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Physical Activity Participation is on the up!

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council is to pilot a new initiative aimed at encouraging people to get more involved in sport and physical activity across the district.

The project will focus on increasing participation amongst women and girls, children and young people, those with disabilities, people who live in rural communities and those facing the greatest barriers to being active.

A successful funding bid for £49,000 to help deliver the scheme, which will run from this October until March 2027, was made to Sport Northern Ireland's Get Active 2026/27 financial support programme, funded by the Department for Communities and supported by the London Marathon Foundation.

Working with partners including Healthy Kidz, National Governing Bodies, schools, Health and Social Care Trusts and community organisations, the pilot

will provide targeted participation opportunities and strengthen pathways into existing Council programmes, local sports clubs and community-based activity.

The key aim is to help more people move from introductory activity into regular, sustained participation, while also testing new partnership approaches and gathering evidence to inform future programme development. Council officers will develop Be Active Pathways following a review of existing physical activity provision.

Cllr Hanna said a partnership approach paves the way to creating healthier, more active and more connected communities across Newry, Mourne and Down.

A new access link between Dunleath Park and St Patrick's Avenue in Downpatrick town centre opened recently.

NEW ACCESS LINK IN DOWNPATRICK TOWN CENTRE

Communities Minister Gordon Lyons has welcomed the completion of a new access link between Dunleath Park and St Patrick's Avenue in Downpatrick town centre.

The project, co-funded by his Department and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, creates an important connection between the town centre and Dunleath Park, making it easier for residents and visitors to enjoy the area's popular walking path and

recreational amenities, including playing fields, a pump track and a skate bowl.

Located at St Patrick's Avenue, the new 1.2 metre-high entrance features steps alongside a concrete ramp with a pedestrian guardrail. The design improves

accessibility to the park and strengthens physical links between the sports facilities and the town centre.

Welcoming the completion of the project, Minister Lyons said, "I am pleased that my Department has supported this improvement.

Dunleath Park is a fantastic asset for the whole local community, and the addition of the new pump track and skate bowl has made it a popular destination for urban sports.

Continued on page 4



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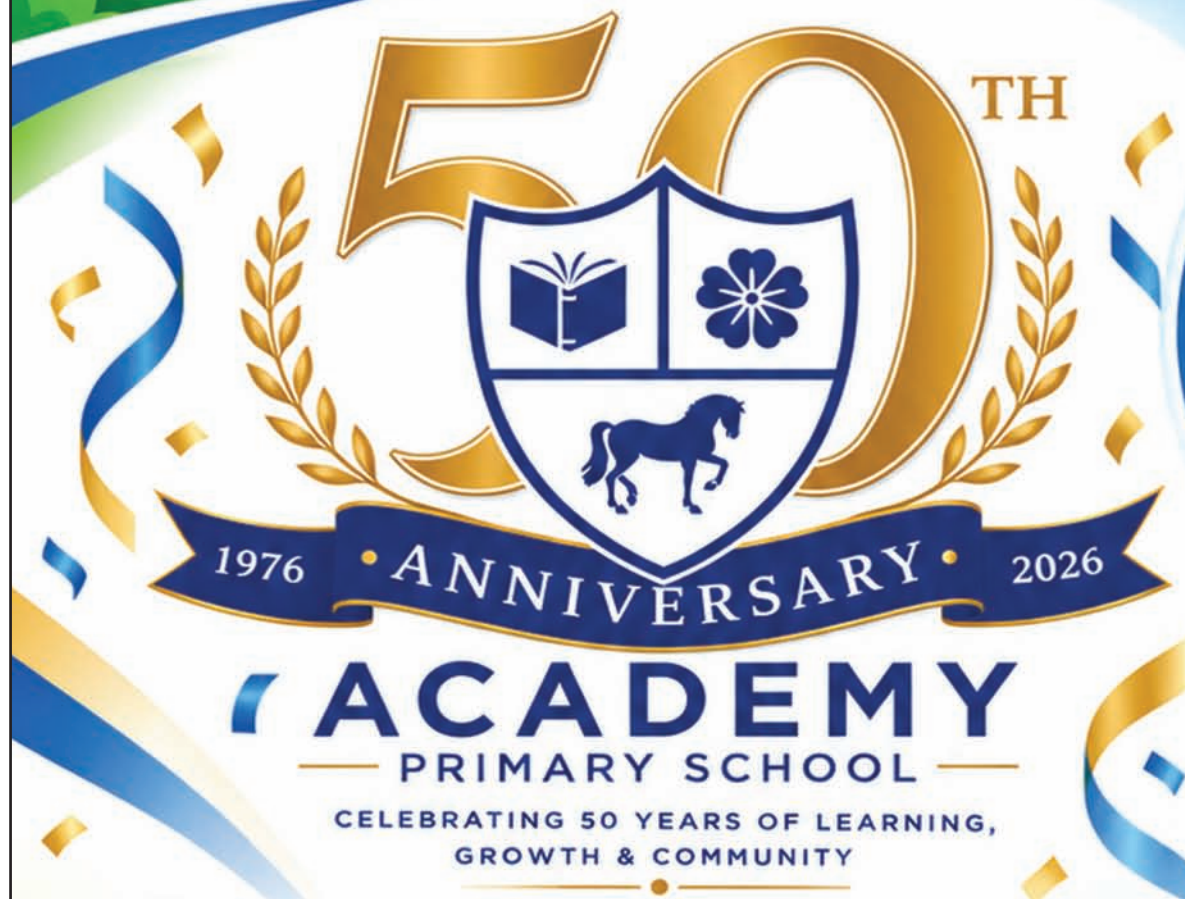
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Eats & Beats Served Up a Memorable Weekend

Thousands of food and music lovers descended on Newcastle for the popular Eats & Beats Festival as it returned to Donard Park in early September.

Set against the spectacular backdrop of the Mourne Mountains, the two-day festival brought together an exciting programme of live music, local food, cookery demonstrations and family entertainment, creating a vibrant festival atmosphere in the heart of Newcastle.

This year marked a new chapter for Eats & Beats, with ticketing introduced for the first time to help manage capacity and support the continued delivery of a safe and enjoyable visitor experience.

Food was once again at the heart of the festival, with more than 24 food vendors and 18 regional food producers showcasing a wide range of local flavours and artisan produce throughout the weekend.

The popular Cookery Demonstrations attracted food lovers across both days, with Paul Cunningham hosting the programme and also cooking live. He was joined by Jenny Bristow, Suzie Lee, Paula McIntyre, Adam Morrison, Ryan Harrison



and Bradley Webster, who shared recipes, cooking tips and culinary inspiration with festival audiences.

Music fans were treated to more than 24 live performances across the Homegrown and World stages, with a diverse programme spanning pop, rock, country, punk, blues, ska, reggae and international sounds. The weekend line-up included D:Ream, Eric Bell & When Ireland

Rocked, JC Stewart, Lisa McHugh, Muireann Bradley, Anna's Number and Taylor Lally, alongside World Stage performances from The Skallions, Magwere, Baile An Salsa, Havana Roots, Manouche and more. Families also enjoyed entertainment and activities throughout the weekend, including the Kids Zone and Curious Minds Experience.

Eats & Beats forms part of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's programme of events designed to attract visitors, support the local tourism and hospitality sector and showcase the breadth of experiences available across Mourne Gullion Strangford.

For more information and inspiration on visiting Mourne Gullion Strangford, visit visitmournegullionstrangford.com.



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SUCCESSFUL NEURODIVERGENT SUMMER CAMP

Castlewellan Community Centre hosted a celebration event to mark the end of a very successful two-week Neurodivergent Summer Camp, with young people and their families joining programme partners and community representatives.



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The programme was funded and supported by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Mournes and Slieve Croob District Electoral Area (DEA) Forums, County Down Rural Community Network (CDRCN) and Housing for All, with the collective investment enabling the summer scheme to provide a safe, inclusive and engaging environment for neurodivergent young

people. Around 40 young people took part in the programme, enjoying a wide range of fun and interactive activities designed to promote social inclusion, personal development, confidence building and friendship, with the scheme offering participants the opportunity to engage in a structured programme of activities while enjoying a supportive and welcoming atmosphere.

Each of the participants received a certificate in recognition of their involvement and achievements throughout the programme.

Slieve Croob DEA Chairperson, Councillor Alan Lewis, highlighted

the importance of providing opportunities for neurodivergent young people to participate in activities that support their wellbeing, development and social connections.

"This programme has provided a much-needed opportunity for young people to engage in a fun-filled and varied programme of activities within a safe and supportive environment. It has enabled participants to build confidence, make new friends and enjoy meaningful experiences during the summer holidays," he said.

Event organisers expressed their gratitude to the Mournes and Slieve Croob DEA Forums,



County Down Rural Community Network and Housing for All for their support, which ensured the successful delivery of

the programme.

The success of the two-week summer camp demonstrates the value of partnership working

in providing inclusive opportunities for young people and supporting families across the local community.



