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(L to R): Nina Cristinacce (Lightfoot Kitchen and Deli); Imogen Donegan (Seacourt Print Workshop); Rhianna Joel (Project Officer - Gifted (Market House, Bangor)); Lynne Bloomfield (Executive Director/Digital Gifted (Market House, Bangor))

## Empower Your Future

Ards and North Down Borough Council is calling on all businesses and entrepreneurs from across the Borough to engage with its free business support services through the launch of the 'Empower Your Future with Our Support' campaign.

This campaign is designed to raise awareness of the comprehensive support available to help companies and individuals thrive in today's competitive market.

Over the past year, the Council's Economic Development Service has delivered a range of innovative programmes, each designed to address various business and individual needs and challenges. These programmes have provided critical support to more than 1,420 local businesses, which, as a result, have seen significant growth in their operational capabilities and market competitiveness.

A range of comprehensive programmes include Go Succeed; 1:1 Free Advice; Free Research Services; Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF) and Mind Body Business.

In 2024/25, programmes were also delivered in Agri-Food, supporting the Food and Drink sector, and Female Leadership, helping entrepreneurs enhance their business skills and gain a Chartered Management Institute (CMI) qualification.

Additionally, the Green Adaptation Programme enabled businesses to measure and reduce their carbon footprint and identify savings through a tailored carbon reduction plan. The Labour Market Partnership (LMP) has provided funding for an Employee Upskilling programme and delivered ten academies, which have supported over 200 people to achieve qualifications and sustainable employment.

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## DISCOVER THE MAGIC OF ARDS AND NORTH DOWN: CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE AND EXPLORE HIDDEN TREASURES

This spring and summer, Ards and North Down beckons locals and visitors to unwind, rejuvenate, and uncover the area's hidden treasures.

Whether you're seeking a peaceful retreat or an exhilarating adventure, the breathtaking landscapes and rich heritage of Ards and North Down offer something for everyone. From wellness activities to thrilling outdoor pursuits, this vibrant

region invites you to explore and experience its unique charm in exciting new ways.

Unlock the Best of Ards and North Down's Hidden Treasures

The Experience Ards and North Down programme brings a fantastic line-up of events

and activities, each offering a unique way to experience the beauty and culture of this picturesque part of Northern Ireland. This year's highlights include:

24 May | Seacourt Supper Club | Bangor  
Treat yourself to a delightful supper

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**Continued on page 4**

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# Bangor Hockey Club claims Anderson Cup Victory

North Down DUP MLA Stephen Dunne has supported a Mayoral Reception to celebrate Bangor Hockey Club's recent success in the Anderson Cup. Mr Dunne commented:



Mayor Alistair Cathcart and Stephen Dunne MLA with Club President Tracy O'Hara, Club Chairman Peter Hopkins and members of Bangor Hockey Club at a reception at City Hall to celebrate the club's Anderson Cup Victory.

'It was a real pleasure to join with members of Bangor Hockey Club for a special recognition reception to recognise the club's tremendous success in the recent Anderson Cup Final.

The side secured their first piece of major silverware after a thrilling final back in

March, coming from behind to defeat South Antrim 3-2. This was also an opportunity to recognise Bangor Hockey Club's ongoing commitment to supporting the local community. This volunteer-led club provides opportunities for men, women and young people to

socialise and build meaningful friendships whilst enjoying the sport that they love. With almost 300 adult members and over 400 junior members competing at every level in Ulster Hockey throughout the competitive season, Bangor Hockey Club are at the heartbeat of

the local community. I would like to congratulate the team and the club as a whole for their success, and I am sure more silverware will follow in the years to come. I would also like to thank the Mayor Alistair Cathcart for agreeing to host this special reception.'

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# Kilcooley Over 55s Club

North Down MLA Stephen Dunne has hosted members of Kilcooley Over 55s group for a tour of Parliament Buildings, Stormont. Mr Dunne commented:



Stephen Dunne MLA, Deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly and Junior Minister Pam Cameron with members of Kilcooley Over 55s group at Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

‘It was a pleasure to host members of Kilcooley Over 55s group for a tour and chat at Parliament Buildings, Stormont, alongside the Deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly and Junior Minister Pam Cameron. The group showed a real interest in both the history of the building and the workings of our local government.

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-BOB ZELLER, Founder Belfast Giants

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Over 55s groups like this are a great method of providing those who are more at risk of social isolation an opportunity to meet together, socialise and build meaningful friendships. I would like to commend Jean Leckey and the members of this group, which meets every Monday, for their ongoing work to support those within the local community, and I wish them well for the years ahead. My office is always happy to facilitate tours of Parliament Buildings for local community groups, and I would encourage anyone interested in participating in a tour to please feel free to get in touch at anytime.'

# HOUSE PRICES IN ARDS AND NORTH DOWN INCREASE BY 8.8%

PropertyPal Northern Ireland Housing Market Update Q1 2025

The Northern Ireland housing market made a strong start to 2025, with approximately 6,200 agreed sales in the first three months of the year and homes reaching 'sale agreed' 16 days faster than the historical average, according to PropertyPal's latest quarterly report. The situation with house prices is also robust, with the price of an average home in Northern Ireland increasing by 8% on an annual basis when comparing Q1 2025 against Q1 2024. Price growth was seen across all council areas on both a yearly and quarterly basis, with Derry City & Strabane experiencing the highest rise as average prices increased by 14% over the year. In Ards and North Down, there was a 20.28% increase in agreed sales in Q1 2025 compared to Q1 2024. The number of agreed sales increased to 860 in Q1 2025. Average house prices also increased between

Q1 2024 and Q1 2025. They were up 8.8% with the average house price in Ards and North Down being £278,466 in Q1 2025. Commenting on the NI market, Jordan Buchanan, CEO of PropertyPal said: "The Northern Ireland housing market has made a strong start to 2025, with approximately 6,200 agreed sales in the first three months of the year, broadly in line with the long-term average. Encouragingly, homes are selling faster than usual, taking an average of 47 days to secure a buyer and more than two weeks quicker than the historical average. This points to continued strength in underlying demand. Supporting this, buyer enquiries per property increased by 15% compared to the previous quarter, signalling strong momentum that is likely to carry into Q2. "On the pricing front, the market has seen further acceleration.



Jordan Buchanan CEO PropertyPal

The average property now stands at £226,000, marking an 8% annual increase. Recent figures from Nationwide also place Northern Ireland at the top of the UK regional growth rankings, underlining the relative strength of the local market. "Looking ahead, the outlook remains mixed as economic

uncertainty clouds the medium-term picture. The Office for Budget Responsibility has recently halved its UK growth forecast, and new tax policies introduced by the Labour government are increasing business costs from this month. In addition, rising global trade tensions may further impact economic

confidence and market sentiment. However, on the positive side, the labour market remains resilient, with earnings continuing to outpace inflation. This, combined with expectations of further interest rate reductions, should help improve affordability and sustain activity in the months ahead."

## Community Advice

Ards and North Down

## Community Advice

Ards & North Down

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## Continued from page 1

5 June | Deadly Tales of Bangor - A Wartime Whodunit? | Bangor Step back to the 1940s for a gripping, immersive murder mystery night at the Old Market House in Bangor. Solve a wartime crime while soaking in the atmosphere of Bangor's fascinating history. 9 October | Forage and Feast with Paul

Cunningham | Helen's Bay Join MasterChef star Paul Cunningham for a sustainable foraging adventure. Explore the wild landscape, gather local ingredients, and enjoy a delicious feast prepared from nature's bounty. Step Into the Past with Our Guided Walks and Tours For those who love a good story, Ards and North Down's guided walks and tours will bring local history to life in a fun and

immersive way. Check out these must-do tours: 24 and 25 May | Bangor Bay Boat Trip Sail with Brian Meharg, author and skipper of the Ocean Crest, for a fascinating cruise around Bangor Bay. Hear the legendary story of the notorious smuggler, Jenny Watt, and enjoy the bay's scenic views. 15 June and 24 August | Trad and Tide | Bangor Bay Relax on a coastal

cruise along Bangor's shoreline, serenaded by local musicians of Clanreagh, as Brian Meharg shares salty tales from the region's maritime past. 21 June | Summer Solstice Voyage of Discovery | Portaferry Celebrate the longest day of the year with a magical midsummer voyage through Strangford Lough, filled with traditional Irish music and captivating tales of pagan folklore. 31 October | Spirits of the East Coast | Donaghadee Get into the Halloween spirit with a spine-tingling adults-only tour of Donaghadee. Explore the haunted streets and uncover eerie legends

in this historic harbour town. A Year-Round Celebration of Local Culture and Heritage The Experience Ards and North Down programme doesn't end with summer! Throughout the year, local culture and heritage are celebrated with events like New Year's Day Historical Walking Tours and Stories and Supper evenings at the Ulster Folk Museum in Cultra, where visitors can enjoy seasonal feasts and captivating storytelling. For more details on these exciting experiences and to book your spot, visit [www.visitardsandnorthdown.com/experienceAND](http://www.visitardsandnorthdown.com/experienceAND).

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# Muir gives talk to Hollywood U3A.

North Down Alliance MLA Andrew Muir has given a presentation to the Hollywood District of the University of the Third Age (U3A) on the subject of Lough Neagh.



Andrew Muir MLA with Liz Wallace, Norma Cooper and Valerie Cobain from U3

Speaking after the event on Friday 25th April, Mr Muir said: “I was delighted to have the opportunity to speak to the membership of Hollywood U3A on a subject very close to my heart, Lough Neagh. It was encouraging to see such engagement on issues of water quality as well as a passion for protecting and enhancing our environment. “We know that pollution, climate change and invasive species have played a significant role in creating the environment for toxic blue-green algae blooms to thrive and there is much work being done to address this. “The Lough Neagh Report and Action Plan sets out a pathway to reduce pollution through education, investment, regulation and enforcement. The vast majority of actions are already underway with science and research playing a key role and informing decision-making. “Lough Neagh is not only a national treasure, but also a litmus test for the state of our environment and we must do all we can to reverse the damage done through decades of neglect.”

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Tuesday 27th

June  
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# Sports Development Capital Grant Programme NOW OPEN

**The Sports Development Capital Grant Programme is now open for applications. The initiative supplies financial assistance to eligible sports clubs for the delivery of capital projects within Ards and North Down.**

Ards and North Down Borough Council has £70,000 available for the 2025/2026 financial year and can award up to 60% of eligible capital costs with a maximum award of £6,000 in respect of any one project.

Grants are available for capital expenditure such as facilities or equipment, defined as 'expenditure for technical assistance and/or purchase, improvement, restoration and construction of an asset directly related to the applicant organisation'.

The Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Alistair Cathcart, said:

"The Sports Development Capital Grant Programme

provides all eligible sports clubs in Ards and North Down an opportunity to further develop their clubs. It can help ease the financial burden of purchasing essential equipment, for example, and it enables clubs to offer more opportunities. Supporting them through the Capital Grant Programme helps to ensure that our local sports scene continues to grow, it gives our residents increased opportunities to take part and it helps build on the great sporting success that our Borough has already achieved."

