



Last week residents and supporters were invited to a free event in Chopwell, organised by the Northumbria Fashion team, to celebrate the launch of The Regeneration Shop. Photo by Phil Punton.

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## Designers and researchers unite to support community regeneration project

Staff and students from Northumbria University are helping to bring the work of a North East community regeneration project to life.

Those who study, research and teach across the disciplines of design, fashion and occupational therapy at Northumbria have been supporting and evaluating the vision of the [Chopwell Regeneration Group](#), a charity based in the west of Gateshead.

The regeneration group's goal is to nurture a community that works together, helps local people succeed and contributes to a village that thrives through local projects to offer support with volunteering, job creation and skills development.

After transforming the former Lloyds Bank in the village into a café, meeting place and community market in 2022, the regeneration group are now preparing to open their second high street project at the end of March – with a little help from experts at Northumbria.

The Regeneration Shop will bring an empty retail unit back into use and encourage residents in the village and the local area to bring household items – from small electrical goods to clothing – to be repaired by local volunteers. The shop will sell repaired and upcycled second-hand goods, minimising waste that would otherwise go to landfill, and contributing to a more sustainable future.

Last week residents and supporters were invited to a free event in the village, organised by the Northumbria Fashion team, to celebrate the launch of The Regeneration Shop. This was a chance for guests to take a front-row seat at a fashion show created by students from Northumbria's [Fashion Communication BA \(Hons\)](#), [Fashion Design and Marketing BA \(Hons\)](#), [Fashion BA \(Hons\)](#), and [Fashion Design MA](#) degree programmes.

[Assistant Professor Sophie Wetherell](#), Programme Leader for Fashion Design MA (Sustainable and Ethical), said: "Last week's event at Chopwell was a fantastic team effort between Chopwell Regeneration Group and Northumbria's Fashion staff and students. Launching the event, with a focus on local community and sustainable clothing, was such an exciting opportunity and we look forward to continuing this work through The Regeneration Shop. The students did a fantastic job in helping to plan and deliver the event, creating such a positive atmosphere and bringing joy to the evening.

"This initiative also aligns with [current research into sustainable fashion practices in the School of Design](#) funded by a UK Research and Innovation grant examining the promotion of assessment and circular transparency in fashion, headed up by Dr Alana James, as clothing repair and resale are a critical solution at the local level."

The catwalk showcased a range of affordable, pre-loved clothing, curated and modelled by the students and young people from Chopwell. This included 120 clothing items and accessories sourced and donated by the University which were available for sale on the night and will be available to buy from the shop when it opens. Students were also on hand to repair any damaged clothes for resale, and to demonstrate repair techniques that the shop will continue to use.

[Professor Anne Peirson-Smith](#), Head of Fashion at Northumbria University, said: "The Regeneration Shop in Chopwell offers a huge opportunity for the local community to access an informal learning and support space to upskill and implement positive environmental transformation at local level by repairing and recycling garments and other household items.

"Fashion students at undergraduate and postgraduate level from Northumbria, supported by staff, have gained invaluable real-world experience through this opportunity to apply the skills they've been taught by managing this launch event in the form of a pre-loved fashion show and repair workshop. This inspirational collaborative effort proves that a community can contribute to a local circular economy and engage in a practical way by minimising waste and turning a disposable culture into a positive approach to social change based on communal action."

[Dr Ollie Hemstock](#), an Assistant Professor from [Northumbria School of Design](#), specialises in research on how design and repair concepts can support community regeneration. While helping to run pop-up repair cafés in the west of Gateshead, Dr Hemstock met members of the Chopwell Regeneration Group and heard of the plan to open The Regeneration Shop in the village.

He explained: "I believe it is essential that we, as designers and researchers, work with local communities to enable, amplify and celebrate grassroots leadership in responsible consumption and circular economy. Collaborating with the Chopwell Regeneration Group is a fantastic opportunity for staff and students as issues of waste and repair cut across all disciplines of design.

"My background is in architecture and I teach into the [Interior Design BA \(Hons\)](#) programme, so I was very happy to work with The Regeneration Shop's team to survey the existing site and design the interior layout of the shop, thinking carefully about how to make the most of the space. I am

excited for the shop to open, where I – and other colleagues from the School of Design – will continue to contribute to an ongoing programme of community-based, creative repair activities.”

Opportunities to work with the regeneration group on research and knowledge exchange activities have continued through [Dr Tracy Collins](#) and [Dr Helen Atkin](#), from the University’s Health and Life Sciences Faculty. They have been looking at and will be exploring the health and wellbeing impacts of the work happening within the local community, including The Regeneration Shop.

Dr Collins explained: “Some of the conversations with volunteers and people that use the facilities in the village have fed into the development and the use of the space, as well as the accessibility of the built and social environment for people with a range of needs.

“We have an [Occupational Therapy MSc](#) student about to go out on our first practice placement in Chopwell and an Occupational Therapy MSc student research project which aims to evaluate some of the activities that take place in the community, including the impact on health and wellbeing.”

Chopwell Regeneration Group’s interim Chair of Trustees, John Coburn explained: “We are excited to be bringing another space in Chopwell into use to serve the people who live here. This initiative has been made possible through close collaboration and funding from members of the local community and partners from across the region.

“The trustees of Chopwell Regeneration Group all live and work in the village and are dedicated to creating projects that are wanted and needed most by the people who live here. The Bank, our first major project, was the result of a community consultation and is thriving. In September 2023, we ran a village-wide consultation to discuss opportunities for our next big project. When votes were counted, 92 per cent were in favour of The Regeneration Shop, which will offer three services - affordable repairs to textiles, household items and small electrical appliances, the skills development of residents to repair things themselves, and the recycling, reuse and sale of repaired goods to contribute to the shop’s sustainability.”

The Regeneration Shop will officially open on Saturday 30 March from 9am until 4pm.



## ENDS

**Photo captions:** All images, except image 5, should be credited to Phil Punton. Further images available on request.

Image 1 – Left to right: Sarah Cotton, Senior Programmes Manager at Chopwell Regeneration Group; Jennine Wilson, Lecturer in Fashion and Senior Technician at Northumbria University; Hal Convery, Shop Manager at The Regeneration Shop; Crystal Hicks, Executive Director of Chopwell Regeneration Group; Gayle Cantrell, Assistant Professor BA Fashion Communication at Northumbria University; Sophie Wetherell, Assistant Professor BA Fashion / MA Fashion Design at Northumbria University; Emma Jane Goldsmith Assistant Professor BA Fashion / MA Fashion Design at Northumbria University; Professor Anne Peirson-Smith, Head of Fashion at Northumbria University.

Image 2 – Left to right: Crystal Hicks, Executive Director of Chopwell Regeneration Group; Sophie Wetherell, Assistant Professor BA Fashion / MA Fashion Design at Northumbria University; Professor Anne Peirson-Smith, Head of Fashion at Northumbria University; Gayle Cantrell, Assistant Professor BA Hons Fashion Communication at Northumbria University.

Image 3 - Northumbria student Helen Gilroy takes to the event catwalk.

Image 4 - Northumbria student Pippy Harper helped to showcase some of the affordable, pre-loved clothing on offer.

Image 5 – Dr Ollie Hemstock at one of the pop-up repair cafés.

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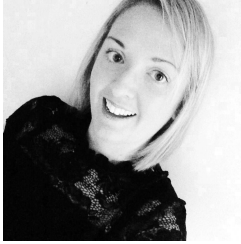


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