

The background of the entire image is a high-contrast, blue-tinted photograph of an industrial welding environment. In the upper half, two robotic arms are visible, with bright sparks emanating from their welding points. The lower half of the image shows a close-up of a welding torch creating intense blue light and sparks. The overall aesthetic is futuristic and industrial.

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INSPIRING GROWTH

A SERIES OF ARTICLES SHINING A SPOTLIGHT ON INNOVATION, RESILIENCE AND AMBITION IN 2020 BY WARD HADAWAY

INSPIRING GROWTH

STEVE MCNICOL,
WARD HADAWAY



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FASTEST 50

“What a year!” Although I guess given all that has been going on that might conceivably be considered an understatement.

Not in living memory has a natural “event” of this magnitude affected every country, every business, every person in such a significant way. We are caught up in something that will have a lasting impact in many different ways – something that generations to come will look back at and talk about.

What will define the pandemic’s ultimate impact is how we come out of the other side. And we are all custodians of how and in what form businesses emerge across our region.

A vast number of businesses have suffered, some irreparably, taking an enormous toll on those who work both for and with them. But this unprecedented event has also created opportunities, accelerated technical developments, given fresh outlooks and forged new partnerships - even in the heart of ongoing adversity.

Learning from these positives, and holding on to them as the new normality emerges, is key to rebuilding the successful businesses, productive teams, and vibrant communities of the future.

As we spoke to business leaders and considered the impact that lockdown restrictions had on our Fastest 50 events in Leeds, Manchester and Newcastle during 2020, we got a very clear feel for their thinking and approach to growth, and their own response to the impact of the pandemic.

So as the New Year approaches, we wanted to share with you some of the stories that we heard during those conversations. “Inspiring Growth” is a series that makes us proud of the innovation, resilience and people-centred approach that businesses across Yorkshire and the North East have shown in abundance. At a time when it can be only too easy to dwell on the challenges that we all face in the coming year we hope that the collection brings with it some positivity and inspiration.

Versions of the articles have all appeared over the last couple of months in The Journal or The Yorkshire Post, on our website and social media feeds.

We would like to sincerely thank all those who agreed to take part in this series, and took the time to share so candidly their experiences and insights.

Also thanks to Rachel McBryde and Nicola Williamson from PR consultancy McBryde and Co who turned these insights into the series of engaging pieces that you find across the following pages.

It is our intention to keep shining a positive and constructive spotlight through 2021 and beyond, highlighting success and innovation to inspire those who work in business. If you have your own story to share, please do get in touch.

Take care and stay safe.

Steve

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INSPIRING GROWTH IN YORKSHIRE

JOHN MURRAY,
WARD HADAWAY

A version of this article appeared in the Yorkshire Post on 10th November.

The Fastest 50 in Yorkshire has run every year for the past decade. But 2020 is not the same as any other year.

In spring this year Aspire Leeds was booked, the champagne was on ice and we were set to bring the business community of Yorkshire together for our annual celebration of the very best in business. Just 10 days before the event, all that changed – the pandemic escalated and we all pressed pause.

Throughout the year, we have considered what to do next with this well-established initiative – how to use the momentum of Ward Hadaway's Fastest 50 and what it stands for to help businesses who are adapting and striving in the most difficult of circumstances.

When we went back to the roots of what the Fastest 50 is about – celebrating entrepreneurialism, highlighting business success, using those who have been there and done that to act as a guiding light – we felt that a series featuring a range of businesses sharing their experiences could inspire others.

There is no crystal ball, no magic wand, no right or wrong way to do business right now. But there are themes that many of the businesses we know and work with have in common, not least flexibility, agility and adaptability.

So we commissioned this series of articles under the banner of Inspiring Growth in Yorkshire; talking to some of those in our business community about both their past growth and success, but also about how they have responded to the pandemic.

We hope this proves to be both inspirational and valuable for those who are facing their own business challenges.

But at the outset we also want to reflect on the steps our firm has taken in the face of this pandemic.

We have tried and tested disaster recovery plans in place, which kicked into action as soon as the scale of the impact of the pandemic became clear. We are continuing to focus on how we keep our people and our clients safe, protecting their health and wellbeing whilst providing the service that our clients need and deserve. The measures that we adopted back in March have been regularly reviewed and adapted – they have served us and our clients extremely well and they will continue to do so.

Throughout the year, we have listened to the needs of our markets and focused our communications on providing clarity in the face of great economic and regulatory change. In March we built an online hub to house a library of Frequently Asked Questions which we have constantly added

to, covering everything from furlough to CBILS, force majeure to data protection, and everything in between.

We made this available to the whole region and shared it with as many people as we could, through membership bodies, regional agencies and the media.

All of which is why we want you to hear our message loud and clear – we are here for you whatever the pandemic throws at us all.

So as part of this resolute message, we wanted to create something positive and stimulating at a time of unprecedented uncertainty. We hope you enjoy this series Inspiring Growth in Yorkshire, founded on the essence of our Fastest 50 and what it does best – celebrating our great region, and the businesses in it.

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John Murray, Ward Hadaway

THE MOST SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS IN THE WORLD?

LANCHESTER GROUP

A version of this article originally appeared in The Journal on 9th December 2020.

Lanchester Group of Companies' managing director Tony Cleary reveals how placing sustainability at the heart of its agenda supports not only the planet, but profits too.

It's funny where a hip operation can take you. The creation of arguably one of the most sustainable businesses in the country, with the largest open loop water source heat pump system in Europe, doesn't necessarily spring to mind.

But for Tony Cleary, managing director of Lanchester Group of Companies, recuperating after an operation to replace his left hip gave him time to reflect. It was during this period, nearly a decade ago, that he started to read about renewable energy and the benefits not only for the environment, but also for business.

"Back then, investing in renewable energy was fairly new for businesses," says Tony, speaking from the Lanchester Group offices - home to Lanchester Wines, Greencroft Bottling, Lanchester Energy and Lanchester Properties - in Stanley. Lanchester Group's gift business, Spicers of Hythe, is based at one of the company's Gateshead sites.

"The investment in renewables was a risk, because the government had grants in place but it wasn't always clear how the money would be distributed. However, the more I read about it, the more I thought it was a good idea.

"Our facility is on a hill - we're high up. It was the ideal place for a wind turbine. The more I found out about sustainable energy, the more I thought that there was a real opportunity to be more sustainable as a business, as well as creating renewable energy from a commercial perspective."



Tony Cleary, Lanchester Group

You could say that Cleary was ahead of his time. He recognised that customers, employees and suppliers are interested in more than just the price of goods. Increasingly, they want to know how things are made, what the impact of production is on the environment and what your ethos says about you as a business.

"You have to believe in this stuff," Tony continues, "and we do. You can't just do it as a 'bolt on' - greenwashing your business because you think it will look better. You have to get buy-in from the board, and we have placed our sustainability agenda front and centre of our plans - it's considered in every decision we make because we believe being carbon neutral is just the beginning."