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Development Opportunity announced for Downpatrick

Communities Minister Gordon Lyons has announced the launch of a Pre Market Engagement exercise for the redevelopment of the Irish Street site in Downpatrick. The opportunity will be run in partnership with Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.

The engagement invites developers, investors and hotel operators to help shape proposals for a landmark

regeneration scheme on the prominent town centre site, comprising the former PSNI station, a number of listed buildings along Irish Street and an 83-space Council-owned car park.

Launching the Pre-Market Engagement, Minister Lyons said, "The Irish Street development site has the potential to transform the town centre, creating a vibrant destination that reflects Downpatrick's rich heritage while supporting a growing tourism economy and strengthening local businesses. This is a significant opportunity to bring forward

a high-quality regeneration scheme in one of the most important locations in Downpatrick.

"Through this engagement, we are inviting developers, investors and hotel operators to work with us to shape a scheme that can deliver real and lasting benefits for Downpatrick and the wider region, encouraging growth and improving the tourism offer."

The Department's vision for the 2.02-acre site includes a hotel-led regeneration scheme that will enhance the town centre, support tourism, and

act as a catalyst for wider regeneration, alongside complementary residential, retail, and public realm uses. It will further enhance the town's appeal as a place to visit, live, and work, creating new opportunities for investment, regeneration, and sustainable growth.

To support delivery, the Department and Council are proposing to offer a capital grant of up to £5.2 million to help bring forward a high-quality scheme.

Malachy McGrady, Chair of the Downpatrick Regeneration Working Group

said, "The Irish Street site is widely recognised as a key opportunity to drive regeneration in Downpatrick town centre. The Working Group welcomes this important step forward and looks forward to seeing proposals that reflect the ambition and potential of Downpatrick as a place to live, work and visit."

Developers, investors, hotel operators, and other interested parties are encouraged to participate in the Pre-Market Engagement process. For further details, please visit the eTenders NI Portal.

Continued from page 1

This new ramp and stepped access make it much easier for everyone to reach the park directly from the town centre, while supporting local regeneration."

Newry Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Councillor Glyn Hanna said, "We are pleased

to have delivered this enhancement alongside our partners. The pump track, skate bowl and pitches are incredibly well-used. This accessible entrance ensures the park continues to serve the whole community effectively, making it easier for everyone to move between St Patrick's Avenue and the sports facilities."

Mal McGrady,

Chairperson of the Downpatrick Regeneration Working Group said, "The new access is a welcome addition that builds on Downpatrick's ongoing regeneration. By creating a direct and accessible link between the town centre and the park, we hope to increase footfall, support local businesses, and encourage active,

healthy lifestyles for residents and visitors alike."

The project is part of a wider series of initiatives by Department for Communities, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and the Downpatrick Regeneration Working Group to boost economic activity and create a more connected town centre.

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Exercise Referral Programme for those with Cancer

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council has relaunched its cancer exercise referral programme, which commenced at leisure centres in Newry and Downpatrick in September.

The 12-week programme - which supports the Council's healthy living objectives by promoting long-term physical activity and providing structured opportunities for adults living with cancer and beyond - is aligned with the organisation's existing Physical Activity Referral Scheme (PARS) and will run alongside the successful existing Move More initiative.

Since its original launch, the Move More programme has developed into an ongoing physical activity class, with participants remaining in the programme for extended periods, with the classes becoming accessible to a wider range of people.

As part of the Council's district-wide review of sports development and health and wellbeing provision, consideration was given to current participant attendance, delivery arrangements and similar cancer physical activity referral models operating elsewhere in Northern Ireland.

The review identified an opportunity to re-establish a structured cancer referral



and progression pathway in Newry, Mourne and Down, while retaining the existing Move More classes as an ongoing physical activity opportunity.

Move More will be retained within the Council's Be Active for Life timetable at Newry and Down Leisure Centres as an open, lower level physical activity and progression class, with detailed referral, eligibility, screening and operational arrangements finalised by Council officers in consultation with relevant

health and social care partners.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Councillor Glyn Hanna said, "The return of the cancer exercise referral initiative will provide people living with cancer with structured support to become more physically active in a safe and welcoming environment, helping them improve both their physical and emotional wellbeing."

"Physical activity can play an important role in supporting people through

and beyond a cancer diagnosis. Reinstating this programme demonstrates the Council's commitment to providing accessible opportunities that help residents improve their health, build confidence and enhance their quality of life."

Cllr Hanna said the cancer exercise referral programme reflects the Council's desire to ensure everyone has the opportunity to benefit from being physically active, regardless of the challenges they may face.

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JESSICA UNDERTAKES VITAL STRANGFORD LOUGH RESEARCH

A former participant in Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Geopark Youth Leader Programme is examining how Climate Change may be impacting on Strangford Lough's tern population as part of her Master's dissertation.



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Jessica Murray-Gibbons is one of the Council's representatives on the Landscapes NI Youth Panel which brings together young people from across Northern Ireland to act as ambassadors for the region's designated landscapes, Geoparks and AONBs.

Jessica, who is from Rostrevor, said her involvement with the

Council Programme, designed for young people aged between 16 and 24 to explore nature conservation and help them develop practical outdoor skills, deepened her desire for nature and the need to protect it.

She applied for a place after completing her degree in Anthropology at Queen's University in Belfast and with a summer to contemplate what she would do next, Jessica chose to pursue a career that made her feel she could make a real difference.

"I realised volunteering could provide me with exactly that – a chance to offer my free time, learn from others and make a difference – no matter how big or small. It was my mum who discovered the Geopark Youth

Leaders Programme on Facebook and I applied as soon as possible and was grateful to be accepted," she said.

Jessica explained the Programme encourages young people to volunteer with the opportunity to achieve the Wild Youth Award and, while volunteering was a key aspect of the programme, participants were also provided with many opportunities to learn through sessions on orienteering, surveying, inspiring and leading others.

Among her stand out memories was a session at Tyrella Beach where Gavin Grant, the Council's AONB and Geopark and Marine and Coastal Engagement Officer, taught participants about



marine wildlife and the importance of protecting it.

Jessica feels fortunate she was part of the Council Programme and wished there were more opportunities like this when she was younger. She said it's so

beneficial for the younger generation to understand the importance of looking after the natural environment.

Jessica's dissertation is examining how climate change, through rising sea levels and increased storms, may

be impacting Strangford Lough's tern populations, most notably, through destruction to nesting habitats. Terns are regarded as some of the most important breeding seabirds on the internationally acclaimed waterway.

Seniors' Summer Scheme Historical Tour

As part of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Seniors' Summer Programme, the Downpatrick, Rowallane, Mournes and Slieve Croob District Electoral Areas (DEAs) organised a fascinating St Patrick's Historical Tour on Tuesday 25 August which was attended by people from across the district.

The event provided an opportunity to explore some of the most significant heritage sites associated with the Patron Saint including St Patrick's Grave and the High Cross at Down County Museum in Downpatrick and St Patrick's Church at Saul. Historical insights and background information at each



Members of Crossgar's Down Patchwork and Craft Group, Down Senior Forum and Downpatrick Everyone Active, who enjoyed the St Patrick's Historical Tour as part of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Seniors' Summer Programme. Included are District Electoral Area (DEA) coordinators Priscilla McAlinden (Slieve Croob), Katrina Hynds (Downpatrick), Nicola Whyte (Rowallane) and Taucher McDonald (Mournes).

location were provided by the Council's Heritage Officer Linda McKenna (left), who highlighted the religious heritage connected to St Patrick and the important role the sites continue to play in the story of the region,

with participants welcoming the opportunity to learn more about St Patrick's legacy and visit key historical landmarks within the district, making the tour both an informative and enjoyable experience.



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Expansion of Home2Hospital Service

A Home2Hospital volunteer-led service for older people and their families supported by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council has been expanded as part of a pilot project.

The service, administered by Bolster Community, ensures people do not miss vital hospital and healthcare appointments and is delivered by volunteer drivers transporting people to South Tyrone, Belfast, Craigavon and Downpatrick.

Previously only available to residents in the Slieve Gullion and Mourne District Electoral Areas (DEAs), the service has been expanded to include Crotlieve DEA with the Council's support. The pilot will run from September until March 2027 to ensure people don't miss vital healthcare appointments and also help them access additional support services and links to social groups and activities.

Almost one quarter of residents in Crotlieve are aged 65 and over, with a number reporting they have previously missed an important hospital appointment due to transport issues. The introduction of the new pilot will address this.

Due to the difficulties people in the Slieve Gullion and Mourne DEA rural areas encounter accessing hospital appointments in Craigavon, Belfast and beyond, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council helped facilitate the



Home2Hospital scheme which proved hugely successful.

Between April 2025 and January this year in these DEAs, the service provided 539 return journeys for 359 users, with 368 trips for residents in the Mourne DEA and 171 for those in Slieve Gullion. Thirteen volunteer drivers transported people to 21 different healthcare settings.

