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Issue 86 - Belfast BT4 • BT5 • BT16

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Health Minister Mike Nesbitt with kinship carers. L-R Ruth McGuigan; Scot Hamilton; Anita Montgomery; Thomas Spence; Tracey McGuire; Brenda Slowey; Health Minister Mike Nesbitt; Kerrylee Weatherall, Interim Executive Director of Social Work.

NI'S FIRST KINSHIP CARE CELEBRATION WEEK

Health Minister Mike Nesbitt has paid tribute to the compassion and commitment of kinship foster carers at an event marking Northern Ireland's first Kinship Care Celebration Week.

The focus of the week is to recognise and show gratitude to kinship foster carers who provide such positive experiences for the children in their care, often in difficult circumstances.

Kinship Care is an arrangement where a child who cannot be cared for by their parents is placed by a

Health & Social Care Trust with a relative or family friend.

"Kinship care is a specialised type of care for a child which has unique strengths. It is a fundamental cornerstone of the children's care system in Northern Ireland," the Minister said.

"Kinship foster carers open their homes and their lives to children who need safety, stability, and security. You are the relatives, the grandparents, the older siblings, the aunts and uncles, and the close family friends who step up and make a real difference to so many young people in

our community.

"This week we want to say a huge thank you for all that you do. You embody the core values of compassion and commitment."

Continued on page 4

Translink fares frozen

Infrastructure Minister Liz Kimmins has confirmed that Translink fares will remain unchanged for a second year in a row, despite significant financial pressures across the public transport system.

The decision comes at a time when households are facing rising fuel and living costs and when public transport continues to play a vital role in helping people get to work, education and essential services.

Minister Kimmins said: "In the current context of rising fuel and oil prices, I do not believe it would be right to increase public transport fares and place further pressure on workers and families. Many people rely on buses and trains every day and keeping fares stable helps provide some certainty at a very challenging time."

The Minister acknowledged that the decision was taken

against a difficult funding backdrop: "I am fully aware of the financial pressures facing Translink and the wider public sector. This is an extremely constrained budget environment and there are no easy choices. Freezing fares for a second year has required careful consideration."

Minister Kimmins also stressed that she will continue to engage closely with Translink as the financial situation evolves. She said: "I will keep working with Translink to manage these pressures responsibly and to ensure the best possible services within the funding available."

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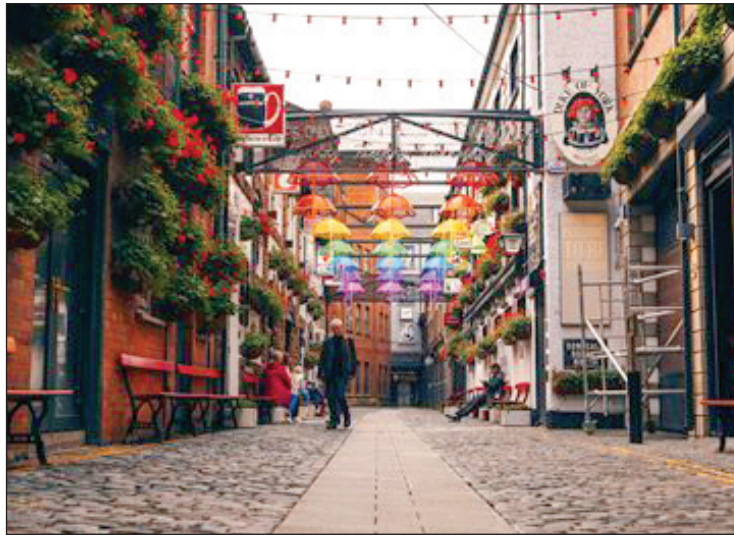
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Supplementary planning guidance agreed for historic areas

Belfast City Council's Planning Committee has agreed two Supplementary Planning Guidance masterplans identifying 'Development Opportunity Areas' in the city centre's Cathedral and Northeast Quarter, and Sailortown, Greater Clarendon and City Quays.

The Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) supports and clarifies policies included in council's Local Development Plan (LDP). It is non-statutory planning guidance, intended to be read in conjunction with the existing planning framework, as a guide to developers, communities and local representatives and to assist in assessing planning proposals.

Councillor Ryan Murphy, Chair of Belfast City Council's Planning Committee, said: "This is all about guiding the regeneration of key parts of the city. It's our intention that these SPGs will encourage a greater focus on placemaking and heritage as we seek to attract investment in housing and mixed-use developments to support our Belfast Agenda objectives. They will be material in determining relevant planning applications in both areas and will provide important direction for developers and the wider community about how the Council would like to see these areas developed



in the future. "These documents have been developed with real care and consideration, taking on board public consultation feedback. They provide a clear and comprehensive masterplan approach to the future development of both the Sailortown, Greater Clarendon and City Quays areas and the Cathedral and Northeast quarter of the city

centre - areas which hold great historic significance and exciting potential." In other business at its meeting this evening, the Planning Committee approved permanent change of use for Common Market in Cathedral Quarter, from warehouse and offices to public house and entertainment venue/events space including a street food market. It also granted

planning permission for the construction of a new three storey Sports Hall, Gymnasium and PE Facility and footbridge connecting to an existing GAA playing field at St Mary's Christian Brothers Grammar School on the Glen Road. For more information on the council's Local Development Plan (LDP), go to www.belfastcity.gov.uk/ldp

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April is Rosacea Awareness Month —

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The clinic offers a comprehensive suite of services designed to address a variety of concerns. These include laser hair removal, tattoo removal, carbon facials, and SPMU (Semi-Permanent Makeup) removal. Omorphia is particularly noted for its inclusive approach; transgender and PCOS (Polycystic Ovary Syndrome) recognizing the significant impact these procedures can have on a person's confidence and quality of life.

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Beyond laser technology, the clinic utilizes advanced Cryopen therapy for the removal of warts and skin tags, and offers micro-needling to target wrinkles and pigmentation. As an exclusive stockist of the award-winning vegan skincare range Pestle & Mortar, Sophie also provides personalized consultations to help clients find the perfect facial routine for their unique skin type.



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Continued from page 1

Minister Nesbitt visited Belfast Trust Kinship Foster Care offices where he met social work staff from the kinship care team and a number of kinship foster carers, including Thomas Spence. Mr Spence has been a kinship carer in the Belfast area for the last two years.

"I have had tremendous support from the Kinship care team and this week is so important as it gives kinship carers due recognition," Mr Spence said.

"Everybody's circumstances are different and this week has been an opportunity to get our voices across and to be heard."

Eimear Hanna, Belfast Trust Head of Service, Adoption and Fostering Services, said: "We are so delighted to be celebrating our first ever Kinship Care week in Northern Ireland.

"As the Belfast Area has the highest number of Kinship carers across the region, this is a particularly important celebration for us. Due to families stepping up in challenging times we are able to keep our children close to their family, schools, friends, clubs and everything that is important to them. Things that most of us are lucky enough to take for granted.

"We want to extend our gratitude and thanks for everything they do to support our children."

Belfast City Council highlights measures towards climate resilience on Earth Day

Belfast has retained its A-grade status for climate action for the fourth year in a row and remains the only city in Ireland, and one of only 20 cities in the UK, to achieve the ranking.

The internationally renowned accolade, from the Carbon Disclosure Project, recognises the multiple climate initiatives supported by Belfast City Council and the bold steps it has taken to cut carbon emissions in line with the city's net zero targets.

And, with the recent Earth Day celebrations themed around 'Our Power, Our Planet', the council is highlighting the progress made towards change, and encouraging residents to make small daily changes which,

together, can help support our environment city-wide.

After becoming the first organisation to sign up to receive green electricity from a new wind farm at Ballyutoag in the Belfast Hills, over 200 council venues, including City Hall, Belfast Zoo and leisure and community centres city-wide, now receive energy from renewable sources.

The council has also embraced the potential of solar power. Solar panels on the roof of Donegall Pass Community Centre now power the building, and all activities held at the centre. Since the panels were switched on in March, the building has been effectively off-grid for 80% of the time.

This pilot project, along with other smaller solar panel installations in locations like the Grow NI community garden in the

Waterworks, are also being used to test the feasibility of expanding the approach to other council properties.

Bin lorries and other council vehicles are also becoming more sustainable too, with 235 of the 410-strong fleet now running on Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil (HVO). HVO is an odourless, biodegradable, low carbon, zero sulphur fuel manufactured from waste renewable materials such as rapeseed and sunflower oil. It eliminates up to 90% of CO2 emissions when compared to fossil diesel and significantly reduces nitrogen oxide (NOx), particulate matter (PM) and carbon monoxide (CO) emissions.

A further 31 vehicles run on electric, all of which release zero CO2 emissions into the atmosphere, alongside one hybrid vehicle.



Residents are also being supported to do their part, through the Belfast Net Zero Neighbourhood Framework which asked people to imagine what it would be like to live in a net zero neighbourhood. The now completed UP2030 project concentrated on an inner-

city area taking in the Linen Quarter, Sandy Row, Barrack Street, Donegall Pass and the Market, working with local community and city partners to investigate opportunities around more energy efficient homes, trees and green spaces, safer walking and cycling

routes to encourage active travel, cut emissions, save energy and boost resilience to climate change. The learning from this project will now be used to inform engagement with other neighbourhoods across the city as we move towards our net-zero goals.

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SO LONGA KILTONGA – COOL FM UNLOCKS THE QUAYS TO THE CITY LIVE ON AIR

After 50 years broadcasting from its original home in Kiltonga, Bauer Audio Northern Ireland has marked the end of an era in fitting style, taking the show on the road.

To celebrate the move to its new headquarters in City Quays, Cool FM's Breakfast Show, hosted by Pete Snodden, Paulo Ross and Rebecca McKinney, broadcast the move live on air from the iconic Cool bus, travelling from its long-standing base at Kiltonga (Newtownards) to the station's stunning new city-

centre base. The live roadshow held special significance for the station, marking Bauer Audio NI's final ever broadcast from Kiltonga, the site that has been home to generations of presenters, producers, journalists, and the backdrop to some of Northern Ireland's most recognisable radio moments

over the past five decades. Listeners tuned in as the breakfast crew swapped the studio walls for a set of wheels, sharing live updates, behind the scenes moments and plenty of on-air banter as they journeyed into Belfast, bringing the audience along for a historic final send-off. Their red-carpet

arrival at City Quays, officially unlocked the next chapter for Cool FM, Downtown Radio and Downtown Country in the heart of the city. The move signals a significant investment in the future of broadcasting in Northern Ireland, placing Bauer Audio NI at the centre of the region's growing media and business district.

Pete Snodden added: "Broadcasting the move live from the bus, was as chaotic as you'd imagine – we're used to giving the traffic and travel updates – not stuck in the middle of them!" "Saying goodbye to Kiltonga was a big moment for all of us, but pulling up at City Quays, mics still live, really felt like the start of a new adventure. Same breakfast show, same brilliant craic, just with a simply stunning view."

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BELFAST LOUGH SET TO COME ALIVE WITH GP14 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS 2026

Belfast Lough is set to come alive with over 100 boats from across the world as the spectacular GP14 World Championships sail into Northern Ireland in August 2026 - promising a week-long celebration of world-class racing, coastal energy and true regatta spirit.

Hosted by the Royal North of Ireland Yacht Club, and supported by Ards and North Down Borough Council, the championship will take place from 8th to 14th August 2026, welcoming elite sailors, families and supporters from across the globe to one of the UK and Ireland's most iconic sailing waters.

