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Representatives from six partner local authorities were recently updated on the significant progress being made on the £1bn Belfast Region City Deal.

SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS BEING MADE ON BELFAST REGION CITY DEAL PROJECTS

Representatives from six partner local authorities were updated recently on the significant progress being made on the £1bn Belfast Region City Deal.

Hosted recently at Belfast City Hall, the Council Panel meeting was followed by a Belfast Stories site visit.

Planning is approved for the Factory of the Future site at Global Point, Newtownabbey, and the contract for pre-construction

has been awarded for this key component of the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre.

Studio Ulster construction is progressing at pace at Giant's Park, Belfast, and appointment of a supplier for equipment design,

development, supply, and installation is underway. The cutting-edge virtual production facility will be operated by Ulster University, via Studio Ulster Ltd.

Queen's University is now awarding a contract

for the iREACH Health pre-construction phase, submitted its planning application for the Lisburn Road site, and is progressing work on site acquisition.

Continued on page 4

Public invited to get involved

Belfast City Council is inviting people to come along to info events during February to find out how they can get involved in its Belfast 2024 programme.

Residents can call into drop-in information events from 5-15 February to hear how they can become part of the city's biggest ever celebration of culture and creativity: A Belfast 2024 open day will also be held at 2 Royal Avenue in Belfast city centre on Thursday 29 February, 10am-5pm.

Residents can sign up to the Belfast 2024 mailing list at a new website - www.belfast2024.co.uk - or follow the Belfast 2024 social media channels on Facebook (@belfast2024) and Instagram (@belfast2024) for the latest on projects and initiatives.

At the heart of the Belfast 2024 programme is a series of ambitious projects developed by our creatives, in partnership with citizens across the city, and selected following an open call to the city's cultural sector in 2023.

They include a biodiversity initiative with communities (Wild Belfast), a sustainable fashion, learning and events hub, with a flexible membership-based arts community (Show Some Love Green House), a musical celebration of the Townsend Street interface area with Ulster Orchestra and a collaborative growing initiative with artists and gardeners based around Black Mountain Shared Space in west Belfast (Guerrilla Walls).

Each project will be shaped by the input of participants, creating a rich and diverse tapestry of creative outputs across the year, which could include film, poetry, public art, dance, nature, gaming, music and theatre.

For more information about Belfast 2024, visit www.belfast2024.co.uk

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Belfast City Council and NICVA partner to explore inclusive employment

Over 200 delegates gathered at Ulster University's Belfast campus recently to explore how Belfast can address economic inactivity and achieve a truly inclusive labour market.

Delivered by partners Belfast City Council, NICVA and the Belfast Labour Market Partnership, with funding from the Department for Communities, the event explored the causes of economic inactivity, what needs to change in employment support to meet current and future challenges, how health and employment services might work better together; and how skills and employment services can be more aligned.

Belfast Lord Mayor Councillor Ryan Murphy said: "This stunning Ulster University campus represents the level of ambition we all have for Belfast. And through The Belfast Agenda, we've committed to growing the economy in a way that's truly inclusive, making sure that people can reach their full potential.

"Addressing economic inactivity is undoubtedly a complex, multi-layered challenge and there won't be a quick fix, but we know that a collaborative approach will deliver a shared solution - and



therefore a better outcome. The crux of inclusive employment is helping people find jobs and helping businesses and organisations find people. Today is an important first step towards doing that more effectively."

Andy Haldane, Chief Executive, Royal Society of Arts delivered the keynote presentation: "People Make Places: inclusive labour markets at the heart of successful towns and cities." Marguerite Shannon, Senior Economist, UUEPC, and Tony Wilson, Director, Institute for

Employment Studies also presented recent findings and there was panel discussion with Celine McStravick (NICVA), Paddy Rooney (Department for Communities), Moira Doherty (Department for Economy) and Suzanne Wylie (NI Chamber).

There were also breakout sessions on health, welfare reform, skills, and resourcing, with feedback provided by session chairs Dr John Kelly, Ursula O'Hare, Richard Kirk, and Kristel Miller.

Delegates discussed how

our health and employment services might work together better, lessons learned about delivering effective personal support, upskilling, local-level interventions that could be scaled up, and what new support programmes might look like.

For more information on Belfast City Council's employability and skills support, including Employment Academies and the Gateway To Choices (G2C) service, visit www.belfastcity.gov.uk/employability

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HUB-IN FUNDING BRINGS INNOVATIVE VISITOR EXPERIENCES TO BELFAST'S MARITIME MILE

£120,000 of funding has been awarded to six proposals from Belfast's creative and digital businesses, artists and innovators to develop innovative visitor experiences to animate and enrich the city's Maritime Mile.

They will collaborate with heritage organisations and communities along the Maritime Mile to develop prototypes which use technologies such as augmented reality, virtual reality, and artificial

intelligence, to encourage more visitors and local people to explore the historic area which connects attractions, sculptures and viewing points on both sides of the River Lagan.

The projects are being supported by the Belfast HUB-IN (Hub of Innovation) programme, developed by Belfast City Council's City Innovation Office in partnership with the Maritime Belfast Trust and funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 initiative, to explore how digital innovation can help to sustain, enhance, and preserve the Maritime Mile's rich and unique heritage.

The successful applicants are being supported to develop a series of prototypes:

Aura Digital Studios Limited - will create an Augmented Reality experience highlighting HMS Caroline's heritage. The free-to-download mobile app will give a fascinating glimpse into the lives of the people who worked on this First World War ship through

WebXR, 3D animation and storytelling.

Big Telly Theatre Company - will develop a digital and live interactive experience along the Maritime Mile. The adventure will begin at The Big Fish sculpture where visitors can talk to an AI Salmon of Knowledge, before engaging with live performers and 3D holographic experiences at City Quays, St Joseph's Church, and Sailortown. Community partners include Belfast based artist Corrina Askin, The America Bar and Sailortown Regeneration.

Darin Smyth - Darin Smyth, in partnership with Belfast Metropolitan College, will develop a new immersive digital experience, Maritime Echoes: An AI Voyage to the Past, bringing local historical figures to life using the latest AI technology. Visitors will be able to engage in 'conversations' with pioneer of Belfast shipbuilding William Ritchie; chairman of Harland and Wolff during the Titanic era Lord Pirrie;



social reformer Mary Ann McCracken; Captain Henry Ralph Crooke, who led HMS Caroline during the Battle of Jutland; and a linen mill worker from the early 20th century.

Flax & Teal - will develop interactive 3D/VR rooms along the Maritime Mile, giving visitors a lens into the generations who shaped the area. They'll work with the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) and local communities to develop new 2D and 3D experiences, using images,

video, audio, and historic maps to tell local stories.

Katya Solomatina - will develop 'Memory Anchors', a fine art initiative designed to engage people of all ages to discover new ways of expressing feelings through interactive digital sculpture and storytelling.

The artist will collaborate with the Sailortown community on digital sculpting, AI-driven verbal art, photogrammetry and NeRF scanning (extracting 3D information from 2D images), sound recording,

and improvisational storytelling to create immersive art pieces.

Ulster Touring Opera - will work with EastSide Partnership and Whitepot Studios to develop a new immersive experience along the Yardman's Trail using cutting edge technology such as 3D film, AI and Augmented Reality.

