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Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Councillor Peter Byrne, attended the 'Know Your Numbers' gardening workshops event at the Saintfield Men's Shed project.

## SAINTFIELD'S MEN'S SHED HOST 'KNOW YOUR NUMBERS' GARDENING EVENT

Men's Sheds from Rowallane, Mournes, Slieve Croob, Downpatrick and Crotlieve joined Saintfield Men's Shed to take part in four workshops designed to refresh

The Know Your Numbers workshops hosted by Saintfield Men's Shed helped 'shedders' refresh their mathematical skills when making their own bird feeders, creating origami features and planting bulbs and tessellations, by using geometry concepts such as symmetry, transformation and spatial reasoning to help make their gardening projects more visually appealing.

community spaces where men can come together to enjoy practical hobbies and share skills to support projects in their local communities. They encourage friendship-building, improve wellbeing, reduce loneliness and combat social isolation through connection, conversation and creation.

The 'Know Your Numbers' workshops gave participants an opportunity to meet new people and

establish new connections.

Keen to support this initiative Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Councillor Peter Byrne, attended the event and said, "Throughout Newry, Mourne and Down, Men's Sheds are catalysts for creativity, where local people can make a genuine difference to their communities by sharing their knowledge and skills to produce tangible positive results. 'Shedders' get

great enjoyment working together, while this hugely popular initiative tackles the very prevalent issues of isolation and exclusion."

The 'Know Your Numbers' gardening workshops were funded through the Shared Prosperity Fund and is part of the Department for the Economy's Multiply fund. Multiply is a free adult numeracy programme aimed at improving adult numeracy skills and confidence with numbers.

## £525,000 road improvement

Infrastructure Minister John O'Dowd has announced that a £525,000 carriageway resurfacing scheme and drainage improvements on the A2 Shore Road, Strangford (commenced in early Jan).

The resurfacing scheme involves the asphalt resurfacing of a 1.3 kilometre stretch of the Shore Road between Strangford Village and Killeef. The scheme will start from the end of a 2023 resurfacing scheme, 1 kilometre south of Strangford village and extend for 1.3 kilometres in the Killeef/Ardglass direction. To facilitate the safe delivery of the scheme it is necessary to implement a Monday to Friday road closure from 8:00am - 17:00pm. The road closure is in place to Friday 14 March 2025 (road open evenings and weekends).

An alternative route will be signed with traffic being diverted via the following route:

A0025 Castleward Road, A0025 Downpatrick Road, A0002 Shore Road, C0283 Churchtown Road, C0366

Lismore Road, C0283 Crew Road, A0002 Ardglass Road.

The Department has programmed the work operations and traffic management arrangements to minimise inconvenience however, while steps have been taken to accommodate local access and Translink bus and school services throughout the scheme, road users should expect some delays and are advised to allow additional time when travelling in the vicinity of the works and are asked to comply with all temporary traffic restrictions.

Subject to favourable weather conditions, the works will be substantially complete by 14 March 2025, however the Department will keep the public informed of any change.

For more information about this and other improvement schemes visit: [Trafficwatchni.com](http://Trafficwatchni.com)

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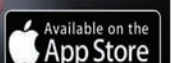
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# Tourism NI welcomes innovative proposal for Treetop Walk in Co Down

Castlewellan Forest Park is being investigated as the potential location for Northern Ireland's first ever Treetop Walk.

The aim of the project is to create a sustainable visitor experience which provides close-to-nature recreation, showcases the natural beauty of Castlewellan Forest Park and provides an adventurous and educational attraction for both residents and visitors.



The proposed treetop walk would be the first of its kind in Northern Ireland, offering visitors the chance to immerse themselves in the forest canopy, enjoy breathtaking views and engage with the park's rich biodiversity from a whole new perspective.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, in partnership with EAK Ireland, and in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) Forest Service, has agreed to explore the feasibility of the project.

As part of the project development, an assessment on the potential impact of the project on traffic and the existing road network will be required, with mitigation measures developed for the area.

Early engagement with residents and businesses will also be a key focus during the development of the proposed attraction.

Pete Byrne, Chairperson of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, said: "Castlewellan Forest Park is one of our district's most cherished assets, and this exciting proposal has the potential to elevate it to an iconic landmark visitor attraction for Northern Ireland."

"By working together, we hope to create an innovative, nature-based attraction that will inspire visitors while preserving the park's natural beauty for generations to come."

Tom McArdle, EAK Ireland Treetop Walks said, "We are delighted to announce the proposed treetop walk in Castlewellan Forest Park that we are exploring alongside Newry, Mourne and Down District Council."

"The success of our Treetop Walk Avondale in Co Wicklow shows the potential for this type of tourism attraction, and we believe it would bring many benefits to the local area and surrounding region."

David Roberts, Director of Strategic Development at Tourism Northern Ireland, said, "We welcome this innovative proposal

which would add to the high-quality tourism and hospitality offering that we have in the area."

"Northern Ireland is renowned for its natural landscapes and outdoor spaces. The proposed Treetop Walk in Castlewellan Forest Park, already a magnet for people with its activities and trails, would act as an anchor attraction for visitors who can then go on to explore the wider area."

"We look forward to working closely with Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and partner organisations to further explore this ambitious project."

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# COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON SUPPORTS GROUPS CHAMPIONING INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY

During December, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Councillor Pete Byrne, has been visiting a number of remarkable local organisations that work to promote inclusion and diversity within our communities.

The purpose of these visits was not only to shine a spotlight on the incredible work they do but to present them with a donation to help support their essential services.

These groups play a pivotal role in fostering

connections and enhancing wellbeing through community driven projects that create opportunities for interaction, participation and wellbeing. Their efforts bring residents together ensuring that everyone feels supported and valued.

Speaking about their impact, Councillor Byrne said, "I am delighted to support these incredible groups as they continue to deliver their invaluable services and support to so many people.

Their tireless work makes a difference to the lives of residents across the length and breadth of Newry, Mourne and Down. These champions of inclusion and diversity enrich lives and, in many cases, quite literally provide a lifeline to those in

need."

Green Spaces Community Growing Project creates a welcoming space where people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds can participate in creative nature-based health and wellbeing activities.

Dramability is a mixed ability drama group providing classes, theatre trips, summer schemes and residential for children, working closely with local schools and playgroups to provide workshops and presentations on the themes of difference and inclusion.

Shimna Stars Special Olympics Club offers support, sport, recreation, social interaction and learning to those with an intellectual disability.

TAG The Active Group



provides young adults affected by mild to moderate learning disability with opportunities to develop their full potential.

Down Right Brilliant provides people with Down Syndrome and their families with opportunities to enhance speech,

communication, numeracy skills through the provision of a youth club, speech and drama classes and more.

Amazing Abilities provides a meeting space for children with additional needs and their families, to enable them to enjoy recreational activities and

engage with knowledgeable and supportive volunteers.

Cuan Mhuire has been selected as the Chairperson's Chosen Charity during his year in office. The work they do to help individuals and families struggling with addiction is life changing..

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## Young County Down athletes off to a flying start in Flahavan's league

Young athletes from across County Down have competed at the first round of the Flahavan's Athletics NI Primary School Cross Country League, which took place at Londonderry Park.

Competing in the individual races Euan Kelly

from Academy Primary School, Saintfield, took the top spot in the first boys' race, followed by Jay Foster from Spa Primary School, Ballynahinch in second place, and Joshua Bingham from Loughview Integrated Primary School, Castlereagh in third.

In the second boys' race of the day, Ben Dumigan from Towerview Primary School, Bangor and Darragh Burns from Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School, Downpatrick came in first and second place respectively, followed by Lorcan Brennan from St Bernard's Primary school in third.

In the ultimate boys' race of the round, coming in first place was Harry McVeigh from Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche, Castlewellaan followed by Robin Anderson from Grange Park Primary School, Bangor in second place, then Declan McNeill from Loughview Integrated Primary School, Castlereagh coming in

third.

Gaining first place in the first girls' race was Julia Figera from Killyleagh Integrated Primary School followed by Lottie McCarry from Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School, Downpatrick and Celeste Grandjean from St Michael's Primary School in second and third place respectively.

Rose Reavy from Towerview Primary School, Bangor came in first place in the penultimate girls' race of the Round, with Laura Biel from Loughview Integrated Primary School, Castlereagh in second place and Lucy White from Ballyholme Primary School, Bangor placing in third. In the third and final girls' race of the day, coming in first place was Teagan Moxham from St Patrick's Primary School, Ballynahinch, with second place going to Lilly Henderson from Spa Primary School, Ballynahinch, followed by Amber Keown from

Downpatrick Primary School in third.

Teams of six entered the girls' and boys' races and collected points for their school to compete in the second round, with the hopes of qualifying for the final which is set to take place on 28TH of Feb 2025 at Mallusk Playing fields

The top three boys' teams were Towerview Primary School, Bangor, St Michael's Primary School, Belfast and Sullivan Upper Prep, Holywood, whilst the top three girls' schools were St Michael's Primary School, Belfast, Towerview Primary School, Bangor and Ballyholme Primary School, Bangor. The 2024-2025 league was launched once again this year at Portstewart Strand by Athletics NI and Flahavan's and will also be supported by popular Antrim athlete Callum Baird, who is the current NI and Ulster 100m champion and U23 Irish Indoor 200m Champion. Callum will provide

inspiration and motivation to the young athletes taking part this year, passing on his expert knowledge and training tips and reflecting on his own career to date. Following the final, Callum will also visit the winning schools to meet the young athletes.

With the second round due to take place in December, schools will compete in two out of the three rounds to qualify for the final which is due to take place in February. The top 20 boys and top 20 girls at will be invited to join the Flahavan's Athletics Northern Ireland Junior Endurance Squad, which will further develop their athletic careers by providing training sessions over the next 12 months.

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

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# NMD Be Active Sports Awards

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, in partnership with the Sports Association Newry, Down and South Armagh (SANDSA), is excited to announce the opening of nominations for this year's NMD Be Active Sports Awards.

These prestigious awards will once again acknowledge the remarkable sporting accomplishments of athletes and clubs whilst collectively recognising the tremendous contributions of mentors and volunteers during the calendar year January to December 2024.

The awards ceremony will take place on Friday, March 14, 2025, at the Canal Court Hotel, Newry.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Cllr Pete Byrne, said, "These awards celebrate the exceptional commitment and determination of our athletes, their coaches and mentors and the unwavering support of our volunteers. Their efforts form the foundation of our vibrant sports communities across the district. They inspire others and create opportunities for people of all ages to participate in sport and physical activity at all levels. By recognising these accomplishments, we hope to motivate even more individuals to get involved—whether through participation or volunteering—and enhance the positive influence of sport in our community."



