



# HOMEGROWN HOMEGROWN HOMEGROWN

**THE SERIOUSLY  
SUSTAINABLE ISSUE**



**ISSUE 5**  
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# SUSTAINABILITY SUSTAINABILITY SUSTAINABILITY SUSTAINABILITY

## WELCOME TO THE LATEST EDITION OF HOMEGROWN, A CELEBRATION OF BUSINESSES AND BRANDS FROM THE NORTH.

It has now been several months since COP26 so in this dedicated sustainability issue we have spoken to a wide range of experts and entrepreneurs, to find out what is happening here to tackle climate change.

From an entrepreneur in the circular economy creating an alternative to fast fashion, to the latest in food and drink production, a look behind the scenes at the world's largest offshore wind farm Dogger Bank and discussion on the future of buildings – we shine a spotlight on some of the companies leading the way in our region.

We also share expert advice from our new sustainability lead at O on what companies should be considering when planning their ESG journey to avoid Greenwashing pitfalls and reputational damage.

We hope you enjoy this edition, please also look out for our first Homegrown podcast to accompany it on our social channels.

# SUSTAINABILITY SUSTAINABILITY SUSTAINABILITY SUSTAINABILITY

## CONTENTS CONTENTS CONTENTS CONTENTS



4



16



6



18



# GREENWASHING PITFALLS:

## SUSTAINABILITY JOURNEYS AND HOW TO PORTRAY YOUR STRATEGY

### Communicating your sustainability strategy – the pitfalls and risks

Businesses around the world are coming under pressure to demonstrate their efforts to decarbonise from all sides - consumers, shareholders, employees, and governments. Every business is at a different point in their sustainability journey and plotting the right journey is key, but how it's communicated is important and often overlooked.

Invest in the communication of your sustainability strategy and it's the difference between standing out for all the right reasons and building loyalty with stakeholders, to being accused of Greenwashing, the corresponding drop in share value, and potentially dragging the reputation of your industry down.

We all have a role to play on the path to net zero, but here we explore the other reasons why now is the time to plot or progress a more sustainable business model if you haven't already, we also cover why strategic communication is so important.

### Why now?

Awareness of climate change increased following [COP26](#) and the latest [IPCC report](#), and consumers are changing their lifestyles and purchasing habits accordingly. Six out of 10 consumers are ready to change their purchasing behaviour to minimise their environmental footprint according to a 2020 [report](#) by IBM Institute for Business Value and data suggests this has intensified during the pandemic.

Millennials are also changing their job-hunting decision-making process, a study by [Swytch](#) showed that 40% of millennials – who will make up three-quarters of the workforce in six years – said that they've chosen a job in the past because the company performed better on sustainability than the alternative. Meanwhile 70% of respondents said that if a company had a strong sustainability plan, it would affect their decision to stay with that company long term.

Investors are also asking businesses questions about their ESG performance (Environmental, Social and Governance) and expect

answers to be embedded across corporate cultures and reporting to be robust. The US\$7t asset manager BlackRock chairman and chief executive, Larry Fink, [wrote](#) in his annual letter to CEOs in 2021 "climate change has become a defining factor in companies' long-term prospects. ... I believe we are on the edge of a fundamental reshaping of finance."

Finally, government legislation is trickling through which will financially penalise businesses with less sustainable business models. The UK government [now requires](#) a decarbonisation plan from suppliers bidding for contracts over £5m, and [extended producer responsibility](#) obligations are being brought in by Member States across Europe – these are just two examples of the legislation being introduced to give businesses with sustainable business models a competitive advantage.

### The risks and pitfalls of bad communication

The risks that surround how businesses communicate environmental progress are illustrated in memorable PR



## CLIMATE CHANGE HAS BECOME A DEFINING FACTOR IN COMPANIES' LONG-TERM PROSPECTS.



disasters over the last few years. Volkswagen is still suffering [five years later](#) after its 'diesel gate' PR scandal in 2015, when the car manufacturer was found to have installed devices that cheat emissions tests in vehicles, while they simultaneously shouted about vehicle environmental credentials. More recently the British beer brand Brewdog came under fire when former employees wrote [an open letter](#) making damning statements about company culture but also criticising the founders of hypocritical behaviour where beer-making practices contradicted marketing messages around climate action.

Regulatory bodies are also on the hunt for unfounded environmental claims, with the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), and Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) setting out guidance with key principles advertisers need to follow. The Competition & Markets Authority are also working on this area and equivalent body in the US the National Advertising Division are looking at taking action too. The media, NGOs, and protest groups are also starting to scrutinise business actions - Extinction Rebellion recently attacked major global banks based on questionable environmental claims.

It's not a simple landscape for businesses to navigate - with every environmental challenge that presents itself, a new set of innovative solutions is produced, and options aren't always tried and tested. When David Attenborough's 'Blue Planet effect' hit in 2017 and awareness of marine plastic sky-rocketed, the material market was flooded with biodegradable and compostable alternatives to traditional plastic packaging - many of which aren't regulated, and countries don't always have the infrastructure to process it. There are big financial risks for businesses who invest in new machinery and packaging without fully understanding the environmental context of switching materials.

