

ISSUE 25 | 2023

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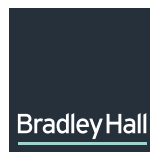
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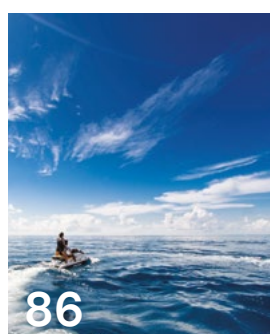
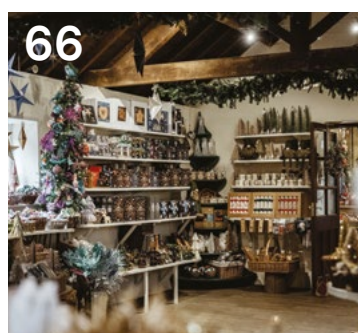
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# Contributors Round up



## Recipes Terry Laybourne

As the owner of 21 Hospitality Group (21HG), Terry has his roots in the North East and has worked here for more than 35 years. His Newcastle-based restaurant group includes 21, The Broad Chare and St Vincent on Newcastle's Quayside; also Café 21, Saltwater Fish Co, and Porterhouse within the Fenwick department store. He also operates a Café 21 from Fenwick in York and has a bistro at The Lakes Distillery, in Cumbria.

He was the first chef in the region to bring a much-coveted Michelin Star to Newcastle shortly after he opened 21 Queen Street on Newcastle's Quayside.

In 1998, Terry was awarded a 'Catey' (celebrating the best in the UK hospitality sector) for Independent Restaurateur of the Year. Awarded an MBE in 1998 for services to the restaurant and tourism industries, Terry began his training in some of Europe's finest hotels, returning to the region to spend eight years as lead chef, building a formidable reputation for the Fishermans Lodge restaurant in Jesmond Dene, Newcastle.

It was in 1988 that he and a his small team went solo to establish 21 Queen Street which has evolved into the much larger 21HG. In 2006 Terry was awarded a life time achievement award at the Northern Hospitality Awards.

Terry has been a member of the Academy of Culinary Arts since 1998.



## Travel Geoff Moore

After joining the Merchant Navy at 18 then entering the superyacht industry in 2007, Geoff has had the privilege of travelling to all four corners of the globe as a crew member on board some of the yachting industry's most prestigious vessels. Fast forward 20 years, whilst the days of transporting and looking after celebrity guests are behind him, he now runs West Nautical from its global headquarters in Newcastle upon Tyne.

They offer a range of nautical services, with a special focus on curating and organising unforgettable luxury superyacht holidays to the world's finest destinations.



## Business Wayne Halton

Wayne has worked in the North East for more than 35 years both as a newspaper journalist and a senior PR practitioner. Before moving into PR and launching his own successful consultancy, he worked in the news room at The Journal and was Business Editor at The Northern Echo.

His experience stands him in good stead to provide insightful and honest articles about issues affecting the regional economy and business environment. He will chew the fat and sit toe-to-toe with some of the biggest names and rising stars in the North East business world.

As a specialist in B2B communications, he will conduct a new series titled Big Business Interviews, highlighting and humanising successful business owners in the region. This long-form interview will be published in every forthcoming issue of Portfolio.

Wayne will also be responsible for managing a range of new editorial columns where business people candidly share insights and observations that have helped shape them and their business journeys.



## Wine David Harker

David's interest in wine began in the early 1980s in Dennhofer's restaurant in Durham, after learning that there was more than two types of grape. David was curious about the different wine grapes in use and that he could make informed choices about which wines to try if he knew more about the varieties.

Following several wine qualifications, David's hobby became his profession when he took on the ownership of Newcastle Wine School. The Wine School runs wine tastings, wine courses, private events and wine tours for customers in Newcastle and across the North East.

Since leaving school at sixteen, David's life has followed many paths including a spell in local government, three years at Newcastle University, accountancy training and Chief Executive of Durham County Cricket Club.



# Let me introduce myself

Editor's notes from  
Jessica Laing



**As we prepare to bid farewell to 2023 and say hello to 2024, I'm feeling particularly reflective on what has been a fantastic end to my year.**

After a three-year hiatus - during which time I pivoted into new realms of content, PR, marketing and copywriting - I'm delighted to have returned to the world of publishing.

Magazines have always had a special place in my heart. A journalist and writer since the tender age of 21, I've been fortunate enough to lead and edit a number of brilliant titles during my career - most of which were, and still are, firmly rooted in the North East.

Home to a growing number of trail-blazing businesses and inspiring individuals, our region is never short of fantastic stories - and it's always been a joy of mine to be able to share them in the pages of a magazine. Something tangible. Something you actually take the time to sit with, indulge in, lose yourself in. A rare thing in today's fast-paced, on-the-go, digital world.

I remain a big believer in the power of print and I'm delighted to add Portfolio North to my roster. As editor, it's my job to make each edition better than the last, with insightful and impactful editorial that engages, educates and entertains. And I vow to do just that.

I'm looking forward to taking good care of the magazine's editorial vision and, in time, boosting its reputation - and I hope you'll join me on what I'm confident will be an exciting and rewarding journey. I'd like to extend a warm and heartfelt thank you to Cassie and the rest of the team for welcoming me into the fold.

Even when you're back doing what you've always done and loved, settling in to a new environment, getting to know a new product and finding your place within a new team can feel daunting - but their unwavering support and confidence in me have made the last couple of months feel like home.

I'd also like to thank all the new clients I've met - many of whom you'll read about in the pages of this edition - for their well wishes.

Here at Portfolio North, we are committed to building and nurturing the relationships we have with our clients - the people who trust us to help fly the flag for their business and personal brand - and it's been a pleasure getting to know them.

In our final edition of the year, we've given you an extra helping of must-read

content to see you through the most wonderful time of the year - and I can assure you it's only a taste of what's to come.

From success stories in the worlds of recruitment, property and hospitality, to expert advice from big names in digital, law and more, we bring you the latest business news and updates, coupled with exclusive interviews you won't read anywhere else.

If that wasn't enough, we also take you on a tour of Middleton Lodge's new and highly-anticipated Forest Spa, unwrap our top gifts for the festive season, reveal BoConcept's top secrets, venture to the region's largest supplier of real Christmas trees and talk lessons in life and business with one of the North East and Yorkshire's best-loved figures - Valeria Sykes.

Call me bias now, but it's a real page-turner, I assure you.

From all of us at Portfolio North, we hope you have a wonderful Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year.

Here's to new beginnings.

# News from across the North East

## Samuel Knight International welcomes new COO



Renewable energy talent solutions firm, Samuel Knight International, has appointed Dylan Christie as its new Chief Operating Officer.

Dylan comes with 25 years' experience across engineering and technology recruitment sectors and will be pivotal in growing the EMEA and RoW renewable energy recruitment business.

Group CEO Steve Rawlingson said: "I am delighted to welcome Dylan aboard. With expertise in high-level growth, Dylan has previously developed one of the world's leading tech companies - achieving £220 million in sales.

"I am very confident that Dylan will achieve similar success here at Samuel Knight International as we continue to grow too.

"This development of our C-Suite leadership team will strengthen our market position. It will also allow me to focus working on the future plans and growth for the business. Plus, I will continue to develop the global business with the senior management team based in

Dallas and Boston".

Over recent months Samuel Knight International has increased headcount across the UK and USA by 35% and grew revenues by 26%. 2023 will prove £25.3 million in sales while creating a solid run rate coming into 2024.

New COO Dylan Christie said "I am very pleased to join Samuel Knight International at such an exciting time for growth. We have very ambitious plans for development and I look forward to working with the talented team here to realise these projections.

"In addition, we will still be remaining faithful to our aim of working with our global community to achieve zero carbon emissions by 2050, whilst also building one of the best companies in the world".

Samuel Knight International has also appointed Ben Townsend as Head of Energy, Jack Roberts Vice President Strategic Partnerships and Alison Lowrie as EMEA & RoW Strategy Director.

## £3.6 million skills training boost for the North East

The North East is set to benefit from a huge skills training boost, as colleges and universities share a £3.6 million pot through the Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF).

The funds focus on the skills requirements of businesses located in Sunderland, Gateshead, South Tyneside and County Durham, identified in the North East Local Skills Improvement Plan (NELSIP).

The Department for Education (DfE) has announced £165 million funding from the LSIF to enable collaborations of further education colleges and training providers to meet specific regional skills needs identified in the Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs). The announcement was part of a £200 million funding boost to support local areas to offer more high-quality training opportunities

to meet local skills needs.

This is part of a government drive to level up the country, get more people into good jobs close to home, plug skills gaps and grow the economy.

The North East

Automotive Alliance (NEAA) was commissioned to lead work to develop the NELSIP, which sets out the key changes needed to ensure post-16 technical education and training is responsive to the needs of employers in the region. The NELSIP report identified six priorities which included providing essential digital skills, aligning 16-plus technical education and training provision, increasing the supply of level 3+ technical skills, collaborating to deliver key technical skills for regional growth, ensuring employer focus and prioritising social inclusion.

The report was approved and published in August.





## Sheepfolds Stables welcomes Vito and a taste of Italy



An ambitious young chef is set to bring the authentic taste of Italy to Sunderland, as the latest addition to the hotly anticipated Sheepfolds Stables development.

Vittorio Farigu, 25, who is currently executive chef at Gino D'Acampo's popular restaurant on Newcastle's Quayside, will be opening Vito's Osteria, which will offer small plates of stunning cuisine, inspired by different regions of the Mediterranean country.

The restaurant, which will open in spring 2024 when the £3 million Sheepfolds Stables development is complete, will offer more than 50 covers, and is Vittorio's first foray into owning and managing a restaurant.

Vittorio – or Vito for short – said: "The idea is a concept I have been thinking about for a long time and it is inspired by the atmosphere of a family dinner. I want to create a place with a specific identity and authenticity; for it to have that feel of being at a family dinner – like the ones I enjoyed when I was little, with laughter, love and great food."

## Big boost for sustainable aviation fuel on Teesside as five firms win multi-million pound funding



Making Teesside the UK capital of creating low-carbon aviation fuel has taken a big leap forward after a major funding boost.

Almost £40 million from the Department for Transport's Advanced Fuels Fund has been awarded to five Teesside-based firms leading the way in creating Sustainable Aviation Fuel.

The total award in the latest round of the fund was £53 million – with companies with operations in the region taking home 75 percent of the grant cash on offer.

Arcadia e-Fuels (£12.3 million), Nova Pangaea Technologies (£9.1 million),

Alfanar Energy (£8.7 million), Abundia Biomass-to-Liquids (£4.5 million), and Willis Sustainable Fuels (£4.7 million) were successful in their bids.

The region's long-standing chemical engineering expertise has seen several firms opt to line up a base in the Tees Valley. Making Teesside International Airport's the UK's first Net Zero Airport is also part of the region's wider Net Zero Strategy with an ambition for Net Zero flights by 2035.

Tees Valley mayor, Ben Houchen, said: "Here on Teesside, we are leading

the way in sustainable aviation fuel and this announcement just goes to show it with 75 percent of this fund going to local projects.

"We are committed to making aviation sustainable to secure the future of Teesside Airport and by getting ahead of the curve we can make sure we are best placed to lead the transition to SAF.

"These fantastic projects will create local jobs for local people and make our airport a key player in the industry.

"Let there be no mistake about it – we get things done and we get there first."

# Ascot Care eyes future growth with multi-million pound refinance deal

Further expansion is in the sights of a leading North East care provider after it completed a multi-million pound refinance deal with HSBC UK, thanks to support from award-winning law firm Mincoffs Solicitors and RMT Accountants and Business Advisors.

Ascot Care operates seven care homes across the region, with the team most recently acquiring Langley House Care Home in Horden and Princess House Care Home in Seaburn.

The funding will allow the family-run business to strengthen its presence in the sector and grow its portfolio across the North East and further afield.

Along with its other homes in Alnwick, Darlington, Durham, Whitley Bay and South Shields, the care provider also owns Ascot Care Agency, which delivers high quality home care and live-in care across the region.

Gareth Nesbit, director at Ascot Care, considers the recent refinance a crucial step towards achieving their long-term growth objectives.

"It's been a very smooth process with Mincoffs, HSBC UK and RMT," he said.

"We continually look to expand the group with care homes that fit our portfolio and a crucial part of that is obviously having the right professionals in place to assist, in terms of solicitors, banking and accountancy."



## This Eagles season is a Seriös one



The British Basketball League's most successful franchise has unveiled its fresh new look at home and abroad – and this time it's Seriös.

The Seriös Group Newcastle Eagles was unveiled as the new name for Tyneside's top-flight men's and women's teams earlier this year.

And Marc Steutel's men's roster is determined to make a big impression in the club's eye-catching Seriös Group-branded kits when European hoops makes its Newcastle debut next week.

"It's exciting to think that we're just a few days away from welcoming Basket Brno

to town," said Seriös Group co-founder and CEO Lee Rorison.

"I was glued to the TV when Marc and the guys made their European North Basketball League (ENBL) debut in Lithuania earlier this month.

"And it's fantastic to see the Seriös Group name making its mark far beyond the UK!

"When we had the chance to double down on our support of the club by becoming the men's front of shirt sponsors it was a no-brainer.

"The fact that there are at least seven games in Europe this season is an added bonus.

"Everyone at Seriös Group is really excited for the ENBL campaign and I'm already looking forward to attending the games with my team.

"As an organisation we're fully invested in the franchise and the front of shirt branding looks brilliant."

Steutel's roster debuted their Seriös One change kit on the way to a battling win at Bristol earlier this season. It featured again during last week's high-profile clash at league leaders London and Lee is excited to see the Eagles spreading the word when it comes to Seriös Group's proprietary product.

"We've been developing Seriös One for the whole life span of the business," he explained.

"That's the best part of three years and so it's fantastic to see it finally out there.

"The branding looks great on the white shirts and it ties into some marketing we have planned around the product.

"Seriös One is a fully hosted data platform solution and the Eagles were one of our earliest adopters.

"There are sensors throughout the Vertu Motors Arena collecting energy consumption and space

utilisation data.

"Seriös One processes the data collected to predict how the venue can become more energy efficient – and maybe it's playing its part in helping Marc's team get off to a great start this season!"

Seriös Group was formed in 2020 with a remit to provide quality and competitively priced data and test solutions.

The firm already boasts a varied roster of regional, national and international clients and continues to bolster its Newcastle headquartered operation.

Seriös One launched earlier this year, offering businesses the opportunity to fully unlock the full potential of their data.

"Seriös One will be a game changer for the Vertu Motors Arena," said Eagles' Managing Director, Paul Blake.

"Like all venues we are dealing with increasing energy costs and thanks to Lee and his team we will have access to data that makes us far more efficient.

"It's great to see the product on the men's away kit – the branding's really strong. This is a partnership that continues to go from strength to strength."





# Festive fun

Lowes Financial Management hosted its regular Festive Fizz business social event at Pepo cocktail bar in Newcastle in November.

The event was a fantastic opportunity for Lowes' business partners, clients and connections to come together and welcome in the festive season with a glass of champagne or two, reflect on the past year and begin making plans for the year ahead.

[www.lowes.co.uk](http://www.lowes.co.uk)





# Fizz in the City

Fizz in the City returned to Banyan, Newcastle, in October for a special Halloween-themed afternoon. The popular ladies' networking event is hosted by leading Newcastle-based law firm Mincoffs Solicitors, with Portfolio North joining as media sponsor.

Each event pairs with a chosen charity and the firm's final Fizz of the year raised money for youth development charity NE Youth, which is dedicated to making a positive difference to the lives of young people. Held three times a year, the event invites its attendees to create connections over a glass of fizz and a cupcake in a relaxed networking environment.

Charities it has supported in the past include COCO, Maggie's Centres, The Children's Foundation, 4Louis and The Chronicle Sunshine Fund, among others.

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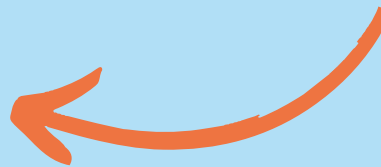


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# Challenges and opportunities facing MMC and off-site construction

**Our business editor recently took part in a round-table discussion at Expo Sunderland about the evolution of off-site construction – and whether the industry is at a tipping point.**

Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) has reached a 'tipping' point as more young people enter the construction industry and are aware of its flexibility and benefits, says a leading UK academic.

There are elements of modular or off-site construction integrated into many large building projects today, he said.

However, Paul Jones, professor of architecture and head of subject at Northumbria University, warned that MMC and or offsite construction still faced perception hurdles and traditional operators and vested interests in the built environment were trying to block its growth.

Professor Jones was speaking at a recent round-table event at Expo Sunderland, hosted by off-site building specialist Remagin, that featured leading industry experts and thought leaders. Remagin – led by Scott Bibby, country manager UK and Ireland – wanted to explore what is going well in MMC implementation, the impact of MMC on

traditional construction practices, what customers want and perceptions or concerns around MMC technologies.

One company represented at the event that champions MMC was McCarthy Stone, the UK's leading developer and manager of retirement communities.

Peter Forsyth, director of strategic initiatives, at McCarthy Stone, said: "One of the biggest issues that stops MMC being used more widely is the perception it's more expensive than other traditional methods of construction.

"We have proven that's wrong. It certainly can be more expensive if you don't implement properly. You also need to consider whole life value of a project, so it's important to measure this as well as cost.

"Offsite construction is clearly not as weather sensitive and so there is an advantage in construction speed and efficiency. You're not just manufacturing a building in a factory, there is a proper production flow with associated quality controls. Once built, we have experienced significantly fewer defects at handover.

"At McCarthy Stone we have proved we can do it. We have several schemes around the country designed this way. We have learnt a lot and we know how to extract the maximum benefits."

John Nordon, creative director of igloo, which is delivering 1,000 new homes at Riverside Sunderland, said planning regulations can sometimes be a constraint on the design and standardisation of offsite, modular housing. He highlighted the value of strong partnerships with local authorities.

Forsyth acknowledged that while he was a big advocate for MMC it was really the drive and vision of John Tonkiss, the CEO of McCarthy Stone, who made this possible; in any organisation without support from the very top it is difficult to overcome the inertia to change.







He is confident more people will turn to off-site manufacturing to deliver certain types of projects and he believes this will be partly driven by the next generation of people entering the industry.

"There is a new generation of people coming into construction who are aware of MMC. They are perhaps still influenced by those in the sector who have only worked with traditional methods, but there are those who are curious about things and not so fixed in their views," said Forsyth.

Professor Jones added that over the next 10 years it is predicted there will be a massive loss of traditional knowledge and experience as people retire from the industry. "This demographic shift and change will force MMC to be considered and used more," he added.

Richard Marsden, MD of Sunderland-based architects and engineers BDN, expressed the need for industry and the education sectors to work more closely together to create new courses outside of traditional construction to attract more young people to the sector.

"We will struggle to change perceptions and raise awareness of MMC if young people can't learn

about innovative and different ways of construction. I don't know where young people go to learn about these things. We need to be creating different pathways," said Marsden.

Scott Bibby, of Remagin, agreed it was vital to establish greater links between education and the offsite construction industry. He has already established strong connections with schools, FE colleges and universities across the North of England.

Neil Guthrie, of Sunderland City Council, wholeheartedly agreed that the skills mix in construction needed to change and more young talent needed to be attracted to the sector.

"We need to break down what construction is and can be. We need to change the focus for young people and broaden their understanding. We need to promote innovation and the exciting changes taking place in construction," he said.

In terms of what customers and clients demand and want from MMC, Guthrie was quick to highlight key requirements: "MMC has got to deliver speed and quality. The country needs to deliver more housing and to accommodation - and

quickly. MMC needs to come up with a concept, design and deliver quickly and to the right quality."

Guthrie added: "I think one of the challenges MMC faces, has been the perception the quality is no better, maybe worse. If you take housing out of a factory environment, it should almost be pristine and have no defects."

In summary, Scott Bibby highlighted how the offsite construction sector is evolving, improving in places and that it was important for the sector to keep pushing the merits of MMC more - particularly in light of some high-profile challenges which have been seen recently.

Later, Scott said that he sees offsite construction as the leader for the sector and, like any good leader, it takes less credit and has more scrutiny. He added: "We must continue to drive improvements, our performance and build strong relationships with customers so that together we can educate those resistant to change and the next generation entering the industry."

**For more information about Remagin, visit at [remagin.world](https://remagin.world)**



# The SDDE Smith Group soars as the 5th fastest growing company in the North East in 2023

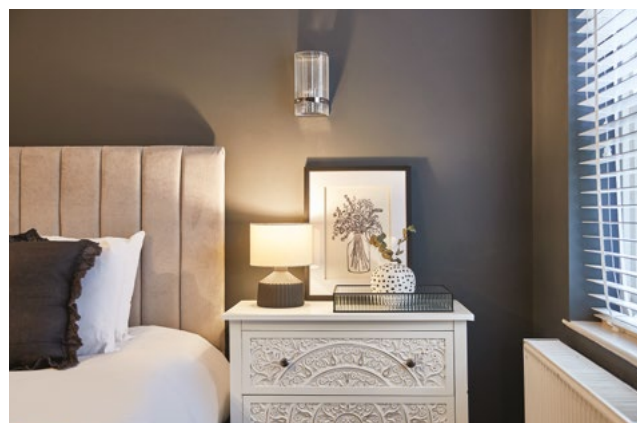
**In an impressive feat of entrepreneurial excellence, The SDDE Smith Group has been recognised as the 5th fastest growing company in the North East in 2023, by the UK Fast Growth 50 Index.**

At the forefront of this success is Host & Stay, the leading brand within the group, boasting a portfolio of 1,000 properties and an all-encompassing holiday home and serviced accommodation property management service.