Adam Black, Lanchester Group's head of energy, has been instrumental in the development of the sustainability strategy.

Tony continues, *"In business you have to surround yourself with people who are cleverer than you, and Adam is brilliant. He doesn't just go with the status quo. If we've got a business decision to make, he thinks around the project, looks at it from all angles. He considers if there's a better way to deliver it. It might not be what everyone else is doing, or how it's always been done - but if there's an improvement to make, he'll figure it out."*

Lanchester Group's ambitions are huge - *"to be the most sustainable business on the planet"* - but talking to Tony you get the feeling this isn't just hot air.

The company now has four wind turbines producing 5.5million kWh (kilowatt hours) of clean, renewable electricity per year. Around 42% of this electricity to run operations at its Greencroft Estate, the remainder - enough



Imogen Holland, Ward Hadaway

beacon to the business community of our region. Its leadership in sustainability demonstrates that the triple bottom line of people, planet and profits can indeed be achieved. The organisation has put its purpose – to be the most sustainable business on the planet – at the heart of its growth strategy and they are reaping the rewards, both commercially and environmentally.”

Tony concludes, “My advice to any business thinking about pursuing a sustainable agenda is that you have to believe in it, invest in it and be passionate about it. And secondly, look very carefully at all your options and seek advice from experts you trust.”

The future for Lanchester Group seems not only bright, but bright green.

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to power 800 family homes - is fed into the National Grid.

There's also a 41 kW solar array on the roof of its office complex producing enough clean electricity to cover day-to-day electrical use.

The piece de resistance is at the Lanchester Wines warehouses in Gateshead, two of which are close to the River Tyne, which have been installed with a 4 mW open loop water source heat pump system - the largest of its type in Europe. These take geothermal heat from water in disused coal mines to provide warmth for the buildings and are recognised as exemplars in terms of renewable energy production for business. And there's more to come next year as the firm looks to build a new bottling plant that will be an icon of sustainable building.

Imogen Holland, a partner at Ward Hadaway, said, “Lanchester Group is a



Greencroft Estate, Lanchester Group

THE SECRET TO SUCCESS? A POWERFUL PRODUCT AND A TALENTED TEAM

HISENSE UK



Bill Goodwin, Ward Hadaway

A version of this article originally appeared in The Yorkshire Post on 8th December 2020.

We talk to Howard Grindrod, vice president of Leeds-headquartered Hisense UK, alongside Bill Goodwin, a partner at Ward Hadaway.

"We provide both aspirational and functioning goods that are desired by people in equal measures," says Grindrod. "Whether it's a laser TV, pyrolytic oven or washing machine, we aim to provide the highest quality product we can."

Seven years ago, Chinese-owned Hisense entered the UK market by establishing a base in Leeds. It originally employed five people from the area and focused on selling white goods only. Fast forward to 2020, after successive years of continued growth, the UK business is set to expand by 30 per cent as it cements its position as a mid-to-high end consumer brand. Following a corporate acquisition of appliance company Gorenje, Hisense UK now provides a much wider product range including electronics, dishwashers and ovens.

"Despite establishing the UK business when we were coming out of the last major economic crisis - the 2008 financial crash - we stuck to our quality-centric strategy and continued to grow as a result," says Grindrod. "Selling superior products and providing first-rate service by our brilliant people is what we do. We don't divert from this - it's the vital ingredient to our success."

When the pandemic hit, the 50-strong Hisense team switched to home working overnight; something no employee had done before. The company has always had a strong digital presence, but lockdowns and less instore shopping has seen Grindrod focus more on digital, improving Hisense's website and partnerships with retailers online.



Hisense UK have recently signed a two-year agreement with Leeds United.

"All of our employees have been working from home since March," explains Grindrod. "And they've adapted amazingly well to this given our sales strategy changed extremely quickly to align with the 'stay at home' message. With people at home a lot more, they've had time to think about their next in-home purchases. Online selling has become a much greater focus - our sales have increased - and we've seen our brand awareness improve too."

As 2020 has seen Hisense UK's digital presence strengthen - like other businesses across the region - is this a sign for future growth?

"Digital is a strong retail channel to any business - it makes up 60% of our sales," says Grindrod. "But I wouldn't dismiss the role bricks and mortar plays in growth plans either. The remaining 40% is driven through physical stores."

"High street shops play a key part in any retail strategy and while digital will always remain strong, nothing replaces seeing that physical product in store. No business can adopt a one-size-fits-all strategy - we need variation in our shopping environments and our shopping experience. While the final delivery might be made online, the actual decision-making process very often starts offline. Physical shops boost online sales - they'll always have a unique role in retail."

Bill Goodwin explains why Hisense's unwavering focus on quality has supported its rapid growth to become a distinguished UK brand.

"Hisense retains high quality standards across every single aspect of their business and it's certainly paying off. By focusing on

UNITED AT HOME



Hisense



excellence, having in place an agile strategy that can respond to the most unexpected situations, and investing in a talented, innovative workforce, Hisense inspires growth and innovation. Grindrod and his team have definitely earned their place in this year's Fastest 50 for an impressive fourth year in a row - they're an asset to Yorkshire's thriving business community."

Hisense UK has just announced a two-year agreement with Leeds United to become an official club sponsor. The new partnership will see Hisense support the newly promoted team with extensive branding and see the company's award-winning televisions installed at Elland Road and the Thorp Arch training ground.

Grindrod adds: *"The Leeds United partnership highlights just how important Leeds and the wider Yorkshire region is to our future growth. We're looking to expand our team in the next few months, hiring approximately 10 more people from the local area. Our continued success is down to two things: our product and our people. Without quality, innovation and passion in both, we wouldn't be where we are today - and that's why we've established ourselves as a trusted household brand not just in Yorkshire but across the UK."*

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BACK TO BASICS TO SAFEGUARD YOUR BRAND AND PROTECT FUTURE GROWTH

FENTIMANS

A version of this article originally appeared in The Journal on 2nd December 2020.

We catch up with Ian Bray, chief executive at Hexham-headquartered Fentimans, alongside Phil Tompkins, a partner at Ward Hadaway, to discuss how taking stock, looking at what you've got and safeguarding the brand and the core business can inspire growth and profitability in the future.

"A new virus and its lifechanging effects on the economy was something no one could have predicted," reflects Ian Bray, CEO of Fentimans. "No business, of course, would welcome a crisis, especially one on this scale, but it's demonstrated some cold, hard truths for many leaders. I genuinely believe, once the world moves on from this, businesses will be stronger, put stability and agility at their core, and become more resilient and better able to endure turbulent environments in the future."

