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Issue 232 - BT22 • BT23

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(L-R): On-Call Watch Commander Danny Dickson (Comber Fire Station), Deputy Lieutenant of County Tyrone Revd Canon Matthew Hagan MBE DL, NIFRS Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Aidan Jennings

92 EMPLOYEES RECOGNISED FOR THEIR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO NIFRS

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) has recognised and celebrated 92 employees who have completed 20, 30 or 40 years of service.

The ceremony was held at its Learning & Development College recently and was attended by Deputy Lord Lieutenant of County Tyrone, Reverend Canon Matthew Hagan, NIFRS Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Aidan Jennings,

NIFRS Board Member Paul Kennedy and Health Minister Robbie Butler.

The awards recognise employees in both operational and support roles within NIFRS. Forty-nine operational employees received

20-year long service medals, 7 support employees received 20-year long service pins, 26 operational employees received 30-year clasps and glasses, 2 support employees received 30-year glasses, 6 operational employees

received 40-year clasps and medallions, and 2 support employees received 40-year medallions.

**Continued on
page 4**

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Newtownards Woman Scoops 250k Jackpot Prize

A married woman from Newtownards, County Down, has scooped the top prize of £250K on Merlin's Prize Potions, an Instant Win Game from The National Lottery.

The lucky lady, in her 50s, thought she would try her luck and play a few National Lottery instant win games, but never expected to be so lucky as to win a jackpot prize.

She said: "The feeling when I won was just incredible... I screamed so loudly with excitement that my neighbours wondered what was going on!"

"This win is going to make a huge difference to our lives, and I am so excited at the thought of being able to buy a house and a new car. Dreams really do come true!"

Kathy Garrett, Winners' Advisor at Allwyn, operator of The National Lottery, congratulated the winner, saying: "A huge well done to our lucky Newtownards winner! We

hope she and her husband find the house and car of their dreams, and that their neighbours aren't too worried after hearing her celebratory scream!"

Playing any National Lottery game is more than just a chance to win; it's a way to contribute to something much bigger. Each week, players help generate around £33M for National Lottery-funded projects. With over £53BN raised for Good Causes since launch, this funds hundreds of projects in every postcode area across the UK. From supporting the arts and sport sectors, to empowering local community groups and preserving iconic British landmarks, players' participation makes a difference every single day.

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The Brent are back!

Thousands of Arctic geese return to Castle Espie in one of Northern Ireland's greatest wildlife spectacles

One of the most remarkable wildlife spectacles in Northern Ireland was underway in October as light-bellied Brent geese made their annual return to WWT Castle Espie after an extraordinary 3,000-mile migration for the autumn and winter.

The birds will spend the autumn and winter months around Strangford Lough before beginning their return journey north in spring.

The small, dark-bellied geese have travelled from their breeding grounds in the Canadian High Arctic, making an epic journey that takes them across Greenland and, typically, via Iceland before they reach Strangford Lough.

Around 90% of the world's light-bellied Brent geese gather on Strangford Lough, making it one of the most important places on Earth for this remarkable migratory population. For WWT, their arrival is also an important reminder of the need to protect the wetland habitats on which migratory birds depend.

In October 2025, a census across Strangford



Lough recorded 30,000 Brent geese, with around one quarter of those birds visiting WWT Castle Espie.

The geese are drawn to the lough's extensive eelgrass beds, which provide a vital source of food after their long migration

The geese can be viewed from WWT Castle Espie's Brent Discovery Hide, with the changing tides often bringing feeding and roosting birds closer to the reserve. Visitors may also be able to pick out family groups within the larger flocks. Young Brent geese

have distinctive pale markings along their flanks, offering an opportunity to see the next generation of these long-distance travellers. Maurice Turley, Reserve Manager at WWT Castle Espie, said:

"The return of the Brent geese is one of the real highlights of the year here at WWT Castle Espie. To look out across Strangford Lough and see thousands of birds that have travelled all the way from the Canadian Arctic is an extraordinary experience. What makes

it particularly special is knowing just how important this place is to them. Strangford Lough supports around 90% of the world's light-bellied Brent geese, so what we see here is part of a much bigger international conservation story."

Maurice added: "For visitors, it's a chance to experience migration at its most spectacular. Listen for their calls, watch the flocks moving together over the lough and take a moment to think about the incredible journey each bird has made to get here."

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- Healthy Relationship Programme

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

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• Financial Abuse

• Sexual Abuse

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

Contact us at 02891 273196

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Continued from page 1

Employees were also recognised with commendations for their actions, professionalism and distinguished conduct.

Health Minister Robbie Butler paid tribute to those receiving recognition for their years of service. Minister Butler said: “I want to extend my congratulations to all the long service award recipients from across the service and pay tribute to their remarkable dedication. These colleagues have shown resilience in their commitment to Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, and today we celebrate milestones of 20, 30 and 40 years of protecting our communities and saving lives. Every individual here today represents the commitment, professionalism and teamwork which are at the heart of the fire service, and they should be proud of all they have achieved in their exceptional careers.”

NIFRS Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Aidan Jennings said: “I am deeply honoured to recognise the 92 employees who are being celebrated for their many years of service, and I am equally humbled to be among those receiving this recognition. These awards are a fitting tribute to the skill, courage and commitment that our employees demonstrate on a daily basis.

“Their work plays a vital role in supporting our community. It involves being there when people need us most, often in challenging and unpredictable circumstances, while consistently going above and beyond to help keep the public safe, support people on their worst days, and build trust with the people of Northern Ireland.

“It is a privilege to work alongside such a devoted group of people, and I am proud of the difference they make every single day.”

ABSOLUTELY ARDS AND NORTH DOWN

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

Targeted at visitors seeking authentic experiences, culture lovers and outdoor enthusiasts, Absolutely Ards and North Down celebrates the stunning coastlines, rich heritage, vibrant creative community and exceptional local flavours that can be found across the Borough, while highlighting the people who bring these experiences to life.

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

Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Craig Blaney, said: “We are delighted to launch our autumn tourism campaign, Absolutely Ards and North Down, showcasing everything that makes this area such a special place to visit at this time of year.

“At the heart of this campaign are the people who help shape our tourism offering every day. From local producers and artists to activity providers, gardeners and hospitality businesses, their passion, expertise and stories help create memorable experiences for everyone who visits.

