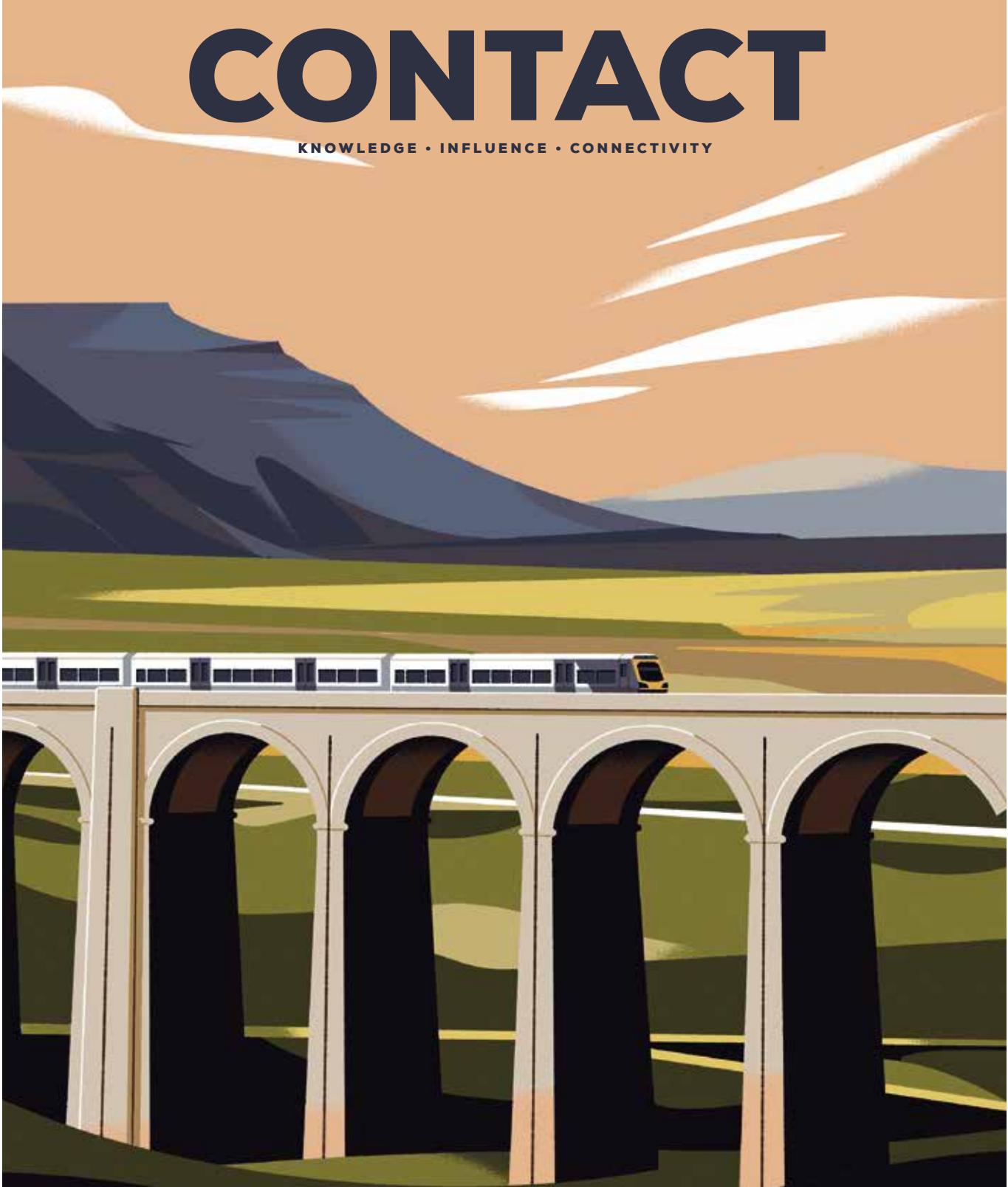


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North East England  
Chamber of Commerce

JULY/AUGUST 2019



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**Jim Clear, Head of Ecommerce**

Wyevale Garden Centres

We're really happy with the results Glass Digital have achieved. We've just had our busiest month ever, so much so we are having to turn away business! I have the utmost trust in their recommendations and we really appreciate being able to ask questions and run things by them whenever we need. Everyone is really friendly and a pleasure to work with.

**Andy Dark, Director**

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### PUBLISHED BY

MattaMedia Ltd

### ONLINE

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

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Interest	£0.00	Initial payment of	£248.81	Duration of the agreement	49 months

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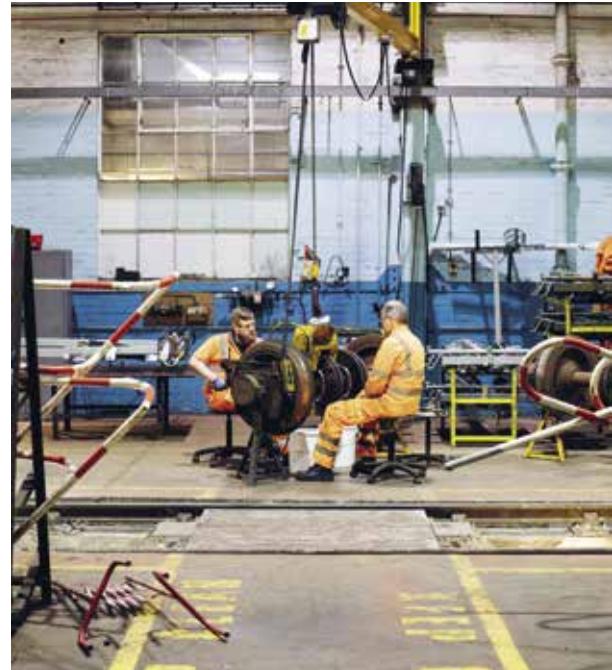
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# Get on board our train campaign

Rail connections can help our businesses travel to new heights

This issue of Contact focuses on something which is at the heart of so much of our business success – connectivity and transport. Without great links, not only around the region, but also around the country and the rest of the world, we would struggle to find new markets and deliver products and services.

We have launched an ambitious campaign to tackle one of these key connections for our members, namely the train line between Edinburgh and London. Under the banner Fast Track East Coast, we are putting forward the case for substantial investment to improve the capacity of this vital route that is all too often not fit for purpose.

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At the recent North East Business Awards it was clear to see the potential to grow in all of the many outstanding stories highlighted. Imagine what these businesses could do if there was more reliability and frequency on our rail network.

Since I last wrote a Contact column we held our AGM and I want to thank you for giving me the honour of being elected by you as your President.

I'm a proud North Eastern businesswoman with a keen interest in activities around our region, from my own company in Tees Valley to my home in Northumberland and look forward to meeting as many of you as possible over the coming months.



As part of my term I particularly want to focus on the importance of ensuring our companies are supportive of their employees. My aim is to build on the

mental health awareness so passionately advocated by our past President John McCabe and encourage support for flexible working, in particular for those with caring responsibilities for either children or elderly relatives.

We have taken this approach in AES Digital Solutions and have found that the team responded so positively to it with benefits including improvement in staff morale, retention and generally helping to create a happy, productive environment, something for which we all definitely strive.

**"At the recent North East Business Awards it was clear to see the potential to grow in all of the many outstanding stories highlighted. Imagine what these businesses could do if there was more reliability and frequency on our rail network"**



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JAMES RAMSBOTHAM CBE - CHIEF EXECUTIVE

# Why investing in our region's infrastructure is vital

There have been some mixed recent statistics relating to North East business but there's also been some notable bright spots, including the long list of Chamber members who triumphed at the North East Business Awards

**James Ramsbotham CBE**  
Chief executive  
@NEEChamberJames

**Our summer does seem to have**  
delivered something of a mixed start.

The good news was a very welcome visit from Home Secretary Sajid Javid, who came to discuss immigration policy post-Brexit with our members in June.

One of the principal reasons for our existence as a Chamber is to ensure our members have the opportunity to grow their influence. This meeting was a perfect illustration of how we strive to make a difference to Government thinking.

Another important element in our campaigning is to improve and strengthen connections between our key cities. On this *Contact* magazine launch day, we have launched a powerful campaign to attract much-needed investment for the East Coast Main Line rail network.

There are full details on *Fast Track North East* in the policy section of *Contact*. I urge everyone to support our call for an excellent rail link between Edinburgh and London. The need for greater investment in our regional infrastructure has never been greater, especially because of the challenges that Chamber members face with Brexit.

The impact of leaving the EU was recently laid bare within the Government's latest international trade statistics. These insightful windows into our exporting world showed increased exports from the North East but also a



potentially harmful trend of importing more products – probably to combat possible shortfalls expected with the impact of Brexit.

Our companies continue to outperform the rest of the country but this achievement is under threat by political instability. It is great news that the EU continues to grow and increase its dominance as the region's top export destination. However, this data should act as a reminder to those in Westminster that they need to deliver a deal which preserves our trading relationship with our biggest and most important market.

The, often different, fortunes of our region were also set out starkly in a further set of figures indicating that we

have the lowest employment rate and highest unemployment rate in the UK.

Employment has fallen in the North East from the record high reached last year, despite a national trend of rising employment. The difference between the employment rate in the North East and the national average is now at its highest point since 2015.

Our members tell us that they are struggling to recruit staff with the right technical skills, suggesting a need for a stronger focus on retraining and upskilling programmes to help people into work.

With the Government about to announce the new Conservative leader and Prime Minister as we go to print, we want to see him acknowledge the

need for a regional approach to skills and training and give the North East the powers and resources to tackle this issue.

I am very much a 'glass half full' person and, despite those troubling statistics, I was delighted to be part of the great celebration of truly outstanding companies at the recent North East Business Awards.

On behalf of the Chamber I give huge congratulations to our members who won honours. I also make no apology for naming every one of them in this lengthy list: Coleman James, Nano Purification, UK Pods, Beamish Museum, Tharsus Group, Esh Group, Egger UK, Atlas Cloud, Intelligence Fusion and Newton Press.

They are all shining examples of our innovative and productive regional business sector and they are all well-deserved winners.

Another opportunity to celebrate our members' achievements was at our AGM. We were delighted to see so many of you there. Our new President, Lesley Moody, gave a powerful speech in which she set out her views on the important issues for the next two years including the need for Government to take better heed of the views of businesses.

Since the publication of the last edition of *Contact* we now have the North of Tyne Mayor and I congratulate Jamie Driscoll on his appointment.

The potential for devolution to make a real difference is clear in Tees Valley and we held an informative event, in early July, on how to unlock the opportunities it brings. The session, supported by our Partner member Lichfields, heard from Teesside University Business School experts on how all businesses can play a part in creating a sea change in the region through the increased powers.

Finally, I want to salute one of our major employers, Nissan, for achieving the fantastic statistic of producing the ten millionth car at its Wearside plant. This is a testament to the power of its dynamic leadership team, steadfast workforce and dedicated supply chain. I cannot think of a better example of North East determination to be innovative and succeed.





## TOURISM

# Discover our Land campaign

Northumberland is open for business! That's the message that was delivered to Westminster at a special event on May 22

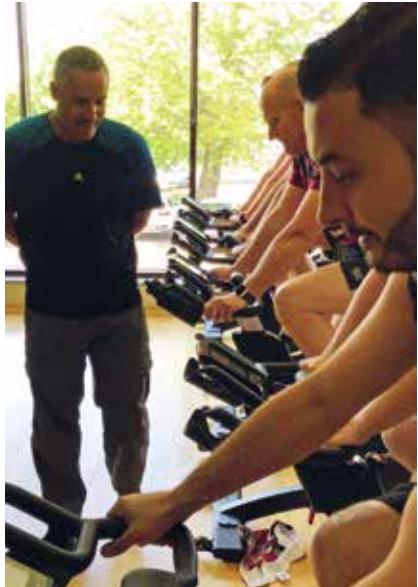
Business leaders and top tourist attractions from Northumberland recently travelled to Westminster to help spread the message about the Discover our Land campaign, which promotes the county as a great place to live, work, visit and invest.

The showcase event, organised by Northumberland County Council and hosted by Lord Curry of Kirkharle, was held at the House of Lords and promoted everything which Northumberland

has to offer both from a business and investment perspective.

Partners at the event included The Alnwick Garden, Northumberland National Park, Port of Blyth, NHS Northumbria International Alliance, Alnwick Castle, Produced in Northumberland and Advance Northumberland.

Representatives from VisitBritain, Sport England, English Heritage and Highways England were invited to attend the event, along with peers and MPs from across the UK.



## CHARITIES

### Decathlete supervises charity workout

Double Olympic Decathlon champion, Daley Thompson CBE, paid a visit to Ramside Hotel and Spa in County Durham to put staff from Cintra and Prospect Engine through their paces at a health and fitness day, as part of his support for North East international children's charity, Comrades of Children Overseas. The two companies won the session in a prize draw.



## TRANSPORT

### £12m investment in green buses

Go North East, the region's largest bus company, celebrated the recent Clean Air Day with the announcement of a £12m investment in 54 high-specification environmentally-friendly buses to help revolutionise bus travel across the region.

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The order from Go North East includes the region's first latest generation zero-emissions full electric single-deck buses, with nine now confirmed from the world's largest electric bus manufacturer, Yutong.

In addition, there will be 34 of the latest low-emission Euro six-engined double-deck buses and 11 single-deck buses from UK-based manufacturers Wrightbus and Alexander Dennis Limited.

The buses will start to enter service from September, with the electric buses arriving in July next year.

The double-deckers will be part of the bus operator's recently announced 'X-lines' concept for its fastest and most direct commuter and express traveller services into the North East's cities including Newcastle, Durham and Sunderland.



## TRAINING

### New apprentice at Banks

A young Bedlington graduate has taken his first step on the career ladder after becoming Banks Mining's latest Northumberland apprentice.

Liam Besford had begun a two-year apprenticeship with the company's plant support team at the Shotton surface coal mine near Cramlington. It will see him combining extensive practical on-the-job training with online learning modules provided by Northumberland College.

## CONSTRUCTION

### Esh begins work on £35.6m road project

Esh Civils, the civil engineering division of Esh Construction, has begun work on the next phase of a multi-million project to improve Sunderland's road network.

The £35.6m contract was awarded earlier this year and the public will start to see large-scale clearance and ground works in coming weeks and months.

This is the third of five phases on the Strategic Transport Corridor (SSTC 3) and sees the creation of a dual carriageway starting in Pallion which will run underneath the Queen Alexandra Bridge, into the city centre via Trimdon Street and incorporate a section of St Mary's Boulevard.

## ANNIVERSARIES

### Two members reach major milestones

Two stalwart North East businesses are celebrating significant milestones this year. 2019 marks a half-century since the establishment of North East Truck & Van Limited (NETV), the independent commercial vehicle dealer group, while Newcastle International Airport-based international freight specialist Universal Forwarding has reached 30 years since its establishment.

Founded in March 1969, NETV started life as an independent servicing workshop in Sunderland, now with headquarters in Billingham. It has seven dealerships across the UK.

NETV holds Iveco, Fiat Professional and LDV franchises as well as being MAN dealers in both Hull and Carlisle.

Meanwhile Universal Forwarding, which was founded by directors Phil Naylor and Trevor Harbottle in 1989, has grown to become the largest independent freight forwarder in the North East. A member of the International Freight Association, the company has a worldwide network of partners.

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NETV's Blaydon facility

## COMMERCIAL PROPERTY

### Allies on the move

Digital Allies and sister company Remember Media are moving out of separate offices in the e-volve Business Centre, Rainton Park to co-locate within a single, larger premises in Enterprise House, Team Valley.

Digital Allies delivers digital marketing solutions, from website design and build through to SEO work, paid search, training and strategy development and now has a workforce of 18.

