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Winning team Heat Haze Heros from St Malachy's High School, Castlewellan team members Daithi Brown; Rory McClean; Eamonn McAleenan; Meabh Dunnn; Meagh Fitzpatrick

PUPILS FROM ST MALACHY'S HIGH SCHOOL COMPETE IN LONDON TO TAKE HOME THE CROWN AND £10,000

A team of students from St Malachy's High School in Castlewellan is celebrating after earning a coveted spot in the national final of the RTX Quadcopter Challenge, an exciting STEM competition that's inspiring the next generation of innovators and engineers.

Now marking its 10th anniversary, the challenge is the flagship STEM outreach programme from RTX, giving students across the UK the chance to design, build and fly their own quadcopters in a

bid to be crowned national champions.

The team then travelled to London to compete at the Honourable Artillery Company for the chance to be crowned the 2025 Quadcopter Challenge

Champion and win £10,000 to support STEM initiatives at their school.

Andrew Gibbons, Senior Composite Materials & Processes Engineer at Collins Aerospace in Kilkeel said, "This year's

Quadcopter challenge attracted impressive participation with teams demonstrating creativity and ingenuity.

Continued on page 4

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Ulster-Scots Cultural Showcase in Killyleagh

Rowallane DEA Forum hosted a lively Ulster-Scots cultural event on Thursday 27 November at the Sir Hans Sloane Centre, Killyleagh, where attendees enjoyed an afternoon of language, learning and local creativity.

Delivered by the Schomberg Society, the event gave participants an engaging introduction to the richness of the Ulster-Scots language. Attendees learned about the history, heritage and unique expressions associated with the Ulster-Scots tradition, with plenty of lively examples shared throughout.

Local poet, Roy Ferguson captivated the audience with a number of wonderful renditions of Ulster-Scots poetry. His readings brought the language to life, highlighting its

rhythm, humour and distinctive character. A complimentary lunch offered a chance for groups to chat, connect and reflect on the themes of the day.

Speaking about the event, Rowallane DEA Forum Chair, Councillor Callum Bowsie, said, "It was fantastic to see such strong interest in local culture. The passion of the Schomberg Society and the talent of Roy Ferguson made the event both entertaining and informative. We look forward to supporting more cultural activities across the district."

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Insight to Opportunities as Adult Learners Meet Local Employers

South Eastern Regional College (SERC), in partnership with Invest Northern Ireland and the Department for Communities (DfC) Employer Services Branch, hosted an employer engagement event for adult learners as they prepare to explore possible career pathways.

The 40 students attending are currently studying either the Level 3 Access Diploma in Foundation Studies or Re-start, a first step course for adult returners. The ground-breaking meeting introduced them to seven local employers, all offering varied and flexible career paths.

The event, titled Think Differently, sparked conversations about innovative approaches to employment and lifelong learning through a panel and networking session.

Catherine Shipman, SERC's Head of Engagement and Development said, "This event demonstrates the power of collaboration in shaping inclusive career pathways and in supporting those returning to education. Employers were glad to engage with motivated learners, and the adult students benefited from networking opportunities and the chance to gain practical insights to career pathways."

Joanne McMullan, Head of Labour Solutions from Invest NI said, "Access to a strong skills pipeline and diverse labour pool is vital to a strong regional



South Eastern Regional College (SERC), in partnership with Invest Northern Ireland and the Department for Communities (DfC) Employer Services Branch, hosted an employer engagement event for adult learners as they prepare to explore possible career pathways.

economy with good jobs and improved productivity. Addressing our high rates of economic inactivity and promoting life-long learning will be key to ensuring we have the workforce we need for the future. Events like this between industry and education are a critical step in making this happen."

Paddy Rooney, Deputy Secretary, Work and Health Group, DfC said,

"Employers and jobseekers can each face obstacles in meeting their labour market needs. DfC's Employer Services Branch is proud to be involved in events like these which help employers and jobseekers to better understand each others' needs and importantly help find mutually beneficial solutions. We look forward to continuing to work with Invest NI to-

wards that goal." This successful initiative is just one demonstration of SERC's commitment to empowering learners and strengthening partnerships with industry. The college works with the support of Invest NI to meet the evolving needs of the Northern Ireland economy. Visit www.serc.ac.uk Real Learning for Real Life #BetterOffAtSERC.



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Educating & Empowering

Continued from page 1

I have no doubt that there are more than one or two engineers in their midst. It was obvious that a great deal of time had gone into preparing presentations and Quadcopter designs for test flying."

The RTX Quadcopter Challenge is an annual competition designed to inspire the next generation of engineers and innovators. Since its launch in 2015, the programme has engaged over 2,000 students

from more than 200 schools across the UK. Participants work alongside engineers from across RTX including Collins Aerospace, gaining hands-on experience in design, problem-solving and teamwork.

This year, students from five local schools were challenged to design a quadcopter that embodies community spirit and delivers a positive local impact. The 'Heat Haze Hero's' from St Malachy's High School rose to the challenge, developing a concept



The Judges (Pavlos Tranakidis, James Maginnis, Dr Hanagh Winter) with the regional Final Winners "Heat Haze Heroes" at the Armagh Planetarium.

that aims to help quickly locate fire hotspots in the Mourne mountains, help local firefighters and help anyone finding themselves caught in fires in the mountains.

"Our flagship RTX Quadcopter Challenge has supported STEM leaders of tomorrow unlock their passion since 2015," said Alan Henning, Director of Operations for Commercial Seating at

Collins Aerospace. "We are creating pathways for passionate young people to enter the aerospace sector."

RTX is committed to advancing UK prosperity and fostering innovation in STEM. Through initiatives like the Quadcopter Challenge, the company continues to inspire young minds and support the development of future STEM leaders.

Work Based Apprenticeships Offers Flexibility for Progression

The apprenticeship route has become increasingly popular over the past few years.

And whilst many people are familiar with both apprenticeships and higher level apprenticeships, the work-based apprenticeship is another model of delivery that can prove win-win for both the apprentice and the employer.

