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Issue 208 - North Down BT18 • BT19 • BT20 • BT21

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Back row (L-R): Claire Edgar (Solicitor specialising in Family Law), Sheila Simons (former Social Worker from Safeguarding Division), Claire McCollum (BBC presenter and event facilitator), Emalyn Turkington (CEO of North Down & Ards Women's Aid). Front row (L-R): Gillian Robinson (local representative), Mayor Alistair Cathcart and Lindsay Fisher (Head of PSNI's Public Protection Branch). Image: Ian Pedlow

## CHANGE FUND LAUNCHED TO HELP END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Following the Northern Ireland Executive's launch of a strategic framework for Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG), Ards and North Down Borough Council launched the Change Fund during a recent EVAWG panel discussion that was held at Clandeboyne Lodge.

The NI Executive's framework outlines a seven-year strategy to address the entire range of gender-based violence, abuse and harm which is disproportionately experienced by women and girls, and which is rooted in gender inequality. As part of this framework, Ards and North Down Borough Council, together with other councils across Northern Ireland, is delivering the Change Fund - a grants programme for community and voluntary organisations.

The Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Alistair Cathcart, said: "The EVAWG panel discussion provided the ideal opportunity to launch the Change Fund in Ards and North Down. Over 100 people attended the event, including councillors, statutory representatives, plus a range of community and voluntary organisations and interested individuals."

**Continued on page 4**

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## Ward Park Plans in motion this Spring!

Ards and North Down Borough Council is undertaking two substantial projects in Ward Park; a large, modern play park near the tennis courts and car park, and a new Dementia Friendly Sensory Garden beside the library.

The Council has secured £231,000 in funding from the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government as part of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to deliver the new, improved play park and Dementia Friendly Sensory Garden, with additional funding coming from Council's existing Play Park Refurbishment budget. Work has already started on the new play park with both projects to be delivered by the end of March this year.

Ward Park is also set to benefit from a £5.5 million Environmental Improvement Scheme due to commence this Autumn. A public information session was held in April 2024, and residents are kept regularly updated on the scheme through the Ward Park Residents Association and

the Council's Engagement platform (<https://ards-northdown.govocal.com>).

As part of these environmental improvement works, the ponds have already been desilted. The remaining work to improve paths and bridges, upgrade lighting and furniture, strengthen pond walls, and replace animal enclosures is planned to begin in Autumn, after the Summer 2025 events programme has ended.

The new play park and Dementia Friendly Sensory Garden projects are outside the scope of the Environmental Improvement Scheme, but both are welcome additions to this cherished green sanctuary in the heart of Bangor, enjoyed by the entire community.

For more information, visit [www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/wardpark](http://www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/wardpark)

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# ECO VOLUNTEERS CELEBRATED AT LIVE HERE LOVE HERE AWARDS

Live Here Love Here, a people-powered campaign dedicated to improving the local environment and fostering civic pride, has revealed the winners of its 2025 Community Awards.

The event, held at Belfast City Hall recently and hosted by TV presenter Joe Mahon, brought together over 150 guests - including DAERA Minister Andrew Muir, local leaders, environmental advocates and volunteers - to honour the outstanding contributions of voluntary community groups across Northern Ireland working to improve the environment and promote civic pride.

Sponsored by Power NI and supported by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), nine local councils, and the Housing Executive, the awards serve as a vital platform for recognising the power of collective action in tackling community environmental challenges such as dog fouling, littering, biodiversity loss, transformation of neglected spaces, and environmental education.

On the night, 12 awards were presented to celebrate the achievements of local community groups, including the Regional Champions Awards, which honoured volunteers from Live Here Love Here's nine partner council areas. Donaghadee Community



Development Association received Ards and North Down Borough Council's Regional Champions Award for their work with 150 volunteers to enhance the town through environmental initiatives and advocacy for local improvements, including floral displays, a community orchard, and coastal conservation. Groomsport Village Association was also recognised in this category as runners-up for its efforts in maintaining the village's beauty through litter picks, "In Bloom" initiatives, and projects like a fairy garden that supports biodiversity while fostering community spirit.

The Lasting Contribution Award, supported by DAERA, was presented to Copeland Bird Observatory for their enduring commitment to environmental sustainability and community improvement spanning more than 6 decades. Since 1954, the observatory has been dedicated to bird conservation, research, and community engagement, particularly on the Copeland Islands, making a lasting impact on local biodiversity. While, the Community Together Award, supported by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, was presented to Hollywood

Shared Town for their work supporting smaller groups and leading initiatives that build a cohesive and inclusive community, focusing on environmental improvements and social spaces for Hollywood residents. Runner-up, Comber Regeneration Community Partnerships (CRCP), was also recognised for transforming the town with initiatives like creating a community garden and fostering pride and responsibility among residents.

For more information on the Live Here Love Here campaign and the Community Awards, visit [liveherelovehere.org](http://liveherelovehere.org).

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**Continued from  
page 1**

The discussion explored the key issues involved in EVAWG and highlighted how serious the problem is.

"Violence against women and girls is an issue that can be hidden in plain sight, and it affects the lives of women and girls whether they live, learn and work. The Change Fund will help our community to collectively address these issues and deliver change by enabling community and voluntary organisations of all shapes and sizes to

play their part in ending violence against women and girls. It encourages local organisations and groups to seek funding for projects that will raise awareness and focus on the prevention of this violence. I look forward to seeing many new projects and interventions taking place with support from the Fund."

Applications are open and must be submitted by 4pm on Thursday 3 April. More details, including application forms and guidance notes, are available from [www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/evawg](http://www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/evawg).

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# FLEADH CHEOIL COULD BE A MASSIVE BOON FOR ARDS AND NORTH DOWN.

**Alliance Representatives Andrew Muir MLA, Connie Egan MLA and Cllr Gillian McCollum have praised Ards Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (Ards CCÉ) on its successful joint bid alongside Belfast City Council to host the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in 2026.**

The Fleadh is the largest Irish music festival in the world and is expected to attract hundreds of thousands of visitors to Belfast, returning millions to the economy.

The Fleadh Cheoil will be held in Northern Ireland for only the second time as the festival celebrates its 75th Anniversary, whilst Ards Comhaltas will be marking its 50th year.

"Ards CCÉ is absolutely thrilled and honoured to bring the Fleadh to Belfast next year, and hopefully, in 2027 as well," said Niall McClean, Chair of Ards CCÉ.

"We cannot wait to see the streets filled with music, song and dance, and there will be plenty of opportunities for Hollywood, Bangor and Newtownards to take advantage of. We want to make sure that Ards and North Down, as our home, has a part to play in the festivities and the whole community shares in our

love of traditional music." Connie Egan, North Down MLA, praised Ards Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann for its success.

"It is an amazing achievement, and I am delighted that the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann will be coming to Belfast.

"Huge congratulations are due to Ards CCÉ for all the work that went into this joint bid with Belfast City Council. The Fleadh will bring hundreds of thousands of people to Northern Ireland next year and will be a big boost for tourism, benefiting local businesses and people. I personally cannot wait to see the city alive with traditional music and culture."

Fellow North Down MLA Andrew Muir also offered his congratulations.

"The bid comes at the end of a long process over several years and a lot of work put in by both Ards CCÉ and Belfast City

Council, and I am over the moon that it has all paid off.

"With the seventy-fifth anniversary of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann coinciding with Ards Comhaltas' fiftieth anniversary, it is shaping up to be a very special year. In Northern Ireland, we have such a rich culture to offer visitors, and I am pleased that the organisers are engaging across the spectrum of our shared society."

Hollywood & Clondeboyne Councillor Gillian McCollum spoke about the opportunities for Ards and North Down.

"This is such exciting news for Ards CCÉ, greater Belfast and the rest of Northern Ireland. We are going to see a huge number of performers, competitors and tourists flock to the city, all of whom will be eager to see what we have to offer in terms of culture, entertainment and



hospitality.

"Ahead of the festival, we should be exploring how Ards and North Down can take advantage of the economic and social

opportunities. It is great that Belfast City Council is already engaging and we should be looking at possible fringe venues for the Fleadh and how we can

encourage people to stay in the Borough, before, during and after the festivities. This could be a massive boon for Ards and North Down."

## TASTE AND FOOD HEROES AWARDS

**Local food and drinks producers have been recognised at the fourth annual TASTE AND Food Heroes Awards, hosted by Ards and North Down Borough Council at Bangor Castle.**

The event, recognising the local industry's achievements during 2024, saw a wide range of producers from across the Borough celebrate their successes alongside guests, including representation from the renowned Blas na hÉireann awards.

2024 was an extremely successful year for the Borough's food and drink sector with a range of regional, national and international awards received by local producers, restaurants and independent food retailers. Ards and North

Down currently ranks third among Northern Ireland's local authorities for the number of awards won by our talented producers and second for awards won by hospitality and restaurant businesses.

This 2024 edition of the Taste AND Food Heroes Awards celebrated 15 producer winners, two retailers and 13 restaurant winners, who secured a total of 105 awards across a range of national and international standards from the most globally reputable

competitions. In addition, our first award winner celebrated an MBE for services to the food and drink industry.

The two main awards on the night were presented to Bryan Boggs from Clondeboyne Estate Yoghurt who won the Local Food Champion award and Robbie Neill from Stonebridge Farm who secured the prestigious Lady Dufferin Producer of the Year award, judged by the Clondeboyne Estate.

The Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor



**Mayor Alistair Cathcart presents the Lady Dufferin Award to Robbie Neill of Stonebridge Farm**

Alistair Cathcart, said: "These awards are a celebration of what has been a very successful year for our food and drink sector. Our Borough boasts an increasingly strong and impressive sector that continue to do us very

proud and the Taste AND Food Heroes Awards show that innovation, tenacity, and resilience are the hallmarks of our local food and drink producers."

For more information, go to [visitardsandnorthdown.com](http://visitardsandnorthdown.com).

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NEWTOWNARDS

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## NEWTOWNARDS

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**PLANET BINGO**

WEDNESDAY + SATURDAY NIGHTS

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WIN UP TO **£2770** PRIZE MONEY

**£1195** IN HOUSE PRIZE MONEY

# CONSTRUCTION ON £5.6M NEWTOWNARDS TO BANGOR GREENWAY UNDERWAY

Infrastructure Minister Liz Kimmins has marked the start of construction on the new £5.6m Newtownards to Bangor Greenway.

This project is funded by the Department for Infrastructure in conjunction with the Department for Transport (DfT) through the

Levelling Up Fund (LUF) and Ards and North Down Borough Council.

The 5.4km long greenway utilises much of the old railway track and will run between Floodgates, Newtownards and Green Road, Bangor. It includes up to four-metre-wide paths for walking and cycling with accompanying railings, fencing, lighting and planting.