If you're at the beginning of your sustainability journey it's worth doing your research and due diligence or better still seek out expert advice before you decide on the journey you're going to take. For those who have already established a related-target and corresponding action plan - remember to invest in the communication plan too.



# SUSTAINABILITY COMMS 101

## GETTING THE LANGUAGE RIGHT

It's worth investing in how you're going to communicate your sustainability journey - firstly to avoid the fairly deep pitfalls that businesses accused of Greenwashing can end up in, but also because stakeholder engagement will be a huge part of whether your plans are successful.

If communication is well-thought through and integrated, your business will be able to grow alongside the global appetite for sustainable products and services. Below are some rules for those who are beginning to plan how they communicate their sustainability strategy, or businesses who want to review what they've done so far with a more critical lense.



Transitioning to a more sustainable model is new subject matter for consumers and businesses alike and the technology, solutions, and expectations are constantly evolving. Whether businesses are just starting out on their journey to being more sustainable or if they're 10 years into their decarbonisation plan - there is always more to learn. That's why it's worth making it clear in all communications around sustainability that you're on a journey, albeit one you take seriously without delay.



## GOLDEN RULES:

- 1 Becoming a sustainable business is a journey not a destination, you can't be perfect and being sustainable doesn't have an end point. Strive for continual improvement, communicate progress regularly and encourage your customers, employees, suppliers, and shareholders to join your journey.
- 2 Always give context to claims you make. Yes, your packaging might be 100% recyclable, and your product could be made from 100% recycled content, but are you still powering facilities with a carbon-intense energy-source? Make it clear claims are part of a bigger action plan.
- 3 Don't let your sustainability strategy sit in a single department in silo - it needs to be integrated throughout the business. Internal communications will play a significant role in the successful roll out of a sustainability strategy as many will rely on employee behaviour change.
- 4 Beware of offsetting, it is an unregulated market often riddled with flaws, your first focus should be on decarbonising your business model before offsetting is considered. If it must be considered, look at local projects so you can check progress and monitor what impact they've had.
- 5 If you haven't already, invest in mapping out your carbon footprint, you can then start to understand and track your scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions. There is software available now which makes this more affordable and accessible for SMEs.
- 6 Use data to support your communication - your marketing teams can work their magic developing infographics and videos that pull out the stats that matter and illustrate your progress to stakeholders.
- 7 Avoid vague language (eco, sustainable, green) that's not backed up by evidence e.g. a strategy or data that underpins what's being said. [The Science-based Targets Initiative](#) offers quality resources for businesses who are learning the language of sustainability for the first time.
- 8 Consider third party accreditations such as becoming a B corp which offer a framework to work through - they can make it quicker for consumers doing their due diligence and can offer other benefits. But make sure you understand the rigour behind certifications.
- 9 Consider commissioning a life cycle assessment where it could support your decision making but take time to make sure you're asking the [right](#) questions.
- 10 Get to know the sustainability credentials of your supply chain (from where the laptops come from, to where your pension provider invests) and switch suppliers if necessary - there are simple ways you can build sustainability criteria into your procurement process.
- 11 Be honest, transparent and use science.
- 12 Invest in understanding and monitoring changes in your audience expectations.







# PIONEERING THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

## - INTERVIEW WITH ISABELLA WEST OF HIRESTREET

Isabella West, born and bred in the North East and a graduate from Oxford University in Economics and Management, founded the clothing rental business Hirestreet in 2017 with the purpose of helping customers find an affordable alternative to buying fast-fashion.

### Where did you get the idea from, was it a bedroom or kitchen table business?

The idea has been with me for years - I grew up with two sisters so was very used to sharing my clothes. When I was at school I started Swap Shop (a genius play on Topshop!) and my friends would bring in their dresses and swap for a new outfit. At University I developed The Dress Cupboard - one consolidated wardrobe of all the girls

on my floor that they were happy to lend to others. It comes from my love of going out, being from the North East.

I moved to London as a strategy consultant helping businesses solve key problems. The side of that which interested me was the consumer side - trying to break down a consumer problem and making sure a business was targeting consumers the right way to address it.

This led me to Selfridges group working in their strategy team - we were asking what does the future of retail look like? As part of that project I had access to US data coming out and in 2016 Rent the Runway launched a subscription element, so they had phenomenal data coming out of that - they had this amazing understanding of what their key customer wanted from a fashion proposition.

I wanted to be able to provide that confidence people feel when they get dressed up - but in a way that was sustainable and affordable. We wanted to provide an alternative to buying fast fashion, which makes up over 50% of fashion sales in the UK. I didn't want to solve a problem for a small niche of people, I wanted it to be available to people who bought from places like Zara, like myself.

It's been an amazing journey since - I have taken that concept and done as much as I can to focus on what that customer wants, and looked at how we evolve that experience, from her first rental outfit for a wedding to renting an outfit for work for example.