South Eastern Regional College (SERC) offers a range of work-based apprenticeships at Levels 2 and 3. These unique apprenticeship courses offer learners an opportunity to study without the need to come into college for a day each week.

Victoria Boyd, Head of Training Programmes and Apprenticeships explains, "Work-based apprenticeships are particularly suited for those sectors that have considerable skills gaps such as early years, hospitality, catering and health and social care. Staffing resources for employers in these sectors are often stretched, so having a member of staff out of the workplace for a day is almost impossible. However, having committed staff is in the employer's interest, and this is where the work-based apprenticeship comes into its own."



(L - R) Sarah Arogba, Lala Mabe and Blessing Arogba, completed Level 2 Work-based Apprenticeships in Health & Social Care through their employer CWC Croob Cottages and SERC. The young women are now progressing to a Level 3 Work-based Apprenticeship.

Blessing Arogba (22), moved to Castlewellan from Nigeria along with her sister Sarah - both young women are pursuing work-based apprenticeships through SERC and their employer, CWC Croob Cottages in County Down.

Blessing, who worked in health care in Nigeria, was keen to continue in the care sector. She successfully secured a post with CWC Croob Cottages and was encouraged to continue her qualifications with a Level 2 Work-based Apprenticeship in Health and Social Care through SERC. This past year, the young woman completed both a Level 2 Diploma in Health and

Social Care and a Level 2 Certificate in Induction into Adult Social Care as part of her Level 2 Work-based Apprenticeship in Health and Social Care. Her dedication and hard work were further recognised with a well-deserved promotion to Senior Care Assistant at CWC Croob Cottages.

Blessing said, "The work-based apprenticeship offered an opportunity to gain a qualification and evidence my learning. It has been a great course which has helped me in my job. The modules of study are all relevant to the work and I have become more skilled and confident as I have progressed."

Now that she has completed the Level 2, Blessing has already commenced the Level 3 Work-based Apprenticeship in Health & Social Care. She said, "I would recommend the work-based apprenticeship route. It has been busy juggling work with the course, but my employer has been very supportive, and I have had a lot of support from Olive Watson, my Work-based Training Consultant at SERC, who has helped me plan out my study over the year. This has helped me keep on top of the work as I progress."

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Serves 6 - 8 people	Serves 8 - 10 people	Serves 12 - 14 people

LOCAL RAILWAY RECEIVES THE KING'S AWARD

The Downpatrick & County Down Railway, Northern Ireland's only volunteer-led full-size heritage railway, has been awarded The King's Award for Voluntary Service for 2025.

This is the highest honour a local voluntary group can receive in the United Kingdom and is equivalent to an MBE.

The award comes as the Downpatrick & County Down Railway celebrates its 40th anniversary year, having been formally founded in 1985. Over the past four decades, volunteers have transformed a derelict brown field site into living history. The organisation preserves and operates vintage trains from the Victorian era to the modern day, and delivers museum education programmes, provides inclusive volunteering opportunities, and hosts major public events that attract thousands of visitors annually. The dedicated volunteer team

manages every aspect of the railway's operations, from restoration and engineering to visitor experience and governance.

The Downpatrick & County Down Railway is one of 231 charities, social enterprises and voluntary groups across the United Kingdom to receive the prestigious award this year. Their work, along with others across the UK, showcases the exceptional contribution volunteers make to their local communities and the positive impact volunteering has on people's lives.

The King's Award for Voluntary Service recognises outstanding work by volunteer groups. The honour was created in 2002

to celebrate Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee and has continued under His Majesty The King. The 2025 announcement marks the third year of The King's Award for Voluntary Service.

Recipients are announced annually on 14 November, The King's Birthday. This year's awardees reflect the diversity and strength of the voluntary sector across the UK, including groups protecting local environments, supporting vulnerable people, and preserving cultural heritage. The King's Award for Voluntary Service is one of the most challenging honours to achieve in the UK voluntary



sector. Groups undergo a rigorous multi-stage assessment, and only those demonstrating exceptional impact, leadership and volunteer commitment are successful. This places the Downpatrick & County Down Railway

among the highest-performing volunteer-led organisations in the country.

Representatives of the Downpatrick & County Down Railway will receive the award crystal and certificate from Gawn Rowan-

Hamilton, Lord-Lieutenant of County Down, in the coming months. In addition, two volunteers will attend a Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace in May or June 2026, alongside other award recipients.

Residents Lead the Way in Allocating £98,000 to Community Projects

Residents in Newry, Mourne and Down have voted for 98 projects promoting good health and wellbeing to receive public funding.

The awards of up to £1,000 per group were made through the Communities Leading

Change Participatory Budgeting campaign. The initiative allows residents to decide how a portion of public funds is spent by voting for the projects they believe will have the greatest benefit and impact on their community.

A total of 98 projects were funded through Market Stall events across the seven District Electoral Areas (DEAs), with an unprecedented number of people attending to vote. Applicants set up stalls to showcase their projects,

with attendees required to visit all stalls and then vote for their top five favourite projects. These Participatory Budgeting events were also compered by the Chair and Vice chair of each DEA.

After the votes were counted and verified, 70% of the groups were awarded funding. The other 30% who did not receive funding on the night have been given support from Council partners to apply for different sources of funding or have been signposted to free resources to help deliver their project.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Chairperson, Councillor Philip Campbell said,

"I am delighted that we have had such a massive turnout for this year's Communities Leading Change project. Over 6000 votes have been placed in a very short space of time, and we have awarded £98,000 to community groups across Newry, Mourne and Down. Feedback has been very positive with almost all groups commenting on how these events have given them an opportunity to engage with the wider community and the other organisations in their area.

"Congratulations to all the projects who have received funding. The range and diversity of projects was fantastic. I look forward to their completion and seeing the positive impact they will have on their communities."

Each group will now have until 31 March 2026 to spend their funding. The Council will be hosting events in May 2026 for the public to attend to

hear how these projects have benefitted the area in which they live.

