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Mayor of Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council, Councillor Kurtis Dickson welcomed the Wallace High School rugby team, coaches and guests to a civic reception at Lagan Valley Island

WALLACE HIGH SCHOOL HONOURED AT CIVIC RECEPTION FOLLOWING HISTORIC SCHOOLS' CUP VICTORY

Wallace High School's rugby heroes were given a rousing civic reception at Lagan Valley Island, as Mayor of Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council, Councillor Kurtis Dickson welcomed the team, coaches and guests to celebrate a historic sporting moment for the city.

The Ulster Schools Cup champions were welcomed by the Mayor, alongside special guests including Deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly, Education Minister Paul Givan MLA, MLAs Michelle Guy and David Honeyford and Lisburn and Castlereagh Councillors.

Wallace High's 24-15 win over Royal School Armagh earlier this year made his-

tory as the school's first ever outright victory in the prestigious tournament. The reception celebrated not just the result, but also the years of dedication, team spirit, and community pride that led to a remarkable achievement.

Speaking at the event, the Mayor said, "Sport has a unique power, it teaches resilience, builds friendships,

and unites communities. What this team has achieved will be remembered not just by them, but by everyone in Lisburn and Castlereagh who have supported them along the way. They have written a new chapter in Wallace High School's history, and I have no doubt that they will go on to achieve even greater things, both on and off the field."

The team's performance, led by captain Jon Rodgers, whose father also captained Wallace in the 1989 final, was celebrated with inspiring speeches and a highlight video showcasing the pivotal moments from the final.

The event concluded with group photographs capturing a moment that will live long in the memory of all involved.

Knit + Stitch Show returns to Lisburn in November

The UK's biggest and best textile craft show, Knit + Stitch, is set to return to Northern Ireland in 2025, taking place at the Eikon Exhibition Centre, Lisburn, from 13th – 16th November 2025.

With a legacy spanning over 30 years, Knit + Stitch have become the leading consumer textile exhibitions in the UK, offering a winning combination of inspiration, learning, and shopping. The event attracts craft hobbyists, textile artists, and industry professionals, providing a vibrant hub of creativity for makers of all skill levels.

Theresa Morrissey, Group Executive Director, Eikon Exhibition Centre, expressed her excitement about hosting the event: "We are thrilled to

welcome Knit + Stitch back to Northern Ireland in 2025. The Eikon Exhibition Centre is the perfect venue to host this fantastic celebration of textile arts and crafts. We look forward to welcoming thousands of craft enthusiasts and industry experts for what promises to be an inspiring and creative event."

Exhibitor applications are now open for businesses and artisans interested in showcasing their products and expertise.

For more information and to stay updated on ticket sales, visit the Knit + Stitch website.

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COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH NURSE CONQUERS EVEREST CHALLENGE TO HELP SUPPORT SUICIDE CHARITY

Libby Elliott from the South Eastern Trust's Lisburn Community Mental Health Team has taken mental health awareness and support to new heights, by completing the incredible challenge of reaching Everest Base Camp, along with a group of sixteen keen climbers.

Together they helped raise an outstanding £26,574 for PIPS Suicide Prevention Ireland.

Passionate about promoting mental health and suicide prevention, Libby combined her personal goal with a powerful fundraising mission, braving high altitudes, tough terrain and freezing temperatures to help support those in crisis.

The climb was arranged by local social media influencer, Caroline McKenna who is known as 'acountydowntunder'.

Speaking about her amazing expedition, Libby said, "Last summer I was selected to undertake the challenge of Everest Base Camp in order to raise money for PIPS Charity, a cause very close to my heart. Working as a Community Mental Health Nurse you see so many people who are suffering from ill mental health and I wanted to do something to challenge myself and help



support those affected by suicide.

"There is such a demand for services and PIPS Suicide Prevention help provide counselling and befriending support to individuals who are experiencing suicidal thoughts and mental unwellness, a much needed service. Completing Everest Base Camp was definitely one of the most physically and mentally challenging things I have completed in my

entire life but keeping in mind the why behind the challenge it helped me with each and every step."

The money raised by Libby will go directly towards helping PIPS Suicide Prevention Ireland deliver life-saving services, offering immediate support to individuals in emotional distress or crisis, as well as providing vital education and training across

communities in Northern Ireland.

Libby's colleagues in the Lisburn Community Mental Health Team have praised her for her determination, selflessness and courage, describing her achievement as a powerful symbol of hope.

Libby hopes her Everest journey inspires others to open up about mental health and to support the life-changing work of local charities like PIPS.



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YOUNG ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCATES TAKE THE STAGE TO CHAMPION ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

Pupils from across the Council area gathered recently to speak out on environmental issues as part of a 2025 Environmental Youth Speak competition organised by our Waste Management team at the Island Arts Centre Lisburn.

A total of 27 young people from 14 primary and post primary schools participated in the event held to advance environmental awareness among the younger generation by providing them with a platform to research, speak out, and

examine environmental issues. The competition had two age categories: Junior P6 & P7 and Senior Y8, Y9 and Y10.

Our Mayor, Cllr Kurtis Dickson, said: "It was great to hear the many wonderful ideas the contestants had researched for this event

which could help protect our precious Environment. The presentations were fantastic, and I learnt lots of new tips to reduce waste in my own life. Empowering the next generation to speak out is a hugely important part of effective climate action globally, and it will only have a positive effect on our Council too."

"How to be a Waste Buster!" was the theme for the Junior section and pupils were required to research how to reduce and eliminate waste in their daily lives and inspire others to do the same.

Chair of the Council's Environment and Sustainability Committee, Cllr Pat Catney, praised the efforts of the participants: "I was delighted to be invited to attend this year's Environmental Youth Speak as a guest judge, and the time, effort and practice the students put

in resulted in an amazing range of creative and passionate presentations. The standard was very high, and the judging panel had a very hard job picking the winners from such a talented group."

The senior section had a theme of 'How being Frugal and Thrifty is cool for the Planet' asking them to explore how using these techniques is not only cool for the planet but also a great way to reduce waste and save money.

Taking the Junior section Winners' Cups back to their school were Annie and Lena of Rowandale I.P.S. Moira, with Blake and Issac of Seymour Hill P.S. in second place and Leon of Pond Park P.S. in 3rd place.

The Senior Section winner's trophy went to Molly of Laurelhill Community College, the first student to win the title two years in a row



with Rebecca and Belem of Friends School Lisburn in second place and Sara and Zola of Wallace High School in 3rd place.

All participants received a certificate, and a reusable shopping bag made from recycled material and an insulated stainless steel

drink bottle.

If you would like more information on how schools can take part in future competitions or

to book a visit to your school by the Waste Education Officer, please email: waste.education@lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk

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PCSP launches support programme to empower community groups in fight against crime

A new funding programme has been launched by Lisburn & Castlereagh Policing and Community Safety Partnership (PCSP) to help support projects that tackle crime.

The scheme, called the Project Support Programme, is open to all constituted community groups, neighbourhood watch schemes and community police liaison committees operating within the Lisburn & Castlereagh Council area.

Grants of £500 to £5,000 are available to successful groups for projects that continue up to the 20 February 2026 under the following themes:

Theme 1 – Reducing anti-social behaviour, addressing the effects of drugs and alcohol as a contributing factor in crime and anti-social behaviour, increase reporting of Domestic Abuse incidents and provide support to the victims, increase confidence in policing;

Theme 2 – Reduce the fear of crime, especially amongst vulnerable groups including addressing hate

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Application forms and guidance notes are available online at www.lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk/pcsp or by request from Lisburn & Castlereagh PCSP Officer on email pcsp@lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk. Completed applications will not be

accepted by email.