### How did you get the first brands on board?

I wanted to start with a minimum viable product and get something in the hands of customers as soon as possible. I had an array of dresses, initially kept in my bedroom and progressively they overtook my parents' basement. I asked my friends for fancy dresses that they wouldn't mind donating to help me test and learn about the concept.

I had about 200 donated dresses, we did a very budget shoot, built a very haphazard WordPress website - the whole concept was 'Is there interest in renting at this level?'

You could only rent a dress for 10 days and deliveries were always

on a Friday - I was doing the dry cleaning and running to the post office to make sure they'd have their outfit for the weekend.

What was really interesting was that we had done a consumer survey before we launched and they said they would spend around £30-50 buying an outfit twice a month - so they'd like to rent a dress at around the same amount.

But what we actually saw was that people upgraded



I WANTED TO BE ABLE TO PROVIDE THAT CONFIDENCE PEOPLE FEEL WHEN THEY GET DRESSED UP - IN A WAY THAT WAS SUSTAINABLE

to rent a £150 dress for £30, they were substituting the purchase for a rental.

Had we just based our plans on the survey - they just didn't know what they wanted from a rental proposition because one didn't exist.

By launching as an MVP and not spending too much before we tested with customers then it gave us a sweet spot of items that were popular to rent.

We learned that the way into the market was as a live proposition - that's the key thing that I would always stress to any future entrepreneur. Get real-life customer feedback as soon as you can.

We've taken that ethos with us - fail really fast, test hypotheses quickly, focus on the customer and keep iterating the offer towards them.

### What was the first big step change?

It was just me from May 2018 to April 2019, and I built up our rentals and data points to give me an understanding to how we would want to scale.

In December 2018 I started a seed fundraising round, we had 97% of our stock rented that Christmas and featured in national press so we had all the evidence.

In the April following we closed that seed round, raising from private angels and we hired a head of marketing and CTO and moved the stock up to our warehouse partner in Glasgow.

That was the real first change in pace - they could power hundreds of thousands of rentals a day.

It took a whole year to get to that point.

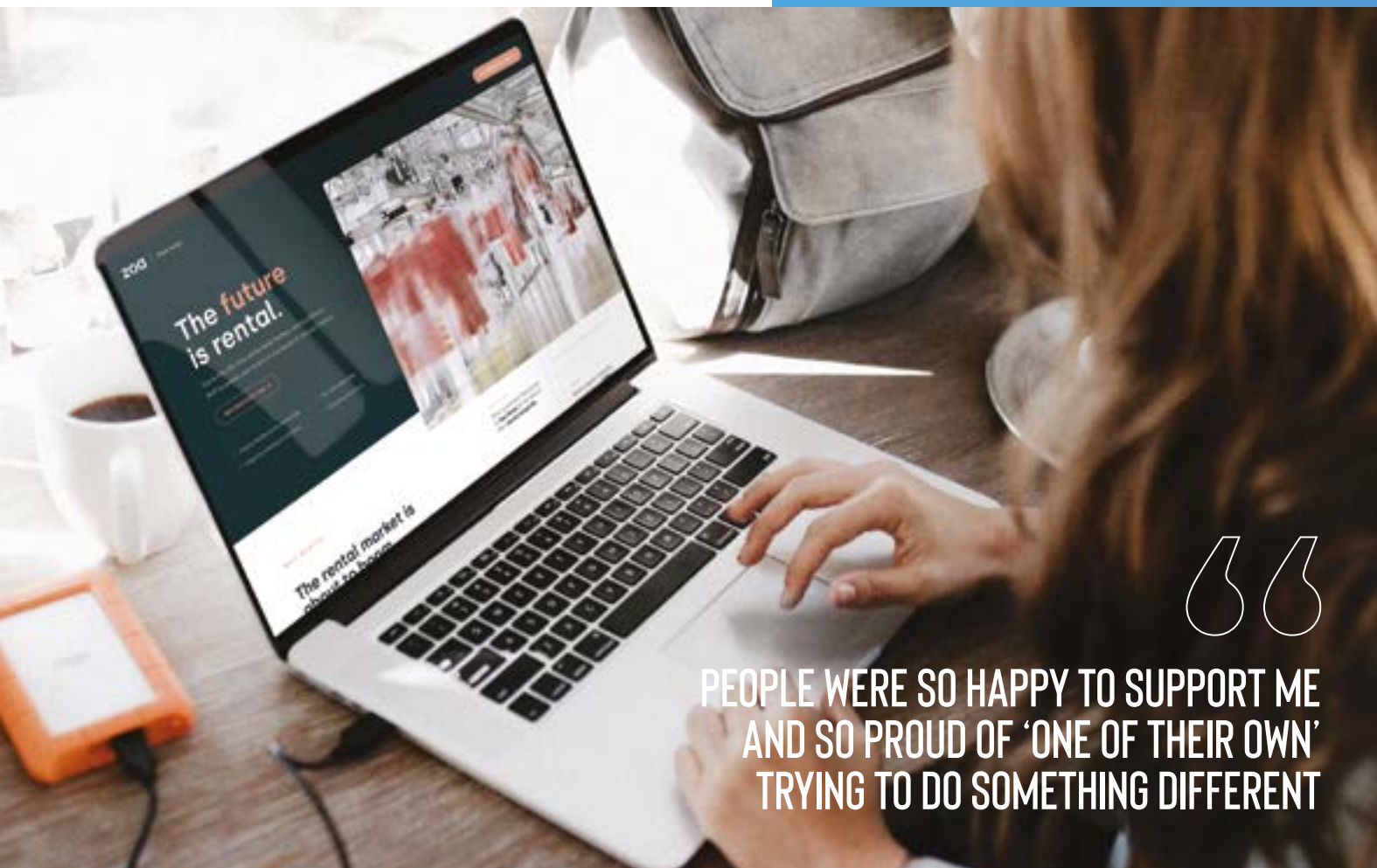
### How did you know where to go for those funders and partners?

