

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

Straitéis Chultúir, Ealaíon agus Oidhreachta Culture, Arts and Heritage Strategy 2022—2027



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

Contents

Introduction	05
The Purpose of this Strategy	06
Value of Culture, Arts and Heritage	09
The Strategic Context	15
Our Culture, Arts and Heritage Offering	17
Key Insights	23
The Big Challenges and Bigger Opportunities	30
The Vision - 2027	34
Delivery	36
Key Priorities Year 1 to 3	37

The Vision

In 2027, 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.

We are shaped by our historic landscape and are proud of our museums and built heritage.

By 2027, 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.

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.

Growing Our Sector

Strengthen and support our culture, arts and heritage sector following the impact of the Covid pandemic.

Developing Our Arts Venues and Museums

Reimagine and grow our arts venues and museums.

Growing Our Audiences

Bringing our arts, culture and heritage to life for our residents and visitors.

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 following the impacts of the Covid pandemic, 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.



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 - with investment in the arts, culture and heritage critical to rebuilding the sector.

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 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**.

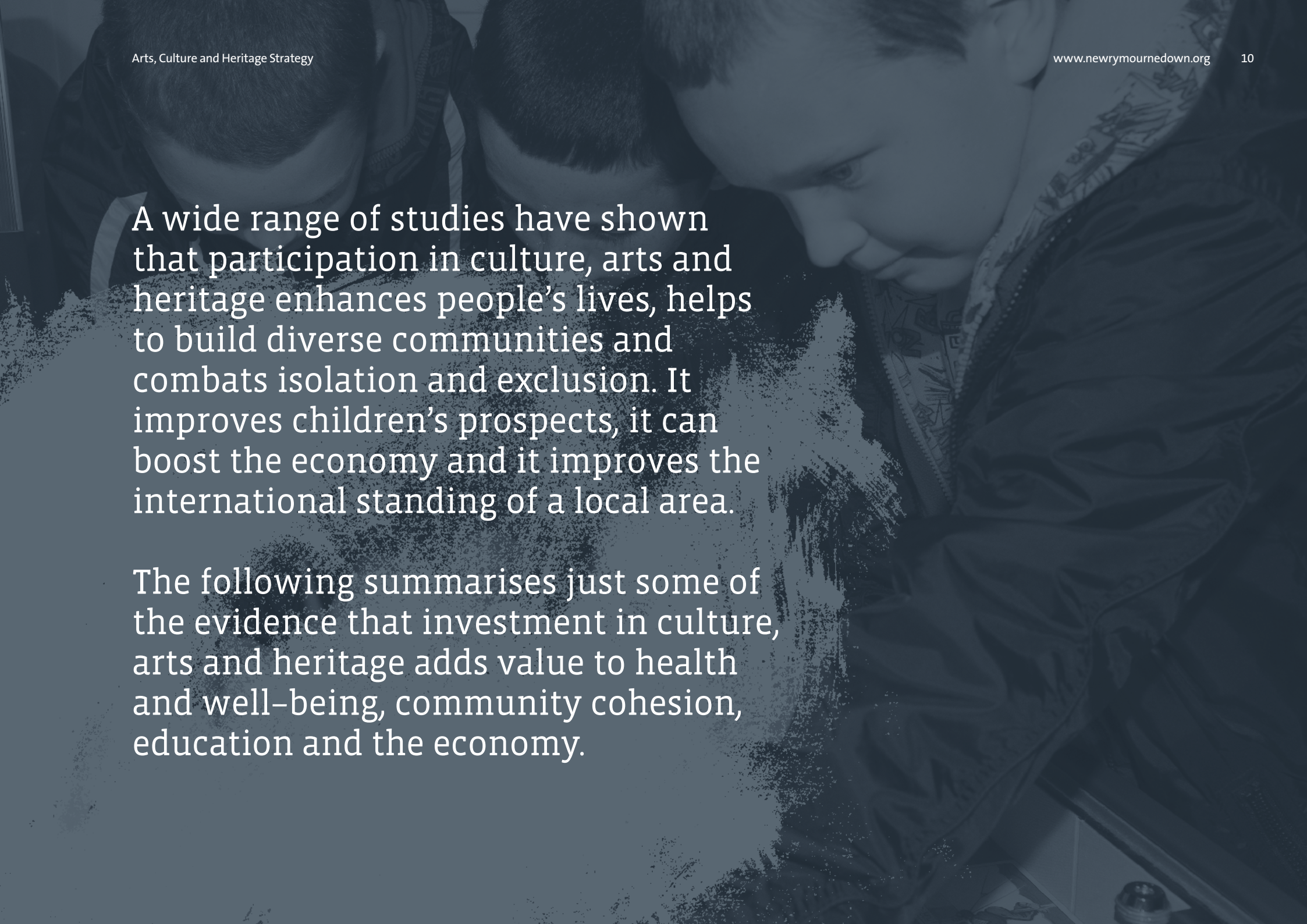
Such groups have been devastated by the impacts of the Covid pandemic and are now attempting to deliver activity with limited resources, but they have the ability to reach and engage a huge number of participants and audiences in **every townland, village, and urban centre** throughout the district.

