

Strategic Plan

2019-2024



BIRR THEATRE & ARTS CENTRE

Birr Stage Guild CLG

WORKING DOCUMENT



Introduction

Central to the arts activity in the town of Birr, is Birr Theatre & Arts Centre which provides a space for performances, visual arts, workshops and rehearsals for professional and amateur artists and audiences living and working in the Offaly region. Since opening in July 2000, we consistently deliver a high-quality arts programme to a loyal audience base and have supported artists as they build their careers.

“Birr has a rich and diverse creative ecosystem of interconnected cultural resources within the community. Each cultural resource plays an important role in shaping the town’s arts and culture scene. Facilities, spaces, festivals, makers, artists, designers, arts organisations, tourism and businesses are all connected to one another and in turn, support the health and vitality of the place”

Louise Browne & Associates, June 2019

Located in the south of Offaly close to the north Tipperary and east Galway borders, Birr Theatre & Arts Centre is a unique and valuable asset significantly contributing to the cultural landscape of the region.

It is widely recognised that the arts are not an isolated sphere of activity but reach into most aspects of people's lives. Providing for arts development ensures a vibrant and creative community. Many community groups and development agencies use the arts as a tool for engaging with disadvantaged groups. The arts are non-judgmental and accepting of all abilities and backgrounds and an important factor in breaking down barriers that exist with disadvantaged groups. Birr Theatre and Arts Centre provides a valuable resource in the county, and surrounding region, working towards breaking down those barriers and encouraging greater participation in the community. Audiences travel from far afield to attend events here, thus contributing significantly to the local economy.

This working document, outlines how Birr Theatre & Arts Centre plans to keep up to date and relevant to the artists we support and to our audiences. This document incorporates our obligations to our main stakeholders: Pobal, Offaly County Council, The Arts Council and is informed by their own strategies.

Our Mission

It is our objective to encourage, develop, foster and stimulate public interest in all aspects of the arts and in general social and cultural affairs. Our aim is to provide facilities and opportunity for artists (established and aspiring) for the organisation of artistic and cultural events and maintain a centre for the holding of workshops, exhibitions, conferences and performances of all kind, notably theatrical performances. Also, to promote the knowledge, appreciation, and practice of the Arts.

Aims and Objectives

- Encourage, develop, foster and stimulate interest in quality arts events.
- Encourage access to and active participation in all art forms.
- Provide a platform for a dynamic quality arts programme for the development of artists to present innovative new quality work.
- Provide a space in which artists can make high-quality art.
- Promote knowledge and appreciation of all art forms to all sectors of society.
- Ensure that the centre remains flexible in the utilisation of innovative artistic production.
- Develop education and outreach around the area of youth arts.
- Develop the centre as a centre for dance in the county.
- Develop self-awareness through the arts.
- Develop the health and well being of the community through the Arts.
- Develop further outreach programmes to benefit the elderly, people with disabilities, travelers, youth inclusion and new communities.

Areas for Development / Goals

We have identified the following strategic goals which will inform our ambition into the future.

Monitoring

The Goals listed below will be monitored by the Board of Management and a progress report of each item will be reported at the January and July meetings each year for the duration of this plan.

Birr Theatre & Arts Centre – Strategic Plan

Sustainability	
<i>To enable Birr Theatre & Arts Centre to continue to be a dynamic, multidisciplinary arts centre we need to plan for the future to ensure long-term sustainability.</i>	
Goal	Action
Staff – ensure sufficient staff requirements to continue to provide a year round programme of arts activity for the community, paying particular attention to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff remuneration • Staff retention • Staff Complement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish Staff sub group to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ meet and review salaries and examine staff retention ◦ identify staff training and development needs ◦ deal with staffing welfare/disciplinary issues as they arise ◦ Seek funding to increase staff complement
Funding – to secure continued funding not only at current levels but increased funding to ensure the delivery of a quality and vibrant arts programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek additional financial support from Offaly County Council and The Arts Council • Identify alternative sources of funding • Examine fundraising opportunities

Succession	
<i>Birr Theatre & Arts Centre acknowledges the commitment and dedication provided by volunteers since our inception in the mid-1990s, some of whom continue to volunteer to date. Ensuring good governance is to the fore of our agenda.</i>	
Goal	Action
Board Members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Recruiting new members allows people with fresh ideas, abilities or networks to provide their support to our organisation. Staggered replacement ensures continuity and avoids ‘memory loss’. Planning for succession provides a way of maintaining the balance of wisdom and work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek new members with artistic and business backgrounds • Examine possibility of setting up task groups (artistic, building, marketing, finance, HR, volunteers). Each task group to be headed up by a board member. • All Board members to become Directors • Review Rotation of Directors (Company Constitution) in line with best practice while keeping the development and growth of the organisation as a priority
Front of House team <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing recruitment of front of house team means a shared workload for all and lessens dependency on a few individuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify new potential volunteers (newly retired/new members of community) with input from current volunteers • Review Volunteers Policy
Governance – ensure good governance throughout the organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer our current Governance Code to the new Charities Governance Code

Artform Development

Providing a quality and varied arts experience for our audiences to enjoy, ensuring we grow our audiences throughout the year. Ensure fair and appropriate remuneration for artists.