Such is the demand for the event, entries sold out in record time, with a waiting list now in place - a clear reflection of both the global popularity of the GP14 class and the appeal of Belfast Lough as a premier sailing destination. Competitors will range in age from just 14 to over 80 years old, showcasing the unique inclusivity and lifelong appeal of the sport.

From colourful sails lining the horizon to the buzz of crews preparing dockside, Belfast Lough and Holywood town, will transform into a vibrant international Regatta - a showcase not just of competitive sailing, but of Northern Ireland's warm hospitality, stunning coastline and proud maritime heritage.

Lindsay Nolan,



Gerry Reid, Event Director at Royal North of Ireland Yacht Club is pictured with, Cllr Gillian McCollum, Mayor of Ards and North Down Borough Council and Lindsay Nolan, Commodore RNIYC.

Commodore of the Royal North of Ireland Yacht Club, said: "We are incredibly proud to bring the GP14 World Championships to Belfast Lough in 2026.

"This event will be a true celebration of sailing - not just for our club, but for Northern Ireland as a whole. We're looking forward to welcoming competitors and visitors from around the world and giving them an unforgettable experience

both on and off the water." Beyond the racing, the event is expected to deliver a significant boost to local tourism and the wider economy, with visitors exploring everything from seaside towns and coastal walks to the vibrant culture and hospitality of the region.

With a packed schedule of racing, social events and onshore celebrations planned, the GP14 World Championships 2026 will

be more than a sporting event - it will be a moment for Northern Ireland to shine on the global stage.

Further announcements, including event highlights and visitor information, will be released in the coming months.

Keep up to date with event timings or if you would like to offer your volunteer services visit - <https://rniyc.org> manager@rniyc.org Tel: +44 (0)28 9042 8041

GOLFNOW BELFAST SPORTS AWARDS 2026

IBF World Welterweight Champion Lewis Crocker was among the winners in this year's GolfNow Belfast Sports Awards.

The awards ceremony, honouring the city's athletes, teams, coaches and volunteers, took place at City Hall recently, and brought together sports clubs and governing bodies to look back at an action-packed year of sport.

The gala event is part in Belfast's European City of Sport 2026 celebrations, delivered by Belfast City Council, GLL and ACES – Worldwide Capitals and Cities of Sport Federation.

Accepting his award for Sports Personality of the Year (Male) from his training base in Australia, Crocker paid tribute to the city's boxing scene and acknowledged the vital role of coaches and volunteers in his journey to sporting success.

Sharing the spotlight was Caitlin Fryers from Immaculata Boxing Club who picked up the prize for Sports

Personality of the Year (Female), fresh from her own recent medal win at Stranja, Europe's oldest boxing tournament, and ahead of this summer's Commonwealth Games.

Two more athletes were also inducted into Belfast City Council's Sporting Hall of Fame – Arlene Boyles from Pegasus Hockey Club and, posthumously, Kevin Morgan from Olympian Triathlon Club.

The other GolfNow Belfast Sports Awards winners were:

Pathways to Club (sponsored by Active Belfast) – Jordan Smith from Savage Martial Arts

Healthy Lifestyle (sponsored by Active Belfast) – Jim McGlinchey from Shaftesbury Healthy Living Centre and Brain Injury Matters

Young Aspiring Coach of the Year



(sponsored by GLL) – Jordan McKeown from Hawarden Tennis Club

Senior Coaches of the Year (sponsored by GLL) – Martin Lindsay from Immaculata Boxing Club and Phil Gunning from Belfast Trojans

Female Coach of the Year (sponsored by GLL) – Claire Dowdall from Queen's University Camogie Club

Disability Coach of

the Year (sponsored by GLL) – David McKay from Malone Tornadoes Mixed Ability Rugby Club

Volunteer of the Year (sponsored by Belfast City Council) – Jonathan McClelland from Berlin Swifts and Swiftettes

Junior Team of the Year (sponsored by GolfNow) – North Belfast Harriers Athletics Club

Senior Team of the

Year (sponsored by GolfNow) – Phoenix Basketball Club

Young Athletes of the Year (sponsored by Sports Medicine NI) – Chester Enriquez from Origin Gymnastics Club and Yeva Gavrylova from Cheol Taekwondo Academy

Disability Athletes of the Year (sponsored by Commonwealth Games NI) – James MacSorley and Katie Morrow

Photography exhibition exploring identity, belonging, and cultural heritage

Communities Minister Gordon Lyons has launched a landmark photography exhibition exploring identity, belonging, and cultural heritage in Northern Ireland at the Belfast Exposed gallery.

The BIEN (British? Irish? Either? Neither?) programme of exhibitions at the Belfast Exposed gallery has been developed in partnership with the Office of Identity and Cultural Expression (OICE).

OICE and Belfast Exposed will deliver an accompanying programme of readings, performances and talks.

The Minister said: "I am pleased to launch this exhibition today. Photography is an art form that has a unique role to play in how communities, identity and culture is recorded.

"These three interconnected exhibitions provide us with an opportunity to bring together a diverse range of artists and subjects, all of whom are proud to call Northern Ireland home.

"This is exactly the kind of initiative that enables us to celebrate together the diversity that makes Northern Ireland a welcoming place for everyone. I encourage everyone to come along and see it for themselves."

Dr Katy Radford, Director of the Office of Identity and Cultural Expression said:



Communities Minister Gordon Lyons (centre) pictured with Dr Katy Radford, Director of the Office of Identity and Cultural Expression (OICE) (L) and Deirdre Robb, Chief Executive, Belfast Exposed (R) at the opening of BIEN – British? Irish? Either? Neither?.

"The Office is delighted to work with others who see culture and heritage as ways to celebrate being from Northern Ireland. We exist to promote a positive sense of belonging and community cohesion providing opportunities to celebrate together, in an open and respectful manner."

Deirdre Robb, Chief Executive of Belfast Exposed, added: "For over forty years Belfast Exposed has created a space where photography can explore the social and cultural realities of Northern Ireland. BIEN continues that tradition by bringing together artists

whose work reflects the diversity of identities that shape our society today. Each artist approaches the question of identity from a different perspective — through language, heritage, landscape, memory and lived experience.

"What unites them is a belief in photography's power to help us see one another more clearly. We are honoured to partner with OICE on a project that opens up new conversations about who we are, and how we understand each other."

For more information visit: <https://www.belfastexposed.org/>

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'RAIL COOL RULES' FOR SCHOOLS

Translink has partnered with Rail Safe Friendly, an accredited UK-wide programme, to help spread the vital message of rail safety in Northern Ireland. The new partnership also marks the launch of a new 'Rail Cool Rules' (RCR) campaign created by Translink and targeting P7 pupils.

With the primary aim of keeping young people safe when using or near the railway, the campaign brings rail safety to life through an animation video featuring Translink NI Railways employees plus engaging classroom activities.

The resources are now available for local primary schools to use in the classroom and cover the following 8 key topics: Platform Safety, Yellow Lines, Getting On & Off

Services, Objects On Tracks, Respect, Level Crossings, Construction Sites and Train Speed.

Stuart Heaton, Managing Director of Learn Live and Rail Safe Friendly, marked the milestone by saying:

"We're delighted to welcome Translink to the Rail Safe Friendly programme. This partnership reflects the rail industry's shared commitment to making railway safety education accessible to young people nationwide. We're excited to have Translink involved and look forward to continuing our work to help protect young people from the risks

of railway trespass."

Oakwood Integrated Primary School in Belfast is the first school in Northern Ireland to use Translink's Rail Cool Rules resources to complete the Rail Safe Friendly Programme and receive its Gold standard accreditation. Teacher Maria McKenna said:

"Our pupils enjoyed exploring the topic of rail safety using the Translink video resource and quiz activity to inspire further conversation about this important subject. Our school is situated near the railway line and 'Rail Cool Rules' is a quick



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and engaging way to raise awareness about safe and responsible behaviour when using train services, especially as pupils prepare to head into secondary level education. We would recommend other schools take part in the new campaign and bring rail safety into the classroom."

For further information visit www.translink.co.uk/railcoolrules and follow Translink socials #RailCoolRules.

Lyons invests £200,000 for repairs to Northern Ireland's historic churches

Communities Minister Gordon Lyons has announced £200,000 in funding towards the long term sustainability of Northern Ireland's historic church buildings.

The funding will be administered by the National Churches Trust (NCT) to help address a range of urgent structural and fabric repairs at four church buildings.

Minister Lyons said: "Since 2018 my Department has supported the National Churches Trust via the Historic Environment Fund and through Covid recovery funding. The work of the NCT has been vital for places of worship in Northern Ireland, ensuring that these important buildings are cared for long into the future.

"I am pleased to be able to announce further support of £200,000 from my Department for this year's grant programme."

The churches that will receive support are: Mount Merrion Parish Church (CoD), Belfast; Bloomfield Presbyterian Church, Belfast; Whiteabbey Presbyterian Church, Newtownabbey; and Seymour Street Methodist Church, Lisburn.

Claire Walker, Chief Executive of the National Churches Trust, said: "We are deeply grateful to the Department and Minister not only for this funding, but for their continued



Communities Minister Gordon Lyons (centre) pictured with (l-r) Kerry Rooney, National Churches Trust and Richard McChesney, Whiteabbey Presbyterian Church as the Minister announced £200,000 in funding towards the long term sustainability of Northern Ireland's historic church buildings

partnership and support over the past eight years, which has made a real and lasting difference to places of worship and the communities they serve.

"These grants will fund essential works to safeguard four historic buildings, helping to keep these churches open, safe and welcoming. Each project reflects the dedication of local congregations and volunteers who work

tirelessly to care for these important spaces.

"The National Churches Trust remains committed to supporting churches across Northern Ireland, and we look forward to continuing this work through our Medium and Large Grants programmes, helping even more places of worship to thrive at the heart of their communities."

Further information on these grant schemes and on

other sources of heritage funding is available at <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/topics/historic-environment/historic-environment-funding-grants>

Further information on the National Churches Trust's work in Northern Ireland including events and advice on maintenance is available at <https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/get-support-northern-ireland>.

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Cash Converters, Belfast: Providing a bargain shopping destination and selling service for 30 years!

Cash Converters Belfast has been a fixture of the city's High Street since it was established by founding Director Martin McGrath in September 1996, offering a unique blend of retail and financial services.

Located at 22 High Street, the branch is a reliable destination for all who are looking to either de-clutter their homes or hunt down a high-quality bargain. It operates six days a week, providing a consistent and professional presence for city-centre shoppers and those in need of immediate financial solutions.

The store's two retail floors are a diverse marketplace where the inventory changes daily. Shoppers can find everything from high-end jewellery and luxury watches to the latest gaming consoles and musical instruments. For those looking to sell, the store offers instant valuations and immediate cash payments for gold and all quality pre-owned goods.

Cash Converters, Belfast Manager Lee Cochrane says:

"Gold and silver jewellery are always in high demand. We currently have a fabulous selection of all types of jewellery in-store."



Beyond traditional retail, the branch specializes in flexible cash options like a Buyback service. This allows customers to sell an item for quick funds while retaining the option to repurchase it within twenty-eight days for the original price plus a small

administration fee. To make use of these buying and borrowing services, customers must provide a valid photo ID and proof of address dated within the last three months. The ten-strong Belfast team are noted for their efficiency and straightforward

approach, making the store a dependable choice for those who value speed and security. Whether you are searching for a rare find or managing a temporary budget gap, this branch remains one of the most versatile service providers in the heart of the city!