Last year, Scrabo Golf Club received a Sports Development



Capital Grant and used it to purchase battery powered machinery, such as chainsaws, trimmers and blower, to replace petrol powered course equipment. Following the damage caused by Storm Eowyn, this equipment was put to immediate use.

Alison Hiles, Lady Honorary Secretary of Scrabo Golf Club, said:

"The application process was simple to follow with any queries or questions being quickly responded to. Scrabo Golf Club is extremely grateful for the support received from Ards and North Down Borough Council and in particular the assistance

received from council officers."

Capital Grant Applications opened on Monday 28 April 2025 and will close at midday on Monday 28 July 2025. Applications will be assessed in August with notifications to sports clubs in late August.

Programme guidance and criteria, together with application forms, can be found at [www.leisureardsandnorthdown.com/sports-development/funding](http://www.leisureardsandnorthdown.com/sports-development/funding). Alternatively, email [sportsdevelopment@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk](mailto:sportsdevelopment@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk) or telephone 0300 013 3333 (ext 40327).

## Shortlist revealed for Young Enterprise NI 2025 awards

**Bangor Academy & Sixth Form College among school teams vying to be 'Company of the Year' at Belfast City Hall ceremony**

Six student-powered 'companies' from schools across Northern Ireland have reached the final stage in this year's Young Enterprise NI awards – YEA25 – and will be hoping their business idea and entrepreneurial approach will make the cut in a major award ceremony at Belfast City Hall.

Among them was Bangor Academy & Sixth Form College who created 'Beez Kneez', a business that produces and sells beeswax wraps and anti-spiking drink covers. The business idea was inspired by the Northern Ireland Executive's 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls' initiative, as well as a desire to tackle sustainability through the use of environmentally friendly materials.

They will join Royal School, Armagh, Omagh Academy, Larne High School, Dominican College, Portstewart, and Strathern School, Belfast, whose teams were selected after pitching their business idea to an esteemed panel of judges and in front of an audience at Invest NI's Belfast head office earlier this month.

Future-focused, innovative and creative, Northern Ireland's newest generation of entrepreneurs won over the panel with their passion for business, sustainability, branding, marketing, sales and growth before earning a place at this year's top table.



**Pictured (L-R) following a tough pitch battle to an esteemed panel of judges and in front of an audience at Invest NI's offices are Sales Manager Joe, Marketing Manager Holly, Sustainability Manager Emma, Managing Director Tilly, and Company Secretary Ariana.**

The overall winner, securing the Young Enterprise NI Company of the Year 2025 award, will be announced at the ceremony in May.

The winning company will also go forward to represent Northern Ireland at the Young Enterprise UK Company Final Awards, providing the chance to secure their place on the Young Enterprise European Company of the Year final in Athens later this year.

Northern Ireland's leading enterprise education charity, Young Enterprise NI is dedicated to inspiring and educating local young people about the world of business and entrepreneurship. Supported by many of the biggest names in the region's business community, by providing fun, practical business experiences, the organisation empowers young people to develop critical

skills such as teamwork, leadership and financial literacy. The annual awards are a key part of its work.

This year's judging panel included Young Enterprise alumni Adam Ewart, founder and chief executive of local award-winning baggage shipping company Send My Bag, Invest NI executive director Iain Joannides and Vera McWilliams, representing the Chartered Institute of Export and International Trade. Bank of Ireland senior manager Eighrean Horner, Jonathan Williamson, chief operation officer for EY Northern Ireland and Radius Housing chief executive John McLean OBE were also represented on this year's stellar panel.

Last year, students from Friends' School Lisburn won Company of the Year

with their company, Bottle Up, which tackled plastic waste by creating handmade flowers from used plastic bottles.

Young Enterprise NI receives no public funding and relies on local businesses and a range of stakeholders for support. Organisations which have pledged support, joining its 'Business Backers' programme include Danske Bank, Bank of Ireland, A&O Shearman, Finnebrogue, Henderson Group, Dale Farm, Musgrave, Kilwaughter and Lynas Foods.

Young Enterprise NI is also grateful for the support of Belfast City Council for making available the stunning Great Hall for these prestigious awards.

For information on Young Enterprise NI and how you can help its vital work, visit [www.yeni.co.uk](http://www.yeni.co.uk).

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## THE 2025 NI AND ULSTER CHAMPIONSHIP SEATON CLASSIC 10K

**It's that time of year again! Road racing season! The newly renamed NI and Ulster Championship Seaton Classic 10K (formerly the Bangor 10k) is back for 2025, with registrations now open until Wednesday 24 th September 2025.**

The NI and Ulster Championship Seaton Classic 10K, which is proudly sponsored by leading

local estate agent, John Minnis Estate Agents, and organised by North Down Athletic Club in association with Athletics Northern Ireland and Ards and North Down Borough Council, will take place on Saturday 27 th September 2025 at 10am.

The popular race is open to elite and novice runners alike, and early registration is recommended. Runners can take advantage of the competitive early bird rate until the end of June.

The annual event offers athletes the chance

to take on a fun challenge whilst enjoying a stunning coastal route, which begins in Castle Park and makes its way through Bangor city centre, before heading out along the coast and countryside to Groomsport and finishing in Ward Park.

John Minnis, Director at John Minnis Estate Agents, which offers a comprehensive range of property services, including residential sales, lettings, and property management, said:

"As a local estate agent, we are dedicated to supporting community initiatives, and John Minnis Estate Agents is thrilled to once again partner with

North Down Athletic Club to facilitate this exciting event.

"The NI and Ulster Championship Seaton Classic 10K is always a fun-filled occasion which champions positive health and well-being locally, and we are very much looking forward to welcoming athletes and spectators to the city of Bangor in September."

Jamie Stevenson, Chairperson of North Down Athletic Club, added:

"We are delighted to roll out the name change and the rebrand for our club's annual 10k race. David Seaton was one of our great local athletes, at both club

and international level, and within North Down Athletic Club has held the positions of chairman and president.

David continues to support and coach our members and remains heavily involved in the local running landscape. We are so pleased to pay tribute to his services to the sport in this way. "We had our biggest race ever last year, completely selling out with nearly 1500 runners, and we are delighted to have secured the NI and Ulster Championship status again for 2025. We would urge everyone to sign up early to avoid disappointment!"

The Mayor of Ards and

North Down, Alistair Cathcart said:

"Ards and North Down Borough Council is delighted to welcome this fabulous event back to Bangor. This year marks 20 years since the Bangor 10k was rejuvenated and its rebranding to the Seaton Classic 10k is a fitting tribute to David Seaton MBE.

"I am sure it will be another challenging event and I hope many competitors will be able to make use of our Borough's first class sport and leisure facilities to help them prepare. Good luck to all involved."

The 2025 Seaton Classic 10K prize fund is in excess of £3500, and a reduced early bird offer is available until the end of June 2025, with registrations starting from only £15.50.

The race will also be supported by Cosimac, Electronic & Security Services, Pure Running, Gordons Chemists, and Aurora Aquatic and Leisure Centre.

For more information or to register for the NI and Ulster Championship Seaton Classic 10K, please visit [www.northdownac.co.uk/seatonclassic10k](http://www.northdownac.co.uk/seatonclassic10k)

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# Project ELLA Environmental Initiative Brings Students to Donaghadee

Students from Bloomfield Primary School visited Pink's Green in Donaghadee where they took part in litter picking and rock pool exercises as part of Ards and North Down Borough Council's environmental awareness initiative, Project ELLA.

Launched almost two years ago, Project ELLA focuses on the four keys of Environment, Learning, Lifestyle and Action. It is primarily a schools based programme that gives students the opportunity to learn about the importance of environmental protection as well as the role that residents have in improving and enhancing the Borough through positive environmental action and behaviour.

After successfully completing a beach clean where they collected bags of litter and debris from the area, Bloomfield Primary School's Year 5 students gained an insight into marine biodiversity through rock pooling. They found crabs, starfish and more, and learned about how threats such as climate change, litter and pollution can affect



Students from Bloomfield Primary School took part in Project ELLA in Donaghadee. Image: Ian Pedlow.

the environment.

The Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Alistair Cathcart, said:

"Project ELLA is about connecting people to the landscape and our natural environment and encouraging positive actions and behaviours. It is a collaborative

concept that is designed to improve and protect our natural environment by way of education and community engagement.

Working with local children helps to instil that sense of community and accountability from a young age and it was wonderful to see

the enthusiasm of Bloomfield Primary School's Year 5 students as they completed their tasks."

For more information about Project ELLA, visit [www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/project-ella](http://www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/project-ella) or email [projectella@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk](mailto:projectella@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk).



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## 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!

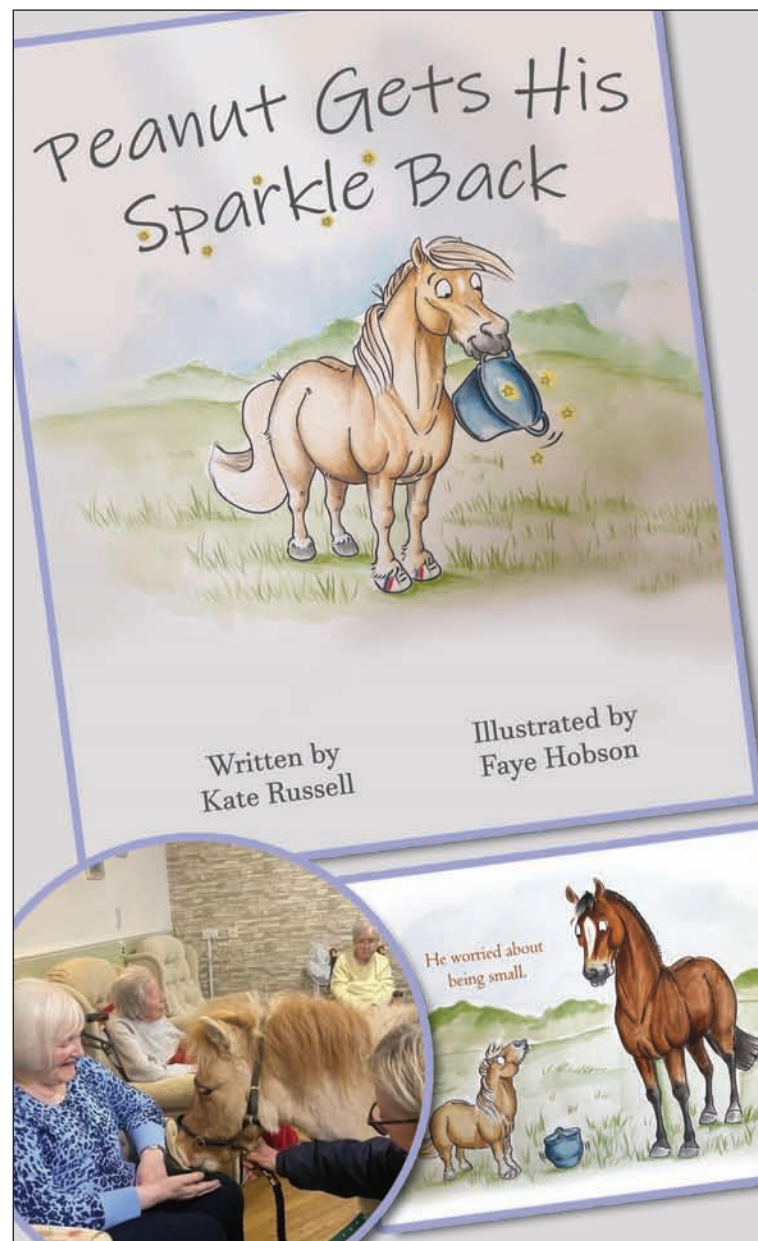
The story aims to help children with anxiety and worries and show that that it is ok to have worries but not to let them build up. 'Peanut, gets his sparkle back' is a heart-warming children's book about overcoming fear and finding the courage within oneself.

