

APRIL 2024 | PROPERTY

BUSINESS BULLETIN

Speeding up our planning system

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**Exclusive:
Carr steers
CALA towards
green growth**




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Speeding up planning

The sixth edition of the Chamber's Investment Tracker published last May told a story of £6.5billion of major infrastructure and regeneration projects completed in the region since 2017, making it an even better place to live, work, study, visit and do business. Looking ahead, it also identified a future pipeline of a further £15billion+ of projects.

Not bad for a place many commentators reckon is on the way out but in light of an uncertain economic outlook, it will be fascinating to see what has changed when the seventh edition is published later this year.

The Chamber believes that it is the role of all three tiers of government to create the framework and conditions that will act as a catalyst to enable the private sector, investors, companies and entrepreneurs to do *their* bit.

A mixed report card on this one.

Aberdeen City has shown great ambition with its city centre masterplan already having given us Marischal Square and Provost Skene's House, our incredible Art Gallery, refurbished Music Hall and a re-born Union Terrace Gardens. With further work underway at the beach and the creation of a destination 'market' venue linking Union Street to The Green, with covered public space, pop-up retail units and food and drink outlets, all supported by major upgrades to infrastructure and streetscape.

The latter is supported by the UK Government which is investing more than £40million of Levelling Up funding into major regeneration infrastructure projects in the North-east.

In Peterhead, a derelict historic mansion house in the town centre will be restored, extended and developed into a modern museum, library and regional cultural hub. The present museum and library

building will be converted into a live performance venue with music and dance rehearsal studios upstairs.

And Macduff's popular Marine Aquarium will receive a substantial and much-needed investment, creating a new two-floor extension with refurbished and expanded displays and interactive exhibits, plus a cafe, community space and educational suite.

Scottish Government has provided £400,000 towards the Our Union Street project.

And, moving away from town and city centres, Investment Zone status for the North-east brings a ten-year, £160million package - supported by both governments- will unlock opportunity and inward investment to supercharge energy transition and digital technology projects regionwide.

Meanwhile however, instead of this acting as a catalyst, too many barriers including cost inflation, ever increasing amounts of red tape and planning delays are often strangling at birth the plans of businesses and entrepreneurs to bring unused buildings back to life, to create town and city centre living, open independent retail outlets, hospitality businesses and leisure venues.

The planning process - specifically the buildings standards/control part - needs to be better resourced, more collaborative and less confrontational. Investors need certainty and pace to give them the confidence to proceed. Without this, they'll simply take their cash elsewhere.

Many of the people we speak to tell us that the default position is 'No (unless)' rather than 'Yes (how)'. Too often the planning process is seen as more important than planning *progress*.

As we approach the first anniversary of the adoption of NPF4 I was reminded of a quote from a senior industry practitioner who said it was

one of the worst pieces of legislation she had seen in her 20 years in the business.

So it was encouraging to hear Planning Minister Joe FitzPatrick announce that the Scottish Government has launched a wide-ranging review with the aim of speeding up the planning process and potentially streamlining the conversion of empty and listed buildings. But while reviews are all well and good, action - at pace - is what is needed.

Part of the consultation will look at regulations that would give planning authorities the option of creating Masterplan Consent Areas. These areas, which could cover either sites or specific developments such as housing in defined areas, would come with consents granted up-front for projects considered to be of most local benefit. This would simplify consenting for developers and provide certainty, making it easier for them to secure investment.

One of the ways an MCA could be used is to streamline consents for conversions to bring empty buildings, including listed buildings or the upper floors above retail units, back into use. This could be a game-changer for efforts to regenerate town and city centres as well as supporting Investment Zone activity.

And the Chamber will be convening a roundtable of interested parties this month to ensure its response to the consultation reflects the views of our members.

However, just building fields of dreams does not guarantee they will come. There is little point in investing in our towns and cities if it's too difficult to get there (and back).

Legislation and rhetoric continues to be anti-car with restrictions increasing and a drive to get people to leave cars at home. But this is a real challenge given the demography and geography of the North-east of Scotland.

Anecdotal evidence is that a combination of confusing factors such as bus gates and the impending Low Emission Zone are acting as reasons for people to travel into Aberdeen city centre less often.

While we have seen improvements in some bus journey times, recent media reports tell of the challenges of travelling by bus to, from, in and around our Buchan towns. In fact, for this very reason, the Chamber recently lost a member of staff because it was just too difficult for her to get to work.

Of course, Peterhead and Fraserburgh are now the two largest towns in the UK furthest from the rail network, confirming the importance of the work being led by the Chamber and Campaign for North East Rail to reinstate rail links between Aberdeen and Buchan.

A comprehensive study, supported by the Just Transition Fund, was undertaken by two of the world's leading infrastructure consultancies, AECOM and Stantec, and explores in depth the possibility of passenger and freight services running north of Dyce and onwards to Peterhead and Fraserburgh for the first time in over 50 years. This was submitted at the end of March. Watch this space for next steps.

Finally, if we are to get people moving around the whole region to enjoy our compelling leisure, culture and nighttime economy we simply must overhaul our outdated, territorial and over-regulated taxi system, attract more drivers and make it simpler for passengers to have confidence in the service. The Chamber will continue to explore the art of the (surely) possible with the appropriate parties.



Russell Borthwick
Chief Executive



Our premier partners

The Chamber sits at the heart of the North-east business community, and one of our core aims is to help create the economic conditions and business environment which will allow this region to flourish.

Our premier partners see the value of a strong regional Chamber and choose to engage with us at this level to reinforce their ongoing commitment to the region and its economy.

Without their support we would not be able to undertake much of the work that we do. Their engagement is hugely valued and appreciated.

If you are interested in joining them, we'd love to talk to you!



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Carr steers CALA towards green growth

The green housebuilding revolution is on the horizon for most, but it's well underway for CALA Homes.

From this month, new homes are required to use climate-friendly alternatives to gas boilers, such as heat pumps.

"Do we think the consumer is ready for this? Is there enough of an appetite for it? We believe there is. For the quality of product, at the right price point in the market, we think that people will want to take this technology forward."

The Scottish regulations are a year ahead of the UK-wide regulations, which won't come into place until 2025.

But CALA's Interim Regional Director Fraser Carr is keen to get ahead of the game.

"The move completely off gas is a big one; it's completely new technology.

"We have a first development in Aberdeen at Grandhome with the first homes that we've ever built that are completely off gas.

"It's a little bit of a leap because there's a comfort zone in what you've done before.

"And we've gone even further by putting in EV chargers to every property, and some of the properties also have solar panels on the roof to supplement and feed the air source."

The expense isn't the only challenge facing CALA, it's also encouraging buyers to embrace the green technology.

The UK has 412 heat pumps per 100,000 people. That's a fraction of the 3,068 heat pumps per 100,000 people across Europe.

CALA has been fitting hybrid air source heat pumps for a number of years.

"It is challenge making sure our consumers understand it, what it means for them and what the benefits to them are. But we're quite excited to see that travel.

"It's also a challenge trying to find a supply chain that can deliver it at the right price and in the right quality.

"We do believe we've got that, but then you've then got to think about the consumer once they've moved in and the maintenance element of it, so you need enough as a supply chain to maintain good, new technology going forward.

“

We believe going full air source is probably the best solution for our customers

"And I think there's more people now having a conversation around sustainability measures in the home, more people understanding the energy efficiency of it.

"For all of us there's a step into a new space and trying to find the balance of the consumer market being ready for it, it's not too left field, but the key thing for us is that it's deliverable for our customer.

"There's lots of technology out there but we believe going full air source is probably the best solution for our customers at the minute."

Sustainability is a challenge that CALA continue to meet head on but, like most housebuilders UK-wide, problems out with their control can prove to be a tricky hurdle to clear.

"The cost of living over the last 12-18 months has directly impacted all of us and impacted the ability of our consumers affordability," Fraser says.

"Rising mortgage rates over the last 12 months, majorly through quarter three last year, has adversely impacted consumer sentiment.

"But while lenders have responded with better products and better offerings, there's still a nervousness and trepidation out there, I think because of the underlying cost of living.

"We are seeing some improvement around consumer confidence although it is still at a very low level."

The cost pressures facing housebuilders are seemingly never-ending.

Firms are forced to juggle the cost of materials and construction, whilst being wary about the cost of

living crisis facing the consumer.

“Upward cost pressure is very difficult to pass on to consumers or to pass on anywhere else across the supply chain, other than having to absorb it.”

But Fraser reckons there's light at the end of the tunnel.

“A lot of the factors that have hit the supply chain are out with their hands so we need to work in partnership with our suppliers to get the best possible outcomes.

“We need to try to make sure that we have a real strong handle on the supply chain, from outside our business coming into our business and how construction team especially actually deal with that.

“A lot of that you really have to absorb and ride the wave of it.

“For recent developments, we are in a tender situation with external partners that actually the prices are moving downward, which is good.

“That's probably as much a response to them having to respond to lack of work, as much as actually the cost base softening.”

Operating within a fairly unique housing market in the North-east has its own challenges for Fraser and his team.

But with CALA's extended history in the region, understanding local consumer trends is something the firm exceed in.

“

We've got a really strong team who really believe in what Aberdeen's got to offer.

“As one of the few house builders that has a regional office on the ground here, we believe we have a really good read of what's going on in the local economy, politically, economically, and as an employment base.



“What we saw 5-10 years ago of open plan living, people have moved away from that now and want more separated living with more working from home.

“The more you understand your marketplace, which we believe we do, the more you’ve got a good chance of plotting, for us simplistically, where people want to live.

“Our focus, probably quite uniquely, in this part of the world remains just in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.

“We don’t build beyond the City and Shire and we think with the history we’ve got here and the expertise we’ve got here there’s a great market to focus on.

“We’ve got a really strong team who really believe in what Aberdeen’s got to offer.”

CALA’s belief in the North-east is felt from top-down, so much so that Fraser swapped the bright

lights of Los Angeles for the glorious granite of Aberdeen.

His six months in the property sector stateside came to an end in 2008 when he relocated across the pond.

He was made Sales and Marketing Director at CALA a decade ago.

“Aberdeen, especially the housing sector, has been on quite a journey for those 10 years.

“I walked into the peak of the market in 2014 and it’s been a roller coaster since then.

“There has been challenges within that, across the Aberdeen market. I think what we’ve what we’ve faced in the last 12-18 months is more of a UK market challenge than just an Aberdeen challenge.

“The city has actually tracked well and performed well. Prices are steady, activity levels are steady, and I think that’s all anyone in the city is looking for.

“We, as a business, have to adjust to what the environment is doing no matter how Aberdeen moves in terms of that journey it’s going to go on, they’ll still be a need for housing at a level and we just got to understand what that level is and who that potential buyer is.

“We saw change when the AWPR opened in terms of commuters and where people want to live.

“Schooling is a huge factor in terms of tracking where schools have capacity and where school standards are.

“And then we look at our employment bases around the city. There are things opening up, as we’ve seen with Prime Four for example, which changes where people want to live.”

The constant challenges facing housebuilders hasn’t damaged CALA’s determination to build a legacy in the region.





**How we
operate
is more
important
than ever
before.**

If anything, it's spurred them on.

"We're as passionate about our future as we have been about our history in Aberdeen.

"The next 12 months or so will probably see change at a UK political level and how that translates into Aberdeen, no matter what sector you're in, is going to bring a little bit of uncertainty, probably more so than the rest of the country. We just have to be able to respond to that.

"Ultimately, having a trusted brand that consumers want to interact with, that supply chain want to interact with and that landowners want to interact with is really important to the integrity of our business.

"How we operate is more important than ever before."

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Business lessons I've learned



Jeff Richardson,
Remote Operations Centre Manager, Fugro

What does your company do that others don't?

The combination of our innovative technologies and our people who apply them sets us apart. Geo-data is critical to the construction and operation of any structure on earth and is going to be even more important in the future as we adapt to climate change. Collecting and understanding this data will influence how effectively we build infrastructure and transition our energy sources. Leveraging our personnel expertise combined with our remote and autonomous robotics and sensors, data analytics and cloud processing solutions means that we can collaborate with clients to deliver safer and more sustainable projects throughout an asset's life cycle.

What are the most pressing challenges that your industry sector faces today, and why?

Recruitment and skills. The numerous challenges industry has encountered has meant experienced personnel have sought work in other sectors. In addition, university courses which gave graduates the background knowledge to enter many of our key roles have changed or closed. We have to be more open to the

experience of candidates and be prepared to invest more in training. Fugro has an established training academy in the UK to help ensure personnel have the skills and knowledge we require.

What is the hardest lesson you have learned in your career to date?

Never assume anything and don't take short cuts. Early in my offshore career I needed to trace a proposed pipework route to a new module. The area looked clear and I made an assumption about where the pipework would run. Unfortunately, when the pipework was installed, it clashed with some existing steelwork by a matter of millimetres. That was a harsh lesson I never wanted to repeat so I endeavour to be methodical and meticulous.

