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Lette, Emma and Bella Ferris with Cllr Matt Garrett, Deputy Chair of BCC People and Communities Committee, launching this year's Belfast in Bloom Competition.

## OFFICIAL OPENING OF CITY QUAYS GARDENS

A vibrant new green urban garden for the city has recently been officially launched at Belfast Harbour as a traditional maritime bottle smashing ceremony was performed at City Quays Gardens.

The £3.5 m investment by Belfast Harbour has created a 2-acre green public space on land which was previously used as a car park between the historic Belfast Harbour Offices and the City Quays office buildings on the River Lagan waterfront. The garden has been built to 'One Planet Living' sustainability standards and is another important element in the development of the Maritime Mile. Marked out by a distinctive nest' sculpture at its entrance, the gardens feature richly planted green spaces with seating, extensive tree planting, events lawns with amphitheatre seating and outdoor workspace. The space incorporates an eco-conscious design that will create new habitats for wildlife and enhance biodiversity. Chair of Belfast Harbour Dr Theresa Donaldson and Councillor Ruth Brooks, Chair of Belfast Council's People and Communities Committee, declared the gardens open at a gathering of Belfast Harbour stakeholders, including port tenants, government, contractors, residents, community groups and businesses.

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## YOUNG GARDENERS HELP LAUNCH BELFAST IN BLOOM COMPETITION

Staff and pupils from St John the Baptist Primary School are calling on budding gardeners to follow their lead and enter this year's Belfast in Bloom competition.

The school was among the winners of last year's contest, picking up the prize for Best School Garden (West). Their outdoor space brings pupils, their parents and grandparents together to foster a love of growing, with wildflowers, seasonal planting and vegetables

all on display. The school's gardening club have also made the garden a home for local wildlife, with bug houses and bee-friendly habitats. Run by Belfast City Council, Belfast in Bloom celebrates the green-fingered efforts and work of local residents, community groups and

businesses across the city. There are individual awards, community prizes for commercial premises, businesses and schools. Visiting the St John the Baptist PS garden, Councillor Matt Garrett, Deputy Chair of Belfast City Council's People and Communities Committee,

said: "What a brilliant space the children and their teachers have built, creating a place that looks amazing and encourages young people to spend time outdoors, in nature, together with their friends and families."

**Continued on page 4**

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# £1m Vacant to Vibrant investment gains returns!

**Belfast City Council has agreed the final grants for its £1m Vacant to Vibrant city centre scheme, launched in 2022 to incentivise take up of empty units – and the figures show it's been a resounding success.**

As well as helping to revitalise and animate the city centre, the council's investment will generate over £3.5m in rates – a return of almost £4 for every £1 allocated in grants.

Although the city centre funding has been fully allocated and the scheme is now closed, the council is currently inviting further applications for its citywide Vacant to Vibrant scheme.

Businesses and organisations as diverse as Another World, ArtsEkta, Bodega Bagels, Golden Thread Gallery, High Society, Michele International Hairdressing, Neighbourhood Café, Sloan's Gym, Vault Artist Studios and Verona Bridal benefitted from the city centre scheme.

Of 48 grants awarded, 23 have helped, or are helping to regenerate a historic building or building of interest. Round House Bakery for example will be using their funding to bring artisan sourdough breads,



pastries, and pizza to a unit in Cathedral Buildings, after it was almost destroyed by fire three years ago.

Those awarded grants will generate £23m in sales over the lifespan of the scheme. Vacant to Vibrant will also create 139 jobs, with a further 34 indirect employment opportunities across the supply chain.

Vacant to Vibrant's success is now being replicated citywide, with nine applications securing a total of £195,000 to date. That

investment will generate rates of almost £370K and result in 33 direct jobs, with a further 10 indirect employment opportunities across the supply chain.

Recent citywide examples include Forward South Partnership creating a new larger office space and a one stop community hub in a long-term vacant property on the Lisburn Road and Charlie's Pizza

Belfast creating a pizza restaurant in a long-term vacant unit on the

Ormeau Road.

Applications for Belfast City Council's Vacant to Vibrant citywide scheme (grants between £2.5k and £25K) are welcome from business start-ups, independent retailers, social enterprises, cultural and voluntary organisations and property owners seeking to transform their vacant property. Grants will be offered on a first-come, first-served basis, until all funding is allocated.

For further information, go to [www.belfastcity.gov.uk/vacanttovibrant](http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/vacanttovibrant)



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# AWARE NI CELEBRATED THE POWER OF COMMUNITY FOR MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK

During Mental Health Awareness Week (12–18 May 2025) Northern Ireland’s depression charity AWARE NI highlighted the power of community and how connection can play a vital role in protecting and improving our mental health.

The theme for this year’s campaign was “The Power of Community”, a message that resonates deeply with AWARE NI’s work supporting people living with depression, anxiety, and bipolar across Northern Ireland. To mark the week, AWARE NI shared

voices from across the region that show just how life-changing community can be — from peer support groups to book clubs and running teams. The charity spoke to four individuals who found strength through connection and are helping others do the

same. Lewis’ Story: Friendship built one mile at a time

Lewis is a loyal member of Boundary Brewing Running Club in East Belfast, where weekly runs finish with a chat and a beer at the taproom.

For Lewis, mental health is deeply personal. “The state of our own mental health dictates our entire world view and experience,” he says. After his family faced a mental health crisis in 2023, he learned two key things: “We are naturally very resilient as humans, and even more so when we support each other through that challenge. And we are never

alone – crises like the one we faced are far more common than we realise.”

He’s found community and connection through Boundary Brewing Running Club in East Belfast. “There are no miles that pass or feel easier than miles shared,” he says.

When Lewis ran from Belfast to Dublin, the club’s support spurred him on. “The whole club really got behind me, and it helped massively knowing I had that extra support.”

For Lewis, moving together makes space for openness. “Exercising and being outdoors tends to open up your mind and add more fluidity to thoughts. I find I do my

best thinking on a run.” His advice to anyone hesitant to join a group? “Everyone has been in the same place as you. Try bringing a friend or family member with you. Once you make the first step, you tend to stick.”

Courtney’s Story: Creating space for women to connect

Courtney founded Belfast Girl Gang in September 2020 after feeling the isolation of lockdown and the challenges of making friends as an adult. “We created a space to do just that—make new friends,” she says. What started as a way to combat isolation has blossomed into a community of like-minded women and non-binary people, united by a shared love for reading and connection.

For Courtney, the impact of this community on her own mental health is clear. “I always leave feeling like my cup is full and really positive,” she shares. “You get this rush of positive emotions that sets you up for the rest of the weekend.” The group has become a source of strength for many members, with conversations around mental health happening naturally within the safe



and welcoming space. Courtney believes that simple acts like reading together or sharing a cup of tea foster deep connections. “It’s the small things that are so powerful,” she says. The group has helped members form lifelong friendships, and Courtney encourages anyone feeling lonely to find their own community. “You’re not

weird or abnormal—so many people feel it,” she adds. “Don’t be afraid to try a few out to find what suits you best.” AWARE NI Chief Executive, Karen Collins, said: “Community comes in many forms — whether it’s a support group, a sports team, a book club or just a cup of tea with someone who understands. This

campaign is a reminder that even the smallest acts of connection can make a big difference to our mental health.” AWARE NI runs free peer support groups, mental health education programmes, and wellbeing initiatives in schools, workplaces, and communities across Northern Ireland. To find out more, visit [www.aware-ni.org](http://www.aware-ni.org).

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### Continued from page 1

“Their Belfast in Bloom award was well deserved and really appreciated by the school as an acknowledgement of all the hard work and effort that has gone into the garden.”

“If you know a school that is doing something similar, a neighbour with amazing window boxes or hanging baskets, a business who has created a brilliant atmosphere with creative planting or a community group

going the extra mile to bring people together through gardening – we want to hear about it!

“Nominating someone for an Belfast in Bloom award is a great way to recognise their efforts and, with this year’s sunny spell, we hope to have lots of beautiful entries to choose from.”

Residents can enter for the ‘Best Hanging Basket’, ‘Best Window Box’ and ‘Best Garden’.

Community organisations can enter for ‘Best Community Street’, ‘Best Community Group’

and ‘Best Community Garden’.

Businesses can enter the commercial category for ‘Best Hotel’, ‘Best Public House’, ‘Best Restaurant’, ‘Best Commercial Street’ and ‘Best Commercial Premises’, and local schools can enter for ‘Best Kept School Garden’ in the north, south, east and west of the city.

There are also awards for ‘Best Individual Allotment’ and ‘Best Allotment Site’ in Belfast.

The competition

is free to enter, and nominations can be made online at [belfastcity.gov.uk/belfastinbloom](http://belfastcity.gov.uk/belfastinbloom). The closing date for the school awards’ category is Friday 20 June 2025 and the closing date for all other categories is Friday 1 August 2025, with judging taking place in August.

Other winners in 2024 included The Errigle Inn, Linen Quarter BID for Great Victoria Street, Wolfhill Community Garden and Dundela Infants’ School.

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# Cultivate programme unearths Belfast's green entrepreneurs

**Cultivate, funded by Belfast City Council, saw 13 participants put their eco ideas to the test at hands-on workshops and expert-led sessions designed to grow and scale their concepts and maximise the potential positive impact for communities and the wider city.**

Three businesses have also secured funding of £2,500 each to further develop their ventures, following a pitch competition hosted by sponsors Herbert Smith Freehills.

They include KitchenSync, an app to cut food waste and encourage meal planning, Mude Adaptive Clothing, providing sustainable solutions for those who wear medical devices and Agri Navi Tech which uses GPS technology to keep livestock safe on farms.

