have an in-house tech system that allows clients – such as large utility companies with high volumes of work – to log in, check on debts and see the best strategy forward."

Associate solicitor Amy Carlton, who leads the

defended debt recovery disputes arm of the team, believes Muckle's strategy successfully balances recovery with relationship preservation.

While many firms outsource disputed debts, Muckle handles them entirely in-house.

This seamlessly provides cost efficiencies for the client and ensures continuity of knowledge at every stage of the journey.

Amy says: "By handling our clients' bulk debt recovery work, we develop a deep understanding of their businesses and customer relationships.

"So, if a debt becomes disputed, there's no relearning process; we already have the background knowledge needed to manage the matter seamlessly."

Amy adds: "We're a law firm, so we understand the importance of protecting clients' commercial relationships.

"We have a high recovery rate, and part of that success is because we take a client-led approach; we don't want to damage their hard-earned customer ties by being heavy-handed.

"Maintaining a healthy working relationship is often just as important as recovering the funds.

"We're one of the leading specialists in high-volume litigation, and clients trust us to handle complex and large-scale matters with confidence."

Supporting a wide array of sectors from

construction and professional services to private schools and utilities, Muckle has spent decades advising innovative businesses.

Such commitment to the region from a longstanding North East firm was recently cemented with the opening of a permanent Teesside office at Boaz House, in Stockton-on-Tees, which has joined existing base in Newcastle and Penrith.

Colin adds: "The landscape of commercial debt recovery is changing; it is no longer just a reactive measure, but an essential pillar of financial health.

"For SMEs across the North East, the lesson is not to wait for a late payment to become a complex dispute.

"By engaging with a trusted commercial adviser early and ensuring your contracts are airtight from day one, you can minimise risk and preserve vital customer relationships, while cash flow continues to fuel a business' growth."



Muckle LLP

To learn more about Muckle and its expert debt recovery services, visit the website at the top of this article or email head of commercial debt recovery Colin Churchward at colin.churchward@muckle-llp.com

5



MINUTES

WITH MICHAEL SLAVIN

www.northernstage.co.uk | Instagram: [northern_stage](https://www.instagram.com/northern_stage)

As his first year at the helm draws to a close, Michael Slavin, chief executive at Newcastle-based Northern Stage, tells Steven Hugill about his first 12 months in post, the responsibilities that come with leading a flagship arts venue and why, in a world of increasing division, theatre's power to entertain, challenge and unite audiences has never been more important.

You're approaching your maiden anniversary as chief executive of Northern Stage. How would you assess your first year at the helm?

It's been a journey and, like all journeys, there have been some moments of jeopardy, but the overall sense is one of joy.

We have had some great successes – Beauty and the Beast; I, Daniel Blake; Little Shop of Horrors – to which audiences have really responded.

And I'm so excited for Christmas, when we have all three stages in operation, with the highlight being The Snow Queen, directed by our brilliant artistic director Natalie Ibu.

Looking ahead, we have a genuinely exciting slate of shows through 2027, 2028 and beyond, which will continue to entertain, provoke curiosity and explore new ways of seeing the world.

Although your career began in retail, your CV includes time at York Theatre Royal and a spell as chief operating officer at 11Arches, the charity behind Bishop Auckland's spectacular Kynren live-action show. How have those experiences shaped your leadership style, and how are they influencing your approach at Northern Stage?

I've been fortunate to experience a breadth of different types of organisations and cultures.

The commercial drive of my time in retail still remains with me, as having secure finances allows us to take risks and continue to deliver an artistic programme of excellence, quality and integrity.

The best commercial minds I have worked with have been in arts charities because when money is tight, you must manage every penny well.

This was a lesson well learnt at York Theatre Royal, where I also first saw the importance of community in action through its specialism in large-scale community projects.

This further developed at 11Arches, where 1000 volunteers deliver the Kynren night show – a profound reminder to me that there is talent and skill everywhere if you can create an environment in which people can show it.

Northern Stage has long been recognised as one of the North East's flagship cultural organisations. What responsibility comes with

leading an institution that plays such a central role in the region's creative landscape?

My role is a pleasure and a privilege.

We are the leading producing theatre in the North East and, given our distance from other theatres of our type, we have to ensure we serve the whole region, both now and in the future.

The years since 2020 have been tough for arts organisations, but Northern Stage is bucking the trend and seeing year-on-year growth.

We have ambitious plans for the future, and will continue to make as many new shows as we can.

Recently, that has been two or three productions per year, but going forward we will deliver six or seven.

We must also remember the changing demographics of our region.

In Newcastle, more than 25 per cent of school-age children come from the global majority, and we must be an organisation in which those young people see themselves represented and which tells stories from the full gamut of lived experience.

We must also entertain, be a welcoming space and ensure we are financially secure.

We will do all of this and more as a beacon for creativity in the North East.

The North East has earned a reputation for punching above its weight culturally, with Newcastle's hosting of the MOBO Awards and Mercury Prize ceremonies complemented by Middlesbrough's staging of this year's Turner Prize. What makes the region such a fertile place for creativity?

The people; they are entrepreneurial, friendly, committed and believe in the North East.

The wider North has long been the engine room of this country, through the mines and the mills, the creativity and the culture, and through the willingness to change and be changed.

Despite the myriad challenges of post-industrial decline, the identity of the North East remains.

That openness, pride and the embodiment of 'shy bairns get nowt' all manifest as a willingness to take risks, which means creativity blossoms.

Theatre has the power to entertain, challenge

and bring people together. At a time of increasing division and fragmentation, what role can venues such as Northern Stage play in creating shared experiences and stronger communities?

Our region is changing, and change often creates fear.

That fear is being stoked and amplified by various media, and we must be watchful that minority opinions don't cause us to lose sight of our truths and what matters.

The North East has always had its arms open, and the Geordie welcome is famous.

To lose that is to begin to lose our identity.