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.tobiandpeanut-therapyponies.com/product-page/peanut-finds-his-sparkle-children-s-story> Book priced £10, (postage fees apply).**





# SAY “YES” TO THE FOUR SEASONS HOTEL & LEISURE CLUB, MONAGHAN

If you’re recently engaged or deep into planning your big day, don’t miss the perfect opportunity to discover all that the Four Seasons Hotel & Leisure Club, Monaghan has to offer.

Join us for our Wedding Showcase on Sunday 15th June 2025, from 1pm to 5pm, and take a personalised tour of our opulent wedding suites and the luxurious Honeymoon Suite with our dedicated and award-winning weddings team. With over half a century of experience and a one wedding per day promise, the hotel knows what it takes to create a day as unique as your love. Whether you’re planning a grand celebration or an intimate gathering, you’ll see first-hand how your wedding vision can come to life.

As a thank you for attending, enjoy a free booking bonus with any wedding confirmed within two weeks of the showcase. Plus, new wedding bookings for 2025 will also receive a 10% discount on the package price and complimentary



Mark Barton Photography

wedding meal for their top table (T&Cs apply).

Make a weekend of it and enjoy 20% off overnight stays on the 14th and 15th June with discount code WEDDSHOW, exclusively via [www.4seasonshotel.ie](http://www.4seasonshotel.ie). Can’t make the

showcase? Not to worry — Wedding viewings are available 7-days a week to help you plan your celebration of a lifetime.

Looking for a date to truly remember? Due to special circumstances, New Year’s Eve 2025 is available — a rare and

magical opportunity for an unforgettable celebration.

Appointments are essential — Contact the hotel today to secure your personalised viewing: [weddings@4seasonshotel.ie](mailto:weddings@4seasonshotel.ie) or +353 (0)47 81 888 Coolshannagh, Co. Monaghan, H18 Y220

# Welcome increases to support for childcare from April 2025

Many families across Northern Ireland rely on registered childcare providers every day to enable them to go to work.

## Employers For Childcare

While childcare costs remain a significant expense it is welcome news that there is an increase in this vital support for the 2025-2026 financial year.

NI Childcare Subsidy Scheme support will continue for 2025-2026. The NI Childcare Subsidy Scheme provides a 15% subsidy on childcare costs for working parents of children under Primary school age and who are in receipt of Tax-Free Childcare.

The Education Minister Paul Givan has confirmed that the scheme will continue into 2025-2026 and the key

changes from April 2025 are:

- Increased Subsidy Cap: From April the maximum subsidy cap per child will rise by 10% to £184 per month per child, and £367 per month for a child with a disability.

- Increased Childcare Provider Payments: To support childcare providers and to prevent rising operational costs from being passed onto parents, the administrative payments to providers will be increased.

Increased Universal Credit Childcare cap

As announced in the Autumn Budget the Childcare Element of Universal



Credit will increase by 1.7% from April in line with rises to other elements of Universal Credit.

The Childcare Element of Universal Credit is calculated at 85% of the childcare costs reported in the UC Assessment Period up to a maximum cap for one child of £1031.88 or £1768.94 for two or more children.

Get advice to make sure this is right for your family

While these changes will provide valuable additional support, working out which is best for your family can be confusing. We would encourage anyone using registered childcare to call the Family Benefits Advice Service on 028 9267 8200 for advice to ensure they are still receiving the best form of support or email [hello@employersforchildcare.org](mailto:hello@employersforchildcare.org).



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# Discover the Future of Dental Care at Helens Bay Dental

In an era where healthcare is rapidly advancing, Helens Bay Dental is leading the way with a truly modern, patient-focused experience.

The recently expanded Digital Clinic at Helens Bay Dental is setting a new benchmark in dental care—combining cutting-edge technology, convenience, and compassionate service to deliver an exceptional experience for every patient.

For new patients, the benefits of joining the Digital Clinic are immediate and significant. From the moment they walk through the doors, they are welcomed into a seamless digital workflow that reduces waiting times, improves diagnostics, and enhances comfort. With state-of-the-art digital scanners, 3D imaging, and paperless systems, consultations and treatment plans are more accurate, efficient, and personalized than ever before.

Patients can expect early detection of dental issues, minimally invasive treatments, and precise outcomes—all thanks to advanced digital technology. Whether it's cosmetic improvements, routine hygiene, or restorative work, Helens Bay Dental ensures each visit is streamlined and stress-free.

But it's not just about technology. What truly sets the clinic apart is its unwavering commitment to patient care. The team at Helens Bay Dental takes the time to understand each patient's needs, offering tailored advice, flexible appointment options, and transparent pricing. Becoming a patient



at the Digital Clinic isn't just a step toward better dental health—it's a step into the future of dentistry.

For those seeking trusted care in a warm, high-tech environment, Helens Bay Dental offers the perfect combination of innovation and integrity.

New patients are welcome now—with the added convenience of online booking and flexible hours. Call today on 028 9185 2444 or email [info@helensbaydental.co.uk](mailto:info@helensbaydental.co.uk) to book your first appointment. Your smile deserves the very best.

# THE VITAL WORK OF NORTH DOWN & ARDS WOMEN'S AID

CEO, Emalyn Turkington explains how North Down & Ards Women's Aid (NDAWA) supports women, children and young people who are affected by domestic and sexual abuse.

She says: "We are a passionate team and totally committed to making a positive difference to the lives of women, children, and young people in the North Down & Ards area."

CEO, Emalyn Turkington wants to thank her team for the amazing work they do every day and the action they take listening and advocating for the women, children and young people they work with.

"We are an all women organisation, and our strong ethos 'for women, with women, by women' is reflected daily in our roles. We exist to accelerate action, challenge attitudes, structures and systems which perpetuate domestic abuse. We seek through our work to enable women, children, and young people to live free from violence and abuse. I could not do my role as CEO without the incredible Team, Board

Members and Volunteers that I work with. The team at NDAWA inspire action through support, compassion, respect, providing a listening ear, showing empathy, being non-judgemental, and empowering women, children, and young people to find their voice and reach their full potential – thank you!

NDAWA would also not be able to complete our work without the support of the partner agencies we work with and our local community.

By working in partnership, NDAWA are helping to implement awareness programs and training within organisations and communities to challenge harmful social norms, promote understanding of consent, and equip individuals in the community with the knowledge to recognise and



NDAWA recently participated to 'Accelerate Action for Gender Equality' on International Women's Day. Pictured is CEO, Emalyn Turkington.

respond to abuse.

If you are affected by domestic and sexual abuse or want to find out more information about North Down & Ards Women's Aid, please contact the Bangor office on 028 9127 3196.

## THE BAKERS COTTAGES

ACCOMMODATION

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Set in the heart of the County Down countryside with views of the Mourne mountains and the rolling fields, this was once the bakery for the local area. An ideal tranquil location for exploring the Mourne Area of Outstanding Beauty but also with easy access to Belfast. Whether you want to relax and unwind in peace and soak in the 6 person hot tub or explore the numerous local attractions The Bakers Cottages is your perfect base.

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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## Olympic Lifts and Stannah have the lift solution for you!

**Celebrating 40 years of providing lifting solutions across the UK & Ireland, Olympic Lifts is your trusted partner for a wide range of accessibility products. Based in Lisburn, our easily accessible showroom just off the M1 showcases several Home Elevators.**

Our strategic location allows us to provide rapid and efficient maintenance and support throughout Ireland, with vehicle tracking ensuring the closest technician is dispatched in the event of a fault.

A key area of our expertise lies in Stannah stairlifts, for which Olympic Lifts is sole distributor in NI. Our extensive range of Stannah products is designed with a refreshingly modern aesthetic to integrate beautifully into any home, whether classic or contemporary. We offer Stannah stairlifts for all types of staircases, including:

- Stannah curved stairlifts: Expertly designed to navigate winding or complex staircases, effortlessly handling

- curved bends, intermediate landings, and corridors.
- Stannah outdoor stairlifts: A revolutionary solution for split-level properties, cliff-set homes, or providing access to lower gardens, garages, or cellars.
- Stannah straight stairlifts: Reliable and space-saving options for straightforward staircases.

Beyond Stannah stairlifts, Olympic Lifts also supplies, installs, tests, and maintains Passenger Lifts, Access Lifts, Goods Lifts, escalators, and Moving walkways. We are proud to have completed almost 20,000 projects over the past four decades. Recently, we launched our new machine room traction drive access passenger lift, a versatile Hybrid Lift suitable for both domestic and commercial properties,



offering numerous sizes and finish options.

Our commitment to continuous development, investment, and product advancement ensures that Olympic Lifts offers the most up-to-date, highest quality products and services. This dedication translates to an improved

purchasing experience, enhanced efficiencies, and cost savings for our valued customers.

For more information on our range of Stannah stairlifts and other lifting solutions, please contact us at 02892 622331 or visit our website at [www.olympiclifts.co.uk](http://www.olympiclifts.co.uk).

## HANNON Coach & Sail is perfect for a city break in Glasgow!

**Direct Belfast – Glasgow Express now departing from the new Belfast Grand Central Station.**

An award-winning service offering hassle-free travel, HANNON Coach & Sail is ideal for a city break in Glasgow and the perfect antidote to flying and airport stress! Already hugely popular with those in the know, the Belfast – Glasgow Express Coach Service is rated 5-Star on TripAdvisor.

A shopper's paradise, Glasgow is recognised as having the best retail therapy in the UK outside of London. Consistently voted 'top of the shops', the city is Scotland's premier shopping destination.

Not just shopping, Glasgow is also famous for its fantastic nightlife, and great choice of restaurants and bars. Glasgow is the perfect choice for your next city break away.

With a simple flat fare of £47 which includes the cost of the ferry and your bag, the Belfast – Glasgow Express offers a really attractive,



convenient and low-cost alternative to flying.