“Through themes including Shoreline Escapes, Historic Discoveries, Creative Connections, Savour the Flavour, Memorable Moments, Stay a While and Travel with Care, we are celebrating the unique experiences available across the Borough and encouraging visitors to



Pictured (L-R) Kyle Lamb, National Trust - Mount Stewart, Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Crai

discover Ards and North Down for themselves.”

Laura Bradley, Indie Fide, said: “Ards and North Down is an area bursting with creativity, innovation and passion, and we are proud to play a part in showcasing this.

“Absolutely Ards and North Down encourages people to discover the array of local flavours we produce and indulge in the stories behind our creations. We’re excited to be part of this campaign, celebrating the area’s talented makers and vibrant community.”

To find out more information about Ards and North Down’s autumn tourism campaign, visit: visitardsandnorthdown.com

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Disney Magic Creates Unforgettable Memories for 20 Northern Ireland Children

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

A group of 44 people, including parents, local health professionals and NICLT representatives, set off on Saturday, 3 October, for two days of Disney magic. The trip was carefully organised to provide a safe, supported and stress-free experience, with medical professionals from Causeway Hospital joining NICLT General Manager Fiona Williamson and board member Anna Kayes.

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

Chelsea Simpson, mum of Franklin, seven, from Carrowdore, Newtownards, said: “Franklin has cystic fibrosis, a genetic condition that affects several parts of his body, particularly his lungs and digestive system. He has been through so much since he was born, including many complications and surgeries, and at one point we nearly lost him. He fought right back and is the most fun-loving, happy boy. He adores the Avengers, superheroes and Mickey Mouse. When we were told he had been chosen to go

to Disneyland Paris, it felt like a dream come true. We are incredibly grateful for this once-in-a-lifetime experience.”

The charity’s Chair, Colin Barkley, highlighted the importance of the trip: “We are committed to giving these incredible children and their families the chance to create unforgettable memories. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, fundraisers and corporate partners - including The Bushmills Inn, WineFlair, C-Tec (NI), CosyRoof, Bells of Crossgar, Energystore, Mango Contact Centre and Send My Bag - we have been able to expand our reach and offer this wonderful Disneyland Paris



Matthew and Chelsea Simpson with daughter Maisie and son Franklin (7) from Carrowdore, Newtownards.

experience in recent years.

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

Each year, Northern Ireland Children to Lapland and Days to Remember Trust takes approximately 80 local children, accompanied by a parent or carer, to Rovaniemi in Finnish Lapland - home of Santa Claus. The trip includes husky and reindeer rides, snowmobile safaris, sleigh rides and, of course, a magical meeting with Santa himself.

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Football Rivals Unite to Raise Vital Funds

Football rivals Ards and Bangor came together for a special community Football and Fun Day ‘Rivals for Good’ event which has raised over £6,000 to help purchase vital paediatric equipment for the Emergency Department at the Ulster Hospital.

The fundraising initiative was inspired by Bangor parents, Nadine and Ryan Chambers after their daughter Alex who, in December 2023, suffered a sudden and devastating brain haemorrhage at just 18 months old. Alex was rushed to the Ulster Hospital Emergency Department where she was taken directly to the Resuscitation Unit and cared for by a team of 23 healthcare professionals before being transferred to the Royal Hospital for Sick Children.

The football and fun day event brought players, families and supporters together at Clondeboyne Park in Bangor for a day celebrating football, inclusion and community spirit with one shared goal, improving emergency care for children and supporting local families.

The event also saw the South Eastern Trust’s Senior Communications Officer, Joy Kennedy take to the pitch with her club, Rosario Women’s Social Team. The team enjoyed a 6-1 victory against Cloughy FC as part of the day’s football tournament.

Nadine said: “This was Alex’s first stop and this will be many other children’s first stop for



emergency care too. Every hospital should be equipped and ready with everything that they need.”

The funds raised will help the Emergency Department purchase equipment specifically identified to support children in emergency care. The equipment such as a silent Nebuliser, used for young children or older children with Learning Disabilities.

A Vein Finder that helps locate veins that are not visible to the eye which reduces the discomfort and distress of failed attempts to draw blood/insert cannulas etc. A baby/neonatal mannequin for training. Distraction and sensory toys that are used to help calm and distract children during examinations or procedures and enhanced sensory equipment to help create an

environment where children who need a quiet, low-stimulation space can feel settled and supported.

Nadine added “I think that every child coming through the door should get the treatment that they need and that the staff have the equipment to provide the best possible care. If we can make a difference for another family, then that’s what it’s all about.”

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W: www.dundonaldhighschool.co.uk

PAINT THE TOWN PINK!

Stormont sets the stage for an unforgettable night of music and song to launch Action Cancer campaign

Action Cancer's Paint the Town Pink fundraising campaign will officially launch this year with an unforgettable evening of music and song in the magnificent surroundings of Stormont's Great Hall on Friday 25 September.

For one night only, Comber Silver Band and Fortwilliam Musical

Society will join forces in a special musical collaboration to mark the beginning of Action Cancer's annual Paint the Town Pink campaign, supported by Action Renewables.

Taking place annually during Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October, Paint the Town Pink raises vital funds for Action Cancer's unique, free breast screening service – the only one of its kind available in the UK and Ireland. Every £120 raised funds one potentially life-saving breast screening appointment for well women aged 40–49 and 70+, groups not covered by the NHS screening

programme.

Businesses across Northern Ireland are encouraged to 'go pink' and host fundraising events throughout October, from coffee mornings and bake sales to dress-down days and pink-themed pub quizzes. Action Cancer will provide participating businesses with a fundraising pack including pink bunting, balloons, collection boxes and creative fundraising ideas.

As the charity receives no government funding for its breast screening programme, it relies heavily on support from the local community and business sector to continue delivering this vital service.

Action Renewables, a leading provider of renewable energy expertise in Northern Ireland and a returning partner of Paint the Town Pink, is once again supporting the campaign in 2026.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women in Northern Ireland, accounting for 30% of all female cancer diagnoses. On average, 1,516 women are diagnosed each year and



Representatives from Fitzwilliam Musical Society, Action Renewables, Action Cancer and Comber Silver Band pictured at Stormont for the launch of Action Cancer's Paint the Town Pink 2026 campaign.