The role theatre can play in this is significant, as we are an engine for empathy.

To watch a theatre production is to be transported, to exist in new worlds, hear new voices or understand new experiences.

In this time of division, that has two roles to play: the first is for everyone to see themselves on our stages, to hear their own stories and to know we are a place that is theirs.

The second is for audiences to see others' experiences on stage, to engage with what the people in their communities – who they may not know – have experienced and felt, and create a place in which we all know each other a bit better, in which we all care for each other a bit better and in which we think twice before believing the worst.

As you head into your second year as chief executive, what would success at Northern Stage look like for you, the organisation and the people it serves?

Success is to continue to be the leading theatre maker in the region, creating productions which speak to the North East and which audiences respond to.

For the people we serve, it is to create opportunities – to see great work on our stages, to engage with us through our brilliant outreach programmes and to work alongside us to make art that is timely, powerful and rooted in the North East.

Northern Stage is – and will remain – a beacon for art, creativity and inclusion.

Newcastle Innovations: Driving regional growth through collaboration

Newcastle Innovations

www.ncl.ac.uk/newcastle-innovations

Newcastle University has unveiled a new venture designed to strengthen collaboration with businesses and help turn research, expertise and innovation into lasting economic growth. Bringing together commercialisation, company creation, consultancy, research partnerships, innovation and skills development, Newcastle Innovations aims to deliver tangible benefits for organisations, communities and the wider economy. Here, N magazine explores the new approach and the impact it is set to make.



Economic growth doesn't happen in isolation.

It is created when research, talent, industry and investment come together with a shared purpose.

This principle sits at the heart of Newcastle Innovations, Newcastle University's new knowledge exchange, partnership and enterprise arm, which has been launched to make it easier for businesses, investors and partners to access the university's world-class expertise and innovation ecosystem.

Opening the door to easier collaboration

Newcastle Innovations reflects a changing role for universities.

Today, universities are expected not only to educate and discover, but also to help shape places, drive economic growth and address

major societal challenges.

Newcastle University's Business and Innovation Strategy recognises this responsibility and positions the university as an enterprising institution focused on creating impact through collaboration.

By bringing together commercialisation, company creation, innovation, consultancy, research partnerships and skills development under one banner, Newcastle Innovations provides a clearer route for organisations looking to work with the university.

As the university's front door to collaborative problem-solving, Newcastle Innovations aims to remove barriers, support innovation-led growth and ensure outstanding research translates into real-world economic and societal benefits.

From supporting high-growth spin-outs and

attracting investment to helping businesses innovate and develop new products, its work is designed to strengthen the regional and national economies.

Delivering economic impact

The launch of Newcastle Innovations is built on a strong foundation of performance and measurable impact.

Across the university's innovation ecosystem, commercial and partnership activity continues to generate significant economic value.

In 2024/2025, Newcastle University supported more than 46,000 continuing educational and professional development learner days, while attracting in excess of 1.6 million attendees to public engagement activities.

Such commitment to the workforce economy demonstrates the scale of its contribution to skills development and community engagement.

Estelle Blanks, Newcastle Innovations' director, says: "We're creating real value through collaboration – driving investment, supporting inclusive growth and delivering transformative impact."

The university's spin-out portfolio has continued to grow steadily, increasing from 29 active companies in 2020/2021 to 42 active spin-outs in 2024/2025.

Together, these businesses support hundreds of highly skilled jobs and attract substantial external investment into the region.

Over the last two years, the university's spin-outs secured more than £90 million of external investment (HEBCI data 2023-2025).

Intellectual property activity has also reached new levels. The university recorded 74 invention disclosures during 2024/2025, the highest figure in the last five years, while total intellectual property revenue increased to £4.6 million.

Total licences rose to 219, reflecting growing demand for Newcastle-developed technologies and expertise.



Estelle Blanks, Newcastle Innovations' director

The wider innovation ecosystem is delivering benefits beyond commercialisation.

The National Innovation Centre for Data has already helped create 1500 jobs, and is forecast to contribute £742 million to the North East economy over the next decade through increased productivity, innovation and business growth.

Programmes supporting regional businesses are also generating impressive results.

Newcastle University leads Arrow – a bespoke innovation support programme – on behalf of four universities in the North East.

Arrow connects regional enterprises with academic expertise and specialist facilities, and has helped more than 300 organisations develop innovative new products, technologies and services.

Newcastle University plays a key role in major regional initiatives, including the North East AI Growth Zone, a programme expected to create more than 5000 jobs and attract up to £30 billion of private investment.

Newcastle Innovations is helping ensure the region is positioned to benefit from emerging opportunities in artificial intelligence, clean growth and advanced manufacturing.

Newcastle Innovations is also helping North East innovation reach global markets.

Part of a three-way alliance between Newcastle University and Cancer Research Horizons, Astex Pharmaceuticals secured a collaboration and licence agreement with Genentech, a

member of the Roche Group, to advance the development of novel cancer treatments.

The powerhouse partnership highlights the strength of the university's commercialisation ecosystem and its ability to translate world-leading research into opportunities that attract international partners, investment and economic value.

Professor Jane Robinson, Newcastle University pro-vice-chancellor – business, partnerships and place, says: “We are pursuing national priorities through our regional distinctiveness, which, in turn, addresses global challenges.”

Building the future

Newcastle Innovations is more than a new name.

It represents a commitment to making collaboration easier, accelerating innovation and strengthening the North East's position as a centre for research-led growth.

Its mission is simple: turn ideas into impact, together.

By connecting businesses, investors, communities and researchers, Newcastle Innovations is helping transform knowledge into economic value, creating jobs, attracting investment and ensuring innovation developed in the North East delivers impact far beyond the region.

As Newcastle University approaches its 200th anniversary, Newcastle Innovations will be central to turning ambition into opportunity – and opportunity into growth.

Spark your next partnership

In a changing world of economic and societal challenges, let's evolve together.