Bolster Community's Home2Hospital coordinator Paula McCracken said, "For more than 14 years, the scheme has been helping older people in rural communities attend essential hospital appointments that they might otherwise struggle to reach. What started as a transport service

has become much more than that, with every journey providing an opportunity to build relationships, identifying emerging needs and help older people remain connected to the services and support that enable them to live independently.

"Through delivering Home2Hospital across the area, we have built a dedicated team of committed volunteers, developed strong working relationships with local health professionals and community organisations and established straightforward systems that ensure the service runs safely, efficiently and reliably."

Paula added: "These

foundations mean we are ready to begin supporting older people in Crotlieve while already serving those in the Slieve Gullion and Mourne DEAs. The real strength of the service is the volunteers, many of whom have been part of it for years, quietly giving their time and help to assist older people attend appointments they might otherwise miss.

"Home2Hospital is about more than just a phone call or a journey. I enjoy chatting with service users, building relationships and providing reassurance along the way. Knowing a friendly conversation can make someone feel supported and valued is what makes the service so rewarding for me."

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Autumn: Season of mists and mellow...fruiting bodies?

In his famous line of poetry, John Keats used the word 'fruitfulness', but besides all the apples, pears, rosehips and other fruits of autumn, there are also what scientists call the 'fruiting bodies' of lots of fungi (or funguses if you prefer),

What we mostly call mushrooms and toadstools which appear at this time of year in a multitude of shapes, sizes and colours, are for fungi reproduction including a simple mechanism to spread far away from the original organism, with tiny spores (the equivalent of plant seeds) falling from their undersides to blow away on a breeze.

But of course, there are variations, and for instance, puffballs (pictured) lack an opening below the cap, so that when they break or are kicked emit clouds of dust-like spores, hence their name. An average Giant Puffball (not common here) can produce seven trillion spores. Thankfully, very few geminate, because, if they all did, it has been calculated that they would produce a mass of fungi 800 times the



volume of the earth!

There are about 5 million fungi species in the world (an estimated 9,000 in Ireland) and they are hugely important underground where their main 'bodies' live, extensive thread-like masses called mycelium, which, we're learning, connect trees and other

plants, exchanging nutrients and even carrying chemical or electronic messages which appear to be understood by plants. This phenomenon has been termed 'the wood wide web'.

So, when you're out walking in the countryside this autumn, keep a lookout

for puffballs, and many other fungi fruiting bodies, bearing in mind that what you're seeing are only the short-lived reproductive organs and that what the network parents are doing under your feet is amazing, and possibly vital for plants and all natural life on earth.

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Future secured of one of Northern Ireland’s most important heritage collections

Communities Minister Gordon Lyons has officially opened a new archive facility for the Historic Environment Record of Northern Ireland (HERoNI) at the former Belfast War Room in Mount Eden Park, Belfast.

The project secures the future of one of Northern Ireland’s most important heritage collections while giving new life to a significant Cold War landmark. The repurposed facility will provide a permanent, sustainable home for HERoNI, which documents more than 45,000 historic sites through maps, plans, records and photographs. The facility will now serve as the permanent home of HERoNI, a key public resource documenting Northern Ireland’s rich and diverse historic environment. The archive contains records relating to more than 45,000 historic places,

including archaeological sites, historic monuments and buildings, as well as industrial, marine and defence heritage sites. Its collections include drawings, maps, plans, documents and hundreds of thousands of photographs spanning all periods of Northern Ireland’s history. The transformation of the War Room demonstrates the potential for the sustainable reuse of historic buildings. While the structure’s original design posed significant challenges for redevelopment, its distinctive features, including 1.5 metre-thick reinforced concrete walls, a windowless design



Communities Minister Gordon Lyons and Rhonda Robinson, Department for Communities archaeologist examines the restored generator at the Belfast War Rooms. The War Rooms is the new archive facility for the Historic Environment Record of Northern Ireland (HERoNI).

and a network of small internal rooms, have proven highly suitable for archival storage. These characteristics help maintain stable environmental conditions essential for the long-term preservation of sensitive historic records.

THE CAUSEWAY HOTEL IS AN IDEAL AUTUMN RETREAT

As the days grow shorter and the crisp sea air settles along the North Coast, The Causeway Hotel invites you to relax, recharge, and embrace the season with our popular Winter Warmer package.

Nestled beside the world-famous Giant’s Causeway, our historic hotel offers the perfect setting for a cosy two-night escape. Surrounded by breathtaking coastal scenery and steeped in history, The Causeway Hotel is an ideal retreat for those seeking comfort, tranquillity, and unforgettable views. Available from £185 per person based on

two people sharing midweek and £190 per person based on two people sharing on Friday and Saturday nights, the Winter Warmer package includes two nights’ accommodation, a three-course dinner on both evenings in the hotel’s elegant 1836 Ballroom Restaurant, breakfast each morning and complimentary access to the Giant’s Causeway Visitor

Experience. Away from the crowds of summer, the season offers a chance to truly appreciate the tranquillity and natural beauty that make this corner of Northern Ireland so special. Explore the coastline at your own pace, breathe in the fresh Atlantic air, or simply sit back and enjoy the ever-changing views from this unique clifftop location.

Whether you are planning a romantic getaway, celebrating a special occasion or simply craving a change of scenery, The Causeway Hotel offers the perfect opportunity to leave the everyday behind and enjoy a memorable coastal escape for two. For more information or to book, call 028 2073 1210 or visit www.thecausewayhotel.com.

Belfast Marathon Participants Raise £7,813 for Charity

A group of inspirational men and women from across the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council area who came together through their own life-changing health experiences have raised an impressive £7,813 for Northern Ireland Chest, Heart and Stroke after taking on the Belfast City Marathon relay.

Aged between 63 and 78, the participants completed the 26-mile route in two relay teams, turning their personal journeys of illness, rehabilitation and recovery into an opportunity to give something back to the charity which has supported so many people facing serious health conditions. The marathon challenge was the culmination of friendships formed through prescribed exercise classes and weekly walks delivered through Newry, Mourne and

Down District Council’s Be Active for Health initiative. The participants have experienced a range of serious health conditions, including heart attacks, major cardiac events and surgery. Through the Council’s Physical Activity Referral Scheme (PARS) and Cardiac Rehabilitation classes, they have been supported to rebuild their strength, improve their fitness and regain confidence in being active. The programmes are delivered in partnership with

the Southern and South Eastern Health Trusts and the Public Health Agency (PHA), with participants receiving an assessment from exercise referral coordinator Paula Early. For many in the group, their regular Friday walks have been just as important for their mental wellbeing and friendships as they have been for their physical health. What began as a group of strangers brought together by similar health experiences, developed into



a close-knit group who now share a determination to stay active and support one

another. The decision to take part in the Belfast City Marathon

was driven by a desire to recognise the support they had received during

their own recovery journey, while raising vital funds to help others facing similar challenges. The men and women hope their story will encourage others recovering from serious illness or living with chronic conditions to seek support and take the first steps towards becoming more active. PARS and Cardiac Rehabilitation classes form part of the Council’s Be Active for Health initiative, which aims to reduce health

inequalities and support people living with chronic conditions or recovering from surgery to improve their physical and mental wellbeing. For more information on the PARS and Cardiac Rehabilitation programmes, visit <https://www.newry-mournedown.org/be-active-for-health>, email PARS@nmandd.org or contact your GP or health care professional, who will assess your suitability to join the programmes.

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An unforgettable night of music and song to launch Action Cancer campaign

Action Cancer's Paint the Town Pink fundraising campaign will officially launch this year with an unforgettable evening of music and song in the magnificent surroundings of Stormont's Great Hall on Friday 25 September.

For one night only, Comber Silver Band and Fortwilliam Musical Society will join forces in a special musical collaboration to mark the beginning of Action Cancer's annual Paint the Town Pink campaign, supported by Action Renewables.

Taking place annually during Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October, Paint the Town Pink raises vital funds for Action Cancer's unique, free breast screening service – the only one of its kind available in the UK and Ireland. Every £120 raised funds one potentially life-saving breast screening appointment for well women aged 40–49 and 70+, groups not covered by the NHS screening programme.

Businesses across Northern Ireland are encouraged to 'go pink' and host fundraising events throughout October, from coffee mornings and bake sales to dress-down days and pink-themed pub quizzes. Action Cancer will provide participating businesses with a fundraising pack including pink bunting, balloons, collection boxes and creative fundraising ideas.

As the charity receives no government funding for its



Representatives from Fitzwilliam Musical Society, Action Renewables, Action Cancer and Comber Silver Band pictured at Stormont for the launch of Action Cancer's Paint the Town Pink 2026 campaign, which raises vital funds for the charity's breast screening service.

breast screening programme, it relies heavily on support from the local community and business sector to continue delivering this vital service.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women in Northern Ireland, accounting for 30% of all female cancer diagnoses. On average, 1,516 women are diagnosed each year and 310 die from the disease.

