

Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon

**Arts, Culture and Heritage: A Framework for the
Future**

2021-2031

Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon Arts, Culture and Heritage: A Framework for the Future

The process for developing this Arts, Culture and Heritage Framework began in 2017 with a comprehensive engagement and consultation process, which saw 120 arts, culture, and heritage organisations and individuals contribute to dynamic sessions held across the Borough. It was important to hear a range of views and the consultation included those that deliver arts, culture and heritage programmes and activities, those that engaged with them and those that did not. Through workshops, focus groups and one to one conversations the consultation process was rich, constructive and inspiring.

The original process of consultation, development and revision took place but then stalled for a time as other areas of work and a structural review took priority. Then there was the Covid pandemic. In 2021 the need for the Framework to be reviewed, revised and put into action in order to drive the recovery and development of the arts, culture and heritage sector post pandemic and beyond.

This Framework document is designed to be a blue print for the direction of developing, delivering and supporting the arts culture and heritage people, places, programmes and promotion over the next ten years. The world has gone through a once in a lifetime experience over the past 18 months and the need for arts, culture and heritage has never been greater as a way of making sense of what has happened and of regenerating our communities and economy.

Arts, culture and heritage has a pivotal role to play in moving forward with greater determination and ambition than we perhaps had when we began this process.

Why Do We Need A Framework At All

Our priorities have changed since we began this process. So why do we need an Arts, Culture and heritage Framework now?

- To link to the Council's Connected Community Plan, Corporate Plan and Tourism Development and Marketing Strategy , Inclusive Growth Plan, Green Agenda and Economic Recovery Plan.
- To support and underpin the UK City of Culture bid - it is essential that the bid fits into a longer-term plan for culture within the Borough.
- To develop stronger working relationships with Arts Council Northern Ireland Heritage Lottery Fund, Tourism NI, Craft NI, HED, DFC, National Museums NI and other regeneration and renewal funds for culture and tourism.
- To support, develop and sustain the independent cultural sector in its relationships with external funders
- To strengthen the visitor destination product both in terms of permanent facilities, events and cultural marketing

- As a tool for Covid recovery, reconnecting communities and tackling social isolation
- To take measures to support growth in jobs / careers / skills and talent retention in the Borough working closely with the education sector
- To support place making, town centre renewal and make ACBCBC area a place of choice to live, work, visit and invest
- To tell our Borough's stories to the world and create international connections
- To contribute to climate and sustainability agendas using culture
- To build on civic pride
- To address inequalities and provide culture for a growing population and changing demographic in Northern Ireland's second largest local authority area
- To support diversity, peace building and recognition of different cultures, faiths and histories
- To promote the traditions of the past and invest in the traditions of the future
- To sustain and grow the creative industries across the borough
- To co design with and communicate plans clearly to our residents and visitors Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon
- To deliver cultural facilities and services for a growing and ageing population

Definitions of Culture

There are many definitions of culture but for the purposes of this Framework and our future planning a broad definition of culture includes visual arts, literature, music, theatre, dance, combined arts, architecture, crafts, design, heritage and the historic and natural environment, heritage & unique sports, museums and galleries, languages, libraries and archives, film, broadcasting and media, digital animation, animation, visual and special effects, photography, and publishing. Food and drink also form a part of many peoples' cultural lives and could usefully be added to the Borough's definition for artisan, bespoke and authentic food production and catering, given the importance of Food Heartland to the borough.

The Importance of Culture

Cultural activity is a basic human and developmental need. It is recognised by Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that:

'Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.'

Cultural activity allows individuals to explore and express their identity and to satisfy the human need for inspiration and creativity. For communities, cultural engagement encourages a sense of belonging and engenders a sense of confidence, community cohesion and civic pride, contributing to health and well-being. Culture creates safe spaces for the celebration and exploration of diversity; it opens access and encourages understanding. Cultural activity makes an important contribution to our society, but it also provides enjoyment, connection and a feel-good factor that is essential to our quality of life. Culture contributes to economic growth, regeneration and to the visitor economy being one of the main drivers of tourism. Having a strong cultural infrastructure is a key influencing factor when targeting inward investment, recruitment and staff retention. It can also be instrumental in changing perceptions of the Borough and in addressing major issues such as sustainability and climate change.

