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Pictured L-R is Kyle Lamb, National Trust - Mount Stewart; Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Craig Blaney; Christine Casey, Kiri Cottage Crafts; and Marianne Kennerley, Boom Studios.

World Sight Day marked with 'Power of People' Event

RNIB Northern Ireland and Ards and North Down Borough Council hosted a joint event in Bangor Castle to celebrate the 'Power of People' on World Sight Day recently.

The event took place to recognise community champions, and to honour a partnership between the Royal National Institute of Blind People in Northern Ireland (RNIB NI) and Ards and North Down Borough Council who are working together to create a 'Visibly Better Borough' for blind and partially sighted people in the district.

Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Craig Blaney welcomed guests to Bangor Castle to shine a spotlight on the impact of collaboration between local council, charities, volunteers and community advocates in creating a more inclusive society. Read more <https://www.ardsand-northdown.gov.uk/World-Sight-Day>

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ABSOLUTELY ARDS AND NORTH DOWN

Ards and North Down Borough Council has launched its autumn tourism campaign, **Absolutely Ards and North Down**, inviting visitors to discover the people, places and stories that make the Borough a must-visit destination this season.

Targeted at visitors seeking authentic experiences, culture lovers and outdoor enthusiasts, Absolutely Ards and North Down celebrates the stunning coastlines, rich heritage, vibrant creative community and exceptional local flavours that can be found across the Borough,

while highlighting the people who bring these experiences to life.

As part of the campaign, visitors can also enter a competition to win £300 towards an autumn stay in Ards and North Down, providing the perfect opportunity to experience everything the destination has to offer.

Mayor of Ards and

North Down, Councillor Craig Blaney, said:

"We are delighted to launch our autumn tourism campaign, Absolutely Ards and North Down, showcasing everything that makes this area such a special place to visit at this time of year.

"At the heart of this campaign are the people

who help shape our tourism offering every day. From local producers and artists to activity providers, gardeners and hospitality businesses, their passion, expertise and stories help create memorable experiences for everyone who visits.

Continued on page 4

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Taste Autumn Finale at Bangor Castle and Walled Garden

The final weekend of Taste Autumn in Ards and North Down proved a success, as visitors flocked to Bangor Castle and the Walled Garden, in September, to celebrate the region’s vibrant food and drink scene.

The Taste Autumn Finale Weekend brought together two flagship events, Taste Ards and North Down at Bangor Castle and the popular Chilli Festival in Bangor Castle Walled Garden, creating a memorable weekend packed with local flavours, artisan produce, live entertainment, and chef demonstrations.

The finale marked the end of this years Taste Autumn in Ards and North Down, a borough-wide celebration of local food, drink and seasonal experiences which ran from 11-27 September. The programme featured a variety of events, including Tide and Turf Food Festival in Portavogie on Saturday 12 September, Stargazing at Ballyhalbert Point, and a range of special activities delivered by local food and drink producers, hospitality businesses and tourism providers across the borough.

Visitors to the finale



Luca Montorio of Peppup at Taste Ards and North Down at Bangor Castle

weekend enjoyed the opportunity to meet local producers, sample award-winning food and drink, and celebrate the outstanding quality of Ards and North Down’s food offering. Together, the events provided a fitting finale to another successful Taste Autumn programme, reinforcing Ards and North Down’s reputation as one of Northern Ireland’s premier food tourism destinations.

Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Craig Blaney commented: “The Taste Autumn Finale weekend was a wonderful celebration of the outstanding food and drink offering we have here in Ards and North

Down. It was fantastic to see Bangor Castle and the Walled Garden bustling with visitors, all enjoying the wealth of local produce, talented makers and unique experiences on offer.”

For more information on upcoming events and local producers, see www.visitardsandnorthdown.com

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• Group support programmes including

• Journey to Freedom

• One Stop Shop - free multi-agency drop in service

• Court support

Our range of Children's Services include:

• Art Workshops

• Helping Hands

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• Healthy Relationship Programme

We also provide awareness raising sessions and training to our local community, schools, businesses and agencies.

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For any further information about the One Stop Shop or Women's Aid support services

Contact us at 02891 273196

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LOCAL PARKS RECOGNISED WITH SEVEN GREEN FLAG AWARDS

Ards and North Down Borough Council is celebrating after seven of its parks and green spaces were awarded the internationally recognised Green Flag Award, the benchmark standard for high-quality parks and green spaces across the UK and beyond.

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The Council was awarded Green Flag status for:

- Ballymenoch Park
- Castle Park and Walled Garden, Bangor
- Cairn Wood
- Clandeboyne Cemetery
- Kiltonga Nature Reserve

- Linear Park, Bangor
- Londonderry Park

The Green Flag programme, managed in Northern Ireland by

Live Here Love Here, recognise sites that meet stringent criteria relating to environmental management, biodiversity, cleanliness, safety, accessibility and community involvement.

Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Craig Blaney, said:

"We are delighted that seven of our parks and green spaces have achieved Green Flag Award status. These awards reflect the Council's ongoing commitment to providing welcoming, safe and well-maintained spaces for residents and visitors to enjoy."

Our parks, nature

reserves and open spaces play a vital role in supporting health and wellbeing, encouraging outdoor recreation and protecting local biodiversity. This recognition is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our park teams and volunteers who help ensure these spaces remain places of pride for our communities.”

The Green Flag Award is an internationally recognised benchmark of quality for public green spaces. In 2026/27, 122 parks and green spaces across Northern Ireland achieved Green Flag status. The programme is managed by Live Here



Love Here, sponsored by Power NI (part of Energia Group), and supported by the Department of

Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs.

For more information
about parks and open

spaces in Ards and North Down, visit www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk.

New Play Area Officially Opened

Children and families in Bangor are already enjoying a fantastic new play area at Bangor Sportsplex, following the completion of a major refurbishment project costing £170,000.

The new facility was designed with local children in mind, with pupils from Rathmore Primary School playing a key role in shaping the space by sharing their ideas and helping to choose the features they wanted to see. Following construction throughout July and August, their vision has now become a reality.

To mark the official opening, the Mayor joined pupils from Rathmore Primary School for a special celebration at the site.

Packed with exciting new equipment, including swings, slides and a range of play features designed to encourage active outdoor play, the refreshed play area is already proving popular with local families.

It was a memorable moment for the children involved in the design process, who were



delighted to see their ideas brought to life and to try out the equipment for the first time. The investment demonstrates Council's commitment to providing high-quality play and recreation facilities that support children's

health, wellbeing and development, while creating welcoming spaces for families to enjoy together.

Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Craig Blaney said:

“Council is committed to providing high-quality

facilities that support the health, wellbeing and development of local children and families. This investment in the Bangor Sportsplex play area has created a vibrant, modern play space shaped by the young people who will

use it most, and it was a pleasure to celebrate its opening alongside pupils from Rathmore Primary School."

The new play area at Bangor Sportsplex is now open and ready to be enjoyed by the local community.

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Continued from
page 1

"Through themes including Shoreline Escapes, Historic Discoveries, Creative Connections, Savour the Flavour, Memorable Moments, Stay a While and Travel with Care, we are celebrating the unique experiences available across the Borough and encouraging visitors to discover Ards and North Down for themselves."

Niamh Hanlon,

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Collections and House
Manager at Mount Stewart
- National Trust, added:

"We are proud to be part of a campaign that celebrates everything that makes Ards and North Down unique.