The Yardman's Trail celebrates the heritage links between east Belfast and the Maritime Mile, and visitors will be able to download a free app and

experience residents telling their stories about the area.

Visit www.belfastcity.gov.uk/XRBelfast and www.smartbelfast.city for updates.

The Belfast HUB-IN project is part of a €7.9 million European initiative that aims to transform historic urban areas through innovation and spread public benefits from urban regeneration. It's funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 869429.

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Continued from page 1

It's also working to launch its Global Innovation Institute Advisory Board. The outline business case for Ulster University's Centre for Digital Healthcare Technology (CDHT) has received approval from the Department for Economy and is currently being reviewed by the Department of Finance.

Mid and East Antrim's i4c Cleantech Centre at St Patrick's Barracks has received outline business case approval and an Integrated Consultant Team will soon be appointed.

Belfast City Council has secured £3.8m

funding to support the Belfast Region as a 5G Innovation Region and has signed a contract for almost £1m to deliver the 'Augment the City' SME challenge competition launching in March. The outline business case for the Design Smarter: Digital Twin Centre led by Digital Catapult has also been approved. The £7.5m Digital Transformation Flexible Fund project involving all 11 councils, led by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council has also been launched.

Funding contracts are in place for the Carrickfergus, Newry City Centre and Bangor Waterfront regeneration projects and an outline

business case has been approved for The Gobbins Phase 2, with work progressing to agree a funding contract in the next month.

Meanwhile, procurement of design teams for Bangor Waterfront, Destination Royal Hillsborough and the Mourne Mountain Gateway visitor experience are progressing well. Design development is underway on Belfast Stories and Carrickfergus Regeneration.

Feasibility studies are being completed on Belfast Rapid Transit Phase 2 extensions to Glengormley and Carryduff and work is underway to determine city centre routes to align

with the Eastern Transport Plan, Bolder Vision for Belfast and proposed public realm projects.

Public consultation on the proposed Newry Southern Relief Road opens this spring and procurement for a Lagan Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge design and build contractor will get underway in late 2024.

Work is also progressing on a skills assessment to understand the labour and skills implications of the Belfast Region City Deal investments, including the Advanced Manufacturing and Creative Industries sectors.

For more information, go to www.belfastregioncitydeal.co.uk

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Transforming four Belfast urban spaces: from grey to green

Almost £115,000 is being invested in making the city greener as part of A Bolder Vision for Belfast, thanks to Belfast City Council and the Department for Infrastructure Blue Green Infrastructure fund.

Belfast City Council's 'Grey to Green' initiative invited the city's businesses, social enterprises, charities, and schools to submit expressions of interest in a fund to support temporary green projects in the city centre, and the successful applicants have now been confirmed.

The Conservation Volunteers has been granted meanwhile use of a section of the Belfast Stories site on Royal Avenue to develop a publicly accessible community garden, using polytunnels, raised planters and vegetable beds for a period of around 18 months.

During this time, the environmental charity will also deliver an extensive engagement programme, working with range of minority groups, including adults and young people struggling with mental health issues.

Dave Morton Director for NI and Scotland, The Conservation Volunteers added: "We welcome this exciting opportunity to work alongside community and council partners on the transformative Grey to Green initiative. The Conservation Volunteers have been connecting communities with green



spaces across NI for several decades and know firsthand the value that a connection to nature brings for physical and mental wellbeing.

The Belfast Stories site off Royal Avenue perfectly lends itself to the development of a shared community space, where we can work with all our local stakeholders to ensure the benefits of Grey to Green have a long and lasting reach."

Killultagh Estates is creating a Living Wall at 32-38 Linenhall Street; a vertical greening project on the façade of a prominent nine storey office building, in the heart of Belfast city centre.

Maritime Belfast Trust will deliver the Queen's Quay Greening Project, transforming a vacant area of land into an attractive green space through planting and helping to improve connectivity and wayfinding on the Maritime Mile.

And Belfast South Community Resources will be creating 'Sandy Glade' on a derelict site at the corner of Sandy Row and Wellwood Street, planting a glade of native trees and pollinator shrubs and a living green wall, landscaping the glade with ornamental sand and gravel areas.

Belfast City Council's 'Grey to Green' initiative

follows a call for expressions of interest to Belfast based small businesses, community groups and schools to create a temporary city centre social farm or garden for a period of around 18 months.

The demonstrator project on a section of the Belfast Stories site forms a key action arising from last August's Belfast Healthy Cities 'Greening the City' workshop and are part of the 'Greening the City' Advisory Group's ongoing work.

For further information, go to www.belfastcity.gov.uk/greytogreen and www.belfastcity.gov.uk/boldervision

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Ashley Currie (right of photo) receiving an award at the 2023 NI Staff Nursing Care Awards for 'Creative Use of the Environment'

CONGRATULATIONS

ASHLEY CURRIE
Registered Manager
Nazareth House Care Village.

Nazareth House Care Village is pleased to commend and thank our colleague and Registered Manager Ashley Currie on the excellent and inspirational leadership in ensuring high standards is maintained.

These high standards have also been commented on in the latest unannounced RQIA Medicines Management Inspection held during October 2023. The Report states the 'Review of medicines management found that robust arrangements were in place for the safe management of medicines. Medicine records and medicine related care plans were well maintained. There were effective auditing processes in place to ensure that staff were trained and competent to manage medicines and residents were administered their medicines as prescribed. No new areas for improvement were identified'. Based on the inspection findings and discussions held, RQIA were satisfied that Nazareth House Care Village is providing safe and effective care in a caring and compassionate manner; and that the service is well led by the management team regarding the management of medicines. Ashley and her skilled team place our residents and their loved ones at the centre of all decision making and ensures that the Village is a 'Home from Home'. Well done Ashley for the excellent leadership and compassionate approach that is so obvious.

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BRINGING VIBRANCY TO BELFAST CITY CENTRE

2024 is off to a promising start for three Belfast businesses, thanks to funding from Belfast City Council.

They join 15 other successful Vacant to Vibrant applicants, all breathing new life into Belfast city centre and re-energising a number of vacant city centre units. And there are many more bringing their business

right into the heart of Belfast – ranging from retail to beauty and food and beverage offerings. A key project in Belfast City Council’s Future City Centre Programme, the Vacant to Vibrant capital grant

scheme is all about creating a vibrant, unique, and thriving place where people spend time, live, work, study, visit and invest. Vacant to Vibrant is helping Belfast based independent business