What is the most valuable piece of business advice you have ever received?

Perhaps not initially given as business advice but as a surveyor assisting fabrication operations I was told the old adage of "measure twice - cut once". I've always remembered this and I've interpreted it in my subsequent roles to mean verify

Quick fire round

What was your first job?

A paper round delivering free newspapers.

When would you like to retire?

When I feel it's the right time.

What did you have for breakfast?

Bagel, poached egg and a spot of spicy mayonnaise!

Who, or what, inspires you?

No one person but I am constantly inspired by the day-to-day achievements of family, friends and colleagues.

What's the last book you read / film you saw?

Dead Girl Walking - Christopher Brookmyre.

information before making a decision you can't easily change.

What's been your proudest career achievement to date, and why?

The way operations are conducted offshore are going to change massively in the coming years as innovations in robotics and communications enable more to be controlled from an onshore facility like our remote operations centre in Aberdeen. I'm proud to be part of a team on the forefront of this transition which brings a range of benefits to personnel and clients through improvements in safety, data delivery and sustainability.

If you could make one thing happen tomorrow that would benefit North-east Scotland, what would it be?

Improved collaboration between industry and education. We need to ensure that the workforce of the future is prepared for the requirements of industry, that companies understand what the expectations of the next generation are, and that accessing education for personnel who want to retrain is available and affordable.



northwood
Local knowledge, national reach

Northwood property market preview

Award-winning estate and lettings agency 'Northwood' is celebrating its 15th anniversary this year. While a time for reflection, it is also very much about looking forward. Northwood owner and director Laura Mearns and Operations Director Matt Pullinger highlight some of the trends for 2024, as well as the challenges faced by landlords, tenants, sellers, and buyers.

What are the main property trends for 2024?

Laura: There's no two ways about it, the sales market in recent years has been volatile! Already this year, we have experienced a surge of buyers and sellers looking to make their move and, with a stabilising market and mortgage rates, we expect to see more properties for sale. First-time buyers are looking for ready-to-move-in properties, having had extra time to save. This increased activity has had a positive impact on sales values achieved in the first two months of the year and we anticipate this will continue.

The Rightmove Price Index shows that the average sale price has risen 5.4% in Scotland in February 2024, compared to January and up 3.7% compared to this time last year.

Agreed sales in the first six weeks of the year are 16% higher than previous year, indicating early bird buyers feels 2024 offers the right conditions to move.

Matt: Meanwhile, we also expect that demand for rentals will continue to rise, with supply falling as many landlords sell their property due to increased legislation requirements and ongoing mortgage pressures. This continues to push rental values up.

What is driving the increase in demand for property?

Laura: 2024 looks set to be a year with increased activity and investment in the energy sector, as well as progress towards energy transition and the launch of associated projects, all of which will increase buyer and renter confidence as the economy in Aberdeen city and shire improves and new jobs are created.

What are the challenges facing landlords in 2024?

Matt: In recent years, landlords have faced ever-changing legislation. This year it is repairing standards which kicked in on 1 March, and rent increase temporary measures from 1 April. There is also the Housing Bill, which aims to deliver stronger rights for tenants, greater protection from eviction and a national system of rent controls for the private rented sector.

Laura: These changes are great news for tenants, offering more protection going forward; however, they create new challenges for landlords. We can help them navigate and manage these changes, allowing them to focus their

efforts on growing their investment. We also offer our risk-free Guaranteed Rent service, where we become the tenant providing a fixed rental income for a minimum period of 12 months.

What sets apart Northwood from other selling agents?

Laura: Our personalised estate agency service – Bespoke by Northwood – offers sellers a customised sales and marketing service based on individual needs with the aim of achieving a premium price for property. With national reach through our portals and our expert local knowledge, we advertise no more than 50 properties at a time. The seller and buyer journey are key.

Why choose Northwood for all your lettings and sales needs?

Matt: We're an award-winning team of experts with national reach and local knowledge, we provide sales, lettings, and investor solutions under one roof and we always go over and above for our clients!

To find out more about how Northwood can help you with all your lettings and estate agency needs, contact us today on 01224 218450, visit our website at northwooduk.com/aberdeen, or visit one of our offices in Rosemount, Inverurie and Banchory.

MEET THE



Sarah Misra,
CEO,
Befriend a Child

WHEN WAS YOUR CHARITY ESTABLISHED?

Befriend a Child was started in 1975 by two local women who sat on the Children's Panel in Aberdeen. They recognised that many of the children going through the children's hearing system would benefit from a trusted adult role model to support

them through their challenges. Our befriending programme was born, and we now support over 240 children a year.

WHAT DOES YOUR CHARITY DO?

We are a local, independent charity that delivers quality 1:1 befriending and mentoring programmes to children and young people in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. We also run three youth clubs in priority areas of the city and provide support to families experiencing financial hardship and social isolation.

WHAT SORT OF COMPANIES DO YOU DO BUSINESS WITH?

We are only able to make a difference to so many local children, young people and families thanks to the much-needed support of Aberdeen based companies and individuals. Support is varied and includes corporate donations, attendance and sponsorship at events, Charity of the Year partnerships, employee fundraising, participation in our Giving Tree Appeal, giving expertise pro-bono and corporate volunteering.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE FACING YOUR BUSINESS AT THE MOMENT?

The demand for our services continues to grow, particularly for children experiencing mental health challenges and those affected by poverty. Our befriending and mentoring projects are delivered by a team of incredible volunteers and key to supporting children on our waiting list is recruiting new volunteer befrienders and mentors.

AND THE BIGGEST OPPORTUNITY?

To continue to build strong partnerships with local businesses, community organisations and local councils to ensure we have the funding, volunteers and resources in place to make a positive impact to local children and young people. Leveraging social media and digital platforms are also key to raising awareness and engaging supporters and volunteers.



Dr Gordon Drummond,
Director,
Cairngorm Lodges
& Cairngorm Bothies

WHEN WAS YOUR BUSINESS ESTABLISHED?

Cairngorm Lodges opened in Spring 2013 and Cairngorm Bothies opened in April 2020 - that's the same date the "unspeakable" occurred that went on to plague the tourism and hospitality industrial sectors. By the time we actually opened all of our warranties had expired! Fully operational now,

however, and enjoying providing multi-award winning accommodation serving the North-east community who enjoy short breaks away with us.

WHAT DOES YOUR BUSINESS DO?

We provide the accommodation facilities where folks can recharge enjoying the natural capital of Royal Deeside. The physical setting of both Cairngorm Lodges and Bothies is uniquely located within a Scots Pine woodland. The accommodation units are sensitively positioned to give each guest their own space and view. The Lodges and Bothies are designed to be operated in an environmentally sensitive manner and all the activities, the products and services we use are ethically and considerately sourced.

WHAT SORT OF COMPANIES DO YOU DO BUSINESS WITH?

Our supply chain is almost all local. We use the local laundry, local suppliers for consumables and local labour from our adjacent village. We like to and want to do business, locally. Most of our customers are individuals as opposed to companies, but interestingly a very

high proportion of them come from, here in the North-east.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE FACING YOUR BUSINESS AT THE MOMENT?

Short breaks, holidays, time away are all considered by the customer as a luxury and perhaps as non-essential spend. In these times of a cost-of-living crisis people are very discerning in how they spend their hard-earned cash and we are competing and working hard to win that disposable income. It's scarce.

AND THE BIGGEST OPPORTUNITY?

We are recognised, through the multitude of awards, as being pioneers in sustainable and regenerative tourism. We have the first ever completely off-grid, purpose build, holiday development powered entirely by renewable energy. We are aligned with an expanding market and are leading the field. We are gaining respect and traction for our achievements. The byproduct of that will be that success will follow.

MEMBERS



Anne Magarin,
Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland,
Community, Events and
Corporate Fundraiser (North)

WHEN WAS YOUR BUSINESS ESTABLISHED?

1899

WHAT DOES YOUR BUSINESS DO?

Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland is Scotland's largest health charity

working to help the one in five people across Scotland living with chest, heart and stroke conditions, and Long Covid, to live life to the full.

WHAT SORT OF COMPANIES DO YOU DO BUSINESS WITH?

We work with any business that is interested in giving back to the community through fundraising activities. We run an extensive range of fundraising events that make fantastic team building and CSR activities for all kinds of organisations.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE FACING YOUR BUSINESS AT THE MOMENT?

Our biggest challenge is ensuring that people in Scotland living with our conditions get access to a quality supported self-management and community recovery service. Currently, this is not available to all and where it is, it differs in quality and impact. We are working with our partners in the NHS and Scottish Government to address this.

AND THE BIGGEST OPPORTUNITY?

The kindness of people is a huge opportunity for Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland. We are fortunate to benefit from the support of volunteers and fundraisers from across the country who give up their time to support our organisation. Without them, we wouldn't be able to help the people that we do.

WHAT ARE YOU MOST PASSIONATE AND PROUD OF WHEN IT COMES TO YOUR BUSINESS?

Personally, I am passionate about making sure that there is help available for people in their moments of need - for them to know that they are not alone living with life-altering conditions and helping to achieve our No Life Half Lived campaign.



Cameron McCready,
Chief Executive,
Home-Start Aberdeen

WHEN WAS YOUR BUSINESS ESTABLISHED?

Home-Start Aberdeen was founded in 1987, working from a church hall cupboard, it served the community in Mastrick. Since then, we've grown and expanded our services to work with families across the city and meet the varied needs of those who are facing ever increasing challenges.

WHAT DOES YOUR BUSINESS DO?

We offer compassionate, holistic support and friendship for families with young children to give them the best start in life. Our team of staff and volunteers provide advice, reassurance, practical support and signposting to help families become more resilient, self-reliant and able to cope with difficult circumstances.

WHAT SORT OF COMPANIES DO YOU DO BUSINESS WITH?

Home-Start Aberdeen has formed close ties with a number of third sector organisations, NHS teams and departments, schools, social workers, early learning, childcare providers and more to help us reach and support as many families as possible. We are also grateful for the support of local individuals, groups and businesses who generously donate, volunteer or lend support to our work.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE FACING YOUR BUSINESS AT THE MOMENT?

We are supporting families in the face of unprecedented challenges to family life. Many are in complex circumstances and require more intense support, for longer, to achieve positive outcomes. These challenges also impact our ability to recruit and retain the volunteers who are so crucial to sustaining our model of support.

AND THE BIGGEST OPPORTUNITY?

The silver lining to these challenges is that people are becoming increasingly aware of the need for services like ours and are reaching out to access them. As families feel the squeeze of financial hardship and reduced public services, we are constantly innovating and collaborating to meet their needs in a robust, friendly and accessible manner.

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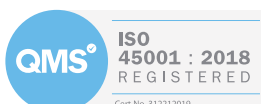
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P&J Live enhance sustainability credentials

North Scotland's largest live event venue, P&J Live, has announced the appointment of sustainability specialists, Positive Planet, as its net zero advisors to help enhance and accelerate the venue's climate and sustainability journey.

Positive Planet will initially be calculating the venue's carbon footprint across Scope 1 (direct emissions from owned sources), Scope 2 (indirect emissions from the generation of purchased energy) and Scope 3 carbon emissions (all indirect emissions) using the Government approved Greenhouse Gas Protocol.

Carbon hotspots within the business will be pinpointed, allowing for the development of a carbon reduction plan. Positive Planet will also engage with all P&J Live staff to conduct carbon literacy training, teaching the basics of climate change science and to develop a better understanding of what changes individuals can make to help impact climate change.

P&J Live is currently one of the most sustainable buildings of its kind in the UK, with its site designed to be a living environment and attract people and wildlife to the grounds. This includes 29,000 planted trees and shrubs and a 7km network of footpaths that serve the site and connecting surrounding areas.

Gilson Gray continues expansion with acquisition

Full-service legal firm Gilson Gray has further strengthened its position in Edinburgh with the acquisition of MHD Law.

The deal represents the group's second takeover deal of 2024. MHD has a 100-year history and, over that time, has established a strong local reputation for delivering legal services across property, estate agency and conveyancing; private client services; and family law, including associated court work. A team of 17, including Kieran Fitzpatrick, Chris Benson and Raymond Fairgrieve, will now join Gilson Gray's Edinburgh office.

The deal will see MHD's clients gain access to the full spectrum of legal, property and financial services offered by Gilson Gray across the UK, including corporate and family business support, litigation, debt recovery, lettings, as well as the expertise provided by its financial services arm, Gilson Gray Financial Management.

Glen Gilson, Chair and Managing Partner of Gilson Gray, said: "MHD is a firm of rich tradition and a long-established feature of the Scottish legal market. We are honoured to welcome the MHD team and their loyal client base to Gilson Gray. The takeover is aligned to our ambitions for growth during 2024, as we look to consolidate and capitalise upon the multi-regional expansion of recent years."



