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The North East SME Innovation Programme enables businesses from across the region to use innovation to gain competitive advantage and accelerate growth.

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Available to SME's located in the North East LEP area (County Durham, Northumberland and Tyne and Wear) and have been trading for 12 months or more.

### Note quite ready?

If you're a Durham-based SME, 12 hours business consultancy support may be available through our Flexible Support Programme.

Contact the **Innovation Team** at the **North East BIC**:  
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[www.ne-bic.co.uk/supporting-innovation](http://www.ne-bic.co.uk/supporting-innovation)



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# Business resolutions for 2020

Looking forward to a period of more certainty and clarity for business in the region

Happy New Year and welcome to the first Contact magazine of 2020!

It's fitting that the theme of this first edition in 2020 is Sustainability and Innovation - exciting and inspirational forward-thinking topics for the start of a new year... and talking of the new year - I wonder what the most popular business new year resolutions will be? Perhaps improving sustainability, growing your business, increasing international trade, introducing flexible working, reducing your businesses' environmental footprint, embracing new and emerging technologies to help improve business growth or increase productivity... whatever your aim, I wish you well for 2020!

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As we enter this new decade I'm hoping it will be the start of a period of more certainty and clarity for business in the region. Following the election, talk of changes to Government spending rules and increased spending on infrastructure in our region are encouraging and I hope will lead to an improvement in economic stability and business confidence leading to a turnaround in last year's declining QES results.

We also have another Brexit deadline on the horizon, hopefully an outcome on 31 January that will move us forward, but like many, I believe we will still have years of negotiation and decision-making that will have implications for businesses and the region. However, I'm certain that the Chamber will continue to make sure our voice is heard.

I'm sure 2020 will once again be a busy year as the Chamber continues



to expand the number of events and activities to support our companies and region, and it will be an exciting year with the launch of the first North

East England Chamber of Commerce Business Awards - do look out for information about how to enter.

To round off my welcome, I want to thank all the Chamber team on behalf of members for all their hard work and support they have provided in 2019 and also to say a big thank you to them for helping me in my first few months as President.

***"As we enter this new decade I'm hoping it will be the start of a period of more certainty and clarity for business in the region"***



Though we've grown rapidly in size,  
we're still extremely agile.

We've assisted and collaborated with many businesses, organisations and individuals across all sectors to ensure their continued success, which has in turn, led to our continued success. Though being a heavyweight law firm has its undoubted benefits for our diverse range of clients, we're very proud of the fact that we're still nimble, still responsive, still agile, meaning our team can react and move more quickly and efficiently. We give clients 'Legal solutions that fit', which means that we give them what they really need. We don't give them flannel, over-complication and quite frankly, stuff they don't need.



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Legal solutions that fit

# New Year, new stability?

Some encouraging export figures; workshops assist local retailers; the onus on Government to work with business; and a Ministerial visit puts transport infrastructure issues in the spotlight

James Ramsbotham CBE  
Chief executive  
@NEEChamberJames

Some of the characters of Dickens' great novel *Christmas Carol* have inspired my first column of this decade, although I am hoping the Chancellor doesn't intend to emulate Scrooge at Budget time.

We definitely experienced the Ghost of Christmas Past rattling his chains with the impact of Brexit on our economy. Our latest export figures highlighted opportunities but also the challenges of leaving the EU.

The figures showed that our trade with the rest of the world outside the EU has increased, led by a 42 per cent increase in exports to the Middle East. This is good news. However, we should treat these results with a hint of caution as global activity is plagued by volatility. Our survey indicates that this will continue, so we urge the Government to make it a priority to provide real support for international trade.

On a positive note, I am delighted to report that the Ghost of Christmas Present, with his bonhomie and generosity, was definitely there in the spirit of our retail workshops organised with Newcastle Building Society.

***"Now, in the New Year, we hope that stability will ensue and that confidence will return. However, Government should see these results as a stark indicator of the need to secure a positive Brexit outcome that supports our international traders"***

Ambitious high street retail businesses in North Tyneside are currently benefiting from fantastic advice on how to attract more customers and improve their profitability. In the first session, John Lewis staff very kindly shared their extensive window display knowledge which was extremely useful for the retailers, in particular during the peak Christmas shopping period.

This project built on our detailed report on how to improve

town centres and what needs to be done to support our high street retailers, in particular independent traders.

After the vagaries of 2019, I know we are all keen to know what 2020 will hold for us. Our latest Quarterly Economic Survey results included your views on trading conditions for the coming months and, although they didn't include a visitation of the Ghost of Christmas Future, they did ring bells of the alarming kind.

Results for the end of last year show the direction of the regional economy; continuing a trend we saw in the third quarter. Investment has slowed down dramatically and export sales continue to disappoint.

Our survey was conducted during the election campaign and it is clear to see that political and economic uncertainty is creating real difficulties for business.

Now, in the New Year, we hope that stability will ensue and that confidence will return. However, Government should see these results as a stark indicator of the need to secure a positive Brexit outcome that supports our international traders. They must turn warm words on regional investment into swift actions.

We did take some heart from the Queen's Speech which raised the hope that encouraging investment and rebalancing could now be a serious part of the next Government's agenda.

It will be important that promises are delivered properly, not just ideologically. Government should look to work with business if it wants to tackle these issues seriously and with clarity so that business can prepare and grow with confidence in the future.

We were given the perfect opportunity to put this view forward, and also set out the case for significant investment in the region's transport infrastructure, earlier this month during a meeting with Transport Secretary, Grant Shapps.

The meeting, organised by us and hosted by Womble Bond Dickinson, allowed our members including transport operators, infrastructure providers and companies who rely on transport networks in order to do business, to discuss a range of issues. We particularly focused on the urgent need to invest in key rail infrastructure such as HS2 and the East Coast Main Line; supporting the aims of the Chamber's Fast Track East Coast campaign.

We emphasised our significant aviation, maritime, road and rail assets and our requirement for better public transport, ensuring

that the Secretary of State understood that the lack of historic investment in the region's infrastructure has prevented us from reaching our economic potential for far too long. We were, therefore, pleased to hear the commitments given by the Minister to improving this situation as part of Government's drive to address the productivity challenge facing our country.

There are certainly challenges ahead, driven home by the recent announcement from Hitachi. Despite the heavy blow of job losses, we possess a tremendous asset in this state-of-the-art £100m plant. It is one of the most advanced in Europe with an established successful UK-wide supply chain. Building on our conversation with the Transport Minister we now call on the Government to increase investment in our rail network (particularly HS2) with trains built by Hitachi to really deliver economic 'levelling up' for the North East.

I am very aware that there are other businesses in our region who are similarly having to rethink their business model and exploit different opportunities to those they anticipated.

In this new decade we want to celebrate them and spread news of their successes, highlighting the type of 'roll up your sleeves and let's crack on' culture that exist here in North East England. In order to do this, we have launched our Chamber Business Awards. More details are on our website. Please enter these awards and help us to celebrate your achievements.

I wish you all the very best of luck in 2020.





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*Knight Frank's North East team*

## COMMERCIAL PROPERTY

# Knight Frank celebrates 25 years in Newcastle

Knight Frank Newcastle is celebrating 25 years in business - having grown from three to 76 employees to become the North East's largest commercial property agency.

The firm has, using its global networks, driven millions of pounds of inward investment into the region through thousands of property deals over the past two and a half decades.

It all started in Autumn 1994 when two surveyors - Mark Swallow and Tim Evans - persuaded global real estate consultancy Knight Frank to open a North East office, which was a modest 350 sq ft space at Doxford International Business Park in Sunderland.



Branch staff pictured at a Slow Shopping training day

## FINANCIAL SERVICES

### Building society champions Slow Shopping

Following a successful pilot, the Newcastle Building Society is expanding the Gosforth-based Slow Shopping initiative across its entire branch network.

The initiative – which was started by Gosforth resident, Katherine Vero, following her mother’s dementia diagnosis – is now being supported across its branches in the North East, Cumbria and North Yorkshire.

Slow Shopping particularly caters for those who live with visible, invisible, intellectual or cognitive disability. As part of Slow Shopping, retailers dedicate times when shopping can be more relaxed, where more trained staff can be available and there are more opportunities to sit down.

Newcastle Building Society is the first financial services provider in the UK to train its branch staff to deliver Slow Shopping across its entire network. Each of its 29 branches will host Slow Shopping on a different time and day and will be promoting the times and days within each branch.

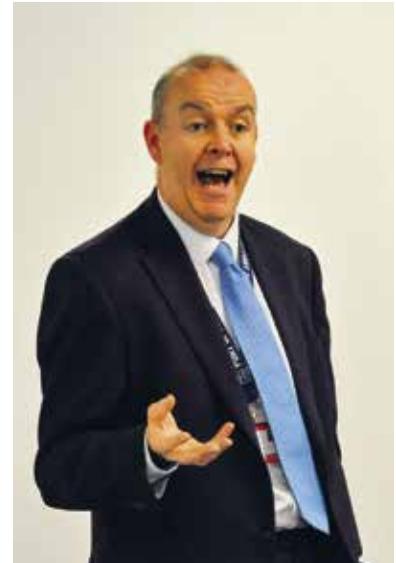
## BUSINESS CONSULTING

### Hospitality experts launch business consultancy

Husband and wife team, Michael and Ashleigh Donald, are offering their knowledge and training skills to hotels, tour agencies and restaurants through a new company, Halo Business Consulting.

With more than 30 years’ collective experience in global hospitality operations and marketing communications, the founders are offering consultancy in the key areas of customer experience, operations, marketing and communications.

Acting as an outsourced and hands-on resource, companies can benefit from access to senior leadership without the need to commit to a full-time or in-house resource, Ashleigh said.



Port of Tyne CFO Mark Stoner introduces the tech event at the UK’s first 2050 Innovation Hub

## LOGISTICS

### Port stages innovation event

The Port of Tyne – which established the UK’s first 2050 Maritime Innovation Hub last year – recently hosted a gathering to inspire innovation and acceleration through collaboration, bringing organisations together across the spectrum of maritime logistics, technology and academia.

Over 40 companies including tech partners from the Connected Catapult, Royal HaskoningDHV and Nissan along with representatives from the universities of Newcastle, Northumbria, Durham, York and University College London joined forces during the event held at the port.



## TRAINING

### Universal Wolf adds five apprentices to pack

Complex sheet metal fabrication company Universal Wolf has welcomed five new apprentices, its biggest intake to date.

The new recruits join during a period of sustained growth for the business and Universal Wolf said it sees the continued intake of apprentices as key for the future sustainability of the business.

This year's cohort are studying the Advanced Apprenticeship in Fabrication and Welding Engineering at Northumberland College, with a focus on electrical and electronic programme engineering, and fabrication and welding.



Charys Urwin with her award at Komatsu UK

## MANUFACTURING

### Komatsu hails superstar apprentice

A rising star of Komatsu UK's workforce has claimed the prestigious accolade Apprentice of the Year.

HR assistant, Charys Urwin, 22, was awarded the honour following outstanding work at college and her progress since joining the company as a new apprentice just over two years ago.

Tutors at New College Durham nominated Charys for her excellent academic results and the enthusiasm she has displayed in her HR role at Komatsu's Birtley plant, her employer said.

## FINANCIAL SERVICES

### CBPE invests in Perspective Financial Group

CBPE Capital LLP is making a major investment in Perspective Financial Group Limited, following approval from the FCA.

Perspective is a nationwide financial planning and wealth advisory business which operates from 15 offices across the UK employing 180 staff, including 55 advisers. Its largest office is in Newcastle upon Tyne where it employs 50 staff including 17 advisers.

The group provides impartial, specialist advice for individuals, corporates and trustees on pensions, retirement planning, inheritance tax planning, investments and group risk and business protection matters, often working closely with other professional advisers such as accountants and lawyers.

## FOOD AND DRINK

### Entrepreneurs launch ginger beer with Asian twist

Two Sunderland businessmen have launched a new ginger beer inspired by their Asian heritage.

Co-founders Abu Shama and Kamal Hussain spent four years developing their Avenue and Greene drink brand, extensively market testing it to develop the distinctive flavour and bottles.

The new liquid launched in September this year and is already stocked in over 50 hotels, restaurants and bars.

Future plans include creating a mango and ginger drink, Indian lemonade and a sugar-free ginger beer.

James Ramsbotham, chief executive, North East England Chamber of Commerce said: "We are delighted to have this ambitious start-up enterprise in our membership. The potential for growth of this brand is clear to see with its original, modern flavours yet building on a heritage drink tradition. We wish them very success."



L-R: Abu Shama, James Ramsbotham and Kamal Hussain



Building technologies manager, Paul Kinghorn and building technologies business development manager, Pete Craggs

## ELECTRICAL SERVICES

### Park strikes partnership with Israel's Vitrea

The building technologies division of Park Electrical Distributors (PED), the North East's leading independent electrical wholesaler, has announced an exclusive partnership with home automation specialist, Vitrea Technologies of Israel.

PED building technologies manager, Paul Kinghorn, said: "With advanced wired and wireless technology, Vitrea is changing the landscape of home automation, making smart homes more affordable and achievable.

"This exclusive partnership with Vitrea provides us with a route to market with a leading brand. Vitrea products offer simplicity, enabling us to get in front of a range of potential customers, such as property developers, self builds and smart home buyers."

## TECHNOLOGY

### Grid Smarter Cities wins Innovate UK contract

The Newcastle-based technology house and smart solution provider Grid Smarter Cities has won an Innovate UK contract, which will focus on creating an innovative Freight Traffic Control Platform to help manage construction freight movements and deliveries in congested urban centres.

Partnering with Croydon Council and electric vehicle infrastructure business EB Charging, the Innovate UK funded project award, worth in excess of £485,000, will see Grid working with the partner organisations to develop and pilot an 'alpha' product in a live construction development in Croydon borough from March 2020.

Grid is working in parallel with a number of specialist partners to investigate the potential of vehicle telematics, 3D mapping and electric vehicles on the future of construction logistic operations.

## INSURANCE

### Travel partnership helps forces take a break

A North East insurance broker is set to arm military personnel with more routes to comprehensive travel cover, after signing a deal with two forces-focused businesses.

Just Travel Cover, which helps holidaymakers of all ages and with pre-existing medical conditions arrange travel insurance, has set up a new partnership with specialist national broker Forces Solutions and independent insurance comparison site Forces Compare, which will make it easier for serving members of HM Forces, associated civilians, veterans and their families to find insurance.

The Sunderland-based firm offers bespoke insurance schemes that address the unique challenges faced by servicemen and women when they plan a holiday. The cover will be made available through Forces Solutions, with customers signposted to the provider by Forces Compare.



Alfie Usher (Forces Compare), Maj Ian Flannery (Bradford Armoury Reserve Darlington) and Daley Gore (Just Travel Cover)



## ENGINEERING

### Osbit on growth path

North East engineering company, Osbit, has announced its most successful financial year to date, delivering 55 per cent growth in sales, 44 per cent growth in profit and 30 per cent growth in employees.

In the past twelve months, the company has supported major offshore wind and oil and gas projects across four continents, for customers in Australia, the Far East, USA and Europe. During this time, the size of individual projects taken on has increased by 400 per cent, while its year end order book has grown by 850 per cent.

To support its ambitious growth, Osbit has also invested £1.7m from existing cash reserves to acquire its headquarters in Riding Mill, Northumberland and has completed an extension to house a further 70 employees.



John Hannah (centre) from Tharsus receives the Employer of the Year Award



Sally Dixon, Beamish the Living Museum collecting the Customer Commitment Award

## BUSINESS AWARDS

# Two North East winners at national awards

Blyth-based Tharsus and Beamish the Living Museum of the North in County Durham, won top honours at the British Chambers of Commerce Awards held at Tobacco Dock in London. Both winners are members of North East England Chamber of Commerce, who supported their applications for the awards.

