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Councillors Chris McCracken & Alex Harbinson (Alliance, Bangor Central DEA)

## ALLIANCE COUNCILLORS CALL FOR MORE OPPORTUNITIES IN BANGOR'S ACTIVE TRAVEL PLAN

Councillors Chris McCracken and Alex Harbinson, commenting on the recently developed delivery plan by the Department for Infrastructure, have called upon DfI to show more ambition for active travel, including greater opportunities for people to travel into Bangor City Centre and improved integration with existing public transport networks.

The Active Travel Delivery Plan, which is currently open for consultation, has highlighted DfI's plans to develop new infrastructure for walking, wheeling, and cycling across the borough. Commenting on the plan Councillor Chris

McCracken said: "The greater prioritisation of active travel by DfI is welcome. However, the proposal to build just 5km of protected routes on the outskirts of Bangor over the next 10 years is underwhelming, and lacks the ambition we need to

see." "To achieve our climate goals in Northern Ireland, and to improve the health of our society, we need to further expand opportunities for active travel in our towns and cities. I would particularly like to see more routes

leading into Bangor City Centre, as well as routes to better connect our residential communities with schools, workplaces, shops, buses and trains."

**Continued on page 4**

## NIFRS recruiting for On-Call Firefighters

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) is calling on those who want to make a real difference in their community to become On-Call Firefighters.

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# Asda Bangor provides emergency supplies to community following disruption left from Storm Éowyn

Asda Bangor Community Champion, Ami Craig, recently secured emergency funding from The Asda Foundation to support her community, which had been affected by Storm Éowyn.

Ami arranged the emergency funding from the Asda Foundation to provide supplies to those impacted by Storm Éowyn. The community champion filled a trolley with essentials including tea, coffee, biscuits and soup which were delivered to Kilcooley and Ards North Down Women's Centre.

The Asda Foundation has pledged over £8,000 to community hubs and groups across Northern Ireland to help with essential items as thousands of homes remain without power, enabling emergency grants of up to £500 available per store across NI.



Ami said: "The centre have opened their doors to families in the local area without power, giving them a space to warm up, charge their phones and get a hot lunch. We were only too happy to help."

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# HAGAN HOMES PROUDLY SPONSORS IRISH INTERNATIONAL SWIMMER GRACE DAVISON FRESH FROM HER OLYMPIC DEBUT

The two-year partnership will support the athlete's training efforts as she gears up for more competitions

Ballyclare-based Hagan Homes has announced its sponsorship of Grace Davison, the Irish International Swimmer from Bangor, who made her Olympic debut at the 2024 Paris Games. The partnership will see Hagan Homes support Grace over the next two

years, providing essential funding towards her training and development as she prepares for the next Olympic Games, in Los Angeles, 2028. Grace, who trains with Ards Swimming Club and splits her time between the Ards Leisure Centre and

Bangor Aurora, has been making waves in the international swimming scene since the age of 14. Her impressive track record includes seven Irish Junior Records, two Ulster Senior Records, eleven Ulster Junior Records, three Irish Senior Relay Records, and two Ulster Senior Relay Records.

At just 17 years old, she has already represented Ireland and Northern Ireland on multiple prestigious platforms, including the Commonwealth Games, European Championships, and World Swimming Championships. The partnership between Hagan Homes and Grace is built on shared values of commitment, determination, and the pursuit of excellence. Founder and Chair of Hagan Homes, James Hagan said.

He added, "We are incredibly proud to support Grace as she continues to excel in her

swimming career. Her dedication to her sport and her achievements at such a young age are truly inspiring. At Hagan Homes, we believe in nurturing talent and supporting our local communities. Grace embodies the spirit of perseverance and excellence that we value, and we are excited to be part of her journey towards the next Olympics."

Grace's recent performance at the Paris 2024 Olympics showcased her potential on the world stage. Competing in the Women's 4x100 Medley Relay, her team finished 13th overall, setting a new Irish Senior Record.

Grace said "Competing at the Paris Olympics was a dream come true and an incredible learning experience. Setting a new Irish Senior Record with my teammates in the 4x100 Medley Relay was a proud moment, and it has fuelled my determination to continue improving



and representing Ireland on the global stage. I'm already focused on the next four years, with my sights set on the Los Angeles Games in 2028."

The sponsorship from Hagan Homes will be instrumental in Grace's preparations for upcoming competitions, the Commonwealth Games 2026 in Glasgow and the next Olympic Games in Los Angeles in 2028. The funding will help her access essential support services, including coaching, strength and

conditioning, dietetics, physiotherapy, sports psychology, and physiology, which are crucial for competing at the highest level.

Speaking about the partnership, Grace said, "I am so grateful to Hagan Homes for their support over the next two years.

This sponsorship will make a significant difference in my ability to train and compete at the highest level. Having the backing of a respected local company like Hagan Homes means

a lot to me, and I'm excited to represent them as I work towards my goals in swimming."

Grace's dedication to her sport is evident in her numerous accomplishments, including a gold medal in the 400 Individual Medley and a silver in the 200 Individual Medley at the 2023 Youth Commonwealth Games in Trinidad, as well as a bronze medal in the 100 Freestyle at the 2024 European Junior Championships in Lithuania.

Her achievements highlight her as one of Ireland's brightest swimming talents, and with the support of Hagan Homes, she is well-positioned to continue her upward trajectory in the sport.

James Hagan added, "We are delighted to play a part in her journey and look forward to celebrating her future successes. Supporting local talent like Grace is at the heart of what we do, and we are excited to see what the future holds for her."

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### Continued from page 1

Councillor Alex Harbinson went on further to comment: "I welcome DFI's proposed design principles for active travel, which include high quality infrastructure and the creation of people centred places. One third of journeys are less than two miles and supporting active travel for shorter journeys will deliver many social, environmental, economic and health benefits."

Councillor McCracken concluded "The Alliance Party aims to engage with the Department around the delivery of active travel and to encourage greater ambition for Bangor City Centre. I would also encourage members of the community to respond to the DFI consultation, which closes in late February, and to demand better."

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# BBC's Hope Street Helps Pique Interest in Donaghadee Homes with PropertyPal Views Up Over 20%

Insights from NI's leading local property portal PropertyPal suggest that interest in properties in Donaghadee rose whilst the most recent series of Hope Street aired on BBC One.

The drama series, which aired its series four finale recently, is a co-commission between BritBox North America, BBC Northern Ireland and BBC Daytime, made with support from Northern Ireland Screen.

Donaghadee sets the scene for the majority of filming in locations across the town such as Shore Street, Donaghadee lighthouse and Port Devine Harbour.

Over the past two months, while the show was airing, the number of users browsing properties on PropertyPal in Donaghadee increased by 25%, while property views rose by 21% compared to last year.

Donaghadee was named as one of The Sunday Times Best Places to Live in 2024, alongside Portstewart and Belfast's Ormeau.

Described as a "hotspot on the Ards Peninsula", the town was praised for its "charming lighthouse, multicoloured houses, and a centre packed with useful independent shops, friendly cafes, pubs and restaurants showcasing local produce."

Commenting on the rise in interest, Emma McNally, PropertyPal's Chief Operating Officer said:

"Hope Street showcases the beautiful seaside location of Donaghadee and the popularity of both the programme and its setting has led to a spike in interest in property listings in the town.

Last month we saw a rise in traffic to Donaghadee properties, contributing to an overall 20%



Emma McNally COO PropertyPal

increase in website traffic compared to the same time last year. With the show being broadcast on BBC One, across all of the UK, the exposure is not only positive for Donaghadee, but for NI as a whole and we anticipate that this momentum in traffic will continue to grow."

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# VOLUNTEERING IN BANGOR CASTLE WALLED GARDEN

World Soil Day and International Volunteer Day were celebrated earlier this month. To mark the occasion, volunteers who work in Bangor Castle Walled Garden revealed why they decided to take up a volunteering role in the Garden.

Derek McClure recently won the Ards and North Down In Bloom Volunteer of the Year award for his volunteering efforts. Until recently, he was a voluntary Director of the Accept Care group of companies and was Chair of North Down YMCA, as well as volunteering on Saturdays in the Cancer Focus charity shop in Newtownards, not to mention his volunteering work in Bangor Castle Walled Garden.

Derek started volunteering in various capacities around 60 years ago, when he was 14 years old, but his hobby has always been gardening. He can recall digging in his grandfather's garden when he was just four years old, and a few years later, his father built a greenhouse for him for his eighth birthday.

"I've continued gardening throughout my life," Derek said. "When the opportunity arose to become a volunteer within Bangor Castle Walled Garden, I jumped at the chance. Not only did it allow me to develop

my horticultural skills but it also allowed me to put something back into the local community.

"I've always grown a few vegetables on a small plot in my own garden so it seemed like a perfect match to develop more of my skills in the Walled Garden's vegetable patches. Never in my wildest imagination did I think that my biggest problem would come from the crows and pigeons that basically eat everything that's green above the level of the soil!"

Liam Harrington joined the Walled Garden team to spend more time outdoors and contribute to the community. His volunteering work has helped him to expand his gardening knowledge, which he now applies to his own garden.

"I particularly love working in the vegetable plots," Liam said, "especially with some of the more unusual vegetables that are grown in the Walled Garden. It is very

rewarding to see everything blossom over spring and summer after putting the effort in during winter. It's a wonderful space to spend a few hours."

Noel Poots has enjoyed Bangor Castle Walled Garden for many years. Shortly after pandemic restrictions eased, Noel was invited to become one of the volunteers at the Garden. He jumped at the chance to get to know more about plants and gardening in general.

"I enjoy being part of the volunteer team," Noel said. "They are a great bunch of people and good fun to work with. I also enjoy getting involved in the wide variety of work in the Garden and enjoy working alongside the knowledgeable and helpful council team. At this time of year, there is a lot of hard work such as cutting back plants, digging out weeds and mulching but then spring arrives and everything in the garden comes alive again!"

Heather Shiell returned to Northern Ireland in 2019 after living abroad for several years. Having previously enjoyed tending

to her mother-in-law's garden during the 1990s, complete with vegetable plot and fruit bushes, she returned to her passion after walking through Bangor Castle Walled Garden with a friend.

