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# 18 MONTHS & €20,000 FINE

A Wicklow town solicitor and former developer has received a 18 month suspended sentence and a €20,000 fine for attempted deception, arising out of the non-payment of the financial contribution owed to the local authority on an apartment complex he developed.

Patrick O'Toole (63) of The Old Rectory, Wicklow Town, had pleaded not (NOT) guilty to a total of six counts at Dublin Circuit Criminal Court. Following a trial, a jury found him not guilty of a single count of corruption, but guilty of three counts of deception and two counts of attempted deception.

On the corruption count, it was alleged that on an unknown date

in the summer of 2006, he procured or counselled the then Wicklow Town Clerk, Frank O'Toole (no relation) to furnish a letter incorrectly stating that he had paid the €64,840 in financial contributions the accused owed to Wicklow Town Council for the development of an apartment complex in the town.

In 2015, the former town clerk, Frank O'Toole, was given a 18

month suspended sentence and fined €10,000 for corruption after being convicted of furnishing the letter, which read: "I wish to confirm that the financial contribution in respect of this development has been paid."

At his trial his defence Senior Counsel claimed that his client, Frank O'Toole, was being "Thrown under the bus."

The sentencing judge



Members of the Arklow Fire Service with young visitors at the Arklow Fire Station Open Day last week. Pic: Michael Kelly

in that case noted that there was no evidence that Frank O'Toole had benefitted from the offence.

The two men are not related, and Frank O'Toole, who is now in his 70s, was a State witness in the recent trial against Patrick O'Toole.

The three counts of deception against Patrick O'Toole alleged that he had used the false letter to dishonestly induce solicitors acting for purchasers of a number of the apartments to complete the purchases. These related to dates in 2006, 2007 and 2008.

There were two counts of attempted deception, one in 2008 and one in 2012 in which it was alleged that he attempted to dissuade Wicklow Town Council from seeking the money by sending the same false letter.

He also suggested

that the council contact Frank O'Toole himself about the matter. The council did, and that led to the Garda investigation.

Frank O'Toole told the solicitor's trial that he did not want to supply the letter for the defendant, but did so as he believed that the money would be paid after the sale of the apartments.

"I knew he was a solicitor, a man of honour, a man I trusted. I couldn't entertain the idea that he wouldn't honour a commitment to pay," testified the now retired Frank O'Toole. "We had a financial impasse here. If I could give him a letter, he'll get his conveyancing done, the council would get their money and the people would get their houses."

Patrick O'Toole maintained his innocence when interviewed by

gardai, and said that he had not understood it to be a false letter.

A number of solicitors from the local area also gave evi-

dence of his good character.

Continued on page 6

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# Sea Swim to aid local charities

Five local causes will benefit from Bray Lions Club annual Charity Sea Swim, to be held on New Year's Day 2025. They include two Special Schools- Marino Community School and Newcourt as well as Bray Womens Refuge, WH Five Loaves and Bray Lions Christmas Dinners project.

Bray Lions has this year taken over the Christmas Dinners project from the Knights of St. Columbanus. It involves the distribution on Christmas Day of dinners and treats to the homes of 150 people in need. The preparation, packing and distribution of the dinners will be undertaken by Bray Lions members and supporting volunteers.

The Charity Swim has been part of the New Year tradition in Bray since 1984 when it was established with the dual purposes of having some fun and raising funds for local charities. The annual event has to date realised more than €400,000 for a long list of worthy local causes.

This year the swim will take place opposite The Martello, whose owners are providing changing facilities for the swimmers and post-swim hospitality.

A team of Bray Lions will provide stewarding, communications and safety services and Lions will also take up a bucket collection on the seafront.

Swimmers can collect sponsorship cards from Quinn's Pharmacy, Quinsborough Road, Bray or The Martello and can also register on the day.

Says Bray Lions President Karl O'Broin: "We are honoured to continue to organise this traditional event in Bray again this year. We are confident of the good turn-out of swimmers and spectators and we look forward to the traditionally generous response of the people of Bray to our fundraising on the day."



Martin O'Rourke, Diane Parsons, Jonathan Smoothery and Katie Hempenstall at the Sunbeam House Services Christmas party in Lucinda Lodge.



Bray Lions members fundraising at last year's New Year's Swim.

# Person of the Year community award for Kathleen Kelleher

Having arrived in Greystones in 1973, the Boston-born Kathleen Kelleher quickly threw herself into volunteer work in the local community. She's now been named Greystones Person of the Year.

From Greystones Cancer Support to the Paddy's Day committee, Meals On Wheels, the Holyhead Twin Town committee and becoming a local councillor to the Greystones Active Retirement Association and the Public Participation Network, this is a woman who likes to keep busy. Especially when it comes to helping those around here. Which is why, after a staggering 51 years of doing just that, Kathleen Kelleher has been awarded the Greystones Person of the Year 2024.

Sponsored by EBS Greystones, manager Danny O'Connor said, "This feels like an award Kathleen could have gotten decades ago so, we're delighted that this remarkable woman has finally gotten the recognition she deserves." For her part, Kathleen simply said, "I'm speechless..."



Kathleen Kelleher.

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## Shankill Classical Music Club

The next meeting is on Wednesday 8th January. Usual time - 7:45 to 10:00 pm, including a teabreak; and venue - Shankill Day Centre, Lower Rd, Shankill (100 yds from the main street, car parking available). The February meeting will be on Wednesday 12th February.

The music will be as always: a varied programme of classical music on CDs, covering many genres - orchestral, instrumental, vocal,

opera etc. - in a friendly setting. Visitors and new members are always welcome. You don't need to be an expert! There's no charge on the night. For further info phone or text John at 0872109175.

## Bray Lions Club New Year's Day Swim

Save the date! The Bray Lions Club's annual New Year's Day fundraising swim will be held on Wednesday 1st January at 12 noon. The meeting point is The Martello. The swim will raise

funds for the Lions Club's Christmas dinner deliveries, W.H. Five Loaves, Bray Women's Refuge, Marino Special School, and New Court School.

## New meet-up group

A new monthly meet-up group has been created for people who are new (or newish) around the Wicklow town, Rathnew and Ashford area. The group was set up on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/14358749836>)

69459) by Alexander Kenny in January this year and now has about 1,000 members. The group is to help people connect and make new friends as it can be challenging to do so in a new town. "It's all about building connections and many members have told me how much they value the group," Alexander says.

## Wicklow Mountains National Park

Great news from the Spinc. The new trail is now completed and open for walkers. The WHITE, RED & BLUE trails are now open again without any detours.

## Become a Foroige Club Volunteer

Foroige is Ireland's leading youth development organisation. "We believe profoundly in the potential of every young person." Applicants must be 18+, complete an online application, garda vetting clearance and induction training. How to apply: Contact Edel McGrath, County Wicklow, 086 237 8067, email: edel.mcgrath@foroige.ie. www.foroige.ie.

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# Cliff walk assessment goes out to tender

Wicklow County Council has gone out to tender to carry out a comprehensive assessment of the Bray to Greystones Cliff Walk. This iconic route, which has faced a series of ongoing challenges, including erosion, landslides, and maintenance issues, will undergo a thorough evaluation to ensure its safety, sustainability, and accessibility. The closing date for the receipt of tender applications is February 7th, 2025.

Once commenced, it is expected that a report will take one month to process and complete. Wicklow County Council has applied to the Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government for funding for this phase of the project.

Cllr Stephen Stokes has welcomed the move by Wicklow County Council, and commended their recent actions to find a long term resolution. This includes the re-establishment of the Cliff Walk management committee, which is now meeting regularly.

Cllr Stokes stated: "Getting positive momentum for the Cliff Walk is essential. There is significant activity happening, which includes engagement with Irish Rail. Wicklow County Council is acutely aware of how important the Cliff Walk is to the community, and I support their plan of action. Assessing the Cliff Walk in a holistic manner is vital. It's time to pursue a decisive and comprehensive plan."

The tender process will identify qualified experts to examine issues affecting the Cliff Walk. The successful company will firstly be asked to inspect a number of key areas including: the condition of the Cliff Walk, the integrity of the rock face along Bray Head, and the identification of all points along the trail that are at risk of collapse due to the effects of coastal and surface water erosion. Additionally the report shall seek to identify possible solutions, that could be implemented in the short to medium term in order to reopen the Cliff Walk in its current location. At a minimum this analysis is expected to focus on the risk to the public of a hazard occurring regardless of measures implemented, the cost of the measures, the expected lifespan of mea-

asures, and the environmental impact of proposed measures. Finally the safety, health and welfare risks associated with the implementation proposed measures should be looked at. The Sport Ireland Outdoors publication 'Walking Trails - Criteria for Ireland' shall serve as the reference document in determining the appropriate criteria and standards applicable. Where shortcomings are found these shall be documented, mapped, and a risk assessment conducted to determine any potential impacts for users of the Cliff Walk.

Commenting on the decision, Cllr Stokes added: "The Bray to Greystones Cliff Walk is one of Wicklow's most cherished natural attractions, enjoyed by locals and visitors alike. Unfortunately, closures due to erosion and safety concerns have impacted the ability of people to access and enjoy the walk. Going out to tender for a detailed assessment is a crucial step towards ensuring that we understand the full scope of the issues, and take the necessary action to restore this beautiful coastal path for generations to come."

On the Greystones side, a circa 800 metre length of the cliff walk has become very hazardous to the public by virtue of the substantial risk of collapse of the walk whilst people are on it. Several recent slippages over the last decade, and more recently the last five years, have led to the walk itself collapsing twice at one location, requiring a bridge to be erected, and a subsequent longer bridge, at a collapse at a second location.

The seven kilometre walk between Bray and Greystones is believed to have been in existence for use by both communities since the mid 1850s, when the Bray to Greystones train line was completed.

The walk was originally used as an access route for construction workers. The Cliff Walk has been officially closed by Wicklow County Council as a through route to the public since March 2021.

This was due to a collapse of the soft clay cliff face on the southern side of the route.

Another incident of a rock fall onto the northern side of the route in October 2022 further exacerbated

the closure. Wicklow County Council remains committed to maintaining and improving public amenities and ensuring that the natural beauty of the county is protected and accessible.



