

Waterford Cultural Quarter Strategic Plan 2026-2030





Draft Foreword

Culture is the connective tissue of city-making: it shapes identity, animates public life, and turns space into place. Waterford Cultural Quarter demonstrates how heritage, creativity, and contemporary arts practice can be harnessed to drive inclusive urban renewal. Rooted in the city's distinctive history and heritage yet outward-looking in ambition, the Cultural Quarter positions culture not as an add-on, but as essential infrastructure which supports economic vitality, social cohesion and civic pride. Our cultural institutions including Waterford Gallery of Art, Garter Lane Arts Centre and new projects in development will support our community to thrive.

This strategy recognises culture as both a catalyst and a common good. It supports innovation and opportunities for creators, artists and those with an interest in new ways of looking at things. It sets out a framework to steward growth with purpose - protecting authenticity, enabling experimentation, and ensuring that the benefits of placemaking are widely shared. In doing so, it establishes Waterford Cultural Quarter as a model for culture-led regeneration with long-term impact.

Mayor of Waterford City and County Council

Councillor Séamus Ryan

A key objective of our Corporate Plan is to enhance Waterford as Ireland's Best Place to Live – as an ambitious, vibrant and progressive place, that fosters culture, creativity, well-being, placemaking and a strong sense of community.

The Waterford Cultural Quarter (WCQ) is a core initiative supporting our ambition, activating cultural assets, creative production, and promotes everyday participation to reframe how people experience the city. It prioritises vibrant streets, adaptable spaces, and a year-round programme of activity that invites residents and visitors alike to linger, connect, and contribute. By clustering cultural uses and fostering collaboration across institutions, artists, businesses, and communities, the Quarter strengthens Waterford's narrative as a living, working cultural city.

As Waterford continues to grow and transform, WCQ will leverage opportunities such as the development of the North Quays with its connecting bridge, the Greenway expansion and the benefits of cultural diversity. Bringing visitors and locals alike to new creative practices and innovative cultural experiences enhances Waterford's reputation as a hub for excellence in the arts. Supporting Waterford's creative economy, using WCQ as a hub for skills development and innovation, while ensuring that the heritage of the O'Connell Street area is amplified through sensitive regeneration, strong storytelling, and active engagement with local communities and cultural practitioners.

Waterford City and County Council Chief Executive

Sean McKeown

Highlight achievements 2021-2025:

- Under Call 2 of the Government Urban Regeneration Development Fund, €27.66m was allocated for a series of **public realm and regeneration projects** in the historic core of Waterford City Centre including WCQ; re-imagining the city as an attractive environment where people want to live, work and play. WCQ Place; Community and Cultural Hub has been delivered, several projects are early planning stages including renovations to 3 & 4 Great Georges Street, 25 /26 O'Connell Street, the former Munster Express buildings on Hanover Street and 7 Thomas Street. Each of these buildings have been earmarked for various purposes including Thomas Street Pocket Park and Art House and a Maker Hub.
- **WCQ Place; Community and Cultural Hub** was opened in 2023 and is home to Waterford Integration Services (WIS), a humanitarian NGO. The hub has been used as a festival venue, youth bands performance space, hosts Waterford New Communities Network events as well as a wide range of community-based purposes.
- Initiated in 2022 and designed collaboratively with a variety of stakeholders including SETU, WWETB and crafters, **WCQ Crafts Market** takes place each weekend from May to September. The market sells a variety of locally made crafts, hosting brightly branded stalls. Traders develop entrepreneurial skills, support the local creative community and provide an additional attraction for locals and visitors alike. The Crafts Market takes place during the Winterval festival, providing unique Waterford made gifts for visitors and new audiences for the vendors.
- **Pedestrianisation** takes place each weekend along O'Connell Street, from Thomas Hill to Sergeants Lane, allowing for spillover from the hospitality businesses throughout the year. Music, food and a genuine welcome have led to a vibrant entertainment experience in the Cultural Quarter, supported by the *Let's Meet at O'Connell Street* group made up of local hospitality providers.
- Waterford Cultural Quarter supports the city-based **festival programme** from St Patricks Weekend in March, Africa Day, Pride of the Deise, Summer in the City, Spraoi International Street Arts Festival, Harvest to Winterval in November and December, as well as Culture Night, the Viking Marathon, Waterford Writers Weekend, Imagine and Waterford Walls. Festivals form a huge aspect of the creative economy in Waterford, supporting artists, performers, designers, producers as well as a massive community and volunteer effort each year.
- 31 O'Connell Street, the **Waterford Gallery of Art** provides exhibitions of excellent quality including works by local and nationally renowned artists as well as showcasing valuable and much-loved works from the Waterford Art Collection. **Garter Lane Arts Centre and Garter Lane Studios** support a wide range of outreach activities, theatre, dance, film and visual arts while providing artist in residence opportunities for emerging artists.
- Bridge Street acts as a conduit from the north into Waterford city and serves a large commuter population every day. The Walls Project were commissioned to create a **series of murals** along the street with support from WCQ, co-created with residents where appropriate.