Attending the commencement of construction Infrastructure Minister Liz Kimmins said: "I am delighted that my Department could contribute £2.8m to deliver this greenway project between Bangor and Newtownards and it is great to be here today to see work on the ground underway."

"Active travel is a key element in addressing climate change and creating cleaner and greener spaces that are open to everyone. By investing in greenways and other high quality active travel infrastructure we are giving people more options to think about how

they travel and helping them embrace healthier lifestyles.

"This greenway will benefit both the local community and visitors to the area and will complement plans for further development opportunities in Ards and North Down, including opportunities that will arise through my Department's Active Travel Delivery Plan, which is currently out for consultation. Once completed this greenway will provide a safe alternative route for those who choose to leave the car at home and use it to travel to work or to study, to shop, to visit family and friends or simply just for leisure."

"By making small changes such as choosing to walk, wheel or cycle we can all make a big difference in beating congestion, reducing our carbon footprint, and improving our physical and mental wellbeing."

"This project is a fine example of the value of Government

bodies working together to deliver for local communities."

The scheme will utilise the former railway track and will be completed in two stages. Stage one has now commenced between Belvedere Road, Newtownards and Whitespots Country Park.

Stage 2 will be between Whitespots and Green Road, Bangor, passing Ark Open Farm, mostly following the former railway line in a north easterly direction towards Green Road, Bangor where it will link with the existing shared path along Green Road.

Minister Kimmins was joined by other funders, Ards and North Down's Mayor Councillor Alastair Cathcart and representatives from UK Government.

Mayor Cathcart said: "It is fantastic to see work progressing 'on the ground' on this new greenway. The 5.4km route will help to better connect the town of Newtownards with the city of Bangor by providing a new



DfI Minister Liz Kimmins joins Ards and North Down Mayor Cllr Alastair Cathcart as construction work on the Ards North Down Greenway gets underway

safe path for those who want to walk, wheel or cycle. We expect it to be popular with leisure users, including those wanting to undertake exercise or to access Whitespots Country Park/Ark Farm, as well as those who are commuting to work or a place of study such as the South East Regional College campus in Ards. We are immensely grateful to our funders for their financial and technical

support and to our contractors Charles Brand for their enthusiastic and innovative approach to delivering this exciting green infrastructure project."

DfT Local Transport Minister Simon Lightwood said: "I'm pleased to see construction begin on this greenway, which will make walking and cycling between Newtownards and Bangor easier, safer,

and more accessible than ever before."

"We know investment in active travel helps people live happier and healthier lives. This is why we are funding Ards and North Down Borough Council £3.2m through the Levelling up Fund - £2.3m of which is going to support this important project."

The project is expected to take around 12 months to complete.

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## Commemorative Events to Mark 80th Anniversary of VE Day

Ards and North Down Borough Council has announced several commemorative events and activities to mark the 80th anniversary of VE Day.

They will take place over 8-9 May, with beacon lightings in Bangor, Newtownards and Ballyhalbert coinciding with the national commemoration, together with the raising of unique VE Day 80 flags, and a performance by the Band of the Royal Irish outside Bangor Castle.

Thursday 8 May will mark 80 years since VE Day, the official end of the Second World War in Europe. Commemorations will begin when two unique VE Day 80 flags will be raised at 9am, with one outside Bangor Castle and the other at Conway Square, Newtownards.

In the evening, at approximately 9.30pm, beacons will be lit outside Bangor Castle, at Newtownards' Conway Square and at Ballyhalbert's Burr Point. Beacons symbolise the light and hope that emerged from the darkness of war. Commemorations will conclude on Friday 9 May when the Band of the Royal Irish will hold a VE Day 80 performance outside Bangor Castle.

The Council would like to encourage community groups, voluntary groups and schools to get involved.

A small grant scheme will operate with up to £1000 available for

constituted community and voluntary groups. The scheme opens for applications on Monday 10 March and will close on Monday 24 March.

Non-constituted community and voluntary groups will be able to avail of celebration packs on a first come, first served basis, while North Down Museum will host several events including WWII themed Little Historians workshops (23-25 April), a VE Recollections Exhibition (6 May - 3 August), a VE Day talk (8 May), and a VE Day Living History Family Day with Valhalla Theatre Group (11 May).

The Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Alistair Cathcart, said:

"Millions of people lost their lives during the Second World War. It brought huge suffering to people across the world so it is important to commemorate this occasion. We must remember those that fought for our country and secured our freedom. They gave up so much for the benefit of society and we must thank everyone that played their part in bringing the war to an end. Without them, we may not be living in what is the largely peaceful and democratic society that we have today."

For more information, visit [www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/veday80](http://www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/veday80).

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# Muir marks NI’s First Repair Week at Bangor Mini Repair Café.

North Down Alliance MLA Andrew Muir has attended the Mini Repair Café at Remakery Studio in Bangor as part of Northern Ireland’s first Repair Week.

During the event, the North Down MLA was pleased to have a lamp repaired by one of the volunteers.

Northern Ireland is the first region in the UK to host Repair Week, which was led by Northern Ireland Resources Network and funded by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs through the Carrier Bag Levy.

“It was brilliant to get to the Mini Repair Café, where I was able to get my lamp repaired and given a new lease on life. The work that Remakery and Bangor Repair Café do is so valuable, saving countless household items from landfill and helping to promote a more circular economy,” said Andrew Muir MLA.

“We can all do more to reuse and repair, which will help reduce waste for the benefit of all of us and our environment. If your much-loved item needs some care and



Andrew Muir MLA and Ron Ballard with the fixed lamp at the Mini Repair Café.

attention, I would highly recommend attending one of Bangor’s monthly Repair Cafés and Remakery has a great selection of preloved and upcycled furniture to brighten your home.”

Speaking about

Northern Ireland’s first Repair Week, Andrew Muir added:

“Our first Repair Week has been a huge success, and it was great to see Northern Ireland taking forward this campaign to promote the importance of repair.

It is also encouraging to see repair activities and events taking place across our communities, bringing people together in a positive environment, to learn new skills and take inspiration from each other.”

## County Down author Kate launches her first pony book for children!

County Down horsewoman turned author Kate Russell has launched her first equestrian themed children’s book.

Kate, a well known figure in the NI world of equestrianism and equine therapy has published ‘Peanut gets his sparkle back’.

Kate says: “I have always wanted to write a children’s book from an early age. I have stories whirling in my head and usually inspired by the ponies dogs and cat. My friend had two young boys who would listen to my stories – they encouraged me to write a book and what’s more - asked if they could be in it!

Working with children and the ponies through equine facilitated learning I could see the very real benefits of the interaction with the different pony personalities.”

The book is based on the main characters Peanut an 8hh Falabella cross pony and Tobi a 27 yr old rescue pony. In real life this odd couple have struck a very strong friendship and became pretty much inseparable! Peanut is young, curious and cute and everyone who meets him falls in love with him. Tobi is older, a little bit stiff but calm with the kindest nature. They are both very much loved for being themselves! In real life Tobi & Peanut are also fully qualified therapy ponies who like nothing better than helping others!

The story aims to help children with anxiety and worries and show that that it is ok to have worries but not to let them build up. ‘Peanut, gets his sparkle back’ is a heart-warming children’s book about overcoming fear and finding the courage within oneself.

With charming colour illustrations by the talented Faye Hobson, and a relatable story, young readers will be inspired to face their own worries and become brave little ponies themselves!

‘Peanut gets his Sparkle Back’ is ideal for children 3-9 with coloured text suitable for children with dyslexia, teaches valuable lessons about perseverance, self-confidence and the power of friendship.

It’s a must read for parents, teachers and children alike and is sure to become a beloved addition to any child’s bookshelf!

Join Peanut and his friends on their journey to bravery and show your little ones that they too can conquer their worries and be the courageous heroes they’ve always dreamed of being.

**You can find out more about Tobi, Peanut and friends and also purchase a copy of the book direct online at**  
**<http://www.tobiandpeanut-therapyponies.com/product-page/peanut-finds-his-sparkle-children-s-story>**  
**Book priced £10, (postage fees apply).**

## Firewalk Challenge

Friday 28th March 2025  
Stormont Grounds, Belfast

**Walk on hot coals, for a life-saving cause**

**Sign up today**  
**[www.airambulanceni.org/firewalk](http://www.airambulanceni.org/firewalk)**  
**Help YOUR air ambulance save lives, brains and limbs!**

# MOUSE MATTERS

**JV Allister encourages us to tolerate mice in our gardens.**

I don't know if I have any mice in my garden. I did spot one a couple of years back playing hide and seek with a rather stupid cat, but as they mostly feed at night and are fast-moving, they could be out there in a hedge or the compost area, perhaps eating the food I've scattered for blackbirds and robins.

Of course, I'm talking about the wood mouse, also sometimes called the field mouse, not the house mouse which, as its name suggests, mostly lives in buildings, not the great outdoors.

We have only the two mouse species in Ireland and, along with many other wild creatures they're in decline. It seems likely that house mice now struggle to find suitable accommodation because modern homes are like sealed boxes, and when found they can be subject to the array of poisons available off the shelf in hardware stores.



Wood mice, mainly country dwellers, have similar problems because of more intensive agricultural practices, including hedge removal, plus the extensive use of what they call rodenticides. Although they might thrive in some woodland, they are increasingly scarce in more open farmland which is probably at least part of the reason for the decline of kestrels, specialist rodent hunters.

So, as with many other wild refugees from farmland, wood mice are drawn to the relative safety of our gardens, particularly those with trees and decent-sized hedgerows, where they will find shelter and food, even if it's mainly for the birds. They are opportunists, feeding on seeds, nuts, berries plus worms and insects, pretty much anything that's available. While their

life span is short, they do breed prodigiously but are not a threat to our plants or gardens or carry diseases; they're just small creatures living precariously on the edge. I've got a mix of mini habitats in my suburban garden, and hope I'm sharing it with these small mammals, but the neighbourhood cats are often on the prowl...

JVA

# Celebrating the Women at Helens Bay Dental on International Women's Day

**Today, we proudly honour the incredible women who make up the heart and soul of our advanced dental clinic.**

As we celebrate International Women's Day, we pause to reflect on the exceptional contributions, expertise, and dedication of the 19 women who help shape the exceptional care we provide every day.

These women are more than just skilled professionals—they are leaders, educators, mentors, and trailblazers in the dental field. They inspire us with their tireless commitment to patient care, their passion for advancing dental practices, and their unwavering strength in overcoming challenges. Whether they're performing delicate procedures, providing compassionate care, or managing the daily operations of our clinic, their presence elevates the standards of excellence we strive for.