"From our world-renowned gardens and heritage to the exceptional people who care for and share these special places, there is so much for visitors to discover and enjoy throughout the autumn season."

Marianne Kennerley, Boom Studios, added:

To find out more information about Ards and North Down's autumn tourism campaign, visit: visitar dsandnorthdown.com

Disney Magic Creates Unforgettable Memories for 20 Northern Ireland Children

Twenty children from across Northern Ireland, all living with life-limiting or life-threatening conditions, have enjoyed the trip of a lifetime to Disneyland Paris thanks to the Northern Ireland Children to Lapland and Days to Remember Trust (NICLT).

A group of 44 people, including parents, local health professionals and NICLT representatives, set off recently, for two days of Disney magic. The trip was carefully organised to provide a safe, supported and stress-free experience, with medical professionals from Causeway Hospital joining NICLT General Manager Fiona Williamson and board member Anna Kayes.

The initiative gave families a welcome break from the daily challenges of managing serious health conditions and the opportunity to create joyful, lasting memories together.

Agata Oliveira, mum of Leonor, nine, from Bangor, said: "Leonor was diagnosed with Crohn's disease in August 2023 and has been through a lot, including multiple hospital stays and IV medications. Getting the chance to go to Disney with her was amazing. I could hardly believe it, and neither could she. She was so excited to meet the characters and experience all the Disney magic. The NICLT team have been wonderful, answering all our questions and supporting us throughout."

The charity's Chair, Colin



Agata Oliveira and daughter Leonor (9) from Bangor.

Barkley, highlighted the importance of the trip:

"We are committed to giving these incredible children and their families the chance to create unforgettable memories. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, fundraisers and corporate partners - including The Bushmills Inn, WineFlair, C-Tec (NI), CosyRoof, Bells of Crossgar, Energystore, Mango Contact Centre and Send My Bag - we have been able to expand our reach and offer this wonderful Disneyland Paris experience in recent years.

"What makes this trip so special is seeing families able to focus simply on enjoying time together. Our team and the medical professionals who travel with us work hard to make the experience as safe, accessible and relaxed as possible. We are enormously grateful to everyone whose support helps us create these memories for children and families across Northern Ireland."

Each year, Northern Ireland Children to Lapland and Days to Remember Trust takes approximately

80 local children, accompanied by a parent or carer, to Rovaniemi in Finnish Lapland - home of Santa Claus. The trip includes husky and reindeer rides, snowmobile safaris, sleigh rides and, of course, a magical meeting with Santa himself.

Northern Ireland Children to Lapland and Days to Remember Trust receives no government or national funding and relies on donations to continue its work.

For more information or to support the charity, please visit: <https://nichildrentolapland.com>



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TRUST ORTHOPTIC TEAM HELPS JAMES GET HIS VISION BACK IN FOCUS

This World Sight Day, the South Eastern Trust encouraged people to prioritise their eye health and have regular eye tests as part of the global ‘Love Your Eyes’ campaign.

74-year-old Bangor man James Robinson, has praised the expert care he received at from the Ulster Hospital’s Orthoptic Team when he developed double and blurred vision.

Having always attended his regular eye appointments, James explained how his symptoms came out of the blue in December 2025.

James was subsequently diagnosed with Myasthenia gravis, a rare, long-term autoimmune condition that causes muscle weakness, double vision and fatigue by blocking the chemical signals between your nerves and muscles.

A keen football fan, James detailed how his enjoyment of watching the sport was affected when it looked like, “There were about 40 players on the field instead of 11!”

James explained, “I play golf and I could not see where I was going on the green. I was hitting the wrong balls and it affected my

life. I could not drive and my wife was then having to drive me and pick me up. I could not take her anywhere.

“I was put on a course of tablets and had special lens on my glasses to help me to see. Since December last year my sight has got better and my treatment has been very good, the staff here have certainly helped me.”

For optimum eye and general good health, South Eastern Trust, Adult Lead Orthoptist, Katharine Hand stressed how important it is to have regular eye tests.

Katharine added, “The official theme for World Sight Day this year was ‘Love Your Eyes’. Some people say that the eye is the window into your health and eye health can tell if you are Diabetic and if there are any underlying issues with your thyroid.

“We would encourage people who are experiencing any double vision to attend



Patient James Robinson has praised the care he continues to received from the Ulster Hospital's Orthoptic Team. James is pictured at one of his routine appointments with South Eastern Trust, Adult Lead Orthoptist, Katharine Hand

their local Optician who can refer to Orthoptics if needed.

“With patients such as James, there are lots of treatment we can give as well as specific exercises, the use of prism lenses

which we can adjust as the patient’s condition improves.

“We would encourage regular eye tests and if a person feels any changes to their eyes, to attend their local Optometrist.”

BANGOR MODEL TAKES CENTRE STAGE AT VICTORIA SQUARE’S PLATFORM 26

Models from Bangor, Dromore and Downpatrick bring local talent to Victoria Square’s Autumn/Winter fashion show

County Down modelling talent took centre stage at Victoria Square’s latest fashion show, as models from Dromore, Bangor and Downpatrick joined the runway for Platform 26 recently.

The leading shopping destination welcomed guests for an evening of seasonal style, beauty and entertainment, transforming part of its car park into an underground subway-inspired setting for a unique showcase of the latest Autumn/Winter 26 collections from retailers across the centre.

Representing towns across County Down were Hannah Johns, Megan Johns and Lois Banks, all from Dromore, Anya Stewart from Bangor, and Remi Shore from Downpatrick, who modelled a selection of new season looks on the Platform 26 runway.

Styled by Cool FM’s Rebecca McKinney and Victoria Square Personal Shopper Taylor Armstrong, the show brought together a mix of everyday wardrobe staples, statement pieces and elevated seasonal looks,



Anya Stewart from Bangor

highlighting the key trends set to define the months ahead.

From rich textures and layering to standout pieces designed to make an impact, the runway showcased the versatility of the new-season collections and offered plenty of inspiration for refreshing wardrobes for Autumn/Winter.

The fashion show formed part of an evening-long experience, with guests also able to visit The Beauty Junction before the runway. The interactive beauty space featured brands, complimentary touch-ups, expert advice and exclusive samples, giving guests the chance to get event-ready before taking their seats.

Speaking after the event, Michelle Greeves, Centre Manager, Victoria Square, said:

“Platform 26 gave us the opportunity to celebrate the arrival of Autumn/Winter in a really creative and engaging way.

“From the styling and runway looks to The Beauty Junction, we wanted to create an experience that was about more than simply showcasing new collections. It was fantastic to see guests enjoying the evening and getting inspiration for the season ahead, we’re delighted with how the event came together.”

Platform 26 took place at Victoria Square, with two shows bringing the Autumn/Winter 26 collections to the runway and showcasing fashion talent from across the wider region.

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Calling All Amateur Photographers to enter Shorelife Photography Competition

The Shorelife Photography Competition invites amateur photographers of all ages and abilities to capture the beauty, wildlife and memorable moments that make Ards and North Down’s coastline so special.

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The mass return of thousands of Brent geese to Strangford Lough, creates a spectacular backdrop for photographers and wildlife enthusiasts alike. Visitors to the loughshore may be lucky enough to spot these remarkable Arctic visitors across the lough and surrounding coastline while exploring the event and capturing their own memorable images for the competition.