Lesley Moody, Chamber president, said: "Both Tharsus and Beamish are fantastic examples of our North East business community. They have outstanding teams who deliver ambitious growth plans, create jobs and are highly innovative in their approach. We are delighted their hard work has been recognised and congratulate them on this great success."

John Hannah, robotics lead at Tharsus, which specialises in creating and developing unique engineering solutions, accepted the award on behalf of the business. He said: "It is a tremendous honour to win the Employer of the Year Award. This achievement is another important milestone on a much longer journey for our company to become a really significant regional and national employer."

Sally Dixon, assistant director at Beamish, said: "We are on track to have a record year at the museum and hit 800k visitors, which is tremendous. For us, our success is all due to our amazing staff, volunteers and visitors who come not just from our region, but nationally and from around the globe."

Runner-up in the Export Business of the Year was Nano Purification from Gateshead.

## TRANSPORT

# Transport Secretary visits region to discuss infrastructure priorities

North East businesses set out the case for significant investment in the region's transport infrastructure during a meeting with Grant Shapps MP, Secretary of State for Transport, in Newcastle on 6 January.

The meeting, organised by the North East England Chamber of Commerce and hosted by law firm Womble Bond Dickinson, brought together transport operators, infrastructure providers and companies who rely on transport networks in order to do business.

Among the topics discussed was the urgent need to invest in key rail infrastructure such as HS2 and the East Coast Main Line; supporting the aims of the Chamber's Fast Track East Coast campaign. Businesses also raised the importance of improved global connectivity to support export aspirations post-Brexit, the potential of reforms to Treasury funding models to transform investment in the region and the challenges of decarbonisation.

# Business synergies underpin a great regional partnership

A partnership between the County Durham open-air museum Beamish and Go North East continues to thrive, based on a mutual passion for sharing the region's heritage. Mark Lane finds out more

**Beamish Museum**  
[www.beamish.org.uk](http://www.beamish.org.uk)  
 @Beamish\_Museum

**Go North East**  
[www.gonortheast.co.uk](http://www.gonortheast.co.uk)  
 @gonortheast

**Beamish, the largest open-air museum** in England, is long-established as one of the North East region's foremost cultural attractions. Situated in County Durham on a 300-acre site, the museum tells the story of the people of North East England from 1820 through to the 1950s, and its annual audience has grown from 300,000 to almost 800,000 over the past ten years.

Few would doubt the importance and relevance of such an attraction. But how can we get more people there? Indeed, how can we make Beamish more accessible to people who do not drive or to young families on low incomes?

The obvious and highly successful solution can be found in the far-reaching partnership between Beamish and Go North East.

These two organisations – both long-time North East England Chamber of Commerce members – have worked collaboratively for many years to ensure there are regular bus routes running to the museum, providing comprehensive accessibility for the whole region. Indeed, visitors to the museum receive 25 per cent off the entry price if they have travelled by bus.

In addition, Go North East has also recently lent support to the Northern General Transport Bus Depot. The depot and workshop, which is part of the £20m Remaking Beamish project, is home to the museum's growing fleet of buses and allows visitors to watch engineering work on historic vehicles.

As ever, there is a vital educational component here. The depot includes a range of learning activities in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) as well as offering

apprenticeships to ensure heritage engineering skills are passed on.

To find out more about the partnership between Beamish and Go North East, I recently spoke with Sally Dixon assistant director partnerships and communications with Beamish and Stephen King commercial director with Go North East (both pictured below left).

Sally says: "We're hugely proud of the partnership with Go North East. It is a fantastic organisation to deal with – you couldn't hope for a better working relationship. Their team is hugely passionate about preserving the company's heritage and it's been so developmental and positive for both organisations to work together to create innovative ways of making this happen.

"Stephen King has really gone above and beyond to support our work at the museum and is a much valued member of our Business Friends Leadership Group – a group of Beamish board members and others close to the museum who work closely with the Partnerships Team to extend the museum's network of business relationships."

The Business Friends scheme offers a wide range of benefits including Corporate Passes (each one being completely transferrable and admitting groups of up to five any day the museum is open), access to Beamish exclusive partner events programme and PR and profile, as well as acknowledgement that's visible to Beamish's fast-growing annual audience.

Elaborating on the scheme, Sally says: "Business Friends has grown from six to 56 partners over the past four years, which we're hugely proud of, and we are targeting 100 partners by the end of 2020. Members come from a wide range of sectors and include charities keen to use the passes for the client groups they work with, to businesses looking for distinctive new ways of developing their staff benefits offer."



Of his company's involvement, Stephen King says: "Go North East is the longest standing business friend of Beamish having joined the Business Friends scheme when it first started over ten years ago. The company has actually been working with Beamish in some way shape or form from the very early days of Beamish, operating bus services to the main entrance.

"The partnership has developed between the two organisations and features joint projects around accessibility to the museum, best practice around engineering, communications and training through to the remaking the Beamish Northern General Transport Company bus depot."

Asked what it is about the Beamish project that appeals to him and his organisation, Stephen says: "Like many of us in the North East my first memories of Beamish was a school visit which just inspired me to be proud of the region and our heritage. Somewhere in that visit was a wow moment of being able to step back in time in the North East and to be proud of it. The museum just brings our culture and our history to life in such a unique and inspiring way that is so important.

"I am always amazed at the synergies between Go North East and Beamish in terms of the pride and energy that exists within our teams. It's a regional pride, a pride that we do something important for the region and a pride that we have a long-standing history and heritage. By working with Beamish we are not only supporting this but we are also turning this into action in terms of developing our bus services for the people of the North East and our business which is really powerful stuff."

Stephen says services to Beamish by Go North East continue to grow, and he can only see the relationship between these two like-minded organisations going from strength to strength. He adds: "We now have more services to the



main entrance than ever before. Beamish is a great organisation which we are hugely proud to work in partnership with. There is a lot of synergy between the two organisations along with a great sense of pride within our respective teams who are immensely proud of our relationship which I think really brings the partnership to life.

"For our company centenary celebrations in 2013 for example, we chose Beamish as the place to celebrate with as many people from Team GNE

as possible along with friends and stakeholders."

He concludes: "We have a very close working relationship with Sally and the whole team at Beamish which creates a wonderful forward-looking, creative thinking and genuinely collaborative relationship. It actually provides an exciting way of working which is great fun! I suppose you could sum up the relationship of the two organisations as being best friends who share honesty, support and laughter."

# The importance of investing in health and wellbeing in the workplace

In the wake of what has been dubbed a mental health crisis, Newcastle College has taken strides to improve the support it offers to its staff and young people. Principal Tony Lewin discusses the steps they are taking to tackle the issue

## Newcastle College

[www.ncl-coll.ac.uk](http://www.ncl-coll.ac.uk)

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Current statistics, published by Mental Health First Aid England, show that up to 1 in 6 working adults suffer from symptoms associated with mental ill health at any given time, responsible for 72 million working days lost each year. People with long-term mental health conditions lose their jobs at double the rate of those without a mental health condition, equating to 300,000 people – the population of Newcastle.

Given that 75% of mental ill health develops by the age of 18, these figures drive home the importance of educators and employers alike providing the right support for students and staff.

“As a further education college and a University Centre, it’s vital that we protect and safeguard the young people who have entrusted their education to us,” he says.

“We are positioned in the heart of an extremely diverse community and with that comes a number of issues which affect many of our students, including high levels of poverty and deprivation, which have been proven to have a negative effect on both the physical and mental health of young people.

“Up to one in ten young people are currently suffering and it’s frightening that suicide is the leading cause of death for those aged 5 – 19. Especially when this epidemic has been linked to so many different contributing factors, including academic pressure and a lack of professional support available.

“We have had a Central Support Service, as well as an additional Higher Education Support Team, in place for many years. Both of those offer our students support on a wide range of personal and academic issues, including access to a counselling service and additional support for our learners who may be struggling with a mental health illness or addiction.

“This year, we have introduced a Youth Mental Health First Aid Scheme, which means that our learners can access immediate support from a specifically trained member of staff if they’re

experiencing a mental health crisis.

“The provision is similar to the physical first aid service we have across our campus but focuses on our students’ emotional wellbeing and allows us to respond quickly and effectively to students when they need us the most and help them to access professional help when it’s needed.

“Of course it isn’t just our young people affected by these issues and it’s important for both our learners and our staff that we can offer a similar level of support to our employees. As the statistics show, mental health is a leading cause of absence from work, which in the world of education would also negatively impact our students. So, it’s vital that we can foster a culture and an environment which helps our staff to work effectively and feel supported while they’re here.

**“As a further education college and a University Centre, it’s vital that we protect and safeguard the young people who have entrusted their education to us”**

“We’ve recently launched a very similar Mental Health First Aid service for colleagues, although it does sit apart from the student focused one. We have volunteer members of staff who have undergone specialist mental health training in order to support their colleagues in times of need. This support can vary from having a non-judgmental conversation in confidence, through to guiding them towards appropriate professional support.

“We aren’t asking our colleagues to be professional therapists or counsellors, but being able to talk to someone who will listen to you in confidence and trust that they won’t judge what you’re thinking or feeling can go a long way to helping an individual feel supported in the workplace.

“The idea is to allow people to have an informal conversation about things without the pressure of it being a manager or HR. Those support steps will be there when they’re ready, if necessary, but it can be difficult to start that conversation in a formal way.

“Before we implemented the Mental Health First Aid service, and still in place, is the Employee Assistance Programme which offers a lot of resources for both mental and physical wellbeing, including access to a 24-hour confidential support line. “As well as this, we ensure that we implement Employee Wellbeing Days throughout the year. This allows departments across the College to take time within their teams to take part in beneficial activities outside of their usual working structure. It could be a physical activity, exercise, volunteering, or simply some team-bonding.

“I think most people are aware that there is still room for improvement when it comes to mental health support



and improving everyone’s wellbeing, no matter the industry, but I’m glad that we are taking steps to make these improvements.

“Here in the North East especially, where our suicide rates are the highest in the UK, where unemployment and poverty is so prevalent, I hope that we can continue to make positive changes to help improve the wellbeing of everyone who lives, works and studies here.”

# The quest for sustainable trade

Jack Simpson, North East England Chamber of Commerce policy adviser, calls for more green trade policies as he considers the impact of international trade on climate change, highlighting many initiatives which show steps in the right direction for a reduction in environmental impact



**Jack Simpson**

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**I**n what was billed as the “Brexit election” the word climate appeared just as much as the word Brexit across the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat manifestos: 61 times each.

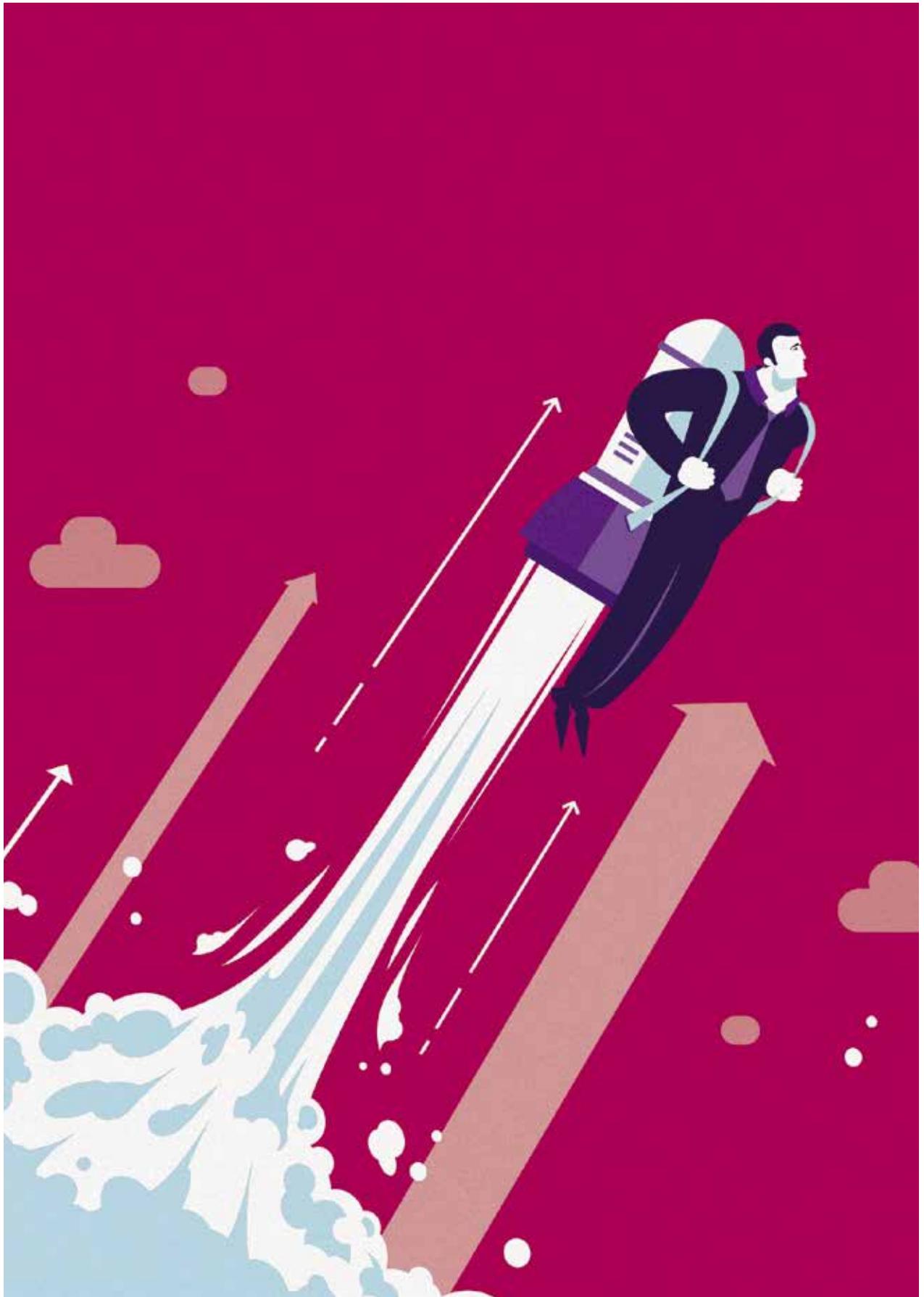
Stated wisdom asserts that global trade aids sustainable development. The World Trade Organisation declaring “Trade growth enhances a country’s income generating capacity”, improving jobs, innovations and quality of life. However, international trade has major environmental impacts – when we think of big cargo ships and long-haul flights across the world. The reality is that transport contributes 18 per cent to the total sum of man-made emissions.

Not only will we be trading more as productivity rises, but emerging economies will rapidly enter global trade, opening more markets and opportunities, meaning we will be sending more goods further. The International Transport Forum estimates that by 2050 cargo journeys will lengthen on average by 12 per cent and CO2 emissions will increase by 290 per cent.

If this continues unchecked, climate change will have the added consequences of extreme weather, such as storms and hurricanes, which will more severely disrupt global trade and supply chains, with logical consequences for coastal communities and ports.

It is clear that these figures don’t fit with the conventional wisdom that global trade enhances “sustainable development”. While I am not disputing the economic advantages of international trade, something must change to fit the shift towards a sustainable, but prosperous, global economy.

To hit the target of halving global transport emissions by 2050, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) estimates that ships will need to be emission-free by 2030. However, we don’t have to go back to the age of sail and scurvy to create a more sustainable transport model.



Research suggests slowing ships and zero-carbon power will be instrumental in this pursuit and innovations are beginning to take shape across the world. New technologies and logistical processes are already paving the way to a cleaner method of international trade.

Ports will be hotbeds of sustainable innovation, and the North East could be potential trailblazers. In December, the Port of Tyne announced the “Tyne 2050” strategy with sustainability at its core. It aims to be carbon neutral by 2030 by completely electrifying the port and using the UK’s first Maritime Innovation Hub to develop new technology in collaboration with global businesses.

