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The Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Gillian McCollum alongside (L-R) Peter Schofield, Mrs Rene McAlister, who celebrates her 97th birthday this month, and Rene's daughter, Janet Schofield.

SPRING TEA DANCE BRINGS JOY AND COMMUNITY SPIRIT TO QUEEN'S HALL

The Queen's Hall in Newtownards was filled with music, colour and community spirit on Tuesday 10 March as Ards and North Down Borough Council hosted its Spring Tea Dance, the third event in the 2025/2026 tea dance season.

Guests were welcomed by the Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Gillian McCollum, who opened the afternoon by highlighting the importance of connection and wellbeing within the community.

The Spring Tea Dance forms part of the Council's wider active ageing programme, which aims to encourage older adults to

stay engaged, connected and involved in local life.

Music and dancing were led by Liam McLaughlin, whose energy and enthusiasm kept the dance floor lively throughout the afternoon. Guests also enjoyed a refreshment break with tea, coffee and biscuits—a chance to chat, relax and recharge before returning to the music.

The Mayor of Ards and

North Down, Councillor Gillian McCollum said:

"Spring is a season of renewal, colour and fresh beginnings. As the flowers bloom and the days grow longer, it feels only fitting that we gather together in friendship, music and celebration. Events like this remind us of the importance of community – taking time to connect, to laugh, and to promote

wellbeing in a fun and meaningful way.

I'd like to thank Age Friendly Ards and North Down, Community Development and Arts & Culture for organising these events, which play such an important role in bringing people together."

Continued on page 4

Ards locals urged to take part in Breast Foot Forward Walk

On Friday 5th June, a sea of pink will sweep through Belfast once again as Action Cancer hosts the Breast Foot Forward Walk.

Walkers will gather at Belfast City Hall from 6pm for a lively warm-up with Fitness Freddy, plus plenty of free goodies to kick things off. Participants can choose between a 5K or 10K route, helping to raise vital funds and awareness for breast cancer across Northern Ireland.

This year's Breast Foot Forward Walk aims to raise £70,000 to fund potentially life-saving breast screening appointments for 583 local women.

Action Cancer is the only charity in Northern Ireland offering free breast screening to well women aged 40-49 and over 70 – those who fall outside the NHS screening programme. All participants

are encouraged to raise a minimum of £120 in sponsorship, the amount it costs Action Cancer to provide digital breast screening for one woman.

Early registration is now open and will run to the end of April with a reduced price of £10 per adult and £5 per child. So, grab your BFF or your 4-legged friend, get dressed up in pink, and step your way to the finish line with Action Cancer. So sign up, save a life, and support a friend.

For further information or to register, visit www.actioncancer.org/breast-foot-forward, contact Action Cancer on 028 9080 3344 (option 2) or email breastfootforward@actioncancer.org

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Familiar voices return as Downtown Radio celebrates half a century on air

Nifty at 50! Northern Ireland's longest running commercial radio station, Downtown Radio, is marking its 50th anniversary this month, celebrating five decades of broadcasting, resilience and connection with listeners across the region.

To celebrate the occasion former programme director and broadcasting legend, John Rosborough will hosted a special anniversary programme, 'Downtown 50 years on,' reflecting the stations history and the people who helped shape it.

As part of its golden milestone, the station will also welcomed back several familiar voices from its past, pairing some of its earliest presenters with today's on-air teams. Among those returning were Ivan Martin, Richard Young, John Daly, Hendi, Jerry Lang and Ronan Kelly, giving listeners the chance to hear well known voices reunited on the airwaves.

John Rosborough said: "When Downtown first went on air, there was a real sense that we were doing something different, bringing local voices, music and stories directly – and legally – to listeners in their homes and cars every day. None of us could have imagined then that the station would still be going strong 50 years later.

"What made it special was always the people – the presenters, news team and engineers behind the scenes. In many ways we broke the broadcasting mould in what



Left to Right - Paul Orr, Owen Beers, Sean McKeown, Owen Larkin, Declan Wilson, Neal McClelland & Gary Myles.
Front Left to Right - David Coleman & Kirstie McMurray.

was a bleak, dark time in Northern Ireland, bringing the music, chat and news that local communities needed and appreciated. It's wonderful to see the station still thriving and to be part of such a great milestone."

Since launching in Kiltonga, Newtownards in 1976, the station has become a fixture of the local media landscape, breaking new ground in commercial broadcasting at a time when radio in Northern Ireland was evolving in response to the popularity of offshore stations and growing demand for local voices on air.

While it is the only

commercial radio station still broadcasting from its original home, after 50 years, Downtown Radio is preparing for its next chapter, with plans in motion to relocate to new studios at City Quays in Belfast later this year. The milestone anniversary offers a moment to reflect on the station's journey – one defined by resilience, reinvention and a loyal audience that continues to tune in decades later.

As part of the milestone, Downtown Radio has also unveiled a digital archive, making historic clips and memorable moments from its broadcasting history

available online for listeners to revisit.

The anniversary celebration also coincides with the launch of a new book written by Rosborough and Martin. Titled "It brought a smile to your ear", the book, which charts the story of the station and the personalities behind the microphone over the past five decades was launched in No Alibis, Botanic Avenue, Belfast at 6.30pm on March 31.

View the digital archive from breaking news to everyday voices from the past 50 years: downtown.co.uk/50

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WHITESPOTS LINE CONNECTS BANGOR AND NEWTOWNARDS

Ards and North Down Borough Council is celebrating the completion of works on the new Whitespots Line of the Comber Greenway. A transformative 5.4-kilometre active travel route linking Newtownards and Bangor.

The milestone was marked at an event attended by project partners, funders, contractors and community representatives. Speaking at the launch, the Deputy Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Vicky Moore,

said the project represents "a significant step forward for sustainable travel, community wellbeing and connectivity across the Borough, reflecting the vision, teamwork and dedication invested in creating a route that strengthens opportunities for walking, wheeling and cycling while showcasing our natural environment; an important investment in our communities, our environment and our collective future."

The new shared-use path strengthens opportunities for walking, wheeling and cycling for residents and visitors of all ages, while showcasing the area's natural environment through a safe, accessible and scenic route.

Major funding support for the project was provided by: Department for Infrastructure (DfI) and The UK Government:

Attending the official launch Infrastructure Minister Liz Kimmins said: "One of my first events as Infrastructure Minister was

to attend the sod cutting for the Newtownards-Bangor Greenway and I am delighted to return today to see the progress that has been made as the scheme enters the final stages before opening to the public.

"Greenways and active travel in general can help make our lives better. Whether people are walking, wheeling or cycling to work, school, or for leisure, high quality active travel infrastructure can help facilitate a positive change in our lives. This new Greenway will provide improved travel choices, providing people with the opportunity to travel more sustainably as part of their everyday journeys.

"I was pleased that my Department could contribute £2.9m to this project and would like to congratulate everyone involved on the collaborative efforts that have brought the project to this point.

"It was great to see the pupils from West Winds Primary School today out enjoying their bikes along



a section of the route. I hope they share their experience here today with family and friends and encourage them to make use of this fantastic outdoor facility which provides an opportunity to combine exercise and fresh air with our everyday activities."

Work is now underway on a section of the Newtownards to Comber "Scrabo Line", which is the first phase in a project that will connect Bangor to Ards, on to Comber,

and join the established Greenway running right through to Belfast.

While the Whitespots Line marks a major milestone, the Council emphasised that the expansion of the Greenway network is progressing at pace. Work is now underway on a section of the Newtownards to Comber "Scrabo Line", which is the first phase in a project that will connect Bangor to Ards, on to Comber,

and join the established Greenway running right through to Belfast. Plans are also advancing for a Bangor to Donaghadee connection, further strengthening sustainable travel options and community links.

The Whitespots Line will soon open to the public, and the Council remains committed to building an interconnected, accessible and environmentally responsible Greenway network across Ards and North Down.

For more information see www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/Greenways

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PSNI The Power to Change Campaign

Ards and North Down Borough Council is proud to continue to support The Power to Change - an initiative by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), the Department of Justice and the Executive Office, urging men and boys across Northern Ireland to reflect on and change their attitudes and behaviours towards women and girls.

The campaign challenges men and boys to step away from negative attitudes, challenge inappropriate behaviour among peers, and act as safe, active bystanders when they see harassment, misogyny or harmful behaviour occurring in their communities.

The PSNI emphasises that ending violence against women and girls requires men and boys to be part of the solution. The campaign focuses on two key

elements:

Challenging attitudes and behaviours by encouraging men to consider the impact of their words and actions. Empowering "active bystanders", giving men and the wider community the confidence and tools to safely intervene when witnessing unacceptable behaviour.

The Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Gillian McCollum said: "Violence against women



and girls has no place in our society, and meaningful change can only happen

when men and boys actively choose to challenge harmful attitudes and behaviours. The Power to Change campaign sends a clear and necessary message: we all have a role to play in creating safer, more respectful communities. I encourage everyone across our Borough to engage with this initiative and take a stand for the safety and dignity of women and girls."

The Council recognises the importance of cultural and societal change in tackling misogyny and gender based violence and welcomes efforts that empower men and boys to take responsibility, challenge harmful behaviours, and foster safer communities for women and girls.

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Ards and North Down Sports Awards

The 2025 Ards and North Down Sports Awards were held at Clondeboye Lodge recently. The winners were announced at the prestigious ceremony.

Rory McIlroy has been named as Ards and North Down Sports Person of the Year. Rory was among several individuals and teams recognised at the annual Ards and North Down Sports Awards, which was hosted by radio presenter Denise Watson.



Bangor Hockey Mens 1st XI took the Sports Team of the Year title, Emily and Annabel Ridout, of Ballyholme Yacht Club, were named as the Under 18 Junior Team of the Year, and Ballyholme Primary School (gymnastics) secured the Under 15 Junior Sports Team of the Year award.

More individual success came for Grace Davison (swimming) who won Under 18 Young Sports Person of the Year, and Sara Devany (athletics) took the same title in the Under 15 category. Sports coach, Curtis Coulter, also achieved success as he was announced as Sports Coach of the Year (swimming).

The commitment and service of Cillian O'Neill (football) was

acknowledged with a win in the Volunteer of the Year category, Lifetime Achievement awards went to Alastair Wilson (rugby) and Pdraig Braniff (hurling), while Martyn Irvine (cycling) and Davy Larmour (boxing) were inducted onto the Wall of Fame.

AWARD WINNERS
Sports Person of the Year, sponsored by Mervyn Stewart, North Down MG - Rory McIlroy

Sports Person of the Year Under 15, sponsored by Exploris - Sara

Devany Sports Person of the Year Under 18, sponsored by Prestige Trophies - Grace Davison

Under 15s Junior Team of the Year, sponsored by Ards Suicide Awareness Group - Ballyholme Primary School.

Under 18s Junior Team of the Year, sponsored by Newtownards Saturday Market Traders - Ballyholme Yacht Club, Emily and Annabel Ridout.

Sports Team of the Year, sponsored by Progressive Building Society -Bangor

Hockey Club Mens 1st XI Volunteer of the Year, in memory of Alderman Menagh - Cillian O'Neill Sports Coach of the Year, sponsored by The Echlinville Distillery - Curtis Coulter

Lifetime Service Recognition Award, sponsored by Ards and North Down Sports Forum Alastair Wilson and Pdraig Braniff

Wall of Fame Inductee, sponsored by the Mayor of Ards and North Down, Cllr Gillian McCollum, along with Martyn Irvine and Davy Larmour.

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Sophie Christie's journey into the world of aesthetics began with her own first laser treatment in 2015. Inspired by the transformative power of the technology, she utilized the opportunity to qualify at one of London's top laser training clinics, eventually opening her own practice in 2022. "It brings me so much joy when I see men and women's lives transformed by the services that I provide," Sophie says.

The clinic offers a comprehensive suite of services designed to address a variety of concerns. These include laser hair removal, tattoo removal, carbon facials, and SPMU (Semi-Permanent Makeup) removal. Omorphia is particularly noted for its inclusive approach; transgender and PCOS (Polycystic Ovary Syndrome) recognizing the significant impact these procedures can have on a person's confidence and quality of life.

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Beyond laser technology, the clinic utilizes advanced Cryopen therapy for the removal of warts and skin tags, and offers micro-needling to target wrinkles and pigmentation. As an exclusive stockist of the award-winning vegan skincare range Pestle & Mortar, Sophie also provides personalized consultations to help clients find the perfect facial routine for their unique skin type.

TRUST'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK RETIRES AFTER FOUR DECADES

After an exceptional career spanning 40 years in Health and Social Care, The South Eastern Trust's Director of Children's Services and Executive Director of Social Work, has retired.

Born and bred in Newtownards, Lyn began her Social Work career in 1986 as a Residential Social Worker in Marmion Children's Home

Lyn joined the former Ulster Community and Hospitals Trust on 1 September 2004 as a Social Worker, initially based in the Family Resource Centre at James Street in Newtownards. Her commitment and expertise saw her quickly progress through a series of senior roles and in September 2022, she was appointed as Director of Children's Services and Executive Director of Social Work.

Reflecting on her career, Lyn said, "Over the past 40 years, I have worked with countless children, families, carers and professionals across England and Northern Ireland. Every role



taught me something new, every challenge shaped me, every success and every failure helped me grow. Through all of it, I have been surrounded by people who inspired me, supported me, challenged me and kept me grounded.

"When I came to the South Eastern Trust 22 years ago, I found a community. A community of practice

but more importantly, a community of people who care deeply about making a difference. The talent, dedication and passion across the Trust is truly remarkable. I will miss this work and the people I have had the privilege to get to know over my years of service."

Wishing Lyn well in her retirement, Trust Chief Executive, Roisin Coulter, added, "I would like to thank

Lyn for all of her years of dedication and contribution to the South Eastern Trust. Lyn is a highly respected and highly regarded and is the most senior leader of Social Work and Social Care right across the Trust.

"She has given her heart and soul and was very much part of the Trust family. I would really like to thank her for her lifetime contribution."

Sam's Life-Changing Collision and Redefining Normal Life

Following a visit to the charity Air Ambulance NI recently, Sam Courtney has decided to share his experience of a road traffic collision in September 2021 and coming to terms with life changing injuries and a new normal over the past 4 years.

Sam, from Newtownards, was driving to work in Bangor, when he was involved in a single-car collision on a country road. His car veered off the road, hit a water pump, and crashed into a tree. Sam has no memory of the incident and to this day, doesn't know what caused the incident to happen.

The first responders to the scene were off-duty Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service staff who quickly called for emergency services.

Sam's injuries were extensive, most severely a head injury and brain bleed on the brain stem that has left Sam with a brain injury. He had multiple fractures across his body and severe damage to his pelvis. He spent several weeks in a coma and a month in the ICU at the Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH) in Belfast. He had extensive surgeries to his head, legs, hips and pelvis.

Sam said: "I now understand the critical importance of quickly deploying the Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS) to incidents like mine, where every second counts. The

role of the charity Air Ambulance NI, along with the significant contributions of all first responders, hospital teams, physiotherapists, and support services, is invaluable."

Following his time at the RVH, Sam was transferred to Musgrave Park Hospital for rehabilitation. He faced the daunting task of relearning basic movements and to learn to walk again.

Four years on from the incident, Sam said, "This is undoubtedly the most impactful event that has ever happened to me. There are days when I have felt like giving up but I want to do right for me and to recognise all those who helped me both on the day of the accident and thereafter. I have a lot to be grateful for as I can live independently, see my daughter, play rugby and hope in time that I can get back into employment. I'd also like to have a rugby fundraiser for Air Ambulance NI Charity to help a future patient receive the care they need."

The HEMS that responded to Sam, is tasked on average twice



every day. The service is provided by way of a partnership between Air Ambulance NI Charity and the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service. The medical team consists of a doctor and paramedic who can provide extensive interventions at the scene that improve a patient's chance of surviving and help improve their recovery when they have suffered critical injuries as a result of major trauma.

When travelling to the scene by helicopter, the air ambulance flies at approximately 180mph and this is only possible thanks to donations and fundraising from the public. The charity needs to raise £8,200 in fundraising to keep the helicopter flying and be there for people like Sam. You can find out more about the service and how you can support at www.airambulancenl.org

NEW COMBER RESIDENT BORN ON MOTHERS DAY

Mums-to-be received the greatest gift of all to celebrate Mother's Day, with the birth of their babies at the Ulster Hospital.

Comber's Leah Rafferty celebrated the arrival of her baby daughter Fern who was born at 7.13am. "Fern was

actually five and a half weeks early, we were shocked and not expecting it."

Weighing six pounds and five ounces, Leah added how the early birth of her precious baby daughter was such, "A nice wee surprise."

As she cradled her beautiful baby daughter Tuathlaith, Abi McCrory from Downpatrick described the birth and arrival on Mother's Day as, "Such a wee

blessing. It is just amazing to have Tuathlaith here as she wasn't due until March 20.

She must have decided Mother's Day was the day!" laughed Abi.

Tuathlaith, who was dressed in her beautiful pink Easter bunny suit, weighed seven pounds 10 ounces and came into the world at 4.35am. "Tuathlaith's Dad Paul and I are just delighted."



Baby girl Fern Rafferty who arrived into the world on Mother's Day

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Planning a city break in Glasgow? Skip the airport queues and travel stress and choose the Belfast-Glasgow Express with HANNON Coach & Sail—a comfortable, hassle-free way to reach the heart of Scotland's largest city.