Speaking at the Cultivate finale, Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Micky Murray, said, "Supporting local businesses to thrive, making life easier for all our residents and protecting the environment are all key commitments in the Belfast Agenda – our city's community plan.

"The Cultivate programme has been a great way to nurture the entrepreneurial talent in our city whose ideas and ventures are crucial in developing



our communities, our environment and our future growth. "Reducing emissions and improving sustainability are both areas of high business growth and today's event shows how Belfast is leading the way in developing the businesses and solutions of the future."

As part of Cultivate, participants heard from leading voices in environmental and social impact, including Alice Thompson (co-founder of Social Bite

and The Big Sleepout), Professor Ian Robertson (neuroscientist, author and global authority on performance), Mark Pollock (world renowned speaker and pioneer of a cure for paralysis) and Richard Soton (author, consultant and speaker).

Aidan McGeary from Mude Adaptive Clothing was among those who took part and was successful in securing further funding for his venture.

He said: "Hearing from world-class

entrepreneurs and leaders over the past six months has been a game-changing experience for me and for my business.

"I've had the opportunity to develop alongside an amazing group of like-minded and purpose-driven business leaders. To win one of the £2,500 prize pots is the icing on the cake."

For more information on the range of free support provided by the council for entrepreneurs and small businesses, visit [belfastcity.gov.uk/businessinfo](http://belfastcity.gov.uk/businessinfo)

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# Long addresses Northern Ireland's first Correctional Research Symposium

The Northern Ireland Prison Service hosted the three-day conference, held bi-annually by the European Organisation of Prison and Correctional Services (EuroPris) and the International Corrections and Prisons Association (ICPA), for academics, public sector agencies, and other organisations to share evidence-based practices and research

By sharing different perspectives of rehabilitation and through collective and shared responsibility, we can change the lives of people who come into prisons.

That was the message from Justice Minister Naomi Long in an address to delegates at the first Correctional Research Symposium to be held in Belfast.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service are hosting the three-day conference, held bi-annually by the European Organisation of Prison and Correctional Services (EuroPris) and the International Corrections and Prisons Association (ICPA), to provide a unique platform for academics, public sector agencies, and other organisations to share evidence-based practices and research.

Justice Minister Long said: "Today, in Northern Ireland, the justice system is facing many of the same pressures being experienced in the rest of the United Kingdom, across Ireland and indeed globally. This includes delivering effectively within constrained budgets and with competing budgetary pressures in important areas like health and education. We are also managing a protracted and significant increase in the prison population within an aging prison estate.

"However, we want to build upon the many strands



Justice Minister Naomi Long is pictured at the first Correctional Research Symposium to be held in Belfast alongside (from left) Natalie Boal, Executive Director International Corrections and Prisons Association (ICPA); Peter Severin, President ICPA; Beverley Wall, Director General of the Northern Prison Service; Caron McCaffrey, President of the European Organisation of Prison and Correctional Services (EuroPris) and Gustav Tallving, Executive Director EurPriso. Picture: Michael Cooper

of partnership that are already happening in our prisons and beyond. We want to learn from others.

"When I look at the diverse range of topics and workshops that has been developed for the Symposium, I can see connections that will lead to learning for everyone - how we support staff; the importance of desistance; protecting minorities; changing culture; understanding trauma; and how infrastructure can contribute to rehabilitation.

"Effecting meaningful change, through a renewed collaborative approach, will involve the development and implementation of initiatives to tackle some

of the wider societal issues that contribute to offending behaviour. And, of course, additional resources will be required to make a real difference."

Minister Long added: "An approach based upon partnership is fundamental to the ethos and the work of the Northern Ireland Prison Service. The Service works with over 40 individual organisations and those partnerships are focused on the core objective of rehabilitation and resettlement - preparing people in prison for life in the community. Our collective aim is to support and challenge individuals to address and change their offending behaviour, so that

they can reintegrate into society and build a better future for themselves, and their families, that is free from criminality.

"In our prisons, voluntary and community sector partners deliver a suite of interventions, ranging from support to address addictions, mental health challenges, and past trauma, to programmes which support parenting skills, and programmes which challenge attitudes that lead to violence against women. A wide-ranging curriculum of educational, vocational and employability skills training is also delivered via partners from the Further Education sector."

# NEW BOARD MEMBERS TO DRIVE LINEN QUARTER VISION

LQ BID has announced the appointment of five new board members to help advance its strategic vision.

Joining are Avril Keys (BBC), Jeanette Donohoe (Cleaver Fulton Rankin), Orla Farquharson (Limelight), Paul Roberts (Community Places NI), and Ruairi McLaughlin (Voco Hotel). Together, they bring a wealth of insight from media, legal, hospitality and charity sectors - valued experience that will support existing members of the board to bring continued improvements across the Linen Quarter.

These new members join an established board of 16, including Sarah Cull as Chair (Danske Bank, Chair), Colin Mountstephen as Deputy Chair (Deloitte) and Fearghal McKinney as Treasurer (British Heart Foundation).

Chris McCracken, Managing Director of LQ BID, welcomed the appointments. He said, "The wealth of expertise across our newly appointed board members marks an exciting new chapter for our vision of a Belfast that makes sense for everyone. Their strategic vision, commercial acumen and business networks will support us as we continue to contribute placemaking initiatives that benefit the Linen Quarter, and wider city centre, across regeneration, animation, safety, connectivity, sustainability and wellbeing. We'd also like to extend our sincere thanks to outgoing board director Karen Blair of Cleaver Fulton Rankin

for her invaluable support in recent years."

Sarah Cull, Chair of LQ BID, added, "These new appointments bring a fresh energy that will be instrumental in shaping the future of the Linen Quarter and our many improvements across the public realm. Their insight will help us bring continued value to our 300 member organisations and we look forward to their contribution as we build on the strong foundations already in place with city decision makers to ensure the Linen Quarter remains a thriving hub for business, culture, and investment."

The historic Linen Quarter, the area stretching from City Hall to Shaftesbury Square, is home to more than 300 organisations such as Deloitte, Invest NI and various Governmental departments, with Kainos' 14-storey office block currently under construction on the Dublin Road. It is rapidly becoming one of the most vibrant, must-visit areas of the city with 40 cafés, bars and restaurants, a dozen hotels, three major music venues and some of the best street art the city has to offer, including the largest mural in Ireland.

The BID's role is centred on placemaking which takes a people-centred approach to city planning and developments.

Chris concluded, "We



need to continue to think imaginatively to restore economic vitality to Belfast - the city is not without its challenges, but with continued investment we can unlock its full potential. We continue to deliver pioneering improvements across the Linen Quarter that bring the people who work, live and socialise here greater enjoyment, improved wellbeing, and a sense of belonging. Since our inception, we have delivered £4 million worth of improvements across more than 30 projects including a dedicated police officer transforming safety measures in the area, a clean team who maintain the area's pleasant aesthetic, revitalisation initiatives such as planting, and of course major investment in the public realm including our recent transformation of Blackstaff Square from an area known for antisocial

behaviour into a vibrant outdoor social space."

Plans are afoot to continue to enhance the Square to include a pavement café stretching from the Crown Liquor Saloon onto Great Victoria Street and Brunswick Street. The concept has the potential to become an iconic plaza similar to that in Paris, Amsterdam, Barcelona.

The BID also recently announced the end of its lease at Bankmore Square. The BID's £128,000 investment transformed the area into thriving green social space with public seating, a wildflower garden, and a central reservation for events. Over the past two years, the scheme demonstrated the important role of city BIDs with thousands of people and nature benefitting from space being put to better use.

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# Support For Neighbours To Get Together.

The Eden Project have teamed up with the CO-OP to offer food vouchers to help people take part in The Big Lunch annual celebration of community and neighbourhood.

Everyone across Belfast and NI is being encouraged to help make June 2025 the biggest #monthofcommunity and the Eden Project have teamed up with

the CO-OP to offer food vouchers to help people take part in The Big Lunch annual celebration of community and neighbourhood.

To be in with a chance

of one of 100 £25 vouchers register for a free Big Lunch pack at TheBigLunch.com and pop your plans no matter how simple on their map search Pop your Big Lunch on the map - Eden Project Communities

It does not matter whether you are a constituted group or not said Grainne McCloskey, Eden Project. This is about helping neighbours and groups reach out and meet new people, and make friends that are there for you when it matters.

You don't need a lot to host a Big Lunch,



tea for three out the front or even a pot luck picnic in the park or the back garden, it doesn't need to be a grand affair! I think the best big lunches are when people bring a chair and something to share!

These vouchers are designed to help you make it happen. At a time when costs are rising we want to enable people to keep it simple and come together because its often not whats available

at events but the conversations and fun together that are most memorable.

The Big Lunch is an idea from the Eden Project made possible by the support of Pears Foundation and corporate partners Co-op and Greene King.

Food vouchers will be allocated at random from all those registered on the interactive Big Lunch map in Scotland and Northern Ireland and everyone who registers will receive an e news with discounted money off coupons to help you buy the ingredients for your Big Lunch.

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# Flourishing first year celebrated at The BUG (Belfast's Urban Garden)

It wasn't just plants and flowers that flourished at The BUG (Belfast's Urban Garden) during its first year, but friendships and community connections too.

That's what Deputy Lord Mayor Councillor Andrew McCormick remarked on at a celebration of The BUG's first year on the Belfast Stories site, Kent Street today, Friday May 9.

Over 20 groups and over 2,300 people have been involved in onsite activities during the twelve months of the successful demonstrator project.

The BUG is one of several 'Grey to Green' city centre projects funded under the Department for Infrastructure's £400,000 Blue-Green capital grant programme, administered by Belfast City Council, with The BUG also receiving funding and support from the Public Health Agency (PHA).

