RABY

Spring 2026

Farming | Forestry | Land Management | Buildings | Leisure & Tourism

RABY
Forestry

Spotlight

Forestry & Estate Maintenance Update

As we enter spring, it is always good to see the days getting longer and the new growth beginning to emerge in the woodlands and across the wider Estate. With the winter behind us, the tree planting season is coming to an end, having been one of the most productive in recent years. Over 40,000 coniferous, broadleaf trees and shrubs have been planted across the Durham and Shropshire Estates, supporting future timber production, biodiversity and conservation projects.

After such a dry summer, rainfall appears to have more than balanced out over the winter and has presented some challenging conditions for works on the land. Timber harvesting has continued over the winter period making 2025-26 another highly productive year across the Durham and Shropshire Plantations. The thinning carried out has significantly improved the remaining crops, particularly the oak, spruce and Douglas fir stands in which the increase in light reaching the forest floor should also promote regeneration and development of the ground flora in the coming years.

As well as planting and timber harvesting, the Forestry Team have been engaged in several maintenance projects over the winter, including upgrading some of the deer fencing on the Park boundary alongside our fencing contractor, Paul Seedhouse.

The winter conditions had also taken their toll on some of the Estates' infrastructure including one of the old footbridges on the Ladywood permitted walk. Due to the width of the Langley beck, a bespoke solution was required to replace the bridge. A mature European larch from the wood was selected for a project and was felled and milled on site into large beams, over 11m in length. Larch is a durable timber, and the slow grown and light branched nature of the trees in Ladywood add to the strength making it ideal for the bridge structure.

Before the timbers could be lifted into place the stone parapets required significant renovation and upgrade. Despite the winter conditions the team were able to rebuild and strengthen the stonework to secure the foundations well into the future. The assembly work went smoothly and the project has been a great piece of teamwork from all the forestry lads, from preparation through to finishing of the paths, utilising the skills and craftsmanship from each member of the team, to produce a finished product that will be well used by walkers for years to come.

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Buildings

Hunt Hall, Forest in Teesdale

Refurbishment and letting

A significant refurbishment project has recently been completed at Hunt Hall, a charming property nestled in the heart of Forest-in-Teesdale. The works have successfully blended modern comfort with the building's existing character, resulting in a thoughtfully upgraded and highly functional home.

The refurbishment included the installation of a new kitchen, designed to provide both practicality and a contemporary feel. Alongside this, the entire property has been redecorated, giving each room a fresh and cohesive appearance. New double-glazed windows have been fitted throughout, improving energy efficiency while enhancing the overall aesthetic.

Internally, the property has benefited from new floor coverings, contributing to a clean and updated finish across all living spaces. Upstairs, a new bathroom has been added, complemented by the introduction of an en-suite, significantly improving convenience and suitability for modern living.

On the ground floor, a new cloakroom toilet has been installed, adding further practicality for residents and visitors alike. In addition, a dedicated plant room has been created to house key systems efficiently, supporting the long-term functionality of the property.

Overall, the refurbishment of Hunt Hall represents a comprehensive upgrade, carefully designed to meet contemporary standards whilst respecting its rural setting. The completed works ensure the property is well-equipped for comfortable living for years to come

Bluebell House, Shropshire

Refurbishment and letting

We are delighted to share an update on the Bluebell House Refurbishment Project, a significant transformation that began in Summer 2025 and is now on track for completion in Spring. Although the programme had unexpected delays the results are something we can all be proud of, Bluebell House is a traditional home now ready for future use. Bluebell House has undergone a major upgrade designed to preserve the character of the property while dramatically improving its long-term energy performance and comfort.

As part of the refurbishment, the previous oil-fired heating system has been replaced with a modern low-carbon solution, including: Air Source Heat Pump, Solar Panels and Battery Storage System. In addition, the property has benefited from substantial fabric improvements, including new insulated walls, improved roof insulation, enhanced floor insulation and underfloor heating throughout.

These works have transformed Bluebell House into a far more efficient, sustainable and comfortable home, while retaining the charm and character that make the property so special. We are especially proud to confirm that Bluebell House has achieved an EPC A Rating. This makes it the first property across both the Shropshire and Durham estates to reach this standard, a major milestone and a fantastic example of what can be achieved through thoughtful retrofit design and investment in sustainable technologies.