AberNecessities starts partnership with Aberdeen International Airport

Award-winning Aberdeen International Airport has selected AberNecessities as its new charity partner.

A vote by employees at the recently crowned Hub of the Year at the National Transport Awards has led to AberNecessities being appointed.

More than £62,000 was raised for the previous charity partners We Too! and Kayleigh's Wee Stars as the airport commits future fundraising events like the unique Runway Run to AberNecessities.

Since launching in 2019, AberNecessities has supported over 12,000 children, distributing hundreds of thousands of essential items across the North-east.

Danielle Flecher-Horn, Founder of AberNecessities, said: "We are deeply honoured to be chosen as Aberdeen International Airport's charity of the year.

"This recognition is a testament to our team's dedication and work in the north-east. We are excited to collaborate closely with Aberdeen International Airport, exploring various opportunities to raise awareness and garner support from those travelling to, from and through Aberdeen.

"The airport provides a unique platform to engage with thousands of individuals, and we believe in the strength of numbers within our community. We are truly grateful for this level of support and look forward to this exciting partnership".

Lee McCann, Communications Manager and Charity Management Lead at Aberdeen International Airport, said: "We have been delighted to work with both We Too! And Kayleigh's Wee Stars the last two years. I want to thank both charities for what has been a fantastic partnership that we are sad is coming to an end.

"Our group is looking forward to working with AberNecessities who have seen their demand for support increase over the last few years. AberNecessities do some incredible work across the community, and we hope we can achieve great things working together."

Investing in local talent

Azets' plan for a sustainable future

The rise of Azets over the last six years has been nothing short of extraordinary.

Amid a volatile economic environment, the audit, tax and business advisory firm has grown ten-fold and, with David Booth at the helm, there's no plans to slow down.

"We're just going through the budget process at the moment but, as a business, we're looking to double in size over the next five years.

"We have got a plan for every service line that we're looking to implement. We're looking to bring in some new service lines in Aberdeen because we think there's a market for it."

Graeme Sheils joined Azets in October last year in as a Regional Chair, having enjoyed a lengthy career within the big four.

"I've been really, really impressed by what the guys have achieved in such a short space of time.

"One thing that's really exciting is the youth and the energy throughout the team. There is a genuine belief that Azets is the natural home for growing and ambitious businesses and their owners.

"We're invested in Aberdeen and see great potential in the city, we've got first class office facilities and we're continuing to build specialist headcount.

"As an old guy, having been a partner at Deloitte for over 21 years, and been around a lot of different businesses, the dynamism and energy here is special and really refreshing.

"We've got a lot of autonomy to build on the team's successes to date, to do what's right for Azets in

the North-east and to provide the services and support we think are important to local businesses and their owners."

The duo have big plans for the area.

"This year, we're investing significantly again in more placement students from RGU, interns from the University of Aberdeen, school leavers and graduates as we look to grow the next generation of accounting, audit and tax talent in the region," said David.

"It's 18 in total, and that intake has doubled every single year for five years.

"We're committed to investing locally, creating jobs, and being part of the community and as long as we keep growing, which I think we will, those opportunities are going to continue to be there."

It's not only by investing in young talent has Azets been able to grow at an rapid rate.

David and Graeme pride themselves on providing a tailored service to clients, offering more flexibility than its larger competitors in the big four.

"The key to success continues to be David and the team. Apart from being good at what they do, the approach is nimble and flexible, providing that tailored local service," according to Graeme.

"Some people just want a 'no frills' compliance services, with their audit and tax filings completed with minimum fuss and on time. However, we also bring more to the table.

"We can bring some different insight through our tax, systems and controls and risk expertise, as well digital and analytics offerings."

Despite the incredible success David has helped bring to the company, neither he nor Graeme is blind to the challenges awaiting them in the not-too-distant future.

The latter has been in Aberdeen since 1994 and is well aware of the opportunities and challenges on the road ahead.

While Aberdeen has a massive opportunity to secure its position in the energy sector through energy transition, this comes with a warning over the current taxation regime, both corporate and personal, which Graeme feel risks both confidence over future investment and a potential talent drain away from the region.

"We have incredible skills and talent here but our political leadership needs to help us by facilitating an environment that provides confidence to invest for longer term economic growth and create the career opportunities that will come with that.

"The Energy Profits Levy is a handbrake on investment and the Scottish personal tax rate differential is also unhelpful. The energy sector needs to be seen as more attractive to build a career.

"At the moment I think there is hesitation with people concerned about the longer-term vision.

"This, combined with personal tax rate differentials, is contributing to younger and more experienced professionals looking elsewhere for opportunities.

David has spent the majority of his life in the North-east. He's already had a lasting impact on Azets in the city but is under no illusions as to how challenging things are getting.

"When you've got an already tight market for talent, if you add the

AZETS

David Booth,
Managing Partner,
Azets



Graeme Sheils,
Regional Chair,
Azets



points in Graeme mentioned, it's just going to get harder for us to attract talent and retain talent, and that's what we're going to need to be able to grow.

"We've been relying on the universities. We have recruited at the placement level and graduate level heavily with the aim of trying to build a real conveyor belt of talent. That is a challenge already, never mind looking forward 18 or 24 months.

"The numbers on the accounting and finance courses at the local universities have reduced over the past few years.

"They've been as low as they've ever been and that's concerning.

"I'm not sure what's driving it, but that's coming through in terms of volume of graduate applicants and placement applicants.

"However, we have been an attractive option for students so have managed to recruit some real talent from a limited pool."

Graeme added: "The reality is that it's always been hard to get people to come to Aberdeen if they haven't

had any previous connection to the city, and the clouds around the energy sector are adding to that challenge.

"But I think the biggest challenge we've got is that people born and bred in Aberdeen and the North-east now deciding to go elsewhere to gain experience because they don't see opportunities locally.

"My worry is they don't return."

The trials and tribulations of current and future policy decisions may prove to make things more difficult for Azets, but a successful UK-wide rebranding of the company in 2020 has played a massive role in developing the company into a major player nationally and locally.

"The journey in the first couple of years was pretty hard, it was a chore to convince staff to join you and sell them the vision, it was the same with clients," said David.

"But we've taken in the right people at the right time. CV19 actually worked in our favour, a lot of clients started looking at costs and we capitalised on that.

"Certain firms made the decision to give staff pay-cuts and we put pay up to keep our people. A lot of decisions at the right time helped accelerate our growth.

"The rebranding and the office move, which were sorted at a similar time, were big parts of the growth journey.

"Taking potential clients and hires into this office and showing them round was a big selling point."

With an impressive, modern office space on Albyn Place, it's easy to see the attraction.

A young workforce that's invested in Aberdeen, and a young company that's investing in Aberdeen, has Azets setup for a bright future, despite what challenges may come their way.

David said: "I do think we've got an exceptionally strong team and we're looking to build on that over the next few years with key strategic hires."

More than 60 firms interested in moving to Union Street

More than 60 businesses have registered an interest in setting-up on Union Street thanks to a joint-effort by the public and private sectors.

A new report has revealed that the Granite Mile has finally turned a corner, thanks to a major partnership between Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeen Inspired, Our Union Street and Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce.

It is now being proposed that financial grants for equipment and a pop-up test space for entrepreneurs are added to efforts to rejuvenate the street in 2024.

A protracted oil and gas downturn followed by a pandemic left Union Street with one of the highest shop vacancy rates in the country. An emergency summit was called in November 2022 when the number of vacant ground floor units peaked at 47.

However, a major collaborative effort has turned the tide, and today the number of vacant shops has fallen to 37, with the number vacant and available to rent believed to have fallen below 30.

The street now boasts some of the most generous incentives in the UK – with grants to fit-out units and up to two years rent and rates free where the premises has been empty for more than five years, subject to landlord support.

A paper to Aberdeen city councillors outlined the progress to date, and how it plans to build upon the momentum.

Grant scheme

Since launching last summer, Aberdeen City Council's Empty Shops Grant Scheme has attracted 65 expressions of interest.

The scheme offers grants of up to £35,000 where the money is match-funded by new tenants or landlords, and is designed to bring empty unit back into use.

The £500,000 fund was supposed to be spent over two years but has been such a success that the council has agreed to add another £500,000 to the scheme and extend it to 2026.

In a report to councillors, Jen Lawrie, a Senior Project Officer in the City Development team at the council, said grant funding had helped four shops open already: a fashion boutique at 226 Union Street, a coffee takeaway at 474 Union Street, a watch retailer at 132 Union Street and a restaurant and takeaway at 118 Union Street.



Ryan Crighton,
Director of Policy,
Aberdeen & Grampian
Chamber of Commerce

To date, the £140,000 of public money which has been spent to date has leveraged in £1million of private investment.

Since the start of 2024, nine further applications have been moved forward, which will bring the total number of grants awarded to £455,000.

Going forward, it is proposed that the scheme be extended to include business equipment where it is specific and integral to the new business operations, and costs for basement and first floor works will also be eligible if it helps bring a ground floor back into use.

Footfall progress

The report to council also estimates that city centre footfall rose by 17.8% during 2023, although it still lags behind pre-pandemic levels.

Spectra and the Christmas Market boosted average weekend footfall figures of 156,835 and 125,694 respectively, compared to the average weekend footfall in 2023 of 117,409.

This programme is enhanced by Aberdeen Inspired's Foodie Fortnight twice annually and NuArt.

The Chamber's Ultimate Masterclass Festival – which is bringing big names such as Steven Bartlett, Gary Neville, Davina McCall and Louis Theroux to Aberdeen City Centre – has also been credited with having an impact.

Additional efforts

Looking forward, the council report says it will work with Marks and Spencer “to explore options and secure a buyer/alternative use for the St Nicholas store they are vacating”.

The local authority is also exploring how it can provide pop-up pilot retail space for entrepreneurs

and SMEs to test products, market demand and develop business skills and resilience.

The council will also support Aberdeen Inspired's work to find a use for upper floors, and it will also continue to support Our Union Street, led by entrepreneur and former FTSE100 Chief Executive Bob Keiller.

The community-led, not-for-profit organisation is seeking to restore pride and prosperity to Union Street and has five key focus areas:

- **Brighten the street:** This is about getting the street clean then bringing extra colour and interest to it.
- **Fill the units:** Create and market a compelling offer then attract great businesses to occupy them and bring them back to life.
- **Use the space:** Use the empty shop windows as a fascinating and often changing street gallery that attracts people to the street and brightens up empty retail units.
- **Tell the story:** Creating a single reliable source of information about what's happening in the city centre and creating lots of attractions and events.
- **Engage the people:** Recruiting and deploying the volunteers required to deliver the four action areas above.

It has been set-up by Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce, Aberdeen Inspired, Aberdeen City Council and Opportunity North East, with additional support from Shell, which recently relocated to the street. AB15 Limited – owned and run by Mr Keiller and his business partner Derrick Thomson – is also funding the organisation, and both businessmen have committed to running the organisation free of charge.

Business lessons I've learned



Evelyn Mair,
Group Health & Fitness Manager, Sport Aberdeen

What does your company do that others don't?

I believe Sport Aberdeen really takes what is important to everyone and puts that at the heart of its decision making. I don't believe that any one company can provide everything for everyone all the time, but at Sport Aberdeen, we strive to ensure no one is left out, everyone has a choice, all needs have been considered, and we commit to continuous improvement.

What are the most pressing challenges that your industry sector faces today, and why?

I could name many challenges across our sector – financial, recruitment, training, sustainability, and so on. I would say from a physical activity perspective, we are really starting to recognise the positive impact of health and fitness on the economy and society as a whole. There is definitely a need to support all means of physical activity to improve our economy and to help people live longer, healthier lives.

What is the hardest lesson you have learned in your career to date?

Not everyone will be on the same page as you or have your passion for your area of work – however, having the ability to recognise that what you are passionate about can enhance, benefit and drive other areas of the business will bring teams together and that's what makes the difference. Creating a culture where there is a mutual understanding, appreciation and respect for everyone's contribution is crucial, but can often be overlooked.

What is the most valuable piece of business advice you have ever received?

Balance in life and work will ensure longevity and productivity in both – love what you do, and you will never work a day in your life. No one at work is irreplaceable but in life you are the ONLY one.

Quick fire round

What was your first job?
Dental Nurse.

When would you like to retire?
55.

What did you have for breakfast?
Granola and Greek yogurt.

Who, or what, inspires you?
My children and people in general.

What's the last book you read / film you saw?
Book – Memoirs of a Geisha. Film – The Crow.

What's been your proudest career achievement to date, and why?

I truly feel I have achieved so many things throughout my career in leisure and fitness, no single instance stands out if I am totally honest. Each in its own way has led naturally onto the next thing or has created an opportunity that has kept pushing me forward. I guess reaching almost 30 years in an industry I love, still loving it now and constantly evolving with it is an achievement!

If you could make one thing happen tomorrow that would benefit North-east Scotland, what would it be?