Luke Nolan, Conor Kelly, Noah Moody and Mary Kate Burke of the 6th Wicklow Rathdrum Scouts at the Rathdrum Christmas Market in the Sports Complex in Avondale.

Have a **GREEN CHRISTMAS** This Festive Season **RECYCLING** for December & January

## CHRISTMAS TREE SHREDDING 2025

NO WREATHS, PLASTIC TREES OR DECORATIONS PLEASE

Town	Location	Collection Dates	Operating Times Weekdays
Arklow	Arklow Recycling Centre, Croghan Industrial Estate, Emoclew Road, Arklow	3rd to 18th January 2025	During Normal Recycling Centre Opening Hours
Bray	Bray Recycling Centre, Beechwood Close, Boghall Road, Bray	3rd to 18th January 2025	During Normal Recycling Centre Opening Hours
Baltinglass	Rampere Recycling Centre, Rampere Baltinglass, Co. Wicklow	3rd to 18th January 2025	During Normal Recycling Centre Opening Hours
Wicklow	The Murrugh Recycling Centre Wicklow	3rd to 18th January 2025	During Normal Recycling Centre Opening Hours
Avoca	Avoca Recycling Centre Boghall Road, Bray	3rd to 18th January 2025	During Normal Recycling Centre Opening Hours
Blessington	County Council Yard, Naas Road	3rd to 18th January 2025	Monday - Friday 9am - 4pm
Greystones	Carpark to front of the Council Offices on Mill Road near to the bottle banks	3rd to 18th January 2025	Monday - Friday 9am - 5pm

The Christmas tree collection service is a free service for households (domestic) only. One tree per household/vehicle will be accepted.

No commercial collectors. Litter fines will be issued to those depositing trees outside the times specified and to individuals or other entities operating unauthorised collections.



## CHRISTMAS 2024 / 2025

### Opening & Closing Times Wicklow County Council Recycling Centres

	Arklow	Avoca	Bray	Wicklow Town	Rampere, Baltinglass
Monday 23rd December	9am - 4:30pm	Closed	9am - 4pm	9am - 4.30pm (closed for lunch 1pm - 1.45pm)	8.30am - 4pm
Tuesday 24th December Christmas Eve	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
Wednesday 25th December Christmas Day	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
Thursday 26th December St Stephen's Day	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
Friday 27th December	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
Saturday 28th December	9am - 1.45pm	9am - 1.45pm	9am - 1.45pm	9am - 1.45pm	8.30am - 1pm
Sunday 29th December	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
Monday 30th December	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	8.30am - 4pm
Tuesday 31st December New Year's Eve	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	8.30am - 1pm
Wednesday 1st January New Year's Day	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed
Thursday 2nd January	9am - 4:30pm	9am - 4pm (closed for lunch 1pm - 2pm)	9am - 4pm	9am - 4.30pm (closed for lunch 1pm - 1.45pm)	8.30am - 4pm



Cllr Stokes on the cliff walk.

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# New environmental group advocates for sustainable offshore wind development

*Blue Ireland aims to protect Ireland's marine environment*

Blue Ireland, a coalition of local environmental groups from across Wicklow, Wexford, Dublin, Louth and Galway, has been formed to safeguard Ireland's marine ecosystems and coastal communities as the country accelerates offshore wind energy developments.

For over 20 years, offshore wind farm projects have been proposed under outdated planning policies, targeting ecologically sensitive areas of Ireland's coastlines. Simply put: Wind turbines need to be placed where they do the least harm to sensitive marine ecosystems. Blue Ireland says they support renewable energy development but want it done right.

A Blue Ireland spokesperson confirmed that their objectives align with those of the World Wildlife Fund, which states: "Offshore renewable infrastructure is still infrastructure. It needs to be subject to best-practice planning and design and requires rigorous evaluation using both environmental impact, assessments and strategic environmental assessments."

Many sites targeted two decades ago, and referred to as legacy projects, are now controlled by foreign, privately owned entities. The first four projects listed below have applied for planning permission to An Bord Pleanála in the last few months. The final two are expected to apply before the end of the year.

- Dundalk, Louth
- Codling Wind Park, (Bray/Greystones/Wicklow)
- Arklow Bank Wind Farm (South Wicklow/Wexford)
- North Irish Sea Array Ltd, (Skerries/ Balbriggan, Dublin)
- Dublin Array (Bray and Kish Banks, South Dublin and Wicklow)
- Fuinneamh Sceirde Teoranta (Sceirde Rocks, Connemara, Galway)
- Oriel Wind Park

Blue Ireland warns that Ireland risks repeating past mistakes with developer-led planning. The group cites alarming biodiversity losses, such as a 46% decline in Harbour Porpoise populations and continued threats to seabirds like puffins and kittiwakes. Blue Ireland wants to ensure offshore renewable energy infrastructure is sited in environmentally appropriate locations and advocates for alignment with best international practices in marine planning.



Derek Mitchell.

This will ensure the sustainable development of ocean resources while protecting marine ecosystems and biodiversity.

A spokesperson for Blue Ireland said "In 2023, the Irish government acknowledged that developer-led planning was misguided, but it continues to push legacy projects that bypass key environmental considerations. Assessments commissioned and paid for by developers often lack objectivity and are not subject to independent scrutiny, leaving Ireland's marine ecosystems at risk. Our seas are vital ecosystems that must be preserved for future generations. We are advocating for responsible, evidence-based development of offshore wind that does not come at the expense of biodiversity."

Blue Ireland urges the public, businesses, and policymakers to support its efforts to promote sustainable development and independent oversight of offshore wind projects. The group is focused on:

- Advocating for ecosystem-based Marine Spatial Planning
- Challenging flawed project approvals through legal and scientific channels
- Raising awareness of the urgent need for adoption and enforcement of Marine Protected Area (MPA) legislation

Blue Ireland is also asking the public to collaborate with them by providing support in key areas such as recognising the importance of biodiversity and marine protection, legal advocacy, scientific research,

and political and regulatory action.

"Support is vital if we are to succeed in raising awareness of the risks to our coastlines and the protection of marine species and habitats."

The Irish Sea's near-shore banks are home to rich marine ecosystems, due largely to the fact that the light-filled waters facilitate the growth of phytoplankton, the basis of the marine food chain. In turn, an abundance of small fish feeds internationally important and endangered seabird species, for example, shags, terns and kittiwakes and marine mammals such as the protected harbour porpoise.

According to Blue Ireland, a number of the

sandbanks were identified decades ago as Important Bird Areas and flagged as unsuitable for development. Nevertheless, proposals were allowed to advance. Sandbanks also protect the coast from erosion, a particular threat along Ireland's east coast.

In Connemara, proposed wind farm sites near Galway Bay threaten habitats within multiple Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs), as well as a potential Marine Protected Area (MPA) identified by Fair Seas as an Area of Interest for protection, in 2022. Off the South Coast near Waterford, wind farm proposals overlap with an

Important Marine Mammal Area (IMMA) and habitats crucial to red-listed puffins, already in decline due to food shortages.

"Without stronger protections, Ireland's marine environment faces irreparable harm. The recently published findings from ObSERVE 2 (a major scientific programme to improve knowledge and understanding of Ireland's protected offshore species) highlight the critical importance of Ireland's waters for seabirds, marine mammals, and other species. The lack of adherence to National and European regulations and weak legislation continue to undermine biodiversity conservation."



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# NEW YEAR HOPES FOR WICKLOW

As 2024 draws to a close, the County of Wicklow reflects on a year of growth, challenges and change. As we enter into 2025, *Wicklow Times* turned to the voices of our TDs and Cathaoirleach to offer their hopes and aspirations for the year ahead.



An Taoiseach Simon Harris TD.

An Taoiseach Simon Harris said "A new year always represents an opportunity for a reset, and to make real difference and meaningful changes for county Wicklow. I am so grateful to the people of Wicklow for the vote of confidence they gave me in the ballot box just weeks ago. I want you all to know I am more energised and more determined than ever before to work with you and for you and to make our county and our country an even better place.

"Myself and my team and our excellent councillors will be ready to support our communities on projects and issues of concern throughout 2025. I, along with countless people in the community

want to see the re-opening of our beautiful Bray to Greystones Cliff Walk.

"As your TD and as your Taoiseach, I have continually advocated for steps to be taken towards the cliff walk's re-opening. I have been in constant contact with the Chief Executive of Wicklow County Council on this, and I will be chairing the first meeting of the new Cliff Walk Taskforce in the new year. I will work tirelessly on this until we see meaningful progress.

"I will also work to see more progress made on tackling anti-social behaviour, particularly with regards to getting more Gardaí on our streets, and further resources allocated to ensure that our communities stay safe.

"I am eager to see improvements in infrastructure and transport, so that traffic issues, in the county can be addressed. To facilitate this, I will continue to oppose the close of the N11 Junction on Herbert Road in Bray and will push for more investment in public transport right across Wicklow.

"Investing in schools, childcare facilities, sports clubs and public amenities will remain a priority and delivering for Wicklow on these areas is something you can be sure I will do. I also want

to support our small and medium businesses across the county including assisting them with the cost of business.

"There are of course many more challenges and opportunities that I will be working hard to address in 2025, and I look forward to continuing to engage with communities right across the constituency so that I can continue to be a strong voice for Wicklow in Dail Eireann."

New TD Edward Timmins of Fine Gael said "I hope 2025 will be a peaceful and prosperous year for the residents of County Wicklow. As a new TD, I want it to be a year where we focus on 'quality of life' issues and address some of the big concerns facing com-



Edward Timmins TD.

muters and communities from transport to infrastructure to affordable housing. I hope it's a year where we see further increased supports for people. I am very hopeful that we will see improvements in educational and medical services. I would like to see small businesses in the county flourishing in 2025. I wish all those involved in sport and the arts and entertainment every success in 2025.

"Above all, I hope it's a year where people feel optimistic and well represented in Dail Eireann. I will be a very accessible TD for the people of Wicklow. I assure you that I will use every opportunity to raise your concerns at national level. I will work with my colleague Taoiseach Simon Harris, my fellow TDs and all the councillors for the betterment of county Wicklow."