Remember Media is a provider of written content, bespoke publications, video and photography services.



## TRAINING

### TTE to train Iraqi technicians

The TTE Technical Institute has secured a new project with international energy and water company TAQA to provide technical training to Middle East-based technicians.

A group of 13 technicians from TAQA's Atrush Block oil production facility in the Kurdistan region of Iraq are spending three months in the UK at TTE's fully-equipped training centre in Middlesbrough to develop practical engineering competencies to achieve internationally-recognised qualifications.



L-R: Megan Irons, Danielle Harvey (senior fundraiser at St Oswald's) and Leah Pattison

## CHARITIES

### Solicitors climb Everest for St Oswald's

Two trainee solicitors at commercial law firm Watson Burton recently embarked on the journey of a lifetime to raise funds for St Oswald's Hospice in Newcastle.

Leah Pattison and Megan Irons ascended to the Base Camp of Mount Everest – 5,380m above sea level – in support of the hospice, which provides specialist hospice care to North East adults, young people, babies and children with life-limiting conditions.



## SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

### Cook yourself happier

15

Chamber member Catriona MacDougall has founded an innovative new non-profit social enterprise, Cook Yourself Happier.

The main purpose of her venture is to teach anyone affected by mental health issues to prepare healthy and delicious meals from scratch.

All the recipes have been formulated to include ingredients scientifically proven to improve mental health, as well as providing a form of mindfulness through the act of cooking itself.

The dishes have been selected to offer a wide range of preparation times and difficulties, accommodating the mood of the cook on any given day.

Catriona, who has worked in a wide range of catering environments over more than 20 years, has been in talks with publishers about a book, and recipe cards to accompany the lessons she offers.



Ean Parsons (left) and operations manager Dean Tempest at the new site

## LOGISTICS

### Parsons opens new site

Sedgefield-headquartered Parsons Containers Group has opened a new 2.2-acre site under the Tees flyover. It now houses Parsons' U Hold The Key self-storage business, plus container handling facilities.

Parsons now has nine sites in the North East and this latest opening has the potential to develop into one of the biggest that is run by the group, the company said.

The business was founded by entrepreneur Ean Parsons in 2000 and is now one of the UK's largest multi-discipline shipping container businesses.

## TRANSPORT

### Airport unveils masterplan

Newcastle International Airport has published its Masterplan 2035, a scheme which is set to play a vital role in the future of the region's transport and infrastructure.

During a four-month public consultation on the draft plan, the airport welcomed feedback from members of the public as well as local businesses and stakeholders – with the vast majority of respondents being supportive.

Over the consultation period, the airport's Masterplan 2035 website saw



23,000 unique views and almost 55,000 page views. The final plan sets out the goals for its centenary year in 2035.

It will enable the airport to deliver the connectivity that the North East will need to compete in the global

marketplace.

The plan sets out the possibility that the number of jobs supported across the North East could grow to 27,800, and the contribution to GVA could reach up to £2.03bn by the year 2035.

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The new homes designed by Pod for Lambton Park

## COMMERCIAL PROPERTY

### Lambton Park project underway

Building work has started on the first phase of a new development designed by Newcastle architects Pod.

The move sees civil and building works underway on the new Eastern Village as part of the initial phase of the redevelopment of Lambton Park, the ancestral seat of the Earls of Durham.

This will involve creating a new southern estate gateway that will set the scene for the future development of the historic site.

This Victorian character area will feature 69 luxury four and five-bed terraced properties framing a formal boulevard as part of Pod's vision to regenerate one of the most significant historical locations in the North of England.

The first properties will be ready later this year.



## PEOPLE

### New patron at Pride Media Centre

The UK's first LGBT+ business and media centre is celebrating ongoing support from a prominent equality campaigner.

The Pride Media Centre at Pelaw, Gateshead, was officially opened in June by Lord Michael Cashman CBE, one of the founding members of the national LGBT+ charity Stonewall.

And the former actor and MEP has agreed to become a patron of the pioneering hub, which will offer advice, support and training to those in the LGBT+ community.

The complex houses a variety of businesses, including multi-channel broadcaster Pride World Media, newly-launched online television station, Out and Proud TV and LGBT+ charity, Northern Pride, which organises the annual festival in Newcastle.



L-R: Gateshead College students Tyler Hammond, Scot Shield and Adam McGurk with Geek Talent's Dominic Murphy and Jill McKinney of Sunderland Software City

## SKILLS

### Scheme aims to produce tech talent

A ground-breaking scheme to attract new talent into the digital technology sector has been launched in the region.

Gateshead College has teamed up with Sunderland Software City, PROTO: The Emerging Technology Centre and North East digital firms to kick-start the programme, which is designed to help the industry tackle skills shortages and become more competitive.

The flexible programme offers a radical new approach to training and developing tech talent.

Students from the college spend at least 45 days working with several companies on live projects, acquiring the skills they need to build a successful career – a shift away from traditional work placements, which are often much shorter and are spent in one company.

## EDUCATION

### College announces investments

Northumberland College has unveiled plans to deliver a multi-million pound investment programme which will further position it as one of the region's leading education and training providers.

Key investments will be made across the campuses at Ashington, Kirkley Hall and Berwick over the next twelve months to construct innovative, industry-focused facilities, with work starting this month.

## COMMERCIAL PROPERTY

### Hedley opens Wynyard office

Planning specialist Hedley Planning Services has opened a new office in Wynyard Park as it looks to expand its operations into Yorkshire and Teesside.

The firm has also appointed planning and development expert Stephen Litherland, who previously worked as group planning manager at Bellway Homes covering planning matters on a national basis and latterly, at a senior level for Story Homes.

He will head up Hedley Planning Services (Yorkshire), which will be based in its new offices at the Evolution at Wynyard.

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Dave Crone, who is now executive chair of Omega, with Craig Swinhoe

## MANUFACTURING

### New MD at Omega

Team Valley-based Omega Plastics Group has appointed a new managing director. Craig Swinhoe has taken over the reins of the plastics injection moulding and tooling business from Dave Crone, who has held the position since 2006.

He has a broad range of experience leading businesses and developing and executing group strategy, most recently as group MD of Quantum Pharma.

# Train manufacturing giant shows its faith in regional supply chain

Mark Lane looks at the impact of Hitachi Rail in the North East and finds out about its relationship with fellow Chamber member Millfield Composites on a supply contract for products relating to its intercity and commuter trains

**Hitachi Rail**  
[www.hitachirail-eu.com](http://www.hitachirail-eu.com)  
@HitachiRailEU

**Millfield Composites**  
[www.millfield-group.co.uk](http://www.millfield-group.co.uk)

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**The North East has a long and proud association with the rail sector**, and there was a definite sense of an industry coming home in 2015 with the announcement of the opening of Hitachi's £82m County Durham train manufacturing plant. At the time, George Osborne, the UK's then chancellor, described the investment (Hitachi's first rail plant in Europe) as "a huge boost to confidence for British manufacturing and particularly the rail industry".

Since that time, Hitachi's production site, which is based in Newton Aycliffe, has gone from strength to strength. Hitachi Rail chose this region to make a new investment into the latest generation of trains for the UK's Intercity Express Programme. That initial £82m investment has now gone beyond £100m and hundreds of new jobs have been created in the process.

The Japanese giant's rail vehicle manufacturing facility will in total be building 122 high speed trains for the £5.7bn InterCity Express Project for the East Coast and Great Western mainlines. Yet there could be other work to follow. Indeed, Hitachi has recently submitted a joint bid to build trains for the HS2 high speed rail link in a move that could provide a further boost to the Newton Aycliffe plant in terms of orders and associated job creation. Hitachi has joined up with fellow rail manufacturer Bombardier for the HS2 bid, in the process revealing the first picture of its Great British train which the company is hoping will be the first to run on HS2.

As good news stories go, this is one of the most positive to come out of the North East in recent years, particularly given the ongoing trials and tribulations of our manufacturing sector,



Luke Davies (left) and Millfield Composites engineering manager, Simon Cook

many of which have been made worse by uncertainty over Brexit.

One of the most satisfying aspects of this story has been the impact Hitachi has had on the local supply chain. Despite being Japanese-owned, Hitachi has made a point of showing a major commitment to the North East since it commenced production here. Where possible the company has utilised the local supply base and local labour force. Indeed, these were two of the primary reasons why the company opted to locate here.

I recently caught up with Luke Davies, a commodity manager for car body and interior, stationed at Hitachi's Newton Aycliffe plant. Among Luke's tasks has been developing relationships with the local supply base, one of which is Millfield Composites – of which more later.

Luke says: "The factory is currently building pioneering intercity trains for LNER for the East Coast Mainline and is supporting companies across the region through a strong use of local suppliers."

He adds: "Hitachi Rail has a strong belief in sustainability and the socio-economic value to the local community. For instance, we are a co-founder of South Durham UTC – the North East's first University Technical College for young people aged between 14 and 18."

Since 2013 Hitachi has spent over £1bn with UK suppliers

and prioritised both domestic and local suppliers wherever possible, creating a supply chain of over 1,400 suppliers. In fact, a key focus of the procurement team has been the localisation of the supply chain.

Explains Luke: "We are now at a point where 70 per cent of parts by volume come from within 40 miles of the Newton Aycliffe site. We are incredibly proud of the positive impact we're having in the local area. Our supplier selection process is extremely robust and covers areas such as accreditations, quality, technical competence, financial health, social responsibility and value."

Such a process was how Millfield Composites came to be supplying Hitachi Rail with side window panels and door post covers for its intercity and commuter trains.

Luke has high praise for the business, a fellow North East England Chamber of Commerce member, with which it has established a solid working relationship of mutual benefit. He says: "Millfield has shown an ability to regularly deliver good quality products to us in the required quantities enabling us to keep an optimum amount of stock. They have been flexible and have adapted well to our increasing build rate.

"We have worked closely together to build a positive relationship through

## **"Our businesses work very closely together on design, development, production and aftermarket. We collaborate on global and European projects and are keen to continue to be of help and support to Hitachi Group"**

regular business reviews either on site at Hitachi Rail or at Millfield's site in Newcastle. We continue to work collaboratively on areas like quality, new product introduction, parts protection and packaging requirements.

"We have been building intercity trains for Great Western Main Line and East Coast Main Line and Millfield also supplied the parts for the Class 385 commuter trains that have recently been introduced on the Edinburgh-Glasgow route."

To find out more about the relationship between Millfield Composites and Hitachi Rail I also caught up with John Doyle, director with the business.

Millfield Composites Group is a collection of SME businesses based in the North East supplying composite products and services to a range of global OEM customers and market areas. The business has around 120 employees including apprentices. With a turnover

of around £12m, it has regional facilities in both Newcastle and Hartlepool plus a recently opened facility in the North West.

As suppliers to Hitachi Rail, the business has supplied painted products for intercity and commuter trains. "We have supplied predominantly to Newton Aycliffe but also Doncaster, London, Italy and Japan," says John.

Explaining how the business relationship started, John says: "We received our first formal RFQs in 2015 though we had been to various supplier events before the factory was built to understand their supply chain requirements. We had also been audited by their QA teams in 2014.

"Hitachi Rail is now one of our major customers and we are very proud to supply them. Their work has allowed us to grow and employ local people at our group and also amongst our local suppliers too.

"Our businesses work very closely together on design, development, production and aftermarket. We collaborate on global and European projects and are keen to continue to be of help and support to Hitachi Group."

John makes the point that while Hitachi Rail does source locally, its suppliers have to be able to cut the mustard to be selected. He says: "Hitachi are a large company seeking to buy, where possible, locally from the North East - provided suppliers are globally capable and competitive."

He concludes: "Their teams are friendly and respectful, in our experience, and we have found the relationship and projects to be technically challenging yet rewarding."



# People power: why staff are the key to success

It might sound obvious that people are the key to an organisation's success, but getting there and creating a winning culture where staff and customers feel valued and everyone works towards a shared goal isn't easy. Here Mark Thompson, director of people development and organisation at Gateshead College, explains the journey they've been on

**Becoming the number one college in the country for our student achievement rates didn't happen overnight, it took a lot of hard work, some very strong leadership and a great team effort. We've worked hard to create a culture where not only our students can do well but where our staff feel valued and respected.**

We all spend such a high proportion of our lives at work and if we aren't happy in our jobs we won't stay, or if we do, we won't be productive.

Recognising and rewarding staff is one way to make them feel valued. Here at the college, we're careful to celebrate the achievements of our staff in a variety of different ways. And they don't need to be grand or expensive, a simple thank you can really make someone's day and it's important not to lose sight of this.

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**"We want all employees and students to feel comfortable discussing their mental health and ask for support if needed"**

But it's not just about the simple stuff. We've also worked hard to create a culture where staff feel confident to put forward new ideas and to know they'll be acted upon. Your people are your strongest asset, and they're all brimming with innovative ideas, so don't be afraid to ask them how you could do things differently; it's not only a great motivational tool but you'll also get a fresh perspective on things.

There's no doubt that the investment that we make in our people has been and will continue to be, crucial to our success.



*Mark Thompson, director of people and organisation development at Gateshead College*

We recruit well, taking the time to get the right people for the job, and we invest in our workforce, developing their skills and supporting them to try new things.

However, this investment in skills and people development is only one side of the story. It's a well-known fact that companies that focus on the health and wellbeing of their staff are generally more respected and valued by employees, which can lead to increased productivity, better workforce retention rates and a reduction in staff absenteeism.

At Gateshead College, the mental health of our staff has been high on our agenda for a number of years.

We want all employees and students to feel comfortable discussing their mental health and ask for support if needed.

All of our employees have completed a mental health awareness qualification so they're able to spot the signs if a student or colleague is struggling.

In addition, we have a team of mental health champions tasked with supporting our whole team with practical initiatives. It's been a gradual process over a number of years, but we've always remained clear that this was an issue we weren't going to shy away from, and I think we're now seeing real benefits.

Of course the job of developing, training and supporting staff is never done, but I'm very proud of the progress we've made and the real impact it's had, not only on the happiness of our workforce but on the success of our business.

It's this that puts us in a strong position to support other businesses. We've been, and still are, on our own journey of harnessing our people power so we understand the challenges, how training can make a difference and where best to focus your efforts.

To find out more about Gateshead College and the courses on offer, visit: [www.gateshead.ac.uk/employer](http://www.gateshead.ac.uk/employer).

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# Don't overlook the human side of Brexit

Naz Demir, international trade manager, expresses concerns that many Chamber members may be ignoring how their staff might be effected by Brexit and suggests it is a business imperative to explore the issue thoroughly



**Naz Demir**

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As an international trade manager I am often asked about the impact of Brexit on import and export regulations, customs, tariffs, legal status and finance, but few question me on the people aspects. No one has asked 'what would happen to my EU workers or to the British expat staff who are working and living abroad?'

Statistics indicates that approximately 2.4 million people who are born in the EU are working in the UK, each one will be affected in a one way or another by Brexit depending on their circumstances. The UK exiting the European Union means that the government will end reciprocal European Freedom of Movement to the UK, which means that EU, EEA and Swiss citizens and eligible family members will need immigration permission if in, or entering, the UK after it leaves the EU (either 31 December 2020, which is the end of the 'transition' period in the event of a deal or, in the event of no deal, once free movement ends).

The government has stated that EU, EEA and Swiss nationals already resident in the UK will be eligible to apply for a new status confirming that they can continue to live in the UK after that date. The status can be 'settled' or 'pre-settled' in the UK. Irish citizens will not need to apply because the Common Travel Area agreements existed between the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland prior to the EU Directive.