Action Cancer has been

at the heart of cancer prevention, detection and support in Northern Ireland for more than 50 years. Its services are free to the user but cost the charity £4 million annually to deliver. These include an early detection breast screening clinic, therapeutic support for people living with a cancer diagnosis and those supporting a loved one, and a range of health improvement programmes.

Services are available at Action Cancer House in Belfast, at 13 regional locations and onboard the Big Bus, supported by SuperValu and Centra, which visits 175 locations each year.

If you or your workplace would like to take part in Paint the Town Pink, please contact Mark Irwin-Watson in the fundraising team on 07580 133752 or email ptt@actioncancer.org

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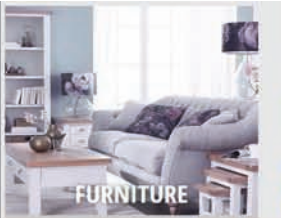
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THE POWER OF THE LOCAL POUND

Walk down any thriving high street and you will feel the energy of a real community.

From the smell of freshly baked bread to the warm greeting at the corner greengrocer, local businesses form the backbone of our towns. Yet as digital convenience expands, these vital independent shops face an unprecedented challenge. Choosing to shop locally is far more than a simple errand. It is a vital investment in our shared future.

Boosting the Regional Economy

When you buy from an independent retailer, a significantly higher percentage of your money stays within the local economy. Small business owners buy from local suppliers, hire local staff and pay taxes that fund essential community services. A single purchase at a neighbourhood butcher

or bookshop creates a ripple effect. It directly supports local families, drives regional growth and keeps high streets vibrant.

Unmatched Quality and Expertise

Independent traders offer specialized knowledge that algorithms and giant supermarket chains simply cannot match. A local cheesemonger or florist takes deep pride in their craft, offering personal recommendations and tailored service. Furthermore, local food traders often source produce from nearby farms. This reduces transit times, cuts plastic packaging and ensures fresher, better-tasting food on your table.

Preserving Community Identity

Beyond the economic advantages, independent



shops give our towns their unique character and charm. Unique storefronts turn bland streets into welcoming places to gather and connect. Shopkeepers know their customers by name, fostering a strong sense of safety and belonging.

Every time you choose a high street shop over a massive online retailer, you vote for the kind of community you want to live in. By spending locally, we preserve our town centres and secure a resilient future for everyone.

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THE CHRISTMAS COUNTDOWN THAT SAVES YOUR PURSE

Christmas costs creep up fast when you count down without a plan. British households spend about £106 on going out, £172 on food and £76 on experiences during the festive period.

A clear countdown budget stops that spend turning into January debt and stress.

Start eight weeks out by listing income and fixed bills to find your festive pot. Check last December statements to spot pinch points like parties or travel. Split what you can afford into food, gifts and activities rather than wish lists. That pot must include personal extras that often get forgotten.

Book your pre Christmas hair and beauty slots now and set the budget aside. A wash, cut and blow dry is the most popular

treatment amongst UK adults before Christmas. Research shows adults in Northern Ireland budget £171.50 on average for festive hair and beauty appointments. Lock in your cut, colour or up-style early and set aside £40 to £60 for it. Add nails, brows or beard trims into the same beauty pot so you avoid last minute panic spends.

At six weeks tackle home decoration with a tight limit. You do not have to spend a lot on decor to make your home look festive. Check what you already own before buying

anything new. Thread ribbon through cookie cutters and hang them from hooks for a cheap touch. Shops like The Range, B&M and Ikea offer good Christmas decorations at low cost. Use clear vases filled with baubles, greenery or fairy lights to create cosy displays. Save gift bags, tissue paper and ribbons from earlier purchases to reuse for wrapping.

Five weeks out plan food, travel and social life. Book trains early and look at split tickets to cut fares. Freeze essentials bought on offer and use up store



cupboard items like stock cubes. December is the most popular month for overdraft use

with Brits borrowing £178 on average. Prioritise needs over fear of missing out and

budget for each social event separately. Create a present pyramid with special gifts at the top

and cards at the bottom to keep it fair.

Work extras need their own small pot. The national average for Secret Santa is £13 with many spending £21 to £25 in generous trades. Suggest a £10 cap to keep it friendly for everyone. Thoughtful under £10 gifts can feel personal without breaking the limit. Budget for the office party outfit, taxi and contributions to collections too. Hunt real bargains on voucher sites but avoid buying just because something is in a sale.

In the final three

weeks go granular with separate pots for presents and socialising. Remember buy now pay later can push debt forward and a quarter of users miss repayments. Keep long term goals in sight so a spontaneous meal does not derail savings. In the last week wrap with saved bags and ribbons and use labels to cover old logos. Embrace staying in with films and homemade gifts to cut credit card debt into the new year. Seek free guidance from your bank if you feel overstretched and protect your future budget.

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30 years celebration for McElholm Optometrists

For 30 years, McElholm Optometrists has been proud to provide independent eyecare to the local community.

Founded by Edel in 1996, the practice has grown through a simple commitment to looking after patients properly — taking the time to understand their individual needs and providing high-quality, personal eyecare. Today, that family tradition continues as Edel is joined by her sons, James and John Hughes, who have recently returned from working in

England to become part of the family practice, where they join Edel and Christine Wilson on the clinical team. They bring fresh experience and new ideas while maintaining the personal, familiar approach that has always been at the heart of McElholm Optometrists. With practices in both Kircubbin and Downpatrick, the team offers comprehensive eye

examinations enhanced by OCT technology, expert advice on frames and lenses, contact lens services and dry eye management.

Commenting on behalf of the family practice James says:

“We believe that independent optometry means having the freedom to put patients first — offering honest advice, taking time to find the



right solution and building relationships that last. As we look towards the next 30 years, our aim is to combine the experience and trust built by Edel over three decades with the enthusiasm and expertise of the next generation. We are incredibly grateful to the patients and families who have supported the

practice since 1996, many of whom have continued to visit us generation after generation. We look forward to welcoming both familiar faces and new patients through our doors, and continuing to provide independent, family-run eyecare across the local community for many years to come.”

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Hello Hygge: Why Winter Wins

Winter gets a bad press. Yet darker months bring quiet rewards that summer cannot match. Planning ahead gives you something to look forward to and lifts mood.

Sleep becomes deeper when nights lengthen. Researchers found people get more rapid eye movement sleep in winter than summer. That extra rest supports cellular repair and clears metabolic waste overnight. It also explains why a cosy lie-in feels so natural.

Cosiness itself is good for wellbeing. A study of 2,000 adults found more than two thirds believe relaxing nights in are good for their wellbeing. Think thick socks and soft blankets and mugs of soup. Heart FM notes that big coats and scarves and favourite spots with a book are central to winter joy.

The season also turns

social in a smaller and kinder way. Psychological research describes winter social hibernation as health protective behaviour. You gather with fewer people but with more warmth. You talk longer and listen better.

Outside there is plenty to enjoy. Many towns hold winter festivals and parades and outdoor markets. You can wrap up warm and gather by firepits and lose yourself in the night sky. Northumberland and the Yorkshire Dales hold star-gazing safaris and events throughout the winter months.

Winter light is rare and beautiful. Low sun paints



long shadows and frost brightens every hedge. Cold air makes you breathe faster and walk brisker and feel more alive. Experts say any activity that raises heart rate benefits the heart even in winter.

Embrace the season rather than endure it. Mayo Clinic experts suggest that embracing winter helps make it healthier and happier. Light a candle and book a dark skies night and let winter do its quiet work.

Small Steps can boost a BIG Growth in Confidence!

Taekwon-Do NI is helping children and adults across Northern Ireland grow in Strength & Confidence!!

The Organisation is part of the United Kingdom Taekwon-Do Council and affiliated to the World ITF Taekwon-Do Council. It runs Clubs in Community Centres, Leisure Centres & Church Halls across Northern Ireland. The President for Northern Ireland is Mr Leo Maguire, VI Degree. Leo is also the National Coach and a member of the Northern Ireland Council of Taekwon-Do.

Tiger Cubs is the level for primary school age children. No experience is necessary to join and classes welcome small children from Age 3 right up to adulthood. Mums and Dads can join in too with the children, training together builds family confidence and a shared achievement.

There's also Little Tiger Cubs (3 to 5 years) and Active Tigers (5 to 8 years). Taekwon-Do for the more

senior class age ranges from 9 years to adulthood. We also offer a six week Female Self-Defence course, led by Female Instructors and is perfect for young girls leaving home or going to University or for adults to combine get-fit as a new skill.

The course gives practical skills and confidence for independent living away from home. Adult classes focus on fitness and self defence and beginners are always welcome. The Clubs welcomes everybody and adapts sessions to suit all abilities and needs.

Grading is by Leo Maguire himself. This ensures consistent standards across the region. Taekwon-Do NI also provides a GCSE in Taekwon-Do with the Education Authority. It offers free trials to secondary schools as a PE alternative and FREE Taster Sessions run from Nursery



level through to High School Education.