Values:

Inclusion

Diversity

Creativity and Innovation

Sustainability

Collaboration

Equity



Waterford Cultural Quarter Vision and Mission

Waterford Cultural Quarter's (WCQ) vision is "To deliver inclusive and sustainable innovation and growth for the cultural and creative sectors of southeast Ireland; to become a distinctive, welcoming and engaging place to the heart of Waterford which is open, inspiring and a vital addition to the city's creative, knowledge and visitor economy while supporting a climate resilient future."

Waterford Cultural Quarter's mission is "to be a vibrant, creative, safe and sustainable neighbourhood which supports community, artists and creative business. It is a cultural destination which showcases the best of southeast Ireland and embraces carbon neutrality actions"

WCQ draft Objectives & Actions 2026-2031

Objective 1:

To support well managed Places and Spaces (for creative practice)

Waterford Cultural Quarter is primarily an urban regeneration initiative, bringing under-utilized buildings and spaces back into use, promoting social inclusivity and supporting sustainable ways of living. Within this context, we plan on using our built heritage and cityscape as a backdrop for fostering imagination, arts practice and creation, creative exploration, cultural expression and education. It is the aim of this strategic plan to make attractive places and spaces where people want to live, work and play in their creative neighbourhood.

Actions:

- Develop a series of well-connected and carefully curated buildings that stimulate creativity, cultural expression and community development while including flexible spaces, and the use of innovative technologies e.g. digital/virtual environments.
- Consider the use of informal gallery/exhibition space on O'Connell to showcase the creative output of the quarter.
- Investigate and instigate residential & accommodation schemes for artists and for staff of start-up/small high value businesses to negate the potential impacts of gentrification in the area.
- Advocate for public realm improvements including;
 - Enhanced pedestrianisation supported by traffic analysis studies, including supporting one-way traffic system for Meeting House Lane / Sergeants Lane with the aim of prioritising social interaction.
 - Upgrades of public lighting throughout the WCQ area.
 - Shared spaces for pedestrians, bicycles and cars which supports all users of our streets.
 - Promote the use of green space which supports nature & bio-diversity for well-being, spaces for creative play, especially for children and for informal spaces for the community based on the idea of the 'Open city' and Ethics for the City by Richard Sennett
- Continue to animate the area encouraging artistic expression, supporting cultural heritage and art trails, embracing festival and market activity.
- Encourage the use of WCQ as a connecting space for cyclists which links the city to Waterford's Greenway and encourage WCQ as a place that supports sustainable mobility including walking.
- Ensure excellence in governance and management of WCQ assets to safeguard a sustainable future for this urban re-development.

- Ensure all building projects, festival activities and WCQ consider sustainable approaches in line with the Waterford Green Deal Sustainable Energy Community and Climate Department of Waterford City and County Council.

Sub actions:

Renovation

- 3 & 4 Great Georges Street – support renovation to become high quality office accommodation, retaining the important heritage of the building.
- 25 / 26 O’Connell Street – support renovation to develop space for enhanced creative production and skills development as well as possibilities for Waterford’s visitor economy.
- Hanover Street (Former Munster Express buildings) - support renovation to develop space for innovation.
- Thomas Street Art House and Pocket Park; support renovation to develop space for artistic production in a community setting .
- WCQ Place; Community and Cultural Hub – continue to develop as a place of diversity, inclusion and creative expression which supports weekend and night-time economy.
- Other capital project opportunities may arise during the lifetime of this strategic plan; we will endeavour to introduce culture and creativity as core elements of building developments in WCQ or aim to introduce elements of creativity into each development.

