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Alderman Owen Gawith, Environment and Sustainability Chairman LCCC and David Morrow, Manager of Habitat ReStore, Lisburn launched the Pre-loved Christmas Toy Scheme at Habitat for Humanity recently

GIVE PRE-LOVED TOYS A NEW STORY THIS CHRISTMAS

This Christmas, LCCC are once again partnering with Habitat for Humanity to help local families and protect our planet through the Pre-loved Christmas Toy Scheme.

Every year, many toys that are still in great condition are thrown away. By donating toys that are no longer played with, you can help another family create special memories, while reducing waste and saving valuable resources.

Last year alone, the scheme diverted around 21 tonnes of toys from

landfill – proof that small actions really can make a big difference!

Alderman Owen Gawith, Environment and Sustainability Chairman, said: “It’s fantastic to be working with Habitat for Humanity again this Christmas. Over the past four years, this simple idea of donating toys so

they can be loved again, has grown into a heart-warming local tradition.

“It brings joy to families, strengthens our community and helps protect our environment. Please leave your donated toys at either one of the nominated council facilities or Habitat ReStore, Lisburn.”

David Morrow, Manager

of Habitat ReStore, Lisburn said: “We’re delighted to continue our partnership with the council to help families access good-quality, pre-loved toys at affordable prices this Christmas.

**Continued on
page 4**

Festive fun planned in LCCC

Preparations are well underway for Christmas in Lisburn and Castlereagh.

The Mayor of Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council, Alderman Amanda Grehan has launched the council’s exciting programme of free, inclusive and affordable family fun. It offers something for everyone, with a range of free events for all ages right across the council area.

One of the biggest evenings in the social calendar is the Christmas Switch On event taking place on Thursday 20th November in Lisburn City Centre at 7.00pm.

The Switch On event will ensure young adults with disabilities are part of the event. It will be an evening to remember with Santa, singing, an Enchanted Walk and, of course the beginning of the spectacular Lisburn Light Festival.

With a range of community light switch on events and the return of the ever-popular Christmas Markets in Royal Hillsborough, Dundonald and Carryduff, you can wrap up warm and get outdoors.

The amazing Castle Gardens Light Trail will start on Friday 21 November, running daily from 4pm to 8pm until Monday 22 December, and is free to attend. It will offer live music and Christmas markets there every Wednesday to Saturday evening and Santa will be in his grotto. It is a sparkling event that is sure to be a hit with all the family.

Check out the #LC_lovesChristmas programme online at www.lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk/christmas

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Lisburn awarded Northern Ireland’s ‘Best Kept City’

Lisburn has been awarded the ‘Best Kept City’ in the prestigious Northern Ireland ‘Best Kept Awards’ from the Northern Ireland Amenity Council.

The award recognises Lisburn’s high standards of presentation, civic pride and commitment to sustainability, with the city’s floral displays, well-maintained public spaces and active volunteer network contributing to its success.

Councillor Tim Mitchell, Communities & Wellbeing Chairman, said: “It’s tremendous Lisburn has been named Northern Ireland’s Best Kept City.

“This achievement reflects the dedication of our local residents, community groups and council teams who work tirelessly to keep our city looking its best all year round. Their collective effort and pride in Lisburn make it a wonderful place to live, work and visit.”

Alderman Owen Gawith, Environment & Sustainability Chairman added: “This award is a valued recognition of the commitment



shown in maintaining the cleanliness and environmental quality of our city.

“Through the efforts of our cleansing teams and wider community initiatives, everyone involved has helped make Lisburn a cleaner, greener and more sustainable city. I extend my sincere thanks to all who contributed to this

success.”

Now in its 68th year, the Best Kept Awards were established to encourage communities across Northern Ireland to take pride in their local environment. The awards recognise not only aesthetic excellence but also efforts to promote sustainability, biodiversity, and community engagement.

There was further success for the Lisburn and Castlereagh area, with Annahilt receiving the ‘Welcome Award’, and Moira named runner-up in the ‘Best Kept Small Town’ category.

These accolades further highlight the dedication and community spirit that make the Lisburn and Castlereagh area stand out.

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PCSP HOST 'KEEPING YOURSELF SAFE' EVENT

Lisburn and Castlereagh Policing and Community Safety Partnership (PCSP), in partnership with the Education Authority, Lisburn YMCA, The Resurgam Trust, PSNI, and the Youth Justice Agency, hosted a successful 'Keeping Yourself Safe' event recently at Laurelhill Youth Centre, Lisburn.

The event brought together young people aged 14-16 from across Lisburn and Castlereagh for an evening focused on personal safety and awareness. Through interactive workshops and discussions, participants explored key topics such as Ending Violence Against Women and Girls, Drugs, Online Safety, and the consequences of their actions.

Councillor Alan Martin, Chair of Lisburn & Castlereagh PCSP, said: "Our young people face new and complex challenges every day, both online and in their communities. Events like this give them the knowledge and confidence to make safe, informed choices."

"We are proud to work with our local partners to ensure that young people across Lisburn and Castlereagh feel supported and aware of



how to keep themselves and others safe."

Johnny Crymble, Senior Youth Officer, Education Authority Youth Service, said: "It's vital that young people have the chance to share their views and experiences on the issues that affect them most. Events like this not only help them

stay safe, but ensure their voices are heard and valued in shaping safer, more supportive communities."

Lisburn and Castlereagh District Commander, Superintendent Kelly Moore, said: "It's inspiring to see so many young people actively engaging in policing

and community safety issues. Their energy and commitment help strengthen community connections, and we thank them for their valuable contributions to building a safer and more trusting future."

The evening also provided a valuable opportunity for young people to

engage directly with community safety representatives and local partners in a relaxed, informal setting.

Lisburn & Castlereagh PCSP would like to thank all partners and attendees for contributing to an engaging and impactful evening.

**Continued from
page 1**

"Your donations will help local families find affordable gifts and every toy sold supports Habitat

ReStore's mission, building sustainable community, including through training and

support programmes right here in Lisburn and Castlereagh."

Where to donate your toys

Please drop off good-quality toys and games before Saturday 13 December at:

- Habitat ReStore (Lisburn)
- The Cutts Household Recycling Centre
- Carryduff Household Recycling Centre
- Maghaberry Community Centre.

Toys must be clean, complete and in good condition/working order. Games and puzzles must be in their original boxes. Sorry, we cannot accept soft toys.

Where to shop for pre-loved toys

Donated toys will be sorted and displayed for sale at affordable prices in the Christmas Toy Store at Habitat ReStore, Lisburn, from Thursday 13 November to Saturday 20 December. There will also be pop-up toy shops at Lough Moss Leisure Centre, Maghaberry Community Centre and Ballyoran Community Centre.

By donating or choosing a pre-loved toy this Christmas, you are helping to give each toy a new story - spreading joy to local children while caring for the planet.

Find out more at: <https://www.lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk/w/christmastoysscheme>

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Nominations open for Mayor's Community Awards 2026

The 2026 Mayor's Community Awards in Lisburn and Castlereagh have been declared open for applications by Mayor, Alderman Amanda Grehan.

These awards by Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council shine a spotlight on the outstanding contributions of volunteers and community groups across the council area.

Mayor Amanda said: "The Mayor's Community Awards are a wonderful opportunity for us to say 'thank you' to the many individuals and groups who dedicate their time to helping others and strengthening community spirit.

"Across Lisburn and Castlereagh, there are so many people who quietly make a difference every day, whether it's organising local projects, fundraising, or offering vital support to those in need. Their hard work and commitment truly deserve to be recognised and celebrated."