Working with a university is no longer an academic exercise; it's a strategic move toward innovation, resilience and long-term success.

The strongest partnerships begin with shared curiosity, so whether you're looking to solve a challenge, recruit talent or explore new ideas, a university collaboration could be the way forward.

The first step is a simple discussion about what the next moves could be.

Start your business evolution here.



Newcastle Innovations

To learn more about Newcastle Innovations and find out how a university collaboration could help your organisation strengthen its growth goals, visit the website at the top of this article or email innovations@newcastle.ac.uk

Removing the stress of buying and selling a home

EMG Solicitors

www.emgsolicitors.com

LinkedIn: EMG Solicitors I B Corp

Buying or selling a home can be one of life's most stressful experiences. EMG Solicitors, a B Corp-certified law firm headquartered in the North East, is doing all it can to adapt to changes in the market, while keeping clients at the heart of everything it does and ensuring the process runs as smoothly as possible. Here, N magazine speaks to Andrew Allon, senior associate and departmental lead of residential conveyancing, about how EMG Solicitors continues to focus on client care, getting the basics right and living by its values.

EMG Solicitors is an award-winning Legal 500 firm, providing expert legal advice across residential conveyancing, Court of Protection, deputyships, family law and mediation, education law and wills, trusts and probate.

The growing law firm now has 14 offices across the UK and a team of more than 300 colleagues, further strengthening its services and ability to provide specialist, accessible legal advice to more clients nationally.

Having worked in residential conveyancing for more than 15 years, Andrew Allon brings a wealth of experience to property transactions and has adapted to many changes in the housing industry, while championing innovation in the conveyancing process.

Over the years, there have been continued efforts to improve the process of buying and selling a home.

In June 2026, the Government proposed an industry shake-up to reduce delays, cut costs and help prevent sales from falling through, and to make greater use of digital tools.

Andrew says: "The sector as a whole is broadly supportive of any new legislation that can make buying and selling a home easier for people. I think a digital approach is just what we need in a modern world.

"For it to work, it must be adopted across the board by banks, lenders, Land Registry and other organisations involved.

"Thankfully at EMG, we already work closely



EMG Solicitors' office network includes a base in Gosforth, Newcastle

“Our firm values, which we live by every day, mean everything to us; it’s about being kind, compassionate and understanding, while always working hard to protect a client’s position during the process”

and effectively with those other parties, which makes the process far more straightforward and helps to avoid any delays.”

EMG Solicitors has introduced several new ways of working to improve the process of buying and selling a home for its clients.

Andrew says: “We operate a pod system at EMG, giving our clients access to a small, dedicated team that looks after their property transaction from start to finish.

“This means there’s always someone on hand to provide updates and answer any questions.

“We also have separate onboarding and post-completion teams, ensuring clients are supported at every stage of the process.

“It’s also about getting the basics right.

“A big focus for EMG is communication and transparency. We believe good communication is key to delivering client excellence, which is why we are happy to stay in touch in whichever way works best for our clients, whether by

phone, email or face-to-face.

“We also have an online calculator on our website so anyone can generate an instant quote for their property transaction and we’ve created a series of easy-to-follow videos that guide buyers through the process.

“They include everything from what to do first, our role as solicitors and getting ready for exchange and completion.”

EMG Solicitors’ residential conveyancing team supports clients across the UK. Their clients can also benefit from the expertise of the firm’s wider teams, including its wills, trusts and probate specialists.

The two teams work closely at EMG to ensure estate plans or wishes that clients have for their properties in the future are met.

Founded in 2014, EMG Solicitors is ranked in Tier 1 by Legal 500 for personal tax, trusts and probate and was named Private Client Firm of the Year at the Legal 500 Northern

Powerhouse Awards in 2024.

EMG is also rated 4.8 out of 5 on the ReviewSolicitors platform with more than 1200 client reviews.

EMG Solicitors prides itself on living its company values of cooperation, courage, excellence, integrity and kindness, with this approach making a significant difference to its clients.

Andrew adds: “At EMG, we go above and beyond doing just the legal work.

“Our firm values, which we live by every day, mean everything to us. It’s about being kind, compassionate and understanding, while always working hard to protect a client’s position during the process.

“We’re here to make things as stress-free as possible from beginning to end.

“We want the journey of buying a home to be as exciting as getting the keys.”



Andrew Allon, EMG Solicitors’ senior associate and departmental lead of residential conveyancing



EMG Solicitors

Scan here to find out more about EMG’s residential conveyancing services and get an instant online quote.



For more information about EMG Solicitors’ wider services, call 0330 024 0245 or visit the website at the top of this article.

FROM NORTH EAST ENGLAND TO SOUTH EAST ASIA

22-28 NOVEMBER





The North East Chamber of Commerce is set to lead a Singapore trade mission in November, aimed at helping businesses from the region forge new links in South East Asia. Here, Jen Rycroft, North East Chamber of Commerce executive director - membership and international trade services, tells Steven Hugill about the significance of the trip, the importance of building on the region's renowned industrial legacy and the opportunities that abound for businesses to expand into new territory.

The North East Chamber of Commerce is set to embark on a Singapore trade mission in November. Tell us a little about the venture and the opportunities you're hoping to unlock across the South East Asian island city state.

Taking place from 22 to 28 November (inclusive of travel), the mission is a focused three-day programme delivered in partnership with the British Chamber of Commerce Singapore. We are taking a select group of North East businesses into the market, giving them access to insight, senior business networks and tailored commercial introductions that would be difficult to secure independently.

Singapore is an important commercial opportunity in its own right, but it is also one of the leading gateways into South East Asia.

It combines world-class infrastructure and strong legal and regulatory frameworks with a highly connected and international business environment. For companies with ambitions to grow across Asia, it offers an excellent base from which to explore the wider ASEAN market.