The categories available for nomination include: Junior Club Coach of the Year 2024; Senior Club Coach of the Year 2024; Junior Team of the Year 2024; Senior Team of the Year 2024; Junior Sportsperson of the Year 2024; Senior Sportsperson of the Year 2024; Junior Volunteer of the Year 2024; Senior Volunteer of the Year 2024; Sportsman / Team

of the Year with a Disability 2024. Nominations are open to all athletes, sports clubs, schools, local organisations, and sports enthusiasts within the district. Nomination forms can be obtained from: Council Website: [www.newrymournedown.org/leisure-and-sport](http://www.newrymournedown.org/leisure-and-sport) Newry Leisure Centre: 60 Cecil Street, Newry, BT35

6AU Down Leisure Centre: 114 Market Street, Downpatrick, BT30 6LZ The deadline for nominations is Monday 10 February 2025 at 4pm. Nominations can be submitted via email to [leisureandsport@nmandd.org](mailto:leisureandsport@nmandd.org) or dropped off at reception at Down Leisure Centre, Downpatrick, or Newry Leisure Centre.

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# NEW DUNLEATH URBAN SPORTS PARK

**A sod cutting ceremony has marked the official start of construction work on the Dunleath Urban Sports Park, in Downpatrick, paving the way for a cutting-edge skatepark and pump track.**

The Newry, Mourne and Down District Council project is supported by major funding from the Department for Communities (DfC) with up to £439,032.28 allocated by them towards the project, with the Council

contributing an additional £74,527.61. This combined investment of £513,559.89 will deliver state-of-the-art facilities to Downpatrick, designed to enhance community health and wellbeing while revitalising the local area.

The project will be constructed by civil engineering and construction firm CivCo Ltd. The development will feature an 80-metre pump track (approximated), incorporating a dynamic series of banked turns and undulations, alongside a state-of-the-art 400m<sup>2</sup> skatepark. The skatepark will include ramps and grind rails as trick features, offering an exciting and modern space for urban sports enthusiasts of all ages and skill levels.

Communities Minister Gordon Lyons said, "My department has been pleased to provide significant funding for the Dunleath Urban Sports Park. This exciting addition to the sporting landscape of Downpatrick will provide a dynamic new space that supports health, community, and economic growth in the area."

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Councillor Pete Byrne, said, "The Dunleath Urban Sports Park represents a substantial investment in our community on many levels. This state-of-the-art skatepark and pump track will provide a new and alternative sports facility



for people to enjoy. It is poised to become a much-loved and frequently used space, encouraging physical activity and healthier lifestyles.

"The facility's strategic location near Down Leisure Centre will not only create a new hub for recreation but also increase footfall to Downpatrick town centre, linking the park with the High Street and Down Leisure Centre. It demonstrates the Council's commitment to enhancing our facilities, fostering vibrant, active, and connected communities, while contributing to the revitalisation of our town centres, and I extend our appreciation to the Department of Communities

for its invaluable support of this project."

Chair of Downpatrick Regeneration Working Group (DRWG), Mal McGrady said, "The DRWG is delighted with this significant marker made in relation to one of our identified key projects — the pump track/skate park project at Dunleath Park. This project has been in the planning process for some time now and we are delighted to be able to 'cut the sod' in the current financial year.

This is one of many ongoing projects that the DRWG have collaborated on with the Department for Communities and Newry, Mourne and Down District along

with other Government agencies. On the back of the flood recovery scheme and infrastructure renewal projects we are beginning to see improvements in Downpatrick Town Centre which we hope will be pleasing to both residents and visitors alike.

This particular project will provide a much-needed outlet for our youth to avail of additional sport and recreation facilities and hopefully support mental and physical well-being. The Downpatrick Regeneration Group is actively involved in a number of other key projects which it is hoped will be delivered in the next financial year."

## Campaign Launched to Raise Awareness of Unwelcome Sexual Attention Faced by Women and Girls in Public Spaces

**A new digital and PR campaign to raise awareness of the unwelcome sexual attention that women and girls experience has been launched by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council.**

Women and girls can experience various types of sexual violence in public spaces, from unwelcome sexual remarks and touching to rape and femicide. Sexual violence can happen on streets, in and around

schools, public transportation, workplaces, parks, public toilets and other spaces and even online.

The latest #RespectMySpace campaign from our Safeguarding Team will focus on raising awareness to the unwelcome sexual attention that women and girls can experience here in our local community. Whether it's travelling home from a night out or going for a run in the local park women can experience unwanted sexual harassment. Newry, Mourne and Down District Chairperson, Councillor Pete Byrne said, "This campaign aims to highlight various scenarios faced by women and girls in public spaces as they go about their daily lives. It's vital that everyone understands what violence against women and girls is, including its root causes, to play an active role in preventing it."

To support this work, we have partnered with Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Southern Health and Social Care Trust and South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to promote our new '#RespectMySpace' campaign across local media and social media channels.

Donna Murphy, Assistant Director, Family Support and Safeguarding, Southern Health and Social Care Trust, said, "It's so important that women and girls feel safe whilst out and about in public spaces within our local communities. Everyone can play a part in changing this. We are asking people to make small but significant changes to their behaviour to help women and girls feel safe when accessing public spaces. This includes men calling out others when their behaviours may make women and girls feel unsafe." Jason Caldwell, Assistant Director, Safeguarding & Family Support, South Eastern Health Social Care Trust, said, "Calling a space a safe space is not enough. We need to create a culture of trust where women and girls are not subject to unwanted attention, catcalling, harassment or to be made uncomfortable in our public spaces. Collectively we must take a stand and take responsibility in ensuring all our spaces are safe for everyone, regardless of gender". Both the Health Trusts are ensuring that their teams are on hand to support anyone who needs help or support. The

key phone numbers which are promoted as part of this partnership are as follows: Southern Health and Social Care Trust 028 3756 7100 and South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust: 0300 100 0300 and the 24 Hour Domestic and Sexual Violence Helpline: 0808 802 1414. The campaign is also supported by a range of online resources which are available on the Council's corporate website: [www.newrymournedown.org/safeguarding](http://www.newrymournedown.org/safeguarding) The web page also sign posts to other support services available for women and girls. Lord Mayor of Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Councillor Sarah Duffy said, "Improving the wellbeing of our communities and preventing violence that is targeted towards women and girls is a key objective of this campaign. The messaging highlights that is targeted towards women and girls is a key objective of this campaign. The messaging highlights that is targeted towards women and girls is a key objective of this campaign. The messaging highlights that is targeted towards women and girls is a key objective of this campaign. For further information on the #RespectMySpace campaign please visit [www.newrymournedown.org/safeguarding](http://www.newrymournedown.org/safeguarding).

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# Schools Environmental Poster Competition

At this year's Schools Environmental Poster prizegiving event, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Councillor Pete Byrne welcomed winners to the Council Chamber in Downpatrick.

Ten pupils from schools across the district received prizes for their winning posters after being selected from the many entries received from local schools.

Managed by the Council's Sustainability team, the annual competition asked primary and secondary school pupils across the district to design an eye-catching poster on an environmental topic of their own choice.

The Chairperson presented the winners with a framed copy of their winning poster and a gift voucher.

Two of the winning posters, designed by Ollie Kearney from St Malachy's Primary School, Castlewellan and Maciej Libera from Abbey Christian Brothers School, Newry will now be showcased on a billboard in Newry and Downpatrick in early 2025.

The primary school winners are Anna-Rose McNeill, St Moninna's Primary School, Cloughoge; Adam Briggs, Glasswater Primary School, Crossgar; Ollie Kearney, St Malachy's Primary School, Castlewellan; Cate Coffey, St Colman's Primary School, Saval and Rebecca Rodgers, St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint.



The secondary school winners are Naomi Gamble, Killeel High School; Hannah Begley, Sacred Heart Grammar School, Newry; Maciej Libera, Abbey Christian Brothers School, Newry; Emer O'Neill, St Paul's High School, Bessbrook and A'obh McGrath, Mary's High School, Newry.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Councillor Byrne began by congratulating all the

pupils on their success. Reflecting on the importance of each of the winning designs and said, "Your winning poster designs cover some very crucial topics such as Climate Change, the problem of Single Use Plastic and the damaging litter which it creates.

It is reassuring for me as First Citizen of this Council to know that these topics are high in our young people's thoughts. Your involvement in

competitions like this, along with programmes such as Eco-Schools, is vitally important. So, I encourage you to continue to be champions for the environment."

Cllr Byrne continued, "A special word of congratulations to Ollie and Maciej. I look forward to seeing your designs up on billboards in 2025 helping to raise awareness of the important issues of plastic pollution and climate change"

**Women's Aid**  
NORTH DOWN & ARDS  
02891 273196

Working to end Domestic Abuse

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

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- Court support

**One Stop Shop**

10.00 am-12.00 noon  
No appointment necessary  
Crèche facilities are available

**LOCATION:**  
House Church,  
Crawfordsburn Road  
Newtownards, BT23 4EA

For any further information about the One Stop Shop or Women's Aid support services  
Contact us at  
02891 273196

**NEXT DATES:**  
Tuesday 28th January  
Tuesday 11th February  
Tuesday 25th February  
Tuesday 11th March  
Tuesday 25th March

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

The One Stop Shop provides FREE, immediate and confidential access to Women's Aid, legal support, benefits advice, housing support and safety advice.

**Housing Executive**  
Community Advice

# Free eye test

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**Free eye test voucher**

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Cannot be exchanged for cash or used with any other voucher. Excludes OCT scan (which incurs an additional charge) and customers already entitled to a free NHS-funded eye test. Valid for one eye test on or before 30 April 2025. Voucher must be presented at time of eye test. One per person at named Specsavers store only.

# GAME, SETT & MATCH

JV Allister writes about the perils for badgers in Winter

It's been a while since I saw a badger, at least a live one, and thankfully winter is the season when they are less likely to travel far and become roadkill, although it will not be long until mating season, a time for travel and fatal jeopardy.

Badgers are social animals, living in mixed sex 'clans' of between four and eight individuals in their home, known as a sett, which is usually dug under a large tree, with a series of tunnels leading to sleeping chambers, and often with many entrances and exits. They are very particular about bedding, regularly kicking out and replacing leaves, which helps reduce the build-up of parasites.

They are also particular about where they deposit faeces, being the only animals other than humans to dig latrines, often located on the edge of their territory, although possibly more to do with scent-marking territory, clan and mating status rather



than hygiene.

Unlike some mammals, they don't hibernate in winter, but become less active, entering what's called a torpid condition when they sleep a lot, even lowering their body temperature to conserve energy.

