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£2.5 million Public realm works get underway in the Church Street and De Courcy Place areas of Downpatrick this summer.

PUBLIC REALM WORKS IN DOWNPATRICK BEGIN

Communities Minister Gordon Lyons has announced that public realm works in the Church Street and De Courcy Place areas of Downpatrick will start this summer.

The Department for Communities has provided £2.5million of funding for the scheme, with a contribution of £400,000 from Newry, Mourne and Down District Council. Newly appointed contractors, John McQuillan Contracts Ltd, are now

working in partnership with scheme consultants AECOM to prepare for onsite works commencing in the summer of 2026.

The works will take place on Church Street from Pillar Well Lane to the Scotch Street junction, and on De

Courcy Place/Lower English Street from the Church Street junction to the frontage of Denvir's Hotel. The scheme will focus on providing a long overdue renewal and upgrade of the area, including new footpath surfacing, comprising granite paving with

natural stone kerbs; tactile paving for pedestrian crossings; replacement traffic signals; street furniture planters; new street trees; and new streetlights.

Continued on page 4

Beaches Retain Prestigious Blue Flag Status

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council is delighted that local beaches at Cranfield, Tyrella and Murlough have again received a prestigious Blue Flag Award for 2026.

The internationally recognised award is presented to beaches and marinas that meet the highest standards in water quality, safety, accessibility, environmental management and cleanliness.

Located at the mouth of Carlingford Lough, Cranfield's sandy beach is famous for its shallow waters and stunning views of the Mourne Mountains, with Murlough beach outside Newcastle situated near the foot of the Mournes. The National Nature Reserve facility features a wide, sandy beach backed by a 6,000-year-old sand dune system. Tyrella beach outside Downpatrick, boasts a breathtaking two-mile stretch of flat, wide sand backed by dunes.

Confirmation that the three local beaches have again been awarded Blue Flag status came at a special

awards ceremony hosted by Live Here Love Here at The Stables in Groomsport. Across Northern Ireland, 21 beaches and marinas were recognised.

This year's Blue Flag programme placed a particular emphasis on accessibility, with Newry, Mourne and Down District Council continuing to improve inclusive access across its beaches with recent developments at Tyrella including a new amenity building with Changing Spaces facility, plans for a new accessible pathway and the introduction of accessible beach equipment in partnership with the Mae Murray Foundation.

For more information on Council beaches and visitor facilities, visit www.visit-mournegullionstrangford.com/explore/beaches



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Exciting Be Active Summer Programme 2026

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council is delighted to officially launch the Be Active Summer Programme 2026, with bookings opening from 10am on Monday 15 June for another exciting summer of sport, recreation and fun across the district.

Running throughout July and August, the programme is designed to keep children and young people active, engaged and entertained during the school holidays through a wide variety of activities suitable for all ages and abilities.

The programme includes a broad range of opportunities across Council leisure facilities, including outdoor and indoor swimming, multi-sports camps, basketball, squash, table tennis and much more. Inclusive programmes are also available to support participation for all children and young people.

Welcoming the launch of the programme, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Councillor Glyn Hanna said, "The Be Active Summer Programme continues to play an important role in encouraging children and young people to stay active, social and engaged throughout the summer months. We are proud to offer a wide range of affordable and inclusive activities that support healthy lifestyles and provide enjoyable experiences for families across the district.

"With something for everyone to enjoy, I



Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson Councillor Glyn Hanna (back, second left) at the launch of the Be Active Summer Programme with participants front row (from left) Emily McKendry, Shea Fitzsimmons, Tyler McKendry, Charlotte Barker, Emily Kilmartin and Orla Fitzsimmons. Included are back row (from left) NMDDC officials Kerri McConnell (Acting Head of Indoor Leisure), Andrew Patterson (Active and Healthy Communities Director) and Robert Geary (Sports Development Manager).

would encourage parents and guardians to explore the programme and take advantage of the fantastic opportunities available this summer."

The summer programme highlights include:

- Multi-Sports camps for primary school-aged children
- Teen Activity Week
- Inclusive Camps for

children with neurodiversity such as autism and ADHD

- Autism-friendly swim sessions
- Teen Gym Sessions
- Outdoor swimming opportunities at the Tropicana at the Newcastle Centre
- A range of Council-supported sports and recreational activities across the district

All activities are delivered by qualified staff in safe and supportive environments, ensuring children and young people can enjoy a positive and active summer experience.

To view the full Be Active Summer Programme 2026 and book activities, please visit <https://www.newrymournedown.org/summer-programme>

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future initiatives such as a UNESCO Tourism Trail, highlighting World Heritage Sites and Global Geoparks as drivers of sustainable tourism, education, cultural identity and community development.

Supported by the UK National Commission to UNESCO and National Commission of Ireland to UNESCO, the project will bring together designated sites across the island to strengthen collaboration through shared landscapes, heritage and identity.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council is the lead partner, responsible for overall coordination, governance, financial management and communications, with the project delivered in partnership with Cavan County Council and Cuilcagh Lakelands UNESCO Global Geopark.

A photograph showing two hikers from behind, standing on a stone wall. They are looking out over a vast, open landscape under a bright blue sky with large, white, fluffy clouds. The hiker on the left is wearing a dark jacket and a backpack, while the hiker on the right is wearing a red jacket and a backpack. The landscape below them is a mix of green grass and brown earth, with a winding path visible in the distance. The sky is filled with large, white clouds, and the overall scene is bright and sunny.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and the Mourne Gullion Strangford UNESCO Global Geopark, is at the centre of an innovative new all-island partnership connecting UNESCO-designated sites across Ireland for the first time.

The emerging network will involve all 14 UNESCO sites on the island of Ireland as well as the six Tentative UNESCO sites, creating new cross-border links through workshops, community exchanges, creative residencies,

environmental
action activities and
cultural storytelling
programmes.

Over the course of the project, UNESCO Together will deliver more than 650 participations in cross-border activities, including in-person workshops,

community events at UNESCO sites and online exchanges.

Creative programmes will also celebrate UNESCO-recognised intangible cultural heritage, including Irish harping, uilleann piping, hurling, falconry and dry stone walling.

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Welcoming the scheme, Minister Lyons said:

"I am pleased that work to improve this historic part of Downpatrick will soon be commencing. This major investment will complement previously

completed schemes within Downpatrick and will help unlock wider physical and social regeneration within the town centre to encourage more visitors and tourists to the area, providing a welcome boost for the local economy."

Newry, Mourne and
Down District Council
Chairperson Councillor



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Philip Campbell said:

"This investment is long overdue, represents a key output from the Downpatrick Living High Street Framework and is a great opportunity to further boost the overall regeneration and growth of the town. Council is fully aware of the disruption already experienced on the street from the advance utility works and will work closely with government agencies and the public realm contractor regarding traffic management and overall delivery of the works."

Mal McGrady, Chair of Downpatrick Regeneration Working Group (DRWG), said:

“Downpatrick
Regeneration Working

Group is pleased to see the further roll-out of works identified as necessary to upgrade one of the main arterial routes into the centre of Downpatrick and make the approach to the historic English Street/Mall area more appealing visually. We are thankful to the Department of Communities and Newry Mourne and Down District Council for providing funding which will improve the town centre for residents, businesses and visitors alike. DRWG will continue to address areas identified for improvement both in relation to infrastructure and events that will enable us to enhance visitor numbers to the town."

Spotlight on Improving Health and Wellbeing

Newry Mourne and Down District Council Community Planning partners recently held celebration events in Newcastle and Newry to recognise inspiring projects promoting good health and wellbeing, supported through the Communities Leading Change Participatory Budgeting Programme.

Newcastle’s Burrendale Hotel hosted groups from the Downpatrick, Rowallane, Slieve Croob and Mourne District Electoral Areas (DEAs), while Killeavey Castle hosted groups from the Slieve Gullion, Newry and Crotlieve DEAs. The respective event hosts were BBC NI’s Barra Best and Rachel Duffy from The Traitors television series.

Ninety eight community groups across the district were allocated a total of £98,000, with projects highlighted during the Newcastle celebration including those by the Schomberg Society, Kingdom Youth Club, Ballynahinch Men’s Shed, Ballynahinch Community Collective, DisAbility Hub, St Brigid’s Primary School, Downpatrick, Aughlisnafin GAC G4MO, Annsborough Youth Group and Dundrum Coastal Rowing Club, with guests enjoying entertainment from Annalong Community Choir, also recipients of a Communities Leading Change grant.

Projects highlighted during the Killeavey Castle event included those by St Mark’s High School, Warrenpoint, Ballyholland GAC, Newtownhamilton and District Community First Responders,



Killeavey Castle celebration event host Rachel Duffy (fourth right) winner of The Traitors television series, with (from left) Crotlieve District Electoral Area (DEA) coordinator Shirley Keenan, Gerard Rocks and Annie Clarke (Southern Health and Social Care Trust), Pádraig Harte (Newry DEA coordinator), Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Deputy Chairperson Councillor Geraldine Kearns, Raymond Jackson (Confederation of Community Groups), Aileen O’Callaghan (Education Authority) and Slieve Gullion DEA coordinator Aoife McComiskey.

Breastmates Newry, Greater Armagh Road Men’s Shed, Crossmaglen Darkness into Light and Amazing Abilities, with guests enjoying entertainment from Traditional Arts Partnership, one of the groups to receive a Communities Leading Change grant.

Raffle prizes at both events were donated by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust, Newry, Mourne and Down Leisure Services and the Community Planning Department.

At the Burrendale event, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Councillor Philip Campbell said, “It’s

a pleasure to celebrate the community groups who have been successful through our Communities Leading Change Participatory Budgeting programme. Thousands of people across our district took part in voting, learning more about what is happening in their area and having a real say in how public money is spent. That is democracy at its most local and most meaningful.

The project funders include Department for Communities, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, Southern Health

and Social Care Trust, Public Health Agency, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, PSNI, Housing for All – Clannmil, Arbour, Radius and Ark (in kind support), County Down Rural Community Network, Confederation of Community Groups and Newry, Mourne and Down Policing and Community Safety Partnership.

