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Issue 221 - BT22 • BT23

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

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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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 the environment.

For more information about Project Ella, visit www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/project-ella or email projectella@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk.

Continued on page 4

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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:

26 April | Macha Workshops | Kircubbin

Immerse yourself in the ancient traditions of the Ards Peninsula. Create bath salts and soothing balms from local ingredients, while delving into the myths, folklore, and sustainable practices that make this region so special.

2 May | Strangford Sea Safari and Swim | Killinchy

Hop on a thrilling rib ride across Strangford Lough's secret hideaways and cool off with a swim in the sheltered waters.

Get to know the rich history and natural beauty of this iconic location.

17 May | Create Your Own Spring Garden Box | Millisle

Join expert florists at The School Garden in Millisle and learn sustainable floristry techniques. Craft your own spring garden box filled with locally grown flowers and foraged ingredients, taking home a piece of the region's beauty.

24 May | Seacourt Supper Club | Bangor

Treat yourself to a delightful supper at Bangor's historic Seacourt Print Workshop. Enjoy a sustainable menu curated by the renowned Lightfoot Kitchen & Deli, plus take an exclusive behind-the-scenes tour of the workshop.

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



Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Alistair Cathcart

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.

COUNCIL INSTALLS NEW AIDS TO NAVIGATION IN STRANGFORD LOUGH

Ards and North Down Borough Council (ANDBC) has upgraded Aids to Navigation (AtoN) in Strangford Lough as part of its commitment to develop safe navigation through the Borough's waters with the help of funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Four new routes are now in place in addition to a main arterial route through the Lough.

The Council is the Local Lighthouse Authority responsible for Aids to Navigation within its Borough. In March 2022, ANDBC worked collaboratively with Newry, Mourne and Down District Council to utilise the Northern Ireland Environment Agency's Challenge Fund to start the process of upgrading AtoNs.

Using this fund, a consultant was appointed to carry out navigational risk assessments and stakeholder engagement sessions to help devise a new system of navigation. After extensive engagement, the final report detailed that a single, lit, arterial route should be provided through the centre of the Lough.

The Council subsequently secured £80,000 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to implement the findings. This was a Communities & Place investment priority as part of the Council's 'creating positive outcomes for our communities and places' project. Following further engagement with the Royal Yachting Association and sailing clubs in the area, additional routes were identified to complement the main arterial route. These included Kircubbin to Whiterock, Whiterock to Ringhaddy, Rainey Island and Comber River.

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

"This was a collaborative project that involved several organisations and invited engagement from a range of stakeholders to ensure it satisfied the needs of all those who use Strangford Lough. Feedback from sailing clubs has been very positive and the navigational aids will make the Lough safer for all those who use it. I am delighted that this project has been successfully realised at minimal cost to our ratepayers."

The new Aids to Navigation are in the process of being recognised by Commissions of Irish Lights and old AtoNs will be removed where practical.

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Newtownards to host Armed Forces Day 2025

Visitors to Newtownards can enjoy breathtaking aerial displays, a military parade and a host of family friendly entertainment, cookery demonstrations and technical challenges when Northern Ireland Armed Forces Day 2025 (AFD25) comes to the town in June.

Ards and North Down Borough Council will host the national event on Saturday 21 June 2025 at Newtownards Airfield. It will give visitors an insight into the work of the Armed Forces - Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force - as well as celebrating and honouring those who serve and have served.

It has been confirmed that the aerial display on the day will include the C47 Dakota from the Royal Air Force Battle of Britain Memorial Flight, and the UK's premier military parachute display team, the Falcons. The much loved and revered Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team, the Red Arrows, will also be in the skies on 21 June - the only Northern Ireland display in their calendar this year.

The event will start at 10:30am with a band performance and



the official regional Armed Forces Day military parade through Newtownards. This will be followed by a special Drumhead Service and Flag Raising at Ards Airfield. UTV presenter, Paul Clarke, will act as compere and talk visitors through the programme, which will include musical performances from the

Band, Bugles, Pipes and Drums Royal Irish Regiment.

Visitors will also be able to enjoy a programme of military activity that wouldn't normally be seen by the public, along with live music, food stalls a fun fair and lively street theatre.

The free to attend event takes place on Saturday 21 June,

10:30am - 5pm, at Newtownards Airfield. It will close in style with a Beating Retreat at 4pm. Full programme details and information on parking/park and ride will be available soon.

Please go to www.visitardsandnorthdown.com/afd25 and watch our socials for the latest information.

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MEGAN'S INCREDIBLE TRIPLE TRANSPLANT STORY HIGHLIGHTS IMPORTANCE OF ORGAN DONATION

Portaferry's Megan Moore is bravely sharing her incredible journey of receiving three life-saving transplants, a liver and two kidneys, to highlight the vital importance of organ donation.

Megan was born with Alagille Syndrome, a rare genetic disorder affecting multiple organs, including the heart, liver, kidneys and eyes. The condition can cause significant liver damage, structural heart abnormalities and other health complications.

Her life-saving transplant journey began at just six years old when she underwent a liver transplant

in 2000. Fourteen years later, in 2014, she received her first kidney transplant and in June 2024, she underwent a second kidney transplant, this time, thanks to a living donor, her Aunt.

Reflecting on her transplant journey, Megan shared, "Due to my condition, I unfortunately needed a liver transplant when I was six years old. I was feeling okay afterwards, although I did have some complications. When I was fourteen, I required my first kidney transplant and in June 2024, I had my second kidney transplant, which my Aunt very kindly donated to me."

Megan recalled the moment she received the life-changing phone call that a liver was available, "It was just before Christmas and my family was with me. I didn't know what to expect. When I got the call, I just sat on the stairs and cried. I was only six years old at the time."

Years later, as a teenager facing the need for a kidney transplant, Megan said, "I felt scared, but having been through a transplant before, I knew what was going to happen and I could deal with it. My daddy had just passed away at the time as well, so it was all very overwhelming."

When doctors informed Megan that she needed a second kidney transplant, her family immediately stepped up. "Quite a few members of my family volunteered to be tested. My Aunt was the final match and we went through the living donor programme. When I realised she was a match, I cried because I didn't think I would make it to my 30th birthday. There was sunshine at the end of the tunnel. Everybody was so happy for me!"

Expressing her thanks to the medical team who supported her, Megan added, "The Renal Unit



staff at the Ulster Hospital are just fantastic. They helped me so much, especially, going through dialysis and getting the transplant while also dealing with my Dad's

passing." Now, Megan is using her story to encourage others to consider organ donation, saying, "Organ donation can change somebody else's life for the better. It

gives them another lease of life and gives their family hope. It's the best thing to do and I hope that by sharing my story, more people will be inspired to consider becoming donors."

THE PENINSULA NAMED ONE OF NORTHERN IRELAND'S TOP 20 CARE HOMES

The Peninsula, owned by Dunluce Healthcare, has ranked as one of Northern Ireland's Top 20 Care Homes within the first year of its opening, achieving an impressive score of 9.7 out of 10.

Located in Newtownards, The Peninsula became one of the fastest-filled new care homes in the UK due to its hotel-style accommodation, luxurious facilities, and exceptional person-centred care.