"I had definitely missed the garden during all the years that I'd been away," Heather said. "In autumn 2022, I was walking with a friend through Bangor Castle Walled Garden and was enjoying the wonderful planting schemes and the autumn colours.

We chatted to some people who turned out to be volunteers and I couldn't believe it when they said there was a slot free to become a volunteer.

"I am learning a lot about plants but there are extra benefits like making new friends and being outdoors. We also helped at events such as the springtime 'Awake the Garden', fun and games days for kids, music nights for adults, helping with wildlife education and sustainable garden practices. Generally, though, every week we're busy



digging, cutting, mulching, trimming, planting or cropping. We also meet a wide range of visitors who we love to chat to. It's very heartening to see so many people enjoying the garden and I love being a part of it all."

Taylor Boyd was recently forced to retire from his window cleaning business

after 35 years and found he missed working with many of his customers. However, he decided to volunteer and has found a lot of enjoyment in working outside and being with other like-minded individuals.

"I needed something to do and volunteering at Bangor Castle Walled Garden suits me as I was

used to being outside. I knew I would be interested in gardening as I created my own garden from scratch. I enjoy making things grow, especially when sometimes I don't know what was going to appear in my garden! I am going to keep volunteering and that will allow me to make new friends and keep busy.

I love it." Ards and North Down Borough Council is currently developing its volunteering opportunities in parks and cemeteries across the Borough. If anyone is interested in volunteering, email [andparks@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk](mailto:andparks@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk) or phone 0300 013 333.

## Streamlining for Success: Council's Office Rationalisation and Future Plans for Bangor Castle

Ards and North Down Borough Council is embarking on a significant rationalisation of its office estate.

Currently, the Council operates from multiple administrative buildings, many of which are inefficient to use, operate, and maintain. This initiative will relocate

approximately 420 Council employees to a single, modern, fit-for-purpose office building in Bangor city centre. The new office will embrace the efficiencies of hybrid

working, requiring around 50% less office space than the current footprint. The move aims to promote better collaboration between council services, provide efficiencies, increase footfall to support existing businesses, offer the potential for shared service delivery with other key public sector agencies, and act as a catalyst for economic growth and city centre regeneration.

An important element of this rationalisation is the future use of the Bangor Castle. In August 2024, the Council appointed global consultants Barker Langham to explore viable options for the future

use of Bangor Castle and develop a preferred option, culminating in the production of Outline Business Cases (OBCs) for Bangor Castle and North Down Museum.

The consultants have completed a situation analysis and established an initial list of functional prospects. These options were then scored against criteria aligned with the Council's Corporate Plan, producing a shortlist of five options:

- Boutique Hotel and Events Centre
- Larger Hotel and Events Centre
- Creative Hub and Cultural Arts Centre
- Small Business Workspace

• Small Business Workspace and Museum

These shortlisted options are currently undergoing a comprehensive multi-disciplinary appraisal process. Some options include retaining the North Down Museum in its current location, while others propose utilising the full footprint of the castle and even extending the footprint but taking in to account the heritage of the Castle and park. For options that do not include the retention of the museum, a separate OBC is being developed to explore future location options for the museum.

Susie McCullough, Chief Executive of Ards and North Down Borough Council, said: "This rationalisation project is a significant step forward for Council. By moving to a modern, efficient office space, we are not only improving our operational effectiveness

but also supporting local businesses and fostering new opportunities for growth in the area. The future of Bangor Castle and North Down Museum is a key part of this vision, and we are committed to finding the best possible outcomes for this historic site which will in turn benefit our ratepayers."

The identification of a preferred working option for the Castle will be reported to the Council in the early part of 2025. Following this, the proposals will be presented to stakeholders to gather feedback before detailed financial delivery and operational models are produced as part of the final Outline Business Case, which is envisaged to be completed mid-2025.

For more information, visit [www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/Civic-and-Office-Accommodation](http://www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/Civic-and-Office-Accommodation).

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# Muir pleased 'Johnny the Jig' plaque set for restoration.

Local Alliance MLA Andrew Muir has ensured the plaque outside the Johnny the Jig playpark will be refurbished by Ards & North Down Borough Council.

The statue, which was erected in 1953, commemorates Boy Scout Fergus Morton, who sadly lost his life in a road accident. It was gifted to Holywood by local artist Rosamund Praeger.

Mr Muir said, commenting on the refurbishment of the plaque; "I want to thank Council for acting swiftly on this matter after I raised the need for restoration. The plaque is important to the installation, attributing the work to Rosamund Praeger and highlighting her compassion for the children of Holywood.

The refurbishment is expected to be completed quickly, and the plaque will be returned to the sculpture within the coming weeks.

The North Down MLA further said: "Johnny the Jig is an essential part of the local character of Holywood. Ensuring the upkeep of the plaque and statue means that individuals in time to



come can still enjoy Praeger's artwork and remember the sad passing of Fergus.

"Given the statue's place within the conservation area, I felt it was important that

the plaque be restored to allow more people to understand our local history."







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## Peanut Gets His Sparkle Back



Illustrated by Faye Hobson

Written by Kate Russell




He worried about being small.

## County Down author Kate launches her first pony book for children!

County Down horsewoman turned author Kate Russell has launched her first equestrian themed children's book.

Kate, a well known figure in the NI world of equestrianism and equine therapy has published 'Peanut gets his sparkle back'.

Kate says: "I have always wanted to write a children's book from an early age. I have stories whirling in my head and usually inspired by the ponies dogs and cat. My friend had two young boys who would listen to my stories – they encouraged me to write a book and what's more – asked if they could be in it!

Working with children and the ponies through equine facilitated learning I could see the very real benefits of the interaction with the different pony personalities."

The book is based on the main characters Peanut an 8hh Falabella cross pony and Tobi a 27 yr old rescue pony. In real life this odd couple have struck a very strong friendship and became pretty much inseparable! Peanut is young, curious and cute and everyone who meets him falls in love with him. Tobi is older, a little bit stiff but calm with the kindest nature. They are both very much loved for being themselves! In real life Tobi & Peanut are also fully qualified therapy ponies who like nothing better than helping others!

The story aims to help children with anxiety and worries and show that that it is ok to have worries but not to let them build up. 'Peanut, gets his sparkle back' is a heart-warming children's book about overcoming fear and finding the courage within oneself.

With charming colour illustrations by the talented Faye Hobson, and a relatable story, young readers will be inspired to face their own worries and become brave little ponies themselves!

'Peanut gets his Sparkle Back' is ideal for children 3-9 with coloured text suitable for children with dyslexia, teaches valuable lessons about perseverance, self-confidence and the power of friendship.

It's a must read for parents, teachers and children alike and is sure to become a beloved addition to any child's bookshelf! Join Peanut and his friends on their journey to bravery and show your little ones that they too can conquer their worries and be the courageous heroes they've always dreamed of being.

**You can find out more about Tobi, Peanut and friends and also purchase a copy of the book direct online at <http://www.tobianpeanut-therapyponies.com/product-page/peanut-finds-his-sparkle-children-s-story> Book priced £10, (postage fees apply).**

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# WINTER WILDLIFE IN THE WOODLAND

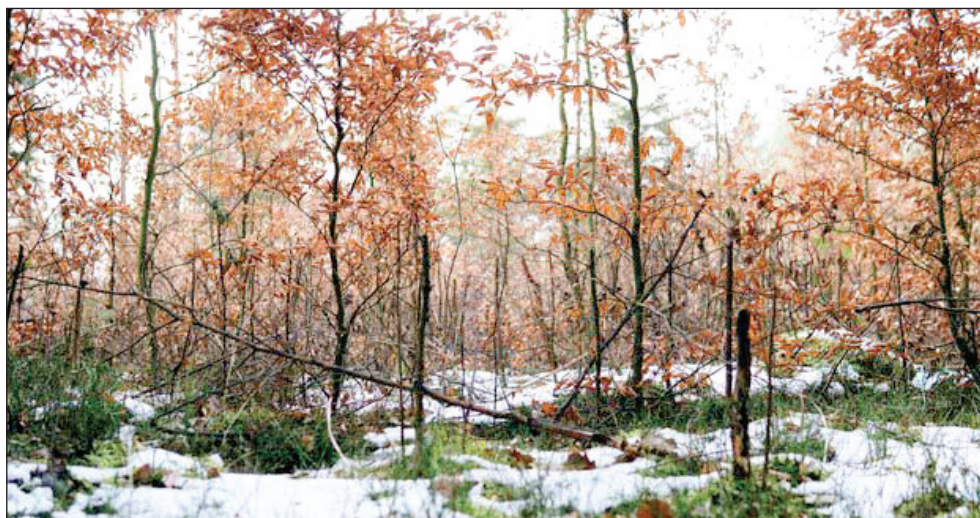
**JV Allister spots the first green shoots of spring on a winter woodland walk.**

I park at the roadside, hopefully leaving room for cars or tractors to pass, but this place is a bit off the beaten track, so it should be OK. Although the snow has mostly disappeared from the road, it's still heaped on the grass verges, one more than the other, indicating the wind direction, and it's on the least affected one that I spot the wild garlic coming into bloom, and chew a stalk. While I know they're native plants which happen to bloom early, I don't remember them from my childhood days, so possibly they're good colonisers.

The wood which I intend to explore is mostly deciduous, although adjoined by a larger

plantation, more like a forest, of Sitka spruce, aliens in regimented rows, shadowing needle-covered ground, providing habitat mostly unsuited to native creatures and plants, although I suppose crossbills and coal tits might be attracted to the seed cones and reclusive sparrowhawks to it as a nesting site from which they can emerge at speed to predate the birds of the nearby native woodland edge and hedgerows.