You have to shake that network tree - I'm someone who loves data and economics and hate asking for things. That's been the area of being a CEO that has taken me most outside of my comfort zone - pitching and public speaking is not where I feel happiest.

Getting used to using my voice on LinkedIn and sharing articles didn't make me 100% comfortable - but I'm really glad I did it.

One of the best things I did was move home - what I found when I came home to the North East was that people were so happy to support me and so proud of 'one of their own' trying to do something different in the big





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world of fashion – everyone helped. I don't think I would have had a tenth of the feeling of community if I had stayed down in London. The North East is such a lovely place and people are so encouraging.

That's the one thing that I will always try and give back to – anytime a small entrepreneur is wanting support or help.

### How did you win those big brand accounts?

It's been a process. We had to obviously build out the Hirestreet credentials – we are the biggest rental platform in the UK with nearly 2m users but this takes time. There are brands we work with now that I could not have started a conversation with three years ago and it wouldn't have gone the same way.

It's about not being discouraged, asking what is my current size and then reaching out to the brands you can work with today and working with them before stepping up.

I took certain rejections as negative to begin with – but it's never actually a 'No' it's usually a 'Not Yet'. That's really key – the brands you see us working with now, that was not a 'yes' in previous years.

It is about being super resilient, not taking it personally if you're not big enough yet, not giving up and being super polite and respectful of their requirements of you. And be that person that does not let it go.

M&S is the biggest brand we partner with, they have 30million customers and are the second biggest clothing retailer in the UK, but it takes time for them to think you are a brand that is credible and trustworthy enough to deliver a service on their behalf. Three years ago I didn't understand the scale of the wave of traffic they send to you – that they can make you Apple News biggest news story of the day.

I am proud of the resilience we have shown to knock those doors down.

Renting occasion wear is commonplace but slowly you'll see us break down other industries so that becomes the norm there too.

### Do you pinch yourself when the big deals land, and do you take time out as a team to celebrate?

Culturally I need to get better at stepping back and celebrating the wins – I am rubbish at it. I launched M&S at midnight on the 16th and I was working on a new client on the 17th – I didn't look back at all.

I don't know when it ever sunk in – there's always so much left to do – but I don't want to be that type of CEO for the business, so it's an area I am personally working on. How do we be target-led and make sure that when we hit it we have a planned celebration.

### Who has helped you on this journey?

In the early years I worked myself into the ground, I became ill by doing everything myself. On weekends I got up at 6am working, I said no to plans and didn't have a life.

My family and my other half pulled me back from that – 18 months in I was able to separate the highs and lows from the business from my own life.

For instance Covid hit, and I had no understanding how to navigate through it – I internalised all that stress.

My family helped me to separate that and work on some work-life balance.

I was always told I would benefit from a mentor and I spent years looking for someone without success. I have the most amazing mentor now, he was the COO of Depop and it was announced in the press he was leaving, so I messaged him a year ago on LinkedIn and asked if he might have a half hour chat with me – and we've spoken almost every day since.

We had a positive but challenging conversation and he offered to chat the next week and he is now my mentor and person that guides me – but it was worth the wait. I'm grateful I didn't force a fit anywhere else.

### Tell us about Zoa?

It comes back to the core principles of the business – being super in tune with what your customer wants.

When your revenues are going in the right direction and the numbers are good you don't question things as much as you should. In the pandemic we had this ability to slow down and stop for the first time – we took a step back and looked at the market.

We were looking at acquiring customers and purchasing stock through wholesalers. I don't like inefficiencies, so I realised that both of those things would be more efficient by powering our rental business with retailers, who already own stock and have an established customer base.

We went through this exercise to future proof the business – we took the core technology that we use to rent on Hirestreet and gave that directly to retailers to they could start to rent themselves.

It's a white label SaaS product – if you want to launch a rental business you can go on and do that tomorrow – it's like Shopify but for circular commerce.

Its early days on Zoa, we spent 18 months building it and were first to market in the UK but its definitely still a market that is evolving but it will dominate the next five years I believe.

We already know what's coming after that. If I'm working on today's problem in the business something is dramatically wrong. I have a brilliant team who look after various elements of the business and focus on the needs of today but that is definitely not my role – Zoa was the first time you saw us prepare for the future and we will continue to do that.