The Top 20 Care Homes list, which is compiled annually by carehome.co.uk, is based on published reviews from residents and their family and friends.

Ryan Smith, Chief Executive at Dunluce

Healthcare, commented:

"As the newest addition to Dunluce Healthcare, The Peninsula was built to set a benchmark in care home design and quality."

"To receive this recognition in its very first year of operation is a fantastic achievement and a testament to the dedication of the entire team, who have created a comfortable, safe, and fulfilling environment for our residents."

Purpose built in 2024,



The Peninsula's exceptional facilities include ensuite bedrooms, landscaped gardens, wellbeing and salon services, and private rooms for socialising.

Ashley Robinson, Residential Manager at The Peninsula, added:

"We are incredibly proud to be recognised as one of the Top 20 Care Homes in Northern Ireland."

"From the beginning, our commitment has been to high-quality care for our residents, placing their wellbeing and happiness at the

heart of everything we do.

"This recognition is particularly meaningful as it's based on the feedback from residents and their families, who benefit from the care and support we provide every day."

"We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who took the time to share their experiences and leave a review."

For more information about the care provided by Dunluce Healthcare, along with its range of facilities, visit dunlucehealthcare.com.

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Over 1,600 Primary 7 Pupils Attend BeeSafe in Newtownards

The Deputy Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor David Chambers, visited Ards Arena Youth Resource Centre at the end of a two-week BeeSafe educational programme that hosted over 1,600 pupils and more than 40 schools from across the Borough.

Funded by Ards and North Down Borough Council as well as Ards and North Down Police and Community Safety Partnership (PCSP), BeeSafe is aimed at Primary 7 children who are preparing for their transition out of primary school.

The programme is designed to promote community and personal safety while also reducing anti-social behaviour within the Borough. Topics covered included bus safety, fire safety, home safety, internet safety, anti-social behaviour and mental health.

The Deputy Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor David Chambers, said:

“This is an exciting time for all Year 7 students as they near the end of primary school and get ready to move to the next stage in their academic paths. It was great to see so many of them benefitting from this year’s programme which has helped to



Deputy Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor David Chambers, is pictured with the Chair of Ards and North Down Policing and Community Safety Partnership, Councillor Vicky Moore, alongside representatives of the PSNI, NIFRS, Translink, the Council’s Community Safety and Home Safety teams, plus pupils from Newtownards Model Primary School, Ballywalter Primary School and Millisle Primary School.

equip and prepare them for the transition. I hope they all enjoyed the programme and wish them well in their future studies.”

The Chair of Ards and North Down PCSP, Councillor Vicky Moore, said:

“BeeSafe is a multi-agency project aimed at Primary 7 children and designed to promote community

and personal safety as well as reduce anti-social behaviour, crime and fear of crime within the Borough. It has been viewed by many that Primary 7 is a key age to engage with children, when they are open to new ideas and are able to fully understand key safety messages and more likely to apply the learning they

receive, especially when they move in to the next stage of their education at secondary level when they may face these dangers for the first time. We are delighted to be able to support such an important and worthwhile initiative.”

For more information, visit ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk.

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10-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF ARDS PENINSULA FIRST RESPONDERS CELEBRATED AT BANGOR CASTLE

Ards and North Down Borough Council hosted an event at Bangor Castle recently to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Ards Peninsula First Responders.

The event was attended by the Minister of Health, Mike Nesbitt, and was officiated by the Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Alistair Cathcart.

The Ards Peninsula First Responders was set up in February 2015 to provide first aid and emergency life support to people across the peninsula. It is a registered charity that operates without financial support from government entities and is reliant upon the commitment of dedicated volunteers.

Minister of Health, Mike Nesbitt, said:

"Reaching the 10-year milestone of the Ards Peninsula First Responders shows that they have not only acted as volunteers, but as advocates and activists to encourage others to join the scheme. Their work to train new recruits to enable them to go from strength to strength, with the aim of im-

proving outcomes for those in health distress must be commended.

"Community First Responder schemes such as this really do represent the best of community and the best of humanity. Selflessly giving up your own time and energy to help those most in need, especially in our rural and hard to reach areas, is truly admirable."

Ards Peninsula First Responders cover approximately 84 square miles of the BT22 area and have been tasked with around 4,000 calls since their launch. Each call represents a life impacted, a family supported, and a community united in the face of adversity. They respond to the most critical emergencies, such as cardiac arrests, heart attacks, and strokes, all moments of crisis that can change lives forever.

Through their CPR awareness programs, they have also empowered thousands of individuals in the



Ards Peninsula First Responders (APFR) were hosted at Bangor Castle to celebrate their 10th anniversary. APFR volunteers are pictured with Minister of Health, Mike Nesbitt, Mayor Alistair Cathcart, Susie McCullough (Chief Executive), and Michael Allen (Northern Ireland Ambulance Service).

community with the skills to act decisively during a crisis. They have instilled with the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in 2021.

Their dedication and service were recognised with the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in 2021.

This prestigious honour was testament to their hard work and is a reflection of our community's belief in the importance of being pre-

pared and responsive.

For more information, visit www.facebook.com/ArdsPeninsulaFirstResponders.

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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. 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."

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Minister Lyons celebrates sport with local primary schools

Communities Minister Gordon Lyons launched the first of two Celebration of Sport days for 1,400 primary school pupils in Carrickfergus and Newtownards.

Around 700 pupils from Carrickfergus, Larne and surrounding areas joined Minister Lyons and some of Northern Ireland's top sports stars recently at the Amphitheatre Wellness Centre to take part in a range of sports tester sessions. A second session for pupils from Bangor and the Ards Peninsula took place at Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex in late March.

Speaking at the event, Minister Lyons said: "The Celebration of Sport is a fantastic way to introduce young people to a range of team and individual sports they wouldn't normally play. It is important for everyone to be more active and today is about giving young people the chance to participate and find a sport or activity they like. Sport should be inclusive, and it is great to see the activities today include disabled sports, which are an integral part of the event."

Now in its 11th year, the Celebration of Sport is a fantastic opportunity for young people to try out different sports and help them become 'more active, more often'. For the second



Wheelchair basketball was one of the sports on offer at the Celebration of Sport event in Carrickfergus recently.

year, the Department has partnered with the Councils involved to offer a truly collaborative experience for the children attending. The annual event promotes physical wellbeing and encourages young people of all abilities and from different backgrounds to participate in and appreciate the wider benefits of sport.

Minister Lyons added: "The Celebration of Sport days show how sport can

be both inspiring and unifying and it is great to see so many local pupils enjoying new and established sports, aimed at all ages and abilities. Growing participation through events like this can encourage young people to take up a sport, supporting the habit of regular physical activity from an early age. We know the positive mental and physical benefits being part of a sports team or

participating in an activity you enjoy can deliver.

"I am pleased to welcome local athletes at the top of their game who are joining in the celebration and inspiring the next generation to pursue their sporting dreams for many years to come."

Over 700 pupils from the Bangor and Ards Peninsula area attended the Celebration of Sport at the Ards Blair Mayne Leisure Centre in Newtownards.