A robin sings, then another further along the woodland edge, territorial competitors, and, as I stand to listen, typically one flutters down to say hello. The woodland edge rather than the darker barer interior attracts



most wildlife, whether birds such as robins or blackbirds, and warblers in spring, and field mice, bees

and butterflies in season, to feed and nest because the sunlight, particularly along this south face, encourages

trees such as hawthorn, hazel and mountain ash, and wildflowers such as daisies, dandelions and

honeysuckle. The slight path I follow up the hill might have been made by badgers or

humans, or both, weaving between grey trunked beech, gnarled oak and smooth elegant ash, along ditches and over small hills, at least one of which looks like it might contain a badger family. It is still and silent other than the sound of my laboured breathing and uncertain footsteps, breaking twigs and crushing dead leaves, but I stop to allow my senses to settle, to see and listen, and am rewarded by a sharp call 'tsurp', frequently repeated, and watch a family party of long-tailed tits, siblings, parents, cousins, maybe in-laws, pass by above, flying quickly from twig to twig, tree to tree, searching for minuscule invertebrates.

After they pass, I relish the silence and the company of the trees, already budded, ready for spring, before making my way back down. A magpie cackles nearby, up to mischief no doubt, and the robins are still singing, joined by foraging blue tits excitedly calling to each other.

I will visit again during the year to enjoy this place, to look, listen, smell, touch and feel woodland and its inhabitants, and, when the leaves are back, to breathe in the oxygenated air. But even today, as it becomes chilly and there are snow clouds gathering, I feel refreshed in body, mind and spirit, and am grateful. JVA

## SALE OF MARGEY ORIGINALS AT TITANIC HOTEL BELFAST

**Artist Adrian Margey will be returning to Titanic Hotel Belfast with his latest exhibition and sale of work from Friday 28th February – Sunday 2nd March.**

Margey shot to notoriety as a result of his bold and colourful contemporary depictions of Irish landscape and landmarks.

He is now also winning a great deal of praise for his more subtle, impressionistic works that embrace a naturalistic palette. Visitors should therefore expect an eclectic exhibition filled with vibrant landscapes, dramatic cityscapes and dreamy beach scenes. From large-scale

canvases to smaller pieces, collectors and art lovers will enjoy depictions of Belfast City, Donegal, the North Coast, Glens of Antrim and the Mourne alongside representations of traditional Irish musicians and dancers.

Margey exhibits regularly across Northern Ireland and was selected by Tourism Ireland to live paint at Ireland Week in Milan in the spring.

He also exhibited at

Art Source in Dublin's RDS this autumn.

The light filled setting of Drawing Office One at the Titanic Hotel will make for a spectacular backdrop to this stunning new body of work. With original pieces and limited edition prints going on show, there will be artwork to suit a range of budgets.

Admission is free and everyone is welcome. Opening times as follows: Friday 28th February: 6pm



– 9pm | Saturday 1st March: 11am – 9pm & Sunday 2nd March: 11am – 6pm. For more information telephone Margey's Portrush studio on 07841593762 or visit [www.adrianmargey.com](http://www.adrianmargey.com).

## Age NI's Advice Line is here to help

**Age NI's Advice Line is a free, confidential service for older people, as well as their families. Our team will give reliable information and advice on many issues, from housing and health, to claiming benefits and care homes.**



Whether you need help knowing about your entitlements, accessing care services or simply require reassurance, Age NI's advisors are just a phone call away. Last year, Age NI helped over 10,000 callers receive the support they are entitled to.

Open Monday to Friday, from 9am to 5pm, the confidential helpline provides expert advice on difficult matters, ensuring that no one feels lost or alone.

A key feature of the advice line is Age NI's Benefits Calculator, a tool that checks if older people are eligible for any financial support.

Many people can miss out on benefits they are entitled to simply because they are unaware of them. Our Benefits Calculator helps make sure that our callers will receive any financial aid they are entitled to, helping to ease any money worries.

Navigating financial matters, care options and benefits can be overwhelming, but the Age NI friendly team helps older people access financial aid, guiding them through the complicated process.

Call the Age NI Advice Line today on 0808 808 7575 or email [advice@ageni.org](mailto:advice@ageni.org). Visit [www.ageni.org](http://www.ageni.org)

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# Don't miss the financial support you are entitled to with childcare costs – check now what's available for your family

Parents often find it difficult to remain in work after having children, due to the challenges of finding and paying for the childcare they need.

## Employers For Childcare

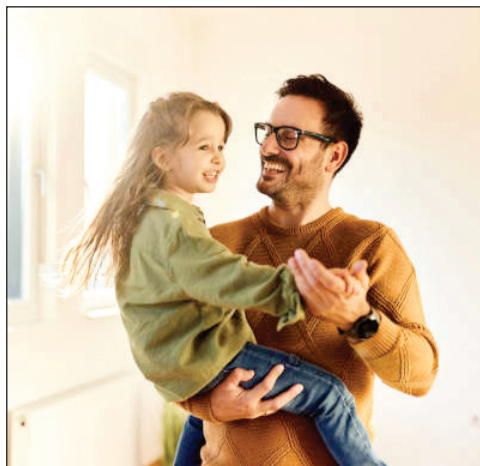
This can be especially difficult when children are very young and requiring full-time childcare, but is also an issue for families of older children requiring 'wraparound' childcare outside of school hours and during holidays.

There is help available with the cost of registered childcare for most working parents. This includes registered childminders, day nurseries and out of school clubs. Details of registered childcare in your area can be found on the Family Support NI website [www.familysupportni.gov.uk](http://www.familysupportni.gov.uk).

Support with registered childcare for working parents includes Universal

Credit, Tax-Free Childcare, Childcare Vouchers or Tax Credits. For parents with children below primary school age who are using Tax-Free Childcare, additional support is currently available through the Northern Ireland Childcare Subsidy Scheme. It has been confirmed by the Education Minister that funding for this scheme will continue into the next financial year.

Northern Ireland Childcare Subsidy Scheme Parents who are using Tax-Free Childcare can make a saving of 20% towards their registered childcare costs up to a maximum of £2,000 per year per child. However,



if these parents have children under primary school age, they can also receive a 15% reduction in their childcare costs, up to a monthly maximum of £167 per child, through the Northern Ireland Childcare Subsidy Scheme. This is not available for older children (at primary school) and is only for families using Tax-Free Childcare.

Get the right childcare support for your family

It can be difficult for parents to work out what childcare support is best for their family. We would encourage anyone applying for childcare support for the first time or whose circumstances have changed (eg moving into work or working more hours) to call the Family Benefits Advice Service on 028 9267 8200 or email [hello@employersforchildcare.org](mailto:hello@employersforchildcare.org) for free, impartial and confidential advice.

# Cllr McCollum to head Alliance North Down Association

North Down's Alliance Association has had its Annual General Meeting, electing Cllr Gillian McCollum as its new chair.



Alliance membership at the AGM, including Cllr Gillian McCollum, Andrew Muir MLA, Connie Egan MLA and Eóin Tennyson MLA.

The AGM was held at the Imperial Bar in Bangor and speakers included the Alliance Deputy Leader Eóin Tennyson and Paul Collins from Integrated Education Fund.

The Holywood and Clondeboye Councillor has said that she will be focusing on community engagement and has encouraged those with an interest in Alliance to consider becoming a member of the party.

"I am delighted to be taking on the position of Chair of the North Down Association for

this year and will be focused on welcoming new membership and continuing to engage with local communities on the issues that matter most to them," said Cllr Gillian McCollum.

"We have a strong elected team and are backed by a passionate membership within the Association. We want to build on the huge support for Alliance here in North Down, continuing to promote our vision of progressive, inclusive and positive politics. For anyone who holds our values dear, please

consider becoming part of the party, we would love to have you on board!"

Alliance MLA for North Down, Andrew Muir commented, "I am pleased to have Cllr McCollum heading up our local Association and I know she will bring her usual passion and drive to the role. Gillian will do an excellent job, working with our existing membership and welcoming yet more new faces to the party as well. I am looking forward to another year of hard work on behalf of the people of

North Down." Fellow North Down MLA, Connie Egan said, "I would like to congratulate Cllr Gillian McCollum on her election as Chairperson of the Alliance North Down Association. I look forward to working alongside her and our North Down team to further expand our outreach across the constituency. It is brilliant to see so many people from right across North Down joining the Alliance Party, reflective of our diverse and vibrant community."

# Another dazzling 5 Star review for Helens Bay Dental

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# Muir welcomes ban on single use vapes

A ban on the sale and supply of single use vapes will come into force on 1 June 2025, Minister Muir said.

The Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Minister Andrew Muir has announced that, from 1 June 2025, selling and supplying single-use vapes will no longer be allowed in Northern Ireland.

The Scottish, Welsh and UK Governments have also introduced equivalent legislation, with the same implementation date of 1 June 2025.

It is estimated that as many as five million single use vapes are simply thrown away in residual bins or littered every week across the UK, rather than being recycled.

The Minister said: "The environmental damage created by the rise in the littering and incorrect disposal of used vapes, as well as their poor recyclability, is a key concern for me. Single use vape

waste can have a devastating impact on our environment and biodiversity and I welcome this ban which will have better benefits for our environment and consequently for our general health and well-being.

"The ban follows strong support from the Northern Ireland public in response to the UK wide consultation on 'Creating a Smokefree Generation and Tackling Youth Vaping'. 90.4% of individual respondents from Northern Ireland agreed there should be restrictions on the sale and supply of single use vapes and 84.9% agreed that restrictions should take the form of a ban on their sale and supply."

The Minister concluded: "My Department, UK Government, Scottish and Welsh Governments



have committed to separately developing legislation to ban single use vapes, with an agreed UK wide ban coming into operation from 1 June 2025.

"Alignment of approaches will reduce environmental harms associated with the incorrect disposal

of single use vapes and will help provide clarity for businesses which are currently selling single use vaping products."

Businesses have six months to prepare for the change by selling any existing stock of single-use vapes. During this period, DAERA will

work with retail organisations and other stakeholders to ensure those affected understand the ban and their new subsequent responsibilities.

UK-wide guidance for businesses is being prepared and is due to be published on DAERA's website later this month.

# Givan opens new £4.4million extension at Parkhall Integrated College

Education Minister Paul Givan has officially opened a new state of the art extension for sixth form provision at Parkhall Integrated College.