But winter is also when their cubs are born, placing responsibilities on the females (known as sows; males are boars)

to feed and protect their young. You see, while badgers mate at almost any time of the year, but particularly in spring and early summer, because of an unusual reproductive technique known as delayed implantation, they have only one litter a year, born in the worst of winter weather in January or February, but safe and warm underground. The cubs will not appear above

ground until April or May by which time their parents and clan relations will be out foraging, possibly mating, and continuing the cycle of annual badger life.

As with most wildlife in Northern Ireland, badgers are vulnerable, mainly because of developments which damage or obliterate their territories, including new roads which cross ancient

badger tracks; as many as 50,000 are killed on roads each year in the UK, more than any other native animal.

And sadly, there are still antisocial criminals in our society who regard so-called badger baiting by dogs as 'sport'.

But hopefully at this time of the year the adults and cubs will be mostly safe in their warm beds, gently snoring. JVA.

## Start the new year with clear vision – Book your child's eye test at Specsavers Downpatrick

As the new year and school term has begun, now is the perfect time for parents to prioritise their children's eye health and Specsavers Downpatrick is encouraging parents to schedule an eye test for their children as they head back to school.

Recent research by Specsavers reveals that nearly a quarter of children aged 4-16 in Northern Ireland have never had an eye test, and over a third haven't had one in the past three years. Yet, 63% of parents report that their children have faced school-related issues potentially linked to vision problems, such as struggling to see the whiteboard, needing to sit at the front of class, or suffering from frequent headaches.

The survey found that many parents delay eye tests because their child shows no visible problems

(23%) or hasn't complained about their vision (13%). Other reasons include not being advised that an eye test is needed (23%) or not knowing when to schedule one (13%).

However, children often don't realise they have a vision problem until it affects their learning. Early eye tests can catch issues like lazy eye or squinting, which are much easier to treat if detected early.

Jordan Jackson, Director at Specsavers Downpatrick, explains: "Your child's eyesight is crucial for their development. More than 80% of

learning, cognitive skills, and social development rely on good vision. An eye test is important not just for checking sight, but also for detecting potential health issues.

As we start a new year, we encourage parents to prioritise getting their child's eyes tested."

Start the new year off right by giving your child the gift of clear vision. A simple eye test can make all the difference.

To book an appointment at Specsavers Downpatrick visit [www.specsavers.co.uk/stores/downpatrick](http://www.specsavers.co.uk/stores/downpatrick)



**We are a local advice charity and provide a much needed free, independent service.**

## Extended Opening Hours

### Tuesday and Thursday

#### 4 p.m-6 p.m

(funded October to March)

**Opening Hours: Monday- Friday**  
**Reception: 9:00 a.m - 4.30 p.m**

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## County Down author Kate launches her first pony book for children!

County Down horsewoman turned author Kate Russell has launched her first equestrian themed children's book.

Kate, a well known figure in the NI world of equestrianism and equine therapy has published 'Peanut gets his sparkle back'.

Kate says: "I have always wanted to write a children's book from an early age. I have stories whirling in my head and usually inspired by the ponies dogs and cat. My friend had two young boys who would listen to my stories – they encouraged me to write a book and what's more - asked if they could be in it!

Working with children and the ponies through equine facilitated learning I could see the very real benefits of the interaction with the different pony personalities."

The book is based on the main characters Peanut an 8hh Falabella cross pony and Tobi a 27 yr old rescue pony. In real life this odd couple have struck a very strong friendship and became pretty much inseparable! Peanut is young, curious and cute and everyone who meets him falls in love with him. Tobi is older, a little bit stiff but calm with the kindest nature. They are both very much loved for being themselves! In real life Tobi & Peanut are also fully qualified therapy ponies who like nothing better than helping others!

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

With charming colour illustrations by the talented Faye Hobson, and a relatable story, young readers will be inspired to face their own worries and become brave little ponies themselves!

'Peanut gets his Sparkle Back' is ideal for children 3-9 with coloured text suitable for children with dyslexia, teaches valuable lessons about perseverance, self-confidence and the power of friendship.

It's a must read for parents, teachers and children alike and is sure to become a beloved addition to any child's bookshelf! Join Peanut and his friends on their journey to bravery and show your little ones that they too can conquer their worries and be the courageous heroes they've always dreamed of being.

**You can find out more about Tobi, Peanut and friends and also purchase a copy of the book direct online at**  
<http://www.tobianpeanut-therapyponies.com/product-page/peanut-finds-his-sparkle-childrens-story>  
**Book priced £10, (postage fees apply).**



# Start off the new year with a spring clean of your family finances!

Start as you mean to go on with your first new year's resolution – find out what financial support your family may be entitled to.

## Employers For Childcare

We know that Christmas will have been an expensive time for parents, with presents to buy and celebrations to plan, and this can make January feel very long until the next pay day.

Financial support with childcare costs

Now is the time to check the support you are getting towards registered childcare costs, which could be through Tax Credits, Universal Credit, Childcare Vouchers or Tax-Free Childcare. Due to changes in the way some benefits are now calculated, and for those claiming Tax-Free Childcare the introduction of the NI Childcare Subsidy Scheme, the support that was best for you last year may no longer be your best option this year. Added to this, if you've had any change in your household

circumstances it is important that you make sure you are receiving the best and most appropriate form of support for your family.

Extra childcare support when starting work

If you are in receipt of benefits, such as Universal Credit, and are considering moving into employment or increasing your working hours, and feel that the costs of registered childcare are a barrier to doing so, then you may be entitled to additional support. Talk to your work coach about the Advisor Discretion Fund as you may be entitled to receive a non-repayable grant to pay up to £1,500 of your first month's upfront childcare costs.

Childcare Vouchers If you are a member of the Childcare Voucher scheme have you made sure to make at least



one payment from your salary into your account within the last 52 weeks? If you've paused your Childcare Voucher payments or been unable to sacrifice into your account, but have plans to use registered childcare again in the near future, have you looked into backdating your payments to make the most of your annual allowance?

We are here to answer your questions Simply give Employers For Childcare's Family

Benefits Advice Service a call on 028 9267 8200 and our advisors will be able to calculate exactly what support you may be entitled to in 2025. We provide advice and guidance on a wide range of support including help towards registered childcare costs.

So ahead of the long wait until January's pay day, give our team a call. We will be delighted to hear from you, and to help you get 2025 off to a good start!

# 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 are 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 en-suite, 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 and encourage this bond to continue. They aim to

create a comfortable atmosphere of homeliness happiness and caring.

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# Wedding Open Day

SUNDAY 16TH FEBRUARY  
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## Ulster Wildlife urges nature lovers in Down to help bring it back in 2025

Northern Ireland's largest nature conservation charity is asking County Down's local wildlife supporters to make a difference for nature on their doorstep this year.

Ulster Wildlife is calling upon fans of our flora and fauna to make 2025 their 'wildest year yet' as it works to tackle the biodiversity crisis in Northern Ireland.

"We know nature here is in trouble, with 1 in 9 species facing the threat of extinction", says Rosemary Mulholland, Head of Nature Recovery at Ulster Wildlife.

"The devastating images we see from Lough Neagh are the face of this crisis, and we need wildlife champions more than ever to help protect the nature they love."

The local nature charity is leading on efforts to recover

some of Northern Ireland's most beloved wildlife, including barn owls, red squirrels and hedgehogs, and is managing 18 nature reserves around the country – the equivalent of 1,190 football pitches – to create space for nature to bounce back.

"In recent years, we have seen the highest number of known barn-owl chicks fledged and recorded red squirrels and pine martens in more woodlands than ever before", says Rosemary.

"Our reserves are vibrant and vital havens for nature, from rare butterflies and fungi to globally threatened seabirds like kittiwakes.



They offer a lot of hope, but there is so much more that we can and need to do to avert a crisis for our local wildlife."

Want to help bring

nature back in Northern Ireland? You can support Ulster Wildlife for just £1.50 a month until Friday 31st January. Visit [www.ulsterwildlife.org](http://www.ulsterwildlife.org) to join now.

## JC Campbell: Move to Newry for popular Rostrevor Car Dealership!

JC Campbell is a well-established car dealership located in Rostrevor, County Down.

This year JC Campbell celebrate the impressive milestone of 80 years in business and it is marked by the first year operating in a whole new location. The new address is 11 Old Warrenpoint Road, Newry, BT34 3PF!

Focus on MG and JC Certified Used cars

JC Campbell is currently an authorized dealer for MG. The brand has seen record growth in the UK in the last few years and is going from strength to strength locally. The JC Certified Used Car department stocks a wide variety of cars from all brands and are prepared to the highest standards. Whether you're looking for a reliable family car or a stylish sports utility vehicle, you're sure to find the perfect fit at JC Campbell.

Comprehensive Services  
In addition to car sales, JC Campbell provides a comprehensive range of



services to meet all your automotive needs. These include:

- Servicing and Repairs: Their experienced technicians can handle all your vehicle's maintenance and repair needs – Authorised Repairer for MG, Honda and Citroen.

- MOT Prep: Keep your car roadworthy with their convenient on-site MOT preparation service.

- Finance Options: They offer flexible finance

packages to help you drive away in your dream car.

- Motability Agent: Fully accredited Motability supplier for all your needs in new vehicles and servicing.

Community Involvement  
JC Campbell is committed to supporting the local community. They actively participate in various initiatives and events, demonstrating their dedication to giving back.

Visit JC Campbell Today  
If you're in the market

for a new or used car, or if you need any automotive services, be sure to visit JC Campbell in Newry. Their friendly and knowledgeable staff will be happy to assist you in finding the perfect vehicle and providing top-notch service.

Contact Information:  
• Address: 11 Old Warrenpoint Road, Newry, BT34 2PF  
• Phone: 028 4173 8691  
• Website: <https://www.jccampbell.co.uk/>

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# STRONG DEMAND FOR SOIL NUTRIENT HEALTH SCHEME TRAINING

A key part of the Soil Nutrient Health Scheme (SNHS) is the completion of training to utilise the information provided in soil analysis reports.

Training has been developed by the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE). This training helps farmers to understand and interpret their SNHS soil analysis report, make best use of organic manures, and learn how to create a

Nutrient Management Plan. It can be completed from the comfort of their home online at: [www.cafre.ac.uk/snhs-training](http://www.cafre.ac.uk/snhs-training). For those who do not have access to online training or do not feel confident in its use, a limited number of face-to-face training sessions

are being provided. These will involve viewing the training videos in a theatre. This training is being delivered by Countryside Services Ltd. Commenting on the delivery of the face-to-face Soil Nutrient Health Scheme training, Dr Andrew Kerr, Rural

Contract Manager at Countryside Services Ltd stated: "Following the success of the events held to date we have experienced a surge in interest from farmers wishing to attend the face-to-face training courses. Farmers recognise that

completing the training could be necessary to receive payments under future farm support schemes and have demonstrated an appetite to attend the face-to-face training events. To cater for demand we are pleased to release a further four additional training dates."