Guidance notes: <https://www.lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk/w/guidance-notes-for-lisburn-castlereagh-policing-and-community-safety-partnership-project-support-programme-2025/26>

Application form on Smart Survey: <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/PCSP-PSP-25/>

Online or physical information sessions can be arranged to provide support to potential applicants. For more information and to express an interest in one of these information sessions, please email pcsp@lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk

Completed applications must be returned either online at www.lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk/pcsp or in a sealed envelope endorsed 'Policing and Community Safety Partnership - Project Support Programme Application 2025/26' and addressed to the PCSP Manager, Lisburn & Castlereagh Policing and Community Safety Partnership, Civic Headquarters, Lagan Valley Island, Lisburn, BT27 4RL to arrive no later than 1.00pm on Friday 30 May 2025.

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COUNCIL CELEBRATES ACHIEVEMENTS OF LOCAL VOLUNTEERS AT SPECIAL RECOGNITION EVENT

LCCC hosted a celebration evening recently at Lagan Valley Island, honouring the dedication, commitment, and accomplishments of local volunteers who successfully completed training courses delivered by the Council between September and March.

Organised by the Council's Community Services team, the event brought together volunteers from across the area to celebrate

their commitment to personal development and community impact. Councillor Jonathan Craig, Chair of the Council's Communities

& Wellbeing Committee, said: "These volunteers have shown incredible perseverance and passion. Their achievements go far

beyond gaining new skills — they represent a meaningful step toward building stronger, more resilient communities. Many have overcome personal challenges to get here, and I see them as true changemakers in the community. I encourage them to keep learning and growing through future opportunities."

In line with the Council's commitment to empowering volunteers and community organisations, Councillor Craig also announced the launch of the Council's new Training Programme for April-June 2025. The upcoming programme will include practical and informative sessions such as Mental Health

First Aid, steward training, manual handling, and social media skills.

The evening was brought to a close with a testimony from Irene McKittrick of Moorcroft Rural Community Association. Irene shared how the training boosted her confidence and positively impacted the success of her group, underscoring the real-life value of the programme.

For further information or to register for upcoming training opportunities, go to Community group training - lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk or please contact community.services@lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk



'Blast Off' competition trophy secured by Friends' School, Lisburn

Post-primary schools across the Lisburn and Castlereagh area have been competing in the council's 'Blast Off' programme over recent months.

The winning team and school is Friends School, Lisburn for their business named 'ReBorn'.

Blast Off is a youth entrepreneurial programme as part of Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council's Go Succeed initiative, which was delivered on its behalf by Young Enterprise NI.

Teams from Dundonald High School, Friends' School Lisburn and Wallace High School took part in a recent pitching finale event at The House of Vic-Ryn. The judging panel took its time to deliberate and identified 'ReBorn' as the

winner. The two runner-up teams were Cheeky Ceramics from Dundonald High School and ReVibe from Wallace High School.

Visiting their school to present their trophy, Alderman Amanda Grehan, Regeneration & Growth Chair at Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council said

"ReBorn impressed both the judges and audience with their heartfelt presentation, sharing the story behind their unique product - a memory blanket crafted from cherished, outgrown baby clothes. While the



emotional connection of sentiment and nostalgia resonated, it was the team's incredible branding, originality of the product and delivery of their presentation that ultimately earned them top marks from the judges."

Speaking about the other teams Alderman Grehan continued, "All the teams who presented on the day deserve recognition for their creativity, innovation and business acumen. We were incredibly impressed by the energy and enterprise displayed by the students at the pitching event."

Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council is proud

of the success of the programme which saw high scores awarded for demonstrating exceptional teamwork, presentation skills, and the potential to make a significant impact in their local environment by including an element of recycling or upcycling in their product idea.

Freddie Harris, Area Manager for Young Enterprise NI said "The quality of some of the pitches was outstanding, and it is clear that many of these students have a bright future ahead in business. Their creativity and entrepreneurial spirit are truly inspiring."

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Lisburn Marks VE Day 80 with Moving Commemorations and Beacon Lighting

Castle Gardens was the site of a poignant beacon lighting ceremony recently as Lisburn joined towns and cities across the UK and beyond in marking the 80th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day (VE Day).

The ceremony was preceded by a beating retreat from the Band of the Royal Irish Regiment, creating a memorable and fitting tribute to the anniversary of the end of conflict in Europe in 1945.

Earlier in the day, Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council (LCCC) delivered a comprehensive VE Day 80 programme, honouring the courage and sacrifice of those who served in the Second World War. Events included a solemn flag raising at Lagan Valley Island, a wreath-laying ceremony at Lisburn War Memorial, and a celebratory tea dance in Market Square — all designed to remember, reflect and unite the community in a spirit of peace.

As evening fell, Lagan Valley Island, Castle Gardens, and Union Bridge were illuminated in red as a mark of remembrance, honouring those whose service secured the freedoms we cherish today.



The Mayor, Councillor Kurtis Dickson, reflected on the day's events:

“On this significant anniversary, we joined with communities around the world to honour the generation that gave so much for the cause of peace and freedom. The 80th anniversary of VE Day reminds us of the extraordinary resilience, unity and sacrifice that brought an end to war in Europe.”

“It has been incredibly moving to see so many

people take part in our commemorations recently. From our veterans’ families to school children learning about VE Day for the first time, our VE Day programme has brought the community together in a shared act of remembrance and gratitude. Raising the Flag of Peace and observing a two-minute silence this morning were moments of quiet reflection, while this evening’s beacon lighting

ceremony was a powerful symbol of hope and enduring peace.”

“As my year as Mayor draws to a close, I could not have wished for a more meaningful way to conclude my term than by standing alongside our community to mark VE Day 80. I extend my heartfelt thanks to all those who made today’s events possible — your commitment ensures we continue to honour the legacy of the VE Day generation.”

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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.

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Unveiled as Official Builders’ Merchant Partner of the Irish Football Association

Northern Ireland’s leading builders’ merchants named as official builders merchant partner of the Irish Football Association, the Irish FA Foundation and the Northern Ireland national teams.

MacBlair, Northern Ireland’s leading builders’ merchants, has today announced a partnership with the Irish Football Association, the Irish FA Foundation and the Northern Ireland national teams.

Through this partnership, MacBlair also becomes the title partner of the Irish FA Foundation’s People & Clubs programme and the MacBlair Building Support Fund.

The MacBlair Building Support Fund in collaboration with the Irish FA, will directly support clubs through the provision of building materials for projects such as upgrading clubhouses, enhancing pitches, or improving facilities.

Additionally, MacBlair is launching a Club

Support Fund, which will provide more general funding to help clubs with essential needs such as equipment, kit sponsorship, and other day-to-day operational costs.

MacBlair Managing Director Alan Wright said: “We are proud to partner with the Irish FA and strengthen our commitment to local communities across Northern Ireland. At MacBlair, we believe in making a real impact, and through the MacBlair Support Funds, we’re excited to help clubs enhance their facilities and create lasting benefits for grassroots football.”

Stephen Bogle, Head of Commercial Operations at the Irish FA, said: “Partnering with MacBlair reflects our shared



Julie Carson, Head of Marketing at MacBlair, and MacBlair Managing Director Alan Wright joined Stephen Bogle, Head of Commercial Operations at the Irish FA, and Stephen Garrett, Senior Commercial Manager at the Irish FA, to announce the new partnership.MacBlair

commitment to supporting football at a grassroots level. The MacBlair Support Funds will provide vital assistance to clubs across Northern Ireland, helping them to

grow, thrive, and continue serving their communities. We’re proud to work with a partner that understands the power of football to create lasting, positive change.”

