

Comhairle Ceantair an Iúir, Mhúrn agus an Dúin  
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

# Straitéis Chultúir, Ealaíon agus Oidhreachta Culture, Arts and Heritage Strategy 2020—2025



Comhairle Ceantair  
an Iúir, Mhúrn agus an Dúin  
Newry, Mourne and Down  
District Council

# Contents

Foreword	03
Introduction	04
The Purpose of this Strategy	05
Value of Culture, Arts and Heritage	08
The Strategic Context	14
Our Current Culture, Arts and Heritage Offering	18
The Research – What Did You Say?	25
Key Insights	29
The Big Challenges and Bigger Opportunities	37
The Vision	41
2022: Our Year of Ambition	42
Delivery	43
Next Steps	44

## Réamhrá

Tá lúcháir orm Straitéis Chultúir, Ealaíon agus Oidhreachta de chuid Chomhairle Ceantair an Iúir, Mhúrn agus an Dúin a chur i láthair don chéad chúig bliana eile.

Tá traidisiún saibhir agus iomráiteach ag an cheantar seo i dtaca le cultúr, na healaíona agus oidhreacht. Dá bhrí sin, tá sé rí-thábhachtach straitéis a bheith againn a leagann amach treoiphlean chun muidinne a threorú agus a chur ar an eolas maidir le comhoibriú chun na hearnálacha áirithe sin a fheabhsú agus tacú le fás geilleagrach agus torthaí sóisialta.

Tá an straitéis seo ann chun an Straitéis Athghiniúna Gheilleagrach agus Infheistíochta agus an Straitéis Turasóireachta a chomhlánú. Baineann sí le agus tugann sí tacaíocht do na cuspóirí straitéiseacha laistigh den Phlean Pobail agus do na cuspóirí straitéiseacha a bheas sa Phlean Corparáideach don tréimhse 2019–2023.

Tá Comhairle Ceantair an Iúir, Mhúrn agus an Dúin ag forbairt mholtaí uaimhianacha faoi láthair maidir le hinfheistíocht £10 milliún i dtionscadal athfhorbartha chun halla Bhaile an Iúir agus Teach Éigse Sheáin Uí Chuiléannáin a chur chun cinn mar shaoráid ealaíona,

drámaíochta agus chomhdhála a bheas aitheanta go hidirnáisiúnta.

Is í an aidhm a bheas leis an infheistíocht seo ná réimse níos leithne imeachtaí ealaíona agus cultúir a chur ar fáil do chónaitheoirí áitiúla; cur leis an soláthar iontach ealaíona agus cultúir atá ann faoi láthair i dTeach Éigse an Dúin; agus tionchar ollmhór geilleagrach a chumadh do ghnóthaí áitiúla agus don cheantar máguaird.

Chomh maith le fás agus forbairt ár dtithe éigse a spreagadh, tá aidhm ag an straitéis seo clár tacaíochta a thabhairt isteach don iliomad grúpaí deonacha agus amaitéaracha a raibh ról lárnach acu maidir le himeachtaí cultúir, ealaíona agus oidhreachta a chur ar fáil ar fud an réigiúin seo leis na cianta.

Cuirim fáilte roimh fhorbairt na straitéise seo agus tá mé ag tnúth le leathnú soláthair ealaíona, cultúir agus oidhreachta fud fad an cheantair sa chéad chúig bliana eile.

## Foreword

I am delighted to present our Culture, Arts and Heritage Strategy for Newry, Mourne and Down for the next five years.

This region has a rich and celebrated tradition when it comes to our culture, arts and heritage. Therefore, it is vital to have a strategy that sets out a blueprint to guide and inform how we will work together in order to enhance these sectors whilst supporting our economic growth and social outcomes.

This strategy does not exist in isolation and complements our Economic Regeneration and Investment Strategy and our Tourism Strategy. It also connects with and supports the strategic objectives within the current Community Plan and the strategic priorities that will be included in our forthcoming Corporate Plan for 2019–2023.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council is currently progressing ambitious proposals to invest £10 million into redeveloping Newry Town Hall and the Sean Hollywood Arts Centre into an internationally-recognised arts, theatre and conference facility.

This investment aims to provide a greater range of arts and cultural activity and events for local residents, complement the fantastic arts and cultural offering already in place in Down Arts Centre and generate a huge economic impact for local business and the wider district.

In addition to driving the growth and development of our arts centres, this strategy aims to introduce programmes of support for the numerous voluntary and amateur groups that have played an essential role in delivering culture, arts and heritage activities across this region for many years.

I welcome the development of this strategy and I look forward to seeing the growth and enhancement of the arts, culture and heritage offering across the district over the next five years.



**Cllr Charlie Casey**  
Chairperson  
Newry, Mourne  
and Down District  
Council

## Our District is Unique

In our mountains, forests and coastline; throughout our rural landscapes, dotted with monuments and castles; in the chords of our music and awe-inspiring art; and in the vibrancy and enthusiasm of our people – this region is celebrated for our rich culture, arts and heritage.

From our myths and legends and the tales of our past through to the modern expression of our culture, we are known and celebrated through the stories, music and art that has been handed down from one generation to the next.

We are inspired by the beauty of our places. Our diverse culture and heritage defines our sense of being and our connection to this region.

This strategy sets out a blueprint to guide and inform how we will work together to enhance our arts, culture and heritage sectors, with the aim of supporting our economic growth and social outcomes. This is a living document that will serve as a planning tool to provide a clear set of priorities for the development of arts, culture and heritage programmes and initiatives across the district over the next five years.



A woman with her hair in a bun, wearing glasses and a purple sweater, is sitting on a yellow stool in a workshop. She is looking down at a brown dog sitting on the floor. The workshop has wooden shelves and a blue metal frame in the background.

# The Purpose of this Strategy

## Definitions and Scope

Culture, arts and heritage form an intrinsic part of our everyday lives. There are many definitions covering each of these terms:

### Our Culture

...is about who we are, our way of life, our cumulative knowledge, our behaviours, beliefs and values, and how these are passed on from one generation to the next.

### The Arts

...are how we express our culture through various means, including performing arts and drama, visual arts, music, dance, craft and creative industries, media and film, festivals and events, and our language and literature.

### Our Heritage

...connects our lives today to the past through our stories, buildings and places, monuments and ruins, artefacts, our natural heritage, and through the traditions and memories handed down from one generation to the next.

## Why do we need a Strategy?

This strategy **sets out a vision** of where we want our arts, culture and heritage offering to be in five years' time and how we propose **to work in partnership** with our stakeholders to get there.

This document is not an end point: it is **a new beginning and a foundation** upon which the Council's investment and support of annual programmes and activities can be based.

Over the next five years, this strategy will evolve and be subject to measurement and review against key indicators of specific and time-bound progress. A fundamental element of this strategy will be the **formation of a new Arts and Culture Forum**, composed of key individuals and organisations that represent the different parts of the sector. This Forum will act as the **voice of the sector** and will be engaged to **sense-check** and inform the Council's progress against the delivery of this strategy.

## Our Community and Audiences

Our district has a rich and broad culture, heritage and arts offering that is **intrinsic to this region** and the people who live and work here. In Slieve Gullion, Newry, Crotlieve, the Mournes, Slieve Croob, Rowallane and Downpatrick, there is a rich and unique cultural life that is protected, celebrated and enhanced **through groups and individuals** who are passionate about the communities that they are part of and do so much to enrich.