Specsavers Connswater celebrates 25 years of eye and hearing care with local customers

THE team at Specsavers Connswater is celebrating 25 years of caring for east Belfast and beyond's eyes and ears with a weekend of fun for customers.

Across the 29th and 30th May, the store will be welcoming customers to try their latest designer frames and sunglasses, then they can snap some sharable photos at the special photo booth that will be in-store.

Dispensing director, Lynsey Caldwell, who opened the practice back in 2001, says they want to bring their customers and patients into their celebrations as it's their loyalty that has kept them here over the years; "This is a big milestone for us as a business and as a team of healthcare experts. To be able to provide consistent and accessible eye and hearing care in our community and beyond for 25 years is very special for us. We have seen generations of families come through our doors, which is a huge privilege.

"We wanted to have a celebration that includes everyone, and



so on Friday 29th and Saturday 30th May, we would love our regulars to come along and be some of the first to try on our new designer frames and sunglasses and be the stars of the show with our Specsavers photo booth. The photographs will be sharable for social media, and can be printed out to bring home."

Customers can also

enter in-store giveaways to win a pair of designer sunglasses, says ophthalmic director, Paula Cunningham, who joined the practice in 2003; "It's our birthday but we want to give the gifts to our loyal customers, and celebrate the relationships we have built with them over the years. They trust us with their health, and our team of experts takes

that very seriously. However, we still plan to have a lot of fun for our celebration weekend!"

Specsavers Connswater is situated in Connswater Retail Park, beside Ulster Bank and McDonalds. Visit from 10am on 29th and 30th May to join the celebrations, or book an eye or hearing test via specsavers.co.uk/book/belfastconnswater.

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Harness the power of infrared heat for superior results and deep rejuvenation.



Our saunas provide powerful detoxification through sweating and flushing toxins from the body. This therapy is a great way to boost metabolism and calorie burn to support weight loss and overall health. Regular use leads to improved heart health and lower blood pressure and stronger immunity. You will notice glowing skin and better sleep and a renewed sense of vitality after every visit. A 30-minute session is available for £30.

Perfect for passive recovery and low-effort flexibility, our innovative lazy Yoga mats combine gentle support and Yoga-inspired design. These mats allow you to ease tension and enhance mobility without physical strain and serve as a perfect complement to our other treatments. Whether you are looking for a quick stretch or a way to amplify your spa session, these mats offer a unique way to recover. We offer 2 x 15-minute sessions for only £15.

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**SURE START EAST BELFAST
CELEBRATING
25 YEARS OF CONNECTION**

Established in 2001 and originally working in Inner East Belfast we have expanded to Tullycarnet, Cregagh, Ballybeen and Bloomfield SOA1 and SOA3. Originally led for 15 years by Geraldine O'Regan and the last 10 years have been led by Tracey Ripley McElvogue.

For 25 years, East Belfast Sure Start has been at the heart of the community— connecting children, parents and families with the support they need to thrive from the very beginning.

We are proud to have supported generations of families by:

- Strengthening early development
- Promoting family health and wellbeing
- Working alongside families to support children at home
- Building trusted connections



**Celebrating
25 years
2001-2026**

We work across 4 locations.
East Belfast Network Centre.
Early Years Centre and Parents and Children Centre based on Albertbridge Road
Carew Family Centre
Ballyoran, Ballybeen

We have grown with and alongside this every changing community, where many families still face everyday pressures, barriers and challenges. We have been listening to them, adapting in challenging times, innovating, continuously learning and connecting with others to ensure every child has the best possible start in life from the earliest days of pregnancy, we have walked alongside families, offering practical guidance, emotional support, and opportunities to build strong early bonds with their babies.

We have supported parents through; educational, peer and 1:1 support, getting ready for birth groups and pregnancy yoga.

This support has continued once baby has arrived with parent and baby groups, breastfeeding support, exercise classes, baby swim and massage.

We recognise that every adult in a child's life plays a fundamental role in their development and wellbeing. Our relationships with parents are successful because we foster a respectful, two-way communication and parents and practitioners really listen to each other. Our parents are valued and involved, and together we build trust, recognising that they are their child's first and most enduring educator.

From our peer support groups, stay and play sessions and parent and toddler groups, we promote parent's connections with other parents, services and the wider community, making their world feel more connected as a whole.

At Sure Start we recognise that each child is an individual with different skills, strengths and needs. To support children to flourish, we create environments and programmes that celebrate the uniqueness of each child and nurture their development. We recognise that there is no one right to play, move or communicate. We make children feel valued and give them a sense of belonging and we create children who are thinkers and doers instead of passive learners.

What began as a team of 8 has developed into a team of 40 with a vast range of skills, knowledge and experience. Elizabeth Dalton, Deputy Coordinator, Lisa Flynn, Family Support Lead, Lana Molloy, Early Years Lead, Honor Letman, Developmental Programme for 2 Year Olds Supervisor and Elaine Wilson, Developmental Programme for 2 Year Olds assistant all celebrate their 25th work anniversary this year which shows a lifetime commitment to the children of East Belfast.

The passion of our dedicated team is woven through every part of our impact. Their commitment to children and families is one of our greatest strengths. We pride ourselves on staying at the forefront of early years research, ensuring that our approach supports both the child's journey and the family's well-being. Our team share a common goal: ensuring every child and parent feels seen, heard, and supported. We combine years of professional expertise and training with a warm, nurturing approach.

As we celebrate our 25th Anniversary, we would like to thank the families, staff and partners who have been part of our journey—and we look forward to continuing these connections for many years to come. If you have a child aged between 0 and 4 years old and are interested in our services please connect with us.

East Belfast Sure Start Information & Services
55 Templemore Avenue, Belfast, BT5 4FP T: 028 9073 5686
E: admin@surestarteast.org.uk | W: www.eastbelfastsurestart.co.uk



"It takes a Village to raise a child" and we are so proud to be part of that Village for the children of East Belfast.



Ajendance NI: Inspiration, creativity and education!

Ajendance is a prominent dance company and performing arts school that has established itself as a cornerstone of the local creative community.

Founded on the principles of inspiration and creativity and education, the organization operates two primary studios in East Belfast and Banbridge. Led by Annika Drennan and Clare Montgomery, Ajendance nurtures talent across all ages and skill levels. The company prides itself on offering a welcoming environment where absolute beginners and aspiring professionals alike can explore their passion for movement and performance.

The curriculum at Ajendance is remarkably diverse and encompasses a wide range of styles to ensure every student finds their niche. Dancers can engage in foundation work for street styles such as Hip Hop and Locking and Popping, or they can pursue more classical training in Ballet and Tap and Modern Jazz. The school also integrates specialized programs like Acrobatic Arts and Progressing Ballet Technique and the "Triple Threat" sessions which combine singing and dancing and acting. This multidisciplinary approach is designed to develop well-rounded performers who are



equipped with the technical skills and the confidence required for the modern stage.

Beyond its role as a training facility, Ajendance has earned a reputation for excellence in the competitive arena. The school has produced numerous Northern Ireland and Ulster and All Ireland champions, as well as securing prestigious titles at the UDO World Championships. Their teams achieved first place in the UK at the SOAR Big Weekender, a testament to the dedication of both the instructors and

the students. These achievements serve as a platform for young dancers to gain exposure and many students have successfully transitioned into professional careers or gained admission to elite institutions such as Bird College, Shockout, Urdang, London Studios Centre and more.

The impact of the company extends far beyond the studio walls through significant community projects and professional collaborations. One of their most notable initiatives is "Project Dance NI," which is

a creative learning weekend that brings together dancers from across the region to learn from industry experts. Ajendance has also been featured prominently in the media and has participated in national projects like "Fly the Flag" for Human Rights Day and appeared on Sky Arts. By creating job opportunities and participating in high-profile events like the Spirit of Northern Ireland Awards, the company continues to champion the arts and provide a vital support system for the next generation of creative talent.

Carlisle House Substance Use Rehab Treatment Centre

For over three decades, Carlisle House has stood as a beacon of hope for individuals navigating the complexities of substance misuse. Established in 1992, this residential treatment centre provides a sanctuary for those seeking to build a life free from dependency.

At its core, Carlisle House employees a strength-based model, prioritizing respect, dignity, and compassion. Unlike traditional clinical settings, Carlisle House treatment programme is rooted in systemic practice, which focuses on people's strengths, their expertise, and locates the problems of substance use within the wider contexts of family, communities and society. We view recovery as a collaborative journey with peers and staff. This approach of itself challenges blame and stigma.

In employing the above model, we offer a comprehensive therapeutic programme that integrates a diverse range of evidence-based interventions including Individual & Group Therapy, Family Therapy,

Creative & Art Therapies, Eco-Therapy and Pharmacological Support. Beyond its primary residential treatment, Carlisle House extends its support through supported accommodation in North Belfast, to ensure that the transition back into independent living is met with the necessary structure and guidance to prevent relapse.

Post programme there are several different types of ongoing supports allowing ex-residents to stay connected and continue their personal growth in a safe environment.

You're Invited: Open Morning on May 26th 10.30-12.30pm.

To foster greater understanding and community ties, Carlisle House is hosting an Open Morning on the 26th of May from 10:30 AM to

12:30 PM.

This event is a vital opportunity for:

- Service Users and Families: To see the facilities firsthand and meet the compassionate team.

- Healthcare Professionals: To learn more about the referral process and the specific support pathways available.

The team encourages anyone interested in attending to contact them in advance to help with planning.

As part of its ongoing commitment to excellence, Carlisle House is currently recruiting Support Workers. They are looking for dedicated individuals who share their values of acceptance and respect to join their professional team. If you are passionate about

social care and want to make a tangible difference in people's lives, the centre invites you to apply.

Whether you are seeking help for yourself, a loved one, or are interested in a career in social witness, the doors of Carlisle House are open.

Helpline: 028 9032 8308 (Available 9:00 AM - 11:00 PM);

Email: carlislehouse@pcisocialwitness.org; Website: www.carlislehouse.org; Address: 2-4 Henry Place, Belfast, BT15 2BB

Charity No. NIC104483

Carlisle House is a service of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and is registered with the RQIA, serving adults from the Belfast and Northern Health and Social Care Trust areas.

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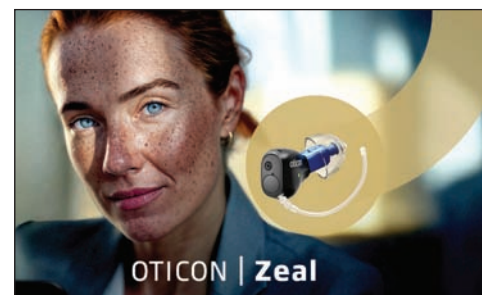
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Ajendance

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Step out of your comfort zone.. or stay stuck.

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A New Chapter for Theology in the Heart of Belfast

Belfast School of Theology is stepping confidently into a new season.

Now nearing the end of its first full academic year within the Stranmillis University College campus (the 4th move since its foundation in 1943), BST has not simply relocated. It has repositioned itself. What began as a move from the quiet familiarity of Glenburn House has become something far more significant: a renewed commitment to forming followers of Jesus for missional impact in the heart of the city.