Our aim is not simply to organise a visit. We want each business to return with a clearer understanding of the opportunity, where its product or service might fit and the partnerships, customers or routes to market that could help it move forward.

Each delegate will receive business-to-business meetings, alongside market briefings, introductions to key agencies, site visits, networking and support before, during and after the mission.

Which sectors are best placed to benefit from the expedition, and what potential does it hold for businesses operating in complementary industries?

The mission is open to businesses from every sector, provided they are export-ready, growth-focused and serious about exploring the market. We are already seeing that breadth reflected in the businesses signing up, including PD Ports, the North East's largest port and logistics operator.

There are, however, some particularly strong areas of alignment between Singapore and the North East, including technology and innovation, advanced manufacturing, professional and financial services, sustainability and clean technology, logistics and supply chain, life sciences and other high-growth, service-led industries.

We also see opportunities around ports, maritime, energy transition, decarbonisation, digital trade and industrial innovation.

These are areas in which the North East has genuine capability and where Singapore is investing, innovating and developing international partnerships.

The potential extends well beyond companies that sit neatly within those sectors.

Major projects and growing industries rely on complex ecosystems of suppliers, advisers and specialist services.

An advanced manufacturer may need digital expertise, logistics support, legal advice, finance, training or low-carbon solutions.

That creates openings for businesses across complementary supply chains, including smaller firms whose expertise can solve a very specific problem.

The important question is not simply, 'What sector are you in?' but, 'What value can you bring to the market?'



Jen Rycroft, North East Chamber of Commerce executive director – membership and international trade services, pictured at PD Ports, one of the North East businesses signed up to join the Chamber's trade mission to Singapore in November



North East companies carry a global reputation for innovation, expertise and world-class products. What competitive advantages do they bring to the international stage, and how will the trade mission help showcase those strengths to Singaporean businesses and investors?

North East businesses combine deep industrial expertise with an ability to adapt and innovate.

We have longstanding strengths in engineering, manufacturing, energy, chemicals, ports and logistics, alongside growing capabilities in digital technology, life sciences, professional services and clean growth.

Our companies are often highly specialised, practical and very good at turning complex challenges into commercially viable solutions.

They also bring the credibility that comes from operating in demanding global industries, where quality, reliability and technical expertise are essential.

There is already evidence that these strengths resonate in Singapore. North East exports to the market increased by 110 per cent, or £126.5 million, between 2024 and 2025, with growth led by power-generating equipment and organic chemicals.

That reflects regional strengths in advanced manufacturing, industrial innovation and the energy transition.

The mission will help businesses communicate those capabilities directly to carefully selected potential customers, partners and investors.

Because the programme is limited to between eight and 12 companies, the introductions can be shaped around each delegate's objectives, rather than following a generic schedule.

For businesses considering international expansion, what does a trade mission offer that virtual meetings and online networking simply cannot replicate – and what role does the North East Chamber of Commerce play in helping businesses turn conversations into contracts?

Virtual engagement is useful, but international business is still built on trust, credibility and relationships.

Being in the market allows a company to understand how business is conducted, experience its pace and culture, ask better questions and build rapport in a way that is much harder through a screen.

The informal conversations around a meeting, site visit, networking event or dinner can be just as valuable as the formal agenda.

A trade mission also creates momentum.

Instead of arranging isolated calls over several months, businesses can undertake a concentrated programme of relevant meetings and quickly test assumptions about demand, positioning and potential partners.

The Chamber's role is to reduce uncertainty and help businesses use their time effectively.

We support delegates with preparation before departure, work with our partners to arrange relevant introductions and provide daily support in Singapore.

Crucially, our involvement does not end when the flight home lands.

We will help delegates continue the relationships they have begun and identify practical next steps.

Contracts will rarely be signed overnight, but structured preparation and sustained follow-up can turn a promising conversation into a genuine commercial pipeline.

The North East has a proud heritage of exporting engineering, expertise and innovation around the world. How will this mission help today's businesses extend that legacy and lay foundations to create the next generation of international success stories?

International trade is part of the North East's identity.

For generations, this region has exported products, ideas and expertise around the world.

Today's opportunity is to build on that heritage while reflecting the modern North East economy: advanced, innovative, increasingly service-led and focused on clean growth and new technology.

The mission gives ambitious companies a supported route into a market they might otherwise find difficult to access.

Even where an immediate sale does not result, the insight, relationships and confidence gained can shape a company's international strategy for years to come.

The wider regional impact matters too.

When more businesses export, build global partnerships and attract investment, the benefits flow through supply chains and support growth, jobs, innovation and confidence at home.

We want to help create businesses that can become the region's next international success stories and, in turn, encourage others to look beyond familiar markets.

How does the expedition fit into the North East Chamber of Commerce's wider international trade strategy and long-term ambitions for the region?

The Chamber has supported, connected and represented businesses for more than 200 years.

We are proudly rooted in the North East but, through the wider British Chambers network and more than 70 overseas Chambers, we are connected to markets around the world.

This mission brings those two strengths together.

It builds on our Trade Ready support, which helps businesses navigate export documentation,

customs procedures, market insight, training and the practical realities of international trade.

The Singapore programme provides a structured journey from initial interest and market preparation through to tailored meeting planning, in-market activity and post-mission follow-up.

Our long-term ambition is to build a stronger international trade pathway for North East businesses.

We want more companies of every size to see international growth as achievable, understand where the right opportunities lie and have access to the expertise and relationships needed to pursue them confidently.

This is, therefore, about more than one mission.

It is about positioning the North East as an outward-looking, ambitious and internationally connected region with the capability to compete on the global stage.



