



BUSINESSWORKS

Issue 25 Hull and East Yorkshire

BEARING FRUIT

The Cherry Group:
home improvements
without the hassle

JOIN THE HUB

Why Gareth Laycock
is taking on the
logistics giants

POWERING CHANGE

Meet the couple
behind Eco Group Hull

ROOM TO GROW

This is just the beginning, says Nikki Blowers
as Eazy Rooms marks 10 years

OUR MINDS YOUR MATTERS

- EXECUTIVE SEARCH
- MANUFACTURING & ENGINEERING
- PROCUREMENT & SUPPLY CHAIN
- HUMAN RESOURCES
- COMMERCIAL MANAGEMENT

www.consortiumrecruitment.co.uk



CONSORTIUM
PROFESSIONAL RECRUITMENT

Get in Touch

01482 205 808
Ergo Centre
Bridgehead Business Park
Meadow Road
HU13 0GD
Info@cprec.co.uk

CONTACTS

SALES

Helen Gowland
07854 442741
helen@bw-magazine.co.uk

PRODUCTION

production@bw-magazine.co.uk

DESIGN

Craig Hopson
Designer
craig@bw-magazine.co.uk

EDITORIAL

Sam Hawcroft
Editor
sam@bw-magazine.co.uk

PHOTOGRAPHY

Leo Francis
Photographer
hello@leofrancis.co.uk

bw-magazine.co.uk

@BWMagazineHEY

@BWMagazineHEY

Businessworks Magazine

BW Publishing and
Events Group Ltd

bw
BUSINESSWORKS

WELCOME

Welcome to this edition of BusinessWorks, where we continue to celebrate entrepreneurship and innovation across a diverse range of sectors – including shining a light on some of the region's most inspiring female business leaders.

Last time I mentioned my own small business adventures on the Holderness & Hornsea Gazette, and six months on we are still plugging away at it. It's hard to believe we've already hit the one-year mark since taking over the paper in February 2024.

The past 12 months have been a whirlwind – a steep learning curve, plenty of plate-spinning and a hell of a lot of hard graft – but we're still here, still proudly independent and still committed to producing a newspaper that serves its community. Our journey mirrors that of this very magazine, in a way – as it's another quality independent title whose founder knows a fair bit about threats, challenges and opportunities.

For me, the start of this year has felt a little more straitened than many would have hoped. Economic uncertainty continues to weigh on businesses, and the forthcoming rise in National Insurance contributions is yet another concern for employers already navigating tight margins. The balancing act of managing costs while supporting employees is not an easy one, and for many SMEs, every extra percentage point on the wage bill makes a difference. As a small business owner, I understand these pressures all too well.

One phrase I've found myself saying a lot is "survival is the new growth" – which I don't think lacks ambition; quite the contrary. These are hard times for many (just read Phil Ascough's column on the hospitality sector!) and sometimes all this talk about "growth trajectories" can get a bit wearing if you're just battling to keep going, as many are.

Every business owner I've spoken to for BW has said the same thing: surround yourself with people who share your vision and are willing to pull together to make it happen. Of course, there are times when you question why you put yourself through the stress, when you could just take a steady job, clock off at 5pm and let someone else worry about it. But then you remember: you do it because you love it, you believe in it, and because independence matters.

If that resonates with you, keep going. There's a wealth of support out there, and if you need a reminder of what's possible, just read the stories in this magazine.



Sam Hawcroft, BW Editor

In association with

Big Dog

Hallmark Solicitors

children's
HULL AND EAST YORKSHIRE
COUNCIL

Hull
City Council

Kingston
Cleaning
Services

THE
one
POINT

REALITY
solutions
Sage • IT • Cloud • Development

Sailors'
Children's
Society

Sirius
SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS



When you have finished with
this magazine please recycle it.

bw CONTENTS

ISSUE 25

Embracing entrepreneurship in Hull and East Yorkshire

www.bw-magazine.co.uk



22

10



42



50



32

FEATURES

10

ROOM TO GROW

As Eazy Rooms marks its 10th anniversary this year, Sam Hawcroft talks to founder Nikki Blowers

22

POWERING CHANGE

Meet the couple behind Eco Group Hull

32

JOIN THE HUB

Why Gareth Laycock is taking on the logistics giants

42

BEARING FRUIT

Sam Hawcroft talks to Chris Wilson, co-founder of home improvements firm the Cherry Group

ALSO INSIDE

16.

WOMEN IN BUSINESS

40.

FOCUS ON FINANCE

48.

OPINION - CREATOR COACH

58.

EVENTS DIARY

49

LS LIFESTYLE



Try before you buy!

FREE 30 Days Phishing Simulation

- ▶ All Staff Phishing Simulation.
- ▶ Post Simulation Review Call.
- ▶ Notifications Following Failures.



Sign up for a phishing simulation and receive a £15 Just Eat voucher

Call Us To Claim
01482 420150



Claim your **FREE** IT and Cyber Audit

Call Us Today
01482 420150

www.theonepoint.co.uk

THEone
POINT



www.astorprod.com
01482 291700
Email: info@astorprod.com

In today's fast-paced digital world, high-quality video content is no longer a luxury – it's a necessity

Stop struggling, start selling, choose Astor!



Whether it's for marketing, internal communications, brand storytelling, or product launches, video has become the most effective tool to capture attention, engage audiences, and drive results. However, the process of creating a compelling video can often feel overwhelming. That's where we come in.

At Astor Film Productions, we take the stress out of video production by providing a seamless, end-to-end service. With years of industry experience and an award-winning team of filmmakers, we bring creativity, expertise, and technical excellence to every project. We understand that our client's time is valuable, which is why we've perfected a seamless process designed to eliminate the complexities often associated with video production.

Our approach is collaborative and strategic. We begin with an in-depth consultation to understand our client's goals, brand identity, and target audience. From there, we develop a tailored production plan that aligns with their objectives. Our team excels in scriptwriting, location scouting, filming, and post-production - no detail is overlooked. With cutting-edge equipment and a commitment to high-quality results, we guarantee a product that not only meets but exceeds our client's expectations.

One of the biggest advantages of working with Astor Film Productions is our full-service approach. We handle every detail—so our clients don't have to. From logistics and scheduling to editing and final delivery, we ensure a smooth and efficient process. Our vast experience allows us to anticipate challenges, navigate potential pitfalls, and

deliver projects on time and within budget. We understand that businesses need a return on their investment, which is why we focus on creating content that not only looks great but also delivers tangible results.

Whether you need a dynamic promotional video, a corporate documentary, an engaging social media campaign, or a compelling brand story, Astor Film Productions has the expertise to bring your ideas to life. We believe that great storytelling is at the heart of every successful video, and we are passionate about helping businesses communicate their message in a way that resonates with their audience.

Beyond just creating visually stunning content, we also prioritise strategy. Our videos are designed with a purpose—to increase engagement, boost conversions, and strengthen brand loyalty. We take the time to understand your audience and craft videos that connect on an emotional level. The right video can make a lasting impact, and we're here to ensure your content is both memorable and effective.

Our process is designed to be transparent and hassle-free. We provide regular updates and encourage collaboration throughout the production journey. Whether you are looking for a one-time video project or an ongoing content partnership, we are flexible in adapting to your needs and goals.

In a world where content is king, video is the most powerful way to stand out. Let Astor Film Productions help you simplify the process, enhance your brand presence, and create videos that leave a lasting impact. We handle the details—you enjoy the rewards. Partner with us today and bring your vision to life with confidence. ●

Boost your brand with Blue Light Weekend

For businesses looking to align with a high-profile community event while securing significant brand exposure, Blue Light Weekend in Withernsea presents a compelling opportunity

As East Yorkshire's largest free family festival and air show, BLW attracts more than 25,000 visitors and delivers extensive media coverage across local and regional platforms. With the next event set for August 2-3, 2025, organisers are actively seeking corporate sponsors to help expand its offering while providing sponsors with prime branding opportunities.

Sponsorship of BLW is more than just a financial contribution – it's an investment in the local community, supporting a volunteer-led initiative that raised more than £8,000 for charities in 2024.

The event's reach, coupled with its diverse range of activities – from an air show and parachute jumps to a World Mascot Championship and the ever-popular Colour Run – ensures businesses can engage with audiences in a meaningful way.

Companies looking for significant brand alignment can become the headline sponsor of the Blue Light Weekend Air Show. This includes exclusive naming rights, media coverage in print and digital advertising, and multiple large-scale banners placed along Withernsea's promenade. Businesses can also sponsor sea rescue displays, ensuring visibility alongside dramatic lifesaving demonstrations.

For brands aiming to engage with a family-friendly audience, the World Mascot Championship offers exclusive sponsorship rights, with business branding featured on event marketing and merchandise.

The Withernsea Raft Race, another hugely popular event whose history predates that of BLW, is also available for sponsorship. Likewise, businesses can sponsor a Colour Run station for just

£150, complete with on-site banners and the option to actively participate in the event by throwing paint at runners.

Beyond event sponsorship, businesses can support the 60-strong volunteer team by funding their uniforms or secure advertising in BLW's official event programme. For a more tailored approach, companies can even sponsor an individual aircraft, receiving exclusive mentions every time their sponsored plane is featured.

BLW offers multi-tiered sponsorship levels, ensuring options for businesses of all sizes. With extensive media partnerships, a kilometre-long PA system for sponsor adverts and a committed local audience, it provides a high-return opportunity for businesses looking to enhance their corporate social responsibility efforts while securing premium brand visibility. ●



For more information on sponsorship opportunities, visit bluelightweekend.com or contact admin@bluelightweekend.com.





**Sailors'
Children's
Society**

To find out more, contact us on
01482 342331
www.sailorschildren.org.uk

With a focus on sustainability, team expansion, and strategic partnerships, Sailors' Children's Society is better prepared to serve its beneficiaries and secure its legacy of care for future generations



Steering Sailors' Children's Society towards transformation

Since joining Sailors' Children's Society two years ago, Natasha has led a significant transformation of the charity, enhancing its ability to support seafarer families during crises such as bereavement, illness, or family breakdown. Her leadership has modernised the organisation, expanded its reach, and improved sustainability, while remaining dedicated to its mission of providing long-term financial, emotional, and practical support.

"When I joined Sailors' Children's Society, I was inspired by its 200-year legacy of helping families. My goal has been to honour that history while modernising our approach for today's challenges," Natasha said.

Bringing extensive experience from the charity sector, previously leading Hull and East Yorkshire Children's University through substantial growth, Natasha expanded its staff from 3 to 23 and its turnover from £125,000 to £800,000, engaging over 70,000 children in enriching educational experiences. This expertise has been instrumental in shaping a strategic vision for Sailors', enhancing its impact.

One of Natasha's milestones has been increasing the charity's team from six to ten members, thereby improving service delivery and diversifying income streams. "Growing our team is vital for extending support to families in crisis," she explained.

Understanding the need for financial sustainability, Natasha forged partnerships with businesses aligned with Sailors' goals. Notably, Streets Accountants and Beerhouse Self Drive funded a rebrand and a new website, modernising the charity's image. "These updates reflect the dynamic organisation we've become, made possible by partners like Streets Accountants," Natasha noted.

Collaborating closely with the board of trustees, Natasha implemented a three-

year strategic plan, enhancing the charity's social media presence, securing new funding, and establishing stronger corporate partnerships. A key success was renewed patronage from Her Royal Highness Princess Anne, who extended her support for an additional three years.

Events have been crucial for awareness and fundraising under Natasha's leadership. The charity hosted its most successful Sports Lunch, raising £100,000 after costs, and launched its first Ladies Lunch with over 300 attendees and keynote speaker Louise Minchin. "These events not only raise funds but also connect us with supporters, showcasing our commitment to families," she shared.

A landmark achievement was securing an £85,717 grant from Greenwich Hospital for Royal Navy families, reinforcing the charity's mission. "This grant allows us to provide targeted support to these families," Natasha highlighted.

