SUNDERLAND MAGAZINE

DIGITAL EDITION
November 2026



Inside this month

Runner takes on London Marathon for Sunderland and South Tyneside NHS team that helped girlfriend 11

Sunderland's Gig Lab wins Innovate UK Funding 4

Sunderland's Healthy Plates scheme teams up with fitness guru Katie Bulmer-Cooke for sell-out games 6

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IN THIS ISSUE

Your people, your pages

4 Sunderland's Gig Lab wins Innovate UK Funding

6 Sunderland's Healthy Plates scheme teams up with fitness guru Katie Bulmer-Cooke for sell-out games

7 Community Spectacular Marks Opening of Culture House

8 Sunderland dance company wins funding to tackle loneliness

8 Gwailo mark ten years on the circuit with debut album

9 Sunderland Pays Tribute to Armed Forces Heroes in Moving Remembrance Parade

9 Sunderland Launches UK's Largest School Esports Programme Across 14 Local Schools

10 In brief: Sunderland

11 In brief: Sunderland

12 In brief: Newcastle

13 In brief: Newcastle, Durham

14 In brief: Hartlepool

16 Your story could be next

Every photo is numbered with its page. Spot a face, turn to the number.

On the cover: Runner takes on London Marathon for Sunderland and South Tyneside NHS team that helped girlfriend, page 11. Photo: STSFT.

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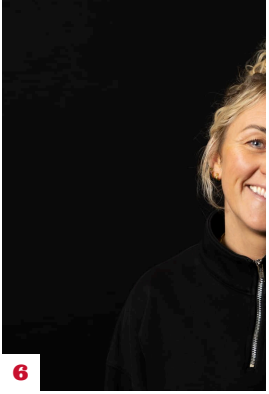
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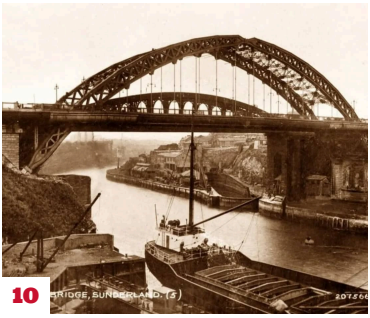

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Photo: Adam Kennedy

SUNDERLAND

Sunderland's Gig Lab wins Innovate UK Funding

The live music platform will work with Northumbria University and technology partner Sauce to develop transparent, human-led AI that takes the guesswork out of booking shows and puts more places on the UK's touring map.

Sunderland-based live music platform Gig Lab has won funding through Innovate UK's Next Wave: Breakthrough Wave 1 competition, which drew over 700 applications nationally.

Led by Ghostwriter Consultancy & Events in partnership with Northumbria University and technology partner Sauce, the funding will allow Gig Lab to build and trial human-led AI tools over a 12-month development phase next year.

These tools will give small venues and independent promoters the same quality of insight as the biggest players in the industry, helping them identify where shows are likely to succeed and to secure venues with available dates, giving them greater confidence to invest in live music.

The Funding

Part of Innovate UK's £10 million investment into the UK's frontier creative industries, the funding supports commercial digital platforms

moving beyond proof of concept to unlock long-term sector growth.

The award caps off two years of rapid growth that has seen Gig Lab expand the team and win the Innovate UK 'Women In Innovation' and Thinking Digital 'Startup Of The Year' awards.

Built by the live music industry for the live music industry, Gig Lab already provides a single shared workspace for venue teams, bookers and promoters, replacing scattered email threads, endless spreadsheets and outdated diaries with real-time diary management, event contracting, reporting and show folders.

Human-led AI

Gig Lab's approach is human-led from the start, recognising concerns about AI in an industry built on relationships.

The new AI tools will work alongside experienced promoters and venue teams, while every booking decision remains firmly in human hands. The tools will show the reasoning behind each recommendation, and free up time to back more artists and put on more shows.