In our community choirs, drama groups, craft collectives, pipe bands, local branches of the Comhaltas, community arts groups, heritage groups, tour guides and local ambassadors, Ulster Scots groups, Feis committees, school groups and the numerous voluntary organisations, there is **passion, vibrancy, commitment and diversity** that should be championed and celebrated. The work of those individuals and groups goes so far to develop awareness, reach new audiences, cultivate talent and make a powerful contribution to wider society.

It is often from within these groups that our **world-class music, dance and art is cultivated**. It is from our dance schools, orchestra, theatre groups and art classes that some of our most talented young people have come. Those people have gone on to grace the world stage and, as a consequence,

have shone a light back onto the district they call home. The positive work of these groups enables us to preserve our community history and identity and to promote **social cohesion and understanding**.

Such groups deliver activity with limited resources, but they reach and engage a huge number of participants and audiences in **every townland, village, and urban centre** throughout the district.

The cumulative impact of the various activities and programmes delivered either within Council venues or throughout the district **by passionate and committed individuals** and groups generates a tangible economic return.

There are, however, wider **intangible returns** associated with the **health and well-being** of our citizens, the **sense of place** and educational attainment of our young people and the **inclusion and cohesion** of our communities. Those are the areas where the potential for returns from the development of our arts, culture and heritage offering through this strategy is greatest. Those intangible returns are presented in more detail on the next page.



# Value of Culture, Arts and Heritage



A wide range of studies have shown that participation in culture, arts and heritage enhances people's lives, helps to build diverse communities and combats isolation and exclusion. It improves children's prospects, it can boost the economy and it improves the international standing of a local area.

The following summarises just some of the evidence that investment in culture, arts and heritage adds value to health and well-being, community cohesion, education and the economy.



## positive impact

There are numerous pieces of research that evidence the

that the arts, culture and heritage can have on the **physical, mental and social well-being of older people.**

Engagement in arts activities offer

## holistic benefits

including physical, mental and social well-being.



Studies have found that visiting historical sites

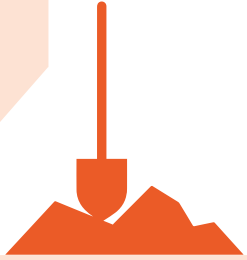
had a **statistically significant impact on well-being** similar to attending arts or cultural events.



Those who had attended a cultural place or event in the previous 12 months were

## almost 60%

more likely to report good health compared to those who had not.



People who take part in the arts are

## 38%

more likely to report good health according to the Cultural Learning Alliance.



# Health and Well-being

## Can Digging Make You Happy?

Studies of the impact of archaeological excavation on the well-being of students and community groups have identified that participant well-being improved in relation to the **'physicality', 'connectivity', 'satisfaction'** and **'social dynamics'** gained through excavation.

**Social isolation** is associated with health risks in a similar way to smoking and obesity. Older individuals who are more socially isolated are more likely to report poor health. Arts projects have been seen to **reduce isolation among participants by up to**

## 80%



Artists enjoy higher job satisfaction than other employees.



Participation in drama

involves consideration of a character's motivation and behaviour. This improves the ability of pupils to understand other perspectives.



There is strong evidence that participation in the arts can contribute to community cohesion, reduce social exclusion and isolation, and/or make communities feel safer and stronger.



Participating in or attending **cultural places or events** has a positive impact on well-being.





The arts can help break down barriers between different social groups.



Participation in arts activities is associated with improvements in young people's cognitive abilities and transferable skills.

Learning through arts and culture can improve attainment in Maths and English and

develop skills and behaviour

that lead children to do better in school.



# Society and Community



# Education



There is strong evidence that participation in the arts can contribute to community cohesion, reduce social exclusion and isolation, and make communities feel safer and stronger.



Participation in the arts creates more engaged citizens. Young people who engage with the arts in school are twice as likely to volunteer and

20%

more likely to vote than other young adults.



A cohort study demonstrated that students participating in an arts programme had

significantly higher grades in academic subjects such as English, Maths and Science.

# £130 billion

The cultural and creative industries are the fastest growing industry in the UK. In 2017 the sector generated

Gross Value Added (GVA) world-wide, representing 7% of the UK economy.

# 42%

of all spending by overseas visitors to the UK involved engagement with arts and culture.



Investment by public sector in the arts and the historic environment contributes up to £4 to the local economy for every £1 spent.

# £1 = £4



Working with a creative company leads to increased innovation in SMEs beyond the creative industries.

## Economic

In 2011, the arts sector in the Republic of Ireland contributed

# €307 million

in taxes. And state-funded arts practitioners and organisations generated a turnover equivalent to more than twice what they received in grant aid.



Participants in amateur arts activities increase their employment potential through skills development and networking.



Arts and culture contribute to local economies by **attracting visitors, creating jobs and developing skills, attracting and retaining businesses and revitalising places.**

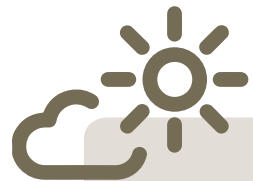


**Well designed arts and cultural venues**  
add considerable value to  
the built environment

by attracting visitors, generating  
increased activity, and helping to create  
places where people want to live.



# Place Making



Well managed outdoor arts events  
attract a **demographically diverse  
audience** that is representative of  
the local population, contribute  
to pride of place and encourage  
community cohesion.



## Rural Touring

involves communities directly  
in all aspects of delivery and  
has been shown to have a  
profound effect on **community  
development, social capacity  
and volunteer activity.**



Although


# 29%

**of the audience at rural touring  
events are first time attenders,**  
they attract loyal, regular attenders,  
playing an important role in  
rebalancing rural inequality for  
those interested in culture.



# The Strategic Context



The background of the page is a photograph of a stone archway. Through the arch, a stone building with battlements is visible. The text is overlaid on this image.

This strategy does not exist in a vacuum and is intended to connect with and support the strategic objectives that are included in the Council's forthcoming Corporate Plan (2019 to 2023) and within the current Community Plan.

This strategy also aims to support the delivery of Council priorities in terms of improving the local economy, increasing employment and supporting good relations and community engagement.

An ambitious vision for the arts, culture and heritage cannot be delivered by the Council alone. We have developed the priorities and vision detailed within this strategy after a comprehensive consultation with a wide range of individuals, groups and key stakeholders from within the sector. Without the input and collective partnership of these stakeholders, the scale of ambition and change we want to achieve would be impossible. In a wider Northern Ireland context, a number of bodies and Departments have produced strategies, priorities and frameworks, which we have taken cognisance of in this strategy (see Appendix 1).

## Consultation – Getting Your Views

To gain a clear understanding of the priority areas and critical feedback of key stakeholders and the local community, a wide-ranging and comprehensive consultation and research exercise was undertaken as part of the process of developing this strategy, which included:

- A comprehensive audit of our existing arts, culture and heritage offering.
- A review of relevant local, national and international plans and policies and engagement with the key Government agencies with overall responsibility for the development and promotion of arts, culture and heritage in Northern Ireland.
- An online public survey to identify key themes and a wider vision for arts, culture and heritage in the district.
- Focus groups and workshops with artists, performers, community stakeholders and representatives from private sector businesses and Government agencies.

We consulted with a wide range of **organisations and stakeholders**. Their feedback helped us to gain a 360-degree view of the challenges and opportunities for the development of arts, culture and heritage in Newry, Mourne and Down.

**A review of all available audience, finance and evaluation data** from all venues and museums was undertaken and a **summary socio-economic profile** was developed. **A strategic review of the internal and external environment** was then undertaken through a SWOT analysis with staff and key stakeholders at all focus group sessions.

