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Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Cllr Valerie Harte and Cllr Gareth Sharvin were among those celebrating the recent announcement of £600,000 Department for Communities Funding.

PROJECTS IN DOWNPATRICK AND NEWCASTLE TO RECEIVE ALMOST £600,000 DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES FUNDING

Council plans for Dunleath Skate Park and Pump Track and a temporary events space at the Newcastle Centre site are to proceed with major funding from the Department for Communities (DfC).

At a meeting of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Active and Healthy Communities Committee recently, members heard that contracts for funding between Council and DfC had now been agreed for both projects.

This means that the Dunleath Skate Park Project, due to be delivered by March 2025, will receive £390,176.36 of DfC funding, in support of Downpatrick's Living High Streets framework, with an additional Council

contribution of £25,000. DfC is also funding the flexible temporary events space at the rear of the Newcastle Centre with £200,000, with work due to commence in the coming weeks.

Minister, Gordon Lyons MLA said, "I am pleased to be able to support the Dunleath Skate Park that was identified as a high priority project in the recently published Downpatrick Living High Streets Framework."



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Live Here Love Here Community Awards 2024

Live Here Love Here, Northern Ireland's people-powered campaign dedicated to promoting civic pride and fostering environmental stewardship, has announced the recipients of its 2024 Community Awards.

The awards, sponsored by Belfast Harbour and supported by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), took place on Thursday 29 February, and celebrated the many individuals, schools, and community organisations, that dedicate their time to improving the environment through activities such as education, litter-picking, and tackling biodiversity loss.

Following a nomination period which was open to the public throughout January, 12 awards were distributed on the evening. Saintfield Community Association Environment Team received the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Champions Award in recognition of their commitment to carrying out environmental improvement

schemes, seasonal planting and weekly tidying activities, including picking up litter on all main roads leading into Saintfield.

Newcastle's Ark Community Gardens received the Community Together Award, supported by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, in acknowledgement of their efforts to address community division through environmental action. 2024 marks 10 years of Live Here Love Here, detailing the campaign's ongoing commitment to improving communities across Northern Ireland and empowering people to protect the environment.

Some of Live Here Love Here's initiative include Big Spring Clean and Adopt a Spot. For more information visit www.liveherelovehere.org.

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Council Works with Partners to Help Promote Importance of Allergen Awareness

The Council recently organised a series of Allergen Awareness seminars for catering businesses in various location across the district to support local food and catering businesses.

Over 89 delegates attended the seminars which provided businesses with information on the legal requirements in relation to allergens, how to manage allergens and risks within their business, what information they need to provide to customers and how to effectively communicate allergen information with their staff and their customers.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Councillor Valerie Harte said, “We were delighted to have the opportunity to offer this new allergen seminar to the food businesses within our Council area. The seminars were packed with useful information for food businesses on how to manage food and beverages when it comes to serving customers who may suffer from allergies.”

Cllr Harte continued, “Allergies can be incredibly serious, and it is important that all food establishments within the Council area are providing the correct information to their staff and the public when it comes to the ingredients, they are using in their food offerings.”

For businesses who



Mr Nadim Ednan-Laperouse the Natasha Allergy Research Foundation is pictured with Sarah Davidson Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, Council Chairperson, Councillor Valerie Harte, Catherine Hallissey, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and Brian Reid Deli Lites Ireland

were unable to attend the information seminars Council has hosted key information online at <https://www.newrymournedown.org/business-allergens>. Businesses can also talk to an Environmental Health Officer on 0330 137 4024 to ensure that their business is meeting the requirements of The Food Information Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Following the recent led allergen seminars, our Chairperson of Council, Councillor Valerie Harte and representatives from the Environmental Health

Department were kindly invited to attend an event organised by Deli Lites Ireland Ltd where Mr Nadim Ednan-Laperouse from the Natasha Allergy Research Foundation was the speaker.

Mr Ednan-Laperouse daughter Natasha, aged 15 tragically died on the 17 July 2016 whilst on a flight to France after consuming a baguette which had sesame seeds baked into the dough. The label on the packaging didn't include this ingredient and the sesame seeds were invisible to the naked eye.

Following on from the inquest into her death in

2018 the family campaigned to have a loophole in the legislation changed to ensure that all prepackaged foods made and sold in the same premises had to have list their ingredients. Natashas Law came into effect on 1 October 2021. Council representatives were delighted to support this local event organised by Deli Lites and would also encourage food business owners to learn more about the work of the Natasha Allergy Research Foundation by visiting their website <https://www.narf.org.uk>



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CASTLEWELLAN FOREST PARK RECEIVES INVESTMENT FROM THE NATIONAL LOTTERY HERITAGE FUND

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council is excited to announce the commencement of the construction and restoration work of the ambitious heritage project at Castlewellsan Forest Park.

The project, 'Re-Rooting our past in the Future: Castlewellsan Historic Demesne', has been made possible by a substantial investment of £2.69 million from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and the financial support will revitalise and conserve the cultural and natural heritage of the park for present and future generations.

Northern Ireland construction firm, OB Construction has been appointed as the main contractor to carry out the work, which will be split over multiple areas within the worldclass Arboretum and the Grange courtyard.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Councillor Valerie Harte said, "The Council's vision to establish Castlewellsan Forest Park as a heritage-led destination, has taken a step closer with

the appointment of OB Construction as the main contractor. The Council's intention is to revive, commemorate and interpret both the natural and built heritage of the historic demesne."

Chairperson Cllr Harte continued, "At the heart of the project are people, heritage and community. Delivery of this project will ensure the protection of the Park's rich legacy for the enjoyment of generations to come. Whilst construction and restoration are ongoing, there will be a varied programme of activities, events, environmental education and skills development delivered by the Council's Education and Biodiversity Officer, Volunteer Coordinator and Gardening team. The programme of activities will provide opportunities for the wider community to

learn about the importance of heritage, biodiversity and conservation, fostering a sense of environmental stewardship and creating an inviting park accessible to all."

The project is committed to the sensitive conservation and management of the landscape, ensuring the protection of its plant collection and vital biodiversity. At the heart of Castlewellsan Forest Park is the National Arboretum and Annesley Garden. The walled Garden provides a central focal point for the Arboretum and this investment will restore the historical nature of the planting in the Arboretum. The Grange will be developed into a vibrant visitor core, featuring the establishment of a welcome centre, community space, café facilities and open event space.



Chair of The National Lottery Heritage Fund in Northern Ireland, Mukesh Sharma, added, "Heritage has a unique role in bringing people together where they live, work and visit. Thanks to money raised by National Lottery players, this project will

deliver a high quality, heritage destination that will enhance the wellbeing of surrounding communities and increase tourism by preserving the natural environment and built heritage at Castlewellsan Historic Demesne.

"Over the next ten years,

through our Heritage 2033 strategy, the Heritage Fund is committed to supporting landscape projects, both rural and urban, that help habits and species thrive, reduce and mitigate the impacts of climate change while connecting people to our unique natural heritage.