Social Democrats TD Jennifer Whitmore said "As 2024 comes to an end I would like to wish each and every resident of County Wicklow a Happy Christmas and Peaceful New Year. I'd also like to thank you for your support throughout 2024 and for re-electing me to be your representative and voice in the Dail. 2025 is full of potential, and I have many hopes for what the year will bring to our communities across Wicklow. I have been a strong advocate for the expansion and natural reforestation of the Glen of the Downs through the purchase of surrounding lands by the State. I hope that in 2025 this will



Jennifer Whitmore TD.

become a reality for our county so that future generations can enjoy and cherish this ancient woodland.

"Our communities have faced many challenges in the past year, and I will continue to work with and for communities across Wicklow to ensure the expansion and development of our public services, improved public transport options, school and childcare places, and local, accessible, and inclusive health-

care. I want to see progress being made with the many school building, expansion and repair projects across the county, the opening of the Neuro Rehabilitation Centre in Bray, the re-opening of the Cliff Walk and the introduction of more bus routes that connect communities and people to the places and services that they need to get to. I have high hopes for 2025, may it bring us all health, happiness, and harmony."

Sinn Féin TD John Brady said "2024 was a busy year which also saw a general election, and I would like to express my thanks to every single person who voted for me, returning me to the 34th

Dail for another term giving me the opportunity to represent the people of Wicklow once again.

"Unfortunately, the dominant issues going into 2025 remains the Housing crisis, with availability, affordability - obscene house prices and rent costs, and homelessness getting worse instead of better. I and my party colleagues in Sinn Féin will continue our efforts to push for the solutions we have brought forward to be implemented, solutions designed to bring an end to the housing crisis, giving fresh hope and opportunities to those who have been locked out of the housing market, or were forced to emigrate, or who are chained to punishing rents that continue to squeeze workers and families across the county, to bring back into public usage the hundreds of boarded up and derelict houses across the county.

"I believe in investing in our communities, our people, and the pursuit of a better way of life. I want to see a cohesive strategy designed to deliver good quality well paid jobs here in



John Brady TD.

Wicklow, a public transport system that works for the people of Wicklow, the prioritisation of our transport infrastructure here in Wicklow, bringing an end to the traffic chaos that plagues our county, by advancing the N11 / M11 upgrade scheme, the N81 Tallaght to Hollywood Cross upgrade scheme, and through investment in our rail infrastructure, including the fast tracking of the DART to Wicklow Town, the extension of the 65-route to Baltinglass - it is also critical that the Herbert Road remains open in Bray.

"We need to rebuild our sense and wealth of community across the county. I want to see the delivery of services and amenities for our hard-pressed communities. People across Wicklow need access to GP and Dental services, our communities need sports and recreational facilities that enrich the fabric of our towns and villages for young and old alike. The Bray to Greystones Cliff Walk needs to be reopened, West Wicklow needs Swimming Pool, additional sports and social facilities are also needed in Wicklow Town and Bray.

"2025 is going to be a busy year. The people of Wicklow deserve nothing less from their politicians."

Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council Clr Paul O'Brien said "As we welcome the New Year, I am filled with hope and optimism for the year ahead. The past year has brought both challenges and achievements for our communities, and I am immensely proud of the resilience, compassion, and unity shown by the



Cathaoirleach Paul O'Brien.

people of County Wicklow.

"Looking forward, 2024 presents us with new opportunities to build on this spirit of togetherness. Our priorities will continue to focus on sustainable development, enhancing local infrastructure, supporting businesses, and promoting health and well-being for all. We are committed to creating a vibrant, inclusive, and forward-thinking county where everyone can thrive.

"I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to our frontline workers, community volunteers, local businesses, and council staff who have gone above and beyond in their service. Your contributions are a testament to the strength of our county.

"As Cathaoirleach, I encourage everyone to continue supporting each other, embracing kindness and compassion in the year ahead. Let us work together to create a brighter future for all. Wishing you and your loved ones a healthy, peaceful, and prosperous New Year."



COMHAIRLE CONTAE CHILL MHANTÁIN  
WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL

## SECTION 75 – ROADS ACT, 1993 PROVISION FOR TEMPORARY CLOSURE OF PUBLIC ROAD

Wicklow County Council hereby gives notice that it proposes the temporary closure of the following public roads:

### Roads to be closed:

Strand Road, Bray, Co. Wicklow.

### Period of closure:

Wednesday 5th February, 2025 from 7:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.

### Alternative Routes:

#### Southbound

Turn right onto Seymour Road, turn left onto Quinsborough Road.

#### Northbound

Turn left onto Quinsborough Road, turn right onto Seymour Road.

### Reason for Closure

This road closure is necessary in order to facilitate reinstatement works by Gas Networks Ireland.

Any person wishing to object to the proposed road closure must lodge their objection in writing to Transportation & Infrastructure Delivery, Wicklow County Council, County Buildings, Wicklow Town, Co Wicklow or via email at [roadtrans@wicklowcoco.ie](mailto:roadtrans@wicklowcoco.ie) not later than 12.00 noon on Tuesday 7th January, 2025.

Linda Healy,  
Senior Executive Officer,  
Transportation & Infrastructure Delivery.

# 18 MONTHS & €20,000 FINE

Continued from page 1

At sentencing (last Thursday), Detective Sergeant Donal O'Sullivan gave evidence that Partrick O'Toole had since paid the full amount to the local authority. This was an overpayment, because the amount had been reduced by €10,000 when two of the apartments were sold to the local authority for social housing.

Michael O'Higgins SC, defending, told the court that the evidence had been that his client had sought 'a letter of comfort'.

"That is a lawful demand," he said. "This is most likely the reason why the acquittal occurred."

"If Frank O'Toole had made this clear to the council in 2013 when asked, it would not be unreasonable to ask whether we would ever be here at all," he added.

He said that his client was aware that sales could be closed on an undertaking that the financial contributions would be paid, and that this had been done for 20 years.

However, he said that the two attempt-

ed deceptions of the council were more serious.

"It could never have been more than a delaying tactic," he said, referring to the fact that his client had actually sent the council to Frank O'Toole.

Counsel noted that the investigation had started in 2013 and had taken over 10 years to come to hearing.

"It has taken a huge toll on him," he said, describing the 'stress factor' he had lived with as a heavy penalty.

"He has had this hanging over him for a quarter of his working life," he added.

He noted that Frank O'Toole, who was convicted of a more serious offence, had received a suspended sentence.

"My client has paid a huge price," he continued. "His lifetime's work is marred. His standing is damaged. It seems very likely that his right to earn a livelihood will be taken away from him and an early retirement beckons."

He said that there was no financial loss to the council, just a delay in payment, which was offset by the overpayment of

€10,000.

"This is a case in which the court would be justified in imposing a non-custodial sentence and perhaps a fine," he suggested.

He explained that his client was now financially stable, having been in NAMA for many years.

Judge Martin Nolan stated that to say this was an odd case would be an understatement.

Noting that Patrick O'Toole had no previous convictions, he said that he considered it very unlikely he would reoffend.

"He has led a good life up to now, has contributed to his community, and many people think very well of him," he said. "I think it would be unfair to impose a custodial sentence."

He imposed a sentence of 18 months on the 2012 attempted deception: but suspended it on condition he be of good behaviour. He fined him €20,000 on the 2008 attempted deception, giving him six months to pay, and took the other three counts into consideration.

# Aontú call for new Ceann Comhairle and TDs to take pay cut

The new Ceann comhairle Verona Murphy was confirmed to the 34th Dail Eireann, but Aontu leader Peadar Toibin has been calling for the role and all TDs to take a substantial reduction in salary. Toibin who is a TD for Meath West, believes the €255,000 salary attached to the job needs to be reduced and that a two-term limit should be introduced for holders of the office.

Currently, the salary attached to the position of Ceann Comhairle exceeds that paid to the Taoiseach, British Prime Minister, and most European leaders which have more responsibility. For another scale the Ceann Comhairle makes more than the President and Prime minister of India with a GDP 7 times our size and population of 1.5 Billion. The

basic salary attached to the role is €113,679 with an additional allowance of €141,834. The Ceann Comhairle position is impartial and the TD who holds it essentially forfeits their responsibilities as a TD and no longer votes on legislation or other Dail business.

"Without a good Ceann Comhairle, you can see the Dail fall

into dysfunction. A good Ceann Comhairle is very, very important to the functioning of democracy but the salary is way out of kilter," said Deputy Toibin.

Toibin added that he has long believed all TDs in Dail Eireann, which he is one, are overpaid and that the Government should change the law to reduce the salary attached to being a TD and a minister.

In a statement before the General election, Aontu Candidate for Wicklow Ciaran Hogan had said very similar statements, and pledged to donate €45,000 of TD salary to Wicklow community projects if elected.

"We have a system where those making decisions are materially unaffected by the consequence of their decisions, they don't feel the pinch of inflation, or the worry each bill can bring. Many TDs have never run a business, turned a profit, or been financially successful outside of politics at all. We need the type of people who are in Dail to make the country better for everyone and most definitely not for self serving reasons. We need the type of people who willingly to turn down money in the Dail now more than ever," stated Ciaran at that time.

Deputy Toibin continued "I'll be honest, Aontu has already said we



Cathal McKeirnan, Stephen Mason and Joe McGrath at the Sunbeam House Services Christmas Party in Lucinda Lodge.



Peadar Toibin TD.

have too many TDs. We need to decouple the constitutional ratios between population and TDs because it is not necessary. What we do need is proper town and borough councils to add that layer of democracy locally," he added. "The closer decision making is to those people affected the better it will be."

The 174 TDs in Dail Eireann cost the taxpayer €19.7 Million per year in Salary alone, and that is before additional allowances, Dail Committee bonuses, and expenses such as travel. For example British MPs make €35,000 less than our TDs, while being responsible for 92,000 constituents, which is almost 3 time their Irish equivalent (32,000).

"There has to be an understand-

ing amongst elected representatives of what is going on at kitchen tables around the country, in terms of how people are struggling to make ends meet. There's a line in a Beck song 'Loser' which says 'you can't write if you can't relate', but I think equally you can't govern if you can't relate to the experiences of people," Toibin said.

In 2021, the Aontu leader introduced a private members' bill to cut TDs salaries by 25% during the Covid-19 pandemic but the legislation was never progressed. Toibin said his party, who in this election went from one to two TDs, plans to look at introducing a cap on the salary of the Ceann Comhairle, ministers and TDs again in the next Dail term.