A list of the successful projects can be found at: <https://www.newrymournedown.org/communities-leading-change>

If you would like more information on how to get involved contact communityplanning@nmandd.org

Participatory Budget Funders and Partners are Newry, Mourne and Down District Council; PHA; Southern Health and Social Care Trust; South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust; Northern Ireland Housing Executive; Shared Housing Programme - Radius/Clanmil/Ark/Arbour Housing Associations; The Executive Office; PSNI; Department For Communities; County Down Rural Community Network and Confederation of Community Groups.

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Councillor TERRY ANDREWS

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£4.5m Local Economic Partnership Action Plan

The Minister for the Economy joined Newry, Mourne and Down District Council at a Local Economic Partnership meeting where the council formally commenced delivery of its Local Economic Partnership Action Plan, becoming the first council in

The Council's Local Economic Partnership was formed on 27 January 2025. The aim of the Partnership is to deliver on the Department for the Economy's Regional Balance Fund which focuses on creating good jobs, increasing productivity, improving regional balance and decarbonisation.

Economy Minister Caoimhe Archibald said: "Local Economic Partnerships set out a new strategic approach to economic development, locally led and with a mission to deliver on regional balance."

"I firmly believe local issues require local solutions. I look forward to seeing the delivery of this action plan that will have a positive economic impact as we move forward."

After welcoming the Minister, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Councillor Campbell, thanked the Minister and the Department for their support and funding.

"We are proud to be the first council in Northern Ireland to



begin delivering through the Local Economic Partnership Action Plan," said Cllr Campbell. "This plan has been co-designed with our key stakeholders to strengthen productivity through targeted mentoring and grants for businesses and social enterprises."

"Through our new Commercial Property Revive and Reimagine Grant, we will drive local economic activity, attract new businesses and create space for existing enterprises to grow. We will also work closely

with the Department for Communities to ensure we maximise every available funding opportunity."

"Another aspect of the plan will see us working with the partners to boost awareness and adoption of AI across the local business community."

Councillor Campbell also highlighted the Council's ambition on sustainable tourism. "Our district is proud of its tourism offering, to ensure we maximise on our offering we will support the Mourne

Gullion Strangford Geopark Sustainable Tourism Network," he said. "This will play an important role in advancing our ambition to become a sustainable tourism destination."

Councillor Campbell concluded by paying tribute to members of the Local Economic Partnership for their commitment and contribution in developing the Action Plan, adding that she looks forward to seeing the projects progress in 2026.

A photograph of two young students, a girl and a boy, in school uniforms. They are both smiling and looking at a tablet computer that the boy is holding. The background is slightly blurred, showing other students in a classroom setting.

A circular logo for Loughinisland Primary School. It features a gold star in the center, a cross, and the text 'Loughinisland Primary School' around the perimeter. Below the star, it says '2024' and 'CHINI PUERO FIDES'.

OPEN EVENING

THURSDAY 15TH JANUARY 2026

PRINCIPAL'S ADDRESS 5PM & 7PM
POST-16 INFORMATION SESSION AT 6PM
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The logo for St. Macartan's P.S. Loughinisland. It features a circular emblem with a rainbow arching over a landscape with a church and trees. The text 'ST. MACARTAN'S P.S.' is at the top, 'LOUGHINISLAND' is at the bottom, and 'PRAISE THE YOUNG AND THEY SHALL SUCCEED' is written below the emblem.

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A circular inset photograph showing two young students in school uniforms. They are both looking at a tablet computer that one of them is holding.

A circular inset photograph showing two young students in school uniforms. They are both smiling and looking towards the camera.

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The best time to see and hear wild geese in Ireland, north and south, is winter.

In autumn many species migrate south from Canada, Iceland and other northern countries to find food and shelter during the cold dark days, and there's something about their wild calls and easy, purposeful flight, often in V formation, which tugs at our hearts, evocative of unrestricted freedom.

Indeed, historically, people have venerated wild geese, and for instance, the term was applied to the Irish Jacobite soldiers who left Ireland in 1691 following their defeat in the Williamite War, an event commemorated as the 'Flight of the Wild Geese'.

My favourite native geese are the light-bellied brents which visit Strangford Lough and our east coasts in thousands every year, but there's another goose with an interesting mixed



heritage.

Greylag geese are large... up to 3 foot in length...and it's their size which attracted humans to regard them as food, not just by killing them, but domesticating them, as we did with cows, sheep and all the rest, and they became what we might call the farmyard goose. Yet unlike those other domesticated animals, and despite all the subsequent goose-for-food breeding programmes over centuries, greylags still exist as a species.

They still migrate south for winter from Iceland, but others stay here year-round, mating and breeding, mainly the offspring and descendants of escaped domesticated geese, what the scientists call 'feral', a word mainly used to describe domesticated animals...cats, dogs, etc... which have returned to the wild.

On a clear cold winter day, when we hear the haunting honking of geese it's hard not to stop what we're doing, to look up and admire these magical wild birds as they fly past. Perhaps part of their attraction is that they always seem to know where they're going...

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Kaleidoscope is Northern Ireland's only centre that offers gymnastics, cheer and dance under one roof - and that's exactly what makes it stand out.

Families don't have to choose one pathway — children can try different disciplines, discover what they enjoy and thrive in a setting that prioritises inclusion, positivity and most importantly, fun!

The club's success is backed by major recognition for their amazing teachers and coaches, Kaleidoscope has been awarded British Gymnastics NI Club of the Year and Cheersport Ireland Club of the Year, showing its strength across two very different sports. Its dance programme has also earned a place as a finalist for Co. Down Dance School of the Year, highlighting the quality and creativity of its dancers and coaches.

Kaleidoscope offers a wide mix of classes, from



recreational gymnastics and cheerleading to a wide range of dance classes, inclusion classes, musical theatre, adult fitness, holiday camps and birthday parties. There are opportunities for those who just want

to enjoy the sport and stay active, as well as structured competitive pathways for athletes ready for the next step.

At Kaleidoscope, we strive to give every young person the chance to find the

activity that feels right for them. Whether they love cartwheeling, dancing, stunting or just being part of a team, there's a place for them here at Kaleidoscope — and they're supported every step of the way.