Re:lettings Limited (which specialises in residential property lettings, management and maintenance) to relocate in a larger, more prominent unit at Forsythe House. Meanwhile, Absolute Hair and Beauty, another independent business operating in Belfast for over 30 years, is undertaking refurbishment works to the ground floor unit at 84 Castle Street to support long-term occupation following a short-term occupation, creating two additional employment opportunities and long-term security for the business. And food sales and distribution SME, North South Retail Ltd

has been awarded a Vacant to Vibrant grant to support the refurbishment of two vacant units to create a café and bakery in Great Northern Mall on Victoria Street. The £1 million pilot capital grant scheme is open to small businesses, independent retailers, social enterprises, and cultural and voluntary organisations until July 2024; aiming to incentivise both property owners and potential occupiers to bring vacant Belfast city centre spaces back into use, while supporting the city centre’s revitalisation and ensuring sustainable rates growth. Applicants on the scheme also benefit from wrap around support offered by council’s Enterprise and Business Growth team, providing resources to support the start-up or expansion



of the business or organisation, including one-to-one mentoring and workshops to help with growth and long-term sustainability. As part of the council’s wider programme to tackle vacancy, and to

support the Vacant to Vibrant scheme, council also provides a matchmaking service through a partnership approach with commercial agent Frazer Kidd, linking businesses with potential units,

with the opportunity to access capital funding through the scheme. Grants of up to £2.5k are available for pop-up ground floor use (minimum four months), up to £15k for active floor usage up to 150m², and up to

£25k for active floor usage over 151m². For more information on how to make an application, go to www.belfastcity.gov.uk/vacanttovibrant or email the team at vacanttovibrant@belfastcity.gov.uk



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Schoolchildren meet Scottish poet Robert Burns

Local primary schoolchildren and their teachers met Robert ‘Rabbie’ Burns in Belfast recently- in a special celebration of the life and works of the Scottish poet and lyricist.

The event was part of Burns Week organised by the Ulster-Scots Agency in partnership with Belfast City

Council. Belfast has a strong historical connection to Ulster-Scots and a unique relationship with

Robert ‘Rabbie’ Burns. It was the first place outside Scotland where his work was published and was





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home to members of his family and close friends. One of the world’s oldest Burns clubs – the Belfast Burns Club - was established 151 years ago and Belfast is home of the largest collection of Burns material in the world outside Scotland, which is held at the Linen Hall Library.

Northern Ireland leads the way for life-saving skills in the UK

Northern Ireland is leading the way for life-saving skills in the UK as figures from the British Heart Foundation (BHF) revealed recently that almost three-quarters of adults here (74 per cent) have learnt CPR and almost all (96 per cent) believe it's an important skill to learn.

Scotland followed closely with 71 per cent of adults having the skills to save a life, Wales at 68 per cent and respondents from England lagging behind at 58 per cent. Respondents from Northern Ireland are also the most confident at performing CPR (63%), followed by Wales (60%), Scotland (59%) and then England (57%)2.

The nationally representative survey suggests that there are still around 350,000 adults in Northern Ireland who are yet to learn the skills to save a life. The figures have been revealed as the British Heart Foundation (BHF) has made a UK-wide appeal to learn CPR during Heart Month in February, with the message to help protect the heart of someone you love. With around 80 per cent of out-of-hospital cardiac arrests happening in the home, you're often likely to perform CPR on a loved one.

A survey which was carried out for the BHF by Censuswide, also suggests generational differences in CPR awareness in Northern Ireland with the Millennial Generation (aged 27-42) leading by example with 83% having learnt CPR compared to 61% of Baby Boomers (aged 59-77).



The life of Belfast born Steve Bond, 61 was saved by his wife Andrea when she performed lifesaving CPR for 13 minutes after he had a cardiac arrest.

There are over 1,400 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests every year in Northern Ireland. Tragically, less than one in ten people survive, a statistic the BHF is determined to improve by giving everyone the opportunity to learn CPR.

Performing quick CPR and defibrillation in the event of a cardiac arrest can be the difference between life and death.

The charity's free and innovative online training tool RevivR can teach CPR and the correct steps of defibrillator use in just 15 minutes. Quick CPR and defibrillation can more than double the chances of survival.

The BHF is now urging the public to learn CPR for free in just 15 minutes – using its online tool,

RevivR. The tool means anyone can learn lifesaving CPR skills, anywhere, anytime – and all that is needed is a mobile phone and a cushion.

RevivR teaches you how to recognise a cardiac arrest, gives feedback on chest compressions and outlines the correct steps of using a defibrillator, giving anyone the confidence to step in and help to save a life.

Fearghal McKinney, Head of the British Heart Foundation Northern Ireland, said:

"It is reassuring that nearly three quarters of people surveyed in Northern Ireland have been trained in CPR and the majority feel confident using it. However, our mission during Heart Month

is to further increase those figures.

"Every moment matters when someone has a cardiac arrest, and being able to step in and perform CPR could be the difference between life and death. A cardiac arrest can affect anyone, at any time, so we want as many people to learn CPR as possible.

"With our tool RevivR, all you need to learn how to save a life is a spare 15 minutes, a phone and a cushion. Give it a try during your next coffee or lunch break – it could help you save a life, a loved one."

To support the British Heart Foundation this Heart Month and find out more about RevivR, visit bhf.org.uk/heartmonth. To try RevivR, go to bhf.org.uk/revivr

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Belfast athletes achieve oat-standing results

Young athletes from across County Antrim have topped the leaderboard at the third round of the Flahavan's Primary School Cross Country League, which took place at Six Mile Water Park, Ballyclare, at the beginning of February.

Topping the leaderboard in the first girls' race of the day was Eloise McAuley from St MacNissi's Primary School, Newtownabbey, followed by Aoife Burke from St Bride's Primary School, Belfast, in second place and Evie Fawcett from Antrim Primary School in third.

In the first boys' race of the day, Downshire Primary School pupils topped the podium, with Max Welby and Robbie Sterritt finishing in first and second place respectively, followed by Harry Davidson from Thompson Primary School, Ballyclare in third place.

Cillian McLoughlin from St Michael's Primary School, Belfast, was first to cross the finish line in the second boys' race, followed by Tom McMurray from

Inchmarlo Prep School, Belfast, in second place and Leo McClinton from Wallace Prep School, Lisburn, in third.

The pupils have also been competing in teams of six to collect points for their respective schools in order to qualify for the final, with St Bride's Primary School, Moneynick Primary School, and St Mary's Primary School, gaining the top spots in the first girls' team race of the day. Pupils from St Michael's Primary School, St Aloysius Primary School, and Pond Park Primary School helped lead their team to victory in the second girls' team race of the day.

The top three schools in the first boys' team race were Downshire Primary School, Riverdale Primary School, and St Bride's Primary School, Belfast, with St Michael's Primary School, Belfast, Campbell College Junior School, Cabinhill, and Wallace Prep School, Lisburn achieving top points in the subsequent boys' team race.



L-R; Tom McMurray, 2nd, Cillian McLoughlin, 1st, Leo McClinton, 3rd

The successful athletes are gearing up to take place in the final round later this month at Mallusk Playing Fields. The top 20 girls and top 20 boys will be invited to join the Flahavan's Athletics Northern Ireland Junior Endurance Squad, a fantastic opportunity which will provide training sessions for the athletes over the next 12 months to support with their personal development.

The 2023-2024 league has been represented by County Down native and Flahavan's ambassador Hannah Gilliland, who has been

providing her top tips and advice to the young athletes throughout the league. Following the final, Hannah will also pay a visit to the winning schools to meet and greet the young athletes starting out on their exciting athletic careers.

For further information on the league, please contact Athletics NI at info@athleticsni.org or 028 9060 2707.

To learn more about Flahavan's full range of products, follow @Flahavans on Facebook and Instagram

THE KING OF THE FOREST

That would be the mighty oak. But what makes oak trees mighty, or even 'Kings'?



