

ISSUE 13

Southport's Journey

MAGAZINE

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Proudly
Independent.

Young Voices
Meols Cop partnership

Southport Matters /
Neighbourhood of the Year

Cristal Palace
2026 cultural ambition

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Editor's Note



SOUTHPORT'S JOURNEY

Hello — and welcome to March.

There is something quietly satisfying about this point in the year. The initial momentum has either faded or found its footing. What remains is the real work. The steady building. The decisions that shape what something becomes over time.

That is where Southport's Journey stands right now.

Over recent months, this magazine has grown in ways that may not shout from the rooftops, but they matter. New voices are joining us. People rooted in this town. People who know their craft, their sector, their corner of Southport deeply. Experts in what they do, and invested in where they live.

It changes a publication when knowledge becomes collective.

What began as a small, intentional project is steadily becoming a wider platform for the town's thinking. A place where insight sits alongside story. Where what's on meets context. Where experience, skill and lived perspective share the same pages. Not louder. Just stronger.

This shift is not about expansion for its own sake. It is about depth. About reflecting Southport properly through the people shaping it every day.

Across this issue you will see that momentum. Cultural ambition. Community leadership. Young voices stepping forward. Enterprise, wellbeing and creativity sitting side by side. A town not waiting to be defined, but choosing what comes next.

Southport has always held talent. The difference now is that more of it is visible.

Thank you for reading. Thank you for backing local voices. We are building this carefully, and with intention. And we are proud to build it here.

See you around Southport.

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

hello@southportsjourney.com
www.southportsjourney.com
[@southportsjourney](https://www.instagram.com/southportsjourney)

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

Inside This Issue

Issue 13 | March 2026

A place-led magazine documenting the people, ideas and momentum shaping Southport. This month: culture, community and a town raising its own standards.

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Welcome. Your *Journey* starts here.







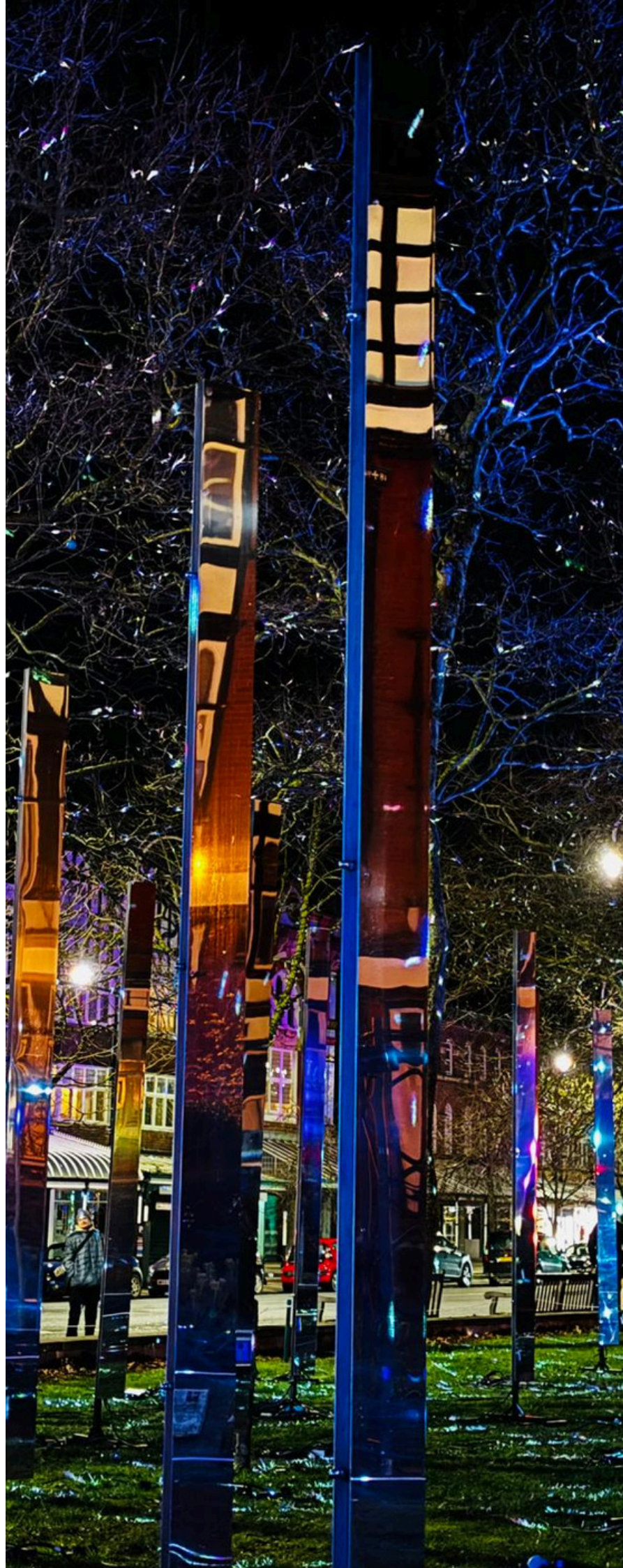
LIGHTPORT 2026

Lightport showed something real. Not just crowds, not just colours, but a town that chose to show up. Lord Street thrummed with life. Restaurants were full, bars were alive with conversation, and families and friends wandered the lights together.

What stood out wasn't just the installations. It was the clear intention behind them. Lightport was ambitious. It was designed and backed properly, and Southport responded. That response matters because it proves something: when we invest in bold ideas the town answers back.

Footfall rose. Conversations buzzed. People planned evenings instead of slipping through them. That energy is the seed for what comes next in Southport's cultural year.

It's no longer theory. It's lived experience. And having had this taste of what's possible, local businesses and visitors alike now have one eye on the next spectacle lining up for spring.



CRISTAL PALACE



A suspended chandelier, aerial performers and a town stepping confidently into its next chapter.

If Lightport felt like a turning point, then Cristal Palace feels like the moment Southport lifts its eyes even higher.

On April 3rd and 4th 2026, the Town Hall Gardens outside The Atkinson will become the stage for something genuinely breathtaking. At the centre of it all will be a vast chandelier suspended above the gardens, not simply as decoration but as a living structure. Performers will move around it, beneath it, from it. Dancers and aerial acrobats cascading in slow arcs, suspended in light, turning the space above our heads into part of the performance itself.