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UK’S BIGGEST FOOD COLLECTION CALLS FOR VOLUNTEERS TO SUPPORT CHARITIES.

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

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

During the collection Tesco customers will be encouraged to donate long-life food to support the charities in their work. Donations for Trussell will help its community of food banks provide emergency food parcels to people who cannot afford the essentials, while donations to FareShare will support

its network of 8,000 local charities and community groups helping to feed people in local communities across the UK.

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

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

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



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

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

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

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BALLYNAHINCH CREDIT UNION MARKS 60 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

Ballynahinch Credit Union celebrated its 60th Anniversary in 2025! For six decades, this institution has embodied the true spirit of 'people helping people', evolving from humble beginnings in the parochial hall of St Patrick's Church to becoming a vital, modern financial hub on High Street.

The journey of the Credit Union since its founding in 1965 is a testament to the dedication of its volunteers, staff, and members. It's a story of growth and adaptation—from relying on a team of committed volunteers in the early days to becoming

computerised in the 90s, and later moving into its current prominent, refurbished office (the former White Horse Hotel) in 2004. As the financial world has changed, so has Ballynahinch Credit Union, adapting to regulation and embracing

digital services, all while maintaining its core mission.

As the Credit Union enters its seventh decade, it does so under new leadership, ushering in a fresh chapter for the organisation. The recent appointment of

Caroline O'Brien as the new Manager is a significant development for Ballynahinch Credit Union.

Ms. O'Brien takes the reins as Manager, supporting the Board of Directors and staff, at a time when the need for accessible, supportive, and local financial services is greater than ever, particularly in light of ongoing economic challenges like the cost of living crisis. The Board of Director's leadership is expected to drive further innovation in member services and reinforce the Credit Union's commitment to providing a genuine alternative to traditional banking.

The success of the Credit Union, is rooted in its dedication to serving its members and the wider Ballynahinch community. From providing competitive loans for local families to fostering a culture of savings, the Credit Union has proven time and again that it is For You, Not Profit.

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Ways to Get Ahead in 2026: Experts Say Mindful Living Is the New Productivity

As 2026 approaches, the conversation around success is shifting. Instead of chasing endless consumption and constant busyness, experts argue that the real edge comes from mindful curation — especially in how we manage technology, time, and health.

Digital Discipline Takes Center Stage

The first step, analysts say, is tackling digital overload. Rather than vague time blocking, the recommendation is to schedule short, intentional “digital minutes” for specific tasks like checking emails or responding to messages. Outside of those windows, notifications should be aggressively limited.

Phone-free zones are also gaining traction. Dining tables, bedrooms, and the first hour of the day are increasingly being treated as sacred spaces for mental clarity and deeper relationships. “Technology should serve your goals, not dictate them,” one productivity coach noted, pointing to the rise of “digital sabbaths” — entire days offline — as a growing trend.

Minimalism Moves Beyond Design

Minimalism is no longer just about clean interiors; it’s becoming a lifestyle strategy. Advocates suggest decluttering both physical spaces and schedules to reduce decision fatigue. A popular tactic is the “tidy-up trio,” a daily commitment to remove

three non-essential items. The same principle applies to calendars. Non-essential meetings and social obligations are being cut to reclaim time for creativity and rest. Financial experts add that automation — from bill payments to savings transfers — is a simple way to turn passive spending into active saving. Even small steps, like unsubscribing from marketing emails, can reduce stress and sharpen focus.

Buffer Zones for Life’s Unpredictability

With uncertainty a constant, resilience is being reframed as preparation. Financial advisors recommend a 30-day accessible savings fund as a cornerstone of mental calm. Time management specialists echo the idea, urging people to add 15-minute buffers to appointments to avoid the corrosive stress of rushing. Emotional buffers are equally important. Weekly, non-negotiable time for restorative rest — whether through meditation, journaling, or nature walks — is being promoted as essential. “Think of buffers as shock absorbers,” one



wellness expert explained. “They protect you from life’s inevitable bumps.”

Health Through Micro-Habits

Extreme fitness regimens are out; micro-habits are in. The “five-minute movement rule” — stretching, walking, or light exercise daily — is gaining popularity as a sustainable approach. Hydration is another focus, with many adopting the simple ritual of drinking water immediately upon waking. Sleep routines are also being emphasized. Experts suggest consistent wind-down practices, such as reading or gratitude journaling, to prime the body for rest. Nutrition

follows the same logic: small swaps, like adding vegetables to each meal, compound into long-term vitality.

Growth Mindset as the X-Factor

Beyond physical health, the growth mindset is being hailed as the defining trait of future success. Scheduling “skill-play” time — learning a language, experimenting with cooking, or exploring creative hobbies — keeps curiosity alive. Setbacks, experts argue, should be reframed as feedback rather than failure.

Networking is part of this equation too. Communities that challenge and inspire

are seen as critical for staying adaptable in a rapidly changing world. “In 2026, opportunities will favor those who remain flexible and engaged,” said one career strategist.

The Bottom Line

Getting ahead in 2026 isn’t about doing more — it’s about doing what matters with clarity. From digital discipline to minimalist momentum, buffer zones, micro-habits, and a growth mindset, the path forward is less about hustle and more about intentional design.

As one expert summed it up: “Success in 2026 will belong to those who curate their lives, not those who consume without pause.”

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Company director Aodh Hannon says people seem to really love the convenience of the service

as we take you right into the heart of the city centre.

"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.

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Blooming Brilliant

When the decs come down turn to fresh flowers to revitalise your home!

As the festive sparkle of Christmas decorations begins to fade, many homes feel a little bare. But fear not, for the winter months offer a beautiful opportunity to refresh your decor with a stunning array of fresh blooms. While it's true that cut flowers generally last longer in cooler temperatures, making winter an ideal time for floral displays,

the right choice of resilient flowers can ensure your home remains vibrant well into the new year.

