

A photograph of a woman with light brown hair tied back, smiling and looking upwards and to the left. She is wearing a light-colored, textured cable-knit sweater and holding a white ceramic mug with both hands. The background is a warm-toned room with wooden bookshelves filled with books. A dark metal frame, possibly of a chair or table, is visible on the left side of the frame.

Building a better Bishop Auckland for everyone

issue

9



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A busy market town bursting with opportunity.



Welcome to the March edition of the Bishop newsletter.

We started the new year celebrating a busy Christmas period. Events such as **Christmas Town, Aglow** and the **Weardale Railway's Santa Express** attracted thousands of people to the town, helping to bring an extra boost to businesses during the festive period.

January also marked the completion of the **Durham Dales Gateway**, which has transformed a derelict annex, next to Bishop Auckland Railway Station, into brand-new visitor parking facilities. The development will create additional capacity for more people to visit the Weardale Railway and has been completed in time for the Stockton and Darlington Railway 200th anniversary celebrations. A full programme of events is planned throughout this year to mark the bicentenary.

And round two of the **Property Reuse Fund** has been launched, allowing more businesses the opportunity to transform disused units into exciting retail spaces. In this edition, we hear from one woman who has used her share of the funding to take a leap of faith and turn a passion project into a space that supports the community.

On page 7 you'll find details of events and activities coming up, including the return of **Bishop Auckland Food Festival** on Saturday 12 and Sunday 13 April. As one of the North East's biggest food festivals, the event offers two days of delicious food from the region's best independent traders, fun-filled family entertainment and activities, as well as cookery demonstrations from a star-studded line-up of celebrity chefs. Make sure to check the What's On page for a hint as to who will be appearing.

We hope you enjoy this issue!

www.bishopaucklandregeneration.com
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Full steam ahead for heritage railway development

As the world prepares to celebrate the 200-year anniversary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway, improved access is being provided to an offshoot of the original line.

The Durham Dales Gateway project has seen enhancements to the historic 18-mile Weardale Railway – which first began as a branch off the Stockton and Darlington Railway.

A derelict annex next to Bishop Auckland Railway Station has been transformed into brand-new visitor parking facilities. It includes 91 car parking spaces, six electric vehicle charging points, five new cycle racks and plans for a brand-new ticketing system. The development has been made possible with funding from the Stronger Towns Fund, administered by Durham County Council, and Weardale Railway owners, The Auckland Project.

The state-of-the-art facility will help accommodate an anticipated increase in railway passengers during this pivotal year, supporting the full programme of events planned for 2025.

Claire Gibbons has worked at Weardale Railway for the last three years as senior community liaison officer.

The role involves connecting with residents, community groups, businesses, and schools, promoting Weardale Railway and sharing its exciting history.

Having now stepped into a new role as general manager, Claire is looking forward to the landmark year that is to come.

“We have got a really exciting year ahead,” Claire said, “We will be working closely with a lot of Bishop Auckland groups to organise some fantastic activities.

“The completion of the Durham Dales Gateway will allow us to create bigger and more events starting from the Bishop Auckland side going to Weardale.”

Claire’s hope is that the Durham Dales Gateway will help more people discover the hidden gems of the Weardale line.

She said: **“When I came here three years ago, I knew very little about trains. I had been here about a year when I got the opportunity to drive a train. Once you**



get experience with the running side of trains, it really gets under your skin.

“We’re so lucky with this part of the line. It never ceases to amaze me how beautiful the journey from Bishop Auckland to Weardale is. We run

photography groups and competitions here, and in the past we’ve invited Durham Wildlife Trust to study the area. They were blown away at the wildlife, flora and fauna that can be found along the line.

“The idea is to promote the railway in the area and show how important it is to our history and what it can do for people’s wellbeing. We hope the Durham Dales Gateway will encourage more people to travel along the line and support our visitor economy, so that we can keep the railway going for another 200 years.”