It is a bold image. A chandelier hanging in the open air, framed by the architecture of Lord Street, transforming a familiar civic space into something theatrical and alive. The kind of spectacle that shifts perspective. The kind that makes people pause mid-conversation and look up.

It is not difficult to imagine the atmosphere. Music drifting through the evening air. People gathering early to secure a view. Families leaning against railings. Friends meeting for dinner before the show, then spilling back onto the street as the first notes begin. A collective intake of breath as the performers rise.

But what sits beneath the spectacle is just as important.

There is a growing sense that the town is beginning to coordinate around moments like this. Conversations are happening between businesses. Workshops and planning sessions are bringing people into the same room. Online collaborations are beginning to take shape. For the first time in a long while, it feels as though different groups are moving in the same forward direction rather than in parallel.

The funding secured under the Elegantly Eccentric programme has created opportunity. What happens next depends on how well we carry the momentum forward. Businesses showcasing their offers. Restaurants preparing for full evenings. Creators sharing the build-up online. A town choosing to amplify itself rather than wait to be discovered.

“For the first time in a long while, it feels as though Southport is moving in the same forward direction.”

Cristal Palace is free and open to all, but it is more than an evening of performance. It is another chance to demonstrate that Southport can host ambitious, large-scale cultural moments with confidence.

If Lightport was proof of appetite, Cristal Palace is proof of intent.

And this time, we already know the streets will fill.

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 -7



SOUTHPORT MATTERS

Celebrating What Already Thrives

Southport Matters is a community group and emerging movement of local change makers focused on raising the standard of where we live.

Built on the belief that authentic community leadership shapes a brighter future, it brings together residents who already care deeply about their streets, villages and shared spaces. Our area is full of active communities working hard to improve life for everyone. We have seen the power of good neighbourliness during moments of crisis and uncertainty. The intention now is to make that strength consistent, visible and sustained.

This is not about celebrating occasional gestures. It is about outcomes. Cleaner public spaces. Safer walking routes. Stronger neighbour networks. Visible collaboration. A shared expectation that decline is not inevitable and that pride is something we actively maintain.

Across Southport and the surrounding communities, that culture already exists. In neighbourhoods that quietly hold themselves to higher standards. In areas where responsibility is collective, not outsourced.





“This is about outcomes, not optics. Public spaces that feel cared for. Safer streets. Communities that collaborate. A shared refusal to accept decline.”

Neighbourhood of the Year 2026 celebrating pride, progress and collaboration.

In 2026, a Neighbourhood of the Year Award will formalise that commitment. One area will receive recognition in the media and a prize of up to £1000, shaped around what that community genuinely needs. Practical. Meaningful. Reinforcing what good looks like.

And the definition of Southport is straightforward. If you consider yourself Southport, you are part of it. From Banks to Halsall, from Hesketh Bank to Shirdley Hill, belonging is not limited by a boundary line. If standards become visible, people will start paying attention to how their own area measures up.

That is where momentum begins.



**Southport
Matters**

www.southportmatters.co.uk

SOUTHPORT ON SCREEN LORD STREET

Lord Street is well known for its Victorian architecture and its influence on Napoleon III's rebuilding of Paris in the 1850s. A mile long boulevard which boasts covered verandas on one side and gardens on the other it provides a variety of external sets all in one place.

Unsurprisingly it's popped up a few times on screen.

The 1969 film *What's Good for the Goose*, starring Norman Wisdom, was filmed entirely on location in Southport. Timothy (Wisdom) rents a flat in Sandown Court. External shots featured the building name and the dolphin water feature in the garden. A driving shot also shows the roundabout and fire station. The HSBC also featured as the Bank of England where Timothy worked in London before being sent to Southport for the annual Bankers Conference.

On the corner of Court Road and Union Street, Punch Tarmey's played the role of F. Holden Fish & Chip shop in the 2014 film *Noble* starring Sarah Greene as Christine Noble.

Wayfarers Arcade is featured in the 1986 film *Mr Love* as the scene of an impromptu operatic performance, making the most of the acoustics in the arcade. The arcade also appears briefly in *What's Good for the Goose* while Timothy is on a shopping trip.

The Broadway cinema in *Mr Love*, was the old Picture Palace/Classic/Cannon cinema which was demolished in 2003 and replaced by The Vincent.

Our last stop along Lord Street is The Prince of Wales Hotel. The function room hosted the ballroom dancing scene in the 2022 film *Perfectly Frank*, which was mostly shot in Southport. Another dance scene was filmed in the Lord Street Hotel. If you haven't seen it yet, it's a charming musical that shows off Southport in all its glory.

Join me next month for another location that has featured on screens both big and small.

Follow my set jetting adventures at filmsethunter.co.uk or on Instagram @filmsethunter



HOPE TURNS *One*



“From the moment we first met Wendy & Claire, we knew my Dad was in the safest hands possible. In one of the hardest times our family has ever faced, they brought a calm steadiness that you simply cannot manufacture.”

Hope Funeral Care celebrates one year of thoughtful care, growing trust, and steady support for families across our community

One year ago, two women quietly opened the doors to Hope Funeral Care with a clear belief that funerals are not one size fits all. Every person is different, and every goodbye should reflect that. Twelve months on, Wendy and Claire have grown a women-led business rooted in care, consistency, and attention that turns difficult days into meaningful moments.

Over this past year, Hope has become a steady presence for families across the community. Not because of grand promises, but because they listen. They take the time to understand who someone was, what mattered to them, and how their family wants them remembered. From personal touches to carefully considered services, their work is intentional and designed to feel right for the people involved.

Families often speak about the way they are treated, as much as the service itself. As one shared, “They treated my Dad with dignity and respect, and treated us with compassion.” That balance of professionalism and warmth runs through every conversation. Questions are answered clearly. Nothing is rushed. Space is given when it is needed most.

The care does not end once the funeral is over. Hope has built a reputation for thoughtful aftercare, checking in and remaining available in the weeks that follow, when grief often changes shape and quiet support matters most.

As NAFD board certified and CMA compliant professionals, Wendy and Claire combine warmth with high standards and transparency. One year in, Hope has become a trusted part of the community. A place where people feel heard, and where loved ones are looked after with the dignity they deserve.