The above statement appears to be quite complicated, especially for companies which have not dealt with immigration rules prior to Brexit, so in simpler terms, what does this translate to in practice? I started my exploration voyage by speaking to a considerable number of company directors across various sectors and they all

appear to be united in their desire: an immigration system that is fair, low-cost, modest and unbureaucratic to navigate.

I noted that the concerns appear to be higher amongst certain sectors as they feel that they will sustain a considerable damage in terms of shortage of supply of EU workers, these are key industries and services in UK, for example the food and drink manufacturing, hospitality and social care.

My exploration and discussions then in turn led me to thought provoking and critical questions. Do businesses have the necessary skills and workforce to continue delivering its business plan objectives? Has the HR department explored the potential impact of Brexit and the uncertainty surrounding its workforce? I fear that this in many respects appears to have been overlooked, for many EU nationals the past few months have been researching what the leave vote means for them with what it appears to be little or no support from their prospective employers.

Although, one must say that its not entirely the employer's fault, one must agree with the notion that many factors such as the uncertainty around the shape of the labour market, the unclear impact of changes in the employment law, the current and future changes brought about by the immigration

departments are all factors that are potentially causing confusion for certain companies who are still not sure what Brexit might mean for them and are adopting a 'wait and see' approach.

Suddenly this became the turning point in my voyage and I felt it's critical for me to advise company directors to start having a clear strategy post-Brexit, whereby they create a workforce that provides the skills and people their respective companies need, whatever the final outcome of Brexit may be.

In examining the challenges that Brexit brings to the EU nationals who are living and working in this country, suddenly my thoughts turned to the Brits who are residing, working and owning properties across the EU. When we take a more in-depth look, it becomes quite clear that certain countries have taken measures to protect and safeguard those rights, though for many Brits the question is much more than a residency card, for example the impact on healthcare and pensions, specially in countries where a "No Deal" could lead to a "Third Country National" treatment. Cultural and language barriers could suddenly become an issue for individuals who will have to tackle new administrative and legislative cordon.

The more I think about this, newer scenarios jumps into my



thoughts, what about third country nationals who are married to Brits and/or have EU residence? How are they treated post-Brexit and will they face more red tape? Freedom of movement is a much deeper issue than just a simple stay or leave. Whether we agree or disagree with what the public voted for, Brexit brings about a new challenge for families and individuals who are affected by new immigration rules. Perhaps the emotional strain is an aspect we are all overlooking for all parties involved.

Brexit might open the door to certain threats, but with it comes opportunities and it's appropriate to identify from the outset that plans need to be modified in response to how the future unfolds. Whether we agree or disagree with the current way the whole Brexit has been dealt with, we must remember that the business arena with its various sectors remains

competitive so now isn't a time for complacency.

The UK will face a brighter future only if organisations are able to recruit the right candidates, train as appropriate and retain the skills and labour they need to achieve the overall business objectives as previously stated. A statement I read recently appear to be appropriate to end this article with: "Adaptation is built in, rather than ad hoc."



# Powering ahead: Tees energy firm re-charged for the future

Mark Lane finds out what Sembcorp UK has to offer to energy-intensive customers and potential investors at Wilton International and hears how the industrial powerhouse has reinvented itself to respond to the UK's ever-changing energy needs



The UK energy market is a complicated beast. Highly politicised as well as being at the mercy of powerful global market dynamics, it's a sector of the economy which has had to adapt to massive global disruption in recent years. Low carbon and renewable forms of generation are gradually displacing coal and other forms of fossil fuel production across the world. Additionally, the UK has specific issues challenging its 2050 'net-zero' carbon emissions targets, with the next generation of nuclear plants behind schedule and still years away from playing their part in the nation's energy 'mix'.

With its huge concentration of chemical and other process industry, Teesside is of vital importance to the economy of the North East in terms of jobs and investment and the millions earned as a result of the exports of its main manufacturing companies are equally important to the continued prosperity of the UK.

One commodity that Teesside's processing companies need is energy – lots of it! Nowhere is this more apparent than on the 2,000 acre Wilton International site near Redcar, once home to ICI's chemical and petrochemical operations.

Contact was curious therefore to catch up with perhaps the most pivotal player at Wilton. In a wide-ranging interview with Nomi Ahmad (pictured above), head of Sembcorp's UK energy operations, we found out about the Singapore-based company's UK expansion plans, why the region needs to pull together and adopt a bipartisan approach to tap into international inward

investment opportunities and why companies like Sembcorp, operating in volatile markets, need more than ever the maximum possible certainty and stability from central government.

Nomi brings more than 25 years of rich and varied experience to his role for Sembcorp. His career spans power development, engineering procurement and construction, project finance, mergers and acquisitions and asset management across Asia, the Middle East, and the Americas. Chosen to lead the UK expansion, he has been in post since early 2018 during which time massive strides have been taken towards integration in all the UK energy sectors.

The scale of Sembcorp's activities and physical assets at Wilton is impressive – not just plants, but also miles of cabling and pipelines generating and distributing reliable, low carbon supplies of power and steam. Sembcorp also supplies water and a variety of other utilities and services to on-site customers including petrochemicals giant SABIC, Lotte UK Chemical and the biofuels firm Ensus.

Having acquired the business 16 years ago, Sembcorp has since invested more than £300m at Wilton and now guarantees customers ultra-reliability by generating from a flexible array of power producing assets including gas (the cleanest of the fossil fuels) biomass and waste to energy facilities.

The £65m Sembcorp Biomass Power Station pioneered large scale biomass power production in this country when it began operations in 2007. The plant utilises around 300,000 tonnes of sustainably sourced wood as its fuel in order to generate 35MW of green power for the site's companies.

More recently, Sembcorp partnered with the waste management firm Suez and I-Environment (a subsidiary of the Japanese investment firm ITOCHU Corporation) in developing a £250m plant to utilise 440,000 tonnes a year of



Merseyside's non-recyclable household waste as a fuel, diverting it from landfill in order to generate the equivalent of the power used in 63,000 homes. Along with multi-million pound investments in two gas turbines, a steam turbine and package boilers, Sembcorp offers site investors access to reliable supplies of competitively priced, low carbon power delivered via the largest privately owned distribution network in the UK.

Nomi explains: "Having access to

exploring its own investment ideas which – potentially – could bring a substantial number of new jobs and investment into the area.

Sembcorp's plans to develop a large-scale power station are deemed as potentially vitally important to the UK's energy security and infrastructure as well as its ability to supply the low carbon needs of energy-intensive industries looking to set up operations in the Tees Valley. With a capacity of up to

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**"We are tracking this area carefully, but we firmly believe this project coming to Teesside is a win-win for all concerned"**

power and utilities on tap is one of the major reasons why industrial companies would want to site themselves at Wilton and we have a compelling proposition for inward investors. Centralised on-site generation and other utilities can cut the capital expenditure and gross energy costs of an industrial business by 15-20 per cent."

Nomi adds that with the UK energy market is in the throes of significant change, Sembcorp has broadened its portfolio to capitalise on the opportunities resulting from increased price volatility at the same time as

1,700 MW – the equivalent of the power needed to supply 1.5 million homes and businesses – the station plan was approved by Greg Clark, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) in April this year.

Earmarked for the site of the now demolished former 1875MW Teesside Power Station which ran from 1993-2013, the proposed £500m facility would have the added advantage of being carbon capture ready and capable of feeding surplus electricity into the national grid to meet a substantial tranche of the country's energy needs.



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Sembcorp is currently looking at the business case for the project in the light of the rapidly changing UK energy and regulatory environment and will take a final decision in the months ahead, with the development consent giving the company until April 2024 to begin construction.

If it goes ahead, the plant could see 60-80 permanent new jobs created at Wilton site and a further 150 in the supply chain. It would also support up to 1,000 jobs in the engineering construction sector during an anticipated three-year build out.

The process would incorporate the assembly of two gas turbines trains in two separate phases. A decision is yet to be made on a possible technology provider.

Says Nomi: "A number of sites have been identified in the UK as carbon capture and storage (CCS) sites. Wilton and the South Tees area have several compelling features that make carbon capture attractive, however, given the high cost, CCS will require some level of subsidy from the Government to be commercialised.

"If Teesside is chosen as a site, we believe that Wilton could be a strong contender for locating the anchor power plant and CCS project as we own the land with no need for any compulsory purchase, we have the grid and gas connections, the associated site infrastructure and a development consent order already in place, and this could shorten the development of the station by 12 to 18 months.

"We are tracking this area carefully, but we firmly believe this project coming to Teesside is a win-win for all concerned. Having this carbon-capture facility on Teesside would instantly make the

area more attractive for inward investors who – with the added advantage of the carbon capture capability – would be able to say they were consuming green energy."

Another major UK development for Sembcorp in the past 18 months has been the £216m acquisition of UK Power Reserve.

The purchase has given Sembcorp entry into an entirely new market – flexible distributed energy – via its largest generator and catapulted the company from being simply a provider of centralised utilities on Teesside into a truly integrated energy business with operations at around 40 locations throughout the UK.

It has given Sembcorp a foothold in the UK's fastest growing power market and additional capacity of more than 800MW that has taken the company's total contracted UK capacity to more than 1,000MW, including one of the biggest battery storage portfolios in Europe.

Moving forward, Sembcorp is looking to work closely with the Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen and local development agencies in a joined up approach aimed at capitalising on huge inward investment opportunities for the area. One of these is South Tees Development Corporation (STDC).

To this end, Sembcorp and STDC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) last year to maximise investment opportunities at two of the key industrial sites in the Tees Valley – Wilton and the adjacent 4,500-acre STDC area.

Since its launch last year, the STDC area, which includes the former SSI Steelworks site and approximately three miles of river frontage, has received more than 100 enquiries from investors around the world.

The MoU will see Sembcorp and STDC jointly promote investment, directing businesses to the most appropriate site for their requirements.



Nomi described the agreement as "a significant step forward in the regeneration of this area".

Elaborating, he says: "Both parties are keen to attract inward investment into the area and so why not work together on that process? We are not competing - we can extend our network to service international customers, whether that be here or in the STDC area.

"We will never turn away inward investment from Wilton but, equally, if they want to go to the redeveloped SSI site, we can supply them with utilities and services there. Having the MoU removes the potential for infighting between the two areas."

So what kind of investment might the joint Wilton/STDC approach appeal to? There are many possibilities, suggests Nomi, including - for those requiring power only - mineral processing, data centres, tyre reprocessing, oil refining, metal recycling and industrial gas.

For those requiring both power and heat, the site could serve many sectors including rare earth oxide processing (Peak Resources have already identified Wilton for a development), minerals processing (the massive Sirius Minerals development linking the polyhalite mine near Whitby to its export facility on

the Tees is already underway), plastics, metal and waste recycling, advanced manufacturing, speciality paper and petrochemicals.

We end our interview with a broader look at the UK energy market and what it is like to be a key player in the sector during such a volatile period.

Nomi's overriding message is one of the need for stability and consistency from national governments with regards to overall energy strategy. He is confident that Sembcorp's UK operations are diversified enough to withstand market shocks, although he also acknowledges that, "at the end of the day, the future of our business is dependent on the future of our customers' businesses".

With many of these businesses being international players, with the potential to make their investments anywhere around the world, the issue of Brexit is never far away. Like many, Nomi would simply like to see resolution on Brexit either way, and a black and white answer as to whether we are in or out as opposed to the never-ending political posturing over the issue we have witnessed over the past two years.

He is also a great believer in partnership and collaboration. Having worked internationally, his experience has offered him an outsider's perspective on Teesside in terms of what it has to offer regarding energy and utility supplies alongside the logistics infrastructure, a great workforce and a wide range of grant support.

Nomi concludes: "There has to be a very concerted effort between business and government to really partner to say how you can add the maximum number of 'ticks' to make this place attractive for somebody to invest in, because we are ultimately competing with the likes of Germany, Holland and so on. How can we ensure the right story is being told? This is a key question for the prospects of Teesside, and indeed our Sembcorp business, in the years ahead."



## SEMCORP OVERVIEW

Sembcorp's UK operations belong to the Utilities arm of the Sembcorp Industries ([www.semcorp.com](http://www.semcorp.com)), a leading energy, water, marine and urban development group operating across multiple markets worldwide.

Sembcorp has chosen to locate its newly formed UK business at Wilton International where it has been established since 2003.

Aside from Sembcorp's supply of resilient, secure and low cost energy, the site's fundamental strengths to investors are clear to see.

Its established industrial infrastructure is ready to deliver the utilities, feedstocks, industrial gases and products needed by investing businesses.

Comprehensive, multi-modal freight transport solutions are directly accessible on Teesside bringing logistics efficiency, flexibility and security.

Its top-tier 'COMAH' status provides the health, safety and security standards demanded by major process industry companies.

Sembcorp's 'plug and play' land and property solutions mean a range of large-scale, fully serviced development plots are available, with flexible tenancies and pre-consented planning.

Last but not least, Wilton's location within the Teesside industrial cluster provides access to a large, technically skilled workforce, expertise and supply chain opportunities.

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# You can never be over-prepared to do business in Germany

Maria Dotsch, international trade adviser for the Department of International Trade in the North East, explains future sales potential in Germany for UK businesses – independent of the Brexit outcome

**Germany is a powerhouse which is not only geographically but also economically at the heart of Europe.** It shares borders with nine European countries and international trade, foreign languages and accents due to cross border working and living, has become second nature to a lot of German people and their neighbours alike.

It's interesting that there is the general presumption that the German business culture is much alike the British. As a German native working in the UK I am often asked about the ins and outs of trading in Germany or setting up a business. I always start by explaining that Germany has its nuances in the economy as well as in culture and traditions. The country is particularly known for its traditional Oktoberfest, its carnival culture and globally renown Christmas markets.

However Germans do not like mixing business life with private life.

The business culture is reserved sometimes clinical and technical, but take it from me the business culture is very welcoming although at the same time somewhat direct. The German language itself is a very technical and harsh language and not as melodic as Italian or French.

In business don't be surprised at a methodical way of communication that focuses on ideas, process, expectations and outcomes. It is important to stick to what you have agreed and deliver to the expectations. So, in my opinion the initial analytical stage of forging a partnership might take a little longer, but when both parties have found a good level of understanding and ways of working, it will be most likely the basis of a long and loyal relationship.

Payment ethics of German companies are generally very good compared to other parts in the world so it is worthwhile investing the time to establish good relationships. Quick one-off deals are always seen as a little uncommitted to the market. This also counts for hiring staff in Germany. Be aware of the very different rules and regulations especially when hiring staff or agents. Not only higher wages but higher reimbursements of expenses compared to the UK are the norm in Germany, together with stronger staff rights regarding working hours and paid holiday time and paid sick leave.

The strength of Germany's globally renowned dual system of vocational training is indisputable. It consists of about 1.3 million apprentices and more than 8,800 vocational schools. Over 60 per cent of all German enterprises offer vocational training

compared to only 30 per cent in the UK. In addition there are about 2.8 million students enrolled in Germany's universities. The majority are on courses with a technical focus.

The country's share of university students in the sciences, mathematics, computer sciences, and engineering is the highest in the EU, with 31 per cent of all German students. According to OECD statistics, Germany has the highest rate of graduates with a doctoral degree in sciences and engineering. But still the skills shortage is now a great concern of German businesses according to a recent economic survey by the German Chamber of Industry and Commerce.

Highly qualified engineers, technicians, researchers and medical professionals but also software development, programming, metal construction, aerospace and automotive and other similar jobs will be needed in the future.

Germany has traditionally strong manufacturing industries including the automotive and machinery industry which drive the high-tech nation and it leads in innovations like robotics. The electronics industry and ICT services are at the forefront of this. The chemical and medical sector is also a key player but the energy and environmental technology industry is gaining more prominence due to consistent green government policies. No surprise that with a population of over 82 million and the biggest consumer market in Europe, Germany will stay a strategic important trading partner for the UK in the future.