The project comprises of a new library and 10 specialist classrooms including Science, Home Economics, Media, Business Information Systems, Art and Design and English, along with support accommodation and additional parking. The extension will accommodate approximately 130 pupils.

Speaking at the official opening, the Minister said: "This is a great day for pupils and staff at Parkhall Integrated College. The investment of over £4.4million will enhance the educational experience for everyone involved at the school and future generations."

"The opening of a new school building is something to be celebrated and improving the schools' estate remains a key priority for me. I will continue to make the case for additional funds to ensure that this important area of work gets



Education Minister pictured with Principal Neil Owen and pupils Ariana Lupascu and Rachel Foster at the official opening of a new state of the art extension at Parkhall Integrated College.

the attention it deserves."

The £4.4million project was funded through the Fresh Start Programme supported by the United Kingdom Government.

The Minister continued: "I would like to commend staff, pupils and parents for their perseverance and patience over the last number of years as the project team has taken the

work through from design to planning and construction.

"I am confident these new, modern facilities will match the school's collective enthusiasm and passion for learning and teaching and help Parkhall advance further on its education journey."

Construction on the site began in April 2023 and was completed in August 2024.



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Fully refurbished in 2019, many of the original site features have been sympathetically restored, including the Bakers Hole well. Beautiful granite kerbing entices you along the drive leading up to the private accommodation and grounds. An idyllic location where tradition meets modern 5\* awarded accommodation. The Bakers Cottages has it's own private wild flower gardens, sweeping towards the restored well. A covered BBQ area means you can grill outside whatever the Northern Irish weather may bring. Across the courtyard brings you to the hot tub house, with it's 6 seater tub. This building also offers a cosy sitting area with a wood burning stove that opens out through double glass sliding doors to an outdoor dining area overlooking the tranquil rolling hills, with the Mourne Mountains in the distant background. The perfect setting to relax and enjoy the sunset. An outdoor play area for the children is located within sight of this outdoor living space, and the dog building is also here, allowing your whole family to enjoy making memories at The Bakers Cottages.





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# HERE COMES THE SUN

**Why Planning Your Summer Holiday now could be a Game-Changer for your mental health!**

The first daffodils are poking their heads through the soil, a gentle warmth is returning to the air, and a sense of possibility hangs in the breeze. It's early spring, and while summer might seem a distant dream, it's the perfect time to start planning your summer holiday. Why? Because the benefits, both for your mental well-being and your wallet are significant.

**The Mental Boost:** Anticipation and Control  
Imagine this: the long winter months are behind you, and you have a sun-drenched getaway to look forward to. Just the act of planning a holiday can provide a significant mental boost. Studies have shown that anticipation is a powerful emotion,

and the excitement of envisioning your trip can increase happiness and reduce stress levels.

Having a holiday to look forward to can also provide a sense of control. In our busy lives, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by responsibilities. Planning a holiday allows you to take charge, make choices, and create something positive for yourself and your loved ones. It's a chance to escape the daily grind and focus on relaxation and enjoyment.

**Financial Advantages:** Early Bird Gets the Best Deals

Beyond the mental benefits, planning your summer holiday in early spring can also be a smart financial move. Booking flights

and accommodation in advance often means securing better deals. Airlines and hotels tend to offer lower prices for early bookings, and you'll have a wider range of options to choose from.

Planning ahead also allows you to budget more effectively. By spreading the cost of your holiday over several months, you can avoid a large financial outlay all at once. This can make your holiday more affordable and reduce any post-trip financial stress.

**Tips for Early Holiday Planning**

- Set a budget: Determine how much you can afford to spend on your holiday. This will help you narrow down your options and avoid overspending.



- Choose your destination: Consider your interests and preferences. Do you want a relaxing beach holiday, an adventurous hiking trip, or a cultural city break?
- Book early: As

mentioned earlier, booking flights and accommodation in advance can save you money.

- Be flexible: If you're flexible with your travel dates, you may be able to find even better deals.
- Do your research: Read reviews and compare prices before making any bookings.

- Get organized: Create a detailed itinerary and make sure you have all the necessary documents, such as passports and

visas. Planning your summer holiday in early spring is a win-win situation. You'll not only reap the mental benefits of anticipation and control, but you'll also have a better chance of securing great deals and sticking to your budget. So, as the days get longer and the weather starts to warm up, take some time to dream about your perfect summer getaway. Your mind and your wallet will thank you for it.

## NI Farming Awards 2024: Young Farmer of the Year

**Rebekah Evans was presented with the Young Farmer of the Year award by Isuzu UK dealer, Eakin Bros, at the Northern Ireland (NI) Farming Awards 2024.**

The event, taking place at the Crowne Plaza Belfast, recognised farmers' achievements across the country.

Rebekah Evans was acknowledged for her unwavering commitment to the agricultural industry. Evans takes on multiple part-time roles, including working on a dairy farm and at a local agricultural supplies store, whilst simultaneously studying for her A Levels.

The nomination for Evans outlined her ambition to go above and beyond to learn and develop into an exceptional farmer, stating: "We could immediately see an admirable work ethic and ability to pick up information and tasks instantly for such a young age, she literally could 'turn her hand to anything'. She is so eager and willing to learn every aspect of farming and has gained a wealth of qualifications, achievements and experience within the farming industry for



someone so young.

Evans lives on the family farm with her parents, two sisters, and grandmother. She has been regarded as particularly hands on at the farm, which works with 50+ dairy cows, and 60 commercial breeding ewes.

Some of her day-to-day responsibilities include feeding calves twice a day, managing the breeding plan for the herd, and she also artificially inseminates the cows when

they are on heat.

The award winner's drive and passion for farming has been recognised with an impressive award win at the NI Farming Awards. Managing Director at Eakin Bros, Peter Eakin, presented the award to Evans at the glittering ceremony which took place before Christmas.

For more information about Eakin Bros, please visit [www.eakinbros.co.uk](http://www.eakinbros.co.uk).

# APRIL COUNTRY MUSIC WEEKEND

APRIL 11TH - APRIL 13TH 2025 AT THE ABBEY HOTEL DONEGAL

## FRIDAY 11TH APRIL 2025

 <b>DAVID JAMES AND HIS NEW BAND</b> 9.15PM - 11.15PM	 <b>JIMMY BUCKLEY</b> 11.30PM - 1.30AM	 <b>ADRIAN RYAN</b> 1.30AM
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## SATURDAY 12TH APRIL 2025

 <b>CONOR O'DONNELL</b> 2.30PM - 4.30PM	 <b>JOHNNY BRADY</b> 9.15PM - 11.15PM	 <b>MICHAEL ENGLISH</b> 11.30PM - 1.30AM	 <b>STACEY BREEN</b> 1.30AM
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## SUNDAY 13TH APRIL 2025

 <b>PATRICK FEENEY</b> 3.00PM - 5.00PM	 <b>KIERAN MC AREE</b> 9.00PM - 11.00PM
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# SPRING HOME INTERIOR TRENDS FOR 2025

## Embrace the New Season with These Vibrant and Inviting Trends

Spring is a time for renewal and rejuvenation, and this extends to our homes as well. As we bid farewell to the winter blues, it's time to embrace fresh, vibrant trends that will infuse our living spaces with a sense of warmth, energy, and optimism.

Here are some of the top spring home interior trends for 2025:

### Bold and Bright Colour Palettes:

Say goodbye to muted tones and embrace a symphony of colours! This spring, we're seeing a resurgence of bold and vibrant hues. Think deep yellows, electric blues, and vivid greens. These

colours add a sense of excitement and vitality to any room.

### Organic Modernism:

This trend seamlessly blends natural elements with modern aesthetics. Expect to see plenty of natural materials like wood, stone, and rattan, paired with clean lines and minimalist furniture.

### The Allure of Chrome:

Chrome accents are making a comeback, adding a touch of glamour and sophistication to any space. From light fixtures to hardware, chrome elements can elevate the look of your home.

Chunky Porcelain Chic:

Think oversized vases, statement bowls, and decorative plates. Chunky porcelain pieces add a touch of personality and visual interest to any room.

### Retro Revival:

Mid-century modern and vintage-inspired pieces are making a strong comeback. Embrace this trend by incorporating retro furniture, geometric patterns, and warm wood tones.

### Maximalism:

Embrace the maximalist trend by mixing and matching patterns, textures, and colours. This is a great way to express your

personality and create a truly unique space.

### Natural Stone Accents:

Bring the beauty of nature indoors with natural stone accents. Think marble countertops, stone backsplashes, and stone fireplace surrounds.

### Statement Lighting:

Make a statement with your lighting fixtures. From bold chandeliers to sculptural pendant lights, statement lighting can add a touch of drama and elegance to any room.

### Earthy Neutrals:

While bold colours are trending, earthy neutrals like beige, brown, and cream are still popular. These colours create



a calm and inviting atmosphere, making them perfect for bedrooms and living rooms.

### Sustainable Decor:

Sustainability is more important than ever, and this extends to home decor. Look for pieces made from recycled or

eco-friendly materials, and support local artisans and businesses.

By incorporating these trends into your home,

you can create a space that is both stylish and inviting. So embrace the new season and let your creativity shine!

## Half of people in NI are not confident in their smile, study finds

Brushing your teeth twice a day, cleaning them for at least two minutes, and visiting the dentist once a year are the staples of oral hygiene learned from an early age.

A new study from health and beauty tech retailer Currys, surveyed 2,000 people across the UK to explore the nation's oral hygiene habits, and results

show that Brits still have a lot to learn. More than 6 in 10 Brits (63%) say that they brush their teeth for less than two minutes, and 16% of the nation says that they

clean them only once a day. In addition to not following the basics, 40% of Brits say they struggle to get to a dentist when they need them.

The nation is losing their smile: is it bad hygiene or the fear of the dentist?

Oral health has been linked to self-esteem, and this is proven in several US

studies, for both adults and children.

In the UK, data reveals that nearly 4 in 10 people (38%) are not confident about their smile, and a staggering 59% of them consider their teeth to be discoloured or yellow.

The data paints a similar picture in the Northern Ireland where nearly 6 in 10 (59%) people consider their teeth to be discoloured or yellow, with over a half (51%) not being confident in their smile.