Dance Showcase Event at Down Leisure Centre

The Downpatrick, Rowallane and Slieve Croob District Electoral Area Forums (DEA) in association with Jenna Finnegan Dance School developed a dance programme to promote health and well-being in local primary schools.

Schools that participated included the Academy Saintfield, St. Josephs, Crossgar, St. Patricks, Legamaddy, St. Colmcille's, Downpatrick, St. Michael's, Finnis and St. Mary's,

Aughlisnafin. Jenna had been working with the schools over a four-week period choreographing individual and group dances which culminated in a showcase event which was held on Thursday 8 February 2024 in Down Leisure Centre.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Councillor Valerie Harte said, "I commend this excellent initiative provided by the three DEAs which



allowed every child to participate in a fun activity which not only helped their physical but also their mental health.

I have really enjoyed watching all the performances today and am very impressed with the level of dancing skill on display, well done to everyone involved."

In researching the need for developing a dance focused project, it became clear to the DEAs

that not all children are athletic and unless they play football, rugby, netball or other mainstream sports they are often left out and as a result often may not participate in any form of exercise.

The event concluded with everyone enjoying a 'healthy' lunch to encourage participants to try something new and consider making healthier food choices in the future.

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Council Paves the Way for Small Settlements

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, under the ‘Small Settlements Regeneration Programme’ is proposing to undertake Environmental Improvement (EI) Schemes in Bessbrook, Castlewellan, Rostrevor and Saintfield.

The EI Schemes will improve the physical infrastructure of the villages following significant investment provided by the Department for Communities, Department for Infrastructure, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.

The Council and its consultants, AECOM, worked closely with the local community and statutory stakeholders in relation to the design and submission of planning applications for each settlement. Proposed projects include enhancing public realm, upgrading footpaths, providing new street furniture and lighting and public seating. Planning submissions for all four settlements were approved in late 2023 and the schemes are now progressing through the procurement stages to enable site works to commence in early 2024. Contractors will be making direct contact with affected businesses and premises to keep them informed of the planned programme of works in the coming



weeks. Under the ‘Small Settlements Regeneration Programme,’ the Council has also commenced delivery of seven revitalisation schemes in the villages of Annalong, Dundrum, Killyleagh, Meigh, Newtownhamilton, Strangford and Killough and several of these regeneration projects, including shop front and dereliction enhancement schemes, have been completed to date. Department for Communities Minister Gordon Lyons said, “The

regeneration initiatives currently being delivered by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council through funding from the Small Settlements Programme will make our small towns and villages more appealing, accessible, vibrant, and welcoming. They will provide facilities, infrastructure, and help to make them even more attractive places where people will want to live, work, visit and invest.” Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Minister Andrew Muir, commented,

“This continued investment in revitalising and regenerating rural towns and villages will enhance the aesthetic appeal and sustainability of these settlements. The Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme acts a catalyst for further regeneration and investment, it will increase the footfall of locals and visitors alike, and the dwell time of users. This will help economic activity and have a positive effect on the health and wellbeing of all who shop locally or visit.”





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RESIDENTS ENCOURAGED TO SHOP LOCAL AND SUPPORT LOCAL RETAILERS

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, with support from the Department for Communities, is launching a new Make It Local public relations and advertising campaign, to urge residents to buy from and celebrate their local and independent businesses.

Launching on Thursday 29 February, the initiative is designed to celebrate the fantastic range of goods and services available on our highstreets and encourage the public to 'keep it local' when planning how they will spend their earnings. It will showcase local

businesses through digital, print, outdoor advertising, social media activity and promotional PR.

The campaign focuses on Newry and Downpatrick's commercial centres, which were severely impacted by the autumn flooding, and in the coming days, some of our local business

owners will be appearing on fresh new adverts with the caption 'Where you shop makes a difference!' However, the Council is keen to stress that all its town centres require the assistance and support of their local community.

As part of the campaign, two distinctive groups where captured enjoying shopping days out in Newry and Downpatrick. In Downpatrick, it follows a typical family on a Saturday, taking part in the weekly Park Run, checking out the shops and boutiques and enjoying its famed local hospitality; and in Newry, three friends benefit from the sights and sounds of a day out in

the City, showcasing the vibrant commercial centre and its wide selection of retail and hospitality businesses.

Department of Communities Minister Gordon Lyons said: "I am committed to the development of cities, towns, villages, and rural settlements across Northern Ireland. My department supports a range of initiatives which encourage communities to grow and prosper in a number of ways. In this instance, we're showcasing the range and variety of businesses in the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council area. In doing so, we hope to stimulate

the local economy and encourage people to shop in the area."

Speaking about the launch of the campaign, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Councillor Valerie Harte said: "Our City and town centres right across the district need a much-needed boost from their local communities, however, it has been particularly testing time for businesses in Newry and Downpatrick as they work to re-establish themselves after the flooding.

"There is still plenty more work to do to encourage the green shoots of recovery. Campaigns such as this are an



Content creator Steph Duke and family with, centre, Deputy Chairperson of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, Councillor Gareth Sharvin

important part of ensuring our high streets are busy once again.

"The Council offers

its sincere thanks to the Department of Communities for their contribution to fund this

campaign, which helps us to continue to support our retailers and reinforce the 'Make It Local' ethos."

Silent Valley wins Top Trail in Co Down at Walk NI Awards

Silent Valley has been revealed as the Top Trail in County Down by the Walk NI Awards 2023.

Ringed by mountains, Silent Valley is located within the Mourne Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Its site includes beautiful parkland, lakes and a pond and a number of walking trails for all abilities. It attracts around 50,000

visitors every year, most of whom come to enjoy the peace and solitude of its unique mountain landscapes and the varied wildlife.

Owned by NI Water, Silent Valley is one Northern Ireland's most visited tourist sites.

NI Water Area Manager Gary Presheo said: "We are really proud that Silent Valley has been voted as the winner of the Top Trail in County Down by the Walk NI Awards 2023. It offers a number of walking trails for all abilities, making it an enjoyable place to visit in the midst of unique and delightful countryside that is also a haven for wildlife.

"NI Water provides a number of visitor facilities at the site including an information centre, conference centre and education centre – all housed in two historic bungalows that overlook the parkland's wonderful views. A beautiful traditional tea room is also open daily throughout the year, exactly what you need after a walk through this beautiful part of the country.



"Silent Valley is a stunning site open for visitors to explore and enjoy, while also operating as a key strategic reservoir providing drinking water for a large part of County Down and the Greater Belfast area. It has celebrated some

momentous anniversaries recently – 100 years of the Mourne Wall last year and recently 100 years since the cutting of the first sod which was the beginning of the reservoir we depend upon today. These anniversaries serve as a reminder of

the age of the site as well as a time to reflect on NI Water's continuing its good work to not only provide safe drinking water for the population it serves but also as a shared space for all to enjoy for the next 100 years."



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New Visitor Amenity Facility Announced for Tyrella Beach

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council is delighted to announce the appointment of an Integrated Design Team to deliver new visitor facilities at Tyrella Beach to assist with improving the overall Visitor Experience.