310 die from the disease.

Action Cancer has been at the heart of cancer prevention, detection and support in Northern Ireland for more than 50 years. Its services are free to the user but cost the charity £4

million annually to deliver.

These include an early detection breast screening clinic, therapeutic support for people living with a cancer diagnosis and those supporting a loved one, and a range of health

improvement programmes.

Services are available at Action Cancer House in Belfast, at 13 regional locations and onboard the Big Bus, supported by SuperValu and Centra, which visits 175 locations

each year.

If you or your workplace would like to take part in Paint the Town Pink, please contact Mark Irwin-Watson in the fundraising team on 07580 133752 or email pttp@actioncancer.org

Minister meets veterans taking part in Help for Heroes sports event

Communities Minister Gordon Lyons has met armed forces veterans taking part in a sporting event designed to support health and wellbeing after active service.

Organised by Help for Heroes, the Community Sport Series took recently at Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex in Newtownards. The event brought together veterans and their families to participate in a range of inclusive and accessible sporting activities.

During the visit, the Minister met veterans and their families before joining in a game of

boccia, a Paralympic sport originally designed for athletes with high support needs.

Minister Lyons said: "It was a pleasure to meet veterans and their families and to see first-hand the positive impact events like this can have.

"Sport provides an opportunity to stay active, build confidence, develop new skills and strengthen connections with others who share

similar experiences.

"Our veterans have given so much through their service and it is important that they can access the support they need to live well after leaving the Armed Forces.

"That is why I launched the Veterans Support Line NI earlier this year. The service provides a dedicated and confidential point of contact, helping veterans and their families access benefits, housing support and a wide range of other services.

"My Department is also strengthening support for veterans through improved access to services, enhanced staff training and closer engagement with veterans' organisations to ensure that those who have served our country

face no disadvantage when accessing public services."

Mark Wright, who was a private in the Light Infantry, said: "The Community Sport Series is a great way for veterans to get together and try different activities. It also helps to build a sense of community among veterans."

Mark's wife Fiona said: "I am glad to see initiatives like the Veterans Support Line. Resources like this are much needed to help veterans access vital support."

The Veterans Support Line NI can be contacted on 0800 158 5556 or by texting ADVICE to 07860 042576.

For more information visit www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/veterans-support-line-ni.

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Freshers' Fair Fun for Students

SERC's Students' Union got the year off with some fun at the college's annual Freshers' Fairs.

New and returning students, had the opportunity to meet the Students' Union team and discover the full range of student support services available in SERC as well as engaging with over 40 organisations, charities, local suppliers and businesses including: Army Reserve, Autism Initiatives, Cancer Focus, Cara Friend, Danske Bank, Everlast, Exchange Accountants, Fly Boy Pizza, Good News For Everyone, Habitat for Humanity, Lena, Libraries NI, Women's Aid, NUS-UI, PIPS, Pizza Co., Positive Life, Progressive Building Society, Public Health Authority, Queen's Film Theatre (LUMI), Rainbow Project, Royal Air Force, Samaritans, SET Carers Support Service, Simon Community, Specsavers, The Rainbow Project, Volunteer Now,



Woodland Trust, and Youth Initiatives. Ross Currie, Student Engagement Manager at SERC said, "We were thrilled with the turnout of more than 2700 students attending our annual Freshers' Fairs across SERC's four main campuses at Bangor, Downpatrick, Lisburn and Newtownards. "The fairs form just one of the highlights that kickstart the academic year, and it is great to see so many students make connections, access support and explore activities they can get involved with throughout the year." Ross concluded, "Our Freshers' Fairs would not be a success without the input of the many organisations who support us with their presence. We would like to thank everyone who came along to each of our campuses to engage with our students - many offering giveaways, draws and competitions, which added to the excitement - whilst sharing information about their organisation."

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ROBIN SWANN MP OFFICIALLY OPENS NEW HANNON STEEL FACILITY AT NUTTS CORNER

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

Robin Swann MP, Member of Parliament for South Antrim, joined the HANNON Steel and wider

HANNON Group team on Thursday, 1st October 2026 to officially open the new premises and unveil

a commemorative plaque marking the occasion.

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

The purpose-built facility has significantly

expanded HANNON Steel's capabilities, providing greater space for stockholding and processing, improved customer facilities and a modern base for its daily steel distribution operation across Northern Ireland.

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

Adrian Hannon, Managing Director of HANNON Steel, said:

"The official opening

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

HANNON Steel supplies mild steel products to engineering, fabrication, agricultural, construction and manufacturing businesses across Northern Ireland, supported by its own daily delivery fleet.

The new facility also forms part of the HANNON Group's wider

investment in the former RAF Nutts Corner site and its longer-term plans to develop the location as a base for a number of Group operations.

Robin Swann MP said:

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

"The new warehouse and offices are very impressive and provide a modern working environment for the team, as well as the capacity to support the



continued growth of the business. It is particularly encouraging to see this investment already bringing benefits to the local area through employment and its wider contribution to the

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

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All-female team provides a wide range of life-changing services

Emalyn Turkington is the Chief Executive Officer of North Down & Ards Women's Aid, a specialist organisation dedicated to supporting women, children and young people affected by domestic and sexual abuse across the North Down, Ards and surrounding areas.

With a strong commitment to empowering women, Emalyn leads a passionate

all-female team that provides a wide range of life-changing services, including crisis

accommodation, outreach support, advocacy, children and young people's programmes, awareness raising, and preventative education within local communities.

North Down & Ards Women's Aid is proud to be an organisation built on the principle of "for women, with women, by women." This ethos recognises the importance of women supporting women through lived experience, professional expertise, and a shared

commitment to creating safer communities. As a female-led organisation, NDA Women's Aid provides a safe and understanding environment where women can access support, rebuild confidence, and regain control of their lives free from abuse.

As a leader, Emalyn is passionate about collaboration, innovation, and strengthening opportunities for women. Her work extends beyond service delivery to



developing partnerships with statutory, community, and business sectors to improve outcomes for women and children.

Through her leadership, North Down & Ards Women's Aid continues to champion women's voices, challenge gender-based violence, and support women to thrive, demonstrating the power of women working together to create meaningful and lasting change.