EAT

FROM CASUAL BITES TO
PROPER PLATES,



Bistrot Vérité

The Reservation That Gets an “Ooooh”

Mention you've booked a table at Bistrot Vérité and you're usually met with the same response: an impressed little “ooh”. It's that kind of place. Elegant without being stiff, confident without being showy.

The menu changes daily, shaped entirely by the freshest seasonal produce, so what you read here reflects one exceptional evening rather than a fixed list. That fluidity is part of the appeal. Dining here feels like stepping into something crafted in real time.

We focused on starters and sharing plates. Madras-spiced chickpea chaat bombs delivered a single, flavour-packed mouthful of warmth and spice. The Comté cheese and onion gougère was all crisp pastry and molten centre, rich and deeply satisfying. Crispy chilli king prawns brought crunch and heat, offset by a bright Asian salad and cashews, while ginger wontons with pickled cucumber and soy-honey dressing layered sharpness and sweetness beautifully. The pâté maison, generous and textured, anchored the table.

Desserts, though, stole the evening. The tarte tatin arrived glossy and unapologetically caramelised, the apples soft and buttery beneath a delicate layer of crisp pastry. Paired with Calvados ice cream, it balanced warmth and sharpness beautifully, rich without ever feeling heavy. The steamed ginger pudding with Yorkshire rhubarb and custard lingered long after the last spoonful.

Polished service and thoughtful wine pairings complete the experience. This is Birkdale dining at its most exciting — seasonal, confident and worth dressing up for.



STEAMED GINGER PUDDING

-with Yorkshire rhubarb & custard.

The Rhubarb Triangle in West Yorkshire, between Wakefield, Morley and Rothwell, is world-famous for producing forced rhubarb. In fact, Yorkshire Forced Rhubarb holds Protected Designation of Origin status, placing it in the same category as products such as Stilton cheese or Champagne.



KOREAN KITCHEN

Korean Flavours on Lord Street

There's a fresh energy on Lord Street coming from The Korean Kitchen, and our first visit was an immediate yes. The kind that makes you mentally plan your return before the plates are cleared.

We began with a Korean peach juice, sweet and refreshing with real chewy pieces of fruit that made it feel far more considered than a standard soft drink. It set the tone perfectly.

Sharing is the way to approach the menu. The jeyuk bokkeum — spicy thin sliced pork belly stir fried with vegetables and finished with sesame oil and seeds — arrived bold and warming, served with sticky rice and three seasonal sides that added contrast and depth. The Korean katsu followed, a crisp panko chicken cutlet coated in rich sauce, comforting yet refined.

For first timers, the Home Alone bowl is their signature and firmly on our list for next time. Lord Street just got a little more exciting.

The Authentic taste of South Korea



EDUCATION

IDEAS, SKILLS, AND INSIGHTS YOU
CAN ACTUALLY USE

THE BIG PICTURE

WITH



I CAN!
EDUCATION

Exposure to natural light influences melatonin production, which regulates sleep timing. Even small increases in evening light can shift sleep onset.

Children's nervous systems respond to environmental cues. Changes in light and routine can temporarily affect emotional regulation.

Sleep disruption, even by thirty to sixty minutes, is linked with increased irritability and reduced frustration tolerance in children and adolescents.

WHAT TO SAY & WHAT NOT TO SAY

What to say

- "It feels different at the moment, doesn't it?"
- "Your body might still be adjusting."
- "Let's find a calm way to end the day."

What to avoid

- "You were fine last month."
- "There's nothing wrong."
- "Just go to sleep."

WRITTEN BY I CAN EDUCATION

LIGHT SHIFT

The emotional effect of lighter days

March often feels like relief. The light stretches into early evening. Windows open. Coats are lighter. Adults tend to welcome this shift without much thought. Children, however, do not always experience it as simple uplift.

More light changes rhythm. Sleep can take longer. Bodies feel more alert at bedtime. Younger children may seem wired at the exact hour they used to wind down. Teenagers, already running on delayed sleep cycles, can drift even later.

Energy also rises in the day. Some children become more playful and expansive. Others become unsettled. You might notice more silliness, more irritability, or quicker frustration. It can look like defiance when it is actually dysregulation. The nervous system is adjusting to a seasonal shift.

“GROWTH OFTEN BEGINS WITH DISRUPTION.”

Transition is rarely smooth. Even positive change carries a wobble. Just as darker months ask children to conserve energy, lighter months invite expansion. Expansion feels exciting, but it can also feel exposing. There is more social time. More visibility. More opportunity for comparison.



“EVEN POSITIVE CHANGE CARRIES A WOBBLE.”



Rather than viewing this period as a behavioural dip, it can help to see it as recalibration. Bodies and brains are responding to environmental change. Containment becomes important again. Not tighter rules, but steadiness. Predictable evenings. Gentle cues toward rest. Emotional tone that says, "Your body is finding its new rhythm."

Spring does not only bring growth. It brings adjustment first.



YOUNG VOICES

*Writing from Meols Cop
High School in
partnership with
Southport Learning Trust*

Last month, we began something we intend to continue. A standing space for teenage writing from Meols Cop High School, created in collaboration with Southport Learning Trust and rooted in a simple belief: young people deserve a real audience.

The piece you are about to read moves us somewhere very different from February's hopeful spring imagery. This time, we step into a forest thick with mist. Wolves circle in the half-light. The atmosphere is tense, immersive, and entirely imagined. It is a reminder that teenage writers are not confined to diary-style reflections on school corridors and exams. They are building worlds.

Nationally, there is growing conversation around giving young people meaningful, real-world platforms. Not just classroom praise. Not just posts that disappear online. Print carries a different weight. To see your work published in a magazine distributed across Southport, Birkdale and Ainsdale is to be placed inside the town's cultural record.

This collaboration is not a token feature. Over the coming months, we will watch range develop, confidence strengthen, and voices sharpen. We will see different genres, different moods, different risks taken on the page.

That is the point. Not perfection, but progress. Not performance, but expression finding its place.

We hope you enjoy this month's piece and feel encouraged to share it. When young voices are read, talked about and passed on, they travel further than the page.

STAGE
COACH

SOUTHPORT

CREATIVE
DANCE COURAGE
FOR LIFE! ACT

STAGECOACH SOUTHPORT REGISTERS ARE OPEN!

Singing, dancing and acting classes for 4 - 16 year olds!

Stagecoach has been inspiring children and young people through the performing arts for over 35 years. Students build the Creative Courage to stand up on stage and gain skills that will last them a lifetime.