Natasha's background as a qualified teacher with international experience has shaped her innovative leadership style. By fostering partnerships with schools and businesses, she has positioned Sailors' as a leader in comprehensive family support.

Looking ahead, Natasha aims to deepen the charity's impact, expand its reach, and strengthen ties with businesses and community organisations. "Our future focus is on building deeper connections to ensure Sailors' Children's Society remains a lifeline for generations to come," she said.

Natasha's transformative leadership exemplifies her dedication, expertise, and vision, enabling the charity to emerge stronger and more effective in serving its beneficiaries. "With the support of our partners, we will continue providing vital assistance to seafaring families," she concluded. ●

Our Lincolnshire Expansion

Excitement is building as Run with It expands further

Run With It is an educational charity dedicated to inspiring young people by helping them enhance their Maths and English skills in unique, real-world environments. We currently operate at 4 centres across East Yorkshire and have recently expanded into Lincolnshire as part of a 3-year partnership with Quickline.



As part of our growth into Lincolnshire we are now collaborating with the Study United Centre at the Attis Arena in Scunthorpe and the Grimsby Town Foundation at Blundell Park. We have also partnered with Humberside Airport to offer exciting and interactive sessions for learners in rural areas with limited recreational options for children, making school trips less accessible compared to urban regions.

We recently welcomed students from Oasis Academy in Wintringham to join us at Humberside Airport. The children completed a range of activities around the airport including a mock check-in, exploring the terminal, visiting the currency bureau, and a bag packing exercise. The session was a resounding success and a huge thank you goes out to Quickline, Humberside Airport, and Study United!

It has been an incredible year for Run With It and we are proud to announce that we have increased our learner outreach by 33.3% compared to the previous academic year. We have witnessed some amazing success stories from learners who have experienced our unique way of learning. With the continued support of our sponsors and new partnerships we are excited for what 2025 will bring for our growth and expansion into Lincolnshire.

For more information about our activities and future events, please visit www.runwithhull.co.uk



System Q – your trusted partner in security innovation

With over 30 years of experience, System Q is a leading manufacturer and distributor of CCTV and security solutions, providing businesses with the tools, knowledge, and support to navigate industry regulations.

Many companies, as well as public and private organisations, are adopting Facial Recognition Technology (FRT) to enhance security, improve customer experience, and simplify authentication processes. As FRT continues to evolve, staying compliant with emerging standards like BS 9347 is more important than ever. Non-compliance could mean hefty fines, legal complications, and reputational damage - but navigating these updated policies doesn't have to be daunting.

At System Q, we're committed to helping businesses stay compliant and future-ready. Our free FRT compliance guide offers expert insights, including:

- A breakdown of BS 9347 and what it means for your business
- Practical strategies to mitigate compliance risks
- Exclusive templates and audit checklists to simplify compliance.

With our in-depth roadmap, you'll gain the knowledge and tools needed to confidently implement and maintain FRT solutions while meeting industry standards. By leveraging our expertise, businesses can confidently adopt FRT solutions while remaining compliant, secure, and committed to ethical use. ●



Download our free guide today: www.systemq.com/frt-compliance-guide

ROOM TO GROW

As Eazy Rooms marks its 10th anniversary this year, *Sam Hawcroft* talks to founder **Nikki Blowers** about the many challenges and achievements along the way...

For Nikki Blowers, the journey to creating Eazy Rooms has been anything but straightforward.

Hers is a story filled with resilience, determination and a fair share of unexpected twists. From working in local government to navigating business mergers, legal battles and personal growth, Nikki's entrepreneurial path is a testament to what's possible when you refuse to give up.

Nikki's career began in the public sector, working for Hull City Council straight out of school. She quickly carved out a niche in economic development, promoting the city's business opportunities both locally and internationally. "I used to do big exhibitions, even in France," she recalls. "It was a great job – I was part of promoting Hull's industries, from call centres to food production."

Her role evolved when she was seconded to Hull's urban regeneration company, Citybuild, where she worked closely with property developers on projects that would shape the future of the city. It was here that Nikki's interest in property began to take root, though at the time, she had no idea it would become the foundation for her own business. ►



Life took a detour when she moved to Southampton with her then-partner, a professional footballer. While she initially felt adrift leaving her career behind, fate had other plans. After returning to Hull, one of the property developers she'd met during her council days tracked her down and offered her a role in his company. "I became a director, scouting for property opportunities across the UK. It was a fast-paced, exciting environment, and I learned so much about the property market."

After years in the property sector, Nikki decided it was time to forge her own path. Armed with industry knowledge and a growing network of contacts, she saw a gap in the market: the need for flexible, high-quality serviced accommodation in Hull.

"It was around the time Hull was gearing up for the City of Culture," she explains. "I'd been working with training providers who needed accommodation for apprentices, many of whom were too young to stay in hotels. That's when the lightbulb went off."

A chance meeting with a developer who owned a large property, Anchor House, provided the perfect launchpad. Nikki's idea – to create a "home-from-home" environment for corporate clients – quickly gained traction. Sitting in a café, she and her early collaborators scribbled down ideas on a napkin, sketching out what would become Eazy Rooms. "I still have that napkin," she laughs. "That's where the name and logo were born."

From day one, the business took off. "Our first clients came in thick and fast. I was running around making beds, doing the shopping, handling bookings – I was literally doing everything."

But the demand kept growing, driven by Hull's booming industries, particularly in renewables and construction. Eazy Rooms quickly built a reputation for providing tailored, stress-free accommodation solutions.

Like any entrepreneurial journey, Nikki's path wasn't without its hurdles. One of the most significant challenges came in 2022 when Eazy Rooms merged with another company – a decision she quickly regretted.

"It seemed like a good idea at the time. We thought it would help



“*“Our goal is to become the go-to provider for flexible, corporate accommodation and travel services, not just in the UK but internationally.”***”**

us grow faster,” Nikki reflects. “But it turned into an absolute nightmare.” The partnership soured, leading to legal disputes, attempts to poach clients – and worse.

“It was brutal,” she admits. “But that experience taught me a lot about resilience. I had to fight to protect the business I’d built from scratch.” Despite the stress, Nikki’s relationships with loyal clients held strong. “That was the silver lining – our clients came back because of the trust we’d built over the years.”

Another challenge came in the form of staffing. “Finding reliable people who genuinely care about the business is tough,” she says. Nikki went through several hires who didn’t work out before finally meeting Ebony, her right-hand woman. “She’s a little mini-me,” Nikki says with a smile. “She’s dedicated, sharp, and I trust her with everything. Having the right people in place has been a game-changer.”

Eazy Rooms isn’t just about accommodation now. Under Nikki’s leadership, the company has evolved into a multi-faceted business, offering corporate travel services, property development and even international bookings.

“We’ve expanded beyond Hull and Grimsby,” she adds. “We’re placing clients in Northampton, Norfolk, Bristol. And now we’re offering corporate travel solutions – flights, train bookings, car hire – you name it.”

The company’s growth has also included property investments. Nikki has partnered with developers and started ►



purchasing properties, transforming them into high-quality serviced accommodations. "We recently converted a two-up, two-down house into a four-bedroom property with en-suites and modern amenities. It's about maximising space and creating value."

Despite the rapid growth, Nikki is committed to maintaining the personal touch that sets Eazy Rooms apart. "We're not trying to be a faceless corporation. Our strength is in the relationships we build with clients. We know their needs, and we adapt to meet them."

Even as the business expands, Nikki remains hands-on, keeping a close eye on operations to ensure standards remain high. "I've done everything in this business at some point," she says. "I've made beds, done the cleaning, handled transport for clients – it's important to understand every part of what you're offering."

The lessons Nikki has learned along the way extend far beyond business strategy. She's had to build resilience, adapt to constant change and recognise the importance of boundaries. "There was a time when I took every problem personally. If something went wrong, I would stress over it for days," she admits. "Now, I know that sometimes things are just out of your control. You do your best, fix what you can, and move on."

She's also learned the power of saying no. "In the early days, I would take on every client, every project, even if it wasn't the right fit. Now, I know that not every client is for us, and that's OK. If someone is constantly making unrealistic demands or treating my team unfairly, I'm not afraid to walk away."

After years of relentless work, Nikki has found a new focus: balance. "For the first eight years, it was all work, no life," she admits. "I'd be on call 24/7, losing sleep over the smallest things." But in recent years, she's embraced a different approach, investing in her own well-being as much as her business.

"I've discovered the power of mindfulness," she says. "I've been to Bali, Iceland, and even done spiritual retreats. Yoga, meditation, sound baths – you name it, I've tried it. It's been transformative."

As Eazy Rooms approaches its 10th anniversary, Nikki is more excited than ever about the future. "We've only just scratched the surface," she says. "Our goal is to become the go-to provider for flexible, corporate accommodation and travel services, not just in the UK but internationally."

The company plans to expand its property portfolio, grow its travel services division and continue forging strong partnerships with businesses across industries. But no matter how big Eazy Rooms gets, Nikki insists the core values will remain the same: flexibility, integrity and exceptional customer service.

For those looking to follow in her footsteps, Nikki's advice is simple but powerful. "Trust yourself. Stay adaptable. And don't be afraid to think big. Build strong systems, surround yourself with the right people, and never lose sight of your vision."

She also emphasises the importance of resilience. "Challenges will come – some bigger than you can imagine. But every setback is an opportunity to learn and grow. Keep pushing forward, and success will follow."

From scribbling ideas on a napkin to managing a national accommodation network, Nikki's journey with Eazy Rooms proves that with grit, determination and a clear vision, anything is possible. And as the company celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2025, one thing is clear: this is just the beginning. ●







Women in Business

The inspirational local leaders driving change in our region

In the ever-evolving landscape of business, the importance of championing women's leadership, innovation and resilience cannot be overstated.

The theme of the recent International Women's Day 2025 – inspiring inclusion – continues to resonate, reminding us that equity in business is not just a one-day celebration but a year-round commitment.

International Women's Day has a history dating back to the early 1900s, when it was first marked by rallies advocating for better working conditions, fair pay and voting rights. Officially recognised by the United Nations in 1977, it has since grown into a global movement celebrating women's achievements while calling for greater gender equality in all aspects of society – including business.

In this edition, we're shining a spotlight on the inspiring female leaders making an impact across a range of industries.

Vicky Doyle, founder of Lemonclean, balances entrepreneurship with raising a family while championing sustainability. Lana Grisina, founder of Lead Talent Solutions, turned her early experiences in agency work into a mission to transform recruitment with a personal touch. Liz Owen-Dyce, talent and brand lead at MS3 Networks, is driving inclusivity in the workplace while promoting professional development. Kim Johnston, ICAEW regional director, is bringing people together to strengthen business networks. In the public sector, Kath Wynne-Hague and Gillian Osgerby are shaping Hull's cultural and historical landscape, while Jeni Cornwall, head of people at Eden Mobility, is focused on creating workplaces where employees thrive.

Each of these women brings a unique perspective on leadership, perseverance and the power of community. Their stories remind us that success comes in many

forms – whether it's building a business from the ground up, driving change in established organisations or creating opportunities for others to succeed.

While progress has been made since the earliest days of IWD, there is still work to do. Women remain underrepresented in leadership roles, face barriers to investment and often balance professional ambitions with societal expectations. By continuing to share their stories, champion equity and push for meaningful change, we can help ensure that future generations of women have the opportunities they deserve.

As we look beyond IWD, the focus remains on fostering an environment where women are not just participants in business but driving forces behind meaningful change. The stories in this feature serve as a testament to what's possible when ambition meets opportunity – and when women support, uplift and inspire one another.