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of Moher: Yes, they're popular for a reason! These towering cliffs in County Clare offer dramatic views of the Atlantic and the Aran Islands. Consider a boat trip for a different perspective. Explore the Unique Landscape of the Burren: This karst landscape in County Clare is unlike anywhere else in Ireland. Discover unique flora, ancient dolmens, and the fascinating Aillwee Cave. Savour the Southern Charms (County Clare to County Cork): Drive the Scenic Ring of Kerry: While technically a separate route, the Ring of Kerry loops around the stunning Iveragh Peninsula and is easily incorporated into a Wild Atlantic Way adventure. Expect breathtaking coastal views, charming villages, and historical sites. Explore the Dingle Peninsula: This peninsula boasts dramatic scenery, including the Conor Pass, the Sleah Head Drive (with its stunning views of the Blasket Islands), and the vibrant town of Dingle, known for its traditional music scene. Walk the Seven Heads Peninsula: This lesser-known gem in County Cork offers beautiful coastal walks with stunning views of the rugged coastline and sandy coves. Discover the Gourmet Capital of Kinsale: End (or begin!) your Wild Atlantic Way journey in the charming town of Kinsale, known for its picturesque harbor, historic Charles Fort, and its reputation as a culinary haven.

The Secret to Hotel-Soft Towels

Ever wondered how hotels manage to keep their towels consistently soft and inviting, the kind that feels like a gentle cloud against your skin?

It's a sensory detail that often elevates the hotel experience, leaving you pondering the magic behind that luxurious fluffiness. While you might not have access to industrial-grade laundry facilities, the secret lies in a combination of smart choices and meticulous processes that you can certainly incorporate into your own laundry routine. At the heart of a truly plush hotel towel is its inherent quality. Hotels understand that the foundation of softness begins with the material itself. They often invest in premium cotton varieties, such as the renowned Turkish or the exceptionally absorbent Egyptian cotton. These types of cotton are characterized by their long, unbroken fibers, which contribute significantly to both the towel's luxurious feel and its long-term durability. Furthermore, hotels pay close attention to the towel's GSM, or grams per square meter. A higher GSM indicates a denser weave and a thicker, more substantial towel that naturally feels more opulent and absorbent. Beyond the initial quality of the towel, the way hotels launder them plays a crucial role in maintaining that coveted fluffiness. Their approach often involves a less-is-more philosophy when it comes to cleaning agents. They typically opt for mild yet effective detergents that cleanse thoroughly without stripping the natural softness from the cotton fibers. Surprisingly, many hotels either minimize or entirely avoid the use of fabric softeners. While these products might offer a temporary sensation of softness, they can leave behind a waxy residue that actually hinders absorbency and can lead to towels feeling stiff and less fluffy over time. In regions with hard water, hotels may also

employ water softening systems to prevent mineral buildup, which can make towels feel rough and scratchy. They also ensure proper washing cycles with warm water for effective cleaning, often including an extra rinse to eliminate any lingering detergent that could contribute to stiffness. Crucially, they avoid overloading washing machines, allowing ample space for the towels to move freely and be rinsed thoroughly. The drying process is just as vital in achieving that signature hotel softness. Commercial dryers are often used on lower heat settings, a deliberate choice to protect the integrity of the cotton fibers. High heat can cause the fibers to become brittle and lose their plushness. Moreover, over-drying is a common pitfall that hotels actively avoid. Towels are often removed from the dryer while still slightly damp and then allowed to air-dry the rest of the way. This technique prevents them from becoming overly stiff and retains their natural loft. Some establishments even utilize dryer balls, similar to tennis balls, to help physically fluff the towels and improve air circulation during the drying cycle. Prompt removal from the dryer is another key step, preventing wrinkles and potential stiffness from setting in. Beyond these core practices, some hotels employ additional techniques to enhance towel softness. An occasional rinse with white vinegar can help to remove any residual detergent buildup and naturally soften the fibers. Similarly, adding baking soda to the wash cycle can aid in deodorizing and contributing to a softer feel. Ultimately, hotels also understand the importance of regular replacement. By having a system in place to retire older towels, they ensure that guests are always greeted with fresh, high-quality linens that maintain that desirable level of fluffiness. While replicating a hotel's exact laundry setup at home might be challenging, understanding their underlying principles can guide you in achieving significantly softer and more luxurious towels. By focusing on the quality of your towels, being mindful of the detergents you use, avoiding excessive fabric softener, employing lower heat drying, and being careful not to over-dry, you can bring a touch of that hotel-like plushness to your own bathroom.

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A DONEGAL DESTINATION TO LOVE

Here are some good reasons to make Letterkenny your next destination:

Retail Therapy at Its Finest: Letterkenny boasts a fantastic shopping scene. From the bustling Letterkenny Shopping Centre with its mix of high-street brands to the charming boutiques and independent shops dotted along Main Street, you'll find everything from fashion and homeware to local crafts and souvenirs. Whether you're after a serious shopping spree or just a leisurely browse, Letterkenny has you covered.

Family Fun at Tropical World: Prepare for an exciting family adventure at Tropical World! This popular attraction is home to a diverse collection of butterflies, exotic birds, reptiles, and even meerkats.

Kids will be mesmerized by the vibrant colours and fascinating creatures, making it an educational and thoroughly enjoyable outing for all ages.

Journey Through Time at Donegal County Museum: Immerse yourselves in the rich history and heritage of County Donegal at the Donegal County Museum, located in Letterkenny. Housed in a beautifully restored 19th-



century workhouse, the museum tells the story of the region through fascinating exhibits, artifacts, and interactive displays. It's a fantastic way for families to learn about the past in an engaging way.

Tee Off at Championship Golf Courses: Golf enthusiasts will be delighted by the proximity of world-class golf courses to Letterkenny. The region boasts stunning links and parkland courses, offering challenging play and breathtaking scenery. Whether you're a seasoned pro or a

beginner, a round of golf in Donegal is an experience to savour.

Dive into Local Culture at An Grianán Theatre: Catch a captivating performance at An Grianán Theatre, Letterkenny's premier arts venue. From plays and musicals to comedy shows and live music, the theatre offers a diverse programme of entertainment.

It's a great way to experience the local arts scene and enjoy a memorable evening out.

Explore the Majestic St. Eunan's Cathedral: Admire the architectural

grandeur of St. Eunan's Cathedral, a prominent landmark in Letterkenny. This impressive cathedral, with its stunning stained glass windows and intricate details, is a testament to Gothic Revival architecture. Take some time to appreciate its beauty and serene atmosphere.

Family Adventures at Arena 7 Entertainment Complex: For a day packed with family fun, head to Arena 7. This entertainment complex offers a wide range of activities, including bowling, laser tag,

arcade games, and a soft play area for younger children.

There's something for everyone to enjoy, making it a perfect option for a rainy day or an action-packed afternoon.

9. Discover Local History at Conwal Parish Church: Step back in time at Conwal Parish Church, one of the oldest churches in the Letterkenny area. Its historic graveyard tells tales of past generations, and the church itself offers a glimpse into the region's religious heritage. It's a peaceful place for reflection and

a reminder of the area's long history.

With its blend of shopping delights,

family-friendly activities, fascinating historical sites, and that unmistakable Irish

charm, Letterkenny offers something for everyone. Come and experience it for yourself!

Book a Golden stay at the Station House Hotel

Superbly located in the heart of the thriving town of Letterkenny so you only have to open the doors at the Station House Hotel and you are right where all the action is.