She continued: "This is your chance to tell us about those incredible individuals or groups who go above and beyond to improve the lives of others. These awards are a great way to share the positive stories that make our community so special so please get involved and submit your nominations!"

The council is inviting



nominations for six award categories:

- Brian McDowell Volunteer of the Year Award
- Fiona Irvine North Star
- Rising Star
- Golden Star Age Friendly
- Constellation
- Together We Shine

Councillor Tim Mitchell, Communities & Wellbeing Chairman, also praised the initiative: "I am delighted

the council can work in partnership with the Education Authority, South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust and Volunteer Now to help deliver this worthwhile scheme.

"The work being carried out in our communities is invaluable. I would encourage people to take the time to submit a nomination."

The deadline for entries is

Friday 28th November 2025 at 4.00pm. Finalists will be shortlisted and invited to a gala event held in Lagan Valley Island on Thursday 19th March 2026 where the winners will be announced.

Click <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/CommunityAwards26/> to submit a nomination form. Please note self-nominations will not be accepted.



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Preparatory Department

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PLANNING APPROVAL GRANTED FOR £75 MILLION ENERGY STORAGE PROJECT

Planning approval has been granted by LCCC for a major long-duration battery energy storage facility at Moneybroom Road, Lisburn.

The project, which will involve a private investment estimated at £75 million and will play a vital role in supporting Northern Ireland's transition to a low-carbon energy system.

Battery energy storage is seen as critical infrastructure for a resilient electricity supply by storing energy. This makes it easier to use renewable sources like wind and solar.

As a result, the project will support Northern Ireland's transition to a cleaner, more secure energy future and those looking for sustainable places to locate business by providing options to invest in renewables.

The major planning application was processed by the council's Planning Service and is a strong example of the council's proactive and professional approach to facilitating investment in the area.

Alderman James Tinsley, Chairman of the Planning Committee, commented:

"This approval reflects Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council's commitment through our Plan strategy to attract strategic investment and enabling developments that generate economic opportunities for our residents.

"It demonstrates the area's potential as a hub for innovation and shows we are keen to support proposals that contribute to sustainable growth and



regional resilience.

"I would like to repeat the agent's sentiment and commend our planning officials for their professional approach to the processing of this

application."

The planning application was managed by Les Ross Planning. Les Ross, lead consultant on the project, added:

"Securing planning

permission for this major energy storage facility reflects the strength of the proposal and the constructive engagement with the council's Planning Service.

"Their clear communication and timely decision-making were key to progressing this important infrastructure project, which will contribute meaningfully to energy resilience and regional investment.

"When developed, the Moneybroom Road facility will help balance electricity supply and demand, enable greater use of renewable energy on the grid and enhance the resilience of Northern Ireland's energy infrastructure.

"During the construction phase it will create employment and contracting opportunities for local people and businesses. From an investor's perspective it shows Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council is very much open for business in how it approaches this complex and major application."

Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council remains committed to supporting innovative, sustainable developments that deliver long-term benefits for the local economy and community.

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New Accessible Apprenticeship Programme

A new Accessible Apprenticeship Programme will offer tailored employment support to 10 graduates facing barriers to employment or long-term health condition.

It will be delivered by the Lisburn & Castlereagh Labour Market Partnership, to support recent graduates from the area return to work or start a new career.

The Lisburn & Castlereagh Labour Market Partnership programme is funded by the Department for Communities. Labour Market Partnerships create targeted employment action plans for council areas, allowing for collaboration at local and regional level to support people towards and into work.

Councillor Claire Kemp, Regeneration & Growth Chair said: "We are delighted to introduce the Accessible Apprenticeship Programme, which exemplifies our commitment to ensuring no one is left behind in the world of work. Graduates with disabilities bring unique skills and perspectives that enrich our local economy and community.

"By providing tailored support and working closely with employers who embrace inclusivity, this programme opens



doors to rewarding career opportunities. We are excited to see how the participants will grow, contribute, and inspire others to pursue their ambitions."

The Accessible Apprenticeship Programme offers tailored support, including skills development, career mentoring, and direct

engagement with inclusive employers who value diversity in their workforce. By fostering confidence and practical work experience, the programme empowers graduates to achieve their full potential and thrive in the local job market.

Applications are now open for graduates who are unemployed

or underemployed due to a long-term health condition or barrier to employment. For full eligibility criteria and further details, visit: <https://www.lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk/w/lmp-programmes#accessible-apprenticeship-programme>

To express interest or find out more, email: LMP@lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk

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Inspired to Learn... Learn to Inspire... Largymore Primary School #Open to All

Largymore Primary School, located on the Hillhall Road in Lisburn, is an established school with a history stretching back over 120 years.

Staff and Governors are committed to providing an inclusive, nurturing and enriching environment where every child is valued, cared for and understood.

Nurturing: The school is recognised as a 'Nurture School' following the six principals of Nurture. Children's learning is understood developmentally, the classroom offers a safe base, language is understood as a vital means of communication, transitions are significant in daily school life and all behaviour is communication. These all promote a calm atmosphere where pupil anxieties are lowered, and our aspiration is to see our pupils happy and enthusiastic about their learning. It provides an environment where every child is given the opportunity to succeed and develop in their own unique way.

Early Intervention: It takes a village to raise a child. We work in partnership with parents,

health professionals, Trust Family Hub, Barnardos, Help Kids Talk, Early Intervention Lisburn, Emerge, Transforming Lives for Good and our Community voluntary groups to provide not only emotional and wellbeing support but also a variety of learning programmes to enable children to access the curriculum.

Learning Community:

Our school is committed to developing a sense of ownership independence and community. We cultivate mature, confident and self-motivated learners who are ready for the next steps in their academic journey. We listen to views wishes and experiences of children and encourage them to utilise their voice for good through involvement in Pupil Council, Digital Leaders, Eco Team, Playground Pals and Subject focus groups

Embracing Technology

We ensure our pupils are proficient in the use of digital media, communications software and emerging



technologies. Each class has high speed internet access with ipads, personal chromebooks for all P5-7 pupils, interactive Panels, micro-bits and robotics to enhance their digital learning.

We take great pride in delivering the highest possible quality of Teaching & Learning experiences for our children. Academic achievement is celebrated, as well as wider sporting and creative endeavours inside and outside of school. All children are

expected to aim high and reach their potential and Largymore Provides the perfect environment for this.

Awards & Recognition

- Nurture School
- Action Cancer Health Gold Award
- Best Kept School Award
- Eco Green Flag School
- Global Learning School
- Anti Trafficking
- Active Sustrans Travel School
- Incredible Years School

Discover the Difference at Friends' School Lisburn Preparatory Department

Friends' Preparatory Department, as an integral part of the wider Friends' School community, is the only Quaker school in Northern Ireland and offers a nurturing and inclusive environment for children aged 3-11.

The school was founded in 1774, as the Ulster Provincial School, to educate Quaker children in the Lisburn area. The school's progressive approach was evident from the start, being unusual for its time in providing education for both boys and girls, a reflection of the Quaker value of equality which remains central to its mission.

The school was established on Prospect Hill thanks to a generous bequest from linen merchant John Hancock. Over its 250-year history, it has grown from a small institution to a thriving community.

The school's ethos is intrinsically linked to its Quaker heritage. It fosters a set of core values encapsulated by the acronym ASPIRE: Adventure; Sustainability; Peace; Integrity; Respect & Equality. The school's overall motto, "Quae Sursum Sunt Quaeerite" (Seek those things that are above), encourages pupils to look beyond themselves to develop and flourish. The

Preparatory Department focuses on creating lifelong learners in a nurturing environment, aiming to strike a balance between academic achievement and the overall wellbeing of each child. Friends' Prep is the first fully trained Muddy Puddle Teacher school in Northern Ireland, embracing outdoor learning and encouraging pupils to live adventurously.