Host & Stay's journey began in December 2018, with just nine holiday homes. It now manages over 1,000 properties across the UK. This is a reflection of the leadership of Dale Smith, the CEO of The SDDE Smith Group, and the dedicated workforce that makes up the Host & Stay brand.







The brand's end-to-end holiday property management service has revolutionised the holiday home sector, with an industry leading 10% + VAT management fee, Host & Stay provide clients with a seamless experience from property acquisition to bookings, housekeeping and maintenance, interior design and more.

The recent expansion into Liverpool, following the strategic acquisition of Host So Simple, added 150 holiday lets to Host & Stay's impressive portfolio. This move not only widened its geographical reach, but also solidified its unrivalled client service in a new city. Additionally, the acquisition of Blue Fox Rentals facilitated Host & Stay's expansion into Kent, marking another milestone in the group's growth trajectory.

Another standout entity within The SDDE Smith Group is Resicentral. As part of the group, it is set to reshape and revolutionise Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) and Multi-Dwelling Units (MDU). Resicentral streamlines operations for building owners, operators, and asset managers by providing a comprehensive suite of features, including energy management, SMART automation, security, access control, and video entry. The platform not only enhances efficiency and convenience, but also prioritises sustainability, safety and social well-being.

Resicentral's commitment to Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles sets it apart, with initiatives such as tree planting for carbon offsetting and support for renewable energy integration. Its success lies not just in cutting-edge technology, but in a holistic approach that aligns with the values of users, investors, and industry stakeholders. With ongoing projects in London and Manchester, Resicentral is already reshaping the landscape of property technology.

Dale Smith, the driving force behind the group's success, expressed his delight at being awarded the 5th fastest growing company in the North East. In a statement, he said: "We are honoured to receive this recognition, and it's a testament to the dedication and hard work of our talented team. As we celebrate this achievement, we are gearing up for the new year with a commitment to continuous improvement and innovation."

Smith further emphasised the group's ambitious goals, stating: "Looking ahead, our focus remains on driving the business forward. We are actively implementing changes and initiatives to propel us towards our target of managing 5,000 holiday homes by 2025. The new year brings new opportunities and we are excited to embrace them as we continue to push boundaries and create better places to live, work and stay."

# Lights. Camera. Action.





## Blockbuster plans that could transform the North East economy have taken a step forward, with proposals to build a major film studio in Sunderland now in for planning consent.

FulwellCain - a joint venture between global entertainment company Fulwell 73 and Cain International - and Sunderland City Council are spearheading a bid to gain approval that will pave the way for a £450 million film studio on the banks of the River Wear.

The application, which has been submitted to the local authority's planning committee, sets out specific plans for phase one of the studios, with two further phases also submitted for outline consent.

In all, the development will deliver a 1.68m square foot film industry hub at Pallion with 20 premium sound stages suitable for major feature film and HETV productions, if the plan is supported to get over the line by UK Government.

This represents the most significant step forward to date for Crown Works Studios, which will be one of Europe's largest facilities, bringing 8,450 jobs.

If planning consent is granted when it goes before the local authority's committee in March 2024, all local permissions will be in place to progress with the scheme, with the spotlight turning to national government to get behind the proposals if they are to become a reality.

The studios could generate £334 million for the local economy every year, creating jobs and contract opportunities spanning a vast range of disciplines including the trades and manual skills. The impact will be felt across the region and align well with government commitments made in the spring to spur on the development of the UK's creative industries.

Leader of Sunderland City Council, councillor Graeme Miller, said: "This represents an important step forward for the city, underlining our commitment to a scheme that will be just about the most ambitious catalyst for economic development seen for decades in the North East.

"It requires support and that's clear, but - as a council, working with FulwellCain - we have absolutely thrown our weight behind this to ensure everything is lined up to make it a reality. We have done everything in our gift to demonstrate our determination to see Crown Works Studios delivered."

If planning consent is granted, and with Government backing, spades could be in the ground as soon as 2024 on the huge studios, with the final phase set to complete by 2027.

Crown Works - named after the former shipyard that once stood on the site - will be transformational for the city's economy, cultivating an eco-system on a scale not seen since Nissan's investment in Sunderland in the 1980s, while meeting the growing demand for studio space in the UK.

Leo Pearlman, managing partner at Fulwell 73, said: "Sunderland City Council has shown its commitment to our plans with this application, and we have demonstrated ours too, with everything lined up and ready to go should we gain approval and get the support we need from government.

"This is a transformational plan that will reinvigorate not only the city and region's economy, but will represent a shot in the arm for the UK's creative industries and we are determined to do everything we can to ensure the impact of the studios are fully understood and supported."

Crown Works Studios will include provision for production workshops and office space, a vendor village for supply chain businesses, administrative and social facilities, a multi-storey car park and an extensive backlot.

Strong partnerships are being established to ensure that Sunderland reaps maximum advantage from the opportunity - from the job creation it will bring to the economic prosperity it could generate through increased footfall and spend in the heart of the city. These relationships will be key in delivering the skills needed to power the studio and grow a sustainable film and media ecosystem.

# A place for great opportunity

**One of the UK's most influential housing policy experts has named Sunderland one of the places where people "should be investing".**



Speaking at the Sunderland Expo's Delivering Future Cities Forum, Michael Palin, executive director for markets, partners and places at Homes England, said that the city passed all tests to be named as "one of the places with greatest opportunity" in the UK.

Addressing around 150 delegates at Sunderland City Hall, Mr Palin outlined how the local authority's approach was preparing Sunderland for a prosperous future.

"Sunderland is one of the leading places in what a future city might look like," he said.

"There are five key tests to measure successful delivery: firstly, there is a clear vision, second is a good partnership approach - including partnerships across the private sector - third is alignment of effort to deliver on the plan, fourth is flexibility, because you never know what might happen and, finally, the fifth test is bringing together the right capability. If a place meets those five tests, that's where you should be investing."

"We argued to government - it was Robert Jenrick at the time - that Sunderland was one of those areas and we reported to Michael Gove that Sunderland was one of the places that greatest opportunity could be found - the reason for this? It meets the five tests."

Mr Palin was speaking on a panel that also included Ed Whiting, director of Levelling Up, and Robin Denton, local government director at Microsoft, which brings together leaders who champion innovation, stimulate growth, challenge and share best practice in building the cities of our future.

The event explores how Sunderland City Council, working with stakeholders, partners and the government is delivering social and economic growth to inspire future generations.

Mr Palin added: "Sunderland has exceptional leadership, excellent partnership working and alignment of effort in everything it does - all joined-up in a coherent plan. There's recognition that things take time and the council was seeking all the right partnerships. It became an area of great opportunity."

He added: "If you want a place that typifies great leadership, Sunderland is it. Whatever a future city might look like, this feels like it to me."







Ed Whiting, director of Levelling Up, talked about the 'ingredients' needed to deliver growth and change and the current levelling-up priorities that will support cities like Sunderland.

He said: "When cities underperform, the way to deal with that is to increase their size. We work with housing programmes, ways of attracting private investment and place-specific regeneration.

"You can't build a growing economy without jobs and we're working with all kinds of partners about how to build a successful city centre - just like what is happening here in Sunderland."

Patrick Melia, chief executive of Sunderland City Council, said he hoped the event would be an opportunity to learn, share ideas and ultimately inspire further growth and development.

"We are creating opportunities for everyone in a connected, international city," he said.

"If all our residents are proud to live in Sunderland, we've achieved our ambition. 1,000 new homes, doubling

the city centre housing capacity, along with new commercial developments, will ensure that everyone feels the benefit of our investment - so connecting the city's communities is vital.

"The Expo is a unique opportunity for Sunderland - it gives us the chance to showcase everything that we are doing and will be doing in the coming years, but also to listen and to absorb all of these amazing ideas and hear about other incredible projects happening across the UK."

Graeme Miller, Sunderland City Council leader, said: "I'd like to thank everyone who has given up time to come along to Sunderland Expo and take part in these vibrant exciting discussions on what a modern city should look like and what its priorities must be.

"Getting so many experienced and skilled people in one room to point their collective know-how at our city can only be of huge benefit as we continue to move forward with our exciting growth plans and ensure Sunderland is the best medium-sized city in the UK."





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A full-page photograph of Valeria Sykes, an elderly woman with short brown hair, smiling at the camera. She is wearing a dark navy blue double-breasted jacket over a white top with a small brooch. She is holding a small black quilted handbag. She stands in front of a large, multi-paned window that looks out onto a garden with green plants and a patio. The room has dark wood paneling and a colorful patterned curtain above the window. A red upholstered chair is visible on the left.

# Lessons in life and business

Valeria Sykes, owner, Grantley Hall





**The best piece of business advice I've ever been given is to surround yourself with people that you trust and that share the same vision.** When I embarked on the Grantley Hall project, I knew that I had to have a team of people behind me that understood the overall goal of creating somewhere that would really put Yorkshire hospitality on the map. Throughout my life and career, I've learned that the key foundation for happiness and success is to surround yourself with like-minded individuals.

**From a very young, age my love and interest in nature has helped teach me to be happy and grateful for the simple things in life, which really helps to keep my feet on the ground.** In fact, one of my favourite areas of the hotel, is our beautiful grounds, which look amazing throughout the seasons.

**One of the most significant pieces of life advice I always go back to is "enjoy your achievements as well as your plans", which is from one of my favourite poems called "Desiderata", by Max Ehrmann.** The poem has always

resonated with me and means "things desired" in Latin. It gives the reader a positive framework to go through life and has always been a pragmatic source of inspiration for me throughout my life and my attitude towards it.

**One life lesson I wish I'd learned sooner is that patience is key and that some things cannot be rushed.** Grantley Hall is a prime example. It was purchased back in 2015 and, after a lengthy four-year restoration project, it was transformed. The property needed a lot of work carrying out to it and we wanted to ensure that the project was done to the highest standards. Grantley Hall was designed and created to BREEAM standards - the world's leading sustainability assessment method for new buildings.

**Growing up in Yorkshire has taught me the importance of resilience, determination and pride in whatever you do.** A huge reason the family embarked on the recreation of Grantley Hall was to create something Yorkshire could be proud of and I would like to think that we have achieved that goal - and more.





# Valeria Sykes

**One of the hardest lessons I've learned in business is to try to maintain a positive and constructive outlook during testing times.** The same goes in life - remaining strong and positive even when times get tough. It can be hard, but doing so provides the opportunity to improve and evolve going forward.

**When I look back on my life and career, I see now that working with my family has been paramount to the success I've had.** Especially when it comes to Grantley Hall, as we all share the same aspirations, along with the same hard work and determination to make them a reality. Being involved in many projects over the years, varying from interior design ventures to large-scale commercial projects, has really helped prepare me for the Grantley Hall journey.

**When I think about what's required to succeed in life and business, the biggest parallel is to stay true to yourself and your morals, even in difficult times.** There will always be challenges in life - both personally and professionally - but the trick is just knowing how to approach everything with a positive attitude.

**As I reflect on my life so far, one of the things I've learned most about myself is that I love being busy and like to have different areas to direct my passions.** I have a true passion for restoring old buildings, so when I saw the empty Grantley Hall estate for sale I knew that it was a project that I had to embark on. I wanted to restore it back to its old glory so that we could celebrate the very best of our county. I've always been a proud Yorkshire woman, but throughout Grantley Hall's restoration I became even more passionate for my county; using Yorkshire's suppliers, products and people to create the hotel into what it is today.

**I don't think I'd give my younger self any advice, even knowing what I know now.** I'm not sure I would need to tell her anything - my life has gone down a path which I wouldn't ever wish to change. Through all the good and bad times, I am here now and all the more happy for it.

[grantleyhall.co.uk](http://grantleyhall.co.uk)





# Opening doors in Sunderland

**Powered by family values, Kirtley Co and Wear homes are doing good things for the place they call home. Our editor chats to managing directors, Alex Kirtley and James Parkinson, about the parallels between their thriving businesses and their shared mission to make Sunderland a better place to live and work.**

They say never mix family with business, but for Kirtley Co and Wear homes, it's proved to be a recipe for success. Family-owned and ran for over 40 years, Kirtley Co is a key player in Sunderland's commercial property space. A landlord, developer and renovator in one, the business is responsible for transforming unused and unloved sites into high-spec workspaces for companies big and small.

Places like Kirtley Co. in Middlesbrough – now home to several flexible office spaces – alongside warehousing and self-storage sites in Peterlee, business units in Leechmere,

Deptford and Southwick and, perhaps most notably, Sunderland's historic Mackie's Corner – one of the flagship projects in the city's ongoing regeneration.

Today, managing director, Alex Kirtley, and her sister, Toni, sit proudly at the helm, determined to steer the business forward and carry on what their father, Henry, started all those years ago.

For Wear homes, it's a similar story. Also spearheaded by family, it's another local business making its mark in Wearside's property landscape – only this time with a focus on residential homes.





Founded just over a decade ago by managing director and property specialist, James Parkinson, the business provides quality affordable housing in and around Sunderland - including properties surrounding the latest city centre developments.

The properties - some of which are ex council houses - are immaculately refurbished to offer a higher standard of living and tenants are sourced and supported by James and his trusted team, which now includes his sister and other family members.

Alex and James - both in their early thirties - met during their schooldays and have remained friends ever since.

Today, they're allies in business, too, sharing the same ambition to improve Wearside's standard of living and working, shine a light on why it's a great place to put down roots and help boost and grow local communities. All with the support of those closest to them.

"I'm a huge advocate for businesses supporting other businesses - especially those that operate in the same space," says Alex.

"Recently, someone asked me who our competitors are and I had no clue how to answer that question. Because I don't see other people or companies who are doing similar things to us as competitors - in my eyes, we're all on the same side."

"Kirtley Co and Wear homes are interlinked in many ways - not only are we both family-owned and led, we both share the same goal, which is to improve Sunderland's reputation as a place to do business and live happily. Why wouldn't we want to support each other?"

"We've both created quite a niche for ourselves - affordable family homes and affordable luxury workspaces - and so we've always been on hand to lend advice, share experiences and offer up suggestions and ideas to one another," adds James.

"It's nice to be able to lean on each other and share our expertise and insights because everyone benefits - not just ourselves as business owners, but more importantly, our tenants."

"Like Wear homes, Kirtley Co also shares the same strong family values and lead as a personal service, which is also really important and a reason why we relate to one another so much."

"They also have a small turnover of tenants, like we do, and they recognise the importance of building trusted, long-term relationships with them. Our business model and work ethic are very similar. There's a lot of common ground there," he says. Today, both businesses are playing their part in Sunderland's ongoing regeneration, which has seen the city slowly rise from underdog to top dog in recent months.

Following private sector investments of over £2 billion, several significant commercial, leisure, public sector and residential developments are now in the works to help reinvent Sunderland as a dynamic business location and a vibrant place for community life and culture.

Boosted by local businesses such as Kirtley Co and Wear homes, the aim is to change people's impressions of the area and put it on the map as a desirable, up-and-coming place for work and play. For Alex and James, it's a welcomed shift - and a movement they're proud to contribute to.

"Thinking back to when we bought Mackie's Corner, for example, there was no investment happening in the city centre. Mackie's was a derelict building and the area was in total decline. It was really sad to see," recalls Alex.

"Buying there was a huge risk, but our hope was that, if we invest, perhaps it will inspire others to do the same - and together we can begin to turn things around and unlock the city's potential."

"In our case, we wanted to set the bar for future investors by creating luxury, yet affordable, workspaces. We wanted to show businesses what could be made possible."

"It was - and still is - about changing people's perspectives, so we're thrilled to see much-needed changes happening and more businesses popping up in and around the city."

"It's definitely been a long time

coming," echoes James, who grew up in East Herrington.

"Similarly to Kirtley Co, Wear homes is dedicated to raising Sunderland's profile and driving as many people to the city and surrounding areas as possible - including the lesser-known postcodes that we deal with, which have been overlooked in the past."

"It's an exciting time for people - couples, individuals and families - to invest and make Sunderland their home. You could say we're biased, but it really is a fantastic place to live, with so much to offer."

"It's full of friendly, down-to-earth people, it's really accessible with great transport links - you can travel between the city, countryside and beach all within no time at all - and its leisure and hospitality scene is going from strength to strength."

In an extra bid to keep more people in Sunderland and grow bigger and better communities, Wear homes - which recently hit an impressive milestone of 100 properties made available as quality affordable housing - also offers tenants the opportunity to eventually own their rented property as part of its rent-to-buy scheme.

And in 2024, James and his team will be releasing another scheme to help bring more investors into the residential housing market. In true Wear homes fashion, it will be a personalised service, geared towards investors who are looking to grow their portfolios in Sunderland and expand their offering.

"The current demand for rental housing is the strongest we've seen it over the past decade and we believe this will continue into next year, bringing new and exciting opportunities," says James.

"Although we're active in multiple housing strategies, supplying affordable homes across Wearside remains our priority and we're looking forward to literally opening more doors to more people."

**For more information about Kirtley Co, visit [kirtleyco.uk](https://kirtleyco.uk). For information about Wear homes, visit [wearhomes.com](https://wearhomes.com) or contact James at [james@wearhomes.com](mailto:james@wearhomes.com)**



# AI – worth the hype?

Jon Leighton, MD at Land Digital, shares his thoughts on the digital innovation that has everyone talking.



Over the last year, the hype around artificial intelligence (AI) has started to gain momentum - and I mean serious momentum. ChatGPT, for example, reached 1 million users in five days and surpassed 100 million in just two months.

But, along with skyrocketing adoption, we've also seen an increase in articles that outline the inevitable human demise it will bring, terminator-style.

Yet, while I'm no John Connor, I can confidently assure you that we won't be battling the T-2000s for global domination anytime soon. But, will the rapid adoption and evolution of AI change the everyday way of life and the roles of professionals in certain industries?

The short answer is: well, it depends. I never claimed to be an AI expert, but what I can offer is my opinion and perspective as someone who has worked in digital for a while.

AI is a very broad topic that can mean different things to different people. It might mean large language models, machine learning, superintelligence, or self-awareness. And it has actually been around in its various costumes for quite some time. In fact, the earliest successful AI program was written in 1951. That's right - AI in some form predates your grandparents twisting to Buddy Holly.

But, over the past year, it's large language models, or LLMs, that have been making all the headlines in the world of AI. LLMs like ChatGPT, Bard, Claude and more have started to take prominence in all our feeds and inboxes, marking perhaps the most significant new wave of AI in the mainstream since the emergence of smart speakers like Google Home and Amazon Alexa, which now already look very dated in their interactions.

So, how will all of these technologies change our everyday life and the way we work? Who knows - I did say I wasn't an expert. But, I am confident there will be change, just as there was throughout the industrial revolution - and a lot of us remember the change the internet brought with it and the impact this has had on our daily lives.

Our working lives are already going through a period of change. There has been a greater adoption of technology over the past few years, which has evolved the way we interact and manage our professional workload, but I feel the bigger changes are yet to be seen. Industries that dedicate huge amounts of time to carrying out repeatable tasks or consume and summarise large amounts of content will need to look at their business model to identify future risks and assess how their models can adapt to change.

What else? Well, what about the four-day working week? This might actually be able to be introduced while increasing productivity, rather than settling for the same level of output. Hey, why even stop at the four-day week? Why not three, or even two days? You get the idea.

Will all of this be positive? I remember when I moved up to the North East 20 years ago and my parents gave me an A - Z roadmap, which is how I learned to navigate around the big roads (don't judge me, we only had one roundabout where I grew up). At the time, I retained a lot of that information, but since the mass adoption of



navigation I have relied more and more on just following the arrow. I know I'm not alone in saying that following this arrow has got me in a lot of trouble in the past.

Now, I think it would be fantastic if we enable AI to do all the 'boring' jobs and leave us to focus on being creative. That's a far better outcome than letting AI do our thinking for us, which I feel would be a real shame and a great loss that we might not notice until it is too late.

But, to me, all of this doesn't signal that the robot uprising is right around the corner, but rather, marks the beginning of a new era where we will rely more and more on the advancement of AI to power our daily lives. The intention of AI isn't to help produce the same results for less, but instead to empower us all to do more, whether that's in our professional or personal lives.

In other words, think of LLMs more like Arnold Schwarzenegger in Terminator 2 than the original. But, that's not to say they can't still pack a real punch - you still wouldn't mess with Terminator 2 Arnold. While current LLMs may not understand the words they generate in relation to the prompts provided, this doesn't mean that these words can't impact us and our lives. After all, humans don't need to understand what they say for the words to have a positive or negative meaning to someone else.

So, as we race to embrace the latest AI innovations, it's vital we remain conscious and responsible for the ways we use and interact with it day after day and reflect on lessons learnt from social media and the unexpected outcomes that medium has created.

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**THE SOCIAL CO.**





# Reflecting on a record-breaking year



## Leading North East based social media agency, The Social Co. is reflecting on a successful 2023, following a year of award wins and new clients.

The Social Co. supports clients nationally and internationally through its 30 plus Durham-based social experts who support clients in all areas of social media marketing including paid and organic social media strategies, video content and brand development, to create maximum exposure and targeted digital marketing which drives sales.

Reflecting on 2023 at The Social Co., co-founder James Ogilvie said: "We have had a really successful year, with a brand-new website and a host of new clients, who have been fantastic to work with.

"We recently won Most Creative social media Agency in the UK at the SME News Business Elite Awards,

which is a fantastic recognition of our hard work and specialist services. We have also been nominated for two awards at the North East Marketing Awards, which takes place in December.