The majority of people in the Northern Ireland (84%)—similar to the national average—clean their teeth twice a day. However, 14% still think that brushing only once a day is sufficient. More than a fifth (22%) of people in Northern Ireland don't follow the recommended two-minute minimum, brushing for one to two minutes. More alarmingly, nearly a third (30%) of Irish spend only 30 seconds to 1 minute brushing their teeth.

Not following basic oral hygiene practices or being

unable to secure a dentist appointment can lead to serious health problems. For example, an untreated tooth infection can easily spread to surrounding tissue and other parts of the body, potentially resulting in hospitalisation in only the best-case scenario.

Fear of the dentist, also known as dental anxiety or dentophobia, is one of the main barriers to securing a timely appointment. It is a common issue, with recent research confirming that 41% of Brits suffer from it. Another obstacle to good oral health, either on its own or combined with dental anxiety, is the difficulty in getting a dental appointment when needed, which was highlighted by nearly the same percentage of people in the UK (40%).

In Northern Ireland people also battle with fear of the dentist (43%) while a similar percentage (38%) highlight cost as the reason they are putting off a visit to the dentist.

Bad breath tops the list as



the worst off-putting dental attribute

So, while bad oral hygiene and struggling to get a dentist appointment can affect health and lead to poor self-esteem, it also carries some social consequences too.

Bad breath was flagged across the nation as one of the worst observable dental habits for a considerable number (73%) of people, followed by missing teeth

(41%) and smoke on the breath (40%).

The Irish agree that the most off-putting dental attribute is bad breath, with missing teeth coming in second, and visible plaque emerging as the third most off-putting dental attribute in the region.

You can find more about the study here: <https://www.currys.co.uk/techtalk/kitchen-and-home/tooth-truths.html>



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# FINDING YOUR PERFECT SPRING GETAWAY: WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A RELAXING RURAL HOTEL BREAK!

The winter months can often feel long and dreary. But with the right escape, at just the right time, you can transform the season with a cosy and rejuvenating experience.



A relaxing hotel break can be the perfect antidote to the winter blues, offering a chance to unwind, recharge, and enjoy some much-needed pampering.

When choosing your winter wonderland, consider the ambiance. A crackling fireplace is the epitome of winter cosiness. Look for hotels with inviting fireplaces in guest rooms, lobbies, or communal areas. Opt for hotels with warm and inviting interiors, featuring rich colours, plush textiles, and comfortable furnishings. While winter days may be short, ensure your chosen hotel maximizes natural

light. Large windows and skylights can make a big difference.

Indulge in the hotel's wellness facilities. Enjoy luxurious spa treatments like massages, facials, and body wraps. Escape the cold with a relaxing swim in an indoor pool, perhaps with a jacuzzi or sauna for added relaxation. Maintain your fitness routine with a well-equipped gym or take advantage of fitness classes like yoga or Pilates.

Savour delicious meals at the hotel's restaurant, perhaps enjoying a romantic dinner by candlelight. Look for cosy dining areas with warm lighting and inviting atmospheres. Treat

yourself to a traditional afternoon tea, complete with delicate sandwiches, pastries, and a pot of steaming hot tea.

If you're looking for more than just relaxation, choose a hotel near winter sports destinations that appeal, in Northern Ireland we are fortunate enough to have a wealth of opportunities for activities such as mountain or hill hiking, horse-riding, cycling, surfing, boating, shopping and simply walking. Explore the surrounding area with a scenic winter walk, enjoying the crisp air and picturesque landscapes. Alternatively, enjoy

a cosy night in with a good book, a glass of wine, and a roaring fire.

Look for hotels that offer personalized service, going the extra mile to ensure your stay is truly unforgettable. Many hotels offer special winter packages, including discounts, complimentary upgrades, and festive treats. If you're planning a romantic getaway, look for hotels with intimate settings, such as boutique hotels or charming country inns.

By considering these factors, you can find the perfect hotel break to escape the winter blues and create lasting memories.

Intersperse unique

## Create a Cottage Garden

The cottage garden, with its informal and romantic character, evokes a sense of peace and tranquility.

It's a style that embraces the natural world, celebrating a riot of colours, textures, and scents.

To design your own enchanting cottage garden, embrace the natural by avoiding perfectly manicured lawns and straight lines. Opt for curving paths, irregular borders, and flowing planting areas. Let your borders blend into the surrounding landscape, allowing plantings to spill over paths and create a sense of informality. Utilise natural materials like stone, brick, and wood for paths, edging, and garden features.

Fill your garden with a profusion of flowers in a variety of colours and heights. Think cottage classics like roses, peonies, delphiniums, and poppies. Include annuals like nasturtiums, petunias, and sunflowers to add bursts of vibrant colour throughout the season.



herbs and vegetables amongst the flowers for a truly productive and picturesque garden.

Create a sense of depth by planting a mix of tall, medium, and low-growing plants to create layers and visual interest. Utilize climbing roses, clematis, and honeysuckle to adorn fences, walls, and arches. Plant low-growing groundcovers like ivy or sweet woodruff beneath taller plants to add texture and suppress weeds.

Incorporate unique

features such as a small pond, a bubbling fountain, or even a simple birdbath to add a touch of magic to your cottage garden. Create shady seating areas and support climbing plants with charming arches and pergolas. Add rustic touches with antique garden tools, birdhouses, and decorative pots.

Finally, embrace imperfection. Allow some weeds to flourish, and let nature take its course. Regularly deadhead spent blooms to encourage continuous

flowering and prevent self-seeding.

Most importantly, enjoy the process. The cottage garden is all about enjoying the journey. Relax, observe your plants, and let your garden evolve over time.

By following these tips, you can create a charming cottage garden that is both beautiful and inviting.

Remember to let your personality shine through and enjoy the process of creating your own unique piece of horticultural heaven.

## March Madness at The Causeway Hotel

Looking for the perfect getaway this March? The Causeway Hotel has you covered with unbeatable offers to make your stay unforgettable.

Stay Longer, Save More

Embrace the magic of March with our Winter Warmer deal. Book two nights and enjoy the third night free! Savour a delicious breakfast each morning and indulge in dinner on your first two nights. With more time to explore the stunning coastline and iconic landmarks, there are endless reasons to stay longer.

Rest & Reflect March Weekend Getaway

Escape to the coast with our exclusive weekend retreat. Enjoy a bottle of complimentary prosecco waiting for you in your room and indulge in a late checkout (Friday-Sunday) for ultimate relaxation. Whether it's a romantic break or a solo recharge, we'll help you make your weekends truly memorable.

Family-Friendly March Break

Looking for a fun-filled family adventure? Kids under 12 stay and eat free when sharing with adults. Enjoy a cozy night's stay with breakfast for just £180, or upgrade to dinner, bed, and breakfast for £200. Create cherished memories as you explore local attractions, perfect for family bonding this spring.

Don't miss out on these fantastic offers this March. Whether it's relaxation, adventure, or quality time with loved ones, The Causeway Hotel has something special for everyone. Book now and let your journey begin!

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# BLOOMING BEAUTIES: A GUIDE TO TRADITIONAL SPRING FLOWERS AND THEIR MEANING

Spring is a time of renewal, rebirth, and vibrant colours bursting forth from the earth.

Flowers, with their delicate beauty and sweet fragrances, are the perfect messengers of this joyous season. Each bloom carries a unique meaning, adding a layer of symbolism to their charm. Let's delve into the world of traditional spring flowers and uncover the secrets they hold.

Tulips, those elegant, cup-shaped flowers, are synonymous with spring. They symbolise perfect love, with different colours carrying nuanced meanings. Red tulips declare a deep, passionate love, while yellow tulips represent cheerful thoughts. Daffodils, with their sunny yellow trumpets, are the heralds of spring. They symbolise new beginnings, rebirth, and hope. Giving daffodils to someone signifies that you see them as

a source of joy and inspiration. Hyacinths, these fragrant, bell-shaped flowers, come in a variety of colours, each with its own meaning. Pink hyacinths represent playful joy, while blue hyacinths symbolise sincerity. White hyacinths convey purity and innocence.

Lilacs, those fragrant shrubs, boast clusters of tiny, delicate flowers in shades of purple, pink, and white. Lilacs symbolise first love, innocence, and purity. Their sweet scent evokes a sense of nostalgia and romance. Lily of the Valley, those dainty, bell-shaped flowers, are known for their sweet, delicate fragrance. They symbolise humility, sweetness, and a return to happiness. Lily of the Valley is often associated

with weddings and new beginnings. Violets, these small,



with weddings and new beginnings. Violets, these small,

unassuming flowers, come in a variety of colours, most

commonly purple and blue. Violets symbolise modesty,

faithfulness, and humility. They are often associated

with secret love and remembrance.

Snowdrops, those delicate, white flowers, are often the first to emerge in late winter or early spring, peeking through the snow.

They symbolise hope, rebirth, and the promise of spring to come. Crocuses, these cheerful, cup-shaped flowers, come in a variety of colours, including purple, yellow, and white. Crocuses symbolise joy, cheerfulness, and new beginnings. They are a welcome sight after a long winter.

Primroses, these vibrant flowers with their cheerful yellow blooms, are a symbol of young love and new beginnings. They often grow in woodlands and hedgerows, adding a touch of wild beauty to the spring landscape.

Flowers have been used to convey messages for centuries, with each bloom carrying a specific meaning. This "language of flowers," known as floriography, was particularly popular during the Victorian era. Understanding the symbolism of flowers can add a deeper layer of meaning to your bouquets and gifts.

Whether you're creating a vibrant bouquet, planting a spring garden, or simply enjoying the beauty of nature, flowers are an essential part of the spring experience. Their colours, fragrances, and symbolic meanings evoke feelings of joy, hope, and renewal. So, embrace the season and celebrate the beauty of spring with these traditional blooms.

## Fun places to visit this spring

County Down is a beautiful region in Northern Ireland that offers a wide range of activities for families.