For more information, or to receive support, please contact the Bangor Resource Office on 028 9127 3196, email info@ndawomensaid.org or send a message via our website www.ndawomensaid.org

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A CELTIC CONIFER: THE SCOTS PINE

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

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

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



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

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

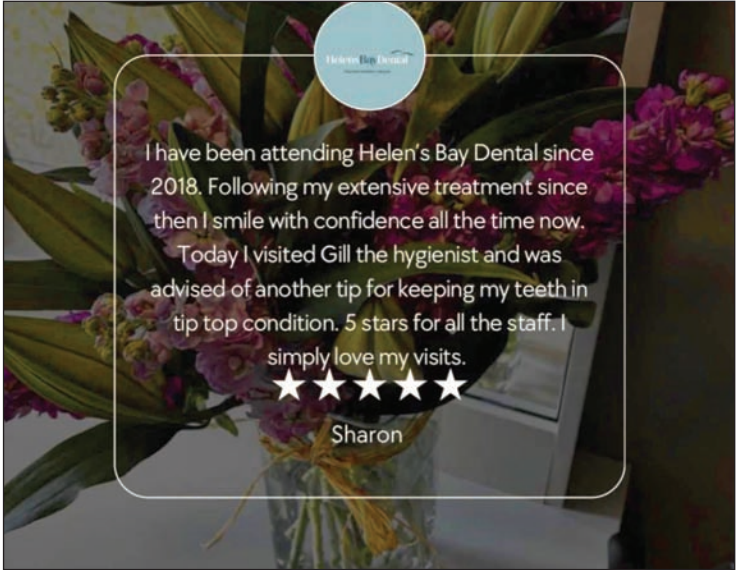
native plant species. There are millions of conifers in commercial plantations throughout Ireland, primarily fast-growing non-natives such as Sitka spruce, which are of minimal biodiversity value or none, and we need to do more to promote, protect and cherish our native trees, particularly our ancient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

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includes two nights' accommodation, a three-course dinner on both evenings in the hotel's elegant 1836 Ballroom Restaurant, breakfast each morning and complimentary access to the Giant's Causeway Visitor Experience.

Away from the crowds of summer, the season offers a chance to truly appreciate the tranquillity and natural beauty that make this corner of Northern Ireland so special. Explore the coastline at your own pace, breathe in the fresh

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Fabulous New Flavours for Christmas from Glastry Farm Ice Cream

Christmas is a very special time for families, coming together possibly for the first time in a busy year, talking together, rejoicing together on all that is good in life, eating together with good food.

Here at Glastry Farm we recognise the importance of the season of goodwill and have produced a trio of Xmas flavours for your dinner table. POACHED PEAR & MULBERRY WINE, CHRISTMAS PUDDING and D U N V I L L E WHISKEY ice-cream with our association with Echlinville Distillery and their Award winning products. All will be available in 5 litre format in hotels and restaurants with the one litre packs available in retail format in farm shops and stores throughout the area.

We have a bevy of ice-creams that suit every palate and taste, independently assessed by judges from across the British Isle. A series of Great Taste Awards proves the quality of the range and our Vanilla Bean ice-cream was honoured as the named dessert on the menu for the Irish Food "Oscars" recently in the Mansion House,



Dublin.

The latest development in our range is a range of lactose free, low fat, lower sugar sorbets with the highest fruit content on the market.

For those customers looking for a healthier option just look for our ACAI BERRY, MANGO & PASSION FRUIT or RASPBERRY RUFFLE sorbets. To introduce the range to the Christmas table we have included POACHED PEAR & MULBERRY WINE, a unique combination in sorbet format of a very

traditional favourite.

In 20 years we have made tremendous progress from Glastry, "the townland of the green pastures" with our lush pastures, our pedigree dairy herd with superb milk quality, the essential ingredient of great products, state of the art equipment and great highly qualified staff, our Production Manager, Joanna, is working on a super new flavour for 2027, But our most valuable asset, is you the faithful customer base who appreciate, healthy, local food!

CANCER FOCUS NI WELCOMES MAJOR EXPANSION OF BOWEL CANCER SCREENING PROGRAMME

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

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

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

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

"We strongly welcome today's announcement. This is a significant and positive step in the right direction and one that Cancer Focus NI has been calling for.

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

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

There is also a second important issue that needs to be addressed, which is the sensitivity of the screening test itself. Northern Ireland currently uses a FIT threshold of 120 micrograms of



blood per gram of faeces. Scotland and Wales use the more sensitive threshold of 80, while England is now moving from 120 to 80, with its phased rollout due to be completed by March 2028.

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

future reductions in Northern Ireland's threshold, but we want to see clear ambition and a pathway for delivering this change also.

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

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

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Boosting the Regional Economy

When you buy from an independent retailer, a significantly higher percentage of your money stays within the local economy. Small business owners buy from local suppliers, hire local staff and pay taxes that fund essential community services. A single purchase at a neighbourhood butcher or bookshop creates a ripple effect. It

directly supports local families, drives regional growth and keeps high streets vibrant.

Unmatched Quality and Expertise

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

Preserving Community Identity



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

safety and belonging.

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

Hello Hygge: Why Winter Wins

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

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

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

The season also turns social in a smaller and kinder way. Psychological research describes winter social hibernation as health protective behaviour. You gather with fewer people



but with more warmth. You talk longer and listen better.

Outside there is plenty to enjoy. Many towns hold winter festivals and parades and outdoor markets. You can wrap up warm and gather by firepits and lose yourself in the night sky. Northumberland

and the Yorkshire Dales hold stargazing safaris and events throughout the winter months.

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

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

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

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New Year Open Day at Dundonald High

Dundonald High is a controlled co-educational secondary school. It opened in the early 1970s as Dundonald Boys High School before merging with the girls' school in 1990.

Today enrolment stands around 600 with an admissions number of 120 new places annually. The school is soon to benefit from significant investment. Seven months ago it was announced that funding has been secured from the Department of Education for a brand new sports hall and state-of-the-art synthetic all weather sports pitch! Fantastic additions to all already impressive school campus.

The school will open its doors for its Open Day on Saturday 23rd January 2027 from 10am to 1pm.