The Council’s vision is to enhance the visitor experience at Tyrella Beach, and this project will help achieve this through the provision of a new amenity building. It is essential that Council continues to deliver and provide quality infrastructure to service visitor requirements within the district. The investment in Tyrella Visitor Amenity will support new toilet facilities, exterior showers, a first aid room and storage facilities which can be used by lifeguards and other essential services. It is anticipated that the new visitor facilities will be operational and open for the summer of 2025.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Councillor Valerie Harte said, “This is an important project that will support Council in delivering a quality outdoor experience for both visitors and locals. Tyrella Beach is an important natural resource to showcase the Geopark and important local flora and fauna whilst providing a quality beach landscape for a wide range of outdoor activities.”



Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Councillor Valerie Harte is pictured (L-R) with Andrew Donald-Gleeds, Caolain Boyd, Assistant Director of Capital Projects and Procurement-Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, Alan Simpson - Gleeds and Michelle Boyle, Head of Tourism Development and Visitor Experience at Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.

Tyrella has been awarded the prestigious Blue Flag Award annually since 1997 in recognition of high levels of beach cleanliness, safety, water quality and management. Tyrella Beach and Dunes, is also a designated Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI). With a wide, flat, sandy beach two kilometres long and backed by 25 hectares of mature dunes in a conservation area,

throughout the year visitors can enjoy scenic walks and gain an insight into the habitat of local flora and fauna.

Our district is fortunate to have achieved Blue Flag Status at 3 beaches, Cranfield, Murlough and Tyrella and each year during the summer period, the Council provides a Lifeguard Service at these facilities, which attracts a significant

number of visitors. Council is keen to promote the district as a premier outdoor destination, and the recent UNESCO Global Geopark status for Mourne Gullion Strangford helps showcase the 600 square miles of premier outdoor landscape and 100 miles of coastline, with the district offering a wide menu of activities and tourism experiences for locals and visitors.



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Moving from Tax Credits to Universal Credit – important information

Over the past few months lots of working parents who have been in receipt of Tax Credits have received notification that they have to move onto Universal Credit instead.

Employers For Childcare

Universal Credit allows for higher financial support towards registered childcare costs than Tax Credits and so families using childcare can often find that they are better off moving to Universal Credit.

The Government has committed to ensuring no one is worse off by moving to Universal Credit by providing ‘Transitional Protection’ to make up the loss between what is received under the old benefits, and

Universal Credit. However, there are strict rules around the eligibility for Transitional Protection so you should always seek independent advice before applying for Universal Credit. Other benefit changes in 2024

In addition to households being moved to Universal Credit as mentioned above, the amount that is being paid through all benefits, including Universal Credit, Tax Credits, Housing Benefit etc, is



increasing from April 2024 by at least 6.7%. So, if you receive benefits, you may be entitled to more money from April onwards.

For free, independent advice on the financial support your family is entitled to, including with

registered childcare costs, call our Family Benefits Advice Service on Freephone 0800 028 3008. Last year, where we did a ‘better off’ calculation for a family, we identified an average of £5,600 in additional financial support.

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Priced at just £105 per person based on two adults sharing, this



exceptional package offers unbeatable value for an unforgettable springtime escape. Whether you’re seeking a romantic getaway or a serene solo retreat, Rest & Reflect at The Causeway Hotel

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WHAT USE ARE SLUGS AND SNAILS?

I belong to a generation which routinely killed or removed anything which might eat or otherwise damage a plant we admired or wanted to eat, bedding plants perhaps or home-grown lettuce or radishes.

Enemy number one was the slimy slug, closely followed by snails (a wee bit less slimy because of their shells).

Back then, I gave little thought to their use or function in nature, but in recent years, as I have experienced the decline in our wildlife, particularly other invertebrates such as insects, I've become more aware of the importance of all creatures and how they interact as part of a balanced natural world.

Slugs and snails are loosely related over eons of evolution (slugs may have had shells at one time) and both live on the mess that nature often

leaves behind, mostly dead and dying plants, and, like earthworms and fungi, recycle that waste (more efficiently than we do).

Of course, if they encounter a juicy flower seedling or vegetable, they'll eat it. But in fact, in most gardens, the 'damage' they do is relatively minor, and outweighed by their value...as food!

Most people like to see birds, and animals such as hedgehogs, in their gardens, but killing off all the slugs and snails would remove an important food-source from them (frogs are also partial to a slug or two, and they are prey for some insects). Even worse, unless properly



controlled, slug pellets can actually kill other garden wildlife. I no longer think it makes any sense to scatter poisons in flower or vegetable beds.

We may not like

the look of them or be happy when they munch on a particular plant, but slugs and snails are important to natural recycling, and as food for others... even us. Yes, I recall

with satisfaction a meal of Escargot served in garlic oil and butter...but not from my garden of course. Vive les limaces, vive les escargots!

JVA

Tullywest Manor is celebrating over 30 years in business!

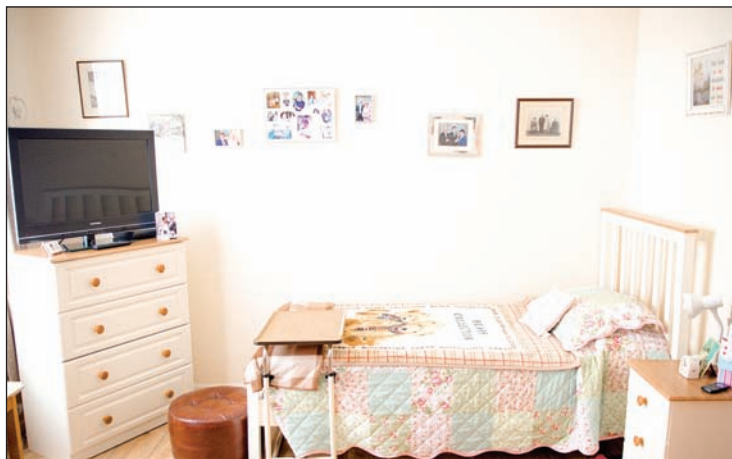
Tullywest Manor is situated in a beautiful rural setting, overlooking the hills, lakes and farmlands of the Co. Down countryside.

It opened its doors to its first residents on 17th March 1989. The aim is to provide high quality services catering for the individual needs of each resident, ensuring that privacy, dignity and respect of each resident is maintained at all times.

Residents coming into care here encouraged to maintain their normal social interests, hobbies and outings with relatives and friends as well as participate in activities and outings arranged by the home

Residents views and suggestions for social activities, outings are sought at Resident meetings and actioned if appropriate

Tullywest Manor features a large lounge, dining room, entrance hall with seating area and a spacious conservatory, where residents can circulate and



meet with each other and relatives.

Each tastefully decorated bedroom, most with ensuite, offers complete privacy where residents are encouraged to express their own personal tastes.

Tullywest recognises the need for a person-

centred approach to care. Encouraging staff to learn more about the Residents lives helps us tailor our care to each individual need.

Tullywest Manor recognises that residents are individuals with family and relatives of their own

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Room for Improvement: Home Design Trends for Spring 2024

From playful patterns to sustainable materials, here are some of the top home design trends to look out for if you are planning some home décor this year.