FIND OUT MORE



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07877185273



The Ollayne Forest

Forests can be scary places, but this one was terrifying. The Ollayne Forest was no place for children, it's eerie silence blankets it, and when you walk past it lures you in. Every now and then you will hear the odd whisper of the trees, but even they shake sometimes. The fog envelopes you in as you walk past, creating a creepy environment. Whoever dares to enter, never comes out safely.

What makes this forest so dangerous you may ask? Well, they say that at night the wolves come out to viciously stroll through the trees, waiting for their chance to pounce. The trees whisper quietly, a warning to escape before time diminishes. They say even the coolest of people get a shiver down their spine. It is a living nightmare. Will you dare to enter the spooky Ollayne Forest?

By Jess

Les Misérables

LITTLE THEATRE
Home of the Southport Dramatic Club

Meols Cop's production of the West End musical, Les Miserables, is brought to Little Theatre on Houghton St for the **4th - 6th March**. The French tragedy recently celebrated its 40th anniversary and has been widely viewed for generations as an international masterpiece. The performing arts groups production has previously sold out of tickets, and as the performance is limited to 3 night, we recommend you book your tickets fast! Under the Music And Drama staff, Mrs McNally, Mrs Robertson, Miss Rose and Mr Norcross, the students have been relentlessly encouraged and supported since June 2025, shaping them with confidence and enhanced the teens' theatre skills. We hope that you will come see the show!!

TICKETS ON SALE NOW £10 EACH

Raising the Curtain on Local Talent

Proud to support our partnership with Southport Learning Trust

We are proud of our strong links with Southport Learning Trust and the opportunities it creates for young voices to shine. This week, students take to the stage with their production of Les Misérables, and I will be there on Friday evening to support them. We encourage the community to do the same. A full review will be published on the Southport's Journey website, so make sure you are subscribed and following to receive it straight to your inbox.

We value this partnership and the creative energy it brings to the magazine each month. We look forward to Friday's performance and to discovering the next wave of thoughtful, original work from students across the Trust.

Q
&
A

My child is suddenly taking ages to fall asleep. Nothing else has changed.

Lighter evenings can delay the body's sense of night, especially as we approach the clock change. Even before the time shifts, the extended daylight can subtly affect melatonin release. It is not always resistance or testing boundaries. Sometimes it is biology catching up with a changing season. The aim becomes steadiness rather than control, allowing the body time to find its new rhythm.

with I CAN Education

My usually calm child is suddenly hyper after school.

Longer daylight often increases stimulation. School days can feel longer when the world outside looks active and bright, and the body is more alert. Some children come home carrying that extra energy and do not yet know how to bring it down. What looks like sudden hyperactivity can be a sign that they need a gentler, slower transition into evening rather than immediate demands or expectations.

Since the days have started getting lighter, my teenager is moody and snappy. Is it hormones or just attitude?

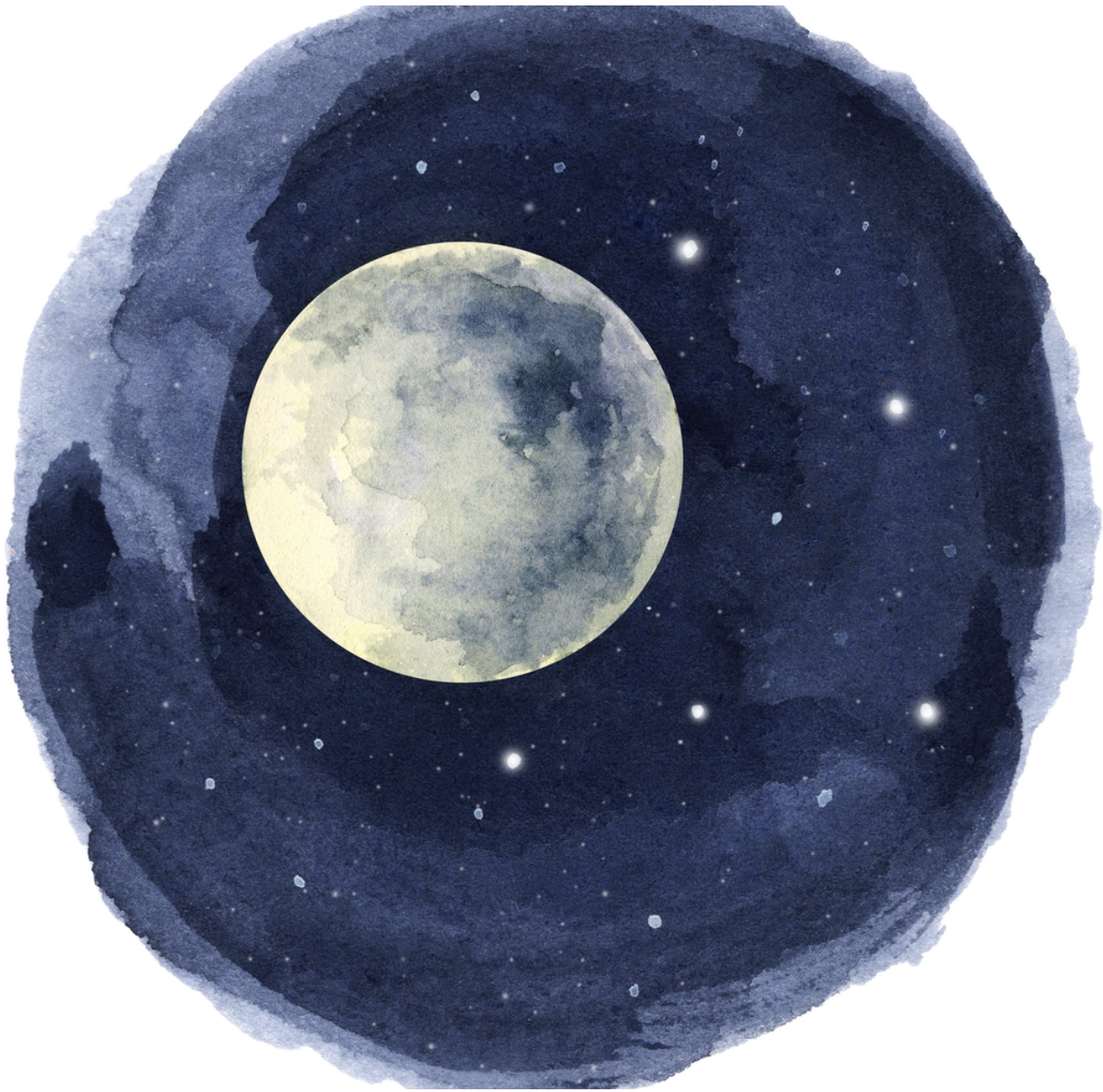
Seasonal shifts affect sleep and energy in ways that are easy to underestimate. As evenings stretch, teenagers often drift later without meaning to, and even small sleep shifts can affect mood. It may look like attitude, but it can be fatigue wearing a sharper face. Their nervous system is adjusting to longer days, and mood can wobble before it settles.