*Women
in Business*

Liz Owen-Dyce

**Talent & Brand Partner,
MS3 Networks**

I've always been passionate about people. After 15 years as a licensed retail manager, I made the decision to transition into a career focused on recruitment and people development. After 8 years in recruitment, that journey led me to MS3 Networks, where inclusivity and career growth are at the heart of what we do. Now, as I work towards my CIPD Level 5, I'm breaking into the People profession with a renewed sense of purpose—proof that it's never too late to invest in yourself and embrace new opportunities. The world is my oyster, and continuous professional development is the key to unlocking doors—not just for me, but for all women in the workplace.

Since joining MS3, I'm incredibly proud of the initiatives we've implemented that have made a real impact—and I've been fortunate to play an active role in bringing them to life. One of the most meaningful is our partnership with the Sailors' Children's Society. Their work provides long-term support to families facing adversity, ensuring children have the stability and opportunities they deserve. Being involved in local community events, connecting with local families, and seeing firsthand the difference we're making has been incredibly rewarding.

Through these initiatives, I've also had the chance to build a network of like-minded women in business across Hull, sharing ideas, supporting one another, and championing the positive impact we can have. Supporting causes like this reinforces MS3's commitment to making a difference—not just in business, but in the communities we're part of—and I couldn't be prouder to contribute.

From flexible working policies to menopause support groups and Bupa healthcare, MS3 ensures our team has access to essential physical and mental health resources. These initiatives make a

real difference in balancing career growth with personal well-being. In my mind, we choose to work somewhere that aligns with our personal values—where we're given the space to be ourselves, grow our careers, and thrive. Benefits packages aren't just perks; they're game-changers for working women.

This is why I love my job—helping women like me thrive—and why I'm proud to be part of the change. But this is just one piece of a bigger picture. My challenge is for all businesses across all industries to actively push for equity—through mentorship, inclusive hiring practices, and policies that remove barriers

to progression. Action is not optional. If we want more women in leadership, we must create environments that truly support them. It's about investing in women, amplifying their voices, and ensuring the next generation sees no limits to what they can achieve. ♦





Kim Johnston

ICAEW Regional Director, North East, Yorkshire and Humber

The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW) is a professional association that promotes, develops and supports chartered accountants and students around the world. Founded in 1880, ICAEW has a long history of serving the public interest, working with governments, regulators and business leaders globally, and currently has over 208,000 members and students in 146 countries worldwide.

Kim recently joined ICAEW as Regional Director for the North East, Yorkshire and Humber regions. She will be enhancing professional communities and driving regional strategies while working with the team to deliver a calendar of events, networking opportunities, and career support initiatives. These events include a Behind the Business series where members visit leading businesses such as Amazon and Nissan, to discover how they are transforming their operations with exclusive insights into sustainability strategies, financial performance, and technological innovations. Kim

brings with her a wealth of experience in partnership working across the private, public and charitable

sectors which allows her to bring valuable connections to the Institute for future events.

Kim's background is predominantly in commercial business development. Most recently she worked in telecommunications, first as Chief Commercial Officer at MS3 Networks, and before that as the Regional Partnership Director for CityFibre.

Previously, Kim was Business Development Officer for Leeds City Council and Communications Manager for Leeds Chamber of Commerce. With a PhD in researching the impact of the integration of teams within the English health and social care system, Kim has an excellent understanding of partnership working across organisations and enjoys engaging with a diverse range of stakeholders, including local and regional policymakers, to achieve shared goals.

ICAEW supports, develops and promotes the role of chartered accountants as trusted business leaders, difference makers and advisers. Kim said: 'I am thrilled to have joined ICAEW and to have the opportunity to work in partnership with members across the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber.

"The current economic challenges require our members to be adaptable, proactive, and continuously informed about the latest developments in technology, regulation, and economic conditions.

I look forward to providing opportunities and showcasing the excellent work our members are doing within the region." ♦





Lana Grisina

Owner and Founder,
Lead Talent

FROM CAR WASH TO CEO:

MY JOURNEY IN RECRUITMENT

My journey to becoming a successful recruitment entrepreneur began in the most unlikely of places – a car wash. It was 2009, I was 18, and I had just arrived in the UK from Lithuania, with no English and no idea what the future held.

The car wash was my first job. It was hard work, but it was also my first taste of independence. I quickly realised that if I wanted to get ahead, I needed to learn English. So, I enrolled in evening classes and started working with an agency, taking on a variety of roles – from meat factory worker to quality control inspector for Yorkshire puddings (yes, you read that right!). I even had the privilege of packing flowers for the royal wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton.

These jobs, while providing much-needed income, often felt dehumanizing. I was just a number, a pair of hands to be hired and fired at will. This experience, however, ignited a fire within me. I vowed to never treat people the way I had been treated.

Driven by this determination, I learned English, attended Hull College, and eventually landed a job in recruitment. It wasn't glamorous at first. I was thrown into the deep end, dealing with mass recruitment drives and high-pressure environments. My "on-call" phone was glued to my ear, and I often found myself fielding calls at 3am. Looking back, it's incredible how much pressure I put on myself at such a young age.

Over the next 14 years, I climbed the ranks in the recruitment industry. I visited countless factories, from fish processing plants to chocolate factories, gaining invaluable knowledge about the manufacturing process. But more importantly, I learned the importance of treating people with respect and dignity.

In March 2024, I finally took the leap and started my own recruitment firm.

Drawing on my years of experience and deep understanding of the local market, I'm committed to providing a personalized and ethical service to both clients and candidates.

My unique selling proposition (USP) is simple: I understand the challenges faced by both employers and job seekers in this region. I know the importance of finding the right fit, not just filling a vacancy. I believe in investing time in building

relationships and understanding the specific needs of each client.

I have big aspirations for my firm. I want to play a role in developing the talent pipeline in our region, connecting people with fulfilling careers and helping businesses thrive. I believe that by focusing on individual needs and providing personalized support, we can create a more rewarding and sustainable recruitment experience for everyone. ♦





Gillian Osgerby

Programme Director for Hull City Council

Gillian Osgerby has been a key figure in shaping the city's landscape. With six years at Hull City Council, her expertise in delivering complex capital development projects has driven transformational change across the city, particularly in the realm of preserving its historic assets.

As Programme Director for the £60m Hull Maritime initiative, Gillian oversees the restoration of six of Hull's most significant maritime landmarks, including the Maritime Museum, Dock Office Chambers, Queens Gardens, the North End Shipyard, and the historic ships - Arctic Corsair and Spurn Lightship. Her role involves providing strategic leadership to ensure the successful delivery of these high-profile projects, alongside a comprehensive community engagement programme that aims to connect the

city's rich maritime history with its residents and visitors alike.

Gillian's work extends beyond Hull Maritime, with notable contributions to other landmark projects in the city. Under her leadership, Pearson Park has been refurbished, properties along Beverley Road improved, and the Guildhall Time Ball installed. She's also been instrumental in the restoration of the National Picture Theatre and the planning of the South Blockhouse site.

"I am passionate about maximising the potential of our heritage attractions and what they contribute to the city," says Gillian. "It's a privilege to work on some of our most significant and beautiful buildings, raising their profile, and better telling their story and contribution to Hull's history."



"I very much enjoy leading my team and feel very lucky to love my job," she adds.

Gillian's leadership and passion for Hull's heritage have been central to revitalising the city's historic assets, ensuring they remain a central part of Hull's future while honouring its past. ♦



Kath Wynne-Hague

Head of Culture, Place and City Centre for Hull City Council



Since joining Hull City Council in January 2023, Kath has worked hard to strategically develop Hull's culture and place thinking, ensuring the city is recognised nationally and internationally as a creative hub and driver for the north. She said: 'Hull doesn't receive the credit, reputation, or national investment it deserves, and together I know we can change this.'

A self-described storyteller, door opener and bridge builder, originally from the south bank, Kath's adopted home city is Hull, with family moving to the city nearly 30 years ago.

In her first year, Kath spent time listening to those in the culture sector

to develop a deep understanding of how the cultural ecology works together, as well as commissioning new research. All this provided the foundations to develop a new five-year culture and heritage strategy, as well as shape a bid for Hull to become a UNESCO Creative City. Kath has worked in Local Government for almost 20 years across many services, including cultural development, project management and visitor economy. Prior to this, Kath worked as a freelance artist, putting on live art events, music gigs and exhibitions across the UK. Kath continued: 'I wanted to bring everything I have learnt from my past experience to fast track opportunities and give back to the city which offered so much to me in my early creative journey.' ♦



*Women
in Business*

Vicky Doyle

**Founder,
Lemonclean**

Vicky Doyle founded Lemonclean 15 years ago and has successfully scaled the business to a seven figure turnover that now employs 130 staff. Working for major local and national businesses on some of the most prestigious projects in the region. Lemonclean is firmly established as one of the regions most trusted commercial cleaning companies.

Lemonclean grew through Vicky's entrepreneurial leadership, learnt in her earlier career in fashion retail in which she ran 31 stores and won national awards working for the Arcadia Group.

The business has an all female management team, is fiercely eco friendly and one of the only commercial cleaning companies to use entirely eco-friendly cleaning products and

have used local business Bio D products since its inception many years earlier.

Vicky has a passion for life and is extremely proud of the culture she has created in her team.

Lemonclean support local grass roots clubs in various sports; ice hockey, football, rugby and netball to name but a few. They believe in local supply chains and buying and sourcing locally, supporting local businesses is in their DNA. ♦



*Women
in Business*

Jeni Cornwall

Head of People, Eden Mobility

As Head of People at Eden Mobility, the UK's largest independent mobility retailer, I am passionate about building a workplace where employees feel valued, empowered, and inspired to succeed. My role is to cultivate a culture of growth, inclusion, and opportunity, ensuring that every team member has the support they need to thrive.

With over 15 years of HR experience across retail, manufacturing, aviation and global shipping, I have a deep understanding of workplace dynamics. I am committed to bridging generational gaps, recognising the unique strengths of diverse age groups, and creating an environment where collaboration drives success.

I take pride in supporting our

leadership team, developing people-focused strategies that blend traditional practices with modern innovation. By coaching leaders and promoting adaptability, I help shape a culture of respect, engagement, and continuous development. When employees feel supported, the business thrives, and that's what truly motivates me.

Eden Mobility's remarkable growth continues, with 10 new stores set to open in 2025. This expansion is a testament to our commitment to delivering outstanding service to our customers and strengthening our position as the market leader in mobility retail. I am excited to be part of this journey and our ongoing success. ♦



Powering change

Eco Group Hull's story is one of resilience, ambition and an unwavering commitment to quality, writes *Sam Hawcroft*



What started as a small plumbing business run by Stuart Angus has grown into a leading provider of multi-trade services, offering everything from heating and electrical work to renewable energy solutions.

Alongside his wife Sarah, whose strategic thinking and business acumen helped shape the company's expansion, the Hull-based firm has built a reputation for expertise, reliability and customer trust. But like any entrepreneurial journey, their path hasn't been without its challenges.

Stuart began his career as a highly skilled plumber and heating engineer, and his

meticulous attention to detail and reliability earned him a strong reputation in the Hull and East Yorkshire area.

As the demand for his services grew, so did the number of requests from customers asking if he knew a trustworthy electrical or renewable heating specialist. This recurring theme planted the idea for a business that could provide a comprehensive, one-stop service for homeowners and businesses.

"I kept getting emails from customers saying, 'Do you know an electrician? Do you know someone for this?'" says Sarah. "And we realised there was a real demand for a one-stop solution. People don't just

want a tradesperson – they want someone they can trust for everything."

Recognising this opportunity, Sarah and Stuart decided to expand. The transition from Eco Plumb to Eco Group reflected their broader ambitions, moving from a plumbing-focused company to a multi-service provider. "We haven't just rushed in and tried to do everything all at once," Sarah explains. "We've taken it in stages – making sure each new service is delivered to the highest standard before expanding further."

This methodical approach has allowed Eco Group to steadily grow without compromising its core values. What started as a small family-run business has now expanded into a team of 15 to 20 engineers operating across Hull, East Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire. More recently, the business has taken on national projects, proving its ability to scale while maintaining high service levels.