Sustainable Materials
Sustainability is a growing concern for many homeowners, and it's no surprise that sustainable materials are becoming more popular in home design. In 2024, we can expect to see more homes incorporating eco-friendly materials such as bamboo, reclaimed wood, and recycled glass.

Bold Patterns
Bold patterns are making a comeback in 2024, with homeowners looking to add a touch of personality to their homes. From geometric shapes to floral prints, bold patterns are a great way to add interest to any room.

Natural Textures
This year we can expect to see more natural textures in home design. From woven baskets to jute rugs, natural textures are a great way to add warmth and depth to any space.

Statement Lighting
Statement lighting is a

great way to add a touch of drama to any room. In 2024, we can expect to see more homeowners incorporating statement lighting fixtures such as chandeliers and pendant lights into their homes.

Vintage Accents
Vintage accents are a great way to add character to any home. This season we can expect to see more homeowners incorporating vintage pieces such as antique mirrors, old-fashioned clocks, and vintage textiles into their homes.

Bold Colours
Embrace bold colours. From deep blues to rich greens, bold colours are a great way to add drama and interest to any space.

Smart Home Technology
Smart home technology is becoming more popular in homes across the UK, and it's no surprise why. Voice-activated assistants, smart thermostats, and automated lighting systems are now



everyday essentials. By incorporating these home design trends into your home, you can create a space that is both stylish and functional!

GREEN AS A NEUTRAL

Green is transcending its botanical roots to become a versatile neutral at EZ Living

Neutrals create a timeless look, but that does not mean we're confined to only beige, ivory, taupe and grey. Green is just as universal as most classic neutrals and adds a sense of calm and harmony. Whether it's your main furniture pieces or added as an accent, varied shades of green will bring a touch of organic sophistication to any room.

Nature
Green cultivates a nurturing environment that forms a soothing connection to nature. Especially at this time of year, a sense of calm and relaxation is welcomed into our homes. Green brings about reminders of renewal, with its connection to grass and plants budding in spring.

The Truman Oslo Pine Leather Power Recliner Sofa is a stunning green



centrepiece to add to your living room. It features lush leather upholstery that radiates elegance and is the perfect green hero piece to add to your living room.

New Neutrals
Greys are being swapped for more earthy tones; green makes the perfect addition to this mix. This is branching from

the evolution of Scandi-inspired designs from minimalist and cool, to warm and cozy. The usual greys are being changed out for warmer colours like off-white and taupe's, to create an overall more cocooning vibe in homes. Green adds the perfect amount of freshness to a new neutral ensemble.

If you're looking to dip your toe into this trend and incorporate a splash of green, accent chairs are the perfect choice. The Scandi inspired Copenhagen Green Fabric Chair captures a cool, contemporary look. Its compact footprint enhances any space without overwhelming your existing scheme.



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In case you missed it, cooking outdoors has undergone a revolution. Forget burnt burgers and bangers or expensive takeaway pizzas.

Today it can be a walk in the park to produce great restaurant quality food in your garden or back yard. Now your outdoor food is only limited by your imagination and even then the best brands give you a wealth of tasty, tried and tested recipes specifically created to help you make the most of their appliances.

The Big Green Egg, beloved by the world's best chefs, is a case in point. With an Egg you get access to literally hundreds of recipes and how-to videos. There's plenty on YouTube too, even some produced by Newtownard's very own Eggsperts at The Stove Yard, who also provide live demonstrations and tastings in the summer months. Whatever style of cooking you wish to undertake a Big Green Egg will make it ever-so easy for you. Sear, roast, bake bread or pizzas,

smoke, cook slow and low, cook in the pan or cook Mediterranean plancha style. With the Egg's precise temperature control it's going to be perfection every time.

Traeger Grills and Smokers, will help you widen your horizons too. You can even control them and set automatic reminders for different stages of the cooking process while you're heading home from the supermarket with the beer and wine. A Traeger Grill will also handle a variety of foods for the biggest of family feasts with ease when you need it to. No wonder it's the USA's number one pellet grill and smoker.

Then there's the UK's own, award-winning Gozney portable outdoor pizza oven for that authentic wood fired pizza flavour when and wherever you want to make a day of it. How could



you resist a delicious pizza every two minutes, especially when there's a queue of hungry kids to keep happy? No need to be a money-saving expert to understand that not only will your pizzas taste so much better because you've made them yourself but also because they'll cost a

fraction of what you've been used to paying.

As The Stove Yard's Pete Gough says "Since lockdown we've seen a sharp increase in interest in outdoor cooking, so this year we're kick starting the barbecue season with some tremendous savings in our Big Spring Sale starting

on the 23rd of March. Our customers can then make the most of their new appliances at the very first sign of sunshine. We'll be displaying what we believe are three of the very best brands – Big Green Egg which is exclusive to us, Traeger Grills and Gozney pizza ovens."

STATION HOUSE HOTEL

The Station House Hotel is a Contemporary, Boutique Family Run Hotel in Letterkenny Town Centre & in the Heart of the Wild Atlantic Way.

Make a break for it in Donegal this Spring and base yourself at the Station House Hotel.

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

Superbly located in the heart of the thriving town of Letterkenny, so you only have to open their doors and you are right where all the action is! From the endless number of family-friendly activities to shopping centres, charming boutiques, the vibrant nightlife scene, relaxing restaurants, the theatre and more, and with easy access to all major routes and natural



attractions, Letterkenny has so much to offer!

Choose from our range of their guestrooms for your accommodation, whether you are travelling as a couple, with family members or friends they have a number of room types for you to choose from including family, interconnecting, twin, triple, double, accessible, and executive. All of which are vibrant with a fresh and contemporary approach to the décor and designed with your comfort in mind! The Depot Bar & Restaurant provides the perfect excuse for a pause & to pamper your palate, various menus are available including lunch, barfood, set dinner menus, vegan, gluten free,

dessert, children's etc.

Since opening this award-winning hotel has garnered a reputation as one of the most popular hotels in Letterkenny and indeed in the greater Donegal area for Donegal hospitality at its best, quality accommodation, dining, and a true local's local! A place where value and top-class customer service is always assured & reflected in countless reviews on various digital platforms such as TripAdvisor and Google.

Book your well-deserved getaway now, the Station House Hotel have some incredible offers available & discover all that Donegal has to offer.

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Retro trends for Houseplants.

While many garden centres say it is rare and unusual indoor plants that are most wanted now, the wider trend is for old-fashioned foliage houseplants such as Monstera cheese plants, rubber plants, yucca, ficus and dracaena. Houseplant sales continue to rise among existing garden centre customers. So much so that Growers have been struggling to meet demand for simple foliage plants. Cacti and succulents (the darling buds of last year) are also

still in high demand. FloraHolland figures show houseplant sales have risen 1.1% this year, but the average price of the biggest seller, the Phalaenopsis orchid, has dropped by almost 10%, showing an oversupply in the market. Driving demand is the relatively young generation — that is from teens to 30s — who have a need to return home to some sense of reality using green plants to balance their internet/social media hours spent in virtual worlds on a

screen. Indoor plants are companions that are beautiful, can be nurtured easily, but do not need daily walking or feeding. Houseplants fulfil this role and are introducing a new generation to the world of plants, albeit in a small but vital way. These are the plant lovers of the future so in this respect the huge trend for indoor plants is opening a door to a greener future for all. The Instagram effect is also driving the younger plant-buying market. The Monstera

[cheese plant] is super popular at the moment and has been for a few years. Nostalgic of the 1970s, the Monstera is in really high demand and some sizes are not always available from growers, which results in having to pay a premium price. Houseplants have seen huge growth of 50% or more in garden centres and other retailers such as Ikea over the past two years, powered by Instagram pictures, nostalgia and appreciation of the benefits they have for cleaning air in homes.