Ciaran Hogan.



Leah Flynn and Comrad Estrocio at the Christmas Night Lights in Avondale.



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# New publication on Baltinglass and the prehistoric hillforts of Ireland

Wicklow County Council recently hosted the launch of a new publication which highlights the importance of the archaeological landscape in the Baltinglass area.

The book titled 'Baltinglass and the Prehistoric Hillforts of Ireland', was authored by James O'Driscoll, Alan Hawkes and William O'Brien and published by Wordwell. The official launch took place on Tuesday 10th December by Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council Cllr Paul O'Brien.

The Baltinglass area of west Wicklow has the largest concentration of prehistoric hillforts in Ireland. This unique landscape has been the focus of study in recent years undertaken by University College Cork and supported by the Baltinglass Municipal District and Wicklow County Council through the Community Monuments Fund from the National Monuments Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Speaking at the event Cllr O'Brien stated "I am delighted on behalf of Wicklow County Council to officially launch this fine new publication which high-



Lilly Kelly and Yvonne Whitty.

lights the remarkable archaeological landscape of the Baltinglass area."

Cllr. Patsy Glenon, Cathaoirleach of Baltinglass Municipal District commented "This is a landmark publication, one which places Baltinglass at the very centre of Irelands prehistoric landscape."

Wicklow County Council Chief, Executive Emer O'Gorman stated

that "Wicklow County Council has been pleased to support the authors on their journey of investigations in recent years and we look to working in partnership with the local community and businesses to promote opportunities for heritage led regeneration in Baltinglass in the future."

Books can be purchased from [www.wordwellbooks.com](http://www.wordwellbooks.com).



David Case and Paul Carberry at the launch of a new publication 'Baltinglass and the Prehistoric Hillforts of Ireland' in Germaines of Baltinglass.



Cathaoirleach of the Baltinglass Municipal District Cllr. Patsy Glenon, Deputy Edward Timmins, Alan Hawkes, James O'Driscoll, Wicklow County Council Heritage Officer Deirdre Burns, Cllr. Jason Mulhall, Cllr. Avril Cronin, William O'Brien and Liam Cullen.

# Coillte launches 2025 Forestry Scholarship Programme

Coillte has announced the launch of its 2025 Forestry Scholarship Programme. Building on the success of its inaugural programme, which saw scholarships being awarded to three students, the scholarship provides substantial financial and career support for students pursuing a full-time, third level forestry programme at University College Dublin (UCD) or South East Technological University (SETU).

Offering up to €20,000 per recipient across their degree, alongside paid summer placements and career opportunities with Coillte, the scholarship was created to address the growing need for skilled professionals to support Ireland's environmental

and economic sustainability. Inaugural scholars Aine O'Dwyer (Donegal), Mia Sibbald (Kildare) and Alex Power (Waterford), now in their first semester at SETU, are already benefiting from the programme.

The launch of the 2025

Forestry Scholarship comes amid growing interest in forestry careers, as revealed by a recent RED C survey commissioned by Coillte. This survey found that 60% of 18-34-year-olds view a career in the forest and wood sector as attrac-

tive, with over a quarter of all those surveyed describing it as very attractive. Furthermore, 57% of women surveyed expressed interest in a career in forestry, highlighting the sector's broadening appeal across diverse demographics.

This growing interest aligns with the industry's pivotal role in addressing Ireland's climate and housing challenges, while meeting the increasing demand for sustainable timber. Public sentiment also strongly supports forestry's role in addressing these challenges:

- Nearly 70% of RED C survey respondents favour increased timber frame housing, reflecting a rise in support since 2022.
- 80% believe Ireland should be self-sufficient in timber production, with over half strongly agreeing.

The forestry sector is recognised as a key driver of Ireland's climate action objectives, requiring more than 1,700 skilled professionals by 2030 to meet the ambitions of Ireland's Forest Strategy.

Launching the 2025 Coillte Forestry Scholarship programme, Mark Carlin, Managing Dir-

ector of Coillte Forest, said: "Forestry is essential to Ireland's environmental and economic future, offering diverse careers in a wide variety of areas. With CAO applications now open, we encourage students to consider forestry as a meaningful career that contributes to a greener, more self-sufficient Ireland."

Carlin added: "Forestry is not just about planting and harvesting trees - it is a dynamic, multifaceted sector. There is a wide range of careers available, including planners who use sophisticated information technology to develop strategic forest management plans, ecologists working to protect and enhance biodiversity across our estate, supply-chain managers working to co-ordinate the supply of sustainable wood products, and recreation managers delivering trails and activities for people to enjoy. Sustainability is at the heart of forestry today and technological innovation continues to transform the forest sector."

Speaking about the scholarship's impact, inaugural scholar, Alex Power, said: "Receiving the Coillte scholarship



Inaugural scholars Aine O'Dwyer (Donegal), Mia Sibbald (Kildare) and Alex Power (Waterford) with managing director, Coillte Forest, Mark Carlin. Pic: Naoise Culhane.

**FINE GAEL**

Wishing everybody a Happy & Prosperous New Year

**Cllr. Peter STAPLETON**

087 972 5067 @peterstapleton.finegael@outlook.ie

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**Shane LANGRELL**

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Department of Further and Higher Education,  
Research, Innovation and Science

# Abbey Lane opened in Arklow

Arklow Municipal District recently completed a project focused on the protection and enhancement of the Abbey Wall and Abbey Lane. A prior survey in the area revealed significant archaeological findings, including 17th-century pottery and pre-1800 bones. Following the Department of Heritage's policy, these artefacts have been preserved in their original location.

This laneway, a vital pedestrian link from Castle Park to Main Street and adjacent to the Abbey Cemetery, now serves as a revitalized public space, blending historical preservation with community enhancement.

The stone paving and construction around the flowerbed were completed by Michael Bennett & Sons Building Contractors. Meanwhile, the conservation of the Abbey Wall was carried out by specialists from Kirwan Conservation Ltd., following traditional methods with a stone and lime mortar mix. They reinstated the window openings in the Abbey Wall using steel frames that reflect the original design undertaken by Stephen Keogh. These windows also allow views of the graveyard from the laneway.

Arklow Municipal District staff installed the new lighting to the wall and laneway as well as completing the works to the flowerbed. The project was overseen by District Engineer Avril Hill

and Executive Engineer Damien Byrne.

In a speech, the Cathaoirleach of Arklow Municipal District, Cllr. Pat Kennedy, expressed his enthusiasm for the project, stating, "I hope you all agree that this is a wonderful space, offering additional public realm opportunities that can serve as a tourist attraction, a venue for entertainment, and a hub for markets. At the same time, it beautifully preserves and maintains our connection to our heritage."

Chief Executive of Wicklow County Council, Emer O'Gorman, welcomed the project's completion, saying "it was important to conserve the Abbey Wall, and remain sensitive to its history and preserve to the artefacts found."

Leonora Earls, District Manager of Arklow Municipal District, noted that "those who were involved in the project showed a deep respect for the area's heritage while enhancing its value for the community."

The Cathaoirleach also acknowledged several contributors to the project's success, including funding from SSE Renewables and Deirdre Keogh, Community Engagement Manager, who supported the Christmas lighting in the laneway. He also noted, funding from the Local Enhancement Programme, which was secured through

the Arklow Town Team.

Additionally, he thanked Arklow Tidy Towns for agreeing to undertake planting and for their commitment to sensitively preserving the history of the Dominican Abbey and the Dominican Order. Finally, the evening concluded with a beautiful vocal performance by Dynamics Vocal Ensemble.



Local Arklow Councillors along with senior members of Wicklow County Council at the official opening of the Abbey Lane Protection & Enhancement Project in Arklow.



The Dynamics Vocal Ensemble at the official opening of the Abbey Lane Protection & Enhancement Project in Arklow.

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Cathaoirleach of the Arklow Municipal District Cllr Pat Kennedy officially opens the Abbey Lane Protection & Enhancement Project.

# Tiglin founder throws hat into Seanad race

Aubrey McCarthy, a dedicated community leader and successful businessman, has officially launched his campaign for the Seanad election. He is standing for the Trinity College panel, which invites participation from over 75,000 graduates of Trinity College Dublin.

With a deep commitment to social justice, education, and inclusive economic growth, McCarthy says he is determined to bring his experience, compassion, and drive to Seanad Eireann.

Growing up in a challenging environment impacted by addiction and deprivation, McCarthy has dedicated his life to turning adversity into opportunity for individuals and communities. His personal experiences have shaped his understanding of the obstacles many families face, and this has fuelled his desire to create lasting change.

A graduate of Trinity College Dublin (BSc '93, MA '23), McCarthy founded the well-established Wicklow charity Tiglin. This charity provides housing, rehabilitation, education, and employment support for those affected by homelessness and addiction and is also responsible for the greatly admired social enterprise cafe Rise at the Cove in Greystones. Since its establishment in 2008, Tiglin has assisted over 1,100 people on their journey to rebuild their lives.

McCarthy's tireless commitment to community service and social justice has been widely recognised, earning him prestigious awards such as the Irish Red Cross Humanitarian of the Year Award in 2024 and the Trinity Alumni Award in 2023. McCarthy also leads a successful businesses that employ over 40 people, demonstrating his ability to stimulate economic growth while fostering community well-being. His notable ventures include The Elms in Punchestown, a well-known furniture store and coffee shop that has become a valued part of the local community and a well known destination store.

"I am deeply committed to making a positive impact on our society," said McCarthy. "I've seen first-hand how opportunity can transform lives, and I want to ensure that every person in Ireland has access to those same opportunities."

If elected, McCarthy's priorities will include: Housing: Tackling the housing crisis by increasing supply, making homes affordable, and providing support for those affected by homelessness.

Education: Ensuring equal access to high-quality education, empowering individuals to build better futures.

Supporting Irish SMEs: Strengthening the backbone of our economy by supporting small and medium-sized businesses.

Tackling Violence Against Women: Advocating for policies that protect women, reduce gender-based violence, and support survivors of abuse.



Sarah Gorman and Tara Gargan with Leon, Bobby and Kerrie McKenna celebrating Christmas in Wicklow Town.