Friends' School Lisburn is consistently recognised for its high standards. The Grammar School has been named the Northern Ireland Secondary School of the Year by The Sunday Times on three occasions (2011, 2017 and 2024), indicative of its sustained success. The Preparatory Department feeds into this strong tradition, laying solid educational foundations. Over 90% of Prep pupils secure a place at a Grammar School at the end of P7.

The school celebrated its 250th anniversary in 2024, a major milestone marked by several special events, publications and



legacy projects including a Guess How Much I Love You Garden at the Preparatory Department, based on the book by old scholar Sam McBratney. The garden includes an outdoor classroom used by all classes.

The school is set in a wooded 20-acre site, with extensive sports facilities, including rugby pitches, tennis courts, floodlit hockey pitches, a sports hall, and a purpose-built gym. Pupils in the Preparatory Department enjoy the advantages of being part of a small, close-knit community

with all the facilities of a large school to enjoy.

Open Days for prospective parents will be held on Friday 28th November 2025 and Friday 16th January 2026, from 10-11.30am. We would love to show you how a Friends' School Preparatory Department education makes a difference. For more information or to arrange a visit at any time, please contact the Prep office via telephone 02892 669198 or email prep@friends.lisburn.ni.sch.uk

Website: <https://www.fslprep.co.uk/>

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Nursery and Primary 1 places available for September 2026

Child Benefit – Parents experiencing long processing delays

New parents who have applied for Child Benefit are experiencing long wait times for their applications to be processed and even to receive a response from HMRC.

Employers For Childcare

These delays have been going on for some time, with parents who have already submitted an application waiting months for a response from HMRC. It seems that there is not much prospect of the processing times being reduced in the near future.

What is Child Benefit?
Child Benefit can be

claimed by someone who is responsible for bringing up a child and it is often the first benefit that a parent will claim which is specifically linked to having a baby.

This benefit can provide vital financial support to parents at a time of increased household expenditure due to having a newborn baby often coupled

with a reduction in income as parents are receiving Statutory Maternity or Paternity Pay or Maternity Allowance instead of their normal salary.

Applications for Child Benefit and more information on the eligibility criteria can be found at www.gov.uk/child-benefit.

Payments for new claims of Child Benefit will automatically be backdated by three months from the date of submission or to the baby's date of birth,

whichever is later.

How long is the delay?

At the time of writing the HMRC website says that for a Child Benefit application made in late October 2025 - a reply can be expected in mid-March 2026. That is a delay of four and a half months, almost 20 weeks!

On the website it also states that they are currently processing claims that were received in June 2025, which again is well over four months ago.

Parents can check the progress of their own Child

Benefit claim via the HMRC website: <https://www.tax.service.gov.uk/guidance/Check-when-you-can-expect-a-reply-from-HMRC>

Further information
If you would like further information on help what financial support your household may be entitled to, contact our Family Benefits Advice Service for free, impartial and confidential advice.

Contact us by emailing fbas@employersforchildcare.org – we are here to help.

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These centres are strategically located in Hillsborough, Holywood Road in Belfast, Magherafelt, and a facility at Musgrave Park. To support the public healthcare system, the Musgrave Park site is dedicated solely to serving NHS waiting lists.

The remaining three locations—Hillsborough, Holywood Road, and Magherafelt—are the core centres for private patients, offering a comprehensive range of scans for those seeking rapid access to diagnostic services.

Alliance Medical NI are committed to delivering high quality diagnostic care to patients at affordable prices. These three private centres offer a variety of essential medical scans, with transparent pricing designed to be accessible to patients. X- Rays ranging from £100, Bone density DEXA scans from £200, Ultrasound from £250; Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) ranging from £310; Computed Tomography (CT) and Fluoro are available from £400.

The Holywood Road facility, for example, is also equipped for specialised procedures, including MRI Prostate scans, MRI Arthrograms, and MRI. The company’s services are covered by numerous major health insurance providers, including AXA PPP, Aviva UK Health, WPA, H3, and Vitality.

Alliance Medical NI is committed to rapid patient access. They often make appointments for medical scans available within 24 to 48 hours. This focus on efficiency ensures that



patients receive a swift diagnosis, allowing them to proceed with the necessary next steps in their medical care without undue delay.

The company upholds clinical quality by ensuring all scans are reported by Radiologists who are registered with the General

Medical Council (GMC).

The diagnostic services are further supported by Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) registered Radiographers, underlining the company’s emphasis on professional excellence.

For further information on services, booking, and centre details, prospective patients can follow on Instagram at [alliancemedicalni](#) or visit the website at <https://www.alliancemedical.ie/>

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To book, call us on 028 2073 1210 or visit our website at www.thecausewayhotel.com

Let the coast call you back this winter.

UK’s biggest food collection calls for volunteers

With food banks and charities facing continued high levels of need this winter, people are being urged to give the gift of their time to take part in the UK’s biggest food donation drive.

Now in its 13th year, the Tesco Winter Food Collection is taking place in all Tesco stores from November 27th to November 29th. Tesco’s charity partners, Trussell and FareShare, are calling for volunteers to sign-up to support the event in store as both charities are providing a lifeline in response to high levels of need.

During the collection Tesco customers will be encouraged to donate

long-life food to support the charities in their work. Donations for Trussell will help its community of food banks provide emergency food parcels to people who cannot afford the essentials, while donations to FareShare will support its network of 8,000 local charities and community groups helping to feed people in local communities across the UK.

Volunteers will help out at collection points

in Tesco stores to raise awareness of the impact every single donation will have on people across the UK, who rely on Trussell and FareShare for food.

Donations are needed now more than ever, with one in five Trussell food parcels coming from Tesco and its customers.

Kris Gibbon Walsh, CEO at FareShare said: “Food from FareShare reaches a network of over 8,000 charities across the UK, enabling them

to provide food support alongside access to other vital services. In the winter months, many people accessing these local groups are forced to choose between keeping warm and eating. This makes the Tesco Winter Food Collection more important than ever. We know from experience that having volunteers present in store significantly increases the number of food items donated, and hope that more people

than ever will generously give up their time this year. By volunteering just three hours, people can play an important part in our mission and help create lasting change, one meal at a time.”

You can sign up to volunteer in your local Tesco store with FareShare at <https://fareshare.org.uk/foodcollection/> or with Trussell at <https://www.trussell.org.uk/support-us/tesco-food-collection>

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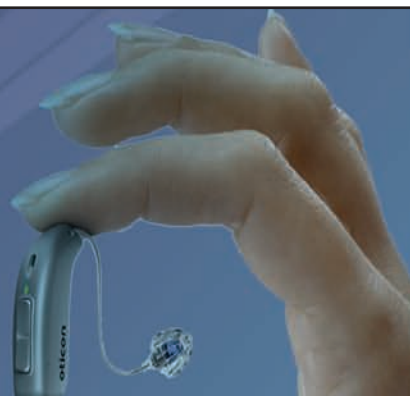
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A Warm Welcome Awaits at the Station House Hotel, Letterkenny

As autumn settles over Donegal, there's no better time to plan a well-deserved getaway — and few places offer a warmer welcome than the Station House Hotel in the heart of Letterkenny.

Combining local heritage, modern comfort, and award-winning hospitality, this much-loved hotel continues to be a favourite among visitors from near and far.