A full list of the successful projects that secured funding is available at <https://www.newrymournedown.org/communities-leading-change> with additional information available at communityplanning@nmadd.org

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COUNCIL UNVEILS PLANS FOR EXCITING NEW PARK GOLF EXPERIENCE IN NEWCASTLE

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council has unveiled plans for Ireland's first park golf experience at the foot of the Mourne Mountains in Newcastle.

The nine hole course is being developed at the Island Park on the footprint of a former pitch and putt facility, with the exciting proposal supported by a range of Golfing organisations, including Royal County Down (RCD) Golf Club, home to the world's number one golf course.

Due to open next summer, the all-ability facility will be developed on stunning parkland, with the installation and maintenance of tee boxes and putting greens carried out by RCD, with the new par three course featuring artificial tees and fairway style greens, with participants using only one club and large, light golf balls, which reduces the distance

they can travel.

A recommendation to progress the eco-friendly facility designed to provide an affordable, accessible golf experience for all ages and abilities, including schools, youth groups, older people and those with mobility issues, was agreed at a meeting of the Council's Active and Healthy Communities Committee on 15 June and will be considered by the full Council when it meets next month.

The new park golf facility has been designed to support physical activity, social inclusion and community engagement, while enhancing visitor facilities in the resort.

Council officials have been working on the golf park plan with Mr Kevan Whitson, the former Royal County Down professional, with Golf Ireland excited at its future potential.

The Council proposal aims to develop an accessible, welcoming golf facility that promotes health, skill development and community cohesion, offering a golf experience for juniors to seniors and everyone in between.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Councillor Glyn Hanna, said, "The new nine-hole course will be a major attraction and can be enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities.

"It is located in a



Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson Councillor Glyn Hanna (second left) with former Royal County Down Professional Kevan Whitson (second right) with NMDDC Active and Healthy Communities Director Andy Patterson (right) and Assistant Healthy Living Director Conor Haughey at Island Park.

beautiful location with the Mourne Mountains providing a stunning backdrop. Special thanks to Royal County Down for its involvement with this

scheme which will be extremely popular with a wide range of people."

The Council Chairperson said the new park golf

experience will add to and complement existing attractions in Newcastle, helping draw more people to the resort and supporting local businesses.

Successful Creative Upcycling Project Goes Back to The Future

A creative upcycling project delivered in Downpatrick during National Reuse and Repair Week was a major success, helping local people learn new skills, reduce waste and build confidence through furniture restoration and repair.

The From Old to Gold: Repair, Share and Care programme was delivered through a partnership

between Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Sustainability Section, the Life Change Changes Lives (LCCL) charity and the Northern Ireland Resources Network (NIRN).

Over four days, participants transformed unwanted furniture rescued from a Council recycling centre into unique, restored pieces while learning practical skills, including sanding,

painting, waxing, upholstery and patchwork using reclaimed materials.

The project highlighted the importance of the circular economy by demonstrating how reuse, repair and upcycling can prevent waste, extend the lifespan of materials and reduce the amount of furniture going to landfill.

Alongside the environmental benefits, the programme also delivered significant

social and well-being outcomes for participants and for the LCCL volunteers who acted as mentors and trainers, sharing skills and knowledge gained through the charity's ongoing furniture upcycling programme.

The project achieved exceptionally positive outcomes, with every participant reporting satisfaction with the programme, increased confidence in repair and upcycling skills and a strong sense of personal achievement. Feedback also highlighted the importance of social connection, inclusion and the supportive atmosphere created throughout the workshops.

Participants praised both the welcoming environment and the opportunity to meet new people while learning

practical skills. One said "everyone is so friendly and positive, and the craic is 90" while others remarked "The atmosphere in the place is very accepting" and "Wonderful organisation. I had an amazing time, learned new skills and had great craic."

LCCL Operations Manager, Ailish Teague said: "This project created a welcoming and positive space where people could learn, connect and support one another. The feedback demonstrates the real value of combining sustainability with community wellbeing and lifelong learning."

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council hopes that the project's success will encourage more people to embrace repair, reuse and upcycling as part of a more sustainable future.

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Motor Vehicle students learn from the best ahead of Rallye Lecale

Further education students with the drive to progress from the lecture theatre to the national rallying stage got a chance to meet with two of Northern Ireland's top drivers recently and pour over ultra-modern modern and classic cars.

South Eastern Regional College Motorsport and Motor Vehicle students and apprentices met with Northern Ireland and British Rally Champions Jonny Greer and William Creighton at the College's Downpatrick campus.

The event was arranged ahead of next month's Carryduff Forklift Rallye Lecale in the town which is being organised by the Ballynahinch and District Motor Club, supported by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and the Downpatrick Regeneration Working Group.

Students had a chance to speak with the drivers to learn about the technical side of the sport and sit behind the wheel of Greer's GR Yaris.

Joining the students was outgoing Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Outgoing Chairperson, Councillor Philip Campbell, who said the enthusiasm for their respective courses and future plans to get involved in motorsport was infectious.

"The students fully embraced the opportunity to meet the drivers, learn more about the cars they drive and the opportunities for a career in motorsport. There was also a chance to quiz the drivers and those who work at the highest levels of motorsport whose expertise lies in the technical and en-



Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Outgoing Chairperson, Councillor Philip Campbell with South Eastern Regional College students Johnny Warnock and Caleigh Baine.

gineering side of rallying," he said. "There was also a focus on the importance of responsible driving and the risks of unsafe behaviour on public roads."

Cllr Campbell said that he is he is delighted the event presents an opportunity to showcase what Downpatrick and wider Lecale has to offer.

Two Castlewellan students who met the rally drivers are keen to pursue a motorsport career.

Johnny Warnock (17) and Caleigh Baine (21) have always had an interest in cars and aim to harness that enthusiasm to progress a career in motorsport with a focus on the engineering side.

William Creighton said he was delighted to meet the students and explained education is now an essential

ingredient in motorsport.

"It's no longer about learning on the job. Rallying has become a very high-tech sport, it's complicated and complex and I encourage young people who have underlying skills and who see a career in motorsport to have a good education as the courses they study will help bring out the best in them," he added.

Catherine Shipman, Head of Engagement and Development at the South Eastern Regional College, said she was delighted to work alongside the Ballynahinch and District Motor Club to organise the event.

"Rallye Lecale represents a fantastic opportunity to celebrate motorsport locally and it's been a great opportunity to showcase

the talent, ambition and potential of our students. It was wonderful to welcome our partners and rally champions to the Downpatrick campus to provide our learners with an engaging, real-world experience that connected directly to future pathways," she said.

Ballynahinch Motor Club Chairman, Mr Brian Crawford, said he hopes the recent event will help benefit the students when it comes to their future career choices and thanked College lecturers for the enthusiasm they showed.

"It was a fantastic day bringing students and leading figures from the world of motorsport together and showcase the many opportunities available within the industry," he added

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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.

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their own and encourage this bond to continue. They aim to create a comfortable atmosphere of homeliness happiness and caring.

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Email : tullywestmanor@googlemail.com
https://www.tullywestmanor.com/

Bowman Windows start their BIG Summer Sale on Monday 20th July 2026

We are now celebrating 56 years in business – so you can be confident you are dealing with a well-established local family business who care.

With up to 30% discount across many of our products, it's the perfect time to undertake some home improvements. Why not upgrade to new 'A' Rated PVC windows, install new fascia, soffit & guttering or design your stunning new Apeer composite door. You could also eliminate all that unsightly cement mortar along your gables with our attractive PVC dry verge edging system. Replace your old Velux roof window and get a bright new white PVC finish inside with optional black out blinds.

Our Story – Our Team It all began in 1970 with a small van, a few pieces of glass, some tools and a very big dream. 56 Years on Bowman Windows are still one of the leading window and door suppliers throughout Ireland.

David Waddell started his career with Bowman Windows in September 1991, managing our busy stores department and making sure that

all materials are ready on time for all our jobs. For the past 10 years David has also priced and organised all our fascia, soffit and guttering requirements. At 81 years young, Davids' wealth of knowledge, experience and drive is a great example to us all.

Our Offer

- Up to 30% Summer Sale starts Monday 20th July 2026
- Low upfront costs – only a 50% deposit secures any order
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Our Service When you place an order with us you can be sure you're in trusted hands. From our first survey until your job is completed our dedicated sales team will look after you. To help other customers we welcome



your 'before and after' photographs for our social media platforms.

Bowman Windows sales office and showroom is located at 50a Newry Street, Banbridge BT32 3HA

Opening Hours Monday – Thursday 8.30am – 4.30pm and Fridays 8.30 am – 1.30pm Saturday – Closed

Don't Forget! We can install your windows if you have a grant from the Affordable Warmth Scheme or the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Please contact us for more information.

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Don't Forget! Our BIG Summer Sale starts Monday 20th July 2026

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Beyond 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 (the Eclipse), a versatile Hybrid Lift suitable for both domestic and commercial properties, offering numerous sizes

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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 Stairlifts and other lifting solutions, please contact us at 02892 622331 or visit our website at www.olympiclifts.co.uk.

Public consultation on new Warm Healthy Homes Fund

Communities Minister Gordon Lyons has launched a public consultation on the proposed Warm Healthy Homes Fund.

Thousands of hard-pressed households will be eligible to apply for the fund, which will adopt a whole-house and fabric-first approach to improving the energy efficiency of qualifying homes.

The Warm Healthy Homes Fund is a key action within the Warm Healthy Homes Strategy 2026–36, which was launched by Minister Lyons in February to tackle fuel poverty among low-income households across the owner-occupied and private rented sectors.

Minister Lyons said: “I am

committed to ensuring that everyone in Northern Ireland has access to a warm, safe, secure and affordable home in which they can live and thrive.

“This consultation marks another important step forward in delivering on that vision and ensuring that the Warm Healthy Homes Strategy delivers for those most in need.

“The proposed Warm Healthy Homes Fund will provide a long-term, sustainable solution to fuel poverty, modernise energy

inefficient homes, build on the success of the Affordable Warmth Scheme and provide targeted, practical support for low-income households.”

The consultation invites views on key elements of the proposed scheme, including:

- Revised eligibility criteria
- Increased grant limits per household
- Additional measures such as low-carbon and renewable technologies
- Enhanced consumer

protections

• Stronger quality standards aligned with recognised frameworks

Responses to the consultation will help inform the final design of the Warm Healthy Homes Fund ahead of launch.