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specific size that you are looking for, or if you would like to mix and match any of the shed features, please email or telephone, as they can be custom-built to your requirements. All of the timber buildings are hand-crafted in the Hillhead Road workshop, allowing Hillhead Sheds to customise your timber building to suit your own specific requirements. This allows you to have a wooden shed in the design you want. All of the timber buildings come with free fitting as standard (Within a 25-mile radius of Ballyclare). An additional fee will only be added outside this boundary. At Hillhead Sheds there is an emphasis put on providing a no-nonsense professional service and expert advice. Hillhead Sheds will always endeavour for a hassle-free after-sales service however, in the unlikely event you



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HOME INTERIOR DESIGN TRENDS FOR SPRING 2024

The interior design world is buzzing with new trends and ideas. According to House Beautiful and Zillow, the following are the top interior design trends for spring 2024:

Statement pieces: In 2024, we will see a shift from filler pieces to conversation starters. Sculptural furniture is coming to the fore,

which means that even your smallest side table can make a big statement.

New neutrals: The evolution of Scandi-inspired design, from cool and minimalist to cosy and cocooning, informs an array of warm neutrals in 2024. Greys are being swapped for earthy beiges, contemporary off-whites and taupes that sit so well with the natural materials and modest decoration of Scandi homes.

Ruffles: Ruffles – for the most part applied to cushions and table linen – are adding a bit of fun and whimsy to our homes.

It's usually matched with a gingham print, ice cream shades or candy cane stripes like these fabulous Amuse Bouche examples from Rose & Grey.

The one-wall kitchen:

The one-wall kitchen is truly an exercise in ingenuity. This diminutive layout requires a real balance between storage capacity, functionality and flow – it can be tempting to install a whole row of cabinets on your one-wall kitchen, but that can be imposing. Open shelving can be a bit of a visual break, and adds opportunity for decoration – an important element in an otherwise functional space.

L-shaped and chaise sofas:

The pragmatic amongst us are saving space with L-shaped and chaise sofas, turning awkward alcoves into seating. These sofas are perfect for small spaces and can be used to create a cozy and inviting atmosphere in the living spaces.

Relaxed silhouettes:



In 2024, we will see new relaxed silhouettes in interior design. This means that we will see more of comfortable and cozy furniture in our living spaces.

Playful trimmings: Playful trimmings are making a comeback in 2024. We will see

more of bold patterns, textured fabrics, and personalized decor items in our living spaces.

Vintage shopping: Vintage shopping is becoming more popular in 2024. It's a great way to save money and reduce waste. You can find unique pieces

from flea markets and secondhand sellers destined for upcycling and repurposing.

Sensory gardens: Sensory gardens are becoming more popular in 2024. They are a great way to connect with nature and create a relaxing atmosphere in

your home.

Murano glass chandeliers: Murano glass chandeliers are making a comeback in 2024.

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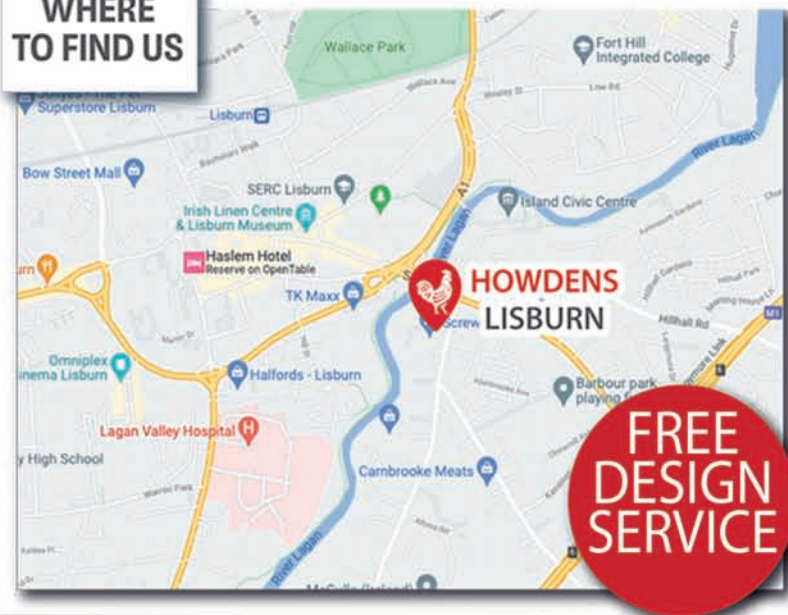
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PGI STATUS AN ACCOLADE FOR FARMERS NORTH AND SOUTH

Agriculture Minister Andrew Muir MLA has described the attainment of PGI status within the EU for Irish Grass Fed Beef, similar to that awarded to Champagne, as a tremendous accolade for farmers North and South.

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) Minister is jointly hosting an event at the Weir family farm near Lifford in Co Donegal, with Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) Minister Charlie McConalogue, TD, to mark the recognition of Irish Grass Fed Beef as an all island Protected Geographical Indication (PGI).
“The granting of Geographical Indication status for Irish Grass Fed Beef places it on the same pedestal as world-renowned products such as Champagne, Parma Ham, Roquefort Cheese and, of course Irish Whiskey,” Minister Muir said.
“Having a Protected


Geographical Indication is a triumph, a recognition of how the unique climate, landscape and practices of a region translates into food and drink, bestowing them with a distinctive taste and character. It is wonderful that the pedigree of Irish Grass Fed Beef has achieved this level of international recognition and an accolade to the hard working agriculture industry.”
Minister Muir paid tribute to both the Livestock and Meat Commission and Bord Bia for their collaborative work with processors and producers in progressing the successful application, as well as Minister McConalogue and the Rt Hon Mark Spencer, Defra Minister for Food,


Farming and Fisheries, for the support they gave in achieving this status.
Minister Muir added: “The whole process has been an amazing success, not only by ensuring farmers North and South get the recognition they deserve, but in developing strong working relationships between government bodies North, South, East and West. I hope these relationships are further developed in any future all-island GI applications.”
Minister McConalogue said: “On this very positive day for Irish farmers and Irish beef, marking the registration of the All Island Protected Geographical Indication for Irish grass-fed beef, we are also marking the first of many positive



engagements that I look forward to with my Ministerial colleague, Minister Andrew Muir. I welcome that with the Assembly and Executive back in place, Minister Muir and I are together, here in my home county

of Donegal, to mark this substantial achievement for our Island and for our farmers.
“I would like to congratulate the applicants Bord Bia and the Livestock and Meat Commission who have achieved this on behalf of producers and processors across the island. The collaboration between my Department, Northern Ireland’s Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, the United Kingdom’s Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Bord Bia and the Livestock and Meat Commission is reflective of the valuable and ongoing north-south co-operation on agricultural matters and our positive engagements in the interests of farmers and processors across the island.”
The Minister added “Visiting this excellent beef farm in Donegal today is a reminder of the quality and sustainability of Irish beef and why it is in such demand around the world. The primary produce from Irish farmers that goes into creating our internationally respected quality food is the backbone of our agri-food sector.
Securing the PGI status is recognition of these premium standards. I look forward to seeing these PGI products on European supermarket shelves and continuing to tell the story of Irish farming to an international audience.”