Wow that's a big question and if I am honest, I don't have one thing. I could be here all day, but one area I would like to see improve is homelessness and intervention/opportunities for reformed drug and alcohol dependants.



Aberdeen Tall Ships Races on the horizon

The countdown is on for The Tall Ships Races Aberdeen 2025.

The Tall Ships Races is the largest free family event in Europe and returns to Aberdeen after 28 years, expecting to draw 400,000 visitors and 50 Tall Ships from across the globe from July 19-22, 2025. The North Harbour at Port of Aberdeen, including Upper Dock and Regent Quay, will transform from an energy hub into a world-class event space.

Throughout the festival, visitors can board the magnificent Tall Ships and enjoy free family entertainment. The big

stage programme will include a diverse mix of local and Scottish talent, from sea shanties and choirs to street performers, maritime-themed exhibitions, artists, crew and navy bands, and visiting headline acts.

Councillor Martin Greig, Aberdeen City Council, said: "Hosting The Tall Ships Races is a great opportunity for everyone in Aberdeen to celebrate our maritime heritage. The event will bring together people of all ages and backgrounds in an amazing festival of the sea. It will be a truly international experience that will make a huge impact for the good on the city and region. Preparations are well underway and much work has been planned to make sure that all can enjoy this splendid experience."

Bob Sanguinetti, CEO of Port of Aberdeen, said: "As the host location for The Tall Ships Races, we're gearing up to provide a spectacular backdrop and world-class facilities for this historic event. It's a privilege to showcase the capabilities of Port of Aberdeen and contribute to this massive opportunity for the city and its people."

Adrian Watson, CEO of Aberdeen Inspired, said: "The Tall Ships Races represent a pivotal moment for Aberdeen, uniting the city in celebration and anticipation. Aberdeen Inspired is thrilled to partner in bringing this global spectacle to our doorstep, promising an unforgettable experience for visitors and residents alike. We know the arrival of the Tall Ships will offer a welcome major boost for our city centre businesses, including all our fantastic restaurants, bars, shops and other attractions."



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Andy Forbes,
Location Director,
Wallace Whittle



Welcome to the world of Wallace Whittle – where practicality meets proficiency, and our commitment to quality echoes through decades of experience.

I'm Andy Forbes, Location Director in Aberdeen, and I've been part of the Wallace Whittle team for over 36 years. Across our six UK offices, we are dedicated to quality of product, quality of service and a relentless pursuit of excellence in mechanical, electrical, and sustainability design consultancy services.

Our Aberdeen office has been going strong since the mid-eighties and has left its mark on significant local projects, from the Bon Accord Centre to Union Square. We have a wide range of expertise and experience across our growing team, and we pride ourselves on offering opportunities for the next generation. We provide a market-leading wage for apprentices as well as covering course fees, so they can earn while they learn with hands-on experience.

My team, now thriving in our new office in 1 Marischal Square, embody our long-term commitment to the city and its growth. We wanted to emphasise our commitment to Aberdeen and

support the city centre in any way we can, addressing our ESG credentials, and our new space in 1MSQ allows us to deliver on all those fronts.

We've been part of many iconic local projects, including the original Talisman House, Aberdeen Sports Village, Prime Four and ABZ Business Parks, The Capitol and The Silver Fin offices, and the fitout design for the new Shell UK HQ. Our work in the Public Sector extends to projects at ARI - The Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital, The Emergency Care Centre, and the new Mortuary facility. Currently, we're actively engaged in new school projects in the city and at the Beachfront and the Energy Transition Zone in Aberdeen.

Our footprint in the Education sector includes successes like the Inverurie Community Campus, Stoneywood, Milltimber, and Countesswells Primary Schools along with Greyhope Primary School & Community Hub, and the Early Learning Centres program.

On a national scale, our portfolio boasts notable projects such as Battersea Power Station, the multi-award-winning Buchanan Wharf and St James Quarter in Edinburgh. Currently, we're designing the £700million Monklands Hospital replacement project.

In Aberdeen, it's a challenging time for the industry. We have the perfect storm of new NHS projects being placed on hold for a couple of years, local authorities are cash-strapped, and the energy industry is transitioning from oil and gas to renewable energy sources. However, we remain optimistic for the future. There are still opportunities out there, but we must work harder to seek them out.

Wallace Whittle is well-positioned to tackle these challenges, boasting one of the few MEP consultancies with a dedicated team of in-house Sustainability specialists. This allows us to offer more specialist services to our clients in areas such as Net Zero analysis or studies, operational energy assessments, ESG, Passive design analysis, thermal comfort, daylight modelling and wellbeing.

If you'd like to have a chat about your next project or pop in for a visit to the WW office in Marischal Square, please feel free to contact me at andy.forbes@wallacewhittle.com.





Empirisys CEO awarded prestigious IChemE Franklin Medal for 2024

Leading data science and process safety company Empirisys' CEO, Gus Carroll, has been awarded the Institution of Chemical Engineers (IChemE) Franklin Medal for 2024; one of the most prestigious accolades in the Chemical Engineering community.

IChemE medals and prizes are awarded annually, and celebrate the remarkable achievements of individuals, universities and companies, encompassing an array of talent from both industry and academia.

The Franklin Medal has been awarded to Gus Carroll following his outstanding and continuing positive influence across a long and diverse career in safety performance across a range of chemical industry organisations and regulators.

Commenting on the award, Gus said: "I am humbled and honoured to have been recognised by IChemE for the contribution I have made to process safety over the last thirty years, working within major hazard operating companies, trade associations and with regulatory authorities".

Local First Aid trainer named finalist in prestigious awards

Sarah Phillips, Owner and Trainer at First Aid at Work Aberdeen & Aberdeenshire, has been announced as a finalist in two distinguished categories: Qualification Course First Aid Trainer of the Year and Parent & Carer First Aid Trainer of the Year in the Mini First Aid Awards nominations 2024.

Sarah's dedication and expertise in the field of first aid training have earned her recognition among the top professionals in the industry. Her commitment to providing high-quality training services has been instrumental in empowering individuals with life-saving skills.

First Bus and Openreach expand EV charging partnership to Aberdeen

First Bus has announced it is growing its biggest electric vehicle partnership to date with the UK's largest broadband network provider, Openreach, helping them carry out cleaner, greener journeys in Aberdeen. Openreach are one of the first businesses in Aberdeen to plug into this innovative shared infrastructure initiative from one of the UK's largest bus operators.

The initial phase of the partnership will witness Openreach electric vehicles from its fleet charging at the First Bus depot on King Street while buses are in service. This enables Openreach engineers to cover more ground, reduce their environmental impact, and dedicate more time to the needs of their customers.

As industry leader in the decarbonisation space, First Bus is keen to harness its EV infrastructure to help support local communities and businesses reach their own environmental aspirations. This commitment aligns with the bus operator's own ambition of reaching a zero-emission bus fleet by 2035.

Graeme Macfarlan, Commercial Director for First Bus Scotland, said: "We are delighted to be extending this partnership with Openreach to Aberdeen so quickly after its launch earlier this year, demonstrating the power that comes from working together to reduce carbon emissions and improve the air quality in the communities we serve.

"As businesses across Scotland embark on the journey to electrify their fleets, it simply isn't practical for every business to build its own charging infrastructure. We understand these challenges and are providing a smart solution that benefits the community and optimises space. It's simple and effective – and everyone wins!

"At First Bus, we are committed to delivering cleaner, greener journeys across our UK networks, not only through our own fleet but by working in partnership with businesses such as Openreach. We'd love to attract more businesses to charge up using our kit whilst our buses are out on the road."

SRCN Solutions launches new video series

SRCN Solutions has recently created and launched a series of short videos which introduce the company and provide an insight into key factors that they believe are key to the success of their projects.

SRCN specialises in creating, refining, and improving work management systems in the oil and gas, renewable, utilities and power sectors and help organisations manage and execute work with maximum efficiency, fast, freeing up the resources they need to focus on the bigger picture.



Clan reveals next chapter

Clan Cancer Support has announced it will deliver a new sculpture trail in 2025 which will see giant BookBenches appearing in the North-east, Moray, Orkney and Shetland.

The announcement marks the charity's third trail project with Light the North (2021) and The Big Hop Trail (2023) raising a combined total of more than £520,000 for Clan services. Clan chose the BookBench sculpture, which depicts an open book, because of its lifeline listening support service which enables anyone impacted by a cancer diagnosis to open up and tell their story.

The charity hopes the sculpture, which is 1.4 metres wide and can seat two adults, will encourage people to take time to reflect on their wellbeing as they enjoy discovering artwork on the trail when it's live from July – September next year.

Fiona Fernie, Clan's CEO, said: "Sculpture trails have been hugely important to us over the past few years. They raised a significant amount of income as we recovered from the pandemic and helped us engage with our communities across the regions we serve.

"The beginning of any client journey at Clan is about opening up and sharing your story, so the BookBench sculpture resonated with us. It's a functional bench which will allow next year's trailgoers to take a moment for themselves and enjoy the beautiful surroundings we're so lucky to have on our doorsteps.

"For artists, it's the ideal canvas to depict the stories connected to our regions, celebrate the tales of our heritage and recognise the fantastic literacy talent across the north of Scotland and the Isles.

"We're beyond excited to announce our next chapter in our trail journey and will now begin to develop the project with key partners across our communities ahead of the BookBenches being unveiled in the wild next summer."



Aberdeen Science Centre is walking on sunshine

Aberdeen Science Centre has been awarded more than £37,000 in funding to install rooftop solar panels, which will see the centre benefit from improved energy efficiency and a reduction in its energy bills.

A total of 48 solar panels, which have been donated to Aberdeen Science Centre, are set to be fitted to the centre's roof shortly. The donation was facilitated by global renewable energy producer Sonnedix.

Responsible finance provider Social Investment Scotland (SIS) awarded the centre just over £27,000 in grant and loan funding to support the installation of the panels, while Sonnedix donated a further £10,000. G & A Barnie Group, a Scottish engineering firm, has also agreed to install the panels at a reduced rate.

The solar panels are expected to generate close to 20,000 kilowatt-hours (kwh) of electricity per year, contributing to a significant reduction in Aberdeen Science Centre's carbon emissions and a notable saving in its energy costs.

Bryan Snelling, Chief Executive officer at Aberdeen Science Centre, said: "At Aberdeen Science Centre, we pride ourselves on helping our visitors to discover more about the science behind renewable energy, and thanks to the generous support of Social Investment Scotland, Sonnedix and G & A Barnie Group, we can now truly make use of that science to power our centre.

"With close to 50 solar panels set to be installed on our centre's roof, we are proud to be making our operations greener and doing our bit to reduce Aberdeen's carbon footprint. The money saved on our bills can also be reinvested into our centre and into further developing our public offering of exhibits, workshops, and community projects."



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Fred Anderson,
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Grand Designs: Building on Aberdeen's legacy

Aberdeen's architecture is steeped in history, with a rich legacy that many take for granted.

Examples of this can be found across the city. For instance, Marischal College, the headquarters of Aberdeen City Council, was founded in 1593 as Aberdeen's second university.

Similarly, many older buildings are being used for purposes other than what was originally intended, including the office of North-east recruitment expert, TMM Recruitment and TMM Executive, located on Albyn Place in the city's west end.

Constructed in the 1800s as a residential property, the building has been home to numerous notable people over the years. This includes regius professor of obstetrics and gynaecology at the University of Aberdeen, and namesake of Aberdeen's under-construction Baird Family Hospital, Sir Dugald Baird.

It was eventually converted into an office, which TMM Recruitment moved into in 2009.

Looking to enhance the building while acknowledging the cultural significance of properties such as this, TMM Recruitment recently refurbished its interior spaces.

Amanda McCulloch, Chief Executive at TMM Recruitment, said: "We want to continue our investment into a beautiful, traditional granite building that is part of Aberdeen's heritage.

"Our vision was to create an environment that our team can truly be proud of, one that enhances employee wellbeing and leaves a lasting impression on visitors. Gathering ideas

from our team was an essential step in determining how the space could work more effectively.

"We've been much bolder, adopting the colours in our brand identity throughout the public spaces, and in addition to cosmetic interiors such as flooring, lighting, and furniture, we've invested in technology and redesigned the kitchen/breakout area, to create a more vibrant and contemporary space. This communal area has been transformed from a room that people only spent time in to make a cup of tea to being a space where people meet for lunch, take proper breaks, and socialise."

Sustainability was also taken into consideration, with a motion sensor LED light system installed in open plan workspaces and an electric vehicle charging connection in the staff carpark.

Amanda continued: "Unfortunately, we couldn't implement every change that the team suggested, namely adjustable desks that our recruiters could attach treadmills to. After a trial run, we discovered that the idea isn't as effective as it looks on TV!