At Stranmillis, BST now sits within Belfast's most dynamic academic corridor. Surrounded by students, ideas, and conversation, the school has become more visible, more accessible, and more connected than ever before. This is no longer a place set apart. It is a place set within.

That shift matters. Because theology was never meant to exist at a distance from real life. It is shaped in community, sharpened in discussion, and lived out in the everyday rhythms of work, study, and worship. In this new setting, BST is embracing that reality with fresh energy.

The past year has been one of rediscovery. Staff and students have adapted quickly, building a community that feels both grounded and forward-looking. The academic depth remains. The spiritual formation remains. But there is a new sense of momentum, shaped by proximity to the wider student world and the opportunities that come with it.

The space itself reflects that vision. Purpose-built facilities encourage collaboration, conversation, and shared learning. Informal moments matter just

as much as formal teaching, whether that is in the student centre, overlooking the campus, or in the everyday interactions that happen between lectures. The environment is not just functional. It is formative.

And beyond the building, the city becomes part of the classroom.

Coffee shops, libraries, churches, and communities all contribute to a learning experience that is integrated and alive. BST is not just teaching theology. It is equipping

people to live it.

As the first year in Stranmillis draws to a close, what is most striking is not just that the move has worked. It is that it has clarified the school's purpose.

BST exists to equip followers of Jesus through theological education and spiritual development within a vibrant academic and worshipping community. In this new location, that mission feels more tangible than ever.

The invitation is simple.

Study theology with us. Find out more at www.bst.ac.uk.

ACTIVE TIGER CHAMPIONSHIP ON MAY 24TH AT THE SHANKILL LEISURE CENTRE

UKTC Northern Ireland, a prominent branch of the United Kingdom Taekwon-Do Council, is dedicated to fostering a community of martial artists who embody the core tenets of the sport: Courtesy, Integrity, Perseverance, Self-Control, and Indomitable Spirit.

Under the leadership of Northern Ireland National Coach Mr. Leo Maguire, a VI Degree Master, the organisation provides a welcoming environment for students of all fitness levels and ages to improve their health, learn self-defence, and build lasting confidence. There are numerous centres for classes throughout the greater Belfast area.

UKTC Northern Ireland is hosting the Active Tiger Championship on May 24th at the Shankill Leisure Centre. This competition is specifically tailored for children aged five

to eight years old who are currently enrolled in the Active Tigers program.

The event is designed to give these young students a taste of the excitement of the ring and provide valuable experience in a controlled, positive atmosphere. To celebrate their participation and hard work, every child will take home a well-deserved medal, reinforcing the organization's commitment to making the competitive journey a rewarding and confidence-building experience for even the most junior


members.

The Active Tigers syllabus is carefully structured to instill discipline and respect while teaching essential Taekwon-Do skills in an age-appropriate manner. As students progress into the standard Taekwon-Do classes for ages nine and up, they continue to develop their physical abilities and mental fortitude through consistent training and grading. The curriculum ensures that all sessions are safe and approachable, welcoming beginners who may be starting their journey into

martial arts for the very first time. By focusing on personal growth and mutual respect, the instructors aim to help every participant reach their full potential both inside and outside the training hall.

Those interested in joining a class or learning more about the upcoming seminars and championships can visit the official website at taekwondo-ni.co.uk. For direct inquiries, potential members can contact Mr. Leo Maguire at 07891191494 or via email at taekwondoni@msn.com.

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Discover Glasgow the Easy Way with HANNON Coach & Sail

Planning a city break in Glasgow? Skip the airport queues and travel stress and choose the Belfast-Glasgow Express with HANNON Coach & Sail—a comfortable, hassle-free way to reach the heart of Scotland's largest city.

Now departing from the new Belfast Grand Central Station, this award-winning service offers a smooth coach-and-ferry journey straight into Glasgow city centre, making it the perfect alternative to flying. Already a firm favourite with seasoned travellers, the Belfast-Glasgow Express is proudly rated 5-Star on TripAdvisor.

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.

With a simple flat fare of 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.

"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).

Advanced Glaucoma Care in the heart of Royal Hillsborough: Glaucoma Laser

A new service has been launched in Affidea Hillsborough Private Clinic to help patients suffering from Glaucoma, under the care of Mr Jonathan Bonnar, Consultant Ophthalmic Surgeon with a Specialist interest in Advanced Cataract and Glaucoma Surgery.

Proven Benefits of Glaucoma laser

- up to 70% of patients did not need drops at 6 years.
- Less likelihood for glaucoma to progress than those taking drops.
- Less likelihood to require glaucoma surgery than those taking drops.
- Effects can last up to 6 years, and the procedure can safely be repeated if needed to try and keep you free from drops.

Data taken from a recent, extensive UK

study.

Unlike invasive eye surgery, this laser option:

- Causes no permanent tissue damage
- Has a low risk of complications
- Doesn't require incisions—return to normal activities the next day.

Who is it for?

SLT laser is now the NICE recommended first line treatment for open angle glaucoma and high eye pressure (OHT), in preference to drops. The majority of



patients with open angle glaucoma or OHT are eligible.

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Where the magic of childhood lives



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Headteacher Peter Chambers says that Hollywood Steiner school offers an alternative to mainstream education!

In a recent Best of Belfast podcast Peter discussed how the school has doubled in budget, size, and staff since 2020. He also highlighted that most people in Northern Ireland are unaware of alternative education options!

In a recent Best of Belfast podcast Peter discussed how the school has doubled in budget, size, and staff since 2020. He also highlighted that most people in Northern Ireland are unaware of alternative education options!

One of the key aspects Peter emphasized was the power of delaying traditional desk-based learning until the age of six. Instead the school focuses on practical skills like outdoor play, baking and crafts.

Peter explained that smaller class sizes create a more conducive learning environment, allowing teachers to focus on

teaching rather than constantly managing poor behaviour. He also shared how the school encourages a more informal atmosphere by allowing students to call teachers by their first names and eliminating school uniforms.

Founded in 1975, Hollywood Steiner school is looking forward to celebrating 50 years in the anniversary year, 2025!

A co-educational, independent and integrated school the educator is a proud member of the global Steiner school network, with over 1400 schools in 75 countries. Within the UK and Ireland, there are 29 and



Headteacher, Peter Chambers

6 Steiner schools, respectively, making us the sole representative in Northern Ireland. At Hollywood Steiner School, you'll find a welcoming community that feels like an extended family. The campus serves as a community hub, hosting events throughout the

year.

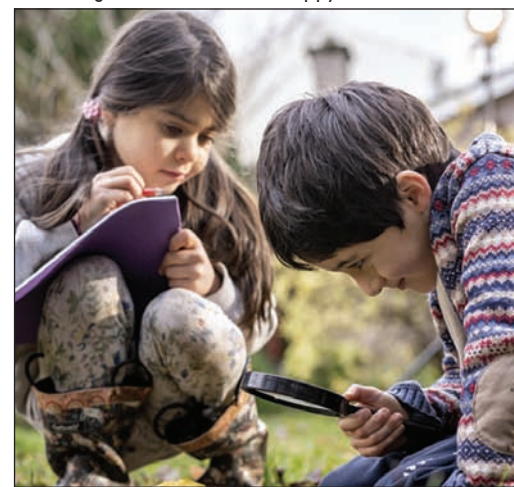
At the heart of Hollywood Steiner is the Waldorf Curriculum. This curriculum prioritizes childhood development, starting with preschool and kindergarten. Nature-based experiences and imaginative play are key components. Formal reading and writing instruction begins at age 6, aligning with the global standards. The approach fosters moral responsibility, empathy, and a sense of wonder, leading to emotionally mature and academically successful students. Unlike traditional education, the Waldorf model allows children

to learn at their own pace. This personalized approach ensures a deep understanding of concepts and skills. This independent school offers a rich, diverse, and integrated education that emphasizes cooperation over competition.

Why Choose Hollywood Steiner School? The school consistently scores well above the NI average and in this years GCSE results 88% of students achieved seven GCSE A* - C (pass grades), including English and Maths. Hollywood Steiner school is suitable for every child. For academically advanced students, we provide a balanced

approach that nurtures their social-emotional and creative strengths. For those who may need additional support, our curriculum offers a nurturing environment

that allows them to grow at their own pace and reach their full potential. The Waldorf curriculum fosters well-rounded individuals who are both happy and successful!



Educating head, heart and hands



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ONE FOR SORROW, TWO FOR JOY...

For reasons which are obscure, magpies have long had a poor reputation, being associated with luck (good or bad), theft and bad things generally.

Actually, as members of the crow family, they are intelligent, inquisitive, highly adaptable to habitat changes, and really quite beautiful, particularly when sunlight reveals the blue/green iridescence of their black feathers, sharply contrasting with large areas of white. I would go so far as to suggest

that if they were not so common here and perhaps found only in the tropics, they would be greatly admired.

Yes, their mad cackling does sound ominous, even threatening, and of course we all love and prefer birds that sing.

Their supposed notoriety goes way back. The children's

nursery rhyme of sorrow and joy was penned in the 1700's, and even earlier, in about 1470, the artist Piero della Francesca's painting of the Nativity featured a lone magpie sitting incongruously on the stable roof, presumably a sign of sorrow to come.

As a child I believed that they were thieves,

particularly of bright shiny things such as jewellery, and that rings might be found in their nests, because I had read so in books. Of course, that has been proven as nonsense, originating in the script of an old French play. Give a dog, or a bird, a bad name...

While omnivorous, they do raid small birds' nests in the spring to eat eggs and young, and they don't help their reputation by doing it in an obvious, noisy way. But it has been proven that they are not responsible for the decline of songbirds. The greatest predators of fledglings are domestic cats which are estimated to kill more than 27 million birds a year in the UK.



And, if you're looking for the real reasons for songbird decline, we are the culprits, removing their habitat and dosing our land,

whether agricultural or domestic gardens, with chemicals, the so-called herbicides, pesticides, even artificial fertilisers, which all damage

natural food-chains. Let's all try to wean ourselves off these chemicals. Birds, bees and other creatures will be allowed to flourish.

You might note that the illustration for this article is two magpies. Old habits and superstitions die hard. So, here's to joy! JVA

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Howdens Ravenhill has designs on kitchens and bedrooms

Howdens is taking NI by Storm proving top choice for tradesmen who want to provide customers with the best selection of high quality bedrooms and kitchens in town! We put the design team at Howdens Ravenhill under the spotlight!

Amy has been Kitchen and Bedroom Designer at Howdens Ravenhill since the branch opened! She studied Fashion Design at the Ulster University, which developed her eye for colour, texture and detail, something she now brings into her kitchen and bedroom designs.

Amy has built strong working relationships with many local joiners and tradesmen. Known for her chatty, approachable and down-to-earth attitude, her favourite part of the role is the design process, she is most at home picking out pretty colours, creating spaces that are both practical and aesthetically pleasing.

Amy says: "What makes our design service different is how personal it is. We're not just designing kitchens or bedrooms, we're creating spaces that people are going to use every single day. I've actually gained quite a few friends who started out as customers, which says a lot about the relationships we build. We really take the time to understand what each customer needs and make sure the design works for them long term, not just visually."

Gemma recently

joined the design team at Howdens Ravenhill, bringing a fresh perspective and enthusiasm for interiors. Before joining Howdens, she worked in furniture retail, where she developed strong customer service and sales experience.

Her background means she's confident guiding customers through their options and helping them make decisions that suit both their style and budget.