**Individual consultation sessions** were held with: Council staff aligned to each of the Council arts venues and museums and those engaged in festivals; elected members; statutory organisations; the Council's CEO and Director of Service; cross departmental staff; other neighbouring councils, including Ards and North Down Borough Council and Louth County Council; and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

**Some 14 Sector and community-based consultation focus groups** were held across two full days and evenings in Newry and Downpatrick, to provide opportunities for different culture, arts and heritage genres and arts and crafts practitioners to engage in the development of the plan. This included separate focus-group sessions on the following: emerging artists and professional performing arts encompassing music; theatre and dance; creative industries (including cinematic and crafts enterprises); dance and music including stage schools; visual arts and literature; arts and cultural venues (Council, community and private venues used for arts and heritage); arts for older people and arts for young people; festivals/community festivals; amateur arts including drama societies; historical societies, neighbourhood renewal and rural communities; and local businesses.

For those who were unable to attend these sessions, **a series of one-to-one meetings and telephone consultations** were also conducted. A questionnaire was shared with key stakeholders who were unable to attend the focus groups.



On the basis of this in-depth consultation and engagement process and the **desk top review** on audiences and activity, a paper was produced on the emerging priority themes and potential actions under each. **A public engagement e-survey** was then sent to all those consulted as well as to the general public through the Council's community database to seek feedback on the emerging themes and actions for the culture, arts and heritage strategy and the views that people had about a vision for the strategy. **This public engagement survey was completed by 93 key stakeholders** and informed the development of the final draft strategy.




# Our Current Culture, Arts and Heritage Offering



**B** Cross-carved stone  
Early Christian, c.400 - 1177AD  
Aughnacavan, near Derraghmore, Co. Down  
Lent by the Ulster Museum with the kind permission  
of the Trustees of the National Museum

**4** Glazed cooking vessel  
19th century  
Manufactured at the traditional pottery  
works at Dromparick, Co. Down  
Lent by the Ulster Museum with the kind permission  
of the Trustees of the National Museum



To create a vision and plot a course to achieving that vision we need to know where we are starting from and what our arts, culture and heritage offering looks like today. The following is an overview of our existing service provision.

## Arts and Entertainment



**Down Arts Centre in Downpatrick:** a 164-seat auditorium, a visual arts gallery, an artist's workshop and two workshop/meeting spaces that present live theatre, music and comedy and attract local professional and voluntary performance groups as well as curated exhibitions and a wide range of arts classes and workshops. It presents 50 one-day workshops and 106 classes from June to September and 22 live performances on Fridays and Saturdays.



**Newry Town Hall:** a 470-seat auditorium, which hosted 15 live performances between June and September 2018, with a large number of productions by local groups and commercial promoters. 23 different groups and promoters hired the venue in 2017/18. The building's fabric has recently undergone significant renovation, and the Council is currently progressing visionary proposals for the creation of a multi-million pound investment in Newry Town Hall and the Sean Hollywood Arts Centre to integrate and develop the centres as an internationally-recognised theatre and conference offering.



**Sean Hollywood Arts Centre:** a 130-seat auditorium with fixed seating, a visual arts gallery, a rehearsal room and two workshop/meeting spaces, which host live theatre and music shows, mainly by local groups. It presented 16 performances between June and September 2018. 23 different groups and promoters hired the venue in 2017/18.



**Warrenpoint Town Hall:** a 365-seat auditorium with removable seating and two meeting rooms that present live theatre and music, almost exclusively by local voluntary groups. It presented four performances between June and September 2018. Seven different groups and promoters hired the venue in 2017/18. It is also used on an ongoing basis for non-arts focused community services.

## Arts and Entertainment at other Venues



In the summer months, an entertainment programme is provided as part of the **Newcastle Summer Season** in various buildings in and around Newcastle. Over 5,000 visitors attend each year and the responses to customer surveys are very positive from both repeat and new visitors to the district.



The **Great Hall at the Downshire Estate** in Downpatrick is used mainly by voluntary groups for events such as concerts, musicals, and pantomimes, etc. Other spaces used for events include the Annesley Hall in Newcastle, the Old Court Chapel in Strangford and the Lodge Business and Cultural Centre in Castlewellan.



## Heritage Centres



**Down County Museum** was founded in 1981 and is housed in the County Goal of Down, which opened in 1796. It has a collection of over 12,000 objects and 50,000 photographs and has 10 exhibition galleries. The central Governor's Residence building houses a permanent exhibition entitled 'Down Through Time', which features over 1,100 items that range from prehistoric times to the present day. Visitors can experience the original gaol cells, and the museum's collections focus on County Down's distinctive history, including early Christian heritage, farming and fishing and the history of the gaol alongside regular temporary exhibitions. The museum's education programme offers tailored visits and activities for community groups and primary schools and its online learning resource supports Key Stage 3 students to understand changes in County Down from 1900 to the 1920s in a national and international context.



**Newry and Mourne Museum at Bagenal's Castle:** Bagenal's Castle comprises a sixteenth century fortified house and adjoining nineteenth century warehouse. It houses Newry and Mourne Museum and Newry Visitor Information Centre. The Museum's diverse collections include material relating to prehistory, Newry's Cistercian foundations, Ulster's Gaelic order and the building of a merchant town and the first summit level canal in the British Isles. Visitors can also discover the history of the 'Gap of the North', the historic mountain pass between Ulster and Leinster located to the south of Newry. One of the main exhibitions, 'A Border Town's Experience of the 20th Century', examines local attitudes to major political and economic events of the 20th century. There are also permanent exhibitions on farming, fishing and folklore in the Mournes and South Armagh. The museum's education programme includes lessons for schools around six main topics and a loan box service that also supports reminiscence activity in the community, including in healthcare settings. The Reside Collection is an online database provided by the museum that supports the study of local history and genealogy.

Entry to both museums is free, and they both receive very positive reviews and feedback from new and repeat visitors. Down County Museum has achieved four-star grading through Tourism NI's Quality Grading Scheme for Visitor Attractions. Both museums are also accredited on the Museums, Libraries and Archives Accreditation Scheme.

## Built and Natural Heritage



Newry, Mourne and Down contains 17 Grade A, 83 Grade B+ and 1,327 Grade B listed buildings. The Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) index places the district third in a league table of NI local authority areas in terms of historic built environment assets and activities around those assets. The district scored highest in historic built environment assets and in activity in parks and open spaces.

The Department for Communities' Historic Environment Division has identified 41 historic sites and monuments within the district that are state care.

Newry, Mourne and Down is ranked third out of the eleven local authority areas for its landscape and natural heritage assets and activities with 84,000km<sup>2</sup> of Areas of Outstanding Beauty, 13,000km<sup>2</sup> of Special Conservation Areas, 16,000km<sup>2</sup> of Sites of Special Scientific interest and 443 ancient trees.