The service is operated by HANNON Coach and leaves twice a day from Belfast, Grand Central Station (Stand 18) and drops visitors right in the heart of Glasgow's 'Style Mile'. The simple flat fare allows passengers to pick and mix dates and times of travel to suit and with no luggage charges it makes a perfect

travel option for a shopping trip. There are also a great range of hotels just minutes from Glasgow Buchanan Bus Station.

Company director Aodh Hannon says people seem to really love the convenience of the service as we take you right into the heart of the city centre.

"People love the fact that it's so hassle-free compared to flying, no airport transfers

and with no extra charge for luggage it is a massive help with keeping the cost of a break down," said Mr Hannon.

The service can be booked online at [www.hannoncoach.com](http://www.hannoncoach.com) up to 1 hour before departure or by phone using the very friendly telephone booking service.

Call 028 9265 0700 (Mon – Fri) or visit [www.hannoncoach.com](http://www.hannoncoach.com)

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# CEILINGS, THE FIFTH WALL WITH SOMETHING TO SAY

The ceiling — sometimes referred to as a room's fifth wall — often gets short shrift in decorating schemes.

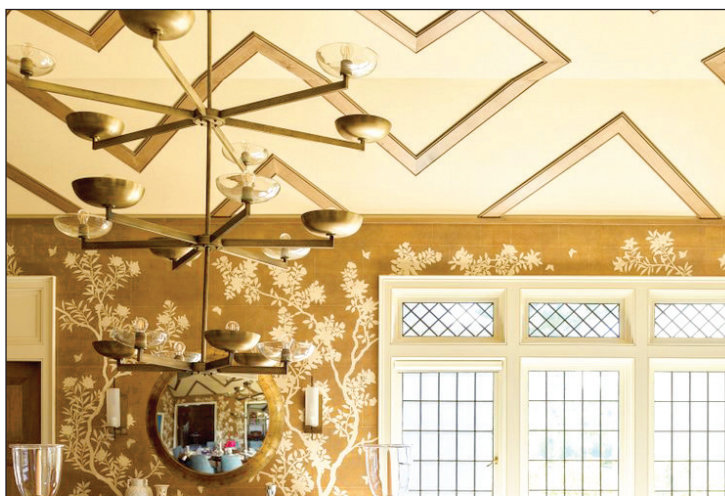
Walls and furnishings take centre stage while the acreage overhead receives a coat of neutral white paint, with perhaps a snazzy ceiling fixture.

That wasn't the case historically. Plaster ornamentation and murals were used centuries ago, and the Victorians really went to town on the

ceiling, with elaborate mouldings and stamped tin sheeting. Ceiling medallions graced more formal spaces like dining rooms and parlours, while timber beams and tongue-and-groove boards were popular in kitchens, bedrooms and common spaces. Through the early 20th century, curvy coving, panelled grids and ornate moldings were popular.

But with the advent of modernism after the 1930s, ceilings became the serene planes most of us are familiar with.

Now we're looking



up again. Designers are really getting creative with architectural elements, as well as paint, wallpaper and lighting.

"Statement ceilings are a great way to bring detail and visual interest to a room," says Gideon Mendelson, founder

and creative director of his New York-based eponymous design group. "We see them as an opportunity to create something

unexpected that adds to the space."

As well as millwork and wallpaper, Mendelson's done custom hand-painting on ceilings. "It sets it apart from the rest of the home, and gives the space its own personality," he says.

Smooth-finished ceilings make it easy to apply whatever you can dream up: paint, peel and stick or traditional wallpapers, or even ornamentation like origami, decals, buttons, faux jewels, botanicals, twigs, garlands, ribbon, stencils or scarves.

Command strips will hold most lightweight objects firmly to a

smooth ceiling, but if you're stuck with one of those textured ceilings, you'll either have to refinish it or opt for wood panelling or tin sheets.

Not ready to fully dress your ceiling? You can still add some excitement there with a light fixture.

"A ceiling statement doesn't have to involve complicated architectural details," points out Leigh Spicher, design studio director for the Atlanta-based homebuilding group Ashton Woods. "It can also be created by adding a chandelier that contrasts in either style or scale to the room."

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## Inspiring conservatory ideas

Whether you're building a new conservatory or looking to give your current conservatory a little TLC, get inspired for your next project with a mix of these fun and unique ideas!

Questions to ask yourself include: What square footage am I working with? Which conservatory design will fit in with the style of my house? How do I want

to use my conservatory? (i.e. For dining, sunbathing, botany, or reading etc.) Once you've answered these questions, it's just a matter of choosing your design and deciding how best to decorate it.

Glass extensions are a sleek and effortless way to upgrade your conservatory. Not only do they invite lots of light and warmth into your home, but they also work with almost any brickwork or cladding design. Double glazing and integrated doors offer a seamless transition into your garden, while landscaping your outdoor space gives you something beautiful to look at on a rainy day.

An orangery. Orangery's are another modern conservatory design idea. Bringing nature indoors with tall parlour palms and hanging baskets full of Mandevilla ('Rocktrumpet') is ideal. Better yet, if you're opting for an orangery, the world is your botanical oyster. For a fragrant oasis, attach

Bougainvillea and Jasminum azoricum to trellises; decorate tables with Stephanotis floribunda-filled pots, and place giant Phoenix palms in lonely corners. Succulent popularity is spiking in the world of interior design. If you're less green-fingered than the average gardener, having a selection of cacti displayed in terrariums, vases, and/or refined concrete pots is a (literally) effortless way of modernising your space.

Sleek flooring. A stunning addition to any conservatory; wooden parquet floors are contemporary, stylish, and intricate. Whether you choose a walnut, oak, laminate, or even vinyl design, these floors will transform your conservatory into a tranquil retreat fit for royalty.

A coloured conservatory. Have you been searching for conservatory colour ideas? Teal is a multifaceted colour available in a spectrum of shades – from pale celeste and aquamarine to rich



evergreen and ocean blue. Choosing the right shade for your conservatory is just a matter of light. The brighter the room, the darker you can get away with. That said, to maintain balance, we suggest you stick to the middle of the palette.

A contemporary dining area. A great way to utilise your modern conservatory is to turn it into a garden dining room. Think quintessential picnics with jute decor and polished brass place settings. You can either design

a more formal dining area by sticking with a traditional dining table and chairs or opt for something a little more sociable and choose benches and relaxed floor seating.

Stackable furniture. When it comes to decorating a small conservatory, maximising your space and working with the light is essential. Stackable rattan furniture is perfect for keeping things neat and compact. Mini greenhouse. Also known as sunrooms, lean-to conservatories are rectangular-shaped structures attached to the wall of your house.

Perfect for growing herbs or filling with air-purifying plants, lean-tos can house workbenches, banquet tables, or swing benches that look out into your lovingly landscaped garden.

Practical furniture. Keep it simple and elegant with grey furniture and bright decor. Light grey floor tiles work well in sunrooms with lots of light, as do anti-bleach furniture choices like rattan sets or twisted metal love seats. Consider floor cushions and recliner chairs, and surround yourself with sun-loving plants for a lung-friendly and green-fingered oasis.

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## Outback 365: Strategic Store Relocation benefits customers!

**Outback 365, a prominent provider of premium outdoor living products, has recently announced a significant step in its growth journey: the consolidation of its operations to focus on its Dungannon showroom as its primary location.**

This marks an exciting new chapter for the company, promising numerous benefits for both Outback 365 and its valued customers.

Established in 2017, Outback 365 has established itself as a leading retailer of hot tubs, saunas, pergolas, and garden furniture. Partnering with world-renowned brands like Jacuzzi®, Leisurecraft and SUNS Lifestyle, the company has been dedicated to transforming outdoor spaces into personal oases for relaxation and enjoyment. Previously operating with showrooms in both Dungannon and Bangor, this recent move signifies a focused approach to enhancing customer experience and streamlining operations.

This decision brings forth a multitude of advantages:

**Enhanced Customer Experience:** By concentrating resources and expertise in one central location, Outback 365 can offer a more personalised and comprehensive shopping

experience. The Dungannon showroom now boasts an indoor space for year-round comfort, wet changing facilities for trying out hot tubs and saunas, and even an in-house coffee bar for a relaxed browsing atmosphere. This dedicated space allows customers to fully immerse themselves in the product range and receive focused attention from the knowledgeable team.

**Streamlined Operations and Services:** Consolidating into a single hub allows Outback 365 to streamline its operational processes. This can lead to greater efficiency in inventory management, service scheduling, and overall customer support. Customers can expect a more cohesive and responsive experience, whether they are making a purchase, arranging a delivery, or seeking after-sales support.

**Expanded Service Capabilities:** The Dungannon location is poised to become a central point for all Outback 365 services,



You can now trial a hot tub or sauna for yourself at The Outback 365 Dungannon showroom.

including hot tub repairs and servicing, relocation services within Northern Ireland, and expert advice on product selection and maintenance. This concentration of expertise ensures that customers have access to comprehensive support from a dedicated team.

**Focus on a Personalised Shopping Experience:** With a focused product range showcased in the enhanced Dungannon showroom, Outback 365 can offer a more tailored and attentive shopping

journey. The team can dedicate their expertise to guiding customers through the available options, ensuring they find the perfect outdoor living solutions to meet their individual needs and preferences.

**Commitment to Continued Support:** While the Bangor showroom will eventually close, Outback 365 remains committed to all its customers. Delivery services will continue to be available for those unable to visit the Dungannon location, and

virtual consultations will ensure that customers across Ireland can still access expert advice and guidance.

By centralising its operations, Outback 365 is poised to enhance customer experience, streamline services, and build a stronger foundation for future growth in the premium outdoor living market across Ireland. This commitment to providing exceptional products and services from a dedicated hub signals a bright future for Outback 365 and its customers.

## Budget Designer HomeWorks – Celebrating 31 Years of Trusted Local Service

**For over three decades, Budget Designer HomeWorks has been helping homeowners across Northern Ireland improve and enjoy their homes.**

From stylish new windows and secure, energy-efficient doors, to beautiful conservatories, sunrooms and expertly designed bathrooms - we take pride in delivering quality, value, and peace of mind.

Every installation is tailored to suit the unique needs of your home. We don't do off-the-shelf; we take a hands-on approach to design and installation, ensuring each project is carefully managed from start to finish. Our team is known for being approachable, reliable, and highly skilled - and it's this personal service that keeps customers coming back and recommending us to others.

We are proud to be the trusted, authorised agents for leading manufacturers across the UK, Ireland and beyond - bringing the best in quality, design and innovation to every job. We also operate a dedicated trade supply division, working with local fitters, builders, and joiners to provide dependable products and expert advice across a



wide range of products and installations.

Some of our windows and doors are even made right here in Northern Ireland, using A-rated thermal glass for outstanding insulation and security. Whether it's a full home upgrade, a new bathroom, building work or a simple door replacement, we work hard to keep lead times realistic - and always aim to deliver on time and on budget.