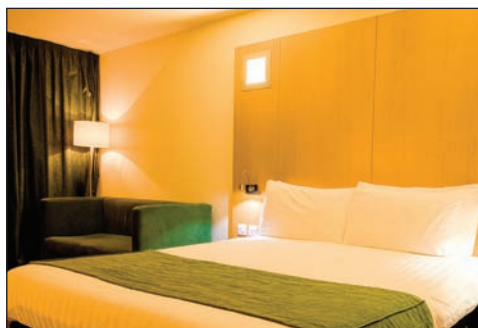
Built on the site of the old railway station, the Station House Hotel has been part of Letterkenny life since 2004. Over the past two decades, it has earned a reputation for excellence, consistently recognised with TripAdvisor's Travellers' Choice and Certificate of Excellence for 14 consecutive years — its consistently high guest ratings on both Google and TripAdvisor speak volumes about the exceptional service and genuine warmth that define every stay.

With 81 spacious bedrooms, the popular Depot Bar & Restaurant, and conference and banqueting facilities.

the hotel offers the perfect balance between traditional warmth and modern convenience. Whether you're visiting for business, leisure, or a bit of both, it's a place where genuine Donegal hospitality comes naturally.

Step outside and you'll find yourself in the centre of everything. Letterkenny's shops, cafés, theatres, and nightlife are all within easy reach, while some of Donegal's most stunning attractions lie just beyond — from Glenveagh National Park and the majestic Slieve League Cliffs to the county's Blue Flag beaches. For those who love golf, hiking, or simply exploring Donegal's wild beauty, the Station House is an ideal base.

The hotel's accommodation caters for everyone, offering



Executive, Family, Interconnecting, Twin, Double, Triple and Accessible rooms designed with comfort and relaxation in mind. Meanwhile, dining at the Depot Bar & Restaurant is an experience in itself. With a menu inspired by fresh, local ingredients and a friendly, welcoming atmosphere, it's no wonder the Depot has become one of Letterkenny's most popular spots to eat and unwind.

For those seeking exceptional value, the hotel's Golden Years Offer provides the perfect opportunity to enjoy a break at your own pace — with no prepayment required, you can book now and pay on arrival.

Whether you're planning a short escape, a family holiday, or a well-earned retreat, the Station House Hotel promises the comfort, charm, and hospitality that make every visit memorable.

Belfast Cooling: Climatise Your Property for the Future

Belfast Cooling stands as a dedicated leader in Refrigeration & Air Conditioning, with a core mission to transform the way we manage air quality and temperature in our homes.

Specializing in sustainable, cost-effective, and efficient air management, Belfast Cooling ensures you control the temperature of your home, not the other way around.

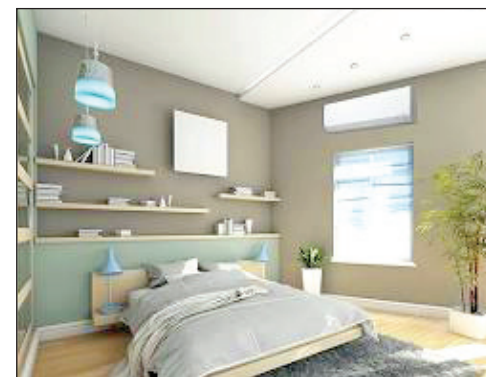
Founded on a passion for improving residential comfort, Belfast Cooling has built a reputation for providing top-notch installations, repairs, and maintenance. They offer comprehensive heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) services tailored specifically for domestic use, ensuring every space is perfectly climatized.

From the primary living areas like Bedrooms and Kitchens to increasingly popular spaces such as Garden Rooms, Belfast Cooling provides solutions to both heat and cool your property all year round. Their service is

designed for longevity and reliability, backed by a team of experienced HVAC engineers who are committed to outstanding customer satisfaction.

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In a move to make future-proofing your home more accessible, Belfast Cooling is currently offering a significant incentive: ALL DOMESTIC INSTALLATIONS ARE VAT FREE UNTIL 2027. This promotion underscores their commitment to delivering exceptional value alongside



the highest quality service.

While specializing in the residential market, Belfast Cooling also extends its top-tier air conditioning and refrigeration services to commercial properties. Whether you require a completely new system installation, urgent repair work, or routine maintenance, the company operates on principles of

expertise, reliability, and a collaborative approach to meet your exact needs.

To climatise your property for the future and take advantage of their current promotion, you can contact Belfast Cooling directly:

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BELFAST CHRISTMAS MARKET 2025

Get ready to step into a winter wonderland as the Belfast Christmas Market returns to the iconic City Hall grounds in 2025!

A cherished tradition, this market transforms the heart of the city into a festive spectacle, offering a truly enchanting experience for locals and

visitors alike.

When is it Happening?
The Belfast Christmas Market generally runs from mid-November right up until December

22nd or 23rd. This allows ample time to soak up the festive atmosphere, whether you're looking for unique gifts, delicious treats, or simply a dose of Christmas cheer.

What to Expect: A Feast for the Senses

Prepare yourself for an immersive sensory experience that embodies the spirit of Christmas:

- A Global Culinary Journey: One of the market's biggest draws is its incredible array of food and drink. Expect to find traditional German bratwurst, towering Yorkshire pudding wraps, French crepes, Dutch pancakes, and Spanish churros. For those with a sweet tooth, there's an abundance of fudge, chocolates, and festive pastries. And of course, no Christmas market experience is complete without a warming mug of glühwein or a pint of local craft beer.

- Unique Artisan Crafts and Gifts: Beyond the food, the market is a treasure trove of unique gifts and handcrafted

goods from across Europe and beyond. Browse stalls offering bespoke jewellery, intricate wooden carvings, personalised ornaments, festive homeware, and luxurious clothing. It's the perfect place to find that special, one-of-a-kind present that you won't find on the high street.

- Festive Ambiance and Entertainment: The City Hall grounds are beautifully adorned with twinkling lights, festive decorations, and a towering Christmas tree, creating a truly magical backdrop. Live music, carol singers, and occasional street performers often add to the vibrant atmosphere, filling the air with the sounds of the season.

- Family-Friendly Fun: The market caters to all ages. Children will delight in the sweet treats, vibrant stalls, and the general buzz. Keep an eye out for Santa's Grotto – a popular attraction where little ones can meet Father Christmas



and share their wish lists. Making the Most of Your Visit

To ensure you have the most magical experience at the Belfast Christmas Market 2025, here are some top tips:

1. Go Early or Late (on weekdays): The market can get incredibly busy, especially on weekend evenings. If you prefer a more relaxed stroll, consider visiting on a weekday morning or early afternoon. The market generally opens around 10:00 am or 11:00 am.

2. Dress for the

Weather: Belfast winters can be chilly and damp. Wrap up warm with layers, a waterproof coat, hat, gloves, and comfortable shoes, as you'll be doing a lot of walking.

3. Bring Cash (and Card): While many vendors accept card payments, having some cash on hand can be useful for smaller purchases or if a particular stall only takes cash.

4. Plan Your Food Stops: With so many tempting options, it's easy to get overwhelmed.

Take a walk around first to scope out what takes your fancy, then strategically plan your culinary journey. Don't forget to grab a festive drink to warm you up!

5. Embrace the Atmosphere: Don't just rush through. Take your time to soak in the sights, sounds, and smells. Enjoy the festive buzz, listen to the music, and simply revel in the Christmas spirit.

6. Explore the City Hall: While you're there, take a moment to admire Belfast City Hall itself. Its stunning architecture

provides a magnificent backdrop to the market.

7. Combine with Other Activities: The market is conveniently located in the city centre, making it easy to combine your visit with some Christmas shopping in Belfast's many stores or a visit to other local attractions.