When it comes to strong, stable businesses, Bray is certainly a man in the know. It's been over 100 years since Fentimans started brewing botanical drinks and it's still family run; owned by the great-grandson of Thomas Fentiman. As brewing techniques have modernised over the years, the business has stayed true to its roots to maintain the unique Fentimans taste that is now sold in 84 countries worldwide.

"And that's why Fentimans is so popular," explains Bray. "It's a high-quality drink that everyone likes. We are doggedly focused on the quality of our drinks and no matter where you buy a bottle of Fentimans, we want to make sure it provides that same taste, every time. When people discover our brand, they stick to it, making our lives easier because we don't have that tough fight to secure a repeat purchase."

When the pandemic hit, many businesses scrambled to create ways to validate their

service or product in a socially distant world. For many, it wasn't about growth, profit and expansion, but sheer survival.

"And this is very important," says Bray, "and a vital lesson to learn in business that can enable growth in the long run. While a lot of our income is generated with supermarkets, there's no escaping the fact that on-trade plays a big role too. Of course, we've suffered from the closure of hospitality establishments nationwide; it's been a very challenging year."

Fentimans had to switch strategy when the UK entered its first national lockdown in March. The business moved from focusing on activity that was profit driven to managing the business for cash.

"What we've done this year is take stock," explains Bray. "And focused on protecting our assets of which our most important is

our 66-strong team who work exceptionally hard, day-in, day-out, whether we're living through a crisis or not. We've been incredibly agile and have been buckling down ready to focus on further growth in 2021."

Phil Tompkins, a partner at Ward Hadaway, explains why Fentimans demonstrates an important quality for all businesses. It's not only about focusing on growth and that bottom line but consolidating what businesses have with a view to future expansion. This powers growth in the longer-term.

"Fentimans have a very strong and successful business model which is weathering one of the most testing times in history for many organisations. Ian and his team are a fantastic example of how taking stock, looking at what you've got and safeguarding the brand and the core business can inspire growth and profitability in the future."



Ian Bray, Fentimans

2021 holds high hopes for the company as it will see them establish its first direct to consumer online sales channel, which has always been the plan, pandemic or not. The longer-term business plan projects more growth, becoming even bigger, and better, within the drinks sector.

Bray adds: *"We have learnt just how strong our business is and what it's capable of. By getting back to basics, leaders can protect what they've built, focus on their core values and ensure the quality of their service and product remains intact. We have a product no one can emulate, which we work meticulously hard at maintaining."*

"The North East business community is such a positive, welcoming place. If I had any advice for other regional business leaders it would be to focus on what you're good at, understand who your customers or clients are, and give them what they want. Ultimately, be proud of what you do and be fiercely protective of that, no matter what."

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Phil Tompkins, Ward Hadaway

HOW CRISIS IS CREATING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

MERCIA

A version of this article originally appeared in the Yorkshire Post on 19th November 2020.

We talk to Mercia's Will Clark about the outlook for investments, alongside Adrian Ballam, partner in the corporate team at Ward Hadaway.

Who would have thought a tiny microbe could cause such massive disruption to our lives and our economy? The impact of Covid-19 will be more far-reaching than previous recessions, according to SME finance provider Mercia. History shows that

'emergent threats' such as pandemics and wars accelerate new discoveries and the rapid adoption of new behaviours.

Will Clark, Managing Director of Mercia's Regional Venture Funds, says we are living through a period of transition. *"We can already see the way that the pandemic is changing the way we shop, work, interact with other people, the type of entertainment we choose, and our attitudes to health and wellbeing."*



Will Clark, Mercia



Stardog and Turbocat from Red Star 3D

"It will hasten the demise of some businesses, but it will create new opportunities for others – and not just digital start-ups. Many established businesses will successfully pivot and adapt. It's worth noting that some of today's most successful companies emerged in the wake of the last recession."

"If we want a strong regional economy, we need Yorkshire businesses to be at the forefront in the recovery. The good news is that today there is a lot more funding in place to help regional businesses to adapt and grow."

Mercia offers a range of loans and equity investment to Yorkshire SMEs – including money from the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund (NPIF), its own funds, and government-backed CBILS loans.

So what type of businesses are experiencing growth right now? Will explains: *"Healthcare is the most obvious example – everything from biotech to digital health and medical devices. The pandemic has put a new perspective on the value of healthcare."*

"It has also accelerated the move to online shopping and remote working and is driving uptake of digital technologies across all industries. Traditional sectors like manufacturing, which Yorkshire is renowned for, are reinventing themselves by adopting smart technologies. There has also been a boom in online gaming."

The burgeoning tech sector is an area of opportunity Ward Hadaway partner Adrian Ballam works closely with Mercia on, acting as a trusted advisor for a number of clients.



Adrian Ballam, Ward Hadaway

He said; *"Digital transformation has been accelerated during this period and it's driving wholesale business change in Yorkshire, even amongst more traditional industries."*

"We've completed a number of deals with Mercia in recent months accessing the NPIF fund, many of them involving digital technologies. It's interesting that certain historic parts of Yorkshire such as Saltaire are reinventing themselves as real hubs of innovation; perhaps in time, they can become the Silicon Valley of the North – we certainly have the talented individuals and businesses to make it happen."

Will continues: *"All of these companies will need funding and investors, and advisors are collaborating to help them to access it."*

We work closely with Ward Hadaway to ensure every business has a clear understanding of the process and the funding package. We consider ourselves as a trusted partner to a business and make sure advisors do the same, something Ward Hadaway is very good at."

5 businesses on a growth curve

Here are five companies who have recently received funding from Mercia to support their expansion:

Advanced Digital Innovation (ADI), Saltaire

ADI's app MyPathway allows hospital consultants to communicate with patients remotely and keep track of their condition,

and removes the need for appointment letters. Already in use in Leeds, the app has proved a boon during the pandemic.

Bimsense, Hull

Bimsense's smart building software allows construction projects to be created digitally before being built to identify any problems and risks. It also provides a digital audit trail in line with the recommendations of the Grenfell Tower report.

Tribosonics, Sheffield

By embedding sensors within bearings and other moving parts, Tribosonics creates 'intelligent components' which can monitor friction and wear and tear. Remote monitoring helps extend plant life, prevent critical failures and reduce energy use.

Abingdon Health, York

A specialist in rapid diagnostics, Abingdon recently struck a deal to supply the

government with Covid-19 antibody tests, which can produce results in 20 minutes and could play a key role in mass testing to assess nationwide immunity levels.

Red Star 3D, Sheffield

This award-winning animation studios creates its own films which are shown in cinemas and theme parks, the most recent being StarDog and TurboCat which is available on Amazon. It is now taking on contract work from film companies and plans to create 40 new jobs.

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Tribosonics (from left to right: Glenn Fletcher, Mark Wallace, Ari Bastian, Christina King, Sarah Sandle, Janelle Harper, Janet Pryke, Phil Harper)

BUMP, 'BOTS AND BALLOON SWORDS: FROM BLYTH TO THE WORLD

THARSUS

A version of this article originally appeared in *The Journal* on 25th November 2020.