Participation in cultural activity can lead to learning new skills, opportunities to volunteer, career development and the creativity of our workforce as a whole.

In Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon arts, culture and heritage services are ideally positioned to tell the story of both the place and its people nurturing a sense of civic pride and engagement. This in turn helps to promote the borough as place to live, work, visit and invest in. We want all our residents to be digital and human champions of our Borough's natural and cultural attractions.

Principles and Values

Ambition – We will be ambitious for the place and make creativity a fundamental part of the fabric of life in the borough. We have ambitions to be a UK City of Culture and have a UNESCO world heritage site

Access and equality – We will strive to provide opportunities for more people to access the arts, culture and heritage, breaking down social and economic barriers.

Distinctiveness – We will use our unique and compelling stories, creativity, landscape and heritage to deliver a distinctive cultural offer- celebrating our stories and writing new ones.

Partnership – we will seek to work in partnership across the arts locally, nationally and internationally and to embed programmes through collaboration with other sectors including tourism, health, education and commerce.

Growth – we will seek to grow, strengthen and make sustainable, the cultural infrastructure, develop creative skills and measure the impact of arts, culture and heritage as our borough grows

The Cultural Landscape

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council is the largest in Northern Ireland outside of Belfast – it has a population estimated at 210,300 and is growing fast. It is incredibly diverse in terms of landscape, rural and urban, a city and towns, history and population. The cathedral city of Armagh has historical significance that spans millennia – as the Home of Saint Patrick and the ecclesiastical capital of Ireland. The 'new town' of Craigavon, which is situated between the market towns of Lurgan and Portadown, created a large population centre which has flourished into a hive of industry.

Stunning countryside spans through the orchards to the shores of Lough Neagh to the foot of the Mourne Mountains holding a host of townlands, villages and the thriving market town of Banbridge.

Arts, culture and heritage already play an important role in community life and the Borough has developed a number of high-quality cultural venues. However, as well as theatres, galleries and cinemas we see culture taking its place in our streets, markets and public spaces, in our homes, schools and places of daily life.

Visual Arts

Council has three venues presenting visual arts, each with their own unique identity.

The F.E. McWilliam Gallery and Studio is an accredited museum and offers a diverse programme of museum standard temporary exhibitions and a permanent collection of work by internationally renowned sculptor F.E. McWilliam, who was born in Banbridge in 1909. The sculpture garden, recreation of F.E. McWilliam's studio and a busy popular restaurant make it a destination for locals and visitors. There is significant scope to grow this facility to realise the benefits fully.

The Market Place Theatre and Arts Centre provides a varied visual arts programme in its gallery and communal spaces, with regular opportunities to participate in visual arts through their workshop programme.

Armagh County Museum has a fine collection of paintings and works on paper including pictures across Irish art history, from 18th century to the present day; and a collection of paintings by Lurgan-born writer, poet and mystic, George Russell (AE). Works from the collection are regularly on display in one of three temporary exhibition spaces in the museum.

In addition the new Southern Regional College (SRC) campus in Banbridge hosts facilities for Ceramic, Photography & Art Studios as well as IT, Multimedia & Innovation Spaces. Combined with the new SRC campus in Armagh this is a £50m + investment supporting the arts and creative industries in the borough.

With group studio spaces at Mount Zion House in Lurgan The Shore Collective is an artist led initiative, based close to the waters of Lough Neagh. It is made up of artists working in a wide range of media, such as fine art painting, textiles, photography, performance art, music, writing, ceramics and sculpture. The Collective gives artists at all stages of their career, the opportunity to develop their individual working practice, engage with a wider audience and showcase their work as a strong creative collective, both locally and internationally.