Unlike many companies in the trade sector, Eco Group doesn't rely on subcontractors. Every single engineer is directly employed, ensuring that each job is completed to their exacting standards. By keeping everything in-house, Eco Group ►





has been able to guarantee a high level of professionalism and accountability, building long-term relationships with customers who know exactly who they are dealing with.

"A lot of firms win a contract and then scramble to find subcontractors to do the work," Sarah says. "We don't operate like that. Our team are all employed by us, so we know exactly who is going out to do each job, and we can guarantee the quality of the work."

Stuart echoes this sentiment, emphasising the importance of trust. "When you have your own team, you know who's representing your business every day. We've built relationships with our clients because they know who they're dealing with. That's something you don't get when you outsource everything."

Building a business of this scale hasn't been without its challenges. Stuart and Sarah have both faced significant hurdles, from navigating industry regulations to managing rapid expansion. For Sarah, stepping into a traditionally male-dominated industry presented its own difficulties. "I think women have it a lot harder than men in business," she says. "You're juggling everything – running the business, being a mum, managing staff and dealing with personal challenges. There's this expectation that you should be able to do it all, and it can be overwhelming."

Despite these obstacles, Sarah and Stuart have successfully led Eco Group's growth, balancing family life with business demands. Even their children have become involved in the company, creating informative videos on home maintenance safety and general information for the sector.

“*We realised there was a real demand for a one-stop solution. People don't just want a tradesperson – they want someone they can trust for everything.***”**

“*“We’ve built relationships with our clients because they know who they’re dealing with. That’s something you don’t get when you outsource everything.”*

While Eco Group has expanded significantly, it hasn’t lost sight of its local roots or community values. One of its most meaningful initiatives is Sarah’s “passion project”, Empowering Possibilities, a non-profit scheme that provides free labour for urgent home repairs in cases of financial hardship.

This initiative is currently focused on Hull and the surrounding areas, but Sarah hopes it will grow alongside the business. “It started with just helping people locally, but I’d love to see it reach further,” she says. “It’s not just about business – it’s about being part of something bigger. We’ve helped people who were coming home from hospital and needed a separate electrical socket for oxygen machines, families with no heating in winter, and single parents who had to choose between fixing their boiler and buying Christmas presents.”

Their commitment to giving back doesn’t stop there. Eco Group actively supports local grassroots sports teams, sponsors Hull FC, and donates to charities such as Life for a Kid. They believe that as their business grows, so should their ability to support the community around them.

Looking to the future, Eco Group has no plans to slow down. Stuart is focused on expanding the commercial side of the business, taking on larger contracts and increasing the company’s geographical reach. Sarah, meanwhile, is passionate about strengthening their reputation in the domestic market. “In a perfect world, I want everyone in Hull to think of Eco Group first when they need a plumber, heating engineer or electrician,” she says. “We want to be the go-to name for quality and reliability.” ►



The company also plans to increase its workforce to around 30 employees, ensuring they can continue to meet demand while maintaining the high standards they're known for.

Sarah oversees much of the company's financial and administrative backbone, managing accounts, insurance policies and feeding into health and safety audits, as well as a bit of networking.

"We've got a business development manager now, so she's out and about doing whatever business development managers do," she laughs. "Stuart's role is more project management and networking, and quoting for larger-scale jobs goes through him or Ryan Jordan, contracts manager on the electrical side."

The company operates with a structured but pragmatic approach, making sure everyone knows their responsibilities while keeping a sense of camaraderie within the office. "We've sort of ended up with a girls' office and a boys' office – and it just works so much better!" says Sarah. "We like our music and a bit of chat, whereas the boys sit in complete silence with their headphones on."

This lighthearted division underscores a deeper truth about Eco Group's culture: it's a workplace where people are given the space to work how they work best. The mix of professionalism and personality is part of what makes the company a great place to be – structured when it needs to be, but flexible and fun when it can be.

In both the office and out in the field, the company operates with a mix of electricians, gas engineers and specialists in air-conditioning and renewable energy. While each trade has its core focus, the team is structured to allow for adaptability and professional growth. "Depending on what the job is, we mix and match," says Sarah, "but it's about making sure they're as skilled as possible, and that we give them as many opportunities to learn and develop. We don't get anywhere without having the most qualified staff."

Renewable energy is also a major focus for the company, with demand for solar panels, EV charging points and air source heat pumps increasing rapidly. "The

world is changing," Stuart says. "More people are looking for energy-efficient solutions, and we want to be at the forefront of that. It's not just good for the environment – it's good for homeowners too."

Eco Group has already made significant strides in this area, with a growing number of large-scale installations and partnerships in the renewable sector. "It's an exciting time," Stuart says. "This industry is evolving, and we're evolving with it."

Despite all the challenges, Sarah and Stuart wouldn't have it any other way. "Running a business is intense," Sarah admits. "You never really switch off. But the rewards are worth it. Seeing the company grow, seeing the impact we have on our customers and our community – it makes all the hard work worthwhile."

"Small enough to care, big enough to do the job" – that's the philosophy that drives Eco Group forward. And with their dedication to quality, trust and sustainability, they're well on their way to becoming one of Hull's most respected trade service providers. ●



Business Travel

Made Simple



RIGHT HERE IN HULL



We manage every step of your journey, from
Door to Door, so you don't have to.

0330 004 0520 | sales@good-travel.co.uk | good-travel.co.uk

Quarry House, Hesslewood Office Park, Hessle, HU13 0LH

DEBT RECOVERY FOR CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

The construction industry is a hugely important sector within the UK economy, contributing significantly to infrastructural development in the UK. Statista 2024 expects the construction sector to increase in growth to a revenue of £476.6 billion by 2027 with building construction forming the largest segment of the market with a whopping growth in revenue up to £238.4 billion. Its importance for the Humber Region and the North as a whole cannot be overstated. However, UK construction sector and the companies within it are beset with issues relating to late payment and insolvency. These challenges are a significant drag on the UK construction sector, creating instability as well as a challenging environment for growth.

According to PWC and Builders Merchant News, an increase in insolvencies highlights financial pressure and challenges faced by the UK construction sector as it remains the industry with the highest number of insolvencies in the UK, with almost one fifth of the entire insolvency cases in 2023.

This article explores the common challenges encountered in relation to late payment, debt recovery and insolvency for construction projects in the UK and offers practical and implementable solutions to overcome these challenges.

COMMON CHALLENGES IN UK CONSTRUCTION DEBT RECOVERY AND INSOLVENCY?

The most common challenges in the UK construction industry ranges from late payments, delays and difficulty with complex and complicated dispute resolution mechanisms as well as client or contractor insolvency.

Late payment is a particularly pernicious and prevalent issue which disrupts both upstream and downstream cash flow and project timelines, while disputes over work quality, scope, and contractual terms can lead to delays and additional costs and in the process, the collapse of companies along the pipeline.

The insolvency of clients or contractors poses significant risks to businesses in the sector, including unpaid invoices and potential project delays.

Added to these issues is the complex contractual arrangements needed to govern

and protect the interests of parties involved particularly in large scale projects. Throw in a sprinkle of inadequate documentation and processes and you have very complicated debt recovery situations and weakened legal claims requiring a higher degree of effort and resources to resolve, not to mention the additional costs required to reach a resolution and/or settlement.

SOLUTIONS TO OVERCOME DEBT RECOVERY CHALLENGES

How can companies engaging in construction projects and in general those operating within the construction protect themselves from these headwinds and avoid disputes leading to construction litigation?

1. Effective Contract Management

Implementing clear and concise contractual terms and regularly reviewing and updating contracts can help prevent disputes from arising and facilitate smoother debt recovery processes. Companies should ensure that contracts are professionally drawn up and that staff are provided adequate training on the terms of the contract for each project.

Additionally, clear communication of payment terms and expectations at the outset of the project as well as vigilance can help avoid misunderstandings and reduce costly and time absorbing disputes.

2. Early Intervention and Communication

Ensuring prompt identification of payment issues and engaging in open and transparent communication with clients or contractors can help resolve payment issues and differences before they escalate into disputes. Establishing a clear process for addressing payment issues & maintaining regular communication throughout the project can foster positive relationships and facilitate timely payment. Timely payment should be prioritised as this is crucial for maintaining healthy cash flow & ensuring the successful completion of projects.

3. Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

Mediation and arbitration can offer cost-effective and efficient alternatives to construction litigation for resolving disputes in construction projects. Engaging in ADR processes such as adjudication, mediation, early neutral determination and negotiations can help parties reach mutually beneficial agreements, avoid the time, expense, and uncertainty associated with court proceedings and litigation as well as preserve relationships.



4. Credit Management and Risk Assessment

Credit management and risk assessment are all essential for identifying potential risks coupled with taking adequate and appropriate steps to mitigate exposure to bad debt. It is beneficial to conduct thorough credit checks on clients or contractors before entering into contracts and implementing credit management policies and procedures can help identify potential risks and mitigate exposure to bad debt. An example of this might be in situations where substantial risk has been identified to insist on personal guarantees where possible or upfront payments.

Regular monitoring of payment performance and taking proactive steps to address payment issues as soon as they arise can help minimise the impact of late payments and insolvencies on cash flow.

5. Legal Remedies and Enforcement

Understanding the legal options available for debt recovery and engaging legal professionals specialised in construction law at an early stage can help construction companies enforce their rights and recover unpaid invoices effectively and efficiently. Taking timely legal action when necessary and pursuing all available remedies can help expedite the debt recovery process and protect the company's interests.

CONCLUSION

Debt recovery and navigating insolvency laws and systems remains a complex and challenging process for construction companies, but proactive strategies and effective communication can help mitigate risks and facilitate smoother payment processes.

By understanding the common challenges in debt recovery and collection of unpaid debt and implementing practical solutions, UK construction companies can protect their interests, maintain healthy cash flow, and ensure the successful completion of projects as well as safeguard growth.

Effective contract management, early intervention and communication as well as the use of alternative dispute resolution (ADR), credit management and risk assessment as well as legal enforcement are key strategies to overcome debt recovery challenges.

Establish a clear process for addressing payment issues and maintain regular communication with clients or contractors throughout the project. Conduct thorough credit checks and implement credit management policies and procedures to identify and mitigate potential risks.

Engage in alternative dispute resolution processes, such as mediation and adjudication, to resolve disputes efficiently and cost-effectively. Seek legal advice and assistance from professionals who are specialists in construction and insolvency law to understand your rights and enforce contractual obligations effectively. It is often said that the best advice is to seek advice early.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this article Visit: hallmarksolicitors.co.uk and request a call back. Alternatively, you are welcome to call us 0800 037 1305.



HALLMARK SOLICITORS.co.uk

CONSTRUCTION DISPUTE RESOLUTION.

- Commercial Litigation
- Adjudication & Enforcement of Adjudication
- Debt Recovery
- Tax Dispute

Conflict Resolution

EXPERT GUIDANCE AND CUSTOMISED SUPPORT.

ABOUT HALLMARK SOLICITORS

Hallmark Solicitors is a commercial law firm specialising in debt recovery, construction and insolvency law. Our solicitors provide legal advice to businesses of every size and handle complex cases on a regular basis. Our highly qualified lawyers are experts in their field and are genuinely committed to excellence in every aspect of their work, providing clients with a timely, cost effective and highly personalised solution.

We are easily accessible with Consulting Offices based in London, Leeds & Kingston upon Hull where we have our head office. We provide a genuine alternative to large and medium size law firms and boast a client-reach that extends far beyond the borders of the United Kingdom.

Excellence is our hallmark - We take time and effort to understand our clients' problems, their aims and objectives in order to provide an effective and responsive service. We take a results-based approach whilst alerting our clients as to what is realistic and attainable to enable them make an informed decision.

With technological advances, cross-border trade has become a more integral part of our client's business activities. As a result, our solicitors practice with both a national and international perspective.