One of the most cheerful and enduring choices for post-Christmas decor is the Tulip. Available in a vast spectrum of colours, from crisp whites to bold reds and sunny yellows, tulips bring a fresh, spring-like feel to any room. Their unique characteristic of continuing to grow and

gracefully bend towards light adds a dynamic, living element to your arrangements. Pair them with a simple glass vase for an elegant, modern look.

If you're looking for something with a striking presence, Oriental Lilies are an excellent choice. While their scent can be potent, their large, exquisite blooms and long-lasting nature make them perfect for a prominent display.

Choose varieties like 'Stargazer' or 'Casa Blanca' for their dramatic beauty. Be sure to remove the pollen stamens to prevent staining and prolong their freshness.

Finally, don't overlook Chrysanthemums. Especially the 'Cremon' or 'Santini' varieties, these resilient blooms are winter superstars. They come in an incredible range of shapes, sizes, and colors, from dense

pom-poms to delicate daisies. They are incredibly versatile, fitting seamlessly into both traditional and contemporary settings, and will easily outlast many other cut flowers, keeping your home looking lovely long after the last of the tinsel is packed away.

Embrace the beauty of these hardy blooms to banish the post-holiday blues and infuse your home with natural elegance.

The critically important work of NDAWA

Emalyn Turkington, CEO, explains how NDAWA continues to provide frontline services to women, young people and children affected by domestic and sexual abuse, even though resources are being stretched to the limit.

The work of NDAWA is critical in working with women, children and young people affected by domestic abuse in the Ards and North Down area. NDAWA are seeing more women seeking support staying with their abusive partner as they cannot afford to leave, or women who have left the abusive home who need more support with finances/ budgeting and debt management.

When needed, NDAWA will do what they can to help women in financial difficulties with their basic needs of food, electric, gas

or oil. At times they can secure funding for these situations, at other times they use monies from donations NDAWA have received from generous donors. It is always great when the public or other agencies donate money or raise money for NDAWA.

Christmas can be a challenging time for many families, even more so for families that live in an abusive environment. Help and support is available. North Down & Ards Women's Aid have emergency refuge accommodation and



community support services available. We are open and here to help and have been supporting women and children throughout the year. You can directly support women and children this

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Set amongst the breathtaking scenery of the Slieve Foy Mountains and the medieval village of Carlingford, the Greenway is a breathtaking walking and cycling route that offers a newly paved surface with plenty of scenic views along the way or challenge yourself with a hike up Louth's tallest peak.

The Four Seasons Hotel Carlingford is located nearby, making the newly renovated hotel the perfect spot to base yourself from for a break that offers adventure and relaxation in equal measures. Feel the crisp, invigorating mountain air on your cheeks as you enjoy the scenery, perhaps stopping for a warm cup of tea at one of the village's inviting spots to truly appreciate the

moment. As your adventure of the day comes to an end, return to alluring village of Carlingford, where the evening promises warmth and charm. You will be spoilt for choice on which pub to unwind down in, with many offering a roaring fire to gather around and the authentic sound of traditional live music filling the air. It's the perfect way to let the day's activity



melt away. As the night ends, retreat to the Four Seasons Hotel Carlingford. This is where every

detail, from the friendly faces to the cloud-soft beds, reminds you that this is more than a stay; it's pure serenity. For the ultimate post-adventure recovery, make sure to visit the hotel's Leisure Club. Here, you can sink into the soothing heat of the jacuzzi to relax tired muscles or embrace the invigorating chill of the brand-new ice plunge for a truly revitalising experience. It's the perfect contrast to your day of fresh air and cosy evenings, ensuring you leave feeling completely refreshed.

Regency Carpet Manufacturing: Weaving together Quality, Innovation, and Community!

Regency Carpet Manufacturing recently celebrated a significant achievement, proudly winning two prestigious accolades at the recent Bangor Business Awards: 'The Commitment to the Bangor Business Community' and 'The Sustainability and Environmentally Friendly Business of the Year.'

These wins are a powerful testament to the company's commitment to quality, its forward-thinking approach to manufacturing, and its vital role as a major employer and community partner within the Bangor area. Securing these top business honours underscores Regency's excellence in blending traditional craftsmanship with modern innovation and sustainability, marking it as a true leader in the region. In the heart of Bangor's Balloo Avenue stands a business that has quietly become one of the UK's carpet manufacturing powerhouses. Since 1995, Regency Carpet Manufacturing Limited has been blending traditional craftsmanship with cutting-edge innovation, producing carpets of exceptional quality that turn houses into homes across the UK and Ireland. Part of the long-established Furlong Flooring Group, Regency's

100-strong team operates 25 state-of-the-art tufting machines, creating products built to last. But this is no ordinary factory floor. Sustainability sits at the heart of the operation, with recycled yarn now woven into many ranges, showcasing how a local manufacturer can lead the way in shaping a greener future for the industry. Equally important is the company's commitment to people. Regency offers apprenticeships in Electrical, Mechanical, and Joinery, opening doors for young people in the area to learn vital skills while building solid careers. The business also invests in its community, supporting local charities and groups, reflecting a belief that true success comes from giving back. Their new 3-year sponsorship as Youth Pathway Sponsor for Bangor Rugby Football and Cricket Club highlights their long-term commitment to the area. As one of Bangor's most



substantial employers, Regency plays a vital role in the local economy. With significant turnover and an impressive scale of operations, the company's carpets are certified to the highest standards — ISO 9001, ISO 14001, and ISO 45001. From traditional wool-like styles to advanced performance synthetics, Regency brings comfort, durability, and style to homes nationwide.

Regency Carpet Manufacturing isn't a shopfront showroom; it's something far more powerful. It's a symbol of Bangor's industrial strength, a story of skilled people and forward-looking innovation, and a company whose reach extends well beyond Northern Ireland's shores. For nearly three decades, Regency has been more than a manufacturer.

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Campbell College Headmaster offers some advice on getting the best out of School Open Days!

January marks the start of Open Day season, a time when parents and primary pupils explore schools to find the right fit.