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Glasgow is a vibrant, stylish city with something for everyone. From world-class culture and nightlife to outstanding restaurants and bars, it's a destination that never disappoints. Shoppers are particularly well catered for—Glasgow is widely recognised as the UK's top shopping destination outside London, with its famous 'Style Mile' offering unbeatable retail therapy.

With a simple flat fare of just £49,



including ferry travel and luggage, the Belfast-Glasgow Express delivers outstanding value. With no hidden costs and flexible travel options, passengers can pick and mix dates and times to suit their plans—making it ideal for a spontaneous spring getaway or a longer city break.

The service operates

twice daily from Belfast Grand Central Station (Stand 18) and drops passengers at Glasgow Buchanan Bus Station, close to the Style Mile and a wide range of excellent city-centre hotels.

Company Director Aodh Hannon says the service's popularity comes down to convenience and simplicity.

"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."

Bookings can be made online at www.hannoncoach.com, or by phone through HANNON's friendly booking team on 028 9265 0700 (Monday-Friday).

UNISON'S REAL LIVING WAGE CAMPAIGN

UNISON's Real Living Wage campaign in Northern Ireland is challenging low pay and improving living standards for workers across public services and the independent sector.

Built on a clear principle—that every worker should earn enough to cover the real cost of essentials such as food, housing, heating and transport—the campaign promotes the Real Living Wage, currently £13.45 per hour, which

is independently calculated to reflect actual living costs rather than government minimums that often leave workers in "in-work poverty."

This issue is especially urgent in Health and Social Care, where

many committed staff continue to endure chronic low pay. UNISON works directly with employers to support accreditation as Real Living Wage employers, ensuring fair and decent pay for all workers, including those in the independent care sector. The union also campaigns for fair pay structures within the NHS, protecting Agenda for Change staff on Band 3 and above from pay

compression.

UNISON emphasises that the Real Living Wage delivers benefits beyond individual workers. Fair pay strengthens wellbeing, morale and job satisfaction, helping employers retain skilled staff and reducing turnover in vital services. A fairly rewarded workforce is more stable, more motivated and better equipped to deliver high-quality care and service provision.

UNISON's Real

Living Wage campaign is rooted in dignity, fairness and financial security for those who deliver essential public services. By championing real pay for real living across Northern Ireland, UNISON remains committed to building a more equal and sustainable society—one where workers are paid not just to survive, but to live.

Gillian Foley UNISON Branch Secretary & Trade Union Chair

Want us to bring food to you? The Phat Fryer is now on Deliveroo!

Since opening its doors in Autumn 2025, The Phat Fryer has quickly become a staple of the Bangor food scene.

But while the name might be new to the Gransha Road, the expertise behind the counter certainly isn't.

As the sister business to the legendary The Chip Stop—which has been open on the Belfast Road for nine successful years—The Phat Fryer carries a serious pedigree for frying. At both businesses

the focus remains on the holy trinity of a great chippy: perfectly battered cod, generous portions, and freshly cut chips.

If you don't feel like leaving the sofa, The Phat Fryer has you covered. Delivery has officially launched, running Tuesday through Saturday from 5:00 PM. The Phat Fryer

is available now on deliveroo too!

Whether you're ordering on the new apps for Android and iOS or through their website, you can now get those freshly cut chips delivered straight to your door without breaking the bank.

visit www.thephatfryer.co.uk to place your order.

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WHAT'S HITTING THE STAGE AT BELVOIR STUDIO THEATRE?

Belvoir Studio Theatre is living up to its "Theatre for All" motto this spring and summer with a packed calendar that ranges from cult classic musicals to high-energy rock tributes and side-splitting local comedies.

Whether you're a fan of big band brass or family-friendly adventures, there is a seat waiting for you at Belvoir Studio Theatre, 94 Belvoir Drive, Belfast.

The season kicks off with the botanical mayhem of Little Shop of Horrors, running from April 28th through May 2nd. The musical energy shifts mid-month as on Friday, May 15th, the DM Big Band takes the stage for a special cabaret performance, promising a night of rich, brassy arrangements. They are followed immediately

on Saturday, May 16th, by Black Rose, who will perform The Irish Rock Tribute Show. This high-octane set celebrates the legends of Irish music, featuring hits from icons like U2, Thin Lizzy, The Cranberries, and Snow Patrol.

Late May is dedicated to comedy. First, Theatre 3 Newtownabbey presents Anyone for Marriage? by Patrick Sheehan on May 22nd and 23rd. This play follows a quirky cast of characters—including a bug-spotter and a fortune-

teller—as they search for love at the fictional Auld Paud's Holiday Farm.

The laughter continues from May 27th to May 30th when the Lambeg Players present Second Honeymoon, written by the legendary Sam Cree. This comedy is sure to resonate with anyone who has ever had a vacation go slightly off the rails.

The schedule rounds out in June with a production designed for the younger crowd (and the young at heart). From June 24th to June 28th, the Belvoir

Players Academy presents Madagascar: A Musical Adventure JR. Based on the hit DreamWorks film, the show follows Alex the Lion and his friends as they escape the Central Park Zoo for an unexpected journey to the island of Madagascar.

Tickets can be booked through the Belvoir Studio Theatre box office. You can reach them by phone at 028 9049 1210, via email at boxoffice@belvoirplayers.org, or visit the website at www.belvoirplayers.org

Summer Fun at Leadhill Primary School

This is a busy term for all schools and as the weather improves the children of Leadhill Primary School love to get out and about on site, taking learning outdoors and having fun together.

There was a flurry of activity earlier this

term, when children helped to plant over 200 new trees on the school site, helping to enrich the biodiversity in our school grounds. The site is buzzing as the eco team carry out their spring gardening duties, planting in the greenhouse, flowerbeds and planters, and making sure the weeds are kept at bay. They continue to work hard to keep the school's green credentials to the fore. Work is due to start on the installation of a brand new heating system this term, providing a significant improvement to the energy efficiency of the school.

A significant highlight for the summer term is sports' day on 19 May, a great family event which is held at the Henry Jones Playing Field. The Leadhill



family are very excited to welcome the brand new group of P1 and playgroup pupils, who will be attending welcome sessions in June but are also preparing to say farewell to the P7 class who have made such a fantastic

contribution to the life of the school. Their residential and special Leavers' Event will be a lovely celebration of their time at Leadhill.

If you would like to find out about how your child could be part of the Leadhill

family, in the Primary School or Pre-school Playgroup, visit the school website on www.leadhillps.com or phone the school to arrange for a conversation with the Principal, Anne Millis. We would love to welcome you to our school!



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Caravanning and Camping in NI

If you are planning to spend your summer under canvas or in a caravan within Northern Ireland, the most critical step you can take right now is to finalize your bookings immediately.

Many of the premier council-run sites along the Causeway Coast, including Benone, Juniper Hill, and Carrick Dhu, are open for reservations and are seeing high demand. Private parks in "honeypot" areas like Newcastle and the Fermanagh Lakelands are also reporting high occupancy for July and August, meaning that those who wait until the first signs of warm weather to book may find themselves limited to less central locations or smaller, inland sites.

The regional landscape for 2026 is defined by a distinct move toward specialized "experience" camping. In the Sperrin Mountains, which recently secured renewed global recognition as a Dark Sky location, sites like Dungannon Park and various "almost-wild" spots are seeing a surge in popularity from stargazers. Meanwhile, the Fermanagh region remains a primary draw for water-based holidays.

However, travellers should note that the popular Crom campsite has confirmed a closure for the 2026 season, which has redirected a significant amount of traffic toward Castle Archdale and the Kinnego Marina on Lough Neagh. Planning your route around these shifts in availability is essential for a smooth trip.

Vehicle preparation in the early spring is particularly vital for Northern Ireland's unique terrain. Whether you are navigating the steep, winding roads of the Mourne Mountains or the coastal gusts of the Antrim plateau, ensuring your towing mirrors are correctly adjusted is a legal requirement that carries heavy fines if neglected. This is also the time to conduct a "damp check" on your caravan or motorhome, as the high humidity of the past winter can lead to costly repairs if issues aren't caught before the summer heat. There can be long

lead times for servicing, so booking a mechanical and habitation check this month is a wise move to avoid a pre-holiday breakdown.

Finally, 2026 is seeing a significant push toward sustainable, low-impact touring across the country's forest parks and coastal reserves. Many sites are now offering discounted rates for campers who arrive by bike or foot, or those who utilize portable solar arrays rather than relying on traditional electric hook-ups. Investing in a high-quality leisure battery or a portable power station now will not only save you money on "pitch-plus-electric" fees but will also grant you more freedom to stay at smaller, more remote sites that lack full infrastructure. By combining early bookings with a few key gear upgrades, you can ensure your Northern Irish summer holiday is both environmentally friendly and stress-free.