"We were delighted that the team was able to maintain business as usual during the redecoration and that they have embraced the changes in their working areas. We very much looking forward to welcoming visitors so they can see our office for themselves."

TMM Recruitment's experts specialise in a personalised approach to finding the best people for vacancies across a variety of sectors.

To find out more, visit www.tmmrecruitment.com

Neville tells all on football and business careers at sold-out UMF event

Legendary footballer and entrepreneur Gary Neville kicked-off a trio of UMF events at the Music Hall in 2024 spilling the beans about his decorated career playing under Sir Alex Ferguson, secrets to the success of Manchester, and he even tipped a former teammate for the Dons job...

A 90-minute interview with Sky Sports pundit and hotel owner attracted more than a thousand punters to a sold-out Music Hall as this year's Ultimate Masterclass Festival hit the Granite Mile for the first time.

The eight-time Premier League winner had the audience laughing throughout with stories from sharing a changing room with David Beckham and Roy Keane, being coached by Archie Knox, and the 'golden generation' of the English football team that delivered no trophies.

SCHOOL OF HARD KNOX

Gary joined his boyhood team as an 11-year-old, just a number of months before Sir Alex Ferguson made the move south of the border.

"I'm at Manchester United in August 1986. Sir Alex Ferguson joined with Archie [Knox] in November 1986, after Ron Atkinson gets sacked.

"From the age 12 to 13, I was coached by Archie Knox."

Archie had spent three years working under Sir Alex at Aberdeen, leaving for a three-year spell in charge of Dundee. He returned to work under his fellow Scot shortly before the pair moved to United.

"For a start, I couldn't tell a word he was saying, that was the first problem, but I knew it wasn't pleasant," joked Gary.

"The first-team coaches, Archie, Bryan Kidd, he brought Nobby [Styles] in, they all came down to all the Centre of Excellence sessions in the evening and the boss would quite often turn up himself.

"But Archie came in and coached us every single week and we dreaded it."

But the 85-time England-cap admitted the coaching he got from young age was pivotal into paving the way for his future career.

"It's amazing to think of the experiences that we were given at the ages of 12 or 13 by being coached by these amazing people, but they were hard on us, they were tough with us. And we needed that toughness, and we needed that direction...but that wouldn't be possible today."

FINDING SUCCESS IN FAILURE

Inevitably, Gary was asked about one of his few failures in life, being manager of Valencia.

A spell lasting barely three-months, and winning precious little points, meant Gary returned to punditry duty quicker than he'd liked.

"We've spoke about Sir Alex's loyalty before, but we haven't spoke much about the other side of Sir Alex which is the way he exits people," he said, explaining why he felt he didn't succeed in Spain.

"He exits people quickly and effectively if he feels like they are

going to become a danger to his business.

"I remembered the loyalty part and giving people a chance, but I didn't remember the other bit which is you have to make clinical exit decisions at times."

It's a mistake Gary hasn't made again in his life outside of football.

"Not many people leave our businesses in Manchester but I feel if someone is not right, I exit them quite quickly, but still in the right way.

"You worry about having those difficult conversations, but you treat them maturely and do them face-to-face and not hide behind someone in your team doing it for you."

"A lot of my learnings come from Sir Alex, but there are some things he did that I still reference.

"Always deliver the bad news, or the disappointing news, yourself and you can gain huge respect from that.

"I used to sit in with him when I was the PFA (Professional Footballers' Association) representative exiting young players from the football club.

"I'd go in with them, and Sir Alex would say 'look, your future is not going to be at Manchester United'.

"Imagine being a young player and listening to that message?"

"But it taught me a lot about how to deliver difficult conversations with honesty, with compassion, but also with hope.

**ULTIMATE
MASTERCLASS
FESTIVAL**

UMF

“

**Can you
imagine the
thought of
Aberdeen
winning the
title again?**

“Sir Alex used to exit them, he would give examples of players he'd let go who have gone onto incredible things, but he would also get them an introduction and three or four football clubs to get a professional contract.”

ABERDEEN: THE NEXT MANCHESTER?

Gary, who has had a lasting impact on the incredible regeneration of Manchester since retiring from football, shared a number of anecdotes about reviving what he described as a “ghost town”.

“I think football has been a great driver,” he said, along with music and the universities in the city.”

He even praised the billion pound investment in the east side of the city made by the owners of Manchester City, and used it as an example to not turn away outward investment.

And he's now taking a central role in a potential regeneration of Old Trafford, having on a task force to reinvigorate the stadium and surrounding areas.

“Can you imagine the thought of Aberdeen winning the title again?,” he said.

“You need money nowadays, you need investment, you need expertise. That will come to Aberdeen again.”



“At some point, there will be an investor, a partner, a local businessman or owner, that comes along and wants to invest in the football club and create a legacy.

“A way to drive a city forward can be through many areas it can be through university, it can be through education and health, regenerating the stadium.

“If you regenerate the stadium and you build a successful football team, then you get people talking about Aberdeen again in a football sense. That has been a catalyst in Manchester.

A NEW DONS GAFFER?

As the night drew to a close, the inevitable discussion on which one of Gary's teammates would be the right fit for Aberdeen ensued.

Dwight Yorke has applied before (much to Gary's surprise), but it was Ole Gunnar Solksjaer whose name was mentioned.

“I was dying on television for two or three months because everyone was saying ‘why won't you criticise Ole Gunnar Solksjaer? Why won't you stick the knife into him? It's embarrassing that you allow him to carry on at United.

“But then I spoke to him two weeks ago. I am so happy that I never, ever stuck the knife into him on television, even if I thought the job was difficult for him and it was the right time for change.

“The loyalty to my team mates, to him in particular who I'd sat next to for 11 years in the dressing room, we were so close.

“He loves football, I'd love him to come up to Aberdeen and make you successful again.”

WHAT'S NEXT FOR GARY?

“I would like at some point to think that I could have an impact on Manchester United winning again.

“For me, that is not on the football side, that is nothing to do with the football side.

“I feel like it's on the other side of things.

“I was asked to join a task force to regenerate the stadium and that was something I could not turn down because I'm so passionate about the area.

“I can't believe what's happened because of the lack of regeneration over the last 10 years around the club.

“That's something I'm hoping I can have some type of impact on.”

AND WHAT'S NEXT FOR UMF?

Our stacked 2024 line-up rolls into April when we'll welcome Davina McCall MBE to the Music Hall to talk about her life as a TV presenter, dealing with addiction, and what makes her one of UK TV's most loved personalities.

Tickets to see Davina are selling fast, grab yours at [umf.events](https://www.umf.events).

Thank you to our 2024 UMF series sponsor TotalEnergies, and thank you to our event sponsors Fifth Ring and Appetite for Business.

Thanks to our drinks reception sponsor D2Zero, our AV partner PCL Live, our hotel partner The Chester Hotel, staging partner BoConcept and transport partner Luxe Scotland.



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Business lessons I've learned



Vicki Roddie,
Park Manager, Miller Parks

What does your company do that others don't?

Miller Parks prioritise customer experience and we pride ourselves on tailoring our homes to any requirements that our customers have, going that extra mile to fulfil requests that aren't necessarily standard when purchasing luxury retirement homes.

What are the most pressing challenges that your industry sector faces today, and why?

Whilst trying not to use a cliché answer, the main challenges we experience today is the same as everyone around the country – increasing costs across the board. We try to stick to our company values, focusing on customer service and experience, the rising costs of materials, furniture, labour etc cuts into our profit margins making it more difficult to offer our customers the lowest price possible.

What is the hardest lesson you have learned in your career to date?

The hardest lesson I've learnt is accepting that sometimes despite all your efforts, time and patience you don't always get the outcome you were looking for and focusing on the next goal to keep moving forward is the best approach.

What is the most valuable piece of business advice you have ever received?

Let go of your ego. Your ego tries to protect you from looking stupid. Instead of listening to it all the time, learn when it's okay to let go and do something different.

What's been your proudest career achievement to date, and why?

My proudest achievement was selling my first home for Miller Parks. I had been tasked with a sales role out with my comfort zone and previous experience, which despite my initial imposturous thoughts I managed to complete.

Quick fire round

What was your first job?

Clerical assistant at BP when I was 16 years old.

When would you like to retire?

Not for a long time. I love my job and still have lots of goals to accomplish.

What did you have for breakfast?

A cream egg and a black coffee (I'm not a breakfast person).

Who, or what, inspires you?

I'm inspired by people that have started from nothing and become successful in their field.

What's the last book you read/ film you saw?

I'm currently reading *The Power of your Unconscious Mind* and just watched the *Wolf of Wall Street* for the fourth time.



Modern onshore turbines and battery storage are helping power us towards net zero

Gavin Shirley,
Development Project Manager,
RES



The onshore wind industry has been on quite a journey over the last few decades but never has its evolution been more important than now.

The UK's first commercial wind farms comprised 400kW machines with tip heights of 30m or so. A 10-turbine site could generate enough electricity for around 3,000 homes.

Technology has advanced considerably since the early 1990s, in part thanks to Andrew Garrad CBE and Henrik Stiesdal who have been awarded the prestigious Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering this year. Over the last four decades, Garrad and Stiesdal have made ground-breaking engineering inputs, developing the early technology and maintaining their presence in leading positions as the industry has grown, enabling some of the world's biggest rotating machines, which help drive progress towards a net-zero energy economy.

We now benefit from in-depth understanding of wind regimes and modern turbines with installed capacities of 6MW or more. These modern turbines are taller, 200m high or more, and now very much the norm for proposed new sites.

Another technology that's been through a similar journey, albeit in a shorter space of time, is Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS). Output capacities have advanced considerably over the years from 5-10MW to 100MW or more today, and BESS are now part of the core infrastructure for most new onshore wind farms.

A BESS not only helps to maximise the efficiency of an onshore wind farm and therefore contribute towards net zero, but also improves energy security and plays an important role in creating a more flexible grid network.

RES' Hill of Fare Wind Farm proposal, near Banchory, is an example of the new phase of onshore wind farms that include both technological advances. If consented, the 105.6MW 16-turbine scheme will utilise modern 180m and 200m turbines and a BESS with a power output capacity of 100MW and storage energy capacity of 200MWh. To find out more visit www.hilloffare-windfarm.co.uk.

Scotland's renewable energy industry and its supply chain supported more than 42,000 jobs in 2021, with onshore wind accounting for more than 12,000 of these, and generated over £10.1billion of output. In Scotland alone we have approximately

9GW of installed onshore wind capacity and this is targeted to more than double to 20GW by 2030. The commercial burning of coal for energy in the UK has been almost phased out completely by renewable electricity, including onshore wind.

Earlier this year, the EU's Climate Service reported that the critical 1.5°C global warming limit had been breached for an entire year for the first time. As the world warms and we see more intense weather events such as storms, flooding, heatwaves and wildfires affecting people worldwide - the need to decarbonise, fast, becomes ever more apparent.

Each new onshore wind farm built is a step closer to achieving this and to reaching net zero.





Kirkwood Homes launches spring offers

Aberdeenshire-based luxury housing developer, Kirkwood Homes, has launched a selection of exclusive money-saving incentives to help buyers move into their dream home this spring.

Available across Kirkwood's developments throughout Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Tayside, these incentives have been applied to selected homes at Balgillo Heights in Broughty Ferry, Castle Road and The Grove in Alford, Strabathie Village in Blackdog, The Brambles in Sauchen and Inchmarlo in Banchory.

These plot specific offers are available across a selection of 3, 4 and 5 bedroom homes, and range from mortgage deposit contributions, cashback, generous LBTT payments and a range of extras and upgrades including luxury flooring.

Shirley Craig, Sales Manager at Kirkwood Homes said: "With the cold and darkness of winter behind us, the arrival of spring marks a sign of new beginnings - and the perfect time to move to a brand new home. Kirkwood Homes are delighted to enable prospective home buyers to make their dream a reality with this wide range of incentives, helping fund their important purchase."

To view the plots featuring in this exclusive offer, visit: <https://kirkwoodhomes.co.uk/step-into-spring>

Hill of Fare Wind Farm Proposal





Revitalising Aberdeen: Embracing change and building tomorrow together

Richard Tinto, Director, Tinto Architecture

As Aberdeen “bottoms out” in terms of departing retail - Marks and Spencer’s relocation to Union Square being the final nail in the coffin for many, we can now start to look forward objectively to the opportunities that lie in the city to regenerate both the spaces within, and the wider sense of place that the city centre could represent.

By far and away, the biggest of those opportunities lies with a brave acquisition strategy of redundant buildings by the council that create the space to reimagine the centre of Aberdeen. This strategy has been successfully adopted in other parts of the UK where we now see rapid redevelopment and repopulation through people living and working in city centres. This is not just about new buildings, it’s about retrofitting the stocks we have, green spaces, human spaces, areas to live, work and play.