SPRING WELLBEING

A SEASONAL RESET FOR MIND, FAMILY AND CONNECTION



LOOK UP!

Last night, 3rd March, the moon over Southport was impossible to ignore. Low. Heavy. Almost theatrical in the way it hovered above the rooftops. The sky was clear, the air still, and for a moment the noise of everything else fell away. It stopped me in my tracks...

There is something about the moon that shrinks our problems without dismissing them. It reminds us that we are on a planet spinning through space, that our headlines, inboxes and worries exist within something bigger. The world feels unsettled right now. It is easy to carry that tension in our shoulders, our jaw, our breath.

The moon does not fix that. It does not solve what is complex or painful. But it can steady you enough to stand inside your own life again.

Under that wide, silver sky, I found myself thinking about smaller, closer things. My family. The roles we hold. The dreams quietly forming at the edge of ordinary days. Where I fit. What I am building. What still matters, even when everything else feels uncertain.

Life is demanding. It asks for resilience and constant response. Looking up felt like a refusal to be swallowed by it. Not denial. Not escape. Just a brief, deliberate act of awareness.

On a Southport pavement, beneath that bright, watchful moon, I felt both the weight of the world and my place within it.

"It did not fix anything. It simply reminded me that I am still here, and that matters.



CONNECTION CHANGES EVERYTHING

“ *Spending time with people who matter to us helps us feel accepted, relaxed, valued and part of something bigger than ourselves.* ”

Improving wellbeing does not always require something dramatic. Sometimes it begins with something simple: spending time with other people.

Your mental health is how you are feeling in your mind. It can be good or bad and all points in between. The mind is a complex thing, and it can be both a good servant and a poor master. Wellbeing can be described as how you feel about your day-to-day life.

Today, we will look at two things that can make you happier. They are friends and family. In other words, human connection and interaction. Now I know our families can be frustrating and some people can be rude and intolerant, and I am sure we have all had ‘friends’ that have let us down in our lives. There are also people who it is best to cut off and avoid. However, so many studies have been done into the importance of human connection with friends and family, and they are all really positive. Spending time with people who matter to us helps us feel accepted, relaxed, connected, valued and a part of something.

Much of it costs nothing at all. Playing a boardgame, watching your favourite movie with others or going out into nature and the multiple places in and around Southport where we can access green space. Parks, the Beach, the nature that is on our doorstep and just beyond. Going to a Nature Reserve. Taking the dog with you. Having conversations. Eating together.

Now of course you have to pay for some things, and Southport has many great places to eat and coffee shops/pubs where you can meet people. Chatting. Checking in with each other. Doing a pub quiz. Going out for something to eat. Getting things off your chest. Listening to others and offering advice. Things that invariably make you feel better.

So today, stop and take notice of the people in your life. Value them. They won't be around forever. Plan a day out. Have a meaningful conversation. There is a Buddhist saying that the best way of improving your happiness is to help others. Take notice of the people in your life. Value them. Plan the conversation, the walk, the shared meal. These small moments often do more than we realise.



LOCAL LOVE

Interiors Edit

Spring flowers bring freshness, colour and a sense of renewal to any space. Popular varieties include tulips, daffodils, hyacinths, cherry blossoms and peonies, each adding soft fragrance and delicate texture. With their pastel tones, vibrant yellows, blush pinks and fresh greens, spring blooms instantly brighten interiors and create a light, uplifting atmosphere that reflects the optimism of the season. To compliment your floral arrangements with stunning vases support Southport's high street.



1. Floral Decal Vase- Dunelm 2. Verwood Ceramic Urn Vase- Neptune
3. Green Lemon Tree Vase- T.K.MAXX 4. Mini Bud Display Bottle- The Range
5. Striped Ceramic Vase- M&S

MILLS
INTERIORS

TOO MUCH!



Still Not Sorry...

International Women's Day often arrives wrapped in slogans. This year feels quieter. More grounded.

For many women, progress has not come through grand gestures, but small internal decisions. Stop softening the sentence. Remove the apology. Take credit. Speak without rehearsing every reaction. Most women recognise the phrases, offered as advice or humour. You're a bit much. Don't be bossy. Smile. Tone it down. You're lucky to be here. Individually they seem minor. Over time, they shape posture. They teach women to manage rooms before entering them.

Something is shifting.

Across Southport and beyond, women are not just navigating systems. They are building them. Leading classrooms. Coaching teams. Launching businesses. Supporting families. Not from adversity, but from vision. The change is subtle. Less about proving worth. More about claiming space.

It looks like sharing ideas before they are polished. Leading without cushioning every edge. Ambition without apology.

That is worth marking. Not as a moment. As a direction.

ONLINE IMPACT

Turn local footfall into online growth

An **INVESTSEFTON** workshop
delivered by **Lizzie Barnett**, Studio
Nine Group

Helping Sefton businesses show up online with clarity, confidence and a clear strategy during major local events.

What we'll cover


- ✓ Planning content around Sefton's biggest events
- ✓ Moving from last minute posting to structured campaigns
- ✓ Making your business visible before, during and after peak footfall.

