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Deputy Chairperson, Councillor David Lee-Surginor pictured with winning pupils from the annual Environmental Youth Speak competition including junior winner Aoibhinn Cunningham from St Malachy's Primary School, Castlewellan; Paddy Keenan from St Paul's High School, Bessbrook, senior winner. Runners up in the junior section Aralynn O'Hare, St Joseph's Primary School, Carnacaville and Olivia Tumilty, St Colman's Primary School, Saval. Runners up in the Senior section Ella McKee, Kilkeel High School, Emma Hearne, Our Lady's Grammar school and Eva Kelly, Sacred Heart Grammar school.

## ENVIRONMENTAL YOUTH SPEAK COMPETITION WINNERS

Winning pupils from Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's annual Environmental Youth Speak competition attended a special awards ceremony at the Downshire Council Offices recently.

Fourteen pupils from primary and secondary schools were selected from forty online submissions to present their speeches in front of a three-person panel. The annual competition, organised each year by Council

aims to encourage debate on sustainability issues, culminates with the crowning of the Junior and Senior Environmental Youth Speak Champions 2025.

Ten primary school pupils and four

secondary pupils were selected to perform their speeches in person at the celebration event. Primary school pupils spoke on the topic 'Welcome to the World of Waste Wizardry'; 'Lesson One: Making

Our Waste Disappear', while Secondary schools were asked to speak on 'Back to the Future. Learning from the Past to Reduce Our Carbon Footprint'.

**Continued on page 4**



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## PCSP Guidelines for E-Scooter Use

Newry, Mourne, and Down Policing and Community Safety Partnership (PCSP) is issuing a reminder to residents and visitors regarding the current legalities surrounding the use of electric scooters (E-scooters) in our district.

As the popularity of electric scooters continues to rise due to their convenience, it is important for users to be aware of the restrictions in place. While E-scooters are available for purchase, it is crucial to understand that they are currently illegal to use on public roads, pavements, or in public spaces across the district.

Under current legislation, E-scooters are not recognised as a form of transport and are not approved for on-road use. This means that riding an E-scooter in public areas, including pavements, parks, or other public spaces, is against the law.

E-scooters are treated as motor vehicles but do not generally meet the necessary construction and safety standards required for use on the

road. As such, they are restricted to off-road use only and can only be used legally on private property, with the permission of the landowner.

Newry, Mourne and Down PCSP strongly encourages parents and young people to familiarise themselves with these legal requirements before purchasing or using an E-scooter. The use of these vehicles, if not properly regulated, poses significant risks to the rider and to members of the public, particularly due to the high speeds and lack of safety features commonly associated with these devices.

For more information or enquiries please contact Newry, Mourne and Down PCSP at PCSP@nmandd.org.



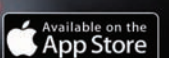
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# Destination Downpatrick for SkillBuild NI Regional Finals

The Construction Industry Training Board NI (CITB NI) in partnership with South Eastern Regional College (SERC) has announced the SkillBuild NI 2025 regional competition will take place on Tuesday 20 May 2025, at the College's Downpatrick Campus.



(L – R): Francis Rice, Principal Lecturer SERC, with SERC apprentices, David Magee (19), from Annahilt, Level 3 Carpentry & Joinery, and Aleesha Gribben (19), from Ballynahinch, Level 2 Carpentry & Joinery, and Rachel Dorovatas CITB NI.

SkillBuild NI 2025 – the annual search for the top performers within construction apprenticeship and traineeship programmes from across Northern Ireland - will see hundreds of competitors head to Downpatrick for a showcase of the wealth of talent and professionalism

throughout the industry. Designed to test skills, technique and ability within tight time frames, the competition will identify the top performers in 11 different trade areas ranging from brickwork to wall and floor tiling as they compete against each other in their chosen trades.

Winners will have the opportunity to represent Northern Ireland in the SkillBuild UK National finals later in the year. Supported by the Department for the Economy, local suppliers and construction companies, the competition provides an opportunity

to showcase the high level of skills and the impressive talent within the workforce, as well as raising the status and standards of professional and technical education and training. Visit [www.serc.ac.uk](http://www.serc.ac.uk) Real Learning for Real Life #BetterOffAtSERC.





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# SLIEVE DONARD HOTEL HOSTS INVESTMENT SHOWCASE EVENT

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council hosted a showcase event at the Slieve Donard Hotel in Newcastle recently highlighting the opportunities connected to upcoming multi-million-pound public and private sector investments.

The People, Place and Prosperity investment symposium, supported by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, drew together more than 100 business and civic leaders, investors and entrepreneurs to hear about Council's strategic plans for regional economic growth. AI specialist and Founder of AI Ireland, Mark Kelly,

shared valuable insights on the impact of artificial intelligence and how businesses should embrace this rapidly developing technology. Having advised industry giants like AbbVie, Amazon, Microsoft, and Oracle, Mark addressed businesses in Newry, Mourne and Down on embracing AI transformation, future-proofing their businesses and navigating the digital age with confidence.

Economy Minister, Dr Caoimhe Archibald, who opened the event, said addressing regional disparity was a key objective for her Department through partnerships with Councils, local partnerships, Invest NI and education providers.

Participants also heard from a range of expert speakers across two panel discussions. The first panel examined Newry, Mourne and Down as a unique region that could utilise its geographical location, outstanding natural beauty, and highly skilled workforce to attract and encourage investment. Speakers included Council Chief Executive Marie Ward, Laura O'Hare from Collins



Aerospace; Anastasia Desmond from the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) and David Conway, Chief Executive of Louth County Council.

The second panel focused on innovation and the importance of businesses being encouraged and supported to harness cutting edge technology such as AI to drive growth and boost productivity. Speakers included Catalyst Chief Executive Steve Orr; Janet Burns from BT; David Quinn of the Belfast Region City Deal at Queen's University Belfast; and Adrienne Hanna, Founder of Right Revenue.

The event concluded with the announcement of criteria details for a £3 million Grade A Office

Accommodation Grant Fund for Newry. A Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) project, the Grade A Office Accommodation Fund aims to promote private sector investment through the development of new office space and create new employment opportunities. (See: <https://www.newrymournedown.org/office-accommodation-fund>)

A district-wide £1 million Tourism Accommodation Programme Fund was also announced, providing targeted financial backing to local hotel accommodation projects. This will target proposals for the development of new build hotels with a minimum capacity of 15 bedrooms and above, and proposals for existing certified tourism accommodation that will add at least 15 additional bedrooms. Both the Grade A Office Accommodation and Tourism Accommodation Programme funds are due to open later this year.

# Kimmins announces next steps for A24 Ballynahinch Bypass Scheme

Infrastructure Minister Liz Kimmins has announced the next steps for the progression of the A24 Ballynahinch Bypass Scheme.



The proposed scheme will provide a single carriageway bypass, approximately 3.1 kilometres in length around the eastern periphery of Ballynahinch. Minister Kimmins has confirmed that the scheme will be moving forward to business case and procurement stage.

During a visit to the town, Minister Kimmins said: "I am delighted to announce this positive step forward for the long-awaited A24 Ballynahinch Bypass scheme. I know that for the local community, businesses and commuters through the area this will be a welcome development.

"This important project will help to significantly alleviate traffic congestion in the centre of Ballynahinch, improving journey time reliability, road safety and air quality on the busy A24

Belfast to Newcastle Road. As part of my commitment to increase opportunities for active and sustainable travel I am also pleased that the scheme will include the provision of a new footway/cycleway and a park and share facility.

"This will all serve to enhance the town centre environment and provide a more positive experience for locals and visitors alike."

Continuing the Minister said: "Major projects take years to develop and complete the necessary statutory orders, so we do need to prioritise the development and delivery of our schemes accordingly. On that basis and having already committed to take the A1 Junctions Phase 2 project to construction I can confirm that, in order to minimise the budget

impact on future years, the Ballynahinch Bypass will be managed sequentially to the A1 Junctions project.

"When completed, these strategic road improvement schemes will deliver for communities and road users for generations to come."

The Department will now commence the work to review and update the necessary documents to bring this scheme to procurement, including the finalising of the Business Case. This process is likely to take in the region of two years. With a procurement start planned in 2027/28, works could commence in 2028/29 and take 2 years to complete. Delivery of the scheme will be dependent on the successful completion of the statutory processes and the future availability of finance.

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## Continued from page 1

After much deliberation the judges chose as this year's overall winner, in the

Junior Section, Aoibhinn Cunningham from St Malachy's Primary School, Castlewellan and Paddy Keenan from St Paul's High School, Bessbrook was the senior winner.

Environmental Youth Speak is a fun public speaking competition organised each year by the Council to encourage debate on sustainability issues. On presenting the winning pupils with their prizes, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Deputy Chairperson, Councillor David Lee-Surginor welcomed all the pupils and said, "I

really enjoyed hearing all your speeches today. Congratulations to our overall winners Aoibhinn and Paddy and to all of today's speakers.

You presented imaginative, informative and engaging speeches. Reducing the impact we have on the environment is vital and you all have demonstrated excellent knowledge and awareness of the need to change how we live in order to reduce waste and our carbon footprint."

Runners up in the junior section were Aralynn O'Hare, St

Joseph's Primary School, Carnacaville and Olivia Tumilty, St Colman's Primary School, Saval. Runners up in the Senior section were Ella McKee, Kilkeel High School, Emma Hearne, Our Lady's Grammar school and Eva Kelly, Sacred Heart Grammar school.

Deputy Chairperson Lee-Surginor presented the Junior and Senior Champions with a trophy for them to keep. All pupils who attended also received a commemorative certificate and a voucher to acknowledge their contribution.

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# Downpatrick & County Down Railway Celebrates Double Win at CO3 Leadership Awards

The Downpatrick & County Down Railway (DCDR) is celebrating yet more awards success - with a double victory after its Chairman, Robert Gardiner, and Finance Officer, John Noble, were honoured at the CO3 (Chief Officers 3rd Sector) Awards, held recently at Belfast's Europa Hotel.

Robert Gardiner was named Leader of the Year in the Small Organisation category, while John Noble took home the Trustee of the Year award, recognising their dedication and exceptional contributions to the heritage railway, voluntary sector, and social enterprise sector in Northern Ireland. The awards, hosted by former broadcaster Sarah Travers, were part of CO3's 40th-anniversary celebrations, recognising outstanding leadership within the third sector.