"We are going through a company restructure and have a series of exciting announcements to make before the end of the year and in the first quarter of 2024, including new national and international clients."

"We have welcomed new members to our team this year and with their skills, and our upcoming brand refresh, 2024 is set to be a fantastic year for The Social Co."



# Smart Media Buying receives prestigious national cinema award

Northeast media buying agency, Smart Media Buying, received the prestigious Best (New) Use of Creativity in Cinema for its JD Sports King of the Game 2022 cinema campaign in the recent national Digital Cinema Awards 2023.

Smart Media Buying, based in Houghton-le-Spring, was recognised for its creative and innovative approach to cinema media buying by the 7th annual Digital Cinema Awards. The awards, held at BAFTA in

partnership with Campaign, showcased and rewarded the best strategic use of cinema medium and work created by the media industry in the past year.





The category, Best (New) Use of Creativity in Cinema, celebrated campaigns that demonstrated the clever use of new ideas and innovative thinking for the cinema medium to deliver something tangible for the advertiser.

Hayley Shaw, JD Sports Fashion plc's Media & Partnerships Manager said:

"This award is a testament to all the teams at JD, Smart Media and DCM, who worked seamlessly together to ensure this media campaign was a success.

"As a first time buy for the business in this particular medium, we wanted to maximise every touchpoint of the cinema journey and create an authentic experience for our consumers. Using great insights and planning, we created a powerful and bold campaign that delivered excellent results and we are thrilled to have now also received industry recognition in the form of this award."

The 7th annual Digital Cinema Awards saw intense competition among strong national media buying agencies of all sizes representing many of the most impressive national brands across the UK.

Nominees in the Best (New) Use of Creativity in Cinema included Havas Media Network, Havas PLAY on behalf of Kia, EssenceMediacom on behalf of No 7 Beauty Company, Wavemaker on behalf of Paramount +, Initiative on behalf of Prime Video, Starcom on behalf of Samsung, and OMD on behalf of Tourism Ireland.

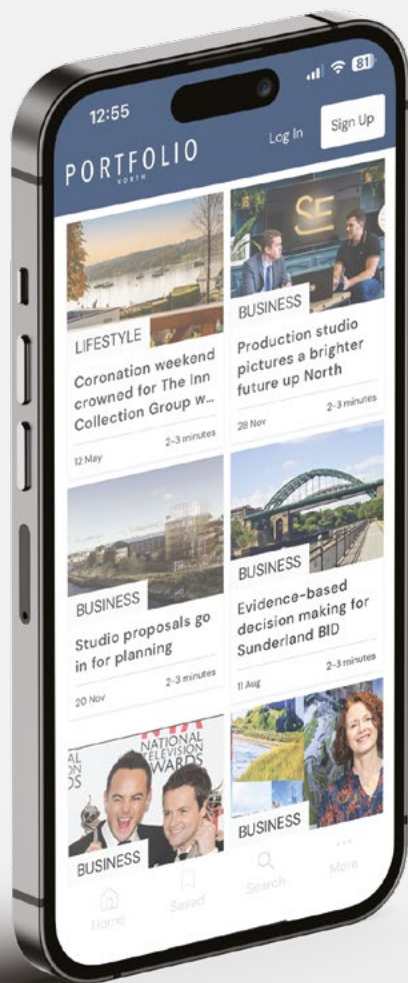
Mark Clancey, Smart Media Buying Managing Director, said: "It's truly an honour to receive this award among such prestigious nominees. It represents a culmination of months of hard work by the Smart Media Buying and JD teams to introduce the brand to a new advertising medium and creatively bring to life what you see on screen through engaging and eye-catching experiential activity."

Smart Media Buying's approach to cinema saw JD adopt cinema as their lead medium as they sought to reach 16-24-year-olds during a particularly busy 2022 Q4. The results of the campaign far exceeded typical benchmarks, proving Smart Media Buying's creative approach to media buying enabled JD to reach its target audiences at the busiest time of year.

Rachael Cochrane, DCM Regional Sales Director, said: "Smart Media Buying encouraged and guided JD into cinema advertising, enabling them to embrace the medium whole-heartedly and truly make their investment count.

Using great insights and planning, they created something bespoke for the big screen that was contextually relevant and imbued with creative merit. It was a powerful and bold campaign that delivered excellent results."

Smart Media Buying specialises in cinema, TV, radio, and press advertising together with DOOH / OOH and direct mail on both a hyper-local, national, and international level.



# Portfolio North launches exclusive app

Portfolio North has announced the launch of its news app, which is set to offer users exclusive content and opportunities, enhanced by an optimal mobile experience.

With an established print readership of over 50,000 readers per edition across the North of England, Portfolio North has been steadily building its digital presence since launching its website, dedicated social media channels and e-newsletter in 2021 - reaching 49 million impressions from April 2022 to April 2023.

The magazine, which publishes bi-monthly print editions for readers in both the North East and Yorkshire, also publishes daily news on its website. The publication has now taken a further step into the digital space in developing a free app which is available now on the App Store and Google Store.

Cassie Moyse, director and co-owner of Portfolio North's Yorkshire and North East magazines commented on the launch of the app: "I've been in the PR and news world for a long time and have always had an interest in the media, and have watched this industry change considerably over the past decade or so. Portfolio North is a news source where we can share the truly regional news from the North, provide interesting, relevant, entertaining, educational and credible news and features through readable and enjoyable platforms.

"It's integral for us to respond to how our readers like to consume their news so that we can create a popular and trusted news source. We know that one reader might catch up on the news on their mobile on the commute to work, some may prefer to sit down at a weekend with a cuppa or a glass of wine and flick through the pages, some may catch up on their desktop on their break - and some do all of the above.

"Our news-app will provide readers with exclusive content and opportunities, a clear layout and efficient user journey while creating an easier to read mobile experience - which will also result in more views and longer reading time.

"The news-app is an important piece of the puzzle in creating a print publication with better quality, better content, a longer 'shelf-life' and genuine value in its print quality, content and production, coupled with user-friendly digital platforms and in-person events."

Designed by North East based Land Digital, the app features the latest breaking news articles, lifestyle round-ups, recipes and exclusive features, which will be available only to app subscribers.

Cassie continued: "The team at Land Digital were fantastic to work with and I am incredibly proud of the product we have produced. The team thought about every detail and made the process easy and enjoyable. I'm looking forward to continuing to work with the team on other projects in 2024."

The app includes the ability to choose specific areas of news to view, save and favourite posts and unique content including interviews with well-known businesspeople from industries with bases in the North East and Yorkshire.

Each category is separated into North East and Yorkshire lifestyle or business news, as well as its Wine and Dine club, ensuring readers easily find stories that are specific to their interests. Previous print issues of Portfolio North are also available to enjoy, with digital editions uploaded to the app.

**To download the app, visit the App Store or Google Play Store and search 'Portfolio North'.**



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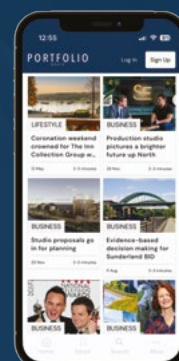
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# Five reasons to use a solicitor for your will

**Lydia McCaslin, head of wills, probate and trusts at Mincoffs Solicitors, explores the benefits of engaging with a solicitor to prepare a will – and the potential risks associated with other options.**

While it's often a task many choose to put off, most people understand the importance of making a will to ensure that wishes are accurately carried out after death and to provide security for loved ones left behind.

However, the process can be expensive and some people may have wondered if they could save themselves time and money by drafting a will without engaging a solicitor.

While this is an option, it's important to note that there are a number of reasons people choose to place their trust in solicitors when creating a will, with potential consequences if it is not handled correctly.

## Expert advice

Whether dealing with a young couple who have just purchased their first home, or a divorcee with multiple assets overseas, solicitors specialising in wills, probate and trusts can offer trusted, expert advice tailored to each client's particular circumstances. A full-service firm, such as Mincoffs, also benefits from the ability to consult colleagues working in corporate or family law, who can weigh in on more complex cases if needed.

## Ensures validity

Like any other legal document, a will must meet certain conditions in order to be legally valid. A will created without the advice and guidance of a solicitor may open itself up to challenges of its validity, which could ultimately result in it being classed or considered as invalid after death. In these circumstances, assets would be distributed according to intestacy rules and, as a result, may not reflect the wishes of the deceased.

## Awareness of broader issues

While some wills can be simple and straightforward, others require more attention. When these circumstances arise, solicitors are highly trained in how to manage them in the most efficient way for their clients. This can include dealing with pensions, life insurance, foreign assets, complex family structures or inheritance tax, among others.

## Regulated and insured

Unlike will writing services, law firms are regulated by the Law Society and are required to have professional indemnity insurance, which means there are protections in place for clients if something goes wrong. For example, if someone instructs a law firm to draft their will and then years later the business closes down, it must still follow specific requirements for the safekeeping of clients' documents even if the firm ceases to exist.

## Peace of mind

A will is one of the most important documents a person will ever have to sign and will be relied on after death. Knowing that assets will be distributed according to a person's wishes and that loved ones will be taken care of is a huge relief to many, so it's imperative that a will outlines this clearly. A solicitor knows the right questions to ask and how to draft the document, so it doesn't leave anything open to interpretation further down the line.

**For friendly, sensitive advice about writing or updating a will, contact Lydia McCaslin, head of wills, probate and trusts on [probate@mincoffs.co.uk](mailto:probate@mincoffs.co.uk) or visit [mincoffs.co.uk/services/wills-probate-trusts/](https://mincoffs.co.uk/services/wills-probate-trusts/)**



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# Investing – it's easier (and more important) than you think



**That the financial world is the preserve of only those who are able to decode it is a misconception that Lowes Financial Planner Josh Mayne DipPFS works hard to change.**

Here, he talks about how accessible – and vital – investing is.

One of the most common misconceptions in the world of finance is that financial planning only becomes relevant at age 50 and up. There are many reasons why that isn't the case and why some of our most successful outcomes are with clients who engaged a planner earlier in their working life, whatever their chosen career.

While your professional journey is in full swing, you're often (not always, but often) at your most aspirational. Lifestyle ideals, future ventures, families, travel plans, renovation projects, school fees and more. It's sensible to consider what is achievable for yourself and how that would be potentially made more likely by investment.

This is the first of a three-part series, in which we will highlight the life-enhancing features of the main strands of financial planning - beginning with investing.



### What Is investing?

Put simply, investing is placing your money in an asset with the intention of making a return over time – be it through capital growth, or income generation.

An asset can mean anything from simply cash to physical property, rare metals, precious or luxury items, and, most often in the world of financial planning, stock market-based investments. You may hear the latter referred to as financial instruments, which cover several different types of stock market investment.

Returns come in the form of growth in the value of that asset – or income generated from it, usually dividends or interest.

### Why does investing matter?

There are several reasons why investing is important to your financial wellbeing, but two fundamental ones stand out.

The first has been difficult to avoid in recent months and is, of course, inflation. Inflation means your pounds buy you less next year than they do this year. Some form of return is required to offset that loss of buying power. Cash is a key component of any financial plan, but returns on cash rarely, if ever, adequately compensate you for these price rises.

However, if inflation is the illness, then investing is the antidote and so the first reason that investing matters is wealth preservation, particularly over a long period.

The second is related to the first, but is more aspirational. Where your goal is to maximise your wealth and achieve the targets you personally seek to achieve, then some form of investment will usually be required.

That's because stock market investments have higher potential returns than cash in the bank, and the price paid for that extra return potential is the risk that your pot falls in value, at least in the short-term. That's why the length of time you invest becomes so important, and the longer, the better. Since the dawn of markets (or at least record keeping), the chances of markets ending any one year in positive territory have varied, but over ten years or more, the trajectory is more often than not, upwards.

Although nothing is guaranteed, growth in investment portfolios should exceed that from cash-based investments over the longer term, with the extent of this outperformance often correlated with how much risk you take.

Investing a pot of £50,000 for 10 years at a 5% annual return gives £75,000 after a decade. Just imagine the difference the extra growth could make to you in achieving your life's aspirations. So, the second reason investing is important is wealth growth. But more importantly, it is what it means to you.



### What are your options?

As a business, we take great care in making the process of investment feel easy and transparent and we realise there are perceptual and informational hurdles for many people to overcome before they decide to explore investment. If this is you, then please be assured that you are not alone.

### The 'who'

Frequently, these barriers are due to the number of options there are in terms of who you approach Banks, online platforms, financial planners, robo-advisers, stockbrokers, and so on. How do you choose between them? The 'finfluencer' movement has not helped, encouraging many into poor investment choices, based solely on hype.

From our decades of experience in guiding our clients through all stages of their lives, our strong belief is that nothing replaces being able to speak to a regulated individual from an independent financial planning firm. The growth in online self-select investment options has in many ways been good for our industry and the people we serve, but unless a human being is involved then you can't know with certainty that the options chosen are right for you.

This was cited as important by a recent study by a prominent professional investment body, where one-fifth of the respondents who referred to themselves as non-investors said they would change that if there was an element of personalisation to the solution\*.

Busy professionals often fall into this category. We encounter many who, despite being part of their company pension scheme, are invested along with everybody else in an off-the-shelf solution with no personal tailoring.

Returning to the study, over half of the

'non-investor' respondents would engage if the plan was fully tailored to them, which is something we at Lowes have always believed in.

### The 'what'

This decision is much simpler once you have engaged a professional to make it on your behalf, especially one with a range of investment options available to them. Your individual or family circumstances are considered, goals clearly defined, and how you feel about risk is measured and clear. The resulting portfolio is constructed specifically for you.

We have an extensive range of stock market-based investment solutions available to us, and Lowes' leading position in the field of structured products – an innovative type of investment giving exposure to the stock market with an element of capital protection – allows us to offer our clients exclusive investments that are better than those available in the broader market.

Furthermore, you can rest assured that every such investment the company recommends is personally approved by Ian Lowes, drawing on his decades of expertise in the sector.

### The 'why'

This is better described as 'your why'. The investment portfolio is the means, but it is the end that is most important – and unique – to you, be that ensuring your family's long-term financial health is taken care of, your retirement is prosperous and not constrained by money worries, or any number of further reasons.

**Lowes Financial Management is one of the longest standing Independent Financial Advice firms in the UK, based in Jesmond, Newcastle.**

Lowes Financial Management is one of the longest standing Independent Financial Advice firms in the UK, based in Jesmond, Newcastle. Regularly recognised in professional awards (including being named ILP Moneyfacts 'Investment Adviser of the Year', 2023) and were amongst the first firms in the UK to achieve the accreditation "Chartered Financial Planners". With exceptional client satisfaction, over 97% of clients\*\* would recommend Lowes to friends, family or colleagues.

\* IFA Magazine \*\*Lowes Biennial Client Satisfaction Survey, 2023

# What makes me tick?

Sam Spoors, founder and MD of Talentheads



## My morning routine is...

Always kickstarted by letting our gorgeous two toy poodles, Holly and Rose, into our garden. We flick the fairy and fish tank lights on before turning the radio on for a bit of background noise.

Eventually we wake the kids - and always encourage the little ones to make their beds and open their curtains - before we all head downstairs to enjoy breakfast together.

## What puts me in a good mood...

Music! If I'm at home or in the office, there's always music on. Nothing lifts my mood like belting out a banger such as Inner Smile by Texas.

## What makes me angry...

Bad manners. If someone pushes into a queue or doesn't say thank you, I can't ignore that.

Greed also makes me angry - there's just no reason for it. Both are super frustrating traits in people.

## Values I try to live and work by...

Loyalty, honesty, gratefulness, appreciation and respect. My value system is integral to everything that I do, to the point where I'm prepared to make important decisions based on whether it fits with my personal and business values.

## Bad habits I try to break...

I convenience eat too much. My home and work life are so busy, so I tend to rush and pick up food that is easy and convenient.

I then encourage others to do the same for ease. It's not great and as a result there are lots of negative consequences.

## What motivates me most?

Making a difference. I want to make an impact and leave something positive behind. Doing something different, changing perceptions, challenging what has always been done - that makes me get out of bed each morning.

## My sources of joy are...

My children, my relationship with my husband, the success of my business, my two toy poodles, music, food and dancing.

## I relax and destress by...

Reading or listening to a good book. I like a good mixture between crime fiction, a meaty autobiography and a business book on scaling successful businesses or leadership.

## What most people don't know about me?

I ran for England Schoolgirls' and absolutely loved it. Cross country was my event and I have fond memories of grassy spike running shoes and foil wraps on completion of a run.

## If I didn't do my current job, I'd like to be...

A home-maker. I never had the opportunity to consider being a mum who could stay at home when I had my children. Although my kids would hate me being at home (they say I would run the house like a business), I would love to be part of the school activities, be there when they come in on an evening and to keep on top of running a household of four children and two dogs. I say this as it's completely the opposite of what I currently do. However, I wouldn't change being a business owner. I love the pace, challenge and disruptiveness and I've definitely found my calling.

Talentheads is a specialist recruitment consultancy. For more information visit [talentheads.co.uk](https://talentheads.co.uk), email [hello@talentheads.co.uk](mailto:hello@talentheads.co.uk) or contact 0191 300 8688



# The best piece of business *advice you've been given*

“ Don't take no for an answer - there is always a way. I say this to myself regularly when I'm faced with a challenge, or when someone has put the barriers up. Most of the time there is a way or means around a barrier... so long as it's legal! ”



**Richard Shell**  
The Doxford Group

“ One piece of advice that has stuck with me is to never underestimate an enthusiastic amateur, which I take to mean that you can succeed in anything you do, so long as you have enough passion and determination. ”



**James Allison**  
Middleton Lodge

“ The best piece of advice I have given is very simple - to remain calm and trust your gut instinct. I'll often have a gut instinct about a situation and I've learned through experience and learning along the way that it's important to listen to it. I also know not to make decisions if I'm feeling high emotions - instead always look at the data. When the data lines up with my instinct, I know I'm moving in the right direction. ”

**Annelene Hutton**  
Dawson & Sanderson



“ Warren Buffet once said 'look for three things in people - intelligence, energy and integrity. If the last isn't present, don't bother with the first two'. Voltaire once said 'judge a man by his questions, not his answers'. Both have shaped my whole career and feature at the forefront every single day. ”

**Brendan Haywood**  
Osbit



“ One thing I was told in the very early days of working with BoConcept was 'question the ordinary'. This mindset, which can look frustrating to some, is with me now, as a director of the business. A mindset that every team member has also adopted - the freedom to challenge the normal. That's where true team growth comes from. ”



**Richard Wingfield**  
BoConcept

# On the move?

Expert moving advice from leading removals company, Doree Bonner International.



David Robson, branch manager for Doree Bonner International's Newcastle office, offers some advice to guide you through the moving process.

"Moving to a new home is an exciting milestone, but it can also be a stressful experience without proper planning and organisation," he says.

"Whether you're relocating to a new city or just moving across town, the logistics of packing, transporting, and unpacking can be overwhelming. We understand this, which is why, as a professional moving company, we aim to take the strain, to ensure a seamless transition to your new home.

"If you've entrusted professionals to sell your property, arrange a mortgage and manage the conveyancing, doesn't it make sense to use a professional moving company to deal with the most important part of all - moving - rather than the stress of trying to handle it yourself?"

## Questions to ask yourself

- Will the moving company truly understand our unique needs?
- Will our effects be handled with utmost care?
- Can we rely on them to be flexible and accommodating?
- Does the mover boast a proven track record?
- Are they a member of the BAR (British Association of Removers)?

Everyone's requirements are different. At Doree Bonner, we understand this. From your initial contact, our highly trained co-ordination staff will ensure your move runs smoothly from start to finish.

With years of experience and an unwavering commitment to values such as honesty, respect, courtesy, flexibility and reliability, we stand out in the industry.

## Virtual and home survey

Our co-ordination staff will arrange for a member of our sales team to visit your home - either physically or virtually - ensuring you receive a comprehensive quotation tailored to your specific needs, from moving the largest piece of furniture to your smallest piece of china, or even making a special case for those valuable prized possessions. This visit is free of charge and you are under no obligation to use our services.

## Moving day

Come moving day, your team that will have been specially chosen from our extensive front-line staff will begin wrapping and packing your effects using the highest quality packing materials. Sit back and relax as our uniformed crew - who all carry photographic identity cards, are DBS checked and part of our Customer Values Initiative - carry out your move.

## Storage

Moving dates can change at the last minute, necessitating storage for a short or longer period. At Doree Bonner, like many other professional moving companies, we offer modern, purpose-built secure storage services with 24-hour surveillance, so you can be sure your valuable belongings are safe with us. You may need storage for a longer period and the advantage of choosing a removal company for storage is the "pay-for-what-you-need" pricing model. Unlike self-storage units, where you might pay for unused space, removal companies charge solely on the volume of storage required.

You can also store with a removals company without moving with them, so if you currently have items in storage, consider contacting Doree Bonner or another removals company for a quote. You may find yourself pleasantly surprised by the savings and convenience they offer.