Choosing a school can be an exciting experience, but also a little daunting. Headmaster of Campbell College, Mr Jonathan Anderson, shares practical advice to help guide your decision.

Start with the little things: When visiting, observe how pupils behave and interact with teachers, each other, and with you and your child. The Principal's address will outline the school's values, but the atmosphere and pupil interactions often speak louder than words.

Talk to pupils: They are the best advocates, if given the chance. Ask open questions such as, "Why do you enjoy school?" Avoid yes/no questions and listen carefully to

their answers. Then ask yourself, "Would my child feel at home here?" This is very different from "I want my child to go here!"

Think partnership: Education works best when school, parent, and child collaborate. Consider how the school communicates and involves families. Your involvement matters, and the relationship between home and school is key to a child's success.

Be practical: Picture daily life. How is the uniform worn? How do pupils greet you? What are their manners like? These details reveal a lot about the school culture.

Do your homework: Read the materials provided, explore the school's website and



social media, and compare what pupils say with what's promoted. Authenticity matters. Gather as much information as possible before making your decision.

Choosing a school is about finding the best environment for your child - and for you. Take time, ask questions, and trust your

instincts.

For more information, contact:

Campbell College,
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BT4 2ND

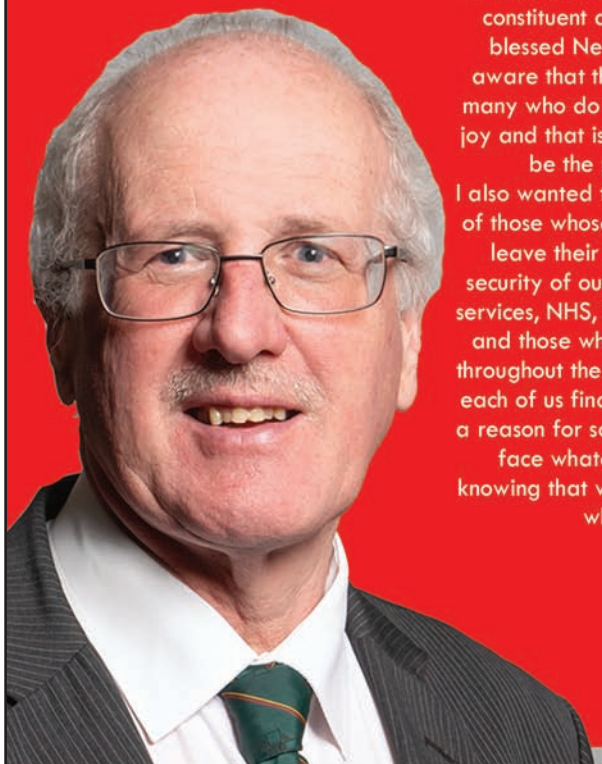
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Open Day: Saturday
17th January 2026 |
9:00am - 12 noon

Jim Shannon MP

Best Wishes for Christmas and New Year to all residents of Strangford



I wanted to take this opportunity to wish every constituent a very peaceful Christmas and a blessed New Year. Whilst saying this, I am aware that there are many who grieve losses, many who do not find Christmas to be a time of joy and that is why I am praying that peace will be the portion of all in Strangford.

I also wanted to take the opportunity to thank all of those whose jobs and callings mean that they leave their family to see to the safety and security of our community within the emergency services, NHS, Care in the Community and Homes and those who work in shops to keep us going throughout the Christmas period. Thank you! May each of us find a reason to give thanks - and be a reason for someone else to give thanks - as we face whatever this New Year may bring, knowing that we are always better and stronger when standing together!

Best wishes,
Jim.



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FieldDay partners with Ulster Wildlife to encourage 5,000 households to Let Nature In bloom

Local County Down fragrance company FieldDay has partnered with local nature conservation charity Ulster Wildlife to encourage 5,000 households to get involved in the charity's Let Nature In wildlife gardening campaign.

The campaign inspires households to take simple but powerful steps to support wildlife, starting in their own gardens. From planting native flowers for pollinators to leaving water and natural food for birds, these small changes can make a big difference for biodiversity.

Already more than 2,600 households have signed up to Let Nature In. And with one in nine native species at risk of extinction in Northern Ireland – including once-common garden visitors such as hedgehogs and house sparrows – the campaign has the potential to make a huge difference in

helping bring nature back.

Dawn Miskelly, CEO of Ulster Wildlife, said:

"We're thrilled to partner with FieldDay to inspire even more people to take simple, positive action for nature. By making small changes at home, together we can make a big difference for local wildlife – helping to bring nature back, one garden at a time."

Maureen Carvill, Wildlife Gardening Officer at Ulster Wildlife, said:

"Our gardens collectively cover more land than all of Northern Ireland's nature reserves, making them a lifeline for wildlife especially as climate

change and habitat loss take their toll. With FieldDay's support, we're aiming to reach our ambitious goal of getting 5,000 households involved – sowing the seeds of change and creating a network of wildlife-friendly spaces that will help nature thrive."

Alix Mulholland, Co-founder of FieldDay, added:

"We've always been inspired by Ireland's landscapes, and through this partnership with Ulster Wildlife, we can combine creativity with conservation. Helping people transform their outdoor spaces into havens for wildlife is a natural extension of our



ethos – and it's easier than people think, thanks to Ulster Wildlife's fantastic step-by-step guides."

Everyone who signs up to Ulster Wildlife's Let Nature

In' campaign will receive a free digital pack, packed full of information to get started, plus seasonal advice and tips to help bring more nature into gardens, terraces, and

balconies.

To join the campaign and bring more nature into your outdoor spaces, visit ulsterwildlife.org/let-nature-in

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REALISTIC FITNESS GOALS FOR THE FAMILY

The key to successful family fitness in 2026 is setting realistic, sustainable, and fun goals using the S.M.A.R.T. framework: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely.

Instead of focusing on high-pressure resolutions, prioritize small, consistent habits that become lifelong routines. Core family targets could include scheduling three active sessions per week (like biking or hiking) and incorporating a non-

negotiable 15-minute family walk after dinner to increase daily movement and reduce screen time.