From the endless number of family friendly activities to shopping centres, charming boutiques, the vibrant nightlife scene, relaxing restaurants, the theatre and more, and with easy access to all major routes and natural attractions, Letterkenny has so much to offer over the winter season.

The hotel is built on the grounds of where the old Station House once stood when the Railway system in co. Donegal was in operation from 1901 to the 1940's. It was bought by the Gallagher family in 1953, four years after the last train passed the old building.

It became their home up until 2004 at which point it was demolished and developed into a wonderful hotel boasting 81 spacious bedrooms.

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of their guestrooms for your accommodation, whether you are travelling as a couple, with family members or friends they have a number of room types for you to choose from including family, interconnecting, twin, triple, double, accessible and executive. All of which are vibrant and fresh and a contemporary approach to the décor and designed with your comfort in mind

and feature plasma TVs with Chromecast allowing you to connect your phone or device directly to the screen so you can stream your favourite TV shows and films during your stay and relax, unwind and feel right at home at the Station house Hotel.

The Station House is also home to the Depot Bar and Restaurant, a true "locals local", and one of Letterkenny's best and most popular bars

and restaurants. It provides the perfect excuse for a pause and to pamper your palate, offering a wide range of sumptuous dining options.

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Photo by Mark Barton

on the package price and complimentary 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.

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 or +353 (0)47 81 888 Coolshannagh, Co. Monaghan, H18 Y220

Elevate Your “I Do”: Taking your Wedding Day photography to new heights

Imagine your wedding day unfolding like a scene from a movie – the sprawling venue, the gathering of loved ones, the intimate moments between you and your partner, all captured from breathtaking angles you never thought possible.

This is the magic that drone photography can weave into your special day. Moving beyond traditional ground-level shots, drones offer a unique and dynamic perspective that can transform your wedding album into a cinematic masterpiece. So, what exactly can these aerial eyes add to your cherished memories? Let’s take flight and explore the possibilities: Setting the Scene Think sweeping panoramic shots of your chosen venue, nestled amidst stunning landscapes. Drones can capture the full grandeur of your celebration, showcasing the beauty of the surroundings and the layout of your event in a way that ground-level photography simply cannot achieve. These images provide context and a sense of place, allowing you to relive the atmosphere and the sheer scale of your special day. A Bird’s-Eye View of Your Guests Imagine a heart-warming aerial shot of all your guests gathered for the ceremony or mingling during the reception. This unique vantage point captures the collective joy

and love surrounding you, creating a powerful visual representation of your community coming together to celebrate your union. It’s a beautiful way to remember everyone who shared in your happiness. Capturing Candid Moments While your main photographers focus on close-up interactions, drones can discreetly capture candid moments unfolding across your venue. From laughter during cocktail hour to heartfelt conversations in the gardens, these unobtrusive aerial shots can document the natural flow and genuine emotions of the day without guests feeling overly conscious of the camera. Adding Movement and Dimension to Your Wedding Film Drone footage isn’t just for still photography. Incorporating aerial videography into your wedding film can add a breathtaking cinematic quality. Imagine sweeping shots of your arrival, graceful flyovers during your first dance, or dynamic transitions between different parts of your day. This adds a layer of visual storytelling that elevates your wedding video to a whole new level.



Documenting the Flow of the Day For larger weddings or events spread across a significant area, drone photography can be invaluable for documenting the logistical flow of the day. From guest arrivals to the procession and transitions between different locations, aerial perspectives provide a clear overview of how the event unfolded. Important Considerations: While the possibilities are exciting, it’s crucial to consider a few key aspects when thinking about drone photography for your wedding: Regulations and Permissions: Drone usage is subject to regulations that vary by location. Ensure

your photographer is licensed and aware of any restrictions in your chosen venue. Weather Dependence: Drones are sensitive to weather conditions like strong winds and rain. Have a backup plan in case aerial photography isn’t possible on the day. Venue Restrictions: Some venues may have specific rules or restrictions regarding drone usage due to privacy or safety concerns. It’s essential to check with your venue beforehand. Experienced Pilot/ Photographer: Choose a photographer with experience in drone operation and aerial photography to ensure safety and high-quality results.



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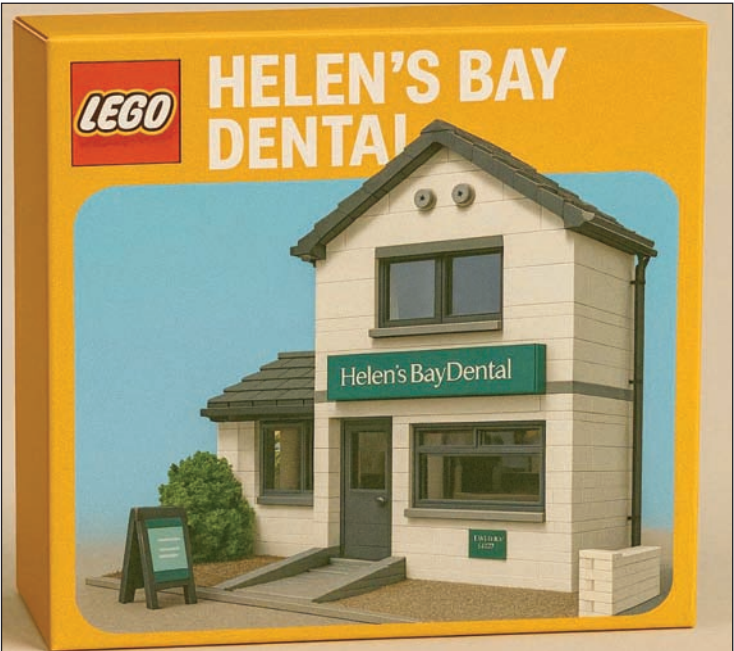
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Ceilings, the fifth wall with something to say

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.”

PLANNING AN OUTDOOR KITCHEN

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 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

You can install built-in speakers and a even a flat screen TV, or choose only music and let the view from your outdoor kitchen and dining area entertain you and your guests.

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Toye Vehicle Repairs: Keeping you on the road!

Toye Vehicle Repairs is a dependable destination for all your automotive needs. Celebrating 3 years under the ownership of Garry McClurg, this garage has built a reputation for providing reliable and comprehensive vehicle repair and restoration services.

At Toye Vehicle Repairs, you'll find a dedicated team of experienced and fully qualified mechanics ready to get your vehicle back on the road with efficiency and expertise. They pride themselves on catering to a diverse range of vehicles, handling servicing and repairs for both standard cars and light commercial vehicles. Whether you drive a Ford, BMW, or any other make and model, their skilled technicians have the knowledge to address your specific needs.

The services offered by Toye Vehicle Repairs are extensive, ensuring that most automotive issues can be expertly handled under one roof.

They provide thorough

MOT preparation to ensure your vehicle meets all necessary standards. Utilizing advanced vehicle diagnostic tools, they can accurately identify and resolve complex issues.

Routine maintenance such as vehicle servicing, battery checks, brake and clutch repairs, gearbox servicing, suspension work, and essential engine care like oil replacement and battery maintenance are also expertly carried out.