The consultation is open now and runs for 12 weeks until 19 August 2026.

More information and details of how to respond can be found at: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-warm-healthy-homes-fund>.





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QUEEN CAMILLA VISITS NORTH DOWN & ARDS WOMEN’S AID

Her Majesty the Queen visits North Down & Ards Women’s Aid to highlight support for women, children & young people affected by domestic abuse.

North Down & Ards Women’s Aid were honoured to welcome Her Majesty The Queen during a special visit to learn more about the essential services the charity provides to women, children, and young people affected by domestic abuse across the Ards and North Down area.

During her visit, Her Majesty met with staff, volunteers, women, children and partner agencies to gain insight into the organisation’s frontline work supporting women, children and young people experiencing domestic abuse. The visit offered an opportunity to highlight the breadth of services delivered by North Down & Ards Women’s Aid, including safe refuge accommodation, outreach support, advocacy services, and therapeutic programmes for women, children and young people.

Chief Executive Officer, Emalyn Turkington, welcomed Her Majesty and shared the organisation’s mission to



NDA Women’s Aid and One Stop Shop agencies with Her Majesty the Queen.

provide safety, support, and empowerment for those impacted by domestic abuse.

“We are deeply honoured to welcome Her Majesty The Queen to North Down & Ards Women’s Aid.

Her visit shines an important spotlight on the reality of domestic abuse in our communities and recognises the vital work our team does every day to support women, children, and young people on their journey to safety and

empowerment.”

Her Majesty was given a guided tour of the outreach facilities and had the opportunity to meet with frontline staff and partner agencies to hear first-hand about their and the critical importance of accessible, compassionate support services in local areas.

North Down & Ards Women’s Aid serves the Ards and North Down area, providing confidential, specialist support tailored to the needs of all women,

children and young people who use the service. The charity continues to advocate for increased awareness, funding, and collaborative action to address domestic abuse at both local and national levels.

“This visit is a powerful recognition of the resilience of those we support and the dedication of our staff and volunteers. We hope it encourages continued community support and strengthens understanding of the impact of domestic abuse.”

Cossum Swim School is celebrating 30 years sharing water safety and swimming skills!

Cossum Swim School is a family business celebrating 30 years teaching swimming skills across Northern Ireland.

The school delivers lessons in six venues throughout Northern Ireland and is a recognised STA Approved Training Centre. Cossum Swim School was founded by the late Des Cossum and today the business is owned and managed by his daughter Claire. Claire’s Sister, Maeve, is also an STA Approved Tutor in the business.

When enjoying the water this summer, understanding basic safety is just as important as knowing how to swim. Cossum Swim School proudly highlights the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) “Float to Live” campaign—a simple, proven technique that saves lives by fighting the instinct to panic or thrash in cold water.

If you or someone you are with gets into trouble



in water, remember these five steps:

Tilt your head back to keep your airway clear, Stay calm and control your breathing,

Use gentle sculling movements to stay afloat,

Don’t worry if your legs sink as everyone floats differently,

And once steady, signal for help or swim to safety.

The RNLI strongly

recommends practising floating in a safe, supervised environment.

Enrolment is now open for summer swim camps that your child will love over their school holiday. Cossum Swim School also offer lessons for babies, beginners and competitive athletes. You can also sign up for junior lifeguard training, advanced swimming, teacher courses or adult-only sessions. Visit their

website to register your family for the upcoming sunny season. Make this summer both fun and safe.

To buy tickets for Summer Swimming camps or to secure your place for our September term, visit www.cossumswimschools.co.uk

Summer Camp Dates are 6th - 10th July & 20th to 25th July - first come first served basis

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Summer Allergy Survival

Mid-summer in Northern Ireland brings beautiful green landscapes, but it also triggers intense misery for thousands of hayfever sufferers.

The absolute worst pollen producers during June and July are perennial grasses, which dominate our rural pastures, road verges, and lawns. Highly allergenic species like ryegrass, Timothy grass, and cocksfoot release billions of microscopic grains that easily become airborne in the breeze.

While spring tree pollen has mostly subsided, summer also sees a massive surge from weeds like nettles and dock leaves. These plants thrive in our damp maritime climate, creating a double threat when combined with

the peak grass season.

Beating the mid-summer pollen surge requires a proactive strategy focused on reducing your daily exposure. You should try to stay indoors during the early morning and late evening because pollen counts naturally peak during these times. When you must venture outside, wearing wraparound sunglasses helps create a physical barrier that keeps floating allergens out of your eyes. Smearing a small amount of petroleum jelly just inside your nostrils can also trap pollen before you breathe it in.

Your home should be a safe haven from seasonal allergens, so keep windows firmly closed during high-count days. After spending time outdoors, change your clothes immediately and wash your hair to remove trapped particles before getting into bed. If you have a lawn, delegate the mowing to someone else or keep it tightly clipped to prevent the grass from flowering. Finally, tracking daily forecasts from the Met Office allows you to plan your outdoor adventures when the atmospheric risk is lowest.

KEEPING YOUR COOL

The "Cool House" isn't just an aesthetic choice; it is a strategic approach to living that blends historical design with modern sustainability.

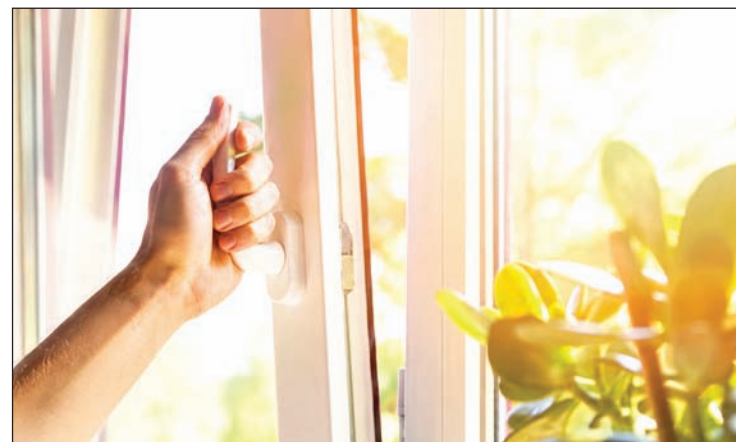
By focusing on how heat enters and moves through a building we can create a sanctuary that feels refreshing without relying solely on the hum of a cooling unit and the resulting spike in the electricity bill.

One of the most effective ways to lower indoor temperatures is to stop the sun before it ever touches the glass. Traditional awnings and external shutters are making a significant comeback in contemporary design because they address the root of the problem. While interior blinds provide privacy they often allow solar heat to pass through the window and become trapped behind the fabric. By installing external louvres or deep eaves we can block the harshest rays during the peak of the day and ensure that the interior remains naturally shaded. This approach prioritises the "envelope" of the home and transforms the facade into a

functional layer of climate control.

Nature offers its own ingenious cooling system through the process of transpiration. Incorporating an "indoor jungle" is more than just a decorative trend; it is a way to actively humidify and cool the air within a room. Large-leaved plant varieties such as Peace Lilies and Rubber Trees act as natural evaporative coolers. They release moisture into the atmosphere and helping to break up stagnant heat. When strategically placed near windows or in breezy corridors these plants create a microclimate that feels significantly fresher and more revitalising than a sterile air-conditioned environment.

The tactile experience of a home changes dramatically with the seasons and the swap from winter wools to summer linens is essential for thermal comfort. Heavy velvets and synthetic blends should be packed away in



favour of breathable natural fibres like hemp and cotton. These materials allow for far better airflow and do not trap body heat against furniture or bedding. Even the visual palette plays a role as lighter colours reflect light rather than absorbing it. By stripping back the layers and opting for a minimalist approach to textiles we create a sense of visual "cool" that translates

into physical comfort.

Managing the airflow of a house is an art form that requires understanding the daily rhythm of the sun. The most effective low-tech hack is often the most counter-intuitive: closing the windows and drawing the curtains during the hottest hours of the afternoon. By sealing the house when the outdoor air is warmer than the indoor

air we preserve the thermal mass of the building. Once the sun sets and the outside temperature drops opening windows on opposite sides of the house creates a cross-breeze that flushes out the day's warmth and replaces it with the crisp air of the evening. This rhythmic approach to ventilation ensures that the home remains a true refuge from the summer heat.

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Glasgow is a vibrant, stylish city with something for everyone. From world-class culture and nightlife to outstanding restaurants and bars, it's a destination that never disappoints. Shoppers are particularly well catered for—Glasgow is widely recognised as the UK's top shopping destination outside London, with its famous 'Style Mile' offering unbeatable retail therapy.



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The service operates twice daily from Belfast Grand Central Station (Stand 18) and drops passengers at Glasgow Buchanan Bus Station, close to the Style Mile and a wide range of excellent city-centre hotels.

Company Director Aodh Hannon says the service's

popularity comes down to convenience and simplicity.

"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."

Bookings can be made online at www.hannoncoach.com, or by phone through HANNON's friendly booking team on 028 9265 0700 (Monday-Friday).

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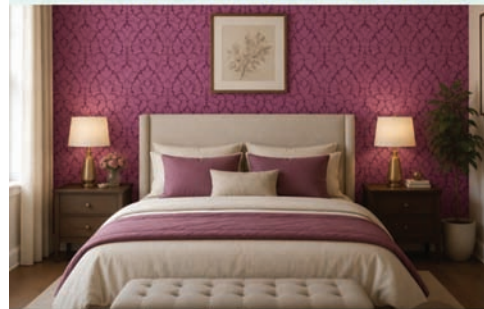
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Summer of Fleadhs in Area

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council is encouraging residents and visitors to experience a vibrant summer of traditional Irish music, culture and community spirit as three major Fleadhs take place across the district in the coming months.

The Council has provided funding support towards the events as part of its ongoing commitment to cultural development, tourism growth and supporting local communities.

The summer programme begins with the Armagh County Fleadh in Crossmaglen from 25-31 May, marking a particularly significant occasion as the Fleadh returns to the town for the first time in more than 50 years.

The event is expected to

bring a major celebration of music, dancing, singing and Irish culture to the heart of South Armagh, with a packed programme of competitions, sessions, concerts and community events planned throughout the week.