With a ten-year warranty on all installations,

professional project management, and strong aftersales support, you can trust us to get the job done right - and to be there if you ever need us.

You can visit our dedicated bathroom showroom next to our main hub in Bangor NI, where our experienced team can help bring your ideas to life, no matter the size or style of your space.

Budget Designer HomeWorks - From Design To Fit, We Take Care Of It.

## OUTBACK365 Hot Tubs & Outdoor Living Evolving for a Stronger Future!

### WE'VE GOT SOME GREAT NEWS!

We're made Dungannon the heart of Outback 365, bringing everything together in one fantastic showroom.

#### At Outback 365, we're constantly evolving to better serve you.

As part of our growth strategy, we've made the decision to consolidate our operations and focus on our Dungannon showroom as our primary location. This move allows us to expand our services, streamline our operations, and ultimately improve your shopping experience.



#### What does this mean for our NORTH DOWN customers?

- **Same phone number** – You'll still be able to reach us at the same phone number for any queries or assistance.
- **Order chemicals online** – You can still easily order all your hot tub chemicals and accessories online, with free delivery options available.
- **10% off at our Dungannon showroom** – As a thank you for your continued loyalty, we're offering 10% off our entire range when you visit us at our Dungannon showroom.
- **Customer service continuity** – Our same friendly and knowledgeable team will continue to provide excellent service at our Dungannon showroom, and we'll be available for virtual consultations for those unable to visit in person.
- **Delivery and support** – If you're unable to make it to Dungannon, we offer delivery services to bring the products you need right to your door

Our Dungannon showroom is located at:  
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## Budget Designer HomeWorks

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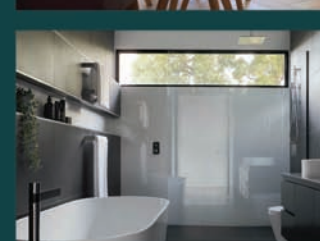
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## PLANNING THE SPACE

Think about the direction – in the UK a South facing situation is normally preferred to make the most of all that natural light during summer but also think about roof cover, especially over any appliances and your food prep area. You might also want to consider having ventilation for your cooking system installed just as you would indoors.

## FUNCTION AND FORM

Make provision for countertop space for cooking as well as serving & entertaining. For example an island with bar area and stools could be considered or perhaps a lounging area as well

## GET COOKING

Traditional Barrell style Barbecue grill, ceramic cooker, rotisserie, smoker or even a (gas or wood-fired) pizza oven? Options can include sear burners, side burners and warmers. You can even integrated some smart technology options into your outdoor kitchen.

## KEEP IT COOL

It may not be too long a trek to the kitchen but an outdoor fridge can be beneficial if you are

# PLANNING AN OUTDOOR KITCHEN



preparing salads and or cool desserts out of doors. Also handy for keeping drinks cool and within easy reach.

## WHICH MATERIAL

Stainless steel is a hot favourite for industrial look cabinetry however there are lots of powder-coated metals that also work. Stone and tile are also options.

Countertop materials are another thing to think about. They need to be both functional and durable.

## HEAT IT UP

If you want to use your new outdoor kitchen well into Autumn consider installing heat sources such as patio heaters and a fire-pit.

## POWER UP

Be sure you have enough power on the deck or patio, which could mean enlarging a gas line or adding electrical capacity to run appliances and lighting.

## LIGHT IT UP

You will need functional lighting for cooking safely at night – so consider this at

work surface level as well as ambient lighting.

## ENTERTAINING OUT OF DOORS

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## Choosing patio doors

For those of us lucky enough to have a rear garden, patio doors are a fantastic choice.

These versatile doors help to infuse our homes with light, maximise on outside views and create a seamless transition from home to garden.

## What is a patio door?

Generally, the term 'patio doors' cover all types of doors that open out either onto your garden/patio area, into your living area or simply slide open/closed. These are usually glazed and come in a variety of options including different styles, colours and materials.

What are the different types of patio doors? Depending on the style and layout of your home, plus your requirements, you have a range of options

to choose from when purchasing patio doors. You may be wondering about the different types of patio doors, and the most popular styles sold are bifold, sliding, French and Crittall/Belgium doors.

What are bifold doors? Bifold doors are ideal to create a continuous flow from indoors to outdoors. But exactly what are bifold doors? They can fold onto themselves and can open up entire walls letting your home flow out into your garden. Bifold doors are great for flooding rooms with natural light and taking up a minimum amount of space when open. However, can be quite 'frame' heavy when they are closed.

What are sliding doors? Popular in households in the 1960's & 70's, sliding doors are experiencing a resurgence. They let in plenty of natural light and are available with narrow frames to maximise garden views. They can also slide back on themselves and even into cavities within the walls, to blur the line between indoors and outdoors.

What are French doors? These are more traditional styled, hinged, double glass doors and are available in wood, aluminium, and uPVC. They can be designed with a single pane of glass per door for a contemporary feel or multi panelled glass for a more

traditional effect. These doors are ideal for smaller openings, however, with the addition of side lights they can be used in bigger openings too.

What are Crittall doors? Many people haven't heard of Crittall doors but they are actually quite common. Traditionally these doors are black, metal/steel framed, with multi glazed panes. Popular for their industrial/art deco feel, they are now even available in multiple colour choices. Crittall or Belgium style doors are hung with matching glazed side panels/walls. These doors are also a great source of natural light.

What materials can

patio doors be made of? With such a wide range of material options available today, it may be a little confusing when it comes to choosing the best doors for your home. Below are the most common materials used: uPVC: Affordable and durable. Aluminium: Modern, energy efficient and strong. Softwood: Beautiful but can be affected by warping if not protected. Hardwood: Perfect for period homes but will need to be sealed or painted. Steel: Strong and great for industrial themes.

For more info see [www.checkatrade.com/blog/expert-advice/guide-patio-doors/](http://www.checkatrade.com/blog/expert-advice/guide-patio-doors/)

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# Getting On the Property Ladder – Advice for First Time Buyers

**As a first-time-buyer, the prospect of getting on the property ladder can seem daunting and complicated. However, by following our advice, the steps can become significantly easier.**

The first thing that you will have to do is begin saving for a deposit. Generally, you will have to save between 5% and 20% of the value of the property that you like – if the home is £150,000 then you will need between £7,500 (5%) and £30,000 (20%) depending on the property. It is important to note that saving more for your deposit will give access to a wider range of cheaper mortgages – so get saving!

It is important that you factor in the other costs associated with buying a property. These can add up to the thousands of pounds and can derail any potential budget when it comes to getting your first home. Additional costs include survey costs, solicitor's fees, buildings insurance and valuation fees to name but a few. It is worth asking your bank about these prices before



making an offer and you can therefore factor them into your budget. First-time-buyers do have an advantage here as they will pay no Stamp Duty on the first £300,000 for properties valued up to £500,000.

When applying for your mortgage, the most important factor for your lender is to know that you will be able to meet your repayments. You will need to provide

documentation of all of your outgoing costs, including, debts, household bills, or other costs such as car repayments, childcare or travel costs. The amount that a lender will give you for a mortgage is directly related to both your income and outgoing expenses – so it is important to consider this when looking into homes that you can afford.

There are a number of governmental schemes available to help first-time-buyers get on the property market such as affordable housing schemes, help to buy schemes and shared ownership schemes. These are designed to assist those who are struggling to save their full deposit and might be exactly what is required to get you on the property ladder.

# Driveway ideas for maximum kerb appeal

**Your driveway serves more than one purpose. While it's a convenient and safe place to park your vehicle, it also plays a lead role in creating a lasting first impression.**

Here's a round-up of some key types.

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

**Resin driveways.** Resin driveways have become increasingly popular with UK homeowners looking for modern front driveway ideas as they offer a contemporary appearance and incredible durability. The mixture of resin and aggregates creates a seamless surface that's resistant to weeds and cracking, with an array of colours and patterns available, you can easily match your home's exterior. Resin driveways naturally drain water and are environmentally friendly. Resin's neat and smooth finish is stunning all by itself or with a few key features.

Consider the shape of your resin driveway and whether you'd like any cut-outs for plants, trees, water features, or decorative edging. Due to resin's versatility, the sky is your limit.

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

**Concrete driveways.** Poured concrete is one of the most common driveway materials on the market. It's used to create low-maintenance driveways that require minimal upkeep. Coloured concrete is great if you want to add dimen-

sion and interest, such as a cream border or chequered patterns. It's also malleable when installed correctly. For example, it can make patterns when poured into moulds and can be sectioned and paired with other materials, such as aggregate or slate. Stamped concrete can give the appearance of a different material such as stone or brick for a fraction of the cost.

**Block paving driveways.** Block paving creates a classic and elegant first impression. It's usually made from concrete, which is engineered in a factory for consistency and accuracy. For this reason, block paving is a durable and versatile option for your driveway. A popular design trend with block paving is using light

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

For more information see <https://www.check-atrade.com/blog/ideas/driveway-ideas/>



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Wood Floor Warehouse also stock a wide range of laminates, engineered, LVT and solid wood flooring from quality brands such as Egger and Lamett, offering a wide range of colours and styles from quality suppliers to suit every budget.

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view the range and order a sample online [www.woodfloorwarehouse.co.uk](http://www.woodfloorwarehouse.co.uk).

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and 27 Ravenhill Road, Belfast

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and late-night Thursday to 8pm. Make sure you drop in during these times for a great deal and a friendly chat!

## Unveiled as Official Builders' Merchant Partner of the Irish Football Association

Northern Ireland's leading builders' merchants named as official builders merchant partner of the Irish Football Association, the Irish FA Foundation and the Northern Ireland national teams.

MacBlair, Northern Ireland's leading builders' merchants, has today announced a partnership with the Irish Football Association, the Irish FA Foundation and the Northern Ireland national teams.

Through this partnership, MacBlair also becomes the title partner of the Irish FA Foundation's People & Clubs programme and the MacBlair Building Support Fund.

The MacBlair Building Support Fund in collaboration with the Irish FA, will directly support clubs through the provision of building materials for projects such as upgrading clubhouses, enhancing pitches, or improving facilities.

Additionally, MacBlair is launching a Club Support Fund, which will provide more general funding to help clubs with essential needs such as equipment, kit sponsorship, and other day-to-day operational costs.

MacBlair Managing Director Alan Wright said: "We are proud to partner with the Irish FA and



Julie Carson, Head of Marketing at MacBlair, and MacBlair Managing Director Alan Wright joined Stephen Bogle, Head of Commercial Operations at the Irish FA, and Stephen Garrett, Senior Commercial Manager at the Irish FA, to announce the new partnership. MacBlair

strengthen our commitment to local communities across Northern Ireland.

At MacBlair, we believe in making a real impact, and through the MacBlair Support Funds, we're excited to help clubs enhance their facilities and create lasting benefits for grassroots football."