Prior to the pandemic, 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 generated 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 and their importance as we emerge from the Covid pandemic, more critical than ever before. Those intangible returns are presented in more detail on the next page.



Value of Culture, Arts and Heritage

A dark, blue-tinted photograph of three children leaning over a table, focused on a task. The child on the right is a boy with short hair, looking intently at something on the table. The other two children are partially visible on the left, also looking down. The background is dark and out of focus.

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.



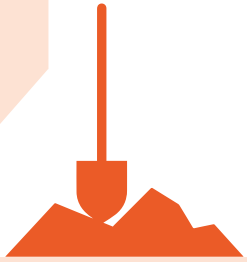
Studies have found that visiting historical sites

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

Prior to the pandemic 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 taking part in organised archaeological excavations 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



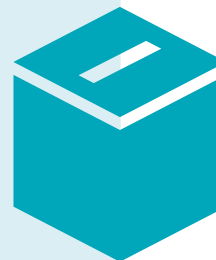
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Participation in the arts
creates more engaged
citizens. Young people who
engage with the arts in
school are twice as likely to
volunteer and

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

Prior to the Covid pandemic 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.

Prior to the Covid pandemic

42%

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



Prior to the Covid pandemic investment by public sector in the arts and the historic environment contributed up to £4 to the local economy for every £1 spent.

£1 = £4

The impact of COVID-19 on the arts in NI resulted in estimated losses of

£25 million

in 2020/21



Economic



The Arts Council of Northern Ireland's box office survey highlighted losses of

£8.3 million

for ticket sales and an additional £5.3m from other revenue streams (June 20)



The impact of COVID-19 on the arts in NI resulted in estimated losses of £25m in 2020/21. Arts and culture contribute to local economies by **attracting visitors, creating jobs and developing skills, attracting and retaining businesses and revitalising places.**

Ulster University's Economic Policy Centre has estimated that of the

39,100 jobs

in arts, culture and heritage, it was estimated that

12,000-16,000

were vulnerable as a result of COVID-19 impacts and restrictions.

Ulster University's Economic Policy Centre, Dec 2020



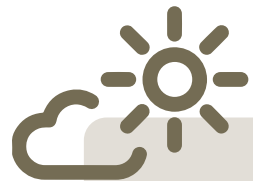


Well designed arts and cultural venues
add considerable value to
the built environment

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**.



Prior to the pandemic although

29%

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



The Strategic Context



The background image is a sepia-toned photograph of a stone archway. Through the arch, a stone building with battlements is visible. The building has a small window with horizontal slats. The overall tone is historical and architectural.

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 Corporate Plan and 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.