Each one of these women brings something unique to our team, from their diverse backgrounds and perspectives to their shared vision of creating a welcoming and inclusive space for both patients and colleagues alike. They remind us that healthcare is not

only about expertise; it's about empathy, connection, and a shared commitment to improving lives. On this International Women's Day, we celebrate their achievements, their perseverance, and the positive impact they have on everyone who walks through our doors.

To the 19 women at our clinic—thank you for your passion, your professionalism, and your dedication. You are the backbone of our success, and we are so proud to work alongside you. Here's to the incredible women who inspire us every day—not just today, but every day.




THE BAKERS COTTAGES  
ACCOMMODATION



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bookings@thebakerscottages.co.uk  
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Set in the heart of the County Down countryside with views of the Mourne mountains and the rolling fields, this was once the bakery for the local area. An ideal tranquil location for exploring the Mourne Area of Outstanding Beauty but also with easy access to Belfast. Whether you want to relax and unwind in peace and soak in the 6 person hot tub or explore the numerous local attractions The Bakers Cottages is your perfect base.

Fully refurbished in 2019, many of the original site features have been sympathetically restored, including the Bakers Hole well. Beautiful granite kerbing entices you along the drive leading up to the private accommodation and grounds. An idyllic location where tradition meets modern 5\* awarded accommodation. The Bakers Cottages has it's own private wild flower gardens, sweeping towards the restored well. A covered BBQ area means you can grill outside whatever the Northern Irish weather may bring. Across the courtyard brings you to the hot tub house, with it's 6 seater tub. This building also offers a cosy sitting area with a wood burning stove that opens out through double glass sliding doors to an outdoor dining area overlooking the tranquil rolling hills, with the Mourne Mountains in the distant background. The perfect setting to relax and enjoy the sunset. An outdoor play area for the children is located within sight of this outdoor living space, and the dog building is also here, allowing your whole family to enjoy making memories at The Bakers Cottages.



# Financial support for children with disabilities or additional needs

Many parents of children with additional needs are unaware that they may be entitled to financial support – here's an overview of the support that may be available to families:

## Employers For Childcare

Disability Allowance (DLA) and Personal Independence Payment (PIP)

Children under 16 with a disability or additional needs may be entitled to Disability Living Allowance (DLA), while those over 16 can receive Personal Independence Payment (PIP). The amount received will depend on the condition and how it affects the child.

Depending on household circumstances, entitlement to DLA or PIP can also help with entitlement to other benefits such as Universal Credit and Carers Allowance.

Higher payments of other benefits

As soon as possible after receiving a positive DLA or PIP decision you should contact whoever pays your current benefits to tell them you're now getting DLA or PIP, as this could result in you getting higher payments

of other benefits such as Universal Credit or Housing Benefit.

You'll also be exempt from the 'benefit cap' which limits the amount of benefit payment a household can receive, and also may be eligible for help towards your household rates if you have made any adaptations to your home to meet the needs of the person with the disability.

If you do not currently receive any benefits

The awarding of a disability benefit is a significant change in circumstances.

The entitlement to DLA or PIP may mean that households with a higher income, and who would not otherwise be eligible, can qualify for support.

You should contact an independent benefits advisor who can check if this change means that your household could now be entitled to



any other benefits, such as Universal Credit.

Carer's Allowance and Carer Element

Parents and others who care for someone in receipt of DLA or PIP could be eligible to receive Carer's Allowance, which is paid weekly at a rate of £81.90. Eligibility depends on the circumstances of both the carer and the person being cared for.

If the carer is in receipt of Universal Credit and is in receipt of Carer's Allowance, or would be in receipt of Carers Allowance if it weren't for their income being too high, they may be eligible for an additional Carer

Element of Universal Credit of £198.31 per month.

For a couple with one partner working and the other not working but in receipt of Carers Allowance, and/or the Caring Element of Universal Credit, they can meet the criteria for financial support with their registered childcare costs which otherwise require both members of a couple to be working.

Further information

For personalised advice on what support your family may be entitled to, contact the Family Benefits Advice Service on 028 9267 8200 or email hello@employersforchildcare.org.

# NDAWA PARTICIPATES TO 'ACCELERATE ACTION FOR GENDER EQUALITY' ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY.

North Down & Ards Women's Aid (NDAWA) supports women, children and young people who are affected by domestic and sexual abuse.

We are a passionate team and totally committed to making a positive difference to the lives of women, children, and young people in the North Down & Ards area. This year for International Women's Day (IWD) on Saturday 8th March, the theme was 'Accelerate Action for Gender Equality.'

CEO, Emalyn Turkington wants to thank her team for the amazing work they do every day and the action they take listening and advocating for the women, children and young people they work with.

We are an all women organisation, and our strong ethos 'for women, with women, by women' is reflected daily in our roles. We exist to accelerate action, challenge attitudes, structures and systems which perpetuate domestic abuse. We seek through our work to



enable women, children, and young people to live free from violence and abuse. I could not do my role as CEO without the incredible Team, Board Members and Volunteers that I work with. The team at NDAWA inspire action through support, compassion, respect, providing a listening ear, showing empathy,

being non-judgemental, and empowering women, children, and young people to find their voice and reach their full potential – thank you!

NDAWA would also not be able to complete our work without the support of the partner agencies we work with and our local community. One of the biggest ways to

help NDAWA 'Accelerate Action for Gender Equality' is to Support the Supporters, thank you to all our supporters!

If you are affected by domestic and sexual abuse or want to find out more information about North Down & Ards Women's Aid, please contact the Bangor office on 028 9127 3196.

**Women's Aid**  
NORTH DOWN & ARDS  
**02891 273196**

Working to end  
Domestic Abuse

**North Down & Ards Women's Aid provides a wide range of free support services to women and their children affected by domestic and sexual abuse.**

Our services include - • Emergency refuge accommodation  
Floating support service for women in the community  
• Children's services • Group support programmes including  
• Journey to Freedom  
• One Stop Shop - free multi-agency drop in service  
• Court support

**Our range of Children's Services include:**

• Art Workshops • Helping Hands • Transformers  
• Healthy Relationship Programme

We also provide awareness raising sessions and training to our local community, schools, businesses and agencies.

## One Stop Shop

A multi-agency drop-in service for women experiencing:

- Physical Abuse
- Financial Abuse
- Coercive control
- Sexual Abuse

The One Stop Shop provides FREE, immediate and confidential access to Women's Aid, legal support, benefits advice, housing support and safety advice.

**Women's Aid**  
NORTH DOWN & ARDS

**10.00 am - 12.00 noon**  
**No appointment necessary**  
**Crèche facilities are available**  
**LOCATION: House Church,**  
**Crawfordsburn Road**  
**Newtownards, BT23 4EA**

**For any further information about the One Stop Shop or Women's Aid support services**  
**Contact us at 02891 273196**

**NEXT DATES:**  
Tuesday 25th March  
Tuesday 8th April  
Tuesday 13th May

Our sessions are held on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month!

**Housing Executive**

Community Advice  
Ards and North Down



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# BOOK A GOLDEN STAY AT THE STATION HOUSE HOTEL

Superbly located in the heart of the thriving town of Letterkenny so you only have to open the doors at the Station House Hotel and you are right where all the action is.

From the endless number of family friendly activities to shopping centres, charming boutiques, the vibrant nightlife scene, relaxing restaurants, the theatre and more, and with easy access to all major routes and natural attractions, Letterkenny has so much to offer over the winter season.

The hotel is built on the grounds of where the old Station House once stood when the Railway system in co. Donegal was in operation from 1901 to the 1940's. It was bought by the Gallagher family in 1953, four years after the last train passed the old building. It became their home up until 2004 at which point it was demolished and developed into a wonderful hotel boasting 81 spacious bedrooms.

Choose from a range of their guestrooms for your accommodation,



whether you are travelling as a couple, with family members or friends they have a number of room types for you to choose from including family, interconnecting, twin, triple, double, accessible and executive. All of which are vibrant and fresh and a contemporary approach to the décor and designed with your comfort in mind and feature plasma TVs with Chromecast allowing

you to connect your phone or device directly to the screen so you can stream your favourite TV shows and films during your stay and relax, unwind and feel right at home at the Station house Hotel.

The Station House is also home to the Depot Bar and Restaurant, a true "locals local", and one of Letterkenny's best and most popular bars and restaurants. It provides the

perfect excuse for a pause and to pamper your palate, offering a wide range of sumptuous dining options. Since opening in 2006 their focus has been to provide good quality food using the finest of fresh seasonal local produce to create dishes that just ooze with flavor.

Grab yourself a great hotel deal with this incredible value Golden Years offer.



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*\*Offer subject to availability and valid for stays Sun to Fri only until the end of March 2025 & based on 2 people sharing.  
You must be over 50 years of age to avail of this offer!\**  
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**Website;** www.stationhouseletterkenny.com

# Rowan Tree Art Therapy

Talking about emotions isn't always easy—but what if you didn't have to use words at all?

At Rowan Tree Art Therapy, creativity becomes a powerful tool for healing. Whether you're navigating anxiety, stress, trauma, or simply seeking a new way to express yourself, art therapy offers an accessible path to emotional well-being. Unlike traditional talk therapy, it provides a non-verbal, creative outlet. Learn to process feelings, develop coping strategies, and gain new insights into your emotional well-being.

Get involved:  
This May, Rowan Tree Art Therapy is offering a six-week creative wellness workshop in Newtownards for adults looking to improve their mental health through artistic expression. Each session will explore a new theme, promoting

self-exploration, emotional resilience, and personal growth in a supportive, non-judgmental environment. Using a variety of art materials, participants will 'Recharge, Reflect, and Create' while discovering the therapeutic benefits—no artistic experience needed.

'Discovering me' is designed for children aged 10-16, including those who are neurodiverse. Each session will encourage self-expression, confidence, and emotional resilience. This inclusive program provides a safe, supportive space where children can explore creativity, build social connections, and develop healthy coping tools. With



numerous materials available, participants can experiment and find what works best for them, whether through colour, texture, or imaginative storytelling. Spaces are limited, and early booking is recommended for a discounted rate. Register

now through the website to secure a place!  
Email: info@rowantreearttherapy.co.uk  
Find us on Facebook & Instagram: @RowanTreeArtTherapy  
Website: www.rowantreearttherapy.co.uk

# Rowan Tree Art Therapy

Embark on a journey towards healing and self-discovery with tailored therapy sessions.

Art therapy is a form of psychotherapy that uses the creative process of making art to help individuals express themselves, explore emotions, and work through challenges. It's a safe space for you to process thoughts and feelings that might be difficult to express with words. No art experience required—just an open mind and a willingness to explore!

### One-to-One & Group Art Therapy

Discover the therapeutic benefits of art in a supportive, confidential space. Whether individually or in a group, use art to explore and express emotions, helping you work through life's challenges.