This project sets a new benchmark for future refurbishment works across the estates and demonstrates our continued commitment to improving the quality, performance and resilience of our homes.

Projects of this scale and complexity are only possible through the hard work, skill and dedication of the many people involved throughout the process.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all contractors, specialist trades, consultants and site teams who have contributed to the successful delivery of Bluebell House.

RABY
Farming

Spotlight

Farming Update

As we face increasingly turbulent times, it makes us realise just how important UK food production is. We saw the COVID crisis and food supply disruptions, UK agriculture stepped up to that challenge. We then saw the ongoing Ukraine crisis, and the resulting bread wheat and cooking oil shortages, UK produced OSR oil kept the supply chain going. Now, during the Middle East crisis, C02 and biofuel products are being sourced using UK wheat; ironically, the local Teesdale production facility had recently been mothballed, but luckily, it is being reopened. During all three of these major events, Raby proudly kept supplying. We are also proud to support the local livestock sector where we can, with proteins, cereals and fodder beet. A country should be able to feed its population. Farmers always step up to that challenge.

Spring is always a very busy time on the farm. The sheep team are busy lambing the ewes and the Longhorn Cattle are calving, this year we are looking for 'A' names, do share your suggestions.

The arable crops at Raby need particular attention at this time of year. Applications of natural crop stimulants, trace elements and major nutrients are in full swing. One of the main emphases of crop production here is to produce as robust a plant as possible to lessen the reliance on synthetic applications. Typically, in the growing season, we use seaweed extracts, fulvic, humic acids, manganese, magnesium, boron and zinc etc. We are looking at SAP testing this year to complement the soil and tissue testing we already do. Tissue and Sap testing have subtle differences, plant tissue testing measures the total nutrients accumulated and stored in the plant over time, while plant sap testing measures the nutrients currently in transit and available for immediate use.

We are also trialling a biological seed treatment, derived from compost. It will be interesting to see if it stimulates crop growth.

We are very pleased with the performance of the fresh addition to the farm fleet. The Sands sprayer is working well. Stephen soon got to grips with the vast array of technology on board, E taps, GPS, and variable rate ability. It is enabling a greater level of application accuracy of products.

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Land Management

Departmental Update

Biodiveristy Net Gain

In so many industries, there is often a fine balance between the best economic decision and one that delivers for the environment. Biodiversity Net Gain has the potential of delivering on both fronts for Raby and the Estate, which have earmarked two new potential BNG sites on the Estate that will allow us to make the best of strategic locations to as many markets as possible, whilst also best serving nature.

There is always a fine balance between preserving the landscape and character of our land holdings from a historic perspective, maintaining food production and creating better space for nature. We've developed substantial schemes that balance these strands and create a mosaic of different habitats to support the diverse wildlife on the lower portion of the Co. Durham estate. These will include scrub corridors to connect existing woodland habitat, hedgerow creation, species-rich and diverse grassland swards that will continue to be part of the Home farm's livestock enterprise but managed in a less intensive manner, and wetland creation, among others.

Having created our Habitat Management and Monitoring Plans, we are now in the process of working up the necessary legal documents with the Local Authorities to enable us to take the next steps.

The BNG market remains a speculative opportunity for the Estate, but we hope to commence works on the ground next spring, all being well.

In a further update to the Estates existing BNG schemes linked to our housing development sites in Gainford and Staindrop, their growth and progression continues to go very well, something that is continually monitored at regular set intervals.