Destination Industry Day and Networking Event a Resounding Success

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's annual networking event took place on Friday 23 February in the beautiful surroundings of the Montalto Estate outside Ballynahinch.

This year's focus was on sustainable tourism and learning more about the newly designated Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark.

The event attracted a diverse range of tourism industry professionals and stakeholders committed to preserving the natural



beauty and heritage of this special geographical area.

A range of speakers shared invaluable insights into how the Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark status could benefit tourism. They also emphasised the importance of sustainable practices for individual businesses and how this could benefit communities and the economy.

Speaking at the event, Newry, Mourne and Down District Chairperson Council, Councillor

Valarie Harte said, "We are thrilled with the success of this industry morning and networking event. The enthusiasm and commitment shown by attendees highlight the collective dedication to maximising sustainable tourism opportunities within the region. The event provided a dynamic platform for networking, enabling participants to form valuable connections and partnerships that will contribute to ongoing collaborative initiatives."

Youth and Future Talent Awards

The eighth Youth and Future Talent Awards (YAFTAs) were launched recently in Downpatrick. Created by Newry and Mourne Youth Council in 2012 the awards have developed over the years to include the entire district.



The YAFTA Awards are supported by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, the Community Planning Partnership, the Education Authority Youth Service and the Education Authority Flare Team.

The aim of the awards is to highlight the 'unsung heroes' throughout the district who do not normally

receive recognition for the contribution they make to their families, youth groups, schools and in the wider community.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Councillor Valerie Harte said, "The Council is delighted to support the YAFTAs which have been developed and delivered by the Education

Authority Youth Service with the assistance of the Community Planning Partnership. The awards highlight the outstanding achievements of young people within our District and it is more important than ever that we celebrate the dedication of our young people who contribute daily to safer, stronger local communities."

Competition is

expected to be strong for the eight awards and nomination categories.

Shortlisted nominees being invited to attend the awards ceremony in the Canal Court Hotel on Thursday 28 March 2024.

For further information contact Rosie Carey, Senior Youth Worker, Education Authority by telephoning 028 302 51515 or by email on rosie.carey@eani.org.uk.

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HERE’S WHY YOU SHOULD FALL ASLEEP WITH YOUR PET!

In 2023, 53% of UK adults owned a pet, a 2% rise compared to 2020. And while it’s natural to want to share most of our lives with our furry friends, how far is too far?

According to a YouGov sleep survey, almost half of Britons admit to letting their pets sleep in the same bed as them – Sleep expert Ashley Hainsworth from Bed Kingdom has looked at the pros and cons of doing this and whether it’s right for you.

What are the benefits?

Helps with Insomnia

Falling asleep with your pet beside you can increase endorphin levels, thus reducing stress and anxiety. In turn, this can help you fall asleep quicker, which is ideal if you’re someone who has difficulty getting some well-needed shuteye.

Security and comfort

If you live alone, sleeping with a pet can increase your sense of security and heighten comfort levels. Feeling safe and relaxed is

extremely important and can drastically improve your sleep quality.

Warmth

A key factor in determining whether you have a good night’s sleep is body temperature. If you feel the cold more than the average person, cuddling up to a warm pet at night may be precisely what you need to drift off.

Bonding

Sleeping with your pet can significantly increase your bond and strengthen your relationship. You might find that you can read their body language better, and simply be more in tune with one another, which can improve their behaviour and overall happiness as a result.

Are there any risks involved?

Like most things,



letting your pet sleep in the same bed has some potential risks.

Sleep disruption

Our pets are living beings and therefore, move around a lot; you may find that your pet is finding it difficult to settle and won’t stay still, so their constant movement and rearranging may

disrupt your sleep. One way to combat this is to invest in a bed large enough to accommodate you and your pets – this allows for any movement that does occur to go unnoticed.

Hygiene

Our pets can carry dirt and other unwanted guests

in their fur. Fleas, ticks, and lice are all common problems, and the last thing you want is for those to end up in your bed. Dirt may also cause allergies, as well as getting all over your sheets. To tackle this, keep up to date with your pet’s vaccinations and make

sure they are clean after being outside. You should also wash your bedding more frequently if you decide to let your pets sleep with you, specifically every three to four days.

Behavioural issues

There are varying arguments as to whether letting your

pet sleep with you causes them separation anxiety. Either way, it is important to stay vigilant, and if you notice any problem behaviours begin, consult a trainer or an animal behaviourist. Some signs to look out for include an increase in destructive behaviour, extreme vocalising like howling, barking or whining when you leave, and toileting inside the house, even if they are trained.

Should you let your pets sleep in the same bed?

Sleeping with your pets can be extremely beneficial to those who suffer from loneliness or sleep disorders such as insomnia. However, if you’re someone who likes your personal space at night or cannot commit

to the upkeep needed for your bed to remain clean, perhaps letting your pet spend the night with you isn’t the best option.

Ashley Hainsworth from Bed Kingdom has commented: “No one knows our pets like we do. When deciding whether to let your pets share the bed, you should consider several different factors, such as your lifestyle, sleeping habits and your pet’s temperament. It has clear benefits, but the risks shouldn’t be disregarded either. Keep an eye on how things progress, but if sleeping with your pet works for you, that is the most important thing.”

Story used courtesy of <https://www.bedkingdom.co.uk/uk-bed-sizes-mattress-size-guide>

Opportunities in Horticulture Careers Fair at CAFRE

The College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise was delighted to host an ‘Opportunities in Horticulture Careers Fair’ for students studying Floristry and Horticulture at Greenmount Campus, Antrim.

The Careers Fair offered businesses interested in offering work placements or graduate employment the chance to engage directly with CAFRE students.

Students connected with company representatives to find out more about potential career paths, and in some cases to hear about the next step in preparing to apply for one of their companies’ roles.

On commenting on the Careers Fair, event organiser Caithriona McCruden, Lecturer at CAFRE said: “Through our careers

programme we aim to develop the employability skills of our students, support their career planning and ultimately contribute to their successful transition into the world of work. This year we are delighted to have over 25 organisations present, many with imminent positions to fill. Today’s event gives employers access to CAFRE trained students, who have the desire to follow great careers in the horticulture sector.”

A broad range of businesses were represented at

the Opportunities in Horticulture Careers Fair, demonstrating the breadth of career opportunities which exist within the sector.