We talk to Dave Swan, Technical Director at Blyth-based robotics firm Tharsus about how the pandemic inspired their latest innovation, Bump.

There's no denying it. Social distancing is hard to do. Wash our hands? Yes. Wear a face covering? OK. Distance ourselves indefinitely from our friends, family and colleagues? Hmm. It goes against the grain of our instinctive human nature.

But this is the world in which we find ourselves. And for many businesses the consequences of not distancing appropriately go beyond health harms. If sections of our workforce are infected and have to isolate – or worse still are hospitalised – this can quickly and easily undermine operations with devastating effects.

How to solve the problem of effective social distancing was the challenge that Blyth's Tharsus undertook in March when 'lockdown one' began. Operating across three sites in the Northumberland town, the wisp of a solution germinated as the engineering firm grappled with how to keep its workforce safe and secure, and remain the requisite two metres apart on site.

"It began with balloon swords," laughs chief technology officer Dave Swan, explaining how Bump – wearable tech that lets the user know when they've got too close – took shape.

"We were asking our teams to stay apart, but it was new, and it was hard because it's not our human nature. We'd just reconfigured our spaces to encourage closer working and collaboration and now we had to say, 'no, please stay apart.'"



Dave Swan, Tharsus

"So we messed around with balloon swords – the idea being that if you each extended one to touch the other you were two metres apart. Any closer was too close. The novelty wore off after a couple of days and we were left scratching our heads. How could we create behaviour change and help keep people safe, without being dictatorial about it?"

Dave and a small team set about finding a solution. The company had never made wearable tech before – *"we're machine builders"* – but that didn't stop them reaching out to their network around the globe to help find a solution.

"We didn't have all the answers in Blyth," Dave continues. *"So we talked to our contacts, to academics, specialists in moulding, radio frequency technology, firmware, electronics and marketing and we*

created a consortium of people who could rise to this challenge."

At one point Tharsus and their partners were working around the clock on the project – one team in Blyth and one in New Zealand, handing over to the other at the end of each day so work could continue. In 12 weeks they had a solution – Bump. By October Bump was being deployed at the scaled back London Marathon.

When Dave and the Tharsus team embarked on the project there was no roadmap, but Bump served as a rallying point, a project the team could get behind that gave them purpose during uncertain times. Its commercial value is as yet undetermined but its worth is so much more than the product itself.



The Bump system to reinforce social distancing



Jamie Gamble, Ward Hadaway

“Creating Bump gave us all a focus, and a focus for good. It was born out of a need within the business to keep our people safe, but it became a project we could all work on together and believe in. It reminded us of all the things we are good at as a team. And it helped broaden our network – and good things have come out of that alone.”

Jamie Gamble is a partner in the employment team at Ward Hadaway. He said; “People are the lifeblood of any organisation and learning how to harness their talents, provide purpose and clear direction and keep everyone engaged is key. This includes not only your employees but your wider network.

“What is interesting about the Tharsus story during lockdown is that they have used Bump as a focus for their workforce. They

have communicated its purpose clearly and asked the team to support its development, created opportunities and encouraged innovation. They have empowered their people and their business partners with positive effects.”

So what next for Tharsus? Dave concludes; “It’s about that fine balance between being true to our engineering and manufacturing roots, whilst remaining open, agile and innovative. It’s about keeping that entrepreneurial spirit alive within an established business, keeping the energy high. As long as we have forward motion, that will enable growth and we’ll be in a good place, whatever the future holds.”

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The Tharsus team

NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES FUELLING GROWTH

YORKSHIRE HOUSING

A version of this article originally appeared in the Yorkshire Post on 12 November 2020.

We talk to Yorkshire Housing's Nick Atkin, alongside John Murray, executive partner and Joint Head of Social Housing at Ward Hadaway.

"We are living through a revolutionary period our grandchildren will study," says Nick, who hails from Doncaster.

What's interesting is the part this pioneer of housing policy will play in shaping that history – as the social housing organisation he leads is at the forefront of transformative change, shaping the communities of the future. The pandemic has simply accelerated his plans for change.

"COVID-19 isn't good from many perspectives and especially for those hit worst from a health and economic perspective," he says pragmatically. "There are some positives though, not least in terms of how we can better support our communities, customers and employees, as well as reducing our impact on the environment. Now is an opportunity to shape the lives we want to lead and connect as families and communities."

Nick is someone who is a forerunner when it comes to thinking outside the box. He's operated 'paperless' for 17 years and has long advocated working flexibly.

"We've stuck rigidly with a 9am-5pm routine since the post-war era and that drove swathes of people into cities to work. Over time, people got sick of the commute, so they moved to the cities, where housing is expensive and small. Now many of us are working from home, that brings huge changes to our living arrangements – and our housing needs."



It was always on the cards that Yorkshire Housing would build 8,000 new homes over the next 10 years, but the scope of that housing need has changed overnight.

"Now people are looking at their houses – which have suddenly become their workspaces – and they're thinking, 'this doesn't work'. They need larger homes and gardens for their families. They don't have to commute as frequently as in BC (Before Covid) times so where once city living negated travel, that's no longer a consideration. So rural homes surrounded by green spaces are in demand and they offer a better quality of life."

Likewise, Nick believes we'll see big changes to high streets across the country. He continues; *"The pandemic has accelerated the decline of the high street.*

We'll soon see empty buildings where shops once were and that presents an opportunity. How can we support locally based people with community facilities – places they can go to interact for work and leisure. Spaces where colleagues – and non-colleagues can meet, socialise and work. They might even live on the high street, with shared communal areas for work."

John Murray says that Yorkshire Housing represents a shift he sees first hand.

"The housing sector has its own unique challenges; a product in high demand and limited supply, but with methods of delivery of some services severely curtailed by lockdown, income loss for tenants due to coronavirus, and remedial action for rent arrears effectively suspended for six months.



John Murray, Ward Hadaway

"This has driven the need to innovate to find practical and legal solutions, to amend processes and procedures and to regularly re-evaluate risk. Home working has highlighted the importance of true and trusted relationships between employer and employee, and lawyer and client, as we support each other."

Nick says Yorkshire Housing has used the crisis to think big and long-term. And that is fuelling growth.

"We've changed how we work and we've put in the technology required to facilitate that for colleagues. Offering more flexibility as to how and when they work – which helps the work/life blend, especially as we're all increasingly taking on caring roles, not only for children but for parents and grandparents too."

"We've also looked at how we can better support our customers. Flexible working for our colleagues means we can offer more flexibility for our customers too. For example, if they need a repair carrying out, traditionally that would have happened on a weekday between 9am-5pm. Now we can offer many more options that suit a 21st century lifestyle."