Well, the 'King' question has a simple answer: people like to name things that they love, and oaks are truly beloved muscular and dominant trees.

They have been around for a very long time, following in the footsteps of pioneer trees such as birch and juniper after the last Ice Age, adapting and evolving along the way. An oak can live for 500 to 1000 years, and it seems that they are adapting and evolving for the future. Research has shown that mature oaks should be able to increase their rate of photosynthesis (how

they create 'food' for themselves) by up to a third in response to the expected 30% increase in CO2 levels; that's critical as we, and they, face up to the effects of global warming.

But they're not just here to be admired for how they look or continue to evolve or be used for making furniture or building sailing ships as in the past; they are critical to nature itself.

Oak trees support more wildlife than any other native tree; birds such as jays, and mammals such as badgers and squirrels love their acorns,

caterpillars eat their leaves, and in turn are food for tits. In fact, 326 species of wildlife are found on oak trees. And their bark, which has vertical ridges and grooves that channel rainwater to the ground, provide the perfect place for many mosses, lichens and liverworts, as well as a happy hunting ground for treecreepers, woodpeckers and all the rest.

It will not always be obvious, but there are two kinds of oak in Britain and Ireland, the Pedunculate (Common or English) oak and the Sessile (Irish)

oak. There are slight differences in the leaves and particularly in how they bear acorns (Common/English on long stems, Irish in clusters on short stalks attached directly to the outer twigs), but they are mixed up all over these islands, both serving mankind and nature, and if any tree should be singled out for particular attention, then it seems appropriate to call them Kings of the Forest.

Sometimes the beech tree is called the Queen of the Woods, but that's a story for another day... JVA

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COUNCILS JOIN TO DELIVER A ‘STAY WARM STAY SAFE’ CAMPAIGN ACROSS LOCAL COMMUNITIES

From worn-out hot water bottles to poorly stored electric blankets, keeping warm in our homes can pose several significant hazards you may not be aware of.

Each year dozens of accidents and fires lead to serious injuries caused by the incorrect use of common household items.

To help highlight the dangers of heating and electrical devices Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council is leading on a cross-council ‘Stay Warm Stay Safe’ campaign. It is being funded by the Office of Product Safety & Standards (OPSS).

As part of the ‘Stay Warm Stay Safe’ campaign, this council partnership has produced guidance on safety tips and checks to help eliminate risks in the home. It focuses on the key areas of:

- electrical blankets/heated throws
- hot-water bottles
- overloaded electrical sockets



- electrical chargers
 - portable heaters
- and how incorrectly using these products can pose a danger.

For further information or to request a home safety visit you can contact the council at ehhealth@lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk or telephone 028 9244 7397.

The councils involved in the ‘Stay Safe Stay Warm’ campaign alongside Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council are Armagh City, Banbridge &

Craigavon Borough Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, Belfast City Council, Ards and North Down Borough Council, Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.

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- ◆ Live-in care
- ♥ Home help

KEEP WARM STAY SAFE AT HOME



SAFE USE OF ELECTRIC BLANKET /HEATED THROW.

Whilst an electric blanket / heated throw can be a cost-effective way of keeping warm, important to use them with care, following the advice below;

Buy a new electric blanket at least every 10 years from a reputable seller. Never buy one second hand.

Look out for worn or frayed fabric, scorch marks, exposed wires, damage to the cord and soiling. Listen out for buzzing from the control unit. Any blanket not in good condition, needs replaced.

Always follow the manufacturer's instructions.

Never use an electric blanket and hot water bottle at the same time. This is particularly important if using an air flow mattress or emollient creams.

Keep blanket flat. Protect wiring during storage by rolling. Don't store anything on top of it. Keep in a dry place.

Ensure to unplug the blanket before getting into bed, unless it has a safe thermostat setting for all night use.

Tie/secure the blanket in position using the tapes attached to it.

OVERLOADING ELECTRICAL SOCKETS

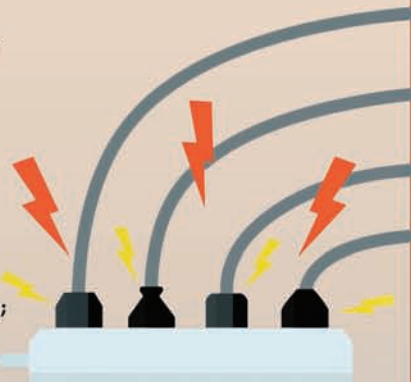
Too many appliances plugged into the same socket or extension lead, can result in overheating, and become a fire hazard.

Important to avoid overloading sockets by,

- Referring to manufacturer's guidelines.
- Checking the maximum current rating stated for the extension lead.
- Never plugging an extension lead into another extension lead.
- Electrical adaptors of any type must never be overloaded.

Check sockets and plugs regularly for danger signs eg;

- Sparks, smoke, blackness or scorch marks.
- Melted plastic, smell of hot plastic or burning.
- Damaged or frayed leads or visible coloured wire.
- Fuses that blow or circuit-breakers that operate for no obvious reason



LCCC
Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council

SAFE USE OF HOT WATER BOTTLES AND PORTABLE HEATERS

Recent accident figures indicate that as hot water bottle usage has increased, so too have burns and scalds To stay safe:

- Follow manufacturer's instructions.
 - Don't use boiling water, and don't overfill the bottle.
 - Avoid direct skin contact – place in its cover or wrap in a towel.
 - Rubber deteriorates over time; old hot water bottles can break and cause serious burns. Regularly check for signs of wear and tear and do not use hot water bottles more than two years old.
 - All bottles have a flower symbol to indicate year of manufacture.
 - A child's skin is 15 times thinner than an adult. Babies should never be given hot water bottles.
 - Skin may also be thinner due to ageing, lifestyle, and medication.
 - Hot water bottles are not suitable for everyone. Certain medical conditions can lead to loss of sensation, with people unaware they are being burned.
 - In case of burns or scalds seek medical attention.
- Insert image of portable heater

Whilst portable heaters can be cost effective, enabling the heating of just one room, be mindful that,

- Fires typically start when bedding or clothes are placed too close to heaters.
- People with mobility issues are especially at risk of tripping or falling onto a heater.
- Certain kinds of heater can present a carbon monoxide risk which can be fatal.

www.lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk

Age NI launches Good Vibrations to support mental health of older men

Age NI has launched a major new programme aimed at supporting the mental health and wellbeing of men in Northern Ireland aged over 50.

Age NI's Good Vibrations programme has been funded by Movember and is one of only 16 projects selected across the world for its 'Scaling What Works' Mental Health Grant funding.

The Movember-funded project has gained the support of the Northern Ireland Mental Health Champion, Professor Siobhan O'Neill, who said,

"The Department of Health's 10-year Mental Health Strategy recognises the need to prioritise early intervention. I welcome the focus of this project on males aged 50+, particularly those who are experiencing life transitions in work, relationships, as carers, or who are experiencing the effects of loneliness or social isolation. This project will provide a much-needed pathway for education, intervention and support for older men."