Beyond the everyday repairs, Toye Vehicle Repairs also possesses a special expertise in classic car restoration. This passion for automotive heritage sets them apart, offering a valuable service for

owners looking to preserve and rejuvenate their cherished vintage vehicles.

Toye Vehicle Repairs is committed to delivering quality workmanship at competitive prices. This dedication to excellence has been recognized through prestigious accolades, including a win at the UK Enterprise Awards in 2023 and further recognition at the Automotive Awards in 2024. These awards underscore their commitment to providing outstanding service within the automotive industry.

Customer feedback consistently highlights Toye Vehicle Repairs' commitment to going the extra mile for their clients. Reviews often

praise their efficient service, transparent communication, and fair pricing, reinforcing their position as a trusted and reliable garage in the Newtownards area.

For reliable garage services encompassing everything from routine maintenance to intricate repairs and even classic car restoration, Toye Vehicle Repairs offers a comprehensive and trustworthy solution for vehicle owners in and around Newtownards. Booking an appointment is easy – simply give them a call or send an email to experience their award-winning service firsthand.

Toye Vehicle Repairs is at 64 Comber Road, Killinchy.

Call: 0289 754 1261 or email: info@toyevr.com.

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.

Wildfires are not just costly to fight; they endanger lives – the public, firefighters, and local communities. They decimate wildlife, destroying habitats and

precious peatlands, vital carbon stores in our fight against climate change. Let's be vigilant and responsible, ensuring our countryside remains safe and enjoyable for everyone.

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.

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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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



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

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, 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.

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OUTBACK365

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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:
Unit 4, 126 Tamnamore Road, Dungannon
www.outback365.co.uk | 028 8747 0303

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UNLOCK THE ULTIMATE OUTDOOR ADVENTURE: TOP CAMPING HACKS FOR YOUR NI GETAWAY

Northern Ireland, with its stunning coastline, rolling green hills, and mystical forests, offers a breathtaking backdrop for a memorable camping holiday.

However, even the most seasoned outdoor enthusiasts can benefit from a few clever hacks to enhance their experience. Whether you're planning

a family adventure in a bustling campsite or a tranquil escape into the wilder parts of the country, these tips will help you make the most of your time under the Northern Irish skies.

Setting Up Like a Pro:

Pitch Perfect Every Time: Before you even leave home, do a practice run of setting up your tent in your garden. This will familiarize you with the process and ensure all the necessary parts are present. When you arrive at your campsite, take a moment to assess the terrain. Look for a flat, even surface away from any obvious dips or rocks. Placing a groundsheet or tarp beneath your tent not only protects the bottom from damage and moisture but also makes packing up cleaner.

Light Up Your Night Efficiently: Instead of relying solely on a single lantern, consider using multiple smaller, battery-operated LED lights or headlamps. These are more versatile for tasks like cooking or reading in your tent and conserve energy. String fairy lights around your tent for a cosy ambience and added visibility at night. Don't forget extra batteries!

Organize Your Space: Keep your campsite tidy

and functional by utilizing storage solutions. Packing cubes are fantastic for organizing clothing and gear within your backpack or tent. Consider hanging a mesh organizer inside your tent for easy access to small items like toiletries, phones, and keys. A collapsible washing basket can double as a storage container for shoes or dirty laundry and keep the inside of your tent clean.

Comfort is Key (Even Outdoors!):

Sleep Soundly: Invest in a good quality sleeping pad or air mattress to insulate you from the cold ground and provide cushioning. For added warmth on chilly nights, place a blanket underneath your sleeping bag. A travel pillow can make a significant difference in your sleep quality.

Stay Dry and Comfortable: Northern Ireland's weather can be unpredictable. Pack layers of clothing that you can easily add or remove as the temperature changes. Waterproof jackets and trousers are essential, as is a good pair of waterproof walking boots. Keep electronics protected from rain and moisture in waterproof bags.

Embrace the Natural Insect Repellent: Midges and other biting insects

can be a nuisance, especially during the summer months. Consider natural insect repellents like citronella candles or sprays. Wearing long sleeves and trousers, especially at dawn and dusk, can also help.

Food and Drink Made Easy:

Clever Cooking Solutions: If you're planning to cook, a portable camping stove is a must. Pack pre-chopped vegetables and pre-marinated meats in airtight containers to save time and effort. Consider one-pot meals like stews or pasta dishes to minimize washing up. Biodegradable dish soap and a quick-drying towel are your friends.

Hydration is Paramount: Carry a reusable water bottle and refill it whenever possible. If you're venturing into more remote areas, consider bringing a water filter or purification tablets.

Smart Snacking: Pack non-perishable snacks like energy bars, nuts, dried fruit, and oatcakes for quick energy boosts between meals. Store food in airtight containers to keep it fresh and prevent attracting wildlife.

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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.

PLANNING AN OUTDOOR KITCHEN

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 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
You can install built-in speakers and a even a flat screen TV, or choose only music and let the view from your outdoor kitchen and dining area entertain you and your guests.

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. 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. Orangeries 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.

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MORE THAN 6,000 STAFF ON BOARD TO DELIVER THE 153RD OPEN – WITH 100 DAYS TO GO

It's just 100 days until The Open returns to Northern Ireland and the build at Royal Portrush is in full swing.

A team of more than 6,000 permanent and temporary staff working for The R&A, contractors and agencies, are involved in the overall delivery of the Championship, from the initial build, to overseeing its staging and the final derig.

All eyes will be on the North Coast from July 13-20 when some of the

sport's top golfers descend on Royal Portrush, one of the world's top courses, to compete for the iconic Claret Jug.

More than 250,000 fans are expected to attend The 153rd Open, which is expected to deliver a combined economic and media benefit of more than £150 million to the region.

Contractors are on site

with compounds already erected, work has also begun on the roll out of the trackway and the first structures are up.

Today, work will begin to erect the famous grandstands at the 1st and 18th holes, offering spectators some of the best views of the much-anticipated action.

In mid-April, work will

start to erect the hospitality structures and those in the spectator village.

The R&A have recruited for around 1,200 roles for The Open across various functions to support the Championship's delivery. Of these, 85% of the roles have been filled by the local community.

Such was the success of a recent recruitment event held by The R&A in Portrush, that the process has already been closed.

Around 1,200 marshals will be enlisted to work at the event as well as 500 volunteers.

More than 600 journalists from around the world will be attending The Open to cover the action with an estimated 100 million viewers able to watch play in over 190 countries.

A site management team has also been set up to manage the contractor community and deliveries from a host of local businesses who are suppliers for the Championship.

Johnnie Cole-Hamilton, Executive Director – Championships at The

R&A, said: "We are thrilled to be bringing The Open back to Royal Portrush and there is huge excitement among golf fans to see the best men's players face the challenge of this magnificent links once again.

"The Open in 2019 was a massive success and showed just how much collective enthusiasm, passion and commitment there is to make Royal Portrush one of the leading venues for the Championship.

"The 153rd Open will be the biggest ever event held in Northern Ireland and we are looking forward to welcoming over 250,000 fans in July for what promises to be another special celebration of major championship golf."

Aine Kearney, Director of Events at Tourism Northern Ireland, said: "With just 100 days to go until The 153rd Open at Royal Portrush, all the partners involved in the delivery of the event are working in collaboration to make it even bigger and more memorable than 2019.