Enniskillen:  
Wednesday 22 January from 1.00pm to 5.00pm in the Ardhowen Theatre  
Craigavon:  
Thursday 30 January from 1.00pm to 5.00pm in the Civic Centre  
Cookstown:  
Monday 10 February from 1.00pm to 5.00pm in the Burnavon Arts and Cultural Centre  
Downpatrick:  
Wednesday 19 February from 1.00pm to 5.00pm in the St Patrick's Centre



Dr Andrew Kerr, Countryside Services pictured with Mary McCormack and a group from Camowen Farmers who participated in the Soil Nutrient Health Scheme Training Event at the Burnavon in Cookstown.

To book your place visit: [www.cafre.ac.uk/snhs-training](http://www.cafre.ac.uk/snhs-training) or telephone Countryside Services on 028 8778 9770. Please note that pre-registration for these events is essential, and you must bring photographic ID with you.

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## DAERA launches £1.55 million rural micro business development grant aid fund

DAERA has recently launched the Rural Business Development Grant Scheme which will deliver £1.55million in capital grants to support rural micro businesses across Northern Ireland.

The Rural Business Development Grant Scheme is funded through the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs 'Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation' (TRPSI) Programme and is delivered in partnership with local Councils.

Eligible rural businesses can apply for capital assistance of 50% up to the value of £4,999 for the purchase of capital equipment which will

help their business to enhance sustainability or lead to growth opportunities and the creation of employment opportunities which in turn strengthen the rural economy.

Launching the scheme, Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Andrew Muir, MLA, said: "I am pleased to announce the opening of the £1.55million Rural Business Development Grant Scheme. This fund is

important in delivering on the Department's priority of building strong and diverse rural communities and the draft Programme for Government priority of growing a globally competitive and sustainable economy with a focus on addressing regional balance."

Minister Muir continued: "I urge all eligible rural businesses to go online and apply as soon as possible. Rural Businesses continue to

play a vital role in our rural communities, and I want to support them at this challenging time and provide them with opportunities that will maximise their potential and stimulate business growth."

Details of the Rural Business Development Grant Scheme are on the DAERA website at: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/services/rural-business-development-grant-scheme-rbdgs>. Only online applications can be accepted for this scheme.

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# Four Seasons Hotel Carlingford to hold Wedding Open Day!

**This Award Winning Venue located in Carlingford, is simply one of the most beautiful places to get married in Ireland!**

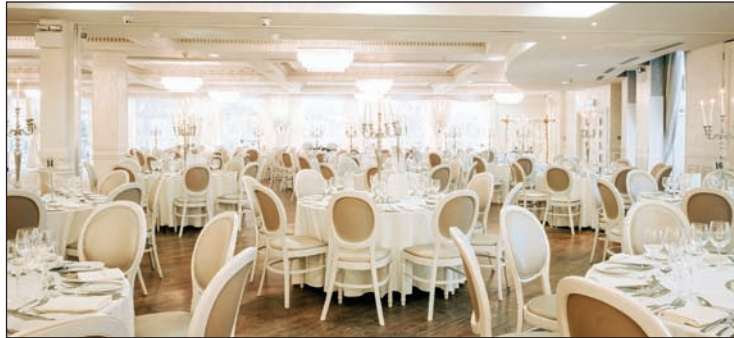
Prospective Brides and Grooms can see this for themselves at the forthcoming Open Day on Sunday 16th February, appointments are available from 11am to 5pm – reserve yours today!

Celebrate the beginning of your love story, along with your family and friends, at the Four Seasons Hotel, Carlingford with Fairytales from your childhood, including the legend of Queen Meave, the Brown Bull of Cooley and Cuchulainn which were all based in the Majestic Cooley Peninsula.

Carlingford provides the perfect backdrop for Your Wedding. With Carlingford Lough and Cooley Mountains, the Old Abbey, King John's Castle and quaint cobbled streets, your photographs will be treasured forever.

The Four Seasons Hotel Carlingford provides an idyllic Wedding Venue in Carlingford boasting 58 well-appointed bedrooms and a Full Leisure Centre for your extended family and guests to enjoy, sitting quaintly beneath the Cooley Mountains overlooking Carlingford Lough.

The Four Seasons Hotel,



Carlingford lies peacefully under the inspiring Cooley Mountains, overlooking Carlingford Lough and only a stone's throw from the rambling streets of the beautiful medieval village of Carlingford.

A jewel in the crown of Ireland's Ancient East, Carlingford offers rugged landscapes, breath-taking sea views and something for all tastes to keep your days full of enjoyment.

Everything from the Carlingford Lough Ferry to boutique shopping and cultural events, consistently bringing a buzz of holiday feel and fun factor to all visitors.

The hotel has recently undergone a number of renova-

tions including the fabulous new executive bedrooms and our classically decorated Lobby with a modern twist, featuring sphere hanging chandeliers and chic button tufted couches. At the Four Seasons Hotel Carlingford you will be assured a warm welcome, superb cuisine and exceptional service along with a destination holiday amongst the best in the Emerald Isle.

The Four Seasons Carlingford was Proud Winner of the RSVP Live Best All-in-One Venue last summer.

The Hotel team is also absolutely thrilled to have been awarded Highly Commended in Excellence in Service at the Irish Hotel Awards recently!

This recognition reflects their dedication to providing top-notch service to every guest who walks through the doors.

The hotel's most recent awards also include:

- Best Large Hotel Wedding Venue in Ireland 2024 & 2023 - Save my Day Awards
- Best Scenic Venue Four Seasons Carlingford 2023 - RSVP
- Highly Commended Wedding Coordinator of the Year 2023 - Linda Scott - Leinster - Wedding Suppliers
- Hotel Venue of the Year - Leinster 2021
- The Venue Co-ordinator of the Year Leinster 2020 winner - Linda Scott

# STRENGTHENING ANIMAL WELFARE A TOP PRIORITY

**A range of policies aimed at strengthening animal welfare, such as introducing Lucy's Law to ban third party sale of puppies and kittens, outlawing the use of adverse training devices such as shock collars and mandating microchipping of cats are among the top priorities for proposed animal welfare reforms in Northern Ireland, Andrew Muir MLA has said.**

During a number of engagements last week, the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Minister updated stakeholders on proposals for his key animal welfare priorities.

Minister Muir met with members of the Northern Ireland Companion Animal Welfare Group (NICAWG) and the All-Party Group on Animal Welfare. The Minister updated stakeholders on current work to bring forward a version of Lucy's Law for Northern Ireland and consulting on mandatory CCTV in slaughterhouses. Additionally, he informed the group of his intention to convene an expert group to review Dog Breeding regulations.

Minister Muir said: "Animal welfare is one of my top priorities and I want to ensure that we focus on the right initiatives and that our resources are focused in the areas most in need of reform."

"I intend to bring forward a suite of secondary legislation to address a wide range



of issues including the mandatory microchipping of cats and strengthening microchipping requirements, including making it an offence not to update records, and the prohibition of the use of aversive training devices such as shock collars.

"While my department is currently advancing preparations to bring forward a version of Lucy's Law for Northern Ireland, and consult on mandatory CCTV in slaughterhouses, I was pleased to discuss

with stakeholders other anticipated reforms. These include my ambition to commission a comprehensive expert review of dog breeding licensing, which would also consider the need for regulation of canine fertility services."

The Minister continued: "I want an open and ongoing dialogue on these matters. While I want to give an indication of what the priorities will be, the detail of those reforms will be open to

public consultation and ongoing dialogue with key stakeholders. I believe that by working together we can ensure efforts are focused on addressing the right issues and collectively, we can go further to achieve the best possible outcomes."

The Minister concluded: "Once you are sure you can commit to the responsibility of owning a pet, please consider adopting and providing a home to the many animals living in rehoming organisations."



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# THE FUTURE OF FARMING MACHINERY

The UK farming landscape is undergoing a technological revolution, with cutting-edge machinery and vehicles poised to transform productivity and efficiency.

Self-driving tractors and harvesters, equipped with GPS, sensors, and AI, are now capable of operating independently, reducing the need for human intervention. This allows farmers to focus on other tasks, improving efficiency and reducing labour costs.

Drones equipped with sensors capture detailed data on crop health, soil conditions, and irrigation needs. This information, combined with variable-rate technology, enables

farmers to apply inputs like fertilizer and pesticides precisely where needed, optimizing resource use and minimizing environmental impact.

Telematics systems allow farmers to monitor their machinery remotely, track performance, and diagnose problems in real-time. This reduces downtime and improves maintenance efficiency. Furthermore, data collected from sensors and machinery can be analyzed to identify trends, optimize operations, and improve decision-making.

Electric and hybrid vehicles offer sustainable alternatives to traditional diesel-



powered models, reducing emissions and operating costs.

Robotics and automation are also playing a significant role. Robots can be used to identify and remove weeds,

reducing the need for herbicides and improving crop quality. Automated milking systems can collect milk from cows more efficiently and hygienically, improving milk quality

and reducing labour costs. These technologies are not only improving efficiency and productivity but also helping farmers to reduce their environmental impact

and adapt to the challenges of climate change. As technology continues to evolve, UK farmers are well-positioned to embrace innovation and remain competitive in the global marketplace.

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## Create a Cottage Garden

The cottage garden, with its informal and romantic character, evokes a sense of peace and tranquility. It's a style that embraces the natural world, celebrating a riot of colours, textures, and scents.

To design your own enchanting cottage garden, embrace the natural by avoiding perfectly manicured lawns and straight lines. Opt for curving paths, irregular borders, and flowing planting areas. Let your borders blend into the surrounding landscape, allowing plantings to spill over paths and create a sense of informality. Utilise natural materials like stone, brick, and wood for paths, edging, and garden features.

Fill your garden with a profusion of flowers in a variety of colours and heights. Think cottage classics like roses, peonies, delphiniums, and poppies.

Include annuals like nasturtiums, petunias, and sunflowers to add bursts of vibrant colour throughout the season. Intersperse herbs and vegetables amongst the flowers for a truly productive and picturesque garden.

Create a sense of depth by planting a mix of tall, medium, and low-growing plants to create layers and visual interest. Utilise climbing roses, clematis, and honeysuckle to adorn fences, walls, and arches. Plant low-growing groundcovers like ivy or sweet woodruff beneath taller plants to add texture and suppress weeds.