The CO3 Awards celebrate the vital work of charities, social enterprises, and voluntary organisations across Northern Ireland, honouring the leaders behind their success. The Trustee of the Year category recognises outstanding governance and commitment, while the Leader of a Small Organisation award celebrates inspirational leadership in smaller charities.



at the awards comes during a milestone year for the heritage railway, which is also celebrating its own 40th anniversary in 2025. Since its founding, the volunteer-led organisation has worked to preserve and promote Northern Ireland's railway heritage, overcoming many challenges along the way, not least the Covid pandemic and devastating floods that hit Downpatrick in 2023, threatening the very

future of this unique tourist attraction and social enterprise. Despite this, the organisation's resilience has earned it growing recognition for both heritage preservation and community leadership. The volunteer-run attraction has now won seven major awards in the past six months, including the Heritage Railway Association's 'Team of the Year' and 'Achievement of the Year' awards, as well as being crowned Northern

Ireland Social Enterprise of the Year. The railway has kicked off its 40th Anniversary year with sold-out events at St Patrick's Day and a special Mother's Day afternoon tea, and is planning a gala dinner in August to mark its 40th anniversary, more details of which will be released in due course, and of course the For special events and tickets see the DCDR's website at [www.downrail.co.uk](http://www.downrail.co.uk)





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# OCN 'TOOLS UP' FOR SKILLBUILD NI REGIONAL COMPETITION 2025

Open College Network Northern Ireland (OCN) has been announced as one of the core sponsors of SkillBuild NI Regional Competition 2025, part of the UK's largest and longest-running construction skills competition.

The partnership underscores OCN's commitment to fostering talent across Northern Ireland and supporting the development of essential skills within the construction industry.

The annual competition will take place on Tues 20 May 2025, at South Eastern Regional College's (SERC) Downpatrick Campus. The brightest recruits and top performers within construction apprenticeship and traineeship programmes from across Northern Ireland, will compete against each other to win in categories ranging from brickwork to wall and floor tiling. The competition is designed to test skills, technique, ability within tight timeframes, and identifies the top performers in 11 different trade areas.

SkillBuild is delivered by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB

GB) and showcases some of the brightest talent in construction. Supported by the Department for the Economy and local construction companies, the competition provides an opportunity to showcase the high level of skills and the impressive talent within the workforce, as well as raising the status and standards of professional and technical education and training.

Last year, 331 NI students competed in the Intercampus Competitions, NI Regional Heat and the UK Finals hosted by World Skills UK and CITB (GB). Additionally, 2024 was a special year for Cabinet and Furniture Making student Isaac who competed in World Skills, Lyon alongside Electrical Installation student Daniel Knox.

The partnership aligns with OCN's mission to enhance the skills profile of



the local workforce through accredited qualifications and training programmes.

Martin Flynn, CEO of OCN said: "We are delighted to be one of the core sponsors of SkillBuild NI Regional Competition 2025 which aims to showcase the incredible talent emerging from our construction training programs. This competition is a fantastic platform for apprentices to demonstrate

their skills and for us to highlight the importance of continuous learning and development in the industry."

Barry Neilson OBE, Chief Executive CITB NI commented: "CITB NI is delighted to welcome OCN as sponsor for SkillBuild NI Regional Competition. Without the support of the sponsors across the industry the competition simply could not happen. SkillBuild

NI Regional Competition is an opportunity to encourage and continue to develop the future work which is crucial for industry growth and shaping the future of our local industry. We wish all the competitors the best of luck for the forthcoming regional qualifier competition in May."

For further details on SkillBuild please visit [www.goconstruct.org](http://www.goconstruct.org)



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## Upgrades to Finnis Souterrain Visitor Experience

Finnis Souterrain, an important and unique archaeological site located in Finnis, south of Dromara, County Down, has officially reopened to the public following over a year of extensive repairs and improvements carried out by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.

Access into the souterrain was restricted for more than 12 months to facilitate essential upgrades. The work was completed in September last year and the site

was then closed to the public during the winter months.

Funded by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency through the Environment Fund,

these improvements included the replacement of the entrance steps, the installation of new lighting and sensors, the addition of solar panels, the construction

of stockproof fencing along the entrance path, the placement of new information panels at the entrance gate and the erection of a wooden sign to guide visitors from the main road. The site will remain open from April to the end of September and the improvements made will make it better for visitors to explore this souterrain and learn about its fascinating history.

Dating back to the Early Christian period (6th to 10th century AD), souterrains are relatively common but their dark, confined nature often makes them unsuitable for public

access. Therefore, Finnis Souterrain, known locally as Binder's Cove, gives a unique opportunity for people to visit one of these hidden places.

Visitors can now explore this captivating historical site once more, gaining a rare insight into life during the Early Christian period. Check in advance if the site is open by emailing: [visitorservices@nmandd.org](mailto:visitorservices@nmandd.org) or contact Visitor Services and Attractions on +44 (0) 330 137 4046. For more information: [www.visitmournemountains.co.uk/things-to-do/finnis-souterrain-p808341](http://www.visitmournemountains.co.uk/things-to-do/finnis-souterrain-p808341)

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# Giant Adventures Await

The Giant Adventures Series is back for 2025, bringing an exciting line-up of immersive tourism events to Mourne Mountains & Ring of Gullion. Designed to captivate both visitors and locals, this trio of unforgettable experiences celebrates the region's rich mythology, music, food and breathtaking landscapes.

The 2025 series kicks off with Wake the Giant on Saturday 28 and Sunday 29 June in Warrenpoint, before moving to Eats and Beats in Newcastle on Saturday 6 and Sunday 7 September, and concluding with the mystical Footsteps in the Forest in Slieve Gullion Forest Park from Monday 20 to Sunday 26 October.

The journey for 2025 begins with Wake the Giant on Saturday 28 and Sunday 29 June in Warrenpoint. The legend of Fionn mac Cumhaill comes to life once again as the giant spirit of Warrenpoint awakens. This year, Fionn won't stand alone — he will be joined by a spectacular Gathering of the Clans. Giants from near and far will come to celebrate heritage, culture and the power of storytelling, making this year's festival an unforgettable display of myth, music and magic.

With family-friendly activities, green crafts, wellness experiences and a packed festival atmosphere, Wake the Giant is the perfect summer celebration in the heart of Mourne Mountains and Ring of Gullion.

Following this, the highly anticipated Eats and Beats festival returns to Newcastle, Co Down, on Saturday 6 and Sunday 7 September, promising



an unmissable weekend of incredible flavours and unforgettable music.

This vibrant festival at the foot of the Mourne Mountains, will feature two dynamic stages showcasing an eclectic mix of local and international artists, providing the perfect soundtrack to a celebration of the region's rich food culture. Visitors can savour the finest locally sourced food, experience live cookery demonstrations and indulge in a diverse selection of artisan produce. From the freshest coastal flavours to hearty mountain-inspired dishes, Eats and Beats is a feast for the senses, blending taste, sound and culture in one spectacular setting.

As the nights grow darker, the mystical woods of Slieve Gullion Forest Park will come alive with eerie encounters, spellbinding storytelling and otherworldly wonders. Footsteps in the Forest returns to the Forest from Monday 20 to Sunday 26 October and is the perfect way to celebrate autumn magic in one of Ireland's most mythical landscapes. This extended Halloween festival will immerse visitors in the ancient traditions of Samhain, blending legend, folklore and theatrical performances in a hauntingly beautiful setting.

With three unmissable events spread across the summer and autumn of 2025, now is the time to mark your calendar and start planning your Giant Adventure in Mourne Mountains & Ring of Gullion.

For event details or ideas of where to stay, eat and more things to do in Mourne Mountains & Ring of Gullion, visit: [www.visitmournemountains.co.uk/giant-adventures](http://www.visitmournemountains.co.uk/giant-adventures)

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# SONGBIRDS OF SPRING

**A time of renewal, flowers blooming, leaves bursting forth on trees, bees buzzing...and bird song.**

While mistle thrushes, along with robins and blackbirds, are songbird heralds of spring, I really look forward to hearing our warblers, mainly chiffchaffs, willow warblers and blackcaps, most having flown perilously from southern Europe and Africa.

I remember a few years ago spotting a newly arrived willow warbler at Crawfordsburn Glen as it alighted on a bush, clearly exhausted, but undoubtedly determined to do what nature requires: to eat, regain strength, breed and raise young. But song is also integral to that process, critical to the breeding season when males sing loudly to attract mates and declare territory.

It's mostly in woodland, and in large mature gardens, that you're likely to hear these warblers; you'll seldom see them, small greenish/brown birds hidden by new leaves.



The blackcap is a little flashier than the others, with a black cap on the males, the females sporting a brown one. One of the earliest warblers is the chiffchaff.

Although its song is not particularly melodious, high-pitched notes from which it gets its name, chiffchaff, chiffchaff, chiffchaff echoing through the woods, for me that's welcome

proof that spring has really arrived.

I tend to associate other warblers with late spring into summer, their beautiful cascading songs heard repeatedly, blackcaps mainly in woodland, willow warblers preferring more open space, often close to freshwater where willows grow.

In recent decades we haven't made it easy for many birds and

other wild creatures, clearing or damaging habitat, and killing off the insects that warblers need to survive because of chemical pollution of our air, water and soil, but hope springs eternal, and I'm immensely grateful and joyful when I hear our warblers, a vivid reminder of life's cycle, and its importance.

JVA

# A Rare Opportunity: Make Your Dream New Year's Eve Wedding a Reality!

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ones, as the final  
seconds of the year  
tick down. As the  
clock strikes midnight,  
share your first kiss of  
2026, beginning the  
new year in the most  
unforgettable way.

For couples envisioning a breathtaking New Year's Eve wedding, a rare opportunity has just become available. Due to special circumstances, the coveted 31st December 2025 wedding date at the Four Seasons Hotel & Leisure Club, Monaghan, is now open.

This exclusive chance to host the most dazzling celebration of the year won't last long—act quickly! A New Year's Eve wedding offers a perfect blend of romance and




excitement. Guests will be enchanted by the festive atmosphere, featuring twinkling lights, elegant décor, and the joyful spirit of welcoming the new year. Plus, as a special offer, all 2025 wedding

bookings will receive a complimentary meal for the top table (T&Cs apply). With limited availability for this highly sought-after date, now is the time to secure your dream wedding.