The groundwork was set in the Tees Valley, as a PUBLIC report outlined the huge potential for AI and digital technology in maritime. PUBLIC reports a Dutch start-up has cut shipping wait times by 20 per cent. This may sound small, but it means that ships can sail slower, burn less fuel, resulting in a reduction of 135 tonnes of CO2 emission.

One of the biggest challenges lies in aviation, and when you think of the amount of energy required to get 60,000kg off the ground, going for net-zero might seem daunting.

EasyJet became the first airline in November to announce offsetting plans of its carbon emissions. This means that easyJet will be investing in community projects and schemes that reduce emissions, to compensate for the amount of emissions it produces. While this may barely scratch the surface of reducing global emissions, it is at least a step in the right direction.

One of the themes that has underpinned all this rationale has been utility: how we use current processes, and how can we utilise them more efficiently. The case to improve and expand the rail network exemplifies this.

All too often when we talk about

*“With a new Conservative majority set to pursue an independent trade policy, away from the EU it would be wise to put sustainability at the heart of its trade policy. Incentivising sustainable development, sharing of new technologies and skills for market access could spread the green revolution”*

improving rail it is dealing with passenger numbers, and how quickly we can get to Edinburgh, London, or Manchester.

But freight needs to be part of the discussion, both in a business and green sense. Rail’s use of dedicated travel lines and the general step to electrify the lines makes it a much more sustainable model for transport. Finally, being smarter about storage (fitting more goods in less space) will cut down traffic volumes, and will mean we’re moving less, while carrying more.

These are short-term fixes that we’ll see more of through 2020, in the longer-term viable alternatives to carbon fuel will be needed. Electrification is rapidly developing, with hauliers and ports researching the viability of electric alternatives, currently within clusters or port zones, but could be the direction of travel for supply chain logistics. The transition to renewable power sources will further support new green supply chains.

On a recent visit from Chennai, an

Indian entrepreneur outlined his plan for an electric vehicle supply chain, powered by mobile battery packs that drivers and hauliers can pick up from depots, clients or designated points.

An emerging class of carbon-neutral fuel is being developed to replace classic fossil fuels, known as electrofuels. These fuels are produced from water or CO2 with help from renewable energy sources like solar or wind. However, we’re some way off that becoming commercially and logistically viable.

All major parties promised to prioritise the environment in their new budgets, with new investment in research and development, transitional funding for energy-intensive industries and carbon capture and tax schemes to ensure a greener and more sustainable economy by 2050.

Businesses have been at the forefront of this climate innovation, but government must also play its part in pushing and supporting the transition to a greener global economy.

With a new Conservative majority set to pursue an independent trade policy, away from the EU it would be wise to put sustainability at the heart of its trade policy. Incentivising sustainable development, sharing of new technologies and skills for market access could spread the green revolution.

It would be frustrating to put such effort into a green transition to be undone by developing nations using old energy intensive strategies to compete.

A green trade policy that supports and develops sustainable technology in developing markets will be vital in protecting us from taking two steps forward, but one step back, in our quest for sustainable trade.

We are currently standing at the foot of a new era, how we respond to this climate crisis and innovate sustainably will define our future.

# From Newcastle. For Innovation. For North East Business.

The importance of innovation to businesses goes without saying. But innovating requires space – be that mental, financial or physical – that is all too rare. Newcastle University has several schemes that can help, all supporting North East businesses’ R&D, product development, and the creation of high quality jobs in our economy

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## Arrow

The Arrow programme has two strands, both designed to provide short, intensive and focussed support for SMEs based in the North East. The Innovation Catalyst connects your business with Innovation Associates, Academics and Business Development Managers to exploit University research and expertise to deliver tangible business benefits. The Innovation Accelerator can provide match funding up to £10k to access third party services such as prototyping, analysis and testing.

## Intensive Industrial Innovation Programme

The IIIP is also for North East SMEs but offers support over a longer period than Arrow. A dedicated postgraduate researcher is assigned to your company working exclusively on your research needs whilst pursuing their PhD studies. The researcher has the support of experienced academics to ensure they are maximising the impact that can be made. The researcher balances their time between working on your premises and at the University.

## Knowledge Transfer Partnerships

KTP is a UK-wide programme which has helped businesses for more than 40 years to improve competitiveness and productivity through the better use of knowledge, technology and skills. KTPs are part-funded by Innovate UK and are open to UK companies of any size. The aim is to transfer knowledge to your

organisation to meet your strategic needs and increase profit. Projects last between 12 and 36 months, depending on your needs. We employ a KTP Associate to work exclusively on the project at your premises under joint company and academic supervision.

## National Innovation Centres

The National Innovation Centre for Ageing develops and applies Ageing Intelligence™ allowing you to generate new insights and capitalise on the longevity economy.

The National Innovation Centre for Data delivers key technical and practical data skills into organisations. This will enable you to improve your competitiveness and grow your business.

The National Innovation Centre for Ageing (NICA) and the National Innovation Centre for Data (NICD) are both based at Newcastle Helix. Their new building – The Catalyst – will soon be home to a thriving programme of events, talks and get-togethers.

## Captured

The Captured programme is open to businesses based in Newcastle, Gateshead, Durham, Sunderland, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Northumberland with fewer than 20 employees. Captured works on the principle that the best advice for businesses comes from experienced people. The programme gives small businesses a chance to spend time developing with support from



*Nic Palmarini, Director of the National Innovation Centre for Ageing*

experienced managers of the region’s larger private sector organisations including Siemens, Sage, GSK and Home Group.

## Acknowledgements

These schemes are funded by a range of organisations including the European Regional Development Fund, Innovate UK, North East Local Enterprise Partnership, Medical Research Council and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council.

## Find out more

We are here to help local businesses to innovate. The Arrow programme is our front door for local business and organisations to access any of the support we have available. The team there will be able to help you identify the best ways that we can work together.

# Designing for a sustainable future

In 2019, 11 Stirling Prize award winning Architecture Practices pledged to “design buildings, cities and infrastructures with a more positive impact on the environment” and laid out a call to arms for practices around the UK to join them. Today, there are 832 signatures including those of Ryder Architecture, FaulknerBrowns Architects, xsite Architecture, MawsonKerr and GT3 Architects from the North East

**The human impact, for better or worse,** of the built environment sector is increasingly studied, it is frequently the subject of R&D activity and it plays a huge role in masterplanning. For example, our own census data research provides supporting evidence for the urban design theory that high density mixed use developments increase footfall and encourage economic activity; there is a higher likelihood that people will walk, rather than using

Many people’s response to the threat of climate change is a sense of hopelessness, but careful design of the workplace itself to provide opportunities for environmentally friendly behaviour can empower people, contributing significantly towards mitigating ‘climate anxiety’. The crucial role of Architects in engaging their publics can provide a building’s users with the agency they need to actively engage in and understand sustainable

gathering, MIPIM, has chosen ‘The Future is Human’ as the theme for this year’s event in recognition of this and the United Nation’s forecast that by 2050, there will be 9.7 billion world inhabitants and 70% of those people will live in urban areas. The organisers propose that “cities are poles of business activity, employment, education and innovation; their role is crucial in promoting growth that is sustainable, economic and socially inclusive, as well as in surmounting environmental and social challenges”.

In response, Invest Newcastle will lead a collective of North East Ambassadors from the built environment sector to MIPIM, including GT3 Architects, under the mutually reinforcing banners of smart tech, health, placemaking, sustainability and wellbeing. The intent is to further enhance Newcastle’s international proposition and current status as ‘Smart city of the year 2019’ and to lead the way in thinking about sustainable city design. Together, we’ll present our work as practices working in accordance with the principles of Architects Declare and as organisations working in the built environment to secure a better future for our cities and their inhabitants.

GT3 Architects, along with the rest of the Invest Newcastle cohort will be present between 10th and 13th March on Stand C.19.C

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cars, if the number of people living and working in a given area is high and so density is important to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transport. More people walking means more people being more active more often and a net improvement to physical wellbeing and so the scenario delivers ‘co-benefits’.

design solutions, so soft-landing and post-occupancy evaluation services are increasingly a crucial part of our offer to clients.

Designing for sustainability is therefore inherently designing for people.

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# THE APPRENTICESHIP LEVY PITFALLS, AND HOW TO SOLVE THEM

It has been almost three years since the Apprenticeship Levy was introduced and it's clear that many businesses are still uncertain about how to best utilise it.

Apprenticeships are a brilliant way for individuals to earn while they learn and are a reputable alternative to university. The levy was introduced to encourage businesses to see the potential that apprenticeships can bring and give individuals the chance to prove themselves in the world of work from the outset. Levy paying employers have already lost £133m of unspent funds that they will no longer be able to access and utilise.

Learning Curve Group surveyed over 600 CIPD HR leaders to find out exactly what was stopping them from utilising their funds, which revealed less than 50% of respondents felt they were making the most of their apprenticeship levy contributions.

It quickly became apparent that there are 5 key blockers preventing employers from getting value from the fund, which include:

#### **Misconceptions around eligibility**

Nearly a quarter (23 per cent) of our survey respondents said the eligibility criteria were one of the main concerns they had about apprenticeships.

#### **The availability of relevant qualifications**

Almost a quarter (24 per cent) of respondents said the available apprenticeship programmes were just not relevant to their industry or their skills needs.

#### **The 20% off-the-job requirement**

Many employers said they just couldn't afford to lose a member of staff for the equivalent of one working day a week.

#### **Perception of a complicated online system**

One employer in particular said that while the system appeared simple in principle, in reality exploring all the options was a long-winded process.

#### **A lack of interest from staff**

Apprenticeships are a different way of training compared with either more commercial or academic routes, and employers need to communicate better with their staff exactly how apprenticeships can be used for more senior training, or for re-skilling and up-skilling.

The full report, including how to combat these pitfalls can be downloaded by emailing [levywhitepaper@learningcurvegroup.co.uk](mailto:levywhitepaper@learningcurvegroup.co.uk)

# We're motivated by results, are **you?**

Our award-winning approach  
to training and development  
delivers results and **98% of  
employers agree\***

\*Overall employer satisfaction - Employer Survey 2018/19



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# Adopting a New Year's resolution to tackle accidents caused by drink driving

'Dry January' may seem a strange time to be talking about driving under the influence of alcohol, however the impact of doing so is an ongoing issue for UK road users. The beginning of a new decade offers an opportunity to consider whether more can be done to protect businesses and drivers from the devastating effects of a drink driving related accident

**Growing numbers of businesses that operate fleets, such as Hawthorns Logistics, are installing interlock devices.** These devices are automatic control systems which are designed to prevent driving with excess alcohol, by requiring the driver to blow into an in-car breathalyser before starting the ignition.

Large scale quantitative research on alcohol ignition interlocks has shown that alcohol interlocks are 40 to 95 percent more effective in preventing drink driving reoffending than traditional measures, such as license withdrawal or fines.<sup>1</sup>

## North East Business that puts safety first

North East-based Hawthorns Logistics is a family run business with over 30 years' experience. Their drivers are part of the family, and driver welfare is a key priority for the business, as is their responsibility for the safe transport of their customers' products.

As part of their pledge to safety first, the company has installed interlock devices to their 28 strong HGV fleet.

The business was already looking at the benefits of interlock devices when they became aware that a driver from another haulage company had been involved in a fatal accident. Given their stringent safety standards, this incident led them to

invest in an interlock system that would protect their own drivers.

Dave Kilsby commented, "We believe that having the interlock devices in place will safeguard our drivers from unwittingly getting behind the wheel while under the influence of alcohol. Many people don't realise the effects of alcohol the morning after a night out.

"Since installing the devices, there has only been one occasion when a driver had to be replaced. Overall knowing the interlock is in the vehicle means that risks aren't taken. From our perspective as a business, it is part of offering of a first class service both to our customers and our employees."



Hawthorn Logistics not only installs the interlock devices in their own vehicles, but also provides a service to other companies to install the devices through lights bars and accessories.

Drink driving facts to consider:

- A blood alcohol concentration of 1.5 g/l, makes a fatal crash 200 times more likely than if a driver is sober<sup>2</sup>
- 8.00am is consistently one of the highest times for positive breathalyser tests throughout the year

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<sup>1</sup> [https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016\\_12\\_alcohol\\_interlock\\_guidelines\\_final.pdf](https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016_12_alcohol_interlock_guidelines_final.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> *Alcohol Interlocks and Drink Driving Rehabilitation in the European Union, best practice and guidelines for member states European Transport Safety Council 2016*

# Energy revolution gathers pace in Northumberland

Mark Lane gets the inside track on the £450m conversion from coal to biomass energy generation at Lynemouth Power Station and finds out why it has been such a positive project for the region, which can now consider itself at the forefront of clean energy production

**Lynemouth Power Station**  
[www.lynemouthpower.com](http://www.lynemouthpower.com)  
[@Lynemouth\\_Power](https://twitter.com/Lynemouth_Power)

**Lynemouth Power Station, which has dominated a section** of the Northumberland coast for more than half a century, epitomised the old heavy industries that forged this region.

Currently, the site is in the final stages of conversion, transforming into a trailblazer for the generation of clean, sustainable energy which the new economy demands to meet the threat of climate change.

“We are the first fully-converted coal to biomass station in the UK and one of the largest in Europe. Many of the technologies and some of the practices are state-of-the-art,” says Deborah Walton, finance director of Lynemouth Power Limited (LPL).

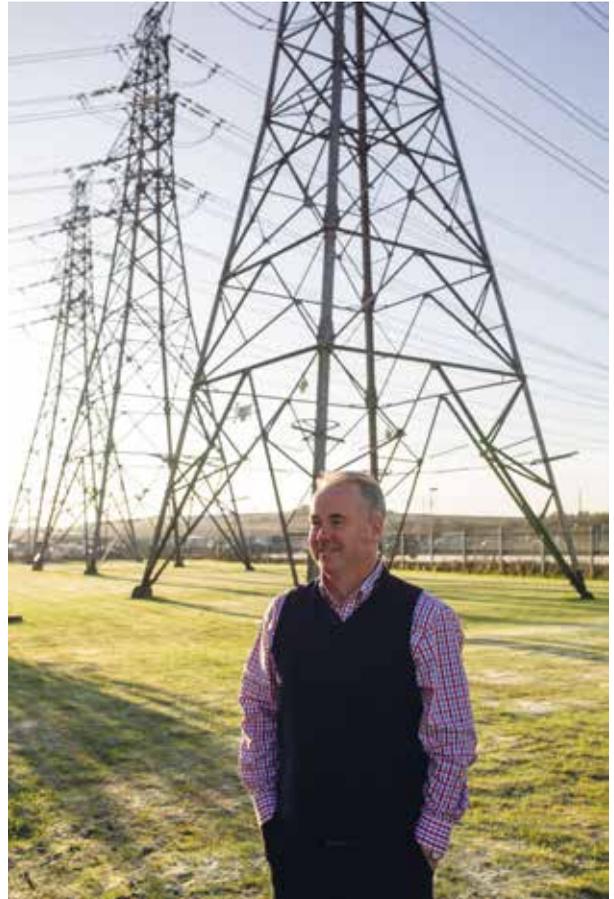
As a consequence, the station is now attracting much attention with LPL personnel being invited to countries such as Denmark to share some of the lessons learned.

It was originally built as a coal powered plant in the late 1960s to power the neighbouring Alcan aluminium smelter plant and it was one of the area’s largest employers. However, after the financial crisis of 2008, the smelter was closed and the power station, which then became a stand-alone operation, was sold to Czech company EPH in 2016.

“We knew that beyond the end of 2015 it wouldn’t have been financially viable to continue with coal, so we stopped generating in December 2015,” explains Deborah.

The old coal plant was demolished and LPL began the long and complicated process of converting to a biomass power plant, which generates electricity by burning pellets made from wood residue from the forestry and sawmill industries, a renewable source of energy.

The £450m conversion project is one of the UK’s single, most ambitious renewable energy investment projects of recent years and has become one of the largest civil engineering projects and industrial development programmes ever undertaken in the North East.