In my opinion the skills shortage poses a challenge but at the same time it poses an opportunity for UK companies. Forging mutually beneficial and complementary partnerships can result in rewarding deals for both parties.

And based on data from the Federal Statistical Office of Germany the UK is Germany's third biggest trading partner after the US and France and in reverse the UK's biggest trading partners are the US followed closely by Germany.

Germany hosts two thirds of all international trade shows in the world. That alone shows the importance of the location with Germany attracting dealmakers from all over the world. I have experienced first-hand that booking to go to a trade show requires forward planning up to one year ahead. Even in the age of Air BNBS, accommodation gets snapped up very quickly. Something to consider especially when you are taking a team out to an exhibition.

In my view this country offers a sophisticated and highly developed market and, depending on what you have to offer,



it can be price sensitive and highly competitive. As with all business it is important to do your homework as you can never be over-prepared.

Think about your USP and what features of your product or service will really appeal to customers. German businesses have a lot of respect for UK products and services, they value

technologically advanced products and services and a reliable infrastructure and most of all they are very welcoming.

Understanding the local customs, traditions, geography and social dynamics can make negotiations easier and lead to a successful outcome that can also help open doors in neighbouring countries.

# A transparent ambition for troo

Founder and chief executive of business energy benchmarking specialist troo, Andrew Richardson, discusses how the company is striving to redefine the utilities brokering market, and how a newly-agreed partnership with the Chamber will benefit the membership

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## ***What sparked the business idea for troo?***

Having worked in the fiercely competitive utilities sector for over 20 years, I was becoming increasingly frustrated at the lack of regulation of the sector, and an absence of transparency in pricing.

Founded in January 2018, troo is a service aimed at the SME market to offer highly competitive rates for their energy prices – with the company taking a clearly-defined fixed fee from the supplier – alongside offering a free online benchmarking platform to allow price comparison.

At troo, we provide a quick and easy benchmarking system to enable businesses to check their energy deals. It's a great way for companies to see whether the renewal rate they are getting from their incumbent supplier is good. Or whether the deal the broker has told them is the 'best in the market' is anything resembling that!

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**"At troo, we don't hide any commission in the rates we provide, which is fundamentally different to the way many brokers operate in this unregulated market"**

## ***What is your company's mission?***

troo exists to change the way businesses buy energy. troo's ambition from day one was to make an impact in the sector, and bring much-needed honesty into the industry, I believe we have accomplished this.

Our view is that businesses need a reliable and transparent

partner to help them source the fair energy deals. We will do that with them. troo has the built-in expertise and capacity to support them and we have the supplier relationships to access great prices.

## ***What makes troo different?***

There is a great ethos at troo built on a mission around transforming the way businesses procure their energy. We are turning the regular energy market on its head; it is a bold vision.

At troo we believe energy should be viewed as a service not a commodity, it's a vital part of your organisational infrastructure and you only realise the true value if it fails. And that's why we have built troo assure in to our service, a dedicated team of industry professionals on hand to assist our customers.

We act as an outsourced energy partner, always ready to point you in the right direction or deal with problems as they arise.

troo assure gives you the peace of mind that when it comes to energy, somebody is always fighting your corner, allowing you to do what you do best, run your business.

## ***How does your offering benefit your clients long-term?***

Every business needs a reliable and transparent partner to support them in sourcing fair energy deals. troo has the built-in expertise and capacity to support them and we have the supplier relationships to access great prices.

At troo, we don't hide any commission in the rates we provide, which is fundamentally different to the way many brokers operate in this unregulated market. troo can save you money, time and hassle, and we openly share how much we make from helping you, a modest single, set-fee rate, depending on the amount of energy consumption and amount of meters.

That's it; it's a simple model, but totally transformational.

## ***What will your partnership with the Chamber offer members?***

We are thrilled to partner with the North East England Chamber of Commerce as their preferred energy supplier, and the exciting new alliance launched as an energy service to the membership in May this year.

Alongside the Chamber, we are providing members with an all encompassing energy service, with transparency at the core of how we work. Uniquely, we disclose the one-off set fee we receive from the supplier, should a member place their business through us.

Our long-term goal is to simplify energy for members, ensuring it's easy to make an informed decision. Transparency brings trust and we see troo as a dependable partner to the Chamber and its members.





# Sector can unite health, innovation and sustainability

Arlen Pettitt extols the many virtues of the North East electric vehicle industry and calls for the market it serves, and the important principles it represents, to be taken to the next level, as it has been so highly impressively in Norway



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**I**n 2017, the Government announced it would ban the sale of new petrol and diesel cars by 2040 as part of a grand strategic vision to reduce emissions entitled ‘The Road to Zero’.

Strategies such as these, while sounding bold and decisive in theory, often unravel when confronted with the practicalities of the real world.

In this case, the initial criticism was of a lack of ambition – twenty years is a long time; it could be six or seven cars if you’re someone who always trades up at the end of a personal contract purchase term.

The subsequent criticism was of the lack of support for the industry and consumers. In 2018, the financial incentives in the form of the plug-in car grant were cut completely for hybrids and reduced from £4,500 to £3,500 for fully electric vehicles.

As of May, plug-in and hybrid vehicles made up 6.6 per cent of new vehicle registrations, but there is still a long way to go, with alternative fuelled cars accounting for just two per cent of the more than 32 million cars in use in the UK.

The latest market share statistics released by the European Automobile Manufacturers Association (ACEA) put the UK broadly in line with France and Germany, but lagging behind a number of other European countries, including the Netherlands, Finland and Sweden.

The ACEA links this variation to GDP, with the extra cost associated with electric vehicles meaning nations which are wealthier on average tending to have higher proportions of electric vehicle sales.

However, nowhere in the world can match Norway, where electric vehicles are approaching 60% of total sales.

Norway does have a high GDP per capita, of course, but not high enough to explain the difference alone.

So, what has Norway done the UK could learn from?

Having made a clear policy decision in the early 1990s to support electric vehicles, they've then stuck to it, with generous financial and practical incentives designed to boost demand.

Norwegians buying an electric vehicle weren't required to pay VAT on it, saving 25 per cent on the purchase price; they were exempt from road tax and tolls; they could park for free in many major urban areas; they could use bus lanes.

Most of these incentives remain in place, despite the maturity of the Norwegian market.

There's infrastructure too, with 7,600 charging points for Norway's population of just over five million, and less than 100,000 miles of roads.

In the UK, by comparison, we have two-and-a-half times the charging points with more than 17,000, but 12 times the population and four times the road mileage.

The Office for Low Emission Vehicles (OLEV) is responsible for administering the UK government's support for electric vehicles – including on-street and at-home charging infrastructure and those vehicles eligible for the plug-in grant.

The OLEV has a war chest of £900m, but Norway's incentives are worth more than £500m a year and have been for 30 years.

In short, we're talking about a commitment on a different scale – both financially and symbolically.

In that context, it's no wonder that the

*"Clean air is high on the agenda for the region, with Newcastle, Gateshead and North Tyneside required by government to take action on hotspots of pollution across Tyneside's road network"*

and health and life sciences.

It's not too much of a stretch to argue that the electric vehicle sector cuts across all four, with the motivations for advances in health and energy in particular coupling with the motivations for the future of the electric vehicle sector.

Clean air is high on the agenda for the region, with Newcastle, Gateshead and North Tyneside required by government to take action on hotspots of pollution across Tyneside's road network.

To meet air quality targets, both locally to the North East and wider national goals, we'll need to change the way we travel – part of that will be increased use of public transport; part will be using flexible working to reduce travel overall; and part will be maturing the nation's electric vehicle market.

Fundamentally, the bones of all of this exist but the challenge is to take it mainstream.

In the North East in 2017, we averaged 1.05 cars per household, with 29 per cent of households having no car at all – compared to 1.21 cars per household across England as a whole, and 24 per cent carless households.

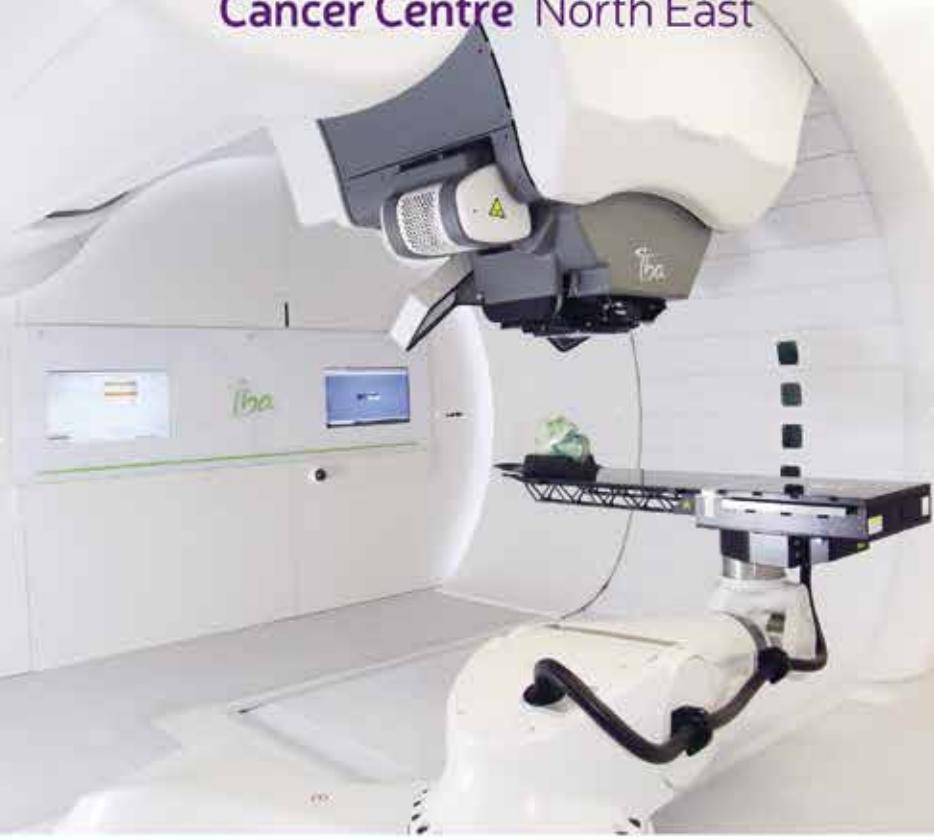
As a result, we naturally rely more heavily on public transport, but we also travel less – our average commute is shorter than anywhere else in the country, and we travel amongst the shortest distance for business and education.

Considering the geography of our region, that speaks more to a closing of horizons than it does to a developed 'post-travel' economy – people just live, work and study in closer proximity, potentially missing out on opportunities which are a bit more difficult to get to.

Future investment in the region's infrastructure needs to address this, and it needs to draw on all those prime capabilities of the region – we can be a healthy region, an innovative one, and a sustainable one if we take aim at the electric vehicle sector and make it a core part of the future of the region's economy.

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# Driving through tough challenges to achieve world leader status

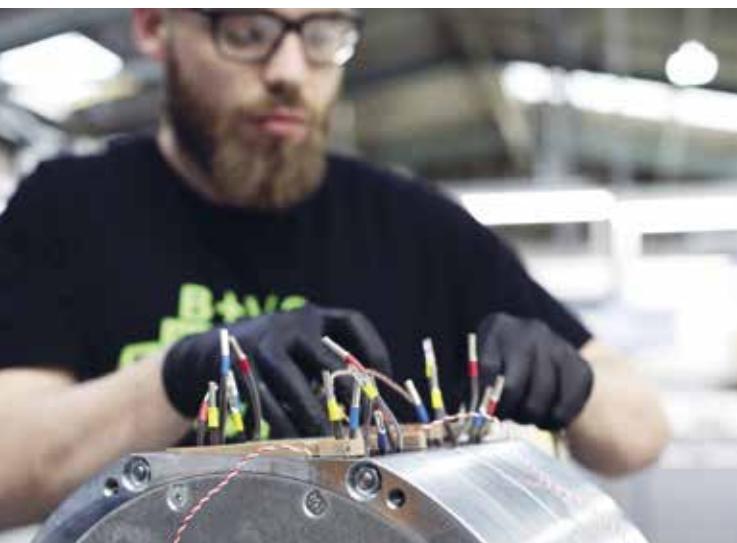
Mark Lane hears how Cramlington's Avid Technology has steered a course through a variety of difficult business hurdles to find its products and services in demand from some of the biggest names in the worldwide automotive industry

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**Positive PR comes in many weird and wonderful forms.** One would be hard-pressed, however, to find a more original example than that experienced by North East electrical component specialist, Avid Technology, just recently.

The company, which is based at Nelson Industrial Estate, Cramlington, was going about its daily business recently when staff there noticed a large advertising truck parked outside its premises. The van was clearly operating on behalf of an Oxford-based competitor and was advertising a recruitment fair it was



running at a local hotel. "That's a bit cheeky," Avid's managing director Ryan Maughan (pictured foreground, right) tells me with a smile.

Some company owners might have gotten on their high horse about such an approach, which could be construed as being underhand. Ryan was fairly relaxed about it though, instead taking it as a compliment with regards the talented team and genuinely world-class engineering skills Avid has assembled in the North East.

Here he makes an interesting point. "When you are involved in the investment world, you find there are a lot of people out there thinking all the clever stuff happens in Cambridge and Oxford and that the North East is just about bashing bits of metal," he says. "The fact that an Oxford business is looking to poach staff from our region is recognition of our business, and the region as a whole, in terms of the skills we have developed in engineering and related technology areas."

There's another point to be made here. A cursory glance on Right Move will tell you that if you want to purchase a house in, for example, Oxford, you'd better have been saving for a decade for a deposit or have had a nice leg up from the bank of mum and dad. "Actually, a lot of engineering graduates coming out of the region's universities are choosing to stay here as they realise that the quality of life is excellent," Ryan says. "They can also earn similar salaries, and afford to get on the property ladder."

Ryan is a passionate North Easterner, who was born and raised in Blyth. He had a lengthy career in engineering before setting up Avid, spending more than a decade in the motorsport industry before becoming disillusioned.

"I literally woke up one day and decided I wanted to do something meaningful," he explains. "Motorsport is exciting but you are in an industry which is doing so much damage to the planet. The industry is about marketing, not engineering, or making the world a better place."

Ryan, who had travelled the world in that industry, headed back to the North East. He took an engineering role in Consett but harboured plans of branching out alone.

He established Comesys Europe in 2004 to design and manufacture control and measurement systems for heavy-duty vehicles, such as electronic throttle controls, electronic control systems, and other mobile electronics.

The company also became involved in the design of more efficient engine thermal management systems.

In 2008, Avid Vehicles was established as a spin out of the company's R&D business into a stand-alone company. The focus was on the development of electric and hybrid vehicle powertrain systems and the continued development of electrified engine ancillaries and thermal management systems.

Avid Group was formed in 2009 by bringing together Avid Vehicles and ComeSys Europe. The Avid Innovation business,

which contained all activity relating to the electric vehicle battery development unit was sold to Hyperdrive in 2012. In May 2012 the drive by wire controls business was also sold to Continental Automotive.

It sounds quite a straightforward process of development, but it has actually been a bumpy and challenging ride for Ryan and his team. Indeed, the story of Avid's development to the present day is worthy of further investigation for it offers some valuable lessons about never giving up, sticking with what you believe in and continuing to knock on doors even if the market might not seem quite ready for your products.

The first setbacks came in the 2008 financial crash, which hit vehicle manufacturers – a key customer base – who pretty much stopped production overnight. This badly impacted the order book but Ryan managed to keep things afloat and decided to focus on electrification.