## Doree Bonner International's top 10 tips for moving

- 1 Seek recommendations from family or friends as a starting point for choosing your removals company
- 2 Plan your move well in advance - at least 4-6 weeks - even if you don't have an exact moving date
- 3 Choose a moving company that is a member of the BAR (British Association of Removers) or internationally-accredited with FIDI FAIM, as these companies are amongst the top six hundred movers in the world
- 4 It's important that you request the moving company to conduct a virtual or home survey so they can assess your requirements and tailor the service accordingly
- 5 Plan arrangements for children and pets in advance of the move
- 6 Inform neighbours about the move, making allowances for the removal's vehicle
- 7 Keep essential documents, such as passports and driving licenses, medicines if required, keys and small valuable items, such as jewellery, with you personally
- 8 Ensure you have comprehensive insurance in place for unseen events
- 9 Pack a box with essentials like a kettle, mugs, tea and coffee
- 10 Relax and let us handle the logistics

For more information, contact Doree Bonner International's Newcastle branch on 0191 268 6383, email [bradleyhall@dbonner.co.uk](mailto:bradleyhall@dbonner.co.uk) or visit [www.doreebonner.co.uk](http://www.doreebonner.co.uk) and Doree Bonner's YouTube page, where you can find helpful videos about its storage services. [www.youtube.com/@DoreeBonner](http://www.youtube.com/@DoreeBonner)



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# Bradley Hall raises £55,000 at annual Festive Fundraiser

Full-service property specialist Bradley Hall hosted its annual Festive Fundraiser in December with the aim of raising tens-of-thousands of pounds for local charities NE Youth, Bravehearts of the North East and Great North Children's Hospital Foundation.

The event, which hosted 600 guests at The Fed, Gateshead, was supported by key sponsors – Housebuilders Strata Homes and Pubs with Rooms company The Inn Collection Group – and raised £55,000 in total.

Since the launch of its annual fundraiser, Bradley Hall has raised and donated over £300,000 for local charities, community action projects and grassroots sports clubs. The firm has contributed to helping over 30 different regional charities and sporting groups including NE Youth, Marie Curie Newcastle's Hospice, Heel & Toe Children's Charity, Morpeth Rugby Club, ABF The Soldier's Charity, Glendale Agricultural Society, as well as local food and toy banks across the region.

Cassie Moyse, group marketing director at Bradley Hall said: "Last year's Festive Fundraiser was a great success and we're delighted to have enjoyed yet another fantastic event this year, in partnership with Inn Collection Group, Strata and Portfolio North. Having The Inn Collection Group and Strata on board allowed us to raise even more funds for these deserving charities in exchange for some excellent exposure for the businesses.

"Since starting our Christmas fundraising event a few years ago, we

have raised a staggering amount for local organisations, which wouldn't have been achievable without the support of our sponsors, guests and the charities involved – as well as all the very generous people and organisations who donate raffle and auction prizes every year. Hundreds of charity and community service users have been supported by the funds raised and donated and we are truly grateful for everyone who has been a part of our Festive Fundraisers."

This year's Festive Fundraiser also marked 35 years of Bradley Hall, which has grown from operating a single office to branches across the North, including Alnwick, Morpeth, Gosforth, Durham, Teesside, Sunderland, Newcastle and Leeds. Bradley Hall's growing expert team continue to work towards making the North a better place, to live, work and socialise.

Neil Hart, group CEO at Bradley Hall, said: "Being able to raise money for three very important local charities such as NE Youth, Bravehearts of the North East and the Great North Children's Hospital Foundation is something we are very proud of, and we would like to thank our guests and business partners who have purchased tables and the local businesses which have donated prizes.

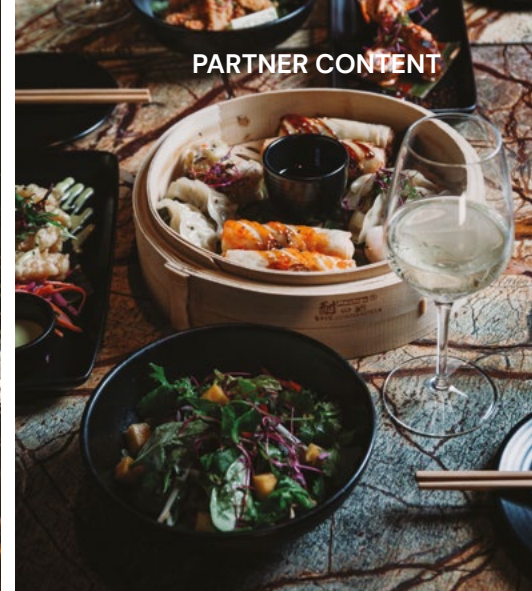
"As a northern business, it's important for us to do what we can to support community organisations and charities which support our local people. Our Festive Fundraiser brings together a lot of people who can each give a little, meaning that we can collectively make a positive impact to the charities which we work with. Thank you to everyone involved."

The Inn Collection Group has been supporting NE Youth – a leading North East youth development charity – since 2019. Owing to this, the pub with rooms group were keen to support them further through a partnership of Bradley Hall's Festive Fundraiser.

Sean Donkin, The Inn Collection Group managing director and NE Youth trustee, said: "We were delighted to support Bradley Hall's Festive Fundraiser this year. "Supporting our local communities is hugely important to us and these two charities do brilliant work in the North East, so becoming the partner sponsor was a great fit for us."

Gemma Smith, managing director of Strata, said: "We were delighted to sponsor Bradley Hall's 35th birthday Festive Fundraiser to raise money for some amazing charities. The fun-filled event was one to remember and raised a great sum to help some of those most in need."





PARTNER CONTENT



# The Muddler joins Keel Square line-up

The popular North East restaurant has announced plans to open a venue in Sunderland.

The Muddler, a pan-Asian restaurant and cocktail bar that is famed for its tasty dishes and unique cocktails, will open in Keel Square next year, having signed up to space in premises on the ground floor of the new Holiday Inn. The business will join neighbouring venues The Botanist and Keel Tavern - both of which are also set to open in Riverside Sunderland - later this year, adding to the ever-expanding array of city centre bars and restaurants moving into the heart of Sunderland.

The Muddler serves a range of Eastern inspired small and large plates, as well as a selection of sushi dishes, and an extensive menu of drinks that has established the Newcastle restaurant as a popular lunch, pre-theatre and evening destination. The business hopes to replicate the success it has seen on Grey Street when it opens in Sunderland.

Neill Winch, chief executive at Danieli Group - the company behind The Muddler - said: "We're really excited to be launching The Muddler in Sunderland, a place we know well having spent the last few years establishing STACK in Seaburn, a venue that has proven to be phenomenally popular.

"The city centre in Sunderland is going through an amazing transformation,

with more venues opening their doors to welcome people by day and night. Positioned on the doorstep of the Empire, as well as the city's Auditorium, we are at the heart of a regenerating part of the city centre that is becoming an established place of work and play.

"It's brilliant to join an increasingly exciting line-up of venues that are each bringing their unique offer to the city."

Subject to planning and licensing being approved, the unit will be transformed into a stunning venue with a luxurious and welcoming feel where customer can enjoy a meal in the gold adorned restaurant area or just enjoy drinks in the cocktail bar.

Councillor Kevin Johnston, dynamic city cabinet member for Sunderland City Council, said: "We're thrilled that The Muddler will be joining the fantastic line-up of venues in the transforming Riverside Sunderland, adding to the city's offer for residents and visitors.

"The transformation of Riverside Sunderland is creating new places to live, work and play, and we know there has been growing excitement about the fantastic venues that will be serving up more choice by day and evening. The Muddler's announcement will add to that."

The deal to bring The Muddler to Sunderland city centre - overseen by Square One Law - was brokered by North East commercial property experts Bradley Hall. Neil Hart, group CEO at the firm which has a base in Sunderland city centre, said: "We're thrilled to have played a key role in bringing The Muddler to Keel Square.

"Sunderland's transformation is gathering pace, and securing another high-quality leisure operator to open its doors in the city will support the daytime and evening economy, bringing residents and visitors into the city centre."

The Keel Square hotel is one of a number of developments complete that forms part of Sunderland City Council's Riverside Sunderland delivery plan. Backed by millions of pounds of investment, the plan includes number of large-scale developments in the city centre, including the development of Maker & Faber, two new Grade A office spaces; the Sheepfolds Stables leisure development; and a new housing scheme on the former Vaux Brewery site. The ambition is to double the area's residential population and increase employment by 50 per cent.



A close-up portrait of a middle-aged man with short, dark brown hair and light blue eyes. He is wearing a light blue, textured button-down shirt. The background is a plain, light grey. The text 'Winning the war on washroom facilities' is overlaid in large white font on the lower half of the image.

# Winning the war on washroom facilities



It's a topic none of us really want to talk about. Still, if we're honest, hygienic washroom facilities are something we all appreciate when we're out and about. **North East-based commercial hygiene and washroom provider NWR Hygiene is continuing its push, working with owners and managers of businesses and organisations to underline the importance of providing a high-standard washroom facility.**

In the ongoing battle for impeccable washroom facilities, NWR Hygiene is emerging as an industry leader, having recently made significant inroads in Cumbria and West Yorkshire. The company's commitment to service excellence has led to further expansion into key sectors, including education, hospitality and care homes.

Managing director, Chris Lowery, successfully expanded his sales team earlier this year, welcoming Louise Cardwell to help expand the operation throughout the Lake District and Cumbria and focusing further on growth across the Yorkshire region, a move supported by existing account manager Rakhee Soni.

It was a gamble which has paid off. NWR Hygiene has recently welcomed the Yorkshire-based T&R Pub Group Ltd to its clients list, working with the group to ensure that convenient female hygiene solutions are provided at its premises across Leeds, Bradford, Huddersfield and Wakefield. The hygiene specialists have had further wins across the Yorkshire region, onboarding residential care homes in Halifax and Bradford and a Primary School also based in Bradford.

Chris Lowery commented: "Having spent most of our time focusing on the North East, it's time now to push the boundaries and expand our reach further afield.

"Getting the right people for the job was crucial to our plans. We needed people who understood the market and could build a network to reach our target market, whether geographical or sector-based".

In addition to celebrating the successes gained in the Yorkshire region, the team have also added the Grade 1 listed Silverholme Manor located on the Graythwaite Estate in Ulverston to its impressive client list. The eco-friendly

manor house and wedding venue is working with NWR to ensure that all guests have access to high-end washroom services that are befitting of its place in the market.

Continuing the push into the education sector, further education college and leading training provider in the South Lakes, Kendal College has joined the client list for the provision of hand dryers, clinical and medical waste, floor mats and general washroom services. With a commitment to the community, Louise has also worked with the Barrow-based Cavendish Street Social Club to upgrade their facilities to a high standard.

Chris said: "Whether we are working with a care home or college, we take the time to truly get to know the needs of that organisation or business.

"We get under the skin to understand the types of people who use the facilities, their needs, and how we can facilitate these needs safely and hygienically. Once we start chatting with a customer, we usually find we have the solution to their needs."

With consumer behaviour and expectations changing constantly, is this having a knock-on effect?

Chris said: "It certainly is. These days, users of washroom facilities expect a high standard of environment. It's not enough anymore to provide the basics - people want working equipment, sanitised environments and odour-free facilities.

"With cutting-edge technology and a dedicated team, the battle for better washrooms is being won, one facility at a time."

**For more information about NWR Hygiene, contact Chris Lowery on 01207 505275 or visit [nwrhygienegroup.co.uk](http://nwrhygienegroup.co.uk)**



# Seaside spectacular

The Tynemouth Castle Inn opened with a literal bang at the start of November – and has been wowing diners, drinkers and guests ever since.

Born out of the transformation of the much-loved Park Hotel – an iconic site that has stood sentry over Longsands Beach since the 1930s – The Inn Collection Group has created a new place to eat, drink and lay your head, to which people from all over the region are flocking in droves.

The anticipation that had been steadily building throughout the renovation period was clearly displayed The Tynemouth Castle Inn's official opening day, with more than 100 people

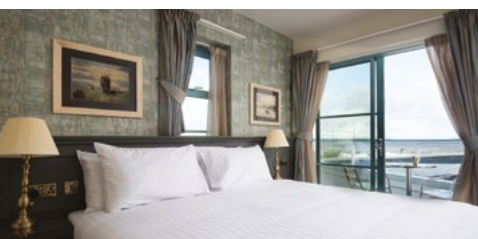
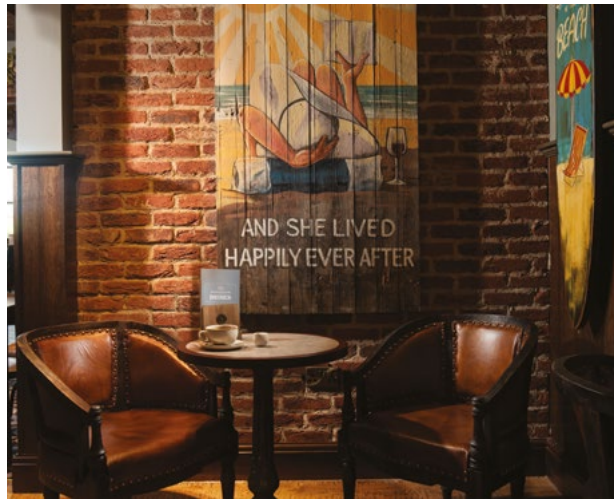
gathered outside to be amongst the first to sample the new-look pub with rooms.

Greeted into the modern and colourful surroundings that exude 1920s-style glamour, positive first impressions were made as guests settled into the venue's many cosy corners and wowed at the venue's unique interior design.

Brought to life by Newcastle-based studio, BXB Interiors, the venue's indoor space is large enough to welcome up to 270 drinkers and diners.







The dishes and drinks on offer were sampled in abundance on an opening day where performance outstripped even the most optimistic hopes for the new-look venue, with more than 250 hot drinks, 500 plates of food and 1,000 pints served.

Now with an inventory of 72 fully-refurbished rooms - more than half of which offer a sea view - The Tynemouth Castle Inn is set to be a destination of choice for those who do like to be beside the seaside. Occupancy rates for available bedrooms were at an impressive 60% since its opening - a figure that currently spikes to a whopping 96% at weekends.

In addition to the Inn's brand new food and drink offering and luxury rooms, two more on-site developments are about to open their doors - both serving up classic coastal treats for guests and visitors to enjoy.

Named after the ancient King of Northumbria, new fish and chip shop, Oswin's, will offer the very best of sustainably-sourced fish shop favourites, all cooked in either beef dripping or sunflower oil, allowing the shop to cater for all tastes.

Staples like cod and haddock - landed in North Shields and traceable back to the boat that made the catch - are all on the menu, coated in a special golden batter that the team spent weeks perfecting in the build-up to opening.

Other extra-special dishes, such as Oswin's Crispy Mix medley of cod, king prawns and squid, are also on offer, sitting alongside monkfish, scampi and more.

For those who prefer something sweet, new ice cream parlour, Cones, will be on hand, serving up more than 20 flavours of gelato - all of which are made fresh on the premises. Decked out with art-deco interiors to complement the look and feel of Tynemouth Castle Inn, it offers sweet-toothed customers the opportunity to add unlimited toppings to their ice cream of choice, making each serve completely unique.

Classic flavours include raspberry ripple, mint chocolate and salted caramel, while new varieties stretch espresso martini and its Nutella-flavoured gelato - the only version in the North East that uses a unique recipe endorsed by Ferrero, giving the unmistakable taste and smell of the world-famous chocolate spread.

With Oswin's open from 12-8pm, Cones from 10am-6pm and the Inn open from 8am to 11pm every day, the new development is set to become a warm and welcoming destination for all ages and tastes, all year round.

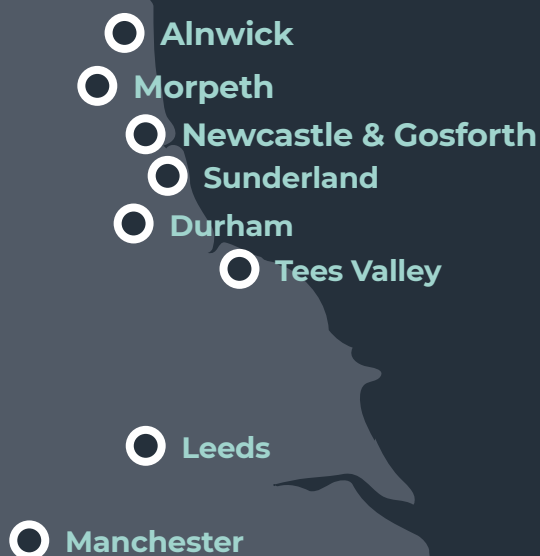
Throw in top attractions, including Tynemouth's award-winning Longsands Beach and Tynemouth Aquarium, just a stone's throw away, this corner of the Grand Parade really is the perfect place from which to eat, drink, sleep and explore.

[inncollectiongroup.com](http://inncollectiongroup.com)

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# Maintaining the human touch in business

With Dunja Cobb, founder of Litt Recruitment

## The rush to digital transformation may suit many businesses. Our Business Editor spoke to one company where the human touch is central to everything they do.

In an age of artificial intelligence and digital transformation it's refreshing to meet a business that is focussing on a more traditional, human approach. Even in recruitment – a people-oriented business – there is a growing trend to automate the process, whether that's onboarding candidates, mailing prospective employers, to undertaking online interviews.

However, one North East company, Litt Recruitment, is bucking this trend and has gone back to basics.

"We want to have the human touch," says director and founder Dunja Cobb. "We agreed, when we set up, that we wanted to take an old school approach. That means lots of face-to-face meetings for pre-screening and interviews.

"Lots of recruitment agencies outsource the resource side of things but we source and pre-screen every single person."

Dunja, 31, says this approach is more time consuming, but it helps secure the right candidates for employers. She adds:

"We want to provide the right candidates, which are relevant for a particular role and suitable for a client's business. We try to represent the best interests of both parties to achieve the desired outcome."

Litt Recruitment has been trading for less than two years but has a track record in the recruitment and personnel sector and is making strong headway in a brief period.

The company, based on Newcastle Business Park, already works for companies across the North East as well as national clients operating in multiple sectors. Key areas include accountancy and finance, hospitality, sales, office support, HR, engineering and manufacturing.

"We recruit across a wide range of sectors, placing people in permanent roles. We offer local expertise but have a network of contacts that spans across the USA, UK, Europe and the Middle East," says Dunja.

Future growth, she believes, will come from recruiting specialist consultants to develop the IT and medical sectors, along with the steady expansion of her team.

She adds: "During 2024 I

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**During 2024 I intend to push the development of the business, securing more national activity while remaining focussed on our key region. I don't want to grow too fast, but I want to reach a middle ground where we can still provide a personal, bespoke service and maintain profits.**

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intend to push the development of the business, securing more national activity while remaining focussed on our key region. I don't want to grow too fast, but I want to reach a middle ground where we can still provide a personal, bespoke service and maintain profits."

Litt Recruitment also has a CSR programme and is increasingly working with local communities and has worked with Feeding Families and hosted a charity gala for Hadrian School. Dunja has become a mentor for The Girls' Network programme supporting young women.





Dunja has clear plans for the business and is supported in her ambitions by a dedicated team and her husband and businessman Paul Cobb, a founder and director of Newcastle-based Green Energy Advice Bureau (GEAB).

It was here, before she set up Litt recruitment, that Dunja cut her teeth in the world of personnel and recruitment. She worked alongside her husband in the energy brokerage business for around seven years.

Her roles included admin and finance and increasingly HR and taking responsibility for the staff needed for a growing energy business. The company grew rapidly from its base in South Shields and around 50 staff, growing to around 170 within a few years, requiring the relocation to larger offices in Newcastle.

This period prompted a rethink for Dunja, as she realised she needed a new challenge and could set up independently of GEAB. Her colleagues, John Rooney, and Lee Wright had a lot of business knowledge and relevant experience. Together they established Litt Recruitment. Today John is the recruitment director and Lee heads training. Further consultants have been recruited.

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**We don't necessarily just want traditional recruitment consultants – but people who can talk, have a personality they can bring to the job and understand the situation of both clients and employers.”**

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The early growth has come through job noticeboards, networking and word of mouth. More latterly further awareness has been generated through a website and social media platforms. Dunja says: “It's been a great initial start. The feedback we have had from clients has been amazing. We want to continue the growth and are looking to find more recruitment consultants.

“We don't necessarily just want traditional recruitment consultants – but people who can talk, have a personality they can bring to the job and understand the situation of both clients and employers.”

Dunja is a woman who knows what she wants. As a former boxer and occasional shooter, she clearly has a fighting spirit and knows how to achieve and hit a target.

**For more information:**  
[www.littrecruitment.com](http://www.littrecruitment.com)



## Recruitment industry insights

# Property and estate agents

The property and estate agent industry is experiencing several recruitment trends right now – and employers need to take notice if they want to secure today's top talent. Here, the experts at Litt Recruitment reveal their insights into what successful recruitment in this in-demand area requires – and how they can help.



## Top trends

### Digital transformation

Today's rise in technology means there is a growing demand for professionals who are skilled in digital marketing, data analysis and online property platforms. Companies are increasingly recruiting individuals who can effectively leverage technology to streamline processes and enhance the customer experience.

### Customer-centric approach

There is a shift towards a more customer-centric approach in the industry. Employers are seeking candidates who have strong interpersonal and communication skills, as well as the ability to provide excellent customer service.

This trend reflects the importance of building strong relationships and delivering personalized experiences to clients.

### Sustainability and green practices

As sustainability becomes increasingly important, there is a rising demand for professionals who have knowledge and experience in sustainable practices within the property industry. This includes expertise in eco-friendly building materials, energy efficiency and sustainable property management.

### Remote work and flexibility

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of remote work and flexible working arrangements. Many companies in the property and estate agent industry are now offering remote work options or flexible schedules to attract top talent.

Candidates with the ability to adapt to remote work environments and demonstrate self-motivation are highly sought-after.