From dramatic shoreline views and fascinating wildlife to family experiences and festival highlights, entrants are encouraged to submit images that celebrate the character of Ards and North Down. Photographs can be taken any time before the competition closes on 18 November.

Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Craig Blaney, said:

“The photography competition offers another way for people to connect with our coastline, whether they are keen amateur photographers, photography enthusiasts or simply enjoy getting

creative and capturing special moments.

“We are looking forward to seeing the unique perspectives, creativity and talent of those taking part, and celebrating the images that showcase the very best of Ards and North Down’s coastal environment.”

The Shorelife Photography Competition closes on 18 November 2026.

The competition is free to enter and open to amateur photographers of all ages and abilities. The competition is free to enter and open to amateur photographers of all ages and abilities.

For full competition details and entry information, visit: www.visitardsandnorthdown.com/ShorelifePhotoComp

For information on Shorelife Celebration and the full programme of events, visit: visitardsandnorthdown.com/Shorelife

NO IFS' OR BUTTS FOR KILMAINE NURSERY SCHOOL

NI Water has donated waterbutts to Kilmaine Nursery School, Bangor to help with their eco initiatives. Waterbutts are a great way of harvesting rainwater, which can then be used to water plants, fill water trays and supply mud kitchens.



Anna Killen, NI Water Education Officer, said: “We get plenty of rain in this part of the world, but this rainwater has to be cleaned at our treatment works before it goes into the taps. Using a waterbutt to catch the rain is just one way to ensure there’s enough water for everyone now and in the future. “For more information on how to save water in your garden, download our ‘How Water Wise Are You?’ leaflet from www.niwater.com/information-leaflets. Or why not give our water audit a try to see how water wise you are www.getwaterfit.co.uk

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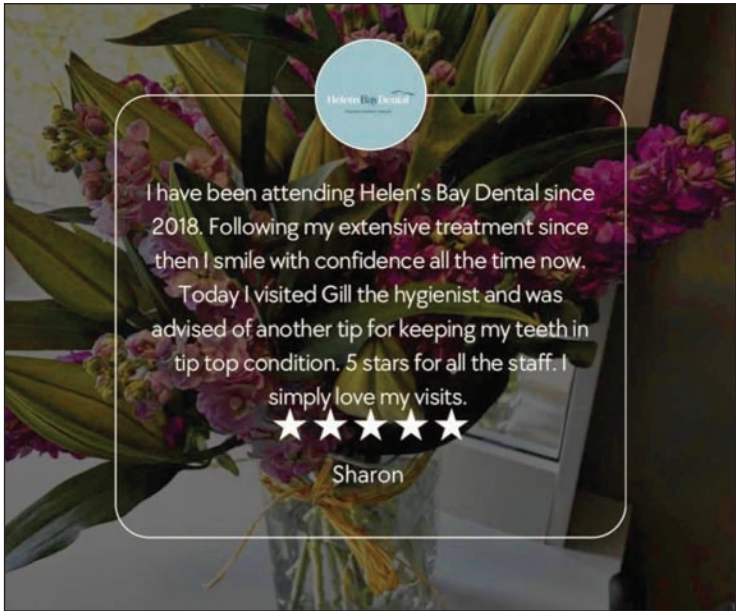
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The patients tell the story best. One recent five-star reviewer praised the team for explaining everything clearly and providing gentle, reassuring care. Another described the practice as welcoming and professional, with treatment that was quicker than expected. A patient who had dental implants praised



the clear explanations at every stage and the confidence they gained from their new smile. The investment in digital technology, including advanced scanning and an in-house dental laboratory, helps plan treatment with greater

precision and, where suitable, create crowns during your visit. That can mean fewer appointments and less disruption to everyday life. But technology alone isn't enough There is also a team that listens, respects your concerns and treats you as an individual. Whether you want to maintain healthy teeth, overcome dental anxiety or rediscover

your confidence with a new smile, Helens Bay Dental combines modern private dentistry with personal care. Your health. Your smile. Your confidence. Supported by a team that puts you first. Call Brooke at Helens Bay Dental 02891 853304 to book a complementary Treatment Coordinator visit to see what can be done

A CELTIC CONIFER: THE SCOTS PINE

There are over six hundred species of coniferous trees in the world, but after the last ice age only three were native to Ireland: yew, juniper and Scots pine.

The pine is the tallest, growing up to 35 metres, with a conspicuous dark green crown often shaped by winds in exposed areas, and colourful flaky bark, orange near the top, brown to purple near the bottom. For me, it is quintessentially Celtic in its strange elegance.

While in prehistoric times many were cleared to make way for agriculture, they were also used for house building and masts for ships, and their resin to waterproof boats. Back then, everything natural had a use and value, including their refreshing scent and brilliant flame when burned, associated in many countries with themes of rebirth, purification, fertility and eternal life. Indeed, in medieval times, roughly 400-1100 AD, the Scots pine was regarded as particularly valuable and designated as one of the 'nobles of the woods'.



They are slow growers, and mature ones are now often found in the grounds of old estates and grand houses where they continued to be held in high regard for their native heritage. In addition to their craggy beauty, their evergreen foliage provides winter cover for many birds and is often favoured as a secure location

for herons' nests in spring. Red squirrels feast on the cones, along with crossbills (small birds whose crossed mandibles are adapted to prise open pinecone scales), and insects are found in cracks and crevices in the bark, in turn becoming food for tree creepers. Additionally, research has shown that Scots pines in Ireland provide habitat for almost 15% of native

plant species. There are millions of conifers in commercial plantations throughout Ireland, primarily fast-growing non-natives such as Sitka spruce, which are of minimal biodiversity value or none, and we need to do more to promote, protect and cherish our native trees, particularly our ancient wildlife-friendly Scots pine. JVA

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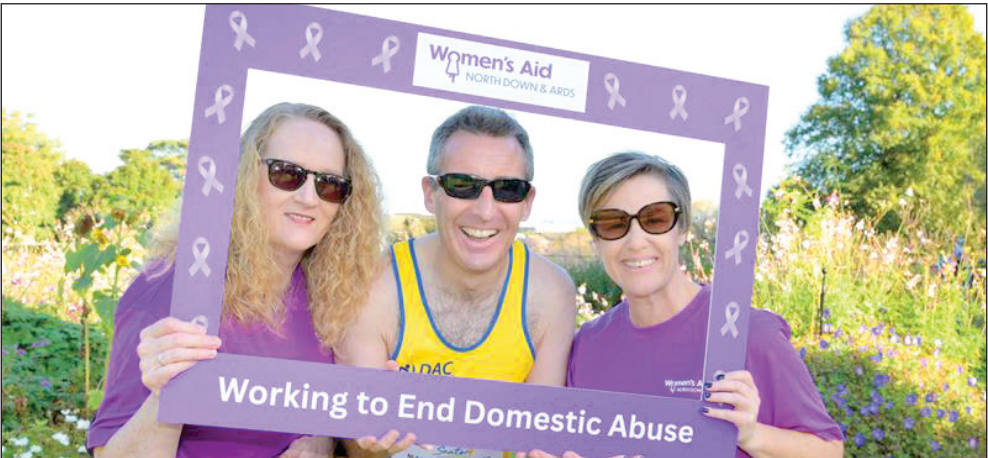
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Wool offers natural beauty that synthetic fabrics struggle to match. Its texture holds rich colour and keeps shape after long wear.