The Belfast Christmas Market 2025 promises to be another unforgettable celebration of the festive season. Mark your calendars, gather your loved ones, and prepare to be enchanted by this truly magical experience!

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

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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 Christmas shopping. 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

COUNTING DOWN TO JOY: 10 WAYS TO GET INTO THE FESTIVE MOOD

The Christmas season is about anticipation, warmth, and a little bit of magic. As the days tick closer to December 25th, it's the perfect time to trade the stress of the everyday for the spirit of the holidays.

If you need a spark to ignite your festive cheer, here are 10 essential activities to help you embrace the joy and make your countdown to Christmas truly memorable.

1. Curate the Perfect Holiday Soundtrack
Nothing shifts your mood faster than music. Start your countdown by creating a Christmas playlist that blends the classics, modern hits, and maybe a few sentimental favorites.

Whether it's carols while you clean or upbeat tunes during a commute, let the sounds of the season become the backdrop to your month.

2. Dive Into Decoration Day

Make a dedicated day or weekend to deck the halls. Pull out the boxes of ornaments, untangle the lights, and fill your home with festive cheer. The act of decorating, especially with loved ones, is a tradition that instantly boosts the festive feeling. Don't forget to light some holiday-scented candles or

use diffusers for an extra sensory layer!

3. Host a Cozy Christmas Movie Marathon

Grab a big blanket, a thermos of hot chocolate (extra marshmallows are mandatory), and settle in for a night of festive films. From the nostalgic classics to modern holiday comedies, a movie marathon is a low-effort, high-reward way to bask in the Christmas spirit.

4. Bake Your Way to Bliss

The aromas of Christmas are just as important as the sights and sounds. Baking holiday treats—gingerbread cookies, sugar cookies, or mince pies—will fill your home with a welcoming, festive scent. Plus, you get to enjoy the delicious results (and maybe leave some for Santa).

5. Plan a Random Act of Kindness

Embody the true spirit of giving. Dedicate some time during your countdown to a random act of Christmas kindness. This could be donating a toy, volunteering at a

local charity, shoveling a neighbor's driveway, or simply leaving a generous tip for a service worker. Giving back is one of the most heartwarming parts of the season.

6. Get Lost in the Lights

Bundle up, grab a hot drink, and take a drive or a walk through your local neighborhood to admire the Christmas lights. There's something undeniably magical about seeing houses transformed into sparkling winter wonderlands. Many towns also host special lighting displays or festivals—make it an annual outing!

7. Send Out Holiday Cards

Take an hour to sit down and write personalized Christmas cards. While digital messages are easy, a handwritten card arriving in the mail is a truly special gesture. It gives you a moment to reflect on the important people in your life and spread a little extra cheer.

8. Set Up a Festive Reading Nook

The darker, colder days



are perfect for curling up with a good book. Create a cozy corner with twinkly lights, a soft cushion, and a stack of Christmas-themed stories or novels. Slowing down and savoring a holiday story can be a much-needed break from the seasonal hustle.

9. Create a Christmas Countdown Tradition

Start a simple daily tradition, like opening an Advent calendar (chocolate, toy, or even

a scratch-off activity calendar). The small, daily moment of anticipation helps build excitement and makes the countdown feel more intentional.

10. Indulge in Some Holiday Crafting

Get creative and make a few homemade decorations or gifts. This could be anything from simple paper snowflakes to salt dough ornaments or a DIY wreath. Crafting engages your hands and mind in a

fun, festive way, and the resulting decorations will carry a special, personal meaning.

The countdown to Christmas is your opportunity to press pause on the ordinary and enjoy the extraordinary joy the season brings. Pick a few items from this list, light a fire, and let the festive mood take over!

What's the first festive activity you're planning to check off your list?

H2o Swimming Academy Making a Splash in Lisburn!

As H2o Swimming Academy prepares to celebrate an incredible 10 years in January 2026, we're diving into the next exciting chapter — the opening of our brand-new Lisburn facility this December!

Located at Unit 4, 24 Altona Road, Lisburn, our purpose-built swimming academy is designed to provide the perfect learning environment for swimmers of all ages and abilities.

Whether you're a complete beginner or looking to refine your technique, our friendly and experienced instructors are here to help you grow in confidence, skill and love for the water.

To mark our Lisburn launch, we're inviting families to take part in free taster lessons throughout December, giving children and parents the chance to meet our team, explore the new facility and experience what makes H2o Swimming

Academy so special — before regular classes begin in January 2026.

Since opening our first site in Ballycastle in 2016, H2o has expanded across Northern Ireland and beyond, with thousands of swimmers now learning every week across eight locations. Our mission has remained the same from day one: to create a safe, supportive and fun space where every swimmer can thrive.

Bookings for Lisburn's free taster lessons are now open.

For more information or to register, visit www.h2oswimming.com/lisburn.

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Already planning your Christmas meal? While the classic roast turkey and familiar fixings will always hold a cherished spot, today's festive catering scene is moving beyond tradition to embrace global flavours, sustainability, and personal dietary needs.

For hosts and caterers alike, this shift presents a fantastic opportunity to craft a holiday meal that is both spectacular and inclusive. Here some catering trends transforming the modern festive menu:

The Rise of the Plant-Forward Feast

The most significant trend influencing modern menus is the massive demand for creative, satisfying plant-based and vegan options. No longer relegated to a sad side dish, vegetable-centric meals are taking their rightful place as the show-stopping centrepiece.

• The Impressive Vegan Roast: Forget the simple nut roast. Caterers are crafting elaborate mains like Mushroom Wellington wrapped in flaky pastry, Stuffed Whole Roasted Cauliflower with herb gremolata and pomegranate, or a rich Butternut Squash

Lasagna.

• Creative Comfort: Look for hearty, nourishing dishes that use whole grains and legumes, such as a Truffle Mac and Cheese made with cashew cream, or a savoury Shepherd's Pie topped with celery root mash.

• Root-to-Stem Cooking: A focus on sustainability means chefs are minimizing food waste by incorporating traditionally discarded parts of vegetables, adding complex, earthy flavour to side dishes and stocks.

Interactive Food Stations & Personalization

Guests want an experience, not just a meal. Buffet lines are evolving into engaging stations that encourage mingling and allow for personal customisation, a practical way to cater to diverse dietary needs without hassle.

• Build-Your-Own Bars: Stations like a "Gourmet

Mashed Potato Bar" with mix-ins (truffle oil, caramelized onions, smoked cheese, chives) or a Taco/Grain Bowl Station with fresh salsas and various proteins make the meal fun and personal.

• Dessert Decorating: Interactive dessert stations, where guests can decorate mini cakes, cookies, or create their own sundaes, are a huge hit.

• The Elevated Appetizer: Many gatherings are ditching the formal sit-down meal altogether in favour of a lavish spread of small plates and upscale appetizers (often referred to as "mezze" or "tapas" style) served throughout the evening.

Health-Conscious Indulgence & Mocktails

The holiday season is synonymous with indulgence, but modern menus find ways to satisfy cravings without sacrificing



wellness goals.

• Healthy Fats and Lean Proteins: Recipes are opting for healthy fats like olive oil and nuts, and integrating leaner, flavourful proteins like rack of lamb or beef tenderloin as a luxurious yet lighter alternative to a massive roast.

• Non-Alcoholic Drink Design: The "sober curious" movement has led to dedicated mocktail bars. These aren't just juice mixes; they feature layered, complex non-alcoholic cocktails made with sophisticated ingredients like artisanal syrups, fresh

herbs, and sparkling teas.