Further exploration is required of the opportunity to have a regional gallery of scale in the borough.

Crafts

The Borough celebrates its outstanding craft creators, whose work both preserves and develops ancient techniques and also embraces modern skills and new technologies. Artisan creators skilfully hammer and manipulate precious metals, turn and chisel wood and stone and carefully stitch textiles and leather. The white-hot

furnace of the glassblower to the throwing wheel of the potter and the blacksmiths forge are all part of our rich creative heritage. SRC College is keeping traditions alive with its ceramic facilities.

The Market Place Theatre and Arts Centre and FE McWilliam Gallery support craftspeople with annual Craft Fairs and present exhibitions of high quality craft works as part of their annual programmes.

Public Art and Sculpture

The Borough has a good track record of commissioning and displaying public art and sculpture. The FE McWilliam Gallery has particular curatorial expertise in sculpture, with its collection of FE McWilliam sculptures worked with Sky Arts on public art commissions such as the striking Peace Portraits. Its plans to expand the Gallery to include workshop space and to commission a landmark sculptural work as a gateway piece for Banbridge, which will be seen from the main Belfast – Dublin route, will be an important statement of the Borough's ambition.

Armagh has the Angels and Gargoyles miniature sculpture Trail, pieces of public art reflecting the city's heritage and stories, which were an integral part of an Environmental Improvement scheme. Most recently a neon sculpture developed from a community art project has been installed as part of the The Market Place Theatre and Arts Centre's refurbishment.

Lurgan and Portadown both have significant pieces of public art on main routes into and through the towns, telling the stories of those places and its people to the shores of Lough Neagh.

Arts Council Northern Ireland promote the inclusion of public art in urban and rural spaces, in regeneration projects and new build and refurbishment schemes. They encourage collaboration between artists and architects/design professionals and advocate the development of public art strategies. Our Borough may be well placed to enhance its collection as part of this strategy building on existing commissions and trails. Also ensuring adequate maintenance programmes are in place to support this.

Performing Arts

The Market Place Theatre and Arts Centre (MPT) opened in 2000 and has since offered audiences a programme spanning theatre, dance, comedy, music, poetry and song. It attracts over 70,000 attendances per year including national and international audiences. Situated at the heart of Armagh City the Market Place Theatre and Arts Centre is an anchor to the city centre regeneration playing a key role in building the night-time economy.

The Market Place Theatre regularly hosts and has close working relationships with local community and voluntary performances and presentations by and for the John Hewitt International Summer School (a festival of literature, ideas), John O'Connor Writing School, Armagh Pipers Club, Mid Ulster Network, Northern Ireland Bands Association, William Kennedy International Piping Festival, local choral societies, a range of amateur theatre groups, dance schools and musicians.

MPT works in partnership with SRC and the Armagh Multi Media Access centre (AMMA) to provide a professional performing and creative arts space and opportunities for students to present their work.

Its stages also feature the best professional performing arts including musicians, theatre companies, dance companies, comedians and singers from Northern Ireland, the UK and Ireland as well as other international performing artistes.

Guitar schools, brass bands, traditional song, rock bands, pipers, Lambeg drummers, Bodhran players, choral song, church music, theatre and musical rehearsals, digital music recording, dance steps, storytelling and rhyming are sounds that can be heard from the halls, bars, rehearsal rooms, recording studios, venues and homes across our Borough. The performing arts are in our blood and we have produced some of the best in the world.

The Uilleann Pipes, championed by the Armagh Pipers Club, recently achieved UNESCO World Heritage Status and traditional music, from both the Irish and Ulster Scots traditions, is prominent across the borough.

The Borough has to date had limited professional theatre and dance production but has developed good relationships with companies from Belfast and further afield. SRC Armagh has Dance, Music & Performing Arts Studios providing opportunities for young people to grow their interest, skills and careers in the arts.

