

ISSUE 12

Southport's Journey

MAGAZINE

Proudly
Southport.
Proudly
Independent.

*LIGHTPORT AND
THE YEAR WE STOP
UNDERSELLING
OURSELVES.*

*LET'S BE HONEST
THIS VALENTINES
DAY*

QUIET CONFIDENCE

HOW SOUTHPORT IS LEARNING TO BE SEEN WITHOUT SHOUTING

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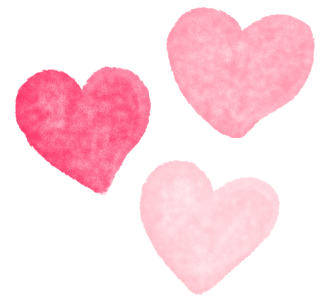
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Editor's Note

SOUTHPORT'S JOURNEY

Hello — and welcome to February.

I've always loved the month of February. Not just because it's labelled the month of love, but because it arrives once January is finally behind us. The reset has happened, the noise has quietened, and whatever routines we're keeping have begun to settle in. February feels less performative and more honest.

For me, it's the month where passion returns — not in a dramatic way, but through consistency. The walks you keep taking. The work you keep showing up for. The conversations that deepen because you stayed. It's where momentum quietly builds, and intention starts to feel natural rather than forced.

That same feeling runs through Southport right now. There's a sense of a town finding its rhythm again — not rushing, but preparing. This year holds enormous promise, and while we're standing on the edge of something exciting, it's the everyday choices that will shape what comes next. How we support local. How we collaborate. How we care for the things we're building together. This issue reflects that energy. Stories of connection in all its forms — love for creativity, for community, for work done well and relationships nurtured over time. Pieces that remind us not every new start needs to be loud, and that progress often comes from showing up consistently.

Thank you, as always, for reading and supporting Southport's Journey. It means more than you know.

Here's to February — a month for steady growth, quiet confidence, and choosing what we love, again and again.

See you around Southport.



Lizzie Barnett

Editor-in-Chief



About Southport's Journey

We're an independent magazine celebrating the people, places and projects that make Southport proud—sharing warm, useful stories across print, digital and events. We champion independents, share what's on, and make it easier to discover something good every month.

Get involved

Have a story or event? Want to advertise, pitch or partner?

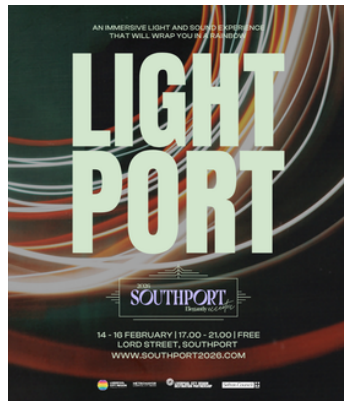
Email hello@southportsjourney.com or visit southportsjourney.com.

We'd love to hear your story.

Welcome your *Journey* starts here



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Capturing the soul of the town, this artist paints the faces behind Southport's stories — offering a vivid look at the people who shape our community.

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Southport's teens step into the spotlight as we partner with Meols Cop High School — giving young voices a platform and the confidence to be heard.



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Want to be featured in the magazine? We're always looking for stories big or small!









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📷 @southportsjourney

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Dates for the Diary - 2026

Southport

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Events

Limited Edition

LIGHTPORT

Southport: The Year We Stop Underselling Ourselves.

This isn't just a packed events diary — it's a statement. Southport is heading into a year where it stops underselling itself and starts showing up properly. From large-scale cultural moments to long-standing favourites returning with renewed energy, 2026 feels like a town backing its own identity, economy and people. It's Southport choosing itself — not loudly, not arrogantly, but with quiet confidence and intention. And inviting others to finally take notice.

What makes this year different isn't just the number of events, but the ambition behind them. These aren't isolated weekends in the calendar; they're moments designed to bring people into the town, keep them here longer, and give locals something to feel proud of. Streets become stages. Skies become theatres. The familiar becomes newly impressive. Lightport sets the tone early in the year, transforming the town with large-scale light installations that invite people to walk, linger and see Southport differently. It's playful, creative and quietly bold — exactly the kind of event that signals a town confident enough to experiment.



This isn't just a busy calendar. It's a town backing its own identity, economy and people.



Spring brings spectacle with Cristal Palace, where Lord Street becomes an open-air performance space, blending theatre, music and movement above the heads of passers-by. It's the sort of event that stops people mid-stride — not because it's loud, but because it's unexpected.

As the year gathers pace, the Food & Drink Festival returns, celebrating both local producers and regional flavours, followed by the much-loved Flower Show, which continues to draw national attention while remaining firmly rooted in Southport's identity. These are events that balance scale with familiarity — impressive without losing their soul.

Summer skies belong, as ever, to the Air Show, where thousands line the seafront to watch precision, power and nostalgia unfold above the water. And as the evenings darken, the British Musical Fireworks Championship closes the season with drama, colour and collective awe — a reminder of how powerful shared experiences can be.



Together, these events tell a bigger story. Not just of entertainment, but of confidence. Of a town investing in culture, footfall and future opportunity. For local businesses, creatives and communities, this matters. Visibility brings connection. Connection brings growth.

2026 isn't about chasing attention for a weekend — it's about building momentum that lasts. Southport isn't trying to become something else. It's finally allowing itself to be seen for what it already is. And this year, that feels like enough.

What's On!

Your overview of events!

14-16 February 2026
Lightport

21 March 2026
St Patrick's Day Irish Beer and Music Festival
Victoria Park

3-4 April 2026
Cristal Palace, Lord Street

18 April 2026
Sausage and Cider Festival,
Victoria Park

18 April 2026
Spring Beer Festival
Victoria Park

2-3 May 2026
Big Top Festival
Victoria Park

29-31 May 2026
Southport Food and Drink Festival, Victoria Park

12-19 July 2026
The Open Championship,
Royal Birkdale

20-23 August 2026
Southport Flower Show

29-30 August 2026
Southport Air Show

26-27 September 2026
British Musical Fireworks Championship

2-18 October 2026
Southport Comedy Festival,
Victoria Park

24-31 October 2026
Books Alive Festival

December 2026
Christmas in Southport



MEET THE FILM SET Hunters

Film and TV are increasingly shaping where we travel, with on-screen locations becoming must-visit destinations in their own right.