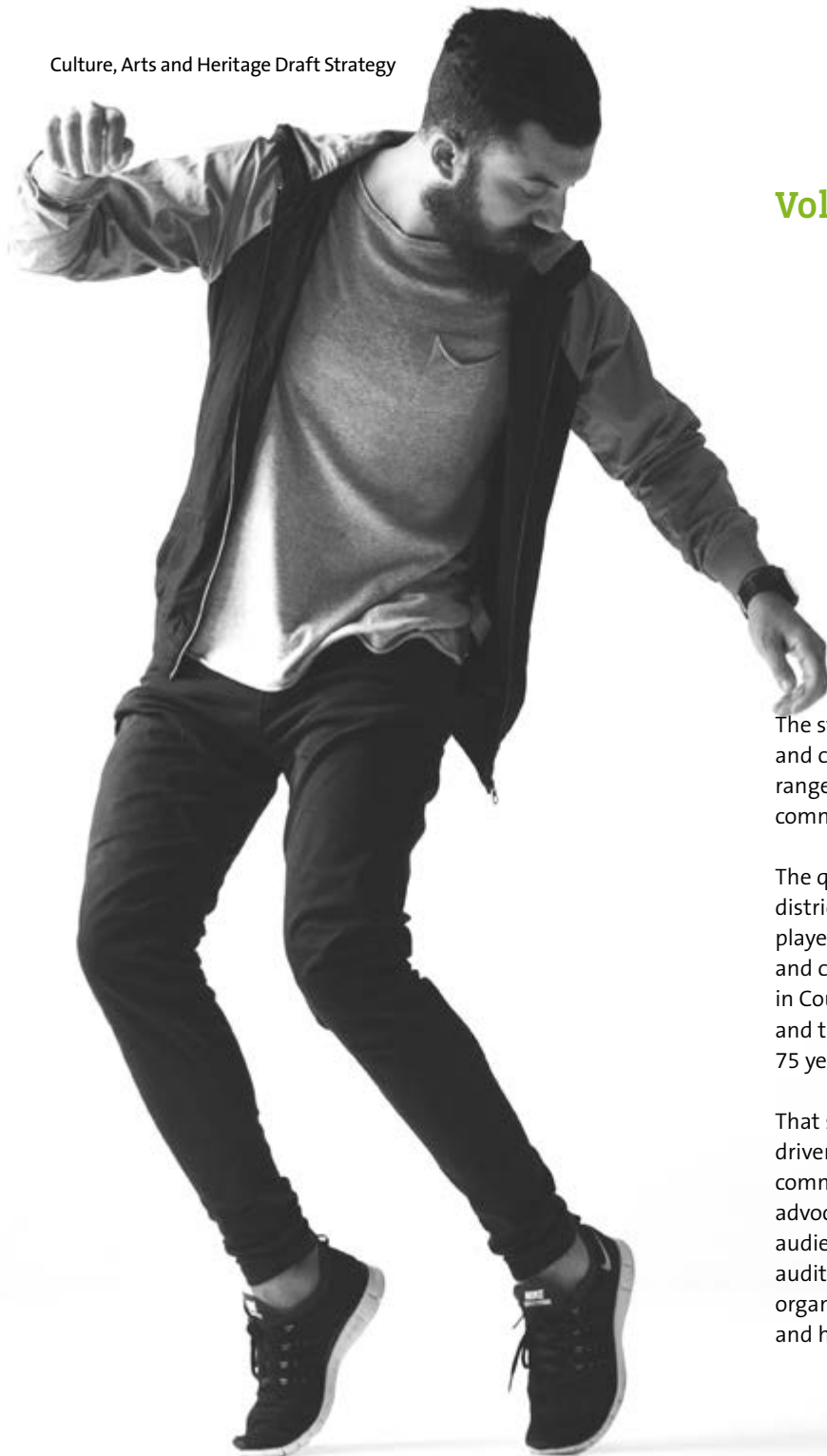
## Festivals and events



Culture, arts and heritage have a key role to play in delivering the Council's Tourism Strategy. A key strength identified in that strategy is the district's extensive range of tourism events and festivals, particularly those with a strong artistic and cultural focus that serve to highlight the region's unique heritage.

Tourism is a key pillar of the Council's Corporate Plan and Economic Strategy, and a crucial component in realising the potential of the district's tourism offering is the success of the events and festivals that are run, hosted or funded by the Council. In the 2019/20 financial year, 39 events and festivals will take place in the district, including the showpiece Giant Adventures Programme of major events that take place annually.

The economic impact of the district's main tourism events in 2018/19 was close to £10 million, emphasising the importance of their continued success to the local economy.



## Voluntary and Amateur Groups

The strong provision in, and passion for, arts and cultural activity has been driven by a wide range of groups and individuals based in the local communities across the district.

The quality of, and community support for, our district's amateur groups has meant they have played an essential role in providing arts, heritage and cultural activities out in local communities and in Council venues, particularly in Newry Town Hall and the Sean Hollywood Arts Centre, for more than 75 years.

That strong and diverse arts and cultural offering, driven by groups and individuals within local communities, means there is a critical mass of advocates and champions that are actively engaging audiences and participants across the district. An audit undertaken in 2016 identified 235 unique organisations providing 434 different arts, culture and heritage programmes and activities across the

district. It was found that the Council's knowledge of, and its interaction and engagement with, this wide variety of groups is limited, and an opportunity therefore exists to build closer partnerships with key providers.

From the research undertaken, it is evident that 40% of the arts and culture offering that was delivered by the 235 organisations was mostly centred in Newry, Newcastle and Downpatrick.

From the research undertaken as part of the development of this strategy, it appears that, although numerous parts of the district potentially have a strong arts, culture or heritage offering, the visibility of the activities that are taking place is limited, and this is particularly the case in more rural areas.



# The Research — What Did You Say?

The following are the key themes and comments that were raised by a wide range of stakeholders and consultation participants in the development of this strategy:

## Advocacy and Collaboration

- The sector's voice isn't loud enough.
- Nobody is championing the arts in this area.
- The Arts Committee was good but was abandoned following RPA – it should be reformed.
- Arts organisations don't have the opportunities to meet and collaborate.
- Partnerships should be a priority.
- Get on board with local businesses and venues to work together and make it happen.
- The arts are a lifeline monitor.

## Strength of Our Offering

- Our strength is our heritage in the arts and culture right across the district.
- We have so many assets: natural and built heritage, venues and culture.
- Our tourism sector has a role for arts and heritage, focusing on authenticity and epic moments.
- Fantastic events run and supported by the Council like Footsteps in the Forest and Wake the Giant.

## Audience Engagement and Accessibility

- We have to stop arts, culture and heritage being seen as elitist.
- We need to do more to connect people to our arts, heritage and cultural assets.
- Bottom up thinking is needed – how do we support the local groups reach out to the wider community?
- We need to widen the reach of the local arts centres.

## Financial Pressures

- Internal and external funding constraints are really biting.
- The method of obtaining funding is not a level playing field.
- Small businesses and crafts people have to make their own way. I do not rely on the government for any assistance as it doesn't exist.
- There are so many opportunities for funding partnerships out there – we need to actively hunt these opportunities.
- The main threat is lack of funding and inequality of access, particularly for those whose life would be most enhanced by opportunities to engage.
- We need to work with the Arts Council and the main Belfast-based partnership organisations to seek support and outreach.

## Council Support of the Sector

- It's great the Council is enthusiastic about arts, culture and heritage.
- The Council is not prioritising the arts due to a lack of understanding of the benefits – seen and unseen – of the arts on economic and social well-being, and the health and well-being of communities.
- The arts are valuable to the district's social and economic goals.
- Project organisers are the experts, not the Council. NMDDC therefore need to support the district's arts groups.
- The arts are a statutory duty but here they are actually run by the amateur community.
- The Council has no strategy or enthusiasm for what the arts groups offer to people of Newry, Mourne and Down.