Coming out the other side of the recession, the business began to grow again but what became apparent was that financially, it would not be possible to scale all areas. Something would have to give and so parts of the business – as highlighted above – were sold, in effect to put funding into the core area.

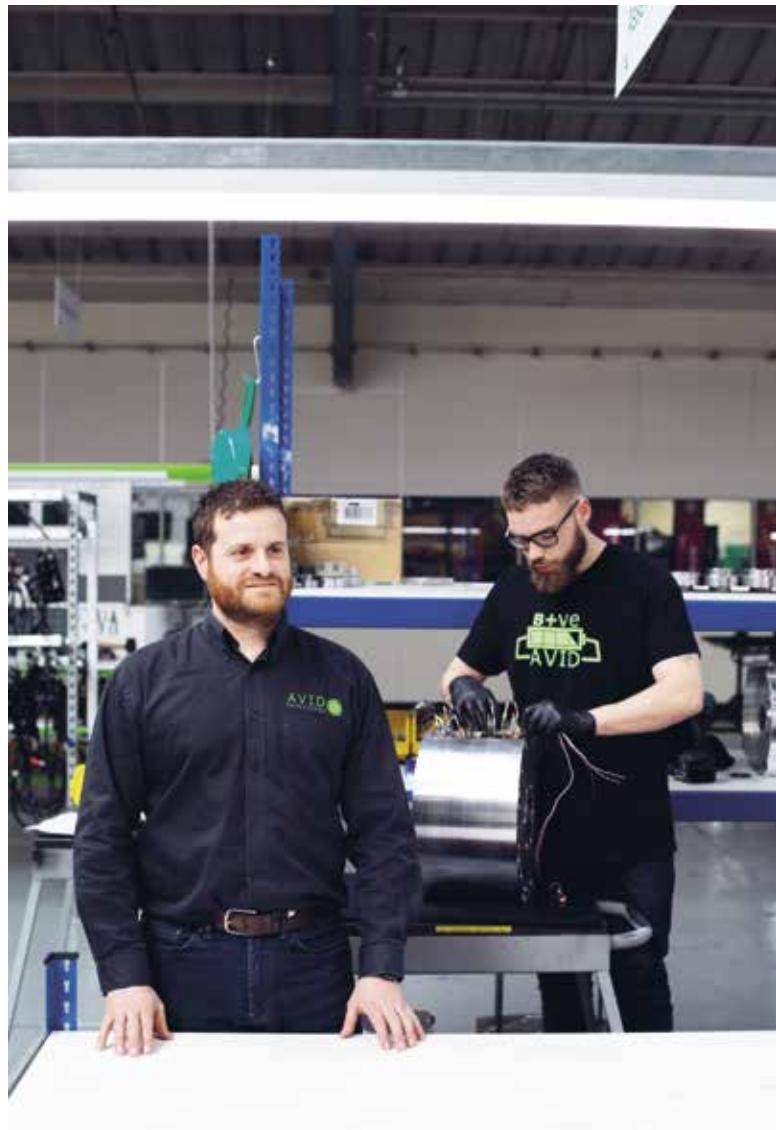
"My naïve and optimistic mind didn't think it was high risk as electrification seemed obvious to me and the way things were going," Ryan says. "But in hindsight, things took a lot longer to develop here than we anticipated. It was a big risk at the time but we still believe this was the right approach."

The faith has paid off. Initially, Ryan and his team spent much of their time educating the market, working with customers on electrification issues to help them understand the process of electrifying their products. The last couple of years, however, things have moved on a pace as it has gone from a case of working on early stage, low volume electrification programmes to greater volumes and major programmes. Ryan relates how, in recent times, several customers have announced new strategies which have electrification at their heart. Avid has been in this space for years and, as such, is now well placed to capitalise on this huge push towards electrification, from governments, consumers and businesses.

"The market is now very much that everybody is moving to electrify their vehicles," Ryan says. "There is the pull from consumers on one side and push from legislators on the other."

The latter has seen the introduction of tough new emissions testing laws in the wake of 'diesel-gate' and this is affecting all vehicles, including cars and trucks. In essence, it is hard – if not impossible – to meet these new requirements without having some electrification.

On top of that, we are seeing broader government targets about climate emissions and the goal-setting of cutting down CO2 emissions in the UK. These are, in turn, linked into the Paris Agreement which many countries are now working towards



(notwithstanding the world's largest economy, the US, whose President has inexplicably opted out of the Paris Agreement).

Cutting down on CO2 means moving towards electrification in vehicles, if not a move towards hybrid vehicles whether that be general cars or more specialist areas which Avid focuses on – these include off-road, construction sector vehicles, trucks, and high-performance cars.

**"The market is now very much that everybody is moving to electrify their vehicles. There is the pull from consumers on one side and push from legislators on the other"**



On the heavy-duty side, Avid now deals with all the major global truck manufacturers, both in the US and in Europe, including the likes of Mercedes. In terms of 'off-highway,' the company is again working with all the major players in Europe and the US. Indeed, as we spoke, the business had just recently signed a major deal with Caterpillar.

Finally, on the high-performance car side, Avid is working with some seriously

blue-chip names, including McLaren and Aston Martin. "I don't see us getting into mainstream passenger vehicles," Ryan says. "The reasons for that is we believe we can add value on vehicles where electrification is difficult to do and technically complex. We want to be electrifying vehicles nobody else can. The only area we are getting close to mainstream cars is with Jaguar Land Rover on their future vehicles, but even that is at the high-performance end of the market."

Ryan reels off big blue chips quite matter-of-factly, yet there is never any sense that he takes such business for granted. He has been at the heart of the company since the start and, as such, has experienced many setbacks and periods where large swathes of the sector were turning pretty much a deaf ear to electrification.

"We have been in a unique position in that last 14 years in that we have been out there advocating electrification," Ryan says. "We used to get laughed at. We would go to a meeting with a large vehicle manufacturer and they simply weren't interested, but we kept at it and have been persistent and consistent. That has helped us – we are not just a component supplier; we really help with customers, add a lot of value and so on.

"Large blue chips can be hard to deal with, they do move slowly, the corporate decision-making is vast and complex. But if you are persistent and have something they value well... the situation we are in now is that they come to us. We don't do any outbound selling, we have a great existing customer base and we get amazing inbound enquiries. On a frequent basis, we are getting enquiries through for multi-million-pound programmes."

While this sounds fantastic – and it is certainly better to have a business whose products are in demand than not – growth has never been straightforward. Nor has finance.



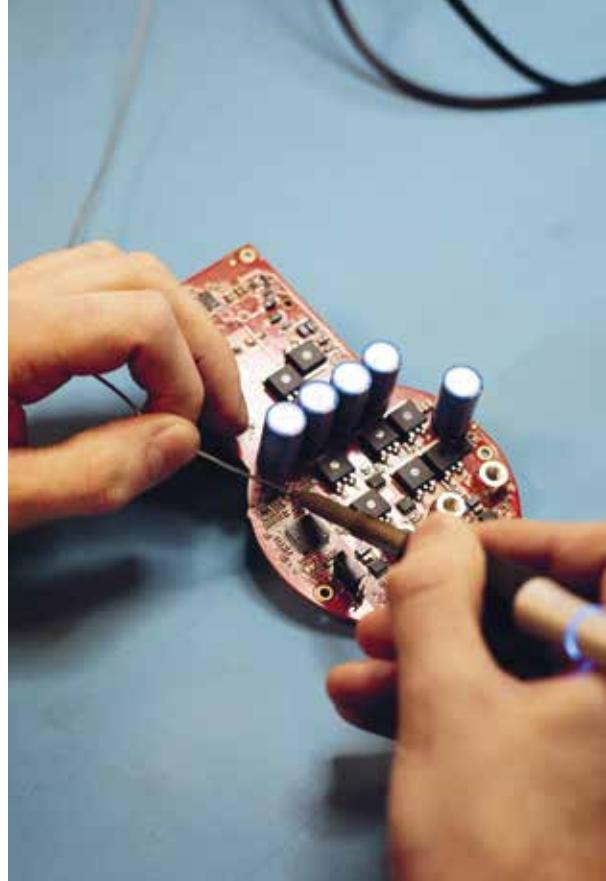
Ryan asserts that finance and funding have been a "consistent issue". He suggests the business has been able to raise funding but never quite in the quantities required to execute plans and scale in the way intended along the way. Selling off chunks of the business was a necessary evil in order to fund the electrification part of things.

Explaining, Ryan says: "Investors like businesses which generate cash, they don't like things where you are investing in high risk, or where you have to use cash in the short-term to build a bigger business in long-term. There is a problem with that in the UK, compared to the US."

There is indeed. In the US, early-stage tech businesses in all sorts of weird and wonderful areas seem to attract seed funding, perhaps as a result of a generally more entrepreneurial, risk-taking climate but also perhaps due to less onerous laws around bankruptcy in the States. Failure isn't a big deal in the US.

When Ryan sold off two parts of the business, he was left with just seven staff and admits that, at that time, it was "like starting from scratch".

It may have been daunting but things have come a long way



since then to the extent that the company, which now employs more than 100, has huge plans for investment over the next 12 months. "We plan to move into a new facility which will be triple the size of our footprint, with new space, better facilities for testing, prototyping and so on. We don't know where we will go next but we will be staying in the North East.

That last point is very important for Ryan. He speaks with great pride about the region and he is clearly absolutely thrilled to have been able to build a business which is a genuine force for good in the area in terms of job creation and which is also emphasising the strengths of the region in high-tech manufacturing.

He says: "One of the big things I wanted to do was create a substantial business in the region. Growing up through the 1980s, it was tough times around here. My family were involved in coal and went through hard times to the extent that my dad didn't want me to come back to the region, he didn't see any opportunities here.

"I did travel around but wanted to come back and do something substantial. I saw an opportunity in that we have great universities, great people but, also, the area is not over-developed in that we have plenty of industrial space, a great workforce and lots of good engineering graduates coming out of our universities. It is a great place to start and grow a business."

Ryan concludes: "I wanted to create a great business and I recognised that the only way to do that was by having a great team and being a really great place to work - challenging, stimulating and fast-paced. I am really keen that this is a company that gets people excited, gives them a reason for wanting to get out of bed in the morning."

# Newcastle University and Siemens collaborate to enhance region's digital skills

Working in collaboration with the region's universities has long been an integral part of the Siemens business helping inspire innovation, connectivity and enhance skills within the communities and industries they operate in

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**One partnership that continues** to do just that is the one shared with Newcastle University. Here we learn more about how projects like MindSphere and the recent launch of the 'Connected Curriculum' programme is helping support the needs of an ever increasingly digitalised society

Officially joining in 2018, the university has played a key part in Siemens' MindSphere Innovation Network (MINE), which aims to connect estates and academic assets from various universities across the UK.

Following the launch of Newcastle University's MindSphere Lab at their flagship Urban Sciences Building, the facility showcases the huge impact of digitalisation on industry providing users with access to Siemens' open cloud-based platform, MindSphere.

Effectively connecting industrial machines and devices via IoT protocols,

the software allows data from multiple sources to be captured and analysed simultaneously.

As the interface with the university's estate and cyber-physical research assets, the laboratory also makes data available to improve teaching and research collaborations between academics and industry partners, to uncover new business models, create commercial opportunities through digitalisation, and build evidence for change in how we manage our built environment.

The software also provides an opportunity for individuals to harness data from a number of projects across sectors including infrastructure, manufacturing, water and energy creating limitless potential in developing solutions that long term will not just have a positive impact regionally but globally too.



Following the success of MindSphere, Siemens is now partnering with the universities within the (MINE) network to support apprentices and academics with the launch of a new teaching programme called 'Connected Curriculum'.

The new 'Connected Curriculum', will see Newcastle University work closely with Siemens to bring advanced industrial tools, data and approaches into their respective apprenticeship, undergraduate and masters courses. And at the heart of the programme will be Siemens world-leading cloud-based IoT platform MindSphere.

The Connected Curriculum announcement was made by Brian Holliday, Managing Director of Siemens Digital Industries, at the 2019 MindSphere Innovation Network (MINE) Symposium in June.

Hosted at the University of Sheffield, the two-day event saw 15 academic institutions explore the potential for collaborating with Siemens, each other, and other companies, across Industry 4.0 projects and technologies including Industrial IoT.

Brian Holliday, Siemens Digital Industries managing director, said: "Collaboration is central to delivering successful, robust and secure industrial IoT projects. Universities can be key partners in this process, often having expertise industry doesn't such as data science, visualisation and insights into human behaviour including how people engage with technology."

"This is why Siemens developed the MindSphere Innovation Network in partnership with several universities two years ago, which in turn has informed the Connected Curriculum we have



announced this week. I am now looking forward to working with Newcastle, Sheffield, John Moores, Middlesex and Manchester Metropolitan universities to help explore the full potential of Industrial IoT with our MindSphere platform at the heart of the process."

Beyond digitalisation, Newcastle University and Siemens are collaborating on a number of different projects to shape policy, develop technology and grow the skills base of the region. All of which will help support the UK's transition towards Net Zero Carbon by 2050.

More recently, Newcastle University have become a principal partner in Siemens global Centre of Knowledge Interchange (CKI). This close relationship not only demonstrates Siemens' commitment to global R&D activities, but also highlights the role regional businesses in Newcastle and South Tyneside are playing in investigating Energy Systems of the future and Smart Grid technologies.

Siemens are also the main sponsor for the National Centre of Energy Systems Integration (CESI). The five-year project funded by the EPSRC

**"The new 'Connected Curriculum', will see Newcastle University work closely with Siemens to bring advanced industrial tools, data and approaches into their respective apprenticeship, undergraduate and masters courses"**

(Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council) supports the research and demonstration of the integrated energy system which optimises energy production and consumption across today's discrete energy vectors (Power, Gas and Heat) including transport infrastructure and energy storage technologies.

To discover more about the MINE or Connected Curriculum, please visit [www.siemens.co.uk/mine](http://www.siemens.co.uk/mine).

# Championing the electric route to reducing carbon footprint

With greater awareness on the need to use more sustainable modes of transport, Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust shares its success in using electric vehicles as part of its drive to be more environmentally-friendly. The organisation's travel plan co-ordinator, Satish Sethuraman, reports

**As geographically one of the largest trusts in England, travel and transport are key areas for Northumbria Healthcare.**

Every month thousands of journeys are made to carry supplies and people between our multiple hospital and community sites across Northumberland and North Tyneside to ensure the provision of high quality care to our patients.

Eager to reduce the environmental impact of these journeys our electric vehicle journey started in a small way back in 2012 as a part of our green travel plan.

We first applied for OLEV funding to introduce charging points at our sites in both Northumberland and North Tyneside and, having been successful, we installed five dual charging points trust-wide to cater for the then relatively small number of patients, visitors and staff using electric vehicles.

Having dipped our toe in the water, we were eager to do more and two years later we started to review our internal fleet of vans and its movements.

With a baseline position in 2014 of running an ageing fleet of diesel vans procured via a lease arrangement approaching its termination date, the idea of implementing the electric vans within the facilities department was put forward by the team led by hotel services officer, Michael Taylor, to our trust board.

The proposals were supported based on the projection that introducing electric vehicles would significantly cut our carbon footprint by approximately 100 tonnes.

There was one stumbling block, though, electric vehicles require charging points and while we had five, this would not be sufficient for our future needs. We set about getting them installed and looking at devices that could charge the vans faster.

A year later we had introduced 13 of Nissan's all-electric e-NV200 vans to our fleet and they were put to use delivering health supplies and mail and collecting samples between our hospital and community sites across our patch.

'Rapid' charging points specifically for the vans were also installed at convenient locations across our trust that are able to charge them from zero to 80% in less than half an hour.