The Vincent Hotel, Lord Street, Southport

5:30pm - 8pm or 10am-12:30pm

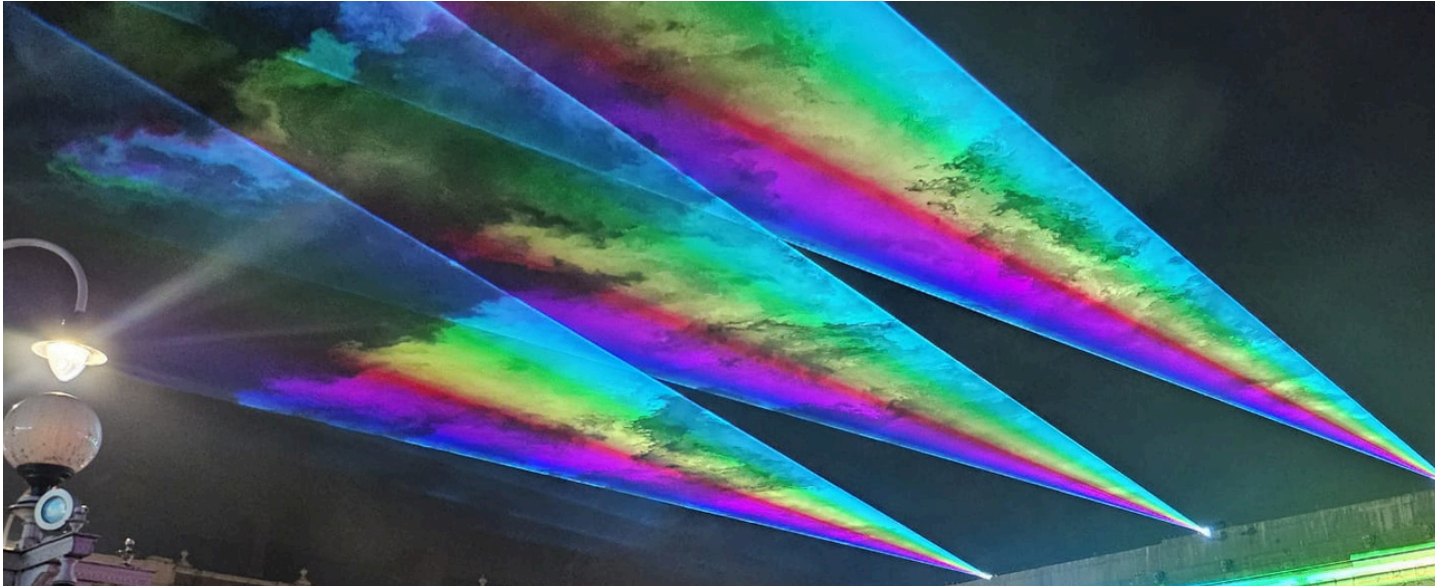
MARCH 23RD OR 24TH

EMAIL : INVESTSEFTON@SEFTON.GOV.UK

Sefton Council 



I LIKE, I LIKE, I WONDER



Wonder bypasses logic and goes straight to something deeper.

Feedback is often treated as something binary. I like it. I don't like it. A thumbs up or a thumbs down. Recently, while running a workshop with an enthusiastic and receptive bunch of graduates, we explored a different approach: I like, I like, I wonder.

What struck me was how quickly this simple shift changed the tone of the conversation. The first 'I like' opens up appreciation, acknowledging effort and intention. The second reinforces value. And then comes the most powerful part: I wonder. Not judgement. Not criticism. Curiosity. Empathy. An invitation to explore what could be different, better, or simply seen from another perspective. It opens up learning and opportunity, rather than closing things down.

Perhaps it's no coincidence that wonder has been on my mind lately. I'm currently reading *The Power of Wonder* by Monica C. Parker, who describes wonder as an extraordinary emotion that can change the way we live, learn and lead. What's not to like about that?

In the book's introduction, Parker outlines five elements of wonder. There's Watch – an openness to what's around us. Wander – that encourages us to experience deep curiosity. Whittle – that feeling of being absorbed, pared back into the moment. Wow – the spark of delight. And finally Whoa – those awe-filled moments that stop us in our tracks. Reading this, I realised how often wonder shows up in everyday life, if we give ourselves permission to notice it.

Here in Southport, February has offered plenty of opportunities. Lightport transformed familiar spaces into something unexpected, using light in creative ways and in surprising locations. Seeing the places we think we know so well in a different light created moments of both 'wow' and 'whoa', often expressed by my children as squeals of delight. It was a good reminder to me that wonder doesn't need explanation to be meaningful. Sometimes it's enough simply to experience it.

I've felt that same head-to-toe sense of wonder watching fireworks, or more recently, during the incredible displays of the aurora borealis. You don't need to know the science to feel moved by it. Wonder bypasses logic and goes straight to something deeper. It also often leaves me with a huge goofy grin on my face!

My mum, a retired teacher, often talks about awe and wonder as gifts that parents, teachers and guiding influences can introduce early on. From tiny seeds of cress placed carefully on damp cotton wool transforming into green hair atop an eggshell face, to baby chicks hatching, to the quiet magic of the natural world, these moments shape how we see life. They teach us to look, to wander, and to most importantly wonder.

So, as we move through March, I find myself wondering.....where will you find your wonder this month? Maybe it's already here. Or maybe you're saving it for the arrival of the Cristal Palace in Southport at the beginning of April – a 15-metre-high chandelier that promises to make us all stop, look up, and say... whoa. And perhaps, if we let it, that sense of wonder might quietly change the way we see everything else too.



Travel Near & Far

Staying close. Looking Further



Spring in Japan

Each spring, Japan softens into pink and white as cherry trees come into bloom. For a brief window, parks, riversides and temple gardens pause beneath drifting petals. Sakura season is not simply a spectacle. It is a cultural moment shaped by tradition, attention and the awareness that beauty does not last.

Tokyo often provides the first glimpse. In gardens such as Shinjuku Gyoen and along the Meguro River, blossom arches over water and walkways, lanterns glow at dusk, and the city feels both animated and reflective at once. Further west, Kyoto offers something quieter. Temple grounds and stone paths are softened by pale blossom, especially in the early morning before the crowds gather.

Elsewhere, Osaka's castle grounds and the historic lanes of smaller towns carry the same delicate contrast between permanence and fragility. Petals fall quickly. The peak rarely lasts more than a week. That fleeting quality is part of the tradition of hanami, the practice of gathering simply to sit beneath the trees and notice.

Cherry blossom season is less about photography and more about presence. It is a reminder that travel does not need to be hurried to be meaningful. Sometimes it is enough to stand still and look up.

Staying Close

As the light shifts here, so does the way we move through Southport.

