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Communities Minister Gordon Lyons pictured with Bryan O'Donnell, President, Cricket Ireland and Sarah Keane, Chief Executive Officer, Cricket Ireland at day one of the Ireland v New Zealand test match at Stormont.

FUTURE IS BRIGHT FOR LOCAL CRICKET AT IRELAND V NEW ZEALAND TEST

Communities Minister Gordon Lyons highlighted the bright future for local cricket as he watched the Ireland cricket team take on New Zealand in the first day of the test match at Stormont recently.

This was the second test match to be hosted at Stormont and the first time welcoming New Zealand to Belfast.

Minister Lyons said: "I welcome the New Zealand team to Belfast and hope they enjoy a very warm reception."

"The Ireland team have a tough task as they take on one of the very best teams in world cricket but I wish them every success."

"It is fantastic that Stormont is hosting its second test match in just two years and points to a bright future for local cricket."

"With the 2030 ICC Men's T20 World Cup on the horizon, I will continue working with partners to ensure Northern Ireland, and Belfast, plays a key role in delivering this prestigious global tournament."

The Minister added: "I

congratulate the Stormont Pavilion ground staff, the Northern Ireland Civil Service Sports Association (NICSSA) and Cricket Ireland on securing this match and developing such an outstanding international venue."

Sarah Keane, CEO of Cricket Ireland, said: "We are delighted with the support of Minister Lyons for cricket across Northern Ireland, and in their

willingness to work with the Irish government on improving facilities that will sustain and grow the game for years to come."

"Given cricket is a very welcoming and highly inclusive sport in Ireland, an investment in cricket is indeed an investment in strengthening communities, in particular, creating cross-cultural experiences and a greater sense of shared values."

CHAMBER NEW YORK TRADE MISSION

Belfast Chamber recently led a high-level business delegation to New York as part of a trade mission designed to strengthen commercial ties and create new opportunities for trade.

The three-day visit, brought together over 30 representatives from a diverse range of sectors, reflecting the breadth and ambition of Belfast's business community.

Led by Belfast Chamber CEO Clare Guinness, the delegation participated in a programme of business meetings, conferences and networking events with influential leaders from across New York's commercial landscape.

The programme began with a welcome reception hosted by Belfast City Council and NI Bureau at the Fitzpatrick Grand Central Hotel, followed by a business and networking breakfast delivered in partnership with Invest NI and hosted by Options Technology.

Among the key events

on the itinerary was the New York New Belfast conference, hosted by Aisling Events at the prestigious New York Athletic Club. The annual event brought together civic, business and cultural leaders from both cities to strengthen relationships and explore new opportunities for collaboration.

Representatives who participated in the trade mission included AAB Group, Adepta Partners, Beecome More, Belfast Met, BLK BOX, Bradley Art, Browne Jacobson, Glandore, Hire IQ, Linen Mill Studios, Mammoth Design, MKB Law, Ocho, Pinsent Masons, Regency House, Rockport School, Sumer NI, Tughans, Ulster University, Version 1 and Vyta.

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Ride On Belfast encourages more people to discover Belfast by bike

Cycling enthusiasts took to the streets of Belfast recently as Ride On Belfast made its return to the city as part of the year's Bike Week programme.

Funded by Belfast City Council and organised by Cycul, the event brings people together in a fun and inclusive way, while highlighting how active travel is helping to create a healthier, greener and more connected Belfast.

Cyclist of all levels came together for a community ride from Queen's University through the city, finishing at City Hall.

Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Róis-Maire Donnelly, was at City Hall this morning to welcome cyclists.

"It's fantastic to see so many people choosing to leave the car at home today and choose cycling as an alternative to their daily commute," she said.

"This is a great opportunity to encourage more people to experience the benefits of cycling, whether for everyday journeys, leisure or simply exploring the city. Events like Ride On Belfast showcase how cycling can contribute to a healthier, greener and more connected Belfast, and highlights just how easy it



is to travel around our city on two wheels.

"Belfast is perfectly suited to cycling. As a compact city that's easy to navigate on foot or by bike. And, as we prepare to welcome thousands of visitors for the upcoming Fleadh, we will be encouraging people to consider cycling as a convenient way to travel around the city, so

they travel at their own pace and help keep the city moving."

Ride On Belfast is among a wide range of events and initiatives delivered by Belfast City Council to boost participation in cycling and support more walking and cycling across the city.

The Bolder Vision for Belfast strategy, developed

with the Department for Communities and the Department for Infrastructure, is prioritising walking, cycling and public transport in the city centre to create more space for people and better connect with local communities.

For more on the council's support for active travel, visit belfastcity.gov.uk/activetravel

#NOTJUSTFORBOYS EMPLOYMENT CAMPAIGN

Belfast City Council has become the first local authority in Northern Ireland to sign up as a champion for the #NotJustForBoys initiative.

This campaign is an initiative led by Women's Tec to support young women and girls to enter and sustain employment in sectors where they are underrepresented – such as construction, gardening, transport and mechanics.

Councillor Ian McLaughlin, Chair of Belfast City Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee said: "The #NotJustForBoys initiative is aimed at getting young females in schools to consider careers that may have seemed unimaginable to them.

"Within Belfast City Council, we are currently recruiting for painting and decorating apprentices, and this is a fantastic opportunity for women and girls to break into a highly skilled, rewarding trade within Council. The role is combined with a recognised qualification meaning successful applicants will be able to earn as they learn.

"As part of our commitment to the #NotJustForBoys campaign, Belfast City Council will provide the training, supportive environment, and mentorship needed for



female tradespeople to thrive.

"By introducing girls to technical and trade skills early, the #NotJustForBoys initiative is also fully aligned to the Council's Gender Action Plan – which aims to bridge the gender pay gap and promote equality in employment across all Council jobs."

Helen Kerr, Head of Business Development at Women's Tec said: "We are proud to welcome Belfast City Council as

the first council to join us as a #NotJustForBoys Champion.

"Having Belfast City Council stand alongside us is hugely important, not only because of the practical support they bring, but because of the powerful statement it sends about the importance of gender equality and inclusive opportunities for all.

"Their commitment demonstrates that creating opportunities for women and girls is not the

responsibility of any one organisation alone, but something that requires collective action and leadership across our communities."

As part of the strategic partnership, Belfast City Council will actively support the campaign with Women's Tec through practical workplace initiatives including hands-on skills taster sessions and providing specialised work experience placements within council trade departments.

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‘Gamified’ Programme boosts skills and employability for local residents

Eighty residents took part in the second ‘Gamified Essential Learning Programme’ delivered by the Lisburn and Castlereagh Labour Market Partnership, with 60 participants successfully completing the programme and achieving a recognised qualification.

Participants, aged from 19 upwards, embraced the interactive, non-classroom learning environment delivered by Studyseed CIC on behalf of the council. Following strong demand for the programme, additional funding was secured, allowing participant numbers to double from the originally planned 40 to 80.

Funded by the Department for Communities, Labour Market Partnerships create targeted employment action plans for council areas, supporting collaboration at local and regional level to help people move towards and into work.