## Council Arts and Heritage Venues

- Can the facilities be better run through another kind of structure?
- Hire charges are unrealistic.
- We present one event per month (with a peak audience of 70) followed by discussions but the room hire fee was doubled so it's becoming unsustainable.
- There's very strong participation in heritage sector (especially the museums) but the sector is under-resourced and under-appreciated.
- Down Arts Centre puts on a fantastic theatre programme and workshops – it should be replicated in our other centres – to reach new audiences and get more people to experience the arts.
- We need to free up our arts centres to be run as modern, vibrant, creative hubs that are attractive to new audiences.
- A strength is the relationship between the museums and local historical societies.
- We need to attract more big productions to Newry whilst building the capacity and support of our amateur groups that have been the beating heart of the arts in Newry for the past 30 years.
- The work the museum delivers is so important to promoting good mental health, and the community connection to our past and place.
- Why don't we host more big conferences in the city? The Town Hall is an amazing venue.

## Marketing

- We have missed a lot of interesting opportunities because we didn't know about them.
- You have to really go looking for what's on.
- We can achieve our vision through coordinated planning of what is on and how and to whom it is communicated.
- We don't have enough data on audiences.
- This area needs a funded online ticketing system and a proper database.
- The websites are out of date.

# Key Insights

A significant volume of research, surveys, workshops and consultation has been undertaken in the past eight years, which has helped to build a clear picture of the challenges and opportunities now facing us. The key findings and emerging themes of this work to date are summarised in this section.



## 1 Our Residents – Accessing the Arts, Culture and Heritage

- In research undertaken by the Council in 2018, based on face-to-face interviews with 764 residents across the district, just 15% of respondents said they had attended or participated in an arts, heritage or culture activity or event in the past 12 months.
- Respondents with a higher average household income and those with a higher level of educational attainment were more likely to engage in an arts, heritage or culture activity or event.
- Respondents were asked what would motivate them to engage, with 64% saying that they needed more information about events and activities; 40% saying that they needed events and activities that were more relevant to them and their families; and 16% saying that online booking for events at Council-managed facilities would motivate them.
- Although numerous parts of district appear to have a limited arts, culture or heritage offering, particularly in more rural areas, there is actually a wide range of arts and cultural based activity taking place, with the visibility of this activity often limited.
- Whilst Newry, Mourne and Down's 178,000 residents are dispersed across the third largest council area in Northern Ireland, an opportunity exists to provide greater outreach and accessibility to arts, cultural and heritage based initiatives and programmes in partnerships with local communities and the voluntary sector.
- The proportion of young people under 16 years of age account for 23% of the population in the district, which is a higher proportion than that in other council areas of NI. Conversely, over-65s account for 14% of the population of the district.
- Priority groups for audience development include families, those in more rural areas and our older population.

### 15%

of respondents had attended or participated in an arts, heritage or culture activity or event in the past 12 months.

### 64%

of respondents said they needed more information about events and activities.

### 16%

of respondents said that online booking for events would motivate them.

## 2 Our Arts Centres

- Although over 133,000 residents and visitors attended events and activities in our arts centres in an average year, an imbalance exists across the district in terms of the provision and programming in our main arts centres in Newry and Downpatrick.
- A review of audience information from Down Arts Centre shows that it continues to outperform other similar sized venues across Northern Ireland, attracting people with a 45-minute drive time to the venue, including significant numbers from Belfast.
- Down Arts Centre invests similar amounts in its programme to comparable venues in the North and South of Ireland, but the Sean Hollywood Arts Centre, Newry Town Hall and Warrenpoint Town Hall are under programmed because of their comparably small programming budget.
- A lack of a modern box-office system has had a considerable negative impact on residents' ability to purchase tickets online and the venues' ability to promote events and access timely audience data. Through a critical analysis of the research undertaken, it is clear that Newry Town Hall and the Sean Hollywood Arts Centre are one of the only regional arts centres across Northern Ireland without a box-office ticketing system, which is a significant disadvantage when it comes to growing new audiences and attracting touring productions.
- Although Down Arts Centre does have access to limited audience data, its box office system is dated and not fit-for-purpose. There is an opportunity to appraise and modernise the marketing and promotion of our venues and vastly improve online accessibility to tickets and, as a result, the data on audience insight.
- The lack of timely and accurate information on financial performance and audiences is a major challenge in the future management and growth of our arts venues within the district.
- Research into opportunities to increase our local residents' motivation to engage with the arts highlighted that 64% said that they needed more information about events and activities; 40% said they needed events and activities that were more relevant to them and their families; and 16% said that online booking for events at Council-managed facilities would motivate them. It is clear that opportunities exist to review and enhance the marketing infrastructure, resource capacity and marketing budgets available to promote our arts centres and to encourage greater audience participation.

# 133,000

residents and visitors attended events and activities in an average year.

# 40%

of respondents said they needed events and activities more relevant to them and their families.

### 3 Investment in Theatre Provision in Newry

- The Council is currently progressing ambitious proposals to invest £10 million in the redevelopment of Newry Town Hall and the Sean Hollywood Arts Centre to transform them into an internationally recognised arts, theatre and conference facility that will attract new audiences to Newry, provide a greater depth of arts and cultural activity and events for local residents and generate huge economic impacts for local business and the wider district.
- This significant investment is part of the wider Newry City Centre Regeneration Plan that is being progressed alongside the Belfast Region City Deal.
- Through the reimagining and redevelopment of Newry Town Hall and the Sean Hollywood Arts Centre, we have a collective opportunity to appraise how we deliver our services to meet our customers' needs.
- There are key questions that need to be addressed. How can we support the dedicated voluntary and amateur groups that have driven the development of the arts in Newry over numerous decades in terms of building their capacity? We are seeking to provide access to state-of-the-art theatre facilities and support the growth and development of productions and

outputs. How can we achieve those objectives whilst creating a modern theatre and arts facility that protects the rich built and cultural heritage that is intrinsic to Newry Town Hall and realises the full economic benefits that this new facility will provide? How can we provide a modern, innovative and vibrant arts centre with leading technical provision and audience growth targets that is attractive to touring productions of relevant scale?

- In our research and consultation, those are the main areas of opportunity that have been identified in the development of the theatre and conference facilities at Newry Town Hall and the Sean Hollywood Arts Centre.