The Commissioner for Older People in Northern Ireland, Eddie Lynch, also commended the project, saying,

"Supporting the mental health of the older generation is something which needs more focus and Good Vibrations is a fantastic programme which



(l-r): Siobhan Casey, Director, Age NI, Eddie Lynch, Commissioner for Older People NI, Professor Siobhan O'Neill, NI Mental Health Champion and Sarah Ouellette, Country Manager, Ireland, Movember.

bridges a gap in services and support for older males, in order to help them meet specific challenges of later life. Planning for the third age is very important, but it can be a daunting and difficult transition for many people.

I'm supportive of any programme that seeks to support people through the various challenges that this transitional time can bring. I congratulate Age NI and all the partners involved in getting this comprehensive programme up and running."

Manager, Community and Workplace, Rhiannon Watt said,

"In order to make real and long-lasting change, it's a no brainer for us to fund programs which strengthen the impact of prevention models that are already operating in a real-world environment and enable them to scale successfully."

"With middle aged men and those in their older years feeling left behind, it's important that they receive access to support that is tailored to their circumstances and unique

challenges they face as they move through these phases in their lives.

"Here at Movember, we know that healthier men means a healthier world. That's why we're delighted to partner with AGE NI on their Good Vibrations programme in our ongoing endeavour to help change the face of men's health."

For more information on the Good Vibrations programme, or to request a copy of the Good Vibrations Men's Health Guide, visit www.age-ni.org/goodvibrations.

Step into Comfort: Feet Street Podiatry Puts Your Best Foot Forward

Nestled on the Cregagh Road, Feet Street Podiatry clinic was established by Andrea Jones (a former Podiatry lecturer) and offers an extensive range of foot health services.

With an unwavering commitment to improving the lives of patients, the skilled team of talented HCPC registered podiatrists will ensure your feet receive the care they deserve.

Feet Street offers a diverse range of services including:

1. Nail Surgery: From permanent removal of ingrown toenails to treatment of fungal infections, Feet Street will have your toenails looking and feeling healthy in no time!

2. Biomechanics: Understanding how your feet move is crucial to maintaining overall health. The clinic's biomechanics experts will analyse your gait and help you address any issues that may be causing discomfort or pain.

3. Pressure Plate Gait Analysis: Feet Street are proud to offer state-of-the-art pressure plate gait analysis. This advanced technology allows assessment of your walking pattern in detail

to tailor treatment plans to your specific needs.

4. 3D Printed Bespoke Insoles: Say goodbye to uncomfortable off-the-shelf insoles. Feet Street's 3D printed Phits+ bespoke insoles are designed specifically for your feet, providing unmatched support and comfort.

5. SWIFT Verruca Treatment: Verrucas can be stubborn, but Feet Street has got the solution! The cutting-edge technology of SWIFT uses microwave energy to target and eliminate verrucas quickly and effectively.

6. Core Podiatry Care: Feet Street offers all the essential podiatry services you've come to rely on, from nail care, to corn removal, or managing hard skin.

And in exciting news, Feet Street are gearing up to offer Shockwave Therapy treatment for musculoskeletal injuries!

Gift vouchers for the clinic are available



online and make perfect Easter and Mother's Day presents. If you haven't experienced Feet Street, or would like to treat a loved one to healthy

happy feet, now is the ideal time!

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We also welcome four acts to the island for the very first time – Jasmine Myra and her seven piece band, Luke Bacchus Quartet, Scottish trio AKU!, and French trailblazers



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afternoons are well and truly covered!

As always, you can pay per ticket or take advantage of our ridiculously good value Full Festival Ticket, giving access to all 11 gigs for £45 (limited

number available).

So come along and get your fill of truly incredible music. See you at the front!

For more info See: www.brilliantcornersbelfast.com

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Direct Belfast – Glasgow Express now departing from Belfast, Europa Bus Station.

An award-winning service offering hassle-free travel with very generous baggage allowance, HANNON Coach & Sail is ideal for spring shopping in Glasgow and the perfect antidote to flying and airport stress! Already hugely popular with those in the know, the Belfast – Glasgow Express Coach Service is rated 5-Star on TripAdvisor.

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

Not just shopping, Glasgow is also famous for its fantastic nightlife, and great choice of restaurants and bars. Glasgow is the perfect choice for your next city break away.

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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.

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2024 Vitality Membership Lisburn Half Marathon, 10K Road Race and Fun Run

Entries are now open for the 2024 Vitality Membership Lisburn Half Marathon, 10K Road Race and Fun Run and with an extra day of training this leap year, there's really no excuse not to get involved!

Mark your calendars for Wednesday 19 June 2024, when the popular event will once again take place starting from Lagan Valley LeisurePlex.

Runners can sign up online from today and avail of an early-bird entry rate until 30th April 2024. Early registration is strongly advised, following the 2023 event which sold out.

With the New Year not long past, it's the perfect time to set a fitness goal and with a trio of races to choose from, there really is something for everyone on the night.

The Half Marathon and 10K Road Race, with their flat and fast routes, offer ideal opportunities for individuals hoping to progress to longer distance running or striving towards a personal best.

The 3K Fun Run offers family and friends the

opportunity to come together and complete a fitness journey of their own. Schools and youth groups are encouraged to take part and avail of a group discount all whilst getting active.

Events are inclusive and are open to wheelchair and hand cycle participants.

Launching the event, the Mayor of Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council, Councillor Andrew Gowan said, "The council is delighted to launch the 2024 Lisburn Half Marathon, 10K Road Race and Fun Run. The event is a firm favourite in the sporting calendar and continues to be recognised as a popular fixture amongst runners from across Northern Ireland and beyond. The 2023 event saw huge numbers taking to the streets of Lisburn resulting in the races selling

out.

"Given that 2024 is a leap year, I would urge you all to take advantage of an extra day's training, set yourselves a challenge and sign up for the Vitality Membership Lisburn Half Marathon, 10K Road Race and Fun Run.

With proceeds from all three events supporting the Mayoral Charity, it really is a great occasion to get moving together."

Councillor Thomas Beckett, Chair of the Communities and Wellbeing Committee, added, "The Half Marathon, 10K Road Race and Fun Run have been firm favourites with runners and families for over 40 years now. This year's event is once again being sponsored by the council's Vitality Membership package, which offers individuals and families a



diverse range of activities, sessions in multiple facilities, encouraging those of all generations to look after their health and wellbeing. Following the success of the 2023 'Ditch the Tee and Plant a Tree' initiative, participants will have the option to plant a tree instead of receiving a race t-shirt, highlighting the council's sustainability objectives and allowing those involved to make a lasting contribution to the environment.

"I would like to encourage everyone to sign up today for the Half Marathon, 10K or Fun Run on 19 June and look forward to seeing many of you there on the night."

For further information or to register for the Half Marathon, 10K Road Race or Fun Run, visit www.lisburnhalfmarathon.com. To avail of our early bird rates, sign up online before 30th April 2024. Details can also be found on the Council's Sports Development Facebook page, 'Be Active, Stay Active Lisburn Castlereagh.

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One Step Ahead

"Not just podiatrists, we are Foot Medics™"

From humble beginnings, the first Foot Medic™ clinic was founded in Glasgow in 2009 by podiatrist Ciaran Canney and since then, Foot Medic™ Glasgow has grown to a multiple award winning nationwide network of clinics, developing a noteworthy reputation for clinical excellence and innovation.