The Town Hall in Portadown is a popular venue on the amateur theatre and musical theatre circuit and hosts performances, competitions and festivals across performing art forms throughout the year. The venue would benefit from refurbishment and updating in order to update its equipment and cater for performances in the digital era and in a more energy efficient way.

Heritage

The preservation of local heritage is a central part of this strategy. The protection of archives, the built environment and cultural fabric will require strong partnerships to be developed, with the council driving this agenda.

There are many ways to explore and experience heritage in the Borough. Armagh City has several significant cultural venues including Navan Centre & Fort, Armagh Robinson Library, Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich Library & Archive, Armagh, The Archbishop's Palace, No 5 Vicar's Hill, and Armagh Observatory and Planetarium, Irish & Local Studies, Fusiliers Museum and Milford House collection

Armagh County Museum (ACM) is the oldest county museum in Ireland and holds a collection of art, artefacts and books relating to County Armagh.

In Craigavon the Barn Museum at Tannaghmore Gardens, holds museum accreditation. The collection on display and in store at Waterside House is diverse and reflects the heritage of the local area. This needs to be reviewed as part of a coordinated Museums Service.

Near Portadown Moneypenny's Forge offers experiential learning and promotes the preservation of the traditional skill of blacksmithing.

The F.E. McWilliam Gallery and Studio in Banbridge is also an accredited museum with an outstanding collection and on site interpretation.

There are a number of other venues and attractions that offer opportunities to uncover aspects of the heritage of the area including its industries such as the orchards and linen production. Orange Heritage is celebrated at Sloan's House and Dan Winters Cottage, whilst Brownlow House, has strong links to both the Orange Order and the linen industry. Irish/Gaelic Cultural heritage is celebrated at the new Aonach Mhacha Cultural Centre in Armagh.

The intangible heritage of our people and their stories past and present plays an increasingly valuable role in our distinctiveness as a place. Burgeoning independent Heritage Tour programmes across the Borough give people, local and visitors, opportunities to experience our history, including lesser known stories and places.

Culture in the Community

Access to cultural services and programmes is offered by cultural venues across the Borough and through partnerships with community and arts organisations including The John Hewitt Society, The Shore Collective and Armagh Pipers Club. Such organisations have the potential to deliver locally relevant projects in response to specific needs and opportunities identified in close partnership working with the local community.

Outreach programmes and creative community initiatives, often focusing on rural communities and those with limited access to the arts, are offered by many of the Borough's cultural and community venues. 'Playful Museums', targeting families with early years' children, dementia-friendly cultural programmes and the large-scale, Arts Council NI/ACBCBC partnership funded Connected project, are all examples of successful creative community initiatives delivered across the borough's cultural venues.

Events

Armagh City currently hosts two Tourism Signature events each year. The award-winning Georgian Festival celebrating the city's eighteenth-century Georgian heritage and the The Home of Saint Patrick Festival in recognition of the strong connection with Saint Patrick.

The award winning Tourism Signature event, the Food & Cider Festival, celebrates County Armagh's famous apple orchards and our Borough's local cuisine as one of Ireland's top emerging food destinations through the Food Heartland.

Lurgan Park has hosted the prestigious UK Pipe Band Championship.

Banbridge plays host to Buskfest, a celebration of street music and in 2022 Armed Forces Day will take place there. The town also hosts events as part of Food & Cider Festival and Home of St Patrick's festival.

Community-focused and organised events are held throughout the Borough including Country Comes to Town, in Portadown and two local agricultural shows in Armagh and Lurgan.

Cultural Activity

A thriving arts scene, populated with professional artists, unique cultural organisations, creative industries, a host of localised cultural interest groups and vibrant community festivals, enriches the Borough.

During the public consultations, over 120 different types of cultural organisations, individuals and activities were represented – from formal cultural organisations to voluntary cultural activity and community-based groups. From music to local history, drama to crafts, the wealth of cultural activity across all areas of the Borough was impressive and to be encouraged.