North East Chamber of Commerce

The deadline to sign up to the Singapore Trade Mission is September 25, 2026. For the latest programme dates and registration information, email Jen Rycroft, North East Chamber of Commerce executive director – membership and international trade services, at jennifer.rycroft@necc.co.uk

OUT OF

In the latest instalment of a series exploring businesspeople's lives beyond the workplace, Steven Hugill speaks to Deb Ions, marketing director at Newcastle, Darlington and Leeds-based law firm Square One, about balancing her legal sector role with time singing in the Northern Proud Voices Community Choir. Here, Deb reflects on the power of music, the strength of community and the significance of allyship and friendship in a busy and increasingly technology-led world.



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OFFICE

When you're not leading marketing operations at law firm Square One, you can sometimes be found performing with Northern Proud Voices Community Choir. What sparked your passion for singing, and what inspired you to join the organisation?

I've always loved singing, but I'd never really found the confidence or opportunity to join a choir.

That changed when I saw Northern Proud Voices perform a few times last year.

They were fantastic – not just because of how good they sounded, but because of the joy, energy and sense of belonging they created.

I remember thinking, 'I'd love to be part of that.'

It's a special community and the choir is incredibly talented, and so welcoming and supportive.

Since joining, I've had the privilege of performing at Sunderland and Newcastle Prides, as well as marching through the streets of Newcastle.

It was such good fun, with thousands coming together to celebrate community, kindness and acceptance.

I'm proud to stand alongside the LGBTQIA+ community as an ally.

Creating inclusive communities is everyone's responsibility, and good allyship is about showing up, listening, learning and standing alongside others.

Northern Proud Voices welcomed me from day one, and every rehearsal demonstrates just how powerful music can be in bringing people together.

As you say, the choir represents far more than making music – it's about creating a safe and welcoming space where people can be their true selves. How have you seen that sense of belonging transform people's confidence and wellbeing?

I've only been a member since January, but Northern Proud Voices is about much more than learning songs.

From the outside it's a choir, but it's also a community.

I can't speak about people's individual journeys, but what I have observed is the importance of belonging.

For some, the choir is a huge part of their lives and an extended family.

It is a place where people can come together, be themselves and share something they love.

It's important, in a world where it's easy to feel disconnected, to have a place where you know you'll see familiar faces every week, work

towards something together and feel part of a supportive community.

In an increasingly busy and technology-led world, how important are organisations like Northern Proud Voices Community Choir in maintaining vital personal connections?

Organisations like Northern Proud Voices are more important than ever.

We spend so much time connected to technology that it's easy to lose sight of how valuable it is to spend time with people.

For me, choir is a chance to switch off.

For a couple of hours each week, I'm not thinking about work or emails – I'm singing, laughing, catching up with friends and learning new songs.

It's a great way to de-stress, and I always leave rehearsals feeling better than when I arrived.

I also think there's something powerful about a group of people coming together with a shared purpose.

We all come from different backgrounds and walks of life, but for those few hours we're simply focused on making music together.

What has been the most memorable moment you've shared with fellow choir members – on or off stage – and why has it stayed with you?

I've had some great experiences in the short time I've been a member.

Sunderland and Newcastle Prides were great fun, and I've had the opportunity to speak about allyship on behalf of the choir at Sunderland Minster and Newcastle Cathedral.

It was a privilege to be asked.

Just as the choir uses its voice to bring people together through music, I believe allies should use their voices to help create a more inclusive society.

I don't believe responsibility should rest solely on the shoulders of those who are fighting for equity.

Many of the core disciplines of marketing – creativity, communication and building strong relationships – are also at the heart of community organisations. Have your experiences with the choir helped you develop new skills and perspectives that have enriched your professional life?

Absolutely.

Marketing is ultimately about understanding people, building relationships and communicating in a way that genuinely connects.

Being part of Northern Proud Voices has

reinforced just how important those things are.

The strongest communities are built on trust, inclusion and making people feel they belong.

Those principles are just as relevant in the workplace as they are in a choir.

When joining any new group, it's always important to listen, appreciate different perspectives and recognise that everyone brings something unique.

Whether you're building a brand or building a community, success comes from people and consistency.

Strong brands aren't built by one campaign or one big moment; they're built by consistently showing up, staying true to your values and creating experiences that people genuinely want to be part of.

And that's exactly how the choir has built such a strong and welcoming community.

What are your and fellow members' ambitions for Northern Proud Voices Community Choir over the coming years, both musically and as a force for inclusion, belonging and personal growth?

I'd love to see Northern Proud Voices continue to grow, welcome new members and reach more people through its performances.

Musically, it's exciting to think about taking on new challenges and performing in new venues, but I hope the sense of community and belonging always remains at the heart of what makes the choir so special.

I'd also love to see even more allies get involved.

Inclusion is something we all have a role in, and the choir is a great example of what can happen when people from different backgrounds come together.

That doesn't happen by accident.

Jon's musical direction, Andrew's accompaniment and the hard work of the committee create an environment where people feel welcome, supported and able to grow in confidence.

Their commitment is what enables the choir to thrive.

Personally, one of the unexpected bonuses of joining Northern Proud Voices has been the friendships I've made.

A few of us joined around the same time – Gill, John, Graham and Will – and it's been lovely getting to know them.

I hope many more people get the chance to experience that same sense of connection, belonging and community in the years ahead.

Fresh eyes on the future

Jackson Hogg

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Operating as the leading specialist STEM recruitment firm in the North East, Jackson Hogg is entering its next chapter of growth. Helping write its future success is new managing director Louise McReynolds, who brings great pedigree from working across multiple UK regions. Here, Louise tells N magazine what drew her to Jackson Hogg and why the company will be staying true to its values as it rolls out its expansion plans.

Louise McReynolds has spent her career helping businesses grow.

From leading recruitment teams across multiple regions to building her own networks across the engineering and manufacturing sectors, she has developed a reputation for helping people and organisations realise their potential.

And she has now taken on a new challenge.

Having joined Jackson Hogg in May, Louise has stepped into the role of managing director at the Newcastle-headquartered STEM recruitment specialist.