From chunky cables to fine merino layers wool brings warmth and elegance together. The soft drape and natural lustre of wool elevate everyday winter outfits. It layers beautifully over shirts and under coats without bulk.

Choosing British wool supports local farmers and rural communities directly. British Wool supports research into new markets and subsidises shearing training across the UK. Projects like the Clapdale Wool Project create a circular economy and feed profits directly back to local farmers. Buying traceable British yarn helps maintain flock numbers and rural skills. It keeps value within local supply chains rather



than overseas factories. Wool is naturally odour resistant and requires significantly less washing than synthetic fibres. This resistance means garments need less frequent washing and retain their look for longer. When washing is needed lower temperatures reduce energy use and carbon footprint. Experts recommend a wool cycle at a low temperature of 30°C or a maximum of 40°C. Washing less frequently reduces water and energy consumption across the wardrobe. Airing garments after wear often refreshes them without a full wash. Less washing and cooler cycles save money and extend garment life with ease.

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

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For more information or to book, call 028 2073 1210 or visit www.thecausewayhotel.com.

CANCER FOCUS NI WELCOMES MAJOR EXPANSION OF BOWEL CANCER SCREENING PROGRAMME

Cancer Focus Northern Ireland has welcomed today's announcement that bowel cancer screening will be extended to more people across Northern Ireland, describing it as an important and positive step towards earlier diagnosis and improved cancer outcomes.

Health Minister Robbie Butler has announced a phased expansion of the Northern Ireland Bowel Cancer Screening Programme. From 2 November 2026, people aged 59 will begin to receive screening invitations, followed by 58-year-olds from April 2027. The programme will continue to expand until everyone aged 50 to 74 is eligible by 2031. Once fully implemented, an additional 135,000 people are expected to be invited for screening each year.

Cancer Focus NI has been calling for bowel cancer screening in Northern Ireland to be expanded to people from the age of 50, bringing the region into line with other parts of the UK.

Nora Smith, Director of Cancer Support and Prevention at Cancer Focus NI, said:

"We strongly welcome today's announcement. This is a significant and positive step in the right direction

and one that Cancer Focus NI has been calling for. Bowel cancer screening can save lives by helping to detect cancer earlier, when treatment is more likely to be successful. Extending the programme will give thousands more people in Northern Ireland the opportunity to take part in screening, and ultimately we want to see everyone aged 50 to 74 able to benefit.

"However, today's announcement should be seen as an important step towards achieving equity, rather than the final destination. People aged 50 to 74 are already eligible for bowel cancer screening in England, Scotland and Wales. We therefore welcome the commitment to reach this age range here, but would encourage every effort to be made to deliver the rollout as quickly and safely as possible.

There is also a second important issue that needs to be addressed,



which is the sensitivity of the screening test itself. Northern Ireland currently uses a FIT threshold of 120 micrograms of blood per gram of faeces. Scotland and Wales use the more sensitive threshold of 80, while England is now moving from 120 to 80, with its phased rollout due to be completed by March 2028.

Lowering this threshold matters because a more sensitive test has the potential to identify more abnormal growths and more bowel cancers. We welcome the Department's

commitment to use evidence from the expansion to inform future reductions in Northern Ireland's threshold, but we want to see clear ambition and a pathway for delivering this change also.

Where you live in the UK should not determine the standard of cancer screening available to you. Our ambition must be equity of access, equity in the quality of screening, and ultimately equity in cancer outcomes."

The charity is encouraging everyone who receives a bowel cancer screening kit to complete and return it.

New partnership to drive health innovation

A new partnership aimed at improving health outcomes and supporting economic growth across Northern Ireland was launched recently.

The Academic, Health and Economic Partnership (AH&EP), a joint initiative led by the Department of Health and the Department for the Economy, will help Northern Ireland translate its health and life sciences research and clinical expertise into real-world impact.

The partnership includes health leaders, academia, industry and government partners, and was launched at NICON 2026. It brings together health and

social care, universities, industry and communities to develop, test and scale innovations that improve people's health while supporting economic growth and investment.

The AH&EP will identify priority health challenges, support the development and testing of innovations and accelerate the adoption of proven solutions across the health and social care. This will create a more joined-up pathway from discovery to

implementation and scale.

The launch comes as Northern Ireland seeks to strengthen its position as a leading location for health and life sciences, building on growing interest from investors and life sciences companies.

Speaking at the launch, Mike Farrar, Permanent Secretary at the Department of Health said: "Northern Ireland faces significant health challenges, from increasing demand for services to the growing

burden of long-term conditions. At the same time, we have exceptional assets: a single integrated health and social care system, internationally recognised research expertise, innovative businesses and committed partners across the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The AH&EP was formally launched at NICON 2026, Northern Ireland's leading conference for health and social care leaders.

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SuperValu and Centra team up with Pennies to raise funds for Action Cancer

Leading convenience retailers SuperValu and Centra, part of Musgrave Northern Ireland, have partnered with fintech charity, Pennies, to offer customers a chance to donate to a local charity when paying by card.

SuperValu and Centra customers can now add a 20p donation on their purchases in participating stores to support the retailers' long-term charity partner Action Cancer and help keep its Big Bus on the road. The Big Bus, a mobile detection unit, delivers breast screening appointments to women outside of NHS screening age (40-49, and 70+), skin cancer detection appointments, and health checks to men and women.

Following a trial in six stores at the end of 2025, the Pennies micro-donation facility is now live in 70 SuperValu and Centra stores. It has welcomed over 900,000 donations and raised more than £180,000 to date.

Gareth Kirk, CEO of Action Cancer said:

"We have enjoyed an invaluable relationship with SuperValu and Centra since 2001, and their store teams, staff and customers have shown incredible support over the years. We're delighted to be part of this new fundraising initiative which elevates the partnership to another level. These small donations will go a long way to help us deliver life-saving services directly in communities across Northern Ireland."

Pennies has now reached the huge landmark of surpassing 179 million micro-donations across all of its partners – a milestone made all the more significant as growth in giving has accelerated in the last three years and weathered the worst of the Covid pandemic.



(L-R) Action Cancer CEO Gareth Kirk, Musgrave Northern Ireland Managing Director Trevor Magill, and Action Cancer Senior Fundraising Manager Lucy McCusker launch a new partnership with fintech charity Pennies.

The charity has estimated that micro-donations present an ambitious but achievable opportunity to inject an annual £1bn into the UK charity sector - if every UK card holder gave just 35p a week.

Musgrave Northern Ireland has supported Action Cancer since 2001 and has raised £4.25 million for the charity to date.

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expertise, innovative businesses and committed partners across the public, private and voluntary sectors.

"The AH&EP brings these strengths together behind a shared ambition. Our goal is simple: to improve health outcomes for our population by making it easier to develop, test, adopt and scale innovation. If we get this right, patients will benefit from better care, staff will have access to more effective solutions, and Northern Ireland will be recognised internationally as a place where innovation can thrive and deliver real impact."

The AH&EP was formally launched at NICON 2026, Northern Ireland's leading conference for health and social care leaders.