Victoria Smith, co-founder of Gig Lab and director of Ghostwriter Consultancy & Events, said:

"Live music depends on risk takers, and this award lets Gig Lab back them. By combining decades of venue and touring expertise with Northumbria University's research in human-led AI, we can reduce the guesswork in booking shows, make more of them viable and put more places on the UK's touring map."

"Being backed by Innovate UK for a third time means a huge amount to us. They've believed from the start in our vision of live music that is better connected, more sustainable and open to more places, and we can't wait to take that vision further than ever before."

Local backing

Since Gig Lab was first conceived in Sunderland in 2024, the team has also completed Innovate UK's Create Growth Programme and secured key backing from Innovate UK and Music Venue Trust, as well as further backing from the North East BIC and Sunderland Culture.

Phil Witcherley, Director of Economy and Innovation at the North East Mayoral Combined Authority, said:

"The North East has always produced great music and the people who make it happen, and Gig Lab shows the region is now building the technology the whole live music ecosystem can rely on.

"When venues and promoters can book with confidence, more shows go ahead in more towns, which means more opportunities for artists to play, stronger venues and more communities sharing in live music. Seeing a Sunderland business lead that work is exactly the kind of growth our creative economy needs."

The team behind Gig Lab brings deep operational roots across UK live music. Victoria Smith and Helen McGee are trustees of LIVE Trust and Music Venue Trust, respectively, alongside founders who have run venues from grassroots rooms to some of the UK's biggest live music operators.

By James Hamilton

Continued at **sunderlandmagazine.com/sunderlands-gig-lab-wins-innovate-uk-funding**

SUNDERLAND

Sunderland's Healthy Plates scheme teams up with fitness guru Katie Bulmer-Cooke for sell-out games

Sunderland's Healthy Plates initiative, which offers diners healthier options without compromising taste, has teamed up with fitness coach Katie Bulmer Cooke and the Sunderland Fitness Games.



6

Photo supplied by Healthy Plates

A trailblazing initiative offering Sunderland diners healthier menu options without compromising on taste is expanding beyond restaurants and cafés and stepping into the world of health and fitness.

Launched earlier this year as a joint project between Sunderland City Council and Sunderland's BIDs, comprising the City Centre BID and the Seafront BID, Healthy Plates works with local eateries to adapt dishes into more nutritious alternatives.

A host of local restaurants and cafes signed up to get involved and now the scheme has a new recruit, in the shape of North East fitness guru, Katie Bulmer Cooke.

Sunderland Fitness Games

Katie is behind Sunderland Fitness Games, a sell-out event taking place on Saturday 28th November at Bede College, where competitors take part in a series of challenges which test their strength, fitness, determination and teamwork.

And as an added incentive for this year's winners, they will receive a £25 Sunderland Gift Card which can be spent at one of the city's Health Plates venues.

By Barbara Parker

Continued at **sunderlandmagazine.com/sunderlands-healthy-plates-scheme-teams-up-with-fitness-guru-katie-bulmer-cooke-for-sell-out-games**

Community Spectacular Marks Opening of Culture House



Photo: Southpaw Company

School children from St Anthony's Girls' Catholic Academy were the first audience for HOME, a community performance by Southpaw Company marking the opening of Culture House in Sunderland.

HOME, devised by the innovative dance company, Southpaw, featured live performance, immersive visuals and powerful storytelling.

An audience of school children from St Anthony's Girls' Catholic Academy were treated to the first performance which saw dozens of community participants perform alongside Southpaw Company's professional dancers in the multi-purpose venue, Culture House, to mark its opening.

The Story of HOME

The children were enthralled by HOME which saw dancers in different rooms, in windows and on the spiral staircase of the new building. Children followed the story of Lyra, a young woman born in Sunderland who achieves her dream of becoming an astronaut following encouragement by her late father to reach for the stars and "look up".

Kate Stebbing, an English teacher at St Anthony's who coordinates the school's SHINE-funded project, said the production was "fantastic" with "wonderful, stand-out performances." She added:

For many students, the arts give them an opportunity to shine. They can express themselves and be inspired, so watching a show like HOME, and having the Culture House here in Sunderland, was very empowering. We can raise aspirations while giving children a sense of belonging.