We are more than happy to have a no-obligation discussion about any matter that you might have and we can be contacted on 0800 037 1305 or +44 (0)1482 616 616 (if calling from outside the UK).

Disclaimer: Please note that this article is provided for general information only. It is not intended to amount to advice on which you should rely. You must obtain professional or specialist advice before taking, or refraining from, any action on the basis of the content of this article.

Hallmark Solicitors is the trading name of Hallmark Legal Services Ltd a Limited Liability Company. Registered in England & Wales (Co. 6634235)

Head Office: Chandlers Court, 158/159 High Street, Hull.

Consulting Offices: London & Leeds

Authorised and Regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (499161)



Face to face with Milly Rose

No-Nonsense Business Coaching & Mentoring in Hull



If you're serious about growing your business, Milly Rose is the expert you need in your corner. With a decade of experience building successful ventures, she's now offering business coaching and mentoring—partnering with Hull University to support ambitious entrepreneurs and business owners.

Milly's approach is refreshingly direct—no fluff, no jargon, just real strategies that work. Whether you're launching a startup, scaling an existing business, or troubleshooting challenges, she cuts through the noise and gets straight to what matters. Her coaching sessions are tailored to fit your unique circumstances, empowering you to unlock your full potential.

Beyond one-on-one coaching, Milly is available for inspirational talks, where she shares hard-earned lessons, practical advice, and the mindset needed to thrive. By fostering a collaborative environment, she encourages

open dialogue and creative problem-solving. Her energy and expertise make her an invaluable asset to anyone looking to level up.

If you're ready to take your business further, book a session with Milly Rose today and gain the insights you need to succeed. With her guidance, you can navigate the complexities of entrepreneurship with confidence and clarity.

For coaching, mentoring, or to book an inspirational talk, get in touch now, and take the first step towards a more prosperous future for your business. ●

hello@fantasticfaceshull.com



Primary Care Perinatal Mental Health Specialists

House of Light offer NHS talking therapies to residents in Hull and East Yorkshire

At House of Light, we understand that the journey into parenthood can be challenging. Established in 2007, our charity is dedicated



to offering support and counselling to parents before and after birth. We specialise in helping families navigate perinatal mental health issues, including:

Antenatal and Postnatal Depression, Anxiety, Obsessive Behaviours & Thoughts (OCD), Birth Trauma and Miscarriage and Baby Loss

Our services include group peer support and one-to-one counselling, providing a safe, non-judgemental space for you to discuss your concerns and explore your feelings. We are committed to breaking the isolation felt by parents struggling with their mental health and ensuring that any parent can access the support they need to give them and their little ones the best possible start.

Together, we can raise awareness and reduce the stigma attached to mental health issues.

Together, we can make a difference. ●

You are not alone. For further information on how you can access our services please visit our website: houseoflight.org.uk or scan the QR Code with your phone

Call: 01482 580499

Freephone: 0800 043 2031

Email: help@houseoflight.org



house of light





01482 890146

Email info@sirius-hull.co.uk

Visit sirius-hull.co.uk

In today's evolving digital marketplace, establishing a dropshipping business offers a compelling opportunity for aspiring entrepreneurs. Alan Gordon-Freeman of Sirius shares his insights on the most effective strategies for launching a successful dropshipping venture

How to start a dropshipping business

The key difference from other retail businesses is that you do not buy, hold or ship your stock. Orders are fulfilled by third-party suppliers. Typically, You find a dropshipping supplier that can supply the goods you want to sell. Customers browse your online store, place orders and pay you for their items. The orders and the money (less your markup) are then passed from your website to the supplier, and finally the supplier packs and ships the order to the customer. The customer has no idea you have not fulfilled the order as the whole process is automated. All you need to do to start a dropshipping business is to choose a dropshipping supplier and set up your online store onto your website. Once you have done that, you simply select the items you want to sell, add them to your site and start marketing your site.

What are the benefits of dropshipping?

Low start-up costs, no inventory management, a vast range of products and flexibility.

Can you start dropshipping business with no money?

It's possible to start a dropshipping business with next to no upfront costs if you're canny. To start, you'll need to find suppliers who don't expect payment in advance. Next, you'll need to find a way to market your website, and sell the goods for free, or you could try selling online via social media.

Some marketing can be done at very little cost, also influencer marketing and social media can build awareness for your business.

Why do dropshipping businesses fail?

There are some potential drawbacks too. Lots of competition, if you're selling the same products as many other dropshippers, you will struggle to stand out.

You will need an attractive, well-optimised and easy-to-use website. It will need to offer customers secure but simple ways to pay. If you don't look like a legitimate business and trustworthy, you will struggle to convince people to buy from you.

Products from overseas mean there can be long lead times. Where possible, you should try to work with suppliers in the UK where



shipping is likely to be quicker and more reliable. Shipping and returns can also be more difficult to manage.

How do I find a dropshipping supplier?

You can find dropshipping suppliers in the same way you would find any other supplier. You can search online, visit trade shows, approach manufacturers directly or search online directories.

Finding a good supplier will be key to your success. Do they offer a good range of products? Do the products match up to their description? What are their shipping times and costs? What do their online reviews reveal? What is their customer service like? Is there a robust returns policy without any 'nasty' surprises? What are their payment terms?

What are the best dropshipping platforms?

Aliexpress, Sprocket, Worldwide Brands, SaleHoo and CJDropshipping all have great offers, but being mainly in China can cause delivery delays. ●

Remember, Sirius offer free independent business advice and on-going support. Just call 01482 890146 to arrange an appointment with an advisor, or leave a message by emailing info@sirius-hull.co.uk

JOIN THE HUB

Gareth Laycock is taking on the logistics giants with HubXpert, offering tailored fulfilment solutions that give businesses a smarter, more flexible alternative. By *Sam Hawcroft*

For Gareth Laycock, entrepreneurship wasn't a premeditated journey. It was something he grew into – starting from the ground up, learning every aspect of his family business before ultimately leading it into new territory.

As the managing director of HubXpert, a dynamic warehousing and fulfilment company based in Hull, Gareth has been instrumental in transforming a traditional logistics firm into an innovative and scalable business, helping local companies thrive.

Gareth's route into the business world was far from conventional. "I went to a naval school in Hull, with plans to go into the Royal Navy," he says. "But for a couple of reasons,

that didn't work out, so I ended up training to be a fully qualified plumber instead." His first steps into the family business weren't mapped out, either – he initially joined to help out during the busy Christmas period in 2010, picking and packing orders.

At the time, the company was still in its early days, operating under the name D&AGF Ltd, which had been founded by Gareth's mother in 2007. The business specialised in B2B lingerie distribution, and like many small enterprises, it was run from modest beginnings.

"We started in a double garage at our family home," Gareth says, "and it arose from a 'kitchen table' conversation. We needed a ►



limited company name, so we used the initials of my mum and stepdad, Diane and Alan Gordon-Freeman. It was never the intention to use it for marketing because we would always trade under different names."

His role in the company evolved naturally. "After that Christmas, I just started taking on more and more duties, learning from the bottom up. There was never a set plan – it was more about identifying what needed doing and figuring out how to improve things."

Over time, and as the business grew, he became deeply involved in the operations, logistics and long-term strategic planning. That hands-on experience helped shape his leadership approach – one that balances big-picture thinking with an intimate understanding of day-to-day business challenges.

One of Gareth's key skills as an entrepreneur has been his ability to

pivot. The lingerie distribution sector has undergone massive changes over the years, particularly with the rise of e-commerce and direct-to-consumer models. "Seventeen years ago, the phrase 'fast fashion' wasn't really a thing," he said. "But over time, the industry evolved significantly, and it became much more competitive."

Rather than resisting change, Gareth embraced it. He recognised that the company's real strengths lay in its warehousing capabilities, stockholding and logistics expertise. That led to a strategic shift – rather than focusing solely on distribution, the business would start offering its fulfilment service to other companies.

This resulted in the creation of HubXpert, a specialist warehousing and fulfilment provider catering to businesses of all sizes. Under this new 'umbrella', Gareth and his team built a service designed to remove logistical headaches for companies, helping them

scale efficiently without the burden of managing their own warehousing and shipping operations.

"We realised that our value wasn't just in the products we stocked – it was in the data, the stockholding and the ability to fulfil orders quickly and efficiently," he adds.

The rise of e-commerce giants such as Amazon has changed the landscape for fulfilment businesses. But instead of seeing Amazon as an insurmountable competitor, Gareth has positioned HubXpert as a viable alternative, particularly for businesses looking for a more tailored, localised service.

"In essence, what we're offering with HubXpert is similar to Amazon's Fulfilment by Amazon (FBA) model, but with a more personal touch," he says. "One of our key strategies is championing local businesses – helping them streamline their operations without losing control of their brand."

An example of this approach can be seen in HubXpert's work with this very publication, helping founder Helen Gowland remove a logistical headache with the distribution of the 2023 BW Business Guide. "We centralised the distribution, segmented the mailing list and got everything dispatched quickly – within 24 to 48 hours of the print arriving," Gareth says. "It improved efficiency massively."

That bespoke approach extends to businesses of all sizes. Whether it's an independent publisher struggling with storage and distribution, or a fast-growing online retailer needing a scalable fulfilment solution, HubXpert offers a service tailored to the specific needs of each client.

"We can add a lot of value with the software capabilities we have," says Gareth. "We've got direct connections into all the major e-commerce stores, such as Shopify and WooCommerce. This aligns with our main vision of championing the local area. We will work with anyone from a startup right through to larger organisations. A new system that we're just 'bedding in' allows us to be even more efficient. It will extra value to clients, especially around the connectivity for e-commerce stores, with a lot of other 3PL (third-party) ►





logistics) benefits that we can pass on.”

Growing a logistics business isn't just about finding customers – it's about building the right infrastructure. For HubXpert, that has meant two major relocations to accommodate expansion, the most recent in 2015.

“Our last warehouse move was a massive project,” says Gareth. “We had months of planning to make sure there was no downtime. In the end, we moved thousands of stock items over a four-day weekend, and were fully operational again by 8am on the Tuesday.”

Finding and retaining the right staff has also been a challenge. While the company has seen significant growth, it has also had to adapt its workforce along the way. “As the business has grown and evolved, we've had to restructure and bring in additional new skills.”

Today, HubXpert operates with a lean but highly efficient six-person team, focusing on automation, technology and streamlined processes to maximise efficiency. “We invest heavily in our systems and technology to make sure we're operating as efficiently as possible,” adds Gareth.

Beyond logistics, HubXpert is also committed to sustainability and innovation. The company is part of ‘Oh Yes! Net Zero Hull’, an initiative focused on reducing the carbon footprint across the region. The business is also accredited with Cyber Essentials, the SME Climate Hub, and The HMRC Fulfilment House Due Diligence Scheme.

“Our focus isn't just on growth – we want to do it responsibly,” says Gareth. “That means making sure we're operating efficiently, minimising waste and staying ahead of industry regulations.”

Looking ahead, Gareth has ambitious plans for HubXpert. His goal is to establish the company as the go-to warehouse and fulfilment provider in the Humber region, supporting a diverse range of businesses while maintaining a highly personalised service.

For Gareth personally, entrepreneurship has been a journey of continuous learning. He credits



much of his success to mentorship and networking, having taken part in various business growth programmes, including Goldman Sachs' 10,000 Small Businesses and Step Change at For Entrepreneurs Only (FEO).

“Our vision is to scale significantly, and we're actively implementing our growth plan,” he said. “We've learned a lot from The Step Change programme, and we're applying that knowledge to build a business that's not just successful but also sustainable.”

“As a business owner, you never stop learning,” he adds. “I've been fortunate to have great mentors and a strong support network which has helped me navigate the challenges and push the business forward.”