In this new series, film location hunters [The Hunters] take us behind the scenes of local screen appearances, turning familiar places into filming locations worth visiting.



Set Jetting is a growing trend in film tourism where visitors travel to a destination because they saw it in a film or TV show. We've been finding filming locations for 10 years and it's taken us to destinations, near and far, that we would never otherwise have visited. It started with a trip to New York in 2005 to see the Ghostbusters Fire Station and grew from there. It's a fun way to travel and see the world.



Southport has had its fair share of screen time, so fasten your seat belts and let me take you on a tour of Southport on screen.

The first stop on our tour of locations is Hesketh Park, which featured prominently in the film Mr Love. The 1986 film, featuring a young Julia Deakin follows the story of a mild-mannered gardener, Donald Lovelace (played by Barry Jackson), who earns a reputation for being something of an unlikely Casanova.

Several scenes featured Hesketh Park: An early morning yoga session took place on the rocks of the waterfall feature, several scenes took place in the conservatory, and one scene featured an art class taking place at side of the lake.

While you're visiting Hesketh Park on you screen tour, you might as well pop across Park Crescent to the Salfordian, which featured in series 3 of Tin Star, starring Tim Roth and Genevieve O'Reilly. The Salfordian featured as a care home.

Tin Star series 3 was filmed in 2020 and is available to stream on Now TV. Mr Love isn't currently available for streaming.

Join us next month to find out what was filmed on Lord Street.



EAT

FROM CASUAL BITES TO PROPER
PLATES,



Banana Bread

EATING BY MOOD

Some days call for steak and red wine. Others just want banana bread and a quiet table.

Lately, I've been eating by mood — and it's led me to some very good places.

The steak anchored the evening. Cooked simply, sliced like butter, and left unmasked by sauce. Seasoned chips, cherry-red tomatoes hitting the griddle with a sizzle, a deep merlot poured alongside — and the glow of the Vincent Hotel lights beyond the window. Unhurried. Exactly right.

At the other end of the day, the tea rooms in Birkdale offer comfort in its purest form. Warm banana bread studded with chocolate chips, topped with a gooey dollop of vanilla mascarpone. Each bite indulgent, best paired with a hot latte — or, when the afternoon stretches, an espresso martini.

And then there's Wild Roots. Their granola bowl, layered with stewed apples and plums, feels like winter breakfast done properly. Balanced, deeply flavoured, and quietly nourishing. Served with an iced matcha — plain or flavoured — it's well worth the trip.

From indulgent evenings to intentional mornings, this is how the town is eating right now — and it suits us.

Different moments, different plates — all worth ordering.


Delicious



“

**Roses are red.
Smoothies are
blended.
Mix it up this
Valentine's —
freshly
recommended.**



What Actually Makes a Good Brunch? Is it the food? The coffee? The company?

You've woken up, waited it out, and now it's time for the best meal of the day. Brunch!

And then there's the coffee. Properly made, full-bodied, and ordered before anything else. Get the coffee right, and the rest will follow.

Here's my non-negotiable: brunch should be filling and worth the price. There is nothing worse than paying for brunch and leaving hungry. One sad piece of toast carrying the entire plate? No thank you. Brunch needs balance. Carbs matter. Protein matters. And the weekend is absolutely not the time for counting calories — it's the time for enjoying what's in front of you without guilt.

Brunch should feel generous. Plates that look inviting. Portions that make sense. Food that actually keeps you going.

Of course, brunch doesn't only belong to weekends. There's a quieter kind of brunch too — the midweek one, slipped between meetings. The solo table. The moment you carve out just for yourself. A pause. A reset. Coffee first, thoughts second. Maybe you try a matcha instead. Maybe you flirt with a new flavour. Maybe today is the day mushrooms finally make it onto the plate... or maybe not. That's the beauty of it — no pressure either way.

And then there's the social brunch. The one that creeps dangerously close to midday. You're scanning the drinks menu "just in case." Someone says, "It's basically lunchtime." Someone else says, "I could go either way." Suddenly, brunch becomes something else entirely — louder, longer, filled with shared plates, clinking glasses, and the kind of conversation that only happens when nobody's watching the clock.

A good brunch doesn't shout — it cracks on.



EDUCATION

IDEAS, SKILLS, AND INSIGHTS YOU
CAN ACTUALLY USE



Q

&
A

with ICAN! Education

“My child isn’t struggling academically, but they seem exhausted by school already this year. I keep wondering whether they’re unmotivated, or whether the pace is just a lot for them.”

This is a common February concern. By this point in the school year, the novelty has gone and expectations are high — but children’s stamina develops gradually, not evenly. Many children can understand work long before they can sustain it day after day. What looks like a lack of motivation is often cognitive fatigue. A short-term dip doesn’t mean your child can’t cope; it means they’re still building capacity. Adjusting expectations slightly, prioritising rest, and focusing on effort rather than output often helps motivation return naturally.

“I worry that my teenager is constantly on their phone, especially in the evenings. Everyone says screens are the issue, but taking it away just makes things worse.”

For many teenagers, phones aren’t just entertainment — they’re a way to decompress, connect, and escape pressure. February can feel emotionally heavy, and screens often become a coping space rather than the cause of distress. That doesn’t mean boundaries don’t matter, but understanding why your teen reaches for their phone matters more than simply removing it. The most effective approach is balance: clear device-free times, open conversations about how online content makes them feel, and plenty of offline ways to regulate stress.

“My child isn’t unhappy exactly, but February feels heavy. Mornings are harder, emotions are closer to the surface, and everything seems to take more effort.”

Yes — this is incredibly common. February lacks the energy of a fresh start and the comfort of a break. Children are navigating ongoing routines, academic demands and social pressures without much pause. This low-level emotional fatigue doesn’t mean something is wrong; it means they’re human. Support comes from consistency, patience, and small pockets of calm. Often, what children need most in February is reassurance that they don’t have to push harder — they just have to keep going.