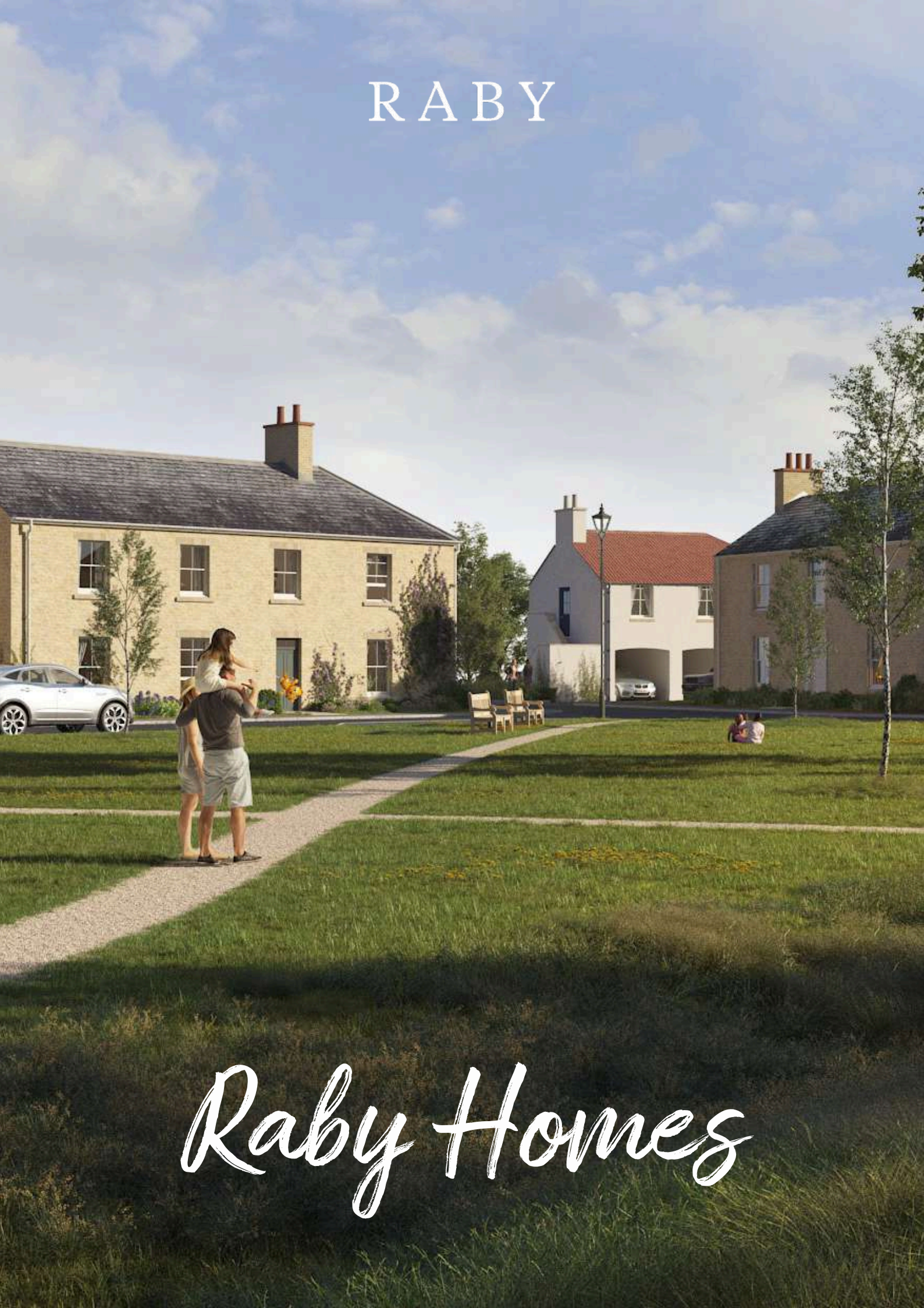
We have this spring concluded the reinstatement of one of those BNG plots at Selaby (pictured) following the installation of a major infrastructure project by Northumbria Water.

Celebrating 100 years of the renowned Dales Botanist

Lord and Lady Barnard hosted dale botanist Dr Margaret Bradshaw's 100th birthday at High Force Hotel in January. Nationally renowned for her work to conserve and protect the upper dale's rare flowers for more than 70 years even releasing her first book about Teesdale at the age of 97. Margaret received a signed birthday card from King Charles and Queen Camilla to celebrate the momentous occasion.

"On behalf of everyone at Raby, we would like to wish Dr Margaret Bradshaw a tremendous 100th birthday. What a magnificent milestone and we hope Margaret enjoyed her special celebration at High Force Hotel too.

"Margaret has achieved many incredible things in her 100 years and we'd like to thank her for being a long-term champion and advocate for Upper Teesdale. It's a truly wonderful part of the country and thanks to Margaret's efforts, the national importance of the flora here has become more widely recognised. Many happy returns Margaret."
Duncan Peake, CEO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Raby Homes

Departmental Update

Raby Breaks Ground on Staindrop Homes

Work has begun on a collection of new high-quality homes in Staindrop at the East Leaze development.