Our Culture, Arts and Heritage Offering

8 Cross-carved stone
Early Christian, c.400 – 1177AD
Aughnacavan, near Donaghmore, Co. Down
Lent by the Ulster Museum with the kind permission
of the Board of Trustees of the National Museum
Ireland

7 Glazed cooking
vessel
13th century
Manufactured at the medieval pottery
kilns at Downpatrick, Co. Down
Lent by the Ulster Museum with the kind permission
of the Board of Trustees of the National Museum of
Ireland



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.

Museums



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.

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.



Newry Town Hall: a 470-seat auditorium, with a large number of productions by local groups and commercial promoters. 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.

**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 is also used on an ongoing basis for non-arts focused community services.

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 84,000km² of Areas of Outstanding Beauty, 13,000km² of Special Conservation Areas, 16,000km² of Sites of Special Scientific interest and 443 ancient trees.

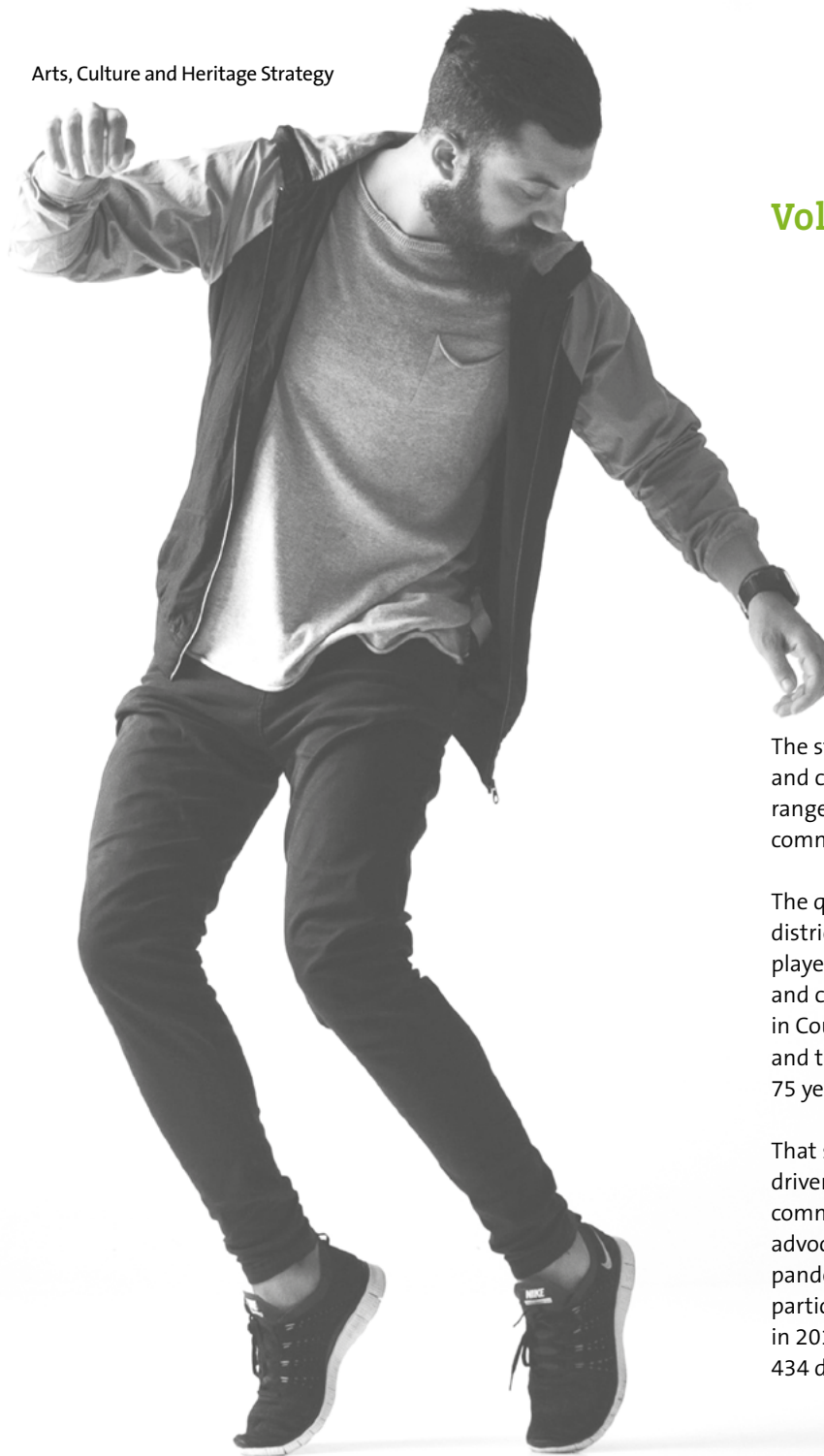
Festivals and events



Culture, arts and heritage have a key role to play in delivering the Council's Tourism Strategy. A key strength identified in that strategy was the district's Tourism Events Programme prior to 2020, particularly those festivals and events that highlighted the region's unique cultural 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 prior to the Covid pandemic, had been 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 in 2019, it was 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.

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 Museums and Built Heritage

- 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. However, according to research, undertaken prior to the Covid pandemic, showed the proportion of local residents who had visited one of our two museums was lower than the corresponding figure for the other districts of NI.
- Through the development of programmes, 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. Prior to March 2020 our museums delivered 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.



2

Our Residents – Accessing the Arts, Culture and Heritage

- In research undertaken by the Council in 2018, 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.
- Providing better access to arts, cultural & heritage activities is a key priority as we emerge from the impacts of the Covid pandemic.
- 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 prior to the Covid pandemic.

64%

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

16%

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

3 Our Arts Centres

- Prior to 2020, over 133,000 residents and visitors attended events and activities in our arts centres in an average year. However an imbalance existed 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 in 2019 showed that it continued 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.
- 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.
- Prior to the pandemic, 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, prior to the Covid pandemic.

40%

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

4 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.



5 Arts and Cultural Tourism Events

- 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, Iúr 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 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.