This also means the ‘mantra of outsourcing’ applies to himself, too – the key philosophy of ‘letting go to grow’, one of the key tenets of business growth courses. “We can all help out and do some accounts work, and things like that, but it's better to pass those jobs on to people who can do them better. We outsource a lot of our design work, and other specialised tasks to other people who are far better placed and more experienced than we could ever be.”

He also acknowledges the personal

sacrifices that come with running a business, particularly when balancing work and family life. “Having a young family has made me even more focused and driven,” he says, “but I also I think it's about leaning onto the network you've got – I have some great contacts that I know I could pick up the phone to and ask for advice or support anytime if I needed to”

What sets HubXpert apart from other warehousing and fulfilment providers is its adaptability, bespoke service offering, and commitment to local businesses. Unlike large-scale logistics firms, the company provides a tailored approach that can be adjusted to suit the specific needs of its clients.

“For many businesses, outsourcing logistics can be a game-changer,” Gareth says. “It allows them to reduce overheads, improve efficiency and grow faster. And because we operate with a personal but professional approach, they can be confident they're in safe hands.”

As HubXpert continues to expand, its foundation remains the same – rooted in family-driven values, efficiency and innovation. And with Gareth Laycock at the helm, the business looks set to become a key player in Hull's growing logistics and fulfilment sector. ●





www.rthcars.co.uk
info@rthcars.co.uk
www.facebook.com/RTHChauffeurs
www.instagram.com/rthchauffeurs

In today's fast-paced world, transportation isn't just about getting from point A to point B — it's about the experience. We speak to Ricky at RTH Chauffeurs to learn more

A seamless journey with RTH Chauffeurs



Whether you're heading to an important business meeting, catching a flight, or enjoying a night out on the town, comfort, reliability, and professionalism are key. At RTH Chauffeurs, we offer all of this and more, ensuring your ride is as smooth and luxurious as your destination.

Our Services: Your Comfort, Our Priority
At RTH Chauffeurs, we specialise in providing premium chauffeur services for a variety of needs. Whether you're looking for a corporate chauffeur to ensure you arrive on time for your meetings, a special event chauffeur for a wedding, gala, or celebration, or an airport transfer service for a stress-free trip to and from the airport, we have you covered.

We are committed to offering personalised services that cater to your unique preferences. Our fleet of well-maintained, luxurious vehicles is equipped with the latest amenities to ensure you travel in utmost comfort and style.

Why Choose RTH Chauffeurs

Experienced Chauffeurs: Our chauffeurs are highly trained professionals with years of experience. They undergo background checks and driving tests to guarantee safety and excellence in service. Their discretion, knowledge of local areas, and commitment to providing a top-tier experience set us apart.

Punctuality: We understand the value of your time. That's why we ensure that every trip is completed on time. Whether it's an early morning airport pickup or a late-night drop-off, you can trust us to be there when you need us.

Luxury Fleet: Our vehicles are top-of-the-line, carefully chosen for their elegance, comfort, and reliability. From sleek Mercedes to V CLASS Minibus', every car is equipped with modern technology, and climate control to ensure a relaxing journey.

Customised Experience: We know that no two clients are the same. That's why we offer customisable packages to meet your specific needs. Whether it's a bottle of water, Wi-Fi access, or any other special requests, we are happy to accommodate.

Competitive Pricing: Luxury doesn't always have to come with a hefty price tag. At RTH Chauffeurs, we offer transparent pricing with no hidden fees, ensuring that you receive the best value for a premium service.

Our Promise to You

We understand that each journey is important, and we promise to go the extra mile to make sure your experience is flawless. Whether you need a ride for business, pleasure, or something in between, we guarantee a safe, comfortable, and enjoyable ride. Your satisfaction is our number one priority, and we strive to make every trip memorable.

Book Your Ride Today

Booking with RTH Chauffeurs is simple and quick. You can book online, or by calling our customer service team. We offer flexible payment options and a wide range of services to cater to any occasion.

Experience the next level of travel. Choose RTH Chauffeurs for your next journey, and let us handle the rest. ●



Your brand's new best friend.

Big Dog

Brand & Design | Websites & Apps | Exhibitions & Display

Brand's best friend

Find out more —> big-dog.co.uk



DUTTON MOORE

Chartered Accountants
& Business Advisers

*Dutton Moore, Aldgate House,
1-4 Market Place, Hull, HU1 1RS
01482 326617
www.duttonmoore.co.uk*

Post the Labour Government's first budget, we talk to Tony Bullock, Managing Partner at Dutton Moore Chartered Accountants & Business Advisers, to get his overview of the implications of the decisions and how that impacts on businesses...

Budgeting for Britain



Rachel Reeves delivered her first Budget as Chancellor of the Exchequer in October. Although Labour had fought a growth-focused election on the back of an improved working relationship with business, we as a firm, along with other businesses, shared a widespread sense of shock when the budget put businesses on the hook for the bulk of the £40bn of tax increases.

The new government argued the hikes were necessary to lock in long overdue investment in public services due to an alleged black hole in the public finances inherited from the Tories. But we warned the higher costs, from measures such as higher employer National Insurance contributions and National Living Wage increases from April, would be passed on to customers and hit wage growth, employment and investment.

At a time when the Bank of England is struggling to cut interest rates due to stubborn cost pressures in the economy, there is the real threat posed by potential business price hikes ahead. Firms will have to raise their prices in response to tax hikes and business confidence is at its lowest level since the mini budget market meltdown of autumn 2022.

Jobs across the manufacturing and services sectors were shed in December at the fastest rate since January 2021, with businesses overwhelmingly blaming rising costs as a result of Labour's first budget back in power.

Businesses have to raise their costs to counteract the tax increases. This does the opposite to investing in the economy. This threatens upward pressure on inflation – with business confidence weak in a pressure cooker of rising costs and taxes.

We know from advising our clients what the implications are for businesses of all shapes and sizes. Businesses are cutting back on investment and increasing prices – whilst the national insurance hike is particularly damaging. The budget plans are not helping businesses struggling now.

The Bank of England will also rightly be concerned that firms raising prices to offset budget tax rises could curb its ability to reduce borrowing costs in the months ahead.

What is also alarming is that in order to draw dividends out of a company to pay Inheritance Tax (IHT), the beneficiary will have a total tax bill of 65%.

We have a number of clients in the agricultural sector and the budget was hugely negatively significant and devastating for them. Farmers are often asset rich but cash poor, meaning in the absence of IHT reliefs

the next generation would have to break up their farm to meet IHT liabilities. This would then threaten a reduction in available land for food production and ultimately have an impact on food prices. This affects everyone!

Agricultural reliefs ensured farmers had the ability to pass farms on to their children, the continuity of farming knowledge and experience, so giving the nation the food security we all rely on. Farmers have been devastatingly affected by this budget...they simply won't be able to afford to stay in farming.

In conclusion I fear that the policies being brought in by this new government will destroy the infrastructure of the economy in this country. ●

WE ARE HULL CITY LADIES FC



Our History

We were born in 2001, Hull City Ladies FC is paving the way for success and reaching new heights.

Hull City Ladies FC, often referred to as **The Tigresses**, are making waves in women's football as the highest performing club in the region. Currently competing in the FA Women's National League (Tier 3), the team's remarkable achievement of securing promotion last season has set them on a path of growth and ambition.

As an independent club, Hull City Ladies has charted its own course, establishing a strong identity within the community.

With a dedicated group of players, coaches, volunteers, and supporters, The Tigresses have shown what's possible when passion meets opportunity. As with any ambitious sporting venture, reaching the next level requires more than just hard work and determination—it requires strong backing and support.

Our Supporters

From grassroots support and the 'Tigress Army' that follows us from our own ground at the Easy Buy Stadium in Barton Upon Humber, the bedrock of our supporters have motivated the team to new heights.

MAKING IT HAPPEN!

As we strive for more success, we could not do this without our sponsor partners. We can help you grow your brand whilst giving your organisation plenty of benefits whilst supporting our youth and senior teams.

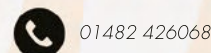
Managing Director Danny Johnson emphasizes the club's mission, stating: "We are creating a lasting legacy for the people in our region, more specifically for women and girls playing football. We want to give more opportunities to everyone to support, participate, and engage with women's football."

By partnering with Hull City Ladies FC, your company will be associated with a team that is not only focused on success but also dedicated to our core values ensuring that diversity, equality, inclusivity, health and well-being remain at the heart of everything we do, for the continued growth of women and girls football.

Sponsorships are an important form of revenue for us but just as importantly, they are a demonstration of support from like-minded companies.

**SPONSOR OUR
TEAMS**

CALL US ON: 01482 426068





Cherry-picked for success

Sam Hawcroft talks to **Chris Wilson**, co-founder of growing Beverley-based home improvements firm the Cherry Group

When Chris Wilson left his stable job as an emergency planning officer within the council, he wasn't chasing a grand vision of corporate dominance or a meticulously crafted business plan.

In fact, his leap into entrepreneurship was sparked by a simple conversation with a friend, Stew, a locksmith by trade, who suggested he was "wasted" in the public sector. That offhand remark would become the first step in an unexpected yet remarkable business journey, culminating in the creation of Cherry Group.

Chris's background couldn't have been further from the world of windows, doors and conservatories. Having spent 14 years working in contingency planning, he was used to organising emergency responses, liaising with public services and navigating the bureaucratic intricacies of government operations. It was a secure job, but when he found himself stuck in a career with little room for progression and a pay cut following a colleague's return from maternity leave, the frustration set in.

"It was a good job, and I enjoyed it, but I needed to do something different," says Chris. "Mid-30s, sitting in a room with people earning six figures while I was doing a lot of work for much less – it just didn't sit right with me."

That's when Stew approached him with an opportunity. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Stew's locksmith business had slowed, prompting him to explore window and door maintenance as an additional revenue stream. Recognising Chris's organisational skills from his work as well as his time managing football teams and handling grant applications, Stew asked him to oversee the administrative side of the fledgling operation. The timing wasn't exactly ideal – Chris had a three-month-old baby at home – but sometimes, the biggest risks lead to the greatest rewards.

Starting a business during a global pandemic isn't for the faint-hearted. With no prior experience in the private sector, let alone in the home improvement industry, Chris relied heavily on ►

“People want quick, sustainable solutions without the hassle of months-long construction projects. Plus, with rising energy costs, everyone's thinking about insulation and efficiency.”

transferable skills from his council days: planning, scheduling and managing operations. The early days were challenging.

"It was really slow going at first," he says. "It was just me and Stew with a few subcontractors. We were winging it, trying to get our feet under the table."

But they weren't winging the installations. Their commitment to quality work, combined with Chris's knack for organisation and Stew's technical expertise, began to attract clients. They diversified quickly – expanding from windows and doors to conservatory warm roofs, modular extensions and even acquiring a locksmith business to strengthen their offerings. Recognising the need for a cohesive brand, they rebranded as Cherry Group – with their three distinct divisions being the symbolic three "cherries" on the stalk: windows and doors, eco-rooms and locksmiths.

One of the most striking things about Cherry Group is its deliberate departure from the traditional double-glazing sales

model. "I never wanted to be the typical double-glazing salesman," Chris says. "You know the type – turn up, sit in someone's house for three hours, quote a ridiculous price, and then magically knock off £5,000 if they sign today. People hate that."

Instead, Cherry Group operates on transparency and honesty. Quotes are provided quickly and fairly, without high-pressure tactics or gimmicky sales pitches. This approach has not only resonated with customers but has also become a cornerstone of the company's growth strategy.

"Our best marketing tool is just being decent people," Chris adds. "No foot-in-the-door tactics, no phoney discounts – just honest work."

Chris's brother Jamie, also a locksmith by trade, has stepped away from the tools to lead the window and door sales side of the business, supporting its expansion while maintaining the company's ethos of

no hard selling and a strong family feel.