### Art & Wellbeing Workshops

Tailored workshops designed to promote mental and emotional wellness. Reflect, express, and develop coping skills in a safe, supportive environment.

### Creative Art Workshops

Engage in artistic activities that inspire creativity and self-expression, while fostering connection and collaboration in a group setting. Workshops can be tailored to your needs.

I'm Sarah, the founder of Rowan Tree Art Therapy, based in the Ards and North Down region. As a qualified and HCPC registered Art Psychotherapist (MSc), I am passionate about using art to support personal growth and emotional well-being. The Rowan tree, symbolising courage, wisdom, and protection in Celtic lore, mirroring the essence of therapy itself—helping individuals navigate life's challenges with support and strength.

**GET INVOLVED IN THE UPCOMING WORKSHOPS:**  
Recharge, Reflect, and Create!: A creative art therapy workshop for Adults  
Discovering Me: A creative art therapy workshop for Children

**BOOK NOW!**  
6-week Group Art Therapy workshops

Contact Us:   
Email: info@rowantreearttherapy.co.uk  
www.rowantreearttherapy.co.uk

# FUN PLACES TO VISIT THIS SPRING

County Down is a beautiful region in Northern Ireland that offers a wide range of activities for families.

From exploring historic castles to hiking in the Mourne Mountains, there is something for everyone to enjoy. Here are a few ideas for fun family activities to do in County Down:

**Mourne Mountains:** The Mourne Mountains are a stunning mountain range that offers a variety of hiking trails for all levels of experience. Families can enjoy a leisurely stroll along the lower slopes or challenge themselves with a more strenuous hike to the summit of Slieve Donard, the highest peak in Northern Ireland.

**Castlewellsan Forest Park:** This beautiful park offers a variety of activities for families, including walking and cycling trails, a lake for boating, and a play park for children. The park also has a visitor centre where you can learn about the local flora and fauna.

**Tollymore Forest Park:** Another great option for families is Tollymore Forest Park, which is known for its beautiful scenery and its role as a filming location for the popular TV series "Game of Thrones". The park offers a variety of walking trails, a river walk, and a picnic area.

**Strangford Lough:** This large sea lough is a great place for families to enjoy a variety of water activities, such as kayaking, canoeing, and paddle-boarding. Families can also take a boat tour of the lough to see the seals and other wildlife that live there.

**Exploris Aquarium:** This popular aquarium is home to a variety of marine life, including sharks, rays, and seals. Families can learn about the different species that live in the Irish Sea and participate in interactive exhibits.

**Down County Museum:**



This museum tells the story of County Down from prehistoric times to the present day. Families can learn about the history of the region and see artifacts from different periods.

**Saint Patrick Centre:** This

centre tells the story of Saint Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland. Families can learn about his life and his impact on Irish culture.

No matter what your family enjoys, you are sure to find plenty of fun

activities to do in County Down. With its beautiful scenery, rich history, and variety of attractions, County Down is the perfect place to create lasting memories with your loved ones.

PROGRAMMES INCLUDE

**THE REAL ME: [18+]**  
Equipping women aged 18+ with skills to make positive life changes and live a life of purpose

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## HANNON Coach & Sail is perfect for a city break in Glasgow!

Direct Belfast – Glasgow Express now departing from the new Belfast Grand Central Station.

An award-winning service offering hassle-free travel, HANNON Coach & Sail is ideal for a city break in Glasgow and the perfect antidote to flying and airport stress! Already hugely popular with those in the know, the Belfast – Glasgow Express Coach Service is rated 5-Star on TripAdvisor.

A shopper's paradise, Glasgow is recognised as having the best retail therapy in the UK outside of London. Consistently voted 'top of the shops', the city is Scotland's premier shopping destination.

Not just shopping, Glasgow is also famous for its fantastic nightlife, and great choice of restaurants and bars. Glasgow is the perfect choice for your next city break away.

With a simple flat fare of £47 which includes the cost of the ferry and your bag, our Belfast – Glasgow Express offers a really attractive, convenient and low-cost alternative to flying.

The service is operated by HANNON Coach and leaves twice a day from Belfast, Grand Central Station (Stand 18) and drops

visitors right in the heart of Glasgow's 'Style Mile'. The simple flat fare allows passengers to pick and mix dates and times of travel to suit and with no luggage charges it makes a perfect travel option for a shopping trip. There are also a great range of hotels just minutes from Glasgow Buchanan Bus Station.

Company director Aodh Hannon says people seem to really love the convenience of the service as we take you right into the heart of the city centre.

"People love the fact that



it's so hassle-free compared to flying, no airport transfers and with no extra charge for luggage it is a massive help with keeping the cost of a break down," said Mr Hannon.

The service can be booked

online at [www.hannoncoach.com](http://www.hannoncoach.com) up to 1 hour before departure or by phone using the very friendly telephone booking service.

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# 2025 Women in Business Awards

Northern Ireland businesswomen leading in a broad range of sectors including finance, fashion and manufacturing were recognised at a special awards ceremony on Thursday evening.

Hannah Mary Kennedy, Founder and Managing Director at HMK Property, picked up the small business award for Best in Professional Services at the 13th Women in Business Awards, which last night celebrated the remarkable accomplishments of women business leaders across 14 categories at Belfast's Crowne Plaza Hotel, where close to 500 delegates came together to champion the very best of local talent and hear from First Minister Michelle O'Neill, who opened the event as keynote speaker.

Sponsored again by Virgin

Media O2 Business, this year's Awards welcomed a record number of entrants and on the night eighteen inspiring women were honoured for their year-round excellence.

The highly acclaimed Business Woman of the Year 2025 award, sponsored by Virgin Media O2 Business, was presented to Jayne Taggart, Chief Executive of Enterprise Causeway, for her ingenuity and vision in creating a thriving business ecosystem on the north coast, culminating in a major €8m investment and the opening of the Court House Shared Creative Hub

in January this year. Jayne is not only an exceptional business leader but also a trusted mentor having spent almost 30 years helping others to start and scale their businesses.

Commenting on this year's winners, Women in Business Managing Director Lorraine Acheson said: "It is our privilege to bring together this roster of exceptional businesswomen who each have demonstrated continued innovation and their positive impact on the Northern Ireland economy."

"Tonight wraps up our 13th year of the Women in



L-R: Pictured are Vicky Green from award sponsor Crowne Plaza Hotel, Hannah Mary Kennedy and Women in Business Managing Director Lorraine Acheson.

Business Awards which has become a fantastic fixture on the local business calendar to champion the truly amazing talent pool on our doorstep. On behalf of the

Women in Business team, a warm congratulations to all the 2025 winners and finalists. We can't wait to see what the future holds for you and your businesses."

## Toby takes the reins at Keeway Equestrian

Keeway Equestrian has carved a niche within the equestrian world providing high-quality arena surfaces as well as innovative equine bedding and horse fencing solutions. Following a long career in Civil Engineering and a lifetime in an Equestrian driven family Tim McKee took a leap of faith in the Equestrian world!

Keeway Equestrian has provided all surfacing for Gransha Equestrian Centre since 2019 and Tim has also been developing knowledge and offering a range of products to fit the Irish Equestrian Market. Now under the new management of Tim's nephew Toby Fynn – the envelope continues to be pushed sourcing and offering innovative solutions for the equestrian!

Keeway Equestrian focuses entirely on the needs of horse and rider,

prioritising safety and performance. At the heart of their offerings are their specialised arena surfaces, designed to provide optimal footing for a variety of equestrian disciplines. Whether it's an indoor or outdoor arena, Keeway Equestrian offers arena fibres engineered to ensure consistent performance regardless of weather conditions, minimizing the risk of injury and maximizing horse comfort.

Beyond arena surfaces, Keeway Equestrian

demonstrates a strong commitment to safety and sustainability. Their Equisafe fencing solutions provide secure and reliable boundaries, while their Ecoflax bedding offers a sustainable and healthy environment for horses. This dedication to comprehensive equestrian solutions extends to other essential yard equipment, such as horse wash bays, demonstrating their understanding of the diverse needs of equestrian facilities. Keeway

Equestrian works closely with a range of equestrian establishments across Ireland, including riding schools, livery yards, and stud farms.

Their collaborative approach and dedication to providing top-tier products and services have solidified their reputation as a trusted partner within the equestrian community.

Keeway Equestrian's product line reflects their commitment to quality and innovation. Their

arena fibre solutions cater to the diverse needs of riders and horses, while their Ecoflax bedding provides a sustainable and comfortable alternative. Furthermore, their Equisafe fencing prioritises the safety of horses and riders alike. To explore their full range of products and services, you can visit their website, which offers detailed information and contact details.

www.keewayequestriansurfaces.com

## GRANSHA EQUESTRIAN



### 2025 EVENTS

SHOW JUMPING SERIES –  
MARCH 14TH & 21ST, APRIL 4TH & 11TH  
MARCH 28TH DRESSAGE EVENING COMPETITION  
MARCH 29TH BALMORAL IRISH DRAUGHT  
PERFORMANCE AND PERFORMANCE HORSE QUALIFIERS  
MARCH 30TH DERBY FOR JUNIORS AND SENIORS  
APRIL 5TH SHOW JUMPING | APRIL 14TH FUN DAY  
APRIL 19TH WORKING HUNTER HORSES AND PONIES  
AUGUST 2ND SUMMER SHOW AND FAYRE  
AUGUST 10TH 3 PHASE CHALLENGE FOR SENIORS AND JUNIORS  
MARCH 27TH & 28TH | MAY 29TH & 30TH  
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# PRIORITY HEALTH OUTCOMES ANNOUNCED FOR LIVE BETTER AREAS

The Department of Health has set out the three priority themes for the Live Better approach to tackle health inequalities.

Activities within the first two Live Better locations, which have been identified by local stakeholders, will deliver across themes of Starting Well, Living Well, and Ageing Well. They will also promote awareness of health inequalities issues through community health fairs, health checks and improving health literacy.

The initial Live Better locations are the Court District Electoral Area (DEA) in Belfast and The Moor DEA in Derry/Londonderry. The three priority themes have been identified through engagement with local stakeholders to identify health issues in their neighbourhoods. They will involve:

- Starting Well: children's oral health (The Moor); childhood vaccinations (Court);
- Living Well: prediabetes, smoking cessation and cancer screening (The Moor); smoking in pregnancy (Court);
- Ageing Well: frailty and falls prevention (The Moor); connecting isolated older people

with local support services (Court); and In addition, health fairs and checks will be provided in both areas.

Health Minister Mike Nesbitt confirmed the agreed outcomes on a visit to a health fair hosted by Shankill Shared Women's Centre in the Court area.

The event included information stalls, advice and support, alternative therapies and health checks.