The celebrations continue with the Fleadh Cheoil an Dúin (Down Fleadh) in Downpatrick from 15-21 June, offering another opportunity to showcase the district's rich musical traditions in the historic home of

St Patrick. Musicians, performers and visitors from across the island are expected to gather in the town for a week-long programme celebrating traditional Irish arts and culture.

The Ulster Fleadh takes place in Warrenpoint from 19-26 July, bringing one of the province's largest traditional music festivals to the scenic coastal town. Last year's event attracted around 30,000 visitors, with organisers hoping to grow this year's visitor

numbers to 40,000.

The programme of summer events will create a vibrant atmosphere across towns and villages throughout the district, attracting competitors, performers and visitors from across Ireland and beyond, with the increased footfall providing a significant boost for local businesses, hospitality providers and the wider tourism sector, while also highlighting Newry, Mourne and Down as a welcoming

and culturally vibrant destination.

Ideally located between Belfast and Dublin, the district offers excellent accessibility through direct rail services on the Belfast-Dublin line, extensive bus connections and strong road links, making it an attractive base for visitors attending Fleadh events across the region.

Visitors staying in Newry, Mourne and Down can enjoy a wide range of accommodation options including

hotels, guesthouses, self-catering properties and coastal retreats, experiencing the renowned Mourne Gullion Strangford offering outdoor adventures, food experiences and a packed calendar of festivals and events throughout the summer season.

For further information visit <https://www.visitmournegullionstrangford.com/whats-on/summer-trad-and-fleadh-in-mourne-gullion-strangford>



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Milne adds two more sites to Holiday Park Portfolio

Milne Holiday Parks has recently expanded its portfolio with the exciting acquisition of two new holiday parks, now known collectively as Groomsport Bay.

This significant development further solidifies Milne Holiday Parks' position as the leading provider of high-quality holiday destinations along the stunning Northern Irish coastline.

Milne Holiday Parks now boasts a collection of seven beach-front parks, offering an enviable selection of locations for those dreaming of owning a home by the Sea. The addition of Groomsport Bay complements their existing parks: Cranfield Bay, Mourneview, Silvercove, Pebble Beach, Cranfield House and Shanlieve All 12x month holiday parks. Each of these parks offers unique characteristics and access to the beautiful beaches and landscapes that Northern Ireland is renowned for.

The appeal of owning a holiday home at a Milne Holiday Park is further enhanced by the attractive financial options available.

Prospective owners can step into their dream with deposits starting from as little as 10%. Flexible finance options are available at low rates, making holiday home ownership more accessible than ever. This allows families and individuals to invest in a lifestyle of relaxation and coastal enjoyment without undue financial strain.

Currently, Milne Holiday Parks offers an impressive selection of over 200 new and pre-owned holiday homes for sale. This extensive range ensures that there is something to suit various tastes and budgets. Adding to the appeal, Milne Holiday Parks is currently offering free site fees for 2025 & 2026 on new purchases, representing a significant £6000 saving for new owners. This limited-time offer presents a compelling reason to explore the opportunities available at their six beach-front locations.



Cranfield Bay Caravan Park

Owners at Milne Holiday Parks can enjoy their holiday homes ALL Year Round, allowing for extended breaks and the flexibility to visit whenever they desire. This extended season maximizes the value of ownership and allows for enjoyment across different seasons, from summer beach days to cosy autumn retreats and refreshing spring escapes with the added bonus of being able to rent out their holiday homes with great returns.

For those interested

in learning more about owning a holiday home at any of the Milne Holiday Parks, including the new Groomsport Bay, further information can be found on their website: www.milneholidayparks.com. Additionally, individuals can text "HOLIDAY HOME" to 07860 617 616 to request a call-back and speak directly with a representative who can provide personalised assistance and details on available properties and financing options.

History for the present day: County Museum, Dundalk

At its heart the key idea behind the County Museum, Dundalk is that of curiosity where the visitor is presented with an exciting, unfolding story that excites a curiosity in the past; something that fuels the imagination.

This is a museum and collection that presents the past in a way that is accessible – one that highlights Louth's rich industrial history, a story that is unique. These are the tales of Arctic explorer, Sir Francis Leopold McClintock (who mapped most of the Canadian coastline); engineer Peter Rice (who was involved in the construction of the Sydney Opera House, the Lloyd's Building and the glass pyramid at the Louvre) and Beatrice Hill-Lowe (the first Irishwoman to win a medal at the Olympics).

This is a Museum like no other, one that engages both the heart and the brain creating a curiosity about the past. It is a museum that invites conversations between family members about what life was like in the past and how it



has changed. It creates connection and conversation that is deeply interesting and rewarding.

This is a Museum with a collection of more than 80,000 items where there is

something for everyone, be it the three-wheeled, Ferrari-red Heinkel motor car, William of Orange's leather jacket, Oliver Cromwell's shaving mirror or a selection of St. Brigid crosses. With

the recent opening of a temporary exhibition on one of Dundalk's greatest bands, The Corrs, this story is brought up to the present day.

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The Kilmorey Arms Hotel, Kilkeel

Located in the beautiful Kingdom of Mourne at Kilkeel, the Kilmorey Arms Hotel offers an exceptional experience.

This family-run establishment seamlessly blends its rich historical charm with modern comforts. Originally built in 1843, the Grade B2-listed building has famously hosted distinguished historical figures like Sir Winston Churchill and President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Today, the hotel features 24 beautifully appointed rooms and three fully equipped suites.

These luxury spaces make the property an ideal choice for relaxing weekend getaways, corporate events and idyllic weddings. Guests can experience world-



famous Northern Irish hospitality the moment they arrive.

The highly renowned restaurant takes full

advantage of its location in the largest fishing port in Northern Ireland. Chefs proudly use fresh, locally sourced seafood and seasonal produce to create sumptuous menus. Visitors can enjoy these authentic culinary pleasures in both the main dining room and the atmospheric bar.

Beyond its excellent accommodation and dining, the hotel remains deeply committed to supporting the local community. The Kilmorey Arms Hotel is a proud sponsor of

the Castlewellan Show 2026. This partnership highlights their dedication to celebrating regional agriculture and country heritage.

The hotel serves as a perfect base for exploring the breathtaking County Down landscape. Visitors can easily access local treasures like the Silent Valley Reservoir, scenic mountain trails and pristine beaches. For bookings, guests can contact the team on 028 4176 2220 or visit www.kilmoreyarmshotel.co.uk.





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FARMING AND FUN AT THE FOREST PARK

The countdown is on for the highly anticipated Castlewellan Agricultural Show 2026. The vibrant event will return to the stunning surroundings of Castlewellan Forest Park on Saturday 18th July.

This massive celebration of farming and country life spans across fifty acres of beautiful parkland. Gates open from 9am until 5pm for a spectacular summer showcase. Organisers expect to welcome up to twenty thousand visitors to enjoy the lively countryside atmosphere.

Agriculture remains at the very heart of the day. The competitive arenas will host a variety of livestock classes with thousands of fine animals being judged. Visitors can view premium beef and dairy cattle alongside sheep, horses, ponies, pigs and poultry. Exciting national championships and qualifiers are also scheduled.

Beyond the livestock rings, entertainment options are incredibly diverse. Families can enjoy thrilling



showjumping events, competitive dog agility trials and a fun family pet show. Children will love the designated play areas, face painting and energetic bouncy castles. Foodies are well catered

for in the bustling food village. This popular area proudly promotes the finest local producers with everything from gourmet meats to sweet treats. Nearby, a vibrant craft marquee and an array of

trade stands will showcase unique local wares.

The dedicated show committee is eager to welcome visitors from towns and cities alike. They want to profile everything the countryside has to offer.

Donkeys will delight at Castlewellan Show 2026

The historic Castlewellan Agricultural Show returns on Saturday 18th July 2026 within the beautiful grounds of Castlewellan Forest Park.

The highly anticipated donkey classes will take centre stage in Ring 13. Judging begins at 10am under the expert guidance of Liz Langford. This popular section is proudly sponsored by Green Energy Wind from Castlewellan. It offers a brilliant platform for local and national exhibitors to showcase their best

animals. Exhibitors can enter an impressive variety of competitive categories throughout the day. In hand classes will test conformation and turnout across multiple age groups. The line-up features dedicated slots for stallions four years and over alongside separate classes for geldings and

mares. Young stock aged between one and three years old will also have their moment in front of the judge. The pet and aged donkey category evaluates suitability as a family companion. Conformation is ignored here to focus entirely on temperament and character.

Skill and grooming remain highly valued at this northern agricultural event. The best conditioned and turned out class judges presentation rather than physical conformation. Young handlers under sixteen years old will compete to demonstrate their handling abilities and ring craft. Furthermore a riding class introduces a dynamic element requiring suitable tack and strict rider weight

limits. Local breeders living within a twenty five mile radius can compete for the best local donkey title.

The action continues after lunch with thrilling driving classes scheduled from 2pm. Spectators can enjoy traditional long reining and exercise categories. The private driving and trade classes will display elegant vehicles and historical agricultural styles. Competitors will aim for top prizes and the prestigious Coco Perpetual Memorial Trophy. This event acts as an official qualifier for the upcoming Donkey Breed Society Championship Show. It ensures premium livestock competition and an unforgettable summer day out.

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CASTLEWELLAN SHOW!

When is the next show? Saturday 18th July 2026

What time does the Castlewellan Show open?

The show opens to the public at 9:00am, with competitions and activities running throughout the day. We recommend arriving early to make the most of everything on offer.

Is there parking available at the event?

Yes — on-site parking is available within Castlewellan Forest Park. Stewards will direct you on arrival. Accessible parking spaces are also provided for visitors with mobility needs.

How much is parking?

Parking is FREE within Castlewellan Forest Park on Show Day

Are there children's activities at the show?

Absolutely! From our funfair with bouncy castle, inflatable slide, bumping cars, inflatable maze, bungee trampoline, games trailer and face painting.

We have interactive displays to animal encounters. There is plenty to keep younger visitors entertained.

Do I need to buy my tickets in advance?

You can still purchase your tickets on the gate on show day. Tickets bought in advance online are 20% cheaper. We recommend advance purchase for speed on entry on show day

Can I bring my dog to the show?