Celebrate in style

and begin your new life surrounded by the ones you love. Enquire now and turn your dream New Year's Eve wedding into a reality: [weddings@4seasonshotel.ie](mailto:weddings@4seasonshotel.ie) | +353 (0)47 81 888 | [www.4seasonshotel.ie](http://www.4seasonshotel.ie)




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A large industrial rendering plant with a black facade and a white chimney. The Linergy logo is visible on the side of the building. Several vehicles, including a white tanker truck and several cars, are parked in front of the building. The sky is blue with white clouds.

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**Photo credit: Mark Barton Photography**



# PLANNING FOR LATER LIFE AT HOME

A survey conducted by Home Instead revealed that many families find discussing care options challenging. 81% of people hesitate to talk about care with their parents, despite 33% expressing concern about their physical health.

Home Instead encourages people to start these conversations early to make the transition into care as smooth and stress-free as possible.

Here are some tips to broach the subject of care with your older loved ones:

1. Start Early: If your parents are over 70, begin observing their daily routines and any challenges they face. Casually introducing the idea of care as a way to maintain great quality of life in our 70s, 80s, and beyond. Having the discussion before it becomes an immediate necessity can help make the conversation less awkward later. By addressing potential concerns early, like vision issues or difficulties driving, you create a more comfortable environment for

discussion when the need for care eventually arises. The support needed first may well be home help or dementia support, rather than for personal care.

2. Talk It Out: Foster open dialogue about your observations, focusing on your parents' wishes. It's important that Mum or Dad feels heard and has the opportunity to share their thoughts and preferences in a respectful and productive conversation. Collaborate to find solutions that work for them and use examples of where you are concerned about gaps in their current health and wellbeing. Use a tone you would appreciate if the roles were reversed.

3. Maximise Independence: Look for solutions that support their autonomy. If they need assistance at home,



consider options that allow them to continue engaging in activities they love, like cooking.

4. Attend one of Home Instead's 'Preparing for Later Life at Home' workshops, which run quarterly either as a

webinar or in Saintfield.

If you'd like to sign up for our next workshop, or if you'd appreciate some information or advice, please call 028 9560 9910 or email [info@downlisburn.homeinstead.co.uk](mailto:info@downlisburn.homeinstead.co.uk).

# The County Museum, Dundalk

The County Museum, Dundalk is one of the country's greatest secrets. Housing a collection of over 80,000 items every aspect of growing up in Louth is lovingly presented over three galleries of permanent exhibition.

Indeed the display artefacts recognize the complicated nature of the Irish historical experience. Artefacts on view include a three-wheeled Heinkel motorcar, King William of Orange's leather jacket from the Battle of the Boyne; Oliver Cromwell's shaving mirror as well as the first ever Olympic medal won by an Irishwoman (Beatrice Hill-Lowe).

Most poignantly each and every item in the collection has a story behind it, one which reveals so much not only about the era in which

it was used but also about the item's owner; providing a window into the nature of the owner's life; his or her dreams and aspirations, and indeed, what fate ultimately befell them. These are stories which elevate the artefacts beyond the banal to something more gripping providing an insight into a world long since gone; a life which, in an Irish context, uniquely mixed the agricultural and the industrial, the rural and the urban.

The County Museum, Dundalk is one of the



country's best kept secrets but, sometimes, the fun of a secret is the sharing.

More information can be had by contacting us at 042 9392999.

## Welcome increases to support for childcare from April 2025

Many families across Northern Ireland rely on registered childcare providers every day to enable them to go to work.

### Employers For Childcare

While childcare costs remain a significant expense it is welcome news that there is an increase in this vital support for the 2025-2026 financial year. NI Childcare Subsidy Scheme support will continue for 2025-2026.

The NI Childcare Subsidy Scheme provides a 15% subsidy on childcare costs for working parents of children under Primary school age

and who are in receipt of Tax-Free Childcare. The Education Minister Paul Givan has confirmed that the scheme will continue into 2025-2026 and the key changes from April 2025 are:

- Increased Subsidy Cap: From April the maximum subsidy cap per child will rise by 10% to £184 per month per child, and £367

per month for a child with a disability.

- Increased Childcare Provider Payments: To support childcare providers and to prevent amid rising operational costs from being passed onto parents, the administrative payments to providers will be increased.

Increased Universal Credit Childcare cap

As announced in the Autumn Budget the Childcare Element of Universal Credit will increase by 1.7% from April in line with rises to other elements of Universal Credit.

The Childcare Element of Universal Credit is calcu-

lated at 85% of the childcare costs reported in the UC Assessment Period up to a maximum cap for one child of £1031.88 or £1768.94 for two or more children.

Get advice to make sure this is right for your family

While these changes will provide valuable additional support, working out which is best for your family can be confusing. We would encourage anyone using registered childcare to call the Family Benefits Advice Service on 028 9267 8200 for advice to ensure they are still receiving the best form of support or email [hello@employersforchildcare.org](mailto:hello@employersforchildcare.org).



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# PADDINGTON NURSERY GROUP, CONTINUING TO EXPAND AND IMPROVE EARLY YEARS CARE AND DEVELOPMENT!

The original Paddington Lodge is situated in Carryduff, the second Paddington Lodge, is situated in Saintfield. Then there's Paddington @ Academy PS is in Saintfield and Paddington's Little Treasures is in Carryduff.

Now Paddington's Little Birdies has now opened its doors, the fifth business venture for the Paddington Group. The official Open Day is taking place on Saturday 10th May.

These are private day nurseries, offering care for children from a very young age (around 3 months) up to school age (around 5 years), and in some cases, even provides after-school care for older children (up to 11 or 12 years).

Key aspects of each of the 'Paddington' Nurseries include:

**Age-Specific Units:** They cater to different developmental stages by having separate units for babies, toddlers, and pre-schoolers, ensuring age-appropriate

activities and attention. The baby unit further segregates children based on their developmental milestones.

**Comprehensive Care:** The nursery offers an all-inclusive package, often providing formula milk, meals, and nappies. They can also cater to special dietary requirements.

**Focus on Learning Through Play:** They emphasize creating a stimulating environment where children can learn and develop through play-based activities, including sand and water play, role play, arts and crafts, and gardening. **Pre-School Preparation:** For older pre-school children, they offer activities designed to prepare them for the transition



to primary school, potentially mirroring some of the activities they will encounter in P1.

**After-School Care:** In addition to day care, they often provide after-school care, including school pick-up and drop-off

services, homework supervision, and snacks.

**Qualified Staff:** All staff are described as fully qualified and dedicated to meeting the individual needs of each child.

**Extended Hours:** They typically operate

from early morning to early evening, catering to the needs of working parents.

**Semi-Rural Settings:** Many of the locations boast a large site with extensive outdoor play areas, offering a semi-rural environment for children to explore.

## ULSTER HOSPITAL MIDWIFERY STAFF 'ROCK THEIR SOCKS' TO CELEBRATE WORLD DOWN SYNDROME DAY

Midwifery staff in the Ulster Hospital Maternity Unit came together to mark World Down Syndrome Day with a vibrant 'Rock Our Socks' tea party.

Staff donned bright and bold mismatched socks to raise awareness and celebrate diversity, particularly honouring Nora, the daughter of South Eastern Trust Infant Feeding Lead, Ruth Leemon, who has Down Syndrome, along with other children who share the condition.

Midwifery staff gathered to enjoy a cuppa, cakes and buns while making donations to Positive About Down Syndrome, a charity dedicated to supporting parents and ensuring professionals have access to essential information, resources, and training.

Clinical Practice Facilitator, Lisa Robinson highlighted



the significance of World Down Syndrome Day saying: "It is great to have an opportunity to have a cup of tea and a bun together and celebrate that we are not all the same. We don't have to be the same and that is what makes us

unique. It is lovely to have an opportunity to celebrate that. Everyone is rocking the socks and we are embracing it!"

The 'Rock Our Socks' initiative is a global campaign that symbolises inclusion and acceptance.



## Paddington's Little Birdies

### Paddington's Little Birdies team looks forward to Open Day!

"Paddington's Little Birdies" Day Nursery comprises of 3 care rooms, registered for care of up to 40 children from 0-5 years.

The new Walker Room, for children 18 mths to 2 years, opens just after Easter! The Open Day is taking place on Saturday 10th May. Business owner Jacqui Rowe has 35 years childcare experience in Childcare and developing Day Nurseries. "Paddington's Little Birdies" is managed by Dianne Wright who has over 20 years experience (and was previously the manager with Birdies) and Liz Wilkinson who also manages Paddington's Little Treasures in Carryduff. There are also plans to open further rooms in the near future.

The building has been fully renovated and has 3 separate external play areas so that all age groups have access to outdoor play at the same time. The new nursery strives to ensure top quality childcare by providing a bright and welcoming home from home environment, offering a varied range of age appropriate resources which ensures that every aspect of the children's development is catered for and providing a fully qualified care team.

The original Paddington Lodge, situated in Carryduff; the second Paddington Lodge, is situated in Saintfield; Paddington @ Academy PS is in Saintfield and Paddington's Little Treasures is in Carryduff.

- Top quality childcare with a fully qualified care team
- A bright and welcoming home from home environment
- We provide varied range of age appropriate resources
  - Baby Room registered for 8 children aged 0-2 years
  - Toddler Room registered for 10 children aged 2-3 years
  - Pre-School Room registered for 22 children aged 3-5 years.
- 3 separate external play areas

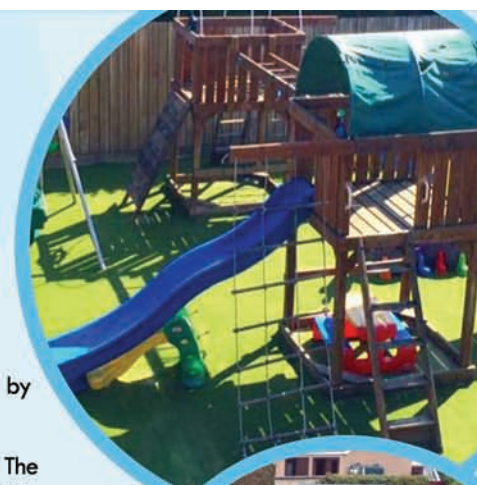
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- Paddington Lodge, 57 Hillsborough Road, Carryduff, Belfast, BT8 8HS | Tel: 028 9081 3023
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- Paddington Academy, Academy P.S. Listooder Road, Saintfield, BT24 7JA | Tel: 028 9751 9295
- Paddington's Little Treasures 12 Edgar Avenue, Saintfield Road, Carryduff, Co Down, BT8 8DQ | Tel: 028 9081 4515
- Paddington's Little Birdies, 20 Pond Park Rd, Lisburn | 028 9279 5894 / 07523281063

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**OPEN DAY**  
**Saturday**  
**10th May 2025**



**Walker room opening after Easter**





# ECONOMY MINISTER ANNOUNCES £600,000 FUNDING TO BOOST ACCESS TO APPRENTICESHIPS

**Economy Minister Dr Caoimhe Archibald has announced funding of up to £600,000 for projects to increase access to apprenticeships.**

The Apprenticeship Inclusion Challenge Fund will provide funding for six projects that will trial ways to remove barriers to apprenticeships for women, people with disabilities and people from disadvantaged areas.