What began in Stew's converted garage, with windows and doors being delivered to his driveway (much to the amusement of the local Facebook groups), has evolved into a thriving business with more than a dozen employees, a showroom and a fleet of company vehicles. The decision to shift from subcontractors to full-time staff was pivotal, marking a significant transition from a small operation to a structured company with defined roles and responsibilities.

"It was a big leap," Chris says. "Suddenly, you're responsible for people's livelihoods. There's payroll, HR, IT security, contracts – it's not just about getting the work done any more; it's about running a business properly."

This growth hasn't been without its challenges. Reinvesting profits back into the business, managing cash flow and navigating the complexities of employment law have all been part of the learning ►





curve. Yet, despite the pressures, Chris and Stew have maintained the culture that set Cherry Group apart in the first place: a focus on people, both employees and customers.

"Finding the right people is always a challenge," Chris says. "We're in an era where people ask what a job can do for them before they ask what they can bring to the role. That's been a huge shift. You need to find those who genuinely care about what they do."

Cherry Group's success is also rooted in strategic partnerships. Their collaboration with Leka Systems, for example, has allowed them to offer cutting-edge modular extensions and conservatory warm roofs – solutions that address common issues such as poor insulation and unusable seasonal spaces. These modular builds can be installed in a matter of days, offering

clients cost-effective, energy-efficient alternatives to traditional extensions.

"The modular side of the business is where we see the most growth potential," Chris explains. "People want quick, sustainable solutions without the hassle of months-long construction projects. Plus, with rising energy costs, everyone's thinking about insulation and efficiency."

Networking has also played a crucial role. Chris acknowledges that, in the beginning, he underestimated the value of business relationships. "I used to think networking events were a waste of time, but they've been invaluable. It's not just about what you get directly – it's about helping others and building a reputation. Eventually, it all comes back around."

While the ambition to grow is strong – especially in the eco-rooms and modular extension market – Chris is clear about

what success looks like. "I don't want to be rich. I just want to live comfortably, go on nice holidays with my family and not have to stress about money. That's the goal."

It's a refreshingly grounded perspective, one that reflects Cherry Group's ethos: honest work, genuine relationships and a commitment to doing things differently. But growth remains on the horizon. Chris and Stew are keen to expand their footprint in new areas, particularly in Driffield and other parts of East Yorkshire where they see potential.

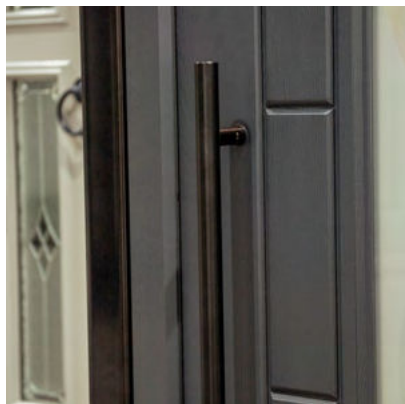
"We've done really well in Beverley – more than half of our jobs are there – but there are other areas where we haven't tapped into the market as much yet," Chris says. "We're looking at strategies to expand, whether it's through local advertising, networking or partnerships."

There's also a focus on the next phase of modular builds. Cherry Group has been in discussions with installers in Manchester and Dundee to create a nationwide network, ensuring their services reach a wider audience while maintaining the high standards they've built their reputation on.

As Cherry Group continues to expand, Chris remains mindful of the delicate balance between growth and maintaining the personal touch that defines their business. "When we started, I had contact with every single customer. Now, we've got jobs I haven't even been involved in. That's weird, but it's also a sign that we've built something sustainable."

One thing Chris has learned through it all is the importance of loyalty – both to customers and suppliers. "There have been plenty of times when we could have switched suppliers for a slightly cheaper deal, but loyalty goes a long way," he says. "If you build solid relationships, you get reliability in return. That's invaluable in this industry."

From contingency planning meetings to managing modular builds, Chris's journey is proof that entrepreneurship isn't about having all the answers from the start. It's about taking the leap, learning as you go, and staying true to what matters most. Cherry Group may have started as a modest venture between two friends, but with an eye on sustainable growth and a commitment to doing things the right way, the future looks incredibly bright. ●





Business Software Solutions



Bespoke Software Development



Managed Cloud Services



IT Managed Services



Certified Support Services



Accredited Training & Consultancy

REALITY
solutions
Sage • IT • Cloud • Dev

Sage Business Partner

Microsoft Partner



01482 828000



www.realitysolutions.co.uk

Who knows what's really going on?

Social media bubbles managed by malicious billionaires have made it a very different world, writes *Mal Williamson*...

Oh my, oh my, oh my social feeds! So full of people advising me.

They have answers, solutions, tricks, insights, offers, bargains, giveaways, must-sees, must-dos. For health and wealth they all know better than me. I am a fool, a patsy, a laggard, a dullard and a fraud. They know best.

Apologies for everything I have ever offered to anyone in my own swollen social rivers of ice-cold rainwater draining in from the Mountains of the Bleeding Obvious all around us!

All of the above is different from understanding – i.e. knowledge that is placed in a context and worked with. That context is your business, your creative project, your real life. And anyone posting surface-level gushings of their own ego-centric viewpoint online is, well, to be ignored.

I have learnt nothing.

From the subscriptions, the rip-offs, the

strategies, the kooky ideas, the quirky questions... nothing. I am still here, enjoying life.

Meanwhile, of course, we have Trump. Utopian freedom or dystopian exaggeration? Christian Nazi or selfish CEO? You know what you think and I know what I think. Somehow, though, we need to know what the world thinks? With old-fashioned mass media we all knew who thought what, more or less. But the social media bubbles managed by malicious billionaires have made this a very different game. Only those with the data – all the data – know what is going on. We guess.

And none of us seem able to keep up – let alone get ahead?

The advice is pouring in, of course – spread your wealth into gold and savings and currencies and properties. Diversify your markets – no – consolidate your markets. New markets, please! Play to

your strengths. Innovate! Side hustles, back in the office, get on the road, face-to-face, podcasts and webinars, write a book, read a book, listen to a book. Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear... I am not finding that much helps with this overload of advice and “support”. You are your support. And your loved ones. And you and they know not what to do. Is the answer in your heart or your brain or your gut? In your past or your future or the present? There's a war on.

Never have I felt so at war. As a child of the Cold War I thought I was used to this tension, although I am too young for the Cuban Missile Crisis. Several conflicts have resolved themselves “over there” during my lifetime. But this one?

It's on my screen when I'm editing clients' films and it's on my phone when I'm chatting with mates. It is wrapped around all my business and project decisions either as a *what-if*, a *so-what*, a *don't-know*, *who-cares*, *then-what*, *does-it-matter* or a *stay-strong*. It is an awful lot of *whelm*. Creators make stuff. We have problems and inner turmoils and yet we still make stuff. Entrepreneurs work through everything from the mundane to the magnificent. You'll be fine. You know this stuff. Help each other.

I'll work with anyone for free – online or at my place – who needs or wants help and quotes this article. ●



Mal Williamson is a festival-winning freelance film director and business coach
creatorcoach.co.uk and
malwilliamson.com
afilmbymalwilliamson@gmail.com





LS | LIFESTYLE

ISSUE 25

DINING ■ MOTORING

THE LADIES OF THE LAMP

This lovely bistro on platform two at Cottingham station has pretty much been the domain of women since day one, writes *Phil Ascough*





Writing this ahead of International Women's Day, I find it impossible to avoid pondering why most chefs are men. But not for long.

People may or may not have their own ideas on why that would be the case, and if you really want to get to grips with it then by all means try an online search. But I don't, so I'm happy to park it for now and maybe sit down and consult an expert some time when she's not working full-on in her kitchen.

There are a couple of candidates around here but not that many. As far as I'm aware there is only one restaurant in the vicinity that is completely run by women. That's not house policy, it's just the way things are. Every now and then a bloke will pop up to lend a hand at the Old Lamp Room in Cottingham, but the lovely little bistro on platform two at the village railway has been pretty much the domain of women since day one.

There is one notable exception that we'll come to later, but for now it's worth looking back at day one, which we reported on five years ago. Kasha Gravill-Vines opened the building, funnily enough an old lamp room, selling coffee, the most exquisite home-made cakes and various savoury snacks.

It was delightful but short-lived as Covid descended. Fortunately much of the offer was easy to transfer to cardboard. My Father's Day treat in 2020 was a picnic box stuffed with all sorts of goodies.

As Covid subsided, Kasha was diagnosed with cancer but has confronted her illness with a determination to establish the restaurant as one of the region's culinary stars, regardless of whether she will be around to see it.

She added breakfast, brunch and lunch, then acclaimed Sunday dinners. Small steps. When the Black Horse at Little Weighton closed last year, chef Wendy Rowley joined the team and launched monthly supper clubs that sell out weeks ►

“Lunches can be light or rather more laden, especially on a Sunday when the Old Lamp Room is one of the few places in the area to recognise that some people don't want to eat until 5pm or even 6pm.”

ahead. This year, they have introduced an evening service every Friday and Saturday.

There is much more to come. The most recent recruit before our latest visit was Daisy Rowley, Wendy's daughter. So that's two female chefs in the same, small kitchen.

Wendy reveals that Daisy grew up in the surroundings of Wednesdays bistro in Beverley when they ran that. When Covid got in the way of Daisy's plans to follow her sociology degree with a Masters, she joined her mum in the kitchen at the Black Horse. After that she went to the Tiger Inn at Beverley. They both relish the reunion and Wendy says it will make everything at the Old Lamp Room "doubly as good".

It's the sort of place where I often don't know where to start, or where to finish! In truth, I've never been there early enough to try the breakfast but even if I had I'd struggle to get past the cake cabinet.

Lunches can be light or rather more laden, especially on a Sunday when the Old Lamp Room is one of the few places in the area to recognise that some people don't want to eat until 5pm or even 6pm.

Our own supper club crew still talk about the back-to-back nights we enjoyed at the Old Lamp Room in April 2024, and another visit is imminent, or possibly two.

Most recently I dragged three hungry companions along there to try the new Saturday night service. All strong independent women, they weren't about to let me tell them what to eat so all that stuff about each of us trying something different in the interests of thorough research went straight out of the window.

They all tucked into the confit duck leg tartiflette served with buttered greens and a plum and cherry gravy. I had a fish pie that combined haddock, salmon and tiger prawns, one of which was skewered on top as a smart garnish. It was finished

with boiled egg and crispy leeks and was superb, but next time I'll have the duck because sometimes I do as I'm told.

Meaty mains when we went included slow-cooked belly pork, lamb sausages and a steak and ale pie. Vegetarian options were butternut squash and cauliflower mac 'n' cheese, and a vintage cheddar and onion Homity pie. Maybe next time.

We'd been rather more adventurous with the starters. I'm always wary of wasabi so someone else chose the sesame panko tiger prawns and we were both happy. The goats cheese crostini with strawberry chilli jam, rocket pesto, fruit and nuts struck me as inappropriate on a night when the Station Road potholes outside were packed with ice.

I managed to steal one pulled-pork bonbon and loved it. Bite-sized, breadcrumb parcels served with sticky apple and barbecue sauce. Sweet, savoury, superb.



The Yorkshire pudding fondue intrigued me so I ordered it and was rewarded with five mini-puds and three delicious dips – a rich onion gravy, brandy green peppercorn sauce and cheesy cauliflower.

Dessert was always going to be a stretch but three of us made an effort and we weren't disappointed. Sticky toffee pudding with vanilla ice cream and butterscotch sauce brought a rave review from across the table, and a triple chocolate brownie with pistachio and Bailey's didn't last long.

My vanilla rice pudding with Yorkshire rhubarb, ginger compote and flapjack crumbs was the perfect finale to a hot and hearty meal that set me up perfectly for the winter walk home.

Not that we were in a hurry as we sat, finished the wine, ordered a coffee or two and admired the décor created by the man about the house, Kasha's husband Mark. A giraffe and zebra – not real of course – sticking out of the wall and peering through the blossom suspended from the ceiling. A 3D-style staircase and bookshelves mural. Unremarkable tables given a new lease of life with a layer of coins or keys, all held in place by a coating of resin.