Families are invited to visit for the Principal's address which will take place at 10:30 and 11:30 am and an opportunity to look around the facilities and get a look at daily life at Dundonald High School.

Led by Acting Principal Ms Rosemary Bird, Dundonald High is a caring school in the heart of the community. It aims to provide education that enables academic success and shapes confident resilient individuals prepared for life beyond school. The school pledges an inclusive



environment that celebrates diversity and ensures every child feels safe and empowered. The school motto Absque Labore Nihil translates as 'Nothing Without Labour', still

a focus central to the school ethos of effort and reward.

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Research shows high quality early childhood education and care can have positive and long lasting impacts on outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged children. Benefits grow when care is warm and responsive and when staff are well trained and stable.

The Study of Early Education and Development followed 3,930 children and families. Children who attended more hours per week between ages two and four had significant cognitive and socio-emotional advantages.

Those benefits were felt regardless of family disadvantage.

Quality matters most. Children in high quality formal group settings such as nursery and playgroup showed increased non-verbal cognitive development and fewer behavioural problems by age four. They showed better self-regulation and fewer peer problems. Children who spent more time with childminders were also found to have fewer emotional difficulties such as fears and worries.

There is a link to later learning too. Studies of early years provision found children who attended early education were almost eight months ahead in literacy and numeracy compared to those who did not. That early advantage helps future achievement in primary and secondary school.

Social and emotional growth is central. Early interventions were found to have lasting benefits in preventing mental health issues and fostering positive relationships. Emotional competence

at three to four years contributes to social competence in kindergarten and beyond.

Good settings work closely with families. Relationships play a huge role and home learning still matters. The best nurseries share routines, listen to parents and support independence, curiosity and wellbeing every day.

Choose a place where staff know your child by name and where play has purpose. That foundation makes school feel less daunting and far more exciting.

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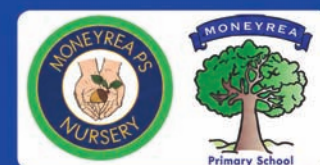
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AGEnda's Christmas campaign to reduce loneliness and isolation in older people.

AGE north down & ards (AGEnda), serves as a vital pillar for the community in the North Down and Ards area, focusing on the health and holistic wellbeing of local older residents.

The organisation's primary mission is to promote good health, financial stability, and overall wellness among the local population, ensuring that the process of ageing is met with dignity and robust social support. Recently, the organisation has expanded its reach by launching a specialised Carers' Support Project. This initiative, made possible through significant funding from The National Lottery Community Fund Northern Ireland, specifically targets individuals aged 65 and older who find themselves

in a caregiving role for family members or friends within the region.

AGEnda's Carers' Support Project is designed to address the unique challenges faced by older caregivers, particularly the risks of loneliness and social isolation that often accompany such responsibilities. By fostering connection and focusing on improved mental health, AGEnda provides a lifeline for those who might otherwise feel disconnected from their community. To achieve these goals, the organisation facilitates

various engagement opportunities, including personalised home visits and "Carers' Circles," which consist of small, informal groups that meet in local areas. Beyond these social meetings, AGEnda also hosts specific activities, workshops, and events tailored to improving wellbeing, while providing essential signposting to other relevant organisations and local community supports.

In addition to targeted carer support, AGEnda operates the "Good Morning Call," a service centred on the safety

and independence of its clients. This program provides regular check-in calls that ensure clients are safe and well, allowing them to remain in their own homes for as long as possible. The value of this service extends beyond the client, as it offers a friendly voice for conversation and provides family members with invaluable peace of mind knowing that their loved ones are being checked on. Furthermore, the Floating Support Service offers short-term advice and practical assistance to help clients maintain

their independence both at home and within the wider community, effectively reducing social isolation.

In the next few months AGEnda will be continuing with the annual Christmas campaign to reduce loneliness and isolation and improve mental health and wellbeing. Older people are supported through telephone support, circles, social activities and delivering a handmade Christmas card and a small gift to over 300 older people's homes in person by our staff and volunteers throughout



the North Down & Ards areas.

For those wishing to support this vital work with local older people, the organisation accepts donations via cash, bank

transfer, cheque, or a convenient QR code. Community members can access these services or learn more by contacting AGEnda at 02891271968 or via email at agenda@

agenorthdownards.co.uk. Their official website, www.agenorthdownards.co.uk, also provides additional information on their diverse range of services.

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Planning a city break in Glasgow? Skip the airport queues and travel stress and choose the Belfast-Glasgow Express with HANNON Coach & Sail—a comfortable, hassle-free way to reach the heart of Scotland’s largest city.

Now departing from the new Belfast Grand Central Station, this award-winning service offers a smooth coach-and-ferry journey straight into Glasgow city centre, making it the perfect alternative to flying. Already a firm favourite with seasoned travellers, the Belfast-Glasgow Express is proudly rated 5-Star on TripAdvisor.

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destination outside London, with its famous ‘Style Mile’ offering unbeatable retail therapy.

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The service operates twice daily from Belfast Grand Central Station (Stand 18) and drops passengers at Glasgow Buchanan Bus Station, close to the Style Mile and



a wide range of excellent city-centre hotels.

Company Director Aodh Hannon says the service’s popularity comes down to convenience and simplicity. “People love the fact that it’s so hassle-free compared to flying, no airport transfers and with no extra

charge for luggage it is a massive help with keeping the cost of a break down.”

Bookings can be made online at www.hannoncoach.com, or by phone through HANNON’s friendly booking team on 028 9265 0700 (Monday-Friday).

WAYS TO WARM UP THIS WINTER

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

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

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

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

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

Feed your inner furnace. Eat at least one hot meal each day and enjoy regular hot drinks. Porridge and stews and soup warm you from inside while tea or coffee lifts morale. Having hot drinks like tea or coffee will warm you from inside during a cold snap.

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

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THE CHRISTMAS COUNTDOWN THAT SAVES YOUR PURSE

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

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

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

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

At six weeks tackle home decoration with a tight limit. You do not have to spend a lot on decor to make your home look festive.

Check what you already own before buying anything new. Thread ribbon

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

In the final three weeks go granular with separate pots

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

Get protection against potentially serious virus

The Public Health Agency (PHA) is encouraging everyone who is eligible for the Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) vaccine to get it when invited. RSV is a common virus and highly infectious virus which affects the airways and lungs.