Incorporate unique features such as a small



pond, a bubbling fountain, or even a simple birdbath to add a touch of magic to your cottage garden. Create shady seating areas

and support climbing plants with charming arches and pergolas. Add rustic touches with antique garden tools, birdhouses, and decorative pots.

Finally, embrace imperfection. Allow some weeds to flourish, and let nature take its course. Regularly deadhead spent blooms to encourage continuous flowering and prevent self-seeding. Most importantly, enjoy the

process. The cottage garden is all about enjoying the journey. Relax, observe your plants, and let your garden evolve over time.

By following these tips, you can create a charming cottage garden that is both beautiful and inviting. Remember to let your personality shine through and enjoy the process of creating your own unique piece of horticultural heaven.

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# WINTER WILDLIFE IN THE WOODLAND

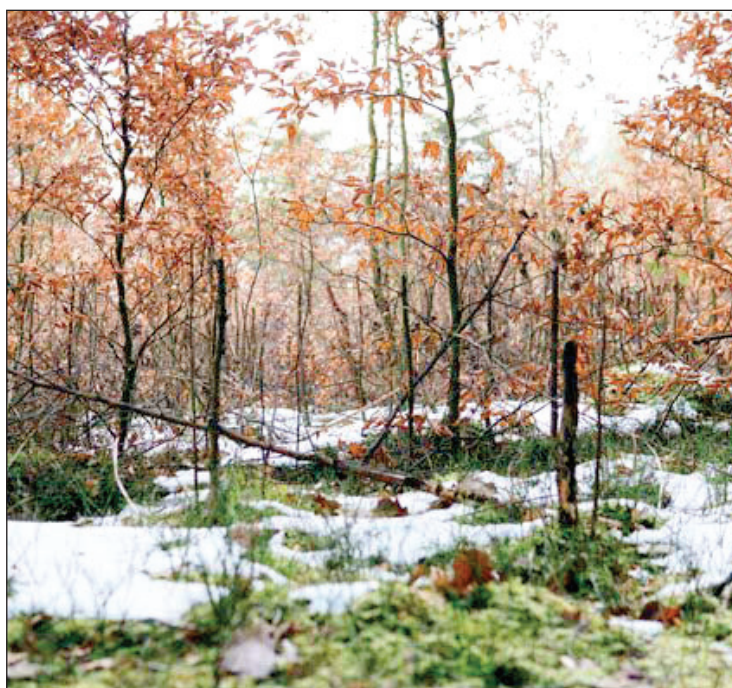
JV Allister spots the first green shoots of spring on a winter woodland walk.

I park at the roadside, hopefully leaving room for cars or tractors to pass, but this place is a bit off the beaten track, so it should be OK. Although the snow has mostly disappeared from the road, it's still heaped on the grass verges, one more than the other, indicating the wind direction, and it's on the least affected one that I spot the wild garlic coming into bloom, and chew a stalk. While I know they're native plants which happen to bloom early, I don't remember them from my childhood days, so possibly they're good colonisers.

The wood which I intend to explore is mostly deciduous, although adjoined by a larger plantation, more like a forest, of Sitka spruce, aliens

in regimented rows, shadowing needle-covered ground, providing habitat mostly unsuited to native creatures and plants, although I suppose crossbills and coal tits might be attracted to the seed cones and reclusive sparrowhawks to it as a nesting site from which they can emerge at speed to predate the birds of the nearby native woodland edge and hedgerows.

A robin sings, then another further along the woodland edge, territorial competitors, and, as I stand to listen, typically one flutters down to say hello. The woodland edge rather than the darker barer interior attracts most wildlife, whether birds such as robins or blackbirds, and warblers in spring, and field mice, bees



and butterflies in season, to feed and nest because the sunlight, particularly along this south face,

encourages trees such as hawthorn, hazel and mountain ash, and wildflowers such as daisies, dandelions

and honeysuckle. The slight path I follow up the hill might have been made by badgers or humans,

or both, weaving between grey trunked beech, gnarled oak and smooth elegant ash, along ditches and over small hills, at least one of which looks like it might contain a badger family. It is still and silent other than the sound of my laboured breathing and uncertain footsteps, breaking twigs and crushing dead leaves, but I stop to allow my senses to settle, to see and listen, and am rewarded by a sharp call 'tsurp', frequently repeated,

and watch a family party of long-tailed tits, siblings, parents, cousins, maybe in-laws, pass by above, flying quickly from twig to twig, tree to tree, searching for miniscule invertebrates. After they pass, I relish the silence and the company of the trees, already budded, ready for spring, before making my way back down. A magpie cackles nearby, up to mischief no doubt, and the robins are still singing, joined

by foraging blue tits excitedly calling to each other.

I will visit again during the year to enjoy this place, to look, listen, smell, touch and feel woodland and its inhabitants, and, when the leaves are back, to breathe in the oxygenated air. But even today, as it becomes chilly and there are snow clouds gathering, I feel refreshed in body, mind and spirit, and am grateful.

JVA

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## Surviving winter weather on the farm

The cold spell in the past weeks has acted as a reminder that now is a good time to plan for all eventualities in weather conditions.

Kieran McCartan, College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE), Agri-environment Adviser, reminds us that: "Freezing conditions may result in frozen and burst pipes; snow and ice can result in problems in getting deliveries in or collections out and feeding stock outdoors. High wind has the potential for causing damage to farm buildings."

For each of these risks you should think about how you would deal with severe weather and your ability to provide water, food and shelter for livestock.

Kieran advises that: "It is good practice to ensure all water pipes within and outside buildings are well insulated. Turn off water to fields that have no livestock and keep a supply of relevant water fittings to repair any leakages that appear after the thaw. Check antifreeze is in all vehicles. You should also keep a supply of grit/salt."

Kieran continues that "If wind is forecast, secure all loose objects that may be blown around the farmyard,

close and secure all doors and windows. Keep away from the sheltered side of walls, buildings and trees in case they collapse. Do not go and repair damage while the storm is in progress. Do not drive unless your journey is necessary and if you must drive, be aware of side winds. Do not touch any electrical / telephone cables that have blown down."

If snow and frost are forecast, plan how you would get food and water to your livestock. If milk collections are suspended, have you

extra storage capacity in place?

If feed deliveries can't get through, have you sufficient feed stored to cover your requirements. Minimise air flow by sealing doors and preventing drafts, drain out the milking machine and protect pipes/pumps from freezing.

Keep tractors, handlers and quads in a shed when not in use.

Check and test backup generators and equipment, never use stand by generators indoors, as the fumes from the engine can be

lethal.

Before going out onto the land always tell someone where you are going, how long you will be and wear suitable layers of cloths and high visibility clothing when searching for animals.

Kieran advises to: "Keep a close eye on the weather forecast so that you can take appropriate action. Check websites to see if there is interruption to water and electricity supplies in your area. Some time spent now, preparing your farm for the

unexpected, could save you a lot of problems in the future."

Have a list and/or store the numbers on the phone of those you may need to contact. These could include the electricity company, electrician, NI water, plumber, milk collection and meal supplier and keep your phone and a torch fully charged. The main priority is that you stay safe.

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# NEW YEAR NEW EVENTS AT AIR AMBULANCE, CALLING FOR YOUR SUPPORT

The air ambulance medical team is called upon twice a day to critically ill or injured people, and the charity has expanded its events portfolio for 2025 to help raise the £7,000 needed daily to keep the team airborne and saving lives.

They are calling on you to sign up to a challenge event for 2025.

For the first time the charity is bringing a 'Firewalk' to the grounds of Stormont where 100 participants will take on temperatures of 500C

in bare feet walking along a path of hot coals! This unique event, scheduled for Friday 28th March, sponsored by Scott's Fuels, is the perfect individual or corporate team building challenge, with mental and physical

training provided by UK Firewalk host, Scott Bell, two-time Guinness World Record Breaker. Participants will celebrate their success with a sumptuous meal in the Long Gallery of Parliament Buildings at Stormont, a rare opportunity to enjoy an evening in this prestigious location. Registration for the event including training and post challenge meal in Stormont is just £60 with a suggested fundraising target of £150.

Air Ambulance NI has organised three abseil events, the first of which is 2nd March when participants will

take on the thrilling experience of abseiling 120ft down the iconic Europa Hotel, Belfast.

For those with a greater adrenalin drive, you could try a skydive, leaping out of a plane at 10,000 feet!

And for those who would like to keep the feet on the ground, the charity is calling upon walkers and runners to sign up to the Moy Park Belfast City Marathon which will be held on Sunday 4th May 2025. To register for the walk, relay or full 26.2 miles, go to <https://belfastcitymarathon.com/>.

Kerry Anderson, Head of Fundraising said, "This year our

charity aspires to raise £3m to sustain the Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS) and during that time it's expected the medics will be called approximately 700 times. Every call needs the support of the public in fundraising.

Our events portfolio offers something for everyone from the firewalk to the abseils, skydives and even dragon boat racing up the River Lagan as well as a runway run at City of Derry Airport. For a full list of events please go to <https://airambulancenl.org/upcoming-events/>

None of us know what the day ahead



holds and on average for two individuals, they will need the help of the air ambulance service. It could be a serious road traffic collision, farm accident, medical

emergency or sports incident, whatever the incident the medical team can be at the patients' side in minutes, providing interventions that can make a difference.

Please support your air ambulance this year." For more information and to sign up now for any of the events being organised, go to <https://airambulancenl.org/upcoming-events/>

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## Your home, your style, your solution!

Check out the new curtain department at The Blind Spot

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

The Blind Spot is already a well-established blinds and shutters company with

over 30 years of experience.

Manager Krystina Bradford says:

"The original factory shop was opened in 1990 by my mum and Grandfather. We still specialize in manufacturing and fitting high-quality window coverings for both residential and commercial properties. This now includes venetian, vertical, roller and roman blinds but also embraces new technologies and advancements - today we also offer motorised blinds, shutters, multi-function Blindscreens as well as our new curtain department!"

Book Now for delivery within 6 weeks!"

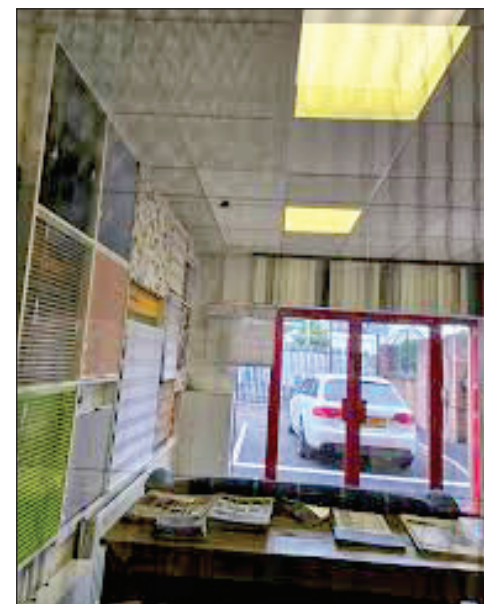
Did you know that investing in quality blinds can help improve your home's thermal insulation? Whether you prefer sleek roller blinds, practical #blindscreen, or classic shutters, The Blind Spot has you covered. Say goodbye to wasted heat and hello to a warmer, cozier home!