Durham Dales Gateway is a £1.1m project, with £900,000 awarded through the Stronger Towns Fund. It is also one of a series of projects within Bishop Auckland, which have received a combined total of £53 million Levelling Up funding from the Government.



Where there's wool, there's a way

“... wool just makes sense to me”

Lauren Leigh Hinthorne

A woman is using her passion for wool to transform a disused building into a venue for the community.

Lauren Leigh Hinthorne is currently redeveloping the former Golden Star Chinese takeaway, 9 North Bondgate, into a yarn shop and workspace using a grant from Durham County Council's Property Reuse Fund. She moved to Bishop Auckland in 2021 after her York-born husband was transferred to the area for his job.

The couple met 20 years ago while Lauren was completing post-graduate studies at the University of York. For the last 15 years, Lauren, who is originally from Seattle, has worked in international development and organisational learning, a job that has taken her to countries including Australia, Kenya, Kosovo, Madagascar, Papua New Guinea, and Thailand.

After moving to the area and setting up her own consultancy businesses, Lauren feels she and her husband have set down roots here.

"Over the past three years we've completely renovated our house, developed connections with our neighbours, and just really come to like the area. Bishop Auckland has so much potential, but realising that potential requires all of us to participate and get involved in whatever way we can," she said.

"For me, the thing that I miss most from where I used to live is the local yarn shop, so I decided to try to create one. Taking on a vacant, semi-derelict building isn't something I ever thought I'd do, and it has been a huge learning curve, but it is also an exciting adventure and has introduced me to so many people."

Lauren's vision for 9 North Bondgate is for it to become a beautiful textiles-based building, with her own studio occupying the upper floor and a yarn shop downstairs. A significant part of the downstairs floor will also become the workshop for a local seamstress to run a tailoring and haberdashery business.

Lauren hopes to use her selling space to stock 100 per cent British wool from small and local producers and, in the future, she also plans to use the space to bring in instructors for workshops and classes.

"I first started knitting in 2017 when we moved to a new town in the States. I joined a local group, and I found my people - wool just makes sense to me. We still meet every week on a video call, but the sense of community is what I miss," she said.

The pandemic and the 'Tom Daley effect', which has seen people take up the hobby after being inspired by the Olympic gold medalist, have led to over a million new



knitters in recent years. And Lauren is keen to encourage and support these enthusiasts.

"Online tutorials can only get you so far. Young knitters and crocheters I've spoken to locally say they put their projects down if they get stuck or frustrated because there's nowhere to go for help. I hope to create a space where I can raise awareness of the small producers who are doing incredible work and reinvest in the wellbeing of the community," Lauren added.

"This building is going to be quite the passion project, but it's about taking the leap of faith and seeing who shows up."

Before



After



Cellar Door Architecture

The transformation of 9 North Bondgate is being funded by the income Lauren has made through her consultancy businesses, with the support of a grant from the Property Reuse Fund.

Lauren is just one of the business owners to have been supported in the first round of the fund, which aims to bring vacant buildings back into use.

Following the success of the first phase, the council has now allocated £1.2 million of **Stronger Towns Funding** to launch a second round of funding.

Owners and tenants can apply for round two of the **Property Reuse Fund**. Due to high demand and significant amount of interest, applicants will need to provide evidence of job creation and bringing vacant floorspace back into use.

Property owners or leaseholders can enquire about this funding by e-mailing ced@durham.gov.uk

Project updates

Bishop Auckland Bus Station

Bishop Auckland's new bus station is taking shape.



The building's steel frame, comprising more than 120 steel girders weighing a total of 23.49 tonne, has been installed.

The roof is nearing completion while construction of the internal walls, various retaining wall structures and car park paving works is progressing.

The bus station – which is being delivered by Esh Construction on behalf of Durham County Council – will offer modern and accessible facilities to passengers.