In conclusion, Nick says; *"The pandemic has opened up a whole range of possibilities for how people live their lives and it's long overdue. Like many others, Yorkshire Housing has a once in a generation opportunity to grasp this opportunity with both hands and shape the future of how we work and live."*

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GOOD, BETTER, BEST

RYDER ARCHITECTURE

A version of this article originally appeared in *The Journal* on 30th November 2020.

Ryder managing partner Mark Thompson reveals how a never-ending desire for improvement has fuelled growth.

"That'll do' just isn't good enough," says Mark Thompson, managing partner at Ryder and North East Local Enterprise Partnership board member, reflecting on the relentless attention to detail that the award-winning practice places on everything they do, from design to client service.

It's an approach that serves them well. Established in 1953 and headquartered in Newcastle, Ryder now has offices around the world, and continues to grow, employing over 250 people globally and working with many more through the international Ryder Alliance, a group of like-minded specialists.



Steve McNicol, Ward Hadaway

"We can always do better," continues Mark. *"It's about continually looking to improve, not resting on your laurels or giving up. Putting yourself in the shoes of the recipient of your work helps. It's not personal when we ask for more, we expect it of all our people, from top to bottom, me included."*

The business benefits of this approach are significant and Ryder has built a reputation for quality, world-class work and added-value at every level. From delivering against client briefs to investing in local communities to looking after its people, the team is always striving for more.

"Sometimes the benefits of our approach are rather intangible, but our client and people surveys show us we have high levels of retention, referral and recommendation. Many of our people spend their whole career with us and our clients return again and again," Mark continues.

Part of Ryder's ongoing success is its emphasis on investing in and developing people. *"We expect our team to take ownership of their decisions and their work and to be leaders within their area of expertise."*

"But that relies on having the right culture and infrastructure in place to support them – from learning and development to openly communicating our expectations. Ryder has always been a place where there are opportunities, but we expect ownership of challenges and solutions in return. We seem to attract like-minded people who enjoy working together. One of the highlights of the past 12 months was seeing Mark Clasper, who joined us as a graduate and won a Ryder Bursary to study in Glasgow in 2005, being promoted to partner."

Steve McNicol leads on client experience at Ward Hadaway. Commenting on Ryder's success, he said; *"Companies like Ryder exemplify how investment in people and communities can lead to significant market advantage. Successful businesses are only as*



Mark Thompson, Ryder

strong as their employees, and creating a culture where expectations are clearly defined and investment in personal development is more than skin-deep takes time and commitment. But the rewards for businesses are significant.

"In many ways Ryder's culture reflects our own. We have a history of nurturing talent from within. Our recent announcement that two of our colleagues who started with us as trainees have been promoted to partners reflects our approach. We are determined to keep doing the things we believe in to help develop our people and our firm, and in so doing retaining and attracting the best talent."

What does the future hold for the practice? Mark concludes; *"Every year since 1994 we have created a 'Ryder Blueprint' charting our direction of travel for the year ahead. At the end of each year, I am always amazed by what we've achieved. As long as there is continual progress and forward motion, we are heading in the right direction."*

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Bank House, Newcastle



Giants on the Quayside



Great Charles Street, Birmingham

INNOVATION AND BELIEF DRIVES HOPE FOR HOSPITALITY AS LOCKDOWN BEGINS

BLACK SHEEP BREWERY



Jonathan Pollard, Ward Hadaway

A version of this article originally appeared in the Yorkshire Post on 26th November 2020.

We talk to Black Sheep Brewery's chief executive, Charlene Lyons, about the renowned brewer's response to the pandemic, alongside Jonathan Pollard, Corporate Partner at Ward Hadaway.

"Never in a million years could anyone predict the situation facing businesses across the UK right now," says Charlene Lyons, CEO, Black Sheep Brewery. "Especially those in the hospitality industry who continue to face a myriad of challenges with yet another lockdown as we approach traditionally our busiest time of the year."

Breweries across the country have been hugely affected with the closure of pubs, clubs and bars as well as 'corona' legislation that hugely impacts sales.

"To put it into context, if the sale of chocolate was outlawed what would happen to cocoa manufacturers?" asks Lyons. "They would inevitably have to close as they'd lose all of their income, overnight. The same applies to breweries. We are an industry that traditionally relies on the sale of ale, beer and lager in the UK's 60,000 plus pubs, clubs and bars. If those close, what can we do? And this extends through to our entire supply chain from hop and malt suppliers to bottle and can suppliers."

As well as supplying pubs and bars across Yorkshire and the UK, Black Sheep Brewery has an online shop, where people can buy their favourite beer directly. Before 2020 this wasn't the brewery's biggest focus but that soon changed, and significantly.

Six weeks prior to an unprecedented national lockdown, the cogs at Black Sheep had already started turning. Lyons and her team created a contingency plan in the event that a full-scale lockdown would ensue. And how vital that decision was.



Charlene Lyons, Black Sheep Brewery

Black Sheep developed a fully-fledged online strategy where it focused on its unique brand, readdressing off-trade activity, where the brewery sold directly to customers through its website or from supermarket shelves.

The business overhauled its packaging and how it appealed directly to the consumer, introducing mini-kegs and a new delivery service. Combined with a large scale and sustained social media drive, Black Sheep saw online sales through www.blacksheepbrewery.com skyrocket by 3,000 per cent.

"As the first lockdown loomed, we were already in the process of switching to plan B, a plan we knew most likely had to be plan A for a long period of time," continues Lyons. "Not only have we maintained our bespoke and highly personalised brand but we've differentiated it from competitors and

positioned ourselves as a brewery who, despite pub and club closures, can continue to make some of the finest Yorkshire ale in the UK and deliver this right to your doorstep.

"From our local home delivery service across the farms, villages and towns of North Yorkshire, to our national mail order operation, we have experienced an explosion in interest from customers up and down the country that want their taste of Black Sheep."

Black Sheep's strong and focused leadership is clear to see. Lyons and her team have not just steadied a ship approaching an iceberg, they've managed to steer it towards brighter horizons.



Jonathan Pollard, a partner at Ward Hadaway, explains why Black Sheep Brewery has demonstrated key qualities that all businesses require to enjoy the good times and create opportunity during the challenging periods.

"If the pandemic has taught us anything it's that companies must be nimble and able to adapt at any time to the changing situation. The ability to diversify and develop a strategy, service or product that makes an organisation stand out from others is crucial. These qualities, alongside a strong and focused leadership team that can come together and make brave business decisions to direct the company through uncertain times, are hallmarks of a successful business."

Black Sheep is keen to demonstrate to other businesses that even in the face of great adversity, success is possible. Especially for a thriving business community like Yorkshire's that's brimming with creativity, innovation and a desire to achieve.