The Active Tigers programme sums up its Ethos! Small steps bring big confidence and discipline and fun! Students learn to watch their confidence grow with each class and

for more information contact Taekwon-Do NI on 07891191494 or visit [taekwondo-ni.co.uk](http://www.taekwondo-ni.co.uk).

A brighter, stronger tomorrow starts with the first class.

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Fitness and Fun at Comber Leisure Centre

Comber Leisure Centre provides a vital hub for community health, sport and family entertainment.

The facility welcomes over 110,000 visitors every year, with modern indoor and outdoor amenities tailored for all ages.

Fitness enthusiasts can take advantage of the impressive gym equipped with cardiovascular equipment, resistance machines, free weights and a functional cube for bodyweight training. A specialized hand bike and other adaptable equipment, ensure accessible workouts for

individuals with physical disabilities. Serious lifters can utilize a separate Conditioning Gym, designed specifically for advanced strength and muscle building. The gym also houses an interactive private training space – FITT Pod.

Over 30 weekly exercise classes take place in the centre, from Group Cycle and Kettlebells to Pilates and Chair Aerobics. After a workout, visitors can unwind in the Health Suite, complete with

a sauna, steam room and experience shower. Membership inclusive of all these facilities starts from just £21.45 a month.

Younger visitors are equally well catered for in the centre's vibrant soft play facility. Designed for toddlers up to ten-year-olds, the adventure space features slides, a biff-bash forest, climbers, a ball juggler, a log ramp and roller squeezes. The soft play area operates casually throughout the week and serves

as a popular venue for children's birthday parties and special events.

Beyond the gym and play zones, the centre houses a versatile sports hall alongside outdoor all-weather facilities. These include a covered dome with four tennis courts and a floodlit astro turf pitch used by local sports groups. Dedicated party rooms and complete disabled accessibility throughout make Comber Leisure Centre an essential local resource.



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FROST, FUN AND FLAWLESS PLANS

Planning a Winter Break? – Whether its Christmas Shopping in Prague, soaking up the winter sun l or skiing on Italian slopes or even a break closer to home - start with a clear purpose.

Do you crave rest, adventure or festive cheer? Set a realistic budget early and stick to it. Good planning helps you enjoy shared experiences without stress. Shared experiences are crucial. Confirm your travel documents and dates before you book

anything, including passport validity and return details. A favourite drink and a quiet moment can help you focus on decisions. Choose a destination that matches your energy and weather tolerance. A city break offers markets, galleries and cosy cafes within walking distance.

For central exploration book accommodation as centrally as possible. Research suggests the location of your accommodation makes a big difference to your break. Compare hotels, vacation rentals and hostels for value and warmth before committing. Once you



polished evening outfit. Experts advise planning outfits in advance so you pack less and feel polished every day. Keep your confirmations and driving licence in hand luggage for easy access. Build a loose itinerary with one main activity per day. Leave space for spontaneity, hot chocolate and long lunches. You can also create a schedule that organises your area and sets new objectives.

A Winter break is a time for relaxation and recharging from a busy term. Balance sightseeing with sleep, books and gentle walks. Take regular breaks to rest and recharge using short focused bursts. Take time to organise quality programmes that make everyone feel important. With documents checked, bags packed and plans loose you will return home refreshed.

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have a gauge on flight costs look at available areas and costs. Consider restaurants you want to

visit beforehand to avoid disappointment. Packing smart is essential for cold

weather comfort and confidence. Choose versatile layers, waterproof boots and a

Academy PS & Nursery Unit, Saintfield Celebrates Fifty Golden Years!

Academy Primary School and Nursery Unit in Saintfield is marking a major milestone. The school is celebrating 50 years of learning growth and community from 1976 to 2026.

The current school site opened in 1976 to

replace the old Saintfield Academy and four other rural schools. It serves the town of Saintfield and the immediate surrounding country area.

Academy Primary School & Nursery Unit, is a child-centred, family-orientated school committed to the academic, emotional, physical, creative and spiritual development of every pupil. The school prides itself on fostering a supportive and happy learning environment where every child is valued as an individual.

The school's ethos is built upon a strong focus on Pastoral Care, which ensures pupils feel cared for and valued. This supportive foundation allows children to meet—and often surpass—their educational potential. High academic standards are maintained, but the school's primary aim is the development of the 'whole child.' By instilling values like kindness, safety, and respect, Academy Primary ensures its



pupils are well-rounded, responsible, and prepared for their future, hoping that when they grow up and walk past the school gates, their hearts will be flooded with fond

memories, pride and affection.

The school also offers a vibrant and varied extra-curricular program to further develop teamwork, self-esteem

and social skills.

We were very proud to have won these two prestigious awards at the 'Families First Awards':

June 2023 – Best Pastoral Care in a Primary School

June 2025 – Best Primary School in County Down

The school can be contacted at Academy Primary School 194 Listooder Road Saintfield Ballynahinch County Down BT24 7JA on 028 9751 0407.

For more information, you can visit the school's website at www.academyprimary.com or scan the qr code in their advert. (On page 2)

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Christmas
Moments*

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ADDING TEXTURE TO YOUR HOME

It is all too easy for certain rooms in your home to become flat and uninspired – this is exactly where adding texture can help.

For a reason unbeknown to many, texture seems to be an afterthought when it comes to interior design. However it is this very element that will make a room pop, giving it that extra edge of aesthetic pleasure. Texture is often primarily associated with the sensation of touch; however it can also really impact on how we view a room. In many ways, it is the perceived sense of touch that we derive pleasure from – if a velvet sofa looks particularly smooth or a blanket seems notably soft then even if we do not experience it first hand, we can appreciate it. Modern interior design demands a variety of contrasting textures for space to feel complete and these can range in colour, function and style. If everything in a room is the same texture, then our eyes have trouble



distinguishing between one thing and the next. If we have a variety of textures then this adds visual weight to any space. It is important to be restrained. Stick to two or three textures per space.

In terms of furniture,

bringing wooden elements such as coffee tables or benches into your home will add that variety of texture. Similarly, if you are redesigning a space entirely, it can be beneficial to use new textures such as marble

or granite tabletops and even exposed brick work. If it is a quick texture fix that you are looking for, adding satin cushion covers or wicker storage boxes could be exactly what you need.

Using Colour to Create Feng Shui in Your Home

Feng Shui can be exactly what you need to create an environment that will aid you in achieving your flow and abundance.

If 2026 is the year for self growth and renewal, then Feng Shui decoration should be at the top of your to do list. Unlike traditional interior design, this style is aimed solely at creating a vibrant feeling of joy and harmony that will bolster your energy, enthusiasm and drive to achieve your goals. Similar to other design trends, each space must be designed in a unique way for its individual purpose. Designing a home office using Feng Shui will mean dispelling traditional ideas that focus purely on functionality and focusing on creating a space that exudes positive, vibrant energy. Achieving these desired energies can be done by following basic feng shui principles, starting by clearing out old energy before beginning to redesign. In a practical sense, this means decluttering. Decorating a cluttered home makes little sense from a feng shui perspective and the process of decluttering has been shown to have clear cathartic properties. It is therefore imperative that you have a blank canvas to work from when beginning



to create positive energy through interior design. Air and light are both essential elements for creating positive energy (or Chi) in your home. Once your home is clutter-free your air quality will greatly increase and your feng shui decorating can begin. It is important not to underestimate the power of colour to change the energy

of a room and the mood of all those who enter. Have a balanced pallet throughout your home is vital and using the Bagua map, you can decide what kind of energy you would like to promote in each room. Feng Shui has relatively strict symbolisation for colour, with red/purple-violet inviting abundance,

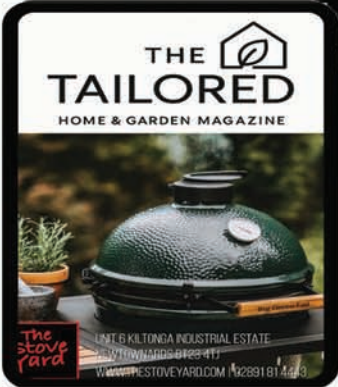
passion or royalty, green promoting restorative energy, black evoking wisdom and whites symbolising purity or precision. Fundamentally, each room must serve a purpose and through colour, you can promote the creation to positive energies that will aid you in achieving your good karma.

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Multi-million investment in new AI and Fintech Centre of Excellence at First Derivative

First Minister Michelle O'Neill, deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly and Economy Minister Dr Caoimhe Archibald have announced that First Derivative is investing £15.3 million in R&D and jobs at a new AI and Fintech Centre of Excellence.

First Derivative, an EPAM company, is a global consulting firm that provides a range of solutions for the financial services industry. Its client base includes many of the world's top financial institutions.

Welcoming the investment while visiting the company's HQ in Newry, First Minister, Michelle O'Neill said: "This investment is a huge vote of confidence in Newry, our people and the potential of this city. First Derivative has deep roots here and has shown that a world-class company can be built in Newry and compete globally.