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We have a bevy of ice-creams that suit every palate and taste, independently assessed by judges from across

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A&J Catering eliminates the stress of hosting by tailoring bespoke party packages to your exact specifications. Whether you are hosting an intimate backyard gathering or a large-scale reception the service provides an



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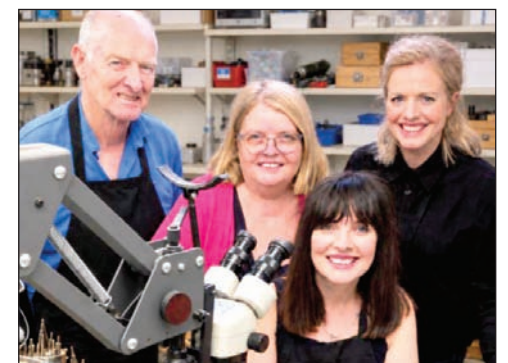
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Get protection against potentially serious virus this winter

The Public Health Agency (PHA) is encouraging everyone who is eligible for the Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) vaccine to get it when invited.

RSV is a common virus and highly infectious virus which affects the airways and lungs.

The virus circulates all year round but cases typically peak during autumn and winter. It can make babies and older adults seriously ill and cause serious complications.

The vaccine helps increase protection against the virus for those at risk.

The RSV vaccination programme in Northern Ireland is available to all adults aged 75 years or older and to all residents in care homes for older adults, regardless of age. Pregnant women are also offered the RSV vaccine from 28 weeks

of pregnancy, to provide protection to their babies from birth.

The RSV vaccine can be given alongside other vaccines where appropriate. It is important to remember that RSV, flu and COVID-19 are different viruses, and vaccination against one does not provide protection against the others. Therefore, it is important that you take up the offer of vaccination to help maximise protection against respiratory infections during the winter months.

Vaccination is being offered to:

- All adults aged 75 years and over

- All residents in care homes for older adults, regardless of age.

- Pregnant women, to help protect their babies after they are born, from 28 weeks of pregnancy.

Older adults
 All adults aged 75 years and over are eligible for vaccination. Those newly turning 75 this year should receive an invitation from their GP practice.

The programme recently expanded in April 2026 to include those aged over 80 years (with no upper age limit). Once you become eligible, you remain eligible for life – so if you still need to catch up with your RSV vaccine,

contact your GP practice. We urge everyone who is eligible to take up the offer promptly when contacted by their GP. Residents in care homes and those who are housebound will be offered vaccination from their local HSC Trust vaccination team.

Pregnant women
 Pregnant women will be offered the vaccine from 28 weeks into their pregnancy. The timing of the vaccine offer will help protect their newborn babies from serious illness caused by an RSV infection. The RSV vaccine can be accessed via HSC Trusts – speak to your midwife for further information.

Meet Pat Lundy – Beautiful Dentures, Personal Care

For over 40 years, Pat Lundy has been helping people smile with confidence.

One of Northern Ireland's first qualified Clinical Dental Technicians, Pat handcrafts beautiful, natural-looking dentures at East Belfast Dental & Implants, taking the time to understand each patient and create dentures that look great, feel comfortable and fit beautifully.

From full and partial dentures, Pat provides a truly personal service. His attention to detail, experience and willingness to go the extra mile have made him a much-loved member of our team.

Pat is an integral part of our friendly team, led by Dr Peter McCarron.

Established in 1956, bought by Peter in 2003, we're very proud of our family-friendly practice where patients of all ages are made to feel welcome. We believe dentistry should be relaxed, supportive and free from lectures.

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meet Pat for a free, friendly denture consultation? Call us on 02890451966
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The Power of the Local Pound

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

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

Boosting the Regional Economy

When you buy from an independent retailer, a significantly higher percentage of

your money stays within the local economy. Small business owners buy from local suppliers, hire local staff and pay taxes that fund essential community services. A single purchase at a neighbourhood butcher or bookshop creates a ripple effect. It directly supports local families, drives regional growth and keeps high streets vibrant.

Unmatched Quality and Expertise

Independent traders offer specialized knowledge that algorithms and giant super-

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

Preserving Community Identity

Beyond the economic advantages, independent

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

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

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Lace Up this December with Autism NI's '12 Runs of Christmas' Challenge

Northern Ireland's Autism Charity is inviting workplaces, running clubs and community groups to take part in a festive running challenge this December to raise vital funds for local autism services.

The '12 Runs of Christmas' is a virtual running challenge which asks participants to complete twelve runs during the month of December for Autism NI.

Autism NI's Fundraising and Events Officer, Ruth Brown-Kerr said: "We're delighted to launch our '12 Runs of Christmas' challenge and invite people

across Northern Ireland to get involved. Whether you're an experienced runner or just starting out, this is a fun way to take on a personal challenge while raising vital funds for autistic people and their families.

December is also a very busy time for our services, as families navigate the challenges around

Christmas. Therefore, this challenge is aiming to help us raise £10,000 collectively to support our Helpline service and our parent and carer support courses. Every person who takes part and every pound raised will help us continue providing these vital services.

I would also like to give special thanks to CDE

Group for sponsoring our packs for this fundraising challenge."

It is free to sign up and take part in the '12 Runs of Christmas' challenge. Supporters are also asked to raise £80 each to fund local autism services. To receive a free fundraising pack, please visit www.autismni.org or email events@autismni.org.

Medal Success for Taekwon-Do NI teams in Championships!

Taekwondo NI is the largest provider of Taekwon-Do classes in Northern Ireland. It runs classes right across Northern Ireland including Bangor, Holywood, Newtownards Belfast, Saintfield and Lisburn.

Taekwon-do NI is part of the United Kingdom Taekwon-Do Council and affiliated to the World ITF Taekwon-Do Council. The President for Northern Ireland is Mr Leo Maguire, a VII Degree Black Belt who is also the National Coach and a member of the Northern Ireland Council of Taekwon-Do.

Recently Teams from Taekwondo-NI competed at a host of high level Championships & Events.

The Newtownards UKTC NI Taekwondo-Do Club were part of the N.I. Team who won collectively 25 Golds, 17 Silver and 7 Bronze at the Irish National Championships recently in Dublin.

In mid September the N.I. team participated in the Chang Ung Cup in Scotland, at the end of the month travelling to the Netherlands to compete in the Battle of the Lowlands.

No experience is necessary to join, and classes welcome students from Age 3 right up to adulthood. Mums and Dads can join in too with the children, training together builds family confidence and a shared achievement. The Clubs welcomes everybody and adapts sessions to suit all abilities and needs.

The programmes start with Little Tiger Cubs (3 to 5 years) this is a learn through play approach to Taekwon-Do which works on the core

skills we all need for any sport. Active Tigers (5 to 8 years) raises the bar and introduces a more Taekwon-Do focused session. For the more senior class age ranges from 9 years to adulthood, includes the high performance training for those looking to advance in the sport.

The Active Tigers programme sums up its Ethos! Small steps bring big confidence and discipline and fun! Students learn to watch their confidence grow with each class and for more information contact Taekwon-Do NI on 07891191494 or visit taekwondo-ni.co.uk.

<http://www.taekwondo-ni.co.uk/>



Ellie McQuillan from the Newtownards UKTC NI Taekwondo-Do Club was one of the N.I. team who collectively won 25 Golds, 17 Silver and 7 Bronze at the recent Irish National Championships.

Active Tigers

- Discipline
- Life Skills
- Fitness
- Confidence
- Flexibility
- FUN!