Some examples of programmes up and running or due to get underway include: a physio-lead intervention on safer mobility, including strength and balance exercises for older people with a

text message service encouraging participants to be more active; a 12-week community-led pre-diabetes intervention programme; and a number of health check opportunities across the two demonstration areas.

Aidan Dawson, Chief Executive of the PHA, said: "The local community organisations and primary care providers collaborating on Live Better are helping to deliver a community-centred approach to support people who are impacted most by health inequalities.

"The ongoing work by the PHA to help improve health and wellbeing and tackle



Health Minister Mike Nesbitt is pictured with Betty Carlisle, CEO Shankill Women's Centre; and Stephen Wilson, Head of Strategic Engagement, Public Health Agency.

health inequalities in communities has the potential to deliver better health and wellbeing outcomes, which is

complemented by the Live Better initiative.

"Over the coming weeks, I would encourage everyone to

engage in Live Better activities in these areas to find out more about, and participate in, the project in their community."



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## March is Endometriosis Action Month

Only 50% of young adults in the UK know what endometriosis is, and many health practitioners including GPs and A&E doctors don't recognise the symptoms, resulting in missed opportunities to stop suffering and the disease progressing, as well as wasting NHS resources.

This is despite it being one of the most common gynaecological conditions, affecting 1 in 10 women and those assigned female at birth from puberty to menopause in the UK – although the impact may be felt for life. The shocking lack of awareness and education is leaving those with the condition facing an average of almost 9 years for a diagnosis, leading to loss of education and work productivity, often impacting both physical and mental health.

So today Endometriosis UK is kicking off Action Month (1-31 March 2025) - Endometriosis Explained,

by calling on Governments across the UK to commit to ensuring menstrual wellbeing education is implemented in all schools as well as improving education for all healthcare practitioners, including GPs, pharmacists, nurses and A&E doctors. Without this education, those with the disease will continue to face challenges in accessing the right care at the right time.

Emma Cox, CEO for Endometriosis UK says: "The simple fact is that not enough people know what endometriosis is. Such a common and often debilitating disease deserves the same level of recognition

as conditions like diabetes and asthma. A recent poll for Endometriosis UK has found that only 50% of 16 – 24-year-olds know what the condition is and 47% of people surveyed last year reported seeing a GP 10 or more times before being diagnosed. Not getting a diagnosis can have a significantly negative effect on every aspect of someone's life - including education, employment, and physical as well as mental health. Governments must ensure that all young people and healthcare practitioners receive the appropriate level of education and recognise the signs and symptoms of



endometriosis, so those with symptoms can seek help, and are supported to access care when they do.

We hope Governments across the UK will build on their commitments to support women's health, including ensuring menstrual health education is being properly delivered across all schools, as well as improvements in mandatory training for all health professionals, as a matter of priority.

Without this, the next generation of those with endometriosis will continue to be let down."

Endometriosis UK wants to see a future where women and those assigned female at birth can better recognise the signs of endometriosis and feel empowered to seek help. And when they seek that help, healthcare practitioners are better equipped to put them on the

right pathway for treatment and support in accordance with the NICE guidelines.

A survey for Endometriosis UK last year found that 78% of respondents who later went on to receive a diagnosis had experienced one or more doctor telling them they were making a 'fuss about nothing' or similar comments. Not everyone with the disease will experience severe symptoms, but for those who do, it is hard enough living with endometriosis, juggling the symptoms during daily life, let alone having to battle for understanding and support. The continued lack of awareness around the condition is really a national scandal and now is the time to make the change and better educate the public and healthcare practitioners about endometriosis.



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Before After



# Half of people in NI are not confident in their smile, study finds

**Brushing your teeth twice a day, cleaning them for at least two minutes, and visiting the dentist once a year are the staples of oral hygiene learned from an early age.**

A new study from health and beauty tech retailer Currys, surveyed 2,000 people across the UK to explore the nation's oral hygiene habits, and results show that Brits still have a lot to learn. More than 6 in 10 Brits (63%) say that they brush their teeth for less than two minutes, and 16% of the nation says that they clean them only once a day. In addition to not following the basics, 40% of Brits say they struggle to get to a dentist when they need them.

The nation is losing their smile: is it bad hygiene or the fear of the dentist?

Oral health has been linked to self-esteem, and this is proven in several US studies, for both adults and children.

In the UK, data reveals that nearly 4 in 10 people (38%) are not confident about their smile, and a staggering 59% of them consider their teeth to be discoloured or yellow.

The data paints a similar picture in the Northern Ireland where nearly 6 in 10 (59%) people consider their teeth to be discoloured or yellow, with over a half (51%) not being confident in their smile.

The majority of people in the Northern Ireland (84%)—similar to the national average—clean their teeth twice a day. However, 14% still think that brushing only once a day is sufficient.

More than a fifth (22%) of people in Northern Ireland don't follow the recommended two-minute minimum, brushing for one to two minutes. More alarmingly, nearly a third (30%) of Irish spend only 30 seconds to 1 minute brushing their teeth.

Not following basic oral hygiene practices or being unable to secure a dentist appointment can lead to serious health problems. For example, an untreated tooth infection can easily spread to surrounding tissue and other parts of the body, potentially resulting in hospitalisation in only the best-case scenario.

Fear of the dentist, also known as dental anxiety or dentophobia, is one of the main barriers to securing a timely appointment. It is a common issue, with recent research confirming that 41% of Brits suffer from it. Another obstacle to good oral health, either on its own or combined with dental anxiety, is the difficulty in getting a dental appointment when needed, which was highlighted by nearly the same percentage of people in the UK (40%).

In Northern Ireland people also battle with fear of the dentist (43%) while a similar percentage (38%) highlight cost as the reason they are putting off a visit to the dentist.

Bad breath tops the list as the worst off-putting dental attribute

So, while bad oral hygiene and struggling to get a dentist appointment can affect health and lead to poor self-esteem, it also carries some social consequences too.

Bad breath was flagged across the nation as one of the worst observable dental habits for a considerable number (73%) of people, followed by missing teeth (41%) and smoke on the breath (40%).

The Irish agree that the most off-putting dental attribute is bad breath, with missing teeth coming in second, and visible plaque emerging as the third most off-putting dental attribute in the region.

You can find more about the study here: <https://www.currys.co.uk/techtalk/kitchen-and-home/tooth-truths.html>

## Four Seasons Hotel Carlingford Wins Best Winter Wedding Venue in Ireland

The Four Seasons Hotel Carlingford is proud to announce its recognition as Best Winter Wedding Venue in Ireland at the SaveMyDay.ie Irish Wedding Venue Awards 2025.

This prestigious accolade celebrates the hotel's dedication to creating unforgettable winter weddings in the picturesque setting of Carlingford.

Natalie Haake, Sales and Marketing Manager, expressed the team's excitement about the win: "The whole team is absolutely thrilled with this award. The summer months are always the first to book up, but there is something truly magical about winter weddings in Carlingford. That's why we are delighted to be recognised for this special time of year."

This achievement comes at a perfect time as the hotel has just launched its brand-new Winter Weddings by the Sea package, available on selected dates in 2025 and 2026. Designed to capture the charm of a cosy, romantic winter wedding, the package offers couples a stunning backdrop of Carlingford Lough, warm hospitality, and exquisite seasonal dining.

Carlingford is often described as a hidden gem, and its breathtaking winter scenery creates an enchanting atmosphere for wedding celebrations.

The Four Seasons Hotel's continued commitment to excellence has now been recognised on a national stage, solidifying its position as a top wedding destination in Ireland.

For more information on the Winter Weddings by the Sea package, contact us at: +353 42 9373530 [events@fshc.ie](mailto:events@fshc.ie) [www.4seasonshotelcarlingford.ie](http://www.4seasonshotelcarlingford.ie)





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## HERE COMES THE SUN

**Why Planning Your Summer Holiday now could be a Game-Changer for your mental health!**

The first daffodils are poking their heads through the soil, a gentle warmth is returning to the air, and a sense of possibility hangs in the breeze. It's early spring, and while summer might seem a distant dream, it's the perfect time to start planning your summer holiday. Why? Because the benefits, both for your mental well-being and your wallet are significant.

The Mental Boost: Anticipation and

Control

Imagine this: the long winter months are behind you, and you have a sun-drenched getaway to look forward to. Just the act of planning a holiday can provide a significant mental boost. Studies have shown that anticipation is a powerful emotion, and the excitement of envisioning your trip can increase happiness and reduce stress levels.

Having a holiday to

look forward to can also provide a sense of control. In our busy lives, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by responsibilities. Planning a holiday allows you to take charge, make choices, and create something positive for yourself and your loved ones. It's a chance to escape the daily grind and focus on relaxation and enjoyment.

Financial Advantages: Early Bird Gets the Best

Deals

Beyond the mental benefits, planning your summer holiday in early spring can also be a smart financial move. Booking flights and accommodation in advance often means securing better deals. Airlines and hotels tend to offer lower prices for early bookings, and you'll have a wider range of options to choose from.

Planning ahead also allows you to budget more effectively.

By spreading the cost of your holiday over several months, you can avoid a large financial outlay all at once.

This can make your holiday more affordable and reduce any post-trip financial

stress.

Tips for Early Holiday Planning

- **Set a budget:** Determine how much you can afford to spend on your holiday. This will help you narrow down your options and avoid overspending.

- **Choose your destination:** Consider your interests and preferences. Do you want a relaxing beach holiday, an adventurous hiking trip, or a cultural city break?

- **Book early:** As mentioned earlier, booking flights and accommodation in advance can save you money.

- **Be flexible:** If you're flexible with your travel dates, you may be able to find



even better deals.

- **Do your research:** Read reviews and compare prices before making any bookings.

- **Get organized:** Create a detailed itinerary and make sure you have all the necessary documents, such as

passports and visas.

Planning your summer holiday in early spring is a win-win situation. You'll not only reap the mental benefits of anticipation and control, but you'll also have a better chance of

securing great deals and sticking to your budget. So, as the days get longer and the weather starts to warm up, take some time to dream about your perfect summer getaway. Your mind and your wallet will thank you for it.

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## Learn something new every day in Northern Ireland's immersive classroom

**You're only one small step from giant educational experiences**

When it comes to hands-on learning with activities that enable young people to think creatively and solve problems without compromising on endless fun, Northern Ireland is one of the best classrooms.

A recent poll of 5,000 families sees parents increasingly seek meaningful educational experiences for their children during holidays, short-trips and days out. Northern Ireland is bursting with giant experiences to ignite the imagination of young minds in fun and entertaining ways.

Interested in history and the natural world? Try stargazing at OM Dark Sky Park and Observatory, or view an early edition of one of

the world's greatest fantasy adventure books, Gulliver's Travels at Armagh Robinson Library.

Experience the place where the Titanic was built and launched or step on-board a real-life warship at HMS Caroline, while a myriad of museums and monuments tell the story of Northern Ireland's extraordinary history with a unique flair, entrancing visitors young and old.