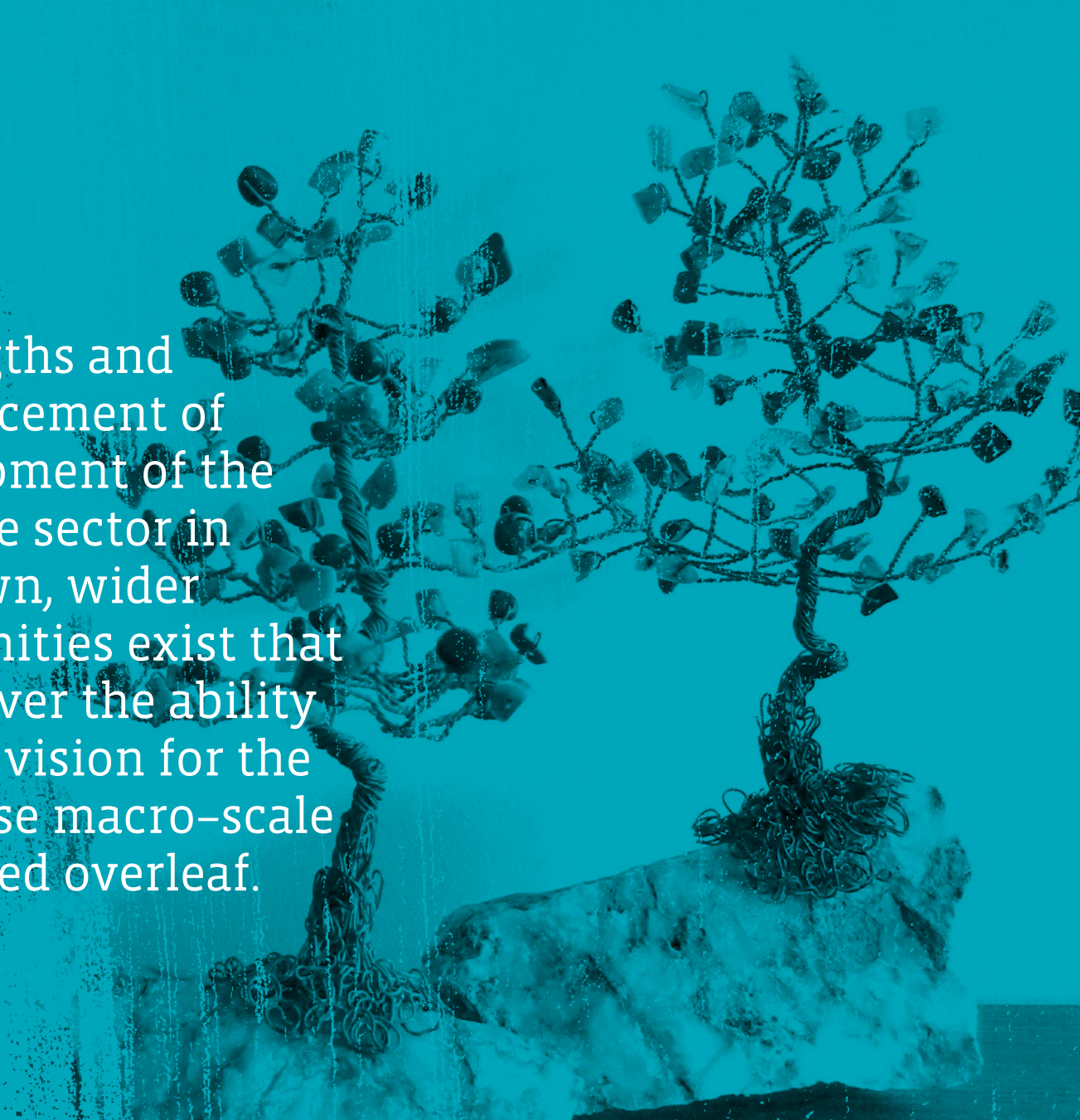
6 Support and Coordination Across Government

- 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.
- 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 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

As we emerge from the impacts of the Covid pandemic, 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** grows year-on-year, and there is a continuing need to support the recovery of the arts, culture & heritage sector in the recovery phase from Covid-19.

- 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.
- In 2022-23 the Council will **invest £2.5 million** in the delivery of 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

Prior to the Covid pandemic, 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 2027, 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.

We are shaped by our **historic landscape** and are proud of our **museums and built heritage**.

By 2027, all our citizens and visitors enjoy a diverse and inspiring arts and theatre programme in our **vibrant and innovative theatre and conference centre** in Newry 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.

20
27

Our Ambition

2027: 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 strategic partners across Government, NGOs, education, heritage, and the multiple organisations and groups in the voluntary sectors.

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.

Growing Our Sector

Strengthen and support our culture, arts and heritage sector.