The needs of retailers will continue to evolve and our job

is to be ahead of the market to be the go-to solution.

We have our first brands using the platform, I am super proud to be powering the next generation of entrepreneurs to be joining the rental market. I love the fun of starting the new elements of the business, I can't help but try and get involved.

We are running a little accelerator programme to the brands that are using Zoa to get started in rental – we have done menswear, skiing, vintage womenswear, peer to peer already.

The next step is powering a large retailer, you'll see that coming in the next few months. In the fashion industry there is a lot of FOMO, so it's a great help for us in our sales cycle that they see M&S doing it and want to be on board with rental too.

[www.hirestreetuk.com](http://www.hirestreetuk.com)  
[www.zoarental.com](http://www.zoarental.com)



### What does your average day look like?

I am up in the North every couple of weeks. I do three days a week head-down working on the business, a day in London and either the North-East or Glasgow where our warehouse is.

Raising fundraising and launching a big brand on Zoa is taking up a lot of my time just now.

Each day is very much a variety, it's a perfect blend of data and trend forecasting with meetings and motivating my team which is very fulfilling. I do that from afar now and I just sit in meetings and upwards learn from them.

To listen to this interview as a podcast  
head to [www.o.agency](http://www.o.agency)



# DOGGER BANK:

## SECURING THE NORTH EAST'S GREEN FUTURE

Set to be the world's largest offshore wind farm, Dogger Bank is located off the North East coast and will bring huge opportunities for regeneration and skills to the area, adding to the already vibrant clean energy sector in our region.

**The project is being developed in three stages - Dogger Bank A, B and C located between 130km and 190km from the North East coast of England at their nearest points. Delivered by joint venture partners SSE Renewables, Equinor and Eni, SSE Renewables is leading on construction and delivery, while Equinor will operate the wind farm on completion for the projects 35-year lifetime.**

At each phase of the project, Dogger Bank will install generation capacity of 1.2GW of clean energy that represents a multi-billion pound investment. Combined, the project will have an installed capacity of 3.6GW and will be capable of powering up to 6 million homes.

### But what does this mean for the North East?

We spoke to Tom Nightingale, North East Stakeholder manager for Equinor, about what the project means for the region, how the North East is ideally placed to become a global centre of the clean economy and how the entire region can be part of the success.

### What does a development like this bring to the region?

"The project will bring huge opportunities for skills and community development. Offshore Wind is a great story in the UK because it aligns with the levelling up agenda. Typically, developments are near coastal towns and historically industrial areas that have been impacted by declining sectors. Dogger Bank is providing this on a much larger scale - as the world's largest offshore wind farm it is a great opportunity

for the entire supply chain, including job creation and investment.

"The typical lifespan of a project like this is around 25 years, but with Dogger Bank it's a 35-year project that will span three phases, so the impact for those wanting to build a career in the sector is huge. Our base here will create hundreds of jobs and we've already started to drive that engagement with local education, businesses and communities."

### How are you engaging with local communities and education?

"We have already announced a £1m community fund during the

construction phase, to support the areas impacted by the wind farm. This includes STEM education and accreditation, University Scholarships and funding for community projects, and that is just the first phase. The money will be distributed across South Tyneside, East Riding of Yorkshire and Redcar and Cleveland.

"A huge focus for us is across STEM initiatives - we really want to support skills and the future workforce. We have engaged with local authorities to really understand the local needs in each area and where we can help to support that agenda and create real value. In South Tyneside for example, the focus will be on the transition from primary to secondary schools and encouraging more young women into STEM careers.

"To solidify this commitment, Dogger Bank is offering a total of 62 scholarships to university students from these areas who are studying anywhere in the UK, providing £5,000 towards their student loan. To be eligible for the scheme, students must study a course that is recognised as 50% STEM by the scholarship fund. So far 25 students have been accepted onto the scholarship programme, and we can't wait to fill the others.

"Alongside investing in education, Dogger Bank Wind Farm is also offering £500 grants as part of the community fund to help support a wide range of causes where groups are fundraising or seeking support - one of the most

rewarding parts of giving back to the community.

"But it isn't going to stop there. This is only the first part of the investment that is planned during the 35 years, with more to come during the operation and maintenance phase of the development.

### How many jobs will Dogger Bank create in our region?

"The project will create a whole host of job opportunities for people in the North East. From entry-level to skilled workers, over 370 jobs will be created which will be associated with the long-term operations and maintenance of the wind farm. The focus is to give people careers they can be proud of and increase the number of people in our region taking on roles in the clean energy sector. In total the project has already created or supported over 3,000 jobs across the UK.



**DOGGER BANK IS OFFERING A TOTAL OF 62 SCHOLARSHIPS TO UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

“There is a huge existing energy supply chain in our region that already supplies to transitioning energy projects all over the world. We want to help enhance this global view of the North East and facilitate the manufacture and supply chain discussions globally. We’ve already got some events on the horizon that will help to support this and introduce businesses to each other. The wind farm is also funding these events and working with local organisations to spread the word and facilitate introductions to ensure that it’s as inclusive as possible for businesses in the region.