Sharon Crainey, Operations Leader, The Conservation Volunteers NI, said: "It's been a joy to see The BUG flourish - thanks to over 20 groups we've engaged with, our



weekly gardeners and volunteers - and we're really looking forward to seeing what's next on our growing journey as we seek a new partner and location for the garden's next phase."

David Tumilty, Senior Health Improvement Manager at the PHA, said: "The programmes that the PHA funds through

The Conservation Volunteers connect with communities at greatest risk of health inequalities. Engaging people in activities that help improve physical and mental wellbeing is so important. We have seen the benefits of people coming together at the BUG, helping to address issues of social isolation, developing

community bonds through this connection, and people getting more active by being in the gardens, which have had such a positive impact throughout the past year."

For more information on 'Grey to Green' projects supported by the Council, visit [www.belfastcity.gov.uk/greytogreen](http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/greytogreen).

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# WHY 'GROWING WILD' CAN BE A WIN FOR ALL!

JV Allister outlines the ways in which Social Housing Landlords are helping conserve nature.

I love nature, and have done since I was a child, and enjoy observing and writing about what I see and learn...from spiders to buzzards, from fungi to mighty oaks...but these days I'm also aware, indeed always aware, of what intrudes on my love and enjoyment: the serious damage to our natural world, right here in NI, and the consequential decline in wildlife.

It's not just that some birds or butterflies we took for granted a few years back are scarce or restricted to specialist habitats and protected places, but that there's an overall ongoing decline in the numbers of almost all previously common species, such as wild bees, moths at night and a whole range of flies.

It's important to emphasise that the decline or loss of species is not something to be mourned for itself, but the impact on other wildlife in our deeply connected natural environment, and



ultimately on us and our food supply.

It's easy to despair about the situation, but my hope rises when I see positive change being led by people and organisations that can make a difference, to help stop and reverse the decline.

Step forward social housing landlords!

With leadership from Alpha Housing, my landlord, and the Housing Executive, social landlords including many housing associations have committed to make their grounds maintenance practices

nature-friendly... changes to mowing regimes to let native flowers flourish, for instance..., to work with tenants on a wide range of habitat creation and activities, and ensure that nature is literally built into new developments.

Indeed, Alpha Housing is deepening its commitment by creating water features, so important to wildlife, including a beautiful pond at its Montgomery site in Bangor.

The commitment and importance of social housing providers to

nature recovery can't be overstated, not least because they are among the largest landowners in NI, but I hope that others will follow, for example health and education authorities, to at least sustain nature while we await positive change in rules on development and farming practices.

Maybe it's no longer despair but hope that many participants and partners will join in the fight...because it is a fight...to rescue nature in this lovely place we call home.

JVA

# Have you planned your summer childcare?

With brighter nights upon us, many working parents are starting to think about their summer childcare plans.

## Employers For Childcare

Additional childcare costs over the school summer holidays can put a significant stretched family finances.

Find out what financial support is available

There is help available with the cost of registered childcare, which can include some summer schemes, as well as year round providers such as registered childminders, out of school clubs and day nurseries. For example, parents may use Universal Credit, Childcare Vouchers or Tax-Free Childcare and the NI Childcare Subsidy Scheme to help meet their bills. Ahead of the summer now is a good time to make sure your family is receiving all the financial support you are entitled to.

Increased support through Universal

Credit and the NI Childcare Subsidy Scheme

In the Spring budget the Chancellor confirmed an increase in support for childcare costs through Universal Credit that applies for families across the UK.

The maximum support that can be received towards childcare costs over this summer is £1,031 per month for one child and £1,768 for two or more children.

In Northern Ireland, the Education Minister announced a 10% increase to the maximum amount of support that can be claimed through the NI childcare Subsidy Scheme to £184 per month per child, or £376 per month of the child has a disability.

With these increases in support available, it is important to check that you are receiving the best form



of support for your family's circumstances.

Finding suitable childcare

The Family Support NI website [www.familysupportni.gov.uk](http://www.familysupportni.gov.uk) is a useful resource for families looking for registered childcare and includes a search function for all registered childcare providers across Northern Ireland, including summer schemes.

Alternative working arrangements

Talk to your employer to see if they can facilitate alternative or flexible working

patterns if you find it challenging to manage childcare over the summer.

Flexible working arrangements can take various forms for example part-time working, compressed hours (working your agreed hours over fewer days), job sharing or term-time only working.

Further information To find out more about what financial support you are entitled to with your summer childcare, contact our Family Benefits Advice Service on 028 9267 8200 or email [hello@employersforchildcare.org](mailto:hello@employersforchildcare.org).

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# GENERATIONS OF SOCIAL WORKERS KEEP IT IN THE FAMILY AS THEY GATHER TO CELEBRATE WORLD SOCIAL WORK DAY

**Generations of families in the South Eastern Trust, who have dedicated their lives to Social Work, gathered in the Great Hall at the Downshire Hospital to celebrate World Social Work Day 2025.**

This year's theme, Intergenerational Solidarity for Emotional and Enduring Wellbeing, highlighted that Social Work is a profession that spans generations. Within the South Eastern Trust, many Social Workers come from the same families, with sons, daughters, nieces, nephews and cousins all playing a vital role, in supporting people from newborn babies to the elderly.

The Downshire event was filled with fun and camaraderie, featuring a 'Family Fortunes' style quiz where families of Social Workers tested their knowledge, answering important questions such as how many cups of tea a Social Worker drinks in a day!

The Nellis family, narrowly won the competition, defeating the Sister Act team after a tie breaker question. They were rewarded with exquisite hurricane lamps, crafted by the Disability Hub.

Emma Nellis, a Senior Social Worker in the Learning Improvement Team, revealed, "Six of the Nellis family are Social Workers and I think that is because we are very principled family."

"I love my job and connecting with people. I am a very sociable person and when I did case work, I enjoyed meeting



**Lyn Preece (Director of Children's Services & Executive Director of Social Work) & Fiona Gunn (Asst. Director Social Work, Learning & Improvement)**

the families I worked with in Disability and Psychiatry of Old Age. I have always been privileged to work with fantastic teams.

"When I left Disability, a family I worked with asked me to call and they thanked me and when I said I didn't really do anything the daughter said 'You listened to my mum'. That to me is Social Work."

Brendan Nellis, a Social Worker in the Gateway Team, reflected, "Today is a great opportunity to share our experiences as a family of Social Workers. There are six of us in the family who have chosen this path. My father was also a Social Worker before retiring. My sister worked for Barnardo's

and when a Support Worker role became available, I applied and that is how my career began.

"Being a Social Worker isn't easy, but having family members in the same profession means we can support each other. I enjoy my job because of the people I work with, it's what has kept me going for so long."

Fiona Nellis, a Key Worker in Ballynahinch Community Services for Older People, shared her journey into the profession saying "I originally applied to study Nursing but was encouraged to pursue social and community work instead. I really enjoy Social Work. There are highs and

lows, but the peaks make it all worthwhile. It can be challenging, but as a family of Social Workers, we all do different aspects of the job and that makes it even more interesting."

Fiona also emphasised the importance of public awareness, "A lot of people do not fully understand what we do as Social Workers. There is so much work happening behind the scenes and it is important that we are recognised for the difference we make."

Highlighting the significance of World Social Work Day, Director of Children's Services & Executive Director of Social Work, Lyn Preece commented,

"This year's theme emphasises how Social Workers provide support across all generations. It is a privilege to come together and celebrate this important work. No two days in Social Work are the same, you never know what challenges you may face, but the ability to intervene, be welcomed into people's homes and make a real difference is incredibly rewarding."

Lyn added, "The intergenerational focus is about empowering families to support each other and build strong networks. I am proud to be a Social Worker and to witness the incredible contribution our Social Workers make in the South Eastern Trust. Their dedication brings a sense of joy, fulfilment and achievement every single day."

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## Honest Food, cooked with care at The Pheasant, Annahilt

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Now that summer is here, we're excited to launch a brand new menu, all fired up thanks to our newly installed Bertha wood-fired oven.

Bertha brings a whole new flavour to the table. Think juicy steaks with flame-kissed edges, slow-cooked lamb, and

beef burgers seared just right, all with that deep, smoky taste only real fire can give. We've kept the classics you love and added a few fresh ideas, all cooked over wood for authentic rustic flavour.

Whether you're indoors by the bar or outside soaking up the sunshine, The Pheasant

is the perfect place to settle in. Pop by for a pint and a bite, or stay a while with family or friends over a long, lazy lunch. Either way, expect good food, a relaxed atmosphere, and real County Down hospitality.

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love for you to try it. It's honest food, cooked with care, and served in a spot that feels like home.

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# Rhododendron is destroying our native Woods and wildlife.

The Woodland Trust highlighted the impact of rhododendron on our native woods during the recent Invasive Non-Native Species Week

The Woodland Trust is urging gardeners not to buy Rhododendron ponticum this spring, as it looks to protect our native woods and wildlife. The charity used Invasive Non Native Species week (12 – 18 May) to draw attention to the appeal, as Rhododendron, in particular, spreads fast, suffocates other plants thereby wiping out havens for indigenous flowers, fungi and wildlife.

Rhododendron ponticum can grow very large, rapidly outcompeting native plants. Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) are animals, plants or pathogens that have been introduced to an area outside their natural range as a result of human activities and not part of the natural spread of species, causing a negative effect on the environment, population and/or economy. INNS play a key role in 60% of recorded global species extinctions and are the sole factor responsible for 16% of documented global animal and plant extinctions.

Northern Ireland is currently ranked 12th worst in the world for biodiversity loss, especially with the lowest level and

poor condition of ancient woodland. As the Woodland Trust's key objectives are to protect and restore woods and trees, as well as create quality native woodland, removing invasive species is a priority in supporting nature recovery.