Dogs are welcome, but must be kept on a lead



at all times. Please clean up after your pet and be mindful around livestock and busy areas.

What are the Opening Hours?

Castlewellan Agricultural Show: 9am to 5pm.

Who runs Castlewellan Show?

The show is run by an organising committee and team of volunteers.

How much are the tickets?

Tickets can be purchased online at a discounted rate. Start your day without a hitch by ensuring you have your entry tickets ready before you arrive to speed up the admission process. Please note, we cannot accept screenshots.

Entry fee can also be paid at the gate on show day. At gate: Adult: £15.00 online £12.00 At

gate: Age 13-16 £5.00

online £4.00 Children

under 12 are free of charge.

For more info see castlewellanshow.com

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SHEAR BRILLIANCE: Agri-Consultancy sponsors Castlewellan Show

Local agricultural consultancy E-MAC Agri Consultancy is dedicated to helping farmers and agri-food businesses thrive by providing expert guidance and support.

The team works hard to optimise operations and help clients achieve their specific business goals.

Community backing remains a core value for the local company. This summer E-MAC Agri Consultancy is proud to announce its standing as a main sponsor for the upcoming Castlewellan Show, 2026! E-MAC is owned by Ellen

Moorehead, married to Joe, who owns a car body repair Centre. Joe's AutoBody Centre is also supporting the event as a sponsor. Together, these local businesses are backing the highly anticipated, first ever speed shear competition at the show. This exciting event highlights rural heritage and will be a new attraction and exciting spectacle for showgoers to

enjoy! Founded by Ellen Moorehead, E-MAC was born from a passion to support local farming enterprises navigating today's shifting agricultural landscape. "Our local beef and sheep farmers face unprecedented policy changes and input costs," says Ellen. "Our unique focus is taking the administrative burden off

the kitchen table so farmers can focus on their stock." Expert advice is vital for modern farming businesses navigating the current agricultural landscape. E-MAC Agri Consultancy offers specialised knowledge to help farmers improve efficiency. Their participation in the local show emphasizes their commitment to the agricultural sector.

e mac

E-MAC is a leading agricultural consultancy dedicated to helping farmers and agri-food businesses thrive. With over 10 years of experience in the agri-food industry and a deep-rooted connection to Northern Ireland farming community, Ellen Moorehead provides expert guidance and support to optimise your operations and achieve your goals.

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The practice actively supports local sheep keepers and smallholders through dedicated educational events, earlier this season hosting a series of Smallholder Vaccine Days. This seasonal programme focuses on vaccinating, foot trimming and flystrike prevention for sheep. The practice stresses that preventative medicine remains the cheapest and most reliable way to secure

animal welfare. These sessions also teach faecal sample collection for convenient in-house testing. Managing the financial reality of veterinary care is also discussed.

Accidents are never pleasant but planning ahead saves lives. Equine emergencies require rapid decision-making and solid preparation. Dr L. Samuel-Napier explains how the first ten minutes can drastically influence the recovery of an injured horse. She advises owners to keep a well-stocked first aid kit ready and write down vital contact numbers. This preparation helps handlers control their own responses when adrenaline hits during a crisis.

Ensuring there are contacts saved in your phone and written copies inside your first aid kits prevents unnecessary delay



in treatment.

Whether it's emergency care or every day health, the professional team at Glenshire Veterinary Surgeons is always ready to assist you. Their practice is situated at 50 Mountview

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TOP TOWS: BEST HORSE TRAILERS

Transporting horses safely is a priority for equestrians. According to transport safety surveys published in *Animals*, around half of UK riders regularly use trailers to travel to events (Hall et al., 2020).

The Ifor Williams HB series remains an absolute staple on British roads. Renowned for its classic aluminium build and robust galvanised steel chassis, the HB511 model offers exceptional durability. Its signature front offload ramp simplifies exiting, which makes it a top choice for nervous loaders.

Another dominant competitor in the UK market is Cheval Liberté, particularly their Touring Country model. This brand focuses heavily on rider convenience and equine comfort. It features a unique Pullman 2 coil-spring suspension system that significantly reduces road vibrations. This design ensures a much smoother ride for your horses. The trailer also boasts an aerodynamic polyester nose cone and aluminium side walls, which keep the unit lightweight and highly fuel-efficient.

Nugent is fast gaining significant traction across the UK, especially with their innovative Spirit 25 model. This manufacturer heavily prioritises heavy-duty structural integrity by utilis-



ing a rugged stainless steel skeleton frame alongside a fully welded, galvanised chassis. A major selling point for Nugent is their patented Dual Drive suspension system. This technology uses parabolic leaf springs to eradicate road chatter and suspension bounce, which ensures a remarkably tranquil towing experience for highly sensitive horses. The interior is also incredibly user-friendly, featuring multi-directional forced air vents for precise ventilation control and cushioned

breast bars that can be safely released from outside the vehicle during an emergency.

Finally, the Equi-Trek Apollo stands out as a premier British-manufactured option. Unlike traditional front-facing models, Equi-Trek has popularised side-loading and rear-facing travel. Many equine behaviourists suggest this orientation reduces transport stress and helps horses maintain better balance during heavy braking. The Apollo offers a bright, spacious interior with a low ramp. This inviting

layout provides a stress-free loading environment for larger horse breeds.

Choosing the right trailer ultimately depends on your budget, towing vehicle capacity and your horse's specific travel preferences. Equine transport research emphasises that regular trailer servicing, optimal ventilation and sturdy internal partitions are vital to prevent injuries (Hall et al., 2020). Investing in any of these top three market leaders ensures safety and peace of mind on every single journey.

Backyard Beauties – Butterfly spotting in NI

The United Kingdom is home to fifty-nine native species of butterflies, but a select few have truly captured the public's heart.

Topping the charts as the nation's favourite is the spectacular peacock butterfly. This garden resident is easily recognized by the large, colourful eyespots on its deep red wings. The bright orange-tip follows closely behind, heralding the arrival of spring with its vibrant tangerine

wing edges. Claiming third place is the iconic red admiral, which sports bold red bands across striking jet-black wings. These three species are frequent visitors to suburban parks and urban green spaces alike.

The delicate holly blue secures the fourth spot, enchanting nature lovers with its shimmering, powder-blue wings.

It is closely followed by the sulphur-yellow brimstone, a beautiful insect believed by many to inspire the word butterfly itself. Next on the popularity list is the comma, famous for its uniquely scalloped wing edges that resemble autumn leaves. The widespread common blue also ranks highly, alongside the small tortoiseshell with

its beautiful orange and yellow patterns. These resilient insects thrive in variety of habitats, making them a common sight for walkers.

Rounding out the top ten are two magnificent travelling species that fascinate British watchers. The exotic swallowtail ranks ninth, though this giant is mostly restricted to the unique wetlands of the Norfolk Broads. Finally, the painted lady claims the tenth spot after completing an epic migration from North Africa to reach British shores.

Together, these ten popular butterflies create a colourful tapestry across the countryside during the warm summer months. Watching out for them offers a wonderful way to connect with local nature.



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DELAMONT CARAVAN SITE OPEN FOR SUMMER SEASON

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council is pleased to announce the reopening of the Delamont caravan site, welcoming visitors to enjoy stays at one of the district's most scenic outdoor destinations throughout the summer season.

The site will operate daily through to September and bookings can now be made online at visitmournegullionstrangford.com/DelamontCaravanPark.

Located beside the stunning Delamont Country Park on the shores of Strangford Lough, the caravan site provides a peaceful rural setting with serviced hard-standing pitches and easy access to the park's extensive facilities and attractions.

Set within more than 200 acres of parkland, Delamont Country

Park offers spectacular views across Strangford Lough to the Mourne Mountains and is a popular destination for walking, family days out and outdoor recreation.

Visitors can enjoy woodland and shoreline walks, picnic and barbecue areas, a children's adventure playground, miniature railway, coffee kiosk and the iconic Strangford Stone.

The caravan site is ideally located just one mile from the historic town of Killyleagh, renowned for its picturesque setting, local hospitality and the



historic Castle, while also being within easy reach of Downpatrick and wider attractions

across the Mourne Gullion Strangford destination. Visitors staying at

the Delamont caravan site this summer will also have the opportunity to enjoy

a packed programme of events taking place across the district, including the popular Downpatrick Racecourse meetings, Fleadh Cheoil an Dúin in Downpatrick and the Skiffie Fest in Delamont Country Park, alongside a range of family activities, festivals and outdoor experiences throughout the season.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Councillor Glyn

Hanna said, "Delamont caravan site is a fantastic addition to our tourism and visitor offering and we are delighted to welcome guests back for the 2026 season."

"Its unique location beside Strangford Lough and within Delamont Country Park provides visitors with the opportunity to relax, explore the outdoors and experience all that the Mourne Gullion Strangford destination

has to offer.

"With a fantastic range of events taking place across the district this summer, Delamont caravan site provides the perfect base for visitors to stay longer, explore more and enjoy the area's unique mix of outdoor adventure, heritage, culture and hospitality".

For further information and bookings visit visitmournegullionstrangford.com.

NI Water urges safe and responsible pesticide use this summer

As summer gets under way and pesticide use increases across farms, gardens and public spaces, NI Water is encouraging farmers, the amenity sector and domestic users to take extra care when storing, applying and disposing of these products to help protect drinking water sources and the wider environment.

Working alongside partners through initiatives such as the Water Catchment Partnership, NI Water is helping raise awareness of how everyday practices can affect water quality and what simple steps can reduce pollution at source. Pesticides used for weed control are often detected in rivers and lakes, where they can pose a risk to aquatic life and increase the cost and complexity of treating drinking water.

While pesticides play an important role in agriculture, landscaping and garden maintenance, summer conditions can increase the risk of products entering drains, streams, rivers and reservoirs - particularly if they are applied carelessly, spilled during handling, or used before rainfall. Careful storage, application and disposal are essential to minimise these risks and protect local waterways.

A number of simple but



effective measures can help safeguard Northern Ireland's waterways:

Follow guidance and best practice: All users, including farmers, groundskeepers and householders, should follow product labels and relevant guidance. Professional users are advised to consult qualified agronomists and adhere to recognised

codes of practice.

Store and handle safely: Pesticides should be stored securely to prevent leaks or spills. Professional users should ensure spraying equipment is regularly checked and calibrated to reduce the risk of drift or run-off.