Public Realm

- Continue the activation zone of WCQ into other “blocks”, concentrating on Hanover Street, O’Connell Street, Thomas Hill & Thomas Street to the Quays
- WCQ Market: seek to expand the market footprint with consideration for a venue for a farmers style market while continuing to maintain well-managed infrastructure supporting the traders.
- Initiate and continue urban animation initiatives using public infrastructure including “City of Lights” projects, catenary wires and outdoor seating.
- Work with Waterford City and County Council (WCCC) Economic Development department in attaining traffic and footfall analysis to support public realm initiatives.
- Expand WCQ digital and in-person walking trails including the Quaker Trail, social history film trail and murals trail with potential to develop new trails.

- Create a welcoming environment for cyclists using the Waterford Greenway, using O'Connell Street as a place of interest as well as a conduit to the city centre.
- Identify and develop urban green spaces with a view to developing O'Connell Street and Hanover Street as green corridors and urban gardens.

Governance

- A robust governance structure is needed to ensure the sustainability of the Cultural Quarter initiative. This structure requires a clear funding model and allocation of staff and other resources which support long-term development and regeneration of the O'Connell Street area.
- Models of governance are to be investigated for the overall project and for each building renovation project with the development of an overall WCQ governance model as required.
- WCQ projects will align with Waterford City and County Council policy in areas such as GDPR, child protection and climate actions and will support the balanced development of Waterford City Centre.
- Support and encourage the development of social enterprise as a model of excellence delivering for the neighbourhood with both creative and non-creative business.

Objective 2:

To develop a strong sense of neighbourhood with our community.

People are the core of Waterford Cultural Quarter. Promoting health and wellbeing, inclusiveness and equity, we strive to work with local communities in promoting common ownership and pride in the neighbourhood. We welcome diversity in communities of place, identity and interest, and support Waterford City and County Council's Corporate Plan mission to create an even greater Waterford.

Actions:

- Continue to place collaboration at the heart of the WCQ initiative; with the communities who live, work and play locally, with the creative sector, education providers, community organisations, business community and with public bodies.
- Actively seek to engage with opportunities that support delivery of this strategic plan, including festivals and events, local, national, and EU level initiatives, organisations and funding streams.

- Work collaboratively within Waterford City and County Council to enhance our WCQ community; e.g. placemaking initiatives with departments of the Council including Economic Development, Planning, Community and Culture, supporting health and wellbeing with Healthy Waterford and social capital attainment with Creative Waterford while engaging with plans for our city centre and the North Quays.
- Continue building strong relationships within the South East Technological University and support the development of Waterford as an UNESCO Learning City.
- Seek opportunities to support new communities and communities of interest in celebrating their cultures while promoting the importance of diversity in our neighbourhood.
- Examine ways to support and work with community agencies and organisations in WCQ including Waterford Integration Services, Waterford Volunteer Centre, Men's Development Network, Buíon Phort Láirge and others.
- Foster opportunities to support climate action including continuing the work of the WCQ Sustainable Energy Community; encouraging Repair Café culture; collaborating with SETU's Engineering and Architecture Departments on Masters and undergraduate projects and supporting the WCCC Climate Action Strategy as appropriate.

Objective 3:

Creating an excellent destination for locals and visitors in Waterford City

Waterford Cultural Quarter is building on a tradition of ebb and flow, comings and goings. Its proximity to the river and the port as a trading destination created a custom of commerce, innovation, creativity and novelty for locals and visitors alike. We aim to support the local and visitor economy of our city by providing excellent experiences for those who choose to spend time in the O'Connell Street area. We aim to showcase our unique cultural heritage, provide high quality creative programming, support local artists and crafts people and the local festival ecosystem.