It has included the successful construction of six, new 194ft high silos storing approximately 50,000 tonnes of wood pellets onsite, working closely with building and civil engineering giant, Sir Robert MacAlpine. Furthermore, bespoke ship unloading and fuel handling storage facilities at the Port of Tyne that store up to 75,000 tonnes of pellets have also been built in close cooperation with C Spencer Ltd.

Part of the train line from the Port of Tyne to the power station has reopened to transport up to 35,000 tonnes of biomass fuel on a weekly basis. The conversion has also entailed a comprehensive, in-depth overview of all onsite facilities and processes including significant modifications to the combustion system along with a comprehensive overhaul and renewal of equipment.

The conversion has involved working closely with a number of partners, many with operations in the North

East. LPL managing director Carl Hopper (pictured left) says: “It was a huge operation to build the fuel handling plant up here. We have upgraded to a soft desk which is a DCS (distributed control system) and facilities management company, Emerson, has been leading on that. If you consider the combustion side of the conversion project, that contract was held by Doosan Babcock Ltd which was primarily tasked with taking the fuel into the station, the milling and the combustion process and emissions.”

In such a huge project there have inevitably been challenges. “I would say that the main challenges have been during the initial stages of commissioning,” says Carl. “The fuel processing plant is brand new and like any other project of this scale and complexity, it did have its initial problems and hiccups coming into commission. Where we had to interface with the existing legacy plant - planned and designed back in the 1960s - and the need to interface with the new plant primarily around the technology for the combustion, those big interfaces were challenging.

“We had several issues but through our engineering resources, expertise and competency, coupled with the support of contract partners, we were able to successfully overcome them.

“In the first few months, just getting the plant to generate stably was the key focus, then to take it from stable generation into a more efficient generation and, coupled with that, trying to establish the emission control. There is a commercial driver which is the megawatts we produce, but there is also a legislative control which is the emissions that LPL must adhere to regarding our environmental permit



***“In the first few months, just getting the plant to generate stably was the key focus, then to take it from stable generation into a more efficient generation and, coupled with that, trying to establish the emission control”***

with the Environment Agency.”

The station has already had a major economic impact and is a major employer. It directly provides about 150 skilled jobs in functions ranging from engineering to operations and support. The majority of staff live within ten miles of the station.

“We have approximately 100 on-site contractors who are based here and they have been hugely supportive during the process and the conversion,”

says Deborah. “Obviously it was a large project and we had to pull various skills in, such as project management support and help. We peaked at over 800 people onsite.”

Carl says that in terms of moving into the operational phase, most recruitment has been done locally. He says: “Many of the new starters at the station have been recruited locally, and that is important given we’re a major employer for South East Northumberland and



the wider North East region. We have a responsibility to our local communities as they are also our next generation workforce, so upskilling, retraining and supporting our employees over the course of the conversion project has been a big factor.”

On the project’s economic impact, he adds: “Also there has been a lot of people travelling here, all using accommodation and spending money in the shops, in the pubs and restaurants, so there has been a huge positive impact on the local economy for the last three years as the project has developed.”

LPL commercial director, Jonathan Scott, says the decision the company made to build the new related facility at the Port of Tyne has also had a positive impact on the region’s economy. “We only have approximately nine days of storage on-site, so it made sense for us to have a partner who was local. That has obviously safeguarded jobs at the Port of Tyne which lost a lot of business with the end of coal and it also provided additional employment for Hargreaves which operates the facility, and for other service providers. All of those related jobs are predominantly North East-based as are the people working for the rail freight company, GB Railfreight.”

It is estimated that Lynemouth Power Station will generate 420MW of electricity and supply enough clean energy to power 450,000 households annually once the final stages are complete.

“We are connected to the local grid system,” says Jonathan. “First of all the energy that we produce goes into the distribution network which is operated by Northern Power Grid and then through that power grid goes down

**“I think a lot of people, when they first hear of biomass, think of cutting down trees just for pellets and that is absolutely not the case”**



L-R: LPL directors Jonathan Scott, Carl Hopper and Deborah Walton

to the supply point at Blyth where it joins the National Grid system. A good analogy is that it goes down the local roads towards the motorway.”

And that energy is far friendlier to the environment than that generated by a coal powered station. It's estimated that Lynemouth will save approximately 1.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions a year compared to coal.

“We have reduced our nitrous oxide emissions by two thirds and more than halved our dust emissions. The sulphurous oxides are minimal now as we have reduced them by more than 95 per cent,” points out Carl.

LPL has signed two long-term contracts for the supply of biomass pellets with US producer Enviva and Canadian producer Pinnacle Renewable Energy.

“It is more environmentally-friendly,” says Deborah. “I think a lot of people, when they first hear of biomass, think of cutting down trees just for pellets and that is absolutely not the case. It's basically forestry residue and sawmill residue products that we buy in pellet form and burn. We have to prove carbon output in every process, whether it's the actual pellet making or the ships that bring it across, and it has a lot less carbon emissions compared to coal.”

Jonathan adds: “In every region where we source biomass, the inventory of trees is increasing each year and are not reducing. The way in which the forestry industries build their business models is that they need to plant more trees than are felled. Young and growing trees absorb significantly more CO2 than old mature trees.”

He continues: “We have to import because we couldn't buy the necessary amount of pellets from sustainable sources if we restricted ourselves and our purchasing to the UK. We have to meet some of the most stringent sustainability requirements which include the harvesting and transportation of the pellets and make sure that we combust them efficiently at Lynemouth.”

Apart from the environment, health and safety is heavily emphasised by the LPL directors. Carl explains: “If you go back ten years, the biomass industry itself was quite an immature business in terms of technology, so as a sector, there's been a lot of learning. Because we are the latest generation of technology companies, we have been able to learn from previous industry experience. Lynemouth has a lot of protection and the highest level of health and safety imposed.

“The plant has been designed with embedded layers of protection all the way through the plant, so if, in theory, something was to happen, the plant would automatically protect itself. That is critical across the site, the design and the combustion process. There has been a lot of learning in the biomass industry itself to get to this point and I'm sure the next big conversion will build upon the experience and success of



Lynemouth.

“We have qualified, highly trained engineers and operators here at all times who look after the entire plant and they have their own specialist expertise in each area so best practice and optimum H&S procedures are already in place. Our engineers are constantly assessing, reviewing and looking at ways to possibly improve performance, if needed, but as far as Lynemouth is concerned, safety is our number one priority and wherever possible, we implement a continuous improvement philosophy.”

Carl points out that, in the future, the plant will have to go through another round of emissions controls with the Environment Agency, which will require further development.

He says: “The revenue streams through the contract for difference takes us to the end of March 2027. So the plant basically has a fixed contract until March 2027 and obviously one of the key strategies is to go beyond 2027. We have to start talking about a zero carbon by 2050.”

For the moment, the management team is quietly satisfied at what has been achieved. Deborah concludes: “We are at the forefront of biomass energy generation and we are very proud that it has happened here in the North East. Every single person involved with LPL is hugely proud that we have taken our power station from where it was to where it is now.”

# Embracing change for a more sustainable future

Based on Shields Road in Heaton, Siemens Power Generation Services has a long-standing history in the North East spanning an impressive 130 years. In that time, the business has continued to innovate and evolve in line with market demand, to support its customers, employees and the communities it serves. Mark Armstrong, head of service facility, Siemens Power Generation Services, takes a look at its ongoing investment in creating a more sustainable future

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At the forefront of Siemens' success is most certainly our people. It is their innovative spirit, pride and commitment which have remained strong despite challenges and changes in the market and that continues to be greatly valued by our customers.

One such change is the announcement that Siemens Gas and Power will separate from the organisation to form a new independent energy business called Siemens Energy. Incorporating all our large-scale power generation, transmission and services businesses, the new company will come into force in April 2020, and will be globally stock listed in September that year.

The creation of a new company and a new culture is indeed an exciting time for the business giving us much more flexibility to adapt, which is essential in today's changing energy market. Also, as a pure energy company, it means we'll be able to attract investment capital for future innovations and new growth fields, allowing us to maintain a technology edge and sharpen our customer focus.

In the North East, the launch of the new company will see transmission and substation service colleagues from Hebburn and Monkton, join the Heaton site, meaning greater service collaboration for our customers. For the Power Generation Services business, we will continue to adapt and focus on new technology, working closely with colleagues on the design and build of new power plants, and training our employees on the latest Siemens gas turbine technology.

In addition, the energy transition, to move from fossil based

to cleaner fuels will also provide an opportunity for the business here in the North East, and we're looking at how we can further secure our future by offering new, greener energy solutions to our customers. Our work with Drax in repowering their coal assets to run on biomass is a great example of this in practice.

Looking further to the future, hydrogen gas turbines will play an important role in energy decarbonisation. Siemens has been researching the use of hydrogen as a fuel in gas turbines for

***“Our work with local schools, colleges and universities is one important way in which we aim to give something back to society”***

over 10 years and the company's commitment is for its turbines to run on 100 per cent green hydrogen by 2030.

It is this look to the future and adaption to market changes which means we have been able to remain on this site for 130 years, but of course none of this would have been possible without the right people. It's why we place so much importance on developing the next generation, investing in our workforce and developing our Power Generation Services apprenticeship scheme which currently has around 25 students enrolled.

The two-year programme, which has been fine-tuned over the years, gives apprentices the opportunity to learn core vocational skills like milling, turning, fitting and maintenance alongside academic learning at Tyne Met college. At the end of their first-year, students begin a rotation programme which gives them experience in every key area of the business. They also get the chance to work on customer sites which, as well as lessening our dependency on agency workers, is an opportunity for them to gain invaluable skills and experience.

Ensuring knowledge isn't lost when people retire is a major driver behind our apprenticeship programme. Employees who have been with the business for 20, 30 or 40 years all play a vital role in passing on to a new generation their technical skills whilst at the same time helping to develop confident and capable young people. We greatly value this style of training and it's no coincidence that many of our senior managers started out as apprentices. Our dedicated training centre which supports such programmes was relocated to the North Works on Shields Road in 2019 allowing it to be much more integrated with the operational areas of the business.

Creating a sustainable business at all levels is the cornerstone of all that we do at Siemens and why it is essential we have a flexible, multi-skilled workforce. For example, because we can see that our workload forecast in the next two years is weighted more towards mechanical than electrical work, we are offering our winders the opportunity to complete a Level 3 NVQ in a different skill so that they have the flexibility to work as a mechanical fitter and effectively have two trades under their belt. This cross-skilling approach also means that our Field Service people will have the ability to work in the Facility team at customer sites.

To Siemens, being a sustainable business also means being a good neighbour and a part of the community – this is something all our employees believe in. Our work with local schools, colleges and universities is one important way in which we aim to give something back to society. As such, we have eight registered STEM (Science Technology Engineering Mathematics) ambassadors who visit local schools to share their love of engineering and to encourage more young people to consider engineering as a career.

In 2019, we developed a new STEM engagement programme focusing on three local schools and it is here we targeted different year groups in a number of different ways. For example, for Year 11 we offered support with CV writing and interview techniques; for Year 9 we looked at raising awareness of different careers in engineering and for Year 8 we developed hands-on project ideas.

We also exhibited at Bring It On, the North East version of The Big Bang event, which attracted over 2,000 school children. Other activities included STEM mentoring whereby two children were partnered with two of our employees with the aim of building their confidence and knowledge of the world of work. In addition, we're currently investigating a 'Teachers in Residence' scheme which gives those who work exclusively in education a broader understanding of how industry operates.

From a higher education perspective, we work closely with Newcastle University, which is a Siemens global principal partner. As part of the partnership we have worked on a programme to support SME businesses in the region, sponsored local entrepreneur events and developed a leadership programme with the university.

Another key focus for the business is around the profile of women in engineering. Linked to Siemens' diversity and inclusion ambitions, we are determined to encourage more young women to consider an engineering apprenticeship. As such, we are looking at whether there is an unconscious bias in the process we use for evaluating potential apprentices, and if there are any other barriers we need to look at removing. We continue to build links with local schools to help challenge preconceived ideas about what it means to be an engineer



and are looking at how we can ensure our apprenticeship application process is equally attractive to both female and male candidates.

To be a sustainable business also means we must continue to find new ways to reduce our environmental impact. We encourage all employees to contribute ideas that will improve the sustainability of our business and a group of cross-functional volunteers meet every two months to drive energy improvements in their area. Environmental objectives also form a part of the Zero Harm plans generated by every department.

One suggestion which we're currently investigating is a rainwater harvesting system; an idea put forward via a Siemens UK employee competition. As well as helping to offset our carbon tax, this could result in big cost dividends and resource savings. Another employee idea which led to a funding award of £33,000 will see how we can circulate hot air more efficiently in the Service Facility.

Following best practice and maintaining service standards forms an important part of the business's sustainable business model. In 2019 the Siemens operations and maintenance team at Severn Power was recognised for its best practice approach to asset management with the award of the international standard, ISO 55000. To be awarded ISO 55000 in the O&M environment is no small achievement: two organisations need to be jointly assessed and share sensitive information, which was only possible because of the strong partnership and collaborative spirit between the teams.

The appointment in 2018 of a dedicated environmental advisor for Siemens Power Generation Services also sharpened our focus on sustainability and undoubtedly played a part in the award of ISO 50001 in October 2019. With this certification comes a commitment to continuously improve our approach to energy management.

Whilst the UK government wants the country to be carbon neutral by 2050, Siemens has set itself a tougher target of 2030. Major focus areas in our Newcastle business include improving the energy efficiency of buildings and production facilities and reducing waste.

We've led the way in Siemens UK when it comes to sending zero waste to landfill, with other Siemens businesses adopting our practices. For example, instead of sending our waste to landfill, it goes to an energy-from-waste plant, plus we're re-using materials, or substituting them for better alternatives.

The energy efficiency of our buildings is also under scrutiny. All lighting within the Service Facility bays and in the main office block has been replaced with intelligent LED technology that delivers 'daylight harvesting' - in other words, the lux level automatically adjusts according to the natural light level, saving money and energy. The new lighting has enabled us to improve light levels across the site and saved the business over £250,000 a year.

Work has also begun to reduce single-use plastic at our Newcastle site with plans to eliminate bottled water from the canteen and to provide jugs of water and glasses in meetings.

Plastic packaging is being substituted and we're also challenging many of our suppliers to follow suit.

The business is also finding smarter solutions to deal with its wood waste. Instead of sending it to be recycled and chipped into MDF, we're looking at a community wood recycling company who make and sell items like tables and benches from waste wood and who employ people struggling to find work.

Another business aim is to re-use more wood packaging. Along with many of our suppliers we've traditionally branded our wooden packaging which makes it harder to re-use. We've therefore asked our suppliers to join us in de-branding their packaging. Wherever possible we want to re-use rather than recycle.

Also underway is an inventory of hazardous materials on site. As well as checking the necessary risk assessments are in place, the cataloguing will be a chance to see whether there are now alternative materials, less hazardous to health and the environment which could be substituted for those previously specified.

We have certainly come a long way as an organisation, embracing change, new sustainable ways of working and encouraging our stakeholders, be that our employees, communities or customers to join us on that journey.

We understand the importance of being agile as a business, responding to market demand but also not being afraid to lead the way, push boundaries and try new things that will support our world tomorrow... today. And it's this passion, sense of ownership and collaboration that lies at the very heart of who we are at Siemens and what will hopefully help support our journey through the next 130 years.

For more information contact Mark Armstrong, head of service facility at Siemens Power Generation Services, at [mark.armstrong@siemens.com](mailto:mark.armstrong@siemens.com).