Applications for the Funds are now open through the IFA and MacBlair websites.

<https://www.macblair.com/macblair-ifa-building-support-fund>

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 added strain on already 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 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.

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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.

We’re proud of what’s coming out of our

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Rhododendron is destroying our native Woods and wildlife.

The Woodland Trust highlights the impact of rhododendron on our native woods during 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

GENERATIONS OF SOCIAL WORKERS KEEP IT IN THE FAMILY

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, Inter-generational 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 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



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

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 inter-generational 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."

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!

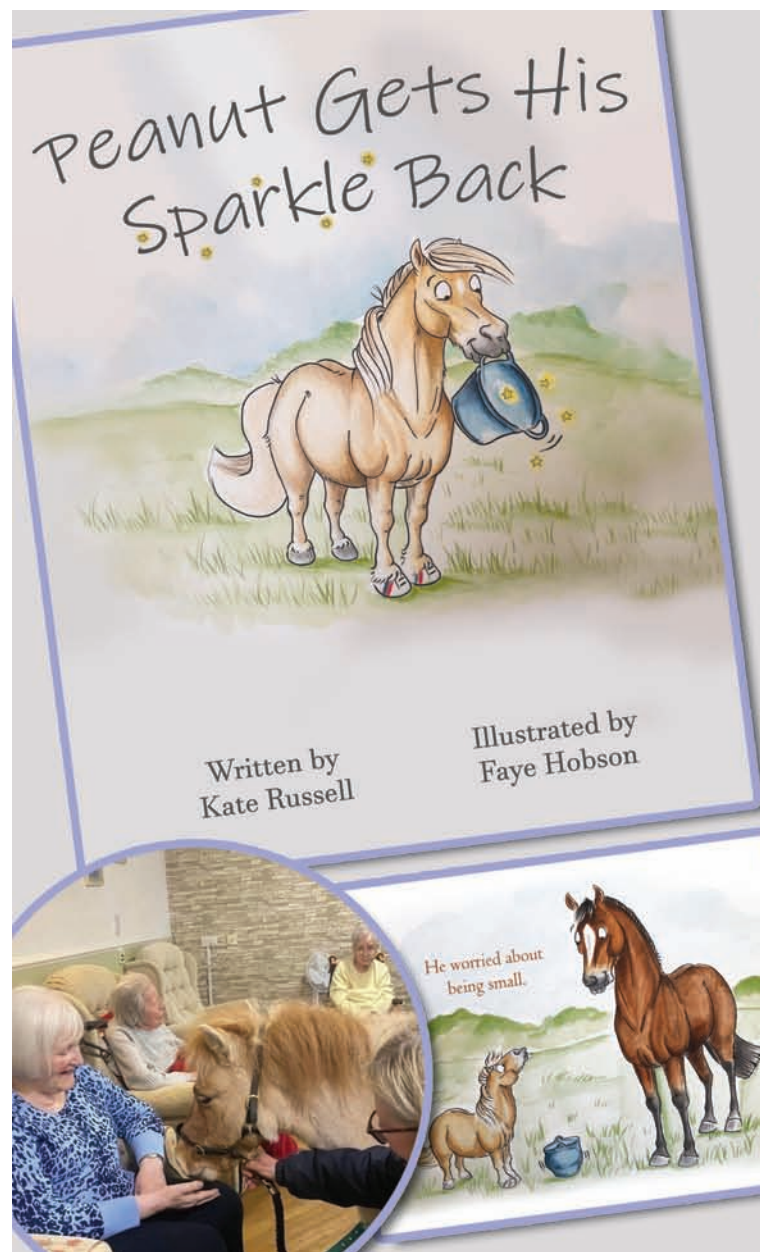
The story aims to help children with anxiety and worries and show that that it is ok to have worries but not to let them build up. 'Peanut, gets his sparkle back' is a heart-warming children's book about overcoming fear and finding the courage within oneself.

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).





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Keep kids active and sociable with multi-sports camps, delivered by our experienced sports coaches. The little movers and groovers out there

can dance their hearts out at our dance camps, which encourage kids to experiment with a variety of dance styles and techniques.

Cool down on the slope! Summer activity specials continue at Craigavon Golf and Ski Centre. Individual tubing, family tubing and footgolf mean lots of laughs and fun for everyone on and off the slopes!

Goodbye school, hello pool (and lake!)

Jump into summer with our wet and wild watersports! Get out on the lake with our kayak and paddleboards hire, watersports activity sessions, aqua inflatable, and lots more taster sessions to help you dip your toe into something new!

Make a splash with our intensive swimming lessons, lifeguard



qualifications, a water safety course and a junior medic course...and of course, £2 swims are here for summer!

Inclusive summer scheme
The ABC Inclusive Summer Schemes, taking place in Banbridge and Armagh, provide inclusive sports and physical activity opportunities for children with a disability,

along with siblings and friends.

Throughout the summer, the fun continues as we look forward to celebrating Love Parks Week, The South Lake Junior Triathlon, Bike Week, Oxford Island Nature activities, trekking, climbing and more across parks and open spaces.

All the details are at getactiveabc.com/summer

Taekwon-Do NI shines with Scottish T-Uk Open Success!

The competitive spirit and rigorous training within Taekwon-Do NI were recently on full display as the team travelled to Scotland for the T-Uk Scottish Open.

Their performance was nothing short of spectacular, with the team bringing home an impressive haul of 22 medals! This remarkable achievement included: 13 Gold Medals; 7 Silver Medals and 2 Bronze Medals.

The team's success is a clear indication of their terrific skill, unwavering sportsmanship, and sheer determination. This medal count once again proves that the hard work and dedication invested in training are yielding fantastic results.

The sporting calendar is already filling up with exciting opportunities for Taekwon-Do practitioners and enthusiasts in Northern Ireland:

- Sparring Seminar with Mr. Hendry Bloks (7th Dan): 7th & 8th June 2025, Shankill Leisure Centre Belfast.
- N.I. National Championships: 21st September 2025, Lisburn.
- W.I.T.C. European Championships: October 2025 (TBC), Almere, Netherlands.
- Battle of the Lowlands: 25th October 2025, Almere, Netherlands.
- Chang Ung Cup: 2nd November 2025, Glasgow, Scotland.
- Open Taekyon Championships: 23rd November 2025, Oss, Netherlands.
- Open Dutch Championships: 31st January 2026, Helmond, Netherlands.
- Flanders Fields Championships: 7th February 2026, Belgium.
- Warrior Open Championships: March 2026 (TBC), London.



Competitors from Taekwon-Do NI enjoyed spectacular success at the T-Uk Scottish Open recently.

Championships: October 2025 (TBC), Almere, Netherlands.

• Battle of the Lowlands: 25th October 2025, Almere, Netherlands.

• Chang Ung Cup: 2nd November 2025, Glasgow, Scotland.

• Open Taekyon Championships: 23rd November 2025, Oss, Netherlands.

• Open Dutch Championships: 31st January 2026, Helmond, Netherlands.

• Flanders Fields Championships: 7th February 2026, Belgium.

• Warrior Open Championships: March 2026 (TBC), London.

• N.I. Colour Belt Championships: 12th April 2026, Lisburn.