The Minister said: "I am very pleased to announce funding for six projects through the Apprenticeship Inclusion Challenge Fund."

"While we have more than 13,000 apprentices across the north, women, people with disabilities and people from disadvantaged backgrounds are underrepresented."

"I am committed to removing obstacles

and making it much easier for these groups of people to take up an apprenticeship."

The Apprenticeship Inclusion Challenge Fund was opened for applications in October 2024. Funding of up to £100,000 over 18 months will go to six successful applicant organisations from across the business, community and education sectors.

Under the gender theme:

- #NotJustForBoys Pathways+ – Women's Tec

- Software for All – Workplus

Under the disability theme:

- Positive Transitions – St Paul's High School,



Pictured at the announcement of projects successful in applying for funding through DfE's Apprenticeship Inclusion Challenge Fund are (l-r) Marion McMahon, St Paul's High School, Bessbrook; Lynn Carvill, Women's Tec; Dr Catherine O'Mullan, North West Regional College; Economy Minister Dr Caoimhe Archibald; Richard Kirk, Workplus; Gabrielle Quinn, Northern Regional College; and Dr Andrew Kerr, Oberon Training and Development

Bessbrook

- Disability Apprenticeships Coleraine – Northern Regional College

Under the place theme:

- Bridging Futures Programme – North West Regional College

- Overcome, Thrive and Develop Programme – MCar NI

The Minister added: "Each organisation receiving funding will deliver pilot schemes that will test new and innovative ways to boost access to apprenticeships."

"This collaborative, co-design approach across the education, community and business sectors is crucial and I look forward to following

the progress of these projects over the next 18 months."

Concluding, the Minister said: "Not only will these projects help people to thrive and reach their full potential, but by developing new pathways to apprenticeships they will also help make our workforce more diverse and inclusive whilst increasing the supply of skills to employers right across the north, in line with my economic vision."

More information on the Apprenticeship Inclusion Challenge Fund is available at: [www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/apprenticeship-inclusion-challenge-fund](http://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/apprenticeship-inclusion-challenge-fund)

## Sólás Charity leads the way in Design of Communication boards for local playparks

**Sólás, a special needs charity which supports children and young people with a broad range of additional needs including autism, have this month completed the design and installation of 12 communication boards, across the Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council area.**

**Sólás, an additional needs charity based in Belfast, Northern Ireland.**

**Established in 2009,** Sólás is a special needs charity which supports children and young people with a broad range of additional needs including Autism. We are based in South Belfast; however, our work extends across Northern Ireland.

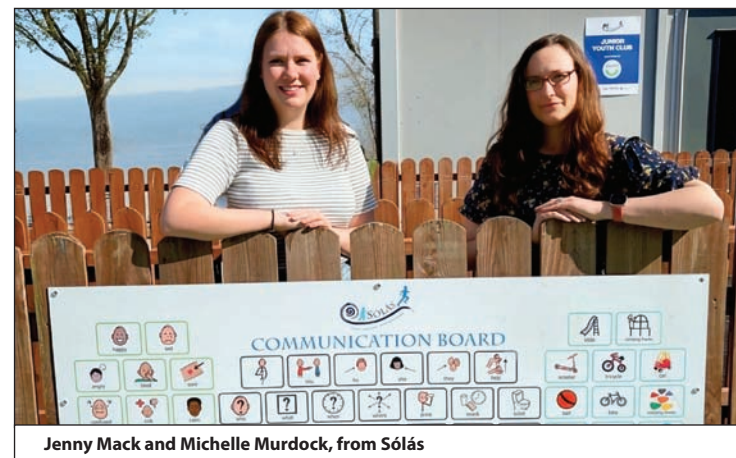
**We have a number of social development, early intervention, educational support, parent support and therapeutic programmes.**

**Contact details**  
Sólás Belfast, 284A Ormeau Road, Belfast, BT7 2GB  
Call us 028 90 247600

Working in partnership with the Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council to design and install 12 communication boards in order to make playparks more welcoming for all!

Michelle Murdock, senior manager at Sólás, who leads on the communication board project, says that the motivation for this work lays with "promoting inclusion and fairness for everyone, particularly those children with additional needs and making playparks more welcoming for all"

The communication boards have this month been installed in 10 parks across the Lisburn



Jenny Mack and Michelle Murdock, from Sólás

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and Castlereagh City Councils, with each board uniquely designed to reflect the context and surrounding area of each park. They allow children and young people to communicate their feelings to others including, for example, what they may need while at the park and how they want to play. This allows for independence and helps

children with language and communication difficulties, to use an alternative medium, (communication boards) to socially interact with peers, and develop confidence. The boards are effective in preparing individuals for activity transitions with the count down on the bottom row of the boards, helping transitions away from an activity and preparing the user for a change, such as going to the toilet, having a snack, going to another activity, or leaving the park. According to Michelle, the boards will have a range of uses for everyone using the play areas and will increase the accessibility and inclusivity of playparks right across the LCCC area.

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# THE VITAL WORK OF NORTH DOWN & ARDS WOMEN'S AID

**CEO, Emalyn Turkington explains how North Down & Ards Women's Aid (NDAWA) supports women, children and young people who are affected by domestic and sexual abuse.**

She says: "We are a passionate team and totally committed to making a positive difference to the lives of women, children, and young people in the North Down & Ards area."

CEO, Emalyn Turkington wants to thank her team for the amazing work they do every day and the action they take listening and advocating for the women, children and young people they work with.

"We are an all women organisation, and our strong ethos 'for women, with women, by women' is reflected daily in our roles. We exist to accelerate action, challenge attitudes, structures and systems which perpetuate domestic abuse. We seek through our work to enable women, children, and young people to live free from violence and abuse. I could not do my role as CEO without the incredible Team,



NDAWA recently participated to 'Accelerate Action for Gender Equality' on International Women's Day. Pictured is CEO, Emalyn Turkington.

Board Members and Volunteers that I work with. The team at NDAWA inspire action through support, compassion, respect, providing a listening ear, showing empathy, being non-judgemental, and empowering women, children, and young people

to find their voice and reach their full potential – thank you!

NDAWA would also not be able to complete our work without the support of the partner agencies we work with and our local community. By working in

partnership, NDAWA are helping to implement awareness programs and training within organisations and communities to challenge harmful social norms, promote understanding of consent, and equip individuals in the community with the

knowledge to recognise and respond to abuse.

If you are affected by domestic and sexual abuse or want to find out more information about North Down & Ards Women's Aid, please contact the Bangor office on 028 9127 3196.

## Unveiled as Official Builders' Merchant Partner of the Irish Football Association

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

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

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

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

Additionally, MacBlair is launching a Club Support Fund, which will provide more general funding to help clubs with essential needs such as equipment, kit sponsorship, and other



day-to-day operational costs.

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

Stephen Bogle, Head of Commercial Operations at the Irish FA, said: "Partnering with

MacBlair reflects our shared commitment to supporting football at a grassroots level. The MacBlair Support Funds will provide vital assistance to clubs across Northern Ireland, helping them to grow, thrive, and continue serving their communities. We're proud to work with a partner that understands the power of football to create lasting, positive change."

Applications for the Funds are now open through the IFA and MacBlair websites. <https://www.macblair.com/macblair-ifa-building-support-fund>

## Cossum family business is in the Swim for success!

**These days it is Claire Cossum who is at the helm of the family Business, Cossum Swim Schools, owning and running 7 successful private swim schools across Northern Ireland including privately owned pools in Ardglass and Crossgar.**

Claire's Sister, Maeve, is also an STA Approved Tutor in the business, which teaches thousands to swim or train for Instructor Certification. Claire claims that the daughters have swimming and water skills in their DNA, having grown up 'poolside' with their father Des and Grandfather Ray both having a passion for all things aqua – with sharing life saving skills paramount on the agenda, teaching children to swim and training the next generation of teachers for over 30 years!

Des, the founder of Cossum Swim Schools, taught countless pupils over the years, always encouraging students to progress to the best of their ability. Many of the current teachers in Cossum Swim Schools started as children attending lessons, and now some of those children have qualified as tutors.

In 1978 along with his father Ray and after a full year training and fundraising, Des coached the Ireland Junior Channel Team who swam the English Channel, breaking the previous world record with a time of eight hours and 40 minutes – a record that stood for another 18 years.

In 1981, Des qualified as a saturation diver and worked all over the world, including The South China Sea and the English Channel.

The family now own the wreck of the historic bullion ship SS Laurentic, which was sunk in Lough Swilly during World War II, which Des and Ray bought and completed countless dives at to piece together her history. At the age of 20 Des gained his STA Graduate Swimming Teachers Certificate and became a member of the STA.

In 1996, Des qualified as an STA tutor and was awarded the Henry Pike Award in 1997 for his role in vastly increasing the STA's awareness in the leisure industry in Northern Ireland.

Sadly Des Cossum passed away in 2024. He was posthumously awarded the Swimming Teachers' Association Cross of Merit for his



Cossum Swim School Founder Des with Claire.

amazing 50-years service to swimming late last year. Des's father Ray (who also passed away in 2023), was a long-distance swimmer, swimming the channel

from France to England, among many other swims.

Today, under the ownership of Claire and with Maeve's skills in tutoring, the legacy of

both Ray and Des is in very safe hands!