Councillor Claire Kemp, Regeneration and Growth Chair, speaking at the graduation, said:

“Once again, our ‘Gamified Graduates’ have shown that numeracy and literacy can be developed in a fun, supportive, game-style environment. From earning points and



challenges to levelling up and achieving badges, participants were fully engaged throughout the programme.

“We were delighted to expand the programme due to high demand, enabling even more residents to take part. The fact that 60 participants successfully completed and gained a recognised qualification is a fantastic achievement.

“This programme was designed to improve employability in a relaxed and encouraging setting, delivered in venues across the council area. I wish all our graduates every success as they use their new skills and qualifications to access further opportunities and employment.”

The council hopes to deliver the programme

again in the next financial year. If you are aged 19 or over and are unemployed, please follow the council’s social media channels for updates.

Information on all Labour Market Partnership employability and skills programmes is available online at: <https://www.lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk/business-and-investment/labour-market-partnership>

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A close-up portrait of a middle-aged man with short brown hair, smiling broadly while wearing dark sunglasses. He is wearing an orange shirt.

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ESTD 2016

A circular logo featuring a stylized compass rose with a star in the center.

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Their faith in Copeland was the anchor that allowed us to launch, and we remain profoundly grateful for the community that helped us find our sea legs.

A small icon of an envelope.

info@copelanddistillery.com

A small icon of a telephone handset.

028 9162 4000

A small icon of a location pin.

The Copeland Distillery
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A wooden tray holding four small glasses filled with a golden liquid, likely whiskey.

A close-up of a hand holding a glass, with a stream of golden liquid being poured into it.

A bottle of Copeland Distillery Irish Whiskey with a label featuring the brand's logo and name.

A person's hands are shown pouring a frothy beverage from a metal pitcher into a blue and white patterned cup.

The exterior of the Copeland Distillery building, featuring a sign that reads "COPELAND DISTILLERY" and "DONAGHADEE COUNTY DOWN".

The Copeland Distillery logo, featuring a compass rose and the brand name.

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A circular icon with the letter 'f' inside, representing Facebook.

A circular icon with a camera outline, representing Instagram.

A circular icon with an 'X' inside, representing Twitter.

MINISTER LYONS HOSTS VISIT OF UK VETERANS MINISTER

Communities Minister Gordon Lyons has welcomed UK Minister for Veterans and People Louise Sandher-Jones as she visited the team staffing the new Veterans Support Line NI in Belfast.

The Department for Communities' Veterans Support Line NI service provides information on

benefits eligibility and other support services to veterans, serving personnel and their families. A dedicated freephone number and accompanying text service have been established.

Minister Lyons said: "I am pleased to welcome Minister Sandher-Jones and highlight the important work being done by the Veterans Support Line NI.

"This service offers a clear, trauma-informed

pathway for veterans to engage with the Department's services, supported by staff who understand the unique challenges associated with military service.

Minister Sandher-Jones said: "The Veterans Support Line NI is a significant step forward in making sure those who have served, and their families, can access the support they need quickly and with confidence.

"No veteran should

face barriers when it comes to housing, welfare or wider support, and this service will play an important role in helping people navigate that system.

"I'm grateful to Minister Lyons and his team for the strong partnership behind this work, which will make a real difference for the veterans community here in Northern Ireland."

The Veterans Support Line NI can be contacted on 0800 158 5556 or



by texting ADVICE to 07860 04257. For more information visit www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/veterans-support-line-ni

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Young rugby teams tackle Primary School Festival at Affidea Stadium

Over 600 young rugby players recently took part in the Primary Schools' Mini-Rugby Festival, playing at the home of Ulster Rugby, Affidea Stadium.

The event was sponsored by SPAR NI, Ulster Rugby's first community partner and the primary sponsor of Ulster Rugby's Mini rugby activities across Northern Ireland.

The partnership began in 2022 and so far, over

8,000 young people have benefitted from the partnership.

The match-up has worked to elevate the club's grassroots sport in local communities by supporting the next generation of players, coaches, referees, and volunteers across the country.

The Primary Schools' Mini-Rugby Festival is a key calendar event for the youth game, which showcases the development of basic skills, understanding of the rules of rugby, and behaviours required to play the game.

This year, the Primary Schools' Mini-Rugby Festival, which ran from 18 - 22 May, saw 690 kids take part over the



Adam Anthony Rugby Development Officer, Keith Shorten Head of Commercial, Stewart Moore and Ben Carson with Bethany Priestley from SPAR NI and young rugby players at the Primary Schools' Mini-Rugby Festival 2026.

five days. Each team got the opportunity to visit the stadium and play against other schools,

encouraging teamwork and collaboration.

Laura Thompson from SPAR NI commented, "Signing as Ulster Rugby's first ever community partner back in 2022 has enabled the club to bring brilliant opportunities and activities to hundreds of schools and clubs across Northern Ireland over the past four years. The Primary Schools' Mini-Rugby Festival is always a fantastic event, supporting the next generation of players

and bringing young people together to learn new skills through team sports."

Hugh McCaughey, CEO at Ulster Rugby, commented, "We want to thank SPAR NI for their support since the beginning of the partnership in 2022. The Primary Schools' Mini-Rugby Festival is a great opportunity for aspiring young rugby players and our partnership with SPAR NI allows us to continue holding events like across the province."

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Autism NI calls for immediate action as new diagnosis figures revealed

New statistics released recently reveal a continued rise in autism diagnosis rates across Northern Ireland, with 1 in 16 school age children now having a diagnosis of autism.

The latest figures, published by the Department of Health, also show particularly high prevalence rates in Belfast, where 1 in 8 school age boys now have a diagnosis of autism. The statistics highlight an urgent need to better understand diagnosis rates and what this means for future autism services and support provision.

Autism NI CEO Kerry Boyd comments: "As the latest figures have shown, there are significant disparities in autism diagnosis rates across Northern Ireland's Health and Social Care Trusts. Northern Ireland now records one of the highest reported rates of autism prevalence internationally, with the most recent Department of Health statistics estimating that 6.2% of school-aged children, approximately one in 16, have an autism diagnosis.

The Belfast Trust area continues to show the highest prevalence, with rates among boys particularly striking,



(L-R) Rebecca Allen (5) and Aaron Allen (9) from Lisburn and Autism NI's CEO, Kerry Boyd enjoy Autism NI's Family Fun Day at W5 to celebrate World Autism Acceptance Week. For more information visit www.autismni.org

estimated at around one in eight. These figures underline the urgent need for comprehensive research into the causes of these regional variations and the growing prevalence of autism across Northern Ireland.

It is therefore essential that the Executive commissions robust, evidence-based research and develops long-term strategic planning to ensure that autistic children

and their families receive the support they need. This must include sustained investment in diagnostic pathways, early intervention, educational provision, mental health support, and adult transition services.

Without meaningful forward planning and increased investment, health and education services will continue to struggle to meet rising demand, leaving too many children facing

unacceptable waiting times and inadequate support."

As a local charity, Autism NI provides life-changing services and support to thousands of autistic people and their families throughout Northern Ireland, while campaigning for greater autism acceptance and inclusion in society.