# Trade missions open doors to new opportunities

John Jenkinson, international trade advisor, who is leading an upcoming Chamber trip to Singapore, looks ahead to the visit and highlights some of the key benefits that can be expected from a well-organised trade mission

**In February 2020, I have the responsibility to lead a group of businesses who are intending to start the New Year with a focus on pushing the boundaries of their business and expanding their international horizons.**

Our trade mission will see a Teesside delegation explore market opportunities in digital and healthcare industries in Singapore. With Singapore's digital health market expected to reach \$379bn by 2024, our initiative aims to showcase the unique and substantial offer Tees Valley companies can make to international healthcare markets.

Singapore is a fantastic place for UK companies to do business, with similar business and legal practices, technical standards, and common language and historical ties. It also has strong IP protection, crucial for entering any market, as well as excellent infrastructure and connectivity, and a highly skilled and educated local population.

I have seen first-hand the effect and results of a well organised trade mission. I have seen introductions change into business partnerships, I have seen new ideas develop and grow, and I have also had the privilege of seeing the success of North East products and services across the world, as a direct result of attending and fully taking part in an international trade mission.

An example of this last point, is an experience I had on a previous trade mission in Asia. The trade mission delegates, my colleague, and I had just finished a week-long intensive trade promotion programme designed to introduce new products to distributors across the region.

To celebrate making it across the finish line of a demanding week of meetings and pitches, we elected to have a bite to eat at a restaurant close by. While we were discussing our orders, I noticed some North East products were on the menu! Not only that, but the products were specifically from a company that had attended the same trade mission one year prior! A clear example if ever there was one of North East trade in action.

With the experienced staff of the North East Chamber of Commerce and Department for International Trade, I can say with confidence that a trade mission is a cost effective way to learn more about an overseas market and open doors to discover new opportunities.

I hope each of us can resolve to make a positive change this year, both in our lives and in our businesses. And, if one of those

resolutions means I can take a piece of the North East around the world and leave it there, then I will consider that I resolution worth keeping.

## Opportunity knocks in Taiwan

**Maria Dotsch, international trade advisor, previews a trade mission designed to help Tees Valley companies working in the renewable energy sector to boost their international sales**

Our trade mission will visit Taiwan in March and explore new business opportunities in the supply chain for offshore wind energy. Seven Tees Valley businesses working across different sectors from technology design, manufacturing, marine engineering, health and safety consultancy are participating in this trade trip.

Taiwan is considered as the next major market for offshore wind development, with a strong project pipeline of 10GW capacity to be established by 2030, and is committed to attracting foreign investment in renewable technology as it phases out nuclear power by 2025.

The country has a skilled workforce with upskilling capabilities, however it doesn't have the offshore wind supply chain in place which will help to implement the huge investment programmes, and that is where the opportunities lie for our delegates.

Taiwan is an advanced, hi-tech economy with a modern infrastructure, a growing logistics hub for the whole of the Asia Pacific region and with the offshore wind sector comes a huge investment programme.

The country can also be used as a platform for developing business with China, given cultural links and shared language as well as being a strategic location to develop stronger offshore wind opportunities in the wider region such as Vietnam, Japan and South Korea.

Working with the British Trade Office and the British Chamber of Commerce Taiwan our visit will help delegates to understand the market from both a political and commercial perspective.

# Small steps to meeting the sustainability challenge

Jonathan Walker, North East England Chamber of Commerce assistant director – policy, provides plenty of food thought as he considers the impact that individuals and businesses can have on the national drive to improve our environmental performance, and the realities and challenges of implementing a ‘greener’ approach



Jonathan Walker

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**T**his morning I filled my re-usable coffee cup, before picking up my homemade lunch and getting into a fossil-fuel powered car to drive into Newcastle. Throughout the day I made a conscious effort to go paperless, but picked up a plastic-wrapped snack in the afternoon.

I also left my bag for life in the car.

This might be considered hypocrisy, inconsistency or simply a decent effort in the face of a world designed to promote convenience over sustainability.

But the fact that I noticed these things when even just a few years ago I wouldn't have given them a second thought, shows just how much the environmental and climate challenges facing society have permeated into everyday life.

The same inconsistencies may well apply in your own business. You've got lights that switch off when you leave the room, but computers get left on overnight. You've got a cycle to work scheme but staff that are out on the road all day. Or a sign encouraging people to go paperless sitting uncomfortably alongside the plastic cups in the water cooler.

Despite all of this, we shouldn't overlook or disregard the cumulative impact that even seemingly small changes can have.

The pressure on businesses to place greater emphasis on their environmental impact has never been greater. Not only is there a moral compunction to do so, but increasingly suppliers, customers and prospective employees will assess a business based on their sustainability credentials.

For some businesses, the areas in which they could make the



biggest carbon reductions or reduce their waste may be obvious, even if the solutions are not.

But for others, a transformative change can only come about through the right combination of company policy, colleague behaviour and business strategy.

You might want to do this, but have no idea where to start. Elsewhere in this issue you'll find some great examples of businesses in our region who are leading the way in terms of innovation in this field, which will hopefully provide ample inspiration.

But if you want to take your colleagues, employees and customers with you, then an intelligent approach to behaviour change is needed alongside these innovations.

You may have heard about the Government's 'Nudge Unit', or Behavioural Insights Team, set up during David Cameron's tenure as Prime Minister and credited with innovative thinking on policy initiatives, perhaps most notably increasing payment of income tax by reminding people that most of their neighbours had already paid.

Changing people's behaviour in this way might feel underhand or manipulative, but in this context it is about creating an environment that motivates people towards sustainable, and away from unsustainable, activities.

There isn't the space here for me to talk about every small change a business can make to reduce their environmental impact. Nor do I think the best approach to this issue is to lecture or patronise.

However the purpose of these articles is to stimulate and challenge your thinking on business topics, so hopefully what follows will at least do that.

Let's look at one of today's most prominent environmental issues.

Single use materials are an understandably hot topic at the moment. It is estimated that around 2.5bn single use drinks cups are used in the UK every year,

*“In an era of increased environmental awareness, not to mention the ‘Blue Planet’ effect, it genuinely astounds me to see single use cups still so prevalent in the various companies and business centres I visit. The problem is that they have become the default option in society”*

almost 38 per person.

In an era of increased environmental awareness, not to mention the 'Blue Planet' effect, it genuinely astounds me to see single use cups still so prevalent in the various companies and business centres I visit.

The problem is that they have become the default option in society. While policy levers may be used to combat this, the lesson that can be learned from 'nudge' theory is to change or eliminate the default option.

Remove them from the workplace, go back to cups and glasses, encourage staff to bring in their own reusable options or even supply them yourself. Evidence shows that individuals change their behaviour quickly if the options available to them also change.

Or think about pairing your sustainability objectives with something that might appeal to people's personal motivations.

An example of this in practice exists in the exciting world of loft insulation. For years, governments have spent large sums of money encouraging homeowners

to improve the energy efficiency of their houses, with very mixed results.

However, what prevented people from getting their lofts insulated often wasn't a lack of interest, but the sheer hassle of removing all the junk they'd stored up there in order to get it done.

A successful scheme with a major DIY retailer showed a remarkable uptake in subsidised loft clearances on the condition that they subsequently installed insulation.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of this is that the pilot scheme actually ended up costing people more than the cost of insulation alone under previous Government initiatives.

You might not have a loft to clear out, but think about what this could look like in your business.

If you've got a lot of car users, what about a vehicle leasing scheme that incentivises uptake of electric or hybrid cars? Staff get the opportunity to drive brand new car, while you reduce your overall carbon footprint.

Similarly a more flexible or agile working policy may allow people to adopt working patterns that better suit their personal circumstances while potentially reducing their travel and resource demands in the office.

Of course, these solutions aren't directly applicable to every business; size or sector may preclude you from making the changes you'd like to. Agile working is far easier to implement in a professional services office than it is in a factory, for example.

But that doesn't mean a new way of thinking isn't worth trying. As society becomes more aware and enthused by climate and environmental issues, businesses that don't take these things seriously will run the risk of being left behind.

So learn the lessons and take inspiration from the stories you'll see throughout this issue, but don't forget to sweat the small stuff. Don't forget your bag for life either.

# A shining beacon for sustainability

Newcastle Helix is a hotbed of sustainability-related activity, exploring the way ahead for other cities in the UK and abroad. Mark Lane visited the impressive city centre site of the ambitious project to find out more about its wide-ranging aims and objectives

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**In the centre of Newcastle stands a remarkable testbed for green solutions that is intended to benefit the city, and beyond, for generations to come.**

Newcastle Helix, described as a living laboratory for urban sustainability, is a landmark 24-acre hybrid city quarter in the centre of Newcastle. It has been built for international tech and science businesses, the local community and residents, combining commercial and residential space with research and education facilities.

It has a wide range of green features built-in to the buildings and the site itself, which comprises five avenues, three cross streets and three public squares.

The new streets and walkways are intended to celebrate the past and the future. The Blue Star Square, for example, was named after the famous Newcastle Brown Ale Blue Star, for this was the site of the Scottish & Newcastle brewery, which closed in 2004 after a long history.

Sean Trott, Newcastle City Council's senior specialist/advisor major projects (pictured below right), explains: "Newcastle City Council and Newcastle University reacted quickly, along with the Regional Development Agency, once it became apparent that the S&N Breweries were looking to vacate the site around 2006. We knew it had huge redevelopment potential and it was a once in a lifetime opportunity to do something at this scale in the city centre. The three partners took the decision to purchase the site so that we could ensure appropriate development sensitive to the needs of the city. The City Council subsequently bought the RDA share when it was brought to a close."

The partners secured grant funding from a variety of sources including the EU, central government and the North East LEP and the university, a lead partner in the project, won a number of bids and brought resources to host national centres on the £350m site. Legal & General also became a partner in 2016.

Stephanie Glendinning is Professor of Civil Engineering and also Dean of Strategic Projects at the university. She pioneered the concept of the Urban Laboratory, an initiative aimed at developing and using full-scale operational infrastructure as a laboratory in which to develop research and impact, an approach which is central to the development of Newcastle Helix.

She recalls the early challenges of the project. "It was getting others to buy into the vision, because, while it seems more mainstream now to be looking at combining computing, computing brainpower, engineering and sustainability, at the time people didn't get what this urban science was about. So it was getting others to buy into the vision, then to get all those different parts together, to get the funding from those different sources."

Outline planning consent was secured in 2011 and the enabling works began the following year.

The next challenge was with the physical site itself. Before it was a brewery, the site had been the pithead of Elswick Colliery and regenerating it meant extracting 40,000 tonnes of coal.

"Most people probably won't realise that we effectively had a city centre open cast coal mine in operation at that time, which must be pretty rare," says Sean. "We took out two seams of coal, producing around 40,000 tonnes to a depth of about 15 metres. At the same time we had to identify and cap off around a dozen shafts, grouting and stabilising as we backfilled."

To address the CO<sub>2</sub> that the coal would put into the atmosphere, Newcastle Helix created permanent stores, taking out about 90,000 tonnes of carbon from the atmosphere. It has also created a carbon-capture garden, using plants to pump carbon out of the atmosphere.



“We also encountered reinforced concrete basements and even a subterranean tunnel from the previous brewery operations and had to break those out to get the site ready for its next chapter,” adds Sean.

There was also a 22-metre drop from one corner of the site to the other, which was critical on Thunder Thursday in 2012 when huge quantities of storm water flowed onto and through the site.

Sean says: “One of the interesting things we’ve been able to do in order to prevent such flooding happening in future is to construct an enormous attenuation facility below Knowledge Square, which can hold back a similar quantity of storm water as an Olympic sized swimming pool and gradually release it back into the sewer systems at a controlled rate. This is one of the great examples of the site really contributing to protecting businesses and residents beyond its immediate boundaries.”

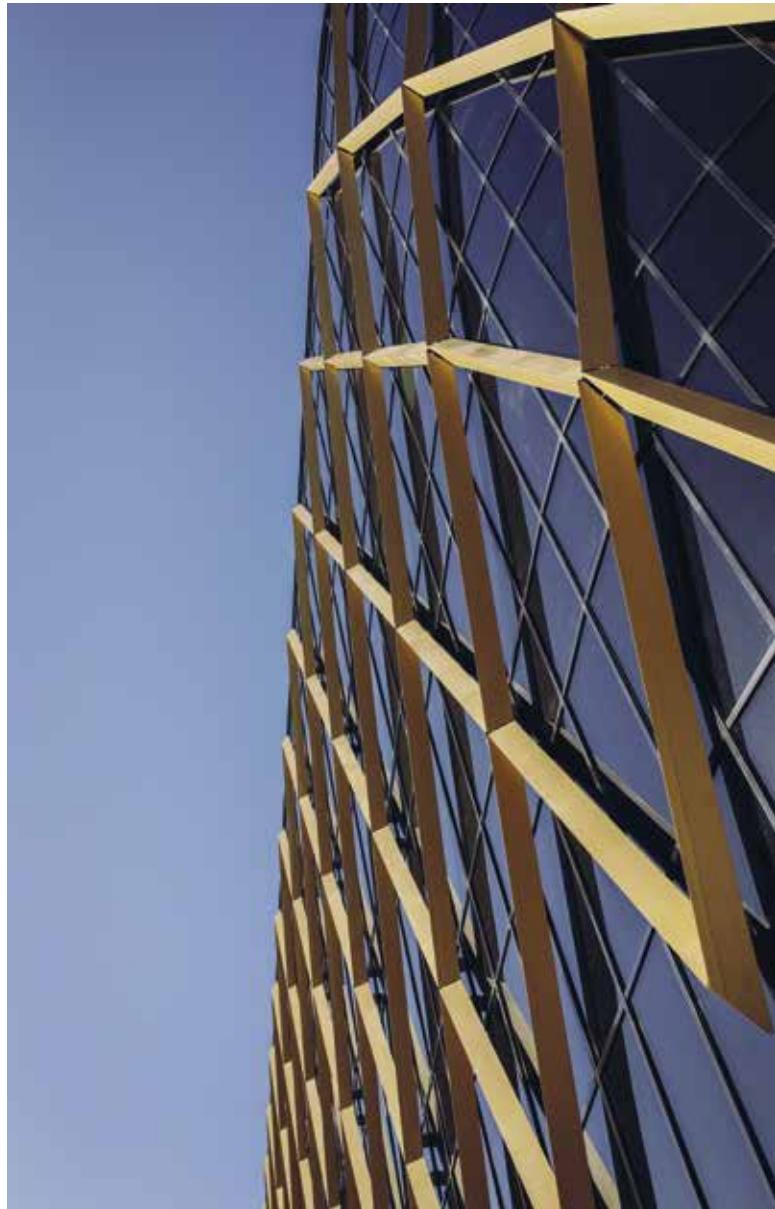
Construction of the first building, The Core, began in spring 2013, opening in October 2014, at which point it was already over 90 per cent occupied by a range of SMEs. It was followed by Newcastle University’s first small building in 2016, The Key, a temporary research structure. Next was the Urban Sciences Building which is now home to the university’s school of computing, which opened in September 2017.

“In 2019 we’ve seen a whole phase of buildings completing, starting with The Biosphere, a commercial laboratory for businesses working in the life sciences sector in May,” says Sean. “This was followed by the Frederick Douglass Centre in September, which has a fantastic 750-seat lecture theatre and then The Catalyst, which is home to both the National Innovation Centre for Ageing and the National Innovation Centre for Data. In December, the District Energy Centre was opened and this is now providing heating, cooling and electricity to most of the buildings on site and will ultimately save 30,000 tonnes of carbon over its first 40 years.”

Two 100,000 sq ft office developments, The Lumen and The Spark, are currently being constructed. Also being built is a rapid charging electric vehicle filling station on Wellington Street that will be able to deliver an 80 per cent charge for electric cars within 20 minutes. This is connected to the Urban Sciences Building to monitor electricity flows and regulate demand.

The next phase will focus on homes, with 450 planned. This will start with a Future Homes scheme led by Karbon Homes that will be adaptable to the changing needs of its occupiers and include some experimental units connected to the Urban Sciences Building for the testing and better understanding of functionality and user needs.