Ahead of the half-term break, Discover Northern Ireland has put together top activity suggestions to inspire young minds with endless fun and some learning by stealth.

**W5, Belfast**  
• W5 is the ultimate family day out with eight exhibition zones and over 250 interactive exhibits covering everything from climate change and nature to optical illusions, built engineering, medical science and much more with limitless fun. From February 8-16 experience Multiverse Mayhem, a theatre show that features big bangs and crazy chemical concoctions, where you can meet the scientists who are travelling through the multiverse. They have landed at W5 and are here to see if the fundamental scientific theories in this world match those in other dimensions. With only 30 minutes before they are sucked back into the vortex, they must conduct as many out-of-this-world

experiments as possible.

**National Museums NI**  
• National Museums NI looks after four distinct museums in Northern Ireland which serve as custodians to 1.4 million objects in collections spanning art, history and natural sciences. Belfast's Ulster Museum is home to a range of multidisciplinary natural sciences, art and history collections while the Ulster Folk Museum at Cultra, in County Down, houses heritage buildings and objects allowing visitors to immerse themselves in a bygone way of life. Also at Cultra, The Ulster Transport Museum takes you on a journey with a comprehensive collection of vehicles from trams and railcars to an iconic DeLorean, the model made famous in the Back to the Future movies. In Omagh, County Tyrone, the Ulster American Folk Park tells the story of emigration to America over two centuries, with 30 buildings and exhibits for the kids to explore, and – you can even board a full-size emigrant ship. With 30 buildings and exhibits for you to explore – and loads for the kids to do – the Ulster American Folk Park is a unique experience.

**Armagh Planetarium & Observatory, County Armagh**

• There are a number of special astronomical events happening this year and Armagh Observatory and



Planetarium (AOP) is 'The Place for Space'. Watch an amazing Full Dome Theatre show and explore the Universe. Touch Northern Ireland's largest meteorite, create your own solar system, or black hole, and visit the Astropark children's trail with augmented reality and sculptures.

With daily shows aimed at everyone from pre-schoolers to adults, there's always something out of this world going on at AOP.

**Exploris Aquarium & Seal Sanctuary, Portaferry, County Down**

• Enjoy a diver's view of marine life from around the world. An underwater glass tunnel lets you experience friendly sharks, a dwarf crocodile, a waddle of penguins at Northern Ireland's only aquarium and seal rehabilitation centre in Portaferry. The Tropical Ocean zone hosts over 100 species of colourful coral reefs. There is a soft play area, café and afterwards why not

take the short car journey or ferry crossing over to Strangford and explore the National Trust's Castle Ward or Audley's Castle.

**Marble Arch Caves, Enniskillen, County Fermanagh**

• Unexplored until little over a century ago, the Marble Arch Caves feature stalactites, cavernous passages, underground pools and streams which have been formed and reformed as the water slowly dissolved the limestone bedrock over countless millennia. First opened to the public 40 years ago, explore the extensive caves on foot, or by boat with one of the popular guided tours and you'll uncover a mind-boggling number of fascinating facts about geology, geography and archaeology in a cave system dating back over a million years.

To plan your next fun-filled learning experience in Northern Ireland, visit [discovernorthernireland.com/familyfun](http://discovernorthernireland.com/familyfun)

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# It's all smiles on the Saintfield Road, Belfast with the arrival of Morrison Dental Clinic

The Principal Dentist and practice owner is Dr Richard Morrison who has a passion for all things dentistry - implant and cosmetic dentistry in particular!

Dr Morrison says: "You can really change someone's life through their smile. Seeing their reaction after showing them their finished result in the mirror is priceless. The change you see in a patient, giving them their smile and confidence, it is not just an aesthetic change but also gives a psychological change which is so rewarding!"

Morrison Dental Clinic is primarily a Denplan practice. The practice ethos is that prevention is better than cure, and that seeing the hygienist every six months or more is the best starting point to maintain a healthy dentition for life. As a Denplan practice, the practice plan includes twice yearly check-ups and hygiene appointments, any x-rays required, and also gives discount off routine treatment. Preventative care, such as routine exams, cleaning, x-rays and oral hygiene instruction can help catch problems early and avoid the need for costly treatment later on.

Significant investment has already been made to ensure that the practice remains at the forefront of technology to improve the patient experience. This includes an intra-oral scanner, which uses 3D photo imaging to scan the mouth, avoiding the need for taking moulds of your teeth. Treatment can then be planned digitally and with greater accuracy than ever, achieve perfectly fitting labwork such as crowns, veneers, bleaching trays etc. Another addition is a recently-installed CBCT scanner, used when there is a need for more information than what traditional 2D x-rays can offer, such as 3D visualisation of jaw bone for optimal planning for implant placement.

Dr Morrison is a member of the Irish Academy of Aesthetic Dentistry and the Association of Dental Implantology, and is always reading articles and attending courses to stay up to date with the latest advancements!



He says: "I believe that we are at an exciting time in dentistry, with more and more technological advances which can improve what is possible for our patients. I feel as a dentist in the modern age we must continually learn and improve our practices otherwise we will be left behind!"

The growing team (so

far!) consists of five dentists, five nurses, dental hygienist Claire, receptionist Shauna, Yuko (Richard's wife) who does a lot of the work behind the scenes!

Morrison Dental Clinic is conveniently located at 95 Saintfield Road (not far from Forestside), and offers free parking available on site! For your appointment Tel: 028 9070 3215



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# Inspiring conservatory ideas

Whether you're building a new conservatory or looking to give your current conservatory a little TLC, get inspired for your next project with a mix of these fun and unique ideas!

Questions to ask yourself include: What square footage am I working with? Which conservatory design will fit in with the style of my house? How do I want to use my conservatory? (i.e. For dining, sunbathing, botany, or reading etc.) Once you've answered these questions, it's just a matter of choosing your design and deciding how best to decorate it.

Glass extensions. Glass extensions are a sleek and effortless way to upgrade your conservatory. Not only do they invite lots of light and warmth into your home, but they also work with almost any brickwork or cladding design. Double glazing and integrated doors offer a seamless transition into your garden, while landscaping your outdoor space gives you something beautiful to look at on a rainy day.

An orangery. Orangeries are another modern conservatory design idea. Bringing nature indoors with tall parlour palms and hanging baskets full of Mandevilla ('Rocktrumpet') is ideal. Better yet, if you're opting for an orangery, the world is your botanical oyster. For a fragrant oasis, attach Bougainvillea and Jasminum azoricum to trellises; decorate tables with Stephanotis floribunda-filled pots, and place giant Phoenix palms in lonely corners. Succulent popularity is spiking in the world of interior design. If you're less green-fingered than the average gardener, having a selection of cacti displayed in terrariums, vases, and/or refined concrete pots is a (literally) effortless way of modernising your space.

Sleek flooring. A stunning addition to any conservatory; wooden parquet floors are contemporary, stylish, and intricate. Whether you choose a walnut, oak, laminate, or even vinyl design, these floors will transform your conservatory into a tranquil retreat fit for royalty.

A coloured conservatory. Have you been searching for conservatory colour ideas? Teal is a multifaceted colour available in a spectrum of shades – from pale celeste and aquamarine to rich evergreen and ocean blue. Choosing the right shade for your conservatory is just a matter of light. The brighter the room, the darker you can get



away with. That said, to maintain balance, we suggest you stick to the middle of the palette.

A contemporary dining area. A great way to utilise your modern conservatory is to turn it into a garden dining room. Think quintessential picnics with jute decor and polished brass place settings. You can either design a more formal dining area by sticking with a traditional dining table and chairs or opt for something a little more sociable and choose benches and relaxed floor seating.

Stackable furniture. When it comes to decorating a small conservatory, maximising your space and working with the light is essential. Stackable rattan furniture is perfect for keeping things neat and compact.

Mini greenhouse. Also known as sunrooms, lean-to conservatories are rectangular-shaped structures attached to the wall of your house. Perfect for growing herbs or filling with air-purifying plants, lean-tos can house workbenches, banquet tables, or swing benches that look out into your lovingly landscaped garden.

Practical furniture. Keep it simple and elegant with grey furniture and bright decor. Light grey floor tiles work well in sunrooms with lots of light, as do anti-bleach furniture choices like rattan sets or twisted metal love seats. Consider floor cushions and recliner chairs, and surround yourself with sun-loving plants for a lung-friendly and green-fingered oasis.

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# BATHROOM TRENDS AND INSPIRATION

Let's dive in to bathroom ideas for your bathroom reno! Which bathroom styles are on trend for 2025?

Contemporary elegance. Clean lines, minimalist designs, and sleek features continue to be popular with homeowners. Neutral colour palettes such as soft grey, white, and muted tones contribute to a timeless, sophisticated, and elegant ambience. Vintage revival. Combining traditional elements such as clawfoot baths, pedestal sinks, and vintage-inspired taps adds character and charm to your bathroom style. Mixing these facets with more contemporary features creates an eclectic and

visually interesting space. Nature-inspired oasis. Homeowners are increasingly seeking to bring the outdoors into their bathrooms. Nature-inspired themes, including natural stone, wood accents, and greenery create a calming oasis, while large windows and skylights allow for ample natural light. Industrial chic. The trend for industrial-inspired bathrooms continues with exposed brick walls, concrete finishes, and metallic fixtures adding an urban feel. Pair with softer



textures such as wooden shelving and accessories and plush towels for balance.

Scandinavian simplicity. Scandinavian simplicity rests on

functional, minimalist design. Light colours, natural materials, and streamlined furniture

is the key to creating a calm, tranquil, and clutter-free bathroom. Spa-like retreat.

Transforming your bathroom into a spa-like retreat is a significant trend. Think rainfall showerheads, freestanding baths, and a calming colour scheme for the ultimate in luxury and relaxation. Soft, plush textiles, ambient lighting, and air-purifying greenery will enhance this look. Sustainable design. Sustainability is a key trend for 2025 and beyond, using recycled materials and water-saving technologies without compromising on aesthetics. Homeowners strive to include eco-

friendly materials, low-flow fixtures, and energy-efficient lighting to reduce their environmental impact. Artistic expression. Many homeowners are pushing forward the trend to inject a powerful punch of personality into their bathroom designs. Whether within bold colour choices on the walls, feature walls, artistic murals, or custom mosaic tiles, homeowners enjoy the opportunity to add unique touches to their bathrooms. For more info see: <https://www.checkatrade.com/blog/ideas/inspirational-bathrooms/>

## Ceilings, the fifth wall with something to say

Look up to add a style statement to your room!