For further information, please contact Autism NI on 028 9040 1729 or visit www.autismni.org

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How everyday connections shape your baby's future

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Increased commitment to EV charger provision

A photograph of three people standing next to a ChargePlace Scotland electric vehicle charging station. On the left, an older man with glasses and a beard, wearing a tan jacket, has his hand on the charging station. In the center, a younger man in a blue quilted jacket stands with his hands in his pockets. On the right, a woman in a tan coat and pink shirt stands with her hands clasped. The charging station is black with a yellow cable. The background shows a parking lot with several cars and buildings under a cloudy sky.



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VITAL WORK OF FOSTER CARERS PRAISED

The Health Minister heard from young people with lived experience of Foster Care, a birth child of Foster Carers, during a special event at Stormont, which was a great opportunity to celebrate Foster Carers across Northern Ireland and to encourage others to consider fostering.

Audiences were treated to a series of amazing performances from young people which included singing, a tin whistle and piano recital and an epic DJ set!

South Eastern Trust Director of Children's Services Marie-Louise Sloan said: "The launch of Foster Care Fortnight provides an opportunity to celebrate and recognise the incredible contribution foster carers make to the lives of children and young people, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all our Foster Carers for their dedication, resilience and commitment and would encourage anyone who has considered fostering to find out more by contacting 0800 0720 137 or adoptionandfostercare.hscni.net to explore how they could make a lasting difference to a child's future."

Speaking at the launch, the Director of Children's Services in Belfast, Kerrylee Weatherall, who



L-R South Eastern Trust Director of Children's Services Marie-Louise Sloan, Assistant Director for Cared for Children Support services Maurice Largey, Head of Service, Fostering and Adoption, Nuala Hanna, Principal Social Worker Governance and Improvement Lead, Fostering, Patricia Mulholland, Principal Social Worker, Sarah Moore and Principal Social Worker, Bridie Rainey

represented HSC NI Foster Care, said: "This year's theme, 'This is Fostering' invites us all to shine a light on the everyday experiences of fostering - to recognise the real, lived moments that define

what fostering truly is. Because fostering is not just about big milestones or headlines. It is about the quiet, consistent acts of care, and being there every single day.

As we launch Foster Care Fortnight, let us use the days ahead to continue shining that light—to tell the stories that celebrate our foster carers, and to encourage others to step forward and be part of this vital community."

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We're living longer - Can we have quantity and quality?

Belfast is ageing. Around 15% of our population is now aged 65+ and expected to rise to nearly one in four over the next 20 years, a shift that will reshape our communities and services.

While this reflects longer lives, it also raises an important question: how do we support people to stay well, independent and connected as they grow older? Loneliness and isolation remain significant challenges across Northern Ireland, particularly for older people. The consequences extend beyond social wellbeing, contributing to poorer health outcomes and increasing pressure on already stretched services.

For over 65 years, Abbeyfield Belfast has provided a unique supported sheltered housing model where residents enjoy the privacy and independence of their own space, a shared dining experience, social activities and companionship. This approach improves self-



esteem and well-being, often delaying and sometimes preventing the need for more intensive support, hospital admission or residential care. Families see the difference too. A recent message from the family of a resident moving on from Abbeyfield Belfast's Voysey House

captured this perfectly. They described staff as "kind, attentive, patient, accommodating and caring," praising a team who supported not only their father, but the entire family through a significant transition. Their words were a powerful reminder that while buildings and services matter, it is the

staff and volunteers who bring warmth, dignity and reassurance to everyday life. As Belfast plans for an ageing future, the message is clear: with the right environment, the right support and a strong sense of community, later life isn't just about living longer, it's about living well.

Met Office experts present evidence on climate change

DAERA Minister Andrew Muir recently welcomed an event organised with the Met Office on the science and evidence behind climate change.

Leading experts from the Met Office were in Stormont to highlight the importance of deploying science and evidence to understand and respond to climate change and its impacts globally and in Northern Ireland. At the event jointly hosted by DAERA in Parliament Buildings, the Met Office presented the latest data and analysis on projected climate trends, including the anticipated local impacts of a warming climate on infrastructure,

public health and the natural environment. Attendees heard about the specific challenges facing Northern Ireland's agriculture sector, with changing weather patterns, prolonged wet periods and increasing temperatures expected to have significant implications for our agri-food sector. Professor Jason Lowe OBE, Met Office Principal Fellow Applied & Climate Science, said: "The role of the Met Office is to provide the very best

climate intelligence through world leading science, enabling decision makers, business and individuals to make evidence-based decisions in response to the challenges of our changing climate. "The evidence is clear that our climate is changing, and we know that reducing our greenhouse gas emissions will help prevent the very worst impacts of climate change. However, it is also critical to adapt to the changes we're going to see, and an

evidence-based approach to assessing the risks will help ensure the most effective action is taken." The session included a question-and-answer panel, providing participants with the opportunity to engage directly with experts and explore the evidence in greater depth. The event forms part of ongoing work by DAERA to raise awareness of the impacts of climate change and support informed, evidence-based action across all sectors.



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Take to the Skies this Summer with Drone Pilot Training Academy!

Looking for a great way to elevate your summer break? Drone Pilot Training Academy has you covered. As Northern Ireland's leading drone training provider, the academy offers an opportunity to learn from expert and experienced instructors!

This summer, the academy is opening its doors wider than ever with an exciting Summer Scheme. Spaces are limited, making it the perfect time for families, hobbyists, and youngsters to get hands-on experience. The beginner-friendly courses are open to children aged 11 and up (when accompanied by a parent or guardian), offering a fantastic, interactive way to bond while mastering the basics of flight controls and aviation safety in a highly supportive environment. Beyond summer fun, the academy is deeply committed to education and professional

development. It hosts dedicated STEM workshops tailored for schools, colleges, and universities to inspire future engineers and pilots. For those looking to upskill to enhance their careers, the academy provides specialized, industry-focused training for professionals in agriculture, architectural careers, civil engineering and construction as well as equipping local councils, search and rescue organizations and charities. This proven track record is backed by trusted partnerships with major organizations, including NIE, BBC NI, the Education Authority



NI, Ordinary Survey NI, and Drone STEM for Schools. Ready to fast-track your journey to becoming a qualified drone pilot with practical, hands-on training? Booking has never been easier. You can call the academy's dedicated AI Booking Assistant today at 07403 656150 for a fast, simple, and 24/7 booking experience. If you would prefer to speak directly to chief instructor Robert Dobbin, you can contact him at 07565 481897. Secure your spot today and get ready to be airborne!

Howdens Ravenhill hits the mark as a top employer

Howdens is proving popular with customers and trades but its also recognised as a great place to work and attract highly skilled and knowledgeable staff . We caught up with staff at Howdens Ravenhill.

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."

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. Celebrating two years of serving the trade and the local community, Howdens on Ravenhill Road has been led by Michelle Law, whose consistent leadership as Manager has been instrumental in the depot's growth.