TURNING OLD INTO GOLD

HOW ROBINSON GOLDSMITHS ARE REDESIGNING HEIRLOOMS SUSTAINABLY

What do you do with a broken chain that belonged to your mum? Or a gold ring that's not your style but holds a lifetime of family stories?

At Robinson Goldsmiths in Bangor, the answer is simple: melt it down and begin again without losing what matters.

This isn't just recycling. It's memory-making, reborn.

In their family-run workshop, old jewellery is given a second life through a thoughtful and skilled process. The gold is melted down - a mesmerising sight - not to erase its past, but to prepare it for a new chapter.

"Working with customers to design and create unique jewellery is a real privilege," says Jennifer Robinson, partner at Robinson Goldsmiths. "Often,

inherited jewellery is just sitting in a box somewhere, unseen and unused, as it's not the right style or size. By using these items to create something new, the customer gets a custom piece of jewellery which is all the more special knowing the history behind it."

Once molten, the gold is poured into a mould, cooled, then carefully rolled, shaped, and crafted into something entirely fresh.

Whether it becomes a sleek new ring, a modern pendant, or a bespoke design co-created with the team, each piece is re-imagined but still deeply rooted in your story.

"Over the years we've turned broken and unloved jewellery into rings, necklaces and brooches," adds Gillian Robinson, shop manager.



Jennifer and Gillian Robinson Goldsmiths.

"These pieces are lovingly designed and created in our workshop from our family to another. By reusing these precious metals and stones, we're also offering a sustainable option

for eco-conscious shoppers." This is sustainable jewellery at its most meaningful: no new mining, no waste just precious materials already rich with history, transformed into

something you'll wear every day and perhaps pass on one day yourself. So if there's old gold tucked away in a drawer, maybe it's time to bring it in, melt it down, and start a new chapter.



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Selecting a Care Home

Selecting a care home is a deeply personal balancing act between clinical necessity and emotional comfort.

To move beyond the polished surface of a brochure, you must prioritize questions about the facility's greatest asset: its staff. Beyond simple ratios, inquire about staff turnover and longevity. A revolving door of caregivers often signals deeper systemic issues, whereas a stable team suggests a more consistent, compassionate environment. It is also vital to confirm that the staff

possess specific training tailored to your loved one's unique needs, such as dementia care or specialized physical support.

A resident's quality of life depends heavily on their sense of autonomy. Ask how much control a resident has over their daily rhythm—from when they wake up to what they wear. A truly person-centred home should offer a variety of social activities

that reflect individual interests rather than a rigid, one-size-fits-all schedule. Similarly, check if residents are encouraged to bring their own furniture and mementos. A room that looks like a hospital ward rarely feels like a home, so the ability to personalize the space is a significant indicator of the home's philosophy.

Medical and nutritional oversight require equal

scrutiny. You should ask how the home manages complex dietary requirements and whether snacks and drinks are available around the clock. On the clinical side, clarify how they handle medication management and emergencies, and ask about their relationship with local doctors. Financial transparency is just as critical; ensure you receive a comprehensive breakdown of weekly fees and potential "extra" costs like hairdressing or specialized outings to avoid stressful surprises later.

Finally, while the answers to these questions provide a framework, your own observations are the most reliable guide. During a tour, look past the decor and watch the interactions. Do the staff address residents by name with genuine warmth? Do the residents appear engaged and well-groomed? The "feel" of a home—the smell, the noise level, and the general atmosphere of respect—often tells you more than any prepared answer. Trusting your intuition alongside these practical queries ensures you find a place where your loved one can truly thrive.

AGEnda, a vital pillar for the community

AGE north down & ards (AGEnda), serves as a vital pillar for the community in the North Down and Ards area, focusing on the health and holistic wellbeing of local older residents.

The organisation's primary mission is to promote good health, financial stability, and overall wellness among the local population, ensuring that the process of ageing is met with dignity and robust social support. Recently, the organisation has expanded its reach by launching a specialised Carers' Support Project. This initiative, made possible through significant funding from The National Lottery Community Fund Northern Ireland, specifically targets individuals aged 65 and older who find themselves in a caregiving role for family members or friends within the region.

AGEnda's Carers' Support Project is designed to address the unique challenges faced by older caregivers, particularly the risks of loneliness and social isolation that often accompany such responsibilities. By fostering connection and focusing on improved mental health, AGEnda provides a lifeline for



those who might otherwise feel disconnected from their community. To achieve these goals, the organisation facilitates various engagement opportunities, including personalised home visits and "Carers' Circles," which consist of small, informal groups that meet in local areas. Beyond these social meetings, AGEnda also hosts specific activities, workshops, and events tailored to improving wellbeing, while providing essential signposting to other relevant organisations and local community supports. In addition to targeted carer support, AGEnda

operates the "Good Morning Call," a service centred on the safety and independence of its clients. This program provides regular check-in calls that ensure clients are safe and well, allowing them to remain in their own homes for as long as possible.

The value of this service extends beyond the client, as it offers a friendly voice for conversation and provides family members with invaluable peace of mind knowing that their loved ones are being checked on. Furthermore, the Floating Support Service offers short-term advice and practical assistance to

help clients maintain their independence both at home and within the wider community, effectively reducing social isolation.

For those wishing to support this vital work with local older people, the organisation accepts donations via cash, bank transfer, cheque, or a convenient QR code. Community members can access these services or learn more by contacting AGEnda at 02891271968 or via email at agenda@agenorthdownards.co.uk. Their official website, www.agenorthdownards.co.uk, also provides additional information on their diverse range of services.



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Minister celebrates community fund programme

Communities Minister Gordon Lyons has praised the work of those involved in the community sector across Northern Ireland as he met some of those who have benefited through his Department's continued investment in its Neighbourhood Renewal programme.

The Department for Communities (DfC) invests over £20million per annum in Neighbourhood Renewal, supporting the work of voluntary and community organisations in the most deprived areas across Northern Ireland, with the Small Capital Investment Programme being a key component of this funding.

In 2024/25, the Fund helped over 1,500 people secure employment through targeted training and employability interventions, as well as giving more than 5,500 adults the opportunity to volunteer within their communities.

Speaking at a community event at the Ecos Centre in Ballymena, Minister Lyons said: "These projects may be described as "small capital," but their impact is anything but small. Investment in

small capital costs keeps services running and allows groups to adapt, expand, or innovate. Whether it's roof repairs, upgraded IT equipment, a kitchen refurbishment, or essential accessibility improvements - these are not minor details - they are the practical enablers of meaningful community impact. My Department's ongoing investment in Neighbourhood Renewal reflects a long term commitment, one that is not only financial but deeply rooted in our belief in the power of communities to shape their own futures."

Over the last year alone, DfC has supported 77 community projects through his fund, with an investment of £1.18m. A number of community representatives attending today's event took the opportunity to share

their stories on the positive impact this funding has had.

Angela Mulholland, West Bann Development said: "This funding has ensured that as a service provider to the local community, we were able to continue to offer a first-class service and providing people with a safe secure environment to learn, play and create."

Jim Mellroy, Harryville Men's Shed added: "Men's Shed provides a vital role within the community offering a safe, welcoming space where men can connect, learn, and support one another. This investment has played a vital role in helping to maintain and strengthen the services we provide to men across the Ballymena community.

Theresa Brady, Ionad na Fuisceoige said: "Small



Angela, John and Jim Communities Minister Gordon Lyons pictured with (l-r) Angela Mulholland, West Bann Development, Jim Mellroy, Harryville Men's Shed and John Hunter, Community Sports Network.

capital funding meets a real need in the community - relatively small amounts of money required that can make a huge difference to the local area."

John Hunter, Community Sports Network, Shankill added: "Relatively small

investments can deliver significant, long-term impact. This funding has created lasting benefits, improving safety, expanding opportunities, and allowing us to meet a broader range of community needs.

North Down and Ards Women's Aid

North Down and Ards Women's Aid provides a vital service to women and children affected by domestic and sexual abuse.

Our vision for WA is the elimination of domestic abuse, but this is a collective responsibility. Domestic abuse is not just a legal or justice issue; it is a cultural and societal problem. We must all work together to end domestic abuse and violence against women and girls. Partnership working is vital in eliminating domestic abuse."

Domestic abuse can include, but is not limited to, the following:

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- Psychological and / or emotional abuse
- Physical or sexual abuse
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- Harassment and stalking
- Online or digital abuse.

NDAWA offer safe, confidential and non-judgmental support for you, whether you are still in your

relationship or have left.

Not everyone wants to stay in refuges, but you can still get support if planning to leave an abusive relationship or help with safer coping strategies to stay.