“We’ve been fortunate to secure a grant from Homes England for the completion of infrastructure to support the development



***“It was getting others to buy into the vision, because, while it seems more mainstream now to be looking at combining computing, computing brainpower, engineering and sustainability, at the time people didn’t get what this urban science was about”***



of the residential plots to the north west of the site, so we'll see those works getting underway in this next year," adds Sean.

"We're also close to being able to announce on the hotel development adjacent to The Lumen on St James Boulevard. We also need to deliver on some of the ground floor uses providing an offer that will really animate the site and help us achieve the place-making ambition."

The Urban Sciences Building (USB), is not part of the district energy network, but rather is a building-as-a-power-plant and part of a 'smartgrid' network. Connected directly to the main grid, the USB has energy storage and power generating capability through solar panels. It can also store heat reducing energy consumption. It contains more than 4,000 digital sensors to ensure it is always operating efficiently. Computing technology is embedded throughout the structure, making it one of the most monitored and high-performance buildings in the country and has won several awards for building design and sustainability.

Another university-led project, The EPSRC National Centre for Energy Systems Integration is located in the USB and investigates the challenges of energy supply, sustainability and affordability.

"The Urban Sciences Building was a sort of vision that started back in about 2012 as potentially a key enabler for sustainable development in an urban context," explains Stephanie. "It was digitally focused, so it was around data and the generation of data and using that data to make informed decisions. We took that idea and embedded it in



the Urban Sciences Building, which is a collaboration between computing at Newcastle and engineering at Newcastle with a little bit of in the mix in terms of decision-making and change of behaviour.

“That’s a kind of focal point for then implementing our ideas around buildings and laboratories, science as a laboratory and the city as a laboratory, and using those different skills in making that kind of data capture, data analysis, data visualisation and use of data to make informed decisions about how we run the building, what makes the site sustainable, what interventions can be made in the city in order to improve its sustainability. That’s the whole kind of different skills of living laboratory that we have constructed over a period of years.

“There are a lot of distributed sensors in the building, across the site and across the city monitoring different aspects of the city. So it might be measuring things like air quality, it might be measuring traffic movements, it might be measuring people movements, so there are lots of different ways of sensing. We have got the CCTV images from across the city, we have got our own monitoring systems out there and all of that data is brought back. It’s stored and it’s processed and it’s visualised in different ways to enable you to see the relationship between, for example, the closure of a road in Newcastle city centre with the changing traffic patterns and changing air quality.”

Stephanie says that the key for projects such as The EPSRC National Centre for Energy Systems Integration is that they are co-located on the Helix site. She says: “We are looking at the interactions between energy usage, traffic movement and water because frequently you can have a demonstrator of one of those – something on energy or something on green infrastructure. Actually, the important thing is to be able to look at those together all in one place and how they interact. That’s the great thing about the Helix, we can do all of that, all at one time, on one site.

“For example, using the Urban Observatory, we can look at radar of a weather front coming in, look at traffic routing around the city and then look at the fast track modelling of where flooding events might occur and we have live updates of what is actually happening in the city, so that you can reroute traffic most effectively in order to prevent that huge disruption that occurred back in June 2012.”

So how could the success of Helix overall be measured? “First of all, it’s the impact on the city,” says Stephanie. “So it’s trying to take some of the things that we are doing on the site and



looking at how that has influenced the city. So, it’s the green infrastructure and that needs to be built out into different parts of the city and we will visibly be able to see whether there is more take-up of that.

“For example, over the long term, can we improve the air quality? We are measuring that, so we will have the proof one way or the other. Can our research change the air quality? It’s also about the people. We have got people involved in doing some of the measurements, local people who are interested, actually going out measuring themselves. Can we create more community buy-in to what we are doing than we have right now? Can we get other people talking about it in schools and community centres? That is just Newcastle, but we are actually linked into other observatories around the country and we need to be able to influence more broadly in those cities as well and then also internationally and get it talked about on the international stage.”

There is also, she adds, an important educational aspect to Helix. “That’s the great thing about having it full-scale and live-in, because you can touch it, you can come and see it, it’s not something that is totally virtual, you can actually come and literally be part of it and that is so much more powerful as an education tool than PowerPoints, or words, or websites, it’s real and you can touch. It’s about influencing lots of people’s behaviour through lots of awareness raising and if a lot of people can change just a little bit, that has a great impact on sustainability.”

# Connected thinking to achieve sustainability goals

Mott MacDonald area director Phil Redman shares his thoughts on the challenges of sustainability for businesses and gives an insight into how a recent office move has enabled his company to enhance its 'green' credentials

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**The world is under pressure from numerous directions** – population growth, financial constraints, resource scarcity, social justice, climate change and ecosystem fragility. These are felt by all businesses in some form and need to be addressed. At the same time, every decision we make has consequences – social, environmental, economic and reputational – that sooner or later impact us all.

When considering this scenario, my advice is to scrutinise why you do things, not just what and how. After all, being sustainable for sustainable sake isn't sustainable. Be clear what your core values are and be consistent in all you do, right through your supply chain. That contributes to a level of integrity that helps you attract and retain talent, encourages the best suppliers to work with you, makes your services or products more desirable to customers, improves efficiency and reduces cost. Sustainability is all about connected thinking – opportunities, interconnections, risks, solutions, impacts. It also can improve efficiency, productivity and value.

Why not set audacious goals? Instead of asking 'what do we think we can achieve', ask 'what would we like to achieve?' Then create simple, transparent means of measuring performance, incentivise dramatic outperformance, and fairly share risk to encourage innovation. You won't tick every box, but you'll have a consistent vision to refer back to.

Our recent Newcastle office move to Time Central was the

perfect opportunity to think about how we could improve our sustainability credentials. Choosing this location enables our staff to get to and from the office with ease using public transport and this will have a big impact on reducing our carbon footprint.

Travel was a key issue in our considerations, as we were moving from an office which had plenty of staff parking. We discussed staff travel planning and invested in a travel plan to look at where staff travelled from and identified options available to them as individuals. Our Newcastle office is now car free. I believe this has improved health and morale of our Newcastle staff, and will help to reduce the immediate and long-term effects of air pollution in our local environment.

We offer discounted public transport options and public transport 'season ticket' loans to staff so they don't have to pay for annual passes all in one go. We also offer a cycle to work scheme, which has proved really popular. We now only have one car parking space at Time Central, dedicated for visitors, and we have converted a second one to a staff cycle park, fitted out with secure cycle racking.

We are also aiming towards 'a paperless office'. However, we still find that a large drawing on a table helps articulate some issues better, so we make sure we have good recycling and confidential waste facilities. Our printers default to double-sided printing. It's the little things that make big differences.

Elsewhere, we provide filtered and chilled mains water to reduce use of plastic water bottles. We redistributed our old office furniture and electrical items to a charity supporting start-ups in the North East. We have developed specific recycling for products that staff use; crisp wrappers now have their own recycling bin! In 2018 we removed desk bins and replaced them with office recycling bins to encourage recycling. Our office manager is our 'recycling champion' and she assists and monitors our waste disposal.

In addition, we upgraded our lighting to LED, reducing energy consumption significantly and put them all on occupancy sensors. No lights burning needlessly overnight! We have increased the use of communication technologies such as integrated services, digital networks and Skype conferencing to encourage flexible and agile working and home working for employees. This also limits the amount of business travel we need to do, but where we do travel we always focus on public transport.

Overall, we work hard to ensure that our Newcastle office is environmentally sustainable, and we are proud of our 'green' credentials.

My final word on sustainability is that you, as a company, must be prepared to invest, as we have done – not just money, but time, culture, commitment. Have confidence in the direction you are going and never be apologetic about change.



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# Investment holds key to tackling climate change issues

Rachel Anderson, North East England Chamber of Commerce assistant director – policy, outlines some of the key challenges faced by the North East economy as it moves forward with the ‘green revolution’. We have the drivers for change, she says, but maybe not, yet, a complete response



Rachel Anderson

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**O**K, right from the off I'll say categorically that the case on climate change has been made. No-one is arguing that we should be tipping plastic into the oceans, or that the rise in sea levels is a good thing and no-one thinks we should uprooting trees and plunging them into furnaces Lord of the Rings style to power a never ending dark industrial march. Nobody thinks Sunderland is like Mordor. So that's clear then, we've got that out of the way, unequivocally, no arguments, full stop.

The environment and human impact upon it is the single issue which has risen meteorically up the agenda over the past year. The second David Attenborough showed us the mess of our making and a turtle eating a plastic bag public opinion shifted, single use became a dirty phrase, coal and its extraction was questioned, fracking shelved and the oil and gas industry had some PR to do. Every company is now looking at its environmental credentials, how much plastic it uses, where there is waste and where they may be judged in the court of public opinion. In terms of procurement, a sound environmental policy probably won't win a contract but not having one can certainly lose one.

At the Election in December, every Party manifesto contained a commitment to zero net carbon emissions in the UK on a timescale between 2030 and 2050. Parties all had comprehensive environmental policies. Some policies were more achievable than



others, but the fact that the Parties recognised public concern over the issues and were acutely aware of the consequences of not acknowledging them is a clear indication on how far the issue has progressed.

This shift in opinion and the waking up of companies to their responsibilities will pose some interesting challenges for the North East Economy. Whilst the vast majority are signed up to reducing their impact on the environment the technologies probably aren't yet there to make a huge impact. Technologies will improve and recycling will find a way to make more plastic recyclable but what happens to areas where economies are based on the way we do things now?

This is a particular issue for the North East. On Teesside there are three plants producing Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) the key material in food packaging, drinks bottles and synthetic clothing fibres. The plants employ a lot of people and generate a huge amount for the local economy in terms of business rates and the supply chain.

Then there's our coal industry, we do still have one. Whilst we don't use coal for large scale electricity generation any more it is a vital component of steel making and crucial to the UK's industrial capacity. There are still users of coal such as heritage railways and many households using coal products. And how would they cook the fish and chips at Beamish?

Turning our attention to energy generation, we have a nuclear power station in the region which has served us well for 36 years. It's aging and we'd like a replacement as it puts over £40m per year into the local economy. If we are going to cut emissions, then nuclear power generation must play a part, but it may not be one of those things politicians are

*“So, whilst we all want to be green, doing it might not be quite so simple and our region may end up paying a disproportionately heavy price for political expediency and environmental policies”*

willing to sign up to in the current climate.

Then we get to the two biggies, our car industry and our offshore sector. Both are moving to be greener and the North East is leading the way in electric vehicle production which has seen significant investment, but we still have a huge industry relying on petrol and diesel vehicles both for the domestic and commercial markets. Offshore is still dominated by oil and gas with some movement into offshore wind but the revenues from the sector still significantly contribute to the North East economy each year.

So, whilst we all want to be green, doing it might not be quite so simple and our region may end up paying a disproportionately heavy price for political expediency and environmental policies.

Therefore, if we are to meet our obligations to the planet, the will of politicians and the public and maintain large parts of our economy, change must

come quickly. We have the drivers for change but maybe not, yet, a complete response.

That response will have to come in the form of innovation. We are already seeing this with projects such as Industrial Carbon Capture and Storage and some of the upgrades to the plants at Wilton with the announcement of a Dupont Teijin plant to recycle previously non-recyclable plastics. Nissan has made a significant investment in its battery plant at Sunderland to expedite the production of the Leaf.

However, innovation costs money, lots of money. Some of that money will need to come from Government or the devolved authorities. In truth though, much more will need to come from industry who must see the business case. It has long been a feature of the North East economy that we have a large proportion of multinational companies but very few headquarters. That means the decision on investment, particularly for expensive process upgrades lies elsewhere in the world. Many of our plants are used to making business cases for investment for growth or indeed, to justify their existence in the UK at all; but making that case based on public opinion and British Government policy could be tricky.

Whilst there are many challenges in our greener world there are significant opportunities, particularly in the circular economy. The key trick will be to secure investment in the new an innovative before the old is obsolete to ensure that the economy moves forward with the green revolution. We can do it and we can do it without tearing up trees or harming newts or any other such environmental catastrophe, we have it all here in the region – we just need the investment to make it work properly.

# Transport's central role in combatting climate change

Marianne O'Sullivan, policy advisor with the North East England Chamber of Commerce, urges the Government to listen to and work with businesses to make advances on issues surrounding sustainability

2019 has seen an increased focus on issues around sustainability and looking ahead into 2020 climate change and sustainability are going to continue to have a large impact on the UK's domestic policy.

With transport emissions accounting for around a third of UK's carbon dioxide emissions, encouraging more sustainable forms of transport is crucial. At the Chamber's recent roundtable with the Secretary of State for Transport, Grant Shapps MP, it was clear that decarbonisation is a priority for the Government in the decision-making process. To demonstrate this commitment the Government's National Infrastructure Strategy due to be published in March has been given two primary aims: to connect different parts of the country and to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. Connectivity, but also decarbonisation, are now the priorities for Government.

Transport emissions are also contributing to issues around air pollution. The Government have set out in the Queen's Speech plans for legally-binding targets on air quality and to increase local powers to tackle sources of air pollution. In the North East there are already proposals for air quality measures to be put in place around central Newcastle. In order to improve air quality and to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in general having reliable and affordable public transport options in the region is essential.

The Chamber has supported calls for investment in the region's bus corridors to reduce congestion and delays for buses and providing new park and ride facilities. Investment in the renewal of the Metro fleet and measures to increase the frequency of the service will also help to increase reliability. The Chamber's Fast Track East Coast campaign for investment in the East Coast Mainline will help to increase the frequency of local rail services, particularly in Tees Valley as well as freight services for transporting goods. This will help to encourage more people to use the rail network rather than road to travel. If transport emissions are to be reduced there urgently needs to be investment in the region's public transport network to give people a viable alternative to travel across the region.

With national targets to have almost every car to be zero emission by 2050 there also needs to be investment in electric vehicles and charging infrastructure. With the North East home to Nissan there is potential for the region to become a test bed for electric vehicle technology.

Environmental measures will also impact on new developments

and how we plan for new homes. There will be 'biodiversity net gain' legal targets in the planning system ensuring that new developments have to leave biodiversity and natural habitats in a measurably better state than before. Balancing the need for new homes with the need to protect the environment will be a major issue for local authorities and developers as well as the Government. The Government is committed to building at least a million more homes over this parliament, ensuring that these new homes are in the right places and do not have a negative environmental impact will be crucial.

Other measures to reduce the environmental impact of housing includes increasing the energy efficiency of homes. Wider issues around energy usage with renewable energy, and energy storage will also become more important. The North East already has the Port of Blyth with its strong links to wind energy and the offshore catapult as well as Tees Valley Combined Authority investing in hydrogen capture technology with the potential for local hydrogen powered trains.

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***"The Chamber has supported calls for investment in the region's bus corridors to reduce congestion and delays for buses and providing new park and ride facilities"***

Single use plastics and the role of recycling are also increasingly a focus for Government. In the Government's proposed Environment Bill there will be charges for specified single use plastic items which will impact both businesses and consumers. There are also plans to create an Office for Environmental Protection to help oversee changes and to help ensure that there is a consistent approach to recycling.

Looking ahead sustainability will continue to be a key issue for the public, businesses and for the Government. With Glasgow hosting the UN's Climate Change Summit in 2020 there will be a renewed focus on the UK's climate change targets; the Government will need to listen to and work with businesses in order to ensure effective change.

# Hotbed for growth puts businesses on fast track to global success

Mark Lane finds out the benefits of being sited at NETPark, County Durham's most prestigious science and technology park, by talking to two companies – PragmatIC and High Force Research – that have their sights set firmly on expansion

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**NETPark in Sedgefield, County Durham is now firmly established as one of the UK's leading science parks and forms a key part of the Business Durham property portfolio.**

Home to a highly successful cluster of science and technology companies which are having a major impact in global markets, including a number of North East England Chamber of Commerce member businesses, the park has recently expanded



PragmatIC CEO Scott White



with the opening of the new £7.4m Explorer buildings.