## What's driven our success

Navigating market challenges and seizing rental market opportunities has been front and centre for several agencies. This has required us to attract professionals with a keen understanding of market forecasting and economic trends, as well as the recruitment of professionals skilled in property management, landlord-tenant relationships and navigating the rental market.

Just putting a standard job advert out there is no longer good enough (if it ever was). It will attract applicants, but it will never entice the best performers away from your competition. We know that top tier talents are not actively looking for new jobs. They are already in one and performing well.

We contact those star candidates and know how to motivate them to move. This is where our close work with clients pays off, as it allows us to both challenge them to create a desirable opportunity, while understanding and being able to sell their vision to candidates.

## How we can help

In today's UK real estate market and at a time when budgets are tight, our clients have been sceptical at times about whether investing in an agency for recruitment is wise - and have, rightly so, required us to prove our value. In tough times, the true quality of your people is tested and now, more than ever before, it is even more important to get the right people on board that align with your goals and mission. Our recruitment strategies have significantly impacted estate agents, guiding them through today's challenges and fostering success.

Here's a snapshot of some of the changes we've helped facilitate with some of our client base...

### Understanding of industry dynamics

Recognition of the strains within the industry and our ability to adapt to changes in the calibre of hires needed. A common callout is the proactive stance we take in response to increased competition for top talent. We know this as the vast majority of our placements have come from proactive means, rather than reactive.

### Collaboration and vision alignment

The close collaboration with our clients has generated positive feedback. Candidates turning up to interviews with a strong understanding already of where they'll fit in and what they are going to be needed for. It's resulted in more engaging and honest interviews. As the market evolves, it's become clear that not only do estate agents need to know their market, but those that work alongside need to be equally educated if they are to truly add value.

### Market insights

Our commitment to understanding market intricacies has empowered our clients to make informed decisions, navigating challenges and seize emerging opportunities.

### Navigating market changes

Our swift identification and placement of professionals with expertise in market analysis has ensured estate agents have adapted to changing dynamics in property demand and mortgage activity. In the three months leading up to October 2023, proportional property sales in England and Wales decreased by 5.6% compared to the same period the previous year. The North East displayed the least impact, with a modest 2% decrease in sales as a percentage of stock.

### Strategic guidance in challenging market conditions

Professionals with a keen understanding of market forecasting and economic trends have provided estate agents with strategic guidance, proving invaluable in navigating challenging market conditions. Equipping estate agents with professionals skilled in negotiation and market positioning has empowered agencies to competitively price properties, navigating the complex landscape of average house price declines.

### Seizing rental market opportunities

The record rises in rent shifted even some of the largest firms focus. Recently, Connells' chief executive said the group now derives 70% of its revenue from lettings. Recruitment of professionals skilled in property management, landlord-tenant relationships and navigating the rental market has turned the rental market's unprecedented highs into a realm of opportunities for estate agents.

[littrecruitment.com](https://littrecruitment.com)



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# Lifestyle

The latest luxury lifestyle news, from travel and interiors, to health, wellbeing and more









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# Press pause

**Tucked away within its enchanting estate, Middleton Lodge's new Forest Spa promises guests a journey into relaxation like no other. Our editor checks in...**

## Location

On edge of the Yorkshire Dales, nestled within Middleton Lodge's 200-acre Georgian estate, you'll find a spa with a difference. A one so relaxing, so utterly divine, I've urged just about everyone I know - family members, friends, mother-daughter duos, couples - to book up. It doesn't happen often, but Forest Spa is just one of those places. It leaves a lasting memory that you want others to share.

Open to both visiting guests and hotel residents, the on-site sanctuary opened this summer and is the latest stage in Middleton Lodge estate's impressive - and oh-so beautiful - development.

Owner James Allison - who has spent the last 20 years transforming the historic site into an award-winning destination to stay, wed, play, eat and now spa - was at the forefront of its design, alongside the estate's creative director, Rebecca Tappin.

With a vision of creating a place where people can connect with nature, press pause and leave feeling rested and grounded, Forest Spa has been inspired by forest bathing - a Japanese practice that means to be at one with nature, among the trees, and being mindful of your outdoor surroundings. A concept that informs everything from the spa's botanical good looks to its jaw-dropping facilities.

## Style

Sitting somewhere between a rustic Tuscan villa and a cosy French farmhouse, a visit to Forest Spa feels like being transported to another corner of the world - umpteen miles away from Yorkshire.

A place to curl up and cocoon and re-energise in the elements interchangeably. A breathtaking place, inside and out, with so many corners of relaxation to discover throughout your spa journey.

Inside, think blonde wooden beams and exposed stonework. Cosy nooks and crannies, filled with plush cream sofas and chairs to sink in. Blankets and pillows galore. Crackling log burners, flickering lanterns and candles. The faint smell of balmy eucalyptus oil in the air. Green foliage and wicker, bringing the outdoors in. Outside, stone walls surround you with open views across the estate's rolling fields and peaceful woodland. The scent from the many plants and flowers fills the air. Comfy, sleep-inducing loungers line the grand heated pool - the heart of the spa.

In short, a soothing and holistic aesthetic - with nods to air, water, fire and earth - that is perfectly in keeping with the rest Middleton Lodge's estate, which is also home to two 18th century stone-built restaurants, romantic courtyards, on-site self-catered cottages, 57 bedrooms and two acres of lush walled gardens.

## Facilities

Our spa journey began in the Pool House. Here, you're invited to kick-back pre or post-treatment, or stay a while and enjoy a spot of lunch. You can even hunker down and enjoy a luxury manicure or pedicure at a dedicated nail station, tucked away at the back - which my friend did.

A central stove provides gentle warmth throughout, while large, floor-to-ceiling doors open out to the pool area and thermal spa, providing dreamy views to swoon over while you eat.

Stretching an impressive 15 metres, the outdoor pool is, arguably, Forest Spa's main attraction. At least it was for us. The fact that it's heated is the icing on the cake, allowing for the longest and relaxing of dips all year round - even on a frosty winter's day.

Even in early autumn, the weather wasn't on our side during our visit, but the white skies and chilly temperatures took absolutely nothing away from it. A few warm lengths, emerged in the gentle steam that the pool emits, was one of the highlights of our visit.

From there and with a glass of fizz in tow, we headed over to the bubbling outdoor hot tub nearby - which is nicely sheltered to create a feeling of cosiness and privacy - before unwinding in the serene Thermal Spa.





Here, you'll discover everything you need to kick-start the senses, including a sauna, with views of the estate's rolling parkland, as well as a stone-walled plunge pool and a tadelakt steam room.

After enjoying all it had to offer, we took great pleasure in stretching out - our cheeks healthy and pink after a final stint in the sauna - on a couple of loungers by the log fire with soft throws and pillows.

We could have easily stayed here another couple of hours - it's the perfect place for catch-ups between friends or a bit of quiet time with a good book - and only managed to tear ourselves away because we had treatments ahead of us.

### Treatments

If you're anything like me, you'll know that a spa visit isn't quite complete without a treatment of some kind. And although a Forest Spa experience is more than satisfying without one, I just had to see what it had on offer.

Some years ago, all forms of pampering at Middleton Lodge took place between two small treatment rooms. Now, massages and other rituals take place within six wooden outdoor huts, tucked away in the estate's grounds, surrounded by wild flowers and medicinal herbs. Two of them are bathing huts, complete with log burning stoves and bath tubs.

The leafy walk up to my individual hut was a picture-perfect moment for me - in what felt like an oasis of tranquillity - before I happily surrendered to my chosen ritual. The Forest Spa's treatment menu includes everything from body and Indian head massage to facials, scrubs, bath hut experiences and specially-curated signature treatments - all made special with products from two of the spa world's biggest names - Aromatherapy Associates and VOYA. Gentle and restorative, with a focus on natural ingredients, both brands fit perfectly with Forest Spa's ethos.

Committed to having the most relaxing day I'd had in months - perhaps all year - I chose the VOYA Total Massage Journey. A 90-minute show-stopper, combining body brushing to boost circulation and release toxins with a stress-melting face, scalp and full body massage, using organic seaweed oil.

I won't give too much away as I want - urge - you to discover its powers for yourself. But let's just say this - I left feeling a stone lighter in both body and mind.

Back in my white fluffy robe, I retreated to the spa's nearby Relaxation Lounge, where a complimentary herbal drink, along with nutritious snacks, were waiting for me by gentle candlelight, along with stunning views overlooking the hut garden.

### Food and drink

Post-treatment, we returned to the Pool House for a few small plates from the spa's nourishing lunch menu. In keeping with Middleton Lodge's renowned estate-to-plate ethos, all dishes are balanced, fresh and cooked using ingredients growing on the estate wherever possible.

For us, it was protein-packed flat iron chicken with just-picked broad beans and zingy gremolata, homegrown lettuce with smoked cheese, avocado and chipotle, followed by estate honey panna cotta with thyme-roasted peaches.

A sweet end to an unrivalled spa experience - made special with impeccable service and packed with local flair - that is yet to be matched.

### Book it now

Hotel residents and day spa guests can choose between a range of experiences, which include morning, afternoon and evening packages and a Day Spa and Day Retreat offering. Individual massages and beauty therapies are also available.

For more information and prices, visit [middletonlodge.co.uk](http://middletonlodge.co.uk)



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## Newcastle Falcons' re-launched Business Club is the ideal way for your company to network and hear expert advice from a range of distinguished speakers.

Sir Graham Wylie CBE, co-founder of Sage Group, was the special guest for the opening event of the season, held at Newcastle Falcons' official restaurant partner, the stylish Gaucho.

A plethora of local businesses were in attendance to hear about Sir Graham's journey to the top. The popular session received positive feedback from attendees, with the talk followed by a Q&A as guests enjoyed the opportunity to learn from Wylie's renowned business acumen.

Another fascinating insight for Falcons Business Club members was in store when rugby legend Tony Underwood was the guest speaker for an event at Kingston Park Stadium, sponsored by law firm Irwin Mitchell.

Held on December 5th, the networking opportunity saw guests learning from a man who has transitioned from international sport to success in the commercial world, firstly as a pilot and more recently as a renowned consultant in leadership and resilience.

These events were exclusive to Falcons Business Club members and made up the first two instalments of a four-part series. Keep your eyes peeled for parts three and four to gain the opportunity to learn from more esteemed business professionals.

To learn more about the club and to discuss securing your membership, please email [corporate@newcastle-falcons.co.uk](mailto:corporate@newcastle-falcons.co.uk).

It is not just in the business world where Newcastle Falcons are learning from household names. The club have been boosted by the recent return of their Argentina quartet, fresh from Rugby World Cup duty.

Los Pumas, as they are known, reached the semi-finals of the international showpiece out in France, with the Falcons having four players among their ranks.

Flying winger Mateo Carreras was the headline-grabber thanks to his hat-trick of tries in a man-of-the-match performance against Japan, while the defensive prowess of centre Matias Moroni was to the fore during their quarter-final victory over Wales.

Prop Eduardo Bello and lock Pedro Rubiolo added plenty of physicality and will now be fully focused on club matters as Newcastle Falcons attack the remainder of the 2023-24 season.

Key in that campaign is the pre-Christmas home game against Bristol Bears, which takes place on Friday December 22.

**General admission and hospitality tickets for the 7.45pm kick-off at Kingston Park are available via [newcastle-falcons.co.uk](https://www.newcastle-falcons.co.uk)**

# Regenerate your skin with PRP – a science-backed skin solution from **Skin & Soul Medical**







## It's the treatment that has everyone talking – from A-list celebrities to the world's leading skincare experts. And it's now available in the North East.

Designed to kick-start the skin's natural regenerative process, Platelet Rich Plasma – otherwise known as PRP – is a pioneering treatment that promises to repair, renew and rejuvenate all complexion types from the inside out.

Skin & Soul Medical, a holistic private clinic with sites in Sunderland and Newcastle, has recently added PRP to its extensive list of treatments, increasing its offering to those in search of healthier, glowing skin.

### What makes it special

A science-backed innovation in injectables, PRP harnesses and celebrates the power of our own blood and what lies within it.

The pioneering treatment involves extracting and re-injecting the natural, platelet-rich plasma and proteins found in our blood back into our skin, helping to stimulate collagen production and tissue renewal and encourage a plumper, smoother, more radiant complexion.

Injections are usually focused on the areas prone to fine lines and wrinkles – including the forehead and around the mouth – but because PRP also works to reduce skin conditions such as hyperpigmentation, uneven texture and acne scarring, places like the cheeks, chin and jawline can also be treated.

And because plasma is rich in growth hormones that contribute to significant cell reproduction, kickstart follicular activity and increase blood flow, PRP can also be injected into the scalp to promote hair growth, making the treatment a fantastic choice for those suffering from hair loss too.

Wherever on the face or body you choose to have the treatment, only your own blood – and plasma – are used, eliminating the risk of allergic reaction or infection.

### The treatment

The procedure is quick, fuss-free and relatively pain-free, however patients are offered topical numbing cream on their chosen areas – especially sensitive places like the scalp – to reduce discomfort and to help make the experience more comfortable.

While that gets to work, a blood sample is taken from the patient and expertly separated into two – protein-rich plasma and red and white blood cells. The plasma is then carefully and slowly re-injected back into the skin.

### Aftercare and results

Post-injection bleeding and redness is common, but minimal, as is mild bruising, swelling and tenderness. Most patients suffer no side-effects and results can show as early as eight weeks.

Unlike traditional fillers, which give short-term results, PRP gets to work deep within the skin walls and stimulates cells to self-restore over time. That means, while most complexions will feel and appear tighter and brighter immediately post-treatment, the results of PRP will only get better and more noticeable over time.

For optimal results, most patients are recommended to have a treatment once a month for the first three to four months, then every three to six months thereafter, depending on their skin concerns, whereabouts on the body the treatment takes place and their response. Following this protocol, anticipated results can first be seen within two to three months.

Those having PRP for hair loss purposes are recommended treatments every three to six months on a long-term basis, however small hair growth can be seen as early as after the second session and most people see up to a 70% improvement in hair growth on average. The first result that patients usually note is decreased hair shedding, followed by early regrowth and increased length of hair. Lucie Royer, founder of Skin and Soul Medical, said: "We're delighted to be able to offer this groundbreaking treatment to our clients."

"Known and loved for its long-lasting results, PRP remains one of the most talked about and highly-anticipated treatments around and we can't wait to help our clients benefit from its special, science-backed powers."

"Whether you're looking to boost overall skin health, wanting to soften the signs of ageing or in search of thicker, stronger hair, a PRP treatment is the ideal solution."

To book your appointment, visit [skinandsoulmedical.com](https://skinandsoulmedical.com) or email [hello@skinandsoulmedical.com](mailto:hello@skinandsoulmedical.com)  
Instagram: @skinandsoulmedical



# A cut above

**Nestled on the leafy borders of County Durham and North Yorkshire – in the charming childhood village of Lewis Carroll – lies Croft Christmas Trees. A destination for real, sustainably-grown Christmas trees for over 25 years and now the region's largest supplier. Our editor pays a visit to its festive estate to find out more...**

## **The magic of Croft**

Year after year, Croft Christmas Trees goes the extra mile to make Christmas tree shopping an experience to remember.

Its picturesque countryside estate – known as the Croft Estate – opens its doors to the public every November and December, giving visitors the chance to pick their very own home-grown tree from a beautiful viewing area, shop the finest decorations from its enchanting on-site Christmas Tree shop and enjoy merriment-packed events within its grounds to help celebrate the most wonderful time of the year.

At Croft, it's an all-year-round affair, during which the business' passionate and expert team plant and harvest thousands of trees in time for the Christmas rush from its very own Christmas tree plantation. The tree farm – which now spans over 100 acres – is the shining star within its festive offering, home to trees of all shapes,

sizes and varieties and driven by sustainability and tree welfare.

"We nurture our trees over an eight-year cycle just to grow a six-foot Christmas tree. It's a real labour of love and we always try to give our customers fresher-than-fresh, just-cut trees," says Steph Braithwaite.

A leading figure within the business for over two decades, Steph works closely with its dedicated farm team and has been instrumental in its development and success over the years.

"In most years, we are planting more than we harvest and this year we planted a staggering 22,000 trees," she explains.

"We have a huge number of repeat customers – some of whom have been coming to us for nearly three decades. Our customers know that our trees have been grown sustainably and with care.

"Today, we are a firm part of the Christmas tradition for many families and often see three generations visiting us, carefully choosing their trees together. It's just so lovely to see.

"We always advise people to care for their Christmas tree as they would freshly-cut flowers and our team is on hand to educate as many customers as possible about how to look after their tree at home."

## **Feel-good farming**

The beating heart of the business, Croft's farming enterprise spans well in excess of 1,000 acres of fertile soil – the place in which carefully-chosen seeds transform into the most important Christmas decoration of all.

Here, tree welfare is paramount to try and





ensure the freshest, healthiest and highest quality trees are on offer – everything from the well-known Nordmann Fir and Norway Spruce to the Blue Spruce and smaller pot grown trees.

From the seed itself, to the sourcing of the saplings, the planting and the growing, each tree is carefully looked after until it's ready to be cut.

"Each one is looked after by human hands," says Steph.

"We do use machines where they add value to help us grow and look after the trees, but much of the work - including the planting, pruning and cutting - is done by our skilled team, using traditional methods."

"Our trees are harvested for the shop throughout the few weeks in the run up to Christmas, so that the trees that are available for our customers are as fresh and as healthy as can be."

"Re-planting as many as, or more than, we harvest - that's also a big part of our sustainable ethos and our eco-conscious commitment," she adds.

"Our environment is never far away from our thoughts and we always seek to work responsibly and ethically."

### A visit to remember

Croft Christmas Trees has developed significantly over the years, evolving into what is now considered a winter wonderland-like destination for families all over Yorkshire and the North East.

Promising a picture-perfect journey into all things merry and bright, it features an alpine-inspired seating area where visitors

can cosy up with mulled wine, hot chocolate, mince pies and more, as well as its very own shop, filled to the brim with ornate Christmas decorations.

Beautiful and colourful enough to give Santa's workshop a run for its money, it's the place to be for interiors-lovers in search of unique baubles and ornaments, twinkling lights, luxury wreaths and garlands and the finest stands to help them display their chosen tree.

"We like to showcase various collections and styles to give customers lots of great ideas around how to dress their trees at home," says Steph - who also happens to be the mastermind behind the shop and its whimsical, curated collections.

"We hope to have something for everyone. The Woodland collection has a rustic fantasy feel and features toadstools and wildlife, whereas the Ski Lodge collection offers winter whites and soft greens.

"We also stock Alice in Wonderland characters, which are popular as they have a local link - Lewis Carroll lived in the rectory at Croft.

"We feel it's so important to offer visitors an exclusive and unique range of decorations so they don't have to travel far to find them."

### Don't miss

Every year, Croft Christmas Trees invites locals and visitors to join them in their seasonal celebrations. 2023's calendar is packed with special events for all ages, including a heartwarming nativity event on December 7th from 6pm and a classic carol service on December 14th from 6.30pm.

**Croft Christmas Trees is open now until December 20th. For more information and to check opening times, visit [croftchristmastrees.com](https://croftchristmastrees.com)**



# Say hello to The Cell

A brand new gym has opened in Sunderland's former Gilbridge Police Station, promising a unique take on fitness and wellness.

Set up by entrepreneurs Holly McBride-Donaldson, Jennie Moyse and Brent Gilpin, the class-based gym is named The Cell and is in the basement of the former police headquarters, which is now a stylish office block called The Yard.

The Cell offers over 25 expert-led fitness classes each week including spinning, bootcamps, yoga and Pilates, with express lunchtime sessions ideal for those working in and around the transforming Riverside Sunderland site.

Holly and Jenny also run Club Zest together, an award-winning female-only gym on Sea Road in Fulwell, where their business partner for The Cell, Brent Gilpin, runs his successful physio business, Finding Function.

The trio had wanted to launch a new venture which takes a holistic approach to fitness, incorporating classes and workshops which reframe the ideals of physicality and work towards overall wellness.

Holly said: "We're so excited to have opened in The Yard and in the city centre where so much exciting development is taking place.

"The Cell is inclusive of all genders, and we offer bespoke fitness classes for people who want to reconnect and be part of a friendly community that champions one another. We also have Brent offering physio treatments, sports massages and wellness support, and there will be a variety of workshops available to attend on the weekends."

The boutique health and fitness hub are offering commercial memberships to businesses based in the city to support a healthier workforce and enable colleagues to access classes together. This month, it is offering businesses that sign up with over 20 employees two free sessions in wellness and stress management throughout the year.

"We all know that good fitness and wellness can help to reduce stress and boost mood, which is why we want to

encourage local businesses to support employees to get involved with The Cell and our flexible classes throughout the day. Our express lunchtime classes are perfect for those with busy lifestyles who work in the city centre," added Holly. The Cell is being supported by Sunderland City Council's Business Investment Team.

Cllr Kevin Johnston, dynamic city cabinet member for Sunderland City Council, said: "The Cell is perfectly located to support the health and wellbeing of the growing workforce at Riverside Sunderland, and given the work the team already do at Club Zest, I'm confident they will make a real positive difference to our transforming city centre.

"As well as being based in a fantastic new office building, The Cell is just a stone's throw from City Hall, The Beam and ongoing developments including Maker & Faber, the new Eye Hospital, and the Vaux neighbourhood. It's a really exciting location for new and established businesses to come and grow."

To learn more about Sunderland as a place to do business, visit [www.mysunderland.co.uk/business-and-investment](http://www.mysunderland.co.uk/business-and-investment)







# The gift that keeps on giving

**It's been three years since Sunderland Business Improvement District had the idea to launch its own city gift card – and it's still in high demand today.**

The first one of its kind in the North East, the idea was to make buying gifts simpler and giving the recipient the opportunity to choose something they really wanted.