She takes over from Anthony Broadhead, who, after ten years as chief operating officer, is switching to a strategic advisor role, supporting Louise, and founder and chief executive Richard Hogg.

Her appointment forms part of Jackson Hogg's plans to build on its already established market presence and strengthen its position in STEM recruitment markets across the rest of the UK and internationally.

While the business already works with clients nationally and internationally, Louise brings experience of what it takes to grow successfully at scale in the sector.

She says: "Jackson Hogg has built a fantastic reputation, and my role is really about helping us build on that. The foundations are already here.

"When you're new to a business, you have the opportunity to look at things differently.

"I've spent a lot of time listening, learning and understanding what makes Jackson Hogg successful before deciding where we can improve further.

"What attracted me was the strength of the business that's already here.

"I want to understand what's made Jackson Hogg successful, protect the culture that people value so highly, and then help the business continue to grow from there.

"I'm looking forward to spending time with our customers in the North East and getting to know them and the wider business community."

Louise joined Jackson Hogg from recruitment company Michael Page, where she spent 14 years after initially securing a place on the firm's graduate scheme.

She progressed through a series of leadership roles with the firm, managing teams across multiple regions including Yorkshire, the North West and the Midlands, while developing expertise in engineering, manufacturing, procurement, supply chain, logistics, property and construction.

It was Jackson Hogg's growing reputation in the technical industries that appealed to Louise when she began looking for a new opportunity.

The company has established itself as the North East's best-known STEM recruitment business, supporting employers across engineering, manufacturing, life sciences, technology and other specialist sectors.

With additional offices in Teesside and Leeds, it has built a reputation for combining technical expertise with a people-first approach.

Louise says: "There were a couple of things that really mattered to me when I was deciding what to do next.

"I've spent most of my career working with engineering and manufacturing businesses, and I wanted to be somewhere I could continue supporting customers in sectors I'm genuinely passionate about.

"I'm passionate about engineering and manufacturing, so wanted to stay in that field where I've worked to build strong networks.

"Jackson Hogg really impressed me."

The second priority was a company whose values and ethical approach matched her own.

Louise adds: "At its heart, recruitment is all about people.

"I wanted to join a business where the culture wasn't just something written on a wall. It was important to me that people genuinely lived those values, and I've seen that from day one at Jackson Hogg.

"The thing that's stood out to me is that the culture here feels real. You see it in the way people treat each other, the way they work with customers and how much they care about doing the right thing."

Louise points to founder Richard and his influence on the company ethos as a reason for its success.

She says: "What Richard and the team has built is incredibly impressive.

"It's not easy to create a business with such a strong reputation in a specialist market, and a huge part of that comes down to the culture and values he's embedded from the beginning.

"It's quite a niche and technical field to scale a business the way he has in the timeframe he's done it in.

"But the more time I spend with Richard, the more I realise that the culture of the business - the key to its success - all comes from him and the way he approaches working with others."

Louise will also be supported in her new role by Anthony, who will remain part of the leadership team at Jackson Hogg.



Pictured, from left to right, are Jackson Hogg director Joel Brown, managing director Louise McReynolds, director Fern Murray and founder and chief executive Richard Hogg

Picture: Lauren Peters (The Bigger Picture Agency)

“When you’re new to a business, you have the opportunity to look at things differently; I’ve spent a lot of time listening, learning and understanding what makes Jackson Hogg successful before deciding where we can improve further”

Louise adds: “The value of having Anthony remain with the business is that I’ve got someone who knows the business inside out that I can sound ideas off.”

And that will be important as Louise continues to roll out her management approach, which focuses on supporting teams to reach their true potential.

She says: “One thing that’s always been important to me is helping people develop and progress in their careers. If the people around me are successful, the business will be successful too.”

And as managing director, she says preserving Jackson Hogg’s culture, while helping the business grow, is one of her key responsibilities.

Since joining in May, Louise has made a point of spending time with every employee across the company’s three offices.

She says: “One of the first things I wanted to understand was why people joined Jackson Hogg and why they’ve stayed. Those answers tell you a lot about what’s special about a business, and it’s something we want to preserve as we grow.

“It’s about learning what has made this business successful – we don’t want to lose that.”

And Louise says harnessing that understanding in an ever-changing recruitment industry shaped by skills shortages, evolving customer

expectations and advances in technology will be crucial to the business’ future.

She adds: “My appointment is an investment by Jackson Hogg.

“I’ve been fortunate to work across a number of regions and markets during my career, and I’m looking forward to bringing that experience to Jackson Hogg as we continue growing our presence across the UK and beyond.

“There is the reality that the recruitment industry, and the markets we serve, continue to evolve.

“This isn’t about changing Jackson Hogg into something different.

“It’s about building on what already makes the business successful and making sure we’re ready for the next stage of growth.”



Jackson Hogg

To find out more about Jackson Hogg and the specialist STEM recruitment services it provides, as well as its HR Partnership provision, visit the website or contact the email address at the top of this article.

BORN

MAYBORN GROUP

TOMMEE TIPPEE

TO

LAST



Words by Peter Anderson
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For more than 60 years, Tommee Tippee has been a trusted name for generations of parents, growing from a simple weighted-base cup into a global parent-care brand. Now, Stone Shi, chief executive of Newcastle-based parent company Mayborn Group, is plotting its next chapter, combining the heritage of one of Britain's most recognisable brands with new products, partnerships and plans to extend its reach around the world. Here, Stone speaks to Peter Anderson about his vision for Tommee Tippee, the importance of its North East roots and how lessons learned through business, endurance running and high-altitude mountaineering continue to shape his approach to leadership.



STONE SHI

Three American brothers. A dog called Tommee. And a cup that refused to be knocked over.

It may sound an unlikely recipe for a global business, but more than 60 years ago, those were the ingredients that gave birth to Tommee Tippee.

Designed in California in the early 1960s, the ingenious infant cup featured a weighted base, allowing it to be pushed and tipped by inquisitive little hands before righting itself again.