Under Michelle's guidance, the Ravenhill team has built a reputation for the "no-nonsense" trade service that Howdens is famous for—focusing on stock availability, expert design advice, and fostering strong relationships with local tradespeople. Whether it's a small renovation or a large-scale housing project, the branch has played a vital role in transforming homes across Belfast. Founded in 1995 with just 14 depots, Howdens

has grown into the UK's number one specialist kitchen supplier and a member of the FTSE 100. Despite its scale—now operating nearly 900 depots across the UK, Ireland, France, and Belgium—the company remains committed to its founding principle: being "worthwhile for all concerned." Howdens Ravenhill Road is at 55 Ravenhill Road, Belfast BT6 8DU. Tel: 028 9010 1600

Cancer Charities Coalition Showcased Impact at Stormont

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

The event highlighted the vital role cancer charities play across Northern Ireland. Charities brought together their individual expertise under a shared mission: to ensure everyone affected by cancer receives the care, support and dignity they deserve. The event also recognised the contribution of the recently established Cancer Charities Fund from the Department of Health in sustaining and strengthening essential services. Richard Spratt, Chair of the NICCC, said: "Cancer

charities have been a cornerstone of support for patients and families. Through the Coalition, we have shown the strength of working together to make a greater impact and ensure no one faces cancer alone. The Cancer Charities Fund has been an important step in recognising the value of our work, however sustainable investment in cancer charities is essential." Minister Nesbitt said: "I welcome the opportunity to meet the charities and to hear more about the transformative work they do, offering personalised

support at the heart of their communities. The Cancer Charities Grant Scheme, funded by my Department and Macmillan Cancer Support, helps charities right across Northern Ireland as they deliver outstanding care to those affected by cancer. "I am committed to the Neighbourhood model of care which brings care closer to people's home. By empowering charities to deliver earlier, more localised support, we can help people stay well for longer and reduce avoidable pressure on hospital services."



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



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New Specialist Clinic Offers Relief for those with Joint Pain

For many suffering from chronic joint pain or musculoskeletal injuries, the path to relief is often obstructed by long waiting lists and a “one-size-fits-all” approach to care.

However, a new specialist practice is changing that landscape. NI Steroid Injection, led by Dr. McQuillan (MBChB), has officially launched to provide professional, affordable and rapid-access treatment for patients from across Greater Belfast and beyond. Dr. McQuillan is an experienced General Practitioner with a robust clinical background. Before specializing in musculoskeletal medicine, Dr. McQuillan spent seven years working in high-pressure hospital environments across several specialties, including Acute Medicine, Geriatrics, Respiratory and Cardiology. A Member of the Royal College of General Practitioners, he has developed a deep expertise in the mechanics of joint inflammation and healing. His philosophy centers on community-based care; he has teamed up with

Marie Hart Physiotherapy to ensure that medical intervention is paired with physical rehabilitation. Dr. McQuillan has also introduced a home-visit service for patients with limited mobility, ensuring that specialist care—including ultrasound-guided treatments—is accessible even to those unable to leave their houses. What sets this new practice apart is its integration of “Point of Care” ultrasound. While many clinics rely solely on anatomical landmarks, Dr. McQuillan utilizes imaging to visualize the exact source of pain, such as the median nerve in Carpal Tunnel Syndrome or excess fluid in the knee. This precision ensures the steroid solution is deposited exactly where it is needed, significantly enhancing patient outcomes and reducing the recovery time for conditions like Osteoarthritis, Rotator



Cuff pain and Bursitis. As a new addition to the Northern Ireland healthcare sector, NI Steroid Injection represents a shift toward more agile, specialized private practices that prioritize patient convenience without sacrificing clinical excellence. For those tired of waiting, the clinic offers a streamlined journey from diagnosis to relief, all under the guidance of a practitioner with a comprehensive understanding of both general and specialized medicine. For more information see <https://nisteroidinjection.com>

MORE THAN A STING IN THE TALE: THE POWER OF NETTLES

Most of us love native wildflowers, which feed butterflies and bees. But some of the plants of most importance are the ones we don’t like, often regarded as terrible weeds which need to be removed asap. Ragwort? Thistles? And nettles.

They all are of vital importance to nature, but nettles are one of the best. Yes, they sting, don’t smell nice and tend to spread, but they also support over 40 different kinds of insects, which use the nettle sting as a shield, protecting them from grazing animals, and in turn are food for ladybirds and many other creatures. But it’s the nettle role as a host for egg-laying insects which is particularly important, vital for some moths, plus butterflies such as the Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock and Comma. And all this insect life, including caterpillars and other larvae, can attract amphibians and hedgehogs, as well as foraging birds.



So why don’t we cherish nettles? Because they sting or don’t have colourful flowers? Because they’re common and associated with unkempt places? In fact, if you want to garden for wildlife, a patch of nettles in a sunny spot will deliver for so many insects and the natural food cycle.

And don’t forget about their medicinal and food properties for us. They are a good source of calcium, magnesium and iron as well as other trace elements and vitamins (nettle soup anyone?) and were a highly valued, nutrient-dense survival food back in prehistoric times. Indeed, traces of nettles have been found

during digs of ancient settlements, suggesting that where there were people there were nettles and vice versa. Sometimes maligned ‘weeds’ need to be rediscovered and valued for what they contribute to the natural world, which of course is our world. JVA

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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."

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Led by Alana McPeak, A&J Catering specializes in bringing renowned hospitality directly to your doorstep. Planning a party, wedding, or special corporate event?

A&J Catering eliminates the stress of hosting by tailoring bespoke party packages to your exact specifications.

Whether you are hosting an intimate backyard gathering or a large-scale reception, the service provides an exceptional array of hot and cold platters designed to impress. Their diverse menus feature everything from beautifully arranged fruit, savoury roll, and gourmet sandwich platters to premium artisan salads and hearty hot mains

like baked lasagnas. For those with a sweet tooth, A&J Catering is highly celebrated for its decadent desserts, including elegantly tiered, fruit-topped fresh cream cakes and rich chocolate gateaux.

Now, new for this summer, A&J Catering is introducing a Modern Mobile BBQ – perfect for cooking hot food for your gathering on-site!

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Master the Sun this summer

Staying safe in the sun is essential for protecting your skin from painful burns and premature ageing.

The easiest way to defend yourself is by applying a broad-spectrum sunscreen that blocks both UVA and UVB rays. You should also seek shade during the hottest parts of the day when the solar radiation peaks. Wearing a wide-brimmed hat and UV-blocking sunglasses adds an extra layer of vital physical defense. Understanding Sun Protection Factor numbers is the key



to choosing the right level of skin defense. The number tells you how much longer your skin can resist burning compared to using no protection at all. If your unprotected skin usually begins to redden after ten minutes then an factor fifteen lotion theoretically grants one hundred and fifty minutes. However real-world conditions like sweating and swimming mean you must reapply the cream every two hours regardless of the number. For reliable safety in the UK climate you should always opt for an factor thirty or higher. Apply the cream generously to all exposed skin about twenty minutes before you step outdoors so it can bond properly. Taking these simple precautions ensures you can enjoy the beautiful summer weather without risking your long-term health.



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SPECSAVERS CONNSWATER CELEBRATE 25 YEARS WITH CUSTOMERS

Specsavers Connswater celebrated 25 years in business with their local customers recently, inviting them in-store to browse the latest range of designer frames, enter into a draw to win a pair of designer sunglasses and strike a pose at

The store, located in Connswater Retail Park (beside Ulster Bank and McDonald's) has been looking after the eyes and ears of east Belfast and the greater Belfast area since 2001, with dispensing director Lynsey Cunningham opening the store before ophthalmic director, Paula Cunningham joining in 2003.