If you would like more information about NDAWA services, or the One Stop Shop, please contact NDAWA on 028 9127 3196 or email info@ndawomensaid.org

Women's Aid
NORTH DOWN & ARDS
02891 273196

Working to end Domestic Abuse

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

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 - Children's services
 - Group support programmes including Journey to Freedom
 - One Stop Shop - free multi-agency drop in service
 - Court support

Our range of Children's Services include:

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

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

One Stop Shop

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

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No appointment necessary
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For any further information about the One Stop Shop or Women's Aid support services Contact us at 02891 273196

NEXT DATES:

12th & 26th May
9th & 23rd June

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

Housing Executive



Looking for the Ultimate Wedding Location?

Carlingford, nestled between the Cooley Mountains and the waters of Carlingford Lough, is one of Ireland's most enchanting wedding destinations.

Its blend of medieval charm, natural beauty, and intimate village atmosphere creates a storybook backdrop that couples and guests instantly love. Nowhere else offers such a seamless mix of romance, history, and breathtaking scenery

in one compact setting. The village's cobbled streets, ancient ruins, and colourful shopfronts evoke a timeless charm that feels far removed from everyday life. Carlingford's dramatic landscapes provide a wedding photo backdrop



that feels like a fairytale. At the heart of this setting stands the Four Seasons Hotel Carlingford, a venue designed for elegant, stress-free celebrations. Its location allows couples to enjoy the full Carlingford experience, with diverse photo opportunities that feel like multiple destinations, all within minutes of the hotel. The hotel elevates weddings with sophisticated décor, spacious event suites, and beautiful gardens. Recently renovated spaces offer a contemporary yet warm atmosphere,

giving couples freedom to personalise their day while ensuring comfort and luxury. Dedicated wedding coordinators guide every detail, ensuring each celebration runs smoothly. Culinary excellence defines the experience, from canapés to carefully crafted banquets rooted in quality and local flavour. Guests enjoy exceptional food, stunning views, and attentive service from a team committed to creating memorable celebrations. What sets the Four Seasons Hotel Carlingford apart is the harmony between bespoke

experience and natural surroundings. The result is a wedding that feels both luxurious and personal, set within one of Ireland's most picturesque locations. For couples seeking beauty, atmosphere, and exceptional service, the Four Seasons Hotel Carlingford offers everything needed for a celebration to remember. With its blend of scenery, service, and style, it consistently delivers unforgettable wedding experiences that leave lasting impressions on couples, families, and guests alike for years to come.

NORTH DOWN'S DIGITAL DENTAL CUSTOMER SERVICE EXPERTS – HELEN'S BAY DENTAL

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with flexible appointments and a caring front-of-house team. For anyone who has been putting off a visit, is new to the area, or wants a practice that values service as much as clinical excellence, they would be delighted to help. Call today to book a consultation or visit the website to send an enquiry. 02891 853304 helensbaydental.co.uk Email info@helensbaydental.co.uk Find helensbaydental on Facebook and Instagram

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The Rise of Lived-In Luxury

As 2026 gains momentum towards the summer months we are collectively moving away from the “catalog-perfect” minimalism that dominated the early 2020s and leaning into something much more soulful.

For Spring/Summer 2026, the vibe is authentic, immersive, and unapologetically tactile. If your home feels like a curated collection of your life’s best moments rather than a sterile showroom, you are exactly on trend.

The Palette: Deep Teals and Sun-Kissed Earth

Forget the washed-out pastels of yesteryear. This season, designers are embracing colours with serious gravitas. Transformative Teal has emerged as a powerhouse shade, sitting right between blue and green to offer a look that is both dramatic and grounding. It works particularly well when used in velvet upholstery or as a bold “colour drench” on walls. To balance this depth, we are seeing a surge in Amber and Burnt Caramel. These warm, unctuous tones replace the flat beiges of the past, bringing a sense of a sun-bleached Mediterranean retreat to any room. Perhaps most surprising is the breakout duo of Icy Blue and Burgundy; the crispness of the blue lifts the weight of the deep red, creating a look that feels both retro and avant-garde.

“Texture-Maxxing” and Materiality

The primary goal this season is to make every surface worth touching, a movement we’ve dubbed “Texture-Maxxing.” Light Scandi oak is taking a backseat to richer woods like walnut and chocolate mahogany, which provide a traditional anchor to



otherwise modern rooms. We are also firmly in a new Stone Age. Travertine and Calacatta marble are no longer reserved for countertops; instead, they are appearing as stone-base lamps, fluted side tables, and heavy marble trays that add physical and visual weight to your decor. To soften these hard surfaces, natural fibers remain essential. While linen is still the king of summer, it is now being joined by heavy bouclé, wool, and even wrought iron for a mix of textures that feel high-end yet entirely approachable.

The Shape of Things: Curves and Postmodernism

Sharp angles are officially out, replaced by fluid, undulating lines that feel more organic. The “skirted sofa” has returned with a vengeance, proving that what was once considered “grandma style” can be reimagined as romantic and sophisticated with the right

decor accents are becoming more whimsical and artisan-focused this year. We are seeing a move toward Folk Bohemia, which is far removed from the “boho” trends of a decade ago. This version is more colourful and craft-heavy, featuring Kelim rugs, intricate lattice patchwork cushions, and hand-painted ceramics. Adding a theatrical flourish

Folk Bohemia and Fruit Motifs

to these spaces is the rise of fruit motifs. From pear-shaped paperweights to pomegranate-shaped glass ornaments and oversized apple sculptures, these playful nods to the bounty of summer add a sense of humor and vitality to bookshelves and coffee tables.

The New Direction of Home

The overarching theme for 2026 is intention. Whether you are adding a splash of chartreuse to a bathroom or layering rugs for extra depth, the focus is squarely on how a space makes you feel rather than how it looks in a photograph. We have reached a point where we are done decorating for “the grid” and have finally started decorating for the human beings living inside. The transition from cool, clinical whites to rich, lived-in layers marks a return to the home as a true sanctuary of personal expression.

SOME SUMMER IDEAS FOR FAMILY DAYS OUT

Summer 2026 in Northern Ireland is shaping up to be a legendary season, especially with the arrival of some massive cultural milestones.

Whether you are a local looking to rediscover your own backyard or you are planning to host visiting family, the calendar is packed with a mix of high-energy festivals and quiet, scenic escapes. From the bustling streets of Belfast to the windswept North Coast, there is a refreshing variety of ways to keep the kids entertained—and perhaps even enjoy yourself in the process.

The Rhythm of the City: Belfast’s Big Summer

One headline event for this year is the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, which descends upon Belfast from August 2nd to 9th. This is the first time the city has hosted the “World Cup” of Irish traditional music, and it is expected to transform the city centre into a massive, family-friendly carnival. You can expect the streets to be alive with sessions, pageants, and plenty of free outdoor performances. Just before the Fleadh kicks off, Belfast TradFest runs from late July into the first week of August, offering a perfect warm-up with world-class concerts and workshops that are surprisingly accessible for younger listeners. If you need a break from the music, the Ulster Museum in the Botanic Gardens remains a reliable refuge, offering everything from Takabuti the mummy to dinosaur exhibits, and it is conveniently located right next to the park for



a post-museum picnic. Coastal Adventures and Maritime Magic

Heading north, the Foyle Maritime Festival in Derry~Londonderry returns in late June to celebrate the city’s seafaring history along the River Foyle. It is a fantastic spot for children who love ships, street performers, and the inevitable excitement of a fireworks finale. Further along the Causeway Coast, the Red Sails Festival in Portstewart takes over the promenade in mid-July. It is a quintessential local festival featuring Irish dancing, live music on the waterfront, and sandcastle competitions that bring out the competitive streak in even the most relaxed parents. For those who prefer a bit of speed, the North West 200 in May often kicks off the summer vibes early, but for a family day out later in the season, the Ulster International

Rally in Ballymena this August celebrates its 50th anniversary with plenty of high-octane spectacle.

Festivals in the Fields: Arts and Nature

For a more laid-back, “boots and grass” experience, the Stendhal Festival in Limavady remains the gold standard for family-focused music events. Taking place in early July at Ballymully Cottage Farm, it offers a dedicated family programme that manages to be cool enough for teenagers while keeping toddlers safely occupied with arts and crafts. If you are looking for something closer to home in County Down, Down Time Summerfest in Downpatrick provides a quirky mix of horse racing, BMX displays, and live music in the heart of St. Patrick’s country. It is the kind of event where you can watch a high-energy stunt show and then wander over to a quiet heritage workshop within the

same hour.