Its inventors named their creation after their beloved dog Tommee, but it was across the Atlantic where the idea truly took off.

A British businessman spotted its potential and invested in the concept, and in 1965 Tommee Tippee made its way to Blyth, brought to the North East by Graham McConnochie.

It was the beginning of an enduring relationship with the region.

From those humble beginnings, Tommee Tippee has grown into one of Britain's most recognisable parent-care names, with its bottles, soothers and feeding products becoming fixtures of family life in homes across the country and far beyond.

And while products, technology and parenting itself have changed considerably in the six decades since, the familiarity of the Tommee Tippee name has endured, earning a level of trust that has been passed from one generation to the next.

Today, the brand reaches parents in more than 60 countries.

And charged with writing its next chapter is Stone Shi, the amiable and energetic chief executive of parent company Mayborn Group, who arrived in 2024 with an enviable global CV, a passion for innovation and a stated ambition to make Tommee Tippee "the most loved parent-care brand in the world".

Like Tommee Tippee, Stone arrived in the North East following a journey that began on the other side of the globe.

Born and raised in northern China, his career began at consumer goods giant Procter & Gamble, where he spent 15 years learning the fundamentals of brands, products and people.

He tells N magazine: "I think of Procter & Gamble as the hometown of my career.

"It shaped so much of how I work and lead today, particularly the importance of really understanding consumers and building brands and products around their needs."

From there came a move into a very different world; Stone joined Amazon, which he says added another layer to his leadership philosophy.

He adds: "I was really inspired by the culture at Amazon – the customer obsession, the long-

term thinking and the focus on innovation.

"It was also where I began to understand the power of e-commerce, data and artificial intelligence, and how technology could transform the way we understand and serve customers."

Further senior roles followed, including at Chinese technology giant Alibaba, before Stone moved into investment, broadening an already varied career spanning consumer goods, technology and finance.

However, after years spent exploring different sides of business, he found himself drawn back towards where his career had started.

He says: "I realised I wanted to get back to the consumer world; I wanted to create things that were more meaningful and lasting for people.

"And then the opportunity at Mayborn Group came along."

It was, he says, an unusually good fit.

The business offered the opportunity to bring together the consumer understanding and brand-building discipline of Procter & Gamble with the speed, technology and data-led thinking he had encountered later in his career.

But there was something else about Mayborn Group that immediately appealed.

He says: "Becoming a parent is one of the most important moments in people's lives.

"If we can understand parents better, solve some of the problems they face and make that experience a little easier, then we're doing something very meaningful."

And while Stone may have arrived at the helm of a business with six decades of history behind it, he is determined longevity never becomes an excuse for complacency.

His approach combines long-term thinking with a sense of ownership and a belief that people should be given the opportunity to build careers, rather than simply do jobs.

But another philosophy, borrowed from his years at Amazon, perhaps best captures the mentality he is trying to instil.

He says: "Every day is day one.

"You respect the heritage and everything that has been built over the years, but you can never stop learning, changing and moving forward."

Those six decades of history also give Tommee Tippee something Stone believes many rivals cannot replicate.

He adds: "It is trust built over generations.

"People trust us because we have proved ourselves on quality, safety and doing the right thing with our products.

"Heritage is something we have that they don't. That is our foundation."

But while that trust represents a distinct



advantage in an increasingly crowded parent-care market, Stone is adamant heritage alone cannot dictate what comes next.

He says: “We are a 60-year-old company, but we should run it like a start-up.

“There are new brands coming into the market all the time, so we have to run faster, keep innovating and keep finding ways to be better.”

And for Mayborn Group, part of that means broadening its reach beyond the products and markets upon which Tommee Tippee has traditionally built its success.

While Tommee Tippee remains comfortably the largest part of the group – Stone jokes it occupies “95 per cent” of his energy – acquisitions have extended the business into new areas of parent-care.

Sleep specialist Gro joined Mayborn Group in 2017, while US breast pump business Baby Buddha followed in 2023, strengthening the group’s presence in a category where Tommee Tippee had historically been less prominent.

Stone says: “We already had breastfeeding products, but we weren’t particularly strong in that area.

“Baby Buddha had fantastic products and expertise, particularly in North America, so it strengthened that part of our portfolio.

“Likewise, Gro gives us a presence in baby sleepwear and apparel.

“Each brand brings something different, but together they allow us to support parents across more of the parenting journey.”

Already a market leader in the UK, Australia and New Zealand, Stone sees considerable scope for Mayborn Group to grow in North America, as well as opportunities across Asia and South America.

But expanding geographically is only part of the equation.

Staying relevant to a new generation of parents also means rethinking how a familiar 60-year-old brand looks, feels and innovates.

That evolution has become increasingly visible this year.

In June, Tommee Tippee embarked upon the first brand collaboration in its history, joining forces with luxury baby brand BINIBAMBA on a limited-edition collection that paired some of its best-known essentials with a more fashion-forward aesthetic.

It has since followed that with a partnership with iconic British design house Morris & Co., whose Strawberry Thief and Acanthus patterns have been reimagined across bottles, soothers and bibs.

But design is only one side of that reinvention.

Technology is increasingly helping Mayborn Group understand parents more deeply, with the business using artificial intelligence to analyse large volumes of consumer feedback, while bringing parents, midwives and healthcare professionals into the product development process earlier.

Stone says: “The closer we stay to parents, the smarter we are.

“We have to understand their problems and frustrations, sometimes before they can articulate them themselves.

“That’s where innovation starts.”

And there are few better examples than Perfect Prep.

First launched in 2013, the formula preparation machine was designed around a familiar parental frustration: preparing a bottle safely, quickly and at the right temperature.

More than a decade later, Tommee Tippee has unveiled a new-generation Perfect Prep that can deliver a fresh formula feed in just 90 seconds.