"Work at the site is well underway and from a planning perspective, it is full steam ahead.

"The Open in 2019 brought huge economic benefits, not just to the North Coast, but to the whole of Northern Ireland and 2025 will be no different.

"It is shaping up to be another world-class sporting event which presents us with an invaluable opportunity to further raise Northern Ireland's profile as a must-see travel and golf destination as well as a fantastic place to invest."

Dr Ian Kerr, Chairman of the Championship Committee at Royal Portrush, said: "Both the championship committee and the members of Royal Portrush are putting in huge efforts to ensure this Championship will be another unforgettable experience, not just for the players but for all visitors and spectators. That is our number one priority.

"The 148th Open was truly memorable and hopefully the 153rd will be even more momentous."

Gilmore Funeral Directors: A Trusted Name in Comber

Gilmore Funeral Directors is a well established third generation family business in Comber, Northern Ireland, offering compassionate and professional funeral services to the local community.

With over 30 years of experience, they have built a reputation for providing personalized and supportive care during difficult times.

Gilmore Funeral Directors understands that every funeral is unique and requires a tailored approach. Their dedicated team works closely with families to create a meaningful and memorable service that reflects the life and wishes of the deceased. From traditional funerals to more contemporary celebrations of life, they offer a wide range of options to suit individual preferences.

Their services include funeral planning and arrangement, pre-paid funerals, memorial services, transportation, floral arrangements, and grief support. They guide families through the entire process, from selecting a coffin or urn to choosing a burial or cremation. They also offer Golden Charter pre-paid funeral plans, allowing individuals to plan

and pay for their funeral arrangements in advance.

Gilmore Funeral Directors is a family-run business, which means that they approach each client with a personal touch. Their commitment to excellence and compassion is evident in every aspect of their service.

Gilmore Funeral Directors were proud to be named winners at the prestigious Funeral Awards NI in 2024. The company was delighted to win no fewer than two awards the Lifetime Service Award for Company Director Ken Gilmore – and the company was also named Independent Funeral Director of the Year!

For more information or to arrange a meeting, please contact Gilmore Funeral Directors:

Address: 1 Killinchy Street, Comber, Newtownards, BT23 5AP
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Website: <https://gilmore-funeraldirectors.co.uk/funeral-services/>



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Owner: Toby Fynn

Toby takes the reins at Keeway Equestrian

Keeway Equestrian has carved a niche within the equestrian world providing high-quality arena surfaces as well as innovative equine bedding and horse fencing solutions.

Following a long career in Civil Engineering and a lifetime in an Equestrian driven family Tim McKee took a leap of faith in the Equestrian world! Keeway Equestrian has provided all surfacing for Gransha Equestrian Centre since 2019 and Tim has also been developing knowledge and offering a range of products to fit the Irish Equestrian Market. Now under the new management of Tim's nephew Toby Fynn – the envelope continues to be pushed sourcing and offering innovative solu-

tions for the equestrian!

Keeway Equestrian focuses entirely on the needs of horse and rider, prioritising safety and performance. At the heart of their offerings are their specialised arena surfaces, designed to provide optimal footing for a variety of equestrian disciplines. Whether it's an indoor or outdoor arena, Keeway Equestrian offers arena fibres engineered to ensure consistent performance regardless of weather conditions, minimizing the risk of injury and maximizing horse

comfort.

Beyond arena surfaces, Keeway Equestrian demonstrates a strong commitment to safety and sustainability. Their Equisafe fencing solutions provide secure and reliable boundaries, while their Ecoflax bedding offers a sustainable and healthy environment for horses. This dedication to comprehensive equestrian solutions extends to other essential yard equipment, such as horse wash bays, demonstrating their understanding of the diverse needs of eques-

trian facilities. Keeway Equestrian works closely with a range of equestrian establishments across Ireland, including riding schools, livery yards, and stud farms. Their collaborative approach and dedication to providing top-tier products and services have solidified their reputation as a trusted partner within the equestrian community.

Keeway Equestrian's product line reflects their commitment to quality and innovation. Their arena fibre solutions cater to the diverse needs of riders and horses, while their Ecoflax bedding provides a sustainable and comfortable alternative. Furthermore, their Equisafe fencing prioritises the safety of horses and riders alike. To explore their full range of products and services, you can visit their website, which offers detailed information and contact details.

www.keewayequestriansurfaces.com



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THE TASTIEST NI FOOD & DRINK PAVILION YET!

NI Food & Drink Pavilion at Balmoral Show

This year's NI Food & Drink Pavilion at the Balmoral Show is set to be a recipe for success as visitors are invited to celebrate local producers, makers and entrepreneurs.

A rich bounty of savoury snacks and sweet treats are guaranteed as more than 90 local food and drink companies feature at the Show, thanks to the partnership between Food NI and the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society at Northern Ireland's leading agri-food event. The sheer quality of the local food and drink offering is better than ever, promising an impressive experience for all visitors.

For those hoping to spice up family meals or impress with new recipe hacks, the Pavilion offers two theatre kitchens with special guests cooking up a storm across the four days. Visitors can take a break from the bustling Show by joining Julie Fitzpatrick as she hosts the new SafeFood Theatre Kitchen. Also, back by popular demand, the Tesco Theatre Kitchen will be hosted by Paula McIntyre and Noel McMeel, featuring the famous Steak Competition and fantastic Female Friday feature. For budding young chefs, the kids cooking



demonstrations in the Pavilion will help everyone get stuck into cooking easy and healthy meals together.

This year's line-up of food and drink companies ensures there's something to suit all tastes as Food NI will once again host Glashy Farm Ice Cream, Finnebrogue, Dundarave Estate, Cloughbane Farm, Krazi Baker, Punjana, Long Meadow Cider and Copeland Distillery. There will also be a variety of new tastes for visitors to get their teeth into including products from Forest Feast, Mash Direct, Loada Balls and Finnebrogue.

The NI Food & Drink Pavilion's long-standing history and success at

the Balmoral Show is no doubt thanks to not only our exceptional local produce but also the framework that supports our producers in ensuring that Northern Ireland is the home of sustainable and healthy food. It is a given that fewer food miles, a lower carbon footprint, a commitment to reusing, recycling and responsible business practices are at the heart of their collective ethos.

Lindsay Curran of Food NI, commented, "Each year our local food sector gets better and better. With sustainability and health rising up the agenda we are delighted to bring a wide range of new and returning

local companies to the Pavilion. It is the highlight of the agri-food calendar. From farm diversifications to chef led businesses, the Pavilion is not just a feast for the senses, it is a great place to do business. Along with Invest Northern Ireland we bring 80 local buyers to see the talented makers we have in Northern Ireland."

The Balmoral Show in partnership with Ulster Bank will return to the Eikon Exhibition Centre showgrounds from Wednesday 14th May to Saturday 17th May 2025. For the latest updates follow Balmoral Show on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.

NI Chamber President to lead business leaders' hike

NI Chamber President Cat McCusker will lead a group of business leaders on a fundraising hike up Slieve Donard on Monday 5 May.