Gemma says: "Customers can expect a really welcoming atmosphere here at Ravenhill. The team feels like a bit of a family, and sometimes customers don't want to leave because there's always a bit of banter going on! We take the time to chat through ideas and really get a feel for what they're looking for, and there's no pressure at all. It's all about helping them explore their options and finding something that suits them perfectly."

What Howdens Ravenhill Design Service the best?

At Howdens Ravenhill, our design service is completely tailored to each customer. We will visit your home and get to know you and take the time to understand how you actually live in your space

not just how you want it to look and how it needs to function day to day. All the while keeping in mind what the customers budget!

We think this sets us apart as we design with real life in mind. Whether it's storage solutions, layout changes or making the most of awkward spaces, everything is thought through carefully. We also work closely with joiners and trades, which helps make the whole process run smoothly from design right through to installation.

A word about Bedrooms?...

With bedrooms, it's all about creating an organised, functional space that works for your routine. We offer a range of fitted options and sliding wardrobes so there is a style to suit every customer! A lot of customers are looking for clever internal storage now things like pull-out rails, drawer inserts and hidden compartments this means everything has its own place. It's not just about aesthetics, it's about making your space feel easier to live in.

Specific about Kitchens?...

Kitchens are the heart

of the home as cheesy as that sounds! We focus on creating layouts that flow well, whether that's for busy family life or more open-plan entertaining spaces.

We help customers through everything from cabinet styles and colours to worktops, appliances and finishing touches. It's about pulling everything together so it feels cohesive, but also practical. No two kitchens we design are ever the same, which is what makes the job so interesting.

New options to include in your design

We're seeing a big shift towards more integrated and streamlined designs. Handleless kitchens, integrated appliances and hidden storage are all really popular at the minute, helping to create a clean, modern look.

In terms of finishes, natural textures are making a strong comeback, particularly oak and walnut frontals, which add warmth and character to a space while still feeling contemporary.

When it comes to worktops, many customers are now opting to upgrade to quartz. It's a really durable, low-maintenance

option, and it's often more affordable than people expect, which makes it a great way to elevate the overall look and feel of the kitchen.

Howdens as an employer

Howdens is a really supportive place to work, with a strong team environment and a real focus on developing staff. The company has even been recognised as one of the UK's best large employers, which reflects the culture and opportunities it offers.

At Ravenhill in particular, everyone works closely together, which creates a positive atmosphere day to day. Rather than working on individual commission, the team works towards shared targets, which means the focus is on finding the right solution for the customer rather than pushing a sale. It creates a more relaxed, genuine experience for customers and allows us to take the time to get the design right.

It's a fast-paced environment, but it's really rewarding to see projects come together and customers happy with the end result.

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day by day. Your credit score is your passport to a mortgage. One missed payment can ruin everything. Check your report today and fix any errors. Do not take out new loans or credit cards before you apply. Lenders want to see a boring and predictable borrower. Pay your bills on time every single month.

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This piece of paper is your golden ticket. Without it you are just another window shopper. Find a mortgage broker who knows the market inside out. They can find deals that you will never see on the high street.

Be prepared to move fast when the right place

appears.

Do not be fooled by a fresh coat of paint and a scented candle. Look for the cracks behind the furniture. Check the age of the boiler and the state of the roof.

Visit the street at night to see what the neighbours are really like. Ask the agent tough questions and do not take "I don't know" for an answer. Trust your gut but verify everything with a professional survey.

Patience is a virtue during the legal process. Conveyancing can take months and it will test your nerves. Keep in constant contact with your solicitor and do not be afraid to nudge them. Once you exchange contracts the house is legally yours. Insurance must be in place the moment you swap. Then comes completion day. Grab the keys and start your new life.

WHAT COLOUR GOES WITH TAUPE?

Taupe is a beautiful colour; with its natural hue and many shades, taupe can blend in with almost any colour scheme.

Taupe is a classic, personality-infused, versatile colour and a great partner to many neutral and novel colours. With taupe, you can choose from a broad spectrum of shades, from light to dark. Choose light shades of taupe for a sleek and straightforward base and use darker shades to show a little creativity in your colour scheme

Homeowners commonly ask, 'Is taupe brown or grey?' Or, you might hear taupe referred to as 'greige' (a mix of grey and beige), but neither is right. Taupe is a blend of brown and grey tones with warmer undertones. Available in many shades, taupe can appear warmer or cooler based on the hue and saturation. Before choosing taupe, always consider the natural light your chosen room receives in a day. Taupe can change its tone and mood depending on how much natural light it gets.

Choose taupe with warm undertones like yellow, pink or red for a cosy, warm glow. Or, for a cooler, more contemporary vibe, go for taupes with green or blue undertones. Before you get to the decorating stage, decide if you want a warm or cool base. This will help you decide which colours to pair taupe with.

Opt for all taupe. A popular way to style taupe is to simply use taupe in various shades in a monochromatic colour scheme. You can use taupe in its darkest to lightest shades on multiple surfaces for a cohesive, interesting, timeless



design. Different sheens, like matte on walls and satin on wood surfaces like skirting and furniture, create a subtle contrast. Choose deeper taupe pillows, throws and rugs to add depth and interest. Using a monochromatic colour scheme also shines the spotlight on any interesting architectural details like moulding or old windows.

Do Grey and taupe go together? Yes, you should absolutely consider pairing taupe and grey if you want a modern and minimalist space. Combine cool grey with warmer taupes, like greens or browns, for a look with more depth. Add accents of dark and warm grey for extra interest. To avoid these two colours looking too similar and drowning each other out, pair taupe and grey in alternate undertones.

'Do blue and taupe go together?' Yes, taupe is the perfect base for bold blue colour schemes.

When choosing a taupe base, bright and bold blues blend seamlessly while adding interest points. In contrast, warm, brown-based taupes look great with pale and pastel blues like periwinkle and seafoam.

Pretty in pastel pink. Because taupe has warm undertones, it pairs nicely with pink. You can choose either blush pink or pastel pink

Taupe and trusty green. Spruce up any neutral shade with lush, warm undertones of vivid greens like forest green or dark emerald. If more natural shades of green are your thing: Sage, Olive green or moss green are perfect choices. However, for a cooler design scheme, use taupe as a base with sage or olive green accents in combination with gold metallic details for a sense of luxury.

Darker shades of green look stunning as an accent wall. Add some green accent pieces like pillows

and throws, and throw in some industrial style lighting and furnishings for a real contemporary finish.

Wrap taupe in warmth. The cosy undertones of taupe make it a perfect choice for: Warm woods, Brass and gold accents. Use taupe as a dominant colour on walls and combine it with deep, devilishly warm tones and accents to create a sense of elegance and sophistication.

Burgundy and taupe. If you need your bedroom decor to pop, consider combining taupe and burgundy to create a warm and cosy feel. Paint your walls in burgundy and choose taupe and burgundy for flooring, textiles and accent pieces

Don't forget metals. As a neutral tone, taupe is brought out of its shell with shiny metals. Use copper, bronze and gold that boast warmer metallic tones

Choosing taupe in your colour scheme creates a calm and snug atmosphere. As a colour, it can be perfect for entertaining, relaxing, family time, and sleeping, like bedrooms and living rooms. However, taupe's serene nature is also perfect for spa-like bathrooms and modern kitchens.

Use taupe bathrooms to create a spa-like peaceful space - try taupe walls with crisp white tiles and vanities, or vice versa.

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CHOOSING FLOORING FOR THE LIVING ROOM

Selecting the right flooring for a living room is perhaps the most significant design decision a homeowner will face as it serves as the literal foundation for every other stylistic choice.

Because this space is often the busiest hub of the house the material underfoot must be robust enough to handle heavy foot traffic and the occasional wine spill while still feeling inviting enough for a lazy Sunday afternoon. The challenge lies in finding a balance between durability and the specific sensory experience you want to evoke during the warmer months when we tend to move between the garden and the sofa with greater frequency.

Hardwood remains the gold standard for many and it offers a timeless warmth that ages beautifully over decades. In a summer-inspired home lighter timbers such as oak or ash can lift the entire mood of a room by reflecting natural light and creating an airy Scandinavian feel. While solid wood is a significant investment it provides a natural

insulation that feels comfortable underfoot regardless of the season. For those who worry about the practicalities of kids or pets engineered wood offers a similar aesthetic with added stability and it is less likely to warp when the humidity levels fluctuate during a heatwave.

If your goal is to create a sense of "Mediterranean cool" then natural stone or porcelain tiles are an excellent choice for the main living area. These materials have a high thermal mass which means they stay refreshingly chilled even when the sun is beating down on the windows. While stone can sometimes feel austere in a traditional setting choosing a honed finish rather than a high-gloss polish can soften the look and make the room feel more organic. Pairing these hard surfaces with

large natural fibre rugs such as jute or sisal allows you to define the seating area and it adds a layer of texture that feels undeniably summery.

For those who prefer the softness of carpet the trend has shifted away from heavy shags toward flatter weaves and natural blends. A wool-sisal mix provides the best of both worlds by offering the durability of plant fibres and the softness of traditional carpeting. Choosing a neutral palette like oatmeal or pale sand can make a small living room feel significantly larger and it provides a versatile backdrop that allows you to swap out seasonal accessories like bright linen cushions or nautical throws. It is important to remember that the pile height will affect how much heat the room retains so a shorter loop is generally preferable



for maintaining a breezy atmosphere. Modern innovations like Luxury Vinyl Tile or LVT have also become a formidable contender for the living room floor and they are particularly useful for open-plan homes where the lounge flows directly into the kitchen or garden. These materials can convincingly mimic the look of reclaimed timber or vintage encaustic

tiles while being entirely waterproof and incredibly easy to clean. This makes them a brilliant option for families who want a high-end look without the stress of constant maintenance. Ultimately the best flooring is one that invites you to kick off your shoes the moment you walk through the door and it should feel like a seamless part of your home's personality.

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A Bright Idea partnership: Arches Lighting Centre and The Chandelier Guys

Established in 1982, Arches Lighting Centre has grown from a local specialist into a true staple of the community, offering a wealth of knowledge that only comes with such a long-standing history.

For those seeking to illuminate their spaces with elegance and character, the showroom and their online presence at www.archeslightingcentre.co.uk provide an extensive range of fixtures that cater to every aesthetic, from the ultra-modern to the timelessly classic.

The enduring success of Arches Lighting Centre is built upon a foundation of trust and a deep understanding of how the right light can transform a room. Over the years, they have become the go-to destination for those who value both style and substance. Their commitment to the local area is evident in their personalised approach, ensuring that every customer finds the perfect solution for their home. This dedication to excellence ensures that they remain a leading name in the industry, blending

contemporary values with a selection of high-quality products.

What truly sets this establishment apart is the comprehensive nature of their expertise, which extends far beyond the initial purchase.

Not only do we sell lights but we also maintain and service them as well. This seamless transition from retail to long-term care is handled by their complementing company, The Chandelier Guys. By visiting www.

thechandelierguys.com, clients can access specialist maintenance services designed to keep even the most intricate lighting fixtures in pristine condition. This dual approach ensures that a beautiful light remains a functional centre-piece for years to come.

The professional reach of their maintenance and service division is broad, reflecting the high demand for their specialized skills. While they are a fixture of the local community, their work takes them across

NI and Ireland. Whether it is a routine check or a complex restoration, they bring the same level of precision and care to every job.