By embracing these trends, hosts can move beyond the traditional turkey without abandoning the spirit of the festive season, crafting a memorable, modern, and utterly delicious holiday celebration.

Add a Touch of Sparkle to Your Christmas Table!

The Christmas table is the heart of your festive celebrations. It's where memories are made, crackers are pulled, and delicious food is shared.

But how do you take it from nice to dazzling? Forget the standard pine cones and tinsel! Here are five fun,

easy, and glittering ways to ensure your festive feast truly sparkles.

The Power of "Snow" and Glittering Runners
Instead of a standard cloth tablecloth, elevate the middle of your table with a luxurious, shimmering runner.

The Upgrade: Choose materials that catch the light, like sequined silver, metal-

lic gold, or deep, velvet burgundy.

The Secret Snow: Use artificial snow (available at most craft stores) sparingly down the runner's edges. This creates a magical, winter-wonderland effect.

The Final Touch: Nestle a few battery-operated micro-LED fairy lights within the "snow" to make it glow from within.

Jewel-Toned Glassware for a Rich Glow

Standard clear glasses are functional, but Christmas calls for an upgrade! Introducing colored glassware adds depth and a beautiful, stained-glass effect when the candlelight hits.

Go Bold: Look for beautiful emerald green wine glasses or ruby red tumblers. These jewel tones in-

stantly make the setting feel richer and more luxurious.

Mix and Match: Don't worry about having a matching set. A table with alternating ruby red and sapphire blue glasses looks deliberate, glamorous, and wonderfully eclectic.

The Sparkle Trick: Place a small, mirrored coaster under each glass to reflect the color and light back onto

the table.

Candlelight Multiplied with Mirrors

Nothing says "sparkle" like soft, flickering candlelight, and you can easily multiply its effect with a clever reflective surface.

The Centrepiece Base: Use a long, mirrored vanity tray or a set of rectangular mirrored tiles as the base for your main centrepiece.

Cluster Candles: Group a variety of pillar candles (in different heights) or simple tea lights in clear glass holders onto the mirrored base.

The Result: The mirror will double the visible flame, creating a mesmerizing, dancing display of light that illuminates every piece of silver and glass on your table!

Get ready to dazzle your guests! With a few glittering tweaks, your Christmas table will be the sparkling centerpiece of your entire holiday season.



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Why Winter could be the Perfect Time to Redecorate!

Winter is actually the ideal time to tackle a project many people put off: redecorating your home. Winter offers a unique set of advantages that make it the surprisingly best season for a home refresh.

Take advantage of Light and Texture

Winter's inherent mood is all about warmth, texture, and comfort. This gives you a natural, immediate focus for your design choices.

You can test the lighting: Unlike summer's bright, forgiving sun, winter light is low and moody. This is the perfect time to evaluate how your current paint colour and lighting fixtures truly look. If a room feels drab on a cloudy afternoon, you know exactly what needs fixing, whether it's adding a dimmer switch, a new floor lamp, or switching to a warmer-toned bulb.

Embrace texture: Winter is the season of layers. Adding or swapping textiles—think a new faux fur throw, a velvet cushion, or a jute rug—can instantly transform a space without a massive overhaul. These smaller projects are satisfying and easy to complete in a weekend.

Contractors and Tradespeople Are More Available

One of the biggest headaches of a renovation project is scheduling. During the spring and summer months, contractors, painters, and other tradespeople are often booked solid with outdoor work and major renovations.

Winter, however, is typically the slow season. This means: Better availability, potentially better rates and possibly even faster project completion.

Take Advantage of Seasonal Sales

The period right after the holiday rush and leading into the new year is a goldmine for savvy shoppers. Retailers know that people are spending less, so they offer deep discounts to clear out inventory.

The "White Sale": Black Friday and January are famously good times for "white sales," offering fantastic deals on bedding,



towels, and linens—essential elements for updating bedrooms and bathrooms.

Post-Holiday Clearance: Look for major markdowns on home décor, furniture, and even small appliances as stores try to move stock. A new piece of statement furniture you've had your eye on might finally be

A GUIDE TO MINDFUL & SUSTAINABLE GIFTING

Christmas shopping often feels like a frenzied race to acquire. This year, shift the focus from volume to value and embrace mindful gifting.

A thoughtful, eco-friendly present is not just kinder to the planet; it offers a deeper, more personal connection to the recipient.

Mindful gifting means choosing items that are intentional, high-quality and built to last, and have a minimal environmental footprint. Ditch the fast-fashion holiday jumpers and disposable plastic trinkets. Here is a guide to choosing presents that truly matter—long after the wrapping paper is recycled.

The ultimate zero-waste gift is one you can't wrap. Experience-based presents create lasting memories and don't end up in a landfill. Class or Workshop; Tickets for a pottery class, bread-making course, or a nature photography workshop. They gain a new skill and a shared memory. Membership or Subscription; A pass to a local museum, National Trust/Park membership, or a digital subscription to an interest (e.g., an audiobook service or a meditation app). Voucher for Service; A gift certificate for a

house cleaning service, a massage, or a home-delivered meal kit. This grants the gift of time or self-care. Planned Outing; A personally designed scavenger hunt, a picnic with local produce, or tickets to a concert or theatre show you'll attend together.

Help your loved ones reduce their daily footprint with beautiful, long-lasting alternatives to single-use items.

Reusable Food Wraps: Replace plastic cling film with beeswax wraps or vegan food wraps made from natural materials. They are washable, compostable, and come in beautiful patterns.

Insulated Reusable Bottles/Cups: A high-quality stainless steel water bottle or leakproof coffee cup is practical and helps eliminate single-use plastic cups.

Zero-Waste Cleaning: Gift a soap block for dishwashing, a set of reusable cloth dishcloths, or a natural cleaning kit with reusable glass spray bottles and concentrate refills.

Jars of Homemade Goods: Fill attractive,

reusable glass jars with homemade granola, preserves, or infused oils. The presentation is personal, and the container is reusable.

When buying an object, look for ethical credentials. These gifts support responsible sourcing and local economies.

Secondhand & Vintage Treasures: A well-chosen vintage piece of jewellery, a classic vinyl record, or a beautiful antique book not only avoids new manufacturing but holds a unique history.

Locally Made Craft: Support local artisans and reduce transportation emissions.⁹ Look for items made by hand

in your area, such as ceramic mugs, wooden toys, or hand-knitted accessories.

Ethical Fashion Accessories: Choose small items made from recycled or upcycled materials, such as wallets made from reclaimed fire hoses or jewellery crafted from repurposed metals.

Grow-Your-Own Kits: A seed ball kit for wildflowers, an indoor herb garden set, or a potted succulent gives the recipient something living to nurture.

By shifting your mindset, you can give gifts that feel deeply personal, reduce waste, and truly bring joy without the burden of environmental guilt.



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9S Series delivers maximum power and efficiency for demanding implements. The 90 GPM ECO pump allows farmers to deliver the power needed to operate the technology features on the implements they need without taking that power away from the operation of the tractor itself. Each

farm and every field are different, and the ECO pump enables farmers to adapt their operations. The right ballast reduces unneeded compaction while providing high levels of traction for heavy draft work, ensuring the maximum amount of power for your operation. Additionally, MF Care Pro service comes

standard on every tractor and is partnered with extended warranty options, guaranteed optimal performance, and reduced costs and servicing time. In addition to money-saving power, the MF 9S Series features Massey Ferguson's exclusive Protect-U design, boasting industry-best cab comfort and visibility.