There was also a much more far-reaching benefit behind the cards – it would ensure that money spent would remain in the city, providing a really positive contribution to the local economy.

Fast forward to the current day and to date more than £200,000 has been spent on the gift cards, proving that it's a concept that not only works, but is also really well received.

For companies – particularly at this time of year – it also helps in deciding how to reward staff or customers in a really meaningful way.

Some organisations in the city have certainly taken this opportunity to their hearts – notably by a recent order for more than £40,000 in gift cards by a corporate buyer.

And the hope is now that other organisations will follow suit, not only demonstrating how they value their team, but also showing their care and consideration for other businesses across Sunderland.

One of the many attractions of the cards is the sheer variety of places where it can be spent. For food and drink lovers, there's a whole host of options where they can cash in their cards for a fantastic dining experience.

From national chains like Nando's to homegrown eateries, such as 808 Bar and Kitchen, Pop Recs, Spent Grain, Engine Room and Manor Bar, there are a whole host of city restaurants and bars which now accept the Sunderland Gift Card.

And it doesn't stop there. Independent businesses, such as men's clothing store, Master Debonair, or many of the high street names in The Bridges also now accept the card.

For someone wanting to give the gift of an experience, Sunderland Bowl, Sunderland AFC and Sunderland Empire are also part of the scheme, extending the choice even further.

They can also be spent at the new Holiday Inn and the Seaburn Inn, making a night away also on the cards.

Sharon Appleby, chief executive of Sunderland BID, believes that the choice of outlets which will take the gift card makes the perfect present – and also hopes companies will get behind them when considering corporate gifts.

"We are delighted to see so many organisations buying gift cards, either to reward staff or to give out as a thank you," she said.

"For larger companies, in which you're not going to get everyone liking the same thing, it makes perfect sense for staff to choose something that they really like for themselves."

The cards also fall under the Government's trivial benefits scheme, which allows a company to give their staff a non-cash reward of up to £50 with no tax or national insurance implications.

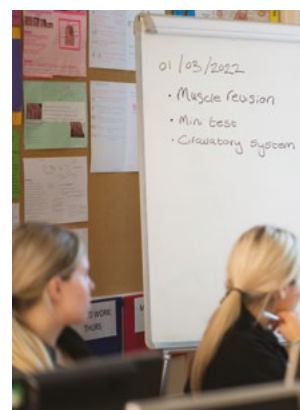
The limit is also per gift, rather than per year, so that anyone who wants to give a thank you to an employee for a job well done or for any other reason can do without any fears of being penalised.

"This is the perfect time of year to remind companies about the gift cards," said Sharon.

"Buying them is not only a benefit for the recipient, but actually helps the wider hospitality and retail operators across the city."

**Gift cards can be purchased via [www.sunderlandgiftcard.com](http://www.sunderlandgiftcard.com) or at physical sales points including The Bridges, Museum and Winter Gardens, National Glass Centre and Houghton and Washington libraries. The gift card can also be purchased as a digital download, which can be delivered directly to the recipient's device wallet.**

**Businesses needing any more information can email [giftcard@sunderlandbid.co.uk](mailto:giftcard@sunderlandbid.co.uk) or call 0191 722 1002.**



# Top-class training

Through world-class training programmes, Direct Skills Group helps budding beauticians and future fitness professionals unlock their potential and reach their dreams.

## Leading the way

In a post-Covid world in which more and more people are feeling inspired to go after the career of their dreams or take their life in a different direction by re-training in something new, businesses like Direct Skills Group are lending a helping hand.

Founded in 1983, the business - formerly known as Yorkshire College of Beauty - has been going from strength to strength for 40 years and, today, holds the title of the largest private training provider of beauty therapy and fitness courses and apprenticeships in the North of England. At the helm is managing director, Lewis Hatcher, who took over the business in 2022 with a goal of developing its offering and expanding its reach. A goal that he has met - and then some.

Since joining, he, with the help of his expert team, has expanded the business' fitness training division from its training academy in Leeds to Newcastle, Manchester, Birmingham and Nottingham, helping it become a leader in its field and a trusted, go-to provider for anyone wanting to make a living on the gym floor.

Now, he hopes to enjoy the same success with the beauty therapy arm of the business by opening the doors of a brand new training academy in Newcastle - set to open in early 2024.

## Sought-after skills

Direct Skills Group offers expert-led training to people of all ages and from all walks of life - from ambitious school-leavers and young people in search of an apprenticeship, to adults looking to boost their skillset, embark on a new career or even gain the tools they need to start a business of their own.

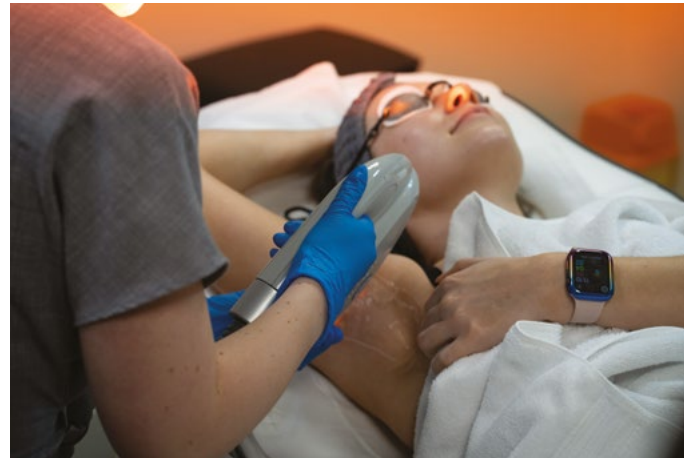
For those wanting to embark in a career in beauty, courses include Level 3 Diploma in Combined Beauty Therapy Skills, Level 3 Diploma in Nail Technology and Level 3 Diploma in Makeup Artistry, along with Level 2 & 3 advanced apprenticeships in beauty therapy.

Fitness fans, meanwhile, can gain their Level 2 & 3 Fitness Instructing and Personal Training Diploma, as well as an extended Diploma in Level 2 & 3 Personal Training and even a Level 3 course in Sports Massage.

"Even though we're living in a digital world, we still firmly believe in face-to-face, in-person training. That's why all our courses and apprenticeships take place in both a classroom and a real-life practical environment," says Lewis.

"Depending on their chosen course, students will visit us at our academy between one and five days a week and their days will be split in two - usually theory in a classroom setting in the morning and practical learning, in either a





salon, clinic or gym, in the afternoon.

"This best-of-both approach means students are given hands-on experience in their chosen sector; they have the chance to work with real life equipment and products and familiarise themselves in the environment they want to work in.

"There is an element of home study involved and exams are taken in person and online. Students are also be asked to present a portfolio of work at certain milestones within their chosen course."

### Unrivalled support

Direct Skills Group works hard to ensure its students go on to enjoy exciting and rewarding careers in the realms of beauty therapy and fitness.

Whether graduates have their sights on joining a local salon, a luxury hotel spa or a leading gym, Lewis and his team are on hand to assist with placing them in the best hands possible, utilising their partnerships with big-name establishments and local business owners to seek out opportunities and build connections.

"In the majority of cases, young apprentices aged 16 to 18 will stay on to work for their employer after they have completed their training," explains Lewis.

"This is fantastic for both parties. Not only is the student given a job they are trained in, experienced at and familiar with, the employer is given peace of mind in knowing that their new employee is well-equipped and skilled enough to succeed within their workforce."

"Those over the age of 19, who use our advanced learning loan funding

to support them through their chosen course, aren't forgotten about either. We're dedicated to helping them find the role they've worked hard for," he says.

"Over the years, we have formed strong partnerships with renowned businesses all over the region, including Grantley Hall, Ridding Park, Q Hotels and Diamond Collection Hotels, operating as their chosen apprenticeship provider to help them secure the best young talent.

"We're able to put students who are looking to join a luxury spa, or a large, nation-wide gym, for example, in touch with the right establishments, who are also actively looking for new starters. We often step in to organise interviews on their behalf and are always on hand to offer support and guidance - essentially acting as the middle man for both parties."

Direct Skills Group also offer practical support and guidance around self-employment to students who dream of starting their own business, as well as hosting inspiring and helpful guest talks from spa and salon owners, experienced beauty therapists, personal trainers and fitness instructors.

"It's really important to us that we give our students as much information and guidance as possible," says Lewis.

"Hearing from professionals who have succeeded in the roles they themselves are striving towards provides our students with a truly unique insight into what it's like really like out there."

### Looking to the future

With a brand new year almost within

reach, Lewis and the team are looking forward to expanding Direct Skills Group's reach and giving those longing for a career in beauty a new place to train, develop and broaden their horizons.

Set to open its doors in Gosforth in January 2024, the business' new beauty and hair academy will provide the same trail-blazing training as its Leeds-based counterpart, only this time in a city that Lewis believes is the perfect fit.

"There is a lot of demand and interest in beauty services in the North East - particularly Newcastle - and we're really looking forward to helping more people achieve their career goals by welcoming them in to our brand new, state-of-the-art academy," he says.

"The new site will offer everything from Level 2 & 3 Beauty Therapy apprenticeships and combined courses for adults, as well as programmes dedicated to nail technology and make-up artistry, massage and more."

"We're also very excited to soon be opening our first hairdressing academy, which will operate inside the Gosforth site. Here, we will be giving the next generation of hair stylists the tools they need to be the best in their field, as well as offering Level 3 qualifications in barbering for adults.

"The future for Direct Skills Group is looking bright and myself and the team are feeling very optimistic about the business' next phase of growth."

For more information, visit [directskillsgroup.co.uk](https://directskillsgroup.co.uk)

# Homeware Christmas gift guide

Transform the homes of your loved ones with our selection of top homeware, accessories and art – perfect for gifting this Christmas.

By Anna Robinson



## Mala Art Co

The brainchild of the trio behind The Social Co and twin artists, The Rocks Brothers, Mala Art Co makes luxury art accessible to the public. Favoured by influencers and celebrities, Mala provide prints of paintings by the brothers in floating frames. With 18 months of happy customers to date, the company has been applauded by Vogue and is destined for further success. A Mala piece is ideal for art enthusiasts or collectors looking to expand their inventory.

One of its most popular pieces is Unbound, a dramatic abstract that makes for an immediate talking point in any room, with captivating blue hues contrasting with white and beige. Available in a range of sizes and frame colours, this piece would be a perfect addition to any home.

## BoConcept

BoConcept has hundreds of stores across six continents, including in Newcastle, York and Manchester and frequently collaborate with designers on its latest furniture ranges. With many of its sofas, dining tables and armchairs available to arrive before Christmas and with the option to customise the colour and style of items, BoConcept pieces are guaranteed to be unique and long-lasting. The brand also offers interior design service - a fantastic gift for the person who has everything.

Its range of accessories are a great way to give a homeware gift without breaking the bank. From linen and boucle cushions, to mirrors and vases, there's something to suit every taste. A favourite of the Portfolio North team is the water ripple vase - a unique shaped vase inspired by the ocean. Finished in a grey ceramic, each angle of the vase changes the view and mirrors the natural patterns of the sea.

## Rowen Homes

A local business with Alice Rowen Hall at the helm, Rowen Homes has cemented itself into the luxury lifestyle category. Working with celebrities such as Rylan Clark, its homeware is sold across the UK. Its flagship Metrocentre shop houses its latest styles and trends.

One of its most popular gifting items is a fire lantern, a portable lantern suitable for inside or outside living. With a burning time of six hours, this is ideal for cosy winter nights. Available in a range of colours, there is something to suit every style of home. If your loved one enjoys a night in by the fire, this would be the perfect addition.

## Clarendon Fine Art

Recently launched in the centre of Newcastle, Clarendon Fine Art is one of 80 galleries in the UK and is home to unique statues, paintings and abstract art pieces by world renowned artists. If an art piece is above your budget, Clarendon sell art books, a fantastic coffee table gift. Fish and Ships by Rebecca Lardner displays coastal scenes, rural landscapes and seaside towns, perfect for those who love the coast of Northumberland. With striking, bright colour palettes, each page is vivid and eye-catching, with a sense of whimsy through her quirky characters in many of the pieces.

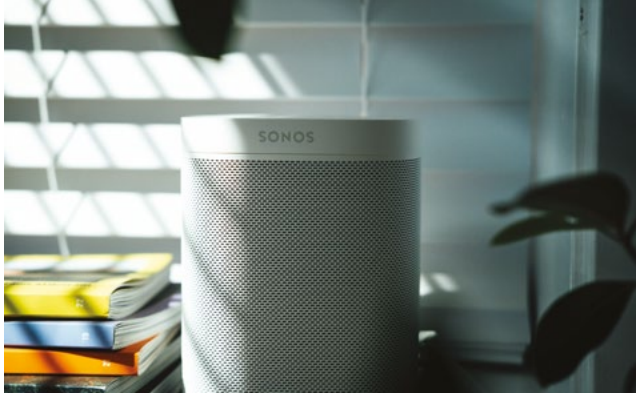
## LUSSO

Leading luxury bathroom designer, LUSSO, is a specialist in bathroom building and fitting. While a full bathroom refit might not be a suitable option, its range of accessories allows you to gift a slice of luxury, bringing peace and tranquility to a loved one's home.

A bath caddy rack is the perfect bath essential, helping to improve the bathing experience by removing clutter and providing a sleek place to access self-care essentials such as candles, skincare products or even a glass of wine.

Available in a range of finishes and colours, this is a fantastic present for someone who needs a little nudge to relax and unwind.





# Luxury Christmas gift guide

Treat the ones you love to something extra-special this festive season. Our luxury Christmas gift guide is a one-stop shop for unforgettable presents and experiences across the North East and Yorkshire.

By Anna Robinson



## Sonos Move - available at Fenwick

With locations in Newcastle and York, Fenwick has been at the heart of a northern Christmas for 150 years. From luxury food hampers to designer clothes and unique homeware, Fenwick has something for everyone. A highlight of this year's gift offerings is a Sonos move speaker. This portable, voice controlled speaker is connected to Google Assistant and Amazon Alexa, meaning your loved one can play their favourite music, check the news and set alarms through hands free instructions. Sonos is renowned for its unrivalled sound quality and sleek, modern speaker designs. Ideal for cooking in the kitchen or enjoying a summer drink in the garden, the speaker is a fantastic addition to any home and is accessible for even the most technophobic of recipients.

## Barbour x Ganni collaboration

Luxury outerwear specialist, Barbour, has partnered with designer brand Ganni to create a new series of coats and jackets, aimed at the fashionista. Based in South Shields, Barbour has been protecting outdoor workers and dog walkers alike since 1894. Now, its collaboration with Copenhagen-based Ganni ensures they reach a new audience. A bestseller of the collection is the bomber jacket, a two-toned wax jacket with contrasting green patches and an exaggerated cord collar. This jacket works well in the city and in the country and is a fantastic gift for the fashion-conscious family member.

## Afternoon tea at Matfen Hall

Recently winning multiple awards for its dedicated renovation, Matfen Hall reopened its doors in April of this year. The hotel, spa and golf course provide a slice of idyllic luxury in the heart of the Northumbria countryside and the restaurants offer the very best in fine dining. Its Afternoon of Indulgence offering takes the afternoon tea to a new level. Matfen's dedicated chauffeur will collect your loved one from home and deliver them to The Orangery. On arrival, guests receive a bottle of Laurent Perrier and an afternoon tea created by Richard Winfield. Using locally sourced ingredients, each item is made fresh each day to ensure the highest-quality experience. Following an afternoon of luxury, guests are driven home with an additional cake and loose leaf tea to enjoy at home.

## An overnight stay at Grantley Hall

Located just outside of Ripon, Grantley Hall is another hotel that has undergone significant restoration in recent years. Boasting a Michelin star restaurant among its six dining spaces, Grantley Hall is perfect for those wishing to gift a loved one with a stay at one of England's best hotels, as voted for by the AA. With luxurious suites, outdoor thermal pool and unique restaurants, it is steeped in luxury.

Give the gift of luxury with an overnight stay for two with dinner. Recipients are able to choose from one of three restaurants to enjoy, including Shaun Ranking, modern British in Fletchers and Asian-fusion in Bar and Restaurant EightyEight. Guests will also enjoy access to the Three Grace Spa and gym and wellness centre. From a Deluxe Room to the Royal Suite, each room ensures stunning views across the rolling countryside of the estate.

## Spa day at Rudding Park Hotel

Rudding Park Hotel in Harrogate offers the very best in spa day experiences. With a roof top spa and garden, indoor pool, juniper log sauna, bucket shower, escape zone, plus two-course lunch and 50 minute treatment, a day at Rudding Park guarantees ultimate relaxation.

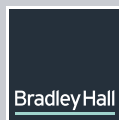
Set in 300 acres of landscaped gardens and woodland, Rudding Park is home to 90 bedrooms, two restaurants, private cinema and two gold courses. Frequently winning awards, including Hotel Spa of the Year, the venue is the ideal location to treat your loved one to a day of unwinding in the town famous for its natural springs and health benefits.



## Beamish Urpeth Villas

**£675,000**

Bradley Hall is delighted to welcome to the market this exquisite four-bedroom detached home located in the popular residential area of Beamish. Situated on a plot of approximately 0.3 acres, this property enjoys large gardens to the rear with fabulous views over the open countryside. The vendors have extended and modernized this current home to create a contemporary family home that extends to over 2300 sq. ft. In the bespoke kitchen, there are ample wall and base units with Silestone countertops and matching splashbacks. There are high-quality integrated appliances, including a double oven, fridge/freezer, dishwasher, and a boiling water tap. This stunning open-plan space forms the heart of the home, with Bifolding doors leading to the rear garden, capturing the countryside views. There is a convenient office on the ground floor, which has direct access to the garden, in addition to fabulous views. To the first floor, there are four double bedrooms, two of which benefit from fitted wardrobes in addition to en-suites with walk-in showers. The main bathroom comprises a freestanding bath, double sinks, a toilet, and a walk-in double shower. Externally, there is a large dual-access drive providing parking for multiple cars. To the rear, there is a large porcelain-tiled sun terrace leading to a lawned garden. Mature trees and shrubs border the garden, creating a high degree of seclusion.



**Durham**  
**0191 383 9999**  
**durham@bradleyhall.co.uk**



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**x 3**



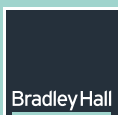
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## Wynyard Plot 8, Cavendish

**£1,300,000**

Bradley Hall Wynyard are delighted to bring to the market this stunning self-built detached property in what is arguably one of the most sought-after areas within Wynyard Park. This magnificent modern mansion is located on Cavendish in a development of large self-built detached properties. Each build is individually designed, therefore offering that unique element along with standalone property specification. Plot 8 offers a blend of high specifications, required to meet the demands of a modern family life, with the quality and benefits of the most up to date building practices. On the ground floor you will find a formal lounge and dining room, a large open plan kitchen/diner/family space as well as a cloakroom and downstairs WC. There is a generous integrated double garage and large utility and handy boot room next to the side entrance. The kitchen space features a showstopping, generously equipped kitchen with ample space to entertain and bifold doors leading to the rear garden space, perfect for entertaining and alfresco dining. On the first floor you will find five double bedrooms, three en-suites, two walk in wardrobes, as well a family bathroom. The master bedroom delivers that wow factor with a curtain glass rear wall providing woodland views and vaulted ceiling. Once completed, this property will offer a 4700 sq ft family home that does not compromise on size or design, with a contemporary finish and Lusso bathrooms. In addition to the luxury finish, this property will be equipped with all modern requirements such as Cat 5 data cabling throughout, underfloor heating for added comfort downstairs and in the bathrooms, smart control systems for heating and lighting and connected entry systems so that you can talk to visitors even when you are not at home.



**Tees Valley**  
**01642 265 300**  
**wynyard@bradleyhall.co.uk**



**x 5**



**x 4**



**x 3**







## Callerton Hall Oriel House

£795,000

A stunning Grade II listed property nestled away within striking distance of Ponteland. This remarkable property, once forming the East Wing of Callerton Hall, has undergone meticulous modernization while preserving its original charm and character, featuring high ceilings and sash windows throughout. Through the front door, you will be greeted by a tastefully designed hallway, setting the tone for the rest of the house. The hallway provides access to the cloak area and utility room. The impressive modern open plan kitchen creates the perfect space for entertaining, effortlessly flowing into the expansive living area, featuring a decorative ceiling and captivating fireplace at the heart of the room. This leads to the elegant dining room, with repurposed original wood flooring benefitting from its own fireplace and further extends into a delightful conservatory providing a seamless connection to the garden. Ascending the stairs with bespoke railings, you'll be captivated by the oriel window, bathing the hallway with natural light. The hallway features beautiful panelling, showcasing the property's attention to detail. The first floor presents three generously proportioned bedrooms, ensuring ample space for comfortable living and a neutrally tiled family bathroom. The midway landing also benefits from a WC. Externally, the inviting garden is meticulously maintained with a rose garden and stone walled borders. To the front there is courtyard parking.