Little Tiger Cubs

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- Christmas Day Evening Dinner Buffet
- Entertainment
- Enjoy a Costa Coffee to take away on morning of departure

Three Night Package

Starting from **£1090** for two people and includes:

- A Two-course dinner in the bistro on Christmas Eve
- A cocktail-making class
- A Christmas Gift
- Breakfast on all mornings
- Christmas Day Lunch (Five Course Carvery)
- Christmas Day Evening Buffet
- Entertainment
- Boxing Day Dinner
- Enjoy a Costa Coffee to take away on morning of departure

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Ways to warm up this Winter

Winter shuffles in and turns your nose pink. You can outwit it without drama or a huge bill.

First master the art of layers. Several thin layers trap heat better than one chunky jumper. Think thermal vest plus fleecy mid layer plus woolly outer. Add socks and slippers with grip and you become a walking duvet. It looks eccentric but it works.

Next treat your house like a biscuit tin. Close curtains at night and keep windows shut after dark to keep heat inside. Use draught excluders around doors and window frames and keyholes. Open curtains by day for light then draw them before darkness falls. Simple steps like closing curtains and checking your boiler help keep homes warm and efficient.

Move a bit. Staying active boosts circulation and generates body heat. Move



around at least once an hour and avoid sitting still for long periods. Try chair exercises or a hallway strut. Keeping active at home and moving every hour helps you stay warm.

Feed your inner furnace. Eat at least one hot meal

each day and enjoy regular hot drinks. Porridge and stews and soup warm you from inside while tea or coffee lifts morale. Having hot drinks like tea or coffee will warm you from inside during a cold snap.

Finally be clever with

heat. Keep the room you use most at around eighteen degrees if you can. Heat one room and spend time there and turn off radiators in unused halls. A hot water bottle or electric blanket keeps the bed cosy without heating the whole house.

HELLO HYGGE: WHY WINTER WINS

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

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

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

The season also turns social in a smaller and kinder way. Psychological research describes winter



social hibernation as health protective behaviour. You gather with fewer people but with more warmth. You talk longer and listen better.

Outside there is plenty to enjoy. Many towns hold winter festivals and parades and outdoor markets. You can wrap up warm and gather by firepits and

lose yourself in the night sky. Northumberland and the Yorkshire Dales hold stargazing safaris and events throughout the winter months.

Winter light is rare and beautiful. Low sun paints long shadows and frost brightens every hedge. Cold air makes you breathe faster and walk brisker and feel

more alive. Experts say any activity that raises heart rate benefits the heart even in winter.

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



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THE CHRISTMAS COUNTDOWN THAT SAVES YOUR PURSE

Christmas costs creep up fast when you count down without a plan. British households spend about £106 on going out, £172 on food and £76 on experiences during the festive period. A clear countdown budget stops that spend turning into January debt and stress.

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

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

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

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

through cookie cutters and hang them from hooks for a cheap touch. Shops like The Range, B&M and Ikea offer good Christmas decorations at low cost.

Use clear vases filled with baubles, greenery or fairy lights to create cosy displays. Save gift bags, tissue paper and ribbons from earlier purchases to reuse for wrapping.

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



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

Brits borrowing £178 on average. Prioritise needs over fear of missing out and budget for each social event

separately. Create a present pyramid with special gifts at the top and cards at the bottom to keep it fair.

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

In the final three weeks go granular with separate pots

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

Robin Swann MP officially opens new HANNON Steel facility at Nutts Corner

HANNON Steel welcomed Robin Swann to Nutts Corner to officially open its new premises. The event marked the completion of the first phase of a major investment in the company's operations at Nutts Corner and wider South Antrim area and the beginning of a new chapter for the HANNON Group.

Robin Swann MP, Member of Parliament for South Antrim, joined the HANNON Steel and wider HANNON Group team on Thursday, 1st October 2026 to officially open the new premises and unveil a commemorative plaque marking the occasion.

The opening follows Robin Swann's continued interest and support for the development at Nutts Corner as the HANNON Group's plans have progressed. Recognising the benefits the investment will bring to employment and the wider local economy, his support throughout the project has been greatly appreciated, and the Group was delighted to welcome him back to officially open the new premises.

The purpose-built facility has significantly expanded HANNON Steel's capabilities, providing greater space for stockholding and processing, improved

customer facilities and a modern base for its daily steel distribution operation across Northern Ireland.

The move represents an important step forward for HANNON Steel, creating the capacity to expand its product range, improve the efficiency of its operations and support the company's continued growth.

Adrian Hannon, Managing Director of HANNON Steel, said: "The official opening of our new Nutts Corner premises is an important milestone for HANNON Steel. We're very proud of what has been developed here and were delighted to welcome Robin back to officially open the facility and mark the occasion with our team."

HANNON Steel supplies mild steel products to engineering, fabrication, agricultural, construction and manufacturing businesses across Northern Ireland,



supported by its own daily delivery fleet.

The new facility also forms part of the HANNON Group's wider investment in the former RAF Nutts Corner site and its longer-term plans to develop the location as a base for a number of Group operations.

Robin Swann MP said: "I was delighted to return to Nutts Corner to officially open the new HANNON Steel facility. It is fantastic to see how quickly the development has taken shape and is now fully operational.

"The new warehouse and offices are very impressive and provide a modern working environment for the team, as well as the capacity to support the continued growth of the business. It is particularly encouraging to see this investment already bringing benefits to the local area through employment and its wider contribution to the South Antrim economy.

"I wish Adrian and the entire HANNON Steel team every success as they continue to grow the business from Nutts Corner."

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Freeze Now Feast Later

November is the perfect month to get ahead and fill the freezer. A little cooking now means less stress when December arrives. Many festive favourites freeze beautifully if wrapped and labelled well.

Start with cranberry sauce which keeps for months and improves with time. Bread sauce and red cabbage also freeze well and save last minute panic. Make your stuffing mix and freeze it uncooked in oven ready trays. Sausage rolls and cheese straws can be frozen raw and baked from frozen. Pastry is a star for make ahead cooking. Mince pie pastry and tart cases freeze for weeks and defrost quickly.

Gravy is worth making now while you have time to do it properly. Use chicken wings and roasted vegetables for deep flavour then freeze flat. Soups and stews

make easy suppers for busy nights in late November. Parsnips and carrots can be part roasted and then frozen on trays. Deserts love the freezer too. Christmas pudding is already made but brandy butter can be rolled and frozen. Freeze cookie dough in logs so you can slice and bake fresh for guests.

Label everything with date and contents and use within three months. Defrost slowly in the fridge overnight and never refreeze raw meat. Use reusable containers and avoid single use plastic where you can. Shop local for meat and veg and ask your butcher for freezer ready cuts.



A tidy freezer now means more time for markets and lights later. Cook in small batches and you will thank yourself on Christmas Eve. Start this weekend and the

festive season will feel lighter and brighter. Your future self will be grateful when the big day arrives. A calm kitchen makes for a happier Christmas for all.

Get the Tree Done in an Hour

Putting up the Christmas tree need not swallow a whole evening. With a clear order and a few shortcuts you can finish in an hour.

Start with the right base. Experts note the easiest tree to assemble is a pre-lit model with pre-fluffed branches. If a real tree is too tall - trim from the bottom to keep its triangular shape.

Fluffing is not optional. Official advice from Christmas experts at John Lewis says artificial trees need serious fluffing. Fluffing branches helps make your tree look fuller and more natural. Work from inside out and bend tips to fill gaps. Former head of Christmas buying at John Lewis suggests forty-five minutes for an average tree but even ten

minutes helps.