EVs in the Cold:A Guide to Winter Performance

As the days get shorter and the temperatures plummet, a common question arises for electric vehicle (EV) owners and prospective buyers: How do EVs perform in the cold?

The answer is nuanced, but with a bit of knowledge and preparation, an EV can be a reliable and even advantageous choice for winter driving.

The Science Behind the Winter Drop

The primary challenge for EVs in winter is the lithium-ion battery. These batteries are an intricate system of chemical reactions, and like many chemical processes, they are sensitive to temperature. The optimal operating temperature for an EV battery is typically around 21.5°C. When the mercury drops, the chemistry slows down.

• Reduced Range: In cold weather, the electrolyte fluid inside the battery becomes more viscous, which hinders the movement of lithium ions. This means the battery's ability to store and release energy is less efficient, leading to a noticeable reduction in range. Studies and real-world data suggest that a drop of 15-20% is common, though this can be more significant in extreme cold.

• Slower Charging: Just as discharging is less efficient, charging also slows down. A cold battery has higher internal resistance, so it can't accept the same rate of charge as a warm one. This is why you might notice that a fast-charging session takes longer in winter, as the car's thermal management system must first use energy to warm the battery to an optimal charging temperature.

Winter-Proofing Your EV: Practical Tips

Driving an EV in winter doesn't have to be a struggle. With these simple tips, you can maximize your car's efficiency and stay safe.

1. Pre-Condition While Plugged In: This is perhaps the most important tip. Most modern EVs have a pre-conditioning feature that allows you to warm the cabin and the battery while the car is still plugged into the charger.

This uses energy from the grid, not the battery, ensuring you start your journey with a



warm battery at its peak efficiency.

2. Use Heated Seats and Steering Wheel: If your car has them, use these. It's also best to charge immediately after a drive while the battery is still warm.

4. Drive Smoothly: Just like with any car, smooth acceleration and gentle braking are key to safety and efficiency in winter. For EVs, this is even more critical as it helps conserve battery power and can make the most of regenerative braking, which recovers energy during deceleration.

5. Park Indoors: If you have access to a garage, park your car inside.

This simple action can help keep the battery from reaching extreme low temperatures overnight, improving its performance and reducing the energy needed to warm it up in the morning.

In conclusion, while electric vehicles do face a unique set of challenges in cold weather, they are by no means unsuitable for winter. With an understanding of how the cold affects their performance and by implementing a few proactive habits, EV drivers can navigate the winter months with confidence and efficiency.



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THE NUGENT TDC CATTLE TRAILER RANGE

Launched in May 2025, the Nugent TDC (Tractor Drawn Cattle) trailer range represents a significant scaling up of the company's offering, specifically targeting professional farmers and hauliers needing high-capacity, heavy-duty livestock transport.

Available in substantial 20ft and 24ft models, the TDC range is built with an uncompromising focus on structural integrity, animal welfare, and towing performance.

Nugent's reputation for robust engineering is evident.

The TDC features a fully galvanised chassis and framework as standard, promising exceptional longevity and resistance to corrosion—essential qualities for any equipment constantly exposed to the elements and livestock effluent. Durability extends to the floor, which uses 3mm fully welded aluminium plating. This is a considerable upgrade from standard floors, providing maximum

strength, hygiene, and a solid foundation for heavy cattle.

Perhaps the most critical innovation in the TDC range is the focus on animal well-being during transit. Nugent prioritised achieving maximum internal width, a key feature designed to ensure livestock have ample space.

This reduction in crowding is vital for minimizing stress and aggression during transport and significantly improves airflow within the unit. Loading is simplified by heavy-duty gates fitted with guide handles and a high-grip rear tail door, ensuring smooth and safe movement onto the trailer.

Safety is further reinforced by a fixed internal dividing gate, standard with dual latches, and crash rails for side impact protection.

As a tractor-drawn unit, stability and smooth running are paramount. The TDC range delivers this through a combination of high-specification running gear. It utilizes 445/45 mini super single wheels, which offer excellent ground contact and enhanced on-road stability, crucial for managing long loads. Complementing this is a mono-leaf parabolic suspension system, renowned for absorbing road shock more effectively



than traditional setups, resulting in a significantly smoother and safer journey for both the livestock and the towing vehicle. The inclusion of a sprung drawbar and an adjustable coupling eye ensures versatile and easy coupling across various heavy-duty tractors.

The Nugent TDC range is positioned as a market leader in the heavy-duty segment. By successfully combining exceptional structural integrity (galvanised chassis, 3mm aluminium floor) with thoughtful features aimed at animal welfare (maximum internal width, smooth

loading), Nugent has produced a robust, reliable, and user-friendly trailer. For large-scale farming or commercial livestock movements, the 20ft and 24ft TDC models offer a compelling, long-term investment. While likely commanding a premium price, the

design suggest operating specifications superior performance and reduced stress on both the operator and the animals.

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Royal Ulster Winter Fair

Get ready for the premier showcase of the dairy industry as the Royal Ulster Winter Fair, in association with sole sponsor Danske Bank, returns to the EIKON EXHIBITION CENTRE in Lisburn on Thursday 11th December.

This single-day event, organised by the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society (RUAS), is a vital fixture in the agricultural calendar, bringing together farmers, enthusiasts, and industry leaders to celebrate excellence in dairy farming and explore the future of agri-innovation.

The Winter Fair features livestock competitions, with top-quality dairy cattle from across the region. Exhibitors compete fiercely for prestigious titles, including the highly coveted Supreme Interbreed Championship. Visitors will have the chance to see some of the finest examples of breeds such as Holstein, Ayrshire, Dairy Shorthorn, and Jersey, demonstrating the genetic excellence achieved by Northern Ireland's dedicated dairy farmers.

The competitive atmosphere in the show ring is a true highlight, providing a platform to celebrate the hard work and dedication that underpins the local dairy community.

Beyond the cattle ring, the Royal Ulster Winter Fair serves as an invaluable business platform and a hub for agricultural innovation with nearly 200 Trade Stands offering a vast array of the latest farm products, services,



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Don't miss the opportunity to witness a spectacular display of dairy excellence and explore the cutting edge of agri-innovation at Northern Ireland's premier dairy event.

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Smart Heat: Maximizing Efficiency with Programmable and Smart Thermostats

As the days get shorter and the furnace starts to kick on, your home's heating system becomes your biggest energy drain.

One of the simplest and most effective ways to lower your winter utility bills while boosting comfort isn't an expensive replacement—it's upgrading the brain of your heating system: the thermostat. By replacing an old manual thermostat with a programmable or, even better, a smart model, you gain granular control over your home's temperature, ensuring you only heat the house when you need to.

The Case for Programmable Savings. A programmable thermostat allows you to set customized heating schedules that automatically adjust the temperature throughout the day. This simple feature prevents your furnace from running

unnecessarily while you're away or asleep.

The core principle is setback: intentionally lowering the temperature during periods of low activity.

• **When You're Away:** There's no reason to keep your house a cozy when everyone is out at work or school. Setting the temperature back by to for eight hours a day can save you up to 10% on your heating bills annually.

• **When You're Asleep:** Your body naturally lowers its core temperature overnight. A setback of to while you sleep not only saves energy but can also promote better rest.

• **The Sweet Spot:** Don't turn the heat off completely.

Setting the temperature too low forces your system to work overtime to reheat the house in the morning, negating the savings. A moderate setback is far more efficient.

Stepping Up to Smart Technology. While programmable models are great, smart thermostats offer an even greater leap in efficiency, convenience, and control. These Wi-Fi-enabled devices learn your routines, monitor your HVAC system, and can be adjusted from anywhere using your phone.