Everything combines to create a cosy, quirky, cracking little restaurant with its own railway station! Parking is easy in the evening, sometimes tricky during the day but the good news is that the Station Road truck trail is undergoing improvements. My wife said the stroll home was like walking on the moon. I wouldn't know, but the Old Lamp Room is certainly taking giant steps. ●





CONVERTIBLE WITHOUT COMPROMISE

Aston Martin has launched a convertible stablemate to its world-beating Vantage Coupe, with the **Vantage Roadster** promising the ultimate open-top driving experience

Aston Martin has unveiled the Vantage Roadster, the convertible companion to the renowned Vantage Coupe.

The Roadster continues the brand's tradition of redefining luxury and performance, now enhanced with the exhilaration of open-top driving.

The Vantage Roadster features Aston Martin's 4.0-litre V8 twin-turbo engine, producing 665PS and 800Nm of torque. It offers the same class-leading performance and dynamic precision as the Coupe, with the added thrill of top-down motoring. The Roadster

combines state-of-the-art technology with the timeless appeal of a British sports car, delivering an unforgettable driving experience.

DESIGN AND ENGINEERING

Engineered alongside the Vantage Coupe, the Roadster's design ensures minimal weight gain and no compromises in structural rigidity. With its lightweight aluminium structure and composite body panels, the Roadster achieves a near-perfect 49:51 weight distribution. The car's advanced suspension system—featuring race- ▶





inspired double wishbones, adaptive dampers, and bespoke tuning—also provides exceptional handling and precision.

The Roadster's roof also uses a Z-fold mechanism, allowing it to open or close in just 6.8 seconds at speeds up to 31mph. This innovative design eliminates the need for a tonneau cover, reducing weight and improving the car's centre of gravity. Despite its speed and simplicity, the roof offers impressive insulation, ensuring a quiet and comfortable cabin even at high speeds.

PERFORMANCE

The V8 engine, paired with an eight-speed paddle-shift transmission, propels the Roadster from 0 to 60mph in just 3.5 seconds, with a top speed of 202mph. Larger turbochargers and other refinements have significantly increased power and torque compared to its predecessor. The electronically controlled limited-slip differential and Michelin Pilot Sport S 5 tyres, specially developed for the Vantage, ensure optimal grip and driving confidence in all conditions.

SAFETY AND TECHNOLOGY

The Roadster's advanced electronic architecture uses six-axis sensors to monitor vehicle behaviour, enabling precise adjustments to the ESP and traction control systems. Drivers can choose from eight traction control settings to suit road conditions and driving preferences, including an option to turn off the system for an unfiltered driving experience.

The car's braking system also features carbon ceramic discs and six-piston calipers, delivering exceptional stopping power. This ensures the Roadster can match its rapid acceleration with equally impressive deceleration.

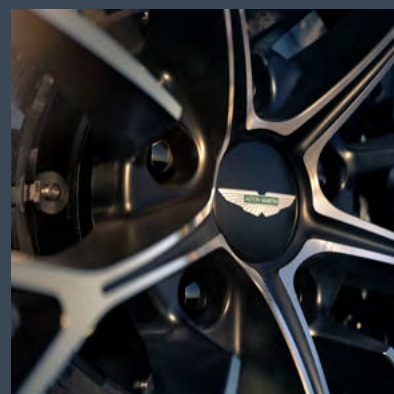
DESIGN EXCELLENCE

The Roadster retains the striking lines and proportions of the Coupe, looking equally stunning with the roof up or down. The roof's seamless integration enhances the car's aerodynamic profile, while its widened stance and signature grille underscore its performance pedigree. New paint options and customisation features, including 21-inch wheels and bespoke liveries, allow for extensive personalisation.

INFOTAINMENT AND CUSTOMISATION

The Vantage Roadster introduces Aston Martin's next-generation infotainment system, featuring a 10.25-inch touchscreen with multi-finger gesture control and physical buttons for key functions. The system is fully integrated with online connectivity and a companion app for iOS and Android. Customers can also opt for an upgraded Bowers & Wilkins audio system, tailored to the Roadster's interior acoustics.

As with all Aston Martins, the Vantage Roadster offers extensive customisation through the Q by Aston Martin programme. Customers can personalise everything from paint and upholstery to bespoke components, ensuring their Roadster is a unique reflection of their style. ●



Deliveries of the Vantage Roadster will begin in Q2 2025.

For more details visit www.astonmartin.com/en-gb/models/vantage-roadster

It's not all doom and gloom

Times are hard – but if you possibly can, please go out and support your local food and drink destinations, writes *Phil Ascough*

The loss of The Hispanist. The launch of a few new culinary ventures. Confused? You should be. But don't be fooled. Just when you think things can't get any harder for the hospitality trade, they generally do.

The only answer is to support your local food and drink destinations. That's easier said than done because the same economic earthquakes that are wiping out our favourite restaurants are also taking their toll on pockets, purses and wallets. But we have to try, because what's the point of working hard to bring in the cash in the first place if you can't spend it on nice things?

Supporting the hospitality sector also means creating jobs, putting smiles on people's faces, giving folk a reason to come to Hull and East Yorkshire. For all the closures there are still many venues battling on.

Some of them are very good indeed. Others are more than half-decent and just need people to believe in them and give them a chance.

Nick Hill, chef-patron at The Hispanist, just ran out of steam after five gruelling years. His opening in November 2019 was delayed just enough to scupper any hopes of a Christmas bonanza that would have brought in some fat ahead of the lean weeks that always come with the start of a new year.

Disastrously, new year 2020 brought Covid. Sure, the closure of bars and restaurants wasn't imposed until March 20, but the cancellations were mounting long before then. Nick resisted any temptation to join the ranks of chefs serving take-away dishes or devising schemes for outdoor pop-ups, which is perhaps ironic as that's one of the things he was exploring as he closed the doors for the last time.

He's already given it a go with some Valentine's special nights at Still, the smart, stylish and laid-back wine and coffee place in Posterngate set up a couple of years ago by one of the guys from Two Gingers. Wish them every success. Go and buy their stuff,



NEW IN 2024: Some of the team at Chinese Whispers.

From left, manager Louise Cree, executive chef Les Leak and assistant manager Ellie Lambert

because it would be great to see the pop-ups pick up, pull in different chefs all with their own ideas and introduce more people to our restaurants.

I'm not going to mention names here because it really wouldn't help the people involved, but there are reports that other good restaurants are almost on the brink. Please get behind them if you can, but also do yourself a favour and check in with them first. The pressures on some businesses are so severe and sudden that the operators might only find out on the day that they can't open in the evening.

Our plans for a supper club in February had to be scrapped because none of the five places we approached could accommodate us. One operator was on holiday. Another was struggling to source a chef. Three others didn't respond to our calls. You get the idea some wounds are self-inflicted.

But there are good things going on as well. Paragon Arcade – birthplace of The Hispanist and the Two Gingers coffee shop which was reinvented as Still – is awaiting the arrival of a high-profile local restaurant group. The Arcade is also buzzing from the activity at Oishii Ne, Salt & Pepper Kitchen, Grubb deli and last year's Hull BID Awards Best in Food and Drink winner Milchig. We'll be taking people there for the Humber Business Week Street Food Supper Club on Monday, June 2.

This year's HullBID winner Thieving Harry's is still going strong in Humber Street and dates back to 2011 – having started life as a pop-up! During 2024 it was joined by new neighbours Social Distortion, Smoke Room and Chinese Whispers.

HullBID has embarked on a new season of supper clubs which is promoting city centre dining destinations at a time when Hull Maritime is rolling out a programme of attractions which it's estimated could attract 300,000 visitors to the city centre every year, on top of the crowds that flock to the usual programme of festivals.

The key for any business is to be available when your customers need you. That's why 1884 Wine & Tapas Bar opened seven days a week until it became a Covid casualty five years ago. Thieving Harry's works to a slightly different theme. It opens on Sundays and Mondays, when many places don't. It closes on Wednesdays and Thursdays, when people can easily find other options.

We moved our January supper club at Tanyalak to a Wednesday because the owner said he preferred to keep Mondays and Tuesdays free for walk-ins, attracting diners who struggled to fine anywhere else. We had a great night, pulled in another full house and again left the owner pondering whether he could get a deal to expand into next door. It's not all doom and gloom. ●

Forward plan with our helpful

EVENTS DIARY



APRIL

- 2** Property & Poppadoms – Hull, by James Rogers, Tapasya@Marina, Hull
- 3** An Introduction to AI for Small Businesses: Smarter Work, Less Effort! by C4DI, Hull
- 3** Education Breakfast Briefing: A Positive Approach to Menopause, by Rollits, Hull
- 10** How to sell when you CAN'T STAND selling! by C4DI, Hull
- 10** Hull Business Expo, Princes Quay Shopping Centre, Hull
- 10** Humber Business Week 2025 Programme Launch, Hull Truck Theatre
- 11** Chamber Goole & Howdenshire Business Excellence Awards 2025, Goole Academy
- 11** THUD Yorkshire – Mayoral Election Special, by Youth Enterprise, Humber Street Gallery
- 22** How to survive presenting online when it's your worst nightmare! by C4DI, Hull
- 23** Know your... building compliance, by Sewell Group, Hull
- 25** National Association for Fine Art Education Annual Conference, 1-2 Pier St, Hull
- 29** UK Landlord Network (Hull), Goodfellowship Inn, Hull
- 30** The Mental Edge: Unlock Professional Growth, Understand Yourself and Other, by Gemma Wardell, The Deep Business Centre
- 30-1** Offshore Wind Connections 2025 (OWC2025), DoubleTree by Hilton Hull

MAY

- 7** Property & Poppadoms – Hull, by James Rogers, Tapasya@Marina, Hull
- 13** Post-16 Open Event, Bishop Burton College
- 14** Employment Law Update, by the CIPD Branch in Humber, Mercure Hull Grange Park Hotel, Willerby
- 15** Northern Lincolnshire Business Awards, The Baths Hall, Scunthorpe
- 15** An Evening with Steve Bruce, Hull City Hall
- 17** Open Event, Hull College
- 21** The Mental Edge: Unlock Professional Growth, Understand Yourself and Other, by Gemma Wardell, The Deep Business Centre

JUNE

- 2-6** Humber Business Week 2025

To have your event listed here, please email sam@bw-magazine.co.uk.

Please note, while we make every effort to ensure these listings are correct, we cannot be held responsible for changes or cancellations – always contact the venue beforehand to check.



we know
corporate
accommodation

We know how to make your stay comfortable, convenient and productive. We know the best locations across Hull, East Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire. And we know how to work to your budget.

- Short stays or longer term rental
- Room only or meals and travel included
- Large shared houses, private ensuite rooms, or fully-equipped apartments

Specialising in quality bespoke serviced accommodation, Eazy Rooms takes the stress out of finding a home away from home for your people.

Eazy Rooms – we know corporate accommodation

Call now on
01482 770360

or email
hello@eazy-rooms.co.uk

or visit our website
eazy-rooms.co.uk


eazyrooms



**Experts in cleaning
services for over 70 years**

Contact us on 01482 648737 or 0113 8631525

National providers to all Sectors

**Our 120 plus strong team deliver our full range of services
nationally to all sectors. NO JOB TOO BIG OR TOO SMALL**



- Exterior building cleans
- Window cleaning
- Gutter cleaning
- Kitchen cleaning
- Air & grease duct cleaning
- High pressure jetting
- Commercial roof cleans
- Solar panel cleaning
- Internal high level cleans
- Factory deep cleans

For more information about our services, please don't hesitate to contact us,
or alternatively, request a free no-obligation quote
info@kingstoncleaningservices.co.uk

www.kingstoncleaningservices.co.uk