The RSV vaccination programme in Northern Ireland is available to all adults aged

75 years or older and to all residents in care homes for older adults, regardless of

age. Pregnant women are also offered the RSV vaccine from 28 weeks of preg-

nancy, to provide protection to their babies from birth.

Vaccination is being offered to:

- All adults aged 75 years and over
- All residents in care homes for older adults, regardless of age.

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

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

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

Pregnant women
Pregnant women will be offered the vaccine from 28 weeks into their pregnancy. The timing of the vaccine offer will help protect their newborn babies from serious illness caused by an RSV infection.

The RSV vaccine can be accessed via HSC Trusts – speak to your midwife for further information.

View information on the RSV vaccine at Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) vaccine for older adults | indirect and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) vaccine for pregnant women | indirect

Wool is a Natural Choice for Winter

Wool has kept us warm through centuries and remains a natural choice for winter. Its fibres trap air and regulate temperature without reliance on synthetic layers. Wool breathes, resists odour and feels soft against skin in cold weather.

Every year sheep produce a new fleece making wool a completely renewable fibre source. When disposed of wool will naturally decompose in soil in a matter of months. It slowly releases valuable nutrients and carbon back into the soil. Wool also uses less energy and water than many other fibres during production. Its durability counters fast fashion and encourages longer active lifespan for clothing. Natural fibres also avoid plastic shedding that harms oceans and waterways.

Wool offers natural

beauty that synthetic fabrics struggle to match. Its texture holds rich colour and keeps shape after long wear. From chunky cables to fine merino layers wool brings warmth and elegance together. The soft drape and natural lustre of wool elevate everyday winter outfits. It layers beautifully over shirts and under coats without bulk.

Choosing British wool supports local farmers and rural communities directly. British Wool supports research into new markets and subsidises shearing training

across the UK. Projects like the Clapdale Wool Project create a circular economy and feed profits directly back to local farmers. Buying traceable British yarn helps maintain flock numbers and rural skills. It keeps value within local supply chains rather than overseas factories.

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



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Key Workers In Line For up to £7,000 Savings at Mervyn Stewart MG & Suzuki, Bangor

Mervyn Stewart MG and Suzuki is rewarding public service with significant savings. The Bangor dealership is offering up to £7,000 off a new MG and up to £5,000 off a new Suzuki

The offer is available for Military, Blue Light, Public Sector, Civil Service and NHS staff. The company is a proud member of the Suzuki Griffin and MG Affinity schemes. These schemes provide dedicated discounts on selected models. Full savings by make and model can be viewed on the Mervyn Stewart website. Motability options are available from nil advance payment, models include the Swift, Vitara and eVitara. The Suzuki

range features the S-Cross and MG4 EV. Scan the QR codes to check eligibility. Mervyn Stewart is one of Northern Ireland's most established family-run dealerships with over 60 years of experience. The group operates award-winning showrooms in Belfast and Bangor and proudly represents MG and Suzuki. Mervyn Stewart also offers Motability, fleet solutions, servicing and maintenance. The business expanded in 2021



after acquiring family dealership Philip Petersen. The South Circular Business Park site in Bangor became its first Suzuki franchise. That showroom offers

new and used sales alongside EV charging and aftersales support. Since opening in 1993 the Suzuki operation has grown from strength to strength. The team



won the national Suzuki Award of UK Number 1 Retailer for Customer Service in 2018. The Suzuki dealership is located at South Circular

Business Park, Bangor, BT19 7AG. The MG dealership is at 5 Greenway, Conlig BT23 7SU. More details are available at www.mervynstewart.com.

Autism NI's '12 Runs of Christmas' Challenge

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

The '12 Runs of Christmas' is a virtual running challenge which asks participants to complete twelve runs during the month of December for Autism NI. Autism NI's Fundraising and Events Officer, Ruth Brown-Kerr said: "We're delighted to launch our '12 Runs of Christmas' challenge and invite people across Northern Ireland to get involved. Whether you're an experienced runner or just starting out, this is a fun way to take on a personal challenge while raising vital funds for autistic people and their families. December is also a very

busy time for our services, as families navigate the challenges around Christmas. Therefore, this challenge is aiming to help us raise £10,000 collectively to support our Helpline service and our parent and carer support courses. Every person who takes part and every pound raised will help us continue providing these vital services. It is free to sign up and take part in the '12 Runs of Christmas' challenge. Supporters are also asked to raise £80 each to fund local autism services. To receive a free fundraising pack, please visit www.autismni.org or email events@autismni.org.

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The magazine cover features two young girls wearing bunny ears and holding Easter eggs. Text on the cover includes 'Family Focus', 'Jacksons OF SAINTFIELD | MODA', 'GARDEN FURNITURE SALE 1/2 PRICE FASHION', 'HEALTHY LIVING SALE', 'HARDWARE SALE', 'CONCRETE, SHEDS, OUTDOORS', 'SALE NOW ON', 'Fostering changes lives', 'Now more than ever, we need foster carers like you', 'Foster with us', and 'actionforchildren.org.uk/fostering'.

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

Three Night Package

Starting from £1090 for two people and includes:

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

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GET THE TREE
DONE IN AN HOUR

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

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

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

Follow a strict layering order to save time. The most efficient sequence is tree setup and fluffing then lights then garlands and ribbon then ornaments and



topper. Always put lights first so cords hide behind branches and baubles. Balsam Hill also advises decorating in layers starting with lights then ribbons then ornaments. Aim for about thirty lights

per foot of height and spiral from base upwards.