In addition to opening throughout the week, The Blind spot is also Open Saturdays: 9:00 AM -

12:00 PM, the showroom is open and free for you to browse at your leisure. Explore a stunning range of blinds, shades, and shutters to find your perfect match. The office is ready to help schedule your home appointment for a personalized quote—no guesswork, just real numbers tailored to your space! Stop by and see them this Saturday they'd love to help make your home vision a reality!

In the showroom you can fully appreciate the wide range and colour choice in beautiful Sante Fe Shutters—these can be installed in less than 6 weeks. You can also appreciate the difference that motorised blinds could make to your lifestyle. View the range of Blindscreens - manufactured within the UK. These are great for keeping our bugs as well as giving total blackout on any window and door including bi fold doors and can revolutionise the way you manage your access to the outdoors at home or in your business.

All of the blinds and shutters are made-to-



measure and crafted with precision. A free measuring service is offered right across Northern Ireland—so there's not need to guess-timate! All at Affordable Prices without compromising on quality and a wide range of Choice. Explore various styles, fabrics,

and colours to match your property's aesthetic. Get in Touch or Visit the NEW SHOWROOM at 4 East Belfast Enterprise Park, Belfast BT5 4GX or give them a call at 028 9059 5255 to discuss your requirements. [www.theblindspotbelfast.co.uk](http://www.theblindspotbelfast.co.uk)

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# Bringing the Countryside Indoors: Achieving Country Living Chic

**Country Living Chic is more than just a decorating style; it's a feeling. It evokes a sense of warmth, comfort, and a connection to nature, even if you live miles from the nearest farm.**

To infuse your home with this timeless aesthetic, embrace natural materials. Incorporate wood, such as rustic beams, reclaimed wood furniture, and woven baskets. Add stone accents like a fireplace surround, flooring, or a stone-topped table. Opt for natural fabrics like cotton, linen, and wool. Use them for cosy throws, textured rugs, and embroidered curtains.

Bring the outdoors in by filling your home with plants, from leafy ferns to flowering blooms. Consider a small herb garden on your windowsill. Incorporate natural elements like branches, dried flowers, and seashells into your decor. Maximize natural light by keeping windows uncovered and framing

beautiful views with curtains or blinds.

Create a cosy atmosphere with a fireplace, if you have one. If not, consider a wood-burning stove or even an electric fireplace. Layer lighting with table lamps, floor lamps, and soft-glowing candles to create a warm and inviting ambiance. Mix and match textures to add depth and interest. Think of sheepskin rugs, chunky knit throws, and velvet cushions.

Incorporate vintage and antique finds. Hunt for unique pieces at flea markets, antique shops, and estate sales. Add character with vintage china, antique mirrors, and old maps. Incorporate treasured family heirlooms to add a personal touch.



Keep it simple and uncluttered. Avoid overcrowding your space. Keep surfaces clean and uncluttered for a relaxed and airy feel. Invest in high-quality pieces that will last for years to come. Embrace imperfections. A few scuffs and scratches can add character to

your furniture. Add personal touches. Display cherished family photos throughout your home. Incorporate souvenirs from your travels to remind you of special memories. Create a cosy reading nook with a comfortable armchair and a

collection of your favourite books. Country Living Chic is all about creating a home that feels both welcoming and stylish. By incorporating these tips, you can transform your space into a haven that reflects your love of nature and all things cosy!

## Spring into Action: Designing, Planning, Planting & Landscaping Your Small Garden

**Spring is the perfect time to revitalise your outdoor space. Whether you have a tiny courtyard or a modest backyard, transforming your small garden into a blooming oasis is achievable with careful planning and a touch of creativity.**

Begin by accurately measuring your garden space and creating a simple scale drawing or utilizing a garden planning app to visualize your layout. Note the sun's path throughout the day to identify areas of full sun, partial shade, and deep shade, which will guide your plant selection. If privacy is a concern, explore options like tall hedges, bamboo screens, or strategically placed climbing plants. Divide your garden into distinct zones, such as a seating area, a herb garden, or a flower bed, to create a sense of order and function.

When choosing plants, focus on verticality by utilising climbing plants like clematis or honeysuckle to add height and visual interest without consuming valuable ground space. Embrace compact varieties such as dwarf shrubs, miniature roses, and space-saving perennials. Consider container gardening to maximize space by growing herbs, vegetables, and flowers in pots and hanging

baskets. Prepare the soil by adding compost or well-rotted manure. Plant strategically by placing taller plants at the back of borders to create a layered effect and group flowers in clusters for maximum visual impact.

Landscaping can further enhance your small garden. Create winding paths using stepping stones, gravel, or decorative paving slabs. Add a tranquil touch with a small birdbath or a miniature fountain, which can also attract wildlife. Install low-voltage lighting to illuminate pathways and highlight key features. Incorporate trellises, obelisks, and wall-mounted planters to add visual interest and maximize space.

Maintaining your garden is crucial for its continued beauty. Water deeply and infrequently to encourage strong root growth. Keep weeds at bay to prevent them from competing with your plants for nutrients and water. Feed your plants with a balanced fertilizer during the growing season. Regularly

remove spent blooms to encourage continuous flowering.

Remember to embrace simplicity by avoiding overcrowding your garden with too many plants. Create a cohesive colour scheme to enhance the overall look and feel of your space. Combine plants with different leaf shapes and textures to add visual interest. Don't be afraid to experiment and see what works best



in your garden. By following these tips, you can transform your small garden into a

beautiful and functional outdoor living space that you'll enjoy all season long. Happy gardening!



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# HAVE AN RSPB BIG GARDEN BIRDWATCH WITH BRITISH GARDEN CENTRES

Your local British garden Centres will have all you need to make the most of your birdwatching experience, from bird feeders and seeds and the team have put together this guide to help you spot more avian visitors!

How to attract more birds to your garden

Want to increase your chances of spotting a variety of birds? British Garden Centres has everything you need to create a bird-friendly haven.

**Bird-friendly plants:** Our stores are brimming with bird-attracting plants, and we recommend planting berries, seeds, and nectar-rich flowers which are a feast for birds all year round. Crab apples, berry bushes, and fruit trees provide food and shelter from predators and the unpredictable UK

weather. Plants such as holly, hawthorn, and rowan offer delicious berries or attract insect snacks, meaning birds will come flocking to the garden for a tasty treat.

**Feeders for your outdoor space:** At this time of year, when the weather is cold and food is scarcer, birds' diets will need supplementing, and we stock a wide range of feeders for seeds, suet, and nectar.

Whatever the size of your garden, invest in seed feeders, perfect for small birds like tits and

sparrows, and come in various styles from ones you can hang from a balcony or tree to stakes that have the full works for your lawn. We also have mealworms and peanut feeders cater to multiple birds, while fat ball feeders provide essential energy, especially during winter.

**Perfect homes:** Provide safe havens with our selection of birdhouses and nest boxes. It's important to choose the right size hole for different species: small for tits, larger for starlings. Open-fronted boxes are

ideal for robins and song thrushes. Garden birds need sheltered places to roost to conserve energy and stay warm and they can also be used for early nesting by some bird species like blue tits and great tits.

**Bird baths and bowls:** Birds need water year-round and the UK winter sometimes sees natural water sources like ponds and streams freezing, making it difficult for birds to find fresh water for drinking and bathing. Choose from shallow dishes, bowls, or elevated birdbaths to help

them remove dirt and aid digestion of food.

Amy Stubbs, Project & Development Manager at British Garden Centres said: Our knowledgeable and friendly staff can offer expert advice on bird feeding, including choosing the right feeders and keeping them clean, as well as advice on bird-friendly gardening like avoiding harmful pesticides, providing clean water, and creating a diverse garden that birds will want to visit again and again."

Website: [www.britishgardencentres.com](http://www.britishgardencentres.com)

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**CONOR O'DONNELL**  
2.30PM - 4.30PM



**JOHNNY BRADY**  
9.15PM - 11.15PM



**MICHAEL ENGLISH**  
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**STACEY GREEN**  
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# FINDING YOUR WINTER WONDERLAND: WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A RELAXING RURAL HOTEL BREAK!

The winter months can often feel long and dreary. But with the right escape, at just the right time, you can transform the season with a cosy and rejuvenating experience.

A relaxing hotel break can be the perfect antidote to the winter blues, offering a chance to unwind, recharge, and enjoy some much-needed pampering.

When choosing your winter wonderland, consider the ambiance. A crackling fireplace is the epitome of winter cosiness.

Look for hotels with inviting fireplaces in guest rooms, lobbies, or communal areas. Opt for hotels with warm and inviting interiors, featuring rich colours, plush textiles, and comfortable furnishings. While winter days may be short, ensure your chosen hotel maximizes natural light. Large windows and skylights can make a big difference.



Indulge in the hotel's wellness facilities. Enjoy luxurious spa treatments like massages, facials, and body wraps. Escape the cold with a relaxing swim in an indoor pool, perhaps with a jacuzzi or sauna for added relaxation. Maintain your fitness

routine with a well-equipped gym or take advantage of fitness classes like yoga or Pilates. Savour delicious meals at the hotel's restaurant, perhaps enjoying a romantic dinner by candlelight. Look for cosy dining areas with warm lighting and inviting atmospheres.

Treat yourself to a traditional afternoon tea, complete with delicate sandwiches, pastries, and a pot of steaming hot tea. If you're looking for more than just relaxation, choose a hotel near winter sports destinations that appeal, in Northern Ireland we are fortunate

enough to have a wealth of opportunities for activities such as mountain or hill hiking, horse-riding, cycling, surfing, boating, shopping and simply walking.

Explore the surrounding area

with a scenic winter walk, enjoying the crisp air and picturesque landscapes. Alternatively, enjoy a cosy night in with a good book, a glass of wine, and a roaring fire.

Look for hotels that offer personalized

service, going the extra mile to ensure your stay is truly unforgettable. Many hotels offer special winter packages, including discounts, complimentary upgrades, and festive treats. If you're planning a romantic getaway,

look for hotels with intimate settings, such as boutique hotels or charming country inns.

By considering these factors, you can find the perfect hotel break to escape the winter blues and create lasting memories.