Stephen Bogle, Head of

Commercial Operations at the Irish FA, said: "Partnering with MacBlair reflects our shared commitment to supporting football at a grassroots level. The MacBlair Support Funds will provide vital assistance to clubs across Northern Ireland, helping them to grow, thrive, and

continue serving their communities. We're proud to work with a partner that understands the power of football to create lasting, positive change."

Applications for the Funds are now open through the IFA and MacBlair websites.

<https://www.macblair.com/macblair-ifa-building-support-fund>

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## Creating Eye-Catching Summer Containers

Summer is the season of vibrant life, and what better way to bring that energy to your doorstep than with overflowing window boxes and cascading hanging baskets?

These portable gardens offer a fantastic opportunity to showcase a riot of colour and texture, transforming even the smallest outdoor space into a floral paradise. But creating truly eye-catching displays takes a little more than just scattering some seeds. Let's delve into the secrets of crafting stunning summer containers that will have your neighbours green with envy.

The Foundation: Choosing the Right Containers and Location

Before you even think about plants, consider the containers themselves. For window boxes, ensure they are sturdy, have adequate drainage holes, and are the right size for your window ledge. Hanging baskets should also be well-draining

and strong enough to support mature plants and moist soil. Consider the material too – terracotta offers a classic look but dries out faster, while plastic is lightweight and retains moisture better.

Next, assess the location. How much sunlight does the area receive? This will dictate the types of plants that will thrive. South-facing spots bake in the sun, ideal for heat-loving varieties, while shadier north-facing walls call for different selections. Understanding your microclimate is crucial for long-lasting, vibrant displays.

Selecting Your Summer Stars

To create eye-catching arrangements, consider these key elements:

• Thrillers: These are your focal point – tall, upright plants that add height and drama. Think geraniums

(Pelargoniums), petunias with interesting habits, snapdragons, or even small ornamental grasses.

• Fillers: These bushy plants fill out the container, adding volume and supporting the thrillers. Consider calibrachoa (Million Bells), lobelia, verbena, or cascading petunias.

• Spillers: These trailing plants cascade over the edges, softening the look and adding movement. Ivy geraniums, trailing lobelia, sweet potato vine (Ipomoea), and Dichondra 'Silver Falls' are excellent choices.

Adding Texture and Colour Harmony

While choosing individual beauties is important, the magic happens when they work together. Think about:

Colour Palette: Do you prefer a bold and contrasting scheme, a harmonious blend of similar hues, or a cool and

calming white and green display? Consider your home's exterior and your personal style.

Foliage Interest: Don't underestimate the power of foliage! Silvery leaves of dusty miller, the vibrant lime green of creeping Jenny, or the deep purple of Alternanthera add texture and visual interest even when flowers aren't in full bloom.

Varying Forms and Textures: Combine plants with different leaf shapes and flower forms for a more dynamic look. The delicate blooms of lobelia contrast beautifully with the bolder flowers of geraniums.

Once you've selected your plants, it's time to get your hands dirty:

Good Drainage is Key: Ensure your containers have adequate drainage holes. You can add a layer of gravel or broken pottery shards



at the bottom, although modern advice often suggests using a good quality potting mix alone is sufficient.

Use Quality Potting Mix: Avoid using garden soil, which can become compacted in containers. Opt for a lightweight, well-draining potting mix specifically formulated for containers.

Planting Technique: Gen-

tly remove plants from their nursery pots and loosen any circling roots. Arrange your "thrillers," "fillers," and "spillers" in the container, ensuring they have enough space to grow. The thrillers usually go in the center or back, fillers around them, and spillers towards the edges.

Watering Wisely: Water thoroughly after planting until water drains from the bottom. During the summer months, you may need to water daily, especially for hanging baskets which dry out quickly. Check the soil moisture by sticking your finger about an inch deep – if it feels dry, it's time to water.

Feeding Frenzy: Container plants rely on you for nutrients. Use a balanced liquid fertilizer every 2-4 weeks to encourage continuous blooming. You can also use slow-release fertilizer granules at planting time.

Deadheading Diligently: Regularly remove spent flowers to encourage more blooms and keep your displays looking tidy.

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# FUN FAMILY ADVENTURES THIS SUMMER

Summer in Northern Ireland offers a breathtaking backdrop for unforgettable family adventures.

From stunning coastlines to mythical landscapes and vibrant cities, there's a wealth of experiences waiting to be explored. So, pack your bags, gather your loved ones, and get ready to create lasting memories with these fun-filled activities.

Dive into Nature's Playground:

**Tollymore Forest Park:** This stunning forest park in County Down offers picturesque walking trails suitable for all ages and abilities. Discover ancient trees, charming bridges, and the Shimna River flowing through the heart of the park. Keep an eye out for wildlife and enjoy a picnic amidst the tranquil surroundings.

**Castlewellan Forest Park:** Another gem in County Down, Castlewellan boasts a magnificent castle, a stunning lake, and a Peace Maze – one of the world's longest permanent hedge mazes. Challenge your family to find their way to the centre and enjoy the beautiful gardens and walking trails.

**Lough Neagh:** As the largest freshwater lake in the British Isles, Lough Neagh offers a variety of water-based activities. Consider a boat trip, try some fishing, or enjoy a leisurely cycle along the shores. There are also several parks and nature reserves around the lough perfect for family picnics and exploring.

Uncover History and Culture:

Ulster Folk Museum and



**Ulster Transport Museum:** Located near Belfast, these interconnected museums offer a fascinating journey through Northern Ireland's past. Wander through a recreated early 20th-century town in the Folk Museum and marvel at vintage cars, trains, and aircraft in the Transport Museum. Interactive exhibits make learning fun for all ages.

**Titanic Belfast:** Immerse yourselves in the story of the world's most famous ship at the award-winning Titanic Belfast museum. Explore interactive galleries, walk the decks of a replica ship, and learn about the city's shipbuilding heritage.

**Derry-Londonderry Walls:** Take a walk around the historic city walls of Derry-Londonderry, one of the best-preserved walled cities in Europe. Enjoy panoramic views of the city and learn about its fascinating past. Consider

a guided walking tour to delve deeper into the city's history. Beyond the city walls, Derry-Londonderry offers attractions like the Tower Museum, which provides insights into the city's history, and the Peace Bridge, a symbol of reconciliation offering stunning views of the River Foyle.

**Belfast:** Explore the vibrant capital city with a visit to Belfast Zoo, home to a diverse range of animals. Take a stroll through the Botanic Gardens and visit the Ulster Museum. For a unique experience, consider a Black Taxi Tour to learn about the city's history and murals.

**Tips for Planning Your Family Adventure:**

Book in Advance: Especially during the summer months, popular attractions and accommodations can fill up quickly. It's advisable to book tickets and lodging

in advance to avoid disappointment.

**Pack for All Weather:** Northern Ireland's weather can be unpredictable, so it's always a good idea to pack layers of clothing and waterproofs.

**Check Opening Times and Accessibility:** Before visiting any attraction, check their opening times and any accessibility information to ensure they meet your family's needs.

**Embrace the Unexpected:** Sometimes the best family memories are made during spontaneous moments. Be open to detours and unexpected discoveries along the way.

This summer, escape and create unforgettable family memories. With a diverse range of activities to choose from, there's something to delight every member of the family. So, get planning and prepare for an adventure you'll cherish for years to come!

## Creating a Wildlife Pond in Your Own Back Garden

Fancy turning a corner of your garden into a buzzing, croaking, and fluttering haven for local wildlife?

Creating a wildlife-friendly pond is not only a rewarding project but also a vital step in supporting biodiversity right outside your back door. It doesn't need to be huge or complicated; even a small pond can make a big difference. So, grab your wellies, and let's dig in!

**Planning Your Wild Oasis:**

Before you start digging, take a moment to consider the best spot for your pond. Ideally, choose a location that receives a mix of sun and shade throughout the day. This will help prevent the water from overheating in the summer and support a wider range of plant life. Avoid placing the pond directly under trees, as falling leaves can decompose and pollute the water.

Think about the size and shape too. Natural, irregular shapes tend to look more appealing to wildlife. Even a small container pond can attract insects and amphibians. If you have more space, consider a larger pond with varying depths. This will provide different habitats for different creatures.

**Digging and Lining:**

Once you've marked out your desired shape, it's time to get digging! Aim for at least one deep area (around 60cm or 2 feet) to provide a refuge for wildlife during hot summers and cold winters. Create shallower edges and shelves – these are crucial for amphibians to enter and exit easily and for marginal plants to thrive.

For lining your pond, you



have a few options:

**Pre-formed rigid ponds:** These are easy to install but come in limited shapes and sizes.

**Flexible pond liner:** This allows for more creative shapes and sizes and is generally more cost-effective for larger ponds. Choose a thick, durable liner that is UV-resistant.

**Puddling clay:** For a truly natural approach, you can use puddling clay to create a watertight basin, although this requires more skill and effort.

Whichever you choose, ensure the liner is securely in place and hidden around the edges with soil, rocks, or plants to create a natural look.

**Planting for Life:**

Plants are the backbone of a wildlife pond, providing food, shelter, and oxygen. Aim for a variety of native aquatic and marginal plants.

When planting, use aquatic compost and ensure the plants are at the correct depth for their species.

Allow some areas of open water for dragonflies to land and for birds to bathe.

**Making it Wildlife-Friendly:**

Beyond the plants, there are a few key things you can do to make your pond a wildlife magnet:

- **Easy access and exit:** Gently sloping sides or strategically placed rocks and logs will allow amphibians and other small creatures to get in and out of the water safely.

- **No fish (initially):** While fish can be attractive, they often eat amphibian eggs and larvae, as well as many beneficial invertebrates. Allow your pond to establish naturally for a year or two before considering introducing fish, and then choose native, small species sparingly.

- **Avoid chemicals:** Never use pesticides or herbicides near your pond, as these can be harmful to wildlife.

- **Natural debris:** Allow some leaf litter and dead wood to remain in or around

the pond. This provides shelter and food for many invertebrates.

- **A source of clean water:** Top up your pond with rainwater whenever possible. Avoid using tap water, which can contain chemicals that are harmful to aquatic life.

Once your pond is established, be patient. It might take some time for wildlife to discover it. You might initially see insects like pond skaters and water boatmen. Gradually, you may be rewarded with the sight of frogs, toads, newts, dragonflies, damselflies, and even visiting birds coming for a drink or a bath.

Creating a wildlife-friendly pond is a continuous process of observation and gentle management. By providing a welcoming habitat, you'll be contributing to the health of your local ecosystem and enjoying the wonders of nature right in your own backyard. So, are you ready to make a splash?

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## Countryside Fire Alert: Don't Let Carelessness Ignite Disaster

While controlled burning has its place in land management, the stark reality is that many devastating wildfires erupt from simple carelessness.

Discarded cigarettes, unattended campfires, and even sunlight magnified through discarded glass can turn our beautiful Northern Irish countryside into an inferno. Deliberately starting these fires is a serious crime with severe

consequences.