Goals should be tailored to age. For kids and teens, focus on fun and skill development, such as trying a new sport or training for



a family 5k fun run. Busy adults should aim for consistency over intensity, incorporating three 10-minute "micro-workouts" on busy days and one strength training session weekly. Older adults

should prioritize balance and mobility, for example dedicating 10 minutes daily to gentle stretching or chair yoga.

To ensure long-term success, use a central tracking chart to monitor progress and

celebrate effort rather than perfection.

By making movement a collaborative and non-punitive part of your routine, you will build a healthier and more connected family in 2026.

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Downpatrick Primary School Celebrates 50 Years!

Downpatrick Primary School is currently celebrating a major milestone, marking its 50th Anniversary since its founding in 1975.

This year of celebrations in 2025, honours half a century of education and dedication to the local community. Guiding the school through much of its recent history is the principal, Mr. Niall Stevenson, who has provided steady leadership and a commitment to nurturing young minds at the school for the past 19 years. The first principal of the school was Mr Bill Nesbitt who had been the principal of the old Downpatrick County Primary School and brought the children 'Down the lane' to the new school. Mr Arthur Greenwood took over in 1985 until 2006 when he retired.

Downpatrick Primary School has continuously adapted to meet the evolving needs of its pupils. The school's commitment to growth is evidenced by developments like the construction of its New Key Stage 1 Block, an investment that reflects the school's focus on providing modern, purpose-built accommodation for its youngest learners.

The school's ethos places a strong emphasis on inclusive education & provides a comprehensive learning environment

supported by varied and modern facilities. The curriculum is delivered with specialised teaching in the LSC classes (The Hedgehogs, The Owls, The Squirrels, The Foxes) ensuring that pupils with diverse needs are fully integrated and benefit from tailored resources and a caring atmosphere. The school opened two new SPEYF classes in 2024, the Butterflies and the Ladybirds which cater for Nursery to P2 aged children with statements of severe learning difficulties.

Beyond the core academic subjects, the school facilities and activities promote holistic development:

Accommodation: In addition to the new Key Stage 1 Block, the school features well-equipped classrooms and dedicated areas for arts and activities.

Sports: The Down Dynamos programme highlights the school's dedication to physical education, offering competitive opportunities in team sports like netball, football, and cross-country.

Creativity and Citizenship: Through initiatives like the Eco Council, Art Club, and the School Council, pupils



are encouraged to develop creativity, responsibility, and an awareness of environmental and global issues. The Eco Council, for example, actively promotes sustainability through projects like their garden tidy-up and the establishment of a Pollinator Garden.

The school remains deeply connected to its community through active engagement. The Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) organises numerous fundraising and social events, from tractor runs and sponsored walks to community galas, fostering a strong partnership between home and school. Downpatrick Primary School also actively participates in Shared Education initiatives and charitable efforts like Angel Wishes, underscoring its role as a key community hub.

THE BUSY PARENT'S GUIDE TO SELF-CARE

The term "self-care" often conjures images of luxurious, uninterrupted leisure: an hour-long massage, a quiet afternoon reading, or, yes, a long bubble bath.

While wonderful, these activities are often completely out of reach for the typical busy parent juggling work, school runs, appointments, and household chaos.

True parental self-care isn't about escaping reality; it's about making strategic, micro-adjustments to your daily life to refill your cup without needing a full-scale vacation. It's about maintaining your emotional and physical reserves so you can show up as the parent you want to be.

Here are some Quick Wins for Instant Relief

When you only have a few minutes, focus on simple, high-impact resets that shift you out of the stress response.

The Power of the 4-7-8 Breath: When you feel tension rising (e.g., during homework struggles or traffic), use this quick calming technique: Inhale silently through your nose for a count of 4. Hold your breath for a count of 7. Exhale completely through your mouth with a "whoosh" sound for a count of 8. Repeat

3-4 times. It physically lowers your heart rate.

Tactical Hydration: Keep a water bottle with you at all times. Taking a big drink of cold water can provide a surprisingly quick mental and physical break. Dehydration often mimics fatigue and irritability.

The "Sensory Reset": Engage one of your senses. Spray a scent (like peppermint or citrus oil) or listen to one specific song on headphones. This

interrupts the mental loop of worry or to-do lists and grounds you in the present moment.

Mindful Movement: Instead of sitting down, stretch while waiting for the kettle to boil or for the kids to put on their shoes. A quick 60-second neck roll, shoulder shrug, or a forward bend releases physical tension instantly.

The most sustainable form of self-care is integrating it into your existing routine, rather than scheduling an extra



activity.

By focusing on these small, consistent acts of self-care, you shift the perspective from "How can I escape?" to "How

can I sustain myself?" You don't need a bubble bath; you just need to honour your own needs within the structure of your busy life.

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

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

Nugent's reputation for robust engineering is evident. The TDC features a fully galvanised chassis and framework as standard, promising exceptional longevity and resistance to corrosion—essential qualities for any equipment constantly exposed to the elements and livestock effluent. Durability extends to the floor, which uses 3mm fully welded aluminium plating. This is a considerable upgrade from standard floors, providing maximum strength, hygiene, and a solid foundation for heavy cattle.

Perhaps the most critical innovation in the TDC range is the focus on animal well-being during transit. Nugent prioritised achieving maximum internal width,

a key feature designed to ensure livestock have ample space. This reduction in crowding is vital for minimizing stress and aggression during transport and significantly improves airflow within the unit. Loading is simplified by heavy-duty gates fitted with guide handles and a high-grip rear tail door, ensuring smooth and safe movement onto the trailer. Safety is further reinforced by a fixed internal dividing gate, standard with dual latches, and crash rails for side impact protection.