Ultimately, the synergy between Arches Lighting Centre and The Chandelier Guys offers a complete lifecycle for premium lighting. From the moment a customer selects a piece from their showroom to the specialized cleaning and technical maintenance required years later, the team provides a professional, end-to-end experience.

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Parents' top online searches about their children revealed

96% of parents in Northern Ireland say they turn to the internet to decode how their child sees the world, with the most obscure and quirky searches revealed.

These queries include 'why do kids say 6 7?', 'why do kids eat sponges?', 'why do kids like sitting in a box?' and 'do kids naturally hate vegetables?'. A massive 96% of parents struggle to understand their child's weird and wonderful world, according to the research. However, the eye care experts at Specsavers, who commissioned the study, warn that a crucial topic is being missed - with no parents in Northern Ireland (0%) seeking advice on their child's vision.

When it comes to their child's physical health, 33% have searched for answers online, with most common themes including sleep problems or tiredness (75%), mental wellbeing or emotional health (63%), high temperatures (50%), or developmental milestones (50%). Yet 0% have sought advice about ways to improve kids' eyesight.

Of those who haven't, many say it's because they didn't spot vision problems in their child (28%) or believe their child is too young for it to be a concern (12%). Paula Cunningham, ophthalmic director from Specsavers Connswater,

highlights that children often don't report vision issues because they assume what they see is normal - and regular eye tests are recommended from the age of three.

Child psychologist, Dr Elizabeth Kilbey, adds: "It's not surprising parents are turning to search engines to help navigate the many questions that come with raising children - from behaviour and development to the often weird and wonderful things kids say or do. "Children are curious and imaginative, and this plays a vital role in how they learn, explore and build confidence. Because so much of that discovery is visual, clear vision is crucial to their development. In all areas of life, and the classroom especially, clear vision is fundamental. Being able to see and focus underpins learning; when vision is affected, it can influence a child's attention, engagement and behaviour. That's why parents should prioritise eye health as an important part of their child's overall wellbeing."

The survey uncovers what parents in Northern Ireland search for most, with 38% saying they search about their child's



habits or routines, while a similar amount (33%) question whether certain behaviours of their child are common. Interestingly, more than half of parents (58%) admit their online searches regularly start with "Is it normal for my child to...".

When it comes to their child's eye health, 16% of parents are not aware of any common eyesight issues which can affect children, such as short-sightedness or lazy eyes (amblyopia). Worryingly, 12% of those polled, have never taken their child for an eye test, while 20% haven't done so within the last two years. The main

reason for this was simply because their child hasn't complained about their vision (12%), with 12% also saying they would make an appointment if there appeared to be an issue.

Paula Cunningham, ophthalmic director from Specsavers Connswater, says "This research proves how easy it is to overlook a child's eye health unless obvious symptoms appear. But that's why being proactive is so important. Regular eye tests can identify issues early - often before a child realises anything is wrong. What many parents may not realise is that many

sight conditions, such as myopia in kids, can be managed or corrected if they're detected before the age of eight, while vision is still developing."

The research aims to encourage parents to prioritise their children's eye health and reveals how children's sight problems are going unnoticed. In fact, around 1 in 5 children under 10 experience sight conditions according to the Royal College of Ophthalmologists* - which is up to 1.6 million children in the UK**.

Book your child's NHS-funded eye test at Specsavers.co.uk for children under 16.

BALMORAL SHOW 2026

The 157th Balmoral Show is set to return to the Eikon Exhibition Centre from Wednesday, 13th May to Saturday, 16th May 2026, marking another milestone for Northern Ireland's premier agri-food event.

As the largest celebration of its kind in the country, the showgrounds at Balmoral Park will once again transform into a bustling hub of activity, drawing over 100,000 visitors who come to soak up the famous "Balmoral Buzz." Whether you are a lifelong farming enthusiast or a first-time visitor looking for a quintessential family day out, the 2026 program promises a balanced blend of traditional agricultural competition and high-octane modern entertainment.

In the Main Arena, the headline attraction for 2026 is the Bolddog FMX team, whose gravity-defying freestyle motocross stunts are sure to provide a heart-pounding spectacle. For those who prefer the elegance of equine sports over revving engines, the International Show Jumping competitions remain a crown jewel of the show, featuring top-tier riders competing for prestigious titles. The arena schedule is packed from morning until evening, ensuring there is a constant rotation of action, from the thundering hooves of the heavy horse displays to the precision of the sheepdog trials.

Food lovers will find their sanctuary in the NI

Food Pavilion, which remains the beating heart of the show's gastronomic offering. This year, the pavilion will feature an array of artisan producers showcasing everything from award-winning cheeses and local spirits to handcrafted desserts. Visitors can enjoy live cooking demonstrations and learn about the important "field to fork" journey, highlighting the sustainability and quality of Northern Ireland's local produce. It is a fantastic opportunity to sample new flavours and chat directly with the makers behind the province's most successful food brands.

At its agricultural core, the show will host over 3,500 animals across hundreds of competitive classes. From the majestic Clydesdale horses and sleek beef cattle to various breeds of sheep, goats, and pigs, the livestock displays offer a masterclass in breeding and animal husbandry. The Cattle Parade remains a highlight of the weekend, offering a mesmerising sight as the champion winners from various categories circle the arena in a display of rural pride and excellence. For the curious, the poultry and rabbit sections often provide a quieter but equally charming look

at smaller prize-winning specimens.

Beyond the animals and food, the showgrounds offer extensive shopping and leisure opportunities with over 500 trade stands. You can find everything from the latest massive farm machinery and tractor tech to boutique country fashion and garden furniture. A revamped Horticulture Area will provide inspiration for gardening enthusiasts, while the Downtown Stage offers a festive backdrop of live music and local talent. For the younger visitors, the Funfair is a mandatory stop, providing classic thrills and games that round out the perfect day of exploration.

As you prepare for your visit, it is worth noting that the show maintains a strict no-dogs policy, with the exception of assistance animals, to ensure the safety and comfort of both visitors and the valuable livestock on display. The gates open at 9:30 am each morning, staying open until 7:00 pm from Wednesday to Friday, and closing slightly earlier at 6:00 pm on Saturday. With 65 acres of site to cover, comfortable footwear is your best friend—because "fashionable" wellies are only practical if they can handle several miles of walking.

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Family Focus



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MINISTER CELEBRATES COMMUNITY FUND PROGRAMME

Communities Minister Gordon Lyons has praised the work of those involved in the community sector across Northern Ireland as he met some of those who have benefited through his Department's continued investment in its Neighbourhood

The Department for Communities (DfC) invests over £20million per annum in Neighbourhood Renewal, supporting the work of voluntary and community organisations in the most deprived areas across Northern Ireland, with the Small Capital Investment Programme being a key component of this funding.

In 2024/25, the Fund helped over 1,500 people secure employment through targeted training and employability interventions, as well as giving more than 5,500 adults the opportunity to volunteer within their communities.

Speaking at a community event at the Ecos Centre in Ballymena, Minister Lyons said: "These projects may be described as "small capital," but their impact is anything but small. Investment in small capital costs keeps services running and allows groups to adapt, expand, or innovate. Whether it's roof repairs, upgraded IT equipment, a kitchen refurbishment, or essential accessibility improvements - these are not minor details - they are the practical enablers

of meaningful community impact. My Department's ongoing investment in Neighbourhood Renewal reflects a long term commitment, one that is not only financial but deeply rooted in our belief in the power of communities to shape their own futures."

Over the last year alone, DfC has supported 77 community projects through his fund, with an investment of £1.18m. A number of community representatives attending today's event took the opportunity to share their stories on the positive impact this funding has had.

Angela Mulholland, West Bann Development said: "This funding has ensured that as a service provider to the local community, we were able to continue to offer a first-class service and providing people with a safe secure environment to learn, play and create."

Jim McIlroy, Harryville Men's Shed added: "Men's Shed provides a vital role within the community offering a safe, welcoming space where men can connect, learn, and support one another. This investment has played



Angela, John and Jim Communities Minister Gordon Lyons pictured with (l-r) Angela Mulholland, West Bann Development, Jim McIlroy, Harryville Men's Shed and John Hunter, Community Sports Network, Shankill at a recent visit to see the work of those involved in the community sector across Northern Ireland and to meet some of those who have benefited through his Department's continued investment in its Neighbourhood Renewal programme.

a vital role in helping to maintain and strengthen the services we provide to men across the Ballymena community.

Theresa Brady, Ionad na Fuiseoige said: "Small capital funding meets a real need in the community - relatively small amounts of money required that can make a huge difference to the local

area." John Hunter, Community Sports Network, Shankill added: "Relatively small investments can deliver significant, long-term impact. This funding has created lasting benefits, improving safety, expanding opportunities, and allowing us to meet a broader range of community needs.

Selected premium granite memorials starting from £800 at Kirkwoods Monumental Sculptors Ltd

Kirkwoods Monumental Sculptors Ltd. stands as a pillar of heritage and craftsmanship in the heart of Belfast, with a distinguished history that dates back to its establishment in 1905.

As a family-run business with over a century of experience, they have earned a reputation as dedicated memorial specialists, providing families with a compassionate and professional service during difficult times. Their long-standing presence in the community is a testament to their commitment to quality and the enduring nature of the tributes they create, blending traditional techniques with modern expertise.

The company specializes in the creation of premium memorials, utilizing high-quality materials such as granite and marble to ensure both longevity and aesthetic beauty. Their extensive range

everything from traditional headstones to more contemporary designs, all of which are meticulously crafted by skilled monumental sculptors. Beyond the creation of new memorials, Kirkwoods offers a comprehensive suite of services including additional inscriptions for existing stones, full renovations to restore weathered monuments to their former glory, and the provision of memorial accessories like flower vases and pet memorials.

Understanding the sensitive nature of their work, the team at Kirkwoods prides itself on offering personalized guidance to help families choose a fitting

tribute for their loved ones. They manage the entire process with meticulous attention to detail, from the initial design consultation to the final installation. Their service is designed to be all-encompassing, often including the first inscription and professional installation within their pricing structures to provide clarity and peace of mind. They also offer expert advice on navigating the various regulations and fees associated with different churchyards and local councils.

Currently, Kirkwoods is highlighting its accessibility through a headstone clearance event, with selected premium granite memorials starting

from £800. This initiative reflects their commitment to providing high-quality craftsmanship at competitive prices, ensuring that families can find a beautiful and lasting memorial within their means. Located at 731 Upper Newtownards Road in Belfast, their showroom invites visitors to view their work firsthand and discuss their specific requirements with a knowledgeable specialist. For those seeking a blend of tradition, quality and personal care, Kirkwoods continues to be a leading choice for memorial services in Northern Ireland.

For more information see www.kirkwoodsms.co.uk

Funding Boost for District's Community Transport Providers

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council has helped drive the success of two local transport providers connecting people and communities.

The Council's partnership with the voluntary sector helped pave the way for Down Community Transport and Newry and Mourne Community Transport to secure £200,000 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, supported by the Strategic Stakeholder Forum, to each purchase a new minibus to meet a growing demand for services.

The additional minibuses have not only had a positive impact on drivers and staff, but individuals and community groups. Over the past year, the transport providers carried almost 11,000 passengers on nearly 3,400 journeys, helping address social isolation and enhance community well-being.