Thrills, Spills, and Indoor Backups

We all know the Northern Irish summer can occasionally involve four seasons in a single afternoon. When the clouds turn grey, W5 at the SSE Arena is still the champion of indoor entertainment, with over 250 interactive exhibits that make science feel like a playground. For the older, more adventurous kids, The Jungle NI in Moneymore offers llama trekking and tree-top adventures that are perfect for burning off excess energy. Alternatively, the Exploris Aquarium in Portaferry allows for an immersive look at the local marine life of Strangford Lough, providing a great educational hook that doesn’t feel like a school lesson. Whatever the weather, the key this year is to keep a rain jacket in the boot of the car just in case.

Draft Rural Policy

Our New Approach 2026-2041 is a new draft policy that aims to understand, champion and support rural communities.

Developed through an intensive co design process involving government departments, local councils, voluntary and community organisations and academic partners, the draft policy places rural voices and lived experiences of rural communities at its core.

The 15-year policy sets out five strategic proposals aimed at bringing people and government together to help shape a thriving, sustainable and inclusive rural Northern Ireland.

The policy is guided by clear criteria to ensure it is fair, effective, delivers good value for money and can be implemented in practice.

It supports collaboration across government, respects the roles of all Northern Ireland departments and complies with the Rural

Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.

Welcoming the launch of the public consultation, Minister Muir said: “This draft policy led by my Department is an approach to understand, champion and support rural communities. It aims to reflect the diversity of rural areas and the experiences of those who live and work in them.

“The proposals seek to identify how people and government can work together to address the challenges and opportunities that face rural communities and highlight the need for coordinated action to support improved outcomes.”

Minister Muir added: “I want everyone to talk rural. Contributions from



individuals, community groups and sector representatives will play a vital role in refining the proposals and informing future decisions. Together,

we can unlock the full potential of rural Northern Ireland.”

Closing date for responses will be: 23:59 on 1 June 2026.

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CONVERTIBLE CRUISE CONTROL

With the NI summer finally on the horizon, there is no better way to soak up the fleeting sunshine than from the driver's seat of a drop-top.

Whether you are looking for a nimble weekend toy for country lanes or a refined cruiser for a trip to the coast, the current UK market offers a fantastic range of options that balance style, performance and open-air thrills. From affordable legends to the latest electric disruptors, here are the top five convertible cars to buy for the 2026 summer season.

1. Mazda MX-5
The Mazda MX-5 remains the gold standard for anyone seeking pure, unadulterated driving pleasure without breaking the bank. Now well into its current generation, it continues to champion the "less is more" philosophy with its featherweight chassis and perfectly balanced rear-wheel-drive setup. The manual soft-top can be tossed back in seconds with one hand, making it ideal for the unpredictable UK weather. While it isn't the most practical car for a weekly shop, its legendary reliability and mechanical connection make every trip to the corner shop feel like a stage in a rally. On the

road price from: £28,585

2. MINI Cooper Convertible
For those who want a bit more personality and room for more than one passenger, the new MINI Cooper Convertible is a quintessential summer choice. It retains the iconic "go-kart" handling that has made the brand a staple on British roads, but with a more sophisticated interior and updated tech for 2026. The Union Jack-themed fabric roof can be opened partially as a sunroof or retracted fully in under 20 seconds, even while driving at low speeds. It is the perfect urban-friendly convertible—stylish, zippy, and surprisingly premium inside. On the road price from: £28,715

3. BMW 4 Series Convertible
If you are looking for a "proper" four-seater that doesn't compromise on luxury or motorway refinement, the BMW 4 Series Convertible is difficult to beat. It has moved away from the heavy folding hard-tops of the past in favour of a sophisticated fabric roof that is significantly lighter, helping the car



feel more agile in the corners. The interior is a masterclass in ergonomics, featuring BMW's latest curved display and high-quality materials throughout. With the "Air Collar" system blowing warm air around your neck, you can even enjoy roof-down driving on those cooler British summer evenings. On the road price from: £53,785

4. Mercedes-Benz CLE Cabriolet
The Mercedes-Benz CLE Cabriolet is the newest addition to the brand's lineup, effectively replacing both the old C-Class and E-Class convertibles to offer a single, highly refined package. It

focuses heavily on comfort and elegance, making it perhaps the best long-distance cruiser on this list. It comes as standard with the Aircap system—an electric wind deflector on the windshield—and the Airscarf neck-level heating, ensuring the cabin stays calm and warm even at motorway speeds. It is the definitive choice for those who want to arrive at their destination feeling as fresh as when they left. On the road price from: £54,495

5. MG Cyberster
The MG Cyberster is the "wildcard" of 2026 and represents a bold new era for the British-born brand.

BMW Unveils the All-New iX3

BMW has officially signaled the start of a "new era" with the premiere of the all-new BMW iX3, the first series-production model of the Neue Klasse.

This next-generation Sports Activity Vehicle (SAV) introduces a radical shift in design, sustainability, and digital architecture, aiming to skip an entire vehicle generation in terms of technological advancement.

Performance and Ultra-Fast Charging

The iX3 50 xDrive will launch as the longest-range battery electric vehicle (BEV) in the UK, boasting a WLTP range of up to 500 miles. This is made possible by sixth-generation BMW eDrive technology, featuring high-voltage batteries with new cylindrical cells that increase energy density by 20%.

Key performance and charging metrics include:

- Output: 469 hp and 645 Nm of torque.
- Acceleration: 0 to 62 mph in 4.9 seconds.
- Charging: An 800-volt architecture allows for 400 kW rapid charging, adding 231 miles of range in just 10 minutes.
- Bidirectional Charging: The iX3 debuts Vehicle-to-Home (V2H) and Vehicle-to-Load (V2L) capabilities for the brand.

A Digital "Superbrain"



Architecture
The iX3 debuts a "digital nervous system" powered by four high-performance computers known as superbrains. The "Heart of Joy" unit manages driving dynamics, processing data 10 times faster than previous systems to coordinate braking, steering, and power delivery.

Inside, the cabin is defined by the BMW Panoramic iDrive and Operating System X. This setup features a full-width windscreen display (Panoramic Vision) that projects information across the driver's entire field of vision, paired with a newly designed 3D Head-Up Display.

Sustainability and Design
BMW has adopted a "secondary first" approach,

with approximately one-third of the iX3 constructed from recycled materials, including marine plastics and PET textiles. Consequently, the vehicle's lifecycle carbon footprint is 34% lower than its predecessor. The iX3 will be manufactured at the fossil-fuel-free Plant Debrecen in Hungary.

The exterior introduces a "reduced" design language, featuring vertical kidney grilles and flush door handles, while the interior is entirely leather-free, utilizing Econeer materials.

Pricing and UK Availability

The BMW iX3 50 xDrive is priced from £58,755 OTR. While series production begins in autumn 2025, the first UK customer deliveries are scheduled for 7 March 2026

Specialists in Renault but experts in all makes – Clifton Motors

Owned by Kirsten Burgess - Clifton Motors, Bangor has a legacy spanning over three decades, this local garage has built an enduring reputation for reliability and technical expertise.

Clifton Motors is a Renault Specialist. While they are fully equipped to handle a diverse range of makes and models, their deep understanding of Renault engineering allows them to provide a level of precision and insight that is often difficult to find outside of a main dealership. This specialized knowledge ensures that Renault owners can receive high-level maintenance and diagnostic repairs without the premium price tags associated with large chains. However, their

skills are by no means limited to a single brand; the team applies the same level of rigorous attention to detail to every vehicle that enters their workshop.

The workshop is outfitted with advanced diagnostic and testing equipment to ensure every car is roadworthy and safe. A standout feature of their service is the availability of Maha brake testing. This specialized technology allows for highly accurate assessments of a vehicle's braking performance, providing drivers with

peace of mind regarding one of their car's most critical safety components. In addition to high-tech testing, the garage offers a comprehensive suite of essential services including MOT checks and full vehicle servicing. By choosing Clifton Motors for MOT preparation, drivers can feel confident that their vehicles meet the necessary safety and environmental standards required by law.

Beyond major repairs and inspections, the garage handles vital routine

maintenance tasks that keep a car running smoothly day-to-day. This includes battery health checks and precise headlight alignment, both of which are crucial for safe driving during the darker winter months. They also offer professional tyre fitting services, making the garage a convenient one-stop-shop for all motoring needs. To book an appointment, the team can be reached at 02891 454 304

Clifton Motors is located on 15e Clifton Road, Bangor BT20 5EW

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Hyundai All-Electric Concept THREE

Concept THREE, Hyundai Motor's first compact EV concept under the IONIQ sub-brand, embodies Art of Steel design language and signals the brand's planned expansion into the European compact EV market.

Hyundai Motor Company unveiled Concept THREE, its first compact electric vehicle (EV) concept under the IONIQ sub-brand, at IAA Mobility 2025 in Munich. The debut represents Hyundai Motor's commitment to offering exceptional EVs in a rapidly evolving global market, where the focus shifts from technological advancement to experiences of emotional fulfillment.