Sustainable technologies to boost the building's environmental credentials feature within the design, including solar photo voltaic panels on the roof, a rainwater harvesting and re-use system and a sedum green living roof to promote biodiversity.

The project is part of an £11.8 million investment in the town, with funding secured through the Future High Streets Fund by Durham County Council, and seeks to improve transport and parking facilities in Bishop Auckland.

Toft Hill

Thanks to everyone who took the time to give their comments as part of a consultation on a proposed A68 bypass for Toft Hill and High Etherley.

Residents, landowners and partners were asked for their views on whether there is a desire for the bypass, as well as five possible options for the route.

Feedback is currently being reviewed and will be used to determine and develop the next stage of the scheme, which would be financed through the government's Levelling Up Fund.

A688 junction improvements

Work to reduce queuing and congestion along the A688 in Bishop Auckland continues.

In the summer, improvements were made to the Princes Street roundabout, which involved widening the road from the roundabout northwards towards Tenters Street to allow extra queueing capacity in the left-hand lane.

The works were completed in October and are part of a £539,000 project, funded by the government's Future High Streets Fund, to improve capacity at Princes Street, Kingsway, South Church roundabout and Coundongate roundabout junctions.

Improvements to Kingsway, South Church and Coundongate will be carried out once designs for each are complete.

You can keep up to date with progress on all of the projects and more at www.bishopaucklandregeneration.com

Bishop What's On



Saturday 1 March to Saturday 3 May

20 Historical Women Who Changed the World

This bold, colourful and educational exhibition is inspired by history and features the works of Doncaster artist, curator and art advisor Chinwe Russell, who was born in Nigeria. Taking place at Bishop Auckland Town Hall, it gives an insight into the lives of some incredible women from around the world, whose work in different sectors has had a massive impact on the contemporary world and continues to do so. This is complimented by artist Jilly Johnson's exhibition, Inspirational Women of Durham, in the Strong Room Gallery.

www.bishopaucklandtownhall.org.uk/gallery

Friday 4 April The Moth

Based on an award-winning short monologue, this thriller deals with war, race, the legacy of history, the power of our actions, the quest for redemption and the limits of forgiveness. Award-winning Elysium Theatre Company returns to Bishop Auckland Town Hall after its sell-out tour of Othello, with a drama that will grip you from the beginning and not let go. Tickets from £10.

www.bishopaucklandtownhall.org.uk/the-moth

Saturday 12 and Sunday 13 April Bishop Auckland Food Festival

One of the region's biggest food festivals returns to Bishop Auckland for a weekend of food and drink, entertainment and demonstrations by celebrity chefs. The festival will feature more than 140 independent traders selling everything from street food, cakes and locally brewed drinks to cheeses and chutneys. Celebrity chefs taking to the cookery stage this year include Sunday Brunch presenter Simon Rimmer, baker Jane's Patisserie and MasterChef 2024 winner Brin Pirathapan.