Ben Neill from Newtownabbey is a first-year student studying on the two year Level 3 Advanced Technical Extended Diploma in Horticulture course at CAFRE.

“I found the Careers Fair really useful. As this is my first year studying Horticulture the event provided me with the chance to explore the vast array of career paths and employers out



Careers Fair, event organiser Caithriona McCruden, Horticulture Lecturer, CAFRE chats to Lantra Scotland Director Dr Liz Barron-Majerik MBE.

there. I gathered lots of useful information about summer work opportunities and the different career options for me, whether that’s in garden maintenance, crop production, amenity, or landscaping. There’s so much to choose from!”

Kyle Ross from Randalstown is on target to graduate this summer with a BSc (Hons) Degree in Horticulture. Kyle commented: “The Opportunities in Horticulture Careers Fair enabled me to connect with professional organisations. Working in garden

retail I was particularly keen to hear about the Horticulture Trades Association’s (HTA) commitment to support the growth, adaption and nurturing of the next generation of Horticulturalists.”

In concluding, Lori Hartman, Senior Lecturer at CAFRE commented: “The Careers Fair invigorated academic and career aspirations for our students. It was wonderful to see such a wide range of organisations in attendance showcasing job opportunities available at a range of entry

levels for our students. We are in no doubt that CAFRE students have been inspired by today’s event.”

Greenmount Campus, Antrim offers Horticulture courses from Level 2 through to BSc (Honours) Degree level. The campus is hosting an Open Day on Wednesday 10th April, book to attend via the events section of www.cafre.ac.uk.

For further information on courses and how to apply for a course starting in September 2024, visit our website: www.cafre.ac.uk

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Toyota prepares new and upgraded models for 2024

Toyota will look to build on its record-breaking sales success in 2023 with a series of new and upgraded models during the coming year.

One of the key introductions will be a new battery electric model based on the Urban SUV Concept revealed at Toyota's Kenshiki forum in early December last year. The production version will be the most compact and accessible model in a planned line-up of six Toyota dedicated BEVs to be launched by 2026.

The Urban SUV Concept has a compact body set on strong shoulders and a high driving position. Drawing on Toyota's experience developing the successful Yaris Cross, space is maximised in a flexible interior that can easily be adapted to prioritise passenger or load

capacity as required.

Both front and all-wheel drive powertrains will be available, together with a dual battery strategy: customers will be able to choose between two battery options, with different capacities to suit their priority for accessibility or driving range.

Keeping the focus on pure electric power, the bZ4X mid-size SUV remains a key player in Toyota's multi-path strategy towards achieving full carbon neutrality in the UK and Europe by 2035.

The Yaris Cross range will expand early in 2024 with introduction of an additional, more powerful, 129bhp version of its 1.5-litre hybrid

electric powertrain. In addition, the model gains a fully digital driver's instrument display and the latest Toyota multimedia system with cloud-based navigation for journey planning with up-to-minute traffic intelligence. The Toyota Safety Sense package of active safety and driver assistance systems is boosted with new and enhanced functions. And for customers looking for the last word in equipment specifications, an exclusive new Premiere Edition model joins the line-up.

A similar package of changes including the new powertrain option, digital user experience and enhanced safety provi-

sions – is also scheduled for the Yaris Hatchback. This promises to maintain the strong market performance of Toyota's smallest hybrid electric model and its UK best-seller.

At the sporting end of the Yaris spectrum, a new GR Yaris is lined up for release this year. The latest version of the high-performance hatch, developed by Toyota Gazoo Racing, comes with a more power from its turbocharged three-cylinder engine, a new Gazoo Racing Direct eight-speed automatic transmission that provides super-fast shifting and a redesigned driver's cockpit. The car's body rigidity and suspension have been



increased, with a focus on even stronger competition driving performance.

At the other end of the size scale, an all-new Land Cruiser is due for launch towards the end of the year.

Toyota has taken Land Cruiser back to its origins as a strong vehicle that can

be trusted to do the job in the toughest conditions, while incorporating new technologies to ensure it delivers exceptional performance both on and off-road. Under the skin, there's a new vehicle platform supporting the classic body-on-frame construction that's

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SPRING GARDENING GUIDE

As our gardens emerge from their winter slumber, it's time to embrace the spring gardening trends that will shape our outdoor spaces in 2024.

Whether you're a seasoned gardener or just starting out, here's your guide to creating a vibrant and resilient garden in the United Kingdom:

The Joyful Garden: Last year's trend of serene, meditative spaces is evolving. Inject some playfulness into your garden this spring. Take inspiration from the RHS No Adults Allowed garden at Chelsea, designed by children – a Chelsea first! It features a den, carnivorous plants, and even a water slide. Channel your inner child with bold colours, playful textures, and whimsical elements that bring a smile to your face. Remember, plants impact our mood, so choose wisely – ornamental grass for movement, roses for scent, and more.

Gardens for All: Don't have a plot of

your own? No worries! This year, there are plenty of options for urban gardeners. Explore balcony container gardens, portable raised beds, and vertical gardens. Attend the RHS's first-ever Urban Show in Manchester this April for ideas.

Guerilla gardening (planting in public spaces) is also gaining popularity. Check out the Garden Organic's Growing Buddies scheme, empowering housing association tenants to green up shared community spaces.

Potty for Pots: Container gardening saw a 200% increase last year, with more households engaging in it. Sarah Raven's book, A Year Full of Pots, offers endless possibilities for pot gardening. Get creative with



containers – from terracotta pots to hanging baskets. Plant colourful flowers, herbs, or even small vegetables. The versatility of pots allows you to experiment and create mini gardens wherever you like.

Blossom Displays and Pruning: Spring is the perfect time to create stunning blossom displays. Plant flowering trees like cherry, apple, or pear for a burst of colour. Prune winter-damaged

shrubs and trees to encourage healthy growth. Remove dead wood and shape plants as needed. Remember to check specific pruning requirements for different species.

Mowing the Lawn: As temperatures rise, your lawn will start growing. Begin regular mowing, but avoid cutting too short. Aim for a height of around 2.5 to 3 inches. Regular mowing encourages thick, healthy grass.

Planting Bulbs:

Spring-flowering bulbs like daffodils, tulips, and crocuses should be planted in autumn, but if you missed the boat, consider buying potted bulbs and planting them now. They'll still bloom beautifully.

Weeding and Feeding: Tackle weeds early to prevent them from taking over. Apply a balanced fertilizer to boost plant growth.

Soil Preparation: Improve soil structure by adding organic matter. Compost, well-rotted manure, or leaf mould will enrich the soil and enhance plant health.

Wildlife-Friendly Gardening: Create habitats for bees, butterflies, and other pollinators. Plant nectar-rich flowers and provide water sources.

Start Sowing: Sow seeds of hardy annuals directly into the soil.

These include poppies, cornflowers, and calendula. They'll bloom later in the season.

Prune Roses: Prune hybrid tea roses and floribunda roses to encourage new growth and better flowering.

Divide Perennials: Divide overcrowded perennials like hostas, daylilies, and irises. Replant the divisions for healthier plants.