For Stone, it is precisely the kind of innovation that encapsulates what Tommee Tippee must continue to do: take an everyday parenting problem, understand it intimately and find a smarter way to solve it.

He says: “Everything has to come back to a real problem for parents.

“With Perfect Prep, that was preparing the milk, getting the temperature right and doing it quickly.

“It sounds simple, but that is what good innovation should do: solve a real problem and make life easier.”

And while Mayborn Group’s products may ultimately find their way into homes around the world, much of the thinking behind them remains firmly rooted in Newcastle.

Today, around 300 people work from the group’s headquarters in Longbenton and, for Stone, the North East remains an integral part of Mayborn Group’s identity.

He says: “There is something special about the North East, and I see many of the same qualities in its people that we value at Mayborn Group.

“People here are very practical.

“They want to create things that have real purpose and think for the long-term, and that reflects how we approach our products – making sure they genuinely add value for parents.

“There is also a strong sense of community.

“People look out for one another and that is exactly the kind of culture I want us to have too.”

Those roots are reflected in employees who have spent decades with the business, as well as close links with the region’s universities.

The vast majority of Mayborn Group’s Newcastle workforce hail from the North East, while the firm works with local universities to develop the next generation of talent.

Stone adds: “We have people who have spent their whole careers here – we recently celebrated someone who has been with the company for 40 years.

“But we also want to bring in young talent through our graduate programme and give them meaningful opportunities.

“And as our global reach grows, I want people to know they can build an international career from the North East.

“We are already sending people we have developed here to North America and Australia to gain experience and perhaps one day bring that back to Newcastle.”

That emphasis on the long-term – on development, resilience and the journey ahead – extends beyond Stone’s working life.

A former basketball player, he took up distance running around 15 years ago and has since completed 47 marathons, describing the hours on the road as a form of meditation – and a valuable space to reflect and, on occasion, make business decisions.

Later this year, he will line up for his next marathon in Shanghai, before turning to an altogether different challenge in China’s

Xinjiang region, where he plans to climb the 7546-metre Muztagh Ata – known as the ‘Father of Ice Mountains’.

It will be his highest climb yet.

Stone says: “There are a lot of similarities between endurance sport and business.

“With a marathon, you need the courage to start, preparation and resilience along the way – but you also have to enjoy the journey.

“Climbing teaches you something different.

“When you are at 6000 or 7000 metres, and the air is thin, you have no choice but to focus.

“And business is the same; strategy is also about knowing what not to do.

“If you try to focus on everything, you create activity, rather than momentum.

“You have to decide what really matters and give it your full focus.”

It is an approach that should serve Stone well, both on the slopes of Muztagh Ata and back at Mayborn Group.

For while Tommee Tippee has already travelled a remarkable distance over the past six decades, Stone is convinced there are greater heights still to reach.

He adds: “We have a wonderful brand, a great heritage and fantastic people, but there is still so much more we can do.

“We have to keep challenging ourselves, innovating and moving forward.

“We have 60 years behind us, but I’m much more excited about what comes next.”



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LAST

Closing this edition of N magazine, Paul Pearson, director at fitness operator OneGym, which runs sites across the North East, reflects on the company's latest expansion moves, remaining agile in an ever-changing leisure landscape and the business' future ambitions in a world dominated by technological and digital innovation.

www.onegymfitness.com

Congratulations on the recent opening of the business' Wynyard base. The venture adds a 15th venue to the OneGym portfolio, with a 16th earmarked to open soon at Sunderland's Doxford Park. What factors do you prioritise when expanding the estate, and what do these latest moves say about the company's growth trajectory?

Every new OneGym starts with the same question: can we genuinely improve the fitness offering in that area?

Growth for growth's sake has never been our strategy.

We look beyond population figures and assess the existing fitness provision, local demographics, accessibility and whether there is a genuine gap for a premium, affordable 24/7 gym.

The location itself is equally important, with visibility, transport links and parking all playing a part in making fitness as accessible as possible.

We also consider how each new club fits within our existing network.

Many of our members live, work and travel across the North East, so having multiple locations adds flexibility while strengthening the OneGym brand.

Wynyard and Doxford Park reflect that approach; they demonstrate our ambition, but also our discipline.

Every new site has to make commercial sense, complement our existing estate and, most importantly, deliver real value to the local community.

Our ambition isn't simply to have more gyms; it is to have the right gyms in the right locations.

The fitness industry has evolved significantly in recent years, from the rise of boutique studios to home workouts, hybrid fitness and more. How has OneGym adapted to changing customer expectations, and how do you balance rapid expansion with maintaining the culture that has underpinned the business since its 2012 launch?

The biggest lesson we've learnt is that you have to listen to your members.

Their expectations continue to evolve, so we continually invest in our clubs, equipment and technology to deliver the experience people want today.

At the same time, we've never believed in chasing every new trend.

We embrace innovation where it genuinely improves the member experience, but the fundamentals of a great gym haven't changed.

People still want quality equipment, a clean and welcoming environment, knowledgeable staff and excellent value for money.

As we've expanded, protecting that culture has been just as important as opening new locations.

Every OneGym should deliver the same standards, the same welcoming atmosphere and the same commitment to giving members outstanding value.

What opportunities do you see for further growth over the coming years, and to what extent will the continued evolution of technology and artificial intelligence influence that expansion strategy?

We've built a strong reputation across the North East and are now actively exploring opportunities beyond the region.

We know our model works, but we'll continue to grow in the same measured way, making sure every new location strengthens the business while delivering the standards our members expect.

Technology and artificial intelligence will undoubtedly play a bigger role in how we operate, helping us analyse trends, improve decision-making, optimise operations and deliver more personalised communication with members.

However, technology should enhance the member experience, rather than replacing it.

People still value friendly staff, expert advice and a welcoming environment, and those will always remain at the heart of OneGym.

We'll continue to embrace innovation where it adds real value, while never losing sight of what matters most: our members.



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