The project was such a success that in 2015 we won the Sustainable Achievement Award by the Institute of Healthcare Engineering and Estate Management, an honour which recognises the organisation that made the best use of

innovative technology and sustainable practices to reduce its carbon footprint.

And we haven't stopped there. We have further invested in improving the electric vehicle charging point infrastructure for staff, patients and visitors on all our trust sites and now have 33.

The number of charging sessions continues to increase year on year and in 2018/19 we had almost 18,000 vehicle charging sessions, a seven per cent increase from 2017/18 with carbon savings of 88.69 tonnes.

I was proud, as travel plan co-ordinator, to be the driving force behind these initiatives and thrilled to be named as an electric vehicle champion at the national Green Fleet awards 2018, putting me among the top 100 most influential people that shaped the low carbon fleet industry in 2018.

Electric vehicles are the way of the future, not just as they help to reduce carbon emissions but also save us money meaning more can be invested in vital patient care.

Given the success of the scheme, and the increased number of charging points making it more accessible for staff to have an electric vehicle, we heavily promote elective/hybrid lease cars through our NHS Fleet Solutions.

We've also been working with North East-based Elmtronics to make accessing charging points easier for staff, patients and visitors through their Hubsta app and management system.

But green vehicles are just part of our sustainability drive to lower our environmental footprint.

We advocate sustainable commuting and encourage our staff to cycle to work with bike sheds and shower facilities on-site. This year we added to our cycle to work scheme which enables staff to purchase bikes through salary sacrifice to allow staff to have electric bikes, called Green Commute Initiative. Seven staff have signed up and we're hoping more will follow.

These are alongside continued investment in the installation of LED lighting and long-running programmes to increase recycling, whilst reducing general waste.

All in all, it's been an enjoyable and successful journey. Our advice to others would be to look at improvements which would have the most benefit to your organisation – for us travel and transport is very important – and don't be afraid to start small, that is what we did and look at where we are now.



# A very different stockbroker

Vinay Bedi, principal investment consultant at Vertem, reveals how a successful marketing campaign has brought the Jesmond-based stockbroker to the attention of North East investors

**Vertem**  
[www.vertem.co.uk](http://www.vertem.co.uk)  
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Vertem's commitment to providing high-quality, unique stockbroking services has proved highly successful since its formation in 2010, but, the company has remained relatively unknown among investors. Keen to remedy this, Vertem began developing a marketing strategy in late 2017.

To help, advertising agency Martin Tait Redheads was recruited and it was decided to start with a focus on branding before explaining the unique investment offering the company

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**"The result has been that more people from the North East are now contacting Vertem than ever before. And what's the question they ask most often? 'Why is Vertem different?' Precisely what the campaign set out to achieve"**

provides investors. The team at Vertem has significant experience in the industry and were fully aware that nobody looking to invest their money, whatever the size of funds, tends to respond to a single advertisement. Successful companies commit to campaigns. Therefore, a concerted marketing campaign was prepared for launch in January 2018.

The two main campaign objectives were to deliver Vertem's name in front of the target audience (essentially North East investors to start with), and to then introduce them to the fact that Vertem's offering is unique.

A tagline: 'Vertem - very different stockbrokers' was created, and a campaign of eye-catching adverts launched.

The result has been that more people from the North East



Vinay Bedi, principal investment consultant

are now contacting Vertem than ever before. And what's the question they ask most often? 'Why is Vertem different?' Precisely what the campaign set out to achieve.

For years it has been so difficult to differentiate between one investment house and another. By creating his own in-house research team based in Newcastle and focussing on a single office approach, John Dance, Vertem's founder, went back to investment basics. Produce the best quality research into investment opportunities, but, pick stocks, shares and funds based on a proprietary analytical technique i.e. it is 'unique'.

Vertem invests client's money into the best ideas, best concepts and best value as identified by its own analysts and research. It does not copy or follow others. Vertem does not curry favour with the large, flavour of the month , fund managers or houses. Vertem does not ignore great ideas because of size. Vertem listens to its clients and even listens to their ideas.

The Vertem marketing effort continues but more North East investors are now noticing Vertem - a stockbroker that prides itself on being different.



# To maximise your investments, think differently



## THINK SMART

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Find out more - call Vinay Bedi on 0191 341 0289 or email [verydifferent@vertem.co.uk](mailto:verydifferent@vertem.co.uk).



Past performance is not an indicator of future performance. The value of investments and any income from them may go down as well as up and investors may not get the amount originally invested.

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# Calling for an infrastructure to match the region's ambitions

Jonathan Walker, the Chamber's assistant director – policy, states a strong case for improving the region's rail connectivity and urges North East businesses to get on board with a new campaign aiming to make it happen



**Jonathan Walker**

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The North East. Birthplace of the railways and a region rightly proud of its rail heritage. But heritage doesn't get your goods to market or connect your business to new opportunities across the country.

The rail network still plays a vital role in supporting our region's businesses, yet its capacity to enable further growth is limited.

The East Coast Main Line (ECML) is a vital artery for North East England; carrying commuters, tourists, business travellers and freight. Unfortunately, this artery is narrow and increasingly clogged.

Between Northallerton, Newcastle and Berwick there is only one track running north and one running south. Crammed onto these lines are inter-city trains, local services and slow-moving freight.

If you've ever looked out of your train window and wondered why it has slowed to a crawl, chances are you're stuck in the middle of this congestion.

Of course, you may be fortunate enough to rarely experience this. On the whole, we do enjoy good connectivity north and south (east-west is a different story, which I'll come to later). But such is the fragility of the network that it only takes a minor issue to have major repercussions.

Capacity issues on the line are already constraining growth. With a predicted increase in demand for long-distance rail services in the years to come, this fragility is likely to be exposed even further.

Significant upgrades to the line are needed to ensure it can both continue to serve the needs of our businesses and act as a catalyst for



investment and regeneration.

That is why the Chamber is launching a major campaign to secure that investment and ensure that Government and Network Rail place ECML at the top of their list of priorities.

The Fast Track East Coast campaign will highlight how valuable rail connectivity is to our businesses and our region; showcasing the firms that rely on ageing infrastructure to meet clients, travel between sites and move their products, as well as raising awareness of what needs to be done to preserve and improve the connections in and out of the North East.

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This isn't about who runs the trains, but about ensuring that the quality of the infrastructure matches the ambitions of our region.

You might wonder why this matters to you. It matters because our businesses need better connectivity to other parts of the UK. While the service to London is good, few would argue that journey times and frequency to places such as Manchester and Birmingham are where they ought to be.

Both HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) are essential to remedy this situation and we continue to be ardent supporters of both.

But ultimately both of these schemes will join the East Coast Main Line near York; continuing their journey to the North East on existing rail lines.

Quite simply, we won't see much benefit from HS2 or NPR without investment closer to home. Improving ECML is a quick win for both of these projects and will enable the North East to maximise the benefits they will bring.

This campaign also matters because investment in our key infrastructure is a

*"While the service to London is good, few would argue that journey times and frequency to places such as Manchester and Birmingham are where they ought to be"*

major driver of regeneration and helps to place us on the radar for those who may want to set up their business in the North East or move here to work or study.

We can already see how HS2 is acting as a catalyst for wider investment in Birmingham and other areas on the route. We can't afford to be left behind.

Major regeneration schemes have been announced for Darlington and Middlesbrough stations. The former to realign the station, partly in preparation for HS2 services, the latter to increase capacity for direct services to London on ECML. More capacity on the network will also open up the opportunity for more frequent local connections.

Plans for further investment in Newcastle Central Station have also been made public; modernising the facilities and unlocking access from the key Stephenson Quarter regeneration site.

If we are to capitalise on the huge potential of these projects, we must ensure the basic infrastructure serving them is fit for the next century.

Finally, the investment in ECML also matters to those who rely on some of the smaller stations in our region. Capacity issues on the line will continue to place pressure on the viability of services to places such as Morpeth and Alnmouth

unless money is spent to allow the right combination of express and stopping services to run side by side.

We must be realistic. This campaign won't achieve any overnight successes. The timescales involved in rail investment mean we're pushing for ECML to be at the top of the list from 2024 onwards.

But the decisions to make that happen will be taken soon. Unless we make some noise on this issue, there is a real danger that we'll miss out for another decade. We cannot allow that to happen.

We'll be working with partners, stakeholders and politicians across the region to make the case for this investment, but the most powerful arguments will come from the businesses to whom it matters the most.

We need you to tell us how and why rail connectivity is important to your business and your plans for the future; we want your stories about the benefits infrastructure spending brings to your local area; and we want you to help us share our message far and wide so that nobody in Whitehall and Westminster can claim they didn't know what we wanted.

As we have seen so often in the past, the North East business community is incredibly powerful when it speaks with one voice. When we're united behind a cause, people listen.

We'll need contributions from businesses of all shapes and sizes from right across the region. We'll be pushing our messages online, through print and social media. If you want to get involved, check out [fasttrackeastcoast.co.uk](http://fasttrackeastcoast.co.uk) or @FastTrackEC

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# A passion for a great regional transport system

Mark Lane gets the inside track on the major transport issues facing the North East, including the upgrading of the Tyne and Wear Metro and potential improvements to the East Coast Main Line, in conversation with Nexus managing director, Tobyn Hughes

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**From a transport perspective, we are blessed in the North East,** although we might not always appreciate it. A good friend from Leeds regularly bemoans the local transport system which he is forced to endure – that's probably the right word for it – for his morning commute to work. He is dependent on the bus, where heavy traffic and other road issues often mean even short journeys can be unpredictable and frustratingly time-consuming in nature. He also uses the local rail network, the consistency of which is patchy at best. All this, just for getting in and around the city.

Meanwhile, 90 miles or so north, we have the Tyne and Wear Metro. We might take the Metro for granted but we shouldn't. Try getting from a suburb of many UK cities outside our region to the relevant city centre and then compare your experiences to using the Metro. You'll soon see the difference.



Yet as superb a service as it provides, the Tyne and Wear Metro is also old. It has actually been around since 1980, which does make one wonder why other cities haven't developed the convenience and ease of such a system during that time; there are only four underground systems in the whole of the UK. A story for another day, perhaps.

For now, back to the Tyne and Wear Metro. The rolling stock it uses is, remarkably, the same now as it was back when it was introduced.

"The Metro turns 40 next year," Tobyn Hughes, managing director of Metro operator, Nexus, tells me. He has a second role as managing director of Transport North East, which includes transport planning and strategy for the area, and as such, is very well placed to talk through some of the issues, trends and challenges facing our region from a transport perspective at the present time.

He is clearly passionate on the subject of the Metro and suggests that, compared to broadly similar systems worldwide, Tyne and Wear is classed as a "mature".

"We are not the oldest but the investment put into our area in the 1970s to create the Metro is now needing topping up and it needs an injection of cash and engineering investment to make sure it is fit for future generations," he says.





"Our area is incredibly fortunate to have it, there are very few areas outside London that have something that delivers the frequency, capacity and fast movement in and outside city centres to and from not just leafy estates but some of more challenging – economically and socially – parts of the region as well. This area is totally reliant on the system and it is starting to get a little long in the tooth."

"The necessary investment is not just about new trains. We are in middle of a programme to upgrade the rail infrastructure as well, including track, overhead lines, and the technology that drives the system. We have invested £300m into our system in the last decade but that is part of an ongoing period of investment. The new trains we are planning are an additional £362m."

"The current trains are 40 years old, yet they were only designed to be used for 35 years so they are past their shelf life. Unfortunately, as fantastic as the system is, it does mean trains are breaking down quite frequently despite the heroic efforts of our maintenance staff. A train built in the late 70s is bound to be made of components which in some cases no longer exist or which are mechanical in nature."

The upshot of this is that repair teams on the Metro often have to improvise to fix parts. This might be an okay short-term fix, but long-term, modernisation is the only way forward.

The benefits of new rolling stock are obvious. A more modern fleet means the mod-cons consumers have come to expect on transport, such as wi-fi, modern seating layouts and just generally a more modern vibe. New trains will also deliver much greater reliability and energy efficiency.

That new fleet is on the way. Nexus is in the midst of a tendering process, whereby potential suppliers are pitching the latest technology and design for the new trains. "It is very exciting to see what the bidders have been coming up with," enthuses Tobyn.

A preferred bidder will be named in early 2020, and contracts signed soon after. New trains will be delivered in 2022-23. "We are confident replacing old trains won't significantly disrupt movement but it is a very complicated business," Tobyn says. This includes the building of a new depot on the site of the current - 100 year old - depot in South Gosforth.

When discussing transport in the region, it is hard to know quite where to begin, and it quickly becomes clear to me that Tobyn has a comprehensive grasp on all the issues involved at the present time.

One of these issues, which seems to come up time and again, is the upgrading of the East Coast Main Line. First things first, then: why is this such a big deal? This was the obvious question

which sprung to mind for somebody who rarely travels along the line and therefore hasn't seen the chaos which I'm told regularly ensues for commuters on the stretch between York and Tyne and Wear.

Tobyn reminds me that the line is



"massively important" to the whole country, given that it connects London with Edinburgh, the Midlands, Yorkshire and the North East. "It is our main link to the rest of the UK," he says. "The last major upgrade to the line was around 1990 when it was electrified. It is clear that there is insufficient capacity in place for the number of services which will need to use it moving forwards so something will have to give, which could mean the North East's rail services being reduced."



The problem is that there are only two tracks for large parts of the journey between Newcastle and Northallerton, which leads to bottlenecks rather like traffic jams on a trunk road, with high speed trains being stuck behind slower trains including freight. "This often means trains are often bunched up," Tobyn explains.

Tobyn points out another absurd situation. Trans-Pennine Express is introducing new high-tech Hitachi trains onto the line soon, and yet it is uncertain whether the power supply

north of Newcastle is sufficient to move them. Consequently, they may well be running on good-old fashioned diesel (which, if memory serves me correct, the government is attempting to eliminate from the country's road networks).

It's all a bit of a mess and it's also hugely political. Adding to this picture is, of course, HS2. Large swathes of the public seem to have it in for HS2 and yet, Tobyn believes it is vital for the region in terms of connectivity. "We back the need to have HS2 to have trains flowing to the region using the HS2 line and the East Coast Main Line. Ultimately, however, unless we get that investment in the East Coast, the North East will remain a very remote part of the UK rail network.

"The North East England Chamber is leading a campaign to get this on the government agenda but the region needs to pull together on this one. We need government to sit up and listen and we need investment in this line now. If we don't see upgrades then when HS2 lines start around 2030 the trains will come to a juddering halt around Northallerton.

"Our message to government is that for a relatively small investment to upgrade our line you will get the benefits of HS2, Northern Powerhouse Rail and

lots of capacity released for the UK network as a whole and bring the North East much closer to the rest of the UK."

As mentioned, transport is a strangely political animal – one where lobbying and having the right contacts in Whitehall can be equally important to actually having a strong business case. On that front, Tobyn believes this region is blessed to have the North East England Chamber.

He says: "The Chamber is very influential in Whitehall and is brilliant at making the case for the region. Chief executive James Ramsbotham is very well known nationally and uses every opportunity to talk up the region."

But what about transport lobbying in particular? How has the Chamber served a purpose here?

Tobyn outlines two clear examples, the first being making the case for upgrading of the Metro. He says: "As a public body we rely on government investment to keep trains moving. A new fleet of trains is a once on a lifetime purchase which relies on a lot of public capital investment. It is also a decision a government can or cannot make – it depends on what they see as priorities for investment.

"We as Nexus did our bit, providing all the numbers and the rational argument. But in terms of helping government understand just how important it was to the region we relied on our stakeholders to help us advocate and demonstrate to ministers and civil servants how important it was. The North East England Chamber played a really important role in that."