Follow a strict layering order to save time. The most efficient sequence is tree setup and fluffing then lights then garlands and ribbon then ornaments and topper. Always put lights first so cords hide behind branches and baubles. Balsam Hill also advises decorating in layers starting with lights then ribbons then ornaments. Aim for about thirty lights per foot of height and spiral from base upwards.

Speed up hanging with zones. Group ornaments by size and style beforehand. Place heavier baubles close



to the trunk for support and layer smaller ones towards tips. Add filler picks before showcase pieces. Finish with skirt

or collar and topper. Choosing pre-lit trees makes setup easier and gives you more time to decorate.

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Gifts For The Impossible Ones

Every family has one person who is impossible to buy for. They claim they want nothing and already have everything they need.

Yet a thoughtful gift can still bring real joy without waste or clutter. The trick is to focus on small luxuries and local flavour rather than grand gestures.

For men who shrug and say socks will do try something with story. A bottle from a County Down distillery or a handmade leather wallet lasts longer. Tickets to a match or a voucher for a barber shop offer experience over objects. Teenagers are tricky but they value choice and independence. A shopping voucher or a cinema pass lets them decide while still

feeling personal. Cosy hoodies and beanies from local shops beat fast fashion and feel more special.

Teachers and hosts deserve thanks but not another scented candle. A jar of local honey or chutney with a handwritten note feels sincere and useful. A potted plant or fresh wreath adds festive cheer without adding clutter. For older relatives comfort is key. Think soft blankets and thermal mugs and easy to read books. A subscription to a magazine or an audiobook service



keeps giving beyond December.

The best gifts often solve a small daily problem. A sturdy tote for shopping or a key finder for lost keys shows you listen. Shop local where you can and ask about gift wrapping and personalised tags. Many independent stores

in the Newtownards area will wrap for free and offer advice. Set a budget and stick to it as thought counts more than price.

Start early in November and you will avoid panic buying and queues. A little planning now means calmer days and happier faces on Christmas morning.

A GREENER CHRISTMAS

A greener Christmas does not mean less sparkle and it can save money too. Small changes at home make a big difference to waste and stress.

Start with wrapping which often cannot be recycled due to plastic and glitter. Brown paper and newspaper and fabric wraps look stylish and can be reused. Try twine and dried orange slices or sprigs of fir for natural decoration. Old scarves and tea towels make clever wraps inspired by Japanese furoshiki. Keep ribbons and tags from last year and reuse them again.

The great tree debate returns every year in Northern Ireland. A real tree grown locally supports farms and captures carbon while growing. Look for Forestry Service sales or certified growers in County Down and Armagh. After Christmas many councils offer free chipping services

for compost. A potted tree can live on in the garden and return next year. A fake tree needs around ten years of use to match the footprint of real. If you already own one then keep using it for as long as possible.

Food waste is the other festive problem. We buy too much and then throw away leftovers that could be lunches. Plan your menu early and check what is already in the freezer. Shop local for loose vegetables and order exact weights from butchers. Use up bread for stuffing and turn turkey into curry and pies. Freeze gravy and ham and sprouts for quick meals in January. Share spare food with neighbours or drop it at a community fridge.



A little organisation now means a calmer and kinder Christmas for all. Choose reusable and local and thoughtful and the season will feel lighter. Eco choices do not need to be perfect to make a real impact.

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ADDING TEXTURE TO YOUR HOME

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

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



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

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

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

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 £30,00 (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-



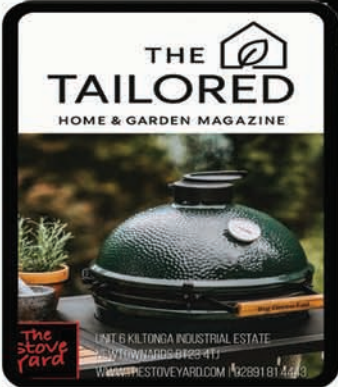
time-buyers do have an advantage here as they will pay no Stamp Duty on the first £300,000 for properties valued up to £500,000. When applying for your mortgage, the most important factor for your lender is to know that you will be able to meet your repayments. You will need to provide documentation 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.

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SHOULD YOU USE YOUR AIR-CON IN THE WINTER?

In a word the RAC says absolutely! In fact consider it an essential part of car maintenance that could directly save you money on repair work further down the line.

First and foremost using warm air from the system in winter is a great way to demist the windows.

The air coming out of the vents is dry, so the air-con acts as a dehumidifier.

If air conditioning is left unused for long periods, seals can dry out, refrigerant may slowly escape and moving components such as the compressor clutch can be more prone to problems.

The air-con is filled with a refrigerant and some oil, and it pays to keep that liquid flowing and the components of the system lubricated.

Why does my air-con smell?

If you've noticed a musty or unpleasant smell coming

from your car's air conditioning, you're not alone. A smelly car air-con system is usually caused by bacteria, mould and moisture building up inside the ventilation system, particularly if the air conditioning hasn't been used regularly.

When the system is switched on, these contaminants can produce a damp or stale odour through the air vents. The problem is often more noticeable after the car has been sitting unused for a while or during warmer weather.

To get rid of bad smells from your car air conditioning, try using an air-con antibacterial cleaner or disinfectant treatment designed for vehicle ventilation systems. Replacing the cabin

air filter can also improve air quality and airflow if it's become clogged with dust, pollen and debris.

The best way to prevent a smelly air-con system is to run the air conditioning regularly throughout the year, even in winter. This helps keep the system dry, reduces the build-up of bacteria and mould, and keeps the components in good working order.

Should I drive with the windows open when the air-con is running?

While the cool blow of the air-con does its job, for many drivers the temptation of feeling that 'fresh air' on their faces doesn't go away.

While you're unlikely to cause too much in the way



of genuine damage to your system, it's generally not recommended to travel for too long with both your window open and your air-con on.

Primarily, it's not economical. If the air-con is running, closed windows will keep the cool air inside the car and keep the temperature moderate.

What's more, the open windows let warm air inside the car, which also puts stress on the air-con system potentially leading to problems.

As a rule of thumb, if it's hotter and more humid outside the car than it is inside, you're losing out to have the air-con running with the windows open.

Does air conditioning affect electric vehicle range?

Yes, using air conditioning can reduce an electric vehicle's driving range, as the system draws power directly from the battery. However, in most real-world driving conditions, the impact is relatively small and is unlikely to make a significant difference to longer journeys.

Modern EVs are designed to manage energy use efficiently, and the reduction in range from running the air conditioning is often outweighed by the benefits of a more comfortable cabin, especially in hot weather.

One way to minimise the effect on range is to pre-condition the vehicle

while it's still plugged in and charging. Many electric cars allow drivers to cool the cabin before setting off, meaning less battery power is needed once the journey begins.

It's also worth noting that cooling the cabin with air conditioning generally uses less energy than heating it in cold weather. Many newer EVs are fitted with heat pumps, which are more efficient than traditional resistive heating systems and

can help reduce the impact on driving range throughout the year.

As with petrol and diesel cars, there's no need to avoid using air conditioning altogether. The comfort, visibility and safety benefits typically outweigh the small reduction in efficiency.

For more information see <https://www.rac.co.uk/drive/advice/car-maintenance/air-con-myths-busted>

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Owned by Kirsten Burgess - Clifton Motors, Bangor has a legacy spanning over three decades, this local garage has built an enduring reputation for reliability and technical expertise.