The Woodland Trust cares for 55 woodlands and community woods across Northern Ireland, from the Faughan Valley in the northwest, to Mourne Park in the southeast. The conservation charity uses a multi-pronged approach on its estate to tackle the problem of invasive native and non-native species, by engaging contractors with machinery and teams of volunteer enthusiasts who remove invasives by hand.

The Woodland Trust also works in partnership with public and private landowners to eradicate invasive species on their land through significant outreach work.

The Woodland Trust has been working on restoring and protecting ancient and veteran trees in Mourne Park since 2019; the woodland conservation charity now manages 188 ha of the land where 73ha is



ancient woodland, extremely rare in Northern Ireland.

The ancient woodland in Mourne Park is under threat from rhododendron, laurel and other invasives like bamboo and Himalayan Balsam and the restoration work aims to clear them so that more light can reach the forest floor. The woodland recovery that has already taken place is evident for visitors to Mourne Park, who, at this time of year, can enjoy the spectacle of carpets of bluebells which have now returned, due to

the removal of the invasive plants.

The Woodland Trust is calling out to landowners who have a crucial role to play and so does everyone. To protect and restore our existing trees and woods in Northern Ireland, we need to pursue a mix of approaches, on our own estate and working in partnership with landowners.

If you own land and want to find out more or get involved, visit [www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/northern-ireland](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/northern-ireland)

# 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, the 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.

Call 028 9265 0700 (Mon – Fri) or visit [www.hannoncoach.com](http://www.hannoncoach.com)



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.

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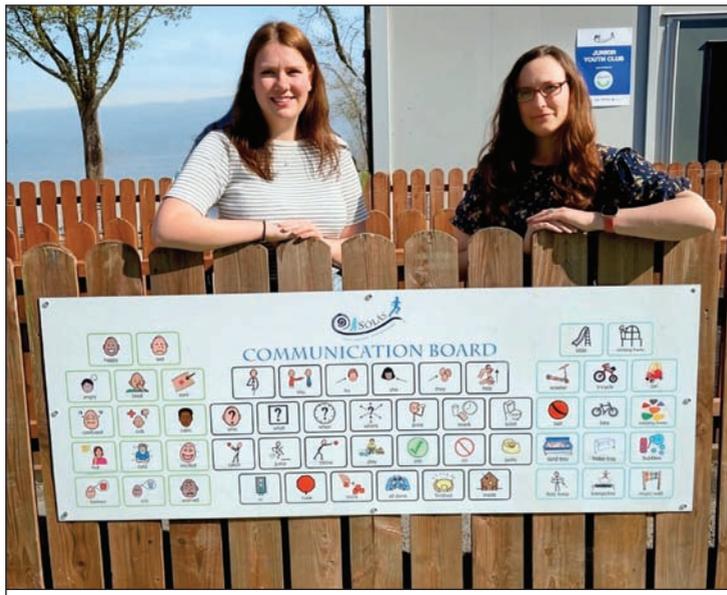
## SÓLÁS CHARITY LEADS THE WAY IN DESIGN OF COMMUNICATION BOARDS FOR LOCAL PLAYPARKS

Sólás, a special needs charity which supports children and young people with a broad range of additional needs including autism, have this month completed the design and installation of 12 communication boards, across the Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council area.

Michelle Murdock, senior manager at Sólás, who leads on the communication board project, says that the motivation for this work lays with "promoting inclusion and fairness for everyone, particularly those children with additional needs and making playparks more welcoming for all"

The communication boards have this month been installed in 10 parks across the Lisburn and Castlereagh City Councils, with each board uniquely designed to reflect the context and surrounding area of each park. They allow children and young people to communicate their feelings to others including, for example, what they may need while at the park and how they want to play. This allows

for independence and helps children with language and communication difficulties, to use an alternative medium, (communication boards) to socially interact with peers, and develop confidence. The boards are effective in preparing individuals for activity transitions with the count down on the bottom row of the boards, helping transitions away from an activity and preparing the user for a change, such as going to the toilet, having a snack, going to another activity, or leaving the park. According to Michelle, the boards will have a range of uses for everyone using the play areas and will increase the accessibility and inclusivity of playparks right across the LCCC area. [www.solasbt7.com](http://www.solasbt7.com)



Jenny Mack and Michelle Murdock, from Sólás

## Moving forward at Leadhill Primary School

There has been a special buzz of excitement over the past few months in Leadhill Primary School, with the opening of our new specialist provision unit, offering 8 places to stated Nursery to P2 children with a primary need of Severe Learning Difficulties.

The new unit, called 'The Foundation Class', will provide a firm foundation and individualised approach to support learning and development for all its new pupils. The class have already become an important part of life in Leadhill as the children forge friendships with all the other children in the Leadhill Family.

In Leadhill, this inclusive, nurturing, family approach is central to the ethos of the school. The school motto - 'Learning Together Moving Forwards' reflects the collaborative nature of the school and the desire to always progress and advance. The new Foundation Class is an exciting part of this journey for Leadhill.

Leadhill aims to support



families with provision of affordable and flexible childcare and a pre-school playgroup for children from 2 years and 10 months.

If you would like to know more about Leadhill, the Pre-school Playgroup and Wrap-Around Care, please

visit our website on [www.leadhillps.com](http://www.leadhillps.com).

Leadhill would love to welcome you for a visit. Contact the school office on 028 90401101 or email Mrs Millis on [amillis370@c2kni.net](mailto:amillis370@c2kni.net) to arrange for a suitable date and time.

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## Looking for a Primary School?

We would love to welcome you to Leadhill Primary School. We have a range of ways to provide you with the information you need:

- Visit our school website.
- Arrange to take a tour of the school. Visits can be arranged by appointment throughout the year
- Make an appointment to meet with the Principal.
- Take part in our Toddle Time group each Wednesday from 9 -11am.
- Find out about our Wrap-Around childcare solutions.
- Find out about our Pre-School Playgroup for children from 2 years and 10 months.
- Speak to the Principal about our SEN provision in our new unit for children with Severe Learning Difficulties.

*'Children are offered a range of opportunities to shine, which highlights all children's gifts. Leadhill is a great family school.'*  
(Parent comment)

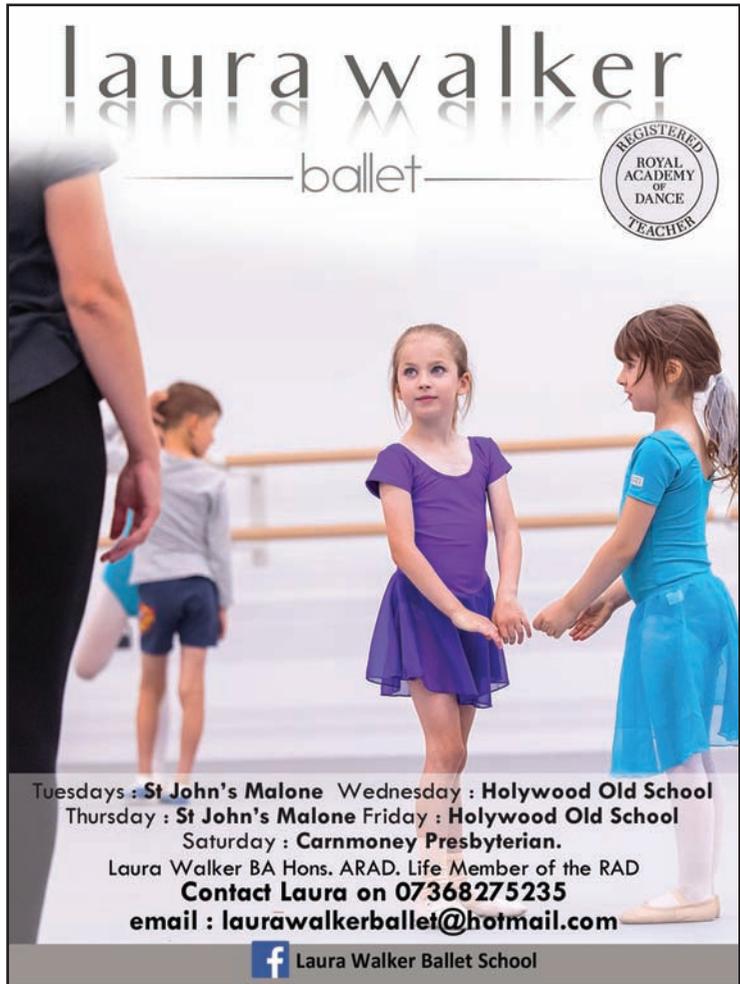
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# BELVOIR PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL CELEBRATES 60 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

Belvoir Park Primary School in Belfast has marked a remarkable milestone—its 60th anniversary—with a series of joyful events that reflect the school’s vibrant legacy and forward-looking ethos.



**laura walker**  
ballet

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The celebrations kicked off by adding a delightful Tea Party to the normal Christmas activities, welcoming past staff to tour the school to reminisce and reconnect with the school.

The event was filled with nostalgia, laughter, and a strong sense of community pride. Guests were treated to a buffet of treats, provided by 'The Thirsty Herd', where they shared memories, and explored displays of old photographs and memorabilia.

A snapshot of the year with a whole school photo, capturing every pupil and staff member together—a powerful symbol of unity and belonging. This image will serve as a cherished keepsake for years to come.

In April the whole school a spectacular show in the Belvoir Players Theatre,

where pupils dazzled audiences with their talent, creativity, and confidence.

The performance was a heartwarming tribute to the school's history, showcasing songs and events from the sixties, the decade the school was built.