Plan applications carefully: Avoid applying pesticides before heavy

rain or during windy conditions. This reduces the risk of chemicals being washed into drains, rivers and lakes or drifting beyond the target area.

Dispose of waste responsibly: Empty containers and unused products should be disposed of correctly. Professional users must use approved waste contractors, while householders should follow local council guidance.

NI Water catchment officer Peter Quinn said:

"Everyone who uses pesticides, whether on farms, in amenity spaces or in the garden, has an important role to play in protecting our waterways. Through partnerships like the Water Catchment Partnership, we are working to raise awareness and promote practical steps that reduce pollution. By working together, we can protect our drinking water, support biodiversity and maintain Northern Ireland's strong environmental reputation."

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Details of Dublin Competition Schedule announced

The Royal Dublin Society is pleased to announce that the Competition Schedule for the 2026 RDS Dublin Horse Show is now available, marking an important milestone as preparations continue for this year’s Show, which will take place from the 5th to 9th August 2026.

The release of the Schedule provides competitors, breeders, and equestrian enthusiasts with full details of the extensive programme of classes and competitions that underpin Ireland’s most prestigious equestrian event.

The 2026 Schedule reflects the RDS’ ongoing commitment to enhancing competition standards and supporting excellence across Irish equestrian sport, and highlights several significant developments introduced for this year’s Show.

These include the introduction of new qualifier structures for key performance classes, such as the

Working Hunter Horses, ensuring that the highest calibre horse-and-rider combinations progress to the Show in August.

In addition, the 2026 Show will feature the inaugural RDS Elite Show Jumping Foal Sale, an exciting new initiative developed in partnership with Goffs. This sale will provide Irish breeders with a world-class platform to showcase top-quality youngstock to an international audience, further strengthening Ireland’s position as a global leader in sport horse breeding.

The competition framework is also supported by major

enhancements to the entry and qualification process, with the upgraded SJI Live system introducing automated eligibility checks, improved transparency, and the innovative “Golden Ticket” system for qualified combinations.

Qualifiers Underway Nationwide

The road to the 2026 RDS Dublin Horse Show is now firmly in motion, with the national qualifier programme already delivering strong engagement across the country, and it will encompass the following over the next few weeks:

- 33 days of qualifier competitions
- 175 individual



qualifier classes

- 44 qualifier categories
- 26 shows and venues

nationwide

- Over 8,000 individual entries

This extensive qualifier network underlines the scale and reach of the

Dublin Horse Show, ensuring that the very best combinations from across Ireland earn their place at the Show in August.

Commenting on the release of the Schedule, Fiona Sheridan, Show Director, said:

“The publication of the Competition Schedule is always a significant moment in the lead-up to the Show. This year is no different and it reflects the scale, quality, and ambition of the Show; while also highlighting the important developments we have introduced across qualifiers, competition structures and breeder initiatives. With qualifiers already

underway across the country and strong entry numbers to date, we are looking forward to welcoming the very best of Irish and international equestrian sport to the RDS Showgrounds this August”.

The RDS encourages all prospective competitors to review the Competition Schedule in detail and to familiarise themselves with the relevant eligibility criteria, qualification pathways and entry processes.

The 2026 RDS Dublin Horse Show Competition Schedule is now available at: <https://www.dublinhorseshow.com/equestrian-information/competition-schedule/>

New strategy to address seabird species decline in NI

DAERA Minister Andrew Muir has launched a new conservation strategy to address the growing crises facing seabird populations, marking an important step in efforts to protect and restore these globally important species.

Across our coasts, many seabird species are experiencing sharp declines due to a combination of pressures, including climate change, food shortages, pollution, invasive species and disease. Without urgent and sustained action, further losses are inevitable.

The Northern Ireland Seabird Conservation Strategy 2026-2035 aims to improve the conservation status of 30 priority species of seabird that frequently occur in Northern Ireland waters, including breeding

species and wintering waterbirds. It sets out a clear framework for action from strengthening protection and monitoring, to restoring habitats and reducing pressures at sea and on land.

The DAERA Minister launched the Strategy during a visit to Rathlin Island, where he received an update on the LIFE Raft project, a conservation success that comes from the world-first eradication of the non-native ferrets which had been harming the seabird population there.

DAERA Minister Muir said: “Northern Ireland’s coastlines and waters are home to many internationally significant and much loved seabirds, such as the puffin, gannet and razorbill. They are

a wonderful part of our natural world, but they are under unprecedented pressure, impacted by food shortages, invasive species, climate change and devastation through Avian Influenza.

“Action is needed to halt the further decline of seabirds, improve resilience and make steps towards recovery. We can take hope from the work of the LIFE Raft project here on Rathlin which is a truly inspiring nature restoration project led by RSPB NI, with support from the Rathlin Development Community Association and other partners. This will have a transformative impact on the fortunes of seabirds and has already led to the return of Manx shearwaters after a 20-year absence.



DAERA Minister Andrew Muir launches the Northern Ireland Seabird Conservation Strategy with partners at RSPB West Light Seabird Centre on Rathlin Island. (L-R) David Quinney Mee, Rathlin Development Community Association, Erin McKeown, LIFE Raft Programme Manager, Joanne Sherwood, Director of RSPB NI, Andrew Upton, Head of British Trust for Ornithology Northern Ireland, Dr Annika Clements, Queen’s University Belfast, Will Hawkins, National Trust and Dr Mathieu Lundy, Ulster Wildlife.

“This Strategy sets out the actions that will be undertaken to protect and restore these important species over the next decade. We developed it with NGOs and the marine and fisheries industry, and now we must continue working together to deliver it.”

The Strategy has been developed through close collaboration across the environmental, marine and

fisheries sectors, ensuring that it is grounded in the best available evidence and shaped by those working directly in seabird conservation. By bringing together expertise across sectors, the Strategy reflects a shared understanding of both the challenges and the solutions required.

Joanne Sherwood, RSPB NI Director said: “Northern Ireland’s first Seabird Conservation Strategy is a

welcome milestone, and the first step in delivering at the scale which is now urgently needed. Seabird populations have declined by over 60% in the last two decades, so this strategy must be properly resourced to turn ambition into action.

Addressing the seabird crisis will require coordinated action across government, industry, conservation organisations and local communities.

This collective effort will ensure that the Strategy translates into meaningful, on-the-ground outcomes for seabirds.

The Northern Ireland Seabird Conservation Strategy 2026-2035 is available on the DAERA website at: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-seabird-conservation-strategy-2026-2035>.

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AIR AMBULANCE NI GETS ITS FIRST-OWNED HELICOPTER

A long held ambition for Air Ambulance Northern Ireland has been to own its primary helicopter, and today, the charity is proud to announce the purchase of a new AW109SP.

Representing a major milestone in Air Ambulance NI's journey since its inception back in 2017, the new aircraft has been procured through Sloane Helicopters and manufactured by Leonardo Helicopters, and it's scheduled to become Air Ambulance NI's primary helicopter from later summer 2026.

Following years of financial planning and supporters' generosity, including contributions from Gifts in Wills, the new aircraft is currently in the final stages of testing and medical fit-out. The new aircraft, which will carry the registration G-HMNI, is due to take flight as the Air Ambulance NI's primary helicopter by late Summer 2026.

For nearly nine years, Air Ambulance Northern Ireland, working in

partnership with the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, has been a vital lifeline for communities, responding to over 5,500 emergency call-outs and saving countless lives. On average, the service responds to 60 calls per month.

Commenting on this next phase in Air Ambulance NI's journey, Dr David McManus, Chair of Air Ambulance Northern Ireland, adds: "Securing a new helicopter represents a transformational moment for Air Ambulance NI and a vital commitment to saving lives across Northern Ireland. This aircraft will offer us a significant gain in operational capability in terms of automation, operations in adverse weather, hours of darkness, speed and payload.



Pictured at the announcement of Air Ambulance NI's purchase of its first helicopter and launching the charity's Lift off Together Campaign are: Dr Nigel Ruddell (Medical Director, Northern Ireland Ambulance Service), the first AANI patient, Conor McMullan and Dr David McManus (Chair AANI) with the new helicopter that's due to take flight as the Air Ambulance NI's primary helicopter by late Summer 2026.

"Through the recent advances in aviation technology, our new primary aircraft will improve patient outcomes, ultimately save more lives and support the future development of the service."

Since its establishment, Air Ambulance NI has

operated two leased aircraft – a primary and a backup. With this new investment, the main helicopter, G HEMZ, will move into a backup role, and the current reserve aircraft, G RSCU, will be stood down from service.

The new helicopter will operate on the same shift patterns as Air Ambulance NI's current service, which is 7am to 7pm daily.

"Air Ambulance NI plays a vital role in enabling NIAS to reach patients in hard to access locations and in the most time critical emergencies. The purchase of this new helicopter is a significant and welcome development, strengthening a service that remains crucial to the people of Northern Ireland," adds Maxine Paterson, Interim Chief Executive Northern Ireland Ambulance Service.

Today, Air Ambulance NI is also launching its new fundraising appeal, Lift Off Together, giving the public the opportunity to have their name, or that of someone special, featured on the underside of the new aircraft for a donation of £200.

With limited space available, this is a rare chance to be part of the charity's next chapter and help Air Ambulance NI's new aircraft to 'lift off together'.

To register your interest in the Lift Off Together campaign, please visit <https://airambulancenilift-off-together.org/>

You can also follow the journey of Air Ambulance NI's new helicopter as it prepares to take flight this summer across all Air Ambulance NI social media channels.

Power and Pull:Top Towing 4x4s for Horse Trailers

Towing live animals requires a vehicle with serious pulling power, excellent stability and a maximum braked towing capacity of 3,500kg.

Professional vehicle reviews by What Car? consistently rank the Land Rover Defender 110 at the very top of this demanding category. The Defender combines an incredibly robust chassis with an advanced four-wheel drive system that effortlessly navigates muddy event fields. Its clever tow assist technology automatically handles tricky reversing manoeuvres, which makes it an absolute favourite among equestrians in the UK.