Developing our Arts Venues and Museums

Reimagine and grow our arts venues and museums.

Growing Our Audiences

Bringing our arts, culture and heritage to life for our residents and visitors.

Key Priorities: Year 1 to 3

1

Objective 1 Growing our Sector

Strengthen and support our culture, arts and heritage sector

Actions	Partners	Timeline - from
Establish a new arts forum that represents key stakeholders in order to improve collaboration and co-ordination of the sector development across the District.	<i>Representative bodies and strategic partners across the Arts Sectors</i>	<i>2022-23</i>
Create networking opportunities between local culture, arts and heritage providers with health and education representatives to enhance opportunities for greater collaboration.	<i>Council, Community Planning Partners, Forum Partners</i>	<i>2022-23 onwards</i>
Establish opportunities for greater support of local arts and heritage groups to develop their capabilities in marketing, sponsorship, and audience development, etc.	<i>Council, Forum Partners</i>	<i>2022-23 onwards</i>
Work with key strategic partners to establish opportunities to support individuals and groups who are internationally recognised and can showcase the District's culture, arts and heritage offering to wider audiences.	<i>Council, Arts Council NI, Forum Partners</i>	<i>2022-23 onwards</i>
Develop a detailed Festival and Events Activation Programme in coordination with key partners.	<i>Council, Forum Partners, other Strategic Partners</i>	<i>2022-23 onwards</i>