The pair said of their work in the local community; "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." Book an eye or hearing test via specsavers.co.uk/book/belfastconnswater.

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.

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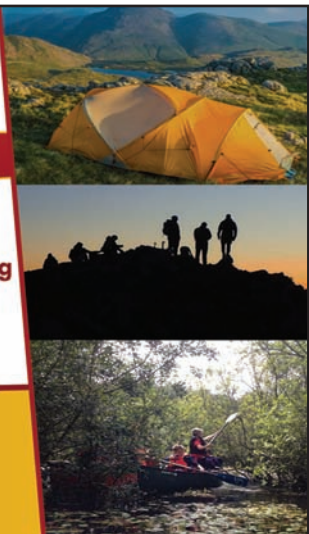


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Summer Allergy Survival

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



The absolute worst pollen producers during June and July are perennial grasses, which dominate our rural pastures, road verges, and lawns. Highly allergenic species like ryegrass, Timothy grass, and cocksfoot release billions of microscopic grains that easily become airborne in the breeze. While spring tree pollen has mostly subsided, summer also sees a massive surge from weeds like nettles and dock leaves. These plants thrive in our damp maritime climate, creating a double threat when combined with the peak grass season. Beating the mid-summer pollen surge requires a proactive strategy focused on reducing your daily exposure. You should try to stay indoors during the early morning and late evening because pollen counts naturally peak during these times. When you must venture outside, wearing wraparound sunglasses helps create a physical barrier that keeps floating allergens out of your eyes. Smearing a small amount of petroleum jelly just inside your nostrils can also trap pollen before you breathe it in. Your home should be a safe haven from seasonal allergens, so keep windows firmly closed during high-count days. After spending time outdoors, change your clothes immediately and wash your hair to remove trapped particles before getting into bed. If you have a lawn, delegate the mowing to someone else or keep it tightly clipped to prevent the grass from flowering. Finally, tracking daily forecasts from the Met Office allows you to plan your outdoor adventures when the atmospheric risk is lowest.

A COASTAL SPIRIT BUILT TO LAST

Founded in 2016 by a then 22-year-old Gareth Irvine, Copeland Distillery began as an Ulster University final-year project. Lacking corporate backing, Irvine launched a crowdfunding campaign that raised £30,000 from over 370 believers before a single bottle was filled.

Today, widely regarded as one of Northern Ireland's most exciting craft spirit producers, the business operates from a beautifully restored, 6,500 sq ft former cinema and bottling company on Manor Street in Donaghadee. Securely anchored by a 125-year lease, this landmark site represents a £1 million investment in the town's heritage.

The distillery's identity is deeply intertwined with its coastal location. Situated steps from the harbour, it draws inspiration from the nearby Copeland Islands—a historic haven for historic spirit smugglers. This genuine sense of place shapes an unusually diverse portfolio spanning five spirit categories: gin, rum, whiskey, vodka, and coffee liqueur. Notable



successes include its Classic Irish Gin, featuring island-foraged botanicals, and a rapidly expanding, award-winning whiskey program boasting multiple Gold Medals. Led by Irvine and Director Commercial Mark Prentice, Copeland balances traditional craft with strategic growth. The distillery operates five days

a week around three copper pot stills. Excitement is peaking for Summer 2026, which features Copeland's most ambitious whiskey roadmap yet: six limited-edition expressions, including its first-ever Peated release. Beyond production, the site thrives as a vibrant community hub. Open seven days a week, it features a

relaxed, dog-friendly coffee shop where visitors can enjoy homemade treats while watching the distilling team at work. With popular Saturday evening tours and an escalating international export footprint—particularly in the U.S.—Copeland Distillery is expertly capitalizing on global trends toward provenance and experiential tourism

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TOP SUMMER TIPPLES FOR OUTDOOR ENTERTAINING

When the mercury rises and the golden hour stretches well into the evening, there is nothing quite like gathering friends for an al fresco soir  e.

The secret to effortless hosting lies in the “tipples”—drinks that are as refreshing to drink as they are easy to serve. Here are the top summer beverages to elevate your next garden gathering.

The Spritz: Effervescent & Elegant

The Aperol Spritz remains the undisputed king of the patio. With its vibrant sunset hue and low-alcohol profile, it is perfect for long afternoons.

For a twist, try a Hugo Spritz, which swaps bitter orange for elderflower cordial, mint, and lime—tasting like a breezy summer morning.

Pitcher-Perfect Punches Don’t get stuck behind the bar all night. Batched cocktails like Sangria (Red, White, or Ros  ) or a classic Pimm’s No. 1 Cup are the ultimate “set and forget” solutions.



Pack your pitchers with seasonal fruit—think sliced strawberries, cucumber, and sprigs of mint—to act as both a garnish and a flavor infuser.

The “Froz  ” Revolution

For those truly sweltering days, Froz   (frozen ros  ) is a sophisticated alternative to a slushie. Blend a

dry ros   with frozen strawberries and a touch of lemon juice for a crowd-pleasing treat that stays cold until the last sip.

Sophisticated Non-Alcoholic Options

Gone are the days when the “sober” option was just lukewarm cola. Impress your guests with a Watermelon & Basil Infusion or a Ginger

and Lime Mocktail. Serving these in highball glasses with plenty of ice ensures every guest feels part of the celebration.

Pro Tip: Freeze edible flowers or berries into your ice cubes. It’s a simple touch that adds a “wow” factor to even the simplest glass of sparkling water or gin and tonic. Cheers to a season of sunshine!

Top beaches in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland’s coastline is a dramatic tapestry of rugged cliffs, golden sands, and historic landmarks, offering some of the most breathtaking seaside experiences in the British Isles.

Along the famous Causeway Coastal Route, Benone Strand stands out as a sprawling masterpiece, stretching for seven miles beneath the watchful gaze of Mussenden Temple. This Blue Flag giant is a haven for kite-fliers and walkers who enjoy the panoramic views of the Donegal hills across the water. Nearby, Downhill Beach and Castlerock Beach provide equally stunning vistas, where the Atlantic surf meets ancient dune systems that feel untouched by time.

Further east toward the vibrant town of Portrush, Whiterocks Beach is celebrated for its striking limestone cliffs and sea caves, making it a favorite for photographers and adventurous surfers. In the heart of the town itself, West Strand offers a classic seaside atmosphere with its bustling promenade and proximity to local



amusements. For those seeking a more secluded escape, White Park Bay remains one of the most tranquil spots on the coast. Managed by the National Trust, this pale arc of sand is famous for its resident cows that occasionally roam the dunes, adding a unique charm to the wild, natural landscape. Traveling south

into County Down, Murlough Beach provides a serene retreat at the foot of the Mourne Mountains. This National Nature Reserve is renowned for its vast dune system and diverse birdlife, offering a peaceful contrast to the lively Newcastle Beach located just a short walk away. On the shores of Belfast Lough, Helen’s Bay is

a commuter’s paradise within Crawfordsburn Country Park, perfect for a sheltered swim in calm waters. Finally, Cranfield Beach and Tyrella Beach offer family-friendly stretches with shallow waters and spectacular views of the Haulbowline Lighthouse, rounding out a diverse list of coastal gems that define the beauty of the North.