For those prioritising legendary mechanical reliability, the Toyota Land Cruiser remains a premier choice. As noted in Auto Express long-term tests, its bulletproof four-litre diesel engine provides massive low-down torque for smooth acceleration. This continuous power delivery is vital to keep horses calm and balanced in transit. The Land Cruiser also features a heavy-duty ladder frame construction, which ensures the vehicle resists body twist under



heavy loads.

Another incredibly popular sight at British equestrian events is the Land Rover Discovery. Revered by Parkers testers as an unmatched premium workhorse, the Discovery matches the Defender's 3,500kg maximum limit but pairs it with a substantial kerb weight that naturally anchors heavy trailers against crosswinds. Its standout feature is the intelligent Terrain Response system, which optimizes

traction across wet grass and deep mud, ensuring you never get bogged down in the lorry park. Furthermore, the split-tailgate design doubles as a highly practical bench for changing into riding boots or watching competitions from the sidelines.

Finally, the Volkswagen Touareg stands out as a highly sophisticated alternative. According to Carbuyer testing, its optional air suspension automatically levels the

vehicle when a heavy horse trailer is coupled to the towbar. This feature prevents the

rear of the vehicle from sagging and maintains optimal tyre contact with the road.

The Touareg also boasts a plush, quiet cabin that reduces driver fatigue during long trips to weekend competitions.

Selecting the right tow car involves

checking both your vehicle payload and the specific weight limits stated on your driving licence. Caravan and Motorhome Club safety data confirms that matching your vehicle weight correctly prevents dangerous trailer sway on fast motorways.

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Cancer Charities Coalition Showcased Impact at Stormont

The Northern Ireland Cancer Charities Coalition (NICCC) hosted a showcase event at Stormont, attended by Health Minister Mike Nesbitt and a number of MLAs who came to show their support for the sector.

The event highlighted the vital role cancer charities play across Northern Ireland. Charities brought together their individual expertise under a shared mission: to ensure everyone affected by cancer receives the care, support and dignity they deserve.

The event also recognised the contribution of the recently established Cancer Charities Fund from the Department of Health in sustaining and strengthening essential services.

Richard Spratt, Chair of the NICCC, said: "Cancer charities have been a cornerstone of support for patients and families. Through the Coalition, we have shown the strength of working together to make a greater impact and ensure no one faces cancer alone. The Cancer Charities Fund has been an important step in recognising



From the left to right: Sarah Christie, MacMillan, Liz Morisson, Cancer Research UK, Stewart Dickson MLA, Mike Nesbitt, Minister for Health, Richard Spratt, Cancer Focus Northern Ireland, Dawn Crosby, Pancreatic Cancer UK

the value of our work, however sustainable investment in cancer charities is essential."

Minister Nesbitt said: "I welcome the opportunity to meet the charities and to hear more about the transformative work they do, offering personalised support at the heart of their communities. The Cancer Charities Grant Scheme, funded by my Department and Macmillan Cancer Support, helps charities right across Northern Ireland as they deliver outstanding care to those affected by cancer.

"I am committed to the Neighbourhood model of care which brings care closer to people's home. By empowering charities to deliver earlier, more localised support, we can help people stay well for longer and reduce avoidable pressure on hospital services."



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GUIDE TO PREVENTING AND CURING TRAVEL SICKNESS

Few things ruin the excitement of a trip faster than the sudden, cold sweat of travel sickness.

Whether you are navigating winding mountain roads, catching a flight, or stepping onto a cruise ship, motion sickness can quickly turn a dream vacation into a miserable endurance test.

Fortunately, you do not have to be at the mercy of your inner ear. By understanding why travel sickness happens and adopting a few evidence-based strategies, you can prevent it from starting or kill it in its tracks if it does strike.

Why Do We Get Travel Sickness?

Travel sickness is essentially a “hardware conflict” in your brain. It happens when there is a mismatch between what your eyes see and what your inner ear (the vestibular system) feels.

Your vestibular system—specifically the semicircular canals in your inner ear—detects movement, tilt, and acceleration. If you are reading a book in the back

seat of a moving car, your eyes tell your brain that you are sitting perfectly still. However, your inner ear feels every bump, turn, and acceleration.

This sensory mismatch confuses the brain, triggering a stress response that leads to classic symptoms: dizziness, cold sweating, headaches, and ultimately, nausea and vomiting.

How to Avoid Travel Sickness (Prevention)

When it comes to motion sickness, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Once the nausea pathway fully activates, it is much harder to reverse. Try these tactical adjustments before you depart:

1. Choose Your Seat Wisely

The goal is to sit in the area of the vehicle that experiences the least amount of movement and allows you to look out at the horizon.

• In a Car: Drive if you can (drivers rarely get



carsick because their brains anticipate every turn). If you are a passenger, sit in the front passenger seat.

• On a Boat: Request a cabin in the middle of the ship, close to the waterline. This is the ship’s natural pivot point and experiences the least rocking.

• On a Plane: Secure a

seat over the front edge of the wing, which is the most stable zone during turbulence.

• On a Train: Always sit facing forward—never backward.

2. Fixate on the Horizon

Keep your eyes on a stable point in the distance. This aligns your visual

signals with the physical movement your inner ear is feeling, instantly reducing that internal “hardware conflict.” Avoid looking at phones, tablets, or books.

3. Manage Your Diet Before Departure

What you put in your stomach matters. Avoid heavy, greasy, spicy,

or highly acidic foods for a few hours before you travel. At the same time, do not travel on an empty stomach; a light, bland snack like crackers or toast can help stabilize stomach acids.

How to Cure Travel Sickness (Quick Relief)

If you are already in

transit and begin to feel that familiar wave of unease, do not panic. Use these fast-acting interventions to settle your system:

1.Change your view and get fresh air:Immediate.

Stop looking down immediately. Fix your eyes on the horizon or a distant, unmoving object. If you are in a car, roll down the window to get cool, moving air blowing directly onto your face.

2.Stabilize your head:Within 1 minute.

Lean your head back firmly against the headrest or a travel pillow. Keeping your head as still as possible minimizes the fluid movement inside your inner ear’s semicircular canals.

3.Apply acupressure: Within 2 minutes.

Locate the P6 (Neiguan) point, which is about three finger-widths down from your wrist crease on the inner forearm, right between the two large tendons. Press firmly on this point with your thumb for a few

minutes, or use elastic acupressure wristbands.

4.Deploy ginger or peppermint:Within 5 minutes.

Chew on a piece of crystallized ginger, swallow a ginger capsule, or sip a ginger ale. Clinical studies show ginger is remarkably effective at reducing nausea. Alternatively, sucking on a strong peppermint sweet or inhaling peppermint essential oil can relax the gastric muscles.

The Medicinal Toolkit

If natural remedies are not cutting it, pharmaceutical options are highly effective. Keep in mind that most of these are best taken 30 to 60 minutes before you start traveling.

A Note on Drowsiness: Many over-the-counter travel sickness medications cause drowsiness. While this can be a bonus if you want to sleep through a long flight, avoid them if you need to drive or stay alert upon arrival.

The Great Summer Holiday Escape

The annual summer getaway is one of the most anticipated events of the year, yet it routinely places the highest amount of stress on our vehicles and our patience.

As motorists take to the tarmac simultaneously, transforming smooth motorways into sluggish bottlenecks, the key to a successful road trip shifts from speed to strategy. Preparing your vehicle, mastering the physics of towing, and maintaining harmony in the cabin are the three essential pillars of stress-free summer motoring.

Long-journey preparation should always begin well before the suitcases are packed, focusing on elements most vulnerable to seasonal heat. High temperatures dramatically accelerate tyre degradation and exacerbate existing structural weaknesses, making a rigorous pressure and tread depth check mandatory for safety. Under the bonnet, engine coolant levels must be topped up to prevent the engine from overheating while idling in seasonal gridlock, and windscreen wash should be filled to clear the heavy coating of dust and insects that intensifies dangerous sun glare. Drivers must also protect their own performance by keeping a plentiful supply of water accessible in the cabin, scheduling mandatory rest breaks every two hours, and wearing supportive, road-appropriate footwear

rather than loose summer sandals or flip-flops.

For those expanding their holiday by towing a caravan or a tent trailer, preparation demands an entirely different layer of mechanical awareness. Towing alters a vehicle’s handling characteristics completely, meaning drivers must strictly verify their car’s maximum towing capacity and legal weight limits before departure. When packing the trailer, heavy items must be positioned low down and directly over the axle to establish a stable centre of gravity and mitigate “snaking”—the dangerous side-to-side swaying triggered by crosswinds or passing heavy goods vehicles. Furthermore, extension towing mirrors are a strict legal requirement to eliminate the substantial blind spots created by a wider load, and drivers must adhere to reduced national towing speed limits, which drop to 60 mph on dual carriageways and motorways.

Even with a mechanically flawless vehicle, a summer road trip can quickly unravel if the passengers in the back seat succumb to the frustration of holiday traffic. Keeping children occupied requires a tactical balance of



digital entertainment, classic interaction, and structured downtime to stave off restlessness. While fully charged tablets and offline playlists provide a welcome shield during extended delays, breaking up the monotony with traditional observation games like “I Spy” or

cooperative word puzzles keeps the family engaged together. Crucially, parents should manage the cabin climate carefully to prevent heat-induced irritability, pack an abundant supply of mess-free snacks, and intentionally frame the inevitable traffic delays as a patient, shared part of the holiday adventure.

Volkswagen’s Electric Hero Finally Grows Up

When Volkswagen launched the original ID.3, it carried the immense weight of being hailed as the electric successor to the legendary Golf.

While it sold well, early adopters fiercely criticized its cheap cabin plastics and a frustratingly glitchy, button-free infotainment system. Volkswagen has clearly taken that feedback to heart. The heavily reworked model arrives with an entirely fresh ethos and a new name: the Volkswagen ID.3 Neo.

On the outside, the ID.3 Neo sheds its slightly awkward, futuristic appearance in favour of a cleaner, more traditional aesthetic. VW has removed the black plastic contrast panels from the bonnet, painting the entire body in a single, cohesive colour. Combined with a continuous front LED light bar, the Neo looks lower, wider, and far more premium. It feels less like a radical electric science experiment and more like a high-quality, modern Volkswagen hatchback.

