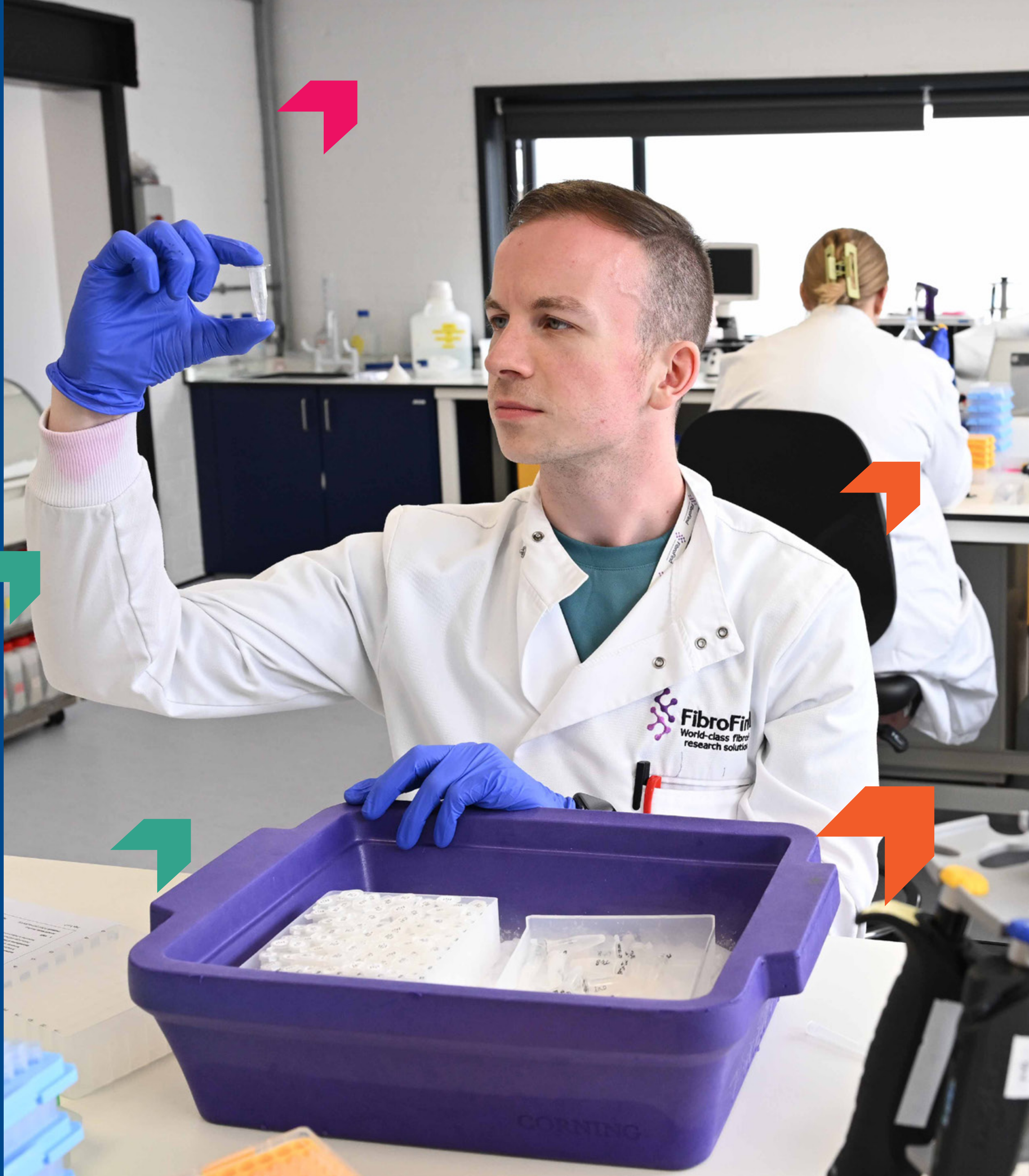


Unlocking Laboratory Space for
the North East Life Sciences Sector

Case study
FibroFind



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To support the continued growth of the health and life sciences sector in the North East Combined Authority area, and to meet the ongoing demand for more laboratory and office space in the region, a feasibility study was commissioned by Invest Newcastle and Invest North East England to explore how existing buildings in Newcastle upon Tyne and the wider area could be converted and adapted into new laboratory space.

Developed by Ryder Architecture, Monstalab, Naylor's Gavin Black and Dome, it shows the potential for over 40 sites across the region to become state-of-the-art laboratory, write up, office and meeting spaces.

The following case study looks at pioneering life sciences start-up FibroFind Ltd - a Newcastle University spin-out specialising in advanced human tissue models for fibrosis research and drug development.