In 2020, friend and fellow podiatrist Damian Murray remodelled his Cardiff clinics in-line with Foot Medic™ Glasgow to prove that the systems of one successful clinic could be replicated in another. This was the start of what would become the Foot Medic™ Group.

Ciaran told EDA Media: "Covid was a turning point for us. Ironically, through streamlining, embracing technology and investing in the right areas we were able to become profitable at a time when other clinics were in turmoil."

In just 2 years the 'model' was replicated in 11 clinics to provide the highest standards of consistent, reliable, and effective foot & ankle care throughout the UK and Ireland.

Foot Medic now has Clinics in Glasgow, Cardiff, Gateshead, and of course, locally at Royal Hillsborough – which is run by Ciaran himself!

The Foot Medic™ Group now work with independent practices to develop, maintain and refine systems so that they continue to exceed the expectations of their patients.

One of the aspects of the business journey that Ciaran is most proud of is the fact that by following the models, profitability in partner practices has been boosted by 30% on average!

He says: "We provide partners with complete operational and treatment pathways and an encyclopaedic online resources that enables them to streamline and identify the best solutions for their patients. We do this alongside monthly marketing and performance reports with our partners which helps them to steer their clinical businesses monthly towards success."

Each Clinic offers routine podiatry but also goes beyond this to offer specialist services like Children's podiatry, diabetic foot care, nail surgery, sports podiatry and rehabilitation, advanced musculoskeletal therapies, 3D printed orthoses and biomechanical assessment.

Now, with the help of analytics such as 3D foot scans, slow motion gait analysis and ultrasound imaging – problems can be assessed quickly and with treatments including shockwave therapy, restorative light therapies, minor surgery and joint injection, there is a whole range of problems that can be assisted when you put your foot into Foot Medic!

In the end however, Ciaran says "True to our company ethos, everything we do is about helping people move out of pain, move more and improve their quality of life.

Through our clinics we're helping thousands of people to do just that. That's what it's all about, and I am proud of that".

Foot Medic™ Royal Hillsborough is located in the Royal village of Hillsborough. The clinic is located next to the Cop at 14e Lisburn Street, Royal Hillsborough, BT26 6AB

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For many, the onset of springtime is almost synonymous with clearing one's home.

As the days begin to get longer and the dark, inclement weather becomes but a distant memory, many wish to refresh their homes by clearing the clutter that has gathered over the last year.

This might be as simple as giving any unwanted clothes to a charity shop or might even span as far as conducting a deep clean across the whole home. If the latter appeals to you, then we have some tips that can make the process much more effective.

It might not be something that you think about regularly, but how clean is your dishwasher?

For many of us, we simply stack up the dishwasher and assume that when the cycle

finishes, our dishes will be sparkling and germ free - however this is not always the case. If not well maintained, your dishwasher can accumulate dirt without you even realising, making your dishes dirty even after they have been through a cycle.

One quick hack to fix this is to fill a dishwasher safe container with white vinegar, place this on the top shelf and set it on a high temperature cycle. The results will disinfect and clean your machine. Once done, you can sprinkle bicarbonate soda on the bottom and run a short cycle to freshen your machine.

Moving to your bathrooms, we find a similar problem. The shower is a place that

we go to get clean, but if the shower itself is unclean then it can easily fail in our objective. Your showerhead can be easily descaled by filling a sandwich bag with warm water, vinegar and lemon juice before putting it around the showerhead. Once allowed to soak, the mixture will remove dirt and grime, preventing blockages and increasing the cleanliness of your shower.

Why not add a little shine to your hardwood floors using tea bags? You read that right...tea bags.

The tannic acid contained in tea bags is a good way of both cleaning and adding shine to hardwood floors. Simply boil a kettle, let



a few tea bags steep in the mop bucket before cleaning. Note that this hack only works on real hardwood flooring and not laminate.

NORTHERN IRELAND HOME TO UK'S OLDEST DIY FANATICS

NORTHERN Ireland has been revealed as the home of the UK's largest community of DIY-crazed pensioners, a new study commissioned by Hallmark Luxury Care Homes has found.

The study of 2,006 adults, aged 66 years and over - the national retirement age - revealed the most popular pastimes of the country's older generations to show how pensioners

are shunning traditional activities in search of new experiences and opportunities.

Make do and mend seems to be the mantra for the over 66's in the country, with nearly a third.

Learning was also a popular aspiration for pensioners in the region, which contained the highest number of older people who wanted to try learning a new language in 2024, showing that you really can teach an old dog new tricks.

And the UK's older generation were revealed to be looking to use their time to try out things they've never done before, with more than a third (37%) saying they were at least

60 years plus before they started a new interest, hobby, or activity in life.

In addition to DIY around the home, Bee Keeping, Cold Water Swimming, Throwing Pottery and Blowing Glass ranked among the more surprising top ten pensioner pursuits for 2024, while a number of retirees even aimed to have a go at extreme sports such as parasailing or skydiving.

The research also showed that while mindfulness might feel a truly Gen-Z phenomenon for keeping brains in tip top condition, we could all learn a thing or two from our elders. Across the UK, the average retiree claimed they practised mindfulness as a day-to-



day lifestyle with more than a third (36%) stating they engage in regular daily hobbies to keep their minds

active and happy.

The study commissioned by Hallmark Luxury Care Homes, is released to showcase the over 66 hopes and dreams of the nation, and to introduce the 'Hopes & Dreams Concierge' who works with residents across all 22 of their care homes to organise special activities and opportunities that hark back to goals, passions and desires that residents have had since they were young.

Hallmark's belief is that at every stage of life one can still experience new moments that can ignite a fire within or make them giddy with excitement.

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SPRING GARDENING GUIDE: CULTIVATING BLOOMS AND BOUNTY

Spring is a season of renewal, and what better way to embrace it than by tending to your garden?

Whether you're an experienced gardener or a budding enthusiast, this comprehensive guide will help you make the most of this vibrant time of year. From planting seeds to pruning, we've got you covered!

1. Seed Sowing: The Miracle of Growth

Raising a fully grown plant from a tiny seed is nothing short of miraculous. As the days lengthen and temperatures rise, it's the perfect moment to sow seeds. Here's how:

Indoor Sowing: Start seeds indoors using trays or pots. Provide warmth, light, and moisture to encourage germination.

Outdoor Sowing: Once frost risk subsides, sow directly into prepared soil. Follow seed packet instructions for depth and spacing.

2. Planting: Giving Life a Rooted Beginning

Planting is an art, and spring offers an ideal canvas. Follow these steps for successful planting:

Choose Wisely: Select plants suited to your climate and soil type.

Prepare the Soil: Clear weeds, amend soil with compost, and ensure good drainage.

Planting Depth: Place plants at the right depth, covering roots adequately.

Watering: Water thoroughly after planting to settle soil around roots.

3. Pruning: Shaping for Beauty and Health

Pruning is essential for maintaining healthy plants and encouraging new growth. Here's what to prune in spring:

Dead or Diseased Branches: Remove any dead or damaged branches.

Shrubs and Trees: Shape shrubs and trees by



cutting back overgrown or crossing branches.