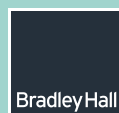
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## Newcastle The Pierre, Stamp Exchange

**£450,000**

Nestled in a prime position within the historic Stamp Exchange, an impressive Grade II listed building, this penthouse apartment boasts over 1400 sqft of internal living space split across two floors, featuring a magnificent rooftop terrace that captures the essence of city centre living. Situated on the top floor, the apartment boasts unique charm, with high ceilings and expansive windows throughout. The property briefly comprises; spacious kitchen- living dining area with tiled flooring, arranged around an impressive spiral staircase, granting access to the mezzanine level. On this level, you will also find three generously sized bedrooms all with solid oak flooring, the master of which boasts a convenient ensuite bathroom. Completing the first floor is a separate bathroom. The mezzanine level, with triple aspect creates an abundance of natural light. This versatile space currently serves as living room with a convenient office area. French doors open onto the expansive rooftop terrace with views of the city, creating an ideal setting for entertaining. The accommodation also includes secure resident parking, conveniently situated on the basement level, accessible via a lift or through fob-activated gates. Nestled within this vibrant city centre are a plethora of exciting opportunities for those seeking to call this remarkable place their home. Ideally situated within walking distance to local amenities, including a vast array of popular bars and restaurants, local shops, cafes, museums, transport links and much more.



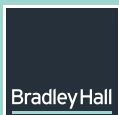
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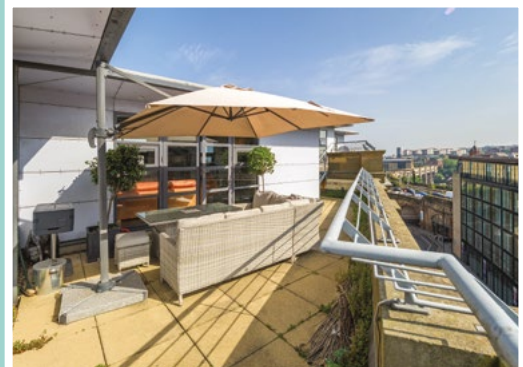
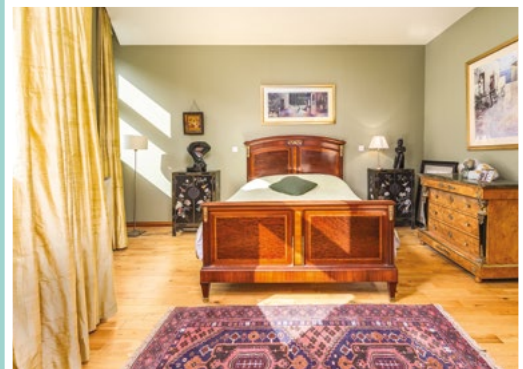
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# New Year, new hobbies

## ...to boost your health and wellbeing

With recent studies showing that flexing our brains and muscles while learning a new skill can have positive effects on our wellbeing, we say there's no time like the start of a brand new year to try something new. From hands-on classes to get your creative juices flowing, to energy-shifting experiences to stretch your body and your mind, our editor reveals there's plenty on offer right here on our doorstep to help kickstart your 2024...

### Get relaxing

The benefits of yoga stretch – quite literally – from increased flexibility, core strength and muscle tone, to improved mental focus, clarity and calmness. Combined with other holistic therapies and gentle movement classes, such as pilates, reiki and meditation, it's a sure-fire way of adding more zen into your life.

The newly-opened **Studio by YOTN** – which you'll find inside Sunderland's historic Mackie's Corner – offers special 'chakra MOT' healing classes, combining meditation, crystal healing and reiki, alongside mindfulness sessions on Sundays throughout the year and regular yoga and pilates sessions.

Over in Tynemouth, overlooking the beach, **Jasmine Yoga & Wellbeing** is a go-to for alternative classes you might not have tried before – including soundbath rituals, sunrise meditation and nighttime yin yoga to help you stretch out and wind down before bed.

**Durham Yoga Studio's** Slow Flow + Restore classes – a mix of yin yoga and soothing slow flow – is just the ticket when your body is craving movement, but your mind demands a slower pace.







### Get crafty

Quiet your mind and channel your energy by rolling up your sleeves and trying a new, relaxing craft. Whether you're naturally creative in search of an outlet, or looking to find a new hobby that keeps stress at bay, there's plenty to discover in and out of the region.

Nestled in Ouseburn Valley, **Kiln** is the place to be for relaxing pottery classes, gently guided by the experts. Slots include plenty of time behind the wheel, during which you'll have the chance to make everything from bowls and plates, to mugs, vases and more.

For soothing cooking classes, head to **Swinton Cookery School** in North Yorkshire. Its team is

passionate about local, seasonal produce and run a relaxed programme of half-day and full-day classes - including baking and bread-making, South East Asian, Middle Eastern, Italian and Fresh cooking - from their open kitchen.

For feel-good, handmade treats, look no further than **La Chocolatrice** in Newcastle, where you can make everything from personalised bars to buttons in a fun, easy-going setting.

For mood-boosting pasta-making workshops, **The Pasta Shop** in Darlington is your go-to. Make your own dough, roll and cut your own shapes and enjoy with a glass of wine or two in the process.

### Get talking

The conversation around mental health is shifting and now, more than ever, more people are recognising the benefits of talking. Whether coaching, counselling or a mix of both, there are lots of mood-lifting avenues to explore - perfect for anyone wanting extra support to help guide them through life and/or business.

Nicola Mercer, founder of **Life Now Coaching**, is a renowned health coach, qualified PT and ex-corporate leader in the North East. Through one-to-one coaching and online programmes, she helps female entrepreneurs and women working in corporate spaces build

new, healthier habits - in mind, body and soul - to help transform their lives and become better leaders.

For those longing to take charge of their lives and free themselves from self-doubt, fear and imposter syndrome, Donna and Cheryl, founders of **Now Is Your Time**, are on hand to help. Based in the North East, their powerful online coaching programmes, personal coaching sessions and corporate masterclasses help people from all walks of life to shift their mindset, shed limiting beliefs and go after the life of their dreams - no matter how big or small.



### Get moving

We all know the correlation between physical movement and improved mental health - and New Year is the perfect time to introduce new ways to get your blood pumping and give yourself a boost of happy hormones. If you're not a fan of the gym, or want to look beyond barbells and free-weights, then why not try an exercise class with a difference?

**RIOT** is one of Newcastle's best-loved spots for boxing, coupled with strength training and cardio. The unique, circuit-based classes promise a mix of punch bag time and weighted and body weight

exercises to give your mind and body a workout to remember.

If time in water helps you wash away your worries, then why not head for the coast and grab a board. All-women surf school, **Yonder Surf**, provides women in North Tyneside with an alternative route in surfing, through empowering lessons, courses and camps.

Based in Beadnell, **KA Adventure** is on hand to give anyone wanting to learn how to kitesurf, paddleboard or get to grips with coastering with the skills and confidence they need.

# Reaching new heights

## Baltic's flagship rooftop restaurant, SIX, is set for a new lease of life under dynamic new ownership by Pneuma Group.

Baltic's renowned SIX restaurant, with its breathtaking views up and down the River Tyne, has an exciting new future mapped out following its acquisition as part of an investment campaign by Middlesbrough-based Pneuma Group.

The group, which is the parent company of the hugely successful Teesside-headquartered game development company Double Eleven, has ambitions to revitalise the region through targeted investments and acquisitions. CEO Lee Hutchinson explained that Pneuma Group is passionate in its commitment to improving quality of life and employment prospects in the area.

"Pneuma Group was set up to invest in places and businesses to safeguard and enhance the impact of Double Eleven over the long term" he says.

"Acquiring SIX is part of that strategy, as one of the things we've come to appreciate is that Double Eleven benefits when Middlesbrough and the wider north east is thriving.

"Pneuma Group is named after an ancient Greek word for 'breath' which perfectly describes our ambition to breathe life and soul into the area and be a lasting part of a positive legacy."

Keith Nicholson, MD of Pneuma Group added: "We are delighted to add the flagship SIX restaurant to the group's portfolio as we continue to invest in exciting businesses and offer high quality services."

"The acquisition of the prestigious SIX restaurant marks a new chapter in the development of Pneuma Group's ambitions to invest to improve the built environment of the region and create an even better and more successful place for people to live, work and play."

SIX will continue to offer its acclaimed menu of modern British cuisine with a particular focus on sustainability and local produce. Greg Lambert, food director of subsidiary company Pneuma Hospitality, added: "SIX is known for offering the highest quality food and produce in a unique venue and we will continue to champion local,

organic produce and seek out the best local suppliers.

"We're also investing in staff and to demonstrate this have adopted the Real Living Wage as the new minimum wage standard from September this year."

As well as driving further innovation in food, the investment also brings with it a significant capital investment in the décor, and refurbishments will be unveiled to SIX diners in the new year.

**SIX bookings can be made at**  
[www.sixbaltic.com](http://www.sixbaltic.com)

**For specific booking needs, please contact Charley Fleming, Pneuma Hospitality's Events & Marketing Director, at [eat@sixbaltic.com](mailto:eat@sixbaltic.com).**





# The Great North Children's Hospital Foundation: reflecting on a busy 2023



The Great North Children's Hospital Foundation, part of Newcastle Hospitals Charity, looks back on another successful year of feel-good fundraising and donations.

241,000 children attend The Great North Children's Hospital every year, the equivalent number of more than three quarters of Newcastle upon Tyne's population, where the hospital is based.

32,000 are inpatients. 44,000 visit the Paediatric Emergency Department. 150,000 have outpatient appointments. 15,000 are day cases. People from across the North East and beyond depend on the crucial services the hospital provides day in, day out. Projects the Great North Children's Hospital Foundation has supported this year include new seating for the hospital's Paediatric Emergency Assessment Unit and Paediatric A&E. The new seats create a colourful, child friendly environment, making children and families attending the department feel at ease and comfortable, despite the stress a hospital visit can cause.

Lyndy Fawcus, Health Play Specialist at the Great North Children's Hospital, said: "I feel these seats help to alleviate any stress they may be feeling."

"The seats are bright, colourful and above all comfortable, which is very important for those children and families who have to wait for long periods of time, often in pain. We have had lots of positive feedback and feel they have made a huge difference to all who attend the department."

The Foundation has also supported investment in a couple of projectors, including a sensory projector for Ward 10, to make the hospital experience more enjoyable for children.

In the hospital's Paediatric Assessment Unit, where young patients attending A&E have assessment and monitoring, there is a new distraction projector. This projector shows a range of calming scenes, distracting patients from uncomfortable procedures, such as having bloods taken.

Lyndy Fawcus added about this funding: "This projector makes a huge difference to the children who come into resus and monitoring and helps ensure the experience is much less scary for them."

Meanwhile, The Great North Children's Hospital Foundation funded two project coordinators, Gareth Williams and Melissa Scott, from the Newcastle United Foundation to work with our hospital's young patients to help make their hospital experience the best it possibly can be. A couple of our patients even got the opportunity to watch Eddie Howe's men in the Premier League at the start of this season thanks to this partnership.

The hospital works with both the Newcastle United Foundation and The Sir Bobby Robson Foundation, part of Newcastle Hospitals Charity, to support children from across the region receiving treatment. This includes fun activities on and off the wards, helping to build confidence and strength.

A massive thank you to everyone who has made a donation or fundraised for the Great North Children's Hospital Foundation this year, and of course in previous years too. It is only with the amazing help of our supporters that we can continue to make a positive difference to the patients, staff and communities of Newcastle Hospitals.



# Facts you didn't know about BoConcept



Renowned Danish furniture and design company, BoConcept, has become synonymous with modern, stylish and functional furniture solutions for homes across the region for nearly 15 years. While you may be familiar with the brand's sleek designs and commitment to quality, there are several fascinating facts that might not have caught your attention. Here, we reveal some things you (probably) didn't know about this iconic Danish brand...





### Danish roots

BoConcept has its roots firmly embedded in Danish design principles. Established in 1952 in a sleepy town in Denmark, the company has been a pioneer in bringing Scandinavian aesthetics to homes worldwide. Founded by two talented cabinet makers, the brand's commitment to simplicity, functionality and craftsmanship reflects the essence of Danish design and is the same today, as it was over 70 years ago. The 'Bo' in its name comes from 'to live' in Danish.

### Customisation galore

One of BoConcept's standout features is its emphasis on customisation. Unlike many furniture brands, BoConcept allows clients to personalise their furniture, choosing from a wide array of materials, colours and configurations. With over 120 fabrics and leathers to choose from for any of their sofas, chairs, beds, dining chairs, this commitment to customisation ensures that each piece is tailored to the individual - or business' - style.

### Collaborations with renowned designers

BoConcept has collaborated with some of the most distinguished designers in the industry. These collaborations have resulted in iconic pieces that blend functionality with artistic expression. Designers such as Karim Rashid, Bjarke Ingles Group and Morten Georgsen have lent their creative prowess to BoConcept, shaping the brand's identity and winning many awards along the way.

### Global presence

While BoConcept's origins lie in Denmark, the brand has expanded its reach globally. With a presence in over 65 countries, it has successfully transcended cultural boundaries, making its mark as the world's most global furniture brand. Local retail stores include Fenwick Newcastle, Monks Cross York and Redbrick Leeds.

### Virtual showroom experience

BoConcept embraces technology to enhance the customer experience. One of the most exciting ways it utilises today's technology is through its virtual showroom experience, which allows customers to explore its collections from the comfort of their own homes. With additional AR technology for experiencing their collections in home and commercial settings.

### The iconic Imola Chair

The Imola Chair is one of BoConcept's most iconic creations. Designed by Henrik Pedersen, this chair has garnered international acclaim for its distinctive shape and luxurious comfort. But did you know this icon was actually inspired by a tennis ball? Its unique design has made it a coveted piece in many contemporary homes and businesses. With less than five people skilled in the craft of producing the Imola, it takes many years of training in expert upholstery to create the masterpiece. Henrik wasn't even going to pitch the design to BoConcept, until he made a last-minute decision to show the team. Lucky for them, he did.

### Recyclability and reusability

As part of its commitment to eco-friendliness, BoConcept designs its furniture with recyclability and reusability in mind. At the end of a product's life cycle, materials are chosen and configured to be easily disassembled, facilitating efficient recycling or upcycling processes. BoConcept's eco-conscious practices not only contribute to a more sustainable planet, but also inspire a shift towards responsible and mindful consumption in the world of modern furniture design. By the end of 2024, BoConcept's full leather collection will be traceable direct from farm source, ensuring responsible and ethically sourced materials.

### Keeping it in-house

BoConcept stands out in the furniture industry not only for its contemporary designs, but also for its meticulous control of production processes. The brand takes pride in maintaining an in-house design team - a critical element that ensures the coherence of its aesthetic vision. The streamlined coordination between design and production, coupled with efficient manufacturing practices, allows BoConcept to swiftly bring its cutting-edge designs from concept to the consumer in industry-leading delivery times.

### Exclusive B2B design showcases

BoConcept curates exclusive design showcases for its B2B clients, offering them a first-hand look at upcoming collections and innovative designs. These events provide design professionals with inspiration for their commercial projects.

For more information visit [boconcept.com](https://boconcept.com) or visit your local store.



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Berwick-upon-Tweed. TD15 1RP  
01289 306 784

Newcastle  
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Newcastle. NE3 2EF  
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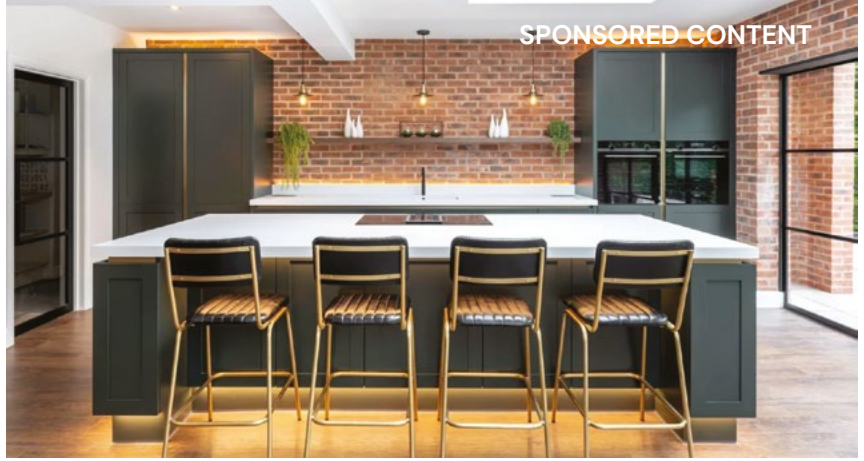
  
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# Six reasons to choose an independent kitchen provider

If a brand new kitchen is on your wish list this winter, then Callerton Kitchens has you covered. Proudly independent for 40 years, it guarantees a personalised service from start to finish and bespoke results that carefully match its customers' wants and needs.

We chat to its expert team about the benefits of choosing an independent provider, like them, to make your kitchen dreams a reality this season and beyond...

## Keeping it personal

Considered as "the heart of the home", the kitchen is one of the most used and most loved rooms in any home. It's only right, then, that it should express who you are and be specifically designed to meet your needs. While large chain stores specialise in high volume generic kitchens and charge impressive amounts to tailor designs, independent providers work with you to ensure your kitchen meets your needs, as well as your personality. They're also less restricted in terms of options, giving you greater freedom of choice when it comes to style, materials and budget.

## End-to-end service

There is only one link in your bespoke kitchen supply chain - and that's us. We work with you to design and create a kitchen to your budget and specifications.

And unlike some of the national chains, our goal is not to upsell you along the way. From your first visit to our store

to the fitting of your kitchen, you have an easy and accessible point of contact, meaning you're always dealing with someone who knows what they're talking about.

## Quality that lasts

We've built up strong relationships with our suppliers over the decades, enabling us to offer high quality and luxury kitchens across the North East at affordable prices. It's important to think about ticket price versus value here. Sometimes, a chain store kitchen will be more cost-effective, but might not last you anywhere near as long. Our kitchens are built-to-last, ultimately delivering a better return on investment.

## Unrivalled service

Independent businesses stand or fall by their products and their customer service. We take the time to understand what you want from a kitchen and deliver a personalised solution - plus we're with you every step of the way. We have over 40 years of satisfied customers behind us - that's a strong track record in which you can place your trust.

## Budget-friendly

Don't get fooled by sale prices at major retailers. While we all love a good deal, make sure you take the time to compare costs with an independent. While we continue to install many bespoke and luxury kitchens across the North East, we pride ourselves on offering fitted kitchen solutions to suit your budget. And thanks to our 40 years of experience, we're experts at giving you tips and tricks on how to reduce the costs, but still get the kitchen you've always wanted.

## The stats don't lie

The numbers don't lie - more people choose independent kitchen specialists than any other kitchen retailers. According to market research experts, JKMR, the UK fitted kitchen sector is worth around £5 billion a year. Independent retailers account for more than a third of the market, while builders' merchants are in second place with less than 30%. The big chains make up less than 20% of the market.

For more information, visit [callertonkitchens.co.uk](http://callertonkitchens.co.uk) or contact the team on 01289 306785.

# The jewel of the desert

Discover luxury day charters in Dubai

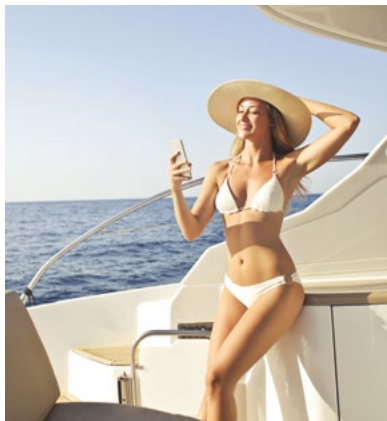
By Geoff Moore



With its unique blend of opulence and innovation, Dubai has quickly become the jewel of the desert, beckoning travellers from all over the world to its shores as its popularity increases each year.







Renowned for its futuristic skyline, punctuated by record breaking structures like the Burj Khalifa and the Palm Jumeirah, the city is truly a testament to formidable architecture. Intertwine phenomenal scenery and turquoise ocean with the best boutiques, exhilarating activities, like dune surfing and desert safaris, and some of the best beach clubs in the world, and you can see why Dubai is high on the list when it comes to a break that has everything.

The city's marinas are no exception to the splendour and magnificence, bordering the tranquil waters of the Persian Gulf. And what better way to take in the cosmopolitan skyline and enjoy the spoils of the ocean at the same time than from the decks of a luxury yacht?

While you can embark on a yacht charter holiday in the region for as long as you wish, many are now opting to test their sea legs with a luxurious day charter before committing to a yacht charter for a longer period of time. If you are heading to Dubai for three nights, one week, or longer, add some extra magic and spend a day on the water. A full-day charter presents a complete exploration of Dubai's iconic landmarks, with ample time to relax and take in the splendour of the skyline.

For those seeking a more condensed, but equally captivating escape, a half-day charter promises an immersive experience in a shorter span, allowing you to discover essential highlights of Dubai's breath-taking coastline, ensuring your journey is packed with impressive sights and memorable moments.

With full day and half day charters becoming the new favourite way to relax, discover why so many people are choosing to charter a yacht in Dubai.

#### The ultimate luxury day trip

If you're looking to celebrate and make your trip to Dubai even more memorable, a crewed yacht charter ticks every box. Your yacht will come with its own experienced captain and crew, meaning you can sit back and relax while your crew serve drinks, set up the water toys and ensure you have a fabulous time.

#### Watersports and water toys

Thrill-seekers can revel in an array of watersports, from jet skiing, water skiing and paddleboarding to exhilarating wakeboarding adventures for those seeking an adrenaline rush. Explore beneath the waves with a Seabob, or take a leisurely paddle with the inflatables, with various options available for all skill levels and paces.

#### Beach clubs

Arrive in style and anchor at a private beach club along Dubai's coastline. Bask in luxury, from Nikki Beach to Zero Gravity, there is a great range of beach clubs in the city. Unwind on pristine shores, sip champagne and revel in the exclusive amenities, from beachside lounges and live DJs to fitness classes or themed parties.