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Aubrey McCarthy.

# Council's annual Christmas decoration prize-giving celebrates creativity and sustainability

The County Buildings in Wicklow Town were illuminated during the Annual Christmas Decoration Prize-giving Ceremony, which took place on the evening of Wednesday, 11th December. This event celebrated innovation and environmental awareness, bringing together young creators from over 20 primary schools across the county.

Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council, Cllr. Paul O'Brien, acknowledged the valuable support of parents and teachers, stating, "We're thrilled to see the incredible creativity and imagination of our young participants. This event

wouldn't have been possible without the dedication of our teachers and the encouragement from parents. This competition also aligns with the wider Green Schools Programme, which has been instrumental in fostering environmental

stewardship among our students, and we commend everyone involved."

The evening showcased artistic flair and enjoyment as students presented their handmade Christmas decorations, crafted from a diverse

range of recycled materials such as can openers, wine bottle corks, socks, used coffee pods, and the ubiquitous toilet roll insert. Each creation demonstrated a unique approach to repurposing discarded items in innovative ways.

Emer O'Gorman, Chief Executive of Wicklow County Council, emphasised the Council's commitment to sustainability, stating, "Our schools through their work and by entering and supporting this annual competition are playing a part in the continued implementation of Co. Wicklow's Climate Action Plan.

The plan is a pivotal step towards a more sustainable future for County Wicklow. This plan underscores our commitment to nurturing a circular economy, reducing waste, and promoting sustainable practices across our community. The young participants in tonight's event have exemplified how creativity and imagination can lead us towards a more thoughtful and sustainable way of celebrating the festive season."

The event not only highlighted the artistic abilities of the young creators but also emphasised the importance of sustainable living and creative giving during the Christmas season. The County Council applauded the efforts of all participants, recognising their role in inspiring a more mindful and eco-conscious community.

The Christmas Decoration Prize-giving Ceremony serves as a reminder that creativity and sustainability can go hand in hand, shaping a brighter, greener future for County Wicklow.



Wicklow County Council Environmental Awareness Officer Sarah Rubalcava, Wicklow County Council Climate Action Officer Jim Callery and Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council Paul O'Brien present Willow Nolan of Crossbridge NS with her award in the Wicklow County Council Recycled Christmas Decoration Competition at Council Buildings, Wicklow Town.



Wicklow County Council Environmental Awareness Officer Sarah Rubalcava and Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council Paul O'Brien present Rachel Sharkey of Delgany NS with her award in the Wicklow County Council Recycled Christmas Decoration Competition at Council Buildings, Wicklow Town.



Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council Paul O'Brien presents Josh Rowan of St. Joseph's NS, Glenealy with his award in the Wicklow County Council Recycled Christmas Decoration Competition at Council Buildings, Wicklow Town.



Wicklow County Council Environmental Awareness Officer Sarah Rubalcava, Wicklow County Council Climate Action Officer Jim Callery and Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council Paul O'Brien with winners of the Wicklow County Council Recycled Christmas Decoration Competition at Council Buildings, Wicklow Town.

# Young athletes in Wicklow screened by Dillon Quirke Foundation

Over 10,000 young people across Ireland have benefited from cardiac screening this year, including in Wicklow, because of the Dillon Quirke Foundation - the charity established to reduce the number of young people dying from Sudden Adult Death Syndrome (SADS). Screenings were carried out in 88 clubs in Leinster.

The Foundation announced last week that 10,128 cardiac screenings have been conducted in every county in Ireland in partnership with 275 sports clubs, including GAA, soccer, rugby, boxing and performing arts clubs.

The Foundation was set up in honour of Dillon Quirke who collapsed and died during a hurling match at Sempie Stadium in August 2022. On average, 100 young people in Ireland die each year from SADS, a rate much higher than that reported in other EU countries. In an effort to reduce this number, the Foundation aims to promote awareness of the importance of cardiac screening in preventing SADS and to provide cardiac screening for young people

nationwide. The screenings are carried out by Advanced Medical Services (AMS), a provider of onsite medical services.

Among those who have been assessed by the Foundation's screening provider this year, 243 people have been advised to undergo follow-up cardiology tests post-screening. This makes up 2.46% of those who have been screened by the Foundation to date. The follow-up testing can include echocardiograms, cardiac electrophysiologist reviews, cardiology reviews and stress tests.

The effective screenings allow for early detection of potentially life-threatening conditions, which has led to timely interventions, including surgeries, that may have saved lives.

The Foundation has ambitious

plans for 2025 with a focus on raising vital funds to allow them to continue screening young athletes in Wicklow and across the country. The Foundation will continue their call to make screening mandatory for young people involved in sport.

Commenting on the Foundation's first year in operation, Dan Quirke, Founder, said: "At the start of 2024, the Foundation ambitiously set a goal of screening 5,000 individuals within the year. We are delighted to have surpassed this target by more than double. We know these screenings are helping to save lives. They can detect cardiac abnormalities and those affected can receive appropriate medical treatment and support at an early stage.



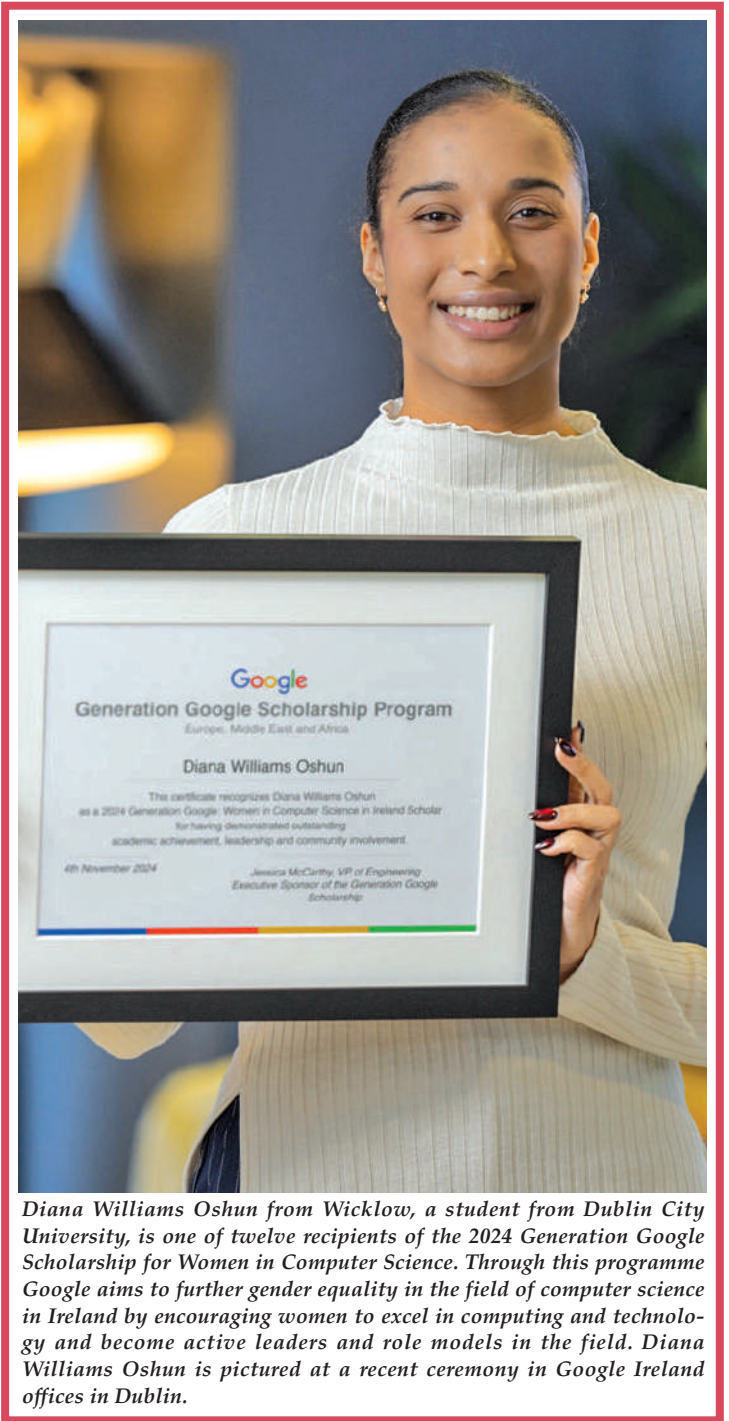
Pictured at the Tipperary Association Dublin event was the Quirke family Dan, Hazel, Shannon and Kelly.

"We are incredibly proud to have reached this milestone in just one year. However, there is always more work to be done, with more hearts to be screened and lives to be saved. We will continue to raise awareness of SADS and the benefits of cardiac screening in identifying heart conditions early on.

"We're looking towards 2025 and our ambition for next year is to continue to screen more young people but also to work toward our overall goal of securing vital mandatory screening for all young athletes. The Foundation would like to sincerely thank those in Wicklow who have attended screenings, the people who have trusted us to screen them and their loved ones, and the sporting organisations and local clubs that have facilitated us in the roll-out of this vital screening programme. Thank you to our supporters and advocates in Wicklow who have donated to our cause or organised fundraisers big and small, and to our inaugural corporate partner Abbott who continue to generously support our mission. We could not have reached this milestone without your support.

"Our whole purpose as a foundation is to reduce the number of young people dying from SADS in Ireland, and this support ensures we can continue to carry out our crucial lifesaving work. We want no family to go through the heartbreak we have experienced."

To learn more about the Dillon Quirke Foundation or to make a donation, please visit [dillonquirkefoundation.com](http://dillonquirkefoundation.com).



Diana Williams Oshun from Wicklow, a student from Dublin City University, is one of twelve recipients of the 2024 Generation Google Scholarship for Women in Computer Science. Through this programme Google aims to further gender equality in the field of computer science in Ireland by encouraging women to excel in computing and technology and become active leaders and role models in the field. Diana Williams Oshun is pictured at a recent ceremony in Google Ireland offices in Dublin.

# Local students secure scholarship with TU Dublin

Two local students Midhnav Manoj from Wicklow Town and Miguel Patrick Kongthon from Greystones have secured a three-year scholarship programme with Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin) following an expansion of its partnership with leading foodservice and wholesale company, Musgrave MarketPlace.