Company background

Established in 2018 by four original founders Jelena Mann, Lee Borthwick, Derek Mann & Fiona Oakley, Newcastle-based FibroFind Ltd provides pharmaceutical and biotech partners with clinically relevant ex vivo platforms that offer a more accurate prediction of human response than conventional animal or cell-based systems. Spun out from Newcastle University, the CRO (Contract Research Organisation) specialises in advanced human tissue models for fibrosis research and drug development. Its technology supports more ethical, efficient, and translatable preclinical testing across multiple organs and disease areas.

The Challenge

Initially based within Newcastle University’s laboratories, an increase in commercial demand, and the growing complexity of client projects, led FibroFind to seek out a new facility in Newcastle upon Tyne – one that provided greater autonomy, expanded infrastructure, and a space designed specifically for scalable, regulated operations.

When the company began its property search, FibroFind’s directors found locating an appropriate lab space for the scaling life sciences business quite challenging, as Lee Reed, FibroFind’s Chief Compliance Officer, explains.

“Purpose-built spaces like The Biosphere, although well-equipped, were cost-prohibitive and would still have required further fit-out to suit our workflows. We viewed several properties that were not fit for purpose without extensive modifications. The process was more time-consuming than anticipated, and a more coordinated support offering for growing biotech companies would have been extremely helpful.”





The Solution

FibroFind visited a facility at Baker’s Yard in Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne. The 7,500 sq ft space provided exactly what the company needed, including room to expand headcount, the opportunity to increase equipment capacity, and the ability to introduce new capabilities without disruption.

“With over 7,500 sq ft of customised laboratory and office space, we now have full control over our infrastructure, allowing us to align our operations precisely with the needs of our clients and internal teams,” said Lee. “The site was designed with growth in mind. It has enabled us to strengthen compliance systems, streamline operations, and enhance cross-functional collaboration – which are all critical as we continue to scale.”

Several factors contributed to FibroFind’s smooth transition to its new laboratory and workspace - one of which was appointing subcontractors that were experienced, reliable, and could deliver high-quality work on schedule. “Key to the project’s success was a talented group of individuals and partners, including JWL interiors, Scientific Lab Supplies, Sanber, Potentia and Adderstone Group - who shared our vision and made it possible.”

Lee also had direct experience of managing laboratory moves - both in Istanbul and within Newcastle University - allowing the company to plan effectively, control costs, and avoid common pitfalls. Lee continued: “Most importantly, we had a clear understanding of our scientific workflows and regulatory requirements from the outset. This enabled us to design a space that is not only compliant but also highly efficient and adaptable.

“If we were to go through the process again, I think we would be more cautious in our assumptions, particularly regarding utilities, lead times, and specialised installations. For instance, elements like data connectivity, electrical upgrades, and lab-specific fittings took longer and required more coordination than initially expected. In future, we would pressure test these assumptions earlier and build in more contingencies for infrastructure.”

“My advice for anyone going through a similar project is plan for flexibility. Your needs will evolve quickly, so ensure your space can adapt - whether through modular lab designs, scalable utilities, or multipurpose work areas. This will make future growth far less disruptive. Also, take the time to understand the full regulatory and infrastructure landscape early on. Requirements around CDM (Construction (Design and Management) Regulations), HSE (Health, Safety, and Environment), and other compliance frameworks can cause significant delays if not fully accounted for from the start.”



For FibroFind, the most rewarding outcome has been the creation of a purpose-built facility that aligns fully with its operational and strategic goals.

The Future

With its core team, infrastructure, and client base firmly in place, FibroFind is now beginning another period of growth - with a focus on scaling service capacity and the breadth of applications for its human tissue platform. The company is actively expanding into adjacent sectors and growing its presence in the region’s thriving life sciences sector.

“The North East offers an excellent blend of strategic and practical advantages for scaling life sciences companies,” said Lee. “It provides access to top-tier academic institutions such as Newcastle University, along with strong NHS partnerships that facilitate translational research and clinical access. From a commercial standpoint, the cost-efficiency of operating in the region - whether in terms of property, hiring, or overhead - gives early-stage companies more headroom to grow sustainably. While infrastructure for scaling biotech companies still has room to mature, the local ecosystem is collaborative, ambitious, and increasingly well-connected.

“The experience has reinforced our belief in what we are building. The journey has been a significant undertaking, but it has positioned us for long-term success, and we look ahead with real optimism.”

Key facts

Name of company	FibroFind
Number of staff	21
Location	Unit 26-27, The Pantry Bakers Yard, Christon Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE3 1XD
Duration of project	8 months
Project team (contractors)	Adderstone Group, Scientific Lab Supplies, JWL Interiors, Sanber and Potentia
Main lesson/challenge	Purpose-built spaces, although well-equipped, can be cost-prohibitive and require further fit-out to suit workflows. Many properties can also require extensive modifications. The process was more time-consuming than anticipated, and a more coordinated support offering for growing biotech companies would have been extremely helpful.
Main benefit to ‘doing it yourself’	The ability to design with growth in mind, and create a purpose-built facility that aligns fully with operational and strategic goals.