Walls and furnishings take centre stage while the acreage overhead receives a coat of neutral white paint, with perhaps a snazzy ceiling fixture. That wasn't the case historically. Plaster ornamentation and murals were used centuries ago, and the Victorians really went to town on the ceiling, with elaborate mouldings and stamped tin sheeting. Ceiling medallions graced more formal spaces like dining rooms and parlours, while timber beams and tongue-and-groove boards were popular in kitchens, bedrooms and common spaces. Through the early 20th century, curvy coving, panelled grids and ornate moldings were popular. But with the advent of modernism after the 1930s, ceilings became the serene planes most of us are familiar with. Now we're looking up again. Designers are really getting creative with architectural elements, as well as paint, wallpaper and lighting. "Statement ceilings are a great way to bring detail and visual interest to a room," says Gideon Mendelson, founder and creative director of his New York-based eponymous design group.

"We see them as an opportunity to create something unexpected that adds to the space." As well as millwork and wallpaper, Mendelson's done custom hand-painting on ceilings. "It sets it apart from the rest of the home, and gives the space its own personality," he says. Smooth-finished ceilings make it easy to apply whatever you can dream up: paint, peel and stick or traditional wallpapers, or even ornamentation like origami, decals, buttons, faux jewels, botanicals,

twigs, garlands, ribbon, stencils or scarves. Command strips will hold most lightweight objects firmly to a smooth ceiling, but if you're stuck with one of those textured ceilings, you'll either have to refinish it or opt for wood panelling or tin sheets. Not ready to fully dress your ceiling? You can still add some excitement there with a light fixture. "A ceiling statement doesn't have to involve complicated architectural details," points out Leigh Spicher, design studio director for the Atlanta-



based homebuilding group Ashton Woods. "It can also be created by adding

a chandelier that contrasts in either style or scale to the room."

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# YOUR GUIDE TO THE BEST CONSERVATORY PLANTS

As spring sunshine fills conservatories across NI, transforming them into vibrant, light-filled spaces, now is the ideal time to breathe life into your conservatory with a touch of greenery.

But which plants should you choose to enhance this environment? British Garden Centres has compiled a guide featuring selected plants that will thrive in the bright, warm conditions of your conservatory, helping you create an indoor paradise.

A conservatory is a unique environment for plants, as the glass can cause significant temperature fluctuations throughout the year and enhance sunlight, leading to increased humidity levels. Plants need to

be able to tolerate these conditions, so here are the top plants that will thrive.

**Cacti**

Cacti are ideal conservatory plants due to their love of sunlight and drought tolerance, making them appealing and low maintenance. Popular varieties like Echinopsis, Cereus, and Opuntia thrive in warm, dry conditions and require well-draining soil, deep but infrequent watering, and ample light, especially during the growing season.

Grouping them in

decorative pots adds a touch of desert charm to your conservatory.

**Succulents**

Succulents are perfect for filling a conservatory, offering greenery, easy care and resilience. Crassula ovata, the jade or money plant, with its fleshy oval leaves and good fortune, thrives in sunny conservatory spots. Echeveria, known for its striking rosette shapes and diverse colours, tolerates dry conditions and bright light, making it a perfect for a conservatory whilst Senecio rowleyanus, the string of pearls, and Sedum morganianum, the donkey's tail, create stunning cascading displays when hung or placed on shelves, adding texture and drama.



Aloe vera, with its thick, pointed leaves, is not only the perfect plant to place in your conservatory but offers medicinal benefits with its soothing gel. It can withstand dry conditions,

and its preference for bright light makes it a natural fit.

**Palms**

For larger conservatories, container-grown palms create stunning indoor

features. The Kentia palm (Howea Forsteriana) thrives in this environment and brings height and a dramatic presence to the space. Likewise, the Ponytail palm (Beaucarnea

recurvata), with its wild foliage, loves being in a dry, humid conservatory environment and, due to its slow growth, will decorate the room with little effort.

**Large houseplants**

Houseplants provide an urban jungle vibe to your home while also being remarkably resilient, with some varieties being ideal for conservatories.

The Aspidistra, also known as the Cast Iron Plant, lives up to its name, tolerating low light, not needing much watering and withstanding the different temperatures, making it an ideal choice for areas of the conservatory that might not receive direct sunlight.

Dracaena, with its ribbon-like leaves, also loves being in an

environment like the conservatory. It adapts well to the warm, humid environment and can thrive in partially shaded areas. The popular Monstera Deliciosa, with its swiss cheese-like perforated leaves, adds a touch of tropical drama. Its rapid growth and striking foliage create a focal point, wherever placed in the conservatory and will encourage a healthier indoor environment by purifying the air and creating a calming, natural atmosphere to relax in.

For more info see Facebook: British Garden Centres

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## Choosing patio doors

For those of us lucky enough to have a rear garden, patio doors are a fantastic choice.

These versatile doors help to infuse our homes with light, maximise on outside views and create a seamless transition from home to garden.

**What is a patio door?**

Generally, the term 'patio doors' cover all types of doors that open out either onto your garden/patio area, into your living area or simply slide open/closed. These are usually glazed and come in a variety of

options including different styles, colours and materials.

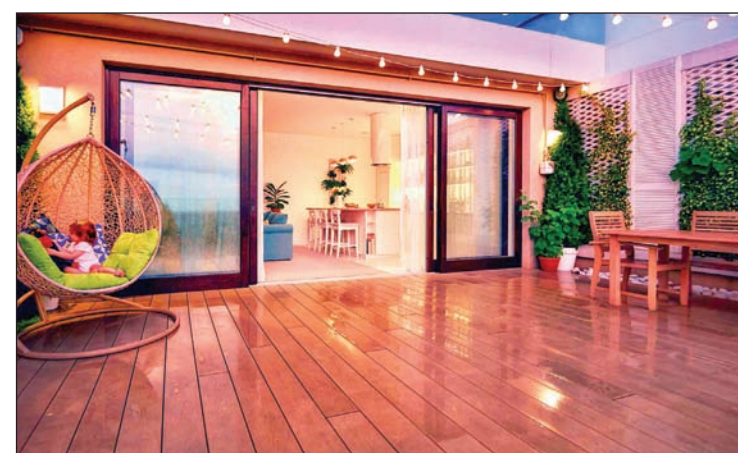
What are the different types of patio doors? Depending on the style and layout of your home, plus your requirements, you have a range of options to choose from when purchasing patio doors. You may be wondering about the different types of patio doors, and the most popular styles sold are bifold, sliding, French and Crittall/Belgium doors.

What are bifold doors? Bifold doors are ideal to create a continuous flow from indoors to outdoors. But exactly what are bifold doors? They can fold onto themselves and can open up entire walls letting your home flow out into your garden. Bifold doors are great for flooding

rooms with natural light and taking up a minimum amount of space when open. However, can be quite 'frame' heavy when they are closed.

What are sliding doors? Popular in households in the 1960's & 70's, sliding doors are experiencing a resurgence. They let in plenty of natural light and are available with narrow frames to maximise garden views. They can also slide back on themselves and even into cavities within the walls, to blur the line between indoors and outdoors.

What are French doors? These are more traditional styled, hinged, double glass doors and are available in wood, aluminium, and uPVC. They can be designed with a single pane of glass per



door for a contemporary feel or multi panelled glass for a more traditional effect. These doors are ideal for smaller openings, however, with the addition of side lights they can be used in bigger openings too.

What are Crittall doors? Many people haven't heard of Crittall doors but they are actually quite common. Traditionally these doors are black, metal/steel framed, with multi glazed panes. Popular for their industrial/art deco feel, they are now even available in multiple colour choices. Crittall or Belgium style doors are hung with matching glazed side panels/walls. These doors are also a great source of natural light.

What materials can patio doors be made of? With such a wide range of material options available today, it may be

a little confusing when it comes to choosing the best doors for your home. Below are the most common materials used: uPVC: Affordable and durable. Aluminium: Modern, energy efficient and strong. Softwood: Beautiful but can be affected by warping if not protected. Hardwood: Perfect for period homes but will need to be sealed or painted. Steel: Strong and great for industrial themes.

For more info see Checkatrade www.checkatrade.com/blog/expert-advice/guide-patio-doors/



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# The all-new, fully electric Volvo ES90

Some might say it is a saloon. Others will see a fastback, or even hints of an SUV.

We'll let you be the final judge – all we know is that the new, fully electric Volvo ES90 carves out a new space for itself by eliminating the compromises between those three segments, which puts it in a class of its own.

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And naturally, it's designed with our pioneering safety tech at its core, in a package that is set to be another Scandinavian design classic from Volvo Cars.

With orderbooks open now in selected markets, the ES90 is the latest addition to our balanced product portfolio of premium Volvo cars. It is the sixth fully electric model in our line-up,

joining the EX90, EM90, EX40, EC40 and EX30 as we continue our journey towards full electrification.

"The Volvo ES90 combines our most advanced technologies with Scandinavian design and superior comfort, creating a true premium Volvo car designed to elevate your quality of life," says Jim Rowan, our CEO. "It joins the EX90 SUV as one of our flagship models and cements our position

as an industry leader in software-defined cars that harness the power of core computing."

The new Volvo ES90 is available for order now in Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Other markets will be added later this year and into 2026.

# Successful initiative to reduce MOT waiting times extended

Infrastructure Minister Liz Kimmins has announced the extension of temporary exemption certificates (TECs) in 2025-26 to help manage MOT waiting times.

Minister Kimmins has extended the use of TECs for some five and seven year-old private cars for a further year. This will allow motorists with eligible cars to continue to drive them legally as long as they are roadworthy and are taxed and insured.

Former DfI Minister John O'Dowd approved the introduction of TECs for five and seven-year-old cars in April 2024 due to increased demands on vehicle testing and delays with the opening of Hydebank test centre.

The intervention has successfully reduced MOT waiting times from over 100 days at the end of May 2024 to around 30 days in early February 2025.

Vehicle licensing information shows that around 107,000 cars may be eligible for a TEC under the extension. The TECs will be automatically processed by



the DVA.

Minister Kimmins said: "TECs have helped to significantly reduce waiting times for MOTs. This extension will allow the DVA to continue to manage the increased demand for MOTs until new testing facilities at Hydebank and Mallusk are open for vehicle testing. These centres will provide the capacity to test more than 200,000 additional vehicles annually.

"Since the introduction of TECs, the DVA has continued to maximise its vehicle testing capacity at its existing 15 test centres through a variety of measures, including recruitment and overtime.

"From 1 April 2024 to 31 January 2025, the DVA conducted 956,759 vehicle tests, compared with 942,789 for the same period in 2023-24. In 2024, there were only six days when

the DVA did not offer MOT appointments.

"TECs have helped improve service delivery while minimising any risk to road safety.

"As road users we all have a personal responsibility to behave in a way that keeps ourselves and others safe and, regardless of TECs, it remains our responsibility to ensure our cars are in a road-worthy condition by getting them serviced."