## March Madness at The Causeway Hotel

Looking for the perfect getaway this March? The Causeway Hotel has you covered with unbeatable offers to make your stay unforgettable.

**Stay Longer, Save More**  
Embrace the magic of March with our Winter Warmer deal. Book two nights and enjoy the third night free! Savour a delicious breakfast each morning and indulge in dinner on your first two nights. With more time to explore the stunning coastline and iconic landmarks, there are endless reasons to stay longer.

**Rest & Reflect March Weekend Getaway**  
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**Family-Friendly March Break**  
Looking for a fun-filled family adventure? Kids under 12 stay and eat free when sharing with adults. Enjoy a cozy night's stay with breakfast for just £180, or upgrade to dinner, bed, and breakfast for £200. Create cherished memories as you explore local attractions, perfect for family bonding this spring. Don't miss out on

these fantastic offers this March. Whether it's relaxation, adventure, or quality time with loved ones, The Causeway Hotel has something special for everyone. Book now and let your journey begin!  
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experience you'll want to repeat year after year. Book your stay today, and let us help you create unforgettable memories. Whether it's a weekend getaway or a longer break, a caravan holiday promises the perfect blend of relaxation and adventure. Don't wait – the open road and the great outdoors are calling!

# CELEBRATING A DECADE OF EXCELLENCE: THE EIKON EXHIBITION CENTRE MARKS 10 YEARS

Nestled in the heart of Lisburn, Northern Ireland, the Eikon Exhibition Centre is a beacon of innovation, adaptability, and excellence in the events industry.

Opened in 2015, this premier venue has redefined the standard for exhibitions, conferences, and large-scale gatherings in the region. As the centre celebrates its 10th anniversary, it's an opportunity to reflect on its remarkable journey and the visionary leaders who spearheaded the transition from its original home at Kings Hall, Belfast.

A New Beginning: From Kings Hall to Eikon

The relocation from the Kings Hall—home of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society (RUAS) for over 80 years—to the purpose-built Eikon Exhibition Centre was a monumental undertaking, spearheaded by the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society with three key individuals at the forefront of this ambitious project: Theresa Morrissey, Group Executive Director; Rhonda Geary, Group Operations Director; and David Browne, Operations Manager. At the time, Colin McDonald, RUAS Chief Executive, played an instrumental role in overseeing the entire process, providing leadership and vision throughout the relocation.

Under Colin McDonald's stewardship, the project was guided to success, ensuring that the move to the state-of-the-art Eikon Exhibition Centre would serve as a fitting home for the future of the RUAS. His expertise and dedication were pivotal in navigating the complexities of the transition and positioning the society for continued growth and success in its new location.

Their leadership, vision, and passion were instrumental in bringing the Eikon Exhibition Centre to life. Each played a vital role in ensuring a smooth transition, leveraging their collective expertise to create a facility that has become synonymous with excellence.

The Eikon Exhibition Hall, the first building erected on the site, set the stage for this bold new chapter. This was followed by the development of the Logan Hall in 2018, a versatile addition that enhanced the venue's capacity and functionality.

Insights from the Leaders: Reflecting on the journey, Theresa Morrissey shared her fond memories of the relocation process:

"Moving from Kings Hall



(L-R) : - Rhonda Geary, RUAS Group Operations Director, David Browne, RUAS Operations Director and Theresa Morrissey, RUAS Group Executive Director

was bittersweet. It was a place steeped in history and tradition, but the potential of Eikon Exhibition Centre was undeniable. The hard work and dedication of the entire team led by Colin McDonald, our Chief Executive at the time, made it possible to turn our vision into reality. His leadership was instrumental in steering us through every challenge. It's incredibly rewarding to see how the venue has grown over the years."

For Rhonda Geary, Group Operations Director and the driving force behind key agricultural events such as the

Balmoral Show, Royal Ulster Winter Fair, and Royal Ulster Premier Beef & Lamb Championships, the priority was ensuring the new venue could meet the diverse needs of both agricultural and non-agricultural clients. Reflecting on the journey, she shared:

"Our goal was to create a space that not only embraced modernity and versatility but also upheld the rich traditions of the agricultural community we represent. Hosting events like the Balmoral Show alongside diverse gatherings such as

Dubshed and the National Balmoral Championships has truly highlighted the adaptability and potential of the Eikon Exhibition Centre."

The 10th anniversary of the Eikon is not just a celebration of its achievements but also a tribute to the visionaries who brought it to life and the countless individuals who have contributed to its success. From its agricultural roots with the RUAS to its status as a premier event destination, Eikon's story is one of growth, innovation, and an unwavering commitment to excellence.

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# ROAD SAFETY CAMPAIGN NETS GIANT WINTER SIGN-UP

The Stena Line Belfast Giants have backed a road safety community engagement campaign to reduce road deaths as winter gets under way.

The Giants are the latest high profile sporting organisation to sign up to the Share the Road to Zero campaign, led by their Captain Mark Cooper.

Ulster Rugby, the Irish Football Association, the Northern Ireland Football League and Ulster GAA also backed the campaign this year.

Sadly, so far in 2024, 60 people have died due to road traffic collisions.

Mark Cooper has now registered more than 180 appearances for the Giants since arriving in Belfast from Canada for the 2021/22 season.

He was appointed captain ahead of the 2023/24 season, during which he led the club to its successful Champions Hockey League

campaign and the Elite League Playoff Final.

Speaking ahead of their game against Coventry Blaze on Wednesday evening, Mark said: "The SSE Arena sits between six and 8,000 people so we will have a bunch of families and people driving to the game.

"Leaving extra early and making sure you give yourself enough time is ideal to keep you and your family safe.

"Without question, road safety is of the utmost importance for everyone, so I'm pleased that we can lend our support to such a vital cause and the Belfast Giants are proud to be supporting the all-important Share the Road to Zero initiative."

Minister John



Infrastructure Minister John O'Dowd welcomes The Belfast Giants signing up to the Department's Share the Road to Zero campaign at the SSE Arena as the winter gets under way. Included with the Minister (from left) are Robert Fitzpatrick, Chief Executive Officer, The Odyssey Trust; Mark Cooper, Captain, Belfast Giants; Paul McMahon, Chief Operating Officer, The Odyssey Trust; and Steve Thornton, Group Head of Hockey and Commercial, The Odyssey Trust.

O'Dowd said: "We are delighted to have The Belfast Giants sign up to our Share the Road

to Zero Campaign and to encourage their fans who travel to games to take care and

responsibility on the roads.

"The winter is on top of us and the roads can

be treacherous with snow, frost and heavy rainfall and every action you take as a

road user ensures you arrive home safely and your loved ones arrive home safely.

"One of the best ways to ensure safety on our roads and fulfil our long-term goal of eliminating death and serious injury by 2050, is by changing road user behaviour.

"We all have a personal responsibility to behave in a way that keeps ourselves and others safe and my Department's Share the Road to Zero campaign reminds us of that. The sad reality is that if we do not change our own attitudes when we are using the roads, our death toll will continue to increase.

"We can all potentially save a life if we RoadWise Up. Pay attention, slow down, wear your seat

belt, don't use your mobile phone while driving and never, ever drink or take drugs and drive."

Steve Thornton, Group Head of Commercial and Hockey at The Odyssey Trust, commented: "Undoubtedly, it's incredibly sad to hear that the number of people who have lost their lives on Northern Ireland's roads has risen.

"By signing up to the Share the Road to Zero campaign, we hope that the Belfast Giants can play a role in reminding people to be responsible on the roads at all times."

Pledging to 'Share the Road to Zero' can be done online via www.sharetheroadtozero.com as an individual or as an organisation.

## DRIVING FORCE

From autonomous delivery vehicles to connected car technology, in this article we consider the Impact of AI on the motor industry and new cars in 2025.

2025 is shaping up to be a pivotal year for the automotive industry, with several key trends and developments likely to dominate the headlines:

Electric Vehicles (EVs) Continue Their Ascent: Expect to see a significant expansion of EV models across various segments, from affordable city cars to high-performance sports cars.

Advancements in battery technology will lead to longer driving ranges and shorter charging times, addressing key concerns of EV adoption.

Sustainable Materials and Manufacturing: Automakers will continue to prioritize sustainable practices, incorporating recycled materials and eco-friendly production processes. Expect to see more innovative materials derived from plants and other renewable sources used in vehicle interiors.

Connected Car Technology: Vehicles



will become increasingly integrated with our digital lives, offering seamless connectivity to smartphones, smart homes, and other devices. Automakers will leverage over-the-air updates to improve vehicle performance and add new features remotely.

Hydrogen Fuel Cell Vehicles (FCEVs): FCEVs, offering longer ranges and faster refueling times than

battery-electric vehicles, may emerge as a viable alternative in certain segments. Governments and energy companies will invest in hydrogen fueling infrastructure to support the growth of FCEVs.

Autonomous Delivery Vehicles: Self-driving delivery vehicles will become more common, revolutionizing the logistics industry and improving efficiency.

Cybersecurity

Concerns: As vehicles become more connected, cybersecurity will be a top priority for automakers, with robust measures to protect against hacking and data breaches.

These are just a few of the major trends likely to shape the automotive landscape in 2025. The industry is undergoing rapid transformation, and the year ahead promises exciting innovations and challenges.

## New Cars to Watch Out for in 2025

2025 is shaping up to be an exciting year for car enthusiasts in the UK, with a number of highly anticipated new models set to hit the roads.

Here are five of the most promising new cars coming out in 2025.

**Renault 5**  
The Renault 5 is a highly anticipated electric revival of a classic French hatchback. It promises a fun, retro-inspired design with modern electric powertrain technology. The Renault 5 is expected to offer a range of up to 248 miles and a starting price of around £20,000.

**Mini Aceman**  
The Mini Aceman is a brand-new model that will slot into the Mini lineup as a small SUV. It will offer a stylish, retro-inspired design with Mini's characteristic quirky touches. The Aceman is expected to be priced from around £25,000.

**MG2**  
The MG2 is an upcoming budget-friendly electric supermini that aims to take on the likes of the

Volkswagen ID.2 and Citroen e-C3. It promises affordable electric motoring with a range of around 200 miles and a starting price of under £20,000.

**Renault Twingo**  
The Renault Twingo is another iconic French model that is set to be revived as an electric city car.

It will offer a fun, quirky design with a focus on practicality and affordability. The Twingo is expected to be priced from around £15,000.

**Suzuki eVX**  
The Suzuki eVX is the Japanese brand's first fully-electric car. It promises a stylish, SUV-inspired design with a range of up to 250 miles. The eVX is expected to be priced from around £30,000.