By Lindsay Parker

Continued at **sunderlandmagazine.com/community-spectacular-marks-opening-of-culture-house**

SUNDERLAND

Sunderland dance company wins funding to tackle loneliness



Photo: Southpaw Company

Southpaw Company, a dance company based at Sheepfolds Stables in Sunderland, has been awarded funding to help combat social exclusion and loneliness in the community through the power of movement.

Southpaw Company, based at Sheepfolds Stables, in Sunderland has received a grant from the Sir James Knott Trust to support and expand AMPLIFY, its community performance programme.

How the money will be used

The funding will go towards weekly dance training for local people of all ages, workshops led by professional guest artists, a community outreach programme and public sharing events.

By Lindsay Parker

Continued at **sunderlandmagazine.com/sunderland-dance-company-wins-funding-to-tackle-loneliness**

SUNDERLAND

Gwailo mark ten years on the circuit with debut album



Photo: Adam Kennedy Photography

After 10 years of grafting on the live circuit, building a reputation for their explosive performances and unapologetic rock 'n' roll attitude, the five-piece are finally ready to bring their first full-length record to the world.

'You Got It' promises to capture everything that makes Gwailo such an exciting prospect on the UK rock scene. Expect hard-hitting rock anthems, blues-driven riffs, infectious hooks and big, arena-ready choruses, alongside the more melodic moments that showcase another side to the band's songwriting.

The album sees the band draw inspiration from the classic rock greats while putting their own stamp on a sound that blends old-school attitude with a fresh, modern energy.

By Whitney Ribbins

Continued at **sunderlandmagazine.com/gwailo-mark-ten-years-on-the-circuit-with-debut-album**

SUNDERLAND

Sunderland Pays Tribute to Armed Forces Heroes in Moving Remembrance Parade



9

Photo: Sunderland City Council

Serving military personnel and veterans joined the Mayor of Sunderland, Councillor Robert Hutchinson, as the city came together to honour those who have served and sacrificed their lives at the annual Remembrance Sunday Parade and Service at the War Memorial on Burdon Road.

The parade was led by British Army personnel from 3rd Battalion The Rifles supported by 4th Regiment Royal Artillery, who both have the Freedom of the City, crew members from Sunderland's affiliated warship, HMS Anson, veterans and community groups and accompanied by music provided by the Eleventh Hour Band.

By Catherine Wilson

Continued at **sunderlandmagazine.com/sunderland-pays-tribute-to-armed-forces-heroes-in-moving-remembrance-parade**

SUNDERLAND

Sunderland Launches UK's Largest School Esports Programme Across 14 Local Schools



9

Sunderland is set to become the first place in the UK to introduce esports across 14 primary and secondary schools, creating the country's largest school-based esports programme.

The city is uniquely positioned to be a national leader in educational esports, with Sunderland headquartered British Esports Federation supporting schools to create safe, supervised gaming environments that help develop digital skills, teamwork, confidence and pathways into future careers.

The co-ordinated roll out is part of a council funded pioneering £2m enrichment programme designed to boost engagement in education and raise aspirations, particularly in communities where additional support and opportunities can have the greatest impact.

By Zoe Walker

Continued at **sunderlandmagazine.com/sunderland-launches-uks-largest-school-esports-programme-across-14-local-schools**

In brief



Photo supplied by South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust

SUNDERLAND

South Tyneside NHS Volunteer Encourages Others After Finding New Career in His 60s

A dedicated NHS volunteer who discovered a new career in his 60s is inspiring others to explore the opportunities that volunteering can bring.

By Catherine Wilson
Continued at **sunderlandmagazine.com/south-tyneside-nhs-volunteer-encourages-others-after-finding-new-career-in-his-60s**



Photo: TyneSight

SUNDERLAND

Sunderland audiences can hear Royal Northern Sinfonia this winter

Musicians from Royal Northern Sinfonia return to Arts Centre Washington on Wednesday 25th November at 7.30 pm, with a lively programme for wind instruments.