Step inside, and it is instantly clear where the bulk of the development budget was spent. The hard, scratchy dashboard plastics that plagued the original model have been replaced by dense, soft-touch materials with elegant stitching. More importantly, common-sense ergonomics have returned to the cockpit. The frustrating, touch-sensitive haptic pads on the steering wheel are gone, replaced by proper, tactile physical buttons. A dedicated row of physical switches now controls the climate settings directly below a crisp, upgraded 12.9-inch central touchscreen running vastly faster, bug-free software.

Under the skin, the ID.3 Neo uses an updated iteration of VW’s rear-wheel-drive platform, offered in three battery sizes. The entry-level

variant utilizes a 50 kWh pack, while a mid-range 58 kWh option balances weight and cost. The flagship Style trim features a massive 79 kWh battery that pushes driving range to an impressive 391 miles. On the road, the rear-wheel-drive setup ensures balanced handling and a tight turning circle, making it incredibly agile in town while maintaining a composed motorway ride.

The Volkswagen ID.3 Neo is the car the original should have been from day one. By admitting its past interface and material flaws, Volkswagen has delivered a highly refined, practical family hatchback. With a much-improved real-world range and a cabin that prioritizes usability over pure minimalism, the Neo stands out as a genuinely compelling, user-friendly choice for the modern driver.

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GET A FAN-TASTIC NIGHTS SLEEP

Installing a electric ceiling light fan could be tempting during warm summer nights, but is the investment worth it?

Upgrading your bedroom with a combined electric ceiling light fan is a fantastic way to improve comfort and air circulation, but installing one involves several critical structural and electrical steps. Unlike a basic light bulb change, a ceiling fan is a heavy, rotating motorized fixture that requires a professional touch.

When you hire a local electrician, their primary task is ensuring structural stability. Because standard plastic ceiling boxes cannot handle the continuous vibration and weight of a 5kg to 15kg motorized fan, the electrician will first check your ceiling joists. If a joist isn't perfectly aligned with your desired location, they will need to install a timber support block or an adjustable metal brace, usually by gaining access from the loft or room above. Once the ceiling is reinforced, they will safely isolate the power circuit, fully assemble the fan unit, and mount the motor housing. Finally, they will wire the fixture—

often installing a digital receiver if the fan uses a wireless remote—and balance the blades using tiny clip-on weights to guarantee silent, wobble-free operation.

In terms of cost, your total investment will depend on the complexity of the wiring and your location. If the electrician is simply swapping out an existing, centred light fitting where the joists are already strong enough, the job is straightforward. This typically takes one to two hours and will cost between £50 and £150 in labour. However, if the electrician needs to head into the loft to install timber reinforcements, or if you want complex new wiring chased down the walls for separate light and speed switches, the labour can quickly rise to between £120 and £350+.

Remember that these estimates cover professional labour and basic electrical materials only; you will need to purchase the ceiling fan fixture separately, which



generally ranges from £60 for entry-level models to over £250 for stylish options with integrated smart remotes. To get the most accurate quote from a local trader, always confirm whether they have clear access to the space directly above your bedroom ceiling, as restricted access can add time and plasterboard repair costs to the final bill.

Creating a Resort-Style Patio

You don't need a boarding pass to escape the daily grind. With the right design choices, you can easily transform an ordinary backyard patio into a high-end, resort-style sanctuary.

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The secret lies in treating your outdoor area with the same editorial care as your living room, focusing on three foundational elements: weather-resistant sectionals, outdoor rugs, and strategic lighting.

First, anchor the space with a deep-seated sectional. To capture that luxury hotel aesthetic, skip the flimsy folding chairs and opt for a generous L-shaped configuration. Look for frames made from durable powder-coated aluminum or synthetic teak, paired with high-performance



fabrics like Sunbrella. These materials resist fading and repel water, ensuring your oasis handles summer storms effortlessly.

Next, define your “outdoor room” with a premium outdoor rug. A large, flat-weave polypropylene rug acts as a visual anchor, instantly warming up cold concrete or stone pavers.

Opt for a subtle geometric pattern or a sandy neutral tone to mimic a high-end cabana vibe underfoot.

Finally, layering your lighting is what takes the patio from day to night. Avoid harsh overhead floods. Instead, string warm LED Edison bulbs overhead for a festive, starry-night ambiance. Complement them with battery-operated, weather-proof floor lanterns tucked into corners, and solar-powered uplighting hidden in nearby planters.

By grounding the space with a plush sectional, softening it with a textile rug, and washing it in a warm, amber glow, you create a private destination you will never want to check out of.

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Why now could be best time to invest in Solar Panels for your home

The decision to transition a residential property to solar energy is increasingly attractive as the technology matures and installation costs fall.

Investing in a home solar photovoltaic system offers substantial financial and environmental rewards, making it one of the most effective ways for homeowners to take control of their energy consumption and reduce their overall carbon footprint.

The primary benefit of home solar panels is the significant reduction in monthly electricity bills. By generating power directly on-site, a household decreases its reliance on the central grid, effectively protecting the homeowner against fluctuating utility prices. Furthermore, when modern systems are paired with battery storage, properties can achieve high rates of energy self-sufficiency by storing daytime power for evening use. Financially, excess energy can often be sold back to the national grid through export guarantee schemes, creating a steady passive income that shortens the initial investment payback period.

However, the transition requires a clear understanding of the accompanying drawbacks. The most prominent hurdle is the upfront financial investment,



which covers high-efficiency monocrystalline panels, smart inverters, and potential battery systems. While costs have decreased substantially over recent years, the initial payout remains high. Additionally, a home's structural geometry dictates its solar viability; properties with heavy surrounding shade or north-facing roofs generate minimal power. Solar generation is also inherently variable, fluctuating based on

seasons and daily weather conditions, meaning a total disconnection from the traditional power grid is rarely practical for the average home.

For homeowners whose properties are structurally unsuited for traditional rooftop panels, several viable alternative renewable technologies exist. Building-integrated photovoltaics, such as solar roof tiles, offer a seamless visual alternative to standard glass modules, though they typically

operate at a slightly lower efficiency. If the goal is strictly to reduce heating bills rather than generate electricity, a domestic heat pump or a solar thermal system can be deployed to extract environmental warmth for hot water and home heating. Ultimately, while individual roof layouts and budgets vary, investing in solar panels represents a reliable pathway toward long-term financial savings and sustainable independent living.

HOUSEHOLDS COULD SAVE MONEY WITH NEW SMART METERS

Homes and businesses across Northern Ireland have the potential to save money on their electricity bills, with the introduction of new smart meters here, said Economy Minister Dr Caoimhe Archibald.

Publishing a new 'Smart Electricity Meters Design Plan' today, the Minister confirmed that smart meters will bring an end to estimated bills, giving people clear, real-time information about how much electricity they use and when they use it.

Minister Archibald said: "The cost of energy here, driven by volatile fossil fuel prices, is not fair and not sustainable for homes and businesses, as we have seen in the months following the war on Iran.

"Today's announcement marks an important step forward for the north, supporting consumers to better manage their electricity usage and helping to reduce electricity bills, as well as creating greater resilience in our local grid."

Currently, in the Republic of Ireland, two million smart meters have been installed, while in Britain 22 million smart meters are now in use. Evidence shows that the installation of these meters has driven innovation and smarter tariffs from electricity suppliers, significantly reducing electricity bills for many consumers.

The Minister added: "The Design Plan published today



sets out how smart meters will be introduced here in a carefully planned, consumer focused way. It is anticipated that the first smart meters will be installed in homes around the beginning of 2028, with a roll out lasting three years.

"I'd like to reassure the public that they do not have to do anything now. NIE Networks and your electricity supplier will be in touch at the right time, and you will be supported through the process at every step.

"There will be no upfront cost for installation, and no

loss of choice. Fixed tariffs and prepayment options will continue to be available, and smart tariffs will be optional. This is about giving people better information and ensuring that those who are most vulnerable can choose to reduce their electricity bills."

Businesses, including small and medium sized firms, will also be covered by the roll-out. Smart meters provide the opportunity for them to reduce electricity costs, provide more accurate bills, raise fewer disputes, help improve cash flow,

while also supporting a more reliable electricity network.

Speaking in support of the announcement, Pat Austin, Director, National Energy Action Northern Ireland, said: "Smart meters can deliver real benefits for households by helping people better understand their energy use and avoid estimated bills. A fair and inclusive rollout will be important to ensure vulnerable households can benefit from greater control over their energy costs and enjoy warmer, healthier homes."

CREATE A WATER FEATURE IN A SMALL GARDEN

A water feature can completely transform a compact backyard, turning it into a peaceful sanctuary.

Even in a small garden, the gentle sound of trickling water masks ambient city noise, while the reflective surface tricks the eye into thinking the space is larger than it actually is.

When space is at a premium, you have to be clever about design. Large, dug-out ponds are rarely practical, but there are plenty of space-saving alternatives. A simple, self-contained plug-and-play water fountain is an excellent choice. These units come with a built-in reservoir and pump, meaning they take up very little floor space and can be placed directly on a patio or tucked into a flower bed.

If you prefer a contemporary aesthetic, water walls or blade fountains are brilliant. They utilize vertical space, allowing water to cascade down a wall or fence panel into a hidden gravel trough below. For a more traditional, wildlife-



friendly approach, you can create a container pond (often called a "patio pond") using an old stone trough, a ceramic pot, or half a wooden wine barrel.

To create a successful small-scale water feature, keep these core practicalities in mind:

- **Power Access:** Most fountains require an outdoor electrical

outlet for the pump. If running a cable isn't feasible, opt for a solar-powered pump.

Just ensure the solar panel is placed in a spot that gets reliable, direct sunlight.

- **Sun and Shade:** Place your water feature where it receives partial shade. Too much direct sunlight accelerates algae growth—which turns the water green—while too much deep shade will cause fallen leaves to rot and foul the water.

- **Greenery and Balance:** Frame your water feature with plants to blend it naturally into

the garden. Use dwarf water lilies or floating fairy moss inside a container pond, and surround the exterior with lush ferns, hostas, or ornamental grasses to soften the edges.

Adding water to a small garden doesn't require a massive budget or a major construction project. By choosing a style that complements your layout and

keeping up with basic maintenance—like topping up the water during hot spells—you

can easily bring the soothing, therapeutic benefits of water to your outdoor doorstep.

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