The trek to Northern Ireland's highest peak will see 30 business leaders reach the summit in support of Cancer Fund for Children. The group will include Roger Johnston, CEO of Axial 3D and Graeme Neill, Managing Director of C.R.N. Financial Group, two members of the '26 Mountains to Mayo' team, who are set to take on a challenge which will see them climb 26 peaks over nine days in June.

Encouraging the business community to get behind those efforts, Cat McCusker, said:

"NI Chamber is proud to support the exceptional work of Cancer Fund for Children. Our Bank Holiday hike is an opportunity for businesspeople across Northern Ireland to donate towards a really worthwhile cause and show their support for the amazing efforts of the 26 Mountains to Mayo team.

"As well as inviting people to donate, we are also encouraging NI Chamber members to lace up their hiking boots and join us



Maria Small (Cancer Fund for Children); Graeme Neill (26 Mountains to Mayo team); Cat McCusker (President, NI Chamber) and Suzanne Wylie (CEO, NI Chamber)

for what is set to be a very social, enjoyable adventure in the Mourne Mountains."

Maria Small, Partnership and Philanthropy Advisor, Cancer Fund for Children added:

"We are delighted that NI Chamber has joined with us to support the 26 Mountains to Mayo challenge, even undertaking their own charity climb. This event, led by Roger Johnston has

truly galvanised the business community and we are incredibly grateful to all of the business leaders taking part.

"Every week across Northern Ireland, approximately 3 children and young people (aged 0-24) are diagnosed with cancer and life changes for their whole family. The money raised through this challenge will help us

provide emotional, social and therapeutic support so these families don't have to face this diagnosis alone."

To donate to NI Chamber's Business Leaders' Hike visit justgiving.com/page/nichamberhike

To register your interest in joining event on Monday 5 May, contact mail@northernirelandchamber.com

Celebrate local business at Ards Peninsula Business Awards Night at Clandeboyne Hotel!

Newtownards Chamber of Trade, in collaboration with Love Local Comber and Visit Donaghadee is hosting the Ards Peninsula Business Awards 2025, in association with Ards Business Hub.

Celebrating the outstanding achievements, innovation, and diversity of local businesses, from manufacturers and retailers to hospitality, technology, and beyond, these awards recognise the vital contributions that businesses make to the local economy!

The prestigious, glittering, awards ceremony will take place on Thursday 22 May 2025, at The Clandeboyne Lodge Hotel. The awards will recognise the hard work and achievements of local businesses in the Ards Peninsula area, as they play a crucial role in driving economic growth and innovation. The awards highlight the remarkable talent and dedication within the community, spanning

sectors from artisan producers and hospitality to manufacturing and technology. The Ards Peninsula Business Awards provide a unique platform for businesses to gain recognition, share their success stories, and celebrate the best of the region's thriving business community. Don't miss this chance to be part of an inspiring evening of celebration!

A panel of experts undertakes judging for each category. Ards Chamber has appointed an independent delivery agent who will form the judging panel for these awards. This panel will be responsible for reviewing applications of all award categories and deciding the winners. The winners

will be revealed on Thursday 22 May 2025 at the Clandeboyne Hotel. Did you enter? The deadline for submissions was Monday 28 April 2025. If you have or if you'd simply like to be part of a great night - this will be the best opportunity this year to don your glad-rags and celebrate the best in local business!

Award Category winners announced on the night will be in the following 14 categories: Customer Service Excellence Award; Best New Business Award; Best Company to Work For Award; Customer Service Excellence Award; Best New Business Award; Best Employee Award; Business Growth Award

; Greatest Sustainability & Environmental Impact; Best Family Business; Contribution to the Local Community; Outstanding Independent Retailer of the Year; Best Licensed Premises; Best Non-Licensed Premises; Excellence in Hair & Beauty; Best Tourism Provider and of course Business of the Year - this winner will be picked from the 14 category winners as the Ards Peninsula Business of the Year 2025. A special Lifetime Achievement Award will recognise an individual who has made a meaningful and lasting contribution to their own business or industry, as well as to the wider Newtownards business community and local economy.

ARDS PENINSULA BUSINESS AWARDS 2025

in association with

Ards Business Hub

Newtownards Chamber of Trade, in collaboration with Love Local Comber and Visit Donaghadee, is thrilled to announce the launch of the Ards Peninsula Business Awards 2025, in association with Ards Business Hub. Celebrating the outstanding achievements, innovation, and diversity of local businesses. From manufacturers and retailers to hospitality, technology, and beyond, these awards recognise the vital contributions that businesses make to the local economy.

THE WINNERS WILL BE REVEALED AT THE AWARDS CEREMONY ON THURSDAY 22 MAY 2025 AT The Clandeboyne Lodge Hotel!

For ticket details see www.ardsbusinessawards.com

Event supported by:



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



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

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 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.

WINNERS ANNOUNCED AT THE 2025 NORTHERN IRELAND APPRENTICESHIP AWARDS

The winners of the Department for the Economy's annual Northern Ireland Apprenticeship Awards were announced today.

Speaking after the awards ceremony in Belfast City Hall, Ian Snowden, Permanent Secretary at the Department for the Economy, said: "All of the finalists in this year's awards are proof of the positive impact that apprenticeships can have."

"These awards are an opportunity to celebrate the fantastic achievements of our apprentices, their employers and mentors, and our excellent training providers."

"With almost 13,000 apprentices and higher level apprentices right across Northern Ireland, it is clear that this pathway to a successful career is increasingly popular."

Congratulating the award winners, Mr Snowden added: "The winners of the NI Apprenticeship Awards represent the best of local

talent, and their success is testament to their hard work and dedication."

Economy Minister Dr Caoimhe Archibald extended her congratulations to all involved. She said: "I extend my heartfelt congratulations to all the nominees and winners at this year's NI Apprenticeship Awards. Your dedication and excellence exemplify the transformative impact of apprenticeships on individuals, businesses, and our economy as a whole."

The 2025 winners are:
Apprentice of the Year Award
Ebony Murtagh, employed at M&W Meats, studying at Southern Regional College Higher Level Apprentice of the Year Award
Ryan McCall, employed at M&R



Property Group, studying at Queen's University Belfast
Public Sector Apprentice of the Year Award
Sarah Welsh, employed at Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council, studying at Belfast Metropolitan College Small to Medium

Enterprise Award
JMG Systems in partnership with South West Regional College Large Employer Award
Citi in partnership with Ulster University Mentor Award
Kevin McCann, Severfield Diversity and Inclusion Award
The Hair Lounge

Public Sector Employer Award
Derry City and Strabane District Council in partnership with North West Regional College
More information on the NI Apprenticeship Awards is available at: <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-apprenticeship-awards>

Have a Blast at the Breast Foot Forward Walk

Every year Action Cancer helps to save and support 20,000 people across Northern Ireland through the delivery of its services including the provision of 8,000 breast screening appointments at Action Cancer House and on board the Big Bus.

On Friday 6th June, a sea of pink will sweep through Belfast once again as Action Cancer hosts the Breast Foot Forward Walk, sponsored by SuperValu.

This year, the charity is calling on 800 enthusiastic walkers to help raise vital funds and awareness for Action Cancer's life-saving breast screening service.