By Laura Hutchinson
Continued at **sunderlandmagazine.com/sunderland-audiences-can-hear-royal-northern-sinfonia-this-winter**



Photo: Jack Malik

SUNDERLAND

Sunderland's Stadium of Light revealed as potential host venue for the 2035 Women's World Cup

The Stadium of Light in Sunderland has been revealed as a potential host venue for the 2035 Women's World Cup.

By Erin Malik
Continued at **sunderlandmagazine.com/sunderlands-stadium-of-light-revealed-as-potential-host-venue-for-the-2035-womens-world-cup**



Photo: Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums, via Wikimedia Commons (Wearmouth Bridge, Sunderland, 1930s), no known copyright restrictions

SUNDERLAND

Timepiece: The new installation at Culture House Sunderland bringing the region's past to each hour

From Monday 16th November, the newly-opened Culture House Sunderland is set to signal in each hour with an audio-visual collage of the city's history.

By Erin Malik
Continued at **sunderlandmagazine.com/timepiece-the-new-installation-at-culture-house-sunderland-bringing-the-regions-past-to-each-hour**

In brief



SUNDERLAND

Sunderland launches six-week campaign to put local voices at the heart of community plans

Sunderland residents are being invited to have their say on the future of their local communities as the council prepares to refresh its plans for neighbourhoods across the city.

By Zoe Walker

Continued at **sunderlandmagazine.com/sunderland-launches-six-week-campaign-to-put-local-voices-at-the-heart-of-community-plans**



Photo: STSFT

SUNDERLAND

Runner takes on London Marathon for Sunderland and South Tyneside NHS team that helped girlfriend

Alfie Robertson, 25, has secured one of STS Charity's first-ever London Marathon charity places and is aiming to raise £2,000 in support of Head and Neck services at South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust.

By Beth Smith

Continued at **sunderlandmagazine.com/runner-takes-on-london-marathon-for-sunderland-and-south-tyneside-nhs-team-that-helped-girlfriend**



SUNDERLAND

Sunderland cycling charity marks 30th anniversary with 321-mile challenge

Gateway Wheelers is celebrating 30 years of bringing the joy of cycling to people of all abilities, marking the milestone with a special fundraising event at Houghton Rectory Park.

By Cattherine Wilson

Continued at **sunderlandmagazine.com/sunderland-cycling-charity-marks-30th-anniversary-with-321-mile-challenge**



SUNDERLAND

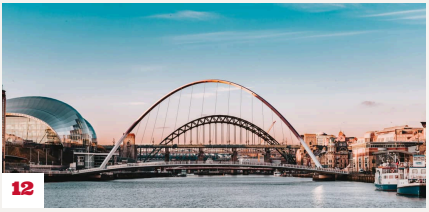
Sunderland Families Come Together to Create Colourful Mural Celebrating Their City

Families, schools and community groups across Sunderland have come together to share what makes their city special, inspiring a colourful new mural celebrating local stories, memories and community pride.

By Barbara Parker

Continued at **sunderlandmagazine.com/sunderland-families-come-together-to-create-colourful-mural-celebrating-their-city**

In brief



12

NEWCASTLE

Newcastle and Gateshead Regeneration Plan Opens for Public Views Until 6 January

Residents across the North East are being invited to help shape the future of Newcastle and Gateshead, with plans to create vibrant, welcoming places to live, work and enjoy.

By Barbara Parker
Continued at **newcastlemagazine.com/newcastle-and-gateshead-regeneration-plan-opens-for-public-views-until-6-january**



12

Photo: Joe Costigan Photography

NEWCASTLE

North East Rugby Players Swap Boots for Swimsuits in Hilarious Charity Calendar

A group of former North East rugby players have traded their muddy boots for miniskirts, swimsuits and Spice Girls outfits in a lighthearted fundraising campaign supporting motor neurone disease charities.