Programming Tips for the Winter Season.

To get the most out of your smart or programmable thermostat, follow this simple scheduling strategy:



1. Morning Warm-Up: Set the heat to turn on about 30 minutes before you wake up. This ensures the house is warm when you step out of bed, without wasting heat all night. 2. Daytime Setback: Program the heat to drop as soon as the last person

leaves the house for work or school. 3. Evening Warm-Up: Set the heat to rise about 30–60 minutes before you arrive home. This allows the house to warm up gradually and efficiently. 4. Nighttime Setback: Program the temperature to drop once everyone is under the covers, typically around 10:00 PM.

By setting up a customized, automated heating schedule with a smart or programmable thermostat, you take the human error out of energy management. It's an investment that pays for itself quickly through lower utility bills and provides a more consistently comfortable home all winter long.

Could an Air source heat pump save £££'s on your heating bills?

An air source heat pump will enable you to generate your own renewable heat by delivering heat at lower temperatures than a gas and oil boiler.

This means that you need to run them for much longer periods to heat your home to a comfortable temperature.

Heat pumps can be a cost effective choice if you're replacing an expensive system such as electric storage heaters, oil, LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) or coal, rather than gas. However for it to be effective - a well-insulated home is essential - otherwise the heat the pump generates will escape more easily.

An air source heat pump works by takes heat from the air and boosting the temperature using a compressor. It then transfers the heat to the heating system in your home. It's a bit like a refrigerator in reverse!

They absorb heat from a cooler place and use it to increase the temperature inside your home. Air source heat pumps look similar to air-conditioning units. Their size depends on how much heat they'll need to generate for your home - the more heat, the bigger the heat pump. An air source heat pump is a low-carbon way of heating your home.

There are two main types of air source heat pumps: air-to-water and air-to-air. They work in different ways and are compatible with different types of heating systems.

In the summer, an air-to-air heat pump can operate in reverse. In other words, you can use it like an air-conditioning unit to provide cool air for your home.

An air-to-water heat pump typically costs between £9,000 and £11,000, according to the Energy Saving Trust. You'll also need to allow for the cost of upgrading your radiators or installing underfloor heating. You might also need to factor in for

extra insulation.

The pump will use a small amount of electricity, but the running costs are minimal.

Check that your installation will meet the building regulations in your area. Also peak to your home insurance provider to check if your policy will cover the changes to your heating system. If you're getting an air source heat pump it's important to make sure that your home is well-insulated so that it can retain the heat. Underfloor heating or larger radiators are often installed alongside heat pumps to better disperse the heat.

When your system is completed, you should get a Commissioning Certificate from the installer. You should also get an MCS installation certificate once the system has been registered (the installer must do this within 10 days).

Other options worth considering could be a ground source heat pump, solar PV panels (for electricity), solar water heating and wood burning stoves.

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The Draft-Buster Guide: Sealing Air Leaks to Keep the Cold Out

When winter winds howl, the last thing you want is that chilling breeze sneaking into your living room.

Those tiny gaps and cracks around windows and doors are silent thieves, robbing your home of warm air and dramatically increasing your heating bills. Sealing these air leaks is one of the quickest, cheapest, and most effective ways to winter proof your home.

1. Pinpoint Your Problem Areas Before you can fix a draft, you need to find it. An easy way to detect air leaks is to perform a "draft test" on a cool, breezy day:

- The Hand Test: Simply hold a damp hand near the edges of all windows, around door frames, and near any wall penetrations (like cable lines or dryer vents). If you feel a noticeable chill, you've

found a leak.

- The Incense Test: Light a stick of incense or a thin candle and slowly move it around the frame of a window or door. If the smoke suddenly blows sideways or the flame flickers violently, cold air is entering.

2. The Solution for Fixed Gaps: Caulking Caulking is the go-to solution for sealing gaps that don't move, such as where window frames meet the exterior siding or where trim boards meet the wall.

- Choose the Right Caulk: For exterior applications, use silicone or polyurethane caulk, as these are flexible, durable, and resistant to extreme temperature changes and moisture. For interior

cracks, acrylic latex is easier to clean up and paint over.

- Prep the Surface: For maximum adhesion, make sure the surface is clean, dry, and free of old, cracking caulk. You may need a utility knife to scrape away the old material.

- Apply a Smooth Bead: Cut the caulk tube nozzle at an angle, making a small opening. Apply steady pressure as you draw the gun along the gap, then smooth the bead with a moistened finger or a caulking tool for a professional seal.

3. The Solution for Moving Gaps: Weatherstripping Doors and operable windows (the ones that open) require a solution that



seals the gap when they're closed but compresses to allow movement when they're opened. That's where weatherstripping comes in.

4. Temporary Fixes for Extra-Drafty Windows If you have very old or single-pane windows, caulking and weatherstripping might not be enough. For these situations, temporary measures can provide

a significant boost in insulation:

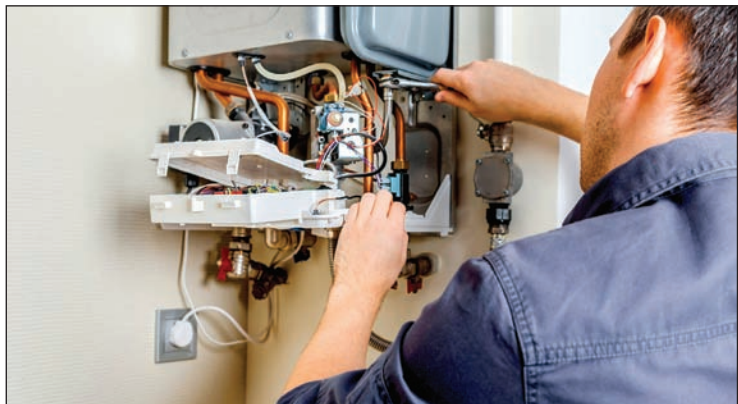
- Plastic Window Film Kits: These inexpensive kits use a clear plastic film applied to the interior window frame and shrunk tight with a hairdryer. They create a layer of still air between the window and the film, which acts as excellent insulation.

- Insulated Curtains: Heavy, thermal-backed curtains or cellular

shades can be drawn at night to block the cold radiating from the glass. Remember to open them during the day to capture any solar heat! By taking a few hours to become your home's draft-buster, you'll ensure the heat generated by your furnace stays inside where it belongs, keeping your family comfortable and your energy bills manageable.

Why Your Boiler Needs Its Annual Check-Up Now

Before you rely on your boiler for months of consistent warmth, a comprehensive annual service is not just recommended—it's essential.



Getting ahead of the winter rush ensures safety, efficiency, and peace of mind.

When is the best time to book your annual service?

Reasonable Notice: Most heating engineers recommend booking your service during the late summer or early autumn (August to October).

This allows you to avoid the inevitable rush of emergency call-outs that begin as soon as temperatures drop (typically from November onwards).

The Rush: During peak winter months, a plumber or heating engineer's schedule fills up rapidly, often dominated by

emergency repairs for broken-down systems. While you

might need only a few days' notice in summer, in winter, you could be looking at a wait of a week or more for a non-urgent service.

For an annual service, aim to give your chosen professional at least 2-4 weeks' notice in the lead-up to winter.

Boiler servicing is a routine cost of home ownership, and the price can

vary based on your location, the type of boiler, and the engineer. Based on current estimates, the average cost for a one-off annual boiler service in the UK is typically: £80-£100 for a gas boiler and

£90-£140 for an oil boiler. Crucially, never allow an unqualified person to service your boiler. Always ask to see the engineer's official ID card (Gas Safe or OFTEC) before work begins.

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