Belvoir Park's commitment to sustainability and environmental education was also recognized during the anniversary year. The school proudly received the Eco-Schools Green Flag, a prestigious award celebrating its dedication to eco-friendly practices.

In addition, it earned the Woodland Trust's Green Tree Schools Bronze Award, highlighting its efforts in outdoor learning and conservation and adding to their Forest Schools practice.

They also welcomed new school pets in the form of three wonderful new



chickens, Bellina, Nando and Peppia!!

These achievements reflect the school's holistic approach to education—nurturing not only academic excellence but also environmental stewardship and community values.

As Belvoir Park

Primary looks to the future, its 60th anniversary stands as a testament to its enduring spirit, dedicated staff, and the generations of pupils who have passed through its doors. Here's to the next 60 years of inspiring young minds and building

firm foundations for lifelong learning.

The year of celebration finishes with a Community Fair on 30th May 2025 from 2:30pm.

We hope that lots of parents, pupils and staff will join us and lots of local community groups for this final event.



**BELVOIR PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**OUR CORE VALUES**

- Trustworthy
- Respectful
- Understanding
- Nurturing
- Knowledgeable

We have 2 Full time Nursery classes, single stream entry P1-7 and 6 Specialist Provision Classes for children with Speech & Language or Social Communication Difficulties catering for pupils from P1-P7.

We aim to develop confidence and natural curiosity in our pupils to help them be the best, wonderful and unique person they can be!

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**60 YEARS**

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Bronze Award

# CREATING A WILDLIFE POND IN YOUR OWN BACK GARDEN

Fancy turning a corner of your garden into a buzzing, croaking, and fluttering haven for local wildlife?

Creating a wildlife-friendly pond is not only a rewarding project but also a vital step in supporting biodiversity right outside your back door. It doesn't need to be huge or complicated; even a small pond can make a big difference. So, grab your wellies, and let's dig in!

**Planning Your Wild Oasis:** Before you start digging, take a moment to consider the best spot for your pond. Ideally, choose a location that receives a mix of sun and shade throughout the day. This will help prevent the water from overheating in the summer and support a wider range of plant life. Avoid placing the pond directly under trees, as falling leaves can decompose and pollute the water.

Think about the size and shape too. Natural, irregular shapes tend to look more appealing to wildlife. Even a small container pond can attract insects and amphibians. If you have more space, consider a larger pond with varying depths. This will provide different habitats for different creatures.

**Digging and Lining:** Once you've marked out your desired shape, it's time to get digging! Aim for at

least one deep area (around 60cm or 2 feet) to provide a refuge for wildlife during hot summers and cold winters. Create shallower edges and shelves – these are crucial for amphibians to enter and exit easily and for marginal plants to thrive.

For lining your pond, you have a few options:  
**Pre-formed rigid ponds:** These are easy to install but come in limited shapes and sizes.

**Flexible pond liner:** This allows for more creative shapes and sizes and is generally more cost-effective for larger ponds. Choose a thick, durable liner that is UV-resistant.

**Puddling clay:** For a truly natural approach, you can use puddling clay to create a watertight basin, although this requires more skill and effort.

Whichever you choose, ensure the liner is securely in place and hidden around the edges with soil, rocks, or plants to create a natural look.

**Planting for Life:** Plants are the backbone of a wildlife pond, providing food, shelter, and oxygen. Aim for a variety of native aquatic and marginal plants.

When planting, use aquatic compost and ensure the plants are at the correct



depth for their species. Allow some areas of open water for dragonflies to land and for birds to bathe.

**Making it Wildlife-Friendly:**

Beyond the plants, there are a few key things you can do to make your pond a wildlife magnet:

- **Easy access and exit:** Gently sloping sides or strategically placed rocks and logs will allow amphibians and other small creatures to get in and out of the water safely.

- **No fish (initially):** While fish can be attractive, they often eat amphibian eggs and larvae, as well as many beneficial invertebrates. Allow your pond to establish naturally for a year or two before considering introducing fish, and then choose native, small species

sparingly.

- **Avoid chemicals:** Never use pesticides or herbicides near your pond, as these can be harmful to wildlife.

- **Natural debris:** Allow some leaf litter and dead wood to remain in or around the pond. This provides shelter and food for many invertebrates.

- **A source of clean water:** Top up your pond with rainwater whenever possible. Avoid using tap water, which can contain chemicals that are harmful to aquatic life.

Once your pond is established, be patient. It might take some time for wildlife to discover it. You might initially see insects like pond skaters and water boatmen. Gradually, you may be rewarded with the sight of frogs, toads, newts,

dragonflies, damselflies, and even visiting birds coming for a drink or a bath.

Creating a wildlife-friendly pond is a continuous process of observation and gentle management. By providing a welcoming habitat, you'll be contributing to the health of your local ecosystem and enjoying the wonders of nature right in your own backyard. So, are you ready to make a splash?

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# Specsavers Connswater partners with Women's Aid to support eye and ear health for local women

**Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid are now able to provide essential eye and audiology services for women affected by domestic violence in Northern Ireland thanks to a new partnership with their local Specsavers stores.**

The stores, including Specsavers Connswater, will offer vital support to vulnerable women, ensuring that they have access to eye and hearing tests, treatments, prescription lenses and frames whenever they need them. As part of this ongoing partnership, Belfast and Lisburn's Women's Aid will also engage with Specsavers staff for awareness sessions to help them to better understand the experiences of women affected by domestic abuse.

Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid plays a crucial role in supporting survivors of domestic violence, with 1,604 women using its services in the 2023/24 year. Of these, 920 identified as having a disability or complex need, including 9 with visual disabilities and 11 with hearing disabilities.

Sarah Mason, Chief Executive Officer of Women's Aid in Northern Ireland said, "The PSNI receive a domestic violence-related call every

16 minutes. Domestic abuse affects women in so many ways, including their ability to access healthcare. Often these women have experienced injuries that can affect both their eyes and ears. Having this partnership with Specsavers Connswater is a vital step in helping women in our local Belfast shelter who are seeking help to rebuild their lives. Eye and ear health services can make a real difference in ensuring that these women feel supported and heard."

Acknowledging the importance of accessible healthcare, Specsavers Lisburn have led the way in initiating this partnership with Women's Aid. Three additional Specsavers stores have stepped in alongside the Lisburn and Connswater stores to provide these services including Abbey Centre, Park Centre and Victoria Square. Women at the Belfast and Lisburn refuges will be able to book an eye or audiology test through the refuge directly free of charge, with the

stores ensuring the on-going care for each individual who uses their services.

Paula Cunningham, Director at Specsavers Connswater emphasises the significance of this partnership, "As two female directors, we are in awe of the work that Women's Aid do and are incredibly eager to offer support women in our local area. We want to be able to offer some normality to women experiencing domestic abuse and offer them a safe space to access testing and care when they need it. We hope that this partnership not only provides practical help but also raises awareness of the challenges that women experiencing domestic abuse in Northern Ireland face."

This collaboration reflects a shared commitment to providing women with the care and resources that they need in a safe and supportive environment. The service will be available to women whenever they require it, reinforcing the importance of accessible healthcare in



Connswater Specsavers Store Director Lynsey Caldwell pictured with Katrina Eves Communications Engagements Coordinator at Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid.

the fight against domestic violence.

To find out more about the work that Women's Aid do

to tackle domestic violence in Northern Ireland visit <https://www.womensaidni.org/>

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY COMMISSION ACHIEVES AUTISM NI IMPACT AWARD

**The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission has recently achieved Autism NI's Impact Award, demonstrating the commitment of Assembly staff to inclusion for autistic and neurodivergent visitors.**

Staff have received tailored training from Autism NI and implemented a tailored action plan of adjustments across their services, to create a welcoming and accessible service.

Autism NI's Director of Development, Christine Kearney said "We are delighted that the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission has achieved the Impact Award. The range of adjustments they have implemented, including quiet spaces, pre-visit information and improved signage, will support many autistic and neurodivergent visitors.

By providing inclusive support, autistic and neurodivergent people can feel more comfortable, less anxious, and can access this service in a way that works for them.

It's fantastic to see such a significant organisation in NI lead the way in building an inclusive society."

Richard Anderson, Autism Champion and staff member at the Northern Ireland Assembly said "We are so pleased to achieve the Impact Award accreditation for our work in building accessibility within the Northern Ireland Assembly and throughout Parliament Buildings.

The training has really built the confidence and skills of Assembly Commission staff, and the action plan process has helped us to implement a range of practical adjustments. Achieving the award demonstrates our commitment to inclusion and helps us to ensure all visitors can have a positive experience."

Autism NI works alongside autistic people and their families, and builds partnerships that champion better understanding, accessibility, and services for our autism community. The Impact Award is available for a range of organisations, to build their inclusive approach for clients, customers and employees.

Autism NI provides vital services for autistic people and their families throughout Northern Ireland, and campaigns for autism understanding and acceptance within society.

To learn more about how you can get involved, please visit <https://autismni.org/training-courses/training-for-organisations/impact-award-for-businesses> or call 028 9040 1729.

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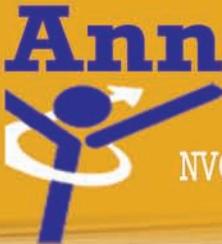
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# FUN FAMILY ARTS AND CRAFTS PROJECTS FOR SUMMER DAYS!

The school bell has rung, the sun is shining (hopefully!), and long, lazy days stretch out before us.

What better way to fill those glorious summer hours than with some fun and engaging arts and crafts projects? Forget the screens for a while and let imaginations run wild with these creative ideas that are perfect for all ages and skill levels. So grab your supplies, head outdoors if you can, and get ready to make some colourful summer memories!

Summer provides the most beautiful and readily available art supplies – nature itself!