SHIELD OR SHOW?

Talking to Children About a Noisy World

Many parents are asking the same quiet question at the moment: how much of the world should our children see?

News headlines feel relentless — conflict, climate worries, political tension — and even when we try to filter it, children overhear conversations, see clips online, or pick up on adult anxiety. The instinct to shield them is natural. So is the worry that avoiding it entirely might leave them confused or more afraid.

Psychologists agree on one key point: children don't need full exposure, but they do need enough truth to feel safe. When children sense that something is wrong but aren't given an explanation, their imaginations often fill the gaps — and those imagined fears can feel far bigger than reality. Silence can sometimes feel scarier than a simple, age-appropriate answer.



“CHILDREN DON'T NEED ALL THE INFORMATION — THEY NEED ENOUGH TO FEEL SAFE.”



That doesn't mean sharing adult worries or constant updates. The balance sits in containment. Offering reassurance first (“You're safe”), keeping explanations brief and factual, and letting children guide the depth of the conversation through their questions. It's also important to notice when curiosity tips into anxiety — repeated questions, disturbed sleep, or worry about unlikely events can be signs they've had enough information.



REASSURANCE MATTERS MORE THAN DETAIL



Children learn how to respond to the world by watching how adults respond to it. When we stay calm, grounded and honest — without flooding them — we teach something powerful: that the world can be uncertain, but it is still manageable, and they are not alone in making sense of it.

The goal isn't to hide reality or expose children to it too early. It's to help them feel emotionally held while they slowly learn how the wider world works.

THE BIG PICTURE

WITH



I CAN!
EDUCATION

Children are more distressed by uncertainty than by simple, contained explanations.



Repeated exposure to distressing news can increase anxiety in children without adult support.



Children regulate fear more effectively when adults model calm and reassurance.



TALKING ABOUT THE NEWS

What to Say

- “You're safe, and we can talk about it together.”
- “That's a big topic — what part are you wondering about?”
- “Some things in the world are hard, but there are adults working to help.”
- “It's okay to feel worried or curious.”

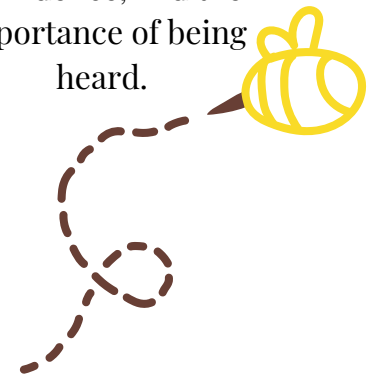
What to Avoid

- Sharing adult fears or worst-case scenarios
- Giving constant updates or graphic details
- Dismissing questions (“You don't need to worry about that”)
- Talking over children rather than responding to what they ask



Young Voices, Looking to Spring

On creative expression,
confidence, and the
importance of being
heard.



The poem on the next page was written by a teenager from Meols Cop High School, offering a thoughtful glimpse into how young people are seeing the changing season — and their place within it.

This piece comes to us through our ongoing work with Southport Learning Trust, a partnership rooted in the belief that young voices deserve space, patience, and an audience that listens.

Writing is often one of the first places young people learn how to make sense of the world around them. It offers expression before explanation, interpretation before certainty. Encouraging that process matters — not just for confidence, but for connection. When young people are invited to create, reflect and be published locally, it strengthens their sense of belonging to the place they are growing up in.

This poem looks ahead to spring — to light returning, seasons shifting, and the quiet optimism that change can bring. It feels fitting. As a town thinking more carefully about how we support and retain young talent, these small acts of expression are part of something larger: helping young people see a future for themselves here, and feel that their perspective has value.

We're proud to share this poem, and grateful to the young writer for trusting us with their words.

Spring Time



Flowers Blooming, trees whispering,
nights grow shorter, stars are glistening,
nature growing, bees buzzing,
pool parties, families loving,
beautiful skies, blue butterflies,
rabbit holes, lots of new goals,
children laughing, parents photographing,
playing outside, on the garden slide,
dogs paddling, playground swing,
family barbecuing, kids colouring,
happy faces, holiday suitcases,
lots of fun traveling to new places
spring time comes to an end,
back to school, with a new friend.



By April



LOVE IS IN THE AIR

FROM RELATIONSHIPS TO SELF-RESPECT, THIS IS WHAT
CLOSENESS LOOKS LIKE NOW

A DATE A MONTH

What happens
when you put yourself first?

February has a way of shining a light on relationships. Who we're with. Who we're not. What we're supposed to want. It's loud about romance, and often quiet about everything else.

But there's another kind of relationship that rarely gets airtime — the one you have with yourself.

Taking yourself on a date isn't about filling time or making a point. It's about choosing your own company, deliberately, without distraction or justification. No multitasking. No productivity attached. Just time spent noticing what you enjoy when no one else is shaping the moment.

That might feel unfamiliar at first.

We're used to framing time alone as something to fit in rather than something to value. A walk squeezed between jobs. A coffee taken quickly. A night in that still revolves around scrolling or background noise. Being alone, but not really present.

A solo date asks for something different.

It might be as simple as sitting in a café with a book you actually want to read. Going for a walk without headphones. Visiting somewhere local you've passed a hundred times but never stopped at.

Taking yourself to lunch and staying long enough to finish your thoughts.

There's no right version.

What matters is intention. Choosing to be with yourself in a way that isn't rushed, improved, or shared for validation. Letting the moment be complete without turning it into content or commentary.

For some people, that time brings clarity. For others, it brings rest. Sometimes it brings discomfort — which is also useful information. It shows you where you've been avoiding quiet, or where you've been measuring your worth through busyness.

And sometimes, it's just enjoyable. Which is reason enough.

In a month that often centres connection outward, taking yourself on a date can be a small act of balance. A reminder that companionship doesn't only exist between people — it exists in how you treat your own time and attention.

You don't need to romanticise it. You don't need to label it self-care. You just need to show up.

And maybe, stay a little longer than you normally would.