**Women's Aid**  
NORTH DOWN & ARDS  
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## One Stop Shop

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

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• Physical Abuse • Financial Abuse  
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**Newtownards, BT23 4EA**  
For any further information about the One Stop Shop or Women's Aid support services  
**Contact us at**  
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# IT'S ALL SMILES ON THE SAINTFIELD ROAD, BELFAST WITH THE ARRIVAL OF MORRISON DENTAL CLINIC

The Principal Dentist and practice owner is Dr Richard Morrison who has a passion for all things dentistry - implant and cosmetic dentistry in particular!

Dr Morrison says:  
"You can really change someone's life through their

smile. Seeing their reaction after showing them their finished result in the mirror

is priceless. The change you see in a patient, giving them their smile and confidence, it is not just an aesthetic change but also gives a psychological change which is so rewarding!"

Morrison Dental Clinic is primarily a Denplan practice. The practice ethos is that prevention is better than cure, and that seeing the hygienist every six months or more is the best starting point to maintain a healthy dentition for life. As a Denplan practice, the practice plan includes twice yearly check-ups and hygiene appointments, any

x-rays required, and also gives discount off routine treatment. Preventative care, such as routine exams, cleaning, x-rays and oral hygiene instruction can help catch problems early and avoid the need for costly treatment later on.

Significant investment has already been made to ensure that the practice remains at the forefront of technology to improve the patient experience. This includes an intra-oral scanner, which uses 3D photo imaging to scan the mouth, avoiding the need for taking moulds of your



teeth. Treatment can then be planned digitally and with greater accuracy than ever, achieve perfectly fitting labwork such as crowns, veneers, bleaching trays etc. Another addition is a recently-installed CBCT scanner, used when there is a need for more information than what traditional 2D x-rays can offer, such as 3D visualisation of jaw bone

for optimal planning for implant placement.

Dr Morrison is a member of the Irish Academy of Aesthetic Dentistry and the Association of Dental Implantology, and is always reading articles and attending courses to stay up to date with the latest advancements!

He says:  
"I believe that we

are at an exciting time in dentistry, with more and more technological advances which can improve what is possible for our patients. I feel as a dentist in the modern age we must continually learn and improve our practices otherwise we will be left behind!"

The growing team (so far!) consists of five

dentists, five nurses, dental hygienist Claire, receptionist Shauna, Yuko (Richard's wife) who does a lot of the work behind the scenes!

Morrison Dental Clinic is conveniently located at 95 Saintfield Road (not far from Forestside), and offers free parking available on site! For your appointment Tel: 028 9070 3215

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## Rumacs: A menu for everyone in Dundrum

Located at 97 Main Street in Dundrum, Rumacs has become a go-to spot for locals seeking a variety of fast food options, focusing on pizza, kebabs, and street food. Rumacs offers a diverse menu catering to different tastes and appetites.

Key offerings include a wide range of 10", 12", and 16" pizzas with various toppings. Classics like Margherita, Pepperoni, and Hawaiian are available, alongside more unique options such as "The Bayside Pizza" (with bayside gouljons, chips, garlic & house sauce) and "The Rumac's Pizza" (with salt & chilli chicken). They also offer a cheesy garlic pizza.

Doner kebabs are available, served with chips, salad, and sauce. They also offer a "Kebab in a Pita Pocket". Their burger selection includes "Smash Burgers" like

"The Original" (with double smash patties and RuMacs burger sauce) and chicken burgers such as "The Big Clucker" (buttermilk chicken with pickled & chilli slaw). A "Beef & Bird Burger" combining a beef patty and buttermilk chicken is also on offer. Besides chicken burgers, Rumacs provides wings in various flavours (plain, southern fried, BBQ, buffalo, hot honey) and buttermilk chicken tenders. Several tempting loaded fries options are available, including "Loaded Beef Fries" with beef brisket and "Crispy Chicken Fries"



with buttermilk chicken and southern-style gravy. They also offer pulled pork fries. Classic sides like chips, wedges, and

onion rings are available, alongside garlic slices and "Rumac's Slices" (salt & chilli chicken on garlic slices). They also offer cheese bites. Milkshakes, Desserts and Kids Meals are also available.

Rumacs offers several value-for-money meal deals, check their colour advert in this issue for details

Download their app, available on both the App Store and Google Play, for easier ordering. Their website is www.rumacs.co.uk, and they can be contacted by phone at 02843 758 252.

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A key area of our expertise lies in Stannah stairlifts, for which Olympic Lifts is sole distributor in NI. Our extensive range of Stannah products is designed with a refreshingly modern aesthetic to integrate beautifully into any home, whether classic or contemporary. We offer Stannah stairlifts for all types of staircases, including:

- Stannah curved stairlifts: Expertly designed to navigate winding or complex staircases, effortlessly handling curved bends, intermediate landings, and corridors.
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- Stannah straight stairlifts: Reliable and space-saving options for straightforward staircases.

Beyond Stannah stairlifts, Olympic Lifts also supplies, installs, tests, and maintains Passenger Lifts, Access Lifts, Goods Lifts, escalators, and Moving walkways. We are proud to have completed

almost 20,000 projects over the past four decades. Recently, we launched our new machine room traction drive access passenger lift, a versatile Hybrid Lift suitable for both domestic and commercial properties, offering numerous sizes and finish options.

Our commitment to continuous development, investment, and product advancement ensures that Olympic Lifts offers the

most up-to-date, highest quality products and services. This dedication translates to an improved purchasing experience, enhanced efficiencies, and cost savings for our valued customers.

For more information on our range of Stannah stairlifts and other lifting solutions, please contact us at 02892 622331 or visit our website at [www.olympiclifts.co.uk](http://www.olympiclifts.co.uk).

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This April 10th, we proudly celebrate 20 years of heartfelt hospitality and unforgettable moments at the Four Seasons Hotel Carlingford.

Located between the breathtaking Cooley Mountains and the serene Carlingford Lough, our hotel has become a cherished part of the vibrant community of Carlingford, offering a warm welcome in the heart of the Cooley peninsula.

Since opening in 2005, we've been honoured to be a part of so many incredible stories – from magical weddings and milestone birthdays to corporate events and family getaways. Over the years, we've remained committed to providing exceptional service, building lasting relationships with our loyal guests, and working alongside a passionate and dedicated team.

As a family-run, Irish-owned hotel, we are deeply proud of our roots. We've grown alongside Carlingford, blending modern luxury with the

town's historic charm. Every corner of the hotel, from our award-winning dining to our vibrant wedding events and refreshed leisure facilities, tells the story of our journey, shaped by care, creativity, and a deep love for our community.

In the past 20 years we have helped many people start out in their first job and currently employ around 130 local people.

To mark this milestone, we're offering a special 20% discount on our Bed and Breakfast rates for midweek stays (Sunday – Thursday, selected dates, subject to availability) throughout the year. You can book this offer online or over the phone and plan your getaway with ease.

We'd love to hear your stories! If you have any photos or memories from your time at the Four



Seasons Hotel Carlingford, please share them with us at [sales@fshc.ie](mailto:sales@fshc.ie). We'll be celebrating these moments throughout the year and invite you to join us in raising a glass to the next 20 years of

celebrations, growth, and connection.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who has been part of this journey – our wonderful guests, the talented team members (past and present), and

the incredible Carlingford community. You've made this milestone possible.

Here's to all the memories we've created together – and the many more to come.

Happy 20th Birthday, Four Seasons Hotel Carlingford!

## Tullywest Manor is celebrating over 30 years in business!

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

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

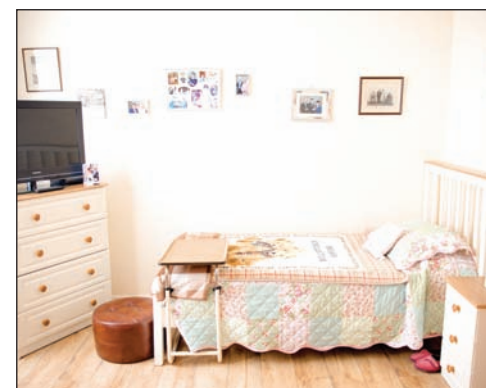
maintained at all times.

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

Residents views and suggestions for social activities, outings are sought at Resident meetings and actioned if appropriate. Tullywest Manor features a large lounge, dining room, entrance hall with seating area

and a spacious conservatory, where residents can circulate and meet with each other and relatives. Each tastefully decorated bedroom, most with 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 rec-



ognises 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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# JC Campbell, Newry Reinventing Your Driving with MGS5 EV

Get ready to meet the modern and sleek MGS5 EV in Spring 2025 – the latest addition to MG’s electric line-up.

The model has already been released in China under a slightly different name - MG ES5, and has quickly gained popularity amongst EV buyers. Combining cutting-edge technology with accessible electric mobility, the striking MGS5 EV focuses on practicality and innovation, with guaranteed affordability. Designed to deliver a smooth and effortless driving experience, this fully electric SUV will not only enhance your everyday driving routine and make it more enjoyable, but it will also reimagine MG’s vision for sustainable and intelligent driving.

A Flagship, Built for Tomorrow  
The spacious MGS5 EV features a sleek design as well as premium materials used throughout the cabin. Built on the Modular Scalable Platform (MSP), this all-new EV truly reflects MG’s commitment to innovation, performance, and unmatched value. The launch of the all-new MGS5 EV further strengthens the manufacturer’s position in the fully electric market, and highlights MG’s dedication to provide even smarter and more sustainable vehicles. Our demonstration model will be on site and ready to experience from mid-April on. Call 02841738691 for more info or to book your test drive

# Winners announced at the 2025 Northern Ireland Apprenticeship Awards

The winners of the Department for the Economy’s annual Northern Ireland Apprenticeship Awards were announced recently.

Speaking after the awards ceremony in Belfast City Hall, Ian Snowden, Permanent Secretary at the Department for the Economy, said: “All of the finalists in this year’s awards are proof of the positive impact that apprenticeships can have.”

“These awards are an opportunity to celebrate the fantastic achievements of our apprentices, their employers and mentors, and our excellent training providers.”

“With almost 13,000 apprentices and higher level apprentices right across Northern Ireland, it is clear that this pathway to a successful career is increasingly popular.”

Congratulating the award winners, Mr Snowden added: “The winners of the NI Apprenticeship Awards represent the best of local talent, and their success is testament to their hard work and dedication.”