In many instances, this activity has been supported directly by the Council. For others, the activity exists with support from Council in terms of information exchange and signposting.

Film

The Borough is increasingly used as a film location, not least for Game of Thrones and, at time of writing, a £30 million+ studio tour in Linen Mill Studios in Banbridge is about to open.

Community film making is also active with 'Making the Future' is a new cross-border cultural programme empowering people to use museum collections and archives to explore the past and create a powerful vision for future change.

AMMA, is a facility where technology and traditional media can be used creatively alongside each other by schools, organisations, the youth sector and the community. They offer professional learning programmes accelerating the creative use of technology in schools. Their association with NI Screen and strong industry links, support a series of annual skills academies for the benefit of ambitious young people who aspire to careers in the screen industries. They are a major asset in developing STEM based learning in the borough..

Data

The population of the borough (estimated at 210,300) is projected to increase by 13% by 2030, compared to 5% growth in NI overall. The number of children (aged 0-15) is projected to rise by 6%. However, the group with the largest projected increase (46%) is people aged 65 and over.

The geography of the Borough has an impact on who engages. Covering an area of 554 square miles, the Borough has a variety of urban and rural areas and contains two key transport corridors. This road network provides easy routes for incoming visitors, but also for residents to go beyond their local area to access cultural experiences.

It is worth noting that half of the postcodes in the Borough are closer to performing arts venues across 5 other council areas than they are to the Market Place Theatre in Armagh. (Source: Thrive)

The Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey (February 2011) gives a broad picture of the factors influencing people to engage in arts and culture. Respondents indicated that the top 3 factors were that they; found it enjoyable (71%); attended to see a specific show (41%); had access to a good arts venue (25%). In Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon that access to arts venues is more limited.

In summary, existing data tells us that cultural provision in the Borough should:

- Consider the needs of a growing population, particularly of children aged 0-15 and people over 65
- Provide engagement opportunities that are attractive to people living in more deprived areas, where engagement in arts and culture is lower
- Deliver enjoyable cultural experiences that offer something distinct from what is available and easily accessible in other parts of Northern Ireland
- Ensure that residents in the Borough have access to high quality arts venues

Our Stakeholders

During the creation of the strategy, we consulted with elected representatives, local stakeholders and council staff. We also spoke to funders and regional stakeholders to understand the broader climate and context.

We had conversations with more than 120 local artists, community groups and arts organisations. They revealed the many and varied benefits of engaging in local projects built around local needs. These include peace building, tackling anti-social behaviour or isolation, and transforming public spaces within an overall health and wellbeing agenda.

The consultees spoke passionately about the difference arts, culture and heritage has made to theirs and others lives. In particular:

- conserving, sharing, deepening understanding of people and place;
- fun, enjoyment, connection, tackling isolation and enhancing wellbeing;
- skilling up, exploring talent and creating employment opportunity;
- celebrating rural life, preserving the spirit of the place and retaining traditional skills and stories;
- engagement, networks, support and understanding communities.

Stakeholders told us that they valued the opportunity to contribute to strategic planning and have their opinions heard. There was a clear desire that consultation should be continued throughout the delivery of the framework, and that it must be regular, consistent and ideally from a single source.

They welcomed the framework and saw the potential for it to provide evidence and focus for attention and resources. There was support for better promotion of existing facilities and events.

Stakeholders want the Council to take a lead role in creating awareness and a clear identity for cultural engagement across the borough. The Council is well placed to develop partnerships with local stakeholders as appropriate, but also facilitate bringing people together to support peer learning, information sharing and planning.

Regional stakeholders view the Council as both a current and potential partner. The resources the Council has at its disposal in terms of the arts, culture and heritage activity and the aspirations around place-making are attractive to regional partners and funders.