From exploring historic castles to hiking in the Mourne Mountains, there is something for everyone to enjoy. Here are a few ideas for fun family activities to do in County Down:

**Mourne Mountains:** The Mourne Mountains are a stunning mountain range that offers a variety of hiking trails for all levels of experience. Families can enjoy a leisurely stroll along the lower slopes or challenge themselves with a more strenuous hike to the summit of Slieve Donard, the highest peak in Northern Ireland.

**Castlewellan Forest Park:** This beautiful park offers a variety of activities for families, including walking and cycling trails, a lake for boating, and a play park for children. The park also has a visitor centre where you can learn about the local flora and fauna.

**Tollymore Forest Park:** Another great option for families is Tollymore Forest Park, which is known for its beautiful scenery and its role as a filming location for the popular TV series "Game of Thrones". The park offers a variety of walking trails, a river walk, and a picnic area.

**Strangford Lough:** This large sea lough is a great place for families to enjoy a variety of water activities, such as kayaking, canoeing, and paddle-boarding. Families can also take a boat tour of the lough to see the seals and other wildlife that live there.

**Exploris Aquarium:** This popular aquarium is home to a variety of marine life, including sharks, rays, and seals. Families can learn about the different species that live in the Irish Sea and participate in interactive exhibits.



**Down County Museum:** This museum tells the story of County Down from prehistoric times to the present day. Families can learn about the history of the region and see artifacts from different periods.

**Saint Patrick Centre:** This centre tells the story of Saint Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland. Families can learn about his life and his impact on Irish culture.

No matter what your family enjoys, you are

sure to find plenty of fun activities to do in County Down. With its beautiful scenery, rich history, and variety of attractions, County Down is the perfect place to create lasting memories with your loved ones.



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# Your home, your style, your solution!

Check out the new curtain department at The Blind Spot

The Blind Spot is now offering made to measure curtains and also curtain rails, complete with a full measuring and fitting service, at their spacious new showroom in East Belfast.

The Blind Spot is already a well-established blinds and shutters company with over 30 years of experience.

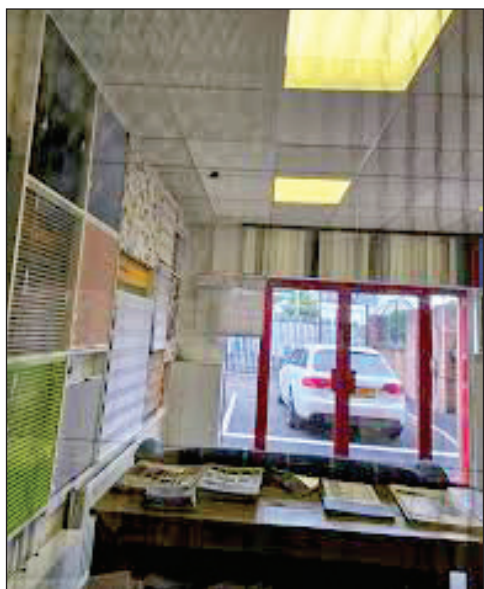
Manager Krystina Bradford says:

"The original factory shop was opened in 1990 by my mum and Grandfather. We still specialize in manufacturing and fitting high-quality window coverings for both residential and commercial properties. This now includes venetian, vertical, roller and roman blinds but also embraces new technologies and advancements – today we also offer motorised blinds, shutters, multi-function Blindscreens as well as our new curtain department!"

Book Now for delivery within 6 weeks!"

Did you know that investing in quality blinds can help improve your home's thermal insulation? Whether you prefer sleek roller blinds, practical #blindscreens, or classic shutters, The Blind Spot has you covered. Say goodbye to wasted heat and hello to a warmer, cosier home!

In addition to opening throughout the week, The Blind spot is also Open Saturdays: 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM, the showroom is open and free for you to browse at your leisure. Explore a stunning range of blinds, shades, and



shutters to find your perfect match. The office is ready to help schedule your home appointment for a personalised quote—no guesswork, just real numbers tailored to your space! Stop by and see them this Saturday they'd love to help make your home vision a reality!

In the showroom you can fully appreciate the wide range and colour choice in beautiful

Sante Fe Shutters –these can be installed in less than 6 weeks. You can also appreciate the difference that motorised blinds could make to your lifestyle. View the range of Blindscreens - manufactured within the UK. These are great for keeping out bugs as well as giving total blackout on any window and door including bi fold doors and

can revolutionise the way you manage your access to the outdoors at home or in your business.

All of the blinds and shutters are made-to-measure and crafted with precision. A free measuring service is offered right across Northern Ireland— so there's not need to guess-timate! All at Affordable Prices without compromising on quality and a wide range of Choice. Explore various styles, fabrics, and colours to match your property's aesthetic. Get in Touch or Visit the NEW SHOWROOM at 4 East Belfast Enterprise Park, Belfast BT5 4GX or give them a call at 028 9059 5255 to discuss your requirements.

www.theblindspotbelfast.co.uk

# BRINGING THE COUNTRYSIDE INDOORS: ACHIEVING COUNTRY LIVING CHIC

Country Living Chic is more than just a decorating style; it's a feeling. It evokes a sense of warmth, comfort, and a connection to nature, even if you live miles from the nearest farm.

To infuse your home with this timeless aesthetic, embrace natural materials. Incorporate wood, such as rustic beams, reclaimed wood furniture, and woven baskets. Add stone accents like a fireplace surround, flooring, or a stone-topped table. Opt for natural fabrics like cotton, linen, and wool. Use them for cosy throws, textured rugs, and embroidered curtains.

Bring the outdoors in by filling your home with plants, from leafy ferns to flowering blooms. Consider a small herb garden on your windowsill. Incorporate natural elements like branches, dried flowers, and seashells into your decor. Maximize natural light by keeping windows uncovered and framing beautiful views with curtains or blinds.

Create a cosy atmosphere with a fireplace, if you have one. If not, consider a wood-burning stove or even an electric fireplace. Layer lighting with table lamps, floor lamps, and soft-glowing candles to create a warm and inviting ambiance.

Mix and match textures to add depth and interest. Think of sheepskin rugs, chunky knit throws, and velvet cushions.

Incorporate vintage and antique finds. Hunt for unique pieces at flea markets, antique shops, and estate sales. Add character with vintage china, antique mirrors, and old maps. Incorporate treasured family heirlooms to add a personal touch.

Keep it simple and uncluttered. Avoid overcrowding your



space. Keep surfaces clean and uncluttered for a relaxed and airy feel. Invest in high-quality pieces that will last for years to come. Embrace imperfections. A few scuffs and scratches can add character to your furniture. Add personal

touches. Display cherished family photos throughout your home. Incorporate souvenirs from your travels to remind you of special memories. Create a cosy reading nook with a comfortable armchair and a collection of your

favourite books. Country Living Chic is all about creating a home that feels both welcoming and stylish. By incorporating these tips, you can transform your space into a haven that reflects your love of nature and all things cosy!

## A Guide to Wood Flooring Options

Wood flooring remains a popular choice for UK homeowners, adding warmth, character, and natural beauty to any space.

While the variety of options can seem overwhelming, this guide will help you navigate the key considerations.

Types of Wood Flooring

- Solid Wood: Crafted from a single piece of timber, solid wood is durable and refinishable, making it a long-term investment. However, it's sensitive to moisture and temperature changes.

- Engineered Wood: Composed of multiple layers, engineered wood is more dimensionally

stable than solid wood, making it suitable for areas with varying conditions. It's also generally more affordable.

- Reclaimed Wood: Offering a unique character and rustic charm, reclaimed wood is an eco-friendly option sourced from old structures.

Wood Species Popular options include:

- Oak: Durable, strong, and available in various colours, from light to dark.



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- Ash: Light and airy, with smooth grain and subtle colour variations, ideal for contemporary interiors.
- Walnut: Luxurious with a rich, dark colour and striking grain patterns.
- Maple: Hard and dense, with a pale colour and fine grain, often used in modern and minimalist designs.

Finishing Touches

Staining enhances the wood's natural beauty, while sealing protects it from moisture, stains, and wear and tear. Finishes like matte, satin, and gloss offer different levels of sheen. Choosing the Right Wood Flooring Consider your lifestyle (pets, children), budget, desired aesthetics, and installation method when making your decision.

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# '100,000 LIFE-SAVING DEFIBRILLATORS NOW VISIBLE TO THE EMERGENCY SERVICES IN THE UK

Health organisations have been campaigning for defibrillator owners to register their device so more people can be helped if they have a cardiac arrest

More people than ever before could have their lives saved from cardiac arrests thanks to campaigning by the British Heart Foundation (BHF) and other health organisations, as the locations of more than 100,000 defibrillators in the UK are now visible to the emergency services.

This means that when someone has a cardiac arrest (when the heart stops pumping blood around your body) and a bystander calls 999, the ambulance services can direct them to the nearest registered defibrillator while they wait for the ambulance to arrive.

There are over 1,400 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests every year in Northern Ireland. Tragically, less than one in ten people survive. This is partly because public access defibrillators are not used often enough.

Performing quick CPR and defibrillation in the event of a cardiac arrest can be the difference between life and death.

The BHF has registered 100,000 defibrillators

on The Circuit, with almost 3,700 registered in Northern Ireland, but there are many more out there that remain unregistered.

Before The Circuit was launched by BHF, tens of thousands of defibrillators in schools, sports clubs, pubs and businesses across the country were invisible to the emergency services.

Now, two years after all 14 UK ambulance services became part of The Circuit, it has reached a 'momentous milestone' – 100,000 defibrillators are now registered.

Health organisations are urging guardians (those responsible for defibrillators) to register them if they are not yet on The Circuit. BHF is also urging people to learn CPR for free in just 15 minutes using RevivR, an online tool you can access via your mobile phone or tablet.

Head of British Heart Foundation Northern Ireland, Fearghal McKinney, said:

"It is just incredible that we have reached a major milestone of 100,000



John Deery (centre) from South Belfast survived a cardiac arrest at this year's Belfast Marathon thanks to a life-saving defibrillator and CPR performed by Peter O'Hare (right holding the defib, also from South Belfast). John and Peter are pictured alongside Head of British Heart Foundation NI's Fearghal McKinney.

defibrillators mapped on The Circuit. When someone has a cardiac arrest, knowing where a defibrillator is can be the difference between life and death, so I have no doubt this will help save lives.