The centre will bring together our expertise and specialist skills with AI software solutions that our clients can integrate seamlessly into their



Pictured (L-R) are Economy Minister, Dr Caoimhe Archibald; First Minister, Michelle O'Neill; Andrew Colhoun, Head of First Derivative; deputy First Minister, Emma Little-Pengelly and Kieran Donoghue, CEO, Invest NI.

existing systems.

Speaking at the announcement in Newry, deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly said: "This is great news for Newry and a real testament to the strength of our tech talent pipeline here in Northern

Ireland.

Securing this project is a clear endorsement of the skilled workforce in Newry and Belfast, our competitive business environment and growing reputation as a centre for advanced technology.

First Derivative will carry out R&D to develop new process and technology solutions for blue chip clients that will enable the company to enhance its competitiveness.

Andrew Colhoun, Head of First Derivative said: "This investment reflects our tech-first strategy, where innovation is at the heart of how we operate and deliver for our clients. We see a significant opportunity to harness advanced

technologies, particularly AI, to modernise operations and improve efficiency.

"Establishing our Centre of Excellence is an important step in realising that vision. The centre will bring together our expertise and specialist skills with AI software solutions that our clients can integrate seamlessly into their existing systems."

Invest NI has offered the company an R&D grant of £3,204,190, helping to secure this significant investment for Northern Ireland ahead of other potential locations.

Invest NI's R&D support for this project is part funded by the UK Government Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF).

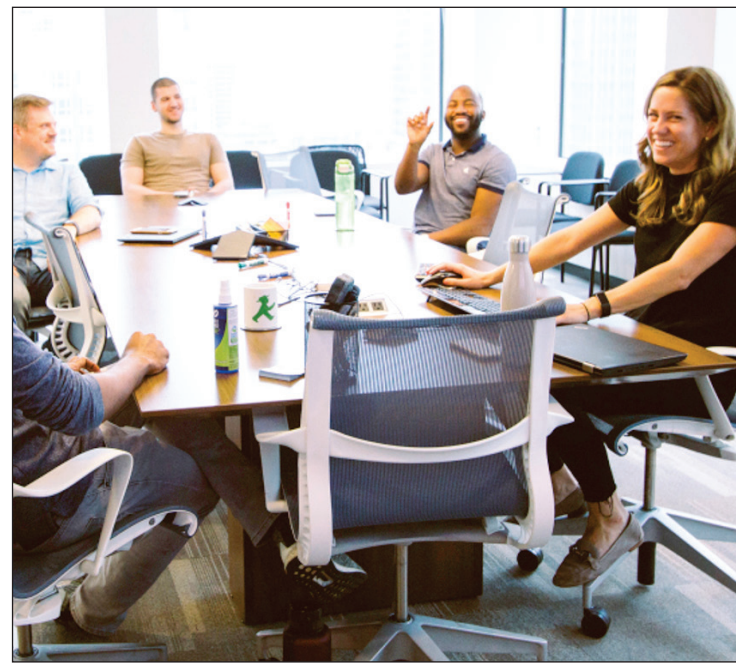
Some of the Best places to work in NI.

Recent workplace studies show local employers scoring highly for trust and growth. Belfast remains a hub for technology and finance investment.

Liberty IT in Belfast leads many national lists for culture. It is the only Northern Ireland organisation ranked in the UK top 50 medium companies. Staff report 86% positive experience compared with 54% in typical firms. Its team emphasises engineering quality and wellbeing awards. The firm also prioritises collaborative problem solving and staff development.

Kainos is another standout with strong employee satisfaction scores. Glassdoor data shows median pay around £60k and a 4.2 rating locally. Allstate Northern Ireland and Citi anchor the Belfast tech scene with large teams. Research notes global names like Citi and Allstate work alongside indigenous firms. Foreign investment has grown on the basis of skills and infrastructure. Both firms offer clear career paths and early talent programmes.

Professional services giants also score highly for development. PwC and Deloitte offer structured training and flexible working in Belfast. Deloitte leads the Best Managed Companies Awards with Bank of Ireland. EY provides strong mentorship and clear progression for graduates.



Novosco and Version 1 are praised for supportive teams and learning culture. First Derivatives and CME Group provide specialist fintech careers with international reach. These employers combine high skill work with good work life balance.

Indigenous manufacturers prove that great culture exists outside technology. A mineral processor and a building façade manufacturer and a waste management company recently joined the best managed list. Kilwaughter Minerals from Larne and Clarke from Ballymena

and Re-Gen Waste in Newry all earned that title. These firms highlight investment in safety and long term careers. Henderson Group which owns Spar stores is recognised for local progression. Moy Park in Craigavon offers stability and strong team support in food production.

Health and public sector employers feature strongly too. Almac Group in Craigavon is a life sciences leader with global reach. Glassdoor data shows competitive pay between £29k and £38k for many roles there. Randox Laboratories in Antrim

invests heavily in science and wellbeing. NI Water won best employee experience programme at recent industry awards. Thales won best apprenticeship scheme and supports early talent in the same awards.

What unites these twenty is people first leadership. They offer learning plans and flexible hours and genuine recognition. Many have been recognised by Great Place to Work and Sunday Times lists. For job seekers in Northern Ireland choice has never been better. Employers now compete on culture as well as salary.

160 micro and SME businesses to invest £3.6m in innovation

Invest Northern Ireland's Business Innovation Grant (BIG) is helping 160 SMEs and micro businesses to embrace innovation and boost productivity.

Developed and delivered in partnership with Innovate NI, BIG was launched in November 2024 to help micro-businesses, sole traders and SMEs develop and bring new products, services, or processes to market.

Making the announcement while meeting with Ballynahinch based parent teacher engagement platform company, Equipple, Alison Currie, Chief Development Officer at Invest NI said: "BIG is making innovation more

accessible for businesses by helping to remove financial barriers and supporting them to develop and bring new products, services, or processes to market.

The programme has also enabled us to reach a wider range of businesses, and to help more to take their first step on the innovation journey.

Alison Currie, Chief Development Officer, Invest NI "Since launching, the grant has supported 160 companies across Northern Ireland. These businesses are planning to invest a total of £3.6m to drive innovation, increase productivity and strengthen the growth ambitions of their businesses.

"The programme has also enabled us to reach a wider range of businesses, and to help more to take their first step on the innovation journey."

Invest NI has offered the

160 companies £2.3m of financial support through BIG.

Equipple is a software platform that automates parent-teacher meeting scheduling and pupil data management. The company successfully applied to BIG in 2024.

Reflecting on the impact of BIG on his businesses, Stuart Henry, co-founder of Equipple said: "BIG has been instrumental in helping us commercialise our platform for market. As a small business, it can be challenging to dedicate the time and resources needed to do this. The funding has enabled us to gather customer feedback and develop new features that our customers desire. We have also been able to build relationships with schools by attending EdTech events to gain valuable insights directly from educators and parents. The grant has given us the



Pictured (L-R) are Alison Currie, Chief Development Officer, Invest NI and Stuart Henry, co-founder of Equipple.

confidence and capability to move from being a promising start-up to a sustainable, growth-focused company, giving us a strong foundation for future opportunities across the UK and other international markets.

BIG has helped business in multiple sectors across Northern Ireland such as digital and creative technologies, advanced manufacturing and life and health sciences.

Alison Currie added:

"SMEs are the backbone of our economy. Often based in the heart of communities across Northern Ireland, they make a significant contribution to local prosperity, job creation and economic growth. By supporting SMEs to invest in innovation, we are strengthening their competitiveness, helping them seize new opportunities and laying the groundwork for sustainable growth right across the region.

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Go Succeed and Young Enterprise NI scheme

Northern Ireland’s enterprise support service Go Succeed and Young Enterprise NI are teaming up for a second year to inspire young people across the region to explore entrepreneurship through their ‘Future Founders’ programme.

Delivered in partnership with all 11 councils across Northern Ireland and the region’s six further education colleges, the Future Founders programme launched in September 2025 and reached more than 2,500 young people during its first year.

The programme is designed to encourage young people to take their first steps into entrepreneurship, building the confidence, skills and mindset they need to turn their ideas into opportunities and become part of the next generation of business leaders.

Future Founders is delivered through three key stages: an introduction to entrepreneurship, an

Innovation Camp and an Entrepreneurship Hub. Through these sessions, participants are given the opportunity to explore what it means to be an entrepreneur, develop their own ideas, work collaboratively to solve challenges and gain practical insight into starting and running a business.

During its first year, students heard directly from entrepreneurs and business leaders, who shared their own experiences of starting and growing a business, the challenges they faced and the lessons they learned along the way.

Mayor, Alderman Thomas Gordon of Mid and East Antrim, which is leading the programme

on behalf of Go Succeed, said:

“We are delighted to see Future Founders return for a second year following the fantastic response to the programme in its first year.

“The feedback we received from both students and educators was excellent and demonstrated just how much potential there is among young people across our communities.