NETPark also host to the North East Satellite Applications Centre of Excellence which helps to stimulate the space sector in the region, helping businesses to identify commercial and research opportunities. It also helps businesses access funding from bodies such as the UK Space Agency, Innovate UK, the European Space Agency and the EU's Horizon 2020 programme.

NETPark has a longstanding connection with the Centre for Process Innovation (CPI) and Durham University, which supports the growth of new technology businesses through spin-outs, licensing and incubation.

NETPark's management holds regular meetings to update businesses on the opportunities available through its partner organisations. These can include, for example, funding a new PhD student, research or the using the high-tech equipment of CPI.

The science and technology park is home to more than 118,000 sq ft of laboratory, office and clean room space of varying sizes to support businesses at each stage of their growth, providing flexibility to take more or less space as they need it.

NETPark's phase three has put the foundations in place providing 26 acres of development land to allow companies that have grown with the park to develop bespoke premises to

meet their future growth needs. These infrastructure works were made possible thanks to a £5m grant from the North East Local Enterprise Partnership, Local Growth Fund.

One NETPark tenant which has ambitious future growth plans is PragmatIC, a provider of low cost, flexible integrated circuits allowing objects to engage with their consumers and environments.

“We have a vision for the business, which is we want our technology to be in one trillion items within the next decade,” says CEO Scott White. “That’s a fairly bold vision, when you put it in the context that the silicon industry reached a trillion devices for the first time last

year and it’s been over 50 years of development since the silicon transistor was first commercialised.”

He adds: “We are looking at potentially spending over the next decade more than £1bn of investment in manufacturing facilities and equipment.”

PragmatIC makes extremely thin, flexible integrated circuits, the equivalent of silicon chips but which can easily be integrated into things at a much lower cost, making them viable on goods into which it would not normally be feasible to put silicon chips.

The business has three product offerings. The initial focus is on radio frequency identification, RFID. This is a technology allowing the unique wireless



*PragmatIC COO Ken Williamson*

identification of objects.

“The reason this is interesting for us is that it’s already a very large market,” says Scott. “There were about 20 billion RFID tags sold in 2019. It’s something that is used to track items throughout the supply chain and all the way through to end-of-life and recycling. But it’s very much limited with silicon-based technology to be only appropriate for fairly expensive items. With our technology that can be extended to pretty much anything.”

PragmatIC’s second offering is its FlexIC Foundry service. Scott explains: “There are a lot of companies that are interested in doing things with our technology. If we were to try to develop the full product for all of those, we just would not have the bandwidth to do so. But with a foundry service we can effectively provide them with a set of tools that tell them how the technology works, they can then design the circuits themselves and we just manufacture it for them. In silicon it could cost millions of dollars to put a new product into production, but we can do that for an order of magnitude lower cost with our technology. So it allows people to bring new products to market rapidly.”

Its third offering is FlexLogIC, an entire suite of processing tools combined with a fully automated materials handling system. “That is a much more modular and scalable approach than the conventional semiconductor model that needs these mega fabs in the Far East in order to achieve the right economies of scale,”





High Force Research CEO Dr Roy Valentine

says Scott. "That means that, in addition to expanding our own manufacturing capability here in the North East, we would also expect that we're going to be adding manufacturing lines around the world very close to our customers' premises so that we could shrink the supply chain for them."

Chief Operating Officer Ken Williamson says that to make a silicon chip takes typically five months then eight weeks of assembly, whereas PragmatIC can turn around one of its products in 24 hours.

"So it's a real game changer for people who want to introduce new

designs and new products," he says.

The company was founded - and is still headquartered - in Cambridge where the initial research and proof of concept was done to establish that there was a repeatable technology.

Scott says: "We needed to look for an appropriate environment where we could develop the concept towards a proper production model so we could manufacture reliably."

A key factor was the high cost of equipment for semiconductor manufacturing and a major attraction of NETPark was the presence of CPI, which could offer PragmatIC access to its equipment to develop its process and prove it as a complete end-to-end manufacturing process before it invested in its own equipment.

Another key driver was the availability of appropriate expertise. Fujitsu, Siemens and Atmel had all made semiconductors in the North East, building up an important pool of experienced personnel.

Ken says: "I'm from Scotland originally, from the so-called Silicon Glen area, and a lot of Scots moved to the North East of England to work on the Siemens and Fujitsu projects. Many of the staff here are former work colleagues who we have recruited back into the industry. For me, it's really refreshing and exciting to be a

rebuilding industry in the North East."

The whole process was facilitated by Business Durham, the economic development arm of Durham County Council. "Business Durham have been really helpful in a number of ways," says Ken. "We have grown extremely rapidly and they were very quickly able to free up space at NETPark Plexus and the Discovery Centres at short notice. The flexibility has been super and it continues to be. They also gave us really good networking advice and introduced us to useful contacts including Quality Hospital Solutions for an NHS project which has now really taken off. They also give us a regular heads up on business networking events, university events, recruitment and engagement events and also provide quick access into North East funding routes as well that we may not always be aware of, so I am super impressed by them."

Scott underlines the importance of working alongside other high-tech companies. He says: "There are a number of other companies on the site that are potentially complimentary from a commercial application perspective, but there are also the benefits of working with other like-minded companies, in just comparing notes on business challenges and connections within the region and so forth. We see that here and in Cambridge, when you get a concentration of similar kinds of companies, not necessarily in the same industry but doing things with technology, it's so useful to be able to compare notes."

A NETPark neighbour is High Force Research, an independent research and development company specialising in chemical synthesis and chemical process development. Set up in 1988, its main areas of business are in the pharmaceutical, biotechnology and fine chemical industries.

CEO Dr Roy Valentine recalls the early days: "We started out with a small unit



in what was the Mountjoy Research Centre just behind Durham University, which was a small science park, now converted to admin offices for the university. We had a unit there and installed a couple of fume cupboards and laboratory equipment. We took a school leaver on who's still with us today and she was one of our first lab technicians."

The fledgling company soon took on a second unit, but, by 1996, had outgrown Mountjoy and bought a plot of land on the new Bowburn North Industrial Estate, where I met with Roy to discuss High Force's expansion to NETPark.

"We put this building up and expanded it a few years later. We've just gradually grown and now we employ 35 people and now this site is completely full," he explains.

About three years ago, High Force Research opened two laboratories at the Wilton Research Centre on Teesside. "We put half a dozen chemists in those laboratories purely doing

***"We needed to look for an appropriate environment where we could develop the concept towards a proper production model so we could manufacture reliably"***

research. But because of the geographical distance, being more than hour's drive from here, it wasn't ideal," he says.

He continues: "We looked at NETPark about three or four years ago, but there wasn't any space there then, but NETPark are now expanding and they have another greenfield with infrastructure but no buildings yet and we thought maybe it could be somewhere where we could put another facility."

Just over a year ago, High Force directors met with NETPark manager Janet Todd. Roy recalls: "Janet said it was going to take quite some time to develop that and put extra buildings up, but she had an ideal space which was about half the size of our present building and it was completely empty. We took the lease out on that building in Discovery 1, where we have half of the ground floor and we fitted out the main area as a large laboratory, now we have five people there at the moment and an office."

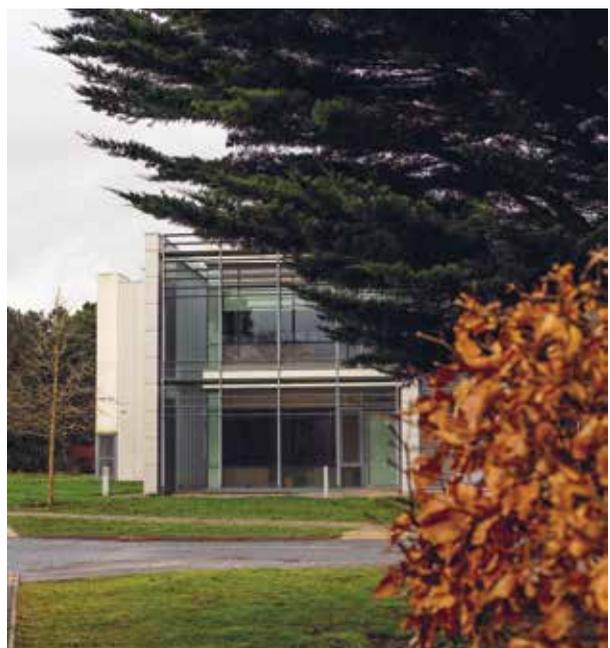
Clearly – and as the name implies – R&D is important to High Force. "At the moment we are sponsoring six PhD students at the local universities," says Roy. "It's a two-way thing, we can financially support the students in the local universities and what we get back potentially is some research that could become commercialised.

"A good example of this is the formation of a spin-out company from Durham University three years ago called Lightox Ltd and we supported the early work over a number of years at the University by sponsoring a number of PhD students in a particular area of chemistry and that has led to what we think is a commercial application going forward. That company now employs eight people."

Roy continues: "We have supported them financially and in other ways and they are now looking for a lot more investment and we will be the manufacturing partner as the products start reach the marketplace. But there is a long way to go and clinical trials need to be done because their products are going to be used as APIs [Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient] as well as imaging agents."

He adds: "Up until now we have been a CRO [contract research organisation], which is a service company and our business has grown over the years as we attracted new customers. Now with our involvement with Lightox, the spin-out company, we want to try and develop our own range of products so that we can offer the market those products."

Roy concludes: "That is our plan, to give us more independence so that the business is not so much reliant on contract research as it has been over the years where you're constantly looking for new customers and projects. That's a service model but we want to become more independent and have our own range of products as well. We see NETPark as the ideal location to accommodate the future expansion we are targeting."



# Mill Volvo announces huge advances in sustainability with UK-first electrification step

Local car retailer Mill Volvo announces that Volvo is the UK's first car manufacturer to offer plug-in hybrid versions across its entire model range

**Mill Volvo**  
[www.millnortheast.co.uk](http://www.millnortheast.co.uk)  
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**Volvo's new petrol-electric XC40 T5 Twin Engine** completes a full line-up of hybrid cars, as well as becoming the UK's first plug-in hybrid premium compact SUV.

Mill Volvo, which has sites in Newcastle, Sunderland and Stockton, has announced the new hybrid range as concern for the environment hits the highest levels on record.

According to a recent YouGov survey, 27% of Brits cite the environment as in their top-three issues facing the country, behind Brexit (67%) and health (32%)\*.

Jeff Tabb, operations director at Mill Volvo, said: "We're so pleased to announce that the plug-in hybrid electrification of our entire model line-up is complete.

"From pledging to remove all single-use plastics from our showrooms by the end of this year to recycling plastic rubbish into parts for our new cars, Volvo is committed to giving all our customers the best possible choice when it comes to cars that are both better for the environment and also practical for their lifestyles and driving requirements.

"The electrification of our model line-up is just the tip of the iceberg for our sustainability journey, and we'd encourage members of the community who are looking to reduce their environmental impact to come and test drive one of these amazing cars."



Following the completion of the petrol-electric hybrid range will be an all-electric XC40 next year, providing further options for those looking to move towards a more sustainable lifestyle.

The XC40 T5 Twin Engine plug-in hybrid is available to order now, priced from £40,905 on-the-road for the dynamic R-Design version. First deliveries to UK customers will be from February 2020.

For more information about Mill Volvo and the new plug-in hybrid Volvo line-up, visit [www.millnortheast.co.uk](http://www.millnortheast.co.uk) or call 016422673251.

*\*[www.yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2019/06/05/concern-environment-record-highs](http://www.yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2019/06/05/concern-environment-record-highs)*



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Fuel consumption and CO2\* figures for the Volvo XC40 T5 Twin Engine, in MPG (l/100km): WLTP Combined 117.5 (2.4) - 141.1 (2.0), NEDC CO2 emissions 43 – 41g/km, T5 Twin Engine WLTP electric energy consumption 3.7 – 4.0 miles/kWh, T5 Twin Engine WLTP all electric range 26.1 – 28.0 miles.

Figures shown are for comparability purposes; only compare fuel consumption and CO2 figures with other cars tested to the same technical procedures. These figures may not reflect real life driving results, which will depend upon a number of factors including the accessories fitted (post-registration), variations in weather, driving styles and vehicle load. \*There is a new test used for fuel consumption and CO2 figures. The CO2 figures shown, however, are based on the outgoing test cycle and will be used to calculate vehicle tax on first registration.

\*T&Cs apply. Model shown is the Volvo XC40 R-design Twin Engine. Contract hire provided by Santander Consumer (UK) PLC trading as Volvo Car Financial Services, RH1 1SR, 18s & over. Finance subject to status. You can never own the vehicle and it must be returned in good condition to avoid further charges. Excess mileage will be charged at 7.56p per mile for the first 5,000 excess miles. After 5,000 excess miles, excess mileage will be charged at 10.08p per mile. Subject to availability at participating retailers on orders received between 25/11/19 to 31/03/20. Guarantee may be required. Not available with other promotions.

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# Business confidential: Chris Shields

Chris Shields is regional sales director at IT solutions business Pulsant, which has a regional office in Gateshead. He has been with the company for 16 years and is responsible for growing Pulsant's sales in northern England and Scotland. Prior to joining Pulsant (formerly known as Lumison) he worked in IT recruitment for seven years and holds an honours degree in pharmacology and physiology from Edinburgh University

## Pulsant

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***If you could invite four people (living or dead) to dinner – who would they be and why?***

I would invite my maternal grandparents as I never met them, both passed away before I was born so it would be nice to meet them. I would also invite my Mum and Dad so they could have a family meal once more. And if I can get to squeeze a few more round the table – I would get my wife and two children there just to complete a family meal that has never happened.

***What's the best business decision you ever made?***

In my late 20s my wife and I took some jobs in Sydney to continue our careers. Moving, working in a new culture and living in a very different city provided some life lessons I still adhere to and an appreciation of things that I came back to.

***Do you use social media, and what is your opinion of it?***

Social media is a great tool for keeping in touch and sharing information, but like all information presented it does need to be viewed with caution and it is easy for opinion to be presented and understood as fact when there is clearly a difference. But like all tools, it is only as good as the user.

***What type of books do you like to read and what was the last book you read?***

I typically read fiction – thrillers and crime novels mainly. I am currently reading *I am Pilgrim* by Terry Hayes.

***Name your fantasy board of directors, and why you have chosen them.***

Richard Branson for vision and risk-taking, Jony Ive for that unwavering focus on the customer experience and design, James Dyson for his ability to rethink the 'known' and my wife as her ability to negotiate is phenomenal.

***If you weren't doing what you're doing now, what would be your dream job, and why?***

A charter boat skipper, meeting lots of people and sailing around some beautiful places in the world.

***What are your favourite places in the North East, and why?***

Bamburgh beach, I am a coastal person at heart. This beach just ticks all that a beach should be: dramatic, ever changing, wide open and a place you can either sit and watch or walk or run along.

***Which are your favourite newspapers and online sources of news, and why?***

The over-riding theme is I get my sources of news from paid journalism. I like the act of physically reading a newspaper in the morning. I like that a physical paper has content that is so much more in-depth to what I normally read online. For online sources I read the online versions of newspapers and television/radio news.

***If you could choose somebody to play you in a biopic, who would it be, and why?***

I would need to choose two for the 'younger' and 'older' me but both for the same reason. Both my nine-year-old daughter and Dad really have no idea what I do for a living, so it would give them a great idea of what I do on a day-to-day basis.

***What's your best piece of business advice?***

"Customers pay our wages". Every company has a customer somewhere in the process and it is sometimes easy to get caught up when integrating and making internal changes. Everything should start with the customer and how they see it, perceive it, buy it, use it, pay for it and the benefits they gain for whatever you provide them.





# Going the extra mile keeps hotel thriving

Mark Lane finds out why the Park Head Hotel in County Durham is racking up awards and commendations and how it has turned itself into a popular venue for local businesses

**In a world where the hospitality industry is often dominated** by corporate hotel chains and their economies of scale, smaller hotels can still thrive. A great example of this can be found in County Durham in the form of multi award-winning North East England Chamber of Commerce member, Park Head Hotel.

