

# LANCASHIRE **BUSINESS** VIEW

## OPENING FOR THE COUNTY

ANDREW FLINTOFF'S RED ROSE ROLE

Exclusive interview on page 29

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# BOWLING THEM OVER

by Ged Henderson



Preston-born sporting icon Andrew Flintoff, known affectionately by the nation as 'Freddie', is heading out to the middle for Lancashire once more. And he can't wait to get slogging for the county. Full interview next page.



**“It’s bizarre. People listen to me now. They never listened when I was a player!”**

**Andrew Flintoff speaks with pride about his appointment as the first Lancashire Ambassador, and the task of raising the profile of his home county across the UK and overseas.**

It’s the second recent high-profile appointment for the England Ashes hero, who has also been unveiled as the new co-presenter of BBC Television’s iconic Top Gear.

And he’s set to take on both jobs with all the enthusiasm he displayed out on the cricket pitch for his country and his native Red Rose county.

When it comes to Lancashire ‘Freddie’ can’t wait to get started in his new opening role. “It’s time to start spreading the word about what we do here,” he declares.

The 40-year-old, who grew up in the Ribblesdale area of his home city, retired

from professional cricket in 2010 and has gone on to carve out strong careers in broadcasting and business.

In many ways he is already a champion for Lancashire. Millions of viewers of TV shows such as A League of their Own and the Australian version of I’m A Celebrity, which he won, already know he’s proud to be from Preston.

And he sees his ambassador status, working with Marketing Lancashire, as a chance to give something back to the county which he says: “Has given me so much over the years.”

Andrew, who was unveiled in the role at a gathering of business leaders at Samlesbury Hall, is also clear on how he will look to tackle the job and what the key messages should be in selling the Lancashire story.

When it comes to attracting inward

investment, he says Lancashire has a strong offering. However, he adds: “It is about promoting what we have and that for me is the bigger job. We have got to look after our own.”

He goes on: “Lancashire is a sleeping giant in some ways and it has got so much to offer and for me it is the people. They are what make the place; they are its best assets.”

He was first approached about the role while attending MIPIM, the world’s leading gathering of property professionals.

The property business he runs with a cousin and one of his friends is involved in a number of projects, including plans to build almost 400 apartments in the Castlefield area of Manchester. If it went ahead it would be one of the tallest developments in the city.

Andrew, whose father Colin worked at BAE

Systems in Samlesbury, is enjoying learning about the business world and this new career in property development.

He points out that his life as a professional cricketer came to an end when he was in his early 30s. "You've got your whole life ahead and you realise that your next career will be a longer one."

He adds: "I stumbled into the media and TV; it was never really the plan, though I enjoy it."

"In business, I'm not going to lie, I am still learning. The last three to four years have been a real learning curve, though I am enjoying that to be honest."

"The nice thing about being in property is that you end up seeing the fruits of your labour. You can drive past it and it is a nice feeling."

Andrew says he would love to be involved in a project in Preston. He very nearly was. Back in 2016 he approached the council with an idea to turn the old post office in the city centre into a four-star hotel.

He was eventually stumped, with the project later being taken forward by Liverpool-based Signature Hotels, which is set to open its Shankly Hotel next year.

Andrew says: "I did a lot of work on it and I was really disappointed. I went to the council with my idea and it would have been a working hotel now. But someone is in there now and that is the main thing."

He says he is still looking for development opportunities in Lancashire, pointing out his partners are also "Preston lads".

Away from his own business interests he is on the board at Old Trafford, looking to do what he can to ensure success for Lancashire cricket. "It's something I never expected and it is bizarre," he says.

"People listen to me now. They never listened when I was a player!"

Cricket is still his passion. Andrew, who went to school at Ribbleson Hall High, where he was a talented chess player and gained nine GCSEs, says: "All I ever wanted to do was play cricket. I played at Fulwood and moved to Lancashire aged nine."

"To be a cricketer, I thought you had to go Oxford or Cambridge. When I was 15 and got my first pay packet, I realised you didn't."

He recalls growing up in Lancashire with affection. The Pleasure Beach was where he took his now wife on their first date.

"I'm a big fan of the Pleasure Beach, he adds. "I was there recently for my daughter's birthday. We had to buy some ponchos, it was chucking it down!"

He's lived in Dubai and in Surrey, but the North West is where he feels most comfortable. His parents still live in Preston and he says: "When I come off the motorway at the Tickled Trout I do feel at home."

Back to cricket and he recalls the pleasure of playing this summer with his sons.

"My problem is I still want to be out there doing it for Lancashire and for England and I think I'm always going to be like that."

"I dream about cricket, it's strange. I wake up some mornings and think 'am I a cricketer?' And then there is the disappointment of thinking, 'no you're not'."

However, he adds: "I've got the business, the media work and the cricket role, and more importantly the family. I'm in a good place."



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## DRIVING POSITIVE WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH

**It's a subject widely discussed – the now famous Stevenson/Farmer report Thriving at Work finding 15 per cent of employees have displayed at least one symptom of a mental health condition, the wide-ranging effect of mental ill health is clear to see. But, as an employer, how do you help your employees care for themselves?**

The same report offered some help, making recommendations for employers in how to drive good mental wellbeing in the workplace.

These are:

- developing and communicating a mental health at work plan
- building awareness of mental health among employees
- encouraging open conversations about mental health and the support available
- ensuring employees have a healthy work/life balance and opportunities for development
- promoting effective people management

### What employers can do

With signposting to early intervention key in reducing the impact of a mental health issue, many employers can utilise the services they have available to employees in the form of employee assistance programmes – either standalone, via group risk products or group healthcare.

### Needs must

Organisations need to take the issue of mental wellbeing seriously. They should invest in training for staff and help affected employees find assistance through both employee benefit and state solutions. Communication is key – first, employees should feel comfortable and supported discussing mental health concerns, and secondly, they must know where and how to pursue suitable help.

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Andrew at the Ambassadors' launch at Samlesbury Hall, with (left to right) county coun Michael Green, Rachel McQueen of Marketing Lancashire and Tony Attard, who chairs the organisation