By Albert Nelson
Continued at **newcastlemagazine.com/north-east-rugby-players-swap-boots-for-swimsuits-in-hilarious-charity-calendar**



12

Photo: Erin Malik

NEWCASTLE

Fenwick Christmas Window Brings the Gruffalo's Child to Newcastle

The Fenwick Christmas Window is one of the North East's most beloved family traditions, globally renowned for its stunning designs and captivating stories each year.

By Erin Malik
Continued at **newcastlemagazine.com/fenwick-christmas-window-brings-the-gruffalos-child-to-newcastle**



12

Photo: Metrocentre

NEWCASTLE

Metrocentre to host indoor 5K run for suicide prevention charity

Two local personal trainers from Everlast Gym, Metrocentre are inviting people to lace up for a 5K run through the shopping centre on Saturday 21 November, raising money for local charity If U Care Share and its suicide prevention and support services.

By Lesley Rice
Continued at **newcastlemagazine.com/metrocentre-to-host-indoor-5k-run-for-suicide-prevention-charity**

In brief



13

Photo: Vodafone/Joseph Holloway

NEWCASTLE

Lost Voice Guy aka Lee Ridley tells Tynemouth residents how technology transformed his life

Comedian and Britain's Got Talent winner Lee Ridley, aka Lost Voice Guy, spoke to a Tynemouth crowd about how technology helped him find his voice and go from a council office to winning Britain's Got Talent.

By Rahul Gandhi

Continued at **newcastlemagazine.com/lost-voice-guy-aka-lee-ridley-tells-tynemouth-residents-how-technology-transformed-his-life**



13

DURHAM

Durham Christmas Festival 2026 returns with over 200 stalls and festive family fun

Durham is preparing to welcome the festive season in style as Durham Christmas Festival 2026 returns on Friday 4 December, opening at 9 am for three days of Christmas shopping, seasonal celebrations and community spirit.

By Albert Nelson

Continued at **durhammagazine.co.uk/durham-christmas-festival-2026-returns-with-over-200-stalls-and-festive-family-fun**



13

Photo: Bishop Auckland's Christmas Town

DURHAM

Four Days of Snow Forecast for Bishop Auckland's Christmas Town

Families can step into the softly lit scene and hold out their hands to catch the snow as it drifts down to gentle music. Around the snowy edges, children can pose beside winter wildlife for a festive photo.

By Thomas Wales

Continued at **durhammagazine.co.uk/four-days-of-snow-forecast-for-bishop-aucklands-christmas-town**



13

Photo: Jason 'The Snapper' Corbett

DURHAM

Brandon Boxer captures the Northern Area Super-Middleweight Championship

Brandon boxing club's 'EL CANNON', Callum Walton has won the vacant Northern Area Super-Middleweight title in a bout with local rival Jack Scott from Jobes Gym in Newcastle.

By Alex Oliver BEM

Continued at **durhammagazine.co.uk/brandon-boxer-captures-the-northern-area-super-middleweight-championship**

In brief

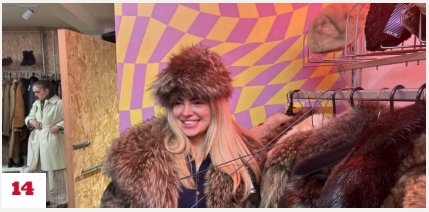


Photo: The Northern School of Art

HARTLEPOOL

Hartlepool fashion student lands Victoria Beckham Internship

Ebony Murtha has swapped the studio in Hartlepool's Northern School of Art for an internship with Victoria Beckham's London Atelier.

By Ian Monaghan

Continued at **hartlepoolmagazine.co.uk/hartlepool-fashion-student-lands-victoria-beckham-internship**

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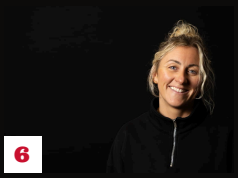



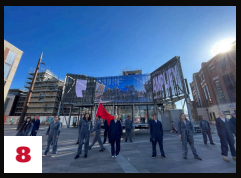







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