	Goal	Action
<i>Programme</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present a programme of high quality, professional (local, national and international) work for our audience to enjoy and engage with while being sensitive to the diverse demographic of our community. • Challenge and encourage our audience to participate in new experiences through the arts • Providing a space for artists to perform / exhibit / develop and grow • Nurture a diverse audience for the arts - building relationships with schools, active age groups, youth groups, travellers movement, new communities, socio-economic disadvantaged etc • Acknowledge the interest in amateur arts and the opportunity it provides to engage with audiences • Grow our public engagement - develop new audiences and expand the engagement with existing audiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine staff support required to deliver greater services • Outreach programme of activity to local second level and primary schools • Examine our new communities and host intercultural events through music, art, film • Use projects, for example, Hullabaloo!, as an opportunity to reach those living in disadvantaged areas • Audit the arts community in the local area • Create greater variety in programming of theatre • Review Visual Arts Policy • Work with new Youth Arts Facilitator at Offaly County Council to put together a programme of Youth Arts activity • Examine existing models for Artist in Residence programmes and consider opportunities for our own residency programme • Support young arts graduates / young people pursuing a career in the arts with access to mentoring and coaching opportunities
<i>Community</i>	<p>Birr Theatre & Arts Centre continues to be at the centre of community life in our town and we need to continue to grow the ‘ownership’ of the Arts Centre within our locality and nurture engagement in our local community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to programme work from local amateur groups and artists • Showcase Birr Theatre & Arts Centre as the centre for arts development in the locality thus raising the cultural profile of our community • Run a PR campaign to highlight that the space belongs to the community and is open to all.

Artform Development ...condt

	Goal	Action
Remuneration and Support of Artists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While ensuring artists are appropriately remunerated we place the artist at the centre of what we do and invest in our artistic community. Provide the opportunity for our diverse range of artists and arts practitioners (local and national, professional and semi-professional) to show excellent work in a warm, welcoming and well equipment space (in our building or elsewhere in the town). Providing an exhibition fee to visual artists and performance fee to performing artist ensures sustainability for artists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore the minimum rate for visual artists – consult with Visual Arts Ireland – and endeavour to increase fees for artists to assist with their exhibiting costs Continue to pay the performance fee suggested by the professional production companies (theatre, musicians etc) and assist with their travel/accommodation costs Identify suitable alternative locations in the town for artists to exhibit/perform and assist in production of same
Festivals	<p>2019 will see the commissioning of a Strategic Review of Festivals* in the town. The overarching goal of this report is to provide recommendations that support sustainable festival development in Birr into the future.</p> <p>The review will investigate the viability to engage a full time Festival Manager for the five current festivals in the town and examine the potential for further festival development.</p> <p>* <i>The current Festivals in the town are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Hullabaloo! Offaly's Children's Arts Festival</i> <i>Scripts Ireland's Playwriting Festival</i> <i>Birr Festival of Music</i> <i>OFFline Film Festival</i> <i>Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate with Birr 20:20 in leading this Strategic Review Position Birr Theatre & Arts Centre as the developer of existing and new festivals with a strong creative focus Partner with the festivals in matters of programming, marketing, budgeting and provide space for festival activities

Building Requirements

As the custodians of a beautiful building, built as a theatre in 1888 we have a civic duty to ensure it's upkeep, safety and presence in the town while also growing a vibrant arts programme that may see us expand beyond the four walls.

Goal	Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide a space with support services for artists and art forms• Provide appropriate space for staff to deliver a professional programme of arts activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review existing building and current requirements:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Opportunities for the expansion of artist/staff space i.e. greenroom/office◦ Stage Lighting requirements◦ Energy consumption – energy audit with a view to reducing carbon footprint◦ Plan for ongoing upgrade of equipment
Birr Creative Court <p>In order to address the limitations of permeant / full-time space in Birr for artistic development, Birr 20:20 commissioned Louise Browne & Associates to carry out a scoping report on the potential of the now unused Birr Courthouse. The report was issued in June 2019 indicating a substantial community and stakeholder enthusiasm and potential for the development of this significant piece of creative and cultural infrastructure in Birr.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be a stakeholder in this project and cooperate with its development• Bring our experience and track record in the support of the development of Birr Creative Court• Be the centre of the 'Creative Ecosystem' in the town of Birr