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

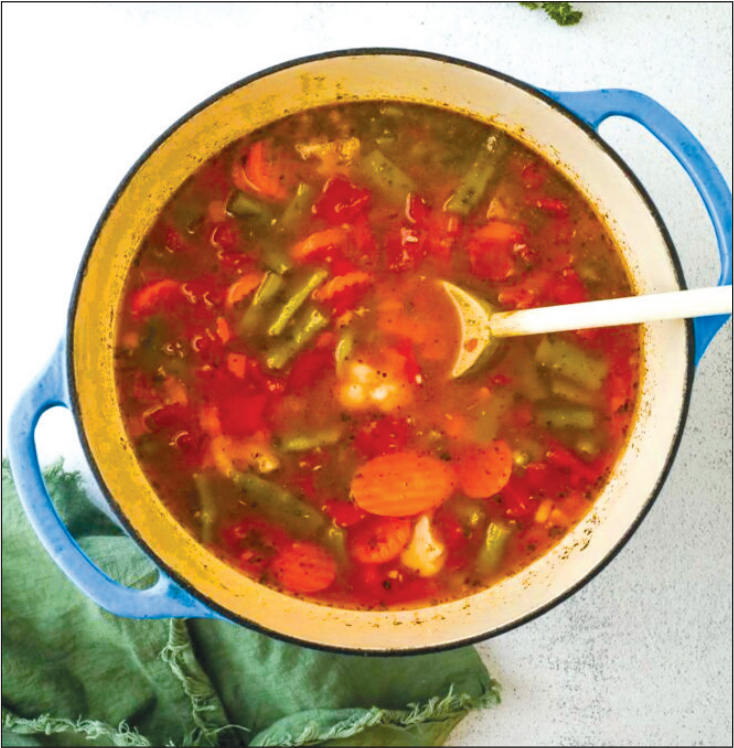
support and layer smaller ones towards tips. Add filler picks before showcase pieces. Finish with skirt or collar and topper. Choosing pre-lit trees makes setup easier and gives you more time to decorate.

Freeze Now Feast Later

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

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

Gravy is worth making now while you have time to do it properly. Use chicken wings and roasted vegetables for deep flavour then freeze flat. Soups and stews make easy suppers for busy nights in late November. Parsnips and carrots can be part roasted and then frozen on trays. Deserts love the freezer too. Christmas pudding is already made but brandy butter can be rolled and frozen. Freeze cookie dough in logs so you can slice and bake fresh for



guests.

Label everything with date and contents and use within three months. Defrost slowly in the fridge overnight and never refreeze raw meat. Use reusable containers and avoid single use plastic

where you can. Shop local for meat and veg and ask your butcher for freezer ready cuts.

A tidy freezer now means more time for markets and lights later. Cook in small batches and you will thank yourself on

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





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Gifts For The Impossible Ones

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

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

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

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

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



keeps giving beyond December.

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

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

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

A GREENER CHRISTMAS

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

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

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

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

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



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





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ADDING TEXTURE TO YOUR HOME

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

For a reason unbeknown to many, texture seems to be an afterthought when it comes to interior design. However it is this very element that will make a room pop, giving it that extra edge of aesthetic pleasure.

Texture is often primarily associated with the sensation of touch; however it can also really impact on how we view a room. In many ways, it is the perceived sense of touch that we derive pleasure from – if a velvet sofa looks particularly smooth or a blanket seems notably soft then even if we do not experience it first hand, we can appreciate it.

Modern interior design demands a variety of contrasting textures for space to feel complete and these can range in colour, function and style. If everything in a room is the same texture, then our eyes have trouble



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

In terms of furniture,

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

or granite tabletops and even exposed brick work.

If it is a quick texture fix that you are looking for, adding satin cushion covers or wicker storage boxes could be exactly what you need.

Getting On the Property Ladder – Advice for First Time Buyers

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

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

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



time-buyers do have an advantage here as they will pay no Stamp Duty on the first £300,000 for properties valued up to £500,000.

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

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

There are a number of

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

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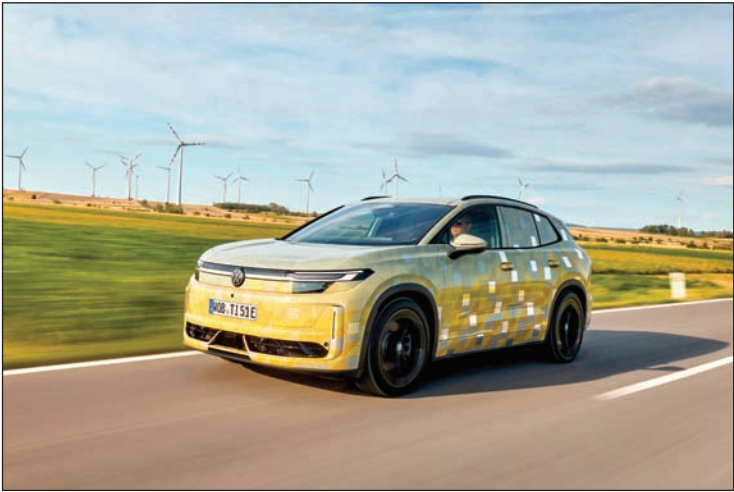
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Electric future, established name:The new ID.Tiguan

Volkswagen is continuing its naming strategy with its next model: following the ID. Polo and ID. Cross, the new ID. Tiguan will arrive at the markets in the beginning of 2027.

The established name is intended to provide customers with clear orientation and stands as a strong product brand for a clearly defined vehicle concept. The new ID. Tiguan will succeed the ID.4 and ID.5 and will be offered alongside the Tiguan with combustion and hybrid powertrains.

The world premiere of the ID. Tiguan took place in early October, Thomas Schäfer, CEO Volkswagen Brand, Head of Brand Group Core and Member of the Board of Management of Volkswagen AG: “More than 8.3 million Tiguan vehicles produced demonstrate the strength and trust associated with this model name. The Tiguan represents a versatile, premium vehicle and embodies the essence of True Volkswagen. With the ID. Tiguan, we are carrying this product promise into the electric future.



The allelectric model builds on the strengths of the bestseller and offers premium design, generous space, intuitive operation and innovative technologies. Together, both models form a strong offering for our customers’ different powertrain preferences.” A strong product brand. The importance of SUVs in this segment

for Volkswagen is illustrated by the following figures: The Tiguan is currently the best-selling model worldwide for both the Volkswagen brand and the Volkswagen Group. In the past year alone, deliveries of the Tiguan and its sister model, the Tayron, exceeded one million units. Both models are available

with petrol, diesel and plug-in hybrid powertrains. In the allelectric segment, the ID.4 and its fastback counterpart, the ID.5, are also highly successful. With more than 950,000 units delivered since 2021, they rank among the most successful battery-electric vehicle (BEV) model series of Volkswagen AG.