A close-up photograph of a white ceramic coffee cup with a gold rim, filled with a light brown beverage. The cup sits on a matching saucer. In the background, a pink and yellow tulip is in a glass vase. The scene is softly lit, creating a warm and cozy atmosphere.

“

Phone off.
No one
needs me
right now.

BE MINE?

Let's Be Honest About Valentine's Day



Not everyone hates Valentine's Day — but a lot of people quietly dread it.

For some, it's the relentless reminder of being single in a world that suddenly feels very paired-up. For others, it's the performative nature of it all: the posts, the flowers, the reservations, the sense that love must be visible and validated to count.

And for many couples, especially those who've been together a long time, Valentine's Day doesn't feel romantic at all. It feels loaded. Another expectation added to an already full life. Another opportunity to notice where effort has slipped, where routines have replaced intention, and where "we'll do something soon" has quietly turned into nothing.

That tension is rarely talked about.

Instead, we're sold a version of the day that leans heavily on consumption. Buy this card. Book that table. Prove something. The message is subtle but persistent: if you care, you'll spend. And if you don't, someone will notice.

It's no wonder the day brings up resistance.

Love doesn't exist neatly on a calendar. It's inconsistent, quiet, sometimes messy. It shows up in small, unremarkable moments far more often than grand gestures. But Valentine's Day asks us to compress all of that into one evening



— and to perform it convincingly.

For single people, that performance can feel isolating. Not because they lack love, but because the narrative around the day leaves little room for anything else. Friendship, self-respect, independence, grief, or simply being content on your own rarely make the cut.

For couples, especially long-term ones, the pressure can surface things that have been sitting unspoken. Resentment about effort. Misaligned expectations. The quiet fear that romance has become something you're supposed to remember, rather than something you're actively creating.

And none of that is fixed by a meal deal for two.

Perhaps the issue isn't Valentine's Day itself, but the way it narrows our definition of connection. The way it turns something deeply personal into something transactional. The way it assumes one shape of love fits everyone.

So if this year you're opting out — emotionally, financially, or energetically — that doesn't make you cynical. It makes you honest.

You're allowed to question the narrative. You're allowed to want something quieter, truer, or different altogether. And if nothing else, you're allowed to admit that love doesn't always look like February tells us it should.

WEDDING MAGAZINES

The new trend



THE REAL WEDDING ISSUE

Weddings are full of moments that move too quickly. The day itself passes in a blur, and before you know it, the photos live on a screen, revisited in snippets rather than as a whole story.

That's why more couples are choosing to document their wedding in a different way — by creating their own wedding magazine. Not for show, not for perfection, but as a way to slow it all down and tell the story properly. These magazines aren't about posing or performance.

They're about meaning. About capturing what your family and friends mean to you, the relationships that shaped your day, and the small, emotional details that don't always make it into a traditional album. Love letters, reflections, guest messages, moments you didn't even realise were happening at the time.

There's something special about holding those memories in your hands. Turning pages instead of swiping. Seeing your story laid out

in full not filtered or lost in a camera roll. A physical copy that can be shared, passed around, and returned to years later.

For many couples, the process itself becomes part of the joy — reliving their love story as it's written and designed, remembering not just how the day looked, but how it felt.

Some moments deserve more than a screen.

They deserve to be kept.

www.studionine.uk

NOT ALONE



FINDING YOUR INNER HAPPINESS

Not every story looks the same. If this season finds you on your own, there are still ways to mark moments, make connections, and feel part of something. There are people, places and groups locally who would welcome you in —

sometimes the first step is simply knowing where to look.

If you're seeking connection, creativity or company, these local groups offer welcoming starting points:

- Art Ease — creative sessions designed to support wellbeing through art, no experience needed.

- U3A Southport — interest-led groups offering learning, conversation and community at your own pace.

- Local community centres and libraries — often home to informal groups, classes and drop-in sessions that bring people

Inspiring Italy this spring

Spring is the season that Italy truly comes alive, inviting travellers to wander through its iconic cities, serene lakes, and captivating coastline. This is the season when the crowds are gentler, the days brighter, and every corner seems fresher, sweeter, and more magical.

Not sure where to choose, let me tempt you with a whistlestop tour of some of my personal favourites. Rome, where ancient ruins and Baroque piazzas shimmer under The liliac hues of wisteria. Wander the cobbled Trastevere, sip a morning espresso, or afternoon chilled white wine on a café terrace, and watch the city's fountains sparkle in the gentle sun. In Florence, the Renaissance capital, art spills outdoors, stunning formal gardens like Boboli bloom in colour, perfect for basking in views across the terracotta rooftops and iconic Duomo.

Venice in spring is a poetry of quiet canals and soft light. Glide by gondola beneath blossoming balconies or lose yourself in the labyrinth of hidden courtyards, where the city's unique magic feels yours alone.

If Milan and its fashion focussed cosmopolitan vibe welcomes spring with a burst of cultural events, open-air aperitivo, and sun-dappled afternoons in Sempione Park.

For those craving tranquility, the Italian Lakes offer glassy waters fringed by wildflowers and pastel-hued villages. Stroll the gardens of Lake Como's grand villas or take a leisurely ferry across Lake Garda, the landscapes are starting to feel lush and crowd-free. On the coast, Sorrento stuns with lemon groves tumbling down dramatic cliffs and endless views over the Bay of Naples. Wander the narrow lanes, pause for a gelato, and let the scent of citrus and sea breeze revive your senses.

Spring in Italy is a feast for the soul - vibrant, romantic, and effortlessly stylish. For a made-to-measure, or simple city Italian escape this spring, contact me for expert advice and truly personal service.

Cath X

Cath Reese Travel Counsellor
Cath.reese@mytc.com

LOCAL LOVE



Interiors Edit

February interiors feels like an expression of love echoing Valentine's Day. It's all about creating an atmosphere that feels intimate, warm and thoughtfully layered rather than overtly themed. Soft textures like velvet cushions and gently draped throws add a sense of romance, while a palette of soft pink blush, warm neutrals, deep reds, or muted burgundy keeps the look sophisticated. Candlelight is essential, dried florals styled loosely for an effortless feel. The key is subtlety: small, considered details that invite connection, transforming everyday spaces into something quietly special.