“The project will bring together a very diverse workforce. Those who are currently in oil and gas, energy specialists, ex-military and entry-level, – and it’s not just the construction phase, Dogger Bank Wind farm needs a full infrastructure at the base in South Tyneside too and recruitment has already started.”

#### What about technology and innovation?

“We are already engaging and collaborating with local universities, colleges, schools, research centres and businesses to talk about the innovative technology and solutions that could help Dogger Bank across the project. We also have the offshore renewable energy catapult testing centre in our region, with huge investments recently announced in robotics and digitalisation - which are obviously key themes for us as the operator. We need to be thinking about and introducing new technologies at every stage of the project’s life span, so if someone doesn’t have the idea today, that doesn’t mean that in five years’ time we won’t need that new technology or innovative solution.

“If businesses have the opportunity to get involved now that’s an amazing thing, but we also want businesses to consider how they can be involved and find success from renewable energy in the future too.

“The wind farm also provides funding to the UK Offshore Wind Growth Partnership which goes to support growth and innovation in the sector. As part of this fund, there is a specific programme in the North East, Technology Innovation for Green Growth in Offshore Renewables (TIGGOR). The programme offers grants to support innovation and drives investment in the region, as all businesses that apply must

either be based here in the North East or proposing to put a base here. It’s really important for driving innovation and developing the local supply chain. Equinor is also a delivery partner on this initiative.”

#### How can the North East lead the way for clean energy?

“The North East is already a UK leader in terms of supply chain, infrastructure and academia in this field. There are some amazing engineering and marine courses

in the area as well as leading energy academies and marine centres which are helping to drive interest in the sector and create the skills that are needed to succeed. It’s about embracing the careers of the future and everyone working together to drive the opportunity for our young people, supply chains and skilled workforce.”



**THERE IS A HUGE EXISTING ENERGY SUPPLY CHAIN THAT ALREADY SUPPLIES TO ENERGY PROJECTS ALL OVER THE WORLD.**

Learn more about Dogger Bank Wind Farm’s community fund here, including eligibility for scholarships and the operator’s fund:

**Dogger Bank in the community**  
- [www.doggerbank.com](http://www.doggerbank.com)



## HUGE INVESTMENTS RECENTLY ANNOUNCED IN ROBOTICS AND DIGITALISATION







# THE FUTURE OF BUILDINGS

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROB CHARLTON  
- CEO AT SPACE GROUP



SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS IS SIMPLY DOING NICE THINGS WITH  
NICE PEOPLE THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE OVER TIME

Sustainability is not a new buzzword in the world of building design, so CEO of Space Group Rob Charlton takes a much longer-term view on what it means to be truly sustainable.

“We are a values-based business that has grown organically over the last 65 years, so we see being a sustainable company as simply doing nice things with nice people that makes a difference over time – whether that’s for the people we employ, the people who use the buildings we create, or the communities around us all,” he says, sitting in his own Spaceworks HQ in South Gosforth, that he says, “is actually more sustainable than replacing it with a new building, despite its 1990s design.”

Space Group was born out of 50-year-old architectural practice Waring & Netts, and is now a group of complementary businesses including Space Architects, BIM Technologies, BIM Store and its latest offspring Twinview.

Twinview is at the cutting edge of sustainability tech because it addresses the biggest challenge of all post COP26 – the carbon agenda.

The UK Government has committed to achieving net-zero carbon by 2050, in an effort to achieve climate change temperature targets signed up to through the 2015 Paris Agreement.

Twinview as a tech platform helps reduce carbon outputs and operational costs including energy, whilst creating a golden thread of information throughout the life of the building, recording maintenance decisions and changes through occupation. It connects Internet of Things (IoT) devices, facilities management software, operational and management information to a Building Information Model.

“As a sector the sustainability agenda has moved through design to construction and now operation is on everyone’s minds. Heating, cooling and electricity use within buildings accounts for around 40% of the UK’s emissions, and as such in recent years there has been a real focus on reducing energy consumption and associated carbon emissions.”

But Space Group is in the business of building things, so what about the construction process – what is the most sustainable way to build a home, hospital, school or office? Modern Methods of Construction (MMC), also

“**THE CLIMATE CRISIS MEANS ALL BUSINESSES MUST ADDRESS THEIR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT MORE URGENTLY, AND WITH PROPERTY HAVING THE BIGGEST GLOBAL IMPACT ON OUR ENERGY CONSUMPTION AND CARBON OUTPUT, REDUCING IT HAS TO BE A PRIORITY.**”



known as smart construction, is a buzzword but is only part of the solution, according to Rob:

“Space Group was ahead of its time with pre-fabricated housing a decade ago with our Spacehus project, which had it been brought to market today would have certainly ticked the MMC agenda.

“MMC can be seen as lots of things, from offsite fabrication for more standardisation, to removing waste and lean construction, but it doesn’t only need to be a huge factory approach, for example it’s difficult for volume housing as they tend to build on site to follow the sales.”