As the first compact EV concept under the IONIQ sub-brand, Concept THREE signals Hyundai Motor's future expansion into a new vehicle category, complementing its existing midsize and large EV models. With Europe experiencing a surging demand for compact EVs — driven by urbanization, sustainability regulations and the growing need for space-efficient solutions — the Concept THREE demonstrates Hyundai Motor's vision for meeting this demand by drawing on its advanced electrification capabilities.

Complementing its strategic positioning, Concept THREE's innovative design also underscores the brand's commitment to delivering a meaningful, emotionally resonant experience in an accessible and practical package. Hyundai Motor anticipates the introduction of Concept THREE to set the tone for its next chapter of design innovation and strengthen its competitive position in the electrification journey.

Art of Steel transforms the strength and flexibility of steel into a language of sculptural beauty. Inspired by Hyundai Motor's advanced steel technologies, the material's natural formability reveals flowing volumes and precise lines that evoke the distinctive aesthetic quality of steel — powerful, gentle and timeless.

Aero Hatch: The sculpted body creates enveloping forms using three main surfaces, while intersecting lines



add visual tension. The Aero Hatch profile delivers aerodynamic efficiency and a distinctive roofline combined with a vertical tailgate, emphasizing urban versatility.

Parametric Pixel: Parametric Pixel lightings are featured on both front and rear of the Concept THREE. The pixels are now more expressive, forming a gradient that adds depth and visual rhythm to the overall design.

Material-driven design: The exterior wears an anodized-effect finish that channels the spirit of Hyundai's Art of Steel design language—a celebration of material as muse. Lemon-tinted glass and matching wheels forge vibrant links between exterior and interior, the cabin

defined by soft yellow and grey tonalities that play across shifting textures to create a space that's both calm and expressive. Furnished Space: The cabin design creates environments that feel warm, intuitive, and calming. By embracing soft volumes and user-focused layouts, it fosters a sense of serenity and clarity. Customizable Experience: Modular 'Bring Your Own Lifestyle (BYOL)' widgets offer tailored experiences that allow customers to personalize their journey.

Mr. Pix: A symbolic character integrated throughout the car evokes curiosity, joy and emotional connection, offering playful storytelling through 'hidden surprises'

and interactive design elements.

Sustainability: The interior envisions the use of sustainable materials such as ocean waste textiles and lightweight aluminum foam. These materials underscore Hyundai Motor's long-term vision to reduce environmental impact while delivering premium design.

Nearly 80 percent of Hyundai Motor vehicles sold in Europe are locally manufactured, reflecting the brand's deep integration and ability to tailor solutions to the unique mobility needs of both urban areas and rural communities.

Compact EVs play a critical role in addressing Europe's urban challenges, as exemplified by the debut of the Concept THREE, underscoring Hyundai Motor's mission to make electrification accessible and attractive for European consumers.

Kimmins launches two new hard hitting road safety campaigns

The hard-hitting campaigns – called 'Priority List' and 'Control or Speed' – address two of the main causes of deaths and serious injuries on our roads – speeding and, more generally, driver behaviour.

Launching the campaigns the Minister said: "Too many people are dying on our roads, something that has been brought into sharp focus within recent weeks. We are only just into the third month of 2026 and, tragically, 15 people have lost their lives.

"We must all do everything we can to ensure no more families are plunged into the unimaginable and life changing grief that road deaths bring to their door.

"As Minister, I want to do all I can to ensure everyone who uses our roads, does so safely. To help drive real behavioural change on our roads we need a societal conversation about how we all behave when we are travelling and, today I am launching two new powerful and hard-hitting advertisements to help stimulate that conversation.

"The first campaign, 'Priority List' challenges the everyday choices drivers make that lead to collisions - inattention, driving too close, and momentary distractions. These may seem minor in the moment, but they can have devastating, life changing consequences. The campaign highlights how a split second decision to take a risk can end in tragedy, a scenario many of us will sadly recognise.

"The second, addresses



excessive speed, which remains a major factor in deaths and serious injuries, particularly on rural roads where you are likely to encounter more difficulties. Despite the risks, many drivers believe they are in control when speeding. However, evidence shows that speed reduces reaction time, increases stopping distances, and leads to more severe outcomes. The message of this campaign, entitled 'Control or Speed', is simple: you can have control, or you can have speed - but you cannot have both."

Minister Kimmins added: "The campaigns will run across TV, radio, digital platforms, and outdoor media, with a focus on raising awareness among all drivers with a particular focus on younger drivers.

"Alongside this work, my Department is reviewing several speed related matters, including national speed limits on rural roads and dual carriageways, HGV limits, and the wider use

of 20mph zones. A public consultation is now open, and I encourage you to take part and make your views heard."

These latest road safety campaigns complement recent work undertaken by the Department for Infrastructure to improve road safety behaviour. Current campaigns include safety around school buses for children www.sharetheroadtozero.com/DriversThinkSafetyWhenPassingBuses, Be Bold. Be Seen www.sharetheroadtozero.com/be-bold-be-seen and our most recent TV campaign which highlights the dangers of drug driving https://sharetheroadtozero.com/TVWebPages/never-ever-drive-on-drugs

You can respond to the consultation on the review of speed limits here: https://consultations2.nidirect.gov.uk/dfi-1/speed-limit-review-2026

Toye Vehicle Repairs: Keeping you on the road!

Toye Vehicle Repairs is a dependable destination for all your automotive needs. Celebrating 4 years under the ownership of Garry McClurg, this garage has built a reputation for providing reliable and comprehensive vehicle repair and restoration services.

At Toye Vehicle Repairs, you'll find a dedicated team of experienced and fully qualified mechanics ready to get your vehicle back on the road with efficiency and expertise. They pride themselves on catering to a diverse range of vehicles, handling servicing and repairs for both standard cars and light commercial vehicles. Whether you drive a Ford, BMW, or any other make and model, their skilled technicians have the knowledge to address your

specific needs. The services offered by Toye Vehicle Repairs are extensive, ensuring that most automotive issues can be expertly handled under one roof. They provide thorough MOT preparation to ensure your vehicle meets all necessary standards. Utilizing advanced vehicle diagnostic tools, they can accurately identify and resolve complex issues. Routine maintenance such

as vehicle servicing, battery checks, brake and clutch repairs, gearbox servicing, suspension work, and essential engine care like oil replacement and battery maintenance are also expertly carried out. Beyond the everyday repairs, Toye Vehicle Repairs also possesses a special expertise in classic car restoration. This passion for automotive heritage sets them apart, offering a valuable service for owners looking to preserve and rejuvenate their cherished vintage vehicles.

Toye Vehicle Repairs is committed to delivering quality workmanship at competitive prices. This dedication to excellence has been recognized through prestigious accolades, including a win at the UK Enterprise Awards in 2023 and further recognition at the Automotive Awards in 2024. These awards underscore their commitment to providing

outstanding service within the automotive industry.

Customer feedback consistently highlights Toye Vehicle Repairs' commitment to going the extra mile for their clients. Reviews often praise their efficient service, transparent communication, and fair pricing, reinforcing their position as a trusted and reliable garage in the area.

For reliable garage services encompassing everything from routine maintenance to intricate repairs and even classic car restoration, Toye Vehicle Repairs offers a comprehensive and trustworthy solution for vehicle owners in and around Killinichy. Booking an appointment is easy – simply give them a call or send an email to experience their award-winning service firsthand.

Toye Vehicle Repairs is at 64 Comber Road, Killinichy. Call: 0289 754 1261 or email: info@toyevr.com.

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Infrastructure Minister Liz Kimmins meets students to discuss the Graduated Driver Licensing scheme

Minister Kimmins has met with students from St Mary's High School and Limavady High School at their new shared campus in Limavady to discuss the Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) scheme.

GDL is a road safety scheme designed to reduce the disproportionate involvement of new – primarily young – drivers in fatal and serious road traffic collisions and will introduce a revised training, testing and post-test framework for new drivers and motorcyclists. It has been launched as part of a new Road Safety Strategy Action Plan, developed in partnership with the Emergency Services, other departments and agencies, focusing on the latest road safety interventions.

Minister Kimmins said: "I was delighted today to meet students from St Mary's High School and Limavady High School to discuss the new Graduated Driver Licensing Scheme and hear their views on the scheme and how it will improve road safety for younger drivers and improve progression to attaining a full driver's licence.

"This is the most significant reform to

driver licensing and testing in almost 70 years, with these changes aimed at young drivers who are sadly most likely to be killed or seriously injured on our roads.

"In 2024, there were 164 casualties (killed or seriously injured) from collisions where a car driver aged 17-23 was responsible with this age group of drivers accounting for 24% of fatal or serious collisions despite holding only 8% of licences.