1



3



2

4

5



1 WILLIAM MORRIS RUG-DUNELM 2 LOVESEAT- NEPTUNE
3 ART- SAMANTHA GREENHILL 4 DOM PERIGNON BRUT VINTAGE CHAMPAGNE- MAJESTIC
5 ROSE BOUQUET- AR FLORIST



COMMUNITY

WHAT'S HAPPENING AROUND YOU,
AND WHY IT MATTERS



Networking

Southport has no shortage of ways to meet people, share ideas, and build connections. From relaxed coffee chats to structured business groups and walking meet-ups, these regular networking sessions offer different formats to suit different working styles. Whether you prefer informal conversation or something more organised, there's likely a seat, or a step, for you.

LEVEL UP NETWORKING WALK

First Thursday of every month
10.00am
Various outdoor routes
Paid
A walking-based networking format focused on conversation, movement, and connection.

SANDGROUNDERS

Second Tuesday of every month
5.00pm
Southport Football Club
Free
A long-standing local networking group with a broad mix of businesses.

SHOUT NETWORK

Fortnightly Tuesdays
9.30am
The Grand
Paid
A structured, supportive networking group with regular meet-ups.

GROW NETWORK

Wednesday 19 February
12.00pm
Hurlston Hall
Paid
A lunchtime networking event in a more formal setting.

COAST BIRKDALE

Last Wednesday of every month
6.00pm
Coast
Free
A relaxed, local business meet-up with a coastal crowd and easy conversation.

THAT WOMAN RISING

Dates vary
Online and in person
Paid
A women-led network

BIG ONION RADIO

At a time when much of our media is shaped by clickbait and division, a new community radio programme is choosing a different path. Big Onion Radio is creating space for Sefton's people, businesses and changemakers — and reminding us what local storytelling can look like when it's done with care.

The idea for the programme first took shape around eighteen months ago, inspired by the community-led work of The Big Onion and Southport Journal. A small group of local collaborators came together with a shared aim: to celebrate enterprise, health and wellbeing, culture, and the good work happening across Sefton.

Momentum gathered quickly. With the support of local creatives and media professionals, the first episode was recorded in December 2025. On the very same day, the team received confirmation that their National Lottery Awards for All bid had been successful — a timely boost for the project.

“ First discussed around eighteen months ago, sparked by a shared desire to celebrate real stories from real people ”

The debut episode set the tone as lively, welcoming and informative, covering topics including mental health and wellbeing, the role of The Big Onion, and an interactive quiz. High-quality production and natural chemistry between the hosts signalled a programme built on intention.

Since then, Big Onion Radio has continued to grow. Episode two featured Southport entrepreneur Lewis Nickson of Poly Up, speaking openly about building a business while giving back. Other episodes have explored initiatives supporting young people into work, with upcoming conversations set to include organisations such as Better Living Sefton, addressing loneliness and health outcomes across the borough.

Covering people and place, health and wellbeing, business and enterprise, and community initiatives, Big Onion Radio offers a positive, community-rooted alternative to mainstream media.

New episodes are released every Friday on YouTube and Spotify.

FINDING YOUR VOICE ONLINE

Once people start thinking about how they show up online, a familiar question often follows:

“But what do I actually say?”

It's rarely a lack of ideas that stops us posting. More often, it's the pressure to sound a certain way — polished, confident, professional, interesting. Somewhere along the line, being online became something that felt like performance.

And when something feels like performance, confidence tends to disappear. Many people describe the same sensation when they talk about social media:

“I don't feel like myself when I post.”

That feeling usually comes from comparison. We absorb other people's tones, their certainty, their style — and slowly, our own voice gets buried under what we think we should sound like. The result isn't growth. It's hesitation. Drafts that never get posted. Words that feel stiff or forced. A quiet sense that being online is something to endure rather than enjoy.

Your Voice Isn't Missing — It's Just Quieter

Finding your voice online isn't about creating something new. Your voice already exists in how you speak to people you trust, how you explain your work in person, and the things you care enough about to talk about without rehearsing. What often gets in the way isn't ability — it's fear. Fear of judgement. Fear of saying the wrong thing. Fear of being too much, or not enough.

So instead of speaking naturally, people edit themselves into silence.

There's a shift that happens when people stop trying to perform online and start trying to communicate.

Performance asks, “Is this good enough?”

Communication asks, “Is this honest?”

One question tightens the body.

The other creates ease.

You don't need to sound like an expert on everything. You don't need perfect phrasing or constant output. You're allowed to speak in your own rhythm — calmly, thoughtfully, imperfectly.

Not every confident voice is loud. Some of the most grounding, trustworthy content comes from people who speak gently, with care and clarity rather than urgency.

If your voice is reflective, warm, or measured, that isn't something to fix. It's something to trust.