From the consultation with local and regional stakeholders, three roles emerged for the council to fulfil in relation to arts, culture and heritage:

1. Deliverer – the Council has invested in cultural infrastructure and will continue to deliver significant amounts of the cultural offer.
2. Partner – the Council will strengthen existing and forge new partnerships with key cultural providers in the area and regional stakeholders around shared aims and to lever funding.
3. Facilitator – the Council can facilitate and support existing cultural activity taking place at a local level across the area.

Regional Stakeholders

The message from this group of stakeholders was very clear in actively seeking continued engagement and partnership from the Council in developing arts, culture and heritage across the Borough. They recognised the value that the Council has in being able to bring a range of interested parties to the table and lead on developing collaboration and partnerships. These consultations highlighted potential funding sources that could be available to the Council to enhance current arts, culture and heritage investment. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland should be fully engaged to explore how they can contribute further to arts activity across the borough. Arts & Business NI could also provide invaluable support to the arts and business sectors locally.

Commentary

The action plan for any strategy needs to build on success and move Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon Borough forward. Whilst data provided by the household survey shows that 86% of the borough's residents engage in culture the real story is very different. There are major inequalities in any area and Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon is no exception. There are social and economic barriers to many people accessing a full range of culture.

Despite 4 Libraries there is currently no bookshop in Armagh City, limited access to dance space and little professional theatre work produced in the borough. Our strategy will expand the menu and grow new opportunities in all parts of the borough. It won't happen over night but by building a shared vision and looking ahead 10 years we can grow our cultural infrastructure as we grow our population.

Vision

The Councils Corporate Plan 2018-2023 and the Community Plan share the long-term aim that:

‘Our Borough is an inspirational and creative place offering quality, inclusive arts and cultural experiences’

The Community Plan acknowledges the important role that arts, culture and heritage play in place-making with one of the long-term outcomes being:

‘The Borough is a place of discovery, where unique cultural and natural assets are cherished and people are inspired to be creative, to grow and to flourish.’

This will form the vision of our 10-year cultural framework. It will be informed by the reasons for the framework, underpinned by the principles and values and driven by a set of major ambitions and detailed actions to realise the above vision.

Measurement and Evaluation

As part of our work on UK City of Culture and review of our tourism strategy will prepare a measurement framework which sets baselines in 2022 against which the strategy can be tracked.

This will include

- Levels of participation
- Population awareness of the borough’s cultural attractions
- External awareness of Armagh’s cultural attractions
- Visitor numbers driven by cultural events
- Levels of attendance and surveys at ? 10 key venues and festivals
- Postcode data on the demographics of cultural attendance
- Satisfaction surveys

Major Ambitions for the First 6 Years

1. **UK City of Culture** – to bid for UK City of Culture with a view to becoming UK City of Culture 2025 or 2029. Our Borough needs the opportunities presented by UK City of Culture to make a step change in its regeneration. to recognise the distinctive heritage and creative potential of Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon, to retain young people working in creative industries and develop and make sustainable or culture, arts and heritage sector.
2. **UNESCO status** – The 10-year cultural strategy will lay the foundations to support Navan and other partners to become designated as UNESCO world heritage sites adding to the UNESCO designation for the Uilleann pipes.
3. **Heritage Streets - spaces and places for culture** – redefining our high streets through Townscape Heritage developments, reuse of historic buildings and reimaging the role of the high streets and public spaces as places to live, meet and share our stories. Alternative 'meanwhile uses' for empty retail spaces might include community bookshops, artists' studios and craft spaces. Our streets, public spaces and landscapes will form the backdrop of our festival and events.
4. **Cultural tourism** - From St Patrick's influence to Game of Thrones, Road Bowling, International Piping, FE McWilliam, Orange Culture, Language, Heritage Tours of Lurgan and Portadown, Food and Cider Festivals, Summer Schools and the Navan Centre, ACBCBC has the ingredients for a major growth in cultural led tourism. This arts, culture and heritage strategy will work alongside the review of the tourism development and marketing plan to maximise the boroughs reputation for cultural tourism. A series of themed years will help build a coherent programme and marketing of the borough. A refreshed calendar of events will build on established, award winning Festivals and create one off moments, pop up events and site-specific events.
5. **A public art trail** across the borough from our venues and public spaces to our high streets, businesses, hospitals, schools and markets we will seek to develop our strength in public art and sculpture and, in so doing, support individual artists and our arts and crafts economy.
6. **Cultural leadership** for the next generation. We will grow a new generation of cultural leaders to learn and be mentored by the current founders and custodians of our cultural agencies. Building on our strengths in summer schools and new technology education we will become a place known for cultural learning.
7. **Cultural capital** – We will develop a 10-year programme of investment to add to the critical mass and secure the sustainability of our cultural infrastructure, including refreshed museums, event spaces and enhanced performance platforms. Our capital strategy will include exploration of the feasibility for the expansion of the FE McWilliam Gallery, an events field at Navan,