He adds: "When the government looked at the North East they could see advocacy, not just by local authorities but advocacy by local business bodies and the Chamber leading the charge on that. I firmly believe that was one of reasons government signed off the investment in the timely fashion it did.

"The second area the Chamber has





helped is in advocating the upgrading of the East Coast Main Line. As I have said, this is a hugely important transport asset for our region, we rely on it for connections to the rest of the UK. It is only when we work hand in glove with the Chamber that we connect up with businesses, large and small, all speaking the same language and making the same points and that is what

***"The Chamber is very influential in Whitehall and is brilliant at making the case for the region. Chief executive James Ramsbotham is very well known nationally and uses every opportunity to talk up the region"***

eventually leads to outside groups, particularly the government, understanding that the region really needs this investment."

Tobyn (pictured right) is hugely passionate about transport and the need for better transport links between the North East and the rest of the UK. His message is quite clear – there are significant economic benefits to being better connected and, conversely, poor connections mean the region risks being left behind.

"Good transport links are critical for us as we are one of the more geographically remote parts of UK so it is important for businesses to demonstrate to the rest of UK they are part of an easy to reach network, whether by motorway or rail," he says. "We have benefited for a long time from flowing rail links from London to Edinburgh, but that time is now passing, the rails are starting to get very congested and investment hasn't come as it should have. That needs to change – we want to be at the heart of a high-quality transport network."

Internal transport links are also crucial, he suggests. He points out that the region has a greater proportion of people travelling by public transport than anywhere outside London. "To keep transport moving, to keep buses moving, to keep the Metro moving is vital for employers to connect to the workforce, and lots of people would say we need more not less transport," he

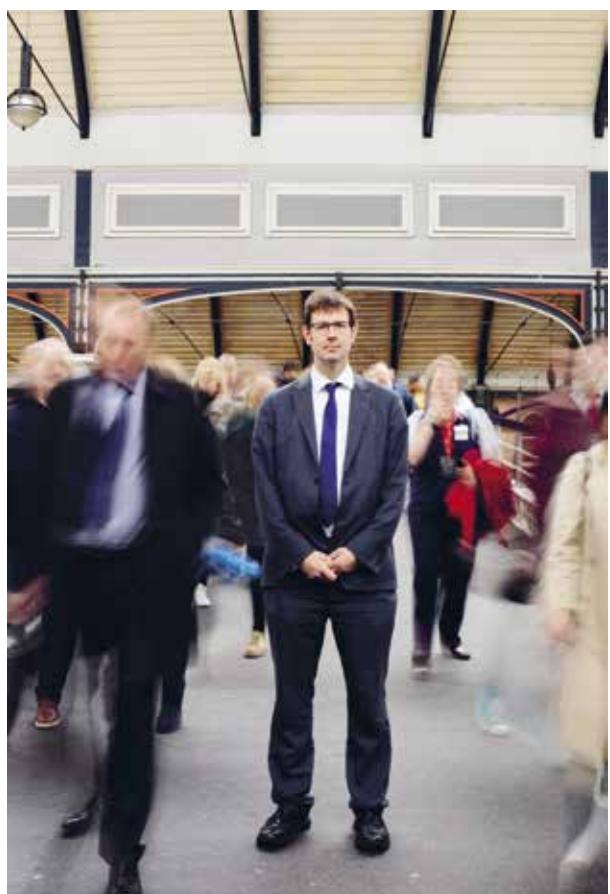
says.

In this context, we often hear the subject of devolution being mentioned. Do more of these decisions on transport need to be made locally? Tobyn is in no doubt. He says: "Nobody knows better than people in this area what we need. Bringing decision-making closer means we will get a system which is better designed for our needs.

"For instance, bringing decisions on the local rail network into the region, we would be able to transform things. As an example, there are routes which could be massively improved and, likewise, there are routes which could have transport services introduced for the first time in decades, such as between Ashington in Northumberland to Newcastle."

Action in this area might not be too far away. The Northern Rail franchise is in place to 2025 but a major review of the rail system is currently underway, and Nexus is among many stakeholders feeding into that, advocating for the regions to have more influence.

If the North East is ever to get close to fulfilling its potential, such change cannot come soon enough.





## **Executive Head Chef, Michael Penaluna and Head Gardener, Mark Birtle bring 'Plot to Plate' dining to Wynyard Hall**

Executive Head Chef, Michael Penaluna and Head Gardener, Mark Birtle, are combining their extensive experience to take guests on a culinary journey in The Wellington Restaurant at Wynyard Hall.

The Edible Garden, which opened to the public in 2016, is now well-established and generates a substantial harvest year on year, enabling Michael, Mark and their teams, to get creative both in the vegetable plots and in the kitchen.

"We've got a few years experience behind us now and the teams are working together better than ever to produce the best possible offering for our guests" says Head Gardener, Mark.

Executive Head Chef Michael, who has been part of the team at Wynyard Hall for almost 1-year, is keen to showcase the finest British cuisine. "A Taste of Wynyard" is the perfect outlet for us to get creative and showcase the fine ingredients grown right here on the Wynyard Estate, along with other local suppliers".

**You can enjoy "A Taste of Wynyard" from £50 per person, or combine the culinary experience with wine pairings and an overnight stay from £275 per couple. Call 01740 644811 (0) to book.**

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WYNYARD HALL

# Mobility as a Service: Sustaining the momentum

David Powell, head of ITS at Cubic Transportation Systems, says that open access to data and proactive data sharing between public and private transport service providers must become a priority

**In many ways, using public transport has never been easier.** Long gone are the days of standing in front of the information board to check departure times, queuing to purchase a ticket at a ticket booth or waiting at a bus stop for a bus that isn't coming.

In the era of smartphones, we're a tap away from fulfilling almost any travel need we can imagine. Most of these conveniences are driven by a trend called Mobility as a Service, or MaaS—a combination of public and private transport services within a given regional environment that provides holistic, optimal and people-centric travel options and which aims to achieve key public equity objectives.

The increasingly rapid development of MaaS in cities around the UK wouldn't have been possible without a solid technological base to enable it. While the industry has welcomed the technological transformation, public transport providers must play their part in keeping the moment going.

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**"Payment innovation is another key technology that's critical for the adoption and further development of MaaS services. Already, 60 per cent of all pay as you go journeys in the UK are made through contactless"**

Mobile should be one key area of focus, as a technology that arguably led to the emergence of MaaS solutions. According to ABI Research, by 2023, nearly eight billion public transport tickets will be delivered to mobile devices—more than double of what we see today. As more passengers turn to their smartphones to manage all travel needs, from research to journey-planning, booking and payment, mobile technology will become a force to reckon with. For public transport providers, that's an opportunity they can't afford to overlook.

By developing native mobile services, centred around one application and focused on the user's journey and individual preferences rather than a particular transport mode, public

transport providers can help create a single place to manage all travel needs across several transport modes, offering passengers convenience and peace of mind.

While many such services already exist, we're witnessing an emergence of new-era mobility apps, such as Cubic Mobile App, which provide truly multi-modal, transport provider agnostic journey-planning services and which unbiasedly expose all choices including public and private services that are potentially in competition with one another.

Payment innovation is another key technology that's critical for the adoption and further development of MaaS services. Already, 60 per cent of all pay as you go journeys in the UK are made through contactless.

The ease of use, convenience and speed offered by contactless payments fits right into the MaaS narrative, while the integration of a financial engine that links payments and accounts and enables consumers to seamlessly book and pay for any mode of transportation they choose through a single portal, regardless of the mobility provider, completes the MaaS experience.

As MaaS adoption in cities grows, a proliferation of different modes, vehicle types and service options will require a new level of monitoring and management to ensure the optimal flow of traffic through city streets. Cities will need access to a centralised platform that provides a holistic view of all travel in the region so that traffic can be managed, controlled and forecasted effectively to help manage congestion, balancing the load across all modes of transport.

Cubic's Transport Management Platform developed in Stockton-on-Tees is an example of one such technology, which allows transport authorities to manage the entire transport network, be able to predict and respond to the transport events, such as accidents or road closures in real-time, optimise traffic flow in real time, and identify congestion hot spots.

As the industry moves towards managing transport as a service rather than transport as a sector, public transport providers will need to embrace a host of new technologies to help the MaaS revolution flourish. With that comes the need for new legislation.

Open access to data and proactive data sharing between public and private transport service providers must become a priority if we are to see truly multimodal mobility services in our cities and regions and keep the MaaS momentum going.



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Cubic Transportation Systems

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# Business Confidential: Sabby Gill

Sabby Gill is managing director, UK and Ireland for Sage and has more than 30 years' experience in the technology sector, across sales, operations and customer services. He has spent his career supporting businesses of all sizes with technology that unlocks their potential – both at home and across international markets

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

There's a whole host of inspiring figures who've left their mark on the world that I would love to understand better in terms of what makes them tick. I'm particularly fascinated though by those who have changed the way people think and act and have done so through conviction and an unwavering belief in what they are doing is right. Perhaps top of the list would be Jesus Christ and Mahatma Gandhi. The other two people I would bring back would be my mum and dad. They were both highly opinionated on all matters, which in my opinion makes for great company.

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

One that largely came about by 'being in the right place, at the right time'. I was working at PeopleSoft, a software provider, when I was offered the opportunity to take on a two-year secondment role at their San Francisco

office, just before it was acquired by Oracle. It gave me great insight into corporate culture and a chance to experience the buzz and drive that surrounds Silicon Valley.

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

Yes, I use social media on a regular basis. It is now a fundamental part of how the world communicates, both from a business perspective and a personal one. It's a great way of keeping informed and there is plenty of good to be said for 'citizen journalism'. That said, there are aspects that I don't like, like the regular bombardment of fake news and misinformation from some quarters. I would like to see some more ownership from the networks to sort this out.

**What does your typical day at work involve?**

It can be extremely varied. Typically, though it will be a mix of coaching and mentoring, along with lots of meetings, both internally and externally, focused on our strategies designed to drive the business forward.

**Name your fantasy board of directors (up to four people), and why you have chosen them.**

Steve Jobs: there is no person that can match him for innovation and vision when it comes to the technology sector. Warren Buffet: he has so much experience across such a diverse portfolio of investments, and the results and success stories to prove he knows what he's doing.

Angela Merkel: I have always seen her as a rock-solid leader and fantastic at corralling people together. She also holds a very high social and humanitarian agenda.

Donald Trump: love him or hate him, he does think outside of the box and not many people have achieved what he has, even if that has been quite ruthless at times.

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

I've always liked the idea of being a skipper on a yacht. A few years ago, I took some sailing lessons, loved it, but work then got in the way of any vague dreams I had back then.

**What are your favourite places in the North East?**

Bamburgh Beach; Jesmond Dene House in Newcastle, a wonderful hotel in one of the most stunning areas of the city; and for a meal out, Dabbawal Jesmond, one of my favourite Indian restaurants anywhere in the world.

**Which are your favourite online sources of news?**

The BBC and Wall Street Journal news apps.

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

My son. We are incredibly close but despite trying to explain what it is I do on a day-to-day basis, I'm not sure it has sunk in. Getting him to play me would be a great way to address that, to step into my shoes and experience first-hand what an MD does for a large tech organisation. He's a few years off, but I think he'd be very good at it!

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

Always 'DWYSYWD' (Do What You Say You Will Do).





# A ‘Logical’ approach to architectural contracting

Logic Architecture managing director Mark Barlow tells Mark Lane how his Middlesbrough-based practice is using a pragmatic business strategy to attract clients and is building its reputation both inside and outside the region

## **When I ask Mark Barlow, co-founder and managing director**

Middlesbrough-based architects practice Logic Architecture, whether siting his business in the Tees Valley has any disadvantages for a company of this nature, his answer gave me a warm glow.

Mark, who originally hails from Essex, says: “Having consciously decided 20 years ago to stay in the North East after studying at Newcastle University I now consider myself an adopted Teessider and believe it is an advantage to base our HQ in this region where we thrive on being surrounded by honest, hard-working yet modest people and businesses.”

Logic Architecture provides a wide range of construction-related design and management services, and is distinctive in a number of ways, not least of which is its acute commercial focus. But its humble beginnings are worth recounting.

Mark, who is also a qualified architect and director of Logic, moved from the South East to this region in 1992 to study naval architecture and marine engineering at Newcastle University. He recalls: “It was at a time when the Tyne shipyards were closing which made me nervous about my future employment prospects combined with a realisation that the course wasn’t creative enough for me so I changed to the seven-year architecture degree.”

Graduating in 1999, he opted not to join the exodus of architectural graduates down to London from the region and decided instead to locate in the Tees Valley where he worked at various local practices, working his way up the career ladder while becoming the youngest ever chairman of the Teesside branch of the Royal Institute of British Architects.

In that time, he began to see opportunities to develop a practice and had very clear ideas about how he wanted to go about it. He explains: “Post-2008 recession it was apparent particularly in the North East that commercial viability remained the biggest hurdle for both the private and public sector. We could see an opportunity existed to create a new type of architects practice that would focus on creating design solutions that would unashamedly follow a logical process to design from the ‘inside out.’ This would ensure a building was fit for purpose and make sure each proposal was commercially viable and would achieve a quantifiable ROI.

“Having delivered numerous projects in the North East, typically to a strict budget, I was confident that my pragmatic

design skills combined with my vast network would be a great basis from which to build a new practice that would set out to do things differently.”

Currently Mark’s Middlesbrough office employs seven people but this has just been boosted by the employment of an Interior Design graduate from Teesside University and the strategic recruitment of an accredited senior conservation architect.

Continues Mark: “Currently 70 per cent of our work is in the North East with further expanding national commitments including a recently completed project for Queen Mary University London, a revamp of the contact centre for Sheffield Council, various commercial projects in Leeds and even a restaurant for a celebrity chef in Devon.”

Other projects the practice has worked on include the £22m Tees Advanced Manufacturing Park which is currently on site and due to complete by mid-2020. In addition, the company recently

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**“The course wasn’t creative enough for me so I changed to the seven-year architecture degree”**

won a tender to prepare a masterplan for a 60,000 sqft expansion of the Boho Zone in Middlesbrough, where Logic itself is located, in addition to various large-scale residential regeneration projects for a variety of North East housing associations including Thirteen & Beyond Housing.

In the education sector Logic is currently assisting Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council with the reconfiguration and expansion of a primary school and is also designing a new sustainable Special Educational Needs-focused outdoor education facility.

In all cases, there are recurring themes of maximising return on investment and extracting value. Mark says: “We are confident our unique ‘Logical’ design rationale can be applied to any building type or development opportunity to extract optimum value and ROI.

“In fact, we estimate we could probably help add value to 50 per cent of UK businesses or homeowners by helping them achieve better efficiency in the use of their property and assets which in turn can help them make money and save money.”

# Hitting the heights of international trade

Crane manufacturer Liebherr Sunderland Works sends more than 90 per cent of its output abroad. Mark Lane meets joint managing director Ralph Saelzer, and gets the inside story on one of the region's most notable exporting success stories

## Liebherr Sunderland Works

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**It's fair to say that the clients of Liebherr Sunderland Works, the manufacturer of cranes for the maritime sector, can be a demanding bunch. Yet this North East manufacturing success story wouldn't have it any other way.**

When I ask the company's joint managing director, Ralph Saelzer, about his company's exporting triumphs, rather than focus on huge contract wins, he instead picks out an intricate order which the company delivered on time and within budget for the Russian market.

"A recent order of ship cranes for the Russian arctic environment was special," he explains. "The cranes are designed to operate in extreme cold temperatures of -50° C which means that not only material and components were specified accordingly but manufacturing processes like welding and painting needed to be in place as well."