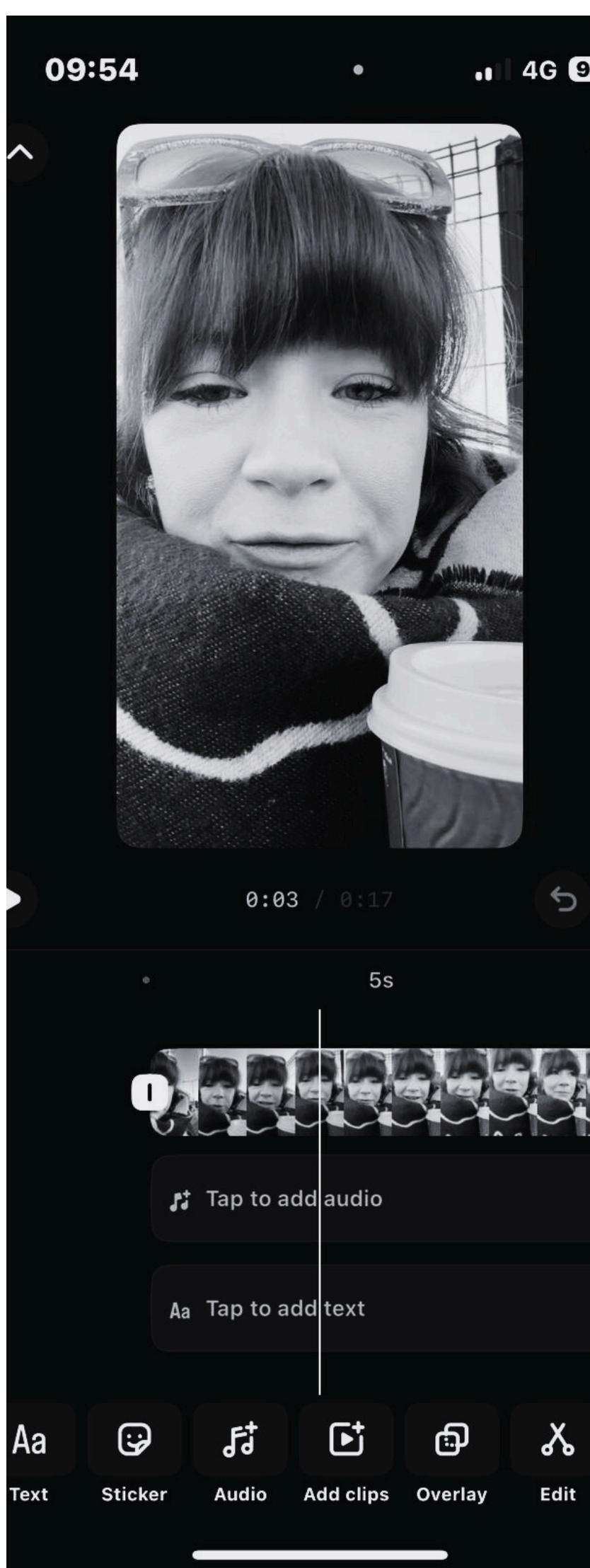
There is space online for people who don't want to shout to be heard. You don't need to perform.

You don't need to sound like anyone else.

You just need to speak from where you are.

That's more than enough.

Find out more @ [studionine.uk](https://www.studionine.uk)



NAVIGATING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL MAZE

By Chris Lewis

On the streets of Southport and across the diverse borough of Sefton, a quiet revolution is underway. Amid the Victorian elegance of Lord Street and the bustling energy of Bootle, aspiring entrepreneurs and social enterprise founders dream big, yet they often encounter a series of formidable barriers that test their resolve and ingenuity.

Sefton's economy blends coastal heritage with urban renewal, but challenges persist. The borough's economic inactivity rate stands at around 20% for those aged 16-64, reflecting the lingering effects of skills gaps and pockets of deprivation that make launching a venture feel like running up a sand dune. Business density remains modest, with roughly 49 enterprises per 1,000 working-age residents, below national benchmarks. While start-up rates lag, many would-be entrepreneurs feel isolated and left to navigate uncertain waters without a strong local ecosystem to buoy them.

Access to start-up capital and affordable loans proves particularly elusive. Traditional lenders often view regional risks, lower productivity and higher perceived volatility, as deterrents, forcing entrepreneurs to rely on personal savings, limited grants, or crowdfunding. For social enterprises, the tension between profit and purpose adds another layer of complexity, making sustainable funding even harder to secure.

Access to affordable premises compounds the struggle. Prime high-street locations in Southport and Bootle command premium rents, especially amid ongoing regeneration, pushing fledgling businesses into less visible spots that impact on footfall, networking opportunities and growth.

A feeling of isolation is another silent hurdle. With a perceived lack of business support and mentorship many innovators feel alone and without access to vital exchange networks of ideas that fuels success.

Yet hope thrives through dedicated support. Merseyside Expanding Horizons stands as a cornerstone for local ambition. Their tailored business start-up programme delivers personalised one-to-one guidance alongside access to seasoned business mentors who share hard-won insights. Free monthly business clubs in Bootle and Southport create welcoming spaces for connection, idea-sharing, and collaboration over coffee and conversation.

For professionals, local owners, and residents dreaming of their next chapter, the path forward is clearer and more achievable than ever.



Chris Lewis

“Talent isn't
the problem.
Access is.”

A growing online community unites more than 100 start-up entrepreneurs, offering round-the-clock peer support, advice, and inspiration. Complementing this is practical infrastructure: low-cost incubator spaces at the Big Onion High Street Hubs. These vibrant hubs on Lord Street in Southport and within Bootle Strand Centre, provide accessible, affordable premises designed to nurture creativity and visibility right on the high street. In Sefton's evolving landscape, where heritage meets opportunity, initiatives like these transform obstacles into launchpads.

For more information email
chrislewis@expandinghorizons.co.uk



Finding Joy

BY KATE MILES - ROBERTS

There's a placemat on my desk that makes me grin every time I see it. It's a photo of me and my eldest son, Jamie, when he was around four, taken at Ainsdale Beach during COVID. I'm on the sand, legs flailing like a startled flamingo, Jamie is sat on top of me, and we're both laughing hard. A colourful umbrella shades our chaos, and it's the very essence of joyful. I keep it on my wall too, because sometimes, you need a visual reminder that joy isn't just a nice idea—it's possible, even when life feels messy.

Lately, joy has been following me around like an overenthusiastic puppy. At my dad's funeral, we sang 'Joy to the World' with all the gusto he would have demanded—loud, unrestrained, full of life. It was a sad day, yes, but joy threaded through it, a quiet rebellion against grief. That's the curious thing about joy: it can exist right alongside sadness. You can be both heartbroken and heart-full at the same time. Strange, complicated, wonderful.

In my learning and development lab, we recently explored joy as something you can actively cultivate—a skill, not a mystery. Our cheat sheet has five simple steps: prioritise relationships, choose experiences over things, move your body daily, practise gratitude, and align your life with what matters most. Simple in theory, slightly trickier when you're juggling work emails and the existential dread of February, but the point is to look for joy and notice it, even in the smallest of ways.