The aforementioned building, St Nicholas Street as a whole, and the St Nicholas Centre itself is an example of what could be done. Coming to the end of its natural life, the Centre combined with the Marks and Spencer building could become a “reimagined” pedestrian plaza and a “get out of jail card” for the incumbent council who betrayed their officers in the original plan to connect north and south of the city together with a pedestrianised central section to Union Street.

Aberdeen sits at a juncture that is both more expansive and more exciting than many places. Our culture is intertwined with our energy industry and being an economic powerhouse for the UK, as well as a stunningly attractive place to visit. As we navigate the transition

towards sustainable energy goals, we have the opportunity to enhance our sense of identity through adopting an accelerated net zero strategy. This involves revitalising our existing infrastructure and spaces, setting a precedent for sustainable urban redevelopment. Let us use the new energy to fuel our assets.

At the risk of sounding parochial, knowing Aberdeen is fundamental to its success. Whilst the city has seen exemplar and imaginative regeneration delivered by way of Broad Street and Union Terrace Gardens, local architects and designers assisting in local projects, understanding the culture, our people, and living and breathing the city can only help the success of any regeneration in the future. Frank Lloyd Wright physically stayed in New York as the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum appeared from the ground, and this dedication can, unless you are willing to relocate, only come from those at home.

Collaboration between all parties on the ground, with action - real action, and a passion for seeing our city rise again will see the turn from the bottom move forward most quickly, but more importantly, more coherently, with local people actively engaged and inspired to help in whatever way they can. It’s time to be brave, it’s time to “build it”. Build it and they will come, and it is time to accept ourselves for who we are, love ourselves for who we are, and move forward with steady confidence that we will create our tomorrow together.



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MEET THE



Mark Reynolds,
Business Development
Manager,
Katoni Engineering

WHEN WAS YOUR BUSINESS ESTABLISHED?

The company was incorporated in 2010 but we started our journey to becoming a modern consulting, engineering, procurement and construction business in 2016. So, we've been operating in our chosen market for around seven years now.

WHAT DOES YOUR BUSINESS DO?

At our heart we are an engineering business offering services under four key areas, rather than bore you on here you can see this at www.katoni.com (a blatant plug for our new website). We've grown organically but quickly and have a full multi-discipline offer focused on the energy sector. However, we also offer specialist services focused on safety, compliance and energy transition for other industrial sectors too.

WHAT SORT OF COMPANIES DO YOU DO BUSINESS WITH?

The majority of our work focuses on topsides for UK and global oil and gas companies. However, we've been branching out in the last few years and work with building service companies and in utilities on things like electrical safety. We've also applied our projects expertise in argi and other sectors particularly focusing on reducing emissions and power solutions.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE FACING YOUR BUSINESS AT THE MOMENT?

We're a small growing business competing with multi-national EPC companies. You'd think that alone was enough but the quality of our service is generally enough to win that battle. It is probably small things associated with growth and deciding when to take our next step up and invest in new service areas. So, I suppose its really all about assessing risk and opportunity!

AND THE BIGGEST OPPORTUNITY?

The biggest we have is actually to let more people know what we do. We've purposefully flown below the radar as we grow but that's changing. This year we have our first marketing role internally, sponsored AFC ladies, created a new website and created the role I am in. This is all focused on growing our profile and client knowledge on what we do.



Matt Pullinger,
Director,
Northwood North East

WHEN WAS YOUR BUSINESS ESTABLISHED?

The first Northwood Aberdeen office was opened in the city's Rosemount Place in 2008 by Laura Mearns and her husband, Steven. At the time, I owned a window cleaning business and I heard they were looking for a window cleaner - we got chatting, and the rest is history.

WHAT DOES YOUR BUSINESS DO?

Now known as Northwood North East, with further offices in Inverurie and Banchory, we're one of the region's leading estate and letting agencies, specialising in residential property leasing and sales in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire. This is our 15th year in business, and we have big community-based plans to celebrate the milestone.

WHAT SORT OF COMPANIES DO YOU DO BUSINESS WITH?

As well as landlords and homeowners, our 12-strong team works with a range of businesses and individuals from relocation companies and construction firms to those who are self-employed, contractors, solicitors, and surveyors. We also work closely with professional bodies including the Scottish Association of Landlords, Propertymark, and the property ombudsman.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE FACING YOUR BUSINESS AT THE MOMENT?

Financial pressures. Landlords are facing increased costs with their mortgages while ensuring they stay compliant with ever-changing legislation, and having the necessary checks carried out. As a result, many are choosing to leave the sector entirely and selling their property - creating a lack of good rental stock.

AND THE BIGGEST OPPORTUNITY?

Our award-winning estate agency business, Bespoke by Northwood, has gone from strength to strength. Our experience across the property markets means we know what it takes to get a property noticed and sold. With many more clients trusting us to successfully achieve a sale, there's huge opportunity across the North-east.

MEMBERS



Stephen Anderson,
CEO,
OilFast

WHEN WAS YOUR BUSINESS ESTABLISHED?

2013. We celebrated our 10th anniversary this year.

WHAT DOES YOUR BUSINESS DO?

Oilfast is a leading independent fuel and lubricant supplier offering a

comprehensive range of products and services tailored to commercial customers. From high-quality kerosene to industrial heating oil, HVO, Marine Gas Oil, AdBlue and Shell lubricants. With a reputation for competitive prices, excellent local service, and a commitment to sustainability, Oilfast is the go-to supplier for businesses across Scotland. Quality matters when it comes to lubricant selection.

WHAT SORT OF COMPANIES DO YOU DO BUSINESS WITH?

We currently operate in a wide range of industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, automotive, construction and plant, haulage and storage, marine and offshore.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE FACING YOUR BUSINESS AT THE MOMENT?

Oilfast is the fastest-growing fuel supply company in Scotland, and we invest heavily in our local areas of operation as well as ensuring we can provide a fast and reliable delivery service. We have invested heavily in new trucks to

keep up with demand and will continue to evolve and ensure we provide customers with the best local service.

AND THE BIGGEST OPPORTUNITY?

With the rising importance of climate change, it's never been more critical for businesses to do their part in reducing their emissions. The road to a greener future is essential for many businesses. The Oilfast family is dedicated to becoming a more sustainable company by offering products like HVO that benefit businesses by significantly reducing greenhouse gases. We partner with Shell Lubricants which offer a portfolio of environmentally acceptable products including Naturelle, a biodegradable range of hydraulic, gear, greases and transformer fluids.



Phil Annand,
Financial Planner,
Thorntons Wealth

WHEN WAS YOUR BUSINESS ESTABLISHED?

2014.

WHAT DOES YOUR BUSINESS DO?

Help clients secure their financial future by advising clients on the full range of financial planning needs including,

pensions, investments, Inheritance Tax planning and personal protection planning.

WHAT SORT OF COMPANIES DO YOU DO BUSINESS WITH?

We advise a broad range of clients including private individuals, business owners and professionals

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE FACING YOUR BUSINESS AT THE MOMENT?

Investors have experienced quite a degree of volatility across most markets as well as economic upheaval in recent years which has had an impact on overall confidence.

AND THE BIGGEST OPPORTUNITY?

As financial planners we provide a sounding board to investors through troubled times and through our experience and education using evidence from previous market downturns we can help to alleviate concerns in the short term.

WHAT ARE YOU MOST PASSIONATE AND PROUD OF WHEN IT COMES TO YOUR BUSINESS?

Focussing on client's needs and objectives as well as the things that are important to them, their families and their lives.

WHAT HAS BEEN MOST VALUABLE TO YOU AS MEMBERS OF ABERDEEN + GRAMPIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE?

Our membership allows us to introduce and network our business to the local community through various means including the numerous organised events and communications.

From oil and gas to bricks and mortar

“Looking back now, I probably would have regretted not doing it after seeing what we’ve been able to achieve by having more time to focus on things.”

“I’m a big believer in you get out what you put in, and if business isn’t going so well, then we need to put more into it to get it going.”

It’s been nearly two years since James Duguid was pushed to quit his contracting job by two friends Shaun Murray and Ali Pittendreigh. The trio had been working in oil and gas, but all had their eyes on the property sector.

“Ali and Shaun, who are my business partners, served an apprenticeship together in welding and fabricating so they have a history of friendship there.

“Ali was actually a client of mine - I was finding deals for him to add to

his portfolio and Shaun was also doing a bit of refurbishment works in terms of project management jobs.”

The three of them formed their connection around November 2021, said James.

The 32-year-old had been deal sourcing on the side for a number of years by that point, alongside his full-time contracting job.

When CV19 hit, and his hours got cut, he started offering coaching sessions with people to help them build their property portfolio.

“I’m quite active on social media, had a lot of messages from people asking for tips and tricks, and to be honest I just didn’t have the time to meet everyone for coffees.

“I decided to put on a day of education. Six people turned up, one of them was Shaun, and literally

within two weeks of attending that course, he went out, found a deal, and we did a collaboration on that together.

“That’s where I saw Shaun’s strengths through the project management side and then from that day, I didn’t do any refurbishment work.

“It was the November course he came on and then it was around April time, the three of us thought we should probably just do something here.

“They two quit their oil and gas jobs and I was still contracting making alright money, and I was quite comfortable to be honest, but they kind of forced my hand.

“But now I’m glad they kind of pushed my hand to do that and get uncomfortable with it.”



The trio then launched SJA Properties in May 2022 and within two years are set to make their TV debut.

“We ended up getting a property for £165,000 (which was the guide price) and then literally at the end of the auction, the same guy who showed us around the property initially came up to us and said Homes Under the Hammer had earmarked this property as one that they would really like to put on the show.

“We’re actually still waiting for a date for it to air.

“Filming was a good experience, having Martin come up for that and just seeing how they operated was a really good experience.

“It will be funny to even to just watch the final episode, I’m itching to see when it’s coming out.”

It was the first time the group had bought at an auction, and it was a property that James had admired since he was on the school bus as a boy.

“It turns out the guy had died and it was repossessed by the bank,” he said.

“

They two quit their oil and gas jobs and I was still contracting... but they kind of forced my hand.

“On a Tuesday afternoon, I got asked to speak at a property and networking event in Aberdeen on the Wednesday night. It just so

happens one of the other speakers was from the auction company that was selling the house.

“On the listing on the auction company there was only photos of the outside of the house.

“I got speaking to him the day after and I said asked what the script was with no internal photos. He said he was heading up the next day to get them, and I asked if there was any chance that I could meet him there.

“I met him there and the first thing I see is him trying to kick in the front door because the water damage has made everything swell up. When he did get the door open, he said I might want to put a mask on because it was just really disgusting.

“It was quite difficult to see the extent of the water damage because the carpets and furniture were still there.”

Such was the damage, the renovation costs at around £130,000 were almost as costly as the property itself.

“We had done our figures to that property being worth about £325,000 to £350,000 when it was done up,” said James.



“The good thing was the auction company said there was 0.7 of an acre with the house but it turns out was 1.2 acre.

“We always planned to split off the land and get planning for a plot and one of my friends’ mum and dad was downsizing and wanted to build a plot and that was ideal for them, though it’s subject to them getting planning just now.

“In the end, we sold the bungalow for £380,370 and the land itself we’ve agreed to sell for £80,000.

The home near Turriff is just one of the dozens of properties SJA are working on at any one time.

The buy-to-let market has thus far been good to the group, but their ambition to expand is showing no signs of slowing down.

“We’ve got quite a lot of pipeline - we’ve got a bank of properties ready to go.

“A lot of the projects we’ve done have been on a residential basis, but we’ve got eight projects in legals at the minute, and one of them includes our first commercial unit purchase.

“We’ve not quite purchased it yet but we’ve got all the plans ready to go just waiting for that transaction to go through.

“Commercial property seems to be lucrative but we’re fairly fresh to it. We’re really just dipping our toes in to be honest.

“But similar to the approach with building up the knowledge base, we’ve started working with a mentor who has done that model. For us, that’s a good way to de-risk any potential pitfalls.

“The opportunity that we’ve bought is quite a good deal on the basis of the purchase price and the location in Turriff. When doing market research we thought there’s a lot of positives and an opportunity here.

“We thought let’s try this one, let’s get it up and running, let’s get all the teething problems out and then maybe we’ll start like scaling into Aberdeen.

“If we can get one or two of them then it can be quite good if you’ve got the model right.”

Despite the pending TV debut and venture into commercial property,

James and his co-directors are remaining grounded when thinking about the immediate future.

They might be relatively new to the industry, but the trio are under no illusions as to how quickly things can change.

“I’m a firm believer that Aberdeen and London have got their own separate economies from the rest of the UK.

“I’m hoping we don’t see the booms and bust cycles that we have in the property industry and things start to just become a bit more norm with steady growth, it would help everyone.

“If you purely have a business head on, it would be more beneficial to have that consistency rather than trying to time the market on when it’s really low and selling when it’s high.