"Behind these figures are too many shattered lives as loved ones set off on an everyday journey and suffer life changing injuries or never come home to their family and friends.

GDL aims to ensure drivers are not just technically competent but also safe, through structured learning, including completion of a Driver's Programme of Training and Logbook. This will better prepare drivers for both the driving test and post-test driving period by helping



Left to right in the photo is: Dr Darren Mornin Principal of Limavady High School, Cian Canning Head Boy, St Mary's High School Limavady, Infrastructure Minister Liz Kimmins, Harry Kealey, Head Boy, Limavady High School and Sean Mullan Principal of St Mary's High School.

learners understand how their attitude, personality, behaviour and feelings can affect their driving style.

"Road safety is a significant priority for me

and my Department, and GDL will be invaluable in helping ensure everyone who uses our roads, does so safely."

The Department will shortly launch a public

information campaign about GDL, and officials will liaise with approved instructors, the PSNI and a range of other stakeholders in advance of its introduction.

Save money while motoring

Unless you've decided to power your car with Flintstone-style footwork, getting from A to B has likely become a significant line item in your monthly budget.

In 2026, with fuel prices and maintenance costs always on the move, driving frugally is less about being "cheap" and more about efficiency engineering. It's about understanding the physics of your vehicle and making small, tactical adjustments that keep more money in your pocket.

Your right foot is the most important component of your car's fuel system. If you treat your pedals like binary switches—either 100% on or 100% off—you are essentially throwing cash out of the exhaust pipe. Real efficiency begins by pretending there is a literal egg under the gas pedal; you want to accelerate smoothly and gradually to avoid "gulping" fuel. Similarly, the "coast is clear" method is your best friend. If you see a red light a

quarter-mile ahead, take your foot off the gas immediately. Let friction and gravity do the work for you, rather than maintaining speed only to slam on the brakes at the last second.

Most vehicles hit their peak fuel-efficiency "sweet spot" between 45 and 60 mph. Once you cross that 65 mph threshold, aerodynamic drag increases exponentially. At higher speeds, your car essentially

transforms into an aerodynamic brick, fighting against the air and burning significantly more fuel just to maintain its pace.

Slowing down by just 5 or 10 mph on the highway can often save you 10% to 15% on fuel over a long trip.

A car that has to work harder uses more energy, so keeping your vehicle in peak physical condition is non-negotiable. Start by checking your tire pressure at least once a month. Under-inflated

tires create higher rolling resistance, which forces the engine to work harder just to keep the wheels turning. Keeping them at the manufacturer's recommended PSI (usually found on a sticker inside the driver's door) can improve your mileage by up to 3%.

Plan your route to minimize stop-and-go traffic and idling. Even the way you park matters.

Don't waste five minutes circling a crowded lot for a

spot near the door. Park in the first open space you see and walk; you'll save fuel, reduce frustration, and get a bit of extra movement in your day.

Use apps like GasBuddy or Waze to scout the cheapest stations along your existing route. For insurance, consider telematics programs that monitor your driving habits; if you're already driving gently to save gas, you might as well get a discount on your premiums for being a safe driver.

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DRIVEWAY IDEAS FOR MAXIMUM KERB APPEAL

Your driveway serves more than one purpose. While it's a convenient and safe place to park your vehicle, it also plays a lead role in creating a lasting first impression. Here's a round-up of some key types.

Gravel driveways offer a charming and cost-effective way to revamp your driveway. Gravel and stone come in a variety of colours and sizes, providing the opportunity to fully customise the look to suit your style. They also pair well with other materials such as stepping

stones, block paved borders, and stamped concrete. In addition, gravel provides great natural drainage and is easy to maintain. You can cleverly combine gravel with block paving to stop the gravel from spraying across the pavement.

Resin driveways. Resin driveways have become

increasingly popular with UK homeowners looking for modern front driveway ideas as they offer a contemporary appearance and incredible durability. The mixture of resin and aggregates creates a seamless surface that's resistant to weeds and cracking, with an array of colours and patterns available, you can easily match your home's exterior. Resin driveways naturally drain water and are environmentally friendly. Resin's neat and smooth finish is stunning all by itself or with a few key features. Consider the shape of your resin driveway and whether you'd like any cut-outs for plants, trees, water features, or decorative



edging. Due to resin's versatility, the sky is your limit.

Tarmac driveways. Tarmac or asphalt driveways are durable and

long-lasting. Tarmac is a mix of aggregates and tar, whereas asphalt is a mix of aggregates and bitumen. The latter offers a better finish and smoother

surface compared to tarmac. The finish of tarmac can be enhanced through 'chip sealing'. This is when tar is poured onto a gravel base, stones

are added, and it's pressed with roller equipment. Tarmac and asphalt are cost-effective to install and pair well with a number of aesthetics: They look great alongside patterned bricks. Create a stunning look by contrasting tarmac or asphalt with lighter stone. Soften the dark tones by including a lush lawn or greenery in your tarmac driveway design.

Concrete driveways. Poured concrete is one of the most common driveway materials on the market. It's used to create low-maintenance driveways that require minimal upkeep. Coloured concrete is great if you want to add dimension and interest, such as a cream border or chequered patterns. It's also malleable when installed correctly. For example, it can make patterns when poured into moulds and can be sectioned and paired with other materials, such as aggregate or slate. Stamped concrete can give the appearance of a different material such as stone or brick for a

fraction of the cost.

Block paving driveways. Block paving creates a classic and elegant first impression. It's usually made from concrete, which is engineered in a factory for consistency and accuracy. For this reason, block paving is a durable and versatile option for your driveway. A popular design trend with block paving is using light grey concrete to border and 'edge' the drive and any central features, such as a roundabout, lawn, water feature, or pathway. A dark grey paving block is then used to fill in the remaining area, offering a great aesthetic that stands the test of time. Whether you use one type of block, two-tones, mixed, or a combination of materials, block paving is a decorative option that offers a lovely finish. Monoblock paving driveways incorporate two-tones of block paving to create patterns and interest. The two tones can be two different materials or two colours of the same material.

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MAINTENANCE TASKS FOR APRIL

April is nature's alarm clock, but it's also the month where your home and garden demand a little manual intervention to shake off the winter blues.

As the soil warms and the days stretch out, the priority shifts from simply surviving the cold to preparing for the "high season" of summer living. It is the bridge between the hibernation of March and the frantic growth of May, making it the perfect window to tackle tasks before they become overwhelming.

The Garden Awakening

In the garden, your primary mission is to get ahead of the growth curve. The Maiden Mow is the first major milestone; when the grass finally starts to push upward, give it a light trim. It is crucial to set your mower blades high for these first few passes, as scalping the lawn too early can stress the root system. While you're out there, launch a proactive strike against weeds. Young, tender weeds are significantly easier to pull than the established monsters they will become by June. Once the beds are clear, applying a thick layer of mulch will act as both a weed suppressant and a moisture-lock for the warmer months ahead. Don't forget the "room" outdoors either—April is the ideal time to scrub down the patio furniture and check if your wooden decking or benches need a fresh seal of oil to survive the summer sun.



Shielding the Exterior Moving to the house itself, your home's exterior has likely spent the last few months taking a beating from wind and rain. Start by inspecting the gutters; even if you cleared them in the autumn, winter storms often deposit a fresh layer of grit and stray twigs that can lead to overflows during April showers. While you have the ladder out, give the windows and frames a deep scrub. Winter leaves a greasy film of salt and pollution on the glass that dulls the natural light entering your home. A thorough cleaning doesn't just improve your view—it allows you to inspect the seals and frames for any rot or cracks that might have

developed during the freeze-thaw cycles of the colder months. Technical Health and Safety Inside the home, the focus should shift toward efficiency and safety. Before the first heatwave hits, service your cooling systems or at the very least, swap out the HVAC filters. A dusty filter forces the system to work harder, driving up your energy bills and shortening the unit's lifespan. Similarly, take a moment to pull your refrigerator away from the wall and vacuum the condenser coils. Dust buildup here acts as insulation, making your fridge work overtime to keep things cold. This is also the standard time to perform your bi-annual safety check: test the batteries in your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors to ensure they are fully operational for the

season ahead. The Seasonal Transition Finally, April is the best time for a functional declutter. As you rotate your wardrobe from heavy wools to lighter

linens, be ruthless with what you put into storage; if you didn't wear a coat all winter, it likely doesn't deserve space in your closet next year. This seasonal swap-over is the perfect excuse to deep-clean the hidden corners of your bedroom and storage areas that usually get bypassed. By clearing out the physical and mental "winter weight" now, you create a refreshed environment that matches the energy of the world outside.

A Quick Warning: Before you hook up the garden hose for the first time, check your outdoor taps for hairline fractures. If water was trapped in the pipe during a freeze, the first time you turn the tap on could result in a hidden leak behind your siding or in your basement.

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