A reset does not require reinvention. Often it begins with small, local recalibrations. A walk along the Prom without headphones. A slow loop around Marine Lake before the day fills. Coffee outside, even if the air is still cool.

In March, the town opens gradually. Café tables edge onto pavements. Coats sit half on shoulders. People test the season before fully trusting it.

The coastline. The pine trails at Ainsdale. The quiet stretch between Birkdale and Hillside. Familiar places seen again with slightly different light.

Micro travel is not about distance. It is about attention.

As the days lengthen, we do not always need to go further. Sometimes we just need to look again.





COMMUNITY

WHAT'S HAPPENING AROUND YOU,
AND WHY IT MATTERS



STEP INTO THE RING - WITHOUT THE PRESSURE



In today's fast-paced world, finding an activity that boosts both physical and mental well-being and connects you with others is more important than ever. More people are turning to boxing-style fitness, not just to get fit, but to feel better, think clearer, and belong to something fun and supportive.

Heart Health That Packs a Punch

A ground-breaking study published this year showed that just six weeks of regular boxing training significantly lowered both systolic and diastolic blood pressure in adults with elevated blood pressure, while also improving vascular function — markers closely linked to long-term heart health.

This isn't surprising when you consider that boxing-style workouts are a form of high-intensity interval training (HIIT) — a type of exercise repeatedly shown to strengthen heart and lung function more efficiently than traditional steady-state cardio like jogging.

Stronger Mind, Sharper Mood

Physical health is only part of the story. A growing body of research shows that non-contact boxing — the type you see in boxercise classes at Project Phoenix — can be an effective intervention for mental well-being. A scoping review of studies found that group boxing workouts significantly reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress, offering a powerful outlet for tension and emotional release while boosting concentration and self-esteem.

The best thing about boxercise is that you don't need experience — or to actually get hit. Our classes at Project Phoenix Southport are non-contact, inclusive, and paced to challenge you at your own level. Whether your goal is to improve your cardio health, manage stress, meet new people, or try something excitingly new, stepping into the gym might just be the best decision you make this spring.



Find out more this spring at:
<https://www.projectphoenixignite.co.uk/>

“It’s not just about fitness. It’s about understanding the game.”



LEADERS FUTURE

On a cold weeknight in Southport, something quietly powerful is happening on court. Under the guidance of Coach Lynne Barnett, girls at Southport Netball Club are not just running drills. They are learning how to understand them.

From grassroots level, Lynne is helping players look beyond repetition and start asking why. Why this movement. Why this spacing. Why this decision at this moment. Training has become as much about the mind as the body. The girls are encouraged to see how drills progress, how small skills connect into larger patterns of play, and how every role on court matters.

Sessions are collaborative. Communication is expected. Players are invited to explore different perspectives, whether that is stepping into a new position or suggesting a drill they have discovered themselves. That ownership is beginning to show. Girls are arriving excited, bringing ideas from outside the club, keen to trial new exercises and refine their thinking. There is energy in the hall. A sense of shared purpose.

Lynne’s approach is breathing fresh life into Southport Netball Club. It is developing not just stronger players, but thoughtful ones. Young athletes who understand that sport is about teamwork, responsibility and growth beyond the court.

And that growth does not stop with the juniors. On Monday evenings from 8 to 9pm, the club runs a dedicated women’s session. For those returning to netball, playing in local town matches, or simply wanting a space to train and rebuild skills, it offers the perfect place to reconnect with the game.



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.

Konnexus network 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
Thursday 19th March
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 ON AIR²

ONION RADIO

At a time when headlines move fast and attention moves faster, Big Onion Radio is choosing to slow things down. The programme is rooted in something simple but powerful: the people and places of Sefton. Every episode starts from that bedrock. Real conversations with real voices. No theatre, no outrage, just stories that reflect the borough as it actually is.

Born from the community-led work of The Big Onion and Southport's Journey, the idea was clear from the beginning. Create a space where enterprise, wellbeing, culture and local initiative could be explored properly, without being squeezed into soundbites. What began as a small collaboration quickly gathered momentum, with the first episode recorded in December 2025 and a National Lottery Awards for All grant confirmed the very same day.

It felt like a signal that the appetite for this kind of storytelling was real.

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

Since then, the show has continued to build. Conversations have ranged from young people entering employment to local entrepreneurs navigating growth. A recurring thread is the reality of running a business in 2026. Not just the wins, but the weight. Burnout is one of the issues we return to often. The warning signs are rarely dramatic. Constant fatigue that sleep does not fix. Irritability. Loss of motivation for work you once cared about. A sense of being permanently behind.

Rather than glossing over it, we explore practical responses. Simple resets. Switching environments. Walking routes across Sefton that allow space to think. The coastline at Crosby Beach. The quieter paths through Ainsdale Nature Reserve. A loop around Marine Lake before the working day begins. The message is consistent. Sustainable business depends on sustainable people.

Covering people and place, health and wellbeing, enterprise and community action, Big Onion Radio continues to offer a thoughtful alternative to mainstream media. New episodes are released every Friday on YouTube and Spotify.



FINDING YOUR VOICE ONLINE

Why Consistency Feels So Difficult

Most people don't struggle to start showing up online. They struggle to keep showing up.

There's usually a moment where a post finally goes out. It feels like progress, sometimes even relief. And then a few days pass. Then a week. Not because the intention disappeared, but because something quietly tightened again.

We often tell ourselves this is a discipline problem. More often, it isn't.

Being visible asks something of us emotionally. Even small posts place us back into a space where we can be seen and interpreted. After time away, the next post doesn't feel like a continuation — it feels like starting over.

The gap raises the stakes.

People assume they need a better idea to come back, something more meaningful to justify the silence. In reality, the pressure mostly exists in our own heads.

Confidence doesn't stack neatly. It familiarises.

The more regularly you show up, the more ordinary it feels. The less often you do, the heavier it becomes.

Posting once is bravery.

Returning repeatedly is identity.

Instead of asking whether a post was good, try asking whether you came back. The value is often in the return itself. Each time reduces the distance between you and the space you're learning to feel comfortable in.

Consistency isn't intensity or motivation.

It's gentleness, repeated often enough that showing up stops feeling significant.

And every small return makes the next one easier.



Sharon Kemp

Thrive with AI

THE TIME THIEF

Think about the last thing you did that you really didn't want to do.