## £10 million

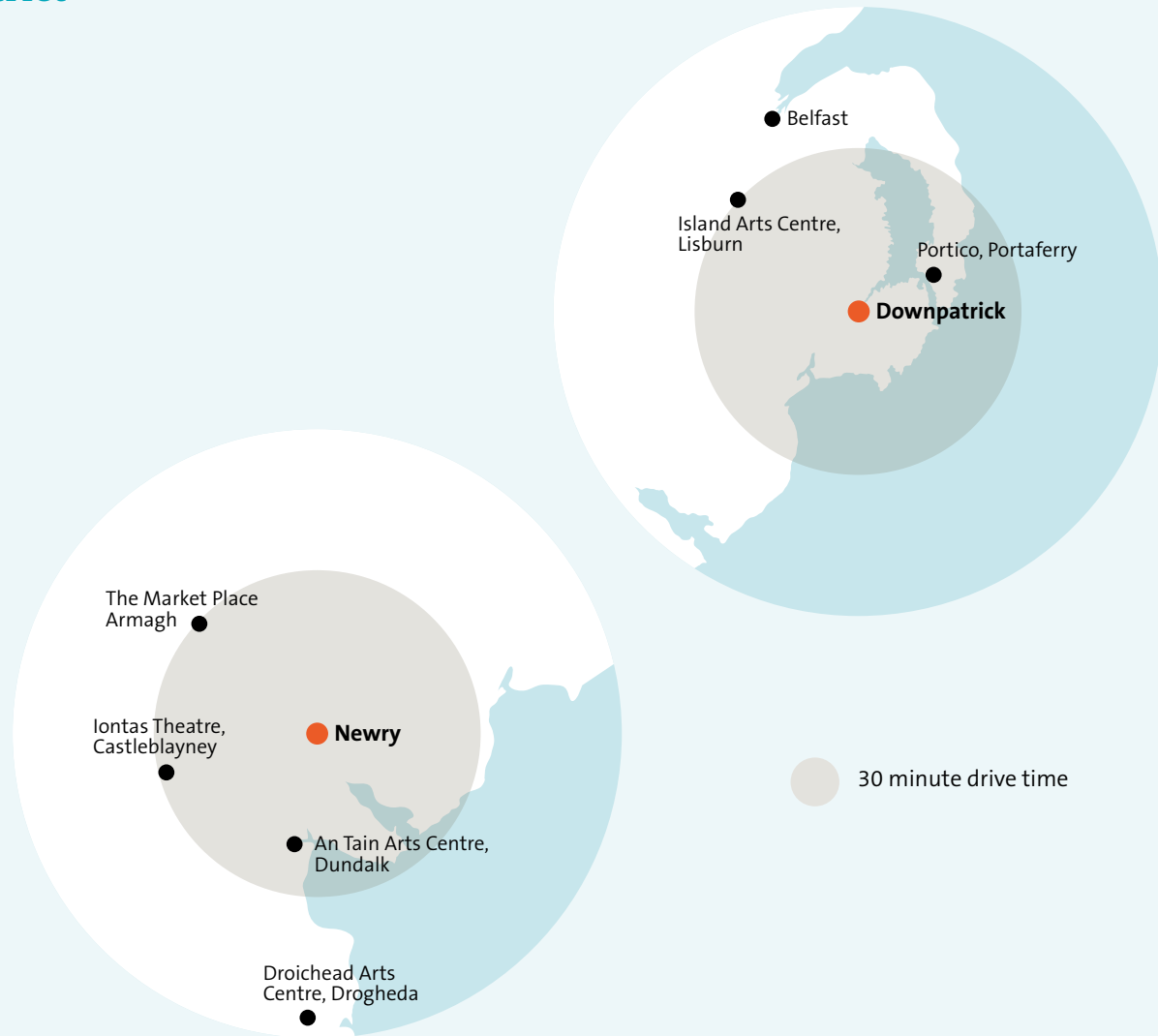
proposed investment in the redevelopment of Newry Town Hall.





## 4 Arts Provision Outside the District

- There are four other venues that have 30 minute drive time catchment areas that overlap with that of Newry, namely the Market Place Theatre, Armagh, Iontas Theatre, Castleblayney, An Tain Arts Centre, Dundalk, and, to a lesser extent, Droichead Arts Centre, Drogheda.
- Down Arts Centre shares a substantial portion of its 30 minute drive time catchment with the Island Arts Centre, Lisburn, Portico in Portaferry and other venues in Belfast.



## 5 Our Museums and Built Heritage

- Our museums continue to reach new audiences. One of the most popular initiatives to engage new audiences was led by the Northern Ireland Museums Council in 2018 and delivered in partnership locally by the Newry and Mourne Museum at Bagenal's Castle. The Late Shift was a series of after-dark events for adults in museums across NI. The event at Bagenal's Castle had one of the highest satisfaction ratings and a higher than average number of first-time visitors at 40%. 85% said the event changed their perception of the museum, higher than in any of the other participating museums. Similarly, the percentage who said that they had been encouraged to find out more about local history was higher for Bagenal's Castle than any other participating museum. The programme shows the potential for changing perceptions of arts, culture and heritage in the district.
- Our museums provide a high-quality visitor experience, receive very positive reviews from visitors, offer excellent education programmes for local school groups and have a strong connection to our local communities and historical societies. However, according to research, the proportion of our local residents who have visited one of our two museums is lower than the corresponding figure for the other districts of NI.
- Through the development of programmes such as the Museum Lates, opportunities exist to reach out and grow new audiences, improve the level of visitor engagement, and, as a consequence, significantly increase the number of repeat visits.
- Our museums can contribute to community cohesion, and a reduction in social exclusion and isolation; and can help understanding and connections between different social groups. Our museums already deliver a huge volume of intangible benefits to our local communities through their education programmes and initiatives such as the Loan Box service, and the Reside Collection of local history and genealogy.
- It is clear that an opportunity exists to increase our outreach to local communities, to engage and grow our audiences and to deliver an enhanced health and well-being programme through our museum and heritage services.
- Outside our museums, research indicates that whilst we have a very strong built heritage offering, more opportunity exists to activate and animate these assets so that more visitors and local communities can become involved and experience the rich cultural heritage of this district.
- In a similar way to our museums, the built and industrial heritage of our district can provide practical benefits to local communities and rich experiences for our visitors through an increased connection to our place and people and insights gained through past narratives. Enhanced access to our heritage assets can support community well-being, civic pride and community cohesion and development.

### 40%

first-time visitors to Bagenal's Castle during Late Shift event.

### 85%

of respondents said the Late Shift event changed their perception of Newry and Mourne museum.



## 6 Arts and Cultural Tourism Events

- Visitor satisfaction, civic pride and huge economic impact is generated for our district through the delivery of the Council's £1.2 million annual events programme. The economic impact of the district's main tourism events in 2018/19 was close to £10 million, emphasising the importance of their continued success to the local economy. Of the visitors who attended our major events in 2018/19, 39% came from outside the district, including 11% from outside Northern Ireland. Of the visitors who came from outside Northern Ireland, the vast majority had travelled from the Republic of Ireland, highlighting the importance of the district's proximity to the border. Furthermore, 42% of visitors said that their perception of the area had improved as a result of the event that they attended.
- Major festivals and events play a very significant role in helping to animate our region, in generating growth in visitor numbers and in engaging tourists and local residents in our unique cultural heritage and inspirational places.
- In addition to the several major festivals hosted by the Council, such as the Festival of Flight, Footsteps in the Forest, Wake the Giant and the annual Saint Patrick's Day parade celebrations, the district is home to a wide range of well-established arts and cultural festivals that have been grown and developed by dedicated committees of volunteers and artists, such as the SOMA festival in Castlewellan and the Fiddler's Green Festival in Rostrevor. The Ulster Pipe Band Championships and Ulster Fleadh were also hosted in the district in 2018 and 2019, providing economic returns and a growth in visitor numbers to the district.
- More recently established festivals, such as the DownTime festival in Downpatrick, Lú Cinn Fleadh in Newry, GI Jive and Reivers Festival in Killkeel also serve to attract new visitors, engage new audiences and generate civic pride in, and economic impacts for, local communities. These cultural and arts-based festivals and events are of a scale where there is growth potential and the potential to attract visitors from outside of the district to stay longer and spend more whilst they're here.
- In addition to the Council's major headline festivals and those well-established tourism festivals and events run by volunteer committees and artists, there are a huge number of community-led festivals and events hosted in towns and villages across the district at key times of the year, such as Easter, Midsummer, Halloween and Christmas.
- Whilst it is clear that there is a huge depth and breadth of cultural and arts focused tourism and community events held right across the district each year, several ongoing challenges exist to the future growth and development of our events programme:
  1. Headline events and major festivals need to evolve and grow over time to maintain audience interest, engage local businesses and meet an increasing need to attract new visitors from outside of Northern Ireland to visit and stay in the district.
  2. A clear understanding and delineation is required between the different levels of tourism, cultural based tourism and community events that are hosted across the district each year, including:
    - A. The several large-scale Council-hosted signature festivals and events.
    - B. The festivals and events that are hosted by dedicated voluntary committees, which have the growth potential to attract visitors from outside of the district and encourage them to stay longer whilst they are here.
    - C. The numerous smaller-scale community-based events that help to encourage community engagement and generate civic pride.
  3. Clear recommendations on Council support mechanisms for these three tiers of festivals and events need to be developed, including considerations for multi-annual funding and capacity building/mentoring support for the dedicated voluntary committees and artists that run some of our best cultural and arts-based tourism events across the district.