**Leaf Rubbings:** Collect interesting leaves of different shapes and textures. Place a leaf under a piece of paper and rub over it with the side of a crayon or coloured pencil to reveal its intricate patterns. Experiment with different colours and layering.

**Flower Power Prints:** Gently press colourful flowers and leaves onto paper or fabric using a heavy book. For a more permanent print, try pounding them gently with a soft mallet under a piece of fabric, releasing their natural dyes.

**Painted Rocks:** Smooth, flat rocks become mini canvases! Wash and dry your rocks, then unleash your creativity with acrylic paints. Turn them into animals, insects, abstract designs, or even little messages to hide around



the garden. Seal with a clear varnish for outdoor display.

**Nature Collages:** Gather twigs, pebbles, shells, sand, and other natural treasures. Use glue to arrange them onto cardboard or paper to create unique collages inspired by the summer landscape.

Beat the heat with some refreshing and vibrant craft ideas:

**DIY Tie-Dye:** A classic summer activity! Experiment with different folding and tying techniques to create unique patterns on old t-shirts, socks, or fabric scraps. Use fabric dyes and follow the instructions carefully for vibrant results.

**Painted Seashells:** If you've been to the beach, those collected seashells

are perfect for painting! Use acrylics or even nail polish to add colourful designs, glitter, or turn them into miniature creatures.

**Friendship Bracelets Galore:** An 'old school' but timeless summer craft! Learn different braiding and knotting techniques using embroidery floss or colourful string to create friendship bracelets for your buddies.

**Tips for Summer Crafting Success:**

**Embrace the Outdoors:** Take your crafts outside whenever possible to enjoy the sunshine and fresh air, and to make cleanup easier!

**Gather Your Supplies:** Before you start, make sure you have all the necessary materials to avoid interruptions.

**Protect Your Surfaces:** Use old newspapers, tablecloths, or trays to protect your work area from paint and glue.

**Don't Be Afraid to Experiment:** Let creativity lead the way! There are no right or wrong answers in art.

**Most Importantly:** Have Fun! Summer is all about enjoying yourself, so relax, get creative, and make some wonderful memories through art.

So, ditch the boredom and dive into a world of colourful creations this summer.

These projects are not just about making something beautiful; they're about spending quality time, fostering imagination, and creating lasting memories. Happy crafting!

# Unlocking Potential at Victoria College Preparatory School

Nestled in the heart of South Belfast, Victoria College Preparatory School is a vibrant, forward-thinking community dedicated to the education of girls aged 3 - 11.

With a proud tradition of excellence, we offer a nurturing environment where every pupil is inspired to thrive - academically, socially, and personally.

Our dedicated staff deliver a rich, engaging curriculum that sparks curiosity and builds confidence. Small class sizes ensure personalised attention, allowing each girl to flourish at her own pace. From early literacy to advanced learning challenges, we prepare our pupils for a bright academic future.

At Victoria Prep, learning extends beyond the classroom. Pupils enjoy a wide range of extracurricular opportunities - from drama and music to languages, creative arts, and sports. Our specialist coaches and

teachers support girls in discovering their passions and developing new skills.

We believe in holistic development. Our inclusive, respectful community fosters resilience, creativity, and a love of learning. With wraparound care from 8am to 6pm, we support busy families while ensuring every child is safe, happy, and engaged.

Sport is a cornerstone of school life, with opportunities in rugby, hockey, netball, gymnastics, and more. Whether your daughter is a team player or an individual competitor, she'll find her place here.

Choosing Victoria College Preparatory School is an investment in your daughter's future. Join us in shaping confident, capable young women ready to succeed in every aspect of life.



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# Create memories at Chestnutt Holiday Parks

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Our modern, fully-equipped caravans provide a cozy and homely atmosphere, offering all the amenities you need for a stress-free getaway. With the flexibility to come and go as you please, and the freedom to explore the beautiful Mourne Coast, a caravan holiday at Chestnutt Holiday Parks is an experience you'll want to repeat year after year.

Book your stay today, and let us help you create unforgettable memories. Whether it's a weekend getaway or a longer break, a caravan holiday promises the perfect blend of relaxation and adventure. Don't wait – the open road and the great outdoors are calling!

# Meet The Ormeau Credit Union Team – Dedicated to Supporting You!

We're delighted to introduce two valued members of the Ormeau Credit Union team – Tina Crawford and Lisa Parr.

With a combined 19 years of experience, they're passionate about helping members with all aspects of their financial journey. Here's a little more about each of them.

**Tina Crawford**  
Tina has been part of the Ormeau Credit Union family for over eleven years and genuinely loves her role. Every day, she looks forward to helping members find smart financial solutions tailored to their lives. Tina is especially passionate about supporting members with

larger borrowing needs and is proud to promote our special low loan rate of just 7.9% on loans over £15,000 – a great option for big plans or big dreams. Her warm personality and deep knowledge make her a trusted adviser to many. For Tina, the best part of her job is seeing members thrive – and knowing she's been part of their journey.

**Lisa Gregg**  
With eight years of dedicated service, Lisa Gregg finds real joy in working at Ormeau

Credit Union. She loves the strong team spirit and the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with members, helping them feel supported and understood. Lisa's role allows her to assist members through all stages of life – from first loans to family budgeting – with care and professionalism. She especially enjoys welcoming new faces and is always eager to share that if you live or work in our bond area, you can become a member. For Lisa, there's nothing



(L) Tina Crawford & Lisa Gregg pictured right

better than being part of people first. So come and an organisation that puts join us!

# Sneaky Ways to Practice Maths Skills Over Summer

Over the Summer Holiday the last thing anyone wants to think about is fractions and formulas.

But hold on a minute! Summer doesn't have to be a math-free zone. In fact, it's the perfect time to sneak in some valuable maths practice in fun and engaging ways that feel more like play than homework. Get ready for some "Math Mania" – summer style!

Become a Kitchen Calculator:  
The kitchen is a surprisingly rich environment for

mathematical exploration.

**Baking Bonanza:** When following recipes, get kids involved in measuring ingredients. Ask them to double or halve the recipe, requiring them to work with fractions and multiplication. "If the recipe calls for 2 1/2 cups of flour, how much do we need if we want to make twice as many cookies?"

**Pizza Power:** Ordering or making pizza? Discuss the

fractions of the pizza. "If we have a pizza cut into 8 slices and we eat 3, what fraction of the pizza is left?" You can also talk about the area of different sized pizzas.

**Grocery Store Guru:** Take your child grocery shopping and involve them in comparing prices per unit, calculating discounts, and estimating the total cost of your purchases. "This box of cereal is £3.50 for 500g, and this one is £4.00 for 600g.



Which is the better value?"

**Outdoor Explorers and Number Ninjas:**  
The great outdoors offers plenty of opportunities for mathematical thinking.

**Nature's Numbers:** Go on a nature walk and count different types of leaves, flowers, or insects. Older children can estimate distances between trees or calculate the perimeter of a garden bed.

**Building Bonanzas:** Whether it's building sandcastles at the beach or constructing a fort in the garden, talk about shapes, sizes, and stability. "How many buckets of sand do you think it will take to fill this section?"

**Sports Stats Superstar:** If your child is involved in sports, keep track of scores, distances, and times. Calculate averages and compare performances. "You scored 2 goals in the first half and 1 in the second. What was your average number of goals per half?"

**Travel Time Trials:**  
When planning day trips or holidays, involve kids in looking at maps, calculating distances, and estimating travel times. "If we travel at an average speed of 60 miles per hour and the destination is 120 miles away, how long will it take us to get there?"

The Sneaky Secret Ingredient: Make it Fun!  
The key to successful summer maths practice is to make it enjoyable and relevant to your child's interests. Avoid making it feel like a chore. Frame activities as challenges, puzzles, or games.

Celebrate their successes and encourage a growth mindset.

By weaving maths into everyday summer activities, you can help your child retain and even improve their skills without the pressure of the school environment. So, get ready to embrace the "Math Mania" and have a summer that's both fun and mathematically enriching!

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# Getting On the Property Ladder – Advice for First Time Buyers

As a first-time-buyer, the prospect of getting on the property ladder can seem daunting and complicated. However, by following our advice, the steps can become significantly easier.

The first thing that you will have to do is begin saving for a deposit. Generally, you will have to save between 5% and 20% of the value of the property that you like – if the home is £150,000 then you will need between £7,500 (5%) and £30,000 (20%) depending on the property. It is important to note that saving more for your deposit will give access to a wider range of cheaper mortgages – so get saving!

It is important that you factor in the other costs associated with buying a property. These can add up to the thousands of pounds and can derail any potential budget when it comes to getting your first home.

Additional costs include survey costs, solicitor's fees, buildings insurance and valuation fees to name but a few. It is worth asking



your bank about these prices before you can therefore factor them into your budget. First-time-buyers do have an advantage here as they will pay no Stamp Duty on the first £300,000 for properties valued up to £500,000.

When applying for your mortgage, the most important factor for your lender is to know that you will be able to meet

your repayments. You will need to provide documentation of all of your outgoing costs, including, debts, household bills, or other costs such as car repayments, childcare or travel costs.

The amount that a lender will give you for a mortgage is directly related to both your income and outgoing expenses – so it is important to consider this when looking into homes that you can afford.

There are a number of governmental schemes available to help first-time-buyers get on the property market such as affordable housing schemes, help to buy schemes and shared ownership schemes.

These are designed to assist those who are struggling to save their full deposit and might be exactly what is required to get you on the property ladder.