Protect our landscapes and communities by following crucial safety tips. Always fully extinguish smoking materials and never toss them from vehicles. Take all bottles and glass home, as they can act as fire starters. Use barbecues responsibly in safe areas, keeping them attended and away from flammable materials. Open fires should be avoided unless

permission is granted by the landowner and lit in designated, safe spots, always keeping children well away.

If you spot a fire, report it immediately to the Fire and Rescue Service. Never attempt to tackle a blaze beyond a bucket of water – evacuate quickly, preferably downhill. Witnessing someone setting a fire? Contact the PSNI immediately.



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# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY COMMISSION ACHIEVES AUTISM NI IMPACT AWARD

The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission has recently achieved Autism NI’s Impact Award, demonstrating the commitment of Assembly staff to inclusion for autistic and neurodivergent visitors.

Staff have received tailored training from Autism NI and implemented a tailored action plan of adjustments across their services, to create a welcoming and accessible service.

Autism NI’s Director of Development, Christine Kearney said “We are delighted that the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission has achieved the Impact Award. The range of adjustments they have implemented, including quiet spaces, pre-visit information and improved signage, will support many autistic and neurodivergent visitors.

By providing inclusive support, autistic and neurodivergent people can feel more comfortable, less anxious, and can access this service in a way that works for them. It’s fantastic to see such a significant organisation in NI lead the way in building an inclusive society.”

Richard Anderson, Autism Champion and staff member at the Northern Ireland Assembly said “We are so pleased to achieve the Impact Award accreditation for our work in building accessibility within the Northern Ireland Assembly and throughout Parliament Buildings.



The training has really built the confidence and skills of Assembly Commission staff, and the action plan process has helped us to implement

a range of practical adjustments. Achieving the award demonstrates our commitment to inclusion and helps us to ensure all visitors can have a positive experience.”

Autism NI works alongside autistic people and their families, and builds partnerships that champion better understanding, accessibility, and services for our autism community. The Impact Award is available for a range of organisations, to build their inclusive approach for clients, customers and employees.

Autism NI provides vital services for autistic people and their families throughout Northern Ireland, and campaigns for autism understanding and acceptance within society.

To learn more about how you can get involved, please visit <https://autismni.org/training-courses/training-for-organisations/impact-award-for-businesses> or call 028 9040 1729.

## Principal Walker’s Pride in school which ‘Always Aims High,’ Nendrum College

Mr A Walker MEd BEd took up the post of Principal at Nendrum College in June 2024.

Previously having taught at Belfast Model in North Belfast from 2007-2022 (where he had been a past pupil), this timeframe included time as Head of Year – senior leader in character and culture. From September 22-June 24 he served as Vice Principal at Craigavon Senior High School before accepting the Principal role at Comber’s main High School – Nendrum College which has 477 pupils and a 32 strong teaching team.

He says: “I could immediately see the incredible potential of the school and when I first came to the school I was struck by the amazingly positive relationship between staff and pupils. One of my first positive experiences was witnessing a ‘Nendrum’s Got Talent’ Competition - there was something about the incredible dynamic that was quite emotional for me and it was then that I realise I was where I was meant to be. It felt like home.”

Nendrum College, Comber, is a school which is very Open to Community – for example the Synthetic sports pitches are accessible to a local football club. Dedicated staff, motivated stu-

dents, and strong links with the local community, which together make Nendrum College a wonderful place to learn and grow.

Principal Walker says: “Throughout my first year as Principal I am would like to thank the local Community including Pupils, the families and everyone locally for how welcoming they’ve been - It has been such a positive year!”

The school motto, Always Aim High, reflects the commitment year after year, to ensure students achieve impressive GCSE results, a testament to the hard work of students and the dedication of staff.

Nendrum College sets high standards and encourage our students to strive for their personal best in all their endeavours. Nendrum College, is proud to offer a learning environment where academic success, personal growth and community engagement go hand in hand.

Since taking up the post Mr Walker has been keen to restructure to ensure that the learning process is constantly being driven forward. He is also on a mission to establish a 6th form at the school



within the next 5 years.

He concludes: “There is very limited 6th form provision locally and I see no reason why children from Comber and the local area should have to travel to access non-selective next level education. At Nendrum College we have state-of-the-art facilities which can easily support a sixth form College.”

It looks like that ‘High Aim’ is on target for the future!



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Parents/guardians and prospective pupils can go to our website [www.nendrumcollege.co.uk](http://www.nendrumcollege.co.uk) where there are links to our introductory video and virtual tour of the College.

Further information can be obtained by contacting the College directly via email at [info@nendrumcollege.comber.ni.sch.uk](mailto:info@nendrumcollege.comber.ni.sch.uk) or by telephone at 028 9187 2361.

We look forward to hearing from you.





# GENERATIONS OF SOCIAL WORKERS KEEP IT IN THE FAMILY AS THEY GATHER TO CELEBRATE WORLD SOCIAL WORK DAY

Generations of families in the South Eastern Trust, who have dedicated their lives to Social Work, gathered in the Great Hall at the Downshire Hospital to celebrate World Social Work Day 2025.

This year's theme, Intergenerational Solidarity for Emotional and Enduring Wellbeing, highlighted that Social Work is a profession that spans generations. Within the South Eastern Trust, many Social Workers come from the same families, with sons, daughters, nieces, nephews and cousins all playing a vital role, in supporting people from newborn babies to the elderly.

The Downshire event was filled with fun and camaraderie, featuring a 'Family Fortunes' style quiz where families of Social Workers tested their knowledge, answering important questions such as how many cups of tea a Social Worker drinks in a day!

The Nellis family, narrowly won the competition, defeating the Sister Act team after a tie breaker question. They were rewarded with exquisite hurricane lamps, crafted by the Disability Hub.

Emma Nellis, a Senior Social Worker in the Learning Improvement Team, revealed, "Six of the Nellis family are Social Workers and I think that is because we are very principled family."

"I love my job and

connecting with people. I am a very sociable person and when I did case work, I enjoyed meeting the families I worked with in Disability and Psychiatry of Old Age. I have always been privileged to work with fantastic teams.

"When I left Disability, a family I worked with asked me to call and they thanked me and when I said I didn't really do anything the daughter said 'You listened to my mum'. That to me is Social Work."

Brendan Nellis, a Social Worker in the Gateway Team, reflected, "Today is a great opportunity to share our experiences as a family of Social Workers. There are six of us in the family who have chosen this path. My father was also a Social Worker before retiring. My sister worked for Barnardo's and when a Support Worker role became available, I applied and that is how my career began."

"Being a Social Worker isn't easy, but having family members in the same profession means we can support each other. I enjoy my job because of the people I work with, it's what has kept me going for so long."

Fiona Nellis, a Key Worker in Ballynahinch Community Services for



Lyn Preece (Director of Children's Services & Executive Director of Social Work) & Fiona Gunn (Asst. Director Social Work, Learning & Improvement)

Older People, shared her journey into the profession saying "I originally applied to study Nursing but was encouraged to pursue social and community work instead. I really enjoy Social Work. There are highs and lows, but the peaks make it all worthwhile. It can be challenging, but as a family of Social Workers, we all do different aspects of the job and that makes it even more interesting."

Fiona also emphasised the importance of public awareness, "A lot of people do not fully understand what we do as Social Workers.

There is so much work happening behind the scenes and it is important that we are recognised for the difference we make."

Highlighting the significance of World Social Work Day, Director of Children's Services & Executive Director of Social Work, Lyn Preece commented, "This year's theme emphasises how Social Workers provide support across all generations. It is a privilege to come together and celebrate this important work. No two days in Social Work are the same, you

never know what challenges you may face, but the ability to intervene, be welcomed into people's homes and make a real difference is incredibly rewarding."

Lyn added, "The intergenerational focus is about empowering families to support each other and build strong networks. I am proud to be a Social Worker and to witness the incredible contribution our Social Workers make in the South Eastern Trust. Their dedication brings a sense of joy, fulfilment and achievement every single day."

# OCN to award £90k in Grants to support NI Learners

30 Grants of up to £3,000 available to help NI education/training providers

To celebrate its 30th anniversary, Open College Network NI (OCN) plans to award up to £90K to education, voluntary and charitable training providers locally via their Centre Learning Grants Programme. 30 Grants of up to £3 000 are being made available by the independent education charity to help fund deserving learner initiatives.

Now in its fourth year, the Centre Learning Grants Programme, with a closing date for applications of Friday 30th May 2025, was created by the OCN Board of Trustees to help fulfil its charitable objectives. At its core, the grants programme is designed to encourage innovation, enhance learning experiences and facilitate progression for learners. By supporting innovative approaches and initiatives, OCN strives to create a conducive environment where learners can thrive and achieve their full potential.

Martin Flynn, Chief Executive of OCN said: "This is the fourth year of our Centre Learning Grants Programme and we are expecting another high level of engagement from our very deserving centres. The grants programme provides a unique opportunity for education, voluntary and charitable training providers to apply for much needed



Martin Flynn, Chief Executive OCN

additional funding that will help them to innovate and enhance their current offering to help learners achieve their full potential."

"This year we will be awarding 30 grants of up to £3 000 to mark our 30th anniversary year. The key aim is to support specific projects or activities that advance the mission and vision of OCN in a way that provides robust evidence of how learning positively impacts individuals, families and communities."

Successful applicants for the 2024 OCN Centre Learning Grants Programme included Bryson Energy, Youth Action Northern Ireland, People 1st, Malone Integrated College and SERC.

Kate Fleck Chair of the OCN Grants Committee, said: "OCN's Centre Learning Grants Programme has become an integral part of our community support network across Northern

Ireland. Being able to fund and deliver this programme for another year underscores our commitment to fulfilling our charitable purpose, which revolves around the advancement of education for the public benefit."

"I have been privileged to see at first hand the positive impact made by our grants programme to providers and learners in a range of settings which has once again inspired all of us at OCN to continue with this important initiative. Over the last three years, we have seen the positive impact of the programme to help engage, enrich and equip learners for life, so I would encourage centres to apply as soon as possible for the 2025 grants scheme."

To apply for funding from the Centre Learning Grants Programme visit <https://ocnni.org.uk/centre-learning-grants>. The closing date for applications is 11pm Friday 30th May 2025.



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# FEARS NEW CAR TRENDS WILL DRIVE UP YOUR INSURANCE

Keeping up with the latest car trends could lead to drivers paying more on their insurance premiums, according to price comparison site CompareNI.

In a survey of 800 drivers in Northern Ireland, CompareNI discovered that when it comes to growing car trends such as the increase in vehicle size year on year, it seems many local drivers are not in favour and fear the expense.

When asked why they were not a fan of bigger cars, 15% of those surveyed felt these types of vehicles use too much fuel, while a further 15% said they were too expensive to buy.

Meanwhile, 14% were put off by the potentially higher cost of car insurance, while 11% pointed to larger cars being more difficult to park.