"We are so grateful to everyone who has played their part in this, from the guardians who have registered their

defibrillator to the partners who have supported this pioneering database.

"But our work isn't done. There are still thousands more defibrillators out there that remain invisible to the emergency services. If you have a defibrillator, please take a moment now to register it - this one simple action could help save someone's life."

John Deery, 64, a retired business banking manager from Eglinton, who now lives in South Belfast, had his life saved because of quick CPR and defibrillation and has since supported British Heart Foundation's campaign to get as many defibrillators registered on The Circuit as possible.

In May 2024, John, an experienced long-distance

runner, was taking part in the Belfast Marathon and had a cardiac arrest at the halfway point around Finaghy crossroads.

Mr Deery credits the use of a defibrillator for saving his life and his four "angel bystanders".

"My angels were all aligned that day – from the wonderful cardiac nurse who started CPR,

Peter who continued with

it and had the defibrillator which saved my life, the police officer who immediately got medical help and protection around me and all the other people who helped that day. My friends Paul and Regina who rang my wife Janet. The paramedics and the hospital staff. It's miraculous what happened, I feel that the marathon actually saved my life with all of those people there with such expertise."

John said: "I'm very lucky to be alive and the positive is that a lot more defibrillators have since been registered on The Circuit because of what happened to me, and it's fantastic to hear there are now 100,000 defibrillators registered.

John added: "It's reassuring that there are so many defibrillators in schools, pubs and sports clubs in case someone has a cardiac arrest, but people can't access them unless the emergency services know where they are.

"If anyone is responsible for a defibrillator please

take a few minutes to register it so more lives can be saved."

Michael Allen, Community Resuscitation Team Manager at Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) said:

"Having rapid access to a defibrillator is one of the key factors in improving the chain of survival from out-of-hospital cardiac arrest. In Northern Ireland at present, less than 1 in 10 people survive an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest. Strengthening every link, affords people the best opportunity to do this.

"This is why it is so encouraging to see The Circuit hit the 100,000 mark for defibrillator registrations. Increasing access to defibrillators across all communities will help to improve the chances of survival for us all. We hope this will be the catalyst for many more registrations in the future."

To find out if your defibrillator is registered on The Circuit or to register it visit theircircuit.uk

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Air Ambulance NI works in partnership with the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service which continues to be a lifeline for communities across the province, offering critical Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS).



The HEMS team attend patients who are seriously ill or injured on average twice per day, bringing emergency pre-hospital care directly to the scene of an incident with the aim of saving lives, brains, and limbs.



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# Mazda CX-80 named Best in Class Large SUV by Euro NCAP

The all-new Mazda CX-80 has been named Best in Class Large SUV by Euro NCAP in its latest series of tests. This prestigious recognition underscores Mazda's commitment to safety and innovation.

In 2024, Euro NCAP tested a total of 44 cars, with the Mazda CX-80 emerging as the top performer in the Large SUV category and achieving a close victory over the Audi Q6 e-tron. This recognition is a testament to Mazda's dedication to providing the highest level of safety for its customers.

The Mazda CX-80 achieved an outstanding 92% score in Adult Occupancy, with full marks in both the Lateral and Rear Impact tests. It scored an impressive 88% in Child Occupancy, ensuring the highest level of protection for younger passengers. The vehicle secured an 84% score for Vulnerable Road Users, highlighting Mazda's dedication to pedestrian and cyclist safety. Additionally, it achieved a 79% score in Safety Assist, demonstrating Mazda's commitment to equipping its vehicles with the latest safety technologies.

The Mazda CX-80's superior safety performance is complemented by its

comfort, convenience, and versatility, making it a standout in the seven-seat SUV segment. Crafted in Japan, this flagship model embodies Mazda's design and engineering excellence. Its exceptional safety ratings reflect Mazda's dedication to customer safety. The five-star rating is supported by Mazda's Skyactiv Multi-Solution Scalable Architecture, enhancing driving dynamics with a front-engine, rear-wheel-drive layout and rear-biased all-wheel drive. With three rows of seating, the CX-80 is the most spacious vehicle in Mazda's European range, offering comfort, versatility, advanced technology, and Mazda's driving performance.

Established in 1996 with the aim of improving vehicle safety, Euro NCAP annually awards the best-scoring cars with the "Best in Class" title, helping consumers choose the safest vehicles for their needs. To determine the 'Best in Class' rating, Euro NCAP calculates a weighted sum of scores



in four safety evaluation areas: Adult Occupant, Child Occupant, Pedestrian and Safety Assist. This total is used to compare cars. Cars qualify for 'Best in Class' based on their ratings with standard safety equipment.

Arriving in the UK this month, the all-new Mazda CX-80 is the new flagship of the Mazda line-up in Europe, sitting above the CX-60 in Mazda's award-winning SUV range. Featuring three-row seating it's

the most spacious SUV ever offered by Mazda in Europe and with its high-quality cabin, technically advanced drivetrains and elegant design is created to challenge established premium brands in the European market.

Based on Mazda's safety philosophy, 'Mazda Proactive Safety', the all-new Mazda CX-80 provides a comfortable driving environment with outstanding visibility. It's comprehensive range

of advanced i-Activsense driver assistance systems – including Cruising & Traffic Support (CTS) with new Unresponsive Driver Support; Smart Brake Support with new Head-on collision mitigation; and Emergency Lane Keeping with new Head-on traffic avoidance assist – ensure active safety at the highest level, cementing the model's five-star Euro NCAP safety rating and Best in Class Large SUV achievement.

# DRIVING FORCE

From autonomous delivery vehicles to connected car technology, in this article we consider the Impact of AI on the motor industry and new cars in 2025.

2025 is shaping up to be a pivotal year for the automotive industry, with several key trends and developments likely to dominate the headlines:

**Electric Vehicles (EVs) Continue Their Ascent:** Expect to see a significant expansion of EV models across various segments, from affordable city cars to high-performance sports cars. Advancements in battery technology will lead to longer driving ranges and shorter charging times, addressing key concerns of EV adoption.

**Sustainable Materials and Manufacturing:** Automakers will continue to prioritize sustainable practices, incorporating recycled materials and eco-friendly production processes.

Expect to see more innovative materials derived from plants and other renewable sources used in vehicle interiors.

**Connected Car Technology:** Vehicles will become increasingly integrated with our digital lives, offering seamless connectivity



to smartphones, smart homes, and other devices. Automakers will leverage over-the-air updates to improve vehicle performance and add new features remotely.

**Hydrogen Fuel Cell Vehicles (FCEVs):** FCEVs, offering longer ranges and faster refueling times than battery-electric vehicles, may emerge as a viable alternative in certain segments. Governments and energy companies will invest in hydrogen fueling infrastructure to support the growth of FCEVs.

**Autonomous Delivery Vehicles:** Self-driving

delivery vehicles will become more common, revolutionizing the logistics industry and improving efficiency.

**Cybersecurity Concerns:** As vehicles become more connected, cybersecurity will be a top priority for automakers, with robust measures to protect against hacking and data breaches.

These are just a few of the major trends likely to shape the automotive landscape in 2025. The industry is undergoing rapid transformation, and the year ahead promises exciting innovations and challenges.

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# ROAD SAFETY CAMPAIGN NETS GIANT WINTER SIGN-UP

The Stena Line Belfast Giants have backed a road safety community engagement campaign to reduce road deaths as winter gets under way.

The Giants are the latest high profile sporting organisation to sign up to the Share the Road to Zero campaign, led by their Captain Mark Cooper.

Ulster Rugby, the Irish Football Association, the Northern Ireland Football League and Ulster GAA also backed the campaign this year.

Sadly, so far in 2024, 60 people have died due to road traffic collisions.

Mark Cooper has now registered more than 180 appearances for the Giants since arriving in Belfast from Canada for the 2021/22 season.

He was appointed captain ahead of the 2023/24 season, during which he led the club to its successful Champions Hockey League campaign and the Elite League Playoff Final.

Speaking ahead of their game against Coventry Blaze on Wednesday evening, Mark said: "The SSE Arena sits between six and 8,000 people so

we will have a bunch of families and people driving to the game.

"Leaving extra early and making sure you give yourself enough time is ideal to keep you and your family safe.

"Without question, road safety is of the utmost importance for everyone, so I'm pleased that we can lend our support to such a vital cause and the Belfast Giants are proud to be supporting the all-important Share the Road to Zero initiative."

Minister John O'Dowd said: "We are delighted to have The Belfast Giants sign up to our Share the Road to Zero Campaign and to encourage their fans who travel to games to take care and responsibility on the roads.

"The winter is on top of us and the roads can be treacherous with snow, frost and heavy rainfall and every action you take as a road user ensures you arrive home safely and



Infrastructure Minister John O'Dowd welcomes The Belfast Giants signing up to the Department's Share the Road to Zero campaign at the SSE Arena as the winter gets under way. Included with the Minister (from left) are Robert Fitzpatrick, Chief Executive Officer, The Odyssey Trust; Mark Cooper, Captain, Belfast Giants; Paul McMahon, Chief Operating Officer, The Odyssey Trust; and Steve Thornton, Group Head of Hockey and Commercial, The Odyssey Trust.

your loved ones arrive home safely.

"One of the best ways to ensure safety on our roads and fulfil our long-term goal of eliminating death and serious injury by 2050, is by changing road

user behaviour.

"We all have a personal responsibility to behave in a way that keeps ourselves and others safe and my Department's Share the Road to Zero campaign reminds us of that. The sad

reality is that if we do not change our own attitudes when we are using the roads, our death toll will continue to increase.

"We can all potentially save a life if we RoadWise Up. Pay attention, slow

down, wear your seat belt, don't use your mobile phone while driving and never, ever drink or take drugs and drive."

Steve Thornton, Group Head of Commercial and Hockey at The Odys-

sey Trust, commented: "Undoubtedly, it's incredibly sad to hear that the number of people who have lost their lives on Northern Ireland's roads has risen.