Dr. Denise O'Leary, Head of School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology, TU Dublin said "We are delighted to see our relationship with Musgrave MarketPlace go from strength to strength with an expansion of the scholarship scheme. TU Dublin graduates already excel in food related sectors in Ireland and across the world, and the mentorship and financial support provided by the scholarships will provide life changing opportunities for more of our students to reach even higher and go further."

The enhanced scholarship programme follows an investment of over €350k in the creation of a state-of-the-art student training restaurant at the university's Grangegorman campus.



Helen Donnell, Immaculate Mlauzi and Katherine Molyneux at the Sunbeam House Services Christmas Party in Lucinda Lodge.



Midhnav Manoj, Miguel Patrick Kongthon and Lohgan Whitt at the TU Dublin Musgrave MarketPlace launch.

# Jingle All the Way to Home of Green Angel for Brittas Bay Music Recital

It was a not so 'Silent Night' at the Home of Green Angel at The Tap, Kilbride as the Brittas Bay Music Academy took to the stage for their annual Christmas recital on Sunday, 15th December.

The thrilled performers were greeted by a very special guest the chief elf himself made a very special appearance. Each participant was treated to a gift from Santa Claus on arrival before they settled in for their warm-up ahead of their much-anticipated Christmas performance.

Parents, grandparents, friends, community, and those enjoying a Christmas coffee and lunch at Green Angel were treated to musical performances from participants from age six to sixteen.

Proceedings began with Hawaiian Christmas themed vocal harmonies from band members and front-women of

Fleetwood Mac Tribute band Mack Fleetwood's Mo Smith and Siobhan Kennedy-Perri who is Director of Music at Brittas Bay Music Academy.

Jane McNamara (aged 7) left the audience spell-bound as she played her specially composed 'film score' on piano, while first-time performers, brother and sister duo, Matilda and Theo Byrne (aged 10 and 7) who only started learning piano 4 weeks ago, bravely came to the stage and gave stellar performances, much to the delight of parents, grandad, friends and peers.

Speaking about the event, Siobhan Kennedy-Perri said

"Every time we put on a performance at The Home of Green Angel, we are blown away with the courage of participants and the support they show each other. From the youngest - aged six to the oldest here today, each performer gave it everything and were so encouraging of each other. That's the kind of environment we strive to foster here at Brittas Bay Music Academy. We are so proud of each and every one of them."

"We were delighted to have the main man himself join us here too - Santa Claus is inundated with requests to make guest appearances but he made a

special effort to clear his diary to attend our Christmas concert especially when he heard it was happening at The Home of Green Angel. They have the best coffee and treats for miles he was treated to some mince pies and coffee on the house!"

Performers on the day were Zoe Carolan, Maria and John O'Dwyer, Noa Haviv, Kat Knopf, Matilda and Theo Byrne, Emmelin Oborskyi, Susan Howe, Frank, Maebh and Jane McNamara. Steel Druid band members Cole Kennedy-Perri and Frank McNamara also performed as soloists and as a duo.



Theo Byrne receives gift from Santa at Brittas Bay Music Academy Christmas recital on Sunday.



Santa Claus makes a guest appearance at Brittas Bay Music Academy Christmas Recital.



Susan Howe (left) and Matilda Byrne (right) meet Santa at Brittas Bay Music Academy Christmas recital.



The performers of Brittas Bay Music Academy at their Christmas Recital at Home of Green Angel, Kilbride.

# 10 Screen Ireland highlights from a successful year for the Irish film industry

2024 has been a year of remarkable achievement for the Irish film industry, underscoring the strength, creativity, and diversity of talent within the sector. From impactful premieres at world-renowned festivals to supporting emerging talent and innovation, the Irish screen industry has demonstrated its ability to captivate audiences.

Screen Ireland takes immense pride in supporting Irish creative talent to reach new heights by providing vital funding and driving innovative development programmes. Through these initiatives, Screen Ireland has supported diverse voices and emerging talent and aided in the creation of productions that resonate both locally and internationally. From nurturing early-stage ideas and upskilling to providing critical resources for large-scale productions, Screen Ireland's support spans the entire creative journey, ensuring that Irish creators can tell their stories, amplify their perspectives, and contribute to the growth of Ireland's screen industry.

Désirée Finnegan, Chief Executive of Screen Ireland, said: "It is a true testament to the calibre of Irish filmmakers and creative artists that Ireland has continued to have remarkable success this year. 2024 saw record-breaking film festival selections and more than 70 award wins for Irish film and TV throughout the year. We're particularly delighted to see audiences connecting so strongly with Irish cinema, with significant box office results and audience reach for Irish films. Along with our industry partners, Screen Ireland is proud to continue building a creative future for the talented Irish story makers whose voices are resonating around the world."

## Here are the 10 key highlights from the year:

**1. Irish Film on the World Stage:** Screen Ireland-supported projects secured over 78 local and international awards over the course of 2024, reflecting the creativity and ambition of Irish talent across film, TV, and animation. Irish film had a sustained presence at A-list festivals in 2024, from the historic selection of *Kneecap* at Sundance and *Small Things Like These* as the first Irish film to open the Berlinale and a continued presence at major festivals throughout the year, from Tribeca to the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) and BFI London. In addition, Ireland and Irish stories were showcased at various international markets throughout the year - notably, Irish TV drama and animation played a starring role at major markets such as Kidscreen, Content London and MIPCOM.

**2. History at Cannes Film Festival:** Five Irish-produced films (*The Apprentice*, *September Says*, *Kinds of Kindness*, *On Becoming a Guinea Fowl* and *The Surfer*) received their World Premiere across the Cannes Film Festival programme this year: an unprecedented number for Irish film at one of the world's most prestigious film festivals. The Irish Pavilion at the Marche du Film facilitated new partnerships, promoting the new France/Ireland Co-Production Treaty and opening opportunities with countries like Canada, New Zealand, and Australia.

**3. Audience Connections:** Along with the international success, local audiences embraced Irish cinema - with over €7 million generated at the Irish and UK box office for projects *Small Things Like These*, *Kneecap* and *That They May Face The Rising Sun*. 20 Screen Ireland supported films were released in cinemas, while 7 Screen Ireland-supported TV Drama series and 6 Screen Ireland supported animations were broadcast on Irish TV, including Irish-language noir thriller *Crá*, new season of comedy-drama *The Dry* and original Irish talent-led animated series such as *Maddie + Triggs* and *Doodle Girl*.

**4. Promoting the Irish Language:** Screen Ireland-supported *Kneecap* made history at Sundance Film Festival, becoming the first Irish-language film to win the Audience Award in the NEXT strand. *Kneecap* is currently in contention as Ireland's Official Selection for the 97th Academy Awards.

**5. The Next Generation of Talent:** Emerging Irish talent were supported through screenings, networking events and talent promotion initiatives at major international festivals and award ceremonies throughout the year. Anna Hardwicke was selected as the EFP Shooting Star, while Evan Horan was this year's Producer on *The Move* and Siobhan Cullen was the winner of the IFTA Rising Star Award. Additionally, over 25 Screen Ireland-funded short films premiered globally, including works from flagship schemes like *Focus Shorts*, *Real Shorts*, and *Virgin Media Discovers*, offering platforms for new Irish voices to connect with audiences worldwide.

**6. Film Awards and Nominations:** *The Flats* won the prestigious Dox:Award at CPH:DOX in Copenhagen, marking the first time an Irish production received this honour, and securing a spot on the Best Documentary Feature longlist for 2025's Academy Awards. Screen Ireland-supported short films like *Room Taken* and *Turnaround* are also contenders for next year's Academy Awards. Just last week, groundbreaking Irish language film *Kneecap* became the most nominated and most awarded film at the British Independent Film Awards (BIFAs), scooping the top prize for Best British Independent Film.

**7. Masterclasses from Industry Leaders:** A series of masterclasses elevated industry skills in Ireland. Jim Jarmusch delivered a sold-out masterclass at the Irish Film in January. Renowned screen industry professionals such as Suzanne McCauley, Jo Spain, John Sloss, Dearbhla Walsh & Catherine Magee, Jay Roewe, Noreen O'Toole and Jonathan Nolan shared their knowledge, expertise and working processes with Irish attendees throughout the year. Screen Ireland's Screen Stakeholders funding also supported IFTA in a series

of masterclasses with international film professionals, including Edward Norton, Todd Field and Alan Moloney.

**8. Celebrating Diversity and New Audiences:** Audience Development was a key focus for Screen Ireland in 2024, with initiatives that celebrated diversity, inclusion, and local engagement. Highlights included a Ukrainian-dubbed screening of *Puffin Rock*, the *New Friends* and the launch of 20 innovative projects supported by the agency's pilot Audience Development Fund. These projects ranged from *Happenings' Remembering* series, which honoured iconic Irish artists through outdoor screenings of documentaries like *Nothing Compares* and *Songs For While I'm Away*, to the inaugural GORM Gathering, a celebration of diversity in Irish screen that united filmmakers, creatives of colour, and industry leaders.

Other standout events included *Directed By Her*, a GALPAL Collective weekend showcasing women filmmakers, and the GAZE Film Festival's starGAZE programme, which promoted LGBTQ+ filmmakers through networking and professional development, supported by the National Talent Academies.

**9. Engaging the filmmakers of tomorrow:** Youth engagement initiatives inspired the next generation, with Screen Ireland partnering with St Patrick's Mental Health Services on their 'Frame of Mind' short film competition - an initiative that resulted in 81 students from 9 counties across Ireland creating short films around the theme of mental health.