Lyons adds: *"If there's only one piece of advice I can give to any Yorkshire business struggling with the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, it's that you cannot afford to have any fear. Leaders must remain agile because the situation changes so rapidly and often. You must believe the impossible is possible and demonstrate resilience to overcome challenges by being bold and brave, despite the uncertainty."*

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STRONG VALUES AND A PEOPLE- FOCUSED CULTURE POWER GROWTH

TOTAL RESOURCES



A version of this article originally appeared in The Journal on 7th December 2020.

We talk to Total Resources' managing director Les Thompson alongside Gillian Chinhengo, a partner in the employment team at Ward Hadaway.

"Always strive to be the best you can. Provide the best product you can and the best service you can," says Les Thompson, managing director, Total Resources. "That's, without doubt, the secret to Total Resources' success."

And it's clear that this strategy has paid off. Featuring in the North East Fastest 50 three years in a row, Total Resources takes third place in the small business category this year, following last year's runner up position. In 2018, the firm was named the winner of the fastest growing small business of the year.

"To take yet another podium position really is testament to the great team we have across our national network of depots," continues Thompson. "Like any business we've not been immune to the virus, working through periods of staff shortages because of sickness and self-isolation at a time where the level of work has increased but because of our dedicated, close knit and hardworking team we're powering through."

With a 155-strong workforce and seven depots across the UK, Total Resources is going from strength-to-strength. The company is headquartered in Boldon, South Tyneside, boasting a 10,000sqft warehouse alongside two floors of offices for business services and support staff.

In the next year, Total Resources will add a further three depots and take on more people. Huge success from humble beginnings when Thompson worked out of

his garage in South Shields, with his driveway home to two sets of temporary trailer traffic light units in between jobs.

And modest and unassuming is what defines Thompson who, to this day, will continue to put on a hard hat and head out to sites, visit customers and check in on his workforce to ensure they're ok and managing well.

"Every member of our team does their job with a smile on their face which is really important," explains Thompson. "They like what they do, and they do it well and our customers can see that. As the managing director I can easily stay in the office all day but there's three things I always keep in my car - hard hats, biscuits and pens. The hard hats are for when I call into a site and visit the staff, the biscuits so I can pop in and see customers when I am passing and check that they're happy with the job in hand, and the pens are there so I can write down any feedback or concerns and ensure they are acted on immediately."

The business was established by Thompson five years ago and following an £8 million investment from Mercia Fund Managers last year, it has continued to grow at a rapid rate, creating jobs along the way. It prides itself on a strong culture, where work ethic, great skills and a collaborative approach creates the foundations of a firm breaking its start-up mould and transitioning to a medium sized business - this year's projected turnover stands at £13 million.

Gillian Chinhengo explains why Total Resources has the kind of qualities that create a successful business, evolving from a one-man start up to a national, UK-wide operator.

"Total Resources has done phenomenally well, demonstrating just how important a strong, people-focused culture is in creating a happy, healthy and productive workforce. By ensuring its people hold the same shared

values and putting this ethos at the heart of everything they do, the company has reaped rewards. It's great to see Total Resources feature for a third consecutive year - Les and his team provide such great inspiration for people-centred organisations and their success."

Les concludes; "My dad always told me something that's stuck with me since I was little. And it's something I hear myself saying to others when giving them advice as I know how exciting, but also daunting, it is to build your business, create your dream and achieve the goals you want."

"Whenever the going got tough, Thompson senior would always say to me, 'Son, you'll get out of it what you put into it' and he's 100% right. If you work hard, put in the hours and do your homework, you will succeed."

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Total Resources Head Office



Gillian Chinhengo, Ward Hadaway



Traffic Lights, Total Resources



Mini IPV Vehicles, Total Resources

YORKSHIRE'S DIGITAL PROWESS SHINES THROUGH THE PANDEMIC DURESS

STUART CLARKE,
PACELINE PR AND LEEDS
DIGITAL FESTIVAL

A version of this article originally appeared in
The Yorkshire Post on 3rd December 2020.

We talk to Stuart Clarke, an advisor to several businesses through his Paceline PR consultancy, and director of the Leeds Digital Festival which fosters digital culture among the region's business community, alongside Flora Mewies, a partner at Ward Hadaway.

"A group of us started Leeds Digital Festival five years ago because we could see just how much the region's start-ups and scale-ups were bursting with technological innovation across all kinds of sectors from health and finance to education and marketing. All that was needed was a central hub to bring together these ideas and creativity and provide a way for businesses of all sizes to collaborate and share knowledge."



Stuart Clarke, Paceline PR and Leeds Digital Festival



The digital transformation and technological strength of businesses, in every corner of the world, has accelerated beyond expectations this year. But then 2020 has been no ordinary year. At a time when social distancing is the norm, Yorkshire businesses have not been immune to Covid-19 restrictions. However, they are weathering the storm with the kind of digital dexterity that speaks volumes of the innovation, creativity and forward-thinking that's alive and kicking within Yorkshire's business community.

"The pandemic has showcased just how digitally adept Yorkshire businesses have become," continues Clarke. "Covid-19 has impacted every industry, but we've seen a real resilience in the region's tech sector: its innovation and creativity has enabled it not just to weather the storm, but also to thrive and grow."

And ambitious companies of all shapes and sizes, from start-ups to corporates, are providing a beacon of hope and inspiration to all businesses across Yorkshire, showing that an organisation can adapt – and even grow – during turbulent, difficult times.

"2020 will without a doubt go down in history as a catalyst for innovation and growth against a backdrop of unstable financial markets and uncertain economic security," believes Clarke. "We are seeing so many companies, born and bred in Yorkshire, opening a new digitally driven door of opportunity. For example, startup Calbot has capitalised on the growth in virtual meetings by launching its meeting scheduling software, gaining customers around the world. Leeds-based early-warning risk intelligence firm Crisp has

continued to grow, with over 50 new team members joining since March 2020 – a real testament to its global scale and ambition.”

And companies like Calbot and Crisp also have a lot of support among likeminded associates within Yorkshire's close-knit business community. For example, local authorities such as Leeds City Council and North Yorkshire County Council as well as Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership have got one thing in common – a shared goal to enable enterprise to thrive, offering advice and direction each step of the way.

“Yorkshire is also home to some of the UK's best universities,” explains Clarke. “They are brimming with graduates in STEM and digital sectors who can help businesses to excel in their digital transformation, enabling long-term growth. Couple this with knowledge sharing, collaboration and partnership – all principles that Leeds Digital Festival was formed upon – and what you've got is a strong, innovative business community where people who want to see others succeed support one another in their journey of growth.”

Flora Mewies explains why events such as Leeds Digital Festival, which Ward Hadaway also sponsors, are vital to the development of innovative and progressive businesses in Yorkshire.