Economy Minister Dr Caoimhe Archibald extended her congratulations to all involved. She said: “I extend my heartfelt congratulations to all the nominees and winners at this year’s NI Apprenticeship Awards. Your dedication and excellence exemplify the transformative impact of apprenticeships on individuals, businesses, and our economy as a whole.”

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# Lick is Cream of the Crop

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

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

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

Founded by the Mournes family and handcrafted in Newcastle, Lick Gelato specialises in authentic Italian-style artisan ice cream. Their philosophy revolves around crafting innovative flavour combinations using high-quality ingredients to deliver exceptional taste experiences, offering a wide variety of options to cater to



diverse palates.

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

Reflecting on their popular offerings, Lick Gelato noted, "Our Vanilla, Pomegranate, and Pistachio has really become a signature flavour for us. Pistachio has been a long-standing offering, and we consistently strive to add our unique touch to classic flavours. Recently, our

interpretation of the popular Dubai Chocolate trend has been incredibly popular and sells out very quickly. Our customers have truly embraced pistachio."

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

With a rich history spanning over eight decades, the Ice Cream Alliance Awards are a highly anticipated event in the industry calendar. The awards are renowned for their stringent judging procedures and their role in acknowledging the highest standards and groundbreaking developments within the ice cream sector.

As a cornerstone of the vibrant ice cream industry, the Ice Cream Alliance continues to encourage innovation and creativity, promising a bright and flavourful future for all.

# HANNON Coach & Sail is perfect for a city break in Glasgow!

Direct Belfast – Glasgow Express now departing from the new Belfast Grand Central Station.

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

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

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

With a simple flat fare of £47 which



includes the cost of the ferry and your bag, the Belfast – Glasgow Express offers a really attractive, convenient and low-cost alternative to flying.

The service is operated by HANNON Coach and leaves twice a day from Belfast, Grand Central Station (Stand 18) and drops visitors right in the heart of Glasgow's 'Style Mile'. The simple flat fare allows

passengers to pick and mix dates and times of travel to suit and with no luggage charges it makes a perfect travel option for a shopping trip. There are also a great range of hotels just minutes from Glasgow Buchanan Bus Station.

Company director Aodh Hannon says people seem to really love the convenience of the service as we take you right into the heart of the city centre.

"People love the fact that it's so hassle-free compared to flying, no airport transfers and with no extra charge for luggage it is a massive help with keeping the cost of a break down," said Mr Hannon.

The service can be booked online at [www.hannoncoach.com](http://www.hannoncoach.com) up to 1 hour before departure or by phone using the very friendly telephone booking service.

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## THE TASTIEST NI FOOD & DRINK PAVILION YET!

### NI Food & Drink Pavilion at Balmoral Show

This year's NI Food & Drink Pavilion at the Balmoral Show is set to be a recipe for success as visitors are invited to celebrate local producers, makers and entrepreneurs.

A rich bounty of savoury snacks and sweet treats are guaranteed as more than 90 local food and drink companies feature at the Show, thanks to the partnership between Food NI and the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society at Northern Ireland's leading agri-food event. The sheer quality of the local food and drink offering is better than ever, promising an impressive experience for all visitors.

For those hoping to spice up family meals or impress with new recipe

hacks, the Pavilion offers two theatre kitchens with special guests cooking up a storm across the four days. Visitors can take a break from the bustling Show by joining Julie Fitzpatrick as she hosts the new Safefood Theatre Kitchen. Also, back by popular demand, the Tesco Theatre Kitchen will be hosted by Paula McIntyre and Noel McMeel, featuring the famous Steak Competition and fantastic Female Friday feature. For budding young chefs, the kids cooking demonstrations in the Pavilion will help everyone get stuck into cooking easy and healthy meals together.

This year's line-up of food and drink companies



ensures there's something to suit all tastes as Food NI will once again host Glasyr Farm Ice Cream, Finnebrogue, Dundarave Estate, Cloughbane Farm,

Krazi Baker, Punjana, Long Meadow Cider and Copeland Distillery. There will also be a variety of new tastes for visitors to get their teeth

into including products from Forest Feast, Mash Direct, Loada Balls and Finnebrogue.

The NI Food & Drink Pavilion's long-standing

history and success at the Balmoral Show is no doubt thanks to not only our exceptional local produce but also the framework that supports our producers in ensuring that Northern Ireland is the home of sustainable and healthy food. It is a given that fewer food miles, a lower carbon footprint, a commitment to reusing, recycling and responsible business practices are at the heart of their collective ethos.

Lindsay Curran of Food NI, commented, "Each year our local food sector gets better and better. With sustainability and health rising up the agenda we are delighted to bring a wide range of new and returning local companies to the Pavilion. It is the highlight of the agri-food calendar. From farm diversifications to chef led businesses, the Pavilion is not just a feast for the senses, it is a great

place to do business. Along with Invest Northern Ireland we bring 80 local buyers to see the talented makers we have in Northern Ireland."

The Balmoral Show in partnership with Ulster Bank will return to the Eikon Exhibition Centre showgrounds from Wednesday 14th May to Saturday 17th May 2025. For the latest updates follow Balmoral Show on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.

## Dancing Diggers to make Balmoral Show appearance!

Balmoral Show organisers, the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society, are thrilled to announce that the renowned JCB Dancing Diggers are returning to the Show for the first time in over 30 years having taken the crowds by storm at the King's Hall in 1993.



Avid machinery enthusiasts and visitors of all ages will be in with the chance to watch the impressive stunt team manoeuvre up to eight mighty machines through pyramid formations, balancing acts and seamless spins on each day of the Show. With the team limiting their appearances to three or

four shows each year, this is an exclusive performance not to be missed.

The JCB Dancing Digger Performance Team will feature at the Balmoral Show, organised in partnership with Ulster Bank, when it returns to the Eikon Exhibition Centre showgrounds from Wednesday 14th

May to Saturday 17th May 2025.  
For the latest updates

follow Balmoral Show on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.




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## LEADING MEN

# Olympic Heroes Deliver Mental Health Programme to Schools

7 County Antrim based schools secure a place on Lidl Northern Ireland's 'Sport for Good' Mental Health Athlete Mentorship programme in partnership with the Youth Sport Trust

Lidl Northern Ireland recently revealed 7 post primary schools across County Antrim were amongst a list of 28 post primary schools to successfully secure a place on the retailer's award-winning Sport for Good programme for the 2024/2025 academic year.

The County Antrim based schools include Ashfield Boys High School, Belfast Boys Model School, Blessed Trinity College (Little Flower Girls School), De la Salle College, Dominican College, Parkhall Integrated College and Parkview Special School.

Established in 2019, Lidl Northern Ireland's Sport for Good campaign has supported almost 200 sports clubs and schools across Northern Ireland to date and provided around £400,000 in funding to encourage more young people into sport.

More than 1,100 pupils across the region are set to benefit from this year's programme, which will see Northern Ireland's sporting elite deliver a series of dedicated mental health workshops designed to enable young people to better manage stress, build resilience and self-esteem and view sport and movement as tools for looking after their mental wellbeing.

The team of specially selected Sport for Good mentors who have been trained to deliver the workshops include Olympic hockey hero Eugene Magee, four-time Paralympic athletics champion Michael McKillop MBE, Olympic steeplechase runner Kerry O'Flaherty and Commonwealth athlete Ciaran Chambers.

Developed in partnership with the Youth Sport Trust, the UK's leading

charity dedicated to improving young people's education and development through sport and play, Lidl Northern Ireland's Sport for Good programme will see the athletes visit the 28 successful schools throughout the year, with each school also receiving £1,000 worth of brand-new sports equipment.

Commenting on the Sport for Good workshops and their impact on young people, mentor Kerry O'Flaherty said:

"I am proud to work with Lidl Northern Ireland and the Youth Sport Trust again this year as a mentor for the Sport for Good programme which has made a real difference to students across Northern Ireland. These workshops help young people understand how to maintain their physical and mental health, while



(L-R) Four-time Paralympic athletics champion Michael McKillop MBE and Olympic steeplechase runner Kerry O'Flaherty.

also demonstrating to them how participating in sport and exercise can build their confidence, self-esteem, and resilience.

I'm looking forward to visiting schools across Northern Ireland and meeting students participating in this year's programme. It's always hugely rewarding to witness a shift in their mindset, and to hear from teachers about the concrete benefits they

and their students gain from the programme."

Lidl Northern Ireland's Sport for Good Mental Health Athlete Mentorship was developed after research revealed that the wellbeing of children in Northern Ireland is at its lowest level since 2010, and 45.2% of 16-year-olds have a probable mental illness.\*

For more information, please visit [lidl-ni.co.uk/lidl-community-works](http://lidl-ni.co.uk/lidl-community-works)

## Rural Needs Annual Monitoring Report 2023-2024

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) Minister Andrew Muir has published the 7th Rural Needs Annual Monitoring Report.

The Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (the Act) was introduced to help deliver fairer outcomes for rural communities in Northern Ireland by ensuring that the needs of people in rural areas are given due regard by public authorities when exercising their functions. The Act applies to Northern

Ireland government departments, district councils and the other public authorities listed in the Schedule to the Act.

The Annual Monitoring Report is an integral part of the rural needs monitoring process as it provides a formal record of all Rural Needs Impact Assessments undertaken

by public authorities. It details how rural needs have been considered by public authorities when developing and implementing policies, and in the design and delivery of public services which can affect rural areas differently compared to urban areas.

While both rural and remote rural areas share

characteristics such as low population density and poor infrastructure, remote rural areas face additional challenges due to their geographical isolation and limited access to essential services.

Publishing the Report, Minister Muir said: "Rural areas can face many challenges, which contrast greatly with urban areas such as increased costs of living, risk of social isolation and difficulties in accessing services, including public transport services, mental health and affordable childcare."

It is important for public authorities to determine any potential barriers to the delivery of a fair and equitable outcome for rural communities

and consider how these barriers can be mitigated or overcome. The Rural Needs Impact Assessment process helps ensure that these issues are considered by public authorities when carrying out their functions.

Minister Muir concluded: "I remain committed to ensuring that the needs of rural communities continue to be considered for people living and working in rural areas and DAERA, in partnership with other departments, has a pivotal role to play."