Marcliffe Hotel completes its largest refurbishment

The Marcliffe Hotel and Spa has recently undergone one of its largest refurbishments having teamed up once again with the local and reputable Laings and Andersons of Inverurie to bring quality, and modern executive rooms whilst retaining the timeless elegance and class of the hotel.

The Marcliffe was established 30 years ago in Pitfodells, situated at the heart of the city's west end. It is a perfect

spot for visitors from the city and shire, serving as the only five-star venue in Aberdeen. The Spence Family, who own the hotel, are fiercely proud of its long-standing friendly atmosphere, warmth, and ambience. Recently, they decided it was time to undergo phase two of the modern refurbishment, after the successful completion of phase one of this project in 2022, resulting in all executive rooms now being upgraded in the hotel.

Each space has been transformed and considerably crafted with eco-friendly smart bathrooms, ergonomic designs and pleasing neutral palettes throughout. The work of the remaining 18 executive rooms and Spa started in January 2024 and has now officially been able to launch to the public.

The refurbished Spa offers a tranquil and inviting space for guests and visitors out with the hotel to enjoy Massage treatments, Facials, Aromatherapy and more. Situated just beyond the main entrance of the hotel, the Spa is open for bookings throughout Tuesday to Saturday.

Visitors and guests can expect to enjoy modern luxury throughout the hotel and spa and take advantage of the hotel's special offers, attractive room rates and local events.

The Marcliffe continues to be busy with events bookings, weddings, dinner reservations, afternoon teas and Sunday lunches and welcome new enquiries. To make a room booking or event enquiry please visit www.marcliffe.com or contact directly on 01224 86100.



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Business lessons I've learned



Gavin Shirley,
Development Project Manager, RES

What does your company do that others don't?

RES delivers a unique Local Electricity Discount Scheme (LEDS) which offers an annual discount to the electricity bills of those properties closest to a participating operational wind farm.

LEDS was developed in response to research and feedback from local communities around RES' wind farms.

We've recently been consulting on LEDS for our Hill of Fare Wind Farm proposal, near Banchory, as part of the £26.4million tailored community benefits package that we're offering - and it's received strong interest from the community.

Should the proposal receive consent we look forward to discussing the opportunity of LEDS further with the community.

What are the most pressing challenges that your industry sector faces today, and why?

Onshore wind is a fantastic technology. It is one of the lowest-

cost forms of new electricity generation and achieves carbon payback within one to three years of operation. It can help address the climate emergency, cost of living crisis, and the issues we face with energy security. This is why the Scottish Government is aiming to effectively double onshore wind capacity by 2030.

Our 16-turbine 105.6MW Hill of Fare Wind Farm proposal, for example, which has just gone into planning, would have the capability to generate enough clean, low-cost electricity for more than 101,000 homes each year and reduce carbon emissions by approximately 69,000 tonnes each year within the grid-mix of fossil fuel, nuclear and renewable generation. It is also expected to provide a £150million economic boost for the area.

The challenge for our industry is trying to get consented projects to deliver all these benefits. Onshore wind can be built in 12-24 months once consented but often spends years in the planning system. That's why the Scottish Government's commitment within the Onshore

Quick fire round

What was your first job?

Mechanic and sales in my local bike shop.

When would you like to retire?

60, meeting Scotland's net zero target in 2045.

What did you have for breakfast?

Coffee and my four year old's left over cereal!

Who, or what, inspires you?

My boys. I want to help develop a sustainable world for the next generation.

What's the last book you read / film you saw?

I listened to the Thursday Murder Club on Audible which was excellent and passed the time nicely whilst travelling.

Wind Sector Deal to halve the time onshore wind farms take to go through planning is very welcome.

What is the hardest lesson you have learned in your career to date?

It's easy to make mistakes when fatigue is high, time is tight and you're under pressure. Recognise those occasions and take a step back, pause, let the mind unwind and refocus.

What is the most valuable piece of business advice you have ever received?

Be confident in yourself and what you say, and don't be shy in asking questions.

What's been your proudest career achievement to date, and why?

As a Senior Planner my team received a Commendation in the category of "In-house Planning Team" at the RTPA Awards for Planning Excellence 2019. I contribute within Scottish Renewables working groups to develop the industry which I can also be proud of.

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Bob Keiller and Charles Skene

Renowned West End business centres mark anniversary with expansion announcement

A leading independent provider of quality serviced office accommodation has celebrated a milestone by expanding its offering in Aberdeen's West End.

To commemorate 40 years in business, locally owned Skene Business Centres have underlined a long-standing commitment to the city by adding 3,755 sq ft of space to its portfolio at Queens Gardens. The move brings the total amount of space available across five addresses at the prime location to 15,500 sq ft.

The news represents a symbolic full circle for the family-run business, which began at Queens Gardens where the Skene family home and business premises were originally located. Nowadays, this address continues to form an important part of the serviced office business which has grown exponentially across key locations in the city.

In addition to underpinning its position within the West End commercial property scene, new office space is due to be added at Rosemount Viaduct and a new business lounge joins the range of facilities on offer at the company's Rubislaw Den North centre.

Founded in 1984, Skene Business Centres have unrivalled experience in the provision of serviced office accommodation in Aberdeen at prime locations in the West End and City Centre. With parking and green outdoor spaces for tenants to enjoy, options available include serviced offices for 1 to 15 desks, therapy rooms, meeting rooms and virtual offices.

Commenting on the company's landmark 40th anniversary, Skene Investments Managing Director Jennifer Lindsay said: "Our success over a very long period is due to several key factors which are central to our business ethos. By working in step with the evolving needs of our tenants, we have created a series of dynamic locations in which businesses can grow and thrive.

"As we reflect on the past and look to the future, we are confident that the additional space we have added in this important year will be beneficial in uplevelling not only our offering but also our flexibility and appeal to a broader range of businesses than ever before."

To find out more, visit www.skenebusinesscentres.com



Aberdeen teenager crowned Scotland's top Foundation Apprentice

Jennifer Emmanuel, a former St Machar Academy pupil, scooped the Foundation Apprentice of the Year prize at the Scottish Apprenticeship Awards, which were held at P&J Live on March 8 – the first time the event has been held 'live' since the pandemic.

The awards, run by Skills Development Scotland, celebrate excellence in apprenticeships at Foundation, Modern, and Graduate level, and businesses which promote and support apprenticeship opportunities, recognising the value of the young workforce.

Seventeen-year-old Jenni knew she really wanted a career in childcare after choosing a Foundation Apprenticeship in Social Services: Children and Young People as a subject in her final school year – and she hasn't looked back.

Foundation Apprenticeships provide school pupils with the skills employers need, offering industry insight to gain a work-based learning qualification at the same level as a Higher.

Jenni said: "I'm absolutely over the moon to win the award and to know that my work has been recognised - it's such a good feeling. My apprenticeship was absolutely amazing, and I wish I could do it all over again."

Thanks to her Foundation Apprenticeship Jenni has landed her dream job in childcare, working as an Early Years Assistant at Bright Horizons Treehouse Nursery, in Aberdeen, and now plans to start a Modern Apprenticeship.

Aberdeen City Council Co-Leader Councillor Christian Allard attended the Awards ceremony. He said: "The young talent in the room, their inspiring stories, and the support of employers was incredible. Our young people are the workforce of the future, and it is essential that we collectively nurture and support them as they progress into their future careers.

"Apprenticeships at all levels are a fantastic route into employment, enabling people to earn a wage while learning and gaining qualifications. Aberdeen City Council is committed to supporting our young people and other city residents into good quality employment."



Prospect 13 reveals brand refresh with vibrant new website

Aberdeen marketing powerhouse Prospect 13 is scaling up its online presence with the launch of a brand-new website to match its uniquely vibrant brand identity.

The innovative marketing and communications agency has unveiled its brand refresh and new website during what is the company's sixth year in business delivering outsourced marketing support to help small to medium businesses reach their creative marketing potential.

"We are all absolutely thrilled with the new branding and website - it's colourful, bold and full of personality – just like us!", says Cerri McDonald, Founder of Prospect 13. "Our goal was to develop a website that would truly bring the Prospect 13 vision to life to reflect our in-house talents, achievements to date, and what working with us is really like.

"Having spent so much of our time developing brands and designing new websites for clients, it was definitely time to create something special for ourselves to represent our services more accurately and reveal more of our capabilities and brand value."

The agency's fresh new digital platform features several visual enhancements to reflect the Prospect 13 passion for bold marketing and communications and has been designed to showcase the 11-strong team's creative talents in strategic marketing, branding and web development as well as PR, digital marketing, graphic design and events. Visitors will find a fully responsive format with engaging content featuring the vivacious marketing and communication experts at Prospect 13.

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Ben Yousef,
Global BD and Marketing Manager,
BME Nitech Ltd.

Area of expertise?

Global business development, sales, and marketing.

What should people know?

People buy the added value product and people first, and whatever else second. This is one of the most enduring pillars of sales and marketing, and it remains true in today's hybrid global business environment. People who do not believe your product will add value to their business or personal usage, that they can deal with you, or who do not feel comfortable or trusting of you will usually not notify you and will buy it from someone else.

What's the biggest mistakes companies make?

Not considering sales team motivation based on personality type. We at BME Nitech, for example, constantly check in with individual team members to understand their needs, provide support, and alter their approach as needed. Therefore, to properly motivate a member of a team, his/her personality work type must first be understood. Furthermore, invest in personality testing methods that identify employees' personality types, how to communicate with them for the best results, and what motivates and engages them i.e. mentoring or training/incentives or all.

What's your top tip?

I like to employ personality types to motivate a sales team. Each personality type has certain capabilities that can be utilised towards achieving the team's common goal. Some people prefer facts and logic, while others like competition and relationship building. Armed with this knowledge, I can engage with each member of the team on a more intimate and personal level, allowing me to go above and beyond in my work and ensure the company's success and customer pleasure.



Phionna McInnes,
Chief Ninja,
We Too! Scottish Charity

Area of expertise?

I have 30 years theatre and events experience, which over the last 10 years I've further developed into delivering accessible and inclusive sessions, performances and events in North-east Scotland especially considering neurodivergent customers sensory adjustments with a "Relaxed Sessions" approach.

What should people know?

We Too! was founded to create a "What's On" magazine for families with disabled children to link up all the suitable activities within the locality. Our Relaxed Sessions are open to everyone to attend, creating an inclusive approach within the community. There are no waiting lists or referrals and most importantly attendees are customers, rather than "clients", or "service-users".

What's the biggest mistakes companies make?

Accessibility and inclusion are different! We are getting better at recognising accessibility, but while accessibility ensures that customers can attend, inclusion is ensuring they're central to the planning and discussion of how this looks for them.

What's your top tip?

Empower and trust your team (in our case, Ninjas). Our Ninjas are also parent/carers, and their relevant, lived-in experience is central to everything we do to create awesome Relaxed Sessions for our customers to enjoy. Stay curious, be adaptable to change and have fun!

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Established in 2018, EPIC Property Services provides a range of property services to landlords and sellers in Aberdeen city and Aberdeenshire.

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"We contacted EPIC as our property had been on the sales market for some time and had very little interest. Our property was a bit tired and uninteresting looking. After having a consultation with EPIC, they arranged to have the rooms painted and by using soft furnishings; cushions, throws, bed linen, rugs, lamps, dried flowers and plants they transformed our property from dull and boring into an inviting home you would want to live in. Our property sold in a matter of weeks after EPIC worked their magic." - Richard, Aberdeen



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Enhancing property value through a connected building approach

How great connectivity will improve the value of your properties

Graeme Gordon,
CEO,
IFB Ltd.



A building without digital connectivity? They don't exist anymore, partly due to the rapid advance of new technologies and, more recently, compliance standards and regulations within the building and property sectors. This is especially relevant when we consider that over 80% of business premises, offices, warehouses, pubs, shops, hotels, that need to meet the 2030 net zero commitment are already here and in use, or in some cases, unfortunately not.

The places where we work need to be better connected than ever, not just for the obvious user requirements but now for building management and services that will pay a critical part in helping meet those 2030 commitments, provide highly efficient, productive places and spaces to work in and from.

Enhanced connectivity is essential to maximising the efficiency of how a building operates, be it commercial or residential and irrespective of its age. Sensors that measure occupancy and footfall, energy and water usage and alert systems for routine or emergency maintenance, depend on robust and reliable end-to-end connectivity. Equally, at a time when many are struggling to attract people back to the office, removing barriers to do this is

important. That includes ensuring employees are able to make and receive mobile phone calls wherever they are in the building.

This becomes a real challenge as when we are all trying to improve buildings and retrofit current ones, with the most positive environmental impact, higher quality insulation and material and new styles of glass – these are practically impermeable to mobile signals. This is a real factor for many of the great new grade A offices spaces in the region, and also many of the buildings currently being retrofitted for the future.

Wi-Fi calling for sure helps, but it's still not great and not that secure.

This is important if you are the tenant or perspective purchaser of a building and also increasingly important if you are a developer, owner, landlord or agent.