“The more interesting thing to look at is the issue of ‘embedded

carbon’ and how we reuse existing buildings. Creative reuse is always our starting point when we look at a project brief, we recently went in for a large office rebuild project asking the question – is knocking down and rebuilding the best way to meet your carbon commitment?”

Space Architects has a conservation team with one of only a handful of the region’s only registered conservation architects in the region – a heritage it has carried for many decades in its portfolio of heritage building projects, such as the redevelopment of the Stockton Globe, transforming the beautiful Art Deco building and the Darlington Rail Heritage Quarter which recently obtained planning approval.

“The other consideration is the landscape around our buildings post-pandemic, we need to balance progress with the need for biodiversity and green public space.

“Gosforth central park during the pandemic was a Godsend for my family – we still use that space now because the pandemic has made us value nature and open space even more.”

Space Group has never stood still, nor has it just followed trends – its balance of pioneering emerging tech with an appreciation for heritage is only matched by its surprising focus on people over bricks and mortar. Buildings, Rob has always advocated, are there to be enjoyed by people – and his business he says is “all about people”.

**“After all, what is sustainability if it’s not creating a better world for the people who live in it?”**



# HERE COMES THE SUN:

## METROCENTRE LEADS THE WAY IN SUSTAINABLE UK RETAIL AND LEISURE

Nestled in the heart of Gateshead, Metrocentre has long established itself as a regional icon.

An instantly recognisable symbol of well-earned leisure time and high-quality retail for generations of North East residents, the centre has been providing visitors with a go-to destination for more than 35 years – at one point even claiming the title of being the largest shopping centre in Europe.

The latest initiative championed by the centre will see it put on the map once again, with the installation of over 3,500 rooftop and solar car port panels set – making it the largest collection of solar panels of any shopping centre in the UK.

### A bright future

Gavin Prior, Metrocentre Centre Director explained: “We’re delighted to announce we have successfully secured ERDF funding to launch this new and unique renewable energy project.

“A massive solar panel and car port installation of this kind has never been seen before in a UK shopping centre and upon completion of the project, Metrocentre will have the largest solar panel installation of any UK shopping centre.”

Switching to solar energy will reduce Metrocentre’s grid dependency by 30%, offsetting more than 37% of its total annual electricity use with its own low carbon supply. Energy generated by the solar panels will be enough to power 600 electric cars for a year.

As of May 2021, there were 26,863 EV charge points in the UK compared to 345,000 registered pure electric

vehicles. The popularity of electric vehicles is growing rapidly, and it is predicted that by 2030 there will be more than 6.5 million pure electric vehicles on UK roads.

With 46 new EV charging bays set to be provided at the Metrocentre as part of the project, the solar panels fitted above each parking bay will provide emissions-free ‘fuel’ for 7,230 electric car miles.

The project builds on the centre’s existing commitment to sustainability and marks a new green era for the destination.

Gavin continued: “Solar energy is the first stage of building a more sustainable future for Metrocentre, by reducing our carbon footprint and bringing renewable energy to the local community. This project, and

others like it, are an integral part of our long-term strategy for the centre which focuses on sustainability and our place in the community.”

Metrocentre’s dedication to sustainability can be seen as far back as 2005, when its £12m Public Transport Interchange launched, accommodating visitors travelling to the centre by bus and train and helping to

**A MASSIVE SOLAR PANEL AND CAR PORT INSTALLATION OF THIS KIND HAS NEVER BEEN SEEN BEFORE IN A UK SHOPPING CENTRE...**

transform the public transport offering in the area. Today, over 100 buses arrive at Metrocentre every hour. Bike storage and shower facilities were also installed to support all staff who use a bike or jog to work.

In recent times the centre has accelerated its sustainable efforts across the board, embracing the global shift towards green practices and finding innovative ways to preserve the planet. The centre recently worked with Infinity Incorporated and sustainable garment provider Clubclass to create staff uniforms from recycled bottles, as well as championing National Recycling Week and supporting the increasingly popular Veganuary initiative across its wide range of restaurants and eateries.

The centre is actively striving to reach its sustainable goals behind the scenes too – working to attain the ISO 14001 accreditation, which focuses on sustainability and environmental management. The centre also diverts 100% of its waste from landfill, to either be recycled or put into energy recovery.

The future looks bright for the Metrocentre, with the solar panel initiative forming part of a region-wide push toward sustainability. Councillor John McElroy, Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport at Gateshead Council, commented: “It’s great to

see Metrocentre committing to this exciting project, the biggest of its kind at a UK shopping centre, to generate power from solar photovoltaics, and to enable customers with electric vehicles to charge while they shop.

“As well as providing this key new infrastructure for EVs, Metrocentre already sees 23% of its customers arrive by public transport and we will continue to work alongside the team to further improve public transport provision, and enable more customers to walk and cycle

to the centre, to help reduce congestion and vehicle emissions.

“Gateshead has an ambitious plan to go zero carbon by 2030, and we work in partnership with major stakeholders in the borough like Metrocentre, to embrace this vital agenda, and reduce their carbon footprint.”

Further sustainable initiatives are currently under review at Metrocentre and the team look forward to announcing plans later this year.