Key Priorities: Year 1 to 3

2

Objective 2 Developing our Arts Venues & Museums

Reimagine and grow our arts venues and museums

Actions	Partners	Timeline
Align forward plans for arts venues and museums to achieve the vision and objectives of the Culture, Arts and Heritage Strategy.	<i>Council, Forum Partners, key stakeholders</i>	<i>2022-23</i>
Design and implement a box office system in Council arts venues.	<i>Council</i>	<i>2022-23</i>
Utilise data and insights from the box office system to create an evidence-based audience development plan for the District.	<i>Council</i>	<i>2023-24 onwards</i>
Create an audience growth plan for arts venues, including the redevelopment of Newry Town Hall, the SHAC, and Down Arts Centre.	<i>Council, Forum Partners</i>	<i>2023-24</i>
Develop a conference and business events programme for the redeveloped Newry Town Hall/Sean Hollywood Arts Centre.	<i>Council and other key stakeholders</i>	<i>2022-23 onwards</i>
Develop and ambassador programme to attract new conferences to the redeveloped Newry Town Hall/Sean Hollywood Arts Centre.	<i>Council and other key stakeholders</i>	<i>2023-24</i>
Adopt a digitally-focused marketing communications plan for arts venues and museums to provide tailored and timely information about the seasonal arts and museum programme and on activities across the District.	<i>Council, Forum Partners</i>	<i>2022-23</i>
Deliver the £10 million capital programme to redevelop Newry Town Hall and the Sean Hollywood Arts Centre into an internationally recognised arts, theatre and conference venue.	<i>Council, user groups, stakeholders from the local arts, culture and heritage sector.</i>	<i>Ongoing from 2019-20 to 2024-25</i>

Key Priorities: Year 1 to 3

Bringing our arts, culture and heritage to life for our residents and visitors.

3

Objective 3 Growing our Audiences

Actions	Partners	Timeline
Develop a heritage exhibition programme in our museums to grow visitor numbers and audience participation from across the district.	<i>Council, NI Museums Council</i>	<i>2022-23 onwards</i>
Develop an outreach programme to provide arts, culture and heritage activities to local communities throughout the district.	<i>Council, Arts Council NI, Community Planning partners including Education and Health bodies, Forum Partners.</i>	<i>2022-23 onwards</i>
Develop a programme of activities to bring together groups and individuals to collect, archive and share inspirational stories from all our District's communities.	<i>Council, NI Museums Council</i>	<i>2023-24</i>
Develop a heritage activation programme to open up and promote our heritage assets to visitors and local residents.	<i>Council, HED, TNi, National Trust, MHT, and other strategic partners.</i>	<i>2022-23 onwards</i>
Widen the demographic of our audiences by attracting people who would not normally visit arts venues, museums or heritage sites through an innovative programme of events and targeted marketing campaigns.	<i>Council, HED, NI Museums Council, National Trust, Forum Partners, and other strategic partners.</i>	<i>2022-23</i>
Adopt a digitally-focused marketing communications plan for arts venues and museums to provide tailored and timely information about the seasonal arts and museum programme and on activities across the District.	<i>Council, Forum Partners</i>	<i>2022-23</i>
Implement a new tourism events programme that celebrates the District's unique culture, arts and heritage offering in order to increase visitor satisfaction and dwell time.	<i>Council, Forum Partners, Tourism NI</i>	<i>Ongoing from 2022-23</i>



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 museums, 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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