Actions:

- Collaborate with programming in cultural anchors Waterford Gallery of Art and Garter Lane Arts Centre & Studios as well as with festival directors and event organisers to develop a clear focus on promoting the brand of **"the creative neighbourhood"**.
- Support the implementation of actions in the [Waterford Destination Experience Development Plan](#) including:

- *Assess the opportunity for the Cultural Quarter to develop the area as a focal point for cultural day time and evening experiences and a location to orientate visitors across the city quarters linked through a new approach to visitor orientation.*
 - *Examine the requirements to develop creative hubs in the CQ providing the opportunity to Meet the Makers linking the CQ to rurally based creative such as the immersive glass making crystal experiences leveraging the glass craftsmanship heritage of the city.*
 - *Develop WCQ as Irelands most vibrant, innovative, urban creative district.*
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- Examine the potential support of a WCQ festival or springboard event in collaboration with cultural institutions and venues in the area the to highlight cultural offerings.
 - Encourage the placing of pre-existing established festival (or festival elements) in the CQ and devise a supportive festival ecosystem to ensure events and activities can go ahead in a safe manner, examining insurance, health and safety, risk assessment etc.
 - Collaborate with WCQ cultural venues and local hospitality providers, Night Time Economy supports and Purple Flag initiatives to ensure a high quality “after hours” offering including family friendly evening entertainment.
 - Leverage opportunities provided by new developments in Waterford including the North Quays and enhancement of the Waterford Greenway into Wexford.
 - Develop a city trail head in WCQ with visitor orientation links to Viking Triangle and other tourism offerings
 - Work with hospitality providers to promote local experiences such as theatre, arts, trails, restaurants, pubs, markets, retailers etc.
 - Build the WCQ Market as a destination experience, aiming to increase the size and types of creative and hospitality offerings available.
 - Commit to acting as a test-bed for new and innovative experiences in arts and cultural expression through support for new festivals, experimentation in use of public realm, supporting new communities in cultural expression.
 - Provide excellent and connected WCQ communications to assist in marketing, branding and promotion keeping stakeholders and communities aware of developments This will include information about regeneration projects and events supporting an increase footfall and dwell time as well as supporting cultural heritage projects.
 - Collaborate with tourism providers including Fáilte Ireland, Visit Waterford and WCCC Economic Development Department in promoting Waterford City as an excellent destination.

Objective 4:

To support Waterford's cultural and creative sector.

Our creators: artists, crafters, theatre makers, digital content creators, filmmakers, writers, dancers and more are essential to the uniqueness of Waterford. They help us understand and express our diverse cultures, they tell stories and truths, connecting us with our communities. Culture and arts provision play a major role in placemaking, in developing identity and allowing for experimentation and innovation. WCQ aims to support creators in Waterford and the region to learn, teach, create and produce work and art in our creative neighbourhood.

Actions:

- Support a creative environment that upholds integrity including freedom of expression, equity of access, tolerance & sustainability.
- Provide infrastructure and development opportunities for artists and creatives including work and exhibition spaces.
- Encourage socially engaged arts practice (Socially engaged practice describes art that is collaborative, often participatory and involves people as the medium or material of the work).
- Ensure cultural heritage is respected, promoting further knowledge about Waterford's past.
- Seek opportunities for funding for artists to work in WCQ in a supported and sustainable way.
- Consider potential housing / accommodation schemes for artists and creatives within WCQ.
- Provide opportunities for ongoing skills development, training and continuing professional development in collaboration with WCCC Arts Office, Waterford Local Enterprise Office and others.
- Work with partners including Creative Ireland and WCCC Arts Office to support creators in learning about digitalisation and new technologies.
- Collaborate with WCCC Arts Office, SETU and Waterford Libraries in examining ways to enhance funding, collaboration and other opportunities for creatives.
- Promote an ambitious innovative environment, looking to national and EU funding sources, e.g. New European Bauhaus to sustain the creative economy.
- Ensure that WCQ activities are grounded in circular economy principles and lead by example in the transition to a carbon-neutral, climate-resilient future.

Appendix 1

Strategic documents supporting the ongoing development of WCQ;

[Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2020-2032](#)

A Key Action is to develop a Cultural Quarter for Waterford. The Waterford Cultural Quarter (WCQ) centred on O'Connell Street recognises the existing cultural assets of the area including the Garter Lane Arts Centre. Through a partnership approach the WCQ will drive the ongoing regeneration of the area through cultural and mixed use development of this historic quarter of the city. Vol 1, Chapter 7, p 329.