These are just a few of the exciting new cars that are set to be released



in the UK in 2025. With a wide range of options to choose from, there is sure to be something to suit everyone's needs and budgets.

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# THE ADVANTAGES OF PROFESSIONAL OVEN CLEANING

A clean oven is not just about aesthetics; it's about safety, efficiency, and overall kitchen hygiene. While DIY cleaning can be effective, professional oven cleaning offers several significant advantages.

Deep and Thorough Cleaning  
Professional cleaners have the tools and expertise to access and clean hard-to-reach areas, such as nooks and crannies, that are often missed during regular cleaning. They use specialized cleaning agents and techniques to effectively remove stubborn grease and grime, leaving your oven spotless.  
Time-Saving Convenience  
Professional oven cleaning saves you valuable time and

energy. Instead of spending hours scrubbing and cleaning, you can focus on other tasks. Additionally, you won't have to worry about the mess, harsh chemicals, or the physical effort involved in the cleaning process.  
Improved Oven Performance  
A clean oven can cook food more evenly and efficiently, reducing energy consumption. Regular professional cleaning can also help extend the lifespan of your oven by preventing damage caused by

accumulated grease and grime.  
Health and Safety Benefits  
A buildup of grease and grime in your oven can pose a fire hazard. Professional cleaning can help mitigate this risk. Additionally, a clean oven can improve indoor air quality by reducing the release of harmful particles and fumes.  
Peace of Mind  
When you hire a professional oven cleaning service, you can rest assured that your oven

is being cleaned by experts who know what they're doing.  
Many professional cleaners offer guarantees on their work, ensuring your satisfaction.  
While DIY cleaning can be a cost-effective option, it may not always provide the same level of cleanliness and efficiency as professional cleaning. By investing in a professional oven cleaning service, you can enjoy a cleaner, healthier, and more efficient kitchen.



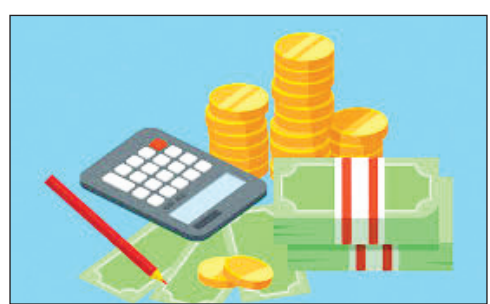
## Slash Your Energy Bills: Simple Steps for Big Savings

With energy prices on the rise, it's more important than ever to find ways to reduce your energy consumption and lower your bills. Fortunately, there are many simple steps you can take to achieve significant savings.

One of the easiest ways to reduce your energy consumption is to simply turn off lights, appliances, and electronics when you're not using them. Even leaving devices on standby can consume energy, so it's important to power them down completely.

save energy is to lower your thermostat by a few degrees. You may not even notice the difference in temperature, but it can make a big difference on your energy bill. Additionally, taking shorter showers can help reduce your water and energy usage.

efficient appliances can also help you save money in the long run. Look for models with high energy ratings, such as A+++.



Another easy way to

Investing in energy-

To further improve your home's energy efficiency, consider insulating your loft, walls, and floor. Proper insulation can dramatically reduce heat loss, keeping your home warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer. Sealing up any gaps around doors, windows, and skirting boards can also help prevent heat loss.

bulbs use less energy and last longer than traditional bulbs.

it's important to provide accurate meter readings to your energy supplier. Additionally, regularly comparing energy tariffs can help you find the best deal for your needs. Finally, explore government schemes and grants that can help you improve your home's energy efficiency.

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## Tasks to refresh your home in the New Year

January is a great time to refresh your home and prepare for the year ahead. A deep clean can breathe new life into your space, while de-cluttering can help reduce stress and create a more organized environment.

Start by giving your home a thorough cleaning. Wash windows inside and out for a clearer view, and shampoo carpets and rugs to remove dirt and allergens. Clean appliances like your refrigerator, oven, and microwave, and don't forget to wipe down baseboards and mouldings.



Next, tackle the clutter. Sort through clothes in closets and drawers, donating or selling anything you no longer need. Organize kitchen cabinets, tossing expired food and tidying up pantry items. De-clutter bathroom cabinets by getting rid of old toiletries and makeup. Finally, take some time to file important paperwork and shred unnecessary documents.

system to ensure efficient operation. Insulate exposed pipes to prevent freezing and clean out gutters and downspouts to avoid water damage.

realistic goals and break down larger tasks into smaller, manageable steps. Make cleaning more enjoyable by putting on music or a podcast, and reward yourself for completing tasks. Involve your family in the process to make it a fun and productive experience.

To prepare your home for the winter months, check your insulation and add more if needed. Schedule a professional tune-up for your heating

As you look ahead to spring, start planning your garden and order seeds or plants. Clean and store outdoor furniture to protect it from the elements, and sharpen mower blades and perform other necessary maintenance on your lawn equipment.

By tackling these January chores, you can create a clean, organized, and comfortable home that will set the stage for a successful year.

Remember to set

# Choosing the Right Window Blinds: Essential Questions to Ask Your Supplier & Installer

## Choosing the Right Window Blinds: Essential Questions to Ask Your Supplier & Installer

To ensure you make an informed choice and have a smooth installation experience, it's crucial to ask the right questions to your supplier and installer.

Before you even start browsing, it's helpful to determine your budget and prioritise your needs. Consider factors like light control, privacy, insulation, child safety, and style. Accurate window measurements are also essential.

When interacting with the supplier, inquire about the types of blinds they offer, such as Venetian, roller, Roman, vertical, pleated, wooden, or bamboo. Ask about the available materials and finishes, including wood, fabric, aluminum, and PVC. Inquire about child safety options like cordless mechanisms, clutch mechanisms, and wand controls. It's crucial to understand the warranty on the blinds and request samples of fabrics and finishes. Ask if they offer a free consultation or in-home measurement service and inquire about the typical



lead time for orders.

When discussing installation with the installer, ask about their experience with the specific types of blinds you're interested in. Inquire about their guarantee on installation work, the typical timeframe for installation, and whether they remove and dispose of old blinds. Ask if they offer any after-sales support or maintenance advice and

inquire about their preferred method of payment.

Don't forget to ask about motorization options if you're considering motorized blinds. Inquire about compatibility, costs, and remote control options. Determine if the blinds can be customized to fit unusual window shapes or sizes. If you have pets, allergies, or specific needs (e.g., blackout blinds for bedrooms), be sure to

discuss these considerations with the supplier.

Finance options may be available if you are ordering multiple blinds or window treatments.

By asking these questions, you can make an informed decision, ensure a smooth installation, and get the most value for your money. Remember to compare quotes from multiple suppliers and installers to find the best deal.

# Preparing Your Home for Sale: A Seller's Guide

Selling your home can be stressful, but proper preparation can significantly increase its appeal to potential buyers and ultimately fetch a higher price.

To begin, de-clutter and depersonalise. Remove excess furniture, knick-knacks, and any items that make rooms feel cramped. Put away family photos, collections, and religious items, as you want buyers to envision themselves living in the space. Consider repainting walls in neutral colours like white, beige, or light gray to make rooms appear larger and brighter.

Next, deep clean and stage your home. Thoroughly clean every room, including floors, windows, and appliances. Eliminate any lingering odours with air fresheners or by baking something delicious. Arrange furniture to maximize space and create a welcoming atmosphere. Consider adding tasteful décor like fresh flowers or plants.

Curb appeal matters significantly. Keep the lawn neatly trimmed and edged. Add colourful flowers to your garden or planters. Pressure wash the exterior of your home, including the driveway and walkways. Repair any broken fences, loose shingles, or peeling paint.

Highlight key features by opening blinds and curtains to let in natural light. If you've recently renovated, showcase those features, such as new kitchen countertops or updated bathrooms. Ensure easy movement throughout the house by de-cluttering hallways and entryways.

Consider professional help from home staging professionals who can help you arrange furniture and décor to maximize appeal, and real estate

photographers who can capture high-quality photos and videos that showcase your home's best features.

Small touches can make a big difference. A fresh coat of paint can do wonders for the overall appearance of your home. Replace old doorknobs and cabinet hardware for a modern look. Enhance curb appeal with well-maintained landscaping.

Be patient and flexible. Be prepared to accommodate showings on short notice and be receptive to feedback from potential buyers and your real estate agent.

By following these tips, you can increase your home's marketability and increase the chances of a quick and successful sale. Remember, presentation is key!

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# HOW TO PROTECT YOUR HOME FROM LEAKS AND BURSTS

With recent low temperatures falling to lows of up to -7 degrees, NI Water would like to remind customers of some small things they can do to protect their pipes and properties from leaks and bursts.

Keep your home heated with a thermostat, insulate your pipes, open doors to allow warm air to circulate to unheated areas of your home and know where your stop valve is located in the event of a leak.

NI Water education officer Anna Killen said: "When a pipe bursts in freezing weather, it's similar to a frozen bottle of water cracking because the water expands as it freezes, putting pressure on the pipe and causing it to break. This might lead to a burst and possible flooding inside your home which can have a devastating impact on your property and belongings. A few simple steps can go a long way to help avoid this."

NI Water's top tips include:

- Check your inside stop valve - Check to ensure it can be opened and closed easily in the event of a leak. Most can be found under your kitchen sink but could also be located under the stairs or in the downstairs toilet. Also check everyone in the house knows where the stop valve is located and how to turn it off.



Receive a free stop tap tag by completing NI Water's online water audit at [www.getwaterfit.co.uk](http://www.getwaterfit.co.uk)

- Keep your home warm - Leave heating on for longer periods at lower settings, even while away. Doing this allows warm air to circulate, and will help prevent pipes and tanks from freezing in the cold weather
- Circulate warm air to unheated areas - Opening doors to unheated areas of your home (e.g. attics) occasionally to allow

warm air to circulate can prevent pipes and tanks from freezing in the cold weather

- Insulate water tanks and pipes - All exposed pipes, including attic pipes should be adequately insulated. Insulate or wrap a towel around outside taps to help prevent them from freezing over

- Check you have home insurance - check your insurance company offers you protection from the large scale damage that mother nature can sometimes cause

- Keep the name of a plumber handy - type in your postcode at [www.watersafe.org.uk](http://www.watersafe.org.uk) to find your nearest accredited plumbing business

- Protect outdoor taps - consider using an insulated tap cover to add an extra layer of protection to outdoor taps. Receive a free outdoor tap cover by completing NI Water's online water audit at [www.getwaterfit.co.uk](http://www.getwaterfit.co.uk)

More helpful advice and tips are available on NI Water's website at [www.niwater.com/winter-proof-your-home/](http://www.niwater.com/winter-proof-your-home/)

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