A copy of the Rural Needs Annual Monitoring Report 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024 is available at <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/rural-needs-annual-monitoring-reports>



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# Are you financially prepared? Nearly 7 in 10 lack a car repair fund, despite spending £2,800 a year on indulgences

A new study has revealed a concerning trend among motorists in Northern Ireland – spending heavily on life’s little luxuries while putting off vital car repairs and lacking emergency funds for motoring costs.

In the survey of 2,000 UK adults commissioned by The Motor Ombudsman, the findings showed the average driver in the region spends around £234 per month – or £2,809 annually – on so-called ‘guilty pleasures’. This includes:

- Takeaways and dining out – £88.93
- Streaming subscriptions – £47.38
- Coffee, snacks and drinks on the go – £29.98
- Taxis and short journeys – £23.42
- Beauty and grooming treatments – £140.13
- Fashion and clothing – £84.38

Despite this level of monthly spending, just 22% of respondents in Northern Ireland have a dedicated savings fund for car expenses – leaving 78% exposed to unexpected bills. Worryingly, 40% of

drivers admit to delaying essential car maintenance in order to save money, increasing the risk of higher repair costs and vehicle safety issues further down the line.

When it comes to financial awareness, only 20% of those surveyed in Northern Ireland said they feel completely in control of their finances. Over half (51%) said they occasionally overspend, while 9% confessed to feeling completely out of control and struggle to manage their spending and finances.

Bill Fennell, Chief Ombudsman and Managing Director of The Motor Ombudsman, commented: “This research shows a disconnect between everyday spending habits and financial preparation for essential costs. Motorists



in Northern Ireland are spending thousands each year on small luxuries, yet very few are putting money aside for repairs.

“With 40% delaying essential maintenance, the implications go beyond personal finances – they could also impact road safety. We’re encouraging drivers to review their budgets, set up repair funds where possible, and access our free motoring resources to stay road-ready.”

The Motor Ombudsman provides impartial resources covering all aspects of car ownership, from servicing and repairs, to buying new and used vehicles.

For more information, and to find a Motor Ombudsman-accredited garage in Northern Ireland, visit [www.TheMotorOmbudsman.org](http://www.TheMotorOmbudsman.org).

# In a class of its own –the all-new, fully electric Volvo ES90

Some might say it is a saloon. Others will see a fastback, or even hints of an SUV.

The new, fully electric Volvo ES90 carves out a new space for itself by eliminating the compromises between those three segments, which puts it in a class of its own.

The ES90 combines the refined elegance of a saloon, the adaptability of a fastback, and the spacious interior and higher ground clearance associated with SUVs. It’s a versatile car that does not compromise on comfort or space. A car that allows for bigger adventures and families, striking the perfect balance between your professional and private life, and allowing you to embrace the special moments in life.

The ES90 is designed to evolve over time and is powered by next-generation core computers that represent an eightfold improvement over the previous generation. It’s the first Volvo car with 800V technology for a longer range and faster charging than any electric Volvo before. And naturally, it’s designed with our pioneering safety tech at its core, in a package that is set to be another Scandinavian design classic from Volvo Cars.

With orderbooks open now in selected markets, the ES90 is the latest addition to our balanced product portfolio of



premium Volvo cars. It is the sixth fully electric model in our line-up, joining the EX90, EM90, EX40, EC40 and EX30 as we continue our journey towards full electrification.

“The Volvo ES90 combines our most advanced technologies with Scandinavian design and superior comfort, creating a true premium Volvo car designed to elevate your quality of life,” says Jim Rowan, our CEO. “It joins the EX90 SUV as one of our flagship models and cements our position as an industry leader in software-defined cars that harness the power of core computing.”

Look at the ES90 in profile and what immediately stands out is the car’s confident and distinctive stance, with a slightly raised ride height to provide the driver with a more commanding view of the road. The flowing

roofline balances elegant looks with interior space and contributes to excellent aerodynamics, boosting overall efficiency and

electric range.

The front features our Thor’s Hammer headlight design, expressing a familiar yet modern Volvo identity. The rear is equally distinctive, with new C-shaped LED rear lamps complemented by LED lamps in the rear window, creating a unique welcome and farewell light sequence. When picking their ES90, customers can choose from seven exterior colours and four wheel options that vary from 20 to 22 inches in size.

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# Hyundai IONIQ 9: Game-changing Electric SUV

IONIQ 9 electric SUV has been hailed as one of the most anticipated electric vehicles (EVs) of 2025.

IONIQ 9 is characterized by its classy, clean and stylish design, with a premium, high-quality and beautifully executed cabin that provides a spacious, airy feeling. IONIQ 9 EV capabilities deliver strong range and class-leading charging capability.

IONIQ 9 is truly ‘Built to Belong,’ accommodating up to seven occupants in its spacious interior while providing innovative features that cater to everyone’s individual needs. IONIQ 9 is more than just transportation — it’s a space where family and friends can stay connected with the latest technology while enjoying the privacy and relaxation that makes every journey special. Whether managing busy schedules through its smart connectivity features or unwinding in its lounge-like interior, IONIQ 9 adapts to users’ dynamic lifestyles.

IONIQ 9’s innovative interior creates a home away from home. Its lounge-like atmosphere is created through elliptical elements and calming tones, while natural light streams through the Panoramic Sunroof. Passengers can experience exceptional roominess with ample second- and third-row space.

The flat floor accommodates flexible seating arrangements for six or seven occupants, while Relaxation Seats 4 in the first and second rows offer full recline capability with leg rests — perfect for relaxing

while recharging.

Passengers can stay refreshed on extended journeys with IONIQ 9’s Relaxation Seats 5. The Dynamic Touch Massage function uses sophisticated pressure and vibration technology to stimulate blood flow and circulation, helping reduce fatigue. In select markets, customers can further enhance IONIQ 9’s lounge-like atmosphere with innovative Swiveling Seats in the second row. When parked, second- and

third-row passengers can face each other for greater interaction.

The rear cargo area accommodates up to 1,323 liters with the third-row seats folded — enough room for four golf bags and four Boston bags — or 620 liters 6 with all rows in place. The front trunk offers additional storage of up to 88 liters in RWD models and 52 liters in AWD models, suitable for storing charging cables, for example.

IONIQ 9’s heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) system demonstrates exceptional efficiency even in very cold weather conditions thanks to Hyundai Motor’s advanced engineering innovations. The system features a heat pump that recycles waste heat, ensuring that energy is utilized efficiently to maintain a comfortable cabin temperature without drawing heavily from the battery.

All variants deliver

confidence-inspiring performance. The Performance AWD model accelerates from 0 to 100 km/h in just 5.2 seconds 9, while the Long-Range AWD variant takes 6.7 seconds.

IONIQ 9 makes charging convenient, replenishing the battery from 10 to 80 percent in just 24 minutes using a 350 kW charger.

Driving is stress-free with Hyundai Motor’s state-of-the-art Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS), which work seamlessly to prevent

accidents and enhance convenience.

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# KITCHEN RENOVATION PLANNING GUIDE:

The kitchen is the heart of the home. Breathing new life into this space can create a whole new feel within your property, as well as add up to 10% to your home’s value.

Every kitchen renovation starts with an idea. Perhaps you’ve always had your ‘dream kitchen’ in your head and need some help making that vision a reality. Maybe you’re bursting with inspiration from home interior magazines and kitchen showrooms but aren’t sure how to narrow down your choices, or perhaps your kitchen renovation project is currently a completely blank canvas!

**Colour Planning.**  
Colour has a huge impact on how we engage with a space. And it’s the combination of colours – otherwise known as a colour palette – that will achieve a desired look or feel. A colour wheel is a helpful tool when deciding a colour palette for your new kitchen. Here are some of the most common options. Tonal. Choose one colour as your ‘base colour’ and add various tones of that colour throughout your room. Harmonious. Choose a colour on the colour wheel and work its neighbouring colours into your scheme. The colours complement each other without being too similar. Complementary. Choose a colour on the colour wheel and find its complementary colour on

the opposite side of the wheel to make a statement with your colour scheme.

**Lighting design.**  
Lighting has many functions. Of course, its main purpose is to light a space, but well-considered lighting can add to the style of your kitchen and have a major impact on the mood and atmosphere too. Kitchen lighting should aim to marry design and function. When planning the lighting for your kitchen renovation, aim to tick off at least one from each of these categories: General lighting. General (or ambient) lighting will spread light around the whole kitchen, via a ceiling light or spotlights, for example. Task lighting. You need task lighting in your kitchen to help perform certain tasks. For example, lights above the worktops where you’ll prep food. Spot lighting Spot (or accent) lighting works to draw your attention to a particular area, for example, artwork on a wall, a bookcase in a recess, or glassware in a cabinet. Atmospheric lighting Atmospheric (or decorative) lighting will help to achieve the right mood for your kitchen space, by using dimmable lamps above a dining area, for example.



Kitchen cabinet inspiration.

The kitchen cabinets you choose will have a huge influence on the overall look of your kitchen. But it’s not just about style. The quality of the material, the finish you opt for, and special features (wine racks, spice drawers etc) will all have an impact on your budget. To help you select the best kitchen cabinets for your kitchen renovation, take a look at the six main styles available. Shaker-style. An affordable, classic, and traditional style of kitchen cabinet that has always been popular. Glass-fronted. Glass-fronted cabinets help to display the

items within, and bounce light around the room too. It’s common to mix and match glass-fronted cabinets with other styles. Tongue and groove.

The texture and warmth of tongue and groove cabinets give the feel of a relaxed, country cottage style kitchen. It’s also a popular design element in a Scandi-style kitchen. Flat-fronted . For a simple and minimalist look in a contemporary kitchen, choose flat-fronted cabinets with no panels or frames. Plywood cabinets will help to achieve an organic, warm kitchen. They’re also a very cost-effective choice. Natural (unfinished) wood. For a truly rustic

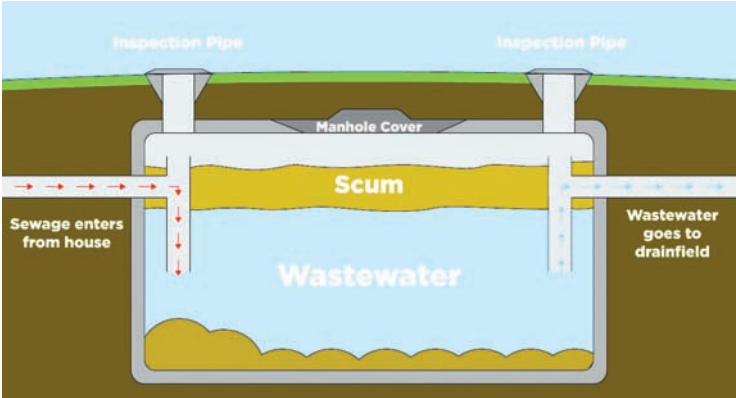
feel, opt for natural wood cabinets in your kitchen. These are popular with homeowners striving for a relaxed, informal style kitchen.