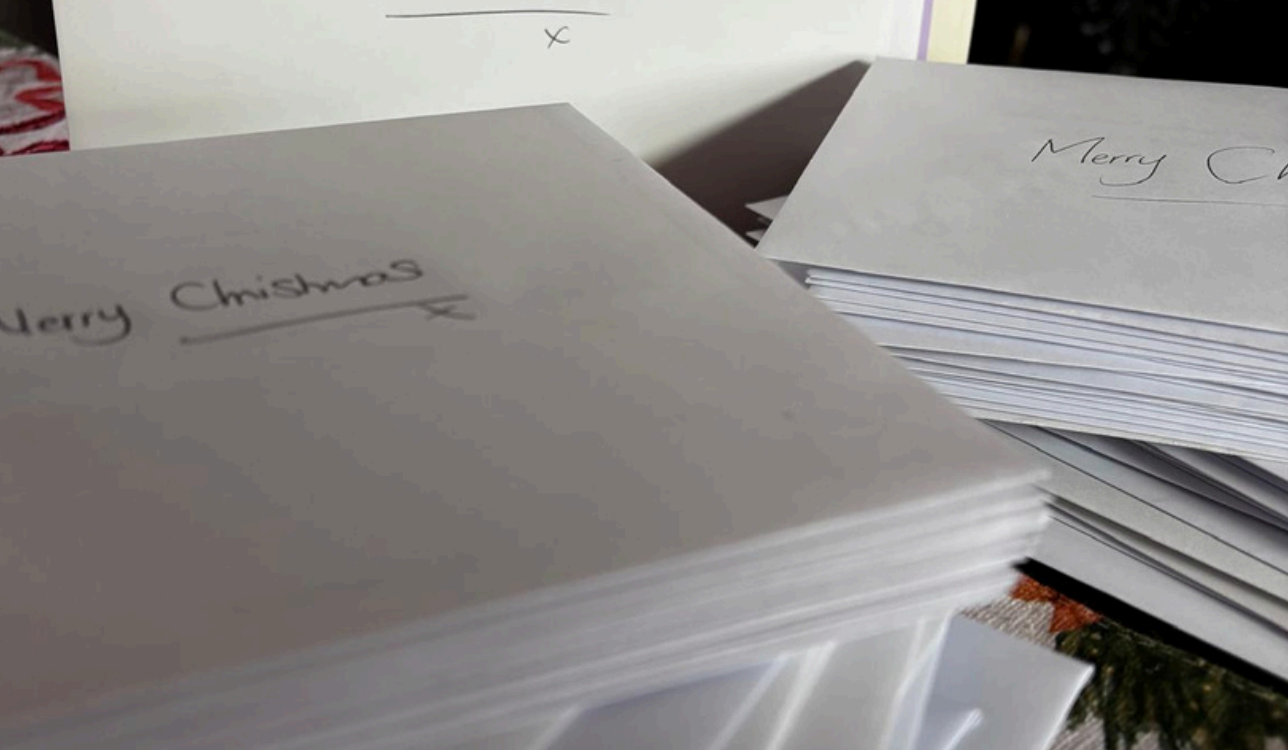
Even IKEA is cheering us on. Their 2026 colour of the year, Rebel Pink, promises to spark pure joy, energy, and self-expression. A placemat, a song, a bold colour, a shared laugh—these little moments remind us that joy is free, portable, and sneaks into the greyest of days.

So, in this cold month of February, when mornings are dark, the heating bill is terrifying, and chocolate stocks run low, here are some tiny joy hacks to try:

1. Dance like nobody's watching [even if the dog looks at you with a quizzical, slightly sideways head tilt].
1. Send a ridiculous meme to a friend. Laughter is contagious.
1. Wrap yourself in a cosy blanket and watch something absurdly cheerful.
1. Notice one beautiful thing a day: the pink sky at sunset, a bright scarf, a steaming cup of tea.
1. Plan a small adventure: a walk on the beach, a weekend coffee in a new café. Experience beats things hands down in the joy stakes.
1. Pause for a moment. Smile, even if it feels forced.

It's worth remembering that joy isn't just a feeling, it's a practice. And sometimes, that's all it takes to turn a dreary February day into a moment that warms your soul.





Cards Written for Someone They Would Never Meet.



The Cards That Made It to the Ward

On Christmas Day, a small stack of handwritten cards was taken onto the wards at Southport Hospital.

They weren't part of a campaign. There were no logos or messages attached — just envelopes, each one written by someone who had chosen to sit down and write a few words for a stranger.

One woman read her card, looked up, and said quietly that it was lovely to even be reminded it was Christmas.

That moment stayed.

In total, 87 cards were written and sent out this year — to hospital wards and into the community. Last year, there were seven. Not because the idea mattered less then, but because it was held by fewer hands.

What changed wasn't scale, but participation.

Each card represented time given deliberately. Someone choosing to pause, think about another person, and write something meaningful without knowing -

where it would land or how it would be received. No one was writing for recognition. No one was told what to say.

And that showed.

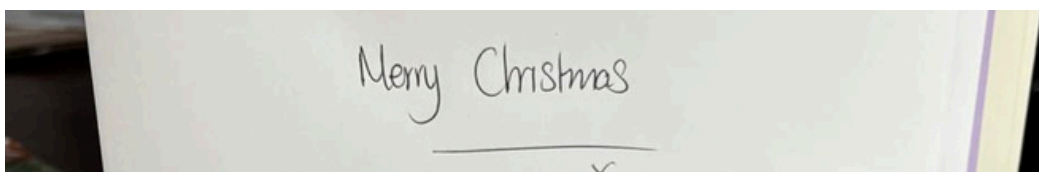
The warmth with which the cards were received was immediate and tangible. Not emotional in a performative way — just real. The kind of quiet gratitude that settles in a room and doesn't need explaining.

Christmas can amplify absence as much as celebration. On a hospital ward, especially, the day can pass differently — marked more by routine than ritual. These cards didn't try to fix that. They simply acknowledged it.

Looking back now, in February, what feels important isn't the number of cards written, but the intention behind them. The understanding that small, individual gestures still matter — and that when enough people act independently, something meaningful takes shape.

Not loudly. Not perfectly.

Just enough.





ANYTHING BUT ANOTHER EPISODE...

From Doomsscrolling to Doing

Has January felt like it's lasted approximately six months?