Taekwon-Do in Northern Ireland continues to thrive under the expert guidance of Mr. Leo Maguire (VII Dan), the Chief Taekwon-Do Instructor for the region and the esteemed President of the Northern Ireland ITF (International Taekwon-Do Federation). The dedication and leadership of Mr. Maguire were further recognised last November at the International Instructors Course, where he was deservedly promoted to the

prestigious rank of 7th Dan, earning him the awarded title of Master! This significant achievement is a testament to his years of commitment and contribution to the art of Taekwon-Do.

For those in Northern Ireland eager to embark on their own Taekwon-Do journey, classes are available in various locations across the region.

Getting started is easy – interested individuals can find more information and book their free trial lesson through the official UKTC NI website at www.taekwondo-ni.co.uk.



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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 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

JAMES AND GRACE THE MOST POPULAR NI BABY NAMES REGISTERED IN 2024

James and Grace were the most popular first names given to babies in Northern Ireland, for births registered in 2024.

This is one of the findings of the Baby Names 2024 statistics published today by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

The statistics show Grace has returned to the top spot as the most popular girls' name after five years at number one from 2018 to 2022 and has appeared in the top three most popular names for 19 consecutive years. James has returned to number one after a six-year stretch at the top spot between 2015 and 2020, then regaining it in 2022.

For boys' names, Cillian was a close second to James. This name has increased in popularity since entering the top ten most popular names in 2020. Noah returned to third place, at which it has placed five times since 2015, after reaching first place in 2023.

Jude entered the boys' top ten in 2024 for the first time in the series which dates back to 1997. Within the boys' top 100, the highest climbers in popularity between 2023 and 2024 were Austin, Rossa, Callum,

and Joseph. Some of the less common names given to baby boys in 2024 were Royce, Bentley, and Phoenix.

For baby girls, Olivia came in second to Grace, having re-entered the top three for the first time since 2018. Fiadh returned to third place, down from second place in 2023 and has held a top five position since 2020.

Within the girls' top 100, the highest climbers in popularity between 2023 and 2024 were Maya, Maria, Eliza, and Ayla.

As with previous years, there were a greater variety of girls' names (2,289) than boys' names (1,826) registered in 2024. Some of the less common names given to baby girls in 2024 were Dolly, Primrose, and Melody.

Birth registrations in 2024 included 948 baby names that had not been used before. Blockbuster movies, popular television series, current celebrities and memorable places continue to appear to be influencing factors for some parents.



Top 10 baby names in Northern Ireland, 2024

Boys:

1. James – 143 Babies
2. Cillian – 142 Babies
3. Noah – 139 Babies
4. Jack – 130 Babies
5. Theo – 125 Babies
6. Jude – 124 Babies
7. Luca – 109 Babies
8. Charlie – 106 Babies
9. Oisín – 105 Babies
10. Oliver – 104 Babies

Girls:

1. Grace – 125 Babies
2. Olivia – 109 Babies
3. Fiadh – 104 Babies

4. Aoife – 97 Babies
5. Emily – 96 Babies
6. Lily/Charlotte – 95 Babies
8. Isla/Sophia – 91 Babies
10. Freya – 90 Babies

You can find out more about these names and others on NISRA's interactive dashboard which facilitates name searches by rank, number of babies registered with that name, meaning and origin. The dashboard is available via a link on the main baby names web page.

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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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? wildfires erupt from simple carelessness.

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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Meet Lisburn's fabulous Slimming World Consultants Linda and Christine

Linda McKay has returned to her role as a slimming world consultant in her original Saturday group in Lisburn at Graham Gardens 8am +9.30am from last July and reopened the Hillsborough Wednesday morning group in the Presbyterian church at 9.30am in January "the last few years have had different challenges for many people and the general consensus among everyone is that it is time to start prioritising ourselves, our health and nutrition, that's where group plays a vital role in support, community, fun and motivation!" says Linda.

Christine Young has been a member of Slimming World for 13 years and a Consultant for the last 7 years. Christine has her groups in Mt Zion, Tuesday 5.30pm. Lisburn City Elim Church Wednesday 5.30pm & 7.30pm. Also Thursday 9.30am. Trinity Methodist Thursday 5.30pm & 7.30pm. Also Friday 9.30am. Having lost 11 stone Christine knows



only too well the burden of carrying excess weight. She also knew changes needed to be made. Christine says "I cannot emphasise enough the importance of having that group support where you'll learn about yourself as a slimmer. Learn about your relationship with food and drink. Make the necessary changes to form new healthier habits that will stay with you. All with the support of like minded,

encouraging members."

With slimming World you can live the life you want, eat the food you want and still lose weight. With food optimising you can lose weight without ever going hungry by filling up on everyday nutritional favourites like pasta, potatoes, meat and vegetables and no need to weigh or measure.

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calories! At slimming world we also support you to take control and change your mindset. Research shows you are more likely to lose weight when you join a super supportive group. You also get exclusive access to the slimming world member website, app and barcode scanner. "And our support" says Linda and Christine.

Contact:

Linda: 07568476044 and Christine: 07981 745742



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TUESDAY
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Nestled in the scenic countryside near Ballymoney, this park, which operated until 1997, offered a unique experience. Drive through enclosures where you could come face-to-face with majestic lions and playful monkeys. Onsite fair rides and perhaps even getting your picture taken with a lion cub! It wasn't exactly Jurassic Park but then again who needs dinosaurs when errant monkeys are around to threaten your wing mirrors?

The closure of the Causeway Safari Park in the late 90's marked the end of an era however its legacy lives on in the stories shared across generations. The site's subsequent transformation into the Benvarren Animal Rescue Kennels signifies a continued commitment to animal welfare and a recent "A Causeway Safari Tale" exhibition at the Ballymoney Museum further underscored the nostalgic

place this park holds in the community's collective memory.

Today, families still have a diverse range of options to immerse themselves in the wonders of the animal world. Here are some fantastic places where you can create new memories!

Belfast Zoo (Belfast, County Antrim): A cornerstone of Northern Ireland's animal attractions, Belfast Zoo boasts a rich history and a diverse collection of over 130 species. From endangered primates to majestic big cats and playful penguins, a visit here is a journey through different habitats across the globe. The zoo's commitment to conservation and education makes it not only a fun day out but also an opportunity to learn about the importance of protecting wildlife. Keep an eye out for their regular events and feeding times for an extra engaging experience.

The Ark Open Farm (Newtownards, County Down): For a more hands-on experience, The Ark Open Farm offers the chance to get up close and personal with a variety of animals.

Children will delight in feeding lambs, petting rabbits, and even encountering some more exotic residents. The farm also features play areas, making it a perfect destination for families with younger children looking for interactive fun.

Annaglinny Park and Farm (Dungannon, County Tyrone): Combining the charm of a farm with the excitement of a park, Annaglinny offers a relaxed and engaging day out. Visitors can meet farm animals, enjoy play facilities, and even participate in animal feeding sessions. It's a great place to learn about rural life and connect with animals in a friendly environment.

Exploris Aquarium (Portaferry, County Down): While primarily focused on marine life, Exploris also features outdoor enclosures with seals and other coastal creatures. It offers a fascinating glimpse into the underwater world and the wildlife that inhabits the shores of Northern Ireland. Interactive exhibits and feeding demonstrations make it an educational and entertaining experience for all ages.