# DOUBLE SUCCESS FOR THE MG HS

The new MG HS SUV has achieved a double win at the 2025 What Car? Car of the Year Awards. The MG HS PHEV was judged 'Plug-in Hybrid of the Year' by the What Car? team whilst the petrol HS SE was crowned 'Best Family SUV for Value'.

Continuing MG's reputation for offering customers outstanding value in the SUV marketplace, the petrol HS SE 1.5T, recognised as the 'Best Family SUV for Value', is available from just £24,995.

David Allison, Head of Product and Planning at MG Motor UK, commented:

"The new MG HS models were designed to raise the bar even higher with more equipment and functionality, distinctive MG styling setting them apart from other SUVs, as well as a choice of advanced petrol or plug-in hybrid powertrains. Two awards from the What Car? experts are a great endorsement for our best-selling MG, and we're confident that this accolade will attract even more new customers to our brand, as well as impressing existing owners



looking for an upgrade.

The Plug-in Hybrid version offers a real alternative for families who love their SUVs but are put off by high running costs.

A range of 75 miles due to the high-capacity battery means most daily commutes can easily be covered by one charge, and for longer journeys, the added security of an

efficient petrol engine and large fuel tank makes it a compelling choice."

MG HS SUV models secured 30,207 sales in 2024 making this MG the 8th best-selling car in the UK. MG was also ranked 10th in terms of UK vehicle registrations, a first for the brand.

The new generation of the HS range offers customers the

best possible overall value in the SUV marketplace. The petrol HS SE 1.5T is available from just £24,995 with the range-topping HS Trophy PHEV priced from £33,995. And, like all MGs, there is a generous 7-year/80,000-mile manufacturer's warranty supported by a 160 strong dealer network.

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# SPRING HOME INTERIOR TRENDS FOR 2025

## Embrace the New Season with These Vibrant and Inviting Trends

Spring is a time for renewal and rejuvenation, and this extends to our homes as well. As we bid farewell to the winter

blues, it's time to embrace fresh, vibrant trends that will infuse our living spaces with a sense of warmth, energy, and optimism.

Here are some of the top spring home interior trends for 2025: **Bold and Bright Colour Palettes:**

Say goodbye to muted tones and embrace a symphony of colours! This spring, we're seeing a resurgence of bold and vibrant hues.

Think deep yellows, electric blues, and vivid greens.

These colours add a sense of excitement and vitality to any room.

**Organic Modernism:** This trend seamlessly blends natural elements with modern aesthetics. Expect to see plenty of natural materials like wood, stone, and rattan, paired with clean lines and minimalist furniture.

The Allure of Chrome:

Chrome accents are making a comeback,

adding a touch of glamour and sophistication to any space. From light fixtures to hardware, chrome elements can elevate the look of your home.

**Chunky Porcelain Chic:**

Think oversized vases, statement bowls, and decorative plates. Chunky porcelain pieces add a touch of personality and visual interest to any room.

**Retro Revival:**

Mid-century modern and vintage-inspired pieces are making a strong comeback. Embrace this trend by incorporating retro furniture, geometric patterns, and warm wood tones.

**Maximalism:**

Embrace the maximalist trend by mixing and matching patterns, textures, and



colours. This is a great way to express your personality and create a truly unique space.

**Natural Stone Accents:** Bring the beauty

of nature indoors with natural stone accents. Think marble countertops, stone backsplashes, and stone fireplace surrounds.

**Statement Lighting:**

Make a statement with your lighting fixtures. From bold chandeliers to sculptural pendant lights, statement lighting can add a touch of drama and elegance to any room.

**Earthy Neutrals:**

While bold colours are trending, earthy neutrals like beige, brown, and cream are still popular. These colours create a calm and inviting atmosphere, making them perfect

for bedrooms and living rooms.

**Sustainable Decor:** Sustainability is more important than ever, and this extends to home decor. Look for pieces made from recycled or eco-friendly materials, and support local artisans and businesses.

By incorporating these trends into your home, you can create a space that is both stylish and inviting.

So embrace the new season and let your creativity shine!

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# THE ENDURING APPEAL OF ANTIQUE AND VINTAGE FURNITURE

In a world of mass-produced, disposable goods, antique and vintage furniture offer a refreshing alternative.

These pieces, with their rich history and unique character, bring a sense of warmth, authenticity, and sustainability to any home. But their appeal goes beyond mere aesthetics. Let's delve into the numerous benefits of incorporating these timeless treasures into your living space.

Unlike much of today's mass-produced furniture, antique and vintage pieces were often handcrafted with meticulous attention to detail. They were built to last, using high-quality materials and time-honoured techniques. This translates to exceptional durability and longevity, ensuring your investment will stand the test of time.

In a world where everyone seems to have the same furniture from big-box stores, antique and vintage pieces offer a chance to express your individuality. Each piece has its own story and history, making it a unique addition to your home. You're unlikely to find the exact same piece anywhere else, adding a touch of exclusivity to your décor.

Choosing antique and vintage furniture is a sustainable choice that benefits the environment. By repurposing existing pieces, you're reducing the demand for new production, which in turn conserves resources and reduces waste. It's a conscious way to



furnish your home while minimizing your environmental footprint. Antique and vintage furniture encompasses a wide range of styles, from classic to mid-century modern, ensuring there's something to suit every taste. These pieces have a timeless quality that transcends fleeting trends, adding a touch of elegance

and sophistication to any space. They can be seamlessly integrated into various décor styles, from traditional to contemporary, creating a unique and eclectic look.

Antique and vintage furniture carries with it a sense of history and heritage.

Each piece has a story to tell, connecting you to the past and adding depth and character to your home. Owning a piece of history can be a truly enriching experience, sparking conversations and adding a unique dimension to your living space.

While not the primary reason to buy antique and vintage furniture, some pieces can appreciate in value over time. As they become rarer and more sought-after, their value can increase, making them a potentially sound investment. However, it's essential to do your research and consult with experts before making any investment decisions.

Contrary to popular belief, antique and vintage furniture can be quite affordable, especially if you're willing to hunt for it. Flea markets, antique shops, and online marketplaces offer a treasure trove of unique finds at reasonable prices. With a little patience and perseverance, you can furnish your home with beautiful, high-quality pieces without breaking the bank.

## Our guide to what can be planted in the garden in Spring

March is a month of transition in the UK garden. As the days lengthen and the soil begins to warm, it's time to shake off the winter chill and get your hands dirty.

Whether you're a seasoned gardener or just starting out, there's plenty to sow, plant, and nurture this March.

For vegetables, you can sow broad beans, carrots, parsnips, beetroot, spinach, summer cabbage, salad leaves, leeks, Swiss chard, kohlrabi, turnip, and summer cauliflower directly into the ground this month, weather permitting. If the weather is still unpredictable, you can get a head start by sowing tomatoes, peppers, chillies, aubergines, celery, and globe artichokes indoors. Onions, shallots, garlic sets, and Jerusalem artichoke tubers can be planted out in March.

Fruit-wise, March is the last chance to plant bare-root fruit trees like apples, pears, plums, and cherries. You can also plant potted soft fruit bushes such as currants, gooseberries, and raspberries. For a head start on your strawberry crop, plant cold-



stored runners.

When it comes to flowers, sow hardy annuals like sweet peas, cornflowers, and poppies directly into the ground. Plant summer bulbs like gladioli, lilies, and crocosmia, and plant biennials like foxgloves, forget-me-nots, and wallflowers for blooms next year.

Other important gardening tasks include preparing seedbeds by ensuring they are weed-free and

raked to a fine tilth. Protect early outdoor sowings with cloches, mini-tunnels, or fleece. Continue to chit early and maincrop potatoes to encourage them to sprout before planting. Prune blueberries and carry out formative pruning of newly planted fruit trees. Mulch raspberries with homemade compost to suppress weeds and improve the soil. Feed apricots, currants, gooseberries, nectarines, peaches, and raspberries with compost. Start preparing runner bean supports and trenches.

Keep an eye out for trending plants like Helianthus Sunfinity 'Eternal Summer', a compact, multi-stemmed sunflower perfect for small gardens. Philadelphus Petite Perfume Pink, the world's pinkest Philadelphus with vibrant pink blooms, is also one to watch. Osteospermum 'PopEyes' Series

thrive in low light levels, while Buddleja Fanfare is a compact, double-flowering Buddleja that attracts pollinators. Hosta 'Sting' is slug-resistant and sun-tolerant with unusual foliage, and Miscanthus 'Lady In Red' is a striking new Miscanthus grass with red-tinged foliage. Acacia dealbata, a large evergreen shrub with fragrant yellow blooms, will be popular, as will Helleborus orientalis 'Anemone Slaty Blue', a rare and unusual Hellebore with dark blooms. Magnolia 'Heaven Scent', a beautiful and fragrant Magnolia, and Clematis montana, a vigorous and colourful Clematis, round out the top ten.

Remember to be guided by the weather, as the weather in March can be unpredictable, so be prepared to adjust your plans accordingly. Always check seed packets for specific sowing and planting instructions.

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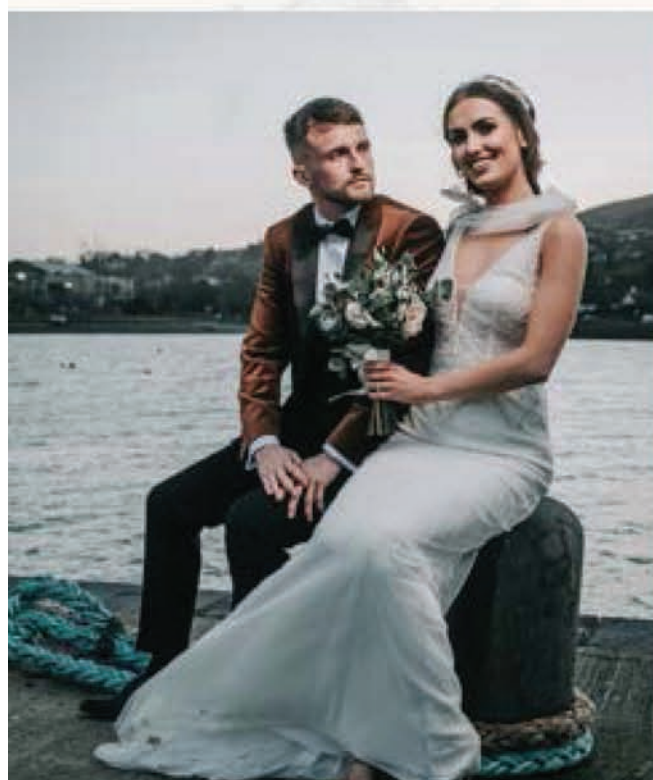
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