The longest month ever. Evenings spent catching up on TV you're not really watching, scrolling your phone without meaning to, telling yourself you'll do something tomorrow.

If that sounds familiar, you're not alone.

By the time February arrives, there's often a quiet urge to feel like you're actually living again — not in a dramatic, life-overhaul way, but in a small, satisfying one. Learning something. Trying something new. Doing anything with your hands instead of another episode.

That's where creative evenings come in. Art classes. Mindful drawing. Creative collage. Even colouring in — no pressure, no talent required. Just something to focus on, something that gives your brain a break from thinking and your hands something useful to do.

The beauty of it is how low-stakes it feels. You can go by yourself and enjoy the calm. Or go with others and let conversation happen naturally. No awkward small talk, no forced networking — just people sitting together, making something, passing the time in a way that actually feels good.

It's not about becoming an artist. It's about filling an evening with something that leaves you lighter than when you arrived. A small sense of achievement. A reason to leave the house. A reminder that doing beats scrolling, every time. February doesn't ask for big gestures.

Sometimes it just asks for a pencil, a table, and a couple of hours where your phone stays in your bag.





Why February Is Where Real Change Begins

January gets all the hype. New plans, fresh starts, big promises. And then February arrives a little quieter, a little more honest. The routines feel harder to keep, motivation isn't quite as loud, and it can start to feel like you've already fallen behind.

If that's you, let me say this first: you haven't failed...you're just human.

January runs on excitement. February runs on reality. Life creeps back in, work gets busy, energy dips, and suddenly the changes that felt easy a few weeks ago take more effort. That doesn't mean the plan was wrong, it just means motivation was never meant to carry you on its own.

Most people struggle because they try to do it all alone. We tell ourselves we should be able to figure it out, stay disciplined, push through. But lasting change rarely works like that. It's much easier to show up when someone's expecting you, when you feel supported, or when you're part of something that reminds you why you started in the first place.

Progress isn't built in perfect weeks. It's built on the days you're tired and the moments you choose to keep going instead of starting over. That's where community and guidance matter most.

February is actually a great time to reset. Not with pressure, not with extremes, but with honesty. To simplify things. To focus on what you can realistically keep up, not what sounded good in January. And to admit that getting help doesn't mean you've failed. It means you're setting yourself up to succeed.

Whether that support comes from a coach, a group, or a place like Project Phoenix, the common thread is this: you don't have to do this on your own. Change sticks when you're surrounded by people who notice when you're struggling, celebrate when you're trying, and quietly help you keep moving forward.

And sometimes, that's exactly where change needs to begin.

Anna McNally

Find our more
<https://www.projectphoenixignite.co.uk/>



AGING GRACEFULLY IS OVERRATED

(I'm Aging Honestly)

I'm 48 this month, which feels like a curious age to admit to in public. Not old enough to be revered, not young enough to be indulged, and somehow still expected to do it all gracefully, preferably while smiling, moisturised, and not mentioning how tired you are.

Gracefully, as far as I can tell, is code. It means quietly. It means not taking up too much space, not having too many opinions, and definitely not saying out loud what you're thinking unless it's been run through several filters and softened with a reassuring laugh.

I was excellent at graceful. Olympic-level. I smiled through irritation, apologised before speaking, and wrapped perfectly reasonable opinions in so much politeness they occasionally disappeared altogether.

But somewhere along the way, something shifted.

There was no dramatic midlife awakening. No retreat, no vision board, no impulse fringe. It was more like waking up one day and realising how exhausting it is to constantly translate yourself into something more socially acceptable. Like living your life with subtitles, and still worrying they might be misinterpreted.

At 48, I've realised I don't actually want to age gracefully. I want to age honestly.

Honestly means I no longer pretend to enjoy things I don't. It means my "no" is now a complete sentence, and my "yes" comes with fewer strings attached. It means I pause before speaking, not to soften my words, but to make sure they're true.

I used to think "finding your voice" was something you were meant to do when you were young, like a rite of passage you tick off somewhere between learning to drive and realising hangovers are no longer optional. Looking back, that feels wildly optimistic.

When you're younger, you're still gathering data. You're testing things out, trying on versions of yourself like outfits in a changing room, some flattering, some deeply regrettable. Your voice at that stage is often borrowed, shaped by expectations, politeness, and the very real desire to be liked.



Age gives you something far more useful: receipts.

It gives you the evidence. The lived experience that tells you what matters, what doesn't, and what you're absolutely no longer willing to tolerate, and the quiet confidence not to explain yourself every time.

I've noticed my voice now isn't louder, just clearer. I choose my words more carefully, but I waste far fewer of them. I've stopped cushioning statements with nervous laughter. I've stopped shrinking good ideas to keep the peace. I've retired from emotional gymnastics and unnecessary apologies.

And the unexpected part? Honesty hasn't made me harder. If anything, it's made me lighter. When you stop performing, you have more energy to actually connect. Less noise, more meaning.

Aging honestly doesn't mean rejecting grace altogether, it just means redefining it. Grace can be boundaries. Grace can be saying what you mean without apology. Grace can be deciding that silence is no longer a personality requirement.

So if this is what 48 looks like, I'm rather enjoying it. A few more lines on my face, a lot more clarity in my head, and a voice that finally sounds like it belongs to me.

Maybe the goal was never to age gracefully at all. Maybe it was to age truthfully, and finally take up the space we were always trying to earn.

Advertising Opportunity for March



Inside March

Our March issue will feature trusted local trades and services supporting homes, businesses, and community spaces across the borough.

Advertising opportunities are now open.

Contact:- hello@southportsjourney.com



THE QUIZ

1. In what year did Southport officially become a town?
a) 1734 b) 1848 c) 1902
2. What's the real sign that summer has arrived in Southport?
a) Sand in your shoes b) queues for ice cream, c) the sudden belief you can sit outside without a coat?
3. Which nearby beach is designated a National Nature Reserve?
a) Ainsdale Beach b) Southport Beach c) Crosby Beach
4. What rare species is Formby especially known for protecting?
a) Red squirrels b) Pine Trees c) Grey Squirrels

Meet the Team



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