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



renowned for absorbing road shock more effectively than traditional setups, resulting in a significantly smoother and safer journey for both the livestock and the towing vehicle. The inclusion of a sprung drawbar and an adjustable coupling eye ensures

versatile and easy coupling across various heavy-duty tractors. The Nugent TDC range is positioned as a market leader in the heavy-duty segment. By successfully combining exceptional structural integrity (galvanised chassis,

3mm aluminium floor) with thoughtful features aimed at animal welfare (maximum internal width, smooth loading), Nugent has produced a robust, reliable, and user-friendly trailer. For large-scale farming or commercial livestock movements,

the 20ft and 24ft TDC models offer a compelling, long-term investment. While likely commanding a premium price, the design specifications suggest superior operating performance and reduced stress on both the operator and the animals.

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DFI Launches Road Safety Campaign: Be Bold. Be Seen

Minister for Infrastructure Liz Kimmins has launched a new road safety campaign to encourage road users to be more visible as the darker winter months approach.

'Be Bold. Be Seen' encourages pedestrians, cyclists, and other vulnerable road users to wear bold bright or high-visibility clothing.

Far too many lives

are being lost and too many families lives are shattered by the worst possible news and evidence shows that people who walk, cycle or ride a horse

are among the most vulnerable groups of road users.

Tragically, more than one in five people killed on our roads over the past decade were pedestrians. Stark statistics have revealed that, on average, 10 motorcyclists are killed on our roads every year.

The campaign features three striking visuals that will appear on the rear of buses, posters and a social media campaign.

1. You wouldn't be seen dead in this

This visual delivers a hard hitting message, that being invisible on the road is a risk not worth taking. The slogan plays on the double meaning of being seen both in terms of fashion and survival.

2. Take a fashion risk not a safety risk

This creative approach is designed to capture attention quickly, particularly in high-visibility formats such as bus rears, by linking fashion choices with personal safety.

3. If he could he would The message is clear: while wildlife has no control over its visibility on our roads, people do. Whether walking, cycling, or working near traffic, choosing to wear high-vis clothing can be the difference between being seen and not.

By using this relatable and emotive image, the campaign aims to spark conversation and encourage behavioural change, especially as daylight hours shorten in autumn.

Minister Kimmins said: "Road safety is a priority for me as Infrastructure Minister as we work hard within the Department to reduce the number of road deaths and serious injuries on our roads.

"This campaign uses simple but powerful images to remind us all

that visibility is a choice. "We hope it encourages people to think twice before heading out without high-vis gear, especially during darker months.

"Be Bold Be Seen is a particularly important message for those who might be most vulnerable on our roads as the nights get darker including pedestrians and cyclists."

The latest road safety campaign complements recent work undertaken by the Department to improve road safety behaviour.

Current campaigns include safety around school buses for children www.sharetheroadtozero.com/DriversThinkSafety WhenPassingBuses, and a TV campaign which urges pedestrians and drivers to recognise the shared risk of using the roads: www.sharetheroadtozero.com/PedestrianSafety.

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Efficiency Upgrades That Really Save You Money

When facing the costs of home maintenance, homeowners often ask: Which investments genuinely pay us back? With rising energy prices, the greatest return on investment (ROI) often comes not from aesthetics, but from efficiency.

From a tradesman's perspective, these three upgrades are the most impactful ways to slash utility bills and increase your home's value in 2026.

Insulation: The Foundation of Savings

Before considering new technology, look at the basics. Proper insulation is arguably the best return on investment a homeowner can make. It's a one-time cost that dramatically reduces heat transfer, extending the life of your heating and cooling systems because they don't have to work as hard.

Attic/Loft: Ensure your loft meets current recommended

insulation levels, focusing on the R-value (a measure of thermal resistance). Upgrading from older, shallow insulation to modern, thick materials can cut heating bills by up to 25%.

Cavity Walls: If your home has unfilled cavity walls, insulating them is fast, relatively inexpensive, and stops a huge amount of heat from escaping.

Investing in robust insulation is like putting a thermos around your home—it keeps the expensive, conditioned air in, providing immediate and consistent savings.

Smart Thermostats: Smarter Heating. Not

Harder For a relatively small initial outlay, a smart thermostat offers powerful control. These devices learn your routines, automatically adjust temperatures based on whether you're home, and can be controlled remotely.

While a smart thermostat doesn't technically generate savings, it maximizes the efficiency of your existing system by eliminating wasted energy. You stop heating an empty house. Furthermore, many models provide detailed energy usage reports, allowing you to identify and adjust inefficient habits. This

technology offers a quick ROI, often recouping its cost within the first year through optimised scheduling.

The Leap to Heat Pumps

For major, long-term savings, few systems rival the Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP). Unlike traditional boilers that burn fuel to create heat, ASHPs extract heat from the outside air (even when it's cold) and use a heat exchanger to transfer it indoors.

While the initial installation cost is significant, government incentives and the unit's incredible efficiency make it a powerful investment:

Exceptional Efficiency:

ASHPs produce significantly more energy than they consume, often achieving efficiencies of 300% or more, compared to around 90-95% for high-efficiency gas boilers.

Dual Function: They provide highly efficient heating in the winter and cooling in the summer, replacing two separate

systems.

A heat pump represents the future of home heating, offering a substantial ROI over its 15- to 20-year lifespan through vastly lower running costs. When calculating your 2026 budget, prioritise efficiency; it's the professional way to future-proof your bills.

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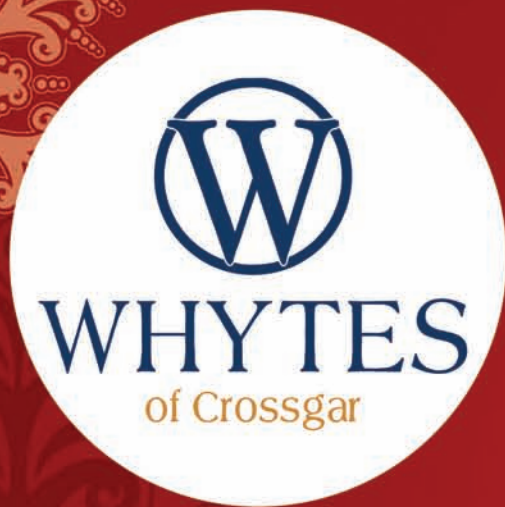
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