World of Owls (Antrim,

County Antrim): For those fascinated by birds of prey, the World of Owls is a must-visit. As Northern Ireland's only dedicated owl and bird of prey centre, it provides a unique opportunity to see these magnificent creatures up close and learn about their conservation. They often host demonstrations and educational talks, offering a truly insightful experience. They also house some other exotic animals, adding to the variety.

Rose Park Farm (Ballymoney, County Antrim): Located near the site of the former Causeway Safari Park, Rose Park Farm offers a fun-filled day with a wide range of animals, from farmyard favourites to more unusual breeds. With play areas and even a "Lagoon Beach," it's a destination that caters to the whole family, offering a blend of animal encounters and recreational activities.

Mountpanther Farm Park (Near Newcastle, County Down): Set against the stunning backdrop of the Mourne Mountains, Mountpanther Farm Park is home to a diverse collection of animals, including farm animals, lemurs, and wallabies.



With play areas and scenic walks, it provides a full day of entertainment in a beautiful setting.

Streamvale Open Farm (Belfast, County Antrim): A popular choice for families in the Belfast area, Streamvale Open Farm offers a hands-on experience with farm animals. Seasonal events and activities like milking demonstrations add to the fun, making it a regular destination for many.

These modern animal parks continue the tradition of providing opportunities

for education, entertainment, and fostering a connection with the natural world. While the thrill of a drive-through safari might be a nostalgic memory for some, the current landscape offers diverse and engaging ways for families to create their own cherished animal encounters in Northern Ireland. The whispers of wild roars may have faded at Benvarren, but the joyful sounds of discovery and delight continue to echo across the many wonderful animal parks that thrive today.

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Health Minister commends cancer care collaboration for young people

Health Minister Mike Nesbitt has attended a special event to celebrate the collaborative efforts in implementing a best practice and Regional Model of Care and Standards for Adolescents and Young Adults (AYA) with cancer in Northern Ireland.

The event marks a major milestone in delivering Action 33 of the Northern Ireland Cancer Strategy 2022-2032 and highlights the shared commitment across the health sector, charities, and young people themselves to ensuring that those diagnosed with cancer during adolescence or young adulthood receive the highest quality, developmentally appropriate age-appropriate care. It also coincides with the conclusion of Teenage and Young Adult Cancer Awareness Month, which shines a spotlight on the unique challenges faced by young people.

The Regional Model of Care and Standards have been co-produced with

healthcare professionals, partner organisations, and crucially, young people and their families, whose lived experiences have shaped a more person-centred approach to services.

Speaking at the event, Minister Nesbitt said:

"Collaboration and co-production have been embedded at the heart of the development of the minimum standards and model of care, and I am keen to see this continue as we progress with the implementation."

"This vital framework represents a significant step forward in making sure that young people receive not just excellent clinical treatment, but holistic, developmentally age-appropriate

support that acknowledges the educational, emotional and social aspects of their journey."

"Adolescence and young adulthood are times of immense change and development, and a cancer diagnosis at this stage presents unique personal challenges. The new standards, shaped with the voices of young people, healthcare professionals, and charities, set out our commitment to delivering the best possible care, enhancing outcomes, and ensuring that no young person faces cancer alone."

"I want to extend my sincere gratitude to all those who are involved in this essential work. Your expertise, passion, and lived experi-



Health Minister Mike Nesbitt signing AYA NI Standards pledgeboard

ence continues to be instrumental in shaping a service that will provide equitable, high-quality, and compassionate care for every young person in Northern Ireland."

The event also heard powerful testimonies from young people who have been directly impacted by cancer and who played a vital role in developing the new standards by sharing their experiences and priorities for better care.

AYA cancer services in Northern Ireland will be delivered by a regional, networked service model with Principal Treatment

Centres (PTCs) for both paediatric and adult services designated at the Belfast Trust. The age range for the AYA cancer service is defined as 13 to 25 years of age. This model is designed to bring the key teams and personnel together that comprise the clinical and holistic components of the pathway of care.

The goal of the service model is to enable service users to access the right care in the right place and at the right time, including clinical trials, while benefiting from co-ordinated holistic and psychosocial support.

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An advertisement for the 'We Eat Local' app. On the left, a hand holds a smartphone displaying the app's interface with various restaurant listings. To the left of the phone is the 'We Eat Local' logo, which includes a circular icon with a fork and knife and the text 'UNLOCK THE POWER OF LOCAL' and 'ORDER TODAY'. Below the logo, the text 'WE EAT LOCAL.co.uk' is written in large, bold letters, followed by the tagline 'Your Local Way to Takeaway' in a script font. To the right of the phone, the text 'LISBURN'S LOCAL TAKEAWAY APP' is displayed in bold, uppercase letters. Below this, it says 'NEW APP USERS USE CODE' followed by 'TASTY20' in very large, bold, yellow letters with a black outline. Underneath 'TASTY20', it says 'FOR 20% OFF YOUR 1ST ORDER' in bold, uppercase letters. To the right of the text is a QR code. To the right of the QR code, the text 'Scan to Download We Eat Local today' is written in a script font.

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 diverse 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!



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Lick is Cream of the Crop

Newcastle Gelato Maker, Lick, Celebrates 10 years with Major Wins at the 2025 Ice Cream Awards!

The annual Ice Cream Alliance Awards, a prestigious event recognizing excellence in the nation's beloved frozen treat, took place recently. Amidst strong competition, a small, family-run enterprise from Newcastle made a significant impact, securing the Best of Flavour title for their Pistachio gelato, first place in the Flavour Class for their Caramelised Biscuit, another first for Best of Flavour overall, and ultimately finishing as the runner-up for the coveted Champion of Champions award.

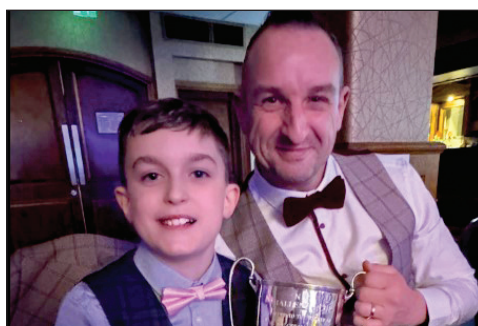
Despite being established relatively recently in 2015, Food NI members Lick Gelato demonstrated their ability to compete successfully against more established names in the ice cream industry.

Founded by the Mournes family and handcrafted in Newcastle, Lick Gelato specialises in authentic Italian-

style artisan ice cream. Their philosophy revolves around crafting innovative flavour combinations using high-quality ingredients to deliver exceptional taste experiences, offering a wide variety of options to cater to diverse palates.

Simon, who accepted the award for the Open Flavour Class, commented, “We are absolutely thrilled. We always hope for recognition but never truly expect to win. To come away with three awards is unbelievable, and to be named runner-up Overall is just incredible. This success truly validates all the hard work and dedication we put into bringing the finest handcrafted artisan gelato to our customers.”

Reflecting on their popular offerings, Lick Gelato noted, "Our Vanilla, Pomegranate, and Pistachio has really become a signature flavour for us. Pistachio has been a long-standing offering, and



we consistently strive to add our unique touch to classic flavours. Recently, our interpretation of the popular Dubai Chocolate trend has been incredibly popular and sells out very quickly. Our customers have truly embraced pistachio."

This year's awards coincide with the family business celebrating its 10th anniversary.

With a rich history spanning over eight decades, the Ice Cream Alliance

Awards are a highly anticipated event in the industry calendar. The awards are renowned for their stringent judging procedures and their role in acknowledging the highest standards and groundbreaking developments within the ice cream sector. As a cornerstone of the vibrant ice cream industry, the Ice Cream Alliance continues to encourage innovation and creativity, promising a bright and flavourful future for all.