Your kitchen worktop needs to be tough and hard-wearing, unlikely to chip, scratch, or be damaged by heat. And crucially, it needs to be affordable. While quartz and granite worktops typically sit at the higher end of the spectrum, materials such as laminate make a super versatile and cost-effective option.

For more detailed info on this topic see: <https://www.checkatrade.com/blog/planning-guides/kitchen-renovation-project/>

# How to look after your septic tank to treat your household wastewater

If you live in the countryside and your house is not connected to an NI Water sewer, it is most likely discharging wastewater into a septic tank on your property.



Septic tanks are small wastewater treatment plants for your home. It is a ‘living’ treatment system which depends on the presence of good bacteria to break down waste coming from your home.

It is important to look after your septic tank to ensure it is operating correctly to prevent pollution to the water environment or problems with treating waste coming from your house. It can be costly to repair a failed septic tank, so good ongoing maintenance is essential.

Below are some tips to help you find your septic tank and understand if it needs de-sludged:

- Don’t know where your septic tank is? Don’t worry: Look for a metal or concrete lid - this may be overgrown or have become covered with soil. Your tank will normally be downhill from your property. Your title deeds will show where it is.
- You will need to register your septic tank with DAERA via [www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/regulating-water-discharges](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/regulating-water-discharges) if you have not already done so. To

ensure your septic tank is in good working order, perform these checks regularly.

- Check the drains around your home. Are they slow at clearing or are your toilets blocking up? This could indicate your septic tank is full or the soakaway is blocked.
- At the tank, make sure the cover is accessible. There should not be a smell from the tank. If the tank needs to be emptied, it may start to leak.
- Check the discharge pipe for appearance and odours. A smelly or dark discharge pipe indicates a likely problem. This could be caused by a build-up of sludge, blocked pipes, or too many chemicals being added to the tank which have killed the bacteria required for the treatment process. Get it checked by a specialist if you see any of these problems.
- If you find fungal growth such as slime in the watercourse or smell odour coming from a nearby watercourse, it may be that your septic tank is releasing untreated sewage. Check the tank and pipes for any signs of damage and contact a plumber to fix the problem.

Did you know that NI Water provide one FREE de-sludging service for domestic customers for your septic tank per year? Further details are available via <https://digitalservices.niwater.com/desludge-open> This service empties up to 4.5m3 of sludge from your tank (subject to

access), aiming to carry out the service within 12 days, leaving enough to keep the living treatment process working efficiently.

There are also ways to maximise the life of your septic tank and reduce its effect on the environment:

- Have your septic tank de-sludged regularly - record any dates of maintenance.
- Don’t drive over the soakaway or build anything above it (concrete or tarmac)
- Only use household cleaning products labelled as ‘suitable for septic tanks’, ‘environmentally friendly’ or ‘low phosphate’. Chlorine bleaches are not recommended for use with a septic tanks as bleach can kills the bacteria needed to treat your wastewater.
- Use a sink strainer to stop solids going down waste pipes
- Use less water by flushing less or using a dual flush toilet
- Only flush the 3 P’s (pee, poo and paper) down toilets
- In the kitchen, do not pour grease or cooking oil down the sink
- Plant trees and shrubs well away from your septic tank, as the roots can block up soakaways and drains.

For more information or to book your de-sludge go to [www.niwater.com/siteFiles/resources/pdf/2024/SepticTankInformation.pdf](http://www.niwater.com/siteFiles/resources/pdf/2024/SepticTankInformation.pdf) and also at [www.niwater.com/arrange-septic-tank-emptying/](http://www.niwater.com/arrange-septic-tank-emptying/)

# Painting and Decorating Costs:A 2025 Guide

Sprucing up your home with a fresh coat of paint or new wallpaper can revitalise your living spaces and even boost property value.

For those considering a professional touch, understanding the costs involved in hiring a painter and decorator in 2025 is crucial for effective budgeting. This guide, based on insights from Checkatrade’s professional estimators, provides a comprehensive overview of typical expenses.

The average cost to paint a medium-sized room (approximately 18m²) in the

UK stands around £450, encompassing both labour and standard trade paint. For larger projects, painting a 5-bedroom house could reach approximately £6,000. Daily rates for painters and decorators generally hover around £325, but this can fluctuate based on experience and location. Regional differences, particularly in major cities like London, often see higher day rates

compared to other areas.

Project-based pricing varies significantly depending on the task’s complexity and scale. Interior painting costs are often calculated per square metre of wall area, averaging around £15. Painting hallways, landings, and stairs can typically cost £1,600, while painting a single door (both sides) averages £90. Wallpapering labour is usually priced per square metre, around £14, with a room costing approximately £450 for labour alone, excluding the wallpaper itself.

Exterior painting for a 3-bedroom semi-detached property averages £1,300, highlighting the increased material and labour required for external surfaces. Factors influencing overall costs include room size and shape, the number of rooms

being decorated, the type and condition of the surfaces, and the chosen paint or wallpaper. More intricate work, such as high ceilings or detailed woodwork, will also impact the final quote.

While DIY painting might seem cost-effective initially, with a medium-sized room potentially costing £50-£100 for paint alone, it doesn’t account for the time, effort, potential for mistakes, and the cost of necessary equipment. Hiring a professional ensures a high-quality finish, efficiency, and often includes insurance against accidents. Furthermore, professional decorators come equipped and handle the clean-up, saving you valuable time and energy.

Hidden costs to consider when budgeting include the choice of premium paint

brands, which can significantly increase material expenses. Wallpaper removal and necessary wall preparation, such as plastering or repairs, can also add to the overall cost. While some painters offer basic plastering repairs, larger jobs may require a separate plasterer, with typical day rates around £300. Ultimately, investing in a professional painter and decorator can save you time, prevent costly errors, and deliver a superior finish. By understanding the average costs and the factors that can influence them, homeowners can effectively plan their decorating projects and find trusted tradespeople to bring their vision to life.

For more guidelines see <https://www.checkatrade.com/blog/cost-guides/painter-decorator-prices>

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# DRIVEWAY IDEAS FOR MAXIMUM KERB APPEAL

Your driveway serves more than one purpose. While it's a convenient and safe place to park your vehicle, it also plays a lead role in creating a lasting first impression. Here's a round-up of some key types.

Gravel driveways offer a charming and cost-effective way to revamp your driveway. Gravel and stone come in a variety of colours and sizes, providing the opportunity to fully customise the look to suit your style. They also pair well with other materials such as stepping stones, block paved borders, and stamped concrete. In addition, gravel provides great natural drainage and is easy to maintain. You can cleverly combine gravel with block paving to stop the gravel from spraying across the pavement.

Resin driveways. Resin driveways have become increasingly popular with UK homeowners looking for modern front driveway ideas as they offer a contemporary appearance and incredible durability. The mixture of resin and aggregates creates a seamless surface that's resistant to weeds and cracking, with an array of colours and patterns available, you can easily match your home's exterior. Resin driveways naturally drain water and are environmentally friendly. Resin's neat and smooth finish is stunning all by itself or with a few key features. Consider the shape of your resin driveway and whether you'd like any cut-outs for plants, trees, water features, or decorative edging. Due to resin's versatility, the sky is your limit.

Tarmac driveways. Tarmac or asphalt driveways are durable and long-lasting. Tarmac is a mix of aggregates and tar, whereas asphalt is a mix of aggregates and bitumen. The latter offers a better finish and smoother surface compared to tarmac. The finish of tarmac can be enhanced through 'chip sealing'. This is when tar is poured onto a gravel base, stones are added, and it's pressed with roller equipment. Tarmac and asphalt are cost-effective to install and pair well with a number of aesthetics: They look great alongside bricks.



Create a stunning look by contrasting tarmac or asphalt with lighter stone. Soften the dark tones by including a lush lawn or greenery in your tarmac driveway design.

Concrete driveways. Poured concrete is one of the most common driveway materials on the market. It's used to create low-maintenance driveways that require minimal upkeep. Coloured concrete is great if you want to add dimension and interest, such as a cream border or

chequered patterns. It's also malleable when installed correctly. For example, it can make patterns when poured into moulds and can be sectioned and paired with other materials, such as aggregate or slate. Stamped concrete can give the appearance of a different material such as stone or brick for a fraction of the cost.

Block paving driveways. Block paving creates a classic and elegant first impression. It's usually made from concrete, which is engineered in a factory for consistency and accuracy. For this reason, block paving is a durable and versatile option for your driveway. A popular design trend with block paving is using light grey blocks to border and 'edge' the drive and any central features, such as a roundabout, lawn, water feature, or pathway. A dark grey paving block is then used to fill in the remaining area, offering a great aesthetic that stands the test of time. Whether you use one type of block, two-tones, mixed, or a combination of materials, block paving is a decorative option that offers a lovely finish. Monoblock paving driveways incorporate two-tones of block paving to create patterns and interest. The two tones can be two different materials or two colours of the same material.

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

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

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

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

Once the groundwork is complete, the focus shifts to creating the building's shell. Bricklayers and structural engineers, if needed, erect the walls and steel supports. Roofers then make the structure watertight, and window and door installers seal the building, protecting it from the elements. This phase is crucial for establishing the basic form and weatherproofing of the building.

The next stage, "first fix," involves installing the internal infrastructure. Electricians and plumbers lay the groundwork for essential services within the walls and floors. HVAC engineers install ducting, while carpenters frame internal walls and prepare for staircases. Insulation installers then ensure the building is energy-efficient. A rough plastering may also occur at this point, preparing the walls for the final finishes.

"Second fix" is where the finishing touches are applied. Electricians

and plumbers complete their installations, fitting fixtures and connecting appliances. Carpenters install doors, skirting boards, and fitted kitchens. Tilers, plasterers, and painters then work their magic, transforming the interior spaces.

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

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



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

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