Managed by Raby Homes, the housing scheme will deliver 72 new properties, from one and two-bedroom apartments, single story, to five-bedroom houses and also includes affordable housing.

The area to the west of Grice Court will also see the enhancement of public and open spaces, featuring tree and ornamental planting as well as a wildflower meadow with many of the existing trees and hedges retained.

Duncan Peake, CEO at Raby Estates said: "East Leaze takes its name following research into the history of the area within the archives at Raby Castle, with the earliest surviving map of this location dating from 1732. We thought it a respectful nod to the past to use this name whilst also looking forward to an exciting new chapter in local history.

"New homes in this location will support existing services within Staindrop village and will contribute towards meeting the housing requirements of the county. Over recent decades, we have seen amenities such as shops and pubs lost in many of our villages. New housing will bring economic benefits to Staindrop to help it thrive – supporting schools and local services."

The design for the scheme was created by Ben Pentreath, one of the country's leading architectural practices involved in the design of traditionally inspired new developments. Their work seeks to draw from the best of the past, making places that are timeless and long-lasting, and yet robustly designed for modern life.

Duncan added: "The key characteristics that define the original buildings of Staindrop have been the primary influence behind our housing design, creating a carefully crafted and planned extension to the village with a retained character.

"We've also incorporated a sustainable design that contributes positively to the area's character, identity, heritage significance, townscape and landscape features, helping to create and reinforce locally distinctive and sustainable communities."

The development of the homes will remain in the control of the Raby Estate to ensure design and build quality is maintained throughout. For further information, visit: www.rabyhomes.co.uk

RABY

Leisure & Tourism

Raby Castle in Bloom with new Floral Installation

‘A major lifestyle destination in the North of England is launching a new floral installation known as Castle in Bloom. Launching on Saturday 2nd May for the Bank Holiday weekend and running until the end of August, the installation will see several areas of County Durham’s Raby Castle transform with breathtaking floral arrangements inspired by nature, including contemporary designs by renowned florist Anna Potter from Swallows and Damsons in some of the castle’s most grand rooms.

The Entrance Hall, known for its grandeur, will feature an incredible suspended orb consisting of dried deschampsia grasses, which have been cut from Raby's own Walled Gardens. Starting at floor level, roots and mosses will spill out onto the ground, and wild wispy grasses wind up the stairs.

On the floor above is the Baron’s Hall, which will house a giant suspended sun portal against the backdrop of the three grand windows. Approximately five-feet in diameter, the portal will feature thousands of strings of dried flowers that swirl around the centre point, decreasing in density as they expand away from its centre.

Anna Potter, founder of Swallows and Damsons said: “The Baron’s Hall is located directly above the castle’s Entrance Hall, so our installation has been meticulously designed to mirror the contrast between dark and light, with the orb representing the moon and the portal signifying the sun.

“Our creation downstairs features mosses, grasses and vines with an overall darker and more earthy experience focusing on texture to create a mystical and quietly beautiful scene, yet upstairs will feel more ethereal featuring colour and floral elements.”

Throughout the Baron’s Hall, there will also be mounds of multi-coloured dried flowers at differing heights, where transparent threads of dried flowers will appear to be evaporating upwards towards the vast ceiling space.

Anna added: “The sun portal will create the impression of a bright, swirling vortex of flowers, emanating colour and movement and the organic mounds of flowers will create an impactful and otherworldly scene, playing with scale and proportion.

“The Castle in Bloom installation takes an outdoor landscape and reinvents it inside. By isolating it in such a grand building like Raby Castle, the display will shine a light on the beauty of nature – it will allow visitors to enjoy the unexpected and find a new level of inspiration, creating a sense of connection and awe for the natural world.”

The wider experience at Raby, including its café and destination retail store, will also celebrate this floral theme alongside an exhibition celebrating Raby’s historic passion for plants. The exhibition will feature important individuals such as the celebrated 18th century botanist Lady Anne Monson who grew up at Raby when the walled garden was being developed and the myriad of head gardeners who have innovated and developed the award-winning garden throughout history.

For further information and to book tickets, visit: www.raby.co.uk/events/raby-castle-in-bloom/

Raby Castle launches Retail Collaboration with Garden Trading

Raby Castle, Park and Gardens has announced a collaboration with Garden Trading, a brand synonymous with a beautifully created collection for the home and garden. The Garden Trading residency is in Raby's Conservatory, located within the stunning 18th century Walled Gardens. Following a launch in early March, it will be running until late summer.