“Yorkshire is home to some exceptionally skilled and talented business leaders who have started their businesses from scratch and now run multi-million-pound companies with an international reach. Digital transformation has been fundamental to this with the pandemic specifically highlighting just how digitally able Yorkshire businesses are, as well as their agility in responding to the crisis.

“We're also seeing high numbers of clients from across the UK working with our specialist immigration team to help global tech talent secure sponsored Skilled Worker visas, EU Settlement Scheme visas and the elite Tech Nation Visa. This scheme, part of the Global Talent Visa programme, enables the brightest and best tech talent from around the world to come and work in the UK's digital technology sector. We've developing a particular skillset in this vital area, which ultimately supports the growth of the UK economy, in a world dominated by digital.

“So, while the pandemic has caused chaos in many quarters, in Yorkshire our business community can be proud of rising to the challenge, finding opportunities when faced with adversity and leading the UK's digital revolution. The future is perhaps brighter than we first imagined, and that's something we can all applaud.”

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Flora Mewies, Ward Hadaway



NEW RESEARCH REVEALS PERSISTENCE AND CREATIVITY KEY TO BUSINESS SUCCESS

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY
BUSINESS SCHOOL

A version of this article originally appeared in The Journal on 19th November 2020.

As part of its ongoing partnership with Newcastle University Business School, Ward Hadaway is supporting new research examining the impact of COVID-19 on UK firms, with a focus on identifying the skills and traits needed by North East businesses to thrive during uncertain times.

The research conducted by Newcastle University Business School and Leeds University Business School, in collaboration with ZHAW School of Management and Law, Switzerland comes as The Journal and Ward Hadaway continue the series 'Inspiring Growth,' shining a light on the Fastest 50 growing firms in the region and celebrating their growth, innovation and commercial achievements. The **full list for 2020** was published on the firm's website.



Joanne James, Director of Executive Education

Dr Cezara Nicoara, lecturer in marketing at Newcastle University Business School, surveyed over 150 business owners and chief executives from a cross-section of SMEs in the North East as part of the research. The purpose has been to take a snap shot of how businesses have responded to the pandemic to inform future decision making, and to revisit this over the coming months and even years to see how attitudes change.

Commenting on the findings, Dr. Nicoara said: *"Business leaders responding to the study said that 'persistence' and 'creative problem-solving' are two of the skills ranked most highly in terms of their ability to respond effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic as businesses adapt. Conversely respondents whose businesses have adapted the least ranked persistence as unimportant, showing a strong correlation between an openness to change and persistence. Business leaders' approach to decision making in a crisis is one of the core focuses of our research going forwards, so we will drill down into this further over time.*

"Firms also reported the move to remote working as a positive influence. This is after many years where remote working has been something which many organisations have viewed with interest but also scepticism and concern. It will be interesting to see the impact that an enforced period of working from home has on its adoption long term, and the resulting significant sociological change to the work and home life of the region.

"Digital transformation obviously will play a key role in the success of many organisations moving forwards, as businesses pivot their operations to be able to trade effectively online. The study emphasised that the skills that have the most positive effects on these transformation projects, and therefore where businesses should focus some of their skills development efforts, include digital literacy, goal planning and creative problem-solving."

Newcastle University Business School offers businesses access to over 150 world-class academics and 4,000 students. The global team drives excellence in research, innovation and education, as part of an international network, addressing global business, policy and societal issues.

Joanne James is Director of Executive Education. She said; *"In a rapidly changing environment, developing effective leadership skills that allow creativity to thrive can bring new ideas to shape a responsible future for business and society.*

"Through our Executive MBA (EMBA) and Strategic Leadership MSc programmes, we aim to develop leaders who are dynamic, creative and tuned into the future of work. Whether you're a small business, large corporate organisation or a public body, we can help you to build new skills, develop new ways of thinking and work with you to investigate real-world challenges aligned to your business objectives."

Damien Charlton, a partner at Ward Hadaway, said; *"We know businesses across the world continue to face significant challenges as the pandemic continues. Certain sectors have obviously been more badly affected than others, but the research provides clear evidence of where to focus skills development and effort to reap rewards.*

"As business leaders, we may need to think completely outside the box in terms of how we operate in this new world. Ensuring that you have the right skills, traits and competencies within your organisation will be critical for future success. Businesses need to listen – to research like this, to what their clients and teams are saying, and to what technology can offer – to give them a very clear steer in terms of where they should focus their efforts."



Newcastle Gateshead Quayside

Dr Nicoara plans to conduct follow up research in the next six months to assess how businesses are performing as they continue to adapt to the challenges thrown at them by the pandemic. Ward Hadaway will share the results so businesses can tap into up-to-date knowledge and data, supporting effective decision making.

To find out more about how Newcastle University Business School can help your organisation, contact **Joanne James**.

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THREE THINGS 2020 HAS TAUGHT US

WARD HADAWAY

A version of this article originally appeared in The Yorkshire Post on 10th December 2020.

We talk to the Leeds based team of legal advisors about what they've learned from the most unpredictable year in business.

"We are fortunate here at Ward Hadaway to work with a diverse range of organisations across the Yorkshire region," says executive partner John Murray. "They come in all shapes and sizes, from the private, public and third sectors, and they need an array of different types of legal support.

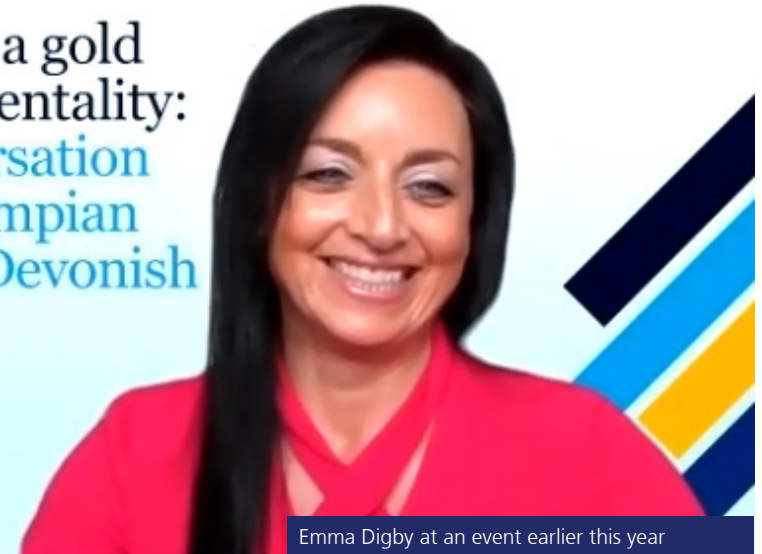
"However, despite their differences, throughout this most unpredictable and challenging of years, we have seen some commonalities and themes emerging that tell us a lot about the characteristics and winning strategies that the most successful and progressive organisations in Yorkshire have deployed. And not only that, we've learnt a great deal about ourselves as a business. As the year draws to an end, it is interesting to reflect on the successful strategies we - and our clients - have implemented as we all continue to weather the storm."