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FAMILY FOCUS

PORTRUSH ARTIST MAKES WAVES IN LISBURN

Portrush based artist Adrian Margey held an exhibition and sale of his work at Haslem on Lisburn Square last month. An impressive body of work demonstrated the breadth of Margey's output.

From depictions of the North Coast to portrayals of Donegal, the Mourne and Belfast, the artist presented work in a variety of contemporary and more traditional styles. The exhibition was well attended and sales of Margey's latest work and limited edition prints were swift.

The artist is now preparing for a busy summer at his Portrush Studio and Gallery located at the junction of Mark Street and Main Street. The studio is currently open for drop-in visits each Saturday from 11am – 5pm, with private viewings by appointment on weekdays. Public opening hours will be extended further during the summer season. Visitors are welcome to watch the artist at his easel and to view his latest work.

The artist gave up his day job in Corporate Communications back in 2008 to focus on his artistic practice

full-time. He has since exhibited widely across the island of Ireland, held his first USA exhibition in Washington DC a couple of years ago and live-painted for Tourism Ireland in Milan last spring. His work is influenced by the Fauve artists, the indigenous artists of South America and the Irish Impressionists. Adrian holds a PhD from Queen's University Belfast.

Admission to the gallery is free – everyone welcome. On-street parking available nearby and also at Lansdowne Crescent which is a short walk away from the gallery. Summer exhibitions are also planned for Portballintrae Village Hall from 1st – 3rd August and Slieve Donard Resort & Spa Newcastle from 23rd – 25th August. For further information please visit www.adrianmargey.com or telephone the Portrush Studio on 07841593762.



Portrush Artist Adrian Margey who recently held a successful exhibition in Lisburn and is now preparing for a busy summer at his North Coast Studio & Gallery.

Countryside Fire Alert: Don't Let Carelessness Ignite Disaster

While controlled burning has its place in land management, the stark reality is that many devastating wildfires erupt from simple carelessness.

Discarded cigarettes, unattended campfires, and even sunlight magnified through discarded glass can turn our beautiful Northern Irish countryside into an inferno. Deliberately starting these fires is a serious crime with severe consequences.

Protect our landscapes and communities by following crucial safety tips. Always fully extinguish smoking materials and never toss them from vehicles. Take all bottles and glass home, as they can act as fire starters. Use barbecues responsibly in safe areas, keeping them attended and away from flammable materials. Open fires should be avoided unless permission is granted by the landowner and lit in designated, safe spots, always keeping children well away.



If you spot a fire, report it immediately to the Fire and Rescue Service. Never attempt to tackle a blaze beyond a bucket of water – evacuate quickly, preferably downhill. Witnessing someone setting

a fire? Contact the PSNI immediately. Wildfires are not just costly to fight; they endanger lives – the public, firefighters, and local communities.

They decimate wildlife,

destroying habitats and precious peatlands, vital carbon stores in our fight against climate change. Let's be vigilant and responsible, ensuring our countryside remains safe and enjoyable for everyone.

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UNLOCK THE ULTIMATE OUTDOOR ADVENTURE: TOP CAMPING HACKS FOR YOUR NI GETAWAY

Northern Ireland, with its stunning coastline, rolling green hills, and mystical forests, offers a breathtaking backdrop for a memorable camping holiday.

However, even the most seasoned outdoor enthusiasts can benefit from a few clever hacks to enhance their experience. Whether you're planning a family adventure in a bustling campsite or a tranquil escape into the wilder parts of the country, these tips will help you make the most of your time under the Northern Irish skies.

Setting Up Like a Pro: Pitch Perfect Every Time: Before you even leave home, do a practice run of setting up your tent in your garden. This will familiarize you with the process and ensure all the necessary parts are present. When you arrive at your campsite, take a moment to assess the terrain. Look for a flat, even surface away from any obvious dips or rocks. Placing a groundsheet or tarp beneath your tent not only protects the bottom from damage and moisture but also makes packing up cleaner.

Light Up Your Night

Efficiently: Instead of relying solely on a single lantern, consider using multiple smaller, battery-operated LED lights or headlamps. These are more versatile for tasks like cooking or reading in your tent and conserve energy. String fairy lights around your tent for a cosy ambiance and added visibility at night. Don't forget extra batteries!

Organize Your Space: Keep your campsite tidy and functional by utilizing storage solutions. Packing cubes are fantastic for organizing clothing and gear within your backpack or tent. Consider hanging a mesh organizer inside your tent for easy access to small items like toiletries, phones, and keys. A collapsible washing basket can double as a storage container for shoes or dirty laundry and keep the inside of your tent clean.

Comfort is Key (Even Outdoors!): Sleep Soundly: Invest in a good quality sleeping pad or air mattress to



insulate you from the cold ground and provide cushioning. For added warmth on chilly nights, place a blanket underneath your sleeping bag. A travel pillow can make a significant difference in your sleep quality.

Stay Dry and Comfortable: Northern Ireland's weather can be unpredictable. Pack layers of clothing that you can easily add or remove as the temperature changes.

Waterproof jackets and trousers are essential, as is a good pair of waterproof walking boots. Keep electronics protected from rain and moisture in waterproof bags.

Embrace the Natural Insect Repellent: Midges and other biting insects can be a nuisance, especially during the summer months. Consider natural insect repellents like citronella candles or sprays. Wearing long

sleeves and trousers, especially at dawn and dusk, can also help.

Food and Drink Made Easy: Clever Cooking Solutions: If you're planning to cook, a portable camping stove is a must. Pack pre-chopped vegetables and pre-marinated meats in airtight containers to save time and effort. Consider one-pot meals like stews or pasta dishes

to minimize washing up. Biodegradable dish soap and a quick-drying towel are your friends.

Hydration is Paramount: Carry a reusable water bottle and refill it whenever possible. If you're venturing into more remote areas, consider bringing a water filter or purification tablets. Staying hydrated is crucial, especially during hikes or warmer weather.

Smart Snacking: Pack

non-perishable snacks like energy bars, nuts, dried fruit, and oatcakes for quick energy boosts between meals. Store food in airtight containers to keep it fresh and prevent attracting wildlife.

Safety First: Know Your Location: Before heading out, research your chosen campsite or area and be aware of any potential hazards. Carry a map and compass or a reliable GPS device, and know how to use them. Inform someone of your camping plans and expected return time.

First Aid Essentials: A well-stocked first-aid kit is non-negotiable. Include essentials like bandages, antiseptic wipes, pain relievers, blister treatment, and any personal medications. Familiarize yourself with basic first-aid procedures.

Leave No Trace: Respect the natural environment by adhering to the Leave No Trace principles. Pack out all your rubbish, leave

plants and rocks as you find them, respect wildlife, and be considerate of other visitors.

Fire safety outdoors - barbecues, camping, countryside Fire safety shouldn't stop when you leave your home. Carelessness outdoors can have fatal results. Barbecues, camping and caravanning all pose fire hazards which can destroy areas of countryside and delicate ecosystems. Dry ground in the summer adds to the dangers but care should be taken all year round!

By incorporating these camping hacks into your Northern Ireland holiday, you'll be well-equipped to handle the unexpected, stay comfortable, and fully immerse yourself in the stunning beauty of the region. So pack your bags, embrace the adventure, and get ready to create unforgettable memories under the Northern Irish stars!

Call of the Wild Atlantic Way

The Wild Atlantic Way is one of the world's most spectacular coastal routes.