www.bishopaucklandfoodfestival.co.uk

Friday 27 June Fuelling the Railway Revolution

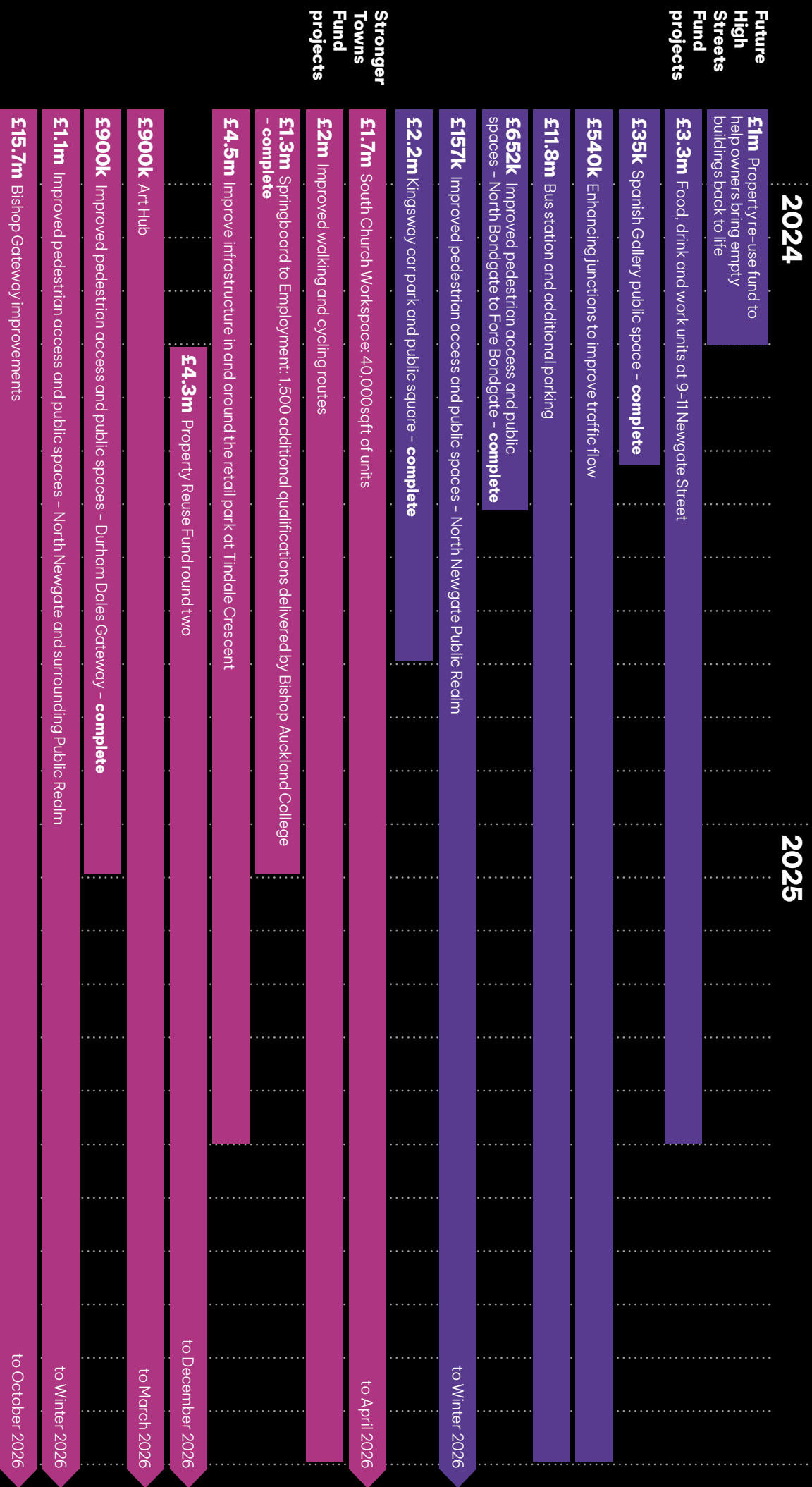
This special exhibition in the Mining Art Gallery explores the inextricable link between coal mining and the railways. Born out of the necessity to transport coal, both below and above ground, the development of the railways was powered by the mining industry. Coal fuelled iron, iron made rails, rails moved coal – the great engineering cycle at the heart of the Industrial Revolution was complete and nowhere did its heart beat more strongly than in the Great Northern Coalfield. Uncover the story through the work of artists who witnessed this social and technological transformation, and those who have been inspired by it since.

www.aucklandproject.org

What's next?

Investment is already happening in Bishop Auckland, with significant work taking place to develop initial plans, appoint contractors and prepare for work to begin on the ground.

Some projects, such as major road and junction improvements, will take several years to complete. The Bishop Gateway will take the longest time to deliver, with a timescale of three years from start to finish and a project end date of October 2026.



Figures show government grant funding awarded to each project.