The family-owned venue, which is styled on an 18th century coaching inn and incorporates an eye-catching courtyard, is located in New Coundon, just off the A688 between Bishop Auckland and Spennymoor. It offers 32 en-suite rooms, a spacious bar, two restaurants and two function rooms, as well as meticulously-maintained gardens and a large free and secure car park.

Experienced husband and wife team Claire (pictured left) and Tony Gibbons purchased the hotel in 2008 and have been racking up awards and commendations ever since. Claire started her career in the pub and nightclub industry over 32 years ago and Tony began his career in the bingo industry even further back, going on to run several large successful leisure companies.

Asked to outline some of the Park Head Hotel's strengths, Claire cites location, outstanding customer service, good wifi strength throughout the property and high quality locally-sourced food. She adds: "Our customers who stay with us say its like home from home and they love the fact we are not a large corporate hotel following a script. Our customer service is genuine and tailored to suit the needs of our guests."

Focusing on these staple strengths, the Park Head Hotel has had great success in attracting business-related clientele. It has hosted many local and national business meetings and conferences for clients including the NHS, Durham County council, Britain in Bloom, North East England Chamber, education authorities, training companies, Durham Wildlife Trust and Bishop Auckland Business Club. The hotel also hosts many local community and networking meetings every month; it is home to the Bishop Auckland Rotary Club and Inner Wheel, the international women's organisation.

"We get a lot of regular and repeat business as our business customers appreciate the way that we look after them, always going that extra mile and making their experience as comfortable as possible," says Claire.

Proof of the quality of the Park Head Hotel as a venue can be evidenced through an impressive roster of awards and commendations. In recent times it has been awarded the coveted Trip Advisor Award of Excellence, a World Host Award, a Durham

Works Achievement Award and a Northumbria in Bloom Silver Gilt Award. Recognition has also come in the shape of two accolades from the Durham County Council Environment Awards - category winner for 'Greener Business' award and also the 'Outstanding Award', of which only three were awarded across the whole of County Durham.

For the business customer, there is great flexibility for accommodating events from a small meeting room to a theatre-style presentation for up to 100 people. Overnight delegate packages are always available and food menus can be tailored to meet individual needs, all at a location with easy access and no need for struggling through the city centre traffic which decreases the value of many alternative venues.

The Park Head Hotel's popularity is due in large part to its well-earned reputation for excellent food. Claire says that the hotel's chefs source as much produce as they can locally, including meats from nearby farmlands and breads from a local artisan bakery. Sunday lunches at the hotel have become particularly popular, featuring a four-roast carvery and a free dessert with every meal.

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***"We always find dealing with the Chamber staff very easy and we have found all of their events to be very professional, so there is a great synergy with our own business"***

The company is a longstanding member of the North East England Chamber and Claire points to the many benefits of membership. She says: "We enjoy attending everything from networking to dinners and interacting and doing business with other chamber members. We have also hosted chamber events."

She adds: "The Chamber does a great job of keeping us well informed with details of changes, new legislation and updates in the business world. We always find dealing with the Chamber staff very easy and we have found all of their events to be very professional, so there is a great synergy with our own business."

# A collaborative approach to economic challenges

Mark Lane meets North East England Chamber of Commerce South Tyneside committee chairman Alan Metcalfe and uncovers his positive outlook for the close-knit borough

## Zenith People

[www.zenithpeople.com](http://www.zenithpeople.com)

@ZenithPeople

Alan Metcalfe, commercial director with recruitment firm Zenith People, has now spent almost three years as chairman of the North East England Chamber of Commerce South Tyneside committee. It's a good stretch, particularly as, by his own admission, he was reluctant to take up the position in the first instance. He has grown into the role steadily, welcoming of the lessons and experience it has provided.

"I have to say I thoroughly enjoy it, the role has educated me on

different sectors and I have met some wonderful businesses and people," he says. "The businesses in South Tyneside truly support the Chamber and are happy to air their views, which is why I think we run a successful committee."

He adds: "We want to make a small difference in the business community, we need to be good listeners, everyone has a different challenge depending upon sector and size and we need to represent the business community as fairly and equitably as possible and I think we are achieving that to a large extent."

Alan draws on a rich and varied career which dovetails well with his Chamber role. Originally a time served engineer for Siemens Power Generation, he worked in technical sales before joining the recruitment industry 23 years ago, progressing to his current position at Zenith People. His main role there is strategic business growth and full responsibility for the finances and expenditure of the business.

He says: "We are a full end-to-end recruitment service and training provider and we differentiate ourselves in that we are fully aware of the challenges in attracting new, and retaining existing staff and therefore work in partnership solving the challenges that all employers across all sectors are currently experiencing. There are over 30 of us in the business now and we have always been based in South Tyneside and are very proud of the fact."

Elaborating on the special qualities of South Tyneside as area, which he describes as a "small, close-knit borough", he says: "I believe what makes South Tyneside so welcoming is the people. Whether it is the business community or the public in general we always welcome visitors. Additionally, we have some of the most fantastic beaches and sights close by."

All of this said, Alan accepts that South Tyneside has its own challenges and he suggests these include health and an ageing population, unemployment and, of course, Brexit. He remains optimistic though: "If we continue to do what we are doing and have more investment to attract new businesses and new homeowners then we can overcome these challenges."

The key for South Tyneside – indeed, the North East – is the ability to adapt and diversify. Can the area step up to the mark





***“The businesses in South Tyneside truly support the Chamber and are happy to air their views, which is why I think we run a successful committee”***

here? Answering, Alan says: “I believe this is an enormous challenge for our area, without doubt there have been huge strides to adapt to an ever-changing borough, but this can be difficult.

“The high street in South Shields needs to be looked at and we do need to diversify if we look at the retail sector and it is important that this thrives but we can’t have the same old as we have done in the past. The good thing is that those who can make a difference are aware of the challenge and are trying to do something about it.”

Success will depend on cooperation between the public and private sectors, as well as organisations such as the Chamber. On this front, Alan suggests he has “always found South Tyneside Council to be proactive in their approach”.

He adds: “Don’t get me wrong, there is an awful lot that could be done better and personally I find the public sector slow in their approach at times; we have had our disagreements. However, we have to recognise that they have had significant cuts in budgets, you can’t please all of the people all of the time.

“But I truly believe that if the council, the Chamber, the Advanced Manufacturing Forum and the public all work together then great things can be achieved. Undoubtedly collaboration is a huge factor in this and a willingness to ‘sort it out’ despite differences. It is also important that the supply chain in South Tyneside is maintained and increased.”

# Relishing building long-term business relationships

Mark Lane talks to Jennifer Rycroft, large business relations and partnerships manager of the North East England Chamber of Commerce, to find out more about her role in nurturing the organisation's relationships with key members

## Jennifer Rycroft, large business relations and partnerships

manager with the Chamber, has seen at first hand the challenges faced by our region in terms of funding compared to London and the South. Following her graduation, she spent a period working in an arts administration internship with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. "It was hard work for little money, but five months later, I accepted a job and moved to the North East to be part of the development team at Sage Gateshead, where I stayed for six years."

Her time with Sage Gateshead gave Jennifer a great insight into working closely with large businesses, where her experience included being part of a team that successfully reached a target set by Arts Council England in 2012 to raise £4m over three years, as part of a tenth birthday appeal to unlock £2m match funding.

She joined the North East England Chamber in 2016, and her prior experiences have provided an invaluable grounding for her current role. "Working for a charity has its own challenges, particularly when it comes to funding," she says. "Moving from working for the arts in London to the North East highlighted the imbalance of government support nationally. Combined with the issue of cuts to local funding and the need therefore to rely more heavily on support from the private sector post-recession, made plugging an ever-increasing gap, near impossible. It did, however, make me even more determined to succeed."

Asked why she chose to join the Chamber, she says: "It was definitely the chance to continue working with some of the businesses I had already established relationships with in my previous role, but also the purpose of the Chamber and the work it did to make the North East an even better place to do business."

In her Chamber role, Jennifer heads up the large business team working with over 300 of the biggest private and public sector organisations across the region through the President's Club and Partner Member Programme as well providing opportunities for further engagement, including sponsorship.

"My day-to-day work is largely focused on managing long-term relationships with a small group of some of the region's most influential businesses who, through representing their sector, work closely with us on shared aims and objectives on behalf of the wider member network," Jennifer says. "We work with just 30 members at one time through the Partner programme, representing one per cent of our total membership; there's a lot of

great work that goes on behind the scenes with these members."

Jennifer spends her time between the Chamber's offices (Durham and Newcastle mainly, but also Middlesbrough), being on the road, in meetings with members or colleagues and working from home.

***"I really enjoy getting to know a business and pulling together something bespoke that works for us and them – in most cases involving the expertise of the wider Chamber team"***

Discussing how she balances this time, she says: "Having a quite a wide remit, generally means I have to block time out to focus and dedicate time to different aspects of my role. I try and dedicate at least one and a half days a week where I can focus on emails, following up with members, pulling activity plans and proposals together. I'll also dedicate time to my team, budgets and overall development of the proposition. Other days are spent progressing campaigns, projects and events that partner members are at the forefront of, in amongst regular Partner and sponsor meetings."

Jennifer says her work is not about "quick wins or high volume – it's considered and longer term". She adds: "I really enjoy getting to know a business and pulling together something bespoke that works for us and them – in most cases involving the expertise of the wider Chamber team. I think it's therefore even more satisfying when something you've been working on for a while – sometimes a year or more! – comes to fruition."

Asked about the most rewarding aspect of her job, Jennifer replies: "The people I work with are a huge part of what I love about working for the Chamber, and I think we have a great working culture. I also love the travel. It's often time consuming and means I have to be quite savvy when organising my diary, but this job has enabled me to see so much of and learn so much about the region."



EVENTS

## CHRISTMAS CHAMBER EXCHANGE

A popular annual event with a Christmas theme and hosted by a panto Dame from Tall Tales Mysteries. The event supported Mission Christmas Cash for Kids and 100+ members brought gifts along for children that otherwise may not receive a gift at Christmas. Many thanks to event sponsor Northern Skills Group and venue sponsor Copthorne.



## COFFEE AND CONNECTIONS WITH CHRISTMAS SHOPPING

On November 28, the Coffee and Connections event, which is part of the Inspiring Females programme of events was hosted by Jesmond Dene House. This Christmas themed event included a shopping opportunity. We also heard from inspiring female, Mandy Coppin, chief executive of Streetwise Young People's Project.



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EVENTS

## LINKING BUSINESS WITH EDUCATION

On November 15, Gateshead College kindly hosted the Linking Business with Education event. 60+ schools and businesses came together to network and share best practice. Chamber members presented how they work effectively with schools, and attendees heard from guest speakers representing the North East LEP, Saggezza, NEMTA and Ingenia Recruitment. Due to high demand, we look forward to hosting another event in the new year.



## CHAMBER SHOWCASE @ NORTH EAST EXPO

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On November 14, the Chamber joined forces with member Fresh Start Events and held the Chamber Showcase @ North East Expo at Newcastle Falcons. Attendees visited member exhibitions and took part in the variety of seminars and networking sessions, including Mac Eddy from Insight6, Ben Drury and also Cheryl Lee and Donna Elliott from Now is Your Time.



## CONTACT LAUNCH

On November 15, 60+ attendees joined the Chamber to launch issue 5 of the all-new Contact magazine at North P&I. Attendees had the opportunity to network with the North East business community, and heard from guest speaker Ben Mason, founder and CEO of Global Bridge.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

JANUARY 31, 9AM-12PM

### **BOOST WITH FACEBOOK**

Facebook have teamed up with the British Chambers of Commerce and the North East England Chamber of Commerce to help you take your business to the next level by using Facebook's free tools and training. Tens of millions of local businesses, like yours, use Facebook and Instagram to get started. With that in mind, Facebook is investing in more people, tools and programmes to help local businesses succeed in growing their brand or community as well as help people get the digital skills they need to thrive in their roles.



FEBRUARY 21, 8.30AM-10.30AM

### **MAXIMISING YOUR MEMBERSHIP**

Hosted at Newcastle Gateshead Marriott Hotel, members are invited to attend this event, giving the opportunity to meet key members of the Chamber team to ensure you are making the most of the products and services within your Chamber membership. The Chamber welcomes any of its members to attend alongside the opportunity to bring colleagues at different levels to ensure your organisation is making the most of your membership. The event also gives members who are new to networking the chance to meet other new members.

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FEBRUARY 25, 11AM-2PM

### **TEES VALLEY ANNUAL REVIEW AND AGM**

Join us at Gisborough Hall Hotel for the Chamber Tees Valley annual review. Join us at Gisborough Hall Hotel for the Chamber Tees Valley Annual Review. It is a great opportunity to get together with members of all sizes and sectors from across the Tees Valley to look back at what's been going on in the Chamber and Tees Valley business community in 2019, and what there is to look forward to in 2020. The event includes the very brief formalities of the Tees Valley Committee AGM and a guest speaker from the Tees Valley business community, attracting 100+ attendees in recent years.

For further information about all Chamber events, visit - [www.neechamber.co.uk/events](http://www.neechamber.co.uk/events), or contact the Chamber events team at [events@neechamber.co.uk](mailto:events@neechamber.co.uk) or 0300 303 6322

# Grow your business overseas

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Discover our range of workshops and events covering a variety of export-related topics



Tap into our knowledge, expertise and access connections overseas. Use our connections to DIT offices in over 100 overseas markets



Join a Northern Powerhouse Trade Mission providing the perfect opportunity to join a group led visit and maximise your export potential



Receive advice and guidance on selling online internationally through our online tool

To find out how DIT North East can help your business or to arrange an appointment with your local International Trade Adviser, contact the North East team on **0345 136 0169** or email [northeast@mobile.trade.gov.uk](mailto:northeast@mobile.trade.gov.uk)



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Development Fund

# Founder of iconic North East half marathon speaks to Chamber Partners

Brendan Foster, founder of the Great Run Company, attended the North East England Chamber of Commerce's Partner's Lunch and spoke to attendees at St James' Park on December 10

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**The Great North Run (GNR) is one of the most iconic events in the North East, beamed around the world live on the day, and showcasing the region in all its glory.**

Statistics of its success are extraordinary and include being the first half marathon to reach one million finishers.

The man behind the whole idea and its huge growth, Brendan Foster, spoke to Chamber Partners at the end of 2019, describing the challenges and opportunities of the Great North Run and its related events.

He explained when he first put forward his idea for the Great North Run he was told if he wanted it to be a success he would definitely have to drop the word 'North' in the title, or London-based media wouldn't be interested.

That wasn't something he was prepared to change and despite keeping North in the name the brand is now iconic with great public support along the route.

He stressed the importance of the support from the local authorities right from those early days and talked about the need now for extra help from the business community. The economic benefit from the GNR is around £30m but he believes more could be achieved if there was increased awareness nationally.

He suggested businesses could encourage colleagues in other parts of the country to come to the region to take part. LNER had been very supportive of the run with its train services and this type of help was invaluable.

In the North East, Brendan Foster believes there is a ripe opportunity for people to better understand the value of sport and how to use it to best effect.



He encouraged the region's businesses to be involved in the GNR to not just take part but help raise its profile so it stays at the top of the world's most high profile half marathons. One

***"The Great North Run is one of the most iconic events in the North East, beamed around the world live on the day, and showcasing the region in all its glory"***

of his suggestions was to dress the city on the run weekend so there is no mistaking the location and to generate more excitement around the event.

This year will be the 40th GNR and Brendan Foster's message was that companies could really exploit the opportunity to organise celebratory events around it, just as the Edinburgh Festival Fringe supports the original Edinburgh International Festival.

There are also other beneficiaries with at least 500 charities raising approximately £24m over the years the GNR has been held.

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