Stretching for over 2,500 kilometers (1,553 miles) along Ireland's western seaboard, from the Inishowen Peninsula in County Donegal to Kinsale in County Cork, the Wild Atlantic Way is a tapestry of dramatic cliffs, golden beaches, charming villages, and ancient history. It's an invitation to slow down, breathe in the fresh Atlantic air, and discover the raw beauty and vibrant culture of Ireland.

So, you're thinking of embarking on this epic journey? Excellent choice! To help you make the most of it, here are just a few of the incredible things you can do and see along the Wild Atlantic Way:

Embrace the Majestic North (Donegal to County Sligo): Hike the Slieve League Cliffs: Forget the crowds at the Cliffs of Moher (though they are stunning too!), the Slieve League cliffs in Donegal offer a more secluded and equally dramatic experience. Hike along the narrow One Man's Pass for truly breathtaking panoramic views of the Atlantic.

Explore Glenveagh National Park: Immerse yourself in the serene beauty of this vast park, home to rugged mountains, pristine lakes, and the elegant Glenveagh Castle. Keep an eye out for red deer roaming freely.

Surf the Waves at Bundoran: Known as Ireland's surfing capital, Bundoran



in County Donegal offers fantastic waves for surfers of all levels. Even if you're not a surfer, watching the skilled riders is a thrill.

Discover Mullaghmore Head: This dramatic headland in County Sligo boasts stunning coastal walks, incredible views of Classiebawn Castle, and a poignant history linked to the Mountbatten family.

Journey Through the Wild Heart (County Mayo and County Galway): Witness the Beauty of Downpatrick Head: This iconic headland in County Mayo features the impressive sea stack "Dún Briste" and offers dramatic views of the coastline and the vast Atlantic.

Step Back in Time at Céide Fields: Explore the remains of an extensive Stone Age farming landscape in County Mayo, offering a fascinating glimpse into Ireland's ancient past.

Explore the Aran Islands: Take a ferry from Rossaveal or Doolin to these unique islands - Inishmore, Inish-

maan, and Inisheer. Discover ancient forts, traditional Irish culture, and stunning coastal scenery, perhaps renting a bike to explore at your own pace.

Experience the Vibrant City of Galway: Immerse yourself in the lively atmosphere of Galway City, with its colourful streets, traditional pubs, vibrant arts scene, and delicious seafood. Don't miss the Spanish Arch and Galway Cathedral.

Marvel at the Cliffs of Moher: Yes, they're popular for a reason! These towering cliffs in County Clare offer dramatic views of the Atlantic and the Aran Islands. Consider a boat trip for a different perspective.

Explore the Unique Landscape of the Burren: This karst landscape in County Clare is unlike anywhere else in Ireland. Discover unique flora, ancient dolmens, and the fascinating Aillwee Cave.

Savour the Southern Charms (County Clare to County Cork):

Drive the Scenic Ring of Kerry: While technically a separate route, the Ring of Kerry loops around the stunning Iveragh Peninsula and is easily incorporated into a Wild Atlantic Way adventure. Expect breathtaking coastal views, charming villages, and historical sites.

Explore the Dingle Peninsula: This peninsula boasts dramatic scenery, including the Conor Pass, the Sleat Head Drive (with its stunning views of the Blasket Islands), and the vibrant town of Dingle, known for its traditional music scene.

Walk the Seven Heads Peninsula: This lesser-known gem in County Cork offers beautiful coastal walks with stunning views of the rugged coastline and sandy coves.

Discover the Gourmet Capital of Kinsale: End (or begin!) your Wild Atlantic Way journey in the charming town of Kinsale, known for its picturesque harbor, historic Charles Fort, and its reputation as a culinary haven.

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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 making an offer and 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.

Choosing patio doors

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

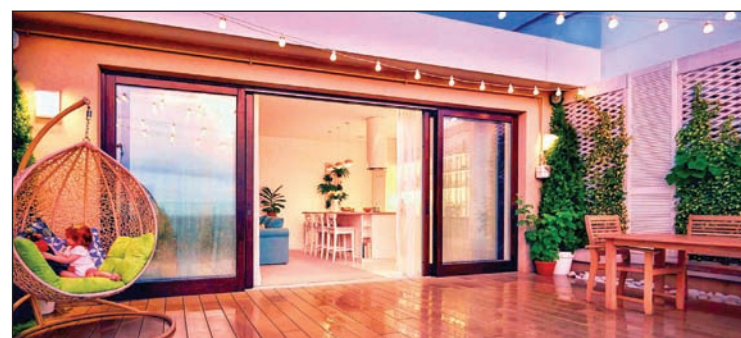
These versatile doors help to infuse our homes with light, maximise on outside views and create a seamless transition from home to garden.

What is a patio door?

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

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

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



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

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

What are French doors? These are more traditional styled, hinged, double glass doors and are available in wood, aluminium, and uPVC. They can be

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

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

of natural light.

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

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

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. 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 blocks 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.

For more information see <https://www.checkatrade.com/blog/ideas/driveway-ideas/>

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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 it's 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 undone.

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 heat of the grill whilst still in the barbeque to ensure that it will remain warm.

Planning an Outdoor Kitchen

PLANNING THE SPACE

Think about the direction – in the UK a South facing situation is normally preferred to make the most of all that natural light during summer but also think about roof cover, especially over any appliances and your food prep area. You might also want to consider having ventilation for your cooking system installed just as you would indoors.

FUNCTION AND FORM

Make provision for countertop space for cooking as well as serving & entertaining. For example an island with bar area and stools could be considered or perhaps a lounging area as well

GET COOKING

Traditional Barrell style Barbecue grill, ceramic cooker, rotisserie, smoker or even a (gas or wood-fired) pizza oven? Options can include sear burners, side burners and warmers. You can even integrated some smart technology options into your outdoor kitchen.

KEEP IT COOL

It may not be too long a trek to the kitchen but an outdoor fridge can be beneficial if you are preparing salads and or cool desserts out of doors. Also handy for keeping drinks cool and within easy reach.

WHICH MATERIAL

Stainless steel is a hot favourite for industrial look cabinetry however there are lots of powder-coated metals that also work. Stone and tile are also options. Countertop materials are another thing to think about. They need to be both functional and durable.

HEAT IT UP

If you want to use your new outdoor kitchen well into Autumn consider installing heat sources such as patio heaters and a fire-pit.

POWER UP

Be sure you have enough power on the deck or patio, which could mean enlarging a gas line or adding electrical capacity to run appliances and lighting.

LIGHT IT UP

You will need functional lighting for cooking safely at night –so consider this at work surface level as well as ambient lighting.

ENTERTAINING OUT OF DOORS

You can install built-in speakers and a even a flat screen TV, or choose

only music and let the view from your outdoor kitchen and dining area entertain you and your guests.



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A new chapter is opening at Larchfield Estate, BT27 6XJ—one that brings practical, modern convenience to the countryside, while preserving the peace and privacy the Estate is so well known for.

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Launching May 2025

Think Storage, is a state-of-the-art self storage facility designed for homeowners, businesses and anyone in need of a little extra space. It's quietly nestled in a discreet corner of the estate— separate from the weddings, events and self-catering cottages that have made Larchfield a favourite local destination for

years.

Whether you're moving house, running a business, or just making space at home, Think Storage offers secure, flexible units from just 15 sq ft (about the size of a garden shed or traditional phone box!) to 200 sq ft (the size of a generous double garage).