“We know there are many young people with brilliant ideas and entrepreneurial ambition, but they may not always have the confidence, knowledge or support to know where to start. Programmes like Future Founders play an important role in giving

young people those first opportunities to explore their potential, develop practical skills and see entrepreneurship as a realistic and exciting career path.

“We look forward to welcoming even more young people to the programme this year and seeing the ideas, creativity and ambition they bring with them.”

Future Founders will take place on campuses across all six further education colleges in Northern Ireland: Belfast Metropolitan College, North West Regional College, Northern Regional College, South Eastern Regional College, South West College and Southern Regional College.

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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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just £49, including ferry travel and luggage, the Belfast–Glasgow Express delivers outstanding value. With no hidden costs and flexible travel options, passengers can pick and mix dates and times to suit their plans—making it ideal for a spontaneous spring getaway or a longer city break.

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.

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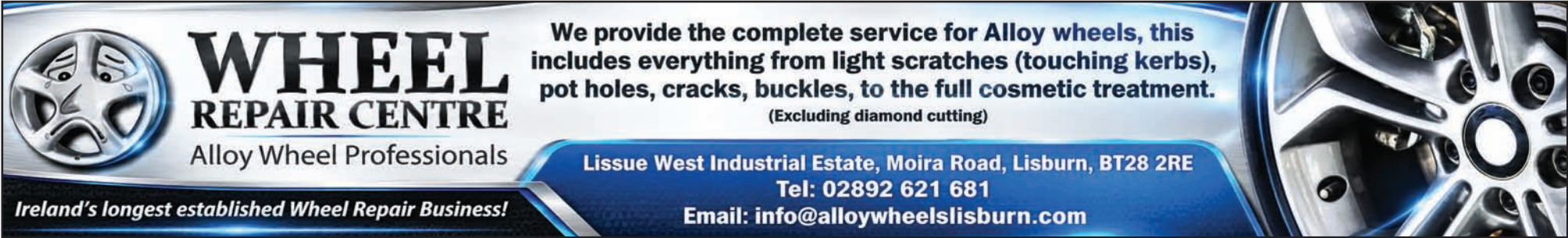
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AUTUMN MOTORING GUIDE

Autumn brings stunning golden landscapes but also introduces treacherous driving conditions.

Sharper chills, fallen leaves and sudden downpours test both drivers and vehicles. Preparing your car beforehand ensures safety throughout this unpredictable transition period. Routine maintenance becomes critical as temperatures drop. According to the RAC, battery failures spike dramatically during colder months as heating and lights draw extra power. Drivers should test their battery strength early to avoid unexpected breakdowns on chilly mornings. Tyres also require urgent attention before wet weather sets in. The AA recommends maintaining a tread depth

well above the legal 1.6 mm limit to guarantee proper grip. Checking tyre pressure regularly is equally vital because cooler air causes pressure drops. Visibility drops significantly during autumn due to shorter daylight hours and low sun glare. Drivers should clean windshields thoroughly inside and out to eliminate streaks that worsen glare. The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency advises replacing worn wiper blades immediately if they smear water across the glass. Keeping screenwash topped up with a suitable winter additive prevents fluid from freezing on frosty mornings. Checking that all exterior bulbs operate correctly ensures you remain visible to other road users. Fallen leaves pose a hidden hazard that many motorists underestimate.

Damp leaves create a slick surface with traction comparable to ice. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents warns drivers to reduce speed when approaching leaf-covered bends. Sudden braking on wet foliage can easily cause skid risks and loss of control. Clearing leaves from the base of the windscreen prevents blocked air intakes and drainage channels. Navigating heavy rain and sudden autumn floods requires patient driving technique. Entering standing water at high speed risks severe engine damage and aquaplaning. National Highways urges drivers to double their stopping distance on wet surfaces. Extending the gap to the vehicle ahead provides vital extra time to react to hazards. When driving



through large puddles, choose the highest point of the road and move slowly in a low gear. Low autumn sun creates blinding glare that severely impairs forward vision. Keeping a clean pair of sunglasses in your glovebox helps maintain clear sight during early morning commutes. Drivers must slow down immediately if dazzled rather than continuing blindly forward. Keeping your distance from cyclists and pedestrians remains essential as poor light makes vulnerable road users harder to spot. By performing basic vehicle checks and adapting driving habits, motorists can safely navigate autumn roads. Thorough preparation prevents costly mechanical repairs and protects everyone on the road.

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A Quiet Revolution: Power Without Diesel

Electric farm transport has moved from prototype to paddock in 2026. The headline launch is Can-Am's first electric utility ATV, the Outlander Electric.

It offers 50hp and a near silent ride for early morning checks.

John Deere has also recently added new lithium-ion Gator electric UTVs with all-day power. At Lamma 2026 HiSun revealed the Stryker electric UTV with cameras and power steering. The sector is broadening fast with more credible battery-electric buggies now available. Fendt also showcased battery, AI and autonomous tech at Agritechnica. For 2026 the Ultimate Guide to tractors lists a mainstream electric model for the first time. British start-ups like Munro in Scotland are building rugged electric 4x4s for farm



use. Opportunities centre on home-grown energy and lower running costs. NFU and Greenwatt are linking farm renewables to vehicle-to-grid trials. Solar on sheds can charge ATVs and small loaders without selling cheap to the grid. Tax helps too as electric ATVs qualify for 100% annual investment allowance. That relief can offset higher purchase prices over two or three seasons. Quiet operation reduces stress for livestock and neighbours. Many farms report lower than all-day fieldwork. Farmers considering a switch should trial a UTV on existing routes. Measure actual mileage, load and charge time against diesel use. Speak to dealers about battery warranties and local service cover. Electric will not replace every diesel yet but it is finding its place. Limitations remain stark for larger tractors. Weak rural networks can struggle with fast charging and this remains a key challenge for V2G trials. Range and weight are concerns when hauling feed or towing trailers uphill. Battery replacement cost and resale values are still uncertain. For now electric suits yard work, fencing and stock checks rather than all-day fieldwork. Farmers considering a switch should trial a UTV on existing routes. Measure actual mileage, load and charge time against diesel use. Speak to dealers about battery warranties and local service cover. Electric will not replace every diesel yet but it is finding its place.

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RENAULT 5 TURBO 3E AND TWINGO E-TECH ELECTRIC WIN AT CAR GENIUS AWARDS

Renault’s latest electric models have come top of the class at the inaugural CAR Genius Awards, with the spectacular Renault 5 Turbo 3E named ‘Idea of the Year’ and the new Renault Twingo E-Tech electric crowned ‘Small Car of the Year’.

The two awards recognise very different expressions of Renault’s approach to electric cars. Renault 5 Turbo 3E turns one of the brand’s most celebrated performance icons into a phenomenal 555 hp electric ‘mini-supercar’, while Twingo E-Tech electric brings clever technology, character and accessible pricing to the heart of the small-car market. Created by the extended editorial team at CAR, the new Genius Awards recognise “innovative thinking, brilliantly implemented”, celebrating standout ideas across the industry. Renault 5 Turbo 3E praised for performance and

concept Renault 5 Turbo 3E secured the ‘Idea of the Year’ title after impressing the judges with both its extreme performance and the ambition of bringing such an uncompromising car to production. Reimagining the spirit of the legendary Renault 5 Turbo and Turbo 2 of the 1980s, Renault 5 Turbo 3E combines dramatic retro-futuristic design with cutting-edge electric performance. Two rear-mounted in-wheel motors produce a combined 555 hp and 4,800 Nm of torque, making it the most powerful road-going Renault ever created. Custom-made to order and priced from £140,000, Renault 5 Turbo 3E is limited

to 1,980 individually numbered examples, referencing the year in which the original Renault 5

Turbo was launched. Reservations are open now, with customers able to select from an extensive range

of exterior liveries, interior materials and finishes. At the other end of the electric-car

spectrum, Renault Twingo E-Tech electric was named ‘Small Car of the Year’, with CAR praising

the personality, value and sense of occasion it brings to an increasingly important part of the market. With its bright green paintwork and expressive, wide-set headlights, Twingo E-Tech electric has already earned the nickname “Le Frog”. Its cheerful design is combined with a compact, city-friendly footprint and modern electric technology, creating a small car designed to be as useful and accessible as it is characterful. Targeting a starting price below £20,000, Twingo E-Tech electric offers a WLTP driving range of up to 163 miles* from its LFP battery and is powered by a lively 60 kW electric motor.

Features associated with larger cars include One Pedal driving and the availability of the OpenR Link multimedia system with Google built-in (depending on version). Customers keen to secure early access can now purchase a Twingo R Pass for £100. This provides priority ordering ahead of the general public, exclusive model updates, a dedicated concierge service, a miniature Renault Twingo E-Tech electric model and a distinctive green Renault key cover. For more information about Renault Twingo E-Tech electric, visit: <https://www.renault.co.uk/electric-vehicles/twingo-e-tech-electric.html>

All-new Toyota Hilux now available with two-seat conversion

The all-new Toyota Hilux is now available as a two-seat model, offering more versatility and load-carrying capability for people wanting a pick-up that’s tailor-made to meet their business needs.