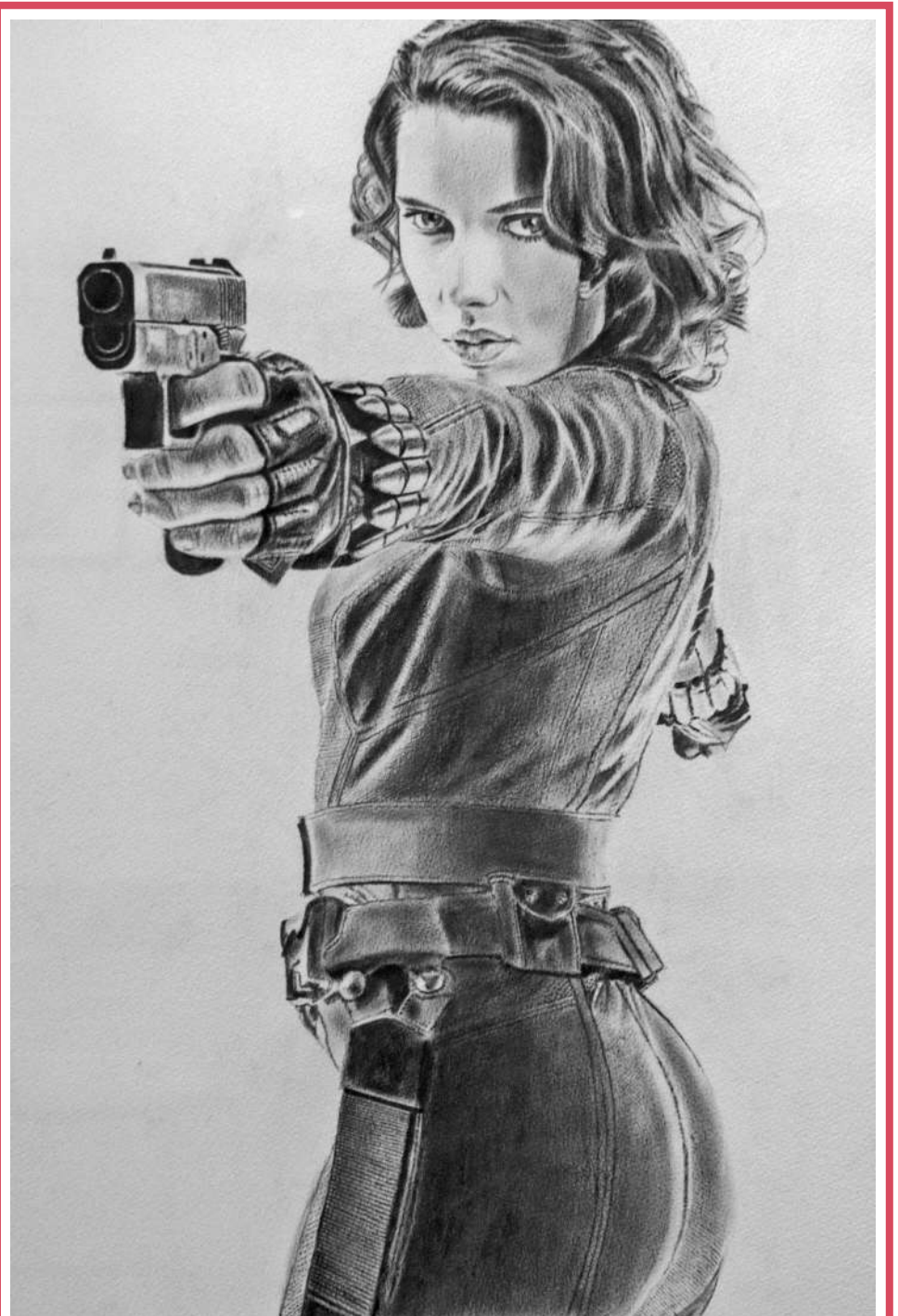
**10. A Year of Transformation:** Innovation took centre stage in 2024, with initiatives like IndieDev 2024 supporting indie game developers and the Animation Innovation and Immersive Development Fund exploring high-concept projects in VR, AR, and immersive storytelling. Dublin hosted the NEXUS Games Conference, spotlighting Ireland's potential in the gaming industry. A new National Talent Academy for VFX was launched in July. The academy will upskill and provide new opportunities for the rapidly expanding VFX and post-production sector in Ireland.

As the year draws to a close and Ireland's screen industry prepares for the opportunities and challenges of 2025, Screen Ireland remains steadfast in its commitment to nurturing Irish talent and promoting bold storytelling. The achievements of this year underscore the value of continued investment and collaboration. Screen Ireland is proud to play an integral role in this journey, working alongside talented partners to ensure Ireland remains at the forefront of the global screen landscape.



## Greystones Local Wins Award in the AIB Portrait Prize 2024 at the National Gallery of Ireland

Arann McCormack with her photograph titled 'I Never Promised You A Rose Garden'. Arann, former pupil of Temple Carrig School Greystones and recent graduate of Institute of Art Design & Technology, was one of three people to receive awards in this year's AIB Portrait Prize 2024, formally known as the Zurich Portrait Prize, the exhibition consisting of 26 shortlisted artists runs until March 9th 2025. Pic: Molly Keane.



Portrait of Scarlett Johansson as Natasha Romanoff, by local Wicklow artist Sean Kavanagh, on display at Sean's new portrait exhibition at Wicklow Town Library.

# Upgraded trail opens at Russborough House and Park

On Tuesday 17th December, Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council, Cllr Paul O'Brien, officially opened the Russborough House & Park Link Trail. He was joined by the Cathaoirleach of Baltinglass MD, Cllr. Patsy Glennon and Wicklow County Council's Chief Executive, Emer O'Gorman.

The works carried out in 2024 included site groundworks, path upgrades, the installation of a gravel surface, grassing, and planting. The existing railings were upgraded and painted, and new fencing was installed in necessary sections of the path. Additionally, a cycle hub area was created, complete with bike racks and signage for bike parking.

Funding for this project was provided by the Department of Rural and Community Development under the Outdoor

Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS), with matched funding from Wicklow County Council.

The upgraded trail now features a wide and level surface, which is enjoyed by the local Parkrun community every Saturday morning. It is hoped that this facility, with ongoing support from Russborough House, will serve as a source of recreation for all visitors.

In his opening remarks, Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council, Cllr. Paul O'Brien noted, "This sustainability project will

enhance the walking trails within these historic parklands which now include a bicycle hub to the side of the main house for visitors travelling on bikes from nearby Blessington."

Speaking at the opening, Cathaoirleach of Baltinglass MD, Cllr. Patsy Glennon said, "I welcome the upgrading of this park trail within the beautiful setting of Russborough House, with such a rich history. I hope that this and other future recreation projects around West Wicklow, will bring much enjoyment not just

for the local community but also for new visitors."

Emer O'Gorman, Wicklow County Council's Chief Executive, added "Outdoor recreation projects like this enhance Wicklow's natural sites and beautiful scenery for the benefit of the community and the many visitors to our County. We are grateful to the Department for their funding and support to allow us to complete this and many other outdoor recreation projects. I would also like to thank Russborough's Board of Trustees for their support and vision on this project."

Joe Carthy, Chairperson of the Russborough House & Park Board of Trustees, remarked, "We thank everyone involved in getting the trail upgraded, the Department, Wicklow County Council, our Architects and the contractors. The new trail has enhanced the walking and running experience of our visitors and local weekly Park Run participants, making it more accessible to families of young children and people with restricted mobility."

Theresa O'Brien, Director of Services and Baltinglass MD District Manager, concluded, "This and all our other ORIS projects can be completed successfully with thanks to our outdoor recreation staff, who work with landowners and contractors to ensure these amenities are built to the highest standards for the enjoyment of us all."



Michael McNamara, Theresa O'Brien, Sol Royo Erasquin, Aisling Hubbard and Cllr. Avril Cronin.



CEO of Wicklow County Council Emer O'Gorman and Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council Cllr. Paul O'Brien.



Theresa O'Brien speaking at the official opening of the upgraded trail Link to Russborough House and Park.



Liam Cullen, Theresa O'Brien, Cathaoirleach of the Baltinglass Municipal District Cllr. Patsy Glennon, Cllr. Avril Cronin, CEO of Wicklow County Council Emer O'Gorman, Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council Cllr. Paul O'Brien, CEO of Russborough House Orla Gallagher, Professor Joe Carthy, Chairperson of Board of Trustees and Cllr. Jason Mulhall.



# 1st and 2nd class Hurling Blitz a huge success

The energy and enthusiasm were palpable as over 250 1st and 2nd class children recently partook in a feast of hurling across two venues: Bray Emmets and Greystones Community National School.

Bray Emmets played host to teams from Greystones Educate Together, Nun's Cross N.S., Gaelscoil Uí Cheadaigh, St Peter's N.S. and Holy Rosary N.S. Each team played four 7-

aside game with skills levels visibly improving with every game. There were 9 pitches up and running with the games being officiated by 6th class students who completed their 'Young Whistlers' training.

Greystones Community National School welcomed teams from St. Laurence's N.S. and Gaelscoil na gCloch Liath. 10 teams competed across 2 groups of 5, with all children getting to play 4

games each. The small sided games allowed the children to get lots of touches on the ball as well as trying out a variety of different positions.

"The children were all buzzing after the blitz with many of them having just taken up the sport," Cumann na mBunscoil Chill Mhantain said. "It was great to hear that so many were looking forward to getting back with their clubs in the new year and to also hear that so many were looking to join clubs for the first time. A big thanks must go to our two hosting venues Bray Emmets and Greystones CNS along with all the teachers, parents and coaches who were there on the day and who give up their time to do hurling with the children."



The 1st and 2nd class Hurling Blitz players in Bray Emmets (top) and Greystones Community National School (below).



Sinead, Pat, Kate and Keira Clarke celebrating the festive season in Wicklow Town.

**DAME STUFF'S**  
**CHRISTMAS COMEDY**  
**CABARET**  
 FEATURING A LIVE BAND  
**FRIDAY DEC 27TH 2024**

SHOWTIME: 8PM | The Whale Theatre | www.whaletheatre.ie | WHALE THEATRE  
 TICKETS: €28

Dame Stuff (the Queen Of Ballymun), is bringing her hilarious comedy cabaret show to Greystones, to the Whale Theatre on Friday 27th December. A two-hour extravaganza with her superb live band featuring many big belter hit songs, plenty of belly dancing (spanx permitting), plenty of laughs and some free fashion tips, like "How to look amazing after sleeping in a skip overnight". Show starts 8pm (doors 7pm). Tickets €28 and available at [www.whaletheatre.ie](http://www.whaletheatre.ie) or call the booking office on 01 2010550 for returns.