## 7 Support and Coordination Across Government

- Culture, arts and heritage activity needs to be further co-ordinated with cross-sector agencies and focused and developed to make a greater contribution to social development.
- In 2016/17, over 1,600 arts-based programmes and initiatives were delivered in the Newry, Mourne and Down District by organisations that were in receipt of funding from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI). Of those activities, 17% were delivered by regularly funded organisations based in Newry, Mourne and Down whilst 75% were delivered by regularly funded organisations based in Belfast.
- In response to ACNI's Challenge Fund, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (NMDDC) developed a series of events designed to increase community engagement. Those events were linked to the tourism strategy theme of telling the stories, myths and legends of the district. ACNI funding represented 14% of the total £1.07million budget for that programme of events in 2015/16.
- Opportunities exist for closer engagement and collaboration between the Council and ACNI to establish mechanisms for greater support and funding of regional arts-based programmes and initiatives outside the major urban centre of Belfast. This is particularly the case for considering future support of key local artists and groups that are responsible for the unique and rich arts and cultural offering of this district.
- Through the development of this strategy, and in close consultation with key partners across Government and the heritage sector, it is clear that opportunities should be progressed for greater engagement between the Council, the Historic Environment Division of DfC, and Tourism NI to unlock the potential that our built heritage presents. The recently published Prospectus for Change: A Strategic Framework to Unlock the Potential of Heritage-led Tourism in Northern Ireland sets out key priorities and a roadmap and vision for the growth of heritage tourism in Northern Ireland over the next five years.

**1,600+**  
arts-based programmes delivered.



# The Big Challenges and Bigger Opportunities



In addition to the strengths and opportunities for enhancement of services and the development of the arts, culture and heritage sector in Newry, Mourne and Down, wider challenges and opportunities exist that will have an influence over the ability to develop and deliver a vision for the sector here. Some of these macro-scale challenges are highlighted overleaf.

## Resource and Budget

The **greatest challenge** within central and local government and across the private and voluntary sectors is that of available resource in people and budget. **Budgetary pressure** on our health and education sectors grows year-on-year, and there is a continuing need to support the growth of new jobs within industry, micro-businesses and SMEs.

- The strategy has been produced at a time when Brexit negotiations are ongoing and **uncertainty exists** as to the nature and precise details of the UK's planned exit from the EU. In addition, uncertainty exists in Northern Ireland with the absence of the NI Assembly and the **lack of an agreed Programme for Government** with set priorities.
- At this uncertain time, the arts, culture and heritage sector has a critical role to play in supporting and strengthening health, education and our economy.
- The Council **currently invests £2.5 million per annum** in delivering arts, culture and heritage programmes and activities within our museums, arts centres and through our tourism events. But outside of Council-delivered activities, a huge number of groups and individuals are responsible for engaging audiences and participants in a wide range of arts, culture and heritage activities on a daily basis.
- Groups and individuals need support in order to **champion and avail** of increased financial support from Government. There is a need to **support those groups and individuals** that bring arts, culture and heritage activities and programmes to our residents. There is a need to make arts, culture and heritage **more accessible to all**.
- There is a need to **champion, advocate for and support groups** to address funding shortfalls and to gain greater recognition for these groups in terms of their work to deliver programmes to a wide range of audiences and participants across regional and rural areas.
- Arts, culture and heritage are central to the delivery of our **tourism strategy** and forthcoming **economic strategy** for the district. More opportunities are needed to enable the **private sector** to link effectively with arts, cultural and heritage initiatives and programmes and with stakeholders in the sector in order to **create new ways of sustainably developing our local economy** and communities.
- The Newry City Centre Regeneration Project, which includes the major investment in theatre and conference facilities in Newry demonstrates how capital **investment in the arts, culture and heritage** through a major capital scheme has an important and **direct link to regeneration outcomes** of our urban areas.

## Accessibility and Equality of Opportunity

Engagement with, and accessibility to, the arts, culture and heritage is **limited for large sections of our location population**.

- There are groups of people living across the district whose access to arts, culture and heritage is affected by socio-economic issues such as **deprivation, negative perceptions of the sector, and physical proximity** to Council venues. Those groups affected include older people, people with disabilities, rural communities, and younger people.
- Rural venues for the promotion of culture and arts can be costly to run and the necessary infrastructure that is available for **rural outreach programmes can be limited**. Other factors that limit accessibility need to be considered also, including ticket prices and the cost of participating in culture, arts and heritage activities.
- There is a need to **create outreach opportunities** and to bring the arts, culture and heritage to life within our local communities and, in doing so, **create economic, educational and health benefits** for our people.

At the most fundamental level is the premise that the **opportunity to engage** in and experience the arts, culture and heritage **should be open to all**, regardless of a person's socio-economic background, educational attainment, physical location or any other factors that may otherwise restrict accessibility and equality of opportunity.



# The Vision

In 2025, Newry, Mourne and Down has a rich cultural life that is celebrated and protected for future generations. Our culture, arts and heritage creates economic impact in our urban centres and brings benefits to all our rural communities across the district.

The sector contributes to our district's **community cohesion** and to supporting a happy and **healthy society** and provides a **catalyst for economic growth** by attracting new audiences and visitors to our district.

We **leverage new inward investment** through our arts, culture and heritage whilst preserving our personal sense of being and **our connection** to the place we call home.

By 2022, all our citizens and visitors enjoy a diverse and inspiring arts and theatre programme in our **vibrant and innovative theatre and conference centre** at Newry Town Hall and in Down Arts Centre. Our voluntary and amateur groups have access to state-of-the-art theatre facilities and are **supported in their growth** and development to inspire new participants and continue to promote the rich cultural heritage of this district to new audiences. All our citizens across the district can access a diverse and engaging arts and culture **outreach programme** delivered within our local communities.

# 2022

## Our Year of Ambition

**2022: Our Year of Ambition** is a celebratory year of arts, culture and heritage in our district. A year-long programme of cultural and arts initiatives, events and activities will be delivered across the entire district. This programme will be codesigned by the Council and our community choirs, drama groups, craft collectives, pipe bands, local branches of the Comhaltas, community arts groups, heritage groups, tour guides and local ambassadors, Ulster-Scots groups, Feis committees, school groups and all the numerous voluntary organisations that demonstrate their passion, vibrancy, commitment and diversity on a daily basis.

A new Flagship International Festival has been commissioned as part of Our Year of Ambition to celebrate our world-class music, dance and art. The festival shines a light on our orchestra in residence and on our talented young people who grace the world stage.

Our arts, culture and heritage sector delivers measurable health and well-being benefits to our citizens. It supports the sense of place and educational attainment of our young people and the inclusion and cohesion of our communities.

Our museums deliver a diverse and inspiring annual programme of exhibitions and events that have reached new audiences and attracted more visitors to come to the district.