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- Enjoy consoles, VR, sim racing and more.
- Parents & friend’s welcome



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How Game Locker is Revolutionizing Entertainment

The entertainment landscape is undergoing a massive transformation, and Game Locker is leading the charge by engineering high-performance, immersive gaming experiences across Northern Ireland.

Far more than just a typical gaming company, this innovative venture blends entertainment, state-of-the-art technology, and skill development into a cohesive community package. By designing elite esports arenas, cutting-edge virtual reality environments, and advanced driving simulators, Game Locker delivers unparalleled excitement, learning, and unforgettable engagement for any audience.

One of Game Locker's standout offerings is its complete mobile flexibility, bringing premium gaming configurations directly to your preferred venue anywhere in Northern Ireland. Their mobile expertise covers high-end console setups, top-tier PC builds, and immersive Virtual Reality rigs. Every booking delivers a comprehensive, hassle-free service that includes up to two or more hours of continuous gameplay, professional equipment hire, premium gaming furniture, and dedicated event coaches to ensure managed program delivery runs flawlessly. Their corporate excellence is highlighted by successful partnerships with major clients, including managing full gaming suites for Allstate's Employee Fun Days in Belfast and Derry, as well as delivering high-profile eventing at the Waterfront Hall.

For those looking to host an exclusive party, Game Locker features a state-of-the-art private arena room located at Inspire Business Park in Dundonald. This venue is the ultimate destination for unforgettable birthday parties, friends' get-togethers, and high-energy game nights for up to twenty-five guests. This package includes a dedicated host, a customizable food zone, and full access to consoles, VR, and sim racing. Additionally, their specialized Apex Racing Simulators division offers mobile simulator hire and structured e-sports coaching sessions for competitive racing enthusiasts.

To secure a booking, contact the team at Unit 5 Inspire Business Park, Dundonald, BT16 1QT. You can reach them by phone at 07519 312338, via email at gl.gamelocker@gmail.com, or online at www.gamelocker.online. You can also connect with them on TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram.

Summer Sky Spectacles

Warm evenings offer a perfect excuse to look up and appreciate the universe. The upcoming months bring several notable displays for stargazers.

Early summer starts with a brilliant planetary pairing. Venus and Jupiter will appear remarkably close together in the western evening sky. This striking alignment is easy to spot with the naked eye just after sunset.

August provides the main highlight of the season. The annual Perseid meteor shower peaks around the middle of the month. Debris from a passing comet creates bright streaks of light as it hits the atmosphere. Fortunate timing means a dark moonless sky will make even faint shooting stars visible.

The month concludes with dramatic events involving the sun and moon. A partial solar eclipse will darken the daytime sky as the moon blocks a portion of the sun. Proper eye protection is essential to watch this safely. Two weeks later a partial lunar eclipse arrives. Earth moves between the sun and moon and casts a deep shadow across the lunar surface.

These events require very little equipment. A clear night and a spot away from city lights are all you need to enjoy the views.

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BEST PICNIC LOCATIONS THIS SUMMER

As the golden hour stretches across the rugged landscapes of Northern Ireland, there is no better way to embrace the summer than with a curated outdoor dinner.

Our local area offers a blend of dramatic coastal views and serene pastoral beauty. For those seeking the ultimate sunset backdrop, the Mourne or Castlewellan lakesides provide a breathtaking vantage point over Lower Lough Erne, while the secluded Murlough Bay offers a quiet, stony beach framed by steep dunes —perfect for a private meal away from the crowds.

However, a truly successful sunset picnic requires more than just a stunning location; it demands a strategic kit. To keep the atmosphere light, a high-quality portable Bluetooth speaker is essential, though one should keep the volume low enough to blend with the crashing waves or rustling trees. To combat the inevitable evening midges without the harsh medicinal scent of traditional repellents,



look for citronella-based balms or lemon eucalyptus sprays that offer a “botanical” fragrance. Other essentials include a weighted picnic blanket to withstand the Atlantic breeze, a set of enamel plates for durability, and a reliable insulated flask to keep your pre-mixed mocktails crisp until the

stars appear. For the ambitious picnicker looking to extend their dinner into the late-night hours, Northern Ireland offers world-class stargazing. The Davagh Forest in County Tyrone, home to the OM Dark Sky Park and Observatory, is arguably the best place to catch the

Northern Lights (Aurora Borealis) due to its lack of light pollution. Alternatively, Ballintoy Harbour on the north coast provides a clear, northern-facing horizon over the sea, giving you the best chance to spot the dancing green lights while finishing your dessert under the vast Irish sky.

Ice Ice Baby

As the summer finally decides to make an appearance ice cream and gelato become in hot demand.

The modern ice cream landscape has evolved far beyond the standard seaside flake. Today, the local artisanal scene is a sophisticated blend of culinary daring and precision chemistry, where makers are ditching synthetic syrups for high-end, locally sourced botanicals.

According to Leo Thorne, head maker at the award-winning Churn & Clover, the secret to the perfect scoop lies in the “overrun”—the amount of air whipped into the mix. “Mass-produced tubs are often half air,” Thorne explains. “Artisanal gelato or ice cream focuses on density. It’s about the butterfat content and the stability of the emulsion.”

This year, the trend is leaning toward the savoury-sweet boundary. Local parlours are reporting a surge in demand for Basil & Hand-Zested Lemon, a refreshing herbaceous hit, and Salted Honey, which uses wildflower nectar



to provide a complex, floral sweetness that lingers longer than plain sugar.

But with great indulgence comes the inevitable “brain freeze.” Known scientifically as sphenopalatine ganglioneuralgia, this sharp pain occurs when something cold touches the roof of your mouth, causing

the rapid constriction and dilation of blood vessels. Thorne’s advice for the over-eager? “Press your tongue against the roof of your mouth to warm the palate back up. It’s a small price to pay for the ultimate cool-down.”

Whether it’s a scoop of sourdough-infused cream or a vegan

sorbet made with seasonal strawberries, the local scene is proving that ice cream is no longer just a childhood treat—it is a craft.

This summer, as we queue at the local van or boutique parlour, we aren’t just buying a dessert; we are tasting the meticulous science of the British summer.

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KEEPING YOUR COOL THIS SUMMER

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

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

One of the most effective ways to lower indoor temperatures is to stop the sun before it ever touches the glass. Traditional

awnings and external shutters are making a significant comeback in contemporary design because they address the root of the problem. While interior blinds provide privacy they often allow solar heat to pass through the window and become trapped behind the fabric. By installing external louvres or deep eaves we can block the harshest rays

during the peak of the day and ensure that the interior remains naturally shaded. This approach prioritises the "envelope" of the home and transforms the facade into a functional layer of climate control.

Nature offers its own ingenious cooling system through the process of transpiration. Incorporating an "indoor jungle" is more than just a decorative trend; it is a way to actively humidify and cool the air within a room.