Indoor and outdoor furniture, pots, homeware accessories and tableware from the Garden Trading collection are being showcased, alongside some of the latest spring and summer 2026 pieces which are all inspired by modern country living with effortless style. Utilising the Conservatory's stunning views of the castle, a Garden Trading showroom has been created featuring the range of products, moving from a stylised utility, dining room and indoor living space to bistro tables and outdoor living.

Stephanie Goss, retail, buying and merchandising manager at Raby Castle, Park and Gardens said: "This is a collaboration I've been aspiring towards for well over a year and we are incredibly excited to bring this to Raby – I just know the overall ethos of Garden Trading is going to appeal to our visitors.

"The Garden Trading showroom features a carefully curated and personally handpicked selection of the brand's wonderful products. It will be amazing to peruse these against the backdrop of our Walled Gardens, which are full of inspiration.
"We also have a dedicated team, trained by Garden Trading, there during its time with us, who can share helpful insight with our visitors, particularly those who are looking for some extra guidance for those bigger, more considered purchases

To complement this new collaboration, florist, Periwinkle Barn is also situated in the Potting Sheds near to the Conservatory, providing seasonal bouquets and floral workshops.

The Garden Trading residency in the Conservatory is open daily between 11am and 3pm and is free to enter.

RABY

Business Support

The Business Support team has had a busy and rewarding period, organising a range of wellness and engagement events since our last update.

We started the year off with a number of wellness walks that employees and volunteers could come along to outside of work time. We met at 8am and set off for a 5-mile brisk walk taking in the local sights. It was a great way to blow away those January blues.

We were delighted to support the Raby Home Farm team during their staff and volunteer open day. The visit offered colleagues a rare behind-the-scenes look at the estate's working farm, providing insights into daily agricultural practices and ongoing projects.

The event was very well attended, with many staff expressing appreciation for the chance to deepen their understanding of Raby's farming heritage. Attendees also enjoyed delicious refreshments, including freshly prepared beef and pork buns, which were a real highlight of the day.

We were also pleased to welcome Emma from the Durham Dales Health Federation, who delivered two highly informative cancer awareness sessions. The sessions were particularly valuable for colleagues who spend significant time working outdoors.

The discussions were thoughtful and engaging, with colleagues asking insightful questions and showing genuine care for their health and the wellbeing of others. It was encouraging to see so many people come together to learn about early detection, prevention, and the small everyday habits that can help protect long-term health.

Another favourite for the teams at Raby Estates to take part in is the Big Spring Clean which was a fantastic success. The teams time, energy, and teamwork made a real difference. Thanks to everyone involved, we collected an impressive amount of litter and ensured that the footpath and roadside to the Castle are looking their very best as we head into the new season.

It was wonderful to see colleagues from so many departments joined with a shared commitment to caring for our environment. Your enthusiasm helps keep Raby and Staindrop welcoming, clean, and enjoyable for residents, visitors, and families alike.

Celebrating Success

Tommy McManus joins the Raby Buildings Team Full-Time After Completing His Apprenticeship

This spring, we are delighted to celebrate the success of one of our youngest team members, Tommy McManus, whose dedication and commitment over the past two years have led to a proud milestone for both him and the Raby Estate.

Tommy joined Raby at just 16 years old, beginning his journey as a Level 2 Joinery Apprentice through Bishop Auckland College. Balancing classroom learning with practical experience, he spent one day each week at college developing his technical knowledge, while the remaining four days were spent working alongside the skilled craftspeople within our Buildings Team.

Throughout his apprenticeship, Tommy demonstrated enthusiasm, a strong work ethic, and a genuine passion for the craft of joinery. Whether assisting with heritage restoration projects or learning the precision and care required for traditional estate maintenance, he embraced every challenge with maturity beyond his years.

We are incredibly pleased to share that Tommy has successfully passed his Level 2 apprenticeship and are even more delighted to announce that he has now been offered full-time, permanent employment with The Raby Estate Buildings Team.