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CREATING 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, verbenas, 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. The delicate blooms of lobelia contrast beautifully with the bolder flowers of geraniums.

Once you've selected your plants, it's time to get your hands dirty:

Good Drainage is Key: Ensure your containers have adequate drainage holes. You can add a layer of gravel or broken pottery shards at the bottom, although modern advice often suggests using a good quality potting mix alone is sufficient.

Use Quality Potting Mix: Avoid using garden

soil, which can become compacted in containers. Opt for a lightweight, well-draining potting mix specifically formulated for containers.

Planting Technique: Gently remove plants from their nursery pots and loosen any circling roots. Arrange your "thrillers," "fillers," and "spillers" in the container, ensuring they have enough space to grow. The thrillers usually go in the center or back, fillers around them, and spillers towards the edges.

Watering Wisely: Water thoroughly after planting until water drains from the bottom. During the summer

months, you may need to water daily, especially for hanging baskets which dry out quickly. Check the soil moisture by sticking your finger about an inch deep – if it feels dry, it's time to water.

Feeding Frenzy: Container plants rely on you for nutrients. Use a balanced liquid fertilizer every 2-4 weeks to encourage continuous blooming. You can also use slow-release fertilizer granules at planting time.

Deadheading Diligently: Regularly remove spent flowers to encourage more blooms and keep your displays looking tidy.

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Check out the new curtain department at The Blind Spot

The Blind Spot is now offering made to measure curtains and also curtain rails, complete with a full measuring and fitting service, at their spacious new showroom in East Belfast.

The Blind Spot is already a well-established blinds and shutters company with over 30 years of experience. Manager Krystina Bradford says:

"The original factory shop was opened in 1990 by my mum and Grandfather. We still specialize in manufacturing and fitting high-quality window coverings for both residential and commercial properties. This now includes venetian, vertical, roller and roman blinds but also embraces new technologies and advancements – today we

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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.

FEARS NEW CAR TRENDS WILL DRIVE UP YOUR INSURANCE

Keeping up with the latest car trends could lead to drivers paying more on their insurance premiums, according to price comparison site CompareNI.

In a survey of 800 drivers in Northern Ireland, CompareNI discovered that when it comes to growing car trends such as the increase in vehicle size year on year, it seems many local drivers are not in favour and fear the expense.

When asked why they were not a fan of bigger cars, 15% of those surveyed felt these types of vehicles use too much fuel, while a further 15% said they were too expensive to buy.

Meanwhile, 14% were put off by the potentially higher cost of car insurance, while 11% pointed to larger cars being more difficult to park.

Only 11% said they liked bigger cars, claiming they felt safer driving these vehicles. Despite all the 'upscaling' going on in the motoring world, it would appear the public seem to prefer a smaller option.

A resounding 85% of those surveyed admitted they thought that the bigger the car, the more the insurance is likely to be, this however, is not always the case.

Size alone is unlikely to

affect insurance premiums. Chances are, bigger cars may be more expensive as they have more advanced technology on board, more powerful engines or in general, are more expensive to buy - all of which will likely have an effect on the price of the car insurance.

When it comes to other motoring trends, interest in the electric car option is starting to pick up pace, but drivers are being warned that unforeseen issues may lead to higher costs and higher insurance premiums. To replace an electric car battery for example, could cost from £4,000 to £16,500 depending on the type of car and the size of the battery. *

There's also a danger of accidentally voiding the insurance altogether, some home insurance providers recommend that EV home chargers get checked annually by a professional, **failing to do so may void the policy and leave people unprotected.

New technology in cars could also affect insurance premiums. Whether it's the very latest audio

system or lane departure warning system, the more technology present, the more expensive the car is likely to be and the greater the risk of theft, something insurance providers take into consideration when determining risk.

Also, the larger the amount of software systems and the more online connectivity the car has, the greater the cybersecurity risk.*** Encryption and firewall systems can help control this but it's an additional risk insurance providers are likely to take into consideration.

AI will also leave its mark on the automobile revolution, with AI powered braking systems and advanced driver assistance systems. AI can look out for the blind spot and help with a smooth transition to a new lane. ****The sensors in the car can keep drivers a safe distance from the car in front, but be aware that the more advanced features a vehicle has, the higher the insurance cost is likely to be as they can be expensive

to repair and replace and increase the overall cost of the vehicle.

The arrival of the hydrogen car could also mean a more expensive vehicle. While the hydrogen is converted into electricity and may indeed offer a cleaner option, the hydrogen fuel cell option is expensive to manufacture, costing much more than a gas or electric option. The fuelling points are not that prevalent, with only a handful across the UK, which creates an added problem. BMW intend to unveil a hydrogen

powered car in 2028, which will be expected to travel further than the current hydrogen fuel cell options and potentially further than any electric vehicle currently on the market.*****

Car ownership is also changing in 2025. The subscription-based model is becoming more popular, as motorists can pay a monthly fee to use the car for a set period.***** The insurance can be included in the subscription fee and drivers can change the car whenever suits them. Given the financial pressures

currently facing the UK, this may pose an interesting proposition for many drivers.

CompareNI helps drivers compare and find savings on all sorts of motoring products, such as car, van and motorbike insurance.-

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Planning a Building Project: who should be on-site when

Successfully sequencing tradespeople is fundamental to a smooth building project. Starting with the groundwork, the initial phase involves clearing the site, excavating foundations, and laying essential drainage.

Groundworkers and foundation specialists are paramount at this stage, followed by drainage experts to ensure proper sewer connections. This foundational work sets the stage for the structural integrity of the entire build.

Once the groundwork is complete, the focus shifts to creating the building's shell. Bricklayers and structural

engineers, if needed, erect the walls and steel supports. Roofers then make the structure watertight, and window and door installers seal the building, protecting it from the elements. This phase is crucial for establishing the basic form and weatherproofing of the building.

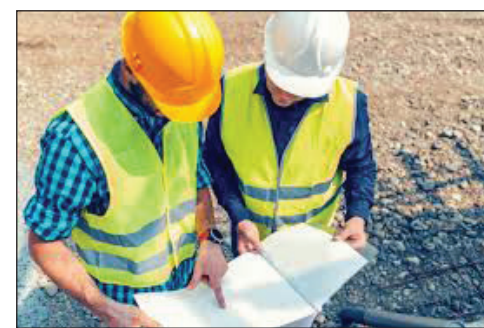
The next stage, "first fix," involves

installing the internal infrastructure. Electricians and plumbers lay the groundwork for essential services within the walls and floors. HVAC engineers install ducting, while carpenters frame internal walls and prepare for staircases. Insulation installers then ensure the building is energy-efficient. A rough plastering may also occur

at this point, preparing the walls for the final finishes.

"Second fix" is where the finishing touches are applied. Electricians and plumbers complete their installations, fitting fixtures and connecting appliances. Carpenters install doors, skirting boards, and fitted kitchens.

Tilers, plasterers, and painters then work their



magic, transforming the interior spaces. Finally, flooring installers lay the chosen flooring materials, completing the interior finish.

The final phase involves external works and landscaping. Pavers and landscapers create outdoor spaces, while fencers install any necessary boundaries. General labourers

handle the final cleanup, ensuring the site is tidy and ready for occupancy. Throughout the entire process, flexibility and effective communication are vital. Coordinating inspections at required stages and understanding the project's critical path are also essential for avoiding delays and ensuring a successful outcome.

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factors that can influence them, homeowners can effectively plan their decorating projects and find trusted tradespeople to bring their vision to life.

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