Together, they employ 16 drivers, have 19 mini buses

and a number of volunteer drivers, making a positive difference in people's lives and ensuring they can remain active in their respective communities by getting out and about, with the Dial-A-Lift (DAL) service assisting those who find it challenging to access public transport.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Councillor Philip Campbell said, "Community transport providers play an invaluable role, particularly at the heart of rural communities. For many with mobility needs, the community transport service is a lifeline.

"The organisations have faced significant funding pressures in the past and I am delighted the service is going from strength

to strength. Transporting almost 11,000 passengers in a year shows the reliance people place on this invaluable service which is staffed by committed individuals, providing access for a wide group of people including the elderly, those with disabilities, Special Education Needs and community group members."

Clr Philip Campbell added, "Community transport providers are making a positive difference across Newry, Mourne and Down and an important contribution to people's overall health and wellbeing, with their staff among the many unsung heroes who work across our district."

Down Community Transport Manager, Sheileen

Brady, has thanked Newry, Mourne and Down District Council for its support and funding provided through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

"This investment has made a genuine and measurable difference across the district. The funding has enabled both organisations to introduce two new accessible buses, strengthen DAL and group hire services and respond to growing community demand," she said.

Newry and Mourne Community Transport Chief Executive, Stephen Yeomans, said the funding it received had an exceptionally positive impact on the organisation and many individuals and community groups across the Council area.



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Michael with his son Franklin



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MYEARTH USERS RECYCLE OVER 100,000 PIECES OF LITTER

myEARTH - Northern Ireland's digital hub for environmental action - is calling on more across Bangor to join its platform, as new figures reveal that users across NI have already recorded more than 100,000 pieces of litter recycled, and 159,783 hours outdoors spent outdoors, since the platform launched less than a year ago.

Developed by Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful in partnership with Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL), myEARTH provides environmental charities, education providers and community groups a dedicated space to connect with schools and households. Organisations simply upload activities known as 'Action Cards' such as litter picking, nature walks, bird watching, planting and recycling, allowing users to choose and complete them in exchange for points.

Maghera's Yvonne

Fleming created The Weatherbies in 2016. The weather-themed characters - Sammy Sun, Rosie Rainbow and Ronny Rain - help teachers and introduce children to various environmental themes through songs and stories.

As Eco-Schools NI's official Early Years partner, The Weatherbies are also using the myEARTH platform to run a schools Song Competition, with 300 schools across NI tracking their Eco-Schools projects through myEARTH. Pupils are invited to create a song about making their

school greener and the winning entry will be turned into an animated music video featuring the children's artwork. Using the Weatherbies resources in any Early Years setting can also count towards the Climate Ready Classroom Award, also found on myEARTH.

Alongside The Weatherbies, over 40 other local partners including the National Trust, Ulster Wildlife and RSPB NI have joined the myEARTH platform, taking advantage of the ready-made route to connect with audiences and



Alex Hall, Project Manager at myEARTH and Peter Fleming, Business Development Manager at The Weatherbies.

amplify their impact.

myEARTH is funded through a £488,557 grant from Dormant Assets NI, delivered by The National

Lottery Community Fund.

To register an activity or sign-up to log participation visit www.myeearth.org.uk

REVEALED: EASIEST PLACE TO PASS DRIVING TEST IN NORTHERN IRELAND

New research has revealed stark regional differences in driving test pass rates across Northern Ireland, showing which areas learners are finding it more difficult to obtain their licence.

The latest figures show some locations are significantly outperforming others, with pass rates varying by more than 20% between some test centres.

It comes as Northern Ireland prepares to become the first UK region to adopt graduated driver licensing, in a move to help reduce the number of young people killed or seriously injured on our roads.*

The system, set to come into force from 1st October 2026, will be the biggest overhaul to driving laws here in 70 years, introducing new rules including a six-month wait for learner drivers before taking their practical test. Learners will also have to complete a 14-module training programme, which needs to be signed off by an approved instructor.

Once they pass, new drivers will face an extended 'R' plate period from 12 months to 24 months, as well as restrictions on night-time

driving and passenger numbers.

With these changes on the horizon, there could be a spike in demand for driving tests in the coming months, as learners seek to attain their licence before the new laws come into effect.

In light of the upcoming revamp, the car insurance experts at CompareNI.com have crunched the numbers to rank which Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) test centres motorists are most likely to pass at.

Craigavon had the highest pass rate for private cars out of all 15 test centres in the region in 2025, coming in at 65.4 per cent. This was followed closely by Downpatrick (64.7%) and Enniskillen (64.5%). At the other end of the scale, busier urban areas show markedly lower success rates, with fewer than half of candidates passing.

Belfast recorded an average pass rate of just 47.2%, with Lisburn coming in at 47.4%. The

lowest pass rate was at Hydebank, where just 45% of candidates were successful.

Overall, 56,898 learners took their driving test in 2025, but fewer than 30,104 (52.9%) passed. Failing a driving test can have a significant financial knock-on effect for young drivers or those on a tighter budget.

There is no discount for resitting the test, meaning candidates must pay the full fee - ranging from £65-£95 - each time they take the test,** while also covering the cost of additional lessons and car hire. This means failing a test could see some learners face hundreds of pounds in extra costs.

This financial strain is compounded by the long delays that learners may face when trying to book test slots - with wait times as long as 10 weeks in some areas,*** meaning they will likely need to take extra lessons to stay test-ready.

All-Ireland economy driving tourism growth - Archibald

Economy Minister Dr Caoimhe Archibald has welcomed latest tourism figures showing trips by visitors from the south to the north increased by 15% in 2025.

According to statistics released by the Central Statistics Office, there were 1.3 million trips in 2025, compared to 1.1 million in 2024.

In addition, there was a total of 2.7 million overnight nights taken in Northern Ireland by these visitors last year compared to 2.5 million in 2024 - up by nine per cent.

Furthermore, the money spent by the visitors increased from just over £242.7 million in 2024 to almost £317.1 million last year - an increase of 31%.

The Minister said: "These latest figures show that the all-Ireland economy is driving growth in our tourism industry. More people from the south are visiting the north, bringing increased spending into our local economy. With Belfast hosting the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann this August we can expect this positive trend to continue."

Tourism NI continues to work to drive visitor growth by encouraging prospective visitors to embark on a giant adventure in Northern

Ireland through investment in marketing and promotion, and by growing the range of visitor attractions and experiences and enhancing the accommodation offer.

Tourism NI's 2026 Spring marketing campaign has already been hugely successful to date, and is on track to deliver 125 million opportunities to see or hear the activity in ROI. The TV, radio, press and social media campaign has been showcasing a broad range of attractions, experiences and events in Northern Ireland as well

as ideas on where to stay, building on the knowledge of what the region has to offer - highlighting value for money and delivering clear and compelling reasons to book a short break.

Carmel Scott, Head of Marketing at Tourism NI, said: "This growth reflects the impact and importance of our sustained marketing focus in this key market, highlighting what our industry has to offer and driving demand."

"ROI visitors continue to enjoy our stunning landscapes and coastlines,

vibrant food and drink scene, and world class attractions, experiences and accommodation - all delivered with the giant welcome Northern Ireland is known for.

"Our heavyweight marketing campaign continues in ROI until 31 March. We will maintain a strong focus on this market and encourage industry partners to do the same, ensuring Northern Ireland continues to achieve marketing cut through and remains top of mind for short breaks all year round."



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Abarth announces changes to 600e range

Abarth has announced a significant evolution of its electric lineup with the introduction of two new trim levels for the 600e range: the Turismo and the flagship Competizione.

These new variants are set to replace the previous Abarth 600e and the limited-run Scorpionissima launch edition, streamlining the brand's offering while honoring the performance-driven legacy established by Carlo Abarth.

Serving as the new entry point to the range, the Abarth 600e Turismo is priced at £33,995 on-the-road. Engineered for drivers who prioritize everyday sportiness and an effortless athletic style, the Turismo delivers a robust 240 HP. It successfully bridges the gap between daily usability and the unmistakable, aggressive character that enthusiasts expect from the Scorpion brand.

For those seeking uncompromising performance, the Abarth 600e Competizione stands as the new high-water mark for the manufacturer. Developed in close collaboration with Stellantis Motorsport, this flagship model is priced at £37,995. It features a powerful 207kW electric motor that produces 280 HP, enabling a 0-62 mph



acceleration time of just 5.85 seconds and a top speed of 124 mph. The Competizione is built upon the advanced Perfo eCMP platform, a state-of-the-art architecture derived directly from motorsport expertise.

The technical specifications of the Competizione reflect its racing DNA through high-performance hardware. It comes equipped with a Torsen limited-slip differential, Alcon monoblock calipers, and vented discs to ensure superior braking stability and

a sporty pedal feel. Inside, the cabin features lightweight Sabelt sports seats designed for maximum support during dynamic driving and a premium Alcantara finish. To ensure maximum grip, the car is fitted with Michelin tires developed from Formula E technology, which also prioritize noise reduction and environmental efficiency.

Visually, the Competizione makes a bold statement with a striking two-tone livery that pairs a

vivid orange body with a contrasting black roof. This aesthetic, combined with exclusive side graphics and an aerodynamically sculpted silhouette, highlights the vehicle's muscular stance. By combining cutting-edge electric technology with hardware traditionally reserved for the track, Abarth continues to project its racing spirit into a new era of electrification, catering to "forever young" drivers who refuse to sacrifice thrills for practicality.

NEW NISSAN MICRA EV

Nissan's iconic MICRA returns for its sixth generation in late 2025, marking a significant shift as the model becomes a fully-connected, pure electric vehicle.

Designed in London with European drivers in mind, this new iteration maintains the car's stylish, unpretentious heritage while embracing zero-emission mobility. Its arrival serves as a cornerstone of Nissan's broader strategy to launch four new electric models in Europe by 2027.

The exterior design is assertive and robust, featuring an SUV-inspired stance and 18-inch wheels as standard across all grades. Notable design elements include a choreographed "welcome wink" from the LED headlights and a distinctive "ice cream scoop" indent along the side panels. To ensure a personalized look, Nissan offers 14 different exterior colour combinations, including sophisticated two-tone options with black or grey roofs.

Inside, the cabin emphasizes understated elegance and subtle nods to Japanese heritage, such as a Mount Fuji silhouette integrated into the storage space. The driver-centric interior is anchored by dual 10.1-inch high-resolution screens



for instrumentation and infotainment. Despite its compact footprint of under four meters, the five-door configuration provides a spacious interior with 326 liters of trunk capacity, which expands to 1,106 liters when the rear seats are folded.

Performance is delivered via two battery options: a 40kWh unit providing 192 miles of range and a 52kWh version offering up to 253 miles. Built on the specialized AmpR platform, the MICRA

is engineered for agility, utilizing a multi-link rear suspension and weighing as little as 1,400kg. Charging is highly efficient, with 100kW DC fast-charging capability allowing a 15% to 80% charge in just 30 minutes. Standard features like a heat pump and Vehicle-to-Load (V2L) technology further enhance its practical appeal.

The driving experience is highly customizable through four distinct modes—

Comfort, Sport, Eco, and Perso—and includes Nissan's e-Pedal for seamless urban driving. Connectivity is a priority, featuring Google built-in services for voice-controlled navigation and app integration. Safety is equally comprehensive, with the ProPilot assist suite providing lane-keeping, adaptive cruise control, and a wide array of emergency braking and monitoring systems to ensure a secure and intuitive journey.