Launched earlier this year, the ninth generation of Toyota’s world-renowned Hilux is presented exclusively in a Double Cab body style, in line with the market’s strong preference. Customers now have the option of a new factory conversion that removes the three-seat bench from the rear section of the cabin and creates a large, flat and secure load area. Measuring 1,290mm wide and 640mm deep, it’s suitable for carrying tools and equipment, easily accessed via the Double Cab’s rear doors. The conversion in no way compromises performance, safety or standard equipment specifications. Hilux

also remains compatible with Toyota’s extensive range of accessories and customisation options. In addition to the convenience of extra load space, the conversion brings potential savings in ownership costs for business users. It also enables flat rate benefit-in-kind taxation and a 100 per cent plant and machinery allowance, where applicable. There’s further peace of mind with Toyota’s market-leading warranty which provides cover for up to 10 years or 100,000 miles, subject to an annual vehicle service at a qualifying Toyota workshop*. This latest development strengthens Hilux’s market appeal, founded on

its fundamental Quality, Durability and Reliability and its legendary ability to take the toughest driving environments in its stride. In line with Toyota’s multi-pathway approach to giving customers powertrain options that meet customers needs

and help reduce carbon emissions, the all-new Hilux range includes both a Diesel 48V engine and a battery electric system. The BEV version has been designed and engineered to ensure authentic strong performance, with permanent all-wheel drive and the ability to tackle

a wide range of off-road conditions, including wading through water up to 700mm deep. Commercial vehicle on-the-road prices (excluding VAT) are from £36,815 for the Diesel 48V and £49,356 for the battery

electric model, including a £5,000 discount funded by the Government’s OZEV large electric van grant. *Terms and conditions apply; for details visit <https://www.toyota.co.uk/owners/toyota-warranty>.



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Spotting Household Electrical Danger Signs

According to Electrical Safety First, electrical faults cause over half of domestic fires in the United Kingdom. Recognising early warning signs prevents property damage and protects residents from severe electric shocks.

Frequent circuit breaker trips indicate severe circuit overloads or short circuits within underlying wiring. Guidance from the London Fire Brigade highlights that flickering lights or buzzing switches reveal loose electrical connections inside fittings. Heat and discolouration offer vital visual clues of dangerous overheating. Sockets must never feel warm to touch. Brown scorch marks indicate arcing behind plasterwork and a fishy chemical odour signals melting insulation inside switch boxes. Physical defects and unusual sensations demand immediate attention. Wobbly



sockets loosen internal wire terminals over time. Reports from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service stress that tingling sensations when touching appliances signal critical earthing faults. When identifying any concerning symptoms, immediate action remains essential. Unplug affected appliances and switch off power at the main consumer unit. Always instruct a registered electrician to conduct thorough safety checks before restoring electricity.

LIGHTS OUT? BE READY

Winter storms can cut power with little warning and a dark cold house is no fun. A small kit kept in one easy place saves stress and keeps you safe.

Build it gradually and add one item at a time when you do your weekly shop. Start with light and information. Put together an emergency kit in a backpack containing battery operated torches with one for each member of the family. Include spare batteries and a battery powered radio and a phone power bank. Choose bulbs that have lithium batteries that charge on your electricity supply and will remain illuminated for several hours in the event of a power cut. Keep candles and matches as backup but never leave them burning alone. Next sort food and warmth. What should be in a household emergency kit includes long-life food and water and a torch and batteries and a wind-up or



battery radio. Add warm layers and blankets and copies of key documents and essential medication. A flask of hot water helps and a camping stove can make tea safely. Keep some cash handy as card terminals and ATMs and online banking can fail in a power cut. Plan what to do when lights go out. Here is a

handy checklist you can refer to so you know what to do when there is no electricity. Locate your torch and power cut survival kit if you have one and check it is a power cut and not a tripped fuse. Report the power cut to your network distributor. Store the number now in your mobile phone with the

name Power cut. Include a list of emergency contact numbers as a paper copy incase your phone loses power. Include essential medication and a first aid kit and backup power for medical equipment if needed. Also essential medication and a first aid kit.

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Waking Up To Wet Windows?

If you wake to dripping windows every winter morning you are not alone. Condensation forms when warm moist air touches a cold surface like window glass.

In winter this is worse because glass stays much colder while heating and daily life create more moisture inside.

The problem is simple physics. Cooking and showering and drying clothes indoors all add vapour to the air. When that moisture has nowhere to go it settles on the coldest surface in the home which is often your windows. That is why condensation appears in the morning and why only interior glass is wet. Condensation issues always increase during winter when external temperatures are low and internal temperatures tend to be high.

Left alone it causes more than a wet sill. Lots of condensation can lead to dampness which can cause mould



growth on blinds and walls and ceilings. When a surface has condensation on it this can provide ideal conditions for growth of mould spores.

You can reduce it without major work. Open windows each day to ensure good airflow and try to do this in the morning. If your home is not

well ventilated that moisture settles on cold surfaces and eventually causes mould and damp. Use extractor fans when cooking or bathing and dry clothes outside whenever you can. Wipe condensation off windows and surfaces each morning to stop moisture sitting.

Heat also helps. It is important to keep rooms heated to prevent condensation as this keeps water vapour from cooling too much. Keep heating on low and steady and keep trickle vents open. Doing this while keeping windows or vents open will help excess moisture escape

LOOK UP BEFORE THE STORM HITS

You do not need ladders to spot winter roof trouble. You can get an idea of your roof's condition with both feet on the ground by looking for obvious damage. A quick check now prevents leaks and costly repairs later.

Start with binoculars from the front and back garden. Scan from the ground with binoculars and check for cracked and slipped or missing tiles and slates. Often this can safely be undertaken from the ground using binoculars and you should look for any loose or missing tiles and cracks or signs of wear. Pay attention to ridges and valleys and around chimneys. A slipped slate or cracked ridge tile may not be obvious but one storm can worsen it.

Next look at gutters and downpipes. Blocked gutters and downpipes are a common cause of storm damage during the wettest months. Make sure your gutters are free from excess debris when you know a storm is coming to make sure any water drains correctly. You should also check from the ground for signs that your gutters are sagging and have them repaired or replaced. Look for debris on the ground that may have come from the roof as this signals loose material.

Do not forget inside. Once



it is safe visually inspect from the ground and look for damage to guttering and torn or missing roof tiles and debris. Take a look inside and see if there are any signs of water damage or leaks. Check the loft if you have one as this will likely be one of the first areas to show signs of damage. Preparing your roof is not only about aesthetics but about ensuring its durability to withstand the weight of torrential rain

and snow and ice.

If you spot anything book a roofer early. You do not need to climb up ladders to

keep an eye on your roof and simple checks can be done safely from ground level.

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Boiler Dead? Check This First

A cold house in winter is miserable and a boiler breakdown always feels urgent. Before calling out a gas engineer for a boiler breakdown carry out a few simple checks beforehand.

These quick checks can save a callout fee and get heat back faster.

Start with the basics that often get missed. Follow this checklist to diagnose the problem with your broken boiler. Check the electricity supply and check the gas or oil supply and check the water supply. Look at the fuse box and the boiler switch and make sure the gas meter has credit. Low pressure is a common cause so check the boiler pressure and top up if the gauge is below one bar.

Next check the controls. Check the thermostat and programmer and make sure timers have not reset after a power cut. Many modern units have a fault code display so check for boiler fault codes and note them for the engineer. Does the boiler have a reset button and if the boiler has a permanent pilot light has it been extinguished. Press reset once and wait to see if it relights.



In freezing weather check for frozen pipes as this stops the boiler firing. The condensate pipe outside often freezes and you can thaw it with warm water. Listen for gurgling and look for dripping. Clear the blockage and reset the boiler again.

If nothing works call a professional. Have

your boiler inspected and serviced by a Gas Safe registered engineer ideally before the cold weather kicks in. An annual service is part of healthy

boiler maintenance and will help reduce the risk of a breakdown when you need it the most. Regular checks clean main components and ensure the boiler is ready for use.



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The logo for Damien Craig Joinery is set against a dark blue background. At the top, the name "Damien Craig" is written in a large, white, serif font, with "Joinery" below it in a slightly smaller, matching serif font. A thin white horizontal line separates the name from the tagline "TAKING CARE OF ALL SERVICES", which is in a smaller, white, sans-serif, all-caps font. Below the tagline is a circular icon containing a white crossed hammer and chisel. Underneath the icon is another thin white horizontal line, followed by the text "TYPES OF WORK:" in a small, white, sans-serif, all-caps font. Below this is the phrase "COVERING ALL TYPES OF JOINERY WORK" in a medium-sized, white, sans-serif, all-caps font. At the bottom, a white rounded rectangle contains a telephone handset icon on the left and the text "CONTACT NUMBER:" followed by the large, bold, white, sans-serif number "077 0332 0111".



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