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Beyond Stannah stairlifts, Olympic Lifts also supplies, installs, tests, and maintains Passenger Lifts, Access Lifts, Goods Lifts, escalators, and Moving walkways. We are proud to have completed almost 20,000 projects over the past four decades. Recently, we

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Our commitment to continuous development, investment, and product advancement ensures that Olympic Lifts offers the most up-to-date, highest

quality products and services. This dedication translates to an improved purchasing experience, enhanced efficiencies, and cost savings for our valued customers.

For more information on our range of Stannah stairlifts and other lifting solutions, please contact us at 02892 622331 or visit our website at [www.olympiclifts.co.uk](http://www.olympiclifts.co.uk).



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# Summer Barbeque Guide

With the sun beating down and heat slowly rising, it is clear to see that barbeque season has finally arrived. However, if you are thinking of investing in a barbeque, there is a great deal to consider.

Prices for barbeques can range from £10 to the multiple thousands and the extensive range has something to cater for every possible need. Depending on the number of grills, number of additional features and quality of its production – there is a lot to consider when choosing your perfect barbeque.

The timeless debate which has been had over many a family barbeque once again raises its head on this occasion – gas or charcoal?

In many cases your budget might well dictate your choice for you as charcoal barbeques tend to be significantly more cost effective. For those barbeque stalwarts, nothing will compare to a traditional charcoal barbeque and using a gas equivalent is as good as cheating.

It is also widely held that the taste from cooking on a charcoal barbeque is distinctive and cannot be reproduced by a modern gas counterpart.

Charcoal does, however, take a considerable length of time to heat up whereas with gas, you can begin cooking almost immediately –



providing an obvious advantage. For the sheer convenience of instantaneous cooking, gas barbeques are hard to beat.

In terms of running costs, with gas barbeques you will often 'rent' a cylinder and pay for each refill of gas that you require - a 13Kg canister costs approximately £35. With charcoal however, costs approximately £15 for a 10kg bag which will serve up to three medium barbeques.

Other factors that should be considered include if the barbeque has a lid, the number of people you are likely to be cooking for and what

type of food you intend to be cooking.

Buying a barbeque with a lid brings a degree of versatility to your barbequing that is not otherwise available. It grants you far greater control over the heat and allows you to cook food more thoroughly as opposed to burning the outside whilst leaving the inside underdone.

If you are sticking to traditional burgers and sausages then perhaps charcoal is for you, however if you wish to branch out and cook chicken or pork then gas may be the safest option.

If you have a large

family or intend on cooking for guests on a regular basis, it might be worth investing in a gas barbeque as it will give you the reliability and accuracy that is required when hosting for numerous guests. It also brings unrivalled convenience that allows its owner to mingle freely knowing that the cooking is fully under their control. More upmarket barbeques will also come with various features such as heating racks that allow food to sit above the grill whilst still in the barbeque to ensure that it will remain warm.

# NEW BIG GREEN EGG DISPLAY AT THE STOVE YARD

The Stove Yard in Newtownards has been Northern Ireland's leading Big Green Egg dealer for over eight years, supplying this iconic outdoor cooker to chefs, food lovers, and barbecue enthusiasts across the country.

Now, for 2025, they've taken things a step further with a brand new dedicated Big Green Egg display in their showroom – showcasing not only the full range of ceramic grills, but also the extensive collection of accessories that make the Egg a complete outdoor cooking system.

From roasting joints and baking sourdough to perfecting pizza and low 'n' slow brisket, the Big Green Egg is the ultimate all-in-one solution.

Its high-grade ceramics lock in heat and moisture, offering unmatched control and flavour – all fuelled by natural lump charcoal.

The new display at The Stove Yard features fully built Egg setups, modular tables, and a wide selection of tools and cooking surfaces – from



cast iron pans and pizza stones to specialist racks and rotisseries.

As the go-to destination for Big Green Egg in Northern

Ireland, The Stove Yard offers expert advice, product demonstrations, and all the support you need to get started or upgrade your outdoor cooking game.

Visit the showroom in Newtownards to see the new display and experience why the Big Green Egg continues to set the standard for outdoor cooking.

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# Eye-Catching Summer Containers

Summer is the season of vibrant life, and what better way to bring that energy to your doorstep than with overflowing window boxes and cascading hanging baskets?

These portable gardens offer a fantastic opportunity to showcase a riot of colour and texture, transforming even the smallest outdoor space into a floral paradise. But creating truly eye-catching displays takes a little more than just scattering some seeds. Let's delve into the secrets of crafting stunning summer containers that will have your neighbours green with envy.

The Foundation: Choosing the Right Containers and Location

Before you even think

about plants, consider the containers themselves. For window boxes, ensure they are sturdy, have adequate drainage holes, and are the right size for your window ledge. Hanging baskets should also be well-draining and strong enough to support mature plants and moist soil. Consider the material too – terracotta offers a classic look but dries out faster, while plastic is lightweight and retains moisture better.

Next, assess the location. How much sunlight does the area receive? This will dictate the types of plants that will thrive. South-facing spots bake in the sun, ideal

for heat-loving varieties, while shadier north-facing walls call for different selections. Understanding your microclimate is crucial for long-lasting, vibrant displays.

Selecting Your Summer Stars

To create eye-catching arrangements, consider these key elements:

- Thrillers: These are your focal point – tall, upright plants that add height and drama. Think geraniums (Pelargoniums), petunias with interesting habits, snapdragons, or even small ornamental grasses.
- Fillers: These bushy plants fill out the container,

adding volume and supporting the thrillers. Consider calibrachoa (Million Bells), lobelia, verbena, or cascading petunias.

- Spillers: These trailing plants cascade over the edges, softening the look and adding movement. Ivy geraniums, trailing lobelia, sweet potato vine (Ipomoea), and Dichondra 'Silver Falls' are excellent choices.

Adding Texture and Colour Harmony

While choosing individual beauties is important, the magic happens when they work together. Think about:

Colour Palette: Do you

prefer a bold and contrasting scheme, a harmonious blend of similar hues, or a cool and calming white and green display? Consider your home's exterior and your personal style.

Foliage Interest: Don't underestimate the power of foliage! Silvery leaves of dusty miller, the vibrant lime green of creeping Jenny, or the deep purple of Alternanthera add texture and visual interest even when flowers aren't in full bloom.

Varying Forms and Textures: Combine plants with different leaf shapes and flower forms for a more dynamic look.



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# CEILING, THE FIFTH WALL WITH SOMETHING TO SAY

The ceiling — sometimes referred to as a room's fifth wall — often gets short shrift in decorating schemes.

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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# 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. Orangery's 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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## Fun Family Adventures This Summer

Summer in Northern Ireland offers a breathtaking backdrop for unforgettable family adventures.

From stunning coastlines to mythical landscapes and vibrant cities, there's a wealth of experiences waiting to be explored. So, pack your bags, gather your loved ones, and get ready to create lasting memories with these fun-filled activities.

Dive into Nature's Playground:

Tollymore Forest Park: This stunning forest park in County Down offers picturesque walking trails suitable for all ages and abilities. Discover ancient trees, charming bridges, and the Shimna River flowing through the heart of the park. Keep an eye out for wildlife and enjoy a picnic amidst the tranquil surroundings.

Castlewellan Forest Park: Another gem in County Down, Castlewellan boasts a magnificent castle, a stunning lake, and a Peace Maze – one of the world's longest permanent hedge mazes. Challenge your family to find their way to the centre and enjoy the beautiful gardens and walking trails.

Lough Neagh: As the largest freshwater lake in the British Isles, Lough Neagh offers a variety of water-based activities. Consider a boat trip, try some fishing, or enjoy a leisurely cycle along the shores. There are also several parks and nature reserves around the lough perfect for family picnics and exploring.

Uncover History and Culture:

Ulster Folk Museum and Ulster Transport Museum: Located near Belfast, these interconnected museums offer a fascinating journey through Northern Ireland's past. Wander through a recreated early 20th-century town in the Folk Museum and marvel at vintage cars, trains, and aircraft in the Transport Museum. Interactive exhibits make learning fun for all ages.

Titanic Belfast: Immerse yourselves in the story of the world's most famous ship at the award-winning Titanic Belfast museum. Explore interactive galleries, walk the decks of a replica ship, and learn about the city's shipbuilding heritage.

Derry-Londonderry Walls: Take a walk around the historic city walls of Derry-Londonderry, one of the best-preserved walled cities in Europe. Enjoy panoramic views of the city and learn about its fascinating past. Consider a guided walking tour to delve deeper into the city's history. Beyond the city walls, Derry-Londonderry offers attractions like the Tower Museum, which provides insights into the city's history, and the Peace Bridge, a symbol of reconciliation offering stunning views of the River Foyle.

Belfast: Explore the vibrant capital city with a visit to Belfast Zoo, home to a di-

verse range of animals. Take a stroll through the Botanic Gardens and visit the Ulster Museum. For a unique experience, consider a Black Taxi Tour to learn about the city's history and murals.