The charity is encouraging men, women and children of all ages to participate in the fun-filled event – where dogs are welcome too! Walkers will gather at Belfast City Hall from 6pm for a lively warm-up with Fitness Freddy, plus plenty of free goodies to kick things off. Participants can choose between a 5K or 10K route, help-

ing to raise vital funds and awareness for breast cancer across Northern Ireland.

This year's Breast Foot Forward Walk aims to raise £60,000 to fund potentially life-saving breast screening appointments for 500 local women.

Action Cancer is the only charity in Northern Ireland offering free breast screening to women aged 40-49 and over 70 – those who fall outside the NHS screening programme. While these appointments are free for the women who need them, each screening costs the charity £120 to deliver. That's why taking part in the Breast Foot Forward Walk is so important – every step helps fund this vital,

life-saving service.

Tanya Byers (aged 45) from Ballyclare has signed up already to this year's event. Tanya knows only too well the importance of this fundraising event. Tanya said: "Action Cancer saved my life through early detection. The doctors told me it would have been years before I would have been able to feel a lump and, as I was not eligible to receive my first NHS mammogram until 50, by that point it may have been too late. I am so grateful to Action Cancer for providing this amazing service."

I'm so excited to get involved in this year's walk. Last year was amazing and I know this year will be bigger and better. It really

is a fun-filled event for an amazing cause and I hope to see you there."

All participants are encouraged to raise a minimum of £120 in sponsorship, the amount it costs Action Cancer to provide digital breast screening for one woman.

Every year Action Cancer helps to save and support 20,000 people across Northern Ireland through the delivery of its services including the provision of 8,000 breast screening appointments at Action Cancer House and on board the Big Bus, supported by SuperValu and Centra. For every 1,000 women screened, an average of six breast cancers are detected – hopefully at an early and treatable stage.

This is only possible because of the continued, generous support Action Cancer receives from the general public in Northern Ireland and through its charity partnership with SuperValu. The charity needs your support now more than ever to continue with the work and help save lives.

Desi Derby, Director of Marketing at Musgrave NI, added: "As a long-term partner of Action Cancer throughout the last 25 years, SuperValu is delighted once again to sponsor this superb event. The Breast Foot Forward Walk is a great opportunity for friends, families, work colleagues and sporting and community groups to come together, have a blast and raise vital funds for this local charity."

Early registration is now open and will run to the end of April with a reduced price of £10 per adult and £5 per child. Everyone taking part will receive a drawstring bag for life and complimentary pink t-shirt. So, grab your BFF or your 4-legged friend, get dressed up in pink, and step your way to the finish line with Action Cancer!

For further information or to register, visit www.actioncancer.org, contact Action Cancer on 028 9080 3344 (option 2) or email breastfootforward@actioncancer.org

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Are you financially prepared? 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.

IN A CLASS OF ITS OWN –THE ALL-NEW, FULLY ELECTRIC VOLVO ES90

Some might say it is a saloon. Others will see a fastback, or even hints of an SUV.

The new, fully electric Volvo ES90 carves out a new space for itself by eliminating the compromises between those three segments, which puts it in a class of its own.

The ES90 combines the refined elegance of a saloon, the adaptability of a fastback, and the spacious interior and higher ground clearance associated with SUVs. It’s a versatile car that does not compromise on comfort or space. A car that allows for bigger adventures and families, striking the perfect balance between your professional and private life, and allowing you to embrace the special moments in life.

The ES90 is designed to evolve over time and is powered by next-generation core computers that represent an eightfold improvement over the previous generation. It’s the first Volvo car with 800V technology for a longer range and faster charging than any electric Volvo before. And naturally, it’s designed with

our pioneering safety tech at its core, in a package that is set to be another Scandinavian design classic from Volvo Cars.

With orderbooks open now in selected markets, the ES90 is the latest addition to our balanced product portfolio of premium Volvo cars. It is the sixth fully electric model in our line-up, joining the EX90, EM90, EX40, EC40 and EX30 as we continue our journey towards full electrification.

“The Volvo ES90 combines our most advanced technologies with Scandinavian design and superior comfort, creating a true premium Volvo car designed to elevate your quality of life,” says Jim Rowan, our CEO. “It joins the EX90 SUV as one of our flagship models and cements our position as an industry leader in software-defined cars that harness the power of core computing.”

Look at the ES90 in profile and what immediately stands out is the car’s confident and

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Comprehensive Services: Bodytec offers a wide range of services to cater to various vehicle repair needs, including:

Accident Management: They can handle all aspects of accident repairs, working directly with major insurance companies to ensure a hassle-free process for their customers. This includes managing the claim, arranging for vehicle inspection, and overseeing the repair work.

Free Collection and Delivery Service: To minimize inconvenience, Bodytec offers a free collection and delivery service for your vehicle. This is especially helpful if your car is not roadworthy after an accident.

Vehicle Inspection

and Insurance Work: Their experienced team can conduct thorough vehicle inspections to assess the damage and provide detailed reports for insurance purposes. They are adept at handling insurance-related repairs and ensuring all work meets the required standards.

Courtesy Cars: Understanding the need for mobility, Bodytec can supply courtesy cars to customers while their vehicles are undergoing repair, ensuring minimal disruption to their daily routines.

Free Estimates: Bodytec provides free, no-obligation estimates for all repair work, offering transparency and allowing customers to understand the costs involved upfront.

Car and Commercial Vehicle Repairs: Their expertise extends beyond cars to include repairs for commercial vehicles and leisure vehicles such as

large vans, small vans, and motorhomes. This makes them a versatile choice for a wide range of vehicle owners.

Skilled Workmanship: Bodytec prides itself on the quality of its work, employing fully qualified metalworkers, painters, and paint preparers. This ensures that all repairs, from minor scratches to major accident damage and paintwork, are carried out to the highest standards.

Quality Assured: They guarantee the quality of their work, aiming to get customers back on the road as quickly as possible with the peace of mind that their vehicle has been repaired to a high standard.

Bodytec Newtownards is proudly associated with CRASH (Collision Repair Accident Support Helpline), an accident management company. This partnership allows Bodytec to provide an even more seamless and supported service to

customers who have been involved in accidents. CRASH can assist with various aspects of post-accident support, further easing the burden on the vehicle owner.

Customer report a high level of satisfaction with Bodytec’s services. Clients often praise their professional service, friendly and experienced staff, attention to detail, and the quality of their workmanship. Many reviewers highlight the smooth and hassle-free dealing from the initial inspection to the completion of the repairs, with each car returned in excellent condition. The company’s commitment to keeping customers updated throughout the repair process is also frequently mentioned as a positive aspect of their service.

Bodytec is located at 129 Quarry Heights, Newtownards, County Down, BT23 7SZ. You can contact them by telephone at 028 9182 1505.

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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, 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. 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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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/>

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

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

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

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

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



for staircases. Insulation installers then ensure the building is energy-efficient. A rough plastering may also occur at this point, preparing the walls for the final finishes.

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

flooring installers lay the chosen flooring materials, completing the interior finish.

The final phase involves external works and landscaping. Pavers and landscapers create outdoor spaces, while fencers install any necessary boundaries.

General labourers handle the final cleanup, ensuring the site is tidy and ready for occupancy. Throughout the entire process, flexibility and effective communication are vital.

Coordinating inspections at required stages and understanding the project’s critical path are also essential for avoiding delays and ensuring a successful outcome.

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