Michael Bennett, Buildings Manager and mentor to Tommy said:

“Since Tommy joined the team in January 2024 we have done some interesting and challenging projects, including High Force Hotel, multiple property renovations and The Rising project. He has been a great asset to not only the joinery side but the whole team. As Tommy’s manager, I’ve seen him grow into a great team player and gain confidence and skills. I was proud of him completing his level 2 joinery and becoming a permanent member of the growing maintenance team. Apprentices are an invaluable resource to Raby Estates as there is such a variety of skills and knowledge needed. Looking forward to seeing him develop within the team”.

This achievement marks the beginning of a promising career and reflects both Tommy’s determination and the value of hands-on learning opportunities within the estate. His journey is a wonderful example of how apprenticeship pathways can lead to rewarding long-term employment, and we are proud to support the next generation of skilled tradespeople.

Congratulations to Tommy, whose hard work has truly paid off, and we look forward to seeing his continued growth and success as part of the Raby team.

Warm Welcome and Fond Farewells

At Raby, our people are at the heart of everything we do. From the historic grounds of Raby Castle to the sweeping beauty of the wider Estate, our team continues to grow and evolve, bringing together individuals with a shared passion for heritage, nature, and excellence.

The team continues to grow across multiple areas of the business, with several new starters bringing valuable expertise. The garden team is expanding with Yasine Ben Abderrahmane joining as Senior Gardener, alongside Katherine Hutchinson as Gardener, both contributing strong horticultural skills to enhance the Walled Gardens. The extensive programme of seasonal events will be further strengthened by Nicole Williams in her role as Events Executive. Housekeeping operations across Raby Castle, Park and Gardens are being supported by Chloe Reed and Jodie Brennan, helping to ensure all areas are maintained to a high standard for visitors.

Within retail, Ginni Donaghy has joined as Retail Manager at The Coach House Shop, supported by Susan Cummings as Retail Assistant. Helen Asken is leading sales for the new Raby Homes development in Staindrop, while the Vinery Café has welcomed Vilisi Karalo as Vinery Lead Chef, further enhancing the food and hospitality offering.

The team bids a fond farewell to Lyndsey McCabe, Finance Administrator, along with Wendy Watts and Mandy Welland-Taylor from the retail team. We also say goodbye to Douglas McClean, Game Keeper, and Rachel Whitehouse, Chef at the Vinery, thanking them all for their valued contributions and wishing them every success in the future.

RABY

What's coming up

It's time to open the doors on a packed Summer programme across the Raby Estate

Leisure & Tourism

Upcoming Events

The Plotters' Forest Mischievous Rabbit Trail
Raby Castle, Park & Gardens
Daily until Sunday 19th April

The High Force Carrot Patch Trail
High Force Hotel & Waterfall
Daily until Sunday 19th April

Garden Trading in The Conservatory
Raby Castle, Park & Gardens
Open daily | 11am- 3pm

Raby Castle Pleasure Ride
Raby Castle, Park & Gardens
Sunday 19th April

Meet the Makers: FATSO Chocolates
Raby Castle, Park & Gardens
Friday 24th April

Spring Awakening Offer
High Force Hotel & Waterfall
Until Sunday 28th June

Leisure & Tourism

Upcoming Events

Create your own Spring Planter
Raby Castle, Park & Gardens
Saturday 25th April

Guided Bluebell Walks
Raby Castle, Park & Gardens
30th April - 10th May

Raby Through the Lens
Raby Castle, Park & Gardens
First Thursday of every month

Terrarium Workshop
Raby Castle, Park & Gardens
Saturday 16th May

Spring Garden Fair
Raby Castle, Park & Gardens
Saturday 23rd, Sunday 24th and Monday 25th May

The Raby Reset: Blue Moon Ritual
High Force Hotel & Waterfall
Saturday 30th May

Leisure & Tourism

Upcoming Events

Summer Solstice Celebration
Raby Castle, Park & Gardens
Saturday 20th June

Classic Car Show
Raby Castle, Park & Gardens
Sunday 28th June

Dad's Go Free into the Castle
Raby Castle, Park & Gardens
Father's Day Weekend, 20th & 21st June

Open Air Theatre – The Three Inch Fools
Raby Castle, Park & Gardens
Friday 26th June

Adventure Cinema Weekend
Raby Castle, Park & Gardens
10th - 12th July

Harvest Market
Raby Castle, Park & Gardens
29th - 31st August

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