#### Snorkelling and diving

Dive into the crystal-clear waters of the Persian Gulf. Explore vibrant underwater ecosystems, encounter diverse marine life and witness the beauty of the Gulf's thriving coral reefs. Depending on your level of experience, diving instructors can be arranged if needed.

#### Sunset views

Indulge in the mesmerising views of Dubai's skyline as the sun sets over the horizon. Relax and enjoy a leisurely cruise aboard the yacht, while sipping on your favourite drink, soaking in the breathtaking transition from day to night.

#### Ocean dining

Delight your tastebuds with a gourmet dining affair on deck. Tailored to your preferences, there's nothing like feasting on fresh and delicious food with your favourite people as you cruise the crystal-clear waters with sea air in your lungs.

#### Fishing

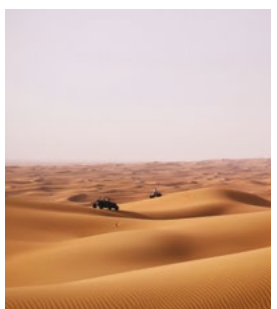
The Persian Gulf, along with its various bays and inlets, offers ample opportunities for fishing. Popular fishing spots include Dubai Marina, Jebel Ali and the waters around Palm Jumeirah. It's worth being aware that some species may be subject to catch-and-release regulations to help maintain sustainable fish populations.

#### Events

If you're in the region for an event such as the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, why not enjoy a day charter with your group? Whether you're experiencing the event with friends or business partners, a yacht offers a great place to relax and enjoy each other's company.

#### Celebrate in style

Yachts are the perfect setting for special occasions. Whether it's a birthday, engagement, anniversary, or any other celebration, consider chartering a yacht for a memorable experience in a private and intimate setting, away from the crowds.



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# Wine & Dine

The latest food and drink news, from the finest wines and must-try recipes to new restaurant openings and more





# RomanHoliday

Contributing wine editor David Harker discovers la dolce vita exploring the neighbourhoods of Rome.







Rome has everything; history, culture, style and of course wine. So what have the Romans ever done for wine lovers? Well there's Est! Est!! Est!!! di Montefiascone, an extraordinary name for an often ordinary wine. Or there's Frascati from the hills overlooking the city. And that's about it for wines that you might find at home. But when in Rome...

Start with La Fiaschetta. A discreet doorway on the corner of the quiet Via dei Cappellari. A short walk from the hotspots of Plaza Navona and Campo de' Fiori but a world away from the tourist traps. Small, simple, authentic and an enthusiastic owner touchingly proud of his regional wines. Be sure to book.

Behind Campo de' Fiori is, L'Angolo Divino. This divine corner has been serving wine since 1946. And from the weary look of the patron he hasn't missed a shift. Take a seat at the bar and work your way down the chalk board of wines by the glass. Nibble on cheese and charcuterie and chat until you get a smile.

Across the Ponte Sisto footbridge is Trastevere, literally across the Tiber. Stop at Trapizzino Trilussa for a wine list dedicated to regional wines and snack on suppli, the traditional Roman street food. Then join the chatter of the evening passeggiata. Through winding, cobbled streets delivery trucks squeeze between pavement tables. This is the Rome of your imagination. Sunlit, bustling, beeping Rome. Around every corner the promise of Audrey Hepburn hugging Cary Grant on the back of a speeding Vespa.

The heart of this vibrant neighbourhood is the Basilica di Santa Maria, one of the oldest churches in the city. For those who follow a different religion pop into the club shop of Trastevere Calcio, Rome's third football team with a history dating back to 1909.

A little further south is Testaccio. A traditional working-class area and the cradle of another football team, AS Roma. This recently gentrified neighbourhood of plane trees and pink pastel buildings makes for a pleasant Saturday morning stroll.

The indoor food market is worth a visit to mingle with gesticulating locals.

Grab a slice of Pinsa Romana and try a glass of natural wine. From the market head to Piazza Testaccio, pause to watch the kids playing in one of Rome's many fountains and then turn towards Via Marmorata for a real treat.

Volpetti Salumeria is an historic delicatessen with terracotta and white tiled floors, where rows of hams hang from the ceiling, artisan cheeses crowd under the glass counter and wines from the length of Italy line the wooden shelves. Sit at a marble topped table for a small bite, a glass of Franciacorta and people watch discerning Italians selecting their Saturday night treats.

For a casual supper step next door into Taverna Volpetti. Enjoy a short menu of seasonal dishes and my favourite wine list in Rome. The list is presented by self-confessed wine addict, Matteo Tomljanovich. Matteo turned his back on corporate life - including a spell at Proctor and Gamble, Newcastle - to devote himself to a love of wine. Let his passion guide you through a list that features cheerful Cesanese from Lazio and rare treasures from Piemonte.

Beyond the ancient Aurelian Walls is the student neighbourhood of Ostiense. De Gusto is a tiny, friendly Enoteca dedicated to wine, spirits and sake. Why sake? "Because I like it," shrugs the owner. Close by is Trecca - Cucina di Mercato, simple ingredients cooked well.

On a Sunday morning - to escape the city heat, choked traffic and tides of tourists - depart teeming Termini on an early train to Frascati. The attractive hilltop town is a pleasant thirty minutes climb past ancient aqueducts, through vineyards and orchards. Ristorante 'Na Fojetta is reassuringly traditional and a perfect place to enjoy a leisurely lunch of Porchetta; the classic Roman slice of slow roasted, boneless pork stuffed with herbs. Perfect with a bottle of Frascati.

Lazio is not the most lauded of Italian wine regions but it has a generous climate, volcanic soils, and passionate wine makers committed to sustainable viticulture. Their wines, made from Bellone, Grechetto and Cesanese, may never leave the region but when in Rome can be enjoyed by the curious wine lover who knows where to look.

## David's Roman address book

### La Fiaschetta

Via dei Cappellari, 64

### L'Angolo Divino

Via dei Balestrari N.12/14

### Trapizzino Trilussa

Piazza Trilussa 42

### Volpetti Salumeria

Via Marmorata 47

### Taverna Volpetti

Via Alessandro Volta 8

### Enoteca De Gusto

Via Gabriello Chiabrera, 58A

### Trecca - Cucina di Mercato

Via Alessandro Severo 222

### Ristorante 'Na Fojetta

Via del Risorgimento 4, Frascati

## What's in a name?

The Romans seem to have an awful lot of words for places to eat and drink, so what's the difference?

### Enoteca

A traditional enoteca is a wine shop where you can taste local wines before buying. The concept has evolved so that you may also be served a small selection of snacks alongside the wine.

### Salumeria

A delicatessen. Some may have a few tables where you can enjoy cured meats and cheese with a glass of wine.

### Osteria

Originally a place serving only wine. Today the emphasis is more likely to be on a simple menu of traditional, local dishes.

### Taverna

An inn or tavern serving drinks with food available.

### Trattoria

A sort of Italian bistro. Traditionally a casual dining place, often family owned, serving rustic local food.

### Ristorante

A more formal, full service restaurant.

# Wine lovers Christmas gift guide

**It's the most wonderful time of the year... to gift the wine-lover in your life the perfect vino-themed present. Our contributing wine editor, David Harker, reveals his list of the best wine-inspired gifts. His knowledge of the wine world is extensive and, as owner of Newcastle Wine School, he is well-versed in recommending the best bottles, experiences and accessories.**



## Essential reading

David recommends *The World Atlas of Wine* by Hugh Johnson and Jancis Robinson. Now in its eighth edition, this book is a 'bible of viticulture' and is an authoritative guide to the world of wine. With stunning imagery from vineyards around the world, this is an essential for any wine lover. Jancis Robinson has also edited the latest Oxford Companion to Wine this year, which is now in its 5th edition.

Designed to make the wine industry more accessible, the book includes information on winemakers across the world including new countries such as Finland, Senegal and Uganda. 15 wine experts work together on the encyclopaedia of wine, providing on the ground coverage from a range of vineyards, detailed insights into the DNA of wine grapes and reviews of complex winemaking processes, trends and sustainability practices. Both books are available from Waterstones.

## Essential membership

If the wine lovers in your family have everything they might need, a membership to The Wine Society makes for a fantastic practical gift. Members receive access to fairly priced wines, with bottles starting from just £6.25. With over 180,000 members selecting from 1,400 specially selected wines, The Wine Society is the go-to wine membership to discover unique wines, chosen by expert sommeliers. With free delivery available, as well as invitations to exclusive wine tastings and online lectures, a gift membership to this not-for-profit wine co-operative makes an ideal lifetime present.

## Essential visits

If you would prefer to gift your loved one a wine-themed experience, there are plenty of wine bars and specialist wine shops in Newcastle offering tastings, flights and pairings.

A favourite is Gosforth based Carruthers and Kent. With an extensive range of wines on offer, this enoteca has tables available every evening for a glass of wine and a charcuterie board, made on site at their deli. With a wine 'vending machine' and membership card, you can try multiple different wines that change weekly, depending on the season and popularity. Booking an evening visit to enjoy with your wine lover is an ideal way to improve the winter nights.

## Essential kit

David recommends a few key pieces of kit to improve a wine enthusiast's inventory. The Laguiole Sommelier corkscrew is crafted by an artisan in France and finished with Thuya wood. Designed for professionals, the stainless steel bolsters sit either side of a small blade designed for removing foil quickly. Personalisation is also available, ensuring this is a unique and treasured gift.

David also suggests Richard Brendon wine glasses. In a partnership with Jancis Robinson, the London based crockery and glassware designer has created a series of wine glasses and carafes that are used in the best hotels and restaurants around the world. Perfect for those who value high quality glassware and the effects it can have on the taste of the wine, the collection is guaranteed to improve the drinking experience.

## Essential voucher

Of course, the essential voucher must be for Newcastle Wine School itself. David hosts wine tastings and exclusive events at venues across the North East, with many taking place in the historic Blackfriars restaurant in the city centre. With a variety of wines at each tasting, and an astute knowledge of the wine industry through his travels around the world, David is well-suited to provide an educational and enjoyable experience for wine fans. Gift vouchers are available on his website.

[www.newcastlewineschool.co.uk](http://www.newcastlewineschool.co.uk)





# The perfect match

**The festive season is a time for celebration and joy – and what better way to elevate your Christmas gatherings than with a delicious selection of wine and cheese pairings?** Read on to discover our favourite seasonal matches, perfect for parties and soirees of all sizes...

## Exploring pairing basics

Pairing wine and cheese is an art that involves balancing flavours, textures, and aromas. The key is to complement and contrast the characteristics of both elements to create a harmonious palate experience and keep your tastebuds on their toes.

### Classic pairings

#### Chardonnay with brie

The creamy texture of brie complements beautifully with the buttery notes of a Chardonnay. The wine's acidity helps cut through the cheese's richness, too, creating perfect balance.

#### Cabernet Sauvignon with aged cheddar

The boldness of Cabernet Sauvignon stands up well to the sharpness of aged cheddar. The wine's tannins complement the cheese's robust flavour, creating a robust and memorable pairing.

#### Cabernet Sauvignon with aged cheddar

The boldness of Cabernet Sauvignon stands up well to the sharpness of aged cheddar. The wine's tannins complement the cheese's robust flavour.

#### Sauvignon Blanc with goats cheese

Sauvignon Blanc's crispness pairs wonderfully with the earthy, tangy flavour of goat cheese.

### Festive pairings for Christmas

#### Pinot Noir with gruyère

The fruity notes of Pinot Noir complement the nutty flavours of gruyère cheese perfectly.

#### Sparkling wine with parmesan

The effervescence of sparkling wine cleanses the palate, making it an ideal partner for the rich, salty flavour of parmesan. The bubbles contrast beautifully with the cheese's texture, too.

#### Port with blue cheese

The sweetness of port wine complements the bold, pungent flavours of blue cheese, such as stilton, exceptionally well. This pairing is a classic during the holiday season.

### Tips for serving

#### Temperature matters

Serve cheese at room temperature to allow its flavours to shine.

#### Variety is key

Offer a diverse selection of cheeses and wines to cater to different preferences. Pair with sweet fruit, like grapes, and salty crackers to elevate each mouthful.

#### Experiment

Don't be afraid to try unconventional pairings. Sometimes, the most unexpected combinations create the most magic.





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# Mulled wine jelly with marzipan cream and cranberry compôte

Helen Doyle, head pastry chef at 21 Hospitality, shares one of her favourite show-stopping festive desserts.

By Terry Laybourne



This dessert is perfect for entertaining at Christmas, as it can be prepared in advance and served straight from the fridge.

When you're ready to serve, remove the jelly from the fridge and spoon over a generous helping of the compôte and cream. Using a grater and a dried cinnamon stick, shave some cinnamon over the top and enjoy.

**Serves 4**

21 Hospitality is a diverse collection of some of the North East's favourite restaurants including 21 Quayside, Café 21 in Fenwick, The Broad Chare, St. Vincent, Porterhouse Grill and Saltwater Fish Company.

[21hospitality.co.uk](http://21hospitality.co.uk)

## Mulled wine (make the day before)

### INGREDIENTS

- 200ml red wine
- 20g honey
- 30g sugar
- The juice and zest of 1 large orange
- ½ teaspoon of grated nutmeg
- 1 whole cinnamon stick, broken
- 4 cardamom pods
- 4 star anise
- 4 whole cloves
- 90ml dry cider

### METHOD

- In a large pan, bring all the ingredients to a boil, excluding the cider
- Once boiling, remove from the heat and add the cider
- Allow to cool, then refrigerate overnight

## Cranberry compôte (make the day before)

### INGREDIENTS

- 100g cranberries (fresh or frozen)
- 80g caster sugar

### METHOD

- In a large bowl, mix together the cranberries and sugar
- Place a saucepan over a high heat
- Once the pan is very hot, add the cranberry mixture and cook for approximately one minute until the cranberries are tender
- Remove from the heat and allow to cool, then refrigerate overnight

## Marzipan cream (make the day before)

### INGREDIENTS

- 60g raw marzipan
- 20g whipping cream
- 95ml double cream

### METHOD

- In a mixer, beat together the marzipan and whipping cream with a paddle until soft and smooth
- Add the double cream and using the whisk attachment, whisk until soft peaks form. Be careful not to over whisk, as the mixture may split. The mixture may appear slightly grainy due to the almonds in the marzipan - this is quite normal

## Jelly (make at least two hours before)

### INGREDIENTS

- Mulled wine
- 2 sheets of bronze gelatine leaf

### METHOD

- Soak the gelatine leaves in just enough cold water to cover them
- Strain the mulled wine into a large pan, using a muslin cloth inside a sieve to remove the flavouring ingredients
- Warm the mulled wine in a pan, being careful not to allow it to come to a boil
- Remove the soaked gelatine leaves from the water and squeeze out any excess
- Add the leaves to the wine, stirring to ensure everything is well mixed before pouring into serving dishes
- Refrigerate and allow to set for at least two hours before serving



# Top Tavern

**After months of anticipation, Keel Tavern has arrived in Sunderland's up-and-coming Keel Square. Our editor finds out more...**

## The story

You'll find Keel Tavern in the heart of Sunderland's Keel Square. Thanks to recent - and ongoing - investment from Sunderland City Council, the historic site is set to transform into a thriving landmark for community and the finest food and drink - and Keel Tavern is the first on its list of new and exciting venues to open for business.

It comes courtesy of Vaultard Group - one of the North East's leading hospitality groups, which has been taking the region's wining and dining scene by storm for over 30 years.

Spearheaded by its owner, Ollie Vaultard, the group is responsible for some of Newcastle's most loved bars and restaurants - including The Bridge Tavern, Redhouse and Barluga - but Keel Tavern marks its first leap over the water into Wearside.

Soon, it will be joined by other big names in hospitality, including The Botanist and The Muddler, who are set to take up space close next year.

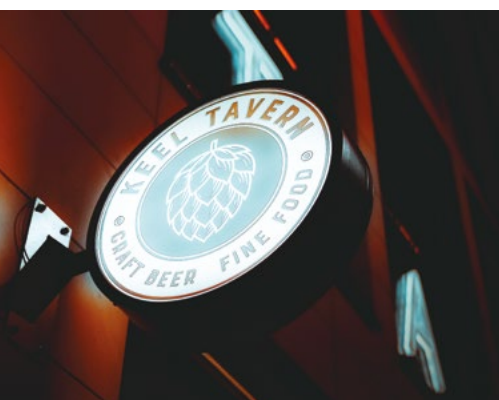
"Sunderland City Council came to us with a clear vision - to change Sunderland.

They wanted to expand its offering and reinvent it as a go-to city for living, working, socialising, eating, drinking... all of it," recalls Ollie.

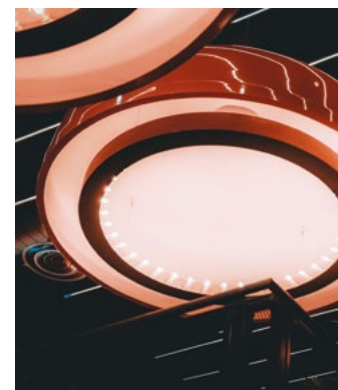
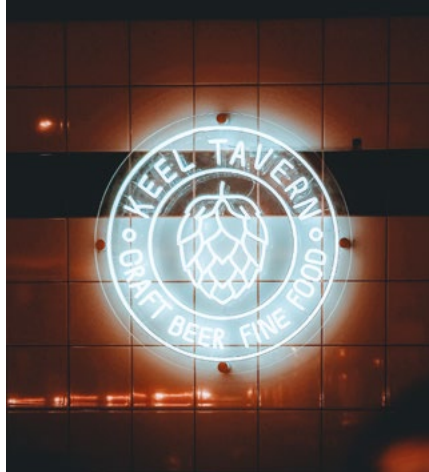
"At the time it felt like a bit of a gamble. We hadn't ventured over the water before and no other businesses were signed up to join us at the time. It's really important to have good trading neighbours, so I wanted to know we'd be in good company - I didn't want to do it in isolation.

"But I'm so glad we agreed - and I'm thrilled other businesses like The Botanist and The Muddler will soon be joining us. Keel Square is a really special part of Sunderland and the council is working hard to breathe new life into it. They understand the role the area plays in the city's resurgence and so do we.

"I feel we are the vanguard of something new and exciting for the people of Sunderland and, hopefully, the economy too. As the saying goes, 'if you build, they will come' and we're excited to watch Keel Square's - and the city's - future unfold."







### What's inside

Keel Tavern takes its name from its whereabouts – but that influence doesn't stop there. Inside, it purposely pays homage to Keel Square's rich brewing history, as well as Sunderland's maritime and football heritage.

With a vision of transforming what was, as Ollie describes, "an empty concrete box" into something special, Vaulkhard enlisted the help of local and award-winning interior design specialists, Pulp House Studios Design House.

Sunderland-born designer, Gerard McElvenney, was at the helm of the makeover and took pride in bringing the group's plans – and a new bar for his city – to life.

"I wanted it to look and feel exactly what it is – a tavern – so the brief was to create a space that managed to feel intimate, warm and inviting without being small – which Gerard and his team have definitely achieved," says Ollie.

"Every single element you see inside, the team built. Inside, you'll discover three different levels and multiple seating areas – from cosy alcoves and private booths to long communal-style tables and seating up on the mezzanine overlooking Keel Square.

"To create a relaxed ambiance, we opted for a palette of warm browns and lots of texture when it came to the smaller details, too. Things like warm, industrial-style lighting, a mix of wood, tiles and glass and so on.

"We wanted to build an informal, easy going pub, where people will feel safe, comfortable and relaxed. Somewhere for friends, family, work mates and so on to meet after work and at the weekend and enjoy good beer and conversation. That kind of place."

Other stand-out features include decorative still tops barrels and grand ceiling lighting shaped like brew stills, balustrades that nod to the city's old Roker Park and a grand German-style beer pump, handmade in Bavaria.

### What's on offer

From an impressive 18 beer taps and six hand pulls, Keel Tavern serves up a variety of craft beers – 12 of which are rotational guest beers, to keep its customers' tastebuds on their toes.

Popular local names, such as Vaux, Maxim, Great North Eastern Brewing Co and Wylam are on the menu, too, alongside much-loved staples, like Guinness and Peroni, as well as a mix of spirits and wines. For the cocktail-lovers, there are a small number of liquor-focused classics on offer, while hungry visitors can expect a casual menu of pub classics – stretching from fish and chips and sausage and mash, to chicken schnitzel, burgers and pies.

"We're not trying to be overly clever or reinvent the wheel when it comes to our offering. After all, there's already a craft beer scene in Sunderland and plenty of great restaurants too," says Ollie.

"Keel Tavern is a pub first and foremost – it's not a restaurant – so the food is really secondary. That said, it will still impress. Perhaps even overdeliver and surpass expectations."

"Simple, informal plates that pack a punch when it comes to flavour and complement the beer well. That's what it's about."

### What's to come

In the coming weeks, dependent on demand and weather, new outdoor furniture will be installed, creating an exciting outdoor space for punters to enjoy all year round. It's thought the space will provide enough room for a further 100 people, in addition to the pub's internal capacity of around 200.

"I've been building pubs for 30 years and I think Keel Tavern is the best we've ever produced," says Ollie.

"It's a product of Sunderland City Council's vision and our confidence in that. I believe the investment is right, the location is right, the offering is right and the environment is right. It's all come together.

"I have a special feeling about it – and I'm excited to see what comes of it and what people think of it."

For more information, contact [keeltavern@vaulkhardgroup.co.uk](mailto:keeltavern@vaulkhardgroup.co.uk)

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