Perennials: Cut back perennials to encourage fresh growth.

4. Lawn Care: A Lush Green Carpet

Your lawn deserves some springtime love too! Follow these tips:

Mowing: Gradually lower your mower blades as the grass grows. Aim for a height of around 2 inches.

Aeration: If your lawn is compacted, aerate it to improve soil structure.

Weeding and Mulching: Tackle weeds early and add a layer of organic mulch to retain moisture.

5. Container Gardening: Portable Beauty

Containers allow you

to create mini gardens anywhere. Try these spring container ideas:

Colorful Blooms: Mix pansies, daffodils, and tulips for vibrant displays.

Herb Haven: Plant basil, mint, and chives in pots near your kitchen.

Shady Spots: Ferns, begonias, and impatiens thrive in shaded containers.

6. Wildlife Gardening: Inviting Guests to Your Oasis

Make your garden a haven for birds, bees, and butterflies:

Bee-Friendly Plants: Choose bee-attracting flowers like lavender, salvia, and sunflowers.

Bird Feeders: Hang bird

feeders filled with seeds and suet.

Hedgehog Hideaways: Create cozy spots with leaf piles and log piles.

7. Gardening for Beginners: A Journey of Green Discovery

If you're new to gardening, fear not! We've got resources to guide you:

Plant Types Explained: Understand annuals, perennials, shrubs, and more.

Know Your Plot: Learn about sun exposure, soil quality, and drainage.

Allotment Adventures: Discover the joys of growing your own food.

Remember, spring gardening isn't just about blooms; it's about

nurturing life, connecting with nature, and reaping the rewards of your efforts. So grab your trowel, don your sun hat, and let's make this spring a season of growth and beauty!

For more inspiration and detailed guides, explore BBC Gardeners' World Magazine and National Trust resources

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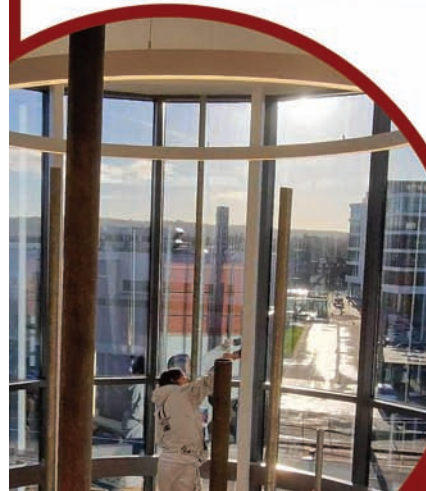
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HOME INTERIOR DESIGN TRENDS FOR SPRING 2024.

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. They are perfect for adding a touch of elegance and sophistication to your living spaces.






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TIP: One of the most important lawn care jobs for a good-looking lawn is correct and regular mowing. As the weather warms up it's likely your lawn will need mowing weekly. You should keep the cut between 25mm (1") and 40mm (1.6") in length.



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Expert reveals simple hacks to feel healthier this Spring!

Sports nutrition experts, Bulk.com have offered some easy tips to implement this Spring and throughout the year.

Top five expert fitness and nutrition tips for easing back into healthy habits:

1. Walk everywhere

Walking is arguably the simplest and cheapest exercise available to us all. It's almost entirely free since all you need is a pair of trainers or shoes that you're comfortable in.

Swapping out short drives to the shops or your daily commute is a great way to sneak exercise into your day without really noticing.

Walking has many benefits to your health: it builds stamina, burns excess calories, and is great for a healthy heart. Experts say that a brisk walking pace is best for your fitness – making this a simple and effective way to feel healthier.

2. Drink less alcohol

It can be difficult to reduce the amount of alcohol we consume, but it's crucially important if you want to improve your health.

An effective strategy for cutting back on alcohol intake is substituting alcoholic drinks with alcohol-free alternatives. These are not only delicious but also contribute to better overall health, helping to reduce the negative side effects your body feels from alcohol consumption.

3. Fill up on vegetables

Processed foods are dangerous, as it can become easy to consume hundreds of calories in small meals. Vegetables are generally much bulkier and less calorie-dense than other foods, they're also full of essential fibre, vitamins, and minerals.

Filling up your plate with plenty of vegetables can be an easy way to control your calorie intake without feeling like you're eating less. It can be hard to improve your diet without feeling hungry, but by bulking up your plate with veg you'll still feel like your stomach is full.

Sweet potatoes, broccoli, carrots, and brussels sprouts are among the most filling and lowest-calorie vegetables, consider filling up your plate with these.

4. Avoid secret sugars

Sucrose, fructose, and dextrose are all scientific names for different types of sugar, easily missed by the undiscerning consumer. You might also see high-fructose corn syrup, barley malt, and molasses hidden in the ingredients list, which are all just sugars in a different form.

What's more, natural sugars are presented as



being much less unhealthy, but they're all still just as calorie-dense and potentially harmful. Watch out for products filled with fruit juices and honey which claim to be a healthy option but can have just as many calories in.

5. Start slowly with exercise - everything in moderation!

The hardest part of exercising regularly is often not getting started but having the strength to maintain a regular routine. This is often due to aches and pains, which can be much worse after taking a Christmas break.

To avoid overworking yourself at the beginning heart rate-based workouts

can be a great way to ensure that you're only pushing yourself as hard as you're ready for. Start your exercise plan with a frank and honest assessment of your fitness to avoid injuring yourself.

At-home exercise videos are an excellent way to get into fitness in a comfortable and convenient way. There are also many great apps and online services to help guide your fitness journey.

Finally, don't forget to stretch! Stretching is essential to avoid injury and to reduce the amount of aching you'll feel in the days after exercise, consider following a stretching tutorial online after every exercise session.

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What to Consider When Buying Garden Furniture

As the days lengthen and the sun graces our outdoor spaces, it's time to turn our attention to garden furniture.

Whether you're creating a cozy corner for morning coffee or planning grand alfresco gatherings, choosing the right furniture is crucial. Let's delve into the essential factors to bear in mind when making your selection.

Style and Harmony

Before you dive into the world of garden furniture, pause and consider your garden's overall style. Here's how:



Complement or Contrast: Decide whether you want your furniture to blend seamlessly with your home's aesthetic or create an intentional contrast. Modern house? Opt for minimalist lines. Traditional property? Antique garden furniture from the 19th or early 20th century might be a perfect fit.

Material Matters: Different styles often align with specific materials. For instance, mid-century items suit contemporary properties, while classic designs pair well with traditional gardens.

Practicality and Functionality

Your garden furniture should not only look good but also serve its purpose.

Consider how you'll use the furniture. Are you hosting family dinners, summer parties, or lounging sessions? Each scenario demands different pieces.

Dual-Height Tables: Versatile tables that transition from coffee to dining height are excellent for entertaining.

Fire Pit Tables: Extend your evenings with warmth by choosing furniture that includes a fire pit table.

Material Selection

The material you choose affects durability, maintenance, and aesthetics. Here are common options:

Wood: Classic and time-

less, wooden furniture blends well with natural surroundings. Opt for hardwoods like teak or eucalyptus for longevity.

Metal: Aluminum, wrought iron, and steel offer sleek designs. Ensure they are rust-resistant and lightweight.