[Waterford City and County Council Development Plan 2022-2028](#)

The Plan sets out policies to develop Waterford Cultural Quarter as a key enabler for enterprise growth, innovation, regeneration, place-making and community development, health and well-being and support measures. Vol 1, Chapter 1, p13

It also sets out in Chapter 3, Waterford City and the MASP that:

In support of RSES MASP Policy Objectives 6, 19 and 20 which seek to enhance the regeneration, vibrancy, tourism and strategic employment opportunities for Waterford City through delivery of the Waterford Cultural Quarter, we will implement the actions set out in the Waterford Cultural Quarter Strategic Plan 2021-2025 and seek further opportunities and sources of funding to support the collaborative efforts of key stakeholders and community groups in building the creative and innovative potential of the Cultural Quarter and its associated communities. Vol 3, Chapter 3, p87.

[Waterford City and County Council's Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023-2027](#)

Waterford's Culture and Creativity Strategy, supporting the Creative Communities pillar of the Creative Ireland Programme references Waterford Cultural Quarter as providing key infrastructural support for the creative community of the region. It cites the OECD report The Culture Fix (2022) which states that *Culture-led regeneration and development strategies can transform places. CCS not only provide economic benefits (through local taxation, job creation, innovation and supply chains), and social benefits (e.g. improved wellbeing and community cohesion) but also contribute to 'place making' by making cities and regions more attractive to work and live, encouraging inward investment, inward labour flows, higher productivity and increased tourism.*

[Waterford Destination and Experience Development Plan](#)

The investment in the Cultural Quarter, city wide placemaking and public realm projects will be key enhancements of the city experience. The development of the Cultural Quarter will create many benefits outside of its urban regeneration focus. It will encourage new visitor flow across the city and will extend the tourism reach into the Viking Triangle and the city centre. The creation of a city greenway trail head located adjacent to the Cultural Quarter and accessing the Viking Triangle will book-end the core city experience.

Waterford City and County Council Arts Plan: Towards 2035

Under the objective of Fostering and Supporting Innovation in the 10 year Arts Plan, actions include a new Emerging Arts Incubator programme and an Arts in Innovation Lab as well as examination of cross disciplinary AI digital integration. These actions can be supported by capital projects in development in WCQ. www.waterfordarts.com

Other strategic document supporting the vision, mission and objectives of the WCQ Strategic Plan include:

- [Waterford City and County Council Corporate Plan 2024-2029](#)
- [Waterford City and County Council Library Development Plan 2025-2030](#)
- [Waterford Heritage Strategy 2025-2030](#)
- [Waterford City Centre Management Plan 2025-2027](#)
- [Waterford Council's Climate Action Plan 2024-2029](#)
- [Cultural and Creative Industries Skillsnet: Skills challenges in the Visual Arts, Performing Arts and Cultural Events Sector](#)
- [Our Strategy - Design & Crafts Council Ireland](#)

WCQ Steering Committee Members (Current)

Ivan Grimes (Chair); Waterford City and County Council Director of Service

Councillor Seamus Ryan; Waterford City and County Council

Councillor Mary Roche; Waterford City and County Council

Councillor Eamon Quinlan; Waterford City and County Council

Dr Sharon O'Brien; South East Technological University

Michael Grant: Board member, Garter Lane Arts Centre

Síle Penkert: Director, Garter Lane Arts Centre

Conor Nolan; Waterford City and County Council Arts Officer

Anne Nolan; Waterford Integration Services

Deirdre Dwyer; Representative Creative Sector

Ed Cahill; Representative Business Sector

Donal Nolan: Waterford Chamber of Commerce

Sarah Jane Hanton; Representative Creative Sector



Katherine Collins; Waterford Cultural Quarter Project Manager

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Sincere thanks to everyone involved in supporting the development of the Waterford Cultural Quarter initiative– our vision of a creative community of people working towards the common good. This includes the WCQ Steering Committee members who advise and advocate for the project, businesses and agencies in the O’Connell Street area, and mostly the people who live, work, learn and play here who make this place a neighbourhood.

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