An exciting heritage activation programme is delivered annually, inspiring the creation of new, commercially sustainable visitor experiences that animate our heritage sites and bring to life the stories, myths and legends of our district.

In addition to our flagship tourism events, a series of indigenous cultural and arts-based festivals and events have engaged new audiences, generated civic pride and economic impact into local communities by attracting international visitors from outside of the district to stay longer and spend more.

Our Arts and Culture Forum is at the heart of it all and is the voice of the sector that sense-checks and informs the Council's progress against the delivery of this strategy.

# Delivery

The key themes of this strategy are the foundations upon which subsequent delivery plans, programmes, initiatives and grant schemes will be created and delivered over the next five years.

## Our Sector

Strengthen and support our culture, arts and heritage sector.

## Our Arts and Heritage Centres

Reimagine and grow our arts venues and museums.

## Our Audiences

Develop bigger and broader audiences across the district.

## Our Capacity and Growth

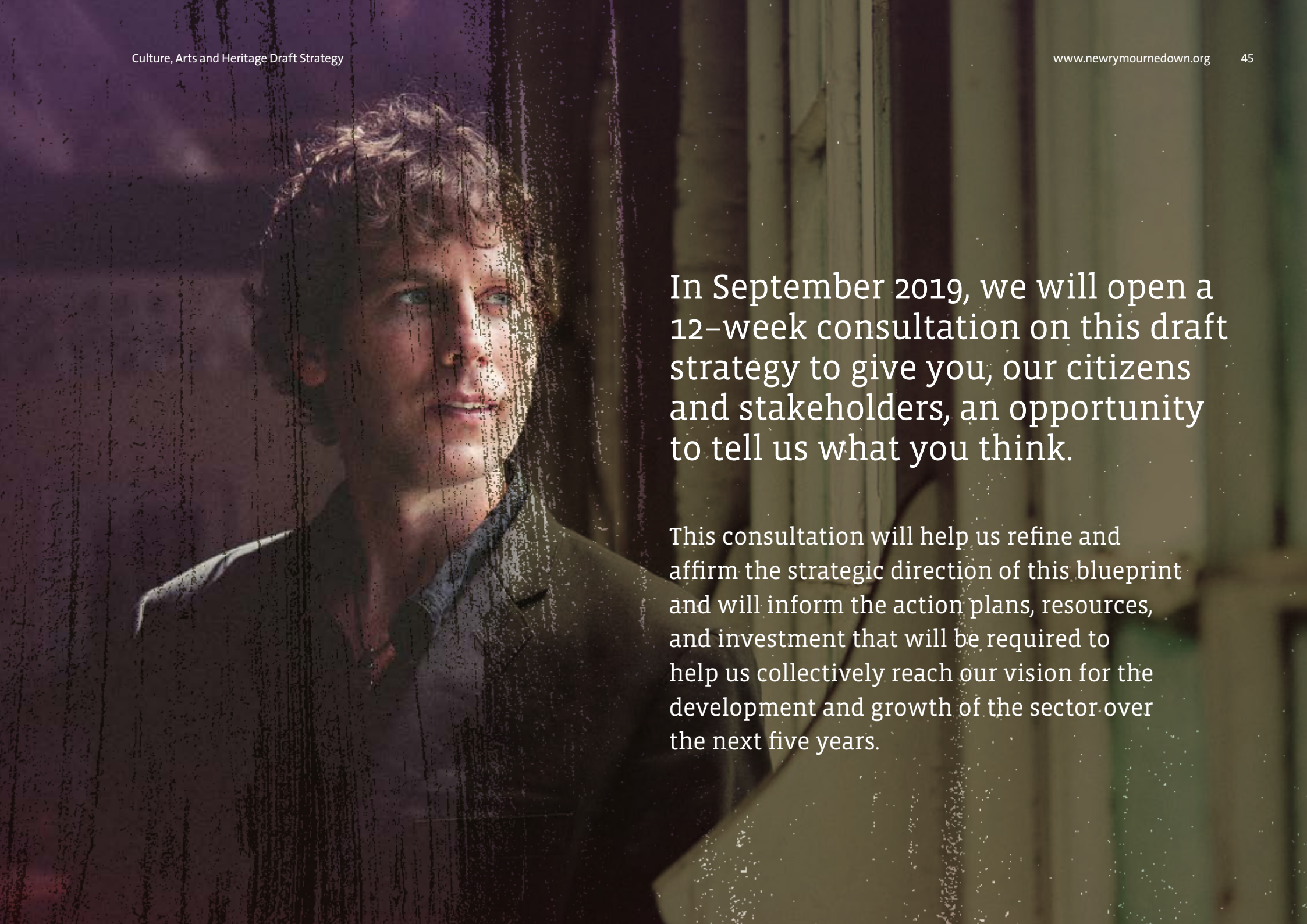
Develop skills, excellence and opportunities in the arts, culture and heritage sector.

## Our Residents and Visitors

Bringing our arts and cultural heritage to life for residents and visitors.

## Next Steps

A significant volume of research, surveys, workshops and consultations have been undertaken in the development of this draft strategy over a number of years. In this document, we have outlined the baseline of where we are today, detailed the immediate and long-term challenges we face and set out an ambitious vision of transformation for reimagining our arts, culture and heritage offering in 2025.

A young man with curly hair is looking out a window. The window has vertical blinds, and the light is coming from the right, creating a soft glow on his face and the blinds. He is wearing a dark jacket over a collared shirt.

In September 2019, we will open a 12-week consultation on this draft strategy to give you, our citizens and stakeholders, an opportunity to tell us what you think.

This consultation will help us refine and affirm the strategic direction of this blueprint and will inform the action plans, resources, and investment that will be required to help us collectively reach our vision for the development and growth of the sector over the next five years.



## Areas included in the scope of this strategy

*As the definition of each term is wide, for the purposes of this plan the following specific areas have been included within the scope of this strategy:*

### Development of our arts facilities, including:

- Newry Town Hall
- Sean Hollywood Arts Centre
- Warrenpoint Town Hall
- Down Arts Centre

**Working in partnership** with key stakeholders to protect, enhance and promote our built heritage throughout the district.

**Development and growth of tourism festivals and events** that promote and enhance the arts, culture and heritage of this district.

**Support of key individuals and groups** who promote the arts and culture of this district to international audiences.

### Development of our heritage centres, including:

- Newry and Mourne Museum at Bagenal's Castle
- Down County Museum

**Growth of audiences and the participation of our citizens in arts, culture and heritage programmes and activities:**

- Within our heritage and arts centres; and through
- outreach programmes within our communities

**Advocacy and support of the individuals and groups** who deliver arts, culture and heritage programmes and activities to our citizens throughout the district.



## Areas not included in the scope of this strategy

*The following areas do not fall within the scope of this strategy, either because there are existing programmes or activities in place that address their development or because the areas listed on the previous page have been deemed to be the key priority areas that the Council should focus on in developing our Arts, Culture and Heritage offering within the district.\**

Infrastructure or programme development of Arts Facilities or Heritage Centres that are not operated or managed by the Council.

Development or funding of public art in civic spaces.

Direct funding or management of state-care heritage assets, monuments and buildings.

Programmes and activities to develop, promote and protect our natural and built heritage that are currently delivered through Landscape Partnerships and/or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management bodies.

Development or support of groups, activities and programmes focused exclusively on either community engagement, sports and leisure or economic development and business start-ups or growth.

*\* Note – these specific areas of focus have been identified through a comprehensive stakeholder engagement exercise that was undertaken as part of the development of this strategy.*

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