That's the export game for you: if the client requests it, you supply it, or risk missing out on future business. There seems to be no danger of that at Liebherr, which this year alone has



sent its cranes to Vietnam, Austria, New Caledonia, France, Russia, Algeria, Indonesia, Thailand, Australia and Belgium. Other countries are in the pipeline and that list will grow considerably as the year rolls on.

**"As per today we don't feel an impact of Brexit but because of the ongoing uncertainty we felt the need to prepare our business for the worst-case scenario, i.e. a no-deal Brexit"**

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Liebherr Sunderland Works has been based in the city it carries in its name since 1988, and is an independent business belonging to the maritime division within the family-owned Liebherr Group of companies, with its divisional headquarters based in Austria.

Its main products were initially offshore and ship cranes, but these days it supplies mainly cranes for the port environment, including Harbour Mobile Cranes and Reachstackers. The Reachstacker LRS 545 is its core product, being manufactured exclusively at its plant in Sunderland for worldwide export.

The business employs 200 highly skilled staff and is proud of its outstanding apprenticeship programme, which boasts an impressive 28 apprentices covering all relevant trades. "When clients are visiting our site they are amazed by the industrial heritage and the competence and friendliness of our staff," Ralph says.

Ralph is one of two managing directors at the business, and in particular he is responsible for production. "The customer is king and we have to fulfil their demands – cranes need to be ready for dispatch on time however challenging the circumstances might be and to be of the highest quality standards," he replies when asked about his personal philosophy in the role. "And, of course, constantly monitoring and improving productivity and efficiency within a safe working environment."

He adds: "I regularly travel within Europe, either visiting suppliers and subcontractors or keeping contact with our sister plants within the division."

While Liebherr occasionally makes cranes for the domestic market, most products which leave Sunderland are destined for overseas clients – certainly above 90 per cent.

Ralph explains: "We literally export worldwide. In the past with offshore and ship cranes it was mainly to China and South Korea but nowadays our port handling cranes get exported to destinations all over the globe. In general, you name a major country and over the years we most likely have delivered a crane to it."

Looking at the countries mentioned earlier in this article, it is clear that Liebherr Sunderland Works is not reliant on Europe from an exporting point of view. That said, the business does have contingency planning in place for the Brexit issue, primarily because it sources extensively from the EU.

Ralph elaborates: "As per today we don't feel an impact of Brexit but because of the ongoing uncertainty we felt the need to prepare our business for the worst-case scenario, i.e. a no-deal Brexit. More than 80 per cent of our components and material are sourced from EU countries."

He continues: "We decided not to increase stock levels but in order to hopefully guarantee a smooth operation in case of possible hold ups at the border we have extended lead times for crucial components.

"We furthermore have applied for the AEO status and very recently went through the successful initial HMRC audit, all with support from the North East England Chamber of Commerce."



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# Nurturing local talent tops county's business agenda

The meetings of North East England Chamber of Commerce County Durham Committee are "buzzing" according to chair Mike Wade of Hodgson Sayers, and with good reason, as Mark Lane discovers

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**It was always going to be a tough ask to follow in the footsteps** of the hugely-popular Brian Manning, former chief executive of the Esh Group and chair of the County Durham committee of the North East England Chamber of Commerce.

When Brian passed away in 2017, Mike Wade, finance manager at roofing and building specialists, Hodgson Sayers, was asked to temporarily fill his shoes having become vice chair to him in 2015.

"Brian was a great example of those important values that the Chamber represents and was never shy to share his experiences and knowledge," says Mike. "Brian was taken from us too soon in 2017 and I stood in until elected formally at the AGM in 2018.

Brian is a hard act to follow and I feel his shadow every time I chair a meeting, which I view as a positive influence reminding me of the responsibility I hold."

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**"There is always a briefing from the Chamber to highlight the work and direction it is undertaking and an exchange of views and opinions on those"**

Mike clearly takes huge pride in his role with the Chamber and is acutely aware of the great influence he and his colleagues can potentially exert in terms of being a force for good in our region. His employer, Hodgson Sayers, joined the Chamber in 2013 and Mike has had no hesitation in becoming extremely active with the Chamber since that time.

"I am a great believer that you should combine involvement with participation and never fail to express my opinion about many of the matters discussed and the wider role of business leaders in the community, acting for the common good," he says.

A natural networker and connector, Mike thrives on the responsibilities offered by his role at the Chamber, including regular committee meetings. He feels they offer a huge opportunity to get like-minded people around one table to get things done. "I really enjoy the low hum of conversation that takes

place at the beginning and end of every meeting, it is almost a shame to call the meeting to order and interrupt that buzz," Mike explains.

"[At meetings], we have presentations from local, regional and national interests which are almost universally well received, with a Q&A session afterwards to really understand the nature of the subject matter. State of trade discussions, detailing those successes and difficulties facing members are always informative and provide a great deal of colour to inform the attending representatives of the Chamber executive of the burning issues which they can assist with.

"There is always a briefing from the Chamber to highlight the work and direction it is undertaking and an exchange of views and opinions on those."

Mike is refreshingly candid on the challenges and opportunities facing County Durham and doesn't shy away from some of the critical questions facing the region. "One of the key challenges for the future prosperity of the county is to attract and retain talent," he explains. "The education provision across the region has achieved standout results and commendations and both New College Durham and Durham University have invested heavily in ensuring that a well-prepared and trained talent pool is available.

"With exciting developments such as Aykley Heads, NETPark and Dalton Park all coming to fruition in the near future, the environment for innovation and growth is available. Who knows what the next big thing will be, but we will be ready!"

Talking more broadly, he continues: "The county, like many, has a very wide range of communities, from the rural in the west and the industrial, which runs from the centre to the coast. One of the main challenges is this disparity.

"Equality of opportunity is paramount and the nurturing of local talent into enterprising activity from the earliest stage, is important. The retail sector is suffering at the moment but there are examples of success all around, businesses that recognise and address the wants and needs of the client base.

Keeping in tune with the subject matter of this issue of Contact, he finishes: "Transport, as ever, is an issue, mainline rail services to Durham must be maintained and the continued improvements to the road network are essential to the prosperity of the county."





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# Campaigning enthusiast makes her mark

This issue, the spotlight is on Marianne O'Sullivan, who has made a seamless transition from Newcastle University graduate to representing North East England Chamber of Commerce members on vital policy issues, including transport. Mark Lane reports

**As learning curves go, they don't come much steeper:** from studying politics as an undergraduate at Newcastle University to advising members of the North East England Chamber of Commerce on vital issues, in areas such as transport.

The past 12 months have been a rollercoaster ride for Marianne O'Sullivan, a policy advisor with the North East England Chamber of Commerce. She joined fresh out of university and was delighted to find a role which ticked all her boxes – providing rewarding, stimulating work while allowing her to stay in the region after her studies.

"I was looking for a role that would allow me to develop my research skills and importantly work on projects that I feel would have a wider positive impact," she explains.

"I thought the policy adviser role at the Chamber would allow me to work on campaigns that would help to benefit the whole of the North East. It was also rare to see a policy role that allowed undergraduate applicants based outside of London.

"I enjoyed living in Jesmond whilst at university with Jesmond Dene being so close and I was keen to stay in the North if possible as it's much more affordable to live and rent."

As a policy adviser at the Chamber, Marianne's work covers transport and development policy. This includes housing, rail improvements, air quality issues and more. She works as part of the Chamber's policy team to deliver on aims for the *Stronger North East* campaign.

"I organise the Chamber's transport and development forums to discuss issues with members as well as organising roundtable events with key policy makers," she says. "Based on member feedback I also write responses to consultations such as the Government's rail review or at a more local level the recent air quality consultation."

"I also work with our partner members on reports and interview interested members. I'm currently working on a report with Womble Bond Dickinson on how improving connectivity can improve international trade in the North East."

How, then, do Marianne and her colleagues ensure that the policy matters that they pursue are those that mean the most to the Chamber's members? She replies: "We consult with all our members on our *Stronger North East* campaign to see what

they want us to concentrate on. For example, last year digital connectivity was mentioned as an important issue so we're looking to have a research project around this.

"Rail connectivity has also repeatedly been mentioned in different policy forums and meetings I have had with members, so we are campaigning on these issues."

She adds: "Ensuring there are reliable local links around the North East is also crucial, whether through making key roads such as the A19 or A66 more resilient or through more reliable public transport services. This will allow people to travel to work or to easily connect to key transport hubs such as airports and rail stations."

The Chamber is a no-nonsense organisation – if a person is good enough, they are old enough. As such, there has been no hesitation in throwing Marianne in at the deep end. She admits to some trepidation at first. "When I first started going to meetings I was a bit nervous about asking questions and

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**"Ensuring there are reliable local links around the North East is also crucial, whether through making key roads such as the A19 or A66 more resilient or through more reliable public transport services"**

speaking in front of people who were a lot more experienced in different sectors and often older than me," she says. "I've learnt now that people won't judge you for asking questions and it's often useful to give a different perspective on issues."

Her first 12 months have also opened her up to the challenge of dealing with the media – a key challenge for all those working in a public facing role with such a high profile body.

"One of my main achievements has been speaking on the radio and TV about the Chamber's views on the clean air proposals," she says, once again showing she has grown into an important aspect of the policy role.

# Home Secretary gets North East business views on immigration post-Brexit

Taking North East business views to Westminster, and bringing Westminster representatives to the North East, is ultimately a big part of why the Chamber exists. On June 27, following the President's Reception at the Discovery Museum, a small group of our members met with Home Secretary Sajid Javid for a frank discussion on immigration

**Representatives from some of the region's major employers and organisations including Newcastle International Airport, Sage plc, Northumbria University, Womble Bond Dickinson, NGI and Newcastle University were able to put their views forward at the discussion.**

Sajid Javid opened the conversation stressing that even though the UK is leaving the EU, we should still be seen as a welcoming country where students and skilled workers can build their knowledge and careers.

He said: "Over the next 12 months we are gathering opinions from a range of sectors on how to manage our UK-designed immigration process. It is vitally important we design a system which allows our businesses to grow and create jobs. They need to be able to employ the best person no matter where they come from."

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**"It is vitally important we design a system which allows our businesses to grow and create jobs. They need to be able to employ the best person no matter where they come from"**

He also discussed his ambition for more overseas students to study in the UK and stay following graduation.

The Chamber has raised genuine concerns that any post-Brexit migration system may end up being designed in a way that hinders North East firms' ability to compete for global talent.

This point was made loud and clear by those who met with the Home Secretary. Among their concerns was the danger of reforms exacerbating the existing shortage of skilled workers in areas such as digital, engineering and academia.

Members openly discussed a lack of awareness among workforces about the implications of leaving the EU and the concerns of those employees about whether they would be able to work in the UK in the long-term.

It was also suggested it should be made easier for overseas



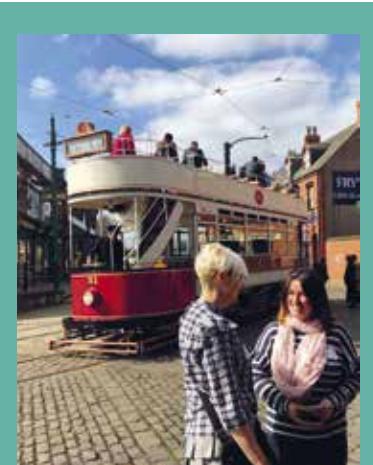
visitors from countries like India and China to visit the North East, as well as the need for a more proactive marketing campaign, to stress the UK is open country for business and leisure.

For his part, the Home Secretary was able to reassure members, from his perspective, that even though the UK is leaving the EU, we should still be seen as a welcoming country where students and skilled workers can build their knowledge and careers.

If this is true, then it would be welcomed by many of the businesses we talk to about this issue. It would also represent an instance of policy developed with one eye on economics outside of the Westminster bubble.



## UPCOMING EVENTS



AUGUST 22, 5-7PM

### CHAMBER SUMMER SOCIAL

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The Chamber Summer Social will be held at the marvellous Beamish Museum in County Durham.

Members will take the tram to the 1900s town and network with refreshments in this unique setting.

SEPTEMBER 18, 9AM-4PM

### DUBAI EXPO 2020, NEWCASTLE EAGLES

Ahead of Dubai 2020, the Chamber will be holding a premium event for members looking to make the most out of the World Expo next year. Hosted at Eagles Community Stadium, the summit will feature insight from Royal Emirates and Ambassadors as well as advice from experienced members. Whether you're thinking about or already trading internationally, this will be the global event of the year.



AUGUST 8, 3-5.30PM

### TEES VALLEY PRESIDENT'S RECEPTION & SUMMER SOCIAL

Next month we give members from across the region the opportunity to meet our new President, as this informal event heads to the North Yorkshire borders for a relaxed summer evening. Featuring a welcome speech from our President Lesley Moody MBE, a selection of summer refreshments and a brilliant opportunity to meet and grow your network at what will be one of our stand out flagship events of the summer programme in the Tees Valley.

## COFFEE AND CONNECTIONS

On May 21, Coffee and Connections visited Tynemouth Golf Club led by the Chamber Women's Advisory Board as part of our Inspiring Females programme. The relaxed mix and mingle networking event gave members the opportunity to network over coffee, with the opportunity to take part in a golfing competition, instructed by pro John Mckenna and coach Paul Whittaker.



## TEES VALLEY ANNUAL BUSINESS LUNCH

On May 17, the Chamber's Tees Valley Annual Business Lunch was hosted at Wynyard Hall, sponsored by Northern Skills Group, Middlesbrough College's training and apprenticeship arm. This year's guest speaker was David Horne, MD of London North Eastern Railway. David spoke about his career, change management and work on the East Coast rail line. The lunch provided a unique opportunity to meet and network with organisations from all sectors and sizes from across the Tees Valley and North East business and political community.



## CONTACT LAUNCH

On May 16, 100+ attendees joined the Chamber to launch issue 2 of *Contact* at the Crowne Plaza in Newcastle. Attendees had the opportunity to network with the North East business community, and the team behind the all-new publication. A panel of guest speakers discussed the theme of the issue – 'people first' – chaired by Arlen Pettitt, knowledge development manager at the Chamber.





## CHAMBER ANNUAL NORTH EAST BUSINESS DEBATE & AGM 2019

On May 23, 250+ members of the North East business community met to enjoy a new format to the Chamber's AGM event. Following a networking breakfast, our new President Lesley Moody MBE was officially voted into her new role. The event featured a new addition to the Chamber Annual programme, the Annual North East Business Debate - an engaging debate focusing on the future of North East business moving into a new decade. The panel included both current and Immediate Past Chamber Presidents, also Alix Bolton of Visualsoft, Stephen King of Go North East and Harvey Emms of Lichfields.

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## CHAMBER GOLF DAY 2019

On June 6, the Chamber's Annual Golf Day event was hosted in partnership with MacDonald Linden Hall, sponsored by Emirates. The event brought businesses from across the region together to share ideas and develop contacts and business opportunities in a relaxed and informal atmosphere. In first place was Durham Tees Valley Airport, followed by JPG First Aid, Welcome Vending and Freightair.



## PRESIDENT'S RECEPTION

On June 27, the President's Reception made another addition to the Chamber's annual events programme. The exhibition attracted a diverse range of attendees and exhibitors reflecting the Chamber's vast network, and showcasing organisations of all sizes and all sectors across the region. The event was hosted by and featured a brief welcome speech from our new President Lesley Moody, giving members the opportunity to hear about Lesley's focus over the next two years and her career journey so far.



## MEDIUM MEMBERS LEADERSHIP LUNCH

On July 3, attendees gathered at Seaham Hall for the Medium Members Leadership Lunch, sponsored by Gateshead College. Attendees were welcomed by Nadine Hudspeth, director of marketing and communications at Gateshead College, and heard from guest speaker Heather Mills, founder of Vbites Foods.





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