Save money while motoring

Unless you've decided to power your car with Flintstone-style footwork, getting from A to B has likely become a significant line item in your monthly budget.

In 2026, with fuel prices and maintenance costs always on the move, driving frugally is less about being "cheap" and more about efficiency engineering. It's about understanding the physics of your vehicle and making small, tactical adjustments that keep more money in your pocket.

Your right foot is the most important component of your car's fuel system. If you treat your pedals like binary switches—either 100% on or 100% off—you are essentially throwing cash out of the exhaust

pipe. Real efficiency begins by pretending there is a literal egg under the gas pedal; you want to accelerate smoothly and gradually to avoid "gulping" fuel. Similarly, the "coast is clear" method is your best friend. If you see a red light a quarter-mile ahead, take your foot off the gas immediately. Let friction and gravity do the work for you, rather than maintaining speed only to slam on the brakes at the last second.

Most vehicles hit their peak fuel-efficiency "sweet spot" between 45 and

60 mph. Once you cross that 65 mph threshold, aerodynamic drag increases exponentially. At higher speeds, your car essentially transforms into an aerodynamic brick, fighting against the air and burning significantly more fuel just to maintain its pace. Slowing down by just 5 or 10 mph on the highway can often save you 10% to 15% on fuel over a long trip.

A car that has to work harder uses more energy, so keeping your vehicle in peak physical condition is non-negotiable. Start

by checking your tire pressure at least once a month. Under-inflated tires create higher rolling resistance, which forces the engine to work harder just to keep the wheels turning. Keeping them at the manufacturer's recommended PSI (usually found on a sticker inside the driver's door) can improve your mileage by up to 3%.

Plan your route to minimize stop-and-go traffic and idling. Even the way you park matters. Don't waste five minutes circling a crowded lot for a

spot near the door. Park in the first open space you see and walk; you'll save fuel,

reduce frustration, and get a bit of extra movement in your day.



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KITCHEN RENOVATION PLANNING GUIDE:

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

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

Colour Planning. Colour has a huge impact on how we engage with a space. And it's the combination of colours – otherwise known as a colour palette – that will achieve a desired look or feel. A colour wheel is a helpful tool when deciding a colour palette for your new kitchen. Here are some of the most common options. Tonal. Choose one colour as your 'base colour' and add various tones of that colour throughout your room. Harmonious. Choose a colour on the

colour wheel and work its neighbouring colours into your scheme. The colours complement each other without being too similar. Complementary. Choose a colour on the colour wheel and find its complementary colour on the opposite side of the wheel to make a statement with your colour scheme.

Lighting design. Lighting has many functions. Of course, its main purpose is to light a space, but well-considered lighting can add to the style of your kitchen and have a major impact on the mood and atmosphere too. Kitchen lighting should aim to marry design and function. When planning the lighting for your kitchen renovation, aim to tick off at least one from each of these categories: General lighting. General (or ambient) lighting will spread light around the whole kitchen, via a ceiling light or spotlights, for example. Task lighting. You need task



lighting in your kitchen to help perform certain tasks. For example, lights above the worktops where you'll prep food. Spot lighting (or accent) lighting works to draw your attention to a particular area, for example, artwork on a wall, a bookcase in a recess, or glassware in a cabinet. Atmospheric lighting Atmospheric (or decorative) lighting will help to achieve the right mood for your kitchen space, by using dimmable lamps above a dining area, for example.

Kitchen cabinet inspiration. The kitchen cabinets you choose will have a huge influence on the overall look of your kitchen. But it's not just about style. The quality of the material, the finish you opt for, and special features (wine racks,

spice drawers etc) will all have an impact on your budget. To help you select the best kitchen cabinets for your kitchen renovation, take a look at the six main styles available. Shaker-style. An affordable, classic, and traditional style of kitchen cabinet that has always been popular. Glass-fronted. Glass-fronted cabinets help to display the items within, and bounce light around the room too. It's common to mix and match glass-fronted cabinets with other styles. Tongue and groove. The texture and warmth of tongue and groove cabinets give the feel of a relaxed, country cottage style kitchen. It's also a popular design element in a Scandi-style kitchen. Flat-fronted. For a simple and minimalist

look in a contemporary kitchen, choose flat-fronted cabinets with no panels or frames. Plywood cabinets will help to achieve an organic, warm kitchen. They're also a very cost-effective choice. Natural (unfinished) wood. For a truly rustic feel, opt for natural wood cabinets in your kitchen. These are popular with homeowners striving for a relaxed, informal style kitchen.

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

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

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

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

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

The next stage, "first fix," involves installing the internal infrastructure. Electricians and plumbers lay the groundwork for essential services within the walls and floors. HVAC engineers install ducting, while



carpenters frame internal walls and prepare for staircases. Insulation installers then ensure the building is energy-efficient.

A rough plastering may also occur at this point, preparing the walls for the final finishes. "Second fix" is where the finishing touches are applied. Electricians and plumbers complete their installations, fitting fixtures and connecting appliances. Carpenters install doors, skirting boards, and fitted kitchens. Tilers, plasterers, and painters then work their magic, transforming the interior spaces. Finally, flooring installers

lay the chosen flooring materials, completing the interior finish.

The final phase involves external works and landscaping. Pavers and landscapers create outdoor spaces, while fencers install any necessary boundaries. General labourers handle the final cleanup, ensuring the site is tidy and ready for occupancy.

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

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Bathrooms need to function on different levels: for relaxing, bathing the family or an invigorating shower before you leave for work in the morning.

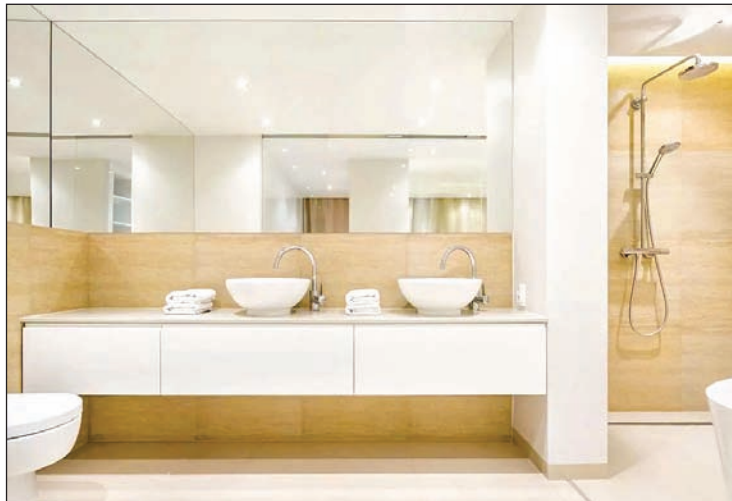
Consider bright targeted lighting for shaving and soft, diffused lights for a relaxing soak in the tub.

Planning is the key to effective bathroom lighting design. Plan your lighting at the very beginning of any new bathroom or bathroom remodelling project and get advice from a qualified electrician as to what you can and can't do. Avoid retrofitting bathroom lights at all costs. Ripping out tiles or chasing wires into walls is messy and costly.

Go for layered lighting. Elevate your design with a layered lighting scheme - this works whether you prefer a contemporary or vintage style bathroom. You should aim for targeted task lighting around the vanity basin area to provide good, even illumination for shaving, getting ready or putting on make-up. General ceiling lights create everyday bright lighting, and ceiling spotlights are ideal for this. Install ambient lighting around a bath or in tiled wall niches to create a spa-like mood for relaxing in the tub.

Know your lighting regulations. Water and electricity don't mix. That's why there are strict regulations around what lights are safe to use in bathrooms. Where in the bathroom you wish to install lighting is another key consideration. Check up on electrical safety regulations which divide bathrooms into zones.

Smart lighting. LED bathroom lighting is the most energy-efficient way to light your bathroom. Look out for smart lighting controls with pre-programmed settings that can save energy and time. Take the tech up a notch with Wi-Fi and Bluetooth compatible lights which will help you create a really bespoke lighting scheme via an app or voice-controlled settings. Smart lightbulbs can be adjusted for operation time, brightness, intensity and colour temperature. Ask your electrician about wireless lighting that turns on via motion-sensor controls - these are super easy to use and safe for night-time use. From barely-there, built-in spotlights to a statement chandelier, bathroom ceiling lighting is usually the main source of light. Make sure the lights aren't too white as this will create a harsh, clinical light in your bathroom. Experts recommend using between 2700k and 3000k (warm white) for the best colour temperature in the bathroom. Remember that a layered lighting scheme will offer a really sophisticated edge in your bathroom design. Flush-fitting ceiling downlights are a popular choice. A simple grid pattern isn't the only layout. Try highlighting certain features by



positioning downlights accordingly. In larger bathrooms, fit spotlights on the perimeter of the room. Pendant lights. Inject a luxurious touch to a bathroom. Go for an oversized statement light as a focal point. Just make sure it has the correct IP rating. Directional lights can help spotlight particular features of your bathroom design ideas. This is a great way to add an ambient lighting scheme with a gentle, diffused illumination. Fabric pendant lights are not the best idea in the moist damp conditions of a bathroom. But you can make a statement with metal and glass overhead fittings. As well as overhead shower lights, try hiding extra lights within bathroom shelves and niches within the shower. Light up mirrored bathroom cabinets are a perfect space-saving piece of kit combining storage, mirror and lighting. Some even come with built-in

Bluetooth speakers and a demister pad. LED flexible strip lighting can transform a small bathroom and create a mesmerising glow around baths, vanity units and bathroom shelving. You can't go wrong with flush-fit ceiling lights for a barely-there glow. Just consider the positioning of the spotlights to get the most out of your design features. Illuminate dark corners in your small bathroom to enhance the feeling of space. Ceiling lights that have built-in extractor fans are key for shower rooms and mini bathrooms (especially those with no windows) to stop steam and moisture building up. Lights on a dimmer switch are flexible and perfect for switching moods - an ideal choice if you have a smaller bathroom and don't have the space for an elaborate, layered lighting scheme. Copyright Checktrade. <https://www.checktrade.com/blog/ideas/bathroom-lighting-ideas/>

Bluetooth speakers and a demister pad

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Driveway ideas for maximum kerb appeal

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

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



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

your limit.

Tarmac driveways. Tarmac or asphalt driveways are durable and long-lasting. Tarmac is a mix of aggregates and tar, whereas asphalt is a mix of aggregates and bitumen. The latter offers a better finish and smoother surface compared to tarmac. The finish of tarmac can be enhanced through 'chip sealing'. This is when tar is poured onto a gravel base, stones are added, and it's pressed with roller equipment. Tarmac and asphalt are cost-effective to install and pair well with a number of aesthetics: They look great alongside patterned bricks. Create a stunning look by contrasting tarmac or asphalt with lighter stone. Soften the dark tones by including a lush lawn or greenery in your tarmac driveway design.

Concrete driveways. Poured concrete is one of

the most common driveway materials on the market. It's used to create low-maintenance driveways that require minimal upkeep. Coloured concrete is great if you want to add dimension and interest, such as a cream border or chequered patterns. It's also malleable when installed correctly. For example, it can make patterns when poured into moulds and can be sectioned and paired with other materials, such as aggregate or slate. Stamped concrete can give the appearance of a different material such as stone or brick for a fraction of the cost.

Block paving driveways. Block paving creates a classic and elegant first impression. It's usually made from concrete, which is engineered in a factory for consistency and

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

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