Tips for Planning Your Family Adventure:

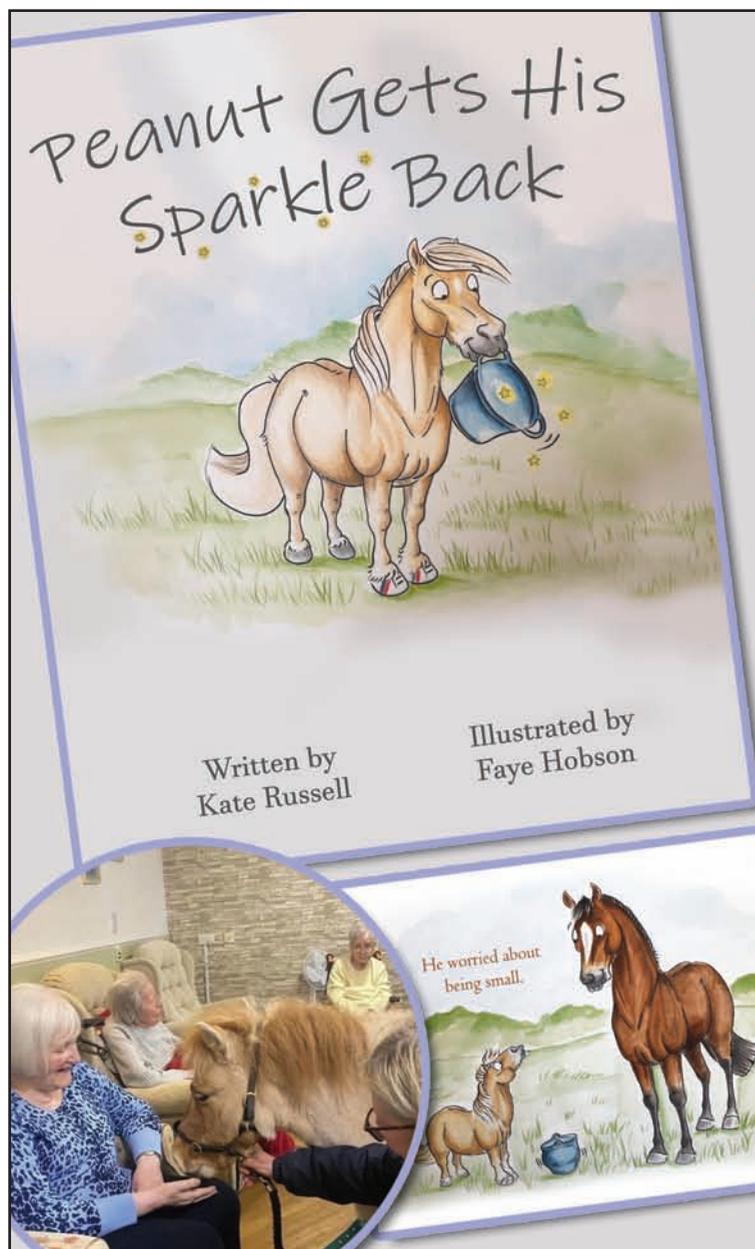
Book in Advance: Especially during the summer months, popular attractions and accommodations can fill up quickly. It's advisable to book tickets and lodging in advance to avoid disappointment.

Pack for All Weather: Northern Ireland's weather can be unpredictable, so it's always a good idea to pack layers of clothing and waterproofs.

Check Opening Times and Accessibility: Before visiting any attraction, check their opening times and any accessibility information to ensure they meet your family's needs.

Embrace the Unexpected: Sometimes the best family memories are made during spontaneous moments. Be open to detours and unexpected discoveries along the way.

This summer, escape and create unforgettable family memories. With a diverse range of activities to choose from, there's something to delight every member of the family. So, get planning and prepare for an adventure you'll cherish for years to come!



## 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).**

# TOP CARS FOR SUMMER MOTORING IN NI!

As we shake off the last of the spring chill and longer, sunnier days beckon, many drivers turn their thoughts to enjoying the open road.

Whether it's coastal drives, countryside escapes, or simply making the most of the pleasant weather, the right car can significantly enhance the summer motoring experience. Here are some of the best and most recently released models that cater to various summer driving preferences:

**For the Wind-in-Your-Hair Enthusiast: Convertibles**

Nothing quite says summer like a convertible, allowing you to soak up the sun and fresh air. Several exciting new and recent models offer this exhilarating experience:

- **Mazda MX-5:** A timeless classic, the latest iteration of the MX-5 (launched in 2015 but continuously updated) remains a top choice for affordable open-top fun. Its lightweight design and

engaging handling make it a joy on winding country roads. You can choose between the traditional soft-top or the retractable hard-top (RF) version.

- **BMW 4 Series Convertible:** For those seeking a bit more practicality and luxury, the latest 4 Series Convertible offers four seats and a more refined driving experience. It boasts powerful engines, a premium interior, and a sophisticated retractable hardtop that provides good insulation when closed.

- **MINI Convertible:** If you're after a stylish and agile city car with open-top thrills, the MINI Convertible is a fantastic option. Its compact size makes it perfect for navigating urban streets, while its fun handling and distinctive design add a touch of summer flair.



It's available with an automatic gearbox for relaxed cruising.

- **MG Cyberster:** A newcomer making waves as an all-electric convertible, the MG Cyberster offers a futuristic design, electric

performance (up to 496hp), and impressive range. Its striking scissor doors and modern interior make a statement, offering a unique blend of open-top driving and electric mobility.

The Versatile Choice:

Electric Vehicles for Summer Adventures

Electric vehicles (EVs) are becoming increasingly popular in the UK, and many of the latest models are well-suited for summer motoring, offering smooth, quiet driving

and impressive range for longer journeys:

- **Tesla Model 3 Performance:** Continuously updated, the Model 3 Performance offers exhilarating acceleration and a sleek design, making it ideal

for summer road trips. Its advanced Autopilot features enhance safety and convenience on long drives, while its spacious interior ensures passenger comfort.

- **Renault Scenic E-Tech:** This new electric family car blends hatchback and SUV characteristics, offering a spacious five-seat interior and a comfortable ride. With a good range, it's well-equipped for summer family adventures.

- **Audi Q6 e-tron:** A recently launched electric SUV, the Audi Q6 e-tron boasts rapid charging capabilities, a state-of-the-art digital interface, and a generous amount of storage space, making it a practical and refined choice for summer travels.

- **Hyundai Ioniq 9:** Set to arrive in the UK, this large seven-seat

electric SUV offers a long range and a spacious, futuristic interior. It's designed for comfortable long-distance travel, making it perfect for family summer holidays.

Features like efficient air conditioning, comfortable seating, and good infotainment systems for enjoyable road trips are increasingly common. Keep an eye out for models with bright and airy interiors, large windows, and those that offer a smooth and comfortable ride for those longer summer journeys! Whether you prioritize open-top thrills, SUV practicality with a view, or the smooth and efficient experience of an EV, the current market offers a wide range of exciting and recently released models to make the most of NI's summer driving season in 2025.

## THE RETURN OF AN ICON: NEW RENAULT 4 E-TECH 100% ELECTRIC NOW AVAILABLE

The new Renault 4 E-Tech 100% electric first seen at the 2024 Paris Motor Show is now available.

Just as the original Renault 4 was born in response to the challenges of its time, the new Renault 4 E-Tech 100% electric is a retro-futuristic reinvention that reflects Renault's commitment to accelerating the energy transition.

The front grille is the first aspect to catch the eye. Inspired by the original Renault 4, it is made from a single 1.45m-long piece and is unique in the industry, with its continuous and illuminated surround perfectly framing the Renault logo at its centre. At the rear, the original's iconic three-part lights are given a new lease of life, with modern lines and a distinctive LED signature.

These are just two of the many nods to the original Renault 4's design; others include the bonnet lines that continue to the bottom of the grille, the shape of the rear quarter window, the three lines sculpted into

the doors that bring to mind the plastic protectors of the original and the distinctive forms in the roof, now adorned with roof bars.

Larger than the Renault 5 (with which it shares 68% of its components), the Renault 4 E-Tech 100% electric offers impressive interior space thanks to its extended 2.62m wheelbase. At 4.14m in length, rear seat occupants benefit from 16.4cm of knee room, while headroom of 85.3cm is particularly generous for a B-segment vehicle.

The dual horizontal screens give the cabin a contemporary look. The central 10-inch multimedia screen is standard, and can feature the award-winning OpenR Link system with Google built-in. It provides access to a range of Google services, including Google Maps, which offers charging-optimised route planning, even activating pre-conditioning of the battery as a charging stop

approaches, as well as a variety of apps from the Google Play store.

First seen on the Renault 5, Reno – the virtual travelling companion – is also present on Renault 4 E-Tech 100% electric. An avatar with real personality, Reno supports customers throughout their ownership experience, both inside and outside the car. Reno can answer questions and perform tasks such as scheduling charging, helping to make everyday life easier.

Built on the same AmpR Small platform as the R5, the Renault 4 E-Tech 100% electric continues the original Renault 4's sense of go-anywhere practicality, with its increased ground clearance (1.2cm more than Captur). The suspension has been optimised for a smoother, more comfortable ride for all occupants, while the steering system has been revised with a shorter ratio



(14:5) and a tight turning circle of just 10.8m, perfect for city streets and easy driving.

Two powertrains are available, both of which are equipped with a heat pump to maximise their efficiency as well as bidirectional charging with

V2L (vehicle-to-load) and V2G (vehicle-to-grid) functionality that can power external devices from the battery or feed electricity back into the grid as necessary\*\*.

The 52 kWh battery uses NMC (Nickel Manganese Cobalt) technology and

a simplified architecture that means it now weighs less than 300kg. It powers a 110 kW (150 hp, 245 Nm) electric motor that accelerates the Renault 4 E-Tech 100% electric from 0-62mph in less than 8.5 seconds, with a WLTP range of up to 250 miles\*.

Renault 4 E-Tech 100% electric features the new One Pedal function. By optimising regenerative braking, the vehicle decelerates smoothly when the driver releases the accelerator pedal, coming to a stop without the driver having to apply the brake.

It joins an array of advanced driving aids that enhance safety and driving comfort, many of which are rarely seen in the B-segment, including

rear occupant safe exit alert, active driver assist combining adaptive cruise control with Stop & Go and lane centring assist, as well as blind spot monitoring and hands-free parking\*. Renault 4 E-Tech 100% electric will also feature My Safety Shield, a feature that can be found across the Renault product range, which allows drivers to activate their preferred settings at the touch of a button.

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