Not the hard things – those we accept. The dull ones. The admin. The forms. The same question answered for the fifth time. The to-do list that follows you from room to room and somehow never gets shorter.

We all have one.

It doesn't matter whether you're running a business, raising a family, looking after someone you love, or simply trying to get through a busy week. There is always a version of the work that drains you.

The repetitive bits. The stuff that needs doing but doesn't need you – not really.

For me, that's where AI belongs. I've spent 25 years watching people work. In boardrooms and back offices, in schools and living rooms, in businesses of every shape and size. And the most consistent thing I've noticed is this: the tasks that eat our time are rarely the ones that need us most. They're just the ones nobody automated yet.

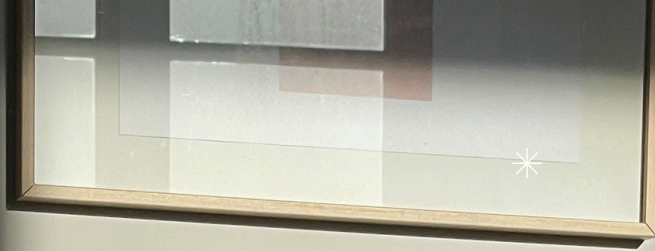
When I started using AI properly, I didn't just save time. I got myself back. The thinking, the creating, the conversations — the parts of work that are genuinely, irreplaceably human — suddenly had room to breathe. AI doesn't need to replace you. It needs to release you.

Quietly. In the corners of your day where time disappears without you noticing.

Because the best version of your life isn't about doing more. It's about doing more of what only you can do.

Every month I'll share one simple, human way to make that real. No tech background needed. Just curiosity and five minutes. You are not a machine. You shouldn't be doing machine work.

Sharon Kemp | Thrive With AI



AI ISN'T ABOUT DOING MORE. IT'S ABOUT PROTECTING WHAT IS HUMAN.

AI Is Here to Release You



AI 01

Delegate the mechanical.
Keep the meaningful.

AI 02

Write the prompt.
Save your energy for the people.

AI 03

Use AI for process.
Use yourself for judgement.

Chris Lewis
Entrepreneur



FROM SURVIVAL TO SCALE

In Navigating the Entrepreneurial Maze, I reflected on the barriers confronting Sefton's start-ups... access to finance, affordable space, confidence and connection. Yet for many fledgling businesses and social enterprises across Southport, Bootle and the wider Liverpool City Region, clearing those initial hurdles is only the beginning. The deeper challenge lies in moving from survival to scale.

In the early stages, energy is spent firefighting. Cashflow dictates decisions. Founders wear every hat, the marketer, bookkeeper, operations manager, often working in isolation while testing whether their idea can truly take root. For social enterprises, balancing community impact with commercial sustainability adds further pressure. Survival is fragile, and growth can feel distant.

Scaling, however, requires a shift in mindset and environment. It means building systems, strengthening networks, refining a value proposition and stepping from reactive trading into strategic planning. Crucially, it also demands an ecosystem that nurtures ambition rather than leaving founders to navigate alone.

Merseyside Expanding Horizons provides that structured bridge. Through the Business Start Up Programme in Sefton delivered in conjunction with Safe Regeneration, entrepreneurs receive tailored one-to-one support that stabilises foundations and prepares them for measured growth. Regular business clubs in Bootle and Southport create consistent forums for peer learning, accountability and collaboration — spaces where challenges are unpacked openly and practical solutions shared.

This support sits within a wider partnership landscape also involving Invest Sefton who provide strategic business advice, funding guidance and growth planning expertise. Together, they form interconnected pillars of support across the borough.

The question facing Sefton now is clear: how do we convert promising start-ups into scaling enterprises and, in doing so, expand the borough's business base? The answer may lie not in isolated success stories, but in strengthening the ecosystem that enables many to grow.



Advertising Opportunity for March



Bring your story to life on A Day in the Life podcast. This is a person-centred space where real experiences are shared without scripts or spectacle. We explore the everyday realities behind businesses, roles and personal journeys, giving life room to breathe. Honest conversation. No theatre. Just people, as they are.



GET INVOLVED

Southport's Journey is growing, and so is the community behind it.

If you have a story to tell, expertise to share, or a perspective that deserves space, we would love to hear from you. We welcome new writers, contributors and local voices who care about this town and want to raise the standard of conversation within it.

Businesses can also advertise alongside trusted, thoughtful content that reaches a loyal and engaged local audience across print and digital.

Whether you are looking to write, partner, collaborate or promote, this is a platform built on connection.

Email hello@southportsjourney.com

Visit www.southportsjourney.com

Let's build it properly.

MEET THE TEAM

Southport's Journey is built by people who care about this town. With each issue, our network of writers, photographers and local experts continues to grow. Every contributor brings lived experience and professional insight, shaping a magazine that reflects Southport with depth and intention. This is more than a publication. It is a connected platform — a collection of perspectives, expertise and stories, brought together each month to raise the standard of local conversation.

Contributors & Credits

Mills Interiors — Creating beautiful, functional spaces with a curated edit of local interior finds.

www.millsinteriors.com

Sarah McEntee — Communications coach helping people use their voice to change the world.

[@comfortably_heard](https://twitter.com/comfortably_heard)

Kate Miles-Roberts — Co-Director at The Clear Thinking Partnership; Vice-Chair, Southport Little Theatre — on clear thinking and calm leadership.

kate@clearthinkinguk.com |

www.clearthinkinguk.com

Cath Reese — Our resident travel writer, sharing stories from smart staycations to worldwide adventures.

cath.reese@travelcounsellors.com

Anna McNally — With over 15 years as a personal trainer, Anna specialises in strength training, pre- & post-natal coaching, and building lasting, science-based results — without the fads.

www.projectphoenixignite.co.uk

ICAN Education — Practical advice, support and helpful hints for parents.

www.icaneducation.co.uk

Chris Lewis - Merseyside Expanding Horizons, The Big Onion, Entrepreneur.

Tim Short - North & South Education CIC, Big Onion Radio Presenter.

Sharon Kemp - Thrive with AI.

Southport Learning Trust, Meols Cop High School.

Lizzie Barnett - Studio Nine Group Ltd www.studionine.uk

Photography Credits

A huge thank you to our STUDIO NINE team for photography and to the extend team that have helped along the way.



Southport's
Journey

Want to be featured, email hello@southportsjourney.com