refurbishment of Portadown Town Hall and enhanced spaces at Armagh County Museum.

Action Plan

An annual plan for our cultural strategy will be developed further after consultation on this draft strategy based on the following headline actions.

1 Establishing an ABC cultural network

Culture in the borough is delivered by the council and a wide range of partners. Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon values the key role culture plays in connecting people and supporting the vitality of the place

- We will support the establishment of a borough wide network of independent and voluntary sector arts groups
- We will more closely together on programming and engagement activity, ensuring greater collaboration to strengthen, connect and enhance our offer
- We will develop themed years for programming and engagement which all can share in
- We will develop multi-annual SLAs with key grant funded external cultural partners and develop our funding programmes to better support and sustain the arts sector and individual artists through an open call.

2 Widening access

Ensuring that everyone has an equal opportunity to realise their full potential and make their own cultural choices underpins the strategy.

- We will target specific groups to make cultural experiences, both as audiences and participants more accessible and relevant.
- We will put an emphasis on Engagement in cultural venues but also in community settings and throughout the events programme.
- We will champion and support engagement work that brings more people to the arts and more engagement with our heritage
- We are committed to ensuring our programmes are accessible to people of all backgrounds and abilities, in accordance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

- We will establish a baseline for engagement (attendance + participation) across the council area.
- We will undertake a public engagement process working through the community planning function, to understand what residents need from their cultural activity and identify barriers to attendance/ participation
- We will deliver a structured outreach programme across the borough

3 Position Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon as a distinctive cultural tourism product

Cultural activity will help develop and deliver the opportunities around cultural tourism by creating cultural tourism experiences that celebrate the distinctive stories of the area

- We will develop and support our festival and events programme to attract new visitors
- We will support our food and drink businesses to grow their visitor experiences
- We will bid for UK City of Culture in 2025 and /or 2029
- We will continue to invest to strengthen our cultural infrastructure, public art and heritage landscape
- We will strive with other partners to secure UNESCO World Heritage status for Navan Fort.
- We will maximise the Borough as a film location and Banbridge as home to Game of Thrones
- We will identify new platforms to tell our distinctive stories
- We will explore the possibility of developing a gallery of National/ Regional significance.

4 Ensuring excellence and artistic freedom

Maintaining and developing the quality of the cultural opportunities offered in the Borough relies on our observance of best practice guidelines:

- We will value artistic freedom, human rights and the expression of a wide variety of perspectives.
- We will ensure Equality and Diversity – ensuring that our cultural venues are safe, welcoming spaces where creativity, discussion, debate and engagement are encouraged.

- We will aim for excellence of experience to underpin all activity.

5 Developing local, national and international partners

Our strategy is rooted in delivery for local people whilst recognising that we need to grow our partnerships national and play a part in international cultural life.

- We will look for non-arts partners to work with in fields such as education, health and the environment
- We will strengthen our relationships with cultural producers in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK
- We will build on our international connections and showcase international work and diversity of cultures in our venues, festivals and summer schools
- We will review and strengthen our financial assistance programme and offer meaningful support to a range of cultural organisations in order to sustain and grow the cultural sector in our Borough in the form of multi-annual SLAs.