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Pictured at Lakers Social and Recreation Club were Dan Gorman, AXA Bray Branch Manager and Finley McDonald, sales, AXA Insurance Bray, and Carl, Rory, Nathan, Richard, Janet and Deirdre from Lakers who were presented with a cheque for €2,500 as the AXA Local Community Award Winners. The award demonstrates how Lakers is contributing to a safer and more resilient future for the local community. Pic: Dermot Byrne Photography .

# Mental health charity launches online support groups

Turn2Me, a national mental health charity, recently launched its Christmas support groups online for people who may be struggling over the Christmas period. The charity stated that Christmas is its busiest period, and that many people struggle with anxiety, stress, financial pressures, grief, loneliness and depression. Turn2Me offers free mental health services.

The support groups are available online on Turn2Me.ie, so they are available to anyone on the island of Ireland.

These online support group themes are:

Christmas Day, the 25th at 6pm - Christmas Blues support group

Stephen's Day, the 26th at 11am - Family Issues support group

Friday the 27th at 11am -

Bereavement support group

Saturday the 28th at 11am - Family Issues support group

Sunday the 29th at 11am - Bereavement support group

Monday the 30th at 11am - How to manage anxiety support group

Tuesday the 31st (New Year's Eve) at 11am -

Feeling Alone support group

Wednesday the 1st January (New Year's Day) at 11am - Feeling Down support group

Turn2Me offers up to six free counselling sessions, free support groups, a free meditation programme, a free 'Thought Catcher' online mood diary and free helpful articles, all on Turn2Me.ie

# GOAL Mile: 'It's more than a tradition - it's a lifeline'

To the people of Wicklow, you are encouraged to think big and to give back. Become part of one of Ireland's most beloved fundraising traditions - the GOAL Mile.

Whether you're walking, running, or simply showing your support, every step you take will help raise vital funds for GOAL's life-saving humanitarian work across 15 countries in the Middle East, Africa, Latin America and Ukraine. Through the GOAL Mile, your family could be the lifeline for other families in desperate need this holiday season.

With over 160 GOAL Mile events taking place across Ireland, including Wicklow, there is bound to be one near you. This is a fantastic opportunity to come together with family, friends, and local communities and to make a real difference.

Goal mile organiser Cllr Lourda Scott spoke about this year's event in Greystones: "The GOAL mile is not only a great way to raise funds for a very worthy cause, but is also a fun, social occasion. The last 3

years in Greystones, myself and the other organisers have been blown away by the enthusiasm from everyone that turn up to take part. One of the things I love about this is that it is for everyone. It doesn't matter how fit you are, all you need is a smile on your face. We have had people running to beat a time, people with buggies and both young and old doing the mile at their own pace. In Greystones we have the GOAL mile on New Year's Day, which is an ideal time to get out and shake off the cobwebs after the Christmas festivities. There's also a chance to catch up with people over a cup of tea to warm up afterwards."

Last year, the GOAL Mile raised an incredible €630,000 - funds that continue to support GOAL's work in some of the world's worst humanitarian crises, including in Sudan, Gaza, Lebanon, Ukraine and

Haiti. This year, your involvement can help make an even bigger impact.

Reflecting on this impact, Helen McVeigh, Director of Fundraising at GOAL, said: "Every year, the GOAL Mile unites people from all corners of Ireland in a powerful display of solidarity and generosity. This cherished Irish tradition is not only deeply meaningful for communities here at home but also has a profound ripple effect across borders, reaching those who need it most. The funds raised through the GOAL Mile directly support GOAL's vital work in some of the world's most challenging regions, providing life-saving aid and hope to vulnerable communities. To our incredible GOAL Mile Organisers, thank you for making this possible. And to anyone thinking of joining their local GOAL Mile, we encourage you to take part. It's more than a tradition - it's a lifeline. Together, we can keep this tradition alive and continue to bring hope to communities around the world."

There are currently seven GOAL Mile locations in County Wicklow, including:

- **The Murrough**, Wicklow Town, Christmas Day, 9:30-10:30am
- **Bandstand Bray Seafront**, Christmas Day, 10:30-11:15am (start times every 15 minutes)
- **Blessington Community College**, Naas Rd, Blessington, Christmas Day, 12:30pm
- **Askanagap** (outside Aughrim), St. Stephen's Day, 11am
- **Eire Og GAA Grounds**, Killincarrig, Greystones, New Year's Day, 11am - 12pm
- **Glenealy GAA/Community Grounds**, New Year's Day, 11am-12pm
- **Murphy's Hotel**, Tinahely, New Year's Day, 12pm

Don't miss out on this chance to be part of something special. To register for your local GOAL Mile or to find out how to set up a GOAL Mile in your community, please visit <https://www.goalmile.org>.

# Countdown is on for Wicklow sports clubs

**RECRUITMENT**

Former Irish rugby international, Donncha O'Callaghan has issued a call to sports clubs in Wicklow reminding members that the countdown is on to the 31st January closing date by which applications for a €5,000 award under the Texaco Support for Sport initiative must be made.

Noting the benefit to be gained by the award, the popular broadcaster and adjudicator confirmed that "entry is open to all clubs irrespective of sporting discipline, size, membership, age, cultural appeal, or gender, including those whose application may have been unsuccessful previously."

Now in its fifth year, the annual initiative has already seen funding of over €500,000 distributed to clubs across the 26 counties, of which €20,000 has come to Co. Wicklow with successful applicants Roundwood & District Athletic Club (2021), Valleymount LGFA Club (2022), Wicklow Archers Archery Club (2023) and Blessington GAA Club (2024) receiving €5,000 in each case.

Further information can be viewed at [www.TexacoSupportforSport.com](http://www.TexacoSupportforSport.com).



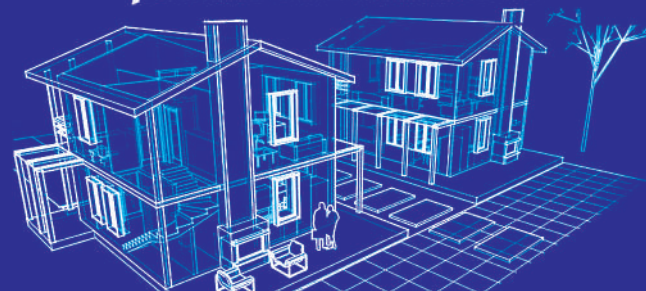
Donncha O'Callaghan.

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# RTE announces Aengus Cox as new Agriculture & Consumer Correspondent

RTE News has announced the appointment of Wicklow man Aengus Cox as its new Agriculture and Consumer Affairs Correspondent. Currently a multimedia journalist with RTE, Aengus has worked with RTE News across radio, television and online since 2012.



Aengus Cox.

Aengus has reported for, edited, and presented RTE's flagship radio news programme Morning Ireland. As a reporter for Morning Ireland he regularly covered food production, the environment, biodiversity and regular investigative features on the reasons behind steep rises in the cost of motor and public liability insurance.

Previously, Aengus worked as a business reporter for RTE News where he covered a wide range of topics including personal finance, housing, the cost of living and an extensive series on Brexit which looked at the impact the UK leaving the EU was having on various sectors such as agriculture and IT.

He has also reported from London during the summer on the British general election and the European Parliament in Strasbourg. Most recently he travelled to Sudan, where he was one of the few western journalists reporting from inside the country on the devastation caused by the ongoing civil war there in a special series for all RTE News platforms airing this week.

In addition to Morning Ireland, he has also presented European Parliament Report on television and has been a stand in presenter on This Week and News at One on RTE Radio 1.

Prior to working with RTE, Aengus was a reporter and presenter with East Coast Radio in his home county of Wicklow. He hosted a weekend current

affairs programme on the station discussing the issues facing people in both urban and rural parts of the county.

Aengus holds a BA Hons in German and Politics, as well as a first-class honours Masters Degree from UCD in European Regional & Minority Studies.

Speaking after his announcement as RTE's new Agriculture and Consumer Affairs Correspondent, Aengus Cox said he is excited to take on the role. "Farming in Ireland has reached a pivotal point, with competing pressures from key environmental targets and the ever-increasing cost of doing business. Farmers are looking to quickly adapt practices in reducing carbon emissions, while at the same time needing to stay competitive. I hope to visit as many farms, agri-businesses, and other stakeholders as I can to tell these stories as they deal with this transition.

I'm also delighted that consumer affairs is so prominent in this brief as it impacts all parts of our lives including pricing, travel cancellations and peoples consumer rights. Technological advances are also hugely beneficial to consumers, offering convenience and security when it comes to things like online shopping. I look forward to investigating how this is affecting consumers and, crucially, reporting on how to avoid getting caught out by scams and keep people's information, and money safe!" Aengus will be commencing his new role in January 2025



Mark Carrick and Teighlour Fegan at the Sunbeam House Services Christmas party in Lucinda Lodge.

# Wicklow tourism business joins Tourism Ireland's B2B workshop

Ireland was promoted to 27 German, Austrian and Swiss tour operators at Tourism Ireland's B2B workshop in Frankfurt, which was organised in partnership with VisitBritain. Thirty-two tourism companies from Ireland - including Powerscourt Estate - took part, meeting and doing business with tour operators who bring valuable tourists to our island each year or who are considering programming Ireland for the first time.

Around 860 meetings were conducted at the workshop, which was followed by a networking session - providing a valuable opportunity for the businesses from Ireland to showcase and sell their products and services, as the tour operators sign contracts for 2025 and beyond.

Tourism Ireland and its partners from Ireland reminded the German,

Austrian and Swiss travel professionals about the many great things for their clients to see and do here including our beautiful landscapes, rich heritage, great food and drink, as well as our world-class attractions and outdoor experiences.

Nadine Lehmann, Tourism Ireland's Manager for Germany, said: "We were delighted to partner

with VisitBritain to bring together these key travel professionals from Germany, Austria and Switzerland, to do business with our partners from Ireland. Our aim was to connect our partners with the influential tour operators who bring valuable tourists to Ireland and who are now contracting for 2025 and beyond."



Tourism businesses from Ireland at Tourism Ireland's B2B workshop in Frankfurt this week, with Aislinn O Driscoll, Failte Ireland (back row, fifth right); Nadine Lehmann (front row, left); Denise Quinn (front row, right); and Monika Woermann (front row, second right), all Tourism Ireland.

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