John Murray and the team at the Great Legal Bake Off

wardhadaway
lawfirm

Building a gold medal mentality:
in conversation
with Olympian
Marlon Devonish



Emma Digby at an event earlier this year

1

COLLABORATE AND PROVIDE CLARITY

Emma Digby, commercial dispute resolution partner continues, "We recognised early in the pandemic that what businesses needed was clarity around complex subjects they were unlikely to have ever dealt with before. 'Furlough', 'CBILS', 'when can I invoke force majeure' – these are terms and questions we're now familiar with, but back in March, for the majority of business leaders, they were new or untested and people didn't know how they could be used to support their organisation.

"So quickly, we provided clarity. We set up a comprehensive online coronavirus business FAQ hub and we shared the answers to over 500 frequently asked questions, all for free

- so businesses could get to grips with their options and act upon that knowledge. We continued to share insights through hosting webinars, producing podcasts, sharing debates and information from guest speakers. The information helped businesses stay ahead of the curve. We wanted to add value and collaborate to help leaders understand more clearly the problems they were facing and the solutions they had to hand."

2

REMAIN POSITIVE, EVEN IN THE FACE OF CHALLENGES

Ian McCombie, a partner also in the commercial dispute resolution team, says, "Positivity has also been vital. We recognised that this wasn't - and isn't - a great point in history for many businesses, but we have tackled the work for our clients with drive, energy and agility, finding solutions to complex issues. It wasn't always easy, but our team supported each other and remained upbeat and outward-facing.

"It's also important to keep moving forwards. The pandemic has not thrown us off our strategic plan to add breadth and depth to the integrated team here in Leeds. We've pressed ahead with our growth plans, despite

the pandemic and have made a number of key appointments and promotions.

"We have added experienced resource to each of our corporate, commercial dispute resolution, insolvency and children teams, and brought new practice areas to the office. New partners Adrian Ballam, Jonathan Pollard, Emma Digby and Stephen Lewis have joined the firm in the past year, alongside associates Sarah Macauley, Neil Armitage, Nev Zaki and Elish Porter, and solicitor Sophie Fox. Further recruitment is planned to increase the strength and depth of our teams and ensure we continue to deliver responsive, expert, bespoke legal solutions to our clients when they need us most.



Ian McCombie, Ward Hadaway

3

TAKE A CLIENT-CENTRED APPROACH

Continuing, Jonathan Pollard, a Partner in the Corporate team, adds, "Our client-centred approach has been key to success, and I think that is something all businesses can relate to. Our integrated 'one team' approach enables us to support the wide-ranging legal requirements of our clients. For example a client may have an issue with a property contract, but we can support them with any additional requirements such as change of use permissions and access to finance and investment. We've always taken a holistic approach but in 2020 that has been more important than ever."

John Murray continues, "Sadly 2020 meant the annual Fastest 50 Awards - a firm fixture in the annual calendar for Yorkshire businesses - had to be cancelled. 2021 is unlikely to bring the glittering 'in-person' ceremony we're familiar with, but we will be celebrating and revealing the Fastest 50 list in an alternative format.

"It would be easy to batten down the hatches and shelve the Fastest 50 until we reach the other side of the global pandemic. But the awards reflect the entrepreneurial spirit, the energy and 'can do' attitude of so many in our business community, that to

suspend them would be a huge disservice to those companies that contribute so much to our regional success."

So watch this space early next year, as our Yorkshire region comes back fighting, and the Fastest 50 companies take flight once more.

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THE 2020 NORTH EAST FASTEST 50: INSPIRING GROWTH

DAMIEN CHARLTON,
WARD HADAWAY

A version of this article originally appeared in The Journal on 4th November 2020.

The prestigious Ward Hadaway North East Fastest 50 Awards, which we established 22 years ago, celebrate growth, innovation, and the commercial achievements of North East businesses. However, they represent something else too. The awards shine a spotlight on the triumphs of the regional business community, its strong work ethic and tenacious spirit to succeed, qualities which have been just as evident in the pandemic-dominated 2020.

The volatile market conditions, job losses and economic repercussions on a global scale that we are witnessing today are unparalleled. Given such difficult times, we deliberated at length whether to go ahead with this year's Fastest 50. Is it the right time to celebrate substantial past growth when so many are under such pressure?



Damien Charlton, Ward Hadaway

Following discussions with those fastest growing, privately owned companies from across the North East who were to appear on the list, the answer was a resounding “yes”. We could obviously not run the annual celebration at the BALTIC, but we knew there were other options.

This year's Fastest 50 list, as always, boasts many management teams with an unwavering passion to succeed who have created high growth, profitable businesses. And it's this spirit, and the business success that it creates, that we want to celebrate.

The Fastest 50 Awards for 2020 will champion resilience, determination, and inspiration at a time when economic uncertainty is high, and we have published **the list** of those businesses on our website. In this document, you will read stories from regional business owners who will share their experiences of driving a rapidly growing business, as well as their candid experiences during the pandemic.

Through their stories, we want this year's Fastest 50 to inspire growth, highlight service excellence, and demonstrate the transformation within North East businesses, both before the pandemic and now, while we're in the thick of it. And being in the thick of it is something we, as a well-established North East firm ourselves, can relate to.

When the country went into national lockdown, our disaster recovery plans were quickly implemented. Our fantastic people adapted incredibly well to such an unexpected and prolonged period away from the office-based environment, and our technology and infrastructure has been equally resilient. Our focus and commitment to meet the needs of our clients remains unwavering.

Throughout the year, we listened to the needs of our clients and their markets, and focused our communications on providing

clarity in the face of great economic and regulatory change. We developed and continue to add to an online Covid-19 hub that features a detailed library of frequently asked questions, covering everything from furlough to force majeure, from CBILS to data protection, from wills to healthcare.

We delivered this free of charge and shared it with as many businesses as possible through our own communications, and through the North East's various membership and business support organisations.

We also worked with Newcastle University Business School to help support research that aims to gain insights into how businesses continue to respond to the pandemic's challenges, and how public bodies make decisions in the future.

We did this all because we fundamentally believe that we must support businesses and people within our region through these incredibly tough times. And it is in this spirit that we have created a new way to celebrate the success of the Fastest 50.

We hope this year's 'Inspiring Growth' articles prove to be both insightful and helpful for those of you facing your own business challenges. They highlight determination, creativity, agility, and passion – the very qualities we need to overcome the current difficulties we face.

In the context of rising Covid-19 cases, it's even clearer that navigating a route to recovery is incredibly challenging. Whatever the pandemic throws at us, we at Ward Hadaway really are here for you every step of the way.

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Hellens Residential Limited, named the overall fastest growing North East business for 2020, as well as winning the small business category.

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FASTEST 50

INSPIRING GROWTH