Why? WiredScore, the global digital connectivity system that defines and certifies digital connectivity, references a 5% uplift in rental values for fully connected buildings.

So, what can you do to meet the challenge of qualifying for new developments and buildings and helping those older buildings to remain an attractive option? There are examples around us - think about the ongoing initiatives in

Aberdeen's Union Street, West End and our industrial parks – but in real terms in any city or area in the UK.

Here at IFB we have been involved early in the conversations when it comes to site and building development and redevelopment. This has been around how to get the best relevant connections to the site and location and to plan this as early as possible, to make the site attractive for the new owner to plug and play their business in.

And importantly, we are involved in some smart planning and delivery, meaning we are securely connecting everything and everyone with everything they need, helping make the buildings a place they want to be in.

IFB will be hosting a series of industry events to raise and discuss the importance of great connectivity helping improve the attractiveness of your properties and the services for owners, developers, agents and owners. For further information, please email geton@ifb.net.





Bancon Homes wins seventh gold award with 100% customer satisfaction

Bancon Homes is pleased to announce that it has been awarded an Outstanding Award for customer satisfaction, alongside a Gold award for the seventh consecutive year.

The awards are run by specialist market research company, In-house Research who are an accredited supplier to the New Homes Quality Board. They help businesses capture, analyse and understand customer insights through an independent telephone survey, with customers who completed their home purchase in the year ended December 31, 2023.

Kevin McColgan, Chief Executive Officer at Bancon Group, said: "We are absolutely delighted to have not only have been awarded an Outstanding Award for customer satisfaction, and a Gold award for the seventh consecutive year, but to have achieved it with a 100% customer rating.

"To hear that 100% of our surveyed customers would recommend Bancon Homes to their friends and family is an incredible achievement, and testament to the hard work, dedication, and exceptional quality and service every person in the business is delivering for our customers."

Part of the Bancon Group, Bancon Homes currently has developments in Aberdeen, Banchory, Strathaven, Mintlaw and Wilkieston. Their outstanding commitment to Customer Service has also been recognised by the Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce as they have been named as finalists in the category of Customer First for a 2024 Northern Star Business Award.



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Paul Tawse and Kevin Yule

Amos Group announces the addition of two highly experienced individuals to strengthen its senior management team. Paul Tawse has been appointed as the Vice President of Europe, Middle East & Africa, and will be based at the company's UK headquarters in Aberdeenshire. With over 20 years of experience in equipment rental, sales, and fleet management services, Paul's expertise will greatly benefit the businesses in these regions. In addition, Amos Group welcomes Kevin Yule as the General Manager for UK & Europe. Kevin brings with him a wealth of lifting and rigging knowledge gained from his extensive experience serving the marine, energy, and renewable sectors for the past 20 years.



Rachael Etheridge and Kelly Jones

Gilson Gray has strengthened its marketing and business development team with two new hires. Kelly Jones and Rachael Etheridge have been appointed as Marketing Manager and Business Development Manager, respectively. Kelly joins the firm from communications agency The Lane, where she worked across a range of corporate sectors, including legal and professional services, as a senior account manager. In her new role, Kelly will help drive the firm's marketing strategy to unlock new opportunities and maintain its position as a market leader. Rachael brings a wealth of experience to the business, having spent over ten years in business development and marketing positions at various legal firms. In the newly created role, Rachael will focus on building Gilson Gray's regional offering by overseeing the delivery of its strategic growth plans.



Andrew Cruickshank

Sword Ping has appointed Andrew Cruickshank as Cyber Security Sales Lead. With over 25 years of working within the Scottish IT market, he has a vast degree of knowledge and experience with complex solution sales across public/private/hybrid cloud and security technologies.



Marcelo Cadena

Marine Technical Limits has appointed Marcelo Cadena as Principal Naval Architect. A Brazilian national, he brings 13 years' experience in the oil and gas industry in South America. Marcelo started work as a Class surveyor, spending the first ten years of his career visiting ships and offshore units for Lloyd's Register and DNV.



Stephen Marcos

OPITO, the not-for-profit global safety and skills organisation for the energy industry, has appointed Stephen Marcos Jones as its new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) following an extensive search process. He will replace John McDonald who has led the business since 2017.



Ken McInnes

Ryden is kicking off 2024 with a strategic move, announcing the appointment of industry stalwart Ken McInnes to a newly created position in client relationship and business development. His expertise and knowledge are sure to bring significant value to the company in his new role.



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Bill Muir

Odfjell Technology is delighted to announce the appointment of Bill Muir as the new VP Projects & Engineering for the UK. Bill brings extensive experience, particularly in technical project management, technical support, and engineering, projects and construction (EPC) across fixed platforms, MODU, FPSO, land facilities and infrastructure applications.


Christine Dodds

Christine Dodds has joined Peterson Energy Logistics' leadership team as Finance Director. She will lead the finance and shared services teams as the company rises to the challenges and opportunities of the energy transition and internationalisation. Christine joins from Repsol, where she spent 13 years in a series of roles in financial reporting and business planning.


AquaTerra

AquaTerra Group has commenced 2024 with a series of new recruits and internal promotions. Andy Jenner has been promoted to Operations Manager from Project Manager. In his eight years since joining the business, Andy has progressed from an Offshore Technician position, consistently securing several promotions which have now brought him to the Operations Manager role. Kyle McLean has joined the company as an Apprentice Mechanic, and last year completed his HNC in Mechanical Engineering, as well as his Level 1 Rope Access Training. Michelle Birch joins AquaTerra Group as the new Finance Manager, succeeding Elaine Pacitti who will shortly commence her well-deserved retirement. Michal Skulski has joined the company as Commercial Lead and is already making an impact while supporting projects for multiple clients.


Tom Carmichael

Hellmann Worldwide Logistics in Aberdeen welcome Tom Carmichael to its team. Tom takes up the role of OCTG Manager and brings a wealth of freight forwarding experience and has specialised in the OCTG sector for the past 6-years.


Claire Ogston

Blackadders LLP has boosted its Aberdeen Residential Property team by recruiting Claire Ogston as its new Director. Claire has more than 17 years' experience in residential property and is an expert in the Aberdeen market having been born, raised and educated in the city. She joins Blackadders from Ledingham Chalmers.


Pete McIntosh

Local creative marketing agency Mearns & Gill announces the appointment of Pete McIntosh as Business Development Manager. Pete has over 20 years' experience working within advertising, marketing and media, with over 15 years of that time spent within the commercial side of radio.


Mark Thomson

Duncan Taylor Scotch Whisky in Huntly has appointed Mark Thomson as Private Client Manager, to look after its range of cask sales as well as their impressive portfolio of high-end and rare whiskies. Mark started his career in hospitality 25 years ago, quickly climbing the ladder into management and becoming a renowned drinks advisor.



Derek Leith

Well-Safe Solutions have announced energy financial specialist Derek Leith has joined the Board as Non-Executive Director. Derek brings over 35 years of financial experience, with nearly three decades in various executive and management roles at EY, including as Global Oil & Gas Tax Leader.



Jack Borg-Delaney

Hall Morrice in Aberdeen has welcomed Jack Borg-Delaney to a newly created role of an additional Audit Director. This strategic addition to the leadership team reflects the firm's commitment to enhancing its audit services and delivering exceptional value to clients.



David Stewart

David Stewart has recently joined Apollo as the company's new Business Development Manager. David brings a wealth of experience acquired from his time in the Army (Infantry), where he held key operational and command positions.



Paulina Panus

Fulkrum announces the key appointment of Paulina Panus as Head of Human Resources. Joining Fulkrum in the newly formed role, Paulina brings a wealth of experience to the human resources department that solidifies Fulkrum's people-centric approach to its continued growth.



Steven Sanderson

Steven Sanderson is the newest addition to the C-SAM team. With an impressive 30-year career spanning the oil and gas, marine, and aquaculture industries, Steven brings a wealth of experience and unparalleled expertise to his role as Systems Analyst.



Aberdeen Performing Arts

Aberdeen Performing Arts has appointed four new board members. Chris Collins, Christine Dodds, Gareth Masson and Yolisa Phahle will contribute to further strengthening the governance and strategic direction of the leading arts organisation in their new roles. Chris Collins is Professor of Music and Head of the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture at the University of Aberdeen. Christine Dodds is a Chartered Accountant with a background in both big four accountancy practice and the energy sector. Gareth Masson is a Partner at Blackadders LLP specialising in family law. Yolisa Phahle is a seasoned CEO and Executive Board member with over 30 years' experience in the traditional and digital media industry in the UK, and Sub-Saharan Africa.



Dr. Alan Lowdon OBE

Balmoral Comtec, a division of Balmoral Group and a key player in the offshore energy supply chain, has announced the appointment of Dr. Alan Lowdon OBE as Non-executive Director. Alan brings over 35 years of experience from various directorial roles in the renewable energy sector, where he has been responsible for strategic, service, and product development.



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Mike Halliday

Mike Haliday joins Online Electronics as Account Manager. Mike brings a wealth of knowledge and experience gained during many years in business development and sales management positions with global organisations in the Energy sector. Mike will be focusing on further growth, enhancing our position with key Operators and EPC contractors in the pipeline industry.



David Lockwood OBE

Wood announce David Lockwood OBE will join Wood as a Non-Executive Director. David brings over 35 years of experience from across global engineering and technology companies. He is currently Chief Executive Officer of Babcock International Group PLC, a FTSE 250 aerospace and defence company, a position he has held since September 2020.



P3 Business Care

Jim Gimmer, founder of P3 Business Care, is delighted to welcome two new members to the P3 team. Grant Wood joins with over 28 years of experience working in the offshore sector, whilst Chris McLean has over 15 years of experience. Together they will be providing the unique P3 model of employee care to new clients on assets in the North Sea.



Jera IT

Jera IT, a leading Scottish-based managed service provider who have offices in Turriff, Edinburgh, and Glasgow has recently welcomed three new additions to the Operations Team. Joining the tribe are Duncan Wallace as Senior IT Engineer (Edinburgh), Kieran Brown – Apprentice (Turriff) and Liam Smith – Apprentice (Edinburgh). Duncan brings a wealth of experience to the role with over 25 years' experience, while Kieran Brown and Liam Smith, as apprentices, will have the opportunity to learn and grow in the field of IT under the guidance of seasoned professionals.



Scott Robertson

Amplus Energy Services Ltd has filled a key role within its Carbon Circle UK Limited partnership by hiring new General Manager Scott Robertson. As GM, Scott will lead the establishment and growth of Amplus's new carbon capture business which was formed in November 2023 following a major strategic investment in leading Norwegian company Carbon Circle AS.



Mark Bruce

Sonihull introduces Mark Bruce as its new Head of Sales – UK and Europe. With more than 20 years of experience, Mark is a trusted voice in the marine sector. His past roles include positions at Kongsberg and The Royal Navy, and he brings a wealth of knowledge about all things maritime.



Ian Mowatt and Malcolm Speagell

In a strategic move poised to accelerate growth and bolster innovation, Deep Casing Tools announced the addition of two key professionals to its leadership team. Ian Mowatt joins as Operations Manager, while Malcolm Speagell takes on the role of Well Engineer Manager. Having held significant roles in the oil and gas sector for over two decades, Ian’s leadership is expected to streamline operations, enhance productivity, and fortify the company’s position as an industry leader. Malcolm Speagell brings a unique blend of technical expertise and various disciplines in drilling management to his new role. With a background in designing and executing well engineering solutions, Malcolm is expected to play a vital role in advancing Deep Casing Tools’ capabilities across the well life cycle.



Ross Christie, Reece Christie and Kester Moore

Absoft has recently onboarded three graduate consultants in response to heightened business demands and successful acquisition of new implementation projects. Ross Christie, Reece Christie and Kester Moore will assume roles as Developers and Finance Consultants. Each have diverse educational backgrounds in computer science, physics and mathematics, and accounting and finance.



Developing the Young Workforce North East

Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) North East has made three new appointments to its board, extending the breadth and depth of its expertise across key sectors and disciplines. Mavis Anagboso, Iain Abernethy and Jenny MacDonald have joined the DYW North East board at a pivotal time as the organisation seeks to increase the volume and quality of activities between the region’s employers and its next generation of workers. The new trio join an 11-strong DYW North East board. The board is chaired by James Bream, CEO of Katoni Engineering. As part of the recruitment Mavis Anagboso takes on the role of Vice Chair.



Graeme Reid

Peterhead Port Authority has appointed a new Chief Executive Officer. Graeme Reid, formerly a Marine Consultant with the International Maritime Contractors Association (IMCA), has wide and extensive maritime management experience.



Stuart Blyth

Graham + Sibbald welcome Stuart Blyth, Associate to the Business Rates team. Based within the Edinburgh office, Stuart is joining to assist the team at a crucial point in the rating process with changes being made to land and listed buildings.



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