Wicker/Rattan: These woven materials exude a relaxed vibe. Synthetic wicker is weather-resistant and easy to care for.

Plastic/Resin: Affordable and low-maintenance, plastic furniture is ideal for casual setups.

Comfort and Cushions

Comfort is paramount, especially if you plan to spend hours outdoors. Consider:

Ergonomics: Test chairs and loungers for comfort. Look for supportive designs.

Cushions: Invest in quality outdoor cushions. They add coziness and can withstand the elements.

Storage: Check if the furniture has storage options for cushions during rainy days.

Size and Space

Measure your outdoor area before purchasing furniture:

Scale: Avoid overcrowding. Choose furniture that fits comfortably without overwhelming the space.

Flexible Arrangements:

Modular sets allow you to rearrange pieces as needed.

Foldable/Stackable: Opt for foldable chairs or stackable pieces for compact storage.

Weather Resistance

Our unpredictable climate demands weather-resistant furniture:

Waterproofing: Look for furniture treated to withstand rain and moisture.

UV Protection: Sun exposure can fade colors and weaken materials. UV-resistant finishes are essential.

Cover Options: Invest in covers to protect furniture during harsh weather.

Budget and Longevity

Set a budget and balance it with quality:

Invest Wisely: Quality furniture lasts longer and provides better value.

Maintenance Costs: Consider upkeep expenses (painting, sealing, etc.) for wooden furniture.

Warranty: Check warranty details for peace of mind.

Remember, garden furniture isn't just about aesthetics; it's about creating an inviting outdoor haven. So, take your time, envision lazy afternoons and lively gatherings, and choose pieces that enhance both beauty and functionality. Happy furnishing!

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A FRESH LICK OF PAINT

Spring is a time of renewal and rejuvenation, and what better way to celebrate the season than by giving your home a fresh coat of paint?

Here are some of the best paint colours to use this spring:

Coral Reef: This shade of coral is perfect for adding a pop of

colour to any room. It pairs well with white or light gray walls and can be used as an accent wall or on all four walls of a room.

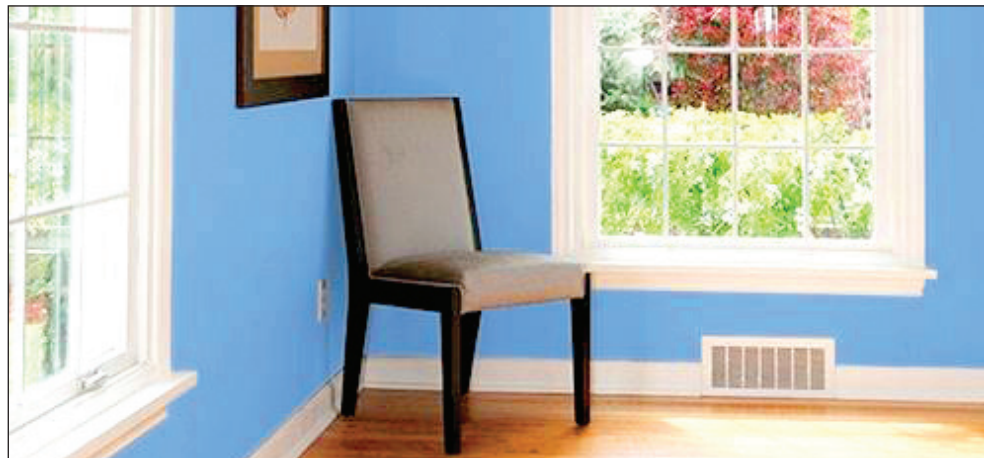
Fresh Mint: This light green hue is perfect for creating a calming and relaxing atmosphere in any room. It pairs well with white or maroon walls and can be used as an accent wall or on all four walls of a room.

English Yellow: This sunny yellow shade is perfect for adding a touch of warmth to any room. It pairs well with white or light gray walls and can be used as an accent wall or

on all four walls of a room.

Nancy's Blushes: This soft pink hue is perfect for creating a romantic and feminine atmosphere in any room. It pairs well with white or beige walls and can be used as an accent wall or on all four walls of a room.

Sky Blue: This light blue hue is perfect for creating a cool and calming atmosphere in any room. It pairs well with white or earth



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toned walls and can be used as an accent wall or on all four walls of a room.

Eagle's View: This lavender hue is perfect for creating a fresh and unexpected look in any room. It pairs well with white or pastel walls and can be used as an accent wall or on all

four walls of a room.

Piranesi Pink: This pale peachy pink hue is perfect for creating a soft and romantic atmosphere in any room. It pairs well with white or natural toned walls and can be used as an accent wall or on all four walls of a room.

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ESSENTIAL HOME MAINTENANCE TASKS FOR SPRING

Repair rotted wood: After winter snow melts and the April showers leave your property damp, it's a good idea to inspect for signs of rotted wood.

If you find any areas in need of replacement, use a polyester filler to rebuild the damaged areas. First, use a 5-in-1 tool to remove the rotted wood from the area. Then press the filler into the recesses of the wood with a putty knife, building up the layers as needed until you have a smooth profile. You should have between 10-15 minutes to work with the polyester filler before it begins to harden. The new structure will take paint well and won't rot again in the future .

Sharpen garden tools: Pruning, clipping and shearing are most useful when clean, precise cuts to the plant are accomplished, and the only way to

guarantee that is to regularly maintain your tools. Pruning shears, hedge shears and grass clippers each have two sharp surfaces which are finely ground at the factory to their most efficient angle. Pick up a new 10-inch mill file at your local home center, and file the blades along their original factory bevel 1.

Clean gutters: Clogged gutters can cause water damage to your home. Clean your gutters and downspouts to ensure that they are free of debris. Use a ladder to reach the gutters and wear gloves to protect your hands. Remove any leaves, twigs, and other debris from the gutters and downspouts. Flush the gutters with water to



ensure that they are clear of any remaining debris.

Pressure-wash patios and decks: Winter weather can leave your patio and deck looking dirty and dingy. Pressure-washing is an easy way to clean these surfaces and restore them to their original condition. Rent a pressure washer from your local home centre and follow the manufacturer's instructions for use. Be sure to wear protective clothing and eyewear

when using the pressure washer.

Repair windows: Check your windows for any cracks or gaps that may have developed over the winter. Fill any gaps or cracks in the window frames or invest in new. This will help to prevent drafts and keep your home more energy-efficient.

Clean dryer vents: Lint build-up in your dryer vents can be a fire hazard. Clean your dryer vents to ensure that they are free of lint and other debris. Disconnect the dryer from the vent and use a vacuum cleaner to remove any lint from the vent.

Reconnect the dryer to the vent and run it for a few minutes to ensure that the vent is clear.

Inspect your roof: Inspect your roof for any damage that may have occurred over the winter. Look for any missing or damaged tiles, and check for any signs of leaks. If you notice any damage, contact a professional roofer to make the necessary repairs.

Clean your chimney: If you have a fireplace, it's important to have your chimney cleaned and inspected annually. Hire a professional chimney sweep to clean your chimney and ensure that it is free of any debris or blockages.

Service your lawn mower: Get your lawn mower ready for the spring

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 in 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.

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