Only 11% said they liked bigger cars, claiming they felt safer driving these vehicles. Despite all the ‘upscaling’ going on in the motoring world, it would appear the public seem to prefer a smaller option.

A resounding 85% of those surveyed admitted they thought that the bigger the car, the more the insurance is likely to be, this however, is not always the case.

Size alone is unlikely to affect insurance premiums. Chances are, bigger cars may be more expensive as they have more advanced technology on board, more powerful engines or in general, are more expensive to buy - all of which will likely have an effect on the price of the car insurance.

When it comes to other motoring trends, interest in the electric car option is starting to pick up pace, but drivers are being warned that unforeseen issues may lead to higher costs and higher insurance premiums. To replace an electric



car battery for example, could cost from £4,000 to £16,500 depending on the type of car and the size of the battery.

There’s also a danger of accidentally voiding the insurance altogether, some home insurance providers recommend that EV home chargers get checked annually by a professional, \*\*failing to do so may void the policy and leave people unprotected.

New technology in cars could also affect insurance premiums. Whether it’s the very latest audio system or lane departure warning system, the more technology present, the more expensive the car is likely to be and the greater the risk of theft, something insurance providers take into consideration when determining risk.

Also, the larger the amount of software systems and the more online connectivity the car has, the greater the cybersecurity risk.\*\*\* Encryption and firewall systems can help control this but it’s an additional risk insurance providers are likely to take into consideration.

AI will also leave its mark on the automobile revolution, with AI powered braking systems and advanced driver assistance systems. AI can look out for the blind spot

and help with a smooth transition to a new lane.

\*\*\*\*The sensors in the car can keep drivers a safe distance from the car in front, but be aware that the more advanced features a vehicle has, the higher the insurance cost is likely to be as they can be expensive to repair and replace and increase the overall cost of the vehicle.

The arrival of the hydrogen car could also mean a more expensive vehicle. While the hydrogen is converted into electricity and may indeed offer a cleaner option, the hydrogen fuel cell option is expensive to manufacture, costing much more than a gas or electric option. The fuelling points are not that prevalent, with only a handful across the UK, which creates an added problem. BMW intend to unveil a hydrogen powered car in 2028, which will be expected to travel further than the current hydrogen fuel cell options and potentially further than any electric vehicle currently on the market.\*\*\*\*\*

Car ownership is also changing in 2025. The subscription-based model is becoming more popular, as motorists can pay a monthly fee to use the car for a set period.\*\*\*\*\* The insurance can be included in the subscription fee and drivers can change the car whenever suits them. Given the financial pressures currently facing the UK, this may pose an interesting proposition for many drivers.

CompareNI helps drivers compare and find savings on all sorts of motoring products, such as car, van and motorbike insurance.-

## Nearly 7 in 10 lack a car repair fund, despite spending £2,800 a year on indulgences

A new study has revealed a concerning trend among motorists in Northern Ireland – spending heavily on life’s little luxuries while putting off vital car repairs and lacking emergency funds for motoring costs.

In the survey of 2,000 UK adults commissioned by The Motor Ombudsman, the findings showed the average driver in the region spends around £234 per month – or £2,809 annually – on so-called ‘guilty pleasures’. This includes:

- Takeaways and dining out – £88.93
- Streaming subscriptions – £47.38
- Coffee, snacks and drinks on the go – £29.98
- Taxis and short journeys – £23.42
- Beauty and grooming treatments – £140.13
- Fashion and clothing – £84.38

Despite this level of monthly spending, just 22% of respondents in Northern Ireland have a dedicated savings



fund for car expenses – leaving 78% exposed to unexpected bills.

Worryingly, 40% of drivers admit to delaying essential car maintenance in order to save money, increasing the risk of higher repair costs and vehicle safety issues further down the line.

When it comes to financial awareness, only 20% of those surveyed in Northern Ireland said they feel completely in control of their finances. Over half (51%) said they occasionally overspend, while 9% confessed to feeling completely out of control and struggle to manage their spending and finances.

Bill Fennell, Chief Ombudsman and

Managing Director of The Motor Ombudsman, commented:

“This research shows a disconnect between everyday spending habits and financial preparation for essential costs.

Motorists in Northern Ireland are spending thousands each year on small luxuries, yet very few are putting money aside for repairs.

“With 40% delaying essential maintenance, the implications go beyond personal finances – they could also impact road safety. We’re encouraging drivers to review their budgets, set up repair funds where possible, and access our free motoring resources to stay road-ready.”

The Motor Ombudsman provides impartial resources covering all aspects of car ownership, from servicing and repairs, to buying new and used vehicles.

For more information, and to find a Motor Ombudsman-accredited

garage in Northern Ireland, visit [www.TheMotorOmbudsman.org](http://www.TheMotorOmbudsman.org).

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# PLANNING A BUILDING PROJECT: WHO SHOULD BE ON-SITE WHEN

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

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

structural integrity of the entire build.

Once the groundwork is complete, the focus shifts to creating the building's shell. Bricklayers and structural engineers, if needed, erect the walls

and steel supports. Roofers then make the structure watertight, and window and door installers seal the building, protecting it from the elements. This phase is crucial for establishing the basic form and weatherproofing of the building.

The next stage, "first fix," involves installing the internal infrastructure. Electricians and plumbers lay the groundwork for essential services within the walls and floors. HVAC engineers install ducting, while carpenters frame internal walls and prepare for staircases. Insulation installers then ensure the building is energy-efficient. A rough plastering may also occur at this point, preparing the walls for the final finishes.



"Second fix" is where the finishing touches are applied. Electricians and plumbers complete their installations, fitting fixtures and connecting appliances. Carpenters install doors, skirting boards, and fitted kitchens. Tilers, plasterers, and painters then work their magic, transforming the

interior spaces. Finally, flooring installers lay the chosen flooring materials, completing the interior finish. The final phase involves external works and landscaping. Pavers and landscapers create outdoor spaces, while fencers install any necessary boundaries. General labourers handle the final cleanup,

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

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# KITCHEN RENOVATION PLANNING GUIDE:

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

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

**Colour Planning.** Colour has a huge impact on how we engage with a space. And it’s the combination of colours – otherwise known as a colour palette – that will achieve a desired look or feel. A colour wheel is a helpful tool when deciding a colour palette for your new kitchen. Here are some of the most common options. Tonal. Choose one colour as your ‘base colour’ and add various tones of that colour throughout your room. Harmonious. Choose a colour on the colour wheel and work its neighbouring colours into your scheme. The colours complement each other without being too similar. Complementary. Choose a colour on the colour wheel and find its complementary colour on the opposite side of the wheel to make a statement with your colour scheme.

**Lighting design.** Lighting has many functions. Of course, its main purpose is to light a space, but well-considered lighting can add to the style of your kitchen and have a major impact on the mood and atmosphere too. Kitchen lighting should aim to marry design and function. When planning the lighting for your kitchen renovation, aim to tick off at least one from each of these



categories: General lighting. General (or ambient) lighting will spread light around the whole kitchen, via a ceiling light or spotlights, for example. Task lighting. You need task lighting in your kitchen to help perform certain tasks. For example, lights above the worktops where you’ll prep food. Spot lighting Spot (or accent) lighting works to draw your attention to a particular area, for example, artwork on a wall, a bookcase in a recess, or glassware in a cabinet. Atmospheric lighting Atmospheric (or decorative) lighting will help to achieve the right mood for your kitchen space, by using dimmable lamps above a dining area, for example.

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

and special features (wine racks, spice drawers etc) will all have an impact on your budget. To help you select the best kitchen cabinets for your kitchen renovation, take a look at the six main styles available. Shaker-style. An affordable, classic, and traditional style of kitchen cabinet that has always been popular. Glass-fronted. Glass-fronted cabinets help to display the items within, and bounce light around the room too. It’s common to mix and match glass-fronted cabinets with other styles. Tongue and groove. The texture and warmth of tongue and groove cabinets give the feel of a relaxed, country cottage style kitchen. It’s also a popular design element in a Scandi-style kitchen. Flat-fronted. For a simple and minimalist look in a contemporary kitchen, choose flat-fronted cabinets with no panels or frames. Plywood cabinets will help to achieve an organic, warm kitchen. They’re also a very cost-effective choice. Natural (unfinished) wood. For a truly rustic feel, opt for natural wood cabinets in your kitchen. These are popular with homeowners striving for a relaxed, informal style kitchen.

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

For more detailed info on this topic see: <https://www.checkatrade.com/blog/planning-guides/kitchen-renovation-project/>

## Painting and Decorating Costs:A 2025 Guide

Sprucing up your home with a fresh coat of paint or new wallpaper can revitalise your living spaces and even boost property value.

For those considering a professional touch, understanding the costs involved in hiring a painter and decorator in 2025 is crucial for effective budgeting. This guide, based on insights from Checkatrade’s professional estimators, provides a comprehensive overview of typical expenses.

The average cost to paint a medium-sized room (approximately 18m²) in the UK stands around £450, encompassing both labour and standard trade paint. For larger projects, painting a 5-bedroom house could reach approximately £6,000. Daily rates for painters and decorators generally hover around £325, but this can fluctuate based on experience and location. Regional differences, particularly in major cities like London, often see higher day rates compared to other areas.

Project-based pricing varies significantly depending on the task’s complexity and scale. Interior painting costs are often calculated per square metre of wall area, averaging around £15. Painting hallways, landings, and stairs can typically cost £1,600, while painting a single door (both sides) averages £90. Wallpapering labour is usually priced per square metre, around £14, with a room costing approximately £450 for labour alone, excluding the wallpaper itself.

Exterior painting for a 3-bedroom semi-detached property averages £1,300, highlighting the increased material and labour required for external surfaces. Factors influencing overall costs include room size and shape, the number of rooms being decorated, the type and condition of the surfaces, and the chosen paint or wallpaper. More intricate work, such as high ceilings or detailed woodwork, will also impact the final quote.

While DIY painting



might seem cost-effective initially, with a medium-sized room potentially costing £50-£100 for paint alone, it doesn’t account for the time, effort, potential

for mistakes, and the cost of necessary equipment. Hiring a professional ensures a high-quality finish, efficiency, and often includes insurance against

accidents. Furthermore, professional decorators come equipped and handle the clean-up, saving you valuable time and energy.

Hidden costs to consider when budgeting include the choice of premium paint brands, which can significantly increase material expenses. Complex projects or those involving difficult-to-reach areas may also incur additional charges. Wallpaper removal and necessary wall preparation, such as plastering or repairs, can also add to the overall cost. While some painters offer basic plastering repairs, larger jobs may require a separate plasterer, with typical day rates around £300.

Ultimately, investing in a professional painter and decorator can save you time, prevent costly errors, and deliver a superior finish. By understanding the average costs and the factors that can influence them, homeowners can effectively plan their decorating projects and find trusted tradespeople to bring their vision to life.

For more guidelines see <https://www.checkatrade.com/blog/cost-guides/painter-decorator-prices>

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