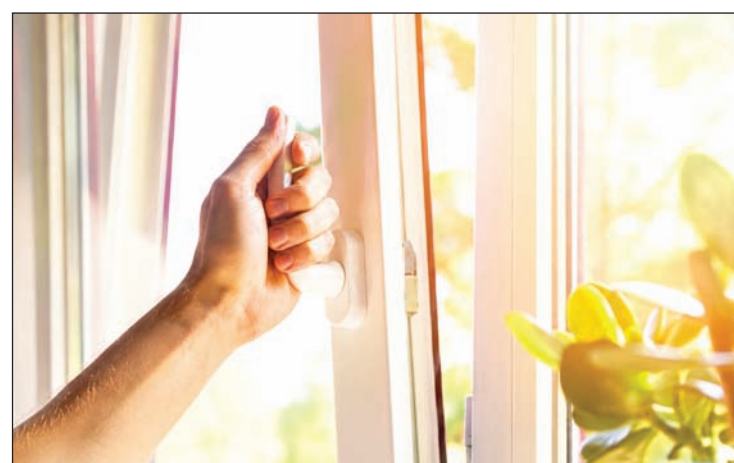
Large-leafed plant varieties such as Peace Lilies and Rubber Trees act as natural evaporative coolers. They release moisture into the

atmosphere and helping to break up stagnant heat. When strategically placed near windows or in breezy corridors these plants create a microclimate that feels significantly fresher and more revitalising than a sterile air-conditioned environment.

The tactile experience of a home changes dramatically with the seasons and the swap from winter wools to summer linens is essential for thermal comfort. Heavy velvets and synthetic blends should be packed away in favour of breathable natural fibres like hemp and cotton. These materials allow

for far better airflow and do not trap body heat against furniture or bedding. Even the visual palette plays a role as lighter colours reflect light rather than absorbing it. By stripping back the layers and opting for a minimalist approach to textiles we create a sense of visual "cool" that translates into physical comfort.

Managing the airflow of a house is an art form that requires understanding the daily rhythm of the sun. The most effective low-tech hack is often the most counter-intuitive: closing the windows and drawing the curtains during the



hottest hours of the afternoon. By sealing the house when the outdoor air is warmer than the indoor air we preserve the thermal mass of the building.

Once the sun sets and the outside temperature drops opening windows on opposite sides of the house creates a cross-breeze that flushes out the day's warmth and

replaces it with the crisp air of the evening. This rhythmic approach to ventilation ensures that the home remains a true refuge from the summer heat.

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 taupe 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 taupe, 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 taupe 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.

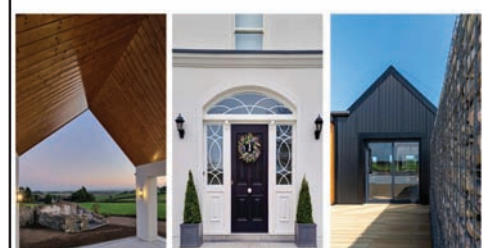
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Do not be fooled by a fresh coat of paint and a scented candle. Look for the cracks behind the furniture. Check the age of the boiler and the state of the roof. Visit the street at night to see what the neighbours are really



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.

M&S Associates Celebrates 50 Years of Property Solutions

Since its establishment in 1976, M&S Associates has built an enduring legacy of excellence in the property sector.

Celebrating an impressive 50-year anniversary milestone, the firm has firmly cemented its position as a trusted leader in design and management. Offering highly experienced building and land surveying services, the team has spent five decades empowering clients by transforming visions into realities with precise, cost-effective spatial solutions.

Operating seamlessly across residential, retail, and commercial sectors, M&S Associates provides comprehensive property solutions tailored to every phase of building care and development. Homeowners looking to expand can rely on the firm for drawing plans for loft conversions, open-plan kitchens, and ensuite garden hubs. Simultaneously, their professional survey inspections and detailed reports cater heavily to property transactions, offering vital damp and timber inspections



alongside pre-purchase property health checks for both rentals and sales.

A core driver of the company's longevity is its dedication to blending traditional surveying knowledge with cutting-edge technology. Through its specialized land surveying division, the firm utilizes high-precision

2D and 3D workflows, including GPS site surveys, topographic mapping, and advanced SCAN to BIM 3D laser modelling. These technical advancements allow M&S Associates to efficiently manage complex tasks such as planning and building control applications, architectural layouts, and critical

boundary or legal mapping disputes all in-house. Fully insured and boasting prestigious industry affiliations, the friendly team remains committed to keeping domestic and commercial projects on time and within budget, steering their historic expertise smoothly into the future.

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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Skills Showcase at Electrical Traineeship Intercampus Competition

South Eastern Regional College (SERC) recently hosted its first Level 2 Electrical Traineeship Intercampus Competition at the college's Newtownards Campus.

Bringing together top talent from Newtownards, Downpatrick and Lisburn Campuses, 10 competitors - who first competed within their own campuses - progressed to the inter-campus final when they went head-to-head in a highly competitive event designed to showcase the technical ability, precision and problem-solving skills of the electrical trainees.

Following an intense day of practical challenges and assessment, Mark Jamison (24) from Belfast delivered an outstanding performance to secure first place; Reece Peak Bellerby (18) from Newtownards achieved a close second place; while Abigail Miller (17) from Bangor, took third place. All three winners are from the Newtownards Campus.

Deputy Head of School, Samuel Lyttle, praised both the participants and the success of the inaugural event. He said, "This is the first



SERC hosted a Level 2 Electrical Traineeship Intercampus Competition at the college's Newtownards Campus which brought together top talent from Newtownards, Downpatrick and Lisburn Campuses. Three students from Newtownards campus took the podium places. (L - R) Reece Peak Bellerby, 18, from Newtownards, took second place; Mark Jamison, 24, from Belfast lifted first place and Abigail Miller, 17, from Bangor, was placed third.

year we have run the competition for the Level 2 Traineeship students, and feedback from learners has been extremely positive. The competition provides an excellent opportunity for trainees to challenge themselves, benchmark their skills against their peers, and build confidence in a competitive environ-

ment. We hope it will also encourage learners to consider progressing to SkillBuild NI competitions in the future." Samuel concluded, "Overall, the competition was a resounding success, highlighting both the high standard of training here at SERC, and the commitment of our learners to develop

professional, career-ready skills for the electrical sector." SERC and the electrical team would like to thank C.K Tools, who generously sponsored the event by providing prizes for the winning competitors. Visit www.serc.ac.uk Real Learning for Real Life #BetterOffAtSERC.

Local Cancer Charity Welcomes Historic Smokefree Generation Law

Action on Smoking and Health NI (ASH NI) and Cancer Focus Northern Ireland welcome the Introduction of the Tobacco and Vapes Bill.

The introduction of the Tobacco and Vapes law marks a major step forward in protecting public health and creating a smoke free generation.

Each year, around 2,200 people in Northern Ireland die from smoking related causes, the equivalent of six lives lost every day. Smoking also places a significant burden on health services, with approximately 34,900 hospital admissions annually and costs estimated at up to £450 million when wider economic impacts are included.

The new legislation introduces a phased approach to ending tobacco use by making it illegal to sell tobacco products to anyone born on or after 1 January 2009. This creates a smoke free generation while not affecting those who can already legally purchase tobacco.

The new law also includes strong measures to address youth vaping, including restrictions on advertising, bans on sales to under 18s, and tighter regulation of products and marketing.