"By signing up to the Share the Road to Zero campaign, we hope that

the Belfast Giants can play a role in reminding people to be responsible on the roads at all times."

Pledging to 'Share the Road to Zero' can be done online via www.sharetheroadtozero.com as an individual or as an organisation.

## New Cars to Watch Out for!

2025 is shaping up to be an exciting year for car enthusiasts in the UK, with a number of highly anticipated new models set to hit the roads.

Here are five of the most promising new cars coming out in 2025.

**Renault 5**  
The Renault 5 is a highly anticipated electric revival of a classic French hatchback. It promises a fun, retro-inspired design with modern electric powertrain technology. The Renault 5 is expected to offer a range of up to 248 miles and a starting price of around £20,000.

**Mini Aceman**  
The Mini Aceman is a brand-new model that will slot into the Mini lineup as a small SUV. It will offer a stylish, retro-inspired design with Mini's characteristic quirky touches. The Aceman is expected to be priced from around £25,000.

**MG2**  
The MG2 is an upcoming budget-friendly electric supermini that aims to take on

the likes of the Volkswagen ID.2 and Citroen e-C3. It promises affordable electric motoring with a range of around 200 miles and a starting price of under £20,000.

**Renault Twingo**  
The Renault Twingo is another iconic French model that is set to be revived as an electric city car. It will offer a fun, quirky design with a focus on practicality and

affordability. The Twingo is expected to be priced from around £15,000.

**Suzuki eVX**  
The Suzuki eVX is the Japanese brand's first fully-electric car. It promises a stylish, SUV-inspired design with a range of up to 250 miles. The eVX is expected to be priced from around £30,000.

These are just a few of the exciting new cars that are

set to be released in the UK in 2025. With a wide range of options to choose from,

there is sure to be something to suit everyone's needs and budgets.

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# THE ADVANTAGES OF PROFESSIONAL OVEN CLEANING

A clean oven is not just about aesthetics; it's about safety, efficiency, and overall kitchen hygiene. While DIY cleaning can be effective, professional oven cleaning offers several significant advantages.

Deep and Thorough Cleaning Professional cleaners have the tools and expertise to access and clean hard-to-reach areas, such as nooks and crannies, that are often missed during regular cleaning. They use specialized cleaning agents and techniques to effectively remove stubborn grease and grime, leaving your oven spotless. Time-Saving Convenience Professional oven cleaning saves you

valuable time and energy. Instead of spending hours scrubbing and cleaning, you can focus on other tasks. Additionally, you won't have to worry about the mess, harsh chemicals, or the physical effort involved in the cleaning process. Improved Oven Performance A clean oven can cook food more evenly and efficiently, reducing energy consumption. Regular professional cleaning can also help extend the lifespan of your oven by

preventing damage caused by accumulated grease and grime. Health and Safety Benefits A buildup of grease and grime in your oven can pose a fire hazard. Professional cleaning can help mitigate this risk. Additionally, a clean oven can improve indoor air quality by reducing the release of harmful particles and fumes. Peace of Mind When you hire a professional oven cleaning service, you can rest

assured that your oven is being cleaned by experts who know what they're doing. Many professional cleaners offer guarantees on their work, ensuring your satisfaction. While DIY cleaning can be a cost-effective option, it may not always provide the same level of cleanliness and efficiency as professional cleaning. By investing in a professional oven cleaning service, you can enjoy a cleaner, healthier, and more efficient kitchen.



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## Slash Your Energy Bills: Simple Steps for Big Savings

With energy prices on the rise, it's more important than ever to find ways to reduce your energy consumption and lower your bills. Fortunately, there are many simple steps you can take to achieve significant savings.

One of the easiest ways to reduce your energy consumption is to simply turn off lights, appliances, and electronics when you're not using them. Even leaving devices on standby can consume energy, so it's important to power them down completely. Another easy way to

save energy is to lower your thermostat by a few degrees. You may not even notice the difference in temperature, but it can make a big difference on your energy bill. Additionally, taking shorter showers can help reduce your water and energy usage. Investing in energy-efficient appliances can also help you save money in the long run. Look for models with high energy ratings, such as A+++.

remotely and optimize energy usage. To further improve your home's energy efficiency, consider insulating your loft, walls, and floor. Proper insulation can dramatically reduce heat loss, keeping your home warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer. Sealing up any gaps around doors, windows, and skirting boards can also help prevent heat loss. Replacing traditional light bulbs with energy-efficient LED bulbs is another great way to save

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# HOW TO PROTECT YOUR HOME FROM LEAKS AND BURSTS

With recent low temperatures falling to lows of up to -7 degrees, NI Water would like to remind customers of some small things they can do to protect their pipes and properties from leaks and bursts.

Keep your home heated with a thermostat, insulate your pipes, open doors to allow warm air to circulate to unheated areas of your home and know where your stop valve is located in the event of a leak.

NI Water education officer Anna Killen said: "When a pipe bursts in freezing weather, it's similar to a frozen bottle of water cracking because the water expands as it freezes, putting pressure on the pipe and causing it to break.

This might lead to a burst and possible flooding inside your home which can have a devastating impact on your property and belongings. A few simple steps can go a long way to help avoid this."

NI Water's top tips include:

- Check your inside stop valve - Check to ensure it can be opened and closed easily in the event of a leak. Most can be found under your kitchen sink but could also be located under the stairs or in

the downstairs toilet. Also check everyone in the house knows where the stop valve is located and how to turn it off. Receive a free stop tap tag by completing NI Water's online water audit at [www.getwaterfit.co.uk](http://www.getwaterfit.co.uk)

- Keep your home warm - Leave heating on for longer periods at lower settings, even while away. Doing this allows warm air to circulate, and will help prevent pipes and tanks from freezing in the cold weather
- Circulate warm



air to unheated areas - Opening doors of unheated areas of

your home (e.g. attics) occasionally to allow warm air to circulate

can prevent pipes and tanks from freezing in the cold weather

- Insulate water tanks and pipes - All exposed pipes, including attic pipes should be adequately insulated. Insulate or wrap a towel around outside taps to help prevent them from freezing over
- Check you have home insurance - check your insurance company offers you protection from the large scale damage that mother nature can sometimes cause
- Keep the name of a plumber handy - type in your postcode at

[www.watersafe.org.uk](http://www.watersafe.org.uk) to find your nearest accredited plumbing business

- Protect outdoor taps - consider using an insulated tap cover to add an extra layer of protection to outdoor taps.

Receive a free outdoor tap cover by completing NI Water's online water audit at [www.getwaterfit.co.uk](http://www.getwaterfit.co.uk)

More helpful advice and tips are available on NI Water's website at [www.niwater.com/winter-proof-your-home/](http://www.niwater.com/winter-proof-your-home/)

## Choosing the Right Window Blinds: Essential Questions to Ask Your Supplier & Installer

Choosing the Right Window Blinds: Essential Questions to Ask Your Supplier & Installer

To ensure you make an informed choice and have a smooth installation experience, it's crucial to ask the right questions to your supplier and installer.

Before you even start browsing, it's helpful to determine your budget and prioritise your needs. Consider factors like light control, privacy, insulation, child safety, and style. Accurate window measurements are also essential.

When interacting with the supplier, inquire about the types of blinds they offer, such as Venetian, roller, Roman, vertical, pleated, wooden, or bamboo. Ask about the available materials and finishes, including wood, fabric, aluminum, and PVC. Inquire about child safety options like cordless mechanisms, clutch mechanisms, and wand controls. It's crucial to understand the warranty on the blinds and request samples of fabrics and finishes. Ask if they offer a free consultation or in-home measurement service and inquire about the typical lead time for orders.

When discussing



installation with the installer, ask about their experience with the specific types of blinds you're interested in. Inquire about their guarantee on installation work, the typical timeframe for installation, and whether they remove and dispose of old blinds. Ask if they offer any after-sales support or maintenance advice and inquire about their preferred method of payment.

Don't forget to ask about motorization options if you're considering motorized blinds. Inquire about compatibility, costs, and remote control options. Determine if the blinds can be customized to fit unusual window shapes

or sizes. If you have pets, allergies, or specific needs (e.g., blackout blinds for bedrooms), be sure to discuss these considerations with the supplier.

Finance options may be available if you are ordering multiple blinds or window treatments.

By asking these questions, you can make an informed decision, ensure a smooth installation, and get the most value for your money. Remember to compare quotes from multiple suppliers and installers to find the best deal.

## Preparing Your Home for Sale: A Seller's Guide

Selling your home can be stressful, but proper preparation can significantly increase its appeal to potential buyers and ultimately fetch a higher price.

To begin, de-clutter and depersonalise. Remove excess furniture, knick-knacks, and any items that make rooms feel cramped. Put away family photos, collections, and religious items, as you want buyers to envision themselves living in the space. Consider repainting walls in neutral colours like white, beige, or light gray to make rooms appear larger and brighter.

Next, deep clean and stage your home. Thoroughly clean every room, including floors, windows, and appliances. Eliminate any lingering odours with air fresheners or by baking something delicious. Arrange furniture to maximize space and create a welcoming atmosphere. Consider adding tasteful décor like fresh flowers or plants.

Curb appeal matters significantly. Keep the lawn neatly trimmed and edged. Add colourful flowers to your garden or planters. Pressure wash the exterior of your home, including the

driveway and walkways. Repair any broken fences, loose shingles, or peeling paint.

Highlight key features by opening blinds and curtains to let in natural light. If you've recently renovated, showcase those features, such as new kitchen countertops or updated bathrooms. Ensure easy movement throughout the house by de-cluttering hallways and entryways. Consider professional help from home staging professionals who can help you arrange furniture and décor to maximize appeal, and real estate photographers who can capture high-quality photos and videos that showcase your home's best features.

Small touches can make a big difference. A fresh coat of paint can do wonders for the overall appearance of your home. Replace old doorknobs and cabinet hardware for a modern look. Enhance curb appeal with well-maintained landscaping.

Be patient and flexible. Be prepared to accommodate showings on short notice and be receptive to feedback from potential buyers and your real estate agent.

By following these tips, you can increase your home's marketability and increase the chances of a quick and successful sale. Remember, presentation is key!

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