# SMALL STEPS EQUAL BIG IMPACT

## FOR THE FOOD AND DRINK INDUSTRY

**Mick Howard is the CEO of Clearly Drinks, a national drinks manufacturer based in Sunderland. Alongside achieving growth through strategic partnerships and listings, Clearly Drinks is continuing to deliver on its environmental and sustainability commitments which were set out back in 2020.**



Driven by Mick's vision to create a company which has a positive influence on the world, the company has gone from being "back of the queue" when it came to environmental initiatives to leading the way in the sector, empowering other manufacturers to take action. Clearly Drinks is actively working towards achieving net-zero status and improving its industry leading carbon footprint. Despite having seen continued challenges in 2021,

the leadership team has continued to invest in sustainability and ESG strategy across the business, but it's not all about grand statements and big gestures, Mick explains.

"When I first joined the business in 2018, ESG wasn't on the agenda at all – it simply wasn't something that was talked about. I started the process by bringing in an external communications team to do a full audit of the business and benchmark where we are within the industry. Ultimately we did this

because as an employer we have a duty of care - to not only be seen to be doing the right thing but to actually do the right thing.

"This is something which I have a personal passion for, I want to leave the world in a better condition than we found it."

Mick believes that there needs to be less talk and more action when it comes to the climate agenda, and that even incremental change is a step in the right direction.

"The time has come to just get on and do it," he says. "There has been a lot of talk from industry bodies, government and environmental bodies, but now is the time to take action. We were really starting from scratch and there was a lot of low-hanging fruit to get cracking with, which made big impacts to our business. We are under continuous pressure as an industry, given that some of the core materials that we use is plastic. Our business is built on the calibre of the people that we employ, and to continue to attract the best talent we had to show real investment in our ESG strategy, which translates into attracting new clients and customers too."

The prospect of 'Saving the World' can seem impossible to a lot of businesses, but Mick



### THERE WAS AN ENVIRONMENTAL NEED TO INNOVATE OUR PACKAGING CAPABILITIES – BUT THERE WAS A CULTURE AND ORGANISATIONAL NEED TOO.

believes that it is a journey - and every journey starts with a first step. Plastic reduction,

a main area of focus for Clearly Drinks, resulted in a substantial investment into recyclable packaging for its products with the business on track to deliver its promise. Its 500ml PET has been made lighter and now weighs 16.5g, saving 36.8 tonnes of plastic from January to May 2021 on top of 77 tonnes achieved in 2020. Lightweighting is also keeping the carbon footprint to a minimum.

"Don't get distracted by the big, scary goal at the end," Mick says. "Concentrate on what you can do and start from there. We have made huge moves forward in our ESG strategy in the past two years, and that has been done through continuous improvement – those small steps are all adding up and when I look back at what we have achieved, it really is impressive. We have reduced 40,000 miles on the road by swapping pre blown 1L contour bottles for preforms, reducing deliveries from 85 loads each year to just five loads, and simply switching from sports cap to flat cap on Perfectly Clear products saved 12.3 tonnes of plastic on top of the 31 tonnes saved in 2020. We have already achieved zero waste to landfill and eliminated 390 tonnes of plastic from our business, with plans to reduce our plastic usage further by the end of 2022.

Luckily the Clearly Drinks team all share the same vision so gaining momentum quickly, and with so much passion, was testament to a true collective desire to push in the same direction."

"It isn't about the 'big bang' from an innovation perspective, it's about looking to see

where you can make adjustments that will all add up to provable impact. What we found beneficial was a prioritised framework that informed our choices, some of these implementations needed investment but most of them just needed an investment in time. Businesses have to understand what is within their reach here and now and what is coming over the hill from a technology point of view, and how quickly you can respond to that.

"I would encourage all businesses to look at the ways that they

can make meaningful traction, rather than waiting for the big innovation that is going to solve all of our problems. If you look at our carbon emissions now, we're best in class, and that is because we have taken the time to look at everything that impacts that, from our waste streams and how we can further reduce them, to our packaging by considering solutions like light-weighting, which has meant we can reduce over 200 tons of plastic which will grow the business. Alongside this we have also diversified our capabilities to shift away from plastic heavy packaging and grow the canning side of the business. If we look into 2022, can demand is going to account for 40 percent of our revenue, so there is a financial incentive as well to make these changes now.

"As a responsible business it's our job to forge the path in what's possible but we do need more support from central government to continue to make meaningful investment and change across UK manufacturing as a whole, it can't be left solely as the responsibility of business owners and leaders. We have good working forums out there, either via the BSDA, the Chamber of Commerce and the FDF, but beyond that it is a real struggle to get support. There isn't a funding pot at a local level and I think the nationally we aren't a big enough priority. So as much as I have tried to drum up support and lobby, there hasn't been nearly enough commitment to help SMEs and manufacturers make those incremental changes across the UK.

"If we are all doing what we can and pulling in the same direction, that's when the needle really begins to move and UK manufacturers can be world leading on the impact we are making to our local and global communities."





**AGENCY**

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