Naomi Thompson Health Improvement Manager



with Cancer Focus NI stated:

"Smoking continues to have a devastating impact on lives, families, and communities across Northern Ireland. Losing six people every day to a preventable cause underlines the urgency for action.

"Smoking is the leading cause of lung cancer and many other diseases. This legislation is a landmark moment. The creation of a smoke free generation is a bold and necessary step that will protect future generations from the harms of tobacco.

"It is also vital that we address the growing

concern around the youth use of nicotine containing products. These new measures will help ensure that children are not targeted or drawn into nicotine addiction.

"However, legislation alone is not enough. In NI there needs to be a coordinated approach to tobacco and nicotine product use - with focussed prevention programmes, investment in stop smoking services, widespread campaigns, funded enforcement; especially targeting communities and groups where smoking rates remain highest.

"This is a once in a generation opportunity to

reduce harm, tackle health inequalities, and move closer to a tobacco free society."

While the new law represents significant progress, challenges remain. Thousands of people will continue to use tobacco products. Smoking rates are highest in the most deprived communities, where people are four times more likely to smoke than those in the least deprived areas, reinforcing the urgent need to address health inequalities.

With sustained commitment and investment, a Smokefree NI by 2035 is within reach.

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GUIDE TO PREVENTING AND CURING TRAVEL SICKNESS

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

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

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

Why Do We Get Travel Sickness?

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

Your vestibular system—specifically the semicircular canals in your inner ear—detects movement, tilt, and acceleration. If you are reading a book in the back seat of a moving car, your eyes tell your brain that you are sitting perfectly still.

However, your inner ear feels every bump, turn, and acceleration.

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

How to Avoid Travel Sickness (Prevention)

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

1. Choose Your Seat Wisely

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

- In a Car: Drive if you can (drivers rarely get carsick because their brains anticipate every turn). If you are a passenger, sit in the front passenger seat.

- On a Boat: Request a cabin in the middle of the



ship, close to the waterline. This is the ship’s natural pivot point and experiences the least rocking.

- On a Plane: Secure a seat over the front edge of the wing, which is the most stable zone during turbulence.

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

2. Fixate on the Horizon

Keep your eyes on a stable point in the distance. This aligns your visual signals with the physical movement your inner ear is feeling, instantly reducing that internal “hardware conflict.” Avoid looking at phones, tablets, or books.

3. Manage Your Diet Before Departure

What you put in your stomach matters. Avoid

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

How to Cure Travel Sickness (Quick Relief)

If you are already in transit and begin to feel that

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

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

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

your face.

2.Stabilize your head:Within 1 minute.

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

3.Apply acupressure: Within 2 minutes.

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

4.Deploy ginger or peppermint:Within 5 minutes.

Chew on a piece of crystallized ginger,

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

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

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

Attention to Detail at Gleam Auto Valeting

Gleam Auto Valeting and Detailing Studio helps local drivers transform their cars.

Gary launched the business in October 2019 out of a true passion for cars. Since then, he has focused on delivering a level of service that is second to none. His studio caters to every type of vehicle, ensuring each one receives the same care and attention.

The studio specializes in premium paint corrections, high-end detailing, and advanced ceramic coatings. To guarantee elite results, the company holds official accreditation from AutoBead. This status grants Gary exclusive access to top-tier, professional-grade products that are not available to untrained enthusiasts. Customers can trust that their valued possession is in safe hands throughout the treatment process.

A commitment to perfection ensures that everyday vehicles and luxury supercars look their absolute best. Customers routinely praise Gary for his seamless



communication and highly professional approach. One client noted their car was returned in pristine showroom condition. The studio secures vehicles inside a secure facility protected by twenty-four-hour CCTV monitoring.

Drivers across the Ards Peninsula and beyond can easily schedule a tailored care package by booking an appointment in advance. The professional studio is conveniently located at 18b Loughdoo Road, Ardkeen, Newtownards, BT22 1HN.

Anyone looking to restore or protect their vehicle can

reach the studio directly by calling 07809 881859.



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GET A FAN-TASTIC NIGHTS SLEEP

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

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

primary task is ensuring structural stability. Because standard plastic ceiling boxes cannot handle the continuous vibration and weight of a 5kg to 15kg motorized fan, the electrician will first check your ceiling joists. If a joist isn't perfectly aligned with your desired location, they will need to install a timber support block or an adjustable metal brace, usually by gaining access from the loft or room above.

Once the ceiling is reinforced, they will safely isolate the power circuit, fully assemble the fan unit, and mount the motor housing. Finally, they will wire the fixture—often installing a digital receiver if the fan uses a wireless remote—and balance the blades using tiny clip-on weights to guarantee silent, wobble-free operation. In terms of cost, your total investment will depend on the complexity of the wiring and your location. If the electrician is simply swapping out

an existing, centred light fitting where the joists are already strong enough, the job is straightforward. This typically takes one to two hours and will cost between £50 and £150 in labour. However, if the electrician needs to head into the loft to install timber reinforcements, or if you want complex new wiring chased down the walls for separate light and speed switches, the labour can quickly rise to between £120 and £350+. Remember that these estimates cover professional labour and



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

Creating a Resort-Style Patio

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

The secret lies in treating your outdoor area with the same editorial care as your living room, focusing on three foundational elements: weather-resistant sectionals, outdoor rugs, and strategic lighting. First, anchor the space with a deep-seated sectional. To capture that luxury hotel aesthetic, skip the flimsy folding chairs and opt for a generous L-shaped configuration. Look for frames made from durable powder-coated aluminum or synthetic teak, paired with high-performance fabrics like Sunbrella. These materials resist fading and repel water, ensuring your oasis handles summer storms effortlessly. Next, define your "outdoor room" with a premium outdoor rug.



A large, flat-weave polypropylene rug acts as a visual anchor, instantly warming up cold concrete or stone pavers. Opt for a subtle geometric pattern or a sandy neutral tone to mimic a high-end cabana vibe underfoot. Finally, layering your lighting is what takes the patio from day to night. Avoid harsh overhead floods. Instead, string warm LED Edison bulbs overhead for a festive, starry-night ambiance. Complement them with battery-operated, weather-proof floor lanterns tucked into corners, and solar-powered uplighting hidden in nearby planters. By grounding the space with a plush sectional, softening it with a textile rug, and washing it in a warm, amber glow, you create a private destination you will never want to check out of.

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

HOUSEHOLDS COULD SAVE MONEY WITH NEW SMART METERS

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

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

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

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

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

The Minister added: "The Design Plan published today



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

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

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

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

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

while also supporting a more reliable electricity network.

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

CREATE A WATER FEATURE IN A SMALL GARDEN

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

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

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

If you prefer a contemporary aesthetic,

water walls or blade fountains are brilliant. They utilize vertical space, allowing water to cascade down a wall or fence panel into a hidden gravel trough below. For a more traditional, wildlife-friendly approach, you can create a container pond (often called a "patio pond") using an old stone trough, a ceramic pot, or half a wooden wine barrel.

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

- Power Access: Most fountains require an outdoor electrical outlet for the pump. If running a cable isn't feasible, opt for a solar-powered pump. Just ensure the solar panel is placed in a spot that gets reliable, direct



sunlight.

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

- Greenery and Balance: Frame your water feature with plants to blend

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

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

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

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



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