EV CHOICE DOUBLES AS NEW MODEL HITS UK MARKET EVERY FORTNIGHT

British drivers are being offered more electric car choice than ever, with manufacturers launching the equivalent of one fully electric model every fortnight for the past three years, according to new research by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT).

85 new battery electric (BEV) car models have reached the UK market since 2023 – doubling the number available to 171.1 They sit alongside 109 plug-in hybrid (PHEV) and 52 hybrid electric (HEV) models, meaning three quarters (76%) of the UK’s market offering is now capable of driving without tailpipe emissions. The breadth of choice is the result of sustained investment by manufacturers, with new vehicles typically taking between three to five years to develop and bring to market.

UK new car buyers can choose from some 385 models across every powertrain and from more than 60 global brands. It makes Britain one of the world’s most diverse and competitive car markets, with options to suit every budget, lifestyle and driving need. Electric cars are now available in every segment – from compact city cars and family hatchbacks to executive saloons, SUVs and sports cars – while strong manufacturer discounts and the Government’s Electric Car Grant are helping to make the switch more



affordable.

The expansion in choice reflects the automotive sector’s leadership in the UK’s transition to zero emission driving. Manufacturers are investing billions in new technologies, battery development, vehicle platforms and production facilities, bringing increasingly sophisticated cars to market with greater efficiency, performance and range. Full EVs are now typically able to travel more than 300 miles on a single charge, well above the 127 miles driven weekly by the average UK driver.

That investment is

also delivering for the environment, with the rapid rollout of battery electric cars alongside advances across hybrid

and conventional engine technologies, helping to cut new car CO2 emissions by more than half a million tonnes a year.

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SHOULD YOU USE YOUR AIR-CON IN THE WINTER?

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

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

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

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

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

Why does my air-con smell?

If you’ve noticed a musty or unpleasant smell coming from your car’s air conditioning, you’re not alone. A smelly car air-con system is usually caused by bacteria, mould and moisture building up inside the ventilation system, particularly if the air conditioning hasn’t been used regularly.

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

To get rid of bad smells from your car air conditioning, try using an air-con antibacterial cleaner or disinfectant treatment designed for vehicle ventilation systems. Replacing the cabin air filter can also improve air quality and airflow if it’s become clogged with dust, pollen and debris.



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

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

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

While you’re unlikely to cause too much in the way of genuine damage to your system, it’s generally not recommended to travel for too long with both your window open and your air-con on.

Primarily, it’s not economical. If the air-con is running, closed windows will keep the cool air inside the car and keep the temperature moderate. What’s more, the open windows let warm air inside the car, which also puts stress on the air-con system potentially leading to problems.

As a rule of thumb, if it’s hotter and more humid outside the car than it is inside, you’re losing out to have the

air-con running with the windows open.

Does air conditioning affect electric vehicle range?

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

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

One way to minimise the effect on range is to pre-condition the vehicle while it’s still plugged in and charging. Many electric

cars allow drivers to cool the cabin before setting off, meaning less battery power is needed once the journey begins.

It’s also worth noting that cooling the cabin with air conditioning generally uses less energy than heating it in cold weather. Many newer EVs are fitted with heat pumps, which are more efficient than traditional resistive heating systems and can help reduce the impact on driving range throughout the year.

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

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

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WAKING UP TO WET WINDOWS?

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

In winter this is worse because glass stays much colder while heating and daily life create more moisture inside.

The problem is simple physics. Cooking and

showering and drying clothes indoors all add vapour to the air. When that moisture has nowhere to go it settles on the coldest surface in the home which is often your windows.



That is why condensation appears in the morning and why only interior glass is wet. Condensation issues always increase during winter when external temperatures are low and internal temperatures tend to be high.

Left alone it causes more than a wet sill. Lots of condensation can lead to dampness which can cause mould growth on blinds and walls and ceilings. When a surface has condensation on it this can provide ideal conditions for growth of mould spores.

You can reduce it without major work. Open windows each day to ensure good airflow and try to do this in

the morning. If your home is not well ventilated that moisture settles on cold surfaces and eventually causes mould and damp. Use extractor fans when cooking or bathing and dry clothes outside whenever you can. Wipe condensation off windows and surfaces each morning to stop moisture sitting.

Heat also helps. It is important to keep rooms heated to prevent condensation as this keeps water vapour from cooling too much. Keep heating on low and steady and keep trickle vents open. Doing this while keeping windows or vents open will help excess moisture escape

Boiler Dead? Check This First

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

Start with the basics that often get missed. Follow this checklist to diagnose the problem with your broken boiler. Check the electricity supply and check the gas or oil supply and check the water supply. Look at the fuse box and the boiler switch and make sure the gas meter has credit. Low pressure is a common cause so check the boiler pressure and top up if the gauge is below one bar.

Next check the controls. Check the thermostat and programmer and make sure timers have not reset after a power cut. Many



modern units have a fault code display so check for boiler fault codes and note them for the engineer. Does the boiler have a

reset button and if the boiler has a permanent pilot light has it been extinguished. Press reset once and wait to see if it relights.

In freezing weather check for frozen pipes as this stops the boiler firing. The condensate pipe outside often freezes and you can thaw it with warm water. Listen for gurgling and look for dripping. Clear the blockage and reset the

boiler again.

If nothing works call a professional. Have your boiler inspected and serviced by a Gas Safe registered engineer ideally before the cold weather kicks in. An annual service is part of healthy boiler maintenance and will help reduce the risk of a breakdown when you need it the most. Regular checks clean main components and ensure the boiler is ready for use.



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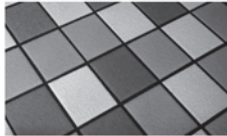
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LOOK UP BEFORE THE STORM HITS

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Glow Safe This Christmas

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

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

Health and safety

goes beyond electrics. Switch off fairy lights and unplug them before bed or when leaving the house. Use a sturdy ladder on level ground and ask someone to foot it.

Keep cables away from paths where neighbours could trip. Check that clips and hooks are secure so displays do not fall in winter winds. Battery boxes and transformers should stay dry and sheltered. Keep inflatables and ladders clear of overhead power lines.

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

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

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

Plan early and you can sparkle safely without overspending.

Lights Out? Be Ready

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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