Spring Cleaning: Clear debris, dead leaves, and fallen twigs. A tidy garden looks more inviting.

Remember, gardening is not just about aesthetics – it's about connecting with nature, improving mental well-being, and contributing to a healthier planet. So, put on your gardening gloves, grab your trowel, and let's welcome spring with open arms!

TIPS FOR A CHILD-FRIENDLY LIVING SPACE

Having a home you can be proud to show off is no mean feat when you have young children.

You want a clutter-free, organised, relaxing space, but the kids probably have other ideas.

Well with some smart purchases and clever storage solutions, you can achieve a style that

evokes serenity and calm, even if your real life is far from it. Here are some tips and tricks to help create a child-friendly living space.

For walls, consider darker colours instead of lighter ones, especially on lower surface areas that are prone to scuffs, knocks and could be used as a canvas for a potential crayon masterpiece. Choose a hard-wearing interior paint that is scuff-resistant, wipeable and up

to ten times more durable than standard matt emulsion. For floors, opt for laminate and wooden flooring in high-traffic areas. When choosing carpets for living rooms, similarly, consider darker colours as they will show the least amount of stains. There's now a full range of child-friendly carpets available, many of which also come with stain-resistance as an added bonus.

When choosing a sofa,

large corner styles are ideal for family living spaces. Leather sofas are particularly child-friendly as they look smart, classic and most importantly can wipe-clean. Some fabric sofas also come with a Staingard service to protect your fabric sofas in the likely event of spills and scuffs.

Storage boxes and tables are perfect for hiding all those toys and clutter. In one full sweep, you can collect a whole



heap of toys and pretend they don't exist with the simple close of a lid..

Pretty throws and accessories will give you a polished finish and help draw the eye away from any potential mess. Think about contemporary patterns and textures in a range of complementary colours. Blankets and throws are warming and welcoming (and they're also useful for hiding spills on sofas and chairs where needed)..

Your hallway is the first thing you see when

you walk in the door, and for most families, this will involve a display of strewn coats, wellies, sporting gear, school bags and books. Look for clever storage that can fit into the space under your, resulting in a clutter-free hallway, freeing up floor space and removing obstacles – which is especially useful if you have to manoeuvre prams and car seats through the hallway.

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WHAT IS THE BEST CITY IN NORTHERN IRELAND TO BUY A HOME IN?

Bangor is the least affordable city in Northern Ireland to own a home in. Meanwhile, Lisburn offers the best work-life balance in the country.

On a national level, five cathedral cities top the list of UK cities with the least disposable incomes after paying their basic bills and mortgage rates. Among bigger UK cities, Bath is the least affordable place to own a home in in England; Newport – in Wales; Bangor – in Northern Ireland; and Edinburgh – in Scotland. Newcastle is the #1 UK city that leaves homeowners with the most disposable income. In Scotland, this is Aberdeen; in Northern Ireland – Lisburn; in Wales – Wrexham.

UK-based data collection experts at SmartSurvey reveal how much disposable income two average-earning homeowners living and working in every UK city would have after paying their basic household bills and mortgage rate. The study evaluates and compares median property prices and median PAYE earnings, as well as gas, electricity, water and council tax bills in 73 cities across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The mortgage rates are calculated equally, based on a 10%



deposit and a fixed 5% interest rate over 25 years. Which Northern Ireland cities are least and most affordable for homeowners? Bangor is the least affordable city in Northern Ireland, largely due to having the highest bills (£418) and home prices (£245,000). Median earnings of £1,985 are not proportional to the costs of owning a home in Bangor. After paying their mortgage

rate and basic bills, two average-earning homeowners here would have £1,844 to spare for other expenses every month. This is the lowest disposable income of all Northern Ireland cities and £626 below the next least affordable city, Newry.

People in Lisburn enjoy the best work-life balance of all city dwellers in Northern Ireland. Despite having the second most expensive homes in Northern Ireland (203,161), salaries are the best here (£2,298). Average homeowners living and working in Lisburn can pay their monthly utilities and mortgage and still have nearly £3,000 every month to cover any other household costs.

The median price for a city home in the UK is £260,000. City residents generally earn £2,154 a month. Their gas, electricity, water and council tax (or “rates” in Northern Ireland) bills amount to £348 every month, while mortgage rates are estimated at £1,520. This leaves two average-earning city homeowners with £2,440 in disposable income every month to cover all their other household costs.

THINGS YOUR HOUSEHOLD INSURANCE MAY NOT COVER

As your home is probably the biggest, most expensive asset you will ever own, it’s a good idea to protect it in any way possible.

This might involve buying CCTV cameras, burglar alarms and in some areas even window shutters, and most certainly will involve signing on the dotted line on home insurance.

The right policy will help you to pick up the pieces should an emergency occur, but it’s also important to be aware of the things that aren’t covered, many current policies don’t cover for accidental damage.

All too often, people forget to read the small print and only find out they don’t have adequate protection when they come to make a claim, so here are five things your insurance probably won’t cover you for:

1. Fences, gates and moveable property
2. Structural maintenance
3. Damp
4. Blocked drains
5. Leaking pipes

Believe it or not, fences, gates and other moveable property are not protected in most home insurance policies, so if bad weather is due it’s essential to batten down the hatches to ensure extensive damage does not occur. All loose objects including outside furniture and gardening tools should be locked away and repairs to broken gates must be made in good time to ensure they’re not made worse in poor conditions.

Many homeowners presume that their insurance policy will cover any structural maintenance that needs to take place on their property – but this is simply not the case.

Many insurers do not count standard or long-term wear and tear such as loose roof tiles or a crumbling wall as claimable, meaning you’ll probably have to foot the bill yourself.



Of course, if lightning strikes and damage is caused this would be seen as a definable event and one which most insurers would cover, but always read the fine print before make presumptions.

While many insurance companies will pay out in the event of a flood – although expect to pay high premiums if you live in a flood prone area – they will not always cover the cost of damp maintenance. Regular damp caused by poor insulation, for instance, is one of the most common exclusions on insurance policies giving many homeowners a headache when they realise they’re responsible for treating the damp.

Not only are blocked drains stinky and annoying, they’re also not usually covered by home insurance. This is because a blockage is often caused by people putting the wrong things down toilets and sinks, and therefore many insurance companies aren’t prepared to pay out for such general maintenance. The good news is there are many ways to unblock drains yourself from using a good old toilet plunger and a bit of elbow grease to throwing three large tablespoons of baking soda down the sink followed by several glugs of vinegar – the chemical reaction of which gets rid of any gunk that’s built up over time.

If the water pipes in your home are old they may rust and leak. If you notice water dripping from your water system, you might be tempted to jump on the phone to your insurance company, but it’s wise to read the details of your insurance policy first. This is because leaking pipes, which have simply deteriorated, are often just considered a generic maintenance issue and are not worthy of a pay out. That said, if the leak has occurred due to a floor, landslide, earthquake or other natural disaster, you might be covered.

Taking out home insurance is a great way to safeguard your property, but be aware that every policy has exclusions limiting what you can and can’t claim for.

Disclaimer: This is a collaborative article and always read your insurance policy terms and conditions.



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