Clifton Motors is a Renault Specialist. While they are fully equipped to handle a diverse range of makes and models, their deep understanding of Renault engineering allows them to provide a level of precision and insight that is often difficult to find outside of a main dealership. This specialized knowledge ensures that Renault owners can receive high-level maintenance and diagnostic repairs without the premium price tags associated with large chains. However, their skills are by no means limited to a single brand; the team applies the same level of rigorous attention to detail to every vehicle that enters their workshop.

The workshop

is outfitted with advanced diagnostic and testing equipment to ensure every car is roadworthy and safe. A standout feature of their service is the availability of Maha brake testing. This specialized technology allows for highly accurate assessments of a vehicle's braking performance, providing drivers with peace of mind regarding one of their car's most critical safety components. In addition to high-tech testing, the garage offers a comprehensive suite of essential services including MOT checks and full vehicle servicing. By choosing Clifton Motors for MOT preparation, drivers can feel confident that their vehicles meet the necessary safety and environmental standards



required by law.

Beyond major repairs and inspections, the garage handles vital routine maintenance tasks that keep a car running smoothly day-to-day. This includes battery health checks and precise headlight alignment, both of which are crucial for safe driving during the darker winter months. They also offer professional tyre fitting services, making the

garage a convenient one-stop-shop for all motoring needs. Book now to be winter ready.

Clifton Motors is located at 15e Clifton Road, Bangor, County Down, BT20 5EW. To book an appointment, the team can be reached at Tel: 02891 454 304, EMAIL: cliftonmotorsbangor@gmail.com or visit www.cliftonmotorsbangor.com.

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Waking Up To Wet Windows?

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

In winter this is worse because glass stays much colder while heating and daily life create more moisture inside. The problem is simple physics. Cooking and showering and drying clothes indoors all add vapour to the air. When that moisture has nowhere to go it settles on the coldest



surface in the home which is often your windows. That is why condensation appears in the morning and why only interior glass is wet. Condensation issues always increase during winter when external temperatures are low and internal temperatures tend to be high. Left alone it causes more than a wet sill. Lots of condensation can lead to dampness which can cause mould growth on blinds and walls and ceilings. When a surface has condensation on it this can provide ideal conditions for growth of mould spores. You can reduce it without major work. Open windows each day to ensure good airflow and try to do this in the morning. If your home is not well ventilated that moisture settles on cold surfaces and eventually causes mould and damp. Use extractor fans when cooking or bathing and dry clothes outside whenever you can. Wipe condensation off windows and surfaces each morning to stop moisture sitting. Heat also helps. It is important to keep rooms heated to prevent condensation as this keeps water vapour from cooling too much. Keep heating on low and steady and keep trickle vents open. Doing this while keeping windows or vents open will help excess moisture escape

BOILER DEAD? CHECK THIS FIRST

A cold house in winter is miserable and a boiler breakdown always feels urgent. Before calling out a gas engineer for a boiler breakdown carry out a few simple checks beforehand. These quick checks can save a callout fee and get heat back faster.

Start with the basics that often get missed. Follow this checklist to diagnose the problem with your broken boiler. Check the electricity supply and check the gas or oil supply and check the water supply. Look at the fuse box and the boiler switch and make sure the gas meter has credit. Low pressure is a common cause so check the boiler pressure and top up if the gauge is below one bar. Next check the controls. Check the thermostat and programmer and make sure timers have not reset after a power cut. Many modern units have a fault code display so check for boiler fault codes and note them for



the engineer. Does the boiler have a reset button and if the boiler has a permanent pilot

light has it been extinguished. Press reset once and wait to see if it relights. In freezing weather check for frozen pipes as this stops the boiler firing. The condensate pipe outside often freezes and you can thaw it with warm water. Listen for gurgling and look for dripping. Clear the blockage and reset the boiler again. If nothing works

call a professional. Have your boiler inspected and serviced by a Gas Safe registered engineer ideally before the cold weather kicks in. An annual service is part of healthy boiler maintenance and will help reduce the risk of a breakdown when you need it the most. Regular checks clean main components and ensure the boiler is ready for use.

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LOOK UP BEFORE THE STORM HITS

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

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

Next look at gutters and downpipes. Blocked gutters and downpipes are a common cause of storm damage during the wettest months. Make sure your gutters are free from excess debris when you know a storm is coming to make sure any water drains correctly. You should also



check from the ground for signs that your gutters are sagging and have them repaired or replaced. Look for debris on the ground that may have come from the roof as this signals loose material.

Do not forget inside. Once it is safe visually inspect from the ground and look

for damage to guttering and torn or missing roof tiles and debris. Take a look inside and see if there are any signs of water damage or leaks. Check the loft if you have one as this will likely be one of the first areas to show signs of damage. Preparing your roof is not only about aesthetics

but about ensuring its durability to withstand the weight of torrential rain and snow and ice.

If you spot anything book a roofer early. You do not need to climb up ladders to keep an eye on your roof and simple checks can be done safely from ground level.

Glow Safe This Christmas

Festive cheer now spills beyond front doors each December. Homeowners favour warm white LEDs draped along eaves and hedges. Getting the look right means thinking about electrics and safety first.

Electrical checks matter more outside than in. Experts advise that you inspect lights for frayed wires and damaged plugs before use. Outdoor sets must be designed for exterior use and carry proper certification. Always connect through a 30mA RCD protected socket for protection. An RCD instantly cuts power if a fault occurs and can save lives. Avoid overloading extension leads and never attempt to repair faulty sets. Replace them instead and use bulbs of the same type and rating.

Health and safety goes beyond electrics. Switch off fairy lights and unplug them before bed or when leaving the house. Use a sturdy ladder on level ground and ask someone to foot it. Keep cables away from paths where neighbours could trip. Check that clips and hooks are secure so displays do not fall in winter winds. Battery boxes and transformers should stay dry and sheltered. Keep inflatables and ladders clear of overhead power lines.

Cost is lower than many expect with modern LEDs. Powering 100 LED

fairy lights costs 2p for eight hours. A typical set of 480 outdoor LEDs costs about nine pence per week. Six hours per night is the UK average for calculations. Retailers note that efficient sets run for pennies per week under the energy price cap.

Choose LEDs over filament and use timers to trim bills further. Dorset Fire Service also reminds households to check lights conform to British Standard BS EN 60598.

Plan early and you can sparkle safely without overspending.

Lights Out? Be Ready

Winter storms can cut power with little warning and a dark cold house is no fun. A small kit kept in one easy place saves stress and keeps you safe. Build it gradually and add one item at a time when you do your weekly shop.



Start with light and information. Put together an emergency kit in a backpack containing battery operated torches with one for each member of the family. Include spare batteries and a battery powered radio and a phone power bank. Choose bulbs that have lithium batteries that charge on your electricity supply and will remain illuminated for several hours in the event of a power cut. Keep candles and matches as backup but never leave them burning alone.

and a torch and batteries and a wind-up or battery radio. Add warm layers and blankets and copies of key documents and essential medication. A flask of hot water helps and a camping stove can make tea safely. Keep some cash handy as card terminals and ATMs and online banking can fail in a power cut.

Plan what to do when lights go out. Here is a handy checklist you can refer to so you know what to do when there is no electricity. Locate your torch and power cut survival kit if you have one and check it is a power cut and not a tripped fuse. Report the power cut to your network distributor. Store

Next sort food and warmth. What should be in a household emergency kit includes long-life food and water

the number now in your mobile phone with the name Power cut.

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



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