6 Sustaining our heritage and building cultural space for a growing population

Our heritage helps define our culture and we continue to grow traditions and

- We will explore all opportunities to protect and bring to life our built heritage including extension of the Townscape Heritage programme. We will reuse historic buildings, reimagine high streets and create 'meanwhile uses' where appropriate
- We will aim to build greater local awareness of our physical and intangible heritage and stories
- We will continue to maintain and develop the quality of our cultural infrastructure and visitor attractions
- We will maximise the use of indoor and outdoor spaces and develop culture and art trails across our Borough

- We will realise capital developments at F.E. McWilliam Gallery and Studio, Armagh County Museum, Navan Centre & Fort and Portadown Town Hall, as well as exploring the potential for new developments that address gaps in our cultural offer.
- We will protect key archives for future generations

7 Developing our talent

Cultural activity plays a key role in making this Borough a place where artists, creatives and related enterprises can thrive. Cultural activity offers opportunities to develop skills, build capacity and access opportunities

- We will promote the expansion of summer schools that support local talent
- We will support arts and creative organisations in nurturing talent
- We will work with AMMA Creative learning Centre and SRCto promote the borough as a place to develop skills in culture and new technology
- We will initiate a funding scheme for individual artists and creative practitioners to enable them to develop their practice and encourage them to remain in the Borough

Appendix 2

Corporate agenda on arts, culture and heritage

The Arts, Culture and Heritage Framework must correlate with the relevant themes and objectives of the Council's Corporate Plan, the Community Plan and Tourism Marketing and Development Strategy, all of which display an ambition for the Borough.

The Corporate Plan 2018-2023 and the Community Plan share the long-term aim that: *'Our Borough is an inspirational and creative place offering quality, inclusive arts and cultural experiences'*.

The Corporate Plan makes the following commitments towards this aim:

- Seek investment to preserve uniqueness of our heritage
- Increase participation in arts and culture
- Improve accessibility to creative experiences

The following actions are intended to achieve this aim:

- Develop a clear vision for arts and culture provision across the Borough
- Promote the area as a place to live, visit and invest in
- Proactively source funding and partnership opportunities towards investment in our Borough
- Provide high quality arts and cultural venues

The Corporate Plan also acknowledges the contributions that art, culture and heritage can make to quality of life, opportunities for young people, celebrating diversity and the economy.

The Community Plan acknowledges the important role that arts, culture and heritage play in place-making. One of the long-term outcomes is:

The Borough is a place of discovery, where unique cultural and natural assets are cherished and people are inspired to be creative, to grow and to flourish.

Relevant short-term outcomes include:

- More people benefit from high quality, accessible artistic and cultural engagement and expression
- Better partnership working helps to nurture skills development, foster innovation and raise our profile as a region that champions creativity

The Tourism Development and Marketing Strategy recognises that culture is a driver for out-of-state visitors. It identifies that the key target audience to increase the tourism economy is focused on cultural activity and highlights the need for investment in the council's venues and product to harness this potential:

“Demand from the Culturally Curious segment will be one of the main drivers of the forecast growth in tourism to the island of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Prioritised investment in the destination's assets will be of significant appeal to this segment;

Allied to this is the fact that the destination contains histories, stories, themes and potential visitor offerings which are unique to this destination and importantly have a strong resonance in a national context”

The Tourism Development and Marketing Strategy identifies the arts, culture and heritage of Armagh City as a key focus for the destination. In order to ensure that we serve our citizens as well as visitors, this framework takes a Borough-wide approach to arts, culture and heritage.

Council also operates within the wider cultural context across Northern Ireland and this context provides both challenges and opportunities.

Statutory bodies including funders, operating in the cultural arena, are coming under increasing pressure around levels of funding available and the need to evidence impact. This has led to a willingness to create partnerships around funding and delivery to maximise both resource and impact.